



Our regional jobs recovery needs your support. Here's why | Opinion

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September is National Workforce Development Month, which was created to raise awareness about the importance of developing a robust and highly skilled workforce for the benefit of both the local and national economy.

More than 8.5 million Americans lost their job during the 2008-2009 Great Recession. The U.S. spent \$831 billion in stimulus funds to help the economy and jobs market recover. It marked the beginning of one of the longest stretches of economic growth and the creation of 22 million jobs between November 2009 and February 2020. However, all the job gains from the previous decade were lost when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the economy one month later. Since March 2020, the U.S. has spent \$4 trillion trying to restart the economy and boost the jobs recovery.

The good news is 14 million people have already been re-employed and job gains have averaged 618,000 per month this year. Job seekers have responded to employers raising wages, offering signing bonuses and adding remote work options. And the number of job opportunities continues to grow. The bad news is that at least 10 million people are still unemployed or underemployed and many potential workers have remained on the sidelines due to childcare issues, health concerns, enhanced unemployment benefits and career changes.

The situation in the Hudson Valley region is very similar. The New York State Department of Labor reports that unemployment dropped significantly from 12.5% to 5.3% since July 2020. There are currently 60,000 people on unemployment and 33,000 unfilled jobs in the region. Another 233,000 jobs are available in the Bronx, Manhattan and Fairfield County. The return-to-work issues are the same in our region and are creating a drag on the economic and jobs recovery.

Fortunately, many challenges are being addressed. Schools are reopening. Organizations like the Child Care Council of Westchester are helping parents who want to return to work find quality childcare and access to financial assistance. More people are getting vaccinated and making it safer to return to work. Unemployment benefits in New York ended on Sept. 5, enticing more people to actively look for a job. Those who want to change careers can choose from almost 10 million job opportunities throughout the U.S. Additionally, Empire State Development offers well-funded programs and resources for employers and the Department of Labor provides a variety of services for employers and job seekers.

The Westchester County Association has stepped up to do our part. We've created the Tri-County Talent Consortium, a group of 25 colleges, BOCES, Career Centers, state agencies and nonprofits from Westchester, Rockland and Putnam counties that are working together to help hundreds of employers and thousands of job seekers. During monthly meetings, employers discuss their talent needs with members who then inform their diverse pool of 100,000 students, alumni and other job seekers about the opportunities and help them to apply. Between meetings, other job opportunities and information are shared, and recruitment events are promoted. Equally important, the Consortium is helping to create new talent pipelines between educators, training providers and employers as well as a regional talent ecosystem that benefits job seekers, employers, and the regional economy.



The Westchester County Association also created a free Employer Resource Guide with training, career service, childcare, housing, transportation, healthcare and other useful information to help employers recruit and retain talent. Additionally, we have a Workforce Committee in the process of creating career pathway programs as well as a Talent Council that addresses the growing nursing shortage. We are also seeking additional federal, state and foundation grants to train job seekers and upskill employees to meet immediate and future talent needs.

Maximizing our efforts and deploying resources now creates a virtuous cycle. Individuals get jobs faster which benefits them, their families and communities. Employers fill positions quicker, which leads to growth and more jobs. As the regional economy grows, the cycle continues.

We welcome your involvement and support of the regional jobs recovery.

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