



GIG ECONOMY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

As the pandemic continues, many negative impacts have been felt by those classified as gig workers: those self-employed, often contracted by other companies or individuals to provide a niche service. This may include graphic designers, wedding videographers, or sound technicians. As of July 2021, one in 10 employed Canadians are gig workers – with a third considering joining the gig economy – and over a third of Canadian employers have gig workers on-staff.¹ For those working in tourism, recreation, or entertainment, the impacts resulting from provincial restrictions have created both short- and long-term effects for their businesses. However, as a working group that many are unfamiliar with, with much gig work being done behind-the-scenes, there is a lack of business supports and community services to address their needs and challenges.

Both nationally and provincially, those who perform gig work have indicated the benefits of being able to work on their own terms and rates, depending on the industry they are employed in. However, there is a healthy discourse at these levels regarding the precarious nature of some gig work arrangements in terms of health and safety, employment security, and financial and legal support. These concerns were echoed in 2021 by the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee (OWRAC), commissioned by the Government of Ontario to address labour market disruptions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In its report, the OWRAC made 21 recommendations to the Government of Ontario in order to improve gaps in support for gig workers. These included “develop[ing] a worker benefits plan that is not tied to employers, set[ting] up a job board for gig work, and [...] greater transparency in gig work contracts.”² At the time of writing, the Government has introduced the Digital Platform Workers’ Rights Act, 2022 to require app-based employers to provide their gig workers the provincial minimum wage, a recurring pay period, rights to notice of removal, dispute resolution in Ontario, and freedom from reprisal. In terms of lobbying and support, the most high-profile group in Ontario is Gig Workers United Local 10-4, a community union under the auspices of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers that represents app-based workers in the Greater Toronto Area. While addressing perceived shortfalls in supports in the province, the union advocates for the legitimacy of gig work in the public eye rather than eliminating the sector.³

Through this report, we identify the benefits and challenges of working in the gig economy, which occupations and sectors are best supported by gig workers, and how gig work can be a successful and a long-term career path. Different occupations will be identified as strong gig positions, with interviews conducted from local gig workers to learn about their career experience. Strategies for success as a gig worker will be developed, as well as recommendations for how the local business community can better incorporate and support gig workers based on worker and stakeholder consultations.

1. H&R Block Canada Inc. “Gig Economy Workforce Rockets to More than One in Ten of Canadians; a Further Third Are Open to Joining, Reveals New Study.” Cision Canada, April 11, 2022.
2. Government of Ontario. Ontario newsroom, December 9, 2021.
3. “About Us.” Gig Workers United. Accessed June 15, 2022.

METHODOLOGY

The terms gig economy or gig work have a highly variable definition. This report follows the terminology outlined by Statistics Canada: a labour market of “unincorporated self-employed freelancers, day labourers, or on-demand or platform workers.”⁴ Such workers were the subject of the first large-scale study of the gig economy by Statistics Canada, released in December 2019. This study utilized tax income to determine the prevalence of the gig economy on a national scale, including reported T2125 filings without business numbers. Despite this standard, its researchers acknowledged that tax filings alone cannot totally account for all portions of the gig economy. This caveat must be considered when viewing projected data on the prevalence of Windsor-Essex’s gig economy.

To determine the state of work for those participating in the gig economy of Windsor-Essex, this report was designed to incorporate the perspectives of local gig workers. This was achieved through consultations with a wide variety of gig workers across several sectors. The consulted gig workers included the following positions: app-based delivery and driving workers, graphic designers, photographers, landscaping labourers, university and college teaching assistants, lighting and stage designers, musicians and stage performers, and non-profit employees. Other consulted stakeholders were business development and support organizations in Windsor-Essex, especially in the realm of available supports for gig workers. While it is important to include jobs that are in the commonly associated with gig work, this report was designed to ensure that the perspectives collected for the report were as varied as possible.

4. Jeon, Sung-Hee, Huju Liu, and Yuri Ostrovsky. “Measuring the Gig Economy in Canada Using Administrative Data.” Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, December 16, 2019.



