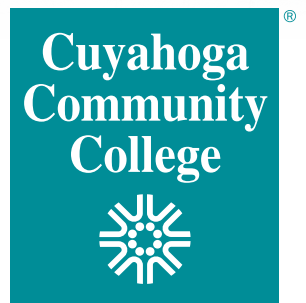


# The Gig Workforce isn't just Delivering Dinner



**Understanding a Skilled and Growing Segment  
of Northeast Ohio's Labor Force**







## About Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C®)

Founded in 1963 as Ohio's first and largest community college, Tri-C has provided high-quality, affordable education and programs to more than 1 million community members. More than 1,000 credit courses are offered each semester in more than 200 career and technical programs. Tri-C also grants short-term certificates, certificates of proficiency and post-degree professional certificates. More than 600 noncredit workforce and professional development courses are offered each year. Tri-C serves students at four campuses and at numerous off-campus sites strategically located throughout the county.



## About Corporate College®

Corporate College delivers affordable professional development training to individuals and organizations. The new Center for Entrepreneurs specifically caters to gig workers and small business owners, offering tools and services — such as a podcast studio — for all stages of their business journey. The industry experts at Corporate College use real-world scenarios to teach skills that can immediately be applied in the workplace. The innovative, customized programs are delivered off-site, online, hybrid or at our conference center, equipped with all the amenities for a successful business meeting or event.

**NEW! Center for Entrepreneurs and Podcast Studio.**



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# Overview

**Flexibility** has become the name of the game in the American workforce. Today, we're not so much a nation of loyal workers staying with the same company for decades as we are a group looking for work/life balance wherever we can find it. For many people, that balance takes shape in the form of gig work.

The term “gig work” has, since as early as 1915, been used to describe any short-term, nontraditional alternative to permanent, traditional employment.<sup>1</sup> It spans a wide range of industries and includes both skilled and unskilled vocations, as documented in recent studies, including a 2019 Mastercard Study<sup>2</sup> and a 2020 ADP Research Institute report.<sup>3</sup>

The rise of the internet and other technological advances have made gig work more accessible over the past several decades. **By 2021, 36% of the U.S. workforce was engaged in gig work, according to a study on the independent workforce by Upwork.**<sup>4</sup> That percentage continues an upward trajectory in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Great Resignation, which accelerated business leaders' acceptance of more flexible workplace models, including blended teams, i.e. a mix of W-2 employees and gig workers.

**Northeast Ohio employers' embrace of this flexibility is central to their staffing success.** Per a 2021 Regional Employer Survey of 650 employers in Northeast Ohio by the Fund for Our Economic Future, the key challenges facing employers were a

shortage of qualified candidates and high turnover.<sup>5</sup> Changing market demands — paired with factors such as declining regional populations, more early retirements and rapid technological advancements<sup>6</sup> — suggest those hiring challenges will continue. In addition, as in-demand skills continue to become more specialized, filling roles quickly becomes increasingly difficult. Gig workers may provide at least part of the staffing solution. Employers that learn to tap into the region's *full* talent pool and leverage the skills and availability of gig workers may set the bar for future staffing trends.

So who are gig workers? What are their priorities? What skill sets do they bring to the table? Where do they fit into the Northeast Ohio workforce? And how can higher education institutions support emerging generations of gig workers?

This report answers these questions with data and insights that shed light on this potential group of workers and delivers recommendations based on the implications of the data.



<sup>1</sup> Illuzzi, Kristy, and Tang, Portia. (2021, October 4). *Gig Economy Trends and Impact on Small and Medium Practices*. International Federation of Accountants. <https://www.ifac.org/knowledge-gateway/contributing-global-economy/discussion/gig-economy-trends-and-impact-small-and-medium-practices>

<sup>2</sup> Mastercard and Kaiser Associates. (2019, May). *Mastercard Gig Economy Industry Outlook and Needs Assessment*. <https://mastercardcontentexchange.com/news/media/fbznwxxi/gig-economy-white-paper-may-2019.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> ADP Research Institute. (2020, February). *Illuminating the Shadow Workforce: Insights Into the Gig Workforce in Businesses*. <https://www.adp.com/-/media/adp/resourcehub/pdf/adpri/illuminating-the-shadow-workforce-by-adp-research-institute.ashx>

<sup>4</sup> Upwork is one the largest global freelancing platforms. The company publishes annual research studies on freelance and independent work in the U.S. The estimates are obtained from their 2021 study, *Freelance Forward*. <https://www.upwork.com/research/freelance-forward-2021>

<sup>5</sup> Fund for Our Economic Future. (2021). *Where Are the Workers?* survey

<sup>6</sup> Ibid



# What is Gig Work?

Definitions of the “gig economy” vary from resource to resource, underscoring the challenge of fully grasping its scope and impacts.

For example, in a 2016 article on the gig economy,<sup>7</sup> the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) described gig work as a **form of self-employment or a contingent alternative work arrangement, typically centered on the completion of a project or task, usually within a set time frame.** (Even so, BLS concedes it does not have an official definition of “gig.”<sup>8</sup>)

Recent studies by McKinsey<sup>9</sup> and Mastercard<sup>10</sup> offer similar descriptions of the gig economy, describing it as a primarily virtual platform or marketplace where independent contractors and freelancers connect with businesses and individuals to provide specific services. Further, the 2019 Mastercard study referenced above breaks the gig economy into four main sectors (Table 1). These sectors encompass diverse short-term jobs and projects ranging from professional administrative, technical and creative services to ride-sharing, home-sharing and babysitting services.

Gig Economy Sectors Definitions and Examples














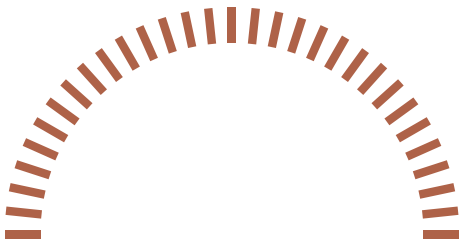
Sector	Description	Sub-Sectors Included	Example Platforms
Asset-Sharing Services	Digital platforms that facilitate short-term P2P rentals of one owner’s (or “freelancer”) property to another individual	Home-sharing, car-sharing, boat-sharing, parking space-sharing, P2P equipment sharing	  
Transportation-Based Services	Digital platforms that require a freelance driver to complete the requested transport service	Ride-sharing, carpooling, restaurant delivery and goods delivery	   
Professional Services	Digital platforms that connect freelancers directly with businesses to complete projects	Business work, microwork, design, tech/coding, writing/translation, administrative	  
Asset-Sharing Services	Digital platforms for freelancers to sell homemade crafts or offer on-demand services for household-related tasks	Home-services, babysitting, handmade crafts, tutoring, pet services and misc. (DJ, events, etc.)	  

