



Job Quality Fellowship Overview – Transcript

Hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Description

Improving job quality improves livelihoods and often transforms lives. Low-wage work in the US economy is far too pervasive. According to a Brookings Institution 2019 report, 53 million workers (44% of all 18-64 working adults) earn low hourly wages. While the economy has expanded, too few workers share in the benefits. The time is now to address the challenge directly and focus on improving job quality for millions who work hard and contribute to our economy. We can no longer afford to have hard working people excluded from the abundance of our economy and marginalized by our society. We need to focus in this moment on the opportunities we have to improve the quality of jobs, and the lives and livelihoods of millions of individuals and families. And that is the theme for the 2022/2023 Job Quality Fellowship.

On Tuesday, November 30, we hosted an informational webinar about the Job Quality Fellowship. We were pleased to welcome two Job Quality Fellows to this conversation—Amanda Cage, president and CEO of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, and Jess Kutch, co-founder and co-executive director of Coworker.org—who discussed their efforts to advance job quality and their experience as members of the Fellowship.

Learn more about this event: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/job-quality-fellowship-overview/>

Speakers

Amanda Cage

President and CEO, National Fund for Workforce Solutions

Amanda Cage is the president and CEO of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. Amanda joined the National Fund in March 2020, bringing more than 25 years of federal workforce system, grantmaking, and organized labor experience to the organization. Throughout her career, Amanda has focused on ensuring economic inclusion and stability for workers and their families. Most recently, she served as the chief program officer at the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. There she managed a \$70 million portfolio of public and private funding and a network of over 50 agencies for the country's second largest workforce system. Before that, Amanda served as director of human capital strategy for the Chicago Workforce Investment Council, where she led a citywide effort to increase Chicago's

competitiveness in a global economy. For five years, she led the workforce development portfolio at the McCormick Foundation, and she was the 2004 J. Ira & Nicki Harris Foundation Fellow at the Chicago Community Trust.

Amanda started her career as a labor organizer working for Jobs with Justice and the Service Employees International Union and was a Trade Union Program Fellow at Harvard Law School. She is an Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program 2017-2018 Job Quality Fellow and a 2019 Leadership Greater Chicago Fellow. Amanda sits on the board of WorkRise, a research-to-action network on jobs, workers, and mobility and sits on the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago's Advisory Council on Agriculture, Small Business and Labor. Amanda earned a bachelor's degree from Oberlin College and a master's degree in public policy from the Harris School at the University of Chicago.

Amanda Cage is a member of the Job Quality Fellowship Class of 2017-18. To learn more about the Job Quality Fellows, visit as.pn/jobquality.

Jess Kutch

Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director, Coworker.org

Jess Kutch is the co-founder of Coworker.org, a platform for people to advance solutions in the workplace. Since its founding in 2013, Coworker.org has catalyzed the growth of global, independent employee networks advancing wins like paid parental leave benefits at Netflix, scheduling reform at Starbucks, and wage increases for workers at a Southern restaurant chain. In 2015, Coworker.org hosted the first-ever digital townhall at the White House on the future of worker voice with President Obama.

A digital innovator, Jess has 15 years' experience working at the intersection of technology and social change. Prior to launching Coworker.org, Jess lead a team at Change.org in raising the company's profile around the world and inspiring hundreds of thousands of people to launch and lead their own efforts on the platform. Jess also spent five years at the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) where she pioneered digital strategies for the labor movement. Jess is an Echoing Green Global Fellow and J.M. Kaplan Innovation Prize winner. She's a graduate of Bennington College and currently lives in North Carolina with her partner, Rebecca, and their young son.

Jess Kutch is a member of the Job Quality Fellowship Class of 2017-18. To learn more about the Job Quality Fellows, visit as.pn/jobquality.

Moderator

Maureen Conway

Vice President, The Aspen Institute; Executive Director, Economic Opportunities Program

Maureen Conway serves as vice president at the Aspen Institute and executive director of the Institute's Economic Opportunities Program (EOP). EOP works to expand individuals' opportunities to connect to quality work, start businesses, and build economic stability that provides the freedom to pursue opportunity. Maureen founded EOP's Workforce Strategies Initiative and has headed up workforce research at the Aspen Institute since 1999. Maureen also curates a public discussion series at the Aspen Institute, Opportunity in America, which brings together voices from business, labor, policy, human services, media, academia, and others to discuss the challenges experienced by many in today's labor markets and new ideas for addressing these challenges. In addition, Maureen oversees EOP's

leadership development programs, which connect innovators, both within communities and from across the country, to peers working to help low- and moderate-income Americans access opportunity.

About

The Job Quality Fellowship is part of the [Economic Opportunity Fellows Network](#), a network of leadership and fellowship programs run by the Aspen Institute [Economic Opportunities Program](#). Within this Network, EOP connects national and local leaders from across sectors — nonprofit, government, business, philanthropy, academia, and more — to advance policies and practices with the potential to help low- and moderate-income Americans thrive in today's economy. Learn more at as.pn/eofn.

