



WorkAdvance

A Sector-Focused Advancement Initiative for Low-Wage Adults

WorkAdvance seeks to boost the earnings of unemployed and low-wage working adults by helping them prepare for and enter quality jobs in selected sectors with opportunities for career growth. Once placed, participants are provided with additional assistance to guide them on a path to career advancement.

WorkAdvance is a sector-focused workforce development program being replicated through the national Social Innovation Fund (SIF). The Social Innovation Fund, administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a public-private partnership to replicate successful programs and build evidence for more impactful ways to reduce poverty and improve communities. The SIF requires a 3:1 private match and its focus on evaluation builds in accountability for results.

THE WORKADVANCE MODEL

More than a simple job placement program, the goal of *WorkAdvance* is to prepare, train, place, and sustain unemployed and low-wage workers in quality jobs with benefits (such as health insurance), and established career tracks. At the heart of this approach is a focus on meeting the needs of employers, and on helping workers advance up career ladders. Each *WorkAdvance* site is grounded in a targeted sector. Program providers have in-depth knowledge of the sector and strong relationships with relevant employers.

The *WorkAdvance* model is designed to meet the individual needs of workers by providing the five core service components below. Providers adapt and tailor these services to the local labor market, individual needs, and the selected sector.

- **Sector-focused pre-employment services.** *WorkAdvance* participants attend an orientation customized to the targeted sector, where they receive an overview of industry trends, occupational opportunities, career ladders, the work environment, and employer expectations. Following the orientation, each individual meets with a career coach to assess the participant's interest in these job opportunities and to create an individualized career plan; the plan outlines the services and skills that the participant needs in order to meet his or her goals. Participants receive job readiness preparation (soft skills, resume assistance, etc) tailored to the sector.
- **Occupational skills training.** Industry-specific skills training, generally of less than a year in duration, is offered free of charge. Participants who complete training receive an industry-recognized training credential. Providers offer training at times and locations that are convenient for participants. The model ensures participants are being trained for in-demand skills that employers are currently seeking for employment.
- **Job development and placement in targeted occupations.** Employers are at the center of *WorkAdvance*, and program staff have deep knowledge of the targeted industry sector, the occupations, the skill needs, and the career

Program Providers

New York City

- Per Scholas (Technology)
- St. Nicks Alliance (Environmental Remediation/Green)

Cleveland and Youngstown, OH

- Towards Employment (Healthcare & Manufacturing)

Tulsa, OK

- Madison Strategies Group (Transportation)

ladders. They also have extensive experience working closely with individual employers. *WorkAdvance* site staffs are continuously involved in job development efforts – identifying employers and their current and future labor force needs. They also identifying and screening potential job slots for those with the necessary credentials. Qualified program participants are placed with employers that have appropriate job openings in the targeted occupations with career opportunities to improve the likelihood of long term retention and advancement.

- **Post-placement services.** *WorkAdvance* participants receive post-placement services from the provider to promote job retention, career advancement, assist with re-employment, and troubleshoot issues that may arise with employers. Continued engagement with participants and employers focuses on steps that can be taken to assist the employee to advance within the industry (such as additional training). Assistance is provided to participants for up to a year post-placement.
- **Financial assistance.** To help pay for employment-related expenses and address other potential barriers to employment, each *WorkAdvance* site sets aside a small flexible pool of funding to be used for expenses such as uniforms, books, industry certification exams, or tools. Similarly, funding may be used to assist individuals with travel costs associated with attending training, or getting to work prior to receiving a first pay check.

EVALUATION

Through this project, the four city evaluation will further refine and test the program model, building a multi-site body of evidence in support of a promising, high-impact, cost-effective intervention that will influence national policy. The impact of *WorkAdvance* is being rigorously measured through a random assignment research design. In this evaluation design – which is widely considered to be the most powerful approach – eligible individuals are assigned through a lottery-like process to either a program group that is offered *WorkAdvance* services, or to a control group that is not eligible for *WorkAdvance* services but remains eligible for other services in the community. In order to create these research groups, program operators are recruiting more potential individuals applying to their program than the number they have resources to serve as part of *WorkAdvance*. In total, over 2,700 individuals are expected to receive *WorkAdvance* services between 2011-2015.