

# The Institute

*Turning Information into Insight*

*A collaboration among Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Johnson College, Keystone College, King's College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, Penn State Hazleton, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, University of Scranton, Wilkes University, and the business community*

## August 2023

The kick-off convening for the Anchors for Economy Research in Action Lab was held on August 16th, 2023, at The Venue in Avoca, Pennsylvania. Representatives of the following organizations were present:

- [City of Scranton](#)
- [Commission of Economic Opportunity](#)
- [Commonwealth Health Regional Hospital of Scranton / Moses Taylor Hospital](#)
- [Geisinger College of Health Sciences](#)
- [Geisinger Health System](#)
- [Greater Wyoming Valley Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Johnson College](#)
- [Kings College](#)
- [Luzerne County Community College](#)
- [Luzerne / Schuylkill Workforce Development Board](#)
- [Marywood University](#)
- [Maternal and Family Health Services](#)
- [Moses Taylor Foundation](#)
- [NEIU 19](#)
- [Outreach](#)
- [Penns Northeast](#)
- [Scranton Primary Healthcare Center](#)
- [St. Joseph's Center](#)
- [The Luzerne Foundation](#)
- [The University of Scranton](#)
- [Wayne Economic Development Corporation](#)
- [Workforce Alliance](#)

First on the agenda for the day was to introduce the Anchor Economy Initiative and its Research in Action Labs to the stakeholders in attendance. As explained during the presentation, the goal of these labs is to institutionalize partnerships, test innovative approaches to addressing larger economic problems, and shift resources towards more equitable systems. However, to successfully construct these labs, community champions, local research, and cross-sector partnerships are required. Fortunately, those organizations present at the kick-off, as well as those that will join in the future, will assist The Institute in establishing these elements. Additionally, the Anchor Economy Dashboard will be utilized to measure the economic impact of anchor institutions in the region to further assist in the process. By leveraging the data of the Anchor Economy Initiative, the Anchors for Equity Research in Action Lab can develop workforce solutions for Northeastern Pennsylvania, with anchor institutions at the forefront. Following this introduction, information regarding the background of the region and its labor market, as well as the conditions affecting workers, was provided. As highlighted during the

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presentation, the region's population has been trending up due to the low cost of living and its proximity to employment hubs. However, the regional projected population growth lags behind the national rate. Additionally, the region's share of residents near retirement age is currently at 34 percent, which is higher than the national figure of 29.3 percent. Lastly, only 26 percent of residents in the region have a bachelor's degree or higher. Pay level often links to high-skill jobs, which in turn links to level of education, so higher educational attainment and enhanced training can lead to greater economic opportunity. Furthermore, only 22.6 percent of graduates from higher education institutions in Northeast Pennsylvania are definitively staying in the region.

Regarding labor market conditions, the top industries in the region are transportation and utilities, followed by education and health. Currently, the top job openings are in the healthcare and logistics and retail sectors. Specifically, registered nurses comprise the highest total of open jobs. Additionally, the unemployment rate in Northeast Pennsylvania has consistently exceeded the national unemployment rate. Furthermore, real GDP per capita in the region in 2021 (\$43,875) lagged well behind the national average (\$59,003). Real GDP refers to the value of the goods and services produced by an economy and is adjusted for inflation or deflation. Lastly, the big picture of workforce conditions in Northeast Pennsylvania was presented to stakeholders. Most notably, there is a disconnect between where jobs are in the region and where available public transit goes. Additionally, based on the Federal Reserve Bank's Worker Voices Project, the following key findings were presented:

- Complex calculations about health risks, family demands, and financial needs affected worker employment decisions.
- The tight labor market has not benefited all workers equally.
- Workers expressed enhanced expectations of job quality.
- Skill development and self-investment remain priorities for many workers.

To end the day, stakeholders participated in their first open discussion of the initiative. The topics of discussion included facts and figures that stood out as intriguing, as well as aspects of the region that require further research. The transportation and utility industries are one notable example of data that stood out to stakeholders. As previously explained, there is a disconnect between where jobs are in the region and where available public transit goes. Regarding utilities, the transportation and utilities industry ranks as the top industry in the region.

Additional discussion points included:

- Understanding the voice of the worker and its importance.
- The need to balance employee needs and organizational needs.
- The future of distribution centers as they become more automated.
- The need to have a pathway for workers lost to distribution to return to healthcare.
- Opportunities to upskill/reskill workers for healthcare opportunities.
- The need to work on career pathways that are simpler to obtain.
- The issue of recognizing credentials from other countries.

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- The need for higher education students to build transferable and soft skills.
- Inviting additional stakeholders to future Anchor Economy Initiative meeting, specifically K-12 superintendents and interested college students.

Finally, proposed topics for further research included solutions to address the aging workforce issue, retention of college graduates, and opportunities to increase trade or technical training. Any questions that remained among stakeholders were discussed at this point of the presentation as well.



**September 2023**

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To start the day, the Steering Committee was introduced. Its members, comprised of healthcare and higher education representatives, arrived early to understand the committee's purpose and their role as members. As explained by the initiative coordinators, the purpose of the Steering Committee is to support the other members and ensure that all anchor institutions involved are aware of the direction in which the initiative is headed. Furthermore, as Steering Committee members, they will work in an advising capacity. Steering Committee members then devised potential research questions to help gather qualitative data for the initiative.

Following the Steering Committee session, the remaining initiative members arrived to participate in an asset mapping workshop. Asset mapping is the process of identifying and assessing the resources, skills, strengths, and potential of organizations in a community or region. As described by the initiative coordinators, there are five important aspects of the asset mapping process which include the following:

- Discovery and learning
- Relationship building
- Connecting
- Celebrating and promoting
- Mobilizing

To better facilitate conversation, participants were assigned to specific tables which included at least one Steering Committee member. From there, participants completed several activities designed to open discussions on the emerging workforce, and how to best utilize collaborative institutions in the area.

*Members of the Anchor Economy Initiative provided a variety of regional organizations that fit into the categories listed on the asset bus poster boards. Of the organizations that were considered anchor employers by initiative members, those that were commonly mentioned included health care institutions, such as Geisinger and Lehigh Valley Health. The most frequently cited workforce partners were pathway programs chambers of commerce. Additionally, the many regional higher education systems were the most referenced organizations in the educational institutions and training programs category. As for social support partners, the Wright Center, the Outreach Center for Community Resources, and regional churches "of all denominations" were mentioned frequently. The Moses Taylor Foundation, as well as the state and Federal Government, were two commonly named funders and financial resources partners. Lastly, both workforce unions and the Advocacy Alliance were frequently listed in the regional labor advocates category. Other notable organizations listed by initiative members on their asset map poster boards included NEPA Alliance and CAN DO.*

*After collaborative organizations were categorized accordingly, initiative members were asked where collaboration is happening among those organizations that were identified. Several examples of collaboration in the region that were highlighted include funders enabling higher education institutions to have a broader regional impact, training programs working with*

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*healthcare providers, and partnerships between boards and employers. Additional examples mentioned during the debrief of this activity include:*

- *Area Health Education Center (AHEC)*
- *Chambers of Commerce*
- *Tech Bridge*
- *Workforce Leadership Academies (WLA) – The Aspen Institute*
- *Wyoming Valley (i.e., funding childcare)*

*Furthermore, when asked where the potential is for collaboration that is not currently happening, initiative members suggested partnerships between employers, funders, and workers to address the transportation barrier.*

*As part of their responsibilities, Steering Committee members were asked to produce research questions to guide the Anchor Economy Initiative. Potential research questions posed by committee members include:*

- *What are the strengths of communities?*
- *Why is there not much diversity in the application of high paying jobs in healthcare?*
- *How do people find out about employment opportunities? How do they perceive them? Are there barriers?*
- *How do the schools and guidance counselors/advisors know that jobs are available for qualified students?*
- *What guidance are high school students getting? Especially bilingual ones; are the pathways there?*
- *What other points of intervention are there to connect students with employment opportunities?*
- *Where are people learning about opportunities?*

*The Worker Personas & Journey Activity required stakeholder representatives to identify examples of prospective workers (those who are seeking or applying for jobs with your organizations) or existing workers. Some of the notable personas mentioned include the following:*

- *Career changers (e.g., manufacturing to healthcare)*
- *Entry level professionals*
- *Parents who require flexibility*
- *Quiet quitters*
- *Retirees re-entering the workforce*
- *Student or adult learners with trauma*

*The second component of the Worker Personas & Journey Activity required initiative members to discuss the journey of prospective and existing workers. Specifically, the pain points that prevent them from succeeding in the workplace, as well as the supports and opportunities that can address these pain points. Some examples of pain points cited during this portion of the day's activity include:*

- *Difficulty comprehending job descriptions*

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- *Imposter syndrome*
- *Insufficient experience or education*
- *Organization culture*
- *Resume gaps*
- *Technology struggles, inaccessibility, or inexperience*
- *Tokensim (i.e., policies or practices that only make symbolic efforts)*
- *Transportation*

Supports suggested by initiative members to address pain points include:

- *Bilingual supports*
- *Financial supports*
- *Having the employer set reasonable expectations*
- *Mentorship*
- *On the job training (OJT)*



**October 2023**

The focus of the October event of the Anchor Economy Initiative was racial equity, the first of two sessions dedicated to the subject. The term 'racial equity' refers to the process of addressing

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barriers that prevent historically vulnerable populations from enjoying living standards that are considered readily accessible by others. Anchor representatives were tasked with engaging in conversations about racial equity in Northeastern Pennsylvania to better understand how it may currently impact both the region and the initiative's overall objectives. These conversations were facilitated by representatives of [Just Strategies](#), a nonprofit organization that provides consultation related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training among its many equity-related services.

