

# Misaligned Opportunities:

How racial inequities create skills gaps & COVID's impact on minority communities in the Northeast Ohio Region.

2021 REPORT



**aligning**   
OPPORTUNITIES

WITH GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM

PREPARED BY **Team NEO**

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH **Delta Dental**

**Team**neo

 **DELTA DENTAL**

 **MAGNET**  
**Ohio** | Manufacturing  
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## from Team NEO

Team NEO, as a business and economic development organization, is focused on building a vibrant regional economy and is committed to ensuring that all members of our community have equal opportunities to participate in our prosperity. A vibrant economy is one that is prosperous, resilient, innovative, competitive, equitable and talented. Building and maintaining a strong workforce and deep talent pools where we leverage the capabilities of everyone in our community will be a key factor in fostering vibrancy as we go forward.

Many good jobs remain unfilled today, and many business leaders are telling Team NEO that they would invest in growth if they could fill available and expected jobs associated with that growth. At the same time, economic success has not been equitable and opportunities to prosper have not been equal for all members of our community, particularly people of color. We believe that Team NEO has a role to play in better understanding obstacles companies and potential employees face in addressing this immediate workforce challenge and how we can build deeper talent pools over time aligned with in-demand jobs.

Our research for the Aligning Opportunities report – and specifically, this Misaligned Opportunities report, produced in partnership with Delta Dental plus generous support from MAGNET, the Deaconess Foundation and JPMorgan Chase & Co. – is one important aspect of the role we play. We believe that robust data and insights can inform and influence critical strategy decisions within higher education institutions, workforce development organizations, partners in economic development, and the private sector to fill open jobs, deepen our talent pools over time and advance opportunities for prosperity in the Northeast Ohio Region.

Our 2020 Misaligned Opportunities report examined gaps in outcomes between white communities and communities of color. The past year-and-a-half has, in many cases, exacerbated that gap – both nationally and right here in the Northeast Ohio Region. As our 2021 report highlights, unemployment, job insecurity, lack of access to critical resources and even Covid infection rates and deaths have disproportionately impacted people of color.

We must work together to help eliminate disparities in educational attainment, employment, entrepreneurship and access to key resources and in-demand occupations. These efforts will strengthen our workforce and drive growth and prosperity for the many companies and institutions, as well as the 4 million individuals, who call the Northeast Ohio Region home.

We hope this report will inform conversations and influence solutions that we, as a region, can implement to build a more vibrant economy.

Sincerely,



**Bill Koehler**

Chief Executive Officer, Team NEO

**The pandemic magnified what we already knew to be true: inequities exist in access to health care for minority communities, as people of color were disproportionately affected by the virus and its effects.**

This problem, along with access to secure employment and upward mobility in the workforce, has been unearthed over the past year. Delta Dental believes in building healthy, smart, vibrant communities for all and remains committed to fostering an organizational culture that celebrates similarities and differences, and exemplifies inclusion, equity and authenticity. We know disparities exist, opinions differ and much work still needs to be done to facilitate meaningful change.



# Overview

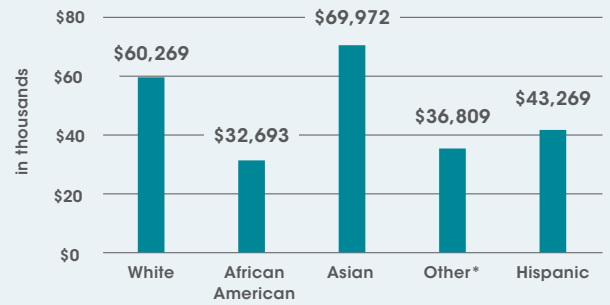
In August 2020, Team NEO released the first edition of Misaligned Opportunities. Our goal was to highlight data showing the gap in economic outcomes between communities of color\* and white communities in the Northeast Ohio Region. Misaligned Opportunities illustrated the unequal footing on which communities of color stand with regard to historic disinvestment, and under-representation in high-paying, high-opportunity jobs.

With this year's edition of Misaligned Opportunities, we leverage new data to understand further COVID's effects on communities of color. We show where minority talent is participating in the workforce against the backdrop of in-demand occupations, and how talent strategies throughout the region support the advancement of minorities.

Last year, Misaligned Opportunities included key statistics demonstrating the disparity between white and minority populations in economic outcomes. We found that minority groups were underrepresented along each metric. In the United States, minority residents make up more than 40% of the total population and more than 37% of the overall workforce. In the Northeast Ohio Region, those numbers are closer to 23% and 19% respectively.

