Navigating Career Opportunities on Long Island...

Working on Long Island: STEM career paths, college prep and fair labor advocacy, LICF is helping improve Long Island’s workforce in many ways...

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Photo by: Calvin M. Calderon
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Wanted: More Long Island workers trained for jobs that require science, math, engineering, and technology skills. Jobs within this sector, known as STEM, can be a game-changer for people living in poverty. Not only do they offer entry-level, professional opportunities with room to advance, but they generally pay very well.

Yet only 4.8 percent of Long Island’s workers are in science and engineering fields, compared to the national average of 5.7 percent.

For nearly 40 years, the Long Island Community Foundation has supported programs that enrich the lives of all Long Islanders. We look for opportunities where we can make a difference. Join our family of funds today.

Pointing the Way to a College Degree

Youth from low-income communities are more likely to avoid cycles of failure and achieve success if they have ongoing academic, personal, and social supports. With $20,000 from the Long Island Community Foundation, Project Morry, a youth development organization, is working with 55 students in North Amityville and Copiague, giving them the tools and confidence to set and reach goals, including a college degree.

Advocacy for LI Farmworkers

Despite working long hours at exhausting and often dangerous jobs, the 80,000 farmworkers in New York State earn a poverty wage of about $8,000 a year. Many lack adequate housing, transportation, and decent sanitation and clean water in the fields. They struggle to access health care and other basic services. On Long Island, about 3,700 migrant laborers, mostly from Central America, work the fields, orchards, and vineyards; many are undocumented. New York State labor rights law currently excludes these workers so they have no legal provisions for basic rights, including wages, overtime pay, collective-bargaining protections, or even a day off each week.

For three years, the Long Island Unitarian Universalist Fund, a field-of-interest fund in the Long Island Community Foundation, has been supporting the Rural and Migrant Ministry with $60,000 to raise awareness, educate the public about how they can support farmworkers, and to push for passage of the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act.

Eastern Suffolk BOCES is an educational cooperative of 51 Long Island school districts, one of the largest in New York State. It provides educational leadership, instruction, management, and support through shared services that enhance the effectiveness of its school partners and improve students’ chances for success. To address these needs, Eastern Suffolk BOCES created a STEM career path that links services, training, and job opportunities. And the Long Island Community Foundation stepped up with funding from generous donors to align regional facilities, resources, and programs. One of those resources is an online employment pathways repository called GPS for Success. On the GPS for Success website, students and adults can watch, read, and learn about jobs, pay, and education/training requirements in 16 career clusters that desperately need more skilled workers.

“Bringing this website to our region has the ability to reach all the education and workforce-development stakeholders on Long Island,” says Sol Marie Alfonso Jones, the Foundation’s senior program officer. “It is a much-needed tool to assist in changing the workforce-development infrastructure, and we are excited to support this project.”

Long Island has become a hub for high-tech companies, so coordinating resources to fill gaps in training workers for STEM jobs is an important task in ensuring these employers stay here, Alfonso Jones added.
How does inequality affect Long Island’s economic vitality?

We know that racial equity is an economic issue as well as a moral one. America is quickly becoming a majority people of color nation, yet racial and economic inequality is skyrocketing. By around 2020, more than half of the nation’s children will be people of color, according to the Census. How can our future workforce be strong and competitive if we do not ensure that youth of color have access to a quality education? Who will be our future homeowners if we do not address the racial wealth gap, where white households have 13 times the wealth of black households and 10 times more than Latinos? Regions thrive when all residents can participate in economic vitality, contribute to the future, and connect with opportunity.

How does PolicyLink address this issue?

We work with partners all over the country and use data to make a case for equity as an economic necessity. For example, research we conducted with the University of Southern California shows that making racial equity a reality nationwide could boost economic output by about $2.4 trillion a year. The next step is to create good jobs, build opportunity-rich communities, and remove social and educational barriers that prevent millions of Americans, especially people of color, from participating in the economic, civic and social mainstream.

How would Long Island benefit from racial equity?

As Long Island’s population becomes increasingly diverse and as its economic base grows, it stands to benefit even more from racial and economic inclusion, especially among black residents. Closing racial income gaps on the Island would result in an increase of more than $22,000 in the average annual income for black adults. In 2014 alone, the PolicyLink study found, and the region’s economy could have been nearly $24 billion stronger if racial income gaps had been closed.

What were the most prominent findings of the report?

While people of color are projected to be the majority of Americans by 2044, the report predicts the shift will come much sooner on Long Island — by the early 2030s — and the implications for the economy are huge. Segregation continues to hinder the Island’s growth, with over 42 percent of neighborhoods still exclusively white. In addition, young people are leaving the area, partly due to the high cost of housing. Seventy-two percent of 18- to 34-year-olds say they plan to leave Long Island by 2020. This is a key demographic in prime working age and a significant tax base.

The analysis also shows that inequality is particularly stark for black Long Islanders, who face an 8.7 percent unemployment rate, compared to 5.6 percent for whites. Wages for black workers have declined 6 percent, compared to a 3 percent gain for whites. The homeownership rate for black households is 22 percent lower than the rate for white households. And black Long Islanders have the highest health risks — 66 percent are overweight or obese — and they live in areas exposed to greater environmental dangers.

