Bridging the Gap:
Connecting Sunset Park Residents to a Changing Workplace

April 2020

Photo credit: Albert Vecerka

Letter from the Research Team
in light of the COVID-19 pandemic

We're proud to share our report, Bridging the Gap: Connecting Sunset Park Residents to a Changing Workplace. It is the culmination of research conducted between May and November of 2019 by Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow and Perch Advisors. When we began our research, we could not imagine the environment in which we would publish it; COVID-19's devastating spread through New York City has and will continue to have an impact on the City's economy, workforce dynamics, and social fabric. However, it is in this moment of crisis that the recommendations our report outlines are all the more timely and critical.

Over the course of four months, we interviewed Sunset Park employers, surveyed hundreds of residents, and spoke with our local workforce development colleagues. We found that many Sunset Park residents lack digital literacy and basic workplace skills. We also found that employers wanted to hire locally - but weren't connected to a pipeline of qualified, local candidates. Residents want better jobs with higher pay, but don't have the education and network to get them there.

With an exponential rise in unemployment, uncertainty around businesses' sustainability, and an increased reliance on technology to conduct daily life and work, this pandemic seems to have exacerbated the issues we uncovered in our research. The challenges that we will face as our economy navigates recovery are not new - but now they are affecting more New Yorkers.

The recommendations in this report - notably around building digital resiliency and industry-recognized skills and creating an ongoing forum for workforce development, local employers, and government partners to collaborate - are prescient. They must be part of the City's post-COVID-19 response. Without equipping the un- and underemployed with technological skills and direct connections to employers, and without a concerted effort between workforce and employers to communicate, we cannot begin to solve our economic woes. The digital divide will continue to worsen and New Yorkers will continue to struggle to make ends meet. We also know that these challenges have never existed in a vacuum. Rising housing costs, food insecurity, and language isolation are interconnected issues, and our solutions must be, too. It will be critical that nonprofits in multiple sectors respond and collaborate together.

In this challenging context, we hope our findings and recommendations present a tangible way forward that can help our communities recover.

Preface

This report was made possible through collaboration with our business, workforce development, educational, and government partners in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Thank you to the Sunset Park residents who shared their time and experiences with us. Thank you to the employers who took the time to speak with us. Thank you to the community-based organizations who participated in our survey and who opened their classrooms to us to survey local residents. Finally, thank you to the thought leadership and partnership of our local elected officials.

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About the Research Team

Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow (OBT) is a workforce development nonprofit that has provided job training, education, and employment placement services to youths and adults since 1983. Rooted in the communities of Sunset Park, Brooklyn, Bushwick, Brooklyn, and Jamaica, Queens, our programs aim to break the cycle of poverty and inequity.

Perch Advisors is an NYC-based WBE certified consulting firm specializing in economic and workforce development strategy and advisory services. The Perch team has a wide range of experience across community & economic development including business outreach and community organizing, small business services, event planning and production, project management, arts and culture programs, non-profit operations and programming, and inclusive community engagement. The firm's approach and values are rooted in the principle that connecting with people first ensures that communities feel empowered and excited about their engagement and impact.

New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) is New York City's primary vehicle for promoting economic growth. Our mission is to create shared prosperity across New York City's five boroughs by strengthening neighborhoods and growing good jobs. We do this by developing, managing, and implementing expansion and redevelopment programs that encourage investment and strengthen the city's competitive position.

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Overview

The Sunset Park waterfront has undergone tremendous growth in the past several years and continues to change in dynamic and unique ways. Historically a stronghold of New York City's manufacturing businesses, the South Brooklyn neighborhood is currently home to a diverse economy with businesses providing jobs in healthcare, construction, and manufacturing. The waterfront's recent economic rejuvenation can be seen at the Brooklyn Army Terminal (BAT), South Brooklyn Marine Terminal (SBMT), and Industry City (IC), where businesses in advanced manufacturing, garment production, e-commerce, technology, and more have thrived.

The change in Sunset Park reflects shifts in South Brooklyn at large. According to the Center for an Urban Future, job growth among creative companies, tech start-ups, and advanced manufacturers—what can be called the "innovation economy"—has been particularly pronounced. Across Brooklyn, the number of creative companies increased by 155 percent over the past decade, compared with just 16 percent growth in Manhattan. Similarly, employment in tech start-ups increased by 175 percent in Brooklyn from 2007 to 2017. And while manufacturing jobs in New York City declined by seven percent, Brooklyn experienced a net gain of one percent since 2011.[1]

Job growth in these industries within Sunset Park is expected to continue. BAT has grown from 3,500 jobs to more than 4,000 in the past three years and expects to add an estimated 500 or more jobs by the end of 2021. The Made in NY Campus at Bush Terminal, currently in development, will offer space for fashion, film, and TV production and is projected to create 1,500 jobs by 2024. Industry City aims to generate 15,000 jobs. Additional investment in industries like offshore wind will create opportunity for higher-wage jobs in renewable energy.

These changes have significant implications for Sunset Park's workforce in terms of job skills. Employers in both existing and developing industries have struggled to find and retain skilled workers in the area, and many Sunset Park residents lack the required skills for new jobs being generated in by the waterfront expansion.

To better delineate the gap between business need and local workforce skill and find solutions that close that gap, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC), the owner-operator of BAT and SBMT, engaged Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow (OBT), a nonprofit workforce development organization, to conduct this study. OBT provides education and job training in Sunset Park, where they also collaborate with Industry City's Innovation Lab on tech-focused programming. OBT partnered with economic and community development consulting firm Perch Advisors to build technical capacity and share expertise in economic and workforce development strategies.

[1] Jonathan Bowles, Eli Dvorkin, Naomi Sharp, and Charles Shaviro, Brooklyn's Growing Innovation Economy. NY: Center for an Urban Future, June 2019. https://nycfuture.org/research/brooklyns-growing-innovation-economy

The objective of our research is to find the best way to leverage the skills and interests of Sunset Park residents to help them qualify for the creative, technology, and advanced manufacturing jobs driving the waterfront's economic resurgence. With stable employment in the traditional manufacturing sector that has long sustained this diverse and vibrant community diminishing and local housing costs rising, Sunset Park's continued economic resilience relies on its capacity to connect its workers to growing sectors. Nonprofit, private, and government stakeholders must all work together to ensure that job growth along the waterfront benefits everyone in Sunset Park.