We are grateful to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Prudential Financial, and the Surdna Foundation for their support of this work.

Transcript

Maureen Conway (00:03)

Good afternoon, and welcome. I'm Maureen Conway, Vice President at the Aspen Institute and Executive Director of the Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program. And I am delighted to welcome you to today's conversation on our Job Quality Fellowship that we are just beginning the recruitment for. So excited to talk to everybody about that. I'm thrilled also to be joined today by two Job Quality Fellows, and we will get to that in a minute.

So what we're going to do in today's conversation. So in a moment, I'll do a quick technology review. Then I'm going to give a little bit of background about the Job Quality Fellowship. Then we'll have a nice conversation with a couple of former fellows, so you can maybe get a feel for things. And really we do want to take your questions about the fellowship. So please do use the Q&A box at the bottom of your screen to pose any and all questions that you might have about our Job Quality Fellowship.

I also do want to give special thanks to Prudential Financial, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Surdna Foundation for their support of our Job Quality Fellowship initiative. And thanks to all of you for joining us today. So on the technology, before we begin, just to note, all attendees are muted. We will be handling, as I mentioned, your questions through the Q&A box. So please do put questions there, but feel free to introduce yourself, share resources or other kinds of things in the chat function.

If you have any technical issues, please chat to us or also you can email us at eop.program@aspeninstitute.org. The webinar is being recorded and we'll share the recording on our website. So no need to take notes. You can listen and engage and go back to it later, if you'd like to. Closed captions are also available for this discussion. So just click the CC button at the bottom of your screen to activate closed captions, if you'd like to use that option.

Okay. So just briefly on our timeline where we are in the application process. So right now, you can submit nominations, you can nominate yourself, you can nominate somebody else. The nominations will close December 15. You have to be nominated to get an application. So it's important to nominate yourself to be in the nomination pool. We review the nominations on a rolling basis to determine eligibility. Eligible nominations will receive an application not later than December 17. We review for eligibility in batches and send them out. And applications are due January 4 at 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time. And we're firm on the deadline, because that way we can make sure we have a fair process. And we'll be announcing the fellows early in February. So that's the timeline for the process.

And just a little background on the fellowship itself. So the fellowship launched in 2017. And at that time, we were interested in highlighting a diverse set of leaders who are focused on the problems in our labor markets. A key avenue obviously to economic opportunity is through work, but as we've been trying to connect to a little work to expand their ability to access quality economic opportunity, we are finding that too many people are connected to work that doesn't really give them a sustainable livelihood or a path forward.

I think we keep focusing on providing services to individuals to help them, but we're not focused enough on the system of employment. And so the Job Quality Fellowship is really for people who are interested in that, how do we focus less on fixing workers and focus more on fixing work? And I think really that the pandemic underscored this situation. We saw essential workers and we saw that their work is important, but their work is not providing them a dignified livelihood. Too many of them are exposed to dangers in their work, dangerous working conditions. And yet we rely on this labor for all of our livelihoods to meet our needs for food, for healthcare, for childcare, transportation, and more.

So really addressing this, what we call a job quality crisis is the work of the Job Quality Fellowship. And the Job Quality Fellowship aims to support and celebrate change makers who are doing this work. So, as I mentioned, the first two cohorts of fellows were intentionally diverse drawing fellows both from business, from labor, from education, from local government, community development finance and more. And that's because we believe all actors really can play a role in addressing the job quality crisis. But this particular fellowship, we're developing a narrower focus than those first two classes. And we're really interested in this intersection between workforce development and worker organizing and advocacy.

Leaders in both of these fields have a strong interest in job quality, but they have different strategic approaches, philosophies, they have different organizational assets. So this cohort of fellows will explore the possibilities for these two fields to leverage each other's strengths towards shared goals. So we expect for this class of fellows that about half will come from workforce development and the other half will come from labor unions, worker centers and other organizations involved in expanding worker power and advancing worker rights. So that is the frame for this fellowship.

So I think that's what I will stop, because now I get to introduce two wonderful both fellows who are amazing exemplars of this. So today, we have with us Amanda Cage, president and CEO of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, Amanda joined the National Fund in March 2020, bringing 25 years of federal workforce system grant making and organized labor experience to National Fund. And prior to taking on the leadership of the National Fund, Amanda was the chief program officer at the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, which is the role she was in when we met her as a job quality fellow. So we're just really thrilled, Amanda, that you could join us today. Thanks for being with us.

