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# Philanthropy Perspectives

*Philanthropy Perspectives is a platform to lift up thought leadership from the field. In select editions of the Weekly Download, guest contributors share their insights on philanthropic issues, innovative ideas and best practices from the sector.*

## **Supporting Job Seekers Facing Multiple Barriers to Work**

A new report by the Workforce Intelligence Network (WIN) for Southeast Michigan is providing a clearer picture of barriers facing Detroiters in our workforce system.

The McGregor Fund commissioned this comprehensive work with WIN in 2017 as they sought to learn more about the “various facets of the workforce system, focusing on the experience of a job seeker living in poverty and facing multiple barriers to employment,” in alignment with the fund’s economic mobility work.

"As a funder deeply curious about and committed to lifting up solutions to the 40 percent poverty rate in our city, McGregor Fund saw that WIN would be able to answer some of the most pressing questions we have about the network of providers and approaches

for connecting jobseekers to work," Kate Levin Markel, president of the McGregor Fund said.

After extensive research and interviews WIN and the McGregor Fund are sharing the findings of *Supporting Job Seekers Facing Multiple Barriers to Work* publicly to highlight the resources and challenges facing job seekers in Detroit where "labor force participating is unusually low."

The report shares that only 61 percent of Detroit residents ages 16 to 64 are working or seeking work. Of those who are disconnected from the workforce, 55 percent do not have a high school diploma or certificate.

### **Research highlights:**

- The most common barriers to employment include safe and affordable housing, accessible transportation and affordable and accessible quality child care.
- The most effective strategies for securing and maintaining employment combine initial work experience, coaching and direct support for basic needs such as transportation, child care and housing.
- Coordination between workforce and other service sector networks, such as housing, are beneficial and much needed. The informal referral networks and relationships of each workforce agency become critical when assisting clients with barriers. Without this coordination, there is fragmentation for the job seeker.
- Public workforce funding limitations and eligibility requirements cause many Detroiters to fall through the cracks when it comes to accessing direct support services. For instance, some programs may offer work readiness resources and support but have very specific eligibility requirements and limited time periods for job seekers to complete activities.

Researchers say these findings point to the need for a person-centered approach that supports individuals, addressing their unique

needs as they look for jobs, whether its housing, transportation, child care, educational or training. The report provides a few recommendations that could help to strengthen the workforce system in supporting job seekers.

### **Recommendations:**

- Create additional data infrastructure in the city and the workforce system to allow providers to better document and quantify the barriers faced by job seekers.
- Increase coordination between the workforce system and other service sector systems, such as housing.
- Establish effective referral tracking. Currently, it is seen as out of reach due to confidentiality concerns and the resources required to set up and maintain such a system.
- Develop more research around the funding details by population to provide clarity on the resources available for job seekers facing specific barriers.

"Overwhelmingly, the WIN report confirms that successfully connecting jobseekers with employment opportunities requires going beyond skill development and also addressing basic material needs, such as housing, child care, and transportation," Markel said. "We'll be sharing other key findings and how our foundation is incorporating them into our work in the coming weeks. And while the report focuses on Detroit, we do believe that many of its findings apply to other Michigan communities and raise important questions for some of our state partners."

Want more?

Read the [full report](#).