



**VOICES FROM
THE FRONTLINE**

AN INTRODUCTION TO NEW YORK CITY'S FRONTLINE WORKFORCE PROFESSIONALS

**DATA REPORT 1
AUGUST 2020**

INTRODUCTION



In 2020, the term “frontline” takes on new and different significance in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Performing a job within its typical context—such as a hospital or in a delivery truck—has yielded the designation of “essential”, and the term “essential” is often accompanied by “frontline”.¹ The term conjures up images of nurses, doctors, grocery clerks, law enforcement, mail and parcel carriers, and home health aides.

Frontline professionals in workforce development are far from visible in this context, and yet they continue to provide a vital lifeline to their clients. These individuals identify jobs for New Yorkers who have been laid off or were looking for work when the pandemic hit—but do so with heightened awareness of the conditions in which those jobs exist to ensure a client does not take a risky job to meet immediate

It is very rewarding when I get to see clients that I have helped achieve what they want, have them thank me for words I might have said to encourage them to do better or pick up their spirit.

— FRONTLINE WORKFORCE PROFESSIONAL

financial needs at the expense of health. Frontline workforce professionals have quickly transformed in-person training, case management, and employment preparation to fit the

virtual environment—often with inadequate technology to perform these jobs, not to mention the need to navigate technology and digital literacy barriers faced by clients.² They advocate for clients by responding to immediate needs not often provided for or properly resourced in a workforce development context, including access to childcare, mental health services, and addressing food insecurity.

In workforce development, frontline professionals are “essential” to connecting New Yorkers to employment. However, the structural deficiencies in how frontline workforce professionals find their way into the field, receive compensation for their work, access clear pathways for advancement, and contribute a voice in the provision of services to meet the needs of clients and employers—and hit contractual milestones—are many and have been documented in various ways over the past several years.³ This is a challenge for the field in normal times, but presents an even greater challenge in a recession, where there is a heightened need for investment—of money, talent, and attention—in the system that helps put vulnerable New Yorkers back to work.

VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE



In mid-2019, The Workforce Field Building Hub at Workforce Professionals Training Institute (WPTI) set out to build upon research about frontline workforce professionals conducted nearly a decade ago. WPTI and the Fiscal Policy Institute's 2012 report, [*Deep in the*](#)

[*Trenches: Understanding the Dynamics of New York City's Frontline Workforce Development Staff*](#), illuminated endemic talent preparation, recruitment, retention, and advancement issues within the “workforce-workforce”.

DEEP IN THE TRENCHES REPORT (2012)

WPTI, in partnership with Fiscal Policy Institute, conducted a survey of frontline workforce professionals in 2011 and released the resulting report, *Deep in the Trenches*, in 2012. Key findings included:

- **The field is highly educated, with more than 75 percent of respondents reporting having a bachelor's degree and 34 percent reporting at least some graduate study;**
- **Frontline workers reported wearing many hats, with 72 percent indicating four or more distinct job responsibilities;**
- **While approximately two-thirds of respondents expressed interest in opportunities for advancement, only half understood what was needed to do so. More than 70 percent expressed an interest in receiving training for a supervisory position; and**
- **Most respondents reported they were satisfied with their job, but also expressed a desire to look for a job at another organization in the near future.**

The report included key recommendations for management, leaders across the sector, and frontline workers themselves, with the goal of improving the frontline worker experience. The *Voices from the Frontline* study builds upon the issues examined in *Deep in the Trenches*, while also exploring new topics relevant to frontline workers.

Recognizing the value of the *Deep in the Trenches* findings—and the need for more current data—The Hub set out to update and expand upon the study, first considering how the economy, the workforce development field, and the public policy environment have evolved over the past decade. In the intervening years, New York City emerged from the Great Recession, adding more than 900,000 jobs between 2009 and 2019 to the economy⁴ and reporting unemployment rates as low as 3.4 percent in February 2020, down from a high of 10.5 percent in 2010.⁵ The goals of the workforce development field have also shifted, as exemplified by three vision statements and frameworks for improving New York City's workforce system released during this period, each building on the others: [*Reenvisioning the New York City Workforce System*](#) (2013), [*Career Pathways: One City*](#)

[*Working Together*](#) (2014), and the [*Workforce Agenda for New York City*](#) (2018). And increased advocacy aimed at improving the funding

of human services organizations and, by extension, human service worker wages, emerged, resulting in improvements such as cost of living adjustments for the lowest paid human services workers.⁶

To update and expand upon the original survey, we conducted a literature review and held multiple focus groups with frontline workforce professionals, leaders of workforce organizations, and an array of stakeholders involved in advocacy, capacity building, and research in support of the workforce field. The resulting **2020 Survey of NYC Frontline Workforce Professionals** was administered online by the CUNY Labor Market Information Service between mid-January and mid-February 2020, yielding 362 responses from frontline workforce professionals from across New York City—double the response rate for *Deep in the Trenches* (see page 5 for an overview of the survey).

While the survey was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings point to a broad array of issues and challenges predating the pandemic, many of which have been and will continue to be exacerbated by it for the foreseeable future. Frontline professionals struggling to make ends meet on their take-home wages or chart a path for career advancement in early 2020 likely stand to face even greater uncertainty.

