

Career Advancement Program (CAP)¹

A Program of the New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS)

PROGRAM REVIEW SUMMARY

This overview of the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) Career Advancement Program (CAP) is based on a program review conducted by Westat/Metis staff for the evaluation of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) initiatives. The data were collected on the Seedco *EarnMore* program site between December 2007 and February 2008 through interviews with staff at CEO, SBS, Seedco, one of Seedco's partner CBOs, and MDRC researchers, and a review of program documents and monthly data reports through February 2008 and management reports from SBS through June 2008.

- Sponsoring Agency:** New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS)
- Provider Agency:** Seedco, operator of the Upper Manhattan Workforce1 Career Center (UMWF1CC), in collaboration with three partner agencies: Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), and Henry Street Settlement (HSS)
- Start Date:** July 2007
- CEO Budget:** \$1,100,000 for the UMWF1CC CAP
- Target Population:** CAP reaches out to an underserved working poor population, as most employment and training programs have traditionally focused on the unemployed rather than on the career advancement of employed but low-wage earners.
- Statement of Need:** Over 350,000 working New Yorkers are living in poverty, constituting approximately 46 percent of poor households in New York City. Due to a lack of skills, including limited English and an inability to access training, many working poor cannot secure permanent well-paid jobs with growth potential. Employment opportunities for this population are often unstable, lack benefits, and offer few chances for advancement or increased income. Low-wage service workers, for example, are much less likely to receive health insurance through an employer as compared to all workers.
- Goal and Services:** The goal of the SBS CAP is to promote career advancement opportunities among low-wage workers and help them increase their earnings by using a career center-based model that provides them with career advancement and employment services organized around an individual career coaching and planning approach, including facilitated access to benefits and work supports (such as Earned Income Tax Credit and food stamps), training and education, and financial literacy and asset-building activities. SBS is currently developing similar CAPs at three other WF1CCs, as well as an employer-based retention and advancement model that will provide services to targeted employers in addition to their employees.
- Eligibility Criteria:** New Yorkers, age 18 years and older, who have been continually employed for the last 6 months, earn \$14 or less an hour, work a minimum of 14 hours a week, do not receive cash public assistance, and are motivated to advance.
- Targets/Outcomes:** The target and actual numbers for selected outcomes, as well as the percentage of each target cumulatively obtained as of June 2008, are presented in Table 1. Targets were negotiated by Seedco, the program provider, in collaboration with SBS, based primarily on prior experience with serving the target population but also informed by the Work

¹ Formerly named Work Advancement and Support Center (WASC), this program review focused on the Career Advancement Program located at the Upper Manhattan Workforce1 Career Center. It is known as *Earnmore*

Advancement and Support Center WASC demonstration² and experience with prior program start-ups. Targets are set on a monthly and quarterly basis, which allows the program to gauge its progress toward yearly targets.

Table 1. Target and Actual Numbers for Selected Outcomes, as well as the Percentage of Each Target Cumulatively Obtained as of June 2008

Category	Target Numbers	Actual Numbers	Percent of Target Met
Enrolled	460	531	115%
Career Plans Established	370	372	101%
Benefits Screening	369	101	27%
New Benefit/Work Support	138	55	40%
Training Enrollment	230	140	61%
Training Completion	173	100	58%
Job Upgrades	124	189	152%
90 Day Retention Post-Upgrade	75% (56)*	56	100%
180 Day Retention Post-Upgrade	60% (14)**	9	64%

*The target number for the 90 day retention post-upgrade was 75% of the 75 participants who had received an upgrade at least 90 days before the end of the first program year and so whose status at this milestone could be measured as of June 2008.

**The target number for the 180 day retention post-upgrade was 60% of the 23 participants who had received an upgrade at least 180 days before the end of the first program year.

Selected Key Findings

Fidelity to the Program Model. The SBS CAP follows the basic features of the WASC demonstration model developed by MDRC and also incorporates best practices from other workforce development programs. Similar populations are targeted, and intensive career coaching is key. However, one of the major differences is that the MDRC demonstration sites allow participants to apply for work support benefits on-site, while the SBS CAP model allows for screening only. Another key strategy that SBS adopted at the *EarnMore* site that differentiates it from the WASC model is the targeting of job development services to a few key industries that offer strong growth potential, as opposed to trying to deal with the labor market at large. This strategy allows staff to obtain more in-depth knowledge of the needs of specific industries and companies. *EarnMore* is also initiating a cohort-based approach that involves businesses and other institutions. This strategy can yield significant advantages, such as allowing the program to enroll an entire cohort of individuals at one location.