Our research aimed to provide answers to the following questions:

- How do community residents find and apply for jobs, and, once employed, what are their opportunities for advancement?
- What connections do employers currently have to potential jobseekers in the community?
- What is the experience of employers in recruiting and hiring local talent?
- What do residents know about the kinds of jobs currently being created along the waterfront?
- What education and skills does the local workforce possess?
- What specific skills or credentials do workers need to qualify for the new jobs being created?
- Does Sunset Park's nonprofit sector have the capacity to meet local job training needs and to connect jobseekers with local employment opportunities?
- What investments and capabilities would be necessary to build adequate capacity?
- How could stronger connections between growing NYC businesses and workforce programs be supported?
- What programs exist in other cities that create meaningful scale of underrepresented hires in similar jobs?

Not covered in this report but worthy of additional research are the topics of helping undocumented residents of Sunset Park find living wage work; the dynamics, cost, and feasibility of offering recommended trainings in languages other than English; skill sets, job functions, and training necessary for manufacturing/advanced manufacturing employment; and the role of the local public school system in workforce and economic development efforts.

About Sunset Park

Sunset Park is a diverse neighborhood in southern Brooklyn that is home to more than 126,000 people. (For the purposes of this study, Sunset Park is defined using the boundaries of Brooklyn Community District 7, which includes a section of the neighborhood of Windsor Terrace.) Nearly half its residents are foreign-born and have limited English proficiency—more than twice the rate for both Brooklyn and for New York City overall. More than 40 percent of residents are Latina/o/x, and more than 30 percent identify as Asian/Pacific Islander.

In addition, there are more Sunset Park residents living beneath the poverty level than on average in New York City. Almost 30 percent of incomes fall below the New York City government poverty threshold, compared with just over 20 percent in Brooklyn and just under 20 percent in New York City overall. Rates of educational attainment are also lower than average. Nearly a quarter of Sunset Park youth ages 18 to 24 have less than a high school diploma, 40 percent of Sunset Park residents age 25 and older have less than a high school diploma, and nearly 21 percent have a ninth-grade education or less.[2] Sunset Park locals are employed primarily in the retail, home and healthcare assistance, and food service sectors.

The South Brooklyn waterfront has a long history of industry and was once a mecca of manufacturing companies that provided an abundance of jobs to the local community. Over the past decade, through thoughtful investment and development, Sunset Park's waterfront has become home to a growing number of creative companies, tech start-ups, and advanced manufacturing businesses, including design firms, garment manufacturers, call centers, e-commerce/retail, and others. Jobs at these businesses vary greatly and include occupations in hardware and software, customer service, production, shipping, administration, web design, and creative work.

[2] Data obtained from US Census 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.
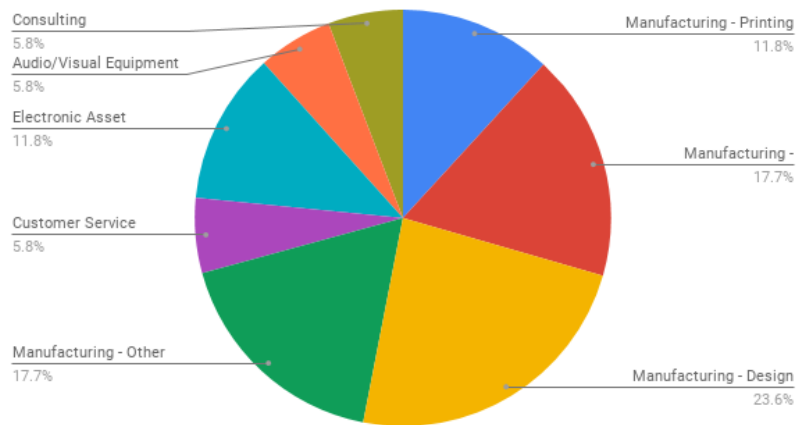
Data and Methodology

Over the course of four months, we collected data from the following sources.

Employers:

- 17 employers were interviewed in groups of two to four people and in one-on-one interviews (via phone calls and in person)
- Questions sought to identify the responsibilities of entry-level and other junior roles, how hiring managers found candidates, and how they made hiring decisions.
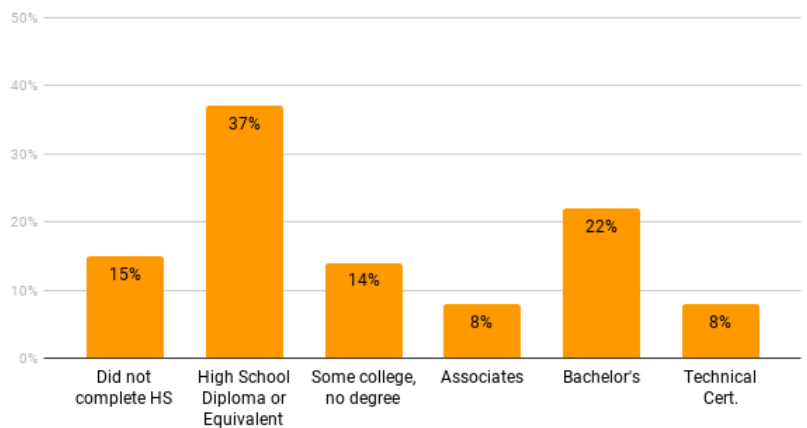
Employer Industries

