



Connecting **Young** Adults to Employment

Results from a National Survey of Service Providers

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December 2015



Acknowledgements

AspenWSI would like to thank all of the individuals and organizations that made this survey project and report possible. First of all, we would like to thank the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their generous support.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the members of the advisory committee convened to help guide this project. They are Kisha Bird at the Center for Law and Social Policy, Chekemma Fulmore-Townsend at the Philadelphia Youth Network, Allison Gerber at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Paula Gilberto at United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut, Sherry Kelley Marshall at the Southwest Ohio Workforce Investment Board, Ron Painter at the National Association of Workforce Boards, Steve Patrick at the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, Vincent Rossmeier at Tulane University, Abby Snay at Jewish Vocational Services–San Francisco, and Sangeeta Tyagi at YouthBuild USA. Their input into the survey design and their review of the findings were critical to this research.

We also appreciate the assistance of Cheryl Brueggeman from the Southwest Ohio Workforce Investment Board for her helpful review and feedback. Our gratitude is extended to staff at Goodwill Industries International, YouthBuild USA, and many others for their help in promoting the survey to their networks. We thank Peace Bransberger and Amy Blair for their tremendous assistance in all stages of this project.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the responses of so many service providers across the country. We thank them for taking the time to share their valuable insights.

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Executive Summary

America's youngest workers are facing their most dire employment prospects in recent history. Nearly 6.7 million young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 are out of school and out of work.¹ The July 2015 young adult unemployment rate was 12.2 percent, more than double the national average of 5.3 percent. Unemployment is even more acute for young people of color, particularly for African American young adults, who have an unemployment rate of 20.7 percent.²

In addition to dealing with a particularly slow economic recovery period, young adult workers are navigating complex labor market dynamics. Older workers, unemployed as a result of the recession, have been taking lower-paying, entry-level jobs. Many employers who previously hired entry-level workers with the aim of developing them into seasoned employees have shifted to prioritizing older job candidates with experience.

There are a range of organizations — youth development organizations, public workforce agencies, community-based organizations, educational institutions, and others — who are working hard to provide young adults with the skills and connections needed to succeed in today's labor market. This paper highlights the results of an AspenWSI survey of organizations that *provide services to young adults (ages 18–29) to connect them to employment*.³ The respondents offered valuable insights on:

- ▶ What is considered a positive employment outcome for young adult clients; and
- ▶ Expectations for, as well as challenges in, connecting young adults to positive employment opportunities.

Close to 400 individuals, representing 340 organizations across the United States, responded to the survey. A little over half of those organizations, 55 percent, are youth development organizations (13 percent) or nonprofit workforce development providers (42 percent). In addition, close to 30 percent of the responses are from Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) (11 percent); one-stop job centers (3 percent); educational institutions, including community colleges (9 percent); and school districts (3 percent). Other responding organizations included government agencies, apprenticeship training programs, ex-offender service providers, foundations, and funder collaboratives.

Key findings

Seventy-five percent of the providers reported that their programs target a specific population. The young adult populations most often targeted include those most disengaged from the current labor market: ***low-income individuals, minorities, and out-of-school, out-of-work young adults***. Moreover, while providers reported targeting certain populations, their reach is also broad. Providers noted serving a variety of populations that have significant issues with connecting to employment, such as minorities, individuals without secondary credentials, and ex-offenders. Half of the providers noted ***servicing young adults up to the age of 24***, and almost another quarter reported serving young adults up to 29 years of age.

The survey was designed to gather descriptive information about the types of services provided to young adult clients. In this spirit, we asked providers about the number of young adults they help to find paid employment in a typical year. Over half of the providers, 59 percent, reported helping up to 100 young

¹ Belfield, Clive, Henry Levin, and Rachel Rosen. *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*. Corporation for National and Community Service. January 2012. Accessed December 9, 2015, www.civicenterprises.net/Economic_Mobility.

² U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Employment and Unemployment Among Youth Summary*. August 18, 2015. Accessed December 9, 2015, www.bls.gov/news.release/youth.nr0.htm.

³ The age range of 18–29 was provided under the guidance of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

adults per year connect to employment. The survey also asked a series of questions about service offerings in the following categories: job-search and placement services, training and skills-development services, and support services. **Overall, providers noted offering a comprehensive range of services in helping connect young adults to employment. The top reported services were:**

- ▶ **Job search and placement services:** Résumé development (83 percent), job-search assistance (82 percent), interview coaching (82 percent), and career counseling (79 percent);
- ▶ **Job-skills and prerequisites training:** Financial literacy (71 percent), critical thinking and problem solving (70 percent), communication and conflict resolution (70 percent), time management (67 percent), and high school diploma preparation (66 percent);
- ▶ **Occupational training and higher education services:** Work-based learning (63 percent), certificate or licensing (56 percent), and noncredit occupational training (52 percent); and
- ▶ **Support services:** Case management (73 percent), financial literacy (63 percent), community service opportunities (61 percent), and appropriate interview attire (60 percent).

Providers emphasized that ***the most necessary and helpful services to support young adults' connections to the labor market are case management, connection to a caring adult, and assistance with transportation.***

Providers reported that their clients work in a ***fairly even mix of part-time and full-time jobs.*** In trying to help connect young adults to paid employment opportunities — which do not include internships, work experience, or summer jobs — providers commonly noted targeting industries with adequate entry-level job openings and significant labor market demand. ***The top reported industries targeted for young adults are:***

- ▶ **Construction** (56 percent);
- ▶ **Transportation or warehousing** (56 percent);
- ▶ **Manufacturing** (53 percent);
- ▶ **Health care** (51 percent);
- ▶ **Retail** (48 percent); and
- ▶ **Restaurant and food service** (46 percent).

Some of these industries, such as health care and manufacturing, have potential for significant wage growth, while others, such as the retail and food service industries, are predominantly characterized by low wages, part-time hours, and limited advancement opportunities.

Providers offered their thoughts on what they consider a meaningful employment opportunity for young adults. ***The top five job qualities noted as important for their young adult clients are:***

- ▶ **Stable employment (not contract or temporary employment)** (72 percent);
- ▶ **Self-sufficiency or family-supporting wages** (65 percent);
- ▶ **Full-time jobs** (61 percent);
- ▶ **Opportunities for advancement and pay increases** (56 percent); and
- ▶ **Predictable, set hours** (48 percent).

We asked about the extent to which providers can place young adult clients in jobs that reflect the qualities that the organizations prioritize as important. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents indicated they can place their young adult clients in such jobs most of the time, and close to half of the survey respondents answered some of the time.

Providers reported a variety of challenges to helping connect young adults to these job opportunities. *The primary challenges that providers characterized as either a big challenge or somewhat a challenge for young adults are:*

- ▶ **Lack of reliable transportation to and from work** (85 percent);
- ▶ **Lack of sufficient socio-emotional or behavioral skills** (79 percent);
- ▶ **Lack of sufficient occupational skills or credentials** (77 percent); and
- ▶ **Lack of secondary credentials** (70 percent).

In open-ended responses, several providers reported that their *funding sources often do not support the time necessary to help their clients attain good jobs*. Organizations also reported receiving funds from a variety of sources to support their efforts to connect young adults to employment opportunities. *The top three funding sources are the federal government (64 percent), foundations (62 percent), and state governments (55 percent)*. The next three sources of funding are donations from individuals (43 percent), donations from business associations (42 percent), and funding from local governments (41 percent). A much smaller proportion of programs reported receiving earned income (13 percent), payments from businesses (9 percent), and funds from unions (1 percent).

Implications about how to better connect young adults to work

These findings have implications for the role of service-providing organizations seeking to assist the large and growing population of disadvantaged young adults who seek to make meaningful connections to the labor market. The importance of this work cannot be overstated. Young adults have historically faced barriers to good income-earning opportunities, and their prospects have further diminished since the Great Recession. Research shows that unemployment and underemployment for young adults will have lasting consequences in the form of repressed wages, decreased upward mobility, and lessened productivity over their work lives.⁴ Further, a weak start in the labor market for the newest generation of workers means lower tax revenues and higher safety net expenditures for the country over time.⁵

Given the challenges facing many young adults in navigating both the changing labor market and a range of socio-emotional developmental challenges, service providers need to help their participants on multiple fronts. These include supporting young adults with personal issues, providing soft skills and technical skills training, and assessing the local labor market and individual employers to determine a good fit for employment. Fortunately, attention has increasingly focused on addressing the problem of young adult unemployment. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), passed in 2014, expanded the requirements for, and opportunities available in, serving low-income young adults. WIOA calls for an increased focus on serving the most vulnerable populations and expanding the education, training, and work experience opportunities provided to young adults.⁶ In addition, the Department of Labor's increased support for apprenticeship programs might provide a vehicle for matching young adults with employers willing to provide young adults with on-the-job training and the guidance and support needed to succeed in the workplace.

Moreover, efforts from the philanthropic and employer communities to develop strategies that improve young adults' employment outcomes have recently increased, and in some cases the two communities have combined their efforts. Two examples are the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative and LeadersUp. The

⁴ Kahn, Lisa B. The Long-term Labor Market Consequences of Graduating from College. *Labour Economics*, 17, No. 2 (April 2010): 303-316. Accessed December 9, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2009.09.002>.

⁵ Belfield, Levin, and Rosen, *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*.

⁶ WIOA requires a minimum of 75 percent of state and local youth funding for out-of-school youth. Further, at least 20 percent of local youth formula funds must be used for work experiences, such as summer and year-round employment, pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training, or internships and job shadowing.

100,000 Opportunities Initiative, launched in July 2015, is a partnership of employers, foundations, and national leaders both to create pathways to economic prosperity for out-of-school and out-of-work youth and to connect employers to a talent pipeline. LeadersUp, an employer-led coalition, was established in 2013 by the Starbucks Corporation and launched by a group of U.S. suppliers. It aims to work with providers to help ensure that employers' hiring needs are integrated into training curricula for young adults.

The following are considerations for practitioners and policymakers interested in further developing and supporting strategies to strengthen connections and supports for young adults in the labor market.

▶ **The Importance of Work Experience and Soft Skills**

In considering the challenges providers encounter in helping young adults connect to employment, survey respondents emphasized the importance of understanding that the issue is not just that young adults lack adequate skills to qualify for jobs. It is also that they often lack socio-emotional readiness for work. In fact, in answering questions about the types of training offered to young adults, providers called attention to what they must do with clients to develop prerequisite, work-relevant soft skills such as communication, conflict resolution, and time management. Because most of the clients lack work experience of any kind, they also lack familiarity with expected workplace behaviors and basic customer-service skills. Further, many young adults lack connections to networks of employed adults who could provide guidance about workplace expectations. Providers do offer young adults more conventional educational and job-skills-development services, such as occupational training or preparation to earn a high school diploma, but they do so to a lesser extent than strategies focused on work experience and soft skills.

▶ **The Importance of Support Services**

AspenWSI asked providers to describe which specific service or set of services are especially necessary or helpful in preparing young adults to succeed in the labor market. Overall, providers emphasized the importance of support services. This is especially important given that most of these organizations serve clients who have limited resources. Some of the services most commonly identified as important are case management, a connection to a caring adult, transportation assistance, and assistance with work-related expenses, such as interview and work attire. Transportation in particular was not only mentioned as a necessary support service but also cited as the largest challenge providers encounter in helping connect young adults to work.