Table 1: Gig Economy Sectors Definitions and Examples (Source: 2019 Mastercard Gig Economy Industry Outlook and Needs Assessment)



<sup>7</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016, March 3). *Why This Counts: Measuring “Gig” Work*. <https://www.bls.gov/blog/2016/why-this-counts-measuring-gig-work.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2019, February 12). *Tracking the Changing Nature of Work: The Process Continues*. <https://www.bls.gov/blog/2019/tracking-the-changing-nature-of-work-the-process-continues.htm>

<sup>9</sup> McKinsey & Company (2022, August 23). *Freelance, Side Hustles and Gigs: Many More Americans Have Become Independent Workers*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/sustainable-inclusive-growth/future-of-america/freelance-side-hustles-and-gigs-many-more-americans-have-become-independent-workers>

<sup>10</sup> Mastercard and Kaiser Associates. (2019, May). *Mastercard Gig Economy Industry Outlook and Needs Assessment*. <https://mastercardcontentexchange.com/news/media/fbznwxxi/gig-economy-white-paper-may-2019.pdf>



To ensure consistency for the data analysis in this report, we represent gig workers using the two terms that perhaps best describe them as data proxies: independent contractors (commonly referred to as freelancers) and self-employed workers (classified

under the 2021 U.S. Census Bureau's worker class). Both terms refer to individuals who currently engage, or have most recently engaged, in gig work as their primary job. This data does not include those who pursue gig work as supplemental income.



## Who are Gig Workers?

As indicated in Table 1, gig work is typically project-based, nonpermanent work that requires specialized skills. Gig workers are likely to require little to no on-the-job training and often have a greater degree of freedom than company employees might have in deciding how they want to complete each project.

They also tend to be well-educated. According to the BLS, only about a third of gig workers have no postsecondary training or credentials (Table 2). Upwork reports that, in 2021, 51% of postgraduate workers were freelancers<sup>11</sup>.

Most gig workers indicate they are doing gig work by choice rather than in response to a lack of more traditional job options. Gig work is more likely to be a strategy to achieve professional, personal or social goals than a necessity.

<sup>11</sup> Upwork. (2021). *Freelance Forward*. <https://www.upwork.com/research/freelance-forward-2021#:~:text=Overall%2C%20the%20percent%20freelancing%20in,an%20increase%20in%20skilled%20freelancing>



## Gig Workforce by Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Independent contractors	Workers With Traditional Work Arrangements
Less than a high school diploma	9.70%	6.90%
High school graduates, no college	24.60%	25.00%
Some college or associate degree	26.80%	27.00%
Bachelor's degree or higher	38.80%	41.10%

**Table 2:** Gig Workforce by Educational Attainment in 2017 (Source: 2017 Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey Supplement on Contingent and Alternative Work Arrangement)

Across multiple studies, **most gig workers indicate they are doing gig work by choice rather than in response to a lack of more traditional job options. Gig work is more likely to be a strategy to achieve their professional, personal or social goals than a necessity.** Among the reasons individuals choose to take the gig route are the desire to start their own business, work from home or add flexibility to their work schedule, according to a recent Fiverr study.<sup>12</sup> In support of these findings, a 2022 study by Rice University confirmed that gig work may indeed spur small business creation, with the entrepreneurial spirit of gig workers often driving new opportunities for business investment.<sup>13</sup>

**Research bears out a fundamental shift in values/priorities among this growing pool of workers. They tend to value work/life balance and control of their careers and income over the benefits and security associated with traditional employment.** Almost all (96%) respondents to a Fiverr gig survey reported working from home in 2022, and nearly half of those surveyed indicated remote work as a preference, even if the pay for full-time, on-site work is higher.<sup>14</sup>

As the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to reshape the work landscape, **it is important to understand the demographic and occupational trends within the gig workforce and how this dynamic group can be supported to provide a talent solution for the region.**



<sup>12</sup> Fiverr. (2022, May). The Skilled Independent Workforce: Sizing the Market in the United States. [https://npm-assets.fiverrcdn.com/assets/@fiverr-private/freelance\\_impact/freelance-economy-2022.1397e4f.pdf](https://npm-assets.fiverrcdn.com/assets/@fiverr-private/freelance_impact/freelance-economy-2022.1397e4f.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Rice University. (2022, January 31). Access to Gig Economy May Spur Small Business Creation, Study Finds. <https://news.rice.edu/news/2022/access-gig-economy-may-spur-small-business-creation-study-finds>

<sup>14</sup> Fiverr. (2022, May). The Skilled Independent Workforce: Sizing the Market in the United States. [https://npm-assets.fiverrcdn.com/assets/@fiverr-private/freelance\\_impact/freelance-economy-2022.1397e4f.pdf](https://npm-assets.fiverrcdn.com/assets/@fiverr-private/freelance_impact/freelance-economy-2022.1397e4f.pdf)



# Minority Workers and Women are Underrepresented

Much like their representation in the most in-demand jobs in the economy, minority workers remain underrepresented relative to their overall share of the labor force in the gig economy. In Greater Cleveland, minority workers represent 21% of gig workers, while overall, minority workers represent 24% of the total workforce.<sup>15</sup> In the larger Northeast Ohio region, minorities represent 17% of gig workers and 20% of the overall workforce.<sup>16</sup> Although a relatively small difference, these numbers add up to thousands of workers in communities of color who are not equally participating in the gig economy.

