



# The Three Spheres of Equity in Workforce Development Programs

*An early analysis of equity within the Good Jobs Challenge programs*  
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The Economic Growth Institute leverages the University of Michigan and other public/private resources, research, technologies, and expertise to foster innovation and equitable economic growth. EGI has provided innovative economic development programming and applied research for almost 40 years.



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## **SPECIAL THANKS:**

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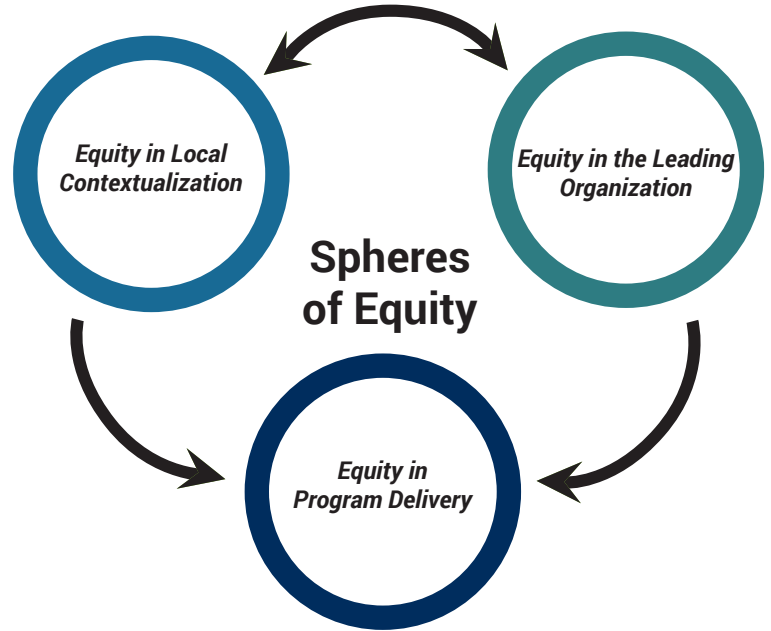
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# Executive Summary

In 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act laid a foundation for innovation in equitable workforce development programs. Through the Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge (GJC), regional leaders are developing sector-specific training programs aimed at addressing disparities and uplifting underserved communities by creating pipelines to good jobs. This report provides early insights into how the GJC programs are prioritizing equity through three interdependent spheres: *Equity in Local Contextualization*, *Equity in the Leading Organization*, and *Equity in Program Delivery*.

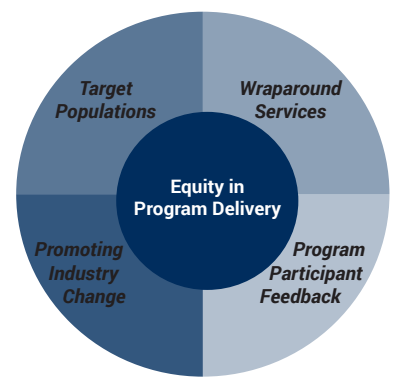
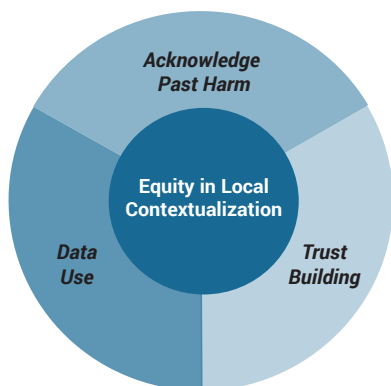


*Local Contextualization* underscores how equity is evident in (1) the use of data in identifying community-specific challenges and opportunities, (2) acknowledging and addressing historical harms, and (3) rebuilding community trust. Key findings include:

- GJC programs most commonly use unemployment and poverty data to describe regional landscapes, with limited analysis of disparities related to wages, opportunities, industry representation, etc. This risks oversimplifying the root causes of inequities needed to strategically inform programming from an equity lens.
- Recognition of historical policies, practices, and approaches that were exclusionary or harmful are part of a restorative justice approach. Nineteen percent of GJC programs acknowledge historical

- discriminatory policies and practices that caused harm, indicating an understanding of the roots of modern disparities.
- The need to rebuild trust with underserved communities is also a part of equity efforts and 34% of GJC programs discuss the imperative of (re)building trust with marginalized communities, signaling intentions to rectify strained relationships. Strong use of data, recognition of past harms, and trust-building are early signs of equity efforts that consider structural and systemic factors in regional programming.

The second sphere, equity within the *Leading Organization*,



addresses how equity efforts are impacted by (1) the background and experience of the organization, (2) its equity framework, and (3) its decision making processes. Specifically:

- Almost half of the GJC programs self-reflected on how their own and their organization's collective experience and background influenced their equity efforts.
- Sixty-nine percent reference developing or already having formalized equity frameworks, though substantial variability exists in scope and comprehensiveness. Of those without formalized frameworks, 30% indicated that they are facing negative local sentiment towards equity efforts.
- While three fourths of GJC leaders mention soliciting input from underserved community representatives, 38% of GJC programs have formalized mechanisms of collaborative decision making. Interestingly, of those with formalized mechanisms, 78% also have equity frameworks.

While many equity frameworks are still nascent, self-reflections and community input channels signify intentions to embed equity organizationally. Stronger formalization and power-sharing processes are needed to actualize equity goals.

In the final sphere, *Program Delivery*, early findings highlight the plans and activities related to equitable implementation, including:

- The GJC program target populations are self-identified by leaders and all programs mention reaching racial and/or ethnic minority groups and 97% also identify low-income communities. Following this, other target populations include youth (81%), women (78%), formerly incarcerated (69%), and

veterans/military-related personnel (63%). Outreach strategies to engage the underserved underscore a collaborative approach, with a significant percentage of GJC programs leveraging the strengths of community-based organizations and/or caseworkers for outreach.

- GJC program also elevates the importance of wraparound services to holistically support program participants.
- Feedback from the program participants is planned by 69% of programs, though specifics are still developing.
- Additionally, 91% envision promoting some degree of equity-oriented change within industry partners through employer training, hiring reforms, and job quality characteristics, indicating the potential for long-term systemic impacts.

While still in early conceptual stages for most, the goals to engage with community, program participants, and employers denote strategic, holistic thinking on programmatic equity.

Examinations of early priorities and plans across these three spheres provide initial insights into GJC leaders' multifaceted approaches to equity. As programs progress, subsequent analyses by this research team will track the maturation and refinement of equitable practices tied to measurable outputs and outcomes. While these findings are specific to GJC, implications span the broader workforce development landscape. By spotlighting the importance of equity in local contextualization, the leading organization, and program delivery, GJC programs can provide an important advancement in fostering inclusive employment pathways and economic resilience nationally.

# Introduction

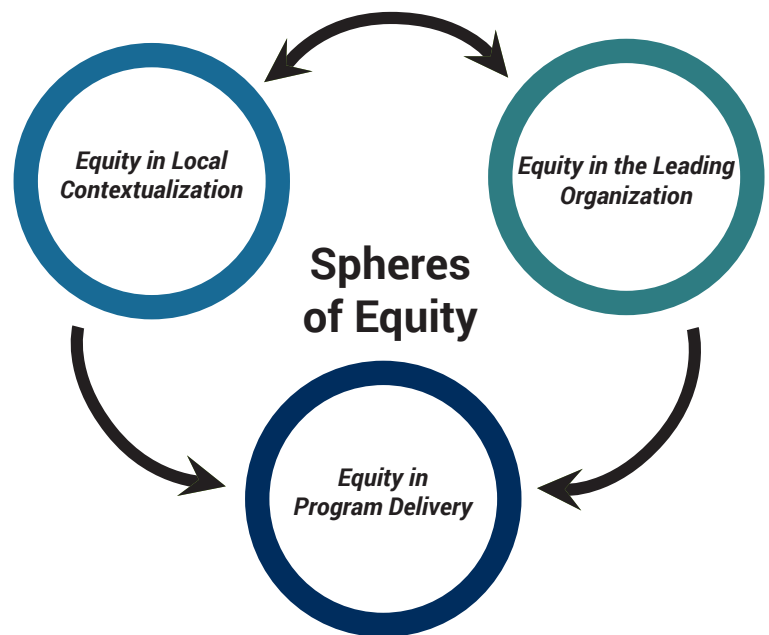
To mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government launched several initiatives in 2021 to promote resiliency and spur economic growth. One of these was the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which provides funding for several recovery investments, including enhanced flexible workforce investments like the Good Jobs Challenge (GJC). The Good Jobs Challenge creates or enhances job placement and training programs, with a specific focus on underserved and underrepresented populations, through the development of industry-specific sectoral partnerships that include employers and workforce development organizations, such as educational institutions, training organizations, organized labor, and more.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike more traditional workforce development investments, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) designed the GJC to be non-prescriptive and place-based, meaning that it did not have required demographic population targets or strict program approaches; instead, EDA looked to communities to define what was needed to create economic change related to jobs and job quality. Additionally, equity is embedded as a priority within the GJC investments, as all federal agencies have recently elevated it as a key priority.<sup>2</sup> This research report provides a first look into how local GJC programs are integrating equity and the report is intended for workforce development program leaders as well as funders of programs like this. While the findings are specific to GJC, the implications for workforce development programs are broad.

Analysis of equity is multifaceted, and GJC programs have the opportunity to embed equity within three different spheres:

1. **Equity in Local Contextualization:** Assessing how GJC programs conceptualize and identify

- the place-based gaps and opportunities;
2. **Equity in the Leading Organization:** Understanding equity within the organization leading the program; and
3. **Equity in Program Delivery:** Identifying how equity is integrated into program delivery



These three spheres represent a multi-layered approach to equity. Additionally, the activities within each of these spheres influence one another. For example, how a community contextualizes its assets and opportunities also influences who leads the program. There is also influence from the organization on local contextualization because who is leading the program development process also influences which gaps or opportunities are prioritized. Finally, these two spheres directly affect how equity is incorporated into program delivery.

These three spheres are unique to EDA investment

<sup>1</sup> EDA defines sectoral partnerships as “a partnership of employers from the same industry who join with other strategic partners to train and place workers into high-quality jobs that employers need filled and intend to fill through the partnership. A sectoral partnership is focused on one specific industry or functional area (e.g., finance, customer service), and one or more specific roles within that industry. Sectoral partnerships are effective because: they are carefully built to include all necessary partners before workforce solutions are designed; they cut across traditional economic development, workforce, education, and social services system silos; they are targeted to in-demand sectors with high-quality jobs; and they consider the economic realities of a regional industry in assessing workforce demand and training needs. Sectoral partnerships heighten the chance of job placement after program completion given their connection to real-time employer demand.” For more information, please see the FAQs of the program [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> President Joe Biden’s [Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) in 2021 as well as a list of all equity-related executive orders as [documented](#) by the Department of Commerce.

