

TOMPKINS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

January 26, 2021

8:30 A.M.

Zoom Platform

PRESENT: S. Pronti, A. Bishop, D. Burrows, J. Cometti, L. Dillon, B. Forrest, A. Iles, K. Kephart, K. Kersey, P. Levesque, C. Malcolm, J. Matteson, J. Sammons, K. Shanks-Booth, T. Tarshus, J. Tavares, C. Whitmore

EXCUSED: H. McDaniel, Kirra Franzese

EX-OFFICIO: A. Hendrix, J. Mouillesseaux

GUESTS: K. Anderson, IAED; M. Belot, Professor of economics at the ILR school and Department of Economics; K. Borgella, Director of Planning and Sustainability; T. Bruer, IBEW; A. Callahan, Tompkins Workforce NY, D. Carrithers, Tompkins County Chief Equity and Diversity Officer, K. Cerasaro, New York State Department of Labor; C. Dettmann, Tompkins Workforce NY; I. Greer, Directory of the ILR Ithaca Co-Lab and Senior Research Associate at the ILR School, C. Harris, New York State Department of Labor; L. Holmes, Tompkins County Deputy Administrator; S. Kittel, Park Foundation; E. Lewis, Senior at the ILR School at Cornell; C. Miller, Alliance for Manufacturing and Technology; D. Mohlenoff, Tompkins Cortland Community College; P. Reifenheiser, Tompkins Cortland Community College; M. Rosin, Chief Strategist, Pathway to Careers; J. Shapiro, BorgWarner; C. Sloan, Tompkins Workforce NY; C. Stanley, Tompkins Workforce NY; E. Torres, Tompkins Workforce NY; C. Walters, TST BOCES; R. Weaver, Director of Research, ILR Buffalo co-Lab; two other attendees

STAFF: N. Branosky, D. Achilles, S. Alvord

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Pronti called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.

BOARD ACTION ITEMS

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – December 15, 2020

It was moved by Mr. Sammons seconded by Mr. Levesque and unanimously adopted by voice vote of members present to approve the minutes of December 15, 2020 as written.

ILR/SCHOOL/CORNELL INITIAL FINDINGS PRESENTATION

- Rusty Weaver, Director of Research, ILR Buffalo Co-Lab
- Ian Colin Greer, Director of the ILR Ithaca Co-Lab and Senior Research Associate at the ILR School
- Mitch Rosin, Chief Strategist, Pathways to Careers (P2C)
- Eric Lewis, Senior at the ILR School at Cornell
- Michele Belot, Professor of Economics at the ILR School and Department of Economics
- Natalie Branosky, Executive Director, Tompkins County Workforce Development Board

The presentation shared initial findings from the Cornell ILR research project, including: Data Analysis (unemployment rates and trends, labor market fluctuations); Qualitative interview trends from discussions with local

employers and workforce development staff; Trends observed (digital divide, working from home, transportation, town vs. gown challenges, gig economy, childcare/parent needs, retention of college graduates in local jobs, new models for skill building/career pathway design, education models/micro-credentials); Suggestions for next steps, including: Collective Impact & Human-Centered Design; Additional Survey of Employers; Expanding NEDP; Digital Literacy focus; Community Workforce Agreements.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:52 a.m.



Pandemic Labor Market Analysis and Skills Mapping

Preliminary report to the Tompkins County Workforce Development Board

January 25, 2021

Research Team: Ian Greer, Cornell University School of Industrial Relations (ILR), Russell Weaver (Cornell-ILR), Mitch Rosin (P2C Solutions), and Eric Lewis (Cornell-ILR), in partnership with Natalie Branosky (Tompkins County Workforce Development Board).

Introduction. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a major shock to the economy of Tompkins County. Before the pandemic, employers struggled in a tight labor market to recruit skilled workers, and many job seekers faced severe barriers to employment. Under the pandemic, some of these problems have intensified along with changes in employer skill requirements, exacerbating some sources of inequality and barriers to work. Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations and P2C Solutions are working in partnership with the Workforce Development Board to conduct research on the County's labor market during the pandemic.

This document summarizes research in progress on employer demand and the supply of skilled workers, with a special focus on working from home, on racial disparities and green jobs. We use (1) statistical data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census Bureau, and New York State Department of Labor; (2) 28 qualitative interviews with local employers and other experts; and (3) a survey of employers.

A statistical portrait of the local labor market. November 2020 the unemployment rate is just slightly worse than it was at the start of the year (3.8% in January 2020), despite topping out around 10% just six months earlier.

