



YOUNG ADULTS@WORK

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES THAT MOTIVATE YOUNG ADULTS

JANUARY 2020

The Annie E. Casey Foundation launched Generation Work™ in 2016 to explore new ways of connecting young Americans with the knowledge and experience they need to succeed in the job market. The initiative, which includes partnerships in Cleveland, Hartford, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and Seattle, weaves together best practices from the adult education and training field — in particular, a focus on demand-driven workforce development strategies — with positive youth development practices, such as mentoring and work-based learning, to better prepare young people ages 18-29 for work.

GOAL

The number of workers nearing retirement age in Connecticut has nearly doubled over the past 20 years, forcing employers to rethink their talent pipelines as part of the planning for replacement workers. Yet, juggling the many generations of today's workforce can present another set of challenges for employers.

Hartford Generation Work focuses on improving employment outcomes for young adults. Recently, we sat down with 63 current and past participants of education and training programs in Hartford, East Hartford and other surrounding communities to see what was important to them in a workplace environment. Interviews were conducted with 41 currently employed and 22 unemployed young adults aged 18-29 who shared their perspective on work.



The voices of these young adults will influence the planning and future direction of Hartford Generation Work. This information will be shared with employers and other stakeholders so that it can help improve workplace practices and culture as well as education and training programs and other efforts to expand employment opportunities for young adults.

THE PROCESS

How Information was Gathered

Hartford Generation Work asked the Young Legends, a young adult leadership group, to conduct interviews with current and past participants in youth and adult education and training programs. Interviews were also conducted by staff at these programs.

Interviews were conducted in August 2019. Interviewers were provided with a set of questions with follow-up prompts and some were provided with a stipend as compensation for their work. The questions were designed by the United Way project lead. The National Fund for Workforce Solutions Job Quality Framework was also

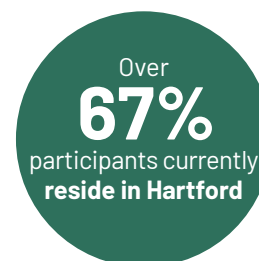
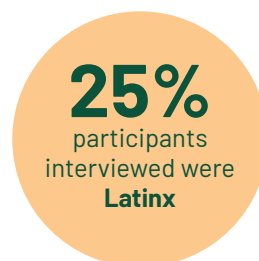
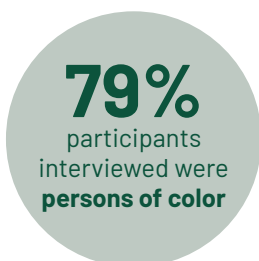
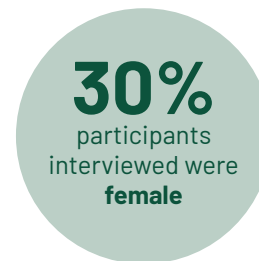
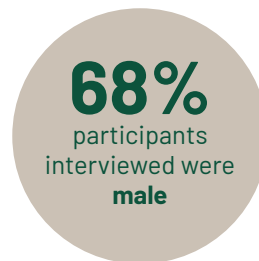
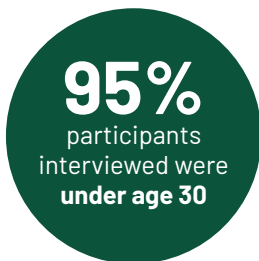
used to inform the interview questions, which focused on foundational elements including: fairness, respect and communication; support elements such as training, mentoring and concrete supports; and opportunity elements including career development, recognition and engagement.



Who was Interviewed?

The majority of participants interviewed were affiliated with an employment and training program or a youth development program operated by Our Piece of the Pie and the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology. In some instances, those interviewed were provided a stipend for their participation. Of those interviewed, 65% are currently employed and, primarily, hold entry-level positions in sectors including manufacturing, and other industries.

Over 95% of those interviewed were under age 30, with nearly half (48%) under the age of 20. Sixty-eight percent of the group was male; 30% were female. The majority of respondents (79%) were persons of color; 41% Black/African-American and 25% were Latinx. Over 67% of participants currently reside in Hartford, with the remainder coming primarily from the ring suburbs of Hartford or smaller urban areas in the region.



WHAT EMPLOYED RESPONDENTS TOLD US

Foundations of a Quality Job

As employers know, integrating new employees into their workforce is critical to engaging employees immediately and decreasing turnover. Onboarding a new employee can be an important step to establishing workplace norms and expectations, especially for young or inexperienced workers.

Most of the young workers interviewed (73%) said that they felt welcomed at their workplace. They cited friendly and welcoming co-workers and getting positive reinforcement for good work as the top reasons for feeling positive about their workplace. Employees who felt that their employer respected or cared for them were more likely to feel welcomed at work.

My supervisor talked to me, made me feel comfortable and made me feel like I was seen.



Positive and frequent communication were cited as practices that helped create a welcoming, inclusive and positive workplace. Frequent feedback in individual and team meetings was important to most workers. While hearing

positive feedback was clearly important, workers also recognized the importance of constructive criticism. Young adult employees were most impacted by a positive communication style that left them feeling respected and valued.

In addition to being able to share ideas, workers want a workplace where it is safe to share concerns. Creating explicit opportunities for sharing concerns and seeing management act on these issues are practices that help employees feel safe.

Similarly, for those interviewed, the most often cited characteristics of a workplace that felt inclusive were an openness to hearing employee ideas and evidence this input was valued (63%). Others cited a learning environment, the recruitment of individuals from different backgrounds and a culture that was not negative.

