



UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

**Comparative Analysis of Workforce Development Programs in the  
Public Sector**

by

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## **Abstract**

Workforce development goes beyond skill training and finding employment; it is about meeting the labor market demands while creating opportunities, fair wages, and empowering individuals through dignified work. Research shows that the field of workforce development has adapted to policy and economic changes to address issues specific around unemployment. However, because larger systematic problems persist, inequitable employment opportunities remain. With government agencies, nonprofits, and private funders at the local, state, and federal level invested in workforce development and economic growth, there is a substantial amount of research on the subject. Still, many individuals continue to face multiple barriers to long-term employment. Los Angeles County has one of the highest homeless and foster youth populations in the nation. Additionally, incarceration and recidivism rates have been growing. This purpose of this project is to analyze different approaches and assess the impact of workforce development programs from the perspective of two nonprofit organizations and one government agency working to create employment opportunities to foster youth, formerly incarcerated, and individuals that have experienced homelessness in Los Angeles County. Through the collection of primary data and the review of secondary research, this project will identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities across the public sector. Findings suggest that workforce development programs are positively impacting the lives of individuals and that the nonprofit sector have more flexibility when it comes to programming. However, government agencies can use their political will to push for better policies that directly impact the opportunities for the individuals they sought out to serve.

**Keywords:** workforce development, economic equity, policy, nonprofit, government

## Table of Contents

Section 1. Introduction.....	2
Employment and Opportunity in Los Angeles County.....	3
Section 2: Literature Review .....	5
Section 3: Methods and Approaches.....	12
Section 4. Data Analysis .....	17
Section 5: Implications .....	20
Section 6: Recommendations.....	25
Section 7: Conclusions.....	27
List of References .....	31
Appendix A: Raw Data Questions 1-8.....	35
Author’s Bio.....	36

## Section 1. Introduction

California is the 6th largest economy in the world, with cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco in its backyard known for innovation and business, having a trained workforce is important. However, finding “good jobs,” affordable housing, and access to health care continue to be a challenge for a growing number of people in California, especially in Los Angeles County. Not everyone has the same access to education and the support networks that are crucial to opening employment opportunities. Although the unemployment rate California has significantly decreased to less than half of total unemployment during the height of the recession, unemployment rates persist in “metro areas,” such as Los Angeles (“California Economy: Unemployment Update,” 2017). According to a study conducted by Policy Link and the University of Southern California, Los Angeles income inequality gap continues to widen, ranking in at seventh in the income inequality out of the largest 150 metro regions (“Equity Profile of the Los Angeles Region,” 2017). The job growth in Los Angeles County has not kept up with the growing population, which has also lead to issues of gentrification, displacement, and a rampant homeless population. A well-trained and strong workforce means that individuals, communities, and the economy thrive. Workforce development took a spike in the U.S. after World War II, and government agencies and nonprofit organizations, what will be referred to as the public sector throughout this paper, continue to dedicate resources and energy in ensuring individuals have the opportunity to fair employment.

Historically, workforce development has been connected to economic development; however, workforce development is part of a much larger system, with interconnected parts working on hierarchical on a local, state, and federal level and vertically impacting individuals,

families, and communities. Workforce development is about more than providing training, finding employment, and developing skills; it is about meeting the demands of labor markets while creating opportunities, fair wages, and empowering individuals through dignified work. Workforce development has adapted to policy and economic changes to address issues unique to unemployment. However, because larger systemic problems persist, inequitable employment opportunities remain.

### **Issues Around Employment and Opportunity in Los Angeles County**

Los Angeles County has a growing homeless population, taking a 20% increase from 2016 (Holland and Smith, 2017). An estimated "1,500 foster youth age out of Los Angeles child welfare system each year, within one year, one fifth will be arrested or incarcerated. Within two years, half will be unemployed. California had 132,785 prison inmates at the end of 2012, and each one cost approximately \$47,421 a year" to taxpayers in California (L.A. Kitchen, 2017). Parolees face high unemployment rates and lack the necessary skills to succeed in a professional environment. Nonprofits across Los Angeles are working to help these specific populations, and have found innovative ways to employ and connect clients to opportunities that eradicate stigmas from their past. Eric Garcetti, the Mayor of Los Angeles, is also committed to ending homelessness and being giving individuals a second chance to employment through his workforce committee and the opening of the office of Reentry in 2015. Various agencies are working towards the same goal, but doing it through its organizational strategy and in compliance with their set funding structures and partnerships. Although this is what makes each organization unique and the public sector strong, it is also important to not reinvent the wheel and share organizational knowledge to serve clients better. Collaborations are strong, and due to the progressive landscape of Los Angeles, there are substantial numbers of initiatives throughout

the public sector to improve the workforce development field. All three populations and the systems that were created to help support them (child welfare system, prison system) are costly to taxpayers in California. These groups continue to face challenges when they exit the system and begin to integrate themselves back into the community. The results of that are that those that with a criminal record, tend to go back to prison, and foster youth who emancipate the system at a young age are not financially or mentally ready to live independently. Nearly half of former foster youth experience homelessness or spend time in jail, and only 3% will graduate from college because they do not have the necessary skills to live independently. (“Facts & Statistics: County of Los Angeles,” 2017). If these systems, created by policy makers and individuals in power are failing our youth and individuals whose youth spent in prison, are failing individuals, it is important how we have reached this point.

With government, nonprofit, and other funders at the local, state, and federal level invested in workforce development and economic growth, there is a substantial amount of research and resources towards this subject in the public sector. The purpose of this project is to demonstrate the impact of workforce development programs and to identify gaps in services. The goal is to compare how government and nonprofit organizations understand workforce development, how they leverage partnerships and policy, and how they measure success, to raise awareness around economic equity for their targeted populations. This research can provide greater insight as to why it is important to invest in specialized workforce development programs for individuals facing barriers in their career trajectory. By exploring how organizations approach strategy and evaluate programs, this project will highlight the value these programs bring to individuals and their communities.

