WorkAdvance

Meeting the Needs of Workers and Employers

Implementation of a Sector-Focused Career Advancement Model for Low-Skilled Adults

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Overview

The WorkAdvance program model integrates the most promising features of two especially important areas of workforce policy: "sectoral" strategies, which seek to meet the needs of both workers and employers by preparing individuals for quality jobs in specific high-demand industries or occupational clusters, and job retention and career advancement strategies, which seek to improve workers' prospects for sustained employment and upward mobility. Specifically, the WorkAdvance model offers the following sequence of sector-focused program components to participants for up to two years after enrollment: preemployment and career readiness services, occupational skills training, job development and placement, and postemployment retention and advancement services. WorkAdvance programs are currently operated by four organizations (two in New York City, one in Tulsa, and one in Greater Cleveland) that focus on a variety of sectors and bring different types of experience and approaches to the implementation of WorkAdvance.

This first report presents early findings on how the four local program providers translated the WorkAdvance model into a workable program. It offers lessons that may be helpful to organizations seeking to implement a sector-focused career advancement program like WorkAdvance.

The WorkAdvance program operations and evaluation are funded through the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a public-private partnership administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. This SIF project is led by the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) in collaboration with MDRC.

Key Findings

- The WorkAdvance model is demanding, requiring providers to work effectively with both employers and program participants and to incorporate a postemployment advancement component that was new to all of the providers. Yet all four providers are now delivering each of the WorkAdvance components, with postemployment services being the least developed.
- Screening for program entry was driven by employer needs; as a result, on average, only one in five applicants were eligible and qualified for the program.
- The "soft skills" taught in career readiness classes appear to have been as important to participants and employers as the technical skills acquired from occupational skills training.
- Early indications are that completion rates for occupational skills training are high, although they vary somewhat across the providers. In most cases, completion of the training led to the earning of an industry-recognized credential, which is a critical first step toward getting a job in the sector.

Support from the Social Innovation Fund for WorkAdvance program operations will continue through June 2015. MDRC's second report, in late 2015, will examine WorkAdvance implementation in more depth and will present findings on program costs as well as impacts on employment, earnings, and other outcomes of the program.

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Preface

Even in good economic times, many low-skilled adults in the United States have difficulty obtaining jobs and advancing in careers that pay enough to support their families. At the same time, some employers report difficulty finding people with the right skills to meet their needs, even in periods of high unemployment. Addressing the needs of both workers and employers, in ways that will benefit both, has become a priority for public workforce systems and workforce development organizations. While these agencies, as well as policymakers, are increasingly looking to sectoral strategies to achieve this, few randomized controlled trials have been implemented at scale to test the effectiveness of these strategies; additionally, there has not been much focus on advancing workers to higher-paying jobs once they begin work in a given sector.

The WorkAdvance program and the related evaluation being conducted by MDRC were designed to test the effectiveness of a model that builds on lessons from previous research and practitioners' experience both in sectoral strategies, which prepare individuals for quality jobs that employers want to fill in specific high-demand industries or occupational clusters, and in job retention and career advancement strategies, which seek to improve workers' prospects for sustained employment and upward mobility. The program integrates the most promising features of sectoral and retention and advancement strategies in the hopes of producing larger and longer-lasting effects on employment, earnings, and career paths than either strategy might have on its own. Specifically, it offers preemployment and career readiness services, occupational skills training, job development and placement, and postemployment retention and advancement services. WorkAdvance programs are currently operated by four organizations (two in New York City, one in Tulsa, and one in Greater Cleveland) that focus on a variety of sectors and bring different experiences and approaches to implementing WorkAdvance.

Serving a dual customer — both workers and employers — can be challenging for many workforce development organizations. Likewise, focusing beyond initial job placement on the steps that workers need to take to advance in a career are new concepts for many workforce practitioners. What are ways in which career readiness training and occupational skills training can be informed by employers? What does it mean to coach someone toward advancement, and how do you actually do it? What kinds of marketing and screening are necessary to recruit and select participants who will be a good "fit" for a given sector? This report offers some lessons for practitioners about what it takes to launch and develop an advancement-focused, sector-based training and employment program.

In late 2015, MDRC will release a report describing the program's effects on employment and earnings, as well as its costs. In the meantime, this report offers workforce development professionals some insights into the challenges of, and best practices for, implementing a program like WorkAdvance.

Gordon L. Berlin
President

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We are especially grateful to our colleagues at the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), who managed the entire New York City Social Innovation Fund (SIF) project, worked closely with the providers to raise the SIF match funds, brought providers together to share best practices and experiences through the SIF Learning Network, and monitored providers' performance. In particular, we thank David Berman, Patrick Hart, Sinead Keegan, and Kristin Morse for their commitment to WorkAdvance.

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The Authors

Executive Summary

Even in good economic times, many low-skilled adults in the United States have difficulty obtaining jobs and advancing in careers that pay enough to support their families. Individuals with no more than a high school education have seen their wages remain flat in real terms for decades, and their employment is often unsteady.[1] Training programs for low-skilled adults often fail to prepare participants for sustained employment and upward mobility, especially if the programs do not lead to a marketable credential[2] or do not focus on jobs in high-demand occupations with genuine advancement opportunities. At the same time, some employers report difficulty finding people with the right skills to meet their needs, even in periods of high unemployment.[3]

Amid much debate about how workforce policy should address these concerns, there is a continuing need for clearer evidence on the best ways to promote the upward mobility of low-skilled workers. The WorkAdvance program and the related evaluation were designed to help fill the gap in hard evidence by testing the effectiveness of a model that builds on lessons from previous research and practitioners' experience in two especially important areas of workforce policy: "sectoral" strategies, which entail preparing individuals for quality jobs that employers are seeking to fill in specific high-demand industries or occupational clusters, and job retention and career advancement strategies, which seek to improve workers' prospects for sustained employment and upward mobility. By integrating the most promising features of sectoral and retention and advancement strategies, the designers of WorkAdvance are hopeful that this combination of services will produce larger and longer-lasting effects on employment, earnings, and career paths than either strategy might have on its own; the WorkAdvance study will provide the first rigorous test of this combination of services.

The WorkAdvance program and evaluation are being conducted under the auspices of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF). Administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, SIF is a public-private partnership designed to identify and expand effective solutions to critical social challenges. WorkAdvance is part of the New York City Center for

[1]Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Heidi Shierholz, *The State of Working America: 2008-2009* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[2]Gayle Hamilton and Susan Scrivener, *Increasing Employment Stability and Earnings for Low-Wage Workers: Lessons from the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) Project* (New York: MDRC, 2012b).

[3]Harry J. Holzer, "Skill Mismatches in Contemporary Labor Markets: How Real? And What Remedies?" Conference Paper (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council and University of Maryland School of Public Policy, 2013).

Economic Opportunity (CEO) SIF project, which is led by CEO and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City in collaboration with MDRC. MDRC is leading the WorkAdvance evaluation; has provided technical assistance to the local providers; and, jointly with CEO, has monitored providers' operations. Funding for the program and the evaluation come from the SIF and a broad array of local funding partners that have matched the SIF funding.[4]

Overview of the WorkAdvance Model

The WorkAdvance model offers a sequence of sector-focused program components: preemployment and career readiness services, occupational skills training, job development and placement, and postemployment retention and advancement services. The dual goals of WorkAdvance are to meet employers' needs for skilled labor while also helping low-income individuals obtain jobs in the targeted sectors, succeed in their jobs, and advance in their careers.

The WorkAdvance model requires local providers to:

- Recruit and select a sufficient number of appropriate participants to fill training classes, that is, low-income individuals who have the ability to complete the program services and be attractive to employers while not being so qualified that they have nothing to gain from the program.
- Develop a clear understanding of the structure, occupational opportunities, and skill requirements of the identified sector; establish and maintain strong relationships with employers; and be nimble in adjusting the program offerings to emerging labor market trends in the targeted sector.
- Engage participants in the full sequence of services needed to prepare them for initial placement and progress along career paths within the sector. Notably, many employment and training efforts have found it difficult to engage participants fully, particularly in multiple service components that extend for the duration that they do in WorkAdvance.
- Integrate postemployment services — especially support for advancement, not just retention — that have not typically been present in other sectoral programs.

[4]WorkAdvance providers worked closely with CEO to identify potential funding sources and raise the matching funds that were required by the SIF.

The WorkAdvance program is being delivered by four local providers that focused on a variety of sectors and brought different types of experience:

- Madison Strategies Group is a nonprofit spinoff of Grant Associates, a for-profit workforce development company that operates a variety of workforce programs in New York City, including sectoral strategies; one such program operated by Grant Associates influenced the design of WorkAdvance. Grant Associates' leaders used that experience to launch a new organization and program in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that focuses on the transportation and manufacturing sectors.[5]

- Per Scholas, in Bronx, New York, focuses on the information technology sector. Before WorkAdvance, Per Scholas had substantial experience with sectoral programs and with a random assignment research design of the type being used in this evaluation (discussed in the next section). It participated in the only rigorous study of sectoral strategies that had been conducted prior to WorkAdvance: Public/Private Ventures' (P/PV) Sectoral Employment Impact Study,[6] which also had a large influence on the design of WorkAdvance.

- St. Nicks Alliance, in Brooklyn, New York, is primarily known as a large, well-established multiservice community-based organization offering affordable housing, health care, youth services, and other social programs. St. Nicks Alliance had operated smaller-scale occupational skills training programs, including environmental remediation training, for more than 10 years. Although the organization had offered occupational skills training on a small scale before, it did not have experience operating sectoral strategies. For WorkAdvance, St. Nicks Alliance focuses on environmental remediation and related occupations.

- Towards Employment is a community-based organization that provides a range of employment services for low-income populations in Greater Cleveland. As part of its employment programming, it offers financial literacy services and computer skills as well as on-site General Educational Develop-

[5]Madison Strategies Group initially offered services only in the transportation sector, including training for transportation-related manufacturing; however, the manufacturing focus gradually became more distinct from transportation as it became clear that someone who is trained to manufacture transportation-related parts can actually operate the machines necessary to make a wide variety of parts — even those unrelated to transportation. It is now more accurate to say that Madison Strategies Group focuses on both the transportation sector and the manufacturing sector.

[6]Maguire et al. (2010).

ment (GED) classes. Potential barriers to employment, job retention, and advancement are addressed by a range of supportive services, including transportation, legal services, and an extensive referral network for housing, mental health, and substance abuse assistance. While Towards Employment offered a range of employment programs and had done previous work in the health care sector, it did not have experience operating sectoral strategies per se. For WorkAdvance, Towards Employment is the only provider that launched services in two very distinct sectors — health care and manufacturing — and in two locations.[7]

Although all the WorkAdvance providers eventually emphasized training first before placement, Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment initially implemented the program model, by design, with two separate tracks: One track emphasized up-front occupational skills training (similar to most other sector-based programs), and the other track sought to place people into jobs first. The "placement-first" track was intended to be a less expensive but still effective route to advancement by providing enrollees the opportunity to gain experience by working and learning sector-specific skills on the job, without participating in formal training first.

The local WorkAdvance programs enrolled participants from June 2011 to June 2013. For all participants, services continue for up to two years after enrollment.

The WorkAdvance Evaluation

The WorkAdvance evaluation examines how the program model was implemented in practice; its effects (or "impacts") on the employment, earnings, and other outcomes for individuals who enrolled in WorkAdvance; and the cost of the program. The impact analysis uses a rigorous, random assignment research design[8] to compare the outcomes for individuals who enrolled in WorkAdvance and the outcomes for individuals in a control group.

[7]Towards Employment subcontracts with Youngstown-based Compass Family and Community Services to deliver services in Youngstown, but research enrollment ceased there in January 2013. The partnership continues with a more targeted focus on manufacturing; however, individuals who had enrolled in WorkAdvance at Compass are not included in the study's implementation or impact analysis for reasons discussed below in this report.

[8]In a random assignment evaluation, eligible individuals who apply for a program are assigned at random to either receive the program's services or not. If the sample sizes are large enough, the difference between the two groups' outcomes — referred to as "impacts" — can be attributed to the program, since the two groups were statistically alike at the time they entered the study and the only difference between them is that one group received program services and the other did not. A random assignment study (also known as a randomized controlled trial, or RCT) is widely held to be the most reliable way to study a program's effectiveness.

This first report on WorkAdvance focuses on how the four local program providers translated the WorkAdvance model into a workable program. It offers lessons to consider when launching sectoral strategies that include advancement services, particularly postemployment. The report offers insights on the level of effort required to implement the program model; the level of technical assistance given to the providers to implement the model within the context of a randomized controlled trial; how program operations evolved over time; and how the four providers' decisions and experiences reflect their individual operating histories, strengths, and weaknesses. In particular, the report describes how the providers recruited and selected participants, as well as the extent to which the providers have so far been able to deliver services with a true sectoral focus while actively engaging workers and employers in the manner that the WorkAdvance model envisions.

This report covers activities through fall 2013: the first 24 to 28 months of WorkAdvance operations, depending on when each provider began enrolling participants. Most of the detailed data that are presented cover the first six months of participation in WorkAdvance services for all program group members randomly assigned through February 2013.[9] The provider-reported job placement data, however, pertain to a smaller sample (enrolled through August 2012), which has 12 months of follow-up data, to allow more time to capture instances of program group members completing their WorkAdvance activities and finding employment.

A second report on WorkAdvance, in late 2015, will examine program implementation in more depth for the full sample, relying on both program and survey data and covering a longer operating period. It will also include findings on program costs and on employment, earnings, and other impacts for 18 to 24 months after random assignment. A total of five years of follow-up is planned for the impact analysis, if funding permits.

Early Implementation and Participation Findings

Translating the WorkAdvance model into a set of concrete services took time, and a substantial amount of technical assistance, for all four providers. The model is demanding, in that it requires providers to have a strong capacity to work with both employers and program participants and also to incorporate a postemployment advancement component that was new to all the providers.

- **Despite bringing varying amounts of experience with sectoral programs and varying operational strengths and challenges to the launch and development of WorkAdvance, all four providers are now delivering ser-**

[9]Program data for this report were collected through August 2013.

vices across all the WorkAdvance model components, with postemployment services being the least developed.

As noted above, Madison Strategies Group and Per Scholas both organizationally focus exclusively on sectoral programs, had already worked within their targeted sectors, had leadership with considerable sectoral programming experience, and ran programs that were predecessors of WorkAdvance; they were able to launch their WorkAdvance programs before the other two providers did. Having a singular focus on WorkAdvance and an operating culture that aligns closely with the model made it easier for Madison Strategies Group and Per Scholas to make the program a priority within their organizations, to serve a dual customer (participant and employer) in the way that the model envisions, and to adapt their staffs to the functional roles that the model requires. Meanwhile, St. Nicks Alliance had to develop a sectoral program in environmental remediation, for which it had already delivered training, within the context of operating a multifaceted organization, and Towards Employment had the extra challenges of gaining expertise in the manufacturing sector and of launching WorkAdvance in two locations and for two distinct sectors each. Additionally, both St. Nicks Alliance and Towards Employment managed other programs and brought to WorkAdvance an operating culture that was initially more focused on removing employment barriers than WorkAdvance calls for.

Yet all four providers are now far along in implementing the program components. By fall 2013, for example, the providers had all incorporated employer input and guidance into almost every part of the WorkAdvance program, including up-front screening, career readiness services, occupational skills training, and job development and placement — making WorkAdvance a truly employer-driven and demand-driven program. Additionally, the providers' employer partners were pleased, overall, with the services delivered by the providers and with the relationships established with them. However, postemployment advancement services are still being developed and rolled out. (For that reason, detailed discussion of this component is deferred until the next report, in late 2015.)

- **Marketing and outreach required a substantial investment of time and resources, especially because, on average, only one in five applicants were eligible and qualified for the program.**

The recruitment sources that generated the largest number of applicants for WorkAdvance did not necessarily yield the largest number who were eligible and suitable for WorkAdvance. However, careful analysis helped providers focus their outreach efforts more productively, so that a higher percentage of applicants could make it through the screening process and enroll. For example, while friends and family members were the largest recruitment source at St. Nicks Alliance, the Internet brought in the largest number of *eligible* applicants. After

learning that placing ads on the local Craigslist site could be effective, St. Nicks Alliance continued to use this source throughout the enrollment period.

As discussed above, a critical up-front WorkAdvance activity was the recruitment and screening of individuals who would be appropriate for the program. The WorkAdvance providers used both objective criteria (such as income guidelines[10] and test scores) and subjective criteria (such as staff assessments of potential barriers to employment) to screen applicants. However, relatively few applicants were screened out as inappropriate by more subjective criteria at the discretion of the providers' staff; most of the individuals who did not eventually enroll in the program either withdrew on their own accord or failed to achieve the required score on assessments of their academic level. The screening for applicants' motivation may well have influenced the high participation rates in program activities discussed below.

- **Despite some advantageous characteristics, particularly with regard to educational attainment and employment history, the sample still faced substantial barriers to employment.**

At the time they entered the study, almost all sample members had at least a high school diploma or GED certificate, and over half the sample had at least some college education. Almost all sample members also had previous work experience, although only one in five were working. There is some variation in education levels across the industries, likely due in part to some providers using a minimum level of education as an eligibility criterion. For example, less than 1 percent of sample members training in the information technology industry lacked a high school diploma or GED certificate, since Per Scholas required this to help ensure that applicants would have the minimum academic skills necessary to succeed in the information technology sector. Other barriers to employment faced by the full sample are apparent, however: More than 36 percent of sample members had been unemployed for at least seven months prior to study entry. This group is of particular interest, as there is concern in the workforce policy community about the reduced labor market reentry rates for the longer-term unemployed. One-quarter of the overall sample had a previous criminal conviction, and even higher rates were seen within those enrollees targeted for the transportation and manufacturing industries (40 percent and 46 percent, respectively). Individuals who were targeted for the health care sector — over 90 percent of whom are female (in contrast to the other sectors, which are majority male) — had the highest percentage of single parents and the highest rates of food stamp usage.

[10]For WorkAdvance, applicants needed to be adults who had a monthly family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and who earned less than $15 per hour at the time they entered the study.

- **Even for a population that had substantial prior work experience, the "soft skills" taught in the career readiness classes were as important to participants and employers as the technical skills acquired from occupational skills training.**

The key features of the career readiness services were designed to provide (1) preemployment coaching to help participants set and follow through with career advancement goals and (2) career readiness classes to teach participants about the sector and help them acquire "soft skills" that are critical to success in their respective sectors. Although the structure and manner of delivering career readiness training varied across the providers, the basic content of career readiness training was similar: All the providers covered such topics as an introduction to the sector, résumés and cover letters, job search, interview preparation, appropriate behavior on the job (such as the importance of punctuality and reliability), and development of individualized career plans (ICPs), although some providers emphasized certain topics more than others. Employers who were interviewed for this report concurred that soft skills — or, as one employer called them, "essential skills" — are in many ways more important than technical skills. Rarely, they said, were individuals terminated from employment for technical mistakes; more often, terminations were the result of a lack of essential skills, such as showing up every day and being on time or because of sloppy behavior on the job.

- **Early indications are that training completion rates are high in Work-Advance: Very few program participants dropped out of occupational skills training within the first six months after random assignment.**

As shown in the top panel of Table ES.1, about 70 percent of participants across the providers participated in occupational skills training. As expected, rates of participation in occupational skills training are higher at Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance (the two providers that only offered training before job placement) than at Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment (the two providers that were initially expected to place only about 50 percent of participants into training and the other 50 percent directly into jobs). The training participation rates averaged 89 percent for the training-first providers, compared with 52 percent for the dual-track providers.

Among those who started skills training, the average dropout rate across the providers within six months of random assignment is about 12 percent — a very low rate for a training or education program geared toward this population.[11] Although the bottom panel of Table ES.1

[11]Gayle Hamilton and Susan Scrivener, "Facilitating Postsecondary Education and Training for TANF Recipients," Brief No. 07 (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2012a).

The WorkAdvance Study

Table ES.1

Indicators of Participation in Program Group Activities at Six Months and Twelve Months After Random Assignment

Cross-Site

Participation in program activity since RA (%)	PS	SNA	MSG	TE	Overall
Six-month indicators for participants randomly assigned through February 2013					
Ever started skills training or obtained a provider-verified job[a]	93.1	85.2	77.0	69.9	81.4
Ever participated in any career readiness activity[b]	93.1	83.5	96.7	97.5	93.2
Ever started skills training	93.1	83.5	52.3	50.9	69.7
Ever completed skills training	76.9	76.4	25.1	33.1	52.0
Ever obtained a credential[c] in targeted sector (%)	70.0	69.2	25.1	15.7[d]	44.2
Ever obtained a provider-verified job[a]	20.0	30.2	51.9	29.7	32.8
Sample size	260	182	239	236	917
Twelve-month indicators for participants randomly assigned through August 2012					
Ever started skills training or obtained a provider-verified job[a]	94.4	85.2	80.3	70.8	83.0
Ever participated in any career readiness activity[b]	94.4	83.5	99.4	96.6	94.2
Ever started skills training	94.4	83.5	49.4	41.5	67.2
Ever completed skills training	79.1	80.0	36.4	31.3	56.1
Ever obtained a credential[c] in targeted sector (%)	70.1	79.1	35.8	15.7[d]	49.3
Ever obtained a provider-verified job[a]	49.2	48.7	67.9	49.0	54.1
Sample size	177	115	162	147	601

(continued)

Table ES.1 (continued)

SOURCES: Program tracking systems managed by Per Scholas (PS), St. Nicks Alliance (SNA), Madison Strategies Group (MSG), and Towards Employment (TE).

NOTES: RA = random assignment.

Refer to Appendix Table E.1 for site-specific details regarding how each metric is defined.

[a]A job is considered verified if the WorkAdvance provider has obtained a pay stub or employment verification form or has made direct contact with the employer.

[b]The first program activity at PS and SNA is skills training, which is offered in combination with career readiness training and includes help with developing a career plan, résumés, and interview preparation. At MSG, the first progam activity is career readiness training. At TE, the first program activity is an initial assessment whereby career goals and barriers to employment are discussed.

[c]Credentials in the targeted sector are locally and/or nationally recognized. There is cross-site variation in reporting of locally recognized credentials obtained in the targeted sector.

[d]TE's program tracking system captures only nationally recognized credentials. Therefore, participants who obtained the locally recognized computer numerical control machining credential are not counted as ever having obtained a credential.

shows that a higher percentage of participants who started skills training at Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance had completed the training within twelve months of enrollment than is the case at Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment, further follow-up is needed to interpret these rates because of the number of participants who were still in training at the end of the twelve-month follow-up period.

- **In most cases, completion of occupational skills training led to the earning of either a nationally or locally recognized credential (or both)[12] — a critical first step toward getting a job in the sector.**

A credential indicates to potential employers that participants left training with a tangible skill, which was the expectation of WorkAdvance training. Most of the training programs were designed to lead to the earning of a credential; in some cases, such as at St. Nicks Alliance, trainings could lead to as many as five different credentials. As the top panel of Table ES.1 shows, at the two training-first providers, Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance, about 76 percent of participants completed training within six months of enrollment, and 70 percent earned a license or certificate. At Madison Strategies Group, all 25 percent of participants who completed training as of six months after random assignment also earned a license or certificate.

[12]Some of the WorkAdvance providers tracked and measured only nationally recognized credentials, obtained by passing an exam developed by a nationally recognized industry association, while others tracked and measured credentials that were not necessarily recognized nationally but that were recognized and valued by local sector employers. In most cases, completion of skills training led to the earning of at least one of these types of credentials.

Towards Employment only reported on nationally recognized credentials, though some of its participants could obtain locally recognized credentials. As a result, the roughly 16 percent reported to have obtained a credential in the health care or manufacturing sector at Towards Employment — which is about half of those who ever completed skills training within six months of enrollment — does not include those who obtained a locally recognized credential.

- **The placement-first strategy, while potentially worthwhile, did not deliver widely in this case on the goal of ensuring that individuals would have opportunities to gain new skills while employed. Whether or not these individuals are advancing, despite having fewer opportunities for skill acquisition than expected, remains to be seen.**

For the placement-first approach to be delivered as intended, it likely needs to be coupled with strong postemployment advancement services, but the eventual impact analysis may ultimately shed some light on this. Postemployment services — which might have helped the placement-first participants gain new skills and advance — were not developed in time to help ensure that these participants could move beyond entry-level positions. Without postemployment services squarely in place, the placement-first approach was not very different from a regular, nonsectoral placement program.

Next Steps

The WorkAdvance providers will continue to deliver services to participants with support from the Social Innovation Fund through June 2015. Researchers will continue to track the progress of program implementation, including the still-developing delivery of postemployment services. A survey of WorkAdvance enrollees and the control group is currently being fielded. The next report on WorkAdvance, in late 2015, will update the preliminary implementation findings in this first report, and it will also include findings from the impact and cost analyses.

Taken together, the WorkAdvance reports will provide policymakers, practitioners, and funders with especially useful information on the feasibility, impact, and cost of expanding and replicating a model of this type for low-income populations in various local contexts. Moreover, efforts are under way to secure additional funding to extend the follow-up of the program and control groups in order to document the longer-term impacts of the WorkAdvance model.

Chapter 1

Background on the WorkAdvance Model and Evaluation

Introduction

Even in good economic times, many low-skilled adults in the United States have difficulty obtaining jobs and advancing in careers that pay enough to support their families. Individuals with no more than a high school education have seen their wages remain flat in real terms for decades, and their employment is often unsteady.[1] Training programs for low-skilled adults often fail to prepare participants for sustained employment and upward mobility, especially if the programs do not lead to a marketable credential[2] or do not focus on jobs in high-demand occupations with genuine advancement opportunities. At the same time, some employers report difficulty finding people with the right skills to meet their needs, even in periods of high unemployment.[3]

Amid much debate about how workforce policy should address these concerns, there is a continuing need for clearer evidence on the best ways to promote the upward mobility of low-skilled workers. The WorkAdvance program and the related evaluation will help to fill the gap in evidence by testing the effectiveness of a model that builds on previous research and practitioners' experience in two especially important areas of workforce policy: sectoral strategies and retention and career advancement strategies.

Sectoral strategies focus on preparing individuals for quality jobs that employers are seeking to fill in specific high-demand industries or occupational clusters. A key element of this approach is to address the needs of *both* employers and workers simultaneously, as explained below in this chapter. Although variations of sectoral strategies have been used for some time, increased interest was sparked by the results of a rigorous random assignment evaluation[4] — Public/Private Ventures' (P/PV) Sectoral Employment Impact Study,[5] completed in 2009 — as well as other tests that used less rigorous research designs. The P/PV study, which examined

[1]Mishel, Bernstein, and Shierholz (2009).

[2]Hamilton and Scrivener (2012b).

[3]Morrison et al. (2011); Holzer (2013).

[4]In a random assignment evaluation, eligible individuals who apply for a program are assigned at random either to receive the program's services or not to receive them. If sample sizes are large enough, the difference between the two groups' outcomes — referred to as "impacts" — can be attributed to the program, since the two groups were statistically alike at baseline and the only difference between them is that one group received program services and the other did not. A random assignment study (also known as a randomized controlled trial, or RCT) is widely held to be the most reliable way to study a program's effectiveness.

[5]Maguire et al. (2010).

three small programs operated by organizations with experience in sector-focused efforts, found substantial improvements in employment, earnings, and wage rates over a two-year follow-up period. Since the study did not follow the research sample beyond two years, it is not clear how much longer these positive results would have lasted and the extent to which workers would have advanced along career paths.

WorkAdvance also draws on lessons from efforts to improve the *job retention and career advancement* of low-skilled workers after initial job placement. As discussed in more detail below in this chapter, these "retention and advancement" programs have had mixed results, but much has been learned about what is likely to be effective and, equally important, ineffective. Particularly relevant for WorkAdvance is the hypothesis that concrete postemployment support — such as coaching tied to specific career paths and proactive reemployment services when a participant loses a job — could help individuals not only maintain their employment but also continue to grow their earnings over time.[6]

By integrating the most promising features of sectoral *and* retention and advancement strategies, the designers of WorkAdvance are hopeful that this combination of services will produce larger and longer-lasting effects on employment, earnings, and career paths than either strategy might have on its own; the WorkAdvance study will provide the first rigorous test of this combination of services. Specifically, the WorkAdvance evaluation examines how the program model was implemented in practice, its effects (or "impacts") on the employment and earnings of individuals who enrolled in WorkAdvance, and the cost of the program.

The WorkAdvance program operations and evaluation are being conducted under the auspices of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF). Administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, SIF is a public-private partnership designed to identify and expand effective solutions to critical social challenges. WorkAdvance is part of the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) SIF project, which is led by CEO and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City in collaboration with MDRC. MDRC is leading the WorkAdvance evaluation; has provided technical assistance to the local providers; and, jointly with CEO, has monitored providers' operations. Funding for the WorkAdvance program and evaluation come from the SIF and a broad array of local funding partners that have matched the SIF funding.[7]

[6]Hamilton and Scrivener (2012a).

[7]The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and CEO led fundraising efforts for the SIF initiative, identifying a diverse set of national and local funders to match the federal funds with support for the program operations, evaluation, and oversight activities. The WorkAdvance providers worked closely with CEO to raise matching funds to support program operations and to meet SIF match requirements.

This first report on WorkAdvance focuses on how four local program providers dealt with the types of challenges that can be expected to arise when launching large-scale efforts to enhance sectoral strategies with advancement services, particularly postemployment.[8] The report offers insights on the level of effort and technical assistance required to translate the model into a workable program, how program operations evolved over time, and how the four providers' decisions and experiences reflect their individual operating histories, strengths, and weaknesses. In particular, the report describes how the providers recruited and selected participants, as well as the extent to which the providers have so far been able to deliver services with a true sectoral focus while actively engaging workers and employers in the manner that the WorkAdvance model envisions. This includes detailed data on the extent to which low-income individuals completed the full sequence of WorkAdvance activities, earned marketable credentials, and entered jobs related to these credentials. A second report on WorkAdvance, in late 2015, will examine program implementation in more depth and over a longer operating period, and it will also include findings from the impact and cost analyses.

Taken together, the WorkAdvance reports will provide policymakers, practitioners, and funders with especially useful information on the feasibility, impact, and cost of expanding and replicating a model of this type for low-income populations in various local contexts. WorkAdvance is being delivered by organizations with varying missions and experience. Notably, two of the four providers had no previous experience operating sectoral programs, and although some had job retention services in place, none of them had ever incorporated substantial postemployment *advancement* services into their programs. The WorkAdvance providers operated in three different locations (New York City; greater Cleveland and Youngstown in northeast Ohio; and Tulsa, Oklahoma) and across multiple sectors (transportation, information technology, environmental remediation, health care, and manufacturing). Consistent with the SIF goal of testing programs at scale, the local WorkAdvance providers recruited twice the number of people that they could serve (since half the people they recruited were assigned to the control group), and the number enrolled in the program group was twice the number enrolled in the P/PV study. The WorkAdvance providers also operated during an especially poor economy, when low-skilled workers were experiencing extended periods of unemployment or underemployment. In contrast, the programs that P/PV studied operated primarily in a far healthier economy.

The rest of this chapter begins by describing the WorkAdvance program model and the four provider organizations that were selected to implement it. Then, more detail is provided on the rationale for the model's design and the policy context in which it fits. The chapter con-

[8]For an MDRC Policy Brief that introduces WorkAdvance, see Tessler (2013).

cludes by elaborating on the WorkAdvance evaluation plan and providing an overview of how the rest of the report is organized.

The WorkAdvance Model

The WorkAdvance model reflects a hypothesis that only through deep knowledge of and relationships with employers in a particular sector can program staff provide the required level of specialized guidance needed for participants to succeed in their jobs and advance in their careers while also meeting employers' demand for specific skills. WorkAdvance also reflects the hypothesis that inclusion of a focus on long-term career advancement can produce better results than those found for previous sectoral programs that lacked this component.

The fundamental focus on employer input and long-term career advancement is expected to be reflected in each of the five WorkAdvance program elements shown in Figure 1.1. These elements — including one that precedes enrollment and then four program components offered after enrollment — present program providers with a variety of implementation choices and challenges. This report presents early findings on the ways in which the local providers delivered the five program elements in practice, along with some of the factors that appear to have promoted or constrained effective delivery.