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programs since the agency relies on the community to define its local needs (contextualization) and provides flexibility in qualifying leading organizations and leaders of sectoral partnerships. As evidenced by the current GJC program portfolio (more detail below), there is significant diversity in who is leading these programs and the local needs they seek to address.

The data informing these findings are from early interviews with program leaders, program applications, initial progress reports, and similar supplemental materials. Program leaders include executives, project directors, and program managers at state and local government, tribal organizations, CFDis, higher education institutions such as universities and community colleges, community-based organizations, industry intermediaries like Chamber of Commerce foundations and associations, among others. These leaders come from an array of backgrounds ranging from professional government staff, program managers of existing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act-funded or locally managed workforce development programs, faculty researchers at universities, and non-profit staff.

For this research, the team conducted semi-structured interviews with 63 GJC leaders from the 32 programs from April 2023 to June 2023<sup>3</sup> and used thematic qualitative analysis to identify the key findings. This report provides insight into on-the-ground activities but does not include program-level performance appraisals or evaluations. Forthcoming reports from this team will eventually dive deeper into approaches that lead to more equitable outcomes.<sup>4</sup> However, with the limited research on the intersection of equity and policy and practice within workforce development programs,<sup>5</sup> these findings should be viewed as preliminary due to the shorter duration of the analysis. For more information on the methodology, please see the appendix.

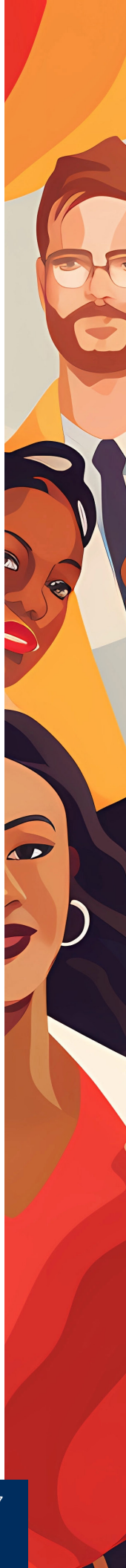
## Terminology Limitations

The research team acknowledges that any terminology, when applied to a broad segment of people, will always be flawed. The phrase “underserved” was the most common catch-all term used in the GJC program documentation when referring to populations or communities to target. It is important to note the context of this word, which places the action and agency on the one doing the serving and identifies the group being served as passive receivers of services. Thus, while this report utilizes this imperfect term of “underserved,” we acknowledge its significant limitations and the implied power imbalance between those serving and those being served.

<sup>3</sup> One GJC program interview took place in October 2023 due to changes in leadership.

<sup>4</sup> This is the first report in a series from this team on equity in GJC as well as the Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC). For more information on this research project and its scope, please see this [post](#).

<sup>5</sup> A [2021 report](#) by the National Association of Workforce Boards provides an initial overview of attitudes towards racial equity in workforce development.



## Background

As the nation's only federal agency dedicated exclusively to economic development, the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) stands at the intersection of multiple policy domains ranging from infrastructure and public works, disaster recovery efforts, revolving loan funds, innovation, and entrepreneurship, planning activities, and more. Originally conceived in the 1965 Public Works and Economic Development Act, the agency leverages partnerships, authorities, and resources to address economic disruptions, long-term economic growth strategies, and accelerate capacity building for local, state, and federal stakeholders through grant-making and program management.

Today, the agency's core mission is centered on three primary goals:<sup>6</sup> (1) creating an ecosystem that promotes economic activity by improving and expanding public infrastructure; (2) promoting job creation through increased innovation, productivity, and entrepreneurship; and (3) empowering local and regional communities experiencing chronic high unemployment and low per capita income to develop private sector business and attract increased private-sector capital investment.

To fulfill these goals, EDA takes a unique place-based approach. EDA investments typically adhere to the following progression:<sup>7</sup>

1. **Assess Local Conditions:** Applicants for EDA investments are invited to articulate local economic conditions, the externalities impacting those conditions, and how investments from EDA will provide relief from those externalities and improve local economic conditions. In the spirit of place-based investments, grantees often have the flexibility to "define" a region, stakeholder groups, or similar constraints based on local conditions.
2. **Identify Resources:** Applicants must identify the types of resources, and what combinations of those resources, are needed to alleviate those conditions, such as programs, staffing, and infrastructure. In many instances,

applicants are asked to identify local or existing resources that can be leveraged to complement the federal investment.

3. **Identify Outputs:** Applicants are generally invited to identify programmatic outputs (ex., placements of participants), capacity (ex., establish or increase tech transfer activities), or a combination of both to demonstrate progress towards achieving these. Because local conditions and resources are delegated to the applicant, this provides some variability.
4. **Realized Outcomes:** Applicants typically self-define the criteria above with some assistance from EDA to ensure alignment with broader agency goals, regulations, and best practices. Upon receiving investment, applicants commit to establishing the processes and procedures needed to achieve and report outcomes. Due to the highly localized nature of investments and economic conditions, these realized outcomes may vary greatly by project or program.

In 2021, with the transition to President Biden's administration and subsequent passage of ARPA, EDA was tasked with implementing new programming to accelerate the nationwide economic recovery effort. Simultaneously, EDA was tasked with implementing these new priorities in alignment with new White House executive orders, such as Executive Orders 14035: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce and 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.<sup>8</sup>

Under ARPA,<sup>9</sup> EDA was charged with investing \$3 billion of supplemental funding through a combination of infrastructure, workforce development, travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation programs, tribal investment, and traditional economic development programs, such as Economic Adjustment Assistance and planning and research programs. Of those, \$500 million was dedicated to fund the Good Jobs Challenge.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see EDA's [site](#).

<sup>7</sup> For more information about EDA's theory of change, please reference their logic model [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> The historical background on EDA is available [here](#) as well as the Department of Commerce's [documentation](#) of equity-related Executive Orders.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on all ARPA investments, please click [here](#).



## Historical Context

The federal government's role in fostering industry-led, community-aligned state and local workforce development has evolved significantly in the last 50 years. While educational institutions are foundational in developing the future workforce,<sup>10</sup> federal workforce development policies and programs provide additional opportunities for training and job placement.

Additionally, workforce development is supported through ecosystem partners and researchers such as the Georgetown Center on Education & the Workforce, Harvard Project on Workforce, Drexel University Center for Labor Markets & Policy, Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, the Business Higher Education Forum, Aspen Institute, Jobs for the Future, Workrise, and many more.

In addition to programs such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) within the Department of Labor (DOL), many federally-funded workforce programs exist,<sup>11</sup> spanning numerous agencies including the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, the Department of Transportation, National Science Foundation, and more. Furthermore, the number of workforce programs has continued to grow as the Biden administration has prioritized workforce within the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act, (IIJA), Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS), and the Science Act. Among past and current workforce development approaches, the GJC investment is unique both in monetary size (i.e., outside of DOL and higher education) and in its approach.

### About the GJC Program

GJC, funded in March 2021 and launched publicly in Fall 2021, is one of the larger modern investments into place-based policy programs.<sup>12</sup> Launched to mitigate the sustained economic impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic, GJC aligns key principles of high-

performing workforce development systems, effective strategies in local economic development, and the prioritization of crucial social outcomes like equity. While many policies and investment principles were applied, the following represent some of the high-level principles that influenced the structure of GJC:

- **Place-based investments:** As an agency, EDA prioritizes local context and capacity, and therefore seeks to accelerate local economic development through funding locally-identified priorities.
- **Sectoral Strategies:** High-performing workforce development programs integrate employer commitments and inputs by centering the programs on specific industry sectors. This theory of change advances that “demand-based” programs will lead to more substantial outcomes for employers and workers. This research team will continue to investigate if demand-based approaches might lead to the prioritization of the needs of industry sectors over individual workers and their personal job aspirations. Recent research has shown that equity-based approaches protect the “economic agency” of workers as they navigate their careers.<sup>13</sup>
- **Regional Training Systems:** Effective and equitable workforce development programs are inherently local and should include cross-sector collaborations of employers, training providers, wraparound service providers, and the incumbent/prospective workforce.
- **Good Jobs Principles:** The Department of Commerce was one of the first federal agencies alongside the Department of Labor to codify key elements of equity, wages, and more. These were eventually outlined as the Good Jobs Principles, a jointly endorsed set of guiding principles by the U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Labor.

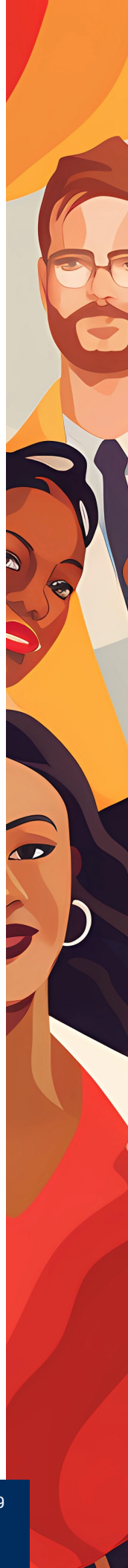
GJC, alongside EDA's sustained efforts in integrating workforce as a core competency, represents a new major addition to the federal workforce investment

<sup>10</sup> The expansive domain of workforce development, its myriad of stakeholders, and the trajectory of past and current federal programs and policies, exceeds the scope of this research project. However, a few of the pivotal legislative milestones which significantly shaped today's workforce development landscape include: the Land Grant Act of 1862, National Vocational Education Act of 1917, the New Deal Legislation of the 1930s, National Apprenticeship Act of 1937, the GI Bill of Rights in 1944, the Vocational Education Act of 1963, The Higher Education Act in 1965, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act in 1973, the Job Training Partnership Act in 1982, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act in 1984, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 1998, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which was enacted in 2014, and the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) in 2018.

<sup>11</sup> The most recent [assessment](#) by the federal government of employment and training programs is 2019, with data from 2017. In fiscal year 2017, 43 federally-funded programs were identified. Since then, there has been significant growth in federally-supported programs such as APRA, CHIPS, and more.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Muro et al., “Breaking down an \$80 billion surge in place-based industrial policy.” Brookings Metro, December 15, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/breaking-down-an-80-billion-surge-in-place-based-industrial-policy/>.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Fuller et al., “Unlocking Economic Prosperity: Career Navigation in a Time of Rapid Change.” The Project on Workforce, Harvard Kennedy School, November 19 2023, <https://www.pw.hks.harvard.edu/post/career-navigation>.



