

**District of Columbia  
Department of Employment Services**

**Project Empowerment  
Comparative Analysis Report**

**November 3, 2015**



***Submitted to:***

Ayesha Upshur  
Project Empowerment  
District of Columbia's  
Department of Employment Services  
4058 Minnesota Avenue, NE  
Washington DC 20019  
202-698-5599

***Submitted by:***

IMPAQ International, LLC  
10420 Little Patuxent Parkway  
Suite 300  
Columbia, MD 21044  
[www.impaqint.com](http://www.impaqint.com)

# PROJECT EMPOWERMENT COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS REPORT

---

## Foreword

For this study, IMPAQ conducted a comparative analysis of the Project Empowerment (PE) program to explore the existing research on transitional employment programs (TEP) and learn about how similar TEPs serve their participants. The goals of the study were to develop an understanding of the PE program, learn about how similar TEPs operate, and provide PE staff with recommendations for program implementation. The study is based on a review of literature on TEPs, as well as interviews with PE staff, program participants, local employers and staff from three similar TEPs. The study also involved PE program observations and the collection of quantitative data on PE and three similar programs.

The findings from this analysis demonstrate that the structure, activities, and services of the PE program are supported by other TEPs, existing research evidence, and expert practitioners in the field of TEPs. The District of Columbia's Department of Employment Services (DOES) funded this study. The study aims to inform program providers and policymakers about the range of individual and contextual factors that may contribute to successful TEP programs. The study provides an in-depth understanding of the factors that contribute to PE's success, such as how individual participant, community, organizational, and programmatic influences contribute to achievement of positive employment outcomes. The District's workforce system should work for everyone and PE plays a critical role in ensuring that no District resident is left behind due to barriers to employment.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Executive Summary .....	1
1. Introduction and Purpose of Report.....	4
2. Methodology .....	5
3. Project Empowerment .....	7
4. Comparative Analysis .....	28
5. Summary and Conclusion .....	48
Appendix A: Comparison Program Profiles .....	52



## Executive Summary

In today's competitive economy, cities are looking for the best way to grow their economy and provide well-paying employment opportunities for all their residents. The District of Columbia is no exception; however, a significant number of job seekers in the District lack the necessary workplace skills and must overcome multiple and complex barriers to find work, ranging from low literacy to a criminal record.

There is no panacea for this issue; however, transitional employment programs (TEPs) can play a vital role in helping job seekers with multiple barriers to employment succeed in the job market. These programs combine time limited paid work experience, skills development training, job development, retentions and supportive services to help individuals with barriers to succeed in the workforce. The primary goals of these programs are to provide stable income, build a work history with work-based learning, and develop skills that make participants more marketable to employers and facilitate the transition to permanent employment. There are economic and social benefits to TEPs. They provide economic benefits to participating employers, affording them the opportunity to build capacity and establish a relationship with a new worker with minimal risk. At the same time, TEPs provide cost-savings to society, such as reduced reliance on public benefits, reduced recidivism, and increased tax receipt (revenue) once the worker is in permanent employment.

Since 2002, the District's Department of Employment Services' (DOES) Project Empowerment (PE) program has been providing transitional employment services to District residents with a substantial need for intensive employment assistance. PE is a transitional employment program that provides job readiness training, work experience, supportive services, and job search assistance to District residents who face multiple barriers to employment. PE receives guidance from the National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN), a national coalition that advances employment solutions for chronically unemployed Americans, including transitional jobs that combine wage-paid work, job skills training, and supportive services to help individuals facing barriers to employment success in the workforce.<sup>1</sup>

To qualify for PE, District residents must exhibit at least three of the following barriers to employment:

- **Basic Skills Deficiency:** The difficulties of job seekers with low levels of education have been well documented. In the District, the majority of the jobs require workers to possess basic skills such as reading and math to earn a decent living. Sixteen percent of 2014 program applicants had low reading and math skills.<sup>2</sup> Typically, PE applicants read at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level and perform math at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level (as determined by completion of the CASAS exam).
- **Lack of a Secondary Education Credential:** As with basic reading and math skills, the majority of well-paying jobs in the District require a secondary education credential such

---

<sup>1</sup><http://www.heartlandalliance.org/nationalinitiatives/our-initiatives/national-transitional-jobs.html>

<sup>2</sup> Data provided by Project Empowerment Staff. Based on a random sampling of prospective PE participants from Fiscal Year 2014.

as a high school degree or Certificate of High School Equivalency. Twenty-four percent of 2014 program applicants were lacking such a credential.<sup>3</sup>

- **Documented History of Substance Abuse:** Substance abuse and addiction create significant challenges in the seeking and maintaining employment. Numerous studies have identified a causal link between employment status or ability to secure employment and substance abuse. Thirty-six percent of 2014 program applicants had a history of substance abuse.<sup>4</sup>
- **Homelessness:** Climbing out of homelessness is virtually impossible for those without a job. In the District's competitive labor market, being homeless or at risk of becoming homeless is a major barrier to finding and maintaining employment. Sixty-four percent of 2014 program applicants reported a history of homelessness.<sup>5</sup>
- **History of Job Cycling:** Strong attachment to the labor force is commonly recognized as a source of economic stability and critical to achieving economic security and promoting pathways to the middle class and self-sufficiency. Conversely, a history of not maintaining steady employment is likely a sign that individuals do not have the employability skills needed to maintain a job and/or face other barriers to employment. Seventy percent of 2014 program applicants had an unsteady employment history.<sup>6</sup>
- **Conviction of a Felony or Previously Incarcerated:** Prior incarceration and convictions adversely affects returning citizens' employment opportunities. In some instances, local policies compound the problems that returning citizens face when seeking employment. Ninety-four percent of 2014 program applicants had a criminal conviction in their background.<sup>7</sup>

Over that past 14 years, PE has provided services to over 10,000 District residents, averaging about 800 or more participants each year. Participants attend an intensive, 3-week training course designed to prepare them to transition into the workplace. Key to the program's success is its focus on life as well as employability skills. Upon completion of the classroom module, participants are placed in subsidized employment for up to 6 months. In addition to job readiness training and job search assistance, PE provides adult basic education, job coaching, occupational skills training, and support services.

IMPAQ conducted a comparative analysis of PE to explore the existing research on TEPs and learn about how similar TEPs serve their participants. This study finds that PE is implementing evidence-based strategies consistent with programs that serve those with multiple barriers to employment opportunities. PE targets the right jobseekers because TEPs are most effective and work best for those with the most barriers, a task that experts in the field and other program administrators agree requires significant time and resources.

---

<sup>3</sup> Data provided by Project Empowerment Staff. Based on a random sampling of prospective PE participants from FY 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Data provided by Project Empowerment Staff. Based on a random sampling of prospective PE participants from FY 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Data provided by Project Empowerment Staff. Based on a random sampling of prospective PE participants from FY 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Data provided by Project Empowerment Staff. Based on a random sampling of prospective PE participants from FY 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Data provided by Project Empowerment Staff. Based on a random sampling of prospective PE participants from FY 2014.

The structure, activities, services, and outcomes of the PE program are consistent with similar TEPs and align with existing research evidence and expert practitioners in the field of TEPs. At minimum, a successful TEP must comprise of:

- Job Readiness Training
- Case Management and Support Services
- Scattered Site-Placements
- Strong Relationships with Employers
- Incentivizing Unsubsidized Work

IMPAQ also presents the following recommendations to enhance PE program operations and effectiveness:

### **Program Management**

- Enhance participant data collection and tracking systems.
- Continue to pursue local funding to ensure program continuity and sustainability. Consider applying for external funding opportunities to supplement local funding.

### **Participant Experience**

- Incorporate a formal mentoring and/or peer support group activities into all program components as well as unsubsidized employment.
- Utilize more in-depth assessments and planning tools to better gauge participants' interests, skills, and progress to better inform the job matching process.
- Redesign the resume development process to better involve the participants.
- Continue to make efforts to strengthen staff-client relationships, including hiring additional staff to lower caseloads and/or offering training opportunities to program staff to refresh and enhance their case management skills.
- Ensure program participants are utilizing funds available through other workforce programs to enhance program experience and ensure needs are being met.

### **Employer Relations**

- Continue to work with employers using a “dual customer” approach to service their needs as well as the participants' needs. Hiring additional Job Developers and Job Coaches would lower caseloads and allow more time to be devoted to ensuring employer needs are met and their feedback on participants is addressed.
- Identify employers that can offer WEX placements in high demand industries and occupations.
- Encourage participating employers to become program advocates and recruit new employers.
- Consider an option similar to the Texas program that incentivizes employers to keep participants in WEX past the 6 month period by allowing them to pay for part of the subsidized wage.

## 1. Introduction and Purpose of Report

Transitional employment programs (TEPs) are social services programs designed to help individuals who face multiple barriers to employment enter the labor market. Examples of barriers to employment include previous incarceration, homelessness, substance abuse issues, and a lack of recent job experiences. These barriers create significant challenges in finding employment. Prior studies suggest that barriers such as a criminal record adversely affect subsequent employment wages and job stability.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the societal costs of these barriers are great. For example, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the average cost of incarceration for federal inmates in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 was 30,619 dollars.<sup>9</sup> TEPs are thus aimed at providing support to individuals to overcome these costly barriers and secure long-term, unsubsidized employment.

TEPs have been implemented using a range of program models. For example, in Illinois, Safer Foundation established a staffing agency that employed transitional jobs workers. The staffing agency contracted with a waste management firm working for the City of Chicago to operate garbage recycling plants in which program clients worked.<sup>10</sup> In Michigan and Minnesota, TEPs are operated by Goodwill Industries with participants working at Goodwill enterprises, including retail stores or in a light manufacturing plant.<sup>11</sup> Among TEPs, the most common components are job development, case management, vocational training, subsidized employment, and job placement services.

There have been few rigorous research studies evaluating the effectiveness of TEPs. A recent meta-study that contrasts and combines results from different studies on correction-based education, vocation, and work programs for adult offenders found only two that used random assignment designs and one that used a strong non-experimental design.<sup>12</sup>

This study compares program design and service delivery of PE with similar TEPs; in other words, it examines how PE compares to TEPs serving similar participants. This research analyzes and compares a range of factors, including individual participant characteristics, program funding, administration, staffing and design.

Understanding how PE compares to TEP best-practices across the country and similar programs will provide PE staff and District policymakers with valued evidence on particular strategies to adopt, expand, or halt. The analysis will also shed light on how these strategies can contribute to the successful transition of individuals with multiple barriers into employment. The findings from this analysis demonstrate that PE is effectively serving a population with multiple barriers to

---

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Bushway, S. (1998). The Impact of an Arrest on the Job Stability of Young White American Men. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 454-479.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2015-03-09/pdf/2015-05437.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.saferfoundation.org/services-programs/transitional-employment-program>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.giscc.org/transitionalemployment.php>

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, D., Gallagher, C., & Mackenzie, D. (2000). A Meta-Analysis of Corrections-Based Education, Vocation, and Work Programs for Adult Offenders. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 347-368.



employment, a task that experts and other programs agree requires significant time and resources. In addition, the structure, activities, services, and outcomes of the PE program are supported by other TEPs, existing research evidence, and expert practitioners in the field of TEPs. This study also paves the way for a full-scale evaluation as it documents program components and processes that are essential to developing a high quality evaluation design.

## 2. Methodology

To build understanding of the PE program, IMPAQ conducted a variety of data-gathering activities, including examination of program documentations, analysis of program data, as well as interviews with participants, staff, and employers, all of which were reviewed in light of the current research literature.

In addition to learning about PE, this study also involved learning about three similar TEPs (in Tarrant County TX, St. Paul, MN, and Newark, NJ) to understand the factors that may explain *why* they achieve success of different types and *how* these factors may be quantified or measured to help inform PE polices and programmatic design. A description of the key activities conducted as part of the comparative analysis is included below.

**Identified Key Characteristics for Comparison.** With input from DOES staff, IMPAQ identified key characteristics of interest for comparing TEP programs. These characteristics served as the data elements, which will be collected on each TEP program to allow for comparison across programs.

**Review of the Literature.** The literature sample was built through web searches (including journal article search engines), bibliography scanning, and an in-depth telephone interview with an expert in the field of TEPs. The majority of the studies in the literature review focus on TEPs or workforce development programs for individuals with barriers to employment. The studies reviewed for this study usually offered comprehensive and multiple interventions that included subsidized employment, classroom skills training, and the development of life skills, which includes highly transferable workforce readiness skills.

**Analysis of Program Documentation.** IMPAQ systematically reviewed a wide range of PE program documentation including an organization chart, logic model, employee handbooks, program fact sheets, and standard operating procedures. This review was conducted prior to conducting staff interviews so that the staff could address any outstanding questions about the program.

**Analysis of Program Data.** A review of PE's participant and cost data was done to conduct descriptive analyses for the program. IMPAQ first developed the statistics profiles of PE program participants, which described the background and characteristics of the participants. The IMPAQ team then analyzed the program data on subsidized and unsubsidized data and presented key program outcomes such as employment rates, job retention rates, and average wages. Finally, IMPAQ explored the program cost data to calculate cost breakdown and cost per participant.

Due to limitations in data availability, IMPAQ was not able to link the profile of each participant with his/her employment data. In addition, IMPAQ did not have access to any long-term participant outcomes beyond their unsubsidized employment period. As a result, the IMPAQ team is limited in its ability to conduct any outcome analysis for the program.

**Participant Interviews.** The team conducted interviews with six program participants who were participating in different stages of the program, including the job readiness training, subsidized employment, and unsubsidized employment. The interviews were facilitated to cover topic areas including:

- Participant background, including educational and employment history
- Reasons for enrollment and enrollment process
- Experience in job readiness training and subsidized employment
- Employment goals

**Staff Interviews.** Key information was gathered through interviews that were conducted with staff including an Intake/Retention Specialist, a Job Coach, a Job Developer, and a Program Analyst. In general, interviews were completed in one or two sessions, using a structured open-response format, and were designed to elicit opinions on the program's overall function and efficacy. Topics discussed in interviews included:

- Program organization and structure
- Target population
- Program service delivery
- Staff responsibilities and daily activities
- Opinions on program design and the efficacy of various components
- Best practices and areas for improvement

**Conducted Telephone Interviews with Representatives from Select TEP Programs.** With input from DOES and Chris Warland, an identified expert in TEPs, the team selected three TEPs to contact for more detailed information about their programs. Via telephone interviews, IMPAQ researchers used semi-structured discussion guides to gather more detailed information about the program components and operations.

### 3. Project Empowerment

This section provides an overview of the Project Empowerment (PE) program. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 introduce the program goals, context, and key players. Section 3.3 presents program services and performance outcomes.

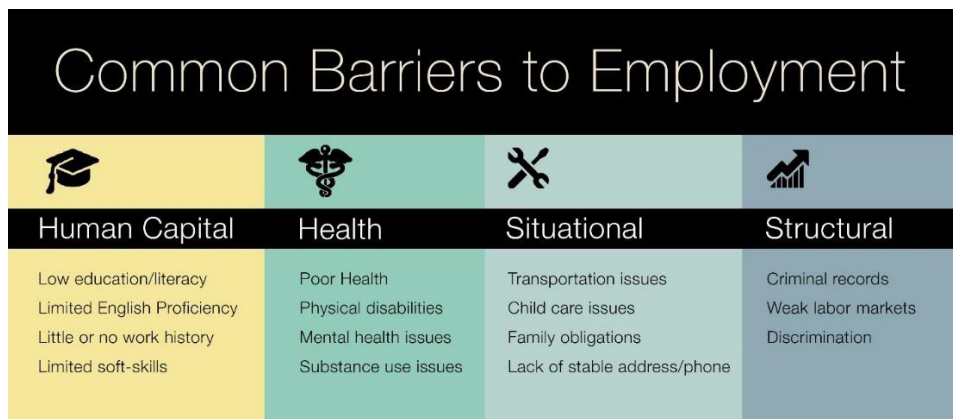
#### 3.1 Program Description

PE is a TEP that provides job readiness training, job search assistance, work experience, and supportive services to District residents facing the most difficult barriers to employment, including homelessness, substance abuse, and previous incarceration.

*Research indicates that transitional jobs programs are most successful and best targeted at populations that typically demonstrate multiple employment barriers and those that have sporadic, problematic, and inconsistent work histories within the 2 years prior to engaging in the transitional jobs program.*

Source: National Transitional Jobs Network. (2010). Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Guide to Transitional Jobs Program Design.

Every year since 2002, roughly 800 members of the District’s most vulnerable population have received services through the PE program. Participants in the program receive wage subsidies while they attend job readiness activities, including an intensive 3-week training course and up to 6 months of subsidized employment experience with a participating employer, all while receiving permanent job search assistance. The main goal of the program is for participants to attain long-term economic self-sufficiency by securing permanent, unsubsidized employment.