Starting with this report, we will periodically release data, key findings, and recommendations emerging from the survey responses and discussions with stakeholders throughout the field. This report lays the groundwork for getting to know survey respondents: who they are; what roles they play; what types of organizations they work for; how they are compensated; and what they need to stay and advance in the field. Subsequent reports will dive deeper into frontline workforce compensation and benefits; explore how race and gender inform one's experience in the workplace; and examine how the grants and contracts funding many workforce programs affect the experience of frontline workforce professionals.

These reports, the initial briefs (see below), and our ongoing engagement of workforce field stakeholders embody the spirit of the initiative's name, *Voices from the Frontline*. Through data, engagement, and responsiveness, we aim to amplify the diversity and strength of the voices from the frontlines of workforce development, particularly in these current times of significant change, uncertainty, and new opportunity.

VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE BRIEF SERIES

As part of the *Voices from the Frontline* initiative, The Hub published five briefs on topics related to frontline workforce professionals, job quality, and the workforce system:

[Brief 1: Who is the "Frontline" of the Workforce Development Field? \(February 2020\)](#)

[Brief 2: Why Focus on Frontline Workforce Professionals? \(April 2020\)](#)

[Brief 3: Why Focus on Job Quality? \(April 2020\)](#)

[Brief 4: Job Quality for Frontline Workforce Professionals \(May 2020\)](#)

[Brief 5: Labor and Employment Policies in New York City \(June 2020\)](#)

2020 SURVEY OF NYC FRONTLINE WORKFORCE PROFESSIONALS

WPTI administered the in-depth, anonymous online survey of frontline workforce professionals across New York City in early 2020. Survey sections and content include the following:

Organizational and Respondent Overview

- Respondent demographics
- Organization type, size, and target populations served
- Job title and core activities performed
- Tenure with current employer; in current position; and in workforce development
- Assessments of representativeness in leadership positions at respondent's workplace
- Understanding of contractual goals

Pay and Benefits

- Employment status
- Annual salary (range) and benefits (provision; affordability; sufficiency of coverage)
- Overtime expectations and compensation
- Schedule predictability, consistency of payment (timeliness and amount)
- Sufficiency of wages to meet expenses

Job Quality and Professional Development Opportunities

- Connection to and support from co-workers and managers
- Autonomy in respondent's role
- Ability to access and support for professional development and growth
- Effect of turnover on respondent's job and assessment of job security
- Assessment of safety in the work environment (physical, emotional, interpersonal)
- Assessment of job satisfaction
- Desired professional development trainings and topics

Future Career Plans

- Advancement desire and ability within current organization
- Likely reason(s) for leaving current employer
- Assessment of ease in finding an equivalent or better job in NYC
- Likelihood of searching for new job in the next year; next three years

WHO MAKES UP THE FRONTLINE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT?



At their core, workforce development organizations connect job seekers to employment, often focusing on the most marginalized populations with the most tenuous connections to the labor market in terms of education, work experience, and social capital. New York City's workforce development field is vast, consisting of hundreds of provider organizations, engaging annually more than 500,000 New Yorkers, supported in large measure by several hundred million dollars of public and private funding.⁷

The 2020 Survey of NYC Frontline Workforce Professionals yielded 362 anonymous responses. Of those respondents, two-thirds are female, a proportion reflective of the gender distribution across New York City's direct service workforce.⁸

% FEMALE IN NYC'S NONPROFIT WORKFORCE



Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of respondents are people of color, reflecting a diverse array of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Just over one-third of respondents are Black or African-American and 19 percent are Hispanic or Latino. Black females make up one-quarter of the total respondents.

