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Community-engaged Research in Practice: Staffing Cooperative of the Los Angeles (LA) Garment Worker Center

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**COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH IN PRACTICE: STAFFING COOPERATIVE
OF THE LOS ANGELES (LA) GARMENT WORKER CENTER**

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A Comprehensive Binder

June 2024

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A | INTRODUCTION

A.1 Purpose

This community-engaged research is grounded in the experiences of Los Angeles (LA) garment workers. Therefore, we affirm the principle that workers should be actively involved in shaping their own working conditions. The purpose of this research, then, is to situate a Garment Worker Center (GWC) staffing cooperative (or staffing coop) in the LA garment industry to further advance workers' rights and leverage their skills and expertise, by conducting an initial customer exploration. Doing so allows the GWC's staffing cooperative to pursue a business model that is competitive and feasible in the LA garment industry.

A.2 Research Questions

We considered the following key research questions to guide our methodology, analysis, and recommendations, in informing the possible business features the staffing cooperative could implement, to strengthen its market competitiveness in the Los Angeles (LA) garment industry:

- (1) To what extent is a high-road garment industry feasible in the L.A. region?
- (2) What are the challenges and needs of garment manufacturers in the context of the L.A. garment industry?
- (3) What are the perceptions of garment manufacturers about a high-road garment industry?
- (4) What can the staffing cooperative provide as assets and skills to supply labor needed for these manufacturers?
- (5) How can the staffing cooperative match the needs of manufacturers in the L.A. region?

A.3 Methods

To answer our research questions, we followed the key community-based research principles. These principles include but are not limited to, shared goals and values, community strengths, equitable collaboration, collective benefit, trusting relationships, and accessible results (Community Research Collaborative 4). Then, we employed an exploratory mixed-methods research design where we initially collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, and then gathered quantitative data through survey instruments.

In the end, we utilized the results from these methods, to think and create recommendations on what the staffing cooperative can include, and/or, not include, as a feature of their business plan. Additionally, for the purpose of this binder, we are not including a detailed methodology; however, it is available if it is requested.

A.4 Meet The Team

Abigail Figueroa (she/her) is a third-year double majoring in Geography and Labor Studies at UCLA. Her interests include labor geography with an emphasis on strengthening American Labor, hoping to work for the Department of Labor as a workforce development strategist.

Sherrod Session is a fourth-year Labor Studies Major at UCLA. His academic interests are in Law, Policy, and Community organizing. He hopes that these interests will intersect in his future endeavors.

Bryen Enzo Morales (he/him) is a second-year majoring in Economics at UCLA. His academic and research interests lie in evaluating the effects of government and social intervention programs, such as the social safety net and social welfare programs, using quasi-experimental quantitative methods.

Justine Ligaya Du (they/she) is a first-year transfer (third year) majoring in Labor Studies at UCLA. Justine has worked as an organizer in the labor movement for over six years and is currently a field-staff organizer for the United Auto Workers. Their organizing is grounded in principles of collective liberation and their love for their community. They hope to continue working in the labor movement following graduation.

Isabel Ortega Hernandez (she/her/ella) is a third-year student at UCLA triple majoring in Political Science, Chicane and Central American Studies, and Labor Studies. She grew up in Santa Ana, CA surrounded by community organizing and solidarity. She is interested in helping uplift historically under-resourced communities through the intersection of public policy, law and community advocacy.

B | OVERVIEW OF THE GARMENT INDUSTRY

B.1 Introduction and Key Industry Definitions

NAICS Code	Code Detail	Description
315	Apparel Manufacturing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cut & sew (cutting and sewing garments after purchase of fabrics <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Manufactured garments that are first knit, then, cut & sew into garments
3152	Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing	Comprises establishments primarily engaged in manufacturing cut and sew apparel from woven fabric or purchased knit fabric
315210	Cut and Sew Apparel Contractors	<p>Cutting materials owned by others for apparel and accessories and/or sewing materials owned by others for apparel and accessories</p> <p>Manufacturing establishments with full lines of ready-to-wear apparel and custom apparel, such as, apparel contractors, performing cutting or sewing operations on materials owned by others; jobbers, performing entrepreneurial functions involved in apparel manufacturing; and tailors, manufacturing custom garments for individual clients</p>
315220	Men's and Boy's Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing	Comprises establishments primarily engaged in manufacturing cut and sew apparel from woven fabric or purchased knit fabric for men and boys' garments
315240	Women's, Girl's, and Infants' Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing	Comprises establishments primarily engaged in manufacturing cut and sew apparel from woven fabric or purchased knit fabric for women, girls, and infant garments.
315280	Other Cut and Sew Apparel Manufacturing	Comprises establishments that were not included in the other sub-NAICS group for apparel manufacturing.

Source: North American Industry Classification System, United States 2022

In this series of graphs and cartography (i.e., maps), we aimed to visualize the trends and spatial distribution of the apparel industry in the US, California, and LA. We started showing some key graphs that indicate the number of manufacturers in the apparel industry from 2019 through 2022. We, then, showcased how this is distributed across LA county and Downtown, LA, in spatial terms. Lastly, we demonstrated the annual average wages in the apparel industry in LA. Our purpose is to inform the services the staffing cooperative should focus on, that are informed by these trends we identified.

We would like to caution that some of the presented estimates may provide inconsistency when information is gathered from different sources. This inconsistency rises from the different methodologies and emerging data each source gathers. Additionally, we would also like to acknowledge may not provide accurate estimates as these estimates were possibly undercounted. However, we assure that these estimates are still helpful in situating the staffing cooperative; it can still give a big picture on the trends happening in the garment industry.

B.2 Industry Overview: The United States

In the cut and sew apparel industry across the whole US, there has been an increase in average price changes among manufacturers, while labor costs, that constitutes wages, has decreased. In this section, we documented these results using the key metrics, Producer Price Index (PPI), labor costs for leather and apparel goods, and quarterly census of employment and wages. Additionally, we used different sources, like, Bureau of Labor Statistics, to investigate the state of the garment industry across the whole US.

PPI, in general, measures the change in the prices firms sell their products domestically. The graph in Figure B.2.1, shows the PPI trend for apparel manufacturers. Since 2003, the rate at which the price changed, has increased by approximately 30%.

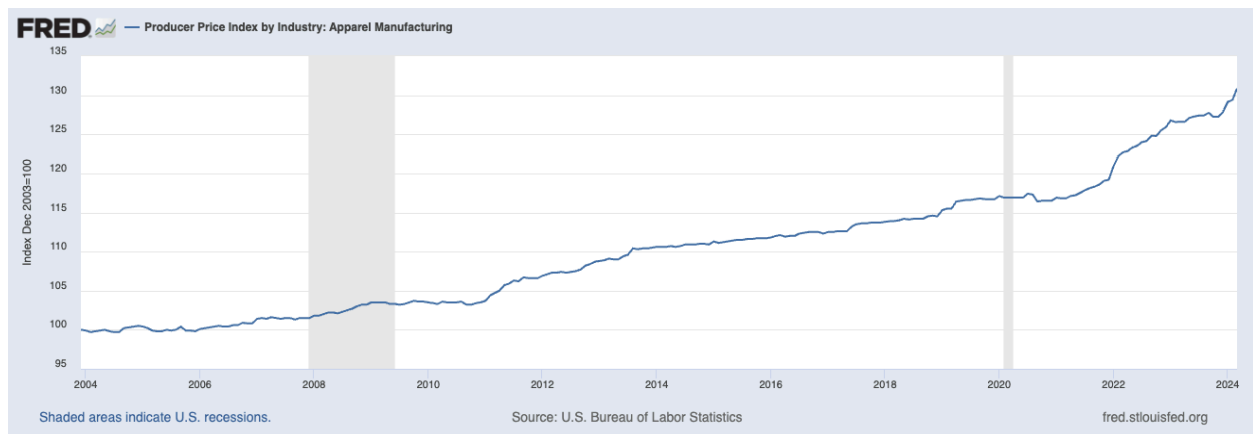


Figure B.2.1 Producer Price Index of Apparel Manufacturing in the US

For apparel retailers, that is, clothing and clothing accessories retailers, Figure B.2.2, demonstrates that there has been an increase in the change in the price they have sold their products. In this figure, it increased by sixty percent, twice the change in PPI among manufacturers. Moreover, it is

crucial to note that this figure shows the seasonality of the apparel industry, indicated by the PPI's fluctuation throughout the year.

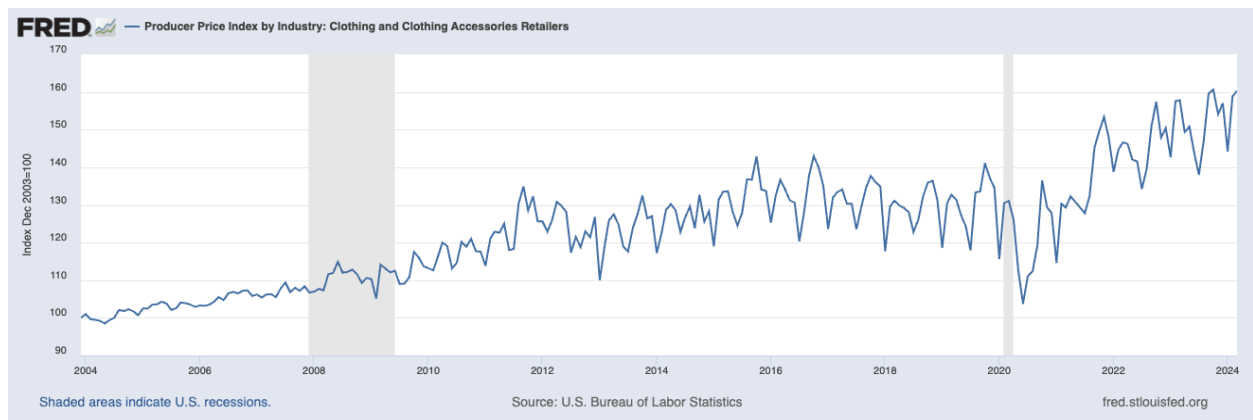


Figure B.2.2 Producer Price Index of Clothing and Clothing Accessories Retailers in the US

Additionally, Figure B.2.3 illustrates a decrease in labor costs among apparel and leather and applied products, since the year 1988. This decrease is indicated by the change from \$20 billion costs in 1988 to \$8 billion costs in 2022. Considering inflation measures, labor costs are twice that of its original value (i.e., \$40 billion). This value translates to being only $\frac{1}{2}$ of money being spent on labor.

