

From Barriers to Pathways: A Workforce Development Study for Gun Violence Prevention

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Submitted to Civic Coalition to Save Lives



Executive Summary

In 2021, the City of Philadelphia experienced a peak in gun violence – part of a three-year period from 2020 to 2022 that saw more than 6,800 shooting victims.¹ In response, stakeholders from across Philadelphia – both public and private – have come together to pursue a coordinated set of public safety interventions. One of the core components of these efforts in Philadelphia has included targeted workforce development for those most vulnerable to gun violence – disproportionately Black and Brown men aged 18 to 34. Despite recent reductions in gun violence, additional progress in addressing the threat of gun violence will require continued efforts to identify the gaps and opportunities within the labor market and Philadelphia’s local workforce development ecosystem that can further improve economic mobility for these populations.

To build on this work, the Civic Coalition to Save Lives (CCSL) – with the support of the Truist Foundation – commissioned this analysis to explore means to strengthen stakeholder partnerships and more broadly support workforce development efforts already making an impact within Philadelphia, including Pushing Progress Philly (P3), Group Violence Intervention (GVI), and Beat the Block. More broadly, this work aims to build on research literature that has shown a correlation between unemployment and gun violence.

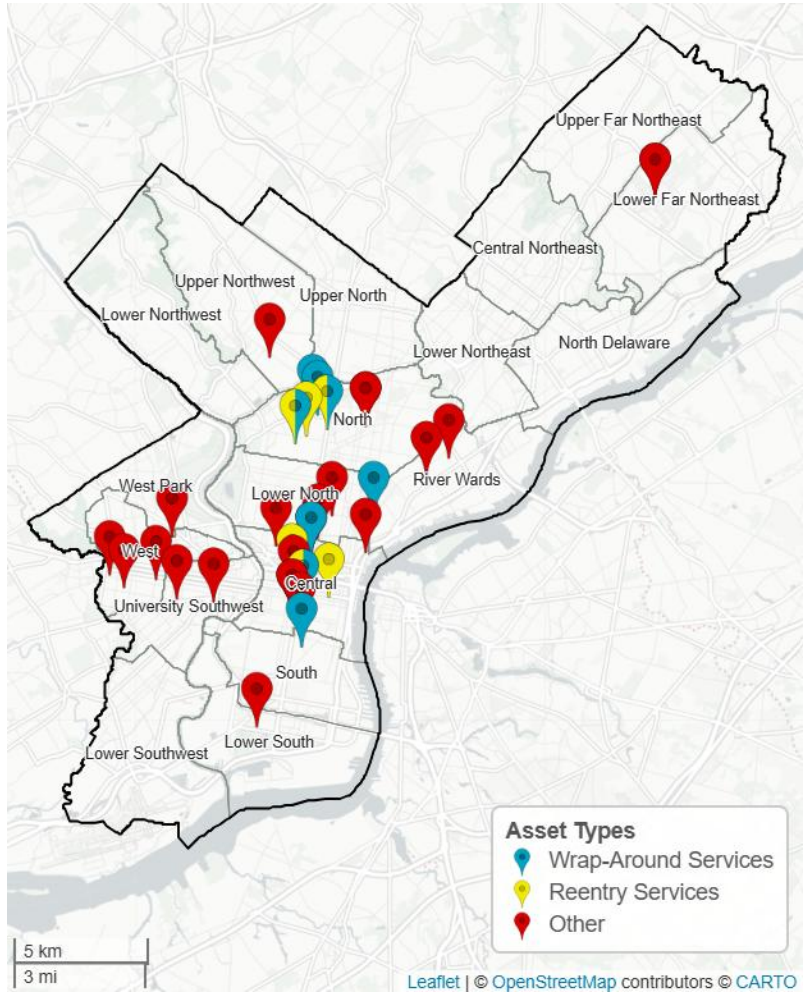
Key Finding #1: Philadelphia Has a Strong Network of Workforce Development Assets

Philadelphia has a strong network of workforce development resources available for vulnerable populations, and the City has invested in several public safety initiatives that incorporate workforce development training opportunities. This includes P3, an Office of Public Safety (OPS) program that brings together workforce, housing, and behavioral health resources to support individuals identified as those most vulnerable to gun violence. Several additional programs and resources are available, including Beat the Block and the City’s Group Violence Intervention (GVI) program, as well as resources specifically for reentering individuals, such as the Center for Employment Opportunities. From a physical proximity standpoint, approximately a quarter of the vulnerable population is located within a half mile of a workforce development asset, such as a resource center or a program location, while the average distance from an asset to SEPTA’s Market-Frankford or Broad Street Lines is less than a half mile.² Maintaining and strengthening accessibility, especially as public transportation faces uncertainty, will be critical to the long-term success of connecting the vulnerable population to workforce development resources.

¹ Shooting victims inclusive of fatal and nonfatal shootings. [Shooting Victims](#), Open Data Philly.

² Measures of physical proximity reflect the geographic location of workforce development assets relative to the residential locations of the vulnerable population, but do not necessarily indicate effective accessibility. Proximity alone does not guarantee that an individual can safely or reliably reach an asset. Barriers may include concerns related to neighborhood-level violence, perceived or actual safety along travel routes, limited mobility, caregiving responsibilities, time constraints, transit reliability, and other social or structural factors. As a result, observed spatial proximity should be interpreted as potential access rather than realized access.

Mapping Philadelphia's Workforce Development Assets for Individuals Most Vulnerable to Gun Violence



Source: Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2025)

Key Finding #2: Wraparound Services are Effective, yet Workforce Pathways Need Strengthening

Despite this network of workforce development resources, vulnerable populations still face significant barriers to finding employment in careers that provide opportunities for economic mobility. Interviews, listening sessions, and provider engagement revealed four categories of barriers that consistently shape the experiences of individuals most vulnerable to gun violence:

- **Emotional Support and Understanding:** Many participants have grown up without consistent emotional support or trusted guidance, making it difficult to navigate setbacks, conflicts, or workplace dynamics independently.
- **Soft Skills and Workplace Readiness:** Limited prior exposure to professional environments leaves participants without the soft skills employers expect on the job.
- **Education, Exposure, and Employment Pathways:** Limited exposure to career-track occupations prevent participants from identifying, accessing, and pursuing viable long-term employment pathways.
- **Criminal Records and Employer Bias:** Criminal histories, licensing restrictions, and employer mistrust frequently disqualify participants from opportunities or result in rescinded offers, even when they are otherwise job ready.

P3, Beat the Block, and similar initiatives are highly effective at addressing these early-stage challenges. Their strength lies in intensive wraparound supports—behavioral health services, case management, peer networks, cognitive behavioral therapy, and same-day transitional employment—that build stability, confidence, and the foundational routines needed to succeed in the labor market. These prerequisites are essential; without them, workforce development alone cannot gain traction for this population.

However, the report’s findings also show that the workforce component remains the most fragile link in the pathway. Participants frequently encounter the same barriers again when attempting to transition into unsubsidized employment, particularly when employer practices, credentialing requirements, and job structures are not aligned with the supports provided during the program.

To achieve durable economic mobility, these wraparound models must be complemented by stronger alignment with sector-based workforce initiatives, employer-informed training pipelines, and committed hiring partners who can translate participants’ readiness into real, sustained employment opportunities with pathways for advancement. Achieving this will require closer and more direct coordination between the key stakeholders within Philadelphia’s workforce pathways – program providers; employers; and policymakers.

Key Finding #3: High-Opportunity Career Pathways Exist but Require Stronger, Deliberate Linkages

Four career pathways, amongst a broader group of available career pathways, were identified as holding potential for Philadelphia’s vulnerable population based on average wage, forecasted stability, respective entry-level accessibility, and available workforce development opportunities within the broader industry. These include:

MANUFACTURING



TRADES



TRANSPORTATION



MEDICAL SERVICES



However, these pathways are not automatically accessible. Moving participants from temporary subsidized to permanent unsubsidized employment requires intentional connection points grounded in best practice: employer-designed cohort training, paid or stipend-supported “earn-and-learn” models, upfront screening for background and licensure eligibility, guaranteed interviews, and structured post-placement support. Strengthening these workforce linkages between programs and employers can reduce late-stage disqualifications, improve retention, and create predictable, sustainable pathways to quality employment.

Key Finding #4: Mutually Beneficial Employer Partnerships Are Essential to Expanding Employment Pathways

Providing Philadelphia’s vulnerable population with opportunities for long-term, sustainable employment will require building partnerships that deliver clear, mutual value for both jobseekers and employers. Jobseekers need livable wages, supportive work environments, predictable schedules, and opportunities for advancement. Employers most likely to benefit from these partnerships are those with persistent vacancies, high turnover, or recurring entry-level staffing needs, where reliable hiring pipelines, reduced turnover, and improved retention directly support their operations.

Within this context, larger employers – such as the University of Pennsylvania, the City of Philadelphia, and SEPTA, among others – with regular staffing needs and hiring cycles, structured work environments, as well as relatively higher wages and a suite of benefits for entry-level positions, make strong candidates for partnership. Together, partnerships with larger employers and the existing resource network can expand access to quality jobs while addressing ongoing hiring needs across multiple sectors.

Table of Contents

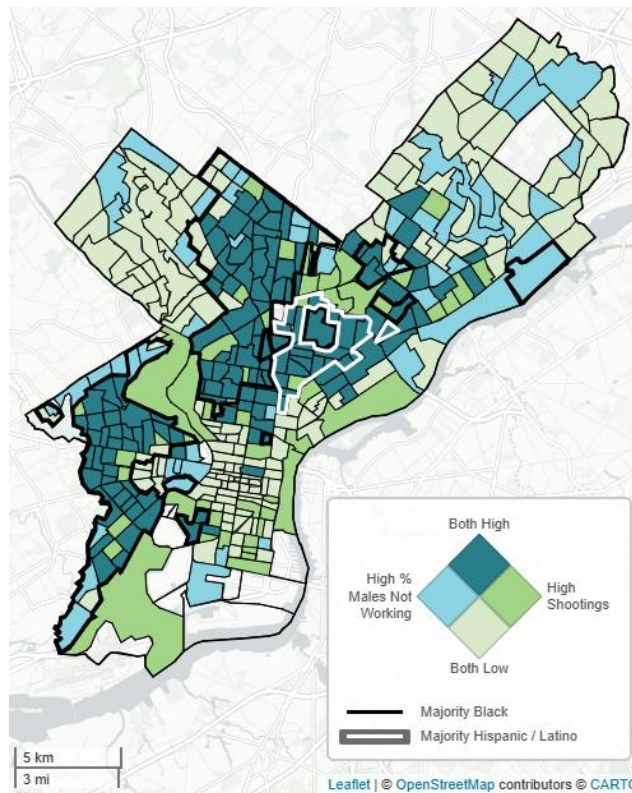
1.	Introduction	8
1.1.	About the Civic Coalition to Save Lives	9
1.2.	Approach and Organization	9
2.	Philadelphia Workforce Development Policy and Resource Landscape Analysis.....	10
2.1.	Defining the Target Population.....	10
2.2.	National Exemplars of Workforce Development Programs Serving Individuals Most Vulnerable to Gun Violence.....	13
2.3.	The City’s Approach to Workforce Development and Gun Violence Intervention	13
2.4.	Identifying Additional Resources	15
3.	Barriers to Workforce Development.....	21
3.1.	Identification of Employment Barriers.....	23
3.2.	Program Response to Identified Barriers.....	26
4.	Exploration Phase Opportunities: Education, Exposure, and Career Pathways	28
4.1.	Considerations for Viable Career Pathways.....	28
4.2.	Potential Career Pathways.....	30
4.3.	Entrepreneurship	38
5.	Transition Phase Opportunities: Reducing Employer Bias and Expanding Program-Employer Connections	39
5.1.	Workforce Development Best Practices: Cohort-based Training and Placement	39
5.2.	Understanding Large Employer and City Perspectives	41
6.	Opportunity Roadmap	46
6.1.	Current Program Employer Benefits: Stages 1 and 2	46
6.2.	Aligning Employer and Jobseeker Needs for Sustainable Workforce Partnerships	48
6.3.	Identifying Potential Employer Partnerships	50
6.4.	Potential Programmatic Pathway Examples	52
A	Appendix: About Econsult Solutions, Inc.	56

1. Introduction

In 2020, Philadelphia experienced a sharp increase in gun violence. In response, City leaders and community partners have intensified efforts to reduce gun violence through a coordinated set of public-safety strategies. Notably, recent trends from the past two years point to a decline in gun violence across the City.

Reducing gun violence long term requires addressing its root social and economic causes. Recent studies demonstrate that neighborhoods facing economic distress and structural inequities experience significantly higher rates of gun violence.³ Further, Philadelphia’s Department of Public Health reports that joblessness is correlated with gun violence.⁴ Figure 1.1 demonstrates that gun violence is prevalent in North and West Philadelphia – majority Black and Hispanic / Latino neighborhoods that have a high percentage of males not working.

Figure 1.1: Shooting Victims (2022 to Present) and Percent of Males Aged 16 to 64 Not Working in the Past 12 Months by Race / Ethnicity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2023), City of Philadelphia (2025), Econsult Solutions (2025)

³ Polcari et al., “Social Vulnerability Index is strongly associated with urban pediatric firearm violence: An analysis of five major US cities,” 2023.

⁴ Philadelphia Department of Public Health, “Chronic Male Unemployment and Gun Violence in Philadelphia,” 2021, <https://www.phila.gov/media/20210628174453/Chartv6e6.pdf>.

This report examines the current landscape of workforce development efforts in Philadelphia as part of a larger strategy to prevent gun violence and build long-term community stability. By connecting individuals to meaningful work and reducing barriers to employment, workforce strategies can address both the immediate risks of gun violence and the long-standing inequities that perpetuate it.

1.1. About the Civic Coalition to Save Lives

The Civic Coalition to Save Lives is a citywide public-private partnership launched in 2022 to reduce gun violence in Philadelphia through a coordinated, data-driven approach. Bringing together over 70 organizations—from community-based nonprofits to major philanthropic, business, and civic institutions—the Coalition focuses on identifying and supporting individuals most vulnerable to gun violence. By strengthening collaboration among service providers, aligning resources, and investing in proven interventions like housing, trauma care, and job support, the Coalition aims to build a more effective and sustainable ecosystem for violence prevention without displacing existing efforts already making an impact. The Coalition directly supports workforce development initiatives, providing flexible grants to community organizations, including Pushing Progress Philly (P3), Group Violence Intervention (GVI), and Beat the Block.

This report was commissioned by the Civic Coalition to Save Lives as part of its ongoing effort to understand and strengthen the role of workforce development within Philadelphia’s broader violence prevention ecosystem and was made possible through the generous support of the Truist Foundation.

1.2. Approach and Organization

This report explores how workforce development can serve as a violence-prevention strategy in Philadelphia by addressing the barriers facing populations most vulnerable to gun violence.

- **Section 2: Philadelphia Workforce Development Policy and Resource Landscape** analyzes the City’s current workforce development infrastructure, target populations, and local nonprofit efforts.
- **Section 3: Barriers to Workforce Development** synthesizes insights from participant listening sessions and focus groups, identifying emotional, educational, and structural barriers.
- **Section 4: Exploration Phase Opportunities** examines career pathways, educational bridges, and credentialing strategies that move participants beyond transitional employment.
- **Section 5: Transition Phase Opportunities** outlines approaches to reduce employer bias, strengthen hiring pipelines, and expand partnerships that create long-term opportunities.
- **Section 6: Opportunity Roadmap** presents actionable recommendations for strengthening jobseeker and employer partnerships within Philadelphia’s workforce development and violence-prevention ecosystem.

2. Philadelphia Workforce Development Policy and Resource Landscape Analysis

To place Philadelphia’s efforts in context, Section 2 identifies national exemplars of workforce development programs applicable to those most vulnerable to gun violence, and it provides a landscape scan of the City’s current workforce development programs, policies, and resources. This descriptive overview establishes a baseline understanding of the local ecosystem and the populations it seeks to serve. This section will:

1. Define the population most vulnerable to gun violence, clarifying the overlapping challenges that shape their employment prospects.
2. Highlight effective national workforce development programs available to individuals most vulnerable to gun violence.
3. Outline current City of Philadelphia policies and initiatives at the intersection of workforce development and gun violence intervention.
4. Categorize and identify the types of assets currently operating in Philadelphia and map the ecosystem.

