



IMPROVING CAREER NAVIGATION SERVICES:
**Considerations for the Workforce Development
Community in Seattle**

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INTRODUCTION

Millions of workers in the U.S. have struggled to find economic opportunities over the last several years. While some of the challenges were brought on by the recession, the reality is that many individuals faced obstacles prior to the economic downturn.

In many cases, these individuals do not struggle because they lack the motivation or work ethic to succeed, but rather because they lack the resources, knowledge, and professional networks they need to create and follow an educational and employment plan that will lead to a well-paying career. Individuals, particularly those who are low-income, may not know what skills and jobs are in high demand in their local economy, what education and training they need to get those jobs, and what careers are a good fit for their own interests and goals. Even with that knowledge, some individuals face barriers related to navigating entry into and persistence through training and educational institutions, do not have the resources they need to pursue educational opportunities, or struggle to effectively balance work, life and educational demands. Finding a good job has also become increasingly difficult in many areas because the recession destroyed many of the middle-skill, middle-wage jobs and replaced them with low-wage jobs.¹

Many of these challenges have led some in the workforce development community to shift their strategies and develop new services. When the U.S. economy was healthy and good jobs were plentiful, workforce development efforts often focused on providing short-term job training and services. The realities of the new economy and the challenges faced by many of today's workers, however, has led many in the workforce development community to move towards supporting individuals through longer-term training programs, some of which involve individuals progressing through a series of educational and employment steps or levels known as career pathways.

The shift towards longer-term services and career pathways has been accompanied by a change in how some in the workforce development community frame the educational and employment services provided to individuals. While workforce development organizations have typically used language related to case management, wraparound support services, and job placement to describe their services, more workforce programs today refer to part of what they do as career navigation.

Career navigation services include activities that help individuals "make educational, training, and occupational choices and manage their careers."² Many of the services that fall under career navigation such as career assessments and advising, wrap-around support services, and job placement and search assistance, are not new and have been provided by many in the workforce community for decades. Other career navigation services, such as college navigation, which help individuals with "getting into college, completing a program and job placement," the integration of financial education and services into training programs, and the embedding of various career, financial, and life supports in the workplace, however, represent a new wave of services that are becoming increasingly common.

Career navigation services are most often embedded within a sectoral workforce development strategy that aims to prepare and connect low-income individuals to career opportunities in a particular industry sector. Institutions such as community-based organizations, community colleges, labor-management partnerships, worker centers and Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) represent a few of the organizations that implement sector strategies and provide career navigation services. These organizations bundle and mix career navigation services in a variety of ways depending upon the needs of their worker or student constituents and business partners, their institutional missions and goals, and their funding. As a result, a variety of career navigation services and approaches have emerged across the country.

Seattle was among the first areas in the country to begin using the term career navigation and deploying bundled navigation services through front-line staff, often known as career navigators. Seattle's early adoption of these concepts has created a strong foundation of career navigation services upon which the city can build to better support low-income workers to move up their individual career ladders. Many questions remain, on the other hand, about how Seattle can improve and coordinate career navigational services and systems to better reach and support various worker populations.

IN FOCUS 1: Summary of Considerations for Improving Career Navigation in Seattle

- **Develop a common framework and vision for career navigation services.**
- **Expand career navigation services into new settings such as the K-12 system and the workplace and to other populations such as ABE and ESL students, immigrants with higher levels of education, and temporary workers.**
- **Grow efforts to integrate intensive financial coaching, education, and services into workforce programming.**
- **Use data and technology to improve navigation services through data sharing agreements and online navigation tools that will help front-line workers improve service delivery.**
- **Pay careful attention to the job designs of career navigators and other front-line workers.**
- **Provide professional development to career navigators and other front-line workers in workforce development.**

For a more detailed discussion of these considerations, see Section IX in this report.

In this research, SJI will discuss some of the foundational pieces that are important in designing career navigation services, and discuss the range of navigation services and supports organizations provide. The report will also highlight some different organizational approaches to career navigation. Finally, we will discuss the experiences, challenges, and successes of workforce development organizations providing navigation services, the critical role front-line workers play in providing navigation, and offer some ideas for how Seattle may improve its career navigation services, which are summarized in IN FOCUS 1. This research primarily draws on more than a dozen interviews SJI conducted with workforce development leaders from across the country. The primary audience for this research is leaders from workforce intermediaries, nonprofit organizations, community colleges, and other workforce development stakeholders including investors who are involved in designing, implementing or supporting career navigation services.

II. DEFINING KEY TERMS

The concept of career navigation has spread widely among the workforce development community as noted in the introduction. Also as mentioned, career navigation services are often one part of a sectoral workforce development strategy, often known simply as sector strategies. Sector strategies are defined as:

“A systems approach to workforce development, typically on behalf of low-income individuals, that: targets a specific industry or cluster of occupations, working to develop a deep understanding of industry dynamics and the specific competitive situation and workforce needs of the industry’s employers within the region; intervenes through a credible organization, or set of organizations, crafting solutions tailored to that industry and its region; supports workers in improving their range of employment-related skills, improving the quality of work opportunities available to them; creates lasting changes in the labor market system that are positive for workers and employers.”³

At their core, sector strategies help low-income individuals to prepare and connect to employment opportunities in targeted sectors or occupations while also addressing the workforce challenges businesses may face in those industries.

The diverse set of approaches and strategies in sectoral workforce development can also be seen in the range of career navigation services provided to workers. The diversity in approach also means career navigation remains a somewhat amorphous concept. Many institutions and initiatives interpret and define career navigation differently. Other types of services such as case management, career counseling, job coaching, and college navigation are sometimes seen as synonymous with career navigation. Though many of these services may fall under the umbrella of career navigation, none of them can stand alone as being career navigation. For example, case management in the workforce

development field is often related to the coordination of various support services. Job coaching often involves providing individuals with advice or tools that help them better succeed in the workplace.

For the purposes of this research and report, we will use the definition provided by the Center for American Progress (CAP), which defines career navigation service as:

“Activities intended to help individuals of any age and at any point in their lives make educational, training, and occupational choices and manage their careers. Such services may be found in secondary schools, colleges, universities, training institutions, public employment services, the workplace, the volunteer or community sector, and the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis or be in person, on the phone, or via the Internet. Specific services may include the provision of career information, assessment and self-assessment tools, counseling interviews, career education programs, internships, work-search programs, and transition services.”⁴

We also distinguish career navigation from college navigation. SJI has defined college navigation as encompassing “a wide variety of services that range from assessment to education and career planning, to getting into college, completing a program and job placement.”⁵ College navigation is, thus, a subset of activities that falls under the larger umbrella of career navigation.

III. THE CASE FOR CAREER NAVIGATION IN SEATTLE

Before discussing how other organizations around the country have designed career navigation services and offering suggestions on how Seattle might improve its own work in this area, it is important to first understand the need for these services. Seattle is the fastest growing large city in the U.S. today⁶ in part because of its healthy economy and the numerous career opportunities that exist across the region's diverse economy. The Seattle metropolitan region's current unemployment rate of 5.0 percent is one of the lowest among the nation's largest cities.⁷ Despite these positive trends, a large number of workers in the Seattle region are struggling to find and build career and economic opportunities. In this section, we briefly outline some of the challenges of low-income workers in the Seattle metropolitan area.

MANY WORKERS REMAIN UNEMPLOYED

According to the latest numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates for 2013, approximately 142,000 workers in the Seattle metro area's civilian labor force are unemployed.⁸ While unemployment has dropped rapidly in the last year and continues to fall, the number of unemployed are of still great concern. Some of these workers do not know what occupations are growing in the region, and if they do, they may be unsure of the path they can follow to connect to these jobs. Many workers may be unfamiliar with community college or other educational institutions and how to enter and succeed in these settings.