Throughout the interviews, communication was a common theme. Workers appreciated a workplace that fostered open, honest and frequent communication between workers and supervisors. Positive and respectful were words often used to describe the kind of communication that was most helpful even when talking about criticism.

Fundamental practices that left employees feeling less valued included a negative atmosphere, confusing processes, outdated or insufficient equipment, understaffing and a lack of diversity among staff at all levels.

Motivating Practices	Demotivating Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good onboarding and orientation process• Clear expectations• Welcoming and friendly co-workers• Listening to and acting on employee ideas• Respectful, frequent communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negativity• Overly complicated work processes• Equipment that is outdated• Lack of communication• No information on company policies

Support

A quality workplace offers a variety of supports that help ensure employees at every level are successful. While traditionally work-based support has been job-related, there is ample evidence that companies that pay attention to morale and other issues that can impact productivity, such as stress, are better able to retain staff.

Frontline supervisors have the most direct impact on both the job success and morale of employees. In interviews, there were positive and negative feelings about supervisors. Practices that led employees to feel supported and valued included consistent feedback and using creating opportunities to teach or retrain an employee out of missteps or errors. Over three-quarters of those interviewed had talked to their supervisor about training needs and workers valued training opportunities such as job shadowing, having an assigned mentor and online training to reinforce skills.



My supervisor doesn't make a big deal when something goes wrong; he points it out and teaches you how to do it right for the next time.



Poor supervision and insufficient training were common issues cited by those interviewed. Employees agreed that their supervisor's management style affected their performance and several noted that their supervisors did not have the training required for their position. The most frequently cited unmet training needs were related to specific job skills; other needs included working in teams and customer service skills. There was also concern about the length of time available for learning new tasks and the availability of training on different shifts.

Motivating Practices

- Regular feedback
- Clear performance expectations
- Well-trained supervisors
- Training plans discussed and in writing
- Plan for career advancement

Demotivating Practices

- Excessive or public criticism
- Insufficient time to learn new tasks
- Unclear lines of communication
- Supervisors perceived as "uncaring"

Opportunities

Employees are more likely to excel in their work when they believe they are appreciated and if they feel they have a future at their company. Being acknowledged for good work was one of the most frequently cited practices among survey respondents who liked their workplace. Workers appreciated verbal recognition, but others noted that providing goal-based incentives improved their work performance.

I was included in the change process for the organization and it made me feel valued.

Only 20% of employees had discussed career growth or advancement opportunities with their supervisor or, if available, Human Resources. As a result, those interviewed had little understanding of what skill sets, training or education would be needed for advancement. This left them feeling unsure about their future at their company.



Motivating Practices

- Individual and public recognition of performance
- Incentives

Demotivating Practices

- Lack of career planning

VERBAL RECOGNITION
CAREER INCENTIVES
GROWTH

WHAT JOB SEEKERS TOLD US

The most frequent reason for being unemployed was a health-related issue (18%) including pregnancy, trauma-related mental health issues and medications that limited work options. Other factors contributing to being unemployed included: lack of identification, transportation and family issues.

Job seekers were primarily using online job search sites to identify employment opportunities (77%). Other strategies included networking with family, friends and peers (6%) and cold calling (27%). Interviewees did not cite connections to community programs or leaders as a source of job leads.



Employment conditions valued by job seekers included: wages, benefits, hours and respect.

Barriers cited included transportation and a lack of knowledge about the application process.

Hartford Generation Work would like to acknowledge and recognize those individuals and organizations who have contributed to this report. Their participation has allowed us to develop and create a document that allow the voice of young adults to be heard as they share their experiences in the work place and in their job search efforts.

Young Legends*

- Juan Colon
- Angel Cotto
- Aleena Durant
- Virgen Guadarrama
- Edwin Kiser

Organizations

- Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology/
Advanced Manufacturing Employer Partnership
- Hartford Working Cities
- Our Pie of the Pie
- Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford

About Hartford Generation Work

The Generation Work partnership in Hartford is working to create more seamless pathways that move young adults steadily forward to quality employment with good wages while simultaneously increasing the availability of quality employment opportunities by developing a network of employers prepared to hire young adults.

The initiative is managed by United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut in partnership with Capital Workforce Partners, the City of Hartford, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, Our Piece of the Pie, and Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford.

**Young Legends are a group of young adults who are engaged in development of leadership skills that they are committed to applying in order to strengthen career pathways and improve employment outcomes for young adults in Hartford. Young Legends serve as critical partners and decision-makers through formal roles with the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative and Hartford Working Cities initiative.*



NEXT STEPS

Hartford Generation Work intends to share these early findings with employer groups supported through Workforce Solutions to encourage the adoption of quality job practices.

We intend to share information about tools that allow employers to identify practices that could improve job quality and to compare their practices with similar businesses across the country. In addition, **Hartford Generation Work** and **Workforce Solutions Collaboration of Metro Hartford** will provide opportunities for employers to secure technical assistance that will help with identifying and implementing changes.



Findings will also be shared with other stakeholders in the workforce development system to inform planning. A more comprehensive survey that delves deeper into these issues and tackles job design elements not included in this survey will likely be undertaken in the coming year.

For more information, please contact Steven Diaz, Senior Manager, Hartford Generation Work at sdiaz@unitedwayinc.org or 860.493.1129.