And Jess Kutch is the co-founder and co-executive director of Coworker.org. Lots of cos there. Coworker.org deploys digital tools, data and strategies and service of helping people improve their work lives. Jess has over 15 years experience innovating at the intersection of technology and social change, including building platforms and digital campaigns to shift power and win change. Coworker.org hosted the first digital Town Hall on the Future of Worker Voice at the White House, which I remember back in 2015. And that was exciting. And Jess has also significant experience with SEIU prior to launching Coworker.org. So I think she has a really interesting experience of thinking about these questions of worker organizing and worker power building from a variety of different angles and really thinking about the ways technology is changing our economy and the ways technology can change things for workers in different ways. I think that's an exciting experience to bring into this conversation. So thank you, Jess, for joining us today.

And I will now just jump into our conversation. You've both been advancing job quality for a while. And I guess just to start, I'm going to ask you both, if you could think about act to when you found out about

the Job Quality Fellowship and think about what drew you to apply to it, why did you think it was an interesting opportunity for you, and maybe share a few highlights of your experience as a job quality fellow and how it's impacted your work. And Amanda, let me start with you.

Amanda Cage (09:01)

Sure. And thank you, Maureen, for having us here today. It's very exciting that there's going to be a third cohort of the Job Quality Fellowship. So when I was part of the job quality fellowship, I had been in the workforce development field for about a dozen years, half of that in philanthropy and half of that as part of the public workforce system. And I had watched us go in and out of a recession where a lot of people lost their jobs and the public workforce in particular really was a lifeline to folks as they were dealing with that disruption in their lives. And in some places we were doing a really good job for folks who came into the workforce development system, who were able to get training, maybe connect a little career counseling, connect to a new industry or occupation. We were able to do something for those folks.

But there were people that we really weren't able to do as much for as we thought. There were a number of people who came into that situation who were living paycheck to paycheck before they were laid off or lost their jobs or people who were laid off and lost their jobs and had depleted their savings while were unemployed. And they just didn't have the time and the money to engage in training. And for those folks, we just tried to get them back into the workplace. And I felt like at times we were just shoveling people back into bad jobs. And I thought to myself, "What are we doing? Really, if we believe in economic mobility and stability, why are we not doing more to help folks who may not have access to training for a variety of reasons? How do we help them at this moment of crisis to get into a different situation?" And so I was really interested in that.

I often say that in workforce development, quality jobs is the third rail. We don't talk about that. Employers play a very important role in our work, and whatever they say goes and we are excited that they're working with us. And so we don't question them and we don't question their workforce practices, we don't question the kinds of jobs they had. And so that really, when I saw the Job Quality Fellowship, the idea of sitting around a room with other people talking about this issue that I felt like I was never able to talk about was really appealing.

I will say that there a couple things that were really meaningful to me around the Job Quality Fellowship. The first is I anticipated that the group would be a lot of worker advocates. And when I got to the Job Quality Fellowship, there are people who represented so many different sectors of the work. And I was surprised by that. And it was very heartening to me to see that people in community colleges and CDFIs, employers, businesses were part of this, what I thought of as a movement that had this little group of folks.

So I got to see people working on this issue from lots of different angles. And obviously the biggest change for me is I love my job. I love my job to come and be the CEO of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. And I am incredibly proud to lead an organization that was on the forefront of this conversation, really when people weren't talking about it. And I'm very excited to continue that work.

Maureen Conway (12:34)

Great. Thanks, Amanda. Jess, let's hear from you.

Jess Kutch (12:38)

Yeah. I was thinking back to what was going on at the time of applying for the application. I think Coworker had been in existence about five years. When we created the organization and launched it

in 2013, a lot of folks asked us, "Well, if people are unhappy with their jobs, why don't they just quit and find a better job?" This idea that folks would maybe risk their own circumstances to organize with coworkers and try to affect change oftentimes outside the traditional union context seemed like a very strange idea to many people. And one of our early objectives was to popularize workplace organizing.

And people weren't even talking about worker voice in 2013. That wasn't in a nomenclature. But we saw indications of people leveraging popular technology to try to network with their peers, to get information out to the public, to engage consumers about what was going on in their workplace. And we saw great potential there. And so around the time of 2016, 2017, you really started to see that bubbling up in the popular culture. I think the market basket strike, it was in the summer of 2014, and that was, at the time, one of the largest strikes, I believe that occurred that year organized by mostly middle managers inside this non-union grocery store chain in New England. And after two to three month long strike, they were able to achieve their objective, which was returning the ownership back to the original owners. But it was just an interesting example of how workers used social media and digital tools to engage with the public, to recruit community support, even engaging with other unions to get some support and solidarity to try to affect change.

So around the time of applying for the Job Quality Fellowship, I think there was a general shift in how people were thinking about what the labor movement is and how workers were engaging employers and coworkers to try to improve their working conditions outside of the traditional union context or as part of it. So yeah. I was interested in Aspen, because I don't have many opera opportunities to sit down with folks from the business community or the workforce development community and hear how they're thinking about these worker uprisings or how are they challenged by this issue of job quality and what are the solutions that they go towards versus what I instinctively go towards and where is their common ground.

