



Lower income workers quick to switch jobs if it means higher pay

by: Jennifer Wilding

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CDAC members (l to r, front row): Jackie Loya-Torres, Michelle Bish, Cindy Logsdon, Monica Abeita, Alan Ramirez, Brenda Sharpe. (l to r, back row): Amanda Brewer, Anne Brandt, Scott Hoversland, Quintin S. Hughes, Sr., Lloyd Rainge II.

Members of the Kansas City Fed's [Community Development Advisory Council](#) (CDAC) shared trends affecting jobs and wages for low- and moderate-income (LMI) populations at the October 2024 council meeting, held at the Omaha, Neb., Branch. Members said while jobs are widely available, wages have leveled off and job-switching is still a common way to earn more money. Jeff Schmid, president of the Kansas City Fed, was on hand to listen and ask questions.

The CDAC is a source of partnerships and ideas for new focus areas and projects. Members offer deep knowledge of communities around the Tenth District and topics from education to workforce development, housing to entrepreneurship.

Members who shared information for the April meeting included:

- **Monica Abeita**, executive director, North Central New Mexico Economic Development District, Santa Fe, N.M.
- **Michelle Bish**, executive director, Northeast Oklahoma Regional Alliance (NORA), Tahlequah, Okla.
- **Anne Brandt**, executive director, Lincoln Littles, Lincoln, Neb.
- **Amanda Brewer**, chief executive officer, Habitat for Humanity of Omaha, Omaha, Neb.
- **Scott Hoversland**, executive director, Wyoming Community Development Authority, Casper, Wyo.
- **Quintin S. Hughes Sr.**, program director, Northeast OKC Renaissance Inc., Oklahoma City, Okla.
- **Cindy Logsdon**, executive director/chief executive officer, Citizen Potawatomi Community Development Corporation, Shawnee, Okla.
- **Jackie Loya-Torres**, manager, CRA and community development, Commerce Bank, Kansas City, Mo.
- **Lloyd Rainge II**, vice president and community development director, Capitol Federal Savings Bank, Lawrence, Kan.
- **Alan Ramirez**, director of strategic lending, Colorado Enterprise Fund, Denver, Colo.
- **Brenda Sharpe**, president and chief executive officer, REACH Healthcare Foundation, Overland Park, Kan.

The Bank's Community Development and Engagement team sends CDAC members questions before each meeting. CDAC members often check with others working with LMI communities before submitting their answers in writing. The quotes

attributed to the CDAC member may reflect that person's own experience or it may reflect that of a knowledgeable local contact.

For this meeting, the team asked CDAC members what changes they had seen for jobs and wages recently in the lower-income communities they served. They were also asked if there was anything else the Bank should know about those communities that might not appear in economic data or news coverage.



Lloyd Rainge shares his perspective on jobs, while Brenda Sharpe listens.

Many, but not all, workers are quick to quit if they can switch jobs and earn more.

Michelle Bish, Tahlequah, Okla. – According to sources at an industrial park, a continuing trend in northeast Oklahoma is job availability. The jobs are there, with shift work available in many instances. This has led to an uptick in job shifting in some communities in the region that have more options with more attractive pay.

Anne Brandt, Lincoln, Neb. – A childcare provider said they have seen a significant amount of people switching jobs. They have had three people quit without a two-week notice this summer. There are jobs available with little to no prior experience needed.

Cindy Logsdon, Shawnee, Okla. - The job market is tightening somewhat and there is a fair amount of job switching for a higher pay scale. I am not sure I see any change in this in the next six months.

Jackie Loya-Torres, Kansas City, Mo. - According to a source at a nonprofit serving Latino communities, their clients generally do not change jobs frequently. Educational and language barriers often complicate their ability to pursue new opportunities, and there is also a fear of the unknown or job insecurity that prevents them from seeking new employment. As a result, they often remain in their current positions despite efforts to find better wages or working conditions.



Michelle Bish interviewed a source at an industrial park to find out what kinds of jobs were available in northeast Oklahoma.

Workers who don't job switch may face wage stagnation.

Amanda Brewer, Omaha, Neb. - As a workforce, we are continuing to see entry level workers and the younger professional workforce change jobs to 'upgrade.' At the same time, we are seeing some clients remain in their jobs for over ten years without receiving any pay raises, primarily due to the fear of job loss outweighing the potential benefit of a modest wage increase.