THE STATE OF THE WINDSOR-ESSEX GIG ECONOMY

In light of these debates, it is important to consider the state of support and fulfillment among gig workers in Windsor-Essex. As per Lightcast data collected for this report, there are 23,426 Windsor-Essex residents who are self-employed. More than half of these individuals (12,678) perform their work in Windsor, followed by Tecumseh (2,266), Lakeshore (2,106), and Leamington (1,756). The remaining municipalities in the region account for 4,620 individuals in this category. Overall, these represent about 13% of all workers in the area. However, it must be stressed that the true number of gig workers in Windsor-Essex is likely higher: these figures do not include those who are employed by app-based companies (such as Uber, SkipTheDishes, etc.) or those who work on an on-call basis for a contracted employer. The scale of gig work in the economic structure of Windsor-Essex reiterates the importance of developing a clearer understanding of the status of those in the area who work on a gig basis.

Among those consulted, 50% had described themselves as working the equivalent to full-time hours when combining their gig work positions. The remaining 50% described themselves as working part-time hours in a gig position in combination with a permanent full-time position. Of these, the most likely category of workers to be employed for the equivalent of full-time hours were landscaping labourers, lighting and stage designers, and app-based delivery workers.

In terms of motivation for taking on their jobs, app-based workers did so primarily for monetary need or as a response to underemployment, while other interviewed workers indicated higher levels of personal passion for their gig work. Despite this, app-based workers were varied in what they enjoyed about their work; some preferred orders or jobs that required only drop-offs and the independence associated with these, while others enjoyed interacting with customers and the social aspect of doing so. The highest levels of personal passion for work included non-profit workers, lighting and stage designers, photographers, and graphic designers. However, those employed in arts-based fields often reported frustrations with limited opportunities for grant-based funding and found themselves supplementing this with additional gig work more than other workers.

For non-profit workers and graphic designers, the benefits they associate with their gig work are typically derived from their ability to work remotely. This allows for a greater level of freedom to take on jobs or responsibilities efficiently and mitigate travel costs. Evidently, this ability is not enjoyed by most other workers consulted, as 54% of the gig work observed in this report requires in-person duties. In the case of post-secondary teaching assistants, their ability to work remotely is largely dependent on the instructor or course they are employed under.

Seasonal demand is also highly variable among gig workers. For example, graphic designers tend to find more consistent projects throughout the calendar year more than other positions, while landscapers, photographers, and post-secondary teaching assistants have the most seasonally-inclined work schedules.

Finally, gig workers in Windsor-Essex appear to maintain connections with each other. Each consulted gig worker indicated that they knew at least one other person who is also a gig worker. Interestingly, it was more common for these connections to be with a different sector or area of expertise than their own. This suggests that the gig economy in Windsor-Essex is highly symbiotic in character. Those participating in it seem to find a great deal of value in developing these relationships. These relationships are sometimes a matter of circumstance, as they are often friends who happen to also be gig workers. Nonetheless, the widespread connections that exist within the local gig economy are notable when considering how interconnected the issues pertaining to gig workers are, and their potential as a wider litmus test for indicators in the region.



CHALLENGES

Job security and uncertainty is a significant challenge faced by gig workers in Windsor-Essex. Only 20% of those surveyed indicated they were able to fully subsist themselves on their gig work alone. These individuals were more likely to be non-profit workers with long-term contracts. Even among these individuals, supplementary income in the form of other gig work was often reported. Around 60% of those consulted reported feelings of anxiety with respect to future income security, usually tied to issues of contract renewal or upcoming job demand. For those that do acquire jobs through apps like Fiverr, TaskRabbit, Uber, and others, a contributor to feelings of insecurity are the 20-30% cut these services may take from the price paid by consumers. Additionally, those who are employed in longer-term contracts reported anxiety during near-end points of their employment term. These workers often reiterated a desire for clarity and clear communication from their employers with respect to potential contract extensions or terminations.

Eligibility for financial supports varied significantly across the sectors of gig workers. As individuals, many had applied for the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) in 2020 and received it. Workers in some seasonal sectors, such as landscapers, apply for Employment Insurance (EI) in slower periods in anticipation of rehiring periods in busier months. However, declaring all income acquired through gig work had rendered 25% of those surveyed to be ineligible for financial supports and some individuals elaborated that it would have been financially beneficial for them not to honestly declare their gig income.