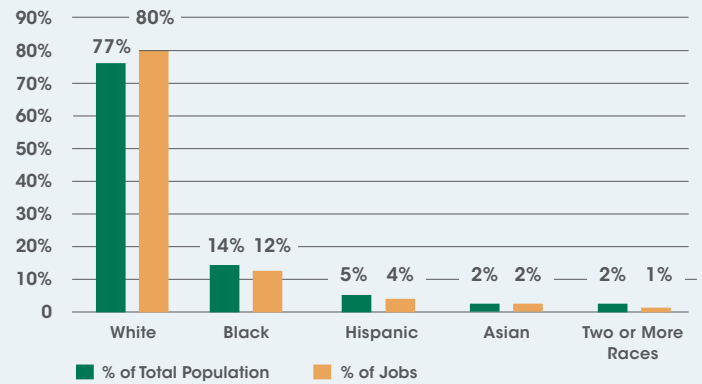
Historically, our region's population has been predominately white. However, minority populations have steadily grown in Northeast Ohio in the past decade: Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian populations have all increased by more than 30%. Still, the overall share of these minority populations is small in comparison to our region's white population. Black (14%), Hispanic (5%) Asian (2%), and others represent lower percentages of the overall Northeast Ohio population. Other key observations between this year's data and last year's data include an increase in the median household income for white, Black, and Hispanic residents and a Hispanic unemployment rate decrease.

Median Household Income



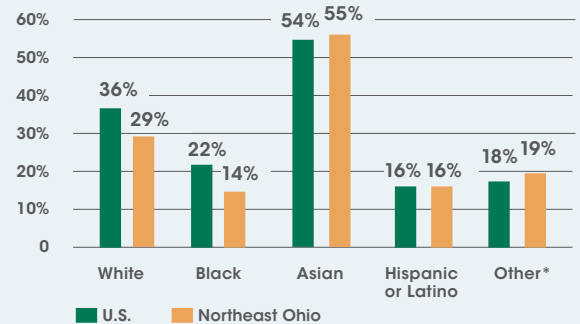
SOURCE: American Community Survey 2015-2019 Estimates

Population vs. Employment in Northeast Ohio



SOURCE: EMSI

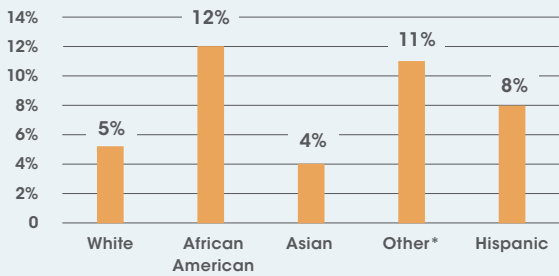
Percentage of Population with a Bachelor's Degree or Above



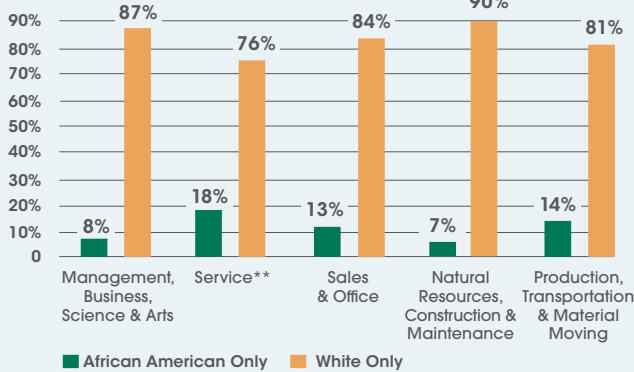
SOURCE: American Community Survey 2015-2019 Estimates

\*For the purpose of this report, "Communities of Color" are defined as census tracts in which 51% or more of the population are people of color.

## Unemployment Rate



## Occupation by Race

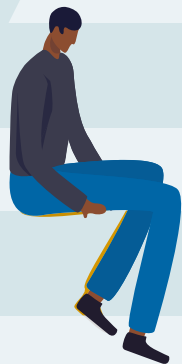


\* American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Some Other Race and Two or More Races

\*\* Food preparation and serving, personal care and service, health care support, building and grounds cleaning and maintenance, and protective services.

SOURCE: American Community Survey 2015-2019 Estimates

Black unemployment was impacted twice as much as white unemployment from COVID



## COVID

Nationally, data showed in early and mid-2020 that people of color were more likely to become infected with COVID, and more likely to die once infected, with African American rates of infection over 1.5 times their share of the population<sup>1</sup>. In addition, Hispanic infection and death rates<sup>2</sup> are even higher, as are American Indian/Alaskan rates.

Unemployment, which had a much higher impact on Black and Hispanic communities from 2015-2019, increased across the board during the pandemic. According to data from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), Ohio workers saw an overall unemployment rate of 8.8%, with white unemployment hovering around 7% and Black unemployment exceeding 14%.

