

Bay Area Black Voices **Employment Outcomes of** **The Black Labor Force in The** **San Francisco Bay Area**

Dr. NNeka Allen-Harrison
Northeastern University



Overview

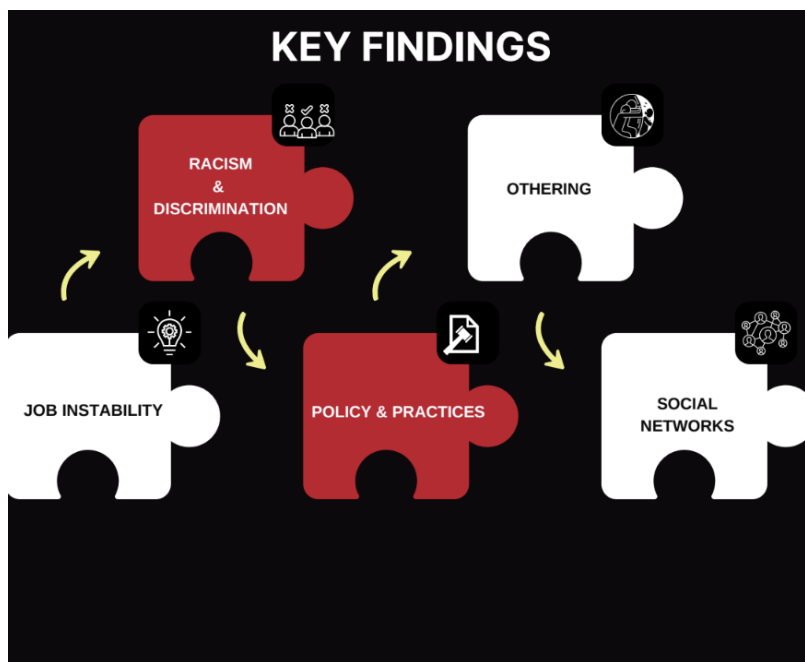
Despite the Bay Area's reputation for global diversity and tech innovation, income inequality still exists across race and gender, leading to significant economic instability for African Americans. Understanding the impact of employment trends on the workforce is crucial to creating policies that redistribute resources and expand income opportunities for marginalized groups. Bay Area Black Voices is a qualitative study that investigates the employment trends of the Black labor force in the San Francisco Bay Area. It explores how empowerment learning can help improve economic outcomes for Black-identified citizens.

This study focuses on individuals who identify as Black or African American and earn their living as members of the San Francisco Bay Area workforce. This report takes a historical approach to discuss a background from quantitative data, current trends, and challenges that highlight critical barriers related to Black employment and retention that emerged as themes from participant responses in this study. The findings and recommendations in this report have far-reaching implications for the research needs of CBOs, secondary and higher education institutions, local, state, and federal entities, and other groups concerned with improving workforce and innovation opportunities for the Black Bay Area and others impacted by economic disparities.

Key Findings

1. Racism and discrimination exacerbate the cycle of racial injustice and trauma for the Black labor force.
2. Black San Francisco Bay Area workers are experiencing the negative effects of racial trauma, which is significantly impacting their overall health and wellness.
3. Job security often requires Black employees to assimilate into the dominant workplace culture to ensure job stability.
4. The act of ‘othering’ involves treating individuals as outsiders or different from the majority.
5. Workplace policies and practices are essential to protecting marginalized groups.
6. There is value in embedding policies and practices in racial equity-centered, results-based accountability systems in the workplace.
7. Integrated job search applications and social networks can lead to more efficient and successful job seeking.
8. Social networks can help San Francisco Black Bay Area job seekers take charge of their career trajectories

Figure 1. Key Findings



Effects of Employment Instability of African Americans

Employment instability has undoubtedly disproportionately impacted African Americans in the U.S. Figure 1 depicts critical findings reported by workforce questionnaire and interview participants. Other findings reveal the following rationalizations given by company managers for not hiring Black workers in the San Francisco Bay Area: overqualified, not a “good fit,” went with another candidate, contract or part-time hire positions only, not ready to hire yet, not qualified, lack sufficient skills, not enough experience or education, formerly incarcerated, or prior felony or misdemeanor conviction. This disproportionate impact has resulted in long-lasting effects on their economic status and overall well-being.

It is essential to understand the devastating effect of employment instability on African Americans and their families. The persistent strain of financial volatility can also negatively impact a person’s emotional well-being, resulting in depression, anxiety, and other social detriments of health. For example, participants reported that employment insecurity has caused accumulated debt and negatively impacted their physical and emotional well-being. The pursuit of creditors and the fear of wage garnishment and legal proceedings trigger existing stress and worry. Many African Americans in California and the San Francisco Bay Area experiencing employment impermanence are also concerned about the possibility of becoming homeless, which implies that irregular employment can lead to homelessness, making it difficult to break the cycle of poverty.

