

**Inside the Black Box:
What Makes Workforce
Development Programs
Successful?**

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Executive Summary

The workforce development system in Chicago and nationwide is multifaceted and includes public and private training providers that work with individuals of all ages and abilities. Broadly, the programs within the system aim to train their participants while preparing them to (re)enter the workforce, graduate them from the programs, and place them into jobs. Some programs experience greater success at these goals and have more lasting effects than others. Identifying successful employment programs and understanding why they are successful at placing people into employment amid such variety is critical, especially during times of high unemployment when the tasks of finding and retaining employment are highly competitive. This study looks at several successful programs in Chicago; it attempts to understand the factors that may explain *why* they achieve success of different types, and *how* these factors may be quantified or measured to help improve the system.

The study assesses the influence of a range of factors, from individual participant characteristics, program and practice elements, and provider organizational aspects, to the broader set of external relationships, on achievement of successful outcomes for workforce development programs. These nested levels of factors—the individual participant within the program, the program within the organization, and the organization within its external context—are interconnected and, taken together, influence success. Intersecting with all of these factors is the role data and outcomes play in how programs achieve and understand their success. Specifically, the study aims to identify the influences within each of these levels that lead to programs’ success, how and if these factors are currently measured, and recommend improvements to the data collection methods and data system that currently exist within the workforce development system. Recommendations for a more robust data system, and the measures this system should track, are listed below, with more complete recommendations in the report. Following this, the influences on success at each level are outlined and explained in more detail in the full report, including how and if organizations measure these factors.

Recommendations for Data Collection and an Improved Data System

The workforce development programs in this study were asked about the array of factors that relate to successful program outcomes and to what extent they collect data on or measure these factors. They all use a variety of management information systems (MIS) to collect data and assess outcome measures. The people we interviewed identified many challenges and limitations with all of these data systems, individually and collectively, and saw a need for more robust and improved measures and an improved, integrated data management information system to better assess program process and outcomes. Findings from this study led to several recommendations to improve the workforce development measures system-wide and to develop an integrated data management system.

Improved measures

- Recommendation 1: Define a set of common measures across programs that can help establish some universal standards while allowing the flexibility to accommodate additional measures that individual programs find valuable or funders require.
- Recommendation 2: Develop longitudinal measures on individuals to assess outcomes over time.
- Recommendation 3: Analyze outcomes by subpopulations, including participant characteristics and barriers to employment, in order to develop risk-adjusted performance expectations.
- Recommendation 4: Expand what is measured in program process and outcomes, including factors related to the individual client, program, organization, and contextual measures of external engagement.

Measures should include the following:

- Initial assessment and continual development of hard skills and soft skills
- Engagement in negative behaviors
- Intermediate participant achievements
- Participant use of other support services and public benefits
- Economic self-sufficiency and family well-being
- Achievement of industry/occupational credentials
- Process measures
- Employer engagement and long-term outcomes with each employer
- Community engagement and community impact

Toward an integrated workforce data management information system

Recommendation: Establish a more integrated data system that can:

1. Interface with other required data reporting systems, minimizing repetitive data entry into multiple systems.
2. Allow collection and analysis of data on all program participants, not just those that are part of a particular funding stream.
3. Provide programs with useful process and outcome measures for self-assessment and external reporting.
4. Improve how programs report outcomes to multiple funders.
5. Be flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of different programs.

Success Factors and Their Measurement

In our interviews with program providers, they identified a number of factors that they believe contribute to the success of their programs and organizations and to successful outcomes for program participants. The extent to which these factors are measured and tracked varies. A summary of the most significant factors that emerged from this study, as well as their existing measurement practices, is included below.

Participants, programs, and practice

Intake assessments

The eligibility and intake assessments that programs require of all applicants are thorough and extensive, capturing as much subjective and objective information about the applicant as possible to determine their willingness and ability to complete their program. As a result, potential barriers to success and employment are identified early, and for those applicants that ultimately enroll, programs have assessed the supports that will be needed to encourage program completion and success.

Although all the organizations in this study capture client characteristics at intake and enrollment, they vary in what information they collect and how they use the information. Participant data is often used to identify and assess individual participants' needs, and some of the organizations use the information to provide individualized program offerings and support. Others use entry tests for placement in the appropriate program. All collect basic demographic information, education and professional history, information on family and housing composition, public benefits used, criminal history, and attempt to gather subjective information on participants' goals, motivations, challenges, and barriers to work.

A comprehensive program approach

Given the barriers some participants face, the successful programs offer a comprehensive approach to training and engaging their participants in addition to the technical and job skills training. This includes addressing psychosocial challenges, such as conflict and time management and professionalism, and

addressing basic needs such as clothing, transportation, and medical assistance. Organizations often track what services clients use to help them overcome barriers, including whether clients use several services or “bundles” of multiple services, which public benefits they take up, and which services they access. This information helps providers know what services should be provided and the uptake of these services to ensure these supports are available. Data on participant characteristics are also used to assess program management and processes. Data about participants’ characteristics, needs, and experiences with the program are also used by program administrators to better allocate resources, including funding and staffing.

Provider organizations

Flexibility in many aspects of the organizations’ operations

Successful organizations demonstrate flexibility to remain committed to their mission while responding to changing participant needs and the economic environment. The organizations in this study are flexible in their service delivery strategies in order to meet the needs of participants, whose profiles are constantly evolving, as well as the fluctuating needs of employers and local businesses.

Successful provider organizations use client-level and organizational data to assess process measures and monitor how well they are doing at providing services and achieving their desired outcomes. Specifically, programs frequently measure the number of clients served, number who dropout, and number who complete the program, as well as internal operations measures, such as caseload size, referrals, and costs per participant.

Organizations also demonstrate flexibility in their capacity and need to diversify funding, and use data on funding in their daily operations. Organizations track where their funds are being spent to meet accountability requirements put in place by funders. As part of these efforts, providers collect and report data differently for their various funding sources and grants, which often require multiple data systems with repetitive data entry.

Organizational leadership and staff

The boards and leadership staff in the organizations we studied are very active. Leadership staff and program staff are often in constant communication, with each recognizing the crucial role the other plays in participants’ success. Leadership staff endorsed the motivation, attitude, and personal experiences and characteristics that program staff bring to the organization, more so than their education or professional experience. Staff evaluations, completed by participants and/or management, are used in most organizations to monitor staff performance.

Plans for growth amid funding challenges

While acknowledging funding as a primary challenge, the organizations in our study all had strategic plans for future growth. These plans differed, with some opting to serve more participants and broaden their scope, and others choosing to narrow their focus and serve existing participants more thoroughly.

External relationships, community, and policy

Employer partners treated as customers and engaged in a variety of ways with the organization

Strong employer relationships permeate the successful organizations in this study, where employers are treated as customers who receive dedicated efforts to ensure their workforce needs are met. Employers engage with training providers in a number of ways—involvement in training components, serving on the board, engaging in volunteer efforts with the organization, and even taking business service trainings from the organization. Organizations must meet employers' and industries' changing demands while ensuring enough partnerships exist to place all graduates in employment. Each organization has dedicated staff who are responsible for finding and cultivating these relationships.

Given the importance of building and maintaining relationships with employers, and identifying and being responsive to employer needs, about half of the programs in the study formally or systematically track their employer engagement. One program in particular uses a business-focused contact management software to track *all* employer engagements. Most programs use data on employer engagement for self-assessment to identify what is working well, or not so well, regarding the number and quality of placements. One organization, for its industry-focused program, tracks interview-to-hire ratios with employers, with an effort to keep this ratio as low as possible. Data on employer engagement can be shared with employers to maintain existing employer relationships and recruit new ones, and demonstrate how well they are meeting the employer's needs. One program provides customized reports to employers to describe their successful placement and retention outcomes and overall engagement with each employer, demonstrating the quality of their relationship. A few programs in the study also track employer engagement with programmatic activities, such as employers' volunteer efforts with the program, by maintaining spreadsheets that record such engagements.

Most programs in the study noted they also use employer-specific data and labor market data on industry and employer needs to better assess the current and projected demand for specific skills with job placements. Some organizations have also used this information to help align their current and future training programs with the needs of employers.

Workforce providers collaborate with each other

The organizations in this study consider themselves to have a dual client base, serving their participants as well as their employer partners and local businesses. Training providers often exhibit collaborative tendencies to work together to fulfill the needs of participants and employers.

Community partners provide many services to the organizations' clients

Community partners, such as schools, healthcare providers, other community-based organizations, and many others, serve as a source of referrals into the program as well as provide many support services that organizations cannot provide on their own. Communities also may play a role determining where an organization is located and/or the types of programs the organization provides. In this sense, organizations often serve an economic development purpose in the communities in which they operate.

With regard to measurement, organizations track community referrals, and some track engagements with community partners.

Engagement in policy and advocacy

The successful organizations in this study are active in advocating for their funding and supporting their services and programs before policymakers at all levels of government. Despite facing numerous policy challenges, they understand the value of advocacy and presenting tangible evidence to lawmakers to protect their organizations and advance their mission.

Introduction

The workforce development system is complex—composed of numerous public and private education, training, and assistance programs at the federal, state, and local levels (Chapin Hall, 2010). Workforce development programs use many combinations of service delivery models and provide services for diverse populations. Identifying successful employment programs and understanding why they are successful at placing people into employment amid such variety is critical, especially during times of high unemployment when the tasks of finding and retaining employment are highly competitive.

This study attempts to assess the influence of multiple factors, from individual participant characteristics to organizational external relations, on achievement of successful outcomes for workforce development programs. Identifying *which* workforce development employment and training programs are successful in placing and retaining participants in jobs is important for funding, policy, and customer decision making. Yet, comparison of programs' outcomes can be challenging. Differences among workforce development program models and goals, participant demographics, and other factors—such as organizational influences, community settings, and funding sources—may lead to differences in program outcomes. Improved knowledge about providers' program processes and the context within which they operate is critical to understanding the differences between program outcomes and to facilitating program improvement. Understanding the factors that contribute to organizations' success in different domains and how these factors may be quantified or measured will strengthen the entire workforce development system and will help policymakers to interpret successful outcomes and improve decision making about funding.

This research explores the environmental and organizational contexts, program and service delivery processes, and measurement practices of six Chicago workforce development programs, which were identified by experts in the field based on their success in both program implementation and participant

outcomes.¹ The programs chosen for the study represent one of the largest types of workforce development programs—community-based employment and training programs. More specifically, the scope of the study is limited to those community-based programs that serve unemployed or underemployed adults in Chicago. Focusing on community-based employment and training programs provides an opportunity to explore what program administrators believe contributes to successful participant outcomes while considering differences in program design, internal organizational structure, and external context. One-stop workforce centers and community college training programs, two other important types of workforce development programs, are not included.

Based on this research, we provide recommendations for how to improve the data management information systems and measurement of individual, provider, and contextual factors to assess programs' and participants' progress, enhance service delivery and innovation, and describe program success among workforce development programs. We also discuss the potential changes programs, policymakers, and consumers can make and the impact those changes might have.

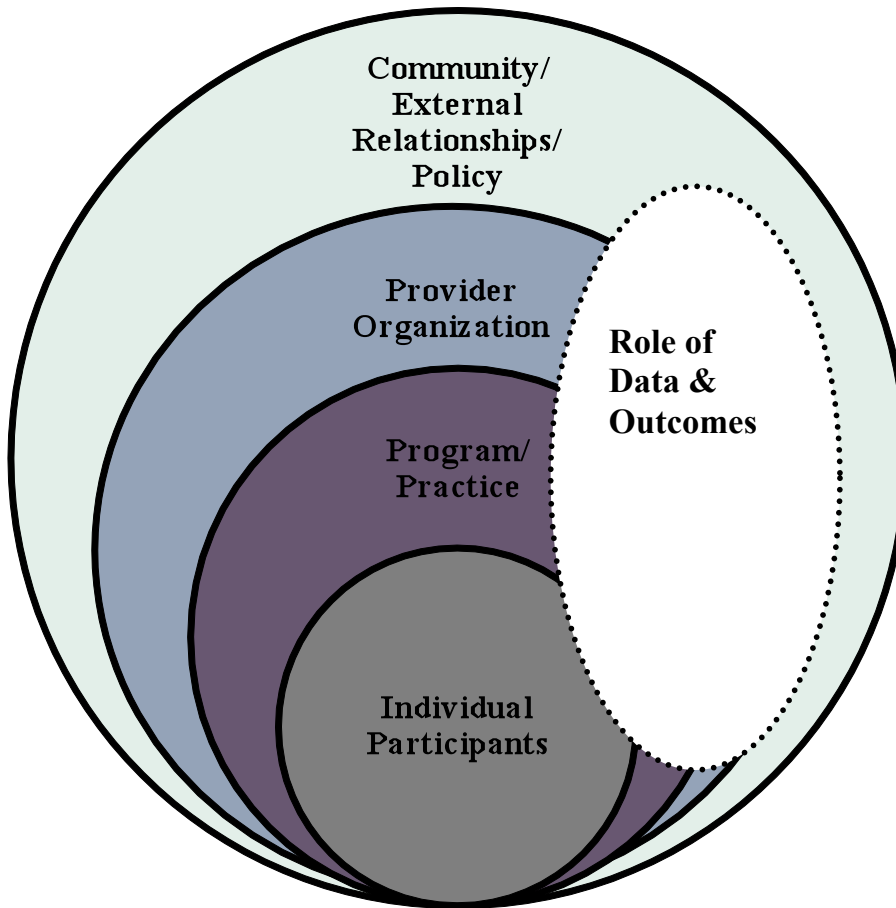
Conceptual Model

The implementation of workforce development programs is influenced by a range of factors, such as individual participant characteristics, program and practice elements, provider organizational aspects, and the broader set of external relationships. Given the nested nature of these types of factors—that is, individuals and their particular characteristics within programs, programs within organizations, and organizations within a broader contextual environment of external relationships—we have adapted Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, in which he describes a series of nested systems that, taken together, influence development.² Our ecological model, shown in Figure 1, represents a conceptual framework in which to depict these factors and their relationships. The additional overlapping layer of the role of data and outcomes is essential for this study because our focus is not only on identifying the factors influencing workforce development outcomes, but also on learning how these factors can be measured and used to assess and improve outcome achievement.

¹ Local experts in Chicago's workforce development field were identified through discussions with local and national researchers, local workforce development advocates, workforce development government program administrators, and private funders. These experts nominated the organizations in this study.

² Since Bronfenbrenner established the theoretical principals of ecology theory in the 1970s, it has frequently been used as a part of conceptual frameworks for studying a variety of influences, characteristics, and processes involved with the understanding of individuals' achievement of outcomes within their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner, 2005). The main principle of ecological theory is that human development is a result of an individual's interaction with environmental factors from a broad, multi-level context and that these surrounding environments are interconnected systems. The mutual interactions among elements across these nested systems—which include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem—represent the complex relationships of environmental factors that contribute to an individual's development or change.

Figure 1: Interaction of Influences on Workforce Development Programs and Data



In this model, several levels are identified that represent sets of factors that influence achievement of successful workforce development outcomes:

- The micro-level begins with *Individual Participants* who are engaged in the workforce development program. Their characteristics, history, and experiences all influence how well they may be able to complete the program and achieve job placements.
- The surrounding level is the workforce *Program/Practice* that engages the individual participant and tries to develop their skills through training and supportive services.
- Encompassing both *Individual Participants* and *Program/Practice* is the *Provider Organization*, which houses the specific workforce program. Such organizational factors as structure, mission, and funding can influence how the program, and ultimately the individual participants, is able to achieve desired outcomes.

- The broadest level is *Community/External Relationships/Policy*, which influences each of the other three levels. Employers, other workforce programs, the surrounding community, and workforce policy are all important external factors that shape the success of workforce programs and the individuals they serve.
- The additional cross-cutting component of *Role of Data and Outcomes* overlays the entire set of levels from the individual through external factors.

This ecological model serves as a useful framework for the purposes of conceptualizing the important factors and measurement aspects involved with achieving positive workforce development outcomes. Because multiple factors from all ecological levels play a role in how the individual achieves outcomes, this study provides a unique look at each of these sets of factors, assesses how they influence program success, and explores how these may be measured and used to improve achievement of outcomes. The conceptual framework described here was used throughout the study, including the structure of the protocol of questions during site visit interviews with program administrators as well as the organization of the study results presented in the following chapters.

Methodology

Workforce development training organizations and their respective training programs were recruited for this study using a process consisting of nomination, selection, and then invitation to participate.

Nominations of successful workforce programs were solicited from local experts in Chicago's workforce development field. The criteria for selection included programs that: (1) had a goal of job placement and retention; (2) are community-based programs that operate within either large, multi-service or small, single-point-of-service organizations; and (3) serve low-income adult service recipients (age 18+) with multiple barriers to employment and retention. Among the 21 nominated programs, 6 workforce programs are included in the final sample for this study. They are described in Appendix A at the conclusion of this report.

Qualitative methods were used for this study, specifically a case study approach based on semi-open-ended, in-depth interviews with organization staff. Interviews and site visits were conducted with program staff for each of the six programs from March through August 2011. A total of 16 workforce staff were interviewed, including organization executive directors, vice presidents, program directors, and other staff. Interview field notes and additional supporting documentation, such as program descriptions and reports, were also included in the data collection. Qualitative software, ATLAS.ti 6, was used to code and analyze the data.