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landscape. While other workforce development programs seek to address portions of the elements above, none fully anchor investments in economic development and competitiveness like EDA due to this unique mandate.

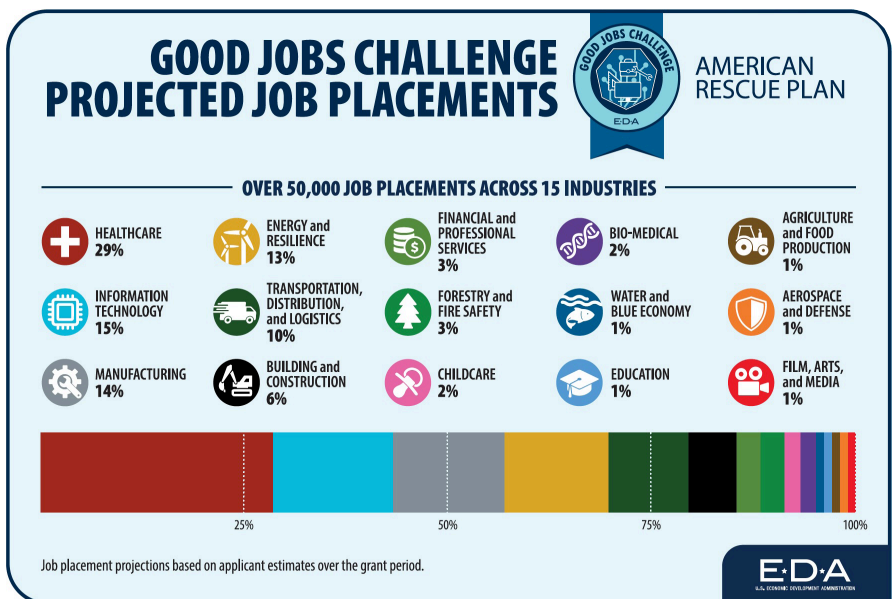
In 2021, EDA invested \$500 million into 32 industry-led workforce training partnerships in 31 states and Puerto Rico through GJC. The local GJC programs are committed to placing over 50,000 American workers into quality jobs in 15 sectors. Pathways to “good jobs” in GJC are an explicit equity strategy of EDA’s investment that is embedded in the local programs with the goal of equitable career opportunities, economic mobility and security for all communities. The three spheres of equity in this report are rooted in these broad-reaching goals.

GJC awards ranged from \$1.8 million to \$24 million, with a median award of \$15,859,759. The local programs’ duration ranges from two to four years and includes three potential phases: System Development, Program Design, or Program Implementation. GJC programs can choose to begin in any phase of the program, with the initial phases providing the lowest funding amount. As programs advance through the stages, available funding increases.

The program lead entities are from a variety of backgrounds. Thirty-one percent are nonprofits (other than institutions of higher education); 22% are institutions of higher education; 9% are city or township governments; 9% are state governments; 9% are local economic development agencies, 6% are chambers of commerce; 6% are workforce development boards; and 2% self-identified as “other,”

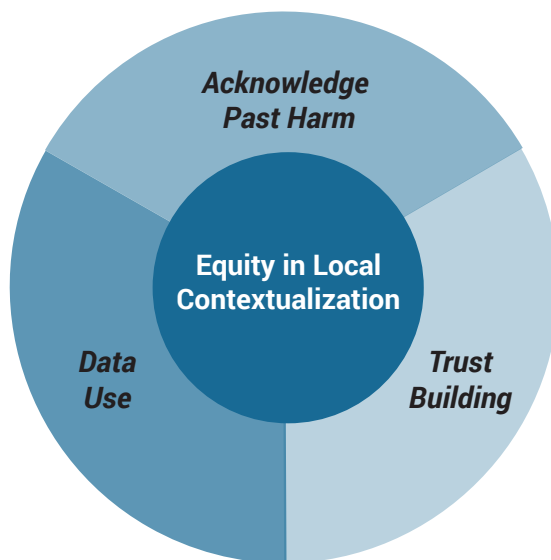
including various other types of nonprofits or regional organizations.

In addition to the lead entities,<sup>14</sup> each GJC program includes one or multiple organizations that lead the sectoral partnerships. In rare cases, the lead entity and sectoral partnership leaders are the same. The breakdown of organization type for sectoral partnership lead organizations is similar to the lead entities. Forty-one percent of the listed are nonprofits; 16% are other regional or nonprofit organizations; 17% are institutions of higher education; 12% are workforce development boards; 9% are government (city, township, county, and state); and 5% are chambers of commerce.



# Equity in Local Contextualization

EDA's place-based investment strategy emphasizes aligning industry needs with local context and capacity. Thus, GJC requires that grant applicants define their local needs, opportunities, and priorities.<sup>15</sup> The framing of these, including assets, challenges, and needs, provides insights into the values and perspectives of funded local GJC programs. Local contextualization, or how a community tells its story, is a key sphere of equity. As with all narratives, what story is told (and how) is indicative of the values and priorities of the community. Stated another way, the data content of the local context has implications for what is "normal" or "average"<sup>16</sup> and this indicates community values. For example, unemployment data points to norms of employment and the value of utilizing one's time towards earning money. In other cases, median wage income data by race, ethnicity, and/or gender underscores the localized values of equal opportunity. In researching the GJC programs, equity emerged in local contextualization through three areas: data use, acknowledgment of past harm, and recognition of broken community trust.



the demographics (including population size and racial and/or ethnic characteristics) of their region. After these two most common data trends, the storytelling diverges. The impacts of COVID-19 are part of some regional stories (47%), as is an acknowledgment that the effects of COVID-19 are not equally distributed and that those most impacted, by and large, were non-white and low-income populations. Additionally,

## Data Use

The GJC programs contextualize their local needs with a variety of data points and information. Specific to the local community, GJC leaders rely most heavily on unemployment and poverty rates to tell the story of the needs within their region, with 81% mentioning these rates. Discussion of unemployment skew between issues of job loss, more generally, and the issue of low workforce participation, though not all made this distinction. Seventy-two percent of GJC leaders highlight

DATA USE BY GJC PROGRAMS	%
Unemployment or Poverty Rates	81%
Demographics	72%
COVID-19 Impacts	47%
Wage or Income disparities	44%
Opportunity disparities	38%
Geographic disparities	28%
Industry representation disparities	25%
Educational attainment	13%
Digital access	6%

<sup>15</sup> The [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) (NOFO) included review criteria for the "Identification of Regional Needs" which included an assessment of the region's economic state, identification of employer needs, and a plan for how the project will provide quality jobs. Additionally, the NOFO also included definitions of potential populations to serve.

<sup>16</sup> Equity work must consistently question if the "average" or "normal" individual experience is inclusive or exclusive. Inclusive and diverse cultures create space for each community and/or individual to define their own development and flourishing according to their values, within ethical boundaries to prevent undue harm (for more, see Sen (2001) and Nussbaum (2011)).

44% highlight wage and income (such as median household income) disparities for underserved and/or underrepresented communities in their region. Opportunity disparities, defined as limited access to opportunities such as training due to income, transportation, or lack of childcare options, are included in regional descriptions by 38% of GJC programs. Geographic access disparities, such as limited access to roads or the differences in service provision for rural areas, are incorporated by 28% of GJC programs, while 25% mention lack of industry representation by race or gender. Finally, educational attainment disparities (13%) and challenges in digital access, such as internet/broadband (6%), are also part of regional descriptions.

### Acknowledgement of Past Harm

Recognition of historical policies, practices, and approaches (i.e., past harm) that were exclusionary and harmful is also part of an equitable approach to Local Contextualization. Restorative justice practices emphasize the need to acknowledge past harm and restore conditions to how they were before the harm occurred,<sup>17</sup> while also identifying and uplifting the assets and strengths within the community. Transformative justice practices highlight the need to stop perpetuating harm and transform systems so that violence and harm no longer occur in the first place.<sup>18</sup> Both frameworks are useful when considering rebuilding trust and fostering collaborative relationships with communities that have experienced harm from federal or state actors. Within the GJC programs, 19% identify and acknowledge harmful historical practices as a component of their equity work.<sup>19</sup> As one GJC leader mentions, *“There’s a lot, with historical trauma, with things that have happened in [state name].”* The long timeline for this process also came up for leaders. One shared, *“[We are]*

## DATA USE

### Key Takeaways for Local Practitioners

- As you are developing programs, dig deeper into the disparities between populations by going beyond the unemployment and poverty rates. Often, disparity indicators, such as wage and income, opportunity, geographic accessibility, industry-specific representation, and education, can provide more insight into the why behind the unemployment and poverty rates. This is critical information as programs are designed and developed to ensure the offerings are addressing the real-time needs of the community. Some GJC programs (9%) are already proactively internalizing the data from local contextualization by developing local success metrics beyond federal indicators of quality jobs for what equitable outcomes entail, such a “community prosperity wage” as a target, or specifically defining a range of equitable pay for the region.

### Key Takeaways for Funders

- These regional descriptions highlight that local programs rely heavily on readily available data points, such as unemployment and poverty rates. However, these macro-level indicators will be difficult to noticeably impact during a short grant cycle. As programs can identify opportunity disparities through data, these will better highlight how the program is moving the needle for underserved communities.

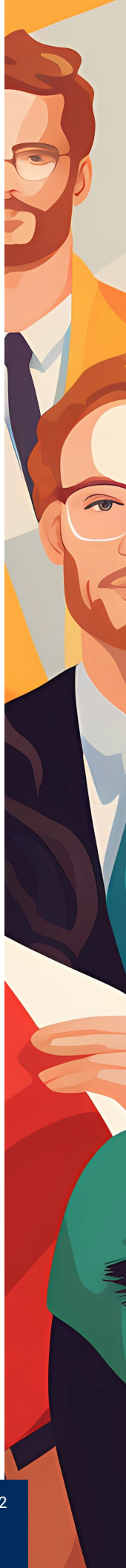
*acknowledging that breaking down 400 years of systemic racism and other forms of discrimination is very much a*

<sup>17</sup> Suzuki, M., & Jenkins, T. (2023). Apology–forgiveness cycle in restorative justice, but how? *International Review of Victimology*, 29(2), 259-276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02697580221079994>.

Vaandering, Dorothy (2014) Implementing restorative justice practice in schools: what pedagogy reveals, *Journal of Peace Education*, 11:1, 64-80, DOI: 10.1080/17400201.2013.794335

<sup>18</sup> Mia Mingus. “Transformative Justice,” *The Digital Abolitionist*, Accessed November 5, 2023. <https://www.thedigitalabolitionist.com/transformative-justice>.