MANY WORKERS REMAIN UNDEREMPLOYED AND TRAPPED IN LOW-WAGE WORK

While median household income in the Seattle area is relatively high at \$66,750, there are approximately 150,000 families in the area whose income is less than \$35,000 per year.⁹ Nearly 300,000 people in the Seattle metropolitan region are employed in service occupations with median earnings of just \$20,796.¹⁰ Many low-income individuals struggle to find stability in their lives and are trapped in dead-end, low-wage jobs with limited opportunities for skills or career advancement. According to researchers at the Center for Poverty Research at the University of California-Davis, "low-wage employment is often erratic and precarious, limiting workers' ability to learn new skills and search for better jobs."¹¹

YOUNG POPULATIONS ARE STRUGGLING IN TODAY'S LABOR MARKET

Across the country, more than six million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 are neither in school nor participating in the labor market, according to the Forum on Community Solutions at The Aspen Institute.¹² In the Seattle area, 24 percent of individuals between 16 and 19, and 14 percent of those between the ages of 20 and 24, are unemployed according to the American Community Survey.¹³ Research conducted by the Road Map Project found only 26 percent of students who graduated from a South King County High School in 2004 had earned a post-secondary credential by age 24.¹⁴ Many of these young populations have not been adequately exposed to different career options and likely do not have a good post-high school educational or career plan in place.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS ARE NOT ALWAYS DESIGNED TO MEET THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF TODAY'S WORKERS

In the Seattle metropolitan region, 29 percent of individuals 25 years and over have a high school education or less. Many of these individuals could benefit from post-secondary education. Community colleges, universities, apprenticeship programs and other training institutions, however, are often not well-equipped or resourced to meet the variety of worker needs they encounter. From a worker's perspective, navigating entry into these institutions, developing an appropriate training plan that leads to a quality career opportunity, and persisting until completion can be challenging, particularly for individuals who are low-income and/or who have barriers.

THE LABOR MARKET AND HOW PEOPLE MOVE THROUGH THEIR CAREERS HAS CHANGED

Over the last few decades, the economy has undergone dramatic transformations requiring workers to engage in life-long learning and skills development. Workers today may not only work for several employers over the course of their careers, they may also have several distinct careers. For many workers, navigating their way through a constantly changing labor market and the maze of opportunities, and pitfalls it may present is challenging. For some, these challenges result in extended periods of unemployment, and for others, a life-long career in low-wage or temporary jobs.

Addressing the problems above requires a number of strategies. Raising the minimum wage, as Seattle has done, expanding the earned income tax credit, and improving other public and employment policies would certainly help many of these individuals and families succeed. At the same time, creating more opportunities for individuals to explore, build and follow a career plan is also needed. Career navigation services that help individuals find their way in the labor market and upgrade their skills if needed should continue to be a priority.

IV. FOUNDATIONS OF SUCCESSFUL CAREER NAVIGATION SERVICES

To make robust career navigation services a priority in Seattle, it is important to understand the components and capacities that are critical to designing and implementing navigation services. Overall, providing effective career navigation services relies on a set of organizational capacities and knowledge as seen in **Figure 1**. Though not all effective navigation services include these foundational elements, the initiatives researched and interviewed for this research often demonstrated or discussed the importance of these in their work.



FIGURE 1

UNDERSTANDING OF BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY NEEDS, AND HIGH-DEMAND OCCUPATIONS AND SKILLS

Effective career navigation services are often rooted in a deep understanding of the industry sector(s) in which the programs are helping individuals to pursue careers. This knowledge base begins with understanding what sectors and occupations are growing and in demand in the local labor market. Program operators then build relationships with businesses in these sectors to better understand what types of skills, knowledge, and experience these businesses need from their workforce. All of this industry knowledge helps programs provide informed career counseling, develop and use assessment and screening tools, create training curricula, and provide targeted, industry- or occupation-specific job search, placement and retention services.

UNDERSTANDING OF WORKERS' SKILLS, NEEDS, BARRIERS AND GOALS

On the other side of the labor market equation, effective career navigation strategies also depend on a deep understanding of workers. To a certain extent, some of this information may be captured

through traditional labor market information and government data sources. Much of this intelligence, however, comes from repeated engagement and dialogue with the worker community(s) being served. Programs interviewed for this research often reported spending a good amount of time and resources upfront to understand their clients' basic skills and educational levels, technical skills and work experience, career interests and goals, and the barriers that may prevent them from being successful in a training program or in the workplace. Similar to the information gathered about industry and business needs, the information gathered about workers informs the design and provision of various career service services.

UNDERSTANDING OF TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PATHWAYS

Career navigation services often involve supporting individuals in making, pursuing, and completing a training or educational goal. Programs may help individuals to enter an apprenticeship program, a certificate or degree program at a community or technical college, or training provided through a union-affiliated organization. To effectively provide career navigation, programs depend on a deep understanding of one or more of these training and educational institutions and systems. Programs need to understand the processes and procedures around application, enrollment, registration, financial aid, graduation, student services, and much more. If the training institution provides numerous training options, program operators need to be well-versed in those different educational pathways and how they align with occupational opportunities in the labor market. Programs providing navigation must also understand the institutional and systemic challenges within these training and educational organizations that may prevent their participants from success. In many cases, programs providing career navigation services are housed within the training or educational institution, or work to build strong partnerships with those institutions.

UNDERSTANDING OF SUPPORT SERVICES AND SYSTEMS

Another part of the knowledge base often required to design and deliver effective navigation is a solid understanding of various support systems and services. In order to be successful in training and the workplace, many workers will need additional support. Public benefits such as food stamps or housing assistance, assistance overcoming substance or alcohol abuse, domestic violence services, child-care supports, and transportation assistance represent just a few of the many different types of supports workers may need. Some of this assistance may be unique to the occupation or sector. For example, construction workers may need assistance purchasing tools, equipment or a car as they begin their career. Programs providing career navigation services provide these support services directly or partner with public agencies or other community-based organizations to make these services available. Programs may also need to know how to offer academic supports such as additional tutoring.

ABILITY TO CREATE STRONG BUSINESS AND CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Programs providing career navigation services need to build and sustain a range of effective collaborations. The ability to build relationships with businesses, as noted earlier, is needed to stay informed about changing industry skill needs and occupational demands; to build effective curricula, training, and support service strategies; and to help participants find employment opportunities. Providing career navigation services also requires working with educational and training providers, community-based organizations, public agencies, and other institutions that can help individuals access a wide range of supports and training opportunities. Partnerships are also vital in creating systems changes that expand services and opportunities for workers and students and are important in moving any advocacy or policy agenda forward.

ABILITY TO COORDINATE AND BLEND MULTIPLE FUNDING STREAMS

In addition to partnering across institutions, building a complete set of career navigation services to serve low-income individuals and those with barriers requires organizations to blend many funding streams. Programs interviewed for this research reported using a variety of funds to support their efforts including government grants, philanthropic dollars, and industry contributions. Programs supporting students in college in particular need to know how to manage, coordinate, and package different funding such as Pell Grants, Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career grants, WIA funds, and philanthropic dollars to support the students through training.

SKILLED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE FRONT-LINE STAFF

As discussed in more detail later in this report, appropriately skilled and knowledgeable front-line staff are also foundational to providing effective career navigation. Many of the foundational components described in this section, such as a strong understanding of workers, businesses and industry, and training and educational institutions, and an ability to forge collaborations are also requisite skills for front-line workers. These workers also must often have a strong ability to case manage, coach, motivate, and effectively impart knowledge and resources to participants.

