



ACT & Opportunity@Work: Work Ready Communities & Rural STARS

TEAR
THE PAPER
CEILING™

STARS*
SKILLED THROUGH
ALTERNATIVE ROUTES



Opportunity
@Work

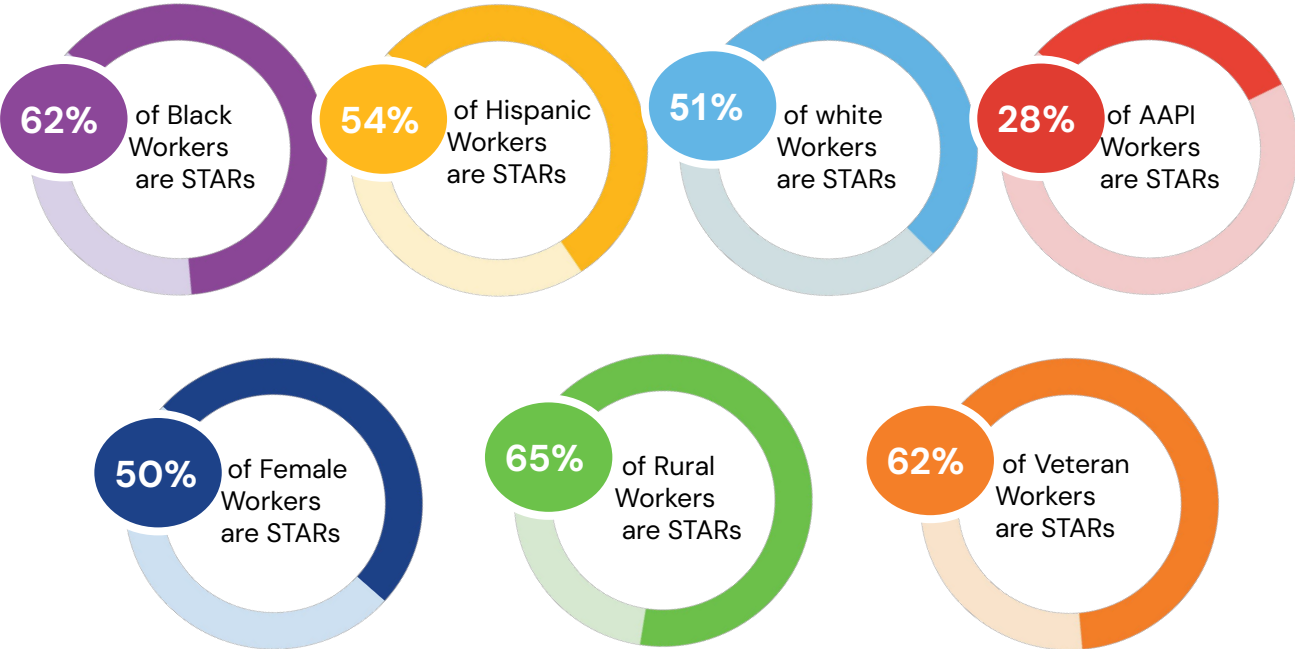
Who Are STARs



The Paper Ceiling & race equity: STARs of all backgrounds held back, including majorities of Black & Hispanic workers



Workers **Skilled Through Alternative Routes** developed skills through routes such as certificates, including skilled credentials/training programs, apprenticeships, military service, community college, partial college, and on-the-job learning

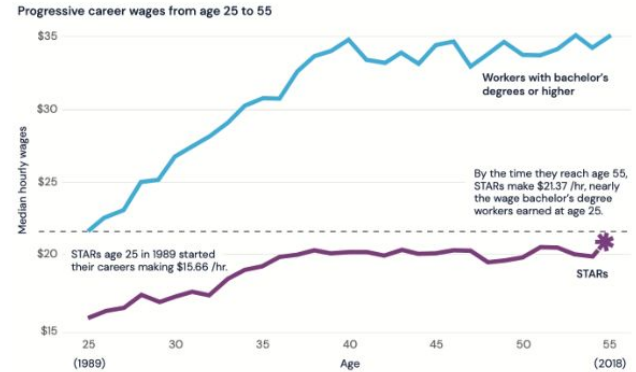


Source: Opportunity@Work Analysis of the 2022 1-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

