



Lynn McBee

(Dallas Workforce) – In November, the U.S. Labor Department’s Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that, over the last four years, the U.S. economy has added some 16 million jobs. According to the Dallas Federal Reserve, job growth in Dallas-Fort Worth increased by 4.2% in 2024, while average hourly earnings grew by 3.3%. This year also saw the region’s unemployment rate drop, with Dallas ranking sixth among the largest metropolitan areas for job gains.

These workforce indicators highlight how Dallas’ growth is creating opportunities for residents. But job numbers alone don’t tell the whole story. Increased automation, evolving employer skill needs, barriers to upskilling and a rising cost of living fueled by higher housing prices contribute to an uneven distribution of the fruits of Dallas’ economic success.

As steward of Dallas’ workforce strategy, I see opportunities everywhere. The city’s strong economic foundation is already in place, but we must address gaps that hold us back and empower every corner of our community. This is not just about jobs – it’s about building pathways to opportunity and prosperity for all Dallas residents.

Bridging the skills gap

Across the city, employers are searching for talent, but many workers lack the specific skills these jobs demand. The good news? Proven solutions are taking root. Programs like Dallas County Promise and P-TECH partnerships provide students with a direct bridge from classrooms to careers, ensuring they graduate ready to contribute and succeed.

One recent success is the Mayor’s Dallas Summer Jobs program. Next summer, the program will expand through a new collaboration with the nonprofit **All Stars Project Inc.** ASP’s expertise in youth development and performance-based programming brings a fresh approach to fostering career-readiness. Together, we are placing over 100 young people from underserved communities in paid internships, prioritizing quality, impact and robust support for both interns and employers.

Workforce Dallas extends this hands-on approach to adults. This year, the program's database grew to nearly 3,500 candidates, supported by 16 job fairs, 29 hiring events, and five training workshops. Personalized coaching, resume writing support, mock interviews and customized career plans are helping participants overcome barriers and thrive.

Connecting communities to jobs

For too many residents, job opportunities exist just beyond their reach – not because they lack talent, but because they face systemic barriers. Many residents in Southern Dallas live far from areas experiencing the greatest job growth, and inadequate affordable transportation can make accessing these jobs unfeasible.

Workforce Dallas has found that 80% of participants in our programs are people of color, with 20% having a criminal background and 13.5% facing mental health challenges. Addressing these barriers is not only an economic imperative but a moral one.

Our strategy is guided by six key pillars:

- Reducing barriers to upskilling
- Identifying geographic hotspots for investment
- Nurturing growth industries
- Building interlocal agreements and partnerships
- Leveraging job-matching tech solutions
- Conducting comprehensive outreach

By combining employer-employee matching platforms with personalized coaching, we help individuals navigate systemic challenges and create lasting change.

Learning from success – Here and elsewhere

Dallas isn't alone in these challenges. Cities like Denver, Nashville and Austin have implemented bold solutions to strengthen their workforces. Denver's sector-specific training programs, Nashville's student success initiatives, and Austin's data-driven workforce plans offer valuable lessons. We don't have to reinvent the wheel – we can adapt what works for our unique Dallas landscape.

What we can learn from these other cities is that success is often a product of the public and private sectors working together. As the new partnership with the [All Stars Project](#) demonstrates, Dallas is fortunate to have a deeply committed philanthropic community that brings resources and networks to the table that can amplify the efforts of the public sector while also promoting a more efficient and effective city government.

A call to action

Our outlook is bright, but success is not guaranteed. To seize this moment, we must act together. Employers, educators, policymakers and community leaders: this is our collective responsibility. Let's invest in workforce training, prioritize transportation solutions and ensure every resident has the tools to thrive.

At the same time, we should celebrate our own successes. Programs like Dallas Summer Jobs, bolstered by ASP's innovative partnership, show that with the right investments, we can achieve measurable outcomes – equipping youth with trajectory-changing employment opportunities while addressing workforce gaps for businesses.

The future of Dallas isn't just about growth – it's about inclusion, innovation and shared prosperity. By working together, we can build a workforce that works for everyone and ensure Dallas remains a model of economic opportunity for generations to come.

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