

## **Virtual Community Organizing: AMOS Institute of Public Life Holds Digital Workforce Summit**

COVID-19 NBA Response Grantee  
November 2020

In June 2020, Iowa's unemployment rate rose to 8 percent, up from 2.7 percent a year ago. Undocumented immigrant families who were ineligible for federal CARES Act unemployment benefits, independent contractors, small business owners, and workers in the restaurant and hospitality industries have been particularly impacted.

The trauma of unemployment is magnified by historic underinvestment in Iowa's unemployment system and job training infrastructure. Better funding of these programs could help undergird the economic stability of Iowa's families during economic crises such as job loss and financial turmoil caused by COVID-19.

Through small group virtual listening sessions, [A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy Institute of Public Life](#) (AMOS IPL) has begun hearing the stories of unemployed workers who cannot afford to wait for their industry to recover. Attendees also shared stories of resilience and hope. Here are a few:

- Vicki Allard is a single mother of two who has worked in the cruise ship industry for over 20 years. In March, she was furloughed and has been waiting for months to receive unemployment benefits. The trauma of unemployment is impacting her and her children, causing economic uncertainty and stress. Due to this economic crisis, Ms. Allard wants to shift to a new career, but in the past 20 years, the job application process, even how to format a resume, has changed.
- During an AMOS IPL virtual civic academy, LaRae Brannan shared her story of joblessness and the importance of wrap-around services including childcare access, support for those in recovery from addiction, and developing confidence and 'soft skills' that helped her find a meaningful career with an insurance company. Four years later, Ms. Brannan is now the board president of Project Iowa, a nonprofit workforce intermediary and member organization of AMOS IPL, which provided the wrap-around support to help her step onto a different life path. Ms. Brannan now wants to learn how to organize and be an advocate, so more Central Iowans can access economic opportunities like she herself benefited from.



Out of these conversations, AMOS IPL leaders organized a Virtual Workforce Summit on July 23 to educate community leaders about the importance of robust job training programs paired with wrap-around services that build political will towards an investment in these programs.

Katie Routh from [Norwalk Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\)](#) and LaRae Brannan co-chaired the meeting. Vicki Allard publicly shared her story and the need for career coaching and training to help unemployed Iowans get back to work in living wage jobs. More than 80 pastors, business leaders, state legislators, and community members attended the summit. Labor economist and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, [Paul Osterman](#), provided a teaching on the economic impact of job training programs for workers, businesses, and the broader community.

At the end of the summit, participants committed to taking concrete next steps: calling the Governor's office in support of the Rapid Restart job training program and including additional civic academies in their community organizing work to identify new leaders, hear stories, and share information about available job training opportunities.

---

*As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for more than 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at [www.nbacares.org](http://www.nbacares.org).*