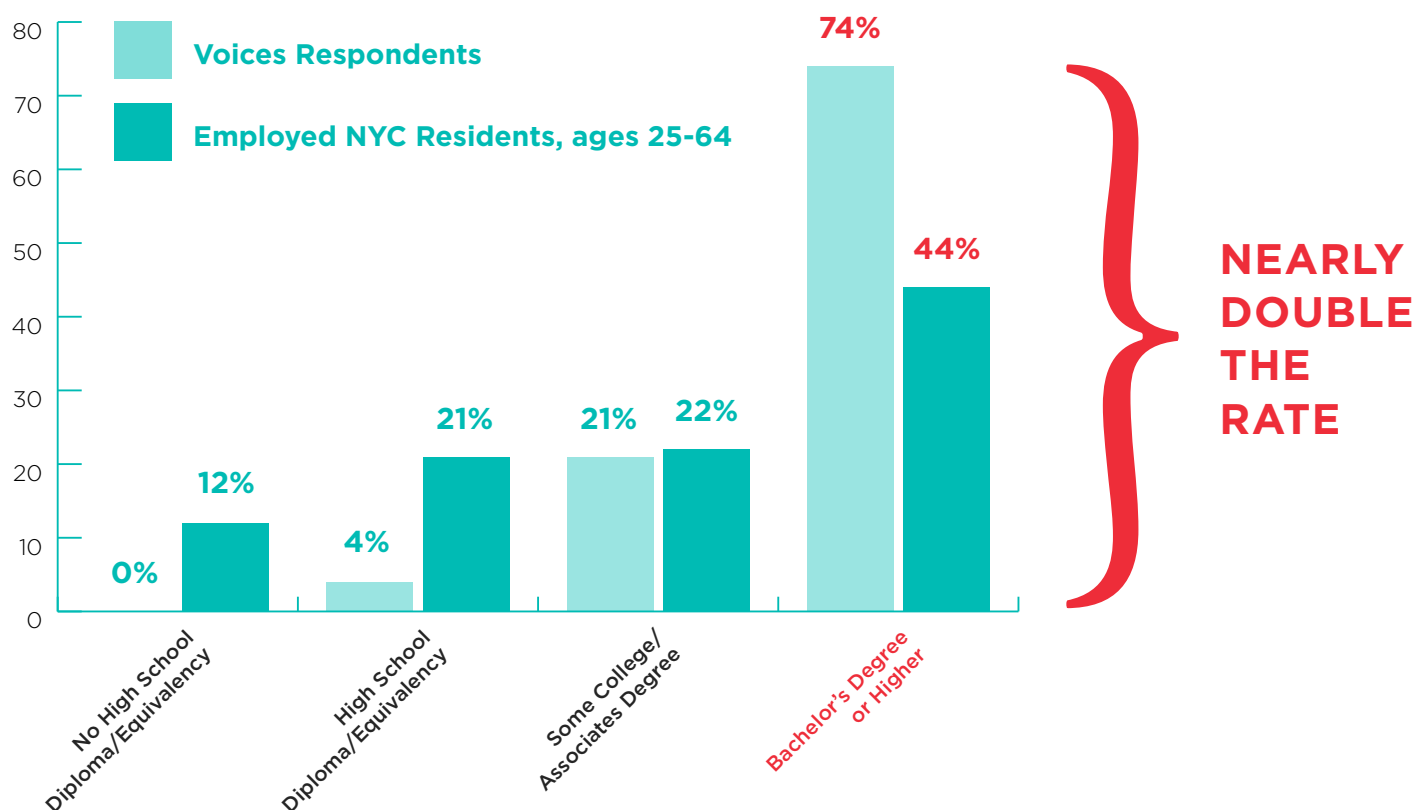
PERCENTAGE BY RACE AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Black or African-American	35%
Hispanic or Latino	19%
White or Caucasian	21%
Other/Multi-ethnic	14%
Asian	5%
No Response	6%

Similarly, respondents span a broad age spectrum: nearly one-quarter are between 18-29 years old; half are 30-49 years old; and 22 percent are 50 years or older.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents possess at least a Bachelor's degree, nearly double the rate of degree attainment for employed New York City residents between the ages of 25-64.¹⁰

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION



Respondents of color in the field are somewhat younger than white respondents; 28 percent of respondents of color are between the ages of 18 and 29, compared to 21 percent of white respondents. And while nearly three-quarters of all respondents possess at least a Bachelor's degree, white respondents are more likely to have a graduate degree (56 percent) than respondents of color (23 percent).

WHERE DO FRONTLINE WORKFORCE PROFESSIONALS WORK?



The array of organizations providing workforce development services includes nonprofits, colleges and educational institutions, proprietary schools, and government entities, among others. In New York City, nonprofits play a prominent role and are a primary target of capacity building, technical assistance, and community building efforts supported by philanthropic and government stakeholders. As such, the vast majority of survey respondents (91 percent) work for nonprofit organizations. Similarly, the vast majority of respondents to the *Deep in the Trenches* survey (79 percent) worked for nonprofits.

WHERE DO RESPONDENTS WORK?



5%

COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY



2%

FOR-PROFIT/PRIVATE SECTOR



3%

GOVERNMENT AGENCY



91%

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

**OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS
WORK FOR NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATIONS**

Overall, 61 percent work for organizations with more than 50 staff—similar to the proportion (two-thirds) of respondents to the *Deep in the Trenches* survey—while 14 percent work for smaller organizations with 20 or fewer staff. Two-thirds work for organizations that provide services other than workforce development, such as housing support or legal services.

It is not uncommon for workforce development programs to target or restrict enrollment to individuals possessing specific characteristics or those from a limited geographic area. When asked what kinds of clients a respondent's organization specifically focuses on serving, 84 percent selected more than one category. Of the remaining respondents who selected one characteristic, 40 individuals work for programs that provide workforce and other services to young adults, ages 16 to 24.

WHAT DO FRONTLINE WORKFORCE PROFESSIONALS DO?



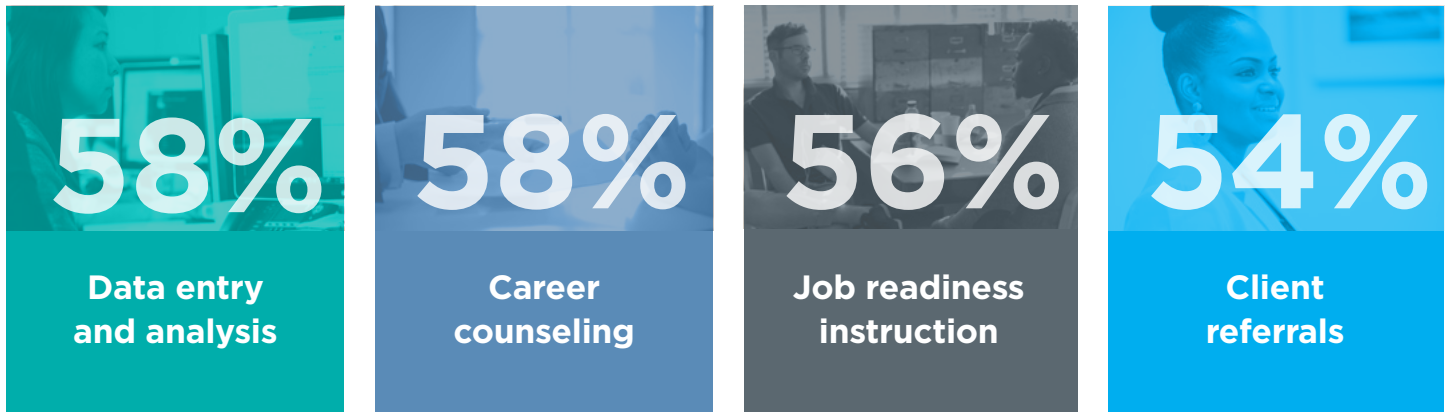
Job titles provide some sense of what a frontline workforce professional does, but it is not uncommon for respondents to wear many hats. Nearly three-quarters of respondents to the *Deep in the Trenches* survey reported having four or more distinct job responsibilities, and the trend continues today.

