

WorkAdvance: Meeting the Needs of Workers and Employers

A summary of findings from the WorkAdvance implementation report

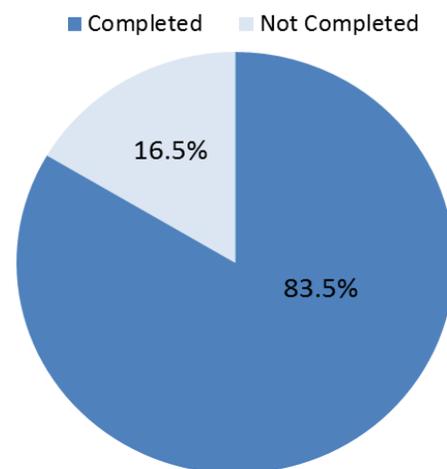
A Sector- and Advancement-Focused Approach

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, workers currently struggle to find family-supporting jobs. At the same time, many traditional job training programs struggle to effectively connect participants with employment opportunities in sectors primed for growth that also offer advancement. Connecting workers with quality jobs and opportunities to advance in their careers is critical to boosting their wages and long-term economic prosperity. WorkAdvance is a pilot job training program that offers low-income participants the opportunity to obtain employment services within a particular sector, and then receive continued services to find a job and advance within their career. MDRC, a non-profit social policy research firm, recently released an evaluation report on the implementation of WorkAdvance. MDRC's report, [Meeting the Needs of Workers and Employers: Implementation of a Sector-Focused Career Advancement Model for Low-Skilled Adults](#), looks at how four providers translated the model into working programs.

MDRC's evaluation finds that the WorkAdvance model is demanding, **requiring that providers communicate effectively with both participants and employers** while also incorporating postemployment advancement, which was new to all of the providers. Despite challenges, all four providers were able to successfully offer the program's services. The report finds that:

- All of the providers engaged a substantial share of enrollees in program services, particularly **skills training** (Chart 1) and career readiness services. Over 83 percent of participants who started skills training had completed the training as of 12 months after enrollment.
- **Job-readiness skills were as important** to participants and employers as the technical skills gained in occupational training.
- **Programs tended to overrepresent men or women, depending on the sector** (Chart 2). Almost all sample members have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, and over half of the sample has at least some college education. Only one in five were working at the time they entered the study.

Chart 1: WorkAdvance Participants Complete Sector-Focused Trainings at High Rates



What is WorkAdvance?

WorkAdvance is one of five Social Innovation Fund (SIF) programs run by the Center for Economic Opportunity and the Mayor's Fund to Advance NYC. The program seeks to boost the earnings of unemployed and low-wage working adults by helping them obtain quality jobs in targeted sectors with opportunities for career growth. WorkAdvance prepares, trains, and places unemployed and low-wage workers in good quality jobs with established career tracks. After placement, the program continues to assist participants to help them advance in their chosen careers. WorkAdvance sites are located in New York City (Information Technology and Environmental Remediation sectors), Cleveland and Youngstown (Healthcare and Manufacturing sectors), and Tulsa (Transportation sector). In each city, a nonprofit targets a specific industry that is projected to have substantial job opportunities. MDRC is conducting a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) evaluation of WorkAdvance, which will be released in late 2015.

Building Evidence

The WorkAdvance research is expected to yield useful information about the benefits of workforce development strategies that focus on both advancement and sectoral programming. WorkAdvance has already succeeded in placing hundreds of people in jobs and helping participants complete quality in-demand training programs. Together, the WorkAdvance implementation, impact, and cost analysis studies will provide valuable data for policymakers and providers on reliable and cost-effective pathways to employment.

Affecting Policy

Implementing a sector- and advancement-focused workforce program is difficult. It demands knowledge of growing sectors, willingness to add postemployment services, and effective communication to build relationships with participants and employers. However, MDRC's report shows that it is possible to deliver the model as intended. The lessons of WorkAdvance implementation are particularly important as federal, state, and city agencies along with local workforce investment boards look to improve their workforce systems and implement the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) legislation signed into law by President Obama in July 2014. WIOA, which won support from most of the major national workforce development stakeholders, encourages sector and industry focused partnerships and career pathways, two of the key WorkAdvance strategies.

Through the SIF initiative, CEO, the Mayor's Fund, MDRC and partners are in close communication with policymakers on the lessons of WorkAdvance. MDRC will release an impact evaluation report in late 2015, which will demonstrate whether WorkAdvance had a significant impact on employment and financial outcomes for those participating in the program.

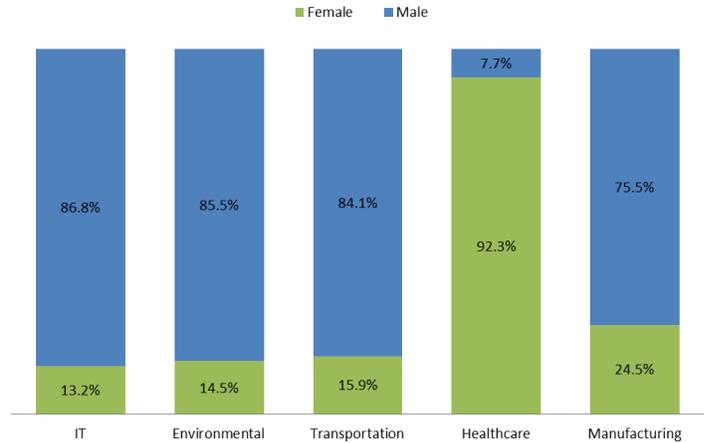
WorkAdvance Partners

Intermediaries: NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, Mayor's Fund to Advance NYC, and MDRC.

Providers: New York City, NY — Per Scholas and St. Nicks Alliance; Northeast Ohio (Greater Cleveland and Youngstown) — Towards Employment; Tulsa, OK — Madison Strategies Group.

Funding Partners: The Social Innovation Fund of the Corporation for National & Community Service, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Open Society Foundations, The Rockefeller Foundation, Altman Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Benificus Foundation, Ford Foundation, Fund for Our Economic Future, George Kaiser Family Foundation, Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Robin Hood Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Tiger Foundation, Tulsa Community Foundation, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc.

Chart 2: WorkAdvance Served a Majority of Male Participants Across Almost All Sectors



Related Workforce Research

Learn more about WorkAdvance and the programs that inspired its development:

- *Meeting the Needs of Workers and Employers: Implementation of a Sector-Focused Career Advancement Model for Low-Skilled Adults* [http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/WorkAdvance_CEO_SIF_2014_FR.pdf]
- *WorkAdvance: Testing a New Approach to Increase Employment Advancement for Low-Skilled Adults* [http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/WorkAdvance_Brief.pdf]
- *Sector-Focused Career Centers Evaluation: Effects on Employment and Earnings After One Year* [http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/CEO-Sector-Based_Approaches_Evaluation_Report-2014_final.pdf]
- *How Effective Are Different Approaches Aiming to Increase Employment Retention and Advancement?* [<http://www.mdrc.org/publication/how-effective-are-different-approaches-aiming-increase-employment-retention-and/>]
- *Job Training That Works: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study* [http://www.issuelab.org/resource/job_training_that_works_findings_from_the_sectoral_employment_impact_study]