

FINAL REPORT

June 30, 2025

The Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) Works Program Evaluation Report

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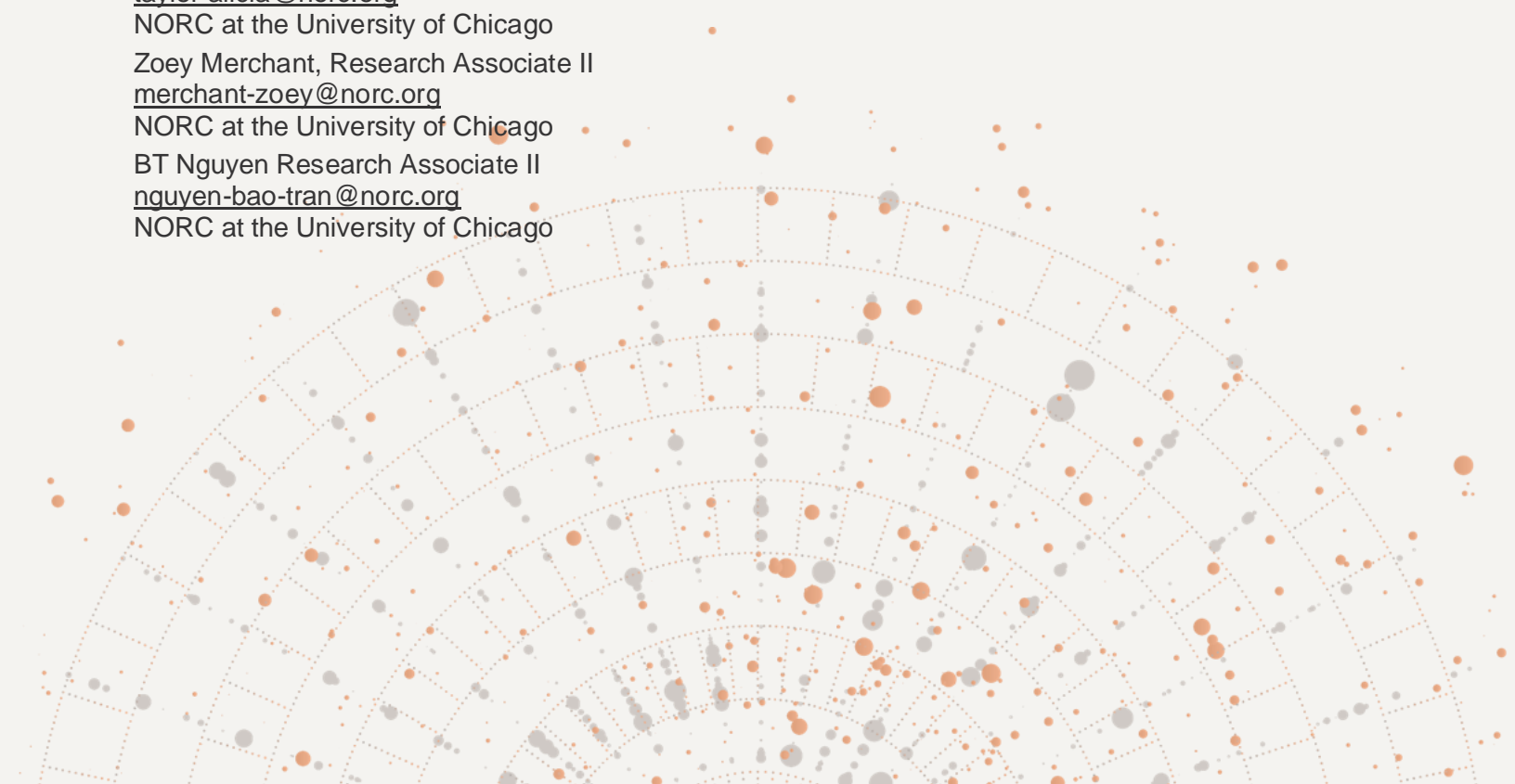


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Letter from Partners

The Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) initiative is based on the philosophy that effective interventions center on clients' needs, community engagement, and collaborative partnerships. The Department of Probation (DOP) established seven NeON strategic sites across the city, offering services and programming tailored to their clients and the communities they serve. The NeON Works program was designed within this framework to provide youth and young adults with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experience they need to ultimately prepare them for success in the workplace. Launched in the fall of 2021 with funding from the NYC Young Men's Initiative (YMI), NeON Works implements a "one-size-fits-one" approach that combines individualized services with personalized supports. NeON Works clients can engage in professional development and career exploration workshops, receive individualized needs assessments and coaching, and establish connections to other opportunities that will result in meeting their education or career goals. DOP staff manage the program and oversee various community-based service providers who deliver programming at the sites.

The Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity) and YMI commissioned an evaluation of the NeON Works program by NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) to examine the implementation of the program model across the various sites and to understand what practices have enabled participants to succeed. This evaluation also explored participant engagement, experience, and progress towards personal goals, including educational achievement, career advancement, and personal development goals. The findings and recommendations from this evaluation will be used to support programmatic improvements and inform adjustments to the program model design. We hope these will also contribute towards the broader discourse that aims to more effectively support youth on probation or community supervision by strengthening restorative approaches and enhancing community relations.

Under Commissioner Juanita Holmes's leadership, the NYC DOP has already taken action to address operational gaps identified in this evaluation. DOP has increased staffing, strengthened wrap-around partnerships, upgraded its technology infrastructure, and realigned case-management practices around five core pillars: reducing recidivism, increasing employment, improving educational attainment, ensuring housing stability, and supporting mental health. DOP has also ensured that NeON Works is accessible and responsive to non-English-speaking communities by implementing robust language-access strategies. These improvements are already in place and are actively shaping how the program is delivered today.

The evaluation underlined some promising findings. Personal connections play a predominant role, both in participants' ability to discover NeON Works and as a fundamental approach that staff incorporate into program delivery: from the intake process to curated program design and tailored career support, authentic personal connections drive participant success and satisfaction with the NeON Works program. That being said, staff capacity is stretched, and a key recommendation to increase staffing to reduce caseloads will continue to be incorporated in future NeON Works program

design and delivery. Expanding staff capacity will focus on expanding job training and career counseling services, which this study found that participants highly value.

Overall, 12.3% of program participants obtained a job placement- a number we would like to see higher. Rates were similar between participants on probation or community supervision and those from the general community. This may reflect the intensive support that participants on probation or community supervision receive from staff. The program will focus on exploring in more depth the cause of this encouraging finding and incorporating these supports to help overcome barriers that they continue to face when accessing internships and completing the program. Additionally, NeON Works will keep striving towards reaching the 40% target of youth engaging in the program who are on probation or community supervision.

Structural barriers, such as housing instability, safety concerns, and limited access to transportation, continue to limit participation and success in the program. Workforce programming alone does not suffice to meet these needs. The report underscores the importance of meeting participants' basic needs in order for them to fully engage in the program and succeed in meeting their personal goals. To address these, NeON Works will focus on formalizing and strengthening its partnerships with local organizations to embed the program with a stronger web of wraparound supports, such as mental healthcare, housing assistance, and food security.

Additionally, NeON Works will also implement the recommendation raised in the report to develop a formal peer ambassador model, where successful and highly engaged program graduates will serve as recruiters and mentors, spreading information about NeON Works resources and supporting new participants to navigate the requirements of the program. This strategy will leverage the program's strong relationships and positive reputation within the community, which are key strengths of the program, to increase recruitment and strengthen program outcomes.

Employing meaningful participatory strategies is fundamental for accurate, relevant, and effective evaluations. This evaluation centered on the voices of both participants and provider staff by establishing a Participatory Action Council (PAC), where members provided suggestions, recommendations, and insights throughout every phase of the evaluation. All PAC participant members were compensated for sharing their time and expertise. Participating in the PAC empowered those most familiar with the program to shape the research design and implementation and validate the findings and recommendations. Their engagement allowed this evaluation to incorporate multiple perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of their community's intersecting needs and challenges. We hope that sharing the challenges and lessons learned from implementing this approach will lead to the incorporation of more participatory strategies in other evaluations.

Finally, we would like to thank NORC, NeON Works providers, and NeON Works participants for their contributions towards the successful implementation of this evaluation, and hope our efforts to transparently examine the NeON Works program will support other initiatives serving youth on probation or community supervision to successfully implement and promote restorative approaches and overcome systemic barriers to success.

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Acknowledgements

This evaluation would not have been possible without the valuable contributions, time, and insights of many individuals and organizations. We extend our sincere thanks to the members of the **Participatory Advisory Council (PAC)**—composed of dedicated staff and program participants—whose lived experience and guidance shaped the direction and focus of this evaluation.

We are also grateful to our partners at the **New York City Department of Probation (DOP)**, the **Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity)**, and the **Young Men's Initiative (YMI)** for their ongoing collaboration, support, and commitment to learning and program improvement.

Most importantly, we thank the **program participants who took the time to share their voices** through surveys, focus groups, and informal conversations. Your honesty, reflections, and stories are the heart of this evaluation and critical to understanding the true impact of NeON Works.

Executive Summary

The NeON Works evaluation was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with the New York City Department of Probation (DOP), the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity), and the Young Men's Initiative (YMI). The evaluation study examined the implementation and outcomes of a community-based workforce development program for youth on probation or community supervision and other youth across New York City.

Launched in 2021, NeON Works provides personalized career and education pathways for young people ages 16–24, with an emphasis on serving those involved with the justice system. Using a “one-size-fits-one” approach, the program delivers individualized assessments, career exploration, and connections to job training, internships, high school equivalency programs, and postsecondary opportunities.

Evaluation Purpose and Design

The evaluation study utilized a Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation (CREE) approach to guide the work (Hood, Hopson, & Kirkhart, 2015). This involved centering community voice through a Participatory Advisory Council (PAC) composed of staff and program participants. The mixed-methods evaluation study aimed to assess the program's reach, range of implementation practices across sites, barriers to participation, participant satisfaction, and outcomes through the collection and analysis of administrative data, participant surveys, site observations, and staff and program participant focus groups. This report presents key findings, recommendations, conclusions, and implications.

Key Findings

- **NeON Works is making progress towards meeting its target of reaching youth on probation or community supervision.** Approximately one-third of participants are on probation or under community supervision; thus, below the goal of 40%.
- **Trust and relationships drive engagement.** Participants consistently cited the quality of their relationships with staff—many of whom share their lived experiences—as a critical factor in their ongoing participation and personal growth.
- **Participants value career and education services.** Participants ranked job training and career counseling as the most useful services, while participants also reported gains in confidence, job skills, and clarity around future goals.
- **Structural barriers persist.** Life conflicts (e.g., school, work, caregiving), transportation, housing instability, and emotional safety continue to limit participation for many. Staff and program participants alike emphasized the need for more wraparound services and trauma-informed support.
- Program outcomes are promising but vary based on the age, education level, and **probation or community supervision status of the youth.** Older participants and those with higher education levels were more likely to secure jobs, while younger program participants were more likely to

pursue education. Youth on probation or community supervision program participants had lower internship access but comparable or better job placement outcomes.

- **Capacity and infrastructure challenges constrain implementation.** Staff highlighted limitations in caseload size, data systems, and resources to support consistent incentives or mental health referrals. These issues affected both service delivery and the ability to scale successful practices across sites.

Recommendations

The following recommendations provide strategic direction for program enhancement based on evaluation findings. Each recommendation is expanded upon in detail within the Recommendations section of this report, including specific implementation strategies and resource considerations.

- **Expand virtual and hybrid programming** to increase flexibility for participants who are balancing competing obligations. Virtual and hybrid models can significantly improve retention by accommodating participants' varying schedules, transportation barriers, and childcare responsibilities. This could include offering core programming sessions both in-person and virtually, developing asynchronous learning modules for skill-building components, and implementing flexible scheduling options that allow participants to engage during evenings or weekends. These modifications would allow participants to maintain employment or handle family obligations while still progressing through the program.
- **Develop peer ambassador models** and improve digital outreach to strengthen recruitment and visibility. Peer ambassadors—successful program graduates who serve as mentors and recruiters—can authentically connect with potential participants and provide ongoing support throughout the program journey. This approach should be coupled with enhanced social media presence, community partnerships, and targeted outreach in high-need neighborhoods. Peer ambassadors provide relatable success stories and culturally relevant support that can improve both recruitment and retention outcomes.
- **Invest in staffing and infrastructure** to support personalized case management, milestone tracking, and cross-site collaboration. Given NeON Works' "one-size-fits-one" individualized model across seven neighborhoods with different community-based service providers, enhanced staffing should focus on reducing case manager-to-participant ratios to enable more intensive support for participants navigating complex barriers. Specifically, this means hiring additional case managers to achieve optimal ratios of 1:10 for comprehensive case management including career coaching, barrier identification, and goal setting. The program should also invest in employment specialists who can focus primarily on job placement services and maintaining relationships with employers, separate from case management functions. Infrastructure improvements should include implementing a unified data management system that can track participant progress across all seven NeON sites, standardizing communication protocols between community-based providers, and establishing regular cross-site coordination meetings to share best practices and resources. This investment is particularly critical for supporting participants who may move between neighborhoods or need services that span multiple sites.

- **Expand wraparound supports**, including safety protocols, mental health referrals, and connections to housing, food, and transportation services. Comprehensive wraparound services address the multiple barriers that prevent participants from successfully engaging in workforce programming. This involves establishing formal partnerships with mental health providers, housing assistance programs, food banks, and transportation services, while also developing internal protocols for crisis intervention and safety planning. Addressing participants' basic needs allows them to focus more effectively on skill development and job placement activities.
- **Target equity gaps** by tailoring outreach, support, and partnerships to meet the distinct needs of younger, lower-education, and youth on probation or community supervision program participants. Different participant populations require specialized approaches to maximize engagement and success. This includes developing age-appropriate programming for younger participants, creating basic education and literacy support for those with lower educational attainment, and establishing partnerships with reentry organizations for youth on probation or community supervision. Targeted interventions should address the specific barriers each population faces while building on their unique strengths and experiences.

Conclusion and Implications

NeON Works evaluation study revealed how workforce development can be reimaged to center relationships, healing, and individualized support. Participants view the program not just as a source of training or employment but as a space to build confidence, clarify goals, and feel genuinely supported. However, sustaining and scaling this model requires addressing structural barriers and investing in the people and systems that make individualized support possible.

With intentional design, stronger infrastructure, and equity-focused practices, NeON Works is well-positioned to deepen its impact in New York City and serve as a model for community-based workforce development nationwide.

Introduction

The Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) Works program evaluation was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) in partnership with the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity), the Young Men's Initiative (YMI), and the New York City Department of Probation (DOP). The evaluation study examined the implementation and effectiveness of a community-based workforce development initiative serving youth on probation or community supervision across New York City neighborhoods.

Designed to provide youth and young adults with a "one-size-fits-one" highly individualized set of opportunities based on individual interests and work readiness, NeON Works sites provide three main services along with wraparound services as needed:

- professional development and career exploration workshops
- individualized needs assessment and support
- supported connections to programs that result in a high school equivalency (HSE) credential enrollment, college enrollment, and enrollment in a college pathway program
- supported connections that result in acceptance into internships and job services programs, job placement, or training that leads to a high-quality credential proven to assist with job placement.

The evaluation included a mixed-method design to examine what is and is not working well across NeON Works sites; identify the effectiveness and benefits of the program's one-size-fits-one model; and determine areas of improvement and ways to expand probation-oriented programming in the city. A total of six NeON Works sites were included in the evaluation, which ran from September 2023 through June 2025.¹ Goals of the evaluation included:

- Understanding who the program is serving and to what extent they are being served
- Identifying how programs recruit and continue to engage participants
- Assessing how well the program is being implemented according to its design
- Identifying factors that hinder or support participant engagement and program success
- Assessing participant satisfaction with the program activities
- Measuring goal achievement and program outcomes

NeON Works represents an innovative approach to supporting youth on probation or community supervision through community-based workforce development services. In this section, we include a summary of current research in the field of workforce development and describe the background and structure of the NeON Works program. In the next section, we present the key findings, and in the final section, we summarize the findings and offer recommendations.

¹Only six of the seven NeON Works program sites were included in the study. The seventh site changed providers at the time the study commenced and did not replace the provider in time to be included in the study. However, findings obtained through administrative data are presented for this site, where available.

Literature on Workforce Development Programs

The literature on workforce development programs for youth on probation or community supervision underscores the importance of holistic and collaborative approaches to overcoming barriers to employment. Community-based programs emphasize “wraparound support” services that address not only employment readiness but also the unique challenges experienced by participants. Offering services such as job search assistance, career planning, and job coaching, and hiring staff with shared experiences foster trust and relatability (Sakala, White, and Hull, 2022). Other workforce development programs highlight the effectiveness of cross-system collaboratives, where community organizations, the justice system, and businesses work together to address employment challenges through data-driven decisions, innovative engagement strategies, and shared goals (Washington, Mercer, and White, 2023). However, some programs experience operational challenges, particularly with youth transitioning from detention to community settings, where coordination between probation departments and workforce programs remains fragmented (Whitaker et al., 2025).

Collectively, these sources suggest that tailored, flexible programming and strong interagency collaboration, along with services that support a spectrum of participant well-being, including mental health support, housing assistance, transportation, childcare, food security, and trauma-informed care—are key to improving workforce development outcomes for youth on probation or community supervision.

Like similar community-based programs, NeON Works’ “one-size-fits-one” model offers similar support, tailored directly to each program participant’s needs. Program offerings typically include job training and career-focused activities individualized to the needs of the participant and focused on preparing them for future success. While other workforce development programs typically focus on career and job training, NeON Works also offers educational support for program participants who express an interest in furthering their education.

While the literature underscores the importance of comprehensive support and interagency collaboration, comparing the effectiveness of workforce development programs remains a complex task due to divergent program goals and evaluation criteria. Many programs serving youth on probation or community supervision are designed around different priorities—some aim primarily to reduce recidivism and ensure access to wraparound services (Results for America, 2024), while others focus more intensively on workforce outcomes, such as employer outreach, job site development, and policy advocacy to expand employment opportunities. Programs that report job placement outcomes often do so in the context of structured opportunities like internships or apprenticeships (ARC, 2024), which tend to yield higher success rates due to built-in supports and employer commitments. Similarly, other programs found that engaging youth in the community—rather than in detention—posed challenges such as “lack of referrals, competing priorities, disinterest, and community risk factors (e.g., safety)” (Whitaker et al., 2025). This variability in program design and intended impact complicates efforts to benchmark or compare outcomes across initiatives.

Understanding what constitutes a “successful outcome” in this field requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges both individual participant progress and broader systemic change. For programs like NeON Works, which aim to track participant outcomes at the individual level, it is important to recognize that such metrics may not align with those used by other programs targeting similar populations. Thus, while outcome data is crucial for evaluating effectiveness, the lack of standardization in success metrics underscores the need for context-specific evaluation frameworks that reflect each program's unique goals and participant needs.

NeON Works Background

NeON Works is based on the philosophy that an effective intervention centers on program participants' needs, community engagement, and collaborative partnerships. Launched in 2021, NeON Works provides youth and young adults with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experience that prepare them for success in the workplace. One of the program's stated goals is that at least 40 percent of its participants be youth on probation or community supervision. NeON Works primarily targets young people on probation who live within the five boroughs of New York City, as well as other youth residing in the communities where NeON Works sites are located. These communities include neighborhoods where a disproportionate number of probation program participants live, including Jamaica, Staten Island, South Bronx, Harlem, Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and East New York. Priority is given to people aged 16-24, and there are no educational requirements to participate. Members can earn a stipend based on participation and goal attainment and can take part in the program for up to one full year. Since 2020, these DOP community-based centers have provided a key location for the implementation of NeON Works.

NeON Works functions as a specialized workforce development component within the broader Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) ecosystem of programs, serving individuals on probation or community supervision and the communities in which they reside. While other NeON initiatives may focus on mentoring, arts programming, or legal services, NeON Works specifically addresses educational and employment barriers faced by participants. This integration within the broader NeON framework allows for both targeted referrals from probation and community-based recruitment, creating multiple access points for those who might benefit from services.

Table 1 includes the NeON Works provider organizations, as well as the borough where each is located.

Table 1. NeON Works Provider Organization and Borough

Provider Organization	Borough (Neighborhood) of Program Site
America Works of NY	Staten Island
Brooklyn Borough of Community Service	Brooklyn (East New York)

Provider Organization	Borough (Neighborhood) of Program Site
Center of Community Alternatives	Brooklyn (Brownsville)
Community Mediation Services	Queens (Jamaica)
Exodus Transitional ²	Manhattan (Harlem)
Center for Justice Innovation – Neighbors in Action	Brooklyn (Bedford Stuyvesant)
The Osborne Association	Bronx (South Bronx) and Manhattan (Harlem) beginning in 2025

NeON Works Program Structure

NeON Works operates through a network of community-based organizations located in neighborhoods with high concentrations of youth on probation or community supervision. The program employs a "one-size-fits-one" service delivery model, providing individualized support based on each participant's specific needs, interests, and circumstances. The service delivery model encompasses several core components:

- **Intake and Assessment:** Intake sessions are designed to gather information and build interest and engagement among program participants. During intake, NeON Works site staff conduct comprehensive assessments to identify each individual's needs.
- **Personalized Goal Setting:** Site staff also work closely with individuals to identify goals. Individuals pursue a range of outcomes, including educational advancement (college enrollment, HSE completion), career development (internships, job training), and employment placement.
- **Wraparound Support Services:** Through the program, individuals take part in a variety of wraparound services. These include comprehensive case management, mental health support, housing assistance, transportation support, and connections to community resources, alongside job training/readiness workshops, educational workshops, and career counseling/job search assistance.
- **Incentives:** NeON Works uses a range of incentive structures to support participation and reduce barriers. Across all sites, participants commonly receive practical supports such as food and MetroCards. The program also regularly covers external training costs, provides stipends, and offers rewards for meeting specific milestones to encourage sustained engagement. These incentives vary across sites so that program sites have the flexibility to offer "one size fits one" incentives.

