MAKE FOOD WORK

A Strategy to Strengthen the DC Food Workforce

Created by the DC Food Policy Council
In partnership with Kaiser Permanente
Executive Summary

This executive summary highlights the key findings from the forthcoming *Make Food Work: A Strategy to Strengthen the DC Food Workforce*. You can read the full report at dcfoodpolicy.org/makefoodwork.

*Make Food Work: A Strategy to Strengthen the DC Food Workforce* (herein, “the Strategy”) provides a roadmap for improving job quality, expanding opportunities, and increasing equity within the food workforce and thereby the food economy in the District. Although the food economy is often considered as part of larger hospitality or tourism sectors, this report highlights the unique challenges faced by workers in the food economy and the unique opportunities to decrease unemployment and create meaningful career pathways within this industry.

The DC food workforce merits its own strategy for improvement because:

**The DC food economy is strong and expanding rapidly.** In 2016, there were nearly 71,300 employees directly employed by the District’s food economy, making up 8% of the total District employment in all sectors. In total, the District’s food economy produced $5.47 billion in economic impact and generated more than $579.3 million in tax revenue for the District.

**Employers in the food economy report a lack of skilled candidates for open positions,** particularly in management positions, and are hiring outside of the District.

**The food economy can uniquely address unemployment** by offering opportunities for those just entering or reentering the workforce without a college or advanced degree.

**Workers in the food sector need more resources to move up the career ladder.** Entry-level jobs in the food sector generally pay wages far below the area median income. Workers in this industry need more support and training to move up the career ladder to better paying jobs.

**The DC food workforce is integral to the overall DC food system.** The public increasingly cares about having healthy options and purchasing local, sustainably grown food. But a system where food is prepared and served by workers whose own health and livelihoods are unstable is inherently not sustainable. We must invest in workers to achieve a truly healthy food system.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This Strategy leverages the insights and knowledge of stakeholders within the District’s food workforce and food economy, including District agencies, food workforce training providers, food businesses, and emerging food entrepreneurs and organizations that support food entrepreneurship. The findings of this strategy come from 20 stakeholder interviews, a one-day convening of 65 key food workforce stakeholders, collaboration with and feedback from partner District agencies, and research on promising practices conducted from October 2018 to June 2019. This Strategy was developed with guidance and financial support from Kaiser Permanente.

Key Players in the District’s Food Workforce

A diverse set of players is focused on strengthening the food workforce in the District, including businesses, government agencies, workforce training programs, and organizations supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Food businesses

The District’s food economy includes a variety of businesses that produce, store, distribute, prepare, sell, and serve food to District residents and visitors. These businesses employ significant numbers of people and contribute to the District’s rapidly growing economy. Some of the biggest food sectors include restaurants and bars, which employed 53,813 individuals; grocery stores, which employed 5,058 individuals; food and beverage manufacturers, which employed 512 individuals; and wholesalers, which employed 658 individuals, according to 2016 data. As this report goes on to describe, finding ways to support food businesses in investing in their workforce must be central to a food workforce development strategy.

