



# What would it take to achieve quality jobs for all workers?

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## About Urban's Next50

The Urban Institute was founded 50 years ago by President Lyndon B. Johnson to provide “power through knowledge” to help solve the problems that weighed heavily on the nation’s hearts and minds. Today, we’re exploring promising solutions to advance equity and upward mobility and identifying what transformational leaders need to know to drive forward groundbreaking ideas. This brief is one of our eight-part Catalyst series, in which we share what it would take to advance bold solutions over the next 50 years.

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# What would it take to achieve quality jobs for all workers?

Work is changing rapidly and fundamentally. New technology, changing workforce demographics, climate change, shifting global demand, and shifts in established business models threaten the quality of some workers' employment. But we imagine a future in which far-reaching changes will improve job quality for all workers while generating higher productivity for businesses and economic growth for the nation. We envision a future in which all workers have access to benefits such as health insurance and retirement savings plans that historically have been provided through traditional employment. We envision people having jobs that enable them to earn family-sustaining wages in healthy work environments where their rights are protected, they have a voice in decisions about working conditions and wages, and their input strengthens productivity and innovation.

Employers largely determine job quality for American workers. Some employers and industries are already addressing pay, benefits, workplace standards, and employee engagement. Workers and worker advocates are finding new ways to increase employee participation in addressing these issues. Federal, state, and local policies can play critical roles by supplementing what employers offer in wages and benefits; providing incentives and supports for employers to adopt "high-road" practices; establishing and enforcing mandates for wages, benefits, and worker protections; or offering incentives or guarantees to ensure that everyone able and willing to work can have a job.

The challenges of achieving quality jobs for all workers are complex. Advances in technology, automation, and artificial intelligence (AI) may eliminate or restructure many jobs and industries. Climate change is changing the locations of businesses and industries, altering the nature of some work, and contributing to shifts in migration. Meanwhile, businesses have concerns about an aging workforce and the skilled workers needed in the new economy. As the number of women working continues to rise, the need for child care and other family benefits also increases. Global competition and new technologies have driven many large employers to alter their business structures through outsourcing, complex supply chains, or franchising. Practices that shift jobs to businesses operating with lower profit margins can erode workers' wages and benefits as well as employer compliance with labor standards and employment protections.

A small but growing share of Americans works as temporary workers, freelancers, or independent contractors, including in the on-demand "gig" economy. Although these nonstandard arrangements

offer flexibility and sometimes supplement traditional employment, they lack the benefits and legal rights and protections associated with traditional employment. These changes pose the greatest risk for low-wage workers of all races, ethnicities, and genders in both urban and rural areas. Yet they also present opportunities for solutions that build coalitions across communities to improve job quality.

Achieving quality jobs for all will require action from employers, industries, workers, the government, and the nonprofit sector:

- Local, state, and federal legislators **increase effective wages**, particularly for low-wage jobs, through legislation raising the minimum wage, supplementing wages, and encouraging employer practices that raise wages.
- Employers, states, and the federal government **expand access to nonmonetary benefits**, such as health insurance, retirement savings plans, and paid sick leave.
- Businesses, industries, and federal and state regulators **strengthen workplace practices, worker protections, and workplace norms** to ensure health and safety and protect against discrimination.
- Employees participate in workplace decisions around job and practices through **expanded worker engagement**.
- Federal, state, and local governments **create flexible public employment strategies** to ensure everyone who wants to work has a quality job.

Leaders in business, industry, government, philanthropy, academia, and advocacy are exploring strategies for improving job quality. Some of these strategies have been well studied, but the effectiveness and impact of newer strategies is still unclear. Decisionmakers and others seeking change need reliable and up-to-date evidence to design, implement, and weigh the trade-offs of all possible solutions to improve job quality:

- Employers and advocates seeking to harness new technologies need a collaborative program of knowledge-building that gathers and shares information about evolving technology in different sectors and occupations and that identifies and develops models that are good for workers and businesses.
- Legislators and employers need to know the impacts of implementing new policies that affect workplace regulations, incentives, and mandates (in aggregate and across types of workers and employers). Concise outcome metrics and a one-stop source of evidence from rigorous evaluations and microsimulation modeling would enable them to better design and weigh trade-offs among policies.



- Employers, worker advocates, and government regulators need easy access to complete and up-to-date information about workplace standards by industry sector and geographic area to advance effective practices.
- To increase employee participation in job quality improvements, worker organizations need to know about emerging strategies, including challenges faced, lessons learned, and ways to expand effective practices.
- Policymakers considering guaranteed jobs programs need to know how different designs can achieve specific goals, including the impact of particular features on outcomes and costs. A focused program of microsimulation modeling could provide consistent and reliable estimates for competing proposals. Rigorously evaluated demonstrations could test the costs, feasibility, and impacts of selected models.
- To target solutions for improving job quality in nonstandard work, legislators and advocates need more information on the number and characteristics of these workers and why they engage in this work. Ideally, the federal government would collect and publish these data. But absent regular federal surveys, a current profile of the nonstandard workforce could be assembled from multiple sources, including new small-scale data collection.

This brief draws on interviews, discussions, and roundtable conversations with a broad array of individuals, groups, and organizations (see the acknowledgments for a complete list). They highlighted innovative solutions being explored across the country, identified gaps in facts and understanding, and suggested opportunities for new knowledge-building that could inform and accelerate solutions to improve job quality for all workers.

# Advancing Solutions: Local Action and Investment, Advocacy, and Private-Sector Innovation

Changes in the labor market have major implications for job quality. Workers, employers, the nonprofit sector, and all levels of government are developing strategies to increase job quality in our economy. We discuss strategies that include different types of policy action, including mandating employer change, providing incentives for voluntary employer practices, and altering government programs. These strategies are discussed in five solution sets.

The first two solution sets consider how to improve wages and access to benefits, both key components of job quality:

- The first set addresses how to achieve higher effective wages, particularly for low-wage jobs. The strategies include legislation at all levels of government to directly increase minimum wages or supplement current wages. They also include successful employer advancement practices for frontline workers and efforts to influence employer wage-setting through industry wage councils and antimonopsony regulations.
- The second set focuses on how to improve access to nonmonetary benefits. This includes federal, state, and local government benefit mandates; proposals for new benefits; and new ways of providing benefits that account for changes in the structure of work.

The third and fourth solution sets address the workplace environment and workers' roles in improving job quality:

- The workplace environment includes health and safety, work rule standards, and antidiscrimination practices. This third set of solutions seeks to improve worker protections through increased public regulation and enforcement as well as employer-, industry-, and worker-led actions.
- The fourth set concerns boosting worker power and engagement. Successful strategies could lead to higher job quality in the categories discussed in solution sets 1 through 3 (wages, benefits, and workplace protections).

A final solution set addresses employment security and access to quality jobs:

- The fifth set includes the creation of flexible public employment subsidies and programs that could provide access to quality jobs during periods of unemployment and for career mobility.

## Solution Set 1: Increase Effective Wages

Wage growth for workers at the middle and bottom of the wage distribution has been fairly stagnant for 30 years. Increasing wages directly or through supplementation would lead to higher effective wages.