Specifically, minority gig workers in Greater Cleveland and Northeast Ohio (Table 3) are underrepresented across management occupations and several professional service-related occupations when compared to their white counterparts. These minority workers (Black or African American, Asian, Hispanic or Latino workers) each make up 10% or less of the gig workers across those occupation categories (Table 3). **Such low representation — paired with the continued underrepresentation of minority graduates in postsecondary completions and enrollments<sup>17</sup> — further emphasizes ongoing disparities in access to employment opportunities and education experienced by communities of color in the labor force.**

**Race or Ethnicity of Gig Workers**

Greater Cleveland Metro (2021)						Northeast Ohio (2021)				
Occupations	White	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Asian	Two or More Races	White	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	Asian	Two or More Races
Management Occupations	84%	5%	5%	3%	3%	89%	4%	4%	2%	2%
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	81%	7%	5%	4%	3%	85%	6%	4%	3%	3%
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	87%	2%	3%	3%	5%	91%	2%	2%	1%	4%
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	85%	4%	5%	4%	2%	91%	3%	3%	2%	1%
Life, Physical and Social Science Occupations	91%	2%	2%	2%	2%	94%	2%	1%	Insf. Data	2%
Community and Social Service Occupations	86%	6%	5%	Insf. Data	3%	86%	6%	5%	Insf. Data	2%
Legal Occupations	93%	2%	2%	1%	2%	94%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	80%	6%	6%	3%	5%	83%	5%	6%	3%	4%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media Occupations	80%	5%	6%	3%	6%	84%	4%	4%	2%	5%
Health Care Practitioners and Technical Occupations	78%	5%	2%	10%	4%	81%	5%	1%	7%	6%

**Table 3: Race/Ethnicity Breakdown of Gig Workers in Management, Business, Science and Arts Occupations in Northeast Ohio versus Cleveland MSA by Race and Ethnicity (Source: Lightcast 2021).** Note: According to the Census Industry Code and Occupations crosswalk, SOC occupations ranging from 11.000 to 29.000 are equivalent of management, business, science and arts occupations from the Census, where gig workers are highly concentrated.

<sup>15</sup> Lightcast Occupations Demographics Data 2021

<sup>16</sup> Lightcast Occupations Demographics Data 2021

<sup>17</sup> Team NEO. (2022). *Misaligned Opportunities Report*.

<https://northeastohioregion.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Team-NEO-Misaligned-Opportunities-Report-2022.pdf>

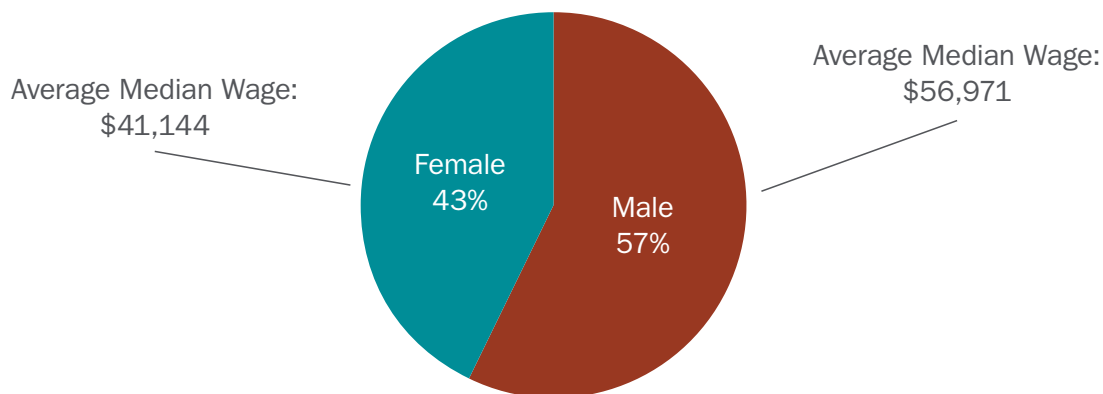


Such low representation emphasizes ongoing disparities in access to employment and education by communities of color.

In terms of gender, women represent 50% of the overall labor force in the Greater Cleveland area but were underrepresented among gig workers at 43% in 2021 (Figure 1). Women also tend to be undercompensated relative to their male counterparts. A 2021 wage analysis of 6,000 U.S. freelancers by Zen Business found that male freelancers charged higher rates than their female counterparts for the equivalent amount of work.

Those freelancing in accounting and consulting represented the widest pay gap, with men earning 33% more an hour than women on average.<sup>18</sup> Male gig workers in the Greater Cleveland area earned about 38% more than female gig workers in 2021, with the average median wage of male gig workers exceeding female gig workers by \$15,000 or more.

### Gig Workforce by Gender and Wage in Greater Cleveland



**Figure 1:** Gig Workforce by Gender and Wage in the Greater Cleveland Area (Source: Lightcast 2021 and Census 2021)

To be more competitive as a region, it is an economic imperative that, regardless of the sector of the economy, we find more effective ways to connect all workers to meaningful opportunities in the labor market, including emergent opportunities like work in the gig economy.

<sup>18</sup> ZenBusiness. (2021). *The Freelancer Pay Gap*. <https://www.zenbusiness.com/freelancer-pay-gap/>



**These statistics challenge the perception that gig work allows for greater labor force participation and more equitable working conditions for women.** Unlike their male counterparts, women tend to face the added pressures of unpaid household and caregiving work, pushing a disproportionate number of them to seek flexibility in their professional work. This likely puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to negotiating with clients, contributing to the gender compensation gap.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the 2022 Fiverr study on independent workers found that, compared with traditional employment, gig work remains an attractive alternative for women, mainly due to its inherent

adaptability. This is further evidenced by the study's finding that women are more likely to freelance due to a lack of schedule flexibility (41% versus 25% for men).<sup>20</sup> **With women representing well over half (64%) of the completions in the pipeline programs identified in Northeast Ohio (listed in Table 4),<sup>21</sup> gig work could be a point for women to enter (or re-enter) the economy.** However, larger systemic challenges remain, such as childcare and adult care policies that disproportionately affect women. Critical wraparound services such as these are increasingly recognized as key components in encouraging greater overall labor force participation, particularly among women.