## **Section 2: Literature Review**

According to our former Labor Secretary, Tom Perez, workforce development is “helping people acquire the skills to compete for good jobs that pay fair wages” (2014). A report by Root Cause defined workforce development as “the field dedicated to gain and retain employment in industries that provide opportunities for advancement but do not require a postsecondary degree (“Social Issue Report,” 2011). Professor Schrock argued that workforce development is also about connecting people to prosperity; however, his definition of workforce development is holistic. Workforce development is “the policies, programs, and institutions that assist workers and employers in connecting with one another, making future-oriented investments in labor force skills, and promoting career advancement and mobility toward goals of household, business, community, and regional economic prosperity” (2014, p. 257). Research shows that workforce development is more than just finding employment; it is about training individuals with the necessary skills to meet the demands of labor markets while earning a fair wage. According to Giloth, it takes “substantial employment engagement, deep community connections, career advancement, integrative human service supports, contextual and industry-driven education and training, and the connective tissue of networks” (2009, p. 342). It is a “distinct area of policy and practice” that has historically been tied to the social sector, from anti-poverty programs to educational policies that focus on occupational and vocational skills training.

### **Evolution of Workforce Development in the U.S.**

Workforce development is a model that "has been adapted in response to shifting social constructions about appropriate levels of integration and employment norms for disadvantaged groups as well as the changing nature of jobs in the entry level labor market" (Cooney, 2016, p.

436). Workforce development models exist in different context and change according to our economic and political environment. Although many workforce models were developed to create workspaces for people with physical and developmental disabilities; individuals that did not always meet the needs of mainstream labor markets, models and industries have evolved. For example, WISE models have progressed to target other marginalized populations that suffer from homelessness, to welfare recipients, disconnected youth, and formerly incarcerated individuals presenting a unique challenge in the field. Similarly, many nonprofit and governmental organizations have identified unemployment as a social issue and a key component in their mission. Government investment and agencies continue to play a huge role in workforce-related activities, and there is more research that supports why training adults facing multiple barriers to employment is not only good for business, but for the future.

In further support, publicly funded programs for job training and employment are deeply embedded in America's social service and policies, and programs shift as the economy and industries evolve. In the 1960's, there was an increasing problem with *inner-city poverty*. The federal government funded initiatives such as the Job Corps and Model Cities that centered around the Johnson's Administration's War on Poverty to provide educational and vocational training to young adults (Schrock, 2014, p. 262). In the 1970's, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) made an effort against poverty by focusing on the most disadvantaged clients. However, employment continues to be a challenge to specific populations that suffer from homelessness, incarceration, and youth exiting the foster care system. Currently, the Workforce Invest Act (WIC) is the federally funded workforce system. There has been an increase in privatization and competition with the rise of for-profit training institutions like ITT



and DeVry University, and community-based organizations (Cooney, 2016). Although the second wave of WISE models was included a broader set of underemployed adults and youth, it also led to the “neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state” or the “commodification of the poor” as referred to Cooney (2016, p. 443). He continues by saying that “federal policy from the top down transformed the entire cash entitlement program for poor families, replacing it with a welfare-to-work program that had lifetime limits for cash aid” (2016, p. 442). According to Giloth, industry-based skill training models developed in the 1990's, as a result, individuals were limited to tight labor markets and short-term programs that had minimal impact on disadvantaged populations (Giloth, 2009, p. 8). Schrock takes a less radical approach in describing the federal policies that allowed programs like this to exist; he said that the welfare-to-work program emphasized, “any job is a good job” (2014, p. 262). Workforce development programs are difficult to define and are contingent to the local economy and investments being made to support certain markets.

### **Decrease in Funding**

Research shows that workforce development programs have also received less funding over the year, with the sector getting more saturated by the nonprofit sector and for-profit businesses, there have been significant shifts in service execution and how these programs work in connection to economic development. According to a case study on youth workforce development programs in California funded by WIA, “total public expenditures for training and retraining low-skilled workers diminished from a peak of \$24 billion in 1978 to \$7 billion in 1998 and a little over \$6 billion in 2000, a 75% cut” (Campbell et. al, 2008, p. 40). With less federal funding, the quality of programs reduced and leads to a variety of social issues like

unemployment, homelessness, and poverty. According to a 2003 study, “638,000 California young people aged 16-24 years were out of school and out of work” (Sum, 2003). The funding cutbacks intensified the growing number of unemployed youth in California, resulting in more young people going to prison, or limiting them to low-wage work that does not lift them or their families out of poverty (Campbell et. al, 2008).

### **Counter-Intuitive Logic in Workforce Development**

Workforce development programs continue to grow out of the need to employ individuals and integrate disenfranchised populations into society. However, workforce development models also have the needs to maintain profitability. Literature tells us that workforce development at times has a logic that at times is at odds with each other. Workforce development programs are meant to address the present labor market challenge, which can be a challenge within itself. As Cooney describes, "a commercial logic that emphasizes efficiency, profitability and competitive rivalry versus a service or social welfare that aims to maximize a program of supportive intervention to produce results for the beneficiary" (2014, p. 436). With the diminishing of funds and shift in social welfare policies that push populations into the labor market, more organizations and WISE models that structured as "nonprofit business ventures," and continue to exist today with organizations such as Homeboy Industries, the Downtown Women's Center, Graystone Foundation. This win-win model helped organizations diversify their income revenue while allowing them to work with populations in need. This model grew as a trend in the nonprofit sector throughout the 1990's because it was a sustainable source of revenue for organizations, which has received criticism for "rhetorical characterization" of the nonprofit sector. (Cooney, p. 443, 2016). Organizations that aim to serve unemployed individuals rely

heavily on these people generating revenue through low-skill job training in retail, restaurants, custodial and landscaping businesses. Although in the past, they have been able to find individuals immediate work, Cooney criticizes these WISE models for “setting up workers for employment in low skill jobs” (p. 446, 2016). In addition to low-wages, unstable hours, and what Cooney described as a “neoliberal moment” in workforce development, he does not elaborate on the nuances of dealing with disenfranchised populations, which also affects the success of workforce development programs.

