Connecting to Opportunity

Lessons on Adapting Interventions for Young People Experiencing Homelessness or Systems Involvement

Louisa Treskon
Kyla Wasserman
Vicky Ho

mdrc
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

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OVERVIEW

The Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP)™ initiative, a nationwide project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, aims to improve education and employment outcomes for young people ages 15 to 25 who have been involved in the child welfare and justice systems or who are experiencing homelessness. Young people eligible for LEAP are likely to be disconnected from school and work, and face added challenges that stem directly from their systems involvement or homelessness, including disrupted schooling, housing instability, limited family support, and trauma. LEAP seeks to reduce the inequalities in life chances and outcomes that affect this population, with the goal of helping these young people reach their full potential by connecting them to postsecondary and career pathways.

LEAP operationalizes two education- and employment-focused program models to help young people at different stages along their educational and employment pathways. One program, Jobs for America's Graduates, or JAG, targets young people who have not completed high school. JAG's goal is to help these individuals obtain a high school credential and to equip them with the work and life skills they need to land quality jobs or acquire a postsecondary education. The second, JFF's Back on Track program, aims to help young people transition to postsecondary education and persist through their crucial first year of college or advanced training.

Ten grantees in eight states are implementing LEAP, each in multiple locations. This report presents implementation, outcomes, and cost research findings from MDRC's evaluation of the grantees' LEAP programs, which focused on the early years of the initiative.

KEY FINDINGS

- Strategic partnerships with public agencies and other organizations are essential to reaching young people who are eligible for LEAP, aligning resources, and opening access to services.
- The LEAP population faces a set of systemic and structural barriers that are unique to their involvement in the child welfare and justice systems, which can hinder their progress in programs designed to elevate their educational and economic opportunities. To better serve participants, LEAP programs adapted how they delivered services to mitigate these barriers and make it easier for young people to participate.
- Back on Track participants had high engagement in the program: Most received a set of services to prepare them for success in postsecondary education or training, 68 percent enrolled in postsecondary education or a job-training program, and 40 percent persisted in school and completed their first year.
- Most JAG enrollees received the program's key services, but more than half did not complete the program. Of those who completed the program's Active Phase, in which the majority of services are delivered, 40 percent earned their high school credential and 76 percent were employed or in school at one point during the first six months of follow-up.
- The costs of providing LEAP services varied by program structure and local context. Costs per participant, including outreach and follow-up, ranged from $5,300 to $7,300.

LEAP program staff members found early on that they needed to adapt their service delivery plan to keep young people engaged for the full program period. This calls out the need for more research into how programs can sustain the engagement of young people on the long path to attaining a high school credential or postsecondary degree. This report details some of the adaptations that LEAP programs developed to promote engagement, but a longer follow-up period is needed to assess whether these adaptations were successful.

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PREFACE

Young people ages 15 to 25 who have experienced homelessness or have been involved with the foster care or justice systems are likely to face unique challenges as they transition to adulthood. Disrupted schooling, housing instability, limited family support, and the trauma that these hardships create can lead to inequities in educational and employment outcomes throughout adulthood for these individuals. The Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP)™ initiative, launched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2015, is an attempt to improve access to postsecondary and employment opportunities for this population and improve their long-term earning potential and well-being.

This study evaluates the implementation of two programs for young people that were adapted by 10 LEAP grantees. Although each of these program models was developed to help young people, neither one specifically targeted young people experiencing systems involvement and homelessness before LEAP was launched. One program, Jobs for America's Graduates, targets young people who have not completed high school, and offers services to help them earn a high school credential and acquire work and life skills that can lead to quality jobs or postsecondary education. The second program, JFF's Back on Track model, aims to help young people transition to postsecondary education and persist through their crucial first year of school. During the first three years of this initiative, LEAP grantees enrolled nearly 2,800 young people in their programs.

The evaluation findings presented in this report provide important information for practitioners and policymakers about the type of community supports that can benefit young people who have experienced systems involvement or homelessness as they transition to adulthood. LEAP grantees did this by partnering strategically within their communities.

Programs for young people often struggle to sustain participant engagement over the time it takes to earn a high school diploma or postsecondary degree. But LEAP grantees may provide insights for better engaging young people over the long term. For instance, LEAP staff members offered financial rewards for reaching program milestones, or individualized service delivery for students who could not attend classes regularly. Though the findings are promising, a longer follow-up period is required to gauge whether these adaptations improved program completion among later LEAP cohorts.

During its first three years, LEAP grantees advanced viable educational and career pathways for their priority populations. This work will inform the next phase of the LEAP initiative, which started in summer 2019. LEAP's next phase will allow for more outreach to young people experiencing systems involvement and homelessness and will heighten the focus on promoting positive change in related practices and policies.

Gordon L. Berlin
President, MDRC

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We are grateful to the leadership of Patrice Cromwell at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, who provided thoughtful oversight of this project. The research team received input throughout all phases of the project from staff at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, School & Main Institute, JFF, and Jobs for America's Graduates. We received valuable comments on drafts of this report from Patrice Cromwell, Jeff Poirier, and Dina Emam of the Annie E. Casey Foundation; Nora Priest, Jean Hammes, Gregg Weltz, and Andy Beck of the School & Main Institute; Lilli Allen and Michael Sack from JFF; and Janelle Duray and John McConnell of Jobs for America's Graduates.

