

University of Massachusetts Boston

## ScholarWorks at UMass Boston

---

Gastón Institute Publications

Gastón Institute for Latino Community  
Development and Public Policy Publications

---

10-2020

### Towards a Workforce Development Action Plan in the City of Chelsea: Community Voices

Fabián Torres-Ardila

*University of Massachusetts Boston*, [fabian.torres-ardila@umb.edu](mailto:fabian.torres-ardila@umb.edu)

Daniela Bravo

*University of Massachusetts Boston*, [daniela.bravo@umb.edu](mailto:daniela.bravo@umb.edu)

Henry Chavez

*University of Massachusetts Boston*

Lorna Rivera

*University of Massachusetts Boston*, [lorna.rivera@umb.edu](mailto:lorna.rivera@umb.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston\\_pubs](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs)



Part of the [Latina/o Studies Commons](#), [Migration Studies Commons](#), [Public Policy Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Work, Economy and Organizations Commons](#)


---

#### Recommended Citation

Torres-Ardila, Fabián; Bravo, Daniela; Chavez, Henry; and Rivera, Lorna, "Towards a Workforce Development Action Plan in the City of Chelsea: Community Voices" (2020). *Gastón Institute Publications*. 263.

[https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston\\_pubs/263](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs/263)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy Publications at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gastón Institute Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@umb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@umb.edu).



# **Towards a Workforce Development Action Plan in the City of Chelsea: Community Voices**

By Fabián Torres-Ardila, Ph.D., Daniela Bravo, B.A., Henry  
Chavez, B.A., Lorna Rivera, Ph.D.

October 2020

---

THE MAURICIO GASTÓN INSTITUTE  
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
AND PUBLIC POLICY

---

# **Towards a Workforce Development Action Plan in the City of Chelsea: Community Voices**

## **Authors**

**Fabián Torres-Ardila, Ph.D., Associate Director**

**Daniela Bravo, B.A., Research Assistant**

**Henry Chavez, B.A., Research Assistant**

**Lorna Rivera, Ph.D., Director**



**THE MAURICIO GASTÓN INSTITUTE  
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
AND PUBLIC POLICY**  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

## **Research Funded by:**



**City of Chelsea, MA  
Department of Planning and  
Development**

## Table of Contents

---

1.	Methodology.....	4
	A. Research Activities and Data Description .....	4
	B. Analysis of Qualitative Data .....	5
	C. Limitations.....	5
2.	Findings .....	6
	A. Interactions with City's Infrastructure.....	7
	B. Experiences in Labor Market.....	8
	C. Job Aspirations.....	14
	D. Participants' Recommendations .....	15
3.	Discussion .....	18
4.	Recommendations .....	20
	Appendix I. Focus group questions.....	22

## Introduction

The mission of the Gastón Institute at UMass Boston is to inform policymakers and the public about issues vital to the state's growing Latino community and to provide research, analysis, and information necessary for more effective public policy development. The Gastón Institute has a long track record of conducting collaborative mixed-methods research in Chelsea, especially with Latino immigrants from Central and South America. For example, in 2008-2010, Gastón researchers worked with Chelsea Public Schools to evaluate family literacy programs at five schools. Since 2016, Gastón faculty have been working with Chelsea High School and Bunker Hill Community College's Chelsea campus on a Latino Student Success Initiative. Most recently, in 2019, the Gastón Institute's bilingual researchers worked with the city of Chelsea to conduct a study focused on resident perceptions about the U.S. Census 2020, aiming to identify culturally appropriate outreach strategies to increase Latino residents' participation in the Census.

Historically, Chelsea has been a city of immigrants and the city's economy has depended on industries that employ immigrants. Chelsea played a key role in the manufacturing of sailing ships in the 1800s, and later became a leading manufacturer of rubber, adhesives, and shoes. Between 1864 and 1890, Russian and Eastern European immigrants, especially large numbers of Russian Jews, settled in Chelsea; by the 1930s nearly a third of the city's residents were Jewish. In 1919, a remarkable 46% of the city's residents were foreign born, and today the city's foreign-born population is almost exactly the same, at 45.6 %.<sup>1</sup> This figure represents a much greater concentration of foreign-born than in the Commonwealth as a whole (15%).<sup>2</sup>

Chelsea today is the second most densely populated city in Massachusetts and its population consists predominantly of Latinos, who represent over two-thirds (66.9%) of the city's residents.<sup>3</sup> This fact represents a striking change since the start of the current century. From 2000 to 2013 the city's Latinos grew in number by 32%, while whites (28%) and Asians (27%) experienced population decline.<sup>4</sup> In reaching out for participants in this study researchers

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/chelseacitymassachusetts/RHI225218#RHI225218>

<sup>2</sup> Granberry, Phillip and Fontes, Mayara, "Latinos in Massachusetts Selected Areas: Chelsea" (2015). Gastón Institute Publications. Paper 206. [http://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston\\_pubs/206](http://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs/206)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/chelseacitymassachusetts/PST045219>

<sup>4</sup> Granberry, Phillip & Fontes, Mayara, op. cit.

leveraged the institute's rich social networks with Chelsea's Latino residents, including our historical partnerships with community-based organizations.

## Purpose of Study

The city of Chelsea, Massachusetts is currently developing an Action Plan for the city's Workforce Development system. A team of researchers at the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) and the UMass Boston Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, were hired by the city to conduct quantitative and qualitative research to inform the city's Action Plan that will strengthen the city's workforce development initiatives. Researchers interviewed job seekers, employers, and other stakeholders, such as leaders of nonprofits and social service providers, to understand workforce barriers for job seekers, as well as identify resources that employers need to improve workforce development in Chelsea. Research partners at the UMDI gathered quantitative research to identify specific needs and barriers as well as resources that will help the city develop an effective and culturally responsive Action Plan for its workforce.

