

Needs Assessment Report On Detroit Workforce Development Sector

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Table of Contents

Purpose.....	3
Research Methodology	4
Needs Assessment.....	5
Top Pressing Needs for Organizations.....	5
Funding Capacity.....	7
Staffing Capacity.....	9
Sector Activity.....	10
Outreach.....	10
Top Pressing Needs of Clients	12
Transportation.....	14
Economic/Community Development.....	15
Education and Foundational Skills.....	15
Ancillary Services.....	16
Future Directions	17
Funding Capacity.....	17
Staffing Capacity	17
Outreach and Engagement	17
Sector Activity	17
Limitations	18
Conclusion	18

Purpose

The VISTA Needs Assessment Report examines current Detroit workforce development efforts and organizational capacity in order to support organizations that aim to reduce the unemployment rate. The VISTA team created an asset map to develop, identify, and categorize information about these workforce development programs. From that map a Needs Assessment was done to identify opportunities to support service delivery within a sample of these organizations. After analyzing the findings of the Needs Assessment the VISTA team developed strategies to support service delivery and recommended ways to address the needs of the Detroit workforce development sector.

Research Methodology

In order to build a foundation for the Needs Assessment, the VISTA team began by gathering information for an asset map that identifies, categorizes, and stores information about all economic, workforce, and entrepreneurial development programs¹ that serve Detroit residents. The organizations offering these programs were further categorized into direct service, intermediary, and umbrella organizations. The asset map was used to help choose which organizations to include in the first round of the Needs Assessment. The VISTA team conducted informal interviews to gather information for the asset map and to determine whether or not a Needs Assessment had been done for the sector.

Following the informal interviews, the VISTA team generated questions for the Needs Assessment. Originally one set of questions was created; however, based on the different roles of frontline staff and program directors, two separate Needs Assessments were done. Each one had five sections: (1) Planning and Implementation (2) Evaluation (3) Impact (4) Broader Impact² and (5) Needs Assessment. Once the questions were finalized, the VISTA team used the asset map to determine which organizations to include in the first assessment round. The VISTA team selected organizations that represent a diverse sample of Detroit workforce development programs. Of 15 organizations contacted, 12 responded and nine were able to participate in the first round of the Needs Assessment. The VISTA team then set up interviews with program directors, frontline staff, or both from each of the nine organizations.

In order to analyze the results of the Needs Assessment, the VISTA team created a coding database. For each question in the Needs Assessment, the team pulled quotes directly from the interviews and entered them into the database. Using the quotes from the interviews, the team then created themes and categories based on similar answers among the organizations. From the themes and categories the VISTA team noted the number of respondents with similar answers (e.g. 5 of 5 frontline staff said transportation was a need for their clients). Based on the answers to the Needs Assessment and VISTA team member abilities, the team created recommendations for how we can support the organizations. The team used these results to create a scorecard for each organization, using a Likert Scale³ and quotes to identify the greatest

¹ Each organization was also identified as government, nongovernment, for-profit, or nonprofit

² This section was called Best Practices in the Program Directors Needs Assessment

³ A standard scale ranging from 1-5, with 1 being no need identified and 5 being strong need identified

needs. The scorecard and recommendations were discussed with the organizations and used to create a service plan for the VISTA team to engage in capacity building efforts.

Needs Assessment

The VISTA Needs Assessment addressed the organizational needs from both director and frontline staff standpoints. In addition to the organizational needs, both directors and frontline staff commented on the needs of their clients. Each organization addressed their needs based on its mission, vision, and goals since each organization serves different clientele based upon its location and the types of services it offers. Although there are differences among their missions, visions, and goals the organizations identified similar needs.

Top Pressing Needs for Organizations

Figures 1 through 4 show the organizational needs identified by our findings. Figure 1 shows the current organizational needs of frontline staff; Figure 2 shows the future organizational needs of frontline staff; Figure 3 shows the current organizational needs of program directors; and Figure 4 shows the future organizational needs of program directors.