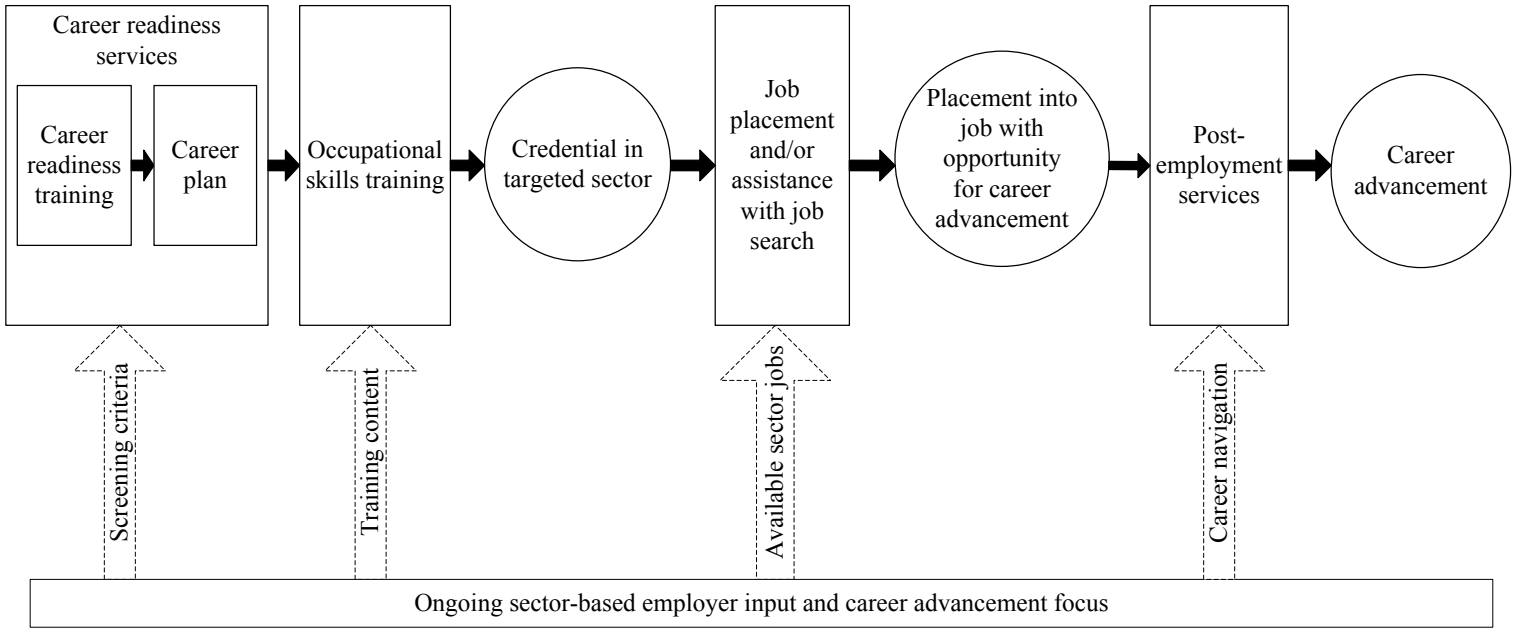
1. **Intensive screening** of applicants prior to enrollment is intended to ensure that the providers select participants who are appropriate for the sector and the particular training programs offered. The program staff face the challenge of identifying low-income applicants who have the ability to complete the program services and be attractive to employers while not being so qualified that they are likely to find high-quality jobs in the sector on their own.

2. Sector-focused **preemployment and career readiness services** are expected to include an orientation to the sector, career readiness training, individualized career coaching, and financial assistance for employment- and training-related expenses, such as a transportation subsidy or paying for licensing fees, tools, and uniforms. These services help address the reality that many low-income, low-skilled individuals need help with soft skills, as well as with occupational skills, to prepare them for long-term employment. Career readiness training should accustom the participants to the work environment, educating them on the attitudes and behaviors expected in order to be successful employees. The sectoral focus could be reflected in mock interviewing in, for example, an information technology (IT) program that includes the specific kinds of questions that a company's IT supervisor might ask in a job

The WorkAdvance Study

Figure 1.1

Program Logic Model



NOTES: Program components are represented by boxes. Program outcomes are represented by circles.

The program logic model presents the key components and outcomes of the training-first track. The placement-first track does not include occupational skills training or a credential in the targeted sector prior to job placement.

interview. Similarly, career planning would explore career ladders in the IT sector and the kinds of credentials required to attain higher-level IT positions over time.

3. Sector-specific **occupational skills training** is expected to impart skills and lead to credentials that substantially enhance workers' employment opportunities. The WorkAdvance providers are expected to offer training only in particular sectors and for occupations that the providers, in ongoing consultation with employers, have identified as being in high demand with good pay and potential for career advancement.

4. Sector-specific **job development and placement** are intended to facilitate entry into positions for which the participants have been trained and for which there are genuine opportunities for continued skill development and career advancement. To ensure that job development and placement are linked with the occupational skills training, the providers' job developers (or "account managers") are expected to maintain strong relationships with employers who hire the kinds of individuals that the program has trained. This includes helping to identify shifts in industry requirements and employers' needs that should be reflected in adjustments to the program's occupational skills training curricula over time.

5. Postemployment **retention and advancement services** are needed because WorkAdvance participants might not easily advance in or even retain their jobs without coaching to address "life issues" that might arise, help identifying next-step job opportunities and skills training to move up career ladders over time, and help with rapid reemployment if they lose their job. The providers are expected to maintain close contact with workers and employers to assess performance and needs and to offer these types of services.

Although all the WorkAdvance providers eventually emphasized training first before job placement, two of them (in Ohio and Tulsa) implemented the program model with two separate tracks. Based on previous workforce experience in New York City, one track emphasized gaining skills first through training (similar to most other sector-based programs), and the other sought to place people into jobs first; the goal for the two dual-track providers was to designate at least 50 percent of their participants to go into training first, while the remaining could be placed first. The placement-first track — which these two providers initially emphasized more than the training-first track — was intended to be a less expensive but still effective route to advancement by enabling enrollees to gain experience and sector-specific skills (such as through on-the-job training) without participating in formal training first. Another rationale for

making placements right away was that it helped the providers offer and deliver a more immediate service to employers while participants in the other track were still going through training and site staff were building relationships with employers. However, at MDRC's urging, both the providers eventually shifted mostly to the training-first approach, since providers were not going to be able to reach the goal of enrolling 50 percent of participants in training if so many people continued to be placed first. Additionally, preliminary evidence from the WorkAdvance experience suggested that placement-first too often resulted in participants entering low-wage jobs that, in practice, did not lead to on-the-job acquisition of skills.

The Organization of WorkAdvance Service Delivery

As described in detail in Chapter 2, the WorkAdvance model was delivered by four local organizations that focused on a range of sectors and brought differing backgrounds to the project:[9]

- Madison Strategies Group is a nonprofit spinoff of Grant Associates, a for-profit workforce development company that operates a variety of workforce programs in New York City, including sectoral strategies. Grant Associates' leaders used that experience to launch a new organization and program in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that focuses on the transportation and manufacturing sectors.[10]

- Per Scholas, in Bronx, New York, focuses on the information technology sector. Before WorkAdvance, Per Scholas had substantial experience with sectoral programs and with a random assignment research design through its participation in the P/PV study.

- St. Nicks Alliance, in Brooklyn, New York, focuses on environmental remediation and related occupations. Although the organization had offered occupational skills training before WorkAdvance, it did not have experience operating sectoral strategies.

[9]Some of the sectors overlapped with those in the programs studied by P/PV (Maguire et al., 2010). Those programs focused on preemployment training in the construction, manufacturing, health care, medical billing and accounting, and information technology sectors.

[10]Madison Strategies Group initially offered services only in the transportation sector, including training for transportation-related manufacturing; however, the manufacturing focus gradually became more distinct from transportation as it became clear that someone who is trained to manufacture transportation-related parts can actually operate the machines necessary to make a wide variety of parts — even those unrelated to transportation. It is now more accurate to say that Madison Strategies Group focuses on both the transportation sector and the manufacturing sector.

- Towards Employment focuses on the health care and manufacturing sectors in northeast Ohio.[11] While Towards Employment offered a range of employment programs, it did not have experience operating sectoral strategies.

Enrollment began at the four WorkAdvance providers between June and October 2011, with program services being offered to individuals for up to two years after their date of enrollment.

The local provider organizations received substantial technical assistance and related support from MDRC and sometimes from contractors working closely with MDRC. This was needed because the program model had been designed specifically for the WorkAdvance demonstration and most of the providers had little or no experience with certain program components, especially postemployment services that focused on career advancement rather than only on job retention. MDRC's technical assistance included guidance materials, trainings, and conferences; observations of service delivery and a written assessment of strengths and areas for improvement, given to the providers between 7 and 11 months after program launch; and regular contact through phone calls and site visits. MDRC and CEO monitored providers' performance through observation and collection of data from each provider's program tracking or management information system (MIS).

The Rationale for the WorkAdvance Model

This section provides more detailed background on the economic issues that WorkAdvance was designed to address and the rationale for the particular program design that was adopted.

The Economic Challenge That WorkAdvance Addresses

WorkAdvance seeks to address several broad shifts that have been evident in the U.S. economy over the past 30 years by training unemployed and low-wage adults to obtain better-paying jobs in high-demand sectors of the local economy. Due in part to automation, the growth rate of middle-skill job categories that employed large numbers of American workers in the early 1980s — such as "production, craft and repair" and "operators, fabricators, and laborers" — has slowed. On the other hand, high-skill jobs that require a college degree have grown, and low-wage, low-skill jobs have also expanded.[12] Additionally, wages at the bottom of the labor

[11]Towards Employment subcontracts with Youngstown-based Compass Family and Community Services to deliver services in Youngstown, but research enrollment ceased there in January 2013. The partnership continues with a more targeted focus on manufacturing; however, individuals who had enrolled in WorkAdvance at Compass are not included in the study's impact analysis for reasons discussed in Chapter 2.

[12]Autor (2010).

market have been stagnant and declining (in real terms) due to numerous factors, including the decline of unions, changes in labor norms, increased competition, and globalization.[13]

It is becoming more difficult for workers who have only a high school diploma or less to access the so-called "middle-skill" jobs that can help pull them out of poverty.[14] While there is substantial debate over whether these middle-skill jobs are disappearing[15] or largely shifting to different industries and occupation types,[16] there is consensus that the skill requirements of such jobs are increasing. Contemporary middle-skill jobs differ from those of the past in that they require specialized skills and the performance of nonroutine tasks.[17] Common examples of middle-skill occupations include construction occupations, technicians in the health care field, and information technology support staff — precisely the kinds of jobs for which WorkAdvance seeks to prepare participants.

At the same time, there is evidence that employers in some industries are having trouble finding qualified applicants for middle-skill jobs.[18] Employers also appear less willing to absorb training costs than in the past, particularly when considering hiring new employees, possibly out of a concern for losing their investment when workers leave.[19] On the supply side, surveys reveal that, compared with employers, low-wage workers are less confident in the utility of training and education to help them advance in their careers. Workers also often lack awareness about training opportunities, and take-up rates of both employer- and government-sponsored training programs are low.[20] Employers also emphasize the importance of job/career readiness and life skills for low-skill jobs.[21] At the same time, surveys show that employers feel that the kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) education system is not sufficiently preparing students with the range of skills needed in the workplace.[22]

These trends — increased skill requirements, employers' reluctance to bear training costs, low levels of human capital, and workers' doubts about the effectiveness of training — point to a possible "skills mismatch," in which the skills that workers have do not match the skills needed by employers.[23] While the severity of this "skills mismatch" is debated, it is clear

[13]Howell (1997).
[14]Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010).
[15]Autor (2010).
[16]Holzer (2010).
[17]Holzer (2010); Holzer and Lerman (2007).
[18]Morrison et al. (2011).
[19]Cappelli (2012).
[20]Tompson, Benz, Agiesta, and Junius (2013).
[21]Osterman (2001).
[22]Peter D. Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies (2005).
[23]Osterman and Weaver (2014).

that workers who lack postsecondary education often have difficulty obtaining middle-skill jobs that offer higher wages. This is one of the problems that programs such as WorkAdvance seek to address. Programs that train individuals in areas that match the skills demanded by employers can be highly efficient, since they potentially benefit both workers and employers with minimal displacement.[24]

It is also important to consider that WorkAdvance has been implemented during the period of slow recovery from the Great Recession — a period when even relatively experienced and skilled workers have struggled to find work.[25] Recent studies indicate that employers have responded to this increased supply of unemployed workers by being especially selective, particularly about recent work experience. Those who have been out of the labor market for six months or longer are much less likely to receive calls for job interviews, even when applicants have extensive relevant experience.[26] This situation presents a special challenge — and opportunity — for programs like WorkAdvance, which seek to place such individuals into the labor market.

The Research and Policy Background

The WorkAdvance program builds on several generations of rigorous random assignment evaluations of welfare-to-work and workforce programs that have sought to improve the employment outcomes of low-income people. The first strand of evidence comes from evaluations of programs designed to help people make the transition from welfare to work. By the late 1990s, several studies had found that rapid job placement programs (known as "work-first" programs) can increase employment rates, but most people get stuck in a "low-pay, no-pay" cycle — that is, many participants who found jobs did not have substantial sustained financial gains in the long run.[27] The initial hope that what labor economists call "returns to experience" would pull these workers out of poverty faded as most workers who remained employed saw little real wage growth.[28]

[24]Displacement occurs to the extent that employment programs have effects by favoring some workers over others who would have gotten the job without the program. In a general equilibrium sense, there is no improvement. However, if sectoral programs help fill vacancies with better-trained employees, then there would be positive effects that go beyond simply switching workers in the employment queue.

[25]This recovery was notable for the lack of job creation and earnings growth. The period up to 2007 was sometimes called the "jobless recovery." Thus, low-wage workers have confronted an extended period of labor market stagnation (Kolesnikova and Liu, 2011).

[26]Ghayad (2013); Kroft, Lange, and Notowidigdo (2012).

[27]Freedman and Smith (2008).

[28]Holzer (2004); Miller, Deitch, and Hill (2011).

As a response to these concerns, the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) study, conducted from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, included multiple random assignment evaluations that examined various programs designed to help improve the longer-term retention and advancement of recently placed welfare recipients.[29] The study highlighted the difficulty of achieving upward mobility through placement and generic coaching alone. Of 12 programs in the ERA evaluation, only three were effective at increasing earnings for participants. The three effective programs each offered postemployment services in combination with other concrete services, including some features that have been included in the WorkAdvance design: job placement in specific sectors where the provider has close ties to employers and proactive reemployment services when a participant loses a job.[30] The ERA study provided some preliminary evidence for the possible long-term benefits of providing advancement and retention services, which became part of the Work Advance model.

In addition, the ERA evidence led the designers of WorkAdvance to go beyond just placement and nonspecific coaching to seek programs that increase skills and human capital, since the ERA evidence (and several other studies)[31] suggests that job experience on its own is not enough to lift low-wage workers out of poverty. Therefore, another strand of research evidence that informed the design of WorkAdvance is in the area of job training.

WorkAdvance draws on lessons from some four decades of rigorous studies of employment and training programs.[32] Within the realm of training-focused programs, research has shown that vocational training that prepares participants for jobs in particular sectors can improve outcomes — provided there are opportunities available in those sectors locally.[33] One of the clearest findings is that training works only when it is aligned with the labor demand needs of employers.[34] As just one example, the ERA study in the United Kingdom found that increases in training did not lead to increases in earnings, most likely because the staff who advised participants on training were not able to customize that advice to specific industries or career paths or to steer participants toward acquiring skills that were in high demand. Even when participants did complete training for in-demand occupations, the program staff typically lacked direct relationships with employers and, thus, could not easily link participants to

[29]Gueron and Rolston (2013).
[30]Henrda et al. (2010).
[31]Dyke, Heinrich, Mueser, and Troske (2005).
[32]D'Amico (2006).
[33]Zandniapour and Conway (2002).
[34]Melendez (1996).

specific job openings in their new fields.[35] The sectoral approach, described in the next section, is an effort to improve the alignment between training and employment opportunities.

The Sectoral Approach

Beginning in the late 1980s, community-based organizations across the United States pioneered workforce development programs using a "sector strategies" approach.[36] Although programs employing such strategies vary widely, the Aspen Workforce Strategies Institute defines a *sector strategy for workforce development* as one that:[37]

> (1) targets a specific industry or cluster of organizations; (2) intervenes through a credible organization, or set of organizations, crafting workforce solutions tailored to that industry and its region; (3) supports workers in improving their range of employment-related skills; (4) meets the needs of employers; and (5) creates lasting change in the labor market system to the benefit of both workers and employers.

Importantly, sectoral strategies go well beyond simply specializing in one area of training. For example, a training provider that trains in a specific field but does not have strong relationships with employers and/or industry associations in that field would not be considered a sectoral provider by Aspen's definition. To qualify as a sectoral program, an initiative must bring together multiple employers in a given field to collaborate on developing a qualified workforce.[38]

While early work by the Aspen Institute[39] and CEO's Workforce Innovations study of sector-focused programs[40] found some encouraging evidence on the benefits of the sectoral approach, these studies were not as scientifically rigorous as randomized controlled trials; rather, the most powerful evidence to date comes from the P/PV Sectoral Employment Impact

[35]Hendra et al. (2011).

[36]Mangat (2007).

[37]Conway (2007), page 2. WorkAdvance can also fit into a "career pathways" framework. As defined by the Center for Law and Social Policy's Alliance for Quality Career Pathways (AQCP), *career pathways* "is an approach to connecting progressive levels of basic skills and postsecondary education, training, and supportive services in specific sectors or cross-sector occupations in a way that optimizes the progress and success of individuals … in securing marketable credentials, family-supporting employment, and further education and employment opportunities" (Alliance for Quality Career Pathways, 2013). However, WorkAdvance programs would form only part of a larger career pathways system, as AQCP envisions career pathways systems as consisting of multiple institutions, including education providers and employer associations.

[38]Woolsey and Groves (2013).

[39]Zandniapour and Conway (2002).

[40]Henderson, MacAllum, and Karakus (2010).

Study.[41] That study, which was a randomized controlled trial, found that sector-focused training programs for low-income workers and job-seekers increased their earnings, employment, job stability, and access to benefits over the two-year period for which follow-up was available. Participants' earnings over two years were $4,500 (or 18 percent) higher than earnings for a randomly assigned control group. Earnings in the year after training were 29 percent higher than the control group average. Impacts from job training programs are usually much more modest, which led to enthusiasm about sectoral programs.

Key elements of the programs studied by P/PV included the providers' experience with sectoral programs, their strong relationships with local employers, provision of job readiness training in addition to occupational skills training, a stringent screening and intake process, and provision of individualized services. Although they aimed to place workers in "good" jobs — jobs that are higher-paying and more stable — the programs did not have an explicit advancement component.[42] There had been a number of sectoral programs even before the P/PV study, but the promising findings led to even greater interest in sectoral initiatives[43] and several attempts to promote the strategy in Congress.[44] Given all this focus on sectoral programs, it is critical to understand these types of programs better, to confirm that they are effective, and to determine how they perform in different conditions and at larger scale.

The WorkAdvance Evaluation

The evaluation includes three components that, together, will provide important information to policymakers, funders, and practitioners on the feasibility, effectiveness, and cost of WorkAdvance. In particular, the WorkAdvance evaluation expands on the P/PV study by addressing whether sectoral programs can be enhanced effectively by the addition of postemployment

[41]Maguire et al. (2010).

[42]Maguire et al. (2010). Earlier, in the mid-2000s, the Work Advancement and Support Centers (WASC) demonstration — which offered training combined with advancement coaching and work supports — had found that training in the right sectors could lead to longer-term earnings gains (Miller, van Dok, Tessler, and Pennington, 2012).

[43]In a survey, the National Network of Sector Partners found that 47 percent of sectoral initiatives profiled were less than five years old (Mangat, 2010). Prominent initiatives founded between about 2005 and 2010 include, among many others, Skills2Compete Maryland, Pueblo Manufacturing Consortium in Colorado, and the South Central Pennsylvania Food Manufacturers' Training Consortium.

[44]The Strengthening Employment Clusters To Organize Regional Success (SECTORS) Act, which would amend the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 to include additional funding for sectoral initiatives, was introduced in Congress in 2008, 2009, 2011, and 2013 without ever moving out of committee. The Careers through Responsive, Efficient, and Effective Retraining (CAREER) Act, which would amend WIA to provide more funding for training leading to industry-recognized credentials, was introduced in the U.S. Senate in 2012 and 2013 but remains in committee.

advancement services delivered by a variety of organizational providers operating at larger scale, including in sectors that were not present in the P/PV study.

- The **implementation analysis** assesses what it takes to operate the WorkAdvance model well, what organizational and other factors influenced operations, and how the programs evolved over time. It will particularly seek to determine whether most participants complete the skills training courses, whether they find jobs in their new fields, whether the program staff establish strong relationships with employers, and how well the providers deliver postemployment services to identify and support advancement opportunities.

- The **impact analysis** uses a rigorous random assignment research design, in which individuals who are eligible for the program are assigned through a lottery-like process to either a program group or a control group. Those in the program group have the opportunity to participate in WorkAdvance, while those in the control group do not. Control group members are free to seek other services in the community. The program's effects, or "impacts," are measured by the differences between the two groups in subsequent employment, earnings, and other outcomes. The analysis will determine whether WorkAdvance improves employment rates, employment retention, wages, and average earnings and whether it reduces material hardship and improves financial well-being. A report scheduled for late 2015 under the current Social Innovation Fund project will include 18 to 24 months of follow-up after random assignment for both groups. A total of three to five years of follow-up is planned for the impact analysis, if funding permits. As data on control group members are not yet available, this report does not present findings for control group members and does not present impact results; these will be included in the 2015 report.

- The **cost analysis** will estimate the average per person cost of operating the WorkAdvance program. It will first estimate the *gross* cost per person by looking at the full costs of services delivered to the program group divided by the number of program group members. It will then estimate the *net* cost per person of WorkAdvance by subtracting the average costs of the services that the control group receives from the average gross cost of providing services to the WorkAdvance program group; this provides an estimate of the cost of WorkAdvance over and above what the costs would have been to serve the program group in the absence of WorkAdvance — that is, the net cost of WorkAdvance. The cost analysis will use MIS, survey, and financial data.

This first report on WorkAdvance presents early findings from the implementation analysis. It covers data through August 2013 and observations of WorkAdvance activities through fall 2013; this includes the first 24 to 28 months of program operations, depending on when the provider started enrolling individuals. Most of the detailed data that are presented cover the first six months of participation in WorkAdvance services for all program group members randomly assigned through February 2013; in other words, the data cover each program group member's first six months of participation in WorkAdvance, regardless of when each person was randomly assigned. The provider-reported job placement data, however, pertain to a smaller sample (enrolled through August 2012), which has 12 months of follow-up data, to allow more time to capture instances of program group members completing their WorkAdvance activities and finding employment.[45]

The decision to report mostly on a larger sample for which there are only six months of follow-up data, rather than a smaller sample for which there are 12 months of follow-up data, was made primarily to capture many of the key changes in the providers' approaches to Work-Advance service delivery in fall 2012 and later. These data cover 71 percent of all program group members. The discussion of the provider-reported job placement data, however, focuses on the sample with 12 months of follow-up data, for the reasons mentioned above. Demographic information is presented for the full research sample, including control group members.

The report draws on a variety of data sources: observations and interviews with the providers' staff; a "funnel analysis," described in Chapter 3, which provides data on recruitment and the flow of participants through the screening and enrollment process; a baseline interview with all sample members conducted at the time of random assignment; and MIS data. It also uses information collected from five focus groups of between 9 and 12 program participants each, individual interviews conducted with 20 participants at two points in their program tenure, and individual interviews with 21 employers identified by the WorkAdvance providers. The data also include case-file reviews of 100 randomly selected participants (25 from each site); these sample members were selected from the full sample and include people randomly assigned throughout the entire enrollment period. The focus group, interview, and case-file data are mostly used to provide examples, from multiple perspectives, of how WorkAdvance was implemented across the providers.

[45]Explained another way, the group with six months of follow-up is a larger group and covers program operations until a later date, but it has a shorter follow-up period; six months of follow-up for each person may not capture activities that took longer to achieve, such as completing training or finding a job. The second group is a smaller group and covers a shorter period of program operations, but it has a longer period of follow-up; the shorter period of program operations may mean that the program was not fully mature when this cohort experienced it, but the longer, 12-month follow-up per person provides more time to complete training and begin employment.

A second report, in late 2015, will examine implementation findings in more depth, for the full sample, and will cover up to 24 months of participation. In particular, it will explore the implementation of postemployment advancement-related services, which are not addressed in depth here because that component took longer for the four providers to develop and implement. As noted above, the 2015 report will also present an analysis of program impacts. At that point, impact results will cover from 18 to 24 months of follow-up for the full WorkAdvance research sample. The impact results will be based on unemployment insurance earnings records and survey data covering a range of outcome measures.

The Organization of This Report

The balance of this report focuses primarily on what it takes to develop, launch, and operate a program like WorkAdvance. The report is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 describes the WorkAdvance providers in more detail, including the background and experiences, strengths, and weaknesses that they brought to WorkAdvance.

Chapter 3 describes the recruitment, screening, and enrollment of the WorkAdvance research sample and details the key baseline characteristics of the individuals in the sample.

Chapters 4 and 5 describe in detail each component of the WorkAdvance model, what the model required in order to be delivered effectively, how each component was implemented in practice, and the extent to which participants actually engaged in the services offered. Chapter 4 focuses on career readiness services and occupational skills training, and Chapter 5 focuses on job development and placement and postemployment services.

Chapter 6 draws early lessons about implementation from the experiences of the WorkAdvance providers, their participants, and employers.

Chapter 2

WorkAdvance Providers

Selecting Program Providers

Under the auspices of the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant, the WorkAdvance managing collaborative[1] set out to select local providers in three geographic areas — New York City; northeast Ohio (Greater Cleveland and Youngstown); and Tulsa, Oklahoma — rather than to conduct a broader national search. A principal consideration in selecting the geographic areas was demonstrated local interest, as represented by a commitment to help raise the match funding needed to satisfy the SIF requirements, and a willingness of local government to support the demonstration. A second important factor was that there be a diversity of local economies and industry sectors, so that the WorkAdvance demonstration could draw on a range of local conditions to inform potential replication and scale-up of similar programs.

The four providers that were selected for WorkAdvance had a range of experiences and backgrounds. Ultimately, this benefited the study, which aims to learn, among other things, whether a range of providers — including some that were less mature in their delivery of sectoral programs than those included in the Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) Sectoral Employment Impact Study[2] or that had no prior sectoral experience at all — can successfully implement WorkAdvance. The evaluation seeks to identify the characteristics of the providers that seem most important in facilitating or constraining smooth implementation of the model (Chapter 1, Figure 1.1) and producing employment-related impacts (that is, gains in employment and earnings that would not have been achieved in the absence of the program), particularly at the scale needed if WorkAdvance is to become a nationwide replicable model.

The WorkAdvance providers were selected by the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City through a competitive process conducted within each of the identified geographic areas, with input from MDRC and local stakeholders, including representatives of government and philanthropy. A primary factor

[1]The WorkAdvance managing collaborative members are as follows: The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City is the grantee of the SIF; the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) manages the contracts with the providers (called "subgrantees") and is accountable to the funders for program implementation and progress and for operating a Learning Network for the project; and MDRC provides technical assistance to the providers in the implementation of WorkAdvance, monitors their performance (along with CEO), and is leading the evaluation.

[2]Maguire et al. (2010). For more background on the P/PV study and WorkAdvance's relationship to it, see Chapter 1 in this report.

in selection decisions was whether a provider could demonstrate that it was currently, or had the capacity to be, firmly grounded in a targeted sector; this included in-depth knowledge of and strong relationships with employers who provided letters of support. Applicants had to demonstrate current or potential capacity to operate at scale, to carry out an advancement-focused approach, and to work with a range of lower-income individuals — rather than only those who would be easiest to place in jobs. Applicants also had to show that they could adapt to changes in the labor market and employers' needs. Additional selection criteria included overall organizational capacity (including appropriate fiscal and data management capacity and the ability to comply with federal funding requirements), clear buy-in to the program model, and a willingness to participate in a random assignment study[3] and to help raise matching local funds. All the selected providers demonstrated the commitment of the agency's leadership to the requirements of the WorkAdvance demonstration.

CEO and the Mayor's Fund did not specify the targeted sectors in each geographic area; instead, providers proposed and had to justify the sector and range of occupations, based on their experience, local labor market information, and the advancement potential of the targeted jobs. Providers also had to articulate how they would implement the core programmatic elements of WorkAdvance within an estimated range of costs per person.

The four organizations selected to operate WorkAdvance are:

- Madison Strategies Group in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which focuses on the transportation and manufacturing sectors[4]
- Per Scholas in Bronx, New York, which focuses on the information technology (IT) sector

[3]Some potential providers were interested in WorkAdvance but were deterred from applying because certain programmatic strategies that they wanted to test were not feasible as part of a random assignment study. In a random assignment evaluation, eligible individuals who apply for a program are assigned at random either to receive the program's services or not to receive them. If sample sizes are large enough, the difference between the two groups' outcomes — referred to as "impacts" — can be attributed to the program, since the two groups were statistically alike at baseline and the only difference between them is that one group received program services and the other did not.

[4]Madison Strategies Group initially offered services only in the transportation sector, including training for transportation-related manufacturing; however, the manufacturing focus gradually became more distinct from transportation as it became clear that someone who is trained to manufacture transportation-related parts can actually operate the machines necessary to make a wide variety of parts — even those unrelated to transportation. It is now more accurate to say that Madison Strategies Group focuses on both the transportation sector and the manufacturing sector.

- St. Nicks Alliance in Brooklyn, New York, which focuses on environmental remediation and related occupations
- Towards Employment in northeast Ohio, which focuses on the health care and manufacturing sectors

The WorkAdvance managing collaborative wanted Towards Employment to be able to enroll a larger research sample than it originally proposed. The collaborative presented several options: (1) increase the number of individuals that Towards Employment planned to enroll in the proposed manufacturing sector, (2) increase the number of enrollees by adding another sector, or (3) increase the number of enrollees by adding a second location. Additionally, the local funder was interested in implementing WorkAdvance in more than one location. These factors led to a decision by Towards Employment to target two industry sectors — health care and manufacturing — in two locations. In order to expand to the second location, Towards Employment subcontracted to another organization, Compass Family and Community Services, located in Youngstown. While operations continue there, a decision was made in January 2013 that the Youngstown enrollees would not be included in the impact analysis.[5] This report therefore focuses on implementation by the four subgrantee organizations.

The Range of Organizations Selected

The four WorkAdvance providers include organizations with very different experiences in workforce programming, including three that focus exclusively on workforce services — one of which also provides broader social services to its workforce participants — and one that is multiservice. (See Table 2.1.) The fact that WorkAdvance also occupies different places within each of the provider organizations, ranging from being the organization's primary program to only one of many, may have influenced how much attention the providers have devoted to fully developing the services that the WorkAdvance model envisions. Launching WorkAdvance took more effort for some providers than others, but they all had to make adjustments to their usual activities and, in some cases, to their staffing to accommodate the model. To varying degrees,

[5]The decision not to include data from Compass in the impact analysis was made upon recognition that the program in Youngstown differed substantially enough from the program at Towards Employment in Cleveland that the sites could not be pooled. The sample size in Youngstown was inadequate to enable an analysis of the site on its own. Reasons for the differences relate to the different scales of the programs. The much smaller program at Compass made it difficult to staff a program that required a focus on two distinct sectors. And many of the individuals that Compass recruited already had credentials in the sector, which made them a poor fit for WorkAdvance. Despite the changed status with regard to the research, operations continue in Youngstown with a narrowed focus on manufacturing, in close partnership with the One-Stop Career Center.

Table 2.1

Institutional Structure of Providers

	Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Location	Bronx, NY	Brooklyn, NY	Tulsa, OK	Cleveland, OH
Year founded	1995	1975	2011	1976
Sector	Information technology	Environmental remediation	Transportation and manufacturing	Health care and manufacturing
Type of organization	In-house training organization providing technology education, access, training, and job placement services. All enrollees to Per Scholas programs are scheduled for technology training and receive placement services.	Large social service agency offering housing, health care, workforce and economic development, and youth and education services. WorkAdvance operates within a broader workforce development unit at St. Nicks Alliance.	New workforce nonprofit, built as the offshoot of a for-profit workforce agency operating in NYC. Transportation Connections WorkAdvance (the Tulsa site of Madison Strategies Group) operates only the WorkAdvance model.	Employment-focused organization that specializes in career readiness training, supportive services, access to occupational skills training, and employer partnerships to assist job-seekers.
Mission of organization	"To break the cycle of poverty by providing technology education, access, training and job placement services for people in underserved communities."	"To serve as a catalyst to improve the quality of life for Williamsburg-Greenpoint residents by addressing economic, educational, health, housing, and social needs while preserving the vibrant and diverse character of the entire community, particularly for low- and moderate-income residents."	"To create opportunities for individuals to build stable and productive lives through education, training and professional development experiences that support an evolving business environment."	"To empower individuals to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency through employment."
Track	Training-first for all enrollees	Training-first for all enrollees	Mixed enrollment to training- and placement-first	Mixed enrollment to training- and placement-first

SOURCES: Documentation provided by sites.

the providers needed to add or expand their focus on sector-specific career coaching and responsiveness to employers' needs, as well as on postemployment services that especially include support for career advancement.

The discussion below presents additional detail on each of the providers, including features that seemed to help or hinder their ability to launch WorkAdvance quickly and smoothly.