### **Creating Measurements for Success**

As discussed in the previous section, the workforce development programs are shaped by funding, policy, and labor market need at local, state, and federal levels. Campbell et al. (2008) outline some key elements that make youth workforce development programs successful to better inform decision-makers primarily at the state level. First, a holistic approach that combines employment preparation with social service and personal support like counseling and transportation. Second, structures that group youth in cohorts where they can work and learn together coupled with paid employment gives them the chance to build self-confidence and professional behavior and attitudes. Lastly, the consistent support of a supervisor has helped put youth on a better path for employment. This article also highlights that the more the state can do to place youth on a secure path to employment, the “less likely to burden the state later with social services or prison expenses” (2008, p. 46). Similarly, *Promising practices: school to career and post secondary education for foster youth* report recommends that programs should incorporate an educational and career counseling element, “developed either internally or in partnership with an educational institution such as a local community college that offers basic

labor market and educational information tied to the regional economy” (2012). According to this report, schools are not preparing foster youth to enter the workforce successfully. Common staples like reliable transportation to a supportive mentor are things foster youth might lack access to, narrowing their career pathways.

### **Strategic Partnership**

Cooney claimed that in order for WISE models to be effective in generating labor market outcomes, they need "a robust strategy of skill investment for their beneficiaries to graduate them into the segment of the labor market where workers are well compensated, and have access to reliable hours and work arrangements" (p. 448, 2011). Former Labor Secretary Thomas Perez believes that programs been to be driven by the needs of local employers and should be designed to meet the needs of local communities which can be achieved through robust partnerships. Partnerships also make it easier to scale and replicate programs. Since 2011, the Department of Labor has invested \$1.5 billion in strengthening and expanding partnerships that create pipelines of skilled workers. Perez highlights the importance of public-private partnerships that bring all important stakeholders to the table, from community colleges, workforce investment boards, labor unions, nonprofit, and employers. (2014, p. 70). Being inclusive is a good strategy, but it does not necessarily mean it is a simple one.

In the *Strength in partnership building: a new approach to workforce development* report, there is often a tension between meeting the needs of the employers and workforce systems. Employers desire the well-trained employees and the agencies seeking to place the as many possible clients in a job. Partnerships and collaborations are important, and identifying common ground is essential to their success. This report discusses the importance of workforce

initiatives conducting an environmental scan for employment opportunities, meaning that programs should create partnerships with growing sectors that have good entry and mid-level career positions available such as health care and information technology (2006, p. 3).

Workforce systems should also anticipate economic decline and shift in trends and not limit itself to one industry in case there is a dip in employment (2006, p. 17). This report also highlights the challenges of government responding to unemployment and working with workforce development programs. Traditionally, government funding was necessary to ensure that programs could reach scale, and although they are a huge component of the workforce development field, they have provided unique challenges to their partners. For example, working with the public sector adds time to the implementation of new workforce initiatives, "government restructuring and miscommunication led to a number of delays" (2006, p. 14). Due to its bureaucratic nature, government agencies often derailed the process of securing funds and changed programmatic requirements midway through the initiative leading to both an "initial underreporting of outcomes and delays in final reporting" (2006, p. 15). Although working with government can be challenging, government agencies and policies play a quintessential role in helping make workforce development a more just and equitable field.

According to Giloth (2012) the workforce development field has grown in policy and practice in the following ways: (1) retention and advancement, (2) employer and job seeker, (3) regions and neighborhoods, (4) race and labor markets, (5) best practices and replication, and (6) labor market reform. Although collaboration can be complex, integration is necessary.

Workforce interventions alone are not enough to support low-income, low-skilled workers.

There need to be other economic and social support systems like child car and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and financial services to increase the "economic well-being of

families to strengthen workforce interventions” (p. 12) The Center for Working Families (CWF) in Chicago focuses on essential economic support in a “community based location that helps build families self-sufficiency, stabilize their finances, and move ahead” (Giloith, 2012, p.12). This new workforce paradigm emphasizes the need of "convergence for outcomes, practices, and policies among practitioners of the fields of employment and training, welfare reform, community development and regional economic development” (Giloith, 2012, p. 13). In the past, strategies have been disconnected and continue to be at odds with each other, but the integration between public system and nonprofits need to exist and work in tandem with the program to support working families to make a more efficient workforce development system.

Unemployment continues to be a problem in our society, yet many nonprofits and government agencies continue to dedicate time, energy, and resources on workforce related activities. This paper will focus on understanding why formerly incarcerated individuals and foster youth face multiple barriers to employment and if the services sought to break these obstacles are having an impact on their lives. This paper will also explore what some challenges, strengths, and opportunities are for organizations across government and nonprofit further improve and make employment more equitable for formerly incarcerated individuals and foster youth.

### **Section 3: Methods and Approaches**

#### **Goals and Objectives**

The purpose of this project is to demonstrate the impact of workforce development programs and to identify gaps in services that can help improve the success of these programs

long-term. The goal is to compare how government and nonprofit organizations understand workforce development, how they leverage partnerships and advocacy, and how they measure success, to raise awareness around economic equity for their targeted populations. This project will also inform a case study looking at L.A. Kitchen's workforce development program; Empower L.A. The goal of the case study is to help L.A. Kitchen formalize its program evaluation process and help integrate best practices used in the field.

### **Needs Assessment**

L.A. Kitchen is a dynamic organization, which has found an innovative way to reclaim healthy, local food that would otherwise go to waste, training men and women who are unemployed for jobs, and providing healthy means to fellow citizens. Through a 14-week culinary training program, L.A. Kitchen's Empower program provides opportunities for employment in the foodservice industry. This program combines emancipated foster youth and older adults transitioning out of incarceration in hands on culinary training, self-empowerment programs, and local internships to increase their chances of employment and reduce systemic patterns of recidivism. Although they had an 85% employment rate and trained MSW social workers and dieticians working with the students, they have found ways to improve the program with each class that graduates. Students are currently surveyed pre-and-post program. However, there is not a formal system to evaluate the success of the program. By interviewing partners and organizations in the field, working with the same populations that L.A. Kitchen does, this project will generate qualitative data from experts in the field and make recommendations based on best practices to enhance its workforce development program.