The workforce issues of our generation

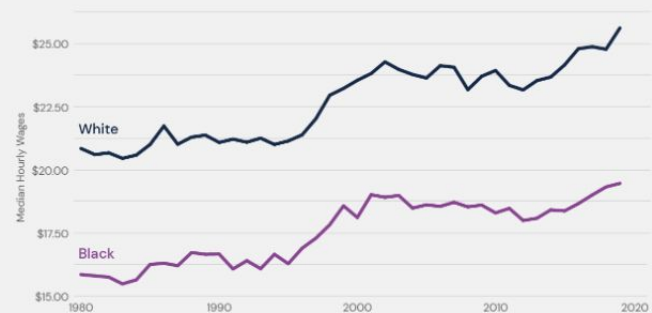
It takes 30 years for a STAR to reach the same wage as a college graduate

The average 25 year old STAR in 1989 started their career making \$15.66 an hour. In 2018, at the age of 55, that same STAR was earning \$21.77 an hour.



The Black-White Pay Gap Hasn't Changed in 30 Years

Black workers are in consistently lower paying jobs than their white counterparts, despite the significant increase in the number of Black college graduates.



Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of 1980 to 2020 CPS ASEC, IPUMS.

Degree requirements, social networks and misperceptions present barriers to STARs

70% 


of new jobs between 2009 and 2019 were in occupations where employers typically require a 4-year college degree

3x 

Degree holders are 3 times more likely to have a strong network than non-degree holders in the USA

*A strong network is defined in relative terms. In this study, someone with a strong network is someone who has a network strength score in the top 20% among U.S. members.



50+% 

of Managers overestimate the proportion of the workforce who do not have a bachelor's degree

*Opportunity@Work analysis of typical entry-level education categories from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Projections program and the 2012 and 2019 Annual Social and Economic supplement to the Current Population Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. **A strong network is defined in relative terms. In this study, someone with a strong network is someone who has a network strength score in the top 20% among U.S. members. Citation: [Reach for the STARs](#) *** [Spotlight on STARs in the Workplace](#).