▶ **Building Relationships with Employers that Are a Good Fit for Young Adults**

We asked providers to identify specific employers who they think exemplify the types of jobs or workplaces that offer a good fit for their young adult clients. Providers identified 566 companies in a number of industries, including health care, retail, manufacturing, and food service. In many cases, the employers identified as offering good jobs for young adult clients are not in the industries that providers reportedly target. Instead, providers noted the importance of specific qualities — such as quality supervision, advancement opportunities, good wages, and regular employment (not temporary or contract) — that made these employers a good fit for young adult clients.

In open-ended responses, some providers explained the importance of these job qualities. One respondent noted *“[the] importance of finding and retaining employers who are willing to work with you through their [new employees’] learning process, and employers MUST be willing to provide training guidance and support as youth learn what the world of work is.”*

▶ **Combining the Efforts of Youth Development and Workforce Development Organizations**

Considering what young adults likely need to succeed in employment, there appears to be great potential benefit from combining the best practices of youth development organizations with those of workforce development organizations. The survey responses suggest that different types of organizations have different forms of expertise and resources that can help enhance the skills and experience of young adults. Organizations focused specifically on youth development offer young adults a range of services

focusing on such areas as social skills, leadership, critical thinking, and conflict resolution. Many of these organizations encourage their participants to gain experiences through community-service and civic-engagement strategies. They help participants make positive connections to caring adult mentors. In general, workforce-focused organizations, such as WIBs, one-stop job centers, and nonprofits focused on industry training, tend to offer computer literacy training, work-based learning, and technical skills training. These organizations also often have knowledge of employers' hiring and training needs, and their connections to employers can improve access to work experience opportunities.

There may be potential for improving young adults' connections to the labor market by finding ways to support collaboration among providers who are well-positioned vis-à-vis understanding and serving youth populations with those experienced in engaging with employers and identifying employment opportunities and environments that are likely to be a good fit for young adults.

Further areas for research and investments

The survey shed light on potential strategies for improving young adults' connections to the labor market. It also pointed to areas where further research could build understanding about how such strategies are implemented effectively and the types of resources that might enhance progress. The following reflections highlight a few areas in which attention could support service providers and offer insights into what they do to provide young adults with the skills and connections needed to succeed in the labor market.

► Exploring Strategies that Can Help Improve the Fit of Employment Opportunities for Young Adults

The survey responses helped identify job qualities that providers have observed are critical to young adults' experiencing success in a job. These include quality supervision in the workplace, on-the-job training, and opportunities for advancement. The survey responses also suggest that finding those employment opportunities requires a service provider not only to seek out industries with labor market demand, but also to cultivate relationships with individual employers in specific workplaces that are the right fit for their young adult clients. Additional research would be useful for identifying more specifically the criteria that providers take into consideration when targeting jobs and employers.

Beyond that, the field needs information about strategies and approaches that service providers may be taking to more proactively engage with employers to try to influence the shape of a job, yielding a better fit for their clients and improving their odds of having a successful employment experience. Understanding and documenting successful strategies and approaches could also help employers reduce costs, such as those associated with high employee turnover. And this information could help providers re-imagine their role in helping clients transition successfully to employment.

► Investing in Opportunities for Organizations to Collaborate, Learn from One Another, and Disseminate Promising Practices

Collaborations between youth development organizations and workforce development organizations could be particularly beneficial for young adults with limited soft and job-specific skills and those with weak connections to the labor market. Working together, different types of providers could leverage their different strengths to coordinate a range of services and strategies — and expand youth development services to include a stronger focus on employment development. Youth-focused organizations are experienced in providing intensive wraparound supports that give their clients time and space to progress in socio-emotional growth, complete secondary education, and pursue postsecondary education. However, these organizations usually have limited expertise in or resources for developing apprenticeships, other work-based learning programs, or employment strategies focused on specific industries or occupational sectors.

Partnerships between different types of organizations can be challenging for a number of reasons. Providers may be constrained from collaborating because their work is supported by funding streams that require a focus on populations with specific characteristics such as age, income, or place of residence. Requirements may differ across potential partners, or one organization's target client base may represent only a small subset of the other's. Different types of provider also seek different types of outcome. While desired outcomes may be highly compatible in terms of long-term goals for all participants, in the short term they may be at odds. For example, one organization might consider it a success when a client persists as a full-time student in community college from one semester to the next. Another organization may only count it as success when a client obtains a full-time job. While both of these outcomes may be desirable for an individual client over the long run, they are likely incompatible in the short term.

Investments that support collaborations between youth development organizations and workforce development organizations could unearth promising practices for addressing young adult unemployment. These investments should support collaboration at all stages, including planning and start-up, experimentation, and ongoing implementation. Providers need opportunities to share their practices, learn about the innovations and strategies of others, and understand one another's organizational assets and limitations. Dedicated strategic planning time would help ensure that providers can invest in building the trust and relationships necessary to coordinate the delivery of services from partnering organizations to young adults.

Further, investments in data management systems and supported environments where data can be shared among service providers have the potential to help providers effectively understand what strategies and services work best for specific populations (e.g., young adults with secondary credentials, young adults involved with the criminal justice system, or young adults with children). Such learning also can help inform the practices of others in the field of helping connect young adults to employment.

► **Exploring Appropriate Outcome Measures for Young Adult Employment**

Employment metrics for young adults tend to include outcome measures similar to those used for the general adult population: job placement, job retention, and earnings. However, youth-service providers emphasized the importance of support services and soft skills development for promoting successful transitions to work. Providers commented on both the length of time and staff resources needed to prepare young adults for work and to find job opportunities that are a good fit. This suggests a need to adapt and broaden the conventional outcome measures used for the general adult population to the reality of what is required to prepare younger adults. For instance, in addition to considering job-placement and retention outcomes, helpful metrics for younger adults would include indicators of a wider range of skills development (both soft and technical skills) and outcomes related to individuals' psychosocial development in response to the support services delivered to prepare them for work. Some of these more qualitative outcomes are neither easy to define nor simple to collect, organize, and analyze across individuals or groups of participants. Nevertheless, this type of measurement is critical to learning about the effectiveness of strategies that address the reality of where young adults start in their path to employment.

Introduction

America's youngest workers are facing their most dire employment prospects in recent history. Nearly 6.7 million young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 are out of school and out of work.⁷ The July 2015 young adult unemployment rate was 12.2 percent, more than double the national average of 5.3 percent. The young adult unemployment situation is even more acute for young people of color, particularly for African American young adults, who have an unemployment rate of 20.7 percent.⁸

In addition to dealing with a particularly slow economic recovery period, young adult workers are navigating complex labor market dynamics. Older workers, unemployed as a result of the recession, are taking lower-paying, entry-level jobs. Many employers who previously hired entry-level workers with the aim of investing in their training and development have shifted to prioritizing job candidates with experience.

The high unemployment rate for young adult workers and their resulting lack of work experience have significant implications. Research shows that unemployment and underemployment for young adults will have lasting consequences in the form of repressed wages, decreased upward mobility, and lessened productivity over their work lives.⁹ Further, a weak start in the labor market for the newest generation of workers means lower tax revenues and higher safety net expenditures for the country over time.¹⁰

Despite this challenging labor market, many employers need workers, and young adults are an important piece of the overall employment puzzle. According to a 2014 survey of 350 employers, young adults can provide unique value to the workplace.¹¹ Employers reported needing young people not only to fill entry-level positions, but also to support a shift to a tech-intensive strategy, strengthen their current and future customer bases, and help build internal and external brand image and loyalty.¹²

There are a range of organizations — youth development organizations, public workforce agencies, community-based organizations, educational institutions and others — that are working hard to provide young adults with the skills and connections needed to succeed in today's labor market. This paper highlights the results of an AspenWSI survey of service providers engaged in this important work on a daily basis. The respondents offered valuable insights on:

- What they consider a positive employment outcome for young adult clients; and
- Their expectations for and challenges to connecting young adults to positive employment outcomes.

⁷ Belfield, Levin, and Rosen, *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*.

⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, *Employment and Unemployment Among Youth Summary*.

⁹ Kahn. The Long-term Labor Market Consequences of Graduating from College.

¹⁰ Belfield, Levin, and Rosen, *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*.

¹¹ The 2014 survey of 350 employers nationwide (representing companies with at least 2,500 employees) was conducted by Penn Schoen Berland for a research study by The Bridgespan Group and Bain & Company (see citation below).

¹² Carlton, Abigail, Michael Ciccarone, Willa Seldon, and Vikki Tam. *Youth Hold the Key – Building Your Workforce Today and in the Future*. The Bridgespan Group. May 2015. Accessed December 9, 2015, <http://www.bridgespan.org/Youth-Hold-the-Key-Building-Your-Workforce.aspx#.Vmm3y01MuM9>.

Survey Methodology and Response

In April 2015, AspenWSI conducted a web-based survey of organizations that *provide services to young adults (ages 18–29) to connect them to employment*.¹³ Recognizing that diverse organizations offer a range of employment-related services, we designed the survey to answer a number of questions, including:

- What types of organizations are serving young adult populations?
- What young adult populations are served by these organizations?
- What types of employment-related services do they provide to young adults?
- To what kinds of paid, regular employment opportunities do they connect young adults?
- What do these organizations consider to be a good job opportunity for young adults, and why?
- Who do these organizations consider to be good employers for young adults, and why?
- What are the challenges to helping young adults connect to paid, regular employment opportunities?

We designed this survey to document the range of services provided and outcomes experienced by organizations, and also to gather providers' unique perspectives on preparing and connecting young adults to employment. Therefore, we cast a broad net and solicited responses from a wide range of organizations. Also, we did not limit the survey to only one respondent per organization; rather, we encouraged the input of multiple respondents. We sought a variety of perspectives on questions about perceptions of and criteria for thinking about what makes a good job and a good employer for young adults. We received 397 responses from 340 organizations. To ensure that the results would not reflect duplicate responses on questions relating to the scale and scope of an organization's services, we followed up when we received multiple responses from one organization. After data cleaning to eliminate inappropriate duplication, the survey yielded responses describing 365 distinct programs located within 340 organizations.

Throughout this report, we include the number of respondents to specific survey questions. This number varies for several reasons. One reason is that most of the questions were optional, and some respondents chose not to answer certain ones.¹⁴ Also, because several questions targeted a specific group of respondents, we programmed skip logic within the survey. For example, if a respondent indicated that her or his organization did not connect any young adults into a paid employment opportunity, the survey skipped questions about the types of employment young adults obtain. A third reason the number of respondents varies is that we have reported on all answers for questions asking for opinions about meaningful job opportunities and challenges encountered in serving young adults, even when these represented multiple responses from one organization.