### Raise the Minimum Wage

The first solution is federal, state, or local legislation to increase the minimum wage. More than half of states have passed minimum wages higher than the 2019 federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, which has not been raised since 2009. Several cities (e.g., Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York City, Seattle, and Washington, DC) and states (e.g., Massachusetts and New York) have approved minimum wages that gradually increase to \$15 an hour. Ongoing campaigns in many other cities and states champion minimum-wage increases.<sup>1</sup> One nationwide example is Fight for \$15, a grassroots movement started in 2012 among fast-food workers in New York City that fights for increases in the minimum wage (and improvements in other worker rights) across the country.<sup>2</sup>

Many studies of minimum wage increases (mostly at the state level) have found positive effects on earnings and minimal effects on employment (Card and Krueger 2015; Marotta and Greene 2019). Studies of local-level minimum wage increases are limited because these changes are new and studying impacts is complicated, but some small positive earnings impacts have been observed, with some debate on employment effects (Allegretto et al. 2018).

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**“Fair pay is a crucial part of the recipe for success at Ben & Jerry’s. We’ve paid a living wage for more than 20 years. Raising the minimum wage is an important investment in social and economic progress.”**

—*Jeff Furman, Ben & Jerry’s*

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Additional efforts are ongoing to increase or even eliminate the tipped subminimum wage, a lower minimum wage for workers (e.g., restaurant workers) who earn a certain level of tips. The federal tipped hourly wage is \$2.13. Campaigns such as One Fair Wage, sponsored by the Restaurant Opportunities United Centers, advocate for one minimum wage for all workers.<sup>3</sup> It is too soon to know the effects of eliminating the tipped wage rule, but proponents believe that its elimination will help equalize wages. In addition, local governments have made efforts to increase the minimum wages paid by government contractors, often known as “living wage” ordinances. Evidence shows generally positive impacts on earnings and reduced poverty but some negative effects on low-skill employment (Adams and Neumark 2005).

Finally, some large employers, notably in the retail industry, have voluntarily increased wages for low-wage workers, creating pressure for other industry employers to follow suit. Walmart increased its starting wage for hourly employees nationwide to \$11, partly in response to the Trump administration’s 2017 tax cut. Amazon increased its minimum hourly wage nationwide to \$15 at the end of 2018. Target had already increased its minimum hourly wage to \$11 in 2017 with a promised raise to \$15 by 2020. Amazon said it raised the wage in part to be a leader, encouraging other companies to increase their wages, and said it would lobby for an increase in the federal minimum wage.<sup>4</sup>

## **Supplement Wages**

A separate strategy to increase wages is to broaden public programs that supplement wages for targeted workers. The federal earned income tax credit (EITC) currently supplements low earnings for millions of workers with children and is one of the largest social benefit programs in the United States. The EITC lifts millions of families out of poverty, reduces inequality, and has beneficial health impacts (Hoynes and Patel 2015; Simon, McInerney, and Goodell 2018). More than half of states and several local areas have their own EITCs, enhancing the federal credit. Studies of proposals to expand the EITC to include additional low-wage workers, particularly those without children, suggest that expanding the EITC could lift many more people out of poverty (Maag 2018). An ongoing evaluation of a pilot expanding the EITC to noncustodial parents in Atlanta and New York City shows promise for this strategy to increase income and employment (Miller et al. 2017).

## **Influence Employer Wage-Setting Behavior**

Another strain on workers’ wages is employers with monopsony power, which gives them great control in setting wages and benefits. In sectors or geographic areas where a few employers dominate hiring,

employers can lower compensation without losing workers. Studies measuring employer concentration geographically find large variation across local areas, with many local areas exhibiting high levels of concentration (Azar et al. 2018). Some researchers and worker advocates have also raised concerns about employers requiring workers to sign noncompete or nonpoaching agreements, even in low-wage work, that deter job changing that could lead to more competition for workers and higher wages.<sup>5</sup> Proposals to address increased employer power include requiring greater government scrutiny of the impact of mergers on labor markets and banning noncompete agreements (Krueger and Posner 2018). Some states (e.g., California) already ban these agreements, while others (e.g., Illinois and New Jersey) restrict their use with low-wage employees.

Other strategies to improve stagnating wages include state-backed, industrywide bargaining over wages and working conditions through mechanisms such as state wage boards—which typically appoint equal numbers of representatives from labor, management, and the public (Andrias 2016)—and new laws. In 2018, New York City became the first jurisdiction to set a wage floor (\$17.22 an hour after overhead and expenses, to align it with the city’s \$15 hourly minimum wage for employees) for the 80,000 drivers of Uber, Lyft, Juno, and Via and caps on the number of cars that can drive. This law may be a model for other low-wage sectors because an estimated 10 percent of all taxi and platform drivers receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program), and 40 percent have Medicaid coverage. Additional ways to increase worker influence and engagement in wage setting and other aspects of job quality are discussed in solution set 4.

Finally, some employers are designing and implementing advancement practices for frontline workers to ensure ongoing wage progression.<sup>6</sup> Other employers, even in traditionally low-paying sectors, have adopted practices that are highly profitable for employers and good for workers. The Good Jobs Strategy framework lays out operational choices that allow workers to maximize the value of their contributions to their employer and allow the employer to maximize its investments in talent (Ton 2014).<sup>7</sup>

## Solution Set 2: Improve Access to Benefits

For most US workers, obtaining health insurance, retirement benefits, sick leave, family leave and paid leave, disability insurance and workers compensation, and unemployment insurance requires having not only a traditional job but a job with an employer that provides such benefits. But the nature of work and the employment relationship are changing. Growing numbers of workers have multiple employers (at the same time and over the life course), work part time, or have alternative or nonstandard work

arrangements (i.e., temporary jobs, on-call work, contract company work, independent contracting, freelancing, or gig work). Moreover, increasing numbers of large companies (“lead companies”) have outsourced functions they used to provide to smaller or subsidiary companies with lower profit margins that do not provide the same employee benefits. This trend is known as the *fissured workplace*.<sup>8</sup> All these trends lead to greater numbers of workers without access to employee benefits.

One way to address a lack of benefits is to increase workers’ earnings (solution set 1) so they can buy benefits in the market. Another way is to reduce the erosion of benefits that comes when large firms outsource labor to firms or use firms in a supply chain that do not provide benefits. Outsourcing and extended supply chains affect workplace employment and labor standards as well as benefit receipt. Solutions to increase employer responsibility are discussed under solution set 3.

## **Develop Portable Benefits Solutions**

Portable benefits are attached to the worker rather than the employer and allow workers in nonstandard work arrangements to access benefits across employers or allow contractors or self-employed workers to access such benefits. Employers as well as unions and other worker advocacy groups are active in this area. Approaches include sector-based models, which target workers in a specific industry, as well as broader models for all independent workers. Benefits that have been considered include health insurance, disability coverage, and retirement plans. Such efforts include a portable paid-leave benefit for housecleaners paid for by their clients (Alia) and a workers compensation benefit program for for-hire drivers in New York City (The Black Car Fund) (Katz, Poo, and Waxman 2018).<sup>9</sup> In 2018, Senator Mark Warner and Representative Suzan DelBene introduced a bill in Congress to create a pilot program for portable benefits for independent workers.<sup>10</sup> In the same year, Uber and the Service Employees International Union 775 jointly supported a portable benefits bill in Washington State.