### Education Pipeline Programs for Top Occupations of Gig Workers

Program	Northeast Ohio Completions (2021)	Greater Cleveland Completions (2021)
Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies	4,028	3,603
Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse	3,168	1,307
Business Administration and Management, General	2,249	1,089
Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities, Other	1,379	168
Psychology, General	1,213	512
Accounting	924	498
Biology/Biological Sciences, General	889	391
Social Work	823	434
Finance, General	694	411
Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse Training	678	221
Marketing/Marketing Management, General	647	238
Mechanical Engineering	572	264
General Studies	563	0
Computer Science	508	297
Criminal Justice/Safety Studies	461	21
Political Science and Government, General	416	175
Law	410	279
Early Childhood Education and Teaching	406	151
Public Health, General	372	66
Medicine	345	205

**Table 4:** Education Pipeline Programs Based on Top Occupations That Gig Workers Are Concentrated In (Source: Lightcast Education Pipeline (2021)). Note: The program pipeline is based on SOC occupations ranging from 11.000 to 29.000, which is equivalent of management, business, science and arts occupations from the Census, where gig work is highly concentrated).

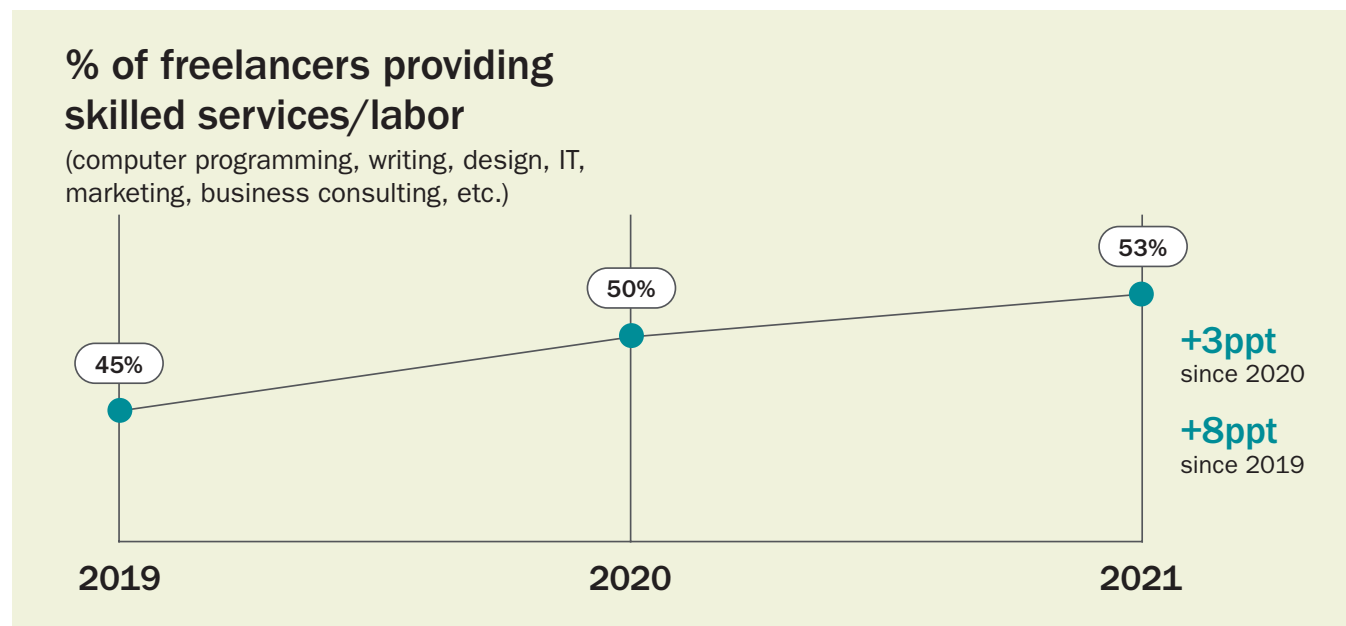
<sup>19</sup> McKinsey. (2022). *Women in the Workplace 2022*

<sup>20</sup> Fiverr. (2022, May). *The Skilled Independent Workforce: Sizing the Market in the United States*

<sup>21</sup> Lightcast. (2021). *Northeast Ohio Education Program Completions by Gender*

# The Concentration of Gig Workers in Skilled Services Sectors

The 2021 Upwork survey found that 53% of freelancers in the U.S. work in skilled service areas, such as computer programming, design, IT, marketing and business consulting. This represents an 8% increase since 2019, as illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Percentage of Freelancers by Occupation Field (Source: [Freelance Forward](#) by Upwork, (2021))

Though using different descriptions of gig workers, 2017 and 2021 surveys conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census similarly found that the gig workforce has been largely concentrated in skilled service fields, as shown in Table 5. Management, professional and related occupations accounted for 43.4% and 42.1% of the gig workforce in 2017 and 2021, respectively. Other top categories included service occupations, followed by sales and office occupations.

**Production, transportation and material moving occupations — which include ride-share drivers, a group often associated with gig work — represent the smallest percentage of gig workers: 6.70% and 8.63%, respectively, for 2017 and 2021.**







### Top Occupations for Gig Workers in U.S.

Occupation	Workers With Alternative Arrangements (BLS 2017)* Independent Contractors	Self-Employed; % Out of Total Self-Employed (Census 2021)**
Management, Professional and Related Occupations	43.40%	42.11%
Service Occupations	18.10%	18.41%
Sales and Office Occupations	16.00%	17.53%
Natural Resources, Construction and Maintenance Occupations	15.90%	13.32%
Production, Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	6.70%	8.63%

**Table 5:** Gig Workforce in the U.S. by Occupation (\*Source: 2017 Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey Supplement on Contingent and Alternative Work Arrangement. The percentage estimates for workers with alternative arrangements are separated and calculated within the four categories shown above.)

\*\* Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey (2021)

This data reflects the occupations of those engaged in gig work as their primary job, hence the relatively low percentage of workers in the ride-sharing category. Gig workers tend not to rely on ride-sharing platforms such as Uber and Lyft for their primary income. According to a 2016 *Harvard Business Review* study on ride-share workers, legal

concerns and the limited security and stability of ride-share work models make this type of gig work unreliable. **Those pursuing ride-share work as their main income source indicated they are doing so because of limited education or lack of other income opportunities.**<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Rosenblat, Alex. (2016, November 17). *What Motivates Gig Workers*. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2016/11/what-motivates-gig-economy-workers>

As national trends in gig worker occupations and sectors span such a broad spectrum, these individuals are more likely to benefit from being understood and defined by their work experience and skills rather than being confined to one category of occupation or industry. Skill sets often cut across industry sectors (for example, technology skills are in demand across many Northeast Ohio industry sectors, including health care, manufacturing and professional services), which can open doors to increased opportunities for engagement.