I think one of the highlights for me was getting to hear from a senior person inside Walmart just how they were confronting an issue that was actively being campaigned on by Walmart associates on Coworker.org at the time. And I got to share like this is what we're seeing, this is what associates are saying, employees are saying. And just hearing how people think about these problems is helpful for me in strengthening my arguments, my approach, our organization's approach to supporting workers. So I just think it's extremely valuable to have that safe space to share thinking. It's not like my mind was changed on anything, but I can appreciate where other folks are coming from, and I can see where the common ground is. And also, it strengthens my thinking.

I also got an opportunity to speak to the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, members of the Federal Reserve, which is probably not an opportunity that would've occurred without Aspen. And I think that as a cohort, we really did come together and form friendships. And that time together, it did not just surface like opportunities to collaborate with just relationships in the field, which I think is undervalued, but is so useful over the long term. And in the midst of this great resignation that we're all experiencing, I think the issue of job quality is becoming ever more urgent. As what you said, Maureen, it's not a labor shortage, it's a job quality crisis. And so the opportunities for us to continue to work other, I think are only going to grow.

Maureen Conway (17:20)

Great. Thank you. That's perfect. And I think you've started to lay the ground for my next questions to both of you, which is really what you think about this particular focus for the Job Quality Fellowship? Amanda, you have a long career in workforce development, but also some experience in worker organizing. And I was just curious what your reaction was for this and what you would hope this group would work on? Yeah.

Amanda Cage (17:54)

Yeah. So before being involved in the public workforce system, I was a union organizer for a decade. And I came into that work obviously out of a deep commitment to workers and their right to organize. And then when I came into the workforce development system, I was shocked and surprised at how much the workforce development system, how little they knew about labor history or worker organizing or unions. And that's a testament to the decimation of the labor movement in this country that there are so few people who have experience with unions that it's a foreign land to them. And it seems so odd given that they have this common goal, which is to improve the life of workers. Work for people and workforce development, see that is one of their main goals and definitely within, within the union movement.

It was even a little more surprising given how many unions are really critical within workforce training, which is a key aspect of workforce development in addition to the building trainings, which is where you get your training. If are in the building trades, you get your training through unions. SEIU has amazing training and worker training in healthcare, UNITE HERE in Culinary. So the fact that these two worlds didn't intersect was a little quite frankly confusing, but it's true. And I think what's really interesting about this moment is this real opportunity in this moment where there's a lot of conversation and talk around worker leverage, worker power for these two fields to really get to know each other.

And I would say from the workforce development side, I think the union movement and the labor movement have a lot to teach around things like equity and fairness and democracy and worker voice, which are just tenets of all the work that the labor movement does, but also in dealing with employers. The piece of unionism that people mostly don't see is the ongoing negotiation with employers. They usually see that union organizing drive, but once you do that, you continue to negotiate with employers about what working conditions look like. And again, I think that's something that workforce development can learn from the labor movement.

And then I will also say as somebody who knew... My experience in the union movement was I worked for a number of unions. I did a lot of work across unions with community organization, which at the time, we thought was just radical work. And now it's a little more commonplace. But coming into the Job Quality Fellowship, I didn't know about organizations like Jess's. So even though I felt like I knew how unions worked, I had worked with union locals, there was so much new worker organizing happening and organizations like Coworker, organizations like the National Domestic Workers Alliance, that there was still things to learn. So I would say, even if you're coming and you've been in the union movement for a long time, there's pieces that you can learn across the board.

Maureen Conway (21:26)

Yeah. Great. Jess, a similar question for you, how you think about this topic at this time. And as a focus for the Job Quality Fellowship, Amanda, was touching on ways that union organizing has changed, but you also were touching on how people's perception of it is changing. So I guess I'm curious how you think about this topic at this time.

Jess Kutch (21:56)

Yeah. With strike-tober and strikes giving, I think in my life, the labor movement is more popular right now than it's ever been in my lifetime. And yet to Amanda's point, fewer people have direct lived experience with labor unions. So that's both the problem and an opportunity, because you also have an opportunity to reimagine what that looks like, what it means to be part of the labor movement. And so far as workforce development goes, I think because there is a hunger participate in this in some way, really equipping people with some knowledge and training about their rights in the workplace, their labor and employment rights, and whether that means accessing regulatory options to try to affect

change like OSHA, filing a ULP or engaging with unions and what that looks like, I think it's really important to somehow bundle that with workforce training.