2.1. Defining the Target Population

The population at the center of this analysis includes individuals at risk of being involved in or affected by gun violence. Defining this population is inherently complex: risk is not binary, and the factors that shape a person’s likelihood of involvement in gun violence overlap, compound, and vary significantly across contexts. In Philadelphia, those facing elevated vulnerability are disproportionately Black and Brown men aged 18 to 34 with prior contact with the criminal justice system. This broader group also includes people both with and without criminal records; those returning from incarceration; individuals on probation or parole; survivors of gun violence; residents of communities with high rates of shootings; young adults disconnected from school and work; and those who interact with group violence.

Within the violence-prevention field, researchers and practitioners often describe different levels of vulnerability to gun-violence involvement (e.g., “at risk,” “high risk,” or “highest risk”). One example comes from the work of David Muhammad and the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR).⁵ Their analysis in Washington, DC identifies a small group of individuals, often referred to as “very high risk”, whose recent criminal-justice involvement, group or crew affiliation, prior exposure to shootings, and residence in the highest-violence neighborhoods place them at a particularly acute likelihood of gun-violence involvement. NICJR’s analysis estimates that while at least 500 individuals fall within this level of vulnerability over the course of a year, no more than roughly 200 are at this heightened level at any given time. Collectively, this group accounts for a disproportionate share of both

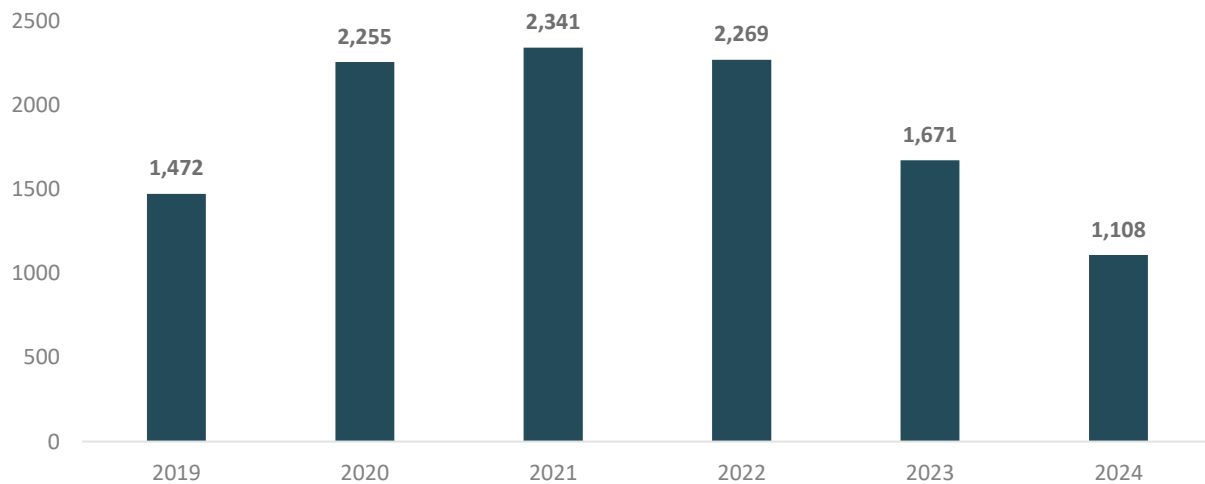
⁵ National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, & Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. (2021, December). *Gun violence problem analysis summary report: Washington, DC* (Summary report). https://cicc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cjcc/release_content/attachments/DC%20Gun%20Violence%20Problem%20Analysis%20Summary%20Report.pdf

shooting victims and perpetrators in the District.⁶ This example illustrates how some practitioners define and operationalize elevated vulnerability within their interventions.

In this report, while we acknowledge these distinctions within criminology and the violence-prevention literature, our target population is not characterized by a specific, defined risk level but is instead defined by program eligibility. Specifically, our study population consists of individuals who are eligible for Civic Coalition to Save Lives (CCSL)-supported programs, including P3 and Beat the Block. These programs are designed to engage adults whose recent experiences, criminal-justice involvement, neighborhood context, and other factors place them at a heightened and more immediate likelihood of involvement in gun violence. Throughout this report, we refer to this population as those “**most vulnerable to gun violence**,” consistent with P3’s definition of serving “*Philadelphia residents ages 18 or older who are resistant to more traditional forms of intervention in neighborhoods most vulnerable to incidents of gun violence.*”⁷ The full eligibility criteria for the P3 program can be found in Section 3.

To situate this population within the broader context of violence in Philadelphia, the figures that follow illustrate where gun violence is most concentrated and how it has changed over time. Figure 2.1 shows the broader time-series trend of gun violence in Philadelphia, showing the more recent decreases in gun violence shooting victims since peaking in 2021.⁸ Figure 2.2 shows the areas of highest concentration of reported gun violence – largely West Philadelphia and North Philadelphia – and the underlying population demographics at the census tract-level.

Figure 2.1: Gun Violence Shooting Victims in Philadelphia, 2019 to 2024



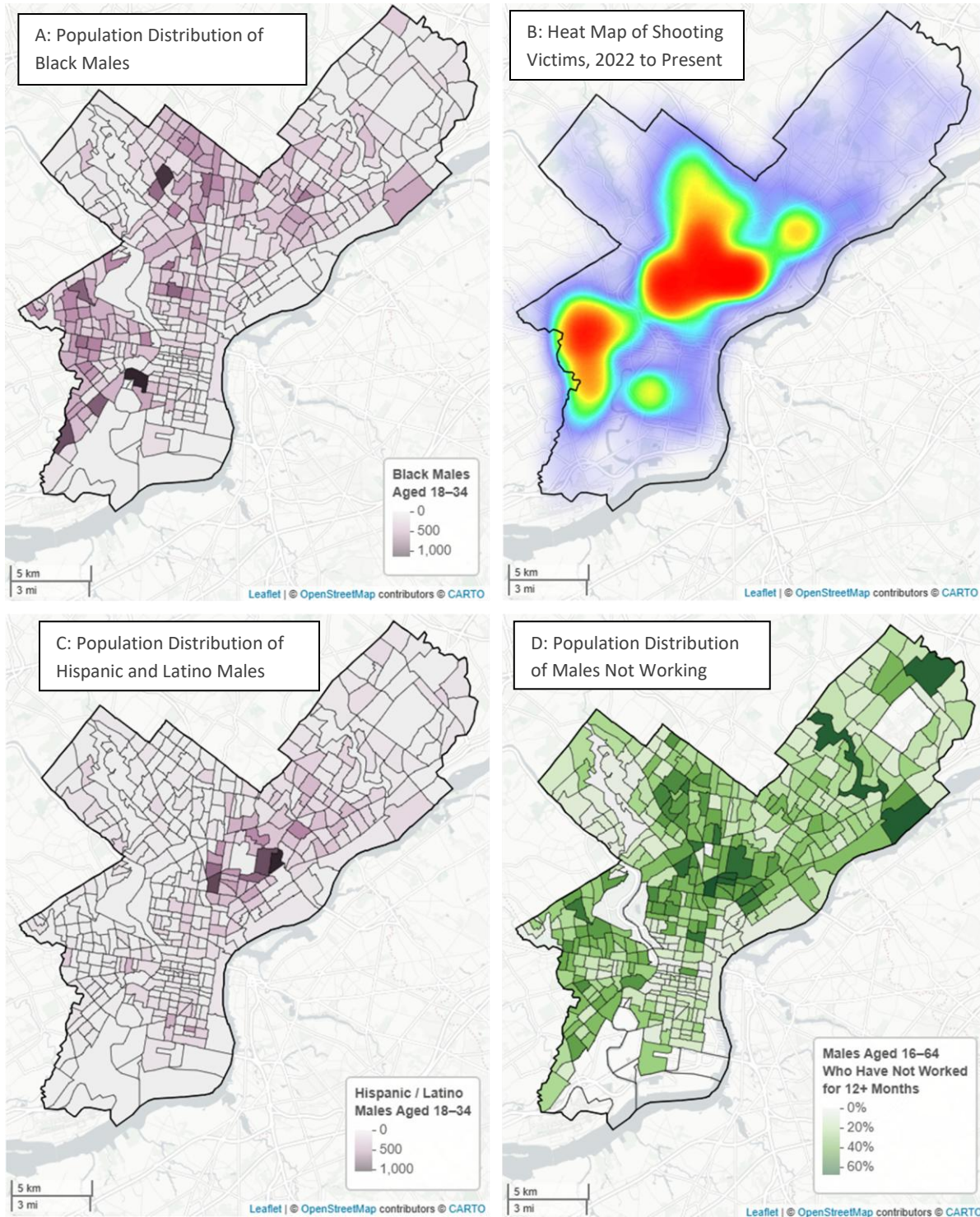
Source: City of Philadelphia (2025)

⁶ National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, & Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. (2021, December). *Gun violence problem analysis summary report: Washington, DC* (Summary report). https://cjcc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cjcc/release_content/attachments/DC%20Gun%20Violence%20Problem%20Analysis%20Summary%20Report.pdf

⁷ <https://www.phila.gov/departments/office-of-reentry-partnerships/our-initiatives/#pushing-progress-philly>

⁸ The figure is inclusive of fatal and nonfatal shootings.

Figure 2.2: Gun Violence Concentration and Population Demographics by Census Tract



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (2023), City of Philadelphia (2025), Econsult Solutions (2025)

2.2. National Exemplars of Workforce Development Programs Serving Individuals Most Vulnerable to Gun Violence

Effective workforce development programs serving individuals most vulnerable to gun violence practice holistic, evidence-based approaches. Leading models combine paid employment with wrap-around supports such as mentorship, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and housing assistance. Programs like READI Chicago and the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) demonstrate how sustained engagement and behavioral health supports can create structured pathways to long-term employment.

READI Chicago

READI Chicago is an evidence-based workforce development program serving adult men at the highest risk of gun violence.⁹ The program combines 12 to 18 months of subsidized work with CBT, individualized case management, and legal assistance. READI Chicago empirically models gun-violence risk to identify program participants and employs credible messengers to grow and maintain engagement. Through randomized control trials, researchers have found that READI Chicago is effective at reducing gun violence in its target population. The program dedicates \$25,000 to \$30,000 to each participant through a mixture of private and public sources. Notable program outcomes include:

- Since 2017, over 2,500 individuals have participated in the program.
- In the 20 months post-enrollment, participants were 63 percent less likely to be arrested for a shooting or homicide.
- Over 80 percent of participants completed substantial programming, with nearly all engaging in work and more than 75 percent participating in CBT sessions.
- Participants have higher rates of employment during the program and after graduation.

The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)

The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) offers transitional jobs, daily pay, coaching, job-readiness training, and long-term job placement services for individuals returning from incarceration. The program operates in 30 cities, including Philadelphia, and helps lower recidivism and promote socioeconomic mobility amongst justice-impacted job seekers. CEO's program starts with a paid orientation that equips participants with essential documents, benefit access and training to begin work immediately, followed by workshops and one-on-one coaching in digital skills, financial literacy, and workplace communication. Upon graduation, participants work transitional jobs with same-day payments for two to four months. Participants continue to receive job retention services after finding unsubsidized employment.

2.3. The City's Approach to Workforce Development and Gun Violence Intervention

The City of Philadelphia has a variety of different workforce development programs and initiatives that connect interested workers to new employment opportunities. Such efforts include the Philadelphia Workforce Hub, Philadelphia Works, and the City College for Municipal Employment. However, most of

⁹ Bhatt et al, "Predicting and Preventing Gun Violence: An Experimental Evaluation of READI Chicago," 2023, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w30852>.

these programs do not specifically aim to address those who are most vulnerable to gun violence. Recent efforts over the past two administrations have worked to establish programming specific to the needs of those most vulnerable to gun violence – recognizing the correlation between employment and the incidence of gun violence.

In 2023, the City of Philadelphia introduced Pushing Progress Philly (P3) – the community violence intervention program modeled after READI Chicago. Like the READI model, the program approaches violence prevention through a holistic combination of behavioral health support, educational resources, employment coaching, and transitional job placement. Piloted in the 19144 zip code in Germantown, Philadelphia, P3 serves residents age 18 or older who may be resistant to more traditional forms of intervention and focuses on working within the neighborhoods most vulnerable to incidents of gun violence. Part of a broader strategy focusing on community safety, reentry, and violence intervention, P3 is a grantee organization of the Civic Coalition to Save Lives. It is one of several programs or initiatives operated by the different City offices that operate within the City’s Office of Public Safety. This also includes the following:

- **Neighborhood Resource Centers (NRCs)**, which offer a variety of services for those who are in the criminal legal system or have been justice-impacted, such as case management, workforce training, digital literacy training, benefits navigation, vital records support and additional support with criminal record pardon and expungement. There is currently one NRC, located in the Hunting Park neighborhood, with more planned to open in other parts of the City. Notably, the site is also used to host P3 programming.
- **Juvenile Reentry Programming** includes five partner programs with local non-profits, including a barber program for youths aged 12 to 19 years old; a music program for youths aged 15 to 21 years old; group therapy for youths aged 13 to 21; a vital records clinic for youths aged 15 to 24 years old; and a workforce development program for youths aged 14 to 24 years old. Each program aims to provide re-entering youths with the soft skills, job readiness training, and documentation needed to find economic stability.¹⁰
- **Behind the Walls Initiatives**, which provides supportive services to those who are currently incarcerated and are preparing for a transition into reentry.
- **Community Crisis Intervention Program**, which places credible community messengers as outreach workers in Philadelphia’s vulnerable neighborhoods to foster meaningful relationships within the community.
- **Group Violence Intervention (GVI)**, launched in 2020, provides an evidence-based approach to address and reduce gun violence that involves members of gangs by offering the message to turn away from guns and towards opportunities that reduce retaliation. GVI provides case

¹⁰ City of Philadelphia Office of Reentry Partnerships, “Juvenile Reentry Programming,” 2024, <https://www.phila.gov/media/20241216122800/orp-juvenile-programming-flyer.pdf>.

management support to connect them to available transitional employment opportunities or other needed City services.¹¹

2.4. Identifying Additional Resources

In addition to City-sponsored efforts, Philadelphia has a significant network of non-profit and philanthropic organizations focused specifically on providing workforce development opportunities and supporting resources to those most likely to be impacted by gun violence.

The study identified workforce development programs and supplementary resources available to those who are most vulnerable to gun violence in Philadelphia – mapping them to better understand their connection and accessibility to the target population. For the purposes of this analysis, programs (or assets) have been categorized by the sub-population that they focus on. This includes an overall workforce development category – representative of programs available to the general target population – as well as programs targeted to those re-entering the job market post-incarceration (a sub-component of the larger target population) or programs with available wrap-around services.

To supplement this landscape analysis, ESI conducted in-depth interviews with organizational leaders to gain a deeper understanding of how these services function and where they overlap, and potential opportunities to better meet the needs of the target population. Interviews targeted organizations with a workforce component, as well as organizations that directly serve populations impacted by gun violence. Interviewed organizations are marked with a check mark (“✓”).

General Workforce Development Programs

- ✓ **Philadelphia Works**, the City’s workforce development board, plays a central role in funding, coordinating, and aligning workforce efforts across Philadelphia.¹² It manages the largest pool of workforce development funding in the City, much of it federally sourced. It oversees the **PA CareerLink** Philadelphia system, a network of four career centers that provide free employment services to City residents seeking to transition into in-demand careers or expand their skillsets with high-demand qualifications. Philadelphia Works also administers the Good Jobs Challenge, which invests in sector-based workforce strategies and supports partnerships with employers, training providers, and community-based organizations focused on inclusive hiring and career pathway development.
- ✓ **West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI)** is one of Philadelphia’s strongest employer-aligned training models.¹³ WPSI connects residents, many of whom face significant barriers to employment, with career-track jobs through cohort-based training designed in partnership with local anchor institutions. Employers such as Penn Medicine, SEPTA, and CHOP commit to hiring participants, and WPSI structures its training around the specific skills and workplace

¹¹ City of Philadelphia Office of Public Safety, “The City’s Group Violence Intervention Program Saves Lives and Influences Cities Worldwide,” 2023, <https://www.phila.gov/2023-12-15-the-citys-group-violence-intervention-program-saves-lives-and-influences-cities-worldwide/>.

