For more information and to access the full reports referenced in the Foreword, go to:
Foreword

At Westchester Community Foundation, we don’t shy away from challenges. We believe a community reaches its full potential when all of its residents have the opportunity to reach theirs. Westchester is an expensive place to live, and it is essential for our residents to access good jobs that pay a living wage. Our businesses need to be able to attract and retain qualified workers. A good economic and talent development system benefits us all.

Four years ago, the Foundation increased its commitment to address the widening gap between job seekers and good jobs. Despite Westchester’s profile as a prosperous community, in some neighborhoods 29 percent of working families do not earn enough to meet basic living costs. At least 10 percent of Westchester’s young adults don’t have a foothold to a career. These statistics are alarming and the reasons behind them are complex, so our responses must be focused and strategic.

We convened stakeholders from business, community, and philanthropy to identify the greatest needs and the most promising opportunities. We examined the big picture of Westchester’s economy, and we drilled down to understand the unique challenges young residents experience entering the workforce.

The Foundation commissioned two research reports:

- **Building Opportunity and Growth: Labor Market and Talent Development Assessment for the Westchester and Putnam County Region (Future-Works)** examined long-term economic projections and labor market data and identified a “skills gap” between job-seekers unprepared for in-demand jobs and employers with jobs waiting for skilled workers.

- **Education, Employment & Opportunities for Young Adults Aged 16-25 in Westchester County, New York (JobsFirstNYC)** focused on critical gaps in educational, training, and employment opportunities for young residents who are not in school and not working in the cities of Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers.

The reports, together with our ongoing convenings with employers and job-training providers, offer a comprehensive and data-driven framework for the Foundation and our partners to address the goal of a better economic- and talent-development system in our region.

This executive summary provides an overview of our work to date. Readers are encouraged to consider these findings against the backdrop of Westchester County’s 2019 Affordable Housing Needs Assessment report, which points out that increasing affordable housing in the County “must be complemented by an equal effort to attract, retain, and create sustainable jobs at a living wage rate.”

The Foundation’s Westchester Index, a community data map, shows in graphic detail the disparities in our County. Finally, the United Way of New York State’s ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained, Employed) Report provides additional data on the struggle working residents have making ends meet.

As we enter 2020 and the next decade, we are moving toward specific actions and a framework by which we can track our progress. Employers, community organizations, and philanthropic partners working together can address the challenges outlined in these reports.

Laura Rossi
Executive Director
Westchester Community Foundation
Projected job growth through 2028 is promising

More than 40,000 businesses in Westchester and Putnam Counties added 27,000 new jobs from 2009 to 2017, an indication of a strong post-recession rebound. Projections made in 2018 show an estimated 55,000 new job openings each year through 2028.

Each year 15,000 of the 55,000 projected new job openings are expected to be in Opportunity Occupations (also known as Middle-Skills Jobs). These occupations require post-secondary certification—but not a bachelor’s degree—and can provide a living wage for an individual, representing a path to greater economic security.

What is the disconnect?

In a region with high median incomes, 62 percent of current Westchester and Putnam jobs require only a high-school credential. Wages for these jobs cannot support our region’s high cost of living. In an area where most residents have four-year, graduate, or professional degrees, 33 percent of Westchester and Putnam residents have no education credentials beyond high school. Without further training, occupations with higher earning potential are out of reach.

Meeting business needs: Employers’ perspective

Employers report multiple challenges to finding job candidates with the skills and aptitude to meet their hiring needs. They also cite challenges keeping employees long-term. Challenges include:

Our region’s affluent profile can work against us:

- Westchester and Putnam employers find it difficult to compete for workers who are drawn to higher wages in New York City.
- The high cost of housing and limited public transportation narrow job options for some residents.
- Working parents need quality, reliable child care in order to work full time.

Expectations about work are changing:

- Workers seek flexibility and healthy approaches to work/life balance.

There is a limited pool of candidates:

- Unemployment is low, and the workforce is aging.
- Few are interested in—and trained for—middle-skills jobs.
- There aren’t enough people who possess essential skills—both technical and basic work skills.
Business leaders:

- **Know the cost of being unable to find the right talent.** The president of a family-owned advanced manufacturing firm reported that it takes 22 weeks to fill a customer’s order because she can’t hire enough skilled workers to add a third shift.

- **See the pace of technology accelerating** ahead of current workforce skills.

- **Are aware of the benefit of internships and apprenticeships** which provide work-based learning and help employers assess if the candidate is well-suited for the job.

- **Are open to connecting to community-based programs** that provide job-ready candidates and to the technical training programs that provide industry certifications. Leaders don’t always know what programs exist or will best meet their needs.