Consulting 5.8%
Audio/Visual Equipment 5.8%
Electronic Asset 11.8%
Customer Service 5.8%
Manufacturing - Other 17.7%
Manufacturing - Printing 11.8%
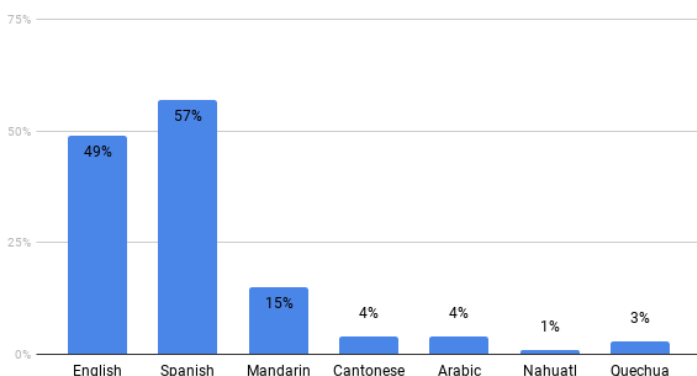Manufacturing - 17.7%
Manufacturing - Design 23.6%

Residents:

- 374 surveys were completed by residents attending Sunset Park fairs, trainings, English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) classes, and hiring events, among other events. The survey covered levels of education, current tech proficiency and usage, interest in tech training, and training preferences.
- Information on Sunset Park residents was also collected via publicly available American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimate (2013–2017)

Formal education & industry-certified credentials

Did not complete HS	High School Diploma or Equivalent	Some college, no degree	Associates	Bachelor's	Technical Cert.
15%	37%	14%	8%	22%	8%

Survey responders' language proficiency

English	Spanish	Mandarin	Cantonese	Arabic	Nahuatl	Quechua
49%	57%	15%	4%	4%	1%	3%

Ethnic breakdown of survey completers

Black/African American 6.1%
White/Caucasian 11.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander 18.4%
Latinx/Hispanic 64.3%

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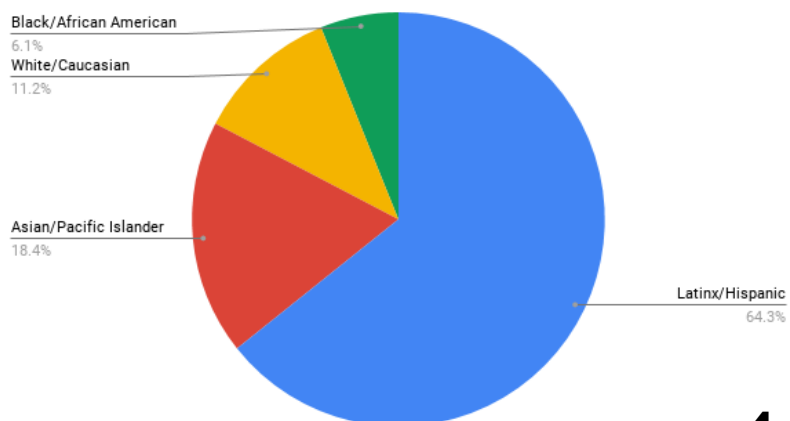
Sunset Park Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):
- Eight local CBOs participated in an online survey
- The survey asked questions about programming, communities served, relationships with local employers, and priorities for growth, with the goal of better understanding Sunset Park's capacity to provide workforce training.

Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow TechSTART program alumni:
- Four alumni of OBT's TechSTART program were interviewed through a focus group, a one-on-one interview, and an online survey[3].
- Alumni were asked questions about how their training prepared them for the tech workforce and what their experiences were in applying and interviewing at tech-based companies.

National Workforce Development Organizations:
- One-on-one phone interviews were conducted with six tech training and workforce organizations across the country that address misalignments between local employers and workforce skill sets similar to those we observe in Sunset Park.
- Questions sought to identify target populations and understand how training programs were developed and structured to serve them. Discussions also focused on relationships with employers, collaborations, program investment, and government involvement (both resource and non-resource based).

[3] TechSTART is a 12-week, full-time training program designed to introduce participants ages 18 to 24 with a high school diploma or high school equivalency to coding languages and Adobe Photoshop. Students learn technical skills in HTML, JavaScript, GIT, CSS, and Adobe Photoshop as well as general workplace readiness, resume preparation, and internship preparation with tech companies. OBT also provides connections to employment after completion of the program.

Broadly, the findings fall into three categories:

1. **Local Awareness of Jobs in Emerging Sectors**, which assesses the degree to which the local workforce understands the nature of and accessibility of jobs along the waterfront in correlation with employer demand and CBO's ability to train for these jobs
2. **Readiness for Jobs**, which considers the current skills of the local workforce, the needs and challenges of employers along the waterfront, and the strengths and capacity needs of CBOs, and
3. **Local Talent Pipelines and System Collaboration**, which diagnoses how employers and CBOs currently work together to meet employer and resident needs.

Local Awareness of Innovation Jobs

Residents in Sunset Park are often unfamiliar with employment opportunities along the waterfront.

Despite strong job growth along the Sunset Park waterfront, residents often lack awareness of what jobs are available and what skills they require. This is coupled with a perception that new job creation shuts out immigrants and other local populations.

An astonishing 67 percent of survey respondents said they had never been to Industry City or the Brooklyn Army Terminal—even when the surveys were conducted at those very locations. This speaks not only to a low level of awareness of much of the economic activity along the waterfront, but also a relative lack of knowledge regarding recent job growth and potential employment opportunities.

Engaging and educating community residents on local jobs can help dispel myths and lead to successful outcomes for neighborhood employment.

Data obtained from national sources shows that historically underrepresented populations in the tech industry often see employment in the sector as unlikely. Communities of color and immigrant communities often lack knowledge of the skills and credentials needed to enter the innovation sector and assume that all such jobs require a higher level of education than they possess. Several national workforce programs recommend outreach programs aimed at increasing awareness of such opportunities.

For Bitwise Industries, a Fresno-based software and real estate company, dispelling myths about local tech jobs among immigrants helped increase enrollment. These programs offer training and career coaching for tech jobs to Fresno residents, where 20 percent of the population is made up of first-generation immigrants, largely of Hispanic and Southeast Asian origin. Despite targeted programming often administered in the students' native language, students often encountered pushback from their families, who saw tech jobs as part of "white culture" and not as jobs for them. In response, Bitwise brought families into classes to demonstrate course content and engage the entire community, not just the students. As a result, Bitwise program attrition was reduced and enrollment increased.