¹² Philadelphia Works, Inc., Philadelphia Works, Inc., “Board Meeting Briefing Book”, 2024, https://philaworks.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2023/10/December-2024_Board-Briefing-Book_FINAL_Approved_Updated_12_17_24.pdf.

¹³ Bruce Katz and Megan Humes, Drexel University Nowak Metro Finance Lab, “West Philadelphia Skills Initiative: A Model for Urban Workforce Development,” 2019, <https://drexel.edu/nowak-lab/publications/case-studies/WPSI-city-case/>.

expectations needed for those roles. Participants receive not only technical instruction but also professional development, job coaching, and stipends, creating a supportive and accountable pathway to employment. In 2024 WPSI served over 300 participants, with nearly 94 percent placed in jobs earning an average starting wage of nearly \$22/hour and over 84 percent retaining employment for at least one year.

- **Same Day Work & Pay** is a low-barrier, rapid employment program that offers immediate, paid work opportunities for individuals who are disconnected from traditional employment pathways.¹⁴
- **Community College of Philadelphia (CCP)** has a wide range of short-term career certification courses for low-barrier industries. The **Pre-Apprenticeship Program** prepares students for high-demand trade and technical careers through foundational training and connections to union apprenticeship opportunities.¹⁵ The **Octavius Catto Scholarship** offers up to \$1,600 per year in financial support alongside enhanced academic and career services to individuals facing barriers to education.¹⁶
- **The City College for Municipal Employment (CCME)** is a collaborative initiative between CCP, Philadelphia Works, and the City’s Office of the Chief Administrative Officer. This program offers free, City-sponsored career training geared towards municipal employment. It is open to Philadelphia residents with a high school diploma or equivalent.¹⁷
- ✓ **EDSI** is a national workforce development institution that has partnered with PA CareerLink and Philadelphia Works to connect individuals to career services. It was also the coordinating agency for **Pushing Progress Philly** as it launched in its pilot phase.
- **Temple University** offers workforce development opportunities for underserved communities of North Philadelphia via the **Lenfest Center for Community Workforce Partnerships (LCCWP)**.
- **JEVS Human Services** is a large workforce development provider that administers technical training through the Orleans Technical Center in Northeast Philadelphia. Their initiatives are inclusive of both educational backgrounds (e.g., individuals without high school diplomas) and justice involvement.
- **AchieveAbility’s People Going Places** programming includes initiatives such as **60th Street Strong** and **Work Smart West Philly**, which support individuals with job training, financial coaching, and digital literacy in high-need neighborhoods.¹⁸
- **Philabundance Community Kitchen** offers free culinary training to low-income adults.

¹⁴ City of Philadelphia Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity, “Same Day Work & Pay Guide,” 2023, <https://www.phila.gov/media/20230113103335/SameDayWorkPayGuide-Final.pdf>.

¹⁵ Community College of Philadelphia, “Continuing Education & Noncredit – Apprenticeship Programs,” 2025, <https://www.ccp.edu/degrees-programs/all-academic-offerings/continuing-education-noncredit/apprenticeship-programs>.

¹⁶ Community College of Philadelphia, “Octavius Catto Scholarship,” 2025, <https://www.ccp.edu/admission-aid/paying-college/scholarships/octavius-catto-scholarship>

¹⁷ City of Philadelphia, “City College for Municipal Employment (CCME),” 2025, <https://www.phila.gov/programs/city-college-for-municipal-employment-ccme/>

¹⁸ AchieveAbility, “WorkSmart West Philly: Coaching, Training & Job Placement for Sustainable Careers,” 2025, <https://achieveability.org/wswp>.

- **Beyond Literacy** is an adult education and workforce development organization that assists participants with employment testing and credentialing.
- **Goodwill of Southern NJ and PA** is a nonprofit employer that also provides low barrier-to-entry employment, training, and certification opportunities.
- **First Step Staffing** is a light-industrial temporary staffing industry that places individuals into entry level positions.
- **Hopeworks, PowerCorpPHL's, and The Philadelphia Job Corps Center** administer low-barrier workforce training programs for young adults.

Workforce Development Programs with Wrap-Around Services

- ✓ **Pushing Progress Philly (P3)** is a City of Philadelphia Office of Public Safety (OPS) program that brings together workforce, housing, and behavioral health resources to support individuals identified as being most vulnerable to gun violence. The model emphasizes intensive, individualized case coordination and aims to stabilize participants across multiple domains of life, not just employment. P3 is a replication of the READI program in Chicago.¹⁹
- ✓ **Group Violence Intervention (GVI)**, housed in OPS' Division of Safe Neighborhoods, is a citywide initiative that uses a data-driven approach to identify individuals most likely to be involved in gun violence. Through direct outreach, participants are offered intensive support, including temporary employment with same day pay and social services.
- ✓ **Beat the Block** is an intensive, paid training program for men ages 18 to 24 who are impacted by gun violence in Philadelphia. Beat the Block provides guidance in job seeking, employment, entrepreneurship, and personal development to empower at-risk men to achieve their professional goals.²⁰
- **Nicetown CDC** offers wrap-around services, including workforce training, to young men aged 16 to 34 to reduce behaviors that lead to violence.
- **OIC Philadelphia** provides free training for high-mobility occupations combined with life skills training and individualized counseling.
- **Ready, Willing, and Able** provides transitional housing, transitional employment, and support services to people experiencing homelessness.

Targeted Reentry Workforce Development Services

- **Uplift Solutions** offers 6-to-10-week training and credentialing programs targeted at re-entering adults. Program graduates have a 100 percent job placement rate and a 2 percent recidivism rate.²¹ Further, Uplift Solutions administers a same day work program for immediate employment and payment.

¹⁹ Sarah Reyes, City of Philadelphia Office of the Mayor, "Kenney Administration Progress Report: Our violence prevention efforts," 2023, <https://www.phila.gov/2023-11-29-kenney-administration-progress-report-our-violence-prevention-efforts/>.

²⁰ Civic Coalition to Save Lives, "July – August – September 2024 Issue," 2024, <https://savephillylives.org/newsletter/august-recap/>.

²¹ Uplift Solutions, "Uplift Solutions," 2025, <https://www.upliftsolutions.org/>.

- ✓ **The Division of Reentry (DOR)** serves as the City’s coordinating body for reentry services and system reform. DOR works to align public agencies, community providers, and funders around the shared goal of reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for returning citizens. It also supports data sharing, strategy development, and public education around the barriers faced by people with criminal records.²²
- **Impact Services**, based in Kensington, offers a range of workforce development programming, including transitional housing, behavioral health support, and employment services specifically designed for re-entering adults.²³
- **Mural Arts Philadelphia** engages justice-impacted individuals through paid job training and community-based mural projects.
- **People Advancing Reintegration – RecycleWorks** is a nonprofit employer that provides training and transitional or permanent employment for people returning from incarceration.

Overlap: Targeted Reentry Workforce Development Programs with Wrap-Around Services

- **The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)** serves returning citizens through temporary employment, workforce training, and job placement support.
- In addition to occupational training, **The Center for Returning Citizens (TCRC)** provides housing and food assistance to justice-impacted individuals.

Mapping the Workforce Development Ecosystem

Many in the target population face overlapping challenges, such as unstable housing, untreated trauma, limited education, barriers to employment, and limited mobility options, that heighten their risk of both perpetrating and experiencing gun violence. Understanding these realities is critical to designing workforce strategies that expand economic opportunities and disrupt cycles of violence. Ultimately, the locations of workforce development assets, as well as the broader set of barriers, may limit accessibility and participation. Transportation costs and restrictions, parental responsibilities, and group violence dynamics can limit feasibility for those that may have to travel beyond their home neighborhood to reach available resources.

Overall, the workforce development ecosystem appears to provide relative accessibility to much of the target population from a spatial perspective.²⁴ Approximately 22 percent of black men aged 18 to 34 fall within a half mile of the study’s identified workforce development assets.²⁵ Additionally, 25 percent of

²² City of Philadelphia, “Office of Reentry Partnerships,” 2025, <https://www.phila.gov/departments/office-of-reentry-partnerships/>.

²³ Impact Services, “Re-Entry Programs,” 2025, <https://www.impactservices.org/jobs/re-entry-programs>.

²⁴ Measures of physical proximity reflect the geographic location of workforce development assets relative to the residential locations of the vulnerable population, but do not necessarily indicate effective accessibility. Proximity alone does not guarantee that an individual can safely or reliably reach an asset. Barriers may include concerns related to neighborhood-level violence, perceived or actual safety along travel routes, limited mobility, caregiving responsibilities, time constraints, transit reliability, and other social or structural factors. As a result, observed spatial proximity should be interpreted as potential access rather than realized access.

²⁵ Census Bureau (2023).

The population share within a half mile of an asset is calculated by selecting census tracts within a half mile radius of assets. If a tract is partially within the radius, a proportionate share of its population is included.

Latino or Hispanic men aged 18 to 34 fall within a half mile of the study’s identified workforce development assets.

Figure 2.3: Distribution of Philadelphia Population Near Identified Workforce Development Assets

Population Near Identified Assets	1/4 Mile	3/8 Mile	1/2 Mile
Total	109,900 (7%)	217,500 (14%)	332,100 (21%)
Black Males 18-34	5,800 (8%)	11,300 (15%)	17,100 (22%)
Hispanic / Latino Males 18-34	2,700 (8%)	5,500 (16%)	8,600 (25%)

Source: Census Bureau (2023), Econsult Solutions (2025)

Research from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health shows that joblessness is directly correlated with higher rates of gun violence, particularly in neighborhoods with concentrated disadvantaged.²⁶ In Philadelphia, the average percent of males aged 16 to 64 who have not worked in 12 or more months within a half mile of identified assets is 25 percent, which is equal to the City’s average. Even a one-point rise in long-term unemployment increases the share of people most vulnerable to gun violence, underscoring the need to leverage workforce assets as both economic and violence-prevention strategies.

Figure 2.4: Percent of Males Not Working Near Identified Workforce Development Assets

Males Not Working Near Identified Assets	Percent Males Not Working
1/4 Mile	25%
3/8 Mile	25%
1/2 Mile	25%
City-Wide	25%

Source: Census Bureau (2023), Econsult Solutions (2025)

Within Philadelphia, the average (median) distance to an identified asset is 1.3 (1.0) miles. For the black male population aged 18 to 34, the average (median) is 1.3 (0.9) miles. For Hispanic / Latino men aged 18 to 34, the average (median) is 1.4 (1.1) miles.²⁷

On average, identified assets are within 0.4 miles of either the Broad Street Line, Market-Frankford line, or SEPTA’s regional rail network. Notably, as SEPTA grapples with uncertainty regarding its schedule, reduced operations will have a particularly negative effect on the target population’s ability to reach employment opportunities, as well as the study’s identified assets. Like the City overall, the number of shooting victims near identified workforce development assets decreased significantly from 2020 to 2024.

²⁶ Philadelphia Department of Public Health, “Chronic Male Unemployment and Gun Violence in Philadelphia,” 2021, <https://www.phila.gov/media/20210628174453/Chartv6e6.pdf>.

²⁷ Calculated as the population-weighted mean of distance from the geographic centers of census tracts to identified assets.

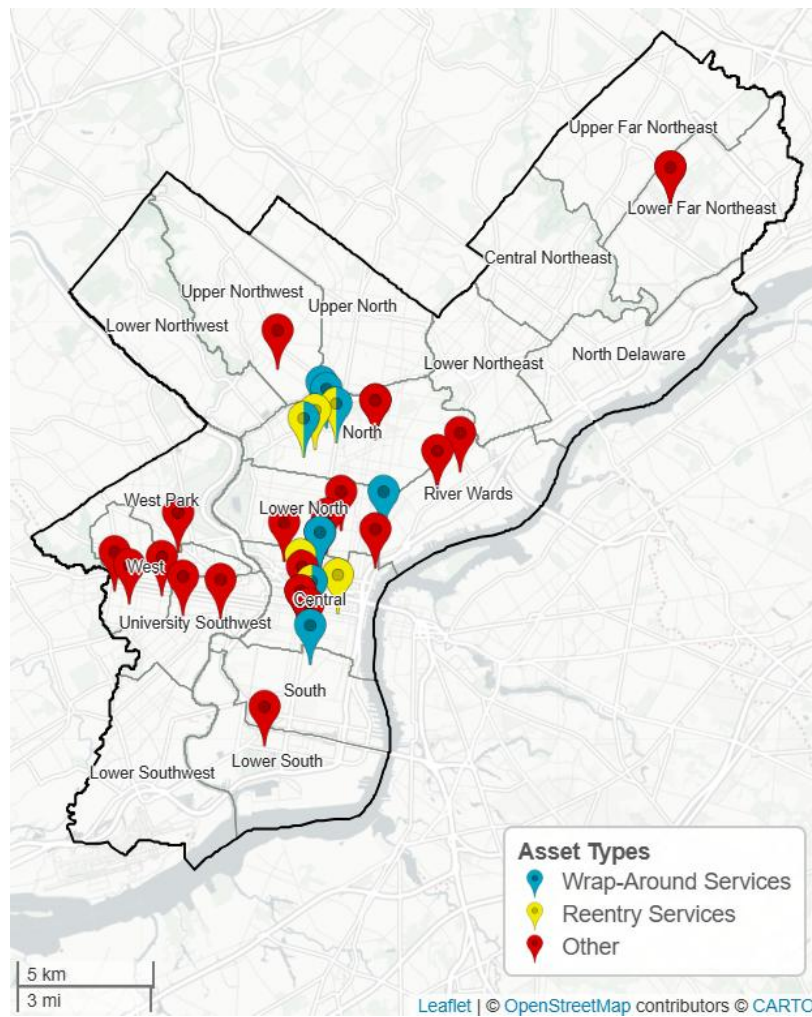
Figure 2.5: Change in Shooting Victims Near Identified Workforce Development Assets (2020-2024)

Shooting Victims Near Identified Assets	2020	2024	% Change
1/4 Mile	211	106	-50%
3/8 Mile	428	215	-50%
1/2 Mile	662	301	-55%
City-Wide	2,255	1,108	-51%

Source: City of Philadelphia (2025), Econsult Solutions (2025)

The analysis assumes that all assets are points, when some assets may more generally cover a neighborhood or region. Further, citywide initiatives like GVI and Same Day Work and Pay are excluded from the calculation. As a result, estimates are conservative, and the true workforce development program coverage may be higher.

Figure 2.6: Workforce Development Programs and Organizations (“Assets”) in Philadelphia



Source: Econsult Solutions (2025)

3. Barriers to Workforce Development

Philadelphia's workforce development landscape includes a wide range of programs that reach individuals most vulnerable to gun violence. However, even among those who participate, significant challenges remain that shape how programs are experienced and the outcomes they achieve.

Direct program participant feedback informs how workforce development challenges are experienced in the target population. Listening sessions were held in Spring 2024 by the Civic Coalition to Save Lives' (CCSL) Workforce Development Subcommittee with participants from Pushing Progress Philly (P3) and Beat the Block. A follow-up focus group was conducted in July 2025 with P3 participants. While their approaches differ, programs like P3 and Beat the Block offer tailored, intensive support to individuals most vulnerable to gun violence, prioritizing healing, stability, and pathways to economic mobility.