<sup>19</sup> There is an interesting intersection between those who use opportunity disparities as part of the data component of Local Contextualization and past harm. Sixty seven percent of those who mentioned past harm also mentioned opportunity disparities.



*long-term effort that we're all in to do what we can, but we're going to hit some bumps along the way."*

### Trust Building

As GJC leaders contextualize their region, the level of community trust is also an important aspect of equity efforts. For many programs, advancing equity requires building trust between historically underserved communities and the leading organization. GJC leaders reference navigating distrust from communities and the need to rebuild this for their programs to be successful. As one leader shared, *"I think the biggest challenge, as it relates to equity and inclusion, that we have faced so far, is figuring out how to get community trust. We had a difficult conversation with someone [who] is a stakeholder in this space, where basically we were so excited to be explaining this project, and all of the great things it was going to do. And after we talked for probably five to seven minutes, she said, 'That's great. I've heard all this before, and it's never come to be. So why is this different, and how are you going to do this?'"* Similarly, another leader shared that in many of their conversations, *"everything that we keep hearing is about trust."* In interviews, 34% reference the need to rebuild trust with local communities, and some reference engaging with community leaders or community-based organizations in these efforts.

Trust-building is a time-intensive process that necessitates work beyond the life cycle of this grant. However, the research team intends to continue investigating the practices related to trust-building within the local GJC programs over the next several years.

## ACKNOWLEDGING PAST HARM AND TRUST BUILDING

### Key Takeaways for Local Practitioners

- Engage with social workers and community leaders engaged in trauma-informed care and restorative justice practices as you seek to reconcile past harmful policies and/or practices (note: calling out past harm without a plan for restoration can be more harmful).
- Building trust is a slow process and will extend beyond the boundaries of grants such as GJC. Efforts to build trust must be rooted in long-term collective regional growth and flourishing, not simply transactional relationships related to program outcomes (i.e., engaging with underserved communities solely to reach target population goals). As you engage with a wide range of community-based organizations (CBOs), begin with small projects and continue to build from there. As decisions are made about the next steps, engage the community representatives in the actual decision-making, and not just in data collection or gaining access to target populations.
- Finally, recognize that capacity building for leaders in underrepresented communities is a critical lever for continued success.

### Key Takeaways for Funders

- Recognize trust building as a strong and valued outcome
- Provide time and funding for these processes of addressing past harm and building community trust.
- Be patient with funding and outcomes. Historically, practices that prioritize speed and short-term outputs are the kinds of practices that have led to breaking the trust in the first place.

# Equity in the Leading Organization

The flexibility in the GJC funding opportunity led to significant diversity among the types of organizations leading local programs. While there were no specific requirements for equity practices within the leading organizations, 94% of GJC programs highlight equity within their own organization in at least one of the following areas: background and experience reflections, equity frameworks, and/or decision making. While equity is not solely a top-down initiative, it is necessary for equity to be embedded at all levels - programmatically and organizationally. This section provides more insight into how organizations leading the local GJC programs are embedding equity.

## Background & Experience Reflections

The intersection of individual experiences, identities (gender, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, religion, etc.), and the value and associated power of each of these are important considerations at the individual and organizational levels. In other words, the “positionality” is the sum of one’s social identities, experiences, and background that influence how one perceives and interprets things. Positionalities are applicable both at the individual leadership level as well as the organizational level. For example, a leader’s positionality can impact how she interacts socially, and an organization’s positionality can also impact how staff internally operate and externally interact with the community.

These experiences and backgrounds (i.e., “positionalities”) can impact the viability and sustainability of equity initiatives. Forty-seven percent of the GJC programs explicitly highlight their leader’s or their organization’s background and experience and how that might advance, or potentially hinder, their equity work. Some elevate their organization’s or personal connections with underserved communities. Others identify a need to hire or contract with community-based organizations (CBOs) or contractors from the populations they seek to reach. Reflecting on background and experience enables program leaders and organizations to understand how



their positionality impacts their efforts and where partners or other leaders are needed to advance equity goals. Some examples of how grantee leaders reflect on their own or their organization’s background and experience include:

- *Our starting point is having mostly white men in leadership ... our work is to advance programs to get folks that represent the communities rather than just continue what’s been happening with the [industry] sector in [our state].*
- *“[This program] was important to me to end intergenerational poverty; I grew up with a very similar background where my father was incarcerated, and my mom was working multiple jobs. So it became more of a passion for me and the only thing that has consistently provided value is education.”*
- *“I will admit I have a lot to learn, and I know that we have areas where we can do a lot of different things. So I’m excited to be a part of [equity in this GJC program], and to see how this grows and then how we can carry it into our other programs as we move forward.”*

## Equity Frameworks

Equity frameworks, or the formalization of equity priorities into procedural norms, are high-level indicators of an organization's prioritization of equity. At this early stage in GJC, leaders are discussing ways they are seeking to codify their priorities into action. Sixty-nine percent of GJC programs reference formalized plans or the process of formalizing an equity approach or framework. Interestingly, 80% of those who actively reflect on their own or their organization's background and experience and its relationship to equity also have an equity framework. While a nationwide scan on equity frameworks in workforce development organizations has not been completed to this team's knowledge, a recent [study](#) by McKinsey & Company (2023) notes that only 40% of Fortune 1000 businesses made public statements of support for racial justice as of October 2022 and only 25% had made internal commitments to promote diversity and inclusion. Additionally, NGIN's 2022 [review](#) of equity announcements, focused on larger financial institutions, found these commitments were only small steps to remedy historical harms, not catalytic changes in improving wealth for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Instead, these equity announcements seem to have aided the companies in their profits, yet did not reach intended target populations because of a lack of systemic change. While nonprofits, educational institutions, local governments, or quasi-government agencies will often have a higher propensity to engage with social issues such as equity, early indicators point to GJC programs advancing equity priorities more substantially than their industry partners. However, all organizations face the challenge of catalyzing change through equity initiatives and not solely additive language or superficial metrics.

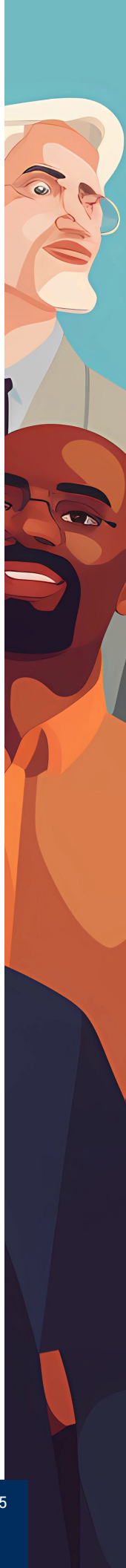
In addition low corporate engagement, momentum may be waning and, if not, turning against equity efforts in some local GJC programs. Thirty-one percent of GJC programs do not have or are not developing an equity framework, and of these, 30% indicate they are navigating negative local sentiment toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. In other words, as of the publication of this report (five months after initial interviews), GJC local leaders in some communities are now navigating resistance to the equity priorities GJC leaders committed to

advance through their programs.

Equity frameworks vary widely in their formation, scope, and application. While some organizations enlist external consultants to guide the development, others are revisiting their overarching strategic plans to integrate equity comprehensively into their GJC program. Subsequent reports from this team will delve further into the potential influence of these frameworks. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the GJC program applications in 2021 were written during a surge in the positive sentiment toward racial justice and equity. However, even with the amplified public and private backing for equity, these frameworks remain non-uniform, with several organizations still in the nascent stages of their development. This underscores the formidable challenge associated with substantive equity work that extends beyond mere proclamations.

Overall, many program leaders are still in the early stages of equity frameworks, and below are some examples of how they discuss these:

- *"We're taking a lot from another initiative, which originated with Harvard Business School. It's called impact-weighted accounts, and that's how they evaluate the workforce of participating businesses: is it reflective of the region's diversity, and is that diversity reflected throughout the occupational ladders at the organization? So that's our outcomes-focused 'North Star' approach in monitoring our businesses and our training programs."*
- *"I think we're attempting a new model, which means there's not a playbook, right? We can't just follow these instructions, and that's where it ends. And there's a lot at stake for a lot of different people. We want to do this, we want to get it right, and there's also competing goals, objectives, and how do we make sure we're all moving forward? So we're kind of going through trial and error with it. However, the one thing is that there's no trial and error about the importance of equity. There are things that are working, but there's more that we could be doing, and how can we do it in a way that's fully sustainable, where it doesn't feel like this is just an initiative right now? We're utilizing all of these components together, we want to be able to see how this can be a good model that sustains [after this project]."*



- “We’re trying to do this Nash Equity Framework, and it’s a guideline for these 9 areas around equity - like how we think about equity, and it’s kind of a self-inventory of how your organization is doing these different areas.”
- “We have a working definition of equity and we’re also putting into place a lot of intentional strategies around building a culture of trust and belonging. But also doing some work with the [organization name] right now, with leadership. And we have equity committees and so we’re working through those committees to implement some intentional strategies to build that kind of culture.”

## Decision Making

The local GJC programs, by design, are intentionally collaborative. The sectoral partnerships are governance structures that include economic development, workforce, education, social services partners and some level of leadership from area employers. From an equity lens, the research team specifically attuned to how underserved communities and/or their representatives were

engaged in decision-making processes. While all GJC programs referenced connections to underserved communities in some way, the extent to which these communities and leaders are engaged and in what activities varied. The discussions by GJC programs in written materials or the interviews around program decision making are captured below.

Many GJC leaders (75%) highlight receiving input from underserved community representatives (including CBOs or wraparound service providers) through open houses, roundtable discussions, town halls, workgroups, or committees. Those with formalized mechanisms of collaborative decision making, such as workgroups or committees, represent 38% of GJC programs. Of these collaborative decision-making programs, 78% also have formalized equity frameworks. This suggests a potential correlation between the formalization of equity priorities and the deliberate distribution of power, thus promoting a more balanced and inclusive decision-making process. As one grantee shares, “We want to elevate and give [community-based organizations] a space to influence decision-making and strategy.” Another grantee describes a detailed training process on a distributed leadership

## COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING

Collaborative decision making embraces a multidimensional process of extensive collaboration, cooperation, and active participation from a variety of stakeholders. Moreover, it acknowledges the inherent power dynamics within a group and provides an avenue for its equitable distribution. Shared or consensus decision making (meaning all stakeholders agree) can be one example of collaborative decision making. Collaborative decision making can also include meaningful community engagement, which in itself also has multiple levels of engagement from input to the community making the decision for itself.