#TearThePaperCeiling #HireSTARs

Majority of STARS Have the Skills for Higher-Wage work

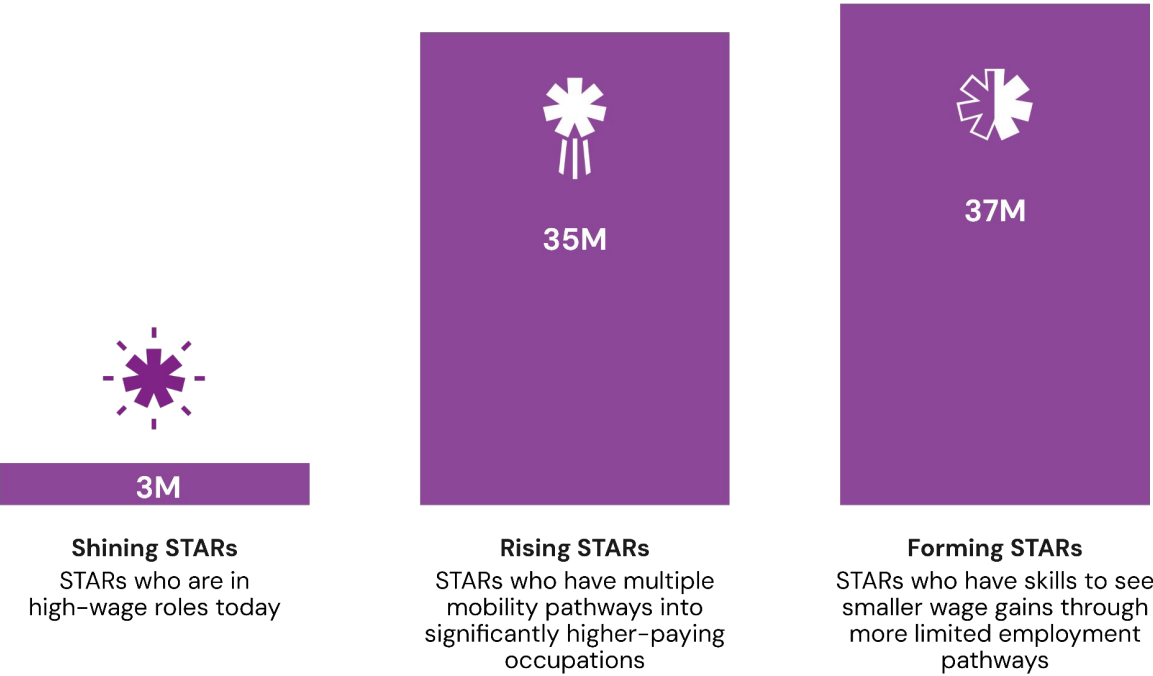


This figure shows the high skills overlap between two sales roles. The first is accessible to STARS, while the second is less so. About 96,000 STARS have made this transition in the five-year period from 2017 to 2021.

Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of the O*NET 25.3 Database and 2017 to 2021 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

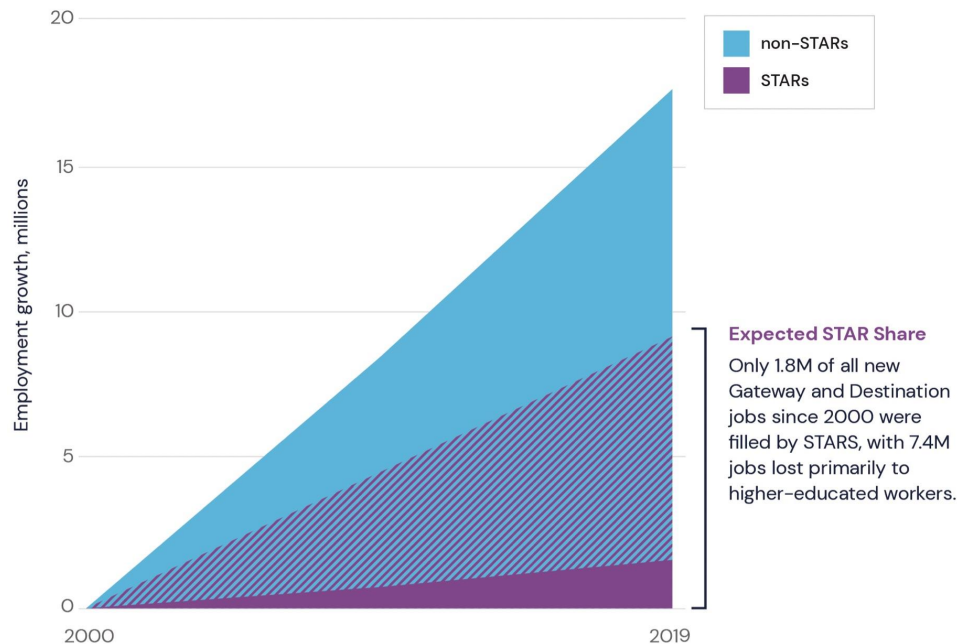
#TearThePaperCeiling #HireSTARS

35 Million STARs have skills for higher-wage work today



Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of 2022 1-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