Source: Heartland Alliance

#### Program Context

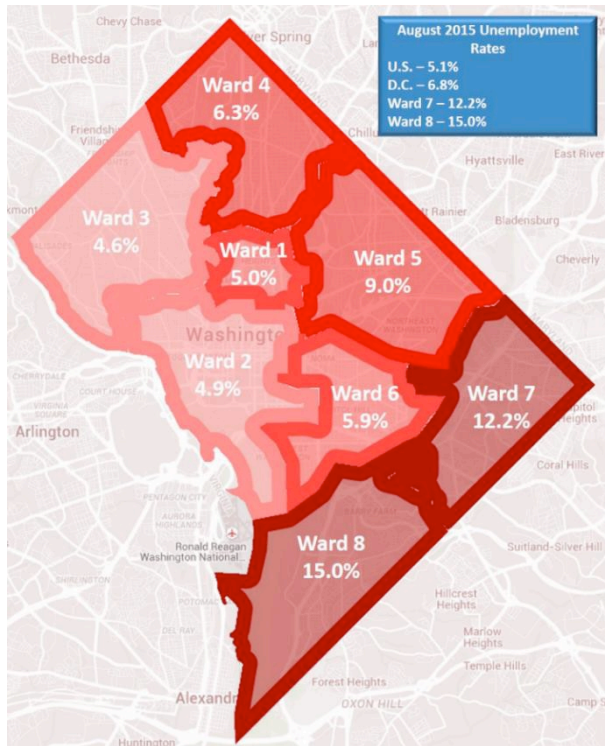
Operated by the District of Columbia’s Department of Employment Services (DOES), PE serves chronically unemployed District residents living in areas that have the highest unemployment rates and poverty levels. Which District residents benefit from PE?

- Those returning home from prison

- Individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of being homeless
- Long-term recipients of public assistance
- Those with little or no attachment to the labor market

Those with multiple employment barriers, especially ex-offenders, have more difficulty finding and maintaining employment. This difficulty is further accentuated in the District because many of the District’s high demand job industries are in fields that require higher education and no criminal backgrounds, which are not attainable for most PE participants. In addition, the majority of PE participants live in the economically distressed District Wards 7 and 8.<sup>13,14</sup>

**Exhibit 1: District Wide Unemployment by Ward**



Comparing unemployment rates across the District wards highlights the striking difference in employment outcomes. In August 2015, for example, while the nationwide unemployment rate stood at 5.1 percent and the District was at 6.8 percent, some areas of the District saw unemployment rates as high as 15 percent.<sup>15</sup> As Exhibit 1 shows, the unemployment rate in Wards 7 and 8 (12.2 and 15, respectively) are almost double the rate in the District overall.<sup>16</sup> The PE program office is strategically located in the District’s DOES office headquarters, in Ward 7 of the District, in the neighborhood in which many of its clients reside.

**Program Context Summary**

- PE serves chronically unemployed District residents living in areas that have the highest unemployment rates and poverty levels.
- The majority of PE participants live in the economically distressed District Wards 7 and 8.

<sup>13</sup> Lazere, E. Making a Good Jobs Program Even Better: How to Strengthen DC’s Project Empowerment. DC Fiscal Policy Institute. April 2015. <http://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Project-Empowerment-Final-April-1-2015.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> “Project Empowerment Demographics” document provided by PE Program Staff.

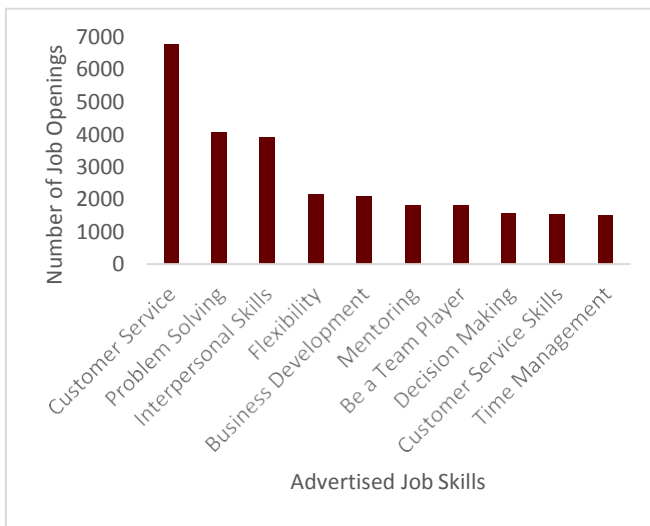
<sup>15</sup> <http://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.us.htm>

<sup>16</sup> District of Columbia Labor Force, Employment, Unemployment and Unemployment Rate by Ward, 2015. [http://does.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/does/page\\_content/attachments/2015%20Unemployment%20Rate%20by%20Ward\\_4.pdf](http://does.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/does/page_content/attachments/2015%20Unemployment%20Rate%20by%20Ward_4.pdf)

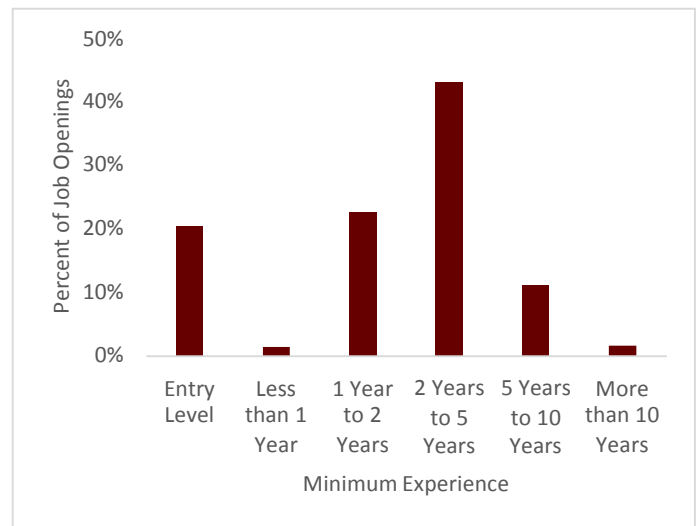
## Program Goals

The goals of PE are to provide job readiness skills for District residents with multiple barriers, expand their access to occupational training, and help them obtain employment. The program offers case management and access to work supports to promote success. As presented in Exhibits 2 & 3, many District employers list a number of life and employability skills in their job advertisements and require job applicants to have some degree of previous work experience. PE helps participants build skills and experience to be more marketable to employers. Without the program, the target population is less equipped to demonstrate these requirements.

**Exhibit 2: Job Skills Required in District Job Listings<sup>17</sup>**



**Exhibit 3: Minimum Work Experience Required in District Job Listings<sup>18</sup>**



PE uses a time-limited wage-paying strategy to transition participants from a short-term wage subsidy period into a long-term job placement. PE combines wage subsidies with skill development, supportive services, real work experience, and job search assistance to provide a wrap-around service approach. PE participants are encouraged to find and maintain unsubsidized employment with the use of financial incentives for finding and retaining employment. In addition to the benefits PE provides to employers and the District's economy, the program creates an even broader social impact by:

- Reducing recidivism rates among previously incarcerated participants
- Enhancing public safety in the service area
- Reducing dependence on social programs
- Developing engaged, positive citizens in the community

<sup>17</sup> Analysis of DC Network VOS Data

<sup>18</sup> Analysis of DC Network VOS Data

## Program Goals Summary

- *PE aims to provide participants with job readiness skills and work experience to help them overcome barriers to employment.*
- *The program benefits participants, employers, the local economy, and society as a whole.*

### Program Structure and Funding

Funded through DC tax revenues<sup>19</sup>, PE's program funding has declined since its start. On average, PE funding since Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 has been slightly over \$9 million, with a budget of \$9.1 million requested for FY 2016.<sup>20</sup> The budget supports PE program services, individual wage subsidies and bonuses for each participant, and program staff salaries. The program is comprised of 18 staff members, including administrative personnel and staff working directly with individual participants. The following sections describe some of the staff roles.

The majority of the program budget is devoted to the cost of participant wage subsidies (6 million dollars), followed by the cost for PE personnel (1.5 million dollars).<sup>21</sup> Wage subsidies include both the hourly wages paid to participants for their participation in program activities (job readiness training, work experience, and professional development/job search activities) and the job retention incentives/bonuses, which range from 50 to 450 dollars depending on the length of time a participant maintains employment.

### Program Staff

The PE program staff includes:

- Associate Director
- Operations Manager
- Program Analysts (3)
- Administrative Specialists (1)
- Intake/Retention Specialist (2)
- Job Developer/Account Executive (4)
- Job Coach (5)
- Facilitators (2)

Each staff member has a specific role within the project. Successful team collaboration requires that all parties work together to coordinate on the success of each individual. Many PE employees have been with the program for a long period of time, which has helped to develop strong working relationships. It is also important to note that approximately 25 percent of staff members are previous PE program participants, a characteristic that helps them to better engage with and serve as mentors to current participants. An overview of three key staff members follows.

---

<sup>19</sup> Lazere, E. Making a Good Jobs Program Even Better: How to Strengthen DC's Project Empowerment. *DC Fiscal Policy Institute*. April 2015. <http://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Project-Empowerment-Final-April-1-2015.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> "DOES Performance/Budget Oversight Hearing Program At-a-Glance" provided by PE program staff (Proposed FY, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with PE Staff. September 26, 2015.



---

*Lower caseloads would allow the Intake/Retention Specialist to better assess the participants' skills and needs at the beginning of the program and conduct more thorough follow up activities in terms of addressing participant needs and tracking outcomes.*

---

### **Intake/Retention Specialist.**

Intake/Retention Specialists act as the case manager and main point of contact for participants during the start of the program and provide supportive services as needed throughout the 3-week job readiness training. They enroll individuals into the program using the

workforce Virtual Online System (VOS) and work with participants to develop an individualized employment plan (IEP). After a participant's subsidized job experience has ended and the individual has been placed in an unsubsidized job, the staff member will then act as the Retention Specialist to track and follow up with the participant for a full year after s/he has been placed in an unsubsidized job. Because they are serving participants currently in the Job Readiness Training and those in unsubsidized work, specialists can have a caseload of about 100 participants at a time. PE management staff recognize that high caseloads limit the level and quality of services that can be offered to participants. Beginning in August 2015, PE enlisted the assistance of temporary workers to act as Retention Specialists thereby alleviating Intake Specialists of that responsibility. The presence of the Retention Specialists has been greatly beneficial to efforts to track the progress of participants who obtain unsubsidized employment. Given those results, efforts are being made to make those positions permanent.

### **Job Developer/Account Executive.**

The primary duties of the Job Developers/Account Executives are employer outreach and job matching. Job Developers build relationships with employers and advocate PE participants as mutually beneficial way to help employers meet their staffing needs. In addition, developers

---

*Taking on a dual customer approach that serves both the participants and the employers can improve job retention. This involves addressing the needs of employers in program design and responding to their feedback.*

Source: Fischer, D. (2005). *The Road to Good Employment Retention: Three Successful Programs from the Jobs Initiative*. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

---

meet individually with each participant during the second week of training to review their interests to arrange WEX site job interviews and provide feedback on interview outcomes.

**Job Coach.** Job Coaches work with participants during their subsidized employment (after they finish job training and before they find unsubsidized employment). Job coaches act as the point of contact for participants off-site. They mentor the participants and help them resolve any issues

---

*Providing participants with regular feedback and coaching on their performance on the job is important as many participants have limited work experience and are unaware of basic workplace expectations.*

Source: Warland, C. (2011). *Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Ensuring that the Transitional Job is a Developmental Experience* (Policy Brief). National Transitional Jobs Network.

---

at work. When needed, job coaches help participants talk to their supervisors about issues that need attention. Caseloads vary by Job Coach but can get to be around 20 employers

and 70 participants per Coach.<sup>22</sup> As with the Intake/Retention Specialists, lower caseloads would likely allow Job Coaches to provide more in-depth services and coaching to program participants. In an effort the lower caseloads for Job Coaches, PE management recently hired an additional Job Coach but they report that more Job Coaches are needed to ensure that participants are getting the feedback and coaching they need to be prepared for unsubsidized employment.

### *Program Staff Summary*

- *PE employees have strong, cohesive relationships*
- *Additional staff are needed to lower caseloads and improve staff client relationships*

### **Program Partnerships**

To address the range of participant barriers, PE offers participants direct referrals to supportive services through partnerships with local agencies and non-profits. In addition, PE staff works directly with a network of employers to identify subsidized work experience opportunities for participants.

*Recruitment Partners.* PE works closely with partners such as the American Job Centers (AJCs), Metropolitan Police Department, the DC Court System, Department of Corrections, Department of Behavioral Health, Department of Motor Vehicles and a range of other community partners to recruit program participants.<sup>23</sup> PE also has a close working relationship with the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) and the Mayor’s Office of Returning Citizen Affairs (ORCA) that also identifies program participants.

*Support Service Providers.* Support service partners provide participants with access to a variety of education, employment, health, counseling, and social services, such as child care and mental health referrals.<sup>24</sup> The PE office, for example, has an in-house District mental health worker on site to whom it can refer PE participants. The Capital Area Asset Builders (CAAB) is another partner and participating employer that provides financial counseling in a group setting and on a one-on-one basis to PE participants.

*Employers.* The most vital PE partnerships are those with employers. PE currently has over 200 employer partners.<sup>25</sup> As Exhibit 4 presents, PE participating employers are a mix of government agencies, private sector companies, as well as local non-profits. As of 2014, about 64 percent of participating employers came from the private sector.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Interview with PE Staff. September 26, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> “Project Empowerment Worksite Supervisor’s Handbook,” revised April 2015. Provided by PE program staff.

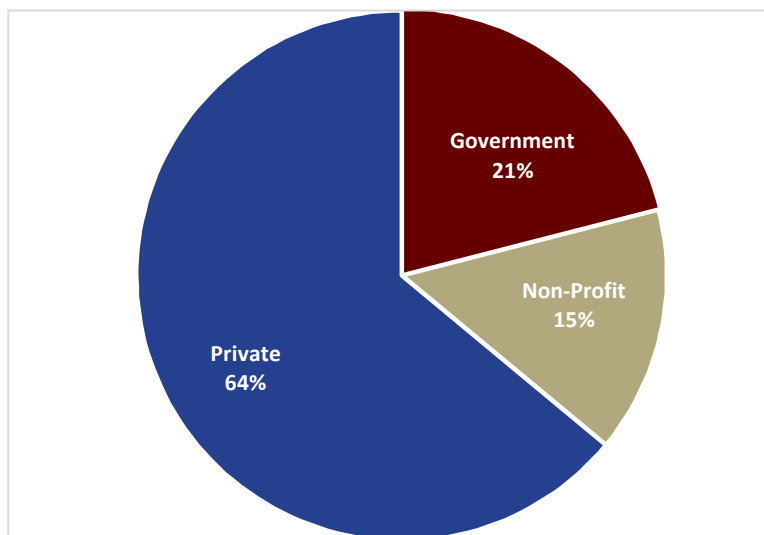
<sup>24</sup> “Project Empowerment Worksite Supervisor’s Handbook,” revised April 2015. Provided by PE program staff.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with PE Staff. September 26, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Lazere, E. Making a Good Jobs Program Even Better: How to Strengthen DC’s Project Empowerment. *DC Fiscal Policy Institute*. April 2015. <http://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Project-Empowerment-Final-April-1-2015.pdf>



#### Exhibit 4: Employer Partner Type



Employer partners provide up to 6 months, and on some occasions up to 12 months, of direct work experience for PE participants.<sup>27</sup> PE Job Developers recruit employers and provide them with information on the type of support that employers and participants will have during their participation in subsidized employment. Employers are tasked with the responsibility of providing a worksite orientation, on the job training, on-site supervision, and reporting on the

participant's performance to the Job Coaches. In addition, employers are trained by PE staff and are expected to use the PE online Time Management System (TMS) to track each participant's hours worked on a weekly basis. PE anticipates that partner employers will consider PE participants for unsubsidized, long-term, employment positions if they have the capacity to do so.

---

*"I give Project Empowerment an 11 out of 10. The program helps participants and employers. It helps us fill positions quickly, affordably, and on a temporary basis, if needed." – Employer Partner*

---

PE has a solid core group of employer partners and currently holds monthly employer forums to promote employer engagement. However, PE staff should expand its reach to employers in high demand industries to educate them about benefits of PE.

While this is likely a challenging exercise given the barriers faced by program participants, expansion could occur by leveraging existing relationships and having employers advocate to other employers about the benefits to business and their satisfaction with PE workers. PE is truly a second or third chance for some and provides an opportunity for participants to prove their worth, as well as for employers to try out new workers.

#### Program Partnerships Summary

- *PE has developed strong working relationships with program partners to recruit participants and provide support services and work experience placements.*
- *Current employer partners could help to encourage other employers to become involved with the program.*

---

<sup>27</sup> Work experiences may be extended for up to 12 months with approval. PE is seeking to extend the work experience to 12 months; currently, extensions occur on a case-by-case basis with approval.

