



Best Practice: Career Advancement Program

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CITY: NEW YORK CITY

POLICY AREA: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

BEST PRACTICE

Through **Advance at Work**, New York City's Department of Small Business Services (SBS) innovative career advancement program, jobseekers receive intensive year-long services designed to help low-wage workers increase their income or attain new careers. Currently available in four of the City's seven WorkforceI Career Centers, funding from American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) will allow the SBS to expand the program at all the Centers by winter 2010.

ISSUE

Mayor Michael Bloomberg recently stated that, while more New Yorkers are working than at any time in New York City's history, fewer city residents able to access livable wages, employer-sponsored benefits, or career advancement opportunities. Too many workers are in low-skilled, low-wage jobs, without tools to plan for career growth. Workers in New York City need access to pathways to jobs in high-growth, high-wage sectors that offer opportunities for advancement. At the same time, NYC businesses need well-trained, motivated workers committed to growing and advancing in their chosen sector. SBS's Advance at Work program serves both of these customers, leveraging the resources, expertise, and infrastructure available at its eight WorkforceI Career Centers.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Advance at Work creates pathways to wage gains for thousands of New Yorkers, by providing them with coaching, training, and other services designed to help them increase wages and reduce expenses. Specifically, the program helps employed New Yorkers achieve promotions, new job placements, or increased number of hours of work (i.e. a move from part-time to full-time work), while accessing wage supports that enable them to save a greater proportion of earnings.

IMPLEMENTATION

Advance at Work builds on the Department of Small Business Services' (SBS) workforce development experience, and on career advancement demonstration projects from across the country. SBS collaborated with MDRC, a leading nonprofit social policy research organization, to develop its original employer-based retention and advancement model based on demonstration projects administered in Dayton, OH, San Diego, CA, Bridgeport, CT, and Fort Worth, TX. SBS also incorporated best practices from The Advancement Project (Seattle, WA), San Francisco Works (SFWorks), Center for Working Families, The Source (Grand Rapids, MI), Boston SkillWorks, Ohio's Bridges to Opportunity Program, and other workforce development programs.

The Department of Small Business Services (SBS) launched the first Advance at Work program in the Upper Manhattan WorkforceI Career Center in July 2007. Programs launched at the Bronx WorkforceI Career Center in May 2008, the Queens

Center in Launched: April 2008, and the Brooklyn Center in October 2008. The program will launch at the LaGuardia WorkforceI Career Center in July 2009, and at the Staten Island and Hunts Point Centers early in 2010.

SBS operates career advancement programs to serve employed workers in five WorkforceI Career Centers. Through the program, trained career coaches and account managers work with incumbent jobseekers, giving them tools to (1) increase income through increased wages, work hours, and employer-sponsored benefits and (2) access work supports (i.e. food stamps, subsidized health insurance, subsidized childcare, and tax credits) that help hard working New Yorkers to keep more



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of the money that they earn. Program customers must be familiar with the services offered by Workforce I Career Centers; have been employed for the six months prior to their enrollment and not be receiving public assistance; have the time to meet regularly with a career coach, and to engage in training, research, and networking over the course of several months; and be committed to identifying a career advancement path and to advancing in their careers. Over a twelve month period, customers develop a personalized career advancement plan; meet one-on-one with a designated career coach focused on their unique advancement goals; attend workshops on negotiating promotions, updating resumes, interviewing and networking, understanding credit scores; and more. Jobseekers are also linked with skills training opportunities (including individual training grants), and work with their career coach to access enrollment for work supports, including subsidized healthcare, no and low tax preparation, and subsidized childcare.

Like all SBS programs, Advance at Work is business-focused. Staff work with local businesses to provide coaching and training that ties to the skills and experiences that employers need.