V. CAREER NAVIGATION SERVICES

Seattle Jobs Initiative interviewed more than a dozen workforce development leaders in the U.S. involved in implementing or supporting workforce development programs that included at least some career navigation services. The workforce development programs and initiatives interviewed and researched by SJI reveal that a large and diverse set of career navigation services are being provided. While helping workers make informed choices about their educational and career plans is certainly a part of career navigation, our interviews suggest career navigation goes well beyond advising and coaching and extends into providing direct supports and assistance to help address a wide variety of barriers and issues that prevent an individual from being successful in choosing and following a career path. Interviewees described providing some combination of the following nine career navigation services to their worker constituents:

Career advising is structured around providing workers with information and guidance about potential occupations and career opportunities. Advising may include tasks such as career exploration, which helps workers identify and explore potential occupations that are in high demand in the labor market, and career assessment, which assists workers in understanding how their personal skills, interests and values align with different occupational opportunities.

Goal setting includes identifying short- and long-term educational and employment goals.

College or training navigation includes academic advising to help workers understand and choose among the different educational or training programs, pathways, and courses that align with their career goals. Helping workers with processes related to applying to, enrolling and persisting in a training program are also a regular part of this type of navigation. Strategies may include help with navigating college, apprenticeship, or other institutions or modes of training.

Job readiness training includes the various non-technical education and training provided to workers to help them be successful in the world of work. Training may help workers build skills in areas such as communication, conflict resolution, critical thinking, and workplace professionalism.

Financial education and services helps workers understanding budgeting, banking, asset building, and other financial literacy topics. Strategies may also help workers with accessing financial services and developing financial plans.

Barrier identification and removal involves identifying and addressing academic barriers such as basic skills deficiencies, as well as non-academic barriers such as a lack of childcare, housing, or transportation. Strategies may provide a number of support services such as case management that coordinate supports, additional tutoring or transportation stipends, and may include linkages to public assistance to address these barriers.

Motivational supports include activities that help encourage workers to pursue and meet their goals. Strategies may include building peer support networks, mentoring programs, coaching strategies, or other activities that help students persist in training. See IN FOCUS 3 for more information on how organizations provide motivational supports.

Job Search and placement services help workers conduct job searches, improve job interview skills, build resumes and cover letters, and connect to internship and job opportunities.

Job retention and career advancement supports help workers maintain their employment and assists workers with the identification and pursuit of job promotions and career advancement opportunities.

IN FOCUS 2: Moving Career Navigation Tools Online

Virginia's Education Wizard is a web-based career and educational planning tool that allows students to take a variety of skill and career assessments, explore and learn about what careers are in demand in their labor market for which they may be a good fit, learn what colleges offer programs that provide training for those careers, compare college programs and costs, access test preparation resources, find and apply for financial aid, apply for admission to a Virginia community college, learn about transfer options, access a course planner that tells them what classes they need to take to complete specific programs, build resumes, and learn job interview tips. The Wizard features a talking Avatar that guides visitors through the resources. Since its release in March 2009, the Wizard has experienced almost 2 million unique visitors.¹⁵

IN FOCUS 3: Integrating Motivational Supports into Career Navigation

Interviewees for this report commonly expressed that front-line workers spend a great deal of time keeping their participants motivated. While most programs rely on navigators to play the role of motivator and do not formally structure motivational programming, some programs have purposefully built in activities specifically designed around motivation. These motivational activities range from using motivational teaching techniques, peer support networks, and mentoring programs.

Training Futures, a partner of Northern Virginia Community Colleges, incorporates “quote bombardment” into the classroom. Students are exposed to over 500 motivational quotes during their six-month training, which they analyze and discuss. Students also participate in Toastmasters to boost their confidence and communication skills.

Capital IDEA in Austin provides weekly navigation sessions for their community college students that cover a range of topics, including goal setting and time management, and focus on building peer support networks. Navigation sessions are used to help keep students engaged and motivated.

The SEIU Northwest Training Partnership, which trains and supports home care aides in Washington State, developed a peer mentoring program that matches entry-level aides with more experienced aides. The mentoring program provides job retention and emotional support to new home care aides as they begin their employment, and helps them develop professional skills in areas such as communication and problem solving.

VI. CAREER NAVIGATION STRATEGIES FROM AROUND THE U.S.

There is no one-size-fits-all model for providing career navigation and the combination and intensity of career navigation services typically differs across initiatives. Some initiatives described implementing virtually all of the services mentioned in the previous section while others described placing a focus on just a few of these services for their clients. For example, interviewees from community colleges tended to emphasize academic advising and college navigation in describing their career navigation services. Interviewees from workforce nonprofit organizations, on the other hand, sometimes described a heavier emphasis on support services, job placement, and job retention services. The use of different types of partnerships and collaborations with various community organizations, social service agencies, educational institutions, and businesses can also vary widely. Below, we provide six different examples of organizations providing career navigation services in order to illustrate the diversity and commonalities in approach. Most of these strategies are collaborative efforts that span and leverage the resources and staff of multiple organizations.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE (NOVA)

Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) has several strategies and partnerships that help a variety of populations to navigate their careers and the college experience. NOVA's Community-Based Organizations Co-Enrollment Programs Office creates and oversees partnerships with workforce nonprofits to provide education and training to predominantly low-income populations in the region. Students typically participate in sector-based training provided by the nonprofit that has been approved for credit by NOVA. In addition to providing the training, the nonprofit partner conducts the outreach and provides case management, support services, and job placement. NOVA assists the

students with the FASFA and provides college orientation sessions, as well as additional counseling and college navigation if the student decides to pursue additional training at the college.

NOVA's other navigation efforts include intensive career counseling and advising. The Adult Career Pathways Program recruits students through large community information sessions and referrals from community partners and the One-Stop system. Students interested in pursuing a college credential at NOVA are assigned to a NOVA career counselor who provides assistance and guidance throughout the entirety of the student's college experience from enrollment to graduation. The counselor provides one-on-one assistance to students for up to three years to help them develop and follow a career and educational plan. Finally, NOVA's Pathways to Baccalaureate Program embeds pathway or transition counselors at partnering local high schools. Pathway counselors recruit students into the program who are interested in college, but who have no idea how to navigate the "college access maze."¹⁶ After the pathway counselor helps the student navigate entry into the college, the student is immediately enrolled in a College Success Skills Class. They are also transitioned to a retention counselor who advises students on academic and personal challenges throughout their time at NOVA and helps them transition to the four-year college of their choice. Many students transfer to George Mason University where there is yet another pathway counselor who provides them with assistance in navigating the university.

CAPITAL IDEA

Capital IDEA in Austin, Texas self-identifies as a sponsorship organization that provides financial support and wrap-around supports to low-income adults pursuing higher education. Participants are typically sponsored in programs at a local community college, with many pursuing training in health care. Participants are recruited through community information sessions, referrals from community partners, and through word-of-mouth through Capital IDEA alumni and their families. To help their students be successful, Capital IDEA provides an intensive amount of academic and non-academic supports. The College Preparatory Academy is offered to students who need to brush up on their basic skills prior to taking the college entrance exam and enrolling in college coursework. Capital IDEA employs eight career navigators whose primary responsibility is to help students navigate community college processes such as registration and financial aid. Navigators stay in regular contact with their assigned students throughout their time in college to monitor their academic progress and intervene when something may impede that progress. Navigators also receive copies of their students' grades from the college and work with college staff and faculty to monitor students' performance and identify any challenges they may be experiencing. Career navigators also facilitate weekly peer support sessions on relevant topics such as time management, study habits, and conflict resolution. These sessions also encourage the students to form study groups, provide peer tutoring and mentoring, and network with one another. Capital IDEA's employment manager is responsible for employer engagement, soft skills development, job search and job placement.