And I'm interested in that conversation. I don't come from that world. And so I don't know what that could look like, but I think we get asked every day by workers that we're supporting in a variety of sectors, "What are my rights here? Is my manager allowed to do this?" Like, "Hey, this seems like it's unsafe, what should I do?" People don't know these things and it's like whether you're in union or not, that's a basic starting point to be able to start having a conversation with both maybe your supervisors, but also your coworkers that your rights are being violated and what you should do. So I'm hoping that can be something that comes out of this next cohort, maybe could be explored more is what that could look like.

Maureen Conway (23:43)

Yeah. Great. And I want to encourage the audience. I see that we're starting to get a few questions in the Q&A box, so please we're going to be getting to those soon. Yeah. So I do want to ask you to maybe say a little bit more about what you hope this next group would accomplish. I remember back when we started, when Mark Popovich and I started chatting with all of you and we built that statement of purpose, really building a shared vision, I think it surprised Mark and I, how much shared expectation there was on the group and how little disagreement there was about that statement. And I guess if you think about that experience, I'm wondering what you're hoping this group might accomplish with a narrower focus, what that could look like, if you have any thoughts about that.

Amanda Cage (24:44)

Yeah. I think part of it is just, Maureen, you mentioned earlier that each of these areas have their own approaches and philosophies and organizational assets. And I think it's really important anybody who's trying to make change, understand how other institutions work like that. And I think this is an amazing opportunity for folks, both coming from the labor movement and coming from workforce development. Both of those fields are hard for people to understand. There's all these acronyms. Both of them have these acronyms where it's almost like you have a secret language that you have that nobody understands, structures that are very different, procedures and processes. And I think it's important for folks to understand that about each other. So I know it sounds like boring, but I do think understanding that and the philosophy they bring to the work is really helpful for folks who are looking to work across the superficial lines that we create.

I would also say that personal connection that Jess mentioned earlier, those close professional relationships have made a huge difference for me in terms of having just a cadre of people who you know who are trying to do same thing, who're trying to do as sounding boards as thought partners, all of that good stuff. And those relationships have continued both with individuals. But I would say, as organizations have connected, I would say for folks to actually do work together. I think early in those days, we would still trying to define job quality. We were all about manifestos and treaties and statements and even gathering resources, like that's been done, we've done that. Congratulations to us, we did that work. Now, it's time just to use those things out in the field and spread them deep and spread them wide.

And I think there's a lot of opportunity right now given all the dynamics that COVID exposed, like who would I thank? I would pay attention to the labor market for a living. I did not think at this point, we would have people say no to work, because the working conditions are just that bad. I didn't see that coming. And so the fact that we're in this moment where we are just hearing a lot about how work needs to be reworked, this is really an opportunity to make a lot of change on the ground.

Maureen Conway (27:26)

Great. Jess, do you want to add anything than that?

Jess Kutch (27:30)

Yeah. Plus one to all of that. I share Amanda's thinking in that. It would be great to see some projects really emerge from this next cohort. And just a moment we're in seems rich with opportunity. I know there are many sectors complaining about hiring and retention, and so it really does seem like a new moment to have an opportunity about job quality within the context of worker voice and workforce development. So I'm just hoping some experiments emerge from that.

And then I would also say, I would love to see some thinking done around how technology is changing the way we work and what impact that has on job quality and worker voice, issues like algorithmic management. Coworker just put out a report that covers 500 different pieces of surveillance technology that's in use in workplaces around the world. So just thinking about how those changes require maybe some different approaches in our field to address the needs that workers have. I would love to see some, some collaboration on that.

Maureen Conway (28:46)

Yeah. Great. Good. And I look forward to reading that report. Okay. So I'm going to start just diving into these questions. I see we have a critical mass here. So I can see how many questions we can answer in a short time. So let's see. If I start with what's now at the top of my screen, what role does economic development play at state and regional levels as it relates to supporting job quality? Should tax incentives structuring be a tool utilized to support the quality of jobs created in region? Is it a function of incentives to do this?

I think those are all good questions about economic development and the role that economic development should play. I think you could probably find different opinions within the Job Quality Fellowship about that. I certainly have my opinions about what role economic development should play since I have a master's in that, but I don't know if either of you want to add anything to that? Have any say? Okay.

Amanda Cage (29:54)

I'll add something to that, because I will say that, especially as it's structured both at the state level and usually at the city or municipality or county level, workforce development is really driven by economic development. When you think about who oversees those resources that come on the ground, oftentimes it is really deployed with an eye towards how do we attract and retain businesses in our locality. And so workforce development is one of those strategies. So workforce development is often part and parcel with economic development, just in terms of how that work happens on the ground.

Maureen Conway (30:39)

Yeah. Okay. Yeah, that is true, although I do think that there are some issues with sometimes how the tax incentives are structured, but there we are. Is there a specific role of person? I'm sorry, my computer seems to that. And I guess within an organization, is there a specific level of person was I believe the question that is now lost me. And so I guess I would say, you really do want to have some influence over programming in your organization. I think we're looking for people who have some experience to bring and who have some level of authority in their organization that they can think about the experience of the fellowship and make changes.

