

# Chicago Hospitality Worker Town Hall



LEARNINGS



& RECAP



## BACKGROUND CONTEXT

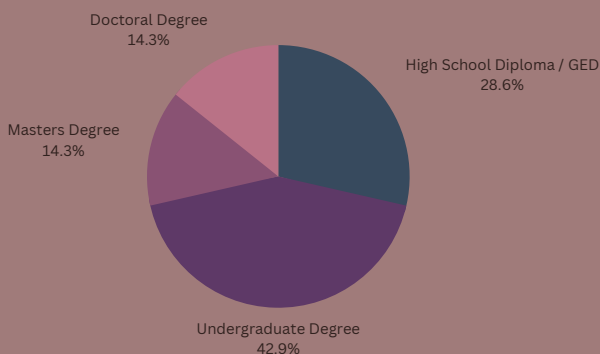
Studio ATAO's Hospitality Worker Town Halls are a nationwide series to foster dialogue, solidarity, and liberation for hospitality workers. We aim to document & amplify workers' recommendations for a more equitable industry.

At each Town Hall, we ask the same three questions to aggregate & analyze responses at a local, regional, and national level.

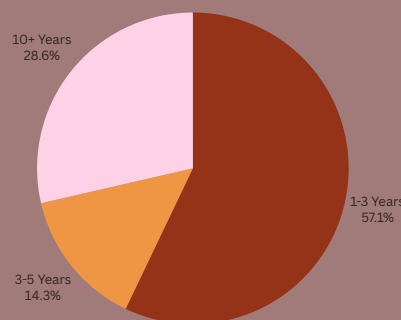
## DEMOGRAPHICS

Over the course of 2022-23, we have heard from over 50 frontline workers across Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles. *Below is the breakdown of demographics specific to Chicago.*

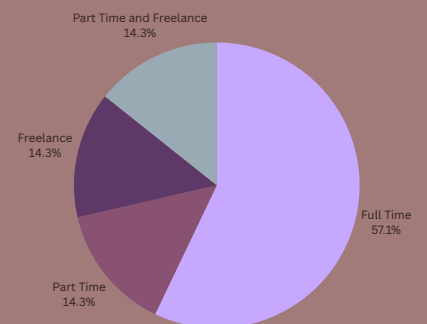
### Highest Level of Education



### Tenure in Industry



### Employment Status



*Note: Participants are all currently in non-managerial roles at their workplaces.*

# QUESTION 1

How is **conflict** addressed in your workplace, and what **mediation process** exists, if there is one?



Every group expressed frustration that workplace “gossip networks” worsened conflicts, while fear of retaliation blocked potential resolution.

- ① A pervasive culture of gossip, implicitly rewarded by their management, was utilized in lieu of directly addressing conflict.

*“Conflict is approached through carceral logic [punishment] and handled through ‘unofficial meetings.’ The conversations then filter out as gossip and rumors.”*

- ② Fear of retaliation from management prevented staff from speaking out about any conflict.

*“Everyone is paranoid. There is open resentment of folks who bring conflict forward, so many just prefer to avoid & ignore serious issues.”*

*“Management creates conflict between workers through combative communication and using tools like scheduling.”*



Participants desired management training & formal policies around conflict, such as:

- Conflict resolution training
- Conflict policies that protect confidentiality
- Using 3rd-party conflict mediation specialists
- Consistent, bi-directional feedback systems

# QUESTION 2

What is one thing that needs to happen for you to **feel good** about staying at your **current workplace**?



All participants desired a clear **investment in staff** of all levels within the workplace, such as:

- ① Formal programs for professional development & training for addressing bias & discrimination, supported through time, money, and resources.

*"Not everyone learns in the same way or has the same goals. Stop gatekeeping knowledge & educational opportunities under the guise of 'protecting' the business.*

*"We need resources to understand how anti-Blackness, racism, sexism, classism & other forms of hate present within workplaces - and can be perpetuated by staff & customers alike."*

- ② Breaking down arbitrary hierarchies encourages worker agency, autonomy, and self-advocacy.

*"Acknowledge workers' humanity and respect our boundaries. Recognize that work is a part of workers' lives, not their entire life."*



Participants also stressed **expanded benefits & career advancement opportunities**, such as:

- Paid breaks & paid time off (PTO)
- Sick, bereavement, medical leave
- Childcare assistance
- Mental health resources
- Mentorship opportunities

# QUESTION 3

What does **accountability mean to you**?  
What accountability system would you want to see implemented at your workplace?



100% of participants voiced enthusiasm for accountability to be developed as an ongoing practice, rather than an one-time apology, by:

- ① Engaging in regular worker Listening Tours (check-ins where workers are interviewed on their experiences), providing mental health resources for people who have experienced harm.
- ② Building skills for staff members on what it means to be accountable as both someone who has enacted harm *and* someone who was harmed.
- ③ Replacing practices grounded in punishment with those built from compassion & a proactive desire to learn from mistakes & restore relationships.

*"Remove your ego. Accept the consequences of your actions & create space for those harmed to express their feelings in the way they need."*

*"Firing someone is not the solution. It does nothing to repair the harm and does not build trust with those left behind."*



As a first step, participants desired a clear **definition of accountability** from management & a public commitment to upholding it.

# IDEAS FOR REBUILDING



Invest in an **emergency fund** for employees facing unexpected financial challenges such as illness, sudden job loss, or a natural disaster. With a safety net to fall back on, employees can feel more secure in their jobs & their ability to weather difficult times.



Incorporate **professional development opportunities** for staff across the business: e.g., stipends for conferences, lunch & learns at family meal, and informational interviews with industry leaders.



Open an **anonymous box** or form for staff to share feedback, slowly building toward safe workplace communication practices.



Establish **practices of flexibility** in how staff can take PTO & sick leave. Encourage collaboration in finding ways to care & cover for each other instead of working from a place of shame.



Create space for idea sharing among the team by hosting **open-forum discussions**. Be willing to experiment with trial periods for new ideas & processes within the business.

## SUPPORT THIS WORK

Studio ATAO's Hospitality Town Hall series is made possible thanks to our generous donors invested in improving the industry.



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