The pandemic revealed minority workers' and residents' struggle with unequal access to critical resources, including internet access. According to the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), almost 20% of all Northeast Ohio households – including over 100,000 Northeast Ohio minority residents – lack internet access. To help move the needle, the Ohio State Budget for fiscal year 2022 and 2023 includes a \$250 million expansion investment for Ohio's access to broadband through grants to internet service providers to expand networks and build more extensive broadband infrastructure. This alone won't move the needle, however, it is an important step to provide equal access to jobs and opportunities in the economy.

Access to education is also critical to a successful career. The next page outlines educational attainment by race.

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Wood, *As Pandemic Deaths Add Up, Racial Disparities Persist – And In Some Cases Worsen*, NPR, September 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity*, June, 2021

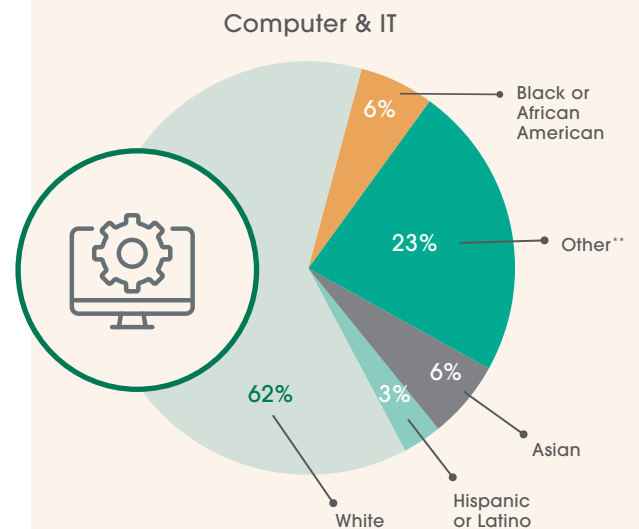
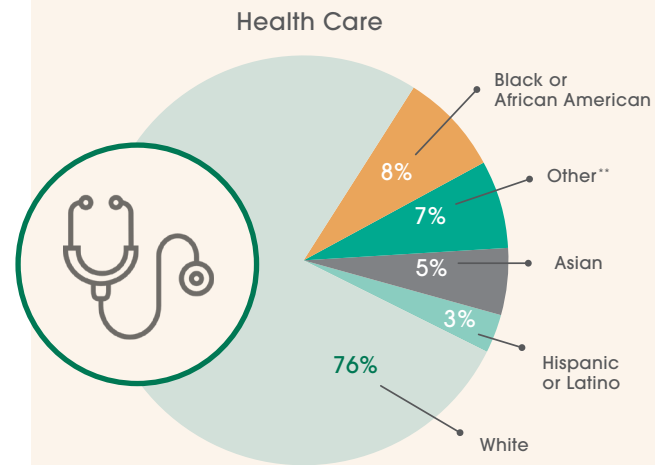
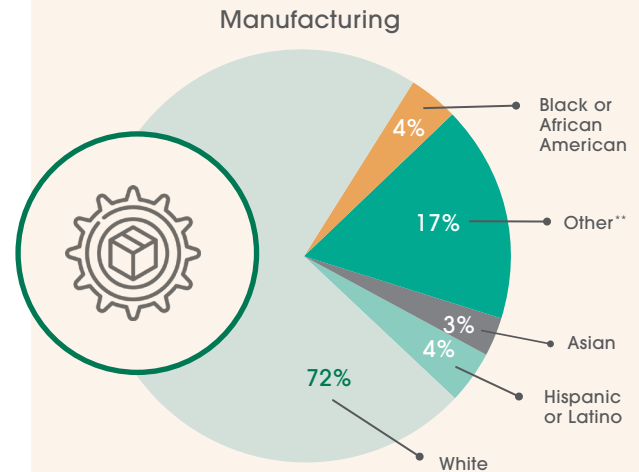
# Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is a pivotal first step toward a successful career. In addition, specific programs provide pathways to higher-wage occupations and career advancement. Last year's Misaligned Opportunities report demonstrated the underrepresentation of minority groups in postsecondary program completions such as the award of a degree, certificate, or other diploma. This year's analysis shows subtle changes in the percentages of 2018 to 2019 minority graduates.

