



Generation Work™

Cleveland / Cuyahoga County

The Annie E. Casey Foundation launched Generation Work in 2016 to connect more of America's young adults — especially young people of color from low-income families — with meaningful employment by changing the way public and private systems prepare and support them in jobs. During the initiative's first phase, five local partnerships worked to align education, employment, and support services to help young people develop the skills required to succeed in the working world; link them with employers; and increase advancement and earning opportunities. Building upon previous successes and lessons, partners in eight communities — Birmingham, Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Louisville, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Wilmington — were part of a second phase focused on working with employers to improve hiring, retention, and advancement practices to better support young people of color. These local sites were supported by national partners that provided project management, technical assistance, and feedback. Since the launch of Generation Work, national partners have included Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunity Program, Child Trends, National Fund for Workforce Solutions, MDRC, Kingslow Associates, and Susan Maciolek.

In Cleveland | Cuyahoga County, Towards Employment, The Centers, Ohio Guidestone, the Advanced Technology Academy at Cuyahoga Community College, Manufacturing Works, and Youth Opportunities Unlimited have been working together to improve the employment and earnings outcomes of young adults, particularly young adults of color, through organizational capacity building focused on system alignment and employer practice change. Partners collaborate across organizations, coordinate across programs, aggregate quantitative and qualitative data, center racial equity, and leverage additional resources for the community. With a shared vision, common goals, peer learning, and a commitment to better outcomes, partners have worked to strengthen career pathways for young adults in Cuyahoga County.



More information about Generation Work
Cleveland|Cuyahoga County can be found [online](https://www.towardsemployment.org/generation-work).

Employer Practice Change:

Listening to worker voice and applying a job quality framework to help employers improve hiring, retention, and advancement of young adults.

Why This Work Matters

Generation Work Cleveland|Cuyahoga County (GWC|C) is grounded in a straightforward premise: Young adults' outcomes are shaped not only by their skills and motivation, but also by the policies and practices of the jobs and workplaces they enter. Employers interested in successfully attracting and retaining young adult talent can benefit from better understanding young adult workers' preferences and priorities, and seeking ways to adapt workplace practices to support their onboarding and career development. GWC|C focused on understanding young adult preferences and equipping staff with the capacity to work with employers to drive changes in the policies and practices that matter most for young adults. By helping employers understand how certain practices can create challenges for young adults, GWC|C worked to improve the long-term employment and earnings outcomes for young adults.

What is Job Quality?

The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program considers stability, economic mobility, equity, respect, and voice at work as key components of a good job. Aspen's Job Quality Center of Excellence (<https://jobqualitycenter.org/about/>) includes resources, tools, and research about job quality for employers, practitioners, and policy makers.



Results for America (left) offers eight core principles as the components of a good job. Each of these eight principles fall into one of three categories: job necessities, job opportunities, and job features. This framework also comes with a tool-kit to help communities grow good jobs.

Jobs for the Future (JFF; below) developed a framework with similar components, though outlined in a more linear manner. The JFF job quality toolkit covers four areas: compensation, advancement, agency & culture, and structure. [Click here](#) to link to the full resource.



The Model In Practice: How Workforce Development Expanded Focus from Job Placement to Job Quality

Since the 1990s, the idea of job quality has slowly gained importance in workforce development. In the 1990s, most programs focused on getting people into jobs as quickly as possible, based on the belief that any job was better than none, even as more work became low-wage, unstable, and offered little chance to move up. In the 2000s, it became clearer that many people were working but still struggling, which led programs to pay more attention to whether jobs offered raises, skills, and long-term opportunities, not just a paycheck. During the 2010s, workforce organizations began to talk openly about job quality, recognizing that pay, benefits, schedules, and treatment at work mattered as much as training, and that employers played a major role in shaping outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic made these issues impossible to ignore, highlighting how low-quality jobs hurt workers and the broader economy, and pushing workforce programs to focus more directly on helping people access jobs that are stable, fairly paid, and sustainable over time.