The Gastón Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston worked with community stakeholders in the recruitment of hard-to-reach Spanish-speaking immigrants for focus groups. Gastón researchers facilitated two focus groups in Spanish and assisted with data analysis and policy recommendations. The goal of the focus groups with Spanish-speaking participants is to understand ideas and perceptions about the extent to which Chelsea residents have career opportunities and resources for workforce development. In order to inform the city's "Action Plan" to address gaps and barriers, we gathered participants' perspectives about the adequacy of existing programs, social services, and potential funding opportunities that could build capacity and career ladders for job seeking populations.

**The COVID-19 Crisis.** The purpose of this study takes a more urgent meaning now that the effects of the COVID-19 are being felt more deeply. Throughout the pandemic, Chelsea has been the state's hottest locale for COVID-19 infections, with a rate of 7,846 infections per 100,000 residents as of July 9, 2020.<sup>5</sup> Recent data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that unemployment in Chelsea increased from 2.3% in March 2020 to 21.6% in May, more than five percentage points above the 16.2% statewide unemployment rate in May.<sup>6</sup> Many industries and

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://public.tableau.com/views/COVID-19dataMay12-2020/COVID-19>

<sup>6</sup> <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LAUCT251320500000003>

occupations that the Chelsea community counted on for employment are having a hard time to recover to pre-pandemic levels<sup>7</sup>. The lingering effect of these unemployment rates in the community will mean a long path to recovery for its members.

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mass.gov/news/massachusetts-weekly-unemployment-claimant-data-10-22-20>

# 1. Methodology

## A. Research Activities and Data Description

This study took the form of two 90-minute focus groups. As this study was carried out during the lockdown imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the two focus groups took place using the online meeting platform Zoom. Participants were presented with an informed consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Massachusetts Boston, and informed consent was obtained following the specifications of the IRB.

TABLE I. Focus Group Participants (Names used are pseudonyms.)

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Occupation	Time in Job	Employment Status	School Degree
Ines	Female	Cook at pizzeria	10 years	Restaurant closed for 3 months Just started working	No High-School (HS)
Martica	Female	Airport	More than 1 year	3 months not working	Adult Basic Education (ABE) student
Celi	Female	Childcare assistant	More than 1 year	Currently unemployed	HS
Lola	Female	Housekeeping Hotel	13 years	Currently unemployed	No HS
Clara	Female	Sales of perfume	More than 8 years	Currently unemployed	Sociologist
Adriana	Female	Florist	6 years	Currently unemployed	ABE
Josue	Male	Cook and truck driver	13 and 12 years	Currently unemployed	ABE
Judith	Female	At a restaurant	More than 5 years	Currently unemployed	Nurse
Alejandro	Male	Package (empacador)	1 year	Currently unemployed	HS
Caro	Female	Maintenance golf course	1 year	Currently unemployed	HS
Fernando	Male	Delivers for Amazon	More than 1 year	Currently unemployed	HS

The two Spanish-language focus groups were conducted in May and June 2020 with a total of 11 participants, seven in the focus group held in May and four from the second one held



in June 2020. Of the total of 11 participants, 8 were women and 3 were men. All 11 participants were residents of the City of Chelsea. (See Table I for basic demographics.) Many focus group participants had held jobs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but most were currently unemployed because of the lockdown.

Participants' recruitment involved the use of several methods: informal meetings with key members of the Chelsea community and direct requests for participation. All the Spanish focus group participants were recruited by a local provider of ESOL classes. Both focus groups were recorded and then transcribed by research assistants at the Gastón Institute.

## **B. Analysis of Qualitative Data**

The research team carried out the qualitative analysis of responses to questions by searching for emerging themes in the participants' responses within the framework of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allows for the segmentation and organization of the data in ways that facilitate searching for patterns that answer the main questions of the project.<sup>8</sup> In our analysis, after completion of transcriptions, the research team analyzed a subset of interviews with the purpose of creating an initial coding framework that could be applied to the interview and focus group data. The coding process was iterative: two different researchers coded each interview; frequent meetings between researchers were held to ensure both reliability and inter-coder agreement; when a revision of the coding framework was necessary, interviews were re-coded. The coding and analysis were facilitated using the NVivo<sup>9</sup> software program.

## **C. Limitations**

This research study has some limitations. The number of participants we interviewed was small. Therefore, the findings reflect the perspectives of a small group of key informants and cannot be generalized to the entire city's population. Future research should focus on incorporating more resident voices, particularly voices of seniors, youth, community leaders, and local organizations to include a more comprehensive understanding from diverse members of the community.

---

<sup>8</sup> Given, L. M. (2008). *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vols. 1-0). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412963909

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home>

## 2. Findings

A total of 292 quotes were coded, analyzed, and classified. In relation to the goals of the project, we found that the participants' views were mostly organized around four themes that roughly correspond to the interview script. These themes and sub-themes are shown in the table below, with its corresponding count of quotes. Each theme, with its subthemes, is described in the following sections.