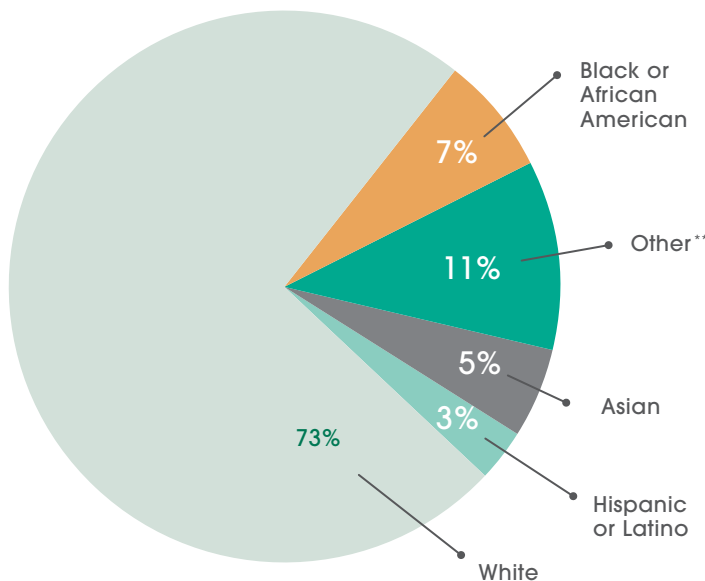
- White and Asian student completions increased 2% while Hispanic and Black students decreased by 1% and 4% respectively.
- In **health care** completions, Hispanic and Asian students gained 1% while Black students decreased by 1%.
- In **manufacturing** completions, white students decreased by 1%, Hispanic and Asian students remained the same, and Black graduations decreased by 6%. Students with Other racial classifications jumped by 7%.
- In **computer & IT** completions, white graduations fell a percent point while Asian, Black, and Hispanic graduates rose by 1 or more percentage points.

As a region, Northeast Ohio has an opportunity to encourage emerging and transitioning minority talent to consider careers in health care, manufacturing, and IT. While future graduation completions will be affected by COVID's disruptions, graduation trends will remain a primary consideration as the region advocates for more diversity in occupations to drive racial equity, innovation, and advancement of our minority communities.

## Postsecondary Completions\* by Race



## Combined In-Demand Postsecondary Completions\* by Race



\*Postsecondary completions is a program resulting in a degree, certificate or other diploma.

\*\*Persons of two or more races or whose race/ethnicity is unknown, or nonresidents of the United States

SOURCE: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2018

## Case Studies

Higher-education institutions, businesses and community organizations are coming together on programs designed to boost educational attainment among underrepresented groups. The following efforts exemplify their commitment.

### IBM & YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

YSU IT Workforce Accelerator, in partnership with IBM, has moved to a cohort-based model working with several community-based organizations, career and technical centers and employers throughout the region. This cohort model has helped to increase engagement and completions of training programs.

To further advance opportunities for their participants, students who complete the IBM IT Pre-apprenticeship programs and enroll at YSU will now be eligible to receive credit articulation through prior learning assessments (PLA). For students looking for jobs, YSU has launched a series of virtual career fairs to connect those students with opportunities within the region.

The IBM partnership continues to offer foundational training for data science, software engineering, cybersecurity and IT support, in addition to new programs around blockchain and big data. YSU has further expanded its tech and tech adjacent workforce training programs to offer free and paid industry recognized credentials through the YSU Skills Accelerator. This online platform is open to all and provides on-demand training for in-demand skills focused on information technology, advanced manufacturing and professional business skills. Early demand for this YSU program demonstrated a need and interest in flexible learning pathways, something that has become increasingly critical to learning and career development in the time of COVID-19.

### LORAIN COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In an effort to uphold our longstanding goal of providing equitable access not only to higher education, but to high-wage, in-demand careers, Lorain County Community College launched our Free Fast Track program during the summer of 2020 with a goal of impacting those most affected by the pandemic. With nearly 30 program offerings focused on Northeast Ohio's high-demand fields IT, healthcare, and manufacturing, the program has seen great success. Since fall 2020, 811 people completed the Fast Track program, making a tangible impact on minority communities hit hardest by the economic crisis. Among the program graduates, 13% are Hispanic/Latino and 12% are Black/African American.

Simone Yalanty, who was laid off from a job as a machine operator due to COVID-19 in spring 2020, decided to use the unexpected time off to change careers. She enrolled in the Fast Track program to earn a short-term certificate in Computer Information Systems – Software Development. She says the

program's flexibility made it easy to remain enrolled, even when she was rehired by her employer.

"For other busy people, especially adults like myself who work and have other obligations, this is the best opportunity I could have ever asked for," Yalanty says. "I'm on my way to a brighter future than I thought I'd get, and it gives me motivation to keep going."

In addition to career counseling and on-the-job training, each fast track program aligns with additional certificates, associate degrees, and even bachelor's and master's degrees through our University Partnership. According to a recent survey of participants, 60% plan to continue their education upon completion of their short-term program.