Figure 1. Frontline Staff: Current Needs of Organization

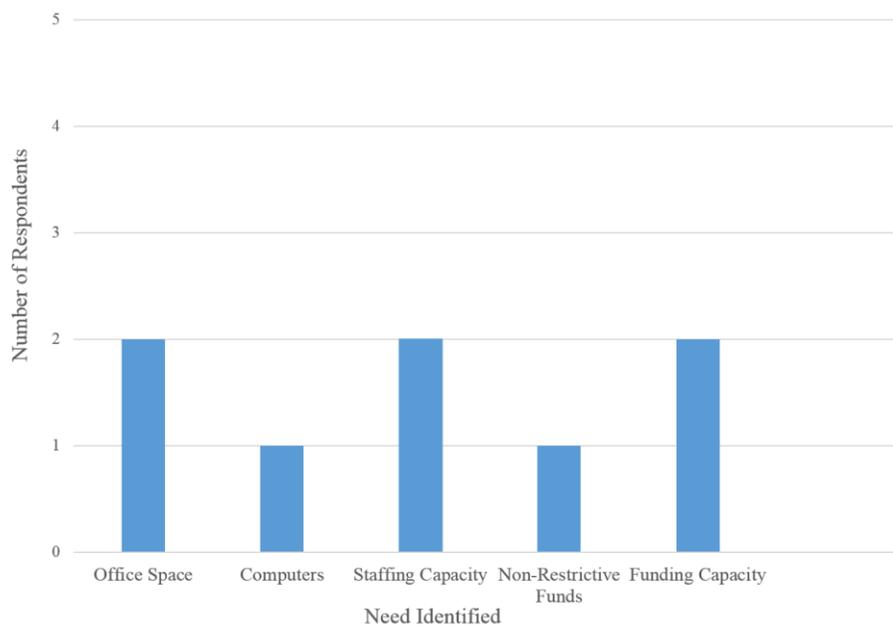


Figure 2. Frontline Staff: Future Needs of Organization

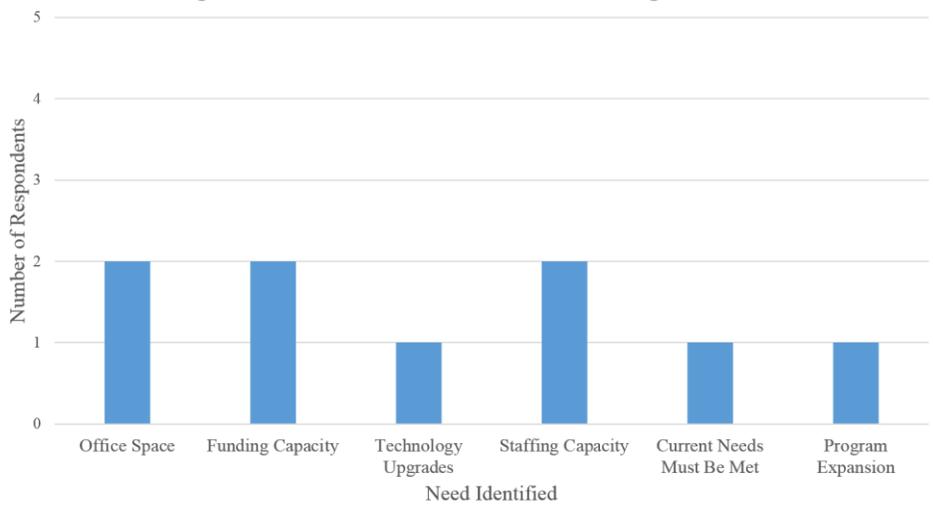


Figure 3. Program Directors: Current Needs of Organizations

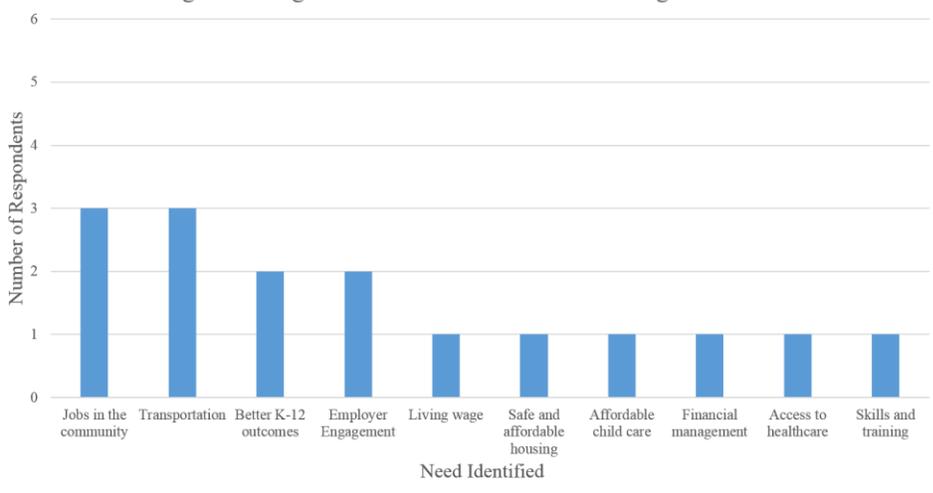


Figure 4. Program Directors: Future Needs of Organization

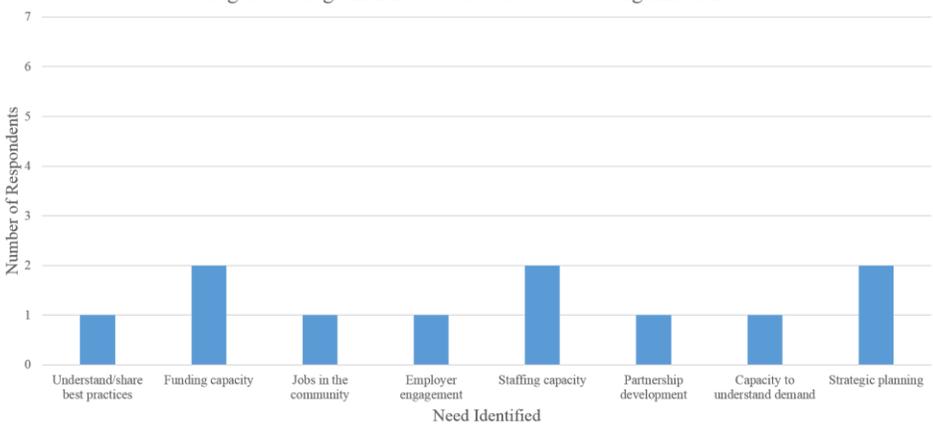
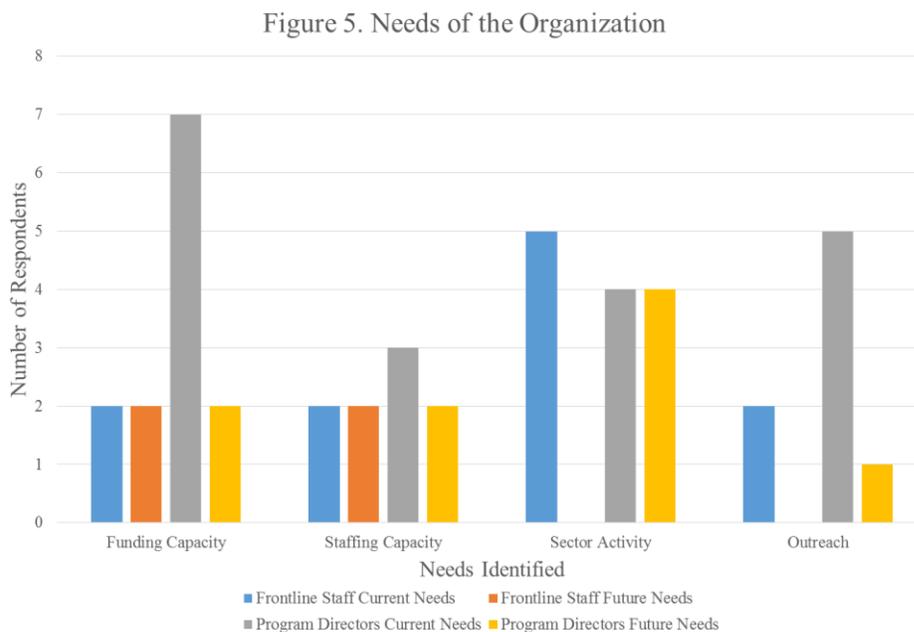


Figure 5 shows the total number of respondents, including frontline staff and program directors, who identified one of the four top current and/or future needs. Each of those needs is further explained below.



Funding Capacity.

Funding capacity refers to an organization’s ability to implement programs and offer services to clients based on the funds necessary and available for programming. Funding capacity includes resource development efforts not tied to human capital, and other non-monetary assets; including (but not limited to) office space expansion, new computers (for technology upgrades), and educational stipends. Workforce development organizations receive funding from a variety of sources, including foundations, employers, private donors, and fees for services offered.

Findings. In interviews with the various organizations, one general theme that emerged was the need for additional funding to implement new programs. The VISTA team asked five organizations’ frontline staff about the allocation and use of resources within their respective organizations in order to meet goals and objectives. Among the responses: “When available, we allocate where it needs to go” and “I can always use more resources.” One frontline staff member said that they needed “unrestricted funds.” Another said “We are able to give bus tickets and other help with transportation.” The flexibility and freedom provided by unrestricted funds