We greatly appreciate the support from staff members at the LEAP grantees who participated in implementation site visits and were open and thoughtful in answering our questions. They work tirelessly to provide services to young people in their communities. The 10 LEAP grantees were the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES), Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD), Covenant House Alaska, The Door, Jobs for Arizona's Graduates, Jobs for Michigan's Graduates, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Project for Pride in Living (PPL), South Bay Community Services (SBCS), and University of Southern Maine (USM).

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Finally, we are deeply appreciative of the young people who agreed to participate in interviews. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

The Authors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the United States, there are almost 5 million young people making the transition from school to work who are "disconnected" — that is, neither in school nor employed.[1] These young people are often involved in the child welfare and justice systems or experiencing homelessness. As a result, they are likely to face added challenges that stem directly from their systems involvement, such as disrupted schooling, housing instability, limited family support, and trauma. The goal of the Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP)™ initiative, launched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2015, is to improve the educational and employment outcomes of these young people by opening access to opportunity pathways for this historically underserved community.[2]

Education and employment are predictors of future success.[3] The LEAP initiative seeks to reduce the inequities in life chances of those who are experiencing homelessness or systems involvement and to help them succeed. LEAP focuses on building the educational and work-related skills of these young people by connecting them to opportunities through postsecondary and career pathways that improve their long-term earning potential.

ABOUT LEAP

The population of young people who are systems-involved or experiencing homelessness is substantial. In 2016, nearly 65,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 20 were in foster care and, though declining in recent years, about 45,000 young people were held in residential placement facilities each day.[4] In 2017, more than 50,000 young people under 25 were homeless, including 10,000 who

1. Measure of America, "Youth Disconnection" (2016), website: http://measureofamerica.org/disconnected-youth/.
2. The Annie E. Casey Foundation received funding from the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) to support a portion of this initiative. SIF was a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) that received funding from 2010 to 2016. Using public and private resources to find and grow community-based nonprofits with evidence of results, SIF intermediaries received funding to award subgrants that focus on overcoming challenges in economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development. Although CNCS made its last SIF intermediary awards in fiscal year 2016, SIF intermediaries will continue to administer their subgrant programs until their federal funding is exhausted. Federal funding support for LEAP was initially slated to last for five years. However, a decision by Congress in 2017 to discontinue funding for most SIF projects means that federal funding for LEAP through SIF will instead end after three years of services.
3. Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, Joseph McLaughlin with Sheila Palma, *The Consequences of Dropping Out of High School: Joblessness and Jailing for High School Dropouts and the High Cost for Taxpayers* (Boston: Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, 2009).
4. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "One Day Count of Juveniles in Residential Placement Facilities, 1997-2016" (n.d.), website: https://www.ojjdp.gov.

were homeless while parenting.[5] These young people often make the transition to adulthood with relatively little family support, have experienced disrupted schooling, and are at risk for experiencing trauma.[6] Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that young people experiencing homelessness or systems involvement may face troubling outcomes as adults across a wide range of areas. Young adults with a history of foster care or juvenile justice custody are less likely than their peers to obtain a high school credential or to be employed.[7] Few foster care youth (only 20 percent of those who graduate high school) go on to college, and even fewer former foster care youth (less than 10 percent) obtain a four-year college degree.[8]

Through two education- and employment-focused program models, the LEAP initiative aims to address these challenges and improve young people's connections to school and work, and thus improve their longer-term economic outcomes. These two program models were developed specially for young people, but before LEAP was launched, neither model targeted the specific population of young people who are experiencing homelessness or involved in the child welfare and justice systems. One program, Jobs for America's Graduates, or JAG, focuses on young people who have not completed high school and provides them with services that aim to help them gain a secondary credential and equip them with work and life skills to transition into quality jobs or postsecondary education.[9] The second, JFF's Back on Track model, aims to help young people transition to postsecondary education and persist through their crucial first year of school. Figure ES.1 provides an overview of the LEAP models, showing how the two models were focused on different populations, activities, and goals. As shown, LEAP grantees were to provide JAG or Back on Track core services but adapt them in a way that addressed the needs of the LEAP population. These LEAP "enhancements," informed by prior research about what this population of young people might benefit from, included additional supports to promote participant success. The immediate goals of these activities were to help participants earn their high school credential and embark on a postsecondary education or employment pathway that would lead, ultimately, to higher earnings.