Madison Strategies Group

Madison Strategies Group is a new nonprofit organization that was formed by the principals of Grant Associates, a national for-profit workforce development company with expertise in engaging businesses to provide education and training. Grant Associates operates New York City's first-ever sector-based One-Stop Career Center, New York City's Workforce1 Transportation Career Center, which aims to serve the needs of both businesses and workers in the city's transportation sector. Like other "Workforce1 Centers" in New York City (known as One-Stop Career Centers/American Job Centers around the country), the sector-based centers provide job search and training services to workers and connect job-seekers with employers, but they focus on a specific sector — in this case, transportation. This experience in New York City was particularly helpful for Madison Strategies Group's operation of WorkAdvance in Tulsa.

Madison Strategies Group is located on the eighth floor of an office building in downtown Tulsa, within walking distance of a major bus line. The space is an open office environment. A small reception area opens up to the rest of the office, where staff desk areas are not enclosed by cubicles or partition walls. There are two private offices: one for the program director and one that is shared by all staff to be used as needed. Adjacent to the reception area is an enclosed classroom, which is used for orientations and career readiness training. Also adjacent to the reception area is a computer lab area, which is open to the rest of the office space, as well. The computer lab area is used for assessments during the intake process and is also available for WorkAdvance participants to use during job search activities.

Prior Experience

After an insufficient number of applicants from Tulsa applied to be part of WorkAdvance, Madison Strategies Group was invited to apply to be a WorkAdvance subgrantee by the Tulsa Community Foundation — a key foundation in Tulsa that would provide the funding match to the SIF grant. Madison Strategies Group's project director and consultants had experience running workforce programs, including sectoral strategies, in New York City. They applied this experience and knowledge, along with a strong customer-service approach with program participants and employers, to the new startup. They also used a "businesslike" strategy to try to ensure strong service delivery, by instituting performance-based incentives for staff. Madison Strategies Group had to build the Tulsa organization and program from scratch,

including opening an office, hiring all new staff, and developing relationships with employers, community organizations, and training providers. WorkAdvance was Madison Strategies Group's only program in Tulsa, since its organization there was established specifically to operate WorkAdvance.

Key Provider Features Affecting Program Implementation

Although Madison Strategies Group had to build a new program in a new location, it benefited from having strong senior managers who came from an organization with a business focus and extensive knowledge of the transportation industry. They understood, from their previous experience, the importance of developing collaborative partnerships with employers, community organizations, and educational institutions to launch the program smoothly. They also understood the structure of the transportation industry, so that while the employers with which they partnered were new to them, their knowledge of the industry helped them develop the necessary relationships relatively easily. In addition, Madison Strategies Group's strong support from the Tulsa Community Foundation helped open doors for Madison Strategies Group staff.

On the one hand, Madison Strategies Group may actually have benefited from starting fresh and not having to coax staff to do things differently than they were used to. On the other hand, working from a temporary location in the beginning while trying to secure a permanent location, and then having to move while the program was under way, hindered what might have been a smoother launch of the program.

Per Scholas

Per Scholas is a nonprofit professional information technology (IT) training institute in Bronx, New York. It is located on the second floor of a building with other offices and is relatively close to a subway line. The space includes an orientation room, three small rooms for conducting screening interviews or one-on-one meetings, two career readiness training classrooms, six fully equipped occupational skills training classrooms, a student lounge for eating and studying together, and staff offices. The space also includes a simulation lab in which students are assigned a work order with a service request, troubleshoot a real-world problem, and document the results in a lab with state-of-the-art equipment.

Prior Experience

Per Scholas had a head start on the other WorkAdvance providers, since it has operated a sector-based training program since 1995 and had participated in the P/PV study. The Per Scholas staff's familiarity with individual-level random assignment in the P/PV study enabled it to incorporate the WorkAdvance evaluation procedures into its program flow more readily than

the other providers, for which participation in this type of random assignment evaluation was a new undertaking.

Much of WorkAdvance mirrored the services that Per Scholas was already providing, under other funding contracts. However, Per Scholas's focus had primarily been on getting its graduates into entry-level IT jobs, whereas WorkAdvance required an additional focus on postemployment and career advancement services. Additionally, Per Scholas's previous funding required it to serve specific target populations (such as women, veterans, and individuals receiving food stamps), so the staff needed some time to integrate the populations targeted by WorkAdvance into its recruitment and enrollment efforts. In particular, women made up a smaller percentage of the sample at Per Scholas than desired for WorkAdvance, because Per Scholas was required by the funder of another program to conduct all-female classes that had to be filled. In other respects, Per Scholas considered WorkAdvance to be only a slight variation of its usual program.

Key Provider Features Affecting Program Implementation

Per Scholas benefited from being a well-established IT training institute that already had strong ties to employers in the industry who liked the organization's business-oriented approach; for example, Per Scholas's "Business Solutions Team" has designated staff who work exclusively with employers, who understand and can speak the language of the sector, and who are dedicated to meeting their needs, while other Business Solutions staff are designated to focus on the needs of students. It also benefited from having dedicated senior managers who understood the changes needed to carry out WorkAdvance's mission, and who were able to facilitate those changes, and from having nimble staff who were able to adjust the way they had been delivering services. At the same time, during the study period, Per Scholas was also focused on opening up locations in two other cities; this led, in part, to some reorganization of senior leadership to ensure that WorkAdvance continued to receive appropriate attention, but it took some time to integrate the program's components into the new management structure. As with the other WorkAdvance providers, it also took some time and a fair amount of technical assistance for Per Scholas staff members to change their culture from a focus on entry into the sector to a focus on long-term career advancement.

St. Nicks Alliance

St. Nicks Alliance is a large multiservice agency housed in several locations in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. All workforce development services are offered in a building separate from the agency's other programs, which include youth, education, and housing services. The St. Nicks Alliance workforce programs occupy a full floor of its building, including five classrooms and one computer lab. These classrooms are shared across all workforce programs

and are used for all on-site WorkAdvance program activities, including orientations, career readiness classes, on-site occupational skills trainings, and group alumni meetings. Additionally, some WorkAdvance occupational skills trainings are offered off-site at partner institutions within the five boroughs of New York City. The space additionally includes a waiting and reception area and staff offices and cubicles.

Prior Experience

St. Nicks Alliance is primarily known as a large, well-established multiservice community-based organization offering affordable housing, health care, workforce development, youth services, and other social programs. Nevertheless, St. Nicks Alliance had operated smaller-scale occupational skills training programs, including environmental remediation training, for more than 10 years. Although only a relatively small part of St. Nicks Alliance's wide array of services are workforce programs, those programs did have an occupational training focus. WorkAdvance is operated by St. Nicks Alliance's Workforce Development division, which also runs asset-building, job readiness, and other programs. With the advent of WorkAdvance, St. Nicks Alliance's existing occupational skills trainings in environmental remediation were incorporated into the WorkAdvance program.

Key Provider Features Affecting Program Implementation

Although St. Nicks Alliance had operated a specific occupational skills training program in environmental remediation and had developed some fruitful relationships with employers within the sector, it had to develop a sectoral strategy for its skills training program; diversify its sectoral focus to include related occupations, such as pest control; and add a focus on advancement. St. Nicks Alliance provided case management to address participants' employment barriers, but the staff were not well connected to employers' needs. Additionally, the WorkAdvance coordinator was new to her position at St. Nicks Alliance, was learning the operations of a large organization, and was balancing a focus on WorkAdvance with the need to attend to St. Nicks Alliance's other workforce development programs.

Towards Employment

Towards Employment is a community-based organization that provides a range of employment services for low-income populations in Greater Cleveland. It provides a broad range of services as part of its employment programming, offering financial literacy and computer skills as part of core job readiness training and on-site General Educational Development (GED) classes. It also offers a range of supportive services to address potential barriers to employment retention and advancement, including transportation, legal services, professional clothing, and an extensive referral network for housing, mental health, and substance abuse. It is located on the third floor of a downtown Cleveland office building, easily accessible by multi-

ple public transportation routes. The WorkAdvance program has dedicated space within Towards Employment's suite, including an orientation room, an office for conducting screening interviews or one-on-one meetings, a career readiness training classroom, a job club area with 20 computers, a student lunchroom, and staff offices. For the most part, WorkAdvance frontline staff and managers have worked in spaces located near one another, and they are currently in an open cubical design to facilitate coordination and information sharing across career coaches. All of Towards Employment's occupational skills training has been held off-site, at local community colleges and other training-provider locations.

Prior Experience

While Towards Employment had about seven years' experience in the health care sector prior to WorkAdvance, this was limited primarily to entry-level nursing assistant and other low-skill long-term care positions. Towards Employment needed to develop more expertise in other areas of the health care sector, as well as new knowledge and relationships in the manufacturing sector. It also had employer-driven programming experience, having implemented fee-for-service employer-based job readiness training and retention services, primarily in long-term care and more recently in acute care, and an employer network built from a history of placing individuals — many of whom were hard to serve and had substantial barriers — in employment every year. The greater focus on sector-based programming, training, and especially career advancement services was new for Towards Employment. It had some familiarity with random assignment through participation in the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) study described in Chapter 1, although, in that study, Towards Employment was involved with randomly assigning health care providers (nursing homes) rather than individuals.

Key Provider Features Affecting Program Implementation

Although the Towards Employment staff had prior connections to labor market groups, considerable effort was made to adapt to other WorkAdvance program components, such as postemployment services that focused on advancement rather than only on retention, as well as sector-based training that responded to changing labor market needs. To complement Towards Employment's own areas of expertise, and to leverage existing industry knowledge and relationships with targeted employers, Towards Employment partnered with industry intermediary groups that brought these relationships and expertise to the delivery of WorkAdvance services. Towards Employment also has a Business Services team, with staff dedicated to serving employers' needs, who then liaise with the Program Services team, which focuses on the needs of the job-seekers.

Towards Employment's program management was stretched across multiple responsibilities, some of which were imposed by the study, the partnership structure, and the local

funder. Towards Employment initially had WorkAdvance programs in two locations, Cleveland and Youngstown, with the health care and manufacturing sectors being addressed in both of them — essentially, launching four programs across the region. In both locations, Towards Employment needed to develop complex collaborative operating structures, in which a network of different organizations had various responsibilities for WorkAdvance service delivery. The rationale for this structure was to avoid duplicating existing services and help establish the long-term sustainability of the model beyond the study years by involving multiple providers in the communities. While these collaborative partnerships may yield long-term changes in the way the partners operate — a goal of the local funder — the structure made an already-difficult task more challenging, as Towards Employment worked to ensure that all staff across multiple partner agencies were on board with the goals of WorkAdvance and to clarify staff supervision and accountability. Towards Employment expected to play a small, primarily advisory role in Youngstown, simply overseeing the subcontractor there, but, in fact, it had to be more hands-on in Youngstown, given the complexity of establishing the program across two sectors. In addition, because the local funder placed a high priority on "systems change" activities — that is, broader initiatives to bring together the various players in the workforce system, including industry, education and training institutions, and policymakers — these activities added an additional set of responsibilities, competing for managers' time. While the systems change agenda introduced a sustainability focus from the very beginning, which is intended to add value over the long term, it also created a more complex program to manage, especially during start-up. Moreover, Towards Employment initially had the largest recruitment target of all the providers; across the two locations, it was originally expected to recruit and enroll 1,500 people, which was 500 more than the next-largest target.[6] Similar to the other three providers, Towards Employment's initial target was eventually reduced to 700 in December 2012.[7]

Staffing the WorkAdvance Programs

As a new organization in Tulsa, Madison Strategies Group hired all new staff for the program, but the other three WorkAdvance providers initially assigned mostly staff who were already working in their organizations; these individuals did not necessarily have the skills needed and sometimes served multiple functions. All four providers made staffing changes over time, including shifting some staff from one functional role to another, expanding the roles of some staff, letting some go or losing them to other opportunities, and hiring others. By making these

[6]The reason that the recruitment target was so large is because the research design initially called for analyzing impacts by sector, and doing that requires a minimum (and, in this case, relatively large) sample size.

[7]All the providers eventually had their recruitment targets reduced, as discussed in Chapter 3. The especially large reduction for Towards Employment is explained mostly by the ending of random assignment in Youngstown.

changes, the providers attempted to consolidate the staff who were focused on WorkAdvance; to match staff with the skills appropriate to each function; and to allow staff to focus on a single, key component of the WorkAdvance model, such as recruitment or career advancement. Management's relationship to WorkAdvance varied: At Madison Strategies Group, the lead management was very involved in the program's day-to-day activities; at Per Scholas, both before and after the restructuring, there was a manager who was able to focus squarely on WorkAdvance while also monitoring the goals of other grants; at St. Nicks Alliance, the management had multiple programs to oversee; and, at Towards Employment, there was a manager dedicated exclusively to WorkAdvance as well as considerable engagement by the executive director.

While the WorkAdvance model did not prescribe a specific staffing configuration, certain staff functions were expected to be in place. Each provider has a WorkAdvance program coordinator, responsible for the overall implementation of WorkAdvance at that organization. Positions fulfill other functions, including recruitment and screening, technical skills instruction, career readiness or life skills instruction, job development, account management, and career advancement coaching. Many of these functions are staffed in-house at the provider organizations, but some are also contracted out to other agencies; for example, Madison Strategies Group, Towards Employment, and St. Nicks Alliance all provide technical skills instruction through off-site partners — either technical or community colleges or other training organizations. Towards Employment uses job developers provided by industry associations and who have expertise and existing relationships in the sector. Though the number of staff across the providers devoted to WorkAdvance changed over time, it ranged from 8 to 15 full-time-equivalent staff, with an average of about 10 across the providers since the start of WorkAdvance. (Appendix Table B.1 presents details about staffing configurations across the providers.)

Some staff functions also overlap with one another or are defined differently across the providers. Initially, many of these functions were assigned to staff who also took on multiple functions or did not have the skills needed to perform certain functions. For example, at St. Nicks Alliance, recruitment was originally spread across several staff who also had other roles, but eventually the organization hired a staff member whose sole function was recruitment. At Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment, which had dedicated recruitment staff from the beginning, other staff with other functions also contributed to the recruitment effort at various times. Across all the providers, career readiness instructors, technical skills instructors, and/or job developers have an informal role in career advancement coaching, though it is not their primary responsibility. At Per Scholas, the career readiness instructors were eventually transitioned to also become career advancement coaches. Additionally, at St. Nicks Alliance and the health care side of Towards Employment, the job developers or account managers split their time between working with participants and employers; at Towards Employment manufacturing, Madison Strategies Group, and Per Scholas, the roles have been divided so that some

staff can focus exclusively on developing relationships with employers while others focus exclusively on working closely with participants.

Summary

The four providers entered WorkAdvance with varying degrees of experience in workforce training and sector-focused services: Madison Strategies Group transferred its parent organization's considerable sectoral experience from New York City to Tulsa; Per Scholas had substantial experience with sectoral programs, including in the P/PV study; St. Nicks Alliance had conducted some skills training in the context of providing multiple social services; and Towards Employment had experience in the health care sector (particularly with delivering work readiness training), prior employer relations, and experience with longer-term engagement with its graduates through its retention programming. All the providers had to add a focus on advancement and postemployment coaching. They prioritized WorkAdvance to varying degrees, depending in part on whether they were engaged only in sector-based training or were managing other types of programs as well.

The providers also entered WorkAdvance with differing experience with research and random assignment studies. Both Towards Employment and Per Scholas had participated in random assignment studies previously, while neither St. Nicks Alliance nor Madison Strategies Group had. All the providers took some time to determine the best staffing configuration to carry out the WorkAdvance components. Based on their previous experience running sectoral programs, Per Scholas and Madison Strategies Group leadership had more familiarity with the skills that the staff needed for each component of WorkAdvance than the other providers did. Per Scholas, St. Nicks Alliance, and Towards Employment moved staff from other positions and provided training on the WorkAdvance model, while Madison Strategies Group hired new staff who, they believed, were a good fit with the model and who could start fresh with a focus on WorkAdvance. All the providers made at least some changes to their staffing over time, either by moving staff on or off WorkAdvance, expanding or contracting their roles, or hiring new staff.

Finally, the providers had differing histories with employer and training partners and brought varying skills to developing those partnerships. It was generally easier for the more singularly focused providers to establish the types of relationships necessary to launch WorkAdvance services and to develop those relationships over time. Despite the fact that the organizations with broader missions (St. Nicks Alliance and Towards Employment) had limited experience with sectoral approaches, they were also able to establish the necessary relationships to provide WorkAdvance services.

Chapter 3

Recruitment, Screening, Enrollment, and Characteristics of the Research Sample

The WorkAdvance providers need to fine-tune a recruitment and screening process that enables them to identify candidates who have the ability to complete training successfully and be attractive to employers, while not being so qualified that they can find appropriate employment on their own without the program's services. In addition, unlike many other workforce programs that may have only basic eligibility requirements such as income guidelines, sectoral programs require that individuals demonstrate an interest in and commitment to the particular sector as well as the aptitude and ability to work in that sector.

All of this requires that the WorkAdvance providers undertake fairly intensive screening of applicants. Program administrators use a combination of objective and more subjective criteria to select potential program participants. Since it is understood from the outset that some individuals will be screened out, recruitment efforts must be targeted as efficiently as possible on sources that will bring in the highest number of eligible and suitable applicants.

Chapter 3 opens by exploring how the four WorkAdvance providers conducted marketing and recruitment, the level of effort required to recruit eligible applicants, the recruitment sources that brought in the most eligible — and most qualified — applicants, and how the providers adjusted their recruitment strategies over time. (For an overview of the providers, see Chapter 2, Table 2.1.) The next section discusses the process by which the WorkAdvance providers screened applicants for the program, the points at which applicants either voluntarily dropped out or were screened out by the providers' staff, and how the providers adjusted their screening processes over time. The chapter concludes by presenting selected baseline characteristics of the WorkAdvance research sample and, for some of these characteristics, by comparing the sample members and the national low-wage worker population.

In brief, the findings show that recruiting individuals who were both eligible and suitable for WorkAdvance required a substantial amount of time and resources. This partly reflects the fact that the random assignment study required providers to recruit enough eligible and qualified individuals to meet program enrollment targets and also roughly an equal number of individuals who would be assigned to the control group. However, the recruitment challenge primarily reflects the fact that only about 20 percent of the individuals who initially expressed interest in WorkAdvance were still both interested in and qualified for enrollment by the end of the intake process.

Although the WorkAdvance providers screened applicants by using both objective criteria (such as income guidelines and test scores) and subjective criteria (such as staff assessments of potential barriers to employment), relatively few applicants were screened out as inappropriate by more subjective criteria at the discretion of the providers' staff. Most of the individuals who did not eventually enroll in the program either withdrew on their own accord or failed to achieve the required score on assessments of their academic level. The thorough intake process, which could span several days, turned out to be a key feature of program implementation, despite occurring before random assignment. For example, the up-front screening for applicants' motivation may well have influenced the high rates of participation in program activities, discussed in Chapter 4.

Figure 3.1 presents a general model for the WorkAdvance intake process across all four providers and indicates which steps usually occurred on which day. The intake process varied somewhat across the providers, but all four of them used the steps presented in the figure.

MDRC completed a "recruitment funnel analysis" for each provider about one year into the enrollment period to document the process by which applicants were identified as being either eligible or ineligible for WorkAdvance services and, if they did not eventually become enrolled, the point in the intake process at which they dropped off. To complete these analyses, each provider tracked all individuals who expressed an interest in the program over a set period of time. The period ranged from 3 to 64 weeks, depending on whether the provider tracked this information in its management information system (MIS) as a routine practice or used a recruitment questionnaire created by MDRC. The provider's staff recorded how each individual had first heard about WorkAdvance and whether he or she was eventually enrolled in the study. If an individual was not enrolled, the provider's staff recorded the step in the intake process during which he or she dropped out or was screened out. A detailed description of the funnel analysis completed by each provider can be found in Appendix Table C.1.

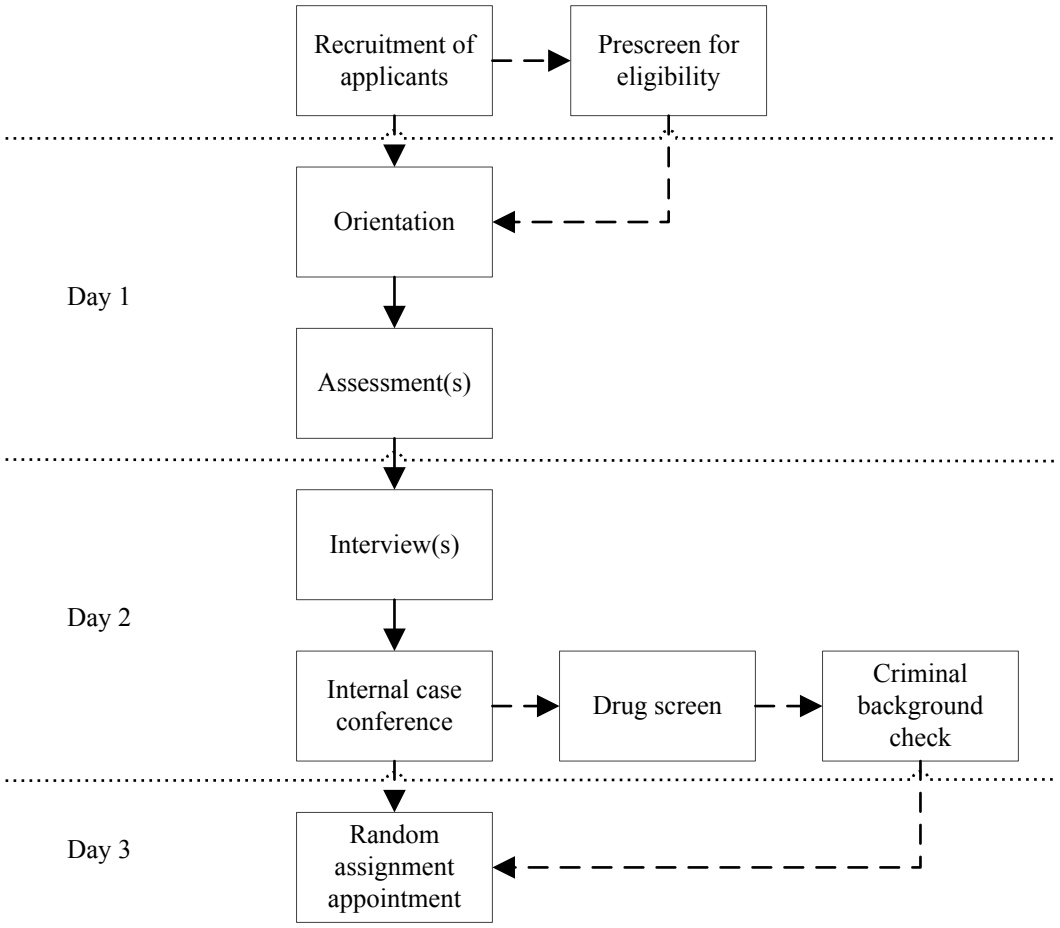
The information from the funnel analyses was used to understand and assess each provider's recruitment and screening process. MDRC discussed these findings with the providers and offered feedback on the relative effectiveness of particular recruitment strategies. Partially in response to this feedback, the providers' recruitment methods and screening procedures changed over time.

Marketing and Recruitment

The first step in the intake process (Figure 3.1) was to recruit eligible applicants. WorkAdvance targeted unemployed and low-wage working adults with a monthly family income below 200

Figure 3.1

The WorkAdvance Intake Process



NOTES: This figure represents a general model for the intake process. Intake processes changed over time and varied across providers; dotted lines represent steps that occurred at some providers but not at others.

See Appendix Table C.1 for a detailed explanation of variation in the intake process, by provider.

percent of the federal poverty level. As a proxy for the targeted low-wage worker population, adults who were working at the time that they entered the study were also required to be earning less than $15 per hour.[1]

Although some applicants were simply referrals from other sources, the WorkAdvance providers needed to undertake extensive marketing and outreach to attract and appeal to eligible individuals. Recruitment messaging emphasized the benefits of the program to potential participants, including the idea that WorkAdvance not only would help them find a job but also would help them begin and advance in a career. The messaging had to be carefully written in a way that would appeal to individuals who met the poverty and income guidelines. In addition, the messaging was somewhat complicated by the random assignment research design used for the study; the providers were limited in the detail with which they could describe the training and types of jobs that the training could lead to, since this information could skew the results of the study if future control group members used it to find similar training or jobs on their own. (Box 3.1 describes some of the messages and features that attracted participants to apply for the program.)

Since the providers did not know in advance which recruitment sources would be most fruitful, they originally cast a wide net and employed numerous strategies to recruit potential applicants, including advertising on the Internet; print, radio, and television ads; job fairs; distribution of flyers to local community-based organizations; hiring a staffing agency to conduct marketing and recruitment; and encouraging word-of-mouth. Some strategies were more successful than others in bringing in not only a large pool of applicants but also a large pool of *eligible and qualified* applicants.

- **Recruitment required a substantial investment of resources. The providers' initial uncertainty about the best sources and methods for recruitment may have contributed to low enrollment numbers during the early stages of WorkAdvance, but the providers adjusted their outreach efforts to combat this. On average, only one in five applicants were eligible and qualified for the program.**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the four provider organizations entered WorkAdvance with different levels of relevant experience. This influenced the level of effort needed to develop their outreach strategies or to shift their previous approaches to focus on the target population

[1] In addition to study eligibility criteria, some of the providers also imposed eligibility criteria related to their given sector and the occupations for which their training programs prepared participants. See Table 3.2 for details.

Box 3.1

Participants' Perspectives on Attraction to the Program

WorkAdvance was designed to be more than just a job training and placement program. To distinguish it from other, more traditional employment programs when marketing it to potential applicants, WorkAdvance providers aimed to feature the program's focus on ongoing career advancement. As with any marketing or advertising, different messages resonate with different prospective customers. So, too, WorkAdvance providers had to determine which kinds of messages would appeal to the types of applicants that they were seeking: low-income or unemployed individuals who were interested in a career, not just a job, and for whom the program could make a difference. In fact, focus groups and individual interviews with participants revealed that the advancement message, and other messages, did resonate with them.

In focus groups and interviews, WorkAdvance participants were asked what attracted them to apply for the program. Generally, participants were attracted because the program offered the chance to have a career, rather than just a job; because it offered occupational skills training and the opportunity to earn a credential; and because the training was free. The idea of a career enticed participants — they hoped that the program could offer them better employment options with a chance to "keep rising up in the field with knowledge, experience, and income," as one participant described. Several participants talked about being stuck in "dead-end" jobs before enrolling in WorkAdvance and about their hopes that the program would set them on a career path: "I was a cashier at [a] restaurant — it's like a fast food court or whatever, and, you know, it was basically like a dead-end job. There was no room for advancement or growth so … after I had left that job … I was thinking to myself — the next thing I get into, I want to be able to grow." Another participant was excited about WorkAdvance and leaving his old job because: "Never was it sufficient; never was it a career. It was just a job, a dead-end job that was probably going to amount to nothing. So it wasn't that hard, you know, for me to change the path, because I wasn't on a career path, I was just on a job path. Now I'm on a path to have a lucrative career."

When asked which feature of WorkAdvance most attracted their interest, the majority of focus group participants and interviewees specifically indicated that it was the occupational skills training. Training attracted those who wanted to work in a particular sector but needed additional skills, those who wanted to earn a credential, and those who simply wanted to gain new skills in a new field. One participant discussed how she hoped that gaining new skills would open up new opportunities for her: "From looking at the website, I saw that there was [an] opportunity to, like, go back to school, and that was like the main thing I was looking for." At the time she thought: "I should probably go to school since I'm having such a hard time, you know, with finding employment. It would only benefit me, or, you know, at least help me get my foot in the door somewhere."

(continued)

Box 3.1 (continued)

The sector focus of the program and the training credentials that could be earned were also driving forces behind program application. Some participants mentioned having previous interest in the sector for which the training was being provided and indicated that this was the most appealing aspect for them. Others cited that being able to earn a credential was the most attractive element of the program: "I wanted to be able to get a certification in something because … I was looking for a job for nearly a year and I wasn't really getting anything."

A big part of the appeal of occupational skills training through WorkAdvance was that it was free for the participants. The chance to get free training brought in those who just needed a job and thought that the training would increase their employability, as well as those who were specifically seeking training that led to a credential. As one participant stated: "Classes are free, and there's going to be support, and there's going to be an internship.… So it sounded like a really good opportunity." A different participant, who was specifically interested in obtaining a credential, said, "The most attractive thing was the amount of certifications for no cost. I mean, for the way the economy is now and how hard it is to find work, that is just brilliant the way that the organization runs and the things they provide for no cost." One other respondent said, "All I saw was 'free training.'" He went on to say: "I needed training [and I] don't have any money. Nowadays, you need certificates for any job that you get if you want to make a decent wage. That's really all I saw. That's what I was expecting to go in for. I didn't really know that they had all the career readiness training, which was actually very helpful."

for WorkAdvance. Since Madison Strategies Group was new to Tulsa, it had no name recognition in the community, and it needed to develop new relationships with organizations and individuals to begin recruitment. In contrast, St. Nicks Alliance and Towards Employment had preexisting relationships that brought people into the program, but, in some cases, those individuals had employment barriers that prevented them from satisfying the program or study requirements. Per Scholas faced a somewhat different challenge with the information technology sector: Since it had other training contracts that required it to serve a certain number of people, some applicants who were eligible for WorkAdvance were instead routed into services funded by these other contracts.[2] The recruitment challenges that the providers encountered were part of the reasoning behind the decision to conduct the funnel analyses described above.

[2]WorkAdvance control group members were not eligible to receive services at Per Scholas under these other contracts.

For sectoral programs similar to WorkAdvance to make the most efficient use of the time and resources that they dedicate to recruitment, they will likely need good information on the relative success of various recruitment sources in bringing in eligible and suitable applicants. Given the screening by the program staff and, in many cases, applicants' self-selection out of the application process following recruitment, the providers had to recruit, on average, five individuals in order to end up with one applicant who could actually be enrolled in the program. (See Figure 3.2.) In total, the four providers had to bring in between 2,500 and 3,500 applicants over the 18- to 24-month intake period to meet the sample goals of between 500 and 700 individuals per site, as required by the study (with roughly half of those who qualified for enrollment being served by the program and the other half constituting the control group).[3]

Some of the initial recruitment strategies brought in a particularly low percentage of applicants who were ultimately found to qualify for WorkAdvance. In order to increase the percentage who would qualify for enrollment, the providers adjusted their outreach strategies based on the findings of the recruitment funnel analyses and their own experiences. It was especially important to identify eligible and qualified applicants as efficiently as possible because the providers were filling class cohorts to start training together; the longer it took to recruit eligible and qualified individuals, the longer those who were enrolled and ready to start training had to wait for their classes to start.

- **Sources that brought in the largest number of applicants for WorkAdvance were not always the same sources that brought in the largest pool of eligible and qualified applicants. An understanding of which sources brought in the most eligible and qualified applicants helped providers to focus their outreach efforts more productively.**

The top panel of Table 3.1 shows that, during the time period covered by the recruitment funnel analyses, friends and family members were the main recruitment source at Per Scholas, St. Nicks Alliance, and Towards Employment and that the Internet brought in the most applicants at Madison Strategies Group. The bottom panel of the table, however, shows that while friends and family members were the largest recruitment source at St. Nicks Alliance, the Internet brought in the largest number of eligible applicants. After learning that placing ads on Craigslist could be effective, St. Nicks Alliance, Towards Employment, and Madison Strategies

[3] As a result of the difficulties that the providers encountered with recruitment, the sample goals were revised downward several times. The total sample goal across providers was originally 3,850; in the end, the total sample goal was reduced to 2,600.

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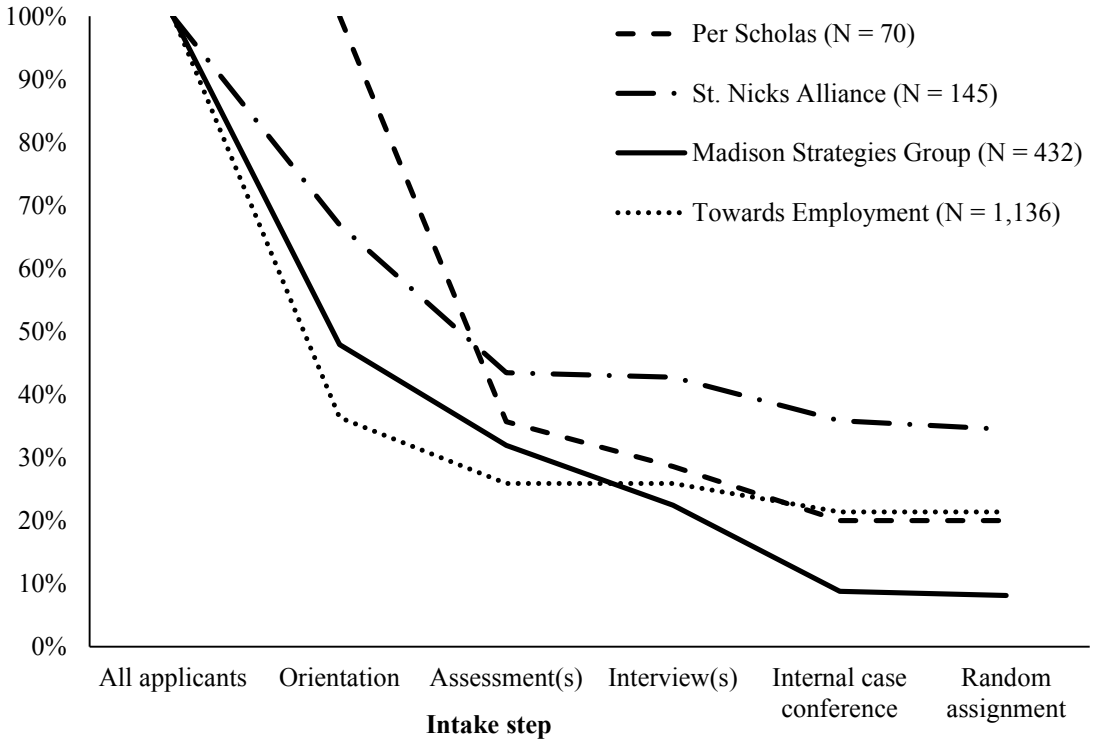
Figure 3.2

Percentage of Applicants Remaining, by Step in Intake Process



SOURCES: MDRC calculations from a recruitment questionnaire administered at Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance, a report based on program tracking data provided by Madison Strategies Group, and program tracking data provided by Towards Employment.

