Outside-in Program Design Strategies

Designate Geographic Focus

A core component of any outside-in program is having a geographic focus on economically under-resourced areas. Targeting specific zip codes for recruitment ensures that resources are focused on the communities most affected by un- and underemployment. Focusing on particular neighborhoods concentrates impact, as intentional, outside-in pathway programs can reach a measurable percentage of individuals living in those areas. Often these same neighborhoods already have economic development efforts underway that can be leveraged, either through community-based organizations and intermediaries with existing networks in the community or through other hospital-led efforts. Having a geographic focus is a way to align investments across the health system and across institutions.

FROM THE FIELD

Some examples of this aligned investment can be found in Minneapolis, where Fairview Health Services partners with a local workforce intermediary to recruit residents of the Cedar Riverside neighborhood, where the unemployment rate is six times greater than the Minnesota state average. Another health system reviews CHNAs and community health improvement plans, and compares those against census data on economic disadvantage by zip code in order to identify their focus areas. From there, the health system's workforce leaders collaborate with talent acquisition leaders in the identified zip codes to determine opportunities for focused recruitment.

Focus on Resident Needs

To serve low-income individuals successfully, training programs should include specific strategies to address the challenges posed by inadequate, or lack of, income, which often prevents participants from joining or completing a training program. Strategies that directly mitigate these financial barriers include offering training at no cost to participants, offering a training stipend to participants while they are in the program, providing bus tickets or ride vouchers so people can get to training, and providing resources to help with childcare, housing, or other basic needs.

FROM THE FIELD

Hawaii Pacific Health (HPH) supports youth with barriers to employment through its public high-school-based clinical education programs. The health system partners with the Hawaii Department of Education to provide training programs which are integrated into the Department of Education curriculum to students at 18 high schools across the state, including several that serve lower-income, Native Hawaiian, and immigrant communities. Students may receive instruction in five job roles: medical assistant, nurse aide, patient service representative, phlebotomist, and surgical instrument processing technician. Training programs range from one academic quarter to two semesters, and the curriculum includes a combination of classroom and online learning, clinical lab training, and externships. Students who successfully complete the training programs receive

primary consideration for employment at the health system upon graduation.

Focus on Jobs with Clear Career Pathways

An intentional outside-in pathway program should not be designed in isolation. It is critical that the end point for a particular applicant is not the position they are hired into, but instead, that there are pathways for advancement within the institution. Explicitly connecting outside-in pathways to future career pathways can be an important recruitment tool. This is a critical strategy of Hawaii Pacific Health.

FROM THE FIELD

Hawaii Pacific Health (HPH) launched a 501(c)(3) subsidiary school named the Academy for Healthcare Innovation (AHI). AHI was developed with the participation of Hawaii's post-secondary educational institutions, four other Hawaii health systems, and the Healthcare Association of Hawaii. AHI's primary goal is to stabilize the shortage of entry-level prepared candidates while providing work and education pathways to upskill and elevate students and the community. With 50% of Hawaii's public high school graduates deciding not to pursue higher education, AHI provides students with the ability to anchor their households with starting salaries ranging from $60,000-$122,000 while providing a clear pathway to life-changing, post-secondary degree acquisition.

AHI opened its doors to adult learners in June 2025, offering access to both education and hands-on clinical practicum experiences that prepare them for certificate-qualified positions in healthcare. Four certificate programs—nurse aide, medical assistant, surgical instrument processing technician, and surgical technologist—are provided in-person at community locations convenient for students, including several HPH sites and a YMCA campus. Approximately 175 students are anticipated in the first academic year, with annual enrollment of 275 anticipated in subsequent years.

The curriculum places an emphasis on opportunities for career advancement from these entry-level positions. To encourage post-secondary degree acquisition, AHI has partnered with every post-secondary educational institution in Hawaii, and is finalizing articulation agreements to allow for AHI credit transfer.

Another healthcare system that uses this strategy is the University Hospitals in Cleveland. Jobs that do not offer possibilities for advancement are not selected for training programs. At times, advancement first involves a lateral move—or opportunity move—to a position with greater career ladder opportunities. This is the case for University Hospitals' pathway program, which helps prepare environmental and nutrition services staff to move into patient care positions. In these cases, employees still have the ability to move into higher-skill and higher-wage positions and are made aware of the process for advancement before they are even hired.