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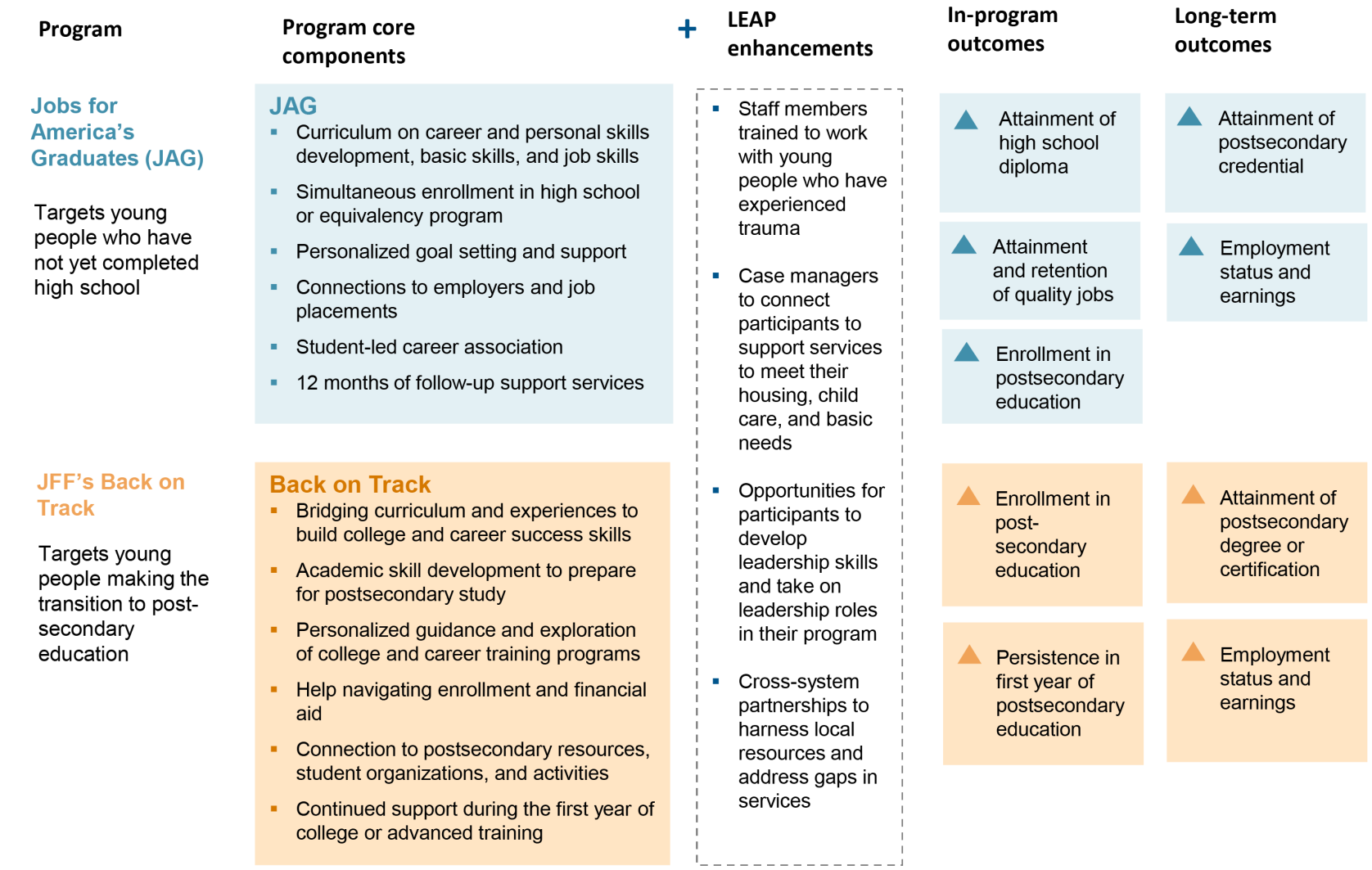
5. Megan Henry, Rian Watt, Lily Rosenthal, and Azim Shivji, *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2017).
6. Robert Schoeni and Karen Ross, *Family Support during the Transition to Adulthood* (Ann Arbor, MI: National Poverty Center, 2005); Richard Settersten, Frank Furstenberg, and Ruben Rumbaut, *On the Frontier of Adulthood: Theory, Research, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Vincent Felitti, Robert Anda, Dale Nordenberg, David Williamson, Alison Spitz, Valerie Edwards, Mary Koss, and James Marks, "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (1998): 245-258.
7. Mark Courtney, Amy Dworsky, Adam Brown, Colleen Cary, Kara Love, and Vaness Vorhies, *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26* (Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2011).
8. National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, "Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care" (2014), website: https://bettercarenetwork.org.
9. There are several versions of the JAG model, called "applications" that are specific to the age and setting of participants. LEAP grantees could implement either the Alternative Education application or the Out-of-School application.

FIGURE ES.1

LEAP Services and Expected Outcomes

LEAP adapts two established programs for a special population: young people ages 15-25 with involvement in the child welfare system, juvenile or criminal justice, or homelessness…

…with the aim of producing positive short-term and long- term outcomes in young people's lives.



Implementing the two models in LEAP are 10 grantees in eight states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, and New York.[10] LEAP grantees reflected a range of structures — including a statewide initiative in Maine; programs at community-based organizations in the large urban areas of New York, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Minneapolis; and programs that operated in multiple locations within their states. LEAP grantees were required to provide JAG or Back on Track services but adapt them to address the local needs of the LEAP population. Each LEAP grantee operated in multiple locations and in partnership with other organizations such as the K-12 educational system, postsecondary education and training institutions, employers, workforce development organizations, child welfare and justice agencies, and other local nonprofit organizations and government entities. About half of the grantees had prior experience operating the core JAG or Back on Track models; other grantees began operating the programs when they joined the LEAP initiative. Two LEAP grantees functioned as intermediaries, overseeing implementation of the initiative and contracting with local partners to deliver LEAP services, but not delivering services to participants themselves. LEAP grantees began implementing services in April 2016, and the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) phase of the initiative, which is the focus of this evaluation, operated through June 2019.

ABOUT LEAP PARTICIPANTS

Young people ages 15 to 25 who had current or prior involvement in the foster care system, juvenile or criminal justice system, or who were recently or currently homeless were eligible to participate in LEAP.[11] During the first three years of the initiative, LEAP programs enrolled nearly 2,800 young people. Figure ES.2 provides a snapshot of LEAP participants upon enrollment with demographic information, involvement in child welfare or justice systems, homelessness, and their prior educational and work experience. Most participants were youth of color.[12] Approximately 51 percent of enrollees had current or prior foster care involvement, 37 percent had current or prior justice system involvement, and 50 percent had experienced homelessness. The demographic composition of participants for each grantee varied, largely due to their geographic location and population focus.