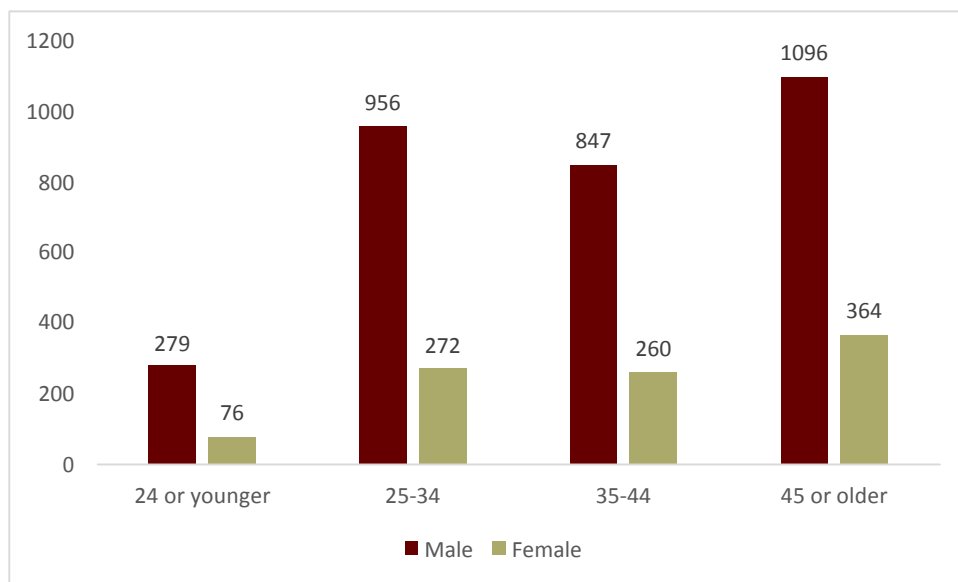
### Program Participants/Target Population

PE targets unemployed District residents ages 22-54 who face significant barriers to employment. Eligible participants must not be employed or receiving government financial assistance such as Unemployment Insurance (UI), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Social Security Insurance (SSI).

Participants must also possess at least three significant barriers, including: a felony conviction, homelessness, long-term unemployment, prior substance abuse, lack of GED, or a below 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. The majority of PE participants are “returning citizens” with felony convictions. In addition, participants must not currently be using illegal substances and must be able to pass a drug screening.

Among the program participants, 8.6 percent are below age 24; 29.8 percent are between 25 and 34; 26.9 percent are between 35 and 44, and 34.8 percent are 45 and older.<sup>28</sup> The majority of PE participants (77.1 percent) are male. Exhibit 5 below shows the age and gender breakdown of PE participants for Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 - 2015.

**Exhibit 5: Age and Gender Breakdown of PE Participants, FY 2013 - 2015**



Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

Exhibit 6 displays the racial composition of PE participants. The vast majority of the participants (98.4 percent) are African American/Black. The rest are white and American Indian/Alaska Native.

<sup>28</sup> Program statistics are based on all participants enrolled in PE in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 to 2015.

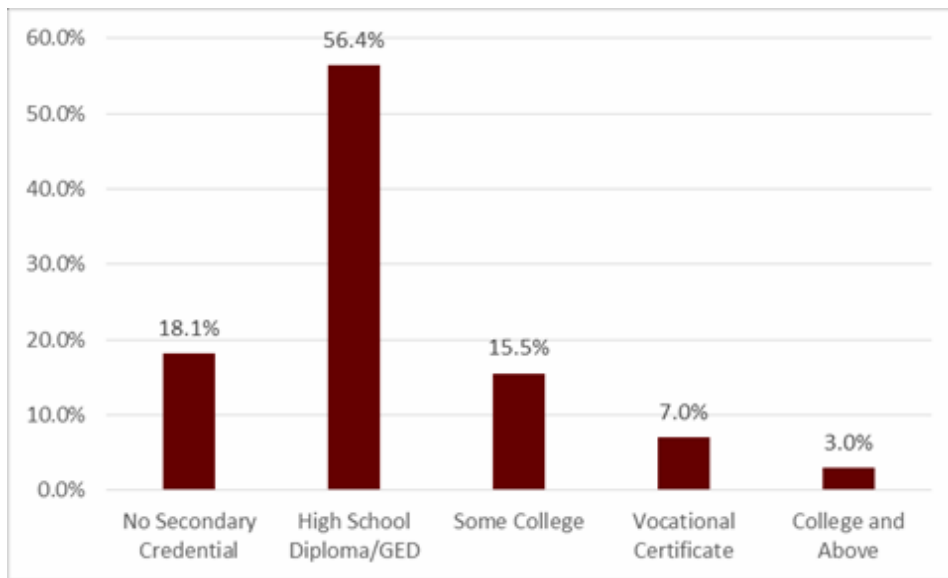
**Exhibit 6: PE Participants Racial Compositions, FY 2013 - 2015**

Age	Number of Participants	Percentage
African American/Black	3871	98.4%
White	25	0.6%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	29	0.7%
other	8	0.2%

Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

Exhibit 7 presents the educational level composition of PE participants. More than half of the participants (56.4 percent) have obtained a high school diploma or GED before entering the program. Less than one fifth of the PE participants (18.1 percent) lacked a secondary credential when they enrolled in PE.

**Exhibit 7: Education Level of PE Participants, FY 2013 - 2015**



Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

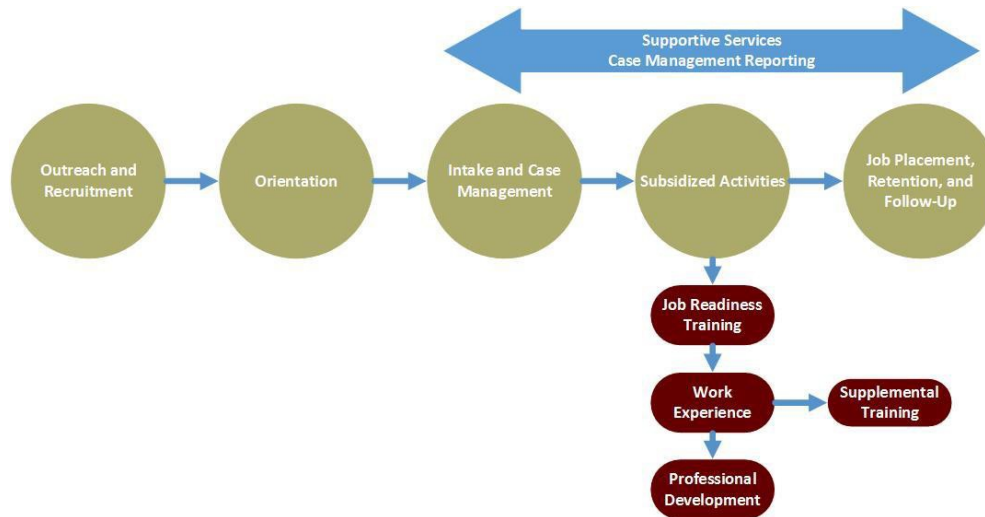
**Program Participants Summary**

- Participants must possess at least three significant barriers to employment
- The majority of PE participants are “returning citizens” with felony convictions.

### 3.2 Program Components

This section presents the key components of the PE program. Exhibit 8 presents the service delivery process through which a participant moves as s/he engages in the program.

**Exhibit 8: Project Empowerment Program Components/Services Flow**



#### Outreach and Recruitment

The majority of interested participants are referred by a case manager in one of the four AJCs in the District. AJC case managers will often assess eligibility and begin the application process for the interested individual. PE also receives referrals from various social service organizations and court system agencies that work with target populations, such as returning citizens and the chronically unemployed.

Additionally, PE staff attend community events and provide information at re-entry panels and prison visits through collaboration with the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) and the Mayor’s Office of Returning Citizen Affairs (ORCA). Outreach efforts for FY 2015 also include working with Department of Corrections (DOC) to engage pre-release prisoners so that they can begin the integration process 6 weeks earlier.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Outreach and Recruitment Summary*

- *PE works with a range of community partners to recruit participants.*
- *The majority of interested participants are referred by a case manager in one of the four AJCs in the District.*

<sup>29</sup> “Accomplishments for FY’14 – Looking Ahead to FY’15, Fiscal Year 2014.” Provided by PE Staff.

## Orientation

Participants are enrolled in the program on a rolling basis. The referral agencies provide assistance scheduling prospective participants for the upcoming orientation. Held every 3 weeks, the 2-hour orientation hosts up to 80 interested individuals and provides a comprehensive overview of PE services and commitment requirements. Orientations are hosted by PE staff and may also include past participants and partner agencies as guest speakers. The orientation serves to encourage and motivate individuals to participate in the program. It concludes with a drug screening and a future appointment with an Intake Specialist. Roughly 5-7 percent of each group attending orientation do not pass the drug screening.<sup>30</sup>

### *Orientation Summary*

- *Held every 3 weeks, the 2-hour orientation hosts up to 80 interested individuals and provides a comprehensive overview of PE services and commitment requirements.*

## Intake and Case Management

At intake, a specialist will review eligibility documents to ensure that the prospective participant meets barrier requirements and passes a drug screening. If the individual meets all requirements, s/he is enrolled in the program and considered a PE “participant.” Case management activities, such as the development of an individual employment plan (IEP) and collaborating with other staff members and partner organizations to address the individual needs of the participant also begin at this time. Program staff reported that participant IEPs are generally completed with generic entries and are not customized for each participant. Using more in-depth assessment and planning tools may help Job Developers better match participants with WEX placements and contribute to improved participant success in the long run.

### *Intake and Case Management Summary*

- *Program applicants must meet barrier requirements and pass drug screening to enroll in PE.*
- *More in-depth assessment and planning tools may help to improve participant success.*

## Supportive Services

PE staff, specifically the Intake/Retention Specialist and Job Coaches, provide and refer participants to partner organizations for supportive services on an ongoing basis. Some examples of supportive services sought for participants include clothing and uniform assistance, referrals for substance abuse treatment, mental health and nutrition referrals. Participants also engage in financial education classes and one-on-one financial coaching through a partnership with the Capital Area Asset Builders (CAAB). As part of the Job Readiness Training, CAAB educates participants on the importance of credit and budgeting and steps required to open a bank account. CAAB also teaches participants about the relationship between long-term employment

---

<sup>30</sup> Interview with PE Staff. September 26, 2015.

and fiscal stability, which can make entrepreneurship, home ownership and other financial goals possible.<sup>31</sup>

### Support Services Summary

- *Intake/Retention Specialists and Job Coaches provide and refer participants to a range of support services on an ongoing basis.*

### Subsidized Activities

The following are training/employability activities offered to PE program participants, at a wage subsidy of \$9.00 per hour for their participation.<sup>32</sup>

*Job Readiness Training.* The Job Readiness training is a full-time, 3-week long course offered on a continuing basis. It is held during work hours, Monday through Friday for a total of 120 classroom hours. Participants are paid for the successful completion of the training and passing of the final drug screening.

---

*“Before the program, I was not expecting what I experienced. The classes exceeded my expectations. I have had employment training at other programs, but they are not nearly comparable.”*

*- Allison Holland, Participant*

---

The training cohort is taught by two facilitators with the help of additional staff and partners. Participants are expected to be on time and attend all classes. The objective of the training is not only to provide participants with the vital life and employability skills necessary to prepare them for the workforce but also to encourage participants to use and build positive attitude techniques that will help them progress along the way. Exhibit 9 presents life and employability skills that are required by many District employers and are addressed in the Job Readiness Training.

---

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.caab.org/en/caab-and-project-empowerment-celebrate-1-year-of-partnership>

<sup>32</sup> The wage subsidy was \$8.5 per hour until August 2015.

## Exhibit 9: Employer Required Life Skills Addressed in Job Readiness Training<sup>33</sup>



The training agenda includes:

- *Week 1.* Participants learn lessons on interpersonal skills such as attitude and self-esteem. Banking basics are also addressed and a direct deposit account is set up for each participant. In addition, the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS), which measures basic verbal and mathematical skills, is administered to and reviewed with each participant.
- *Week 2.* Topics on communication, such as anger management, body language, conflict resolution, and on the job problem solving techniques are taught. Intake Specialists also work with participants to develop their resumes during this week. Program staff reported that, generally, the Intake Specialist develops the resume for the participant. Making the resume development process more collaborative would likely better prepare participants for revising and updating their resumes in the future.

*“I have had several jobs before, so I have basic job skills. However, what I really lack is life skills. We learned that 80% of the communication is nonverbal, and body language says a lot. I realize the importance of body language in interviews.” – Jalmalda Redish, Participant*
- *Week 3.* Participants learn about job interview techniques and practice mock interviews.

---

<sup>33</sup> Analysis of DC Network VOS Data

PE Facilitators strongly emphasize the importance of life skills through the use of group exercises that engage the participants in peer-learning discussions. They also use motivational quotes to help build the participant’s self-esteem and confidence. Facilitators are also responsible for monitoring the participant’s progress in the training and conducting a final evaluation. By the completion of the training, participants are expected to have acquired the life and employability

---

*“Many of these individuals never graduated from anything, no work experience, no education, and so for them I am very proud.” – Charles Jones, Director*

---

skills needed to be “job-ready.” At the end of the training, participants are provided with a certificate of completion during a graduation ceremony. The graduation ceremony serves to help participants recognize their own accomplishments.

*Work Experience (WEX).* Once participants have completed the job readiness training, they are placed at an employer work site to gain employment experience for a period of up to 6 months.<sup>34</sup>

On average, participants are placed in subsidized employment within 13.5 days of completing jobs readiness training.<sup>35</sup> Exhibit 10 below breaks down the length of time participants took to be placed in subsidized employment after they finished their job readiness training. The vast majority of the participants (74.7 percent) were placed within the first 2 weeks of finishing the training. A fourth of the participants (25.2 percent) were placed within 15-30 days following the training. Only a few participants (6.8 percent) took longer than a month to be placed.

**Exhibit 10: Length of Time between the End of Job Readiness Training and Subsidized Employment Placement, FY 2013 - 2015**

Placed in Subsidized Employment within ... of Completing Job Readiness Training	Number of Participants	Percentage
Within one week	449	37.3%
Within 8-14 days	450	37.4%
Within 15-30 days	304	25.2%
Within 31-60 days	51	4.2%
More than 60 days	31	2.6%

Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

Participants work full-time at the worksite while they are monitored by their worksite supervisor and, if needed, supported with additional services. PE staff maintains regular contact with the participants to provide ongoing support and feedback on performance comments received from supervisors. Participants are paid bi-weekly (via direct deposit or prepaid debit card) through the

<sup>34</sup> With recommendation and supervisor approval, a WEX extension for up to 12 months may be granted.

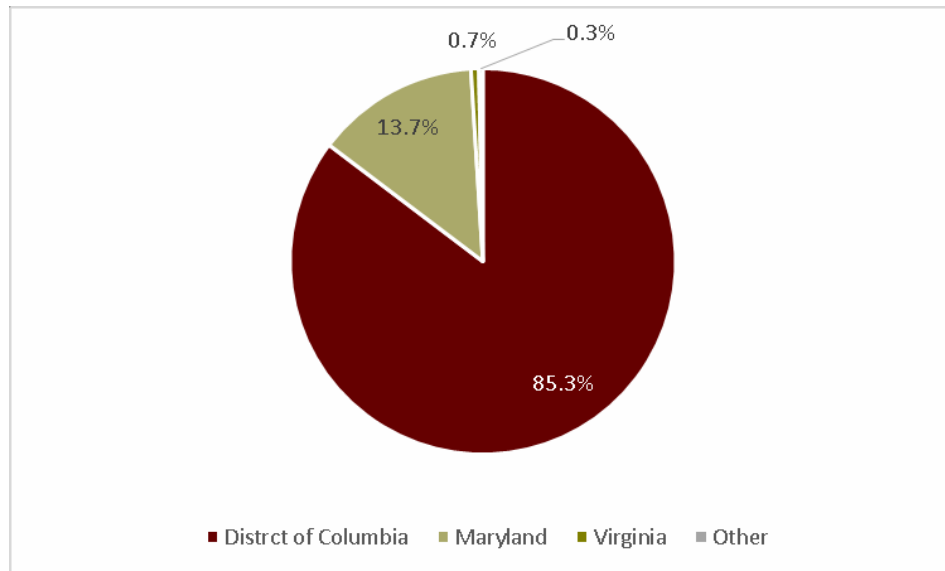
<sup>35</sup> The statistics are calculated based on PE participants since FY 2013.



PE administered payroll system but are responsible for reviewing their timesheets with supervisors on a weekly basis. Currently, the hourly wage for subsidized employment is \$9.00.