Review of Recent Literature

A review of over 100 documents reveals that much of the literature about workforce development program success can be grouped into two major categories: (1) literature that focuses on outcome and process measurement and (2) literature that identifies promising program practices and organizational characteristics. This review found that despite the prevalence of the promising practices for workforce development programs in existing workforce development literature, the actual measurement of these factors appears limited and is seldom documented. There is a distinct mismatch between what is known and what is measured; despite consensus in the workforce development literature that these practices are important and indicators of success, documentation of their measurement is seldom discussed in the literature.

Outcome and Process Measurement

Most evaluation of workforce development in the literature focuses on attainment of policymakers' and funders' desired outcomes. Job placement, retention, and wages are the primary outcomes discussed, not surprising given the primary goal of most programs—placement in employment, employment retention, and economic self-sufficiency. Additional outcomes considered include enrollment and completion, cost per client trained, skill gains, educational attainment, and certification, but these are not often considered (Wilson, 2005). Certain types of programs, such as community colleges, youth programs, or ex-offender programs, may have alternative primary missions, but the goals of employment are the same.

There is significant heterogeneity among workforce development programs in their models, participants, and service-delivery strategies and, as a result, heterogeneity in program-specific outcomes measurement and data collection approaches. For example, programs use various timeframes and outcomes for assessing achievement, including the definition of job placement, the length of time required to measure retention, and how to measure increased wages over time (Bearer-Friend, 2009; Holzer & Nightingale, 2009; Heinrich & Holzer, 2009; Miles, Maguire, Woodruff-Bolte, & Clymer, 2010). As a result, the

literature often notes the need for reliable, consistent, and appropriate performance measures and data in order to improve program performance and achieve success (Miles, et al., 2010; Bearer-Friend, 2009; Bellotti, Rosenberg, Sattar, Esposito, & Ziegler, 2010; Holzer & Nightingale, 2009; Shore & Shore, 2009). Nevertheless, efforts to develop common integrated performance measures across various types of workforce development programs are challenged by the need to incorporate differences in program populations, models, and outcome goals (Wilson, 2005).

Existing process measures are more rarely described in the literature than are outcome and impact measures. A recent United States Government Accountability Office report describes the need for greater investment in rigorous evaluation of workforce development programs' impact and investigation of how the workforce system can be modified to enhance its services (U.S. GAO, 2009). Recommendations for process measures, however, are quite limited in the existing literature, especially measures that transcend differences in program service-delivery models and participants.

Some nonexperimental studies have found how differences in program design and populations relate to program impacts. For example, Heinrich, Mueser, and Troske (2008) found that women and adult program participants had higher earnings than participants in a dislocated worker program. An MDRC report from 2006 explored how different service-delivery strategies significantly influence retention and advancement. Finally, a report from the Joyce Foundation's Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration, which is testing employment programs for former prisoners, found the transitional job group was much more likely to work than the control group early on, but that the differences faded as men left their subsidized jobs (Redcross et al., 2010).

Additional information about process measures and influences on program outcomes will likely be gleaned from studies currently underway. MDRC is conducting an experimental study of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), to be completed in 2015, that will explore how services are implemented and how differences in implementation affect participants' employment, earnings, and related outcomes. The Public/Private Ventures "Benchmarking Project" is currently identifying meaningful outcome benchmarks for the workforce development field to better understand what constitutes "good" performance, considering many influences on program outcomes such as program population, services, and organizational characteristics like age and size (Miles et al., 2010).

The literature does, in some cases, go beyond enumerating the process measures collected to describe how programs may benefit from better use of process data and improved measures. One report highlights the role data and use of performance measures can have to tailor programs to meet the needs of both participants and employers and see increased retention and placement rates (Clymer, 2003). A recent report by Eberts (2009) looked at how performance measures can be improved for the nation's workforce

development system and found that in order to measure accurately the value added of the services programs provide when looking at placement, retention and wage outcomes, local labor market conditions and the personal characteristics and work history of the participants need to be taken into account. Moreover, combinations of process and outcome data may help organizations assess their programs and make changes to better serve program participants. In particular, one report found that participants with multiple barriers benefitted from periodic assessment of needs, growth, success, and long-term outcomes (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), 2006). Another noted that interim evaluations during enrollment could be based on combinations of assessment, program data, and administrative data such as participant employment and educational outcomes (Abt Associates and Metis Associates, 2005). Despite the limited coverage of *measuring* workforce development program practices, there is a wealth of literature on what these promising practices are, and their potential impact on participant and program outcomes.

Promising Program Practices and Characteristics

The workforce development literature is rich with descriptions of promising practices and characteristics of successful workforce development organizations, highlighting many different factors across the ecological model levels that likely influence success across the variety of workforce development programs.

Program Elements

- **Support Services.** The literature emphasizes the provision of support services and case management—including child care, transportation, access to housing and cash assistance, food stamps, health care services, and referrals to substance abuse and mental health services—over any other factor in helping participants overcome barriers to attendance and work (Purmort, 2010; Klein-Collins, 2002; Maguire, Freely, Clumer, & Conway, 2010). For long-term unemployed individuals, research shows the advantage of a human development approach, which draws on psychology and sociology and focuses on understanding the process of change and growth in individuals (Herr & Wagner, 2007).
- **Flexibility.** Flexibility in programming and service delivery is another crucial component of program success. Organizations that support a program’s ability to alter services in order to adapt to both business and participant needs are more likely to be efficient and successful. Flexibility in hours, location, and method of service delivery are desired characteristics in programs’ offerings (Hendra, et al., 2010; Strawn, 2010a; Holzer & Nightingale, 2009; Rynell, 2001; Maguire, et al., 2010).
- **Family Involvement.** Family engagement in programs—including training multiple family members, assessing and intervening in family issues at the time of program enrollment, involving family

members in program-related activities and supportive services, and direct employment services to families—has implications for participants’ well-being and access to resources (King & Elliot, 2000). Programs that include and assist family members, especially programs that support other family members becoming wage earners, may have more success in helping their participants overcome poverty (Shore & Shore, 2009; Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang, & Glassman, 2000).

- **Job Quality.** A program that focuses on the quality of job placement may help participants achieve long-term employment success and self-sufficiency. Determinants of job quality have been defined in the literature as including wages and earnings as well as benefits, job security, advancement opportunities, work schedule, access to child care, and fairness (Lower-Basch, 2007; Shore & Shore, 2009). Once placed in a job, inflexible work arrangements, insufficient benefits, and the workplace environment can influence retention outcomes (Abt Associates, 2009; Richman, 2006; Cohen & Single, 2001).

Organization Elements

- **Diverse Funding Sources.** A number of sources in the literature describe how organizations with diverse funding sources are able to maximize their ability to address individual participant goals, and allow decisions to be made based on the best design of service to the participants instead of following a one-size fits all plan (Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2008). Yet, this diversity in funding sources presents multiple challenges to program practice and measurement. Each funder may differ in required performance measurements, and performance standards that funders request are, at times, not attainable by all programs.
- **Staff, Leadership, and Size.** Additional organizational characteristics that may influence program outcomes include organizations’ staff and leadership characteristics as well as the size of the organization. Staff influences include staff continuity and dedication, staff experience with the program participants and the industries with which they aim to connect their participants, staff expressing cultural competency, and staff training (Abrazaldo, et al., 2009; Shore & Shore, 2009; Clymer, 2003; Nightingale, 2008). In addition, strong and stable leadership within the organization and on its board may be linked to successful outcomes (Abrazaldo, et al., 2009; Social Policy Research Associates and TATC Consulting, 2004; Clymer, 2003; Tate & Klein-Collins, 2004). Lastly, two studies found that the size of an organization, including smaller program enrollment, class size, and the staff-to-participant ratio, can lead to better outcomes (Abrazaldo, et al., 2009; Miles et al., 2010).

External Elements

- **Employer Engagement.** Employer engagement permeates the literature as another factor that likely influences success in workforce development and training programs Employer engagement is credited

for contributing to program success and programs' abilities to improve participants' short and long-term outcomes (Gibson, 2000; Klein-Collins, 2002; CAEL, 2006; Clymer, 2003; Bellotti, et al., 2010). Several examples exist of employers being involved in the development of program curriculum, which can help programs ensure their training is tailored to the needs of the employers they hope to place their participants with upon graduation (Nightingale, 2008; Uhalde & Kazis, 2010; Brown, Maxwell, DeJesus, & Schiraldi, 2002; Strawn & Martinson, 2000).

- **Partnerships.** The literature identifies the strength of organizations' partnerships with community organizations and programs—including employers, workforce development intermediaries, and other agents in the community—as a factor influencing success in programs. Using a dual-customer approach, where the organization seeks to serve program participants and employers, leads to strong employer partnerships, which are commonly referenced as being critical to workforce development programs (Klein-Collins, 2002; Hoops & Wilson, 2010; Gibson, 2000; Maguire, Freely, Clumer, Conway, & Schwartz, 2010).
- **External Contexts.** Neighborhood and community contextual factors, such as crime rates, poverty levels, and access to education, appear underexplored in the literature. Yet, the availability of employment within the community is described as highly influential on program success. A meta-analysis of 73 randomized control trials of mandatory and voluntary welfare-to-work interventions found strong evidence suggesting that the availability of jobs in an area accounts for most contextual outcome variability (Gorey, 2009). Other authors discussed the importance of programs' responses to the environment, including unemployment statistics, labor market information, and the changing needs of employers (Holm, Bergman, & Prince, 2010; Nightingale, 2008; Painter & Aldinger, 2011).

Despite these promising practices, the scarcity in workforce development literature of the measures of these inputs, and the program and participant processes that lead to various outcomes, suggests that an opportunity exists to define helpful measures for program assessment and improvement, especially when considering the multiple influences on workforce development program service delivery and outcomes.

Role of Data and Outcomes

We interviewed representatives of 6 programs deemed to be exemplary by experts in the field. Among the commonalities we found was a need to improve data—to gather more data, to make it more consistent and applicable across programs, and to make it easier to enter and to access. This need is likely to sharpen in the future as funders require more evidence of success and as providers need to learn more about the people they are serving and the environment in which they are serving them. While the following chapters identify many of the key program elements related to successful outcomes, this chapter describes the role of data and outcomes among workforce programs in the study and identifies several challenges and recommendations regarding better data and outcomes. The discussion around these key elements and how and if organizations measure them drove the development and content of this chapter.

Use of Data and Measures

Meet Funder Requirements

Workforce programs are committed to achieving desirable training and employment outcomes for their participants. Programs collect data to assess the progress and outcomes of program participants, and assess the implementation of their programs and the success of the organization. All of the workforce organizations in this study collect standard measures of workforce development success—such as program completion, job placement, employment retention, and starting wages—that focus on participants’ achievement of positive outcomes. Typically, such measures are intended to meet the requirements of public as well as private funding sources. Most of these outcomes focus on immediate job attainment once exiting a workforce program, and are used to assess whether the program met their expected performance goals.

While these standard measures capture the essential outcomes expected of all workforce development programs, providers in this study argued that using these measures alone presents an incomplete picture of not only achievement of outcomes, but of organizational effort and impact. Specifically, they do not

capture all of the participants' achievements, such as interim accomplishments while in the program or longer-term outcomes that become evident after completing the program. In addition, program staff noted that standard measures do not capture the unique circumstances or characteristics of participants.

For example, current standard measures are focused on very specific, and often immediate, time frames. If a participant obtains a job after the time frame specified by funders, they will not recognize this as a placement when the program reports its outcomes. This holds true even for participants with barriers to employment, such as those who are homeless or are ex-offenders, and who may need additional time to achieve positive outcomes. Therefore, providers that do not serve clients with certain barriers to employment can more easily achieve outcomes than providers that strive to serve all those who seek their services.

I kind of feel a lot of times we're getting compared with other workforce development agencies that maybe are working with people that have less [*sic*] barriers, so they still have some barriers to employment, and so a lot of times funders [ask] ... "Well, how do you compare to these entities?" And it's just like I kind of feel like we're comparing apples and oranges.

Unfortunately, some standard performance measures, such as WIA measures, can promote the opposite of what they desire to achieve and drive services in unintended ways. This may give programs an incentive to enroll only the best candidates, avoiding those that may take longer to get a job, or to set lower performance standards. One interviewee noted there are incentives to set lower expectations, so they can "set the bar low so we can achieve the bar high," and demonstrate better performance to funders.

Use Additional Outcome Measures to Communicate a Broader Picture of Performance

Despite the limitations of standard performance measures, the programs in this study have goals that extend beyond the outcomes of interest to funders. This creates tension between collecting data to meet funder requirements and developing measures that reveal the degree to which individual programs achieve their particular goals with their own populations. The organizations in this study augment the standard measures with their own additional outcome measures to present a more comprehensive picture of individual and organizational success.

Because the goals for some organizations extend beyond program completion—such as fostering advancement to the next level of training to promote career development—many organizations in the study track employment outcomes for a longer-term time frame than typically required by funders. They assess job retention, increase in wages, and advancement beyond the initial job placement. Even if funders do not require the collection of this additional data, these organizations are committed to doing so and find it is the only way to evaluate whether they are meeting the goals of their mission—effecting substantial and long-lasting change.

For some programs, the achievement of industry certifications or credentials is an important participant outcome. WIA's performance measures recognize acquiring only one such certification and this can force programs to focus more on job placement and less on earning an extra credential. However, in some programs participants earn several industry credentials during their training, and these additional achievements are not recognized as a positive outcome by some funders (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). The perspective of program providers is that multiple credentials indicate advancement in an industry and prepare individuals for a career with the possibility of long-term retention. At the same time, few organizations are able to devote resources to collecting this data and reporting on the extent to which participants acquire multiple industry credentials.

In addition, several of the workforce programs in the study collect data to measure job quality, not just job placements. Job quality measures can include the number of hours a participant works, whether they are earning a livable wage, growth in wages over time, and receipt of benefits such as paid sick and vacation time and health insurance. Because many programs focus on helping participants achieve financial stability, they look at a multitude of financial inputs and outputs, including wages, public benefits being received, child care and other expenses, and even credit scores. This financial information provides a more complete picture of an individual's financial situation than income alone, and may influence a participant's ability to secure and retain employment.

Use Additional Data and Measures for Program Management

Process measures and other organizational evaluations are essential for organizations and programs to assess their own performance, and thus better manage the program and continually improve practices. As an administrator explained,

We need to eat our humble pie every quarter at least. It has to be a part of our habits and traditions in order to make sure that we stay present to what's most important for the mission.

Some organizations track process measures, such as services used and participant attrition, as a method of internal program assessment and improvement. This sort of data helps them assess use of resources and identify programmatic aspects needing attention. A few organizations use internal and external evaluations to provide insight into how they can improve their program and services. One of the providers had a consultant benchmark its client population, services, and results in comparison to several other recognized workforce development programs across the country. The purpose was to set long-term organizational goals informed by the circumstances and performance of other providers. Other programs conduct self-assessments to better understand how they could lower the attrition rate between the time of referral and the first day of starting the program, as well as attrition once participants begin the program.

The organizations also reported that they use staff evaluations and participant surveys to assess and improve program performance to better serve their participants.

The Need for Better Program Measures

All of the programs who participated in this study emphasized the need to track more comprehensive and meaningful outcome measures that better reflect participant accomplishments, progress, and program impacts. Specifically, many interviewees were interested in developing a more multidimensional picture of their participants. They wanted a better idea of their participants' individual characteristics, life circumstances, and barriers to success; a deeper understanding of specific attributes of their program model; and they wanted to incorporate, and even exceed, the data requirements of their federal and private funders.

Several program interviewees wanted to measure the outcomes of their participants over a longer period of time than is currently measured in order to see longer-term changes in employment outcomes.

One of the biggest mistakes of foundations in general, even the public sector, is that...they want immediate outcomes and we can produce immediate outcomes, but not with effectiveness that will change the lives of the participant.

Program staff also noted that current measures do not account for programs that work with harder-to-serve populations that have barriers to employment. They expressed a desire to provide specific measures relevant to the populations they are serving and for performance expectations to be adjusted accordingly.

Another point raised in the interviews concerned tracking participants who do not complete the program. Although funders are primarily interested in outcomes of those who complete the program and place into employment, one interviewee noted the potential value of tracking outcomes of those individuals who may have exited the program early or exited without a job placement. One interviewee expressed interest in measuring participant resiliency and assessing participants who may drop out due to challenging circumstances, but later reengage in the program.

Furthermore, in regard to measures required by funders, multiple organizations noted the difficulty of attributing an individual's outcomes to a specific funding source, when funding from multiple sources is often used to support the individual as they progress through the program. Interviewees from multiple organizations said they are also looking for ways to tie outcomes to specific services offered, but not all support services are formally tracked. One of the providers believed that there was a positive impact from case management, but acknowledged the challenge in measuring and proving that impact.

Providers in the study also noted that they were looking for ways to measure participant outcomes beyond job placement, retention, and wages, since data about these areas provide only a narrow view of program

success. Providers would like to include additional measures regarding accomplishments, such as achievement of intermediate outcomes during participation in the program and achievement of additional outcomes later, such as obtaining industry credentials and further education.

Several provider organizations noted that they need to look beyond whether individuals are getting and keeping jobs for ways to measure client self-sufficiency and impacts on families and communities. This kind of data would reflect the larger value of the organization to families and the broader communities they serve. One organization wanted to answer questions such as

What is the impact...of a person moving from \$20,000 a year to \$50,000 a year in the community? [and] How much does that increase the purchasing power of the family and what is the multiplying effect in the economy?