Jackie Loya-Torres, Kansas City, Mo. - According to a source at a nonprofit serving Latino communities, many of their clients in LMI communities earn wages below median income levels, often struggling to meet basic living expenses. Wage stagnation is prevalent, with limited potential for significant pay increases. This situation is compounded by job conditions that include low job satisfaction, few opportunities for advancement, and challenging work environments. Additionally, lower educational attainment has negatively impacted job prospects and earning potential. High living costs relative to low wages exacerbate financial stress, making it difficult for clients to afford necessities.

Brenda Sharpe, Overland Park, Kan. - The nonprofit health and human services safety net has traditionally been staffed by lower-wage earners. I am aware of two such organizations whose employees are pursuing unionization, at the urging of national organizations concerned about workers' rights and low wages. Although not a trend per se in the Kansas City region, this development presents an interesting set of challenges for management of those organizations, whose operating budgets typically are dependent upon annual fundraising revenues.

Wages are holding steady or leveling off.

Monica Abeita, Santa Fe, N.M. - Wage increases for low- and moderate-income workers that took effect during and after the pandemic have held steady with no signs of decreasing. Overall, I still think it is a good environment to find work for those trying to do so.

Michelle Bish, Tahlequah, Okla. - Wages seem to be leveling off somewhat as many businesses are trying to cut costs as much as possible due to some slowdown in customer spending. There appears to be slower growth in more skilled job sectors and employers are being selective in who they hire for higher skilled jobs.



Anne Brandt records comments about jobs and childcare during a small-group discussion.

Are workers making enough to live?

Amanda Brewer, Omaha, Neb. - To afford a two-bedroom apartment in Omaha, the wage needed is \$22 an hour. As such, individuals are struggling with debt accumulation, despite any potential changes in job availability or increases in wages. This ongoing financial instability indicates that even as jobs are available, they do not offer sufficient wages or stability to improve overall financial health.

Lloyd Rainge II, Lawrence, Kan. - Although mortgage interest rates settled and then slightly declined, and home sales slightly increased in our markets in the last month, the low-income community continues to face affordability challenges due to higher priced housing inventory and rents.

Cindy Logsdon, Shawnee, Okla. - Families are really struggling to make ends meet. They must consider a secondary job or side job to cover the necessities.

Brenda Sharpe, Overland Park, Kan. - Medical debt continues to be a significant burden for LMI families in Kansas and Missouri, who carry a slightly higher rate than the national average. This debt disproportionately impacts Black, uninsured and rural Americans. Although the average medical debt is more than \$1,000, many families owe more than \$10,000. These families regularly report delaying needed healthcare, drawing down on retirement savings, and carrying higher balances on credit cards, all actions which will adversely affect their economic mobility.

Job outlook varies depending on worker skills and the local economy.

Michelle Bish, Tahlequah, Okla. - Many communities in northeast Oklahoma have ongoing infrastructure projects and business growth that will help to create jobs and benefit the communities. In some industries in northeast Oklahoma we are still seeing trends with the labor force participation rate being lower than average and we have more jobs available than people to fill them.

Quintin S. Hughes Sr., Oklahoma City, Okla. - The rise of gig work and flexible employment options may offer more opportunities for LMI residents, who may require adaptable schedules. However, these jobs often lack benefits and stability. The growth of remote work and technology-driven job sectors can benefit some individuals but can also widen the gap for those lacking relevant skills or access to technology.

Lloyd Rainge II, Lawrence, Kan. - Companies continue to manage staffing levels according to economic trends of lower consumer demand and reduced revenue, focusing efforts on filling positions that require skilled labor.



Quintin Hughes said that gig work offered flexibility, but not stability or benefits.

Workers face a range of barriers to employment.

Anne Brandt, Lincoln, Neb. – A childcare provider said early childhood professionals fall under the lower income category. It has been nice, they said, that increasing the Nebraska minimum wage has benefitted the staff. Unfortunately for programs that are barely making ends meet, to remain open it has caused an increase in the tuition rate. Due to this many families have been pressured to find less expensive means of care.