Portable benefits proposals vary in their suggested benefits and program structure. A specific type of portable benefits is multiemployer or employer-facilitated retirement plans. These plans allow different employers to pay into retirement benefits on a prorated basis to a third-party provider for workers with multiple or part-time jobs. These portable benefits explicitly include part-time workers in standard employer relationships as well as nonstandard or independent workers. Only Vermont has established a state-facilitated multiemployer plan, in the form of a 401(k) (Morse and Antonelli 2017), and four other states and several cities have proposed a multiemployer plan. These plans could also be used to provide paid leave. Some employers are trying to create a similar structure by working with

third-party organizations such as Honest Dollar or Betterment. These organizations provide separate retirement savings accounts, but they lack legal retirement account status.

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**“The nature of work is changing rapidly, but there’s a growing recognition that our policies are still mostly tied to a 20th-century model of traditional full-time employment. As more and more Americans engage in part-time, contract, or other alternative work arrangements, it’s increasingly important that we provide them with an ability to access more flexible, portable benefits that they can carry with them to multiple jobs across a day, a year, and even a career.”**

*—Virginia Senator Mark Warner*

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### **Spur Government Action to Expand Benefit Access**

Another type of solution involves government action to expand benefits by providing them directly or mandating their provision by employers. At present, government-funded health care benefits can be targeted to people with low incomes (Medicaid), or provided more universally (Medicare for older adults). Proposals for “Medicare for All” or other iterations of universal health care would expand access to these benefits.<sup>11</sup>

Other health benefit proposals combine government-sponsored benefits with complementary employer-provided benefits. Some proposals to get to universal health care coverage strengthen government-supported coverage while preserving employer coverage (Blumberg, Holahan, and Zuckerman 2018). In 2004, California was the first state to implement a paid family leave law using a social insurance model with benefits paid by the state and funded by employee payroll taxes. The law has led to longer leave durations and higher earnings one year after taking leave, but no evidence indicates higher turnover or wage costs for employers (Bedard and Rossin-Slater 2016). Other proposals include restructuring Social Security to allow workers to take paid leave in return for delaying retirement benefits (Johnson and Favreault 2018).

Government at all levels can also mandate that employers provide benefit coverage. This strategy does not provide benefits to workers in nontraditional employment, but it can increase access to the many regular employees who do not receive benefits. Several state and local areas have mandated

benefits (including paid leave, workers compensation, unemployment insurance, and schedule notification) to improve job quality. Federal mandates such as the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 could be expanded to require provision of paid leave by employers. Nine states and Washington, DC, have already passed legislation requiring employers to provide paid sick leave.<sup>12</sup> An example of new areas in which governments have mandated benefits is around worker scheduling and hours. The Oregon Fair Work Week Act requires employers in certain sectors to post schedules for hourly wage earners at least a week in advance.<sup>13</sup>

## Encourage High-Road Employment Practices

Another approach endorsed by several unions and led by the American Sustainable Business Council encourages employers to offer more benefits and better working conditions to workers.<sup>14</sup> In these instances, employers not only improve their own practices but are examples and leaders to get other companies to make similar changes.

Some employers offer more generous benefits (e.g., six months of paid family leave at Etsy and free college tuition at Starbucks) and encourage others to follow suit.<sup>15</sup> Other employers offer flexible work and telework arrangements. These arrangements currently benefit more-educated workers, but they could benefit a larger swath of the workforce. The National Domestic Workers Alliance created the Good Work Code, a set of principles to govern workplaces, which has been signed by several health and personal services companies.<sup>16</sup> In 2002, Harvard University implemented a policy of pay parity for contracted workers,<sup>17</sup> meaning workers in companies providing food service or janitorial services to the university get paid the same as if they were employees.

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**“High-road employers know that, logically, their businesses are likelier to thrive and grow when they strengthen their marketplace by operating responsibly and compensating employees fairly.”**

*—American Sustainable Business Council*

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One strategy for encouraging high-road employment practices is to show employers the value of providing new employee benefits to their bottom line. Information on how benefits affect job turnover, workplace safety, or productivity could encourage employers to take up changes voluntarily. Some



employers can create return-on-investment studies or other measures that can encourage employers in the same industry to act. Some employers are working with third-party organizations to measure potential impacts. For example, CareerStat, a network of health care employer leaders promoting investment in frontline worker skills, has developed studies with leading employers on measuring the impact of investments (Wilson and Aiken, n.d.).

## Solution Set 3: Strengthen Worker Protections and Workplace Standards

Job quality consists of more than the wages and benefits that workers earn. It also includes workplace culture and practices. Solutions to improving job quality include enforcing worker protections (e.g., health and safety and antidiscrimination and harassment protections) and complying with government and industry standards. Technological advances raise important concerns about the impact of automation, big data, and AI in these areas, including worker privacy and autonomy and discrimination. Workers may resist raising concerns about working conditions for fear their jobs may be eliminated through automation. But technological forces can increase workplace safety and improve job quality as more routine and dangerous tasks are automated. Technology can also have profound economic benefits, including increased productivity and economic growth and new types of jobs.

Some state and local governments have taken action strengthen job quality for temporary work by, for example, increasing enforcement of existing protections. In addition, employer- and industry-led solutions can improve workplace culture or norms.

### Address Wage Violations

One way to improve workplace standards is to strengthen enforcement against employers who do not pay required wages, such as mandated overtime pay, in a practice worker advocates refer to as *wage theft*. Although wage rule violations occur across several employment types and sectors, instances may increase as more workers enter nonstandard work arrangements. Freelancers often report problems of nonpayment for work performed. These claims can be expensive and difficult to prosecute. The National Employment Law Project is working with groups to improve policies and enforcement efforts across sectors to reduce wage violations (Huizar 2019).

To address this issue, New York City passed the Freelance Isn't Free Act, effective May 2017, which provides protections for the city's hundreds of thousands of independent workers (people retained as independent contractors), regardless of immigration status. Requirements include mandatory contracts when hiring a freelancer for more than \$800 of work and payment due within 30 days of work completion, unless the contract provides otherwise. In addition, clients cannot require freelancers to accept less than the amount owed in exchange for timely payment. The law is designed to make it easier for freelancers to initiate and win lawsuits alleging breach of contract for failure to pay for services. By authorizing double damages and attorneys' fees when freelancers prevail, small cases are more viable. New York City's Department of Consumer Affairs received 264 complaints from freelancers during the law's first year, 98 percent of which alleged payment violations. During this time, the law helped recover more than \$250,000 in lost wages through the city's mediation program (Krinsky, Maxwell, and Rawlinson 2018). The Freelance Isn't Free Act is the only law of its kind in the United States.

## **Increase Employer Responsibility for Companies in Supply Chains or Franchisees**

Solutions that cut across multiple workplace standards and employer protection issues include increasing the employers' responsibility for employees in companies in their supply chain, to which they outsource work, or franchisees. Proposals try to extend or preserve the traditional employer role by reestablishing "that lead companies have some shared responsibility for the conditions arising in the network of workplaces they influence."<sup>18</sup> Solutions to increase employer responsibility include legal actions that try to prove "joint employment," meaning legal employer responsibilities are shared by lead firms and the suppliers, outsourcers, or franchise firms.

Some large employers are taking voluntary actions to ensure job quality in their supply chains and among franchisees. In an international context, a growing number of apparel companies, including Levi Strauss, Nike, and Patagonia, have signed the Transparency Pledge, agreeing to report their supply chain information.<sup>19</sup> In another example, Subway entered into a voluntary agreement to raise compliance among its franchisees.