Survey response

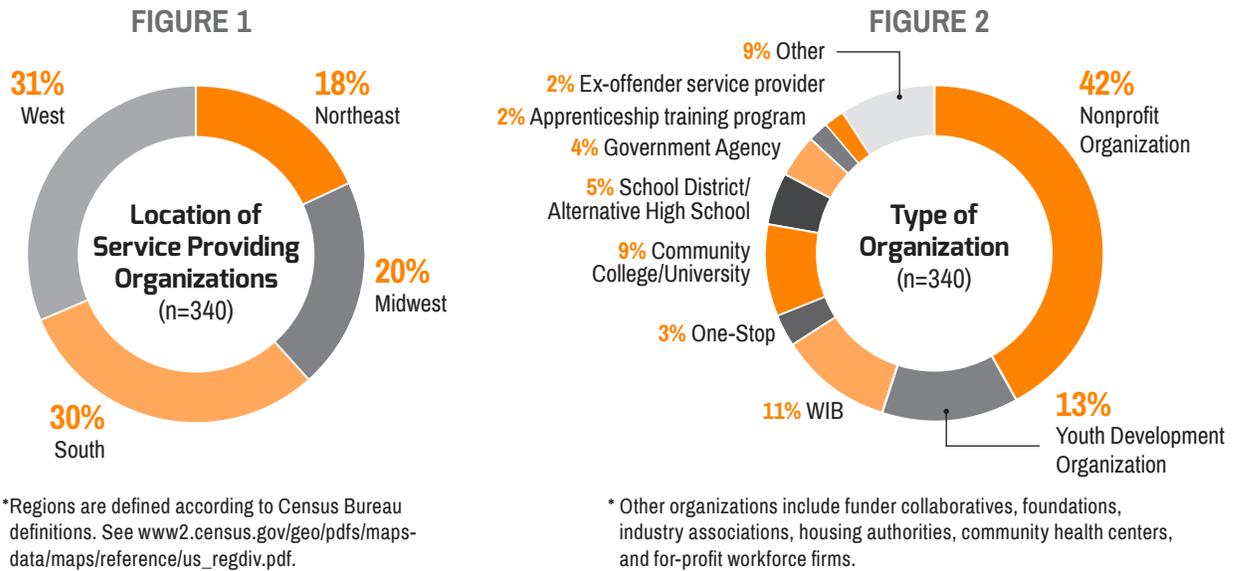
Overall, the survey yielded close to 397 provider responses from 340 service-providing organizations across the United States, with representation from 39 states. After eliminating inappropriate duplication, the survey yielded responses describing 365 distinct programs within the 340 organizations. Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of responses by region.

The survey yielded responses from a variety of service providers, as shown in Figure 2. A little over half of those providers, 55 percent, are youth development organizations or nonprofit workforce development

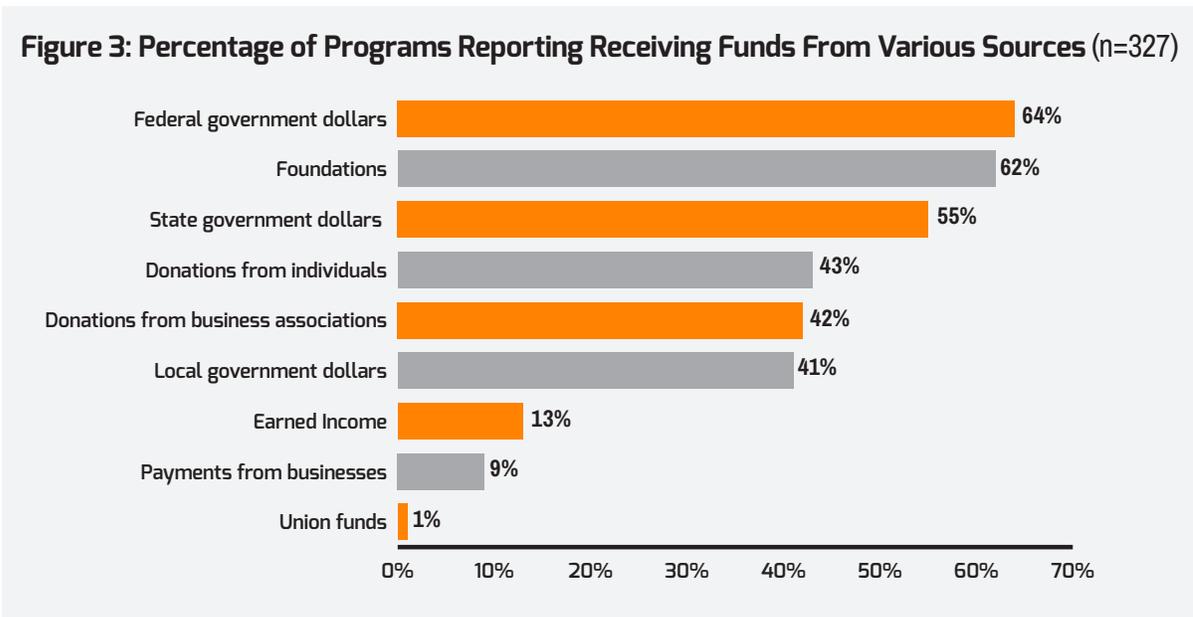
¹³ The age range of 18–29 was provided under the guidance of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

¹⁴ The primary required question was to ensure that respondents provide services to young adults (ages 18–29) to connect them to employment. Another required question captured contact information to help us verify if respondents' answers reflected responses for a distinct organization or program. The remaining required questions helped determine skip patterns within the survey.

providers. In addition, close to 30 percent of the responses are from WIBs, one-stop job center operators, and educational institutions. The following section provides further detail on the survey methodology and the responding organizations.

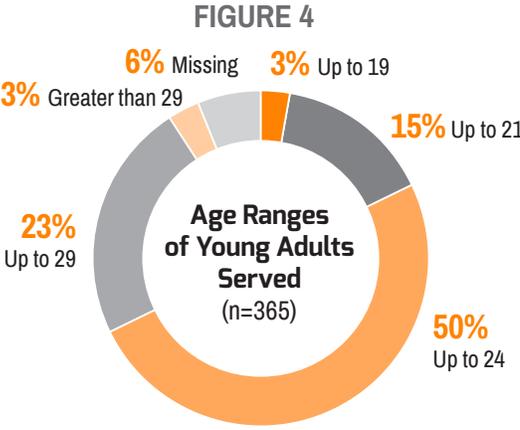


Almost all the organizations reported drawing on a variety of funding sources to support their work connecting young adult clients to employment opportunities, as shown in Figure 3. The top sources were federal government dollars (cited by 64 percent), foundation support (62 percent), and state government dollars (55 percent). The next three sources of funding were donations from individuals (43 percent), donations from business associations (42 percent), and funding from local government (41 percent). A much smaller proportion of programs reported using earned income (13 percent), payments from businesses (9 percent), and union funds (1 percent).



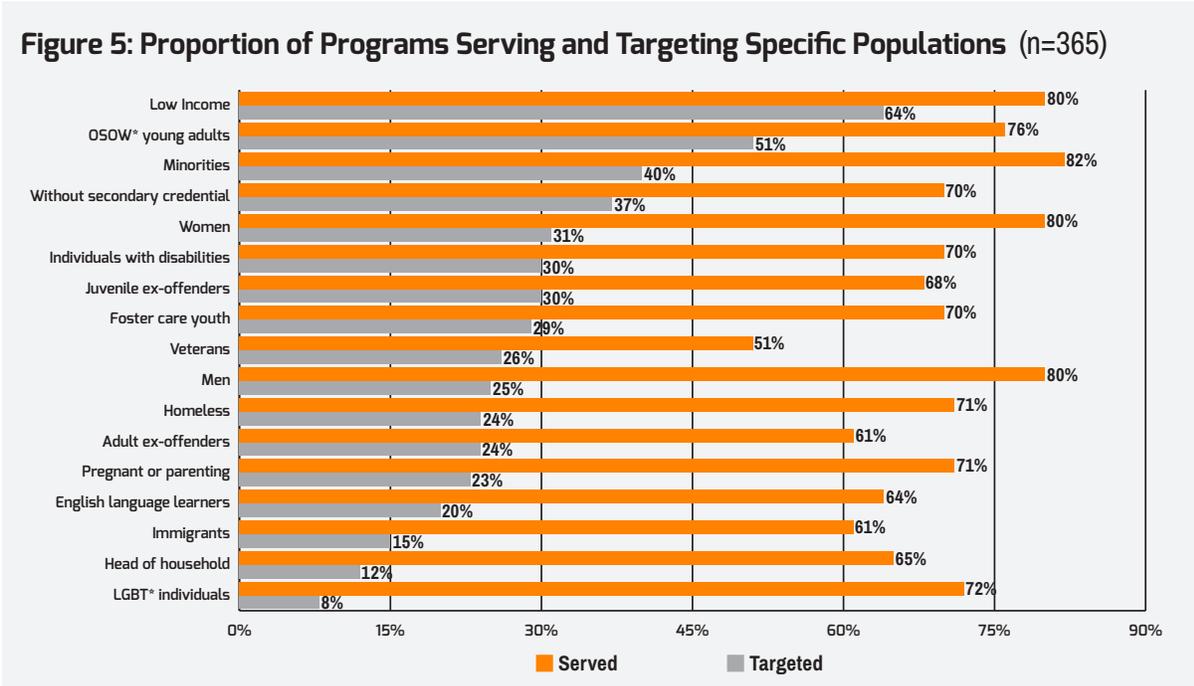
Who Are the Young Adults Served?

Recognizing that programs may define “young adult” differently, we asked providers to specify the age range they include in this category. Figure 4 depicts the age ranges of young adults served. Half of the respondents reported serving young adults up to the age of 24, and a little over a quarter reported serving young adults up to age of 29. Several providers reported they redefined the age range from “up to 21” to “up to 24” as a result of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act of 2014.



To better understand who the young adults accessing employment-related services are, we asked providers about the types of young adults their programs serve. We also asked providers to indicate if their programs specifically target certain populations. In general, providers reported working with a variety of populations that may have significant barriers to employment. The most commonly served populations are low-income individuals, minorities, and out-of-school, out-of-work young adults. Providers also noted serving other challenging populations, such as young adults without a secondary credential, ex-offenders, homeless clients, and English Language Learners.

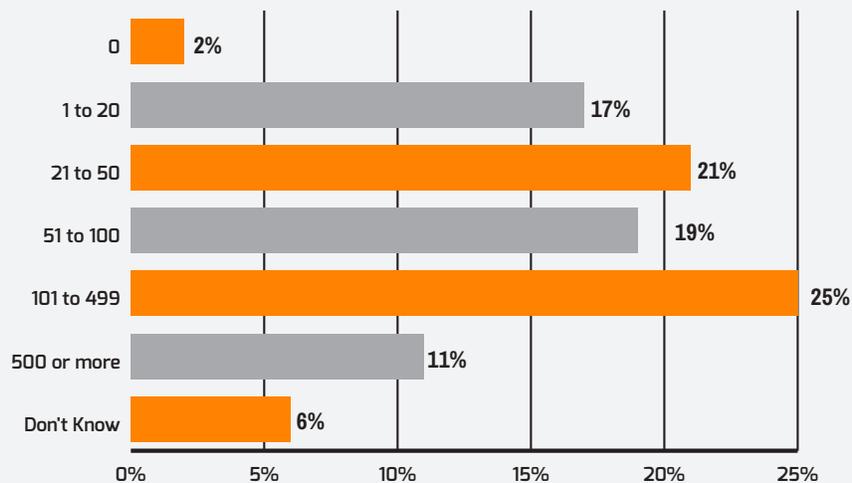
Figure 5 shows the percentage of programs that reported serving each of the populations mentioned in the survey, as well as the proportion of programs that reported they specifically target these populations. Seventy-five percent of the respondents noted targeting at least one specific young adult population. Providers could name other types of young adult populations for which they provide employment-related services. Five percent of respondents indicated they serve other populations, specifying nontraditional college students and young adults with mental health issues or substance abuse issues.