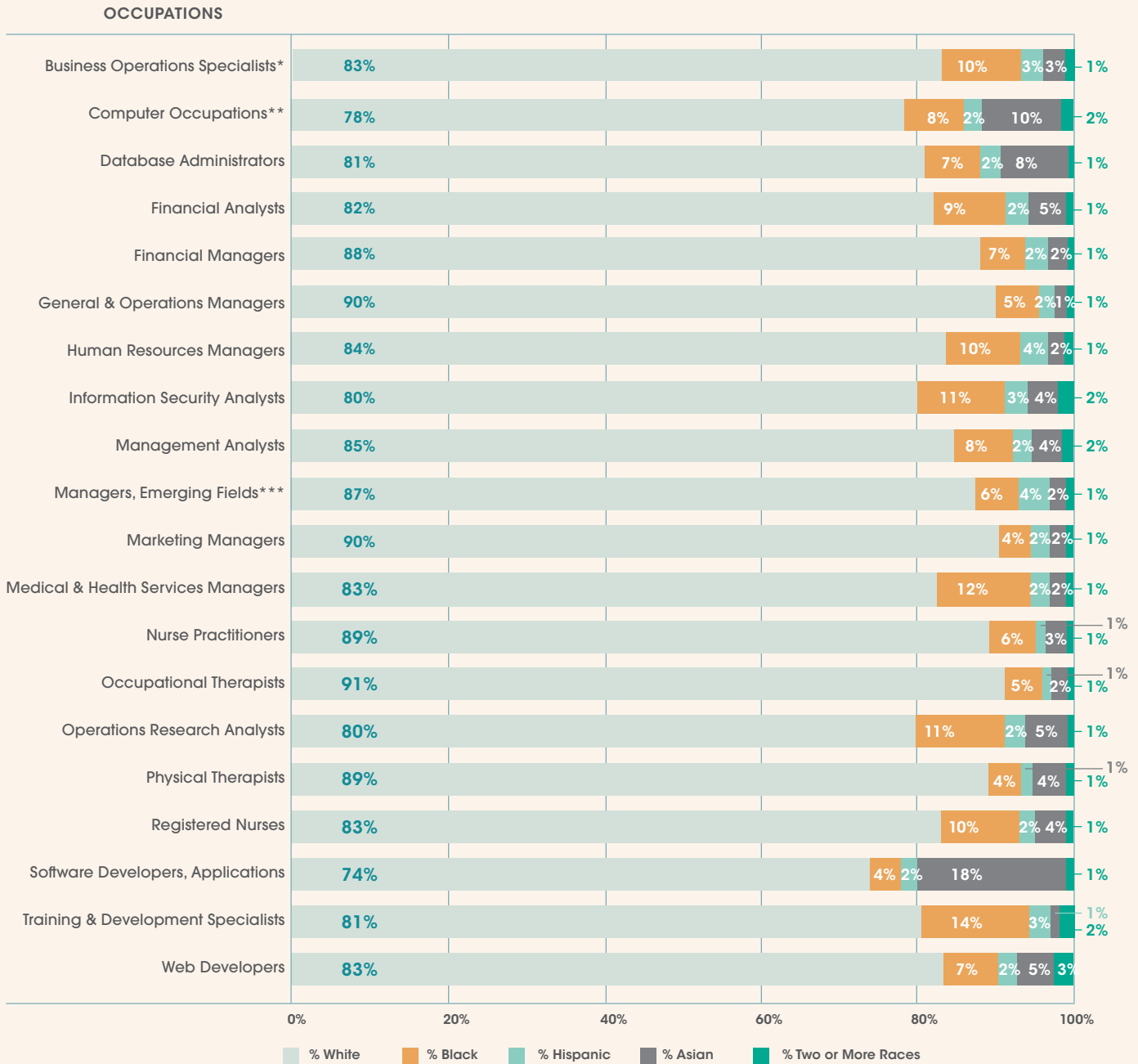
### COLLEGE NOW GREATER CLEVELAND

While COVID has no doubt impacted our workforce in a very immediate way, the effects have likewise been intense on young people and students, which may set the stage for an equally challenging future. College Now has seen this firsthand in the challenges faced by graduates of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and recipients of the Say Yes Cleveland scholarship. In operation since 2018, Say Yes Cleveland provides wraparound services for CMSD students in grades K-12, including services related to counseling, medical essentials, housing, food, and legal supports, as well as a gap-closing tuition scholarship for graduates pursuing postsecondary education. College Now serves as the fiscal agent for Say Yes Cleveland and manages the Say Yes Cleveland scholarship program and has witnessed hardships families faced during COVID, including a lack of internet access, food and housing insecurity after the closing of college campuses, and more, particularly for minority students and families. Many minority students have chosen to delay enrollment in higher education, or stopped out of a current degree program, due to the inability to access remote learning or because of the need to support families due to job loss of other family members or to provide child care. College Now worked tirelessly to help keep students engaged throughout the pandemic, making sure they had a plan to return to college when the opportunity presented itself and knew their options to reenroll and continue their degree programs. It is imperative for organizations like College Now to keep these students engaged and thinking about their next steps in the college-going process, even during the pandemic, to ensure that they are prepared to fill future workforce needs and to keep Northeast Ohio competitive in the regional and national economy.