## **Reduce Employee Misclassification**

One strategy to improve worker protections is stronger enforcement against misclassification of employees as independent contractors. State task forces, commissions, and researchers have found that 10 to 30 percent of employers misclassify their employees as independent contractors, with even higher percentages in certain industries (Ruckelshaus and Gao 2017). Businesses can shed an estimated

30 percent of labor costs by classifying workers as independent contractors rather than employees, thus creating a strong incentive for misclassification. In many industries—including home care, janitorial services, trucking, delivery, construction, hospitality, restaurants, and the on-demand economy—the misclassification of employees as independent contractors persists systemically. US Department of Labor data identify food service, construction, retail, health care, guard services, and hotels and motels as some of the low-wage industries with the highest worker classification violations.

Independent contractors are not covered by federal wage and hour laws, protections against sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination, workers compensation, or unemployment insurance. By shifting risk traditionally borne by employers onto individuals, misclassification imposes substantial costs on workers often least able to shoulder financial risks resulting from nonpayment of wages, workplace injuries, or a slowdown in work. Employee misclassification also costs governments billions of dollars in lost tax revenue. In addition, when some businesses engage in misclassification, it undercuts other employers by making it difficult for responsible employers who properly classify workers to compete.

In September 2011, the Department of Labor launched an initiative to encourage joint or coordinated enforcement efforts to address misclassification. Since then, 35 state labor departments have signed on. Over the past several years, more than 20 states have strengthened requirements concerning the classification of independent contractors or have imposed stronger penalties for businesses that misclassify. The issue of misclassification garnered nationwide attention in April 2018, when the California Supreme Court<sup>20</sup> unanimously adopted the “ABC test,” which requires employers to prove all three elements of the federal “economic realities” test to demonstrate that workers are running their own business and are therefore independent contractors. If employers cannot meet the requirements, workers are presumed to be employees. Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey have applied a similar test to wage and hour determinations. Although more than 20 states use some form of the ABC test, it has primarily been used for determinations under unemployment insurance or workers compensation or for wages in specific industries, such as construction. The Obama administration expanded the types of workers subject to overtime rules and issued guidance on independent contractor and joint employment relationships. These protections have been curtailed by the Trump administration.

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**“One can grow an innovative on-demand company while treating workers responsibly. We don’t need to trade fairness for profits.”**

–*David Weil, Brandeis University*

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## **Increase Protections for Temporary Workers**

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the temporary help (or staffing agency) workforce has grown more than 50 percent since 2009, although it still represents only about 1 percent of the labor force. These jobs pay less, on average, than permanent positions and have few benefits and labor protections. Illinois’s Responsible Job Creation Act amendments to the Illinois Day and Temporary Labor Services Act, which covers more than 800,000 temporary employees, has improved protections for temporary workers (Petersen and Stewart, n.d.). The bill, which garnered bipartisan support, requires staffing agencies to provide workers notice, in writing, of such terms as the wage rate, schedule, and length and location of assignments. The staffing agency must provide a detailed statement of wages, including all deductions. To reduce workplace injuries, agencies must notify workers about the equipment, training, and protective clothing required for a job. Under the law, an agency may not charge a fee to transport a laborer, cash a check, or obtain a criminal background check, consumer report, or drug test. Agencies must also attempt to place temporary workers into permanent positions as they become available. To combat discriminatory hiring, staffing agencies must report the race or ethnicity and gender of all applicants to the Illinois Department of Labor.

## **Provide Incentives for Industry-Leading Voluntary Standards**

In addition to formal, mainly mandatory, federal and state standards and rules, industries, organizations, and companies have established voluntary workplace health and safety standards. Because there is a limit to what regulatory policies and programs can accomplish, having a mix of public regulation and self-regulation can affect the economic “social” subsystem more permanently and institutionally. Federal regulatory programs can monitor or investigate only a small share of employers. Voluntary compliance with industry or company standards can reduce the need for enforcement activities and associated costs (Robson et al. 2007).

Various factors may influence firms’ propensity to pursue voluntary standards. Some firms may view standards as a way of getting ahead of changing regulations and insulating themselves from

negative consequences. Export-oriented or multinational companies may perceive internationally accepted voluntary standards as a way to lower barriers to external markets and reduce the costs of cross-country compliance. This perception can be similar domestically when regulations vary by state. Smaller firms may not have the capacity or resources to bear the costs of operational changes to participate in voluntary standard regimes.

Federal and state policies could provide incentives for voluntary compliance. Currently, federal occupational health and safety compliance assistance services are offered to small businesses. In exchange for their cooperating with federal on-site reviews of their facilities, these businesses are held harmless from federal violations for a time. Expanding this incentive to more firms may encourage more voluntary compliance.

## Solution Set 4: Boost Worker Power and Engagement

The changing nature of work and the changing relationships between employees and employers create new challenges for worker bargaining and employee participation in workplace policies and decisions. For more than 100 years, collective worker engagement has led to many advances in workplace safety, benefits, pay, equity, and culture. But union membership has been declining for decades, and recent legislation in several states and the Supreme Court's *Janus* decision have made it difficult for certain workers to organize in traditional ways. Further, the increase in independent and gig workers has altered many employer-employee relationships.<sup>21</sup> In addition, continuing developments in automation and AI could change or even eliminate whole occupations or classes of workers, create new occupations, and redefine traditional unions and forms of engagement.

The changing nature of work also presents new opportunities for worker engagement. Technology opens up communication and collaboration possibilities among workers, especially for employees who work in different locations for the same company. Information about employee rights and industry and occupational pay is more accessible than ever, allowing for a clearer sense of workers' progress and setbacks. In both challenges and opportunities, worker engagement is a key tool in advocating for and maintaining high-quality jobs in our changing economy.

Despite union membership being at an all-time low, traditional unions continue to organize and adapt to a changing legal environment. Research has consistently demonstrated that robust union membership is associated with higher pay for its members. Declines in union membership partly explain rising wage inequality. Organizations such as the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress

of Industrial Organizations), which recently created the Commission on the Future of Work and Unions, continue to organize to support workers in their attempts for better working conditions. They are also attempting to reach younger workers to reiterate the ability of unions to bargain on behalf of better pay and expansions to benefits, such as paid family leave. Teachers have organized walkouts in several states (e.g., Arizona, Oklahoma, and West Virginia) where public-sector strikes are not explicitly legal. Although this strategy carries significant risks, the walkouts have largely been effective in raising teacher pay.

New developments in and forms of worker engagement can be used and adapted to improve job quality.

## **Support Emerging Forms of Worker Action**

The changing legal environment and declines in private-sector unions have created conditions that promote emerging forms of organizing and engagement. These new forms draw workers together outside union relationships in part because legal circumstances limit their ability to organize and bargain using traditional channels. Other reasons include worker advocates' efforts to seek policy changes that apply to more than a particular workplace or sector and uniting workers affected by increases in independent contracting.

Solutions for expanding worker organizing include expanding collective action by independent contractors and other workers in nonstandard employment relationships. A recent example of success is a campaign in New York City by the Independent Drivers Guild,<sup>22</sup> an affiliate of the Machinists Union representing Lyft and Uber drivers, to raise the minimum wage for drivers. Other examples include the National Domestic Workers Alliance, which has promoted the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights to provide legal protections for time off and guaranteed overtime pay. Domestic workers do not share a common employer to bargain with, and before the efforts of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, they had few channels through which to collectively organize. Another example is the Freelancers Union, which advocates on behalf of independent contractors and provides training for successful entrepreneurship and a way to access health insurance benefits.