* OSOW refers to out-of-school, out-of work young adults * LGBT refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals

A focus of the survey was to explore how organizations help young adults connect to regular, paid employment opportunities. We asked providers to approximate the number of young adults they help connect to such employment in a typical year. We instructed respondents not to provide answers for services related to temporary or special employment opportunities, such as work experiences, subsidized employment, or summer jobs.¹⁵ Over half of the organizations, 59 percent, indicated providing services related to paid employment opportunities for up to 100 young adults, 25 percent reported serving 101 to 500 young adults, and 11 percent reported serving 500 or more young adults. (See Figure 6, below.)

Figure 6: Number of Young Adults that Organizations Help Connect to Paid Regular Employment (n=340)



¹⁵ Two percent of organizations indicated that they did not provide services directly related to paid, regular employment. These organizations were not asked follow-up questions about job placements or types of employers and industries targeted.

What Types of Employment-related Services Are Provided to Young Adults?

To learn more about the ways providers help young adults prepare for and obtain employment, we asked a series of questions about the types of services offered. The types include job-search and placement services, training and skills-development services, and personal-support services.

An open-ended question asked providers to state which specific services or set of services are especially necessary or helpful for young adults to succeed in the labor market. The most commonly cited services were case management, mentorship or connections to caring adults, and assistance with transportation.

In these open-ended responses, providers described why these services may be particularly important for helping connect young adults to employment.

“The most important services that are helpful to young people are related to case management and/or mentoring. As a young adult progresses through our program, gaining skills and building confidence in their ability to problem solve on their own, they become significantly more employable.”

“Transportation — many youth lack transportation, and bus systems do not always operate on a time schedule that is conducive to their work schedules.”

Some providers noted the importance of training and skills-development services in connecting young adults to the labor market. Interestingly, the services reported most frequently did not relate directly to developing occupational or educational skills. Providers more often noted the importance of skills development related to customer service, communication, and time management.

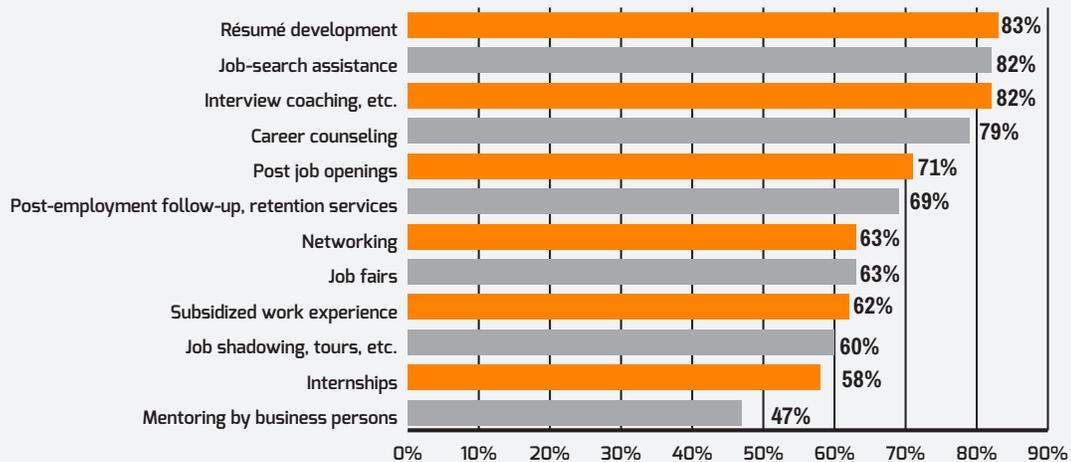
One provider offered insight into the importance of work experience in building workplace behavioral norms and how young adults’ lack of experience diminishes their ability to learn them. Therefore, it is necessary to develop these soft skills outside of the workplace, while also providing the supports to help young adults address other personal barriers in their lives. Specifically, this provider commented:

“Job-seeking youth face many of the same barriers as do their adult counterparts. These barriers are compounded by a major difference between groups — the lack of work history. Without work history, it is much more difficult to convince employers to hire these clients, and without work experience youth have not yet formed a set of workplace-appropriate behaviors. Without experience, youth have less knowledge on how to respond during an interview or on the job — meaning both placement and retention are more difficult to achieve. Therefore, the most effective services relate to building work experience and that set of soft skills for on-the-job success, while addressing any barriers to learning or working that the youth might have. The conflicting priorities of learning how to work while trying to avoid violence near the home or caring for a family or younger siblings cannot be underestimated.”

Job-search and placement services

Respondents could select up to 12 types of job-search and placement services. They reported providing a range of services, with a median of nine different services provided to young adult clients. The top reported services were résumé development, job-search assistance, interview coaching, and career counseling. Figure 7 illustrates the various types of job-search and placement-assistance services provided by respondents overall.

Figure 7: Job Search and Placement Assistance Service Offerings (n=365)



The survey identified patterns related to the type of organization providing certain types of job-search and placement services. For instance, less than a third of community college respondents reported providing post-employment follow up or employment-retention services, whereas more than three-quarters of WIBs, one-stops, youth development organizations, and workforce development nonprofits reported providing this service. Youth development organizations also were more likely to offer services related to work experience, such as internships, subsidized work experience, and job shadowing. Figure 8 details the service provisions among organizations.

Figure 8: Comparison of Job-search and Placement-assistance Services, by Organization Type

Job-Search and Placement Assistance	Youth Development Organization (n=47)	Workforce Nonprofit (n=152)	WIB/One Stop (n=47)	Community College (n=37)
Interview coaching, etc.	89%	84%	89%	78%
Résumé development	89%	84%	87%	84%
Job-search assistance	87%	86%	87%	76%
Career counseling	85%	77%	85%	76%
Networking	83%	59%	64%	62%
Job shadowing, tours, etc.	79%	56%	64%	54%
Internships	77%	53%	57%	60%
Post-employment follow-up, retention services	77%	74%	87%	32%
Posted job openings	77%	72%	83%	70%
Subsidized work experience	75%	63%	83%	30%
Mentoring by business people	64%	45%	51%	38%
Job fairs	57%	62%	75%	68%

Training and skills-development services

Providers reported offering or helping clients access a comprehensive range of training and skills-development services. Provider organizations may offer some of these services directly; they also may connect clients to other organizations for services. The survey did not ask respondents to differentiate how they provide the services. The organizations reported a median of six services related to job skills and prerequisites training, as well as a median of four services related to occupational training. Figures 9 and 10 summarize the types of services related to training and skills development that respondents reported providing to young adults.

Figure 9: Job Skills and Prerequisites Training Service Offerings (n=365)

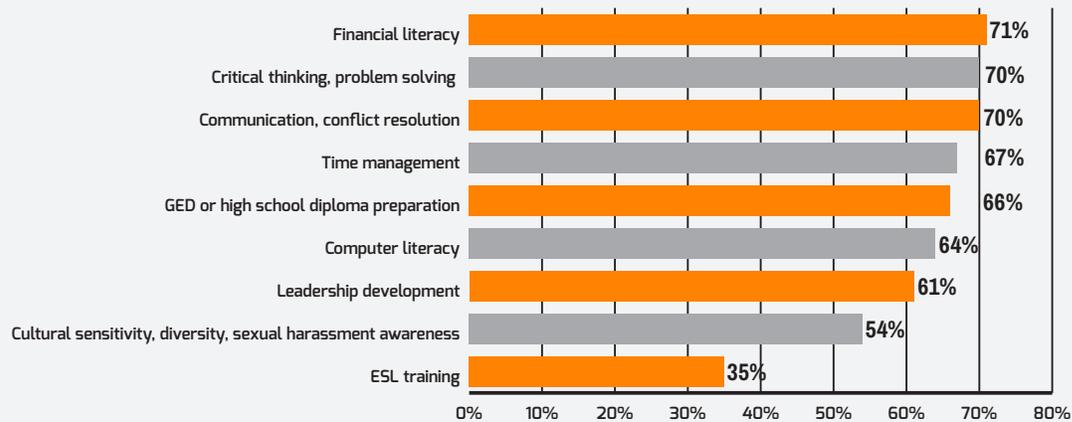
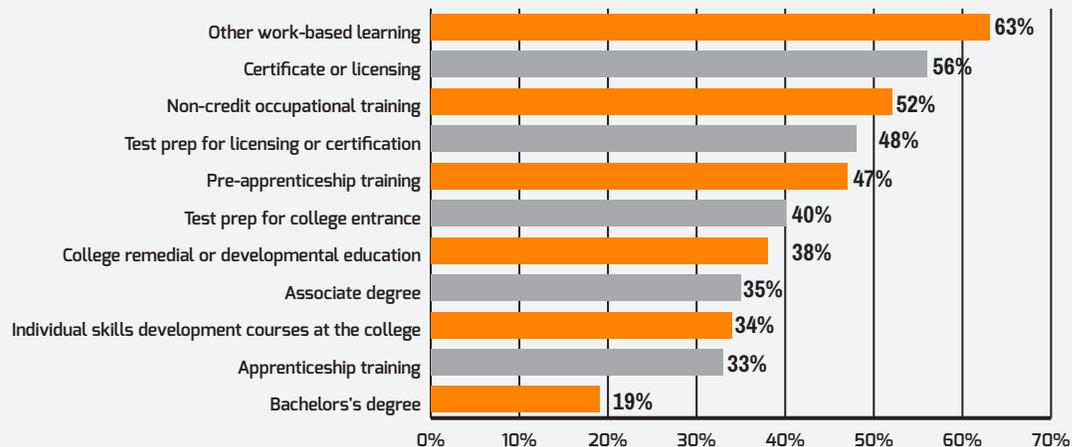


Figure 10: Occupational Training, Higher Education Service Offerings (n=365)