Consistent with these national trends, gig workers in the Greater Cleveland area most commonly work in service-related occupations, which beyond direct service providers include occupation categories such as management, business, science and arts, sales and office occupations. As shown in Table 6, 40.6% of the Cleveland Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) were engaged in management, business, science and arts occupations in 2021.

Top Occupations for Gig Workers in Ohio and Cleveland

Category	Ohio		Greater Cleveland Area	
	Estimate (2021)	% in Ohio*	Estimate (2021)	% in Greater Cleveland Area*
Total Self-Employed	467,434	8.35%	86,976	8.66%
Management, Business, Science and Arts Occupations	191,345	40.94%	35,315	40.60%
Service Occupations	83,468	17.86%	15,986	18.38%
Sales and Office Occupations	83,768	17.92%	18,105	20.82%
Natural Resources, Construction and Maintenance Occupations	62,813	13.44%	10,376	11.93%
Production, Transportation, and Material-Moving Occupations	46,040	9.85%	7,194	8.27%

**Table 6:** Gig Workforce in Ohio and Cleveland MSA by Occupation (Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey (2021)).  
\* Note: The percentage of total self-employed is calculated out of the total workforce in Ohio and the Greater Cleveland area respectively, while the percentage for each occupation in subsequent rows is based on total self-employed).

Some tables containing data in the report may add up to slightly below or above 100. This data error is a product of sample sizes, rounding errors and other inherent challenges when working with public and private sector data — including but not limited to the data sourced in this report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Lightcast.

Production, transportation and material moving occupations — which include ride-share drivers, a group often associated with gig work — represent the smallest percentage of gig workers.



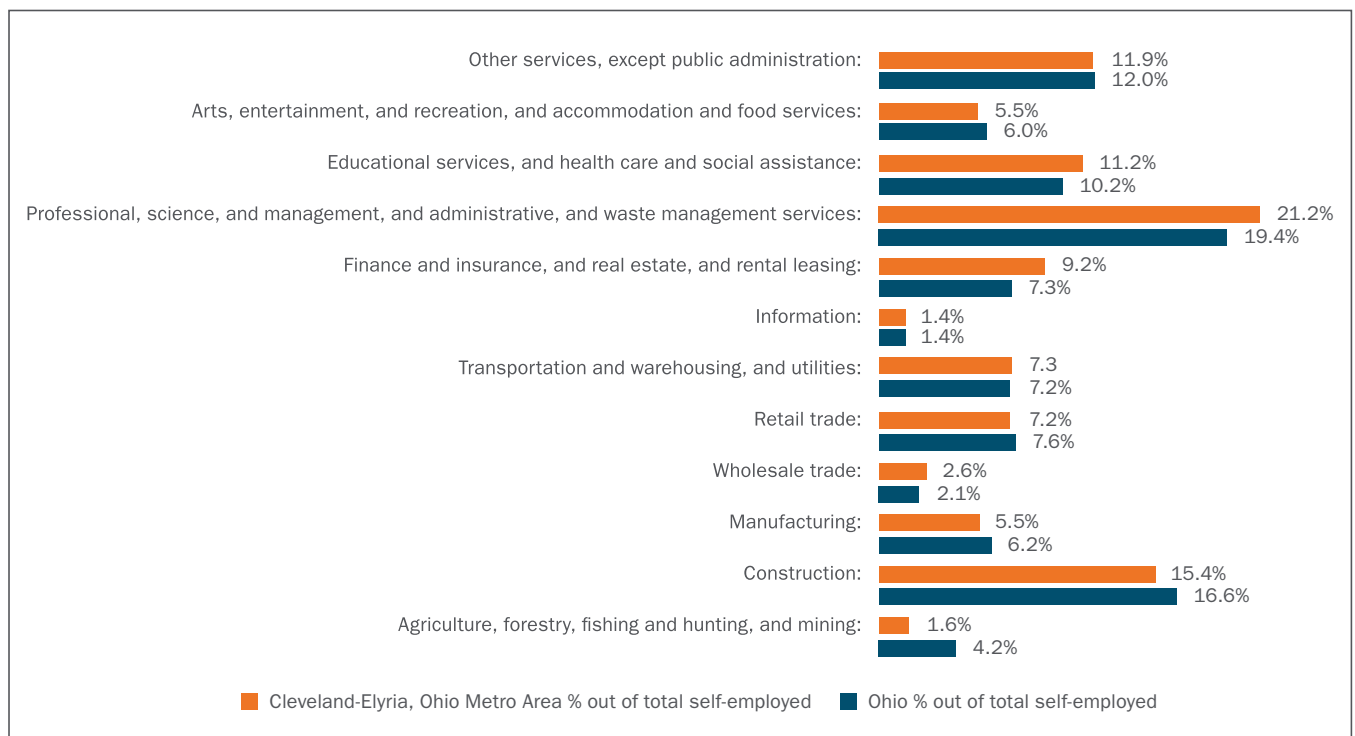




In terms of industries, the trend in the Cleveland MSA also heavily focuses on providing skills and services as the “product.” According to 2021 Census data (Figure 3), the top industries in gig work for the Cleveland MSA are professional, scientific, management/administrative and waste management services (21.2%), followed by construction (15.4%), other services except public administration (11.9%)

and educational services, health care services and social assistance (11.2%). The overall analysis of the occupation and industry breakdown of the gig workforce highlights that, in addition to enabling these individuals to work nimbly across firms and industries, their specialized and transferable skills likely allow for a consulting-like approach to how they think about short-term labor.

### Gig Workers by Industry (Ohio vs. Greater Cleveland Area)



**Figure 3:** Gig Workforce by Industry in the Greater Cleveland Area (Source: 2021 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey)

# Employer Attitudes about Engaging Gig Workers

**Employers across the country and the region continue to experience hiring challenges.** The 2022 Where Are the Workers Survey found that 20% of the workforce in the region resigned during the pandemic, and potentially more than 300,000 employees would leave in the next 12 months.<sup>23</sup> More than half of those workers who resigned cited a negative work environment, low pay, being in transition (e.g., moving, parental leave) or schedule conflicts as reasons for leaving. Additionally, 55.8% of those projected to resign indicated that employers could convince them to stay.