Treehouse's "Project: Unlock the American Dream" serves a similar purpose. This initiative recruits individuals from communities traditionally excluded from opportunities in tech and trains them in skills needed for high-paying tech careers. Treehouse places participants in apprenticeship programs with major corporate partners like Verizon, Nike, and Mailchimp. Recognizing that lack of awareness of the job market in tech was a barrier to minority populations building generational wealth, Treehouse launched a marketing campaign to create awareness about job training opportunities. A major part of "Project: Unlock the American Dream" is a social media marketing campaign in which corporate partners are asked to share compelling images featuring tech workers of all ages and cultural backgrounds to LinkedIn, Instagram, or Facebook.

Employers need support to build a direct and reliable pipeline to local workers.

Employers expressed the desire to hire locally but said that they saw few Sunset Park applicants. They reported that many of their workers came from adjacent South Brooklyn neighborhoods and that such employees had higher retention rates, due to shorter commute times. This correlation between commute times and employee retention is especially true for lower wage and entry-level roles.

Many employers also expressed an interest in having access to organizations that could connect them more closely to the local workforce, but most employers had little or no knowledge of local job training and placement providers.

Readiness for Jobs

Growing job sectors along the waterfront see a lack of basic workplace readiness in local candidates.

A strong connection to local jobseekers is important to businesses. Equally important is access to a candidate pool with strong foundational skills. Businesses surveyed expressed a desire for candidates to show basic work readiness by demonstrating skills in math and literacy, workplace communication, critical thinking, and timeliness and attendance. Business managers expressed frustration that many candidates and employees in entry-level roles fail to demonstrate these skills. Several employers complained that lack of basic arithmetic and writing skills made it difficult for employees to be successful at their jobs, contributing to high attrition rates. Others noted that lack of workplace communication skills meant that employees often failed to communicate when they could not come in to work, which sometimes resulted in their termination. This ends up with a pattern where employees bounce between low-wage jobs, limiting their opportunity to learn.

Lack of English-language and math skills is also reflected in the educational attainment of Sunset Park residents. Forty percent of residents over 25 lack a high school diploma (compared with 19.2 percent of New York City residents as a whole) and nearly a fifth of those have a ninth-grade education or less. More than a quarter of Sunset Park residents speak English not very well or not at all—more than the citywide average.[4]

Employers say many local job candidates lack digital literacy.

There has been a dramatic shift in skills required by employers even in the last 10 years. Entry-level jobs now require a significantly higher degree of critical thinking and digital literacy. In one e-commerce company, even manual jobs such as order fulfillment require the use of handheld scanners and software to track orders. Other duties require the use of computers and scanners as well as apps and software like email, G Suite (Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Slides), Microsoft Office, scanning tools, and other applications.

[4] Data obtained from US Census 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

However, many residents in Sunset Park lack such skills. Nearly a fifth of residents surveyed said that they were not at all proficient in word processing and another 11 percent weren't familiar with the skill at all. One-quarter of respondents are not proficient in Excel, and approximately one-fifth don't know what Excel is. Of employed residents, more than half work in jobs that do not require the use of technology [5], such as food service and childcare, suggesting the need for retraining of workers who are already employed full-time.

For many entry-level and junior jobseekers in tech and manufacturing companies, lack of in-depth experience with technology is a barrier to entry.

Program graduates of OBT's TechSTART program, which ran from 2016 to 2018 and offered foundational training in coding languages and graphic design to young adults, stated that many junior-level positions in technology-based companies require mastery of at least one coding languages, and many require more than one.

Employers at BAT and IC interviewed for this report require familiarity with hardware and software. An information technology asset management company at BAT explained that a "Level One Technician" required basic hardware knowledge and the ability to identify different components of a motherboard and the internal parts of computers. A similar company at IC described similar qualifications for the computer technicians they hire. Meanwhile, a manufacturing company at BAT sought candidates able to work across multiple software systems.

One of IC's lighting manufacturing companies was hiring entry-level product builders to hand-build its products, but even these jobs required the use of product management software, G Suite, and other tech-based tools. Residents surveyed lack these skills, with under two percent of respondents claiming to be very proficient in software development and three percent somewhat proficient. Only 13 percent of respondents claimed to be at least somewhat proficient in working with computer hardware [6].

Despite this gap, only one community-based job training organization in Sunset Park offers tech-related internships that might provide learning experiences that allow workers to gain skills employers are looking for. Only one organization, OBT, provides tech-related training, as well, and it is a specific training in cloud computing, not in hardware and software skills.

Trainings need to be held at a variety of times and on multiple schedules for those looking to upskill into a better job.

Sunset Park has a low unemployment rate, but many of its residents work in low-wage jobs that lack opportunity for wage growth. Seventeen percent of Sunset Park workers are employed in food service (as chefs, cooks, servers, and other restaurant workers)—more than in any other field. Around 10% work in retail and sales. Other fields include administrative work (9%), manufacturing (7%), housekeeping/ maintenance (6%), medical assistance and home health care (6%), construction (6%), and transportation (taxi/truck/bus drivers) (3%). More area residents work in manufacturing jobs than in any other U.S. Census−defined neighborhood in the City.

[5] "Technology" was defined n survey as use of any of the following: computer, tablet/iPad, smartphone, Internet, email, or social media. Respondents were asked to choose all that applied to their current jobs.
[6] "Computer hardware" was defined in survey as "fixing devices, connecting machines to networks, changing computer parts, etc."

One in three currently employed residents stated they would be "very interested" in training in data analytics/Excel; one in four expressed interest in coding, hardware, and Word/Google Docs, and three in 10 expressed interest in learning Photoshop.

When asked what would enable them to attend skills trainings, 63 percent of respondents requested classes outside of working hours. Most CBOs offer training during weekday business hours, which may be inaccessible to residents who work hours between 9 am and 6 pm. Although residents' work schedules vary, offering training with flexible hours at different times of the day or through a combination of in-person and online training creates broader access for residents. National model research also indicates that hosting trainings outside of daytime working hours leads to higher enrollment and more successful outcomes. For example, Bitwise offers six-week courses that meet twice weekly for three hours in the evening, making them accessible for someone working a full-time job.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes are a strength in Sunset Park, but more classes should include work readiness and digital literacy programming.