The most frequently mentioned job title among respondents is “Trainer/Instructor” (13.3 percent), providing credential, work-readiness and/or academic instruction to jobseekers. “Job Developer/Account Manager” (13 percent) is the next most frequently reported title. Individuals in these roles are responsible for business engagement and job placement activities, often serving as a link between businesses and client-facing staff.¹¹



Respondents were presented with a list of commonly performed duties and asked to indicate which of those activities are regularly performed as a part of their job. Eleven percent report any one activity as the sole focus of his or her job, with the most frequent sole duties including technical skills training and data entry. Three-quarters selected four or more activities, consistent with the figure reported in *Deep in the Trenches*. Nearly one-quarter (23 percent) selected an overwhelming 10 or more duties. Data entry and analysis (58 percent), career counseling (58 percent), job readiness instruction (56 percent), and client referrals (54 percent) were activities selected by more than half of respondents.

MOST FREQUENTLY INDICATED JOB DUTIES



An initial analysis of the duties most frequently reported by job title held reveals trends that will be examined in greater detail in subsequent reports. For example, respondents working as Internship Coordinators report a broad array of job duties, some of which would not intuitively fall under the scope of that job title; 76 percent of Internship Coordinators play a role in client recruitment, and 62 percent conduct client intake. And with the exception of Instructors/Trainers, at least half of all respondents regardless of job title play a role referring clients to other organizations for additional or more appropriate services.

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We're effectively trying to look for unicorns: strong administrative skillset, thick enough skin to cope with pressure, serve clients, being ethical, address employer needs. —NONPROFIT LEADER

HOW EXPERIENCED ARE FRONTLINE WORKFORCE PROFESSIONALS?



NEARLY HALF OF
THE RESPONDENTS
ARE IN THEIR FIRST
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT
POSITION (E.G.,
NEW TO THE FIELD)



There's a lack of
a pipeline into
frontline workforce
positions; about
30 percent of our
frontline workers
are our alums.

—NONPROFIT
LEADER

Frontline workforce professionals run the gamut in terms of tenure in the field. Nearly half of respondents (48 percent) said the last position they held was not in workforce development. Sixteen percent of all respondents are relatively new to the field, reporting a year or less of experience, while nearly one-quarter (24 percent) have held positions in the workforce development field for more than ten years.

Similar to tenure in the workforce field, respondents are almost evenly distributed in terms of the length of time with their current employer, with 28 percent employed for less than one year and 23 percent for six or more years.

