Unlocking Economic Prosperity:

Career Navigation in a Time of Rapid Change

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National Fund
for Workforce Solutions

CAREER JOURNEYS REDEFINED: Stories of Struggle, Resilience, and Triumph
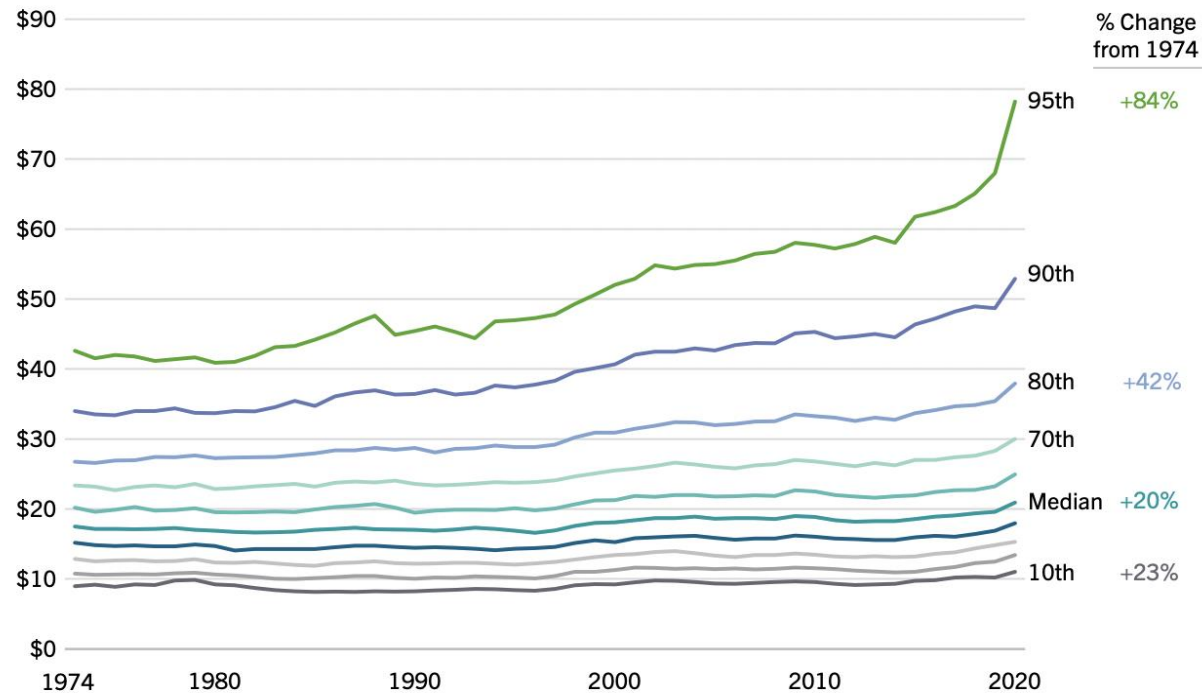
AGENDA