ESOL classes represent an existing and stable entry point into new programming for the area's immigrant population. Half of Sunset Park's CBOs surveyed offer ESOL classes to the large population of residents for whom English is not their native language—as many as 1,000 individuals a year. However, only one of these providers incorporates work-readiness preparation; their classes have high retention rates and seats fill up quickly.

By not incorporating digital literacy and work readiness into these well-attended and consistently sought out classes, training providers are missing an opportunity to upskill hundreds of Sunset Park residents. ESOL students self-identify as having a lower-than-average tech proficiency but a higher-than-average interest in learning tech skills. The 58 ESOL students that responded to the survey reported less familiarity with every category of tech skills than the average survey respondent. They also reported a higher interest than the average respondent in learning tech skills in the same categories.

Multiple opportunities for training at successive levels of skill attainment ensure residents can access both basic and advanced skills, creating long-term pathways to career opportunity.

Surveys of residents show that respondents broadly want to develop the skills find new employment, while others indicated a specific interest in innovation economy jobs. Concurrently, all employers highlighted the need for digital literacy skills in entry-level and junior roles, and the need for scaffolding the acquisitions of skills in order to move into progressively more advanced roles.

In contrast to bootcamp programs, which help participants develop tech-specific skills quickly and efficiently, two national models interviewed for this study use multi-level programs that offer multiple entry points for trainees with different skill levels. Such a model allows workers to pursue entry-level roles after completion of one level, and return to the program to upskill once they're employed.

Geekwise Academy, a coding school fully owned and operated by Bitwise, uses a two-pronged approach to training: an introductory, light-touch program called Career Exposure and a more advanced, long-term career-focused program called Career Fast Track. Career Exposure programs are designed for people with a limited understanding of the skills and needs of the tech industry. The program builds basic familiarity with programming languages and web design and creates opportunities for work-based learning with local employers. For example, a student pursuing a career in design might take a six-week course in graphic design software. Many of OBT's three cohorts of Level1 tech training graduates use their new skills in administrative and clerical roles across various sectors and occupations.

In contrast, Career Fast Track is more intensive and is often a next step for Career Exposure graduates. Career Fast Track is designed for people who want to code for a living and can commit to a part time or full-time training program in the field. Bitwise's software company, shift3technology, hires directly from the Career Fast Track program, as do Bitwise's portfolio of software company partners. Geekwise is able to serve a broad population by offering both light-touch and intensive programs, where participants who enter the program with no digital literacy can go on to pursue a career in tech.

Detroit at Work[7] also uses a tiered model to meet people at their tech skill and comfort level. Detroit residents enter and exit program tiers based on their background in tech. The first tier focuses on the fundamentals of working with a computer, which prepares people for call center work, basic administrative work, and entry-level positions in the tech sector. The second tier is an accelerator program that teaches A+[8] alongside soft skills like customer service, giving participants the opportunity to expand their skill sets and advance their career, for example by moving up to a desktop support or help desk position. The third tier is an apprenticeship program, the fourth tier is an intensive tech bootcamp, and additional tiers are still being developed. This model helps participants access a range of skills to move up the ladder in their current career, or to move on to an entirely new career track in tech.

Career Exposure programs like Bitwise's and tiered programs like Detroit at Work's help participants create an individualized plan for success, allowing them to on-ramp at junctures that make sense in their career path and for their current work schedule.

Local Talent Pipelines and System Collaboration

Employers find local hiring challenging and are largely unaware of the role that local CBOs play in training and placing Sunset Park residents[9].

Waterfront employers—particularly smaller firms with less than 30 employees—are generally unfamiliar with the work of Sunset Park workforce development providers, who offer training to local jobseekers and connect them with available jobs. Employers agreed that access to pre-screened, job-ready candidates was desirable. However, all employers reported having struggled to efficiently identify and hire successful employees through employment websites and by word of mouth, two of the most frequently cited recruiting tactics.

[7] See https://detroitatwork.com/training/information-technology-training.
[8] A+ is an entry-level certification for PC computer service technicians. It certifies entry-level PC computer service professionals in installing, maintaining, customizing, and operating personal computers.
[9] The research team interviewed only those employers who did not already have substantive relationships with OBT or the Innovation Lab.

With improved awareness and collaboration, local CBOs can serve as a more reliable source of prepared local candidates for Sunset Park businesses. Employers that have worked with local organizations in the past found that the collaboration was most useful when there was a single point of contact at the organization along with a regular and consistent feedback loop. Employers want to impart the exact requirements and responsibilities of the jobs to the CBO, who can then screen candidates to find the right fit.

Improved collaboration between Sunset Park workforce CBOs and employers would increase local access to jobs and placements.

Half of CBOs surveyed that engage in job placement said they would prioritize better engagement with employers given adequate additional resources. Half of these same CBOs feel that they have good relationships along the waterfront but acknowledge that they haven't been able to place their clients with many local employers. To increase local placements, CBOs stated that they need more information about available jobs, the ability to provide job training tailored to specific in-demand skills, and more direct connections to employers.

Our recommendations include connecting employers to the Sunset Park job training community so that training providers can understand business needs, tailor training, and ultimately increase job access and economic mobility for Sunset Park residents.

CBOs reduce barriers to employment by providing industry knowledge and access to networks of program alumni.

CBOs and their alumni networks support jobseekers through informal knowledge-sharing of hiring practices and industry experience. thereby reducing barriers to entry in the tech sector. For example, one OBT TechSTART alumna with JavaScript experience who had hesitated to apply for a role that also required familiarity with Python and R was encouraged by her connections to apply anyway. She was granted an interview where she successfully communicated how her experience met the employer's needs—and was hired.

Another alumnus was hired for his current position at Google as an AV technician through the support of a colleague with whom he had worked. His co-worker offered him encouragement and helped him secured an interview by vouching for his work ethic and skill. These examples demonstrate that networks and social capital are critical to transitioning into a new sector and that training providers are important intermediaries between jobseekers and industry employers.