LENGTH OF TIME AT CURRENT EMPLOYER



28% LESS THAN ONE YEAR



26% 1-2 YEARS

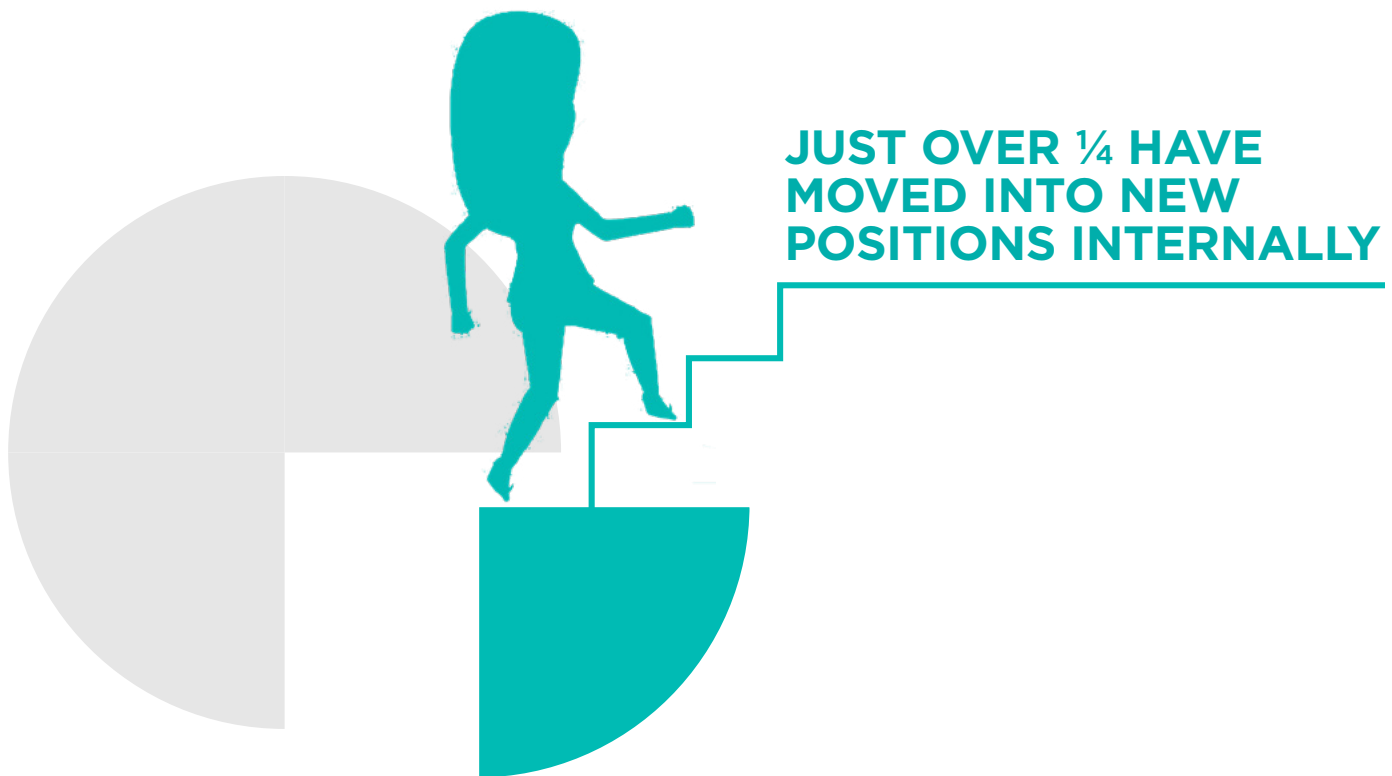


23% 3-5 YEARS



23% MORE THAN 6 YEARS

Respondents indicate that mobility within an organization is typical. Twenty-eight percent have been in their current position for a shorter amount of time than they have worked for their organization. Overall, two-thirds of respondents have been in their current positions for two or fewer years. While tenure in one's current position does not vary notably by gender or education level, respondents of color are somewhat more likely to report being in their current position for less than one year (42 percent) than White respondents (31 percent).



Entering workforce development after having sought services and job placement assistance from a workforce development organization is not an uncommon pathway into the field; 16 percent of respondents were a client of the organization where they work prior to becoming an employee. Slightly less than half of these respondents (47 percent) have a Bachelor's or graduate degree, compared to 80 percent of respondents who were not previously clients of their organization. Eighty-three percent of these respondents are people of color. Notably, nearly double the percentage of former clients have worked at their organizations for more than 10 years (17 percent) than those who were not former clients (9 percent).

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We are nonprofits so we don't traditionally pay as much for the quality we need for the frontline roles. We beg for every dollar to pay them, then try to keep them. —NONPROFIT LEADER

HOW ARE FRONTLINE WORKFORCE PROFESSIONALS COMPENSATED?



As noted earlier, nearly three-quarters of all respondents possess at least a Bachelor's degree, and 30 percent have a postgraduate degree, and the vast majority of survey respondents (91 percent) are employed by nonprofit organizations. Earnings for individuals working in the nonprofit sector are typically lower than those for workers in for-profit settings and some educational and government roles,¹² resulting in a skilled and well-educated workforce that is relatively under-compensated.

Nearly all survey respondents (91 percent) are employed full-time. Those not employed full-time are more likely to be younger and less educated; 45 percent have less than a Bachelor's degree, and 45 percent are between the ages of 18 to 29. In fact, only 29 percent of these respondents—age 18-29 and not employed full-time—possess a Bachelor's or graduate degree.

Compensation for frontline workforce professionals varies widely. Just over half of all respondents (51 percent) earn between \$35,000 and \$54,999 annually. The median annual wage in New York City of \$54,360 more than likely exceeds the median wage among survey respondents.¹³ However, it bears reiterating that a higher proportion of the sample of frontline workforce professionals possesses Bachelor's and graduate degrees than New York City's overall workforce.

EDUCATION LEVEL OF FRONTLINE WORKERS

74%
HAVE AT LEAST
A BACHELORS DEGREE



FRONTLINE WORKER WAGES

58%
OF RESPONDENTS
EARN LESS THAN
\$55,000/YEAR



Some colleagues say they can get their clients a job, but can barely feed their own families. —FRONTLINE WORKFORCE PROFESSIONAL

Seven percent of respondents earn less than \$35,000 per year, placing their salaries near or below New York City's Living Wage of \$34,195 for a single adult with no children.¹⁴ The highest earners, reporting annual salaries of \$75,000 or higher, comprise a similar percentage of respondents (8 percent) as the lowest earners.

As expected, these respondents and the organizations they work for differ in multiple ways when examining wages. All of those earning below \$35,000 are employed by nonprofit organizations. And while only 7 percent of those who work for nonprofits earn \$75,000 or more, nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of respondents employed by other types of organizations are higher earners. Respondents of color earn less than white respondents; double the percentage of white respondents (14 percent) than people of color (7 percent) earn \$75,000 or more, and more than half of white respondents earn at least \$55,000, compared to nearly one-third of respondents of color.

Men report higher salaries than women, though white men, in particular, report significantly higher wages than any other group. While no white male respondents earn below \$35,000, nine percent of women of color do. And while 30 percent of white men earn \$75,000 or more, less than one-tenth each among white women (8 percent), men of color (8 percent), and women of color (7 percent) earn at a similar level.