# Racial Proportionality of In-Demand Occupations

Our Aligning Opportunities series focuses on 20 jobs that offer family-sustaining wages and job security (due to low likelihood for automation). However, the residents filling these occupations in Northeast Ohio today are disproportionately white. Raising the visibility of these fields to emerging and transitioning minority talent pools is critical to the region’s efforts to remain competitive and advance minority communities.

## Racial Proportionality of In-Demand Occupations



\* Business professionals working on energy audits, security assessments, international or online commerce, sustainability and disaster recovery

\*\* Computer-savvy professionals working to design video games, develop computer solutions, build geospatial programs or analyze data

\*\*\*Managers working on organizational compliance, risk, supply chain, investments and security, often in the green economy

SOURCE: Burning Glass Labor Insights; Economic Modeling Specialists International; Team NEO Calculations

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## Where are minority workers concentrated and how can they be introduced to in-demand jobs in your region?

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In Northeast Ohio, white workers hold a majority of the most in-demand jobs. But where are our minority workers concentrated? In Northeast Ohio, Asian, Black or African American, and Hispanic workers are concentrated in the respective ten occupations, accounting for over 300,000 jobs in the region.

### Asian

- Manicurists and Pedicurists
- Medical Scientists, Except Epidemiologists
- Software Developers and Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers
- Postsecondary Teachers
- Physicians, All Other; and Ophthalmologists, Except Pediatric
- Computer Programmers
- Chefs and Head Cooks
- Sewing Machine Operators
- Teaching Assistants, Postsecondary
- Biological Technicians

### Black or African American

- Barbers
- Postal Service Mail Workers
- Parking Attendants
- Nursing Assistants
- Public Transit Drivers
- Home Health and Personal Care Aides
- Residential Advisors
- Security Guards
- Orderlies
- Industrial Vehicle Operators

### Hispanic or Latino

- Meat Processing Packers
- Farmworkers (Animal)
- Farmworkers (Crops)
- Meat Processing Preparers
- Packers and Packagers, Hand
- Production Workers
- Packaging and Filling Machine Operators and Tenders
- Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners
- Military Occupations
- Fast Food Cooks



# Business Ownership

Based on available data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 Annual Business Survey, minority-owned Business Enterprises in Northeast Ohio account for just 6% of firms with paid employees in the region. An October report from the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland showed that Black-owned businesses closed twice as frequently as their white counterparts, while Black-, Latino-, and Asian-owned businesses all struggled at higher rates with closure and downward revenue throughout the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

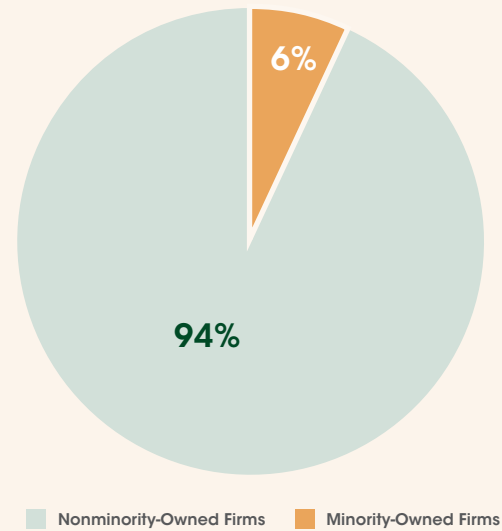
Nationally, over 3 million small business owners left their posts between February and April of 2020, according to a National Bureau of Economic Research study on Businesses Owners completed at the pandemic's onset. The disparity in size and scale of business is further reinforced by data from *Crain's Cleveland Business*, which show that the 20 largest privately held companies in the region employ over 79,700 individuals compared to the 20 largest MBEs which employ just over 2,600 individuals. Compared to last year, the largest privately held companies have almost doubled their employee counts while MBEs only increased by 25%.

In 2020, the Federal Reserve's Small Business Credit Survey provided data that could depict how well employers would be positioned to weather the pandemic. The survey found that collectively, Black- and Latino-owned firms were half as likely to obtain bank financing as their majority-owned counterparts. We reference this data point because our business ecosystem's processes are critical to minority business owners' success. Lack of access to credit and capital for MBEs has inhibited the success and expansion of minority communities in the past.

