

Education, Employment, & Opportunities

for Young Adults Aged 16–25 in
Westchester County, New York

Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers

prepared for the Westchester Community Foundation by JobsFirstNYC • December 2018



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About JobsFirstNYC

JobsFirstNYC is a neutral intermediary and a champion for the workforce needs of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults in New York City. Our mission is to improve the system for young adults by bringing together—effectively and efficiently—all available community, corporate, private, and public resources to accelerate the connection of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults with the economic life of New York City.

Executive Summary

An estimated 10% (22,000) of Westchester County young adults aged 16–25 are out of school and out of work (OSOW). Stakeholder engagements in three cities—Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers—have shed light on a significant need for comprehensive social, educational, and employment opportunities for young residents in each city. Further, they have revealed limited coordination between employers and workforce development agencies (as well as among workforce development agencies themselves), a lack of services and knowledge about available services, a need for more training and education programs, limited transportation options in high-demand employment areas, and an overall lack of skills for in-demand job sectors. Many young adults are employed in low-wage sectors with few career path opportunities and have little to no knowledge of the variety of resources or post-secondary options available to them.

Nonprofit, government, education, and skills-training institutions need to align their agendas and build collaborative relationships to catalyze public and private investments aimed at developing talent-pipeline solutions that create outcomes for young adults, offer skilled employees to small and large businesses alike, and incentivize local economic growth by bringing untapped young adult talent into the labor market.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS, THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- 1 Foster and build relationships between employers and workforce development agencies.** Improve the mechanisms for creating relationships between employers and workforce development agencies. Formalize partnerships between employers, local economic development agencies, and business chambers, with training and education programs to inform employment skills training.
- 2 Develop a clearinghouse of services and craft a communications strategy.** Ensure that community resources are comprehensively mapped and easy to find. There needs to be an understanding of the types of services available to the community and young adults, as well as a place where that information can be accessed and updated.
- 3 Invest in skills development and education and training programs that respond to market demands.** Integrate soft skills development into education and training programs. Invest in more employment training and education programs that respond to local job demands in sectors such as construction, health care, and education.
- 4 Develop a service delivery partnership.** Develop a service delivery strategy that is visible, broadly shared, shaped by multiple stakeholders, and addresses challenges related to mental health, criminal justice, affordable housing, and childcare.
- 5 Explore transportation options.** Devise public transportation options that provide access to places of employment with high demands for talent.

Background

The Westchester Community Foundation engaged JobsFirstNYC in 2017 to undertake both a supply- and demand-side research project for three cities in Westchester County, New York—Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers—to determine the current education and employment conditions for young adults aged 16–25 who are OSOW. The goal was to analyze the demographics of OSOW 16- to 25-year-olds in this area; identify economic sectors that provide young adults with entry-level jobs leading to career pathways; assess the capacity of youth-serving organizations; and obtain feedback from key stakeholders. This document provides a summary of our supply and demand data research findings; communities’ perspectives and recommendations concerning education and employment; and economic opportunities for young adults in the three cities, as well as in the county and state more generally.

During a 12-month period, JobsFirstNYC and the Westchester Community Foundation organized focus groups with stakeholders to seek their input on the conditions, challenges, and opportunities with regard to workforce quality and economic outcomes for young adults in Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers. We engaged with a wide range of stakeholders—including young people, employers, government entities, colleges, local workforce boards, and nonprofits—in the three cities and across the county. Many themes emerged throughout the process, with actionable goals tied to expanding career opportunities for young people in Westchester County, developing talent to support local businesses, strengthening the relationship between employers and the public sector, and establishing infrastructure to build the future workforce.

Stakeholders identified significant barriers facing young adults, including an inadequate response by public systems, such as the education system, the public benefits system, the public workforce system, and the transportation system. According to stakeholders, these challenges are exacerbated by limited resources and a lack of coordination among key players. Further, only a small number of organizations provide workforce development services across all three cities. Stakeholders’ observations underscore what the data says about education and employment conditions in the area and confirm that the wider community has little understanding of the depth and breadth of the challenges facing OSOW young adults.

Conducting this research project presented various challenges with regard to data collection and stakeholder convenings. In terms of data, we had relatively small data sets for the three cities, which required us to create a custom extract of the American Community Survey using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. This involved coding respondents by age, location, and other relevant characteristics and then programming the variables for the desired observations. Moreover, the sample size was smaller for Mount Vernon and New Rochelle than for Yonkers, potentially exaggerating the prevalence of African Americans in Mount Vernon and the median household income in New Rochelle. It is also worth noting that a small sample selection can itself be an indicator of a less stable community, as institutional disenfranchisement, housing insecurity, underbanking, and low levels of voter registration can drive down census responses. Finally, some data could not be isolated by city, since the data scan could not accurately determine city specific numbers.

In terms of the stakeholder focus groups, challenges ranged from finding appropriate neutral meeting spaces to having limited access to certain stakeholders, such as employers. Additionally, while outreach through the chambers of commerce in the three cities and the Mount Vernon One-Stop Career Center yielded participation of employers from various sectors, the process underscored the challenge of engaging employers and business leaders in the partnerships that are needed to more successfully connect young people to promising jobs.

Overall, local stakeholders were enthusiastic in their participation and expressed a desire to secure solutions for OSOW youth. Through our research and conversations with stakeholders, the general lack of investment in the OSOW population was evident. There is an opportunity to build a structured, coordinated effort to improve outcomes for young people aged 16–25 in Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers, as well as Westchester County as a whole.

Overview: Findings and Recommendations

DEMOGRAPHIC AND EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH: YOUNG ADULTS IN MOUNT VERNON, NEW ROCHELLE, YONKERS, AND WESTCHESTER COUNTY IN GENERAL

- **Residents by age group:** Young adults aged 16–25 make up an average of 15% of the population of Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers, higher than the overall 13% in Westchester County. New Rochelle has the highest share of young adults, at 18%.
- **Race and ethnicity:** Westchester County is predominantly white, with a Latinx population of more than 20% and an African American population of less than 20%. Mount Vernon has a notable African American population of 16- to 25-year-olds, at 70%.
- **Out of school, out of work:** Overall, Westchester has a relatively low rate of OSOW young adults. On average, 10% (22,000) of its young adults are OSOW.
- **Latinx and African American:** The OSOW population in Westchester consists of 47% African American, 30% Latinx, and 38% white. African Americans and Latinx are disproportionately represented in the OSOW population given that they account for just 26% and 17%, respectively, of all young adults in Westchester.
- **Low-wage jobs:** Most jobs for 16- to 24-year-olds in Westchester are low wage, consistent with New York State trends. The most common jobs for young adults are retail sales, food service, and military-specific occupations.
- **Largest and fastest-growing employment sectors and their wages:** The largest and fastest-growing sectors in Westchester have middle-income wages, with the exception of leisure and hospitality (which are low wage). Most job growth has been in education, health services and construction, where the average annual wages in 2016 range from \$56,000-plus to \$76,000-plus.

YOUNG ADULTS' PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Barriers for Young Adults

- **Limited training programs:** There are very few training programs in the area, and the programs that do exist don't seem to advertise. There are also few sector-based programs and programs that offer industry credentials.
- **Lack of good jobs:** Young adults believe that the only local jobs available to them are in retail. None are interested in working in retail in the long term, but they are all willing to take retail jobs in the short term.
- **Ineffective public school system:** Young adults shared their negative experiences at the local public high schools. They mentioned that many people drop out and join GED programs rather than get their diplomas.
- **Disillusionment with public systems:** Beyond the public schools, there is a lack of faith in the Mayor's Office and the City Council in the three cities. According to the young adults interviewed, these institutions have little to no interaction with young people.
- **Lack of soft skills:** Young adults spoke very openly about the struggles they have in communicating with managers, reacting to criticism, and attendance at work. They understand that they lack these skills but aren't sure how to gain them.
- **Lack of daycare:** Young adults with children are unable to attend trainings unless they can bring their children with them. They also are unable to work because they lack childcare options.

Recommendations

- **Fund more training programs:** There should be more programs in the area—programs that train for specific industry sectors—to help prepare young adults for the workforce. There should also be more funding that allows programs to effectively conduct outreach and recruit young adults, and provide better staff-to-client ratios. These programs are vital for the economic, educational, and emotional health of local youth. High school equivalency preparation programs should be expanded as well, as there are not enough of them available.
- **Integrate career-minded thinking:** Public schools and training programs should work with young adults to help them understand how to build a career pathway and what career options exist for young adults who lack a high school diploma.
- **Provide soft skills training:** Young adults are eager to improve their soft skills, and employers cite this as the most important skill that is lacking. A training or guidance program to increase these skills is necessary.
- **Provide access to daycare:** There should be subsidized daycare for young adults who are in training programs or working low-wage jobs.

SERVICE PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS: NONPROFIT, EDUCATION, AND GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS

Barriers for Young Adults

- **Lack of skills, access to training, work experience, and jobs:** Young people lack job skills and access to training, as well as information on available training programs. Many young people do not know what jobs are available and do not have the experience to get a job.
- **Homelessness:** There are 1,800 hidden homeless individuals in Westchester—people who are doubling up with other families because they have no place to live and no income. Although there are affordability mandates in new private developments, the state's definition of "affordable" is out of reach for many.
- **Mental health problems:** A significant number of young people have mental health challenges, and many more remain undiagnosed. There are no broad initiatives to address substance abuse, such as opioid abuse. Furthermore, young adults' lack of awareness of mental health services is a concern.
- **Food insecurity:** Young adults have voiced their concern to employers that if they work too many hours, they will lose their government benefits. Across the three cities, food insecurity is related to income level, affects overall health, and affects the ability to provide childcare.
- **Transportation problems:** Transportation is expensive and time consuming. Some young adults have to take multiple buses in order to get to work. In addition, bus routes and schedules are often problematic, limiting ready access to businesses with high employment demands.
- **Lack of childcare and family care:** Finding employment is tough because of the lack of adequate and affordable options for childcare and family care. There is also insufficient information about such care in general.

Barriers at the Systems Level

- **Fragmented and siloed systems:** Most organizations in Westchester work in silos, and there is little to no integrated service approach. There is competition among organizations and not enough focus on leveraging resources to help young adults and their families.
- **Lack of understanding of the out-of-school, out-of-work population:** There is a lack of community infrastructure to address the issue of OSOW young adults, as well as limited awareness of the issue.
- **Lack of services and awareness of services:** There is an overall lack of services, as well as a lack of awareness of the services that are available to young adults and anyone seeking employment.
- **Limited business involvement/ Little to no workforce development coordination:** There is a lack of business buy-in and involvement in workforce development programs and trainings. There is a failure to partner with businesses to build programs where young adults have the opportunity to develop skills and where businesses are able to fulfill their talent pipeline needs. Further, it is a challenge to encourage cities to get involved and actually build pipelines to jobs.
- **Lack of college and post-secondary readiness:** Generally, there is a lack of college readiness. Too many students do not get the appropriate information to transition successfully to post-secondary programs or college, or they enter programs underprepared.
- **Limited funding and related challenges:** Not enough attention is paid to what it actually costs to achieve outcomes, such as meeting the high needs of participants, taking the time to effectively train, and providing retention

and support services. The cities also do not receive enough public dollars to provide the range of training and services needed by local residents.

- **Criminal justice engagement:** Large numbers of people have been incarcerated or have had some engagement with the criminal justice system. There is no systematic way to monitor the number of formerly incarcerated individuals re-entering a community, nor is there easily accessible information on their employment options. Moreover, the shift in criminal justice policies, especially the move to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, have created confusion about what the rules are.
- **Schools, education, and high school equivalency:** The city and school districts try to communicate with each other, but citizens aren't getting this information. Further, the school system lacks a focus on vocational and other career pathways to success and has a low guidance-counselor-to-student ratio. There is also in-school shaming of youth who do not pursue the college route. Finally, there is a high need for High School Equivalency (HSE) programs, and those seeking these services do not know where to go.
- **Lack of government intervention to align economic development and local hiring:** There is insufficient government intervention and a general lack of urgency across the government to align economic and workforce development.
- **Racism:** Structural racism is not acknowledged as a factor that affects employment opportunities for some people. Structural racism needs to be addressed as solutions are developed.

Recommendations

Create a neutral mechanism, such as a task force: To overcome service “silos” and to facilitate more integrated service delivery, local stakeholders should establish a neutrally led, coordinated approach that brings organizations together to find sustainable solutions to the multiple challenges faced by 16- to 24-year-olds who are not connected to promising career paths.

- **Create a neutral mechanism:** Create a mechanism, such as a task force, to undertake a comprehensive approach to addressing young adult barriers and solutions. Identify resources for the hardest-to-serve OSOW population. Encourage the publicly funded workforce system to innovate its approach to partnering with employers and youth-serving organizations. Encourage local governments to create mechanisms that link economic revitalization with job opportunities for young adults. Build an actionable workforce strategy that includes implementation steps.
- **Include the voice of youth:** Youth need to be able to articulate what they need and what programs respond to these needs. Give young adults a seat at the table of workforce development conversations.
- **Establish a workforce development committee/business engagement task force:** Create a committee to align workforce development programs with businesses' needs. Engage employers to follow through on commitments to hire. Incentivize hiring agreements for employers.
- **Develop partnerships:** Develop partnerships to create a full-service delivery strategy that is visible, broadly shared, and shaped by multiple stakeholders.