As would be expected, salaries are higher for respondents with Bachelor's and graduate degrees than for those with less than a four-year degree. Sixteen percent of respondents with less than a four-year degree

Younger respondents are more likely to earn lower wages, with 16 percent of 18-29 year olds earning below \$35,000, compared to five percent of respondents 30 years or older.

earn below \$35,000, compared to four percent of those with a Bachelor's degree and 4.6 percent of those with or working toward a graduate degree. Fourteen percent of respondents with or working toward a graduate degree report salaries exceeding \$75,000, compared to nine percent of those with a Bachelor's degree and one percent of those with less than a Bachelor's.

“

The work is really enjoyable and fulfilling, but the salary is too low given my educational pedigree and previous work experience

—FRONTLINE WORKFORCE
PROFESSIONAL

Younger respondents are more likely to earn lower wages, with 16 percent of 18-29 year olds earning below \$35,000, compared to five percent of respondents 30 years or older.

The next *Voices from the Frontline* data report will more thoroughly explore compensation for frontline workforce professionals, including provision of benefits and sufficiency of both salary and benefits relative to the needs of respondents. It is worth noting here, however, just over one-quarter of respondents agree that their take-home earnings are enough to cover basic living expenses, and only 16 percent feel confident that if a family member lost a job, got sick or had another emergency, they could come up with money to cover one month's expenses based on his or her current salary. Recalling that the survey was administered prior to the official start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is highly likely that multiple respondents have put this scenario to the test in recent months.



ONLY 28% OF RESPONDENTS
AGREE THAT THEIR TAKE-
HOME EARNINGS ARE
ENOUGH TO COVER BASIC
LIVING EXPENSES

ONLY 16% FEEL CONFIDENT
THAT THEY COULD COME UP
WITH MONEY TO COVER ONE
MONTH'S EXPENSES BASED ON
HIS OR HER CURRENT SALARY
IN AN EMERGENCY



WHAT DO FRONTLINE PROFESSIONALS NEED TO SUCCEED, ADVANCE, AND STAY IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT?



A common lament throughout the workforce development community is that people typically do not aspire to work in the field. Few, if any, academic programs exist to train professionals specifically for workforce development, and it is not unusual to hear individuals

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM SUPERVISORY STAFF GOES A LONG WAY

The 2020 Survey of NYC Frontline Workforce Professionals posed the following question: “Please provide an example of how your manager has supported you learning or performing something new.” A common theme throughout several responses focused on access to and encouragement to participate in professional development and skill building trainings. Examples include:

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“My new supervisor is always pushing me to take advantage of professional development trainings and projects that will enhance my career and how I am viewed at the organization. My previous supervisor did none of the above.”

“

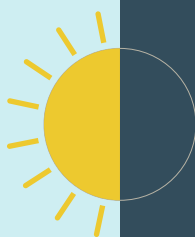
“Our manager always encourages staff to attend training programs. This gives staff a goal to work towards. Training is also a way to show employees that management cares about them and their goals. Few things are more motivating than working for a company one knows works for them in return.”

describe their pathway into the field as one they “fell into” or “stumbled upon”. “Falling into” a profession insinuates a lack of clear pathways for advancement and a likelihood of “falling out” of the field. Nearly half of respondents to the *Deep in the Trenches* survey were likely to seek a new job within the year; while their career trajectories were not followed in the intervening years, anecdotally it is not uncommon to trade stories of movement out of the field on the part of workforce professionals.

Respondents to the recent survey desire professional advancement; 70 percent agree with the statement, “I would like to advance within my current organization into a position with greater responsibility and better pay” and only 11 percent disagree. However, less than half (48 percent) of all respondents agree that the requirements for advancement within their organizations are clear.

70% AGREE

I would like to advance into a position with greater responsibility and better pay.



50% DISAGREE

The requirements for advancement are clear.

Supervisors play a critical role in supporting frontline professionals to advance. Of those who have spoken with a supervisor about advancement, 89 percent express interest in doing so, compared with 66 percent of those who have not spoken with a supervisor about advancement. Among those who have discussed advancement with their supervisor, 73 percent would like to advance and have a sense of what it takes to do so. By contrast, only 24 percent of those who have not discussed advancement with their supervisor would like to advance and know what it takes.

Access to and quality of professional development opportunities varies. Just over half (52 percent) of respondents can access professional development offerings provided in-house at least a few times a year, and a slightly higher percentage (59 percent) participate in training or professional development related to their job offered through external providers with some frequency each year. While the vast majority of those participating in in-house or external trainings find those offerings “very” or “somewhat” useful, a slightly higher percentage rate external trainings as useful compared to internal trainings (89 percent compared to 80 percent).