I will say one of the things that we try to do is our job at the Aspen Institute is to really understand the fellows work to try to document it, lift it up so that other people can learn from it. We really do think about job quality fellows as exemplars for people to learn from. So you want to think about whether you're in that role. That doesn't mean that you have to be the executive director of the organization. And sometimes the executive director of the organization can have trouble committing the time to be away from the organization for a period of days and be at meetings. So you want to think about that too. But you do want to have at least a senior role within the organization. I don't know if Amanda or Jess, if you have any thoughts on that question at all?

Amanda Cage (32:23)

I don't know if this is about your position in an organization, but when I applied for the Job Quality Fellowship, in terms of my own professional development, I felt like I was at a crossroads. I had done the work that I had done for a long time. I was committed to workforce development, but I needed to see it and experience in a new and different way where I felt I could be making... I had a senior enough position that I could make change and I could see this as a space to make change. So I would say for folks, especially people who are in your second or third decade of work, it was a great time for me to broaden my network. I had done a lot of work in Chicago. I had a lot of close colleagues and new, the scene while in Chicago. But it's a great opportunity to build a national network even if you do a lot of work locally.

And it's a real opportunity to just have a new view, to have all your assumptions and the way you think about things be challenged and to see things in a new light. So I would say even if you feel like you're on the old side for the Job Quality Fellowship to consider it.

Maureen Conway (33:44)

Great. If the primary purpose of our organization's work is not advocacy and organizing, should we assume that we are not a good fit for this year's cohort? I wouldn't say that, because I think most people in workforce development wouldn't characterize their primary work as advocacy and organizing. We are looking for people who are interested in influencing the quality of jobs in the labor markets that are relevant to them. So if that's your view of advocacy and organizing, yeah, then that's required, but it doesn't necessarily have to be advocacy and organizing in a narrow sense. I hope that was a clear answer to that question.

I would love to learn more about the logistics of the fellowship. What does being a fellow entail? Are the regular meetings with other fellows virtual and or in person? If so, are those meetings organized around the substantive focus of this year's... Are there guest speakers facilitators? Is there a stipend? So I'll go quickly through some of those. So the cadence that we have for meetings, because alas of our pandemic condition's ongoing, we're hoping to do a hybrid version of the fellowship. So we expect to have some virtual meetings in March and April, and then an in-person convening in May to do some virtual meetings, again, late summer, early fall, and then hopefully an in-person convening in early 2023, I guess that would be.

So having the fellow experience stretch over the course of an entire year, while mixing in person and virtual convenings. In the past, we've said, "Okay, here's the specific dates and times of our meetings and we want everybody to commit to be there on those specific days." Given where we are, we understand things change unpredictably. But we do hope people will commit to doing their best to be there to the best of their abilities. In terms of a stipend, there is not a stipend. However, for in-person meetings, we do pay all of your travel and lodging expenses and all of that, that sort of thing. So that I think is the answer on cadence. And I guess I'm just curious, Jess and Amanda, if you might comment on what you felt like the time commitment, good, was that hard or difficult or how that time commitment felt to you?

Jess Kutch (36:38)

I'll say, I wasn't sure going into it. I was really pleased with... It felt very manageable, the time commitment. And I found that the in person gatherings extremely valuable. And I think many of us travel too much, have too many in person meetings, so I don't say that lightly, it was actually valuable, it was worth it. And whether it was when we gathered in person in DC or on the Aspen campus in Colorado, just having that dedicated time with each other, I think is why we have the relationships we have today. So yeah.

Maureen Conway (37:16)

Great. Thank you. Okay. Does the Aspen team encourage candidates to have multiple nominators who may hold different roles, views of the candidate? Will the quality of nominations factor into the final review and selection of the candidate? For the nomination, you have to have at least one nomination. It can be yourself. We don't necessarily... What can I say about this? Some people do, some people don't. Certainly, if you have more nominations that can be influential, more information for us to consider. But we try to make this process not too burdensome. So it's certainly not required to have a multiple nominations. And I would say most candidates do not have multiples.

How large would the new cohort be? Okay. So we said we're going to choose 10, which probably means we'll choose 12, because I always end up in this situation where we have a whole lot of people apply, they're all great, I can't decide, I take extra. So anyway. So please apply, because I'm excited to learn about you and what you're doing. And I wish we could take more, but basically we take a little over what we've budgeted for essentially, and somehow manage to make it work.