Partners include nonprofit organizations, community colleges, employers, training institutions, and other city and state agencies:

- Wildcat Service Corporation operates the Bronx Workforce I Career Center
- DB Grant operates the Queens Workforce I Career Center
- Goodwill Industries of New York and New Jersey operates the Brooklyn Workforce I Career Center
- LaGuardia Community College operates the Workforce I Career Center
- Seedco operates the Upper Manhattan Workforce I Career Center
- Henry Street Settlement (HSS) and Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) have sub grantee agreements with Seedco to provide outreach and deliver services
- DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE) and its Financial Empowerment Centers provide support on tax outreach and preparation, credit reports, and asset building techniques. OFE and SBS look to expand their partnership in the year ahead.
- ACCESS NYC is a resource to help Advance at Work staff screen customers for over 30 City, State, and Federal human service benefit programs.
- The Financial Clinic and Greenpath Solutions provides training and support on tax preparation, improving credit score, budgeting, and other asset-building techniques and financial literacy services.
- York College, the Brooklyn Cooperative Federal Credit Union, and other VITA sites provide free tax preparation to Advance at Work customers.

COST

Initial funding was available for a six month period for start-up, program planning, and launch in the amount of \$250,000 per Center. Currently, centers receive between \$400,000 and \$600,000 per year to recruit customers and provide program services. Funding comes from New York City tax levy funds allocated specifically to support CEO initiatives, Workforce Investment Act Funds, and federal stimulus funding received under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

The budget for the year beginning July 1, 2009 and ending June 30, 2010 is approximately \$2,570,125 for Advance at Work programs, which operate in five Workforce I Centers.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Advance at Work focuses on advancement outcomes. Monthly and annual performance targets, set for each Workforce I Career Center at the start of the fiscal year and monitored by SBS, pertain to promotions, new placements, and receipt of new work supports. SBS also establishes and monitors targets for each Center related to enrollment, skills training, career coaching sessions, and workshop attendance, as experience and evaluation indicate that jobseekers who access these supports are most likely to advance in their careers.

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Between July 1, 2008 and May 31, 2009, SBS enrolled 1894 jobseekers in the program, 384 of these job seekers have enrolled in skills training, leveraging the individual training grants available to WorkforceI Career Center customers, and 290 of these trainees have completed trainings focused on high-growth sectors. 379 jobseekers have accessed food stamps, subsidized health insurance, subsidized health care, and tax credits for the first time, allowing them to save more of their earnings. Most importantly, 306 job seekers have achieved new job placements, and 333 have achieved promotions with their current employers. We have exceeded or are on track to exceed each of our annual outcomes.

TIMELINE

- Advance at Work programs have operated without interruption for nearly two years, since July 2007.
- July 2007: Launch, career advancement program at Upper Manhattan WorkforceI Career Center
- April 2008: Launch, career advancement program at Queens WorkforceI Career Center
- May 2008: Launch, career advancement program at Bronx WorkforceI Career Center
- October 2008: Launch, career advancement program at Brooklyn WorkforceI Center
- May 2009: Mayor Bloomberg US Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis announce \$2.7 million in federal stimulus funding to expand Advance at Work, allowing SBS to provide the program at all the Centers by winter 2010.
- June 2009: Career advancement programs rebranded under a single name, Advance at Work
- July 2009: Planned launch, Advance at Work at LaGuardia WorkforceI Career Center
- January 2010: Planned launch, Advance at Work at Staten Island and Hunts Point Centers

LEGISLATION

The federal legislation governing the system is the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which has been in existence in its current form since 1998. Most recently in February 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was passed, more commonly known as the "Federal Stimulus Package" which included additional WIA funding to the local system. This funding has allowed for more flexibility for training related investments and it being piloted for future versions of the WIA legislation.

LESSONS LEARNED

Recruitment and Enrollment

- Connecting to and enrolling large numbers of working individuals requires resources and creativity. A good source of Advance at Work customers are individuals who have previously received services at WorkforceI Career Centers. These customers are often motivated to move beyond entry-level job placements and are familiar with the structure of WorkforceI Career Center programs. Centers should continue to integrate recruitment for Advance at Work into their Centers' larger intake and screening processes.
- Recent focus groups organized by SBS indicate that many New Yorkers think of WorkforceI Career Centers as resources for first-time job seekers or individuals without a degree or job skills. SBS and its partners should continue to strategize about how to reframe New Yorkers perceptions of Centers as useful resources for advanced career planning and for skilled workers looking to make career transitions.
- Job development for skilled workers works best when integrated into existing WorkforceI Career Center efforts. Career advancement program-specific account managers should work closely with and be physically located near Business Solutions and WorkforceI Career Centers account managers, and should leverage the SBS brand in doing employer outreach.
- Jobseeker engagement correlates to their initial expectations. Program staff should be clear with jobseekers about what they should expect from the program, what roles and responsibilities they have in the process, what roles and responsibilities their career coaches and account managers have, and what kinds of timeframes

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should be expected.

