



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Racial Equity in Advocacy Series, Fact Sheet #13

October 2020

This fact sheet is the twelfth in the *Racial Equity in Advocacy* series for social policy advocates addressing unequal opportunities by race. Each fact sheet will provide information equipping advocates to embed a racial equity lens into their work to close gaps and improve outcomes for communities of color. Please see the [first fact sheet](#) in the series for a review of key terms and concepts.

In a civil society, everyone who desires a job should have one. Given the United States' superior economic growth (compared to the rest of the world) and ample need for continued goods and services, job creation should meet the demand of unemployed workers.

The need for a federal jobs guarantee is clear. Many long-term unemployed individuals have intense barriers that make them undesirable—or not needed—by private sector employers. Social and structural issues include:

- justice system involvement
- homelessness
- limited English proficiency
- limited education
- outsourced jobs
- automated job functions.

People of color face discrimination in the labor market. Studies have shown that factors such as differences in education and skills gaps are not enough to account for the large Black-white gaps in labor market outcomes. Discrimination likely plays a significant role in the disparate outcomes in unemployment and labor force participation rates.ⁱ For example, résumés containing minority racial cues (such as stereotypically “Black-sounding” names) lead to 30 percent to 50 percent fewer callbacks from employers than otherwise equivalent résumés without these cues.ⁱⁱ

The federal government needs to play a role, through the safety net, in ensuring that all job seekers can find appropriate employment. The federal government has previously instituted such measures during times of high unemployment, however the scourge of racial discrimination ensured that the positive impact of these programs was not equitably experienced by all Americans.

Public Job Creation in the Past

The nation's first experiment with public job creation was part of President Roosevelt's New Deal programs. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), established by Congress on March 31, 1933, provided jobs for young, unmarried, unemployed men. The young men lived in camps operated by the U.S. Army and worked on projects related to forest management, flood control, conservation projects, and the development of state and national parks.ⁱⁱⁱ Illinois Representative Oscar DePriest, the only Black member of Congress at the time, made sure that the authorizing legislation banned discrimination based on "race, color, or creed."^{iv} However, the CCC never lived up to its promise of providing a job to every able-bodied young man who wanted one.

Over its nine-year lifespan, the CCC employed about 3 million men who received the benefit of work, wages, and even educational opportunities.^v This included close to 250,000 Black men in nearly 150 of the U.S. Army's segregated camps.^{vi} While the CCC successfully connected many of the unemployed to work opportunities, its impact was greatly muted by its dehumanizing implementation. The all-Black camps were not welcome in most localities nationwide.^{vii} Furthermore, few Black corpsmen could climb the ranks within the CCC's administrative hierarchy, a direct result of prejudiced beliefs by federal leadership.^{viii}

Despite the nondiscrimination provision of the CCC Act, local authorities were using a definite quota system in the selection of Black enrollees.^{ix} Eventually, this put pressure on federal authorities to create a policy capping Black enrollment in the CCC at 10 percent of total recruits. This was roughly equivalent to the proportion of Blacks in the U.S. in 1930.^x With the Black unemployment rate at twice the national average in 1933, this quota was insufficient to meet the number of Black men eligible for relief.^{xi}

Workforce Development Programs Today

Today's largest federal investment in the workforce development system comes in the form of a block grant, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The funds do not go nearly far enough to ensure full employment in the United States. Subsidized employment is one of many allowable uses of funds which include (but are not limited to) job training, adult education, and case management.

In 2014, Congress passed WIOA, the first major legislative change to federal workforce development policy in 16 years. WIOA ushered in significant changes like:

- prioritizing services to out-of-school youth (opportunity youth) and individuals with barriers to employment
- instituting new performance measures that encourage more services to individuals with serious deficits in their educational levels
- requiring more cooperation between workforce development and related systems such as the Second Chance Act which supports programming for returning citizens.

If implemented with equity, WIOA has the potential to greatly benefit people of color with disproportionate barriers to employment. Unfortunately, WIOA is not always implemented with equity and the opportunities it affords have yet to materialize in many communities of color. Based upon stereotypes that Black males do not want employment or are unwilling to work for low wages, Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) often do not prioritize Black males as a population with barriers to employment.^{xii} As a result, Black-led organizations are less involved in WDB planning and access fewer

grants from the WDB. Without intentional planning that accounts for Black men, they are often disproportionately funneled into job training that leads to lower wage employment.

Conflicting messages from the Trump Administration about its commitment to workforce development further dampens WIOA's potential. The President's budget has consistently requested steep cuts to WIOA. At a time when these resources are deeply needed, the volatility of the funding has created an uneasy climate in local workforce development systems. Communities are less likely to start new programs that could benefit low-income workers for fear that funding levels will not meet the needs of their programs.

The Way Forward

The strategic planning process is a key stage of influence in WIOA local policy development. It guides the program's funding decisions, procurement, and guidelines for eligible training providers for several years. Informed by the community, and using disaggregated employment data, social policy advocates can educate state and local WDBs on disparities in unemployment and underemployment experienced by Black men and other populations. When these groups become a priority in planning, WDBs can then go about the process of developing or utilizing existing partnerships to create employment pipelines and training opportunities that meet their specific needs.

Social policy advocates should encourage the federal government to renew its promise to the American people by establishing a jobs guarantee. To ensure that racial discrimination is rooted out of the system, the lessons learned from the CCC should be factored into any new legislation with ample federal oversight. A federal jobs guarantee would fill the gap left by the limited employment opportunities in the private sector, bringing the U.S. economy closer to full employment. This would benefit people of color who face discrimination in the private market and, especially, those who disproportionately face the collateral consequences of having a criminal justice background. The state would operate as the employer-of-last-resort so that any person who wants a job would be guaranteed one. Furthermore, a jobs guarantee would push the private sector to improve wages and benefits to, at least, meet what the federal government provides.

ⁱ Cajner, T., Radler, T., Ratner, D., and Vidangos, I. (2017). "Racial Gaps in Labor Market Outcomes in the Last Four Decades and over the Business Cycle". *Finance and Economics Discussion Series 2017-071*. Washington, DC: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

ⁱⁱ Kang, S., DeCelles, K., Tilcsik, A., and Jun, S. (2016). Whiteness Résumés: Race and Self-Presentation in the Labor Market. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 61(3), 469-502.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Civilian Conservation Corps". (2015, April 10). National Park Service. Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/civilian-conservation-corps.htm>

^{iv} Heneghan, N. (2014, December 28). "'Just the way society was.' Segregation in the CCC". *The Living New Deal*. Retrieved from <https://livingnewdeal.org/just-way-segregation-ccc-2/>

^v National Park Service, 2015.

^{vi} Medina, 2014.

^{vii} Salmond, J. A. (1967). "Chapter 5: The Selection of Negroes, 1933-1937". In *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Retrieved from https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/ccc/salmond/chap5.htm

^{viii} Medina, D. (2014, February 10). *Civilian Conservation Corps, Racial Segregation, and the Building of the Angeles National Forest*. Public Media Group of Southern California. Retrieved from <https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/civilian-conservation-corps-racial-segregation-and-the-building-of-the-angeles>

^{ix} Salmond, 1967.

^x Heneghan, 2014.

^{xi} Salmond, 1967.

^{xii} Harris, L. (2010). *Building Pathways to Postsecondary Success for Low Income Young Men of Color: A Community Intervention Strategy*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. Retrieved from <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/files/community-intervetion-strategy-excerpt.pdf>