The day's discussion was kicked off by the facilitators providing an overview of their role in the Anchor Economy Initiative. As explained in the [PowerPoint](#), *Just Strategies* aims to assist regional stakeholders in understanding the importance of racial equity in their work, as well as help communities think about how anchor institutions can further economic inclusion. Then, the day's facilitators presented the *Just Strategies* equity change framework. This framework includes three distinct elements that are required to change to improve racial equity: hearts and minds, behaviors, and ways of being, and policies and structure. By providing tools to change these elements, *Just Strategies* is putting initiative participants in a good position to address racial equity in Northeastern Pennsylvania through their respective institutions.

There were three main objectives to be covered by the day's discussions. The first was to engage in a conversation about topics such as race and gender. To spark conversation, initiative participants were asked the following questions:

- What has been the gender, race, or ethnicity of the majority of your teachers throughout your school career?
- How many teachers with marginalized (and intersecting) identities have you had in your school career?
- Why is this an important (or not important) question?

When answering the first two questions, initiative participants provided various responses. However, the majority indicated that they had white, female teachers in primary school. Regarding secondary and post-secondary school, several participants noted that they had white, male teachers almost exclusively. The *Just Strategies* facilitators noted that a lack of diversity among educators is not uncommon, and can be attributed to various historical, social, cultural, and systemic factors. As for the third question, multiple respondents felt that these questions were, in fact, important. One participant asserted that when students do not see someone like themselves, they are without a role model. Following this argument, another participant informed that teachers play an important role in psyche development and that students benefit from seeing instructors who look like them. A third participant explained that lack of diversity in education under prepares graduates for multicultural encounters later in life. Overall, initiative participants were supportive of the conversation and provided constructive commentary. After this initial discussion, facilitators explained to the plenary why racial equity needs to be pursued. As outlined in the PowerPoint presentation, the pursuit of racial equity accomplishes three main objectives, which include the following:

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- Address patterned and sustained inequities
- Dismantle systems and processes that produce inequity
- Address the structural interplay between racism and other forms of oppression

Furthermore, facilitators explained that without the pursuit of racial equity, communities risk reproducing what they are already familiar with (i.e., primary school teachers being mostly comprised of white females). To prepare anchor representatives for this month's event, the *Just Strategies* facilitators asked them to watch a TEDx Talk that explained how Race can be discussed in a civil manner. The video can be watched [here](#). While most anchor representatives who were present supported the belief that discussions about racial equity and its pursuit are important, some worried that a hyper-fixation on diversity overlooks other areas that might require attention.

Following the conversations on race and gender, the remaining two objectives were covered. The first of these objectives was to explore the history of racial inequities in the United States, which provided additional context about racial equity. To make the conversation even more relevant to the initiative, Northeastern Pennsylvania's racial history was discussed as well. Historical events cited in this discussion include the Battle of Wyoming (also known as the Wyoming Massacre), the organization of ethnic communities because of the anthracite coal mining industry, and the presence of redlining in both Scranton and Wilkes-Barre.

The final objective of the day was to reiterate the significance of racial equity to community resilience, which was accomplished through discussion about race in society as well as the workplace. To close the day's event, the *Just Strategies* facilitators asked anchor representatives to reflect on and discuss the following questions:

- What points made about Race in Northeastern Pennsylvania, Society or in the Workplace resonate with you?
- How do you see race playing out in your work and/or the issues you care about?
- What other considerations do you have?



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Various comments were provided in response to these questions. One anchor representative discussed healthcare, specifically the lack of representation in their training programs. Furthermore, they explained that while barriers are not present in higher positions in their hospital, they can afford to be more selective for positions that do not require extensive qualifications. Another issue that was cited by initiative participants was the lack of pipeline development between educational institutions and regional companies. A third notable concern cited by both facilitators and anchor representatives was the lack of diversity present in the initiative itself. One participant noted that representatives of the diverse populations that Anchor Economy Initiative aims to serve need to take part in these conversations. Otherwise, they

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asserted that the process is “inauthentic.” The day concluded with most anchor representatives brainstorming ways in which representatives of diverse populations in Northeastern Pennsylvania could be persuaded to take part in the Anchor Economy Initiative process.



## **November 2023**

The November event of the Anchor Economy Initiative was the second session dedicated to discussion about racial equity in Northeastern Pennsylvania. As was the case with the previous session, the day’s discussions were facilitated by representatives of [Just Strategies](https://www.juststrategies.org/). This nonprofit organization provides a wide array of equity-related services, including consultation related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training. To start the event, *Just Strategies* representatives presented the day’s agenda and primary objectives, which included: (1) practice active listening as an inclusion tool and a necessary element for equity-centered organizational change and (2) brainstorm the necessary elements to advance an equitable provider council. Once the agenda and primary objectives were introduced, they summarized the general themes of the survey feedback from the first racial equity session. The following feedback was received:

- Quality of the session, content, and facilitation received high marks.

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- The discussion of the gender and race of teachers and America's racialized timeline was well-received.
- Participants enjoyed the interactive discussion and "safe space" to share.
- There is an interest in more discussion on strategies for youth and engaging diverse individuals in planning and overcoming barriers.

After the feedback was presented and discussed, anchor representatives were asked to participate in a listening activity in which one person would speak for three uninterrupted minutes while another sat and listened. After these three minutes, the listener would then ask the speaker two open-ended questions to learn more and better understand. Then the speaker would elaborate uninterrupted for one minute. After these three steps were completed, the two individuals would then switch roles. Once the activity concluded, anchor representatives were asked by *Just Strategies* facilitators how they felt not being able to interrupt the speaker. Many expressed a desire to relate during the conversation through interjections. Several others explained that they had difficulty keeping the conversation going. As explained in the day's agenda, the purpose of this activity was to practice active listening, a necessary element for equity-centered organizational change.

The next step on the agenda was to discuss visions for and activities of equitable institutions. The *Just Strategies* [Equity Change Framework](#), as well as key elements for a research in action lab, were presented at this point in the session. The three major components of *Just Strategies* Equity Change Framework include hearts and minds, policies, and structures, as well as behaviors and ways of being. As for key elements for research in action labs, these consist of community champions, local research, and cross-sector partnerships. The goal of these labs is to institutionalize partnerships, pilot and innovate approaches to address regional economic issues, and change systems to create and maintain equity.

Following the discussion about visions for and activities of equitable institutions, anchor representatives were asked about the history of efforts like the Anchor Economy Initiative in Northeastern Pennsylvania. During this large group discussion, a variety of comments were made. Referring to equity and initiatives to move everyone forward in the region, one participant asserted that "we can't get out of our own way." Another asserted that representatives of diverse populations in Northeastern Pennsylvania are not often present in these spaces nor involved in these conversations despite their qualifications or status in the local community. A third participant presented the concept of IPAP to the plenary. IPAP, an acronym for idea – person – action – policy, can be applied to the work of anchor representatives to help them consider the impact their policies have on community members, especially those who are least resilient. Furthermore, when asked about barriers to successful initiatives in Northeastern Pennsylvania, there was a general consensus that worker pipeline issues were one of the most significant.

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Furthermore, when the day's facilitators asked initiative participants what the process to achieve racial equity in Northeastern Pennsylvania might look like, one anchor representative mentioned accessibility to resources. Specifically, the participant pointed out that organizations comprised mostly of people of color in the region need assistance receiving grants. They explained that these organizations are unfamiliar with the process to receive these grants and need both the funding and guidance. It was then asked if underutilized grants can be extended, or even regranted entirely, to help these organizations. It was during this conversation that *Just Strategies* facilitators explained that racial equity is achieved when race no longer determines a person's outcome, and that anchor institutions play a key role in achieving this end goal. At the conclusion of the discussion about the history of equity initiatives in the region, the process and outcomes of racial equity were presented by *Just Strategies* facilitators. As they explained, anchor institutions have the power to make substantial improvements to the regions they serve, which includes the advancement of equity and creation of more inclusive communities. Various opportunities to advance equity were then identified, which include, but are not limited to:

- (1) workforce development
- (2) community engagement
- (3) affordable housing initiatives
- (4) community investments.