Invest in business and targeted employment sectors: City governments' economic development and business attraction and retention efforts should target sectors that provide career pathways and family-sustaining wages.

- **Target employment growth sectors:** Target specific sectors for expansion in the community. This would help diversify and strengthen the business environment by establishing a year-round employment economy.
- **Support and grow existing local businesses:** There are existing businesses with deep roots invested in the local community. These businesses should be supported so they can continue to grow and offer stability.
- **Engage businesses:** Gather more input from employers about what they need so that they can benefit from the dynamics of youth and the communities in which they operate. Share insights with employers regarding how they can be part of the solution via mentoring programs, skills-based volunteerism, and participating as host sites for youth jobs and internships.

Invest in skills development: City governments should increase educational opportunities for young adults and provide more accessible vocational programming.

- **Develop opportunities for work experience for youth:** Young adults need to gain work experience and develop employability skills through internships, summer jobs, and part-time jobs.
- **Create opportunities for entrepreneurship:** Young adults want to start their own businesses. Foster an entrepreneurial environment supportive of new and small businesses and develop entrepreneurship programs, such as accelerators and incubators, for young adults.
- **Invest in technology training:** Partner with local education providers to launch a coding program to train adults and youth.
- **Diversify programming:** Develop targeted programs to help marginalized young adults, such as women, immigrants, and minorities.

- **Utilize existing untapped resources:** There are many successful entrepreneurs and business professionals who can serve as mentors. Identify local success stories and promote legacy businesses as aspirational models for young residents.

Map assets and community resources: Community resources should be comprehensively mapped and easy to find. The cities should develop a tool that uses a platform that young people are likely to interact with, such as a smart phone application.

Explore affordable transportation options: It is difficult for residents without a vehicle or access to reliable transportation to get to and from jobs. The cities should consider a range of transportation options, such as changing bus times in areas of high-volume employment and investing in driver's license programs for young adults.

Improve communication with schools: Coordination across services and institutions is needed in order to ensure that young adults receive the information they need. The city and school districts should place more focus on face-to-face interaction and engagement.

EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Barriers for Employers

- **Lack of available talent/skilled workers/soft skills:** Small business owners are struggling to connect to good local talent and skilled workers who can grow with them. Additionally, many young people lack the necessary communication and soft skills.
- **Lack of diplomas and marketable degrees:** Educational gaps make hiring more difficult, since many career-track jobs require a diploma or degree. High-skilled jobs are often filled by non-residents.
- **Limited interaction between employers and workforce development agencies:** There is a lack of partnerships between employers and workforce development agencies. The workforce development system as a whole does not communicate with employers. Many employers are eager to work with programs but don't know of any. The Workforce Development Board and Chamber of Commerce have several programs designed to help connect businesses to talent, but employers have often never heard of them.
- **Economic development not benefiting local neighborhoods:** The process of bringing new businesses is very political, with no accountability or measurable results for local businesses and residents.
- **Employer struggles with advertising job openings:** Employers need more options to reach communities with potential talent and need help in advertising job openings.

Recommendations

- **Provide skills training/soft skills and career readiness:** Residents need soft skills training, as well as training for technical skills that are in demand by area employers. Both the public education systems and local training programs should work with young adults to make sure they have the soft skills and understanding of career pathways to take advantage of and excel in local opportunities.
- **Foster partnerships between employers and the workforce development system:** There needs to be more engagement and partnership between employers and the workforce development system. Employers are interested in these partnerships but are unaware of the programs that could benefit them. Local small and mid-sized businesses are eager to partner with the workforce development system to find new talent and expose young adults to new career pathways.
- **Secure funding for work-based learning/internships:** External funding could be used to cover the cost of training and employing young adults in a way that would benefit both the small business community and local youth. Young adults would gain the skills and exposure they need to make good career choices and to be prepared for jobs.
- **Expand existing programs:** Expanding resources for the Federal Work Study and Summer Youth Employment programs to cover wages at local businesses would help businesses grow and would provide young adults with opportunities outside of community centers and universities.
- **Advocate for increased public funding:** For the purposes of obtaining public funds for workforce programs, the cities should advocate for their needs to be assessed based on their demographics alone rather than as part of the county as a whole, which has a high median income and low unemployment rates.

Methodology

Data: Comprehensive research was conducted using data from the most recent census, the American Community Survey, the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics project, and the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. Our supply-side analysis highlights the demographic profile of young adults in Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers in order to locate potential talent. Our demand-side analysis highlights occupational information and career-track opportunities for young adults; identifies sectors experiencing job growth and sectors that are receptive to young adults; and identifies large employment sectors in the three cities. Finally, our observations about the industries in which young adults work and the wages that they earn in the county stem from the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics project. These administrative data (unlike sample survey data) do not have a margin of error and present a comprehensive picture of the labor market, allowing for more granular observation and analysis. Data was available in different age clusters, so some data points cover the 16- to 24-year-old age range while others cover the 16- to 25-year-old age range.

Stakeholder convenings: We conducted six stakeholder convenings with a total of 53 organizations and two focus groups of 20 young adults. Participants comprised a broad range of individuals, including residents, business owners, workforce and economic development professionals, education professionals, providers of health and human services, young people, and representatives of various community-based programs. These key stakeholders across the region provided candid and in-depth information on the challenges, opportunities, and priorities vis-à-vis young adults' education and employment. The focus groups consisted of standard questions, allowing key themes to emerge in the process.

Glossary of Terms

- 1 Unemployed:** Persons without a paid job but available to work.
- 2 Not in the Labor Force:** Persons who are neither employed nor unemployed are not in the labor force (includes students).
- 3 Labor Force Participation Rate:** Number of people available for work as a percentage of the total population.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE NUMBERS IN WESTCHESTER

Demographic Trends

Young adults aged 16–25 make up an average of 15% of the population of Mount Vernon, New Rochelle, and Yonkers, higher than the overall 13% in Westchester County. New Rochelle has the highest share of young adults, at 18%.

Figure 1. Residents by age group

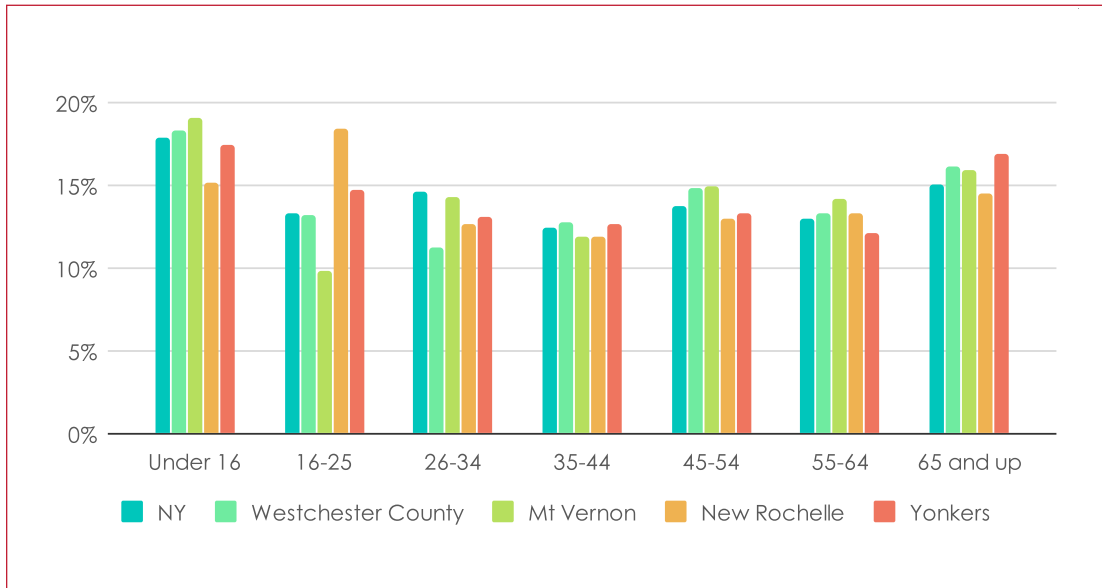
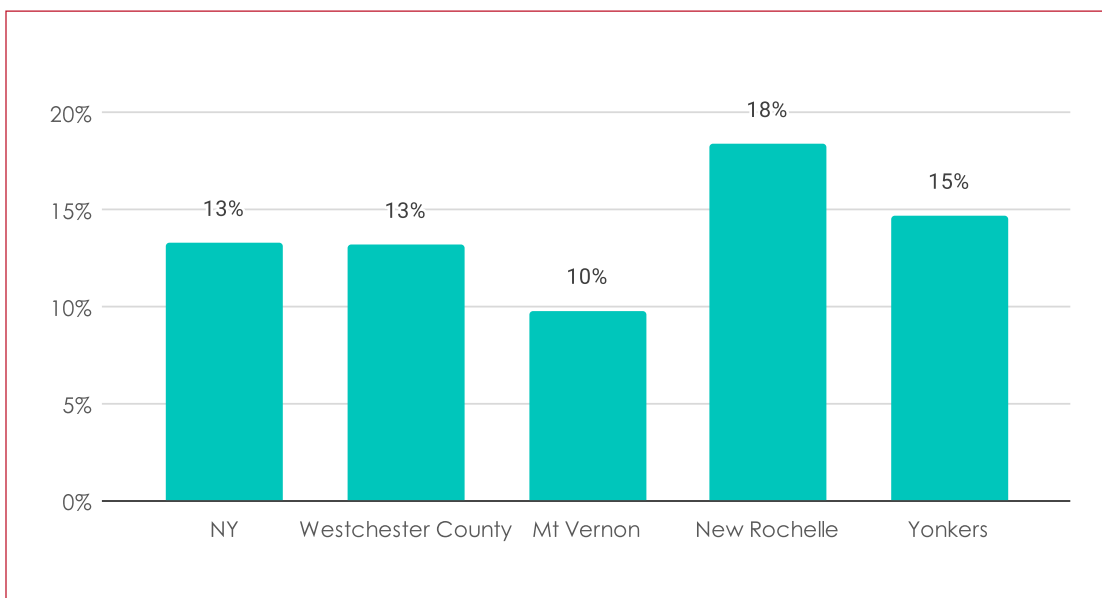


Figure 2. Share of population aged 16–25

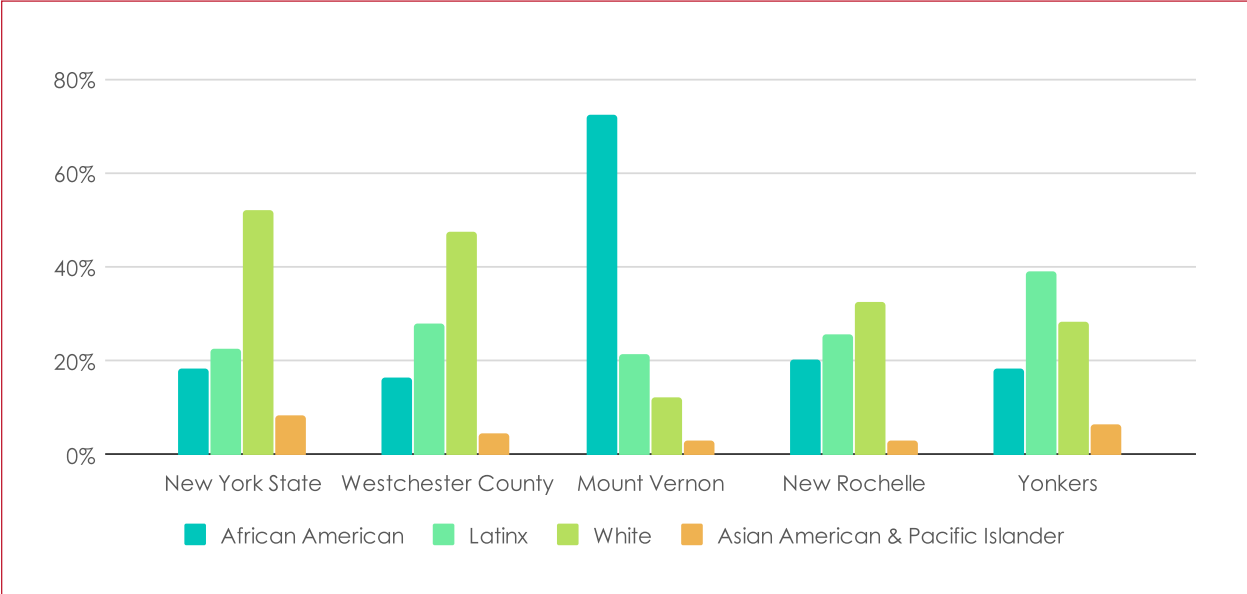


Race and Ethnicity

ALL YOUNG ADULTS (AGED 16–25)

Westchester County young adult residents, aged 16–25, are predominantly white, with a Latinx population of more than 20% and an African American population of less than 20%. Mount Vernon has a notable African American population of 16- to 25-year-olds, at 70%.