The survey found increasing barriers to work across various income levels. In addition to individual circumstances, work **barriers are also heavily tied to broader systemic challenges ranging from transportation access to child care policies. These barriers further feed into the need for flexibility, which is becoming a top priority for the workforce.**

Employers can **consider adopting more flexible work arrangements and inclusive hiring practices.** According to the survey, flexibility paired with competitive wages and opportunities for

advancement offer the most attractive package for attracting and retaining workers and can also help communicate a shift in workplace culture to employees.

That shift may also include bringing gig workers into the fold. The majority of gig workers in Northeast Ohio possess some form of specialized/technical skills that could match the skills employers

need. Furthermore, the project-centered model for these workers means they do not need to be fully onboarded or trained as permanent employees might.

**For employers, using gig workers for certain types of**

**work or projects can be more cost-efficient than recruiting permanent employees, which requires significant time and resources.**

Nonetheless, many businesses continue to overlook gig workers when facing hiring challenges. According to a 2020 Harvard Business Review article exploring the on-demand workforce, **employers' resistance to engaging gig workers is not due to legal challenges but concerns about the potential impacts of outsourcing work on internal processes, company culture and the quality of work.**<sup>24</sup>

**For employers, using gig workers for certain types of work or projects can be more cost-efficient than recruiting permanent employees.**



<sup>23</sup> This estimation is from the 5,000-sample size that was extrapolated into estimated population impacts, based on a total number of 2,899,795 adults (18-plus) in the survey area. The findings are from the *Where Are the Workers Survey 2021*. <https://wherearetheworkers.com/where-are-the-workers/>

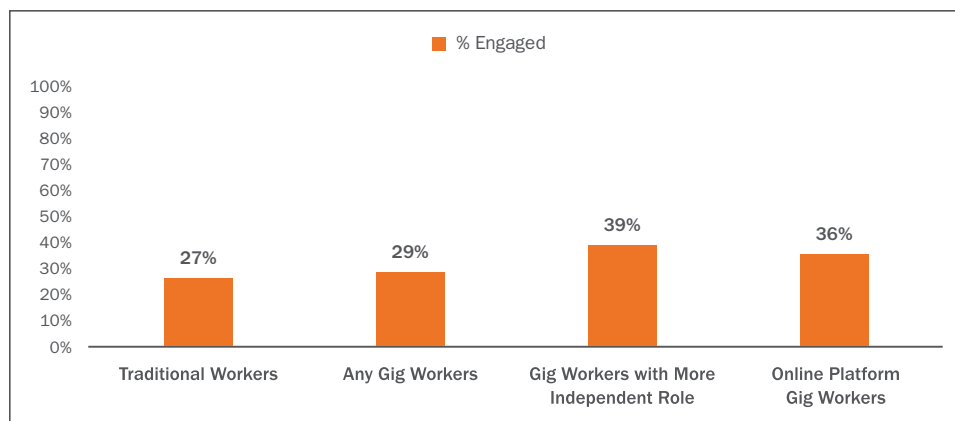
<sup>24</sup> Fuller, Joseph, et. al. (2020, November-December). *Rethinking the On-Demand Workforce*. Harvard Business Review <https://hbr.org/2020/11/rethinking-the-on-demand-workforce>



Whether gig workers may be less engaged than their in-house counterparts is of particular concern. A 2018 Gallup poll found the opposite is true — gig workers tend to be slightly more engaged (Figure 4). Perhaps they are motivated by the enhanced sense of work/life balance,

independence and professional fulfillment that can come from having greater control over how and when they do their work. They may also feel more accountable for the quality of their work since satisfying customers is vital to repeat engagements.

#### Engagement Level of Traditional Workers vs. Gig Workers

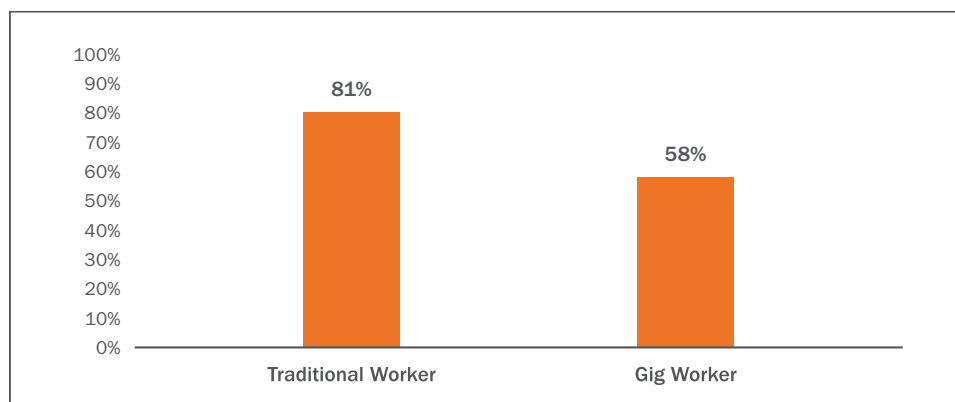


**Figure 4:** Employee engagement level comparison between traditional and gig workers  
(Source: Gallup Report on *The Gig Economy and Alternative Work Arrangements* (2018))

Another employer concern is the risk of revealing internal information to external vendors. Yet organizations can put safeguards in place fairly easily. With over half of gig workers being assigned to work with a manager from the hiring organization (52%) and being limited to working in an assigned group or team (58%), employers can monitor and

regulate the type and amount of information these workers can access, utilizing managers and other permanent employees in the team as potential checkpoints. Employers also have the option of requiring contractors to sign nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) to limit the risk of compromising internal information.

#### Percentage of Gig Workers Working in Teams Compared to Traditional Workers



**Figure 5:** Percentage of Gig Workers Working in a Team Compared to Traditional Workers  
(Source: Gallup Report on *The Gig Economy and Alternative Work Arrangements* (2018))

Once employers' concerns have been addressed, they may be able to see gig workers as an opportunity rather than a risk and as a chance to collectively reshape the workplace culture and processes to reflect post-pandemic demand. For example, they might consider how to adopt

the flexibility and creative autonomy enjoyed by gig workers for their own workers, helping to attract and retain talent through measures such as hybrid or remote work arrangements, flexible hours and access to a wider range of professional advancement options.

