



OFFICE OF
Adult Education
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

HOW PHILLY IS USING CITY JOBS TO TACKLE POVERTY

Juliana Feliciano Reyes | September 18, 2018

Government jobs have long been seen as a pathway to the middle class.

Though they're not what they once were, they're still very much the elusive good job: predictable hours, solid pay and benefits, job security. They're often unionized, and many don't require a college degree. And the City of Philadelphia is the second-biggest employer in the city, after the University of Pennsylvania.

It's a natural solution — one of them, at least — to Philly's persistent poverty rate, especially since the city needs new workers, too: The average age of a Philadelphia city employee is 45.

But there's one big problem: Those who stand to benefit the most from a city job are often the ones who have the hardest time getting one. They don't know how to navigate the city's civil service hiring process, which a recent report called "cumbersome, inflexible, and slow." They might lack the necessary skills, like math, to pass the civil service exam. Or they might not even know about the different kinds of jobs that exist at the city.

It's why the Kenney administration, as part of its workforce plan, has made it a priority to develop what it's calling "career pathways" for city jobs, apprenticeship-like training programs that cater to those who might find it hard to get employed by the city. Through what the Office of

Workforce Development is calling its City as a Model Employer effort, the city is piloting new career pathways based on hiring needs and looking to ones that already work to figure out how to implement them across the city. The Lenfest Foundation has committed \$250,000 for the first year of the effort.

It's good timing for a strategy like this, as the city is working its way toward returning to pre-recession employment levels, according to Commerce Department spokesperson Lauren Cox. In June 2008, the city had 23,111 full-time positions funded by the city budget. By the end of this September, it had 22,226.

Zakiyyah Ali, who runs City as a Model Employer, talked about some of the city's career pathway programs:

Fleet Department

Founded in 1993, the Fleet Department's automotive apprenticeship program is arguably the city's most successful workforce program. It takes high schoolers from auto programs across the city and trains them to work in city garages. The traditional pathway requires four years of experience before becoming a city auto mechanic, which makes it hard for city kids to get mechanic jobs.

Parks and Recreation

Parks and Recreation has one of the biggest seasonal work forces, so the department developed a two-year "community apprenticeship" to get seasonal workers on track to become full-time. These jobs include tree maintenance helpers and recreation center outreach workers. It was launched with 40 participants in June 2017, and 21 apprentices are still part of the program. Those who have dropped out wanted to stick with seasonal work, some got jobs with private employers, and others weren't ready yet for a full-time job and were encouraged to stick with the seasonal job and try again, Ali said.

Streets Department

The Streets Department's five-year-old Philly Future Track is a five-month program that trains workers in two fields: alleyway and commercial corridor cleaning and road maintenance. From 2013 to 2015, out of the nearly 400 interns in the program, more than half kept working with the city and about 75 got full-time jobs.

The department also created an apprenticeship for entry-level surveying jobs, which have been hard to fill, said survey bureau manager Frank Morelli, since most of the students who would be good candidates for these jobs are going to college to get civil engineering degrees. The Streets Department worked with Community Schools coordinator Caitlyn Boyle to recruit students for the program, which gives students a rigorous training in math so they can pass the math-heavy civil service exam.

So far, four high school graduates who completed the two-year internship have been hired as apprentices and will be eligible for full-time jobs once they finish the apprenticeship.

Water Department

The Water Department has developed several tracks based on the positions where it expects openings, including storm water management and graphic design and communications, and works with the city's PowerCorpsPHL hiring program to fill positions.

Airport

This fall, Philadelphia International Airport launched a five-month program to train people for hard-to-fill customer service and custodian jobs. These jobs have high turnover because they're overnight shifts, so the program hopes to offer a realistic preview of the job so that people can decide if they really could commit. The program started with a cohort of 10, where the average age is 25.

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