

Jobs Action Network

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First “proof of concept” results are in: 51% POC in Encore’s good jobs!

It has been six years. We have just finished Year 1 of a two-year “proof of concept” pilot, testing interventions into the labor market that can connect under-employed residents, particularly residents of color, to good jobs. Using the new Region A casino start-up as a huge hiring opportunity with good quality jobs, we thought it could kickstart the second year testing the model with other employers.

Encore has just documented its initial 51% hiring of people of color. At the midpoint of our 2-year test, we see enough positive proof of concept to drive forward into Year 2.

Concept

While we had already won license conditions in 2013 that would ensure Encore jobs would be good quality, we knew this was not going to be enough for under-employed residents with jobs skills and good labor market attachment to get access to these jobs.

We see many under-employed residents—particularly residents of color—cut off from taking the step from low wage, part-time or gig employment to better jobs by a combination of bias and labor market failures. Residents don’t have the information, support, or encouragement they needed. They have no time to take this step working as hard as they do. They see the embedded bias in the labor market or have accepted their low income as their fault. Even after we won strong hiring requirements—40% people of color to match the regional demographics--how could we ensure that residents of color would get their fair share of these good jobs?

Following models in other parts of the country, we decided to address labor market failures and bias by establishing the Community Pipeline in each of our neighborhoods.

Background

In 2013, Everett members of Action for Regional Equity saw the wide support for a casino in Everett. They turned to other community leaders from communities of color across the region said “if there is going to be a casino, we want there to be good jobs and we want our fair share of them!”

Research and our own experience showed us that many residents of color are under-employed—skilled with good labor market attachment—but still isolated from good quality jobs. We saw that such a large start-up backed by civic standards tied to the intention of the state gaming statute could test a new model of connecting residents to good jobs that could be exported to other employers. Community leaders from Everett, Chelsea, Somerville, and Boston committed to working together as the Casino Action Network.

By speaking out together to a responsive and thoughtful Gaming Commission, we won job quality standards (average \$41,000 and 75% full time) as a condition of the license given to Wynn. We led a state-wide campaign, with Gaming Commission and casino support, to change the gaming statute to exempt about 40% of the positions from the rigid CORI exclusions, opening thousands of jobs to those with CORIs. Last year, we won a requirement of 40% people of color in all departments, management and line, front-of-house and back-of-house in the Workforce Plan voted by the Gaming Commission.

Recognizing that words on paper would not achieve these goals, we also proposed an innovative Community Pipeline to the Gaming Commission, asking for a small amount of funding for community organizing that could reach deep into our neighborhoods and a seat at the table joining others connecting residents to good jobs.

In the spring of 2018, a residents committee, One Everett, again led the way demanding what people themselves knew was needed. They wanted information about the jobs and what the Encore was really looking for, a little help preparing to meet the interviewers' expectations, and someone checking that they have not been lost in the shuffle—the inside scoop, the privilege of someone sticking up for them, and required access standards.

We just saw the first results from Encore presented to the MGC Workforce Opportunity Team—51% people of color overall, 40% people of color at the supervisor level and above!

What we decided to try

Trusting the voice of residents about what they need. People who are just surviving don't have time to think about taking a big step forward if there is no good reason. Everyone wanted to know about the jobs—particularly what they would pay. Residents told us that they wanted specific information, that they did not trust the promises being made that they would be hired, and that they didn't need skills training but did need interview prep at a time they were not already working. We have been guided by what people told us.

Using community as a connection to people. We could see so many people who went to work every day, good skills, smart, but not making enough to survive. They did not know what the opportunities were, did not have time after their 3 part-time jobs to look for anything better, maybe did think it was their fault for not completing enough school or training. Even reaching people so they could consider what was possible was not easy. Community leaders, activists, members—just plain residents—would be the link to specific people they knew who needed better jobs. We thought we needed to build a standing web of relationships deep into each isolated neighborhood.

Community residents standing together. Even with good intentions, we have all had too many experiences with lack of enforcement to think any of this would happen without communities having a seat at the table. Even in a partnership, all partners need to be there to move things forward.

How it went—what worked

Information matters. Over 2,000 residents came out to community information sessions. These were not hiring events or jobs fair—just information that residents had said they wanted, at time, in places, and in languages convenient to residents. Interview data now tells us that these sessions topped the list of what helped people decide to apply. In 2018, Everett residents had had repeated meetings with Encore, in particular saying that people needed to know what the jobs would pay—more than “they will

be good jobs.” By the time of the first information session, Encore had put a list of entry hourly wages in writing—with the lowest \$19/hour. We have asked for wage information from agencies that publicize openings and at job fairs. Employers are usually not public about what they pay when they are recruiting. Not only did making this information public help Encore recruit, but people brought this information to their current employers. We now have documented cases where those employers then raised people’s wages to get them to stay.