To end the day, anchor representatives were asked to brainstorm ideas about equity and what it might look like in Northeastern Pennsylvania if the Anchors for Equity Initiative was successful. Participants were asked to write their ideas on sticky notes and then place them onto posters for the facilitators to read to the plenary. Some efforts, activities, policies, and changed mentioned by anchor representatives include the following:

- Having more diverse people in the room
- Transportation and access to childcare; all barriers removed
- Access to gender affirming care and mental health services
- Advocacy opportunities
- Fair contract and ordinance for union workers; equity opportunities
- Availability of bilingual municipal, state, or federal documents
- Community investment and affordable housing
- Equitable community development

Then, when asked about the evidence that would exist to prove the success of the Anchors for Equity Initiative, anchor representatives cited the following:

- Quality of life
- Negative pipeline cycles no longer existing
- i.e., prison pipeline cycle or narcotic, homelessness, mental health pipeline cycle

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- Longevity of diverse businesses
- Sustainable, open, successful

Next, anchor representatives provided examples of the values and conditions that were needed to achieve the successful implementation of equitable policies. Some of the values and conditions cited are as follows:

- Hope and optimism
- Have the next generation be proud of the work that was accomplished
- Collectivism
- Sense of community and caring for others
- Resilience
- Perseverance, or grit
- Being vulnerable
- Knowing that you can be wrong, or being aware that you do not know everything
- Be able to be uncomfortable to transgress out of it
- Mutual respect

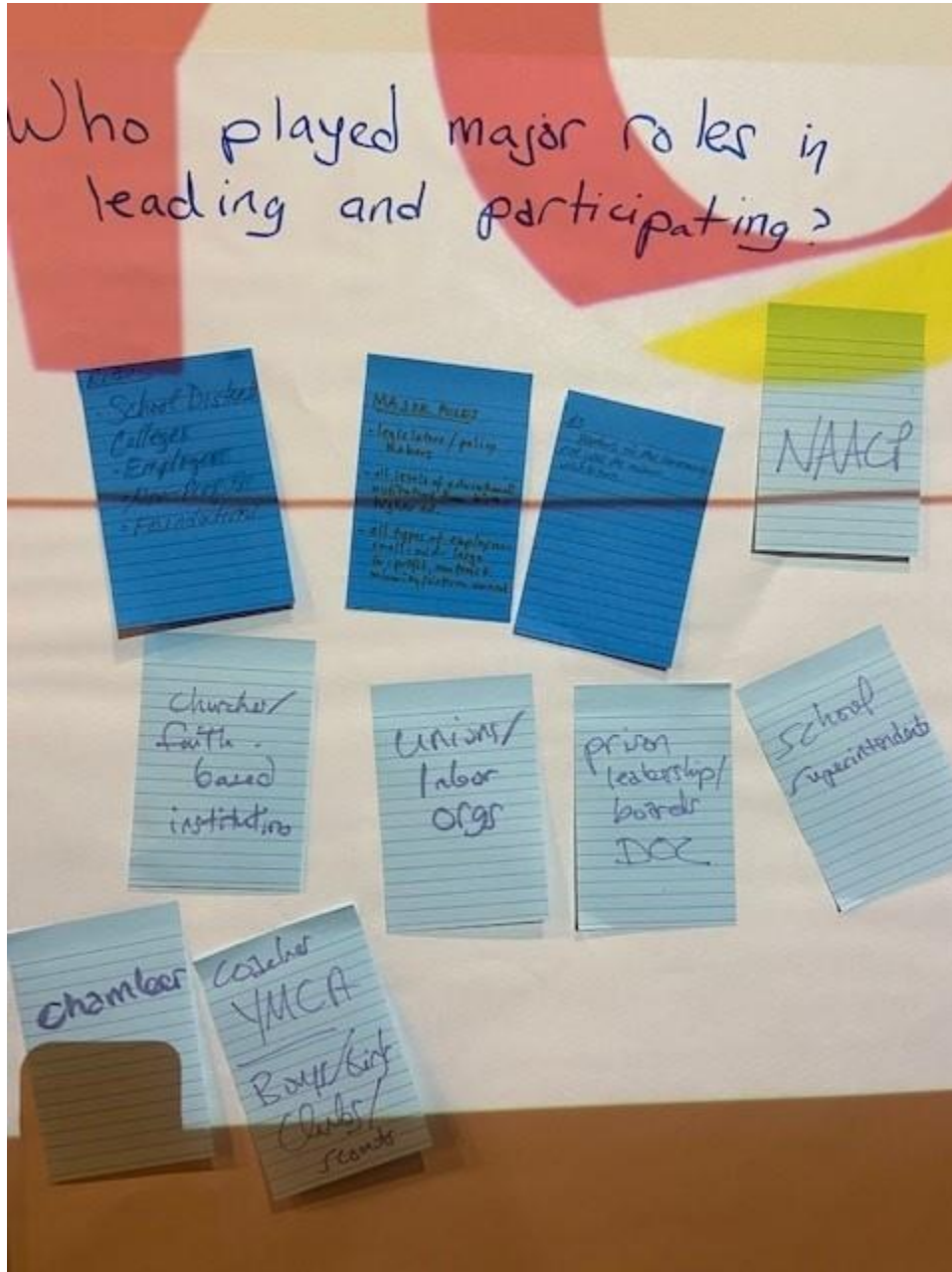
Lastly, anchor representatives named institutions that played major roles in leading and participating in this hypothetical process. Some of the institutions that were identified include:

- Chambers
- Faith-based institutions
- Prison leadership
- School superintendents
- The NAACP
- Unions, labor organizations
- YMCA, Boys and Girls Club

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## December 2023

Following up on the asset-mapping exercise conducted during the September session of the Anchor Economy Initiative, the focus of the December session was an analysis of the results. As determined in the September session and highlighted during this session, the highest priority worker personas include workers facing high barriers, working parents, and workers with only a high school diploma or GED. For context, worker personas are profiles of specific employee

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segments that detail their characteristics and needs. It is these worker personas, as well as mid-career changing workers, immigrants with limited English and low rates of literacy, and young professionals in the field of education that anchor institution representatives felt required the greatest assistance.

The session was facilitated by Sylvie Gallier Howard, Founder and CEO of Equitable Cities Consulting. This organization primarily provides strategic advisory services to nonprofits and the private sector. In addition, Equitable Cities Consulting also offers strategic advisory services, research, and stakeholder engagement, among other services.

To begin the session, anchor institution representatives were reminded of the guiding principles of the initiative and then participated in a simple icebreaker of introducing one another.

Following the icebreaker, representatives were informed about their responses to The Worker Personas & Journey Activity conducted during the September session. As a reminder, this activity required representatives to identify examples of prospective workers (those who are seeking or applying for jobs with their organizations) or existing workers. This collaborative activity led to the creation of worker personas that anchor institution representatives feel are not only seeking or applying for jobs but also face the most significant economic and social barriers. As previously explained, these worker personas include the following:

- Workers facing high barriers
- Working parents
- High school graduates/GED
- Mid-career changing workers
- Limited English immigrants, low literacy
- Young professionals in the field of education

Additionally, initiative participants were also identified high priority opportunity workers during the September session. Based on their responses, these workers include those facing high barriers, working parents, and opportunity youth. For context, opportunity youth is defined as young people between the ages of 16 and 24 years old that are disconnected from school and work. The initiative will be aligned to address the needs of these high priority opportunity workers.

Once these high priority worker personas were summarized and analyzed, the same was done for the assets that have the greatest likelihood of supporting these potential workers as well as their employers, which were also identified in the September session. These assets include the following:

- Support preparing for and finding a job
- Wrap-Around Supports
- Paid Employment and Advancement
- Financial Resources
- Community-Building
- Advocacy

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# The Institute

*Turning Information into Insight*

*A collaboration among Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Johnson College, Keystone College, King's College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, Penn State Hazleton, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, University of Scranton, Wilkes University, and the business community*

Anchor institution representatives then took part in a debrief discussion where they identified what is currently working well in the region. Notable activities highlighted during this portion of the session include, but were not limited to, collaboration among organizations, organizational leadership, and the presence of employee resources specialists. Specific organizations and programs referenced by initiative participants include NAACP, Connect Inclusive, and NEPA Rise. Additionally, they determined that there were numerous opportunities to do more in Northeastern Pennsylvania when it comes to second-chance hires, entrepreneurship, wage disparity, public policy change, and legislative advocacy, among other areas. Lastly, representatives were asked what questions they have for workers regarding these opportunities. Several of these questions included the existence of multilingual support, as well as what happens to diverse hires beyond the entry level of employment and what influences workers' retention.

