

#### QUICKTAKES

According to Department of Labor, as of August 2021, 10.12 million Americans are unemployed or underemployed while 10.93 million jobs in the United States are unfilled. The situation in New Jersey is similar.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics,  
The Employment Situation,  
September 2021

# THE NEW JERSEY DATA FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM INITIATIVE CASE STUDY

By providing new access to meaningful employment; building prosperity and long-term emotional well-being; and strengthening individuals, their families and communities, the Data for the American Dream project has a goal of ultimately strengthening New Jersey itself.

Innovate New Jersey (INJ) and the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJ DOL) invited SOUR and ShedLight.org to help them understand the challenges of job seekers and uncover ways to make to digital search for job training successful, through INJ and NJ DOL's training search tool "Training Explorer".

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

**How might we meet the unemployed and underemployed where they are, to create purposeful experiences in job training ?**

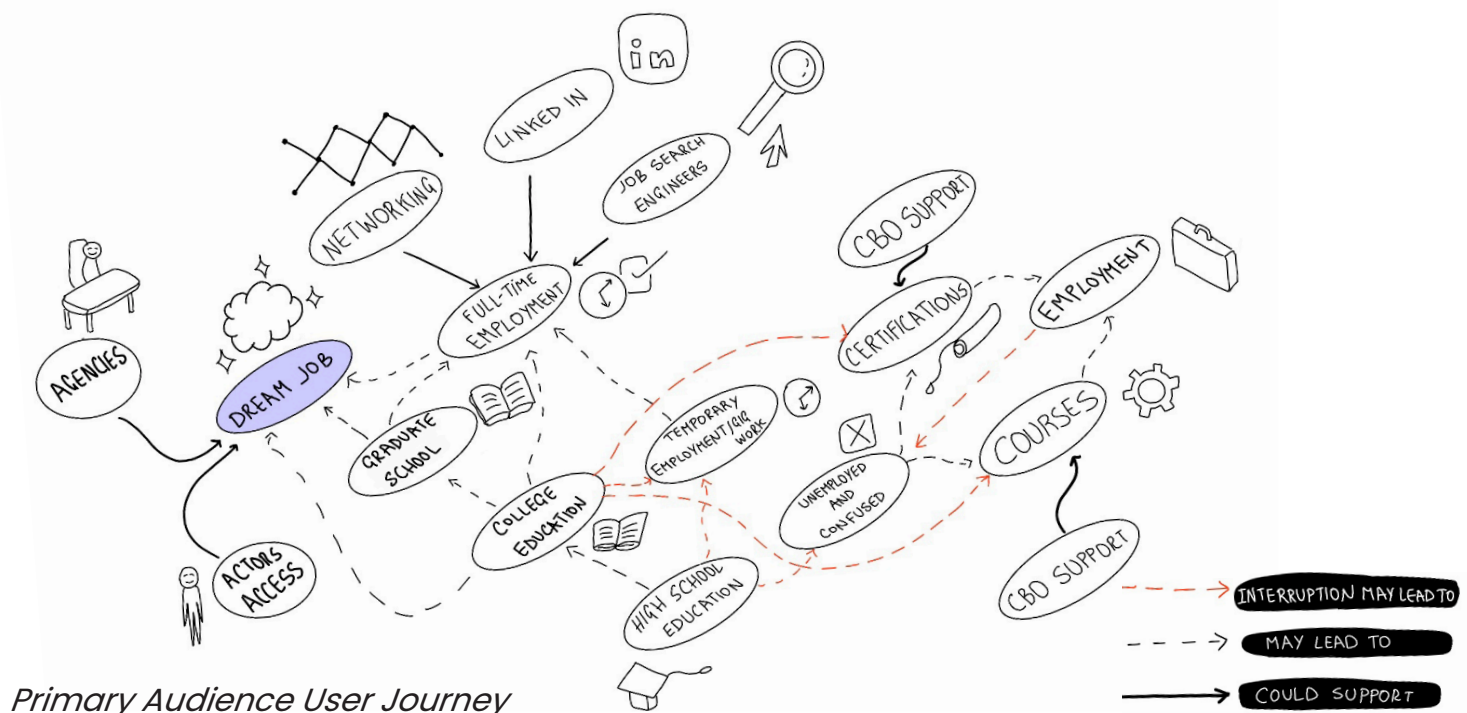
## OUTCOME

Many factors impact the ability to search for training, successfully complete a program, and maintain employment, including the availability of childcare and transportation; health and mental health; and the absence of bigger, more interruptive events in a person's life. Potential training and job seekers often turn to Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to help them manage related issues and get connected to training and support.