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Table 3.1

Percentage Distribution of Applicant Recruitment Sources During Select Time Periods

Recruitment Source	PS[a]	SNA[b]	MSG	TE
Among all applicants (%)				
Friend or family member	32.9	31.7	5.8	35.0
Internet	22.9	17.2	47.9	13.6
Flyer, poster, newsprint	12.9	13.8	NA	11.0
Job/career fair	8.6	10.3	1.4	NA
Another program or organization	24.3	21.4	17.8	14.6
Radio/TV	1.4	0.7	0.5	5.7
Walk-in	NA	4.1	NA	5.4
Employer	1.4	1.4	0.5	n/a
Other/unknown[c]	0.0	2.1	26.2	14.6
Applicants (total = 1,783)	70	145	432	1,136
Among applicants randomly assigned (%)				
Friend or family member	28.6	28.0	8.6	33.3
Internet	14.3	30.0	65.7	11.1
Flyer, poster, newsprint	0.0	20.0	0.0	5.3
Job/career fair	21.4	2.0	0.0	0.0
Another program or organization	21.4	14.0	20.0	9.9
Radio/TV	7.1	0.0	0.0	6.2
Walk-in	NA	8.0	0.0	5.3
Employer	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other/unknown[c]	0.0	0.0	5.7	28.8
Applicants (total = 342)	14	50	35	243

(continued)

Group used this source throughout the enrollment period.[4] Most of the providers initially relied heavily on distributing flyers and other marketing materials to recruit applicants, but the impersonal and passive nature of flyers failed to attract individuals in the same way that other, more direct outreach efforts — such as referrals from partner organizations — did (Table 3.1).

[4]The Internet, while not the *most* successful recruitment source for the other two providers, was nevertheless used in a variety of innovative ways by all the providers. Per Scholas spearheaded the use of Google AdWords to drive more traffic to its website. Other Internet recruitment efforts that were used across the providers included placing ads on job search websites (such as Monster.com), updating the organization's website to be more attractive and more informative, and reaching a broader audience by using social media (such as Facebook and Twitter).

Table 3.1 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from a recruitment questionnaire administered at Per Scholas (PS) and St. Nicks Alliance (SNA), a report based on program tracking data provided by Madison Strategies Group (MSG), and program tracking data provided by Towards Employment (TE).

NOTES: NA= not applicable.

At PS, the recruitment funnel analysis covered 3 weeks in July 2012, and applicants are individuals who attended orientation.

At SNA, two rounds of the recruitment funnel analysis were completed in mid-2012 covering 15 total weeks. The findings from both rounds were combined in this analysis. Applicants are individuals who expressed an interest in WorkAdvance.

At MSG, the recruitment funnel analysis covered 6 weeks in mid-2012, and applicants are individuals who were scheduled for orientation.

At TE, the recruitment funnel analysis covered 64 weeks from mid-2011 to late-2012. Applicants are individuals from the 11 most common recruitment sources who expressed an interest in WorkAdvance.

Refer to Appendix Table C.1 for more details regarding the length and timing of the data coverage period and the definition of an applicant.

[a]Applicants were allowed to select more than one recruitment source at PS, so percentages may sum to more than 100 percent.

[b]In the second round of the recruitment funnel, applicants at SNA were allowed to select more than one recruitment source, so percentages may sum to more than 100 percent.

[c]Applicants at TE in the category of "other/unknown" did not specify how they heard about WorkAdvance. At MSG, this category includes applicants referred by training programs and job placements and applicants who did not specify how they heard about WorkAdvance.

While flyers on their own did not attract large numbers of eligible applicants, marketing materials were still important to help sell the potential benefits of the program. The providers' marketing materials often included messaging that highlighted the potential financial benefits of participating in the program, rather than focusing on the services offered. The providers received technical assistance on suggested language to use and how to increase the appeal of these materials. The messages emphasized opportunities for careers and advancement, rather than simply finding a job. They included "Move your career forward"; "Get a job. Keep a job. Advance into a career"; and "Advance your life today!" A flyer developed by St. Nicks Alliance said, "Need a job, or a better one? Let us help you step up!" The focus of the flyer was on finding a job to *move up,* not on training or any other program services. (Appendix D presents examples of recruitment flyers.) All the providers, however, did use the message of "free training" to attract people's attention; in individual interviews with 20 participants, many mentioned "free training" as the message that most caught their attention.

It took some time for the providers to gain a better understanding of where and how they could recruit the largest number of eligible and suitable applicants; in the meantime, in varying degrees, they all either increased the number or shifted the configuration of recruitment

staff. The providers varied in whether they had a dedicated recruiter or their outreach and recruitment activities were distributed across multiple staff members, and this changed over time. St. Nicks Alliance originally divided its recruitment efforts among staff members who also had other tasks. In July 2012, it realized that it needed to place more emphasis on recruitment, so it hired a full-time recruiter to help boost enrollments. Per Scholas, which started with a full-time recruiter, added another part-time recruiter partway into the recruitment period. The increased level of staffing promoted more concentrated efforts on outreach, and staff were able to reflect with colleagues on which strategies were most effective. Madison Strategies Group started with one full-time position dedicated to recruitment during the enrollment period, and this position was held by the same staff person for the entire period. Early on, it changed the role of one position to include some assistance with recruitment, and it also created a part-time recruiter position in August 2012. Throughout the enrollment period, other staff, such as the career advisers, also assisted with some recruitment efforts, as needed. Recruitment efforts at Towards Employment were split among multiple staff members. It had a part-time recruiter, and other staff — including the operations lead and the project assistant — contributed some of their time to recruitment as well. Partway through the enrollment period, the site also hired an engagement lead to focus specifically on recruiting individuals and on increasing awareness of WorkAdvance in the community.

Since the recruitment funnel analyses cover only a portion of the intake period, it is not clear what precise effect the changes in outreach strategies had, but the providers were eventually able to recruit enough applicants to meet, or come very close to meeting, their target enrollment numbers. Yet the process leading to enrollment of eligible individuals required more than just attracting applicants' initial interest. The providers had to continue to sell the program to applicants while also screening them for a range of factors, including interest in the sector, the ability to complete the program, and the likelihood of being hired by employers.

Screening

As noted above, screening in WorkAdvance was intended not only to identify individuals who met the basic study eligibility criteria but also to identify individuals who the provider staff thought had the right mix of characteristics to benefit from the program and succeed in the training and in an eventual career in the sector. The screening process took at least two days (Figure 3.1), and applicants were asked to report to the provider on multiple occasions. Some of the screening criteria applied to applicants' employability in general, while others were more specifically driven by employer needs in a given sector. Screening for interest in a career, rather than just a job, was one criterion that was valued by employers. One employer in northeast Ohio stated that the job developers used by Towards Employment intended to:

> help get more people into manufacturing, providing them training to prepare them to get into manufacturing, and then helping to ensure that they have a career, not necessarily just a job. So, we certainly were looking for people, and are always looking for people, who want to grow within the industry, you know, not just someone who wants to come and have a job but somebody who wants to learn new skills and continue to grow. And as they grow personally, then, of course, that helps the company as well. So I thought that was something that fit right in line with what we were trying to do with our recruitment plan. That was the primary thing, you know, really a talent pool resource.

Employer- and sector-specific criteria are discussed below, but examples of the more general criteria include Per Scholas's practice of allowing applicants to attend screening-related appointments with staff only if they arrived on time and were dressed appropriately. If an applicant showed up late or failed to adhere to the clothing policy, the staff gave feedback and asked the applicant to return on a different day. In this way, the screening process could be thought of as the beginning stage of the program, since applicants were expected to follow program guidelines and were given feedback on their "performance."

After applicants expressed an interest in WorkAdvance, they were scheduled for or invited to attend an orientation.[5] The orientation was designed to provide applicants with details about the program and the occupational training courses offered and to explain the eligibility criteria, screening process, and study, including random assignment. An income screening was performed during orientation as well, with applicants being screened out if their family income was 200 percent of the federal poverty level or more. One problem that several of the providers faced in their initial orientations was that their language and presentation focused almost exclusively on what they needed from the prospective participants to determine whether they would be eligible for the program and study. After receiving technical assistance on their messaging, the providers reorganized their orientation to focus first on the value of WorkAdvance and why potential participants would want to enroll, before talking about the forms and documentation that were required for enrollment.

To help determine whether applicants had the minimum education levels needed to enter and advance in their chosen sector, income-eligible applicants who were still interested in WorkAdvance after the orientation session were invited to complete an academic assessment (for example, the Tests of Adult Basic Education [TABE] or Prove It!). The WorkAdvance providers sought input from employers and skills training providers to identify the assessments that would most reliably determine an applicant's ability to succeed in a particular sector, as

[5]Some sites performed an initial check for eligibility requirements prior to orientation. For example, applicants at St. Nicks Alliance were asked to fill out an application before orientation, and applicants who were younger than age 18 were told that they were not eligible at that time.

well as where to set the minimum score levels. If applicants did not pass the assessment on their first attempt, they were allowed to return to be assessed again at a later date. Applicants who passed the assessment were scheduled for a staff interview.

During one or two interviews with staff, applicants across all the providers were asked questions about their employment history, career goals and interests, and financial situation — including how they would support themselves during training, much of which was full time and during regular business hours. Staff used the interview(s) to assess applicants' eligibility for the program and screen for potential barriers that would preclude their active engagement (such as needing to find immediate employment). The interview was much like a job interview, as applicants were also evaluated on their professionalism, appearance, and oral communication skills. The providers' staff did not necessarily screen out applicants based on these subjective criteria, but they did assess whether WorkAdvance was the right program to help the applicant. For example, applicants who lacked confidence in their interviewing skills but who passed all the other requirements might be enrolled, with a notation that their weakness should be worked on during career readiness training.

All the providers included additional intake steps to screen for skills specific to a given sector and occupations within it, as well as to the employers with which the providers worked closely. These additional screenings were designed to replicate the same set of checks that employers would use during the interview process. Examples include drug screenings and criminal background checks. As one pest-control employer in New York City, who appreciated the criminal background screening conducted by St. Nicks Alliance, explained:

> I have also been contacted by a lot of programs that work with people that might have been in jail, or have a criminal background, and they're trying to get people back on their feet, and those kind of places — while I really wish that there was more that I can do, because I absolutely think that to get back in the workforce after going through something like that must be really, really difficult and it's kind of like this vicious cycle of, like, you can't get work unless you have experience and you can't get experience until you've had work. For a company like ours, it's really hard to hire people who have a background like that. Our employees are going into people's homes, alone, and some of [the homes] are Park Avenue apartments. We have to have a clean background check, and it's just really hard. So that was one of my concerns.

Table 3.2 presents a full list of additional eligibility criteria and a detailed description of the intake process used by each WorkAdvance provider.

The final decision on whether an applicant was eligible and suitable for the program was based on the entire range of factors that the staff screened for and was generally made by consensus of the staff involved in intake. This decision came either after the second interview or

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Table 3.2

Criteria for Study and Program Eligibility, by Provider, During Select Time Periods

Study intake				
Eligibility requirements	• 18 years or older • Legally allowed to work in the United States • Monthly family income less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level • Earning less than $15 per hour, if employed at intake			
Program intake				
	Per Scholas	**St. Nicks Alliance**	**Madison Strategies Group**	**Towards Employment**
Assessment score	• TABE: 10th-grade level (lowered to 9.5 grade level in July 2012)	• TABE: 9th-grade level (later lowered to 8th-grade level)	• Prove It! Math and Reading: 8th-grade level • Mechanical aptitude test • Behavioral assessment	• TABE Locator: 6th- to 10th-grade level, depending on track
OST-specific criteria		• Driver's license (HCDL only)	• Manual dexterity test • Driver's license (CDL only)	• Criminal background check (health care only) • Sector screening questionnaire
Additional eligibility requirements[a]	• Not eligible for another contract (e.g., veterans) • High school diploma/GED	• Not trained by St Nicks Alliance in past 2 years • Drug screen		• Drug screen

(continued)

Table 3.2 (continued)

	Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Intake process	*Over 1-7 days or longer:* • Potential applicants attend orientation. Staff determine basic eligibility. • Eligible applicants take the TABE. Staff interview those who pass. • Applicants are interviewed again. Those who remain fill out paperwork and enter random assignment.	*Over 1-2 days or longer:* • Staff schedule eligible applicants for orientation. • At orientation, applicants take the TABE. Those who pass are interviewed and fill out paperwork. • Applicants complete drug screening. • Staff conduct case conferences and schedule eligible applicants for random assignment at a later date.	*Over 2-3 days or longer:* • Applicants complete paperwork and tests. Those who pass receive a blank Work History template. • Applicants return with draft Work History. Staff interview applicants and conduct case conferences. • Eligible applicants enter random assignment.	*Over 2 days or longer:* • Staff check eligibility via phone and schedule candidates for orientation. • At orientation, applicants complete all assessments and are interviewed by staff. • Applicants complete drug screening (48 hours). • Those who pass fill out paperwork and enter random assignment.

NOTES: TABE = Tests of Adult Basic Education; GED = General Educational Development certificate; OST = occupational skills training; HCDL = hazmat commercial driver's license; CDL = commercial driver's license.

[a]Some additional eligibility requirements changed over time across all the providers.

during an internal staff case conference. Applicants were then informed whether they would be invited to a random assignment appointment.

- **Many applicants dropped out early in the intake process, before they attended orientation. Most of these applicants appear to have self-selected out of the intake process, rather than to have been screened out by the providers.**

Table 3.3 shows that more than half the applicants in the recruitment funnel analyses at Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment and that about a third of the applicants at St. Nicks Alliance dropped out or were screened out before attending orientation. The reasons that applicants dropped out are unknown (or were not documented), but possibilities include that they lost interest after learning more about the program during a preorientation phone call, wanted a quick job placement rather than longer-term training, did not think that they could meet the eligibility criteria (including passing a drug test, for example), or simply had something else come up that interfered with attending.

- **Once applicants attended orientation, many still dropped out voluntarily, while some were screened out by program staff.**

Among applicants who did attend orientation, the largest drop-off point at Per Scholas, St. Nicks Alliance, and Towards Employment was when applicants failed to progress past the academic assessment (Table 3.4), either because they did not meet the minimum academic level the first time or second time that they took the assessment or because they failed to come back for a second attempt. While this includes a few applicants at Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance who failed the academic assessment twice, the majority of applicants at both of these providers who dropped out at this point did not return for a second attempt.[6] To help prepare those applicants who did return, some providers began offering study sessions; in practice, these sessions also served as a screening mechanism for applicants' motivation, since some applicants chose not to attend the sessions or not to complete a second assessment.

Technical assistance was given to all the providers on the content and delivery of their orientation sessions. For example, providers were advised to be clear about the timing of the steps that followed orientation, so that applicants would not be surprised by the activities coming next, such as the academic assessments. In addition, all the providers were given guidance on how to introduce the study and how to discuss the random assignment process.

[6]This level of detail is not available for applicants at Towards Employment.

Table 3.3

Percentage of All Applicants Randomly Assigned and Distribution of Reasons for Drop-Off

Description	PS	SNA	MSG	TE
Randomly assigned (%)	20.0	34.5	8.1	21.4
Dropped out prior to orientation (%)				
Did not meet eligibility requirements[a]	NA	11.0	0.0	2.9
Did not attend orientation	NA	22.1	52.1	60.7
Dropped out after orientation (%)	80.0	32.4	39.8	15.0
All applicants (total = 1,783)	70	145	432	1,136

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from a recruitment questionnaire administered at Per Scholas (PS) and St. Nicks Alliance (SNA), a report based on program tracking data provided by Madison Strategies Group (MSG), and program tracking data provided by Towards Employment (TE).

NOTES: NA = not applicable.

Refer to the footnotes in Table 3.1 and to Appendix Table C.1 for provider-specific details regarding the length and timing of the data coverage period and the definition of an applicant, as there is variation across providers.

Screening processes varied over time at all providers.

[a]Initial checks for applicant eligibility were performed prior to orientation at SNA, MSG, and TE, and eligibility was checked after orientation at PS. All the providers verified applicants' eligibility after orientation.

The WorkAdvance providers established initial screening procedures based on their expectations for the sector and preliminary discussions with employers. As they began enrolling individuals in the study, however, the providers adapted procedures based on their experience and fine-tuned their screening processes to better identify participants who would potentially benefit the most from the program. The providers also adjusted their screening processes based on employers' input and on feedback that MDRC offered from the recruitment funnel analyses and from other technical assistance.

For instance, the providers initially limited the number of participants with prior experience in a sector. However, when Towards Employment learned from some employers in both health care and manufacturing that prior sector experience would increase access to higher-paying jobs in the sector, some more individuals with prior sector experience were allowed into the program, although "overqualified" individuals were still screened out. This determination

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Table 3.4

Percentage Distribution of Reasons for Drop-Off Among Applicants Who Attended Orientation

Description	PS	SNA	MSG	TE
Reason for drop-off after orientation (%)				
Did not meet eligibility requirements[a]	15.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Left after orientation	12.9	12.4	14.5	7.7
Did not pass assessment test(s)	35.7	22.7	18.8	21.1
Did not attend staff interview[b]	7.1	1.0	19.8	NA
Did not pass internal case conference	8.6	10.3	28.5	12.3
Did not attend random assignment appointment	0.0	2.1	1.4	NA
Applicants who attended orientation (total = 787)	70	97	207	413

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from a recruitment questionnaire administered at Per Scholas (PS) and St. Nicks Alliance (SNA), a report based on program tracking data provided by Madison Strategies Group (MSG), and program tracking data provided by Towards Employment (TE).

NOTES: NA = not applicable.

Refer to the footnotes in Table 3.1 and to Appendix Table C.1 for provider-specific details regarding the length and timing of the data coverage period and the definition of an applicant, as there is variation across providers.

Screening processes varied over time at all providers.

[a]Initial checks for applicant eligibility were performed prior to orientation at SNA, MSG, and TE, and eligibility was checked after orientation at PS. All providers verified applicants' eligibility after orientation.

[b]"Did not attend staff interview" was not used as a drop-off point in the analysis at TE because its data did not include this level of detail.

took into consideration the full range of information known about the applicants and did not focus solely on their prior sector experience.[7]

In another example of loosening criteria, Per Scholas learned through its own experience, and confirmed by the recruitment funnel analysis, that most applicants were screened out

[7]The health care industry has the highest rate of sample members with prior licenses or certifications: 37 percent. Towards Employment reports that the credential most commonly held at study enrollment was a State Tested Nursing Assistant (STNA) license, which expires after a short time if the participant is not working in the field. As a result, many sample members, who had been unemployed for some time before enrolling in WorkAdvance, had expired credentials. Further, STNA credentials alone primarily allow access to low-wage jobs, so WorkAdvance still had the potential to add value for these sample members, if they were placed in an entry-level job and then obtained additional skills, experience, and credentials to advance to a higher position.

after failing the TABE. The site sought employer input and learned that employers were most interested in basic math skills and the ability to think analytically. Some TABE questions did not address these skills, and thus Per Scholas eliminated less relevant questions to avoid screening out suitable individuals. Additionally, Per Scholas recalibrated the TABE scores of previously screened-out applicants using only the new, more employer-relevant TABE questions, and it brought these applicants back to reapply.

In some cases, screening criteria were tightened after receiving employer feedback. About six months into enrollment, St. Nicks Alliance added a criminal background check to the environmental remediation technician (ERT) training program because of trouble placing individuals who had a criminal background into jobs in the ERT field. Potential employers would eventually screen participants for a criminal background anyway, and St. Nicks Alliance was able to serve a more suitable population for the sector by performing this screening up front. Also, Towards Employment found that its TABE cutoff level had to be increased, based on the literacy and numeracy levels necessary for success in certain training programs.

Random Assignment

Random assignment was the final step in the intake process (Figure 3.1). During this process, applicants who were deemed eligible and suitable for WorkAdvance were reminded that they had a 50 percent chance of being selected to receive program services, and they completed a baseline questionnaire and signed a form consenting to participate in the WorkAdvance study. A web-based system managed by MDRC was used both to randomize applicants and to collect the data from the baseline questionnaire. The data are presented below as aggregate characteristics of the research sample.

Before beginning enrollment, MDRC operations staff helped each provider develop a random assignment manual detailing the study enrollment process. Topics included, for example, how to respond to applicants' questions about the study and how to help applicants answer some key questions on the baseline questionnaire. Because applicants only had a 50 percent chance of being selected to receive WorkAdvance services after completing the screening process, guidance was provided on how to deliver the results of the random assignment, especially for applicants who were assigned to the control group. Additionally, the providers gave members of the control group a limited list of referral agencies for other services in the community, but control group members could not receive any services at the WorkAdvance

providers' organizations. The providers' staff were also trained on how to complete the web-based random assignment procedure.[8]

Characteristics of the WorkAdvance Research Sample

Over the course of the intake period, the providers enrolled 2,565 individuals into the WorkAdvance study, randomly assigning roughly half of them to the program group and half to the control group. Table 3.5 presents selected characteristics at baseline of the entire WorkAdvance research sample — both program and control group members.[9] (Appendix Table A.1 presents all the characteristics that were measured at baseline.) The data were collected from study participants using a baseline questionnaire that included questions on demographic characteristics, education level, employment status, income supports, and living arrangements. The data are presented individually by provider and industry as well as for the overall research sample. The variation in baseline characteristics that is seen across industries likely reflects provider-specific eligibility criteria, the industries selected, and the city in which the provider is located.

The majority of WorkAdvance sample members are male, with the exception of the health care industry, in which more than 92 percent of sample members are female. This seems to reflect the typical gender breakdowns for the sectors included in WorkAdvance; that is, health care positions are predominantly filled by females, while information technology, manufacturing, environmental remediation, and transportation jobs are predominantly filled by males.[10] Changing this gender balance would have taken a concerted effort within an already-difficult recruitment process.

The average sample member was 34 years old at study entry, with a somewhat younger sample in the information technology industry and a somewhat older sample in the health care

[8]The random assignment process itself posed challenges for some providers. For example, when Towards Employment was recruiting participants for multiple training cohorts simultaneously, the random assignment of program group members occurred in sequences that were hard to predict. For a given training class, this made it challenging to assemble the correct number of participants to begin their training on a fixed, specific start date. As a result, some classes were delayed, while others were oversubscribed (making it necessary to quickly create additional classes). Towards Employment and MDRC addressed this challenge by refining the random assignment sequencing so that participants were assigned more evenly within each training track, thereby making it easier to assemble a cohort for each class, on time.

[9]A separate analysis compared individuals in the six-month sample with individuals not in the six-month sample and found differences in the average baseline characteristics between the two samples. For example, participants in the six-month sample were more likely to have been previously convicted or incarcerated and to have been unemployed more than six months prior to random assignment. Additionally, participants in the six-month sample were less likely to have been previously or currently employed in a WorkAdvance industry.

[10]Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014); Landivar (2013).

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Table 3.5

Selected Characteristics of Research Sample Members at Baseline

Cross-Site

Characteristic	PS	SNA	MSG	TE		Overall
	IT	ER	TR	HC	MA	
Program group (%)	50.6	50.5	50.6	49.1	50.7	50.4
Demographic characteristics (%)						
Female	13.2	14.5	15.9	92.3	24.5	26.6
Age						
18-24 years	31.4	16.3	22.4	22.4	23.3	23.8
25-34 years	39.6	37.2	33.9	29.0	29.7	34.8
35-44 years	16.1	25.7	20.4	19.9	22.5	20.4
45-59 years	12.8	19.8	22.2	26.1	23.6	20.0
60 years or more	0.1	1.0	1.1	2.6	0.9	1.0
Race/ethnicity						
Latino/Hispanic	36.0	22.8	6.1	5.4	3.8	16.8
White	5.2	6.9	39.2	10.6	26.3	18.4
Black/African-American	44.5	62.7	28.4	78.6	63.0	50.6
Other race[a]	14.3	7.5	26.4	5.4	6.9	14.1
Citizenship						
Born in United States	71.9	76.9	95.4	98.0	97.7	86.3
Naturalized	15.7	11.9	1.1	2.0	2.0	7.3
Noncitizen	12.5	11.1	3.4	0.0	0.3	6.4
Family status (%)						
Marital status						
Single, never married	76.7	70.9	50.6	72.9	72.3	67.4
Married and living with spouse	11.9	14.3	22.8	8.3	11.0	14.7
Married but living apart from spouse	6.1	4.0	6.1	5.7	6.6	5.7
Legally separated, divorced, or widowed	5.4	10.9	20.6	13.1	10.1	12.2
Parent of one or more children	26.2	45.3	51.8	53.8	49.9	43.7
Primary caregiver[b]	17.7	24.8	38.4	52.4	34.3	31.7
Single caregiver	7.4	11.2	13.4	41.7	20.5	16.2
Education level (%)						
Highest level of education attainment						
Less than GED certificate or high school diploma	0.1	11.9	6.0	5.7	6.1	5.5
GED/high school diploma	37.1	44.5	35.7	28.4	45.8	38.1
Some college	32.5	26.5	48.1	53.7	40.3	39.6
Associate's degree/2-year college	9.9	7.5	5.7	6.0	3.7	6.9
4-year college degree or more	20.4	9.6	4.4	6.3	4.0	9.9

(continued)

Table 3.5 (continued)

Characteristic	PS IT	SNA ER	MSG TR	TE HC	TE MA	Overall
Already has a license/certificate in targeted industry	3.6	1.9	13.5	36.9	13.0	11.8
Currently enrolled in education or training program	4.3	3.0	4.6	6.8	8.4	5.1
College course toward 2- or 4-year degree	4.2	1.3	2.3	4.0	4.6	3.2
Employment status						
Ever employed (%)	96.4	97.9	99.3	96.6	98.0	97.7
Number of months of current unemployment spell (%)						
Never employed	3.6	2.1	0.7	3.4	2.0	2.3
Currently employed	13.0	10.5	26.7	27.6	25.9	20.0
3 months or less	29.7	26.7	37.6	17.9	24.2	28.9
4-6 months	11.6	14.5	12.3	12.8	10.4	12.3
7-12 months	14.8	14.7	8.0	11.1	11.5	12.0
More than 12 months	27.2	31.5	14.6	27.3	25.9	24.4
Number of months in current or most recent job (%)						
12 months or less[c]	55.5	54.0	65.9	58.0	58.5	58.8
More than 12 months	44.5	46.0	34.1	42.0	41.5	41.2
Is or has been employed in targeted industry (%)	7.9	2.1	14.7	27.7	33.7	14.9
Average hourly wage at current or most recent job[d] ($)	11.91	13.00	10.32	9.67	10.10	11.12
Average hours worked per week at current or most recent job	32.0	34.4	37.7	31.4	34.8	34.3
Among those currently working	*22.6*	*25.8*	*30.6*	*26.3*	*31.0*	*28.0*
Worked full time (35 or more hours per week)[e] (%)	58.6	65.1	71.4	55.3	66.8	64.0
Average weekly wage at current/most recent job[d] ($)	408	454	400	321	364	396
Circumstances that may affect job change or retention (%)						
Previously convicted of a crime	10.4	19.9	39.7	4.5	46.4	24.2
Previously incarcerated	6.2	18.2	34.2	1.1	23.1	17.6
Previously convicted of a crime and incarcerated	4.8	15.9	26.8	1.1	22.8	14.8
Income and medical coverage						
Average monthly family income ($)	647	695	804	589	612	686
Income sources (%)						
Food stamps/SNAP	17.4	41.9	34.5	63.4	47.0	36.9
Welfare/TANF	6.2	13.7	0.7	6.0	1.7	5.5
Unemployment insurance benefits	24.3	24.6	7.5	10.2	10.7	16.0
Covered by health insurance plan (%)	54.3	54.3	28.3	57.5	38.7	45.6
Sample size	690	479	697	352	347	2,565

(continued)

Table 3.5 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the WorkAdvance baseline information form.

NOTES: Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

PS = Per Scholas; SNA = St. Nicks Alliance; TE = Towards Employment; MSG = Madison Strategies Group; IT = information technology industry; ER = environmental remediation industry; HC = health care industry; MA = manufacturing industry; TR = transportation industry; GED = General Educational Development certificate.

Italic type indicates that the metric is not among the full sample shown in the table.

[a]"Other race" includes sample members who identify as non-Hispanic and listed "Asian," "American Indian," or "Other" as their race, including sample members who answered as "multiracial."

[b]A primary caregiver is a parent who has at least one child living with him or her more than half the time.

[c]This includes sample members who have never been employed.

[d]Wages for sample members who have never been employed are counted as $0.

[e]"Worked full time" does not include sample members who have never been employed.

industry. Half the overall sample identified as black/African-American, with some variation across industries. Most sample members had never been married, and less than half were parents at baseline. The information technology industry has an especially low rate of parents (26 percent). Higher rates of both primary caregivers and single caregivers are seen in the health care industry, possibly related to its predominantly female workers.

Almost all sample members had at least a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate, and over half the sample had at least some college education. There is some variation in education levels across the industries, likely due in part to some providers using a minimum level of education as an eligibility criterion. For example, less than 1 percent of sample members in the information technology industry lacked a high school diploma or GED, since Per Scholas required this to help ensure that applicants would have the minimum academic skills necessary to succeed in the information technology sector.

The employment measures presented are for sample members' current or most recent jobs at the time of random assignment. Almost all sample members had previous work experience, but only one in five were working at the time that they entered the study. Additionally, more than 36 percent of sample members had been unemployed for at least seven months prior to study entry. This group is of particular interest, as the workforce policy community is concerned about the reduced labor market reentry rates among the long-term unemployed.[11]

[11]The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has defined "long-term unemployment" as lasting at least 27 weeks, or a little less than seven months (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

Average hourly wages for sample members' current or most recent jobs ranged from $9.67 for Towards Employment health care sector enrollees to $13.00 for St. Nicks' environmental remediation enrollees — below the $15 hourly wage cap for study eligibility. About 64 percent of the sample worked full time at their current or most recent job, but only 38 percent of those who were employed at study entry were working full time. Many of the training programs offered through WorkAdvance took place Monday through Friday during regular business hours, preventing sample members from working full time while in training. In some cases, the providers helped sample members find evening or part-time training programs to accommodate their work schedules.

Despite fairly high levels of previous education and work experience, many sample members still faced substantial barriers to employment and/or were receiving public benefits. One-quarter of the overall sample had a previous conviction, and even higher rates were seen within those enrollees targeted for the transportation and manufacturing industries (40 percent and 46 percent, respectively). Less than half the sample were covered by health insurance, with an especially low rate of 28 percent for individuals targeted for the transportation industry. At study entry, around 6 percent of sample members were receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); 16 percent were receiving unemployment insurance benefits; and one-third were receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, commonly known as food stamps.

While the baseline questionnaire attempted to get a snapshot of sample members' characteristics at the time that they entered the study, it was limited to certain questions. A case-note review that was completed at each provider showed that sample members faced a range of barriers not picked up by the baseline questionnaire that made their experiences with the program more challenging — barriers that included, among others, unresolved legal matters, mental illness, lack of access to health-related support, unstable housing, inconsistent access to communication tools (for example, a telephone), caring for ailing family members, and maintaining access to reliable transportation.

Comparison of WorkAdvance Sample Members and National Low-Wage Workers

The WorkAdvance study targeted all unemployed and low-wage workers, and yet the sample that was ultimately enrolled in the study likely reflects a combination of (1) the eligibility requirements imposed by the programs, (2) the industries and sectors targeted, and (3) the recruitment methods used to find eligible applicants. Table 3.6 compares the average characteristics of the WorkAdvance sample members and a national sample of low-wage workers. There are a few notable differences between the two groups.