So let's see. As you select the next cohort of fellows, will you have a focus on particular industries or sectors? Not really. This is the way we've narrowed it is by these two fields of practice, but not necessarily by industry sector or anything like that. Let's see. Lots of folks with great backgrounds in the public sector and organized labor, has Aspen considered applicants from the private sector who work in capacity building, economic development, braided funding, partnerships, etc? We are not saying what organization somebody needs to sit within, it's more asking do you work within either workforce development or in worker advocacy, worker organizing. So public sector applicants are nonprofit, private sector, depending on the work of the organization, it could be a fit. So just take a look at the material, see if you think that, that makes sense for you.

Just mentioned getting in a room with one big employer, Walmart. In what other ways have employers been involved in the fellowship? And there was that question about guest speakers. So we do have guest speakers sometimes. And we had a smaller employer in the second round of the fellowship. There's different opportunities for thinking about involving employers as guest speakers. We have had people come as guest speakers as well to think about different employment models and how that can work to support job quality. So yeah. So there are a variety of ways for employers to be involved. And if you have questions, if you think I have something to contribute to this, but I'm not sure I'm a fit as a fellow, we'd love to hear from you. And please send an email to eop.program@aspeninstitute.org. We'd love to hear your ideas.

Okay. I think I answered the question around logistics and time commitment. Are the issues just raised around technology and algorithmic management a potential focus of this fellowship? So Jess, maybe you have a future as a guest speaker on this. I should say that I think one of the things we try to do in our early meetings with the fellows is try to help them get to know each other and help them find some things that they want to focus on together. So there's a maybe for you. Jess, do you have anything that you want to add about what you would hope the fellows might do on this topic?

Jess Kutch (41:49)

Well, I'll just say what I think you were saying is it's up to the fellows to really determine what they want to focus on. And maybe that's not clear. You all from Aspen, didn't come in and say, "This is what you should do, it was really what we decided as a group." So I think it will depend in large part on who is assembled, who's part of this cohort, what expertise do they have and going from there. But yeah, I would love to have some folks that have experience dealing with the impact of technology in the workplace and with workers makes... I guess I'll keep an eye out for who's in the cohort would love to stay involved.

Maureen Conway (42:32)

Okay. So there's a question about given the challenge with COVID, the expectations of in person engagement versus online interaction with the fellowship. This is something that we're all dealing with. As I mentioned, our plan right now is this hybrid model. We're hoping to have some in person time, because I think while we've done a lot of convenings of different types, virtually over the past couple of years now, it's really hard to replace that in person connection. So we really are hoping to do that. The Institute has pretty careful and strict protocols about safety for in person gatherings. And obviously we follow local jurisdiction issues, but we also have our own protocols, because we really do want to make sure when we are in person that it's safe and that it's safe and a good experience for everybody. So that is the best answer I think I can give at this point in time about our in person might be. Yeah, I don't have anything else to say about that, I think.

Okay. Obviously not everyone who applies will be able to be part of the Job Quality Fellowship. Would Aspen consider releasing a reading list or share relevant material so that learning can be shared? Yes. So this could be useful to organizations who want to bring their staff on this job quality journey. So I chuckled a little bit, because I'm not sure when I gave people readings that they really liked the readings very much. But we are happy to share things that we do read, but also I think it is a goal of ours to share out from some of the conversations and try to distill information and some of the insights of the fellows in ways that, that can be shared out more broadly. So we will work on this and we will try to think of different formats and ways to share out. And we also did, I think, at one point develop a reading list, maybe it was in our second cohort. And I think we just circulated among the cohort, but that's a great idea to circulate it out. So I will keep that in mind. That's a good suggestion.

Let's see. All right. Now, this up-voting thing means these questions move around all over the place and I'm losing track. Let's see. Can we solicit nominations from colleagues? Absolutely. Please do. How many nominated-

Amanda Cage (45:24)

Can I also make a plug for nominate yourself. I'm pretty sure I nominated myself. Other people might have nominated me too, but I know I nominated myself. So do not feel like you can't nominate yourself.

Maureen Conway (45:39)

Now is not the time for shyness, nominate yourself. Yeah. And I think many, many nominees nominate themselves. So if that's your path, no shame. In fact, I think most people nominate themselves. Let's see. Can we solicit nominees... How many nominated individuals has an intent to apply for the program? The nomination form is very, very brief. And really the nomination form is only meant to screen for eligibility. So most people who fill out the nomination form, we're just looking to see if you're... So, for example, we're trying to not have people who are doing research in the think tank apply for this fellowship, because they think that they do fellowships. So things like that. It's a very broad screen. So we expect

that most people who are broadly eligible, we will then send an application, but we want to make sure not to waste anybody's time applying that it's just not a good fit for.

How many the out-of-state meetings are there? And does Aspen cover these? So yes, we cover these. We like to, being the Aspen Institute, meet in Aspen. And it's a really nice place to have a group come together and bond. Excuse me, I'm a little frog. And so we hope that we'll be able to bring this cohort out to Aspen, to have a nice Aspen experience, but we'll see. But we cover all of the transportation expenses and all of that. So for this fellowship, I think we were hoping to have one meeting in Aspen and one meeting in DC, because that can also offer some networking opportunities, but we'll have to see how that works out.