# Aligning Skills with Employer Needs

Technology platforms such as Upwork and Task Rabbit are designed to connect customers with contractors who fill their needs. **A quick analysis of current job postings and resumes related to management, business, science and arts occupations on these platforms reveals that the skill sets possessed by gig workers are largely in sync with those desired by employers.**

In fact, many soft skills, software skills and specialized skills — including those needed for finance and computer science/IT positions (Table 7) — are highly transferable. For example, communication and problem-solving skills — along with proficiency with programs such as Microsoft Office — can be applied to almost every business, regardless of industry. Gig workers who offer these skills can be particularly valuable to employers striving to fill talent gaps.

**In-Demand Skills Associated with Top Occupations for Gig Workers**

Specialized Skills	Soft Skills	Software Skills
Nursing	Communications	Microsoft Excel
Marketing	Management	Microsoft Office
Auditing	Customer Service	Microsoft Outlook
Accounting	Leadership	Microsoft PowerPoint
Nursing Care	Operations	SQL (Programming Language)
Finance	Problem-Solving	Microsoft Word
Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)	Planning	SAP Applications
Computer Science	Sales	Python (Programming Language)
Pediatrics	Writing	JavaScript (Programming Language)
Process Improvement	Detail-Oriented	Microsoft Azure

**Table 7:** In-demand skills associated with top occupations for Gig Workers (Source: Lightcast Job Posting Analytics (2021)).  
Note: Skills information was based on SOC occupations ranging from 11.000 to 29.000, the equivalent of management, business, science and arts occupations from the Census, where gig workers are highly concentrated.



The skill sets possessed by gig workers are largely in sync with those desired by employers.



# Implications for Northeast Ohio Employers

Gig workers appear to represent as many as 30,000 to 40,000<sup>25</sup> potential Northeast Ohio students and workers. Given that many of these individuals already have some level of training, a better understanding of gig worker skill adjacency could help employers engage more strategically around the issues of passion, flexibility and opportunity, which are driving the ongoing talent shortage.

**More importantly, there is an opportunity for employers in all industry sectors to understand the value of professional contractual work. This means finding new and different ways of sourcing talent, thinking differently about scheduling and flexibility, and learning to merge traditional workers with their gig worker counterparts to continue to drive efficiency and productivity.** Employers who highlight the advantages of full-time employment beyond simply wage growth — benefits, insurance, vacation, etc. — may also be able to move valued gig workers into more permanent roles to mutual benefit.



Finding new and different ways of sourcing talent, thinking differently about scheduling and flexibility, and learning to merge traditional workers with their gig worker counterparts to continue to drive efficiency and productivity.



One thing is clear from the literature: There is no silver bullet approach to fully developing creative solutions to leverage gig workers and deploy their skills more effectively throughout markets. That said, there does appear to be enough cause to continue to define and refine approaches to strategically engage an increasingly vital component of the labor force.



<sup>25</sup> Team NEO. (2022). *The Gig Workforce Isn't Just Delivering Dinner*

# How Regional Education Programs Support the Gig Economy

With the increasing importance of soft and transferable skills — and one in four working Northeast Ohioans indicating the need for additional training or education to get ahead in their careers<sup>26</sup> — higher education institutions are a critical link in supporting gig workers and the overall workforce. Beyond technical programs and degrees, higher education institutions provide in-demand professional skills training and post-degree certifications.

Consider the specialized skills highlighted in Table 7, which are required for in-demand gig occupations. Greater Cleveland and Northeast Ohio higher education institutions are providing programs that help students develop these skills. As previously highlighted in Table 4, the programs producing the most graduates illustrate the region's particular

strength in liberal arts and sciences, registered nursing, business administration and management programs. (Program completions include 47% at the associate degree level and 30.3% at the bachelor's degree level.)<sup>27</sup>

**Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C®) produces the highest number of graduates in these programs in Greater Cleveland (Table 8) and the second-highest number in Northeast Ohio.** In addition, Tri-C Corporate College® offers a variety of professional training and development resources for workers and businesses. Through post-degree and professional certificates for in-demand skills such as project management and marketing, Tri-C and other colleges help workers become more economically mobile and achieve their career goals.

## Greater Cleveland Area Program Completions by Institution

Institutions	2021 Completions
Cuyahoga Community College District	2,778
Cleveland State University	1,866
Case Western Reserve University	1,755
Lorain County Community College	1,294
Lakeland Community College	719
Baldwin Wallace University	422
John Carroll University	407
Kent State University at Geauga	223
Ursuline College	156
Oberlin College	144

**Table 8:** Greater Cleveland Area Program Completions by Institution  
(Source: Lightcast Education Program Table (2021))

**Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C®) produces the highest number of graduates in these programs in Greater Cleveland and the second-highest number in Northeast Ohio.**



<sup>26</sup> Strengthening Workplaces Dashboard. (2022). *Where are the Workers survey*. Fund for Our Economic Future. <https://dashboard.wheretheworkers.com/#strengthening-work>

<sup>27</sup> Lightcast Education Pipeline Data 2021



# Recommendations for Employers

Gig workers can often save employers significant time and resources when compared side by side with the hiring processes and benefits packages related to bringing on full-time employees. The following actions may help employers prepare their organizations to tap into the full potential of gig workers:

## 1. Identify projects that could be outsourced and are best suited to gig work

This may include short-term projects or those that require specialized skills. Once these projects have been identified, the employer can determine how gig workers could complement their existing team by filling skills gaps, reducing workloads or increasing productivity. Next, they can become familiar with gig work platforms — such as Fiverr, Upwork and TaskRabbit — to determine which platform might be ideal for helping the organization identify and engage with appropriate talent.

## 2. Develop best practices for working with gig workers

The seamless incorporation of gig workers into the workflow requires a solid strategy. Projects will go more smoothly with measures such as these in place:

- Establishment of criteria and policies for sourcing, selecting and working with gig workers — this may include outlining the scope of the work, required skills, deliverables and deadlines and setting clear policies and monitoring mechanisms (e.g., NDAs for protecting sensitive or competitive information). Setting clear expectations with existing employees on how and when to share information with gig workers can also help employers address outsourcing-related concerns.
- A peer feedback structure for both gig workers and in-house teams would enable workers to exchange feedback, improve processes and productivity, and ensure high-quality work.