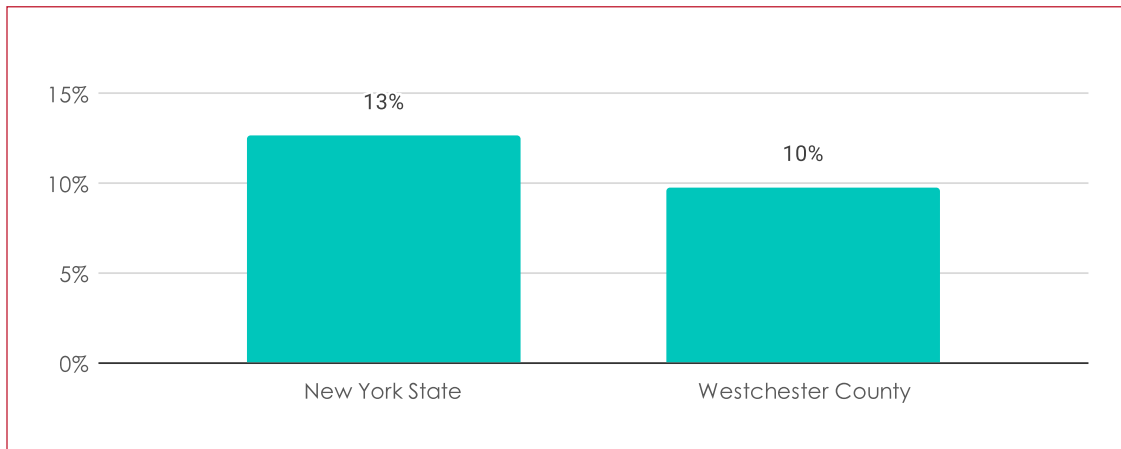
Figure 3. Race and ethnicity of residents aged 16–25



Out-of-School, Out-of-Work Young Adults

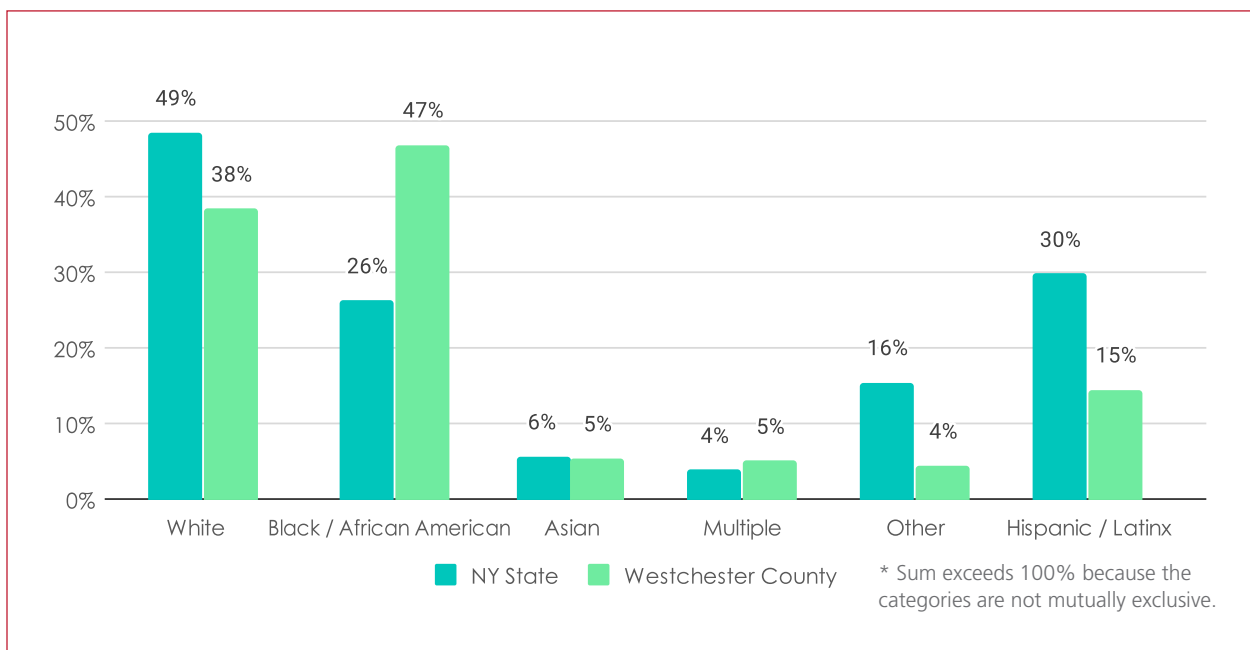
Compared to the state average, Westchester has a relatively low rate of OSOW young adults. On average, 10% of the county's young adults are OSOW. A disproportionate number of them are young people of color: 47% of OSOW youth are African American and 15% are Latinx, both higher than these groups' share of the total young adult population (26% and 17%, respectively).

Figure 4. Proportion of OSOW youth as a percentage of all young adults



* This data could not be isolated by city, since the data scan could not accurately determine city-specific numbers.

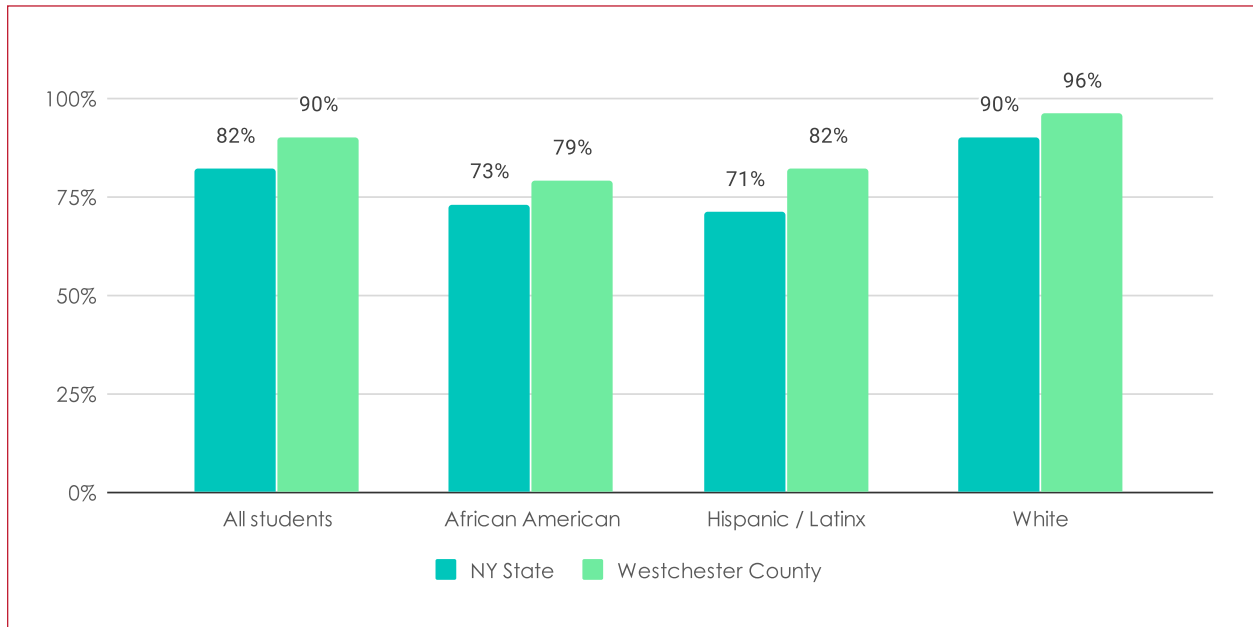
Figure 5. Race and ethnicity of OSOW youth



Educational Attainment

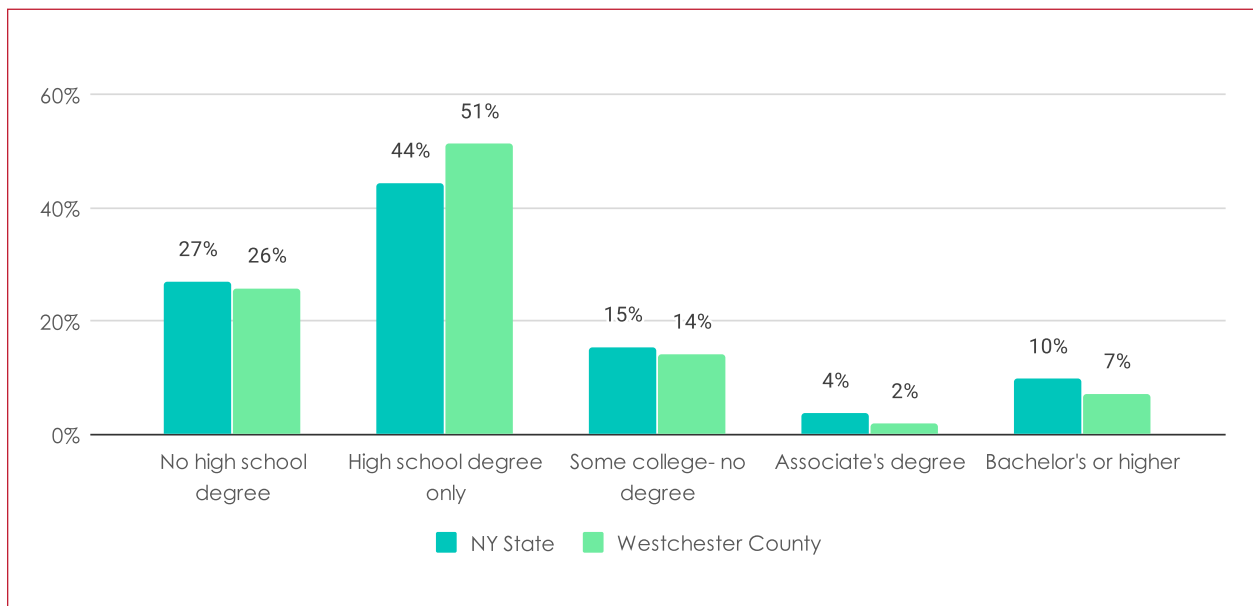
Westchester has higher high school graduation rates than the state as a whole, but racial equity gaps remain. The graduation rate among African Americans is 79% and Latinxs is 82%, while it is 96% among whites.

Figure 6. High school graduation rates by race and ethnicity



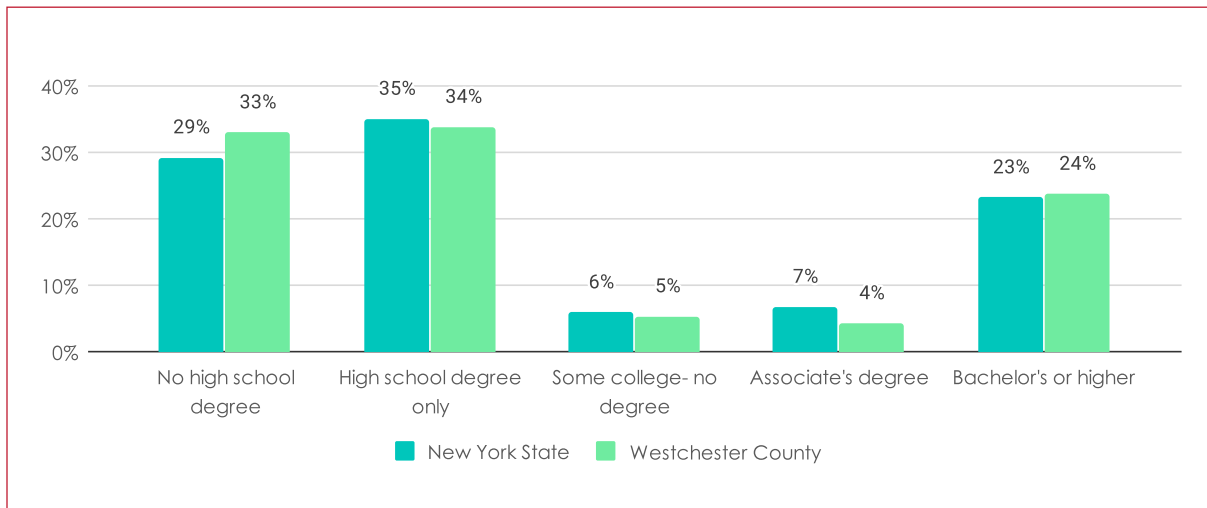
Although a greater share of OSOW young adults in Westchester County have a high school degree compared to the state average, fewer OSOW youth have education beyond high school.