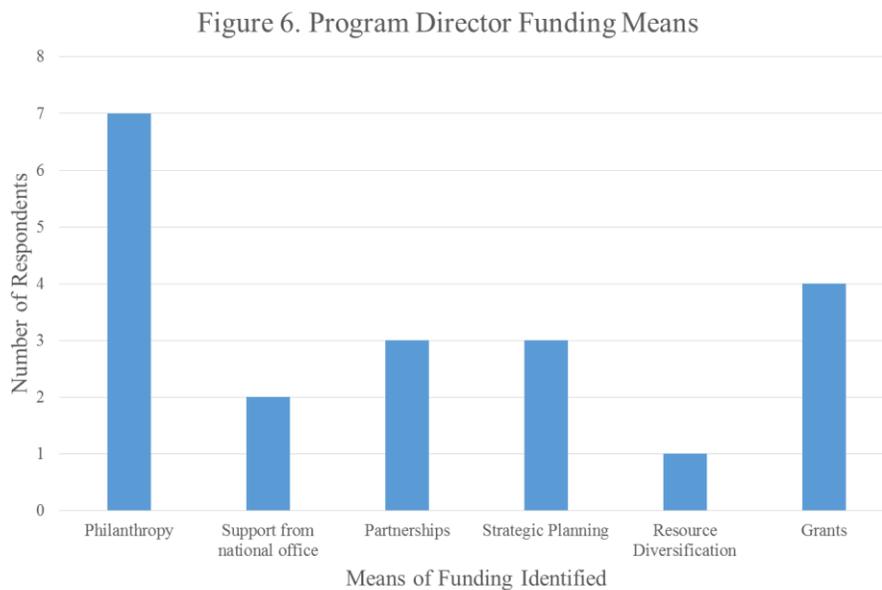
allow this organization to address employment barriers. Another staffer said the organization’s “budget has stayed consistent yet we have been able to increase our outcomes year after year.”

The VISTA team also asked eight organizations’ program directors about funding. Some directors expressed their desire to identify “new funding streams” or strategies, while some identified “partnerships” as a means to increase funding capacity and others, talked about their reliance on “philanthropy.”

Results. The frontline staff members were asked their opinions on whether or not the resources available to the organization are being best used to achieve goals and objectives. 5 of 5 responded that they believed the resources were well allocated. However, one of the respondents also said that their organization was short-staffed and therefore possibly not able to manage all of its resources in the most effective manner. The frontline staff was also asked, “What are your current needs?” 2 of 5 respondents cited funding capacity. When asked about future needs, 2 of 5 frontline staff members also cited funding capacity.

When program directors were asked about how effectively resources are allocated within the organization, 4 of 6 respondents said “effectively” and the other two said “effectively, but with exception.” One director expressed the desire to allocate more funds towards marketing and promotions while another expressed the need for more unrestricted funding. When asked if there was a conscious effort to diversify funds, 8 of 8 program directors replied yes.

Figure 6 shows the funding strategies currently identified by program directors:



Staffing Capacity.

Staffing capacity includes all efforts by organizational staff to provide clients with the services necessary to meet organizational objectives. It also refers to the staff's capacity to implement all necessary aspects of the program for all clients who need services, as well as keep and maintain data about clients and program outcomes. This program implementation may include: case management, leveraging volunteers through civic engagement, and increasing skills and training as well as community education and resources.

Findings. The VISTA team discovered that frontline staff conduct assessments and collect participant data as part of their regular duties. Larger organizations address the needs of their clients as separate services (e.g. GED certification, driver's license renewal). This means they serve a client for a specific need department by department or refer a client to an outside organization for other needs. Depending on the organization and the scope of its workforce development program, caseload varies from 25 to 5,000 per month. Some organizations serve clients from a certain geographic area while others serve all Detroiters who walk through their doors.

Results. In regards to the casework, 2 of 5 respondents among frontline staff identified staffing capacity as an ongoing need, 3 of 5 said that volume does affect their capacity to meet the clients' needs and 2 of 5 said they rely on team collaboration and cooperation to handle the volume. When asked about formation of a client action plan, 5 of 5 frontline staff said that client input was incorporated into the plan. 4 of 5 said their plan takes into account market demand and trends, and 5 of 5 frontline staff explained that they relied on referrals to other departments within their organization or to other organizations to ensure that clients' needs are met.

Among the program directors, 3 of 8 identified staffing capacity as a current need for their organization and 3 of 7 identified case management to ensure clients are best prepared to gain employment. When asked about achieving objectives, 7 of 8 of program directors said they were making progress toward achieving objectives; 1 of 8 said they were meeting or exceeding objectives and 5 of 8 said they were working to improve outcomes. Regarding program capacity, 2 of 4 said they were able to get a greater percentage of participants in each class employed.

Sector Activity.

Sector activity encompasses all initiatives undertaken by two or more organizations within the workforce development sector. Sector activity reflects a shared mission and vision for organizations and stakeholders operating within the workforce development scope. Within sector activity objectives are designed to allow for multiple organizations to contribute to a common initiative. Sector activity may also include cross-sector initiatives regarding workforce development. For example: Access for All is a business and nonprofit initiative designed to place Metro Detroiters into skilled-trades careers. Sector activity also includes supporting efforts to leverage economic and community development initiatives in order to meet workforce needs. The following categories from our data fall under sector activity: program expansion, foundational skills supports, alignment with the sector, understanding/sharing best practices, partnership development/expansion, and strategic planning.