The GWC|C employer engagement strategy equipped employer-facing staff with shared tools, peer learning, and a disciplined test-and-learn approach so they could help employers assess their practices and make recommendations for practical, measurable changes. The GWC|C partnership also continued its established practice of aggregating data, including employer data, across all partners to encourage information sharing and identify trends.

Key components

- **Partnership participation was expanded** to include employer facing staff from each partner. This helped to expand the level of awareness of job-quality and regional exposure to potential strategies to improve it.
- **A shared tool (Opportunity Navigator, later OptN Ohio) was identified and used** to open employer dialogue about workplace practices and to normalize job-quality conversations.
- **Partners were asked to use this specific tool**, but each partner decided when and how they used it in their programming. Rather than prescribing when and how the tool should be deployed, GWC|C prioritized getting the employer information and data and encouraged partners to explore how.

“Manufacturing Works has been connecting manufacturers and jobseekers for many years. GWC|C offered us an opportunity to test a new tool and offer input into how it was deployed. It was encouraging to see our input used to inform the work of other partners.”

- Brianna Schultz,
Manufacturing Works

- **Training for employer-facing staff** covered a range of topics and leveraged local and national partners, while peer learning meetings were hosted regularly and allowed staff across multiple organizations to share tactics, troubleshoot barriers, and build consistency.
- **Technical assistance was available** to support employer-facing staff as they provided coaching and technical assistance to employers. This support helped staff translate insights from the Opportunity Navigator (see side box) into manageable changes employers could implement quickly.
- **Working young adults were consulted** and their voice elevated with employers. GWC|C leveraged additional activity through Youth Opportunities Unlimited's Fund for Workforce Equity project that supported young adult engagement and Towards Employment's Annie E. Casey Young Adult Engagement Innovation Fund project to ensure "quality" reflected what young adults actually experience and value at work. (See Young Adult Worker Voice Brief for more on this strategy).

Job-Quality Tools: Opportunity Navigator to OptN Ohio, an Evolution

The Opportunity Navigator is an online tool developed by Foundation Strategies Group. The tool was available to GWC|C partners at no cost. Data from employer completions was available to the project for aggregation and disaggregation by sector, size, and location. The tool generated a menu of action items that employers could implement to address any areas of focus that emerged from the conversations.

Through ongoing use of the tool in Cuyahoga County and across the state, partners gathered learning about deployment of such a tool and documented questions and feedback about the policies and practices included. This input was used to develop a revised, Ohio specific tool: OptN Ohio for use through the Ohio Workforce Coalition. **OptN Ohio is available at no cost to partners. Aggregated data and customized reports offering guidance and resources for employers are also available to partners using the tool.**

Upon completion of the survey tool, results were compiled into a report with recommendations and delivered to the employer, the project advisor, and the staff working with that employer. This data was aggregated by the project team and then disaggregated by sector, size, and geography with a goal of generating a baseline understanding of which job quality elements were fairly common, and which components were less likely to be in place.

The data showed that Cuyahoga County employers performed best in the area of on-the-job training and professional development, with 86% of employers reporting they post jobs internally and offer formal onboarding processes. Conversely, Cuyahoga County employers reported the least focus on data driven practices with fewer than half calculating the cost of turnover and fewer than one third tracking indicators of inclusion or analyzing retention or promotion rates by demographic group.

Stories of Change: Employer Examples

The examples below are representative of the kinds of employer practice changes supported through the collaborative work of the GWC|C partners.

Story 1 — Multi-step practice change (job posting, hiring, onboarding, and early support)

One GWC|C partner used the Opportunity Navigator to start a broader conversation with a small employer struggling with retention. Reviewing the results of the Opportunity Navigator and the menu of tools provided to address each of the components, inconsistent onboarding and unclear expectations emerged as likely sources driving their retention challenges. Staff worked with the employer, using resources identified through the tool, to support change. The plan included: simplifying job postings and onboarding materials, removing unnecessary screening barriers, introducing cross-training opportunities, adding structured early supports, and providing entry-level workers with exposure to professional development.