The majority of the subsidized employment positions are located in DC, followed by Maryland, Virginia, and other states (Exhibit 11). The largest share of the PE participants work in maintenance (44.2%) and administrative (28.5%) field, followed by sanitation (8.9%) and laborer (8.5%) (Exhibit 12).<sup>36</sup>

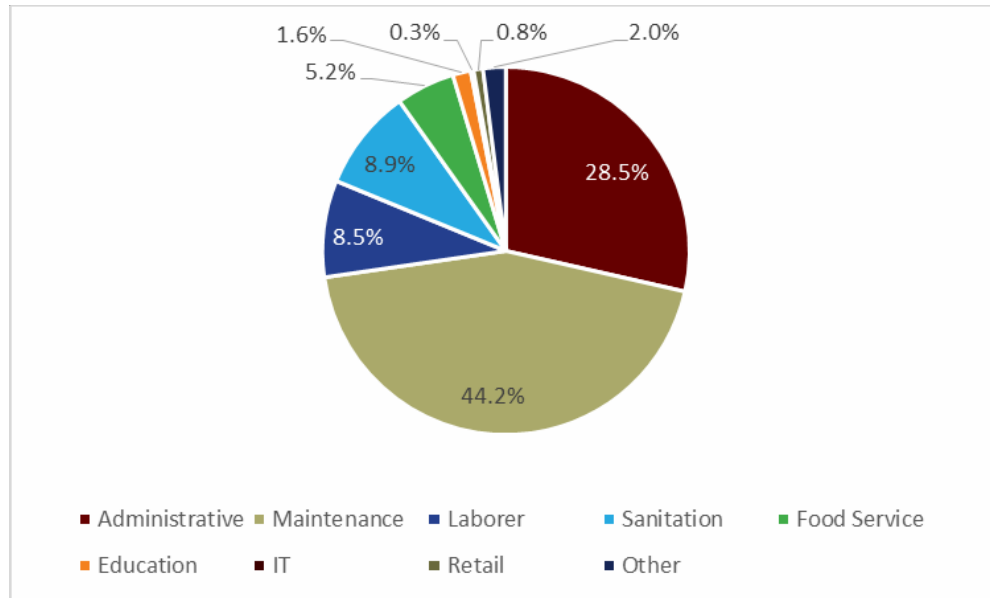
**Exhibit 11: Location of Subsidized Employment, FY 2013 - 2015**



Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

<sup>36</sup> The occupation categories are defined as follows: Administrative – administrative assistant, file clerk, call center operations, concierge, receptionist, dispatcher, legal assistant, and mailroom clerk. Maintenance – landscaping, general maintenance worker, HVAC technician, drywall technician, electrician helper, environmental technician, and carpenter helper. Automobile – auto mechanic and driver. Laborer – general laborer, warehouse worker, manufacturing, and demolition worker. Sanitation – environmental technician, sanitation worker, housekeeping, auto mechanic, and driver. Food service – cook and food service worker. Education: daycare assistant and teachers’ assistant. IT: IT technician. Retail: recreational aide, residential specialist, leasing agent, and concierge. Other: TEP trainee/participant, outreach worker, flagger, intake specialist, counselor, and data entry operator.

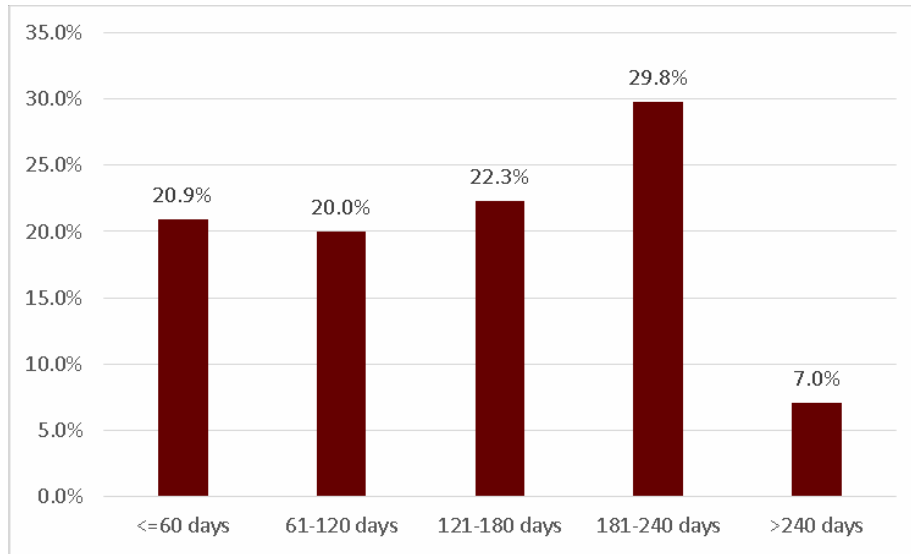
### Exhibit 12: Occupation of Subsidized Employment, FY 2013 - 2015



Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

If a participant secures an unsubsidized employment position during his or her subsidized employment period, the subsidized employment will end automatically. Otherwise, the participant usually finishes the 6-month subsidized employment and transitions to Professional Development/Job Search Activities. If participants are likely to be hired by their subsidized employer and are not in need in additional training they may remain in subsidized employment longer than 6 months. Over the past 3 fiscal years, PE participants spent, on average, 140 days in subsidized employment. Exhibit 13 displays the distribution of the length of subsidized employment of PE participants.

### Exhibit 13: Length of Subsidized Employment, FY 2013 - 2015



Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

*Supplemental Training.* Occupational skills training and Adult Basic Education (ABE)/GED courses may be offered in conjunction with WEX to participants who demonstrate commitment and consistency. Occupational skills training provides participants with the opportunity to develop specific job related skills and obtain certification requirements needed to maintain or obtain a specific job (i.e., commercial driver’s license). Hours participated in training counts toward the total hours allowed per week for each participant’s subsidized activity. Training providers are expected to follow the same payroll responsibilities as a WEX employer site.

*Professional Development/Job Search Activities.* If participants have completed their WEX experience but have still not obtained unsubsidized employment, they may be enrolled in professional development activities. This involves up to 6 weeks of daily structured job search assistance and is held in a classroom setting with additional basic computer training and access to resources needed for applying to jobs (phone, printer, fax, etc.). Participants are paid for their participation in the class as well as participation in any attended job interviews.

- *Subsidized activities include:*
  - *Job Readiness Training which focuses on life skills*
  - *Work experience for up to 6 months*
  - *Supplemental training*
  - *Professional Development and Job Search Activities*

## Unsubsidized Job Placement, Retention, and Follow-Up

The ultimate goal of PE is for participants to obtain unsubsidized job placement by the end of their subsidized program participation.<sup>37</sup> Ideally, the WEX worksite would extend the offer to the participant for permanent employment; however, in some cases the WEX site may not have an available paid vacancy to offer the participant. In the event that a job offer from the WEX site does not occur, job placement at a different site is heavily dependent on placement efforts of PE staff (Job Coaches and Account Executives in particular). Participants must then meet with PE staff to establish a job search plan and are referred job leads on a continuous basis.

Once a participant finds unsubsidized employment, however, an immediate emphasis is placed on job retention. Retention Specialists are responsible for providing ongoing contact, encouragement, and continuous supportive services for up to 1 year after placement. Participants terminated before the 6-month period are reassessed for services. Those completing the 6-month unsubsidized experience are considered successfully exited from the program.

Participants, on average, spent 184 days in the program after they finished job readiness training and before they secured an unsubsidized job. Exhibit 14 presents the length of time between finishing the training and securing unsubsidized employment. A little more than half of the participants (56.2 percent) spent more than 180 days in the program until they obtained unsubsidized employment.

---

*Monetary incentives such as cash bonuses, gift cards, or wage supplements have been shown to be effective methods for keeping participants engaged with program staff and employed. Using incentives in combination with other strategies, such as continued contact and activities, seemed to be effective practices for previously studied programs.*

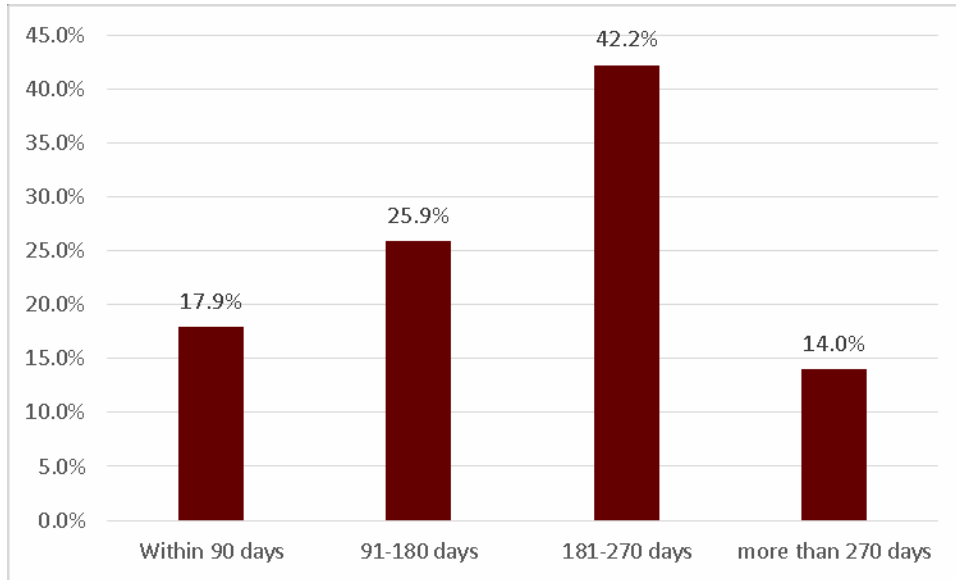
Source: Clymer, C. et al. (2005). *Promoting Opportunity: Findings from the State Workforce Policy Initiative on Employment Retention and Advancement*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

---

---

<sup>37</sup> In FY 2014, 686 PE participants entered job readiness training, and 389 participants entered unsubsidized employment. The ratio of the number of participants entering unsubsidized employment and the number of participants entering training is 56.7%.

**Exhibit 14: Length of Time between Finishing Job Readiness Training and Securing Unsubsidized Employment, FY 2013 – 2015**



Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

Exhibit 15 presents the geographic locations of PE participants’ unsubsidized employment jobs. The locations are more varied compared to subsidized employment. While the majority of the jobs are still located in DC, a larger share of jobs are located in Maryland, Virginia, and other states.<sup>38</sup> Exhibit 16 presents the occupation categories of unsubsidized employment. The three most common occupations for unsubsidized employment are laborer (26.6%), maintenance (24.8), and administration (23.7%).

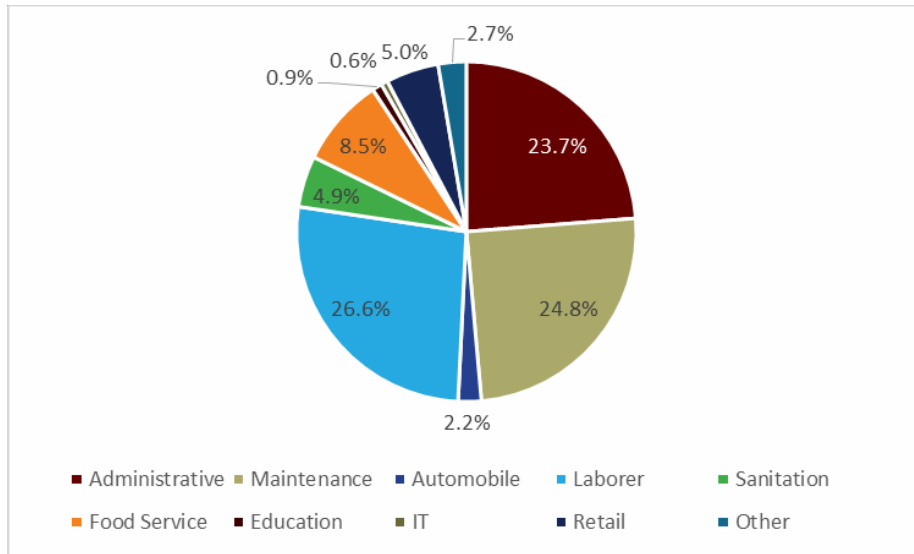
**Exhibit 15: Location of Unsubsidized Employment, FY 2013 - 2015**

State	Number of Participants	Percentage
District of Columbia	451	70.8%
Maryland	141	22.1%
Virginia	33	5.2%
Alabama	6	0.9%
Delaware	1	0.2%
Georgia	1	0.2%
Indiana	2	0.3%
Massachusetts	1	0.2%
Tennessee	1	0.2%

Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

<sup>38</sup>Project Empowerment has been encouraging participants to pursue employment in neighboring jurisdictions by paying participants subsidized wage that is lower than the DC’s minimum wage.

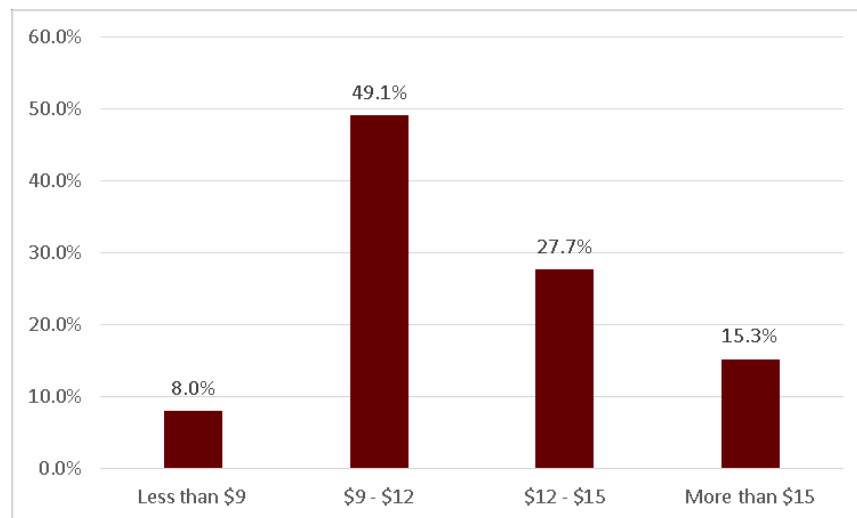
**Exhibit 16: Occupation of Unsubsidized Employment, FY 2013 – 2015**



Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

Between FY 2013 and FY 2015, the average hourly wage of PE participants’ unsubsidized jobs is \$12.60, which is considerably higher than the DC minimum wage.<sup>39</sup> All participants earned more than \$8.25, and a few participants earned as much as \$40 per hour. Exhibit 17 provides a breakdown of the wage range of unsubsidized employment. Almost half of the participants earned an hourly wage of between \$9 and \$12, and a considerable share of participants (43 percent) earned more than \$12 an hour.

**Exhibit 17: Hourly Wages of Unsubsidized Employment, FY 2013 - 2015**



Source: IMPAQ Tabulation of DOES data

<sup>39</sup> The DC minimum wage was \$8.25 per hour until July 1, 2014, when it was increased to \$9.50. On July 1, 2015, it was increased again to \$10.50.

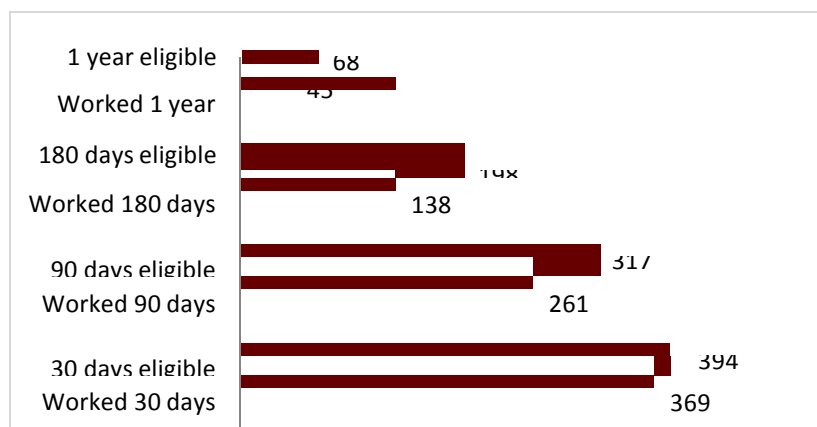
In December 2014, PE restarted the retention incentives after suspending it for about 2 years. PE uses retention incentives to encourage and reward participants for obtaining and retaining unsubsidized employment. Participants must provide proof of continuous employment of at least 25 hours per week. After reaching certain benchmarks, participants receive bonus payments that can total up to \$1,150. Retention incentives, however, depend on the year’s program funding.

- Independently Secured Employment - \$100<sup>40</sup>
- 30-day Benchmark - \$50
- 90-day - \$200
- 180-day - \$350
- 1-year - \$450

Retention incentives are a great way to track participants’ job retention. Due to the discontinuity of the retention incentives in the past few years, information regarding the retention of unsubsidized employment is limited. Most of the participants that have received incentive payments started their unsubsidized employment less than a year ago. For most of them, it is still too early to tell if they will reach the 180-day and 1-year retention benchmarks. As PE continues to pay retention incentives, we expect the percentage of participants reaching each payment benchmark to increase.

Exhibit 18 presents the number of eligible participants from July 2014 to date that reached each incentive payment benchmark. Ninety-three percent of eligible participants reached the 30 day benchmark, 82 percent of eligible participants reached the 90 day benchmark, 70 percent of eligible participants reached the 180 day benchmark, and 66 percent of eligible participants reached the 1 year benchmark.

**Exhibit 18: Participants that Reached Each Incentive Payment Benchmark, July 2014 – Present**



Source: DOES data and analysis

<sup>40</sup> A participant will still receive this bonus if they obtained unsubsidized employment with their WEX site.

- *Between FY 2013 and FY 2015, the average hourly wage of PE participants' unsubsidized jobs is \$12.60, which is considerably higher than the DC minimum wage.*
- *Retention Specialists follow-up with participants for up to 1 year after placement in an unsubsidized job.*
- *PE uses retention incentives to encourage and reward participants for obtaining and retaining unsubsidized employment.*

### **3.3 Data Tracking and Reporting**

The PE program utilizes two case management systems. One is the District's Virtual One-Stop System (VOS), which is used to enter participant information including demographic data and employment activities. The second is the PeopleFirst Case Management System, which is also used to track participant employment activities as well as payroll hours for making wage subsidy payments. Until recently, these systems have not been used to track metrics such as job retention or recidivism rates of PE participants. A feature to facilitate the tracking of job retention has been added to the PeopleFirst system. Further adjustments to the case management systems to facilitate the tracking of these measures as well as the devotion of additional staff time to tracking tasks would help improve metric reporting and assist in measuring the programs' effectiveness and ensuring program sustainability. In particular, tracking recidivism rates of PE participants would be vital to comparing PE outcomes across District residents as a whole. Tracking longer-term outcomes can be very labor intensive and would likely require additional resources.