Figure 7. Educational attainment among OSOW youth



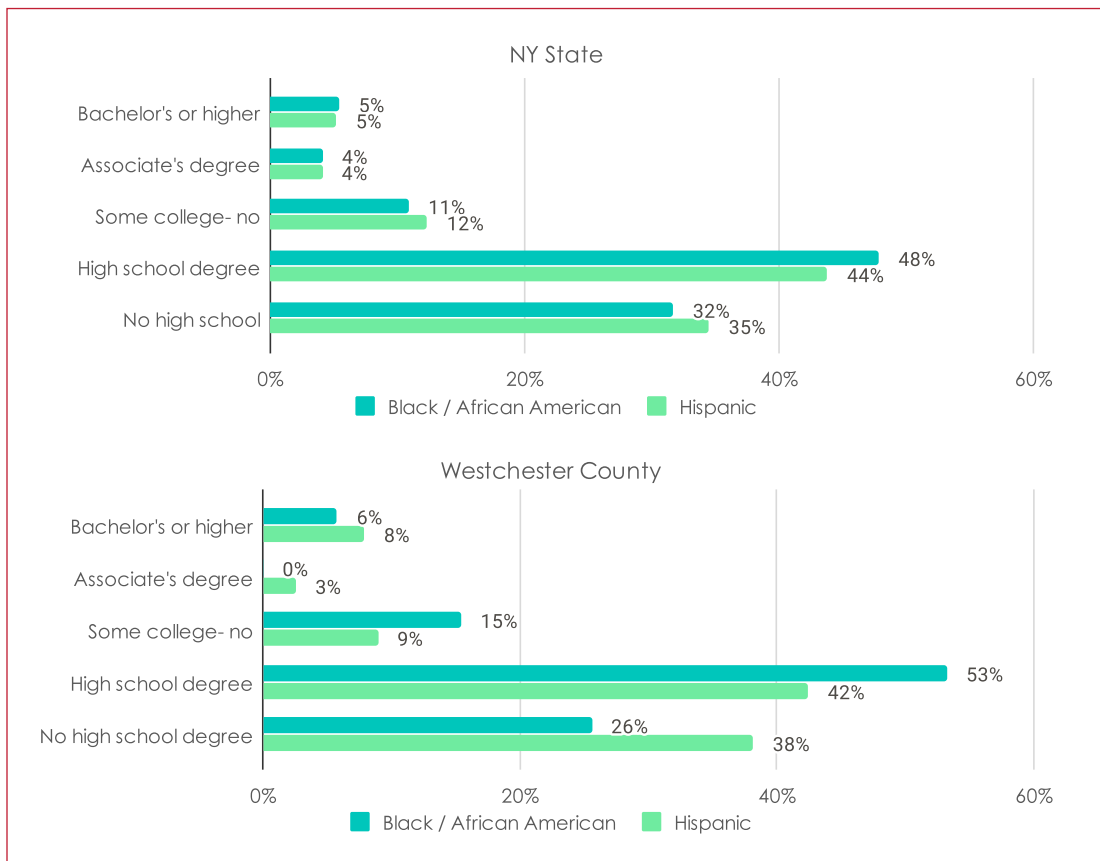
Slightly over a third (34%) of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults have a high school degree, but only 33% have any college and only 24% have completed a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Figure 8. Educational attainment among out-of-school youth who are working



A greater share of Westchester's Latinx OSOW young adults have less than a high school degree, while a greater share of African American OSOW young adults have at least a high school degree.

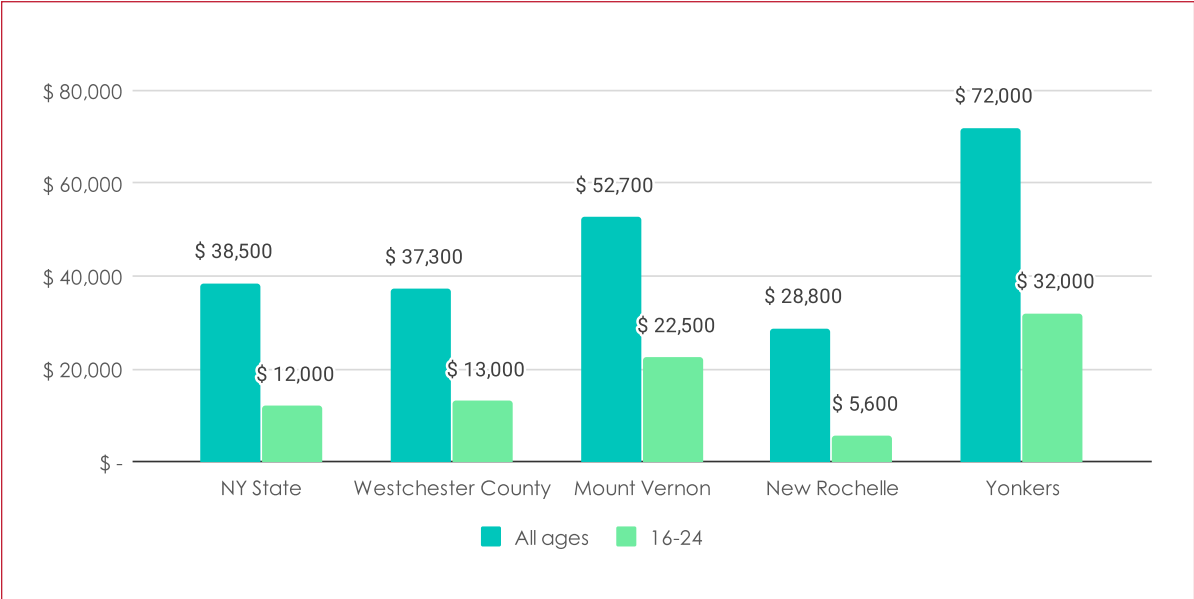
Figure 9. Educational attainment among OSOW youth by race and ethnicity



Income and Poverty

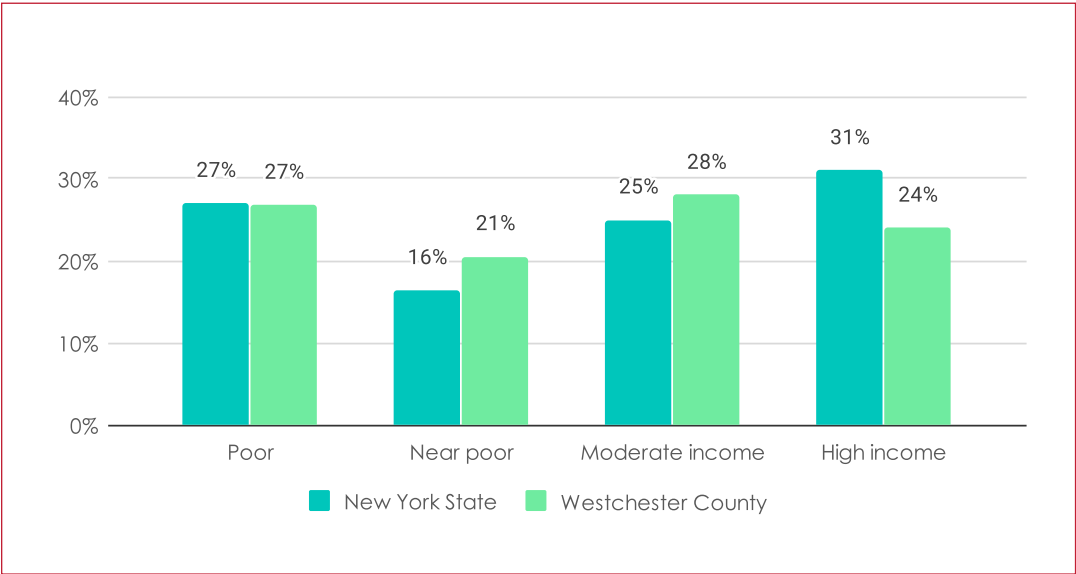
Young adults in Mount Vernon and Yonkers have higher incomes compared to their counterparts in New Rochelle. There are significant differences in the young adult population between the three cities: Yonkers—295,000; New Rochelle—146,000—many in local colleges; and, Mount Vernon—67,000.

Figure 10. Median individual income by age



Compared to the state as a whole, Westchester has a higher share of young adults who are “near poor” and “moderate income.” In addition, 48% of the county’s 16- to 25-year-olds are poor or near poor.

Figure 11. Income levels among 16- to 25-year-olds as a percentage of poverty



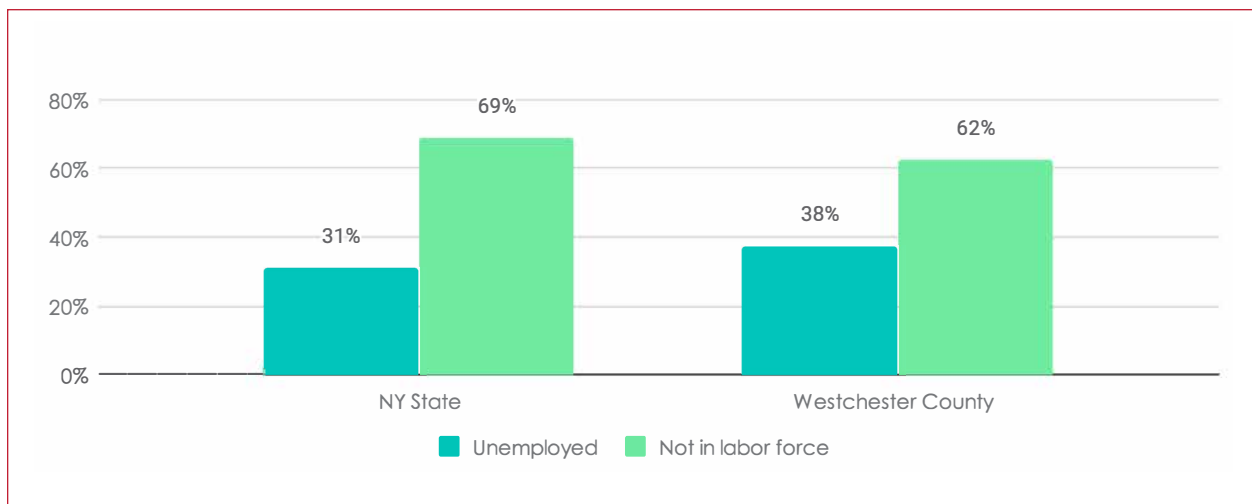
(Poor = income below 100% Federal Poverty Level (FPL); Near Poor = Income 100%-200% of FPL; Moderate Income = Income 201%-399% FPL; High Income = Income 400%FPL)

Employment Trends among Young Adults

Our research analysis has identified growing employment sectors and promising job opportunities for young adults. These sectors are similar to what we see in New York State as a whole, such as retail and food service.

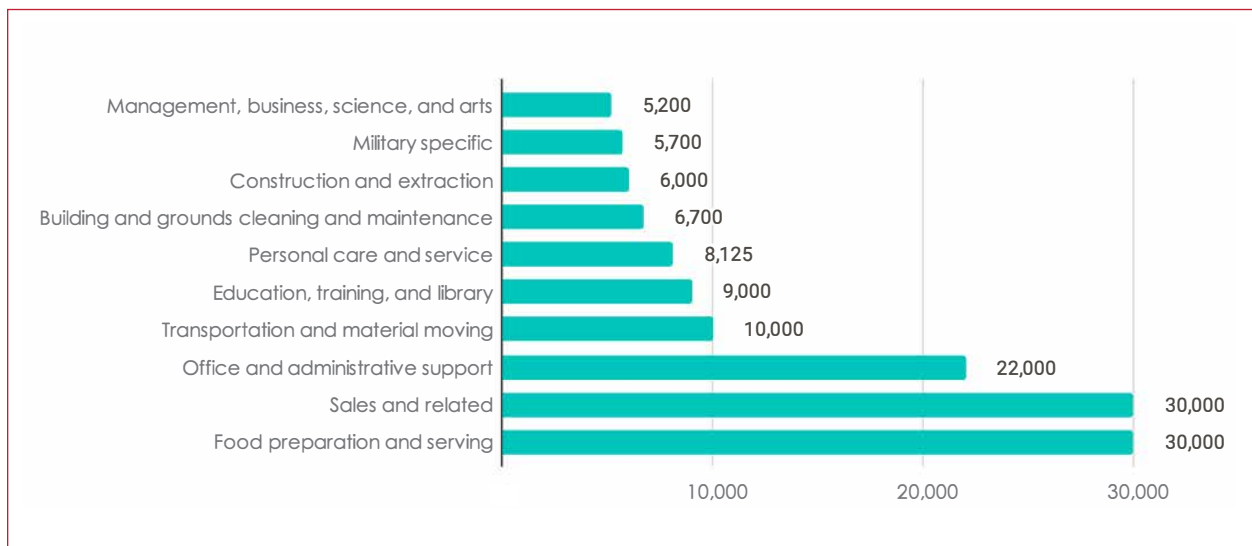
Westchester County has higher young adult unemployment and a lower proportion of people not in the labor force compared to New York State as a whole.

Figure 12. Labor force participation of OSOW youth



Most jobs held by 16- to 24-year-olds are low wage, consistent with state trends.

Figure 13. Most frequently held occupations among 16- to 24-year-olds (Westchester County)



Most jobs held by 16- to 24-year-olds are low-wage, part-time jobs in retail/sales, accommodation and food preparation and serving occupation.