District agencies

Several District agencies support the District’s food workforce and the broader food economy. Table 1 highlights these agencies and their food-specific initiatives or programs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Relevant Food Workforce Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA)</td>
<td>• Administers Business Licenses, including 14 different food-related licenses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| The Office for East of the River Services (ERS)   | • Increases communication of District agency resources for residents east of the Anacostia River  
• Identifies challenges in communities east of the river and connects to District services and resources                                                                                             |
| Department of Employment Services (DOES)          | • Runs American Job Centers and provides job seeking and placement services  
• Facilitates multisector collaboration through the Division of State Initiatives (DSI) to bring specialized services and support to transitional employment program participants  
• Administers ApprenticeshipDC, On-the-Job Training, Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program, Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute, and Senior Community Service Employment Program, which link residents with food jobs  
• Provides resources for employers  
• Houses Office of Wage Hour Compliance & Office of Paid Family Leave                                                                                                           |
| DC Food Policy Council (FPC)                      | • Spearheads Make Food Work: A Strategy to Strengthen the DC Food Workforce  
• Convenes District agency and community partners and the Entrepreneurship and Food Jobs Working Group                                                                                                                         |
| DC Department of Health (DC Health)               | • Conducts Food Safety and Hygiene Inspection Services at food establishments and enforces food safety regulations  
• Administers Certified Food Protection Manager Cards  
• Administers permits for Cottage Food Businesses  
• Partners in administering Produce Rx Produce Prescription Program  
• Hosts the DC Board of Dietetics and Nutrition licensing                                                                                                                          |
| Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) | • Administers Small Business Technical Assistance grants                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Department of Human Services (DHS)               | • Administers the SNAP Employment and Training Program and TANF Employment and Training Services                                                                                                                                 |
| Department of Energy and the Environment (DOEE)   | • Hosts the Office of Urban Agriculture  
• Leads the Urban Land Lease Program and Urban Agriculture Tax Abatement Program                                                                                                                                               |
## Agency
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED)</th>
<th>Relevant Food Workforce Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administers the Neighborhood Prosperity Fund and Great Streets grants, which several food businesses have received</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surpluses/disposes of underutilized District properties for redevelopment, creating new spaces for grocers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads business development efforts to market available space for grocery tenants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administers DC’s supermarket tax incentive program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC Public Schools (DCPS)</td>
<td>Runs Career and Technical Education programs in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runs Career Academies at high schools, including culinary arts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners with ProStart culinary and management program in three high schools: Ballou, Theodore Roosevelt, and Roosevelt STAY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD)</td>
<td>Administers grants for small food businesses (Main Streets, Grown in DC, DREAM, Robust Retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers programs to support food entrepreneurs (Aspire to Entrepreneurship, Build a Dream workshops)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runs the Made in DC program to support local makers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)</td>
<td>Administers Adult and Family Education programs and provides funding for adult basic and secondary education and English as a Second Language education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administers Career and Technical Education programs and provides funding for job-oriented skills and training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of the District of Columbia (UDC)</td>
<td>Provides Certified Professional Food Server and Manager Course, Urban Food Systems and Agriculture Pathway, Nutrition and Dietetics degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operates as the District’s Land Grant Institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Investment Council (WIC)</td>
<td>Business-led board responsible for advising the mayor on workforce investments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintains the Eligible Training Provider List, which indicates training providers eligible to receive federal funds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenes the Hospitality and Food Service Career Pathways working group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administers the Workforce Intermediary Grant Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notably, the District government supports the food economy through the procurement of food in large institutional food contracts. While we do not focus on the District’s procurement practices in this Strategy, there are opportunities for the District to more effectively use its purchasing power to better support the food economy and food workforce.
Food workforce training providers

Food workforce training providers equip residents with the skills and support they need to enter and be successful in the food workforce. While some training providers solely focus on food-related skills, others focus on a range of industries. Table 2 highlights the District’s workforce training organizations with food-related tracks. We attempted to create a comprehensive list of the District’s food workforce training providers and compiled this list from a variety of sources, including WIC’s Eligible Training Provider List, Bainum Family Foundation Food Learning Locator, and research on promising programs around the country.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Food Workforce Programs</th>
<th>Length of program</th>
<th>Special populations served</th>
<th>Participants served annually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amala Lives Institute</td>
<td>Culinary Arts</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Hard-to-employ populations, including returning citizens; low-income individuals; single parents; and individuals with trauma</td>
<td>40–50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food &amp; Agriculture</td>
<td>Veteran Farmer Fellowship Program</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School</td>
<td>Culinary Arts, including Culinary Arts Fundamentals; International Cuisines; Baking and Pastry</td>
<td>Fundamentals Course: 10 months Additional courses: 5 months each</td>
<td>English-language learners; low-income individuals</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Connections</td>
<td>Ward 8 Speedy Greens</td>
<td>16 weeks</td>
<td>Young adults (18 to 24 years old) with behavioral health issues</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC Central Kitchen</td>
<td>Culinary Job Training; Culinary Job Training at DC Central Kitchen Cafe</td>
<td>12 weeks for adults; approximately 16 weeks for Opportunity Youth</td>
<td>Hard-to-employ populations; returning citizens; young adults (18 to 24 years old)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreaming Out Loud</td>
<td>AyaUplift Program</td>
<td>26 weeks</td>
<td>Individuals living in public housing and/or receiving public assistance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodwill Industries</td>
<td>Hospitality Job Training Program</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>Hard-to-employ populations</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington</td>
<td>ProStart Programs, including Culinary Arts and Restaurant Management</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>High school youth</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrive DC</td>
<td>Real Opportunity Training Program</td>
<td>18 weeks (6 weeks of training and 12-week externship)</td>
<td>Hard-to-employ populations; individuals experiencing homelessness</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Planning Organization</td>
<td>Culinary Arts Professional</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Low-income individuals</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Needs for Thriving in the Food Workforce