Even in traditional workplaces, there is more attention on worker involvement. Businesses are focusing on institutionalizing worker engagement strategies, in part because research shows that high worker engagement is associated with higher job satisfaction and greater productivity.

Technology is also being used to organize employee participation. One example is [coworker.org](http://coworker.org), which uses petitions from employees to pursue new policies or changes to old ones. A [coworker.org](http://coworker.org) campaign among Starbucks employees sought to extend paid parental leave to all employees, including baristas who are new mothers and fathers or adoptive parents. The petition, which gathered signatures from nearly 5,000 employees nationwide, succeeded in getting Starbucks to change the policy.<sup>23</sup>

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**“Workers are organizing online at sites like [coworker.org](http://coworker.org) to fight for new protections.... We’ve got to find new ways that they can express solidarity. And that’s where technology can help.”**

– President **Barack Obama**

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A new strategy that moves beyond worker-led organizing is worker representation on boards. Worker councils and worker representation on boards are rare in the United States, but they are common in Europe, particularly in Germany. Senator Elizabeth Warren has proposed the Accountable Capitalism Act, which would reserve 40 percent of board seats for worker representation in firms with annual revenues exceeding \$1 billion. Compared with Europe, worker representation on boards may be difficult to accomplish in the United States, given the history of corporate attitudes toward collective bargaining and norms and laws around worker engagement and bargaining.

Nevertheless, American workers and industry can partner to improve job quality by expanding worker engagement. One example is the Fair Food Program, a worker-driven partnership that brings together farmworkers, Florida tomato growers, and retail buyers.<sup>24</sup> These buyers include some of the largest US food service providers and retailers, including Aramark, McDonald’s, Sodexo, Subway, Walmart, and Whole Foods. These buyers support a wage increase paid for by a penny-a-pound increase in the price of tomatoes and agree to buy only from growers that have implemented a code of conduct (monitored by an independent council). Fair Food Program agreements are legally binding. The program was developed by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a worker-based human rights organization.

Another solution is adapting the model of worker cooperatives, in which businesses are employee owned. Although this model is not new, there has been increasing interest in cooperatives as a way to

improve workplaces. In Austin, Texas, taxi drivers discussed starting a cooperative to compete with Uber and Lyft. But there are challenges in decisionmaking and making the model operational.

## Solution Set 5: Create Flexible Public Employment Strategies

In response to the inevitable shifts in demand for jobs and threats to workers that come with economic downturns and the displacement of jobs by industrial or technological changes, politicians, researchers, policymakers, worker advocates, and social entrepreneurs are advocating for a major expansion of publicly subsidized jobs.

Progressives such as Senators Cory Booker, Kirsten Gillibrand, and Bernie Sanders propose a job guarantee program that would offer a decent-paying job (e.g., \$15 an hour) to anyone who needs one. The Green New Deal resolution introduced by Senator Ed Markey and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez includes a job creation component as part of a huge infrastructure investment to mitigate or reverse the effects of climate change. The Green New Deal also includes a job guarantee, implying public jobs. Proposal details vary. Some advocate for the government to provide wage-paying jobs for people who are unemployed and unable to find a new job by employing them either in jobs comparable with what they would find in the private market or in jobs that provide beneficial services to their communities (e.g., in schools, in recreational facilities or child care, or in public works projects) (Harvey, n.d.). Other proposals advocate more for subsidizing jobs (either directly or in the private or nonprofit sector) during periods of high unemployment (Bivens 2018). These approaches emphasize reducing income inequality in society or providing income and improving the standard of living for people unemployed or having difficulty in the labor market.

Lessons learned since the 1930s tell us that jobs programs have implementation and cost challenges and have varying designs. Universal programs for any worker who needs a job and subsidies that might last a year or more cost more than programs for particular groups (e.g., low-income people) and that are limited to a few months. The wages paid and the number of jobs subsidized can also have unintended effects on the regular job market, possibly suppressing the wages businesses pay or substituting for regular jobs. In addition, the availability of a guaranteed job can be a disincentive for some people to work in a regular job. Moreover, creating enough productive jobs in a short time can be difficult.



Subsidized jobs are controversial because of the challenges and complex cost and administrative details, but there are important reasons to consider them. The incomes and earnings of people in subsidized jobs rise during the subsidy period, which fulfills an important policy objective. A guaranteed job allows people unable to find a regular job to provide for themselves and their family and contribute productively to their communities.

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**“A nation must deliberately and constantly invest in its means of making a living.”**

—*Demond Drummer, New Consensus*

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State or federal guaranteed jobs can also be a solution to unemployment during cyclical economic downturns or in response to displacement caused by trade, automation, or other factors (Harvey, n.d.). Subsidized jobs during the Great Recession provided jobs for thousands of unemployed workers (Barnow and Hobbie 2013). Jobs programs that integrate retraining (e.g., for green jobs or new technologies) can also have long-term benefits for workers whose skills may no longer be in demand or for those seeking new skills. There are many reports (but little definitive research) about how public service employment programs in the 1970s contributed to the growth of black professional career opportunities. Subsidized jobs with industry-specific skills training for youth, as in YouthBuild and Year Up, have had substantial impacts on employment and earnings (LCEH 2014).

Finally, the output of subsidized jobs can provide lasting societal value. Major public works, infrastructure, and public arts projects constructed in the 1930s still remain. In the 1970s, transportation projects benefited from subsidized jobs and the training of hundreds of thousands of people in the trades and construction (Holzer and Nightingale 2007). In rural areas and Indian jurisdictions, federal jobs subsidies in the 1970s provided essential community-based professional administrative and human services personnel that were otherwise impossible.

Careful program design can minimize concerns. Complementing full-time subsidized jobs with a separate component that provides partial wage subsidies to businesses adding new jobs (similar to on-the-job training programs) could help create more regular jobs and reduce the total costs of a subsidized strategy. Targeting the program to low-income people, to communities with high unemployment, or to workers displaced by technological or trade factors could contain costs. Flexible strategies could be linked to the business cycle to scale the program up or down easily and efficiently.

For example, the number of job “slots” could automatically increase by allowing funding to be triggered at a certain unemployment rate. A small-scale but permanent jobs program would help prevent some of the implementation pitfalls that occur when a new program is enacted (e.g., experiencing slow start-up, developing administrative and reporting systems, identifying enough job slots).

# Building Knowledge to Improve Job Quality

We identified six priorities for better understanding how job quality can be improved. These knowledge-building priorities emerged from discussions, interviews, and roundtable discussions with labor and industry experts in business, government, philanthropy, and worker advocacy. The six priorities include research and analysis that can be used to better understand current and future trends, examine proposals and alternatives, and assess the effectiveness of policies adopted.

1. Identify and share reliable information about how employers, government, and advocates can adapt to new technologies and work together to develop new models for good jobs.
2. Estimate distributional impacts and develop outcome metrics for new benefit mandates, workplace regulations, and employer incentives so legislators can better design and weigh the trade-offs between policies.
3. Monitor workplace standards by industry sector and geographic area and analyze what works so employers, government regulators, and worker advocates can advance effective practices.
4. Catalog and assess emerging methods for increasing employee participation in job quality improvements so worker organizations can expand or replicate effective practices.
5. Rigorously estimate the impacts and costs of guaranteed jobs proposals and programs so federal and state policymakers can weigh alternative models.
6. Gather new data on the number and characteristics of nonstandard workers so legislators, program administrators, businesses, and worker advocates can target solutions for improving job quality in nonstandard work.