Client Engagement and Service Provision

- By nature of the fact that they are currently employed, Advance at Work's target population is difficult to serve, especially with the intensive, longer-term service model that makes the program unique. SBS and its partners should continue to work toward offering flexible coaching and training opportunities – including email and phone consultation options, meetings located outside of Career Centers, evening Career Center hours, and onsite access to work support enrollment, credit counseling, and tax preparation assistance.
- The Career Advancement Plan is a useful tool to help jobseekers where they see themselves professionally over time. The plan also works as an accountability measure to help coaches keep customers mindful of the goals they have set and their next action steps. That said, career advancement planning is a complex process that requires rapport between coaches and job seekers and shared understanding of individual jobseekers' skills, motivations, and past experiences, as well as the roles they play in their communities, families, and work places. Program staff should continue to develop plans over the course of several sessions, rather than in a single session.
- Introducing the concept of career ladders earlier in the career planning process helps customers better identify potential job opportunities. Program staff should use visual aides and past client success stories to articulate career ladders in growth sectors to jobseekers.
- Enrollment, career advancement planning, work supports screening, and other infrastructures take time and resources to develop. Program staff should leverage existing resources, as doing so creates time and that can be focused on coaching and related activities.
- Some jobseekers are resistant to applying for work supports due to the negative stigma attached to receiving benefits, and the time associated with completing applications food stamps, healthcare, and other supports. SBS should provide staff with ongoing capacity-building regarding how to "sell" work supports to resistant customers, and SBS and staff should develop clear referral mechanisms with local facilitated enrollment providers, HRA offices, etc., to reduce the time requirements for clients. Enrollment at Centers that takes place at the same time as other coaching or training activities works well.
- Cultivating relationships with employers and external partners (e.g. training providers and tax preparation partners) takes considerable amount of time and energy. SBS can play a key role in identifying and defining roles for such partners.

Career Center Integration

- Because historically Center's programmatic priorities and funding have been tied to high volumes of placements, education for Center staff on the importance of career advancement and how it fits into Centers' and SBS's broader goals is key. Centers should offer all-Center staff 'kick-off' events to introduce the program and its fit with Center's missions; formally integrating career advancement targets into the overall Center's performance measurement structure; and convene team meetings with each unit to help them understand career advancement services.
- Many Center services (i.e. resume writing workshops, computer skills workshops, etc.) are geared toward unemployed and entry-level jobseekers. Centers should work to understand if existing services are accessible to Advance at Work customers, and refine and expand existing services to accommodate evening times and advanced skills level as necessary.

Data Management

- Measuring impact requires extensive data collection and analysis. Center management and SBS should engage in ongoing reinforcement of proper data entry procedures is necessary, i.e. through monthly "spot checks" of electronic and paper customer records and through continual reinforcement about data points and where in the customer flow data collection takes place.

Hiring/Staffing

- Career advancement case management differs from traditional social services case management, as it requires



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an active, bidirectional partnership between the coach and the jobseeker. Competitive salaries, strategic, ongoing, and extended on boarding that focuses on coaches' roles and responsibilities, and a focus on documenting knowledge and expertise is necessary to attract and retain quality candidates, and to pass the knowledge they gain to subsequent staff.

TRANSFERABILITY

When SBS launched the pilot in July 2007, no Workforce1 Career Centers had programs specifically for employed workers. As of July 1, 2009, five centers will, and, by winter 2010, seven centers will. Local Workforce Investment Areas across the country, big and small, could enact similar programs, leveraging their existing services, client bases, and employer relationships. Having large customer bases, existing partnerships, robust data management systems, and strong business development strategies are favorable to this best practice.

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