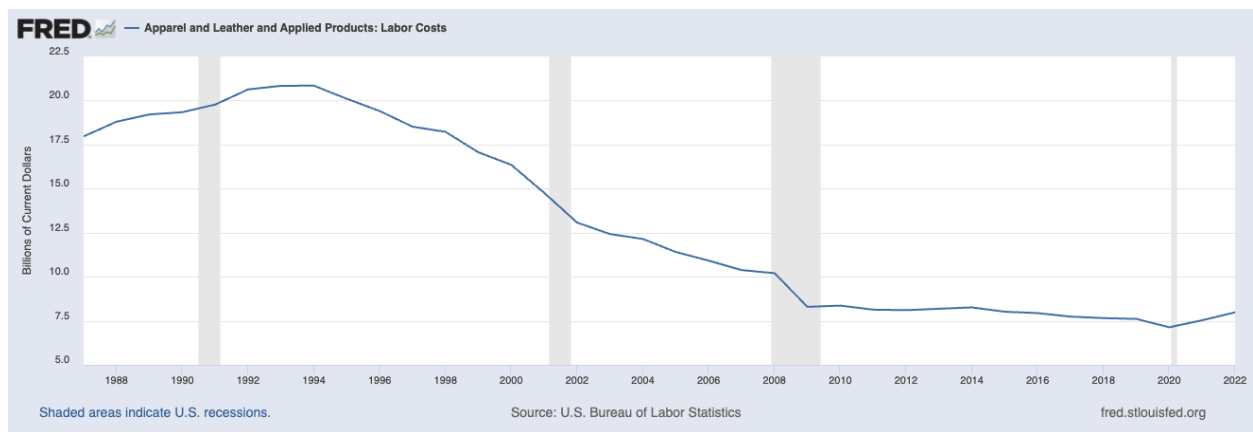


Figure B.2.3 Apparel and Leather and Applied Products Labor Costs

Extending these insights into Figure B.2.4, California, Texas, Florida, and New York are the top states that grossed the most wages from cut & sew apparel contractors. California alone accumulated \$97,445,379, while the national total grossed \$250,532,820 in a year. California contributed to 38% of the total national grossed wages in 2023. Further, we found evidence that California accumulated the most wages, in the garment industry, across the nation.

Total Quarterly Wages Across All US States in 2023: NAICS 31521 Cut and Sew Apparel Contractors

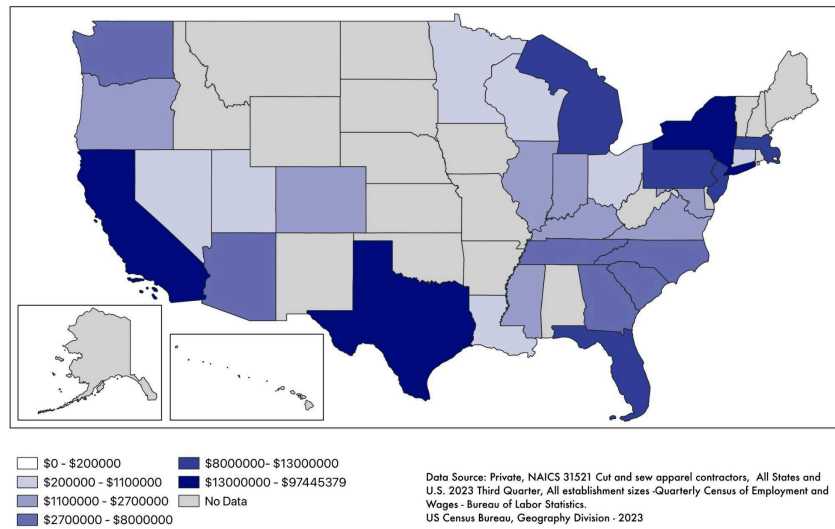
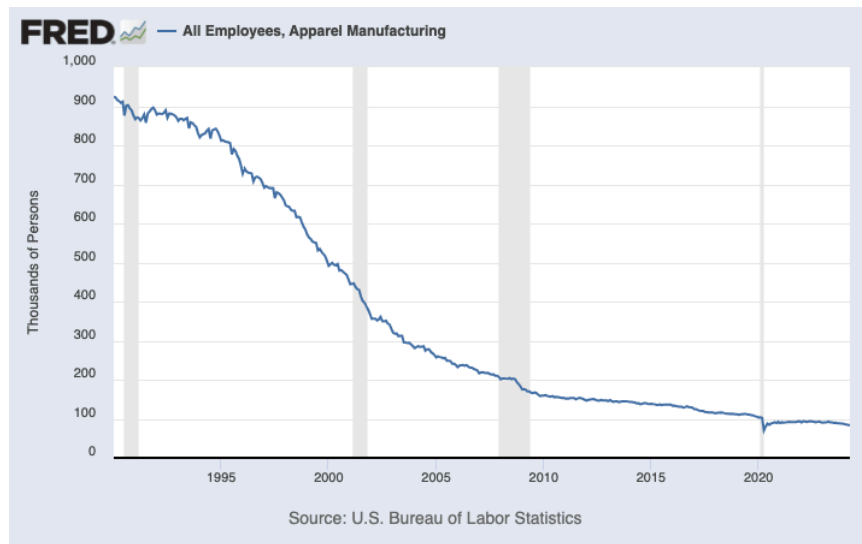


Figure B.2.4 Total Quarterly Wages Across All US States in 2023-NAICS 31521. Cartography: Abigail Figueroa

In terms of employment numbers, there has been a decrease in the number of workers in the apparel manufacturing industry since the 1990s. Figure B.2.5 shows this trend; though, there is an observable steady trend since 2020.



B.2.5 All Employees in Apparel Manufacturing Across All US States

Dividing these employment numbers into different operation categories, like sewing machine operations, across the whole US, there were a total of 116,130 workers operating sewing machines. Their respective mean hourly and annual wages are \$16.83 and \$35,000. This average is close to the median

hourly wage of \$16.56 across the whole nation. In Figure B.2.6, the states of California (17,990 workers), North Carolina (9,760 workers), Texas (6,850 workers), Florida (5,860 workers), and New York (5,830) are the states with the highest number of sewing machine operators. In terms of wages, Figure B.2.7 depicts that states like New York, Washington, Arizona, Connecticut, and Minnesota are some of the states who have earned an annual wage between \$38,430 to \$45,270, which are the highest range of annual wage across the whole nation.

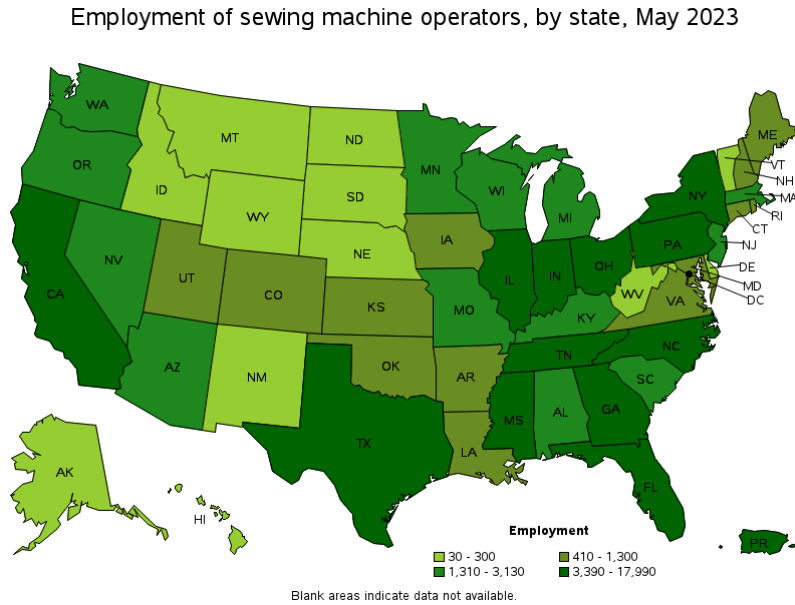


Figure B.2.6 Employment of Sewing Machine Operators, By State, in May 2023 (Source: Department of Labor Statistics. 51-6031 Sewing Machine Operators)

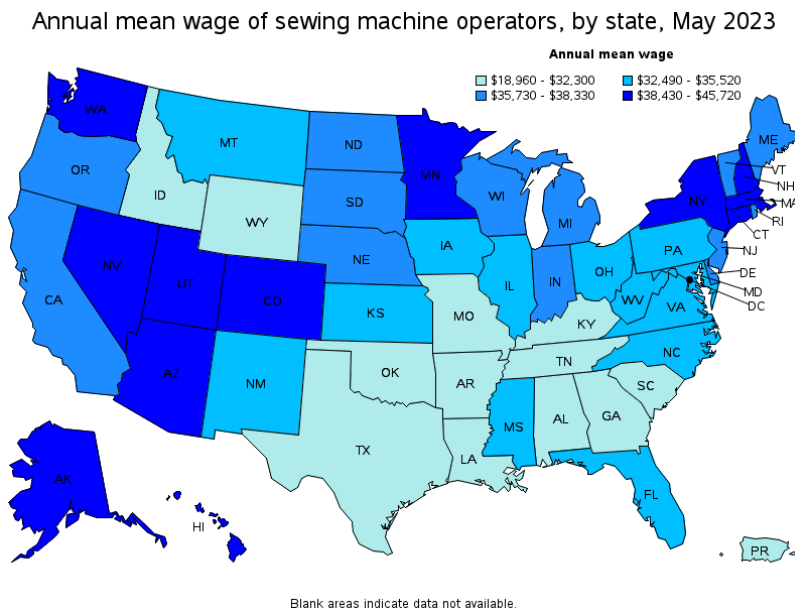


Figure B.2.7 Annual Mean Wage, By State, in May 2023 For Sewing Machine Operators (Source: Department of Labor Statistics. 51-6031 Sewing Machine Operators)

In other operation categories, like cutters and trimmers using hand, across the whole US, there is an approximate number of 7,220 workers. Their respective mean hourly and annual wages are \$18.88 and \$39,260. This average is slightly higher than the median hourly wage of 17.81 across the nation. In Figure B.2.8, the states of North Carolina (1,170 workers), California (720 workers), Indiana (610 workers), Alabama (460 workers), and New Jersey (410 workers) are the states with the higher number of cutters and trimmers using hands. In terms of wages, Figure B.2.9 shows that states like Washington, Oregon, Georgia, New York, and North Carolina are some of the states who have earned an annual wage between \$41,440 and \$50,870, which are the highest ranges of annual wage across the nation.