The JAG and Back on Track models target different points along the educational and employment pathways of young people. JAG focuses on young people who have not yet completed high school. Ninety-six percent of all JAG participants did not have a high school credential at the time of enrollment. In contrast, Back on Track targets those who have completed or are nearing completion of high school. Seventy-three percent of Back on Track participants enrolled in LEAP with a high school credential or were on track to receive it soon. JAG and Back on Track enrollees also differed

10. Grantees were selected by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and a team of internal and external partners from a pool of applicants. Five grantees operate JAG programs, three run Back on Track programs, and two offered both JAG and Back on Track.

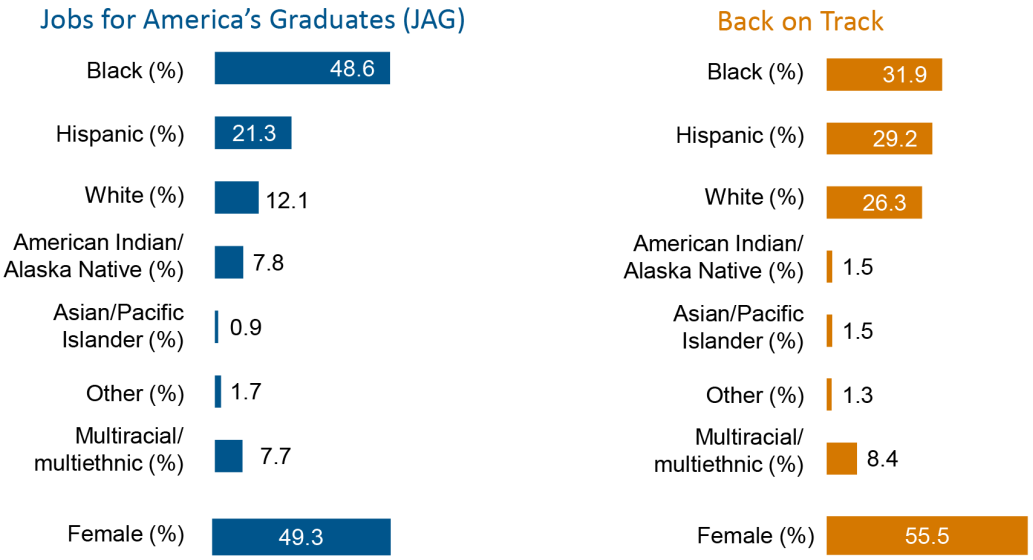
11. Young people who were currently or ever involved with the foster care or juvenile justice systems were eligible for the program, including those who have exited either system and foster youth who have achieved permanent placement. LEAP used the Housing and Urban Development definitions of homelessness, including young people who experience homelessness either with, or without, a parent or guardian.

12. Specifically, 42 percent are African-American, 25 percent Hispanic, 18 percent white, and 14 percent other, including 5 percent American Indian, 1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 8 percent multiracial.

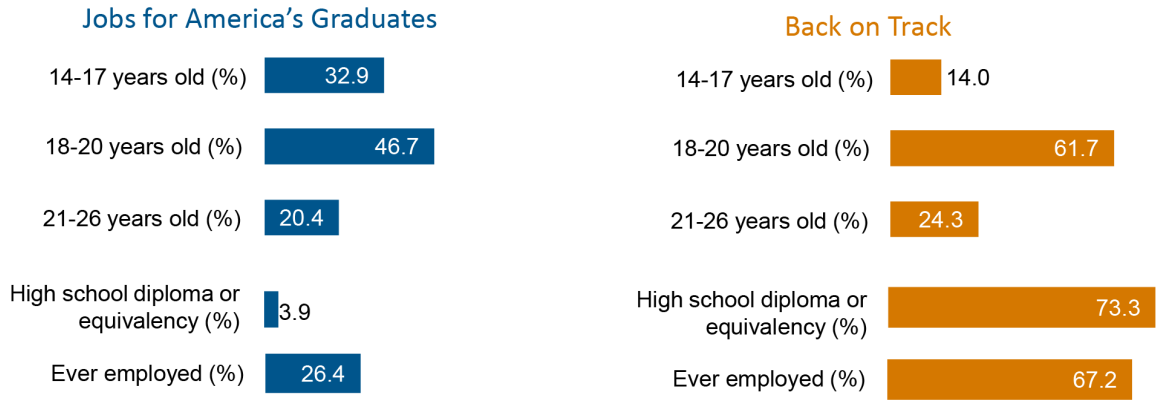
FIGURE ES.2

LEAP Participants at Enrollment

Most LEAP participants were young people of color; 17 percent were parents. **JAG** and **Back on Track** participants differed in several ways.



Back on Track participants were older and most already had their high school credential, compared with **JAG** participants. More **Back on Track** enrollees had work experience.



Across LEAP, 27 percent of participants had involvement in more than two systems, and 6 percent had experienced all three; 53 percent of **JAG** enrollees and 60 percent of **Back on Track** enrollees had current involvement at the time of enrollment.

SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS and Back on Track sites' management information systems. Reflects individual-level demographics on 2,238 individuals who enrolled prior to October 1, 2018.
NOTE: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

in their employment experience. About two-thirds of Back on Track participants had work experience, compared with only one-fourth of JAG participants, who were generally younger than those enrolled in Back on Track. These differences in the educational and employment backgrounds of JAG and Back on Track participants highlight the differing objectives of each program model: JAG focuses on obtaining a high school credential and employment skills whereas Back on Track focuses on access and persistence in postsecondary education.

Demographic data and interviews conducted by MDRC with staff members expose the unique challenges that confront young people in both programs. One of the most prevalent concerns for LEAP participants is homelessness and housing insecurity in general, according to program staff members. Seventy percent of LEAP enrollees, particularly Back on Track participants, did not live with their biological parents. Approximately one-fifth of participants were experiencing homelessness at the time of enrollment, although participants and staff members described how a young person's living situation could change quickly and unexpectedly. Staff pointed out the pressures on participants to contribute financially to their households and thereby prioritize earning money in the short term over pursuing an education or career. In total, 17 percent of participants were parents at the time they enrolled in the LEAP program. The circumstances that many LEAP participants experienced in their lives could hinder their engagement in program services.

Program staff members also described participant assets. They uniformly pointed to LEAP participant attributes such as resilience and resourcefulness. Staff members reported that participants are good at accessing supports and asking for help. Staff at all program locations described participants as self-motivated, driven, and determined to achieve their goals.

THE LEAP EVALUATION

There is limited evidence about what are effective employment and education interventions for young people who have experienced systems involvement or homelessness. Prior studies of the effectiveness of JAG and Back on Track are very limited, and no research findings on their effectiveness specifically with young people who are systems-involved or experiencing homelessness were available at the time of MDRC's evaluation.[13] Given the limited prior evidence, the LEAP evaluation contributes to understanding how to improve employment and educational outcomes for this population.

13. For JAG, a quasi-experimental evaluation found positive impacts on employment, but the study did not include either the Out-of-School or Alternative Education applications that are implemented in LEAP. See Sum, Khatiwada, and McLaughlin with Palma (2009). For Back on Track, an outcome study found promising rates of enrollment into postsecondary education among participants, but without an impact study, it is not possible to know how Back on Track compares to other programs with similar goals. See Center for Youth and Communities, *Creating New Pathways to Postsecondary: Evaluation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Postsecondary Success* (PSS) Initiative (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, The Center for Youth and Communities, Heller School for Policy and Management, 2013).

The LEAP evaluation is primarily an implementation study that seeks to understand how LEAP grantees launched their programs and adapted them to their participant populations.[14] Underlying this main objective, the evaluation seeks to explain why programs chose certain adaptations and how participants responded as a result. Learning about participant experiences during and after LEAP was an important objective of this evaluation and can inform how programs facilitate engagement in their services. This evaluation also focused on how LEAP grantees partnered with local public agencies and nonprofit organizations to deliver services. The evaluation also includes a study of program outcomes. The analysis of program participation data from grantees offers an initial view on engagement and outcomes but stops short of making a determination about causality since this evaluation did not use a random assignment design, which means there was no control group.[15] Finally, a limited study of program costs for three LEAP grantees might help program staff members or policymakers budget for any replication of the LEAP program.

While the evaluation draws on a range of data sources, it has some limitations. The implementation study, which focuses on how services were provided and adapted, covers the first 30 months of the SIF period (Years 1, 2, and midway through Year 3). The outcome study, which averages results across the LEAP grantees, is mostly restricted to participants who enrolled in the first 18 months of the SIF period (Year 1 to midway through Year 2) due to the short follow-up period that is granted during the SIF timeframe. Because participants may take a year or more to complete the program, the analysis had to be limited to participants who enrolled early on to allow for a 12- or 18-month follow-up period. Since LEAP grantees were continuing to adapt their programs based on implementation experiences in the first years of LEAP, the participation rates and outcomes for the earlier cohorts may not adequately reflect the experience of later cohorts. It is too soon to tell how participation rates and outcomes for later cohorts will compare with those of earlier cohorts. Additionally, small sample sizes and the clustering by grantees of participants by race and ethnicity make it impossible to draw conclusions about subgroup results.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Partnering strategically with public agencies and other organizations was key to reaching eligible young people, aligning resources, and opening access to services.**

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14. SIF grantees are required to undergo an evaluation of their programs, with the goal of building evidence on effective interventions. The LEAP evaluation originally targeted a SIF "moderate" level of evidence which requires study designs that can support casual conclusions, such as impact studies using random assignment or quasi-experimental designs. However, the planned impact study of LEAP required a five-year period to allow for enrollment and follow-up of study participants. Once the SIF period was cut back to three years following the decision to discontinue funding for the SIF in 2016, the evaluation design was changed to an implementation study. Under SIF's evidence rubric, this implementation study is a "preliminary" level of evidence.

15. A random assignment design uses a process akin to a lottery to assign individuals to a group whose members receive the specified intervention or to a control group whose members are not eligible to enroll and participate in the program but free to receive other available services. If random assignment is done correctly, the members of both groups share the same characteristics. Then, when the two groups are followed up over time, the differences in their outcomes provide a reliable measure of the program's effects — or impacts.