Finally, programs noted the current emphasis is largely placed on outcome measures when collecting more information to assess process measures would help them to better allocate resources and to learn about areas in their operations that need improvement, such as participant attrition and support services uptake.

The Need for Better Data Management Systems

Agencies expressed a desire to improve and expand data collection to provide a more complete perspective on organizational performance. One of the most common challenges expressed by programs was that they are often using multiple data systems to collect and report program measures, making entering, management, and use of data cumbersome. Most data systems are designed for a specific function or to track a specific population supported by a particular funding source. For example, the Illinois Workforce Development System (IWDS) is used to collect participant information and outcomes on those supported by the WIA or Trade Adjustment and Assistance Act (TAA) funding sources. While all of the programs in our study use IWDS, most expressed frustration with its limited capacity for meaningful case management and outcomes assessment. Additionally, the four Centers for Working Families (CWF) grantees in our study are required to use the Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) data system for case management and assessing outcomes that are part of the CWF services.³ While ETO was reported to be useful for case management, interviewees did not find it to be useful for all programs; it particularly did not help with measures surrounding the educational aspects of programs. Despite recognizing the value of this system, one provider called ETO “really burdensome” because of the sheer volume of data

³ According to the website for the Centers for Working Families, their “approach brings together—or bundles—access to a full range of essential economic supports in a convenient location to help families build self-sufficiency, stabilize their finances, and move ahead.” (<http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/CenterforFamilyEconomicSuccess/CentersforWorkingFamilies.aspx>)

that needs to be collected. Another interviewee said that maintaining the system has been “intense,” but has resulted in a more “data-driven culture” within the organization.

Furthermore, the organizations reported using a variety of other program-specific data systems for collecting information on all of their participants for purposes of case management and tracking outcomes. Additional data systems are used to collect and assess other programmatic aspects, such as referrals, process measures, and engagement with employers. The capacity and customizability of these data systems varies widely. Although all of the programs have to use the standard measures of the state’s IWDS, they augment this with other systems such as business-management software like Salesforce, or basic data software such as Microsoft Excel or Access.

Because of the fragmentation and sheer number of multiple data systems, interviewees noted that it can require significant staff time to coordinate and use the systems and data correctly. Organizations devote varying levels of money and staff towards maintaining these systems. As a consequence, many programs do not use the data to its fullest potential. At least some manual data entry is required to keep the data in the systems updated and consistent. Not only do staff enter and update the information in the databases, but because the systems are often not integrated, staff also have to devote time to transferring data between systems to keep the systems in synch. The cumbersome data requirements staff must navigate can translate into staff having less time to devote to program services. Several program interviewees expressed a desire for a more unified, comprehensive data management system that includes all participants served and contains a broader set of useful measures.

Data and Measurement Recommendations and Feasibility

The workforce development programs that were part of this study used a variety of management information systems (MIS) to collect data and assess outcome measures. However, as mentioned earlier, there are many challenges and limitations to these data systems. Program providers need better measures and an improved, integrated data management information system in order to better assess program process and outcomes, with the aim of improved service delivery and program management. This chapter presents our recommendations, along with feasibility considerations, for improved measures and an integrated data management information system.

Improved Measures for Workforce Development

Recommendation 1: Define a set of common measures across programs that can help establish some universal standards while allowing the flexibility to accommodate additional measures.

Program providers stressed a need for some common measures so they can assess their performance in the context of other programs and establish better comparisons as benchmarks. However, they also emphasized the importance of flexibility and using measures that are meaningful to their unique program and populations or are required by funders. Collecting data and reporting outcomes that better reflect their achievements would facilitate programs' self-assessment and management efforts and benefit funders looking to assess the impact of workforce programs in a broader context.

Although challenging, the development of common definitions for some measures is feasible; in fact, there have been some efforts to establish these definitions through a few national and local efforts, which have advanced the discussion around identifying common measures and definitions across programs.

Recommendation 2: Develop longitudinal measures on individuals to assess outcomes over time.

Workforce programs in the study noted the need to track participant outcomes over a longer period of time than currently required by funders. However, programs are not currently funded for long-term tracking of outcomes. Additional support would be needed to allow programs to follow up with participants for a longer period of time. Furthermore, longitudinal information obtained from linking existing administrative records, such as states' employment and wage data systems, may give programs some of the employment, wage, and educational attainment outcomes they want to track.

Recommendation 3: Analyze outcomes by subpopulations, including participant characteristics and barriers to employment, in order to develop risk-adjusted performance expectations.

Current measures do not account for variation in achieving outcomes among those participants who are hardest to serve—those that have multiple barriers to employment. Measures and data targeting specific subpopulations or those with employment barriers would allow better understanding of outcomes for these participants and performance expectations to be adjusted. This subpopulation analysis is feasible if data is available on all program participants, including their characteristics and other factors that may identify barriers to employment.

Recommendation 4: Expand what is measured in program processes and outcomes, including measures within the individual client, program, organization, and contextual measures of external engagement.

More comprehensive data on a fuller array of measures related to program success will provide a better understanding of participants' needs, progress, and outcomes as well as program process and performance. Much of the data for these measures may already be collected by programs, but may not be part of a data system or formal data collection effort. Some information can be obtained through linked administrative data, such as data on other public benefits and services, which can be used to determine economic self-sufficiency and family well-being. Other measures, however, would require additional data collection. The following are suggestions for types of data that would help to give a fuller picture of the relative success of workforce development programs and their effects on participants, along with the feasibility of incorporating these measures.

Initial assessment and continual development of hard skills and soft skills

This information is essential in order to understand the needs and skills of those entering programs as well as monitoring their development as they progress through the program. These measures could be easily

included as long as programs capture assessment data at intake and at different time points throughout the program. While some of this information is already collected by programs, all of the information would need to be included in a data system.

Engagement in negative behaviors

Information about engagement in such negative behaviors as criminal activity and drug use may be somewhat difficult to obtain, but useful for assessing participants' progress toward employability. If programs include drug testing as part of their program requirements, this information is readily available. However, if they do not, then they are likely not aware of participant drug use and the information becomes difficult to obtain. With regard to criminal activity, information about current or new activity may be difficult to obtain unless this information is shared by the participant, their referral source, or law enforcement. For longitudinal tracking of criminal activity, it may be feasible to use various administrative data sources such as the Department of Corrections' databases.

Intermediate participant achievements

Measures capturing intermediate client achievements, such as program advancement and retention, would be feasible to include. Most of these should be readily available given programs' current efforts to track these achievements. The challenge may be that these achievements are often not currently tracked in a data system, but may be in case notes or other sources, which would be difficult to systematically convert into a data system.

Participant use of other support services and public benefits

Many programs track information about their own support services, but ideally this data would be supplemented with information about services and benefits obtained from outside the organization. Collecting such information is feasible as long as the case manager is aware of these services or follows up on referrals to support services; unfortunately, some services and benefits—especially those provided by a local community organization—may be unknown to the program case manager. It may be feasible to use linked administrative data to assess receipt of public benefits, such as TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, and child care subsidies.

Economic self-sufficiency and family well-being

Economic self-sufficiency and family well-being are broader indicators of how participants and their families move out of poverty toward improved well-being. These measures may be feasible to collect since the CWF sites already collect many indicators of finances and asset development. Moreover, because some programs consider the family, and not just the participant, as a client, it may be possible to include information about overall family well-being. However, this information about the family is

seldom systematically collected by programs. Linked administrative data from other public programs can be useful in these instances.

Achievement of industry/occupational credentials

Tracking industry and occupational credentials, as they are obtained by participants, will help programs and funders understand the longitudinal development of their participants and graduates. Collecting data on industry and occupational credentials may be challenging since this would require follow-up with the participants and likely require collaboration among many independent, and sometimes competing, certification bodies. There can be many credentialing bodies within each industry, and there is little incentive for them to collaborate to provide workforce development organizations with this information. It is also unclear whether these credentialing bodies track this data for their own purposes.

Process measures

Process measures, such as completion of administrative processes, referrals, case management, and training indicators, are all feasible to collect. These are efforts that may be informally tracked by programs for program auditing or assessment purposes. However, many of these indicators may not currently be systemically collected as part of a data system; efforts would be needed to enter this information into a data system.

Employer engagement and employer outcomes

Employer engagement and employer outcomes are feasible to track and, to varying degrees, are already being collected by some of the organizations in the study. This measure would consider employers as customers and track relevant engagement and outcome measures to ensure program staff are actively engaging and sustaining the employer relationship to meet their needs, and, in the process, place program participants in jobs. Programs that do not track this information could begin collecting this information and model it after current efforts of other programs that are engaged in extensive data collection efforts for employers.

Community engagement and community impact

Community engagement and community impact measures would help organizations track which resources they need and use regularly, what partners play an integral role in service delivery, and the impact the organization makes on its local community. Measuring community engagement is somewhat challenging unless programs are currently tracking their engagement efforts with community partners; many of them are already doing this in an informal manner. Community impact, such as economic development within a community or an impact on a community's population through personal and professional development, is more difficult to assess since a variety of other measures on community factors would be needed that are often beyond the scope of the workforce programs.

Toward an Integrated Workforce Data Management Information System

An improved, integrated data management information system for workforce development programs should reduce the challenges of duplicative data entry, limited data scope, and limited external outcomes reporting. A data system should be able to provide programs with a valuable tool for self-assessment and research of important indicators and outcomes to promote program improvement. This data management information system would be much more than a front end software package, since it would need to include a spectrum of functions, including improved data collection, secure data storage or archive, analytic capacity, ability to interface with other existing data systems, and various reporting capabilities.

There is a need to establish a more integrated data system that can do the following:

- Interface with other required data reporting systems, minimizing repetitive data entry into multiple systems.
- Allow collection and analysis of data on all program participants, not just those that are part of a particular funding stream.
- Provide programs with useful process and outcome measures for self-assessment and external reporting.
- Improve how programs report outcomes to multiple funders.
- Be flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of different programs.

The biggest concern regarding feasibility is that developing a new data system may be cost prohibitive without external support from public or private funds. Ideally, funds would be leveraged from both public and private funding sources to support the development of a new integrated data system. Costs would involve not only the development and implementation of a new data system, but sustaining this system and ensuring that it is up to date and continues to be used by programs.

Another concern is the incentive for programs to participate in an integrated, more comprehensive data effort. However, if it is supported by the various public and private funders of workforce programs, that may be an incentive to implement a new MIS system, which would also ease programs' reporting responsibilities to these funders and possibly lead to more consistent use of reporting measures.

Developing a new data system requires substantial effort. However, this new system could build on existing data systems, such as Efforts to Outcomes (ETO), even though these existing systems can be cumbersome, time-consuming, limited, and carry a steep learning curve. An improved and more comprehensive system can at least build on the strengths of existing systems in terms of the measures collected, and then expand the capabilities and types of measures collected.

With regard to the planning and development of a new integrated data management information system, an agency or organization with the capacity to assure the proper data security and confidentiality will have to be identified to house the system. In addition, staff at the host organization need the expertise to maintain the data system, receive and assess the quality and validity of all incoming data, and respond to any technical problems.

Another aspect of the development of the data system would be assessing how an integrated system would connect with existing reporting systems, such as IWDS. Further, outreach and stakeholder engagement efforts would be needed to develop organizational buy in by community-based providers and other workforce entities in order to obtain their involvement and agreement to share data.

Once the data system is up and running, resources will be needed to input prior data into the system and ensure newly collected data is properly incorporated in a timely manner. Additionally, all of the desired functionality of the new data system will need to be tested to ensure programs have the ability to obtain the information they desire about measures and outcomes for performance assessment and outcome reporting.

Finally, with regard to implementation of a new data management information system, education and technical assistance should be offered to all users to build their understanding and support their use of the new data system. These efforts should emphasize the importance of data entry and quality, as well as how data extracted from the system can inform their own self-assessment and improve their reporting.

Success Factors: Participants, Program, and Practice

Throughout an individual's engagement with the organization, program staff and participants engage in a variety of practices that influence a successful outcome for individuals and the programs. Participants and programs take steps at the recruitment and application stages in order to assess eligibility and determine the needs of the participants. At all points, programs address the variety of participants' employment barriers by assisting in the acquisition of basic needs (such as housing, clothing, and healthcare) and development of soft skills that are necessary for employment success. Additionally, programs work throughout the participants' engagement with the organization to ensure a successful job placement is possible for all participants.

Various Practice and Program Models

Workforce development training programs represent a broad range of models, service delivery approaches, and sizes. This heterogeneity within programs, and the resulting range of inputs and factors, was a driver of this study. Many organizations design their programs after common practice models, such as industry-specific programs (i.e., sector-strategies), transitional jobs, career pathways, and bridge models. These models allow programs to narrow their focus on targeted participants, practice approaches, and industries. The organizations in this study use aspects of various models in their programs to best meet the needs of their participants. The programs within the six organizations we studied vary with regard to structure, yet all use a combination of models or functions of models as part of their workforce development programs.

The organizations in this study all offer job preparation along with life skills training, and together they place individuals with employers from diverse industries. One such organization acknowledged they just “don't fit into a traditional hard skills training program.” Often, organizations offer multiple program

models in order to best serve their participants' needs including—but not limited to—sector-based training, occupation-specific workshops or career training, transitional jobs, GED preparation, literacy programs, and bridge programs. Complementing, or at times incorporated into, the workforce development training are social enterprise efforts, CWF services, and flexible programs offered via federal grants such as the Social Innovation Fund.^{4,5} Interviewees acknowledged that these centers and programs provide innovative ways to serve their participants, and are a way to access more jobs and learn best practices from other models while establishing more of a presence in the community. A representative of an organization looking to create a transitional jobs program said:

Participants that take a long time, or that have a pretty significant barrier to employment, so they have a violent felony conviction, or something like that in their background, they really need to have some recent work experience and have somebody that's showing that they're trustworthy in order for them to get a future opportunity...this is gonna be a big key of having the transitional job.

The use of multiple or blended models can help organizations accomplish their missions, which revolve around transforming the individual as well as the community. Fulfilling these missions may require models that are as comprehensive and versatile as the missions themselves. In order to change the behavior of the individuals, many models of service delivery are needed. One organization uses a combination of a sector-strategy model and the CWF model of bundled services for all of their programs, in which all participants spend a portion of their training time going through the financial workshops of the CWF. The organization credits this blend of models with their success and their ability to adhere to their mission to transition individuals and families out of poverty.

There is a two-way causal connection between how your personal and financial life is going and how you perform at work. So again, for us, I guess the takeaway is where the two models come together is really where we have the greatest impact.

Another organization acknowledged that being part of CWF allows them to provide a bundle of services they could not otherwise provide. In their strategic planning, they now aim to measure the number of services accessed, in addition to the number of people served. In essence, the presence of the CWF allows them to deepen their engagement with the clients they serve.

⁴ The Social Enterprise Alliance says “A social enterprise is an organization or venture that achieves its primary social or environmental mission using business methods... Social enterprises *directly* address social needs through their products and services or through the numbers of disadvantaged people they employ.....” <https://www.se-alliance.org/what-is-social-enterprise>

⁵ The Corporation for National and Community Service explains that The Social Innovation Fund, established in 2009 under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, “is an initiative of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) intended to improve the lives of people in low-income communities.” <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/programs/innovation.asp>

Intake Process

The programs observed in this study display differences in their service delivery models and participant population, yet the processes to engage and retain participants in the programs are often quite similar. Before any individual enrolls in a workforce development program, efforts are undertaken by both the organization and individual to ensure a good fit—efforts that impact the ultimate success of both. All programs require potential participants to complete multiple steps prior to enrollment and to meet specific criteria, which enhance the likelihood of success for the participant and thus the program.

Elements of Intake Assessments

Organizations put forth a tremendous amount of work and resources toward participant assessment before individuals are enrolled in their programs. Many organizations receive referrals from community partners who, by nature of knowing the individual and the program's requirements, only refer eligible applicants and thus provide a first level of screening for programs. Despite this, organizations still undergo thorough screening processes of their own to assess whether each applicant would be a good fit for the program. This includes the collection of basic background information such as age, race, gender, educational attainment, public benefits currently received, and scores on skills assessment tests such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Programs may also require certain levels of work experience, education, and aptitude, including applicants' literacy and basic skill level, as part of their eligibility requirements for participants. Together, this information is used to assess their skills and fit for the program's training and services, and to determine the level of services and type of program that would be the best match for them.

Workforce development organizations frequently collect information on the life circumstances of their applicants that could be barriers to work, including disabilities, criminal background, and homelessness. This information is important for programs to know, as some may tailor their programs or services to meet the needs of their participants. Other barriers to employment that are collected at intake are applicants' housing circumstances, family composition, child care needs, and veteran status.

Beyond these criteria, all organizations in this study require at least one face-to-face interview to assess attitude and subjective criteria and understand the support services and resources participants have and will need while enrolled. The interview may identify an individual's basic needs, such as medical care, child care, transportation, and family support and composition. The interview also aims to assess applicants' psychosocial needs, their reasons for applying to the program, goals and motivation to enroll, mental barriers to success, and even the change an applicant hopes to make in their life. The interview may also unveil potential behavioral or psychological problems, such as aggression or depression, which

organizations are interested in collecting and documenting in order to get a complete picture of the applicant. According to one director,

There isn't necessarily one magic answer that will or will not get somebody included, but we're trying to get a picture of the whole situation....So it [the assessment process] asks [for] a lot of information about your previous education, previous housing, physical health, mental health, financial issues, legal issues, family support, it's pretty detailed....Most of that stuff is not there to screen people out, it's just so we know what the deal is.