At this point in the session, key themes were summarized by the facilitators from Equitable Cities Consulting. A positive key theme is the presence of many services and programs for job seekers and workers in the region. Conversely, negative key themes include the deficiency in wrap-around services, a need for pipeline development in the healthcare, manufacturing, and education industries, and the limited access Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) organizations have to resources. As for key themes that highlight regional needs, these include strategic, coordinated efforts to increase the diversity of the workforce and future pipeline as well as a prioritization of BIPOC voices in the decision-making process.

As the session was nearing its end, the 'who,' 'why,' and 'what' of this initiative was summarized for the representatives. As previously explained, the mission will address the needs of workers facing high barriers, working parents, and opportunity youth. Consequently, they are identified as the 'who' of the initiative. The purpose of addressing these needs is to ensure a high-quality workforce system, increase diversity and inclusion of the workforce and future pipeline, improve access to family sustaining careers for workers, and improve job retention. These ideal outcomes are defined as the 'why.' To achieve these outcomes, however, the 'what' must be defined. As explained by the session's facilitators, examples of actions anchor institutions can take to address the needs of workers facing high barriers, working parents, and opportunity youth include the reduction of barriers for opportunity workers, the development of worker-centered strategic partnerships and industry-specific training tied to anchor employment, the improvement of coordination across partners, and the expansion of work-based learning opportunities.

The final activity of the day was to have the anchor representatives define the 'what' of the initiative. To assist them in creating their definitions, representatives were asked the following questions:

- What will be the priority activities of this group moving forward?
- What will be the role of the anchors?
- What will be the role of partners?
- How is this accomplished while centering the voice of workers?

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General activities mentioned by representatives include the construction of a workforce pipeline by ensuring equitable access to education and job opportunities; creation of a comprehensive system of workforce development that attracts, trains, and retains a highly competitive and diverse workforce; creation of an inventory of resources and who provides them; development of an effective system of matching resources to those in need; and prioritization of measurement or evaluation of progress through research. Other activities include raising awareness about available services and career exploration opportunities for workers, as well as policy advocacy. Regarding the role of anchor institutions and partners, representatives explained that they can collaborate with one another to remove the barriers for unemployed and diverse individuals. Without these barriers, individuals can gain the skills needed to fill the positions of hiring employers while the employers themselves can develop a streamlined talent pipeline. Furthermore, one group of representatives felt that collaboration among public and private sectors was key to ensuring “all people prosper.”

Lastly, when asked how these activities can be pursued and roles fulfilled while also centering the voice of works, anchor institution representatives referenced communication and advocacy. More specifically, as one group of representatives explained, anchors and partners can engage workers to better understand their needs. Another group suggested centering the voices of workers and their lived experiences through focus groups and community research.

## **January 2024**

On January 9, 2024, leaders from Northeastern Pennsylvania’s higher education and healthcare institutions were invited to participate in a virtual workshop to inform Anchors for Equity. Participants were invited by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia from a list of leaders at regional higher education institutions and hospitals provided by The Institute. These higher education institutions and hospitals included King’s College, Misericordia University, Lackawanna College, University of Scranton, Marywood University, Penn State Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, Commonwealth Health Regional Hospital of Scranton, St. Joseph’s Center, and Maternal and Family Health Services. Regarding general findings, the discussion fell into three themes or categories:

1. Insights on forces facing healthcare institutions and hospitals in Northeastern Pennsylvania
2. Specific challenges related to workforce identified by healthcare and higher education institutions in Northeastern Pennsylvania
3. Issues for deeper exploration

## **Forces Facing Higher Education and Healthcare Institutions**

Higher education institution representatives described a distinct shift in student needs over the past few years, including students whose academic preparation is insufficient, students with more mental health issues, and students facing food, housing, and transportation insecurity. Additionally, with declining enrollments among traditional-aged students from the region, higher education institution representatives report serving more adults and more international

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students, trends that are expected to continue as the population of 18-year-olds shrinks. As one participant explained, “Our Master’s degree programs are majority international students at this point.”

It was also reported that STEM subjects and business majors are in higher demand than liberal arts subjects and majors. Another participant representing higher education stated that “if you look at business major enrollment and some STEM majors, enrollment is not declining, it is increasing. The enrollment declines are very uneven across majors.”

Regarding the healthcare perspective, hospital representatives identified a shift away from in-patient care to patient care that was taking place at home, in the community, or in other congregant settings. One participant asserted that “there has been a concerted effort to keep people from being in the hospital.” This individual went on to explain that this effort already has and will continue to push hospital-related activities to home-based or out-patient settings. Consequently, the number of people and skills required of the region’s healthcare workforce changes. Furthermore, it was asserted that conducting hospital-related activities in non-traditional settings creates more overall workforce needs.

During the virtual workshop, healthcare and hospital representatives also identified the needs of patients that go beyond direct healthcare. These needs generally included services related to mental health, translation, food, and transportation. As one participant asserted, “We’re seeing a more diverse population and a need for translation services. You can’t always have a male translator for a female patient, so this adds to the need.” Another explained that their institution is “seeing second and third generation patients in poverty. They are the working poor, and they need so many services and often can’t be served within traditional working hours.”

## Specific Challenges Related to the Workforce

As is the case with hospital patients or those reliant on healthcare services in Northeastern Pennsylvania, those just entering the medical or healthcare workforce are also in need of assistance according to the virtual workshop participants. However, in addition to services related to mental health, translation, food, and transportation, healthcare students need greater clinical placement opportunities. Hospital representatives noted that there is a lack of these opportunities for healthcare students, which limits the number of students higher education institutions can accept into these programs and the number of healthcare workers graduating with degrees to fill hospital and healthcare setting jobs.

Furthermore, with the move to reduce the inpatient hospital population in favor of care at home, there are fewer opportunities to train students in a hospital setting. In addition, with hospitals facing their own nursing shortage, there is a lack of nursing staff to oversee trainees. As previously asserted during the virtual meeting, conducting hospital-related activities in the home or out-patient settings creates more overall healthcare workforce needs.

It was also noted that COVID “broke” some of the student-to-work pipelines where students work part-time in healthcare settings. These experiences provide students an opportunity to gain a foothold with an employer. In turn, healthcare institutions are provided with flexible staff.

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Workforce pipelines have been one of the most significant concerns of regional anchor institution representatives, being brought up consistently in discussions throughout the initiative. Some participants felt that students' willingness to work has also contributed to the inefficient student-to-work pipeline in healthcare. As one participant asserted, "Today's college student isn't incentivized to work. Those who can afford to are focusing on balancing their stress and are not hustling the way students 10 years ago did."

In addition to the increased need for home-based care, healthcare, and hospital representatives pointed out that there is a growing need for community-based care workers in the region. This need is further complicated by the fact that these roles are also becoming more challenging jobs as the needs of patients shift. As one participant noted, "In a congregate setting you can have 1 nurse for 10 people and that isn't true at home care." Consequently, they are becoming more expensive for the organizations that employ them and families that pay for them. The one-to-one nature of these roles makes them expensive for the patient/institution and generally results in low wages for the worker.

Other challenges related to the region's healthcare workforce include competition among employers for workers and the failure of data on job openings to accurately portray where the job needs are in healthcare. For example, workers who "burnout" from one position in their respective healthcare institution transition to working for an alternative healthcare employer. Regarding data on job openings, there is a failure to provide a fully accurate picture of the need for direct support professionals (DSPs) and a variety of technological roles. The DSP position is not a role recognized and counted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The absence of official recognition means that DSP openings are not accurately represented, and credentialing is often not given for later college credit. Additionally, the role of "tech" in a hospital is counted separately by specialization (e.g., med tech; radiology tech; surgery tech; etc.) but they are similar roles that are all critical to running services.

Issues for Deeper Exploration for Anchors for Equity

Lastly, virtual workshop participants identified issues for deeper exploration. One issue is the clinical placement opportunities for both higher education institutions and healthcare. To address this issue, it was determined colleges and universities could accept more students into nursing and related programs. Consequently, this would ease some enrollment challenges. Healthcare institutions that need a variety of med tech roles filled are impacted when schools cannot produce enough of those workers. Future Anchors for Equity convenings could explore national models that exist addressing this challenge as well as policy solutions.

Another issue with exploration potential is the increasing need for care workers (at home and in daycare settings) as the population ages and the de-industrializing trend continues. The NEPA Healthcare Foundation has already begun addressing this issue through their Careers in Care program. This program provides salary and educational support for home healthcare workers. Anchors for Equity could explore this model and other models nationally for increasing supports

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for care workers to contribute to the attractiveness of these positions and greater ease of filling them.

