

MEMORANDUM

To: The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

From: Victoria Dougherty Consulting, LLC

Re: Emerging Evaluation Findings from Year 1 of the Career Pathways Initiative

Date: March 30, 2017

This memo presents emerging findings from the developmental evaluation of the Career Pathways Initiative (CPI). In the first year, the evaluation sought to answer questions around program launch, implementation, and early partnership development. Our methods included:

- Reviewing relevant CPI grantee documents, including proposals and reports to the Foundation (ongoing)
- Developing cross-site and site-level theories of change (Jun 2016)
- Collecting self-assessments of partnership development indicators (Sep 2016)
- Collecting enrollment, completion, and employment data from CPI partners (Jan 2017)
- Conducting site visits to interview lead organizations, partners, and participants and to observe programs, when possible (Feb 2017)

Throughout Year 1, we engaged the CPI programs and the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (“the Foundation”) as partners in our learning process. For example, we discussed the feasibility of a data collection tool we were in the process of developing with the sites as part of a data training session – building their evaluation capacity while simultaneously improving our data collection strategies. Similarly, through our presence at the cross-site learning convenings and in one-on-one conversations with sites, we have shared emerging evaluation findings with grantees and partners, as well as gleaned valuable insight as the work unfolded. This open and ongoing engagement with the sites and the Foundation is integral to our developmental evaluation approach.

In April, we will present a full evaluation report designed to inform Foundation and grantee discussions of how to build on the progress of Year 1 to improve site and cross-site efforts in Years 2 and 3.

The findings presented in our Year 1 evaluation describe the programs and their results as of December 31st, 2016. It is important to note that the nine programs operate on different cycles with varying start and end dates and variations in session length. This evaluation presents a point in time in the life of these nine different programs.

2016 CPI Participant Milestones <i>(sessions ending by December 31)</i>	
	CPI TOTAL
Enrolled ¹	300
Completed	79%
Employed at Completion ²	56%
Enrolled in Ed Program at Completion ³	15%
Employed at 6-months ⁴	45%
Enrolled in Ed Program at 6-months ⁵	22%

1) Students enrolled in sessions with an end date on/before 12/31/16

2) Of participants completed, percent employed, as defined by each site

3) " ", percent enrolled in an education program (regardless of employment status)

4) Of participants completing on/before June '16, percent employed 6 months later

5) " ", percent enrolled in an education program (regardless of employment status)

Participant Enrollment

Most Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) programs successfully enrolled the targeted number of participants meeting the population criteria that their program was designed to serve. Six of the nine programs successfully recruited and enrolled their target number of low-income and/or low-skilled individuals in their selected population groups (e.g., immigrants, homeless individuals, formerly-incarcerated individuals). Three of the programs encountered some challenges recruiting the targeted numbers. These challenges included: changes in referral sources; opportunity costs perceived by potential recruits of remaining out of the workforce during training; and recruiting individuals meeting the specified enrollment criteria who also demonstrate the capacity to succeed in the program.

The CPI initiative was designed to target low literate and/or low skilled individuals who are not typically served by other workforce development programs. Given the initiative's intent, to facilitate the launch of a career pathway for individuals traditionally left behind, it is understandable that some of the programs encountered challenges recruiting and retaining their target populations. These programs are exploring options to strengthen the alignment between their target population's capacity for success and program expectations.

Participant Completion

Of the 300 participants enrolled in CPI programs in 2016, 79% (236/300) completed the program.¹ A variety of challenges prevented participants from completing the programs, including academic challenges, the need for more immediate employment, immigration issues, and family responsibilities. But, for the majority of participants, program completion was not a challenge.

CPI stakeholders interviewed ascribed participants' success in great part to the individualized supports the programs provide. Many CPI partners have strong case management functions to assist participants who often face obstacles to success due to poverty, such as transportation and child-care barriers, language, criminal history, etc. Participants interviewed, for their part, expressed strong satisfaction with the CPI programs, noting in particular the support and encouragement they received from case managers and other program staff.

Participant Employment

Fifty-six percent (132/236) of CPI participants gained employment soon after completion. Of the 74 participants who completed the program by June 2016, 45% (33/74) were employed six months later. Not surprisingly, the two programs that served as direct pipelines into employment with partnering organizations were the most successful in placing participants in jobs immediately upon completion.

For most CPI programs, connecting participants to employment opportunities proved challenging. Most CPI programs struggled to engage employers in meaningful ways. In some cases, employers have been involved in CPI curriculum design or delivery of training, but most programs considered this an area in need of improvement. Programs found it even more difficult to secure employer commitments for internships; harder still was securing job placements.