Story 2 — Compensation and pay-scale recalibration

This employer faced wage competitiveness concerns and mounting pressure around hiring and retention. The employer completed the Opportunity Navigator and based on review, the GWC|C partner was able to guide the employer conversation to the role of compensation as a job quality lever. This is particularly valuable because wages and benefits are often treated as a taboo topic. The employer used local cost data and labor-market context to re-evaluate its pay scale and realized their compensation was out of line with regional averages. As a result, the employer increased wages to remain competitive.

Story 3 — Supportive services and employee stability

Across the country, employers and workers are struggling with a cluster of challenges generally called the [social determinants of work](#), the non-job-related factors like health, transportation, or housing that impact employee stability and success. One employer's Opportunity Navigator results recommended they partner with community organizations to help address non-job-related issues for their workers. This employer explored a community partnership with Towards Employment to create their own flexible supportive-service fund that employees could access for emergency needs that could impact their work. By working with a community organization and creating the flexible funding pool, this employer provided a range of assistance for employees, which can boost employee satisfaction, while also taking steps to ensure workers can be present and productive at work. This example illustrates how employers can operationalize "support" in practical ways that stabilize employment for young adults and reduce preventable job loss.

Signals of Progress and Outcomes

While the employer brief is focused on practice change, the broader site data provides additional evidence of potential impact.

In the last six months of 2025 alone (the most recent period of data available), reporting partners served 340 young adults at various stages of their career pathway. Of those, 253 completed the program and 175, or 69%, gained employment after program completion. Of those eligible for each milestone, retention is strong: 96% retained at 30 days, 92% retained at 3 months and 75% retained at 6 months.

These outcomes reinforce the importance of employer change: Retention is influenced by workplace conditions and supports, not just participant skills and readiness.

What We Are Learning

Employers respond best when job quality tools are presented as diagnostic and collaborative rather than evaluative, creating a sense of partnership rather than judgment. Integrating worker voice into these conversations strengthens engagement by highlighting the practices that most influence early tenure, engagement, and advancement. Practice change proves most sustainable when approached iteratively—through small tests, rapid learning, and visible wins that build momentum over time. Finally, peer learning among employer-facing staff acts as a force multiplier, improving consistency, reducing duplication of effort, and increasing confidence in navigating challenging topics such as pay and supervision.



Partner Engagement and System Collaboration:

Building capacity to support employer practice change, elevate worker voice, and strengthen system alignment.

Why This Work Matters

Workforce systems are often fragmented and difficult to navigate, and young adults in particular may struggle with accessing the right service at the right time to advance along a career pathway. They may have to visit several agencies and repeat their personal history multiple times to access support. They often end up in a career pathway because that is what the agency where they landed offered, rather than engaging in meaningful career exploration. For three years, Generation Work Cleveland|Cuyahoga County (GWC|C) partners worked to identify areas of specialization and opportunities for collaboration to reduce the navigation challenges for young adults seeking a career pathway. With the elevated focus on helping young adults access “quality jobs”, the partners recognized that a more aligned and enhanced focus on engaging employers around job quality was also needed.

The Model in Practice: How Partners Worked Together

Partners started the second phase of GWC|C having completed several years of working together: collaborating organizationally, coordinating young adult programming, sharing and aggregating data, leveraging funding, and applying learnings on addressing racial equity in programming. Collectively, the GWC|C partners had served over 700 unique employers across the region and were eager to engage with employers more deeply. GWC|C was intentionally designed to ensure that collaboration resulted in actionable steps that could be applied by each member of the collaborative.

Partners worked to identify a common definition of Job Quality and approach to employer engagement shared across the collaborative focused on elevating young adult voice to inform employer practice change and improve outcomes. Each partner had their own starting point in understanding job quality as a concept, familiarity with tools, and capacity to implement a new approach. GWC|C provided an accelerated path to learning about job quality, hands-on support with deploying a job quality strategy, and ongoing technical assistance from state and national partners. Each partner brought direct implementation experience to bear in discussions of system-wide concepts and had the opportunity to apply lessons learned in their programmatic work. Partners invested staff time and capacity to work towards shared goals.