LEAP grantees found that partners, including child welfare departments, juvenile justice and criminal justice agencies, school districts, nonprofit organizations, workforce systems, and local vocational and postsecondary institutions, were vital to LEAP implementation. LEAP grantees partnered directly to deliver services. Some grantees developed a strategy with cross-system partners to bring LEAP services to young people who were participating in other types of services such as a General Educational Development (GED) program or transitional living services. Grantee connections to foster care agencies or the justice system, though they could be difficult to establish, provided strong referral pathways for participants.

Partnerships were also vital to connecting participants to other services or supports that could benefit them. Staff members as well as participants themselves said they were not always aware of the programs and supports available to young people. Further, accessing these programs and supports when they were aware of them could be challenging due to paperwork requirements and procedural hurdles. Staff members found they needed to become experts in navigating the system, so they could help participants obtain services that could benefit them.

Many LEAP partnerships were born from existing relationships. Nevertheless, LEAP grantees reported that strong and productive cross-system partnerships took time and resources to develop. One strategy used by grantees was to cultivate a shared understanding with partners of how the programs could work together so that each organization could focus on its respective strengths and contribute to a greater whole.

- **Particularly during the first year of implementation, LEAP grantees had difficulty identifying appropriate program participants. Strategic partnerships helped boost recruitment.**

Program staff encountered challenges to identifying and recruiting systems-involved young people, particularly in the first year of LEAP, but most had established referral partnerships and were dedicating less time to recruitment by Year 3. A key recruitment strategy was strengthening relationships with partners in various systems such as child welfare departments, justice agencies, homeless services, and schools. Some LEAP grantees developed data-sharing agreements with system partners that made it easier to access information about potential candidates, while others developed relationships with caseworkers who sent direct referrals.

LEAP grantees described how eligibility for LEAP could be "invisible" — organizations did not always have a good way to identify who in their programs might need additional support. Staff described how participants may not be comfortable openly sharing details about their systems involvement or housing status, particularly if the experience was in the past; young people may not see the relevance of such information for accessing services now. Some grantees shared information about LEAP with all of their participants and gave them the opportunity to share their eligibility privately.

- **LEAP grantees adapted JAG and Back on Track services to focus on addressing the circumstances in young people's lives that constrained their potential. This included adapting how grantees planned to deliver core model activities to promote engagement.**

The LEAP population faces a set of structural and systemic barriers that may make it hard for them to remain engaged in services. Participants faced challenges ranging from food and housing instability to mental health issues to meeting financial obligations to their families. LEAP grantees reported that addressing the barriers young people faced had to be done before focusing on school or work. One way LEAP grantees did this was allowing participants to exercise the option of pausing LEAP programming and returning at a later point. Working with partners to align resources was critical to addressing the circumstances of participants in order to support their pursuit of a high school or postsecondary credential, or to gain work experience.

The JAG and Back on Track models are intentionally flexible in terms of how core activities can be delivered, which allowed LEAP grantees to change the format of service delivery to promote engagement and persistence. For example, some grantees found that they needed to provide services one-on-one instead of in groups to accommodate participants' schedules. LEAP grantees also provided incentives to encourage participation and help with the financial needs that many participants had.

- **Staff-participant relationships were key to delivering services and supporting participant engagement.**

Participants who had positive experiences with the program often reported that their connection to a staff member was a primary reason for enrolling and staying engaged in programming. Staff strove to develop relationships that were authentic, positive, focused on strengths, and driven by young people. A key part of building relationships with participants was building trust. Staff members reported hearing that participants lacked supportive adults in their lives, leaving them hesitant to trust and rely on a staff member. A key part of working with young people was appreciating each one as an individual who should be treated uniquely. Staff members often got to know participants through one-on-one interactions rooted in discussions about participants' goals, personal experiences, and challenges.

When engagement is driven by a participant's relationship with one or two staff people, staff characteristics and turnover can have outsized effects on a young person's engagement in the program. If a staff person is not the right fit and is not able to build relationships with participants, these young people may not remain engaged with the program. The duration of the LEAP program could be 18 months or longer, so it was not uncommon for participants to experience turnover in staff. Grantees noted that staff turnover affected participant engagement negatively.

- **Back on Track participants had high engagement in services and high levels of enrollment in postsecondary education.**

While a longer follow-up period is necessary to evaluate degree and certificate attainment among participants, early results indicate that Back on Track may help participants enroll and persist in postsecondary education. The top panel of Figure ES.3 shows the participation and early outcomes for Back on Track participants. Of those who enrolled during the first 18 months of LEAP implementation, three-fourths completed the model's initial "Postsecondary Bridging" phase, which helps

FIGURE ES.3

LEAP Participation and In-Program Outcomes

Back on Track participants progressed through program phases and enrolled in postsecondary education.[a]

76%
Completed Bridging

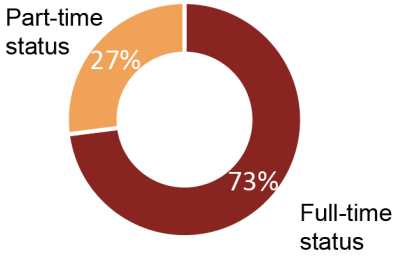
41%
Completed First-Year Supports[b]

