

WorkAdvance

A promising sector-focused strategy to improve economic mobility for low-income adults

A decline in earnings among workers without postsecondary credentials has increased the need for services that help low-skilled job seekers enter and advance in the labor market.



JOB SEEKERS

WorkAdvance connects low-income job seekers to high-demand sectors that offer quality jobs with strong career pathways.



EMPLOYERS

Middle-skill jobs are growing in many sectors and often require sector-specific skills and credentials, which has increased the need for employer input in providing services to job seekers.

The Program Model

WorkAdvance takes a “dual customer” approach to meet the needs of both job seekers and employers.

SERVICES TAILORED TO TARGETED SECTORS	Intake and screening	Career readiness	Occupational skills training	Job development and placement	Retention and advancement
SERVICES FOR JOB SEEKERS	Ensure that they can benefit from training and can meet sector requirements	Help them understand the needs of their chosen sector and develop “soft skills”	Provide training that leads to industry-recognized credentials for in-demand jobs	Facilitate entry into jobs for which they have been trained	Support job performance and career mobility after initial job placement
EMPLOYER BENEFITS	Increased pool of qualified applicants to make recruitment easier and less costly				More informed and supported workforce

The Research Evidence

MDRC conducted a random assignment evaluation of WorkAdvance at four providers from 2011 to 2015. The program recruited groups who have traditionally faced substantial barriers in the labor market, especially in certain high-growth sectors.

BASELINE CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKADVANCE SAMPLE	Male	73%
	Black or Hispanic	67%
	Unemployed	80%
	Unemployed for at least 7 months	36%
	No college degree or credential in targeted sector	65%

WorkAdvance increased participants’ average earnings two years after program entry.

EARNINGS GAIN
RELATIVE TO
A CONTROL GROUP

+ \$1,969
▲ 14%

Impacts varied across the four providers.

Impact of WorkAdvance Across Providers

The variation in results across providers closely matched each provider's experience in running sectoral programs and its ability to adapt to changes in demand.

Difference in outcomes between WorkAdvance participants and a control group

 Difference is statistically significant

	PER SCHOLAS New York City	ST. NICKS ALLIANCE New York City	MADISON STRATEGIES GROUP Tulsa, Oklahoma	TOWARDS EMPLOYMENT Cleveland, Ohio
TARGETED SECTOR	Information technology	Environmental remediation	Transportation, manufacturing	Health care, manufacturing
 EMPLOYMENT IN THE TARGETED SECTOR	▲ 199%	▲ 60%	▲ 34%	▲ 49%
 JOB OFFERED ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES	▲ 25%	▲ 3%	▲ 19%	▲ 18%
 EARNINGS FROM ANY JOB IN YEAR 2	+\$3,747	+\$191	+\$1,837 Full sample -\$77 Early cohort +\$4,125 Late cohort	+\$1,621 +\$132 +\$2,996

To produce employment and earnings impacts, programs needed to **increase**

Per Scholas also **increased total income** and reduced the use of public assistance

At Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment, **impacts**

To produce employment and earnings impacts, programs needed to **increase employment in the targeted sector**, and those jobs had to have **better wages and benefits** than jobs outside the sector.

Per Scholas also **increased total income** and reduced the use of public assistance for WorkAdvance participants. Programs at the other providers had little to no effect on total income.

At Madison Strategies Group and Towards Employment, **impacts were considerably larger for those who enrolled later** in the evaluation.

Early enrollees experienced a less mature program, and many were offered job placement services before formal occupational skills training.