Table II. Main themes and subthemes

Themes		No.
1. Interactions with city's infrastructure - <i>Participant's experiences dealing with the city's infrastructure supporting job training and job improvement.</i>		20
Sub-themes	• <b>Delays in program participation.</b>	5
	• <b>Lack of information about training of programs.</b>	15
2. Experiences in labour market - <i>Participants' experiences in the labor market such as access to job training activities, access to opportunities for better employment, obstacles to better employment, discrimination, etc.</i>		75
Sub-themes	• <b>Factors affecting job satisfaction - References that imply statements about job quality and what a satisfactory job looks like.</b>	18
	a. Job location	4
	b. Job stability	10
	c. Physical demands	4
	• <b>Immigrant experience – Explicit statements about experiences as an immigrant in the labor market, including racial and gender discrimination</b>	7
	• <b>Job preparation – Mechanisms used in the past to obtain job training and qualifications</b>	9
	• <b>Mechanisms for finding better job opportunities - Refers to the methods that participants find and use for job search or job improvement</b>	23
	a. Formal networks	9
	b. Informal networks	11
	c. Self-reliance networks	3
• <b>Obstacles - Refers to participants' statements about the main obstacles that they face when either looking for a job or attempting to improve their current one</b>	18	
a. Language	3	
b. Certifications and authorizations to work	5	
c. Other	10	
3. Job aspirations - <i>Statements that describe the characteristics of jobs participants aspire to obtain.</i>		13
4. Participants' recommendations - <i>Participants' perceptions of what should be the characteristics of job training programs in the city of Chelsea that ideally would help them to fulfill future personal job aspirations.</i>		16

## A. Interactions with City's Infrastructure

This theme includes statements describing focus group participants' experiences dealing with the city's infrastructure to support job training and job improvement. It includes their knowledge of the city's workforce development and job training programs, as well as their experiences when attempting to participate in those programs. When asked about their knowledge of any job training programs in the city, the majority of participants described their lack of information about job training programs in the city:

*... No, no conozco ninguno y pues me encantaría no se tomar algunos si es tan disponibles me encantaría pues sería muy bueno ya si es aquí en Chelsea si Chelsea lo ofrece sería mejor... (Judith)*

*"I don't know any [program]. I would love to be part of some [job training] program, if they are available. It would be very good. If it is here in Chelsea, it would be the best." (Judith)*

*...Pero en sí, ... la capacitación laboral desde que vives en Chelsea, pero de ahí no sé de algunos cursos por lo que digo no me enterado mucho que si dan cursos aquí como para algunos trabajos ya para uno pues... (Adriana)*

*"... About the job training when you live in Chelsea, I don't know of any courses, or I haven't heard of any courses for work for a person like me..." (Adriana)*

*"... Pues yo no conozco, no, no conozco ningún lugar donde puedan dar esa ayuda, la verdad no, no. Como uno para el trabajo más que todo, lo que conozco yo solo XXX y de ahí no oído nada..." (Inés)*

*"... I don't know any place that offers that kind of help [job training]. To tell you the truth, I don't. For my job, I only know XXX [Center that offers English classes], and I haven't heard of anything there..." (Inés)*

Other participants described their participation in programs that are not offered by the city, but by independent providers and/or other non-profits. For example, in reference to obtaining some form of vocational training as a business owner, one individual participated in programs outside Chelsea:

*"... Sí, sería como para el negocio que nosotros queremos ahorrar a un futuro yo creo que esas capacitaciones son más que ya tenemos la licencia ... Pero no, pero no están en Chelsea, esas no son de Chelsea..." (Josué)*

*“...For the business that we want to have in the future, those programs would be good, since we have the license... But those programs are not in Chelsea, they are not from Chelsea...” (Josué)*

Another participant mentioned online tools that she has access to, which are not connected to what the city may offering:

*“... Actualmente a través de los zoom estoy recibiendo talleres de capacitación para marketing lo que son business en línea de los cuales verdad esta nos están dando las herramientas como hacer marketing...” (Clara)*

*“...Right now, I am taking through zoom job training workshops on marketing for online business, where one gets all tools for marketing [your own business] ...” (Clara)*

The participants who described experiences with programs at Chelsea talked about the long waiting lists and slow process for enrolling in those programs.

*“...Yo pregunté sobre qué mi hijo podía estudiar, pero me dijeron de que había muchas personas en espera y yo le comenté eso a mi hijo entonces él me dijo, yo voy a estudiar en el teléfono...” (Martíca, hablando de sus intentos por matricular a su hijo en un programa de aprendizaje del inglés)*

*“... I asked around for something that my son could study, but they told me that there was a long list of people waiting. I told that to my son and he replied to me that he was going to study through his phone...” (Martíca, talking about her attempts to get her son into an English language program)*

Overall, there do not seem to be enough job training programs in the city that the participants in the focus groups can participate in. Or if there are any programs, the information about them was readily not available to these groups of residents. They all expressed in some form or another how great it would be if those programs were easily accessible and information about them were widely available.

## **B. Experiences in Labor Market**

This theme includes statements about participants' experiences in the labor market, such as access to job trainings and job activities, access to work opportunities for better employment, and the obstacles that they face accessing those employment opportunities. It also includes statements about their own immigrant stories and how being an immigrant affects job

opportunities. Many participants also shared statements about the factors affecting their own job satisfaction:

**Job Satisfaction.** In this theme we analyzed statements about job quality and what a satisfactory job looks like. This sub-theme encompasses three aspects: job location, job stability, and physical demands of the job.