When asked what professional development and skill-building trainings would best support respondents to perform their jobs better, more than 40 percent mentioned each of the following topics:

Working with challenging clients and hard to serve populations:	55%
Leadership development:	54%
Management training:	48%
Stress management:	47%
Data analysis and outcomes management:	41%
Trauma-informed approaches:	41%

Nearly half (49 percent) of all respondents are satisfied with their job.¹⁵ When asked what aspects of their jobs respondents find most rewarding, the most frequently occurring themes focused on making a positive difference in the lives of clients and working in a mission-driven environment. An illustrative response, echoed many times over was: *“I find the direct contact with clients and seeing them accomplish the goals they set for themselves to be the most rewarding part.”*



Overall, half of respondents are at least somewhat likely to look for another job with a different organization in the next year. Those likely to look are not confined to respondents who are dissatisfied with their jobs; of those satisfied with their job, 44 percent are likely to look for a new one in the next year. Not surprisingly, 88 percent of those who are dissatisfied with their jobs are likely to look for a new one within the year. Even among those who are neutral on job satisfaction, two-thirds are likely to look for a new job. While those percentages might appear high, recent surveys of the general workforce cite comparable proportions of respondents actively looking for new job opportunities.¹⁶



EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO ARE NEUTRAL ON
JOB SATISFACTION,

**2/3 ARE LIKELY TO
LOOK FOR A NEW JOB**

The most frequently cited reasons likely to cause respondents to leave their current job both point to opportunity and advancement; two-thirds would leave if offered better pay and/or benefits elsewhere, and 56 percent would leave in the absence of opportunity to advance within their current organization. Given the survey's focus on New York City-based workforce professionals, it is worth noting that 38 percent would leave their current organization in order to relocate outside of the city, and 22 percent cite a long commute as a potential factor influencing one's decision to leave.

Keeping in mind that this survey was administered prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly half of the respondents (46 percent) feel it would be at least somewhat easy to find a comparable job in terms of pay and benefits in New York City, and one-third perceive it would be at least somewhat easy to find a better job in the city.

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Although it has been rewarding to assist [jobseekers] in achieving their goals, I have found the field to be stressful and lacking support at times. This led me to resign from my last employer and walk away due to the lack of advancement opportunities and support.

—FRONTLINE WORKFORCE PROFESSIONAL

WHAT'S NEXT



This report is the first in a series that will continue to explore issues relevant to frontline workforce professionals, the organizations where they work, and the broader workforce development community. We provided a sense of who frontline workforce professionals are, what they do, the skills and experience they bring to their work, how they are compensated, and what both keeps them in and drives them away from the workforce field. Subsequent reports will delve into questions such as:

- **How do salaries, benefits, and working conditions affect the career ambitions of frontline workforce professionals?**
- **In what ways does the experience of being a frontline workforce professional differ by race?**
- **How does the structure of grants supporting workforce development programs shape the roles, compensation, and experiences of frontline workforce professionals?**

As demonstrated in this report, we will use data from the 2020 Survey of NYC Frontline Workforce Professionals, along with insights from professionals throughout the field and other relevant data sources to continue sharing useful and timely information about frontline workforce professionals.

Now more than ever, meeting the ever-changing needs of jobseekers, workers, and businesses as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact reality for each of those constituents requires a workforce field prepared to respond. Frontline workforce professionals have and will continue to serve as critical lifelines and connection points for New Yorkers. Understanding who they are, what motivates them to perform this work, and what systemic supports they need to assist New Yorkers during this time of uncertainty will position us for a better recovery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



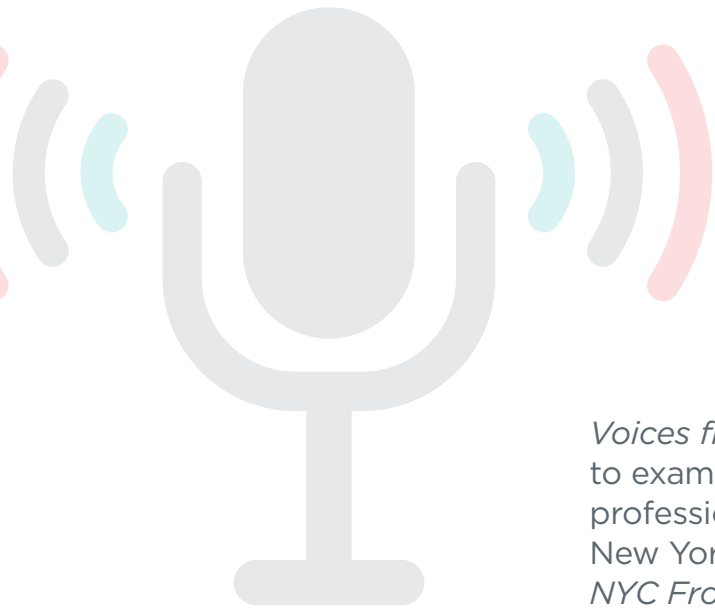
Voices from the Frontline: An Introduction to New York City's Frontline Workforce Professionals is a publication of the Workforce Field Building Hub (The Hub) at Workforce Professionals Training Institute (WPTI). This report was written by Stacy Woodruff, Managing Director of The Hub. The *Voices from the Frontline* initiative is managed by Justin Collins, Assistant Director of The Hub, and research support is provided by Gregory Brodie, Graduate Intern at The Hub.

The 2020 Survey of NYC Workforce Professionals was designed in partnership with the CUNY Labor Market Information Service (LMIS); LMIS administered the online survey and conducted initial analysis of the data. Matthew Vanaman, Research Consultant, performed additional data analyses for this report. East End Advertising designed this report, and Momentum Communication Group provides messaging, media outreach, and communication strategy support. Dana Archer-Rosenthal serves as a strategic advisor to the initiative.