- Challenge

- Overview

- Key insights

- Recommendations
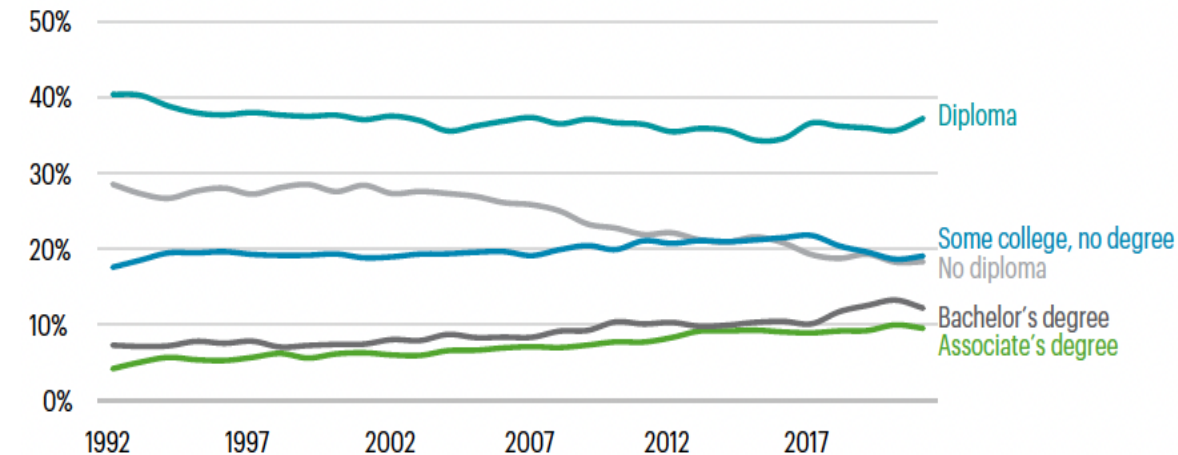
- Journey maps

- Discussion

THE CHALLENGE

Wages have stagnated for the 44% of American workers in low-wage jobs. The majority of low-wage workers have less a college degree.

Figure 1: Stagnating wages among those earning below the 50th percentile

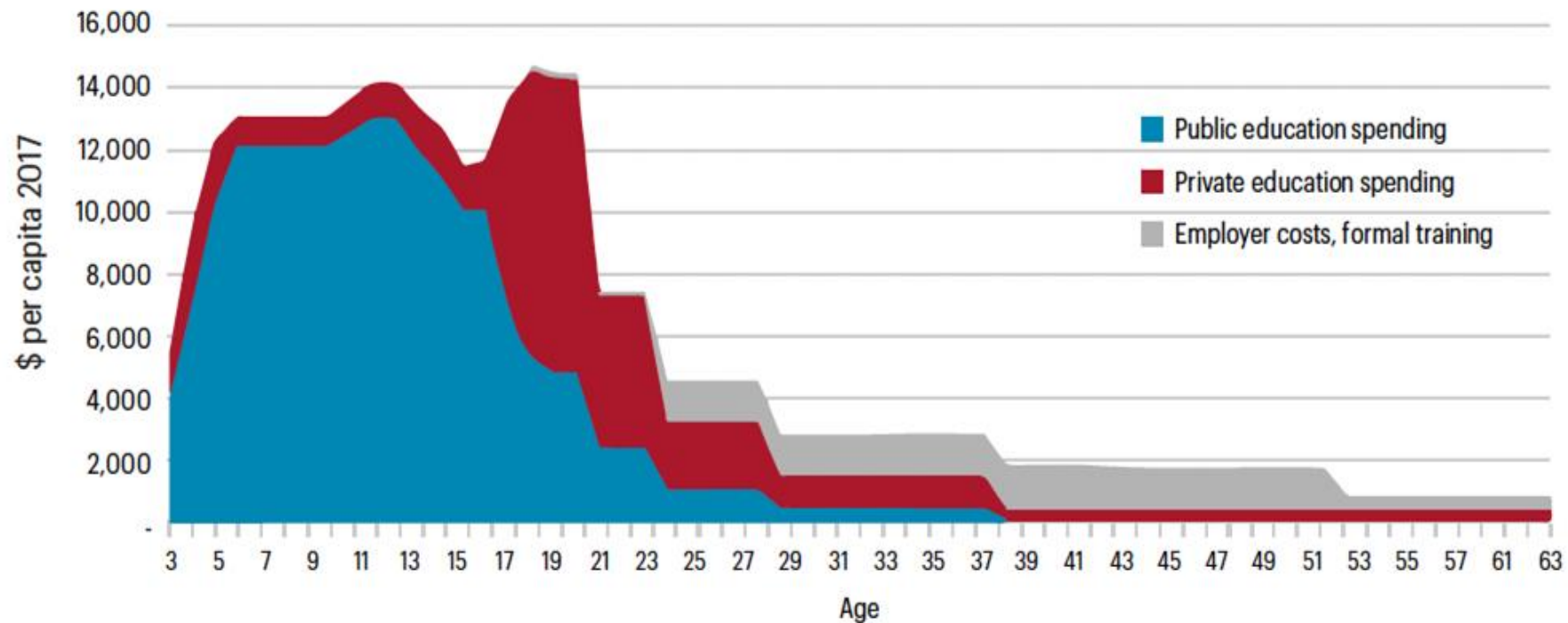Real wages by percentile (2020 dollars), 1974–2020

Percent of low-wage workforce by educational attainment

Source: Fuller, J., Raman, M., (January 2022). Building From the Bottom Up, Published by Harvard Business School.