### I. Job Location

*“... Trabaje en xxxx aquí en Chelsea pues me gustaba mucho porque estaba muy cerca me iba caminado y pues no pagaba bus ni nada para llegar, siempre caminaba...” (Judith)*

*“...I worked in xxx (Super Market) here in Chelsea, well I liked a lot because it was close, I would go walking and did not pay for bus or nothing else to arrive, I always walked...”*

### II. Job Stability

*“...Yo tengo prácticamente dos trabajos, tengo uno yo trabajo como cocinero y estoy desde el 2007 a 13 años y el otro trabajo en el 2008, vine siendo 12 años también y eso es de conducir y me siento muy feliz por los dos trabajos ...” (Josue, hablando de lo feliz que esta teniendo dos trabajos)*

*“.... I basically have two jobs, the first one I work as a cook since 2007 for 13 years and the other job I worked sin 2008 for 12 years as a driver, I fell very happy having two jobs...” (Josue, talking about being happy having two jobs)*

### III. Physical demands

*“...yo pienso por el salario, ya llevo imagínese que ahí donde yo trabajo a veces paso hasta doce horas parada no me dan un descanso para decir que pueda ir a comer, como parada yo pienso que un trabajo asi es mas difícil para los niños, pero es algo que me gusta y me gustaria ejercerlo..” (Ines, hablando de la demanda fisica del trabajo que ha ella le gusta)*

*“...I think for the salary. Imagine where I work—sometimes I am twelve hours standing. They do not give me a break, not even for lunch. I eat standing. I think a job like this is more difficult for the kids but is something I like and would like to do...” (Ines, talking about the physical demand of a job that she likes)*

**Immigrant experience.** Some participants shared their explicit experiences as immigrants in accessing employment and training opportunities in the city:

*“...aquí nosotros estamos en la oscuridad o sea nosotros tenemos nuestros [del país de origen] propios talentos verdad de los cuales este aquí en los Estado Unidos son muy*

*pocos los que tiene la oportunidad de trabajar de lo que saben realmente de lo que están enamorados, aquí tenemos que trabajar de lo que hay para poder sobrevivir...” (Clara)*

*“... Here we are in the dark, that is, we have our own talents [from country of origin], of which, here in the United States, very few have the opportunity to work in what they really know, or what they are in love with. Here we have to work in any job there is to survive ...”*

*(Clara)*

*“... yo quisiera ejercer mi carrera... cuando vienes acá se da cuenta de los trabajos [que hay] se siente como humillado... yo estoy aquí pero voy a hacer esto... aunque me encantaría otra oportunidad pero por lo que todos hablamos de los documentos uno a veces no puede...” (Judith)*

*“... I would like to have a job related to my own career [but] when you come here, and see the kind of jobs [available] you feel humiliated.... I am here, I have to do what I have to do but I would like to have another chance... but because of the documents, you cannot do anything...” (Judith)*

Overall, many of the participants shared statements that reflect the fact that as immigrants, the participants already bring many talents and job-related skills from their own country of origin, but unfortunately, these skills cannot be used in the United States due to many obstacles including language, documentation issues, and other related obstacles that will be discussed further.

**Job preparation.** This theme focused on statements about the educational or technical requirements for getting a job and talks about location or organizations that can provide those skills or job preparation.

*“...yo voy a ir a college, me estoy preparando con el inglés, de hecho, he hablado con la maestra, ella me está ayudando un poco y para el comienzo quiero aplicar al college y tomar una carrera que esté relacionada con ese trabajo ..... pues ver si tengo la oportunidad de entrar ahí...” (Alejandro, hablando de us preparaciones para empezar una carrera)*

*“...I am going to College, I am getting ready with English., In fact, I talked to the teacher— she has been helping me a little and at the beginning of the college application and choosing a career that is related to the job ... to see if I have the opportunity to enroll...” (Alejandro, talking about his preparation for starting a career)*

*“...yo desde que vine acá, trabajé en una pizzería .. mi manager el que me fue ayudando y dándome más capacidad para trabajar .... pues uno como va conociendo más y más, ya uno tiene la capacidad para eso (Ines)*

*“...Since I got here, I worked in a pizzeria.... My manager was the one who helped me and provided me training for work.... As you work more and more you start getting the ability to do it...” (Ines)*

*“...Pues a mí me ayudo mi profesora XXX .... le dije si ella me podía ayudar como hacer mi currículum, ella me dijo que sí. Ella me ayudo, yo no entendía mucho de inglés .... ella me decía palabras a lo más necesario como yo podía defenderme cuando tuviera mi entrevista en el aeropuerto ...” (Martica)*

*“...Well my teacher XXX helped me... I asked her if she can help me how to do my Resume, she told me yes. She helped me; I did not understand English well...She told me the necessary words to defend myself when I had my job interview at the airport...” (Martica)*

*“...fue en un curso que dio XXXX con la ayuda de una maestra que se llama XXX ellos dieron un curso acerca de cómo ayudar a la gente a saber que es la carrera que quieren estudiar, e incluso nos mostraron unos folletos, acerca de diferentes carreras y diferentes escuelas de costos de carreras ...” (Celi)*

*It was a class that taught XXXX with the help of a teacher called XXX they taught a class about how to help people know what career want to study and even showed magazines about different careers and different schools with different cost..” (Celi)*

**Mechanisms for finding better job opportunities.** When it comes to the participants' experiences in the labor market, the interviewees also identified mechanisms associated with finding employment opportunities or ways of finding job training opportunities to improve their skills. The mechanisms identified by the participants included both formal and informal, self-reliant networks. Formal networks are referred as participant using resources available through different formal institutions or organizations:

*“En la colaborativa de Chelsea hay momentos en que ellos dan capacitación quizás alla algún trabajo o sea de cocina o de algún otro tipo de trabajo” (Alejandro)*

*“At the Chelsea Collaborative there are times when they provide job trainings.,Maybe there is a job opening as a cook or some other job” (Alejandro)*