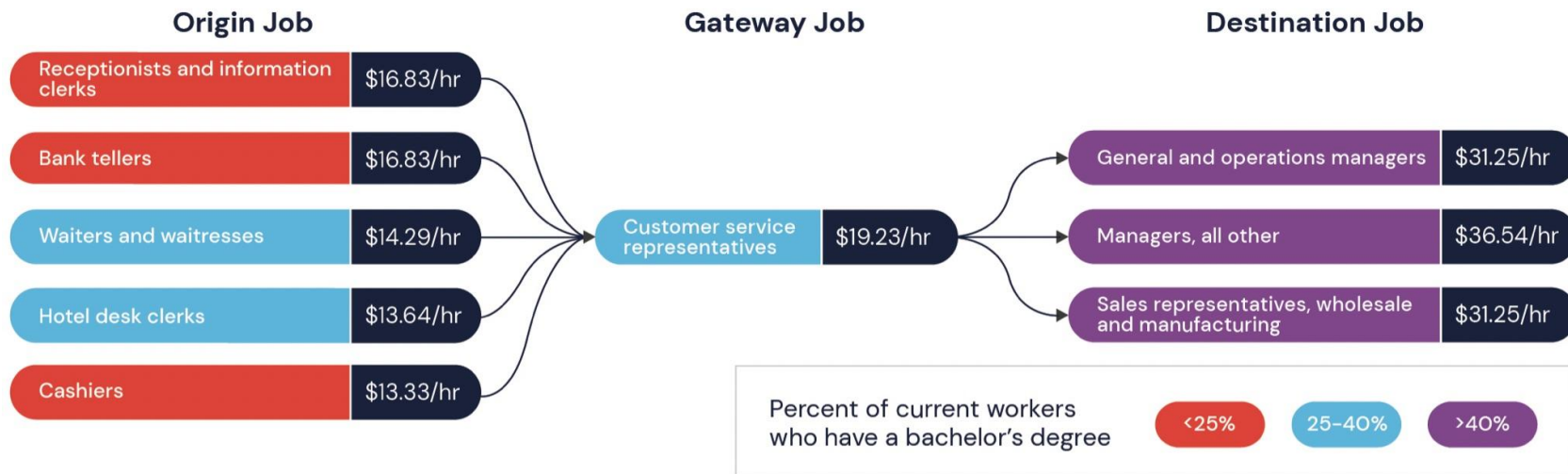
STARs lost access to almost 7.5 million jobs that traditionally open pathways to mobility



Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of the 2019 1-year American Community Survey and 2000 Decennial Census, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

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Study of 130 million worker transitions shows STARs Achieve Mobility Through Gateway and Destination Jobs



Note: Wages calculated for workers aged 25 and older.

Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of the 2021 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

These pathways are often blocked, especially for Hispanic and Black STARs; also inequitable for women

Black, Hispanic, and Women STARs face steep declines across Promising Pathways



Demographics of workers by role:

Low Wage Origin Job

41% Workers w/4-year degree

71% STARs

78% Black and Hispanic STARs

78% Women STARs

Middle Wage Destination Job

55% Workers w/4-year degree

63% STARs

59% Black and Hispanic STARs

56% Women STARs

High Wage Destination Job

35% Workers w/4-year degree

9% STARs

6% Black and Hispanic STARs

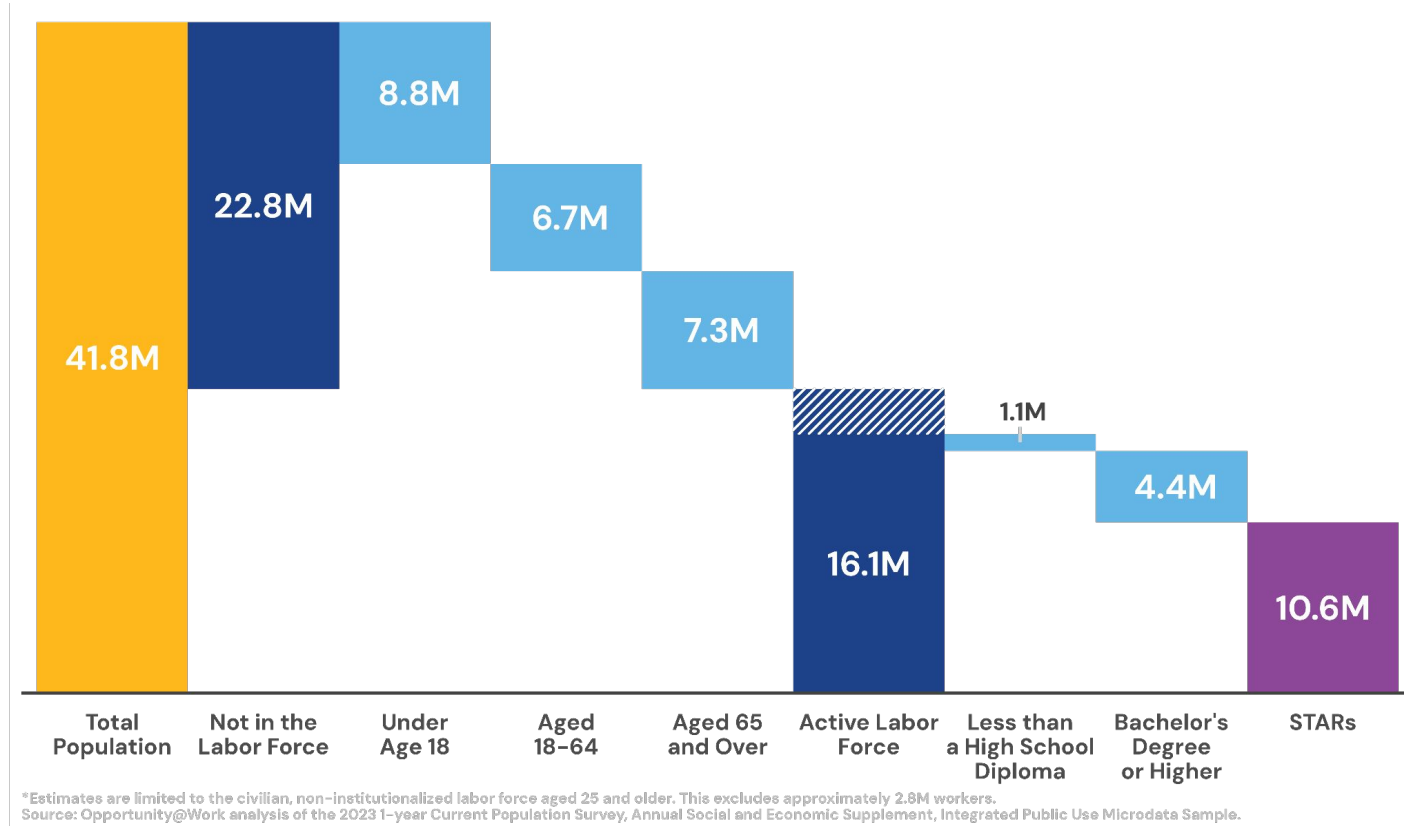
7% Women STARs

This figure shows a steady decline in the number of STARs as they traverse all promising pathways from low-wage origin jobs to middle wage destination jobs (including Gateway jobs) to high-wage destination jobs. It compares, across types of workers, the number of workers who started their upward transition in a low wage occupation and the percent of transitions that ended in a middle- or high- wage destination job. While 35% workers with a four year degree navigate the pathway to reach a high wage destination, only 9% of STARs do. The declines are even more dramatic for Black, Hispanic, and Women STARs.

Rural STARs and Work Ready Communities



Who are rural STARs?



STAR Barriers and Breakthroughs Framework identifies six contributors to STAR mobility



STARs encounter a constellation of barriers

Here are some examples shared by STARs



Family and work commitments compete for time to pursue networking, job searches, and training.



Expenses like childcare, housing, and student debt take precedence over investments in training.



Lack of access to transportation and technology limits job options.



Exclusionary practices like degree screens create a paper ceiling that puts some jobs off limits to STARs.



Social connections offer access to a narrow set of jobs.



