Workforce Development Field Role

This offers a detailed outline of the activities, outcomes, and impacts that organizations and organizational leaders engaged in and experienced in this project.

1 INPUTS

Commitments from organizational leadership:
- Full engagement in the project and understanding of purpose, activities, and intended outcomes
- Open to worker-researchers' feedback and findings on job quality improvement

2 ACTIVITIES OR STRATEGIES

Capacity-building for organizations' leadership and worker-researchers, including the following strategies:

- 1:1 meetings between worker-researchers and coaches
- Office hours
- Webinars and learning hours
- Training on receiving feedback for leadership

- **Learning agenda:** Implement a learning lens throughout the term of the project via surveys, learning debriefs, and continuous evaluation of project.

3 SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

- Leadership shows increased commitment to job quality and greater openness to change
- Initiation of pilot strategies based on worker-researchers' findings
- Improved organizational feedback loops (e.g., with frontline workers and jobseekers, frontline workers and leadership)
- Establishment of accountability systems that maintain momentum for improving frontline workers' job quality

4 LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Organizational investments in job quality through capital and internal policies and practices (e.g., formalized feedback loops), ensuring that workforce organizations have the necessary capacity and infrastructure to provide higher quality jobs
- Worker voice centered and incorporated into day-to-day operations
- Greater resource allocation to programs that support frontline workforce providers and/or support quality, empowered employment
- Workforce organizations across the state share a vision of quality, empowered employmentfrontline workers' job quality

5 INTENDED IMPACT

Lessons from this project are disseminated widely to catalyze **broader systems change**, leveraging existing statewide and national cross-sector networks to influence leaders and practitioners across philanthropy, the public sector, community organizations, employers, and the education and workforce systems to implement **infrastructure and initiatives that create quality, empowered employment** for frontline workforce providers.

Implementation Ideas

Some organizations may be past the exploratory stage of research and looking to implement direct job quality strategies. If that applies to you, here are some ideas to explore:

Job Quality Challenge	Suggested Strategies
Transparency	Create **town hall** or "**ask me anything**" spaces for staff to submit anonymous questions for organizational leadership.
Burnout and Mental Health	Explore efforts like four-day workweeks, employee assistance programs, **wellness reimbursements**, and job description analyses to **improve role clarity**.
Organization-Wide Communication	**Evaluate** existing internal communication channels and **develop training** to ensure consistent use of communication tools and practices.
Inclusion and Belonging	Develop ways to improve employee engagement through employee resource groups and **team-building wellness days**.
Professional Development and Advancement	**Prioritize internal advancement** by filling job openings from within whenever possible, create **transparent promotion criteria**, invest in cross training, and **provide professional development stipends**.

Example Interview Questions

Worker-researchers developed sets of structured and open-ended questions. Here are some examples:

1. What does agency mean to you? What does structure mean to you? What does culture mean to you?

2. How do you feel about the way your supervisor communicates with you?

3. Are there any communication resources that you have used or heard about that you think our organization could benefit from?

4. What do you like about your role? What would you change about your role?

5. What is one immediate improvement we could make to improve your job?

6. Do you feel that you are provided with adequate time and resources to complete your responsibilities? If not, where are the deficiencies?

Outcomes From the Project

The Job Quality Project revealed key insights into how job quality manifests within workforce development organizations, the transformative impact of participatory research, and even early insights into how participating organizations are already applying the results of the research. Outcomes seen directly as a result of the research projects across the organizations include these Key Job Quality Themes:

- **The Importance of Clear Communication**
- **Labor Values in Action**
- **Worker Safety and Well-Being**
- **Centering Lived Experience**
- **Transparent Organizational Cultures**
- **Professional Development and Training Opportunities**

- **Clear Roles and Advancement Pathways**
- **Data Collection and Analysis Skills**
- **Collaboration and Peer Networking**
- **Building Self-Agency**
- **Strategic Thinking**
- **Investing in Sustainable Growth**

- **Elevating Frontline Worker Leadership Skills**
- **Context Matters**
- **Change Takes Time**
- **Ensuring HR Is at the Table**
- **Build a Culture of Collaboration**
- **Implement Feedback Early**

Conclusion

Investing in job quality initiatives that prioritize worker voice, well-being, and organizational transparency is crucial for fostering more supportive and effective workplaces, especially within nonprofit organizations. The lessons learned from this project demonstrate that when client-facing employees are empowered to lead and contribute to solutions, organizations not only improve job quality but also create pathways for growth and sustainability.

For nonprofit leaders, the call to action is clear: Prioritize creating an environment that values and supports staff at all levels, actively engage workers in decision-making, and invest in ongoing efforts to improve workplace conditions. This includes building internal capacity to support reflective supervision, shared leadership models, and feedback loops that ensure staff voices are heard and acted upon. When leaders make these practices a part of the organizational fabric—not one-off initiatives—they lay the foundation for greater staff retention, stronger team cohesion, and more effective service delivery.

For funders, supporting initiatives that strengthen organizational culture, improve job quality, and promote worker leadership is essential to creating a sustainable future of work. Long gone are the days where funders assumed workforce development was solely an economic issue. This project demonstrates that advancing job quality not only supports worker well-being and mental health but also strengthens organizational sustainability—helping nonprofits retain skilled staff, enhance outcomes for jobseekers, and contribute to deeper, long-term impact in the communities they serve. Opportunities for professional growth and continued learning are critical components of quality jobs. Reimagining the role of a funder means embracing wraparound funding strategies that enable organizations to address these interconnected needs holistically.

Equally important was what we learned about the power of participatory research as a methodology. Involving staff in shaping the research questions, interpreting data, and identifying solutions not only built trust but also led to more relevant and actionable insights. This approach deepened engagement across organizations and modeled the very job quality practices we aimed to explore. We see significant potential to apply participatory research to other pressing challenges facing the nonprofit workforce—from burnout and retention to inclusive leadership development—and encourage leaders and funders alike to see it as both a process and a strategy for systems change.

Together, nonprofit leaders and funders have the opportunity to reshape the future of work in the nonprofit sector, ensuring that both the organizations and the people they serve can thrive.

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