SUMMARY

In 2016, the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) partnered with Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and funded contractor Westat and its partner, MDRC, to conduct the *Evaluation of Strategies Used in the H-1B TechHire and Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) Grant Programs.* The evaluation includes three distinct components. (1) The implementation evaluation examined how grantees implemented the programs, challenges and successes, and best practices for future programs. (2) The outcomes evaluation is painting a rich descriptive picture of participants' training program outcomes, such as training completion and credential receipt, and employment and earnings after the program. (3) The randomized controlled trial (RCT) examines, for a subset of 5 grantees, the impacts on participation in and completion of training, receipt of credentials, use of services, employment and earnings, advancement and job quality, and other exploratory outcomes such as overall well-being, health, and housing status.

In 2016, the H-1B TechHire and SWFI grants were created as part of a broad agenda to reduce employers' need to hire temporary workers from outside the United States through the H-1B visa program. These grant programs aimed to achieve this by funding local organizations to offer accessible training and supports to unemployed and underemployed potential U.S. workers who had barriers to training, creating a pipeline of workers able to fill jobs in the high-tech fields such as information technology, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing that employ large numbers of H-1B workers. The opportunity to develop such programs and apply for TechHire and SWFI grants was open to partnerships consisting of workforce agencies, education and training providers, and business-related nonprofit organizations. In June 2016, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration awarded $150 million to 39 TechHire grants providing services in 25 states, and $54 million to 14 SWFI grants providing services in 13 states. TechHire grants targeted several hard-to-serve populations (such as: at least 75 percent of 17-to-29-year-olds who are out of school; and 25 percent of other eligible target populations, such as unemployed, underemployed, and those with barriers that result from disabilities, limited English proficiency, and criminal records). SWFI grants targeted parents with low incomes for whom child care access was a barrier to investing in education and skills. Programs were expected to operate for 4 years, roughly from July 2016 to June 2020.

This Department of Labor-funded study was a result of the annual learning agenda process. It contributes to the labor evidence-base to inform community college and employment and training (https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/topic-areas) programs and policies and addresses Departmental strategic goals and priorities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- At 2 years after random assignment, more TechHire/SWFI participants had completed training than would have without the program. The program also had impacts on receipt of credentials and a variety of pre-employment services.

- SWFI had impacts on receiving help finding child care in a convenient location (12 percentage points more than the control group) and receiving help finding an alternative to regular child care in an emergency (7 percentage points more than the control group). However, this offered support did not translate into increases in child care use or a reduction in child care barriers to training and employment.

- The impact on training completion did not translate into impacts on employment and earnings or other life domains through two years of follow-up.

- While the TechHire/SWFI participants were more likely than the control group to work in jobs that were related to their education or training (46 percent of TechHire/SWFI respondents vs. 37 percent of the control group), participants in TechHire/SWFI were as likely as control group members to indicate that they had regular jobs and that they were receiving many different types of benefits including paid sick days, health insurance, dental benefits, a retirement plan or 401k, or tuition reimbursement.

- The one subgroup for which the programs had an impact on employment was the long-term unemployed—those who had never worked and those who had been out of work for 7 or more months at study entry. Compared with the control group, more long-term unemployed participants (67 percent) reported being employed during at least one-quarter in Year 2, compared to the control group (51 percent).

- The COVID-19 pandemic does not appear to have had an effect on the employment and earnings impacts. Average quarterly employment and earnings fell for both the TechHire/SWFI and control groups in the first year after the start of the pandemic and rose in the second year.

- Findings from the previously completed implementation study suggest that there were challenges with employer engagement and providing job development. Taken alongside the modest impacts on training completion seen in this report, the authors hypothesize that may be associated with the lack of impact on employment and earnings at 2 years.

SEE FULL STUDY

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