



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

A TRUSTED TRAINING AND EDUCATION PARTNER FOR UNITE HERE LOCAL 23 EMPLOYERS AND MEMBERS

ABOUT US

Service Works Training and Education Partnership Fund (STEP Fund) was founded in 2016 to offer continuing training and education benefits to the members of UNITE HERE Local 23. STEP Fund receives grants, and direct contributions from employer partners, which allow us to offer our services for free to union and community members.

OUR MISSION

We offer high quality hospitality training and educational benefits that enable UNITED HERE Local 23 workers to build better careers and brighter futures. We help strengthen union workplaces, empower communities, and support our employer partners in their goal of delivering excellent service.



OUR PHILOSOPHY

JOBS WITH DIGNITY

We believe that all hospitality and food service workers are skilled. From dishwasher to lead cook, they deserve recognition for their hard work and support in their pursuit of further education.

We work with employers who embrace this philosophy and provide their workers with honest wages, good benefits, and continuing professional development.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

We believe that working together is more effective than working alone. Together with our valued community-based organization partners, we can ensure the continued success of our program participants, UNITE HERE Local 23 members, and our employer partners.

INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE

We believe that excellence drives excellence. We are proud to contribute through our high training standards, industry partnerships, and wonderful participants.

OUR SERVICES

In support of UNITE HERE Local 23 and employer partners, we help culinary workers take the next steps in their careers.



02 JOB PLACEMENT

97% of job placements are with UNITE HERE Local 23 employers

“

I came to the US from Cameroon at the end of 2023. I was at home for 6 months without work. STEP helped me find a good job, and I was confident when I interviewed and when I started. I like my job so much. And now I want to be a chef.

Dolores Makoudjou,
Restaurant Associates at
Smithsonian Museums

01 JOB TRAINING

*Culinary Training for entry-level culinary jobs
Food Worker Training for hospitality jobs*



“

I found STEP in 2022 for culinary job training and English. STEP helped me find my job. Now, I always come back to STEP to take different classes, all for free: I have taken ServSafe Manager, baking, and many cooking techniques classes to keep learning.

Isha Doumbouya,
Sodexo at Howard University



03 UPSKILLING

To develop specialized expertise

“

STEP offers free classes to union members as well, so I have been coming every chance I get! I love to cook, and I come to improve my culinary skills and knowledge. I have learned so much about different cuisines, diets, and techniques.

Theodore “Tedd” Harris,
Compass at George Washington University



05 TUITION ASSISTANCE & SCHOLARSHIPS

Merit-Based Scholarships for members' children and grandchildren enrolled in college and university



04 CERTIFICATION

Such as ServSafe, TIPS, AllerTrain

“

I have done TIPS, ServSafe Manager, AllerTrain Lite. I strongly recommend that other union members take advantage of the rights that they have to learn for free.

Sheryl Rhynie,
Sodexo at Ford Cafe



OUR IMPACT IN 2024

TOTAL ENROLLMENTS

441 enrollments across all classes

UPSKILLING CLASSES

Classes offered across a range of culinary techniques and specialty cuisines as well as professional development, digital literacy, and ESOL

260 union members and union friends/community trained, of which 29 also graduated from our job training & placement program

19% of participants took more than 1 class from STEP

CULINARY CERTIFICATIONS

Certifications offered for ServSafe Food Handler, ServSafe Food Manager, AllerTrain Lite, TIPS, Restaurant Professional Learning Suite, AHLA Kitchen Cook

156 certifications awarded

ON-SITE TRAINING FOR EMPLOYER PARTNERS

137 individuals trained

JOB TRAINING & PLACEMENT

50 people served

92% job placement rate for job-seeking graduates

97% of those placed in jobs found them with UNITE HERE Local 23 employers

TUITION ASSISTANCE & SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships awarded to

18 university students in the 2024-2025 academic year



SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR ONE OF OUR GRADUATES!

Meaza Aregawi, a job training and placement graduate, was recognized as a DC Workforce Champion by the Washington, DC government. Meaza currently works with Restaurant Associates at the Smithsonian Museum.

WHAT'S NEW IN 2025

WE'RE EXPANDING!

We are delighted to be increasing our impact through an expansion into Virginia beyond the DC metro area. Thanks to close collaboration with employer and community partners, we held our first training in Richmond, VA in 2024. In 2025, we plan to hold more trainings there, as well as in Williamsburg and Norfolk.

This expansion allows us to further our mission to support UNITE HERE Local 23 hospitality workers and their families, as well as to contribute to the growth of sustainable jobs in the food service industry. We're proud to be able to nurture more culinary careers which will support the local culinary and hospitality industry.



AHLA KITCHEN COOK: A NEW CERTIFICATION

In late 2024, we began offering the AHLA Kitchen Cook certification from the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute. This industry-recognized certification will help job seekers showcase their skills and knowledge, and help them grow their careers.

GROWING OUR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Serving our Local 23 members includes helping them invest in the future. Our scholarship program for members' children and grandchildren helps them afford a college education—whether students attend the local community college or an Ivy League university.

This year, we are delighted to be able to increase our support for our members. The award for each student has increased from \$4,000 to \$6,000. We will now be awarding up to 25 scholarships each year.

OUR PARTNERS

We are grateful for the support of our funders—Ceres Foundation, WorkSource Montgomery (CWN Network), and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington (subgrantee)—for powering our work.

We send a big thank you to our employer partners for their trust.

- **Aramark**
 - **Bon Appetit**
 - **Compass Group**
 - **Eurest**
 - **Flik**
 - **I L Creations**
 - **Levy**
 - **Metz Culinary Management**
- **OTG**
 - **Paradies Lagardere**
 - **Restaurant Associates**
 - **Sodexo**
 - **SP+**
 - **The Kennedy Center**
 - **Yarzin Sella**

OUR TEAM

TEAM

- Amelia Kalant**
Executive Director
- Viviana Alvarez de la Parra**
Head Chef Instructor
- Cynethia Williams**
Chef and Hospitality Trainer
- Claire Kevill**
Lead Hospitality and English Instructor
- Tijana Kapetanovic**
Program and Operations Manager

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- Ashleigh Ciulla**
Vice President of Labor Relations
and Senior Counsel, Compass Group
- Charles Hendricks**
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UNITE HERE International Union
- Marlene Patrick-Cooper**
President, UNITE HERE Local 23
- Margaret Sharp**
Lead Organizer, UNITE HERE Local 23 DC
- Harold Taegel**
Senior Director, Labor Relations, Sodexo
- Oliver Zeidler**
Senior Director, Labor Relations, Aramark

Guest Chef Alex Strong and Risa Gerber, Human Resources Manager, both of Restaurant Associates, with STEP's Head Chef Instructor Viviana Alvarez, and Chef Cynethia Williams, with Culinary Foundations participants.



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