



# Goodskills Career Builder



Empire State  
Development

## Two years in, Goodskills Career Builder shares lessons learned.

Goodwill of WNY (Goodwill) launched Goodskills Career Builder (GCB) in September 2021 with a simple but ambitious goal: to help people of color and disadvantaged adults connect with higher-paying career pathways in Manufacturing and Tech through training, wraparound services, job placement and continued career coaching for three years. The program has since made significant progress, helping more than 400 individuals complete training and seek jobs that offer upward career mobility. Over the past year, GCB has expanded, opening sites in Niagara Falls and Jamestown with training for residents across WNY. The program has cultivated dozens of employer partners who seek qualified applicants for hard-to-fill jobs. This brief shares lessons learned during the first two years of GCB's implementation and sheds light on opportunities for even greater impact.

### Lessons Learned

*These insights are shared to support trainers, workforce funders, and other stakeholders who are working to build an inclusive workforce and strong regional economy.*

- Fill workforce gaps
- Account for workforce barriers
- Invest in targeted outreach
- Solve the transportation challenge
- Reduce barriers to workforce participation
- Cultivate ecosystem-wide partnerships
- Build sustainability and credibility

## How does Goodskills Career Builder work?



Reaches  
**underemployed**  
workers in WNY.



Provides workers  
**workforce readiness skills**  
and **support services**.



Fosters  
sector-  
focused  
**partnerships**  
that **connect**  
workers.

WORKFORCE  
TRAINERS

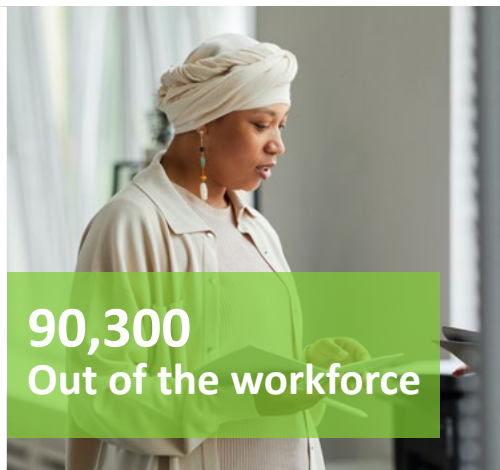
EMPLOYERS



Leads workers to **higher-paying, in-demand jobs** with **career pathways** in Tech, Manufacturing, and Sales and Services.



**80,000**  
Underemployed



**90,300**  
Out of the workforce



**20,700**  
Unemployed

Source: US Census American Community Survey, 5-year estimates (2017-2021); IPUMS-American Community Survey, 2021, and NYS Department of Labor, Local Area Employment Statistics, May 2023. Underemployed reflect adults age 18+ who are not in school and working with earnings under 200% of the federal poverty level. Out of the workforce include adults in their working prime (ages 25-54). Unemployed are those actively seeking a job.

**Fill workforce gaps.** GCB addressed a gap in WNY’s workforce ecosystem that left many employers struggling to fill higher-paying, entry-level jobs and 90,300 prime working age adults out of the workforce altogether. GCB offers a holistic, research-driven strategy to build racial equity through higher-paying career pathways in target sectors. GCB’s home base on Buffalo’s East Side – where a third of working poor and half of all people of color in the region live within five miles – positions it well to address this workforce need.

**Account for workforce barriers.** Many individuals face circumstances that keep them out of the labor force. In Upstate New York, about one in five (21%) working age adults (18-54) are out of the labor force. Most of these individuals take care of family, attend school, or are unable to work due to disabilities or health concerns.

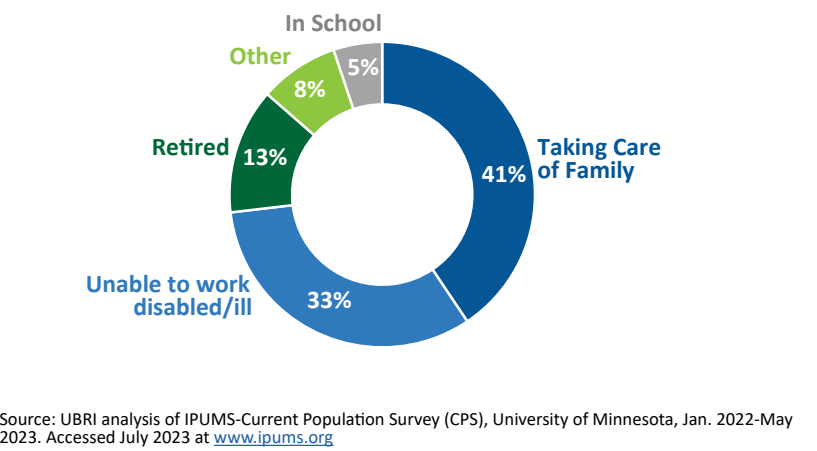
Out of those who are not in the labor force, only 8% want a job but have become discouraged, so they’ve stopped actively looking for work. When these workers were asked why, nearly a quarter (23%) said they cannot find work that matches their skills or training. About 6% pointed to transportation problems.