In light of the insights generated through our research and co-creation sessions, we have identified a focused audience that is ready to search for job training online right now, and strategies for helping more NJ residents to be prepared to use the tool and making the digital search tool more relevant to that broader audience. Specifically, we created recommendations and guidelines around the upcoming work necessary to prepare and plan for:

1. Outreaching to primary audience to promote Training Explorer
2. Making the Training Explorer to be inclusive of an immediate, primary audience, as well as future user segments and CBOs
3. Cultivating relationships with CBOs, enabling in order to enable future collaborations to expand extend the usefulness of the Training Explorer to their constituents.

We provided INJ with a Playbook, including a set of worksheets is provided that will act as a toolkit to support upcoming activities related to CBOS, to help build empathy towards potential partners, set expectations and identify priorities for future collaborations. We also created video storytelling essays that provide INJ with perspectives on the employment journey, in the words of potential end users and CBOs themselves.



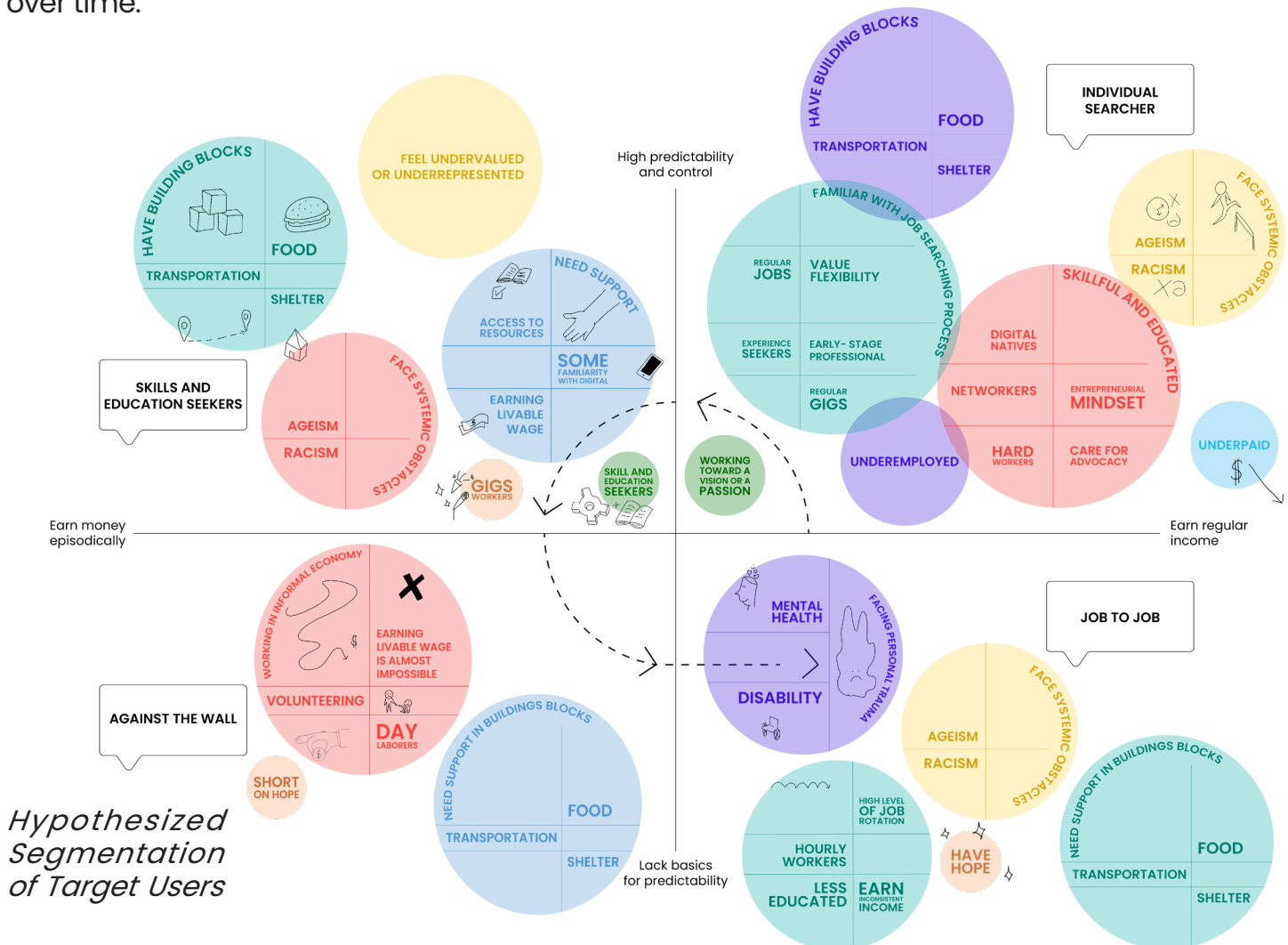
## HOW WE DID IT

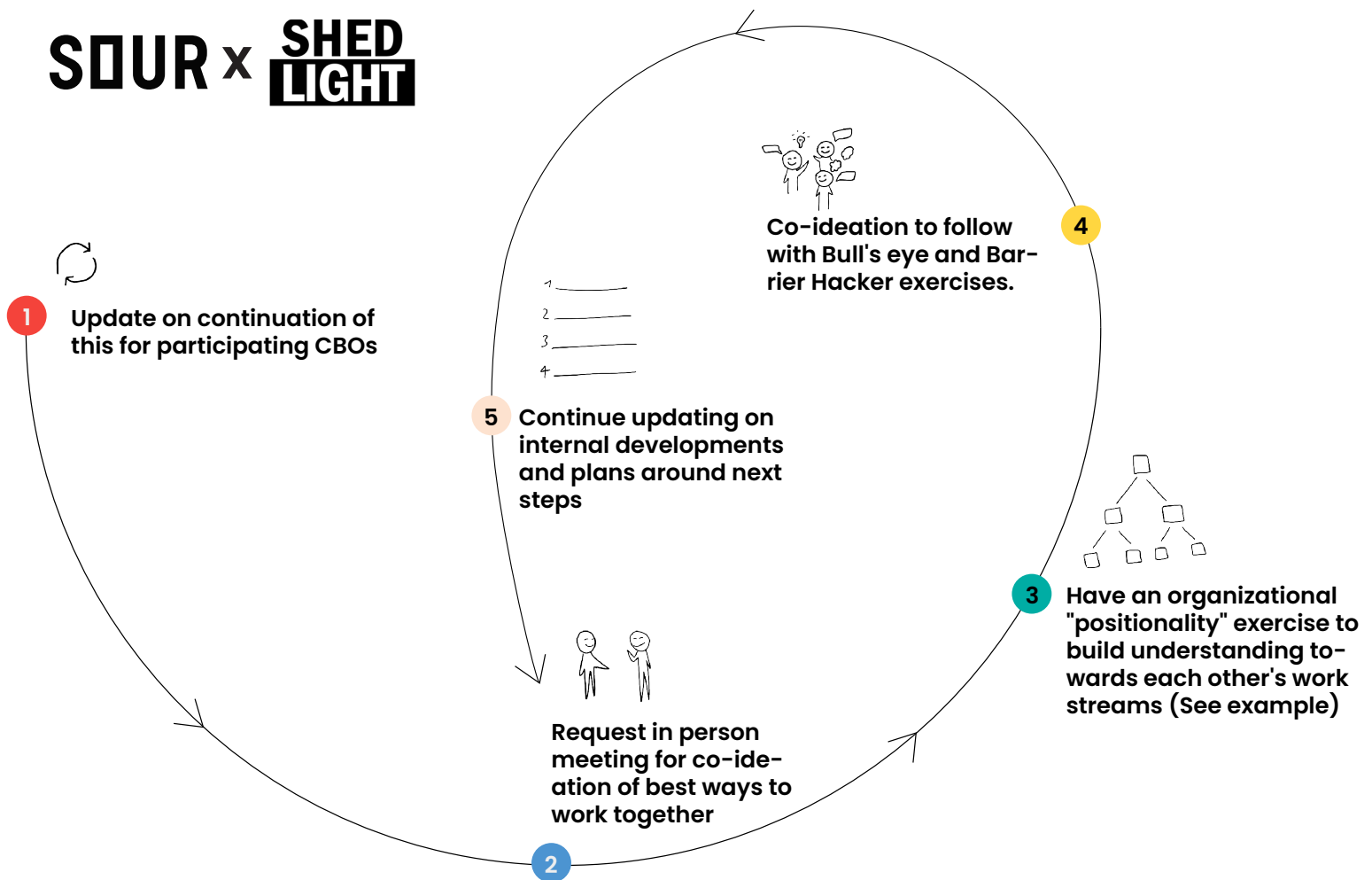
**Desk research** – our typical baseline to begin research. Secondary sources give us an understanding of what has been done in the past, what questions have been asked and answered and what remains to be learned.

**Exploratory Conversations with Experts** – with CBOs to understand the pivotal role that CBOs play in supporting job seekers. This helped us better understand their constituents, services and partnerships.

**Exploratory Conversations with Potential End Users** – with people who had experienced unemployment in the past few years, to gain insight into their employment journeys in the context of their lives. This provided deeper understanding in various user profiles and their wants and challenges, allowing us to segment potential training seekers based on their goals, needs, and ability to use the Training Explorer.

**Participatory design** – we held co-creation sessions with a short list of highly verbal, representative end-users and CBOs to generate actionable insights and frameworks that might guide efforts to optimize the tool itself and develop the broadest possible user base, at present and over time.





*Community Based Organization Working Model Recommendation*

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Many communities, including the chronically unemployed, have been ignored, mistreated and promised solutions for systemic problems for many years. Such history of poor treatment by institutions has created skepticism and distrust within the community and among CBOs that represent the community.

How might we best address these historic baggages and build trust within overlooked or underserved communities?