Beat the Block

Beat the Block offers a paid, intensive training experience for young men ages 18 to 24 impacted by gun violence, focusing on transformation through employment and entrepreneurship. The program is structured in multiple phases, beginning with personal development and expanding into professional skills and business creation. Participants attend daily sessions that build self-awareness, emotional regulation, and goal setting, all within a supportive peer cohort model. This foundational work is followed by job readiness training, including resume writing, interview preparation, and employer expectations. As many participants share aspirations of starting their own businesses, the program provides access to entrepreneurial tools and works with financial institutions to offer workshops on credit building and banking literacy. When participants face challenges such as low credit scores, unstable housing, or lack of identification, the program is designed to meet them where they are and leverage mentorship and practical skills to build new pathways out of violence and towards economic independence.

Pushing Progress Philly (P3)

P3 engages individuals identified as being most vulnerable to gun violence, offering a structured, multi-pronged support system that extends well beyond employment. Participants are referred through community networks or outreach and begin by working closely with case managers to develop personalized service plans. These plans address urgent needs such as housing, mental health care, substance use treatment, education, and financial stability. Employment is a key goal, but it is not often the immediate starting point. Many participants first need support navigating trauma, legal issues, or basic needs like IDs, bank access, food, and clothing. Participants engage in regular check-ins with program staff, and some receive behavioral health services through City partnerships. During transitional employment, participants receive real-time, practical support navigating professional responsibilities, expectations, and communication. They are guided through work readiness training, including resume building and interview practice, as well as business development support for those pursuing entrepreneurship.

To be eligible for the program, participants must meet the following criteria:²⁸

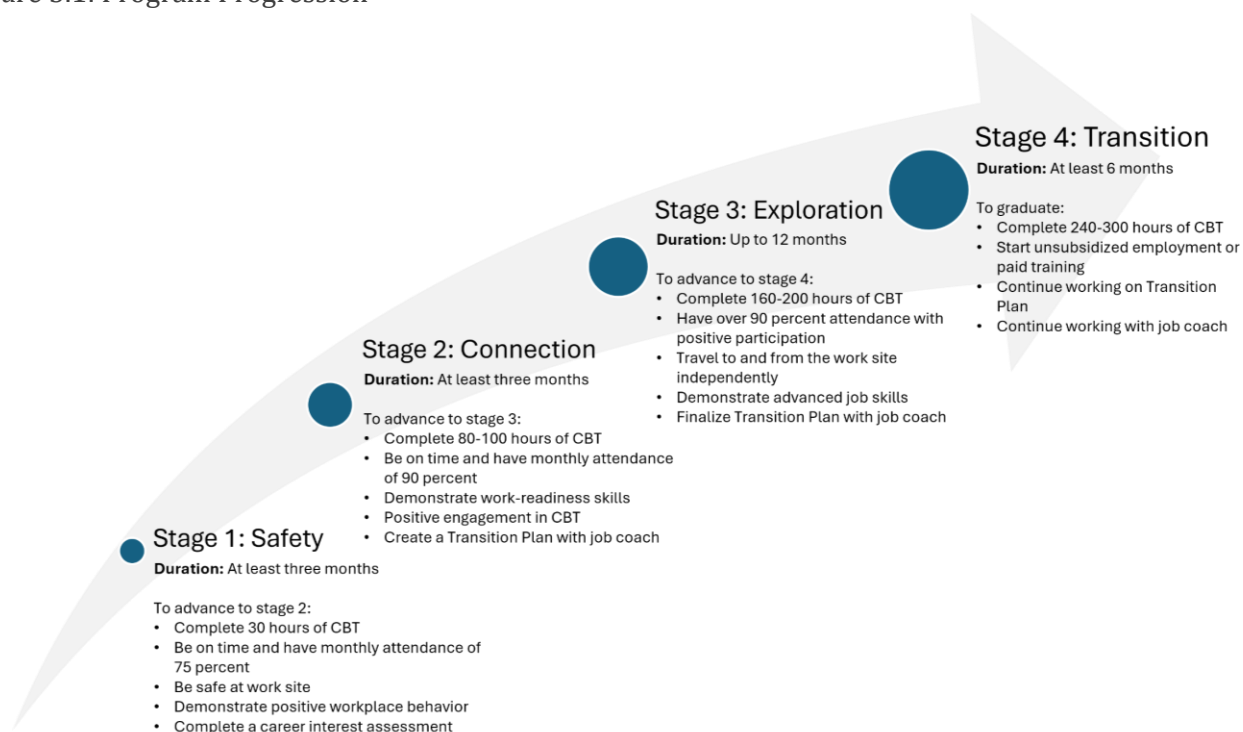
NECESSARY	EITHER	
	Optional Criteria 1 (only one needed)	Optional Criteria 2 (three or more needed)
Resides or spends significant time in ZIP 19144 (Pilot Zip Code)	GVI-based Eligibility	Below HS Diploma/GED educational attainment and living below the poverty line
Age 18 – 35	Identified by Local Police Captain as being at high-risk of gun violence	Past/current involvement in the child welfare system
Male	Firearm history	Actively engaged in illegal drug activity
Unemployed or Underemployed	Criminal History, including the following charges: felon in possession; possession of a firearm with altered or obliterated serial number; illegal transfer of firearms; altering or obliterating a firearm’s serial number; possession of prohibited ammunition; a violent felony; or two or more incidents of possession with intent to distribute	Close association with those who have been convicted of gun violence offenses
		Victim of violent crime
		Promote violence on social media
		Owns, possesses or has ready access to firearms
		Mental health diagnosis
		Service-resistant

Source: City of Philadelphia Office of Public Safety (2025)

Like the READI program that P3 was modeled after, the program is organized over 4 distinct stages. The figure below outlines the progression through the program, which includes mandatory hours of CBT, job coaching, and progress assessments. While the early stages focus on safety and connection, the latter stages focus on growth, exploration and the transition to unsubsidized employment or a long-term career.

²⁸ The figure reflects criteria from the pilot of P3 and are subject to change.

Figure 3.1: Program Progression



Source: Monica P. Bhatt et al. (2023), Econsult Solutions (2025)

3.1. Identification of Employment Barriers

Listening sessions and engagement with program providers highlight several persistent employment-related barriers faced by the target population, which cluster around four themes: emotional support and understanding; soft skills and workplace readiness; education, exposure, and employment pathways; and criminal records and employer bias.

Emotional Support and Understanding

Listening sessions highlighted that emotional support and understanding are often missing in the environments where participants grew up, and many did not fully realize how important those supports were until they experienced them in program settings. The absence of encouragement at home or within their community left some feeling discouraged and doubted. One participant reflected: *“Yeah. Mine, it goes deeper because my failed attempt to finish college. I was going to be the first one and I failed, so with everything they look at me and they’re like, ‘you’re gonna mess up eventually.’”*

In contrast, participants described the profound impact of finding consistent encouragement from peers and mentors within the program. One explained: *“Probably one of the biggest things behind this is just giving us the hope to feel worthy. Just having someone behind you. Someone who says, ‘You know you got this.’ Or even if you do fail, someone who says, ‘Listen you tried... my therapist told me the only time you are guaranteed failure is when you don’t try.’ When he told me that, it kind of stuck with me. Just*

having someone around that has good energy—it gives you more push than even what you had in yourself.”

This sense of brotherhood and mutual accountability was repeatedly highlighted as transformative. As one participant noted: *“We all come from different backgrounds and walks of life and traumas. The brotherhood—we really need that. Where we come from, we don’t have that a lot. The program is a good place to come for support.”* Another emphasized how peer mentorship extended beyond the program: *“He calls, texts—all that. He helped me fix my relationship with my dad. He puts you with the right people, everything. He’s one of the guys I look up to.”*

These reflections show that emotional support is not simply a “nice-to-have” alongside job training, but a key facet that makes sustained engagement possible. For many participants, they did not know they needed encouragement, mentorship, or understanding until they experienced it firsthand—and once they did, it became central to their outlook on work and stability.

Soft Skills and Workplace Readiness

Soft skills, such as communication, punctuality, teamwork, and conflict resolution, are critical to workplace success, but they are rarely taught directly in schools or community settings. As a result, many individuals most vulnerable to gun violence enter the labor market without the professional habits and interpersonal tools needed to thrive in employment settings.

Listening sessions in 2024 highlighted this gap. One participant described the importance of communication and accountability on the job: *“I had a job where I had to drive 50 minutes. And if I was a few minutes late I needed to call in and say I’m a few minutes late, but I’d be expecting a little bit of leeway.”*

Programs like P3 were seen as helping participants build these habits and giving structure to their routines. As one explained: *“Ever since I’ve been in P3 I be looking forward to getting up in the morning... I’m cool with getting up now.”* Another emphasized that readiness goes beyond showing up: *“Being punctual, being able to communicate, being able to identify what triggers people, being able to handle situations as soon as they come and just understanding people... treating people like they’re equal.”*

These reflections emphasize that soft skills are learned, not innate, and require intentional support and practice. Without this reinforcement, participants risk being seen as unprepared, even if they have the technical ability to succeed.

Education, Exposure, and Employment Pathways

Educational attainment and skills development are central to labor market marketability, yet many individuals most vulnerable to gun violence struggle to translate their backgrounds into viable employment opportunities.

Listening sessions in 2024 revealed a strong sense of disconnection between what participants learned in school, their experience, and the realities of the labor market. Several described leaving high school without clear vocational direction or lacking access to postsecondary opportunities. Others noted that even if opportunities were present, they had little exposure to viable career paths in their communities, leaving them uncertain about how to connect education or training to stable employment. As one

participant reflected: *“Growing up, I don’t know if it was because of the group of people that I was around, but I didn’t really witness many people working... everyone around me was either doing something illegal or in the street... a job was kinda foreign. When you thought about it, there was the cable man or the gas or water department, but other than that, like I said, me personally, I didn’t really know anyone that was working besides my mom.”*

This lack of exposure reinforced the disconnect many felt between education and the labor market. One participant explained: *“School doesn’t teach you basic skills... you walk into the world and you’re not ready.”* This sentiment was echoed by multiple voices across sessions, reinforcing the idea that the gap is not only about credentials but also about how education connects to opportunity.

This disconnection from viable career pathways is not only a local challenge but part of a broader structural dynamic identified in national research. Findings from the Opportunity Atlas – an interactive tool by Opportunity Insights and the U.S. Census that maps long-term economic mobility – and related studies on social capital show that children who grow up in communities with stronger economic connectedness—that is, more cross-class interactions between low- and high-income individuals—are far more likely to experience upward mobility as adults.²⁹ By contrast, in neighborhoods where social networks are limited to peers of similar economic status, young people face sharply constrained opportunities to learn about or access higher-paying career paths. Other forms of social capital, such as civic engagement or tight-knit networks, have far weaker associations with economic mobility.

For individuals most vulnerable to gun violence, these dynamics mean they are not only limited by education or credential gaps, but also by a lack of exposure to networks that could connect them to career-track employment. As a result, the jobs they are most aware of—or can realistically access—are often low-wage, temporary, or without advancement potential. Participants expressed frustration at finding work only to discover that wages were insufficient to sustain them or their families. As one participant explained: *“Some of the higher paying jobs are less hours and you can be home more. If I’m making \$14 an hour, I have to work 12 hours or more to pay rent. A higher paying job would help us actually be there for the household and be present.”*

Criminal Records and Employer Bias

Among the barriers raised by participants, criminal records and employer bias were consistently identified as the most significant and discouraging obstacles to employment. Many described experiences where they were accepted into jobs only to be dismissed after a background check, leaving them feeling demoralized. One participant recalled: *“Got accepted, day of orientation they told me not to come back because of my criminal background.”* Others said this left them feeling *“defeat and hopelessness”* — reinforcing the perception that opportunities were out of reach regardless of effort.

Participants also spoke directly to the role of bias and the need for employers to approach justice-involved candidates with more openness and understanding. As one explained: *“What employers should understand is that it’s a person’s first time doing something and already nervous... Just having an*

²⁹ Chetty et al., “Social Capital and Economic Mobility,” 2022, https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/socialcapital_nontech.pdf.

employer that is open and communicative [helps]. Breaking that barrier...” This comment highlighted the importance of employers creating a supportive environment rather than amplifying fear and discomfort.

Another participant stressed how background checks flatten individuals’ stories into labels, stripping away evidence of growth or change: *“Everything looks the same in black and white... robbery looks like a robbery... drug possession looks like drug possession. Before you make the decision based off the black and white, let the person come in and actually explain. Because just the fact that this person is filling out for this job is a step in the right direction... We’re just looking for a space and a chance to turn things around.”*

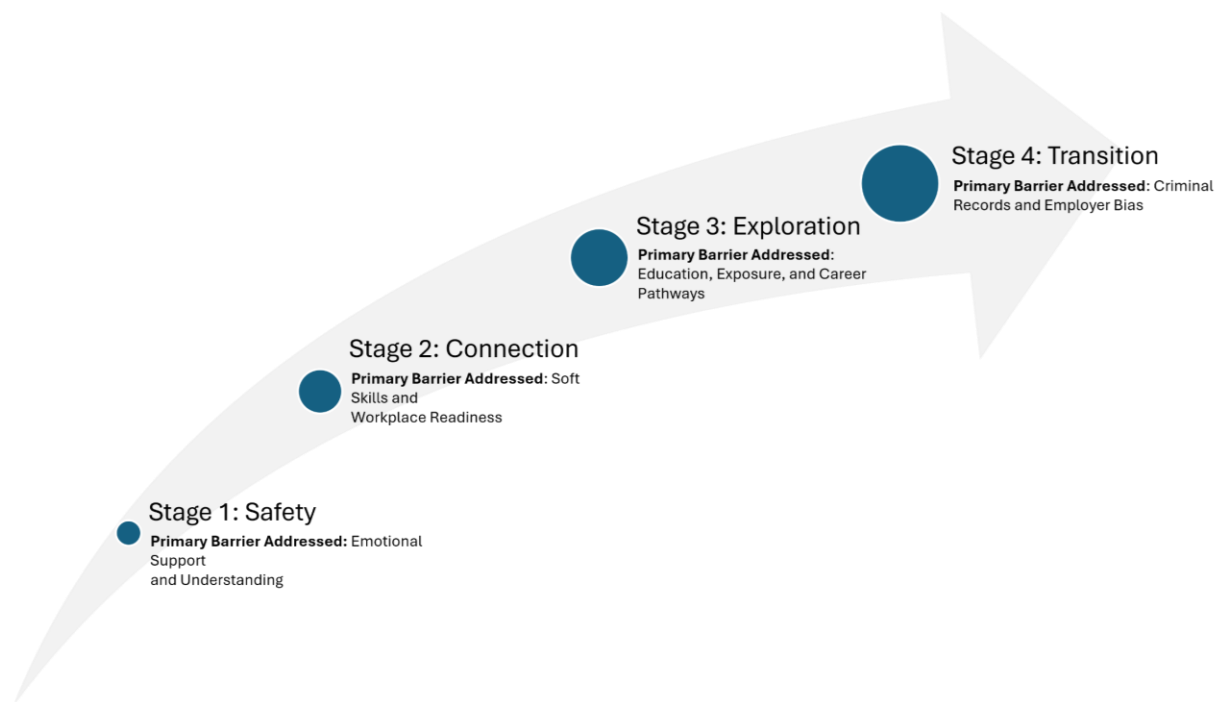
Finally, participants highlighted the lack of clear information about what jobs are actually open to individuals with criminal records, which compounds the impact of employer bias. As one put it: *“Knowing the right people or places to even apply for... there are just certain things they won’t allow us to do just for the felony. So just having knowledge of the things that we actually can do... would be big. Just knowing that you’re worthy.”*

3.2. Program Response to Identified Barriers

The four key workforce barriers identified in these listening sessions—emotional support and understanding, workplace readiness and soft skills, education and exposure to career pathways, and criminal records and employer bias—are all embedded within the design of P3 and Beat the Block. P3 incorporates these elements into a phased progression, beginning with trust-building and stabilization before moving into job readiness, training, and long-term employment connections. Beat the Block similarly integrates mentorship, paid training, and personal development, recognizing that addressing barriers holistically is essential for sustained engagement.