### **Methodology and Processes**

The data collection process was broken out into three phases. The first phase included a thorough literature review of scholarly and credible organizational reports. Scholarly articles were generated via multiple USF library resources. Key terms such as workforce development, program evaluation, economic equity, foster youth, and recidivism were used to produce various links and results. Reports conducted by data-driven agencies like the Department of Labor also helped inform statistical information around employment trends for foster youth and formerly incarcerated individuals and job trends post the 2008 recession. The literature was a critical component in understanding the history and evolution of workforce development in the U.S. and shift in services from the federal government to the nonprofit sector and various cross sectoral partnerships.

In addition to reaching out to organizations with a 501(c)3 status and different departments in Los Angeles County was a critical step. This research intended to have an equal representation of nonprofits and government workforce experts, but was only able to secure one interview with someone from the Mayor's Office of Employment Services. After various emails and calls, I secured interviews with the following experts:

- Zaneta Smith, Associate Director, Clinical & Student Services, L.A. Kitchen
- Kimberley Guillemet, Manager Office of Reentry, Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity
- Joe Altepeter, Director of Vocational Education and Social Enterprise, Downtown Women's Center



By interviewing experts in both the nonprofit sector and government, I was able to conduct a comparative analysis of workforce development. The challenges agencies face, their strengths, and what could further be improved. Participants were recruited based on region and populations served. Out of the three expert interviews, two experts came from the nonprofit sector, and one works for the city of Los Angeles under the Mayor's Office. They were invited to participate due to their experience in workforce development. The partnership with L.A. Kitchen came out in an interest of their business model and its work around food justice and working with foster youth. The Mayor's Office of Reentry works specifically with individuals with a past criminal justice record or those that have formerly been incarcerated. The Downtown Women's Center works exclusively with women that are homeless or transitioning out of homelessness. Although these are different populations, all three agencies work with high-risk groups in Los Angeles that are compounded by numerous issues on their pathway to employment.

The second phase consisted of developing questions for the expert interviews. An eleven question descriptive and explorative semi-structured interview was chosen for this project. All interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded with the consent of the interviewer. Due to time constraints, not all interviewees answered all eleven questions. Here is a sample of the interview questions:

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions:**

1. What is the goal of the XX program or organization? List a couple of goals and explain why they are important.
2. What do you see as current trends in workforce development? How have these shaped your programs/caused them to evolve over time? How comprehensive are the services? How have the services evolved with trends in the field?

3. What is XX organization doing to advocate on behalf of clients to promote for better policies?
4. Specialized targeted programs and strategies help address the complex need of these individuals, which goes beyond skill development and finding a job. In your experience, what are the biggest challenges to obtaining and retaining employment? Identify gaps and how they can further be improved.
5. What partnership and collaborations have been most beneficial in managing your organization's workforce development programs? What made these partnerships successful?
6. Are workforce development programs having an impact on individuals facing multiple barriers to unemployment in L.A. County? How does the XX org measure its impact? What are some performance indicators? How does it track program data? What improvements can be made to better measure program success?
7. Follow-up: Workforce development programs give individuals a second chance, empowerment, self-efficacy, non-tangible items that are hard to measure. How does your organization deal with that? It's often what makes a good story and can help raise awareness and can be vital in demonstrating a program's success.
8. What are strengths and weaknesses in workforce development programs that work to move these individuals upwardly?
9. Does workforce development build community capacity? How so? Why is this important to your organization?
10. Does workforce development and promoting economic equity help break the generational cycle of poverty?
11. What important research questions remained unanswered in workforce development as it relates to XX population?

I wanted to ask questions that would help me understand how they perceive impact as it relates to program goals. Some questions are to exclusively generate data on their specific services, while some are to get their perspective on broader issues that relate to the field of workforce development; industries, trends, and advocacy.




The third phase was conducting the interviews and transcribing the recorded audio into a Word document. As mentioned, not all experts had the time to answer all the questions, but each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes. I do not have any expertise in workforce development, nor am I a researcher. I did have a classmate review my questions to check for bias, that process was extremely helpful as it helped clarify the purpose of some questions.