To thrive in the District’s food workforce, the following skills, competencies, and resources are extremely helpful:

**Technical skills**

Entry-level and mid-level positions in the food workforce require a range of technical skills, including culinary skills like cooking and baking, food preparation skills like knife skills and food handling safety, and service skills like point-of-sale management.⁵

**Workforce readiness skills**

Also known as “soft skills,” workforce readiness skills are core competencies that enable workers to navigate and respond to challenges within the workplace. Key workforce readiness skills in the food workforce include effective communication, customer service, problem solving and adaptability, timeliness and reliability, organization and multitasking, and teamwork.⁶

**Resources and support**

Several environmental barriers get in the way of meeting employer expectations, including lack of affordable and consistent access to transportation, childcare and eldercare, healthy food, and affordable housing.⁷ Employers’ common practice of last-minute scheduling can also pose significant challenges. In addition, many low-income workers lack adequate savings to successfully mitigate an unexpected financial emergency.

**Support to address trauma or mental health issues**

Restaurant kitchens are widely known to be stressful, conflict-filled environments. Stressful or challenging scenarios in the workplace can trigger or exacerbate unaddressed trauma or mental health issues. Existing trauma or mental health issues are often by-products of poverty, exposure to violence and adversity throughout one’s life, or physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.⁸ Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) put individuals at higher risk for poor work performance, financial stress, lower academic achievement, and poor health outcomes, among other risks.⁹

**Education and digital literacy levels**

Across the District, more than 54,000 residents over 18 years old do not have a high school degree or equivalent degree, and 86% of that population is over 25 years old.¹⁰ Although many entry-level jobs within the food economy do not require formal educational credentials, advanced positions like managers typically need at least a high school diploma or equivalent.¹¹ In addition, as technology and automation become further integrated into the workplace, the ability to use digital devices has become increasingly important.
**English proficiency**

The food sector has historically been a welcoming place for foreign-born populations and non-native English-speaking immigrants to enter the formal workforce. However, limited English proficiency can prevent an individual from gaining initial employment and then advancing in the workplace.

**Outside professional development**

Once an individual attains employment, continued training and education are often necessary to acquire more advanced skills necessary to get a promotion to a higher-paying position. The characteristics of many food sector jobs such as unpredictable scheduling practices make this type of continued professional development particularly challenging, but on-the-job training can help overcome many logistical challenges and help workers gain access to the skills they need for their next position. With on-the-job training, workers do not need to sign up for an additional program or coordinate time off work to pursue professional development. Workers are also able to directly apply the new skills they acquire to their workplace.
Strategy to Strengthen the Food Workforce

Identified through the research conducted for this report, the following actions would create more career pathways within the food workforce, thereby supporting the health, wellbeing, and economic attainment of food sector workers in the District. We envision these actions as a starting point for strengthening the DC food workforce, and we look forward to the continued efforts between the District government and its partners to advance this important work.

1. Create a toolkit and training for employers to improve the work environment, connect workers to existing District resources, and decrease turnover.

Improving the work environment for food sector jobs is key to strengthening the workforce. Employers who offer more benefits and professional development opportunities for their workers see lower turnover rates and increased job performance. And workers in these workplaces are better able to maintain employment and move up the career ladder, generating higher incomes and increased job satisfaction.

2. Strengthen worker supports to address environmental barriers, such as access to reliable transportation and childcare, as well as supports to address mental health or trauma-related challenges.