Equal access to capital, enhanced communications, financial education, and networking are mechanisms to help advance business owners. However Black- and other minority-owned business owners have faced challenges in these areas. We as a region must continue to ask ourselves how resource providers can help minority and other business entrepreneurs to navigate the complexities of growth and decline post-COVID.

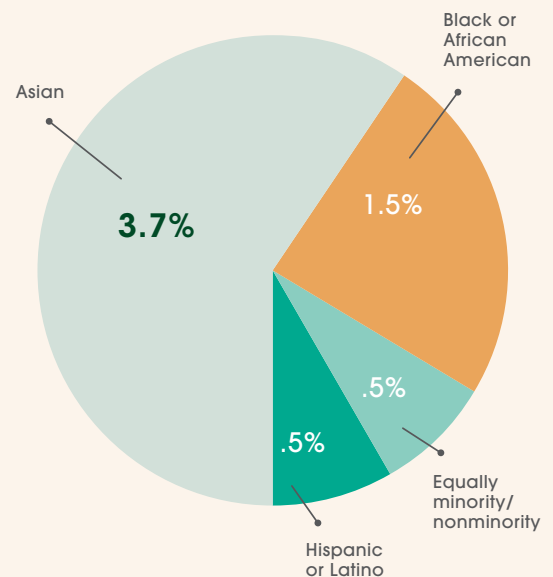
**MBEs increased employee count 25% compared to nearly 50% increase in non-minority businesses**

Business Ownership in Northeast Ohio



SOURCE: Survey of Business Owners (US Census Bureau), 2017

Racial Breakdown of Minority Business



<sup>3</sup> Lucas Misera, An Uphill Battle: COVID-19's Outsized Toll on Minority-Owned Firms, Cleveland Fed October 2020

# Case Studies

## HALL OF FAME RESORT & ENTERTAINMENT CO.

Last year, we highlighted the Hall of Fame Village (HOFV) and the Stark County Minority Business Association (SCMBA), specifically their commitment to Stark County and minority contractors. That has not changed. The Hall of Fame Resort & Entertainment Co., parent to the Hall of Fame Village powered by Johnson Controls, has persisted despite the pandemic's impacts on the construction and entertainment industries. One way HOFV demonstrates this is by using an in-house consultant to support all efforts related to DE&I, including supporting the company as it builds its team for the future.

HOFV has also grown their community ecosystem through partnerships with the SCMBA, Moving Community Forward, Trade Unions, and others to pull from a local pool of qualified contractors and businesses. They support these and all other Stark County businesses by providing access to educational webinars, mentoring, and networking opportunities for businesses in the county.

Through these partnerships, HOFV also uses a Stark County minority business directory to help when selecting contractors within all facets of Phase II of their current development project, projected to be in excess of +\$300 million. With a nation-wide effort being made by companies to use minority contractors and support minority businesses, having this type of resource available can work to offset the negative impacts COVID has left on minority businesses and workers.

## GREATER AKRON CHAMBER & CONXUSNEO

RAISE: Good Jobs for Greater Akron is a collaborative of over 30 organizations convened by ConxusNEO and the Greater Akron Chamber to increase access to economic opportunity for residents underrepresented in high-demand, good-paying jobs. By bringing employers, education/training, workforce, and wrap-around service partners directly into neighborhoods, RAISE information sessions highlight industries, occupations, career opportunities and necessary skills. Residents visit employer, education/training and resource tables to learn more, connect and register with OhioMeansJobs. Job preparation workshops are offered at local libraries, and success coaches support residents to persist as they prepare for job/training fairs in their neighborhoods. Employers also benefit by accessing a more diverse talent pool.

RAISE partners secured the Brazen virtual job fair platform to facilitate connections between employers and displaced and underemployed residents in 2020. Based on that experience, partners are collaborating to:

- 1) develop shared messaging and outreach strategies;

- 2) build a network of neighborhood-based career coaches;
- 3) coordinate case management to remove barriers;
- and 4) enroll residents in a coordinated network of job preparation and training programs.

## OHIO TO WORK

Ohio To Work ([ohiotowork.com](http://ohiotowork.com)) is an initiative that provides Ohio job seekers with a mix of job training, tools, and resources to help them increase their income and improve their quality of life.

Across the state, Ohioans are looking for jobs and new careers. Employers need skilled and work-ready employees. And organizations across the state are already doing great work to empower job seekers. Ohio To Work, an initiative led by JobsOhio, Ohio's Economic Development Corporation, is the culmination of partner organizations at the regional level to connect job seekers to long-term career opportunities with Ohio's employers.

Below is a sampling of results from a participant in the program:



Before the pandemic I was performing well in my career field. Then COVID hit. At first I was just furloughed but then my job went away. And it wasn't coming back.