## **Section 4. Data Analysis**

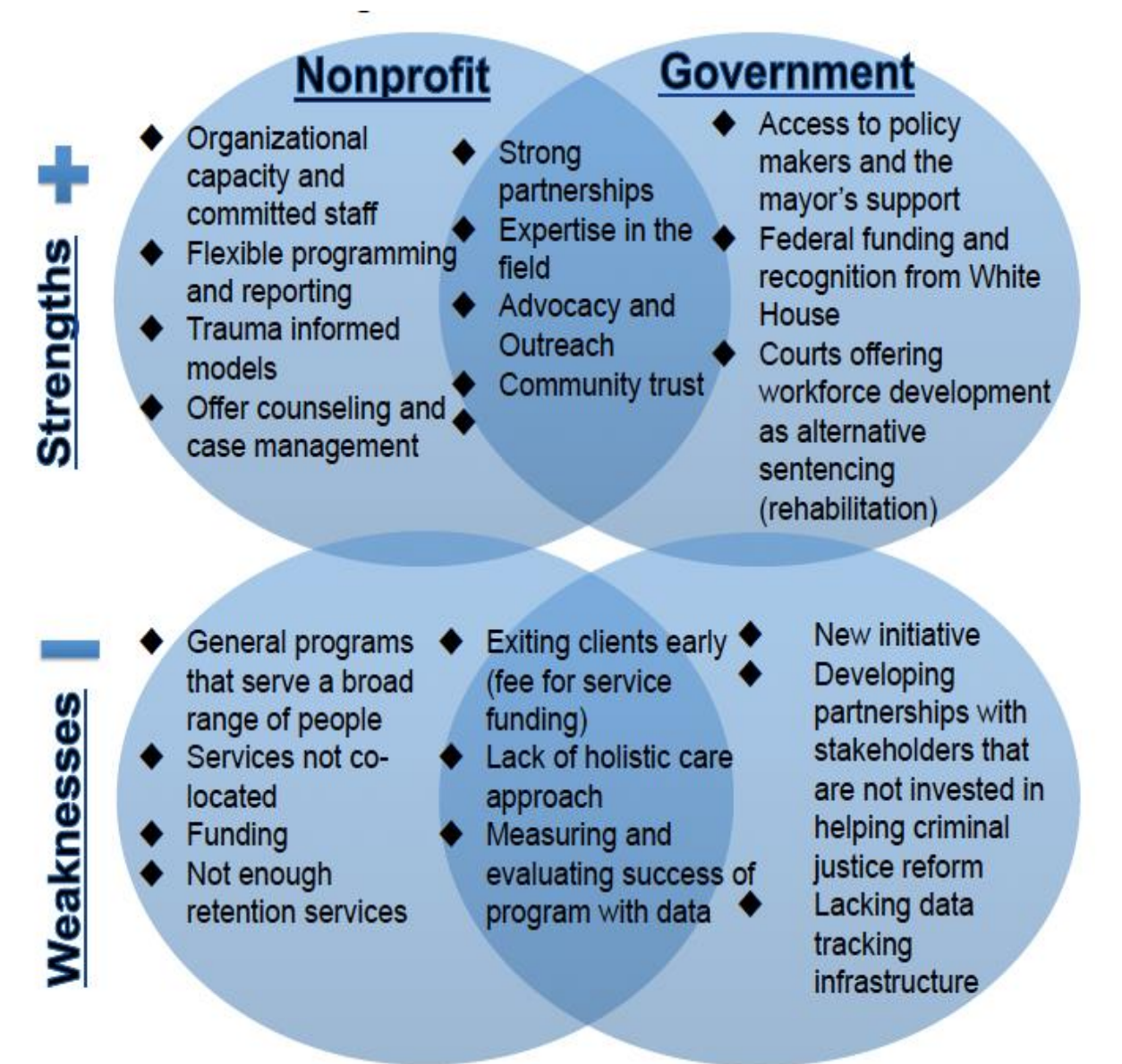
### **Design Analysis**

Once interviews were transcribed in a word document, an excel sheet to keep track of every participant responded in one file. I coded the questions to understand how participants perceive strengths (positive), weaknesses (negative), and what could further be improved (opportunities) in the field. I also asked questions around programmatic data tracking to understand how organizations are using data, if at all, and what this data is demonstrating around the impact of the program on their clients. I used the last section of the chart to determine thematic differences and similarities that occur in nonprofit organizations compared to government agencies (refer to Table 1).

**Table 1: Snapshot of Expert Interview Qualitative Data and Analysis**

				<b>Thematic Analysis</b>
<b>Question 1: What are the goals of your agency's workforce development program? Explain why these goals are important.</b>				
Themes	<b>Equity and Opportunity.</b> Lowering recidivism= increasing public safety	<b>Careers and Professions</b> over jobs.	<b>Solutions.</b> Help women overcome poverty and homelessness.	Goals are to create solutions and opportunities to targeted populations for both the nonprofit and government agency. All goals have a trickling affect (Individual -> Community)
Quotes	<i>"By creating housing and employment opportunities, you reduce recidivism, which in turn improves public safety"</i>	<i>"It's not just teaching them to do a job and move quickly, it's about giving them the opportunity to have a career and a profession."</i>	<i>"Provide solutions for women facing barriers to employment"</i>	
<b>Question 2: What are the biggest challenges to obtaining and retaining employment? What are some gaps in services?</b>				
Themes	<b>Trauma and the necessary wrap-around services</b>	<b>Battle of Trauma.</b> Fear. Integration back into society.	<b>Access to services.</b> Using a holistic, trauma informed approach	Trauma impedes program success in both sectors. If organizations are not providing counseling to address trauma, then individuals are not set up to succeed. Both agreed trauma informed models worked best.
Quotes	<i>"You can put people in opportunity but if there is underlying trauma that is unaddressed, it really doesn't serve them well"</i>	<i>"Fear of success, identity issues, feeling for the first time and reintegrating back into society...that's a hard transition"</i>	<i>"Having access to co-located service agency that comprehensive services...connecting between service providers"</i>	
<b>Question 3: How is your organization measuring program impact? What improvements can be made to measure program success?</b>				
Themes	<b>Lacking robust data infrastructure.</b>	<b>Changes in programming and schedules.</b> Addressing students with learning disabilities.	<b>Challenges around follow-up and dealing with transient population.</b>	Nonprofits are surveying their clients pre and post intervention, however, it's a challenge to keep track of clients once they no longer use organizations service. Garcetti's office is not successfully tracking data.
Quotes	<i>"We haven't done do well with data collection... Anecdotally, it works, but data is needed to back it up"</i>	<i>"We make [programmatic] changes to each class, therefore data is inconsistent...also some students have learning disabilities"</i>	<i>"Employment retention typically means women need to be incentivized...case managers get busy with the day-to-day"</i>	

**Figure 1: Strength and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Programs**



As this model suggests, nonprofits and government agencies working in the workforce development space have similar challenges and unique strengths. This model also highlights the importance of funding, partnerships, and having comprehensive services to achieve long-term

employment. More on these topics will be discussed in the implication and recommendation section.

## **Section 5: Implications**

The findings demonstrate that workforce development and job-training programs in both the nonprofit and government sector are positively impacting the lives of individuals. Both sectors share similar goals for the populations they serve but have distinct programmatic goals. Although there are unique challenges to each organization, both sectors have developed expertise and rely heavily on partnerships to ensure clients continue to develop skills and have a strong trajectory to building a career.