Methodology

Gaining insight into the impact of employment trends on the workforce is essential for developing policies, practices, and programs that equitably distribute resources while boosting career opportunities for marginalized workers. This qualitative study focuses on explicating and amplifying Black workers’ employment experiences in the San Francisco Bay Area. The unit of analysis focuses on individuals who identify as Black or African American and earn their living as members of the San Francisco Bay Area workforce. Data triangulation was accomplished using 45-minute semi-structured interviews, Google Form questionnaires, and reflection memos authored by the researcher. Discovery analysis was employed to code and categorize data to yield topics and emergent themes to generate rich and explanatory descriptions. Conversations with key leaders of community-based organizations (CBOs) offered insight into optimal organizational policies and practices. This informed recommendations for the Bay Area Black Voices Report, aiming to support the improvement of employment and economic outcomes for African Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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Blacks in the workforce need...

policy/legislative protections against employers who engage in unfair employment practices

(i.e., disregarding highly qualified credentials, executing at-will contract firing without cause, and using 'not a good fit' as an excuse not to hire qualified people or to fire qualified people (at-will))."

Male Questionnaire Research Participant | Workforce

Recommendations

The alarming employment gap in the San Francisco Bay Area underscores the immediate need for policy changes and pragmatic approaches to empower African Americans and other marginalized racial groups. This study recommends three key focus areas for advancing social empowerment: policy, practices, and programs.

Policy Implement Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation: Strengthen and enforce existing anti-discrimination laws to ensure that Black workers are protected from systemic racism and bias in the workplace. This includes mandating regular reviews and updates to these laws and ensuring policymakers address emerging issues and trends. Additionally, clear mechanisms for reporting and addressing workplace discrimination should be established, with strict penalties for violations to create a deterrent effect.

Practices Develop and implement transparent hiring, promotion, and compensation practices within organizations. This includes conducting regular pay equity audits, establishing clear criteria for promotions, and ensuring racially diverse hiring panels. Companies should also implement an Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA) system to report on their progress through a publicly accessible dashboard. Anti-racism and discrimination training with an emphasis on meta-reflection should be provided for all employees, particularly those in HR, managerial, and supervisory roles.

Programs Establish and fund post-secondary schools and programs aligned with empowerment learning praxis and a mission to increase employment access for Black workers. In addition to customary career counseling, these programs should include partnerships to ensure employment pipelines, paid internships, and mentorship opportunities are tailored to industries where African Americans are underrepresented. Partnering with local educational

institutions, community organizations, and businesses to create these pipelines and pathways can ensure gainful employment and retention.

Figure 2. The Empowerment-Centered Framework for Improving Black Employment and Economic Outcomes



Figure 2 illustrates an Empowerment-Centered Framework for Improving Black Employment and Economic Outcomes encompassing policy modifications, organizational practices, and initiatives to promote empowerment to improve employment conditions and economic outcomes for Black Bay Area workers. The By Area Black Voices report recommends implementing legislation that focuses on imposing penalties for workplace anti-Black racism and discrimination as a means of addressing the racial harm as a result of systemic racism and discrimination. California policy changes, such as the introduction of the CLBC Reparations Priority Bill Package, can help address Black employment disparities by adding an additional priority that ensures Black employment protections under the civil rights section of its proposed fourteen measures.

This framework also suggests that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) should conduct more thorough investigations and provide detailed progress reports to the public. Additionally, it recommends the creation of state-funded and well-resourced regional Black citizens advocacy and review boards to support the resolution of workplace grievances. The report presents the notion of Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability (AR-RBA), highlighting the importance of implementing policies geared towards attaining anti-racist results.

The *Empowerment-Centered Framework for Improving Black Employment and Economic Outcomes* emphasizes the significance of data transparency in hiring practices and workplace climate in relation to organizational practices. The framework also includes carrying out annual assessments of workplace discrimination against Black employees and adopting human resources strategies such as Racial Equity Impact Assessments and regular pay equity audits to guarantee equal pay.

The *Empowerment-Centered Framework for Improving Black Employment and Economic Outcomes* prioritizes internal empowerment, promoting personal development initiatives emphasizing transformative learning, mentorship, and coaching. It also emphasizes the importance of offering resources, pathways, and employment pipelines for professional growth.

The *Empowerment-Centered Framework for Improving Black Employment and Economic Outcomes* strongly emphasizes racial equity and inclusion initiatives, focusing on comprehensive programs that aim to promote advancement into underrepresented professional industries. The report's findings are significant as they bring attention to historically racially driven harm to Black workers and emphasize the urgent need for harm repair with respect to Black employment, economic opportunities, and workplace experiences.

This context includes public policy, organizational practices, and social empowerment considerations. Implementing a strategy that prioritizes empowerment has extensive and significant implications. This report's implications and recommendations can help foster a collective consciousness for social impact, advance a more equitable economy, and reduce racial inequalities aligned with the principles of social empowerment.

Reference

Allen-Harrison, N. (2024, June 14). *Bay Area Black Voices: Employment Outcomes of The Black Labor Force in The San Francisco Bay Area*. C2C Impact Engine Northeastern University. <https://sites.google.com/northeastern.edu/outcomes-black-labor-c2c-study/final-report>

NNeka Allen-Harrison is an assistant adjunct professor at Northeastern University and a 2024-2025 Policy Fellow with Community to Community (C2C): Policy Equity for All Impact Accelerator. The Bay Area Black Voices report was funded by a 2023-2024 C2C Seed Grant.

Community to Community (C2C) is an impact accelerator at Northeastern University designed to deepen the university's commitment to community engaged research at each of its global campus locations. We strive to move the needle on societal problems at the local level, benefitting the areas our university calls home, while also promoting knowledge transfer across communities that are grounded in the local context.