A third issue that can be explored more deeply by Anchors for Equity is to address the identified mental health challenges for students, patients, and healthcare workers. These challenges had implications for all sectors of the community:

- Colleges are finding it more necessary to increase supports and reduce burdens on students facing mental health challenges. Some leaders felt that college completion was being impacted by students' mental health.
- Patients present with both physical and mental/cognitive issues, making their care more complex for healthcare institutions.
- Healthcare workers are feeling burnout but are also facing challenges of caring for people with mental health issues, including being physically and verbally abused by patients.

During the meeting, it was noted that Anchors for Equity could work with anchor institutions and community-based organizations to identify and develop more community mental health programs and services to address the needs of students, patients, and healthcare workers.

## **March 2024**

Anchor institution representatives, including those leaders who participated in the virtual workshop in January, were invited to attend a virtual meeting to touch base with representatives of the Federal Reserve Bank in March. More specifically, the goal of this meeting was to share what the Federal Reserve Bank was working on up to this point in time, discuss the direction of the initiative and the upcoming and ongoing community engagement strategy, and focus on initiative mission and vision work. As indicated in the table below, which outlines the entire Research in Action Lab Process, the Federal Reserve Bank is working with initiative participants to both define the challenges facing Northeastern Pennsylvania and focusing efforts to address those challenges.

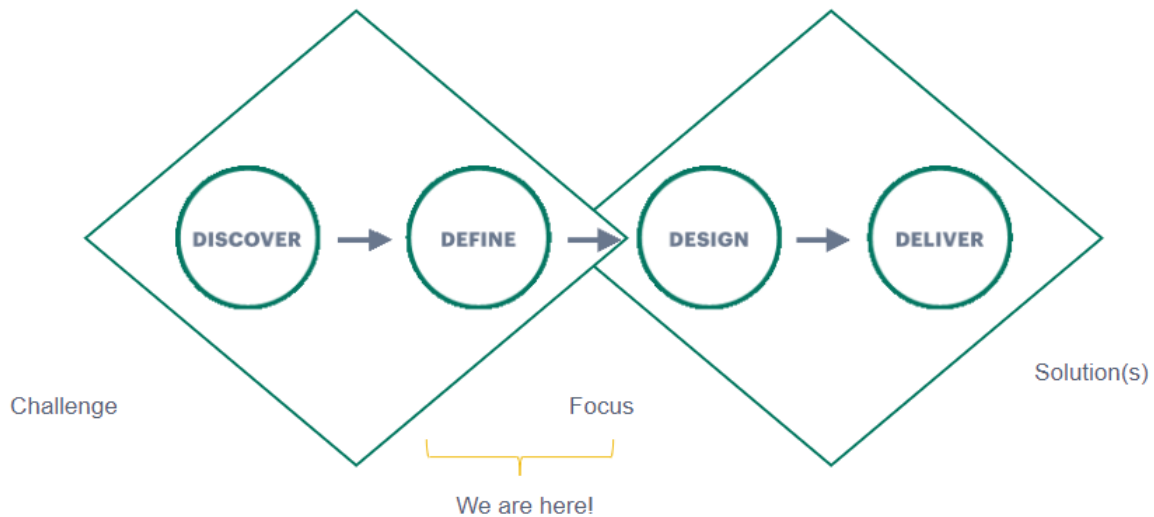
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## The Research in Action Lab Process



Meeting participants were then further updated on the progress Anchors for Equity had made up to that point. Activities already completed included the virtual meeting held in January and the identification of areas of need for the initiative going forward. Moreover, there was a particular focus on community voice and engagement. To identify priorities, which in turn inform next steps for the initiative, the Federal Reserve Bank analyzed conversations from the asset mapping exercises conducted in 2023, as well as those around worker journeys, missions, and vision statements. They then identified concerns that were raised around communities of color and the organizations serving those communities in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The importance of community voice was identified at this stage as well. Representatives from *Just Strategies* were then brought back to engage these particular communities in conversations to further inform initiative efforts.

The work *Just Strategies* was undertaking to engage with communities of color and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) serving communities in Northeastern Pennsylvania included being introduced to and meeting with community organizations, setting up a series of one-on-one community conversations, and coordinating with NEPA Thrives and their leadership around priority areas. These activities are part of a greater landscape analysis that was undertaken to better understand the needs of communities in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

As of March, the priority activities for Northeastern Pennsylvania as outlined by the Federal Reserve Bank were as follows:

- Center voices of workers and be informed by the lived experience of people

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- Multilingual career-connected learning opportunities
- Increase opportunities for diverse talent beyond entry-level positions
- Move from connecting to jobs to connecting to careers
- Policy and advocacy, particularly around credentialing and removing systemic barriers to employment

Lastly, priority problems identified by the Federal Reserve Bank presented during the virtual meeting were related to the increasing diversification of Northeastern Pennsylvania, the region's emergent workforce, and siloed resources. In addition, healthcare workforce needs were identified as well. The diversification of the region refers to the growth of the immigrant populations; however, they face systemic barriers to employment which hamper their social determinants of health. The emergent workforce refers to younger people as well as immigrant workers who struggle to find employment in Northeastern Pennsylvania. As for siloed resources, there are a variety of existing assets and resources in the region to address these issues, but they are isolated from each other. Furthermore, coordination across partners in the region is weak. Lastly, as immigrant populations continue to grow in Northeastern Pennsylvania, the need for multilingual staff and care workers in general increase.

At the conclusion of this meeting, next steps were identified. These steps included another steering committee meeting to be held in April and a presentation focused on community engagement findings held in June.

## **April 2024**

The steering committee meeting held in April focused on Research in Action Lab collaboration. More specifically, this meeting defined the mission and vision of the Anchor Economy Initiative, provided an overview of NEPA Thrives, presented opportunities for collaboration in the region, and proposed institutionalizing regional partnerships.

To kick off the meeting, steering committee members were reminded of the economic impact anchor institutions have on a region. Furthermore, the ways in which anchor institutions can partner to address workforce challenges in their local communities were outlined as well. After these reminders were provided, steering committee members were then updated on the Research in Action Lab Process. As indicated in the Research in Action Lab Process table presented the previous month, the Federal Reserve Bank is working with initiative participants to both define the challenges facing Northeastern Pennsylvania and focus efforts to address challenges. This table can be found below.

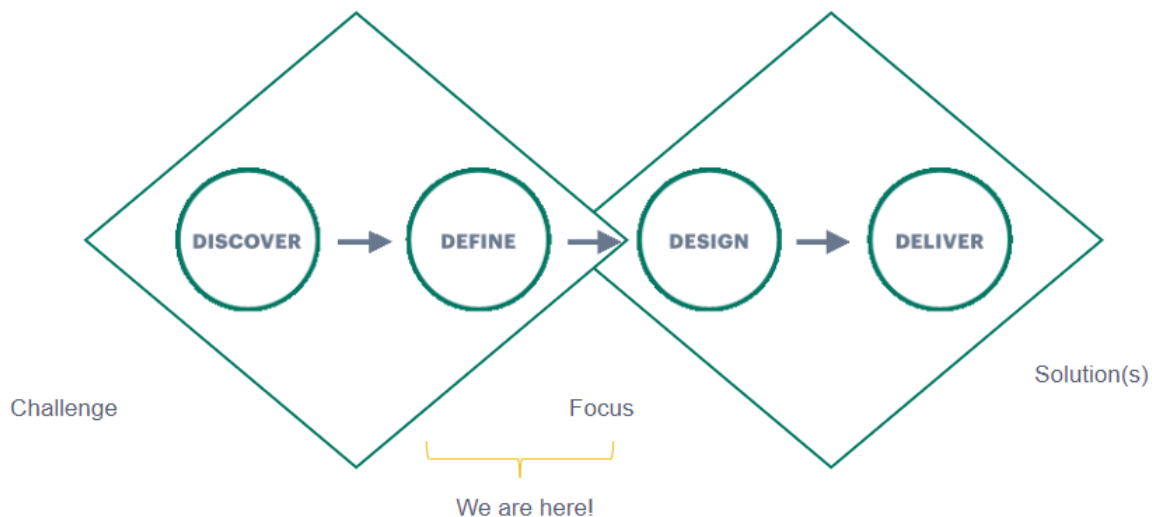
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## The Research in Action Lab Process



The Federal Reserve Bank then updated steering committee members on the mission and vision of the initiative that they devised in response to the feedback they received from initiative members and conversations they have had with community members. As stated during the meeting, the mission of the Anchor Economy Initiative in Northeastern Pennsylvania is to “collaboratively foster solutions with engaged anchor institutions that support NEPA’s emergent workforce to build careers with family-sustaining wages.” The vision is one where Northeastern Pennsylvania provides “access to careers and economic mobility for everyone on an equal basis.” Furthermore, job seekers will feel supported, valued, and empowered, and workers and employers will be connected and able to thrive.