Figure 14. Most frequently held occupations among 16- to 24-year-olds with a 12th-grade education or less (Westchester County)

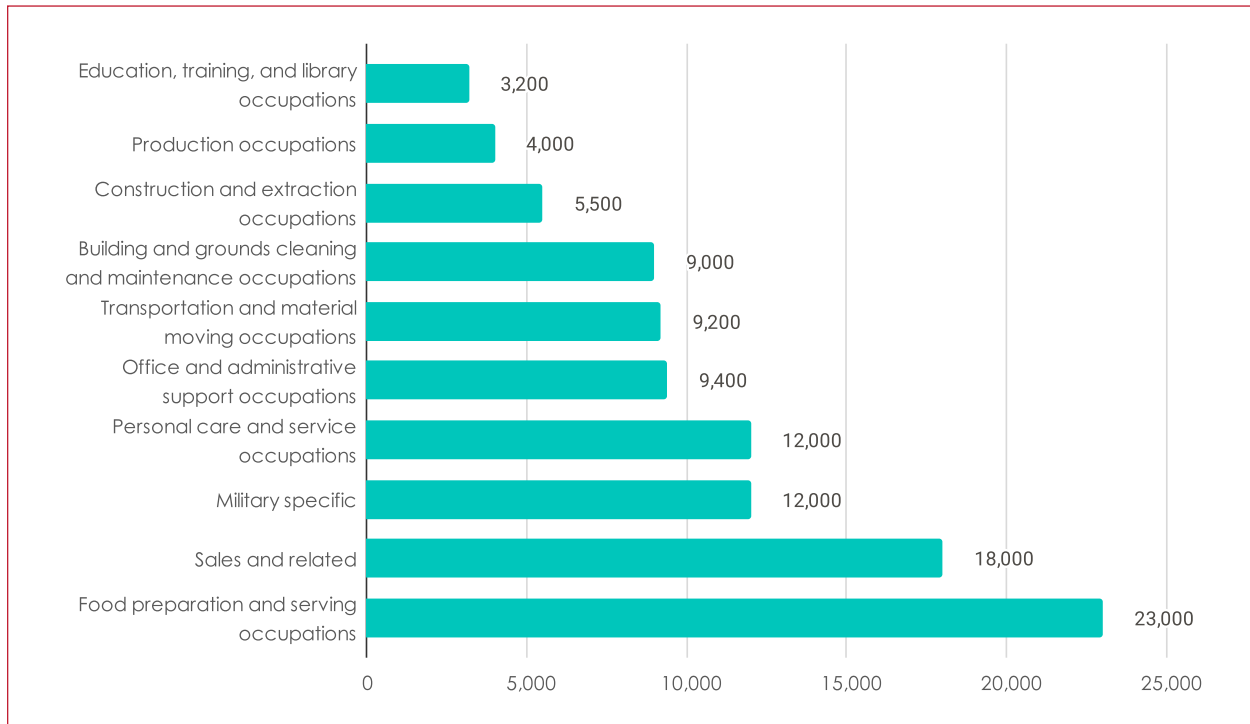
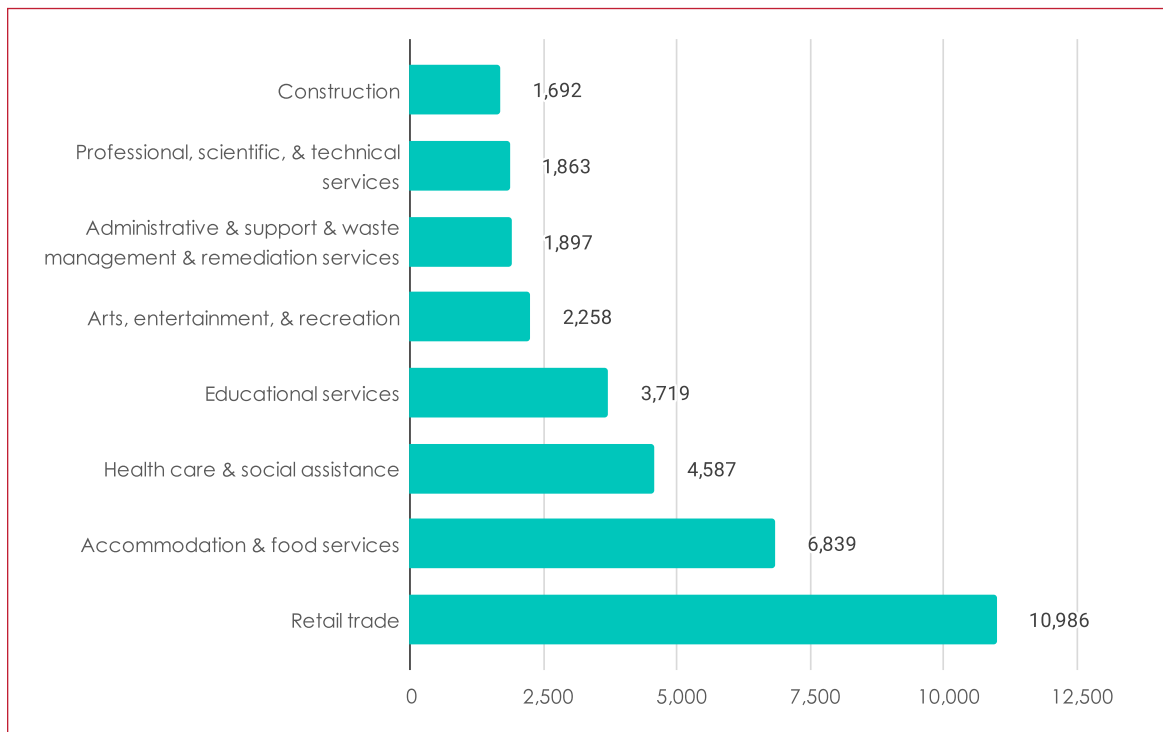


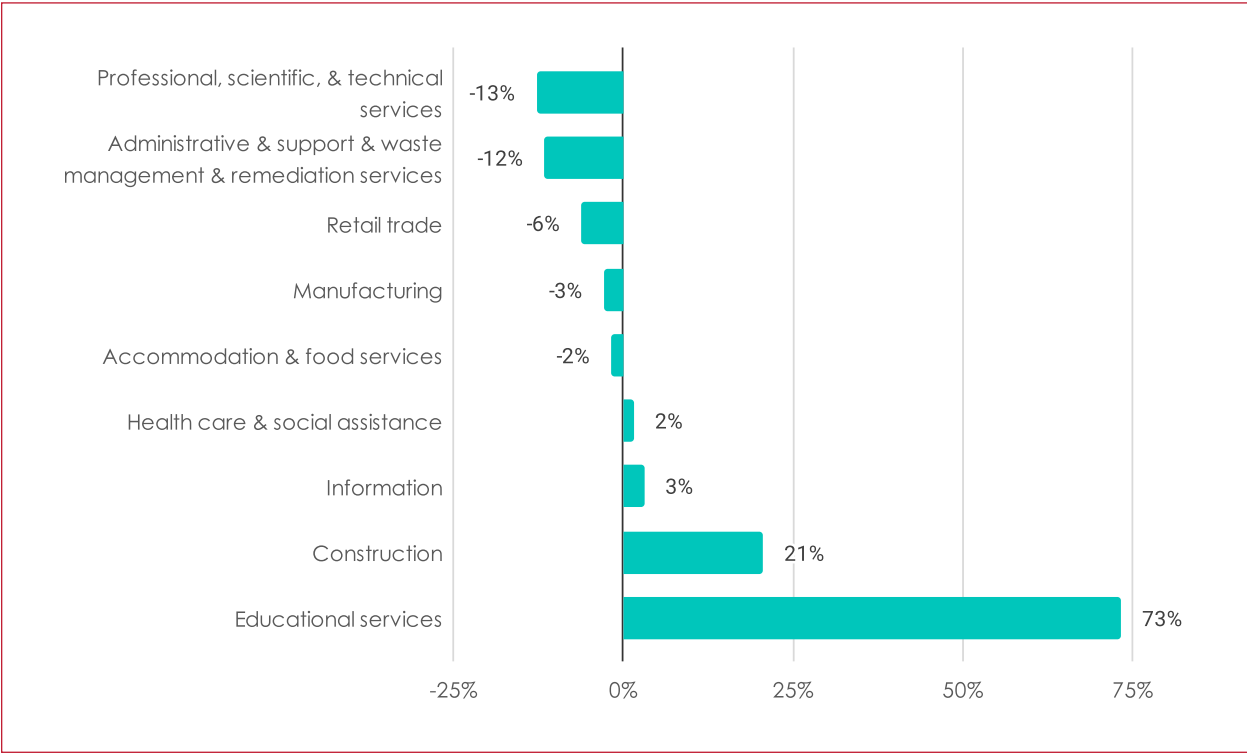
Figure 15. Largest sectors by employment level, 16- to 24-year-olds (Westchester County)



Employment Growth by Sector

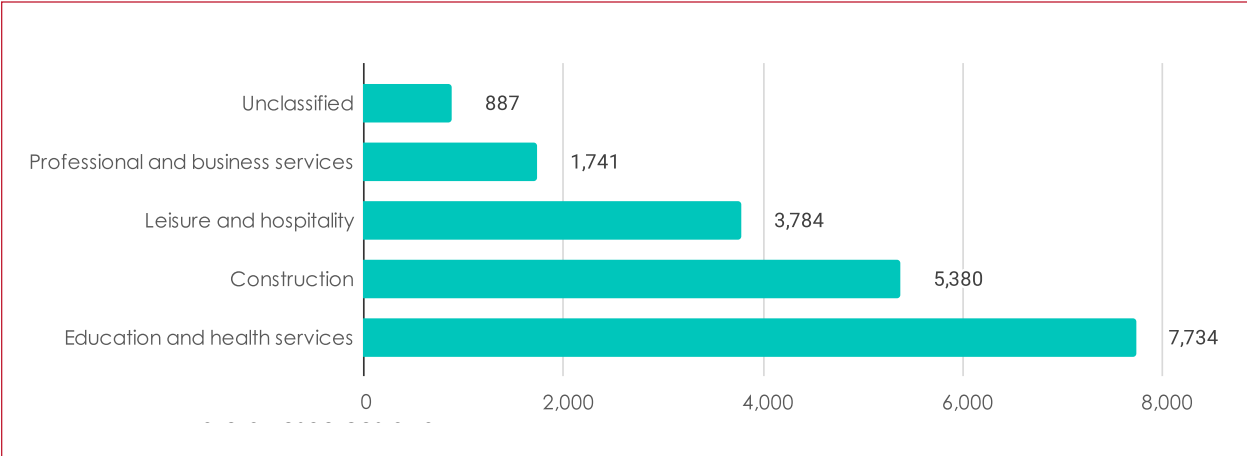
Although most jobs for 16- to 24-year-olds are in retail, accommodation, and food service, the largest job growth has been in construction and educational services.

Figure 16. Growth in employment sectors by percentage for 16- to 24-year-olds (Westchester County, 2012–2017)



Most job growth has been in education and health services.

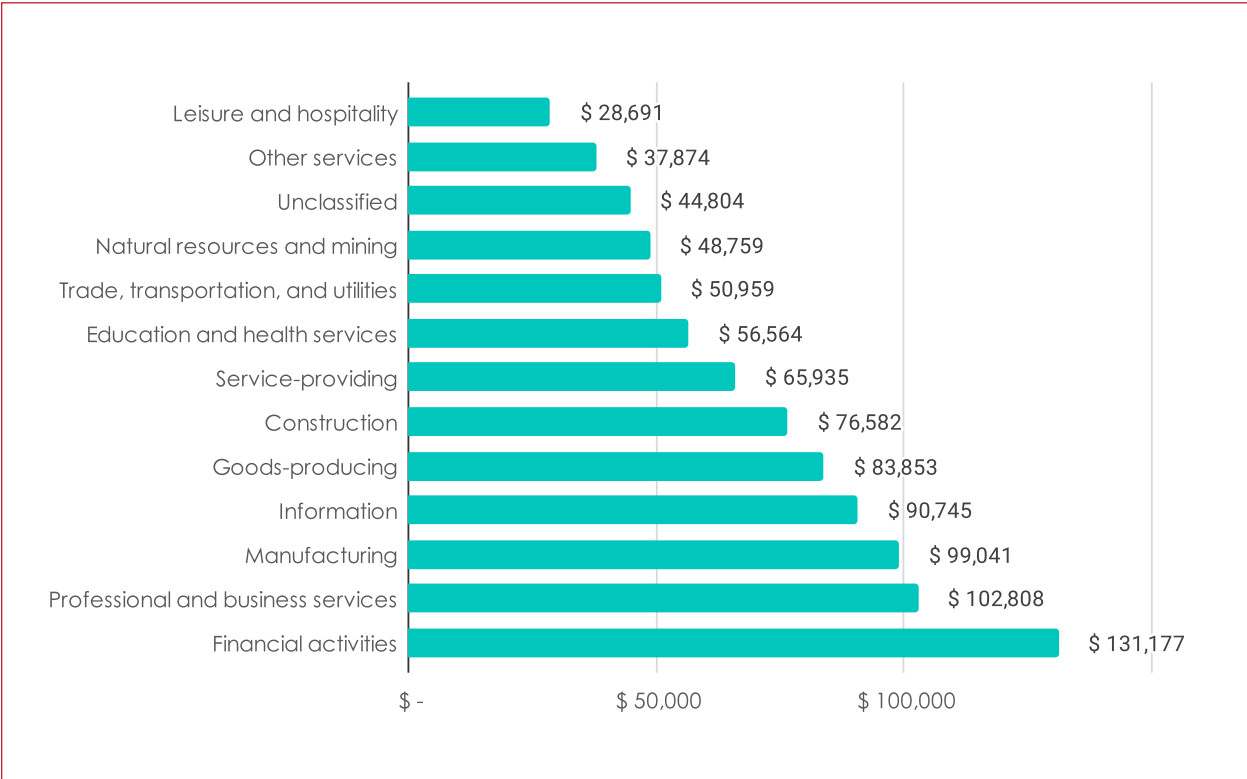
Figure 17. Sectors that have grown by more than 1,000 jobs (Westchester County, 2013–2017)



Employment Wages by Sector

The largest and fastest-growing sectors have middle-income wages, with the exception of leisure and hospitality.