Average time to complete Back on Track phases
15.7 months

Back on Track participants enrolled in postsecondary education…

68%
Enrolled in post-secondary education

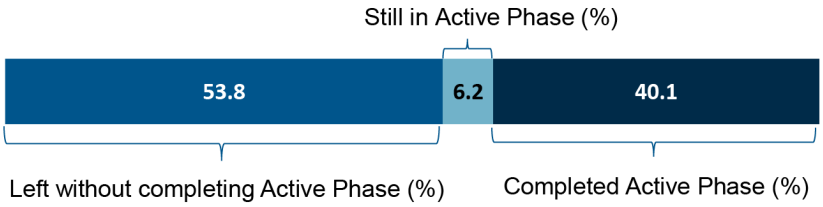
…pursued a full-time course load…[c]



…and worked toward earning credentials

5%
Earned a certification within 18 months

JAG participants received an average of 42 hours of services.[d] About 40 percent of JAG participants who enrolled in the **Out-of-School** application completed the Active Phase.[e]



JAG participants who completed the Active Phase did so in an average of
7.2 months[f]

76% reported they were in school, working or both during of follow-up.[g]

51%
Employed

51%
In school

36% percent reported that they were not connected to school or work at some point.

Average hourly wages[h]

$12.00

Among those who were employed prior to JAG, wages increased by **29%**[i]

Some earned credentials while in LEAP[j]

40%
Earned high school equivalency

21%
Obtained an industry-recognized credential[k]

(continued)

FIGURE ES.3 (continued)

SOURCES: Program data from Back on Track sites' management information systems and JAG e-NMDS.

NOTES: [a]For Back on Track, all measures shown among those enrolled prior to 4/1/2017. N = 315.
[b]Participants complete First Year Support and Back on Track by completing their first year of postsecondary education or training.
[c]Among those enrolled in postsecondary. N=214.
[d]Among JAG participants who enrolled on or before 4/1/2017. N = 683.
[e]Out-of-School (OOS) participants who enrolled prior to 4/1/2017. N = 307.
[f]Among OOS participants who completed the Active Phase regardless of when they enrolled. N = 272.
[g]Subsample of OOS participants in Follow-up Phase, looking at status reported during the first 6 months of follow-up among those who started Follow-up prior to 4/1/2018. School includes both secondary and postsecondary programs. Work includes both full- and part-time jobs. Categories not mutually exclusive. N = 153.
[h]Among OOS participants ever in employment during follow up. N = 104.
[i]Among OOS participants with prior employment at enrollment into LEAP. N = 27.
[j]Among OOS participants in follow-up. N = 274. Categories not mutually exclusive.
[k]Defined in U.S. DOL Training and Employment Guidance Letter 15-10.

participants identify, prepare for, and access a postsecondary pathway.[16] More than two-thirds of the sample enrolled in postsecondary education during the study follow-up period. Among those who enrolled, 73 percent had full-time status, which is comparable to the national average for college students at four-year institutions (75 percent).[17] Of this sample, 41 percent completed the full program by the end of this evaluation's follow-up period (September 30, 2018), indicating they had completed their first year of college or a training program.

- **Most participants who enrolled in JAG received the program's key services, but less than half fully completed the program. Among those who completed the program's Active Phase, in which the majority of services are delivered, most were employed or in school at one point during the first six months of the follow-up period.**

The bottom panel of Figure ES.3 shows the participation and in-program outcomes for JAG. Participants who enrolled received an average of 42 hours of services. Of those who enrolled in JAG's Out-of-School application during the first 18 months of LEAP, about 54 percent disengaged before completing the program's initial phase — the "Active Phase."[18] Participants can complete the Active Phase by attaining their high school equivalency or other credential or obtaining a quality job. JAG participants did not yet have their high school credential, were often behind on credits, and most did not have prior work experience. It could, therefore, take participants more time to complete JAG than

16. Postsecondary Bridging was the first phase in the LEAP Back on Track model but is the second phase of JFF's original model.

17. Joel McFarland, Bill Hussar, Jijun Zhang, Xiaolei Wang, Ke Wang, Sarah Hein, Melissa Diliberti, Emily Forrest Cataldi, Farrah Bullock Mann, and Amy Barmer, "The Condition of Education 2019" (2019), website: https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019144.pdf.

18. JAG grantees implemented one of two models, the Out-of-School application, which was implemented primarily by community-based organizations, or the Alternative Education application, which was implemented primarily in alternative schools. Only Out-of-School application outcomes are presented in the report due to small sample sizes and data quality issues with the data for the Alternative Education application.

Back on Track. Depending on the participant's goals and the LEAP grantees' requirements, several years of program engagement might have been needed for participants to complete the Active Phase. During this time, young people can experience substantial changes in their life circumstances, such as moving, having a baby, working full time, or enrolling in a different program. Staff reported that they were not always able to contact former participants to learn why they had left the program. The report details some of the adaptations JAG programs developed to promote engagement, but it is too soon to tell from the available data whether these adaptations led to increased rates of completion in later cohorts.