When administering the assessment, organizations often collect information on employment barriers, which will help them tailor services once enrolled. One of the organizations studied focuses on serving those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. This provider collects extensive information on the current and previous living situations of clients to make sure the program can address their housing needs. Other providers have very structured certification programs, which lead them to track all educational attainment by the participant. Several organizations ask about illegal drug use, as applicants who are determined to have a substance abuse problem may not be eligible to enroll in the program.

Once the application process is complete, many programs create a final assessment and rating of the applicant. The results of the interview, which are documented at the discretion of staff, are an essential factor when determining the ratings and final assessment of the applicant.

Use of Multiple Data Collection Methods

All of the programs in this study use various collection methods for the information they gather during the intake assessment and enrollment process. These include applications and needs assessment forms that are filled out, databases where information is entered, interview sheets for the interviewer to record responses and observations from the interview, and other methods. A few of the providers in the study maintain all intake information in a database, including the background information and histories gathered as well as additional information from the interviews and in-person assessments. Most of the organizations utilize assessment checklists or another ratings tool to grade the applicant during the intake process, which providers use as a method for accepting or rejecting applicants and as a tool to understand the needs participants will have upon enrollment.

Multiple Uses for the Information Collected During the Intake Process

Some of the organizations use information collected at intake to provide individualized program offerings and support. One organization compiles the information from various intake steps, assesses the incoming participants' data, and creates a personalized plan to match the participant with the program and services that best meet their needs. Some organizations use entry tests for placement in the appropriate program. One of the organizations studied uses background information to separate clients into "high obstacle" and

“moderate obstacle” groups, based on work histories, educational attainment, criminal records, and other barriers. The moderate obstacle group goes into the organization’s regular job training and employment assistance program, while the high obstacle group is assigned to the provider’s transitional job program. Another organization follows a harm reduction approach and does not deter drug users from entering the program. The organization’s intake process does include questions about behaviors where drugs might be a contributing factor, such as violent behavior or the inability to stay employed. If the applicant identifies drug use as an underlying problem, the caseworkers work with them on strategies to reduce or eliminate drug use so they can reduce or eliminate this barrier to obtaining employment.

Several organizations also collect information on the goals of participants to help determine what programs or services will best meet their needs. One of the providers uses a questionnaire that asks about goals to determine whether they are realistic and achievable. One interviewee noted that those participants expressing big, broad goals were not as successful as clients who identified modest, but more easily achievable goals.

People’s plans for the next six months is a question we’ve been asking for awhile and the people who have really concrete and realizable plans who say, “Well, I want to get through this program. I want to get a job. I want to get housing and I want to start saving some money,” tend to do better than a person who says, “I’m gonna open my own restaurant,” which some people do say.

One organization used their baseline intake assessments retrospectively as part of an external evaluation to determine the characteristics of successful applicants. They found that those with more supports and more realistic expectations, as communicated to staff, at the time of assessment were more likely to succeed. They are in the process of revamping their assessment, intake, and process-measurement strategy to reflect these findings.

We ask a lot about supports because we’ve learned from our experience and particularly from an evaluation that a DePaul graduate student did for us, that was very helpful, that people who have the support—so your support system was predictive of success of graduation with our participants.

Another organization uses their intake data for program self-assessment as well—they look quarterly at their incoming participant demographics to ensure there is no bias in the intake process.

Help Identify Successful Enrollees

Given this thorough process to screen and assess applicants, programs and participants alike do a lot of work up front before finalizing who is accepted into a program. This is critical for both the programs and the participants to achieve success. Inadequate education, substance abuse, and a lack of child care, along with a lack of motivation, a lack of commitment to the program or personal change, and a poor attitude were provided as main reasons programs will not enroll applicants.

Poor attitude, poor work history, or no professional references...they've either shown their true colors in our orientation process, which is about a three- to four-hour process, or through their interview.

All organizations in the study strongly emphasized the intangible characteristics of motivation, commitment, and attitude as being vital to success in their workforce development program. One program director summarized his intake employee's top qualifications when assessing applicants by noting,

My instructor has his three As, which are Attendance, Attitude, and Ability, and it's in that order.

These intangible characteristics were deemed by the interviewees to be critically important to identifying successful enrollees, even more so than the information they gather on their education and professional backgrounds. They stand above all other individual characteristics in influencing success for the participant within the program and, ultimately, in employment. As acknowledged by many in the study, these criteria are often neither quantifiable nor easily measured, but are critical to ascertain prior to enrollment.

I think probably the characteristic that is most important to long-term success is attitude. It's difficult to measure. It's subjective...People that come in and that vary in terms of their education background, we see [a range of] people from no GED...to people that have master's degrees. One is not necessarily [more] successful than the other.

Given the objective and subjective criteria organizations consider, when the time comes to enroll, applicants have often gone through a self-removal process. As a result, only those most likely to succeed given the structure and expectations of the program actually enroll. Organizations screen an individual's readiness for the program, and thus the intake information gathered rules out eligibility for groups of applicants. Some of those ruled out may have not passed a test or completed all application steps; others may have exhibited some characteristic or attitude that does not align with the program's requirements and expectations.

Organizations know their processes and understand what it takes to succeed in their programs. Accepting an applicant that is not prepared to complete the program and gain employment would be a waste of both the participant's and the program's resources and time.

It looks like we're not giving someone a chance, from [the applicant's] perspective. From our perspective, we want to take people who are really at the right point and ready 'cause our clients have already had enough failures...we don't want to take a "y'all come" attitude because that's just gonna lead to more failures for some people.

Address Needs with a Comprehensive Approach

The individuals who make it through the assessment process and are accepted into a program still have multiple barriers to success and employment. Interviewees in this study noted that it is very common for their participants to contend with multiple barriers. Staff attempt to address these barriers throughout the program and diminish their cumulative effect, enabling participants and programs to realize more successful outcomes.

Address Hard and Soft Skills, Basic and Psychosocial Needs

In order to prepare participants for work and success, most programs address workforce development, basic needs, and psychological barriers to work throughout the program. Assistance in setting up childcare, referrals to mental health and healthcare practitioners, and transportation assistance are some examples of how an organization is able to address basic needs and psychosocial barriers at intake. As mentioned, part of the assessment process serves as a method to understand what challenges and needs ought to be addressed upon enrollment.

Organizations acknowledge the importance of resolving personal issues and managing life skills throughout the program. The lessons often revolve around conflict management, working in a team, respecting supervisors and peers, time management, and appropriate communication and reactions to various situations. One director said,

You could teach them all the skills about getting a job, but they may not land that job because you haven't dealt with the personal stuff.

Almost all organizations in this study have at least one staff member who is in charge of addressing the supportive service needs of participants. Aside from meetings and regular interaction with these staff, programs have developed a variety of ways to provide services beyond job skills training to their participants. One organization utilizes their social enterprise, which also serves as a workforce training program itself, to offer free meals to participants. All organizations in the study provide some sort of transportation assistance for their participants to help ease the burden of traveling to the program every day. Other common support services offered through the programs include weekend tutors, foreclosure and tax counseling, health and wellness classes, and workshops and training sessions on accessing public benefits.

There is a need for social services sometimes to make it all work. So what we do, to the extent that we can, is try and wrap as much of the holistic package around somebody. But we're trying to empower them, so sometimes what we can do is say, "This is a wonderful resource, we will make the first call for you, you need to keep the appointment."

Organizations often use a wide range of client-level and organizational data to assess process measures and monitor how well they are doing at providing these comprehensive services and achieving their desired outcomes. Specifically, programs frequently measure the number of clients served, number who drop out, number who complete the program, and measure internal operations, such as caseload size, referrals, and costs per participant. Additionally, organizations may track housing changes along with what services clients use to help overcome their barriers, including whether clients use “bundles” of multiple services. One organization created a rating system used to do assessments with participants at different points throughout the program, so that when barriers or needs arise, program staff can take steps to address and alleviate them before they grow too unwieldy. They tell their participants, “we’ll take care of the barriers,” so that barriers cannot be used as an excuse. This information helps providers know what services should be offered and assess the uptake of these services to ensure these supports are available for program participants. Taken together, these measures serve as an indirect gauge of the efforts programs make to commit to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

Improve Financial Well-Being

Financial literacy services—such as teaching budgeting, saving, and credit building—play a role in helping participants gain important life skills, find and retain employment, and ultimately transition out of poverty. Almost all organizations in this study stress this component of their programs and emphasize the importance of these skills in achieving long-term success. Four of the six organizations participating in the study are CWF sites, whose mission is to focus on changing financial behaviors.⁶ Financial services, therefore, is a part of what several organizations in the study offer via their CWF sites. Yet, one organization in the study that does not operate a CWF still incorporates financial services into its regular service delivery model. This organization has a financial literacy requirement, and once a participant and his or her family shows they understand the basics of finance and investing, the organization gives them \$500. A few interviewees mentioned the existence of an emergency funds system within their organization, providing help to participants in desperate financial situations—those needing to pay past due rent or facing a medical emergency—so the organization can help alleviate the financial strain the emergency has caused that may interfere with participant learning.

Some organizations provide financial counseling to help clients apply for public benefits as a way to increase household expenses, while others emphasize financial independence and self-sufficiency, and encourage reducing reliance on public support. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, since

⁶ The Centers for Working Families “specialize in taking a holistic approach to people’s employment and financial needs, linking job placement and career improvement with financial education and maximizing public benefits.” From the LISC/Chicago, Centers for Working Families website, <http://www.lisc-chicago.org/Our-programs/Centers-for-Working-Families/index.html>

organizations that encourage clients to obtain public benefits ultimately want clients to earn enough that they will no longer need them.

Because so many programs focus on helping participants achieve financial stability, they collect information surrounding each participant's financial situation. The programs in our study that are part of the CWF are required to track information about the financial well-being of participants. Several organizations look at income, including income from other household members and from public benefits such as TANF and SNAP (food stamps). Expenses tracked include housing costs, child care payments, car payments, medical bills, and loans outstanding. These inputs and costs provide a more accurate picture of an individual's financial situation than income alone. Organizations also track indicators of overall financial well-being such as credit scores, which can influence a participant's ability to secure employment.

Organizations track these financial measures for several reasons. First, the providers want to have a more comprehensive picture of client resources so they can target support services and financial education to help support participants and their families. Second, they want to track the improvement of financial well-being over time, with the notion that financial stability allows clients to retain their involvement in training programs, secure and retain jobs, and ultimately transition out of poverty. Third, these organizations want to evaluate the services they provide, such as financial workshops and counseling, by assessing improvement on these financial measures.

Combine Technical Skills with Soft Skills

While all programs in this study vary in their curriculum design, each incorporates teaching soft or life skills in the program along with job skills. One program altered its curriculum to incorporate psychosocial components after seeing outcomes of their participants that stemmed from certain behaviors.

And then from that moment, a curriculum was created about behavioral change...It was because we saw certain behaviors manifest themselves in losing a job or making poor financial choices after somebody gained employment, that we realized there needs to be other building blocks in the curriculum as a preventive measure.

This combination of soft skills development, addressing basic and psychosocial needs, and technical skills training is what most program administrators considered a critical component of their program and their successes, enabling participants to be job-ready upon program completion. One interviewee claimed that the combination is the "sweet spot" for the organization—allowing them to provide individuals, their families, and communities with the tools to build better lives and transition out of poverty. It is this programmatic feature that lets them take

...a more holistic approach to working with individuals and families to give them all of the skills they need to transition out of poverty.

Another aspect of the hard skills training most programs incorporate is an effort to mimic workplace settings in their service delivery. Emphasizing the demanding nature of the program and their high expectations, programs implement rules and procedures to emulate a work setting. Requirements to clock in and out, a dress code, maintaining an employee handbook, and assigning participants to serve as “shift managers” and work on teams were examples often discussed in interviews. One manufacturing-focused program in the study created a learning environment with the same type of machines and equipment found in the workplace to ensure their training participants learn on the same machinery they will be using on the job. This attempt to mimic the environment and activities that occur in the workplace is another tool programs use to help prepare participants to enter and succeed in their ultimate permanent job placement.

Take Families into Consideration

Several programs noted the importance of the family unit in the populations they serve, acknowledging that families must be taken into consideration at assessment and throughout the program in order for the participant to complete the program and succeed in employment. A few organizations engage family members in the assessment process in an attempt to understand the whole picture.

We go to their homes and have a meeting with the whole families...so we're all there. We have to create a plan to bring the students to be ready to learn in class.

One organization brings the entire family in during the admissions process to make sure they are all aware of the commitment the individual is undertaking to enroll in the program. Families are also taken into consideration while participants are enrolled in the workforce training programs, not only in their support roles, but in offering programmatic features that engage the family as well. One organization in the study offers a range of programs for youth, and allows the children of parents who participate in evening classes to come to the center while their parents are in class. Additionally, organizations that operate a CWF site have a strong family focus embedded in their organization through that program. The CWF focus is on improving the financial status of low-income families, and the family services provided through them are often available to all participants in an organization's programs. At the same time, one of the organizations in this study, not affiliated with a CWF, maintains a focus on families throughout all stages of the program. This organization cites a participant's ability to be economically stable *for their family* as a successful outcome.

One program is witnessing an increase in their Latino population and, noting the importance of the family unit in the Latino community, admitted they do not currently have a strong family component in their

program. The program expressed that a move towards more family involvement in the future is likely inevitable in order to maintain their level of success. A program staff member acknowledged,

...[we are] looking at ways in which we could better engage the family so they understand what's happening here. We've talked about it through kind of a recruitment process of having them bring their family with them and engaging more of that language...And then even thinking about how we use language in the classroom in talking about community and family because of how they see family. And so slowly the family unit becomes very important.

Organizations understand that family situations can present barriers to learning and success. Part of the purpose of assessing family composition, need, and supports during intake is to gauge the potential barriers in an applicant's family situation. By assessing family needs at the outset of the program, organizations can work with participants to help them alleviate some of their challenges and address the root of the problem that causes some participants to drop out.

I want to know more about who your family is, how your mom work [*sic*], how you work... how you deal, how the children who is being convicted, is a gang active member...So we are not going to solve the problems, but we going to make the student aware of how to manage the problem.

Familial barriers can include a lack of monetary support or income, a lack of child care support, the presence of gangs, and domestic violence, among others. Whether families serve as a support or inhibitor, programs realize the additional impact on successful outcomes they can have by incorporating families into their planning, assessments, curriculum, and service design.

Provide Comprehensive Services beyond Program Completion

Organizations understand the importance of maintaining supports for participants to help them gain some levels of self-sufficiency after program completion. Open-door services for graduates include continued counseling, case management, and/or help with supportive services. One program director explained that

Once you are in our program and if you graduate from our workshops or our job training or you become an alumnus in our supportive services program, you have services for the rest of your life as long as you need them.

One of the sector-based programs in the study allows participants to come back and work on the equipment after graduation, regardless of employment status. Recognizing that it is important for participants to stay fresh on their technical skills, the organization operates an open-door policy and created a Saturday morning class, ideal for graduates who work during the week. Another organization is very interested in advancement and will help graduates prepare for certification testing in order to get credentials in their respective industries. This can be a significant benefit to a job applicant, if not a requirement for some employers, and is an unequivocal step towards becoming better prepared for a job

in the industry. Professional credentials or certificates signal to the employer that the person has both the knowledge to perform a job and the motivation to learn and succeed.

Additionally, necessities such as bus passes, gas cards, and clothing or housing assistance are crucial elements to a graduate's employment retention prospects, helping them maintain their job and support their family while reducing their reliance on public supports. These supports are not typically funded by grants that support the program, but are deemed necessary so that providers find a way to make them available once participants graduate from their program. One organization offers placed graduates a matched savings incentive—graduates who stay in the same job and make a minimum monthly contribution to a savings account are rewarded with a five-to-one match on their savings account at the end of the first year (up to \$1,000). They also have a thorough 12-month post-placement plan with all graduates, offering personal and professional support, guidance, and advocacy on their behalf. By meeting regularly with the graduate and their employer, the post-placement plan aims to ensure that all potential barriers and setbacks, in the workplace and at home, are addressed before they happen, thus improving the graduates' likelihood of success.

Prepare Participants for Successful Job Placement

Workforce development programs all have job placement as a primary goal for participants in the program. The organizations in this study place a strong emphasis on *sustainable* placements of participants with employers, in an effort to fulfill their goals for participants' economic self-sufficiency. They do this by carefully assessing participants' characteristics and improving their job skills to ensure a successful job placement match occurs at the end of the program—one that satisfies both the needs and capabilities of the program participant.

Because of its importance for the organizations in this study, job match and placement is typically considered as participants first engage with the program. An assessment of work readiness and career interests, and meetings with employment specialists, often occur before or immediately after an individual has enrolled in the program. One organization measures participants' level of "employment hope" with a 25-question survey upon entrance into the program. The survey asks participants how their past and present experiences, needs, and supports will affect them in securing a job, along with questions to understand their levels of self-efficacy, confidence, and problem-solving skills. The results of this survey are used to understand their employment and work goals, and they aid the organization in identifying and recruiting potential employers for successful matches. Another organization conducts career interest profiles at orientation to begin thinking about what employers and types of jobs will be good matches for their participants' interests. A third organization described their assessment process as a two-stage process beginning with

...the creative development specialists, they're the ones that start the assessment process. When they think somebody is okay, then we have the job developers look at them. All they're thinking about is "Can I get this person placed in a job?"