Findings. One frontline staff member mentioned “relationship building” as an important part of sector activity and another identified the need to “treat everyone independently and really evaluate the relationship.” Several respondents identified experiences in which they had collaborated with other organizations for a specific program. For the program directors, community engagement was a recurring theme, as was the need to participate in sector wide activities (e.g. Detroit Jobs Alliance).

Results. All of the frontline staff (5 of 5) identified at least one workforce development organization, sector-wide initiative, or cross-sector organization that they have partnered with, and 3 of 5 mentioned the importance of relationship building with partners. 7 of 8 program directors identified communication with community stakeholders as a sector activity, 4 of 8 said they conduct research and analysis to align their objectives with the needs of the community in which they operate, and 3 of 6 said they have active partnerships within the sector.

Outreach.

Outreach includes marketing and promotions in order to increase support from stakeholders and community members. Outreach also promotes organizational services offered. Through this effort, business, community-based, government, and workforce development organizations are made more aware of the services offered. Therefore, workforce development organizations can better implement programs and meet their goals. Outreach also includes

employer engagement/investment, marketing, advocacy, recruiting volunteers, and understanding market demands.

Findings. When asked “How do you plan to meet those needs?” some members of the frontline staff answered “More networking” and “Partnering with other organizations.” When asked about methods for outreach program directors gave responses that varied greatly. Multiple respondents said email was used to make contact with employers and keep up with prospective clients. One program director identified getting “leads from the mayor’s office for employers” as a means of outreach. Some also identified social media, newspapers, radio advertisements, community centers and word of mouth as means of outreach. Others use “referral fairs,” regular electronic postings, and marketing. One organization said “We’re in the community constantly.”

Results. 3 of 5 frontline staff respondents offer on-site interviews to bring the employer and client together, 2 of 5 planned to meet their outreach needs with more employer engagement, 1 of 5 identified “advocacy” as a means to meet their clients’ needs and 2 of 5 planned to develop and expand partnerships. Among program directors, 6 of 7 said they engage in community outreach, 3 of 7 used social media, 5 of 7 attended outreach fairs, and 4 of 7 rely on marketing.

Top Pressing Needs of Clients

Figures 7 through 10 show the needs of clients as identified by the assessment findings. Figure 7 shows the current needs of clients according to frontline staff; Figure 8 shows the future needs of clients according to frontline staff. Additionally, Figure 9 shows the current needs of clients according to program directors and Figure 10 shows the future needs of clients according to program directors.