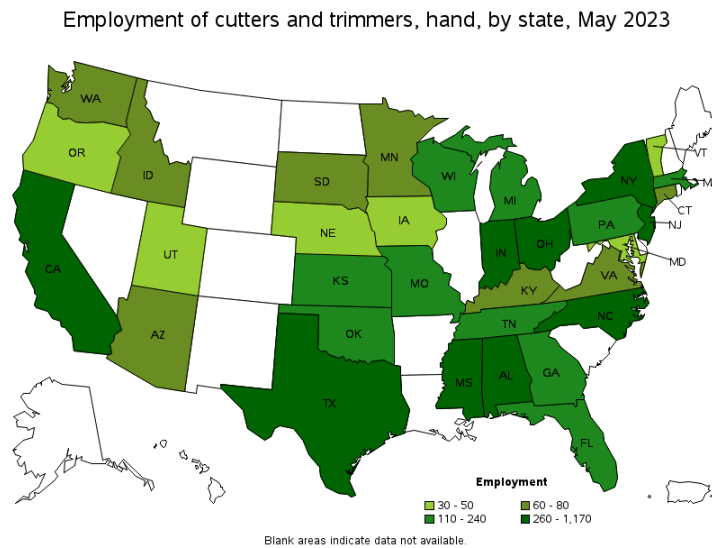


Figure B.2.6 Employment of Cutters and Trimmers, By State, in May 2023 (Source: Department of Labor Statistics. 51-9031 Cutters and Trimmers, Hand)

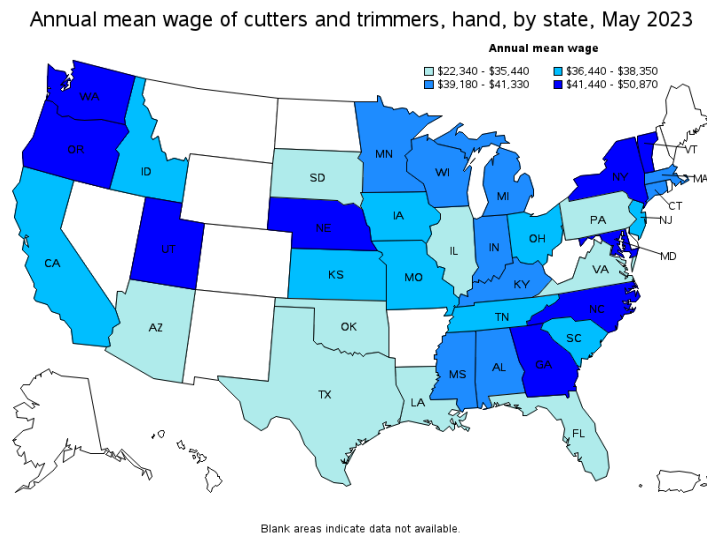


Figure B.2.6 Annual Mean Wage of Cutters and Trimmers, By State, in May 2023 (Source: Department of Labor Statistics. 51-9031 Cutters and Trimmers, Hand)

B.3 Industry Overview: California

According to the Employment Development Department (EDD) of the State of California, the cut and sew industry in California had an estimated employment of 24,240 in 2020. By 2030, it was projected to have an employment count of 20,700. This projected decrease is associated with a 14.5% decline in employment numbers.

In terms of sewing machine operations in California, the estimated number of sewing machine operators was 26,200 since 2018. By 2028, it was projected to plummet by 16.4%, lowering the projected number to 21,900. This decline, in comparison to the whole cut and sew industry, is slightly higher. This is, then, related to an hourly mean wage and an annual mean wage, \$18.00 and \$37,430 respectively. Compared to the median wage of sewing machine operators', this wage is slightly higher, with the median hourly wage for California being \$17.30. For cutters and trimmers in California, the estimated number of workers was 1,700. By 2028, it was projected to decrease to 1,200, constituting a 29.4% decline. This decline was the highest, in comparison, to the employment numbers throughout California. Additionally, EDD revealed that the hourly mean wage for these workers is \$18.08. This is also slightly higher with the median hourly wage for \$17.01

B.4 Industry Overview: Los Angeles

B.4.1 Introduction

The garment industry in Los Angeles has been central to American cut and sew apparel manufacturing in the US. The expansive workforce, the sprawling industrial base, and the proximity of the Port of Long Beach have all been strategically utilized in lining up the supply chain to meet standards of profitability. The manufacturing workforce, however, has largely been left out of this progress.

Due to the relationship between workers in the garment industry, the seasonal changes in different garment sub industries, and the different ways in which the industry is organized, the portion of the industry's revenue is at the expense of garment workers. It is imperative, then, that the LA garment industry must consider ways on how to rebalance and relocate capital among its workers.

Given the geographic location, the political heritage, and the demographic composition that predominates in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, especially in the garment industry, it is important to understand the socio-cultural characteristics that make up the LA garment industry. The history of labor organizations, nonprofit initiatives, and working-class movements created a workplace culture that became prominent across many LA industries, including the garment industry.

It is, then, important to recognize that immigration from Central and Latin America plays an important role in providing the market feasibility of many Los Angeles-based manufacturing firms. International trade agreements, unpredictable immigration policy, and the informal economy in LA are

key characteristics that have made up some of the demographic outcomes in the region. As a consequence, there is a dependence on low-cost, sometimes, undocumented labor that stands to fend off foreign outsourced competition, whose business leaders also benefit from the organization of the industry. In addition, there is not a strong state and federal labor law enforcement agency that can prevent garment manufacturers from breaking the law and engaging in unfair labor practices. Thus, the issue of undocumented labor is connected to immigration as the industry takes advantage of being in a sanctuary city.

B.4.2 Los Angeles and the Garment Industry: Contractors and Establishments

As of 2024, according to the Department of Industrial relations, there are a total of 891 current garment manufacturers and contractors active in LA as of 2024. From 2019 to 2022, the cut and sew apparel industry experienced a steady decline of manufacturers and contractors in LA. We documented these results using the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and US Census Bureau. It is critical to note that the succeeding line graphs only capture LA County alone.

In Figure B.4.2.1, the graph shows a steady decrease, since 2019, among the garment industry. This trend can be observed across the apparel manufacturing industry, the cut and sew apparel manufacturing industry, the cut and sew apparel contractors, the men's and boy's cut and sew apparel manufacturers, and the women's girl's and infant's cut and sew apparel manufacturing industry.

Annual Manufactures and Contractors Establishments In the Los Angeles Garment Industry from 2019-2022 for Cut & Sew NAICS's Codes

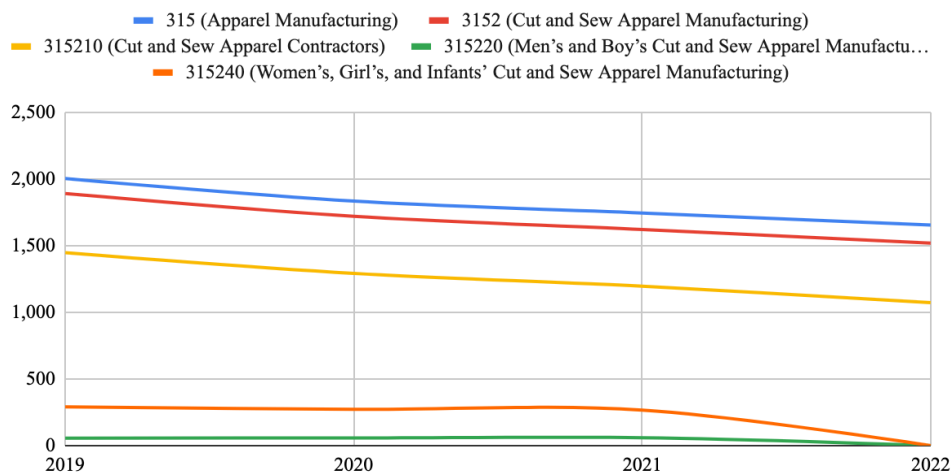


Figure B.4.2.1 Annual Manufacturers and Contractors Establishments in the LA Garment Industry From 2019-2022 Across Cut & Sew NAICS's Codes (Source: Private, NAICS 315, 3152, 315210, 315220, 315210, 315220, 315240, Los Angeles County, California Annual averages 2019 - 2022, All establishment sizes -Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages - Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Further, mapping out the number of active manufacturers and contractors in the garment industry in Figure B.4.2.2, during 2024, it reveals that the manufacturer count is concentrated around the Downtown, LA area. Taking a closer look at Figure B.4.2.3, we observed that garment manufacturers and contractors are highly centralized along the Freeway 105 and Freeway 10. In Figure B.4.2.4, we found that there is a cluster of garment establishments across the industrial areas of Downtown, LA.