Similarly, all of the national workforce program models noted that their employer relationships provided them and their clients with insight into the hiring process. Many found that employers often overstated education and skill requirements in job postings and were open to hiring program candidates with a baseline of hard and soft skills training. At both the Treehouse and Detroit at Work, employer input into training design and talent-screening processes helped align jobseekers with both employer staffing needs and industry standards.

Recommendations V

The research findings support this report's broad recommendations to develop and implement strategies that engage Sunset Park waterfront employers in building a local talent pool and help employers find qualified candidates among local residents. These recommendations were cross-referenced with findings from the national model research, which shows how communities across the country have tackled similar challenges, to see which successful elements of these programs might be appropriate for Sunset Park.

The following recommendations aim to align resident job skills, local employment opportunities, and training opportunities in Sunset Park.

Recommendation 1 proposes trainings to bridge the skills gap between employers' needs and resident workers' capacities, including the following specific programming:
- Digital Literacy in ESOL Courses
- Two-Tier Work Readiness Bridge Programming
  - Tier One: Bridge to Basic Work Readiness + Digital Literacy
  - Tier Two: Advanced Trainings

Recommendation 2 focuses on raising the level of awareness among residents of Sunset Park of opportunities along the waterfront and pathways to employment.

Recommendation 3 proposes the development of a Sunset Park Industry Advisory Board to create an ongoing forum at which employers, city government, and CBO partners can regularly meet. The Board would ensure that training is working: that local employers are hiring from the increasingly skilled pool of local workers, that CBOs are able to access the information and resources they need in order to effectively design and implement programming, and that government is adequately funding successful initiatives.

Recommendation 4 proposes Sunset Park organizations involved in developing and implementing new training receive capacity-building support

Recommendation 1: Provide Focused Trainings in Sunset Park
To address the job readiness challenges revealed by this research, several targeted interventions focused on skills training are proposed. Curriculum for these interventions must be designed in cooperation with employers along the waterfront.

Basic Workplace Readiness & Digital Literacy in ESOL courses: The targeted intervention proposed is funding for digital literacy in existing ESOL classes. This tactic would leverage robust, high-retention ESOL programs whose students have also expressed interest in learning about technology. Programming that addresses language development while building foundational technology skills and context-specific vocabulary better positions students to advance in their current occupations or access other opportunities that may have been previously inaccessible. Programming would focus on basic workplace readiness, light-touch essential skills, and proficiency in office technology (Microsoft Office, G Suite, etc.). Depending on curriculum development, CBOs could incorporate class homework into online portals, use computer-based programming to complement lessons, and/or incorporate digital projects into class activities. However, there is currently no best practice for how to merge language acquisition with job skills training; CBOs and staff must approach new programming with care, for which adequate resources are required.

The anticipated funding for this training is targeted at approximately $9,000 per participant for a 12- to 16-week program. This includes a base cost for training (written and verbal language acquisition), plus the additional cost of Microsoft Office & Customer Service Training (students who successfully complete the training are awarded the Microsoft Office Specialist Credential). The Advisory Group, in collaboration with local workforce partners and experts at organizations such as the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), would identify the appropriate skill level for students to be most successful in this type of training. The baseline for our recommendation around cost and program design closely reflects LAC's report, "Investing in Quality"[10], published in December 2017, which speaks directly to the elements necessary for high-quality adult education programs.

Furthermore, funding must be appropriated for capacity-building. For programming to be effective, instructors and trainers at CBOs must be supported as they integrate office technologies into their ESOL courses (see Recommendation 4).

Two-Tier Tech-Based Work Readiness Bridge Programming at Industry City and/or BAT: Programs across the country show that offering multiple entry and exit points to skill-building can address communities' diverse skill levels and increase access to better jobs. This report proposes a two-tier model with two distinct programs: Bridge to Basic Workplace Readiness and Advanced Trainings. Although they would be two distinct programs, residents could engage with them in sequence if they chose to and depending on their initial skill level and long-term career goals.

Advanced skill-building helps people whose skill levels are just beyond those required for entry-level jobs, thereby creating a pathway into living wage work. The aim is to ensure that there is programmatic scaffolding that allows individuals to continue to build skills and increase wages.

[10] Embedded in their 14 Building Blocks are key ingredients from our recommendations including: program structures that take into account student's schedules to maximize success, curriculum contextualized to students goals, pathways and supported transitions to additional education/training and employment, organizational and staff capacity building, and integrated technology and learning tools capable of meeting employer demand for today's technology-based world.

These programs could be housed at Industry City and/or BAT, as 81 percent of residents surveyed stated that they would be willing to attend trainings located at these sites. Trainings would be developed through the convenings of the Sunset Park Industry Advisory Board, with the input of local employers who can provide direct, iterative input regarding specific skill needs and weigh in on curriculum development and effective training methods. Through participation in this collaboration, Sunset Park's workforce development providers could ensure that basic skills are acquired and that advanced trainings remain relevant to employer needs. The vision is that employer partners would also participate in networking opportunities and provide internships, work-based learning opportunities, and work-site tours.

TIER ONE — Bridge Program to Address Basic Work Readiness + Digital Literacy

This part-time program would last approximately eight weeks and take place during evening and/or weekend hours. It would provide instruction on essential/soft skills through a Basic Workplace Readiness course and incorporate employer-informed basic digital literacy, aligned with feedback from employers gleaned from this project's research. Feedback from the Advisory Board will be critical in designing real-world experiences and simulations, where participants can practice both soft and technical skills in context. An integrated approach focused on work-based learning experience such as internships with employers involved in the Advisory Board would help build skills and resumes. Skills would include professional communication skills, comfort and familiarity with Microsoft Office and G-Suite, and familiarity with basic word processing, Excel, and email. Embedded in this training would be additional instruction in resume and interview preparation to ensure that residents are both skilled and job-ready. At the completion of this program of newly redesigned courses or new courses built from scratch, residents would be equipped to access further training or get hired for an entry-level position in an innovation economy company along the waterfront. Classes could be held within employer locations, such as BAT or Industry City, or at adjacent CBO locations, in partnership with employers.