The knowledge-building priorities discussed here seek to aid policymakers, employers, worker groups, advocates, and philanthropists to advance solutions. These priorities address solutions that do not already have a solid evidence base or considerable ongoing research. Each priority is discussed below, with a focus on how new data, analytic tools, and evidence could accelerate solutions to ensure job quality for all.

# Priority 1: Identify and Share Ways Technology Can Improve Job Quality

Technology is changing at a rapid pace, but there is a gap in knowledge about how these changes are affecting and will affect the structure and quality of work and how technology will affect different types of workers and employers. In addition to automating work tasks, technology makes it possible for employers to rely on AI and algorithms for hiring or tracking detailed work activities. But we know little about how common these activities are or their impacts on workers. Technology also could improve job quality by, for example, restructuring jobs to reduce workplace injuries or improving reliable scheduling across workers. There information cataloguing these positive uses is limited, particularly for low-wage jobs, and how well employers adopt them.

## Applying Knowledge to Accelerate Solutions

Employers equipped with information about the positive and negative impacts of specific technologies on job quality could make informed choices about adopting particular strategies. In particular, employers choosing what technology to use and how to restructure jobs could benefit from information about potential impacts on low-wage workers. Although employers might be able to do these analyses themselves, they may be more likely to include this information in decisionmaking if information is readily available. In addition, this knowledge, coupled with an understanding of industry context and potential structural barriers to adoption, would allow worker and industry groups to develop strategies to foster appropriate conditions and influence or changes that would improve job quality.

## Approaches to Knowledge-Building

A knowledge-building program documenting and identifying examples of technology use that improve job quality would begin by conducting industry-specific analyses. Studies of how technology affects the structure of work in certain sectors, such as logistics and warehouse work or direct patient health care, could uncover avenues for improving job quality and associated challenges. Sector differences in how technologies are implemented and how work is structured require specific industry knowledge. For example, using assistive lifting technology could reduce injuries to home health workers (this has already been shown in hospitals), but the insurance funding model for these services poses a barrier.

Studies of businesses within a sector that vary by size or geographic area could compare the impact of applications of technology and pilot approaches to improving both business and worker value.

Partnerships between researchers focused on improving job quality for low-wage workers and employer groups or industry experts with deep sector knowledge could add to this work by providing access to workplaces and industry expertise. Such partnerships could also create connections with sympathetic employers who could help develop pathways to replicating positive uses of technology.

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**“We don’t yet have sufficient data to map jobs to the skills businesses need in their workforce. We need to integrate public data with proprietary business data to better understand current labor market demand and examine how these data change over time.”**

—*Byron G. Auguste, Opportunity@Work*

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Some technologies that affect workers’ job quality cut across sectors. Convening policymakers, employers, worker advocates, and technology experts to work toward common frameworks to assess positive and negative impacts is one way to address issues and areas of concern. For example, AI is transforming how organizations recruit, hire, and evaluate their workforce. Critical questions have been raised about the impact of these practices on equality of opportunity. Using AI to focus on job-related criteria in hiring could diversify job candidates by reducing bias from subjective human decisions. But when data used to develop the algorithm are not from diverse sources, the analytical models may block underrepresented groups and perpetuate human bias. A “knowledge lab” convening researchers and interested parties could explore what we know about using AI for these purposes and what additional information is needed to better understand how to use AI to advance equality of opportunity and address concerns about fairness, accountability, and transparency.

## Priority 2: Estimate the Impacts and Measure the Outcomes of New Benefit and Workplace Standards

To decide what policies to advance and to weigh trade-offs, policymakers need evidence on how new or proposed policies to improve wages, benefits, and workplace standards will affect workers. For some policy areas, notably the minimum wage, there is a large evidence base. But even this area has different perspectives and findings. Little analysis is available on the potential effects of large-scale increases

(e.g., an immediate increase in the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour) or the impact of local minimum-wage increases. Other topic areas with little evidence include how efforts to improve scheduling for low-wage workers, portable benefit proposals, and differing workplace standards and enforcement regimes affect job quality.

Knowledge gaps, created by the lack of accurate outcome metrics for the distributional impacts of different job quality proposals on specific groups of workers, are large. Policymakers and advocates need to know the impact of outcomes in aggregate, as well as the impacts for specific groups, to target issues disproportionately experienced by certain groups, such as low-wage workers, workers in nonstandard work arrangements or different industries; workers of specific races, ethnicities, or genders; workers with children; and workers in rural areas.

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**“We need to think about what benefits are lacking and what are needed. The questions are not just about access, but what is needed.”**

–*Tanya Goldman, Center for Law and Social Policy*

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Another important knowledge gap is the impact of policies across types of employers, especially small employers that are often exempted from job quality mandates but collectively employ large numbers of workers. There is also little systematic documentation of promising advancement practices and limited evidence in the public domain on the business case for high-road employer practices. Companies that choose this route often do so on culture alone, leaving policymakers and other businesses with little data or evidence to understand the costs and benefits of these practices. It is important to study the labor market effects of industry leaders’ voluntary adoption of higher wage and advancement strategies. Do these employers influence wage and benefit trends among their competitors? How do these practices differ in different labor markets? It is also important to learn from industry leaders to better understand the business case for strategies that can be shared broadly across sectors.

In addition, data are not easily available to measure some direct impacts (e.g., how does paid leave reduce missed work, turnover, coming to work sick, or workplace accidents?). It is even harder to monetize these impacts and to measure overall changes in productivity that may, for example, be because of improved workplace atmosphere. For some policies, such as requiring advance posting of

worker schedules or developing portable benefits, more work is needed to develop metrics for worker outcomes, such as increased stability, ease of arranging child care, or being able to combine multiple gig jobs.

## **Applying Knowledge to Accelerate Solutions**

Additional information on policy impacts should allow legislators and other policymakers to make informed decisions in line with goals and weigh trade-offs between proposals. In addition, advocates could use this information to develop and push for certain proposals. Rapid changes in workforce structures, technology, and nonstandard work make it more important than ever for changemakers to have information on the impacts of new proposals. Employers could use more information on impacts on job turnover, workplace safety, and productivity to consider their options, and advocates could use this information to encourage employers to adopt changes voluntarily.

## **Approaches to Knowledge-Building**

A rigorous knowledge-building program would create new statistical estimates on the impacts of understudied and new job quality policies. As new local or state policies are enacted, their impacts on workers and employers could be analyzed. The results could be used to assess the impacts of other proposals. Policy analyses are taking place in academia and research organizations, but new and creative studies are needed to estimate the impact of new policies.

One approach to knowledge-building uses microsimulation modeling to estimate outcomes across different groups of workers. For example, the Analysis of Taxes, Transfers, and Income Security at the Urban Institute is a microsimulation model that compares results across specific proposal structures, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program work requirement proposals (Acs, Wheaton, and Waxman 2018). This model could be adapted to create an infrastructure that would allow researchers to generate distributional estimates of the impacts of new benefit and workplace standard policies.

Knowledge-building on the effects of new benefit or regulatory policies would require new outcome measures to fully capture impacts. Metrics could be developed that better capture the intended impacts of some new benefit proposals, such as smoother week-to-week work hours, greater child care stability, lower rates of coming to work sick, or lower stress. Some measures could be implemented using available national data sources, such as the American Community Survey, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, or the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Other

measures would require new data collection. Data to measure impacts such as missed work days, turnover, or workplace accidents could be made available by employers. These data, however, are difficult to access. Obtaining them would require building partnerships with employer associations, industry trade groups, or individual employers.