²The Harlem site changed providers at the time the study commenced and did not replace the provider in time to be included in the study, however, findings gathered through administrative data are presented for this site when available.

Evaluation Purpose and Approach

This section outlines the purpose of the evaluation, and the approach used to capture the experiences of the youth and young adults who took part in the NeON Works program. Evaluation questions, data collection methods, and analytic approaches used are described in the following paragraphs.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation study assessed the NeON Works program across its six active sites, examining its reach, implementation, effectiveness, and impact on participants. Using a mixed-methods approach—drawing on administrative data and data collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations—the evaluation explored participant characteristics and experiences, program implementation practices, barriers to participation, recruitment and retention strategies, satisfaction, and outcomes. By focusing on these six areas, the evaluation identified strengths and opportunities for improvement, with particular attention to how well the program serves its target population and supports participants' educational, career, and employment goals. Findings are intended to inform program improvements and guide future resource allocation to maximize NeON Works' impact. Table 2 lists each evaluation question by key focus area and the data sources used to answer them.

Table 2. Evaluation Question by Key Focus Area and Data Source(s)

Key Focus Area	Evaluation Questions	Data Source
Reach and Participation	What are the characteristics of participants across sites?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DOP administrative data • Participant Survey • Focus groups
Participant Recruitment and Retention	How does DOP and NeON Works sites recruit and engage participants in program activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant Survey • Participant Focus Groups • Staff Focus Groups
Program Implementation	How is NeON Works program being implemented across sites? What recommendations do staff have to facilitate program implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Staff focus groups •
Obstacles to Participation	What obstacles prevent participants from engaging with the opportunities offered by the NeON Works program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff focus groups • Participant focus groups • Participant surveys

Key Focus Area	Evaluation Questions	Data Source
Satisfaction	<p>What aspects of the NeON Works program do participants find most valuable, and what suggestions do they have for program improvement?</p> <p>How satisfied are the participants with the support and services provided through NeON Works?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant survey • Participant focus groups
Outcomes	<p>Is NeON Works supporting participants in achieving their goals, such as completing their education, advancing their careers, or finding employment?</p> <p>Does probation status correlate with variations in enrollment, participation, or program outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DOP administrative data • Staff focus groups • Participant survey • Participant focus groups

Evaluation Design and Methodological Approach

This evaluation used a mixed-method design to assess the reach, implementation, and outcomes of the NeON Works program. The approach integrated quantitative and qualitative data sources to capture a comprehensive picture of how the program serves youth on probation or community supervision across New York City. Administrative data and data from participant surveys, site observations, interviews, and focus groups with staff and program participants were triangulated to increase validity.

A Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation (CREE) framework³ guided the evaluation, ensuring that the voices of participants and staff—particularly those most impacted by probation or community supervision involvement—were central to all phases of the study (Hood, Hopson, & Kirkhart, 2015). Drawing on key CREE principles (Hood, Hopson, and Frierson, 2015), the evaluation sought to identify not just whether NeON Works is effective, but for whom, under what conditions, and why.

Participatory and Equity-Driven Design

A cornerstone of this evaluation was the creation of a Participatory Advisory Council (PAC) comprised of seven⁴ program participants (including one program graduate) and five staff members representing the six NeON Works sites included in the study.⁵ The PAC met seven times between July 2024 and April 2025 to co-develop evaluation questions, review data collection instruments, and interpret emerging findings. Their input shaped not only what questions were asked, but how results were framed and communicated. PAC members, who were active or previous NeON Works participants, were

³For more information about Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation (CREE) frameworks and principles, see Hood, S., Hopson, R. K., & Kirkhart, K. E. (2015). *Culturally responsive evaluation: Theory, practice, and future implications*.

⁴Six of the program participants were enrolled in the program at the start of the PAC meeting series. It is unknown if any of them completed the program at any point during the evaluation.

⁵Only five staff members participated in the PAC because one study site (Harlem) was inactive during the data collection period.

compensated for their time with \$125 per session (NeON staff were not). This participatory approach ensured the evaluation remained grounded in the lived experiences of those closest to the program.

Biweekly meetings with the evaluation partners—NORC, DOP, NYC Opportunity, and YMI—provided additional collaboration and coordination throughout the evaluation period. These meetings allowed the team to share fieldwork updates, address evaluation concerns, troubleshoot data access issues, and interpret early results.

Several best practices emerged during PAC implementation. Participants co-created a set of community norms—such as speaking with respect, maintaining confidentiality, and encouraging full participation—which helped foster an inclusive and supportive environment. Logistically, NORC developed a schedule for meeting reminders (Zoom link sent one week in advance, followed by a gentle reminder the day before) and implemented a confirmation process for virtual incentives to ensure timely access. These strategies supported consistent engagement and smooth facilitation throughout the PAC process.

Data Collection Methods

Between September and November 2024, NORC collected the following data from the six NeON Works program sites⁶:

Administrative Data

The New York City Department of Probation provided de-identified administrative data covering the second quarter of fiscal year 2021 through the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2024. These data included participant demographics, service utilization, probation status, and select outcome measures (e.g., credential opportunity, enrolled in college, enrolled in high school equivalent or high school, internships). Due to DOP privacy restrictions, NORC received summary data rather than raw data, which limited the range of analyses possible.

To maintain data security and comply with NORC security requirements, a data sharing agreement was developed and approved by both parties. Data were shared with NORC through a secure data sharing site. While the data obtained was disaggregated by provider site, small sample sizes within some sites and fiscal years made it impossible to conduct analyses at the site level (and still maintain best practices in data security and participant confidentiality). Where relevant, site-level findings are presented. These data are included in the appendix to this report.

Participant Survey

A participant survey was designed to collect information on participant satisfaction, perceived value of services, barriers to engagement, and personal outcomes. Respondents received a \$10 electronic gift card as an incentive to complete the survey. Prior to administration, the survey was submitted to NORC's

⁶ While data was not collected from the Harlem site, administrative data was included for this site.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Surveys were administered through the web-based survey program, Qualtrics, between July and November 2024. Surveys were sent to a total of 666 former and current participants who were 18 years or older and whose contact information was available. It is important to note that while a third of the NeON participants were under 18 years of age, DOP policy requires that minors have parental permission in order to complete a survey. NORC's IRB approved a waiver of parental consent, however, this could not override DOP's policy which resulted in this group of participants not receiving a survey. Although a consent form was made available to providers for parental completion, the process proved cumbersome, and no parental consents were ultimately returned. This limitation restricted survey eligibility to participants who were at least 18 years of age.

This presented a clear challenge and provided a lesson for future projects: efforts to engage youth require early coordination between all parties to establish effective parental consent processes. The difficulty in this case stemmed from limited direct communication channels with parents, as participant contact information was not readily available through existing data collection protocols. We recommend that DOP consider developing streamlined procedures for projects involving minors—such as incorporating consent collection into initial participant outreach or establishing clear data-sharing protocols for research partnerships—to help ensure that younger participants can be more effectively included in future data collection efforts while maintaining appropriate privacy protections.

Additional steps were taken to safeguard data and ensure that only eligible individuals could complete the survey. Participants were required to provide a valid email address and verify it before accessing the survey. Those over 18 who were not on the DOP-provided list could request access through an alternate process. While these procedures were necessary to meet privacy and data security requirements, barriers may have been introduced that reduced participation and limited the generalizability of the survey findings. Overall, 82 participants completed a survey (12.3% response rate).

Site Visits

Between September and October 2024, researchers conducted structured visits to the six provider sites. During each visit, NORC researchers observed at least one activity (e.g., workshop) and conducted focus groups and/or interviews with staff and program participants using semi-structured protocols.

Focus Groups and Interviews

During site visits, six focus groups were conducted with a total of 33 program participants, and 6 interviews were conducted with 16 provider staff. NORC conducted interviews with staff to gain deeper insight into staffing models, referral processes, resource challenges, and implementation adaptations across sites. Table 3 shows the number of participants and staff who participated in focus groups and/or interviews at each provider site.

Table 3. Number of Participants and Staff taking part in Focus Groups and/or Interviews by Site

Site	Number of Participants and Staff	
	Participant	Staff
Brownsville	8	3
Bedford Stuyvesant	6	4
East New York	5	2
Jamaica	8	3
South Bronx	2	2
Staten Island	4	2
Totals	33	16

Focus group participants were recruited through a separate pop-up interest form that was optional to complete at the end of the distributed survey. Interested participants shared their names and emails with NORC and were contacted to coordinate site visitation details separately. Six participant focus group discussions were conducted, recorded (with consent), and transcribed. Program participants were each compensated \$50 for their time. The discussions explored participants' experiences with intake, engagement, satisfaction, and perceived barriers and benefits.

Analytic Approach

Administrative Data Analysis. NORC worked closely with DOP to develop a detailed analysis request identifying the specific administrative data elements needed to address the evaluation questions. DOP compiled and provided analyzed data extracts based on this request, rather than providing raw individual-level records. Data analysis focused on participant characteristics, including race/ethnicity, probation status, age, primary language, and site location. With input from the PAC, characteristics of participants were identified and selected for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to assess baseline patterns as well as inferential techniques, such as chi-square tests, were utilized to explore outcome disparities across key participant groups. The choice of specific analytic methods depended on the availability and structure of the data provided, but the combination of descriptive and inferential approaches strengthened the rigor and robustness of the findings.

Survey Analysis. After the survey was collected, responses were downloaded, cleaned, and analyzed using Stata, a statistical analysis program. Of 82 total survey responses, responses with less than 18% of the survey completed (5 surveys) were dropped. A total of 77 surveys were included in the analysis. Graphs and tables were developed based on the survey questions that corresponded to the overall evaluation questions. The graphs and tables were then presented to the PAC, who provided feedback on the content, design, and interpretation of results.

Site Visit Data Analysis. A key feature of NORC's rigorous interview/focus group analysis is the utilization of NVivo, a software for qualitative and mixed-methods analysis. NVivo provides more

efficient coding and analyses compared to more manual processes, and it automatically performs comparative analyses across the participant demographic characteristics collected by matching demographic information provided by the DOP with survey response data. We used NVivo qualitative data analysis software to employ thematic analysis on the transcribed focus group data to identify, categorize, and compare across the focus group and interview discussions. Interview data was collected through consented recordings, transcribed by Landmark services, and workshop observation notes collected by the researcher(s). We also developed a code frame to identify concepts (or codes) within the data. The code frame allowed us to carefully define, illustrate (i.e., with direct quotes and/or specific examples), and precisely tally the various codes within the data set. Analyzing these detailed codes enabled us to identify key themes and compare these themes within and across interviews.

Limitations of the Evaluation

While the evaluation design provided robust, multi-perspective insights, several limitations should be noted:

- Raw administrative data was not shared with NORC, limiting NORC's ability to clean or analyze data directly. Instead, we relied on analyses conducted by DOP staff.
- Survey access was limited to participants age 18 and up, which excluded approximately a third (32%) of the NeON Works program participant population. As described above, NORC's evaluation team was unable to survey anyone under 18 years of age.
- Focus group and survey participants self-selected into the evaluation, which may bias findings toward more engaged or satisfied program participants.
- The survey response rate was low, so the survey findings only represent select participants' experiences.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation offers strong evidence about NeON Works' implementation and outcomes, grounded in participant voice and informed by both statistical and experiential data. All research instruments can be found in Appendix A. In the section below, we present the findings, organized by key areas of focus.

Findings by Key Focus Area

Focus Area 1. Reach and Participation

Understanding who NeON Works serves and how they access the program is essential for assessing its reach. This section sought to answer the question: *What are the characteristics of participants across sites?* drawing on administrative data, participant surveys, and focus groups and interviews to describe the characteristics of NeON Works participants. Administrative data was used to examine demographics at both intake and completion points, allowing us to explore patterns and identify shifts in participation composition over time. We supplemented the administrative data with survey responses

and selected focus group and interview findings that offer additional context not available in administrative records.

Survey, focus group, and interview data were utilized to highlight characteristics not captured in administrative records—such as motivation for joining, prior program awareness, and household composition—and to identify potential discrepancies between self-reported and administrative data. Together, these sources offer a more nuanced understanding of the participants NeON Works serves, which can inform future outreach and program design. We also examined key characteristics—probation status, age, race, and education—that the PAC identified as particularly relevant for program planning.

Participant Characteristics Across Sites at Intake and Completion

Understanding who NeON Works serves is essential to evaluating the program's reach, equity, and effectiveness. This section presents an analysis of participant demographics based on administrative data collected at both intake and program completion across six provider sites. By examining characteristics such as age, gender, race,⁷ ethnicity, probation status, and geographic distribution, we can assess how well the program is engaging its intended populations and whether any disparities in retention or outcomes emerge across different groups. These findings help identify strengths in reaching priority populations and highlight areas for targeted support and program adaptation. Table 4 presents the characteristics of the participants across program sites at intake and completion. Analyses by site can be found in Appendix B.

Table 4: Characteristics, Across Program Sites at Intake and Completion

Characteristic	Intake	Completion
Age		
Under 18	32%	34%
18 and over ⁸	67%	63%
Gender		
Female	39%	44%
Male	61%	56%
Racial composition		
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%	5%
Black/African American/African	72%	72%
White	4%	2%
Other/Unreported*	21%	22%

⁷The racial categories that DOP collects include Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American/African, White, other and unreported.

⁸The "18 and over" category can be disaggregated as follows: 18-19 years (16% at intake, 15% at completion), 20-29 years (39% at intake, 37% at completion), 30-39 years (8% at intake, 8% at completion), 40-49 years (3% at intake, 2% at completion), and 50+ years (2% at intake, 1% at completion). However, due to small sample sizes in several age groups, these categories were collapsed into "18 and over" for analytic purposes throughout this report to ensure statistical reliability and protect participant confidentiality.

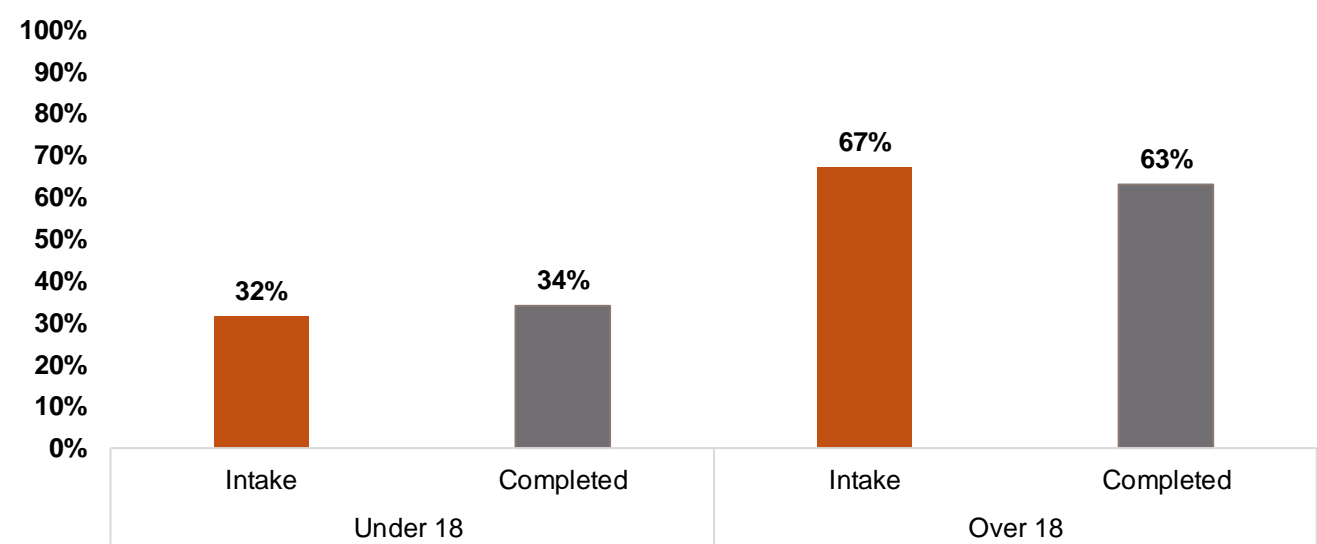
Characteristic	Intake	Completion
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	25%	23%
Non-Hispanic	69%	71%
Other/Unreported	7%	7%

*Administrative data do not specify who is included in the other/unreported category.
Source: NeON Works' Administrative Data (2021-2023), n=3,346 (intake) n=864 (completed)
** Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding and the collapsing of smaller response categories into "Other/Unreported."

Age

Administrative data show that NeON Works primarily serves young adults.⁹ Across fiscal years, 67% of participants were over 18 at intake and 63% were over 18 at completion. The age distribution varied by provider, with America Works of NY (79%) and Brooklyn Community Services (72%) serving the highest proportions of young adult participants. Figure 1 shows the age breakdown at intake and at completion. See Appendix B for full age breakdown by site.

Figure 1. Age at Intake and Completion



Source: NeON Works' Administrative Data (2021-2023), n=3,346 (intake) n=864 (completed)

The comparison between age at intake and age at completion in Figure 1 offers insight into patterns in program retention. However, it is important to note that participants at intake and completion may not represent the same individuals, as some participants may have exited the program early or entered at different points during the reporting period. The slight underrepresentation of over-18 program participants at completion suggests that older participants may face additional barriers to completing the program. Focus group findings highlight that adult participants often balance competing

⁹The program serves program participants between the ages of 16 and 24. For the purposes of the evaluation, we define youth as those who are under 18, and young adults as those 18 to 24.

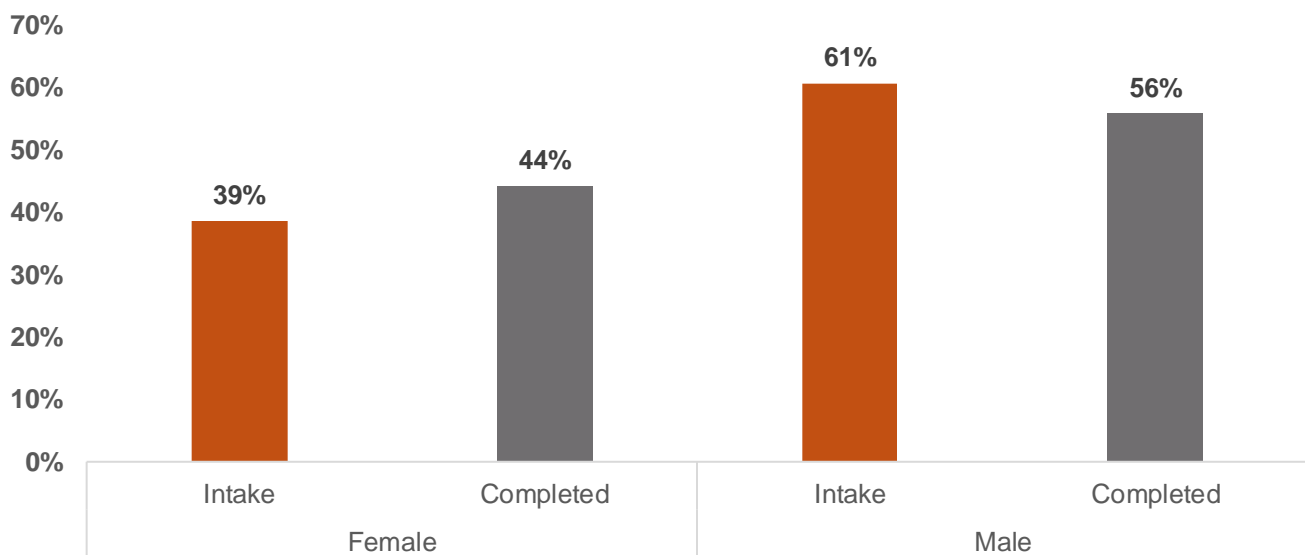
responsibilities, particularly employment and family obligations, which can affect their ability to remain engaged.

Staff noted that age differences within and across sites required tailored scheduling strategies. For example, sites serving more high school-aged participants needed to accommodate participants' limited availability due to school hours.

Gender

Administrative data shows that NeON Works enrolls male participants at a higher proportion (61%) compared to female participants (39%). Across sites, gender breakdown was varied. The Center for Community Alternatives had the smallest proportion of female participants (28% at intake; 30% at completion), while Community Mediation Services had highest proportion of female participants at completion (52%). Figure 2 shows gender breakdown by intake and completion. See Appendix B for full gender breakdown by site.

Figure 2. Gender at Intake and Completion



Source: NeON Works' Administrative Data (2021-2023), n=3,346 (intake) n=864 (completed)

While male participants complete the program at a higher proportion (56%) than female participants (44%), female participants see a slight increase from intake to completion (39% to 44%). The slight underrepresentation of completed male participants, compared to male intakes, suggests that male and female participants may face different barriers to completion.

Racial and Ethnic Composition at Intake and Completion

The racial composition of NeON Works participants reflects both program targeting and neighborhood demographics¹⁰. Across all fiscal years, administrative data shows that 72% of participants identified as

¹⁰The racial categories that DOP collects include Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American/African, White, other and unreported.

Black/African American/African at intake—a proportion that remained consistent through completion. The next largest group was participants identifying as Other/Unreported (21% at intake, 22% at completion), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (3% at intake, 5% at completion), and White (4% at intake, 2% at completion). Across sites, there are varying proportions of races, although Black or African American remains the highest proportion across all fiscal years. At some sites, such as Exodus Transitional Community, The Osbourne Association, and others, “Others/Unreported” is the second highest proportion of reported race, making it difficult to know exact race breakdowns within sites. Table 5 shows the racial breakdown at intake and completion across the provider sites and fiscal years. For more detailed race comparisons across sites, please see Appendix B.

Table 5. Race at Intake and Completion Across All Programs, All Fiscal Years

Race	Percent at intake	Percent at completion
Asian/Pacific Islander	3%	5%
Black/African American/African	72%	72%
White	4%	2%
Other/Unreported	21%	22%

Source: NeON Works' Administrative Data (2021-2023), n=3,346 (intake) n=864 (completed)

Table 6 shows the ethnic breakdown at intake and completion across the provider sites and fiscal years. Across all fiscal years, the administrative data shows that 25% of participants identified as Hispanic at Intake. Overall, the proportion of Hispanic/Non-Hispanic participants stayed fairly consistent from intake to completion. The Osborne Association had the highest proportion of Hispanic participants (40% at intake; 39% at completion), while Brooklyn Community Services had the fewest, (10% at both intake and completion. For more detailed ethnic comparisons across sites, please see Appendix B.