Funding: $4,500 per student for 20 students[11] for eight weeks, which would cover costs for one part-time instructor, one part-time work readiness instructor, and one part-time case manager, as well as materials and the cost of credentialing students[12].

TIER TWO — Advanced Trainings

A full-time, 12- to 24-week program would function as a bridge into just-beyond-entry-level jobs in innovation economy businesses or into more advanced training programs through OBT or at other organizations. Trainings would be in various sectors such as tech, advanced manufacturing, and/or green jobs. This program would require participants to have a high school diploma, and either experience, advanced coursework, or strong interest in pursuing a career in one of these innovation sectors. Given the expectation that those who complete the program go on to a full-time job, a high school diploma would be a baseline education requirement. Advanced trainings would also include a more sophisticated workplace readiness series, with modules specific to the sector. For example, advanced training focused on tech would offer different but complementary modules, including introduction to basic software development, introduction to graphic design, and fundamental IT hardware training, including connecting devices and troubleshooting systems. The length of time in the program could vary according to the number of skills a participant is pursuing.

[11] Includes multi-layered programming including co-teaching, additional curriculum development, aids and visuals, and extended learning practice.
 [12] Based on OBT's current workplace readiness programming costs and budget models for similar trainings in FY20.

The program would also offer explicit opportunities to begin building a network of peers and other professionals, with the Advisory Board helping to facilitate internship and apprenticeship opportunities among partners. Recognizing that local businesses' hiring needs vary in magnitude and that CBOs prefer to develop programs with clear advance demand, the Board would be responsible for identifying the best way to aggregate business need to provide enough hiring security. Finally, the Board would also need to identify viable funding streams to support critical work-based learning experiences.

A full-time hardware and basic tech skills program costs between $10,000 to $15,000 per participant, depending on the range of skills included in the program. As an example, OBT's sector-based trainings in Technology a cost around $11,000 per student. The cost includes 35 to 40 hours per week of technical skills training, one to two hours of work readiness training, one-on-one case management, and internship placement and support - over a span of 12-20 weeks. Funding supports an instructor, case manager, internship coordinator, and the partial salaries of a Program Director and Coordinator for Workforce Development. The Advisory Group would inform curriculum and program design and detailed funding based on specific employer feedback.

Recommendation 2: Launch a Sunset Park Career Awareness Campaign

A comprehensive career awareness campaign would increase community knowledge about job availability at IC and BAT and dispel the notion that jobs along the waterfront are unattainable.

The Advisory Board (see Recommendation 3) would oversee the development of the campaign's content and marketing channels. The Advisory Board could identify opportunities to build on existing marketing campaigns, build local CBO capacity to share information, and help secure new funding to facilitate a broader marketing campaign. The campaign would seek to educate the community that jobs in growing sectors are accessible to all and would provide specific information about how individuals who lack the experience or skills for entry can find access to such jobs. Materials would include descriptions of jobs and pathways to jobs and show a diverse mix of people accessing career opportunities. Based on best practices from national workforce models including Treehouse and Bitwise Industries, campaigns should ensure culturally appropriate language, sensible and compelling models of diversity, and accurate depictions of jobs in the innovation economy. It may be helpful to design a series of "learning tours" or "learning walks" to help concretize what the variety of jobs are, and what "a day in the life" of an employee might look like.

As part of this ongoing knowledge and awareness building, the Advisory Board would create a working group to undertake the creation of a continuously updated local education and training resource guide for residents about the training opportunities in Sunset Park. Residents and businesses both report a lack of information on available workforce development programs in the community. A resource guide, both in print and online, updated no less than quarterly, could further bridge the information gap around available community-based resources in the Sunset Park community.

Recommendation 3: Convene a Sunset Park Industry Advisory Board comprised of Employers and Workforce Development CBOs

This project revealed the misalignment among the skill levels of Sunset Park residents, the needs of waterfront employers, and the current capacities of CBOs. The first two recommendations propose specific steps to address gaps in awareness around local innovation economy jobs and to create a pipeline of career-ready residents. This third recommendation centers on the need for a coordinated body made up of Sunset Park CBOs and employers to address both short-term and long-term workforce needs, and to create strategies for responding to future shifts in the local economic landscape. This recommendation would be a natural extension of existing efforts to coordinate CBO, business, and government stakeholders, with a particular focus on addressing gaps between job readiness and employment opportunities.

In the context of ongoing job growth in the neighborhood and community plans such as the Green Resilient Industrial District (GRID)[13] proposal, it is critical that a body convene to share expertise and ensure the necessary training far in advance of job creation. In particular, the GRID provides a vision for connecting workforce development to economic development tied to green sector jobs and climate change mitigation. Capacity and infrastructure will be needed to clearly identify the range of opportunities and to facilitate the contributions of industry experts to ongoing curriculum development and program design.

As a representative body, the Advisory Board would provide:
- ongoing opportunities for employer-informed curriculum design;
- access to in-depth, real-time knowledge of local job opportunities and skill sets needed to prepare local candidates available jobs;
- planning and resourcing support for new programs; and
- a forum that facilitates continuous feedback between employers and CBOs aimed at building a robust pipeline of local workers.

The Advisory Board would be led by a named facilitator and composed of local employers and CBOs. The facilitator, chosen from outside the collective group, would lead the recruitment and engagement of stakeholders, drive development of tasks, coordinate outreach and employer engagement, and direct the group toward the implementation and execution of the recommendations made in this report. Ideally, the facilitator would be hired by and housed at a neutral entity, such as an employer intermediary (a Business Improvement District, Chamber of Commerce, business, or workforce group). The commitment and credibility will be paramount in the selection of this facilitator.