When asked if Windsor-Essex's transportation infrastructure was adequate in order to get to work, gig workers were largely in agreement. While over 80% of those consulted had access to motor vehicles, those who did often cited how essential owning a car was for access to work due to inadequate regional transit and bike infrastructure. The increased cost of fuel also impacted the ability of car owners to commute, with gig workers that worked primarily remotely noting this as a significant benefit of their work. For the 15% that relied on public transit, routes that do not follow relevant or efficient paths to employers were significant deterrents in their abilities to take certain jobs. The 3% that used biking infrastructure indicated that cycling infrastructure largely feels unsafe, with few protected bike lanes and drivers with low awareness of cyclists. Negative comparisons to other municipalities in Ontario were made with respect to transit and active transportation infrastructure.

In terms of Windsor's affordability to make a living through gig work, feedback largely depended on the work being performed. Consulted workers who performed remotely, such as graphic designers and non-profit workers, largely found Windsor to be an affordable place to live due to strong telecommunications infrastructure. However, app-based delivery workers were generally more likely to remark that Windsor is becoming less affordable to live. Across all sectors, a shrinking availability of affordable rentals and a housing market that remains out of the reach of most gig workers is a concern among all who were consulted.

SUCCESSSES

Over the last two years, cost-efficient platforms catered to matching gig workers and employers have grown considerably. Launched in January 2020, AyeWork is a locally-created mobile application that fills this role without cost to users. The platform's development was led by Rakesh Naidu, CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, but completed independently of the Chamber. Employers, from individuals to large firms, are able to use AyeWork to advertise gig jobs. Gig workers create profiles in order to apply to these postings, specifying their expertise, availability, and individual interests. Gig workers and employers are matched through algorithms that account for skill matches and preferences of both parties, who rate each other's experiences over the course of the job.⁵ These scores are reflected on both sets of profiles for potential gig workers and employers to view when seeking future matches. Developed with community partners including (but not limited to) Women's Enterprise Skills Training of Windsor Inc. (WEST), St. Clair College, Odette School of Business – The University of Windsor, Workforce WindsorEssex, and the Ontario Restaurant Motel and Hotel Association, AyeWork has a userbase of approximately 1,800 clients at the time of writing; this represents a 50% increase since March 2020. Of these, 125 are employer profiles with the remaining users being gig workers. Feedback from both employers and gig workers has been largely positive, with employers finding strong talent quickly due to AyeWork's algorithm and gig workers finding jobs without sacrificing a percentage of earnings to a fee.

In September 2022, British Columbia-based AmbiMi opened a Windsor hub for its own gig work application.⁶ Like AyeWork, the app utilizes a skill-matching algorithm to match gig workers to posted jobs, with payments being processed directly on the app. In terms of focus, the platform primarily showcases "administration, accounting, customer service, hospitality, manufacturing, warehousing, restoration, construction and landscaping" positions.⁷ AmbiMi cited significant success in the manufacturing sector of the British Columbian market. When addressing electromechanical assembler shortages with a mid-size telecommunications firm, it reported that hiring times were reduced by a factor of 98%.⁸ This case study also indicated that 75% of those hired by this firm had their employment extended beyond their initial contract. In addition to the app, AmbiMi's in-person hub provides direct services and training. While there are no upfront costs for users, there is a booking fee charged when jobs on the app are completed.

5. Home."AyeWork." Accessed August 30, 2022.

6. Waddell, Dave. "New Job Recruitment Hub Opens in Windsor," September 16, 2022.

7. Ibid.

8. "How Our Manufacturing Client Reduced Recruiting Time By 98%." AmbiMi. Accessed October 8, 2022.

