

The Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County (WDC) aspires to lead transformative change that will evolve our region's workforce development efforts into an innovative industry, community, and outcome-driven system with racial equity at its core. As a nonprofit, grant-making organization, the WDC collaborates with a diverse set of partners to elevate job quality, economic growth, and prosperity for adults and youth throughout the Seattle-King County region.

RACIAL EQUITY

PARTNERSHIP



SYSTEMS CHANGE

JOB QUALITY

Our mission is to catalyze system change across the Puget Sound to increase prosperity and economic growth of workers, employers, and communities and to ensure racial equity.

OUR WORK

The WDC serves as the Local Workforce Development Board, designated by the City of Seattle Mayor and King County Executive, to set policy and administer federal workforce development funds under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). In 2018, the WDC Board of Directors and its stakeholders set a new direction for the organization to:

- Advocate for system change of industry practices and address barriers to equity.
- Broker shared regional approaches that are responsive to both community and industry needs.
- Access and amplify resources through braiding funding sources.
- Incubate and innovate strategies for racial equity impact and system change.
- Analyze data to measure impact and drive system change.

As a workforce intermediary, we:

- Partner with over **40 community-based organizations**
- Reach nearly **40,000 job seekers and 3,000 businesses on an annual basis**

THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE

The Seattle King County region is the largest labor market in the state of Washington. It represents one-third of Washington's workforce and nearly 42% of all nonfarm jobs [1].

The region has long been recognized for its impressive economic growth. On the surface, King County appears to have recovered from the downturn sparked by COVID-19 with gradual improvements in job growth and labor force participation.

However, the current structure of our regional economy and labor market (pre- and post-pandemic) produces racial gaps in employment and wages, with stark occupational segregation in access to quality jobs, resulting from systemic barriers that have been constructed over time to benefit White people at the expense of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

In collaboration with our partners, WDC pursues comprehensive solutions that elevate job quality and address racial and economic disparities.



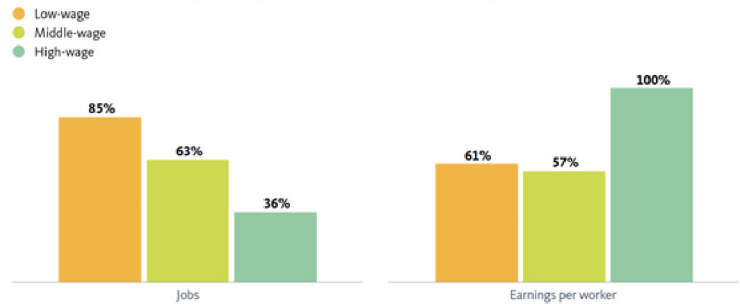
BENEFITS CLIFF

Benefits cliffs occur when people lose work supports as their income rises, even modestly. Often, earning \$1 over a specific eligibility threshold results in a reduction or complete loss of essential work supports, like food stamps or childcare assistance.

Current policies and structural barriers not only discourage career advancement among low-income workers but also create significant barriers on the path to long-term economic security.

A crucial aspect of establishing pathways to economic mobility involves evaluating the interplay between benefits cliffs, workforce development, and policy considerations.

Growth in Jobs and Earnings by Wage Level, Seattle Metropolitan Region, 1990–2018



Sources: PolicyLink/USC Equity Research Institute, National Equity Atlas, www.nationalequityatlas.org. Available at: https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/job_and_wage_growth#. Note: Universe includes all jobs covered by the federal Unemployment Insurance (UI) program.

Over the past three decades, job growth in the region has concentrated among low-wage jobs while wage increases have primarily benefited higher-paying occupations [2].

ECONOMIC INSECURITY

Having a job is often not enough to guarantee financial stability or provide a pathway for upward economic mobility. King County, with the highest cost of living in the state, has over 27% of the state’s struggling households living in the region. [3]

SOURCES:

1. Employment Security Department, King County esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/county-profiles/king
2. Advancing Workforce Equity in Seattle Report seakingwdc.org/advancing-workforce-equity-report
3. Overlooked and Undercounted: Struggling to Make Ends Meet in Washington State: selfsufficiencystandard.org/Washington/

POLICY PRIORITIES

Skills development, which has traditionally been a core component of workforce development, is necessary but insufficient without addressing racialized practices and policies that produce inequitable results.

Through active engagement with policymakers and stakeholders across all tiers of government, the WDC advocates for policy changes that promote workforce development, economic growth, and social equity.

1. INVEST IN EQUITABLE TRANSITIONS TO THE FUTURE OF WORK

- **Digital Skills Building:** Invest in foundational digital skills and workplace digital upskilling to empower workers to adapt to shifts in labor market demands and advance their careers.
- **Pathways to Quality Jobs:** Invest in sector-based career pathways and partnerships to help workers obtain quality, living wage jobs in targeted sectors and occupations, such as those that advance climate resiliency within the clean energy economy.
- **Pathways for Career Advancement for Frontline Staff:** Recognize the demands of frontline staff’s roles and bolster access to credentials to support the upward mobility.

2. ADDRESS BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY AND BENEFITS CLIFFS

- **Flexible Financial Assistance Models:** Invest in programs that remove financial barriers, such as those that offer cash incentives allowing workers to meet their basic needs and engage in skill-building activities without fear of losing benefits.
- **Wrap-around Services:** Invest in support services like childcare, transportation, legal services, and housing assistance to address the broader needs of individuals and families.

3. ELEVATE JOB AND WORKPLACE QUALITY

- **Engage Employers:** Partner with businesses to improve the quality of existing jobs, such as those in childcare and food service sector.
- **Community Partnerships:** Create sector partnerships that promote best practices for recruitment, retention, and job quality.
- **State Commitment to Job Quality:** Promote the adoption of a statewide “Job Quality Framework” for equitable compensation and labor practice, resulting in the creation of high-quality and equitable employment opportunities.