Table 6. Ethnicity at Intake and Completion Across All Programs, All Fiscal Years

Ethnicity	Percent at intake	Percent at completion
Hispanic	25%	23%
Not Hispanic	69%	71%
Unreported	7%	7%

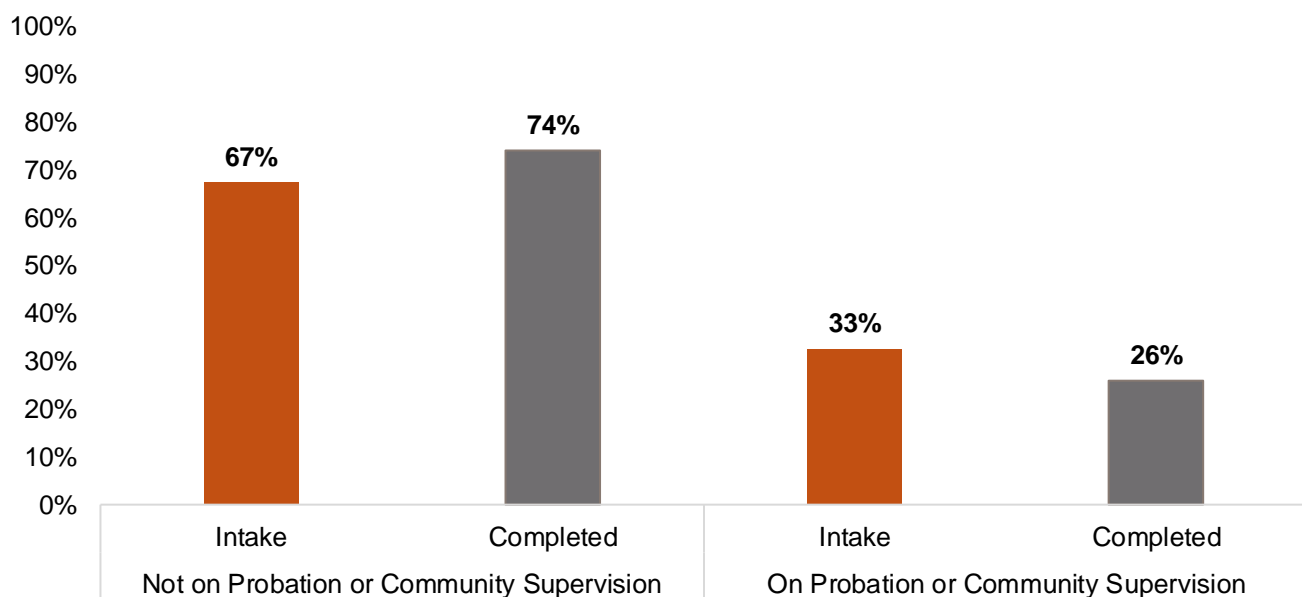
Source: NeON Works' Administrative Data (2021-2023), n=3,346 (intake) n=864 (completed)

This demographic profile has implications for culturally responsive programming. Focus group findings underscore the value of staff who can relate to participants' lived experiences. Eight participants emphasized the importance of working with staff who bring participant-informed, experiential knowledge to their roles. The consistency in racial composition from intake to completion suggests that the program retains participants equitably across racial groups.

Probation or Community Supervision

Participants on probation or community supervision represent an important dimension of NeON Work's program reach. Administrative data show that 33% of program participants were on probation or community service at intake (Figure 3). While this is very promising, it is short of the program's goal of 40%, highlighting the need for continued outreach and coordination to recruit the intended population. This proportion varied significantly across provider organizations: The Osborne Association (43%) and The Center for Justice Innovation (42%) served the highest shares of participants on probation or community supervision, while Exodus Transitional Community served the lowest (18%). For a detailed breakdown of probation status across sites by fiscal year, see supplemental Table 5 in the Appendix.

Figure 3. Intake vs. Completed Probation/Community Supervision



Source: NeON Works' Administrative Data (2021-2023), n=3,346 (intake) n=864 (completed)

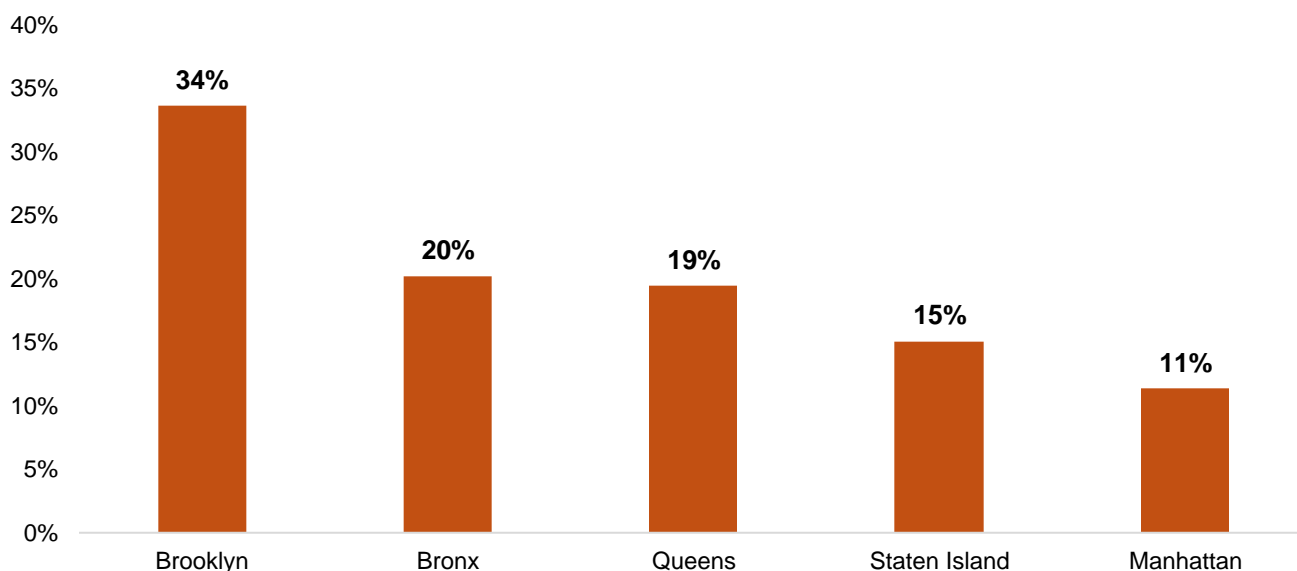
The proportion of participants on probation or community supervision was slightly lower at completion than at intake (Figure 3), suggesting that youth on probation or community supervision may face additional barriers to program completion. Across sites, the proportion of probation-involved participants was lower than those not on probation. However, certain sites, such as the Center for Community Alternatives and Community Mediation Services, had slightly higher proportions of participants on probation or community supervision. Focus group participants highlighted these challenges, noting that "probation status [that] can affect what job opportunities are available to program participants." This finding points to a potential need for enhanced support to help participants on probation or community supervision complete the program successfully. For example, tailored case management could address the unique barriers these participants face, such as scheduling conflicts with court appearances, transportation challenges, or competing probation requirements. Additional support might include flexible program scheduling to accommodate legal obligations, partnerships with probation officers to align program goals with supervision requirements, or wraparound services that address underlying issues like housing instability or employment needs. Regular check-ins with program staff could help

identify emerging challenges early, while peer mentorship from program graduates who have navigated similar circumstances could provide both practical guidance and motivation. Furthermore, clear communication protocols between program administrators and probation officers could ensure that participation is properly documented and credited toward rehabilitation goals, potentially creating additional incentives for completion. For more detailed proportion of youth on probation or community supervision across sites, please see Appendix B.

Geographic Distribution

The geographic distribution of NeON Works participants reflected both the program's site locations and broader residential patterns across New York City. Administrative data revealed that across all fiscal years and programs, approximately 34% of program participants resided in Brooklyn, making it the borough with the highest concentration of participants. This is understandable since three of the six sites involved in the study are in Brooklyn. In contrast, Manhattan had the fewest number of program participants (11%), indicating significantly lower program reach in that area (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Geographic Distribution Across All Sites (Intake)



Source: NeON Works' Administrative Data (2021-2023), n=3,346

This geographic pattern has important implications for program accessibility. Focus group findings reveal that location can function as a significant barrier to participation, with four staff noting that challenges exist among program participants who live farther from sites. This is particularly relevant given program participation requirements that allow probation-involved participants to attend any site across the city, while community-recruited participants are limited to their neighborhood site. We recommend reviewing this policy disparity to determine whether the increased site flexibility for probation-involved participants adequately addresses transportation barriers, or whether it may inadvertently create additional challenges by requiring travel to unfamiliar or distant locations. Consider whether extending similar site flexibility to all participants, or alternatively, implementing targeted

transportation support or prioritizing placement of probation-involved youth at their most accessible sites, might better support consistent attendance and program completion across all participant groups.

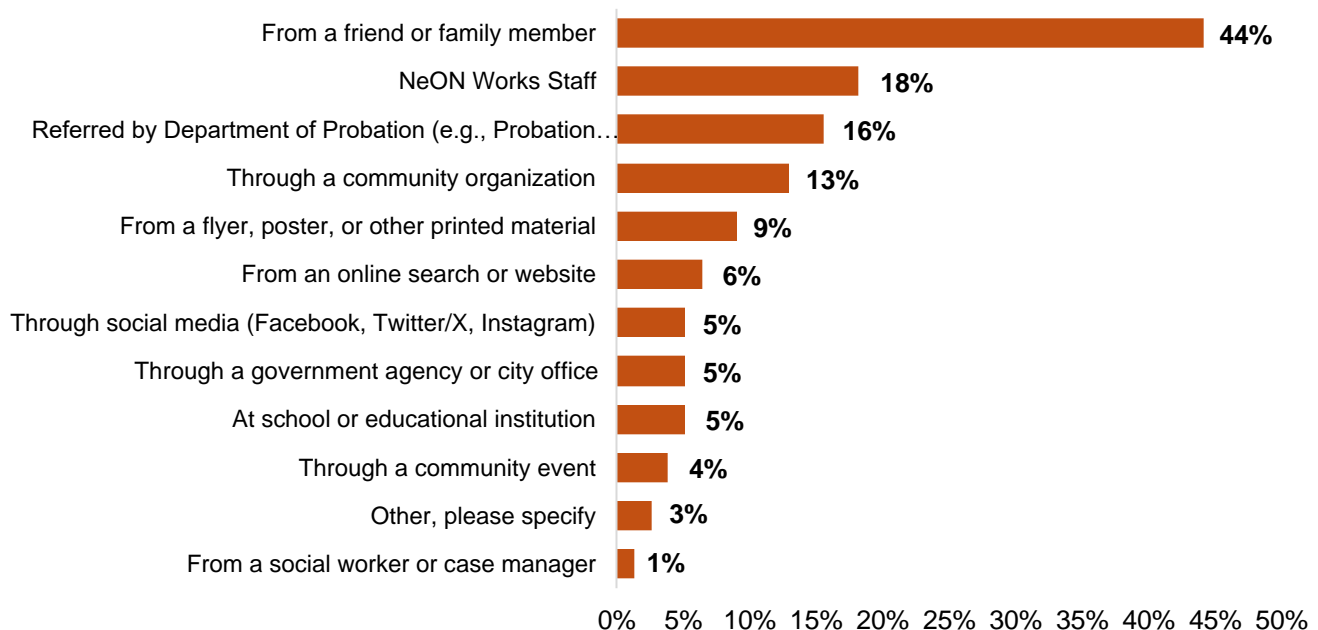
As one staff member explained in a focus group, "Some sites have leveraged their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with the launch of NeON Works programming, and continued to provide virtual participation options" to address geographic barriers. The continued development of these alternative engagement methods could help expand program reach beyond the current geographic distribution.

Focus Area 2. Participant Recruitment and Retention

This section addresses the following evaluation question: *How do the DOP and NeON Works sites recruit and engage participants in program activities?* To answer this question, survey data on how participants were referred to NeON Works were collected, analyzed, and integrated with focus group data demonstrating the importance of interpersonal relationships and communities.¹¹

NeON Works participants learned about the program in a variety of ways, with personal connections playing a predominant role. For example, 44% of those surveyed indicated that they learned about the program through friends or family members, while only 18% were introduced by NeON Works staff, and 16% were referred to by the DOP (Figure 5).

Figure 5. How Participants Found Out About NeON Works



Source: NeON Works Participant Survey (July 2024 – November 2024), n=77

Note: Respondents could select more than one facilitator. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each option.

¹¹ Participant Survey, "How did you learn about NeON Works?"

This word-of-mouth recruitment pattern aligns with focus group findings, where staff emphasized the importance of relationship-building in the community. The high proportion of peer referrals (“from a family or family friend”) suggests the program has established a positive reputation within communities, creating an organic recruitment channel that complements formal referral systems.

The reliance on personal networks for recruitment has implications for program expansion. While effective at reaching individuals connected to existing participants, this approach may limit access for potential program participants without these connections. Focus group participants recommended enhanced social media presence and improved signage at program locations to broaden awareness beyond current social networks.

Four of the focus group participants highlighted the importance of community involvement in their NeON Works recruitment and programming. Community engagement enhances program participants experience of and connection to a site. Some sites shared that they join community events wherever possible, throw community events for their neighborhood to come together at, and make sure they show up for the community in times of crisis. This facilitates a community-centered trust at the community provider site.

Focus Area 3. Program Implementation

The effectiveness of NeON Works depends not only on who it reaches but on how services are delivered and experienced by participants. This section (Focus Area 3) addresses the following evaluation questions: *How is the NeON Works program being implemented across sites? What recommendations do staff have to facilitate program implementation?* This section examines program implementation across sites, explores participant satisfaction, identifies the aspects of the program that participants find most valuable, and discusses program participant and staff suggestions for program improvement, drawing on survey, focus group, and interview data to provide a comprehensive picture of program operation and reception. In this section, we discuss the intake and assessment process, program offerings, and engagement strategies.

Intake and Assessment

The intake process is an information-gathering session as well as a way for participants and staff to build relationships and make connections. Staff across four sites shared that the focus of the intake session is to build interest and engagement among program participants. Overall, program participants were happy with the intake process, with most program participants who participated in focus group discussions sharing that they had positive, nonjudgmental experiences. To provide targeted support, staff aim to make the intake process as comprehensive as possible, covering all relevant aspects of a participant’s situation. One staff member described the way they conduct intakes as a positive and deeply engaging process, displaying how deep inquiry can go during this process. A staff member at another site uses a sharing strategy, coordinating with other service providers within their organization through established data-sharing agreements and participant consent protocols to ensure program participant services are well-coordinated while maintaining confidentiality and HIPAA compliance. Two

staff at one site agreed that the “average” program participant wants to address immediate employment opportunities during their intake process.

Building on the connection-focused approach established during intake, NeON staff also use the intake process to begin connecting program participants to job opportunities through training opportunities that are curated based on individual participant interests and career goals. To be program participant-led, NeON staff model an open and trusting relationship to enable program participants to be honest about their situations and seek help where they need it. Staff bolster this by sharing their own struggles and successes with program participants. One staff member shared in a focus group that they used to be a participant, and that the lens of success after participation makes a positive impact on their program participants’ experiences. Eight program participants shared that they appreciate staff who bring lived experience and shared backgrounds to their work. By being open about their own experiences, staff create an environment that encourages sharing and asking for help when needed.

Regarding the curated training opportunities, staff across all sites shared that both internal and external opportunities are pursued based on program participants’ interests. For example, if most active and engaged program participants at a site are interested in developing or strengthening their computer science skills, then staff would seek those resources for the group. Staff and program participants at one site also shared that they offer cohort training, which keeps a group of students together as they move through a training or certification program, to encourage continued engagement. Another site shared that they group those entering their service year at similar time points into “cohorts” to achieve similar results. Together, these strategies create a holistic environment where authentic personal connections enhance the effectiveness of tailored career support and networking opportunities, ultimately driving both immediate and long-term program participant success.

To further strengthen the impact of the intake and assessment process, there is a need to increase tracking capabilities to monitor participant outcomes over time. While the current approach fosters strong relationships and offers personalized support, systematically tracking participant progress beyond initial intake would provide valuable insights into program effectiveness. Currently, sites face significant limitations in outcome tracking due to contract structures that only compensate providers for achieving one primary outcome per participant rather than recognizing the full spectrum of participant achievements. Additionally, there is no standardized system for tracking participants after they complete or leave the program, meaning long-term employment retention, wage progression, and sustained educational engagement remain largely unknown. The lack of comprehensive tracking also prevents sites from demonstrating the full value of the program that may lead to outcomes months or years later. Enhanced tracking would enable staff to better understand long-term outcomes, identify gaps in service, and continuously refine strategies to meet participants’ evolving needs. More importantly, reformed tracking and compensation systems could incentivize sites to support participants holistically rather than focusing on one outcome, potentially improving both participant experience and long-term success.

Program Offerings

NeON Works sites offer different programs to meet the individualized needs of their program participants. Sites typically offer activities aligned with career/job goals and educational aspirations. The survey data below revealed that among survey respondents, program participants were most involved in activities related to jobs and career training and less engaged in activities related to continuing education. Table 7 shows the activities that participants took part in and how often during their time in the program.

Table 7. Program Participant Involvement

Activity	Frequency					
	Every time it is offered	Often	Sometimes	Do not participate at all	Does not apply to me	Did not know this was an option
High school equivalency (GED) preparation (such as tutoring) (n=67)	10%	18%	15%	25%	25%	6%
College preparation and enrollment programs/ services (n=63)	16%	17%	17%	19%	22%	8%
One-on-one coaching sessions (such as meeting with a NeON Staff member who provided specific instructions or guidance) (n=65)	26%	26%	20%	12%	12%	3%
Courses for career-specific credentialing (n=65)	29%	17%	22%	17%	9%	6%
Job training and readiness workshops (for example, resume writing, interview skills) (n=66)	42%	26%	15%	11%	3%	3%

Source: NeON Works Participant Survey (July 2024 – November 2024), number of respondents ranged across each of the options the sample size is included in the graph

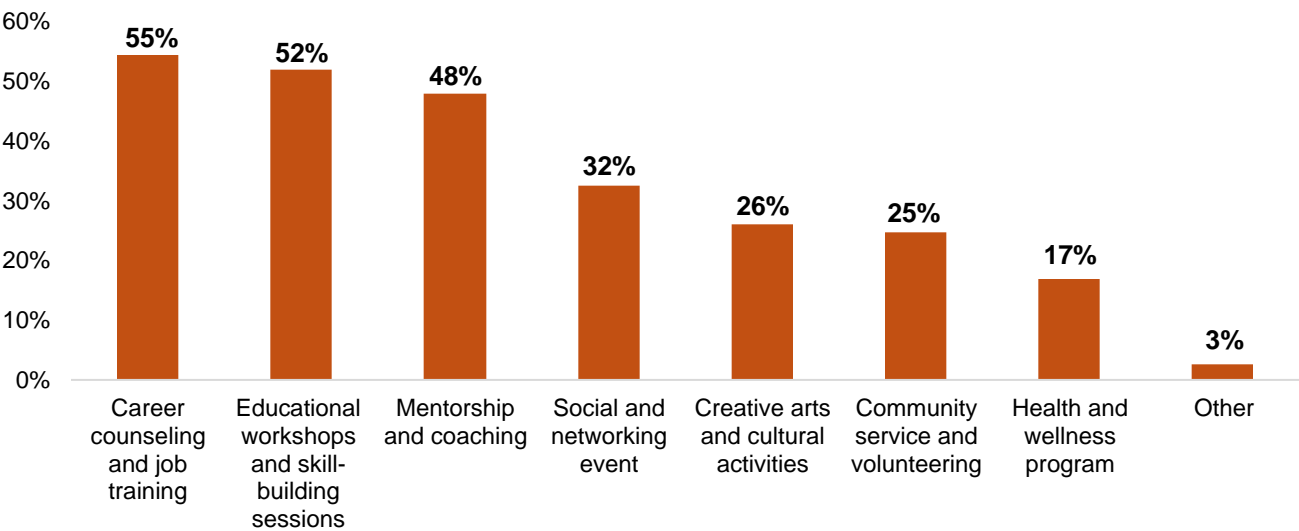
Job-focused activities saw the highest levels of engagement among respondents. For example, 68% of participants reported attending job training and readiness workshops either *every time it is offered* (42%) or *often* (26%). Similarly, 46% participated in career-specific credentialing courses either *often* or *every time offered*. These trends align with focus group findings in which staff described offering “program participant-led, curated training opportunities” based on expressed interests.

By contrast, educational services showed lower participation rates. Only 28% of respondents reported frequent participation (often or every time offered) in GED preparation, and 33% did so for college preparation services. This pattern may reflect the needs-based nature of NeON Works, where

educational services are likely targeted to participants without a high school credential or those pursuing postsecondary pathways. The variation in participation rates across program offerings reflects the personalized nature of the NeON Works model. As revealed in the focus group discussions, staff locate both internal and external opportunities based on program participant interest, allowing for customized service packages that respond to individual needs and goals.

Participants attribute different values to various program components, with career-focused services receiving the highest ratings. Survey data shows that respondents ranked career counseling and job training activities as the most valued aspect of NeON Works (55%), with educational workshops and skill-building sessions following closely (52%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Most Valued NeON Works aspects



Source: NeON Works Participant Survey (July 2024 – November 2024), n=77
Note: Respondents could select more than one facilitator. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each option.

This prioritization of career-focused activities corresponds with focus group findings about participant motivation, where program participants emphasized the importance of "future financial stability" as a key driver of program engagement. One program participant stated, *"My goal is to reach financial stability. I want to make a certain amount of money so I'll be very sufficient with myself."* The relatively low value participants placed on health and wellness programs (17%) contrasts with staff perspectives about the importance of meeting fundamental needs before focusing on workforce readiness. This gap suggests a need for staff to more actively communicate the role of comprehensive support services—including health and wellness—in helping participants achieve long-term success.