While the priority activities for Northeastern Pennsylvania, as outlined by the Federal Reserve Bank, were similar to those presented the previous month, activities that address issues related to health care workers in the region were added to the list. The priority activities are as follows:

- Center voices of workers and be informed by the lived experience of people
- Multilingual career-connected learning opportunities
- Increase opportunities for diverse talent beyond entry-level positions
- Move from connecting to jobs to connecting to careers
- Policy and advocacy, particularly around credentialing and removing systemic barriers to employment
- Explore national models for supporting the mental health of care workers, addressing clinical placement bottlenecks, certifications for foreign-trained workers

Like last month, priority problems were identified by the Federal Reserve Bank during the steering committee meeting. These problems include the increasing diversification of

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Northeastern Pennsylvania, the region's emergent workforce, and siloed resources. In addition, healthcare workforce needs were identified as well. The diversification of the region refers to the growth of the immigrant populations; however, they face systemic barriers to employment which hamper their social determinants of health. The emergent workforce refers to younger people as well as immigrant workers who struggle to find employment in Northeastern Pennsylvania. As for siloed resources, there are a variety of existing assets and resources in the region to address these issues, but they are isolated from each other. Furthermore, coordination across partners in the region is weak. Lastly, as immigrant populations continue to grow in Northeastern Pennsylvania, the need for multilingual staff and care workers in general increase.

Once priority activities and problems were discussed, an overview of NEPA Thrives was provided. For context, the Scranton Area Community Foundation (SACF) established NEPA Thrives in 2021 to find solutions to regional workforce challenges, including skills training, digital access, literacy, and affordable, quality childcare. As explained during the presentation, SACF got involved in addressing workforce challenges through the NEPA Workforce Strategy Group established in 2019. This group was comprised of 25 leaders from every county in the region, representing a range of business, workforce development, education, social service, and civic engagement organizations and agencies. The NEPA Workforce Strategy Group developed its *Next 10 Steps*, as well as recommendations for what it would take to produce a skilled and versatile workforce that is both thriving and meeting the ever-changing needs of the region's economy. Furthermore, much of the work done by NEPA Thrives corresponds with the Anchor Economy Initiative's priority problems and activities. Consequently, NEPA Thrives was brought into the initiative to offer input and avoid duplication of efforts.

Towards the end of the meeting, participants were asked how they might collaborate to address workforce challenges. Participants expressed the desire to prioritize internships in the region at the high school level, as well as the college level. Furthermore, they mentioned the need for work-based learning through better connections with high schools. The need for high schools and higher education institutions to engage with business institutions was referenced as well. Moreover, one participant noted that these institutions must have conversations with families about career exploration.

Regarding the institutionalization of economic mobility in Northeastern Pennsylvania, a case study was cited by one of the participants in which The City of Minneapolis created an award to promote transparency in the promotion of employees in regional companies.

After this meeting, the next steps were identified. These steps included an asset mapping subcommittee meeting in May and the next plenary session in June. The goal of the June meeting is to share potential partnership opportunities, discuss what employer engagement looks like, provide more details, and share a launched asset mapping tool.

**June 2024**

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The June plenary session of the Anchor Economy Initiative provided attendees the opportunity to share potential partnership opportunities, discuss what employer engagement looks like, and give more details about and share a launched asset mapping tool.

To kick off the June Anchor Economy Initiative plenary session, a recap of initiative actions was provided by the Federal Reserve Bank representatives. Included in this recap were the priority activities of the initiative as well as the problems it is attempting to address. As part of the recap, attendants were asked to select one of the challenges identified by anchor institutions in previous meetings and discuss how a collaborative approach might help address it. Challenges identified during the session generally included mental health needs and misconceptions and lack of diversity among community college staff and students, as well as lack of care providers in the region. Some participants also felt that offering better pay in the region would help people overcome barriers that inhibit their economic mobility.

The second presentation of the day pertained to community conversations conducted by *Just Strategies*. This consulting firm was engaged for the Federal Reserve Bank's "Anchors for Equity" initiative; the purpose of which is to better understand the challenges and barriers, hopes and aspirations, and recommendations and solutions regarding workforce challenges from Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA) community members, particularly those who have not historically been included in education and employment opportunities in the region. To inform this work, *Just Strategies* facilitated a series of community conversations with community members, business owners, and leaders across three cities in NEPA: Hazleton, Scranton, and Wilkes-Barre. These conversations took place between April and May 2024.

Challenges and barriers identified by *Just Strategies* included growing disparities between wages and cost of living; persistent inequities exacerbated by immigration, language, and education barriers; discrimination, stereotyping, and harassment faced by both growing immigrant and long-time Black and brown populations; a lack of accessible childcare and transportation; children of color not being well-served by the education system; a lack of support for small business owners; funding not reaching communities and addressing their needs; and siloed organizations. Conversely, opportunities to address these challenges and barriers were also identified. Firstly, community organizations are already reaching out to communities to meet their needs or offer workforce educational programs. And secondly, community members have observed progress in the types of support and diversity efforts employers offer.

In response to the identified challenges and barriers in Northeastern Pennsylvania, *Just Strategies* provided the following recommendations:

1. Workforce solutions must consider basic needs
2. Provide accessible educational opportunities to community members
3. Facilitate opportunities to build community and community leadership

Small table discussions were held once the findings of *Just Strategies* were presented. Topics brought up for discussion included providing immigrants with qualified degrees and the tools to access the workforce, connecting with students earlier to address the pipeline to prison issue in

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the region, and getting the right people in the room to ensure issues are identified and address properly. It was also noted by a participant that organizations like the regional carpenters union are struggling to have people enroll in their programs.

The third and final presentation for the day focused on JobsFirstNYC, a youth workforce intermediary based in New York City. The Scranton Area Foundation invited representatives of this intermediary to speak. JobsFirstNYC's core mission is "to create and advance solutions that break down barriers and transform the systems supporting young adults and their communities in the pursuit of economic opportunities." Representatives of JobsFirstNYC recommended that an intermediary be established in Northeastern Pennsylvania to continually address challenges and identify economic opportunities to improve regional communities.

## **September 2024**

The September plenary session of the Anchor Economy Initiative focused on completing the initial discovery phase and moving beyond defining current workforce challenges to the next

phase of the project – designing solutions to identified problems.

Representatives from the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia facilitated the September session. After a brief icebreaker, they reviewed progress to date and reminded the anchor institutions of the initiative's guiding principles. Then, the facilitators challenged the participants to change the focus of this and future sessions to designing solutions.

## **Solutions in Focus: NEPA RISE**

The first session of the day was hosted by Liz Finley, NEPA Rise Program Director at the William G. McGowan Charitable Fund, who reviewed the launch of NEPA Rise, an innovative collaboration between the William G. McGowan Charitable Fund, Johnson College, Luzerne County Community College, The Institute, United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast PA, and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. The program was designed to support people struggling with poverty and help them access in-demand career education. The goal of NEPA Rise is to get people enrolled in the program, through their courses, and working in their fields of choice in nine months. The program is grounded in research evidence and is currently available to adults in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties whose household incomes fall under 250 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Participants must have a high school diploma or GED to apply, and there is support for interested applicants who do not have either.

NEPA Rise is a rigorous program focused not only on job training but also on self-regulation skills that are often hindered by scarcity and trauma. Working through this is difficult and meaningful and is the foundation to creating real transformation and strengthening executive function skills. The objectives of NEPA Rise are for participants to obtain industry-recognized credentials for a sector that provides a living wage and to enhance participants' confidence, resilience, and agency. In the past two years, NEPA Rise has graduated three cohorts. Seventeen of the

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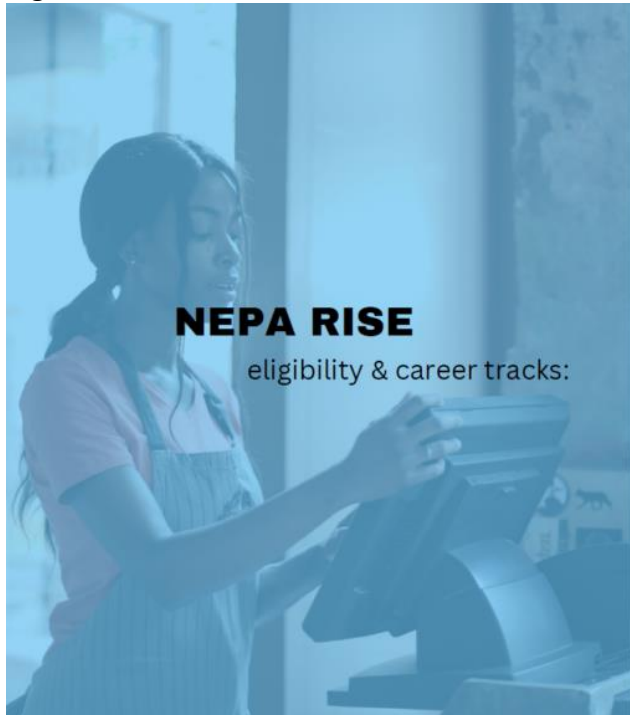
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graduates were in the medical assistant track, which had a 94 percent completion rate, the highest of all tracks.



