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Job training remains a tall task months after April's riots

Aug 21, 2015, 2:55pm EDT



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Months after April's unrest sparked talk of jobs and job training in Baltimore, the topic of workforce development can seem almost too big, too complex, to handle.

More than 88,000 people were unemployed in the Baltimore region in June, according to data from the state of Maryland. Even assuming many of them already have adequate skills and certifications, there's a giant pool of workers out there for the region's training programs to handle. While the [Train Baltimore website](#) lists 151 training programs in the area, many of the most lauded operations can only train dozens of workers a year.

Worse, the churning economy makes it increasingly hard to align the needs of workers, trainers and employers.

"In some ways the goalposts are constantly moving," said [Allison Gerber](#), a senior associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation who oversees investments in workforce development. "The mix of jobs is changing. The replacement rate is slow. There are different types of jobs emerging. The economy is changing while we're seeking to figure out all of the things we need to have in place on the education and training side."

But there is reason to be hopeful, too. Just ask [Fred Dedrick](#), the executive director of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. The Boston-based group, which tries to boost skills and education among low-wage workers, held its annual meeting in Baltimore in June. The post-riot discussion in Baltimore seemed to be moving in the right direction, although getting anywhere is going to take persistence, he said.

"I think what people are realizing is that the most important thing to do with workforce development is execution," Dedrick said. "You have to figure out where the jobs are and make sure

you're training people for the jobs that exist now or that we expect to be there in the future."

[This week's Baltimore Business Journal cover story](#) looks at the state of workforce development in and around Baltimore — and how it's changing in the wake of April's riots. The landscape is still very much evolving, and it will face many challenges. Still, different parties are trying to forge a path forward.

"The nonprofit community has really come together," said Marci Hunn, program director for workforce development at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. "The foundation community has come together in ways that are unprecedented."

The large number of groups involved in workforce development is both a strength and a challenge. On one hand, it can mean groups offering specialized training in specific fields like health care or manufacturing. On the other, it means serving tens of thousands of out-of-work residents can seem impossible.

"You have a lot of very small customized efforts," said [Shayne Spaulding](#), a senior research associate in the Income and Benefits Policy Center at the Urban Institute. "It's very hard to operate those at scale."

Many potential employees face barriers that can stand in the way of their training, too. Those include criminal histories, lack of transportation and even children at home restricting schedules.

One of the biggest moves in Baltimore since April has been a push to bring more employers to the table to discuss workforce development. It's an early step among many to creating more of a job-training ecosystem, said [Jason Perkins-Cohen](#), director of Baltimore's Mayor's Office of Employment Development. The ecosystem will have to be able to meet the needs of employers while also helping residents overcome their barriers, he said.

"What I'm hoping that we can do is think about resolving them in a systemic way," Perkins-Cohen said. "Instead of going, 'That's a nice program and you've got ten people,' let's figure out a solution."