Figure 7. Activities Program Participants Want to See More Of

Source: NeON Works Participant Survey (July 2024 – November 2024), n=77

Note: Respondents could select more than one facilitator. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each option.

Survey respondents most often selected job placement services (25%), interview skills training (22%), and job training/career training or job search assistance (22%) as the types of activities they would like to see more of (Figure 7). These selections reflect continued interest in job readiness and career-focused supports, which align with high participation rates in job training and readiness workshops described earlier in the report.

These expressed preferences align with focus group recommendations for "centralized and comprehensive support" to strengthen connections to employment opportunities. Both data sources point to a desire for more robust pathways from program participation to concrete job outcomes, suggesting a strategic direction for program enhancement.

Although fewer respondents prioritized educational services, this may reflect site-specific variation in program offerings and participant needs. For example, sites that serve more under-18 participants may place greater emphasis on academic supports like GED prep or college advising. In contrast, adult participants may be more focused on career services. However, this study's findings may not fully capture these age-related differences in service priorities, as participants under 18 were not included in the survey sample. Only 17% of respondents expressed interest in health and wellness programs. This may reflect the specific composition of the survey sample and the extent to which these services are offered at each site.

Engagement Strategies

Site observations revealed that across sites, staff get creative to keep the attention of their program participants during workshops. Workshop facilitators were observed calling their program participants

by name to regain their attention and keep their content current and practical. Staff used culturally relevant examples and made sure the content they presented related to program participants. To further increase engagement, some sites offered online workshop accessibility to serve program participants unable to attend in person. And most importantly, some sites matched their program participants to relatable staff to make sure that a program participant felt comfortable with the staff whom they interacted the most.

Resources Needs

Staff across all sites emphasized the need for greater support to sustain and strengthen program implementation. NeON sites require expanded staffing to maintain consistent contact with program participants, monitor progress closely, and dedicate the necessary time to sourcing individualized resources. Supportive connections—such as partnerships with community-based organizations, mentors, and case managers—play a critical role in helping to meet these needs by offering additional touchpoints and services tailored to each participant. However, staff noted that these connections could be leveraged more effectively. Improvements such as systematically tracking the use and impact of supportive connections, ensuring the contracting structure funds these services adequately, and integrating these supports into the overall program framework could enhance their effectiveness. Staff also stressed that current staffing levels continue to limit their ability to coordinate and manage these relationships in a way that maximizes participant engagement and goal achievement.

Beyond staffing, both survey and focus group findings highlighted how resource availability shaped the ways programs implemented key components. Survey data showed that work and school commitments were common among participants (23%) and focus group participants noted that providing supportive services such as childcare and transportation was essential to implementing a program model that meets participants where they are. Staff and participants also emphasized the importance of funding for incentives and community-building activities—core elements of the program’s relational and skill-building focus. As one staff member explained:

“I wish we had more money to pay program participants¹². I think I find us wanting to incentivize young people more heavily. I know that we are asking young people to give us a lot of their time while they’re working towards their goals. I wish that we can have them in a cohort and also incentivize their milestones. I want us to get to a space where we can offer credential onsite.”

These findings point to a consistent message across data sources: additional staffing and financial support are central to strengthening implementation of the program model and sustaining participant engagement over time.

¹² Payment amounts vary by site and activity. Focus group discussions did not provide specific recommendations for how much current payment levels should be increased.

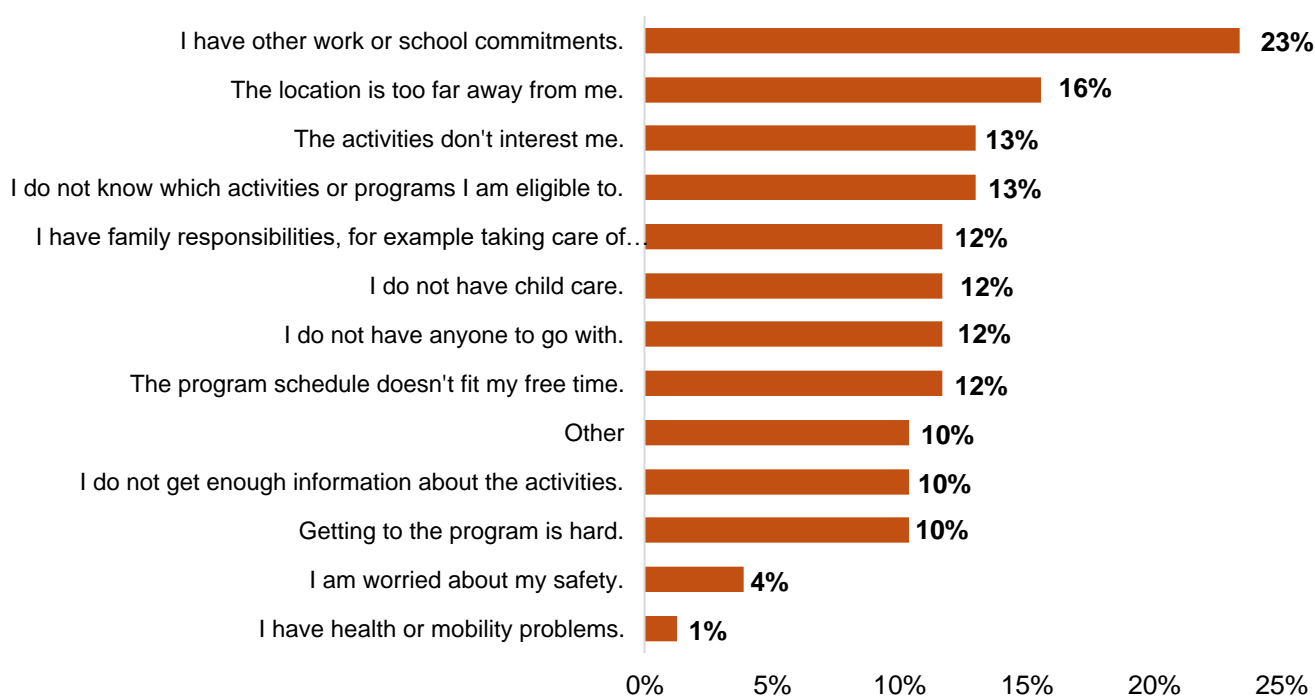
Focus Area 4. Obstacles to Participation

Key to understanding NeON Works' implementation challenges is identifying the obstacles that prevent participants from engaging consistently in program activities. This section addresses the following evaluation question: *What obstacles prevent participants from engaging with the opportunities offered by the NeON Works program?* Data from surveys and focus groups were gathered to identify barriers across the provider sites as well as contextual factors that may influence participation. Common barriers included practical challenges (e.g., scheduling, transportation), environmental barriers (e.g., safety concerns), and internal barriers (e.g., mistrust, shame). These barriers are discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs, along with strategies that may mitigate these barriers.

Practical Challenges

Participants face substantial obstacles related to work, school, and family responsibilities. Survey data identified work or school commitments as the most common barrier to participation, reported by 23% of respondents (Figure 8). Focus group findings corroborate this survey finding, with 24.2% of program participants highlighting familial, school, and extracurricular obligations as factors that limited their attendance. Additionally, several program participants noted that caregiving responsibilities — caring for their own children, siblings, or other family members — significantly impacted their ability to engage consistently.

Figure 8. Barriers to Participation



Source: NeON Works Participant Survey (July 2024 – November 2024), n=77

Note: Respondents could select more than one barrier. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each option.

Staff focus groups emphasized that scheduling challenges are especially complex given the wide variation in age across sites. Some sites have introduced cohort models to boost retention, keeping groups of program participants connected throughout training periods. However, this strategy also introduces rigid enrollment periods, which may unintentionally exclude participants with competing life commitments. The cohort approach offers significant benefits including peer support networks that encourage consistent attendance, shared learning experiences that build community among participants, and structured progression through skill-building activities that can improve completion rates. Staff report that cohort participants often motivate each other and develop lasting relationships that extend beyond the program. However, the tradeoffs are substantial: fixed start dates can force participants to wait weeks or months to begin programming when they are ready to engage, rigid scheduling conflicts with the unpredictable nature of participants' lives including court dates, work schedules, and family crises, and the inability to accommodate participants who need to step away temporarily due to life circumstances without losing their cohort connection. These tensions highlight the need for hybrid models that capture the benefits of peer connection while maintaining the flexibility that makes programming accessible to youth on probation or community supervision with complex, changing circumstances.

Further, transportation barriers emerged as a cross-cutting issue. Focus group participants and staff alike noted that limited access to transportation—especially for program participants living farther from NeON sites—complicated attendance. Virtual options, developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, were cited by staff at one site as a promising strategy to increase accessibility for program participants facing distance-related challenges.

One limitation in our understanding of barriers to program implementation stems from the survey design. While NORC developed the survey instrument with input from the Participatory Advisory Committee, in retrospect, certain response options that could have provided critical insights were not included among the answer choices. Specifically, response options such as *"The activities don't interest me," "I do not know which activities I am eligible for,"* and *"I do not get enough information about the activities"* were absent from the survey. As a result, important insights into participants' awareness, engagement, and perceived relevance of the program may have been overlooked. For future evaluations, we recommend allowing additional time in the evaluation timeline to field-test survey instruments with a broader range of stakeholders before final implementation. This would help ensure that survey options capture the full spectrum of participant experiences and barriers, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles faced by potential participants.

Environmental Barriers

While safety concerns ranked low in survey responses, focus group discussions revealed that safety remains a significant barrier for staff and program participants at many sites. Staff at five of six sites reported that site location safety—particularly in higher-violence neighborhoods—can deter program participant engagement. Safety challenges exist both at the site level and for individual program participants based on neighborhood affiliations.

Staff described implementing strategies such as hiring security guards, enhancing check-in procedures, and offering transportation services to promote safety. As one staff member shared, *"Sometimes we have domestic violence program participants that come in. This is a safe spot. We make sure that they're walked out by security, make sure they're walked in by security."* These efforts reflect a broader recognition that physical safety and emotional security are prerequisites for sustained participation. Relatedly, pre-existing hardships—such as housing insecurity, food insecurity, and mental health needs—also create structural barriers to engagement. Focus group participants recommended expanded supportive services like transportation and childcare. Survey data reflects another complexity: while only 17% of respondents expressed interest in wellness programs offered at NeON sites, 22% indicated a need for easier access to mental health and wellness resources. This discrepancy suggests several possibilities for the gap between need and participation in on-site wellness programming. Participants may face barriers to accessing on-site services such as stigma, scheduling conflicts, or concerns about privacy and confidentiality when receiving services at the same location where they participate in other programming. Alternatively, they may prefer the flexibility of accessing these resources through external providers or referrals that better fit their individual circumstances and comfort levels. These findings highlight the importance of flexible, comprehensive wraparound supports and point to the need for further exploration into the specific barriers that prevent participants from accessing needed wellness services and their preferences for how these resources should be delivered.

"We are mindful of young peoples' proximity to trauma, proximity to violence, and how that impacts their ability to show up in these spaces and be workforce ready. As Neighbors in Action, I wholly believe that healing is a part of being able to change those norms, and change people's lives, and help them transform their lives."

– Staff

Internal Barriers

Beyond practical barriers, focus group analysis surfaced internal challenges such as shame, mistrust, and pride that can inhibit young people's engagement with NeON Works. These themes were synthesized across participant discussions, where individuals reflected on how personal hesitations and past experiences with support systems shaped their willingness to participate. Importantly, several program alumni emphasized that benefiting from programming requires not only logistical support but also a personal commitment and belief in its value. As one program participant explained, *"engaging fully in the program often meant overcoming internal doubts and learning to trust both the process and the people offering support"*.

Pre-existing challenges further complicate engagement, with several staff noting barriers such as housing insecurity, food insecurity, and certification prerequisites. Four staff observed that program participants who live farther from sites encounter additional challenges, compounded by participation rules that often restrict non-probation program participants to their local NeON Works sites. As a potential solution, some sites found that offering virtual participation options—first introduced during the

COVID-19 pandemic—successfully expanded access for program participants facing logistical barriers. A summary of the various barriers to participation is included in Table 8.

Table 8. Summary of Barriers to NeON Works Participation

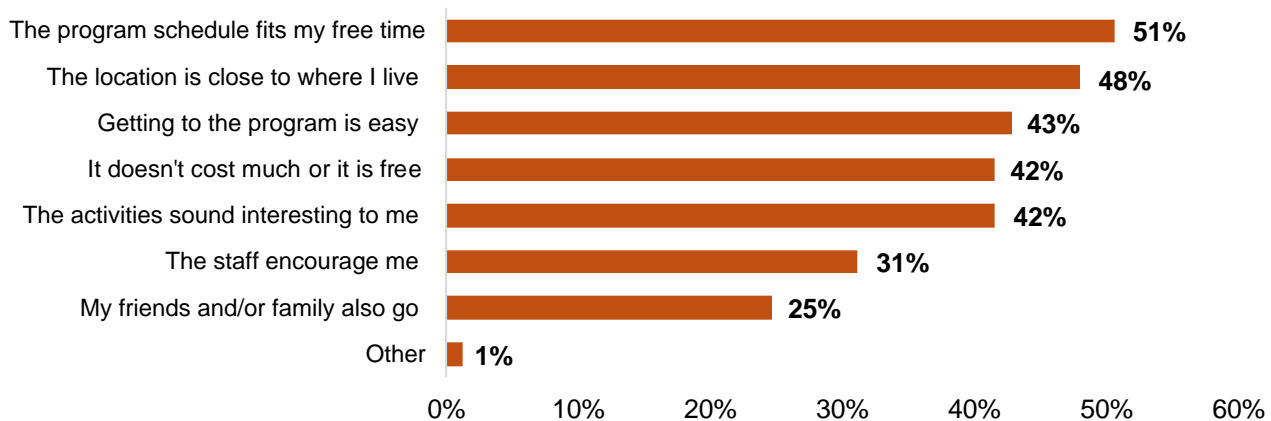
Barrier Type	Specific Barriers Identified	Source(s)
Practical Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work or school commitments • Family caregiving responsibilities • Scheduling conflicts 	Survey, Program participant Focus Groups, Staff Focus Groups
Environmental Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood violence and safety concerns • Transportation barriers • Housing and food insecurity • Limited access to mental health/wellness supports 	Staff Focus Groups, Program Participant Focus Groups, Survey
Internal Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shame, mistrust, and pride • Need for greater personal commitment to benefit from programming 	Program participant Focus Groups, Staff Focus Groups

Facilitators to Participation

In parallel with the barriers described above, participants identified several factors that support their engagement in NeON Works. These facilitators fall into three key categories: practical supports that reduce access burdens, relational dynamics that build trust and motivation, and developmental benefits that create longer-term personal investment in the program.

Practical Supports Lay the Foundation for Engagement

Survey data highlighted the importance of logistical accessibility as a key driver of participation. The most cited facilitators included schedule compatibility (51%), proximity to participants' homes (48%), and transportation ease (43%) (Figure 9). These findings align closely with focus group data, where the majority of program participants emphasized that having a program nearby and available at convenient times made it possible for them to attend. Participants also described how addressing these practical needs created a baseline level of comfort and reduced friction, allowing them to focus on growth and engagement. As one program participant put it, *“Just being able to get here without a hassle makes everything else feel doable.”*

Figure 9. Facilitators for Participation

Source: NeON Works Participant Survey (July 2024 – November 2024), n=77

Note: Respondents could select more than one facilitator. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each option.

Authentic Relationships Deepen Engagement

While survey data ranked “staff encouragement” relatively low (31%) as a facilitator of engagement, focus group discussions offered important context. Eight program participants described how meaningful relationships with staff, particularly those with similar lived experiences, enhanced their sense of belonging and trust in the program. Several noted that staff who were once participants themselves serve as powerful role models and sources of motivation. These accounts suggest that it is not general encouragement that drives participation, but rather authentic, empathetic relationships that reflect shared challenges and successes that make a difference to participants. This nuance is not fully captured in the survey but surfaced consistently across the focus group discussions and interviews.

Community and Personal Growth Sustain Long-Term Participation

Although only 25% of survey respondents cited “friends or family participation” as a motivating factor, focus group participants emphasized broader notions of connection—to both the community and them—as key to participation and engagement. Program participants noted that when NeON Works was embedded in community events or responsive to local needs, they felt more invested in attending and contributing (12.1%). This points to the importance of community alignment in enhancing program credibility and engagement. Moreover, the survey results showed that program content matters to many participants (42% cited “activities sound interesting”) but focus group feedback revealed deeper impacts. Program participants described how program involvement increased their confidence and helped them recognize their own potential (12.1%). These accounts suggest that participation is reinforced not only by content appeal but by how programming contributes to a sense of identity and future purpose.

Focus Area 5. Participant Satisfaction

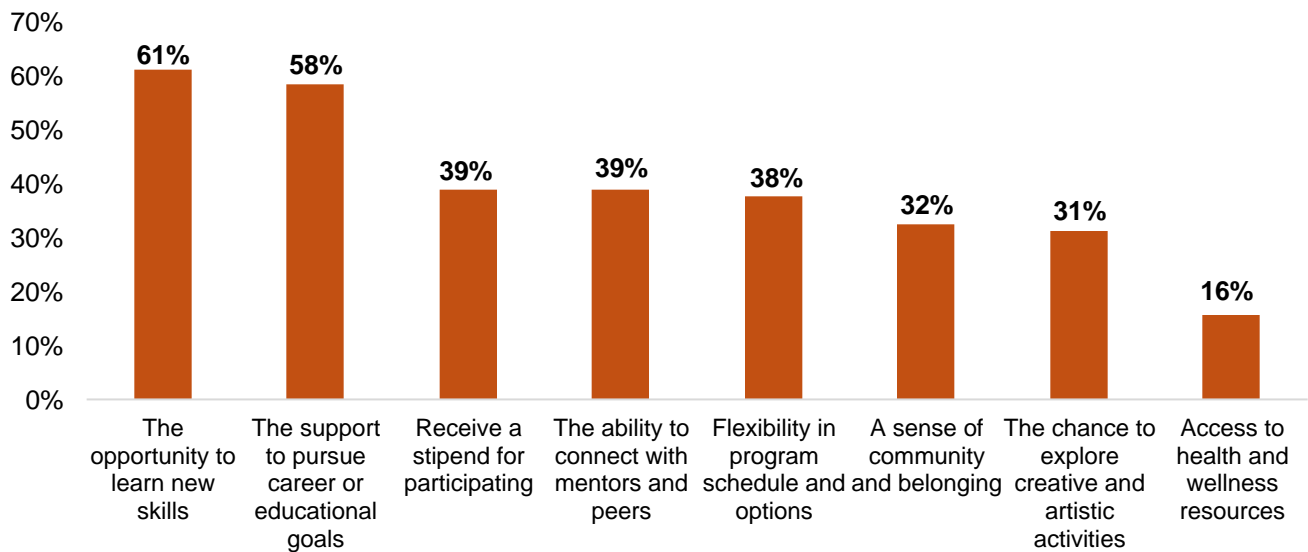
To assess NeON Works’ successes and areas for growth, we examined participant satisfaction and suggestions for continued engagement. We used survey and focus group data to address two evaluation questions: *What aspects of NeON Works do participants find most valuable?* and *What is their level of satisfaction with the support and services provided?*

Using survey and focus group data, this section covers what program participants view as successful program attributes, what activities are most valuable to them, personal program impacts, and what aspects they think could be improved or they wish to see more of. In the following paragraphs, we describe what participants value about NeON Works, how comfort and connection shape participation, and how programming supports personal growth.

What Participants Value About NeON Works

Survey responses highlighted that NeON Works’ personalized approach resonated strongly with participants. Over half of respondents (58%) valued “support to pursue career or educational goals” as a key program benefit. Similarly, 61% highlighted “opportunities to learn new skills” as an important feature. Job training and readiness workshops received the highest satisfaction rating, with 84% of respondents reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied with these offerings. Figure 10 presents important program benefits.

Figure 10. Important Program Benefits



Source: NeON Works Participant Survey (July 2024 – November 2024), n=77

Note: Respondents could select more than one facilitator. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each option.

Focus group findings further illuminate the value of personalized support. The overwhelming majority of program participants emphasized the importance of structured goal setting and tracking measurable progress, which they said helped sustain their motivation and engagement.

How Comfort and Connection Shape Participation

Beyond formal program elements, participants consistently described feelings of comfort and connection as central to their NeON Works experience. Nine program participants reported strong feelings of belonging, often citing relationships with both staff and peers as major motivators for continued participation.

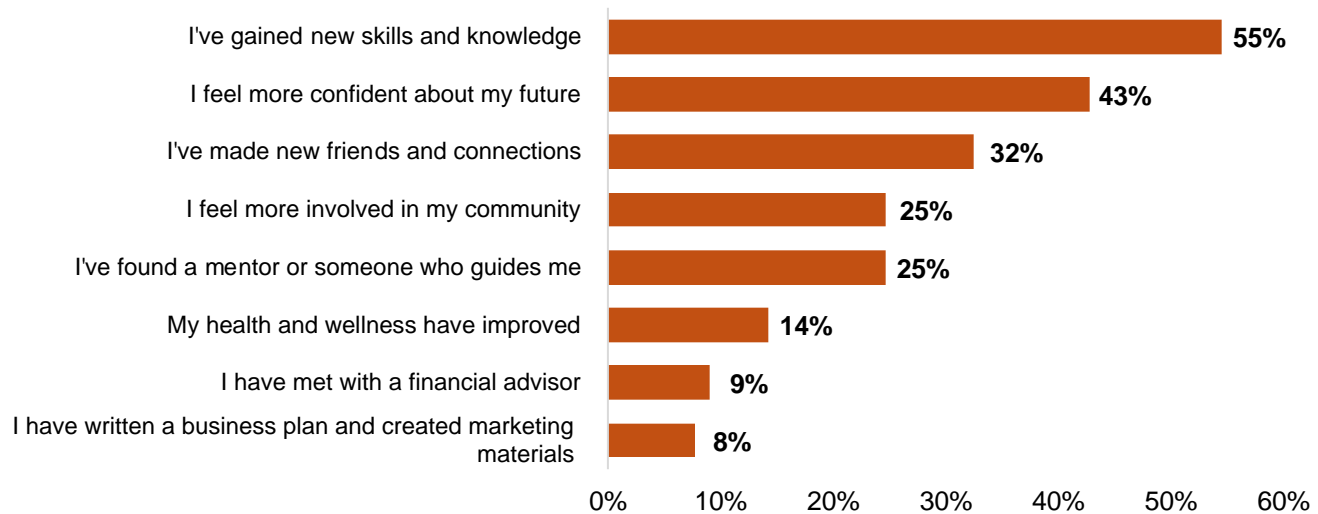
One program participant described the trusting relationships with staff:

"Oh, 'cause it's always fun. She always be makin' us laugh, and then when I come, she always make sure that we're okay, like if we're not—like if we're sad, we can talk to her about our feelings, and she always said, "Oh, whatever happens stays with me. I won't tell nobody," 'cause I know some people, if you tell them something, they're gonna blabber to somebody else, but she doesn't do that. It stays in the room. When I come to bother her, I always come in there and always ask for her."