THE CHALLENGE

Our system was not designed to support a lifetime of upskilling and reskilling.

Sources: The Council of Economic Advisers (July 2018) & OECD, U.S. Census Bureau, BEA, BLS, Association for Talent Development (2017), Carnevale et al (2015), CEA Calculations.

OBJECTIVES

- → Scope the field of career navigation.
- → Review the research and practice to identify challenges, knowledge gaps, and bright spots.
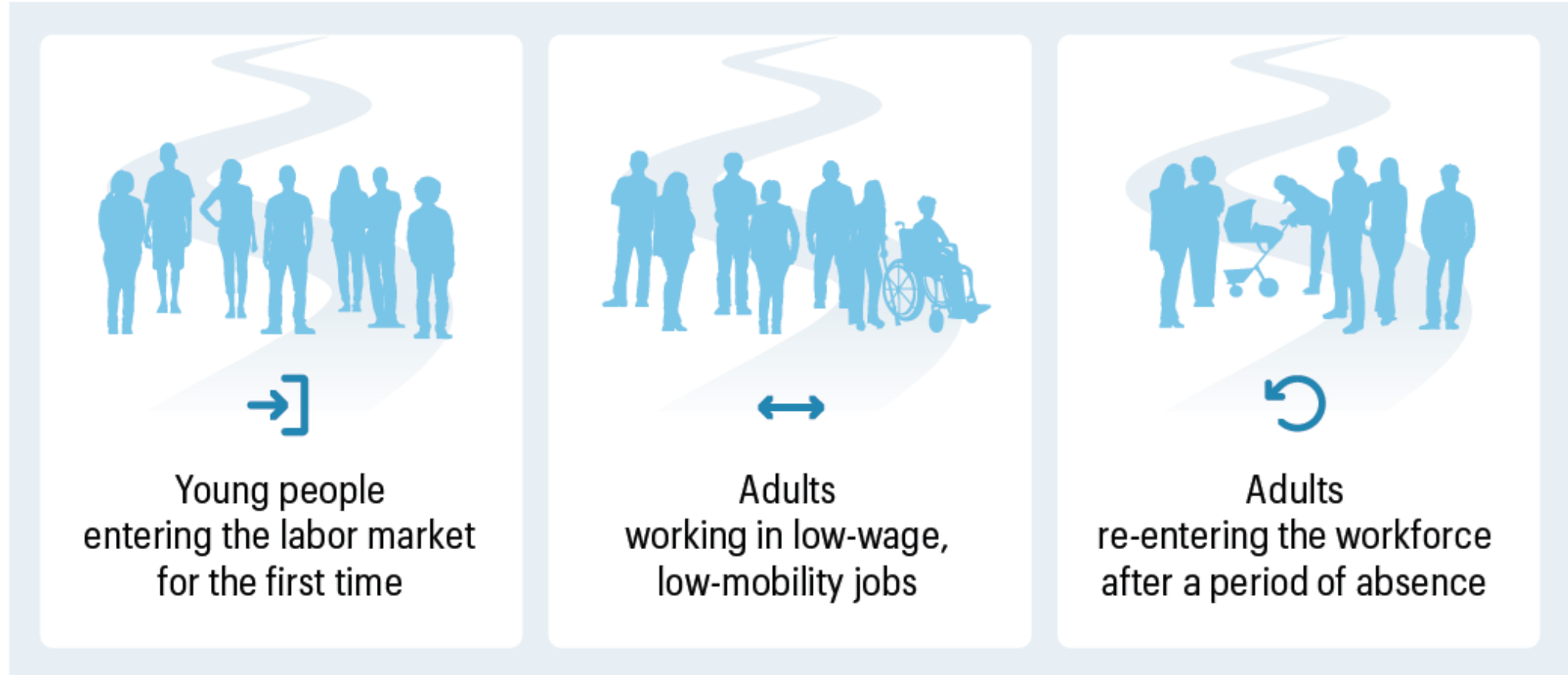- → Identify high-impact recommendations for stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