**RQ1: What is the goal of the XX program or organization? List a couple of goals and explain why they are important.**

All three agencies have similar thematic goals, to create solutions and opportunities for their targeted populations. Across the board, all three organizations seem to connect employment to the individual's success, but also necessary for a community to thrive. Kimberly from the Mayor's Office said it best, "as you work to improve housing and employment opportunities for individuals that have a criminal record, you reduce recidivism, which in turn improves public safety" (personal communication, June 23, 2017). Based on these interviews, there is a consensus that employment is more than just job training and skill development. L.A. Kitchen has a diverse staff of social workers, dieticians, and coordinators on site to assist with clients' mental health, nutrition, and also have a multitude of partners they can refer to for additional needs. Similar services are provided either on site or through the organizations' referral program.

Nonprofits provide a holistic approach to its services; the sector understands the importance of comprehensive services in one location using a trauma informed model. The nonprofit sector is much stronger at doing this over their government counterpart; however, all three experts agreed that without addressing trauma, finding employment is essentially serves no purpose.

**RQ2: Specialized targeted programs and strategies help address the complex need of these individuals, which goes beyond skill development and finding a job. In your experience, what are the biggest challenges to obtaining and retaining employment? Identify gaps and how they can further be improved.**

Trauma was the biggest challenge in obtaining and retaining employment for these specific subgroups. Integrating back into society is a difficult transition, especially when the majority of a person's youth and adult years were spent in prison, the streets, or in and out of the foster care system. Zaneta mentions that the "battle of trauma people have experienced" often gets in the way of individuals succeeding in a professional environment. Workforce development programs do a lot of "hand holding," which is why having wrap-around services is essential to the individual's success (personal communication, July 25, 2017). Joe from the Downtown Women's Center identified working with transient populations as a challenge to the Downtown Women's Center workforce development program. Women often lack stable housing and often to not know where they will be living the next day, let alone in a month. Wrap-around services or a co-located service agency was an identified gap in service by both the nonprofit and government entity. Experts understand that someone struggling with employment is also struggling with other issues and having interventions that help close any gaps along their path to employment is essential in workforce development programs. The two participating nonprofits

are providing counseling and case management to help individuals with other issues they might be facing, making their programs comprehensive. The Mayor's Office is not the direct service provider, but does refer clients to their nonprofit partners.

According to literature, workforce development programs are exposed to "market risk through their commercial activities while developing effective interventions to connect vulnerable populations to stable, good paying employment opportunities" (Cooney, 2016, p. 447). Although this is a market challenge with high-risk populations, there are many benefits. Social enterprises that are built in as part of the business model of a nonprofit organization are popular trends in the sector. Not only are they fulfilling the mission, but this model also helps diversify its funding stream. Research shows that individuals with a past criminal record are more loyal employees and a better investment since they are more likely to stay in the position because it has been difficult for them to secure it, to begin with (Minor et al., 2017). Research also shows that when the economic players opt out of using people with past criminal record, it has a negative impact on our economy. The loss of productivity is concentrated in black and Latino neighborhood, which demonstrates that employment is also a racial issue (Wright, 2013). The ACLU recently published *Back to business: how hiring formerly incarcerated job seekers benefits your company* making the business case for hiring individuals with a criminal record. The report reveals that employees with criminal backgrounds are a better pool for employees and improve the company's bottom line. This article further highlights the cost states incur by formerly incarcerated individuals likely ending in public assistance programs, burdening with increased public cost for shelters and social services (2017).



In addition, both the nonprofits echoed that conducting advocacy and outreach was part of their organizational strategy to help raise awareness around their work and the lives of their clients on a local, state, and federal level. They have been able to push and support bills like Ban the Box that eradicate stigmas around individuals with past criminal record as their duty to create more opportunities.

**RQ3: Are workforce development programs having an impact on individuals facing multiple barriers to unemployment in L.A. County? How does the XX org measure its impact? What are some performance indicators? How does it track program data? What improvements can be made to better measure program success?**

The nonprofit organizations have unique job training programs that are preparing clients for a specific set of skills and trait. L.A. Kitchen focuses on culinary, and the Downtown Women's Center has a retail, social enterprise on-site. The Mayor's office of Reentry focuses on contacts with established companies as well as government contacts to connect their clients to jobs. Consistently across all three agencies, they measure success with completing and graduating from the program or getting them into a transitional position or intern through their partner employers. Getting a job and keeping it is often hard to keep track of because agencies have moved on to help another group of individuals starting the program and clients might not be as responsive. Joe believes there is not an incentive for them to follow-up to surveys conducted months after clients have exited a program. L.A. Kitchen and The Mayor's office have also believe that by connecting individuals with job opportunities, individuals with a past criminal justice record will have a lower chance of going back to jail. However, there are policies that continue to make this a challenge. Each organization has it is own standards and metrics, which

not only align with specific markets (i.e. food industry and retail) but also with the overall organizational strategy and mission.

Keeping track of their clients' process after they exit the program is a challenge in determining the long-term success. L.A. Kitchen was founded in 2013, they have only been operating for a few years and do not have a robust program evaluation strategy, "We make [programmatic] changes to each class, and therefore data is inconsistent." Zaneta also points out that students often have learning disabilities and might not ask for help when taking the survey, making the surveys less than reliable (personal communication, July 25, 2017). The Mayor's Office of Reentry was institutionalized under Garcetti's Officer of Economic Employment in 2015. Kimberley, the manager of the Office of Reentry, has been running the program on her own until last year, which has made it challenging to implement data tracking processes, "we haven't done well with data collection... Anecdotally, it works, but data is needed to back it up" (personal communication, June 23, 2017). Although there are numbers around people served, her office relies heavily on subcontractor reports. The Downtown Women's Center routinely evaluates how their clients are doing, having case managers on site, and with a new data person on their team that started implementing pre-and-post survey and focus groups, they will soon have access to richer data on the impact the program is having on the clients long-term success and employment. Although all agencies see the value in surveying its client's pre-and-post intervention, and making evidence-based decisions, it is not as high of a priority as finding clients the right resources and working through any bumps along the way. All agencies agree that data does help raise more awareness around the issues specific to the populations they serve and often rely on advocacy and outreach for those purposes.