Observations during NeON Works site visits echoed these sentiments. Workshops fostered a welcoming, interactive environment, with facilitators calling program participants by name and using culturally relevant examples. Both staff and program participants noted that workshop content often shifted based on participants' interests, enhancing engagement. As one staff member explained, *"I mean it all depends on the topic and engagement in conversation that takes place during that group session...It depends on who's in the room. Sometimes we may go off topic, which is okay, and we may talk about something that interests the program participant, which is okay. It does depend on the group that we have in here."*

How Programming Supports Personal Growth

Participation in NeON Works contributed meaningfully to participants' personal development. Program participants reported increased confidence, particularly in public speaking and professional communication (12.1%). Survey data reinforced this theme: 55% of respondents said they had "gained new skills and knowledge," and 43% reported they "feel more confident about their future" because of NeON participation (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Participant Growth and Improvement

Source: NeON Works Participant Survey (July 2024 – November 2024), n=77

Note: Respondents could select more than one facilitator. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected each option.

Several participants shared that program activities helped them develop competencies relevant to their long-term aspirations. One program participant described how NeON Works experiences directly contributed to their career readiness and personal growth:

"I picked up a lot on my public speaking skills and becoming a presenter and just working with children as well. Since the summer, it really showed me how much these people would help me grow, especially me wanting to pursue an education, becoming a doctor, and having to present in front of big groups of people. It definitely helped me, and it pushed me to further my career."

This reflection illustrates how NeON Works not only supports immediate skill-building but also instills a sense of confidence and momentum toward long-term educational and professional goals.

Focus Area 6. Program Outcomes

Program outcomes are central to understanding NeON Works' effectiveness in supporting youth on probation or community supervision across New York City. This section addresses two key evaluation questions: *Is NeON Works supporting participants in achieving their goals, such as completing their education, advancing their careers, or finding employment?* and *Does probation status correlate with variations in enrollment, participation, or program outcomes?*

We drew on administrative data from fiscal years 2021 to 2023, supplemented by survey and focus group findings, to provide a comprehensive view of participant outcomes. The analysis moves beyond simple completion metrics to explore how NeON Works supports program participants' aspirations across education, career development, and employment.

This section is organized around five key areas:

- **Participant Motivation and Goal Setting** – examining how structured goal-setting drives engagement.
- **Educational Outcomes** – analyzing enrollment patterns across age and education levels.
- **Internship and Job Training Participation** – exploring how demographics shape access to workforce opportunities.
- **Job Placement Outcomes** – identifying patterns in employment success.
- **Differences by Probation Status** – assessing equity in program access and outcomes.

Participant Motivation and Goal Setting

NeON Works centers its programming on individualized goal setting, which participants consistently identified as a primary motivator. Both survey and focus group data indicated that participants valued the opportunity to pursue goals that align with their unique circumstances and aspirations. Survey results show that 61% of respondents identified “the opportunity to learn new skills,” and 58% valued “support to pursue career or educational goals” as key program benefits. Focus group participants echoed these themes, describing how structured support helped them stay focused and productive. Most of the participants interviewed emphasized the importance of goal tracking and visible progress. One program participant explained:

“I wanna say it's the fact that NeON makes sure if you do come, they will make it worth your time. There's a lot of worse things you could be doing. At the end of the day, you could be laying in your bed, doin' nothin' all day, or you could come to NeON and actually do something. You go home feeling like, 'Hey, I did somethin' productive today.’”

Program participants also described personal and financial aspirations as intertwined with their participation. For some, especially older participants, financial stability was a motivating force:

“I wanna make a certain amount of money so I'll be very sufficient with myself... More money is better, so I should say pushing on that—money is needed from this.”

Some participants also discussed financial goals as a source of motivation, with a few identifying income and economic stability as their primary reason for participating in job-related activities.

Educational Outcomes

NeON Works offers participants support with high school re-enrollment, high school equivalency (HSE), and post-secondary education. Survey results show that 52% of participants valued educational workshops, although this was slightly lower than those who prioritized job training (55%). However, it's important to note that these survey findings on participant priorities cannot be directly compared to administrative data on actual participation rates, as they represent different measures from different data sources. The survey captures participants' stated preferences and values, while administrative data reflects actual program engagement, which may be influenced by factors such as program capacity, availability of specific services, timing of offerings, or individual barriers to participation that may not be captured in survey responses about preferences. In focus groups, education was frequently

framed as a tool to pursue broader career or life goals. For example, one program participant described how staff helped clarify and affirm long-term academic goals:

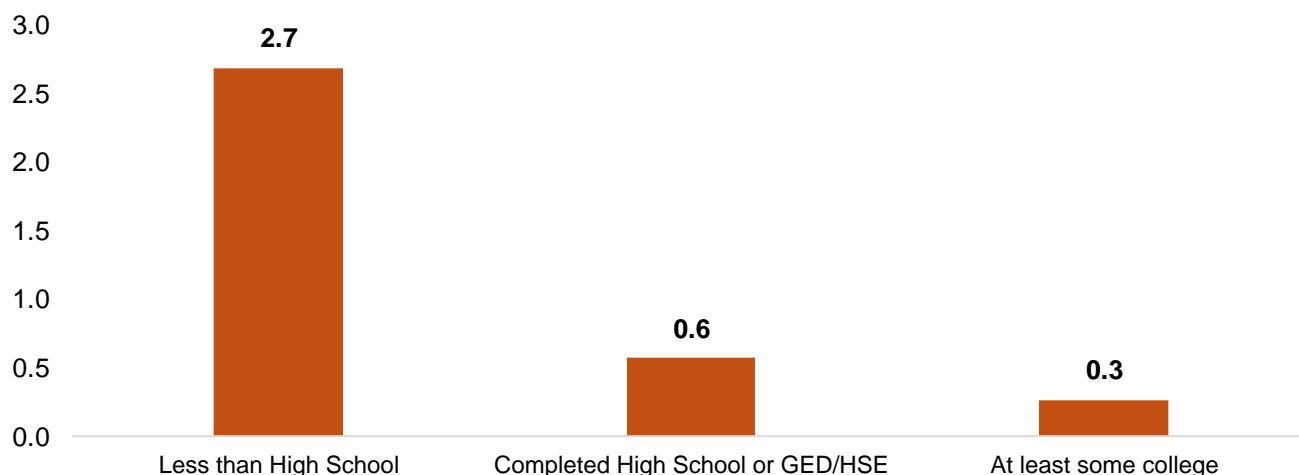
“They really helped me and allowed me to figure out, ‘Okay, if you don’t want to do that, what other career would you like to accomplish in life? What are your personal, financial, and educational goals?’ Once I explained it to them, it was more so like, ‘You have options.’ It made me realize, okay, I’m truly dedicated to what I wanted to do. I wanna pursue my Ph.D., and they made it seem like, ‘Okay, and we’re gonna help you do that.’”

To understand how NeON Works supports these educational goals, we analyzed college enrollment, HSE enrollment, and high school re-enrollment, by age and educational level at intake, and present these below.

Educational Outcomes by Age and Educational Level

The overall level of enrollment in educational programs was low but demonstrated several interesting patterns among types of participants. For example, in Figure 12, the enrollment rate for HSE or high school re-entry programs was more than three times higher among participants without a high school diploma (2.7%) compared to those who had completed high school (0.6%) or had some college experience (0.3%).¹³ However, the fact that participants with high school diplomas or college experience enrolled in these services at any rate warrants further investigation and may indicate data classification issues or suggest that these educational services include components beyond traditional HSE programming, such as remedial education, skills refreshers, or specialized certifications. While the differences between education levels are statistically significant, enrollment rates across all groups remain very low.

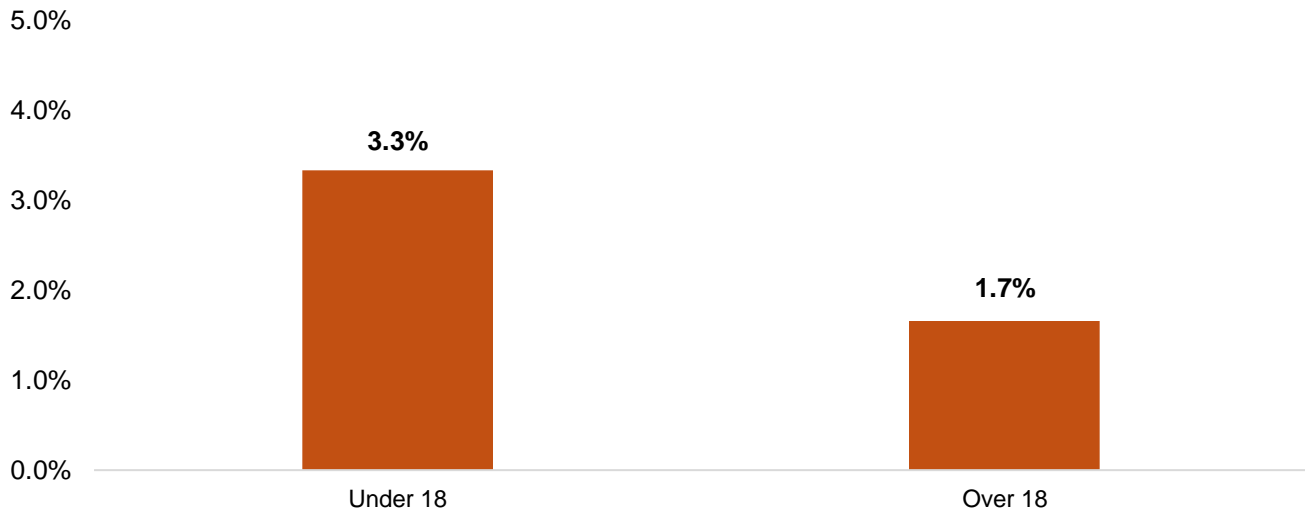
Figure 12. Educational Enrollment by Educational Level



¹³Statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 24.730$, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 13 shows that participants under 18 enrolled in college at higher rates (3.3%) than older participants (1.7%), a statistically significant difference.¹⁴ This likely reflects expected educational trajectories and suggests the importance of tailoring postsecondary support based on participants' age and academic age.

Figure 13. College Enrollment by Age Group



These trends suggest that younger participants are more likely to pursue educational opportunities, while older participants may focus more on immediate employment, consistent with qualitative findings about diverse career paths. Moreover, the general low level of enrollment in educational programs across all groups indicates that this is an area of potential growth and improvement for the NeON Works program.

Internship and Job Training Participation

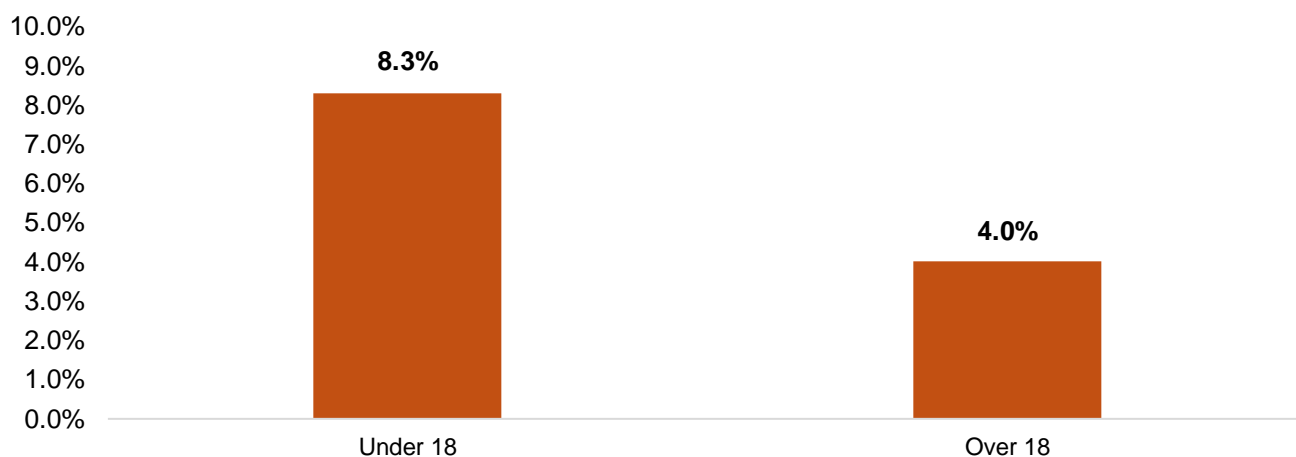
Internships and job training are designed as core components of NeON Works' workforce development strategy. However, actual participation tells a different story: only 5.4% of program participants engaged in internship opportunities, highlighting a substantial implementation challenge. While detailed findings are presented below, participation was generally higher among younger participants and those with less than a high school education, suggesting that internships may be particularly appealing or accessible to these groups, though overall engagement remains low.

Internship Participation Patterns

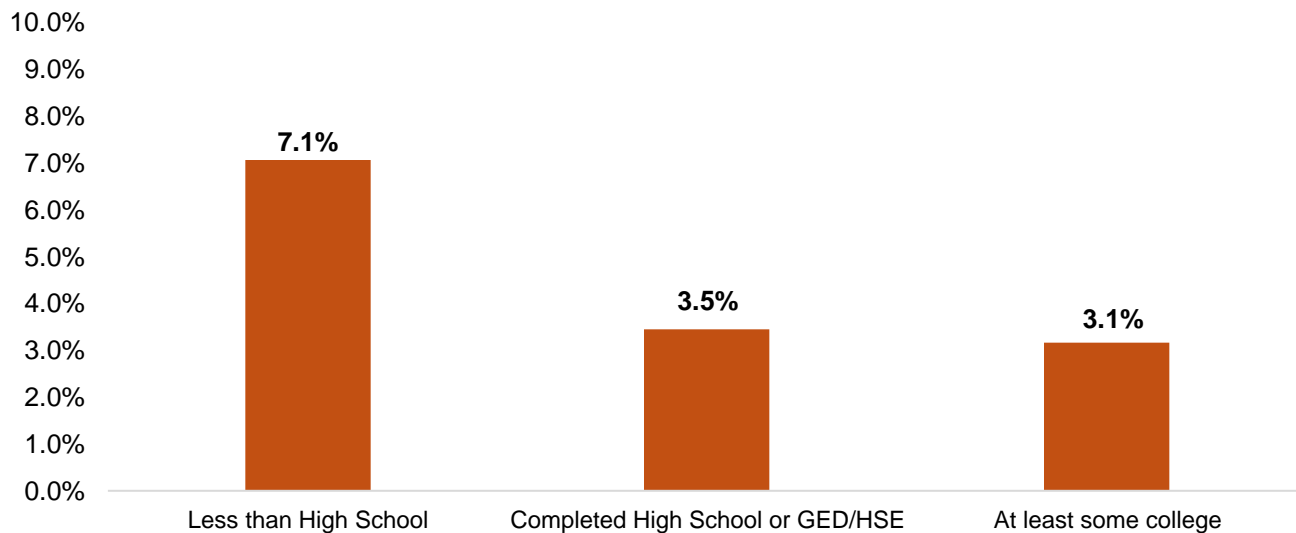
Internship participation (Figure 14) was significantly higher among participants under 18 (8.3%) than among those 18 and older (4.0%).¹⁵

¹⁴Statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 9.783$, $p = 0.002$; $r = -0.053$, $p = 0.002$).

¹⁵Statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 9.345$, $p = 0.002$).

Figure 14. Internship Participation by Age Group

Participants with less than a high school education had the highest internship engagement rate (7.1%), compared to 3.5% of those with a high school diploma or GED/HSE and 3.1% of those with at least some college experience (Figure 15).¹⁶ This pattern may reflect targeted outreach or greater interest among participants with fewer educational credentials, who may view internships as a more critical pathway to gaining work experience and advancing their goals.

Figure 15. Internship Participation by Educational Level

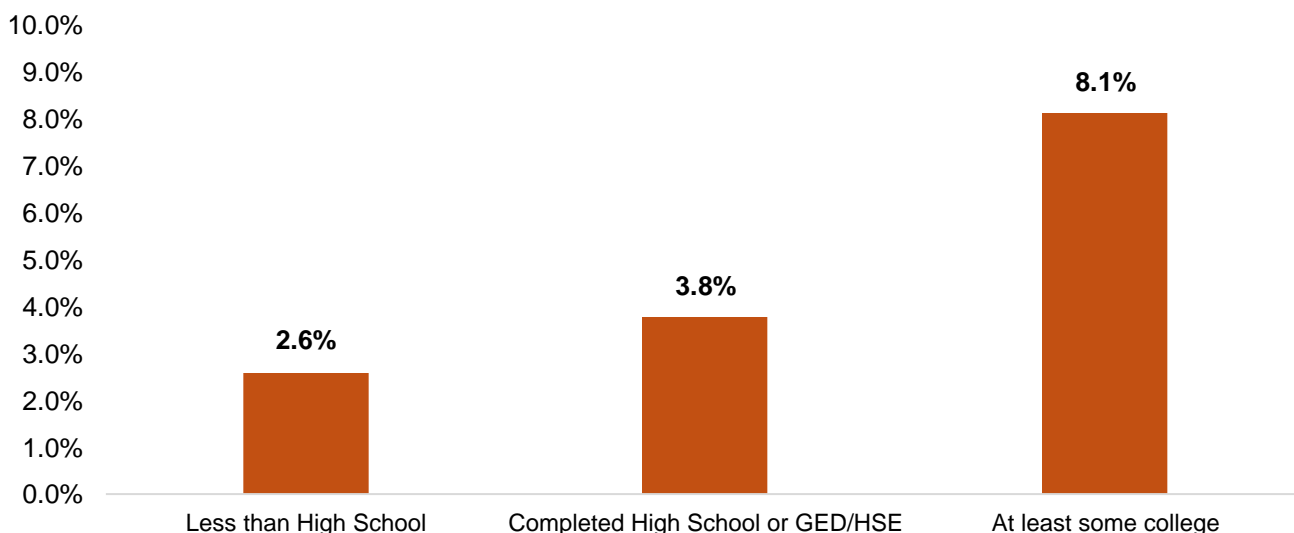
In focus groups at three sites, younger participants shared that the internship offered valuable exposure to professional environments. In contrast, older participants expressed a preference for job placements that offered pay or more immediate advancement.

¹⁶Statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 43.210$, $p < 0.001$).

Job Training Participation Patterns

Job training is another key component of NeON Works' workforce development strategy, including resume assistance, interview preparation, and related employment support. Overall, 3.7% of program participants engaged in these job training opportunities, regardless of educational level, and 3.6% participated regardless of age. This low participation rate stands in contrast to survey findings showing that 55% of participants prioritized job training, highlighting a significant gap between stated interest and actual engagement that may reflect barriers such as service availability, scheduling conflicts, or other implementation challenges. Participation varied across groups: adults (18 and older) engaged at higher rates than youth (4.5% vs. 1.6%)¹⁷, and engagement increased with educational attainment—from 2.6% among those with less than a high school education to 8.1% among those with at least some college (Figure 16).¹⁸ These patterns suggest that job readiness services may be more accessible or relevant to participants who are older and further along in their educational journey, potentially reflecting differences in readiness, interest, or perceived applicability of these opportunities. In focus groups, participants emphasized that training felt most meaningful when it was personalized to their interests and experiences. Workshops were described as welcoming and interactive, with facilitators creating an informal, friendly atmosphere that encouraged participation. Observations across sites revealed that facilitators often knew participants by name, used culturally relevant examples, and adapted content based on who was in the room. At several sites, this personalized approach made sessions feel more engaging and collaborative. As one client shared, *"We were actually learning from each other, not just from [the instructor]."*

Figure 16. Job Training by Educational Level



¹⁷Statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 18.443$, $p < 0.001$).

¹⁸Statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 26.742$, $p < 0.001$).

Job Placement Outcomes

Job placement is a key outcome tracked through NeON Works' administrative data. Patterns reveal significant variation by participant age and educational background.

Job Placement by Age and Education

Overall, 12.4% of program participants obtained a job placement. Figure 17 shows that participants age 18 and older had significantly higher job placement rates (14.7%) compared to those under 18 (7.7%).¹⁹ This difference may reflect employers' preference for hiring adults or older participants' greater work readiness and availability, suggesting that younger participants may require additional support or tailored placement strategies to achieve similar outcomes.

The overall low placement rate suggests several areas for program improvement and further investigation. Factors contributing to limited job placement success may include the structural barriers discussed throughout this report—such as housing instability, transportation challenges, and competing priorities—as well as potential gaps in employer partnerships, job readiness preparation, or follow-up support. Moving forward, the program may benefit from enhanced employer engagement strategies, more intensive job readiness components, extended post-placement support, and targeted interventions to address the specific barriers that prevent participants from successfully transitioning to employment.