Are you considering nominations from prior fellows? I hope prior fellows will absolutely nominate people who they think would be a good fit. They are great nominators and I hope that they will do that. Is there a monetary contribution to the fellow in their organization? That's a good question. I wish there were. I tried to raise money for that at various points and alas, unsuccessful. If you know a funder that would like to fund some challenge grants or something like to our job quality fellows, please let me know. I'll try my pitch again. But at present, no, there is not resources for that.

Excellent. Thank you very much. I have no shame about waving my team cup here. Okay. So let's see. I think most of these... Let's see. I think I answered that. Let's see. So can the next cohort expect similar opportunities for discourse? And if so, what is the structure nature of interact? Hopefully, we'll have a wide variety of opportunities for discourse, I should say. There's building relationships with the fellows. And then as I mentioned, we also do have guest faculty. Again, it's a matter of what the fellows want. So there's an opportunity for fellows to shape who's invited as guest faculty and how to have some of those relationship building opportunities as well.

So what kinds of qualities, characteristics, are you looking for in candidates? I don't know, tell better jokes than me. So I think really we are looking to be more honest, although telling better jokes than me would be helpful. People who are open to... I think you could hear from both Amanda and Jess, passion for their work, passion for the issue of job quality, open to hearing from people who have different ideas and experiences and backgrounds than you. Being willing to consider a different way of looking at a problem, being willing to think about how could I work across some institutional or jurisdictional lines or whatever, and really just being open to thinking creatively about how to address really a very, very challenging problem in our economy and society. So that I think is basically what I would say. And Jess and Amanda, I'm going to ask you, what would you say are good? What makes for a good fellow that you want to be in a fellow's group with? So any thoughts on that?

Jess Kutch (51:06)

I was looking to Amanda to start. [crosstalk 00:51:10].

Amanda Cage (51:16)

Go ahead. Yeah, you go.

Jess Kutch (51:17)

Wow, I wish I had more time to sit and think with that question. I agree with what Maureen said. I appreciate that we were all a bunch of nerds. And I think I say that it's a good thing in my mind. And so just deeply passionate. And folks, I learned so much from people and these fields that I really knew very little about. So yeah, I think that curiosity and interest in hearing from folks from other fields, different kinds of practitioners and trying to understand what problems they're solving is helpful.

Amanda Cage (52:05)

Yeah. I would add to that, just the open mind issue. I think it's a really easy when you do this work to feel really passionate and in some ways get really singularly focused on an issue. And it really opened my eyes to the variety of ways that we could think about job quality and the variety of actors who can be involved. And I would also say, Aspen hat is a prestigious organization. And I think lots of people, there's something about the namesake of Aspen. But I would really encourage folks to... This is a commitment. It is a time commitment. I would say it's a rejuvenating time commitment.

And I always felt the time I spent on the work gave me more energy than sucking energy out of me. But really not just committed for your own growth, but for like this is a movement, regardless of how you're coming to it. And really with a dedication, not like, oh, I'm a little interested in this, I'm going to dabble my feet in it, but it's almost like you're joining this group of people who are going to be working on this for decades. And you should walk into it thinking about it that way.

Maureen Conway (53:20)

Yeah. Amanda, thank you. That was great, because we just have a couple of minutes left and I had wanted to ask you. And so maybe, Jess, I'll go to you, and then maybe, Amanda, if you want to add anything. But what is your advice to people who are considering applying to the fellowship or to the next class of fellows? What would be your just couple pieces of advice to them?

Jess Kutch (53:45)

I think going into it, thinking about how you're going to build on the relationships you're going to form in the fellowship is really helpful. How that'll inform your work and how you'll be able to leverage those relationships to have an impact on job quality. And yeah, I loved Amanda's point, I'm just going to steal it. The thinking of about a 10 to 20 year project or movement that we're all involved with and what are the possibilities of the work we could do together.

Maureen Conway (54:18)

Yeah. Great. Amanda, did you want to add anything or?

Amanda Cage (54:20)

I would add the advice that you should ask for Jess and I to come back as faculty members. We'd love to see you in Aspen.

Maureen Conway (54:31)

Great. Well, I see we're just about out of time. I want to thank everybody for being here for all the questions and engagement. This has been really great. If you think of a question later, please ask. It's eop.program@aspeninstitute.org. We'd love to hear from you. And as I mentioned, this will be recorded and put on our website so you can refer back to it. And thank you so much for your... Thank you also to my fabulous colleagues, Mark Popovich, Mohona Siddique, Tony Mastria, who all make all of these things work and who have been key partners in the Job Quality Fellowship. And thank you all. And I look forward to hearing from you. Okay. Bye.