Research should document advancement strategies for frontline workers, identify the conditions that facilitate and support these strategies both within and outside the business, and identify knowledge gaps. Researchers could partner with umbrella companies for large franchises (e.g., fast food, services) to study the business value of different talent investment and operations strategies (e.g., whether franchises with higher wages and greater participation in their educational assistance programs have better employee retention and higher sales). One approach would be to form a research collaborative with partner businesses, third-party benefit providers, and other experts in which businesses could share anonymized data, test the value of competing models, pilot new approaches to improving the double bottom line, and publicly release findings without risk to their reputation.

## Priority 3: Monitor Workplace Standards and Evaluate Compliance Efforts

Although there is a depth of field expertise in specific workplace standards and employment protections, such as occupational safety, wage compliance, racial discrimination, and sexual harassment, a broader picture of job quality that joins these strands of knowledge is missing, particularly for low-wage jobs by sector. Better measures of enforcement that describe variation by type of violation or problem or by enforcement mechanism (e.g., industry versus regulatory standards) would help state agencies tasked with enforcement and employers or advocates interested in improving workplace standards. Legislators, employers, and worker advocates might find additional ways to approach these issues if they understood how they are connected to other labor market changes, such as increases in nonstandard work arrangements.

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**“The best way to learn about worker voice is through worker centers. Once we’re educated about what to do collectively, data can come forth.”**

*—Mark Pearce, formerly of the National Labor Relations Board*

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There is limited evidence on effective enforcement of labor standards and the costs of violations for workers, their families, and society. Priority 2 discusses modeling and simulation activities that could be used to better understand the impacts of workplace standards. A final gap is information from employers. When considering specific regulations or enforcement regimes, regulators and advocates would benefit from engaging with employers to understand potential unintended consequences and ways to encourage voluntary employer actions. As discussed under priority 2, building employer partnerships to further this work is a next step.

## **Applying Knowledge to Accelerate Solutions**

Legislators and government agencies could use information on what sectors and locations have workplace issues to decide whether and where new rules or greater enforcement are needed. By tracking trends across multiple issues by sector—such as joint trends in safety and overtime violations, wage violation, worker misclassification, and harassment in a specific sector—policymakers could see bigger trends and consider broader efforts (e.g., providing incentives for large employers to work more closely with suppliers on worker issues) to complement specific regulation. Individual employers and associations could use information on trends by sector or issue to target their own change efforts. Better evidence on the impacts of alternatives to regulatory action (including voluntary standards) could help employers and advocates push for actions that work. Even within existing regulations and standards, agencies need evidence of what works to improve compliance at lower costs. Regulators would also benefit from understanding industry voluntary standards to identify opportunities for expansion.

## **Approaches to Knowledge-Building**

A program of knowledge-building would create new indexes for monitoring the current status of workplace standards and violations and use innovative methods to analyze what works to improve outcomes for workers.

The first part of this effort would develop integrated indexes of workplace standards at the state or industry level that consider the overall state of workplace protections, rather than focus on specific standards. This effort would review existing data on multiple issues across geographic locations and sectors. It would likely also involve new data development and collection, potentially pulling in industry partners or state agencies with access to data that could be analyzed and incorporated. Efforts would focus on industries in which low-wage workers are concentrated.

A second part of the effort would investigate the efficacy of different ways of deploying enforcement resources (e.g., inspections). This effort could include studying the effects of collective worker action—including class-action lawsuits, worker associations, and worker advocacy—on job quality. It could also consider how to leverage market forces, such as consumer pressures to improve employer practices, the impact of firms' high-road actions, and the effectiveness of voluntary standards. One example is a study of the effectiveness of notice requirements (e.g., those in the Illinois Responsible Job Creation Act amendments to the Illinois Day and Temporary Labor Services Act) in preventing wage violations. One way to build this evidence would be to use behavioral experiments to analyze different workplace standard enforcement schemes. With states, federal agencies, industry associations, or other partners, evaluations of this type could be developed to test voluntary and regulatory interventions to improve compliance and outcomes. This approach has been explored in health and safety citations (Chojnacki et al. 2017) and in testing different messaging approaches to providing information on obligations or costs of noncompliance to firms or information about rights and complaint mechanisms to workers, but more could be done.

Finally, documenting sectors with rigorous voluntary standards and comparing them with standards set by federal or state agencies would be the first step in assessing the incentives and disincentives involved in voluntary standards. Exploration with industry partners could further understanding of peer strategies to encourage voluntary standards in new areas and could decrease regulatory burden for businesses and government agencies.

## Priority 4: Catalog and Assess Efforts to Expand Worker Engagement

Given the decades-long decline in union participation and legal and institutional barriers to participating in formal unions, advocates for increasing worker engagement and traditional organizers need more information on the effectiveness of emerging forms of worker engagement. Two key questions should guide these knowledge-building priorities. First, why do fewer workers seek to organize? External barriers play a role, but are workers less motivated to join? Do they see fewer benefits to collective advocacy than a generation ago, or do they have other concerns? Are they engaged in business or employer worker participation activities? A clearer understanding of current concerns could inform organizers of which methods would best engage workers, particularly young workers.

Second, what styles of organizing and engagement are effective for increasing pay, expanding benefits, and improving job quality? Research could show how new efforts are enlisting workers, the types of communication and advocacy strategies used, the structure of the engagement (e.g., a traditional union compared with an effort like Fight for \$15), and whether success varies by sector or type of worker (e.g., independent contractors compared with standard W-2 employees).

## **Applying Knowledge to Accelerate Solutions**

Workers and organizations representing them may not have sufficient information on the most effective strategies for successful employer and policymaker engagement, especially in light of restrictive environments for unions. Providing evidence of the efficacy of leading models of collective advocacy would allow organizations to more readily consider and adapt strategies for engagement. Such evidence would give clearer options for addressing workplace culture issues, such as health insurance, paid leave, and workplace safety.

## **Approaches to Knowledge-Building**

A knowledge-building program would begin with a scan of current and recent engagement efforts as this area develops. A second stage would develop case studies on different approaches, highlighting and comparing successful and failed campaigns. Successful case studies would consider different outcomes and restrictions. For instance, researchers could examine Service Employees International Union efforts for Fight for \$15 in different cities to understand the factors that may have influenced successful campaigns in some places but not in others. Researchers could also analyze state exemptions. Additional case studies could examine different models of organizing on behalf of independent contractors and whether promising efforts, such as the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights, could be replicated for different sectors of independent contractors (e.g., freelance writers). New forms of recruitment such as petition-based efforts, as opposed to traditional dues-paying membership models, are worth further analysis. Research could also gather information directly from workers to document their views about traditional and new models of worker engagement. This effort would combine individual interviews and worker surveys to get worker input across sectors, types of work, and demographic characteristics.

Giving workers space on boards is gaining attention, but few American companies participate in this practice. Many firms are also seeking to expand worker engagement and participation. To know whether these approaches are worth encouraging, further research is needed to document and

evaluate the impact of worker participation and engagement activities on company performance, employee satisfaction, and other work measures.