Characteristics of the Clients Served in Comparison to the Target Population. The program's eligibility criteria have been met by the vast majority of enrollees in the program, according to program information provided by SBS. At the time of enrollment, 13 percent reported wages at or below minimum wage and three-fourths (76%) reported an hourly wage below \$10.50. Another 16 percent reported a pre-wage of between \$12.00 and \$15.99 (wage data were not available for 6 percent of enrollees).

Service Delivery. The service activities provided by the program include career coaching, education, training, and employment services (such as advancement workshops and skills training), and work supports—or more specifically, screening for work-support benefits. However, screening for work-support eligibility has not occurred on a consistent or systematic basis across the four service delivery locations. During program start-up, staff felt their efforts should be focused on outreach and recruitment, and therefore have not yet fully implemented all of the program activities, which also includes peer support groups and financial counseling. In addition, the program has been tailored by each *EarnMore* site. Thus, although all sites follow the same theoretical model, specific features of the program, such as recruitment strategies and the type and intensity of services offered, vary across sites to respond to the needs of the specific population being served.

² WASC stands for Work Advancement and Support Center. WASC is a demonstration project developed by MDRC that served as the theoretical model for CAP and is being implemented in four communities. A large-scale evaluation of WASC is currently underway.

Provider Capacity. Seedco has a long history of successful collaboration with local partners to provide services to disadvantaged populations. The three CBOs selected to become partners in the *EarnMore* program are part of Seedco's EarnFair Alliance, maintain well-developed employment programs, and have demonstrated an interest in expanding their retention services to include an advancement component.

Seedco maintains regular and ongoing communication with its CBO partners. The Job Asset Training Coach (JATC) coordinator, who is based at Seedco's offices, meets with each JATC on a weekly basis and organizes periodic meetings with all JATCs to share best practices and brainstorm ideas for program improvement. *EarnMore's* program manager meets biweekly with SBS staff to review program data and discuss the program's implementation and progress toward meeting targets. Seedco has developed a broad array of program protocols, guides, brochures, and other materials designed to build program awareness, encourage client enrollment, and build capacity of program staff.

Agency Management. SBS is taking an active approach to managing this program. It has a well-designed monitoring system in place and provides technical assistance through site visits and telephone, electronic, and written feedback. SBS requires biweekly reports on recruitment and monthly reports on outputs and outcomes. SBS has prepared and delivered to Seedco at least two critical review memos and is in regular contact with Seedco leadership. The CAP model has strong prospects for stability and replicability, and SBS is replicating the model at three additional sites, although they will not provide services at CBO sites. To support the replication, SBS has developed a comprehensive *Operating Manual and Resource Guide* for the new contractors, which includes lessons from the *EarnMore* pilot.

Both SBS and Seedco have demonstrated capacity to collect and report CEO performance monitoring data. However, because SBS's Worksource1 data system does not capture all of the needed data elements, Seedco established a supplemental data system and both systems are used to produce data for CEO. The program review identified discrepancies in monthly data reporting between these two systems, possibly a result of the need for separate data entry, as well as lags in data entry and verification.

Outcomes. As implemented in *EarnMore*, the SBS CAP is in alignment with the CEO mission and is meeting key CEO criteria. Like the WASC demonstration sites, *EarnMore* struggled with recruitment during early start-up, but was able to meet annual enrollment, career plans, and, significantly, job upgrades targets. With respect to benefits screening and enrollment, and training enrollment and completion, however, the program fell short of its targets. SBS and Seedco have discussed how to address this shortfall but new data indicate that eligibility for benefits/work supports is lower than expected and that some individuals already received benefits.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The SBS CAP program model represents an innovative and plausible approach to serving underemployed, low-wage New Yorkers through career coaching and other employment advancement services.

- Initial recruitment strategies relied heavily on the existing client base of the WF1CC and the three CBOs. This suggests the potential value of exploring alternative recruitment strategies that look beyond that client base.
- Not all service components have been fully implemented. These include benefits screening, financial literacy training, and asset building. A more effective and consistent benefits screening process will lead to increased take-up rates, thereby helping to achieve one of the major objectives of the program.
- Minor discrepancies were observed between the monthly verified data provided by Seedco in the *EarnMore* Monthly Management Report and the monthly report provided by SBS, which is based on Worksource1. This suggests the need for continued professional development with respect to data management in addition to tighter record-keeping and data management controls.
- Given strong program management and oversight, and once the *EarnMore* staff are through the pilot implementation phase (which inevitably has a steep learning curve), the program should be able to demonstrate effectiveness in all areas.