Figure 7. Frontline Staff: Current Needs of Clients

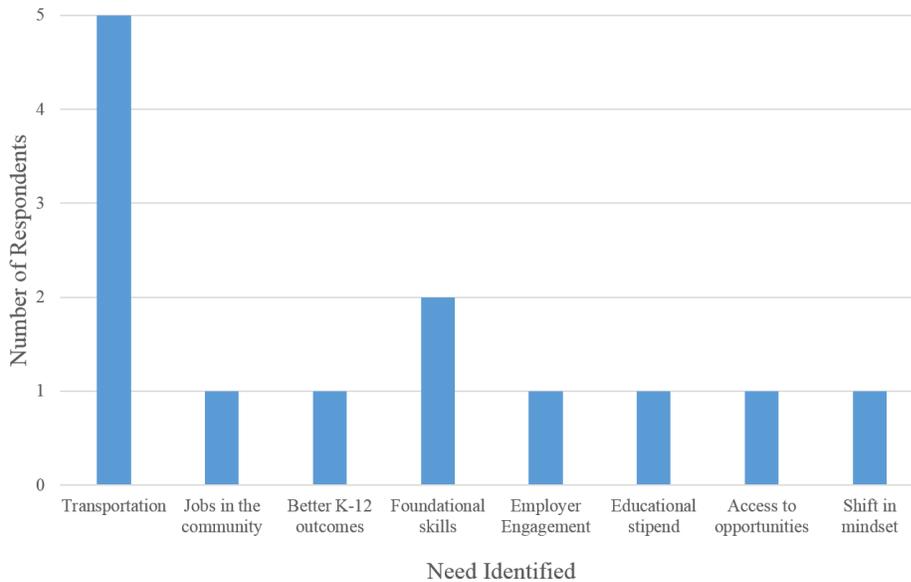


Figure 8. Frontline Staff: Future Needs of Clients

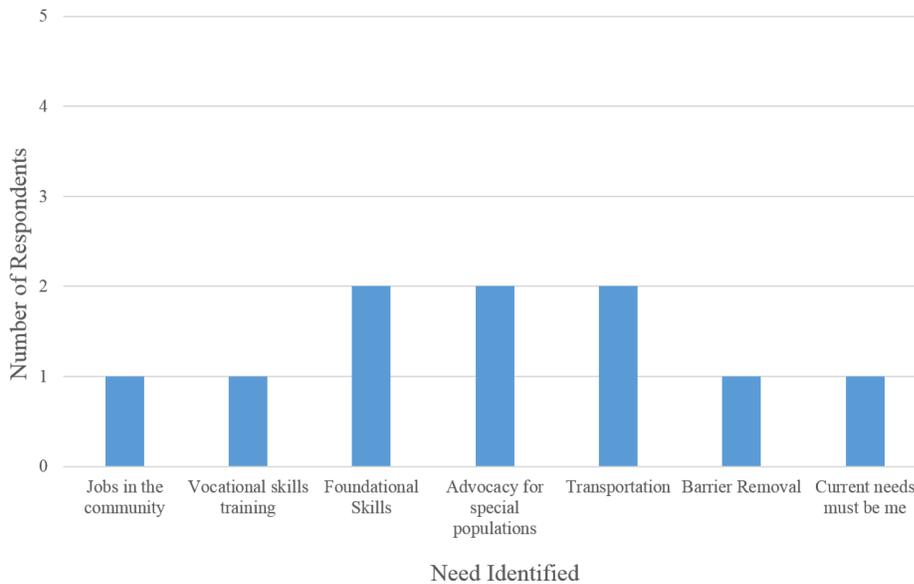


Figure 9. Program Directors: Current Needs of Clients

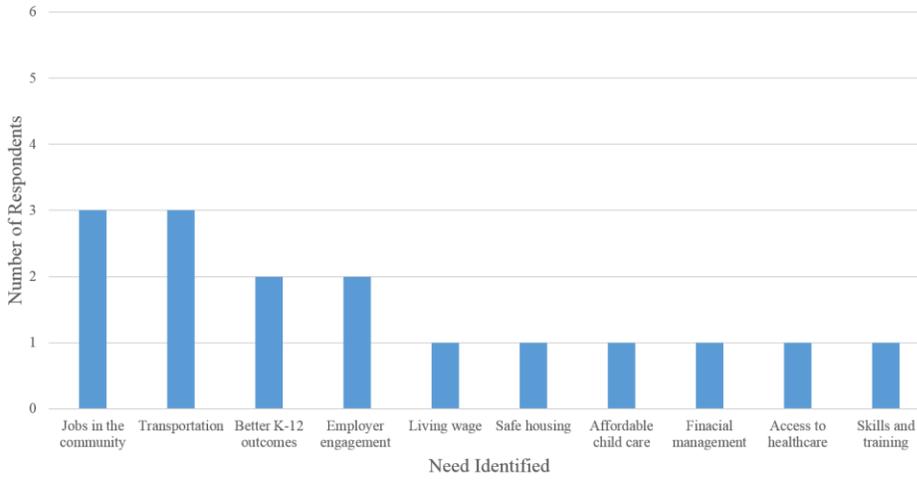


Figure 10. Program Directors: Future Needs of Clients

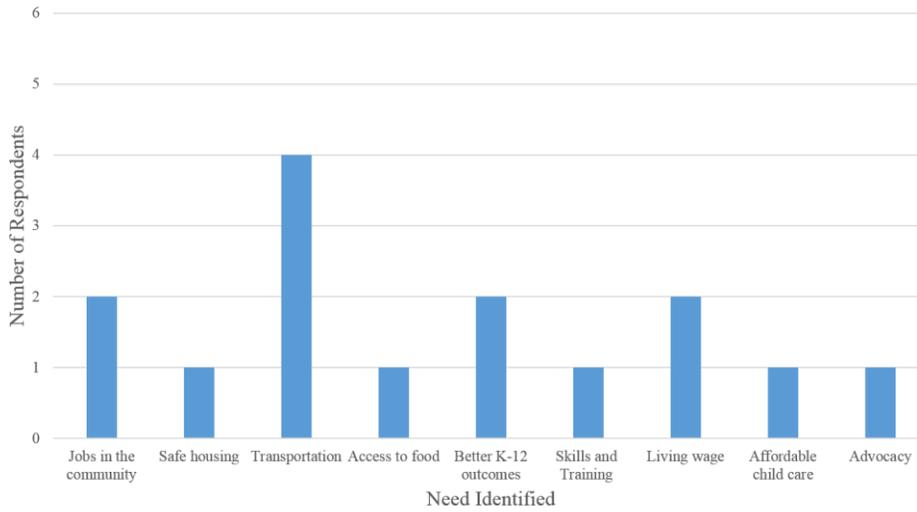
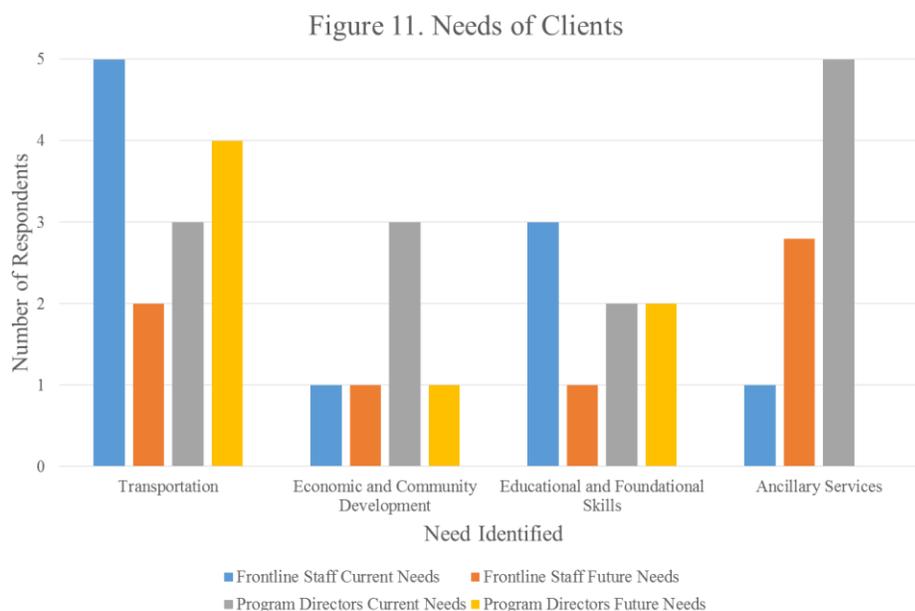


Figure 11 shows the total number of respondents, including frontline staff and program directors, who identified the four top current and/or future needs of clients.



Transportation.

While the City of Detroit continues to offer more methods of public transport, respondents said there is an additional need to expand beyond current projections. When asked what the current needs of clients are, they cited a need to improve transportation methods and options as one of the essential needs.

Findings. Both directors and frontline staff identified transportation as a current client need. One concern raised was centered on the idea that “Detroit is lacking in terms of transportation,” and, because of this deficiency, people must travel for “three hours to get to work on two different bus tickets.” An additional concern was the impracticality of bus scheduling. It was noted that particular job sites will accept applications until a specific time of day, but due to bus scheduling, many applicants do not arrive in time.

Driver’s licenses were also cited as a client need, specifically the ability to maintain a valid driver’s license. One respondent said that often individuals will receive citations or tickets and then, due to an inability to pay the fees, their driver’s licenses will be suspended. In the event that an individual has a license suspended, it has a significant impact on obtaining employment in two ways. One, it has an adverse impact on the ability to search for a job. Two, being unable to drive, limits many job opportunities because of location. To facilitate a resolution of this

problem, a Driver's License Amnesty program was suggested. The program would be a collaborative effort between the district courts, workforce development agencies and licensees.