With respect to transit improvements, the City of Windsor's Transit Master Plan was approved in 2019 and outlines several improvements that would ease travel issues for gig workers that rely on transit. The Master Plan proposes a major redrawing of Transit Windsor's route network in order to better reflect the population's needs, with additional focuses on regional transit. Additionally, it proposes larger and modernized fleet infrastructure in order to accommodate increased ridership and improve both reliability and comfort for transit users.⁹ Transit Windsor added three service lines to the county municipalities of LaSalle, Amherstburg, and Leamington.¹⁰

Under the Master Plan, routes would be redeveloped into six tiers of service that address demand within Windsor and across the region, including those which expressly address gaps in service between the higher-usage routes on arterial networks. As well, the Plan proposes Alternative Delivery Services (ADS) that could include on-demand transit services.¹¹ These proposed improvements address several key concerns that were brought to the attention of this research and could allow gig workers that rely on transit a more equal opportunity to gain employment opportunities.

In terms of entrepreneurship development opportunities, the University of Windsor's EPICentre and the Downtown Windsor Business Accelerator offer several options for co-working spaces that are opportunities for remote gig workers to develop networks and development opportunities. In addition to these services, funding opportunities for business development are also available. These include VentureStart, a program dedicated to supporting the creation of Canada-based business roadmaps, with no cost to relatively broad criteria.¹² The Downtown Windsor Business Accelerator also offers a variety of entrepreneurship programming, such as its Entrepreneur Roadmap, that could assist self-employed gig workers take their passion to the level of small business ownership.¹³

9. "More Than Transit: 2019 Transit Master Plan." City of Windsor, 2019.

10. Kotsis, Julie. "Bus Service from Windsor to Amherstburg Rolls Out." Windsor Star, September 6, 2022.

11. "Transit Master Plan" City of Windsor.

12. Venturestart - Entrepreneurship, Practice and Innovation Centre (EPICentre). "Entrepreneurship, Practice and Innovation Centre" (EPICentre), May 24, 2022.

13. "Programs." The Accelerator. Accessed September 1, 2022.





BEST PRACTICES

CREATING REWARDING WORK ENVIRONMENTS

With gig workers often possessing a wide variety of skills and a strong work ethic, employers in the United States have recognized their significance to their own workforces. In response to this, North Carolina-based training firm Training Industry Inc. developed their own reports into the practice of employers hiring gig workers alongside their permanently-hired employees.¹⁴

They observe that employers who decide to hire gig workers have the greatest chance of success when they **provide regular and constructive assessments** of their work during their employment term. In addition, managers training incoming gig workers performed best when they develop **efficient and incisive training** for these hires so they are able to contribute to the goals of the employer as soon as possible. In their report, being in temporary work arrangements showed that gig workers viewed their employment as a continuous training opportunity and actively seek to gather ways to improve their quality of work. They also emphasized their desire to be treated not simply as stopgaps for their employer, but as valued members of the workforce worthy of respect.

Employers in Windsor-Essex should follow this example to ensure that gig workers are provided these resources and guidance. Fostering an environment where gig workers are able to be an active participant in improving job performance and feedback could prove critical to making their place of work an attractive option to gig workers. Gig workers in Windsor-Essex are well-connected to each other, making a culture that treats gig workers with respect and value more likely to have a consistent pool of talent that will consider applying for these positions.

14. Oesch, T., & Sanders, L. (2019, August 20). Training and managing the Gig Workforce. Training Industry. Retrieved October 22, 2022.

BEST PRACTICES

INFORMATIVE COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Community organizations and service providers are as important to improving gig worker prospects as employers. The Sudbury Workers Education and Advocacy Centre (SWEAC) found it essential that gig workers in the Northern Ontario city understood their rights on the job, especially those who work on app-based platforms. To address this, the SWEAC partnered with local non-profit Afro Women and Youth Foundation (AWYF) in order to lead **informative workshops on gig worker's rights and status**.¹⁵ These specifically addressed the previously-mentioned Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act and how the proposed legislation could affect their working conditions and what they would be entitled to. Spokesperson Tt Scott noted that providing these opportunities in the community allowed gig workers to feel more enfranchised and fully-informed about the legal status of gig work in the region. This is a model that could be replicated by organizations and service providers in Windsor-Essex that are dedicated to providing employment opportunities and training. In order to achieve this, developing partnerships between organizations like that between SWEAC and AWYF could allow for cost, labour, and resource sharing for creating such events to inform gig workers in Windsor-Essex of their present status and how this could change in the future. This is especially important for community partners dedicated to services for immigrants and newcomers, as they form a significant portion of the gig economy. Partnerships in this sphere could then serve to have the dual benefit of providing information to local jobseekers in general and those who are new to Canada and Windsor-Essex.