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Table 3.6

Comparison of WorkAdvance Research Sample Members and National Low-Wage Workers

Cross-Site

Characteristic	PS IT	SNA ER	MSG TR	TE HC	TE MA	Overall	United States
Female (%)	13.2	14.5	15.9	92.3	24.5	26.6	57.0
Average age (years)	31	35	35	36	35	34	38
Race/ethnicity (%)							
Latino/Hispanic	36.0	22.8	6.1	5.4	3.8	16.8	27.6
White	5.2	6.9	39.2	10.6	26.3	18.4	45.7
Black/African-American	44.5	62.7	28.4	78.6	63.0	50.6	18.9
Other race	14.3	7.5	26.4	5.4	6.9	14.1	7.8
Citizenship (%)							
Born in United States	71.9	76.9	95.4	98.0	97.7	86.3	75.2
Naturalized	15.7	11.9	1.1	2.0	2.0	7.3	7.3
Noncitizen	12.5	11.1	3.4	0.0	0.3	6.4	17.5
Marital status (%)							
Single, never married	76.7	70.9	50.6	72.9	72.3	67.4	46.8
Married and living with spouse	11.9	14.3	22.8	8.3	11.0	14.7	31.0
Married but living apart from spouse	6.1	4.0	6.1	5.7	6.6	5.7	1.9
Legally separated, divorced, or widowed	5.4	10.9	20.6	13.1	10.1	12.2	20.3
Parent of one or more children (%)	26.2	45.3	51.8	53.8	49.9	43.7	44.3
Highest level of education attainment (%)							
Less than GED certificate/high school diploma	0.1	11.9	6.0	5.7	6.1	5.5	27.3
High school diploma or GED certificate	37.1	44.5	35.7	28.4	45.8	38.1	35.9
Some college	32.5	26.5	48.1	53.7	40.3	39.6	20.3
Associate's degree/2-year college	9.9	7.5	5.7	6.0	3.7	6.9	6.2
4-year college degree or more	20.4	9.6	4.4	6.3	4.0	9.9	10.3
Number of months of current unemployment spell (%)							
Never employed	3.6	2.1	0.7	3.4	2.0	2.3	3.4
Currently employed	13.0	10.5	26.7	27.6	25.9	20.0	45.9
12 months or less	56.1	55.9	58.0	41.8	46.1	53.2	10.5
More than 12 months	27.2	31.5	14.6	27.3	25.9	24.4	40.1
Average hourly wage at current job[a] ($)	*10.05*	*10.84*	*9.54*	*9.27*	*9.66*	*9.72*	*9.77*
Working full time (35 or more hours per week)[a] *(%)*	*12.2*	*28.0*	*46.8*	*32.0*	*55.6*	*37.6*	*29.8*
Sample size	690	479	697	352	347	2,565	8,946

(continued)

Table 3.6 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from the WorkAdvance baseline information form and March 2012 Current Population Survey (CPS).

NOTES: Sample size varies within variables based on missing values.

Italic type indicates that the metric is not among the full sample shown in the table.

Low-wage workers for the U.S. sample are defined as individuals at least 18 years old, with a family income of less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, not retired, and earning less than $15 per hour if currently employed. The CPS definition of "family" was used to identify the U.S. sample based on family income and includes income from all individuals related by birth, marriage, or adoption who reside together. For simplicity at intake, when determining eligibility for the WorkAdvance study, family income was restricted to income from the applicant, his or her spouse or live-in partner, and any children under age 19 living with the applicant.

GED = General Educational Development certificate.

[a]Measures of hourly wage and working full time are among those currently employed.

WorkAdvance sample members are more likely to be male than the average national low-wage worker. This may reflect the fact that the sectors targeted by WorkAdvance, other than health care, tend to be male-dominated, as described above. More than half the WorkAdvance sample is black, probably reflecting the locations in which WorkAdvance operated, while the national low-wage worker sample is predominately white and Hispanic. The percentage of WorkAdvance sample members who were parents at baseline is similar to the rate for the national sample, but the WorkAdvance sample has a higher percentage of single individuals.

The WorkAdvance sample has somewhat higher levels of education than the national low-wage worker population; only 6 percent of the WorkAdvance sample has less than a high school diploma or GED, compared with 27 percent of the national sample. This is likely due in part to the academic assessments used by the providers to screen applicants prior to study entry. Few people in both samples have no prior work experience. About 46 percent of national low-wage workers were currently employed, though, compared with only 20 percent of the WorkAdvance sample, suggesting that individuals may have entered the program to receive help in finding a job. For individuals who were currently working, the average hourly wages are similar across the samples, but the WorkAdvance sample has a higher percentage of individuals who were working full time.

These differences suggest that the WorkAdvance sample is a slightly less disadvantaged segment of the low-wage worker population in terms of such measurable characteristics as education and employment. Yet the WorkAdvance sample — which includes a large minority population — could possibly be *more* disadvantaged than the general low-wage worker popula-

tion because of the continued presence of employment discrimination based on race. As discussed in Chapter 1, the WorkAdvance sample may mirror the characteristics of a population that is of growing concern to policymakers and researchers: those who have been out of the labor market for roughly seven months or longer and are therefore less likely to find employment over time. These differences should be evaluated when considering how the findings of the WorkAdvance study might be applied to the broader national low-wage worker population.

Chapter 4

Program Implementation and Participation: Career Readiness and Occupational Skills Training

Overview

WorkAdvance was designed to be a demand-driven, sector-focused employment and advancement program in which local providers establish and maintain strong relationships with employers. Local providers were expected to prepare participants for a career in a designated sector through training in soft and hard skills, to match participants to jobs in which they could apply and build on those skills, and to provide ongoing support to promote career advancement in the sector.

This chapter and Chapter 5 explore the strategies that the four WorkAdvance providers used to achieve the goals of the program, the challenges that they faced, and early indications of the participants' activity levels and outcomes. (For an overview of the providers, see Chapter 2, Table 2.1.) Specifically, these two chapters present (1) how each local provider designed the four primary program components: career readiness and supportive services, occupational skills training, job development and placement, and postemployment retention and advancement services; (2) the ways in which the providers delivered these components, including adjustments that they made over time; and (3) the extent to which WorkAdvance participants engaged in the components, along with the factors that may have facilitated or limited their engagement. These two chapters also address the extent and type of employer involvement in WorkAdvance programs, but detailed discussion of the providers' delivery of postemployment career advancement support is deferred until the next report, in late 2015, since postemployment services were the last component of the program to be developed and implemented. As explained in Chapter 1, most of the data presented are for program group members who enrolled in WorkAdvance through February 2013, for whom there are at least six months of follow-up data, while some participation measures are presented for a smaller group who enrolled earlier but for whom there are twelve months of follow-up data.

Chapters 4 focuses mostly on engagement in WorkAdvance services for the first group: program group members who enrolled in the program through February 2013, for whom there are six months of follow-up data.[1] The decision to report on the larger program cohort for which

[1]The placement data presented in Chapter 5 use the second cohort, who enrolled through August 2012 and for whom there are twelve months of follow-up data, allowing more time for participants to complete training and begin employment.

there are six months of follow-up data, rather than the smaller cohort with twelve months of data, was made primarily to capture many of the key changes in the providers' approaches to WorkAdvance service delivery over time. By approximately fall 2012, examples of these changes (Chapter 2) included refinements in the providers' recruitment strategies, Madison Strategies Group's and Towards Employment's shift away from the placement-first option, St. Nicks Alliance's addition of more training programs, and the hiring of an advancement coach at Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance.

Data for Chapters 4 and 5 come primarily from providers' management information systems (MIS), in which the providers recorded participants' activities. The data underwent quality control checks by MDRC before being analyzed. The job placement data may be limited, since individuals who had left the program did not always report to providers that they had obtained jobs and/or because they had obtained jobs that providers do not consider as placements.[2] Placement rates here reflect only job placements as defined and verified by the provider and, therefore, might be underestimating the actual employment rate. The next report will include unemployment insurance and survey data that will provide more comprehensive measures of employment.

Key findings on participants' engagement include that, within the first six months of enrollment (the top panel of Table 4.1), around 81 percent of program participants either started skills training or obtained a provider-verified job. At Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance, with very few exceptions, everyone who obtained a verified job in this time frame had at least started skills training, which reflects the model's design (Chapter 1, Figure 1.1), as the model at these two providers was to provide training to all participants. When considering Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment together, just under half of program group members who obtained a verified job in this time frame had at least started skills training, which also reflects the model's design. (Appendix Figures E.1 and E.2 detail how WorkAdvance members moved through the program components at the training-first and the dual-track providers, respectively.) There was high take-up and completion of both the career readiness activities and the occupational skills training — a notable achievement, given that many workforce and training programs targeting a similar population do not achieve high completion rates.[3] Over this same six-month period, the proportion of program participants across the providers who had a verified job is more modest, at 33 percent. The bottom panel of Table 4.1 displays engagement within the first twelve months after random assignment and shows an average verified employment rate of 54 percent. The notably higher verified employment rate for the twelve-month sample

[2]For details regarding how verified placements are defined, by provider, see Appendix Table E.1.
[3]Hamilton and Scrivener (2012a).

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Table 4.1

Indicators of Participation in Program Group Activities at Six Months and Twelve Months After Random Assignment

Cross-Site

Participation in program activity since RA (%)	PS	SNA	MSG	TE	Overall
Six-month indicators for participants randomly assigned through February 2013					
Ever started skills training or obtained a provider-verified job[a]	93.1	85.2	77.0	69.9	81.4
Ever participated in any career readiness activity[b]	93.1	83.5	96.7	97.5	93.2
Ever started skills training	93.1	83.5	52.3	50.9	69.7
Ever completed skills training	76.9	76.4	25.1	33.1	52.0
Ever obtained a credential[c] in targeted sector (%)	70.0	69.2	25.1	15.7[d]	44.2
Ever obtained a provider-verified job[a]	20.0	30.2	51.9	29.7	32.8
Sample size	260	182	239	236	917
Twelve-month indicators for participants randomly assigned through August 2012					
Ever started skills training or obtained a provider-verified job[a]	94.4	85.2	80.3	70.8	83.0
Ever participated in any career readiness activity[b]	94.4	83.5	99.4	96.6	94.2
Ever started skills training	94.4	83.5	49.4	41.5	67.2
Ever completed skills training	79.1	80.0	36.4	31.3	56.1
Ever obtained a credential[c] in targeted sector (%)	70.1	79.1	35.8	15.7[d]	49.3
Ever obtained a provider-verified job[a]	49.2	48.7	67.9	49.0	54.1
Sample size	177	115	162	147	601

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

SOURCES: Program tracking systems managed by Per Scholas (PS), St. Nicks Alliance (SNA), Madison Strategies Group (MSG), and Towards Employment (TE).

NOTES: RA = random assignment.

Refer to Appendix Table E.1 for site-specific details regarding how each metric is defined.

[a]A job is considered verified if the WorkAdvance provider has obtained a pay stub or employment verification form or has made direct contact with the employer.

[b]The first program activity at PS and SNA is skills training, which is offered in combination with career readiness training and includes help with developing a career plan, résumés, and interview preparation. At MSG, the first progam activity is career readiness training. At TE, the first program activity is an initial assessment whereby career goals and barriers to employment are discussed.

[c]Credentials in the targeted sector are locally and/or nationally recognized. There is cross-site variation in reporting of locally recognized credentials obtained in the targeted sector.

[d]TE's program tracking system captures only nationally recognized credentials. Therefore, participants who obtained the locally recognized computer numerical control machining credential are not counted as ever having obtained a credential.

(relative to the six-month sample) is not surprising, given that participants are likely to delay entry into jobs in order to complete skills training.

The WorkAdvance providers' relative success in engaging participants in program services likely reflected both the screening mechanisms that the providers used and the services and support that the staff provided. The screening resulted in many applicants' "self-selecting" out of the program and meant that those who did eventually enroll tended to have relatively high levels of determination and perseverance. Even so, the level of engagement in WorkAdvance should not be taken for granted, since the participants faced barriers that could make it difficult for them to carry out their plans. The staff's efforts and program supports may have influenced participation levels from the outset, as the providers attempted to maintain communication prior to the beginning of the training course (especially for those with longer waits between study enrollment and class start) and to continue to develop relationships with participants to keep them engaged over time. For example, Towards Employment developed a newsletter that shares success stories as a way to help participants see the long-term value of staying engaged in programming.

The participants' flow through the WorkAdvance program (Figure 4.1) varied by provider. A principal reason for this is that Towards Employment and Madison Strategies Group initially had two different program tracks: one that offered training first and another that placed

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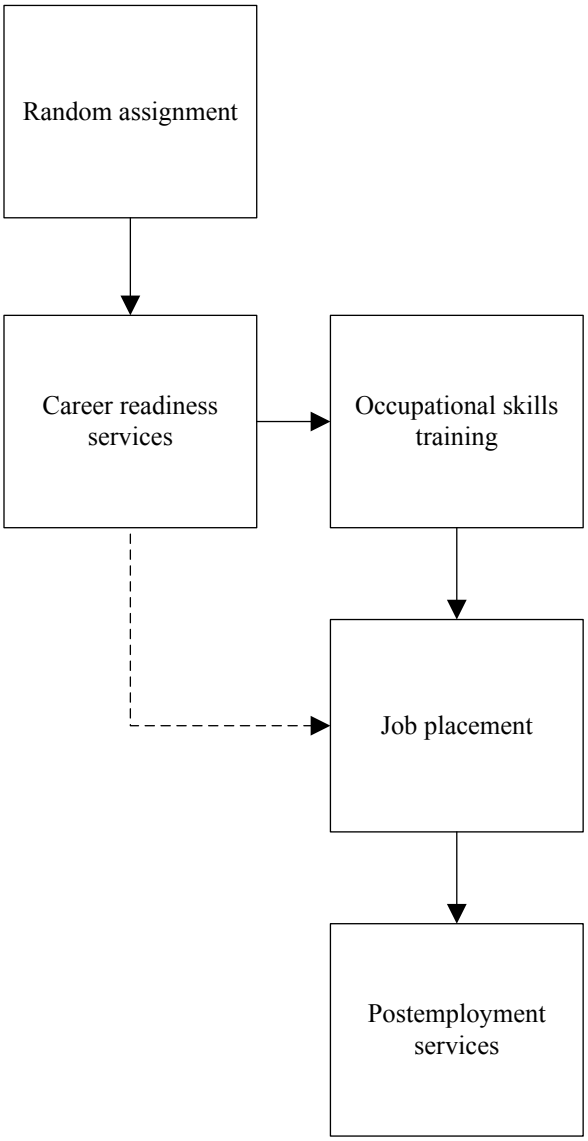
Figure 4.1

Program Activity Flow



NOTE: Dotted lines represent how participants from Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment might proceed through the program if following the placement-first track.

people directly into jobs first, with formal or informal training to follow.[4] Both of these providers were given funding to offer training to about 50 percent of their program participants. In the start-up period of the program, both of these dual-track providers relied more heavily on the placement-first track while they developed relationships with employers and training providers, and it was unclear whether they would manage to enroll 50 percent of their program participants in training. As a result, in summer 2012 — faced with very low training enrollment numbers and after a thorough pilot assessment conducted by MDRC — MDRC and consultants encouraged both providers to channel as many future program group members as possible into training. From that point on, the majority of program group members did attend training first: Among applicants randomly assigned between October 2012 and February 2013 (the last date for which there are six months of follow-up data), 87 percent of participants from Towards Employment and 89 percent from Madison Strategies Group were scheduled for training first within six months of random assignment, and 74 percent and 62 percent, respectively, started training.

The second principal reason for variation among providers was that, as discussed in Chapter 2, the four WorkAdvance providers were not equally experienced in, or prepared to offer, sector-focused employment and advancement services. These differences were reflected in their initial approach to translating the WorkAdvance model into program services, as well as in the level of effort that it took to align their services with the program's goals.

Despite the individual providers' different starting points, all four showed increased ability over time to deliver the full range of WorkAdvance services. Real-time feedback from many employers on new hires — delivered, for example, from the participants' supervisors to the providers' job developers, or "account managers" — helped the WorkAdvance providers refine their career readiness training curricula. All the providers made adjustments to align their occupational skills training offerings and/or curricula to reflect trends in the broader labor market; the demand for specific occupations; and employers' expressed needs for workers with particular skills, such as in customer services. The adjustments ranged from revising elements of training curricula to offering new additional trainings to compete in growing markets. MDRC provided technical assistance on many aspects of the program to help providers refine and adjust their services as needed.

[4]As noted in Chapter 1, the placement-first track was based on quasi-experimental evidence from New York City's experience operating sectoral programs; it was intended to be a less expensive but still effective route to advancement by providing enrollees the opportunity to gain experience and sector-specific skills (such as through on-the-job training) without participating in formal training first. Another rationale for providing job placements right away was that it helped the providers develop relationships with employers while participants in the other track were still going through training.

Career Readiness and Supportive Services

In programs such as WorkAdvance, many participants need more than just occupational skills training to find a job and succeed in it. The WorkAdvance model therefore included a career readiness component that was intended to be contextualized as much as possible to the targeted sectors. Providers were expected to adjust the career readiness classes based on information from employers. From program entry through job search and beyond, providers were expected to build in opportunities for participants to develop résumés and prepare for job interviews through role-playing, learn workplace norms, develop soft skills, and build their knowledge of the industry. This meant that the WorkAdvance program staff were expected, among other things, to model these workplace norms — for example, appropriate dress, punctual and reliable attendance, and respectful time management.

The key features of the career readiness services (Table 4.2) were designed to provide (1) preemployment coaching to help participants set and follow through with career advancement goals and (2) career readiness classes to teach participants about the designated sectors and to help them acquire soft skills that are critical to success in their respective sectors.

- **More than 90 percent of program group members engaged in a career readiness activity within six months of random assignment. Such activity could include attending an orientation to the sector, attending classroom-based career readiness training, receiving one-on-one career readiness training sessions, or completing an individualized career plan (Table 4.3).**

The high average rate of participation in classroom-based career readiness training (85 percent) in part reflects the fact that, at three of the four providers, this training is the first activity after program enrollment and is the primary type of career readiness activity offered. At the fourth provider (Towards Employment), career readiness classes typically begin after participants have met with a case manager to assess needs and discuss career goals and barriers to employment. More than 93 percent of participants engaged in classroom-based career readiness training within six months at Per Scholas and Madison Strategies Group, and 84 percent did so at St. Nicks Alliance. At Towards Employment, 67 percent of participants engaged in *classroom-based* career readiness training, while others at Towards Employment participated in individualized career readiness activities covering similar content. For example, if participants came to WorkAdvance already employed and the classroom-based training schedule conflicted with their work hours, they could receive one-on-one sessions that would cover many of the topics covered in the classes. The participants who engaged in these types of career readiness activities, and other activities that occurred outside the classroom setting, are captured in the measure of having participated in any career readiness activity.

Table 4.2

Career Readiness Services, by Provider

		Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Career readiness services	**Sector Orientation**	Stand-alone 1-day kickoff; also integrated into career readiness training	Integrated into career readiness training	Integrated into career readiness training	Integrated into career readiness training
	Career readiness training (CRT)	Concurrent with OST	Concurrent with OST	Typically provided for one week immediately following enrollment and before start of OST	Placement-first: typically provided for two weeks prior to start of job search; training-first: typically provided concurrent with OST
	Hours of CRT	12 sessions at 7 hours each	9 sessions at 4 hours each	5 sessions at 6 hours each	10 sessions at 6 hours each
	Transportation assistance	Need-based	Need-based	Bus passes or gas cards are provided to all training participants; otherwise need-based.	Need-based
	Pre-employment coaching	One-on-one sessions during OST. Coaches follow up with emails or in person during job search.	One-on-one sessions during OST. Coaches are expected to follow up 2-3 times per week during job search.	One-on-one during CRT. Coaches visit weekly with participants as a group during OST. One-on-one coaching during OST as needed.	Coaches introduce career plan during CRT. Coaches meet with participants in groups and one-on-one up to 3 times per week during job search.

SOURCES: Documentation supplied by providers and interviews with provider staff.

NOTE: OST = occupational skills training.

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Table 4.3

Participation in Career Readiness Activities and Supportive Services Within Six Months of Random Assignment

Cross-Site

Career readiness activity since RA (%)	PS	SNA	MSG	TE	Overall
Ever participated in any career readiness activity[a]	93.1	83.5	96.7	97.5	93.2
Started classroom-based career readiness training[b]	93.1	83.5	96.7	67.0	85.4
Completed classroom-based career readiness training	76.9	76.4	87.5	59.3	75.0
Received help obtaining supportive services[c]	45.8	NA	56.1	69.1	56.6
Sample size	260	182	239	236	917

SOURCES: Program tracking systems managed by Per Scholas (PS), St. Nicks Alliance (SNA), Madison Strategies Group (MSG), and Towards Employment (TE).

NOTES: RA = random assignment; NA = not applicable.

Refer to Appendix Table E.1 for site-specific details regarding how each metric is defined.

Statistics are among participants randomly assigned through February 2013.

Career readiness activities refer to career readiness activities prior to first placement. These might include attending post-RA orientation/assessment, starting career readiness training, developing an individualized career plan, help with résumé development and job applications, and interview scheduling or preparation.

[a]The first program activity at PS and SNA is skills training, which is offered in combination with career readiness training and includes help with developing a career plan, résumés, and interview preparation. At MSG, the first progam activity is career readiness training. At TE, the first program activity is an initial assessment whereby career goals and barriers to employment are discussed.

[b]Some participants may engage in career readiness training with the provider outside a classroom setting. At TE, these participants are counted as ever having participated in any career readiness activity.

[c]Information on supportive service take-up was not included in program tracking data provided by SNA. The overall rate for this measure is among participants from PS, MSG, and TE.

Towards Employment and St. Nicks Alliance may have lower engagement rates in classroom-based career readiness training than Per Scholas and Madison Strategies Group because of the longer wait times between study enrollment and the start of career readiness classes for early enrollees. For example, because career readiness classes started concurrently with occupational skills training cohorts at St. Nicks Alliance and, for training-first participants, at Towards Employment, and because some participants had to wait up to three months or more for their selected occupational skills training to start while cohorts were filled, participants who were enrolled early also had to wait for their corresponding career readiness classes to begin. At

St. Nicks Alliance, which did not offer alternative career readiness services prior to the start of occupational skills training, some individuals may have become disengaged during this time and may not have begun classroom-based career readiness training. At Towards Employment, individuals who had to wait for occupational skills training to begin would be offered alternative career readiness services in the interim, rather than having them wait to receive career readiness classes when classroom-based training began. As noted above, the lower engagement rates in classroom-based training could reflect receipt of alternative services, rather than disengagement.

- **The scheduling and length of the career readiness training, the curriculum used, the instructors' experience, and the amount of advancement coaching — as well as the degree to which workplace norms were modeled by staff — all varied across the providers.**

Since the WorkAdvance model did not prescribe a particular structure or manner of delivering career readiness training, the providers were free to implement this program component in whatever ways they thought would be most effective. As a result, there was substantial variation in the structure and delivery of career readiness training. That said, the basic *content* of career readiness training was similar: All the providers covered such topics as an introduction to the sector, résumés and cover letters, job search, interview preparation, and development of individualized career plans (ICPs) — although some emphasized certain topics more than others. Some providers placed more emphasis than others on modeling workplace norms and holding participants accountable to an expected set of behaviors; Per Scholas stands out in this regard, with its "zero tolerance" period, in which a participant can be dismissed from the program for arriving late to class, and its general code of conduct to which participants — and staff — are expected to adhere. This seemed to make a good impression with at least one employer that works with Per Scholas, who said in an interview with researchers: "The school's always clean; everyone's professional and nice. They get on their students. If anyone is late to class, or not dressing appropriately, they get on them. It's *that* that really takes individuals from the community and takes them to the next level."

Class Scheduling and Length

Total career readiness class time ranged from 30 hours to 84 hours per participant (Table 4.2). This variation is mostly the result of the point at which career readiness classes began at each site. Madison Strategies Group offered career readiness classes as one of the first activities after enrollment, so that both training-first and placement-first participants could attend the same classes, and placement-first participants could then start their new jobs. Towards Employment did the same for a period of time before offering career readiness classes concurrent with occupational skills training for those in the training-first track. These "up-front"

career readiness classes typically lasted one to two weeks. On the other hand, Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance offered career readiness classes concurrent with, and for nearly the full duration of, occupational skills training, in order to reinforce lessons throughout the skills training. This class structure resulted in participants' attending more hours in career readiness classes overall than participants at the dual-track providers. (Table 4.2, above, describes the frequency and timing of career readiness classes, by provider.)

Curriculum

Per Scholas initially used an in-house career readiness curriculum that had already been prepared by staff prior to WorkAdvance. MDRC and consultants suggested some modifications to bolster the curriculum's focus on ongoing career advancement and to incorporate hands-on activities throughout. The curriculum, which Per Scholas uses for all its participants and not only those enrolled through WorkAdvance, was refreshed again in March 2013, after it worked with another consultant outside the context of WorkAdvance. The Per Scholas career readiness curriculum is highly sector-specific: For example, among other related activities, students read about recent developments in information technology (IT), are shown a sample career map developed by the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA), and are given sample technical job interview questions.

In early 2013, Towards Employment, Madison Strategies Group, and St. Nicks Alliance all enhanced their curricula to make them more advancement-focused, with the support of an MDRC consultant.[5] While the providers' previous curricula had been sector-focused in some cases, they did not focus strongly enough on advancement, which, in part, is why the curricula were adapted and strengthened. The new curriculum for these three providers included language and messaging about advancement that was absent from the start of program services. It was also more hands-on and gave participants a sense of what it can be like to be an employer that has to make difficult decisions — for example, choosing to lay off or promote someone. The assumption is that understanding the perspective of the employer can help the participant make good decisions on the job.

These three providers varied in the degree to which they modified this new core advancement-focused curriculum to be more sector-focused. Madison Strategies Group had an expert on its staff add an overview of the aviation industry, an introduction to the trucking industry, and a workshop entitled "Business Communications: Interpersonal Relations & Problem Solving Skills in the Transportation Industry." Towards Employment, with two

[5]Career readiness curricula and technical assistance on career readiness classes were provided by Jodie Sue Kelly, Cygnet Associates (website: http://www.cygnetassociates.com/).

separate sectors, initially offered sector-specific workshops, including "medical math" in the health care sector and an overview of key tools used in manufacturing. Because of the logistical challenges of separating these groups, however, Towards Employment later moved to combine them for efficiency's sake. Yet it offers regular opportunities for participants to separate into different sections to cover more sector-specific content outside the basic curriculum, including discussion of industry career paths with outside experts, employers, and their own industry specialists on staff.

- **The tailoring of career readiness classes to the sector was not done as robustly as envisioned but is perhaps not as crucial to participants as anticipated.**

Despite attempts to customize some of the curricula to the particular sector, feedback from participant interviews suggested that career readiness classes largely covered general topics. Preparation for work in a given sector was covered more thoroughly and more intensively in orientations that the providers offered — sometimes as stand-alone activities and sometimes as the first session of career readiness classes — than in the classes themselves. Many participants in interviews nevertheless spoke highly of the value of the career readiness classes.

Experience of the Instructor

From the perspective of both WorkAdvance managers and participants, the more skilled the instructor was at facilitating career readiness classes, the more engaging and useful the classes were. At all the WorkAdvance providers, career readiness classes were taught by an on-site staff person, who, in some cases, split time between instruction and case management or coaching. MDRC offered guidance to instructors to suggest ways to improve their facilitation and engagement skills, such as classroom management techniques, making lessons more hands-on, and ensuring that activities were explicitly relevant to jobs in the sector and the goal of advancement. After this guidance was offered, one provider decided to replace its career readiness instructor in the hopes of improving career readiness delivery. (Box 4.1 describes some participants' perspectives on career readiness activities.)

Involvement of Employers

Providers have found a variety of ways to engage employer partners in career readiness activities. Madison Strategies Group and Per Scholas have used advisory groups to counsel them on curricula for career readiness classes as well as on occupational skills training and the latest trends in the sector. Towards Employment has relationships with individual employers and has developed relationships with existing business intermediary groups, which carry out a

Box 4.1

Participants' Perspectives on Career Readiness Activities

Career readiness activities were viewed by many interviewees as a welcome "bonus" that they were not expecting — a confidence booster — and as a part of the program that was as valuable to them as the occupational skills training. This latter view was echoed by many employers interviewed for this report, who stated that soft skills were as important to an employee's success on the job as technical skills, if not more so. One participant explained that, because of the career readiness component, the WorkAdvance program exceeded his expectations: "Coming in I thought it was just like, you know, a regular training for a regular job, but I got way more than I expected 'cause I thought the training would be just like a basic training. I didn't even know they would incorporate career readiness … it definitely surprised me … in a good way."

Even participants who believed that they were already well informed about the career readiness content before receiving WorkAdvance services found value. "It gave me a refresher," said one participant. "It helped me dust up some skills, make sure that I was … up to par, speaking of the right vernacular, not saying bad things, not dressing a wrong way. It was common sense to me, but it's still nice as a refresher because I'm, like, 'Oh, okay, yeah, that's right.'" Another said: "I didn't know why I can't ask about money at an interview. I'm here for money; everyone is here for money. So why can't we talk about money? But [our instructor] fluently, in detail, tells you why you shouldn't speak about money."

When asked to rate the most valuable aspect of the overall WorkAdvance program, many participants considered career readiness activities as valuable as occupational skills training: "The most valuable assets [of the program] have been the training, not only the skills training, but the behavior aspect of it … how to approach an employer." Interview preparation was considered to be the most valuable element of career readiness, followed by résumé preparation. One participant said that the career readiness activities have "given me skills that I didn't know that I needed to go into an interview with." Another participant said: "What really helped me to be successful was the interview skills.… No matter how good you are, if you do horrible at the interview, they don't want to hire you." Regarding résumé preparation, one interviewee said: "I never knew how to write a résumé. They helped me out with that. And this is the first résumé I've ever done. It was pretty shoddy at first, but they helped me arrange it, reword it, put a little bit different vocabulary in there. So it looks a lot better than when I first came in."

Moreover, many described the career readiness activities as helping them to build confidence. One participant said that the career readiness activities were "almost like a therapy for me." Another said, "At first glance, it's, like, 'Why does this guy have me doing this?'" He went on: "But you build your inner confidence, your interview confidence, your self-motivation. After you look back on it, you start to say, 'Okay, I know I've grown since before the job readiness training.' You kind of grow without realizing it.… A lot of the things [that the instructor] said

(continued)

Box 4.1 (continued)

are common sense, but common sense that I wouldn't have done at an interview." A different respondent explains how he "used to go to job interviews and be so nervous and so scared." Now, he says, "I feel more confident … and I feel I'm more prepared." He went on to say that it helps participants "to be more comfortable in your own skin and to be able to talk to people properly." One other participant explained why she found the career readiness so valuable: "The confidence that I've gained from it, you know. [The instructor] helped me with like interviewing skills and, like, how to write a résumé and all that. And then actually having a mock interview; that's helped me. I mean, that was the biggest thing. Like, last week I think, that was the most confident I've felt throughout this whole experience; and I don't think I would've gotten that outside of WorkAdvance. I don't think I would have, like, actually actively sought help in my confidence."

similar advisory function. St. Nicks Alliance has relied primarily on relationships with individual employers. In many cases, employer partners across the providers have come to the provider organizations' offices to conduct mock interviews, and they have also hosted visits that give program participants firsthand exposure to the work environment that they can expect to join.

Incorporation of Preemployment Advancement Coaching

To help participants understand what it takes to advance their careers in the selected sector, the WorkAdvance model calls for tailored career advancement coaching to be provided throughout the program. This begins with an individualized meeting with a career coach at program entry. The objective of preemployment advancement coaching is to establish an individualized career plan (ICP), which identifies motivations, career goals, and action steps to achieve those goals. The ICP helps the coach and the participant work together to set career goals and track progress over time. It is meant to be a "living document" that is referred to and updated periodically as goals are attained and/or revised. The plan includes sections on gaining entry-level positions in the targeted sector, how to acquire additional skills, and how to advance. Overall, preemployment advancement coaching was intended to use a strengths-based approach — that is, an approach in which coaches do not focus exclusively on barrier reduction but, rather, on the skills and qualities that participants have and can acquire to progress up a career ladder.

WorkAdvance providers did not always have specialized or experienced staff to deliver individualized preemployment advancement coaching. In some cases, this role fell to staff with more experience in other program areas — often, to the career readiness instructor (in which case, this coaching was typically incorporated into the career readiness classes) or to a case manager, whose primary function prior to WorkAdvance had usually been to identify barriers

and work with participants to remove them, sometimes following a model in which every barrier had to be remediated before a participant could move forward with a career plan. While Madison Strategies Group hired two coaches from the start, Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance used existing staff for early coaching duties, such as completing a career plan and conducting service referrals. Towards Employment used some existing staff and also hired staff with industry expertise.

At all four providers, for those participating in classroom-based career readiness classes, the ICP was initially introduced in a group session during the classes and later was completed and reviewed one-on-one with a coach. Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance later hired separate career coaches to lead pre- and postemployment advancement coaching. St. Nicks Alliance also eventually retrained its existing case managers in advancement-focused coaching as the program progressed, because of a need to shift from barrier-focused case management — in which the focus on barrier removal often prevented individuals from participating, rather than helping them participate — to working with participants on developing strategies for career advancement while simultaneously helping them address barriers. Towards Employment initially had participants start their interaction with the program by meeting with a case manager who conducted a barrier-focused needs assessment; it eventually began to use a different kind of assessment tool that was much more focused on goal-setting. A case manager continues to be the person on staff who handles barriers and challenges, allowing the career coaches to focus more squarely on advancement coaching. In fall 2013, Per Scholas transitioned all its career readiness instructors to serve as career coaches who also focused on career advancement. Madison Strategies Group transitioned its career readiness trainer to serve as an additional career coach in summer 2013.