Quintin S. Hughes Sr., Oklahoma City, Okla. – Despite some positive developments, many lower-income residents still face significant barriers to employment, including systemic issues like having justice involvement and lack of access to transportation, affordable childcare, and healthcare.

Jackie Loya-Torres, Kansas City, Mo. – According to a source at a nonprofit serving Latino communities, for undocumented clients, fear of deportation and exploitation creates significant barriers to securing stable employment. Even those with legal status may face difficulties related to work permits or employment rights, complicating their efforts to improve their job situations.

When federal funding dries up, organizations may face challenges.

Monica Abeita, Santa Fe, N.M. - There is an unprecedented amount of federal and state funding available. In New Mexico, the state has directed significant funding toward discretionary programs or projects. I'm concerned about what this will mean for the non-profits, and even my organization, in the future, as funding will at some point dry up after organizations have expanded their staffing, services and programs.



Steve Shepelwich (l) and Alan Ramirez (r) listen while Monica Abeita shares her experiences in north central New Mexico.

Different areas in the Tenth District are dealing with different issues.

Monica Abeita, Santa Fe, N.M. - The north central New Mexico region has some persistent challenges that continue to affect job availability and wages. They include the overall lack of private sector, higher paying jobs in rural communities, which contributes to working age individuals and families moving away.

Quintin S. Hughes Sr., Oklahoma City, Okla. - Local government, non-profits, and community organizations have been involved in creating incentives for businesses to establish operations in northeast Oklahoma City, leading to increased job opportunities. Many of the jobs being created are in the service sector, including retail, healthcare, and hospitality. However,

the opportunities created within the service sectors also lead to jobs that are low-wage or part-time.

Anne Brandt, Lincoln, Neb. - A childcare provider said, they've seen a dramatic increase in the instability in the workforce. It isn't uncommon for employees to need to regularly miss one or two workdays every week to deal with life events. I expect this to get even worse as the state passes paid sick leave that effectively makes attendance policies impossible to enforce.

Scott Hoversland, Casper, Wyo. - A local utility has requested rate hikes for the last two years. These double-digit rate requests have not been done gradually over the years and LMI customers are having problems finding ways to pay their power bills. It is not only the LMI sector that is having to deal with the rate hikes. These hikes are having an effect on all consumers in Wyoming.

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Jennifer Wilding, community engagement advisor for the Kansas City Fed, uses writing and public engagement skills on special projects for the community development department.

WritingIn 2026, the Kansas City Fed released Wilding's "[The Byways Report: The Scenic Route to Rural Prosperity](#)," examining how small towns have used route-based tourism as a strategy for economic development. Along with expert interviews and technical resources, the report includes stories from several byways, with a focus on Route 66 in Oklahoma. Her [three-part series on Investment Connection](#), the Kansas City Fed's signature program, appears on the [national website](#) about the Fed's work in communities. Wilding co-authored [Disconnected: Seven lessons on fixing the digital divide](#), a layperson's guide to putting broadband, devices and training within reach of a community. In addition to special projects, Wilding edits the Kansas City Fed's [community development newsletter](#). [Subscribe here](#). **Engagement** Wilding served as project director for community-engaged research in a neighborhood where broadband subscriptions were very low. The engagement [built understanding](#) of barriers to connection. She also led [focus groups with unemployed individuals](#) and with people from nonprofits that serve them, held in Chicago, Detroit, Denver and Kansas City. Before joining the Kansas City Fed in 2018, Wilding was executive director of Consensus KC, a nonprofit consulting firm specializing in public policy and civic engagement. She holds a B.A. in urban affairs from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Her hobby is letterpress printing, using a 1,500-pound cast-iron press from the late 1800s. **About the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City** The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City is one of 12 regional Reserve Banks that, along with the Board of Governors in Washington, D.C., make up our nation's central bank. We work in the public's interest by supporting economic and financial stability. The Kansas City Fed's territory includes Colorado, Kansas, western Missouri, Nebraska, northern New Mexico, Oklahoma and Wyoming. Our headquarters is in Kansas City, with branch offices in Denver, Omaha and Oklahoma City. The Kansas City Fed Community Development Department promotes economic development and public understanding that leads to progress for lower-income individuals and communities. Our focus areas include community development investments, digital inclusion, small business / entrepreneurship, and workforce development.