



Leadership Greater Chicago
Low-skilled Work and Workplace Practices:
A business roundtable on recruitment and retention

Introduction

Thanks to a grant from the Partnership for New Communities, Leadership Greater Chicago will convene a business roundtable to examine how the work environment contributes to success in attracting and retaining low-skilled workers.

Why Leadership Greater Chicago?

Leadership Greater Chicago (LGC) plays a unique role by convening leaders from all walks of life to learn about issues facing the region. The roundtable is part of LGC's legacy project, initiated in honor of its 20th anniversary, which is designed to engage alumni of the annual fellowship program in a community project. For the past year, Fellows have been working with residents of the Chicago Housing Authority's Rockwell Gardens development as they seek employment in order to qualify for housing in the new mixed income community currently under construction. LGC created the Job Seekers Network to help residents develop interviewing, time management and other skills.

At the same time that LGC Fellows work with residents who want to overcome personal barriers to employment, we are interested in the nature of jobs available to low skilled workers. These jobs typically have high turnover, and both employers and employees struggle with barriers to recruitment and retention. The goal of the roundtable is to bring together business leaders with workforce development experts to examine whether there is a business case for revised workplace policies.

What is the key issue?

While the roundtable will take a broad look at employment practices that affect low-skilled workers, the primary issue will concern workers' schedules. Research has identified several sources of instability in many low-skilled positions including:

- Scheduling that varies weekly or even more frequently, with little or no predictability
- Ambiguous employment status which results in wide fluctuations of hours worked.

Employers report that the number one asset they look for in hiring is reliability, yet the nature of these jobs makes reliability a huge challenge for employees.

How will the roundtable work?

A planning committee will meet in early August. The preliminary plan calls for:

- Recruit Fellows and associates who work for employers with low-skilled positions
- Ask participants to conduct in-house interviews in order to respond to a survey about their employment practices
- Convene one meeting to share responses and discuss the business issues related to unpredictable scheduling and related barriers to employment (Fall 2006)
- Convene a second meeting to identify recommendations for next steps (Fall 2006 or Winter 2007)
- Summarize a series of next steps which will include connections to other initiatives