WPTI wishes to express gratitude to the dozens of frontline workforce professionals, leaders, and intermediary partners from across the New York City workforce ecosystem who participated in focus groups and stakeholder interviews, broadly disseminated the 2020 Survey of NYC Frontline Workforce Professionals, and provided valuable feedback to realign initiative priorities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals provided informed, candid, and often heartfelt assessments of the roles assumed by frontline workforce professionals; the challenges encountered within workforce organizations and embedded into the fabric of the workforce system; and the importance of the often passion-driven work of frontline workforce professionals in their efforts to position more New Yorkers for success in the labor market.

Additionally, we thank the more than 350 frontline workforce professionals who participated in the 2020 Survey of Frontline Workforce Professionals; without their input, the *Voices from the Frontline* initiative would not be possible. Finally, we are grateful for the support of WPTI's Executive Director, Sharon Sewell-Fairman, and full WPTI team for working every day to provide support, increase capacity, and raise the standards of quality service throughout New York City's workforce development field.

This report was made possible by the generous support of the Altman Foundation, the Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, the Clark Foundation, the New York Community Trust, and the New York City Workforce Funders. We are thankful for their enduring commitment to strengthening the New York City workforce system.



Voices from the Frontline is an initiative devoted to examining and elevating the experiences of the professionals providing frontline services across the New York City Workforce System. *The 2020 Survey of NYC Frontline Workforce Professionals* explores the motivations of workforce professionals, their working environments and long-term career goals, and challenges they face. Findings from the survey and resulting recommendations will inform field-wide leadership of better strategies for worker engagement and satisfaction, and improved program performance.

The [Workforce Field Building Hub](#) brings together key leaders from across the interdisciplinary and diverse New York City and national workforce community to identify common issues and solutions to build and strengthen the field of workforce development.

[Workforce Professionals Training Institute](#) (WPTI) increases the effectiveness of people, programs, and organizations that are committed to generating pathways out of poverty through employment. Our three-tiered approach – professional training, organizational consulting, and systems building – strengthens capacity at all levels of the workforce development system.

FOOTNOTES



1. For further treatment of essential workers, see [“To Protect Frontline Workers During and After COVID-19, We Must Define Who They Are.”](#) The Brookings Institution. June 10, 2020.
2. For example, 75 percent of respondents to a survey administered by the Human Services Council in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic were providing different services as a result of the pandemic. [“Human Services Relief Package.”](#) Human Services Council, 2020.
3. A sample of reports documenting these deficiencies include the following: 1) [“The Unsolved Challenge of System Reform The Condition of the Frontline Human Services Workforce.”](#) Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2003.; 2) [“A Fair Wage for Human Service Workers: Ensuring a government funded \\$15 per hour minimum wage for human services workers throughout New York State.”](#) Human Services Council report. December 2015; and 3) [“Is It the Job or the Support? Examining Structural and Relational Predictors of Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention for Nonprofit Employees.”](#) Knapp, J., Smith, B., Sprinkle, T. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 46(3), 652 –671. 2017.
4. [New York City Employment Trends](#), Office of the New York State Comptroller. February 2020.
5. [Local Area Unemployment Statistics Program, New York City](#). New York State Department of Labor.
6. For example, the Restore Opportunity Now Coalition released its [“Undervalued and Underpaid”](#) report in 2017, which illustrated these challenges and called for increased funding for human services contracts across New York, in order to cover the real costs of the services being delivered, and to fairly compensate human services workers (and reflect their skills, experience, and education). (p. 5)
7. See Brief 2 of the *Voices from the Frontline* series, [“Why Focus on Frontline Workforce Professionals?”](#) for more information on estimates of New York City’s workforce development field size and scope.
8. [“The Economic Impact of NYC Nonprofit Organizations.”](#) NYC Comptroller’s Office and Nonprofit New York. July 2020.
9. [The Economic Impact of NYC Nonprofit Organizations.](#) NYC Comptroller’s Office and Nonprofit New York. July 2020.
10. NYCDData, Baruch College Zicklin School of Business. New York City Educational Attainment by Employment Status for Population 25-64 Years, 2013-2017 (5 Year Estimates). [New York City Educational Attainment by Employment Status for Population 25-64 Years, 2013-2017 \(5 Year Estimates\).](#)
11. For a description of these frontline roles and the associated duties, see [“Who Is the ‘Frontline’ of the Workforce Field?”](#), the first brief released in connection with *Voices from the Frontline*.
12. In 2017, the average annual wage of nonprofit employees in New York State was \$55,572, while the average annual wage for “All other private sector” employees was \$75,387. [Nonprofit Organizations in New York State: Profile in Employment and Wages.](#) The Office of the New York State Comptroller. July 2019.
13. Survey respondents indicated which wage band their salaries fell into rather than providing an actual salary figure. Fifty-eight percent of respondents report earning up to \$54,999. New York City’s median wage is based on the [Occupational Employment Statistics survey](#) and draws on data collected roughly twice per year between November 2016 and May 2019.
14. [Living Wage Calculation for New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY.](#) Living Wage Calculator. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
15. As a point of comparison, the Conference Board’s 2019 Job Satisfaction Survey found 54 percent of U.S. employees are satisfied with their jobs. [“Job Satisfaction 2019: Satisfaction Continues to Rapidly Increase in a Very Tight Labor Market”](#).
16. For example, Mental Health America’s Workplace Health Survey found 70 percent of respondents were actively searching for a new job or contemplating a change. [“A new study reveals 70 percent of workers are actively looking for a new job. Here’s the reason in 5 words.”](#) Marcel Schwantes. Inc. December 4, 2018.



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