

Executive Summary

About New Skills at Work

In 2015, JPMorgan Chase & Co. awarded a grant under its **New Skills at Work** global initiative to Westchester Community College to form an advisory group and undertake demand-driven research and collaborative planning for the Lower Hudson Valley region. The ultimate goal of this process is to better connect residents to promising middle-skill opportunities and contribute to the economic vitality of the region.

Why middle-skill jobs?

Middle-skill jobs typically require more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree. Good middle-skill jobs are a gateway that can lead people out of lower paying jobs into fields with better pay and prospects.

In order to access these jobs, people need education and training that is truly aligned with what employers say they need, now and in the future. Jobs that might once have required a high school education are becoming more sophisticated and now require higher-level skills, including communication and customer service, presentation, analytic, and computer skills. In practically every field, these higher-level skills and at least an associate degree are essential to advancing into management positions.

Why the Lower Hudson Valley?

The Lower Hudson Valley, comprised of Westchester, Rockland, and Putnam counties, has 1.4 million residents and a robust, diversified economy with more than half a million jobs. It feeds and is fed by the economies of New York City, Connecticut, New Jersey, and the Hudson Valley. It has a diverse population with tremendous capacity and potential.

Nonetheless, more can be done to leverage the talents of all segments of the population to make the economy function even better. The population is aging. One in five residents is bilingual, including most of the Hispanic and Asian populations. Still, some Hispanic and Asian residents do not speak English fluently. Sensitivity to cultural diversity and multilingualism are key ingredients in providing good service and care in many industries that are central to the regional economy.

Why now?

In order for the Lower Hudson Valley to continue to thrive, local employers must be able to rely on talent drawn from the workforce in the region. The education and workforce community must work collaboratively with industry to align the skills of the workforce with the needs of the workplace. Residents will directly benefit from increased earnings and better career potential, regional businesses will be able to find qualified candidates more easily, and the Lower Hudson Valley as a whole will experience greater economic participation and prosperity.

The stakeholder group convened for this initiative exhibited a high level of engagement and a spirit of cooperation to coordinate programs in a way that supports both students and employers. The stakeholders are well positioned to increase the capabilities of the workforce in keeping with the future demands of local employers and industries.

Promising middle-skill fields

New Skills at Work in the Lower Hudson Valley involved an extensive research process that included analysis of past, present, and projected occupational and industry demand; review of existing educational and workforce programming; and exploration of employers' current hiring practices and challenges.¹ In the end, three middle-skill occupational areas were selected for additional study: **Health Information Management**, **Tech Support**, and **Hospitality Management**. These fields include jobs that pay well, are in-demand and are projected to continue to grow, have opportunities for career advancement over time, and may not have an adequate supply of qualified candidates.

¹ See Appendix A for a detailed description of the research methodology.

Health Information Management

Accounting for nearly one in seven jobs,² health care is the largest economic sector in the Lower Hudson Valley. With an aging population and structural changes in health care delivery, this sector will continue to grow. As health care providers increasingly rely on electronic health records and related information systems, and as New York State and the federal government expand reporting requirements, demand for health information management personnel is also expected to increase.

There is work to be done to better align programs with the contours of employer demand. To help students and job seekers qualify for these jobs, stakeholders should:

- **Recognize that medical billing and coding are becoming distinct functions and jobs within health care.** Course offerings and programs should reflect this distinction.
- **Wherever possible, offer courses that lead to the certifications and credentials with known value to the**

² New York State Department of Labor Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2014.

