Working Up

A DIALOGUE FOR ACTION TO INCREASE ECONOMIC MOBILITY

THE CHALLENGE

There is striking consensus across the ideological spectrum that economic mobility in America is not what it should be. The promise of equal opportunity to anyone who is willing to work for it feels out of reach for too many hard-working Americans as they are struggling without a clear pathway upward, limiting not only their economic prospects but hampering our broader success and competitiveness as a country. While there is consensus that this presents significant challenges for the nation, people from different perspectives and sectors offer conflicting solutions. A failure to communicate and connect across these divides fuels partisan gridlock in Congress, stifles the generation of creative, new solutions, and limits chances for collaboration leading to impact.

THE PROJECT PLAN

Convergence’s Working Up project seeks to create space for dialogue to catalyze meaningful policy, programmatic and private sector changes to help more people experience upward economic mobility through work. Using Convergence’s proven dialogue process, we brought together 30 influential leaders from business groups, labor, low-income population advocates, workforce development experts, higher education leaders, dynamic practitioners, and key left- and right-leaning voices to develop a common understanding of the issues and craft a shared action agenda. They uncovered potentially surprising areas of consensus and new creative approaches that bypass entrenched divides. The agenda emerging from this process will be able to garner support from a wide range of actors and lead to meaningful changes to address one of the most significant issues of our time.

Prior to the dialogue, we conducted an assessment from which three interrelated issues emerged as areas ripe for consensus leading to innovative solutions and partnerships. These issues served as the starting point for our dialogue, which included 7 in-person meetings and many conversations over the past 18 months:

- Increasing skills among low-wage workers and the unemployed/underemployed to enable them to be competitive for the jobs that exist and better signal what employers need. Issues include improving workforce development programs and investments, more effective engagement with community colleges, increasing access to apprenticeships and other on-the-job training opportunities, and increased visibility and access to career pathways.
- Increasing the availability of jobs paying a family-sustaining wage, including the benefits and supports needed to achieve economic stability and opportunity. Issues include incentives for businesses to create more jobs or raise wages, strategies to grow middle-skill jobs, removing licensure requirements, increase benefits for lower-wage workers.
- Removing barriers faced by particular groups, including formerly incarcerated individuals and single parents, those who lack basic job skills and training, those facing racial discrimination, people living in communities of concentrated poverty, barriers related to lack of financial assets and uneven infrastructures of opportunity based on place.
The dialogue began in the summer of 2016 and is now close to completion as our stakeholder group finalizes its work coalescing around a set of recommendations. The major focus areas include:

**Work Opportunity & Workforce Development //** Post-secondary and career readiness; career access; and career success & resiliency over time

**Creating & Enhancing Quality Work //** Conditions of work that enhance mobility: child care, paid leave, and scheduling practices with responsibility for these conditions shared across workers, employers, intermediaries, government, and others

**Building & Maintaining Financial Security //** Savings & debt reduction; financial skills; affordability of education & training; reduction of income volatility

**WORKING UP DIALOGUE STAKEHOLDERS**

Julian Alssid, Vice President, Workforce Development, Community College of Rhode Island
Ellie Bertani, Senior Director, Associate Innovation, Walmart
Michael Billet, Senior Manager, Labor, Immigration and Employee Benefits, U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Shelley Waters Boots, Senior Consultant, Annie E. Casey Foundation
Melissa Boteach, Vice President, Poverty to Prosperity Program, Center for American Progress
Stuart Butler, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution
John Carr, Director, Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, Georgetown University
Lanhee Chen, David and Diane Steffy Research Fellow, Hoover Institution
Judith Conti, Federal Advocacy Coordinator, National Employment Law Project
Maureen Conway, Vice President, Policy Programs, The Aspen Institute
Marie F. Downey, Executive Director, Boston Education, Skills & Training
Joel Frater, Executive Dean, Monroe Community College
Kate Griffin, Vice President, Programs, Prosperity Now (formerly Corporation for Enterprise Development)
Romanita Hairston-Overstreet, Program Director, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust
Will Heaton, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Center for Employment Opportunities
Kimo Kippen, Aloha Learning Advisors LLC, and former Chief Learning Officer, Hilton
Karen Kocher, Global General Manager of 21st Century Jobs, Skills and Employability, Microsoft
Janice Loux, Executive Vice President, UNITE HERE!
Corey Matthews, Vice President, LeadersUp
Samantha Vargas Poppe, Associate Director, Policy Analysis Center, UnidosUS (formerly National Council of La Raza)
Elizabeth Clay Roy, Chief of Staff, Phipps Neighborhoods
Lisa Schumacher, Director of Education Strategies, McDonald’s Corporation
Damon Silvers, Director of Policy & Special Counsel, AFL-CIO
Abby Snay, Executive Director, Jewish Vocational Services – San Francisco
Grace Suh, Senior Program Manager, Education Programs, IBM
T.J. Sutcliffe, Director, Income and Housing Policy, The Arc of the United States
Russell Sykes, Director of the Center for Employment and Economic Well-Being, APHSA
Jason Tyszko, Executive Director, Center for Education and Workforce, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation
Holly Wade, Director, Research and Policy Analysis, National Federation of Independent Business
Kyle Williams, Director for Financial and Housing Policy, National Urban League