JUMPSTART

Jumpstart in Baltimore, Maryland is a 14-week pre-apprenticeship program managed by Job Opportunities Task Force that prepares and connects individuals to employment and apprenticeship opportunities in the construction sector. Employment in the construction sector presents some unique challenges. The work is physical and often outdoors. Construction is also cyclical and many jobs are short term, so lay-offs are inevitable. Entering and persisting through an apprenticeship program can also be difficult. Jumpstart staff make sure participants understand these unique aspects of the construction sector, that they are exposed to and learn about different construction occupations, and that they are a good fit for their chosen construction career. Once they graduate from Jumpstart and enter employment, participants receive ongoing career guidance and support until they can navigate their new careers in the industry. Participants may be assisted with finding another job after a lay-off. If a participant enters a construction job after graduation, but not an apprenticeship, Jumpstart staff will provide ongoing assistance until the participant is able to enter an employer-sponsored apprenticeship program if that is his or her goal. Because having a driver's license and reliable transportation is critical to maintaining a career in construction, Jumpstart also works on the programmatic and policy level to ensure participants' barriers around transportation are removed.

WORKLIFE PARTNERSHIP

WorkLife Partnership is a not-for-profit organization in Denver, Colorado that partners with member businesses such as hospitals, manufacturers and government agencies to provide services and training to the businesses' employees. Services are designed to help improve workers' retention, productivity, and success in the workplace. Each member business is provided a navigator who helps employees address barriers to work related to transportation, health, housing, childcare, and finances. Financial education services and planning comprise a large part of what the navigator provides. In addition to helping employees pursue additional education and skill building opportunities, WorkLife also provides classes in the workplace to build computer literacy, English language skills, and general life skills such as conflict resolution and stress management.

1199C TRAINING AND UPGRADING FUND

The 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund in Philadelphia provides job training, basic skills instruction and employment services to union members and community residents interested in pursuing or advancing a career in the healthcare sector. A team of career coaches support incumbent workers to advance along their career pathway and job seekers to enter a career path by obtaining the skills and credentials to qualify for post-secondary education and/or employment. They help workers and

the unemployed develop individualized career and educational plans, learn about the occupational steps on a variety of healthcare career ladders, and identify and choose educational programming at the Training Fund's learning center or area community colleges or universities. For incumbent workers covered by the Taft Hartley education benefit, career counselors help members determine the best use of the Training Fund's generous tuition reimbursement, full-time scholarship, and free continuing education opportunities, and also assist members in developing strategies to manage their employment while in training. Members receive assistance with resume development, improving job interview skills, and job placement.

Community residents who are not members of the union are also eligible for a variety of case management, coaching and employment services. For example, post-secondary and employment transition coaches in the Training Fund's Career and College Readiness Department support students in planning their next steps as they are working to improve their basic and academic skills and earn their GED, and participating in career exploration and college bridge programs. The coaches work with the students to develop a career pathways plan that support students in transitioning into employment, vocational training through the Training Fund, or college certificate and degree programs at a partnering college or university. The Training Fund offers a variety of preparatory and credentialed vocational training programs that include wrap-around case management services and, where possible, other supportive services such as transportation assistance. Job developers assist with job search and job placement activities as well as retention services. A separate department focuses specifically on programming for young people ages 17-24. By providing work-based learning experiences for participants in educational programming and occupational training, youth are prepared to transition successfully into employment.

THE HEALTH CAREERS COLLABORATIVE (HCC)

The Health Careers Collaborative (HCC), an employer-led initiative in Cincinnati, Ohio supported by Partners for a Competitive Workforce, was created to address the shortage of employment in health related fields for unemployed individuals and low-wage incumbent workers. The HCC's efforts include helping frontline incumbent workers at partnering hospitals, as well as unemployed and underemployed job seekers, to access training and advance along a career pathway in allied health. Employer-embedded employment and career support coordinators at the hospitals help incumbent workers determine and pursue the next step on their career path. Coordinators help individuals select training programs, access tuition pre-payment for training, and provide job retention supports. Coordinators work with the local community college to provide training and with local community based organizations on support services and the recruitment of new entry-level workers. Though initially funded and supported through a Department of Labor American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant, the coordinators today are funded through the hospitals' funds.

IN FOCUS 4: Career Navigation Services Embedded in the Workplace

Many career navigation services are housed within traditional workforce institutions such as One-Stop Centers, community colleges, and workforce nonprofit agencies. A smaller number of workforce development efforts have embedded their services in the workplace. A consortium of organizations including The SOURCE in Grand Rapids, WorkLife Partnership in Denver, and CARES of Washington in Seattle help provide case management and career navigation services at the workplace of participating employers. These strategies help workers address a variety of life, work and educational issues and aim to improve retention for the businesses. Other strategies such as those implemented by the Health Careers Collaborative in Cincinnati, and many union-affiliated organizations, have helped provide career navigation services to incumbent workers in low-wage, entry-level jobs in order to help them access training and higher wage job opportunities.

As seen in these examples, organizations approach career navigation in various ways. The structure and combination of a program's career navigation services can depend on a number of factors. The worker or student population's needs and challenges are a key factor in determining what types of career navigation services are provided. Project for Pride in Living, a nonprofit workforce organization in Minneapolis that partners with local community and technical colleges to help low-income residents access training, focuses a lot on barrier resolution. According to, May Xiong, Director of Employment Training for Project for Pride in Living, "We spend a lot of time and have a lot of up front conversations and activities around barrier identification. We know our participants need to be in a stable position before they pursue training if they are going to be successful. We also know our participants need work experience if they are to get a job so we ensure all of our participants go through an internship."

The workforce needs and challenges of partnering businesses can have an impact on design decisions. In Denver, WorkLife Partnership works with partnering businesses to address their retention issues by providing a range of career navigation and supports to their workers. According to Liddy Romero, Executive Director at WorkLife Partnership, "We expected to help people pursue additional training and education, and while we definitely help a lot of our clients to do that, we

found out that what people mostly need right now to stay in and be successful in their jobs is help addressing financial barriers so that they could fix their cars, deal with creditors, and manage their finances.” For more information on how organizations have implemented financial education and services, see IN FOCUS 5.

The organization’s institutional capacities and their mission can also influence what career navigation strategies an organization implements. Unsurprisingly, community colleges involved in providing career navigation services tend to focus heavily on college navigation and persistence activities. Funding streams that dictate and measure success and outcomes in different ways can influence service design too. Workforce nonprofit organizations, that are often funded based on job placement numbers and also have may have a jobs related mission, will focus much of their energy on activities that support employment outcomes, for instance.

Regardless of how an organization combines and structures various career navigation services, implementing navigation strategies relies heavily on front-line workers. In the next section of the report, we discuss what our interviewed revealed about the front-line workers charged with helping workers to navigate their careers.

IN FOCUS #5: Integrating Financial Education and Services into Career Navigation

More workforce development organizations, including community colleges, have in recent years recognized the importance of building individuals' financial skills and knowledge as a critical part of enabling them to manage their careers.

At Skyline College in the Bay Area of California, SparkPoint centers provide students with a bundled set of academic, career, employment and financial services. In addition to receiving services from the college's Career Services Center and the California Employment Development Department, students may participate in financial education classes, receive individual financial coaching, and access banking, tax, and asset development services and programs. Other programs interviewed through this research including Instituto del Progreso Latino, Project for Pride in Living, and WorkLife Partnership also highlighted the importance of financial services in their navigation models.