How can the report’s findings be used to advance social inclusion?

The report’s findings show that to build a sustainable economy, Long Island’s public, private, and nonprofit leaders must promote policies and strategies that harness the talents, wisdom, and power of all residents, strengthen the cradle-to-career pipeline for black Long Islanders, and foster communities of opportunity. This will increase the health, wealth, and economic resilience of all Long Islanders.

What is the role of philanthropy?

Philanthropy can support research and analysis, and educational outreach to business leaders and government officials. We also can support leaders of color who are connected to strong organizations that serve communities of color. Funders can use their influence and convening power to bring together leaders and seek cooperation across sectors. At the same time, they can adopt an equity lens and pursue strategies in their grant making to improve the lives of people most in need.

What does the Urban League of Long Island do to promote racial and economic justice?

The Urban League aims to help African-Americans and other disenfranchised individuals secure economic self-reliance, parity, power, and civil rights. In collaboration with other racial equity advocates, it commissioned this report to document barriers to equity in Long Island’s black communities and to organize black leaders as advocates for change. The goal is to...
create a measurable racial equity agenda that will promote policies, programs, and services designed to improve the quality of life in our black communities.

**What barriers to opportunity and equality are highlighted in the report, and what can we do?**

The report highlights these findings:

- White workers have higher median wages than black workers, regardless of education level.
- Black households are more likely to be burdened by housing costs, regardless of whether they rent or own.
- Current education levels of the black population aren’t keeping up with employers’ educational demands.
- Long Island’s GDP would have been **$24 billion higher** with racial equity.
- Average black income would increase by more than **$22,000 a year**, a 68 percent increase.
- Seventy-seven percent of these increases would come from closing the racial wage gap.

To break down barriers to opportunity and equality on Long Island, the report offers some solutions. Among them:

- Improve inclusion and pay-equity training for Long Island’s employers.
- Enforce the Community Reinvestment Act, which can help minimize cost burdens for black households.
- Improve access to quality education for blacks.

**How will you and others use the report to leverage public policy on Long Island?**

Working with a racial equity council of business and community leaders, the League will use the report findings to push for more strategic planning and implementation of policies, programs, and services for the black community to improve health, safety, education, and welfare.

**What is the role of philanthropy?**

The Long Island Community Foundation was an important catalyst for exploring and addressing racial inequity in our region. Foundations like LICF are in a unique position to engage key leaders as partners, raise awareness, and provide ongoing support to local organizations to help us build sufficient capacity to be able to manage this long term and complex effort.
Tech Boys Rock!

Overall, young men of color face greater obstacles when it comes to high-quality jobs. Consequently, they face lower lifetime earnings and higher unemployment rates. To level the field, we recently funded a grant for the Boys & Girls Club of the Bellport Area to create project-based learning opportunities taught by professional women and people of color who work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. These programs make STEM and art concepts relevant and interesting, plus they improve proficiency in math and sciences, and promote career awareness.

“Expanded learning opportunities that develop technical and social skills can help young men of color compete in the 21st Century economy,” says Sol Marie Alfonso Jones, senior program officer at the Long Island Community Foundation. “The Boys and Girls Club of Bellport has the necessary partnerships and quality programming to make this happen.”

Summer of Science

For girls, the middle school years can be overwhelming. Not only are their bodies changing, but so are their social and academic demands. The situation is even more profound for girls in lower-income neighborhoods. Because of a $20,000 grant we made to Girls Inc. of Long Island, 31 middle school girls from Central Islip and Freeport had the summer of their lives at Brookhaven National Labs. The girls experimented with biofuels, observed bacterial growth, learned about the molecular structure of viruses and proteins and more.

Leadership news:

Tonya Thomas has recently joined our LICF team. As an associate program officer, she will support the Foundation’s grant-making and special initiatives. Tonya was the former director of Partnership Development and Programming at SUNY Old Westbury’s First-Year Community Engagement Program. During her tenure there, she developed community partnerships with more than 50 nonprofit organizations and government agencies in the metropolitan area, facilitated work- and internship-readiness workshops, and social-justice awareness programs for the entire first-year class. Tonya has earned a bachelor’s of science in journalism from Boston University, completed a fellowship at UCLA’s Anderson School of Business, and is pursuing a master’s degree in social work at Fordham University.

LICF Welcomes Three New Board Members

Nancy Engelhardt is a social entrepreneur and leadership-development consultant. As the former executive director of Leadership Huntington and founding director of The Energeia Partnership, Nancy helps bring together influential leaders in the region, providing them with information and networks necessary to bring about change.

John T. DeCelle is president and CEO of Nassau Financial Federal Credit Union, a $400 million credit union. He has more than 30 years’ experience in the financial services industry. In June 2016, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo appointed him to the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council.

James E. Meyer, principal of Greco Planning Group, has more than 30 years’ experience in the financial services industry. Most of his expertise is in marketing and relationship building. Jim is president of the Long Island Affiliate of the Partnership for Philanthropic Planning and the Charitable Estate Planning Council of Long Island.
Their Dad wanted to leave money to charity. We helped them.

The Long Island Community Foundation fit their needs perfectly.

“We four brothers grew up on Long Island but now live across the country, and this has been good for us,” says Charlie.

“It keeps us in touch, communicating about our family values,” says James.