Participation Patterns in Career Readiness Training

- **Three-quarters of participants completed classroom-based career readiness training within six months after random assignment.**

As shown in Table 4.3 (above), more than three-quarters of program group members at the three WorkAdvance providers other than Towards Employment completed classroom-based career readiness training. As noted, Towards Employment's completion rates reflect the fact that not all participants attended the formal classroom-based career readiness training: rather, some received more individualized career readiness services that are not captured in the reported completion rates for classroom-based training. Among Madison Strategies Group, Per Scholas, and St. Nicks Alliance, there were relatively high completion rates regardless of the length of this program component. One might expect a short training to be more easily completed; indeed, Madison Strategies Group, with the shortest length of career readiness instruction, has the highest completion rate. One might also expect a longer training to present a barrier to

timely completion, but it also might have given staff the time to establish greater rapport with participants. Per Scholas has both a relatively long career readiness training (84 hours over 12 weeks) and a high completion rate (77 percent). Towards Employment had a much lower start rate for classroom-based career readiness training than the other providers, for reasons discussed above: hence, it had a lower completion rate (60 percent). Still, most of those who started classroom-based career readiness training at Towards Employment did complete it.

- **The available data (Table 4.3) show that just over half of program participants received help from program staff to obtain supportive services.**

The WorkAdvance model calls for the provision of training- and employment-related financial assistance to help participants complete training and secure employment, such as funds to pay for licensing fees, tools, or uniforms and transportation assistance to get to training or work (before the participant receives his or her first paycheck). Additionally, some providers also offered broader wraparound and supportive services, intended to encourage engagement over the long term. Towards Employment has a history of working with a disadvantaged population and providing supportive services to help people complete training and/or start or retain employment. As such, it had systems in place to assess needs and to access and deliver such supports — for example, strong referral networks and agreements with vendors to accept vouchers. It also had a case manager conduct an up-front needs assessment with every WorkAdvance participant prior to starting career readiness services. Likely as a result of this combination of factors, nearly 70 percent of program group members at Towards Employment received help obtaining supportive services within the first six months after random assignment. On the other hand, at Per Scholas and Madison Strategies Group, which did not do this type of assessment or have broad supportive services in place, 46 percent and 56 percent of participants, respectively, received help to obtain supportive services.[6]

In addition to offering outside referrals for business attire or for help with housing or legal issues, Madison Strategies Group also uniformly provided transportation vouchers (a choice of gas cards or a monthly bus pass) to all participants during career readiness and occupational skills training, in part because the public transportation system in Tulsa is very limited. Examples of difficulties that participants faced in staying engaged in the program were found in case files and individual interviews and varied somewhat by provider. For example, at Towards Employment and Madison Strategies Group, challenges included working part time (or, in some cases, full time) while in career readiness and occupational skills training, whereas clients at Towards Employment especially noted issues with costly transportation.

[6]Information on supportive service take-up was not included in program tracking data provided by St. Nicks Alliance.

Adjustments in Career Readiness Services Over Time

- **As expected, all the providers adjusted their career readiness services over time, based at least in part on input from employers.**

In interviews with researchers, several employers commented that the softer skills, or what one employer called "essential skills" — such as interview skills, good attitudes, and a willingness to work — were critically important when making hiring decisions. Indeed, many felt that WorkAdvance participants' shortcomings (as well as the shortcomings of hires from other sources) related more to issues with soft skills than to inadequacies of technical skills.

Sector- and employer-driven changes to the career readiness curricula were often brought about through informal communication with employers. Some employers provided real-time feedback on new employees, which job developers conveyed to career readiness instructors through a variety of avenues, including staff meetings, informal conversations, case notes, and email. In other cases, providers sought feedback from employers. For example, one employer that works with Per Scholas noted in an interview: "Per Scholas is always eager to get feedback to help develop the students' skill sets and interviewing.… Positive or negative, they always want to hear it." Changes included Per Scholas's addition of a customer service component, Madison Strategies Group's use of actual employer interview questions to reinforce best practices in applying for a job, and Towards Employment's integrated examples of real job descriptions and performance reviews. Ultimately, career readiness completion rates were highest among program group members who enrolled in WorkAdvance later, which may be a reflection of the adjustments that providers made to the training over time.

Occupational Skills Training

The goals of occupational skills training in WorkAdvance are to help participants obtain industry-recognized credentials and develop technical skills that apply to the targeted sector and, more specifically, to the needs of particular local employers. When providers originally applied to be part of WorkAdvance, they were responsible for proposing training offerings based on local industry demand, staff and institutional knowledge of the industry, and characteristics of targeted occupations — including job entry requirements, pay rates, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. Providers selected a variety of trainings based on these dimensions. (Table 4.4 summarizes the key features of the trainings that the WorkAdvance providers offered.)

Variation in Occupational Skills Training and Participation Rates

A great deal of variation exists in terms of training course duration, location (on-site or contract-based with an off-site provider), and the breadth of training offerings. Depending on

Table 4.4

Occupational Skills Training, by Provider

		Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Occupational skills training	**Duration**	15 weeks	5 to 12 weeks	4 to 32 weeks	2 to 17 weeks
	Trainings offered	A Plus, Network Plus	Environmental Remediation Training, Commercial Driver's License B (CDL-B) with Hazmat endorsement, Pest Control Technician	Aviation Manufacturing, Commercial Driver's License A and B (CDL-A, CDL-B), Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) Machining, Diesel Mechanic, Welding, Supervisory Leadership	MF: Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) Machining, Welding HC: Phlebotomy, Certified Health Care Access Associate, Patient Care Assistant, State-Tested Nursing Assistant, Medical Billing and Coding
	Targeted occupations	Help Desk Technician, IT Field Technician	Environmental Remediation Technician, Tanker or Hazmat CDL Driver, Pest Control Technician	Aviation Manufacturing Assistants, Semi- and Truck Driver, CNC Operator, Diesel Maintenance Technician, Welder	MF: CNC Operator, Welder HC: Phlebotomist, Patient Access Specialist, Patient Care Assistant and State Tested Nursing Assistant, Certified Professional Coder
	On-site / off-site	On-site	On-site for Pest Control training; mix of on- and off-site at private schools for all other trainings	Off-site at private or technical schools or community colleges	Off-site at private or technical schools or community colleges

SOURCES: Documentation supplied by providers and interviews with provider staff.

the material and certification requirements, course duration ranged from two weeks (for training as a patient care assistant at Towards Employment) to eight months (for Madison Strategies Group's first diesel mechanic trainings). Per Scholas offered its training classes on-site with its own instructors; St. Nicks Alliance had a blend of both off-site and on-site trainings (with independently contracted instructors); and Towards Employment and Madison Strategies Group partnered with off-site training institutes, including community and technical colleges.

All four WorkAdvance providers offered training in cohorts — that is, groups of participants who went through training cycles together — although Towards Employment and Madison Strategies Group also occasionally placed individuals or small groups of WorkAdvance participants into training classes with non-WorkAdvance students. All the providers also offered the training full time[7] and during regular business hours, though Towards Employment and Madison Strategies Group eventually also offered evening and part-time classes (both in cohorts and in "mixed" classes), in part to accommodate participants who worked during the day. Once WorkAdvance participants were scheduled for skills training, they had to wait for the next training class to fill up, generally with 15 to 20 students. Depending on the class, some WorkAdvance participants could be expected to wait up to several months before their desired training began. At Per Scholas, however, all enrollees are assigned to IT classes that begin twice a month, so participants typically wait no longer than a few weeks to begin training. Per Scholas's ability to recruit, screen, and enroll a sufficient number of people to fill classes with 15 to 20 enrollees roughly every two weeks, given that 15 to 20 individuals were also being assigned to the control group during that period, is an example of its ability to adapt quickly to the needs of WorkAdvance and the research and to move participants into classes quickly and keep them engaged.

- **Within the first six months after enrolling in WorkAdvance, more than 80 percent of participants were scheduled for occupational skills training, and about 70 percent actually started the training (Table 4.5).**

As mentioned above in this chapter, occupational skills training was a requirement of participants at the two training-first providers (Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance), while the two dual-track providers (Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment) were expected to place at least 50 percent of program participants in training. Beginning in summer 2012, Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment were asked to direct more participants into training first, to meet the expectation that 50 percent received training.

[7]While the skills training classes themselves were not always full time — that is, 35 hours per week or more — the program commitment, including skills training and career readiness classes, was full time.

The WorkAdvance Study

Table 4.5

Participation in Skills Training Activities Within Six Months of Random Assignment

Cross-Site

Skills training activity since RA	PS	SNA	MSG	TE	Overall
Ever scheduled to start skills training (%)	100.0	100.0	71.1	55.1	80.9
Ever started skills training (%)	93.1	83.5	52.3	50.9	69.7
Ever completed skills training (%)	76.9	76.4	25.1	33.1	52.0
Ever dropped out of skills training (%)	12.7	3.9	8.0	8.5	8.6
Among participants who started skills training	*13.6*	*4.6*	*15.2*	*16.7*	*12.4*
Enrolled in skills training at 6 months after RA (%)	3.5	3.3	19.3	9.3	9.1
Among participants who started skills training	*3.7*	*4.0*	*36.8*	*18.3*	*13.0*
Ever obtained a credential[a] in targeted sector (%)	70.0	69.2	25.1	15.7[b]	44.2
Average number of weeks in training[c]	13.6	7.4	6.8	5.8	8.6
Among participants who started skills training	*14.6*	*8.8*	*13.1*	*11.5*	*12.4*
Sample size	260	182	239	236	917

SOURCES: Program tracking systems managed by Per Scholas (PS), St. Nicks Alliance (SNA), Madison Strategies Group (MSG), and Towards Employment (TE).

NOTES: RA = random assignment.
Italic type indicates that the metric is not among the full sample shown in the table.
Refer to Appendix Table E.1 for site-specific details regarding how each metric is defined.
Statistics are among participants randomly assigned through February 2013.
Skills training activity refers to enrollment in an occupational skills training course in the targeted sector/industry.
[a]Credentials in the targeted sector are locally and/or nationally recognized. There is cross-site variation in reporting of locally recognized credentials obtained in the targeted sector.
[b]TE's program-tracking system only captures nationally recognized credentials. Therefore, participants who obtained the locally recognized computer numerical control machining credential are not counted as ever having obtained a credential.
[c]The scheduled lengths of training varied across sites, industries, and types of training.

As expected, Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance had the highest percentages of participants who were scheduled for and actually started occupational skills training. In addition, both Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment exceeded the goal of 50 percent of participants being scheduled for training (71 percent and 55 percent, respectively) and actually starting training (52 percent and 51 percent, respectively). At Towards Employment, intensive recruiting for occupational skills training (as opposed to recruiting for both placement-first and

training-first tracks) did not become a focus until nearly one year into program operations. Once the shift was made, Towards Employment operated at an accelerated pace to meet (and ultimately exceed) the training goals. Both Towards Employment and Madison Strategies Group had significant challenges to meeting the goal of enrolling 50 percent of participants in training: Towards Employment was working to identify training providers with employer-driven curricula in two sectors and two locations, and Madison Strategies Group had to establish relationships with training providers in a new city and in a short amount of time.

All WorkAdvance providers experienced some drop-off between the scheduling of training and the actual start date, especially early on in the provision of services. The providers that offered training off-site (St. Nicks Alliance, Towards Employment, and Madison Strategies Group) needed time to identify the occupational needs of employers, find training providers that could meet those needs, establish relationships with them, and make adjustments to courses, which included incorporating the skill needs of employers. As a result, initially there was a longer wait time for program group members to start training. Another factor that may have affected drop-off rates was the length of time that was required to fill class cohorts.

Additionally, full-time trainings meant that participants had to find ways to support themselves financially. At Per Scholas, there was relatively little drop-off between scheduled training and the start of training, possibly because (1) program group members were encouraged to have sponsors sign agreements expressing willingness to provide financial support to help ensure successful completion of the 15-week, full-time training cycle and (2), as noted above, Per Scholas started training cycles roughly every two weeks, so program group members rarely had to wait very long after random assignment to start their occupational skills training.

- **Very few participants dropped out of occupational skills training within the first six months after random assignment (Table 4.5).**

Among those participants who started skills training, the average dropout rate across the providers within six months of random assignment is about 12 percent — a very low rate for a training or education program geared toward this population.[8] The training-first providers' completion rates through the first six months of program enrollment are consistent with completion rates found in the Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) Sectoral Employment Impact Study, which hovered around 70 percent (Chapter 1). At both Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment, it is too early to know the completion rates, because many individuals who started were still in training at the six-month mark. It is possible that more participants are still in training at the six-month mark at the dual-track providers because many participants may

[8]Maguire et al. (2010).

simply have attended a longer-term training (such as the eight-month diesel mechanic training offered by Madison Strategies Group) that had not yet completed after six months. Still, among participants who started training at the two dual-track providers, an average of only 16 percent had dropped out after six months.

- **Extensive up-front screening, participants' relatively high levels of pre-training education, and a hands-on aspect to the training are all factors that may have contributed to the high training participation rates.**

Factors that may have contributed to high training participation rates include the extensive up-front screening to gauge motivation, relatively high levels of educational attainment among enrollees, appealing skills training instructors and engaging material, and the level of effort that staff put into supporting participants while they were in skills training. The providers also used a number of approaches, and invested substantial resources, to ensure training completion. Their efforts included offering paid internships, covering transportation costs, adjusting training schedules to allow for evening classes, providing activities to get families involved and foster support among them (such as convening open houses at training locations so families could see the equipment their family members would be using), and checking in regularly with participants and instructors to track progress. The check-ins and, in some cases, referrals to supportive services, as needed, helped head off issues that could become problems on the job later and were a high priority, even when that required traveling off-site for weekly visits to various training locations. (Box 4.2 presents some participants' perspectives on occupational skills training.)

Yet some participants struggled to support themselves financially while engaging in the longer training programs. To help with this issue and also to be responsive to employer demand, two WorkAdvance providers teamed with local community and technical colleges and employers to pare down some longer training courses (such as certifications in CNC [computer numerical control] machining and diesel mechanics) to their essential components. This still produced competitive job applicants, while allowing employers to fill positions sooner and participants to earn wages sooner. In addition, Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment worked with training providers to offer evening or part-time class schedules to accommodate participants who needed to work part time or full time while in training and to allow for potential paid internship opportunities.

Another factor contributing to the high participation rates could be the cohort-based training model. While cohort-based training has the disadvantage of creating longer wait times before the classes start, once training does begin, cohorts help the group to build cohesiveness and supportive relationships that can encourage training completion. This benefit was echoed in participant interviews, in which many individuals cited instances during the training course

Box 4.2

Participants' Perspectives on Occupational Skills Training

Interviewed participants considered occupational skills training (OST) to be one of the most valuable elements that the WorkAdvance program offered. One participant stated, "The material [and] the knowledge that you get out of the whole core of the training is what really stood out to me." When interviewees were asked to compare WorkAdvance with other training experiences, they considered the WorkAdvance OST to be more hands-on and more in-depth. One participant said, "I've noticed that I've learned more; I've gained more technical skills here than in college." Another respondent said, "This training is more rigorous; it's longer, and it's more hands-on [and more] one-on-one." A different participant talked about how his WorkAdvance OST instructor has been working in the field for several years and then said, "I feel like the instructor here is more knowledgeable than what I had previously in my last classroom environment."

While many participants advocated for additional hands-on opportunities during the training, the hands-on training that they did receive was often touted as one of the most enjoyed and valued aspects of the training. One participant said: "I think the hands-on was great. It would have definitely been great to have more of it, but what we did get was good. It really was good." A different participant said that the most interesting part of the training was "playing on the machines.… Pretty much all the hands-on in the workshop is about the best part." One other participant said: "Well, the most interesting part is it's, like, you know, seeing the work done, like getting your hands on it — they call it making chips, you know, cutting metal. You get to see the process done, you know; you're making something. So it's a cool feeling." The overarching opinion was that the hands-on experience was important and that the lecture part of the training was least interesting; however, some specifically said that the lecture was informative. One participant explained it this way: "It's useful to a point. I mean, it's good to read from a book, but you won't know how to do anything until you get out there."

The overall positive view of the training often seemed to be linked to a positive view of the OST instructor. Many interviewees described the instructors as knowledgeable and engaging; for example: "People listen to him because he just, he has such a vast knowledge of the field that when he puts something out there [and] somebody comes back with a question, he comes back, right out, with the answer. He doesn't have to look around or you get an 'um, um.' He knows exactly what he's talking about." Another participant that said his instructor "engages everyone, individually or as a group." He explained that "it's just his ability to listen and to understand what you're saying because you're coming into a field you really don't know anything about." Another participant said, "The training was pretty much right on, but some of the actual trainers we had were excellent." However, some felt that the instructors were not always the best fit. After describing a situation in which instructors were teaching a course outside their direct field of experience, one participant requested that the program only "put the teachers where they belong; the right teachers with the right programs." She said, "Make sure that they're appropriate for that class."

(continued)

Box 4.2 (continued)

Almost all the participants found their training instructor to be approachable and available. One participant said that her instructor made it clear that he was available by saying, "If you ever want to talk or whatever, call me, email me, text me, and, you know, I'm here for you." Another said, "I've had instructors in the past [that] if you ask them questions, they don't care." But she said that this instructor "does care, and the fact that he wants us to succeed really helps make him even that much more likeable, and to me that matters a lot." Participants also held that the instructors were encouraging, indicating that they encouraged questions and open communication. One participant said that his instructor is "a straightforward guy and you can ask him anything; there's no dumb question to him." Another said that his instructor is "always willing to help." He said, "If he has to repeat one specific thing a hundred times he will do it." On the other hand, a different participant explained how this type of repetition can result in her losing interest. She said: "Sometimes when they do over something, you know, my attention span drifts off because, you know, you're talking about the same thing that I know. But I understand. They've got to do that to make sure everybody understands." One other interviewee said that her instructor was "open for constructive criticism." She said that the instructor "was willing to make a change," and she found this to be "real good."

Some of the participants reported that the training instructors used their own experience in the field to illustrate topics with real-life experience and provide a glimpse into the work environment. One participant talked about how all of his OST instructors "were in the business." He said, "One owns a machine shop, which actually was a real good experience because she gave us some insight on things that really only owners would really kind of know." Another interviewee said that, because the instructor "works in the field," he was "bringing what is current" into the classroom. Similarly, another participant said the instructor tells them about "new things he might've come across" in the workplace and how "this company does things versus [the way] this company does things." He said, "As an instructor, he lets us know what companies are expecting of us when we get out there, so it's kind of an advantage to us." Another participant also described how the instructor conveyed the realities of the workplace. He said that the instructor "tells us how it is. He doesn't lie to us. He doesn't make things seem like they're better than what they're going to be."

OST instructors also helped some participants with career planning and provided job leads and connections to the local employers. One said that the training instructor was "always helping figure out exactly which path we need to go." Another said that her instructor has said things such as, "Hey, if you guys are looking, go look here." She said, "He's made all kinds of a plethora of information available to us."

when their WorkAdvance peers helped them academically or emotionally. Several more explained that being with WorkAdvance classmates provided a "level playing field" due to similar backgrounds and unity around a common goal. (Box 4.3 gives examples of participants' perspectives on classroom dynamics.)

Box 4.3

Participants' Perspectives on Classroom Dynamics

WorkAdvance offered training to participants in cohorts (in which the entire training class is made up of WorkAdvance participants) and in "one-off" situations (in which a WorkAdvance participant would be sent to a class that is open to any interested members of the community). In interviews and focus groups with participants, it became clear that being in training together had benefits that training individually did not. For example, participants found it beneficial that they could rely on their WorkAdvance classmates for help. One participant said, "Everybody's kind of on the same track [or] the same playing field, and everybody's pretty much sharing the same interest." Another participant said that it is "easier to be in class with the people from the same walk of life … or that are coming from the same diverse world, you know, where so many things have happened in the last few years with our economy." One other participant said, "It's easier to be relatable to the people in there because they've been through the same thing that I've been through."

Many participants even described the classroom dynamic as being "like family"; they described how they all helped each other by providing encouragement, motivation, or emotional support, and they reported that sharing personal information with their peers helped facilitate a trusting learning environment. One said, "Oh, we're like a little family in the classroom, so you know everybody's got mutual respect for one another." A different participant said, "We share our stories about our families, talk about family life, what we did on our job, where we're going to apply for jobs." Another participant explains, "That's why I said our class, to me, was more like a family because we're all like pulling [for] each other or, you know, helping each other, or assisting each other." Another respondent explained that this type of environment "makes it more personal." She said: "It makes it more welcoming. It makes it easier to learn, and it makes it more comfortable of an environment to really learn everything you want to learn."

Participants described how the classroom was an environment where they helped each other. In some cases, this took the shape of higher-performing peers helping lower-performing peers, but, for the most part, this was communicated as an exchange across all levels. One participant said, "We definitely encourage everybody." He went on: "We're a unit; we learn everything together. When we're on that floor, we're all together. We [are] looking at the same thing; and if one person didn't catch it, the other person's going to bring them up to speed. So we don't have anybody getting left behind." Another said, "Everybody helps each other; everybody's got their back on each other." She said that she had heard one of her friends say, "If one's struggling, everybody's struggling." This friend talked about how he asked a classmate for help. He said, "We have a student here who is very good … he knows his stuff in and out … and he's always willing to help, always." He said that after he received a low test score, he asked for help. Now, he said, this classmate is "going to be my partner in the study session because he [has] seen that my test came back so low and he got none wrong." Conversely, another participant spoke about how he offers to help others: "For the most part, [and] I don't mean to sound conceited, but a lot of times when people have problems in the class, they come to me because they see me on the machine for 20 minutes, I'm done, I'm off. So I help people out when they ask for it."

(continued)

Box 4.3 (continued)

Moreover, the participants were comfortable asking each other for help. For example, a low-performing student explained how he felt comfortable asking for help: "[I had a] test last week and, due to the eviction thing and everything, I wasn't too focused." He said, "I scored the second-lowest in the class." He explained that he knew this because he said, "We're a class; it's not, like, a secret." He said that classmates show each other their grades at their "own discretion." He went on to talk about how his classmates told him to "write down what you got wrong, and we'll work on it during our study sessions when the class is over." He said, "You feel comfortable," referring to the ease that he feels asking his classmates for help. Another interviewee described it in terms of respect. She said: "No one is trying to step on anyone's toes. They're very respectful, and we're always trying to help the next person who does not understand anything."

The following participant described how he found it comforting to be able to relate to one of his classmates: he said that he often talks to one classmate "about what's going on in our lives." He said: "We kind of have a similar thing. We're both unemployed, and his wife and my girlfriend are both working two jobs, and we kind of talk about that, and, you know, how it kind of makes us feel." He said: "It's kind of uplifting, because it's, kind of like, 'Oh, I'm not the only one in this boat. I'm not the only one that feels like this, and it's not going to be this way forever.'" A different participant said: "Because we're all — I guess with all being in the class together, we're all trying to pass the class, so we work with each other to push each other; to help each other pass and everything. So, we can all — I guess everybody came in together, wants to come out together … [and], hopefully, maybe work together somewhere." He said, "We don't want to lose touch," referring to when the training ends. One other interviewee told how she was encouraged one day: "Recently, I had a kind of breakdown 'cause I'm tired. It seemed like I'm being tested every which direction and everyone — I just walked out the room to maybe get some time to myself, and it was, like, everybody was on it, and they came out. I've never — I mean they just walked up to me and just a touch, just a hug, just encouragement." She said that they told her: "It's going to be okay. Hold your head up high. Keep going." She said, "I loved it." Another participant said of her classmates:, "I think we've all bonded. We may not agree all the time, but we are a team." She said, "When someone's missing or someone looks down or something, we always want to find out what's wrong, [and] if somebody cries, we hug."

This support and camaraderie also extended beyond the classroom. After describing how one of her classmates did her a personal favor, one participant said: "When you feel like you're in a smaller community or a community in general, it makes life easier. So, yeah, it made going to school better." Another participant talked about how her class planned to have "a study session for two hours" and then how they would like to have "a little party" after the class ended. Participants also talked about helping classmates with homework. One said: "I talk with people outside of class, and [we] kind of help each other on homework, or [we] answer questions and kind of help each other." Interviewees also talked about staying in touch with classmates after the end of training and about networking on both a personal and a professional level. One said: "We're all Linked-In together online as of right now.… One day one of us will reach out and help the next one."

- **Contact from WorkAdvance staff while participants were in training may also be an important factor in participants' staying engaged.**

Advancement coaches and other staff tried to maintain regular contact with program group members to provide ongoing encouragement and supportive services when needed to keep them engaged. Since Per Scholas delivered training classes on-site, even the WorkAdvance staff who were not directly involved in the training saw participants regularly during career readiness classes, meetings with the career coaches and job developers, and simply being on-site together. This helped foster relationships between WorkAdvance staff and participants and provided support to help keep participants engaged in their training classes. In contrast, the other three providers partnered with off-site trainers and thus had to make an effort to interact with program group members during this time. St. Nicks Alliance avoided this possible obstacle by building on-site career readiness training into their schedule once per week. For most training-first cohorts, Towards Employment brought its career readiness training to participants at the local occupational skills training provider[9] once per week and occasionally brought training participants on-site for career readiness activities, based on the needs of the participants.

St. Nicks Alliance, Madison Strategies Group, and Towards Employment all had their staff visit students at the training providers' sites on a regular basis to provide additional support. In interviews with participants, many of those who attended off-site trainings commented that WorkAdvance staff frequently visited the training site. In addition to the visits, the providers also emailed and called participants frequently to check on their progress.

Case notes reveal that some of the reasons why participants did not complete training include an immediate need for income, inflexible work schedules, or behavioral or mental health setbacks. The providers tried to work around these issues by rescheduling participants for later cohorts or helping them to find employment in the sector.

- **In most cases, completion of occupational skills training led to the earning of either a nationally or locally recognized credential (or both) — a critical first step toward getting a job in the sector (Table 4.5).**

A credential indicates to potential employers that participants left training with a tangible skill, which was the expectation of WorkAdvance training. Most of the training programs were designed to lead to the earning of a credential; in some cases, such as at St. Nicks Alliance, trainings could lead to as many as five different credentials. At the two training-first providers, Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance, about 77 percent of participants completed training within

[9]Towards Employment was able to do this by negotiating free space and equipment from the training providers.

six months of enrollment, and 70 percent earned a nationally or locally recognized license or certificate. At Madison Strategies Group, the 25 percent of participants who completed training as of six months after random assignment all earned either a nationally or locally recognized license or certificate. Towards Employment reported only on nationally recognized credentials, though some of its participants could obtain locally recognized credentials. As a result, the roughly 16 percent reported to have obtained a credential in the health care or manufacturing sector at Towards Employment — which is about half of those who ever completed skills training within six months of enrollment — does not include those who obtained a locally recognized credential.

The credentials obtained through the diesel mechanic and CNC machinist trainings are unique to the local industry's employer needs and were viewed by the WorkAdvance providers as creating a viable avenue to get participants into the sector. Typical nationally recognized certifications for these occupations, for broad entry into the industries, can require upward of two years of schooling. This tends to be a prohibitively long period of time for WorkAdvance because of the commitment required by participants and the cost of the training. Since training of that duration was generally not feasible for WorkAdvance participants, both Towards Employment and Madison Strategies Group worked with employers and/or training providers to abbreviate and adapt manufacturing trainings while still ensuring that training graduates were marketable to local employers.[10] Indeed, in interviews, several employers of manufacturing graduates commented that, in the absence of a formal certification, they valued that their WorkAdvance hires had a basic familiarity with and commitment to the industry.

Adjustments in Occupational Skills Training Over Time: Responses to Employer and Industry Demand

Occupational skills training in the WorkAdvance program was largely aligned to the industry and the particular occupations being targeted, although the extent of employer involvement in developing the curricula varied across the providers. That said, all four providers adapted their skills training curricula at some point — based on labor market and employer input, which providers gathered by reviewing local labor market data, reading industry journals, attending industry association meetings, and consulting with employer advisory groups and individual employers. Madison Strategies Group, for example, added a week to the CNC machining class because employers felt that the participants needed specific additional skills, and it also dropped several components from the aviation training, based on employer feedback

[10]Again, Madison Strategies Group included these credentials obtained upon completion of this locally recognized course in its rates measuring the earning of a credential, while Towards Employment did not, though the courses were very similar.

that those skills would not be needed. One employer who works with Madison Strategies Group noted in an interview that he appreciated that he "could help frame the curriculum to be in line with what we are looking for" and that the employer could "tailor-make the product we need to fill the voids" in positions that were difficult to fill. Per Scholas developed a unit for handheld devices, and St. Nicks Alliance changed its environmental remediation certificate offerings in response to high demand for mold remediation skills following Hurricane Sandy. Towards Employment added an online learning module to its basic machining course, in order to incorporate additional content that was preferred by manufacturing employers but was not typically offered in shorter machining classes.

Additionally, most of the WorkAdvance providers altered their course offerings beyond simply changing curricula. Madison Strategies Group, for example, began CNC machining training in June 2012 and welding training in February 2013 — both in response to employers' and industry experts' input. Likewise, it suspended enrollment for a second training in aviation/aerospace in August 2012 in order to better assess the market need, and, consequently, it held just one more class in December 2012 before discontinuing it. Per Scholas responded to employer feedback by adding a separate training for graduates that focused on software testing (and that may eventually be incorporated into the core training). St. Nicks Alliance added pest control technician training in August 2012, when the demand for environmental remediation technicians was decreasing and demand for pest control technicians was confirmed. Towards Employment adjusted the types of welding credentials that were targeted, based on employer needs, and stopped recruiting for patient navigators, since the occupation was not growing at the pace initially projected.

The extent to which changes to curricula or course offerings were made depended largely on how nimble and adaptable the WorkAdvance providers were, as well as on the strength of their relationships with employers and, where applicable, training providers. For example, Per Scholas was able to leverage business relationships to create networking, training, and placement opportunities. Towards Employment worked with providers to integrate internships or job shadowing into some of the training curricula, based on employer feedback that it was helpful to meet potential applicants and see a demonstration of their skills before they graduated. One possible implication of the adjustments that the WorkAdvance providers made over time is that program group members who completed training more recently will likely have skills that are more aligned with employers' needs than was the case for participants who completed training earlier in program operations.

Chapter 5

Program Implementation and Participation: Job Development and Placement and Postemployment Services

Chapter 5 focuses on the program group sample members who enrolled in WorkAdvance through August 2012, for whom there are 12 months of follow-up data, rather than on the larger sample, who enrolled through February 2013, which is the focus of Chapter 4. The decision to focus on a smaller sample with more months of follow-up was made to allow more time for program group members to complete their WorkAdvance activities and find employment. Data for this chapter come primarily from the providers' management information systems (MIS), in which the providers recorded participants' activities. Again, the data may underestimate employment, since participants who left the program did not always report jobs to providers and/or because participants obtained jobs that providers do not consider as placements.[1]

Job Development and Placement

Identifying jobs that offer good pay, employment security, and opportunities for advancement requires that WorkAdvance providers understand local labor markets and the specific needs of employers.[2] Lessons from prior workforce studies suggest that sector-based training programs that have direct relationships with employers are pivotal to improving employment outcomes for low-income individuals.[3] Job developers need to provide program managers timely feedback from employers and data about the local labor market so that the managers can prepare participants for the best jobs available.

Staffing

A weakness of many employment programs is that job developers do not have a business orientation or experience in the industries into which they are trying to place potential workers.[4] In WorkAdvance, too, not as many job developers have direct experience in the

[1]For a more complete introduction to the data presented in this chapter, see the opening pages of Chapter 4. For details regarding how verified jobs are defined, by provider, see Appendix Table E.1. For an overview of the four WorkAdvance providers, see Chapter 2, Table 2.1.

[2]D'Amico (2006).

[3]Maguire et al. (2010); Henderson, MacAllum, and Karakus (2010); Bloom, Hendra, and Page (2006).

[4]Hendra et al. (2011).

designated sector as the program model intends (Chapter 1, Figure 1.1), but they seem to bring other qualities that help them develop relationships with employers: job developers at all four sites — New York City; greater Cleveland and Youngstown in northeast Ohio; and Tulsa, Oklahoma — have extensive experience in workforce job development and/or sales experience, and several do have direct experience in their designated sectors.

Notably, when initially hiring staff, Madison Strategies Group put greater emphasis than the other providers did on selecting a job developer with extensive executive and/or sales experience — particularly in the form of owning or operating a business — which Madison Strategies Group leadership felt was especially important to generate buy-in and credibility among employers.[5] While Per Scholas, St. Nicks Alliance, and Madison Strategies Group had full-time on-site staff devoted to job development and placement, Towards Employment contracted with local industry associations to act as job developers in both the manufacturing and the health care sector. The goal was to leverage existing relationships to allow for more rapid acceptance of WorkAdvance participants, and the partnership was part of a strategy to encourage collaboration and the spread of WorkAdvance practices across key workforce partners, for sustainability. For the manufacturing sector, this relationship has endured; however, in early 2012, the contract for the health care sector was terminated as the industry association's priorities changed. In fall 2012, Towards Employment leveraged existing relationships, drew on the health care career coaches and leads from other Towards Employment job developers, and added a different health care industry association as a new contracted partner.