*“...desde que llegue aquí a Chelsea entre a estudiar al Bunker Hill Community College clases de inglés gratis, y el GED. Estuve en Roca también unos meses pues ahora en el ILP programa...” (Celi)*

*“...Since I came to Chelsea, I went to study at the Bunker Hill Community College for free English classes, and the GED. I was in Roca for a few months as well, but now, I’m in the ILP program...” (Celi)*

Other participants’ experiences included finding better job opportunities and training through informal networks, which include word or mouth, family members, community members, or friends:

*“...a mi si me ayudo una amiga a conseguir el trabajo que tengo y pues no no estudie y capacitación pues no...mi amiga me dijo asi se hace esto asi asi y pues creo que en si, es una capacitación porque me ayudo un poco como saber a como empezar el trabajo y todo” (Caro)*

*“...A friend of mine helped me get the job I have, and I did not study or receive any formal training.... My friend told me this is how you do the job, so in a way, I believe that she trained me because she helped me get the knowledge to perform the job” (Caro)*

Only two participants declared having no networks that helped them getting their current job(s) or trainings, meaning that they did it entirely on their own.

*“A mi nadie me ayudo a conseguir ese trabajo [trabajo actual]. Lo conseguí por mi sola. Yo lo busque pues no, no eh estudiado para este tipo de trabajo ni nada” (Judith)*

*“No one helped me get this job [current job]. I did it by myself. I looked for it, and no, I have not studied for this type of work or anything ”(Judith)*

Participants showed that they are all very knowledgeable and skillful at finding employment and training opportunities in the city. Formal and informal networks can be a useful tool that can be used by the city of Chelsea to share job-related opportunities and trainings to all its residents, so that everyone has a reliable resource at the city level.

**Obstacles.** Finally, a key finding of this project concerns the obstacles that participants face in the labor market when it comes to accessing employment and training opportunities. The obstacles were identified as English language barriers, work documentation and certification issues, and in some cases plain discrimination at work.



## I. Language

Many of the participants conveyed that in order to access better working conditions and jobs, they must improve their English language skills first. Lack of English language was identified as an obstacle that must be tackled in order to achieve improved job satisfaction and better work opportunities. The challenges of not speaking English well are expressed by the following:

*“...para mí lo más importante ahorita es aprender inglés porque [en mi trabajo actual] tengo oportunidades, pero también necesito aprender más el inglés...porque...en mi trabajo...todo es en inglés mis jefes son Americanos entonces...lo más importante ahorita es aprender el idioma para poderlo leer y escribir bien y hablarlo” (Adriana)*

*“... For me the most important thing right now is learning English because [in my current job], I have opportunities, but I also need to learn more English. ...At my job... everything is in English my bosses are American, so...the most important thing for me right now is to learn the language so that I can read and write it well and speak it ” (Adriana)*

## II. Lack of certification and documents

This sub-theme is connected to the participants' immigrant background because some participants expressed that they cannot access their desired jobs, or the kind of jobs they have in their country of origin, due to lack of employment authorization, Social Security numbers, or other certification obstacles such as lack of high school diploma/GED or job certifications. This sub-theme included statements like the following:

*“Yo tuve un trabajo, que el jefe me dijo que no me podía pagar, dar el dólar de aumento en el salario que daban porque no tenía el GED, no podía hablar inglés, entonces ahí es cuando uno le llevan a buscar un medio a donde aprender a superarse...” (unknown)*

*“I had a job once that the boss told me that he couldn't give me the dollar increase in the salary that they were giving because I didn't have the GED, I couldn't speak English. So that's the push you take to find a way to learn, to excel... ” (unknown)*

## III. Discrimination as an obstacle

Lastly, other related obstacles included issues around family, maternity leave, childcare access, and availability of satisfactory jobs in Chelsea were related to gender discrimination issues which lead to participants' feelings of discrimination and alienation. Discriminatory and

sexist behavior was a prevalent theme identified by participants in the second focus group, and included the following sentiments:

*“Mi primer trabajo fue una imprenta y la persona que estaba de jefa en ese momento era una persona realmente...muy mala...y pues [era] hispana... como dicen por ahí el peor enemigo de un hispano es otro hispano a mi lamentablemente me tocó vivirlo con mi propia raza no con gente blanca ni negra” (Celi)*

*“My first job was at a printing press and the person who was the boss at that time was a ... very bad person.... and well [my boss was] Hispanic,... As they say, the worst enemy of a Hispanic is another Hispanic. Unfortunately I had to go through that experience with someone of my own race, not with black or white people” (Celi)*

*“...cuando yo empecé a trabajar en este restaurante donde yo estoy que no me querían porque era mujer y decían que las mujeres no trabajan como trabajan los hombres...pero había [una persona] que me iba a traduciendo] y le dije que le dijera que yo lo iba a demostrar que una mujer va a trabajar igual que un hombre...tiene la misma capacidad hacerlo casi igual...” (Inés)*

*“... When I started working in the restaurant where I currently work, they did not want me because I was a woman and they said that women do not work as hard as men do.... But there was [a person] who was helping me translate for me and I told him to tell him that I was going to show him that a woman is going to work just like a man ... that a woman has the same ability to do it almost the same ...” (Inés)*

### **C. Job Aspirations**

This sub-theme consists of statements that describe the kind of job that focus group participants aspire to obtain soon. In many cases, they refer to aspirations to have their own business in the area that they are already working:

*“...Bueno en el futuro quiero tener mi propio negocio, manejar ser yo mi propia jefa, no tener nadie que me mande y este y tener en un lugar adecuado para tener mi propia tienda...” (Clara)*