The listening sessions confirmed that these designs are working well in the early phases. Participants consistently described the value of structure, mentorship, cognitive behavioral therapy, and peer support in helping them build confidence, regulate behavior, and establish the basic habits needed for work. These supports provide a strong foundation and ensure that individuals remain engaged long enough to benefit from later stages.

Figure 3.2: Program Progression and Barriers Addressed



Source: Monica P. Bhatt et al (2023), Econsult Solutions (2025)

Yet sustaining impact requires more than early stabilization. The ultimate test of these models lies in how effectively the exploration and transition phases connect participants to viable long-term career opportunities. Transitional jobs in janitorial work, food service, or warehousing provide necessary income and structure but often lack advancement potential. To achieve lasting outcomes, programs must link participants to apprenticeships, sectoral workforce initiatives, and credentialing opportunities that lead to higher-quality jobs.

Achieving this requires more than program design alone. Employers, educational institutions, and other partners must play an active role in opening doors, reducing bias, and providing realistic opportunities for advancement. While not all participants have criminal records, those who do face restrictions that close off entire sectors, making employer engagement and informed career navigation even more critical.

Sections 4 and 5 focus on strengthening the “exploration” and “transition” phases present in many workforce initiatives. These opportunities are not program-specific but point to broader workforce strategies that could expand viable pathways for individuals most vulnerable to gun violence. Importantly, exploration and transition must be considered together: a credential or certificate alone does not guarantee employability if legal restrictions or labor market dynamics prevent advancement, just as employer willingness cannot compensate for gaps in preparation or access to training.

4. Exploration Phase Opportunities: Education, Exposure, and Career Pathways

The exploration phase of a workforce development program is a critical bridge between early stabilization and sustained employment (see Figure 3.1). While subsidized transitional jobs provide income and structure, participants emphasized that these roles rarely build skills or lead to meaningful advancement. To strengthen this stage, programs must expand beyond stopgap work and create on-ramps into careers with real growth potential.

Listening sessions underscored that participants are motivated and eager for opportunity but too often feel disconnected from pathways that could translate their education, training, or interests into stable employment. Many described frustrations with low-wage or short-term roles that left them struggling to meet basic needs and uncertain about the future. As one participant put it, *“If I’m making \$14 an hour, I have to work 12 hours or more to pay rent. A higher paying job would help us actually be there for the household and be present.”*

Strengthening the exploration phase requires aligning transitional opportunities with sectoral workforce programs, apprenticeships, or credentialing tracks that combine immediate feasibility with long-term promise. To do this effectively, it is first necessary to understand the individual-level barriers that shape which pathways are truly viable for this population.

4.1. Considerations for Viable Career Pathways

Designing viable career pathways for individuals most vulnerable to gun violence requires first addressing the common barriers that shape entry into work and training. Listening sessions underscored that participants often arrive with strong motivation, but structural barriers and individual hurdles limit the type of opportunities they can realistically pursue. Three barriers stand out as particularly critical when considering viable career pathways:

Criminal Records and Legal Barriers

Criminal records remain one of the most significant hurdles for this population, closing off entire categories of work not only through employer bias but also through formal licensing restrictions. Even in cases where an employer might be willing to hire someone with a record, state licensing rules can prevent individuals from obtaining the certifications required to enter or advance in the field.

In Pennsylvania, Act 53 requires licensing boards to publish offense schedules and allows them to deny applications for crimes involving violence, weapons, or drug trafficking. This effectively places fields such as medical services and certain personal care occupations out of reach for many justice-involved individuals, particularly those with gun-related convictions. In less restrictive sectors like manufacturing, transportation, or the trades, certain charges can still block access to credentialing programs or City-issued licenses. While tools like preliminary determinations under Act 53 allow applicants to gauge eligibility before enrolling in training, the scope of opportunity remains narrower for those with records.

Organizations like Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE), Defender Association of Philadelphia (Defenders), and Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS) provide pro bono advice and representation to low-income clients in Philadelphia County whose criminal records have prevented them from achieving personal and career objectives. While demand for services is high, these organizations' resources are limited. For example, PLSE caps its yearly intake at 500 individuals and has substantive eligibility criteria to receive services.³⁰

Philadelphia also offers mechanisms for record clearing, but most are inaccessible to individuals with gun-related convictions:

- Record sealing can hide certain non-violent misdemeanors and low-level felonies from most employers after 7–10 years, though records remain visible to justice agencies.
- Expungement permanently destroys records but is generally limited to non-convictions (arrests without guilty pleas or verdicts) or very minor, dated offenses such as underage drinking.
- Pardons can erase most convictions but require a lengthy 5 to 7-year process with multiple steps, legal costs, and ultimately approval by the Governor.

For individuals with recent or gun-related convictions, none of these avenues are realistically available in the near term. In many cases, individuals must wait up to 15 years from the date of their offense before being eligible to seal or pardon their record.³¹ Moreover, individuals must fully repay any outstanding court fines or fees before their pardon application can move forward. Taylor Pacheco, executive director of PLSE, notes, “[Court fines are] really a kind of tautological issue...people are applying for a pardon because they need the job, but they can’t pay their fines because they have no job.” As a result of limited options for expungements and pardons, certain career pathways are closed to the justice-impacted population.

Even with Philadelphia’s Ban the Box ordinance—which delays employer access to criminal records until after a conditional offer is made—the larger issue for workforce development lies earlier in the pipeline. Licensing restrictions, credentialing barriers, and limited eligibility rules mean that individuals with records can invest time and resources in training programs only to discover that they are legally barred from practicing in the field. This may also lead to conditional offers being rescinded which—factored with the emotional well-being considerations presented earlier—can leave individuals discouraged with little recourse for a path forward, spurning those who may be seeking new opportunities back towards harmful social and behavioral practices.

Educational Attainment

Educational barriers are another limiting factor, but the listening sessions showed that the picture is more complex than simply level of educational attainment. Many participants had completed high school, some had attended college, and others had started or finished vocational programs or certifications. Still, interruptions tied to incarceration, family responsibilities, or financial instability often

³⁰ T. Pacheco (Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 29 July 2025.

³¹ T. Pacheco.

derailed progress and left credentials unfinished or unused. For example, one participant had nearly completed a union apprenticeship when incarceration cut the process short, while another earned a Rotary scholarship after graduating at the top of his class but never had the chance to use it. Others described enrolling in college only to drop out after arrests or personal crises.

At the same time, participants described real barriers to pursuing additional credentials. Completing a General Education Degree (GED), for instance, typically requires 120 instructional hours over 40 to 60 weeks and carries a \$144 registration fee—commitments that are often unrealistic while balancing housing insecurity, trauma, and family obligations. Local preparation options exist through Philadelphia FIGHT, JEVS, Beyond Literacy, PA CareerLink, CCP, and others, suggesting that uptake may be limited despite the availability of resources. Participants explained that while interest in education and training is strong, the cost, time, and uncertainty about whether opportunities would follow makes it difficult to commit.

Some also described the stigma and discouragement tied to their educational experiences. One participant explained that after being held back in school multiple times, he stopped attending altogether out of embarrassment and only earned his diploma later while incarcerated. Others reflected on how dropping out or failing to finish college reinforced negative expectations from family or peers—making it harder to see education as a realistic path forward.

Together, these accounts show that educational attainment among vulnerable individuals is mixed rather than uniformly low. Many have diplomas, some college, or technical certifications, but lack the support, stability, and labor market connections to turn these experiences into sustained careers. Without clear bridges from credentials to jobs, participants often remain uncertain that education will lead to opportunity, reinforcing the need for paid, supported training tied directly to employer pipelines and advancement pathways.³²

Vital Records and Documentation

A third barrier is access to basic documentation, such as identification, birth certificates, or proof of address. These are essential for everything from registering for credentialing programs to completing job applications, yet many individuals in this population lack one or more of these documents. Rising requirements—such as proof of citizenship for certain training or hiring processes—make these gaps even more consequential. While some programs provide targeted support to help participants secure vital records, this remains a frequent and often overlooked hurdle that can delay or derail progress.³³

4.2. Potential Career Pathways

Career pathways for individuals most vulnerable to gun violence must be both accessible and sustainable. Programs that demand extensive prerequisites or impose strict licensing restrictions may be unrealistic. Conversely, transitional jobs that provide only short-term wages without building skills trap participants in cycles of instability.

³² K. Brown (P3), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 20 June 2025.

³³ H. Patrick Clancy (Beat the Block), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 7 July 2025; M. McCarthy (EDSI), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 11 July 2025.

The most promising career pathways, therefore, are those that combine four features: strong employer demand, prospects for industry growth, relatively low barriers to entry, and clear opportunities for upward mobility. In Philadelphia, sectors such as manufacturing, transportation, construction trades, and certain medical support services stand out as fields where entry-level roles can be obtained with limited training and experience, while also providing room to grow into higher-wage and more stable employment.

Figure 4.1 lists low barrier, entry-level occupations with potential opportunities for the population impacted by gun violence. Occupations are selected based on their median wage, job growth, average annual job openings, and their status on the PA High Priority Occupations List for Philadelphia, created by the PA Department of Labor and Employment to inform workforce development initiatives. The data points to skilled trades, equipment operation, and repair and maintenance roles as priority industries for workforce development. Skilled trades such as electricians (\$71,700 median wage), operating engineers (\$70,900), and carpenters (\$57,500) combine relatively high wages with the “high priority” designation, making them clear targets for investment. Food service supervisors and restaurant cooks show strong projected growth and large annual openings; however, wages remain relatively low. On the other hand, occupations such as shipping and receiving clerks and light truck drivers show negative growth projections despite many annual openings. In short, the most promising pathways for the target population balance livable wages, steady demand, low barriers to entry, and Pennsylvania’s “high priority” designation.

Figure 4.1: Select Entry-Level Occupations with Potential for the Target Population

Occupation	Median Wage	Job Growth, 2024-2030	Average Annual Openings	2025 High Priority Occupation
Cooks, Restaurant	\$41,400	17%	1,196	No
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	\$46,500	6%	932	Yes
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	\$54,800	2%	718	Yes
Light Truck Drivers	\$45,700	-4%	550	Yes
Cooks, Institution and Cafeteria	\$39,700	1%	453	No
Carpenters	\$57,500	1%	316	Yes
Industrial Truck and Tractor Operators	\$45,800	1%	254	Yes
Shipping, Receiving, and Inventory Clerks	\$46,800	-6%	225	Yes
Postal Service Mail Carriers	\$57,200	-3%	214	No
Electricians	\$71,700	5%	166	Yes
Orderlies	\$45,300	1%	119	No
Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	\$70,900	2%	109	Yes
Bus Drivers, Transit and Intercity	\$47,500	-4%	97	Yes
Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	\$51,900	1%	87	Yes
Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists	\$58,100	-1%	82	Yes
Refuse and Recyclable Material Collectors	\$46,400	-1%	79	No
Medical Equipment Preparers	\$48,000	1%	75	Yes
Dispatchers, Except Police, Fire, and Ambulance	\$49,500	1%	71	Yes
Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics, Except Engines	\$61,700	2%	53	Yes
Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Assemblers, Except Coil Winders, Tapers, and Finishers	\$42,900	7%	47	Yes
Multiple Machine Tool Setters, Operators, and Tenders, Metal and Plastic	\$46,500	-2%	39	Yes
Railroad Conductors and Yardmasters	\$70,400	8%	39	No
Coating, Painting, and Spraying Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	\$50,000	0%	37	Yes
Chemical Equipment Operators and Tenders	\$56,300	12%	30	Yes
Pest Control Workers	\$43,200	-2%	20	No

Sources: Lightcast (2025), PA Department of Labor and Employment (2024-2025), O*NET (2025), Econsult Solutions (2025)

Because employment is sensitive to both macroeconomic trends and local decision-making, local qualitative sources refine the selection in Figure 4.1 to a shortlist of high-opportunity industries. These sources include short-term educational programs offered by the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), as well as insights from workforce development programs, community justice programs, and employers gathered through interviews and focus groups.

Manufacturing

Manufacturing offers a practical pathway to stable employment for justice-involved individuals. Welders, Solderers, and Brazers have been identified by workforce development programs as a high-opportunity occupation with low barriers to entry, especially for justice-involved individuals.

Licensing

Certification is recommended for manufacturing occupations, such as a Welding Certification. Most positions also require a driver's license.

Training

CCP has an extended offering of short to medium-term manufacturing programs, including:

- Electro-Mechanical Technology (Industrial Maintenance) Program: 399 course hours (approximately five to eight months) at \$5,375.³⁴
- Welding Technology Program: 300 course hours (approximately five months) at \$6,000.³⁵
- Navy-Funded Partnership Programs: Naval Welding and Nondestructive Testing: 450 and 600 course hours (approximately five months) respectively, fully funded.³⁶

Barriers

Positions affiliated with union labor may not be available to those with a criminal record. Additionally, medium-term and long-term training programs are unpaid, making them infeasible for a segment of the target population. Partnership between workforce development programs and manufacturing employers to provide stipends for training and credentialing can lead to successful workforce development outcomes.

Outlook: Welders, Solderers, and Brazers

Median Annual Earnings: \$51,900

Average Annual Openings: 87

Past Growth (2015-24): 12%

Projected Growth (2024-30): 1%

Welding Training Program (CCP):

Minimum Qualifications: GED

Timeline: 300 course hours (5 months)

Schedule Options:

- Sep 8 – Dec 8, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Sep 8 – Feb 4, 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Cost: \$6,000

³⁴ CCP, "Electro-Mechanical Technology (Industrial Maintenance)," <https://www.ccp.edu/academic-offerings/professional-development/non-credit-courses/electro-mechanical-technology>.

³⁵ CCP, "Welding Technology," <https://www.ccp.edu/academic-offerings/professional-development/non-credit-courses/welding-technology>.

³⁶ CCP, "Navy Funded Partnership Program," <https://www.ccp.edu/degrees-programs/all-academic-offerings/continuing-education-noncredit/noncredit-course-offerings-0>.

Outlook

The manufacturing sector has been an area of interest for Philadelphia workforce development programs. Organizations like Philadelphia Works are expanding their welding training and certification programs to meet a growing demand in the region, primarily through The Philadelphia Shipyard.³⁷ EDSI, a large workforce development provider, has expressed interest in expanding their role in the manufacturing sector.³⁸ The PA Department of Labor and Employment has recognized manufacturing jobs with low experience and educational requirements as high priority within Philadelphia, including Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers.

Trades

Outlook: Carpenters

Median Annual Earnings: \$57,500

Average Annual Openings: 316

Past Growth (2015-24): 7%

Projected Growth (2024-30): 1%

Carpenter's Readiness Apprenticeship Program (CCME):

Minimum Qualifications: High school diploma or GED, valid driver's license, drug screen, and residency in Philadelphia

Timeline: 10 weeks (2 months)

Location: Eastern Atlantic States
Carpenters Technical Center

Trade occupations, including carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and HVAC technicians, usually begin with short unpaid pre-apprenticeships or community-college certificates that feed into registered apprenticeships with paid on-the-job training. Listening sessions with workforce development participants demonstrate that many participants are interested in the trades, but a lack of paid entry-level training opportunities limits entry.³⁹

Licensing and Training

CCP and CCME's trade programs, including electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and carpentry courses, teach safety and code fundamentals and prepare students for entry-level work or apprenticeships. These noncredit programs do not by themselves grant a trade license; graduates work under a licensed contractor or enter a registered apprenticeship to build verified experience. In Philadelphia, licensure and contractor registrations are issued locally and common requirements include hour documentation, an approved exam, insurance, and coursework completion⁴⁰. Justice-impacted individuals should confirm license eligibility, jobsite screening requirements, and apprenticeship requirements before enrolling in a certification program.

Training

For carpenters, electricians, plumbers, HVAC technicians, and other roles, a common entry point is short pre-

³⁷ H. Patrick Clancy (PhilaWorks), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 8 July 2025.

³⁸ M. McCarthy (EDSI), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 11 July 2025.

³⁹ P3, focus group interview conducted by Econsult Solutions.