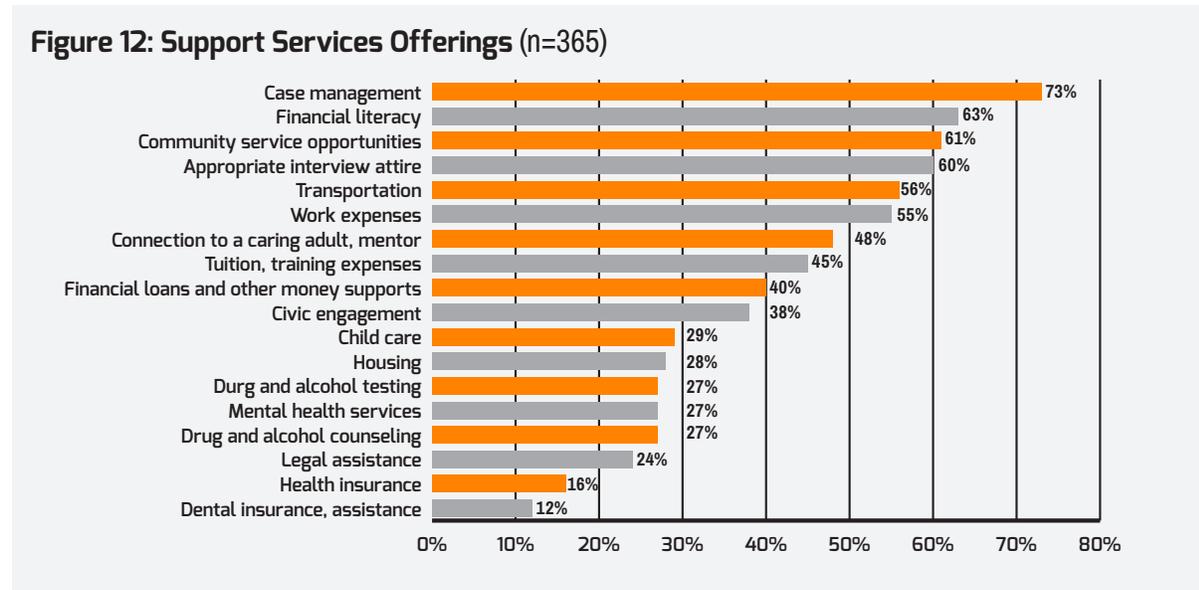
Comparing service offerings by organization type, youth development and other nonprofit organizations are more likely to offer young adults such services as leadership development, conflict resolution, and critical thinking. WIBs and one-stops tend to offer preparation to earn a high school diploma, computer literacy training, and work-based learning. Colleges tend to offer services related to higher education. Figure 11 describes patterns in skills-development services among organization types.

Figure 11. Comparison of Skills-development Services, by Organization Type

Jobs Skills and Prerequisites Training	Youth Development Organization (n=47)	Workforce Nonprofit (n=152)	WIB/One Stop (n=47)	Community College (n=37)
Leadership development	89%	55%	66%	54%
Communication, conflict resolution	87%	70%	75%	51%
Critical thinking, problem solving	87%	67%	75%	68%
Financial literacy	87%	69%	85%	57%
Time management	81%	63%	64%	68%
Cultural sensitivity, diversity, sexual harassment awareness	75%	51%	49%	46%
Computer literacy	72%	59%	81%	65%
GED or high school diploma preparation	72%	59%	87%	68%
ESL training	34%	29%	47%	57%
Occupational Training, Higher Education				
Other work-based learning	79%	59%	83%	51%
Pre-apprenticeship training	64%	37%	53%	38%
Test prep for college entrance	62%	34%	43%	49%
Test prep for licensing or certification	62%	37%	60%	65%
Noncredit occupational training	62%	49%	68%	60%
Certificate or licensing	60%	45%	81%	78%
College remedial or developmental education	53%	28%	45%	73%
Associate degree	45%	27%	47%	65%
Bachelor's degree	38%	15%	26%	14%
Individual skills-development courses at the college	38%	24%	47%	65%
Apprenticeship training	34%	23%	45%	43%

Support services

Respondents noted they either directly provide their clients with a range of support services or help them access such services. Out of 18 options, providers reported helping connect young adult clients to a median of seven types of support service. Over half of the providers reported helping connect young adults to case management, financial literacy, community-service opportunities, appropriate interview attire, transportation, and assistance with work expenses (such as supplies, equipment, testing, dues, and uniforms). Figure 12 summarizes the comprehensive range of support services offered.



An analysis of organization types suggests that youth development organizations are much more likely to provide such support services as civic engagement, connection to a caring adult, and community service opportunities. For instance, 81 percent of youth development organizations reported helping connect young adult clients to a caring adult, compared with 48 percent of overall survey responses. Figure 13 provides a detailed description of patterns in providing support services among organization types.

Figure 13. Comparison of Support Services Offered, by Organization Type

Support Services	Youth Development Organization (n=47)	Workforce Nonprofit (n=152)	WIB/One Stop (n=47)	Community College (n=37)
Case management	83%	80%	85%	49%
Connection to a caring adult, mentor	81%	44%	45%	38%
Community service opportunities	81%	60%	64%	51%
Financial literacy	77%	65%	72%	51%
Appropriate interview attire	75%	63%	77%	38%
Civic engagement	66%	39%	32%	27%
Work expenses	66%	53%	79%	30%
Transportation	66%	51%	81%	32%
Legal assistance	53%	26%	17%	3%
Financial loans and other money supports	53%	44%	43%	30%
Mental health services	51%	28%	15%	11%
Drug and alcohol counseling	47%	24%	30%	11%
Drug and alcohol testing	45%	28%	23%	8%
Tuition, training expenses	45%	36%	70%	62%
Housing	43%	31%	32%	8%
Child care	38%	25%	51%	14%
Health insurance	30%	15%	9%	5%
Dental insurance, assistance	28%	13%	4%	3%

What Kind of Jobs Are Young Adults Accessing?

The survey responses provide insight into the types of jobs that providers are preparing their young adults to access. Questions addressed the number of young adults providers help place in a job in a typical year, whether the jobs are part time or full time, and the industries the organizations target for young adult clients.¹⁶

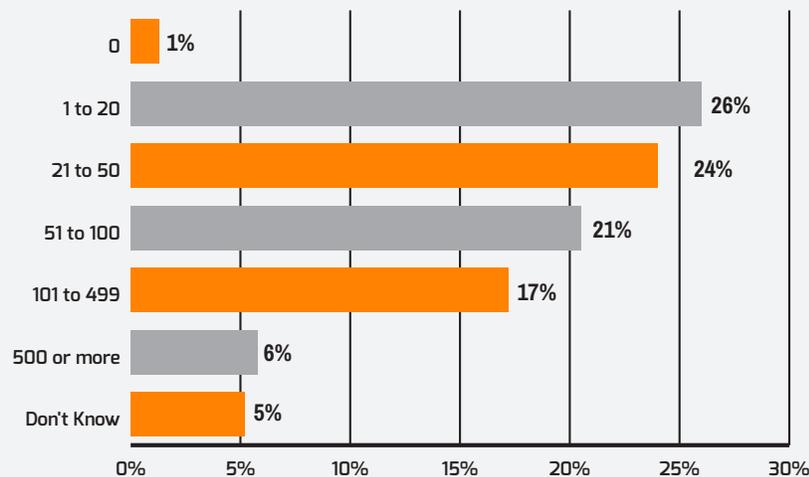
Employment outcomes

Almost three-quarters of the providers indicated that they help place 100 or fewer clients into paid jobs in a typical year. Providers who indicated helping place 500 or more young adults tended to be WIBs and one-stop operators.

The survey asked providers to estimate how many young adult clients they placed in full-time and part-time employment. For each of those two categories of placement, providers could estimate 0 to 25 percent of clients placed, 26 to 50 percent, 51 to 75 percent, 76 to 100 percent, or don't know. Overall, providers reported placing their young adult clients in a fairly even mix of part-time and full-time jobs. Forty percent of providers reported that they place up to half of their young adult clients in part-time jobs, and 46 percent said they place up to half of their young adult clients in full-time jobs. A fifth of respondents indicated that they did not know their clients' work arrangements. Analysis did not indicate any significant patterns in part-time or full-time work according to the age range of young adult clients.

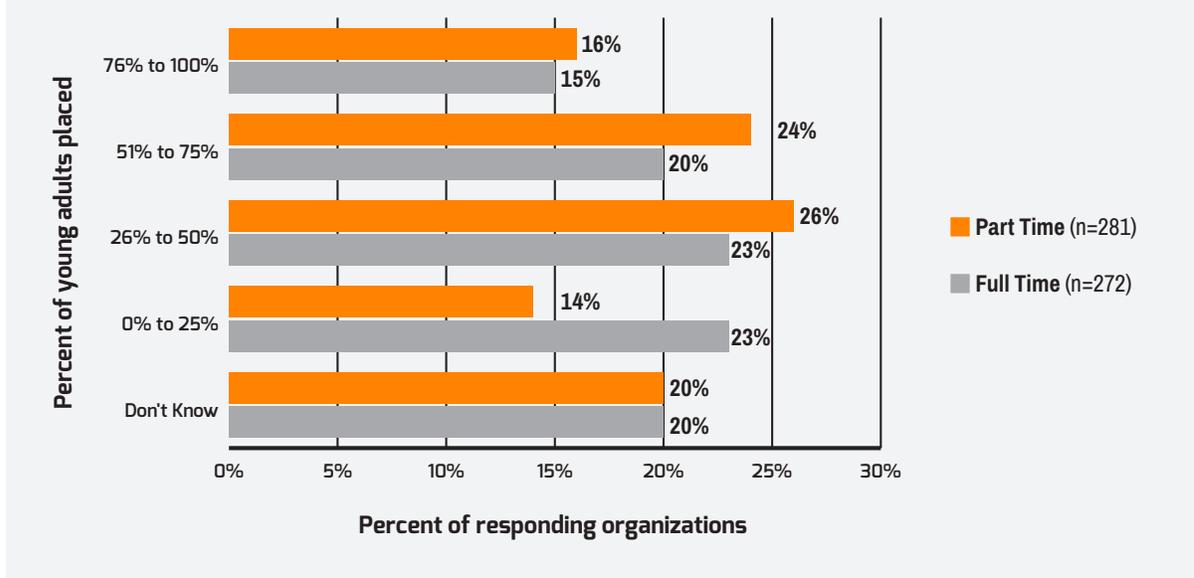
Figures 14 and 15 summarize providers' answers about the employment outcomes of their young adult clients.

Figure 14: Number of Young Adults that Organizations Typically Place Into Paid Regular Employment (n=308)



¹⁶ This section of the survey focused on young adults' connections to paid, regular employment opportunities. These do not include activities such as work experience, subsidized employment, summer jobs, or internships. The questions about young adults' connections to the labor market were asked to a subset of respondents: those who indicated they have knowledge of the employment outcomes for young adult clients.

Figure 15: Percent of Young Adults Placed in Part-Time or Full-Time Jobs



Industries targeted for young adult clients

Recognizing that providers may reach out to employers in a particular industry for a variety of reasons, AspenWSI asked about approaches to connecting young adult clients to jobs in this way. The survey listed 19 industries and asked providers to specify which they target, if they do not specifically target an industry but occasionally place young adult clients in it, or if there are industries they do not target for young adults.

The top targeted industries reported for young adult clients are construction, transportation or warehousing, manufacturing, health care, retail, and restaurant and food service.¹⁷ Further analysis indicates some correlations. For instance, respondents who identified targeting construction also reported transportation and warehousing, manufacturing, and building services as top targeted industries. Respondents who identified retail as a targeted industry reported restaurant and food service, transportation and warehousing, and hospitality and tourism as top targeted industries.