Together, these staff members create the individual's employment plan, and if the individual enrolls, the services provided to the individual throughout the program depend on what is in this plan.

All programs in the study attempt to prepare the individual to successfully enter a job that will be a good fit for their skills, knowledge, and background. In addition to basic job preparation, such as resume writing and mock interviews, organizations train the individual in other skills to ensure a quality match occurs after completion. These skills could include typing, computer training, or work on equipment they will encounter in their industry. One provider provides participants enrolled in some programs midterm grades as well as final grades in order to monitor their progress while enrolled. Another organization utilizes a "job-ready" checklist that is constantly updated throughout participants' program enrollment as they achieve certain milestones and move towards being placement ready. Measures on this list include completed and approved resume and mock interviews, consistent adherence to the dress code, and acquiring levels of basic competency on a variety of soft skills such as conflict management, team building, and communication. Another organization works one-on-one with participants to improve their financial literacy and provides them with opportunities to build credit. The organization says the reason for this is

not just because everybody's hurting, but we have a lot of employers that are actually checking [applicants' credit scores]. So we want to make sure that we're getting them prepared the best way we can...it's part of our employment services because we need to make sure you're employable.

Several of the workforce programs in the study collect some data to measure job *quality*—not just job *placements*—which is a critical component for financial stability and job growth. In this effort, some organizations track weekly hours worked by a placed graduate, wages, growth in wages over time, and benefits received by a graduate's employer. One provider in the study rates the quality of job placements based on total compensation, including benefits like health insurance and paid vacation time, in addition to wages or salary. Despite its importance to self-sufficiency, measures of job quality were not commonly tracked by the organizations in this study.

Success Factors: Workforce Provider Organizations

While each of the six organizations that participated in this study operate in somewhat different ways, they collectively demonstrated a commitment to their mission, flexibility and responsiveness in organizational decision making, meaningful roles for staff and leadership, plans for growth, and diversified funding. These factors, more than others at the organization level, critically impact successful participant outcomes and are influential in the success of these organizations. The organizations in this study measure various aspects of their internal organizational processes, services, and resources in order to better manage their organization and to make adjustments to improve their services.

Flexibility in Service Delivery and Funding

Strong Commitment to Mission

Organizations must demonstrate flexibility in adapting to their environment by embracing the innovation necessary to respond to both a changing market and the changing needs of their participants and partners, while continuing to serve their clients in accordance with their mission. The individual organizations' missions have several common themes.⁷ These include antipoverty goals achieved through self-sufficiency, the improvement and empowerment of the individual, and family and community considerations.

Our goal is not to train people. Our goal is to get them started in a career that's going to change their life economically.

Almost all of the organizations touch on all three of these themes, which reflect their commitments to broad, long-lasting, and substantive impact.

⁷ Organizations' missions can be found in Appendix A.

In the interviews, administrators said they were committed to participants' placement, long-term retention, and advancement, and therefore maintained goals that extend beyond program completion and placement to include fostering advancement to the next level of training to promote career development. One program noted their commitment to follow individual participants from basic education and training to more advanced degrees so they can assess how participants advance from entry-level positions, such as a certified nursing assistant, to more advanced certifications, such as registered nurse. This program has a mission to help participants not only get employed but also transition out of poverty, and typically more advanced training and jobs are needed to help participants achieve better wages.

To ensure they are fulfilling their missions, organizations in the study track several outcomes. Several interviewees said their organizations' mission and goals drive them to focus on addressing longer-term outcomes than funders typically require, such as wages over time and longer employment retention, which offer a better indicator of self-sufficiency and empowerment. One interviewee said,

Some people are like, "Well, the impact is they got a job." So, for me, it's like well, I want more than that. That's getting a job...that's like us breathing.

Another noted that:

Funders wanna know how many people retain for 90 days. We wanna see people retained for a lot longer than 90 days. We really don't wanna put a tag on it because we'd like to see people go into careers where there's upward mobility and they stay for five or ten years. We don't wanna see those folks coming back through the years. We wanna serve the new people that need the same thing.

Respond to the Changing Needs of Participants and the Economy

The organizations in this study have consistently provided programs and services that meet these missions and help participants achieve success, despite facing shifting realities in the labor market and their participant populations during their existence. Most of the programs examined in this study began in the 1970s, 1980s, or early 1990s. Some have since merged with other programs or evolved from other programs to become what they are today. One organization in particular only came to its present makeup after several mergers, which proved to be beneficial to the organization in further diversifying funding and combining the resources and strengths of the prior programs. The ability to last over time and adapt to changing circumstances likely represents the kind of flexibility that organizations need in order to continue to function during dynamic and difficult times.

With a changing clientele due to the economic downturn that started in 2008, organizations are witnessing changes in the diversity of their participants and must adapt services appropriately. Participant characteristics now range from the highly educated and previously employed to those with minimal

education or no work experience. Other participants may have criminal backgrounds, be substance abusers, or be homeless.

I used to say that we know very well the profile of the people.... In the last year and a half it's changing and we've been having people with bachelor degrees, master's degrees, coming over to the organization looking for employment. So that's sort of the profile. When they come into [our organization], we talk to them about...thinking about beyond getting a job and actually creating a master plan and that master plan [is] different from what we used to do a while back. It's a master plan that includes a plan on wealth creation, a plan on career goals, and then also a plan on an overall vision for their life and for their family.

Organizations must demonstrate flexibility in order to properly serve all participants and thus maintain their success. They can use data about participants' characteristics, needs, and experiences to best serve the participants and better allocate resources, including funding and staffing. By using up-to-date information on who they are serving, their needs, and the needs of the labor market, organizations can be more flexible in their service delivery. They have developed new components of programs or new programs altogether in response to a changing labor market, a growing demand for services, and changing participant characteristics. This has included expanding to add adult education and training and accredited curriculum in growing sectors (i.e., healthcare), offering programs for dislocated workers or older adult workers making career changes, providing additional support services (or additional community partners), as well as adding transitional jobs or opportunities in the organizations' social enterprise components. One organization in the study participated in a time-limited transitional jobs program whose success has them now considering adopting a transitional jobs program as one component of their organization's offerings. Several of the organizations now operate social enterprises to help generate revenue and act as a work-based learning and training outlet for participants with multiple barriers who are difficult to engage in the workplace, such as those without any prior work experience and ex-offenders.

Programs also exercise creativity in service delivery within existing models in order to best serve their participants' needs. For example, the four CWF sites in the study are administered in very different ways. One keeps CWF as a separate program with different application procedures from its other training programs. Another has incorporated the CWF into their workforce training program; the two others host the site alongside their training programs, allowing program participants and the public alike to utilize CWF services. One organization used their Social Innovation Fund grant money to operate an alternative school for youth as well as a training and supports program specifically for single Latina mothers. Despite organizations' willingness to adapt in order to respond to changes in the economy, program staff noted that funders have not matched that flexibility in altering their performance requirements. With the recent economic recession and high unemployment, performance expectations have not been altered to account

for the increased demand for services during a time with fewer available jobs. Despite these economic challenges, one interviewee noted, “Our goals never changed when the economy changed.” They continue to strive for positive job placement outcomes for participants during a time when job openings are scarce and more competitive. Organizational flexibility in service design and delivery has helped them realize this continued success.

Diversified Funding

Organizations typically rely on a variety of federal, state, and local grants and funding streams to operate and serve their participants, including money from the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Community Service Block Grant (CSBG), Social Innovation Fund (SIF), and the Trade Adjustment and Assistance Act (TAA), among others. Additionally, Chicago has a strong foundation and philanthropy presence, which provides a greater variety of funding opportunities for local organizations. Such a diverse mix offers maximum sustainability and flexibility. Given this variety, diversity in funding is *essential* to delivering comprehensive services that create real, lasting success for individuals and the organization. Organizations described how diversity in funding translated to elasticity in program design, services offered, and clients served. Therefore, organizations strive to patch together funding from various sources, but also merge funds, incorporate new funding streams, and draw on many different funders for the provision of varied services to different clients. They engage multiple public agency and private partners to serve people with similar workforce preparation needs but who possess different demographic characteristics.

While organizations must rely on various funding partners and designated funding streams that target specific populations, the degree and character of funding diversification differs across organizations. Regardless of the composition, organizations aim to have the mix that allows them to serve their participants in the most efficient and effective manner possible. For example, some organizations cap public funding in order to limit their restrictive funding streams, allowing them to be more creative and responsive. By adapting to new government policies and funding requirements while working with diverse funding sources, organizations are able to stay committed to their mission and to meet diverse funding requirements, both of which are critically important to them and their success. As the economy fluctuates and both budgets and funding streams become more restricted, organizations have to remain diverse in and be creative about their funding sources in order to maintain the level of services offered, clients served, and programs’ success.

The organizations in this study appear to have well-defined internal systems for tracking and measuring their resources and funds in order to maximize their efficiency and maintain funding. Organizations track the resources they use in order to document where funds are being spent and to meet accountability

requirements. As part of these efforts, providers collect and report data differently for their various funding sources and grants, which often require multiple data systems with repetitive data entry.

Despite the efforts to diversify funding to meet the variety of participants and their needs, staff from all six organizations consistently mentioned funding as one of the top challenges to successfully carrying out their work and mission. As the funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) expires, programs face sharply declining funding levels for workforce systems. In fact, recent funding cuts from most sources—including diminishing WIA funding, shrinking state and city budgets, and constricted foundation finances—only exacerbate the existing challenges facing organizations who are already working with much less than their desired levels of funding. One noted,

There are far more people eligible than we have money to serve.

This organization reported they would be significantly downsizing staff the following year due to funding cuts despite already having an overwhelming case manager-to-participant ratio.

Maintain Core Competencies

The programmatic changes, in terms of services offered and participant populations served, have resulted from decisions that allowed organizations to focus on their strengths and reflect broader strategic commitments to serving their core competencies. Given limited resources and organization-specific core competencies and commitments, they must strategically choose whether or not to engage with various service delivery options and potential training programs. (For example, they might need to decide whether or not adding a social enterprise would benefit them.) Generally, organizations have decided to delve deeper into their core competencies rather than venture into unknown areas where they are inexperienced. This decision has been influential in their continued success. One organization, for example, reported they decided to stay away from training in specific industries where they had little expertise or experience, like information technology or construction. Another organization had previously offered youth programs, but stopped when they discovered their resources didn't allow them to commit fully to their youth and adult programs. Staff at that organization said that focusing on their core competencies is

...part of why we're strong now...we've really, really reorganized almost ruthlessly around what our core competencies are and [we are] trying to be really tight about what we do.

For them, this meant devoting more resources to training that was customized for their employer partners and their incumbent workers, rather than youth work. Another organization used similar reasoning to expand their services by putting their strengths to use. They knew they were “excellent adult educators” and built off this core competency to develop a program model that served as a bridge between adult

education and college. Understanding one's strengths and building on these competencies is an important organizational factor that has led to success for the organizations in this study.

Strong Leadership and Staff

A strong leadership team, an active board presence, and dedicated program staff are factors that are essential to an organization's success. The organizations in the study vary with regard to the size and structure of their staff, yet the relationship between and within leadership teams, boards, and program staff in each of these organizations is very similar. Strong, strategic leadership and committed, skilled staff operate in conjunction with one another. Each is successful fulfilling its own role in organizations' internal division of labor, but each also benefits greatly from interactions across the organizational hierarchy. Leadership and staff both acknowledge the essential role the other serves in contributing to the success of the organization.

Active Boards and Supportive Leadership Staff

Board composition is strategically important for the organization's effectiveness, especially in terms of the quality and number of employer relationships and community partnerships the organization is able to preserve. Many maintain a large employer presence on their board, along with a mix of business, policy, and community representatives. Because of this mix of interested partners from the organizations' communities, involved and invested boards were the norm for the organizations in the study.

We have a very active and, I feel, supportive board. I feel very supported by my board.

Boards have the ability to be highly influential in the effectiveness of the organization and its adherence to its mission.

There isn't a lot of bureaucracy. There is a lot of process with those board members and so we're in the process to get things done quicker than what you find in other boards that are more managing boards. This is a governing board that has a strong influence.

Strong leadership also exists in the organizations that participated in this study. Leadership continuity is common among the organizations in the study, as evidenced by the length of directors' employment at the organizations. Staff members who were interviewed for this study averaged over 7 years with their organization, with many reporting having been employed for upwards of 10 years. Further, one organization reported that "most of the people running things were home grown," citing the example that the director of the program started out at the organization as a case manager years prior.

This continuity of involvement at the organization often exists at the founder level as well. Several organizations provided examples of significant leadership presence by the organization's founder long after his or her official role with the organization ended. Strong founder and leadership direction was

given as the reason organizations display the innovation they do—innovation that is necessary to many of their operations. Many organizations credited leadership with the important role of guiding organizational philosophy and direction.

We've talked an awful lot about innovation—it's one of our core values and ...we've been very innovative and got [*sic*] a social enterprise that we started. I think we have the luxury of doing that for two reasons. Number one, because of the board we have, it's still a founder's board...He's the chair and the founder. His presence is very large within the organization....

Management and Staff Rely on Each Other

Several organizations mentioned the importance of having leadership staff that works as a team. Two referenced frequent and regularly scheduled leadership or directors' team meetings that keep all of them in communication with each other. One explained,

...[t]he idea of course [for these meetings] is so that all of us as a part of a leadership team understand what's going on across the company. So there's some sharing that has to be done. Sharing and decision making, sharing of resources to the extent that we can...All of us need to know what resources we can share, what resources we cannot share and everybody needs to know what's going on.

Leadership staff interact with their employees in productive and necessary ways, while trying to limit micromanaging and bureaucratic impediments on staff as much as possible. This can be difficult when there are multiple levels of the organizational hierarchy; however, organizations recognize that limiting vertical bureaucracy empowers supporting staff to use their judgment and make decisions that are beneficial to the organization as a whole. One staff member described their organization as having an

incredibly hands-off type of environment that we work in, so there is very little micromanaging, if any, that goes on here. And so we really kind of empower the staff to make decisions and to use their judgment, which I think is different from some of the workforce agencies, where they're kind of bound to this like, "Well, it's gotta be this way, and this is the rule and the policy on this."

The opportunity for staff to grow and maintain autonomy in various levels of decision making was important to most staff interviewed. One interviewee said of the president of the organization,

He's always giving us space to innovate and to make decisions and to use our talents to achieve the particular goals.

An interviewee at another organization said the leadership

...allow a lot of room for people to grow into their positions and to be creative about how they accomplish their goals.

Also described, however, were the ways in which leadership teams engage with frontline staff regularly and share in the decision-making process. In other words, a “hands-off” attitude does not translate to minimal interaction or limited communication.

Staff also receive support from leadership to prevent burnout, which is especially critical given the emotionally demanding nature of the work. For staff and participants alike, the work demands great ability to deal with emotional stress and trauma. When the emotion and stress get to a level that is particularly trying on staff, leadership or other staff often intervene to encourage self-care or time off.

A few organizations in the study have used attrition data to plan staffing and resource allocation and avoid overloading any particular staff member. At least two of the providers in the study use participant attrition numbers to allocate staff resources for new cohorts of participants. By measuring dropout rates, program administrators can allocate staff based on what the participant numbers will be as the program begins rather than at enrollment. This allows the organization to more efficiently use its resources.

Staff Characteristics and Commitment

In many of the organizations, leadership acknowledged the essential role of staff in fulfilling the mission and serving clients. One referred to staff as their “biggest resource.” Further, staff that interact with clients on a daily basis possess and use specific qualities to deal with participants successfully. Therefore, finding and hiring the right staff is an exceedingly important process that directly impacts the workforce provider’s success, and involves intensive screening and evaluation of potential new staff. Moreover, many of the qualities organizations look for in staff are subjective and may not always be based on education and professional experience. This also means that credentials and the level of education among staff range widely, from those with no college degree to PhD-holders, and are less emphasized in hiring than candidates’ personal attributes and motivations. In one case, a director discussed hiring someone that was inexperienced in the field, but was hired due to their passion and commitment to help the community. These serve as *the* essential characteristics when identifying successful staff, while the training for their roles and responsibilities can follow.

I could see that person was a little green, but I could work with him because he had those skills that you can really build on... You could see the passion. You could definitely see the hunger. You can really see the desire to help the community.

Organizations repeatedly stressed that their staff are committed to and passionate about the organization, its mission, and its clients, and that these qualities were what drove the organization in its success.

I think that it’s very important that people have the skills. However, for me, it’s really important that people [are] mission driven. It’s really, really important...the skills [are] great, but also having the

passion to see, to transform this community and that they see themselves as an integral part of making sure that they have it.

The commitment, passion, and subjective characteristics leaders find invaluable for staff to possess are similar to the characteristics staff identified as critical to success for potential participants. One interviewee summed up the importance of staff succinctly by stating,

I have a very passionate and loyal team of individuals that are here for the right reasons. That makes all the difference in the world.