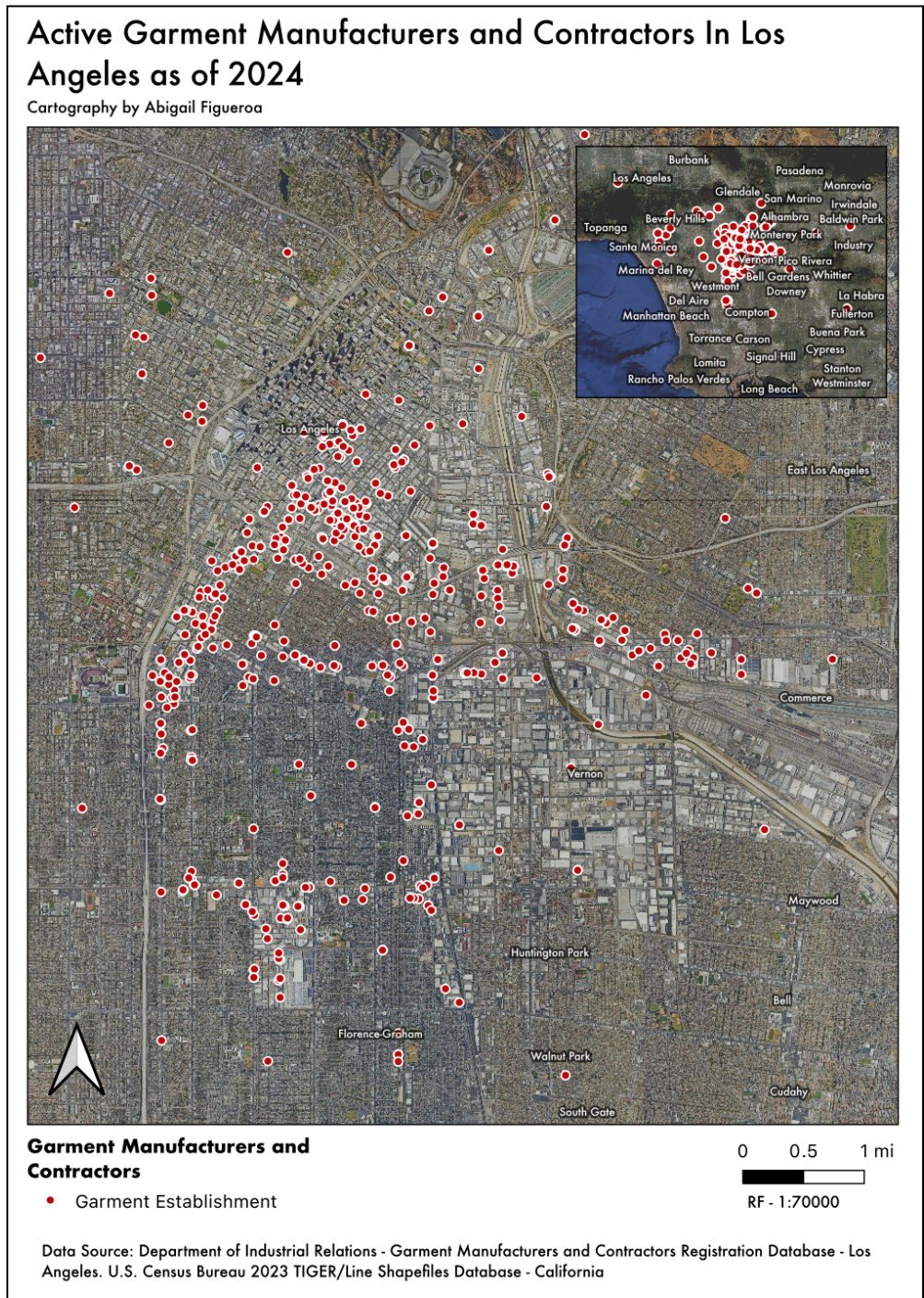


Figure B.4.2.2 Active Garment Manufacturers and Contractors in LA during 2024



Figure B.4.2.3 Active Garment Manufacturers and Contractors in Downtown, LA during 2024 (Part 1)

Active Garment Manufacturers and Contractors In Downtown Los Angeles as of 2024

Cartography by Abigail Figueroa



Garment Manufacturers and Contractors

- Garment Establishment

0 0.25 0.5 mi



RF - 1:70000

Data Source: Department of Industrial Relations - Garment Manufacturers and Contractors Registration Database - Los Angeles. U.S. Census Bureau 2023 TIGER/Line Shapefiles Database - California

Figure B.4.2.4 Active Garment Manufacturers and Contractors in Downtown, LA during 2024 (Part 2)

B.4.3 Los Angeles and the Garment Industry: Annual Average Employment

In Figure B.4.3.1, the graph demonstrates a general increase in annual employment in the apparel and cut and sew apparel manufacturing industry. However, when broken down into the NAICS's niche categories, the women's, girl's, and infants' cut and sew apparel manufacturing industry experiences the sharpest decline since 2021. For cut and sew apparel contractors and men's and boy's cut and sew apparel manufacturing industry, there has been a stable trend.

NAICS: Annual Average Employment in the Los Angeles Garment Industry from 2019-2022

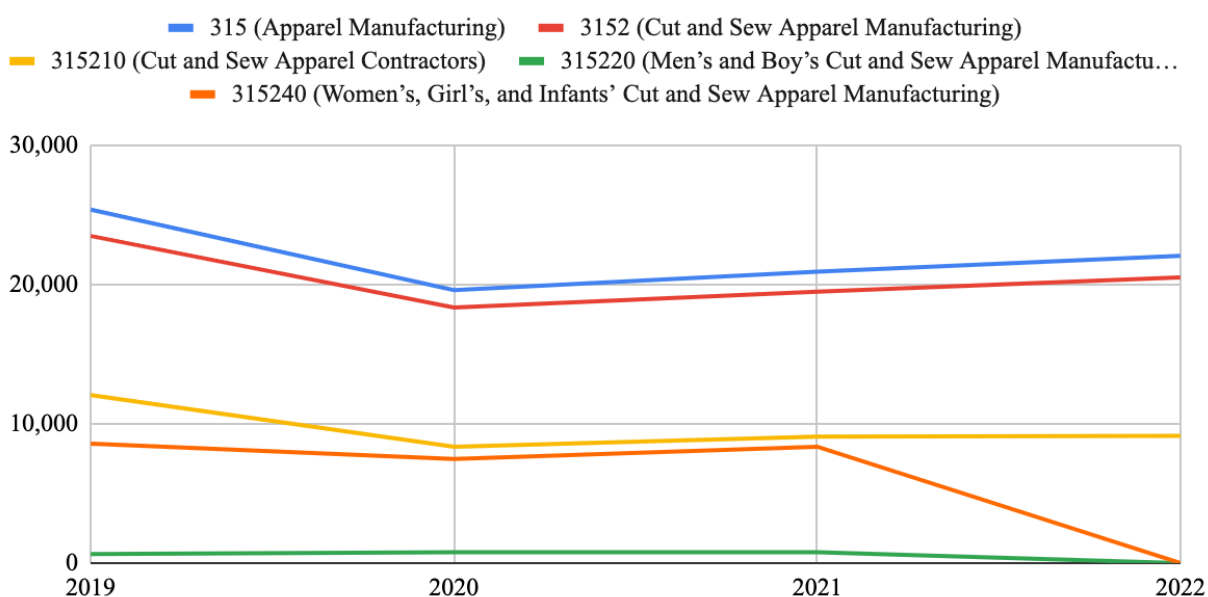


Figure B.4.3.1 Annual Average Employment Rate in the Los Angeles Industry from 2019-2023 (Source: Private, NAICS 315, 3152, 315210, 315220, 315210, 315220, 315240, Los Angeles County, California Annual averages 2019 - 2022, All establishment sizes -Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages - Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Looking at the projected employment from 2020-2030, expanding more insights in employment across the garment industry, according to the Employment Development Department State of California, the metropolitan area of Los Angeles (i.e. Los Angeles-Long beach-Glendale) was foreseen to have a 36.4% decline in employment among cut and sew apparel manufacturing. This is characterized by the difference of estimated employment in 2020, which is 18,400, and the projected employment in 2030, 11,700. In comparison to California, this is more than double of the projected employment decrease across the whole state. Across California, it has been projected that it will decline by 14.5%.

C | FINDINGS

C.1 Qualitative Methods Approach: Manufacturer Interviews

C.1.1 Manufacturer Profiles

We interviewed 5 manufacturers in the L.A. area to better understand their needs. The manufacturer's contact information was gathered through GWC and outside recommendations. The manufacturers we interviewed were:

1. Ocean + Main
 - a. Description: An environmentally sustainable brand based in DTLA that works with many different small contractors from designing to shipping and is active in the coalition space. It is very popular with big celebrities (for example, Oprah!) and has a long-standing relationship with GWC. Through our interview, we also gathered that they focus on gender-neutral clothing, are direct to the consumer, no wholesale, and manufacture entirely in LA.
 - b. Manufacturer Type: Brand
 - c. Contact Information: Mary Price, mary@ocean-and-main.com
2. GTLA Apparel
 - a. Description: An all-phase apparel manufacturer who's owner was born and raised in L.A. and works with clients that care about their product being ethically made. They also provide classes on cut and sew, full package design development, and pattern making. In fact, they have family in the garment industry, are active in GWC Task Force work, and prioritize worker sustainability.
 - b. Manufacturer Type: Manufacturer Contractor Brand (Vertical)
 - c. Contact Information: Lupe Tlatenchi, lupe@gtlaapparel.com
3. Ladysmyth Inc.
 - a. Description: An L.A.-based a-la-carte business that works with small businesses and start-up companies to design and supply their garments. They prioritize aesthetics and environmental sustainability by working with deadstock fabrics. They do not employ workers directly and instead act as a liaisons between garment factories and their clients. They have been active in past GWC coalition spaces.
 - b. Manufacturer Type: Manufacturer Contractor
 - c. Contact Information: Halle Grano & Shannon Weidel, halle@ladysmythla.com
shannon@ladysmythla.com
4. D&D Leather Goods
 - a. Description: An L.A based full package manufacturer that crafts any and all garments—specializes in leather goods. With a small team of workers who know how to work three or more machines each, they take part in operations such as patterns, samples,

prototypes, screen printing, embroidery, and production. They were recommended by Ladysmith Inc. They highlighted their prioritization of worker sustainability through fair wages for example.

- b. Manufacturer Type: Manufacturer
 - c. Contact Information: Daniel Garcia, dnd.leather.goods@gmail.com
5. Bomme Studio
- a. Description: Bomme Studio is an L.A. wholesale clothing manufacturer offering private label services for established brands and custom merch and full-package apparel. They built out production teams and sales teams; and focused on business development and client communication. They do product development with clients and pass it on to production. They were active in the SB62 campaign.
 - b. Manufacturer Type: Manufacturer Contractor
 - c. Contact Information: Bo Metz, bomme@bommestudio.com

C.1.2 Findings

We found four key themes that answer the research questions, (1) To what extent is a high-road garment industry feasible in the L.A. region?, (2) what are the challenges and needs of garment manufacturers in the context of the L.A. garment industry?, and (3) what are the perceptions of garment manufacturers about a high-road garment industry?. Further, we laid out quotes from the manufacturers themselves. As a precaution, we note that some of these quotes came from the interview transcripts itself and from the interview notes. So, some of them were not word-for-word statements from the manufacturers. However, to the best of our ability, we tried capturing the exact statements of the manufacturers by detailedly jotting it in our notes.