WorkLife Partnership's deliberate use of a strategy to combat the "cliff effect" was a particularly unique strategy identified through our interviews. The cliff effect relates to a situation low-wage workers face in which they lose public benefits such as the earned income tax credit or child-care assistance as their earnings increase. "A benefit cliff occurs when just a small increase in income leads to the complete termination of a benefit. The result is that parents can work and earn more, while their families end up worse off than they were before."¹⁷ Through the BridgeBuilder Program, navigators at WorkLife Partnership help employees avoid the "cliff effect" as they move away from public assistance and into self-sufficiency.

VII. FRONT-LINE WORKERS IN CAREER NAVIGATION

The lynchpin behind the delivery of most career navigation services is the frontline worker who works with individuals to develop and follow their career plans. Interviewees of this research had a number of job titles for these individuals including career navigator, academic advisor, pathway counselor and career coach. Job developers and employment placement coordinators are other positions that may be involved in providing career navigation services.

JOB ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The use of different titles for front-line workers who provide career navigation services reflects differences in how various organizations have structured the roles and responsibilities these workers. One interviewee for this research said their navigators function as “traffic cops” who help point students at the community college in the right directions. Another interviewee said their navigators are more like “career coaches.” A different navigator described her role by saying, “I am a guide for my students,” and another said, “My main role is to be present at the college and to help students overcome the personal issues that get in the way of them being successful.” A manual for navigators for the Colorado Sun Initiative stated that “the Navigator’s main job is to be a mentor in the broadest, most general sense of the word.”¹⁸

In some strategies, a navigator or front-line worker may be responsible for everything from outreach and recruitment, to college or training navigation, to job placement. In other instances, these roles may be spread across a number of individuals. For example, at Instituto del Progreso Latino, a community-based organization in Chicago, academic advisors do the recruitment and orientation,

the assessments and intake, the career counseling and goal setting, and the college navigation. Case managers help link participants to public assistance and support services and job developers are responsible for job search and placement activities.

The caseloads of navigators varied greatly among programs interviewed, ranging from 40 up to 250 participants per navigator. Navigators solely responsible for college navigation and persistence strategies tend to be assigned heavier case loads, while those with additional responsibilities such as job placement typically are assigned smaller case loads. Some navigators with higher caseloads described systems for categorizing their clients based on need, self-sufficiency and stability. Those clients with higher needs and less self-sufficiency or stability in their lives may need to be contacted or met with once every week or two, while those with lower needs may only need to be checked in with occasionally.

Reflecting on the use of navigators in the Twin Cities area, Andrea Ferstan, Director of Education and Jobs at Greater Twin Cities United Way, said, "Navigators look different from organization to organization. Their roles and responsibilities depend on the capacity of the organization, the population being served and their challenges, the industry sector they are working in and much more. Some models have navigators that focus primarily or solely on educational success and job placement and retention, and others, have navigators who additionally focus on multiple levels of employer engagement within a sector."

In navigation models focused on helping students complete a community college program and enter employment, many interviewees described challenges in fitting all of the needed career navigation tasks and responsibilities into one role. In some cases, a navigator may be responsible for outreach and recruitment, career assessment and advising, college navigation, and job placement. Jennifer Freeman, Project Manager for the Transformation Agenda for the Massachusetts Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, said "We were finding that the role as it was defined by the job description ended up being too big. The navigator was a crucial position, but the nature of the role had to be more carefully defined by each site, depending on the identified needs at that site, the capacity of other staff, and the particular strengths of the navigator. " Other interviewees echoed these sentiments, saying the often prescribed roles of navigators involve tasks such as outreach, college navigation, and job placement that require different skill sets. "Our pathway navigator position is a challenging role because it asks the navigator to assume a diverse set of responsibilities," said Judy Stoffel at Kirkwood Community College.

SJI examined eight job descriptions for frontline-workers providing career navigation services. Common tasks include responsibility for assisting participants with developing a career and training plan, navigating college or other training systems, and obtaining support services. Most of the job descriptions stated the position involved duties related to conducting vocational and academic

Many organizations implementing navigation strategies have refined the roles and responsibilities of their front-line workers to address these challenges. Some organizations report that they try to build stronger partnerships with other organizations to help with certain tasks such as outreach and recruitment. Others have shifted certain responsibilities to other staff positions internally. Eva Rios, Director of Operations at Capital IDEA, noted, "Our career navigators don't play a strong role in employer engagement, job placement, or outreach and recruitment. We keep them focused on supporting students through their community college experience, which requires a different skill set from employer engagement and outreach activities."

Some organizations have redesigned services to include more group work with participants to be more efficient and increase the amount of time front-line workers have available to complete other tasks. For organizations with ample resources, hiring additional navigators to ease caseloads or creating additional positions such as job developers who can focus on job placement and employer engagement has also been critical.

QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUNDS

SJI also asked interviewees questions about the backgrounds and skill sets they looked for when hiring career navigators and similar front-line positions. The responses varied widely depending on how the initiative designed the job of those individuals. In almost all instances, interviewees described wanting navigators or front-line workers who could work and build relationships with low-income individuals and those with barriers. One interviewee went so far as to say that "We want our front-line workers to look like and have had some of the same experiences as our client population. That helps form a stronger bond and trust with the client and it means our navigators have a stronger understanding of what the real barriers and challenges are, because they have lived it too. This helps them know how to motivate students." One navigator commented, "I was once a low-income, single parent trying to work and go to school at the same time. So I know what my students are going through and I can connect with them because I have a similar background."

Some programs reported they looked for individuals with an associate's degree and others looked for a bachelor's degree and some even looked for candidates with master's degrees. While programs' job descriptions and job postings often listed some kind of degree as preferred, the individual's skill set and work experience seemed more important in hiring decisions. The primary skill sets and backgrounds of front-line workers involved in career navigation roles mentioned by interviewees included:

- **Social service or case management backgrounds**
- **Knowledge or experience working in community college or other relevant educational settings such as with apprenticeship programs**
- **Experience in the private sector or in a particular industry such as manufacturing**
- **Job development, job coaching or human resources experience**

SJI also reviewed the required qualifications and backgrounds stated in the job descriptions we obtained. Required job qualifications listed in these descriptions often included skills in customer service, written and oral communication, interpersonal, computers, problem solving, and multitasking. Descriptions often stated a requirement that applicants have a commitment to diversity, an ability to work on teams as well as independently, and an ability to maintain confidentiality. Some job descriptions asked for candidates with experience working in workforce development or case management, knowledge of the community college system, and/or experience working with at-risk or nontraditional populations.

The skill sets and backgrounds required for career navigators are a function of how each initiative has designed that role. In cases where navigators are asked to wear various hats and play various roles, interviewees described wanting navigators who understand education, support service and employment strategies and systems. Organizations that designed broader roles for their navigators reported that it's often difficult to find individuals with all of the skill sets they are looking for in that position.

In instances where career navigators are assigned job placement and employer engagement roles, programs look primarily for individuals who know how to talk to and build relationships with businesses. Some programs said they look for individuals with experience in human resources or the private sector because they understand how businesses operate and think. Programs focused on helping students pursue training at a community college look for navigators who have worked in or have a good understanding of the community college system. Job candidates with existing relationships with college staff and faculty are highly coveted.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Through this research SJI also wanted to better understand how navigators and front-line workers are taught or developed to do their jobs. Few formal training options exist in colleges or universities for the workforce development field, though some communities have attempted to offer more formalized training. Front-line workers and navigators are likely to “stumble or fall into” the workforce field similar to many other workforce development professionals. Though some front-line workers or navigators have a background in education, the private sector, or social services that is helpful in their roles, many learn primarily through their experience on the job.