A Balance of Compassion and Professionalism

Organizations also reported that staff have and need an intense familiarity with the community and its population in order to appropriately and successfully address participants' needs. One organization mentioned they employed two program alumni, exhibiting a clear connection to the personal experiences of current clients. A director at another organization emphasized this familiarity staff have with the clients by stating,

I don't think [staff] can operate to effectively support all the teaching if they don't understand and haven't experienced it themselves. And that doesn't mean they need to go and live in a shelter... You need to really be with the students to really get where they're at and not react to their anger.

However, it was also stressed that staff should not become too emotionally attached or overly personal when dealing with participants. Organizations look for staff to possess a balance of understanding and compassion with distance and efficiency. One program administrator described the balance as follows,

You've got to be compassionate on one hand because you've got to understand what it is that people bring with them when they come here. This is not a fun place to be. First of all, they [participants] are unemployed. God only knows what kind of pressures they bring with them—emotional pressures, mental pressures, as well as financial pressures. So you first of all, you've gotta be sensitive to that... [But you also have to] depersonalize the relationship that you have with them...you've got to be very clinical in your assessment, both for their success as well as for our success.

The dichotomous nature of this interaction between staff and participants was repeatedly given as an essential feature of participant success. Many referred to the role of staff in motivating and encouraging participants on a daily basis. One said their staff are “constantly motivating people” because

A lot of students...have either been laid off for the first time in their lives or are on public benefits for the first time in their lives....So they can be really down on themselves, and I think our instructors are really good about not letting people have that attitude and giving people responsibilities.

Evaluate Staff Performance

Organizations in the study regularly measure the performance of their staff, including their class instructors and case managers. Methods to measure staff performance include examining participant performance in class and the various components of one's program, and class evaluations. However, one interviewee noted that it is difficult for her to assess the effectiveness of trainers based on class performance and graduation rates alone, as there can be a large variation in the behavior of the participants. For example, if one participant is disruptive, it can interfere with the performance of the entire class.

I assess the effectiveness of trainers, [while recognizing that] it's totally unpredictable and it depends on the class.

Staff evaluations are common in order to maintain the high levels of staff performance that administrators and participants alike expect, as well as make improvements more effectively and quickly. A few organizations in the study utilize student surveys of the program and/or staff upon completion.

One of the last things that we did last year was where students were surveyed for how they felt about staff. And then we got the results of that survey and got to see where they felt left out, where they felt neglected, what they felt about the services overall.

The organizations use these evaluations to try and improve staff performance, as well as to continually improve as an organization, better serve their participants, and ensure they are adhering to their missions.

Plan Strategically for Growth

All six organizations mentioned growth in their plans for the future of the organization. Adherence to the mission is a primary consideration for organizations in their plans for growth, but organizations, and staff within them, do not always agree on the best way to grow while supporting their clearly defined mission. The main source of tension or conflict in plans for growth centers on the question of broader growth or deeper growth—that is, whether organizations (and staff) wanted to serve more clients or to offer more-tailored services to the same number of clients. The organizations were sensitive to the delicate balance between growth and expansion on the one hand and staying committed to their strengths on the other. One expressed a desire for a kind of slower, steady growth in order to ensure the organization spends the necessary time strengthening its core competencies.

Half of the organizations reported that working to improve or expand services for existing clients was their primary concern before serving other clients or expanding their base. This included practical goals of providing associate's degrees rather than certificates, expanding a housing program, expanding social services to participants across all programs in the organization, and offering more transitional and

permanent job opportunities. These organizations expressed a desire to deepen engagement with the clients they already serve. A director at one organization said,

So instead of in the next year saying we served 7,000 and then 14,000 we wanted to say, “No, no. The number served actually went down but the services accessed went up.”

On the other hand, several of the organizations were committed to opening new locations, serving new clients, and adding new programs in new areas of training.

A few other areas for growth were identified by the organizations. Two of the six organizations expressed a desire to expand their employer relationships, one specifically in terms of employer presence on their board. Two additional organizations will focus on expanding their measurement and data collection efforts in order to improve data tracking for program evaluation and to implement a new data tracking program, which they view as essential to securing funding and evaluating program success. Organizations can monitor their progress toward their goals by tracking their number of services, employer partnerships, and clients served each year, and tracking whether any changes in numbers align with the type of growth they desire. Whichever direction organizations decide to grow, a commitment to their mission provides the backbone for all potential change.

Success Factors: External Engagement with Employers, Programs, Community, and Policy

Successful workforce development programs do not operate independently; rather, they engage with a variety of external stakeholders to promote essential relationships, impact their communities, and advocate for improved workforce policies. Specifically, organizations develop strong relationships with employers, who are often considered program clients along with program participants, as well as with many community agents in order to fully serve their participants. Community-based organizations also work with each other collaboratively to meet the needs of program participants and employers, and actively participate in policy and advocacy efforts in support of workforce programs and services. These external engagements are critical to the success of the organization. Although all of the workforce development providers in the study emphasized the importance of external relationships with employers, other programs, and the community, most organizations use more informal means to monitor and assess these relationships and vary greatly in the extent to which they collect data to assess the quantity, quality, and effectiveness of engagement with external partners.

Relationships with Employers

All of the workforce development organizations who participated in this study emphasized the importance of strong employer relationships as a key component for program success, with dedicated efforts to ensure employers' needs are being met. While workforce programs are obviously dedicated to serving those seeking job training and employment, achieving successful job placements cannot be accomplished without establishing strong, trusted relationships with employers.

Meet the Needs of Participants

Many organizations in this study have a core group of employers they work with as partners for job placements; however, they have to engage new employers on a continual basis to maintain a sufficient number of potential job openings for their participants. Because many of the workforce programs in the study work with harder-to-serve job seekers, strong and trusting relationships with employers are critically important to achieve high levels of successful job placements. One program administrator discussed working with employers to help them overcome their perceptions that those who are ex-offenders or are homeless are not qualified candidates for open positions. An administrator from a different organization acknowledged they assess participants' needs and forecast employers' job openings in order to ensure sufficient employment placements are available to place their program participants.

We know that this percentage of our students are known to have [problematic] background and lower education. Then we need to make sure we have enough employers in the pipeline to fill that need.

Despite long-standing relationships with the organization, some employers will not hire job seekers with criminal backgrounds. Due to challenges with placing harder-to-serve clients into jobs, one program estimated an annual 20 percent attrition rate for their employer partners, requiring them to recruit many employers each year to ensure there are ample job opportunities. The trusting relationships organizations aim to build with employers can help place harder-to-serve job seekers, but employer perceptions and a surplus of unemployed workers makes this task extremely challenging.

Respond to Changing Demand

The organizations' emphasis on employer relationships may be more critical than ever during periods of economic recession. Finding job placements for those with barriers to employment has been increasingly difficult with the recent economic downturn:

It's hard to help people find jobs partly because of the way the economy has been in the past few years. Employers can really pick and choose, so they can make hiring ex-offenders like the last thing they're [going to] do. They have so many people in the labor market right now...employers can be so choosy.

As relationships with employers become more important as the economy worsens, they must also evolve to meet the changing demands and needs of employers and participants. The organizations in this study have developed innovative ways to engage employers and build relationships that are adaptable to change over time. A staff person at one program talked about how their engagement with employers helped them update their program in order to better prepare participants and be more responsive to employers' current demand:

So those partnerships that we have with employers help us identify what kind of programs we need to offer to our community in order to make them successful. In order to help them gain those skills to be place-able in the future.

Some organizations noted that the only way they can help participants train for a job, and prepare participants to build a career, is to engage with employers in order to understand what businesses want in regard to skills and credentials today and going forward. Workforce development organizations use inputs from employers, employer-specific data, and labor market data on industry growth to better assess the current and projected demand for specific skills that will be more likely to lead to job placements. This insight into local business needs is essential to change the economic status of participants, according to another interviewee:

It goes back to the economics of what we're trying to help our participants do—change their economic status by helping them build a career. You can only do that if you're talking to [people who know] what's going on in the business world. What are you looking for, not today, but what are you looking for two years from now? So, we can get the programs in place, get people trained, and get them out there.

Understanding the current industry needs allows workforce development organizations to adapt programs to meet this demand, and align current and future training programs with the demands of employers. One organization in the study started a new training program for welding in response to direct requests from businesses for this specific skill set in which they had difficulty finding qualified job applicants. The interviewee stated,

This definitely is an example of trying to be demand driven, trying to be responsive to the employers' needs in the labor market.

As part of their efforts to be responsive to employer demands, all organizations in the study placed importance on ensuring they provide high-quality and careful matching between employer needs and the participants sent as job applicants. They conduct thorough screening of the employer and the job opening before sending participants to apply in order to fully understand the needs and expectations of the employer. This analysis of employer needs helps programs provide a better match for the employer and job seeker, which ultimately allows organizations to build a great reputation with employers.

We don't want to send a whole boatload of people to an employer. We only want to send people that we feel really confident about and then match their skills pretty closely.... We want to talk to them and have [a] relationship where we know exactly what they're looking for and we won't send anybody unless we've got someone that meets their qualifications.

To aid in finding successful matches, one organization utilizes a customer relationship management software system to assess employers' openings and find participants that might be matches for them. A

participant is linked to an opening in the system, and as staff enter information into the system about how a participant is progressing through the program on various points, the system calculates a probability ratio for that opening. The probability ratio increases or decreases according to how the participant progresses. Ultimately, the organization customized this software for their program needs and views the participant as a commodity for their employer partners who are looking to hire.

Most organizations informally track their engagements with employers by noting when and how an employer has interacted with the program, and documenting graduates' placements. They use this data on employer engagement for self-assessment and to identify what is or is not working regarding the number and quality of placements. One organization, for their industry-focused program, tracks interview-to-hire ratios with employers, with a goal of keeping this as low as possible. This helps them monitor their success in preparing individuals for placement and their success in job matches with their employer clients. At times, data on employer engagement is shared with employers to maintain existing employer relationships and recruit new ones, and demonstrate how well the organization is meeting the employer's needs. For example, one program provides customized reports to employers to describe their successful placement and retention outcomes and overall engagement with each employer, demonstrating the quality of their relationship.

Dedicated Program Staff Foster Employer Engagement

All workforce providers in the study noted that employer engagement is pursued by staff members whose main responsibilities are cultivating and maintaining employer relationships.

We have four different departments that engage with that one company on some level. And the more we have that level of engagement, the more activity we typically have at that company. I mean, it's a lot of investment for us, obviously, but it's a value added.

Maintaining employer relations takes dedicated efforts, including site visits and analysis to better understand the needs of the employer. Program staff may communicate with a variety of people working for the employer to fully understand their needs and better match job candidates. The process of employer engagement for one organization was described as,

We're developing also a relationship with them. The relationships... are mounting through the employment specialists and [the director]. We follow up with them. We meet [with employers and]...conduct a site visit. We work with their human resources or their hiring decision makers, whoever the decision makers are. A lot of the time it's challenging, but we try to get there to meet and develop our relationship, try to really understand what is it that their looking for, what qualities, skills, qualifications.

Most organizations in the study emphasized that the staff engaging with employers are critical to their program success, since they understand the program and the need to make connections with businesses to create job placements for participants. An employee at one organization emphasized the importance of these staff and the high-level role they play when interacting with employers and cultivating these relationships:

So that's why we keep their titles as corporate account managers, because we want them to be facing and going toe-to-toe with people in the private sector, and not have like a cute title like, "Oh, you're a life coach," or something like that. Like, "No. This girl's a corporate account manager and she'll be able to go toe-to-toe with so-and-so from your firm."

Staff serving in these employer relations roles are responsible for a variety of engagement activities, including employer recruitment. According to one interviewee, as part of this outreach, the organization's employment specialist first needs to assess whether the business may be a good match by asking such questions as:

Are they a good fit for us? Do they have positions that are entry level that are [going to] meet the needs of the students that need a placement? And from a background standpoint, educational standpoint, are they quality jobs or are they placement? Are they full time? What's the minimum wage that they offer? Do they offer benefits?

At the same time, organizations did note that when multiple staff have this much engagement with an employer, they need to manage communication and engagement efforts to ensure they are coordinated. Several programs noted they are careful about how to engage employers, and identify strategic points at which they engage employers so they do not overburden them. This demands thorough record keeping tracking engagements among all staff with employers, to ensure the relationship is well-managed. Organizations use a variety of internal systems to monitor these interactions.

One program in the study has dedicated business staff called "industry staffing specialists" that work closely with employers and visit them on-site to understand their workplace environment and their job requirements. These specialists focus on specific industries to build knowledge and rapport among businesses and ensure their programs are responsive to industry needs. However, not all organizations have this luxury, as one organization without a sector focus noted. This organization would benefit from an understanding of industry needs. Since the organization does not do training and job placement for specific industries, it is difficult for them to get either a comprehensive overview of all industries or a deep understanding of any specific industry.

Provide Business Services to Engage Employers

Some of the organizations in the study build relationships with employers by offering business services, such as incumbent worker services or customized training. These efforts often help create new relationships, strengthen existing relationships between programs and business, and create additional job opportunities for participants. One program noted that they offer small business classes within the community and do technology assessments for small businesses as ways to get their foot in the door with employers, who they hope will then provide job placements.

These services signal the level of trust the employers place in the workforce training organization, and the confidence they have in their abilities to teach necessary job and technical skills. A few organizations stressed the role incumbent worker training had in developing and establishing this trust:

[Incumbent worker training] probably was more important in the evolution of [our program] because it was initially how many of the employer relationships were established... So there's a lot of things on our incumbent worker business services end that kinda gets us in the door with employers, and then we can start talking about our job seekers... It's nice, too, when we're working with a company and we're going out and customizing a training for them, and our job developer can go with and just kind of start talking about our job seekers and what their capabilities are, and that sort of thing.

Employers Volunteer with Programs

Many organizations have deep relationships with employers that go beyond job placements and business services and engage employers as volunteers, board members, and even funders of the program. A vice president from one organization acknowledged:

The level of our relationship with the companies—I mean, sometimes it's extremely deep so it goes beyond just placement, it's also they volunteer here... they're a major funder for our organization and they have a training program that we have set up with them.

Volunteer activities include guest teaching, conducting mock interviews, and serving as tutors. One manufacturing program noted that some of their employers generously donate raw materials, such as scrap metal and machinery, to the program. Employers view their engagement with the workforce programs as a social responsibility and a way of doing something for their community. A few of the programs in the study formally track this type of engagement by maintaining spreadsheets that record such activities.

Another workforce organization maintains a business leadership council, where employers review program curriculum and play the role of evaluator, helping to further develop the program and look for the next growth opportunities. Employers from these businesses also help advise on the training

curriculum and software used in the classroom to make sure the training is preparing participants for the current skills needed by employers.

Collaboration among Workforce Programs

Almost all of the workforce programs in this study noted the importance of working collaboratively with other programs to ensure they meet the needs of participants and employers. This collaboration allows organizations to better meet the needs of job seekers throughout the community, while enabling them to focus on their organization and program factors that lead to successful outcomes.

Programs in this study often refer applicants to other local training programs that might be a better fit for them. Referrals to other programs are also made for enrolled participants if the original program does not provide a needed service, such as tutoring. One program interviewee noted that they work closely with other Workforce Investment Act (WIA) delegate agencies in Chicago who provide referrals to them for their sector-based manufacturing training or their literacy training.

Organizations also collaborate with other organizations to meet the needs of businesses. One organization noted that if they cannot send enough qualified job candidates to meet the needs of an employer, they will reach out to other workforce programs to help provide the employers with sufficient numbers of job candidates. The interviewee acknowledged their organization has a collaborative relationship with other workforce programs, despite competing for similar resources and participants.

Several programs in the study are part of a formal collaborative network called the Workforce Employer Resource Collaborative (WERC)⁸, which consists of over 20 workforce organizations across the local area that collaborate to serve participants and work with employers to achieve job placements. An employee whose organization is part of the network explained,

The premise behind [the collaborative] is...if you have an employer and you find that...you've got nobody [to fill those employers needs], then you're going to send them to the collaborative and say "I want to make this employer happy, so can you help me find some good people."

While some program interviewees discussed positive aspects of this collaboration—such as better serving participants and creating goodwill with employers—at least one noted the challenges of trying to collaborate around working with employers. They indicated programs are very protective of their employer relationships because of how essential they are to program and participant success. There is also some skepticism about opening those relationships up to other programs.

⁸ www.wercchicago.com

The organizations in the study all emphasized the importance of collaborating with other workforce programs to best serve their participants and employers, but these collaborative efforts are not often formally tracked or monitored.

Community Engagement

The success of workforce programs is largely influenced by the strength of community partnerships. Community factors often have a significant influence on where the program is located and what services it provides. Programs not only strive to meet the needs of the individuals within the communities they serve, but they work with partners and promote economic development for communities. All of the workforce development organizations in the study emphasized the importance of community engagement and creating community partnerships. These partnerships included working with community-based organizations, such as businesses, schools, religious institutions, healthcare providers, financial institutions, politicians, and media. Organizations sometimes work with business intermediaries, such as neighborhood business associations, to connect with employers and inform them of their program's services and graduates. Most programs emphasized that community partnerships are key to their success.

So partnerships, it's our key, it's very instrumental for the comprehensive approach that we have...we know that we cannot do it all.

When community partners believe in what the program is doing, they are more likely to help highlight the program within the community and do what they can to help the program succeed. Additionally, community engagement is often part of the organization's mission, since they are dedicated to making a difference in their communities.