C.1.2.1 Findings: Commitment to Ethical and Sustainable Industry

Two of the manufacturers claimed that a high-road garment industry is possible. They discussed that there are some manufacturers who are committed to environmental sustainability. For some of them, they use fabrics that are eco-friendly and biodegradable. They mentioned that “circular economy” and “deadstock options” are some of these sustainable practices. However, two manufacturers provided some concerns about the potential challenges of a high-road garment industry. They added that there were a lot of consumers who were not willing to pay for more garment products that were made ethically; these consumers demanded more products based on aesthetically pleasing features. For instance, one manufacturer emphasized that “customers like the style and sustainability is more of an afterthought.” Another manufacturer expressed that, even though Gen Z has paved the way for more environmentally sustainable garment consumption, there are not a lot of consumers willing to pay a higher price for a more sustainable product. They elaborated that:

“Five or six years ago, there was hope that consumers would shift to pay more for a [sustainable] product, but it’s just not. That person that does that is very, it’s more of like, higher price point.

People can't just... can't afford it. So when you're saying sales, like, yeah, you when we're talking about domestic, catering to those people most. But there just isn't many of them."

C.1.2.2 Findings: Uncertainty in the Garment Industry

Sustainability and ethical garment production are important aspects of assessing a high-road garment industry, as they influence the demand for these products. In turn, high-road garment manufacturers face tremendous uncertainty in the garment industry. Effects of consumer consumption and a diverse source of clientele, evidenced by manufacturers' perspectives on consumer consumption of sustainable garment products, contribute to this uncertainty. For instance, one manufacturer states that a specific demand for garments dictates the garments the manufacturer is producing. There are some times when there is not enough garment volume demanded, that can be allocated for a full-time worker. Others, on the other hand, rely on subcontractors to do the work. These challenges can, consequently, influence the amount of work these manufacturers are willing to hire. One manufacturer exemplified that when things were slow, implying the demand for garments, they had to let garment workers go. They expressed that:

"One of the things that would make it easier for factory owners is to have [that] kind of that built-in security of being able to pay their workers when times are kind of slow. Otherwise, it's a very... it's... to be a garment worker is probably comparable to like a freelancer like you really, it's like, wherever the work is where you go. There's not a lot of security in it."

These slow times can often be characterized as a low number of requests for a specific garment product and/or garment volume. One manufacturer explained that:

"It just comes down to like, you looked at volume... So you have to outsource the labor to someone, especially as everyone takes their eyelets there and they're busy."

Additionally, one manufacturer brought an insightful perspective on how the budget set by designers potentially influences the wages imposed upon the workers, and the amount of work available upon these workers. They expressed that:

"For all the salaries to be better paid. But it all depends on the designer because the designer sets a budget. For the designers to be conscious about the cost of the work in the US and in CA. Because if we say no to the budget set, then just go to other places. I let them leave right away if they don't agree with my price. But let's say that they would start to think and be like this product is costing this much because they are making it and it's a business. But many of them, the designers only see their design but not the price. They don't know all the back-end; they only see the end goal. But you have to go through the river, the mountains, jungles, etc. We go through so much in the middle. The designer should be more involved in the process because at the end time is money."

C.1.2.3 Findings: Opportunities, Needs, and Challenges

Nevertheless, garment manufacturers also conveyed that hiring in the garment industry is more difficult. Two of the manufacturers asserted that there are not a lot of people who have experience in the garment industry. For example, these manufacturers employed their workers via word of mouth and through outsourcing; through this recruiting practice, they were able to hire workers who possessed the required skills needed for the type of work they were looking for.

As a result of this hiring practice, one manufacturer justified that consistency among workers' products and deliverables is needed. Another manufacturer also shared the same sentiments, emphasizing that:

“As people who build relationships, they just sort of stick with the people that can deliver on time and have good prices. It's kind of like that. Like it's not like you want to be a good team all the time. Where it's like people you can depend on the consistency.”

Additionally, they emphasized some problems with communication and transparency among their new hires. One manufacturer suggested that there should be more communication and transparency in garment work. Another manufacturer, reiterated this, and said that workers, sometimes, when offered work, do not show up, so issues of reliability, professionalism, and commitment come up. As they asserted:

“Workers don't show up after one day and never return calls even if they need work. Finding reliable workers is a challenge. [There is a] struggle with finding professionalism and commitment.”

However, it is important to note that this is not the same across all garment manufacturers. One garment manufacturer disagreed, emphasizing that in L.A., it is easy to hire garment workers. They added that, what is difficult, is keeping the consistency of work among garment workers during downturn seasonal changes.

The majority of the garment manufacturers also expressed the desired skills required upon entry to work. Across manufacturers, having a diverse skill set can prevent holding back the expansion of production, even when the clients require specialized products. Namely, two manufacturers have performed custom orders with high quality that required highly specialized niche skills. Four out of the five manufacturers expressed specialized skills in single needle, overlock, and cover stitch to perform basic garment sewing. One manufacturer emphasizes garment skills in producing cotton, silk, and denim. Another manufacturer highlighted the importance of workers who have knowledge of all machines, such as MRP operations, and multi-operators. They explained that:

“[They] prefer sellers that have skills of using all machines. So MRP operator, multi-operator, yeah, so they're very highly skilled. That's why they're, they're paid a little bit more. Versus like, maybe someone can just run a single nail machine or someone's just running the serge you know, like, the overlock machine. Yeah, so the sewers here have to be able to bounce around. Yeah, like

you got to be able to do buttonholes and use a single needle and an overlock and maybe a flat lock and maybe a cable and like, some hand sewing techniques and things they just have to be really skilled. Yeah.”

Additionally, another manufacturer has a six-person team with a cutter, production line, finishing, and quality positions, with the required multi-needle machine, bartack machine, buttonhole, button machines, and cover stitch skills. A different manufacturer deals with leather goods that require a double needle along with experience working with a head machine; they also highlighted that they need workers who have a minimum experience of three machines. However, they prefer workers who know more than this minimum experience, especially those who take custom-made orders that require specialized skill sets. They expressed that he wanted to get:

Better workers and the ones who could put out the production. For example, all the workers I have now know how to use all the machines. For example, Felix knows how to use [a] minimum [of] 10 [(he is young)], Lazaro: 7 machines, Marisela: more than 10 machines [(she is young)]. The younger ones find the way to always be doing the work –they have the time, the passion, and they like it. It doesn’t matter to me if they take 1 hr to fix and adjust the machine because the client pays for that service. And compared to... Lazaro, he doesn't have much patience anymore since he is older. He has been working with me for about 15 years. I have given him his respect because even though he doesn't have much patience anymore, I give him his respect and time. Here no one is pressured (like in one day or such). It will be started and finished when it needs to. Because if they do it wrong, we need to start from the beginning and do it all over again. And you lose money.

In order to address these needs, some garment manufacturers suggested some solutions. For example, one manufacturer emphasized that there needs to be well-rounded, rigorous garment training for numerous garment workers. As they expanded, they reasoned that this training could provide more diversity in their skills, so they could functionally collaborate as a team when they entered the manufacturing stage. They also highlighted that it is not a requirement to already have a wider range of skills. Though most manufacturers have expressed that they may want people with experience, this specific manufacturer said that they are looking for ambitious and curious people. Additionally, another garment manufacturer suggests a profile system for garment workers to display what they pay their workers for particular expertise for machines and stitching in an orderly manner. It’s important to make it apparent that each manufacturer doesn't offer the same job tasks, therefore, a profile system of the pay expectations and quality for each manufacturer can bridge the gap between garment workers and manufacturers.

C.1.2.4 Findings: Bureaucracy, Legal Process, and Capital

All of the manufacturers expressed that most of the problems regarding low wages in the garment industry may come from different factors. For example, one of the manufacturers indicated the bureaucracy, legal process, and inaccessibility of employment and labor codes during source-clientele or employer-worker contracts. This may indicate that finding a lawyer or an expert can become costly to these manufacturers as it spreads the costs even more rather than focusing on paying the workers. These

costs are even costlier to small garment manufacturing businesses. One small garment manufacturer, they described their biggest challenge as dealing with the bureaucratic process:

“I think our biggest challenges are usually people kind of dealing with because we deal with a large variety of clientele. And when you're learning when you're going through a business and you a lot of the legal stuff starts to come your... you... you... understand why you have contracts you understand you start to really see why you need a lawyer, you know, like these are things I think that were like part of our biggest challenge like I wouldn't say challenges but more of the tribulations that we faced as a company came, you know, at some expense, you know, to us, but we learned how to protect ourselves. A lot more.”

Another garment manufacturer also indicated the difficulty for workers in the industry to take out a permit as one would need an SSN or ITIN number, an identification not widely accessible amongst the garment worker community. However, they also expressed that even without help from this bureaucracy, they managed to navigate legal matters on their own; that is, figuring out everything through self-learning.

Further, some garment manufacturers illustrated that capital can be a big problem. One manufacturer, in particular, expressed the need for a small business lending system as there's a lack of grants in the industry:

“Our type of business it is hard to get funding (e.g., lending). This would be a good avenue for manufacturers to help. To have some sort of small business lending system, where we can borrow money and pay back. Even more grants! A lot of grants in tech and investors, but not in the manufacturing business. It would be good to have an ecosystem in this part that is willing to invest in businesses like mine. Have something that focuses on the manufacturing industry. Eg. During COVID-19, there were grants for restaurants but would be helpful for grants in my industry.”

This system, according to them, is especially important for businesses like them, who are small, and face costly machinery, worker compensation, and rental spaces in the LA region. Another manufacturer supported and amplified these sentiments:

“I think also as a small business, just funding... funding... yeah, having capital to cover everything that you're doing and payroll and things like that. That's just the nature of a small business. And we don't have investors or anything. No, Holly and I have fully grown this business and we've been in business for eight years and we've never had investors and we don't plan on getting investors but also it leads to you know, we have to really hold your bootstraps. You know, when times get tough, you really have to like dig in, you know, and start kind of hustling more and you know, like, but we, but the, the process always like, we trust the process, and that's what we always say we always trust the process. Because we are experts and people always need... will always need us in some form. You know, like, that's not going away.”