15. Contractor, A. (2022, August 5). Workers Centre, advocates want to help young gig workers understand their rights | CBC news. CBCnews. Retrieved October 26, 2022.



RECOMMENDATIONS

While Windsor-Essex has become a growing hub for resources and opportunities for gig work, the challenges found through this report's consultations leave opportunities for improvement. Many issues that gig workers face lie beyond the scope of local partners and stakeholders, such as wage law and taxation frameworks; however, Windsor-Essex can advance the evolving landscape that is the local gig economy:

EMPLOYERS

- View gig experience in candidates as a positive indicator for success in an open position. While this perception is changing, it is still important to keep in mind that gig workers often have varied job experience as a necessity to the nature of their work or for financial reasons. Gig workers are inclined to have strong time and task management skills, making them excellent candidates to fill gaps in the labour force.
- Consider gig workers to address immediate work shortages and advertise on platforms such as AyeWork and AmbiMi. Flexible arrangements that allow for workers to take on multiple jobs can be a part of this solution, as gig workers often rotate between several places of employment. By doing so, employers can be more able to complete goals through gig arrangements and make it easier for these arrangements to be filled by gig workers.
- Ensure gig workers feel valued and communicated to during their tenures. Gig workers employed on a contract basis prefer being kept informed about the prospects of renewal with respect to employment. Even if working on a temporary basis, workers are most productive when they are given opportunities for self-reflection and encouragement in the workplace.



RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Develop relationships with employers that may have staffing shortages and promote gig working clients. Leverage the connections made with employers and individuals that perform gig work.
- Develop events or courses catered to gig workers, such as information sessions or workshops. For those consulted across several industries, a gap in marketing skills in the community was commonly brought up, as well as information on the rights of gig workers. By providing resources that allow gig workers to engage and promote themselves more effectively, they will be able to seek rewarding opportunities and develop stronger client bases and more consistent employment prospects.
- Promote existing applications and services that provide connections for gig work, such as AyeWork and AmbiMi. Increased awareness of these affordable options in gaining work could make a significant difference in the prospects of workers who may be struggling for opportunities or wish to have a greater reach in clientele.
- Support the improvement of regional transportation infrastructure. As the present quality of this infrastructure appears to be a hinderance to gig workers that use them and as the cost of driving is increasing, continued investment in the form of the Transit Master Plan and improved cycling routes provide greater options for gig workers to accept jobs that may otherwise be out-of-reach, unaffordable, or unsafe to travel to.



RECOMMENDATIONS

GIG WORKERS

- Familiarize yourself with existing platforms and services catered to gig workers, such as AyeWork and AmbiMi. These resources are affordable and provide access to a wide community of different occupations and sectors seeking gig workers, while allowing gig workers to showcase their skills and strengths to those seeking their expertise.
- Consider taking marketing and entrepreneurship courses available from community partners, such as The Downtown Windsor Business Accelerator or the EPICentre. Such resources provide valuable skills development for those who seek to enter entrepreneurship or improve their entrepreneurship prospects, and may provide funding opportunities to start a new project or business.
- Consider incorporating your services in order to qualify for greater financial supports. While there is an initial financial cost to doing so, having the status of a business grants further opportunities for funding and financial resources if you perform services on an independent, personal basis.



CONCLUSION

The gig economy of Windsor-Essex spans several sectors, walks of life, and needs. Its diverse nature reflects the strength of those working within it and its essential nature to the labour market at-large. With this importance highlighted, employers can look to see gig workers as valued members of the local workforce and a potential solution to workforce shortages. Community and business development organizations can consider finding intuitive partnerships that can allow gig workers and employers to connect meaningfully in order to advance employment opportunities and ensure gig workers can make the most of their expertise. Even within a rapidly-evolving labour landscape, gig workers will continue to be an important presence throughout Windsor-Essex.



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