SJI asked what professional development or ongoing learning is provided to individuals involved in implementing career navigation services and received a variety of responses. In some places, workforce development programs work to build peer learning communities among their navigators and front-line workers. These peer learning communities offer workers the opportunity to network with one another, discuss common challenges, and share effective practices and strategies.

Some programs helping workers navigate college systems reported using the navigator training offered by the National College Transition Network (NCTN). NCTN offers two online courses. The first, *Finding True North—Role of the Navigator*, is a self-paced course that introduces the primary roles and responsibilities of a navigator and explores other topics such as different advising approaches. The second course, *Navigating Pathways to Opportunity: Comprehensive Student Supports*, is a

The Frontline Focus Training Institute created by the Chicago Jobs Council aims to establish job development as a professional field of work and to improve the capacity of front-line workforce development professionals to better meet the needs of workers and businesses. The Institute provides classes such as Introduction to the Workforce System, Intro to the Workforce Investment Act, Documentation of Case Notes, Conducting Quality Intake Assessments, Helping Clients with Low Literacy, Motivational Interviewing, and a variety of other trainings on employer engagement. Certifications are offered for job development and workforce leadership.

The Institute also offers membership in the Frontline Workforce Association. The Association encourages networking, support and collaboration among frontline workers outside of formal trainings. The Association hosts regular information meetings to offer workers the chance to share best practices, and informal social gatherings.

The Institute and Association are supported through philanthropic contributions, which allow the training to be offered at low cost. The Institute trained over 274 job developers between 2013 and 2014 from nearly 100 different organizations.²⁰

facilitated class that explores strategies and practices for helping students to persist in career pathway programs.²¹ One program provides training to their workers through the Center for Credentialing and Education's Global Career Development Facilitator program. This program includes 120 hours of training helps workers develop competencies in career facilitation processes, labor market information, career assessment, job search and placement techniques and working with diverse populations. As seen in IN FOCUS 6, the Chicago Jobs Council has created an institute that offers training to front-line workers in workforce development, as well as an association.

Program leaders interviewed said the professional development offered was not only important to helping navigators do their jobs better, but also for motivation and job retention efforts. One program leader said, "Like anyone in a job, our navigators want to be growing and learning more. And they want some nice letters or credentials they can put after their names."

XIII. CHALLENGES IN CAREER NAVIGATION

SJI's interviews aimed to get an understanding of what types of challenges and barriers are common across career navigation strategies. Below, we discuss some of the common themes we heard during our interviews with programs across the country.

PARTICIPANT CHALLENGES

Interviewees described a number of challenges their participants or clients face that makes career navigation often difficult. Not surprisingly, many said the populations they work with face a number of barriers and "life challenges." As these challenges arise, individuals may lose motivation and sight of the goals they are trying to achieve, and the temptation to give up and quit the pursuit of their educational or employment goals may be strong. Most of the programs we interviewed that are supporting students in community college said that their navigators spend most of their time addressing student barriers, reminding them of their goals, and making sure they are engaged and persisting in their classes. Interviewees noted the significant challenges of getting students through longer-term pathways and degree programs in particular. Programs serving incumbent workers noted the challenges participants face in going to school and working at the same time.

Interviewees also described issues with participants not initially knowing how to ask questions or self-advocate. One college navigator commented, "Some of our students initially do not receive the services or help they need on campus because they do not know how to advocate for themselves." Programs reported spending a lot of time on providing college navigation services in these instances.

BUILDING AND RETAINING SKILLED FRONT-LINE STAFF

Across initiatives, interviewees expressed a desire to offer more support and professional development to front-line staff providing career navigation services. Many interviewees stated that these workers have difficult jobs that often require them to wear many different hats and develop many different skill sets. Some interviewees said career navigation positions have a high turnover rate. Reasons for high turnover included low pay and the frustrations and stress of doing a difficult job.

BUILDING CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

By their very nature, career navigation strategies require working across different institutions. Interviewees talked about a number of challenges related to building working relationships across organizations and systems. Workforce nonprofit leaders supporting students in community college noted the challenges of building relationships with college faculty and leadership. Some college leaders mentioned struggling to build good relationships with community-based organizations. Interviewees said “balancing different missions and goals” and “different institutional cultures” made partnerships challenging.

One complicating factor in building cross-institutional relationships is the perceived lack of proof that navigation is effective. In some communities, college leaders have expressed a desire to see proof that navigation provided by nonprofits is working on their campuses. While many individual workforce development organizations report positive education and employment outcomes for their participants receiving navigational services, the aggregate impact and outcomes across organizations implementing navigation services can often be difficult to measure. As a result, some stakeholders may not buy in to the strategy.

BUILDING INTER-COLLEGE RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS

College staff and navigators employed by colleges mentioned the challenges of building cross-departmental partnerships and relationships within the colleges. One interviewee said, “Getting the buy in and support of upper-level leadership at the college for our strategies is the biggest challenge.” A navigator employed by the college reported, “Faculty buy in can be challenging to develop.”

PARTICIPANT DATA

Interviewees also identified a number of data-related challenges in implementing navigation services. One nonprofit leader said tracking long-term employment and earnings outcomes for participants they help train and place in employment can be difficult, time consuming, and resource intensive. Sharing data across institutions also proves challenging for some organizations. Nonprofit organizations partnering with community colleges described issues with obtaining and collecting data on students’ educational outcomes and academic performance. Other nonprofit organizations partnering with businesses to provide services to incumbent workers described challenges in getting data from businesses that would allow them to measure impact and return on investment.

IX. CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY IN SEATTLE

Workforce leaders in Seattle cited a number of challenges related to providing career navigation, many of them similar to those cited by organizations in our interviews and discussed in the previous section. Most of the programs interviewed in Seattle are involved in efforts to help low-income populations enter and succeed in community college and then to obtain employment. As a result, most of the challenges cited by these stakeholders relate to these types of services and strategies.

Interviewees in Seattle said some community colleges and workforce nonprofits are challenged to develop effective partnerships across institutions to provide services. Nonprofit leaders and navigators have sometimes struggled to gain traction with college leaders and faculty, while community college leaders have often been challenged to figure out how to adapt to the influx of navigators on their campuses. Front-line workers such as career navigators face a number of challenges in carrying out their roles and responsibilities, and some leaders in the workforce development community believe there appears to be a strong desire to revisit how these jobs are structured and what professional development is needed for these workers. While many individual

workforce development organizations report positive education and employment outcomes for their participants receiving navigational services, the aggregate scale and impact of college navigation services as a whole remains difficult to measure (*For a short discussion on the evidence behind career navigation, please see Appendix A: Evidence on Career Navigation Strategies in the Workforce Development Field*). The challenge has resulted in part because organizations interpret and implement college navigation differently.

While some workforce nonprofits and colleges have developed deeper relationships through their career navigation work, many funders and organizations providing navigation services in Seattle are siloed from one another. This lack of coordination has resulted in a fragmented set of navigation services, rather than a *system* of navigation, which has likely resulted in some system-wide inefficiencies and prevented some workers and students from receiving services. Finally, several interviewees noted that navigation services have been directed at populations that are college ready or near-college ready, and that other populations, such as those in adult basic education and ESL classes are not receiving the career navigation they need. Overall, interviewees also stated a need to expand career navigation services to other underserved communities in Seattle. Below, we discuss some options Seattle workforce development leaders may want to consider for improving career navigation.

