



**STUDY CHRONICLES UNPRECEDENTED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
PARTNERSHIP MODEL FOR HARD-TO-SERVE POPULATIONS IN LOCAL
HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY**

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**Columbia University Case Study on the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone
Development Corporation's Career Opportunities in Healthcare Program chronicles
the pioneer demand-driven workforce development model.**

In 2006, the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation (UMEZ) launched an innovative workforce development program that sought to knock down longstanding barriers to employment that conventional job-readiness training programs had failed to accomplish. A new Columbia University study, authored by Professor Ester R. Fuchs, chronicles the UMEZ Career Opportunities in Healthcare Program and offers a blue print for organizations seeking to replicate this demand-driven partnership model that successfully trained and placed hard-to-serve residents in quality jobs with career ladder opportunities.

In the early 2000s, Northern Manhattan was experiencing an economic revival. The dramatic reduction in crime rates, influx of private investment and rising property values, all pointed to reduced unemployment for the disadvantaged populations of Upper Manhattan. However, the under-employed and unemployed residents still struggled to secure job placements despite the growing local economy. According to UMEZ President and CEO, Kenneth Knuckles, "placing and maintaining the hard-to-serve in jobs is one of the greatest challenges to urban planning and redevelopment of the past 50 years," and the prevailing job-readiness training programs available were not generating adequate job placement rates for this population.

Under the leadership of Mr. Knuckles, the UMEZ sought to secure direct access to local employers that could accommodate the employment needs of Upper Manhattan residents. Given the prominence of major hospitals in Upper Manhattan combined with the rapid growth of the healthcare sector, UMEZ identified healthcare as the ideal industry for this type of sector-targeted program. Over the coming months, the UMEZ established a cross-sector partnership with industry and community leaders and successfully bridged the interests of the residents and employers in Upper Manhattan.

The UMEZ's engagement of community and industry partners ultimately materialized as the Career Opportunities in Healthcare (COH) program and drew on the resources and expertise of the following institutions:

- The UMEZ, which developed the vision for this program and engaged the team of participants
- 1199SEIU Training and Employment Funds (TEF), an independent jobs training agency, created by SEIU Local 1199, with an excellent reputation and a unique understanding of the needs of the union and health care employers
- Some of the largest and most prestigious healthcare institutions in New York City, including: Mount Sinai Medical Center; New York-Presbyterian Hospital; and North General Hospital. A total of 17 employers from all over Manhattan, as well as Brooklyn and the Bronx, hired program graduates.
- Community-based organizations, including: Upper Manhattan Workforce 1 Career Center/Seedco; Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement (HCCI); Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation; Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC); New Heights Neighborhood Center (NHNC).

According to Professor Fuchs, the program developed an unprecedented strategy for successfully partnering with community-based organizations to break the cycle of chronic unemployment that affects many individuals in the distressed communities of Upper Manhattan. The core of COH's successful program was its dual focus on the necessary skills and requirements of one specific jobs sector (in this case healthcare) and on the needs and capabilities of hard-to-serve clients reached through community-based organizations (CBOs). "This dual focus was in turn served by a team-based concept in which multiple partners brought their strengths cooperatively to the same problem," said Professor Fuchs. "The UMEZ, which conceived and organized the COH program and was its largest source of funding, identified a pre-existing healthcare job training program, community organizations that worked with hard-to-serve residents, and major employers with job opportunities. It proved to be a powerful partnership of the right skills and experience to make this important breakthrough in workforce training for hard to serve populations."

In [Innovative Programs in Workforce Development: The UMEZ Career Opportunities in Health Care \(COH\) Program](#), Professor Fuchs documents the development, process, and final outcomes of the Career Opportunities in Healthcare (COH) program. The report found the program to be highly successful, with 108 program participants eventually placed in desirable jobs in the healthcare sector despite the broader distress in the local and national economies.

Among the best practices contributing to COH's success were:

- UMEZ's clear articulation of the program mission and its establishment of concrete program goals. Through established lines of communication, UMEZ ensured that both the program mission and the program goals were recognized and understood by all partners, and cooperation through a performance-based payment structure.
- By partnering with 1199SEIU Training and Employment Funds (TEF), the program provided access to an experienced job training organization, desirable union jobs and a direct point of access to healthcare employers. TEF had the dual responsibility of understanding the needs of their jobseeker clients and their business clients, ensuring that the interests of both would be served by the program.

- The participating community based organizations (cbos) contributed their deep knowledge and understanding of the needs and capabilities of the program's clients. The cbos had the capacity to provide ongoing, individually-tailored support services to COH clients throughout the course of the program.
- UMEZ served as an intermediary throughout the program, leveraging its community leadership and operational capacity to help align the interests and goals of the program partners.

This case study highlights the paramount importance of clear program design, sector targeting, partner selection, effective communication strategies, and program responsiveness. The COH program model, pioneered by the UMEZ, should be replicated in distressed communities across the country.

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