**NEPA RISE**  
eligibility & career tracks:

**Eligibility**

- Adult Residents of Lackawanna & Luzerne Counties
- HHI 250% below the Federal Poverty Line
- High School Diploma / GED
- Desire to upskill / reskill for full-time employment.

**Career Tracks**

- Medical Assistant
- Computer Support Specialist
- Building & Property Maintenance
- Business Management
- Human Services
- Welding Technology
- Industrial Technology
- Diesel preventative Maintenance

A scarcity mindset is one of the biggest barriers to program completion. The participants have all experienced scarcity, which changes a person's brain makeup. Their thoughts often become tunneled to their most immediate need (rent, groceries, utilities). Someone focused on feeding their family will struggle to learn. These challenges are addressed by layering in extra tutoring and academic support, as well as regular support and conversations about how what they are experiencing is normal. Liz shared the Executive Skills Questionnaire that NEPA Rise uses to help identify participants' strengths and weaknesses.

The next phase of NEPA Rise is working toward solutions for the following:

- Growing employer partnerships. They see opportunities outside the college network they currently engage. More partnerships allow for a better transition from being a student to becoming an employee.
- Program sustainability. NEPA Rise is currently grant funded. How will they continue this beyond the pilot program? They are looking at both public and private sector funding.
- Increasing referrals and community partnerships. They would like to work with more organizations that already serve the population. They are seeking to create a direct referral pipeline.

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Group discussion initially focused on the high school diploma/GED requirement, as many felt their clients would be great fits for NEPA Rise (if not for this issue, and the fact that it is a difficult subject to broach due to stigma). One attendee asked, "Is a GED really important, or just a barrier? Is it required for some certifications or because of federal requirements? Or is it that we as employers are biased?" It was suggested that employers go back and review their hiring requirements to see if they still make sense today.

The group then discussed what was needed to sustain and grow the NEPA Rise pilot. Items listed include expanding the network of employers, pressure on the employers themselves to support and sustain the program because of the benefits, and exploring state funding.

## **Anchor Workforce Collaboratives: U3 Advisors**

Tatianna Pinto Swenda, Vice President at U3 Advisors, spoke to attendees about the successes and challenges that occur when anchor institutions come together to address workforce challenges in their communities. Anchors and their surrounding communities have a divide in their aspirations, and successes for Anchors do not always immediately impact the community,

but the potential to drive change is there.

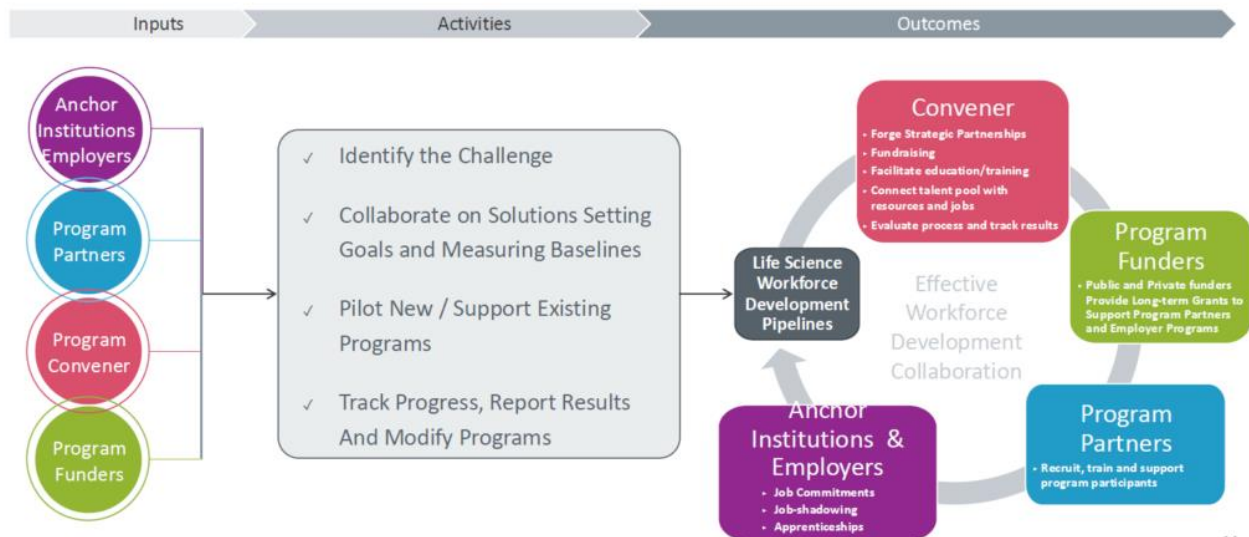
An Anchor Opportunity Analysis can provide insight into how anchors can work together by identifying anchor and community demands and how they can support each other. For example, there is a need for healthcare workers in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Opportunities to address this issue pertain to the growing immigrant population, existing educational and training programs, and a strong higher education community. Challenges include an aging workforce, transportation issues, labor shortages, and language barriers.

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## Workforce Development Theory of Change



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Tatianna then shared a case study of a successful anchor collaboration from Memphis. In the Memphis medical district, only five percent of hospital hires were sourced from local neighborhoods. The community was underemployed and faced significant economic challenges, with 33 percent of the surrounding neighborhoods living in poverty. As the anchors developed goals to address their hiring needs and the community's needs, each goal was tied to KPIs. They created the Memphis Medical District Collaborative and worked to provide wraparound services such as transportation and childcare. Each anchor guaranteed a percentage for the training programs the Collaborative developed and every person who finished the program was guaranteed an interview. They also partnered with high schools, helping seniors acquire CNA certificates as an introduction to work in the medical field.

One of the key takeaways from the Memphis Medical District Collaborative was the need to address culture issues and mistrust among anchors, who saw each other as competitors and not partners. The anchors had to work together to ensure that pay was equitable across the institutions, and also had to update strict background check rules, as Memphis has a high incarceration rate.

The larger group discussed getting labor unions involved in the planning stages for projects like this, based off the NEPA Rise presentation, as many of those jobs are union jobs. They also discussed the challenges that arise in getting hospital systems to work together, such as wage issues and poaching. An individual from the Berwick Industrial Development Association stated

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that they conduct a wage survey every six months, and they only release averaged findings. Doing so helps maintain anonymity and the Anchors do not feel pressured to share specifics on their wages, but they know if they are driving down the average, and it facilitates good discussion.

Participants broke into small groups based on their roles in the community (funders, workforce development partners, and employers) and were given questions to consider. Each group then shared the highlights of their discussions with the larger group.

**Employers:** All confirmed they are partnering with higher education anchors. They agreed to have the most collective impact, with need for overarching shared metrics to measure success. This will also help align businesses that see each other as competition. The shared resources/investment of the group should only be accessible when staying on track with the goal metrics. They also asked if NEPA Rise could help with alleviating background check issues.

## **Break Out Discussion**

**Workforce and Education:** Participants focused on hiring barriers, especially transportation and the need for a system that is reliable and convenient. They also noted childcare issues are often barriers to working and that there is a large need for after-school programming. Additionally, there is a lack of GED providers for courses in the area. The group discussed how to better serve all these needs. They liked the Memphis example of hiring very locally so people can walk to work but recognized there are a lot of workers commuting into Lackawanna County from surrounding counties, so any solutions should account for this dynamic. A participant shared an example from Massachusetts, where a group made a mobile training center to help meet the need in rural communities.

**Funders and Community Organizations:** Participants discussed a collective impact model and investing in “backbone organizations” to make sure someone is taking the lead in these workforce development projects (potentially economic development liaisons like Chambers). They discussed the importance of making space for these conversations to continue and keep all key players involved. They also want to make sure funders are encouraging people to not be afraid to try things, and that they are reinforcing the message that it is okay to fail because it helps everyone learn and do better. The funding approach needs to be diverse; it is not enough to pick just one because all of them are needed to keep things moving forward. Participants encouraged open communication because they often have connections to other resources they can bring to the table. They pondered the example of embedding opportunities in the high schools to get things on the radar before a lot of the barriers exist.