⁴⁰ Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, "Contractor Licensing," 2025, <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dli/programs-services/labor-management-relations/bureau-of-occupational-and-industrial-safety/uniform-construction-code-home/contractor-licensing>.

apprenticeships and community-college entry courses that award beginning credentials.⁴¹ From there, candidates move into registered apprenticeships via unions or open-shop programs that combine paid on-the-job training and classroom instruction.⁴²

Barriers

Across Philadelphia’s skilled trades, programs require applicants to possess a high school diploma or GED, a driver’s license, and a successful drug screening. Generally, programs do not post blanket conviction bans, but placement depends on employer preferences. Justice-involved candidates should be aware that their criminal history may pose a significant barrier to apprenticeships, union entry, and employment.

Outlook

In Philadelphia, carpenters, electricians, HVAC technicians, and plumbers earn more than the national average for their occupations. These occupations exhibit modest growth within the country, indicating a demand for trade labor.⁴³ Coordination between workforce development programs and trade unions can set expectations for training and hiring processes for the justice-impacted population.

Outlook: Electricians

Median Annual Earnings: \$71,700

Average Annual Openings: 166

Past Growth (2015-24): 10%

Projected Growth (2024-30): 5%

Electrical Technician (CCP):

Minimum Qualifications: High school diploma or GED

Timeline: 6 months

Location: Online

⁴¹ Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters (EASRCC), Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters (EASRCC), Carpenters’ Apprentice Ready Program (CARP), 2025, <https://eascarpenters.org/carp/>; U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), “Outreach Training Program (OSHA 10-Hour & 30-Hour Cards),” 2025, <https://www.osha.gov/training/outreach>; National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER), “Core: Introduction to Basic Construction Skills,” 2025, <https://www.nccer.org/craft-catalog/core/>.

⁴² U.S. Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeships, “Registered Apprenticeship Program,” 2025, <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/employers/registered-apprenticeship-program>;

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 98, “Training,” 2025, <https://www.ibew98.org/training/>.

⁴³ Lightcast (2025).

Transportation

The transportation industry offers low-barrier occupations like light truck drivers and industrial truck operators. These positions are often available to justice-impacted individuals. However, jobs within the transportation sector may not match participant expectations and low projected job growth limits the efficacy of training on a large scale.

Licensing

A commercial driver's license (CDL) is required for occupations in transportation. Class B CDLs are applicable to light truck driving, while more advanced Class A CDLs lead to additional opportunities for driving heavy tractor trailers. Licensing is dependent on an individual's criminal record. Allowable offenses include most misdemeanors and some felonies that do not involve a vehicle, including gun and drug charges. However, any criminal charge that involves a vehicle is automatically disqualifying.

Applicants can differentiate themselves in the job market by obtaining a Hazard Endorsement (HL) on their CDL, which is required to transport hazardous materials. The HL requires a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) background check. Individuals with a gun-related felony cannot earn an HL designation for seven years after conviction.⁴⁴

Training

CCCP does not offer CDL training, but several short-term programs in the Philadelphia area do, including one operated by the City's Division of Reentry. Some provide tuition assistance.

Barriers

Transportation jobs can be physically taxing and are not recommended for those aged 25 and below.⁴⁵ For individuals on parole, travel across state lines will restrict job opportunities in heavy truck driving and interstate transportation.

Outlook

Light truck driving jobs in Philadelphia have declined by 12 percent since 2019 and are projected to drop another 4 percent over the next five years.⁴⁶ If an individual can differentiate themselves with a Class A CDL license and a Hazard Endorsement, then jobs as a heavy and tractor-trailer truck driver offer 6 percent growth over the next five years.

Outlook: Light Truck Drivers

Median Annual Earnings: \$45,700

Average Annual Openings: 550

Past Growth (2015-24): 13%

Projected Growth (2024-30): -4%

CDL Course (AAA School of Trucking):

Minimum Qualifications: Aged 18+, valid driver's license, DOT physical and drug screening

Timeline (2 months):

- Class B: 118+ hours
- Class A: 160+ hours

Location: 442 E Girard Avenue

⁴⁴ Transportation Security Administration, "Disqualifying Criminal Offenses," 2025, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-XII/subchapter-D/part-1572/subpart-B/section-1572.103>.

⁴⁵ H. Patrick Clancy (Philadelphia Works), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 8 July 2025.

⁴⁶ Lightcast (2025).

Medical Services

Outlook: Nursing Assistants

Median Annual Earnings: \$45,181

Average Annual Openings: 1604

Past Growth (2015-24): 0%

Projected Growth (2024-30): 1%

Nursing Aide Training (CCP):

Minimum Qualifications: Age 18+, GED, English fluency, flu / COVID vaccine, GP exam, valid ID, PA criminal history report

Timeline: 124 course hours

Schedule Options:

- Sep 6-Dec 6, 6:30am-4:30pm Sat-Sun
- Sep 9-Oct 21, 6:30am-4:30pm, T-Th

Location: 18th and Callowhill, 48th and Market

Employers such as Penn Medicine and Thomas Jefferson University Hospital offer high demand positions in the medical field. It should be noted though that positions within the healthcare industry are particularly background sensitive.

Licensing

Medical occupations require licensure by their associated State board, such as the Pennsylvania State Board of Dentistry or the Board of Nursing.⁴⁷ Applicants must disclose their criminal history, and the board may deny applications based on “moral character.”⁴⁸ Individuals may seek a preliminary determination for licensure eligibility before beginning the certification and licensure process.⁴⁹ In all cases, any violent conviction or gun charge is an immediate disqualification.⁵⁰

An individual with a relevant conviction may pursue licensure if a reasonable amount of time has passed and the individual has demonstrated their rehabilitation.⁵¹ However, even if they pass the licensure requirements, it is likely that a justice-involved individual will see little to no job opportunities in the medical field due to independent employer standards.

Training

CCP offers entry-level medical services training for positions such as Dental Assistants and Nursing Assistants. These programs require a GED and English fluency alongside role-specific requirements including, among others, CPR certification, flu and COVID vaccines, a general physical exam, valid ID, and a Pennsylvania criminal history report. Training is intensive but flexible, with daytime, evening, or weekend options. Tuition typically ranges from \$1,500 to \$3,000.

⁴⁷ Pennsylvania Department of State, “State Board of Dentistry,” 2025, <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dos/department-and-offices/bpoa/boards-commissions/dentistry>.

⁴⁸ Pennsylvania Department of State, “Act 53 of 2020 Best Practices Guide,” 2024, <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dos/resources/professional-licensing-resources/act-53-of-2020-best-practices-guide.html>;

Pennsylvania Department of State, “State Board of Nursing,” 2025, <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dos/department-and-offices/bpoa/boards-commissions/nursing>.

⁴⁹ Pennsylvania Department of State, “SB 637: Preliminary-Determination Application - External Flow User Guide,” 2021, <https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/dos/resources/professional-licensing/Preliminary-Determination-Instructions.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Pennsylvania Code & Bulletin, “Schedule of criminal convictions - State Board of Dentistry,” 2025, <https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pacode?d=reduce&file=%2Fsecure%2Fpacode%2Fdata%2F049%2Fchapter43b%2Fs43b.431.html>.

⁵¹ Pennsylvania Code & Bulletin, “Consideration of criminal convictions,” 2025, <https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pacode?d=reduce&file=%2Fsecure%2Fpacode%2Fdata%2F049%2Fchapter43b%2Fs43b.404.html>.

Barriers

The highest barrier to entry for medical occupations is justice involvement. It is not recommended that an individual pursue a career in the medical field if they have a high misdemeanor or felony criminal conviction. Even if an individual with a criminal record receives training or licensure it is unlikely they will gain employment.

Outlook

If an individual's criminal record is limited or if they are eligible for record clearing, a medical occupation offers high pay after a short training time frame and at low cost. Nursing Assistants, Medical Assistants, Dental Assistants, Medical Equipment Preparers, and Phlebotomists are all designated 2025 High Priority Occupations for workforce development, per the PA Department of Labor and Employment. Medical professions offer a high degree of upwards mobility. For example, an individual who trains as a Dental Assistant can train for and be promoted from an Expanded Dental Assistant to a Dental Hygienists with large increases in pay, and a Nursing Assistant can work towards a Registered Nurse position.

4.3. Entrepreneurship

There is a strong interest in entrepreneurial careers among program participants. Common aspirations include owning moving companies, corner stores, landscaping companies, or clothing businesses, with many participants seeing entrepreneurship as a way to maintain autonomy while staying out of harm's way.⁵² Workforce development programs incorporate entrepreneurship training and financial support at varying degrees. For example, P3 works to match participants with professional mentors but has had difficulty sourcing volunteer mentors.⁵³ Beat the Block provides a formalized, structured pathway, including workshops on forming LLCs, creating merchandise, and building credit. Participants also receive a \$200 weekly stipend during the four-month program and can access equipment like printing tools to support business startups.

Despite participant interest, financial barriers and limited resources restrict accessibility to entrepreneurship – limiting it as a career pathway. A common barrier for aspiring entrepreneurs within this population is low credit scores affecting business funding, or being unbanked.⁵⁴ In addition, few banks or financial institutions offer dedicated or targeted programming for entrepreneurs who have faced gun violence. While some banks do partner with violence intervention programs to connect start-up funds to a select group of emerging entrepreneurs that have completed the program, few options exist. For instance, while Beat the Block has established a partnership with Truist Bank to offer workshops on credit-building and financial literacy, participants still face difficulty accessing loans, particularly those without ID, proof of address, or stable housing. Partnerships with community development financial institutions (CDFIs) that can offer micro-loans to aspiring entrepreneurs could open entrepreneurial pathways.

⁵² P3, focus group interview conducted by Econsult Solutions.

⁵³ K. Brown (P3), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 20 June 2025.

⁵⁴ An individual is unbanked if they do not have a checking or savings account with a financial institution. FDIC, "2023 FDIC National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households," <https://www.fdic.gov/household-survey>.

5. Transition Phase Opportunities: Reducing Employer Bias and Expanding Program-Employer Connections

As demonstrated by READI Chicago and P3, the transition phase of a workforce development program represents the critical stage where participants move from subsidized work into unsubsidized employment. Success at this stage depends on two critical factors: employers willing to hire record-impacted talent (when applicable), and structured bridges that convert training into real offers. Yet listening sessions revealed that this transition often breaks down in practice. Participants described how background checks erase context—*“everything looks the same in black and white... before you make the decision... let the person come in and actually explain”*—and how fear of first steps can be amplified when employers are not open or communicative. Others shared the discouragement of having job offers rescinded at the last minute due to their backgrounds. These experiences highlight that the challenge is not simply skill development, but also employer practices and policies that close doors at the very moment participants are ready to step through them. The following section outlines strategies—grounded in participant feedback and local practice—to reduce employer bias and expand the pool of background-friendly hiring partners.

5.1. Workforce Development Best Practices: Cohort-based Training and Placement

Interviews with Philadelphia Works and EDSI shed light on how the City’s workforce infrastructure is currently positioned to support this transition. Philadelphia Works manages the largest pool of workforce funding in the City, much of it federally sourced, and invests in adult training, youth internships, and pre-apprenticeships. While this funding is significant, strict eligibility rules and documentation requirements—such as proof of citizenship or detailed income verification—limit its flexibility for justice-impacted and gun-violence-affected populations. Staff acknowledged that the biggest gap is paid training; many participants cannot afford to enter programs that offer no compensation during instruction, even when tuition is covered.⁵⁵

EDSI, a workforce service provider for P3, plays a central role in managing transitional placements and employer relationships. Placements have largely been concentrated in hospitality, food service, maintenance, and warehousing—industries with lower barriers to entry but limited opportunities for mobility. EDSI leaders highlighted the need for stronger employer engagement and business development to expand into higher-skill areas such as advanced manufacturing, trades, and infrastructure. They also pointed to the importance of “earn and learn” models, where stipends or wages during training make participation feasible. Both organizations see employer-facing work as the bottleneck: Philadelphia has strong service capacity, but without more employer partners and demand-driven pipelines, participants risk stalling at the transition stage from subsidized to unsubsidized employment.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ P. Clancy (Philadelphia Works), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 8 July 2025.

⁵⁶ M. McCarthy (EDSI), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 11 July 2025.

Against this backdrop, the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI) stands out as a local exemplar of how intentional, employer-centered design can close these gaps and create durable outcomes.

The West Philadelphia Skills Initiative

WPSI stands out locally as a strong example of how employer-partnerships and cohort-based training can drive real employment outcomes. Built and operated by University City District, WPSI has refined a model over nearly 15 years that bridges jobseekers—often from under-resourced communities—with employer demand through customized pipelines, careful selection, and sustained support. Rather than preparing participants for generic entry-level jobs, WPSI starts with employers, identifies real hiring needs, and then builds customized training cohorts to fill those positions.

This demand-driven model contrasts with many transitional job programs, where placements are often limited to maintenance, food service, or warehouse roles. By centering employers as equal stakeholders, WPSI ensures that its participants train for specific jobs with a clear pathway to employment, while also giving employers a vetted, prepared pool of candidates.

The table below highlights the core elements of WPSI’s approach and why they matter for reducing barriers.

Figure 5.1: West Philadelphia Skills Initiative’s Approach to Workforce Development

Element	West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI)	Why It Matters for Reducing Bias / Barriers
Employer-driven cohort design	WPSI begins by engaging employers to define specific roles, then builds training cohorts tailored to those roles. For example, its Medical Assistant program with Penn Medicine combines professional development, technical training, and an externship.	Aligns training directly with employer needs, reducing mismatched expectations and minimizing disqualification due to missing skills.
Record-inclusive practices	Employer partners such as SEPTA and UPenn Facilities accept applicants with felony backgrounds. WPSI pre-clears role-specific eligibility so candidates know whether they meet background and licensure requirements before training begins.	Prevents surprise disqualifications and rescinded offers, which participants often describe as discouraging and destabilizing.
Financial supports during training	Participants receive stipends during professional development (about \$150/week) and hourly pay during technical training phases, with fundraising covering many training costs.	Reduces financial strain during training, helping participants persist despite housing or family pressures.
Strong employer partnerships	Long-standing relationships with anchor institutions such as Penn Medicine, CHOP, Drexel, SEPTA, and the Navy Yard. Employers commit to interviewing graduates upon completion.	Creates predictable and credible hiring pipelines for participants while addressing employer workforce needs.
Supportive candidate experience	Structured processes include orientation, cohort building, professional development, interview preparation, and post-placement retention coaching.	Builds participant confidence, reinforces workplace readiness, and strengthens long-term job retention.

Source: Econsult Solutions via interview with the Skills Initiative (2025)

WPSI reports job placement rates above 90 percent for its graduates, with strong one-year retention and average starting wages in the high teens to low \$20s per hour. At the same time, these outcomes are not achieved quickly or easily. The model requires substantial upfront investment, effort, and commitment from both WPSI and its employer partners. Programs often take six months to two years to design—particularly when building curriculum from scratch—as staff work closely with employers to understand organizational culture, job requirements, and frontline expectations, while also fundraising to provide stipends and cover training costs. Employers, in turn, must commit to deep partnership, including regular engagement with WPSI, alignment of HR processes, and guaranteed interviews for graduates.

Even with this investment, supply and demand remain imbalanced. Interest in WPSI programs consistently exceeds available slots. In one recent example, more than 2,700 individuals applied for a 12-person phlebotomy cohort.⁵⁷ This imbalance underscores both the scale of need and the difficulty of expanding high-quality, employer-driven pathways.

Another distinctive strength of WPSI is its cohort-based approach. Participants progress through the program together, sharing challenges and milestones along the way. This structure builds peer accountability and support, creating a sense of community that helps participants persist through the rigors of training and into employment. Graduates not only gain technical skills and employer connections but also benefit from relationships that extend beyond the program, reinforcing long-term stability and retention.

Ultimately, the strength of WPSI’s model lies not only in its outcomes but also in the intentionality it applies—ensuring that when a program is launched, it reflects genuine hiring demand, provides participants with paid training, and leads to meaningful long-term opportunities.