**Invest in targeted outreach.** GCB focuses recruitment on those who have recently lost a job, are shifting careers, and/or have barriers to training and employment. Even with a communications toolkit and targeted strategies, outreach to diverse, underrepresented populations takes time and resources, especially in communities where transportation barriers are common.

GCB launched in Buffalo with one outreach staff member. It now has five to support additional training sites in Niagara Falls and Jamestown. Data shows that only one out of over 1,200 contacted individuals expresses interest in the GCB program, and out of those, only one in five will enroll in it. That’s why outreach and recruitment accounted for 67% of program costs in the first year.

**90,300 prime working age individuals (25-54) in WNY are out of the labor force—92% are either caring for family, unable to work due to disabilities, retired, or in school.**

Reason for Not Being in the Labor Force, Age 25-54, Upstate NY, 2022-2023



Source: UBRI analysis of IPUMS-Current Population Survey (CPS), University of Minnesota, Jan. 2022-May 2023. Accessed July 2023 at [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org)

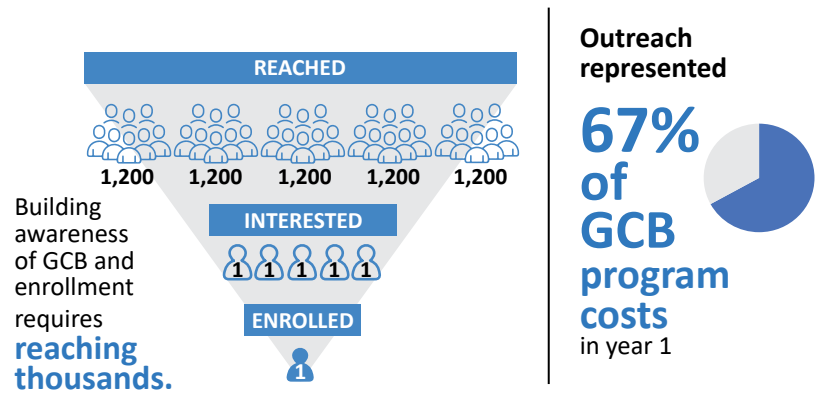
**About 7,600 are discouraged workers, who would like a job but have stopped looking for work for various reasons.**

Why Discouraged Workers are Not Looking for Work, Age 25-54, Upstate NY, 2022-2023



Source: UBRI analysis of IPUMS-CPS, University of Minnesota, Jan. 2022-May 2023. Accessed July 2023 at [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org); NOTE: Another 22% listed an unspecified “other” reason; 2% indicated some form of discrimination.