Community engagement is a spectrum of **for**, **with**, and **by**. “For” implies that decisions are made **for** an underserved community; thus the communities are passive receivers, which removes their action and agency, and does not meaningfully engage or empower a community. Decision making **with** communities allows for sharing power and resources while also building capacity within underserved communities for them to lead projects and programs **by** themselves. Note that capacity building within community organizations is also a key component of this, and some community-based organizations ask more traditional organizations (such as economic development organizations) to lead the grant or program so they can focus on providing services and not administrative burdens. This collaborative leadership model builds capacity within underserved populations while not becoming extractive or burdensome of others’ time and resources. Some of the GJC programs are actively seeking to model collaborative decision making by the community, which will be highlighted in more detail in future reports as more information on implementation practices is available. For more information on community engagement models, please see [Facilitating Power by Rosa Gonzalez \(2019\)](#).



model that provides community-led teams with data and areas of needed impact, allowing the organizations closest to these communities and populations to decide how to tackle the issues collectively.

A key outcome of the System Development phase (72% of programs launched in this stage) is the formation of governance networks that help coalitions identify decision-making processes, formalize networks, and establish engagement and technical assistance plans. Therefore, as grantees advance through the Program Design and Program Implementation stages, the research team will continue to evaluate how approaches to decision making evolve, especially in relation to equity.

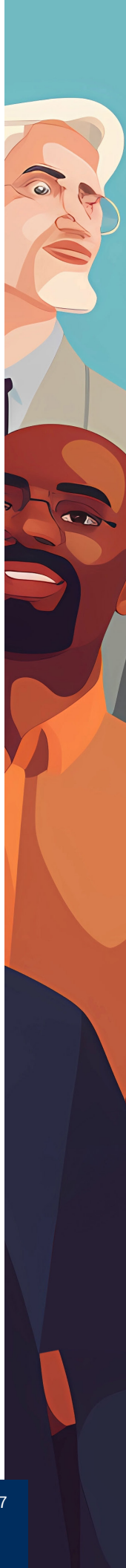
## LEADING ORGANIZATION

### Key Takeaways for Local Practitioners

- Reflect on your role within the ecosystem and evaluate which “seat at the table” makes the most sense for you or your organization based on your background and experience. At times, building capacity through training and administrative support with other organizations can be an effective tool in advancing equity.
- Evaluate who is not currently at the table, why they are not at the table, and/or what barriers are keeping them from being at the table. If a program’s target populations are not represented both at the decision-making table and in daily implementation, there is a critical gap. This is an important opportunity for a program to implement equitable processes in expanding access, inclusion, and formalizing processes.
- Recognize that equity frameworks are difficult to develop but can lead to actionable steps in equity. See the Equity Resources section for helpful approaches (p. 27 ), or consider hiring a consultant to help facilitate the development of a broader equity framework.
- Understand models of collaborative decision-making and formalize the inclusion and leadership of underserved communities in program decision-making.

### Key Takeaways for Funders

- Recognize that equity frameworks are still in the early stages, even for programs prioritizing equity.
- There are early indicators of decreased interest and/or increased resistance to equity priorities in local ecosystems; support and co-learning opportunities are necessary to continue to uplift local leaders in these efforts.
- Funding to support operational changes, especially in structure and decision-making, may provide long-term stability for equity-focused initiatives.



# Equity in Program Delivery

GJC leaders conceptualize equity in their program delivery through four areas: target populations, wraparound services, program participant feedback, and promoting industry change. Most GJC programs (72%) at the time of their interview were in the initial System Development phase, and the stages of Program Design and Program Implementation were still upcoming. Therefore, the findings in this section reflect early insights, which are expected to continue evolving as GJC programs move into the design and implementation stages.



## Target Populations

Each program self-identified their target populations. The funding opportunity encouraged targeting historically underserved populations and areas, based on the needs of their local area.<sup>20</sup>

To understand who GJC programs are targeting, the research team organized the populations and communities identified in interviews and application materials into overarching categories.<sup>21</sup> These categories are outlined in the table on page 19. There is great overlap between these categories, and this table does not represent the intersectionality of populations' identities.<sup>22</sup>

All of the GJC programs mention servicing racial and ethnic minority groups and 97% also mention serving populations with lower socioeconomic status. Following these, GJC programs mention youth (81%), women (78%), formerly incarcerated (69%), and veterans/military association (63%).<sup>23</sup> Significant overlap exists among the above categories, as most GJC programs highlight multiple underserved populations. Other target

populations mentioned once or twice, but not frequently enough to warrant a separate category, include: incumbent workers,<sup>24</sup> people with low literacy rates, dislocated adult workers, career-changers, people without college degrees, domestic violence survivors, men in healthcare, human trafficking victims, single parents, low-skilled or uncredentialed workers.

### Category names and community identities

While all GJC programs mention targeting minority racial and ethnic communities, 84% of these further identified which groups (see page 19, "Minority Racial & Ethnic Group Detail" chart). A key question emerging from these data is whether specifically identifying populations and communities will impact programming, therefore leading to differences in equitable outcomes. The need for culturally relevant practices in many types

<sup>20</sup> As part of the NOFO, EDA provided some direction for target populations, stating "Although not required, EDA encourages efforts to reach historically underserved populations and areas, communities of color, women, and other groups facing with labor market barriers such as persons with disabilities, disconnected youth, individuals in recovery, individuals with past criminal records including justice-impacted and reentry participants, serving trainees participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and veterans and military spouses."

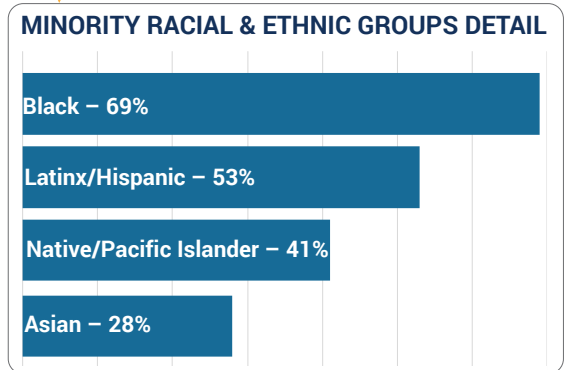
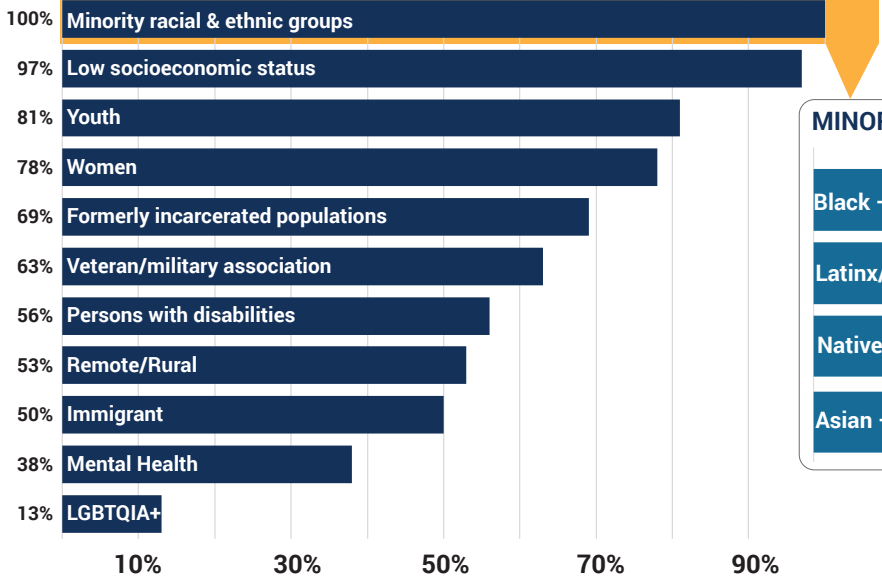
<sup>21</sup> The research team acknowledges that such groupings are simplistic, reductionary, and can be problematic as we are flattening identities into prescribed categories. The team sought to include diverse categorizations while also still reducing it to a manageable quantity for analysis.

<sup>22</sup> Intersectionality is a concept developed in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a civil rights scholar, to highlight how race, gender, and other identities intersect. Intersectionality underscores the complex and interconnected nature of identities, particularly in the context of discrimination and oppression. It recognizes that individuals occupy multiple social positions and belong to various groups, and these intersecting identities can lead to unique and compounded experiences of privilege or disadvantage.

<sup>23</sup> Several categories, particularly the racial and ethnic minority category included multiple populations under the umbrella of our broader categories, and we therefore simplified the counts to one mention per GJC project. The chart on page 18 shows the specific counts of groups mentioned within this category.

<sup>24</sup> The category of incumbent workers refers to workers in need of occupational upskilling or reskilling.

### INITIAL TARGET POPULATIONS FOR GJC PROGRAMS



TARGET POPULATIONS	WORDS INCLUDED IN CATEGORY
Minority racial & ethnic groups	BIPOC, communities of color, Black, Native, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, Latinx, Hispanic, Asian, ethnicities, Latino, races, racial, tribes, tribal, Native Hawaiian, Historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) students, marginalized, minority
Low socioeconomic status	poverty, low income, SNAP, TANF, unemployed, WIC, social assistance, cash assistance, homeless, public housing, precariously housed, economically challenged, food insecure, economically disadvantaged, Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE)
Youth	disconnected youth, opportunity youths, young, teens, foster system, high school students
Women	women, females
Formerly incarcerated populations	criminal history/records/background, justice-involved/impacted, formerly incarcerated, reentry, returning citizens, conviction history
Veteran/military association	veteran, veterans, veterans', military spouses, service members
Persons with disabilities	disabilities, disabled, physically challenged, different abilities, neurodivergent
Remote/rural	rural, remote villages, digital divide, economically underdeveloped area, Appalachian coal communities
Immigrant	English as a second language/English language learners/limited English proficient, immigrant, immigrants, New Americans, undocumented backgrounds, refugees
Mental health	recovery, substance use disorder (SUD), mental health
LGBTQIA+	lgbtq, lgbtqia



of service provision is well documented,<sup>25</sup> but there are still gaps in understanding implications for implementation, especially for workforce development programs. Potential differences in specific community needs, lived experiences, and more may be overlooked by program leaders if they have yet to do their due diligence to understand unique needs and assets within each community.