Developing a Common Framework and Vision for Career Navigation Services

Various groups of workforce development organizations and stakeholders in the Seattle area are engaged in dialogue about improving and coordinating their efforts around career navigation. These conversations, however, are disconnected from one another and an overarching systems-level dialogue is noticeably absent from the community. This lack of dialogue is creating additional silos in what many believe is already a fractured workforce development system. These fractures, of course, result in a system that is hard for businesses, workers, and even workforce development and educational leaders and staff to understand. While disparate funding sources, institutional missions, performance measurements, and stakeholder interests may hinder collaboration in other areas, the delivery of career navigation services is an area where the workforce development community could coordinate its efforts. Leaders of workforce development organizations, community colleges, and other stakeholders such as funders or partners from the K-12 system should convene to explore how they may achieve the following:

- **Map existing navigation services across the community to better understand differences in approach and what gaps may exist in service delivery**
- **Develop consensus around what career navigation services may be standardized or institutionalized in various settings, including in community colleges**

- **Create common career assessment, planning and tracking forms or online portfolios that participants can retain and revisit on their career journeys**
- **Develop stronger hand-offs between organizations and navigators as workers transition to different educational programs or new stages of their career**
- **Create professional development and peer-learning opportunities for front-line workers and career navigators**
- **Expand navigation into other areas such as the K-12 system and the workplace and engage more businesses in offering career advancement and training options to incumbent workers**
- **Develop shared metrics around post-secondary attainment, job placement and retention, earnings, and career advancement that promotes transparency and accountability across the system**

A conversation such as this is certainly not a small endeavor, nor is it a short-term effort. Among the workforce development leaders interviewed for this report, however, there is an irrefutable desire to figure out how career navigation services, and workforce development efforts in general, can be better coordinated and resources better leveraged to create a system that successfully serves all workers and businesses in need. A first step may be for community college leadership to facilitate a dialogue among the various workforce organizations providing navigation services to college students about the challenges and opportunities that are being experienced in this area of career navigation.

Expanding Career Navigation Services

From researching other career navigation services around the country and talking to workforce development stakeholders in Seattle, there are a number of opportunities to expand navigation services to other populations. Workers need different types of career navigation services as they arrive at different points in their educational pathways and careers. For Seattle, much of the focus on career navigation has been placed on helping community college students and there is a clear need to develop a stronger continuum of career navigation strategies that meets workers at various stages in their careers. In order to do so, workforce development investors and programs must expand their reach into new settings and institutions. Some organizations in the Seattle area are already working to expand services in the areas detailed below and more investment and support could help grow and improve these efforts.

CAREER NAVIGATION SERVICES IN K-12 SETTINGS

Low-income and disadvantaged high school students, particularly those without a strong family tradition of post-secondary education or skills development, often struggle to develop and follow a career plan. Bill Kosanovich, Director of Community-Based Co-Enrollment Programs at NOVA said, “There are a lot of promising college students in our K-12 system who face significant barriers to entering college. Our pathways counselors find those students and help remove those barriers.” Community colleges, apprenticeship programs, and workforce organizations should partner with the K-12 system to provide young populations with more career exploration opportunities, help connect them to summer or part-time employment, provide informational sessions about post-secondary educational opportunities, and offer career navigation services to help students develop and pursue a career plan after high school.

CAREER NAVIGATION FOR ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND ESL STUDENTS

Some workforce development stakeholders in Seattle expressed concern about the lack of career navigation services for students in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and ESL classes. While many expressed pride in Washington’s innovation around I-BEST, some worried about the future of students that are far from the skill and educational eligibility requirements of I-BEST. Developing industry contextualized options for lower-level ABE or ESL classes and engaging these populations in career exploration opportunities could help develop stronger linkages for these students to technical skills training and higher-quality employment opportunities.

CAREER NAVIGATION FOR IMMIGRANTS WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION

Some interviewees in Seattle also expressed concerns that immigrants who arrive to Seattle with higher levels of education do not receive adequate career navigation. Interviewees stated that more efforts and services that help skilled immigrants use the education and training they received in their home countries is needed. The Puget Sound Welcome Back Center at Highline College, which helps immigrants make use of their existing skill sets and educational backgrounds, was cited as a promising model that some believed should be expanded.

CAREER NAVIGATION FOR TEMPORARY WORKERS

Some workforce development leaders in Seattle have also highlighted the growing presence of temporary work in our economy and the challenges that presents for many workers. Some discussions have been held around developing strategies to help workers navigate the world of

temporary work. Alternative staffing organizations, which implement employment strategies that combine a temporary staffing model with support services, such as career navigation, to help low-income workers overcome the obstacles of temporary work and maintain employment, offer a model worthy of consideration in Seattle.

CAREER NAVIGATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Incumbent workers, particularly those in low-paying jobs, may struggle to see or know how to access the next step on the career ladder. They may also struggle with navigating the workplace and simply holding onto their current jobs and the modest, but important income they provide. Businesses often suffer with high turnover and loss of productivity when workers are struggling to find stability or when no advancement and professional development opportunities are presented to them. The workforce development community should work to engage and build stronger relationships with businesses to bring navigation services into the workplace. Expanding navigation into the workplace will help companies improve their retention efforts and worker productivity while also assisting workers with developing and achieving their career goals.

Grow Efforts to Integrate Intensive Financial Coaching, Education, and Services into Workforce Programming

A critical piece of building and managing a career involves effectively managing earnings, debts, assets, and savings. Many workers, even those earning a decent wage, are in precarious financial situations. The increasing cost of living in Seattle and King County, slow wage growth, and the lingering effects of the recession are making financial stability even more challenging to achieve. Many workforce initiatives across the country, including some in Seattle, are integrating intensive financial coaching and services into their workforce strategies. These models and services extend beyond helping individuals develop budgets or providing a brief financial literacy training. Programs providing more intensive supports may offer one-on-one and group assistance with taxes, credit score repair, paying off debt, and saving. Services may also include linking individuals to banking services, help with obtaining insurance, and assistance with long- and short-term financial planning. Growing and expanding financial coaching and services such as these could help ensure more workers complete their training and educational goals, retain their jobs, and build the assets and savings needed to reach self-sufficiency and stability in their lives.

Use Data and Technology to Improve Navigation Services

A number of challenges exist in the workforce development community around collecting and using data to inform program and service design and delivery. The workforce development community has also been slow to keep pace with technologies that would allow for more efficient and effective service delivery. Three areas in particular deserve consideration related to career navigation in the Seattle area.

EASE THE BURDENS OF DATA COLLECTION FOR FRONT-LINE WORKERS THROUGH STRONGER DATA SHARING

As it currently stands, many front-line workers spend a considerable amount of time collecting data on their clients' educational and employment outcomes. With stronger data sharing agreements between workforce organizations, educational institutions, and public agencies, the time that front-line workers (including career navigators) spend on data collection could be better spent serving participants. Shared data might also allow the workforce community to test and measure the effectiveness of different career navigation services and approaches.

EQUIP CAREER NAVIGATORS AND FRONT-LINE WORKERS WITH BETTER TECHNOLOGIES

The workforce community needs to better leverage mobile technologies and web-based platforms in support of navigators and front-line workers. Today's career navigators are constantly on the move as they visit students at community colleges, employers in their workplaces, and their partners at other public and nonprofit social service agencies. These workers need to be able to access their participants' files while away from their offices if they are to provide informed services and keep timely and accurate records in an efficient manner. Equipping navigators with tablets and providing access to online enrollment, assessment, and case management tools is past due for the workforce field.

CONSIDER WEB-BASED CAREER NAVIGATION TOOLS

A few states have developed online career navigation platforms. As mentioned earlier in this report (IN FOCUS 1), Virginia's Education Wizard has experienced almost 2 million unique visitors since launching in 2009. Policymakers, investors and the workforce development community in Seattle and Washington State should consider how these online platforms could be adapted to provide additional career navigation support to frontline workers and their clients.