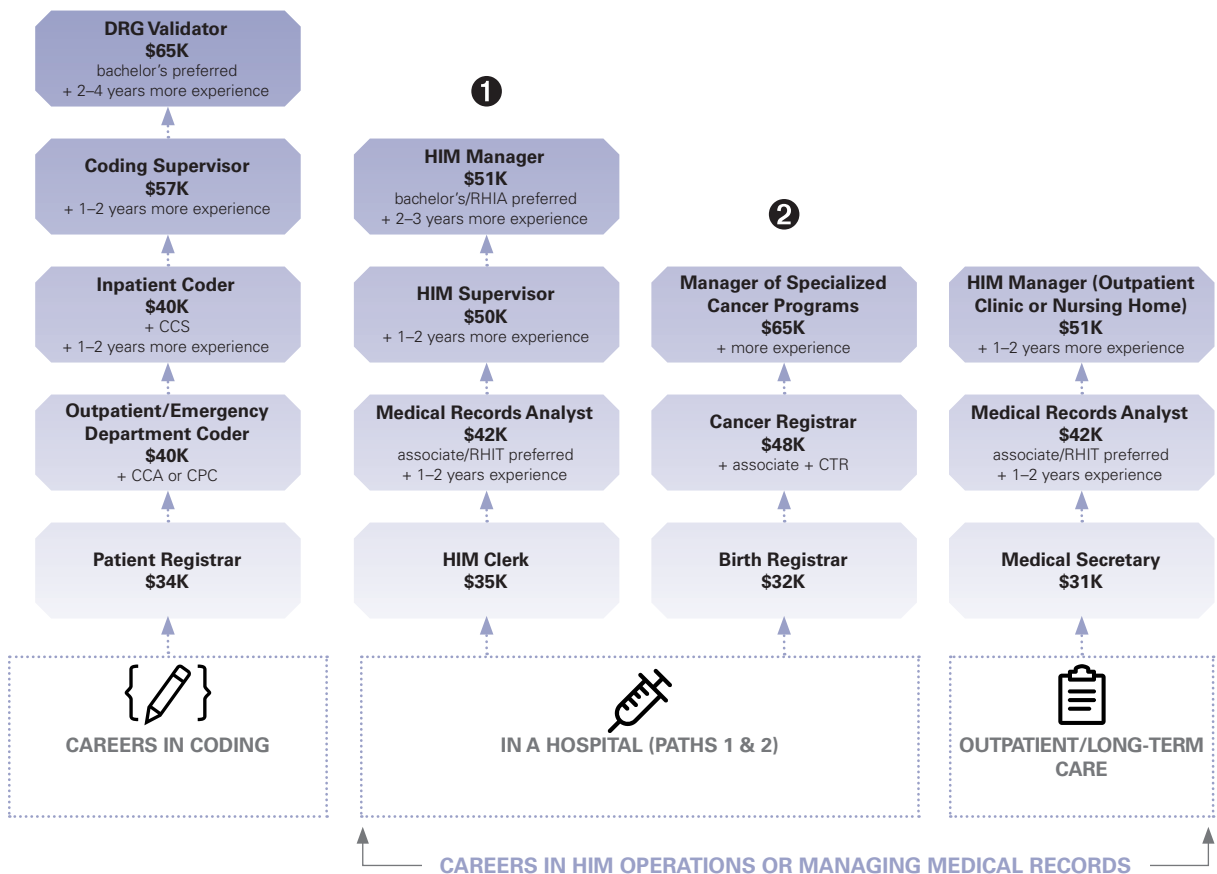
industry. Industry-preferred credentials, such as those offered by AHIMA and AAPC,³ are essential to landing entry-level work as a coder and helping workers compete for higher-level jobs in health information management.

- **Help students get hands-on experience.** Practical experience is highly marketable, but difficult to achieve in the classroom. Efforts must be made to find vehicles for this type of experience.
- **Consider offering an associate degree program accredited by CAHIIM⁴ that leads to AHIMA's highly marketable Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) credential.** Apart from an online program offered by a private university, there are no associate degree programs accredited by CAHIIM leading to the RHIT credential in the Lower Hudson Valley.

³ AHIMA is the American Health Information Management Association. AAPC is American Academy of Professional Coders.

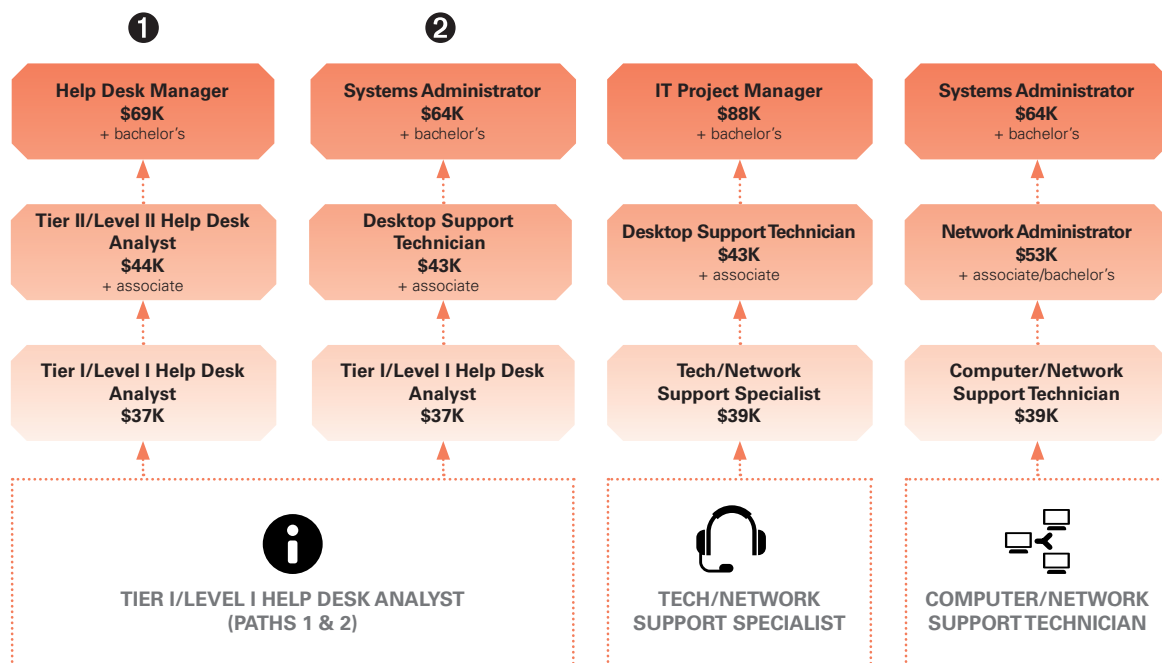
⁴ CAHIIM is the Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education.

HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGEMENT CAREER PATHS



Pay figures reflect median wages, which were supplied by Payscale.com and represent self-reported earnings in Westchester County, New York.

TECH SUPPORT CAREER PATHS



Pay figures reflect median wages, which were supplied by Payscale.com and represent self-reported earnings in Westchester County, New York.

Tech Support

Tech support jobs were selected for attention because they pay well, are projected to increase and typically require a middle-skill level of education. These jobs demand a combination of technical and interpersonal skills that employers are having difficulty finding. Plus, with more education and experience, tech support workers can pursue promising career pathways in several technology disciplines.

To help students and job seekers qualify for these jobs, stakeholders should:

- *Offer programs that lead to an industry-recognized technical certification, such as the vendor-neutral CompTIA A+ or Network + certification*, both of which give candidates an advantage in securing employment. Some of the programs being offered did not lead to any certifications or credentials.
- *Include hands-on experience in their courses.* All employers look for people with more than “textbook” knowledge. Students should have practice actually troubleshooting hardware and software issues.
- *Find a way to teach more than the technical skills, and give students practice working with computer users to resolve their computer issues.* Getting a job, keeping it, and advancing into a career often hinge on good communication and interpersonal skills.
- *Incorporate the fundamental principles of computing into entry-level courses* to help prepare students for career advancement beyond tech support.
- *Encourage people in entry-level tech support jobs to continue their education* for an associate, and then a bachelor’s degree, both of which will enhance their career prospects.

Hospitality Management

The leisure and hospitality sector is a substantial and growing part of the Lower Hudson Valley economy. Over the last 10 years, this sector grew at a faster rate and added more jobs than any other part of the regional economy. Within the last four years, job growth has been especially robust. Looking forward, this momentum is expected to continue.

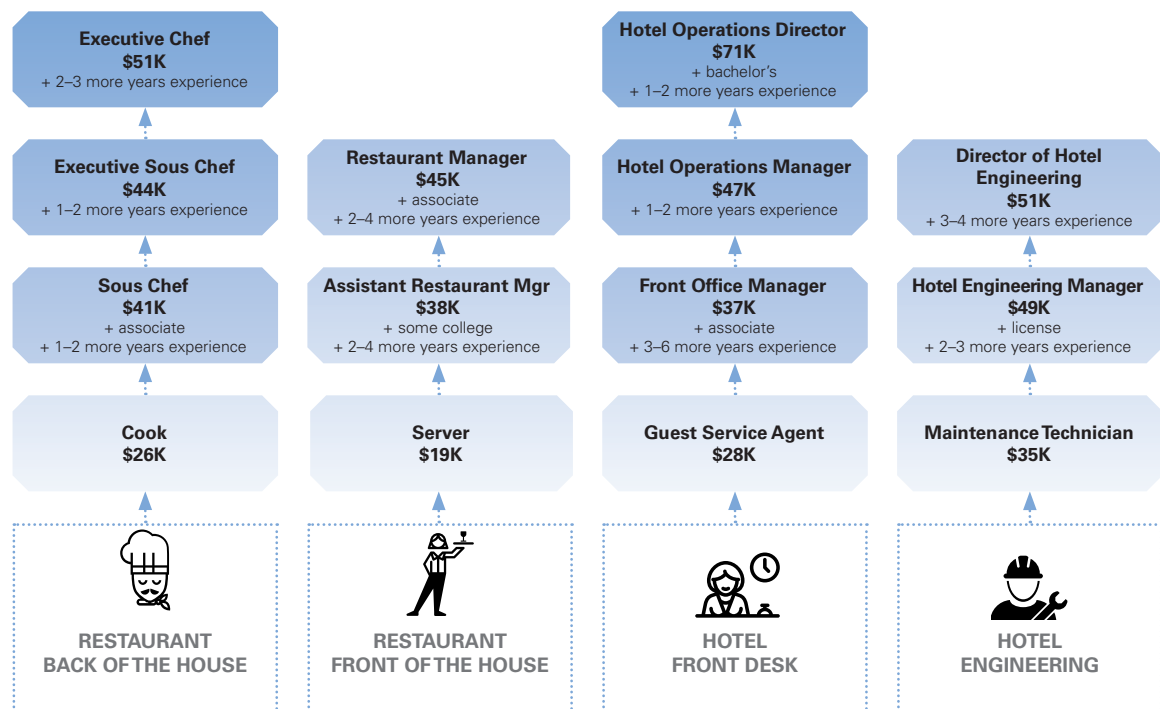
People who work in this field provide a range of services to customers and guests. With more education and experience, middle-skill jobs offer pathways into management and other higher-skilled positions. Many hospitality businesses actively invest in their employees and promote from within.

