



Briefing Paper

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Recommendations for Improving Women's Employment in the Recovery

By the Womens Scholars Forum

In the current economic recovery, women are facing a gap in employment that jeopardizes the well-being and economic security of themselves and their families. This briefing paper, prepared by a group of scholars and researchers collaborating as the Womens Scholars Forum, proposes specific strategies to meet the needs of women facing joblessness in the recovery from the Great Recession of 2007–2009. This group, noting that women's earnings are essential to the welfare of their families, is especially concerned that federal programs reach those most in need, including single mothers, women of color, and those with less education. The members of the Womens Scholars Forum, listed below, offer these recommendations in order to achieve job growth and economic prosperity.

While the Great Recession caused much larger job losses among men, the recovery is leaving women behind. Recent research by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), based on the latest Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) employment numbers through July, shows that while men have recovered nearly 30 percent of the jobs they lost as a result of the recent recession, women have regained only 10 percent of the jobs they lost. Furthermore, in July, according to the BLS, men gained 136,000 jobs and women lost 19,000. (IWPR Quick Figure Q008, August Update, http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/growing-job-gap-between-women-and-men-monthly-number-of-women-and-men-on-payrolls-seasonally-adjusted-january-2007-2013july-2011/at_download/file)

Our recommendations are organized in three parts. The first part proposes several major 'single-bullet' approaches. The second part addresses improving the employment of women in male-dominated jobs typically found in the energy, transportation, and construction industries. The third addresses the need to strengthen human infrastructure and increase support for caring labor.

Part 1. 'Big' Ideas

- 1. Make federal transfers available to state and local governments to replace their lost revenues and enable them to hire back the teachers, case workers, nurses and others they have laid off.** This fast-acting strategy would have a significant positive impact on employment for women. This action would be similar to the Obama administration's initial stimulus transfers, but would focus on replacing jobs that have been cut.
- 2. Expand the length of the school day and the length of the school year.** Assistance to enable public schools to increase the hours that students are in school could come in the form of federal grants for which interested schools would apply. Eligibility could be limited to schools with lower achievement levels since those would be expected to benefit the most from increased instruction hours. This proposal has the virtue of the federal government seeding an overall

improvement in education (and not just helping states and localities fill current holes in their budgets). The grants would have to be large enough to allow public schools to meet all the increased cost of expanded hours, but the grant funds would be limited to several years. Beyond those initial years, the school systems would cover the costs of expanded school hours without federal assistance.

3. **Create an Urban Conservation Corps targeted at employing young women and men.** This should be a large-scale program modeled on successful smaller programs like City Year, an AmeriCorps after-school service program for volunteers aged 17–24, and Youth Build, a federally-funded training and neighborhood revitalization program for inner-city youth. The Urban Conservation Corps program would involve partnerships with labor unions to provide skills training at the same time cities in need are revitalized. Jobs created could include both construction jobs and a variety of service jobs such as improving the use of local foods in the schools and providing direct care services to children during and after school.
4. **Create a simple home weatherizing program.** A simple ‘weatherizing’ program is painting the exteriors of homes. The federal government could subsidize house painting for the residences of lower-income households, through firms that employ 50 percent women and 30 percent minorities. Additional weatherizing could be done in the same way (the low take up rate of the current weatherization effort should be studied in order to increase take up).
5. **Fund child care.** There are easily one-quarter million children on waiting lists for child care subsidies; funding subsidies for these families would both create jobs and improve the standard of living of low- and moderate-income families. Currently, many of these families are paying the full cost of child care or using child care that does not meet quality standards. The regulations should be changed to make low-income families whose parents are looking for work or enrolled in higher education eligible for the child care subsidies. Tax incentives to businesses that provide child care subsidies is an alternative delivery mechanism that could be pursued, although note that this mechanism would not make child care available to student parents without jobs or parents looking for work.
6. **Adopt tax incentives for businesses that offer their employees work-life balance and expand unemployment insurance (UI) benefits for workers with reduced working hours.** Dean Baker, co director of the Center for Economic Policy Research (CEPR), has previously proposed several ideas that enable employers to keep employees that they might otherwise be forced to lay off, including:
 - a) using tax incentives to reward employers who increase paid time off in the form of additional paid sick days, paid holidays, or paid vacation days (essentially subsidizing part of the employer’s wage bill and resulting in fewer layoffs); the tax incentives would be time-limited and would phase out as the unemployment rate improves; and
 - b) expanding the use of unemployment insurance (UI) benefits for workers whose working hours are reduced (in addition to those who lose their jobs); much greater use of this option is made in Germany, for example, and the U.S. system needs to be adjusted to make this type of hours reduction more readily accessible so that layoffs are avoided.