**Outreach is a strategic investment that drives program enrollment.**



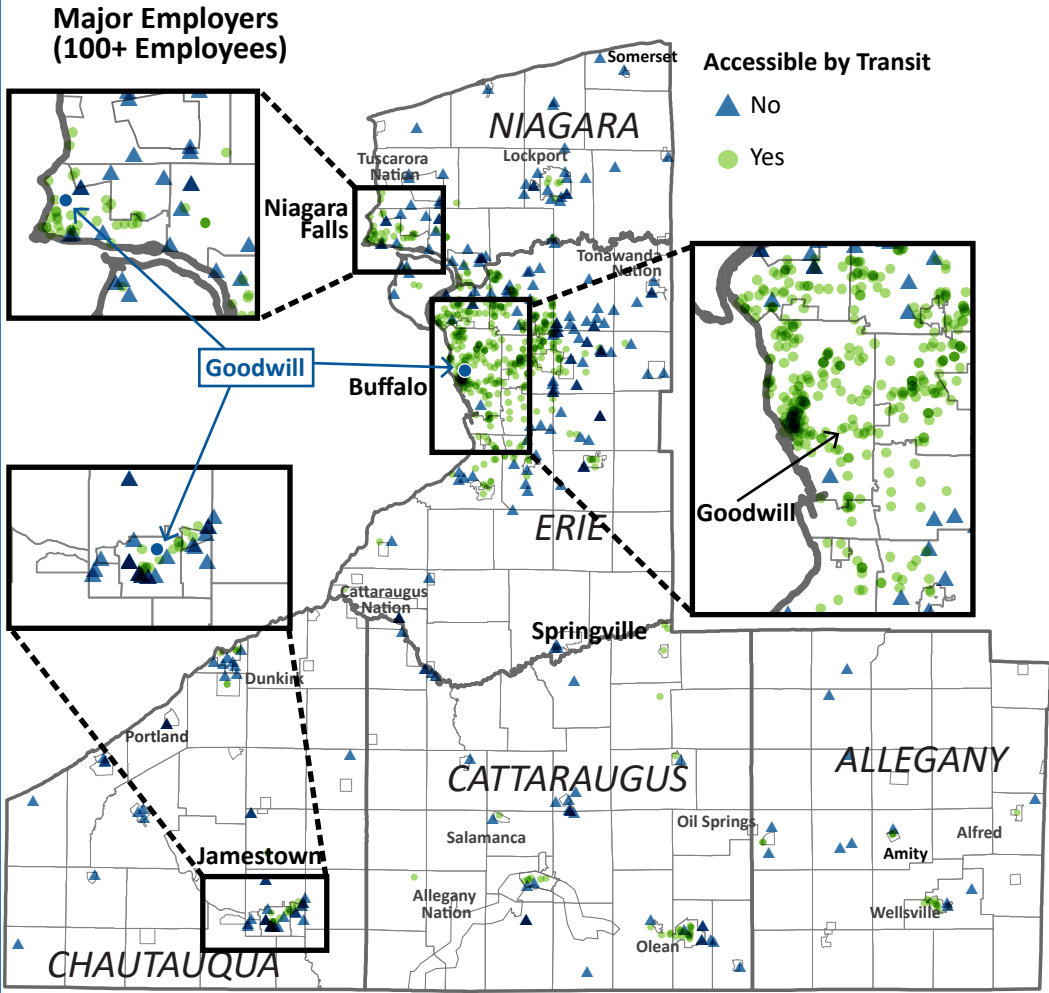
Source: Draws from findings in briefs completed by Goodwill of WNY and UBRI: “Outreach and Recruitment Strategies for a Diverse Workforce in Buffalo Niagara,” (June 2022) and “Training for a Diverse Workforce in Western New York: The True Costs and Benefits” (January 2023).

**Solve the transportation challenge.**

Nearly a quarter of households in Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Jamestown do not have access to a vehicle. Lack of transportation can limit employment options for many of these workers. Over a quarter of the nearly 850 major employers in the five counties are not within walking distance to a transit stop, as highlighted in blue on the map. Even for employers within walking distance of a transit stop, the limited frequency of bus lines can make these locations inaccessible for many potential workers.

For example, on Chautauqua Area Rural Transit Service (CARTS) routes in Jamestown, wait times between bus departures can exceed one hour, and some rural transit routes are only available by request. Even on NFTA routes that serve the metro region, it can take a worker who lives in East Buffalo over 1.5 hours to commute one way to a job in Amherst.

Partnerships with alternative transportation services, employers, and community organizations can help workers overcome transportation barriers. Solutions could include expanded earned income disregard programs, partnerships with employers who address transportation needs, and building on ridesharing programs and initiatives like Vehicles for Change that make car ownership achievable for lower-income workers.



Source: DataAxle, ReferenceUSA Database, 2023. UBRI analysis of transit routes of NFTA, CARTS, Seneca Transit, and Hornell Area Transit, 2017.

**Potential solutions will support employers who address transportation barriers to work.**

**MODELS**

**The Paradox Prize** in Northeast Ohio is an innovation fund that supports nimble, collaborative, community-tailored approaches that connect low-income workers with good-paying jobs. Through eight pilot projects it has engaged 400+ employers and benefited 1,300 workers with solutions that expand options for getting to work, such as door-to-door van service, shuttles, ride-sharing subsidies, and commuter-friendly employer policies. These initiatives involve new partnerships and employer-driven solutions, and they build on existing transit resources.