*“... Well, in the future I want to have my own business. I want to be my own boss without anyone telling me what to do. To have the appropriate place for my own tienda [shop]...” (Clara)*

*“Si pues yo y mi esposa trabajamos muy duro verdad. Porque siempre hemos tenido en mente de tener un negocio como un restaurante porque los dos hemos trabajado en*

*restaurante desde que hemos llegado acá y vemos muy bien el oficio y ese ha sido un sueño de nosotros espero un día tenerlo” (Josué)*

*“My wife and I have worked hard because we have always thought of having a business ourselves. Something like a restaurant, because we have always worked in restaurants, and we like it. That’s our dream and we hope to make it true.” (Josué)*

*“Si, en el futuro para mi seria de poner mi propia Floristería y pues quisiera hacerlo aquí, aquí no más en Chelsea va estar cerca de mis hijos.” (Adriana)*

*“In the near future, I would like to have my own flower shop, right here in Chelsea, and stay close to my children.” (Adriana)*

Other more explicit aspirations referred to professional careers closer to what they have studied or are familiar with:

*“Si...Ahh pues yo me veo en mi futuro ejerciendo mi carrera aquí pues es mi sueño, un sueño desde que he venido lo he tenido y me encantaría pues no se trabajar en el hospital Mass. general o en la clínica de acá de Chelsea pues, aquí ayudando más a la comunidad” (Adriana)*

*“... I see myself working on my career [nursing]. This is a dream I had since I arrived [in the US]. I would love to work in Mass General, or in the clinic here in Chelsea, helping the community...” (Adriana)*

*“Tal vez... yo pueda agarrar clases para, para ingresar a una escuela como asistente de maestra o pues si, sí es mucho mejor pues como maestra.” (Celi)*

*“Maybe I could take some classes to work in a school as assistant to the teacher, or, better, as a teacher.” (Celi)*

#### **D. Participants’ Recommendations**

In this section we discuss participants’ recommendations of the ideal characteristics of job training programs that the city of Chelsea should develop to help them fulfill their future job aspirations. Most of the contributions suggest that there is a general lack of job training programs in the city, especially bilingual programs:

*“... Este en Chelsea, ah este como por ejemplo esos esos espacios para que haya personas que capaciten a más a personas que buscan trabajo e los diferentes tipos de trabajo que como ciudad de Chelsea puede ofrecer a la población de Chelsea o sus alrededores verdad como por ejemplo Revere, Everett, East Boston...” (Clara)*

*"... There should be in Chelsea those spaces that bring capacitation to more people for the kind of jobs that Chelsea, or its neighboring cities such as Revere, Everett, or East Boston, can offer..." (Clara)*

*"... Si bueno, si yo estoy de acuerdo con la primera persona si no me equivoco, que sería bueno que la ciudad nos brinde cursos o sea certificados de preparación algún tipo de trabajo que nosotros queramos o sea gratuitamente como un certificado o algo..." (Fernando)*

*"... I agree with the first person... it would be good that the city provide us with some form of certificate for work, and that it were free..." (Fernando)*

*"eh necesitamos capacitaciones buenas los que quieren como digamos tener un estudio y pues los que como no están muy convencidos de los estudios que quieren llevar ... sería bueno que ofrecieran talleres como para aprender algo nuevo y si nos gusta pues seguir adelante..." (Caro)*

*"... We need good capacitation programs for people who want to study and for others who are not very certain of what they want to study.... It would be good to have some workshops to learn something and if you like, you can continue with it..." (Caro)*

Other contributions centered on the lack of enough English learning programs for the needs of the community:

*"...Bueno yo digo que podrían proporcionar más programas para la gente hispana que necesita hablar, aprender a leer inglés para conseguir su mejor trabajo porque la mayoría de trabajo lo único que te están pidiendo requisitos es que si tú hablas inglés bien..." (Lola)*

*"Well, I say that the city could provide more programs for Latino people that need to speak English to get a better job, because the majority of jobs only ask that you speak English well..." (Lola)*

A few participants mentioned other kind of job training programs:

*"... yo creo que más que nada lo que deberían de brindar es apoyo para obtener GED que es lo que piden casi en todos los trabajos..." (Celi)*

*"... I think that the most important thing is to provide support for the GED, which is what all jobs require..." (Celi)*

Finally, a few participants mentioned job training programs as the ones in their country of origin:

*“... Por ejemplo, como en mi país verdad hay, yo conocí como un lugar donde preparaban a la gente como para como ellos podría generar un trabajo ... que hubiera un centro hacia acá sería muy lindo y si fuera en el idioma de nosotros mucho mejor si es como una escuela donde lo capacitan a uno y a la misma escuela le ayuda a uno a buscar el empleo eso sería muy lindo...” (Josué)*

*“... I knew a place in my country where people could go to get training for jobs... It would be great if there were a place like that here, and if it were in our own language, it would be better. A school where you get capacitation and the school helps you to get a job, that would be beautiful...” (Josué)*

### 3. Discussion

---

In our study we found a highly motivated group of participants, who mostly find a way to navigate the system to find jobs, to get their own training for the jobs, to keep a job, and are always looking for ways to improve the quality of their job. Confirming the not so well-known fact that in Massachusetts, Latinos labor force participation rates are higher than for non-Latinos.<sup>10</sup>

The first finding of our study is that our Spanish-speaking participants have found their own pathways to find and maintain jobs. However, there does not seem to be a pathway to quality jobs, including opportunities for job training or access to jobs that matched their expectations. This is something that has been already identified as a limitation in other contexts, such as the “work-first” strategy in previous evaluations of “welfare-to-work” programs. These programs decrease the reliance on welfare, but the income is not sufficient for improving the family’s standard of living.<sup>11</sup> Although it is not clear how many of the focus group participants have access to welfare or other social services due to their citizenship status, it is clear that they are concentrated in low-wage jobs and these jobs do not seem to fulfill their aspirations.