To help students and job seekers qualify for these jobs, stakeholders should:

- *Consider broadening culinary and food service administration programs to cover the larger hospitality field*, which would position students for management work in all types of hospitality businesses, such as restaurants, full and limited service hotels, country clubs, casinos, fitness centers, and amusement areas.

- *Focus on developing customer service and teamwork skills as well as the more technical business skills*, such as accounting, business planning, and sales.
- *Include an internship or experiential learning component* to any hospitality program. This will give students the work experience that employers prefer.
- *Seek opportunities to partner with employers or industry associations to upgrade their current workforces.*
Hospitality employers are selective and many want to promote from within. In order to qualify for these opportunities, their employees may need to first develop additional skills or receive more education.

HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT CAREER PATHS



Pay figures reflect median wages, as reported by New York State Department of Labor for the Hudson Valley, where available. Otherwise, the data was supplied by Payscale.com and represents self-reported earnings in Westchester County, New York.

General recommendations and next steps

The stage is set for the partners and stakeholders to continue the important work initiated with this **New Skills at Work** project. Stakeholders should:

- **Keep abreast of industry trends and practices in all of the occupations and industries for which students and job seekers are being prepared.** There are tremendous benefits to keeping current with emerging business trends and employer practices. This information should be used to keep course and program offerings up to date and aligned with industry needs and standards.
- **Create or take advantage of industry-education partnerships especially in health care, IT, and hospitality.** A closer relationship with employers and industry organizations can lead to more work-based learning opportunities, internships, and other types of support from the business community.
- **Coordinate educational offerings regionally to avoid overcapacity in some areas and under-capacity in others,** and improve the articulation from one level of training and education to the next.
- **Prepare bilingual staff for service industries.** In industries such as health care and hospitality, there is a growing need for bilingual staff. As the Lower Hudson Valley resident population continues to diversify, the workforce must be able to understand and meet patient and customer needs.
- **Infuse interpersonal skills into offerings across disciplines.** Across all industries, employers mentioned the importance of good interpersonal skills, which are valued for almost every job. Good interpersonal skills also include cultural sensitivity. Teaching these skills could take the form of contextualized learning, simulated work environments, practice in real work situations, or other approaches.

- **Be creative in engaging students to continue their education, even after they start working.** This involves thoughtful strategies for outreach, especially to those that may be underrepresented in higher education. Additional career planning and counseling is needed, as is a greater emphasis on contextualized and experiential learning that will prepare students for the workplaces they would like to enter or progress in.

The findings in this report underscore the fact that more education yields better employment and career prospects. Increasingly, a bachelor's degree is becoming the standard for advancement across the labor market. Educators and workforce practitioners at all levels should make it convenient for working adults to continue their education and they should use instructional techniques and practices that energize students.

- **Maintain the stakeholder group** convened for this initiative.

New Skills at Work in the Lower Hudson Valley not only provides a blueprint for strengthening middle-skill opportunities in selected occupations, but it also offers a platform for continued collaboration among education, business, and government representatives who have shared interests in strengthening regional employment pipelines.