**See:** Fund for Our Economic Future, No Car, No Job; No Job, No Car: Solving the Transportation Paradox, The Paradox Prize, [paradoxprize.com](http://paradoxprize.com)

**Tyson Foods** partners with Commute with Enterprise to offer ride-sharing to workers who live nearby each other and work similar shifts. The cost of the shared van is \$15 to \$25 per week. Tyson also offers a car purchasing program, contributing to a down-payment on a purchase.

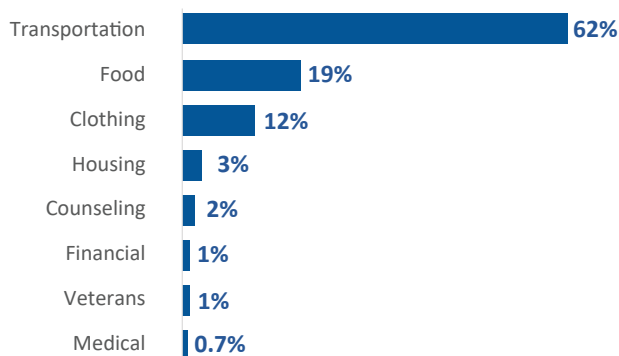
**See:** Tyson Foods, News Release, May 11, 2022, <https://www.tysonfoods.com/news/news-releases/2022/5/tyson-foods-provides-affordable-transportation-team-members-through-ride>



**Reduce barriers to workforce participation.** GCB works to break down the barriers that hinder workforce participation. Part of the program's success is due to the much-needed wraparound services that they provide to their participants, the majority of which focus on transportation assistance. And of course the combination of Manufacturing and Tech training based on employers' needs with existing employer partnerships provides the graduates with access to living wage jobs that include benefits, which ultimately reduces barriers to continued workforce participation.

**Transportation accounts for over half of the referrals and wraparound services Goodwill has provided to GCB participants.**

#### Referrals and services to GCB Participants by Type, 2021-2023



Source: UBRI analysis of data from Goodwill of WNY provided October 2023.

**Access to living wage jobs with benefits can reduce barriers to workforce participation.**

64%	<b>Living Wage</b> % GCB graduates earn a living wage
82%	<b>Retirement Savings</b> % GCB graduates have a 401(k) through their employer
83%	<b>Medical</b> % GCB graduates receive employer medical benefits
85%	<b>Paid Time Off</b> % GCB graduates earn paid time off at work

Source: UBRI analysis of salary and benefits data compiled by Goodwill of WNY through Oct. 2023. The living wage for a single adult household in Erie, Chautauqua and Niagara counties is from MIT's Living Wage Calculator and applied to GCB graduate wages in three locations: Buffalo, Jamestown and Niagara Falls. Percentages are based on GCB graduates who are working and reported their wages and/or benefits.

### Cultivate ecosystem-wide partnerships.

Partnerships with employers are essential, but we also need ecosystem-wide collaborations to create robust career pipelines and provide wraparound services to participants. Coalitions can amplify a shared vision, common goals, collective outcomes and regional impact. Goodwill's involvement in the WNY Manufacturing and Tech Workforce Coalition grew out of collaborative planning and partnerships on two federal workforce applications that included US Economic Development Administration (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge and Build Back Better Regional Challenge.

### Build sustainability and credibility.

A sustainable training program will attract public and private partnerships and foster solutions that engage employers and other stakeholders. Goodwill's social innovation model contributes to a financially sustainable program, generating profits from retail sales at its shops to support training and provide work opportunities for residents. Goodwill also was able to secure three years of funding through the Build Back Better Regional Challenge for a regional plan that will create good-paying jobs and drive inclusive economic development through workforce development, innovation and infrastructure investments.

#### Data Sources and Notes

More than 400 completed training: Reflects completions through the end of 2023, as provided by Goodwill of WNY, February 2023.

Account for workforce barriers. UBRI analysis of IPUMS-Current Population Survey (CPS), University of Minnesota, Jan. 2022-May 2023. Accessed July 2023 at [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org). Upstate New York refers to all counties of the state outside of New York City and Long Island. Discouraged workers are persons who are not working, have not looked for work within the past 4 weeks, but do want a job.

Households without a vehicle. US Census, American Community Survey, 2022. Only includes households headed by someone under the age of 65.

#### Learn More About Goodskills Career Builder

Contact:  
**Thomas R. Ulbrich**  
*President and CEO*  
*Goodwill of Western New York*

1119 William St.  
Buffalo, NY 14206

Tel: 716-854-3494

Email:  
[tulbrich@goodwillwny.org](mailto:tulbrich@goodwillwny.org)