



Evaluation of the TechHire and Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) Grant Programs

SUMMARY

In 2016, the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) funded contractor Westat to conduct the *Evaluation of the TechHire and Strengthening Working Families Initiative Grant Programs*. This evaluation includes an outcomes and implementation study of 53 TechHire and Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) programs, as well as a randomized controlled trial (RCT) impact study of a small subset of these programs—three TechHire and two SWFI programs. The Implementation Lessons for Practitioners issue brief reports on experiences of the five TechHire and SWFI programs participating in the RCT, examining data collected through program observation, interviews with staff, and review of program data. The Affordable Child Care issue brief focuses specifically on 13 SWFI programs and collected information from program staff through an online survey and a set of in-depth phone interviews.

The TechHire and SWFI programs provide training for high-tech jobs and support services for people with barriers to training and employment. TechHire supports young adult participants between the ages of 17 and 29 who have barriers to employment. SWFI supports low-income, low- to middle-skilled custodial parents of at least one dependent below the age of 13 or at least one dependent with a disability or developmental delay who might be older than 13.

This Department of Labor-funded study was a result of the Department's research priorities in 2016. 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 Lessons for Practitioners from the TechHire and SWFI Randomized Controlled Trial:

- **Program recruitment was a challenge, and staff cited three key methods for successful outreach and recruitment.** Specific challenges included generally (1) low unemployment rates during this pre-pandemic period, which made people less interested in training, (2) the relatively high skill levels needed for some of the training, and (3) a lack of dedicated recruitment staff. Recruitment strategies that program staff reported as being successful include partnerships with other organizations to encourage referrals, direct recruitment at Head Start centers, and social media and advertising.
- **Program staff described challenges preparing participants with low skills to enter high-skilled, high-tech jobs in a relatively short period of time.** Of the five programs participating in the randomized controlled trial, three of them



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focused on preparing participants for entry-level jobs within high-tech industries, hoping that advancement would lead to higher-level jobs in the future. One program that trained students for jobs in the information technology (IT) industry included a two-week pre-training career readiness and exploration module, which staff supported and valued.

- **Of the support services that programs offered, case management was widely valued, while childcare services were infrequently used.** Case management services facilitated communication with students and helped connect them to support services when needed, particularly when case managers felt that they had an appropriate caseload and when staff roles and responsibilities were clear. Some staff members credited case management with increasing student success. In contrast, participants only minimally used childcare services. Some programs considered alternative methods—such as changing class schedules or helping to formalize family and friend childcare networks—to expand childcare opportunities. Programs also found that designating a child care “navigator” or “concierge” to assist parents was important.
- **Program staff noted that a dedicated job developer would have enabled more substantive case management of training graduates.** Staff at programs without a dedicated job developer also described challenges with connecting participants to employment opportunities. Relationships with employers were key, and staff noted that these relationships were most successful when mutual benefits were clear.

Affordable Child Care Challenges and Solutions for Low-Income Parents Pursuing Training and Employment: Lessons from the Strengthening Working Families Initiative:

- **Childcare needs are closely tied to family circumstances,** such as the parent’s employment schedule and the age(s) or special needs of the child(ren). Program staff assessed these circumstances during the application and enrollment processes to connect participants with services.
- **Programs viewed support in navigating the complex childcare system as an essential service.** Staff identified lack of information about childcare options as a major career barrier to parents. Programs’ childcare navigators helped parent participants search for high-quality childcare as well as identified subsidies for which they were eligible and high-quality providers.
- **Program staff worked with childcare providers to better accommodate parents.** Successes included co-locating childcare with training programs;



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improving the alignment between childcare services and parents' needs; supporting providers in meeting licensing and other requirements to lower barriers to accepting child care subsidies; and streamlining participants' access to childcare.

[SEE FULL STUDY](#)

TIMEFRAME: 2021-2024

SUBMITTED BY: Westat

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SPONSOR: Chief Evaluation Office

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