**RQ4: What do you see as current trends in workforce development?**

1. **Advocacy:** Workforce development and job training programs continue to influence policy at the local, state, and federal level. Ban the Box, and the Fair Chance Ordinance are two initiatives that help individuals with past criminal records back into the workforce.
2. **Industries:** Social enterprises such as bakeries and retail stores are popular models. Tech, specifically with the growth of Silicon Beach, hospitality, and customer service are also popular. Unpaid training programs have fewer success rates, while stipends continue to be used to incentivize and retain clients.
3. **Systematic Barriers:** Racism, generational poverty, affordable housing, fair wages (steady income), and access to mental and medical care
4. **Measuring Impact:** Accurately measuring impact requires years of the program existing, two out of the three agencies that participated in this research have existed for under five years

**Section 6: Recommendations**

1. Build on trauma-informed model and share results with hiring partners

All experts emphasized the importance of having a trauma-informed model and highlighted that more workforce development programs are integrating different strategies to address trauma. In addition to knowing the challenges of individuals working and healing through their trauma, it is important to have a culturally competent staff. Someone might be trained to deal with certain behavior, but if they the clients have a hard time connecting with

them personally and gaining their trust, it might be difficult to execute the model in practice.

Also, it is recommended that agencies share its trauma informed model with interested hiring partners. Although counseling should not fall on the employer, it can help bring awareness to the experiences of their employees and make it a more a safe and productive space.

2. Help de-stigmatize mental health, homelessness, and individuals with past criminal justice records with internal and external stakeholders through advocacy and outreach

Advocacy is the long-term solution to reducing recidivism, eliminating homelessness, and making sure that youth in the foster care exit the system are prepared to thrive in the real world. By challenging stigmas that are often attached to these groups in society, organizations can open more doors for the clients that go beyond finding them long-term employment. Training and sharing information is an easy way to inform staff and external stakeholders on the issues that directly affect the individuals whose lives they are trying to positively impact. Sharing research that exists its social media outlets is also a great way to communicate to external audiences the issues that are happening outside of their organization, and directly impacting the work the organization is committed to.

3. Leverage graduate student programs in the area to help with data-driven projects and assist students with disabilities

Often graduate students have to complete internships to receive their degree; this would also be an alternative to hiring a consultant. Graduate students are learning the skills and have access to resources that organization and government entities might not. It is a win-win for both partners as long as each partner is in agreement of the deliverables and can provide students with the necessary data and access to staff to complete a project.

#### 4. Conduct focus groups to understand the nuances of program's impact

Although pre-and-post intervention surveys are a great way of evaluating a program, conducting a focus group can be useful to generate detailed information about personal and group perceptions and opinions. Sharing results with staff and having them give feedback is also a way to engage staff and board members at different levels.

#### 5. Create an open-source toolkit

Organizations that work with similar populations can dialogue around best practices and what tools and resources work for them by creating a toolkit. This will also show funders initiative to collaboratively solve problems while allowing organizations to be more effective and knowledge-based. By sharing information, government and nonprofit sectors can sustain growth and be impactful to the individuals and communities.

#### 6. Incentivize students with substantive items like public transportation passes and food vouchers.

Leverage corporate partnerships to donate desirable items to programs to increase participation in surveys and focus groups. Develop relationships with Metro to reduce rates for populations that are low-income and do not have a car.

## **Section 8: Conclusion**

In today's economy, low-skills generally equals low pay, which leaves many disadvantaged people facing multiple barriers to employment with low-earnings for themselves, their families, and actively contributing to their local economy. Over the last three decades, federal funding on employment has decreased, which has to lead to the nonprofits developing

programs to help low-income individuals build skills for various industries. Los Angeles county has a growing homeless population, a concentrated population of foster youth, and individuals with a past criminal record, which has lead to both nonprofits and government entities to focus its efforts in creating employment opportunities for individuals that enter the workforce at a disadvantage. Both the nonprofit sector and government entities play an important and active role in developing skills training programs as a strategy to increase employment opportunities and earning potentials for some of Los Angeles County's most disadvantaged populations. By developing expertise in the population, building strong partnerships with credible public and private entities, and by advocating and conducting outreach, both the nonprofit sector and government agencies are positively impacting lives of individuals through workforce development programs.

By comparing workforce development programs in both the nonprofit and government sector, this research provides evidence to promote and support workforce development programs because of its strengths and identified opportunities for growth. Nonprofits have more organizational capacity and committed staff, flexible programing and reporting, and use a trauma-informed model that encompasses counseling and case management. It's government counterparts have better access to policy makers and have been able to push for ordinances that impact and reduces stigmas for individuals with past criminal record. Identified weaknesses for both sectors had to due with clients exiting too early, the need of more holistic care services, and challenges in measuring and evaluating the success of the program with data. Experts in the field identified that workforce development programs are often too general and strive to meet the needs of a broad range of people, which leads to individuals and their specific needs falling

through the cracks. Both sectors agreed that there needs to be better retention services and trauma-informed models when approaching individuals that have formerly been incarcerated, experienced homelessness, and the foster care system. Workforce development programs across the public sector are providing individuals with a second chance to live a dignified life, empower themselves, and become self-sufficient, which is hard to measure through quantitative data. They are not only advancing economic equity, but also working to improve the lives of individuals' families and the communities they inhabit.