In an open-ended question, respondents provided additional details on why they target, or do not target, particular industries for young adult clients. Overall, respondents noted various reasons for targeting industries. The most cited reasons were labor market demand and the availability of entry-level opportunities. One respondent noted, *“Entry-level jobs are plentiful in warehousing, retail, and restaurants. Other [industries] like IT and health care are targeted because, while skills demands are higher, there are lots of jobs with upward pathways.”*

A few respondents noted targeting industries they feel are a good fit for their young adult clients. One respondent noted, *“Certain jobs in our community are going unfilled — particularly entry-level manufacturing jobs. We have targeted specific employers who like to work with young adults. There are a number of manufacturers whose existing workforce are quite young, so these are comfortable environments for young adults — even those who have challenges.”*

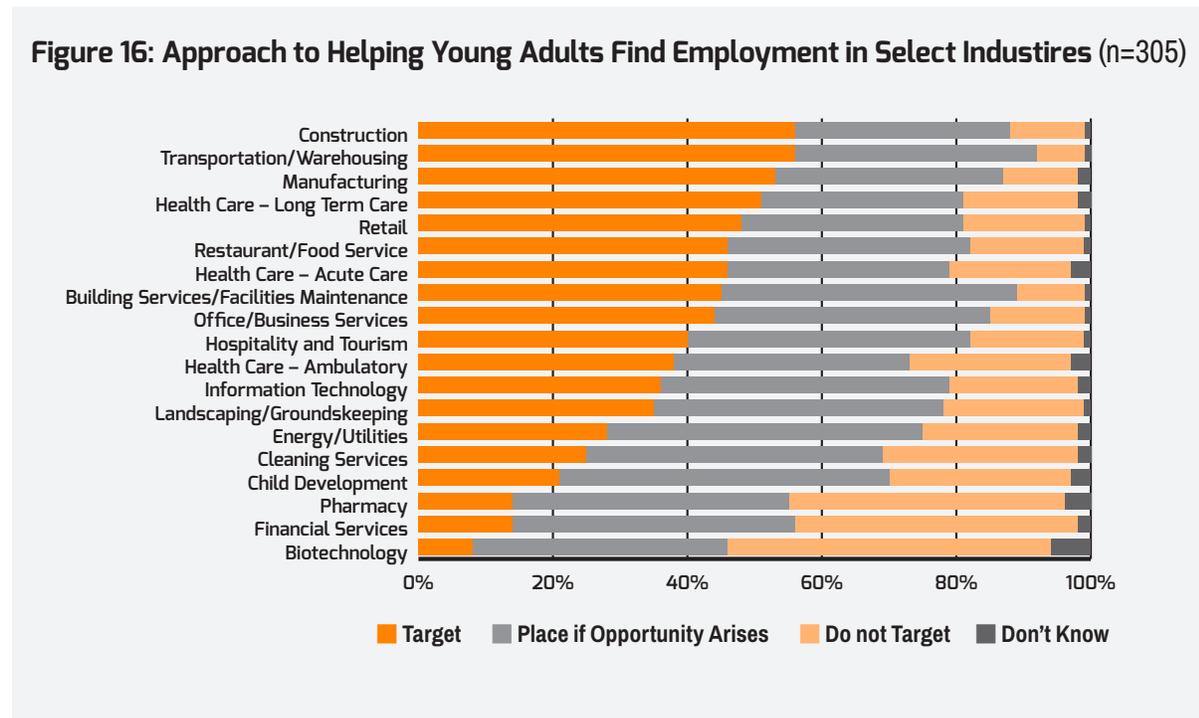
¹⁷ Providers could specify industries not mentioned in the survey. Five percent of the providers reported targeting other industries for their young adult clients, including automotive, aviation, call centers, conservation and land management, and security.

Another respondent noted, “We like to target industries that will provide good pay, training, and an opportunity for career advancement.”

Respondents provided various reasons why they do not target particular industries for young adult clients. Commonly cited reasons included young adults’ lack of the necessary skills and experience, and employers’ biases against hiring young adults. For example, one respondent said, “The young adult clients that I am currently serving lack qualifications for most of the industries I do not target. In addition, their past criminal behavior will serve as a disadvantage for them in those areas.”

Another respondent said, “Some industries make it clear (but not in writing) that it would be a waste of everyone’s time to place 18–24 year-old persons in those particular jobs.”

Figure 16 summarizes the responses.



What Is Considered a Good Job Opportunity for Young Adults?

A focus of the survey was to gather providers' thoughts on what constitutes a meaningful employment opportunity for young adults and which employers might offer better-than-the-norm opportunities for young adult clients. In collecting this information, AspenWSI asked a series of questions about job qualities and workplace characteristics and about why particular employers offer an organization's clients good job opportunities.

Important job qualities for young adult clients

AspenWSI asked providers to consider a list of job qualities and then select up to five that they think are most important for their young adult clients.¹⁸ Figure 17 summarizes their answers.

Ninety-five percent of the providers identified job qualities. The top reported job qualities important for young adults are:

- ▶ Stable employment (that is, not contract or temporary employment) (72 percent);
- ▶ Wages at self-sufficiency or at a family-supporting level (65 percent);
- ▶ Full-time jobs (61 percent);
- ▶ Advancement opportunities with pay increases (56 percent); and
- ▶ Predictable, set hours (48 percent).

In examining answers according to targeted industries, we found that the highest priority job qualities vary little across industries, with the exception of the retail and restaurant and food-service sectors. Providers who noted targeting these sectors also reported placing a higher priority on part-time jobs and predictable, set hours than did respondents as a whole.

Nine percent of providers specified that they place a priority on job qualities not listed on the survey. They noted the importance of jobs that are accessible by public transportation, have safe working conditions, and are supportive of a student's school schedule. Four percent of providers reported that they do not target specific job qualities for their young adult clients. A few of these providers noted that targeting specific job qualities would create further barriers to employment for young adult clients with limited work experience.

We asked providers about the extent to which they place young adult clients in jobs that reflect the qualities they listed as important. Thirty-nine percent of the providers indicated they place their young adult clients into these jobs most of the time, and close to half of the survey respondents answered some of the time.

¹⁸ The list of job qualities provided on the survey was developed from a scan of research on positive job characteristics and under the guidance of the project's advisory committee members.

Figure 17: Job Qualities Providers Prioritize for Young Adult Clients (n=330)

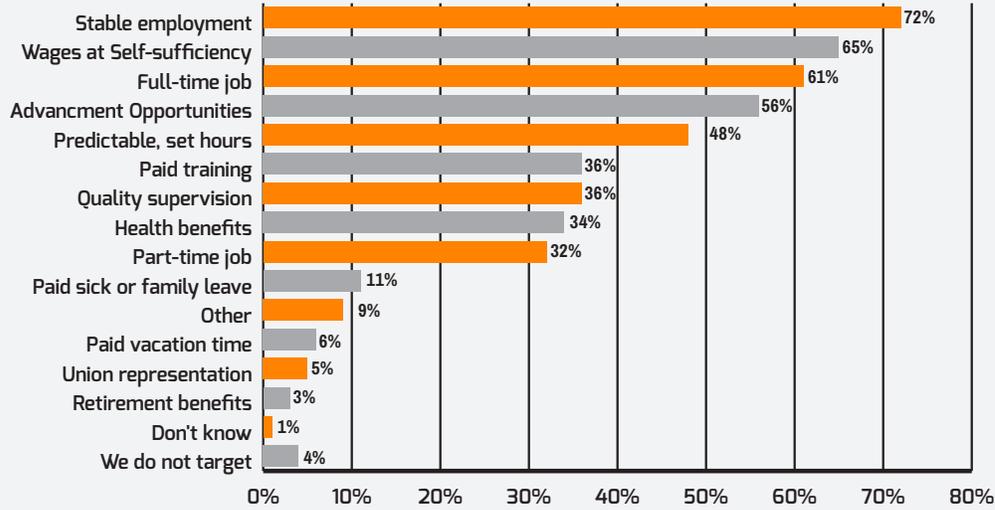
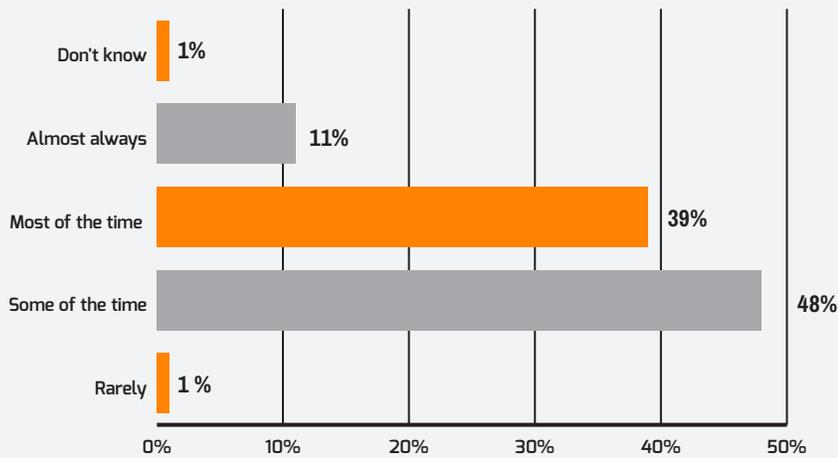


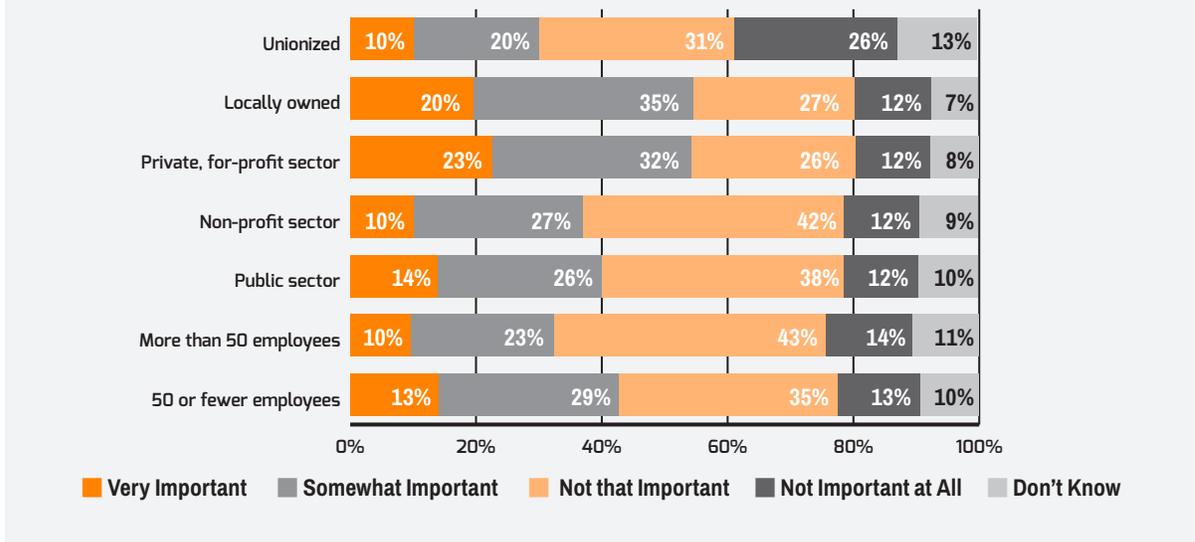
Figure 18: Extent Providers are Able to Place Young Adults into Good Jobs (n=330)



Important workplace characteristics

The survey asked about various workplace characteristics and their relation to what constitutes good job opportunities for young adults. Providers could rate workplace characteristics as very important, somewhat important, not that important, not important at all, or don't know. A little over half of the providers reported that locally owned or private, for-profit workplaces are either very important or somewhat important considerations in helping connect young adult clients to good job opportunities. However, few providers reported placing importance on specific workplace characteristics. Figure 19 summarizes the results.