Meeting training needs: Service providers’ perspective

Our region is rich in colleges and universities which have the potential to formally engage with employers, developing and delivering customized employee training. For example, residents can pursue career and technical training and sector-based occupational training at Westchester Community College and the BOCES system, the two largest providers of job training in the region.

Community-based organizations offer a range of job-preparation programs. Some provide basic resume writing and job-search coaching. Others provide intense work-readiness “boot camps,” occupational training, and job placement. Many providers focus on services for residents with barriers to employment and are funded through public sources, including the Department of Social Services and federal workforce grants.

The Westchester-Putnam Workforce Development Board oversees all workforce programs funded by the Department of Labor, including the federally mandated One-Stop services for the unemployed.

Challenges:

Leaders of community-based training programs and One-Stop centers highlighted multiple challenges to preparing program participants for good opportunities:

- **Funding sources do not always provide flexibility** to adjust programs to better meet participant needs, particularly participants with multiple barriers to employment.

- **Connections with employers are difficult to establish and maintain,** creating uncertainty that training will match hiring needs.

- **There is little formal connection between economic development in Westchester’s cities and community-based training programs.**

- **There are few incentives and little funder support for collaboration** between service providers.

- **Housing, transportation, and child-care needs can derail program participants.**
Unaware and unprepared: The perspective of young adults in Westchester’s southern tier

Young adults ages 16-24 who are no longer in school and are not connected to work face unique challenges navigating a path to economic security.

In Westchester, one out of ten young adults (approximately 12,000) are not in school and not working. Almost half (47%) are African American.

The young people in Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers who provided their perspective on connecting to jobs spoke openly about their challenges:

- They are unaware of jobs outside of retail and food service.
- They are unlikely to know of jobs beyond their own city.
- They received limited guidance about skilled trades or technical training while in high school.
- They are uncertain about how to find training programs.
- Lack of day care keeps young parents from training and employment.

The occupations most frequently held by Westchester’s young people ages 16-24 with a 12th-grade education or less are:

- Food preparation and serving—$10.50-$14/hour
- Sales and retail—$12.70/hour
- Personal care and service occupations—$12.72-$13.18/hour
- Office and administrative support—$15.71/hour

Note: These are 2017 figures, prior to minimum wage hikes.

Leaders’ insights provide a way forward

When we convened business leaders, training providers, and local policy makers, four strategies emerged in response to the question, “What does an effective workforce system for the region look like?”

1. Adopt a systems approach. Leaders emphasized that the community’s many institutions, programs, and stakeholders are components of a “system” that has the potential to be more effective. They recommended:

   - Closer connections between the various economic development initiatives and the talent development network.
   - A systemwide use of accurate data on open jobs and required skills.
   - Training programs to maximize collaboration and minimize duplication.
   - Benchmarking and evaluating talent-development efforts so the community can build on success.

2. Enlist employer leadership. Employers know current and emerging-talent needs. Their active connections to community-based training programs can inform curriculum and help ensure that programs are on track to meet business needs. Business networks can increase employer awareness of community-based training programs, closing the gap between employers and job-ready candidates.
3. **Enlist government leadership.** Mayors, municipal and county planning departments, and the County’s Office of Economic Development are often the first stop for businesses looking to locate or expand in our communities. And it is worth noting that county and municipal leaders proactively recruit businesses. Their understanding of talent needs can be an asset in closing the gap between business needs and talent-development organizations.

4. **Deliver robust training services.** Effective outcomes for job-seekers depend on staff knowledgeable about the local economy and hiring trends, best-practices training and program evaluation, and adequate community resources to meet client needs. Leaders highlighted that:

- Young adults need better information about careers with a future and training pathways to grow in those careers.

- Comprehensive training blends essential job-readiness skills with additional technical or occupational skills, positioning job-seekers for jobs employers are challenged to fill.

- Comprehensive support services, including through partnerships, can help job-seekers overcome obstacles to job-readiness.

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**A Call to Act**

The challenges to developing valuable, skilled employees and creating economic opportunities are complex and require creative and persistent collaboration. We know the desire to create this systems approach has never been stronger than now.

In multiple convenings, employers and community leaders were eager to offer new ideas and work toward solutions. Service providers shared a deep desire to strengthen outcomes. And young people demonstrated a hunger to find genuine paths toward work that pays well.

The Westchester Community Foundation is eager to join with willing partners to meet these challenges. Philanthropic investments attract more investments and commitment from businesses and community organizations. We suggest the following:

- **Connect employers and training organizations.** Employer leadership is key in identifying training needs, and training organizations play a crucial role in reaching residents eager to prepare for good opportunities.

- **Create robust pipelines** between workers and job training that build skills and provide credentials that employers value.

- **Benchmark progress,** using data to match training to economic growth and business needs. Training organizations and job-seekers need current data and reputable projections on occupations and wages so that participants can step in to occupations with a future and livable wages.