Figure 17. Job Placement by Age Group

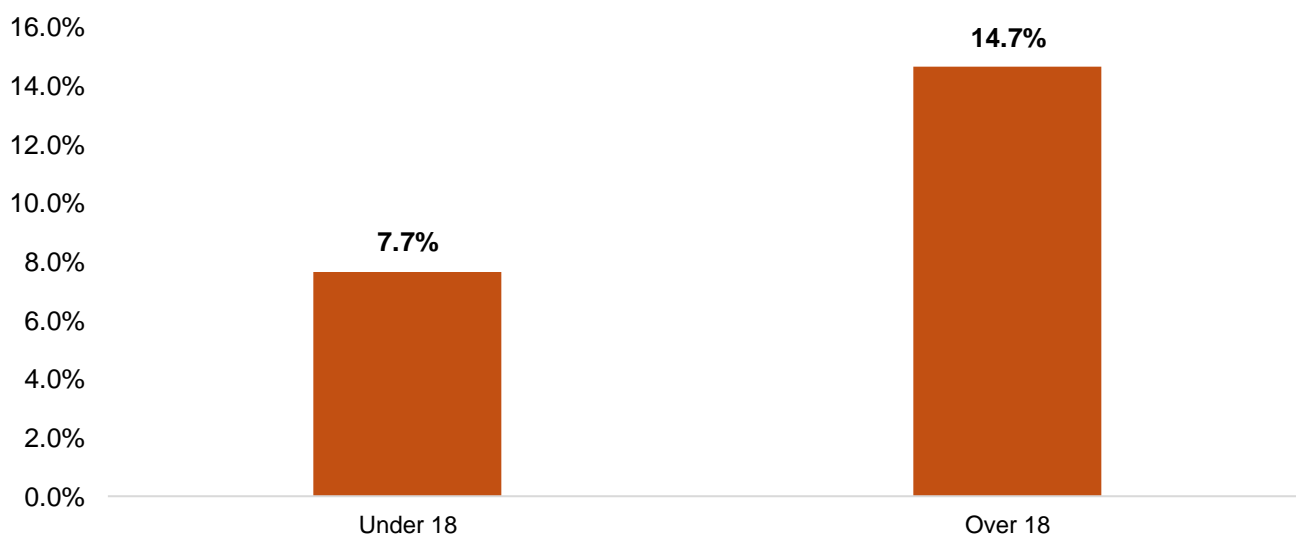


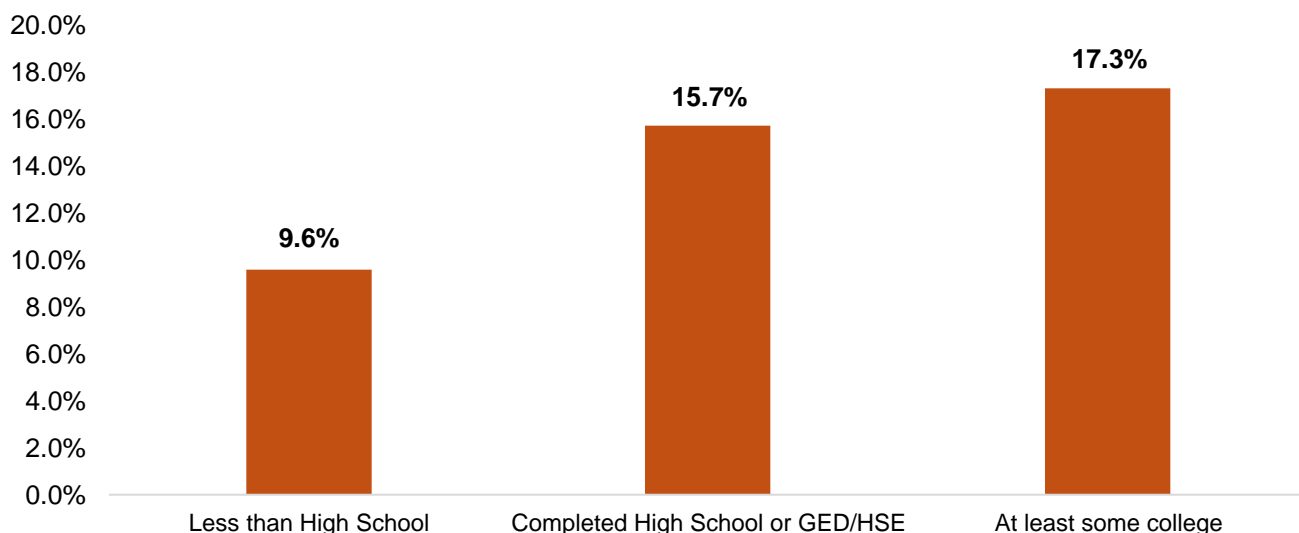
Figure 18 shows that job placement also increased with educational attainment: 17.3% of participants with some college experience secured employment, compared to 15.7% of high school graduates and 9.6% of those without a high school diploma.²⁰ These patterns mirror broader labor market trends, where higher educational attainment is consistently associated with better employment outcomes.

¹⁹Statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 15.288$, $p < 0.001$).

²⁰Statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 23.106$, $p < 0.001$).

Research consistently shows that individuals with higher levels of education face lower unemployment rates and have greater access to job opportunities, suggesting that the disparities observed in NeON Works reflect systemic barriers that extend beyond the program itself.

Figure 18. Job Placement by Educational Level



Focus group data with staff and program participants at three sites consistently pointed to the importance of job placement for participants with financial responsibilities or immediate needs. Staff noted that adult participants often ask whether program offerings will result in a job, and that placement is frequently the top concern for older program participants.

Given the importance of job placement to participants, this is an area for improvement for the NeON Works program.

Differences by Probation Status

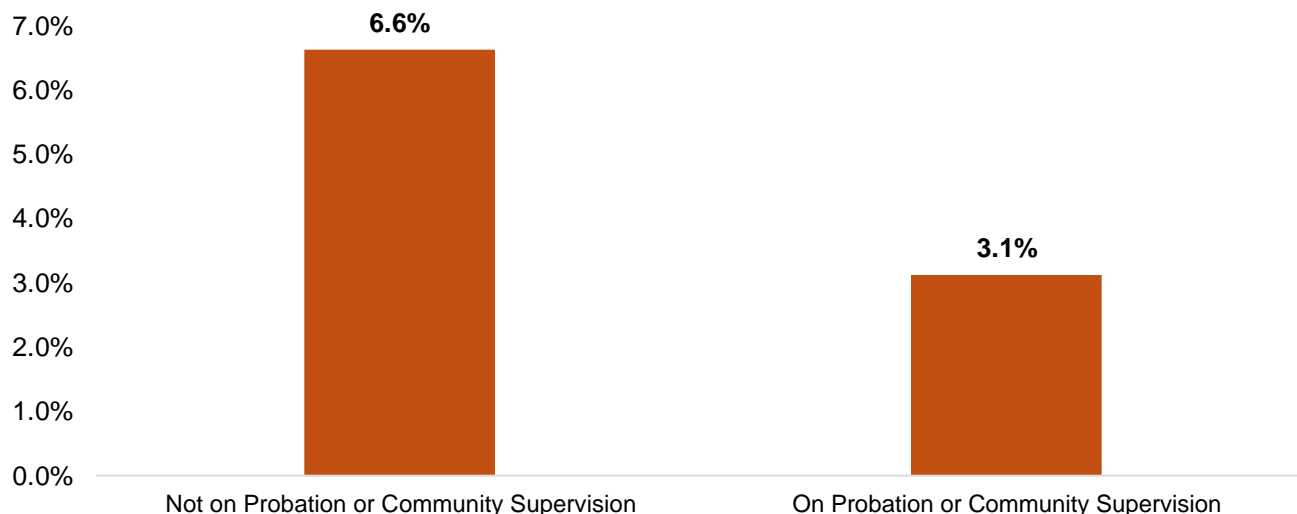
A central goal of NeON Works is to support both youth on probation or community supervision and youth not on probation or community supervision in their career and educational pathways. As such, it is critical to assess whether probation status is associated with differential access to programming or outcomes. This analysis helps evaluate the program's success in promoting equitable service delivery and minimizing systemic disparities.

Program Access and Participation

Administrative data show a small but statistically significant gap in internship participation between participants on probation or community supervision and not on probation or community supervision. While the overall level of completion of internships was low (below 10 percent), 6.6% of participants not on probation or community supervision completed internships compared to 3.1% of those with on

probation or community supervision.²¹ In contrast, job training participation rates were similar between the two groups (4.1% for on probation or community supervision and 3.3% for others; $p = 0.208$), suggesting more equitable access to this workforce development pathway.

Figure 19. Internship Participation by Probation Status



In focus groups, staff at two sites reported that youth on probation or community supervision may face greater barriers to accessing internships due to external constraints such as site restrictions, background checks, and fewer referral options. However, they also emphasized that staff worked actively to mitigate these barriers by identifying alternative placements or advocating for their program participants. One staff member explained:

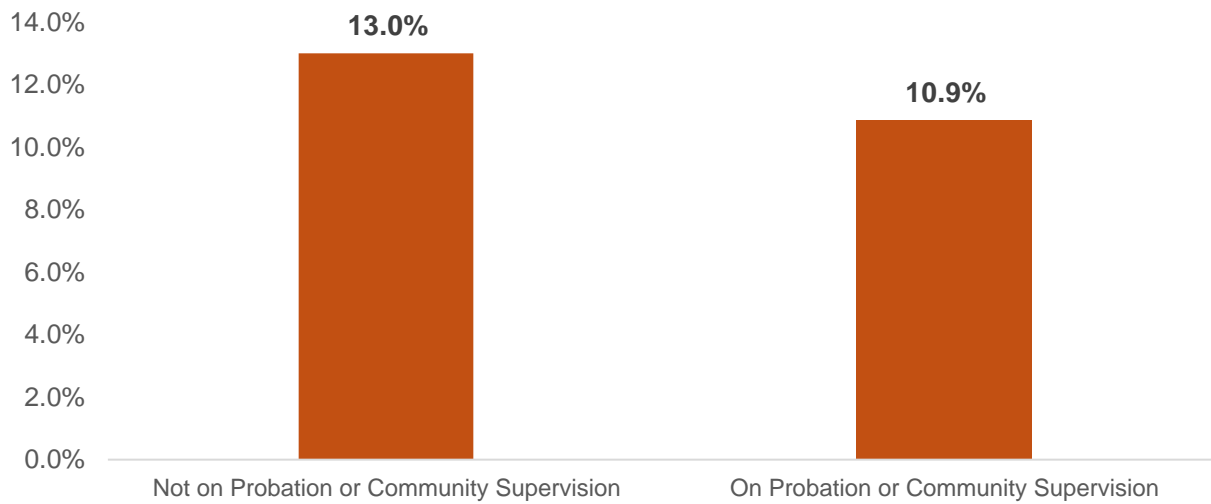
“We try to prep them. We explain what comes up on background checks and how to talk about it. They’re ready. They just need the chance.”

Job Placement by Probation Status

Overall, 12.3% of program participants obtained a job placement. Figure 20 shows that placement rates were similar between participants on probation or community supervision (10.9%) and those not on probation or community supervision (13%), with no statistically significant difference.²² This similar level of job placement rates is encouraging and may reflect the intensive support that program participants on probation or community supervision receive from NeON Works staff.

²¹Statistically significant difference ($r = -0.072$, $p < 0.001$).

²²Not statistically significant ($r = -0.031$, $p = 0.071$).

Figure 20. Job Placement by Probation Status

Key Findings and Recommendations

This section synthesizes the evaluation findings by thematic area, aligning directly with the key evaluation questions. It highlights what is working well, where gaps remain, and offers actionable recommendations for improving NeON Works.

Implementation Prioritization Framework

While all recommendations work synergistically to strengthen NeON Works, resource constraints require strategic prioritization. We recommend a three-tier implementation approach based on cost, implementation complexity, and potential for immediate impact:

Tier 1 (High Impact, Lower Cost - 0-6 months) includes enhancing digital outreach and signage (see Recruitment and Retention), implementing structured feedback tools (see Participant Satisfaction), reinstating hybrid programming (see Barriers and Participation Supports), and developing peer ambassador models (see Recruitment and Retention). These initiatives leverage existing resources and infrastructure while addressing immediate accessibility barriers that prevent eligible youth from engaging with programming.

Tier 2 (High Impact, Moderate Cost - 6-18 months) focuses on increasing staffing to reduce caseloads (see Implementation and Programming), expanding cohort-based programming (see Implementation and Programming), and creating formal safety protocols (see Barriers and Participation Supports). These investments require budget increases but directly address the capacity constraints that limit NeON Works' ability to provide the personalized support that drives participant satisfaction and outcomes.

Tier 3 (Transformative, Higher Investment - 12+ months) encompasses comprehensive wraparound partnerships (see Barriers and Participation Supports), justice-friendly employer network development (see Outcomes and Impact), targeted campaigns for underrepresented groups (see Recruitment and Retention), and longitudinal outcome tracking systems (see Outcomes and Impact). These systemic changes require significant coordination across multiple stakeholders but position NeON Works to achieve equity goals and demonstrate sustained impact.

This phased approach allows the City to achieve early wins that build momentum and stakeholder confidence while establishing the foundation for more comprehensive improvements.

Reach and Equity

What we found:

NeON Works is reaching both youth on probation or community supervision and the broader community, with 33% of participants on probation or community supervision. However, completion rates and job placement outcomes are low and vary across age, education level, and probation status.

Younger program participants and those without high school diplomas participate less in job training or placement programs.

Recommendations:

- **Strengthen targeted outreach and support for younger and lower-education program participants to improve engagement in career pathways.** For younger participants (under 18), develop age-appropriate programming that aligns with school schedules by offering after-school and weekend options, creating youth-specific cohorts focused on foundational skills like financial literacy and career exploration, and partnering with high schools to integrate NeON Works into existing educational pathways. **For participants without high school diplomas**, establish prerequisite skill-building workshops covering basic computer literacy and workplace communication, offer integrated programming that combines GED preparation with career readiness training, and provide additional case management support with reduced caseloads (1:10 ratio)²³ to address multiple barriers simultaneously. Both populations would benefit from **tiered pathways** that allow participants to progress from basic skills to job training to placement at their own pace, rather than expecting immediate job readiness.
- **Monitor equity across sites using disaggregated data and adjust programming to address disparities.** Implement **quarterly equity dashboards** tracking participation, retention, and outcomes by age, education level, race, and probation status across all sites, with site-specific targets based on neighborhood demographics. **Create early warning systems** that flag when certain populations show declining participation or outcomes, triggering immediate intervention protocols. **Adjust programming based on data patterns:** for sites with low younger participant retention, implement extended onboarding periods and peer buddy systems; for sites with education disparities, establish partnerships with adult education providers; for sites with probation involvement gaps, increase probation officer engagement and create justice-involved specific programming tracks. **Establish cross-site learning networks** where high-performing sites in specific equity areas share strategies and provide technical assistance to sites struggling with similar populations.
- **Use participant feedback loops to better understand drop-off points and tailor supports accordingly.** To achieve this, **implement systematic tracking of participant engagement patterns** to identify common drop-off points, including after intake (weeks 2-4), during transition from workshops to job placement (months 3-4), and when participants face competing life demands such as employment or family crises. Building on this data collection, **establish regular feedback mechanisms** including monthly check-ins with all participants, exit interviews with those who leave early, and quarterly focus groups to understand evolving barriers. Based on these insights, **develop targeted interventions** for identified drop-off points: for early departures, enhance the intake process with more realistic expectation-setting and immediate goal achievement opportunities; for mid-program departures, create bridge supports during transitions between program phases; and for life-demand related departures, offer flexible program re-engagement options and maintain supportive contact during breaks. Finally, **create rapid response protocols** that trigger outreach within 48 hours when participants miss two consecutive sessions.

²³ Current caseload ratios vary significantly across sites, with some focus group interviews revealing ratios as high as 200:1, highlighting the need for substantial staffing improvements to achieve recommended levels.

Recruitment and Retention

What we found:

Word-of-mouth recruitment dominates (44% via friends/family), demonstrating community trust and satisfaction. However, formal outreach—especially digital—remains limited, and some sites lack visible signage or online presence.

Recommendations:

- **Develop a formal peer ambassador model to leverage organic recruitment:** Create a structured program that formalizes the existing word-of-mouth network by recruiting current participants who demonstrate high engagement and satisfaction to serve as peer ambassadors. **These ambassadors would receive basic training** covering specific program benefits (such as improved health outcomes, cost savings, convenience factors), key talking points about eligibility requirements and enrollment processes, and simple communication skills for community conversations. **Ambassadors would then host informal coffee chats in community spaces**, attend health fairs and neighborhood gatherings, and **serve as mentors helping new participants navigate initial appointments** and program requirements. The model should include **modest incentives such as \$25-50 gift cards** for ambassadors per successful referral, recognition certificates or small branded items, and program service credits. **Provide ambassadors with business cards** containing their contact information and program details, simple one-page flyers highlighting key benefits, and a basic script or FAQ sheet to help them answer common questions confidently. In practice, this could look like recruiting 3-5 enthusiastic participants per site who commit to 2-3 hours monthly of outreach activities. They might set up information tables at local grocery stores, libraries, or community centers where they can share their personal success stories while distributing materials. **The peer connection addresses trust barriers** that often prevent community members from engaging with formal programs, as potential participants hear directly from neighbors who "look like them" and understand their circumstances. **Consider pairing new ambassadors with experienced ones** for their first few outreach events, and hold monthly ambassador meetings to share successful strategies, address challenges, and celebrate recruitment successes.
- **Enhance visibility through coordinated digital outreach and signage at provider sites:** To create a comprehensive approach, **strengthen both online and physical presence by developing or enhancing websites and social media** for NeON Works provider sites with clear information about workforce development opportunities, vocational certification programs available (like food handler certification, financial literacy training), eligibility requirements for young adults aged 16-24, and the stipend structure based on participation and goal attainment. Building on this foundation, **create Instagram and TikTok accounts featuring success stories** of program graduates who have secured employment, earned GEDs, or gained vocational certifications, alongside posts highlighting upcoming workshops like "Planning My Future: Growth and Development" sessions. To complement the digital presence, **install clear exterior signage at all seven neighborhood locations** that specifically mentions "Free job training," "Earn while you learn," and "Ages 16-24 welcome", ensuring the messaging resonates with young adults who may

be skeptical of traditional programming. Finally, **include QR codes on all materials** that link directly to enrollment forms or text-based contact methods that young adults prefer over phone calls. For implementation, we recommend **designating one lead site to coordinate the digital strategy** while allowing each location to contribute content that reflects their specific community and participant successes. This lead site could manage the central social media accounts, create content templates for consistent messaging, and provide training to other sites on social media best practices. **Each individual site would then contribute local content** such as participant spotlights, community event photos, and neighborhood-specific job opportunities, while the lead site ensures brand consistency and manages the overall posting schedule. **Consider rotating the lead role annually** or appointing co-leads from different sites to prevent burnout and ensure all locations feel invested in the digital outreach strategy.

- **Consider targeted campaigns for underrepresented groups or neighborhoods with lower reach:** To begin, **analyze current enrollment data across the seven target neighborhoods** to identify specific blocks or housing developments with lower participation rates among eligible young adults aged 16-24. Based on this analysis, **develop hyper-local campaigns that address common barriers** this population faces, such as transportation to program sites, childcare during workshop hours, or concerns about how participation might affect their probation status. To build credibility, **partner with local barbershops, bodegas, community centers, and youth-serving organizations** like PAL centers or local churches that already have established relationships within these communities. Additionally, **create targeted outreach specifically for young parents** by partnering with WIC offices and childcare centers, emphasizing how NeON Works' flexible scheduling and stipend payments can support their family responsibilities while building career skills. Similarly, **develop campaigns targeting young adults who may have aged out of other youth programs**, highlighting that NeON Works serves participants up to age 24 and offers "second chance" opportunities for those who want to change their life trajectory through workforce development. These **campaign strategies could include building relationships with high schools and alternative education programs** to reach students nearing graduation or those who have recently dropped out, creating information sessions during lunch periods or after-school programs. Furthermore, **partner with local nonprofits** such as homeless shelters, food banks, and job training organizations that serve similar populations, offering to present at their client meetings or include NeON Works information in their resource packets. Complementing these efforts, **develop social media campaigns featuring participant success stories and testimonials that can be shared across multiple platforms including Instagram, TikTok, community Facebook groups**. These different platforms may be particularly effective for reaching diverse audience segments: Facebook tends to have broader age demographics and stronger community-based networks, while platforms like TikTok and Instagram may reach different audience segments, allowing for targeted outreach strategies across diverse demographics. Finally, **consider hosting "pop-up" information sessions** at community events, local festivals, or outside SNAP/benefits offices where eligible youth are likely to be present.

Implementation and Programming

What we found:

Program participants value personalized intake, staff who share lived experiences, and curated training based on interests. Still, staff capacity is stretched, and some sites lack the resources to offer consistent incentives or excursions that reinforce engagement.

Recommendations:

- **Increase staffing to reduce caseloads and deepen support for program participants.** The evaluation findings consistently highlight that **staff capacity constraints limit the personalized support** that makes NeON Works effective. To address this, sites need **additional case managers to achieve industry-standard ratios of approximately 1:10²⁴** for comprehensive case management that includes individualized intake, career coaching, and ongoing support. Beyond case managers, sites should **hire dedicated employment specialists** who can focus primarily on job placement services and maintaining relationships with employers, separate from case management functions. This staffing expansion should also include **peer support specialists** - individuals with lived experiences similar to participants who can provide authentic mentorship and bridge relationships between formal staff and participants. **Administrative support staff** are equally critical to free up direct service workers from data entry and coordination tasks, allowing them to focus on relationship-building and service delivery that participants value most.
- **Expand cohort-based and interest-driven programming with intentional pacing and scheduling.** Building on participant feedback about valuing curated training based on interests, sites should **formalize cohort models** that keep groups of participants together as they progress through training or certification programs to encourage sustained engagement and peer support. These cohorts should be **organized around participant-identified interests** such as healthcare, technology, or trades, with programming that progresses from foundational skills to advanced training to job placement support. **Flexible scheduling within cohorts** must accommodate the competing demands participants face, offering both traditional daytime programming and evening/weekend options for those balancing work, school, or family responsibilities. Sites should also **implement staggered start dates** throughout the year rather than rigid enrollment periods, allowing participants to join cohorts when they're ready rather than waiting for the next cycle, while maintaining **intentional pacing** that builds skills progressively without overwhelming participants with competing priorities.
- **Build shared learning infrastructure across sites to spread effective strategies.** The variation in implementation across sites indicates a need for **formal knowledge-sharing systems** that capture and disseminate successful practices like trauma-informed intake processes and experiential learning models observed during site visits. This requires **monthly cross-site coordination meetings** where site leaders share challenges, successes, and innovative approaches, with

²⁴Industry standards for intensive case management typically recommend ratios between 1:10 and 1:20 for comprehensive services including career coaching and barrier identification. Current caseload ratios vary significantly across sites, with some focus group interviews revealing ratios as high as 200:1, highlighting the need for substantial staffing improvements to achieve recommended levels.

structured protocols for documenting and replicating effective strategies. **Peer site visits and mentoring relationships** should be established between high-performing and struggling sites, particularly around relationship-building practices and community engagement strategies that drive participant satisfaction. Additionally, **standardized training modules** should be developed for core program components like intake procedures and workshop facilitation, while still allowing for local adaptation based on community needs and participant demographics.