Environmental barriers like the lack of access to reliable transportation and childcare, as well as mental health challenges and trauma, can prevent a worker from maintaining and thriving in a new job. While the District has made impressive strides to support workers—including through progressive early learning and child care opportunities, advocating for expanded public transportation hours, and facilitating low-cost transportation options like the Circulator and Capital Bikeshare—there are still opportunities to expand and strategically coordinate those efforts to support more workers. The District, in partnership with philanthropic and nonprofit partners, should form a comprehensive and integrated network of social support designed for workers facing common environmental barriers. In particular, District agencies that provide convening spaces and community hubs, such as DC Public Library and the Department of Parks and Recreation, should be key partners in this network.
3. Strengthen communication and collaboration between food businesses and workforce training providers.

Workforce training programs only successfully prepare participants for employment if they match the hiring and skills needs of employers. Consistent communication and collaboration between food businesses and food workforce development providers can ensure that programs successfully prepare participants for the workplace and identify opportunities for additional training to advance workers.

4. Create and regularly update career mapping resources specific to food sector jobs.

As the District’s food economy evolves with new technology and business models, food businesses are looking for workers with a new range of skills to fill many positions. A regularly updated resource for career mapping in the food sector could better align training providers and businesses. The maps, driven by labor market data and validated by businesses, would inform the types of jobs available and the type of training needed to get them. Training providers can then create and adjust training curriculums based on that information to more effectively prepare participants to succeed in the workforce.

5. Recognize employers that pay a living wage in the District’s food workforce.

The majority of workers in the District’s food economy currently earn less than half of the area median income. The District must strive to be a place where all residents, including those in all positions within the food workforce, can afford to live and thrive. Even with the recent minimum wage increase in July 2019 to $14 per hour, minimum wage workers are earning less than a living wage in the District. Programs like the District’s anticipated Living Wage Certification Program, proposed to be administered through a DSLBD grantee, can help incentivize businesses to offer living wages to workers. The District and its partners should educate food businesses and residents about the Living Wage Certification Program, encouraging more participation and support of participating businesses.

6. Support the implementation of the Universal Paid Family Leave Program in the District’s food businesses.

Once implemented in July 2020, the District’s Paid Family Leave Program will cover most workers in the food workforce and provide important time to care for new children, sick family members, or one’s own illness. The Office of Paid Family Leave within DOES has started outreach to businesses, and further efforts are needed to make sure that all businesses and workers are aware of the program. A worker outreach plan and partnerships between District agencies and community organizations connected to the food workforce would help increase awareness before the program is fully implemented in July 2020.
7. Develop workplace-based loan programs to help low-income workers overcome financial emergencies.

As mentioned above, relatively small unexpected financial burdens can lead to missed work or termination of employment. To address this risk, the District could help incentivize more food businesses to offer small emergency loan programs. These programs provide emergency loans to workers that are then repaid through small increments (between $50 and $75) from automatic payroll deductions. Workers can build good credit through the program, and once the loan is repaid, can decide to continue the small automatic payroll deductions to build a savings account.

8. Create and incentivize opportunities for on-the-job skills training and professional development.

As described in this report, many workers face challenges with transportation, childcare, internet access, and other issues that make it difficult to seek out outside professional development. Stakeholders interviewed for this project consistently reported that professional development should be as accessible as possible, either by including it on the job or offering paid leave for time spent on outside training. The District could incentivize employers by offering cost-sharing programs to help alleviate some of the expense associated with offering on-site professional development.

9. Leverage existing federal funding for worker advancement.

Several federal funding opportunities could be better leveraged to provide more training and advancement opportunities in the food workforce. For example, the District could encourage more businesses to take advantage of the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), which benefits businesses that hire hard-to-employ populations, including unemployed veterans, returning citizens, residents in designated empowerment zones, and others. In addition, the District could explore how to capture the expanding federal funds available for apprenticeship programs by developing food-specific apprenticeship programs.
Endnotes


4 The information in this table comes from both the stakeholder interviews and the organizations’ websites. It does not include in-house training that hotels, restaurants and other businesses may provide, nor does it include university-based programs, even those leading to credentials and certifications, nor does it include training programs—often expensive—at culinary institutions such as L’Academie de Cuisine.


Learn more about the DC Food Policy Council and access the full report at dcfoodpolicy.org/makefoodwork.