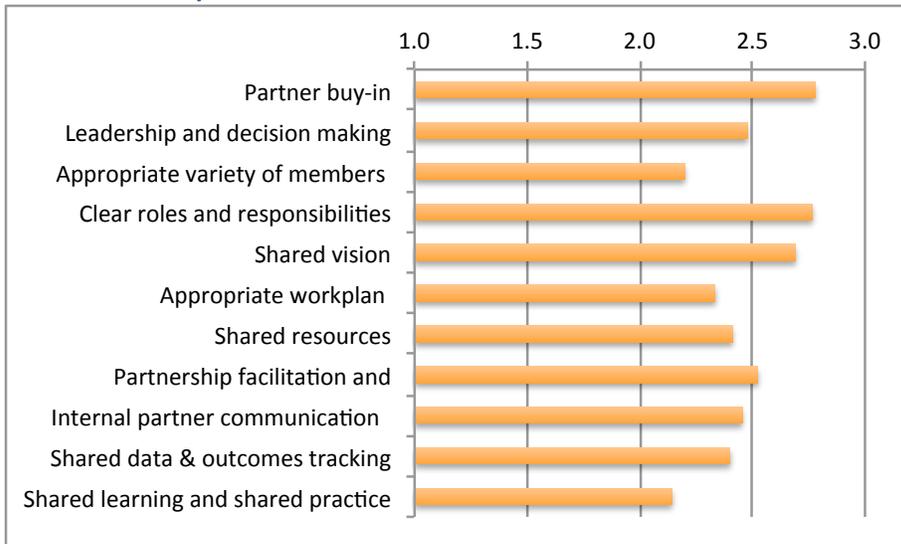
In some cases, the challenge is one of staff capacity; existing staff do not have the time or, sometimes, the skills needed to recruit employer partners. In addition, programs pursuing multiple pathways in multiple sectors found it more difficult to secure employer relationships than programs with fewer pathways. In most cases, the primary challenge seems to be framing the value-add to the employer in partnering with CPI. Attracting employers to CPI programs is more challenging than typical workforce development initiatives because CPI targets low-skilled, low-literate participants with little work experience.

¹ Analysis includes only those participants whose programs ended by December 31, 2016. An additional 36 participants continued their enrollment in a CPI program into 2017, for a total of 336.

For Year 2 of implementation, many CPI programs are intensifying efforts to build employer relationships and to support participants’ transition to employment. A few programs added or are planning to add a job developer staff position to address their organizational capacity issues. Others are looking at ways to engage more employers in the training portions of the programs, for example, by inviting employers to speak to participants about their fields, scheduling site visits, or getting employer feedback on curriculum. For many programs, redoubling efforts to secure internships and jobs for participants has become a top priority in 2017. Several interview respondents indicated that this is an area in which their program and others could benefit from technical assistance and other supports.

Partnership Development

2016 Partnership Self-Assessment*



**CPI partners completed a self-assessment in fall 2016, rating their partnership on various elements of partnership capacity on a scale of one to three, with three being the highest level. The chart illustrates the average across the nine partnerships. The self-assessment will be collected again in 2017 and 2018 to gauge progress.*

Most CPI partnerships were functioning successfully by the end of Year 1 of implementation. The one weakness partners expressed was the difficulty of attracting employers to the table. Partners indicated functioning well in most capacities integral to effective collaboration, such as decision-making, shared resources, communication, and shared learning. For the most part, partners had a shared vision; saw the value for their organizations of collaborating in the initiative; and understood their roles and responsibilities and those of other partners clearly. Many partners interviewed were confident that their joint efforts in CPI would lay the groundwork for long-term

partnerships and deeper collaboration. As discussed on page 3 above, the one area they sought improvement in was recruiting employer partners.

Partners interviewed ascribed the success of their partnerships to strong communication and flexibility in adapting the work based on lessons emerging from implementation. They appreciated the openness of communications, as well as the flexibility demonstrated by their partners in changing course as they go. For example, in one of the programs, the training partner adjusted the curriculum to address participant skill deficits identified by the employer partner.

Cross-site Learning

Partners interviewed appreciated the opportunity to learn from other CPI partnerships during the Foundation's quarterly CPI meetings. They have found great value in learning about other local organizations and programs. In a few cases, organizations have begun referring clients to other CPI programs for services. Partners also foresaw collaborating in the future with other organizations with whom they were connecting through the CPI convenings, a promising early indicator of CPI's long-term goal of fostering an integrated career pathways system. In Years 2 and 3, the Foundation will want to continue to facilitate this knowledge sharing and begin to foster greater coordination among the nine partnerships towards this longer term goal.