Other indicators tell us that even with its seemingly strong recovery, Tompkins County's economy and workforce are still feeling the effects of COVID-19. Although the region has netted about 1,600 jobs since January 2020, six industries have experienced persistent job losses: Leisure and Hospitality, Retail Trade, Other Services, Local Government, Information, and Construction. Our analyses show that the most vulnerable jobs in those industries – the jobs that have likely been lost – are low-wage positions disproportionately held by persons of color. Skills differentials between vulnerable/lost jobs and jobs in industries that have experienced employment increases suggest that many affected, and marginalized, workers are still struggling with chronic joblessness. The workers who have suffered the worst impacts of the pandemic are the county's most underprivileged residents.

Looking to the future, rather than simply working “bring back” the vulnerable jobs that were previously held by currently unemployed residents, it will be important to envision new, higher-quality jobs, and the pathways for moving out-of-work residents into those positions.

The view on the ground: qualitative interviews. Tompkins County has a severe mismatch between supply and demand on the labor market, which has been exacerbated by Covid-19. Our qualitative interviews with employers and representatives of the workforce development system carried out in late 2020 and early 2021 confirm that the challenges of Covid-19 are daunting. The infrastructure is strained, skilled workers are scarce, and even where skilled workers are available it can be challenging to recruit them. We identify, however, five areas where the workforce development system can make progress in the short run to the benefit both of employers and of workers.

1. **Working from home.** When New York State ordered the closure of workplaces not deemed essential, some employers sent workers home and asked them to work on a teleworking basis. These included education institutions, financial services, government, technology. During a pandemic, teleworking can be an important benefit for workers who cannot or do not want to leave their homes, especially those with disabilities and child care responsibilities. While much WFH will continue when the pandemic is over, WFH also involves challenges. Digital literacy, for example, could be improved by embedding International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards into educational programs and using modules from the European Computer Driver License Foundation (ECDL). *Recommendation: a WFH Excellence Program for front-line supervisors and workers to identify and address challenges in the new workplace.*
2. **Job quality.** Many employers we interviewed told us that, although workers with the necessary skills are applying for their openings, it is still very difficult to fill positions. One pointed out that for every ten workers invited to an interview one shows up. Beyond the pandemic-era ‘fear factor’ of working in customer-facing jobs, longstanding job-quality challenges, such as pay, benefits, hours, and job stability can also be barriers to recruitment and retention. These are problems for workforce development: training and placing workers in jobs may not benefit workers or job seekers if (for example) those jobs are not sustained. Drawing on Danish and French models, efforts to address this problem could have strong input from the service users themselves. *Recommendation: A Good Jobs Initiative to stabilize entry-level jobs, using in-work support, including a new, local definition of “a good job” as influenced by the pandemic and jobs of the future.*
3. **Collective Impact.** This theme focuses on improved coordination on the supply side of the labor market. Several issues were mentioned that could be addressed through employers and other local actors, including the digital divide, work from home, transportation and the town/gown divide. Issues that have been identified due to the pandemic are the gig economy, child/parent care, the brain drain (highly educated workers leaving the County), anxiety surrounding COVID, and hesitation by consumers. Local agencies reflected on outskilling, short term certification, new models of education, career pathway pipelines, skill shifts, and the acceleration of programs as ways of meeting these challenges.
4. **Leverage local anchor institutions.** The interviews uncovered opportunities to leverage existing economic and intellectual resources to encourage local hiring, sourcing, and building. This could come in the form of community benefits provisions on large construction projects with hiring goals that

require contractors to make efforts to source a percentage of their labor locally and invest in supports for disadvantaged job seekers. This approach would require the involvement of numerous stakeholders, including the Workforce Development Board.

Next step with research: Employer Survey

We will be distributing a questionnaire in the next few days to employers in the county. The data collected will be used to present descriptive statistics on key questions related to the current challenges businesses face. We aim to identify the most pressing needs of local businesses and inform policies regarding training of those currently seeking work, focused on understanding:

- How businesses have been impacted by the current crisis. How has the demand for their products and services been affected, what adjustments have they undertaken in their workforce, how much retraining has taken place?
- The current challenges businesses experience in recruiting suitable candidates, and what scope they have to increase the attractiveness of positions advertised.
- How businesses envision the near future (within a two-year horizon). How likely do they believe their business will remain open, how much advertising do they intend to undertake and what skills will they be looking for?

Final Product. The final product will be a written report, with recommendations on how best to take our workforce development system forward, and “skills maps” for the jobs we anticipate locally.