Pay Attention to the Job Design of Front-Line Workers and Navigators

A common challenge discussed in our interviews with program leaders was designing the jobs of career navigators and other front-line workers providing navigation services. As noted earlier, the roles and responsibilities of these individuals can vary greatly, even across initiatives with similar approaches and goals.

Workforce leaders in Seattle and other localities focused on helping students pursue training at a community college should revisit how they structure the jobs of career navigators. Asking career navigators to do outreach and recruitment, college navigation, case management, and job placement is seemingly beneficial because it can provide students with one point of contact to meet all of their needs. Finding job candidates who are aptly skilled to play all of these roles, however, can be challenging. And once they are in the job, navigators charged with doing too much may burn out, involuntarily neglect part of their responsibilities, and be less effective overall.

Improving collaborations and partnerships with other organizations that can assist with providing career navigation services may help ease the burden of many navigators. Part of the challenge, however, is that workforce organizations are often under resourced. For investors, adding more capacity and resources to organizations providing navigation services so they can add other staff such as a case manager, outreach specialist, or job developer could help generate better outcomes for the workers and students their investments are targeting.

Provide Professional Development and Training to Front-Line Workers

The success of career navigation strategies hinges on the skills and abilities of the front-line workers implementing these strategies. Unfortunately, many of these workers receive no formal training or education to carry out their assigned duties. Many navigators and front-line workers are able to leverage their education or work experience to fulfill many of their job responsibilities. Some navigators receive limited training with the help of their employers, but by and large, front-line workers charged with navigation learn how to do their job through the experience of actually doing the job.

The lack of training for navigators and front-line workers poses many challenges for the workforce community. First and foremost, some workers may not be fully equipped and skilled to carry out the responsibilities of their jobs, which of course has negative consequences for the participants and business partners they are serving. Second, a lack of professional development can contribute to low job satisfaction and motivation, limited advancement opportunities, and high turnover.

While it is beyond the scope of this research to pinpoint what a curricula or training for front-line workers, and for navigators specifically, may ultimately look like, the diversity in roles and responsibilities of these workers suggests the training will need to meet a variety of needs. Educational programming that allows workers to develop a common set of skills around areas such as case management, working with low-income populations, and building cross-institutional partnerships could serve as a foundation. Additional training and education (and potentially certificates) that provides these workers with opportunities to develop more specialized skills in areas such as outreach and recruitment, college navigation, employer engagement, job development or financial coaching could be added as electives dependent upon the needs of the employing organization, as well as the job responsibilities and career goals of the worker.

Workforce development organizations and stakeholders, who often advocate to other industries to provide more training and career pathways for their employees, need to take their own advice and invest in strategies that support the development of their own workforce. In Seattle, where workforce development nonprofits and community colleges are already partnering in a variety of ways, the question of how to partner to upgrade the skills of the front-line workers they depend upon to achieve positive outcomes for their institutions is readily apparent. Funders of workforce efforts, who also depend upon front-line workers to transform their investments into positive outcomes and returns, should also support and drive these efforts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Carla Andorf, Kirkwood Community College

Juan Campuzano, Insituto del Progreso Latino

Monica Cheng, Goodwill Industries of Seattle

Kelly DeForrest, South Seattle College

Sharron DiMario, Health Careers Collaborative, Partners for a Competitive Workforce

Jennifer Freeman, Massachusetts Community Colleges and Workforce Development Transformation Agenda

Andrea Ferstan, Greater Twin Cities United Way

Cindy Holland, Neighborhood House

Makeeda Holley, District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund

Dawn Kinder, North Seattle College

David Kaz, Seattle Jobs Initiative

William Kosanovich, Northern Virginia Community College

Aranca Lattanzio, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College

Greta Marie Miller, East Mississippi Community College

Bri Nguyen, Seattle Jobs Initiative

Chris Pfautz, Virginia's Community Colleges

Chris Pierson, SkillUp Washington

Eva Rios, Capital IDEA

Liddy Romero, WorkLife Partnership

Kalena Sanchez, Seattle Central College

Rachel Speck, Greater Twin Cities United Way

Rosanna Stephens, Goodwill Industries of Seattle

Judy Stoffel, Kirkwood Community College

May Xiong, Project for Pride in Living

Susan Buckey, Boston Private Industry Council

APPENDIX A: Evidence on Career Navigation Services in the Workforce Development Field

This research also aimed to better understand how career navigation affects workers' education and employment outcomes. SJI conducted a brief literature review to find proven practices and models. The literature review demonstrates that various populations who receive career navigation-like services achieve better education and employment outcomes. It is important to note that career navigation services are often just one part of a wider job training, educational, or workforce strategy an organization or set of organizations implements. Many organizations providing career navigation are also employing other innovative and proven strategies related to employer engagement, curriculum development and instruction. As a result, isolating the impact of "navigation" on worker outcomes apart from these other activities can be challenging. Below, we discuss some of the research that has isolated the impacts of specific career navigation elements, as well as some broader research that looked at the impacts of workforce strategies that included career navigation services.

Research on sectoral workforce development strategies, which typically have various career navigation services embedded within their approach, has repeatedly showed positive outcomes for participants. In the most rigorous study of sectoral initiatives to date, P/PV analyzed the outcomes of participants from three workforce nonprofit organizations adopting a sectoral approach. The three organizations screened, prepared, and trained individuals for occupations in demand in their local labor markets. Other common elements among the three programs included processes that ensured participants' interests, abilities, and qualifications were a match for the target occupations and the provision of individualized services to support training and employment success. Participants in these sector-focused programs earned \$4,500 more on average than the control group after program completion.²²

In another study, high school students receiving career navigation services also demonstrated positive outcomes. Participants in Northern Virginia Community College's Pathways to Baccalaureate Program receive ongoing career and college navigation services beginning in high school and extending through their college education. Participants in the program have achieved higher semester-to-semester and annual retention rates, higher G.P.A.s, and higher graduation rates according to NOVA's Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment.²³

Numerous career and college navigation strategies have been tested on community college students. MDRC's Opening Doors Demonstration showed numerous positive outcomes for community college students receiving navigation-like services. Freshman students who participated in a learning community at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn and received enhanced counseling and tutoring services, textbook vouchers, and a college orientation class earned more credits and were more likely to complete a degree than those in a control group.²⁴ Another study involving Kingsborough and other CUNY community colleges provides community college students with a full range of financial aid, services, and supports, which includes a year-long seminar that provides additional activities around goal setting, academic planning, and other career services. Early results show participating students increased the number of credits they earned on average, improved their ability to

complete developmental coursework, and increased their semester-to-semester retention.²⁵ Finally, students receiving enhanced student services including more intensive college counseling and a modest stipend at Lorain Community College and Owens Community College had higher registration rates and credit attainment in the semester after receiving services compared to a control group.²⁶

The Aspen Institute's Courses to Employment project examined the outcomes of community college students served by workforce nonprofit-community college partnerships. Students served by the partnerships typically received a variety of career navigation services including wraparound and motivational supports, college navigation, and job placement. The study found that across the six partnerships, higher percentages of participants completed their educational programs, obtained employment, and earned higher wages than they did prior to receiving services. In partnerships where more longitudinal data was available, many participants "continued to do well in their education and employment experiences."²⁷

Research on strategies for incumbent and entry-level workers receiving navigation services has also shown positive business returns. The Healthcare Careers Collaborative Initiative, discussed earlier, conducted a Return on Investment (ROI) analysis of the career navigation services and training provided to incumbent and entry-level workers. The ROI found one hospital received a 12 percent return on investment for the incumbent training programs from recruitment cost savings. The hospital also received a net benefit of \$2.6M for the entry-level certificate training program provided due to lower turnover and recruitment costs.²⁸

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