A second finding from our study is the extent to which participants are reliant upon informal networks for obtaining information about job opportunities. The fact that informal networks are the primary sources of work and or job training opportunities has been documented extensively in the literature about immigrant workers who do not trust institutions.<sup>12</sup> Our data does not provide evidence for this interpretation, because participants did not explicitly express this lack of trust in organizations or the city’s institutions. Rather, the use of informal networks was more accessible to Spanish-speaking residents in Chelsea. Friends and family are filling the void in access to jobs, which in turn limits their access to the workforce opportunities that the city has to offer.

A third finding is related to the lack of availability of bilingual job training opportunities, as well as the lack of career development initiatives focused on the assets of Latino immigrants,

---

<sup>10</sup> Granberry, Phillip, "Latinos in the Labor Force" (2020). Gastón Institute Publications. 248.  
[https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston\\_pubs/248](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/gaston_pubs/248)

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton, Gayle (2002). *Moving People from Welfare to Work: Lessons from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; and U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>12</sup> Stone, C., & Worgs, D. (2004). Poverty and the Workforce Challenge. In Giloth R. (Ed.), *Workforce Development Politics: Civic Capacity And Performance* (pp. 249-280). Temple University Press. Retrieved July 9, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bszz7.11](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bszz7.11).

many of whom have international educational credentials that are not accepted by their employers. For the programs that exist, there are long waiting-lists and delays in participation. There are too few job training programs that are bilingual or targeted for Spanish-speakers. This leaves the Chelsea participants we interviewed feeling that they are on their own without a clear path for better careers and economic mobility.

Another finding is the strong association that participants find between learning English or obtaining GED certification and improvement of those job conditions. Although, most times those are necessary qualifications to obtain and maintain jobs, they do not guarantee by themselves access to good quality jobs. It is necessary to consider programs that allow the members of this community the development of higher-level skills necessary to access the type of high-wage jobs available in the greater Boston area.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, one clear finding from this study is that current job training needs in Chelsea are not fully based on the assets the city's Spanish-speaking residents have. Some of the participants expressed a need for job training so they could advance in their current jobs, and this included special licensing or other certifications and English classes. Some participants required support in getting the necessary accreditations to work in areas in which they already had training, whereas others needed job training for jobs that were outside of their informal networks.

---

<sup>13</sup> "Boston ranks No. 2 among nation's top STEM cities." Available at <https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/news/2019/01/09/boston-ranks-no-2-among-nation-s-top-stem-cities.html>

## 4. Recommendations

---

The following recommendations should inform a future workforce development plan in the city of Chelsea:

- a) The Good Jobs Coalition<sup>14</sup> needs to expand its membership by inviting to participate other stakeholders in the workforce development ecosystem such as employers, state labor officials, and representatives of all community-based organizations in the city, as well as an inclusive and representative sample of the city's demographics. The coalition has the potential to become the one entity that will help to set up clear benchmarks for the success of any Workforce Development initiative in the city. Particularly by identify funding sources and bring about general coordination of the Workforce Development actors. In addition, this coalition will seek to address the obstacles faced by immigrant residents, such as waiting lists for ESOL, and extend the offer of job training programs. One important action for this coalition will be to address the creation of a **multilingual communication system** that maintains up to date information about job training opportunities available for the city's residents in and outside the city.
- b) City Hall should consider the implementation in Chelsea of successful workforce development bridge programs for Latinos that have already been implemented and developed in some parts of the country such as the "*Carreras en Salud*" at "*Instituto del Progreso*" in Chicago, the General Service Technician program at Shoreline Community College in Seattle, or the Erie Neighborhood House Workforce Development Program in Chicago.<sup>15</sup> Bridge programs like these are well known for helping fill the gap between adults with limited English and academic skills and "employment in high-demand, middle-and high-skilled occupations."<sup>16</sup> More importantly, by design these programs are asset-based, and culturally and linguistically responsive to the needs of the Latino community, which increase their success. Crucially, the success of these programs requires city's full

---

<sup>14</sup> The Good Jobs Coalition is a grassroots initiative in Chelsea created to strengthen the Workforce Development programs in the city of Chelsea. Currently consists of all-volunteered representatives from community-based organizations such as the [Chelsea Collaborative](#) , [The Neighborhood Developers](#) in Chelsea and city officials.

<sup>15</sup> O'Mara, Allison, Fogel, Ken, and Langtiw, Cynthia. A Mixed Methods Program Evaluation of a Workforce Development Bridge Program for Adult Latino Students and Proposal for Peer Mentorship Program (2016): ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. Web.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Pag. 14.



commitment to move from English-only workforce programs to bilingual programs that fully take advantage of Chelsea residents' language assets.