Given the time it takes to effectively engage employers, the employers and CBOs would first convene separately, then come together through an agreed-upon structure. Separate initial meetings can help generate consensus between local workforce organizations in order to develop a common set of goals. In the early stages of organizing, stakeholders should establish roles and responsibilities, current and future capacity, and time constraints. CBOs and employers will also need to educate each other on both the employment pipeline and in-demand skills, as well as current offerings by local training providers. (Supplemental education about the innovation economy may better position local organizations to engage meaningfully in this process.)

[13] Green Resilient Industrial District (GRID), September 2019. Developed by: Collective for Community, Culture, & Environment, UPROSE, and P.O.W.W.A (Protect Our Working Waterfront Alliance). See https://www.uprose.org/the-grid.

The Advisory Board would need to identify levels of background knowledge and respond accordingly. It would be important to identify "early adopters" and/or companies that are poised to expand, and the Board would need to identify the institutions/entities with convening power to draw businesses to the table. It will be important to set employer expectations for short-term and long-term outcomes of the collaboration and to identify their desired return on investment. During initial meetings, each group would identify its respective leadership, and once merged, the group would identify key areas of focus and collective leadership.

Some of the potential focus area topics to be addressed by the Advisory Board could include:
- Manufacturing and advanced manufacturing training development
- Planning and program alignment for other new or developing industries such as offshore wind, renewable energy, green jobs
- Coordination with ongoing community plans and proposals, such as the development of the GRID.
- Development of broad community education around occupations and training opportunities along the Sunset Park waterfront
- Developing support for engaging undocumented immigrants in the workforce

The Advisory Board would convene four times a year as a group, and would also meet quarterly with City agencies who work at the intersection of economic and workforce development, namely NYCEDC, SBS, and the Mayor's Office for Workforce Development, to share progress, challenges, needs, and recommendations for a stronger local system.

Recommendation 4: Direct capacity-building resources to community-based organizations

A strategic investment in building the skills of local residents must be coupled with investments in the organizations that are closest to both jobseekers and businesses. Mandates to create and transform programming, to coordinate local employers and training providers require building both technical and adaptive capacities at all levels. Funding for technical capacity-building includes curriculum (re)design, access to hardware and other technical equipment, staff training on employer engagement, and access to advanced training facilities. Adaptive shifts include support for curricular implementation, sharing of best practices around contextualized curricula, and building knowledge around innovation economy jobs. Our recommendation is that any grant opportunities include capacity-building funding (outside of administrative costs). Understandably, these amounts will vary based on program design and the level of technical expertise required.

Conclusion vi

Sunset Park is a diverse and growing community that has been a home to generations of immigrant communities, many of whom have benefitted from jobs along the waterfront. As the employment landscape along the waterfront shifts to new jobs in emerging sectors, Sunset Park community members require pathways to employment opportunities at these dynamic job hubs. Economic development can create jobs with family-sustaining wages, but Sunset Park residents urgently need help to access those higher-paying, high-skill jobs. What are the growing sectors and what do their entry-points look like? What skills do they require, and how do they align with skills Sunset Park residents have or want to acquire? How are CBOs in Sunset Park positioned to bridge this gap, and what do they need from the business and government partners to be successful?

Research into the ecosystem of CBOs, residents, and employers in Sunset Park reveals that, broadly, Sunset Park residents are not ready for entry-level innovation economy jobs due to a lack of basic workplace readiness skills and comfort and familiarity with digital systems (computers, email, word processing, etc.). Residents in Sunset Park are not always familiar with job opportunities along the waterfront and if they are, they're not always sure how to access these jobs. Employers, meanwhile, report a desire for more local workers, but are largely unaware of local CBOs and their training and placement capacities. Employers have a difficult time hiring through employment websites and have an appetite for pre-screened candidates who are job-ready and have a thorough understanding of a position's responsibilities. CBOs believe that they can facilitate more job connections at the job hubs of IC and BAT if they have more information about available jobs, trainings tailored to specific skills, and direct connections to employers. They also can play a role in demystifying pipelines to growing sectors along the waterfront, provided that they understand the real needs of employers in real time.

To address these varying needs, recommendations were developed around digital literacy and workplace readiness training, an awareness campaign for innovation economy jobs and pipelines to entry, and a structure for continuous collaboration among Sunset Park stakeholders. These training recommendations take advantage of the strong ESOL courses that already exist in the community and build out a two-tiered model for more widely addressing the lack of digital literacy and comfort with technology. The awareness campaign ensures that residents know about opportunities for living wage positions on the waterfront and can access training programs that could function as bridges into these sectors. Finally, this report proposes a convening of an Advisory Board made up of city government, CBO, and employer stakeholders who can continue to troubleshoot the misalignment between Sunset Park residents' skills and the needs of employers.

Although these recommendations will do much to address the problems identified here, continual assessment of the degree to which residents are able to access living wage jobs and opportunities in the innovation economy will be critical. Only sustained research and investment of time and resources can ensure that skills trainings remain relevant, worker awareness remains high, and employers' needs are met.

Companies

DOOB USA 3D Retail
MakerSpace
Tailored Industry
Malia Mills
DoubleTake Fashion
DesignDeconic
Uncommon Goods
RBW
Roll and Hill
LeeSpring
IEH Corp
Cresilon
King Tele Services
Liquid Technology
Omblingo, Inc
AbelCine
WhatIF Innovation

Community-Based Organizations

(offering workforce training programs)

Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC)
Sunset Spark
Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)
Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SBIDC)
SCO/ Center for Family Life (CFL)
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow (OBT)
Atlas: Developing Immigrant Youth (Atlas DIY)
Brooklyn Workforce Innovations (BWI)

National Organizations

Bitwise Industries - Fresno, CA
Code Louisville - Louisville, KY
Detroit at Work - Detroit, MI
SF Made - San Francisco, CA
Telegraph Academy - Oakland, CA
Treehouse - Nationwide

Resident Survey

374 residents were surveyed at the following locations:
NYU Langone Back to School Event
Brooklyn Army Terminal Block Party
Sunset Park 5th Avenue Block Party
Center for Family Life - ESOL + Workforce Readiness classes
OBT - ESOL classes
Councilmember Menchaca's office
PS 169 Open School Night
Innovation Lab Open Houses
Fifth Avenue Committee - ESOL classes