Getting residents the support they need. Today’s hiring system requires an electronic resume and online application. It also requires that people who have always been hired based on who they know—a cousin, a friend—be able to describe who they are in the terms understood by the person interviewing them. A verbal interview is a whole different ball game from working a shift or two to show what you know. Community partners pushed the workforce system to target services to Encore applicants, pushed for additional funding for the services, and gathered volunteers themselves to offer help when there was nothing else available. Local service agencies volunteered their space in neighborhoods in the evenings. Local residents came to the help sessions to volunteer assistance. Doing a resume with someone can take several hours—we did what we could but learned more is needed to serve under-employed residents. In addition, our interviews are now telling us that encouragement from the community organizers was critical to sustaining interest, effort and hope over the extended time it takes to get a good job.

Demanding results, being a contributor, staying at the table. Workforce system service providers tell us they cannot push the employers they want to hire their participants—they say they can’t jeopardize the relationships. Our experience told us that we needed to stay on it, if we were to have results. By becoming part of the process and a partner in achieving the results we all wanted, there has been success for all of us. At major hiring events, we saw there were issues of both bias and bad process—people turned away by the front desk by someone telling them their English was not good enough and they were not allowed to apply; another Black person told their hair was not acceptable. We immediately flagged issues to Encore, who intervened. But we heard lots of problems. With the support from our cities, we asked Encore to reconsider over 50 people who felt disrespected by overt hostile treatment or by being lost in the shuffle. Challenging an employer’s absolute right to run their hiring in any way they want should not be ground-breaking. Encore agreed. More important, they have now considered about half of the list and offered positions to over 15 of those applicants! Residents are developing trust. Getting these results requires us at the table, support from our cities, and transparency and honesty from the employer.

Collaboration with our cities and workforce system. Community partners can make a difference, but we cannot succeed on our own. Cities, the state, various agencies, commissions, and authorities—all have both legal power and the bully pulpit to join in pushing employers to take steps to hire residents of color and people from the communities excluded from connections to good jobs. We know a lot is missing. The workforce system is also not set up to serve under-employed residents working multiple part-time jobs who are not available weekdays during business hours for help that is primarily in English. We all know that intense services for small numbers of participants may get high placement results, but does not provide the support that other residents need. While much is still missing, our beginning collaborations is a good starting place. Even at the limited scale we have achieved so far, there have been clear successes only achieved by working together.

An unaddressed problem.

Most skilled and committed residents who do not speak enough English are blocked from take the steps from low wage, part-time to good quality jobs. Learning English is a not quick. It has to be built in to a person's schedule over many months or years. Our cities—Boston, Everett, Chelsea, and Somerville, and no doubt other surrounding cities—need a few years of major investment in ESL. Without this infusion, whole groups of people will be left behind.

The economic value of Year 1.

Encore estimated our community information and recruitment led to about 10% of the people at the major hiring events, where the majority of hiring took place. We know our impact has gone past just the 2,000 people we talked to because people tell us that they have been hired because someone else at one of our sessions told them about the opportunity. Over 5,000 people have been hired. That is about 2,500 people of color hired into good jobs. What is the economic benefit of our Year 1 work? Our data and anecdotal evidence lead us to an estimate that we directed assisted at least 600 people who were hired. If we use a rough, back-of-the-envelope, very conservative estimate of our direct contribution, what do we see? An estimated average pay increase of \$10,000 annually, for 600 people, provides \$6 million in additional annual income into our communities and as much as \$12 million to \$15 million to our neighborhoods including a multiplier effect. We see at least 600 families with benefits and more time to spend together. We see the benefit for these 600 families year after year. And we see other people now hearing about this set of good jobs and thinking about how they can get hired.

Year 2 Community Pipeline Pilot—what's coming up

Year 2 will focus on both stabilizing a permanent relationship between Encore and our communities of color and extending the model of a Community Pipeline to other employers.

- Encore expects at least 1500 new hires in the next year from routine start-up turnover. We also see the need to ensure residents moving from unstable part-time work or public subsidies get the help they need to keep the new jobs that come with better pay but also more rigid requirements.
- Working with our cities, community partners in all four cities are already identifying other employers who can be brought into this model in Year 2.
- We will be reaching back out to all of our residents who have signed into the Community Pipeline maintaining and strengthening connections between residents and the greater Boston labor market.
- We will continue to focus on collaboration with our cities and workforce system.

We would like to thank our partners: Massachusetts Gaming Commission; Encore Boston Harbor; cities of Boston, Chelsea, Everett, and Somerville; MassHire Metro North; MassHire Boston; and the Hyams Foundation.

The Jobs Action Network's Community Pipeline is a campaign of Action for Equity. Members include: Alternatives for Community and the Environment, Asian-American Resource Workshop, Bowdoin Geneva Neighborhood Association, Cape Verdean Association of Boston, Chelsea Collaborative, Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corp., Dorchester-Roxbury Labor Committee, Fairmount Job Referral Network, Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, La Comunidad Inc./One Everett, MassCOSH, Monserrat Aspirers, Inc., New England United for Justice, ROC Boston, Somerville Community Corporation.