C.1.2.5 Findings: Perspectives On A Staffing Cooperative

Lastly, garment manufacturers also showed mixed opinions regarding the need for a staffing agency or cooperative, in general. One garment manufacturer noted that a staffing agency can be useful for short-term labor. They described that:

“I think a staffing agency would be very different from what they said, I think that's probably good for people that we need, like short-term labor, right. So like, if you have a big job or a new job coming on, you're wasting money in labor. So I understand the benefits of that, it just isn't for us because we don't do any sewing in house anymore. That would be more like the sewing service, right? So they can step up or scale down depending on their needs.”

Interestingly, a garment manufacturer, on the other hand, does not see a cooperative working. They emphasized that not all workers give the same amount of productivity, and firing them opens up new avenues of bureaucratic nightmares and legal challenges. They exemplified an experience from another manufacturer to justify this opinion:

That doesn't really work. *He mentioned an individual; however it was unclear from the recording*. He was a good person. He had more than 1M workers. They targeted him a lot. He started to give actions to all workers. It worked but not much. They put a lawsuit [against] him. He had that vision of a cooperative. I don't think we are equipped to be in a system like that as Latinos. It's really good to have a cooperative that you are talking about, but not everyone puts their part. For example, when I had 40 workers, there were 2 restrooms and a line of 3 people to go in on their phone. I would tell them, “whats up, what are y'all doing here?” And they would say “we are waiting for the restroom” but “meanwhile you are waiting why not go work and come back” so if you think about it, this influences a lot. Let's say I have the 40 workers, if they all come 10 minutes late – then that's 40 times 10 so 40 minutes – it's time that is being lost. It's the reality. They would even put apples in the restroom so there wouldn't be any restrooms. And ultimately in that case if I lose, we all lose too. Even when a client comes we drink coffee, eat bread, or a beer...I treat them how I treat you... But not everyone thinks this way. And if you align them to the cooperative, they will cause you problems. Little by little it will become a greater issue; then when you want to fire them, then they want to sue you. Then that's the issue of lawsuits. So we are just not prepared.

C.2 Quantitative Methods Approach: Garment Worker Surveys

C.2.1 Findings: Summary

We administered a survey among the group of GWC members that are most involved in founding the staffing cooperative. The survey questionnaire evaluated each garment worker on their expertise in the industry, by asking their skills and the operations they can perform, as well as, their overall job performance and expectations. Only nine responses were recorded with some blank responses.

Further, we argue that the data from this survey is sufficient, where we answer the questions, (1) what can the staffing cooperative provide as assets and skills to supply labor needed for these manufacturers? and (2) how can the staffing cooperative match the needs of manufacturers in the L.A. region?.

In summary, we found that each garment worker has at least 10 years experience in the industry with several having as much as 30 years experience with diverse levels of experience from basic to expertise. Further, we found that they typically work with cotton (22.9%), polyester (20%), and leather (5.7%); though, they also work with some fabrics like lace, denim, and silk (11.4%). In terms of the machine operations they use, most of them use a single-needle (29.4%), tacking (17.6%), button (11.8%), eyelet (11.8%) , and overlock (11.8%), and coverstitch (11.8%) machines. These responses are consistent with the number of operations they can do as almost all of them can use a sewing machine operator, and trimming operations.

Additionally, we found that almost all of them complete their tasks and deliverables, based on the quality and standard their supervisors have set. We also found that they are focused when they have an ongoing task. Below are some of the graphs and/or figures exemplifying these main findings. We also asked for additional information, such as the types of garments that are the most difficult to work with and the estimated count of garments they produce. This additional information aims to contextualize some of the answers they provided, such as, questions related to their job expectations and performance.

C.2.2 Findings: Data Visualization

We visualized the survey responses into various forms (e.g., bar graph, pie chart) for easier interpretations. Below are the graphs that detail the summary:

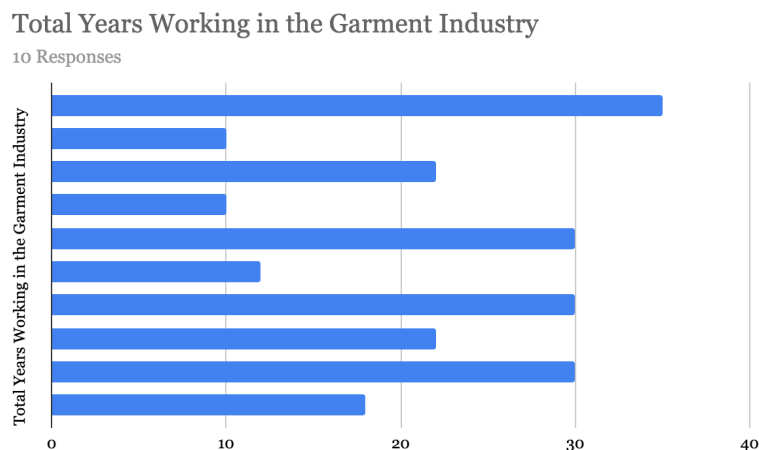


Figure C.2.2.1 Frequency of the Total Years Garment Workers Has Worked In The Garment Industry

Machines Operations Used by the Garment Workers.

9 Total Responses

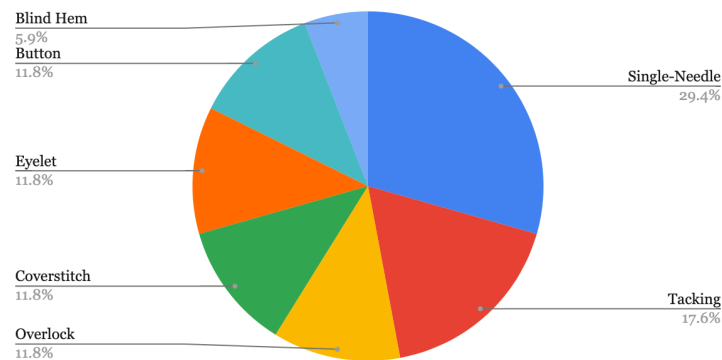


Figure C.2.2.2 Percentage of Machine Operations Used By The Garment Workers

Types of Fabrics Sewed by Garment Workers.

9 Total Responses

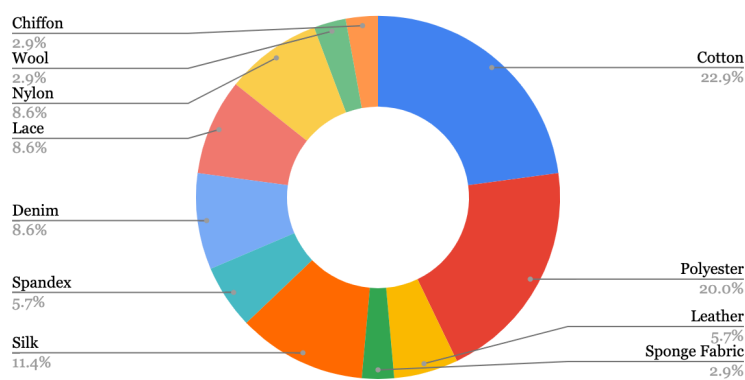


Figure C.2.2.3 Percentage of Types of Fabrics Sewed By Garment Workers

Types of Garments Most Difficult to Work With.

9 Total Responses

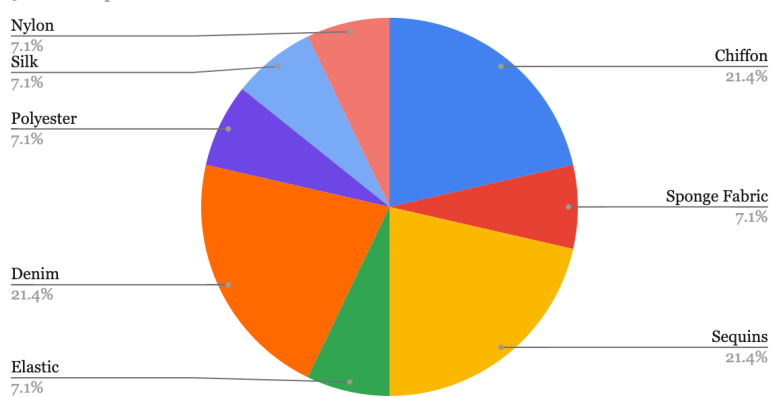


Figure C.2.2.4 Percentage of Types of Garments Garment Workers Identified Most Difficult To Work With