Figure 19: Importance of Workplace Characteristics (n=331)



Companies that provide a good fit for young adult workers

AspenWSI asked providers to name up to three specific companies that exemplify the types of jobs or workplaces they consider good for young adult clients. In addition to naming companies, we asked providers to identify each company’s sector, typical occupations, and average wages, as well as to identify the reasons why the companies are good for young adult clients.

In all, 214 providers identified 566 companies that they consider good for young adult clients. These companies represented a number of industries, as summarized in Figure 20.

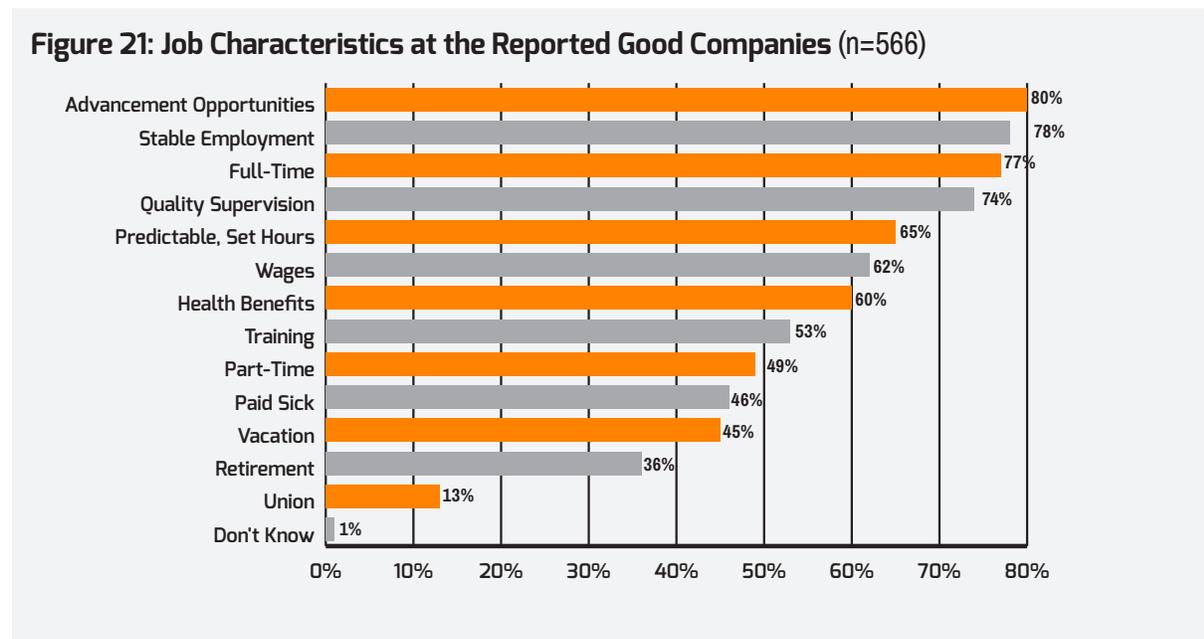
Figure 20: 566 Good Fit Companies, Categorized by Industry (n=214)

Industry	Percentage
Health care	15%
Retail	14%
Manufacturing	14%
Construction	9%
Food service	7%
Hospitality and tourism	5%
Transportation/warehousing	5%
Financial services	3%
Grocery	3%
Information technology	3%
Community resources/nonprofit	2%
Public	2%
Facilities maintenance/property management	2%
Office/business services	2%
Other*	13%
Missing	1%

**Respondents reported a number of companies that were categorized in “other” industries: aerospace, insurance, child development, legal, animal care, biotechnology, and consulting. Each of these industries elicited five or fewer responses.*

The survey asked providers about companies' typical occupations and average wages. Respondents noted a range of wages and occupations within industries. For example, reported occupations within the health care industry included medical assistants and CNAs, phlebotomists, food service workers, patient care, and building maintenance personnel. Occupations within the retail sector included cashier, stocking, warehouse worker, and pharmacy technician. The average wage reported tended to vary by the location of the employer and the occupations listed.¹⁹

For each identified company, we asked providers to identify specific job characteristics that make a particularly good job opportunity for young adults. Survey respondents selected from the same list of job qualities as in an earlier question, and they also had the option to provide additional reasons in an open-ended question. As summarized in Figure 21, providers identified similar job qualities as in previous questions. Advancement opportunities, stable employment, wages at self-sufficiency, quality supervision, and predictable, set hours continue to be important job qualities for young adult clients.



The importance placed on each quality was higher when respondents answered with a specific company in mind. For example, of the 566 companies, 74 percent were considered to provide a good job for young adults because of quality supervision, but in the earlier survey question a little over a third of respondents (36 percent) considered quality supervision as an important job quality for young adults when thinking more generally. Figure 22 compares respondents' stated importance of job qualities between the two questions asking about job qualities in general and with a specific employer in mind.

¹⁹ These variations make it difficult to analyze occupational trends and wages for young adult clients across industries.

Figure 22. Comparison of Stated Importance of Job Qualities

	General Response (n=330)	Response with a Specific Employer in Mind (n=544)
Stable employment	72%	78%
Wages at self-sufficiency	65%	62%
Full-time job	61%	77%
Advancement opportunities	56%	80%
Predictable, set hours	48%	65%
Paid training	36%	53%
Quality supervision	36%	74%
Health benefits	34%	60%
Part-time job	32%	49%
Paid sick or family leave	11%	46%
Paid vacation time	6%	45%
Union representation	5%	13%
Retirement benefits	3%	36%

We further examined job characteristics at good companies as defined by respondents, by select industries — health care, retail, manufacturing, construction, food service, hospitality and tourism, and transportation and warehousing. Overall, good job qualities differ little across industries. One notable pattern is that fewer providers reported wages at self-sufficiency or predictable, set hours as good job characteristics in the retail, food service, and hospitality industries. However, part-time employment is more likely to be considered a good job factor for employers in these industries.

What Challenges Do Providers Encounter in Helping Connect Young Adults to Good Jobs?

Providers acknowledged encountering a variety of challenges in helping connect young adults to good jobs. In open-ended comments, their concerns echoed sentiments from earlier answers about young adults needing supports and needing to develop soft skills in order to get and maintain a job.

Providers shared that *“many of our young adult clients have not learned basic, social workplace skills and only have examples from others who do not possess those skills,”* and *“affordable housing, transportation, and child care tower over all other barriers to employment.”*

There were also providers who said their clients’ criminal records and drug issues are a *“constant challenge”* in helping connect them to work.

Providers noted that many young adult clients lack high school diplomas or the foundational literacy skills needed for higher-paying jobs. However, because of their need to work, these young adults are *“typically [working] in low-skill and lower-wage jobs.”* Engaging them to enter training *“becomes a challenge for a young person who needs to work in order to support themselves and/or their families.”*

Several providers reported that their funding sources often do not support the time and type of supports necessary to help clients attain good jobs. One provider noted, *“It takes time and cost to assist a young adult to be job-ready. Not all grant sources understand the time and expense involved and more often [support] short-term training.”*

Another provider shared, *“Our biggest challenge is getting our participants through the education (secondary and higher education) for credentialing so that we can make that transition to employment. Our participants have a lot of case management needs to work through barriers of transportation, child care, housing, mental health and substance abuse issues We have just learned that it takes time to work with these individuals.”*

Another provider noted, *“Criminal records are a major barrier, and [there are] few, tiny funding streams to address it (none [of which are] recurring).”*

Several providers noted the challenges to engaging the business community in helping connect young adult clients to good jobs. Providers noted that some employers have a bias toward hiring young adults, feeling they *“can’t put down the cell phone, don’t have the social skills to interact with supervisors and peers, not understanding or able to follow workplace rules and norms.”*

Providers expressed a need to create a pool of employers who will not only hire their young adult clients but also provide the *“training guidance and support to youth.”*

The extent to which challenges are encountered

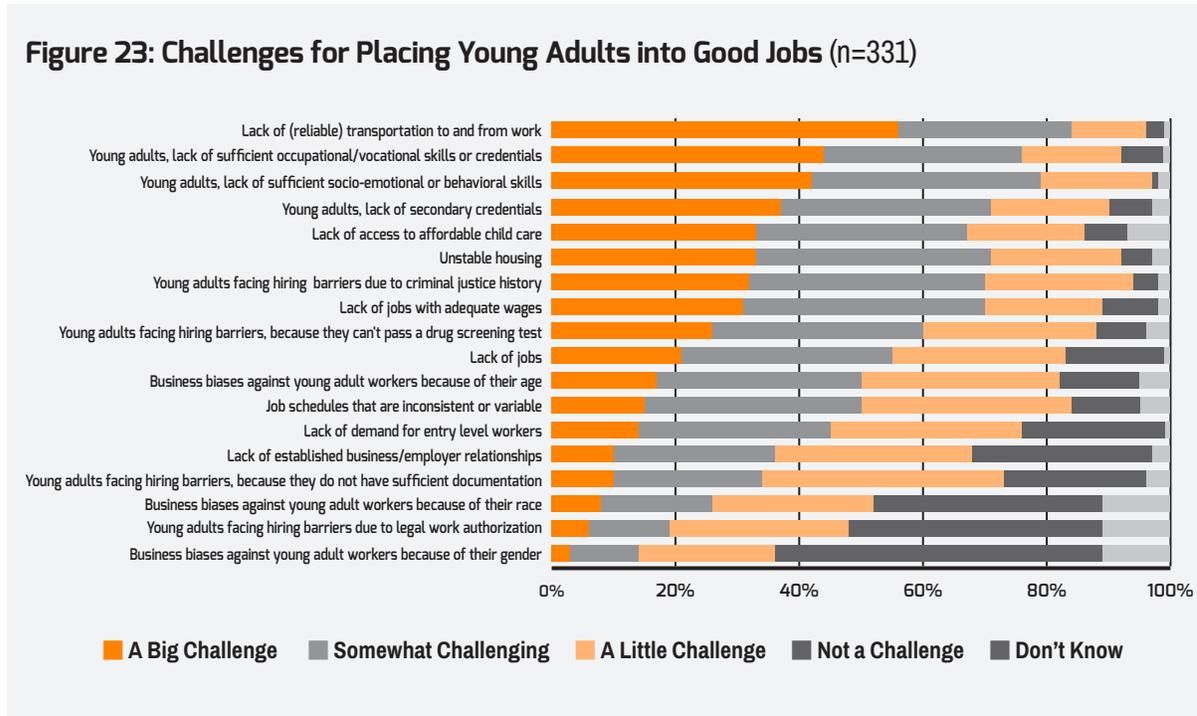
To understand barriers to assisting young adults, AspenWSI asked about 28 specific challenges. Providers identified whether each is a big challenge, somewhat a challenge, a little challenge, or not a challenge at all in helping connect their clients to good jobs.