Figure 18. Annual wages by sector (Westchester County, 2016)



The Sector with the fastest growing average wage for young adults, aged 16–25, are professional, scientific and technical services and highest average monthly earnings is finance and insurance.

Figure 19. Fastest-growing average monthly earnings percentage by sector, 16- to 24-year-olds (Westchester County, 2012–2017)

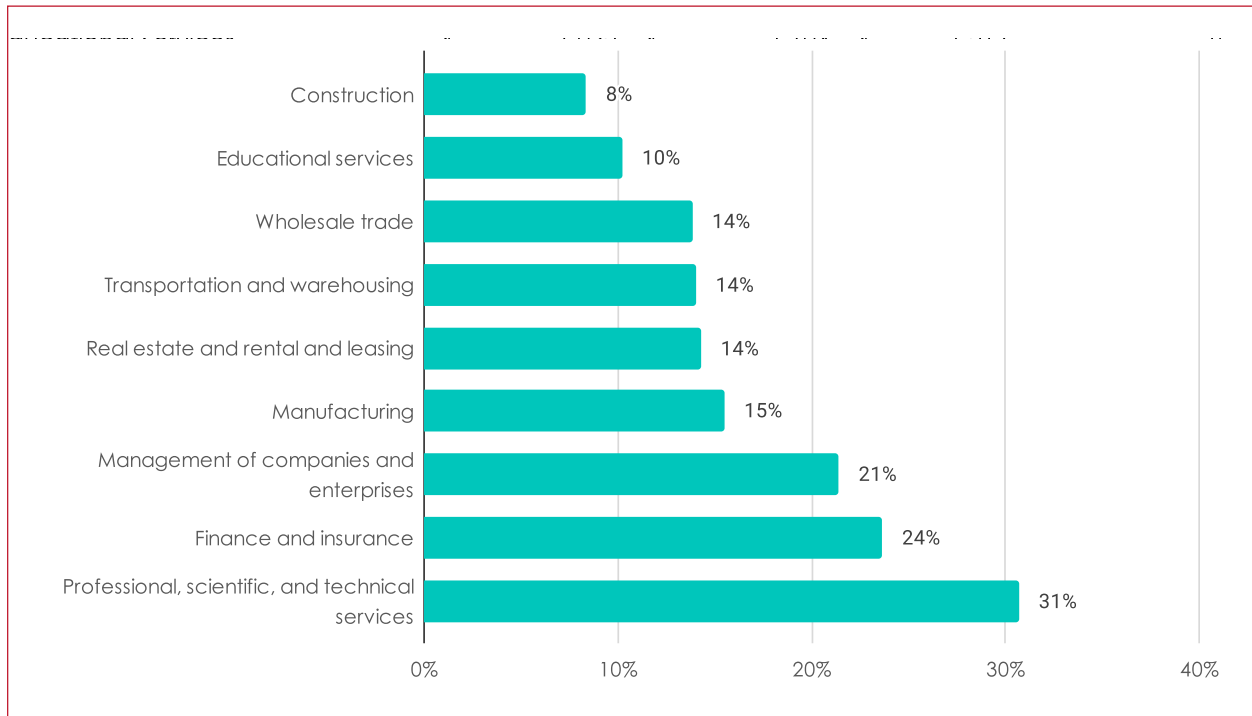
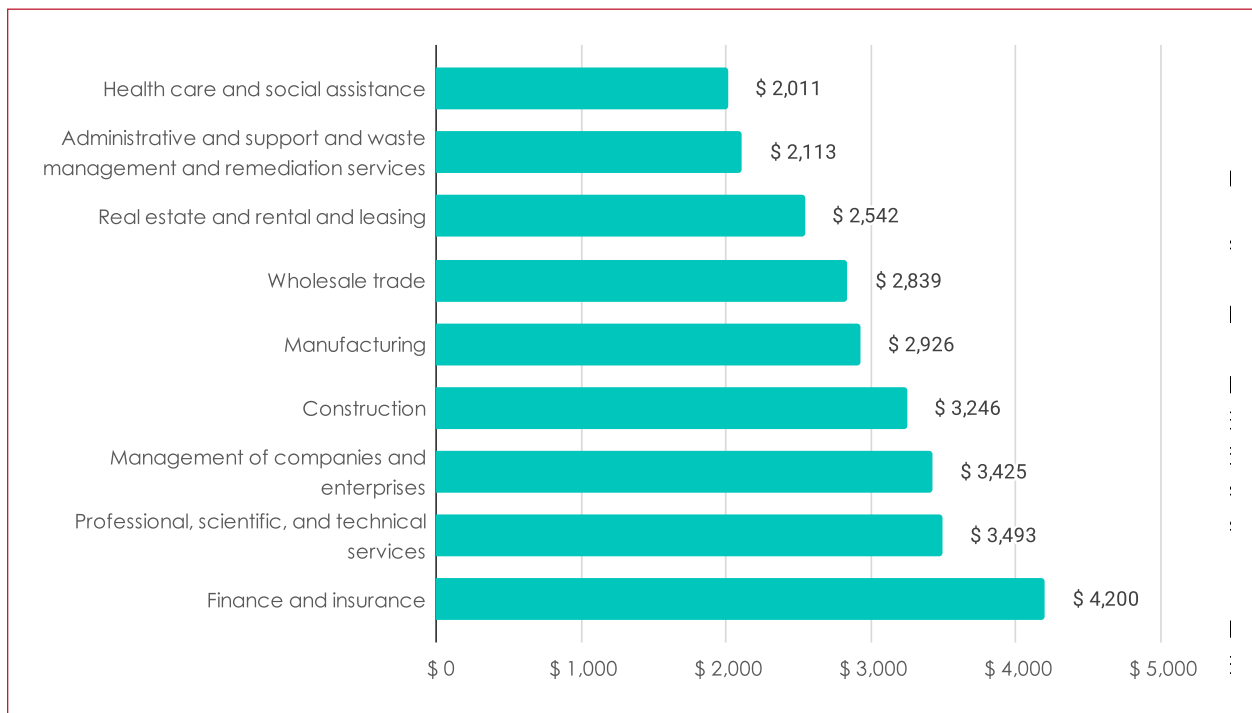


Figure 20. Highest average monthly earnings by sector, 16- to 24-year-olds (Westchester County)



A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DISCUSSION BY STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Service Providers

(Nonprofit, education, and government agencies; not including private sector businesses)

1 Mount Vernon

BARRIERS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

	PROBLEM	DISCUSSION
Housing	Young people have difficulty accessing housing.	Affordable and public housing in New York State extends out to private developments. What is affordable?
Homelessness	There are 1,800 hidden homeless individuals in Westchester. There are people doubling up with families because they have no place to live and no income. 8,000 school-age children (1 out of every 8) are displaced.	Who is homeless? How is homelessness defined?
Mental health	There are a significant number of young people with mental health challenges, and many more remain undiagnosed.	How can this issue be better assessed to know the real numbers and where services are available to address the resulting challenges?
Transportation	Sense of insulation in Mount Vernon. Not much to engage with in the city, and services are difficult to find or get to. There are multiple Metro North stations in Mount Vernon, but no data on whether young people are using them to travel to other places for services or other reasons.	For [the students attending] the Mount Vernon Westchester Community College extension center, [when they finish their course or have to take classes not offered on site], students must go to the Valhalla campus. This [transportation] is burdensome and costly.
Food insecurity	Mount Vernon is the second-largest recipient of the Westchester food bank. Lots of food deserts in Mount Vernon, which has more people per square mile than NYC. 3 million meals a year missed due to food insecurity. 75% in Mount Vernon qualify for free lunch.	The expansion of [Westchester Community College] Valhalla's food pantry is to accommodate growing food insecurity needs. Food security is related to level of income and health.
Childcare	Finding employment is tough due to the lack of adequate and affordable childcare. There is a lack of employer awareness of childcare needs, which can affect employment retention. People are concerned that if they work too many hours, they will lose their government dollars.	The state is putting together a childcare task force, and it would be useful to better understand what it will do. How has universal prekindergarten affected the conversation? It has improved conditions, but problems still remain after 3:00 p.m. due to lack of continuing childcare.

SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"If you have a criminal record, you can't live in public housing."

"Organizations work in silos."

"Lack of access to education or information about education. For the Education Opportunity Center of Yonkers, if you have one college credit you cannot enroll in their system."

"Structural racism should be considered when looking for young adult employment."

"There is an untapped employer base in Mount Vernon. There are a lot of national manufacturers here that may have job opportunities."

"Young people in Mount Vernon need more exposure to career mentorship, and efforts should be targeted to specific neighborhoods. Despite the data, a closer look from neighborhood to neighborhood will show some are not in good condition."

"There needs to be a taskforce to deal with these issues for young adults."

"There is a lack of knowledge about what programs or services are available."

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Fragmented systems: Most organizations in Westchester work in silos, and there is no integrated service approach.

Lack of focus on families: Placing more focus on the whole family is important because the goal should be to relieve as many barriers as possible.

Competition between organizations: Organizations focus too much on achieving their numbers instead of leveraging resources to help one another and to provide better services to young adults and their families.

(SYSTEMIC BARRIERS CONT'D)

Funding: Not enough attention is paid to what it actually costs to achieve outcomes, such as meeting the high needs of participants, taking the time to effectively train, and providing retention and support services. WIOA dollars are complicated to use.

Education: There is a high need for High School Equivalency (HSE) programs. The reality is that people just don't know where to go. For example, when programs are available at Westchester Community College, it is difficult to enroll students because of the need for adult basic education.

Lack of college readiness: There is a lack of college readiness in Mount Vernon, and too many students are not ready to attend college.

Mass incarceration: Large numbers of people are incarcerated. There needs to be a better way to obtain information about the number of formerly incarcerated individuals who are coming back to the community. It is important because people who have criminal records cannot live in public housing, the most likely place that many would go to live.

Racism: Structural racism needs to be addressed as solutions are developed. Racism is not acknowledged as a factor that affects outcomes for some people.

SOLUTIONS: WHAT COMES OUT OF THIS PROCESS?

Task force: Mount Vernon needs a regular task force to deal with these issues for young adults in light of the system's fragmentation.

Coordination: There needs to be a coordinated strategy to get organizations to focus on 16- to 25-year-olds and on finding sustainable solutions for their multiple challenges.

Comprehensive guide to services: A comprehensive service guide should be developed for Mount Vernon. There's already some collective impact work happening in Mount Vernon, but an understanding of what services already exist would allow these partnerships to better focus their advocacy and system-building efforts.

"No wrong door" policy: It should not matter what young people need—they should be connected to the right services wherever they enter the workforce development system. Coordination across programs can help manage this problem.

Partnering: Organizations should stick to what they are good at and think about partnering instead of reinventing the wheel. They should communicate with other organizations in the sector. Organizations should not go for every grant just because they have a good grant writer.

Comprehensive school models: Beacon school and community school models should be considered as options for Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon can put a health center in its schools to address students' health-related issues as part of this comprehensive model.

A common language: From leadership to frontline staff, everybody should be speaking the same language.

Available services: There needs to be an understanding of the types of services available to the community and students and a place where that information can be accessed and kept up to date.

Youth voice and choice: There is a need for a platform where youth can express their opinions. The community needs to start asking youth what they need.

Improved communication with school district: The city and school district try to communicate with each other, but citizens aren't getting this information. They need to place more focus on face-to-face interaction and engagement.

Employer engagement: Mount Vernon has a large manufacturing base of employers that remain unengaged in the community. There should be a concentrated effort to engage them to find out what they need.

2 New Rochelle

BARRIERS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

	PROBLEM	DISCUSSION
Criminal records	Young people do not have professional networks, which makes it harder to find employment regardless of criminal history.	Young people lack social capital.
Homelessness	Young people have difficulty accessing affordable housing. There are many homeless families in New Rochelle.	There is a lack of affordable housing in Westchester.
Lack of childcare and family care	There is not enough affordable childcare or family care. Insufficient options and information about overall family care.	Many young people do not know how or where to obtain these services. There are government childcare programs, but they don't offer enough time to allow someone to go to work.
Lack of skills and training	Young people lack access to job skills and training, and there is a lack of general information on training. Many young people do not know what jobs are available.	Some young people have literacy barriers that prevent them from accessing training programs and jobs.
Mental health and substance abuse	Young people have mental health challenges that are often undiagnosed. There are also substance abuse issues that are evident in some places and under the radar in others.	There are no broad initiatives to address substance abuse, such as opioid addiction.
Transportation	Many young people are unable to pay for transportation to work outside of New Rochelle.	No one really understands how many young people are working outside of New Rochelle.
Generational poverty, food insecurity, racism	There is deep generational poverty in New Rochelle, and many families suffer from food insecurity.	Food security is related to income level, health, and race.
Other barriers: gangs	There is also the challenge of increased gang activities.	There are limited wide-scale solutions for addressing the challenges presented by the presence of gangs in certain neighborhoods.

SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Not enough organizations focused on technology training.”

“There is uncertainty about whether those delivering services are knowledgeable about today’s changing job market, skilled enough, or need to be trained to serve the youth better, given what young people are interested in doing.”

“Lack of government involvement and lack of urgency across government.”

“Westchester needs a neutral intermediary to pull everyone together.”

“There is a lack of community engagement and organized follow-up to address problems identified.”

“There are outdated program models that are not structured to serve out-of-school, out-of-work young adults. There is little focus on this population generally.”

“Organizations work in silos. There is a lack of community engagement.”

“There is not enough understanding across training organizations about credential and skills needed to fill hiring needs.”

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Students' lack of knowledge of post-secondary options: Schools don't educate students about alternatives to college. There is shame associated with going somewhere other than college.

Siloed resources (fragmented systems): Most organizations work in silos, and there is little to no integrated service approach. Attempts to develop such an approach have not been sustained over time.

Lack of community engagement: There is some community engagement, but there is a lack of follow-up and insufficient organized strategies for how to address the problems identified.

Criminal justice (incarceration): The shift in criminal justice policies, especially the move to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, have created confusion about what the rules are.

Education: There is a lack of school systems focused on vocational and other career pathways to success. There is also in-school shaming of kids who do not pursue the college route. Young people say that no one tells them about options other than college for post-graduate engagement. Many employers won't hire someone with a certificate, instead preferring those with college degrees.

Lack of government intervention to align economic development and local hiring: There is insufficient government intervention and a general lack of urgency across the government. Developers are already in New Rochelle working on new economic development projects, and trying to engage them after the development has begun to set aside jobs for local residents would be less effective.

Lack of training for jobs in technology: Not enough organizations offer technology training.

Lack of public understanding of the OSOW challenge: There is a lack of community infrastructure to address the issue of OSOW young adults, as well as limited awareness about the issue.

Challenges in achieving and tracking contracted outcomes: There is a lack of a realistic timeline for outcomes. Investment is needed for socio-emotional support. Youth programs cannot be resourced based on adult program models, as they need more time to be developed and youth need to understand and accept that support will be there for them.

Racism: Structural racism is not acknowledged as a factor that affects outcomes for some people.

SOLUTIONS: WHAT COMES OUT OF THIS PROCESS?

Neutral intermediary: New Rochelle needs a neutral intermediary to pull everyone together to create a comprehensive approach to addressing young adult barriers and solutions.

Career pathways: There needs to be more clarity about career pathways and strategies for how they can be integrated into programs and schools.

Asset/community mapping: Community resources should be mapped to be able to better develop comprehensive life plans for young adults and their families.

Youth-focused coalition: Partnerships should be developed to create a full-service delivery strategy. In this way, a coordinated approach should be visible and shared broadly, and should include input from multiple stakeholders.

Leveraging of existing resources: My Brother's Keeper has already started leveraging resources. This network should be expanded to reach more people and to share its resources.

Nonprofit agencies' preparedness to deliver services: It is important to determine whether agencies are skilled enough or need to train their staff to better respond to today's youth.

Youth voice and youth leadership: Youth need to be able to articulate what they need and what programs respond to these needs. As a result, a space should be created that allows youth to express their needs.

Engagement with businesses and institutions: Employers and institutions will benefit from better understanding the dynamics of youth and the communities in which they operate. Employers can gain further insights as to how they can be part of the solution via mentoring, skills based volunteerism, and participating as host sites for youth jobs and internships. It is important to target institutions such as:

- Business Council of Westchester
- Chamber of Commerce
- Human resources divisions of major businesses
- Youth Bureau
- Braveheart (foster care youth)
- Educational institutions: Westchester Community College; Monroe; Boards of Cooperative Educational Services
- Anchor employers: Montefiore, Iona College

School leadership: Leadership in schools need to ensure that students are aware of all post-secondary options and address the stigma that puts shame on non-college-going students.

Workplace attitude: There needs to be more input and feedback loops from employers about what they need and what challenges young workers face.

3 Yonkers

BARRIERS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

	PROBLEM	DISCUSSION
Homelessness and housing	Young people have difficulty accessing housing.	<p>Notable homelessness in Yonkers. Who are the homeless? How is homelessness defined?</p> <p>Public housing in New York State is considered affordable, but this extends to private developments. What is affordable?</p>
Engaging employers, new business development	Access to employment opportunities; opportunities and perils of full-time employment; job quality.	<p>Full-time employment opportunities would result in the loss of public assistance. Most available jobs would not be able to make up for the loss of benefits.</p> <p>Attracting people to the area to start businesses is an opportunity to diversify the economy and fill vacant storefronts.</p> <p>Residents, businesses, and community organizations should provide young adults with more opportunities and access to training, work experiences, and education.</p> <p>Many current jobs are low-wage, lower-skill positions that offer few to no benefits, job security, or family stability. The jobs offer opportunities for young adults to gain employability skills through work experience, individuals looking for a first job on a career ladder, and people seeking a second job.</p>

continued



continued



Mental health	Young adults face ongoing challenges related to mental health and lack awareness of services.	Young adults' lack of awareness of mental health services is a concern. How do we market to our population more effectively? Creating and nurturing community services and education and training opportunities throughout the city is a high priority. There is a need for additional programs and services that are readily accessible. How can mental health issues be better assessed to know the real numbers and where services are available?
Transportation	The cost of transportation and availability of bus routes is a huge challenge. Barriers for OSOW adults include a lack of transportation options for those who do not drive, do not have a driver's license, or cannot afford parking near the workplace.	Transportation is expensive and time consuming. Some students have to take multiple buses. Also, bus routes and schedules are issues. For example, employers in Ridge Hill are having trouble because employees can't get to work on time for shifts; similarly, employees then have trouble getting back home. This becomes a financial and overall burden for all concerned. Continued improvement of the public transit system to align routes with workplace locations and shift schedules could help remove this barrier. Increased interest in bicycling and walking could be promoted through the development of safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian facilities connecting neighborhoods with employment centers.
Childcare and food insecurity	Finding employment is tough due to the lack of adequate and affordable childcare.	Employers' lack of awareness of childcare needs can affect employment retention. People are concerned that if they work too many hours, they will lose their government benefits. Food security is related to income level and health, and it affects childcare.
Community	There is a general lack of focus on stories of Yonkers residents developing their skills.	Yonkers should find multiple and diverse people—young, old, tradespeople, managers, students, long-time residents, new residents, etc.—who come from the community and can act as role models. Younger residents should be encouraged to improve their skills by taking advantage of education and training opportunities. At the same time, the message to the business community should be that talent exists in Yonkers and they should look there first. Current revitalization, growth, and economic development happening in Yonkers presents an opportunity; however, most of it is occurring in Ridge Hill, where transportation access is a significant problem (see Transportation above).

What are the opportunities, challenges, and needs facing Yonkers' local workforce system?

<p>What are the opportunities and areas of growth?</p>	<p>Neutral network—A network is needed to minimize fiefdoms and silos.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room for growth: Lots of little groups, downtown alliance/merchant, chamber, council; need to pull resources together and leverage voices. • Chamber of Commerce: Could do more for employer recruitment and membership. • City makes it challenging: Planning department and zoning could benefit from more community input. • Workforce development opportunities: More training, counseling, and career information are needed publicly. • Training for businesses: Need to provide more training for businesses and their employees. • Summer employment opportunities: Need increased opportunities for youth. • Capitalize on opportunities: More people could be placed in jobs in construction and redevelopment projects. • Work readiness of young adults: Need more training on interview preparation, how to fill out applications, and how to submit resumes. • Communication with schools and colleges: Need more open communication, referrals, interviews, and pipelines connecting students and graduates with training and jobs. • Mentoring programs: Students need mentoring.
<p>What are the challenges?</p>	<p>Yonkers is a complex and diverse city with unique dynamics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust: Uneven growth in the community and distrust between new and old residents. • Challenges in schools: Lack of good educational opportunities for kids. Kids do not feel the school system is good. There is some violence. • No connection to local leaders/businesses: Important for local leaders and businesses to connect to training programs. • Guidance for youth: Youth have little coordinated direction. • Lack of apprenticeship: Need programs for youth. • Lack of trade schools: Need skilled trades training and jobs. • Limited job qualifications/skilled positions: Skilled workers are not from Yonkers. Hard to fill maintenance mechanics, truck drivers, and supervision positions locally.
<p>What are the needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships: Need more youth internships, summer jobs for youth, and part-time after-school jobs. • Family-sustaining incomes: Need jobs that can sustain a person/family. Current jobs do not pay enough. • Communication: Improve communication—people aren't aware of available programs. • Coordination: Get everyone to work together. • Trust: Build trust with people in the community. • Minority-owned businesses: Need support for minority-owned businesses. • Market-informed training programs: Need thoughtful training programs that respond to market needs. • Transportation: Need better transportation, especially for jobs in areas of heavy business concentration, such as Ridge Hill. • Young adult voice: Give young adults a seat at the table of workforce development conversations. • Options for justice-involved youth: Need jobs for individuals with criminal justice system involvement; they cannot work at hotels and other businesses if they have committed theft. • Funding: Need improved funding mechanisms for programs.

SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"Many young people are homeless. Everything is connected...with homelessness comes food insecurity...comes inconsistent access to technology...which contributes to the technology divide. For example, when employers ask applicants to go to their website, they do not have computers and may have to go to a local library to fill out applications."

"We believe lack of family care is a major factor as to why young people who are out of school and out of work may not be actively seeking work."

"Young adults want support groups of peers. Peer validation is important when dealing with mental health issues."

"There should be a neutral network to minimize fiefdoms and silos. Yonkers is a complex city, with a diverse community and unique dynamics, including race and old residents verses new residents."

"We need more businesses invested in the community, so we can begin leveraging and building relationships."

"We need to provide more training for businesses and their workforce to help close skills gaps."

"Employers need to invest in young workers. Employers do not understand why they cannot keep young adult employees. They do not speak the same language."

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Lack of services and awareness of services: There is an overall lack of services, as well as a lack of awareness of the services that are available to young adults and anyone seeking employment.

Marketing is challenging: There are no central mechanisms for communicating with young people about where provider agencies are or where to access information.

Limited business involvement: There is a lack of business buy-in and involvement in workforce development programs and trainings.

Fragmented systems: Most organizations in Westchester work in silos, and there is no integrated service approach.

Lack of focus on family care: Placing more focus on the whole family is important because the goal should be to relieve as many barriers as possible.

Little to no workforce development coordination: There is little coordination between the workforce system and businesses to build programs where young adults have the opportunity to develop skills and where businesses are able to fulfill their talent pipeline needs. It is unclear what resources exist for the hardest-to-serve OSOW young adult population. It is a challenge to encourage the city to get involved and actually provide jobs.

Local workforce is not built according to employers' needs: Currently, the workforce is not based on needs, and hiring practices are in need of improvement. For example, one employer would not hire even the top student in a program because the student didn't have any work-site experience.

Funding: Not enough attention is paid to what it actually costs to achieve outcomes, such as meeting the high needs of participants, taking the time to effectively train, and providing rigorous training. Yonkers does not receive enough public dollars to provide the range of training and services needed to attach local residents to the labor market.

Lack of college readiness: Yonkers' young adults leave high school unprepared for college. Too many students do not get the appropriate information to transition successfully to post-secondary programs or college.

Criminal justice engagement: Large numbers of people have been incarcerated or have had some engagement with the criminal justice system. There is no systematic way to monitor the number of formerly incarcerated individuals re-entering a community, nor is there easily accessible information on their employment options.

Racism: Structural racism is an historic problem in Yonkers. While racism is recognized, it is not acknowledged as part of the problem that affects employment opportunities for some members of the population.

SOLUTIONS: WHAT COMES OUT OF THIS PROCESS?

Work experience for youth: The workforce development community needs to partner with local businesses to ensure that Yonkers' young adults have greater access to work experiences and opportunities for upward mobility. Young adults need to gain work experience and develop employability skills through internships, summer jobs, and part-time jobs.

Resources for OSOW young adults: It is important to identify resources for the hardest-to-serve OSOW young adult population and to encourage the city's involvement in actually providing jobs. An actionable, step-by-step workforce strategy is needed.

Transportation and driver's licenses: Yonkers should consider a range of transportation options, such as changing bus times in areas of high-volume employment and investing in driver's license programs for young adults.

Workforce development committee/business engagement task force: A committee should be created to align businesses needs and workforce development programs. Workforce development should be built based on the needs of employers. Employers should be engaged to follow through on commitments to hire. It is important to incentivize hiring agreements for employers. Businesses must be at the table at the beginning of conversations in order to have direct input and buy-in regarding programs and trainings.

Targeted employment growth: Based on local economic development and labor market information, Yonkers should target specific sectors for expansion in the community. This would help diversify and strengthen the city's business environment by establishing a year-round economy.

Opportunities for entrepreneurship (startup mindset): Yonkers young adults want to start their own businesses. The city should foster an entrepreneurial environment—such as the Bronx Innovation Factory and the Entrepreneur Space Incubator in Queens—that is supportive of new and small businesses. Moreover, Yonkers should develop entrepreneurship programs, such as accelerators and incubators for young adults.