Part 2. Improving the Employment of Women in Male-Dominated Jobs

Ensuring that women get their fair share of jobs that are nontraditional for women—such as technical and craft jobs in construction, transportation, and green energy—is a longstanding aim of the women’s movement. It is also particularly important in the recovery that women have equal access to jobs that are

supported by federal dollars or federally-guaranteed loans. To this end, employment goals must be established and compliance with regulations must be strengthened

Women's share of these jobs is woefully low—generally below 10 percent in most specific occupations. Apprenticeship programs and other forms of job training (to be provided by public, private, and non-profit employers) should be subsidized and monitored to ensure the programs will reach both young adults first entering the workforce and displaced workers in need of retraining, as well as all populations who are nontraditional for these jobs. In addition, child care subsidies for trainees and flexible training hours must be provided. Every large project should have an Equal Employment Opportunity Officer (EEO) officer onsite and all projects should meet EEO goals. Federal enforcement agencies must be expanded to improve equal opportunity in all employment areas.

Part 3. Strengthening Human Infrastructure and Supporting Caring Labor

Finally, many types of jobs that are underfunded in the best of times are now being cut back severely, and these jobs are done predominantly by women. These are the jobs that provide direct care to children, disabled adults, and the elderly or that support artistic and cultural institutions and the nonprofit community. Examples of jobs that can be expanded or created include:

- home health aides for the elderly and disabled;
- additional assistants in nursing homes, trained at a lesser level than a certified nursing assistant (CNA), to serve as helpers to CNAs, who could be put to work quickly;
- respite care aides to allow regular family caregivers of the disabled and elderly to take needed breaks;
- teachers aides in classrooms;
- additional educational aides to assist adults in ESL and computer literacy;
- counselors to provide information and assistance on a variety of consumer rights issues, such as those involved in housing (both rental and owned) and credit instruments such as car loans, payday loans, and credit cards;
- counselors, health technicians, and aides in domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers, and other emergency and crisis services;
- website and graphic designers to assist nonprofits and public agencies in making their websites, online, and printed materials more accessible and useful to the public;
- archivists to sort and archive the records of important nonprofits and government agencies;
- master gardeners and others to develop gardens for public and nonprofit agencies;
- assistants to welcome and provide information to visitors from other lands;
- library assistants who could read with children (among other responsibilities);
- neighborhood assistants would could check in on the elderly and disabled especially during heat waves and other disasters;
- cleaning personnel to assist in keeping public and nonprofit facilities clean (much needed in the face of budget cutbacks everywhere);
- assistants in day care centers and after school care programs, including expansion of the federally-funded Foster Grandparents program; and,
- recreation and athletic facility assistants

All workers, including home health care providers, must be protected by the provisions in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), either by rule-making or through new legislation such as the proposed Direct Care Job Quality Improvement Act, H.R. 2341 & S. 1273.

The Womens Scholars Forum recommends a major emphasis on social and cultural infrastructure in any ‘infrastructure bank’ that is supported by the federal government. A pool of funds should be designated for building and repairing the physical infrastructure that supports human services, arts, and culture—such as schools, health care centers, shelters, and cultural and arts facilities.

In addition, we would like to see a new infusion of federal grant funding, especially providing more funding to existing grants programs, that would provide funds to local governments and qualifying organizations such as hospitals, museums, arts and media organizations, as well as to other nonprofits providing human and cultural services to provide jobs that can fully staff these new and repaired facilities, in addition to jobs to meet the needs of the existing programs and facilities.

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky is currently developing a bill that offers an excellent example of job-creating strategies. The bill would create more than 2 million jobs—many of them in human services, including community protection like police and fire—paid for through cutting tax loopholes and increasing revenues raised from millionaires and billionaires. These jobs would be funded through existing federal government programs that would be expanded with the new revenue stream. For example, through the legislation Rep. Schakowsky is developing, child care workers would be funded through Early Head Start.

According to the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, investing in social sector jobs, such as early childhood education and home-based care, generates the most jobs per \$1 invested and also provides the most jobs to the most vulnerable groups of unemployed. Investing in care jobs creates twice the number of jobs as the same investment in physical infrastructure and 1.5 times the number of jobs as the same investment in green energy. The Levy Institute recommends grants to state and local government enabling them to increase funding for teaching, child care, and home health care.

The New America Foundation has developed a program of Dignity Vouchers that would subsidize the cost of home aides for the elderly, similar to programs that exist in several European countries. The foundation notes that many current workers must curtail their employment (or experience reduced productivity while at work and higher health care costs for themselves and their employers) because of providing care for their elderly relatives and others who need direct care. Making care more accessible and affordable can be expected to reduce the costs of lost productivity and increased health care costs currently borne by employees and employers.

The proposals listed in this briefing paper include the revitalization of services that are crucial to maintaining the health and well-being of Americans and expanding our human capital through improving education, arts, and culture. Proposals such as these would also help to restore and improve the economic security of women and their families, by improving access to jobs, skills training, and higher education..

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