The reported challenges aligned closely with the open-ended responses about young adults’ need for support services, education and training, and soft-skills development. To a lesser extent, providers reported challenges with business biases against young adults and their own lack of established relationships with employers who could be a good fit for young adult clients.

The top noted “big” challenges identified by providers are:

- ▶ Lack of reliable transportation to and from work (56 percent);
- ▶ Young adults’ lack of occupational skills or credentials (44 percent);
- ▶ Young adults’ lack of sufficient socio-emotional or behavioral skills (42 percent); and
- ▶ Young adults’ lack of secondary credentials (37 percent).

Figure 23 summarizes the responses.



Further analyses conducted on a subset of the reported challenges provided insight on whether providers can offer their clients assistance with services to address these barriers to work. For example, of providers who noted transportation as a big challenge, 63 percent reported offering clients transportation assistance or helping them access such services. Of those providers who noted young adults’ lack of secondary credentials as a barrier, 69 percent of the respondents reported providing or helping clients access education services related to preparing to earn a GED or high school diploma. Forty-five percent of the providers who reported the lack of access to affordable child care as a challenge help clients access child care-related services. Forty-percent of the providers who reported unstable housing as a challenge help their young adult clients access housing assistance.

Implications about How to Better Connect Young Adults to Work

These findings have implications for the role of service-providing organizations seeking to assist the large and growing population of disadvantaged young adults who seek to make meaningful connections to the labor market. The importance of this work cannot be overstated. Young adults have historically faced barriers to good income-earning opportunities, and their prospects have further diminished since the Great Recession. Research shows that unemployment and underemployment for young adults will have lasting consequences in the form of repressed wages, decreased upward mobility, and lessened productivity over their work lives.²⁰ Further, a weak start in the labor market for the newest generation of workers means lower tax revenues and higher safety net expenditures for the country over time.²¹

Given the challenges facing many young adults in navigating both the changing labor market and a range of socio-emotional developmental challenges, service providers need to help their participants on multiple fronts. These include supporting young adults with personal issues, providing soft skills and technical skills training, and assessing the local labor market and individual employers to determine a good fit for employment. Fortunately, attention has increasingly focused on addressing the problem of young adult unemployment. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), passed in 2014, expanded the requirements for, and opportunities available in, serving low-income young adults. WIOA calls for an increased focus on serving the most vulnerable populations and expanding the education, training, and work experience opportunities provided to young adults.²² In addition, the Department of Labor's increased support for apprenticeship programs might provide a vehicle for matching young adults with employers willing to provide young adults with on-the-job training and the guidance and support needed to succeed in the workplace.

Moreover, efforts from the philanthropic and employer communities to develop strategies that improve young adults' employment outcomes have recently increased, and in some cases the two communities have combined their efforts. Two examples are the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative and LeadersUp. The 100,000 Opportunities Initiative, launched in July 2015, is a partnership of employers, foundations, and national leaders to both create pathways to economic prosperity for out-of-school and out-of-work youth and connect employers to a talent pipeline. LeadersUp, an employer-led coalition, was established in 2013 by the Starbucks Corporation and launched by a group of U.S. suppliers. It aims to work with providers to help ensure that employers' hiring needs are integrated into training curricula for young adults.

The following are considerations for practitioners and policymakers interested in further developing and supporting strategies to strengthen connections and supports for young adults in the labor market.

► The Importance of Work Experience and Soft Skills

In considering the challenges providers encounter in helping young adults connect to employment, survey respondents emphasized the importance of understanding that the issue is not just that young adults lack adequate skills to qualify for jobs. It is also that they often lack socio-emotional readiness for work. In fact, in answering questions about the types of training offered to young adults, providers called attention to what they must do with clients to develop prerequisite, work-relevant soft skills such

²⁰ Kahn. The Long-term Labor Market Consequences of Graduating from College.

²¹ Belfield, Levin, and Rosen, *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*.

²² WIOA requires a minimum of 75 percent of state and local youth funding for out-of-school youth. Further, at least 20 percent of local youth formula funds must be used for work experiences, such as summer and year-round employment, pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training, or internships and job shadowing.

as communication, conflict resolution, and time management. Because most of the clients lack work experience of any kind, they also lack familiarity with expected workplace behaviors and basic customer-service skills. Further, many young adults lack connections to networks of employed adults who could provide guidance about workplace expectations. Providers do offer young adults more conventional educational and job-skills-development services, such as occupational training or preparation to earn a high school diploma, but they do so to a lesser extent than strategies focused on work experience and soft skills.

▶ **The Importance of Support Services**

AspenWSI asked providers to describe which specific service or set of services are especially necessary or helpful in preparing young adults to succeed in the labor market. Overall, providers emphasized the importance of support services. This is especially important given that most of these organizations serve clients who have limited resources. Some of the services most commonly identified as important are case management, a connection to a caring adult, transportation assistance, and assistance with work-related expenses, such as interview and work attire. Transportation in particular not only was mentioned as a necessary support service, but also cited as the largest challenge providers encounter in helping connect young adults to work.

▶ **Building Relationships with Employers that Are a Good Fit for Young Adults**

We asked providers to identify specific employers who they think exemplify the types of jobs or workplaces that offer a good fit for their young adult clients. Providers identified 566 companies in a number of industries, including health care, retail, manufacturing, and food service. In many cases, the employers identified as offering good jobs for young adult clients are not in the industries that providers reportedly target. Instead, providers noted the importance of specific qualities — such as quality supervision, advancement opportunities, good wages, and regular employment (not temporary or contract) — that made these employers a good fit for young adult clients.

In open-ended responses, some providers explained the importance of these job qualities. One respondent noted *“[the] importance of finding and retaining employers who are willing to work with you through their [new employees’] learning process, and employers MUST be willing to provide training guidance and support as youth learn what the world of work is.”*

▶ **Combining the Efforts of Youth Development and Workforce Development Organizations**

Considering what young adults likely need to succeed in employment, there appears to be great potential benefit from combining the best practices of youth development organizations with those of workforce development organizations. The survey responses suggest that different types of organization have different forms of expertise and resources that can help enhance the skills and experience of young adults. Organizations focused specifically on youth development offer young adults a range of services focusing on such areas as social skills, leadership, critical thinking, and conflict resolution. Many of these organizations encourage their participants to gain experiences through community-service and civic-engagement strategies. They help participants make positive connections to caring adult mentors. In general, workforce-focused organizations, such as WIBs, one-stop job centers, and nonprofits focused on industry training, tend to offer computer literacy training, work-based learning, and technical skills training. These organizations also often have knowledge of employers’ hiring and training needs, and their connections to employers can improve access to work experience opportunities.

There may be potential for improving young adults’ connections to the labor market by finding ways to support collaboration among providers who are well-positioned vis-à-vis understanding and serving youth populations with those experienced in engaging with employers and identifying employment opportunities and environments that are likely to be a good fit for young adults.

Further Areas for Research and Investments

The survey shed light on potential strategies for improving young adults' connections to the labor market. It also pointed to areas where further research could build understanding about how such strategies are implemented effectively and the types of resources that might enhance progress. The following reflections highlight a few areas in which attention could support service providers and offer insights into what they do to provide young adults with the skills and connections needed to succeed in the labor market.

► Exploring Strategies that Can Help Improve the Fit of Employment Opportunities for Young Adults

The survey responses helped identify job qualities that providers have observed are critical to young adults' experiencing success in a job. These include quality supervision in the workplace, on-the-job training, and opportunities for advancement. The survey responses also suggest that finding those employment opportunities requires a service provider not only to seek out industries with labor market demand, but also to cultivate relationships with *individual employers in specific workplaces* that are the right fit for their young adult clients. Additional research would be useful for identifying more specifically the criteria that providers take into consideration when targeting jobs and employers.

Beyond that, the field needs information about strategies and approaches that service providers may be taking to more proactively engage with employers to try to influence the shape of a job, yielding a better fit for their clients and improving their odds of having a successful employment experience. Understanding and documenting successful strategies and approaches could also help employers reduce costs such as those associated with high employee turnover. And this information could help providers re-imagine their role in helping clients transition successfully to employment.

► Investing in Opportunities for Organizations to Collaborate, Learn from One Another, and Disseminate Promising Practices

Collaborations between youth development organizations and workforce development organizations could be particularly beneficial for young adults with limited soft and job-specific skills and those with weak connections to the labor market. Working together, different types of providers could leverage their different strengths to coordinate a range of services and strategies — and expand youth development services to include a stronger focus on employment development. Youth-focused organizations are experienced with providing intensive wraparound supports that give their clients time and space to progress in socio-emotional growth, complete secondary education, and pursue postsecondary education. However, these organizations usually have limited expertise in or resources for developing apprenticeships, other work-based learning programs, or employment strategies focused on specific industries or occupational sectors.

Partnerships between different types of organizations can be challenging for a number of reasons. Providers may be constrained from collaborating because their work is supported by funding streams that require a focus on populations with specific characteristics such as age, income, or place of residence. Requirements may differ across potential partners, or one organization's target client base may represent only a small subset of the other's. Different types of provider also seek different types of outcome. While desired outcomes may be highly compatible in terms of long-term goals for all participants, in the short term they may be at odds. For example, one organization might consider it a success when a client persists as a full-time student in community college from one semester to the next. Another organization may only count it as success when a client obtains a full-time job. While both of these outcomes may be desirable for an individual client over the long run, they are likely incompatible in the short term.

Investments that support collaborations between youth development organizations and workforce development organizations could unearth promising practices for addressing young adult unemployment. These investments should support collaboration at all stages, including planning and start-up, experimentation, and ongoing implementation. Providers need opportunities to share their practices, learn about the innovations and strategies of others, and understand one another's organizational assets and limitations. Dedicated strategic planning time would help ensure that providers can invest in building the trust and relationships necessary to coordinate the delivery of services from partnering organizations to young adults.

Further, investments in data management systems and supported environments where data can be shared among service providers have the potential to help providers effectively understand what strategies and services work best for specific populations (e.g., young adults with secondary credentials, young adults involved with the criminal justice system, or young adults with children). Such learning also can help inform the practices of others in the field of helping connect young adults to employment.

► **Exploring Appropriate Outcome Measures for Young Adult Employment**

Employment metrics for young adults tend to include outcome measures similar to those used for the general adult population: job placement, job retention, and earnings. However, youth-service providers emphasized the importance of support services and soft skills development for promoting successful transitions to work. Providers commented on both the length of time and staff resources needed to prepare young adults for work and to find job opportunities that are a good fit. This suggests a need to adapt and broaden the conventional outcome measures used for the general adult population to the reality of what is required to prepare younger adults. For instance, in addition to considering job-placement and retention outcomes, helpful metrics for younger adults would include indicators of a wider range of skills development (both soft and technical skills) and outcomes related to individuals' psychosocial development in response to the support services delivered to prepare them for work. Some of these more qualitative outcomes are neither easy to define nor simple to collect, organize, and analyze across individuals or groups of participants. Nevertheless, this type of measurement is critical to learning about the effectiveness of strategies that address the reality of where young adults start in their path to employment.



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