A steering committee of organizational leaders met regularly to share updates, troubleshoot challenges, and align priorities. These meetings were facilitated by a project advisor who was able to surface issues, follow-up with individual organizations, and manage communications. The project advisor also coordinated peer learning groups—initially for young adult facing and employer-facing staff. The project advisor also coordinated professional development and technical assistance from national experts.

Through each of these steps, GWC|C partners deployed a rapid learning cycle methodology, Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) to test approaches, document what works, and refine implementation over time. Experience using new tools and approaches to increase employer engagement was shared so that other staff and organizations could apply learnings in real time. This built synergy across organizations and opened lines of communication beyond that which the project facilitated. This structured approach created a mechanism for ongoing learning and sharing.

“As an educational training provider, the Advanced Technology Academy at Cuyahoga Community College regularly worked with a wide range of partners. Generation Work allowed us to learn alongside our partners, and bring our unique perspective to the table, to raise the collective quality of workforce and technical training for young adults in Northeast Ohio.”

- Mary Kay Bitterman, Advanced Technology Academy at Cuyahoga Community College

Partner Practices

In addition to working with external employers, GWC|C partners - employers themselves - engaged in job quality practice change. For example, The Centers used the survey tool to identify opportunities to improve their own policies and practices and through this work:

1. **Implemented affinity groups** to improve employees' sense of belonging.
2. **Discontinued mandatory drug testing** and revising degree requirements.
3. **Improved recruitment speed** by simplifying the pre-board and selection process.
4. **Partnered with local high schools** to expand the talent pool.
5. **Used an electronic reference platform** and enabled self-scheduling for interviews.

These changes demonstrate a strong commitment to young adult workers and The Centers's employees..

Finally, shared reporting and metrics provided a foundation for reflection and improvement—allowing partners to focus on learning and impact. Partners voluntarily provided data about young adults engaged in their programs, employers they were working with, and organizational efforts to promote job quality, young adult voice, and racial equity. Employer survey data offered insights into the policies and practices adopted by employers across the county. Aggregating all of this data helped the partners better understand young adult outcomes, employer practices, and workforce program capacity.

Stories of Change: Employer Examples

The partners each agreed to engage in job quality conversations with their employer network, though partners were able to identify when and how to have these conversations, given their unique programmatic elements and organizational goals.

Story 1 — Translating a Job Quality Tool into Practice

Given the variety of organizational structures and distribution of employer engagement responsibilities across staff, partners were at different starting points in terms of understanding how to leverage existing employer relationships to introduce job quality concepts and inform an overall employer engagement strategy that would connect more quality jobs to young adult program graduates. To start the process of discovery, partners were offered the Opportunity Navigator. Developed by Foundation Strategies Group, the Opportunity Navigator identified employer practices in six areas.

The goal was to gather data with the hope of sparking deeper conversations about the characteristics of quality jobs that were most important to young adults and identify specific practice changes or community resources that could be helpful in addressing gaps revealed via the tool. Opportunity Navigator data was aggregated and shared back to the partners so they could discuss actual employer practices by sector, size, and practice area.

Early learnings focused on which employers to engage first based on strength of existing relationships,, who in the company to approach to complete the survey, and how the survey was implemented (online, hard copy, or in person as an interview). Partners quickly moved to calling the tool a survey rather than an assessment. This helped the tool feel less like a test and more like a conversation starter to those administering it and completing it. The collective learning allowed all partners to refine their approach to using the tool based on what increased employers' completion of the survey and the quality of what employers shared. Adjustments included tailoring language, strengthening relationship-building strategies, and identifying the right internal respondent within each company. Staff with similar roles at different organizations came together for regular peer learning sessions, and they were able to compare ideas, share challenges, and learn from each other in a practical way. This collective learning process helped eliminate the need for individual trial-and-error.