Jobs offer low pay, irregular hours, and limited opportunities for professional growth.

STARs also achieve breakthroughs

Often leveraging one or more contributor to solve a problem



One intervention can affect the whole system



Barriers can be more pronounced for rural STARs

Across these six contributors there are areas we find rural STARs are more deeply impacted than urban STARs.

- Employment Access
- Financial Resources
- Job Quality



How WRCs can provide breakthroughs for rural STARs

WRCs are more likely to serve rural, STAR and black workers – especially in economically disadvantaged counties with large STAR populations.

Employment Access Example:

Connecting education, workforce, and economic stakeholders at the county level by certifying members of the rural labor force with the WorkKeys NCRC.

This can create a ripple effect that offers breakthroughs in the other sectors.



The reach of Work Ready Communities

WRCs have a large reach, and offer a valuable route to serve rural STARs, particularly Black rural STARs

16.4m

Over 16.1 million active workers reside in WRCs, comprising 11% of the total labor force aged 25 and older.

9.2m

Over 9.2 million STARs reside in WRC counties, comprising 12% of all STARs and 6% of all US workers.

WRCs disproportionately serve rural, STAR, and minority workers.

- 10% of workers living in WRCs reside in a rural area, compared to 8% of workers nationwide.
- 56% of workers in WRCs are STARs, higher than the rate of 52% nationally.
- Nearly half of all Black rural STARs (183k workers) reside in a WRC.

The five WRC counties of Allendale, SC; Adams MS; Choctaw MS; Attala MS; and Bolivar MS serve more than half of these Black rural STARs.

Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of 2021 1-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

NOTE: The estimates presented on this slide are likely significantly undercounting the number or share of workers living in WRC counties. As of March 2024, 586 counties participated in the Work Ready Communities program. However, only 52 of those counties can be identified in the 2021 1-Year American Community Survey data. Due to concerns about identifiability based on the demographic data they provide when surveyed, data regarding which county they live in is redacted for many survey respondents living in counties with small populations.

Impact in Disadvantaged Communities

WRC counties serve disproportionately disadvantaged communities

We classify counties as disadvantaged if they fall into the bottom 10th percentile (or top 90th percentile) in terms of 1) poverty rates, 2) unemployment rates, 3) educational attainment, and 4) the concentration of low-wage jobs.

While only 11% of workers nationally reside in a WRC, the most disadvantaged counties (disadvantaged across all metrics) are twice as likely to be participating in the WRC program.

We also see that counties with lower educational attainment (more STAR workers) have greater certificate participation rates (the ratio of certificates relative to the local labor force.)

Counties that are the most disadvantaged benefit from having the greater engagement among local employers (based on the number and size of the WRC employer partners relative to the local labor force.)

The following five WRC counties are considered to be disadvantaged across all four metrics.
Clark NV; Lucas OH; Hoke NC; Caddo Parish LA; Shelby TN

Source: Opportunity@Work analysis of 2021 1-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

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STAR Pathways

STARs in WRCs are in middle-wage jobs with pathways into healthcare and production roles.

These STARs are more likely to be working in production, Healthcare Practitioner, and Transportation occupations.

They are less likely to be working in low-wage occupations (paying less than \$16/hr) and more likely to be in middle-wage occupations (paying \$16/hr-\$32/hr) relative to STARs residing outside of WRCs.

NCRC Assessments



High unemployment rates impact the likelihood, type, and quality of candidates taking NCRC assessments.

The number of certificates awarded relative to total population is lower in counties with higher unemployment, suggesting that workers in counties with the highest unemployment may be less likely to take advantage of NCRC assessment programs.

In counties with higher unemployment rates, we also see different types of workers taking NCRC assessments as well as different proficiency levels

- Higher likelihood of Bronze scores
- More “Current workers” taking assessments

This suggests that high unemployment rates impact both the type, and the quality of candidates who take NCRC assessments.





Let's discuss:

How can what you have learned today support the work you're doing and how does it impact how you see rural STARs?