Partner with Community Organizations

Workforce organizations partner with other community organizations to serve an array of purposes. Recruitment of individuals into the programs in this study comes largely from community referrals, which are aided by the organizations' long-standing presence in the community. One program administrator noted that the referrals to their program from community partners have minimized the need for them to do their own direct outreach efforts to potential participants. Several program administrators noted that word-of-mouth referrals were most common, as family members and other alumni of the programs are tangible evidence of the impact a program can have. Another organization in the study only accepts participants via community referrals from its 100-plus community partners. Like many organizations, they track their referrals to and from their partners in a database. They can use this data to assess which community partners send clients to their programs and where they need to do additional outreach. This organization also provides detailed annual reports on the status of each individual referral to each of their community

partners. The partners that provide referrals include other WIA affiliate agencies, workforce centers, the Department of Human Services, schools, and other local community organizations. One interviewee described canvassing the community to promote these partnerships, which result in referrals for their financial literacy program:

We do go up and down 26th Street periodically... We'll hit the churches. We will go to the Chambers of Commerce [and] the banks. We partner closely with Fifth Third Bank, with Second Federal, US Bank. They've all like come in [with referrals]... We promote the financial workshops... We go to the alderman and to community fairs.

In addition to referrals, community partners also provide access to additional training opportunities, allowing organizations to deliver services that they are not usually able to provide. Several programs mentioned they partner with schools, including community colleges, which can help programs develop a pathway of continued education and training for their participants. A few programs noted they work with other community organizations to provide GED, ESL, or literacy training to help participants obtain the level of skill needed to begin training programs.

Organizations are deeply dependent on maintaining dynamic relationships with community partners to meet their participants' wide variety of needs. Relationships with community partners have become increasingly important as the economy worsens and the need for support services grows. The dual effect of fewer resources available from community partners, coupled with increased demand for support services from participants, demands an organization have more, and more varied, community partners. Support services from community partners include transportation assistance, financial counseling, health care, housing, food, child care, clothing, and other types of support participants and their families may need. One program interviewee noted that whenever they have a need to provide supports, such as interview clothes, holiday gifts, and school supplies, their community partners help them obtain these items. These partners include community agencies, churches, and even their local chamber of commerce.

Community Characteristics Influence Services Provided

Local community needs influence such programmatic aspects as what and how services are offered and what partnerships are established. Successful organizations in this study have program staff who often work with community partners to identify these needs and determine if current services exist to meet them, or if there is adequate demand for new services. One organization serving the Latino community worked with partners to conduct a community study to help determine the Latino community's interest in specific occupational fields and identify what training programs they should provide. This effort identified a need among local hospitals for Spanish-speaking nurses, so the workforce organization began a nursing program. Some programs collect information on their engagement efforts within the

community, such as the services they provide to residents and businesses, their attendance at community meetings, and conducting community needs assessments. This can help programs understand the needs most critical to their participants and their community and tailor services appropriately.

Community Characteristics Influence Programs' Locations

Most workforce organizations in the study noted that the population and needs of the community played a large influence on where the program is located. Several organizations in this study run programs that focus on serving a specific population; for these organizations, the location of their programs was intentionally based on where these populations are located within the city. Specifically, some of the programs who have missions to serve the Latino community are located near Pilsen and other largely Latino neighborhoods in Chicago, which have a mix of industrial, business, and residential areas within the community. Another workforce program that serves homeless individuals is strategically located in a neighborhood that has multiple homeless shelters in the surrounding community.

Another consideration that was important to several organizations in this study was to be conveniently located near businesses for a specific sector in which the program has dedicated training. For example, one program in the study with a focus on healthcare training is located near several hospitals and healthcare facilities. Another program that is solely focused on manufacturing is located in the heart of a manufacturing corridor, allowing easy access to many employers and establishing a presence within this business community.

One organization in the study recently opened a new location and described its experience with identifying where to locate. This particular program wanted to be near working poor families and in an area with scarce resources. This program also operates as a social enterprise and wanted a community that could benefit from the new business in order to promote additional economic development. When they decided to expand, the program administrators sought out partnerships in various communities to assess their needs. One administrator summarized the process, saying:

With the Garfield Park [location] we actually ... talked to funders. We talked to the foundation community. We also talked to service providers for where they felt was the most need in the city, and East Garfield Park was like at the top of everybody's list.

Community Characteristics Influence Economic Development

Many of the workforce programs in the study acknowledged that they serve an economic development objective within the communities in which they operate. Programs help participants advance economically and become role models within their community. Many workforce organizations also help promote business retention and development within their communities.

Several organizations in this study are dedicated to targeting their services to the community in which they operate, focusing their employment matches within the neighborhood in order to make a difference and support the local community. One organization explained that when a new Target store opened in the neighborhood, the workforce program worked with the company to ensure the construction and retail jobs went to local residents who were unemployed.

Organizations have the ability to help business retention or spur business growth within communities by focusing on the programs and certifications in demand by employers in the areas they serve. One program in this study, located in the Ravenswood neighborhood and focused on manufacturing training, said they help incubate new businesses in the community and help retain manufacturers who may otherwise move out of the city. Another organization worked with the local chamber of commerce to start their social enterprise business within an economically devastated community, with the hope that it would help motivate other businesses to locate to the community. Additionally, several organizations in the study constantly engage their community partners to better understand how they can serve employers. Examples of engagement include employer workshops and breakfast meetings, both of which allow organizations to learn how to improve delivery of their services to businesses and promote economic development in the community.

Despite this demonstrated strong commitment to serving their community, most organizations did not have formal ways to assess their engagement with the community, aside from the few efforts mentioned around referrals and tracking engagement opportunities. Several interviewees noted the benefit of broadening measures of program impact to include impacts on the community, such as the impact of graduates from the community increasing their income two- or three-fold. These measures would strengthen their success and improve the way funders and policymakers assess program impact.

Policy and Advocacy Efforts

Staff in this study reported that their organizations are actively engaged in policy and advocacy around protesting funding reductions, promoting beneficial program and practice strategies, and addressing other policy concerns as they arise.

Protect Program Funding

Organizational leaders are actively engaged in advocacy activities and attempting to influence policy to ensure financial support is available for their programs and ensure policies do not inhibit their ability to serve clients. Several interviewees noted the pending cuts to WIA funding which, among other changes, will result in fewer WIA delegate agencies to administer programs. Organizations also reported reductions in other federal funding sources, such as the CDBG and the CSBG. This has led programs to

depend more heavily on other funding sources, including private funds. These funding reductions and restrictions motivated them to become more active in advocating for workforce funding among policymakers and lawmakers. One program interviewee stated:

We've been getting a little more involved in advocacy because of the funding cuts that are coming, that potentially could be coming, and that have come, with WIA and CDBG and CSBG. So we're getting a little more involved [in] going out and talking to people and getting a good sense of what's going on and having a voice. We always encourage our staff to call the senators, call their representatives.

Most of the organizations noted that they work with federal, state, and local legislators and policymakers, such as members of the US congress, the state's workforce agency, and city government officials. They often have to make the case for the effective cost savings of investing in workforce training. One program, when WIA policy changes threatened their training program dollars, advocated with other key stakeholders to demonstrate the demand for their sector's jobs. Using data, the program succeeded in retaining these occupations on the list of those jobs eligible for WIA training funding.

When program staff engage in policy and advocacy efforts, they frequently use data on their clients to help support their case. Organizations need to convey information about the needs of those they are serving, as well as the positive outcomes they are achieving, which is only made possible through their outcomes data. One program interviewee recalled using the program's data to convey the achievement of positive job placement outcomes before federal policymakers in the US House of Representatives. While the organizations in this study use available statistics as part of these efforts, they also noted the value of sharing personal case stories of specific individuals served by their programs.

Support Promising Programs and Practices

Organizations not only advocate for funding for their programs, but also for promoting effective programs and practices for workforce training. One program administrator noted he plays an active role on a federal task force to address education and workforce training, where he informs them of promising efforts with bridge programs and contextualized learning models. Another organization includes the word "advocacy" in its mission statement. They conduct formal and informal advocacy for their organization and their participants, and advocate with employers to ensure Latinos are being provided opportunities for career pathways. They also advocate on behalf of their community when they need to encourage more employment opportunities or to highlight the lack of programs serving people within the community that would support better employment.

Collective Advocacy Efforts

Most organizations in this study acknowledged they are not only actively advocating for their particular programs but are involved in collective advocacy efforts at local, state, and federal levels. Several interviewees noted they work with other workforce programs, the Chicago Jobs Council, or advocacy organizations to communicate their policy and funding concerns to legislators. One program administrator, whose program works with the homeless, noted they engage in advocacy not only to promote workforce training but also to prevent homelessness. This same organization also works with local community organizing agencies to focus on economic development and housing issues.

As part of these collective advocacy efforts, organizations often tell their stories and write letters to legislators when policy decisions are being made, to inform them of challenges and potential consequences of their decisions. One interviewee said:

I just look at, when legislative decisions are being made, who are they really impacting. And trust me, we told our story. We wrote. Our clients were writing letters. We asked them to. But it's the biggest challenge, when these decisions are made. I wish they would take some of our input there.

Policy Challenges

Despite active advocacy efforts by staff, the organizations in this study face several policy challenges, including management and accountability of public workforce funds.

One common challenge noted by several interviewees is WIA management and accountability outcomes. Specifically, they would like to see management of WIA programs improved; they find the management of the programs to be complicated and overly focused on auditing and financial reporting. However, they acknowledge that state and local agencies are limited in their ability to act since changes would need to be made in federal legislation.

Several organizations noted that it has been challenging to continue to achieve program goals under the current economic circumstances, which may not be taken into account by funders. One of their challenges is educating lawmakers about the positive aspects of programs, since lawmakers often make judgments based on seeing select statistics that may not accurately tell the whole story.

Finally, one program administrator noted the lag in legislation passage and enforcement on the ground. Enacting legislation takes time; by the time laws are enacted, other changes in the landscape may have occurred to make this “new” legislation a mismatch for the current environment. This delay forces them to rely on private funders since the private dollars are more flexible and able to be used with the current need.

Sometimes a legislation that is out there governing what would be considered workforce or job creation ... isn't matching what is actually happening, what people are practicing, experiencing. And when those changes happen, [the legislation is] usually delayed and the economy has taken a completely different turn and then they're trying to catch up. So that's I think another reason why we work very closely with private sector because, well, I don't have time to wait for [changes in legislation and public funding].

Conclusion

This study provides a unique look at the role of data and outcomes in the context of successful workforce development programs. In particular, this research builds on the existing literature on workforce training programs by identifying promising factors that may contribute to the achievement of positive employment outcomes. It also takes the field a step further, exploring how those factors are measured and assessed. While this study provides several recommendations for improved use of measures and integrated workforce management information systems, it also has important implications for workforce provider organizations, administering public agencies, and policymakers, as well as for administrators and researchers.

Implications

Expand Existing Outcomes and Use Improved, Integrated Data Systems

As noted throughout the report, workforce development providers must use limited measures and data required by various funders. However, providers prefer to have more accurate and comprehensive ways to measure participant progress and achievement of employment outcomes. Given the challenges of limited measures and the current fragmentation and duplication of data systems, workforce programs, funders, policymakers, and researchers would all benefit from an improved, integrated data system that collects a broader set of meaningful measures of program participant characteristics, needs, progress, and outcomes.

With regard to program performance measures, risk-adjusted measures could help administrators better understand the nuances of achieving outcomes among the various populations of people served by workforce programs. Assessment data on characteristics, skill level, and barriers to employment would allow programs to estimate risk-adjusted measures to better understand how to best meet the needs of all those engaged in workforce programs. Risk-adjusted measures, which control for these factors, would allow programs that serve participants with more severe barriers to better demonstrate their achievements to funders. These measures would also allow programs to more appropriately weigh their outcomes based

on the participants they serve. Also needed are better measures of participants' achievements during their time with the program. Having longer-term outcome measures of employment and self-sufficiency would also help in developing a better understanding of program and participant impact and success.

Mission, Staff, and Leadership

The history and governance of the organizations in this study may provide insight into the development of and adherence to a strong mission, how organizations have evolved in service delivery and in their partnerships to remain committed to that mission, and how their board and leadership structure has remained a consistent strength in executing the mission. Organizations continually make strong strategic decisions based on their mission—decisions that carry their organizations into the future. Past successful growth and change can also provide guidance for future growth within these organizations, while serving as a guide for others.

Organizations must also continue to encourage strong, interactive relationships between staff and leadership, as they have demonstrated its beneficial effects on smooth and effective program operations. The organizations in this study may provide models for the relationship between different staff across the organizational hierarchy while demonstrating their independent and essential roles and attributes.

Program leadership in the organizations in this study is very active in advocating for funding and policy to support their programs and ensure their sustainability. With greater numbers of unemployed individuals resulting in the need to serve more participants, coupled with declines in program funding, programs must remain active individually and collectively in advocating to legislators and policymakers.

Flexibility

Due to today's economic environment, job seekers have changing needs. These changing needs add a layer of complexity for programs attempting to address all of the needs of participants. Understanding this complexity is crucial to delivering the psychosocial elements of the program that best serve participants. Going forward, it is clear that these organizations and others need to operate flexibly—in their program and service delivery, in their work with external partners, and in engaging a variety of funding sources.

Policymakers and funders can support program flexibility by encouraging comprehensive services, minimizing shifting funding and policy mandates, and facilitating programs' adaptation to changing needs of participants and the economy. Organizations also expressed a desire to have funders recognize the non-linear path from program enrollment to employment of many of the participants that partially contributes to the need for program flexibility as well as the need for adaptable outcomes.

Funding

Part of the continued success of workforce organizations facing tough economic circumstances may be attributed to their ability to continue securing and establishing sufficient funding, which provides the resources needed to produce, collect, and report successful outcomes to funders. These outcomes, along with an organization's established reputation with a variety of funders, help programs secure diverse and stable funding.

The organizations that participated in this study also provided a great deal of insight regarding the limitations and flexibility of funding. Funding requirements focus on the deliverables and steps programs must take to achieve traditional outcomes. Agencies align their services and practices with varying outcome measures, which can differ among funding sources. Funding must be flexible enough to provide support for services beyond immediate job skills training in order for programs and participants to succeed.

Organizations also described the challenges of funding silos that are encouraged at the federal level – the funding that focuses on single types of program models or program participants. However, these silos conflict with the comprehensive mission and services of many organizations. As a result, diversifying funding becomes critical. Agencies and policymakers involved in workforce development need to have a more system-wide, collaborative view of their work in order to ease the burden on providers while improving the outcomes of participants. By working together across silos, policymakers, administrators, and researchers can better see areas where organizations need more support and align policies in ways that contribute to successful employment outcomes regardless of funding silos.

Partnerships and External Engagement

Strong employer relationships allow programs to achieve successful job placement outcomes. Programs engage employers in a variety of ways, including through employer volunteerism and by providing business services. These efforts ultimately serve the goal of building strong relationships with employers, keeping them engaged over time, and finding job placements for program participants, including those harder to serve. Dedicated staff and a dual-client mentality (participant and employer) strengthen the employer partnerships among the organizations in this study.

To improve the quality of the job matches, liaisons from the training programs can work hand-in-hand with an employer liaison. Having this established relationship and consistent interaction help to increase graduates' employment placement and retention. A continuous open dialogue facilitates the job match process from enrollment through graduation, leading to better employment outcomes.

Community engagement is also essential for program success, since community needs shape the services offered by programs, determine where programs may be located, and serve as a source of referrals.

Programs also strive to promote economic development for the individuals and businesses they serve, as well as the overall community. Considering community factors when developing or expanding a training program is essential to its success.

With the many influential factors on workforce development program success, improving measures around these factors and developing an integrated data system for their measurement will strengthen the entire workforce development system. By collecting more comprehensive yet meaningful data in an integrated data management information system, programs will have the information needed to assess their efforts and make improvements to achieve their goals. Ultimately better measures will help lead to better programs and improved employment outcomes for the participants they serve.

Appendix A: Organization Descriptions

This appendix serves as a description of the six organizations interviewed for this report, listed alphabetically.