- → Reviewed 350+ journal articles, book chapters, working papers, and reports.
- → Consulted 60+ experts, practitioners, and frontline workers.
- → Conducted ethnographic interviews with workers across occupations to develop career navigation journey maps

SCOPING CAREER NAVIGATION

Component	Action	Definition
Acquiring knowledge	Self-assessment	Identifying and aligning one's skills, interests, values, and career goals.
	Career exploration	Gathering information about available and aligned careers and pathways.
Making informed career plans	Pathway mapping	Charting a course of education and work actions from one's current state to one's career goal.
Integrating and negotiating education, training, and work actions	Skill and credential acquisition	Attaining the skills, certifications, and experiences necessary to achieve one's goal.
	Job placement and advancement	Connecting to and acquiring jobs that lead to career advancement.

DISSECTING PATHWAYS

Young people
entering the labor market
for the first time

Adults
working in low-wage,
low-mobility jobs

Adults
re-entering the workforce
after a period of absence

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WHAT DRIVES CAREER NAVIGATION?

Information access and accuracy

Accurate knowledge of education and career opportunities, including pathways and economic outcomes data

Skills and credentials

Navigation skills and qualities (i.e., adaptability, self-efficacy), foundational skills, and job-specific skills and credentials

Social capital

Social relationships, networks, and engagement, which impact an individual's values, exposure, connections, and support

Wraparound resources and supports

The wraparound resources at one's disposal, including coaching, finances, technology, transportation and child care

Social structures and ecosystems

Social systems, including public and private policies, economic conditions, and discrimination and racism

CAREER NAVIGATION SUPPORTS

Services, tools, programs or structures that help individuals (1) acquire knowledge, (2) make informed plans, and/or (3) integrate education and work actions to progress.

SERVICES

- Career coaching
- Mentoring
- Social networking

TOOLS

- Exploration & mapping
- Assessments
- Nudging

PROGRAMS

- Navigation courses
- Career exposure
- Experiential, holistic programs

STRUCTURES

- Stackable pathways
- Career centers
- Public & private policies

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DESIGN PRINCIPLES

1. **Communicate information** and pathways in clear, accessible, relevant ways.

2. Integrate diverse **career exposure** opportunities that build social capital.

3. Build foundational and **navigation skills**.

4. Design **culturally-relevant** approaches.

5. Support **high-touch services** that meet individuals where they are.

6. Provide financial and **wraparound support.**

7. Pursue community and intergenerational programs that **build trust.**

8. **Leverage AI** to personalize pathways.

9. Embed **research and evaluation** into career navigation services.

10. **Center equity** by recruiting and elevating individuals from underrepresented populations.

STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS

Actions we can take to build a more equitable career navigation system.

EMPLOYERS

Develop clear pathways - Incentivize and train middle managers in equitable talent practices - Invest in upskilling - Track worker mobility

EDUCATORS & TRAINERS

Provide career coaching - Build foundational and navigation skills - Embed career exposure - Provide structured cohorts and networking - leverage AI to nudge students

POLICYMAKERS

Embed workforce services in communities - invest in career coaching - incentivize career progression - align eligibility requirements - provide universal access to upskilling - collect disaggregated data

INTERMEDIARIES

Recruit underrepresented individuals - build community partnerships - provide career exploration to adults - uplift worker voices