The Job Development Process: Establishing Employer Relationships

Per Scholas and Madison Strategies Group had strong employer relationships and conducted individualized job matching between participants and employers. St. Nicks Alliance matched individuals to jobs but also identified and recommended to employers multiple candidates for any given job. As noted above, Towards Employment relied on intermediary organizations that had existing relationships with employers to match participants with job leads. (Table 5.1 gives an overview of how each provider handled job development and placement.) Since WorkAdvance placements were supposed to be into quality jobs with opportunities for advancement in the sector, it was preferred that job developers who have close connections with employers help to make those matches, rather than relying on participants to place themselves.

Job developers used a mix of networking and cold calls to make initial contact with employers, pitching the value that WorkAdvance could offer by prescreening job applicants,

[5]Madison Strategies Group, unlike the other providers, has a performance-based salary structure. For the job developer who had sales experience, this was a familiar way of operating.

Table 5.1

Job Development and Placement, by Provider

		Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Job development and placement	**Staffing**	2 on-site job developers	2 on-site job developers	1 on-site job developer	1 external contracted job developer per sector;[a] some job development done by coaches and training providers
	Advisory council or industry expert?	Advisory council	Neither	Both	Advisory council through industry associations
	Placement strategy	Made some one-to-one job matches; informed participants about job orders from employer partners	Typically one-to-one job matches, though also sent batches of résumés to employers hiring for multiple positions	Made one-to-one job matches, sent batches of résumés, and informed participants about publicly listed job openings	MF: Intermediary's job developer made one-to-one job matches HC: Coaches made some one-to-one matches; mostly referred participants to openings

SOURCES: Documentation supplied by providers and interviews with provider staff.

NOTE: [a]The health care sector had complications with the intermediary early on and therefore did not have a job developer for close to two years of program operations.

providing career readiness training, and, in some cases, sending applicants who already had certifications that the employer would otherwise have to arrange and pay for — such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) certification for St. Nicks Alliance participants. One employer who was interviewed criticized some aspects of WorkAdvance but nonetheless agreed that the program's prescreening was valuable: "I need to spend a week training them" when new employees come from other recruitment sources, whereas, by working with St. Nicks Alliance, "it probably saves us a couple thousand dollars [for] each guy." Other examples of the value of WorkAdvance were articulated by an employer in Tulsa, who reported that Madison Strategies Group's services helped his company reduce time to hire, reduce turnover, troubleshoot with new hires, reduce safety infractions, and fill skilled positions beyond entry level; the last of these has had the biggest impact on the company. Some providers followed up with an in-person meeting to solidify the relationship and verify appropriate work site conditions — a practice that MDRC and consultants encouraged. All the providers developed relationships with temporary employment agencies, as regular employers in the industries that they serve sometimes hire through these agencies. Once relationships were established, most job developers reported spending part of their time each week checking in with employers to maintain the relationship, identify job openings, and follow up on previous hires. Indeed, strong communication during the job-matching stage appears to be a major factor that, for employers who reported such communication in interviews with MDRC researchers, differentiates WorkAdvance from other service providers, such as staffing agencies. As an example, one employer in northeast Ohio reported in an interview with researchers that, compared with other recruitment sources that he used, Towards Employment was more interested in learning exactly what the employer was looking for in a candidate, while other recruitment sources "simply give us anybody" because those other entities "really only care about making money for themselves."

The number of employer relationships that each provider has varies greatly, in part because of the structural differences across the sectors. For example, because there are three main hospital systems in its local area employing most health care workers, and because these hospitals guided selection of targeted occupations and provide stronger starting wages, Towards Employment prioritized these relationships for its work in the health care sector. St. Nicks Alliance has strong relationships with about 20 to 30 employers and has about the same number in prospective relationships at any given time, while Per Scholas typically contacts 150 to 160 companies in a year and continually seeks to expand its contact base. To some extent, the number of employer contacts also depends on the size of the provider's sectoral program. For example, Per Scholas provides information technology (IT) training and other services to individuals outside WorkAdvance and, therefore, may need to cast a wider net to place graduates.

The Job Placement Process

Across Towards Employment, St. Nicks Alliance, and Per Scholas, job developers meet with participants to begin discussing job opportunities and scheduling interviews, as appropriate, roughly two to five weeks before the end of skills training. These meetings begin at Madison Strategies Group when participants have completed approximately 75 percent of their skills training. (Participants in the placement-first track were channeled directly into job development and placement assistance following completion of career readiness training.) Most providers make matches only after staff have reviewed and approved the participant's résumé and the job developer has determined the individual to be a good fit for an open position. Towards Employment and Per Scholas additionally use a formalized checklist and point system, respectively, to ensure that candidates are job ready before making a referral. Job developers at each provider attempt to filter jobs and determine matches based on participants' availability, shift schedules, transportation, job history, possible barriers, potential for advancement, and fit with the participant's work style. Once a match is identified based on these factors, job developers typically pass the participant's résumé to the employer and/or encourage the participant to submit a formal application to the employer through conventional channels. Some job developers send employers the résumés of multiple appropriate candidates. Ultimately, job developers across the providers try to use their knowledge of career ladders to place participants into jobs in the designated sector that have room for advancement.

Participants spent, on average, over eight weeks in training and, in some cases, were expected to go into full-time training that spanned up to eight months before being placed into a job. For this reason, placement rates are observed for a group of participants for whom 12 months of follow-up data are available.

- **At three of the providers, just under half of participants were verified as having obtained a job within 12 months of entering the program. At Madison Strategies Group, about two-thirds of participants were verified as having obtained a job within 12 months (Table 5.2).**

The verified job rates were likely affected by the length of occupational skills training and any delays in the start of training, especially at the two training-first providers (Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance), but also at the two dual-track providers — since WorkAdvance participants who enroll in training will generally not be placed in jobs until they complete their training course. Per Scholas had a particularly long training course of 15 weeks. At St. Nicks Alliance, the environmental remediation trainees who complete training that qualified them to work with asbestos still have to wait for about 45 days to obtain a "hard card," which provides city and state authorization to work in the this field.

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Table 5.2

Placement Activity Within Twelve Months of Random Assignment

Cross-Site

Placement activity since RA	PS	SNA	MSG	TE	Overall
Ever obtained a provider-verified job[a] (%)	49.2	48.7	67.9	49.0	54.1
Employed at 12 months after RA	45.8	46.1	41.4	30.6	40.9
Obtained a full-time job (35 or more hours per week)	37.3	41.7	61.7	36.1	44.4
Obtained a job with benefits offered	23.7	9.6	59.3	38.1	34.1
Starting hourly wage (%)					
No provider-verified job	51.1	51.3	32.1	51.0	46.0
$7.24 or less	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.7	0.5
$7.25 - $9.00	2.8	6.1	9.3	25.2	10.7
$9.01 - $12.50	22.2	11.3	43.2	17.7	24.7
$12.51 - $15.00	8.0	18.3	8.6	3.4	9.0
$15.01 or higher	15.9	13.0	5.6	2.0	9.2
Average number of weeks in verified employment	10.7	12.8	18.3	10.5	13.1
Among those with a provider-verified job	*21.7*	*26.3*	*26.9*	*21.5*	*24.2*
Sample size	177	115	162	147	601

SOURCES: Program tracking systems managed by Per Scholas (PS), St. Nicks Alliance (SNA), Madison Strategies Group (MSG), and Towards Employment (TE).

NOTES: RA = random assignment.
Italic type indicates that the metric is not among the full sample shown in the table.
Refer to Appendix Table E.1 for site-specific details regarding how each metric is defined.
Statistics are among participants randomly assigned through August 2012. Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.
[a]A job is considered verified if the WorkAdvance provider has obtained a pay stub or employment verification form or has made direct contact with the employer. All placement-related measures shown in this table reflect only provider-verified jobs.

Job development challenges also appear to have affected the verified placement rate of WorkAdvance participants. For example, job developers at St. Nicks Alliance struggled to find permanent jobs with advancement potential in environmental remediation, which has a heavy concentration of short-term, project-based work.[6] Towards Employment's reliance on external

[6]However, for individuals who successfully link together a series of short-term projects in environmental remediation and thus gain experience, there *is* an advancement path through managerial training and additional credentials.

industry associations for job development services had both advantages and disadvantages. While this provided a shortcut to developing relationships with employers, it is more complicated to manage a contracted partner than a direct hire. In the case of the health care association, once the contract was dissolved in early 2012, Towards Employment had to quickly add support from another health care association, and staff that had other roles in WorkAdvance — such as the coaches — were expected to fill in for job development staff. At Per Scholas, job developers found that employers increasingly wanted even entry-level IT technicians to have more experience than the WorkAdvance participants had. Madison Strategies Group's prior experiences in building relationships with employers in the transportation industry in New York City may have helped it develop those relationships more quickly in Tulsa than one might expect for a start-up organization — though it still took considerable effort.

While the above-mentioned factors are important to interpreting the verified job placement levels, the placement rates may also reflect the varying degrees to which the providers were able to verify employment. The providers relied primarily on participants to inform them when they started a job and to verify this by supplying the provider with a pay stub or other proof of employment. While pre- and postemployment advancement coaching could encourage participants to remain in contact with the providers after beginning to work, it is possible that once participants were employed, they did not see the value to themselves of reporting their employment to the program or providing a pay stub or did not feel that they needed anything more from the program. Towards Employment attempted to mitigate this by offering "WorkAdvance Bucks" to participants who provided verification of employment; participants could use these to purchase gift cards, bus passes, gas cards, and other incentives. Additionally, Madison Strategies Group may have a higher placement rate than the other providers because it used direct financial incentives for participants as a means to verify jobs: It provided gift cards of $25 when participants reported (and verified) self-placements into jobs. Its performance metrics and performance-based incentives and bonuses for staff also likely contributed to its relatively higher verified job placement rate. In addition to learning about the start of employment from participants, providers sometimes tried to get verification from the employer or used third-party verification services.

- **The variation in job characteristics and wages across providers may reflect the sectors that they selected, regional differences, and the providers' particular approaches (Table 5.2).**

It is very difficult to draw conclusions across providers about which providers or sectors lead to better-paying jobs, based on starting hourly wages of verified placements. Differences in the sectors and in the local economies and cost of living across the various regions would all have to be taken into consideration. Typical wages and hours across the sectors vary considerably. For example, at Towards Employment, most health care program group members with

verified jobs were earning more than $9.00 per hour but were working part time, possibly working multiple part-time jobs or working part time while in a training program. Most of the participants at St. Nicks Alliance who obtained a verified job had starting wages exceeding $12.50 per hour, but very few were offered benefits. This reflects the nature of short-term, project-based assignments in the environmental remediation field. At Madison Strategies Group, wages below $9.00 per hour could reflect the fact that truck drivers, who are sometimes paid by the mile, are included in the average.[7]

Adjustments Over Time: Technical Assistance, Employer Input, and Labor Market Changes

Even with experienced job development staff, the WorkAdvance providers still had room to benefit from the technical assistance that they received in developing employer relationships, analyzing labor market information, and placing participants in good jobs. At Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment, the assistance was "lighter touch" and focused on early development of local industry relationships. Conversely, St. Nicks Alliance received extensive, ongoing technical assistance to address low placement numbers and strengthen job developers' skills and placement capacity. There, meetings with consultants took place weekly, and then every two weeks, for more than a year to enhance staff capacity, improve internal reporting mechanisms, and provide accountability and general advice. In addition, St. Nicks Alliance received assistance in gathering and analyzing systematic labor market information. In time, MDRC and consultants worked to encourage more proactive job development with stronger direct employer relationships, such as individualized skill-matching between participants and job opportunities.

Postemployment Retention and Advancement Services

Simply helping workers find employment is often not enough to improve earnings in the long run, in part because low-wage jobs typically involve very little hard skill acquisition.[8] In previous advancement programs, career advisers were typically employment "generalists" (without in-depth knowledge of a specific job sector) or were focused primarily on removing employment barriers and achieving job retention rather than on career advancement as well.

[7]"Over-the-road" truck drivers are paid by the mile, rather than by the hour; they are paid only for the time that they are actually driving and not for any other time, when they are technically still working. For example, they are not paid for any time that they spend waiting at a pickup or drop-off location. As a result, the actual hourly wage for these drivers could be lower than that of drivers who are paid by the hour, which could bring down the total average hourly wage for truck drivers.

[8]Hendra et al. (2011); Gladden and Taber (2000); Card, Michalopoulos, and Robins (2001); and Miller, Tessler, and van Dok (2009).

Still, some previous studies showed positive results: One of the strongest sites (Riverside, California) in the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration that was conducted by MDRC provided postemployment assistance, such as counseling, job search and re-employment activities, and referrals to further education and training programs. Drawing on lessons from the ERA studies about what appears to work and *not* work, the postemployment services in WorkAdvance were designed to include the following: an intentional follow-up plan to contact and communicate with the employee at strategic points after starting employment; updating the employee's individual career plan at least twice during the first year of employment, to focus on career advancement rather than only on job retention; and maintenance of regular contact with the employer.

A full exploration of the WorkAdvance providers' postemployment advancement services is being deferred until the 2015 report because these services were the last to be implemented across the providers and because there should be a larger number of employed WorkAdvance "graduates" who begin to receive postemployment services that the next report can cover. The report in 2015 will draw on implementation research that includes observations of career advancement coaching and other postemployment services, interviews with coaches and other staff delivering postemployment advancement services, and data being collected by the providers' staff on the frequency and content of their coaching sessions.

The Implementation of Postemployment Services

Delivery of postemployment services, at this point, is focused mostly on job retention and much less on career advancement (Table 5.3). Providers agree that an appropriate amount of time has to pass after employment begins for participants to be open to thinking beyond retention toward advancement and for employers to be willing even to discuss moving an employee up. Job developers report following up with employers after WorkAdvance graduates are placed into jobs, and employers report satisfaction with this type of communication. These conversations generally focus on how the employee is doing on the job and whether any feedback from the employer is important for either the employee or the provider to know. Job developers and, in some cases, coaches also report checking in with newly hired program graduates to ensure smooth transitions to employment. For example, in a conversation with an employer, Towards Employment learned that new hires were still struggling with some of the math involved with the job. The employer was able to share information about its math assessment and expectations so that coaches were better able to prepare participants.

Certainly, job retention and success in the job are necessary before focusing on advancing to a better-paying or higher-level position, but, without an eventual focus on advancement, participants may not continue to increase their earnings over time. Employers with higher-level positions to fill could be interested in advancing successful employees into those positions,

Table 5.3

Postemployment Services, by Provider

		Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Postemployment services	**Staffing**	1 full-time career coach with 4 additional coaches / career readiness training instructors (serving WorkAdvance and non-WorkAdvance Per Scholas clients)	1 senior coach with 2 additional career coaches / case managers	2 career coaches	4 career coaches (2 for each sector)
	Initial post-employment follow-up	Coaches follow up with participants during first 90 days of employment. Job developers follow up with employers in the same period.	Job developers follow up with participants weekly during first 30 days of employment.	Job developer or career coach follows up with participant and employer within the first week of employment.	Coaches follow up with participants weekly for first 30 days after placement.
	Ongoing follow-up	Coaches follow up with participants quarterly, either over the phone or in-person one-on-one. Participants are also invited to workshops on-site.	Coaches follow up with participants monthly, either over the phone, in-person one-on-one, or in a workshop setting.	Coaches follow up with participants monthly, either over the phone, in-person one-on-one, or in a workshop setting.	Coaches follow up with participants bimonthly through 90 days, monthly until 180 days, and quarterly thereafter.

SOURCES: Documentation supplied by providers and interviews with provider staff.

while the WorkAdvance providers could then help the employers backfill the more entry-level positions that those employees vacate as they move up. Other employers, which may not have higher-level positions to fill, will likely be interested only in successful job retention. To advance, participants working for those types of employers might eventually need to move to another employer that offers a higher-level position. In such cases, the WorkAdvance providers could still help fill the vacated entry-level positions.

To help participants figure out the best way to advance — for example, whether to try to move up at a current employer and what is necessary to achieve that, to apply for a higher-level position at a different employer, or to obtain additional credentials first — coaches must provide concrete guidance, including setting specific goals, sharing feedback from employers, and getting permission from participants to hold them accountable for their commitments. The 2015 report will explore the content of coaching sessions and the approaches that the coaches take to encouragingly prod participants toward advancement.

As with preemployment advancement coaching, WorkAdvance providers did not initially have specialized or experienced staff to deliver postemployment advancement coaching. This role was generally taken on by the same staff who took on preemployment coaching responsibilities, though Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance eventually hired a dedicated career coach to deliver postemployment advancement services. Much later in the project (mid-2013), St. Nicks Alliance's staff began training their existing case managers to fulfill both pre- and postemployment coaching responsibilities, and Per Scholas followed suit shortly thereafter in transitioning its career readiness instructors to take on career coaching duties.

MDRC and consultants have delivered technical assistance to help providers develop and implement the advancement component. In July 2012, an MDRC consultant provided on-site training to Madison Strategies Group to help staff define the structure of the postemployment relationship, frame postemployment conversations, and develop scripts for postemployment follow-up by telephone. The three other providers received this workshop training in March 2013. Following these workshops, MDRC and its consultant hosted a series of five webinars focused on various aspects of postemployment services, including job retention, career and advancement planning tactics, effective case notes, and client reengagement.

Chapter 6

Early Operational Lessons and a Look Ahead

The WorkAdvance program and the related evaluation were designed to provide evidence on how to achieve the twin objectives of satisfying employers' needs for workers with specific skill sets while helping low-income workers find jobs and advance in careers that pay enough to support their families. The program model (Chapter 1, Figure 1.1) builds on lessons from previous research and practitioners' experience, especially in the areas of sectoral and advancement strategies. The next WorkAdvance report will provide strong evidence of whether or not this model is effective. In particular, the report will present the impacts of the program on employment and earnings and an analysis of whether the program is more effective for certain types of participants, such as the long-term unemployed, than for others. It will also update this report's implementation analysis and include a cost analysis.

Consistent with the purpose of the federal Social Innovation Fund, a key goal of WorkAdvance is to help guide potential efforts to replicate programs of this type in a variety of settings, at a meaningful scale and in the most effective ways possible. Although one should be cautious in drawing inferences from the experiences of only four providers (Chapter 2, Table 2.1), the WorkAdvance experience offers some clues for others considering programs of this type. Building on the findings presented in preceding chapters, as well as on MDRC's experiences mounting the WorkAdvance demonstration and providing technical assistance to the provider organizations, Chapter 6 suggests some operational lessons and also outlines "what's next" in the WorkAdvance demonstration.

Lessons for Replication and Scale-Up

WorkAdvance posed a number of challenges in its implementation: The WorkAdvance providers had to implement a recruitment and screening process that enabled them to identify candidates who had the ability to complete training successfully and be attractive to employers but who were not so qualified that they could find appropriate employment on their own. Providers had to find engaging ways to deliver sector-focused career readiness training focused on advancement. In a relatively short time, three of the four providers had to identify occupational skills training providers and curricula that would meet the needs of local employers. In some cases, the employment sectors were new to the providers, so program staff had to quickly develop expertise in the sectors as well as relationships with local employers. All the providers (except for Madison Strategies Group, which was brand-new) had to change their culture from one focused on initial placements and job retention to one focused on working with participants in concrete ways on long-term career advancement. In addition, since WorkAdvance was

conducted under the auspices of the Social Innovation Fund, the four local providers also needed to raise substantial private match funding,[1] launch the program in an ambitious time frame, comply with federal reporting requirements, and operate in the context of a random assignment evaluation (which required them to recruit enough eligible and qualified individuals to meet program enrollment targets *plus* roughly an equal number of individuals who would be assigned to the control group).

In attempting to meet these challenges, a number of operational lessons were learned that may be helpful to organizations seeking to implement a sector-focused career advancement program like WorkAdvance, as described below.

Organizational Lessons

- **Invest in building the business acumen of all staff (from receptionist to job developer).** Staff should become knowledgeable about the targeted sector. This can be done in a variety of ways, including tours of employer establishments, reading trade journals and articles on the industry, staff meetings to share knowledge, and use of employer experts.

- **Train staff early and regularly.** Many staff may not be accustomed to focusing on career advancement and may not know how to coach participants to identify and achieve an advancement goal, so training of staff is essential. But training is not a one-time event; it may take refresher trainings to inculcate staff with the language and practice of advancement coaching.

- **Share performance benchmarks and progress with staff on a regular basis.** Establish goals, monitor performance, and review progress toward goals regularly, so staff can keep track of their progress. This is especially important with advancement coaching, since advancement is a longer-term proposition and staff may need some indication that they are making interim progress. Do not hesitate to make adjustments when performance is not as expected.

- **Design your program to be large enough that your organization can dedicate staff to it, allowing them to become experts in the targeted sector and in serving two customers: workers and employers.** Sector-focused programs are not easy to implement "part time"; they require a

[1]This was done in partnership with the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), which took on a significant portion of the fund-raising responsibility.

substantial investment of staff time in order to become experts in the sector, to develop relationships with employers, and to learn how to be effective advancement coaches. For smaller programs, these goals are difficult to achieve.

Marketing and Recruitment

- **Dedicate specific resources to recruitment, in terms of both staff responsibilities and marketing costs.** Do not underestimate the effort required to identify and recruit the most well-suited population for this type of program. Many organizations are not accustomed to proactively marketing their programs, so it can be easy to overlook the costs and resources required to do it well. But with screening that suggests that only one out of five customers are a good fit for such a demand-driven program as WorkAdvance, similar programs need to consider dedicating resources to marketing.

- **When marketing, early on deliver a clear message about what the program and work in the sector entail.** Potential applicants need to know how long various training programs are, so they can figure out how to support themselves while in training; they need to understand what the work environment in the given sector will be like, so they can determine whether the sector is right for them; and they need to have a sense of what their future in the sector might look like, so they can feel confident and can see themselves thriving in it. This kind of information can help potential applicants determine whether the program is a good fit for them.

- **Track recruitment by source to identify the recruitment sources likely to yield the greatest payoff in terms of eventually bringing in qualified applicants.** Given the likely large drop-off from individuals initially interested in the program to those still interested in and qualified for it at the end of the intake process, focusing on these particular recruitment sources will maximize the chance that recruited individuals will go on to enroll in the program. Be sure that your organization has a well-functioning management information system (MIS) in place to understand the recruitment "funnel" and to guide decisions about the best sources and strategies for recruitment.

- **Allow time for advertising to take hold.** Prospective program applicants often need to see print ads, or hear radio ads, multiple times before they respond. Local media coverage helps (newspaper or TV stories, especially of successful participants). Choose stories carefully; a well-placed story about a successful participant can generate a lot of positive buzz about your program.

- **Screen participants, but take some risks; do not bring in only participants who would find employment and advance on their own.** Aim to bring in participants who, with the help of the provider and in a reasonable amount of time, will be able to compete for job openings but who might not yet be able to do so on their own. Build trust and a good placement record with employers.

Career Readiness

- **Career readiness skills may be just as important to employers as technical skills, if not more so, and imparting readiness skills should be a strong component of any sector-based advancement program.** Even a sectoral program cannot focus only on technical skills related to one sector. Being punctual and adhering to workplace rules (soft skills) are as important as technical skills in ensuring that participants can compete for the best possible jobs, can keep them, and can advance over time. In the end, the combination of strong job readiness skills paired with technical skills may be what will distinguish your participants from others when applying for jobs or seeking higher positions.

- **Behavior change takes time, so it is best if career readiness classes can span enough time to allow such changes to happen.** Integrating career readiness classes into technical skills training classes appears to be a good way to keep people engaged and to allow time for lessons to be absorbed. Importantly, to deliver career readiness training well, it is also essential to model the desired behaviors throughout every interaction with participants.

Sectoral and Occupational Focus

- If warranted by, say, changes in employer demand, be open to changing the focus of training classes or the program's sectoral focus itself. Even after spending considerable time putting programming in place, a provider might need to change aspects of the program — from the occupational focus to the entire sectoral focus — if demand changes. Providers should be prepared for this possibility, as local economies continually evolve, and in-demand occupations and sectors change.

Advancement Focus

- **Infuse the advancement message throughout the program, from the first time a potential applicant hears about the program through all of the**

program components, in order to distinguish it from traditional workforce programs. WorkAdvance is not just about getting a job now but also about developing a career with a future. A clear and consistent message about the purpose and expectations of the program will help ensure that only individuals who are committed to a career in the sector and what it will take to achieve that — including training — are served by the program and that individuals who have only an immediate need for employment (any employment) are served elsewhere.

- **Though barriers often must be addressed to enable participants to complete a program like WorkAdvance and begin working, and though placement and retention are important first steps, keep the focus on career advancement.** Many provider organizations that could consider implementing a program like WorkAdvance are accustomed to focusing only on initial job placements, often in entry-level positions. They are also often accustomed to providing case management and social services, and so the shift to career advancement coaching can be difficult. It is important to emphasize the advancement focus and to provide training to staff to ensure they do not get bogged down in barrier removal or think that their work is over after someone is placed but, instead, continually focus the participant on taking steps toward advancement.

Relationships with Employers and Job Development

- **As much as possible, try to get into the mind-set of the employers within given sectors to fully understand their self-interests, how they operate, and how to become their best provider of talented employees.** Employers are most concerned about the bottom line and do not tend to get involved with WorkAdvance-type programs to be altruistic. Keep the focus on meeting employers' needs; speak their language; deliver good job candidates; and gain their trust. In this way, they may become more willing to give a chance to some program participants who have potential but need a little more development on the job.

- **Allow job developers to "sell" qualified workers to employers.** The "selling" is not always simply about a job candidate's having a credential; it also often reflects a job developer's judgment about the suitability of the match between the candidate and the employer. Sometimes the job developer needs to help employers see the value in a candidate that they may have overlooked, and this is part "art" and part "science."

Postemployment Services

- **Continually invest in the professional development of career coaches, and monitor performance to help ensure that coaches — and program participants — are meeting advancement benchmarks.** The work of the provider staff is not over when someone starts a job; in some ways, the hard work is just beginning. Advancement is a long-term proposition, and to help participants advance, coaches must be able to offer concrete guidance about the best avenues for advancement and the specific actions that employees can take to move into better-paying positions and/or to increase their earnings over time.

What's Next for WorkAdvance?

The four WorkAdvance providers will continue to deliver services to participants with support from the Social Innovation Fund through June 2015. Activities of the Learning Network — established by the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) with the help of MDRC — also will continue throughout this period. This network provides opportunities for WorkAdvance and other SIF program-providing organizations and researchers, as well as other local government partners and funders, to share best practices and to continue to develop and improve their programs and build organizational capacity.

Researchers also will continue to track the progress of program implementation, including the still-developing delivery of postemployment services. A survey of WorkAdvance enrollees and the control group, covering individuals' experiences during 18 to 24 months after entering the study, has started. Earnings data for all study sample members are also being collected, based on unemployment insurance records. A second report on WorkAdvance, in late 2015, will provide an update on program implementation, especially including postemployment advancement services as well as data for the full program sample and for a longer period of time. The report will also include an analysis of the program's employment and earnings impacts and its costs, drawing on the survey and unemployment insurance data. Efforts to secure additional funding to extend the research and learn more about the longer-term impacts of WorkAdvance are ongoing.

WorkAdvance has strong potential to inform workforce policy. As part of the effort to continue WorkAdvance beyond the demonstration's time frame, providers have explored how to leverage Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training funds, Pell Grants, and other federal funding sources, though not always successfully. If the impact analysis demonstrates that WorkAdvance is an effective approach, the study will be well positioned to inform how public funding sources

such as these might assist in aligning funded training with industry demand, provide evidence of the efficacy of this approach, and demonstrate the importance of career coaching to help individuals continue to increase their earnings over time. In the future, it is possible that such federal resources could aid in the scale-up of programs like WorkAdvance. Likewise, the lessons and findings of WorkAdvance have the potential to influence other programs, such as apprenticeship programs, education and training at community colleges, and Career Pathways programs that provide opportunities to gain skills, technical and academic credentials, and employment — all intended to lead to a career path with increased earnings. In general, WorkAdvance is poised to help shape the next generation of sector-based employment and advancement programs and studies so that the workforce policy and practitioner communities can continue to learn what works best to move unemployed and low-wage workers into careers with opportunities for advancement and increased earnings over time.

Appendix A

Additional Baseline Characteristics of the Full WorkAdvance Sample

The WorkAdvance Study

Appendix Table A.1

All Characteristics of Research Sample Members That Were Measured at Baseline: Cross-Site

Characteristic	PS IT	SNA ER	MSG TR	TE HC	TE MA	Overall
Program group (%)	50.6	50.5	50.6	49.1	50.7	50.4
Demographic characteristics						
Female (%)	13.2	14.5	15.9	92.3	24.5	26.6
Age (%)						
18-24 years	31.4	16.3	22.4	22.4	23.3	23.8
25-34 years	39.6	37.2	33.9	29.0	29.7	34.8
35-44 years	16.1	25.7	20.4	19.9	22.5	20.4
45-59 years	12.8	19.8	22.2	26.1	23.6	20.0
60 years or more	0.1	1.0	1.1	2.6	0.9	1.0
Average age (years)	31	35	35	36	35	34
Race/ethnicity (%)						
Latino/Hispanic	36.0	22.8	6.1	5.4	3.8	16.8
White	5.2	6.9	39.2	10.6	26.3	18.4
Black/African-American	44.5	62.7	28.4	78.6	63.0	50.6
Other race[a]	14.3	7.5	26.4	5.4	6.9	14.1
Citizenship (%)						
Born in United States	71.9	76.9	95.4	98.0	97.7	86.3
Naturalized	15.7	11.9	1.1	2.0	2.0	7.3
Noncitizen	12.5	11.1	3.4	0.0	0.3	6.4
Veteran (%)	2.2	6.4	11.7	2.6	6.6	6.2
Family status						
Marital status (%)						
Single, never married	76.7	70.9	50.6	72.9	72.3	67.4
Married and living with spouse	11.9	14.3	22.8	8.3	11.0	14.7
Married but living apart from spouse	6.1	4.0	6.1	5.7	6.6	5.7
Legally separated, divorced, or widowed	5.4	10.9	20.6	13.1	10.1	12.2
Living with a partner[b] (%)	8.1	8.4	17.0	6.3	10.4	10.6
Parent of one or more children (%)	26.2	45.3	51.8	53.8	49.9	43.7
Primary caregiver[c]	17.7	24.8	38.4	52.4	34.3	31.7
Single caregiver	7.4	11.2	13.4	41.7	20.5	16.2
Noncustodial parent[d]	9.1	22.9	17.1	2.6	18.2	14.2
Average number of children living with study participant[e]	0.3	0.4	0.8	1.1	0.6	0.6

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

Characteristic	PS	SNA	MSG	TE		Overall
	IT	ER	TR	HC	MA	
Age of primary caregiver's youngest child (%)						
Less than 6 years old	9.4	13.1	24.4	31.9	17.3	18.3
6 to 9 years old	3.8	4.2	5.5	8.5	6.6	5.4
10 to 15 years old	2.8	4.6	7.3	8.3	6.6	5.6
16 years or older	1.7	2.7	1.1	3.7	3.7	2.3
Not a primary caregiver for any children	82.3	75.4	61.6	47.6	65.7	68.4
Education level (%)						
Highest level of education attainment						
Less than GED certificate or high school diploma	0.1	11.9	6.0	5.7	6.1	5.5
GED certificate	14.3	19.2	13.6	6.8	14.1	14.0
High school diploma	22.8	25.3	22.1	21.6	31.7	24.1
Some college	32.5	26.5	48.1	53.7	40.3	39.6
Associate's degree/2-year college	9.9	7.5	5.7	6.0	3.7	6.9
4-year college degree or more	20.4	9.6	4.4	6.3	4.0	9.9
Currently enrolled in education or training program	4.3	3.0	4.6	6.8	8.4	5.1
College course toward 2- or 4-year degree	4.2	1.3	2.3	4.0	4.6	3.2
Already has a license/certificate in targeted industry	3.6	1.9	13.5	36.9	13.0	11.8
Employment status						
Ever employed (%)	96.4	97.9	99.3	96.6	98.0	97.7
Number of months of current unemployment spell (%)						
Never employed	3.6	2.1	0.7	3.4	2.0	2.3
Currently employed	13.0	10.5	26.7	27.6	25.9	20.0
3 months or less	29.7	26.7	37.6	17.9	24.2	28.9
4-6 months	11.6	14.5	12.3	12.8	10.4	12.3
7-12 months	14.8	14.7	8.0	11.1	11.5	12.0
More than 12 months	27.2	31.5	14.6	27.3	25.9	24.4
Number of months in current or most recent job (%)						
12 months or less[f]	55.5	54.0	65.9	58.0	58.5	58.8
More than 12 months	44.5	46.0	34.1	42.0	41.5	41.2
Is or has been employed in targeted industry (%)	7.9	2.1	14.7	27.7	33.7	14.9
Average hourly wage at current or most recent job[g] ($)	11.91	13.00	10.32	9.67	10.10	11.12
Never employed (%)	3.6	2.1	0.7	3.4	2.0	2.3
$7.24 or less	5.9	5.0	5.5	7.1	6.3	5.9
$7.25 - $9.00	23.6	23.0	28.3	44.6	39.5	29.8
$9.01 - $12.50	30.3	29.7	46.6	30.7	36.3	35.5
$12.51 - $15.00	18.4	15.5	13.9	7.4	8.6	13.8
$15.01 or higher	18.1	24.7	5.0	6.8	7.2	12.8
Among those unemployed for more than 12 months[h]	*40.0*	*44.9*	*25.7*	*41.7*	*36.0*	*40.1*

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

Characteristic	PS IT	SNA ER	MSG TR	TE HC	TE MA	Overall
Average hours worked per week at current or most recent job	32.0	34.4	37.7	31.4	34.8	34.3
Among those currently working	*22.6*	*25.8*	*30.6*	*26.3*	*31.0*	*28.0*
Worked full time (35 or more hours per week)[i] (%)	58.6	65.1	71.4	55.3	66.8	64.0
Among those currently working	*12.2*	*28.0*	*46.8*	*32.0*	*55.6*	*37.6*
Average weekly wage at current or most recent job[g] ($)	408	454	400	321	364	396
Circumstances that may affect job change or retention (%)						
Physical or mental health problem that limits work	0.6	0.8	1.9	1.1	0.9	1.1
Previously convicted of a crime	10.4	19.9	39.7	4.5	46.4	24.2
Previously incarcerated	6.2	18.2	34.2	1.1	23.1	17.6
Previously convicted of a crime and incarcerated	4.8	15.9	26.8	1.1	22.8	14.8
Income and other income sources						
Average monthly family income ($)	647	695	804	589	612	686
Income sources (%)						
Earnings from spouse or partner	9.9	12.6	22.3	6.6	11.0	13.5
Food stamps/SNAP	17.4	41.9	34.5	63.4	47.0	36.9
Welfare/TANF	6.2	13.7	0.7	6.0	1.7	5.5
Unemployment insurance benefits	24.3	24.6	7.5	10.2	10.7	16.0
Medical coverage (%)						
Covered by health insurance plan	54.3	54.3	28.3	57.5	38.7	45.6
Employer-provided or other private health plan	*26.8*	*7.5*	*67.5*	*17.8*	*41.8*	*29.6*
Publicly funded coverage	*73.2*	*92.5*	*32.5*	*82.2*	*58.2*	*70.4*
Parents with publicly funded coverage for their children[j]	*53.5*	*38.5*	*68.4*	*84.6*	*62.7*	*62.3*
Housing arrangements (%)						
Public housing or Section 8 voucher	19.9	13.4	8.0	21.0	12.4	14.6
Reduced rent, group shelter, or homeless	4.4	9.5	3.7	5.4	6.9	5.6
Sample size	690	479	697	352	347	2,565

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the WorkAdvance baseline information form.