5.2. Understanding Large Employer and City Perspectives

WPSI’s model works well because of the significant time and investment required to cultivate deep relationships with both employers and participants. While WPSI is not specifically designed with background-friendly employers in mind, the organization does work routinely with two employers that are well known for opening doors to justice-involved individuals: SEPTA and UPenn Facilities. Econsult Solutions conducted interviews with both organizations to understand their perspectives and hiring processes, and to explore how WPSI’s model could adapt to serve individuals at most vulnerable to gun violence.

Additionally, Econsult Solutions met with the City of Philadelphia’s Department of Commerce and Office of Public Safety, since the City not only acts as a program provider but also as a potential large-scale employer. With its direct connection to this population and existing workforce development program through the City College for Municipal Employment (CCME) at the Community College of Philadelphia, the City appears to be a natural fit to expand its role beyond program administration into a more deliberate hiring partner—an opportunity raised frequently by participants themselves. The City’s Streets Department hosts a workforce development program, Future Track, through which individuals

⁵⁷ C. Garozzo and A. Adams (West Philadelphia Skills Initiative), personal communication with Econsult Solutions, 29 July 2025.

receive on-the-job and workforce readiness training, as well as career growth opportunities with potential for city employment upon completion. Future Track has been a successful partner for the City's gun violence intervention and workforce development programs.⁵⁸

SEPTA

SEPTA is one of Philadelphia's largest public employers and has become a more accessible pathway for justice-impacted candidates in recent years. Following a 2016 lawsuit that challenged the agency's restrictive background check practices, SEPTA revised its policies and adopted a more nuanced 19-point review matrix. Today, background reviews are not conducted until after a candidate is hired, and only HR is aware of the record—protecting privacy and ensuring that decisions are based on individual circumstances rather than blanket exclusions. According to SEPTA, approximately 80 percent of candidates with a criminal background who reach this stage are ultimately cleared for employment, making it one of the city's more background-friendly employers.

Despite this openness, aligning SEPTA roles with individuals most vulnerable to gun violence presents challenges. Many entry points require significant preparation and testing that may exceed what participants in the career exploration phase of their workforce development program are ready for without additional supports. For example:

- **Bus Operators:** Candidates must hold a CDL permit (not a full license, as SEPTA conducts its own training), but the role requires passing 19 separate tests and an extended training process. This pathway is long, demanding, and not easily aligned with transitional job timelines.
- **Custodial Roles:** Applicants need at least six months of prior experience and must pass reading and math assessments. Because these positions are unionized, SEPTA cannot create part-time or transitional slots; the only part-time role is limited and highly competitive.

These requirements suggest that while SEPTA is a critical background-friendly employer, the fit is not seamless for participants transitioning out of subsidized work. Moving individuals from the career exploration and training phase (phase three, per Figure 3.1) of their workforce development program into the subsidized-to-unsubsidized employment transition phase (phase four) via roles at SEPTA would require intentional preparation—such as ensuring literacy and math readiness for custodial assessments, helping candidates secure CDL permits, and building prior work experience that can substitute for the six-month requirement.

In short, SEPTA offers meaningful opportunities but not automatic matches. Its scale, unionized environment, and structured training programs make it a valuable long-term partner, but participants most vulnerable to gun violence will need targeted supports and deliberate pre-placement preparation to succeed in these roles.

⁵⁸ City of Philadelphia, "Streets Department Launches the 2023 Future Track Program — Program provides job-skill training and work experience to Philadelphia's young adults," October 2023, <https://www.phila.gov/2023-10-17-streets-department-launches-the-2023-future-track-program-program-provides-job-skill-training-and-work-experience-to-philadelphias-young-adults/>.

UPenn

The University of Pennsylvania, one of the region's largest employers, has increasingly become a viable pathway for justice-impacted individuals, particularly through its long-standing partnership with the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative. Penn hires between 80 to 95 housekeepers each year across three shifts, creating frequent openings with a structured and unionized environment. The institution consistently hires for entry-level roles, particularly in housekeeping, but candidates must be flexible to work across various campus facilities, including residential halls, gyms, and classrooms.

Hiring decisions at Penn involve internal case-by-case reviews of each candidate's background check, allowing the university to assess individual circumstances rather than applying blanket exclusions. While offenses involving minors remain automatic disqualifiers due to campus safety requirements, other criminal records—including long sentences or past incarceration—are reviewed individually. Penn has successfully hired individuals who were incarcerated for 19 to 20 years, reflecting a commitment to second chances when risk is appropriately managed. However, the university maintains a requirement that applicants have at least one year of prior housekeeping experience (recently reduced from two years). The first year on the job often sees the highest attrition, especially among younger hires aged 24 to 28. Those who stay tend to value stability, strong benefits, and union protections that Penn provides, with overall retention sitting around 75 to 76 percent, according to an interview with university representatives. As Glenn Zeitzer, Director of Housekeeping for Penn Facilities, put it, *"If you're going to do housekeeping work in the City of Philadelphia, I can guarantee you—even in the state—we're paying the highest, we're giving you the most benefits, and we're giving you the opportunity to attend school tuition free."*

While many housekeepers stay within the field, there are examples of individuals who used the role as a springboard to other careers, including in teaching, nursing, and even doctoral-level education. With continued coordination, strategic partnerships, and role-aligned preparation, Penn represents a stable and high-quality employer for individuals ready to enter stable, long-term work, or generous benefits.

The City of Philadelphia

The City of Philadelphia plays two distinct roles as it relates to workforce development: first, providing connections between employers, jobseekers and coordinating broader workforce development programs for target populations and second, as a large employer in its own right, employing a range of different occupations across each City department. The joint effort to match programming and available opportunities for the study's target population requires coordination across several departments, including the Department of Commerce, which focuses its efforts externally, and the Office of Public Safety, which focuses its efforts both internally and externally.

While the Department of Commerce focuses on aligning employers with fair-chance hiring practices and incentivized partnerships, the Office of Public Safety takes a people-first approach, centering economic mobility as a core violence prevention and reentry strategy. In interviews with City representatives, both agencies shared key insights into how City programs can better align employer incentives, workforce supports, wraparound services, and public-sector pathways to improve outcomes for those most impacted by the justice system.

The Department of Commerce positions itself as an indirect service convener and connector that aligns employers, training providers, and institutional partners to expand fair-chance opportunities. Its signature Fair Chance Hiring initiative combines wage reimbursement for employers with an employee retention incentive and is complemented by a referral partner network to mitigate challenges in hiring. Commerce prioritizes deeper, repeat partnerships with a small, consistent set of employers. They typically target small and medium-sized businesses, often in commercial corridors that are already inclined to hire justice-involved residents due to fewer legal hurdles. To reduce employer bias and upgrade hiring practices, Commerce pairs incentives with technical assistance and peer learning, helping businesses revise policies, train hiring managers, and improve workplace culture. Most roles are entry-level and accessible like cleaning, landscaping, and other corridor jobs, though some offer promising pipelines into public-sector pathways that function like apprenticeship programs.

However, many employers remain cautious due to perceived legal risk and complex HR processes, while candidates frequently need to support in “power skills” like timeliness, conflict resolution, and proactive communication about barriers. Moreover, the City’s current funding infrastructure constrains program efficacy as limited flexible dollars, fragmented sources, and policy restrictions hinder comprehensive wraparound service and increased stipends that would help stabilize employment. *“We want to support people and...engage as many people as we can,”* said Gianna Grossman, Deputy Commerce Director of Workforce Development, in an interview. *“That’s really a resource constraint in terms of dollars... The way to support people is honestly to be able to put more dollars towards...each [person].”* The solution ought to prioritize quality over quantity to address the resource constraint available per participant. *“The really successful workforce programs in Philadelphia,”* she notes, *“have more flexible dollars, more dollars per participant, and have more nimble systems that can adapt to changing markets, working with employers, working with residents, [and] working with supportive services.”*

Even considering its range of workforce development programs, the Community College of Philadelphia’s credit model possesses limitations. Moreover, the City College for Municipal Employment (CCME) collaboration between CCP and the City also faces limitations in its current iteration in ensuring job placements upon program completion and often has a wait list of nearly 1,000 interested candidates. The Commerce Department attempts to address these challenges by combining incentives with hands-on technical assistance, creating easier referral pipelines, fostering meaningful relationships with trusted businesses, stabilizing wage supports, and strengthening wraparound services.

On the other hand, the Office of Public Safety (OPS) focuses on economic mobility rather than workforce development, centering the needs of people over employers. Joshu Harris, the office’s Deputy Public Safety Director for Strategy, emphasized that economic stability enhances the office’s goals in expanding career pathways. *“We don’t call it workforce development because that is an employer-side perspective. We call it economic mobility to recognize that we’re focusing on the people that we serve.”* He emphasized the true mission of the office which includes employment access, debt management, financial literacy, and barrier removal. *“It’s not just getting employment but all the things that affect someone’s self-sufficiency financially.”*

OPS has begun partnering with the Streets Department to prioritize referrals from its violence prevention and reentry programs like GVI and P3 into Future Track. The model combines transitional

From Barriers to Pathways: A Workforce Development Study for Gun Violence Prevention

December 16, 2025

and permanent employment, soft-skills development, and strong support systems. Harris was hopeful: *“The promise of having a sustainable salary and benefits that you can support a family on in Philadelphia is a total game changer.”* Harris elevated CCME and continued collaboration with programs like Future Track as a promising solution to expand access to municipal employment that is still in its early stages and plans to scale in the coming year.

6. Opportunity Roadmap

The objective of this report is to identify occupations and job opportunities within the Philadelphia region accessible to individuals most vulnerable to gun violence. However, through extensive stakeholder engagement and analysis of the regional labor market, it became evident that sustainable success in workforce development depends on more than temporary job placement alone. It requires deliberate and enduring partnerships that align employers, workforce providers, and community organizations—strengthening and integrating existing programs rather than duplicating them.

A central priority of this Opportunity Roadmap is to understand how partnerships between employers and jobseekers can be structured so that both parties recognize and derive clear, mutual value. Employers should feel confident that they are accessing a high-quality, work-ready candidate pool, while jobseekers should feel that their contributions are valued, their advancement is supported, and their work provides a pathway to stability and growth. Accordingly, this section offers suggestions on how the different organizations within the Philadelphia region can collaborate to build and sustain these mutually beneficial connections.

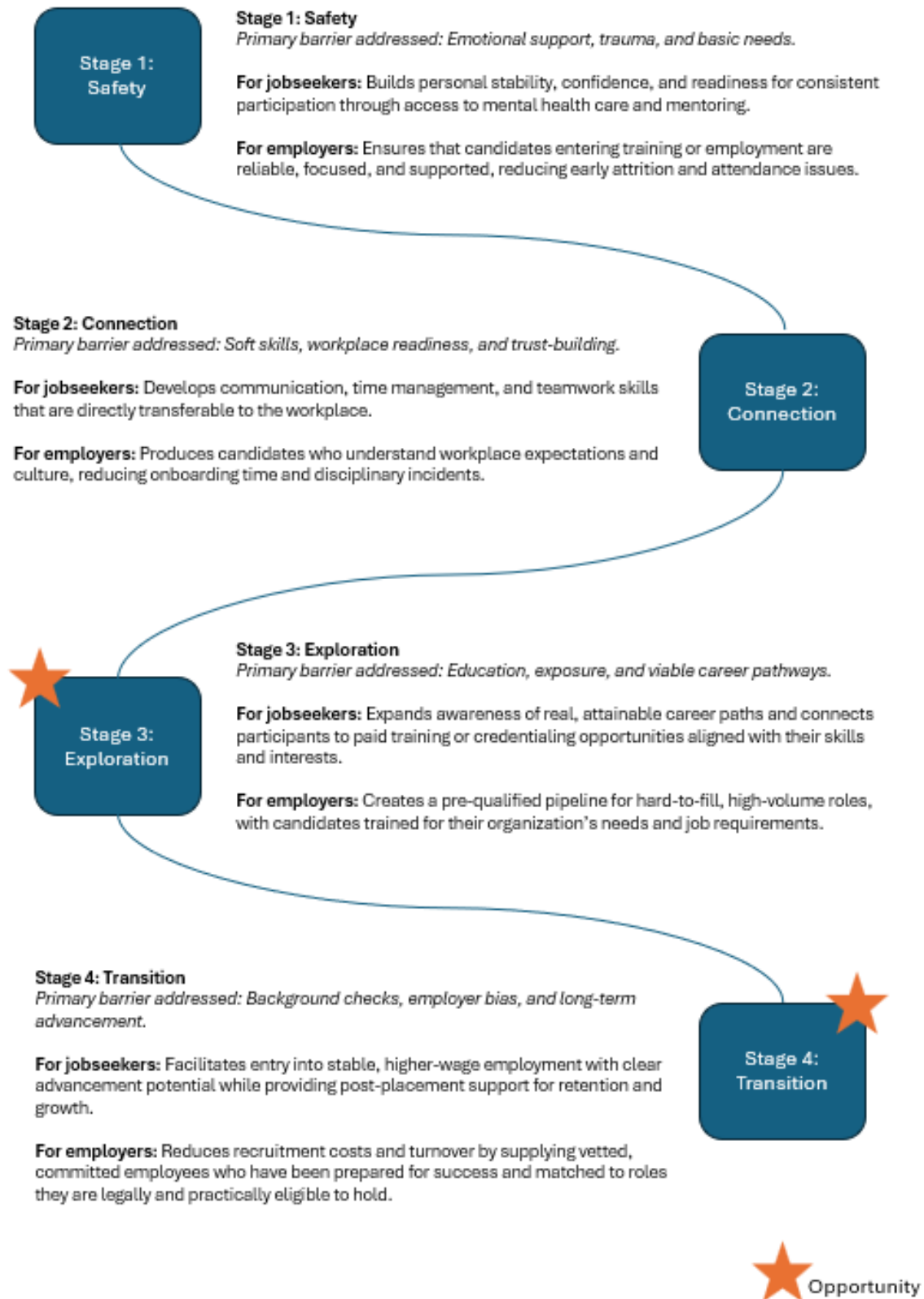
6.1. Current Program Employer Benefits: Stages 1 and 2

The programs reviewed throughout this analysis demonstrate that employment alone is not sufficient, success depends on integrating behavioral health support, mentorship, and skill development within a structured pathway that leads to long-term opportunity. However, what has not been emphasized to the same extent is how these programs can also create value for employers. Another way to look at the P3 program design is from the employer perspective (see Figure 6.1 below).

- Stage 1 focuses on safety and ensures that jobseekers are emotionally and physically prepared to participate in training and employment. Participants gain the stability and confidence necessary to engage meaningfully in the workforce. For employers, this foundation translates to more dependable candidates who are ready to show up consistently and perform reliably.
- Stage 2 focuses on connection and builds upon that foundation by developing essential workplace readiness and soft skills. Jobseekers strengthen communication, teamwork, and time management abilities that help them integrate successfully into organizational cultures. For employers, this stage reduces onboarding challenges and turnover by preparing candidates who not only meet technical requirements but also understand and embrace workplace expectations.

The areas of opportunity within Figure 6.1 lie in the exploration and transition phases of the program. These stages represent the critical bridge between participant readiness and sustained employment outcomes, where alignment with employer needs becomes most direct.

Figure 6.1: P3 Program Benefits for Jobseekers and Employers



6.2. Aligning Employer and Jobseeker Needs for Sustainable Workforce Partnerships

By the end of Stage 2, program participants reported during focus groups that they felt motivated and actively engaged in finding meaningful work. However, it is at this stage that many encounter a misalignment between their individual needs and the realities of the labor market. While participants possess growing confidence and soft skills, they often face limited access to jobs that are both background friendly and offer livable wages with long-term growth potential.

Based on participant feedback and labor market analysis, the characteristics outlined in Figure 6.2 reflect the essential job, workplace, and cultural attributes that make employment sustainable for individuals most vulnerable to gun violence. These include positions that are accessible, structured, and growth-oriented, and workplaces that offer both respect and stability.