## 3. Ensure that gig workers have the tools they need to do an outstanding job

Employers who have adopted a hybrid or remote workplace model may find it easier to bring gig workers into the mix as they have already worked through the logistics of disparate work schedules, virtual team communication, remote equipment and technology needs, etc. However, any employer can work through these details simply by having an introductory planning session with the gig worker and encouraging ongoing dialogue. As with in-house employees, open lines of communication are vital to success.

## 4. Provide resources that promote diversity, equity and inclusion and help address barriers to work

An employer's approach to hiring gig workers should align closely with the hiring policies and practices that make the organization a diverse, equitable and inclusive place to work. Just like full-time candidates, gig workers should feel they are a welcome and valued member of the team.



# Recommendations for Gig Workers

Individuals involved in gig work, or who are considering becoming involved, may find this report helpful in identifying high-potential industries and occupations, as well as in-demand services. Additionally, they can glean insights into strategies that may help them succeed in the labor market — for example:

## 1. Leverage available resources to continue upskilling and expanding expertise

Success in a gig career depends on having not only knowledge and skill sets related to the type of work but also the entrepreneurial savvy that helps in running a successful business, regardless of the industry. Some examples are soft skills training opportunities and entrepreneurial resources in business management, finance and marketing.

## 2. Understand and respect employer perspectives

As discussed in this report, some employers have concerns about contracting gig workers. The contractor needs to alleviate those concerns through honesty, open communication and a collaborative spirit. For example, an employer may worry that a gig worker won't be as engaged as a full-time employee or that their quality of work may not be up to par. A gig worker who anticipates these concerns and demonstrates enthusiasm, integrity and steadfast commitment to quality and productivity will win the day.





# How Tri-C is Helping Gig Workers and Employers

With the lowest tuition in Ohio and campuses, locations and community access centers across Cuyahoga County, Tri-C makes it easy and affordable for gig workers to gain additional skills. Most gig workers have at least an associate degree and/or some form of technical or specialized skill. However, they may benefit from a more flexible route to additional skill development and training. As an alternative to traditional education pathways, Tri-C offers fully online programs, competency-based education, online/hybrid classes and compressed schedules for faster completion. These resources provide gig workers with the skills to be more successful while working, regardless of their education level.

Additional approaches Tri-C is taking to further engage and support current and aspiring gig workers include:

## 1. Building greater community awareness of gig workforce opportunities

Public understanding of the nature of gig work, along with the top industries and occupations for gig work, is limited. Through this report, Tri-C has taken a leadership role in developing and disseminating critical information about the Northeast Ohio gig workforce and how this untapped resource can be a solution for organizations with talent shortages.

## 2. Promoting existing curricula, programs and resources as assets for gig workers

While each gig worker may bring a specialized skill set to the table — e.g., computer skills, design expertise or health care knowledge — they may lack the skills to manage the entrepreneurial side of their business.

Tri-C offers professional development training and small business programs through its Corporate College® campuses. Many of these programs are self-paced and can be completed entirely online.

Classes focus on critical business management skills such as finance, digital marketing, sales, leadership, communication and writing, project management and more.

Tri-C also offers post-degree certificates for associate and bachelor's degree recipients who want to broaden their skill sets. These short-term, in-demand programs are designed for working adults and are scholarship-eligible.

## 3. Collaborating with business stakeholders and gig workers on curriculum development to align skills being taught with market opportunities

Tri-C engages with a network of community stakeholders — business owners, students, workers and employers — to launch and evolve programs that are relevant to employer needs.

Current students and alumni engaged in gig work are also being tapped to serve as ambassadors and sources of insight: Which programs or courses have helped them excel? How might these educational opportunities help others excel? What additional programs would they like to see?

## 4. Investing in and promoting resources for entrepreneurial development

Corporate College recently launched a Center for Entrepreneurs to provide training and services to help entrepreneurs and gig workers launch or grow a business.

Classes are organized by four tracks corresponding to the stages of business growth — from defining an idea to expanding an established operation.

Messaging aimed at gig-minded individuals and entrepreneurs highlights access to experienced instructors, specific outcomes, accessibility and scholarship availability.

The Center for Entrepreneurs also includes a podcast studio that offers:

- Courses on running a show, hosting, interviewing and editing
- Reliable technicians and professional equipment
- Rentable space for independent recording



# Conclusion

Gig workers are not a homogenous set of workers in a concentrated set of industries. They possess diverse skill sets and span a variety of sectors. This report's findings offer valuable insights into the viability of this group as a largely untapped talent asset in the Northeast Ohio region.

The findings on gig workers' relatively high levels of educational attainment, specialized skills, entrepreneurial mindset and desire for flexibility shed light on the need to reassess our understanding of work and education beyond traditional settings. In short, there is great potential for integrating gig workers into the regional workforce while fulfilling their needs for ongoing education and support.



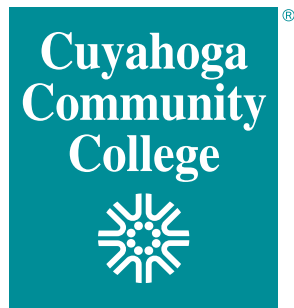
For Northeast Ohio, these findings present several opportunities to reshape our response to the post-pandemic workforce and better integrate and support gig workers in the labor market. These include:

- Recognizing the benefits of gig work within the larger talent ecosystem and the potential these workers can unlock for the overall workforce
- Supporting employers who may not have structures and policies in place that enable them to integrate gig workers into their workflows and collaborative processes
- Building awareness among aspiring and practicing gig workers of the educational programs that meet their needs in terms of both specialized skills and the entrepreneurial skills every contractor needs to succeed
- Investing in resources to address the issues of diversity, equity and inclusion for underrepresented women and minority workers

Northeast Ohio's talent challenge is real and requires urgency to continue to grow the economy and drive prosperity and opportunity for all residents. While there are no silver bullets, gig workers and an effective multifaceted engagement strategy could be a very meaningful component in driving change.







[tri-c.edu/gigreport](https://tri-c.edu/gigreport)