Results. Of the five front line staff members surveyed, all (5 of 5) said that transportation issues are a concern for their clients. Some of the concerns expressed were transportation in general, assistance in paying off state fees for clients, and client need for a valid driver's license.

Of the six directors surveyed, 3 of 6 stated that reliable transportation was a need for their clients. The specific issues cited were transportation in general and the client need for a valid driver's license.

Economic/Community Development.

Detroit is experiencing an increase in economic and community growth and development. The dedication of multiple organizations within the city is helping to guide the actions necessary to sustain the city's rebirth. Through this section of the Needs Assessment, those surveyed were given the opportunity to provide additional insight about specific areas of need for job seekers.

Findings. An often-stated need was additional jobs within Detroit that are accessible to the clients. One frontline staff member said that "more jobs" within the local community are needed. An additional need is an increase in employer engagement and having "willing employers" who are open to the client population.

Results. Of the five frontline staff members who were asked about the current needs of their clients, 1 of 5 stated a current need to explore additional job creation in the community and 1 of 5 stated that job creation would be a future need for clients.

The directors expressed the need for developing additional partnerships within the community. When asked about the current needs of their clients, 3 of 6 directors said that increasing partnerships and economic development are needed. When asked about future needs, 2 of 6 stated the same.

Education and Foundational Skills.

Throughout the workforce development sector, adult basic education skills are seen as extremely important. These skills, including math, literacy, and reading comprehension are currently being addressed within the organizations.

Findings. General themes centered on education and foundational skills. One of the current and future needs identified was better K-12 outcomes. It was suggested that this need could be addressed by having an "improved education system" and "primary school

improvement.”