## **October 2024**

The October plenary session of the Anchor Economy Initiative turned the group’s focus towards looking at resources that already exist in our community that could be part of the solution to

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current workforce challenges. The day was spent answering the question: “what can we do about these problems?”

The October session was facilitated by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, who reviewed initiative progress to date. The anchor institutions present were tasked with reviewing currently available workforce development resources in Northeast PA to determine if they are meeting the community’s needs.

## United Neighborhood Centers of Northeast Pennsylvania

The first session of the day was hosted by Terrilynn Brechtel, Director of Community Education at UNC of NEPA, who first shared an overview of UNC’s mission and their major programs before taking a closer look at their Community Education department. Community Education at UNC includes adult education programs that include English as a second language, citizenship preparation, and job readiness programs. UNC serves every life stage through these programs, and is focused on providing the people they serve with a pathway to self-sufficiency and economic stability. Case managers provide comprehensive support and connect clients to wraparound services to help them achieve their goals.

## Community Education

- Adult Education
  - English as a Second Language
  - Citizenship Preparation
  - Language Partnership
  - Family Literacy for English Language Learners
  - School-Aged Tutoring
- Job Readiness
  - Barrier removal through case management
  - Executive functioning skills coaching
  - Leadership and Advancement
- Additional Supports
  - USCCB Preferred Communities program
  - Extended cultural orientation through case management
  - Welcoming Scranton



[UNC Community Education Video](#)

Terilynn then shared [this video about their services](#), which included client success stories. She highlighted the second testimonial from Wa Mwefu Leonard, who has a dream to work in healthcare after working in health clinics as a refugee after he escaped the Democratic Republic

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of Congo. After spending a little over a year in the United States, he is committed to his studies, both in-person and online classes.

## In 2024..

- 500+ English language learners from 70 countries speaking 20+ languages
  - 14 obtained naturalization
  - 30% on track for at least one educational functioning level gain
- 154 job readiness participants
  - 32 ELLs accessing components outside of language supports
  - 86 have obtained employment with 45 reporting at least 90 days of employment
    - Retail and Restaurant, Social Services, Manufacturing, Warehouse/Logistics, Welding, IT Support, Mechanics, Cosmetology, Healthcare (MA, CNA, LPN, CHA, HHA)
  - 25 obtained a degree or certificate
    - Human Services, Business Management, Industrial Technology



## Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18: K-12 Education as a Partner in Economic Development

Dr. Anthony Grieco, Executive Director at Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18 (LIU18), spoke to attendees about the various ways that LIU18 supports local school districts, and how education services can be a partner in economic development. LIU18 and IUI19 serve 40 school districts in our area and are focused on filling the gaps that school districts have when serving students, and

helping students to reach their full potential.

LIU18 sees many opportunities to partner with the community on economic and workforce development, as outlined in the slides above. In addition to the services that help students prepare for a future career, they also offer a variety of professional development services to school districts, as well as services that can help professionals who want to transition into a teaching career.

Dr. Grieco outlined areas LIU18 wants to develop, including partnering with more local businesses for mentorship and internship opportunities for students interested in certain career pathways. He also strongly encouraged support of more robust career counseling in schools, because guidance counselors often cannot provide the level of career counseling their students need.

## Hazleton Integration Project

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The final speaker of the day was Rossanna Gabriel, the Executive Director of Hazleton Integration Project. For the last ten years, HIP has provided educational, cultural, and athletic opportunities for economically underserved children in the Hazleton area. As Rossanna put it, however, they never say no to a need from their community. They started with a bilingual Pre-K, which expanded to include an after-school program that currently has 80 children enrolled. They also provide ESL support and citizenship classes to adult learners, GED support and basic computer classes.

## HIP Programs

### On a Regular:

- Pre k program
- Afterschool
- Summer camp
- HIP Corp
- Future U-College preparation
- English classes for adults
- Ged in Spanish, for adults
- Computer lessons for adults
- Spanish Classes for adults
- Citizenship classes
- Basketball (weekdays and weekends)



### Current Special Programs:

- Guitar Classes- grant through Quinn foundation
- Immunizations, Medical physicals exam for children with no insurance
- COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing
- Thanksmas
- Shop with the Cops
- Gift Home Delivery Program
- Work-study and Internships collaboration with # colleges
- Food Insecurity project:
- Weekly Food Distribution, dinner for kids, Community dinner, Fork Over Love

### Awards:

- Latino Pride Award
- Community Service for Peace and Justice
- The Renewal Award
- GH Charitable Organization of the Year
- Outstanding Dominican Excelling Abroad



During the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, they began doing food distribution, which maxed out at 550 food boxes a week. They expanded their health initiatives to include vaccinations for children, in partnership with Geisinger and The Wright Center. They continue to provide food to the community by partnering with Dinner for Kids, as well as a food pharmacy with Geisinger, which provides health foods for people with specific health needs.

Attendees were given the opportunity to ask questions of all three speakers, and the major question that arose was how they all get referrals and find/enroll participants, particularly with language barriers, and how can employers support their efforts. LIU18 mentioned community events, but also noted that they are well-known in the community and people proactively reach out to them. UNC is also very integrated in their community, and they rely on word of mouth and relationships with community leaders. They emphasized having bilingual staff and translation

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services on hand. HIP agreed that word of mouth is very important, but they also work closely with other nonprofits, and are currently testing out some advertising campaigns.

## **Break Out Discussion**

Participants broke out into small groups designed to help them identify opportunities for partnership based on three groups of workers: youth, immigrants and refugees, and adults.

### **Youth**

- How might we better partner with schools but also other youth serving orgs to better connect kids to careers?
- Build more systemic solutions, where schools automatically send their students
- Career and STEM summer camps can fail because kids often want the time off, or parents can't get them there. It seems like we need navigators to help parents and kids figure out what is available. The group mentioned some career day events with low attendance and wondered if it is a funding or a transportation issue for schools.
- Junior Achievement held their event at Mohegan Sun Arena and saw 2,000 students over two days. How do you fund that, and how do you make an impression on students?
- Is capacity a problem? An example was given of two students attending the two Scranton high schools and how different communication to parents is. Are high schools assuming students tell their parents about these opportunities, and they do not?
- Discussion kept coming back to breakdown of communication between schools, orgs that support youth, and parents.
- How do we help people better navigate the information they do not know?
- There needs to be a coordinator to make all these connections because messaging in schools is not consistent.
- LIU18 hosts Luzerne County Works website, designed to be that navigation. Even with a scholarship tied to student participation, four local districts did not take part.
- Are there funding or policy changes that would help?
- Criteria for accessing money is too difficult. Groups talked about hearing someone has money for their project but then found there are too many restrictions.
- Christine Jensen at CareerLink was mentioned as someone who is successfully trying to chip away at funding issues and get that support out there.
- Ancillary needs are important – we need to fund transportation, and even stipends for food and housing. Someone can't drop everything for job training if they must feed their children.

### **Immigrants and Refugees**

- How might we better provide supportive services for individuals who are immigrants or refugees in or interested in the care economy?
- Catholic World Services brought in, identified services needed that include transportation costs, pay back services, warm handoffs to community members, help with ESL and

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education, help filing out applications. Need a way to connect navigation assistance to care centers.

- Credentials earned in other countries do not always transfer. Are there wrap around supports to facilitate transfer?
- Language is the biggest barrier to having credentials recognized.
- Ways to create workforce opportunities for immigrants: bilingual managers, offer above services on site with employers.
- How might we improve career pathways for immigrants and refugees in care jobs?
- Address the area's transportation issues.
- Wrap around services like those provided by RISE.
- Geisinger has buses and transportation available. Can the program be expanded or adjusted?
- What policies can impact opportunities for immigrants and refugees so they can better connect to care jobs?
- How do we help kids get status for college if they do not have a social security number?
- Policy recommendation for Pennsylvania: eliminate the need for a Social Security Number to get a driver's license in New York or New Jersey.
- Top focus needs to be getting an official identification and transportation assistance.

## **Adults**

- How can we support adults returning to work or individuals who have been out of the workforce for a long time?
- Adult jobseekers may need refresher courses on interview skills and other work skills (Excel, Outlook, understanding online applications, time management skills)
- Better transportation options.
- Offer more flexible scheduling to help with transportation and childcare issues
- Employers need to do more outreach to show open positions, or adults looking to return to work need someone to push them to apply.
- Are often finding jobs via word of mouth.
- Other barriers adult job seekers are facing include:
- Unresponsive HR staff.
- Online job applications are often cumbersome.
- What could help?
- Career advancement opportunities.
- Help with transportation – bus passes, carpooling organization.
- Employers having staff that are representative of the community they want to hire from.
- Peer mentors.

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