PHILANTHROPY

Embrace the R&D role - support leaders with lived experience - advance research and evaluation
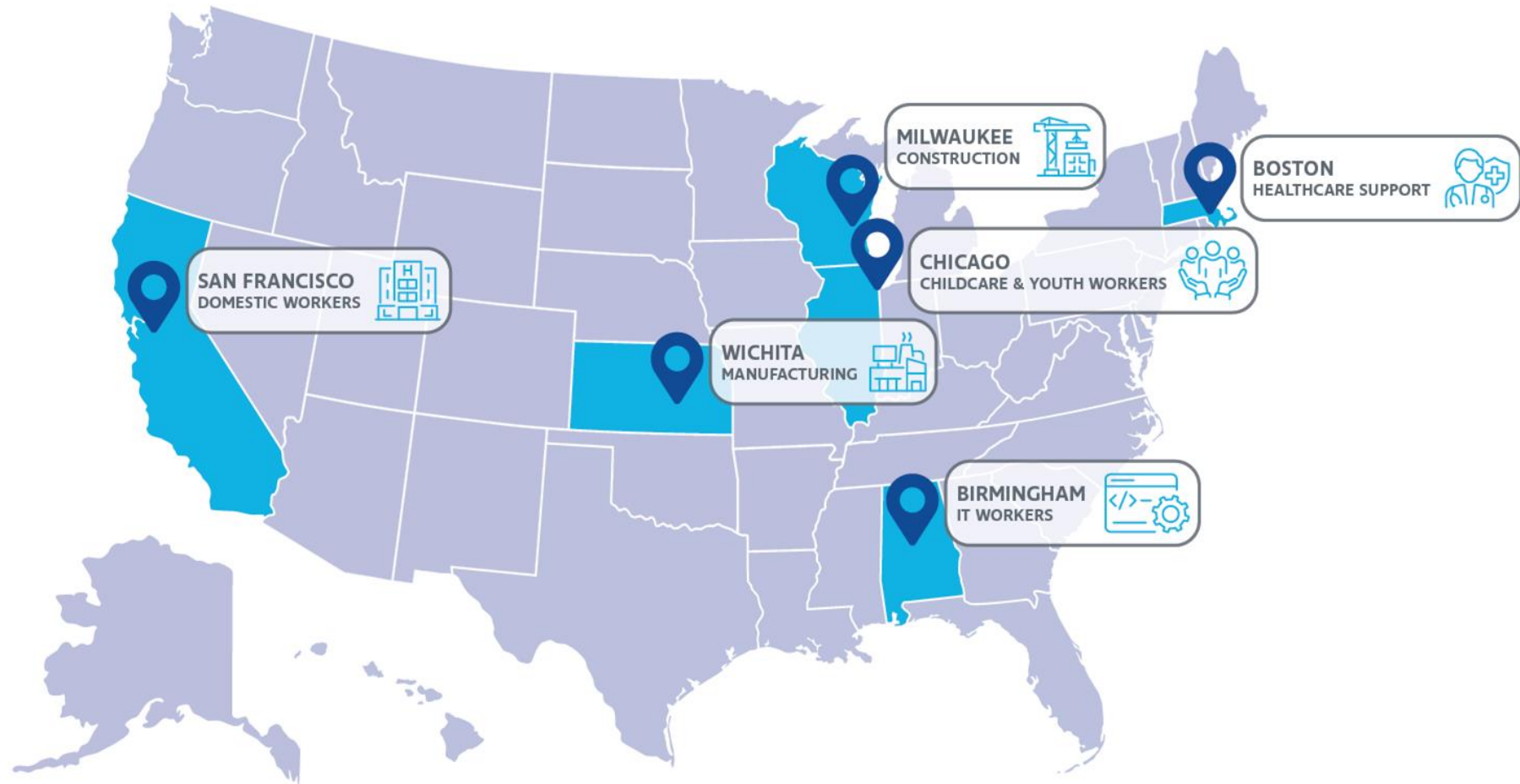
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RESEARCH GAPS

1. Research on career pathways, especially **disaggregated, longitudinal research**, is sparse.

1. There is limited research on the ways **individuals acquire and use career information.**

1. We have a limited understanding of **foundational and navigation skills,** particularly how to measure and teach them.

1. We need more research on the **impact of AI** on career navigation.

1. Causal research on the impacts of **employer navigation programs** is rare.

1. There is limited work on the role of **economic conditions and job supply** on career navigation.

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OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

The National Fund defines **occupational segregation** as the distribution of workers across and within occupations, based on demographics such as race, ethnicity, and gender — often at the intersection of these characteristics. Occupational segregation is not the result of inherent individual preferences, but rather a **multi-faceted, deeply entrenched problem** that requires change on many fronts.

JOURNEY MAPS

MILWAUKEE
CONSTRUCTION

BOSTON
HEALTHCARE SUPPORT

SAN FRANCISCO
DOMESTIC WORKERS

CHICAGO
CHILDCARE & YOUTH WORKERS

WICHITA
MANUFACTURING

BIRMINGHAM
IT WORKERS

National Fund
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Q&A