- **Better align contract payment structure with participant outcomes to incentivize achievement and sustained engagement.** The current funding structure should be revised to **reward both traditional outcomes and supportive connections** that help participants progress toward their goals, recognizing that meaningful engagement often precedes formal employment or educational achievements. **Performance-based payment tiers** should include incentives for reaching intermediate milestones such as completing assessments, attending workshops consistently, obtaining certifications, and maintaining engagement for specific timeframes, not just final job placements. This structure should also **fund the wraparound services and incentives** that participants and staff identify as crucial for engagement, including transportation support, childcare assistance, and celebration activities that build community. **Flexible funding mechanisms** should allow sites to provide individualized supports based on participant needs while maintaining accountability for outcomes, ensuring that the "one-size-fits-one" approach is financially sustainable rather than dependent on sites stretching limited resources.

Barriers and Participation Supports

What we found:

Participants face a range of practical (work/school conflicts), structural (transportation, housing), and internal (shame, mistrust) barriers. Staff and program participants both highlighted how trauma and safety concerns can undermine participation. Virtual offerings helped, but were inconsistent across sites.

Recommendations:

- **Reinstate and scale hybrid programming to improve accessibility.** Given the diversity of participant schedules and life demands, hybrid programming offers critical flexibility for engagement. NeON Works should reinstate virtual options for workshops, case management check-ins, and peer support groups to complement in-person programming. All sites should be equipped with the necessary technology infrastructure and staff training to ensure consistent, high-quality virtual delivery. Clear guidance and shared tools should be developed to streamline hybrid practices across sites. Where appropriate, participants should be able to choose their preferred mode of participation without penalty, reducing barriers related to commuting, caregiving, and safety concerns.
- **Create formal safety protocols tailored to each site's context.** Participants and staff both cited safety as a key concern, particularly in navigating between and within program sites. This includes participants' fears about traveling to certain sites due to neighborhood violence or crime, as well as concerns about personal safety while attending programming. Each site should engage participants, staff, and local community members in developing safety plans that reflect the specific dynamics of

their neighborhoods. These protocols should include strategies for managing on-site conflicts, procedures for supporting participants experiencing community violence or trauma, and clear communication channels for reporting concerns. Staff should be trained in de-escalation and trauma-informed crisis response, and safety measures—such as secure entrances, lighting, and proximity to public transit—should be reviewed regularly. Transparent safety planning can help reduce mistrust and make participants feel more secure in attending programs.

- **Review transportation allowance to ensure that there is enough funding to meet participants' transportation needs.** Inadequate transportation support remains a significant barrier to consistent attendance, particularly for youth traveling from across boroughs or navigating housing instability. The current transportation allowance should be reviewed for adequacy and flexibility, with input from youth and staff. Sites should ensure that Metro Cards are readily available and distributed in a timely and manner. Consideration should also be given to expanding eligibility to cover transportation for related needs such as job interviews, training programs, and social services. Transparent guidelines should be shared so participants understand how and when they can access this support.
- **Partner with local organizations to address food insecurity, mental health, and housing needs that interfere with workforce readiness.** Participants' ability to focus on workforce development is often compromised by unmet basic needs. NeON Works should deepen partnerships with community-based organizations that specialize in wraparound supports, including emergency food access, mental health services, and housing stability. Sites could establish regular office hours or rotating on-site services from trusted providers, making these supports more accessible. Formal referral pathways should be tracked to ensure participants receive timely assistance. Embedding this support into the program—not treating it as ancillary—helps affirm a holistic approach to readiness and reinforces the message that participants' full selves are welcome.

Participant Satisfaction

What we found:

Strong relationships with staff drive trust and encourage ongoing participation. Comfort and belonging were central themes in both survey and focus group responses.

Recommendations:

- **Preserve and support staff-program participant relationship-building through training, coaching, and realistic caseloads.** The foundation of NeON Works' success lies in authentic relationships between staff and participants, which requires **reducing caseloads to industry-standard ratios of 1:10** for comprehensive case management. This will necessitate hiring additional case managers across all sites to ensure staff have adequate time to build meaningful connections with each participant. To support these relationships, sites should implement **trauma-informed care training** that focuses on creating psychologically safe environments and using strength-based approaches. **Weekly reflective supervision** between supervisors and direct service staff will help process challenging cases and prevent burnout, while **peer learning networks among staff** across

sites can facilitate sharing of relationship-building strategies, particularly from staff who share similar backgrounds with participants.

- **Incorporate structured feedback tools to regularly assess and respond to satisfaction levels.** Participant voice is essential to ensuring that programming remains responsive and relevant. NeON Works should implement structured feedback mechanisms—such as quarterly anonymous surveys—to gather participants' insights on staff support, programming relevance, and overall experience. These tools should be co-developed with youth input to ensure accessibility and cultural resonance. Data collected should be reviewed monthly by a cross-functional team, including youth representatives, to identify patterns and prioritize adjustments. Importantly, a transparent feedback loop must be established so participants can see how their input leads to tangible improvements, building trust and reinforcing their role as co-creators of the program.
- **Continue culturally responsive facilitation practices that reflect participants' lived experiences.** Cultural responsiveness must remain central to the program's pedagogy to foster belonging, engagement, and relevance. Facilitators should receive ongoing professional development on culturally sustaining practices, including how to embed participants' identities, histories, and communities into session content and delivery methods. Curriculum should be flexible enough to incorporate current social issues and participant-driven topics, ensuring sessions feel timely and affirming. Focus group participants and PAC members emphasized how impactful it was to have case managers who were from their community or former NeON Works participants themselves. These staff members brought authenticity, relatability, and a deep understanding of participants' experiences. As such, hiring and retaining staff with lived experience—especially alumni of the program and those from the communities served—should be prioritized.

Outcomes and Impact

What we found:

Participants report gains in skills, confidence, and goal clarity. Older participants were more likely to secure jobs, while younger ones engaged more in education. Youth on probation or community supervision had similar employment outcomes but less access to internships than those not involved in probation services.

Recommendations:

- Track outcomes by age, probation status, and education to identify equity gaps. **Develop differentiated programming pathways that address the specific needs and strengths of different participant populations. Create age-appropriate career development tracks** that leverage the finding that older participants are more likely to secure jobs while younger participants engage more in education. **For participants 18 and older**, implement accelerated job placement programming with intensive employer partnerships, immediate income opportunities through paid internships, and fast-track certification programs in high-demand fields. **For participants under 18**, develop education-to-career bridge programming that combines academic support with career exploration, includes mentorship from slightly older program graduates, and offers summer intensive

programs that provide both educational credit and workforce experience. **Establish flexible programming calendars** that accommodate the different life circumstances of each age group, with evening and weekend options for older participants who may be working, and school-year programming for younger participants

- **Strengthen employer engagement and job placement infrastructure to increase overall placement rates.** Hire **dedicated employment specialists** at each site who focus exclusively on cultivating employer relationships, conducting job development outreach, and coordinating placement activities separate from case management functions. Establish **formal employer advisory councils** that provide input on in-demand skills, hiring practices, and workplace expectations while creating a pipeline of committed hiring partners. Implement **intensive job search support** including weekly job club meetings, one-on-one interview preparation, and immediate follow-up with employers post-interview. Create **rapid response protocols** for job opportunities, ensuring participants can be matched and prepared for openings within 48-72 hours. Develop **sector-specific training cohorts** aligned with local labor market demands, particularly in healthcare support, retail, food service, and administrative roles that offer entry-level opportunities with advancement potential.
- **Prioritize internship development for youth on probation or community supervision, who face additional eligibility restrictions.** Build a **specialized network of justice-friendly employers** who are committed to providing internship opportunities regardless of background check results, including social enterprises, community-based organizations, and companies with established second-chance hiring policies. **Develop internal capacity-building internships** within NeON Works sites and partner organizations that provide meaningful work experience while participants build skills and references. **Create individual advocacy with employers and preparation protocols** that help individuals on probation or community supervision navigate background check conversations, provide legal support for record sealing or expungement when appropriate, and offer intensive pre-internship preparation including mock interviews and workplace scenario training. **Establish mentorship partnerships** between individuals on probation or community supervision and professionals with similar backgrounds who can provide guidance and open doors to opportunities.
- **Implement comprehensive milestone tracking and celebration systems to reinforce long-term goals and demonstrate program impact.** Develop **individualized milestone maps** for each participant that break down long-term goals into achievable short-term steps, with celebrations and incentives for each milestone reached rather than only final outcomes. **Create portfolio development systems** where participants document their skill development, completed training, work samples, and personal growth through digital or physical portfolios that serve both as tracking tools and job application materials. **Establish peer recognition and success sharing programs** including monthly celebrations of participant achievements, peer mentorship opportunities for those who reach specific milestones, and alumni networks that maintain connection and provide ongoing support. **Implement longitudinal follow-up protocols** that track participants for 12-18 months after program completion to measure long-term employment retention, wage progression, and continued education enrollment, using this data to refine programming and demonstrate sustained impact to funders and stakeholders.

Conclusion: Lessons and Implications

The NeON Works program offers a compelling model for workforce development that centers equity, personalization, and healing. Through a “one-size-fits-one” approach, NeON Works reaches young people often overlooked or underserved by traditional job training programs—those balancing legal system involvement, educational disruptions, trauma, and economic insecurity. However, the evaluation findings reveal that while participants report high satisfaction and gains in skills and confidence, job placement rates remain low across all sites and participant groups. At its best, NeON Works creates environments where young people feel seen, supported, and believed in, but translating this strong foundation of trust and engagement into employment outcomes requires targeted improvements to employer partnerships, job development capacity, and placement infrastructure.

This success, however, is not uniform. Program implementation and impact vary by site, participant age, probation status, and staffing capacity. While youth on probation or community supervision and community members both benefit from the model, differences in access to internships and training opportunities highlight how systemic barriers—like background checks and geographic restrictions—continue to shape trajectories. Likewise, younger program participants are less likely to complete job-related activities, suggesting a need for more developmentally appropriate supports and pacing.

Participants report high satisfaction, but sustaining engagement remains a challenge. Structural barriers like housing instability, safety concerns, and limited access to transportation intersect with internalized barriers such as mistrust, stigma, and fear of failure. These realities underscore that workforce readiness cannot be separated from emotional readiness and basic needs stability. As staff in multiple focus groups noted, meaningful engagement often begins not with resume prep, but with healing and connection.

Staff, too, are stretched thin. With caseloads at some sites exceeding 200 program participants per worker, even the most committed practitioners face burnout and limitations in the support they can offer. However, it's important to note that these caseload figures may combine participants across different service intensities—including those attending light-touch drop-in workshops alongside participants receiving more intensive case management services—which makes it difficult to assess the true burden on staff providing individualized support. The method for calculating these ratios and whether they distinguish between different levels of participant engagement was not clearly defined in available data. While staff leverage their own lived experiences to build trust, they often do so without the structural support or training needed to fully address the layered trauma program participants carry. Without addressing staffing and resource constraints, the program risks relying on unsustainable emotional labor and informal workarounds.

This evaluation surfaced meaningful tensions that must be addressed for the model to reach its full potential:

- **Flexibility vs. Structure:** The program’s “one-size-fits-one” approach is a major strength, but without consistent infrastructure for tracking engagement, follow-up, or referrals, sites risk uneven implementation and missed opportunities.

- **High Satisfaction vs. Unequal Access:** Participants report high satisfaction, especially with job training. Yet program reach and completion rates vary across age groups, education levels, and probation status. These differences raise questions about how equitably the model is serving its most vulnerable program participants.
- **Relationship-Driven Design vs. Resource Limitations:** The strength of NeON Works lies in its relational model, but staff repeatedly noted that limited personnel, lack of dedicated mental health professionals, and challenges with cross-site collaboration restrict their ability to meet the program's full promise.
- **Short-Term Outcomes vs. Long-Term Stability:** While program participants value the program for helping them “do something productive today,” many also face structural challenges—housing instability, trauma, lack of wraparound supports—that cannot be solved through employment alone.

Lessons Learned

From these tensions, important lessons emerge:

- **Relationships are essential but insufficient without infrastructure.** Trust between staff and program participants builds engagement, but sustainable systems are needed to manage caseloads, referrals, and outcomes at scale.
- **Equity requires intentionality.** The fact that younger and lower-education participants experience lower completion rates must prompt targeted strategies—more tailored programming, better mentorship, and differentiated pathways that reflect readiness, not just eligibility.
- **Youth on probation or community supervision benefit from tailored opportunities, not workarounds.** Rather than adjusting expectations to accommodate background check limitations or systemic constraints, programs must proactively build internship and employment partnerships that are inclusive by design.
- **Workforce development is inseparable from social and emotional support.** NeON Works succeeds where it connects program participants not just to jobs, but to food, housing, mental health care, and a belief in their own futures.

Implications for the Future

As NYC considers the future of NeON Works, three areas deserve focused investment and reflection:

- **Sustaining Relationships at Scale:**
Personal relationships are central to NeON Works' effectiveness. Scaling the model requires strategies that preserve this relational core—through reduced caseloads, reflective supervision, peer-to-peer staffing models, and trauma-informed professional development.
- **Expanding Structural Supports and Flexibility:**
Program participants need more than services; they need stability. Embedding NeON Works within a stronger web of wraparound supports—mental health care, housing assistance, food security—will allow more participants to fully engage. Formalizing virtual programming, increasing transportation access, and offering flexible participation rules are also critical for inclusion.

- **Building a Learning System, Not Just a Program:**

NeON Works is not static. Its strength lies in its adaptability. Investments in data infrastructure, cross-site learning, and program participant-driven feedback loops will ensure the program continues to evolve in response to community needs. Future evaluations should track long-term impacts and capture how NeON Works supports not just employment, but identity development and community connection.

In sum, NeON Works demonstrates what's possible when youth on probation or community supervision are offered not just a program, but a pathway—one rooted in care, opportunity, and belief in their potential. To deepen and expand its impact, the program must now turn inward—strengthening its systems, structures, and supports—so that it can more fully meet the promise it holds.

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Appendix A. Research Instruments

A.1. Survey Instruments

A. CONSENT

- **Why are you doing this study?** We are doing this research study in partnership with the Department of Probation (DOP) and the Young Men's Initiative (YMI) to evaluate the NeON Works program in New York City (NYC). Specifically, we are interested in your experiences as a participant.
- **What will I be asked to do in this survey?** You will be asked to answer approximately 40 questions about your experience within NeON Works.
- **Are there any discomforts or risks for participating in the survey?** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might make you uncomfortable. You may skip any question you choose.
- **What are the benefits of the study?** We hope this research will provide a better understanding of the success and areas for improvement in implementing the NeON Works program and supporting youth with a wide range of lived experiences meet their career and education goals.
- **How long will it take for me to participate in this study?** It will take about 15 minutes to complete the survey.
- **Will my survey responses be kept confidential?** Your participation in this research is confidential. The survey does not ask for any information that would identify who the responses belong to. The NORC Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review records related to this research study. If there are any publications or presentations resulting from this research, no personally identifiable information will be shared because your name is in no way linked to your answers. We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of all the information we collect from you, but no one can guarantee complete confidentiality for data that is sent over the Internet.
- **Who can I contact about this study?** Please contact Diana Serrano at serrano-diana@norc.org with questions, complaints, or concerns about this research. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the NORC IRB Manager by toll-free phone number at (866) 309-0542.
- **Payment for participation:** The first 200 respondents who complete this survey will receive a \$10 gift certificate. You will need to provide an email address to receive the certificate code.
- **Am I required to participate in the survey?** Your decision to participate in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.
- Do you agree to participate in this survey?
 - Yes
 - No [Survey ends]

B. Intro to NeON Works

1. Have you, either in the past or currently, participated in NeON Works?

- a. Yes [Proceed to 2a].
- b. No [Display: This survey is for participants of the NeON works program, a [INSERT DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM]. If you have not participated in this program, please exit survey. If you have participated in this program, please select 'Yes'.].

2. Are you currently participating in NeON works?

- a. Yes [*Proceed to 2a*]
- b. No [*Skip to 2b*]

2a. [If yes] How long have you participated in the NeON Works program?

- a. Less than 1 month
- b. One to three months
- c. Four to six months
- d. Seven to ten months
- e. Ten to twelve months
- f. Don't know.

[Skip to 3]

2b. [If No], when did you last participate? (List month and year as options)

2c. How long did you participate in the NeON Works program?

- a. Less than 1 month
- b. One to three months
- c. Four to six months
- d. Seven to ten months
- e. Ten to twelve months
- f. Don't know.

3. How did you learn about NeON Works?

- a. Referred by DOP (e.g., Probation Officer)
- b. A workshop/training in my neighborhood
- c. Someone in my neighborhood
- d. Flyer
- e. Social Media
- f. Other, please specify _____

4. Which of the NeON communities do you live in?

- a. Bedford-Stuyvesant
- b. Brooklyn
- c. Brownsville
- d. East New York
- e. Harlem
- f. Jamaica
- g. Northern Staten Island

- h. South Bronx
- i. None of the above [If 'None of the above'] Where do you live? _____

5. Which of the following are reasons you decided to participate in NeON works?

Select all that apply. Select 'other' to briefly describe other reasons (not listed) you decided to participate.

- a. My probation officer recommended it.
- b. Connection to job opportunities.
- c. Connection to internships and hands on career experience.
- d. Connection to educational resources (e.g., high-school equivalency tutoring programs).
- e. To participate in workshops and job training.
- f. To earn job related credentials/certifications.
- g. To expand my social networks and introduce me to new people.
- h. Connection to community resources.
- i. To work one-on-one with a job coach.
- j. To receive the stipend.
- k. Other

Briefly describe what other reasons you decided to participate in NeON works. [If more than 3 selected, proceed to 5a. Otherwise, skip to 6]

5a. Please rank your top three reasons you chose to participate in NeON works. [Display all selected answers from 5]

C. Program Experiences

NeON works offers a variety of educational and job-related services to youth in your community and other communities in New York City. The next set of questions asks about your experiences receiving services through NeON works.

Needs Assessment

- 6. Part of the NeON works program is participating in an individualized needs assessment that helps identify what specific services would be useful to you. Which of the following best describes your awareness of and participation in a needs assessment?**
- a. I am/was unaware that I could participate in a needs assessment.
 - b. I am aware of this part of the program but did not/do not plan to participate.
 - c. I am aware of this part of the program, and I am planning to participate.
- 7. Prior to participating in program activities, did you participate in a needs assessment?**
- a. Yes [Proceed to 8]
 - b. No [Skip to 11]
 - c. Don't know/remember [Skip to 11]
- 8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the needs assessment.**
- The needs assessment

- a. considered my individual needs.
- b. considered my specific career goals.
- c. considered my educational goals.
- d. was specific to my community and background.
- e. helped me identify gaps in my education and job readiness.
- f. connected me to resources to help me meet my needs and goals.
- g. helped me create a plan for meeting my needs and goals.
- h. was overall a useful process for my future.

Response Options:

- 1. Strongly disagree
- 2. Disagree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Agree
- 5. Strongly agree

9. Since completing the initial needs assessment, have you talked with someone about your progress towards your goals?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not yet
- d. Not Applicable

10. Is there anything else we should know about the needs assessment?

[Skip to 12]

11. Please briefly describe how you initially started the program.

Program Services

12. What is your level of engagement with each of the following NeON Works program activities and connections?

- a. Connection to high school equivalency preparation (such as tutoring)
- b. Connection to college preparation and enrollment programs/services
- c. Job training and readiness workshops (such as how to write a resume, how to interview, etc.)
- d. Credential preparation courses specific to your career of interest
- e. Crisis management services
- f. Internship placement
- g. Job placement
- h. One-on-one coaching

Response options:

- i. I participated in the past.
- ii. I am participating currently.
- iii. I plan to participate in the future.
- iv. I have not used and do not plan to use this service.
- v. Don't know

13. For each of the following activities and connections, please indicate why you are not participating. *[show only activities where 'I have not used and do not plan to use this service' is selected in Q12]*

- a. Connection to high school equivalency preparation (such as tutoring)
- b. Connection to college preparation and enrollment programs/services
- c. Job training and readiness workshops (such as how to write a resume, how to interview, etc.)
- d. Credential preparation courses specific to your career of interest
- e. Crisis management services
- f. Internship placement
- g. Job placement
- h. One-on-one coaching

Response Options

- i. I was not aware of this service/activity.
- ii. Service is not relevant to my needs.
- iii. Service is not provided in or near my community.
- iv. Time or responsibility constraints.
- v. Other services are a greater priority.
- vi. No specific reason.
- vii. Other, please specify.

The following questions will ask about the program services and activities you have participated in, are currently engaged in, or plan to engage with.

[For each activity where 12a-12h = 1 or 2, show questions 14 – 17]

14. Please indicate how often you engage with [INSERT NAME OF ACTIVITY].

- a. Onetime service/activity.
- b. A few times a year.
- c. Once a month.
- d. Once every few weeks.
- e. Weekly.
- f. Daily.
- g. Not Sure.