Inspiration Corporation

Year Started	Inspiration Corporation was founded in 2003, upon the merger of The Employment Project and Inspiration Café (founded in 1993 and 1989, respectively).
Locations	4554 N Broadway, Chicago, IL 3504 W. Lake Street, Chicago, IL 806 E. 64th Street, Chicago, IL
Mission	In an atmosphere of dignity and respect, Inspiration Corporation helps people who are affected by homelessness and poverty to improve their lives and increase self-sufficiency through the provision of social services, employment training and placement, and housing.
Area of Service Delivery	Uptown and Garfield Park
Description of Services	<p>Inspiration Corporation offers two main workforce development training programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Employment Project</i>, offering job readiness training for individuals. • <i>Inspiration Kitchens</i>, a social enterprise and culinary training program. <p>The Inspiration Corporation also operates a housing program, only available to participants in Inspiration Corporation programs. The organization provides over 100 housing subsidies located throughout Chicago, and plays a leading role in the city’s Rental Housing Support Services Program.</p>
Funding	The majority of funding for The Employment Project is government funding (including WIA, CDBG, and HUD) along with some corporate money. Inspiration Kitchens’ funding is more evenly

	shared between public and private funding.
Website	www.inspirationcorp.org
Program(s) of primary focus in this report	
<i>The Employment Project</i>	
Description	The first two weeks of the program involve social/interpersonal training, and are intended to be motivational. The last two weeks focus on creating resumes and cover letters, discussing how to conduct an effective job search and workplace culture, and interviewing skills practice.
Length of Program	4 week program
Size of Program	384 total enrollments (FY09)
Eligibility	Applicants must be at least 18 years old, homeless or at risk of homelessness, a city resident, willing to seek employment, and committed to seeking and maintaining a positive lifestyle that will be supported through employment.
Participants Served	Adults: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55% Male, 45% Female • 29% over the age of 45 • 71% African-American, 6% Latino, 13% Caucasian, 10% Other/Multiracial • 45% No High School Diploma/GED • 72% Homeless • 67% have felony conviction
<i>Inspiration Kitchens</i>	
Description	This is a restaurant skills training program focusing on basic culinary skills and concepts, teamwork, food sanitation and safety, and restaurant service. In addition to training in the kitchen, the program includes a classroom component as well as communication development and pre-employment skills training. Participants complete an internship through their work in the Inspiration Kitchens restaurant, preparing and serving meals to the paying public.
Length of Program	13 weeks
Size of Program	20 at a time; 109 total enrollments (FY09)
Eligibility	Must be at least 18 years old, able to stand for long periods of time, and able to pass a tuberculosis test. Must also pass math and English tests with a score of at least 70%. Must be committed to finding a job in the food-service industry upon program completion. Additionally, preference is given to those who are homeless, at-risk, or ex-offenders.
Participants Served	Adults; chronically homeless

Instituto del Progreso Latino

Year Started	1977
Location	2570 South Blue Island Avenue; Chicago, IL 60608
Mission	To contribute to the fullest development of Latino immigrants and their families through education, training and employment that fosters full participation in the changing United States society while preserving cultural identity and dignity.
Area of Service Delivery	Pilsen, a predominately Latino neighborhood
Description of Services	<p>Instituto offers several workforce development programs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Carreras en Salud</i>, a healthcare career pathways bridge program • <i>CNC Fast Track Program</i>, helping individuals in lower-skilled manufacturing positions develop more competitive skill sets and advance into higher paying jobs • <i>Mujer Avanzando</i>, a program for Latina single mothers with comprehensive services in career pathways, wealth creation, and childcare service. <p>ManufacturingWorks is a collaborative between Instituto and the City of Chicago’s Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development. ManufacturingWorks is a centralized service center for employers that responds to the growing concern over the insufficient number of skilled workers in the Chicago manufacturing industry. Instituto serves as the fiscal agent and lead managing and operational organization on ManufacturingWorks.</p> <p>Instituto offers adult education, a charter school and an alternative school for youth, a career development program, and citizenship preparation.</p> <p>Instituto is also a Centers for Working Families site, offering financial counseling and career coaching services for Latina/o families.</p>
Funding	The organization is primarily funded through private and corporate philanthropy and individual contributions. However, public funds are still significant and contribute in larger parts to the manufacturing program.
Website	www.idpl.org
Program(s) of primary focus in this report	
<i>Carreras en Salud</i>	
Description	<i>Carerras en Salud</i> is a collaborative career pathways healthcare bridge program established to bridge limited English-proficient individuals into Licensed Practical Nursing. Students mastering their LPN may also obtain certification as a Registered Nurse (RN).
Length of Program	Individuals can enter one of 7 levels, each of which takes 16 weeks to complete. Students advance levels according to their capacity and test scores.
Size of Program	Since began in 2005, over 700 individuals have enrolled.

Eligibility	Participants must have a desire for change and transform their lives, and a commitment to the program.
Participants Served	Latinos

Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC)

Year Started	1985
Location	4432 N. Ravenswood Ave.; Chicago, IL 60640
Mission	The Jane Addams Resource Corporation promotes strong communities, businesses, and households to ensure that people who work do not live in poverty. JARC provides high quality skills training and support services to help lower-income and unemployed workers achieve self-sufficiency. JARC provides economic and workforce development services to businesses to improve their competitiveness.
Area of Service Delivery	Ravenswood corridor; however, participants come from all of Chicago and the surrounding suburbs
Funding	Support is provided by both public and private funding
Description of Services	JARC offers several sector-based job training programs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Careers in Manufacturing Program (CMP)</i>, vocational training programs offering training in CNC and Welding • <i>Manufacturing Bridge Program</i>, for those interested in CMP but lack the requisite academic levels, • <i>Women in Manufacturing Program (WMP)</i>, a recently launched program specifically for women, and • <i>Manufacturing Skills Program</i>, providing job training for employers. <p>JARC also provides adult literacy services, a community technology center, GED prep and business support services.</p> <p>JARC also operates the Jane Addams Development and Delta Corporations—a social enterprise initiative redeveloping mixed-use property in the Ravenswood Corridor.</p> <p>JARC is a Centers for Working Families site, offering financial counseling and asset development opportunities for individuals enrolled in one of the JARC training programs.</p>
Website	www.jane-addams.org
Program(s) of primary focus in this report	
<i>Careers in Manufacturing Program</i>	
Description	The Careers in Manufacturing Program (CMP) is a vocational training program offering tracks in both CNC and welding training. In addition to technical training in workplace-like settings, the CMP offers training in computers (Microsoft Word, internet, and email), work readiness (problem solving, employer expectations, company tours, interviewing skills), and financial education (saving, budgeting, credit and debt, homeownership).
Length of Program	CNC: 20 weeks, 500 hours (100 hours of which is in CWF) Welding: 10 weeks, 235 hours (25 hours of which is CWF)
Size of Program	74 total enrolled (FY10)
Eligibility	Participants must be able to read at a sixth grade level (most newspapers and magazines) for the Manufacturing Bridge, and a

	<p>ninth grade level for CNC and Welding; able to add, subtract, multiply, and divide whole numbers; be drug-free for the past six months; have no felony convictions for sex offenses; be able to stand for long periods of time and lift up to 30 pounds; and have work experience and references.</p>
<p>Participants Served</p>	<p>Participants in the training programs are low-income adults (use the Link card, homeless, or have income below a certain level for household size).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56% are Latino • 21% are African American • 17% are Caucasian • 6% are Asian • 81% are male • 19% are female • Average age: 40 • 55% of all JARC participants are ex-offenders

National Latino Education Institute (NLEI)

Year Started	1972
Location	2011 West Pershing Road; Chicago, IL 60609 1737 West 18th Street; Chicago, IL 60608 Aurora Location
Mission	National Latino Education Institute exists to enhance the quality of life for Latinos through educational, vocational, and employment services, and through advocacy, thus enabling the achievement of economic independence.
Area of Service Delivery	Pershing, Pilsen, Aurora—all communities with a large Latino population.
Description of Services	NLEI offers two main workforce development programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Allied Health Programs</i>: Bilingual Certified Medical Assistant, Medical Office Specialist, Phlebotomy and e-Health/Medical Records Training programs; and • <i>Business & Technology Programs</i>: Business Development Professional and Office Technology Training. <p>In addition, NLEI offers basic career development, financial literacy, computer classes, and ESL and GED prep.</p>
Funding	Funding is a fairly equal mix of private, public, and fee for service.
Website	www.nlei.org
Program(s) of primary focus in this report	
<i>Office Technology Training</i>	
Description	This program prepares participants for entry-level positions in a variety of office jobs. During the course of training, students may participate in a number of training-related experiences in addition to classroom instruction including mock interviews, work place observation, field trips, workshops, and presentations. Newly updated curriculum components include business ethics, accounting, business writing, and computer troubleshooting.
Length of Program	30 weeks
Size of Program	Roughly 15 people per cohort.
Eligibility	High School Diploma or GED, TABE test, interview addressing their reason for enrolling and their level of focus. Looking to make a change in their life.
Participants Served	Adult, Latino. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% Latino • 3.4% African American • 1.4% Caucasian • Average age around 27 • 86% female • 79% have previous work experience
<i>Bilingual Certified Medical Assistant Program</i>	
Description	The Bilingual Medical Assistant (BMA) Program is the only accredited bilingual program in Chicago. Included in the program are classroom and laboratory work, an externship, Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) examination preparation, and a cultural sensitivity

	and cultural competence curricula component. Graduates are eligible to take the CMA exam and are CPR / First Aid, OSHA / Bloodborne Pathogens, and HIPAA certified.
Length of Program	40 weeks, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. 4-week practicum included in this 40 weeks.
Size of Program	Roughly 15 per cohort
Eligibility	High School Diploma or GED; must pass drug test and criminal background screen, TABE test, and have an interview addressing their reason for enrolling and their level of focus. For those looking to make a change in their life.
Participants Served	Adult, Latino. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% Latino • 3.4% African American • 1.4% Caucasian • Average age around 27 • 88% female • 96% have previous work experience

SER Central States

Year Started	1987, following a reorganization of SER of Cook County. SER-Jobs for Progress of Cook County (the predecessor of Central States SER-Jobs for Progress); was founded in 1970.
Location	Little Village Center: 3948 W. 26th Street, Suite 213, Chicago, IL Garfield Workforce Center: 10 S. Kedzie, Chicago, IL Cicero: 2138 S. 61th Court, Chicago, IL
Mission	SER Central States promotes economic self-sufficiency and upward mobility for low-income community residents through education and employment.
Area of Service Delivery	Little Village Center: A largely immigrant and Latino neighborhood Garfield Workforce Center: A predominately African American neighborhood on the west side Cicero: A town west of the city with a large Mexican and Hispanic population
Description of Services	<p>SER Central States offers programs for youth, adults and seniors. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For youth, PODER (a 21st Century Community Learning Center), WIA YES program for out-of-school youth, “GED on Wheels”, a career development center, and a Gang Intervention program. • For adults, SER Central States offers a Healthcare Careers Pathway Program, a Transitional Jobs program and the Garfield Workforce Center. • For seniors, SER offers the Senior Community Employment Services Program (SCSEP), which provides job training and permanent job placements. <p>SER also operates a community technology center—a resource center for community residents.</p> <p>SER Central States is a Centers for Working Families site, offering financial counseling and services.</p>
Funding	The majority of funding for SER Central States is public funding—federal (DOL, WIA), state (IDHS), city (DFSS, DCD) and county, with some private funding.
Website	www.centralstatesser.org
Program(s) of primary focus in this report	
<i>Healthcare Careers Pathway Program</i>	
Description	SER’s Healthcare Careers Pathway Programs involve two main components: helping lower-skilled, lower-income adults gain access to training that leads to a viable career in healthcare, and helping local healthcare employers find quality staff. The program helps individuals complete a contextualized literacy and numeracy program so that they may gain admission into a healthcare-focused occupational training program at Chicago City Colleges and ultimately find employment at a healthcare facility.
Length of Program	8 weeks for the bridge and 8 weeks for CNA training

Size of Program	12-20 participants per cohort
Eligibility	Participants must be below a ninth grade level in math or reading and be either a CHA resident with a FamilyWorks provider or a WIA-eligible low-income adult.
Participants Served	Adults interested in an occupation in the health industry
<i>Garfield Workforce Center</i>	
Description	The Garfield Workforce Center offers employment assistance through employment counseling, job preparation and coaching, resume development, and interviewing skills workshops and facilitates enrollment into occupational training that leads to employment in in-demand fields with wages that lead to self-sufficiency.
Length of Program	Funding and program operations are annual.
Size of Program	Current caseload of 700 adults and dislocated workers
Eligibility	Participants must be Chicago residents, at least 18 years old and low income during the 12 months prior to application or recently laid off from employment.
Participants Served	Low income adults and dislocated workers.

The Cara Program

Year Started	1991
Location	The Cara Program: 237 S. Desplaines; Chicago, IL Quad Communities CWF: 4655 King Drive (Corner of 47 th and King), Chicago, IL
Mission	The Cara Program prepares and inspires motivated individuals to break the cycle of homelessness, transform their lives, strengthen our communities, and forge paths to real and lasting success.
Area of Service Delivery	The Cara Program operates two training sites—one larger campus in the West Loop and a microsite in the mid-south side, but serves communities throughout Chicago; Cleanslate serves 19 communities.
Description of Services	<p>The Cara Program offers a traditional training program focusing on life skills and job readiness training. Additionally, The Cara Program operates two businesses, which also provide on-the-job training, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Cleanslate</i>, a neighborhood beautification social enterprise which provides on-the-job training and transitional support services for participants in The Cara Program who face significant obstacles to employment. • <i>180 Properties</i>, a joint social enterprise venture providing property maintenance for homes in foreclosure in Chicago. Contracted through Cleanslate, 180 properties offers training opportunities for Cara participants and Cleanslate interns, and is a pathway to permanent quality placements for participants. <p>The Cara Program manages the Quad Communities Centers for Working Families (CWF) site. As a CWF site, it offers professional skill development, job placement support, access to income supports and personalized coaching in financial opportunity. CWF participants can also be referred to the traditional program (west loop campus) and to Cleanslate.</p>
Funding	Government funding accounts for a relatively small portion of The Cara Program’s total funding stream (25%), with the social enterprise program contributing a similar share. The largest share of funding comes from private sources, such as corporations, foundations, and individuals.
Website	www.thecaraprogram.org
Program(s) of primary focus in this report	
<i>The Cara Program</i>	
Description	All Cara participants take part in the same program that includes the following programmatic elements: referral and admissions, life and career skills development, job placement, and retention and stability support. Job readiness and life skills training are essential programmatic features.
Length of Program	Monday-Thursday 8:30-5:00, 11+ weeks
Size of Program	560 accepted into the traditional program each fiscal year. An additional 180 are accepted into the training program at the CWF.

Eligibility	Individuals must be homeless and/or at-risk, drug-free, mentally stable, in stable housing, able to work, and motivated, demonstrating a desire for self-sufficiency. No history of excessively violent or sexually-based crimes, and any battery or assault or theft charges are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
Participants Served	<p>Adults, homeless or at-risk of homelessness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average age is 39 • 54% are women • 91% are African American • 77% have HS diploma or GED • Slightly less than 50% have felony conviction

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Appendix C: Methodology

Workforce development training organizations and their respective training programs were recruited using a process consisting of nomination, selection, and then invitation to participate. Criteria for nomination to participate in this study did not specify a specific type of workforce development program. However, programs nominated were to have a goal of job placement and retention; be a community-based program that operates within either large, multi-service or small, single point of service organizations; and should serve low-income, adult service recipients (age 18+) with multiple barriers to employment and retention. Local experts in Chicago's workforce development field—identified through discussions with local and national researchers, local workforce development advocates, workforce development government program administrators, and private funders—were asked to nominate programs.

The research team reviewed 21 nominated programs and selected the eight organizations with the most nominations. The programs that received the vast majority of the nominations shared similar characteristics, including an organizational structure modeled after an independent, local, or neighborhood agency with an independent board, diverse funding sources, and a repertoire of training programs designed to serve disadvantaged individuals with diverse skill levels and educational backgrounds. Executive directors from these eight organizations were invited by the project director to participate in the research project through a letter and e-mail describing the research. The project director then made telephone calls to the executive directors to discuss the project, answer questions about participation, and confirm participation. Of the eight invited to participate, six organizations participated in the interview process. The other two declined to participate, one due to ongoing organization restructuring during the project period.

Incentives, such as payment in any form, were not provided to participants. Study protocols were approved by the University of Chicago SSA/Chapin Hall Institutional Review Board. Interviews and site visits were conducted with program staff from March through August 2011.

The qualitative design of this project used a case study approach based on semi-open-ended, in-depth interviews with organization staff. Interviews were based on the workforce development literature about influences on service delivery, promising practices, and measurement and outcomes. Fifteen interviews were conducted with 16 workforce program staff. One interview was conducted with two interviewees; the rest took place with researchers and a single interviewee. Interviewees included executive directors, vice presidents, program directors, and other directors within the organizations. Organizations participated in two to three interviews that lasted between one and two hours each. At the end of the interviews, interviewers requested documents that were referenced during the interview related to program description, process measurement, and evaluation.

Follow-up communication with each organization occurred at least four points in time. The first took place within a few days of the interview to request the additional documents mentioned during the interview, but not provided at the time of the interview. A follow-up email and then a phone call took place several months following to pose any additional questions and request additional documentation about program description, process measurement, and evaluation. The final contact occurred two months later, as programs were asked to edit and approve a short program description to be included in the appendix of this report.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Supporting documentation of program description, process measurement, and evaluation were also coded. ATLAS.ti 6 was used to conduct qualitative coding, which was based on a set of broad, not mutually exclusive, coding categories designed to correspond to the topics and themes of the interview protocol and the framework of the ecological model. Each transcript was coded twice, by two separate researchers, to improve inter-rater reliability. The researchers then met to resolve discrepancies.

Analyses of the transcript coding was conducted to develop themes and findings related to program offerings, participants, practices and service delivery strategies, and use of data and information. Qualitative data matrices of code content and contextual narrative were created to validate the themes across interviews and organizations and further develop the findings. No specific program or interviewee is identified in the report, and no program was overrepresented.

About Chapin Hall

Established in 1985, Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center whose mission is to build knowledge that improves policies and programs for children and youth, families, and their communities.

Chapin Hall's areas of research include child maltreatment prevention, child welfare systems and foster care, youth justice, schools and their connections with social services and community organizations, early childhood initiatives, community change initiatives, workforce development, out-of-school time initiatives, economic supports for families, and child well-being indicators.

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