Figure 6.2: Jobseeker Partner Needs: Job, Workplace, and Cultural/Social Characteristics of Successful Employment Placement

Job Characteristics	
Low Barriers to Entry	Those that don't require advanced credentials, long unpaid training, or extensive prior experience
Predictable Schedule and Income	Steady hours and reliable pay enable budgeting, consistency, and the ability to plan for the future.
Livable Wage	Wages high enough to cover basic needs and reduce the economic pressures that often drive instability or recidivism.
Workplace Characteristics	
Respectful, Supportive Environment	Clear expectations, fair treatment, and trauma-informed supervision foster dignity and trust.
Skill-Building and Growth	Visible pathways for advancement or skill acquisition that help participants transition from “a job” to “a career.”
Structure and Accountability	Clearly defined tasks, expectations, and daily routines that mirror the consistency learned in program settings.
Cultural & Social Characteristics	
Mentorship and Coaching	Early-stage guidance and feedback to reinforce workplace habits and problem-solving skills.
Social Connection and Belonging	Cohort or team settings that provide peer accountability and a sense of shared purpose.
Recognition and Dignity	Work that feels meaningful and valued, helping participants build identity and self-worth through contribution.

Not every organization will have the type of labor demand that aligns with the structure or intent of these workforce programs, nor the kinds of positions that match the jobseeker characteristics described above. For partnerships to be effective, it is essential to identify employers and sectors where there is a genuine mutual benefit, where organizational hiring needs align with the skills, readiness, and supports that program participants bring.

These programs are best suited to employers facing persistent vacancies, high turnover, or recurring entry-level hiring cycles, where success depends less on prior credentials and more on reliability, consistency, and retention. In such environments, workforce partnerships can add value by providing a pre-qualified, supported pipeline of candidates who have been vetted, coached, and prepared for long-term success.

The characteristics outlined in Figure 6.3 describe the types of employers most likely to find these partnerships beneficial. These organizations seek dependable and work-ready candidates, value predictable and streamlined hiring processes, and are open to ongoing collaboration with workforce development intermediaries to strengthen retention and reduce recruitment costs.

Figure 6.3 Employer Partner Needs: Job, Workplace, and Cultural/Social Characteristics of Successful Employment Placement

Organizational Characteristics	
High-Volume or Recurring Hiring Needs	Employers that consistently recruit for similar entry-level roles, such as custodial, facilities, logistics, or operations, and can benefit from predictable hiring pipelines.
Chronic Vacancy or Turnover Challenges	Organizations where vacancies disrupt operations and retention is critical to service delivery or productivity.
Structured Work Environment	Workplaces that rely on clear roles, procedures, and supervision – creating predictability and stability for both the employee and employer.
Workforce Characteristics	
Reliability and Consistency	Roles where dependability, teamwork, and attendance are more critical to performance than formal degrees or long prior experience.
Cohort-Friendly Staffing Models	Workplaces that can onboard small groups together, fostering peer support, accountability, and operational efficiency.
Openness to Fair-Chance Hiring	Employers willing to consider justice-impacted individuals when candidates have completed structured preparation and support programs.
Partnership Characteristics	
Two-Way Partnership	Open communication and shared accountability between employers and program staff.
Commitment to Workforce Development	Employers that see workforce partnerships as a long-term staffing strategy rather than one-time placements.

6.3. Identifying Potential Employer Partnerships

Building on the characteristics identified above, this section examines Philadelphia’s largest employers to identify potential partners whose workforce demand may align with the structure and intent of programming. The goal is to determine where there is mutual value in that employer hiring challenges overlap with the skills and value provided by program participants.

Philadelphia’s economy is anchored by major institutional employers in education, healthcare, government, and service industries. These sectors employ large numbers of residents, offer structured work environments, and typically experience recurring entry-level hiring cycles, making them strong candidates for partnership. Figure 6.4 below lists the region’s largest employers and their overall job postings from August 2023 through August 2025.

Figure 6.4: Philadelphia’s Top Employers

Rank	Employer	Job Postings (August 2023-August 2025)
#1	University of Pennsylvania	23,535
#2	Federal Government	N/A
#3	City of Philadelphia	3,695
#4	School District of Philadelphia	1,295
#5	The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia	4,999
#6	Temple University	2,642
#7	Thomas Jefferson University Hospital	5,681
#8	Temple University Hospital	6,948
#9	SEPTA	487
#10	Comcast	4,995

Source: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (2025), Lightcast (2025)

In addition to potentially needing high volumes of specific roles, these larger employers typically offer higher wages, strong health and retirement benefits, tuition assistance, and opportunities for career advancement. Many also provide stable employment, union representation or collective bargaining protections, and predictable schedules, which make them particularly attractive to jobseekers seeking long-term stability. For example,

- The City of Philadelphia and SEPTA offer strong public-sector benefits, including comprehensive health coverage, defined pension plans, and generous paid time off. Both also offer free transportation through SEPTA.

- The University of Pennsylvania provides one of the most robust benefit packages in the region, featuring full medical, dental, and vision coverage, retirement contributions, and exceptional education benefits—covering 100 percent of tuition and fees for up to two courses per term at Penn for employees, and partial tuition for dependents (including up to 40 percent of Penn’s tuition at other institutions).
- Comcast offers competitive private-sector benefits, including comprehensive health insurance, a 401(k) with company match, stock purchase options, paid parental leave, and one of the most flexible education benefits.

Targeting larger employers for entry-level positions that require hiring at scale can create mutually beneficial partnerships. However, cultivating and maintaining these relationships requires significant time and coordination to align recruitment processes, training pipelines, and communication across partners. Figure 6.5 below provides an illustrative example of the level of effort involved in coordinating between the University of Pennsylvania Facilities Department and the Skills Initiative for a single program cohort. It is important to note that this diagram does not capture the initial development work required to launch the first cohort, as the program has been refined over multiple years.

Figure 6.5 Illustrative Example of Employer–Program Partnership Coordination



6.4. Potential Programmatic Pathway Examples

The following diagrams illustrate three examples of potential programmatic pathways in the Philadelphia region. Each pathway follows a structured progression from initial preparation and prerequisite supports (Stages 1 and 2) to industry-specific training or transitional employment experiences (Stage 3), and ultimately to long-term placement with major regional employers (Stage 4). Together, these examples demonstrate how coordinated, employer-informed partnerships can expand access to quality jobs while addressing ongoing hiring needs across multiple sectors:

- The **Maintenance Pathway** highlights roles with large institutional employers such as the SEPTA, where consistent demand exists for general helper and maintenance positions. Participants build stability and readiness through foundational programming and then engage in hands-on training with the City of Philadelphia’s Future Track before connecting to full-time employment opportunities that offer stable wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement at the City itself or within SEPTA.
- The **Medical Assistant Pathway** demonstrates how short-term, credential-based training can link directly to healthcare employment. Participants complete prerequisite supports to ensure readiness for training, then enroll in medical assistant certification programs at the Community College of Philadelphia, supported by Philadelphia Works. Graduates can transition into positions at major health systems including Temple Health, Jefferson Health, and Penn Medicine. These roles provide clear wage progression and long-term career mobility.
- The **Welder Pathway** illustrates an emerging opportunity within the defense and logistics sector. Participants complete initial workforce readiness programming and then pursue a 4.5-month hands-on training at the Community College of Philadelphia. Upon completion, they can connect with local Navy Yard employers such as the U.S. Navy, Hanwha Philly Shipyard, or Rhoads Industries, accessing a pathway that offers strong wages and transferable technical skills.

These pathways are intended to be illustrative examples, not prescriptive models; they may not fit every participant, and not all employers shown are confirmed partners or may be interested in developing a program of this kind. Nonetheless, these structured, employer-aligned approaches could potentially strengthen the program’s outcomes by linking training more directly to real, ongoing hiring demand.

General Helper/Maintenance Custodian

Stage 1 & 2: Prerequisites

For a job seeker that is interested in starting in this field, it is important that the prerequisites below are reviewed within the first stages of the program to ensure that this pathway would be feasible:

- 46 percent of postings require a GED
- Many require a valid drivers' license

For SEPTA specifically,

- Most positions require a valid driver's license
- Must possess a high school diploma or equivalent
- Must possess significant and verifiable janitorial/custodian work experience.

General Helper/Maintenance Custodians*

Average Monthly Postings	392
Average Monthly Hires	309
Top Companies*	Annual Postings
Temple University Health System	60
Thomas Jefferson University	24
University of Pennsylvania	19
Earnings Progression (Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers)	
10%	\$31,100
25%	\$37,600
50%	\$41,600
75%	\$50,400
90%	\$56,400

*Included in this occupation are Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers, Maintenance and Repair Workers General, Grounds Maintenance Workers, All Other

Stage 3: Transition/Training Partners

For the general helper/maintenance custodian pathway, the job seeker would enroll in the City of Philadelphia's Future Track program as their transitional employment placement.



The City of Philadelphia's Future Track program offers trainees hands-on experience within the Philadelphia Streets Department.

The latest cohort employed 200 individuals at a rate of \$17 per hour. The initiative seeks to engage at-risk young adults who are not enrolled in higher education and are unemployed in a six to twelve-month paid program to perform meaningful public service work.

Considerations: The Future Track program offers paid classroom and field training, offers free SEPTA transportation, benefits, and a pathway to full-time civil services work. However, the program is temporary in nature, and the City of Philadelphia may not have the full-time employment need for all program participants.

Potential Funded Training Opportunities:

Unlike other pathways, the Streets department is a paid transitional employment track which means there are cost savings within this program.

Stage 4: Employment Partners

The Future Track program offers hands-on experience for participants who are interested in maintenance and groundskeeping work. This experience could be used as a pathway to employment outside the City of Philadelphia:



SEPTA is a background friendly employer that advertises two entry-level career paths: **General Helpers** which are entry-level positions within their Track, Building, and Bus Garages. They are advertised as positions that offer a ground floor opportunity to learn and grow within the department. The second entry level opportunity is for **Maintenance Custodians** – to meet their need, SEPTA employs over 500 maintenance custodians throughout the southeastern Pennsylvania region.

Earnings Progression for SEPTA Maintenance Custodian:

- The starting pay for the Maintenance Custodian position is \$20.14/hour
- After 3 months, \$22.52/hour
- After 7 months, \$26.50/hour
- There are two more progressions before you meet the top rate of \$28.20 after 9 years

Consideration: "Preferably possesses 2+ years of relevant work experience"

Other large employer partners to consider: University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, Drexel University, Penn Medicine, Jefferson Health

Medical Assistant

Stage 1 & 2: Prerequisites

For a job seeker that is interested in starting in the medical field, it is important that the prerequisites below are reviewed within the first stages of the program to ensure that this pathway would be feasible:

- GED
- No criminal background
- Valid drivers' license
- English fluency

Medical Assistant

Average Monthly Postings	86
Average Monthly Hires	123

Top Companies	Annual Postings
Temple University Health System	133
Thomas Jefferson Health System	160
Penn Medicine	53

Earnings Progression

10%	\$39,300
25%	\$42,140
50%	\$47,900
75%	\$51,100
90%	\$56,800

Stage 3: Transition/Training Partners

For the medical assistant pathway, in lieu of transitional employment, the job seeker would enroll in a program that would allow them to sit for the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant exam.



The Community College of Philadelphia is a potential partner for this pathway.

CCP offers a nine-week Clinical Medical Assisting non-degree workforce development program. The cost of the program is \$2,799. Programs are during the day (8:30-3pm, Monday through Thursday over 9 weeks) and also at night (6-10pm, Tuesday through Thursday over one semester).

Considerations: Unlike transitional employment opportunities, there is a cost to this program in addition to the potential \$15 per hour subsidy per person. Total cost would be roughly \$3,510 subsidy plus \$2,799 program cost: \$6,309 for in-class participation per person.

Potential Funded Training Opportunities:

CCP is not the only potential training partner for this Pathway in the region.



As part of the 2024 Good Jobs Challenge, Philadelphia Works announced several training partners for subsidized training in certified medical assisting including Congreso De Latinos Unidos, Propel America, and The Full Circle Group. Looking for these types of partnerships may cut down on program costs with funding already available.

Stage 4: Employment Partners

Having a CMA does not guarantee that the job seeker would obtain employment. However, within Philadelphia, there are several hospital systems that may fit the employer labor demand model necessary for a mutually beneficial partnership:

Temple Health

Temple University Health System had 133 unique postings for medical assistants over the last year with a median annual advertised salary of \$47,840. While the study has not reached out to anyone at Temple Health to gauge their interest in such a partnership, data suggests the institution has ample need for this occupation.



Jefferson University Health System had 160 unique postings for medical assistants over the last year with a median annual advertised salary of \$45,666. While the study has not reached out to anyone at Jefferson Health to gauge their interest in such a partnership, data suggests the institution has ample need for this occupation.

Penn Medicine

Penn Medicine had 53 unique postings for medical assistants over the last year with a median annual advertised salary of \$39,520. Penn Medicine already has a cohort program in place with the Skills Initiative in which participants complete eight weeks of paid coursework for their CMA, have a two-week paid externship and then are eligible for employment starting at \$21.50 with Penn Medicine.

Welder (Shipyard)

Stage 1 & 2: Prerequisites

For a job seeker that is interested in starting in this field, it is important that the prerequisites below are reviewed within the first stages of the program to ensure that this pathway would be feasible and that the participant understands the educational requirements, background requirements, and time commitment.

Security clearance and background checks will be required for this position.

For the Navy Expansion Project specifically,

- High school diploma or GED
- Males born after 12-31-59 must be registered for Selective Service.
- You will be required to obtain and maintain an interim and/or final security clearance prior to entrance on duty. Failure to obtain and maintain the required level of clearance may result in the withdrawal of a job offer or removal.

Stage 3: Transition/Training Partners

For the welder pathway, the job seeker would enroll in the Community College of Philadelphia Naval Welding program as their transitional employment placement.



The Navy Expansion Project within the Community College of Philadelphia started in Fall 2025.

The welding program is funded by the Navy and consists of a full-time 4.5-month program in which students learn the theory, technical standards, and safety requirements of shipbuilding welding. Students will be taught the following techniques and standards:

- Shields Metal Arc Welding (SMAW)
- Gas Tungsten Arc Welding (GTAW)
- Gas Metal Arc Welding (GMAW)
- Qualification of Welding Procedures and Welders
- Fabrication of Piping
- Fabrication of Submarine Structure
- Fabrication of Surface Ship Structure

Considerations: This program is a 4.5-month full-time commitment at CCP's Career and Advanced Technology Center in West Philadelphia. Applications are open for the March 2026 cohort.

Potential Funded Training Opportunities:

Unlike other pathways, the Navy Expansion Project (Welding) is a paid transitional employment track which means there are cost savings within this program and may allow for a "Learn and Earn" model since the program costs are already covered.

Stage 4: Employment Partners



The Naval Foundry and Propeller Center (NFPC) is a modern manufacturing facility located on the Philadelphia Navy Yard Annex in Philadelphia, PA

NFPC employs a highly skilled and versatile workforce of engineers, trades people, and support personnels. A job posting for a Welder includes a pay range of between \$27.71 and \$30.30 per hour.

In addition to the NFPC, there are several other similar employers to consider for welder positions:

- **Rhoads Industries**
- **Hanwha Philly Shipyard:** Has a 39-month apprentice program in which participants are full-time employees on day one. For the first 8 weeks, the class will work on-site. At the end of 8 weeks, apprentices will report to the Training Academy to begin classroom training and hands-on lessons to obtain certification. Upon completion at the Training Academy, apprentices re-join production to begin work on ship construction. All apprentices are required to attend and complete a mix of classroom and online training throughout the duration of the program. Must be 18 years old, have a GED, and pass an aptitude test.

A Appendix: About Econsult Solutions, Inc.

This report was produced by Econsult Solutions, Inc. (ESI). ESI provides businesses and public policy makers with consulting and thought leadership services in urban economics, real estate, transportation, public infrastructure, economic development, public policy and finance, strategic planning, as well as expert witness services for litigation support.

ESI combines robust quantitative analysis with trusted expert insights to create sustainable solutions. The firm works collaboratively with its clients, and draws in expertise, when necessary, from our network of experts and partners across industries, regions, and management practices. Based in Philadelphia, the firm supports clients nationwide.



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