15. The following are a list of reasons that someone might choose to participate in [INSERT PROGRAM ACTIVITY]. To what extent do agree with each of these as the reason YOU decided to participate in [INSERT PROGRAM ACTIVITY]?

- a. To help me reach my educational goals.
- b. To increase my knowledge about specific job requirements.
- c. To help me find a job.
- d. To earn necessary skills and credentials for a specific job.
- e. To help me learn more about my community.
- f. To connect me with job resources.
- g. To connect me with people in my community.
- h. For self-improvement.

- i. To meet the requirements of my probation.
- j. My needs assessment identified this as a gap in my job readiness.
- k. To keep my stipend and other program incentives.

16. Briefly describe the primary reason you participated in [INSERT ACTIVITY NAME] and what hoped you get out of participating?

17. How did you get connected to this service?

- a. My probation officer.
- b. Someone else at DOP.
- c. NeON works program staff.
- d. NeON works stakeholder group.

18. Of the services you used, which was most useful to you and your future. Select one.
[Display only activities where 12a-12 h = 1, 2, or 3]

19. To what extent do agree with each of these statements about your participation in [INSERT PROGRAM ACTIVITY]?

My connection to [INSERT NAME OF SERVICE/CONNECTION]

- a. helped me reach my educational goals.
- b. increased my knowledge about specific job requirements.
- c. helped me find a job.
- d. helped me earn necessary skills to be successful at any job.
- e. helped me earn necessary credentials for a specific job.
- f. taught me more about my community.
- g. connected me with other community resources.
- h. connected me with people in my community.
- i. was useful for my overall self-improvement.

D. Outcomes

The following section asks you about your overall experience with the NeON works program.

- 20. As a result of participating in NeON works, did you...**
- a. Earn a GED or other high-school equivalency.
 - b. Receive a job placement.
 - c. Participate in an internship.

Response Options:

- i. Yes
- ii. Not yet, but it is likely.
- iii. No

21. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about your participation in the NeON works program.

Since participating in the NeON works program,

- a. I feel more equipped to enter the workforce.
- b. I am more confident in my contribution to my community.

- c. I find it easier to provide for myself and my loved ones.
- d. I feel like I belong in the workplace.
- e. I have what it takes to find a job that I love.
- f. It is easier for me to find a job.
- g. I feel unable to navigate the barriers to finding a high-quality job.
- h. My education is still a limitation to my ability to find a job.

Response Options:

- i. Strongly Disagree
- ii. Disagree
- iii. Neither agree nor disagree
- iv. Agree
- v. Strongly agree

E. Demographics

22. Where were you born?

- a. Within the United States or a US territory
- b. Outside of the United States, born to US citizen(s)
- c. Outside of the United States, not born to US citizen(s)
- d. Unsure/Don't know
- e. Prefer not to answer

23. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Unsure/Don't know
- d. Prefer not to answer

24. Which category best describes your race? (Check all that apply.)

- a. Asian
- b. Black or African American/African/Afro-Caribbean
- c. Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native
- d. Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- e. White or Caucasian
- f. Some other race
- g. Unsure/Don't know
- h. Prefer not to answer

25. Are there additional specific identifiers that you think better describe your racial/ethnic category? If yes, if you would like to provide your preferred identifier, please do so.

26. Do you consider English to be your native language?

- a. Yes, it is one of my native languages
- b. Yes, it is my only native language
- c. No
- d. Unsure/Don't know

- e. Prefer not to answer

27. What is your current gender identity? (Check all that apply)

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Transgender, female-to-male (FTM), transgender male, trans man, or trans masculine, male-to-female (MTF), transgender female, trans woman, or trans feminine
- d. Genderqueer, neither exclusively male nor female
- e. Other. Please specify _____
- f. Prefer not to answer

28. What is your age?

- a. 16
- b. 17
- c. 18
- d. 19
- e. 20
- f. 21
- g. 22
- h. 23
- i. 24

Closing Screen

Thank you for participating in our survey. We hope you have a great day. In the next screen, we will ask for your email address to send the gift certificate. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Separate Screen (Not linked to the survey responses.)

Thank you for completing the survey! To receive your \$10 gift certificate, please provide us with your email address below. We'll send the certificate code to this email. Your email will only be used for this purpose and will not be shared with third parties. Thank you!"

Email Address: _____

Focus Group Opportunity - Recruitment

Are you interested in participating in a group conversation about your experiences with the NeON works program? These conversations will take place at or near your NeON works site and will be with your peers who also attend the program. You will receive \$50 Visa Gift Card for your participation in a one-hour conversation.

If you are interested, we need your email and phone number so we can contact you about scheduling this opportunity.

Are you interested? _____ Yes _____ No

*If “No” is selected, the page will close with a THANK YOU!

*If “Yes” is selected...

Thank you! Please provide your email and/or phone number so that we can contact you about your participation in a focus group.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

A.2. Focus Group and Interview Protocols – Program Participants and Staff

Client Focus Group Protocol

Thanks for taking the time today to join us. [Research team introduce yourselves: NAME, NORC, and PROJECT ROLE.]

We have partnered with the Department of Probation (DOP) and the Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) to evaluate the NeOn Works program in New York City (NYC). Specifically, we are interested in your experiences as a participant in the program.

We will be taking about an hour today. This focus group aims to collect information on [INSERT SPECIFICS]. Your participation in today’s focus group is completely voluntary. There are no repercussions for choosing not to participate. Because this is a focus group and there are other people present, we ask that you all agree not to share what is said during this conversation. While participants are asked to keep the conversation confidential, there is a risk that comments may be attributed to you outside of the group. We also ask that you all turn off your phones for the length of today’s meeting.

I’ll now explain how this focus group works. While I have prepared questions, this is more of a conversation. I may ask one of you to share first, and then others can jump in if you want to also share. Please try not to talk over each other and be respectful of each other. Also, you can choose not to answer a question at any time, and we will not use your name in any reports. Do you have any questions about what is expected of you during this session or about the study before we begin?

Can you please verbally consent to participation in this focus group today? (If anyone does not consent, they will be escorted out of the focus group before the session begins.)

Also, I would like to audio record our meeting so that we can remember everything that is shared today. The recordings will remain with NORC and will not be provided to anyone else, and any presentation of the information in reports or other publications will not identify you individually.

If that is okay with you, can you please confirm by saying “yes”?

(If anyone declines the recording then we will not record and will tell the group.)

Great, thank you! Let’s get started!

Introductions

If we could go around and introduce ourselves first, that would be great. Please say your first name, age, and favorite snack? Let’s start with the first person on my right --

Great! Thank you all for sharing and what wonderful snack ideas!

I may occasionally call on someone by name, but please remember you can jump in with your response when you have one. Be respectful of each other and let everyone finish their thought before you jump in.

Background: *Let's start with a few impressions of the NeON works program.*

1. Once you were connected with NeON Works, what was your intake process like?
2. When you first attended a workshop or program, what were your first impressions?

Education/Career/Vocational Program/Internships

Maybe some of you have more short-term involvement in the program and others have a longer commitment to NeoN Works. I also know that you might have different goals while involved with NeON Works. Some of you might be here to further your education, others for career planning. Let's talk a little about the goals you have – education or career related.

3. First, who have you talked about your long-term goals with? Can you share how that conversation went?
4. Can someone start us off by describing what goals you have and how you decided on them?
 - a. What steps did you take to develop these goals?
5. In what ways does NeON support you in achieving your goals? For example, an activity, workshop, connecting with people, mentorship?
 - a. What activities do you find most engaging and why?
6. Have you been connected with any resources outside NeON? Who/how/why?
7. What motivates you to continue participating in this program?

Challenges and Recommendations – *In this final section, I'd like to hear more about what makes it easier or more difficult for you to participate in the NeON Works program and give you an opportunity to make suggestions for ways to improve the program for others.*

8. What, if any, barriers or difficulties have you experienced in accessing or participating in the NeON Works programming?
 - a. Internal program barriers (e.g., scheduling conflicts, location is too far away, not internet access)
 - b. External barriers (e.g., transportation, childcare, scheduling)

9. Finally, what recommendations do you have for improving the NeON Works program?

Okay, thank you all so much for your comments and contributions! We have one final activity together before we finish. Take a moment and think of 3 words that sum up your experience with NeOn and then jot those words down on the paper in front of you. These words are totally up to you. As we leave, we can all hand our papers in. I'll give you a few moments to write something down. Please don't write your name on this paper.

Thank you all for your time and contributing your knowledge to our study of the NeOn Works initiative. We will be sending you an email shortly with Visa Gift Card information for you to access the \$50 incentive for participating. Please keep an eye out for that email; we will follow-up with you all to make sure you receive it. Thank you!

Staff Focus Group Protocol

Thanks for taking the time today to join us. [Research team introduce yourselves: NAME, NORC, and PROJECT ROLE.]

We have partnered with the Department of Probation (DOP) and the Young Men's Initiative (YMI) to evaluate the NeON Works program in New York City (NYC). Specifically, we are interested in the services delivered to clients.

We will be taking about an hour today. Your participation in today's focus group is completely voluntary. There are no repercussions for choosing not to participate. Because this is a focus group and there are other people present, we ask that you all agree not to share what is said during this conversation. While participants are asked to keep the conversation confidential, there is a risk that comments may be attributed to you outside of the group. Additionally, there is not time for all of you to be able to answer every question, but please jump in if you have something to share that has not yet been said. Also, you can choose not to answer any question you do not wish to answer, and we will not use your name in any reports to NeON Works or in any publications.

Can you please verbally consent to participation in this focus group today? (If anyone does not consent, they will be escorted out of the focus group before the session begins.)

Also, I would like to audio record our meeting so that we can remember everything that is shared today. The recordings will remain with NORC and will not be provided to anyone else, and any presentation of the information in reports or other publications will not identify you individually.

If that is okay with you, can you please confirm by saying "yes"?

(If anyone declines the recording then we will not record and will tell the group.)

Great, thank you! Let's get started!

Background

1. Please state your first name, your role with NeON Works, and how long you have been working with this initiative.
2. How long have you been working for [community-based organization]?
3. How would you describe the population you work with?
4. Please talk us through a typical day with the program from your perspective.

Support from NeON

5. What kind of support is provided to your organization to facilitate NeON Works activities?
 - a. Probe for connections to NeON Works leadership
 - b. Are there other supports that would help you in obtaining the program's goals?
 - c. If yes, what would you suggest?
6. Has this support changed over time? If so, in what ways?

Program Outputs

7. What type of activities or programming do you provide to your clients?
8. Walk us through the process of deciding what opportunities are provided to clients.
 - a. How do you decide what each client's tailored approach looks like?
 - b. What strategies do you use to keep clients engaged with the program?
9. Thinking about your site, are there particular challenges or barriers in your community preventing your work with NeON Works from being successful?
10. Please walk us through a particular activity or workshop that went well.
 - a. Why was it so successful?
11. Now walk us through a particular activity or workshop that could use improvement.
 - a. Why did it fall short?
 - b. What kinds of changes can be made to improve it?
 - c. Are these problems pervasive across activities or are they singular to this activity?
12. What do you see as the ultimate goals of the NeON Works program?

Concluding Thoughts

13. Is there anything you wish you could provide to your clients that you currently don't offer? Why?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the NeON Works initiative?

Thank you all for your time and contributing your knowledge to our study of the NeON Works initiative.

Thank you all!

Lead Agency Interview Protocol

Hi, my name is _____ and I'm a researcher at NORC at the University of Chicago. Thank you for your willingness to participate and take part in this interview. As you know, we are conducting an evaluation of the NYC NeON Works Program. As a leader of a sponsor agency for the program, you are an important partner in our evaluation effort.

Our conversation today will last about an hour. As a reminder, your participation is completely voluntary and there are no repercussions for choosing not to participate. Also, you can choose not to answer any question you do not wish to answer, and we will not use your name in any reports to NeON Works or in any publications.

Do you have any questions about participating in this study interview?

Can you please verbally consent to participating in this study? (If no, then end the interview).

Also, I would like to audio record our meeting so that we can remember everything that is shared today. The recordings will remain with NORC and will not be provided to anyone else, and any presentation of the information in reports or other publications will not identify you individually. Is it ok with you if I record our conversation? (Pause for confirmation/do not record if they say no).

Great, let's get started!

Intro & Role

1. Please tell me about your current role. How long have you been in this position?
2. What are your responsibilities overall?
 - a) What are your responsibilities with the NeON Works program?
3. How long do you spend (weekly, monthly?) on NeON Works activities, resources, or support?

Inception

4. What is the origin story of NeON Works?
 - a) Probe for how their organization/agency was included and when
5. What kind of needs did the program originally plan to fulfill?
 - a) Probe: Do you believe that the program has fulfilled those objectives (or is on track to)? Have they expanded on those goals? How so?
 - a) Probe: Is the program serving the populations it set out to? How or how not?
6. How were each of the sites selected to be included?
 - a) Probe: Did that happen simultaneously?
 - a) Probe: Were you involved in the process? How did you contribute?

Collaboration

7. What does collaboration amongst *[other agency leaders/specify depending on who is being interviewed]* look like?
 - a) How do you communicate with each other?
8. Under which conditions do you have the opportunity to interact with participants/clients directly?
 - a) Probe: What is that interaction like? How often does it occur?
 - a) Probe: Do you have recommendations for improving leader and participant communication?
9. How often do you interact with NeON Works staff directly?
 - a) Probe: What is that interaction like? How often does it occur?
 - a) Probe: Do you have recommendations for improving leader and program staff communication?

Sustainability and Impact

10. From your perspective, in what ways is NeON Works program meeting its stated goals?
 - a) How do you know?
11. What are your recommendations, if any, for improving the program?
 - a) What experiences lead you to make those recommendations?
12. What is this program doing really well?
 - a) Probe: What enables the program to do this well?
13. Can you describe your hopes for the future of this program?
 - a) Probe: Is the program sustainable for leaders and staff? Timewise?

Last Thoughts

Is there anything else you'd like to share today that I didn't ask about? Thank you so much for your time today. Again, your feedback is vital to our evaluation of the NeON Works program.

A.3. Site Visit Protocol

Observation Guide Template

Instructions: Observation data will focus on material resources, documents, space descriptions, and generic interactions that *will not include names* of individuals or identifying factors beyond "staff" and "client." If you observe more than two settings/activities, please add another Observation Setting column and continue.

Location:	Date/Time:	Observer Name:
	General Space Setting #1 (what does the space look like?):	General Space Setting #2 (what does the space look like?):
Topic	Observation Setting #1	Observation Setting #2
General description: What are you observing? (Workshop, individual planning session with client, other activity) and who? (#s of client/staff, no names)		
Activity Resources: What resources are being used for the activity? How are clients interacting or accessing them? *Example Resources include blackboards, worksheets, laptops, etc.		
Engagement: How engaged are clients in what you are observing? Is it interactive? How are staff engaging or not engaging with clients? *Engaged looks like they are conversing, or actively listening, with each other		
Discourse: What are clients discussing? Are there recurring themes or topics? How are the staff interacting in that discussion?		
Researcher Questions/Other		

General Observations: *Remember that some locations have other programming happening simultaneously or in the same space; try to delineate what is NeON Works-specific.*

Physical Space: What kind of space is dedicated to NeON activities at the community-based organization? What is it like? (Possible questions: Where is it located? Are there easy ways to get there? How accessible is the building?)		
Materials/Resources: What materials and resources are available at this site? Who are they available to? What materials are utilized the most? The least? Are all resources operating properly?		
Communication/Interaction (<i>no names</i>): Who seems to be interacting and communicating the most? What is the content covering (personal, about program details, about new opportunities, etc.)? What is the relationship between individuals (friendly, professional, etc.)? Are there differences between how different roles interact with each other?		
Researcher Questions/Other		

Appendix B. Supplemental Tables

Supplemental Table 1: Age Across Sites

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Over 18	Under 18
America Works of New York (n=643)	FY21	73%	27%
	FY22	71%	29%
	FY23	86%	14%
	FY24	81%	19%
Brooklyn Community Services (n=413)	FY21	63%	37%
	FY22	72%	28%
	FY23	87%	13%
	FY24	63%	37%
Center for Community Alternatives (n=311)	FY21	68%	32%
	FY22	79%	21%
	FY23	65%	35%
	FY24	43%	57%
Community Mediation Services (n=618)	FY21	53%	47%
	FY22	59%	41%
	FY23	59%	41%
	FY24	37%	63%
Exodus Transitional Community (n=535)	FY21	75%	25%
	FY22	58%	42%
	FY23	63%	37%
	FY24	50%	50%
The Center for Justice Innovation (n=304)	FY21	63%	37%

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Over 18	Under 18
	FY22	71%	29%
	FY23	83%	17%
	FY24	44%	56%
	FY21	29%	71%
The Osborne Association (n=522)	FY22	62%	36%
	FY23	88%	13%
	FY24	80%	20%

Supplemental Table 2: Gender Across Sites

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Female	Male
America Works of New York (n=643)	FY21	43%	57%
	FY22	42%	58%
	FY23	39%	61%
	FY24	38%	61%
Brooklyn Community Services (n=413)	FY21	47%	53%
	FY22	34%	66%
	FY23	31%	69%
	FY24	39%	59%
Center for Community Alternatives (n=311)	FY21	32%	26%
	FY22	23%	28%
	FY23	33%	28%
	FY24	20%	28%
Community Mediation Services (n=618)	FY21	46%	54%
	FY22	45%	55%

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Female	Male
	FY23	41%	58%
	FY24	36%	64%
Exodus Transitional Community (n=535)	FY21	41%	59%
	FY22	46%	54%
	FY23	39%	57%
	FY24	50%	48%
Fund for the City of New York/Center for Court Innovation (n=304)	FY21	66%	34%
	FY22	53%	47%
	FY23	25%	73%
	FY24	29%	47%
The Osborne Association (n=522)	FY21	66%	34%
	FY22	44%	56%
	FY23	22%	78%
	FY24	27%	73%
*Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding and the collapsing of smaller response categories into “Other/Unreported.”			

Supplemental Table 3: Race Across Sites

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Black/African American/ African	Other/ Unreported	White	Asian/ Pacific Islander
America Works of New York (n=643)	FY21	71%	19%	6%	4%
	FY22	61%	23%	12%	5%
	FY23	67%	21%	10%	2%
	FY24	70%	20%	8%	2%

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Black/African American/ African	Other/ Unreported	White	Asian/ Pacific Islander
Brooklyn Community Services (n=413)	FY21	83%	16%	1%	0%
	FY22	88%	9%	2%	1%
	FY23	90%	0%	9%	1%
	FY24	86%	8%	0%	5%
Center for Community Alternatives (n=311)	FY21	90%	8%	1%	0%
	FY22	88%	10%	1%	1%
	FY23	85%	3%	12%	0%
	FY24	77%	17%	3%	3%
Community Mediation Services (n=618)	FY21	73%	20%	3%	4%
	FY22	65%	19%	2%	13%
	FY23	50%	34%	1%	15%
	FY24	69%	18%	3%	9%
Exodus Transitional Community (n=535)	FY21	63%	37%	0%	0%
	FY22	74%	25%	1%	0%
	FY23	78%	21%	0%	1%
	FY24	63%	33%	2%	2%
The Center for Justice Innovation (n=304)	FY21	69%	26%	0%	6%
	FY22	88%	9%	3%	1%
	FY23	80%	13%	7%	0%
	FY24	82%	15%	3%	0%
	FY22	60%	38%	1%	1%
	FY23	58%	38%	3%	1%
	FY24	64%	33%	1%	3%

Supplemental Table 4. Ethnicity Across Sites

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic	Unreported
America Works of New York (n=643)	FY21	21%	73%	6%
	FY22	37%	51%	12%
	FY23	28%	62%	10%
	FY24	26%	62%	12%
Brooklyn Community Services (n=413)	FY21	17%	73%	10%
	FY22	4%	94%	2%
	FY23	16%	84%	0%
	FY24	7%	93%	0%
Center for Community Alternatives (n=311)	FY21	10%	89%	1%
	FY22	14%	84%	3%
	FY23	18%	82%	0%
	FY24	17%	80%	3%
Community Mediation Services (n=618)	FY21	14%	71%	15%
	FY22	15%	78%	7%
	FY23	27%	62%	11%
	FY24	24%	71%	4%
Exodus Transitional Community (n=535)	FY21	33%	56%	11%
	FY22	31%	61%	8%
	FY23	29%	62%	9%
	FY24	17%	65%	17%
Fund for the City of New York/Center for Court Innovation (n=304)	FY21	29%	71%	0%
	FY22	19%	81%	0%
	FY23	18%	82%	0%

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic	Unreported
	FY24	9%	91%	0%
The Osborne Association (n=522)	FY21	33%	66%	2%
	FY22	40%	56%	4%
	FY23	39%	56%	5%
	FY24	46%	42%	12%

Supplemental Table 5. Probation Status Across Sites

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Not on Probation or Community Supervision	On Probation or Community Supervision
America Works of New York (n=643)	FY21	61%	39%
	FY22	73%	27%
	FY23	68%	32%
	FY24	74%	26%
Brooklyn Community Services (n=413)	FY21	62%	38%
	FY22	64%	36%
	FY23	65%	35%
	FY24	81%	19%
Center for Community Alternatives (n=311)	FY21	67%	33%
	FY22	66%	34%
	FY23	59%	41%
	FY24	70%	30%
Community Mediation Services (n=618)	FY21	85%	15%
	FY22	73%	27%
	FY23	57%	43%
	FY24	58%	42%

Provider Site	Fiscal Year	Not on Probation or Community Supervision	On Probation or Community Supervision
Exodus Transitional Community (n=535)	FY21	90%	10%
	FY22	85%	15%
	FY23	78%	22%
	FY24	67%	33%
The Center for Justice Innovation (n=304)	FY21	97%	3%
	FY22	67%	33%
	FY23	34%	66%
	FY24	53%	47%
The Osborne Association (n=522)	FY21	95%	5%
	FY22	56%	44%
	FY23	44%	56%
	FY24	65%	35%