Story 2 — Elevating Worker Voice Through Fund for Workforce Equity

Based on the initial learnings from the employer job quality surveys, GWC|C was able to leverage investment from The Fund for Workforce Equity through Youth Opportunities Unlimited. This award allowed GWC|C to conduct additional young adult worker surveys and interviews to learn more about how young adults—specifically those currently working—defined a quality job. Respondents gave feedback about the various components of the job quality framework and prioritized what was most important to them. Insights from this effort led the GWC|C collaborative to engage Child Trends, a national Generation Work partner, to formally review the Opportunity Navigator and identify which practices are most aligned with their research on positive youth development. Their conclusions were shared with a focus group of young adult workers, resulting in a refined set of principles that could be shared with staff working with employers and with employers looking to improve their recruitment and retention of young adults. Through this evolution, the voice of young adult workers shifted from being a “nice to have” to being a structured input that shaped decisions and guided the GWC|C partners efforts to inform employer practice changes.

Story 3 — Bridging Into the Public Workforce System

Each of the GWC|C partners offered programs funded by Ohio’s Comprehensive Case Management Employment Program (CCMEP). Leaders from Ohio Means Jobs Cleveland|Cuyahoga and Cuyahoga County Job & Family Services were actively involved in the first phase of GWC|C. These leaders were also briefed quarterly through the second phase, with the hope that GWC|C learning would inform public system strategies. Partners engaged the evolving public system leadership and infrastructure to ensure that GWC|C principles—job quality, a focus on young adults, and racial equity—carry forward beyond the project period. This outreach created pathways for embedding these priorities into system-level strategies and sustaining the work beyond the initiative’s formal timeline.

What We Are Learning

Collaboration works best when it is intentionally supported, including recurring convenings, skilled facilitation, shared tools, and a culture that encourages learning with peers.

Continuous learning using a series of rapid cycle testing and review, especially about what did not work as expected, is essential for promoting creative solutions and developing practices that can be replicated beyond a single organization. Documenting small changes and their impact can help accelerate learning and ensure it can be shared beyond one organization or staff.

Finally, influencing systems depends as much on relationships and repeated engagement as it does on formal plans or roadmaps. Trust and consistency are critical to building effective collaboration—when staff know and trust their peers from other organizations, it is more likely they would share learning and feedback.

Partner Input: OptN Ohio

As described in this brief, partners offered input into the deployment and ongoing use of the Opportunity Navigator. These partners also documented questions and feedback about the tool itself and the policies and practices included.

For example, while the original tool asked one question about flexible and predictable scheduling and required a yes or no answer, the revised tool asks about flexibility and predictability separately to allow for additional nuance. Also, partners suggested the new tool include a link to information to help employers know if they pay a living wage, so a link to the MIT Living Wage Calculator was added directly into the survey.



Young Adult Worker Voice:

How young adult priorities informed employer practice change, strengthened tools, and supported better outcomes.

Why This Work Matters

Local research showed that 40% of young adults (18–34) had been with their employer 12 months or less — an indicator of high turnover among younger workers—while employers express frustration about attracting and retaining young workers, as they seek to diversify their workforce and prepare for the future.

Since launch, Generation Work Cleveland|Cuyahoga County (GWC|C) has prioritized the input of young adults in discussions about employer practices, workforce development programming, and work-place priorities with an eye on what will improve retention and advancement. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups by different partners across multiple years, it became clear that young adults are looking for more than “just a job”. Their success depends on workplace conditions that support stability, learning, and advancement.

Listening to young adult workers reveals what traditional metrics can miss: How specific supervision practices, culture, scheduling, and growth opportunities shape whether a young adult enters a career pathway or a revolving door job.