## Priority 5: Estimate the Impacts and Costs of Guaranteed Jobs Proposals

The current interest in guaranteed and subsidized jobs is likely to continue, given concerns about possible displacement from climate change and rapid technological development, worker difficulty during periods of high unemployment, and ongoing income inequality. More proposals for job guarantee programs, such as the one included in the Green New Deal,<sup>25</sup> are being put forward. Many of these proposals have lofty goals but are short on program details, impacts, and costs. Although there is literature on the effectiveness of subsidized jobs, the broad scope of new proposals and the changing labor market require additional evidence on impacts and costs. Legislators need new designs that can address past program challenges and meet future needs, and they need to understand the consequences of different design choices. How can jobs programs supplement, but not displace, job creation? How can they meet fluctuating needs over the business cycle, including quickly expanding during recessions? How can programs address and alleviate the displacement and the extent to which workers need to transition to new jobs because of technology and automation? What skills training (e.g., for green jobs or new technologies) is possible, and how can the training be aligned with employer demand?

### Applying Knowledge to Accelerate Solutions

Policymakers and advocates interested in developing and implementing guaranteed jobs proposals would benefit from new evidence on the impact of specific program designs. Having timely information about the costs and benefits of jobs programs targeted universally versus targeted toward specific workers, such as dislocated or low-wage workers, would allow legislators to weigh the trade-offs and implications of different design options. Knowledge about the effectiveness of different practices and administrative strategies would allow program practitioners to choose the most appropriate models for their communities. As technological developments continue to affect jobs, current labor market analyses of occupations and business demands for workers would help decisionmakers incorporate training and reskilling into subsidized jobs programs to meet business needs.

## Approaches to Knowledge-Building

The first approach to provide the evidence policymakers need would be conducting statistical simulations of the scale and composition of different guaranteed job designs. Existing microsimulation models (including those the Urban Institute uses) could analyze the effects of different proposals, providing information that federal and state legislators and advocates could use to compare the costs and benefits, affected populations, and scale of different approaches. Models could estimate the mix of regular and subsidized jobs necessary to achieve guaranteed jobs for all who can and want to work (i.e., government as employer of last resort). The estimates of costs and impacts would depend on program design features that could be simulated, including who is deemed eligible for jobs (universal or targeted to low-income workers, displaced workers, or communities with high unemployment), policy goals (e.g., countercyclical during periods of high unemployment or structural public works jobs), wage rates (i.e., the minimum wage or a higher or lower wage), types of jobs (e.g., industry focus, public-sector or nonprofit jobs, or private-sector jobs), and amount of complementary support to workers during job subsidization (e.g., skills training, supervision, transportation, or child care) and after the subsidy ends (e.g., help transitioning to a regular job).

A second complementary analysis would conduct rigorous demonstrations (e.g., randomized controlled trials) to formally test job program impacts, costs, and implementation. Rigorous evidence from high-quality evaluations has helped establish the viability and success of various social programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Head Start, and apprenticeship programs. In addition to quantitative impact results, conducting implementation analyses and case studies as part of demonstrations would provide administrators and program practitioners evidence about successful practices and operations at the service delivery level.

## Priority 6: Gather New Data on Nonstandard Work Arrangements

Nonstandard work arrangements with independent contractors, temporary agency workers, and freelance, platform, or gig workers are the current focus of much discussion around the future of work and job quality. But we have limited information about how to assess and address issues, such as the number and trends of workers in these arrangements, the nature and conditions of the work, and worker characteristics. In addition, we do not know why workers choose these forms of work, including perceived positive and negative aspects to the work. In part, these knowledge gaps exist because of inconsistent and ambiguous definitions and a lack of regular national data collection on these topics.

Although the Bureau of Labor Statistics collects data periodically on the “contingent” workforce (including independent contractors, on-call workers, and temporary agency workers), the information is not gathered regularly. The most recent survey was for 2017,<sup>26</sup> but the one before that was for 2005. In addition, research by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and others highlights challenges in gathering this information on surveys because of the difficulty workers have in accurately reporting their employment status, such as independent contract work, gig work, and self-employment.

## Applying Knowledge to Accelerate Solutions

Policymakers, advocates, and researchers need better information on nonstandard work arrangements and workers to decide whether and what actions are needed, such as development of alternative benefits or changes in employment protection laws. Data are needed on the industries and places where nonstandard work is concentrated; workers’ current wages, benefits, hours, and other work; and the extent to which they face employment problems such as wage theft, accidents, discrimination, or harassment. Development of portable benefit proposals would be improved by knowing the impact on different types of nonstandard workers, and that would require accurate measures of how many and which workers are most likely affected. In addition, efforts to fight misclassification of employees as independent contractors would be helped by accurate measures of the numbers and types of workers in nonstandard work arrangements.

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**“Any recommendation must be based on gold standard data. You can’t improve what you can’t measure.”**

—*Erica Groshen, Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations*

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## Approaches to Knowledge-Building

Knowledge-building concerning nonstandard work arrangements and workers would require an improved regularity and accuracy of government-collected statistics. Government funds for data collection are restricted, so interested parties must advocate for the funds to collect these data regularly. Additional preparatory methodological work would be necessary on such issues as how to define different nonstandard work arrangements and how to communicate this information in surveys

of workers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics is doing some of this work, but nongovernment researchers, funded by government or philanthropic grants, can do more.<sup>27</sup>

Another approach to knowledge-building would be to collect data at a smaller scale. Through interviews, focus groups, or small surveys of workers, studies could investigate the circumstances of workers in nonstandard arrangements, going beyond the type of arrangement to explore why workers choose these arrangements, perspectives on positive and negative aspects of the work, and what could improve job quality. Information from these studies could allow researchers to develop questions that could be incorporated into larger worker surveys.

# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See the website for Raise the Minimum Wage, a project of the National Employment Law Project, at <https://raisetheminimumwage.com/>.
- <sup>2</sup> See the website for Fight for \$15 at <https://fightfor15.org/>.
- <sup>3</sup> See the website for One Fair Wage at <http://onefairwage.com/>. See the website for Restaurant Opportunities Centers United at <https://rocunited.org/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Karen Weise, “Amazon to Raise Minimum Wage to \$15 for All US Workers,” *New York Times*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/business/amazon-minimum-wage.html>.
- <sup>5</sup> Sophie Quinton, “These Days, Even Janitors Are Being Required to Sign Noncompete Clauses,” *USA Today*, May 27, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2017/05/27/noncompete-clauses-jobs-workplace/348384001/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Kimberly Gilsdorf, Fay Hanleybrown, and Dashell Laryea, “How to Improve the Engagement and Retention of Young Hourly Workers,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 6, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/12/how-to-improve-the-engagement-and-retention-of-young-hourly-workers>.
- <sup>7</sup> See also “What Is the Good Jobs Strategy,” Good Jobs Institute, accessed April 17, 2019, <https://goodjobsinstitute.org/what-is-the-good-jobs-strategy/>.
- <sup>8</sup> David Weil, “How to Make Employment Fair in an Age of Contracting and Temp Work,” *Harvard Business Review*, March 24, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/03/making-employment-a-fair-deal-in-the-age-of-contracting-subcontracting-and-temp-work>.
- <sup>9</sup> See the website for Alia at <https://www.myalia.org/>. See the website for The Black Car Fund at <http://www.nybcf.org/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Mark R. Warner, US Senator from Virginia, “Sen. Warner Announces Growing Support for Portable Benefits Legislation,” press release, June 20, 2018, <https://www.warner.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=42C209F3-80AF-4E9A-860E-EEB86135447B>.
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