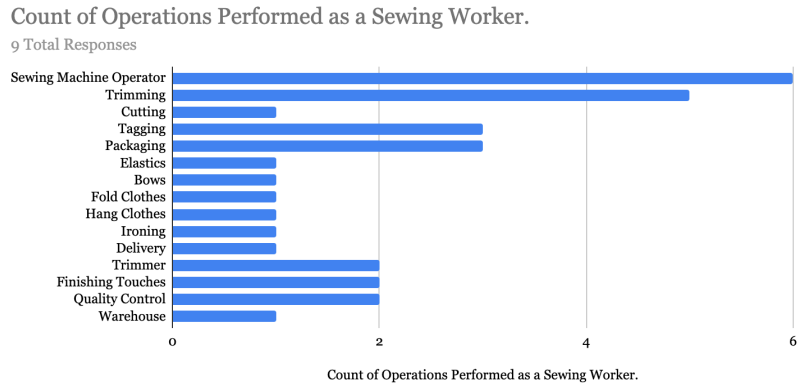


Figure C.2.2.5 Frequency of Operations Performed by Sewing Workers

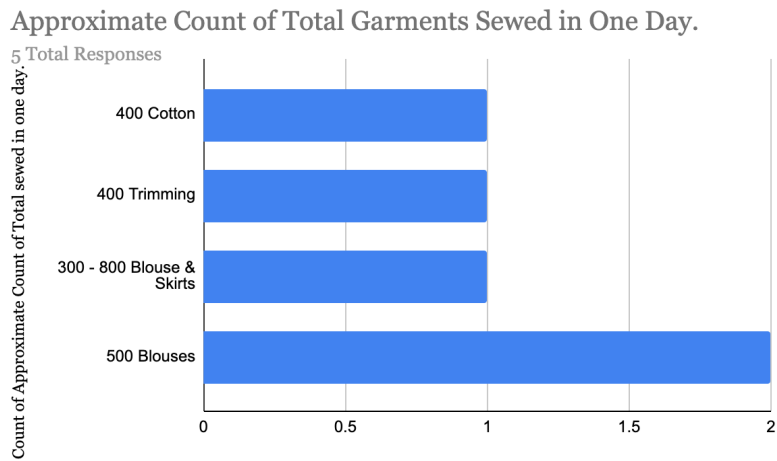


Figure C.2.2.6 Frequency of Total Garments A Garment Worker Sewed in One Day

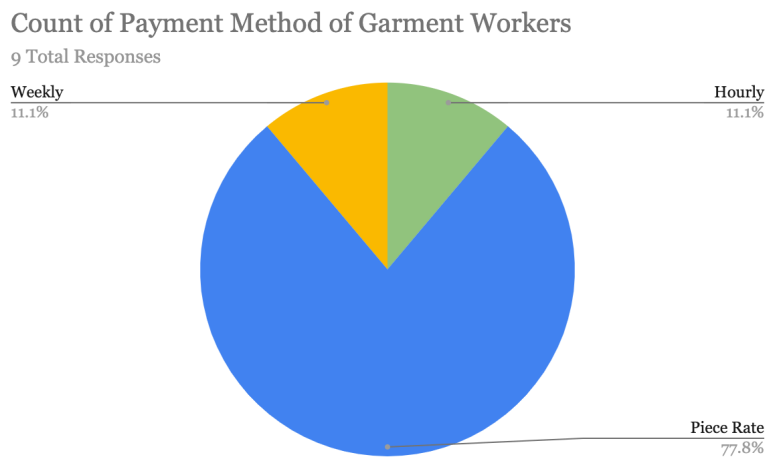


Figure C.2.2.7 Frequency of Payment Methods of Garment Workers

Garment Workers: Job Expectations

9 Total Responses

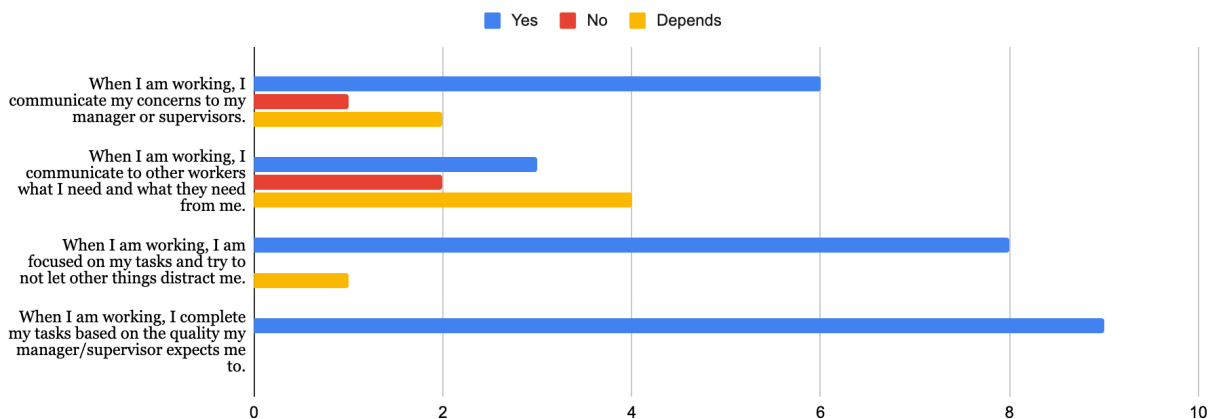


Figure C.2.2.8 Frequency of Job Expectations Garment Workers Has

Garment Workers: Scheduled Shifts Performance

8 Total Responses

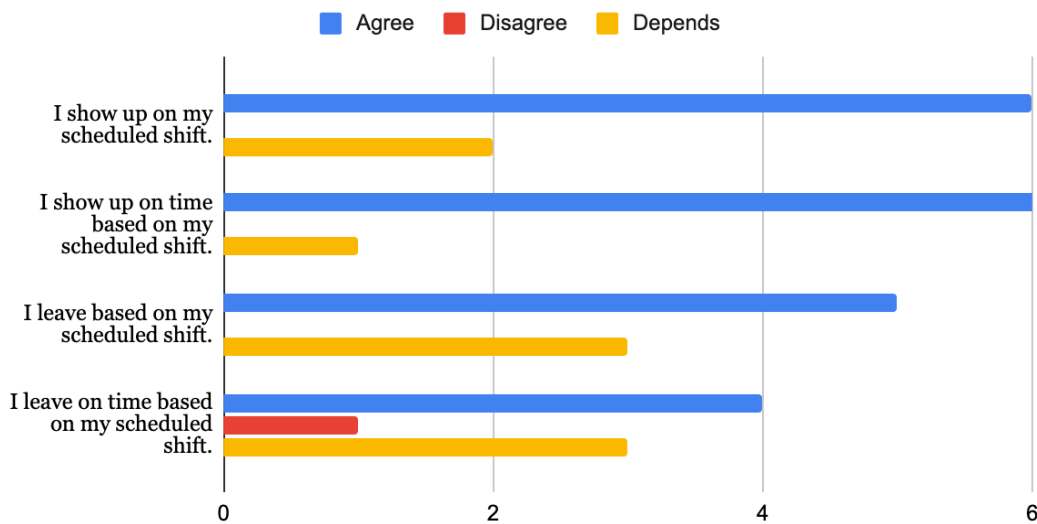


Figure C.2.2.9 Frequency of Scheduled Shifts' Performance Among Garment Workers

D | REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

D.1 Situating The Staffing Cooperative in LA

Based on a preliminary market research analysis, we found evidence of the declining apparel-making industry across the whole US, California, and Los Angeles, when divided into specific sub garment categories. Interestingly, even when the state of California had the highest employment in the garment industry, we also found that it is also one of the states that do not provide higher wages, when compared to other states in the US. From a global perspective, this trend may come from losing contract jobs to foreign manufacturers such as in China, India, Bangladesh, and in recent years, countries in Latin America. Therefore, it is safe to say that the American garment industry has minimal discretion over apparel production.

Yet, LA paints a different picture. LA's trends compared to the whole US and California, as the whole apparel manufacturing industry showed a slight increase since the year 2020. In spatial terms, there is a booming garment industry and garment establishments, especially in Downtown LA, where the staffing cooperative will be situated. So, it is important to note that while the overall nationwide trend seems to paint a declining apparel manufacturing, LA's trends may imply that it has a strong competition for labor among small-scale businesses and designers. Therefore, the staffing cooperative can be feasible in the local LA garment market, especially, if it focuses its services towards cut and sew apparel contractors.

Further, after conducting qualitative interviews with five contractors, it had been widely expressed that there's currently not enough volume for full-time production year-round to sustain a large sewing crew. Though we found a slow rate of employment increase in the LA garment industry, the contractors have expressed problems of seasonality within the fashion industry, competition with fast fashion brands, new generation preferences, and getting enough contracts is difficult. It is important to note that these contractors deal with small contracts that are rejected by overseas contractors. Los Angeles contractors, then, carry on these contracts, but as they face overhead costs such as worker compensation, payroll, contractor license renewals, and rent, they could only accept orders at which they are capable of delivering. Our interviews revealed that it is important for the staffing cooperative to provide additional low-cost service packages, to the garment manufacturers, to decrease these overhead costs they are facing. It is also important for the staffing cooperative to provide resources on efficient ways that garment manufacturers can tackle the challenges they are facing.

Additionally, four out of the five contractors that we interviewed, faced difficulty in finding workers that are reliable and can meet the expectations set upon them as workers. Contractors employ their workers through word of mouth and rely on the worker's judgment as to whether they can offer the skills needed for the required design details. As a result, contractors are already limited in terms of what they're capable of doing. Therefore, a staffing cooperative could alleviate the stresses of hiring workers,

as well as increase contractors' capability of receiving further contracting work to expand their contracting capacity.

A worker-staffing cooperative also offers a domain for manufacturers to easily dispatch workers and also alleviates the legalities of employing undocumented workers for contractors. The advantage of the staffing cooperative offers garment workers with varying expertise needed for particular garments for contractors. The staffing cooperative also assists garment workers' employment opportunities and the co-operative will hold manufacturers accountable for ethical workplace practices, competitive pay, less liability, compensation, and worker safety. The staffing cooperative offers an avenue for high-road manufacturing within the garment industry that will seek better working conditions for garment workers that will simultaneously alleviate the overhead for contractors for employing workers for their contracting business.

We recommend the staffing cooperative to outline their agreed-upon business principles and establish their business plan. We suggest that the staffing cooperative also prioritize determining the appropriate number of clientele that is suitable for the amount of labor (i.e. worker partners) to cover their living costs and business costs. In this stage, the evaluation of the contracts and the terms of their agreement will be determined by how the worker-owners make decisions. In addition to these business plans, we encourage them to provide tools and resources to enable their economic feasibility (i.e., being competitive) in LA, among each contractor they are going to partner with. Additionally, as a business operating in cooperative principles, understanding the dynamics of the workplace is important as well. Standard of living and quality of work should be emphasized, while focusing on investing in worker productivity, through training and apprenticeship opportunities.

Once the business is formulated and finely tuned to the goals of its partners, the topic of capital formation for initiating the enterprise and partnerships is of large importance. This information will be provided in the next section as a potential resource. Because this is not a conventional business model, sources of capital will not be conventional either. Focusing on crowdfunding, donations, and perhaps connections with organizations that are looking to advance the high-road in the garment industry, are one of these sources. These capital recommendations will be detailedly laid out in the next section.