### **Goals and metrics related to underserved populations**

When initially identifying the outcomes for the program, only 53% of GJC programs specifically moved from identifying broad target population outreach plans into specific target population program participation goals at the time of the interviews. Additionally, only some of the goals connect the dots with the full range of the regional target populations they initially self-identify. Detailed target population program participation goals can indicate a program is making a direct connection between intent of equitable outcomes and movement towards the operationalization of equitable access. The lack of specific goals (and thus accountability structures) is concerning because solely identifying and outreaching to target populations will not be sufficient to ensure equitable outcomes. Equitable outcomes are the result of dedicated and meaningful actions, and this includes tracking outputs through metrics that provide specific insight into whether equity is being achieved.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, the research team anticipates, and EDA program managers should expect, that during System Development and Program Design stages, GJC leaders will build in metrics as part of their internal program evaluation. Additionally, EDA currently has robust reporting requirements for GJC programs on workforce program participants, including information on gender, race, and ethnicity. Furthermore, EDA built in “backstops” through phase advancement and reporting, but both may

be limited by the organization’s mission and values to often serve as many as possible. It should be noted that networking and linking potential program participants with other local organizations serving a specific population may advance equity more sustainably than seeking to serve all populations within one organization or program.

### **Outreach**

Workforce development programs rely on various outreach methods to ensure their services engage targeted populations. The GJC programs plan to utilize various approaches to engage underserved populations. The findings in the following sections are preliminary, as only a few of the GJC coalitions were in Program Design or Program Implementation stages at the time of data collection. In its initial form, this analysis of outreach methods is based on the positionality of the organization leading the GJC programs. To reach new communities, many GJC programs are engaging CBOs that are in the communities they wish to serve. Fifty-eight percent of the GJC leaders identify utilizing CBOs for outreach. However, that number may increase as they progress into Program Design and Program Implementation in the grant’s lifecycle. Additionally, 38% of GJC programs are hiring caseworkers or navigators to reach workforce program participants and work alongside these participants throughout their engagement with the local GJC programs. The caseworkers are often individuals who more directly share identities and/or lived experiences of the underserved populations and communities.

As for their mode of outreach, 31% of GJC programs mention multiple digital and mass media methods such as social media, TV, radio, pop-up ads, and more. Many are aware that the digital equity divide will make it difficult for certain recruitment methods to reach their targeted communities, particularly those in more remote areas. Twenty-five percent discuss utilizing

25 Bryan Brown et al. “Moving Culturally Relevant Pedagogy From Theory to Practice: Exploring Teachers’ Application of Culturally Relevant Education in Science and Mathematics,” *Urban Education* 54, no. 6 (2019): 775-803. doi: [10.1177/0042085918794802](https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918794802)

Anna Lau. “Making the Case for Selective and Directed Cultural Adaptations of Evidence-Based Treatments: Examples From Parent Training,” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 13, no. 4 (2006): 295–310. doi: [10.1111/j.1468-2850.2006.00042](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.2006.00042)

Le’Roy Reese and Elizabeth Vera. “Culturally Relevant Prevention: The Scientific and Practical Considerations of Community-Based Programs,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 35, no. 6 (2007): 763-778. doi: [10.1177/0011000007304588](https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000007304588)

Tina Kruse. “Making the Match: Culturally Relevant Coaching and Training for Early Childhood Caregivers,” *Early Childhood Research & Practice* 14, no. 2 (2012). <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v14n2/kruse.html>

26 Greg Guibert et al. “Introduction to the Access, Process, and Outcome Framework for Equity in Economic Development.” National Economic Research and Resilience Center, Argonne National Laboratory, June 2023, [https://www.eda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/NERRC\\_Quarterly\\_Equity\\_Research\\_Brief\\_Final.pdf](https://www.eda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/NERRC_Quarterly_Equity_Research_Brief_Final.pdf).

methods like billboards, flyers, and other “word of mouth” strategies. Other key takeaways from the interviews and application documents include that nearly all GJC programs mention recruiting from job fairs, career centers, community colleges, and technical schools. Sixteen percent of GJC programs specifically mention that their outreach will be culturally specific and accessible to English Language Learner (ELL) participants.

### Wraparound services

One of the most prominent aspects of equity that surfaces among all GJC programs is the provision of wraparound services to ensure the ability to access career opportunities. The types of wraparound services that GJC programs are planning to offer, and their model of delivery are still in development for many. Still, the services will encompass aspects like childcare, transportation, general system navigation, and mental health services. GJC leaders report in the summer of 2023 that the most commonly provided wraparound services – some funded through other programs – to program participants are transportation, navigation, career services and learning materials, and life skills. As more programs reach implementation stages, this will continue to be an area of focus.

The wraparound services are provided through several mechanisms: CBOs, contracted service providers, or the interlacing of these services from other grants and programs, especially as EDA funding cannot address all wraparound needs. For program participants to access wraparound services, 44% of GJC programs rely on CBOs and 38% utilize some version of a benefits navigator, often the same person as the career navigators, career specialists, or case managers. Thirty-one percent of GJC leaders stress their commitment to providing individualized wraparound supports, meaning the supports are tailored to each participant’s needs rather than a “one size fits all” model. One grantee mentions using a “strength-based” model in which participants’ capacities, levels of self-determination, and community resources are the guiding factors in deciding which wrap-around supports will most support participant growth.

Wraparound supports within GJC operate within the limitations of federal funding, compounded by unique statutory limitations for EDA under its authorizing legislations, and thus cannot be utilized for direct cash assistance or stipends. Some of the most common supports mentioned were transportation and childcare (although some are not paid for through the GJC program), and 28% of GJC programs also emphasize including mental health wraparound services. Alongside the provision of wraparound supports, 13% of GJC leaders also highlight challenges in navigating the “benefits cliff” phenomenon, wherein program participants struggle to improve their wages while potentially losing their eligibility for public benefits.


Finally, 9% of leaders highlight during their interviews a necessary change in terminology from “wraparound services,” preferring alternatives like “supplemental services” or “integrated services.” This ambivalence around language strikes at a deeper issue around the terminology of workforce development, such as speaking to a need to attract target populations who may have been attracted to these fields for years but have dealt with being actively repelled by the industries themselves.<sup>27</sup> It is also important to note that no single wraparound service is sufficient to cover every participant’s need. As one GJC leader expresses, it is impossible to “silo” each wrap-around service as they all bleed into each other to ideally create a supportive network to work towards continued program participant success.

### Program Participant Feedback

Another aspect of equity prioritization is feedback at all levels, including the incorporation and elevation of program participants’ perspectives and experiences within the GJC programs. Since 72% of GJC programs were in the System Development stage during data collection in mid-2023, conversations around worker participant engagement were in the early stages. Much of this will be further developed in the Program Design and Program Implementation stages. Thus, discussion of direct feedback mechanisms are somewhat limited at this point, though 69% percent of GJC programs mention some level of direct

<sup>27</sup> This example comes from *Viral Justice: How We Grow the World We Want* by Ruha Benjamin, which dives deeply into the issues around loaded language, power dynamics, and reframing linguistic equity.





feedback mechanisms. Of these, 36% of programs rely on program participant surveys or interviews to gather feedback. Notably, this percentage does not distinguish between the depth of this feedback (e.g., simple surveys versus in-depth interviews<sup>28</sup>). While some GJC programs are providing structured surveys with pre-populated options for response, others are taking a more qualitative approach by collecting personal stories from participants or conducting “empathy interviews,” wherein the feelings and personal experiences of the participants will be at the forefront of the interview. Another popular feedback method mentioned is worker convenings, including roundtables, focus groups, and worker summits, with 36% of GJC leaders who mention feedback mechanisms identifying these as their primary method. Some GJC programs (27%) also plan to incorporate direct feedback mechanisms into their Program Implementation stage but are unsure what those mechanisms will look like. As with most of this report’s findings, mechanisms and implications of program participant feedback will continue to be studied as GJC programs evolve and advance.

### Promoting Industry-level Change

Program leaders also note the need for changes from industry employers to achieve equitable outcomes. Ninety-one percent of GJC programs describe some change they hope to promote in their sectoral partnerships to advance equity. The GJC leaders speak about activities to advance equity-related changes in the industry in the following ways:

- *Educational sessions* such as training sessions for employers in the GJC programs described as “diversity,” “culturally responsive,” or “cultural competency” training. Alternatively, some GJC programs are planning on meetings with employers that feature equity-expert guest speakers;
- Implementing a selection of *skills-based hiring* practices such as recruitment strategies that prioritize a candidate’s skills, abilities, and

competencies over traditional benchmarks such as formal education degrees or specific job experience. This approach often utilizes assessments, competency-based interviewing, and practical tasks within the hiring process to better gauge a candidate’s aptitude and proficiency related to the job requirements to foster equity in opportunities in the workforce;

- Advocating for *job quality characteristics* through connection of job elements and worker well being<sup>29</sup> such as worker safety, flexibility, autonomy, job stability, and advancement opportunities.<sup>30</sup>

Many of these activities are just launching, and the effectiveness of these methods in advancing equity is still to be determined. Additionally, an essential question is emerging of whether the GJC workforce development systems are for the community or with the community. “For” creates a power imbalance where a privileged group is doing something “for” an underserved group, which is not a restorative process but a parental or authoritarian process. One potential concern of a “for” approach is that it can lead to viewing program participants as value units to slot into jobs that other, more privileged groups are leaving in droves. There are also the many challenges of creating jobs in industries that have been historically non-inclusive of specific populations or communities without changing the workplace culture.

### Broader System Changes

Several of the GJC grantees (23%) seek to implement changes not only in their local workforce development systems but also in broader changes in how people participate in the local economy. For example, GJC program leaders discuss aspirations to change how underserved populations engage with the industry sector (such as more community members seeking healthcare services), changing how program participants view their job opportunities, themselves, their long-term potential, and their rights as workers. Others also discuss creating new jobs in the local economy so more people can stay within the community as well as a desire to create affordable housing

28 Additionally, the research team did not include in this count any GJC programs that indicated they would be conducting a single post-placement survey for program participants, as this level of feedback is not an ongoing, iterative process.

29 William Congdon et al. “Understanding Good Jobs: A Review of Definitions and Evidence.” Urban Institute, July 23, 2020, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/understanding-good-jobs-review-definitions-and-evidence>.

30 “Quality Jobs Framework.” Jobs for the Future, August 29, 2023, <https://www.jff.org/idea/quality-jobs-framework/>.

“Job Quality Toolkit.” NIST, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023, <https://www.commerce.gov/work-us/job-quality-toolkit>.

for the community. These broader system changes reflect how the GJC leaders see the equity priority interwoven with other local initiatives and priorities (i.e., as they incorporate equity in their program, impacts will ripple into the community in numerous ways).