Results. The results of the Needs Assessment suggest that there is equal concern between directors and frontline staff on the issues of K-12 outcomes and foundational skills needs. Of the five frontline staff surveyed, 1 of 5 stated that better K-12 outcomes is a current need of clients, and 2 of 5 respondents said that increasing foundational skills is a current client need. 2 of 5 also said that foundational skills improvement would be a future need of their clients.

Of the six directors surveyed, 2 of 6 said that increasing K-12 outcomes was a current need, and 2 of 6z stated that it would be a future need.

Ancillary Services.

During the beginning phases of the Needs Assessment process, a recurring theme was the need for supportive services in order to maintain employment. These services include but are not limited to safe and affordable housing, health care, and financial management skills. Ancillary services were not topics that pertained to securing a job or career directly, but, the added support from these services could help sustain long-term employment.

Findings. The results of the Needs Assessment reflected an understanding of the importance of ancillary services to attain and sustain a job. The topic of ancillary services was broken down into many categories, with one topic not carrying more weight than another. Both the directors and frontline staff surveyed listed several aspects of ancillary services needed currently and in the future.

Results. When asked about current needs, 1 of 5 frontline staff said that an educational stipend is needed as a supportive service. When the same five were surveyed on future needs, 1 of 5 said that there is a need for barrier removal for clients.

When presented with the same set of questions, 4 of 6 directors cited a current client need for ancillary services, including safe and affordable housing, access to child care, development of financial management skills, and access to healthcare. 2 of 6 directors did not indicate a client need for ancillary services in their responses. As for future client needs, 3 of 5 directors said It will be necessary to have having ancillary services available, including housing, food, and child care.

Future Directions

Funding Capacity

Funding capacity was identified as a top need that the VISTA team has the ability to address. By supporting resource development activities, team members plan to assist with diversification of funding streams. The VISTA team will be able to add capacity to resource development by supporting the grant research and writing process. Depending on the needs of the organization, the grants may focus on specific areas such as localized fund development, corporate funding, social justice initiatives or workforce development.

Staffing Capacity

Through the Needs Assessment, the VISTA team found that staffing capacity is an important need for these organizations. The VISTA team will engage with the organizations to provide assistance in increasing staff capacity. Through strategic planning, the team will assist in developing and facilitating workshops that reflect the mission, vision, and goals of the organization and the needs of their clientele. Team members will also engage with the service site and their current or potential partner organizations in order to facilitate the sharing of programs. Finally, the VISTA team will research and connect the service sites with specialized resources that will increase staffing capacity within the organization.

Outreach and Engagement

Also identified was the need for community and sector engagement. By researching current events within the sector, the VISTA team will be able to keep organizations abreast of community events and efforts. The team will assist with staffing tables at various resource events and obtain relevant sector information to be shared with organizations. Finally, providing access to marketing and communications professionals and/or resources, in addition to outreach through social media updates will help add capacity within organizations.

Sector Activity

The need for more activity and involvement within the sector was also identified through the Needs Assessment. The VISTA team will add capacity by conducting outreach activities in order to facilitate relationships among organizations within the sector. Additionally, the team will create and share a workforce development newsletter of events and resources. This

newsletter will include local workforce development events, conferences, relevant literature, guest columns and save-the-date information.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the use of non-standardized assessment, method of survey, time, and availability. In the preliminary research it was found that a sector-wide workforce development assessment did not exist. Due to this deficiency, the VISTA team created an assessment tool based on research, interviews, and feedback from the sector. The original questionnaire was modified during the assessment process due to the need for more refined questions. It was modified by consolidating the direct employment and workforce development questionnaires; questions from each were eliminated after one interview was conducted⁴. This elimination process resulted in a difference in the number of responses. The reason for consolidation was that the team found direct employment to be a function of workforce development. Another limitation was the time and availability of the frontline staff and program directors. This time limitation contributed to the differences in number of responses for some of the questions.

Conclusion

The VISTA team selected nine organizations within the workforce development sector in Detroit to be a part of the first round of Needs Assessments. The sample included umbrella, direct service, and intermediary organizations; eight were nonprofits and one a for-profit organization. Over a five-month period, the VISTA team interviewed various frontline staff members and program directors from the sample and analyzed the information gathered from these interviews. The VISTA team has analyzed the top pressing needs of organizations and their clients based on the information gathered. This analysis found that staffing capacity, funding capacity, outreach and engagement, and sector activity were among the top needs of the organizations. The team also found that transportation, economic and community development, education and foundational skills, and ancillary services were the top needs of clients. These results may provide insight into the kinds of additional funding and collaborations that are needed within the workforce development sector in the city of Detroit.

⁴ Section 5 of the Needs Assessment was not altered throughout the process