- c) City Hall should work with state agencies to address the limitations imposed by federal workforce programs and funding that are available only to U.S. citizens, and find state funding mechanisms for workforce development programs that reach out immigrants who are not authorized to work, but still do work and contribute to the economy of the state and the city.
- d) City Hall should work with state agencies to implement a pilot-program that will create a mechanism to review the credentials and adoption of equivalency standards for non-U.S. educational degrees held by Spanish-speakers. For example, on April 9 2020, Governor Charlie Baker's executive order accelerated the licensing of physicians educated in foreign medical schools in order to address the needs raised by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>17</sup>
- e) City Hall should increase the support to programs offering English as a Second Language (ESL), and other educational programs such as GED/HiSET, and vocational and technical training. The "English Works Campaign" has developed recommendations that might be useful for the city to adopt.<sup>18</sup>
- f) City Hall should explore partnerships with local childcare providers to expand the offer of affordable childcare for city's residents. This will facilitate head of household access to training and educational programs.
- g) City Hall should expand and strengthen the offerings of online job training and other educational programs for the Chelsea residents. This should include partnerships with internet providers for universal Internet access as well as sufficient devices for the city's families.
- h) City Hall should work to strengthen the ties with the community- based organizations that are working closely with the city's immigrant residents. There are several nonprofits and agencies that have built up a great deal of trust among the constituencies they serve— trust that can be a valuable asset in any citywide effort to improve the lives of all the city's residents and to increase the reach of any educational or vocational programs that the city offers.

---

<sup>17</sup> Office of the governor, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. "COVID-19 Public Health Guidance and Directives." Available at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/april-9-2020-foreign-medical-doctors/download>

<sup>18</sup> English for New Bostonians. "English Works Campaign." Available at <https://www.englishformewbostonians.org/english-works-campaign/>

## Appendix I. Focus group questions

---

### Spanish questionnaire

*Díganos su Nombre*

*¿Qué curso o cursos toma en XXX?*

*¿Cuánto tiempo lleva en Chelsea?*

1. *Cuéntenos algo sobre usted:*
  - *¿Cuánto tiempo ha estado trabajando?*
  - *¿Se ha centrado en un tipo principal de trabajo o ha variado de ocupación?*
  
2. *¿Alguien le ayudo a conseguir este trabajo? ¿Estudio para este tipo particular de trabajo? ¿Recibió algún tipo de capacitación laboral relacionada con el trabajo? (Por ejemplo, en el trabajo, la escuela, los amigos, etc.)*
  
3. *En el futuro, ¿qué tipo de trabajo le gustaría tener?*
4. *¿Qué tipo de trabajo necesitaría tener? ¿Puede describir este trabajo y dónde estaría localizado?*
5. *¿Conoce alguna escuela local o programa de capacitación que pueda ayudarlo a prepararse para el tipo de trabajo que desea? Si es así, ¿ha tomado algún curso allí o se ha inscrito en alguna capacitación?*
6. *¿Ha enfrentado algún obstáculo que te haya impedido prepararse o inscribirse en programas de capacitación laboral desde que vive en Chelsea? En caso afirmativo, ¿Qué clase de obstáculos? ¿Qué le ayudaría a superar estas barreras? ¿Qué tipo de estrategias usa usted para enfrentarse a esos obstáculos?*
7. *Pensando en la ciudad de Chelsea ¿Qué programas de capacitación laboral y/o servicios de apoyo nuevos o mejorados le ayudarían a encontrar el trabajo que desea?*

## English questionnaire

1. Can you tell us about yourself?
  - How long have you been working?
  - Have you focused on one main type of work or has it varied?
  - Did you go to school for this particular type of work? Did you receive any work related trainings?
2. Going forward, what kind of job would you like to have? Need to have? Can you describe this work and where it would be?
3. Do you know about any local schools or training programs that can help you to prepare for the kind of job you want? If so, have you taken any courses there or enrolled in any trainings?
4. Have you faced any obstacles that have prevented you from going to school or enrolling in trainings since you've lived in Chelsea? *If yes, what are these obstacles? What would help you to overcome these barriers?*
5. What new/improved training programs and support services would most help you to find the job you want?

## About the Gastón Institute

Established in 1989, the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy was created by the Massachusetts Legislature in response to a need for improved understanding about the Latino experience in the commonwealth. Now in its 30th year, the Gastón Institute continues its mission of informing the public and policymakers about issues vital to the state's growing Latino community and providing information and analysis necessary for effective Latino participation in public policy development. To learn more about the Gastón Institute, visit [www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute](http://www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute).

One of the goals of the Gastón Institute is to be responsive to the needs of the Latino and policy communities through the research we undertake. Please feel free to contact us with suggestions or requests for specific information.

## About the Authors

**Fabián Torres-Ardila** is the Associate Director of the Gastón Institute. He holds a PhD in mathematics from Boston University. Dr. Torres-Ardila diligently works to ensure that the institute supports the development of Latino community leadership through partnerships with local groups.

**Daniela Bravo** is a Research Assistant at the Gastón Institute. She holds a BA in anthropology and cognitive sciences from UMass Boston as well as a graduate certificate in Gender, Leadership, and Public Policy. She was the 2017 winner of the campus's John F. Kennedy Award for Academic Excellence.

**Henry Chavez** is a Research Assistant at the Gastón Institute. He is an undergraduate student in the Human Services program at UMass Boston while simultaneously pursuing an MBA. Henry is treasurer of the Student Immigrant Alliance, a Resident Assistant, and a Mentor in the Immigrant Student Program.

**Lorna Rivera**, PhD is the Director of the Gastón Institute and an Associate Professor of Women's, Gender & Latino Studies at UMass Boston's College of Liberal Arts. Since January 2019 she has served as a member of the Boston School Committee, appointed by Mayor Martin J. Walsh.



THE MAURICIO GASTÓN INSTITUTE  
FOR LATINO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
AND PUBLIC POLICY  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

[www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute](http://www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute) | [@GastonInstitute](https://twitter.com/GastonInstitute)  
[gastoninstitute@umb.edu](mailto:gastoninstitute@umb.edu) | 617.287.5790