Currently, PE provides quarterly reports to DOES on the following performance measures:

- Number of Enrolled Participants
  - Number of Subsidized job placements
  - Number of Unsubsidized job placements
  - Average Wages Earned
- 
- *PE uses the District's Virtual One-Stop System (VOS) and PeopleFirst to track participant demographic information, employment activities, and payroll hours.*
  - *Further adjustments to the case management systems to facilitate the tracking of long term outcomes are needed.*

## **4. Comparative Analysis**

This section presents the findings of this comparative analysis. Broadly speaking, TEPs aim to train their participants while preparing them to enter the workforce. The transitional employment research is broad but provides a consistent definition of the core components of the programs. The program goals typically include providing work-based income support and improving



employability for job seekers with barriers to employment. Examples of basic programmatic designs include increasing basic and job readiness skills, case management services, supportive services and the facilitation of connections to unsubsidized employment.

Some programs experience greater success at these goals and have more lasting effects than others. Identifying successful employment programs and understanding why they are successful at placing people into employment amid such variety is critical. The three comparison programs are listed below and Appendix A provides program profiles.

- **Next Step Program of Tarrant County Texas (TX program):** Administered by the Tarrant County Workforce Development Board and was initially funded through the U.S. Department of Labor’s (US DOL) Enhanced Transitional Demonstration Project.<sup>41</sup>
- **Goodwill-Easter Seals of St. Paul (MN) Prisoner Re-Entry Program (MN program):** Administered by Goodwill Easter Seals of St. Paul with funding from a US DOL grant, the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, and Goodwill-Easter Seals.<sup>42</sup>
- **Newark (NJ) Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative Program (NJ program):** Administered by the city of Newark, NJ’s Office of Re-Entry with funding from the US DOL and the Nicholson Foundation.<sup>43</sup>

These three comparison programs were selected in collaboration with Chris Warland of the Heartland Alliance, an expert in TEPs. Each of the three programs share similar characteristics with the PE program but are different in how they are implemented, especially in terms of the order and intensity of the services provided.

The similarities and differences between these programs and PE are presented in this section to highlight unique components of PE as well as similar components across the programs that have been identified as best or promising practices in TEPs. This section also presents activities that are being implemented by the comparison programs that could help PE become an even more effective program.

## 4.1 Context

### Similarities

PE and the comparison programs all operate within large urban areas. The Texas program serves residents of Tarrant County, a major county within the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. The Minnesota program primarily serves residents of Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, which encompass the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The New Jersey program serves residents of Newark, part of the New York City Metropolitan Area.

---

<sup>41</sup> This program has recently changed program eligibility criteria due to changes in funding requirements.

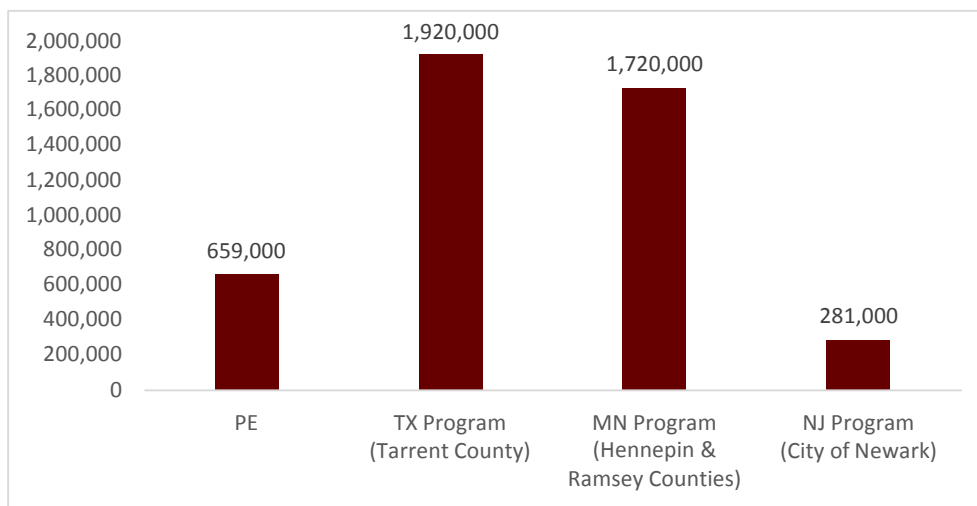
<sup>42</sup> This program has recently adjusted target population due to changes in funding requirements.

<sup>43</sup> This program has since been replaced by a similar program by the city’s new administration.

## Differences

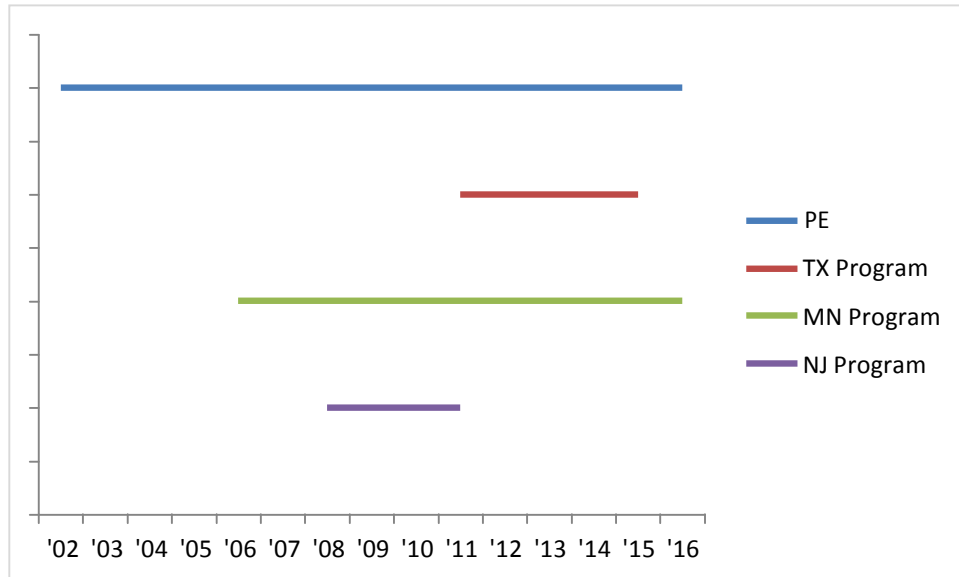
As Exhibit 19 presents, PE's service area is larger than the New Jersey program's service area, but smaller than the Texas program and Minnesota program service areas. PE and the New Jersey program serve city residents (Washington D.C. and Newark, respectively), whereas the Texas program Minnesota program serve a larger geographical region. The Texas program serves county residents and the Minnesota program serves residents of multiple counties. In terms of local industries, the D.C. market has many jobs in IT and government, which are not particularly well-suited for job-seekers with a criminal record. In contrast, Tarrant County has a large, diverse industry base with jobs in logistics and warehousing, which are a good fit for many job seekers returning from incarceration.

**Exhibit 19: Program Service Area Population**



PE has been operating longer than the comparison programs and has received consistent financial support from D.C. government (Exhibit 20). In contrast, the comparable programs have relied heavily on grant and demonstration funds from the federal government or from foundations. Grants and awards from foundations typically support projects for a few years and have specific requirements regarding eligibility. Programs supported with these funds either end when the award expires or have to secure new funding, which often necessitates changing who the program serves or the services it provides.

## Exhibit 20: Years of Program Operation



PE is better positioned to serve its target population because the program is institutionalized within DOES. Many PE staff have been with the program for a long period of time, which allows management to focus on improving existing services instead of having to revamp programming every few years. In addition, the staff cohesiveness that comes with staff retention contributes the program's efficiency.

The D.C. community also benefits from having a stable, ongoing program to serve residents with multiple barriers to employment. The comparable programs are not always able to provide continuous services to the community. For example, after the DOL demonstration that funded the Texas program ended, the program also ended. The WIB that implemented the program successfully went after a new grant, but many of the individuals who would have been eligible for the Texas program were no longer eligible for the new grant-funded program.

### Recommendations

PE should continue to pursue local funding from the D.C. Government to ensure program continuity and sustainability. PE should consider applying for external funding opportunities to supplement, not replace, existing local funds. PE should consider choosing partners like community-based organizations that already have capacity and expertise, such as partnering with TANF to help share costs.<sup>44</sup> Under the new Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA), DOES can use up to 10 percent of WIOA Title I Adult funds on transitional jobs. Although WIOA leaves this as a local decision, the District Workforce Investment Council could adopt a policy that DOES areas must spend 10 percent of their WIOA Title I Adult funds on transitional jobs programs.

<sup>44</sup> Currently, TANF recipients are not eligible for the PE program.

## 4.2 Program Participants

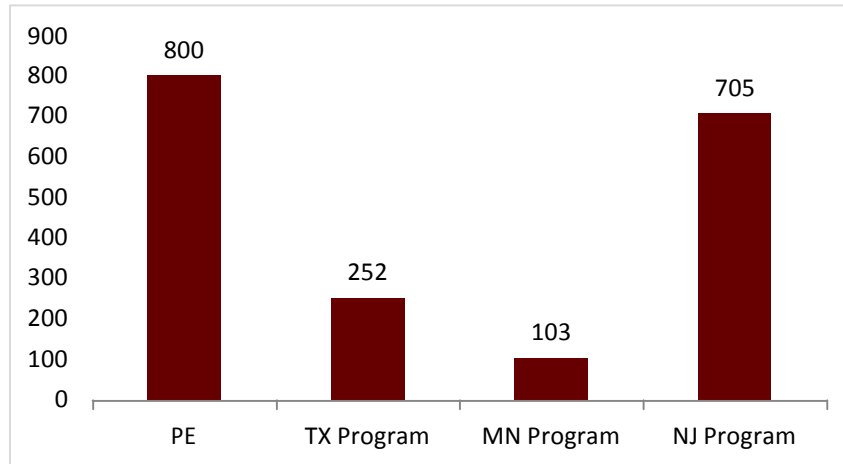
**Similarities:** PE and the other comparison programs target hard to serve populations and returning citizens are eligible for all four programs (Exhibit 21). Residents of the District with a felony conviction or previous incarceration are eligible for PE services. For the Minnesota program, individuals on work-release who have been released within the past 6 months and are determined by the Department of Corrections to be at risk of recidivism are eligible. In addition, the program has recently received a new grant targeting individuals returning to certain high crime and high poverty zip codes. The Texas program and the New Jersey program targeted individuals without a sex offense who were released within 6 months. The Texas program also targeted “the hardest to serve” re-entry customers, such as those who had a long sentence or violent offense.

**Exhibit 21: Re-entry Barriers**

PE	TX Program	MN Program	NJ Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A felony conviction or previous incarceration</li> <li>- No record of a sexual offense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Released from prison within 6 months</li> <li>- No record of a sexual offense</li> <li>- Additional barriers such as a long sentence or a violent offense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individuals on work release</li> <li>- Released from prison within 6 months</li> <li>- Determined by DOC to be at risk of recidivism</li> <li>- Returning to high crime and high poverty zip codes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Convicted of a crime as an adult and incarcerated for that crime</li> <li>- No record of a sexual offense</li> </ul>

**Differences:** Project Empowerment is open to returning citizens and non-offenders with multiple barriers to employment, while the comparable programs exclusively serve returning citizens regardless of whether they have additional barriers to employment. PE also serves more participants than the comparable programs, enrolling 800 participants annually (Exhibit 22). The Minnesota program enrolled 130 individuals over a 2-year period for a DOL grant and is planning to enroll 135 over 2 years for the recently awarded Training to Work - Adult Re-entry DOL grant. In addition to this new grant, the program serves another 30 to 40 people annually. The Texas program enrolled 503 individuals over 2 years and the New Jersey program enrolled 1,410 over 2 years. Serving a greater number of participants with more barriers to employment suggests that PE is working to address a greater number of employment needs.

## Exhibit 22: Annual Program Enrollment



### 4.3 Program Components

The below section reviews the essential components of TEPs and provide a comparison of each PE component as compared to those used in the Minnesota program, Texas program, and New Jersey program. IMPAQ reviews their similarities and differences to PE and makes recommendations for PE based on potential best practices utilized by the comparable TEPs.

**Components.** TEPs may often vary in their delivery models and delivery structure. However, regardless of their design, TEPs will typically include the same essential program components. Essential components of TEP models often include:

- Intake and Assessment Process
- Case Management and Supportive Services
- Job Readiness Training
- Subsidized Work-Experience period (WEX)
- Unsubsidized Job Placement and Retention

*Similarities:* Similar to other TEPs that target the hard to serve, including recently released returning citizens, the Texas, Minnesota, and New Jersey programs are comparable to PE in that they all consist of the same essential components listed above. In addition to the above components, PE and the other three programs also include an additional component for continued Educational/Occupational Skills Training. Educational/Occupational Skills Training goes beyond the initial Job Readiness Training component by providing participants the opportunity to continue expanding their job skills and education credentials. A comparison of this additional component is discussed further below.

---

*The Transitional Jobs strategy is highly adaptable to different delivery models, including subsidized jobs in work crews, in-house placements, or in scattered employment sites. Regardless of the structure, it is important that a comprehensive package of wage-paid employment with ongoing support services throughout the TJ program is provided.*

Source: National Transitional Jobs Network. (2010). Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Guide to Transitional Jobs Program Design.

---

*Differences:* One main difference in the components is that the New Jersey program and the Minnesota program specifically included a component for Mentoring. The Minnesota program assigned a mentor to each participant while the New Jersey program offered mentoring services to participants in structured group settings, which were led by program volunteers. The Texas program hosted weekly networking meetings among the participants that occurred in parallel with training and unsubsidized employment. They lasted 2-3 hours and included employer presentations, job fairs, and on-site interviews. They also provided an opportunity for participants to meet with their Job Developer and Case Manager. While the PE program does not have a formal mentoring program, it is important to note that they have many staff members who were formal program participants that often act as mentors to current participants.

Another general difference between PE and the three programs is service delivery: how components are delivered to participants. The subsidized employment structure, partners/tools used, timing and duration of each of the components, and the activities for which subsidy payments are provided to participants all varied by program. Section 4.4 discusses more on service delivery variation

*Recommendation:* To complement the mentoring role of previous participants that have become staff members, PE should consider incorporating formal mentoring or peer support group activities within its program components. Evidence supporting mentoring shows that participants who received mentoring, including from more experienced participants, had more success staying engaged in the program, finding jobs, and retaining employment.<sup>45</sup> With limited staffing, PE may want to look into recruiting volunteers from a partnering organization who can serve as mentors, either by assigning them directly to the participant or having a pool of candidates to whom volunteers can reach out to themselves. It is important to note that, as a program operated by a government agency, PE may be limited in their ability to utilize volunteers.

Another alternative would be for PE to host peer support group events on a regular basis. Successful PE program participants can be invited to attend the social support events while participants gain understanding and motivation from each other's shared circumstances. Mentoring is a good option especially for recently released participants. "Returning citizens" often need additional support as they learn to adjust their social behavior to their new surroundings.<sup>46</sup>

**Intake/Assessment Process.** After eligibility screening, TEPs' intake/enrollment processes typically include program orientation for new participants as well as individual assessments administered to each participant. Depending on the target population of the program, additional screening and processes may sometimes be used during intake/assessment processes.

---

<sup>45</sup> Warland, C. (2011). *Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Ensuring that the Transitional Job is a Developmental Experience* (Policy Brief). National Transitional Jobs Network.

<sup>46</sup> Giguere, R. (2009). *Coaching Packet: Building Offenders Community Assets Through Mentoring*. Center for Effective Public Policy.

*Similarities:* Similar to PE, participants of all three comparison programs attend an orientation session to learn more about program services and commitment requirements. Depending on how participants are enrolled, orientation can occur before enrollment or after. Either at orientation or at a separate appointment, participants at PE and all programs meet with a staff member to confirm eligibility and complete paperwork. At PE, staff members administer a drug screening test to participants at orientation and then again at the conclusion of their Job Skills Training. PE requires that participants pass the drug screening before participating in WEX. The Texas program also used drug screenings before allowing participants to be placed in their WEX.

With regard to similarities in assessments, PE and all programs used some form of assessment on participants. PE uses two different assessments with participants, one is the IEP that is developed as part of the intake process and is intended to be used as planning tool with the individual, and the second, CASAS, is an academic assessment administered during the first week of job readiness training. PE uses the CASAS assessment as a basic skills assessment to determine the educational barriers that may need to be addressed, such as referrals to ABE or GED classes. The Minnesota program and New Jersey program also administered an assessment of basic skills, and the Minnesota program used a tool similar to the IEP that would get updated as the participant progressed through the program.

*Differences:* Because the majority of the participants in the Texas program were recently released from prison, it was able to leave the drug screening responsibility with the parole officers of the Tarrant County, TX Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD). The Texas program was able to leverage its mandatory regular parole drug screenings when recruiting employer partners, which helped convince employers that participants would be more compliant with the drug free requirement during their participation.