> "We cannot recruit enough existing talent with the required skills and credentials. To fill critical healthcare roles, we must create and build our own workforce by engaging people, helping them see themselves in healthcare, and supporting their skill development and career advancement.

Jenny Macaulay, director of workforce development and planning at Dartmouth Health.

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FROM THE FIELD

Nuvance/Northwell Health connects disengaged young adults, ages 18 to 26, to meaningful healthcare careers through its Academy for Career Readiness. The program is grounded in a strategy of providing structured pathways into employment that combine intentional employability training, experiential learning, and community-based support. Pathways into both clinical and nonclinical roles provide participants with 4-6 weeks of hands-on training, along with wraparound services that provide basic needs supports such as housing, transportation, childcare, and mental health assistance.

Training emphasizes not only technical skills but also critical workplace skills, such as communication, cultural competency, strategic thinking, teamwork, and resiliency, helping participants achieve long-term professional success. “This high level of comprehensive engagement resonates with the young people that we serve,” says Marcus Paca, director of workforce and career development. “Nuvance Health’s willingness to holistically invest in the futures of the communities that we serve is a unique approach that few other healthcare systems embrace.”

One of the key success factors is a deep commitment to building authentic, long-term relationships with community-based organizations, academic institutions, training organizations and philanthropy. Community partnerships are not just transactional—they are the foundation for building trust within communities and are critical to identifying, recruiting, and preparing young people for the workforce. Paca describes how the health system enters new relationships with openness and a willingness to bring resources to the table. “We say, ‘Here’s what we would like to accomplish. Does this align with your mission/objectives? How can we support each other and accomplish our goals?’” This helps to orient the collaboration towards a mutually beneficial, outcomes-based approach where all partners’ contributions are valued and efforts are aligned toward shared goals.

In addition, hospital hiring managers and stakeholders are engaged throughout the planning and training process, many times working alongside community-based organizations and getting to know trainees as they are developed. This helps to build additional trust within the collaboration and demonstrate to hiring managers that the pathway programs are effective and can meet their hiring needs.

Upon program completion, participants are guided through the job application process. “It’s our goal to convert as many program participants into FTE positions [as possible],” explains Paca. “We place young people in the best possible position to earn jobs through positive interactions with hospital stakeholders and hiring managers.”

In 2023, Paca’s’ team converted 100 community member trainees into the health system’s employees; in 2024, that number grew to 131 hires. By the end of the fiscal year 2025, the workforce development team contributed 165 hires to Nuvance/Northwell Health, once again exceeding expectations. In addition, the job placement rate for community hires has increased by approximately four times, from 13% in 2022/23 to over 50% in 2025. “We are also seeing some longer-term data showing that community hires stay at the organization for longer,” says Paca, with reduced turnover rates recorded for roles including patient care technician, patient access liaison, and environmental services roles.

By embedding into community networks and aligning employment pathways with wraparound services, Nuvance/Northwell Health is creating sustainable career opportunities for disconnected youth while meeting its workforce needs.

Include Foundational Skills Training

"Soft skills," or "foundational skills" is a category of skills that refer to a person's ability to work with other people, engage in critical thinking, communicate effectively, solve problems, and manage time. Intentional, outside-in hiring pathways should provide comprehensive training that addresses a range of workforce skills, including communication skills, understanding and managing workplace norms, technical skills, time management, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.

One health system, for example, provides a combination of job training, career development, and soft skills training to the young adults who participate in its workforce development initiatives. The soft skills component includes instruction on communication norms in the workplace, such as how to write an email and how to communicate (what to say) if you're going to be late to work; how to manage time and realistically plan a schedule; how to follow privacy norms and dress codes; and how to build empathy and manage emotions, including when interacting with patients for those on a clinical job-track.