## PROGRAM DELIVERY

### Key Takeaways for Local Practitioners

- As you identify target populations, conduct strengths-based evaluations to better understand the unique needs and assets of the populations.
- EDA funding is constrained in its ability to support a wide breadth of wraparound supports, therefore it is important to engage with philanthropic or additional funding sources to braid services for your program participants.
- While your organization may inherently value equity, some partners may need to see more data on the competitive advantages of diversity and the changing (i.e., more diverse) demographics of the future workforce.<sup>1</sup>

### Key Takeaways for Funders

- Look for and promote nontraditional indicators of program success when evaluating programs and/or funding opportunities. Slow and patient investments that support capacity building of the leaders and organizations doing the daily grunt work of equity are often not prioritized and lead to suboptimal outcomes in the long run or even unsustainable programs.

<sup>1</sup> William Frey. "The US will become 'minority white' in 2045, Census projects." Brookings Metro, March 14, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/>.

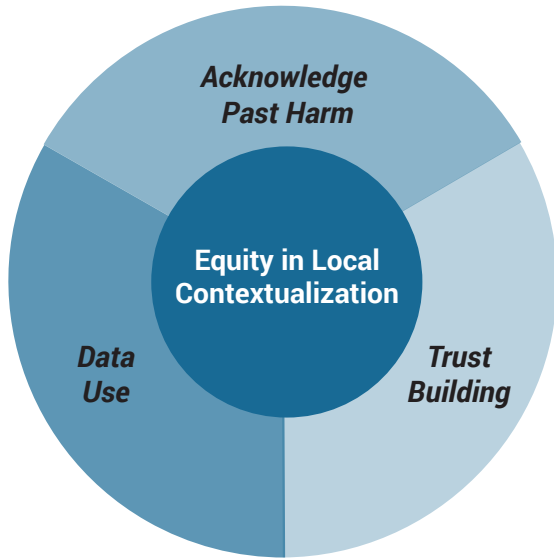
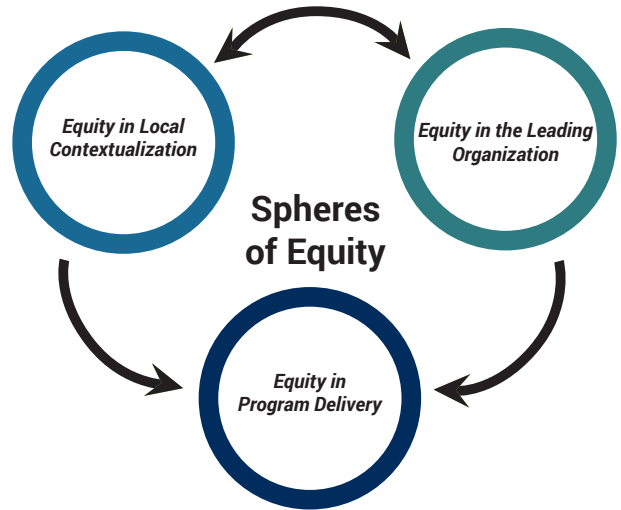
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# Conclusion

The American Rescue Plan Act laid a foundation for innovation in equitable workforce development programs. Through the Good Jobs Challenge, regional leaders are developing sector-specific training programs aimed at addressing disparities and uplifting underserved communities. This research unveils a layered approach to prioritizing equity in GJC, encapsulated by three interdependent domains: Equity in *Local Contextualization*, the *Leading Organizations*, and *Program Delivery*.



*Local Contextualization* underscores the importance of data in identifying community-specific challenges and opportunities, acknowledging and addressing historical harms, and rebuilding community trust. While findings highlight the strong use of high-level data by GJC programs in local contextualization, we recommend a deeper analysis of racial, gender, or geographic disparities to better understand the needs of underserved communities, alongside reflections of historical context and harms.

The second sphere, equity within the *Leading Organization*, addresses how equity work was impacted by the organization, its equity framework, and its decision making processes. While about

half of the leaders recognize their organization's positionality, nearly two-thirds were working on or had already developed formalized equity frameworks. Similarly, most (75%) actively discussed mechanisms for input from underserved communities, though only 38% of these had formalized these processes for collaborative decision making with the community. The journey to integrating a thoughtful and meaningful equity framework remains challenging, pointing to the need for continued support in this area.





## Conclusion



In the final sphere, *Program Delivery*, the targeted underserved populations initially identified by the GJC programs are minority racial and ethnic groups and those with low socioeconomic status. The outreach strategies to engage underserved communities revealed that a collaborative approach could yield positive results, with a significant percentage of GJC programs leveraging the strengths of CBOs for outreach. As programs mature into the design and implementation stages, the additional layer of wraparound services reveals a commitment to holistic support. Additionally, nearly all programs envision promoting some degree of equity-oriented change within industry partners through employer training, hiring reforms, and job quality characteristics, indicating the potential for long-term systemic impacts.

Two of these spheres align with the recent work by the National Economic Research and Resilience Center in the [Introduction to the Access, Process, and Outcome Framework for Equity in Economic](#)

[Development](#) (2023). That report's "Process", defined as the fair and intentional involvement and inclusion of all stakeholder groups in economic development decisions affecting their communities, are embedded with this report's discussion of decision making in equity in the *Leading Organization*. Additionally, the concept of "Access," which is the assurance that all community members, especially underserved populations, benefit from opportunities, broadly mirrors aspects in this report's section on Program Delivery.

Once again, it is important to note that the findings of this report represent early stages and practices in the GJC programs. As the programs evolve and mature, approaches are anticipated to evolve and alter, and new insights will emerge. It's crucial to continue examining these programs while they grow, furthering our understanding of equitable practices in workforce development. Subsequent analyses will follow programs through their maturation, focusing more intently on the measurable output of practices fostering equity.

Overall, the GJC has significantly contributed to progressing the workforce development field. It has not only elevated the importance of equity considerations but also spotlighted a model that tailors interventions to specific community assets, challenges, and needs. Through equity in *local contextualization, the leading organization, and program delivery*, GJC marks a critical step forward in fostering employment opportunities and economic resilience in a diverse and equitable manner. While there is much to learn from these early stages, the potential impact of these programs in creating holistic, equitable, and sustainable workforce development outcomes is promising.

# Appendix

## Methodology

The data informing this report are from early interviews with GJC program leaders, program applications, initial progress reports, and similar supplemental materials. Program leaders include executives, project directors, and program managers at state and local government, tribal organizations, CFDis, higher education institutions such as universities and community colleges, community-based organizations, industry intermediaries like chamber of commerce foundations and associations, among others. These leaders come from an array of backgrounds ranging from professional government staff, program managers of existing WIOA-funded or locally managed workforce development programs, faculty researchers at universities, and non-profit staff. For this research, the team conducted semi-structured interviews with 63 GJC leaders from the 32 programs from April 2023 to June 2023.<sup>1</sup>

Using thematic analysis, the research team identified findings within the three spheres - local contextualization, organizational leadership, and program delivery. Thematic analysis began by identifying (or “coding”) all explicit mentions of equity. These codes were then analyzed to identify associated phenomena, while accounting for a range within each phenomenon. For example, the team coded all mentions of “community-based organizations” and then evaluated the engagement continuum from informing these groups, engaging these groups as subawardees, etc. The research team used these phenomena to identify thematic categories for a second coding phase. Once completed, the codes were counted and cross-tabulated with other codes to identify broad categories of findings.

This methodology intentionally centers the experiences of the GJC leaders. Part of the internal work of equity and inclusion within our research team is undoing elitism through decolonizing our methodologies (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021) and elevating the knowledge and learnings from many sources. The role of this research team is to use social science methodologies to aggregate and synthesize the knowledge into digestible and data-based findings. We are not gatekeepers of this knowledge but instead part of the broader community of information gatherers, storytellers, and meaning makers. Our goal is for this research to help leaders and community members recognize their experiences within a broader data context - both quantitative numbers and qualitative theories and narratives. As social scientists, we are effective aggregators of data, but we are not the owners of each person’s unique knowledge or experiences. These findings are informed directly by the experiences of the GJC leaders prioritizing equity as well as the local and national equity and justice advocates. Our team acknowledges that our work is only possible because of theirs.

The research team is a mixture of practitioners and scholars who recognize their privilege in educational background, organizational affiliation, and their ability to attain financial support for this research. The team is deeply grateful to all the GJC leaders for sharing their time and stories to support this work. Additionally, the team acknowledges how this work is informed by scholarship in indigenous theory, feminist theory, economic theory, Critical Race Theory, intersectional theory, queer theory, Tribal Critical Systems Theory, standpoint theory, and more.

Finally, the research team recognizes that equity work is not confined to grant program borders and should also include considerations of economic mobility, health equity, environmental equity, homeownership, wealth building, and more. Moreover, economic equity is only one piece of the broader puzzle. To truly move the needle, political and cultural change are equally necessary to level a fundamentally unequal economic playing field. This report provides insight into on-the-ground activities but does not include program-level performance appraisals or evaluation. Forthcoming reports from this team will eventually dive deeper into approaches that lead to more equitable outcomes. However, with the limited research and scholarship on workforce development programs, these findings should be viewed as preliminary due to the shorter duration of the analysis.

<sup>1</sup> One GJC program interview took place in October 2023 due to changes in leadership.

# Equity Resources

These are a few of the many resources available to support equity in workforce development programs. Each resource is linked below and includes the abstract or executive summary for reference. If you have additional resources to share, please email Dr. Sarah Crane at sarahrcr@umich.edu.