D.2 Final Recommendations: Filling The Gaps - Bridging Staffing Cooperative Services and Manufacturers' Needs

D.2.1 Recommendations: Summary

Needs	Recommended Potential Solution/s
Skills: Garment manufacturers require and encourage workers to have a diverse range of skills in garment production. Communication, on-time deliveries, and transparency is sought out.	<input type="checkbox"/> Make partnerships with local training centers and vocational schools such as community colleges around LA and Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising to enhance the skills of

	<p>their workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Invest in constructing diverse worker profiles and credential system to showcase the skills and work experiences of the garment workers <input type="checkbox"/> Offer workshops sessions where garment workers teach each other's skills and expertise
<p>Complicated Administrative Process: Garment manufacturers expressed the expensive administrative process, such as finding a lawyer and conducting contract renewals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Add low-cost services and expertise, such as legal advice, to manufacturers when contracting garment staff <input type="checkbox"/> Provide easy-to-use, accessible guides on ways the garment manufacturers can save from the expensive administrative processes <input type="checkbox"/> Hire an attorney that already works with the GWC to be part of the staffing coop team <input type="checkbox"/> Create a structure with "leaders" that ensure on-time and correct deliveries based on the worker's skills (e.g., skills building lead, communication lead and delivery schedule lead). This "lead" system can be done on a rotational basis.
<p>Uncertainty in the Garment Industry: The garment industry can be slow given the seasonal timeline. This means that manufacturers may not need as many workers, potentially leading to job insecurities and piece rate payments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Make a list of manufacturers that can hire the coop regularly to create a reliable network of contractors for steady work <input type="checkbox"/> Broaden the current manufacturer based to manufacturers who are currently high-road and those who are not <input type="checkbox"/> Supply information about the staffing coop to incentivize non-high road manufacturers to consider the staffing coop as an option <input type="checkbox"/> Pay workers a livable wage by the hour and overtime
<p>Consumers: Consumers are not willing to pay more for sustainable clothes which places the burden on manufacturers to bear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Recommend manufacturers to reduce the use of imported materials like leather and try using recycled materials to cut manufacturing costs
<p>Funding: The staffing cooperative needs start-up funding and money to keep the business going.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create marketing strategies such as crowd-funding partnering with unions, worker centers, and nonprofits to make their merchandise and use social media to promote the coop

	<input type="checkbox"/> Lobby for policy incentives like tax breaks to encourage contracting with staffing coop
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D.2.2 Recommendations: Final Comments

We emphasize three main recommendations from the summary we laid out above.

D.2.2.1 Highly Specialized and Diverse Skilled Workforce

The findings highlighted a niche market for a highly skilled and diverse labor force that can sew and cut difficult fabric such as leather. Currently, one manufacturer pays their 10-20 employees roughly \$20 an hour for their skills and expertise. Utilizing the strength of each worker can leverage their labor power to negotiate better pay and compensation, but this can only be done by further advancing garment workers' skills, reliability, and efficiency of the work they practice. The staffing cooperative is unique in that each member offers their own specialty and skills that can be utilized to teach others and lead certain skill-building teams to advance garment workers' labor power. Potential partnerships with other vocational schools to offer certifications of certain equipment and specialties could help workers' skill sets and portfolios.

D.2.2.2 Portfolio System

A portfolio system of the garment worker's skills and previous work could leverage and market workers' skills in the staffing cooperative. One manufacturer raised concern over the lack of communication and skills for garment workers. Portfolio systems could demonstrate the skills each worker offers with guarantee and reality, but in exchange for the staffing cooperative service, manufacturers must pay competitive wages to compensate for the worker's skills and expertise.

D.2.2.3 Legal Consultation and Workforce Solutions

Based on what has been gathered from interviews with local manufacturing firms, it is clear that creating a role within the cooperative is specifically tasked with providing legal services when it comes to writing, understanding, and negotiating a contract. This aspect of the business model can allow for revenue associated with increased liability. In short, manufacturing firms seek to minimize the difficulties in not only procuring workforce solutions but also retaining them under an accountability agreement outlined in the contract.

D.3 Business Assessment: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threat (SWOT) Analysis For The Staffing Cooperative

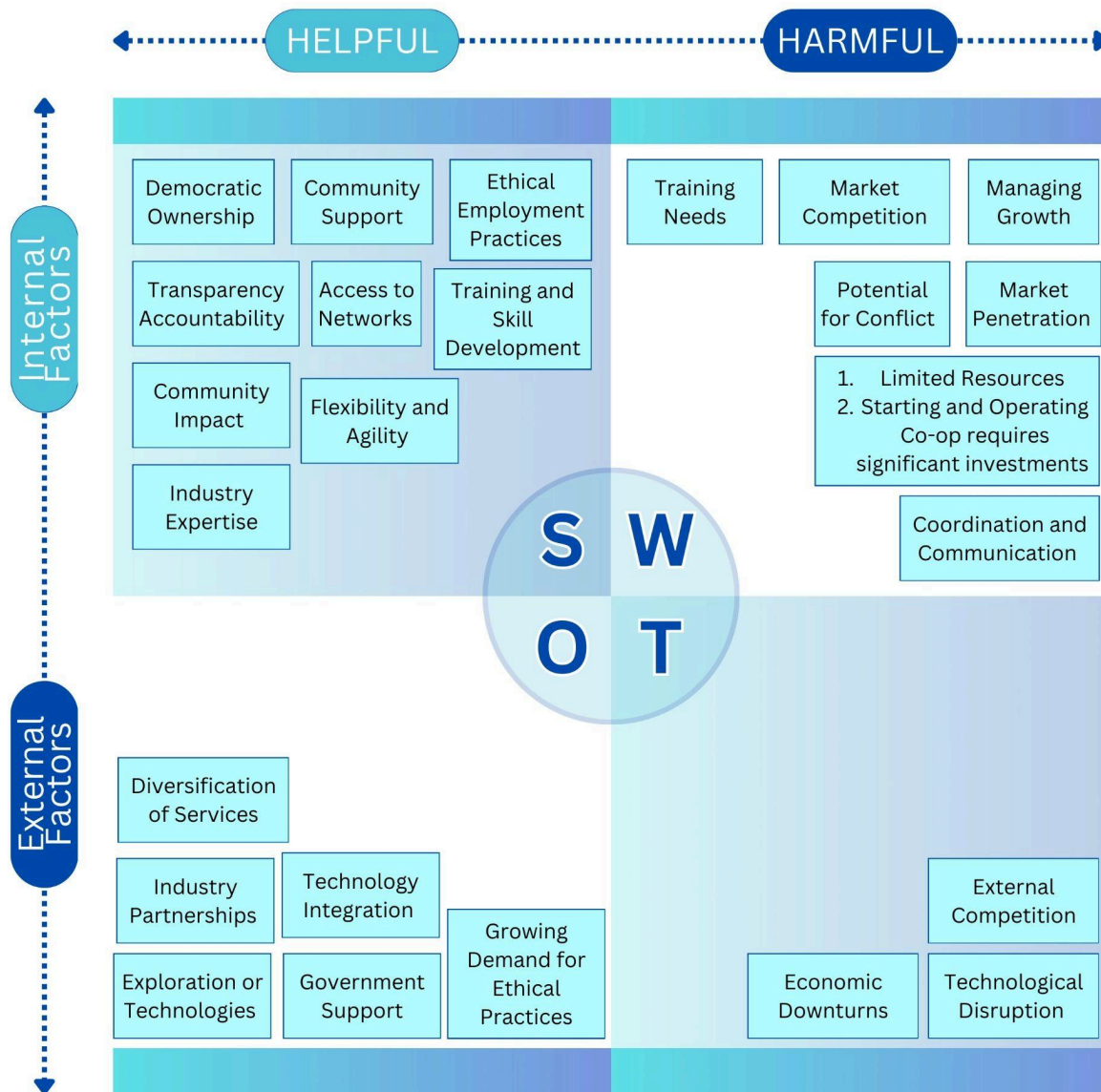


Figure D.4.1 SWOT Analysis

E | RESOURCES AND SUGGESTIONS

E.1 Specialties

E.1.1 Manufacturers that deal with Leather Goods

Leather goods are tied to the cattle industry and it should be assumed that there must be a sustainable way to ethically and responsibly source leather and utilize stagnant or recycled leather goods. Typically leather goods are sourced from non-domestic suppliers which undercuts the domestic supply chain of leather-related goods at the source. In the absence of a policy to protect this industry or make subsidizing its viability a priority to offset lost business from imports, seeking to disrupt the leather goods market by providing skilled labor solutions to source and work on recycled leather, there is a possibility that this area can become highly specialized in Los Angeles.

In short, taking advantage of the recycled goods market where consumers look for alternatives and ethical sustainability, worker owners can benefit from providing their own materials which fit project criteria to the manufacturer they happen to be assigned to. In this case, One manufacturer would be best suited by this aspect of the business as the cooperative can offer rates that include the cost of obtaining leather for operations.

Here are some firms that specialize in selling recycled leather in LA:

1. Recycled Leather (RL)
2. Sav-Mor Leather
3. Neofabrics Inc

These firms can serve as sources for initial inventory. Provided that these prices are in step with what the compensation terms are within a given contract, worker owners can prorate more for their services if working with self sourced leather.

This model for providing materials for manufacturing can be extended to the model for custom orders. Having inventories of materials (recycled) needed to work with manufacturers that are managing custom orders. Depending on the order, worker owners can take advantage of their skill set that is best suited for the respective job and based on the inventory that the cooperative can provide.

E.1.2 Manufacturers that deal with Custom Orders

Los Angeles provides diversity amongst fashion trends and a concentration of capital machinery. This area of specialization can benefit from the number of different manufacturing firms in the Los Angeles Area by diversifying strategies for recruiting highly skilled worker partners who can operate on a non-uniform. In this report, one of the manufacturers specialize in custom orders, which typically yield a higher margin.

Custom Orders, if made scalable based upon joint ventures with manufacturers, where they would be interested in establishing a marketing campaign to elevate custom and well crafted product lines, custom orders can bring in high revenue while allowing for a showcase of a specialized skill set.

The custom orders Market is amongst the most flexible because of its wide range of possibilities. This means that the firm would not be limited to a certain style of garments, a certain material, or a certain set of machines. This would allow for diverse project management goals because of how skilled and versatile worker-owners will be based on this model. This ultimately becomes the bread and butter of specialization as certain worker-owners will be more qualified to work on certain custom orders versus others, affording the use of a detailed portfolio system to choose the right worker-owner for the job.

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