Guarantee Interviews for Cohort Graduates

Cohort models can reduce outreach, recruitment, and screening costs for hiring departments by relying on workforce intermediaries to do some of that upfront work. However, unless entry points for cohort graduates are clearly defined and well understood by all parties, these benefits may not be fully realized. One strategy is to set up processes and systems to identify graduates of a cohort program and guarantee them interviews. If recruiters and hiring managers are able to identify program graduates and interview them for the positions for which they've been trained, it can decrease the time to fill a position, identify qualified candidates, as they've been trained for the position, and increase engagement in the program, as other potential program participants will see that going through the program results in employment.

FROM THE FIELD

In Northeast Ohio, recruiters and hiring managers work together to ensure that participants in the Career On-Ramp initiative are aware of the specific open roles at local health system. This initiative is part of a regional healthcare sector partnership. Since participants in the Career On-Ramp programs undergo preliminary screening, the workforce training partner—Towards Employment—is able to ensure they only train people eligible to work at participating hospital systems. This gives hiring managers greater confidence that Towards Employment's training programs adequately prepare participants for the jobs for which they will be interviewing. The training program then connects hiring managers directly to applicants who have been trained for particular positions and who have learned about the hospital system's culture and practices.

Involve Hiring Managers from the Beginning

Hiring managers are critical actors in the implementation of an intentional, outside-in pathway program because they ultimately make the decision on whether to hire a particular candidate. Without their buy-in and input during the program design stage, even the best training programs can stall. Adjustments will need

to be made to hiring processes in order to facilitate more inclusive hiring, and many of these processes apply directly to the role of the hiring managers. Therefore, hiring managers should be involved in designing training programs in order to ensure that programming is able to meet their workforce needs.

FROM THE FIELD

One health system ensured that its program was co-designed by the medical assistants' hiring managers, who understood the value of the program and the process for building a development pathway. In addition to their training, apprentices are mentored by medical assistants who are one or two levels ahead of them in the work. The goal is that all apprentices feel safe asking their questions and understand the process for moving up in their positions.

Jenny Macaulay from Dartmouth Health expressed that a key strategy for building relationships and developing insight is to "[be] visible by learning the operational/clinical environment and celebrating people so leaders and colleagues know about [our] work." In Workforce Development, we see ourselves as a service partner - listening, asking questions, and responding quickly to understand and solve problems."[i] At another health system, one leader recommends interviewing managers, directors, and leadership to understand their pain points. This enables workforce leads to identify outside-in strategies that could address their challenges, which could then be presented back to leaders and hiring managers to build confidence in the new approach.

Involvement of the hiring managers should extend past initial feedback and program refinement into the implementation of the program itself. The benefits are twofold: candidates have the opportunity to gain experience with interviews and interface with managers, and hiring managers become familiar with particular candidates. This can help increase managers' enthusiasm about the program because it enables them to identify individuals they are particularly excited to hire. One health system regularly brings talent acquisition leaders to meet with workforce intermediary partners to help them better understand partners' work and advocate for candidates trained through these programs with other recruiters and hiring managers. The talent acquisitions team then notifies hiring managers whenever a workforce intermediary is ready to refer candidates who have completed a training program, along with information about what it means to hire individuals from that community and the advantages the candidates will bring by coming through that program.

FROM THE FIELD

An example of this sort of collaboration can be found at Memorial Hermann Health System, which partners with the United Way of Greater Houston and the THRIVE Program on a grant-funded, community-hiring pipeline program. Lori Colson, director of workforce development programs, shared how "some leaders were hesitant to fully engage" with the program. In response, Colson invited hiring managers to attend hiring events and get to know the community partners. "That's where we started to gain our champions," she said. "They were so excited to come to the events, [and] then they started spreading that feedback to their peers, which made it more likely that [they would be] willing to entertain the candidates [and] give them an opportunity to interview."[i] Thanks to this engagement from hiring leaders, combined with data-tracking improvements, the health system counted 37 community hires in 2024.

One of the major obstacles to entry for applicants that face barriers to employment is that due to the sheer volume of applications, automated recruitment processes make it likely that an application will be screened

out before it even gets to an initial recruiter interview. Involving hiring managers in the training process ensures not only that candidates get time with those who have the power to hire, but hiring and departmental managers and recruiters can assist with mock interviews, provide information particular to the institution, help with job-specific training, and explain the application process.