Unlike PE, which uses basic skills assessment to help inform the need for additional educational training of enrolled individuals, the New Jersey program used basic skills assessments to determine eligibility before enrolling. Participants had to demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy skills before they could be enrolled in the program. This is also important to note as it demonstrates that the New Jersey program served participants with fewer barriers to employment.

According to Texas program staff, the set of assessment tools they used was vital to the success of their program. Their assessment tool, Strengths Finders 2.0, a strength based approach, was administered by an outside contractor that specialized in this area. The assessments involved 4-5 hours of different types of tests designed to identify cognitive functioning levels, personal and professional strengths, critical thinking skills, and any mental health or substance abuse issues. Results from the assessments were used

---

*“We assess everything from their vocational skills to their cognitive thinking to their criminal thinking and their recidivism rate... But the main thing we stress is not only their interests but their strengths.” – Debby Kratky, Next STEP Program Director*

Source: In Tarrant County, Program Helps Turn Former Prisoners Into Eager Employees. KERA News, January 7, 2014. <http://keranews.org/post/tarrant-county-program-helps-turn-former-prisoners-eager-employees>

---

by case managers and other program staff to customize their approach with participants during workshops and, most significantly, to identify the best suited job placement for the participant. Assessments clearly helped job developers customize placements based on the individual strengths of each participant.

*Recommendations:* In addition to administering skills assessments to determine basic educational barriers, PE should consider using other types of assessments that focus on critical thinking skills, cognitive functioning, and mental health issues. The results from these individual assessments can then be utilized by program staff to better inform the job matching process and provide quality placements that better suit the individual. Contracting with a third party vendor may need to be considered if PE program staff members do not have sufficient resources or knowledge in the area. Coordinating and training PE staff, especially job placement staff, on how to actually use and apply the information results of these assessments would thus be essential.

**Case Management and Supportive Services.** The purpose of case management and supportive services are to assist participants with ongoing support as they progress through the program services toward the goal of unsubsidized job placement. The extent to which and the specialty area of each staff member who provided the case management and supportive services and referrals varied by program.

*Similarities:* Similar to PE, case management responsibilities at all three programs began at the time of participant enrollment and included checking in with participants on a continuing basis to keep him/her engaged in the program, act as the primary point of contact, and provide referrals to support services until s/he ultimately found an unsubsidized job placement and had at least 6 months of retention.<sup>47</sup> Case management activities at all programs also focused on identifying and resolving issues at WEX sites to prevent termination. The Texas program was similar to PE in that case managers were willing to serve returning participants, those who had lost their unsubsidized job, by helping them find new job placements. All programs offered supportive services that included at minimum clothing and uniform assistance and referrals for substance abuse treatment, mental health and nutrition.

*Differences:* At PE, case management activities are handled by more than one staff member. The Intake/Retention Specialist is the participant's initial point of contact until s/he begins his/her subsidized WEX experience. Case management duties are then handled by the Job Coach until the participant secures an unsubsidized job placement. Once the participant is in an unsubsidized job, the responsibility returns to the Intake/Retention Specialist to monitor retention. Both the Minnesota program and the New Jersey Program had one counselor designated for the individuals' intake, job placement, and retention activities. Supportive services also varied by program. At the Texas Program, participants could co-enroll in the TX Fatherhood Project if they needed help with parenting or child support. At PE, interested participants can receive one-on-one financial literacy training through a partnership with the Capital Area Asset Builders (CAAB). CAAB teaches participants to gain a deeper understanding of controlling personal finances. CAAB

---

<sup>47</sup> PE Retention Coordinators follow participants in unsubsidized work for up to 1 year.



counselors are able pull credit for participants and discuss ways to devise a savings plan and increase their credit scores.

Levels of caseloads per staff member also varied across sites. At PE, caseloads range from around 100 participants per staff member. At the Texas program, caseloads were around 60 per case manager with 40 of those, on average, being in intensive services and the other 20 in follow-up.<sup>48</sup> One important component of the Texas program was that staff received specific training (from Department of Corrections) on how to effectively work with re-entry populations. This training included specific job development techniques for re-entry population, how to effectively use the individualized assessments, as well as safety information regarding neighborhoods in which participants resided.

*Recommendations:* PE staff are expected to handle heavy caseloads which makes it difficult to provide effective one-on-one case management and individualized services to each participant. Meaningful relationships between staff and participants have been found to produce positive impacts on participant outcomes.<sup>49</sup> PE program staff members should review their current case management functions and assess if they are providing meaningful staff-client relationships to participants or if their heavy caseloads are reducing the quality of their relationships. PE staff have acknowledged that high caseloads may be affecting the quality of staff-client relationships and are taking steps to hire additional staff. In addition, PE program staff should engage in related training seminars that can serve to refresh and enhance their skills in servicing specific populations with complex barriers such as homelessness, substance abuse, and criminal backgrounds.

**Job Readiness Training.** All programs offered Job Readiness Training to participants at each program but varied in the length and format of the training across each location.

*Similarities:* At PE and all three programs, the Job Readiness Training component was conducted in a group setting and included a similar “soft skills” training curriculum. Topics such as personal barriers, conflict resolution, job search, interview techniques, workplace behavior, and financial management were covered at each training. Similar to PE, the Texas program training included mock interview practice techniques. Mock interviews in the Texas program training were a critical component that included teaching participants how to disclose and discuss their criminal history through the development of an “impact statement.” The goal of the impact statement was to teach participants how to be comfortable and skilled in talking about their past in a way that can demonstrate to employers their new perspective and valuable skills gained through the program. PE, Texas, and New Jersey programs all encouraged their participants to complete the Job Readiness Training component prior to starting their WEX.

---

<sup>48</sup> Interview with TX Program Staff. Sept. 18, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Warland, C. (2011). *Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Ensuring that the Transitional Job is a Developmental Experience* (Policy Brief). National Transitional Jobs Network.

*Differences:* The main difference here is that, for PE participants, the participation in the Job Readiness Training component is a mandatory subsidized activity. PE participants are paid for their attendance if they successfully pass the drug screening at the end of the training. The majority of the other programs do not start wage subsidies until the actual WEX component. However, the second largest difference in the Job Readiness Training is in the intensity and duration of the trainings. As compared to the other three programs, PE has the longest and most extensive training component that is held full-time for 3 consecutive weeks (120 hours). The Texas program training consisted of 2 weeks (80 hours) of similarly structured classroom training that was also held during work hours. The Minnesota program job readiness component was a 4-day curriculum and unlike PE, allowed participants to either delay training or move onto the WEX experience or occupational training at any time during the process. This could demonstrate that the Minnesota participants have fewer barriers to employment.

---

*Without a doubt, some of the value that transitional employment lends to the TJ model is that paid employment acts as an incentive for vulnerable and low-income individuals to engage and stay engaged in training, education, and job search activities. By helping to address the chaos and uncertainty that accompanies poverty and unemployment, TJ's wage-paid work and supportive services offer the stability to remain in the program and receive coaching and training to build employability skills.*

Source: Warland, C. (2011). Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Ensuring that the Transitional Job is a Developmental Experience. National Transitional Jobs Network.

---

*Recommendation:* PE program staff and participants noted that the Job Readiness Training does not always adequately prepare participants to develop or update a resume on their own. The basic computer training has recently been adjusted to incorporate resume preparation activities. PE should continue to make efforts to provide opportunities for hands on resume development practice into their Job Readiness Training curriculum.

**Educational/Occupational Skills Training.** Beyond the Job Skills Training and subsidized WEX, PE and all three programs included other types of services for participants to enhance their employability skills, either through educational training or occupational skills training.

*Similarities.* In PE and the Texas program, once participants complete their Job Readiness Training, they are free to attend other specialized training services such as ABE or occupational skills training, either in conjunction with their participation in WEX or after their WEX experience if an unsubsidized placement is not immediately attained. Additional training services are usually provided by outside training providers through collaboration and co-enrollment in similar programs. Both PE and the Texas program are able to leverage funds from WIA if participants are eligible for co-enrollment. Similar to PE, the Minnesota program's occupational training component was also a subsidized activity for program participants.

*Differences.* At the Minnesota program, more emphasis was placed on providing participants available occupational training services. Participants at the Minnesota program took advantage

of in-house occupational training certificates such as the forklift training, building facilities training, warehouse operating training as a way to increase their skill set and improve their employability skills.

In addition to occupational skills training and educational training, PE also offers participants extended opportunities to participate in other subsidized activities like Professional Development classes for a period of up to 6 months. The comparison programs offer limited opportunities to continue receiving wages after the WEX experience is over. All programs have ongoing referral or direct provision of support services available, but paid activity is limited. In addition, pre-release participants also face requirements that must be considered when participating in program activities that are not specifically “on the job”. A unique component of the Minnesota program, for example, is that it effectively established a partnering relationship with the court system to allow participation in supportive services to count toward participants’ obligations for the work-release program.

*Recommendation.* Although PE receives most of its referrals from AJCs and is technically able to leverage funds from other workforce programs to enhance both educational and occupational training opportunities, the frequency with which participants take advantage of these funds is unclear. PE should seek ways to better coordinate resources and collaborate with workforce programs that can serve the needs of PE participants, such as for transportation assistance or training dollars.

**Subsidized Work Experience (WEX).** Through the WEX experience, TEP participants gain valuable work experience while earning a wage and receiving guidance from both onsite employer supervisor and program staff. Each program varied in the length of subsidized employment experience offered, the type of employers, as well in the wage amount paid to participants. Recent studies on TEP models indicated that the total number of days in a transitional job was the only component that had the most significant, positive association with a participant’s unsubsidized employment outcomes.<sup>50</sup>

---

*People recently released from prison not only need to find a job, but they also need to remain employed to establish stability and, ideally, to lay the foundation for long-term advancement and wage growth.*

Source: Ready4Work Final Research Report. U.S. Department of Labor, Sept. 2008.  
[http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText\\_Documents/Ready4Work%20Final%20Research%20Report.pdf](http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/Ready4Work%20Final%20Research%20Report.pdf)

---

*Similarities.* Comparable to PE, participants in the Texas program had to interview for their WEX position with the WEX employer before they could be “offered” the WEX opportunity. If the participant was not chosen by the WEX site, program staff provided constructive feedback to participants so that they could improve their interviewing skills and have a better chance for the next WEX site interview. PE staff members

---

<sup>50</sup>Yahner, Jennifer & Zweig, Janine M. (2012). Which Components of Transitional Jobs Programs Work Best?: Analysis of Programs for Former Prisoners in the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration. UrbanInstitute.

practice similar interview feedback techniques with each participant and provide feedback from WEX supervisors.

*Differences.* In PE, Job Developers recruit a mix of both private and public employers to provide 6 months of subsidized WEX for participants, and participants earn \$9.50 an hour (below the local minimum wage) and are paid through the program, not the employer.<sup>51</sup> The Minnesota program provided wage subsidies matching the state’s minimum wage rate for anywhere from 4 to 13 weeks of WEX depending on the participant and service needs.

In Texas, job developers played a key role in recruiting only private employers to provide 8 weeks of work experience for participants. The Texas program paid 100 percent of the salaries for 60 days and then paid half the salaries for an additional 60 days. Having the opportunity to use this “step down” option allowed Texas program employers to extend the WEX period for 4 additional weeks while they paid half the wages. A key component of the Texas program was that, for employers to participate, they had to guarantee that there would be an unsubsidized job opening available for which the participant could apply at the end of the subsidized employment period. This is different from other subsidized employment models, like the Minnesota program, that utilize their own enterprise business to provide the subsidized WEX and later often have to recruit different employers once the WEX period has ended.

The Minnesota program uses its own enterprise, Goodwill retail store locations or light manufacturing plants, to provide the WEX site for its participants. Participants across all comparable programs received wage subsidies for their time worked at WEX sites, however, PE wage subsidies are below the District’s minimum wage, which works to encourage participants to seek jobs with higher pay.

*Recommendations.* PE staff should work to identify employers that can offer WEX placements in high demand industries and occupations. Focusing on industries that are expected to grow will likely allow more participants to move into unsubsidized positions with their WEX employers and ensure that participants are gaining skills that will be in demand in the future. In addition, PE staff should encourage participating employers to become advocates and to recruit new employers.

PE should continue to work with employers using a “dual customer” approach to service their needs as well as the participants. Learning what matters to employers helps to inform the choice in participants that are placed with them.

**Unsubsidized Job Placement and Retention.** Transitioning participants from their WEX experience into their unsubsidized job is often the most challenging step of TEPs. Typically, this part involves heavy job development, supportive service, and participant engagement efforts from program staff. The main goal is to transition participants from their subsidized WEX into unsubsidized employment within the shortest timeframe.

---

<sup>51</sup> Generally PE participation in WEX is limited to six months but in some rare instances, participants are allowed to remain in WEX for up to a year with supervisor approval.

*Similarities.* Similar to the Texas program, many PE WEX employers offer unsubsidized job placements to participants right after their WEX period is over, and, in some cases, WEX employers will offer unsubsidized placement prior to the end of the 6 month WEX period. PE and the comparable programs will also track participants and maintain contact for at least 6 months after participants secure an unsubsidized job placement.

*Differences.* Because of the difference in WEX employers, comparison programs take a slightly different approach to achieving unsubsidized job placements. PE places an emphasis on getting the participant into a 6-month work experience and using that WEX as a resume builder for applying to any unsubsidized job if the WEX employer does not hire the participant. The Texas program focuses on lining up continuous employment with the same private employer beginning with the unsubsidized WEX component. If the participant did well in the subsidized placement, the likelihood of it turning into an unsubsidized job was much greater, especially if the employer was willing to participate in the “step down” extension. The Texas program also placed a lot of emphasis on assessments that analyzed a participant’s strengths and challenges. These assessments helped Job Developers better match participants to the job sites that were in line with participants’ interests and capabilities, ultimately leading to the goal of long-term job placements.

Unlike many other programs, PE is unique in that it provides retention incentives to encourage participants to obtain and maintain unsubsidized employment for up to a year after their placement. Using retention incentives or “bonuses” in combination with other strategies, such as continued contact and activities, seemed to be an effective practice for previously studied programs showing some associations with improved employment outcomes later.<sup>52, 53</sup>

---

*“I think the bonus is a great way of showing encouragement and appreciation. It gives me incentives for making a habit of doing well.”*

*Allison Holland – PE Participant*

---

*Recommendation.* PE may want to consider an option similar to the Texas program that incentivizes employers to keep participants in WEX past the 6 month period by allowing them to pay for part of the subsidized wage. For example, following the first 3 months of WEX, employers could be offered the opportunity to keep participants for an additional 3 months past the standard six months if they pay half the subsidized wage for the remaining 6 months. While this adjustment may not change participant outcomes, it would allow employers to keep the participants at a lower than market wage for an additional period of time and provide the participant the opportunity to extend their WEX period at no additional cost to the program. This recommendation is only feasible if employers wish to keep participants for a longer period of time and are willing to share the cost of the participant wages.

---

<sup>52</sup> Clymer, C. et al. (2005). Promoting Opportunity: Findings from the State Workforce Policy Initiative on Employment Retention and Advancement. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

<sup>53</sup> Hill, H. & Parvetti, L. (2000). Using Incentives to Promote Job Retention and Advancement: Guidance from the Performance Improvement Industry. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research.

In addition, PE should explore utilizing assessments to better inform job matching and WEX placement as well as consider options for expanding job development to contractors specializing in job recruitment and placement.

#### **4.4 Service Delivery**

##### **Similarities**

Service delivery in PE and the comparable programs is similar in that all the programs aimed to provide a similar set of components, but these components were administered in different orders and with different intensities. Similarities in wage subsidies are seen in the WEX component only (wage subsidies for program activity beyond the WEX participation is unique to PE and partially to the Minnesota program). In addition, all programs are anchored to the minimum wage of each area, with PE being the only one that pays slightly below local area minimum wage rates.

Similar to Project Empowerment, the Texas program and Minnesota program had a well-established partnership with the criminal justice system. All 3 programs conduct outreach at facilities and developed robust partnerships. The Texas program staff worked closely with participants' parole officers and even received training from them on how to work with returning citizens. The New Jersey Program also linked with pre-release recruitment centers at correctional facilities to conduct outreach to newly returning citizens. PE has a strong working relationship with CSOSA and ORCA that facilitates recruitment for PE and allows all 3 programs to leverage resources for serving returning citizens. In addition, PE helps to facilitate the relationships participants have with their parole officers by encouraging them to meet at the PE office.

##### **Differences**

PE is administered through program funded staff members who are under the public workforce system. At the Minnesota program, services were delivered outside of the public workforce system through the non-profit organization that had close partnerships with the Department of Correction agencies and pre-release centers. In particular, the New Jersey program leadership comes specifically from the office of re-entry in the Department of Housing and Economic Development, but staff delivering actual services to participants were housed at various community and faith-based organizations around the county. The City of Newark contracted with six different organizations to be the service providers.

The Texas program has a designated office for special workforce programs that hosted its staff and program participants. It also actively sought to use WIA services to co-enroll participants when its program funding for specific occupational training was low. Although PE receives most of its referrals through AJC center staff, co-enrollment in WIA services is not often utilized.