## [Anti-Racist Workforce Development System Framework](#)

Clair Minson

Chicago Jobs Council, 2023

*Chicago Jobs Council (CJC) recognizes that systemic, institutional, and individual racism creates disparities in the way People of Color fare in the labor market. We are continuously working to revise and update our practices, policies, and procedures using a racial equity lens in order to achieve more equitable outcomes for all. In keeping with our commitment to racial equity, we developed three strategic priorities grounded in racial equity and focused on achieving equitable outcomes in our field: (1) Strengthen CJC's ability to advance racial equity from within. Included in this strategic priority is a commitment to exploring what anti-racist workforce development systems, policies and practices could look like. (2) Advocate for policy changes that reduce racial disparities to improve economic outcomes for job seekers marginalized by systemic barriers. Included in this strategy is utilizing advocacy tools to secure support for anti-racist policies and systems. (3) Strengthen the capacity of service providers and build equitable systems for job seekers marginalized by racism. Included in this strategy is supporting organizations in prioritizing and advancing racial equity in their delivery of workforce services.*

## [Elevating Equity in Economic Development: An Inclusive Recovery Toolkit](#)

Jessica L. Gonzalez Martinez, Betsey Suchanic, Deirdre Shaw, M. Yasmina McCarty

New Growth Innovation Network, 2023

*This toolkit is intended to support regional economic development leaders in elevating equity within their organization, planning and CEDS development, and strategy and implementation as they approach recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic Development Districts (EDDs) and similar regional entities have a unique role to play in planning for and achieving inclusive economic development for their regions. This toolkit is based on insights from the Inclusive Recovery Initiative.*

## [Equitable Change: An Intermediary's Guide to Measuring for Equity](#)

Sarah Bennett and Caroline D'Andrea

Jobs for the Future, 2023

*Intermediaries work to improve, vertically align, and systematize the components of career pathways. They are*

*also crucial actors in centering racial equity within pathways work—as advocates, designers, and accountability partners. In these roles intermediaries analyze data within a given program as well as across secondary, postsecondary, and work systems to reveal trends and areas for greatest impact. In this brief, intermediaries participating in the Building Equitable Pathways community of practice share metrics they prioritize when determining if and how their pathways work successfully, resulting in more equitable outcomes.*

## [Equitable Community Planning Toolkit](#)

Fourth Economy, 2023

*The Fourth Economy Equitable Community Planning Toolkit is the result of ongoing research, and contains resources developed to help leaders progress through their equitable planning goals and actions. It includes information on how communities across the United States are rising to meet the equity imperative, as well as tools to apply promising practices and systems change processes in your community. There is a growing interest and momentum in equitable community planning. The toolkit is designed for communities who may be at the beginning stages of equity planning as well as those where equity coalitions, groups, plans, and actions are well underway.*

## [Equity Language Guide](#)

National Recreation and Park Association, 2021

*Developed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), this guide includes content from leading language guides, as well as resources from multiple organizations, associations, researchers and more. It is meant to reflect terminology most applicable to parks and recreation and related professions; however, it is not an all-encompassing equity glossary.*

## [Equity Toolkit](#)

Beloved Community Mind Trust, 2023

*This Racial Equity toolkit is brought to you by Beloved Community, a racial equity and economic equity consulting firm focused on supporting organizations, schools, and workplaces in developing sustainable plans and strategies for operationalizing diversity, equity and inclusion. We believe that Change requires social impact + economic impact. What would it look like if we – as people and the organizations we lead – all made a commitment to an equitable life for everyone? If we understood the root causes of inequity and could identify the ways that we – schools, non-profits, businesses, and government could play a role in building a more equitable community?*

## Equity Resources

### [Equity vs. Equality: What's the Difference?](#)

Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University, 2020

*While the terms equity and equality may sound similar, the implementation of one versus the other can lead to dramatically different outcomes for marginalized people.*

### [Exploring Racial Economic Equity in Workforce Development](#)

Prosperity Now, 2020

*In our Exploring Racial Economic Equity in the Workforce Development report, the Racial Wealth Divide Initiative (RWDI) provides tools and approaches to help practitioners achieve racial economic equity goals that enable underserved, marginalized and excluded community members of color to earn living wages, accumulate assets and build wealth. By retooling programs to shift power and leverage privilege to change the institutions, systems and structures we are in, RWDI has distilled emerging promising practices that address interlocking social, economic and political barriers by considering the contributing factors, naming the problem and designing programs, policy and advocacy for equity.*

### [Good Jobs, Good Business](#)

Pacific Community Ventures, 2019

*Almost one-in-four American workers has a job that pays less than a living wage. Conventional wisdom says providing jobs with low wages, minimal benefits, little training, and chaotic schedules are the only way companies can keep costs down and prices low. MIT Sloan Associate Professor Zeynep Ton makes the compelling case that the presumed trade-off between investment in employees and low prices can be broken. Drawing on more than 15 years of research, Ton's Good Jobs Strategy shows how operational excellence enables companies to offer low prices to customers while ensuring good jobs for their employees and superior results for their investors or owners. The Good Jobs Strategy creates superior value for employees, customers, and investor/owners by combining investment in employees with four operational choices that increase employee productivity, contribution, and motivation. The four operational choices—Focus and Simplify, Standardize and Empower, Cross-Train and Operate With Slack—drive performance and continuous improvement. In this way, the Good Jobs Strategy creates a virtuous cycle where investment in people and operational excellence reinforce each other to drive value. At the same time, these operational choices work best with a trained and motivated workforce and hence require investment in people.*

### [Job Quality Toolkit](#)

National Institute of Standards and Technology, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023

*An outgrowth of a three-year partnership with the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) and U.S. Department of Labor to support various workforce excellence initiatives, the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP) led the effort to develop a Job Quality Toolkit, a menu of vetted strategies and actions for leaders and their workforces to*

*collaboratively choose from to increase the quality of jobs offered. The Baldrige Excellence Framework® served as a foundation for the easy-to-use toolkit that is intended for organizations of all kinds—but especially for those that are small and medium sized.*

### [Inclusive Community and Economic Development in Small & Midsize Communities](#)

Swati Gosh

New Growth Innovation Network, 2021

*Uplifting racial equity in small and midsize cities (defined as population 50,000 – 500,000) cannot be an endeavor of just a few individuals or organizations. Undoing decades of systemic racism and embedding new policies and structures that prevent harm in the future requires cross-sector collaboration between development professionals, city and community leaders, businesses, and myriad other stakeholders. Through generous funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, NGIN built a practitioner-led exploration of why the fields of community development and economic development struggle to collaborate and whether uniting these two practices might elevate community voice and uplift racial equity in small and midsize cities.*

### [Introduction to the Access, Process, and Outcome Framework for Equity in Economic Development](#)

National Economic Research & Resilience Center at Argonne National Laboratory, 2023.

*This research brief introduces the Access, Process, and Outcome (APO) framework, which provides a common understanding for practitioners across the diverse field of economic development. This framework elucidates the underlying drivers that can influence outcomes, either positively through intentional investment and action, or negatively through neglect, oversight, or exclusion. By employing the APO framework, users can collectively work towards achieving equitable outcomes in economic development, ensuring that all individuals and communities have fair and equal access to opportunities, that the processes are inclusive and just, and that the outcomes are equitable for all stakeholders.*

### [Quality Jobs Framework](#)

Jobs for the Future, 2023

*Jobs for the Future's Quality Jobs Framework provides a comprehensive definition of a quality job. It highlights what all workers deserve in addition to good pay and benefits—the flexibility, autonomy, stability, and advancement opportunities that are essential for people to thrive. This framework focuses on what employers, industry leaders, policymakers, and government agencies can do to improve job quality. It also serves as a starting point for identifying actions everyone throughout the learn-and-work ecosystem can take to help millions more people move into quality jobs and advance economically.*

### [Race Equity in Workforce Development: A Survey of Attitudes](#)

National Association of Workforce Boards, 2021  
*NAWB convened a taskforce of workforce visionaries to reveal disconnects in practitioner-led dialogues and to unmask barriers to centering racial equity in the workforce development ecosystem. This report reflects the earnest efforts of workforce stakeholders and the expertise of national experts aiming to build an inclusive workforce development system.*

### [Sparking Creativity: Workplace Applications of Restorative Practices](#)

Linda Kligman  
International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2019  
*Businesses that embrace restorative practices have the advantage of creating intentional workplaces where it is safe to innovate. Studies have shown that diverse perspectives, shared learning, and experimentation are factors that spur innovation. In a restorative work environment, high support is provided to learn and grow, raise concern, and try new things. With high levels of inclusion and energy, restorative practices can help establish group norms, manage expectations, and develop essential interpersonal skills for collaboration. The author draws on Keith Sawyer's research in group creativity and Sunnie Giles's studies that scaffold leadership skills to support global innovation, and shares stories that help translate theory into practice. Examples from the International Institute for Restorative Practices depict principles, habits, and team builders that illustrate how restorative practices can spark creativity. The power of connections, conversations, and collaboration explicitly creates an innovative participatory work culture.*

### [The Language of Racial Economic Equity](#)

Jobs for the Future, 2023  
*The words we use every day can perpetuate and exacerbate inequality, but they can also educate, empower, and drive positive change. That's why we've been examining our use of language and reevaluating how to describe the people our work centers on. Our latest thinking appears in JFF's Language Matters Guide. JFF's Center for Racial Economic Equity—whose mission is to disrupt occupational segregation and eradicate the Black-white wealth gap—has developed this companion guide to dig deeper into language about race and Black people. It offers a foundation for understanding the impact that words and phrases pertaining to race can have on Black people and on efforts to promote racial economic equity.*

### [The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#)

Rosa González of Facilitating Power, 2019.  
*The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership charts a pathway to strengthen and transform our local democracies. Thriving, diverse, equitable communities are possible through deep participation, particularly by*

*communities commonly excluded from democratic voice & power. The stronger our local democracies, the more capacity we can unleash to address our toughest challenges, and the more capable we are of surviving and thriving through economic, ecological, and social crises. It is going to take all of us to adequately address the complex challenges our cities and regions are facing. It is time for a new wave of community-driven civic leadership. Leaders across multiple sectors, such as community-based organizations, local governments, philanthropic partners, and facilitative leaders trusted by communities, can use this spectrum to assess and revolutionize community engagement efforts to advance community-driven solutions.*

### [Understanding Good Jobs: A Review of Definitions and Evidence](#)

William J. Congdon, Molly M. Scott, Batia Katz, Pamela Loprest, Demetra Nightingale, and Jessica Shakespreere  
Urban Institute, 2020  
*Now more than ever, many Americans find their employment and financial status precarious and their prospects for upward mobility limited. This paper aims to add to the discussion on how to promote workers' economic mobility through improving job quality. Definitions of what constitutes a "good job" vary—including adequate wages, benefits, stable schedules, worker protections, positive work environments, potential for advancement, and other features. In this report, we examine definitions and evidence on good jobs, with a focus on elements of jobs that might support economic mobility. We develop a framework for defining good jobs, drawing from different definitions of job quality in the literature. Then we use this framework to organize a review of the evidence on links between elements of good jobs and worker well-being, focusing on elements of jobs that might support worker mobility. We find that job quality definitions vary significantly in their complexity. There is evidence indicating relationships between job elements and worker well-being (variously defined), though the depth and conclusiveness of research vary in important ways. Research connecting job elements to economic mobility is more limited. This report is part of a larger effort to examine the ways additional research and data can support understanding of the role of job quality in worker mobility.*

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