NOTES: Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

PS = Per Scholas; SNA = St. Nicks Alliance; TE = Towards Employment; MSG = Madison Strategies Group; IT = information technology industry; ER = environmental remediation industry; HC = health care industry; MA = manufacturing industry; TR = transportation industry; GED = General Educational Development certificate.

Italic type indicates that the metric is not among the full sample shown in the table.

[a]"Other race" includes sample members who identify as non-Hispanic and listed "Asian," "American Indian," or "Other" as their race, including sample members who answered as "multiracial."

[b]This does not include sample members who responded as "married and living with spouse."

[c]A primary caregiver is a parent who has at least one child living with him or her more than half the time.

[d]While there is a legal definition for a noncustodial parent, in this analysis a noncustodial parent is defined as a parent who has at least one child not living with him or her for more than half the time.

[e]This is the average number of children living with the sample member for more than half the time. The estimate is based on how many people are in the family minus the sample member and another adult if he or she is married and living with the spouse or is not married but living with a partner.

[f]This includes sample members who have never been employed.

[g]Wages for sample members who have never been employed are counted as $0.

[h]This is restricted to sample members unemployed for more than 12 months whose wages were higher than $15 per hour.

[i]"Worked full time" does not include sample members who have never been employed.

[j]The percentage of parents with publicly funded health care coverage for their children is measured among sample members with children.

Appendix B

Staffing of WorkAdvance Providers

The WorkAdvance Study

Appendix Table B.1

Program Staffing, by Provider

	Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Project coordination	1 FT project coordinator	1 FT project coordinator 1 PT (10%) managing director	1 FT program director	1 FT project director 1 PT (10%) executive director 1 FT program manager
Recruitment	1 FT recruiter	1 FT recruiter	1 FT outreach coordinator 1 PT marketing specialist	1 PT outreach specialist with assistance from other staff members
Intake, career readiness instruction, & support staff	1 PT administrative assistant 1 PT intake specialist 2 FT screening specialists	1 FT administrative assistant 1 FT retention specialist	1 FT administrative assistant 1 PT trainer (50%) All staff assist with intake services.	1 FT program assistant 1 PT work readiness manager 1 FT career readiness trainer
Case management / coaching	1 FT follow-up counselor 3 FT career coaches	1 FT case manager 1 PT (50%) case manager 1 FT career coach (senior vocational counselor)	1 FT lead career coach (career adviser) 1 FT career coach (career adviser) 1 PT career coach (career adviser) (50%)	3 FT career coaches 1 PT legal services specialist 1 PT (50%) case manager
Job development	2 FT job developers	2 FT job developers	1 FT business development director (job developer)	1 PT (50%) subcontracted job developer for each sector (2 total) 1 FTE job developer from career coaches and non-WorkAdvance staff
Data management	1 PT follow-up counselor	1 PT (25%) data manager	1 FT operations coordinator	1 PT (50%) database manager

(continued)

Appendix Table B.1 (continued)

SOURCES: Administrative documents compiled by providers.

NOTES: PT = part-time; FT = full-time; FTE = full-time-equivalent.

Staffing turnover and restructuring occurred across all sites over the duration of the program. The positions listed above are generally representative of the staff time devoted to implementing the WorkAdvance program.

Appendix C

Supplementary Recruitment Funnel Exhibits

The WorkAdvance Study

Appendix Table C.1

Time Periods, Research Samples, and Data Sources for the Recruitment Funnel Analysis

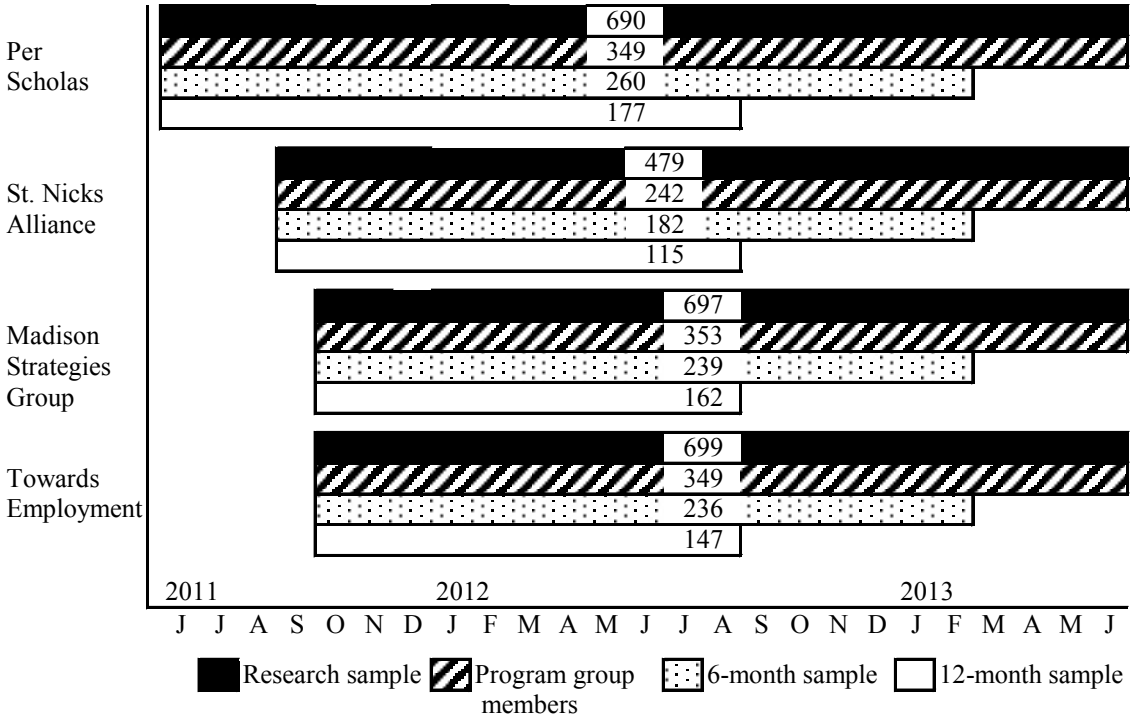
Recruitment funnel analysis				
	Per Scholas	**St. Nicks Alliance**	**Madison Strategies Group**	**Towards Employment**
Data source	• Recruitment questionnaire • Staff outreach activity log	• Recruitment questionnaire • Staff outreach activity log	• MIS • Staff outreach activity log	• MIS
Data coverage period	• 3 weeks • July 2012	• 15 weeks (2 rounds) • May-June 2012 • July-October 2012	• 6 weeks • August-September 2012	• 64 weeks • July 2011-September 2012
Applicant definition/ pool	• Individuals who attended orientation • 70 applicants	• Individuals who expressed an interest in WorkAdvance • 145 applicants (67 in round 1 and 78 in round 2)	• Individuals scheduled for orientation • 432 applicants	• Individuals who expressed an interest in WorkAdvance from top 11 recruitment sources • 1,136 applicants

NOTE: MIS = management information system.

The WorkAdvance Study

Appendix Figure C.1

Enrollment Periods and Research Samples, by Provider



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the WorkAdvance baseline information form.

Appendix D

Examples of WorkAdvance Providers' Recruitment Materials

UNEMPLOYED? WE HAVE A SOLUTION.

The IT industry has thousands of jobs with some of the fastest growing salaries.

Don't think you can do it? You can. We'll get you trained and certified.

And we'll do it for **FREE**.

All it takes is 15 weeks. On your way from tech user to tech pro.

BRONX AND BROOKLYN LOCATIONS

Visit www.perscholas.org

PER SCHOLAS

Need a Job, or a Better One?

Let Us Help You Step Up!

In-demand,

High-Paying,

Career-Focused Jobs

St Nicks Alliance

WA WorkAdvance

St Nicks Alliance, a nonprofit organization that puts people from Brooklyn back to work, is searching for individuals to train for good paying, career-track, high-demand green-collar jobs.

FREE TRAINING

FREE CERTIFICATION

A top-notch certification program in **Environmental Response & Remediation** is available to a select group **FREE.**

TRAINING SPOTS ARE LIMITED

Who's Eligible

- Must be at least 21 or older
- Able to lift 30 lbs and move it 30 ft
- Experience/interest in green living helpful
- High school diploma/GED preferred
- Commit to finish the program

How

- Attend 4-hr orientation
- Every Wed, 10 AM-2PM
- Professional Dress Required

Where

- St. Nicks Alliance
- Workforce Development Ctr
- 790 Broadway, Brooklyn, 2nd Fl.
- J/M Train, or 46/47/57/15 bus to Flushing Avenue

What to Expect

- Pass a math/reading test @ 9th grade level
- Present valid ID, proof of address, social security & benefits card
- Provide resume if available

1. REGISTER

Attend our FREE orientation and see why this program is a golden opportunity

- Training instruction at no cost
- Get a head-start on top-paying jobs
- Train at our state-of-the art facility

2. GET TRAINED

Start a FREE 8-week training program designed to put you to work

- Classroom instruction & hands-on training
- Train in environmental science, site inspection & more
- Field trips & site visits

3. BECOME CERTIFIED

Complete the training program and earn FREE certificates for dozens of jobs

- Hazardous waste, construction health & safety, Lead Awareness, & more
- Specialization certificates
- Qualify for city, state & federal jobs

4. GET HIRED

Pass our training and we'll help you land the perfect job

- Get matched with employers
- Resources for finding jobs around the country

5. BUILD A CAREER

Green collar jobs rank among the most promising & fulfilling

- They're on the rise—Up by 45%
- High job satisfaction
- Competitive Wages

For More Information Call Us @ 718-302-2057 Ext. 231
790 Broadway • 2nd Floor • Brooklyn, NY 11206

St. Nicks Alliance
Where Opportunity Grows

MOVE YOUR CAREER FORWARD

Looking for full-time employment?

You may qualify for
FREE job training
worth thousands of dollars

Diesel Mechanics
Commercial Driving
CNC Machining
Aviation Manufacturing

We Provide

- Free skills training
- Job placement assistance
- Career coaching
- Paid internship opportunities

Next Diesel Mechanics Training

Get great training for well-paying, in-demand jobs!

918-442-2200

TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIONS
WorkAdvance

WorkAdvance is part of a study. Spots are limited.

1645B-100412-TB

GET A JOB. KEEP A JOB. *ADVANCE INTO* A CAREER.

Meeting business needs by giving individuals training and support to enter and advance in manufacturing or healthcare careers

▪ Free Technical Training

MANUFACTURING CAREERS

- CNC Machining
- Welding
- Maintenance

HEALTHCARE CAREERS

- STNA+ State Tested Nursing Assistant
- Medical Office
- Medical Lab

▪ Career Coaching for up to 2 Years

▪ Connections to Employers with Jobs

WHO CAN APPLY?

- ☑ Unemployed or making less than $15/hr
- ☑ Have a high school diploma or GED
- ☑ 18 years of age or older

If you said yes to all of the above, call today!

ADVANCE YOUR LIFE TODAY!

CLEVELAND
216-696-7311
ccinfo@waneo.org

YOUNGSTOWN
330-480-4384 x229
mcinfo@waneo.org

www.waneo.org

WorkAdvance

Towards Employment

compass Family & Community Services

WorkAdvance is a program of Towards Employment, Compass Family and Community Services, and partner organizations across Northeast Ohio. The program is made possible with support from the Corporation for National and Community Service under Social Innovation Fund Grant No. 10SIHY002. Significant regional funding support is provided by the Fund for Our Economic Future. Spots are limited and participants are selected at random.

Appendix E

Supplementary Program Tracking Exhibits

The WorkAdvance Study

Appendix Table E.1

Description of Program Tracking Metrics, by Provider

	Metric	Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Table ES.1 and Table 4.1 [a]	**Ever started skills training or obtained a provider-verified job**	Participant attended first day of skills training program or provider verified that participant obtained job working at least 20 hours per week	Participant attended first day of skills training program or provider verified that participant obtained job working at least 20 hours per week	Participant attended first day of skills training or provider verified that participant obtained job that is intended to be permanent	Participant attended first day of skills training or provider verified that participant obtained job
	Ever participated in any career readiness activity[b]	Participant attended first day of skills training program, which includes career readiness training	Participant attended first day of skills training program, which includes career readiness training	Participant attended at least one day of career readiness training	Participant completed initial assessment to discuss career goals and employment barriers
	Ever started skills training[c]	Participant attended first day of skills training program	Participant attended first day of skills training program	Participant attended first day of skills training program	Participant attended first day of skills training program
	Ever completed skills training[c]	Participant is reported by training instructor to have completed all requirements of training program	Participant is reported by training instructor to have completed all requirements of training program	Participant is reported by training instructor to have completed all requirements of training program	Participant is reported by training instructor to have completed all requirements of training program
	Ever obtained a credential in targeted sector	Participant passed required exam(s) for at least 1 of the credentials offered through the provider	Participant passed required exam(s) for at least 1 of the credentials offered through the provider	Participant passed required exam(s) for at least 1 of the credentials offered through the provider	Participant passed required exam(s) for at least 1 of the credentials offered through the provider
	Ever obtained a provider-verified job	Provider verified that participant obtained job working at least 20 hours per week	Provider verified that participant obtained job working at least 20 hours per week	Provider verified that participant obtained job that is intended to be permanent	Provider verified that participant obtained job

(continued)

Appendix Table E.1 (continued)

	Metric	Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Table 4.3	**Ever participated in any career readiness activity**	Participant attended first day of skills training program, which includes career readiness training	Participant attended first day of skills training program, which includes career readiness training	Participant attended at least 1 day of career readiness training	Participant completed initial assessment to discuss career goals and employment barriers
	Ever started classroom-based career readiness training	Participant attended first day of skills training program, which includes career readiness training	Participant attended first day of skills training program, which includes career readiness training	Participant attended at least 1 day of career readiness training	Participant attended first day of contextualized career readiness training workshop
	Ever completed classroom-based career readiness training	Participant attended last day of skills training program, which includes career readiness training	Participant attended last day of skills training program, which includes career readiness training	Participant completed at least 4 days of career readiness training	Participant successfully completed contextualized career readiness training workshop
	Ever received help obtaining supportive services	Participant received a referral to an outside organization	(Not measured)	Participant received a referral to an outside organization, a transportation voucher, or a training voucher	Participant met with staff to discuss barrier removal
Table 4.5 [c]	**Ever scheduled to start skills training**	All participants	All participants	Participant was designated prior to RA as "on the training track"	Participant was signed up for training
	Ever started skills training	Participant attended first day of skills training program	Participant attended first day of skills training program	Participant attended first day of skills training program	Participant attended first day of skills training program
	Ever completed skills training	Participant is reported by training instructor to have completed all requirements of training program	Participant is reported by training instructor to have completed all requirements of training program	Participant is reported by training instructor to have completed all requirements of training program	Participant is reported by training instructor to have completed all requirements of training program
	Ever dropped out of skills training	Participant started skills training and is reported by training instructor to have withdrawn or been dismissed from training	Participant started skills training, did not complete training within 6 months of RA, and the participant's training cycle is complete	Participant started skills training and is reported by training instructor to have withdrawn or been dismissed from training	Participant started skills training and is reported by training instructor to have withdrawn or been dismissed from training

(continued)

Appendix Table E.1 (continued)

	Metric	Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Table 4.5 (continued) [c]	**Enrolled in skills training at 6 months after RA**	Participant started skills training, did not complete skills training, and did not drop out of skills training within the first 6 months of enrollment	Participant started skills training, did not complete skills training, and did not drop out of skills training within the first 6 months of enrollment	Participant started skills training, did not complete skills training, and did not drop out of skills training within the first 6 months of enrollment	Participant started skills training, did not complete skills training, and did not drop out of skills training within the first 6 months of enrollment
	Ever obtained a credential in targeted sector	Participant passed required exam(s) for at least 1 of the credentials offered through the provider	Participant passed required exam(s) for at least 1 of the credentials offered through the provider	Participant passed required exam(s) for at least 1 of the credentials offered through the provider	Participant passed required exam(s) for at least 1 of the credentials offered through the provider
	Average number of weeks in training	For participants who completed training, the average number of weeks between training start and end dates; for participants who dropped out of training, the average number of weeks between training start and halfway point of training cycle; for participants currently enrolled in training, average number of weeks between training start and 6 months after enrollment; for participants who never started training, 0 weeks	For participants who completed training, the average number of weeks between training start and end dates; for participants who dropped out of training, either the average number of weeks between training start and halfway point of training cycle *or* average number of weeks between training start and dropout date, where dropout date is recorded; for participants currently enrolled in training, average number of weeks between training start and 6 months after enrollment; for participants who never started skills training, 0 weeks	For participants who completed training, the average number of weeks between training start and end dates; for participants who dropped out of training, the average number of weeks between training start and dropout date; for participants currently enrolled in training, average number of weeks between training start and 6 months after enrollment; for participants who never started training, 0 weeks	For participants who completed training, the average number of weeks between training start and end dates; for participants who dropped out of training, the average number of weeks between training start and dropout date; for participants currently enrolled in training, average number of weeks between training start and 6 months after enrollment; for participants who never started training, 0 weeks

(continued)

Appendix Table E.1 (continued)

	Metric	Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Table 5.2 [d]	**Obtained a provider-verified job**	Provider verified that participant obtained job working at least 20 hours per week	Provider verified that participant obtained job working at least 20 hours per week	Provider verified that participant obtained job that is intended to be permanent	Provider verified that participant obtained job
	Employed at 12 months after RA	Reported placement dates indicate that participant was employed at 12 months after enrollment in the program	Reported placement dates indicate that participant was employed at 12 months after enrollment in the program	Reported placement dates indicate that participant was employed at 12 months after enrollment in the program	Reported placement dates indicate that participant was employed at 12 months after enrollment in the program
	Obtained a full-time job (35 or more hours per week)	Provider verified that participant obtained a job working 35 or more hours per week	Provider verified that participant obtained a job working 35 or more hours per week	Provider verified that participant obtained a job working 35 or more hours per week	Provider verified that participant obtained a job working 35 or more hours per week
	Obtained a job with benefits offered	Provider verified that participant obtained a job that offers benefits	Provider verified that participant obtained a job that offers benefits	Provider verified that participant obtained a job that offers benefits	Provider verified that participant obtained a job that offers benefits
	Starting hourly wage	Wage at participant's first job	Wage at participant's first job	Wage at participant's first job	Wage at participant's first job

(continued)

Appendix Table E.1 (continued)

	Metric	Per Scholas	St. Nicks Alliance	Madison Strategies Group	Towards Employment
Table 5.2 (continued) [d]	**Average number of weeks in verified employment**	For participants who have not obtained a job, 0 weeks; for participants who have had 1 job and are currently employed at 12 months after enrollment, the number of weeks between job start date and 12 months after enrollment; for participants who have had 1 job that ended prior to 12 months after enrollment, the average number of weeks between job start date and job end date; for participants who have had multiple jobs, the sum of all weeks in employment as defined by the above rules	For participants who have not obtained a job, 0 weeks; for participants who have had 1 job and are currently employed at 12 months after enrollment, the number of weeks between job start date and 12 months after enrollment; for participants who have had 1 job that ended prior to 12 months after enrollment, the average number of weeks between job start date and job end date; for participants who have had multiple jobs, the sum of all weeks in employment as defined by the above rules	For participants who have not obtained a job, 0 weeks; for participants who have had 1 job and are currently employed at 12 months after enrollment, the number of weeks between job start date and 12 months after enrollment; for participants who have had 1 job that ended prior to 12 months after enrollment, the average number of weeks between job start date and job end date; for participants who have had multiple jobs, the sum of all weeks in employment as defined by the above rules	For participants who have not obtained a job, 0 weeks; for participants who have had 1 job and are currently employed at 12 months after enrollment, the number of weeks between job start date and 12 months after enrollment; for participants who have had 1 job that ended prior to 12 months after enrollment, the average number of weeks between job start date and job end date; for participants who have had multiple jobs, the sum of all weeks in employment as defined by the above rules

SOURCES: Program tracking systems managed by Per Scholas, St. Nicks Alliance, Madison Strategies Group, and Towards Employment.

NOTES: RA = random assignment.

All metrics include only activities that started and occurred after random assignment.

The top panel of metrics included in Tables ES.1 and 4.1 are among participants randomly assigned through February 2013 and cover the first 6 months of program activity; the bottom panel of metrics in these tables are among participants randomly assigned through August 2012 and cover the first 12 months of program activity. For Tables 4.3 and 4.5, all metrics included are among participants randomly assigned through February 2013 and cover the first 6 months of program activity. For Table 5.2, all metrics included are among participants randomly assigned through August 2012 and cover the first 12 months of program activity.

[a]Tables ES.1 and 4.1 include the same metrics and related definitions.

[b] The career readiness activity metric captures the first activity after random assignment.

[c]All skills training-related measures include only skills training programs offered through the provider.

[d]All placement-related measures in Table 5.2 reflect only jobs that the provider verified with a pay stub or employment verification form or through direct contact with the employer.

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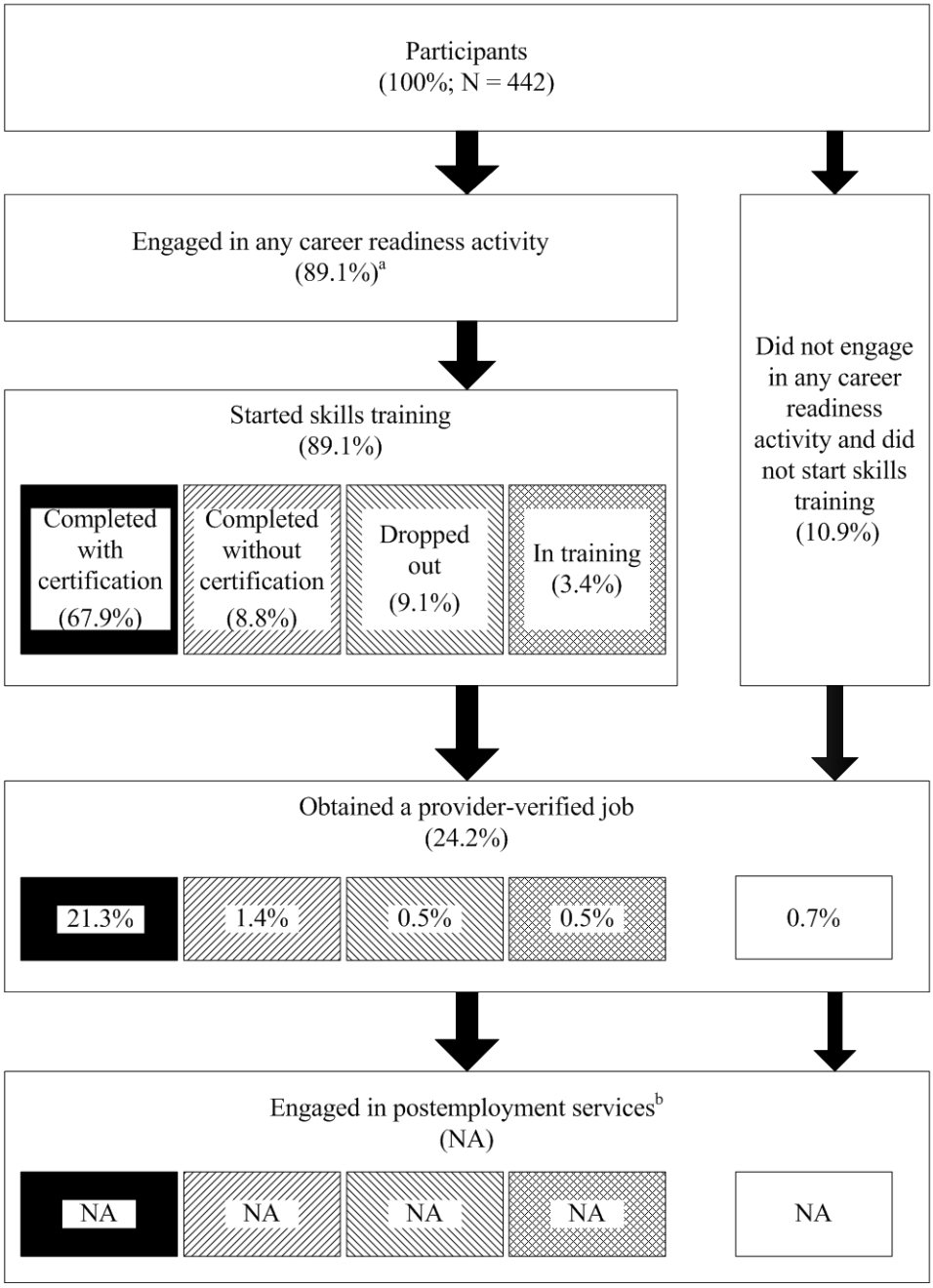
Appendix Figure E.1

Program Activity Flow Within Six Months of Random Assignment Per Scholas and Saint Nicks Alliance



(continued)

Appendix Figure E.1 (continued)

SOURCES: Program tracking systems managed by Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance.

NOTES: This figure is intended to illustrate the various pathways a participant can follow to make it through to the last program component activity within the first six months of enrollment. Statistics reflect participation in program activities through August 2013 and are among participants randomly assigned through February 2013.

Refer to Appendix Table E.1 for site-specific details regarding how each metric is defined.

[a]At both providers, engagement in career readiness services means attending the first day of the skills training cycle.

[b]Postemployment service data are not currently available for extraction at these two providers.

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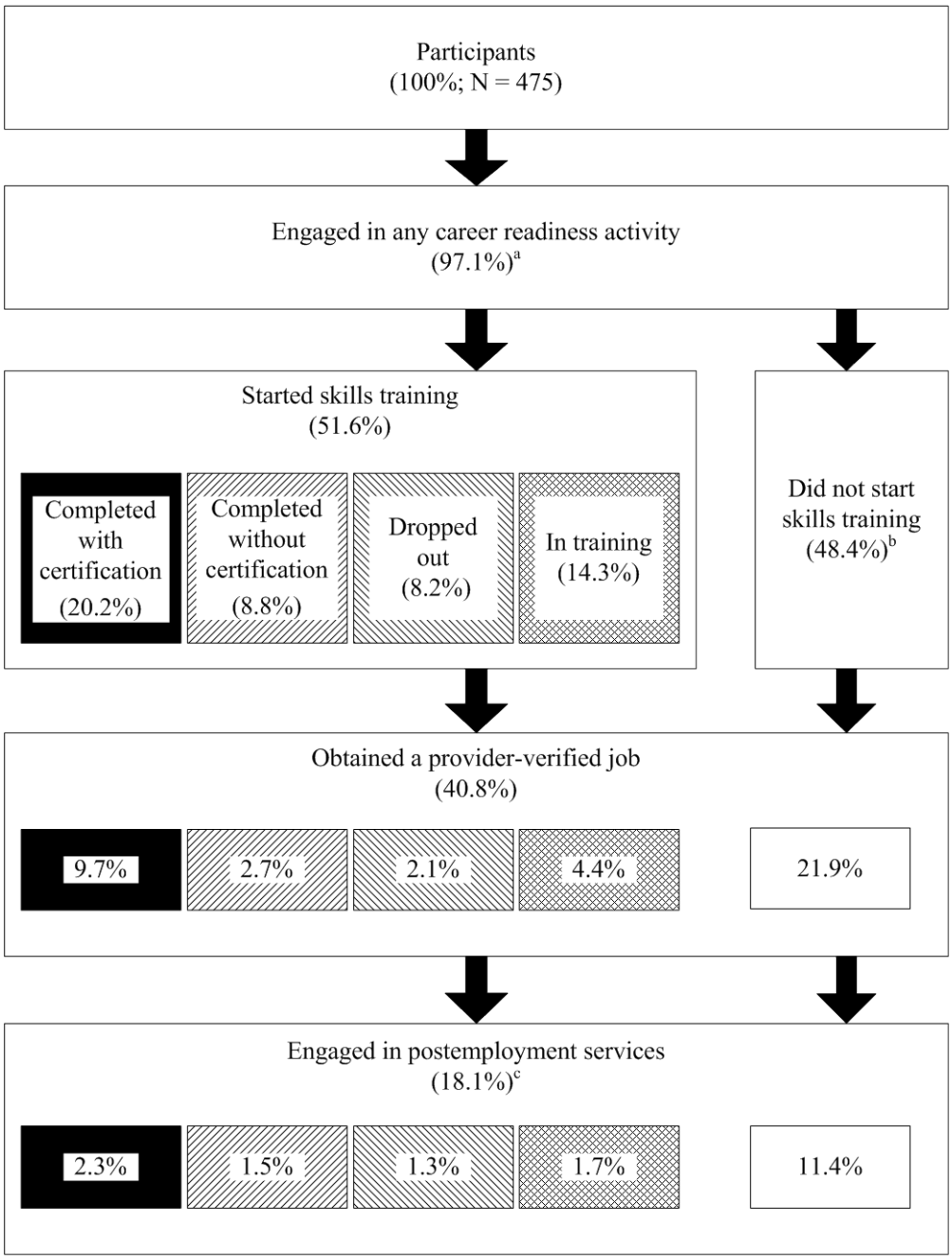
Appendix Figure E.2

Program Activity Flow Within Six Months of Random Assignment

Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment



(continued)

Appendix Figure E.2 (continued)

SOURCES: Program tracking systems managed by Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment.

NOTES: This figure is intended to illustrate the various pathways a participant can follow to make it through to the last program component activity within the first six months of enrollment. Statistics reflect participation in program activities through August 2013 and are among participants randomly assigned through February 2013.

Refer to Appendix Table E.1 for site-specific details regarding how each metric is defined.

[a]Engagement in career readiness services are defined as follows: At Madison Strategies Group, it means attending one day of job readiness training. At Towards Employment, it means attending an initial assessment activity. About 3 percent of participants at both providers did not engage in these initial activities but may have started skills training and/or been placed.

[b]This rate includes both participants who (1) were not scheduled to start training and (2) were scheduled but did not start training within the first six months of enrollment. Nearly 75 percent of participants at both providers who did not start skills training within the first six months of enrollment were not scheduled to start.

[c]Postemployment services are defined as any service that the participant engages in with the provider after the start date of the first verified job after random assignment.

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About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.