The Model in Practice: How Voice Informed Action

Young adult worker voice was gathered through structured inputs (surveys, interviews, and focus groups) and elevated through intentional feedback to employers and to coaching and employer facing staff. GWC|C incorporated young adult worker feedback into employer conversations to help identify employer practice changes and program improvements.

During the second phase of work, GWC|C leveraged a national grant to survey and interview young adults working in Cuyahoga County, with top line results showing 75% of respondents seeking more employer support in the workplace. Learning from those initial exchanges uncovered the need for a deeper understanding of what young adults meant by this, so GWC|C reached out to Child Trends, a national partner for Generation Work, for additional assistance. In earlier work, Child Trends developed the PILOT tool to facilitate the application of Positive Youth Development principles to youth and young adult training, education, and employment programs. GWC|C saw potential in how the understanding of what helps make **programming** young adult friendly could translate into practices that would make **workplaces** more friendly to young adults.

*This data includes young adults engaged in both CCMEP and non-CCMEP programs and does not include all young adults served for the duration of the project.

Partners wanted to better understand connections between the PILOT tool and local employer-focused work. The GWC|C team asked Child Trends to compare the characteristics of positive youth development to the fifty plus quality employer policies and practices outlined in the GWC|C's job quality tool, the Opportunity Navigator. Child Trends identified fifteen characteristics that overlapped between the PILOT and Opportunity Navigator tools. That is, fifteen different characteristics of positive youth development aligned with best-in-class employer practices or policies.

These fifteen practices were first shared with GWC|C partners during leadership meetings and peer learning sessions. During that session, partners discussed their overall impressions of the findings and which of the fifteen topics they could influence, which they thought young adults cared most about, and which the community should prioritize. The GWC|C team then surveyed young adults again about which of the fifteen characteristics were most important to them. Young adults identified five practices of most importance. In Cuyahoga County, young adults want an employer that:

“Through Generation Work, we had an opportunity to try new ways of connecting young adults and employers. We hosted a roundtable discussion with Towards Employment's Young Adult Worker Advisory Council and Towards Employment's Employer Advisory Board, focused on motivations, communication styles, and generational differences—to help employers better understand young adults and guide their organizations in meeting the needs of the emerging workforce. This conversation provided a valuable opportunity for members of the Young Adult Worker Advisory Council to engage with employers as peers and share critical perspectives to inform the Employer Advisory Board's understanding of young adults entering the workforce.”

- James Stubbins, Towards Employment.

1. **Has a clear and organized new-hire training plan** with on-the-job training for all roles.
2. **Offers a flexible holiday schedule** that includes multi-faith and cultural holidays or floating holidays.
3. **Tells [them] about promotion and salary increase opportunities** before hiring others.
4. **Asks for [their] feedback and...ideas** for operational improvements.
5. **Provides cross-training**, job shadowing, or other company sponsored and paid education programs.

GWC|C partners also learned about one specific policy that was important to young adults but did not show up in the PILOT/Opportunity Navigator crosswalk (though it was raised in staff discussions): flexibility. Young adults want flexibility in scheduling, break times, and time off.

Recognizing the value of this feedback loop, partners have renewed or increased their own internal focus on gathering young adult input. For example, Towards Employment piloted a Young Adult Worker Advisory Council to create a sustainable mechanism for engaging young workers around issues of job quality and providing a forum to share their input with employers, as well as to help partners refine programming based specifically on the needs of young adults. Through this Council, and other organizational specific forums for young adult input, additional themes emerged.

The young adult workers surveyed:

- **Valued predictability and clarity** in schedules and expectations, and transparent policies that help reduce uncertainty and stress.
- **Wanted to know their supervisors support them**, respect them, are willing to coach them, and will give constructive feedback. This also helps foster an inclusive culture of equitable treatment with a sense of belonging and fairness.
- **Sought practical supports that reduce instability**, such as transportation assistance, childcare support, or help with short-term financial shocks; these were identified as essential for sustaining employment and promoting success.