Differences are mainly in how each program develops its WEX employer sites and how wages and subsidies are provided to participants and for what activities. For example, the Minnesota program utilized its own separate job development department that supports various Goodwill/Easter Seals programs. PE staff, however, must rely on only a couple of Job Developers to sell the program for a large amount of participants. This difference highlights another program component/activity that could be supported by additional staff. Hiring more Job Developers would improve the program's ability to identify WEX positions in high-demand/growth industries and align with participant skills and abilities.

---

*Benefits of scattered-site placements (in which participants work in for-profit, non-profit, or government sites with 1-2 workers per site) include a work experience that most closely resembles a competitive labor-market job, and the ability to customize placements according to participant aptitudes and interests.*

Source: Warland, Chris. *Transitional Jobs Toolbox: Program Technical Assistance Series. Ensuring that the Transitional Job is a Developmental Experience.* National Transitional Jobs Network. July 2011.

---

PE also differs in the way participants are exposed to various staff and training throughout their participation in the program. Beginning with the Intake Specialist, participants go on to meet the training facilitators, Job Developer, Job Coach, work site supervisor, back to the Intake/Retention Specialist and possibly on to work with additional instructors at additional training classes or professional development. Similar programs with slightly less staff members are able to maintain a bit more continuity throughout the participant's experience in the program. Research indicates that meaningful relationships with program staff including case managers, job coaches, job developers, and retention specialists have been identified as a critical factor in participant success, and strong supportive relationships with staff contributes to positive participant outcomes.<sup>54</sup> Many PE participants have noted that their job readiness instructors were instrumental in ensuring their engagement in the program.

### **Recommendations**

In addition to the recommendations for the individual program components discussed earlier, PE should also consider experimenting with different approaches of subsidy payments. A partial subsidy with employers may help ween participants off from PE payroll and onto the employer payroll if the employers have open positions. In addition, PE should look into ways to offer more support for participants while they are in unsubsidized employment, including the recommended mentoring component or free networking workshops to keep participants engaged and responsive to program staff.

---

<sup>54</sup> Warland, C. (2011). *Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Ensuring that the Transitional Job is a Developmental Experience.* National Transitional Jobs Network.

## 4.5 Partner Organizations & Employers

### Similarities

With regard to recruitment activities, Texas, New Jersey, and Minnesota reported strong working relationships with Department of Corrections, specifically those divisions that oversee parolees. The programs leverage these relationships to recruit participants. The Texas program developed a partnership with the local parole offices to allow their staff to present and share with parolees the services available through the program. This partnership resulted in approximately 70 percent of individuals coming directly from the parole orientation, with the remaining 30 percent of participants coming from community referrals accomplished through other outreach methods.

The PE program also works directly with the “re-entry network,” which includes organizations such as the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) and the Mayor’s Office of Returning Citizen Affairs (ORCA) to recruit inmates in federal prisons. To recruit inmates from the DC Jail, PE recently developed the DC Jail Job Readiness Program, which essentially provides inmates with the Job Readiness Training component of PE while they are still in jail and, if they demonstrate readiness, allows them to begin subsidized employment upon their release.

Once participants are enrolled, all four programs work with outside service providers to help address the full range of participant needs. These partner organizations provide services such as mental health and substance abuse treatment, legal aid services, housing, clothing, and transportation. For example, as part of their partnership with service provider organizations, PE has a staff member from the DC Department of Mental Health on-site to ensure that participants in need of mental health services are linked with him/her immediately.

### Differences

To recruit participants, PE primarily works with local American Job Centers to identify and refer eligible participants for the program. The PE staff also conducts ad hoc outreach in collaboration with various community organizations. The Texas program and Minnesota program do not involve the AJCs to the same extent. The Minnesota program targets most of its recruiting efforts at correctional facilities and halfway houses and thus far has not found a need to reach out to AJCs for referrals. Similarly, the Texas program found most participants through its partnership with local parole offices.

For support services, PE relies on external service providers to help address participants’ needs, while the MN program can provide certain support services “in house.” Although the MN program does partner with a number of outside service providers, the Goodwill Easter-Seals organization operates a number of different programs, many of which address the needs of the TEP participants.

Employer partnerships are a key aspect of PE, though need to partner with outside employers to offer participants subsidized job opportunities was somewhat different across the comparison programs. The Minnesota program, like many other TEPs nationally, is able to offer transitional work experience to its participants through internal enterprise businesses and does not have to



devote time and resources to developing partnerships with employers. The Texas, New Jersey, and PE programs do not have internal enterprises at which they can place their participants for work experience, so they work with employers to identify placement opportunities for their participants. This effort requires significant resources as existing employer relationships must be maintained and new employers are constantly needed due to the often changing staffing needs of employer partners. While the Texas and New Jersey programs have staff devoted to identifying employers that can provide transitional employment placements, PE appears to devote significantly more resources to building and maintaining employer relationships.

Two important components of fostering employer partnerships are ensuring employers are being matched with participants that meet their staffing needs and working with the employers to gather and address

---

*“The Job Coaches check in with me regularly and I provide feedback on the participants. Any issues are addressed quickly.” – Employer Partner*

---

feedback on the program participants with whom they work.<sup>55</sup> PE employs four Job Developers who work with the employer partners to identify their skill needs and participants who are a best fit for the subsidized job opportunities they have available. PE also employs four Job Coaches who work with the employers and participants on a regular basis during the subsidized employment period to facilitate the sharing of feedback on participant performance and work with the participant to improve performance when needed. These efforts are less of a concern for programs like the Minnesota program that place participants in internal enterprise businesses.

While these efforts require significant resources, TEP experts report that this relationship building is essential to strong relationships with employer partners and the success of the participants. These relationships ensure that participants are placed in positions appropriate for their skills and experience allow participants to learn and improve their performance.<sup>56</sup>

### **Recommendations**

Given the importance of employer relationships, PE should devote additional resources to these efforts. Hiring more Job Developers and Job Coaches would lower caseloads and allow staff members to devote more time to ensuring that employers’ needs are met and their feedback on participants is addressed.

---

<sup>55</sup> Fischer, D. (2005). *The Road to Good Employment Retention: Three Successful Programs from the Jobs Initiative*. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<sup>56</sup> Fischer, D. (2005). *The Road to Good Employment Retention: Three Successful Programs from the Jobs Initiative*. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

## 4.6 Funding and Costs

### Similarities

Both PE and the comparison programs require a significant investment of funding and resources to provide services. The Minnesota program received \$1.04 million from DOL to serve 130 people and will serve 135 people for \$1.08 million with the recently awarded Training to Work grant. In addition, staffing and participant wages are covered by an unknown amount of direct

funding from Goodwill-Easter Seals. The New Jersey program received a \$2 million grant from DOL to serve 1,410 individuals. In addition, the program received, with matching funds from foundations, Department of Justice earmark grants, Newark City Council funds and in-kind donations (primarily staff time) from the New Jersey Department of Labor and New Jersey State Parole Board. The total value of the funds and in-kind donations is nearly \$10.2 million.

---

*“It gets to be an expensive model. We think it's worth it because the outcomes are showing, but we're paying the participant wage...we're paying the cost of the training itself and we're paying the stipend for their time in the training....that kind of adds up.” – MN Program*

---

---

*“In Tarrant County, if you're talking about jail, it costs \$55 a day to keep someone in jail. If you're talking about prison, it costs \$40 a day....I would imagine its two-thirds cheaper to run these kind of programs than it is to keep a person locked up.”  
-TX Program*

---

Interview respondents from both the Texas and Minnesota programs affirmed that transitional employment combined with training and case management is expensive but worth the investment. The respondent from the TX program went further and made the case that the money spent on the program costs less than sending someone to jail or prison, making it a good use of taxpayer dollars.

All four programs spend funds on participant wages and training. PE participants earn \$9.50 per hour, Minnesota program participants earn \$7.25 per hour and New Jersey participants earn \$7.82 per hour. Training costs for participants vary and are tied to needs of the individual. The Minnesota program spends between \$585 and \$4,200 per participant on training and the Texas program spent between \$4,000 and \$10,000 overall per participant depending on individual training needs.

### Differences

The comparison programs are generally reliant upon grant and foundation funding, whereas Project Empowerment receives a single funding stream from D.C. tax revenues. The Texas, Minnesota, and New Jersey programs have all received U.S. DOL grants. The Minnesota and New Jersey programs also received foundation funds, and the Texas program accessed WIA, SNAP and TANF funds for training. Exhibit 23 presents the funding sources for each program.

### Exhibit 23: Program Funding Sources<sup>57</sup>

PE	TX Program	MN Program	NJ Program
- \$9 million (DC Tax Revenues)	- US DOL Grant - State WIA, TANF and SNAP	- \$1.08 million (Training to Work Grant) - Subsidies from Goodwill-Easter Seals to cover staffing and participant wages - The Joyce Foundation (in previous years)	- \$2 million US DOL Grant - \$1.02 million DOJ Earmark Grants - \$2.75 million Foundation and local funds - \$4.4 in-kind donations

The overall costs of PE and the comparison programs vary, primarily due to differences in the intensity of services. PE receives \$9 million to serve 800 participants annually. The New Jersey program served 705 annually and spent at least \$5.1 annually. Although the New Jersey program may have spent less overall, fewer than 1 in 5 participants entered transitional employment, one of the most important components of these programs, and the period of time spent in transitional employment is less than that of PE (24 hours a week for up to 8 weeks versus full time work for up to 6 months). PE has greater expenses associated with participant wages and job coaching during the transitional employment period.

The Texas and Minnesota programs have fewer participants (252 per year and 103 per year) than does PE, and participants typically spend less time in transitional employment. The transitional employment period is typically between 8 to 12 weeks in the Texas program and 4 to 13 weeks in the Minnesota program. The Texas program also offers employers a step-down option after several weeks of transitional employment, whereby the program pays 50 percent of the participants' wages and the employer pays 50 percent, resulting in less financial burden for the program.

In addition to wages during transitional employment, PE provides participants with a stipend during Job Readiness Training and professional development activities, which occur for up to 6 weeks after the transitional employment period if the participant has not found unsubsidized employment. Also, unlike the other programs, PE offers retention bonuses to participants in unsubsidized employment, which is an additional program expense.

#### Recommendations

PE should consider offering a step-down option to employer partners. Providing a partial subsidy instead of a full subsidy during the end of the transitional employment period may help reduce program costs and garner buy-in from employers.

<sup>57</sup> Funding amount of the TX Program is not available.

## 4.7 Outcomes

TEPs are generally interested in affecting a common set of outcomes including those related to retention in and completion of the program and subsidized employment, gaining unsubsidized employment, unsubsidized wages, and recidivism.

Comparing outcomes across programs is challenging, as they often track and define outcomes differently. Minor differences in program components and service delivery make it especially challenging to compare outcomes related to program completion. In addition, tracking participant outcomes related to employment, wages, and recidivism is a costly activity because it requires follow-up with/on individual participants and/or access to wage and employment data that can be expensive and time consuming to gather. Rigorous program evaluations devote significant resources to examining participant outcomes and determining at what level those outcomes can be attributed to the effect of the program.

## 5. Summary and Conclusion

The findings of this analysis demonstrate that the PE program is implementing many TEP components that other programs, experts, and research evidence have identified as best practices in the field. This section summarizes the findings of the analysis, highlighting unique components of the PE program and PE components that have been identified as best or promising practices, and the program recommendations included throughout the report.

### Analysis Findings

PE is taking a comprehensive approach to eliminating the employment barriers of its participants by addressing soft and hard skills deficiencies, mental health and substance abuse challenges, and a range of other needs including clothing and food. Multiple participants explained that the Job Readiness Training was much more beneficial than they expected in helping them to change their attitudes and become motivated to succeed in a job. Participants also spoke very highly of the Job Readiness Training facilitators, noting that they were extremely engaging and encouraging.

Participants with experience in subsidized training reported that the Job Coaches built on what they learned in the classroom and helped maintain their motivation while in subsidized employment by providing them with encouragement and feedback to improve their performance. Overall, the PE staff is committed to providing participants with respect and high quality services, which is immediately apparent at the PE offices where all participants are greeted at the front desk by name. Participants explained that this respect, the support services, and the opportunity to build their resume all while earning income has been a life changing experience.

Below sections discuss PE program components that are supported by other programs, TEP experts, and existing research.

**Job Readiness Training.** All three comparison programs and PE offer or have offered job readiness training courses that provide participants with the employability skills that are essential to success in the workplace. Staff from the comparison programs and PE report that these training courses must emphasize on helping participants examine their thought processes in an effort to learn how to make decisions and communicate more effectively.

Evidence and experts in TEPs also support this type of training, noting that populations with multiple barriers to employment require cognitive behavioral interventions to be successful in the workplace.<sup>58, 59,60</sup>

**Case Management and Support Services.** All three comparison programs and PE provide or have provided case management and wrap-around support services to participants to help address major barriers to employment immediately upon entering the program. PE program participants explained that these services helped to address major concerns they had early on so that they could focus on what they were learning in the program. Program staff from all programs along with PE participants also reported that case management services are important in ensuring participants stay engaged and are successful in attaining unsubsidized employment.

Evidence suggests that more frequent check-ins and longer follow-up periods lead to positive outcomes including working more months, working full-time, and higher earnings.<sup>61</sup> PE Job Coaches check in with subsidized participants every 2 weeks for their entire subsidized work experience and Retention Specialists follow-up with participants for a full year.

**Scattered Site-Placements.** TEP experts explain that the benefits of scattered-site subsidized job placements (in which participants work in for-profit, non-profit, or government sites with 1-2 workers per site) include a work experience that most closely resembles a competitive labor-market job and the ability to customize placements according to participant aptitudes and interests.<sup>62</sup> PE and two of the three comparison programs offer or offered subsidized placements. PE staff and participants reported that the Job Developers work to identify subsidized job opportunities that align with the skills and interests of the participants.

---

<sup>58</sup> The Council of State Governments. (2013). *Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies: Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Job Readiness*. Justice Center.

<sup>59</sup> National Transitional Jobs Network. (2010). *Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Guide to Transitional Jobs Program Design*.

<sup>60</sup> Dowden, C., Antonowicz, D., & Andrews, D. (2003). The Effectiveness of Relapse Prevention with Offenders: A Meta-Analysis. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 516-528.

<sup>61</sup> Clymer, C. et al. (2005). *Promoting Opportunity: Findings from the State Workforce Policy Initiative on Employment Retention and Advancement*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

<sup>62</sup> Warland, C. (2011). *Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Ensuring that the Transitional Job is a Developmental Experience*. National Transitional Jobs Network.

TEP experts note that, with scattered employment sites, program staff need to pay special attention to selecting employer partners that contribute to the developmental experience of the participants and ensure that participants are provided with guidance for gaining and practicing work skills.<sup>63</sup> PE Job Coaches work to provide case management, guidance, and support skills to participants while they are in subsidized work.

**Strong Relationships with Employers.** Research indicates that taking on a dual customer approach that serves both the participants and the employers can improve job retention. This approach involves addressing the needs of employers in program design and responding to their feedback.<sup>64</sup> Both the PE and the TX programs employ or employed Job Developers who work to develop strong, collaborative working relationships with their employer partners. PE staff members noted that engaging frequently with employers to identify their skills needs helps to ensure that they match the employer with the participants that are the best fit for their positions.

**Incentivizing Unsubsidized Work.** The most unique component of PE versus the three comparison programs is the provision of retention incentive payments that encourage and reward participants for obtaining and retaining unsubsidized employment. Findings from an evaluation of programs that offered retention bonuses found that they had significantly positive associations with employment outcomes including gaining and retaining unsubsidized employment and unsubsidized wages.<sup>65</sup> TEP experts agree with these findings, noting that participants need to see the value in staying engaged with a retention plan. They note that monetary incentives are especially helpful in keeping participants engaged and providing needed help to new workers who are often earning entry level wages that are not adequate to sustain families or individuals.<sup>66</sup>

Another important finding of this analysis is that serving populations with multiple barriers to employment, especially those with criminal records, is expensive. Due to limitations in cost data made available for this analysis, IMPAQ could not directly compare the costs of serving participants across programs, but staff from the comparison programs explained that significant resources are required to overcome the immense challenges TEP participants face in becoming employed. Program staff justified this spending by citing the high costs of incarceration as well as the many ancillary benefits of TEP programs, including improved public safety, increased tax revenues, and stronger communities.

---

<sup>63</sup> Warland, C. (2011). *Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Ensuring that the Transitional Job is a Developmental Experience*. National Transitional Jobs Network.

<sup>64</sup> Fischer, D. (2005). *The Road to Good Employment Retention: Three Successful Programs from the Jobs Initiative*. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<sup>65</sup> Yaner, J., Zweig, J.M. (2012). *Which Components of Transitional Jobs Programs Work Best? Analysis of Programs for Former Prisoners in the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration*. Urban Institute Research Brief.

<sup>66</sup> Warland, C. (2010). *Program Technical Assistance Series, TJ Toolbox: Getting and Keeping a Job, Best Practices for Employment Retention and Advancement*. National Transitional Jobs Network.

## **Program Recommendations**

IMPAQ also makes the following recommendations to improve PE program operations and effectiveness:

### **Program Management**

- Enhance participant data collection and tracking systems.
- Continue to pursue local funding to ensure program continuity and sustainability. Consider applying for external funding opportunities to supplement local funding.