Untapped resources for mentorship: There are many successful entrepreneurs and business professionals who can serve as mentors. It is important to identify local success stories and promote legacy businesses as aspirational models for young residents.

Technology training: The city should partner with local education providers to launch technology training programs, such as coding programs for adults and youth.

Diversified programming to better serve disenfranchised groups: Targeted programs should be developed to help disenfranchised young adults, such as women, immigrants, and other minorities.

Government investment in young adults: Yonkers should give local businesses access to construction and economic development contracts. Several economic development projects are in the pipeline and, with certifications, local businesses could access some of these contracts and provide jobs to residents.

Support for local businesses: Yonkers should make efforts to partner with business organizations to better understand the needs of local businesses and how they can be supported. There are existing businesses with deep roots in Yonkers that have invested in the local community. These businesses should be supported so they can continue to grow and offer stability.

Young adult task force: With the current fragmented system, Yonkers should establish a task force to examine and address the challenges faced by young adults. This task force should involve a coordinated strategy to find sustainable solutions and should include seats at the table for OSOW young adults.

Business engagement task force/business investment: There is a need for more diverse business investment in the community. A task force should be created to better engage local business in the existing workforce development system, as well as ensure that new investments in economic development benefit all local stakeholders.

Mapping of assets and effective marketing: Community resources should be comprehensively mapped and easy to find. It would be helpful to develop a tool that uses a platform that young people are likely to interact with, such as a smart phone application.

Family care: More focus should be placed on the whole family in order to relieve as many barriers as possible. Young adults with children need support in order to complete education and training. Finding a way to track young adults' education and training processes regardless of the program would be helpful, as this population seems to start and stop programs fairly often, making it harder to advance.

Communication with schools: Coordination across services and institutions is needed in order to ensure that young adults receive the information they need. Yonkers needs to bridge the disconnect between schools and the local workforce development system.

Employers

EMPLOYERS IN THEIR OWN WORD (THREE CITIES)

"It's really hard to create an apprenticeship. If a program exists, great, how fast can it be?... It's a money thing. If we could get funding to train on the job, offer paid internships, or sponsor certification costs, that would create opportunity and help smaller businesses that cannot otherwise afford it."

"There are really two options for Mount Vernon residents: get stuck in the industrial sector or commute outside of Mount Vernon. If people commute, they end up moving away."

"I can't find [qualified] people to replace employees I would let go, so there are no consequences if you're not performing well."

"Entry-level expectations have gone up and young adults don't meet those requirements. It's hard to fill skilled entry-level positions and early career supervisors. Seasoned employees are staying, but it's hard to get the lower levels to stay."

"We need a good talent pipeline or the city fails. We need to strengthen that pipeline of workers. Everyone lacks the necessary skills to fill jobs."

"We're looking for people who are prompt and have good soft skills. We are struggling to connect to good local talents that will grow with us."

"The biggest challenge with the workforce has been lack of communication skills. Younger workers get the computer thing. They can figure that out right away. Millennials really struggle with communication. They also struggle with professionalism."

"[Systems don't connect.] Could we have a whole Westchester community partnership [where] everyone is able to connect on their needs?"

MOUNT VERNON FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- **Lack of soft skills:** The main skills that are lacking in young adult employees are soft skills.
- **Lack of diplomas and marketable degrees:** Educational gaps make hiring more difficult, since many career-track jobs require a diploma or degree. High-skilled jobs are filled by non-residents.
- **Limited cultural fit:** Employers have had difficulty finding the right cultural fit (e.g., people take jobs that they are not very interested in) despite having a supportive work environment that fosters employee advancement. For example, the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce has faced difficulties in connecting people to jobs outside of the industrial sector.
- **Few career-path jobs in Mount Vernon:** Very few jobs have a real career path, and many young adults start out in stocking and delivery and never move out of that field.
- **Limited interaction between employers and workforce agencies:** There is a lack of partnerships between employers and workforce agencies.
- **Stagnation in low-skilled/entry-level jobs:** Many Mount Vernon residents remain stuck in low-skilled and entry-level jobs. There is no cultural pressure to look for better opportunities, and there are few career-path jobs available.
- **Many small businesses:** There are many small businesses with frontline owners that can't hire staff.
- **Economic development not benefiting area:** The process of bringing new businesses is very political, with no accountability or measurable results.

Recommendations

- **Make Mount Vernon a business hub:** Mount Vernon should become a place that creates opportunities for businesses. It needs to be seen as a good place to establish and grow businesses and careers.
- **Tie economic development to local workforce:** The economic development coming to Mount Vernon should be tied to the local workforce in measurable ways, with accountability built in.
- **Build partnerships between workforce development agencies, schools, and employers:** Create partnerships that will help inform skills development, provide relevant work experience, and offer available talent for local employers.

NEW ROCHELLE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- **Lack of talent:** Small business owners are struggling to connect to good local talent that can grow with them.
- **Lack of soft skills among youth:** Employers note a sense of entitlement among the young adult population and say that many lack the necessary communication and soft skills.
- **Little to no career readiness:** Few young adults are willing to start at the bottom and often expect to be in charge right away; but also, conversely, many young adults don't really understand how to build a career path.
- **Lack of time to invest in hiring:** Smaller businesses can't afford to invest time and training in employees who don't work out and who sometimes leave jobs without even giving formal notice.
- **Barriers to employment:** Young adults face a lot of barriers, including poor public transportation, no high school diploma, and no money for transportation and basic needs.

- **Lack of access to public benefits:** Entry-level and minimum-wage jobs often bar young adults from accessing public benefits but do not pay enough to cover daily expenses.
- **Minimal interaction with workforce development system:** Many employers have worked with First Source to find employees, with really good results, although they still have a lot of difficulty finding good talent.

Recommendations

- **Secure funding for work-based learning:** Employers suggested that external funding could be used to cover the cost of training and employing young adults in a way that would benefit both the small business community and local youth.
- **Foster partnerships between employers and the workforce development system:** Local small and mid-sized businesses are eager to partner with the workforce development system to find new talent and expose young adults to new career pathways.
- **Expand existing programs:** Expanding the Federal Work Study and the Summer Youth Employment programs to cover wages at local businesses would help businesses grow and would provide young adults with opportunities outside of community centers and universities. The Youth Bureau’s work readiness program with 13- to 16-year-olds could also be expanded beyond the existing 100 slots.
- **Encourage soft skills and career readiness:** Both the public education system and local training programs should work with young adults to make sure they have the soft skills and understanding of career pathways needed to take advantage of and excel in local opportunities.

YONKERS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- **Good job opportunities in Yonkers:** There are a number of good job opportunities in the Yonkers area, and employers are looking for qualified candidates for career-track positions.
- **Lack of skilled workers:** Employers are unable to find qualified talent for their open job positions due to the lack of workers with soft skills and technical skills.
- **Workforce development system not communicating with employers:** Many employers are eager to work with programs but don’t know of any. The Workforce Development Board and Chamber of Commerce have several programs designed to help connect businesses to talent, but employers have often never heard of them.
- **Lack of public funding:** Public institutions in Yonkers receive state and federal funding based on the area median income of Westchester County, which is very high. As a result, they do not get enough resources for training.
- **Employer struggles with advertising job openings:** Employers need more options to reach communities with potential talent and would like the workforce development system to help advertise job openings.

Recommendations

- **Build partnerships:** There needs to be more engagement and partnership between employers and the workforce development system in Yonkers. Employers are interested in these partnerships but are unaware of the programs that could benefit them.
- **Provide skills training:** Yonkers residents need soft skills training, as well as training for technical skills that are in demand by area employers.
- **Advocate for increased public funding:** Yonkers and Mount Vernon should advocate to be considered independently from the wealth that is present in the northern areas of the county.

Young Adults

YOUNG ADULTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS (THREE CITIES)

"Not every single program is flexible. Some of the programs should have childcare. It's difficult for moms if they don't have that."

"Entrepreneurship... no one teaches you how to ever get there. You have to be a privileged person to even own a business."

"Another problem is that we need more people who can understand us completely. Racism is a problem. Not all white people, but some white people who speak about everything blame the black kids. Nobody stops to think about what leads up to that, like mental health problems. We need people to understand what we've been through. Most people who lead boards don't care."

"I only know about this program. No other programs are advertised. It would be helpful if they were. People are willing to do the work if the program would make itself known."

"I'm not getting the support I need, but I don't know what's missing."

"[Employers] are not serious or consistent. You apply for jobs and they don't call you back."

"The high school isn't great. It's dangerous. The teachers aren't teaching. They're leaving. They don't have time for you. We need to fix our schools. People are dropping out to get their GED instead."

"You need certain training and education to get a job and the training isn't offered. So, your new goal becomes getting into training, but the training costs a few thousand dollars and we can't afford it."

MOUNT VERNON & NEW ROCHELLE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- **Ineffective public school system:** Young adults are having a very negative experience at the local public high schools. More than one mentioned that most people drop out and join GED programs rather than get their diplomas.
- **Disillusionment with public systems:** Beyond the public schools, there is a lack of faith in the Mayor's Office and the City Council, as these institutions have little to no interaction with young people.
- **Lack of knowledge about available programs:** Young adults are very happy with their experience at the Guidance Center, but many are unaware of other programs in the area.
- **Lack of job opportunities:** When asked about what jobs are available in the area, young adults expressed that there are minimum-wage food service and retail opportunities, as well as illegal jobs selling drugs and working as prostitutes.
- **Ambitious, hard-working youth:** Local young adults have real ambitions and seem prepared to work hard to achieve them. Most are still figuring out the exact way to build a path to their goals, and almost all plan to leave the area as soon as they're able to.
- **Lack of soft skills:** Young adults spoke very openly about the struggles they have in communicating with managers, reacting to criticism, and attendance at work. They understand that they lack these skills but aren't sure how to gain them.

Recommendations

- **Expand funding to programs in the area:** Since public institutions are failing them, young adults rely on local programming for education and connection to employment. Increased funding and better staff-to-client ratios are vital to the economic, educational, and emotional health of local youth.
- **Provide soft skills training:** Young adults are eager to improve their soft skills, and employers cite this as the most important skill that is lacking. A training or guidance program to increase these skills is necessary.
- **Advocate for better institutions:** Improvements in the public education system and city leadership are necessary to ensure long-term economic and community growth.

YONKERS FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- **Limited training programs:** There are very few training programs in the area, and the programs that do exist don't seem to advertise. There are also few sector-based programs that offer industry credentials.
- **Lack of high school diploma:** Not having a high school diploma or equivalency is a major barrier to employment.
- **Lack of daycare:** Young adults with children are unable to attend trainings unless they can bring their children with them. They also are unable to work because they lack childcare options.
- **Some understanding of career pathways:** Most of the young adults expressed having some idea of what their ultimate career goal is and are able to articulate how they would achieve their goals.
- **Lack of good jobs in the area:** Young adults believe that the only jobs available to them in the area are in retail. None are interested in working in retail in the long term, but they are all willing to take retail jobs in the short term.

Recommendations

- **Fund more training programs:** There should be more programs in the area—specifically programs with a sector focus—to help prepare young adults for the workforce. There should also be more funding for programs to effectively conduct outreach and recruit young adults. High school equivalency preparation programs should be expanded as well.
- **Offer grants/scholarships for paid trainings:** Grants and scholarships for paid trainings would allow young adults to access even more educational credentials.
- **Provide access to daycare:** There should be subsidized daycare for young adults who are in training programs or working low-wage jobs.
- **Integrate career-minded thinking:** Public schools and training programs should work with young adults to help them understand how to build a career pathway and what career options exist for young adults without a high school diploma.

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PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND EMPLOYERS

Affinity Health Plan	Office of Assemblywoman Amy Paulin
Bagel on the Run	Office of County Legislator Damon Maher
Boys & Girls Club of New Rochelle	Office of County Legislator Terry Clements
Brightway Insurance	Office of Legislator Christopher Johnson
Business Council of Westchester	Office of the Mayor, City of Mount Vernon
Carpenter Contractor Trust	Office of the Mayor, Yonkers
The Center for Career Freedom	Putnam Westchester Workforce Development Board
City of New Rochelle	READI Program, Westchester Putnam Workforce Development Board
The College of New Rochelle	Rice and Rice Attorneys at Law
Community Development and Governance Council of New York	Saunders Trades and Technical High School
Domino Sugar	Soulful Synergy
Express Employment	Southern Westchester BOCES
Goodworks Advisory Group	Talk Hiring
Greyston Foundation	Thomas Consulting
The Guidance Center of Westchester	Westchester Children's Association
Jawonio	Westchester Community College
Jobs Transition Initiative	Westchester County Association
Manhattanville College	Westchester County Youth Bureau
Me, Cute, Totally	Westchester Putnam One Stop Career Center
Mercy College	Westhab
Monroe College	Yonkers Chamber of Commerce
Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce	Yonkers Industrial Development Agency
New Rochelle City Council Member Jared Rice	Yonkers Workforce Development Board
New Rochelle Housing Authority	Yonkers YMCA
Nordic Edge	Youth Shelter Program of Westchester

FACILITATORS

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YOUNG ADULTS

The 20 young adults enrolled in training and education programs at The Guidance Center of Westchester and Westhab.