I attended an Ohio To Work information session and learned about the We Can Code It program. I knew another opportunity like this would never come along again. I was able to get scholarships through Ohio To Work and We Can Code It so there were no costs to me except books.

My career coach from Ohio Means Jobs has been wonderful, he feels like a best friend because he's always rooting for you; he has great suggestions. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't have known about We Can Code It.

The training from We Can Code It is different than my college career. In college I developed skills to be a jack-of-all-trades but with We Can Code It, now I have a profession that nobody can take from me. And, I know exactly what type of jobs to look for.

The pandemic and Ohio to Work gave me the opportunity and the means to make the change I only dreamed of previously.

The future looks very bright."

- Amiyra Alveranga



# Case Studies

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## THE FUND FOR OUR ECONOMIC FUTURE

Health care providers have been struggling to find and retain talent. Since early 2021, hospitals and long-term care facilities in Summit County have been collaborating on solutions to support their talent needs through a health care sector partnership facilitated by ConxusNEO. The Fund for Our Economic Future helped secure a \$195,000 grant from the National Fund for Workforce Solutions to support a new initiative of Conxus to improve the quality of entry-level jobs in health care with a focus on State-tested Nursing Aides (STNAs).

Frontline health care positions, such as STNAs, often consist of low wages, inconsistent hours and limited advancement paths resulting in high turnover. They are also filled disproportionately by Black women. More than a third of STNAs in Northeast Ohio are Black women, though the overall regional workforce is just 12% Black. Further up the career ladder, racial diversity is considerably lower, with Black workers representing just 5% of the nursing workforce with bachelor's degrees.

ConxusNEO is working with employers to adopt a job retention intervention called the "employee coach." This position will serve as a liaison between staff and management to resolve concerns impacting work such as attendance and performance, as well as to make resources available to staff. This intervention is designed to improve retention of employees—a benefit to the employer — and the long-term advancement of STNAs — a benefit to the employees.

The Fund for Our Economic Future will continue to work with partners across the region to deepen efforts with employers to improve retention strategies, especially for positions where there is a high concentration of Black and Brown workers.

## GREATER CLEVELAND PARTNERSHIP

As a leading voice promoting equity and inclusion in Northeast Ohio, the Greater Cleveland Partnership (GCP) advances racially equitable economic development strategies to create inclusive organizational cultures within the region. One of these strategies, CommitCLE, leverages the collective purchasing power of the region's largest corporations and institutions to increase contracts with businesses owned by people of color. This cohort of companies has committed to increasing spending with growth-oriented minority firms.

The companies in the CommitCLE cohort will grow local and diverse spend, mentor two to three minority firms and utilize the Inclusion Marketplace, an online portal that serves as a searchable list of MBEs allowing buyers and suppliers to network and execute deals. Through the Inclusion Marketplace, MBEs promote their goods and services, find business opportunities, bid on work, and find outreach events. On the demand side, buyers post opportunities and source suppliers to diversify their vendor-base.

In addition to connecting MBEs to business opportunities, GCP connects these firms to the most appropriate technical assistance resources and sources of capital via The Business Growth Compass. Moreover, GCP is the recent recipient of a five-year 1.925 million grant from the Minority Business Development Agency focused on supporting the growth of MBEs with over \$500,000 in annual revenue.

## Moving Forward

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### So where do we go from here?

Increasing job access, providing resources to the underemployed, and investing capital in communities and businesses of color are all large-scale approaches to drive change for communities of color. In June of 2020, Cleveland City Council declared racism a public health crisis to address the many factors contributing to poor health and economic outcomes of minorities in the region including inequities around education, workforce, income, housing, health care, and other day-to-day factors.

Northeast Ohio businesses are looking for diverse talent, especially in growing industries like health care, IT, and manufacturing. Attracting talent within our own ecosystem, equitably by race and gender, must be a priority. **To join the conversation, connect with Team NEO at [research@teamneo.org](mailto:research@teamneo.org).**

## About Aligning Opportunities

This report is a supplement to Team NEO's annual Aligning Opportunities report, which serves as the foundation of the organization's Talent Strategy. First released in 2017 through the generous support of the Cleveland Foundation, Aligning Opportunities identifies the supply and demand misalignment within Northeast Ohio's talent pipeline, specifically within the in-demand, high-growth fields of health care, IT and manufacturing. Since 2019, Team NEO has partnered with Delta Dental to increase awareness of Aligning Opportunities among the business and higher-education communities. We engage key decision-makers in meaningful discussions about resolving the talent supply and equity gap, and providing students with greater awareness of, and access to, in-demand careers.



[aligningopportunities.teamneo.org](http://aligningopportunities.teamneo.org)



JobsOhio Network  
.....Partner