### **Participant Experience**

- Incorporate a formal mentoring and/or peer support group activities into all program components as well as unsubsidized employment.
- Utilize more in-depth assessments and planning tools to better gauge participants' interests, skills, and progress to better inform the job matching process.
- Redesign the resume development process to better involve the participants.
- Continue to make efforts to strengthen staff-client relationships, including hiring additional staff to lower caseloads and/or offering training opportunities to program staff to refresh and enhance their case management skills.
- Ensure program participants are utilizing funds available through other workforce programs to enhance program experience and ensure needs are being met.

### **Employer Relations**

- Continue to work with employers using a “dual customer” approach to service their needs as well as the participants' needs. Hiring additional Job Developers and Job Coaches would lower caseloads and allow more time to be devoted to ensuring employer needs are met and their feedback on participants is addressed.
- Identify employers that can offer WEX placements in high demand industries and occupations.
- Encourage participating employers to become program advocates and recruit new employers.
- Consider an option similar to the Texas program that incentivizes employers to keep participants in WEX past the 6 month period by allowing them to pay for part of the subsidized wage.

This analysis also pointed to the somewhat limited number of rigorous evaluations of TEPs. This dearth of evidence makes it challenging for policy makers and program administrators to make tough choices about how to allocate funding. More research is needed in this field to identify TEP practices that lead to the desired program outcomes. A rigorous evaluation of PE could support the effectiveness of existing practices, improve service delivery, and ensure program resources are allocated efficiently and effectively.

## APPENDIX A: COMPARISON PROGRAM PROFILES

---



## NEXT STEP PROGRAM OF TARRANT COUNTY, TEXAS

---

**Target Population:** Ex-offenders who have been released from prison within past 6 months with multiple barriers to employment and are Tarrant County, TX residents.

**Area Served:** Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington Metropolitan Region

**Service Area Population:** 1,912,000 (Tarrant County)

**Unemployment Rate:** 4.1 Percent

**Funding Sources:** U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) Demonstration Grant (\$5.6 million); WIA Formula Funds (Supplemental); TANF and SNAP Employment and Training Funds (Supplemental).

**Number of Participants Served:** 1,002 (503 Enrolled in Next STEP Treatment Group/499 Enrolled in traditional ex-offender services for Control Group).

**Program Description:** The Next STEP program is administered by the Tarrant County Workforce Development Board and was initially funded through the U.S. Department of Labor's Enhanced Transitional Demonstration Project. The goal of the demonstration project was to implement and evaluate, through the use of random assignment, the effect of transitional employment and intensive wrap-around case management services on reducing recidivism of ex-offenders in Tarrant County, Texas. The Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington metropolitan area, of which Tarrant County is a part, has a diverse industry base, with manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, aerospace, and hospitality as the primary industries. Additionally, approximately 7,000 individuals exit the federal or state prison system and return to Tarrant County every year, providing an opportunity for workforce development programs to connect these individuals to in-demand industries.

USDOL awarded the \$5.6 million grant to Tarrant County in 2011, which covered a period of up to 48 months, including 3 months for initial implementation, up to 2 years for enrollment, and 12-21 months of service activity for the 503 program participants randomly assigned to receive enhanced transitional jobs services through the Next STEP program. The Next STEP program is overseen by the Tarrant County Workforce Development Board, which contracts with the service provider C2 Global to provide programmatic services. Nine staff members operate the Next STEP program, including the following positions:

- Program Manager (1)
- Case Managers (3)
- Job Developers (3)
- Administrative Assistant (1)
- Employment Boot Camp Facilitator (1)

**Services Delivery:** The primary source of individuals recruited to the Next STEP program is through the partnership developed between program staff and the local parole offices of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in Tarrant County. The local parole offices hold biweekly sessions informing parolees of their responsibilities and requirements. The Next STEP program developed a partnership with the local parole offices to allow Next STEP staff to present and share with parolees the services available through the program. This partnership resulted in approximately 70 percent of individuals coming directly from the parole orientation, with the remaining 30 percent of participants coming from community referrals accomplished through other outreach methods. After hearing about the program through the parole office, prospective participants attend an orientation session at the program office, at which they are given a fuller description of program services and offerings and are also informed about the random assignment component of the program. Once determined eligible and enrolled into the program, participants generally received the following services:

- *Assessments* – Participants initially meet with an assessment contractor arranged by the program, usually at a local library, where they undergo a 4-5 hour battery of assessments. The assessments are designed to identify cognitive functioning levels, personal and professional strengths, critical thinking skills, and any mental health or substance abuse issues. Results from the assessments are used by Case Managers and other program staff to customize their approach with participants during workshops and job placement activities.
- *Intensive Case Management Services* - Case Managers are responsible for initial intensive case management services that include reviewing the results of the assessment with the participant, the path a participant can take through the program and its requirements, referrals to any necessary supportive services, and, if successfully exited the program, following up with participants to determine any needs to facilitate employment retention.
- *Employment Boot Camp* – One week after completing the program assessments, participants begin a 2-week, 80-hour “boot camp” that is structured similarly to a typical work day. The 2-week boot camp requires participants to develop a resume and also exposes them to career pathways occupational training, child support, financial management, and conflict resolution resources. Additionally, a critical component of the boot camp is teaching participants how to disclose and discuss their criminal history through the development of an “impact statement.” The goal of the impact statement is to make participants comfortable and skilled in talking about their past in a way that can demonstrate to employers their new perspective and valuable skills gained through the program.
- *Training and Subsidized Employment* – Upon graduation from boot camp, individuals are eligible to enter occupational training or subsidized employment. About half of boot camp graduates receive occupational training and the other half enter subsidized employment with an employer. In its application for the grant it received from USDOL, Next STEP included funding to pay for occupational training for participants; however, when funding

is limited given demand, the program co-enrolled participants in WIA to make them eligible for additional training funds. Participants who completed training on occasion would go directly into unsubsidized employment, being hired by employer partners.

Participants who went directly into subsidized employment after completing the boot camp were placed with private employers in Tarrant County. On average, subsidized employment lasted 8 weeks, with the option given to employers to extend the length of subsidized employment for an additional 4 weeks but only being reimbursed half of the wage paid to the participants (known as the “step down” option). A key component of the subsidized employment opportunities to which employers had to agree to participate in the program was to guarantee there would be an unsubsidized job opening available to which the participant could apply at the end of the subsidized employment period. This model is different from other subsidized employment models that try to place an individual in another unsubsidized job once the subsidized job has ended. Another key element was the skill of Job Developers in convincing employers to participate in the program to provide participants a second chance at becoming self-sufficient, with their ability to connect the needs of businesses with the skills the program provided participants.

- *Networking Meetings* - Weekly networking meetings occurred in parallel with training and unsubsidized employment. Lasting 2-3 hours, they included employer presentations, job fairs, and on-site interviews. They also provided an opportunity for participants to meet with their Job Developer and Case Manager.
- *Supportive Services* - The program offered assistance with transportation, rent and housing, work tools and getting licenses, and co-enrolled participants in WIA or their Responsible Fatherhood program. Additionally, program partnerships with organizations that provided services such as financial management and housing assistance were key to supporting the needs of participants to successfully participate in the program.

**Program Completion:** Individuals were exited from the program if they were employed for 6 consecutive months following completion of the training or subsidized employment component. Participants were also able to return to the program if they had lost a job after a year and were eligible to place again in subsidized employment. The program also held quarterly retention meetings at which participants who had gotten unsubsidized employment could share their experiences with current program participants to provide advice and show that goals can be accomplished. Program staff tracked a number of measures to gauge performance, including items such as placement, employment retention at 6 months, wages at 6 months, and recidivism. Of the 503 participants to receive enhanced services, only 12 had returned to the criminal justice system, a 2.4 percent recidivism rate.

## GOODWILL-EASTER SEALS OF ST. PAUL PRISONER RE-ENTRY

---

**Target Population:** Ex-offenders in work-release programs living in high crime and poverty zip codes

**Area Served:** Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI Metropolitan Region

**Service Area Population:** 297,640

**Unemployment Rate:** 3.7 Percent

**Funding Sources:** U.S. Department of Labor (\$2.12 million); State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (Fee-for-Services); Goodwill-Easter Seals (Covers remaining gaps in costs for staff and participant wages).

**Number of Participants Served:** 170-175 annually (80-90 percent are ex-offenders on work release)

**Program Description:** The primary goal of the Goodwill-Easter Seals of St. Paul Prisoner Re-Entry program is to provide individuals leaving the Minnesota correctional rehabilitation system the necessary supports and resources to successfully re-integrate into society, with particular emphasis on workforce development services. Started in 2005, the program initially had a strong focus on transitional employment services; however, as the program has evolved and the needs of participants have become clearer, the program also added service components that identify and address criminogenic factors creating barriers to employment. A staff of 8-10 individuals operates the Goodwill-Easter Seals of St. Paul Prisoner Re-Entry program, which includes the following positions:

- Program Director (1)
- Program Manager (1)
- Intake Coordinator (1)
- Re-Entry Counselors (5)
- AmeriCorps VISTA Member (1)
- Job Development Manager (1)

**Service Delivery:** Program staff have developed partnerships with the Minnesota Department of Corrections and entities operating halfway houses to provide the primary source of individuals recruited into the program. Given the strict requirements of halfway houses and work-release programs, the personal relationships and trust developed between the program and these organizations is critical to providing the necessary supports for successful re-entry. After individuals have been recruited to apply and are enrolled into the program, individuals participate in an orientation and personal intake session that involves an assessment of basic skills. Once enrolled in the program, participants are assigned a Re-Entry Counselor and begin participating in the following soft skill, transitional employment and training, and supportive services:

- *Re-Entry Counselor Services* – Program participants are assigned a dedicated Re-Entry Counselor, who provides services, addresses barriers, and guides the participant through the program. Re-Entry Counselors specifically provide soft skills training that includes job search coaching, resume development, and employment readiness. Re-Entry Counselors are also the primary staff members who monitor participant progress by communicating with work-site supervisors and are responsible for job placement assistance and follow-up. Additionally, Re-Entry Counselors make mental health services referrals and inform participants on the availability of Cognitive Recognition Therapy offered by a clinician from Goodwill-Easter Seal’s mental health clinic. This therapy is available to participants concurrently while they are participating in transitional employment and occupational training services.
- *Transitional Employment and Occupational Training* – Participants are placed in transitional employment at Goodwill sites lasting 4-13 weeks and also a concurrent industry specific training at Goodwill or partner agencies. The program pays participants minimum wage for hours worked in transitional employment and provides a stipend for hours spent in training. Approximately halfway through the training program, the program offers a 4-day Employment Readiness Training, which includes mock interviews, resume assistance, and financial literacy.
- *Other Supportive Services* – The program offers assistance with transportation, work clothes, housing and referrals to health, dental and mental health and legal aid services as well as ongoing case management by a single re-entry counselor. This involves leveraging partnerships with other service organizations in the area that includes Working Well Mental Health Clinic operated by Goodwill, the Recovery Resources Center, Legal Aid and training partners.

**Program Completion:** Once an individual has completed the transitional employment and/or occupational training, the Re-Entry Counselor works with the participant to place him/her into unsubsidized employment. Part of this strategy involves developing strong relationships with employers who are open to hiring those individuals with criminal records. Such occupations typically include those in construction, auto repair, and warehouse processing. After placement into unsubsidized employment, Re-Entry Counselors attempt to stay in touch over a period of 6-

9 months, depending on funding-specific requirements, to provide any necessary follow-up services and track program outcomes. The program tracks demographics, barriers to employment, recidivism risk factors, completion, job placement, employment, job retention, wages, participation in mentoring program, and referrals to support services. The program also administers participant satisfaction surveys for continuous program improvement.

## NEWARK PRISONER RE-ENTRY INITIATIVE REPLICATION

---

**Target Population:** Ex-offenders 18 and older who had been released from incarceration within the past 180 days and were Newark, NJ residents

**Area Served:** New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Statistical Area

**Service Area Population:** 278,427

**Unemployment Rate:** 5.6 percent

**Funding Sources:** U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) Grant (\$2 million); Nicholson Foundation (\$2 million)

**Number of Participants Served:** 1400 (non-violent and violent offenders)

**Program Description:** The Newark Prisoner Re-entry Initiative Replication (NPRIR) program was designed to replicate lessons learned and best practices from two previously funded national USDOL prisoner re-entry programs (Ready4Work and Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative) to reduce recidivism among the formerly incarcerated in Newark, NJ. NPRIR aimed to reduce recidivism in Newark by enhancing the labor market outcomes and employment opportunities for those formerly incarcerated through a comprehensive set of workforce development, employment, and supportive services. The need for the NPRIR was great, as nearly a quarter of Newark's population were involved in the criminal justice system in some manner in 2008, and an estimated 1,700 individuals were returning to Newark from state prisons every year. Combined with the fact that Newark, along with the rest of the U.S., was in the depths of the Great Recession when the program was started, the challenges and needs of the target population were great.

In 2008, USDOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) awarded \$2 million to the City of Newark to implement NPRIR and serve ex-offenders. Additionally, the Nicholson Foundation provided a \$2 million match to ETA's grant to the City of Newark to supplement public funds. The grant funds provided by ETA to the City of Newark allowed the program to operate until June 2011. Prior to receiving the grant from ETA, the City of Newark created the Office of Re-Entry in 2006, with the mission of creating a unified city re-entry system. The Office of Re-Entry served as the entity responsible for the overall management of the grant funds, which included planning and developing the program design, performing all fiscal and administrative responsibilities, and engaging state and local partners to fully leverage resources. The City of Newark contracted with the following six organizations with experience working with ex-offenders to be the implementers and service providers of the NPRIR program:

- La Casa de Don Pedro
- Offender Aid and Restoration
- Renaissance Community Development Corporation Center
- New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
- Goodwill Industries of Greater New York and Northern New Jersey
- America Works, Inc.

La Casa de Don Pedro, Offender Aid and Restoration, the Renaissance Community Development Corporation Center, and the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice were funded with the ETA grant and served non-violent offenders, while Goodwill and America Works, Inc. served both non-violent and violent offenders using funds from the Nicholson Foundation.

**Services Delivery:** To meet its goal of enrolling 1,400 ex-offenders into the program, the NPRIR sought to leverage its partnerships with the New Jersey State Parole Board (NJ SPB) and the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJ DOC). To leverage these partnerships to recruit ex-offenders, each of the six NPRIR service providers made presentations at probationary facilities such as halfway houses and community resource centers sponsored by the NJ SPB. NPRIR service provider presentations provided detailed overviews of the comprehensive services available to ex-offenders and the eligibility and program requirements. A key component in establishing partnerships with NJ SPB and NJ DOC were the personal connections made between staff at each service delivery site and NJ SPB parole officers who would provide referrals to the program. Only two service providers conducted pre-release program briefings with individuals still incarcerated.

Once an individual expressed interest in the program, staff at each service delivery site conducted eligibility determinations and evaluated whether the individual had the determination to see the program through. This assessment included requiring prospective participants to attend multiple orientation sessions and demonstrate a willingness to work. Additionally the individual had to demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy skills. Once determined eligible and “suitable,” individuals were enrolled and received three general categories of NPRIR services: intensive case management, workforce preparation, and mentoring:

- *Intensive Case Management* – The intensive case management component of the NPRIR model was an area many participants pointed to as the most beneficial part of the program. Serving as the primary people with whom participants interacted, Case Managers established personal connections with participants that allowed them feel encouraged and gain a sense that they could accomplish their goals. The primary activities and services Case Managers provided participants included: clear communication of program requirements and activities; counseling and employment services; referrals to mental health and substance abuse organizations; and maintenance of all required documentation while enrolled in the program.
- *Workforce Preparation* - Given the lack of skill and work history of NPRIR participants, a wide range of workforce preparation activities were made available to each participant to meet their specific skill and employment needs. These included employment services



such as instruction on how to search for jobs, complete applications, write resumes and cover letters, interview skills (in particular how to discuss their criminal history), and effective on-the-job communication skills. Providers also required participants to complete work readiness training to make them more marketable to employers.

Some service providers also contracted with employers to provide transitional jobs for participants. Participants in transitional jobs worked 3 days a week at a subsidized wage for 8 weeks and, once completed, returned to a service provider site to seek placement into unsubsidized employment.

Job placement assistance was also made available to participants as many had difficulty navigating the job market during the Great Recession. Service providers only provided job placement services to those participants deemed employable and ready for unsubsidized employment without any program supports. The successful placements made by NPRIR sites were the result of Job Developers developing relationships with employers in Newark and educating them on the NPRIR program, addressing concerns about hiring ex-offenders, and providing them information on tax credits for hiring formerly incarcerated individuals through the Work Opportunity Tax Credit as incentives to hire NPRIR participants.

- *Mentoring* – Most service providers also provided group mentoring services to participants, led by program volunteers that sought to give NPRIR participants interpersonal, emotional, and other supports beyond the case management and workforce preparation services. Having mentor services provided in group sessions versus one-on-one allowed participants to build and share experiences of their former incarceration, talk about challenges they face, and provide a support network that provided positive reinforcement.

**Program Completion:** Once individuals obtained unsubsidized employment, they were exited from the program; however, they were encouraged to continue to participate in mentoring groups and stay in touch with program staff. Approximately 73 percent of participants were employed in their first quarter after program exit, with 29 percent of NPRIR participants returning to the criminal justice system and re-incarcerated.