Equipped with this young adult worker input, partners were able to prioritize which policies or practices to raise with employers who expressed a goal of better attracting and retaining young adult workers, and provided guidance for coaching young adults on how to learn more about employment opportunities that offer the practices they prioritize. As a result, partner staff were able to more effectively work with both employers (on policy or practice change) and young adults (on career advancement).

Shaping Partner Practice

When partners systematically gathered youth input and integrated those priorities into their discussions with employers, conversations shifted. Prompts were made more concrete (e.g., “Is there a named supervisor for the first 90 days?” “How far in advance are schedules posted?”), and the tone of conversations shifted from transactional hiring to collaborative problem solving. Bringing young adult worker voice to the dialogue with employers accelerated conversations about specific practice change commitments. Partners’ employer engagement staff were able to identify a menu of opportunities to help retain young adults such as named supervision, transparent advancement pathways, and clear responses when early-retention issues arise. Managers agreed to actions like posting schedules earlier, using 30/60/90-day check-in templates, and mapping visible skill milestones tied to advancement. The net effect was that young adult worker voice moved from sharing input to a practical driver of employer behavior, improving early-tenure conditions that young adults consistently say matter most for staying and growing.

Listening to young adult worker voices also reshaped how partners prepared young adults. Partners added preemployment content that equips young adults to navigate early employment realities—how to ask for clarity, request constructive feedback, and plan for first-week logistics. Simple tools, like a one page first week checklist, helped participants turn those strategies into action on the job.

By aligning preparation and coaching around young adult worker priorities, partners influenced both sides of the labor market: Young adults entered roles with confidence and practical tactics, while employers responded to specific feedback with changes that support young adult retention and advancement.

What We Are Learning

Through GWC|C, learning about how to engage young adult worker voices emerged across partners, programs, and processes. Partners learned that young adult success depends heavily on workplace conditions that align with young adult priorities, particularly during the critical early months of employment. Programmatic approaches to young worker voice should consider multiple opportunities to gather input and build continuous feedback loops into various programmatic components. Processes designed to gather young adult worker's voices should be structured—through consistent questions, clear feedback channels, and defined decision pathways—to translate insights into real practice change. Perhaps most importantly, GWC|C elevated the importance and value of young adult workers and employers talking to each other.

“Generation Work showed our team that retention for young adults isn't just a measure of how well we prepare them or what training they get. Retention and advancement reflect what the workplace is like, and young adult worker input really underscored the need for us to better understand which workplace practices really support young adults.”

- Kiersten Watkins, Ohio Guidestone

Partners found that iterative testing—small changes observed over short cycles—builds momentum and increases the likelihood that young adult workers share their input. Finding ways to bring young adult workers or jobseekers into employer discussions and pairing that with ongoing coaching for both, ensures that insights move from conversation to action. Once actions are taken, tracking young adult retention, alongside workplace policies and practices like schedule predictability and supervisor check-ins, will help demonstrate the link between workplace conditions and young adult outcomes, reinforcing why these practices matter.



Looking Ahead

As Generation Work Cleveland|Cuyahoga's formal timeline concludes, partners are focused on carrying forward the Generation Work principles of positive youth development, engaging employers around job quality, and promoting racial equity and young adult worker voice throughout future programmatic offerings.

Partners are committed to continuing to:

- **Center job quality and youth worker voice** as core strategies for retention, advancement, and equity in employer engagement.
- **Continue to work on providing** consistent, values-aligned conversations with employers—particularly around onboarding, supervision, advancement, and worker voice.
- **Use shared tools and learning processes** to reflect on what is working and adapt approaches accordingly based on what we are learning.

As the regional workforce landscape evolves, partners are positioned to remain attentive to opportunities to align these practice-change approaches with broader system priorities.

Acknowledgements

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We are also grateful for the engagement of public sector leaders and employers who came to these conversations with an open mind, an eye towards change, and a commitment to improved workforce outcomes for young adults.

Most importantly, we would like to recognize and thank the many young adult jobseekers and workers who participated in surveys, focus groups, committees, and interviews to inform and guide this work.