SUMMARY

In 2016, the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) partnered with the [Employment and Training Administration (ETA)](#) to fund contractors Westat and MDRC to conduct an implementation study and randomized controlled trial (RCT) impact study of the H-1B TechHire Partnership Grants (TechHire) and the Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI). The Department of Labor awarded funds for both of these programs in September 2016.

H-1B visas allow employers to hire individuals from outside the United States to work in specialty occupations, such as science, engineering, and healthcare. TechHire and SWFI, funded through H1-B visa fees, aim to develop a U.S. workforce with the skills to work in these high-demand fields. The grants provide competitive funding for programs that make training more accessible to individuals who might otherwise experience barriers to training and employment; provide support services that address these individuals' unique and varied challenges; and offer a range of training strategies to address skills deficits.

The implementation study, a program evaluation, examined how 49 TechHire and SWFI grantees implemented their programs and perceived the effectiveness of the strategies they used. Researchers fielded one grantee survey in summer 2019 and one partner organization survey in winter 2020; held telephone interviews with grantees between October and November 2019 and with their partners between January and March 2020; reviewed program management documentation; and accessed participant data collected by grantees. All data were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact study, an RCT, included five program locations (three TechHire and two SWFI programs) and 952 individuals (518 receiving program services and 434 in the control group). Researchers fielded two longitudinal participant surveys, held interviews with program staff, and analyzed participant data to explore the programs' effects on participation in and completion of training, receipt of credentials, use of child care and other services, employment and earnings, advancement and job quality, and overall well-being. Some data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Department of Labor-funded study was a result of the Department's research priorities for the upcoming year. It contributes to the labor evidence-base to inform [employment and training](#) programs and policies and addresses Departmental strategic goals and priorities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Implementation Study:

- **Grantees successfully worked with partners for education, training, and supportive services, but experienced challenges engaging employers for hiring**. Grantees established mutually beneficial relationships with workforce investment organizations for recruitment and funding, with education and training providers for participant training options, and with employers for curriculum design. However, only half of grantees entered into agreements with employers to interview or hire program completers. Early and continuous employer outreach helped some to ensure reliable engagement.

- **Grantees had difficulty recruiting qualified applicants, particularly youth and young adults**. For most of the grant and study period, the unemployment rate was low and potential applicants either could earn similar wages and benefits in occupations that did not require training or had barriers to employment that also made training difficult. About half of TechHire grantees struggled to recruit youth and young adults between 17 and 29; several had to turn away individuals aged 30 and over to meet the Department of Labor (DOL) requirement that for programs targeting young adults, at least 75% of participants had to be in this younger age group.

- **Grantees varied in the extent to which the training they funded was similar to existing training programs**. Eighteen grantees said that the occupational skills training they provided under the grant was distinct from existing training programs. In these cases, the distinctive features of the training programs included acceleration, work-based learning, or certifications. In contrast, 14 grantees said that the occupational skills training was the same or similar to existing training programs. The distinguishing feature of these programs was the availability of supportive and wraparound services.

- **Grantees reported that case management was one of the most valuable components of their programs**. One-quarter of grantees used a case management approach to deliver supportive services from intake through the duration of a participant's involvement. Case managers typically helped participants to develop an individualized service plan, connected participants to training and supportive services, and periodically checked in with participants to monitor progress.

- **Grantees worked with childcare providers to accommodate participants' needs but reported less success with increasing employer accommodations for childcare**. Grantees helped both training providers and childcare providers to access subsidies and to co-locate training and childcare services. However, employers were reluctant to accommodate participants' childcare needs, such as by adjusting work hours to align with childcare availability. In some cases, grantees were able to advocate on behalf of individual participants with employers.

- **Grantees experienced challenges placing program completers into jobs, but employers who did hire completers were satisfied with their occupational skills**. Placement challenges were related to completers' lack of soft skills, barriers such as lack of transportation, and a mismatch between the training offered and the skills needed.

Impact Study:

- **The participant populations recruited by the five RCT programs differed in several ways**. Programs had discretion to set eligibility criteria beyond the criteria defined by the grant; as a result, the populations in each local program differed not only by local characteristics but also by screening processes. For example, one program recruited mainly from local community colleges, while others focused on individuals less likely to self-select into college programs. Such differences in background and circumstance could influence participants' success in completing training and securing employment.

- **There was a discrepancy between the intention to prepare workers for middle- and high-skilled jobs and the relatively low skill level provided by the trainings offered**. At three of the five programs, this led to placement in mostly entry-level, lower-skilled jobs that were not in demand. Work-based learning—an intended component of both TechHire and SWFI programs that could have given participants experience that would lead to higher-level jobs—was largely missing from all programs.

- **Participants in the TechHire and SWFI programs were more likely than the control group to receive support related to case management**. Case management included various services to help participants look for and obtain a job. This support increased participants' receipt of preemployment services by a statistically significant margin compared to the control group of individuals not participating in these programs; impacts ranged from a 9-percentage point difference in receiving help developing a résumé to a 22-point difference in receiving help with job readiness or soft skills training.

- **The TechHire and SWFI programs increased participation in occupational skills training relative to the control group**. The programs also produced a positive and statistically significant impact on enrollment in or completion of occupational skills training within 7 to 14 months of entering the RCT. At that time, 43% of the treatment group reported in the Wave 1 survey that they were enrolled in or had completed training, compared to 21% of the control group.

- **SWFI increased the likelihood of participants receiving help to find or access childcare, though it did not impact participants' use of childcare or perception of childcare as a barrier**. Although 31% of SWFI group members reported receiving help finding childcare—17 percentage points more than the control group—similar rates of SWFI and control group members reported having to quit a job, job search, or training due to difficulties obtaining childcare. Interviews with staff revealed a potential mismatch between participants' childcare needs and what the programs could offer.

- **There is no evidence yet that TechHire or SWFI affected labor market outcomes**. This result was expected given the short follow-up period, but longer-term impacts may demonstrate stronger labor market outcomes for participants as compared to the control group. Researchers base this expectation on the positive program impacts for participation in and completion of occupational training programs. A planned 18-month follow-up will provide more evidence on participants' training and employment outcomes.

SEE FULL STUDY