Due to time constraints, I did not receive the necessary data to properly evaluate L.A. Kitchen's Empower L.A. program within the timeline of this project. However, I will be working with them to enhance surveys and formalize its program evaluation processes by taking the following steps:

1. Improve pre-and-post program survey
2. Formalize program evaluation process to help streamline data tracking process by creating a toolkit assessing success indicators by creating an excel document to easily track results
3. Code data and assess the positive impact and identify where there is room for improvement. Code questions and responses to quantify qualitative data.
4. Integrate additional interventions to determine if there's any further improvement

This research scratches the surface of workforce development programs working with specific groups in L.A. County. Further research can look into how specific groups (i.e. men, women, and gender neutral individuals) succeed within these programs, or how race and

ethnicity impact the success of individuals in workforce development programs. Further research on comparing job retention and job placement for various sub groups would also help address specific challenges, gaps, and needs for different populations.



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Appendix A: Raw Data Question 1-8

Questions	MOR	LAK	DWC
Q1: What is the goal of X organization? Explain why they are important.	To create <b>Equity and Opportunity</b> for individuals that are formerly incarcerated of have had criminal justice involvement. To create equity and to <b>improve public safety</b> (improve housing and employment opportunities for individual that have a criminal record, you <b>reduce recidivism</b> , which in turn improves public safety.	To create careers and not just jobs.	Help women overcome poverty and homelessness. <b>Provide solutions for women facing barriers to employment</b>
Q2: What are some current trends in workforce development?	<b>Silicon Beach</b> : "Geographically, tech is a big one...everyone is looking for opportunity there. Less known sectors: high growth in <b>hospitality, truck driving</b> . Areas people don't think of much, but relevant to the region.	<b>Hospitality. Job training programs. Customer service. Advocacy</b> "Ban the box." Restaurants	Unpaid training programs are unsuccessful. <b>Incentives</b> (stipends, transitional jobs - <b>best practice</b> ). <b>Social enterprises</b> .
Q3: How have these trends shaped your program / caused them to evolve.	"Overarching impedes around <b>trauma informed and cultural competent programming</b> . "You can put people in opportunity, but if there is underlying trauma that is unaddressed, it really doesn't serve them well		Sustainable income. Housing and employment (wrap around) services.
Q4: What is your organization doing to advocate on behalf of clients and influence policy to help promote economic equity for X population?	Helped push through " <b>Fair Chain Ordinance</b> ," generally speaking, I'm the main policy advisor when it comes to criminal justice system. I can get support from Mayor's office from state and local level. MOR philosophy to be " <b>Inclusive and to give people opportunity</b> ." Challenging to policy is it comes to developing relationships with stakeholders that might not be invested in helping criminal justice reform. " <b>Counter-intuitive partners</b> " " <b>Business case</b> (Ex: Loyal and hard working) and companies seeing benefit	Testifying in front of supervisors for Ban the <b>Box in L.A.</b> As a model a successful job training program. Interns pursue policy, advocate for clients and populations	Advocacy & Outreach on federal and local level. Having a Seat at the table
Q5: What are the biggest challenges to obtaining and retaining employment? What are some gaps that can further prevent recidivism?	From employers perspective, how to <b>properly address trauma. Missed opportunity</b> . Encouraging companies to partner with orgs that provide <b>wrap-around services</b> and letting orgs support folks that need support, and employers can focus on being employers.	<b>Fear of success</b> . Identify issues - never had a job for longer than a month. <b>Battle of Trauma</b> people have experienced. Have never succeeded in a professional environment. A lot more handholding. <b>Feeling for the first time, reintegrating back into society</b> . A hard transition. Life also gets in the way. Poverty.	<b>Access to service agency</b> (mental and medical health, co-located, <b>holistic approach</b> , housing). Making connections between service providers.

Q6: What partnerships and collaborations are the most beneficial?	Really courting <b>partners and developing relationships</b> . Also the <b>community</b> "community are the first responders to trauma. First people to welcome people home" Be respectful of relationships - it serves us well.	<b>Referral partners</b> (over 100) "We know what challenges they have (via their application) like psychosocial environments and challenges they might be facing. What are their goals they are working on with partners. Psychiatric facility. Alcohol and drug abuse. Tell us they have another support network that is pushing them to move forward.  <b>Internship</b> : business and catering companies that agree to train them. Trust Us. Trust that we train and prescreen them. Train then and then hire them. Second beneficial partner: <b>Restaurants</b> best to hire. Don't do background checks	Workforce dev. Social Enterprises. Connections with people in the community, sharing what works, and what doesn't. <b>Figuring things out together</b> . Federal funding grants (L.A. Rise) for these specific issues
Q7: How is your organization measuring program impact? What improvements can be made to measure program success?	"we haven't done so well with data collection so we are able to show how we have been able to serve people" - Anecdotally it works, people can tell us it works, we know it works - but data is needed to back it up " <b>Subcontractor report - track people in transitional work</b>	Sticking to the same <b>schedule</b> . Charges for each class. Data is inconsistent. But there's a reasons why they change. Making it <b>evidence based</b> , writing articles about it. Making sure those with <b>disabilities</b> get the necessary assistance. Students maybe not taking time they need with survey, a little ambitious, maybe needed someone to read it to them.	6 Markers (housing, income, social engagement). Challenge around <b>data follow-up</b> , employment retention typically means that women been to be incentivized. Case managers, busy with the day to day
Q8: non-tangible concepts (empowerment) that are hard to measure. How does your organization deal with that? It's often what makes a good story and can help raise awareness and can be vital in demonstrating a program's success.	ACLU's business case for employment, benefits of <b>fair chance hiring</b> . Fair Hiring Toolkit - white house recognition. Challenging, but we have tools, providing numbers and data to substantiate what we have known for a long time		Helps case manager understand where person is at and how to work with them. More so for anecdotal purposes. <b>Pre and post just started with new cohort. And Focus groups</b>

**Author's Bio**

Priscilla is a Los Angeles native with Guatemalan and Salvadorian roots. She has over four years of nonprofit experience in program development and coordination. She is interested in food justice, economic equity, and working with marginalized populations. She believes food is a human right and is working to create opportunities for communities of color, specifically women of color. Priscilla is working on completing her coursework for the Master of Nonprofit Administration from the University of San Francisco.