Young people who were engaged in JAG say the program helped them get a job or their high school equivalency credential (such as a GED certificate), gave them a support system, taught them valuable life skills, and provided opportunities they would not have had otherwise. Most Out-of-School application participants (76 percent) who successfully completed the Active Phase went on to engage in work, school, or both during the first six months of the JAG Follow-up Phase.[19] However, 36 percent reported being disconnected from school or work at some point during the Follow-up Phase, indicating that the career pathways of participants were still stabilizing in the period following the Active Phase. Among those who completed the Active Phase, 40 percent obtained their high school credential and about a fifth obtained a credential.[20]

- **As staff-intensive interventions, JAG and Back on Track incurred personnel-related expenses that made up the majority of their costs. The costs of adding LEAP services varied by how the programs were structured and their local context. Per participant costs, including outreach and follow-up, ranged from $5,300 to $7,300.**

A cost analysis for three grantees showed how the costs to operate LEAP varied by each grantee's program structure. The cost analysis looked at different approaches to providing LEAP services, including providing services in a rural context and integrating LEAP services into existing services. Though LEAP has the potential to be cost-effective if it improves high school graduation rates, participation in the labor market, or college persistence, the study design does not allow for the determination of effectiveness since its impact on participants compared with other programs that have similar goals cannot be assessed. There is limited comparative information available about the costs of programs like LEAP, which layer services onto existing services in the community. Most of the cost estimates available for youth programs are of programs that offer a more intensive set of services, such as stipends and tuition waivers, and have higher costs per participant.[21]

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19. JAG programs require a 12-month follow-up period, but this evaluation reports on outcomes during the first six months of follow-up to allow for reporting on a larger sample size.

20. These categories are not mutually exclusive. Credentials include only those that meet the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act definition of industry-recognized credentials. See U.S. Department of Labor, "Training and Employment Guidance Letter 15-10" (2006), website: https://wdr.doleta.gov/.

21. YouthBuild was estimated to have a cost of $24,500 per participant; see Cynthia Miller, Danielle Cummings, Megan Millenky, Andrew Wiegand, and David Long, *Laying a Foundation: Four-Year Results from the National YouthBuild Evaluation* (New York: MDRC, 2018). CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs was estimated to cost $14,000 per participant. See Susan Scrivener, Michael J. Weiss, Alyssa Ratledge, Timothy Rudd, Colleen Sommo, and Hannah Fresques, *Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students* (New York: MDRC, 2015).

LESSONS

The findings in this evaluation bring to light five key observations for staff members and policymakers on program design for young people who have experienced homelessness or systems involvement.

- **Address barriers to opportunity.** Structural barriers, such as housing, transportation, child care, and financial needs, were very salient challenges for the young people who participated in LEAP. To promote engagement, programs must help address these barriers through partnerships or by changing local practices and policies. Additional support for these young people can help address the inequities they face when pursuing their educational and career goals.

- **Develop recruitment pathways through partnerships and data-sharing agreements.** LEAP points to promising strategies for identifying young people who may benefit from additional supports that they may not know are available to them. One promising strategy is partnering with other organizations that may already be connected to young people to align services and build referral relationships. Establishing data-sharing agreements with local or state child welfare, justice, or housing agencies can also help connect eligible participants to services.

- **Collaborate with agencies and other organizations to support implementation.** Partnerships were crucial to LEAP implementation. Grantees built strong partnerships by developing a shared understanding of the initiative's goals among partners, focusing on the mutual benefits of the partnerships to address potential concerns about competition, and establishing formal mechanisms for planning and feedback. Cross-system partnerships can also influence a community's broader approach to a challenge.

- **Staff-participant relationships are key.** Finding the right staff-to-participant fit and retaining key staff is central to participant engagement. Grantees sought to hire staff members with whom young people could identify and with whom they had something in common — such as a shared background. Staff intentionally focused on building strong relationships with participants. Staff also received training in trauma-informed care. Organizations should consider how to promote staff retention and make sure that participants are connected to multiple staff members to mitigate the potential effects of turnover on staff-participant relationships.

- **Allowing flexibility in the delivery of program models can promote participant engagement and success.** LEAP programs found early on that they needed to adapt their original plans for service delivery to better serve participants, such as by offering incentives or one-on-one service delivery options. JAG participants, who usually had a long horizon in the program, often did not complete the Active Phase. Back on Track participants also left the program without completing it. This finding calls out the need for more research into how programs that serve young people can sustain engagement over a long period, as the path to a high school credential or postsecondary degree is a long one. Offering interim milestones, such as pursuing credentials that take less time to earn or paid work experiences, may provide participants with more easily attainable successes that keep them engaged as they reach for long-term goals. LEAP grantees developed these adaptations and others to promote engagement, but a longer follow-up period is needed to assess whether these adaptations will improve engagement among later LEAP cohorts.

LOOKING FORWARD

During the first three years of the initiative, LEAP programs made significant strides in building their partnerships and adapting how they delivered JAG and Back on Track services to LEAP's priority populations. This effort was a response to what staff members for each program model were learning about the support that participants required to persist on their educational and career pathways. These lessons are being carried forward into the next phase of the LEAP work, which started in summer 2019. During this next phase, all LEAP grantees will continue to work with participants who are currently enrolled to support their completion of the program. A subset of the original LEAP grantees will also expand their work to deepen their relationships with system partners, with the goal of replicating services. The ultimate objective is to reach more young people who are involved with systems and experiencing homelessness — and who could thus benefit from LEAP — and to promote change in public system practices and policies for this population.

CHAPTER
1

Introduction

Across the United States, there are almost 5 million young people who are "disconnected" — that is, neither in school nor employed.[1] These young people are often involved in the child welfare and justice systems or experiencing homelessness. As a result, they are likely to face challenges that stem directly from their systems involvement, such as disrupted schooling, housing instability, limited family support, and trauma. The goal of the Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP)™ initiative, launched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2015, is to improve the educational and employment outcomes of these young people, ages 15 to 25, by opening access to opportunity pathways for this historically underserved community.[2]

Education and employment are predictors of future success.[3] The LEAP initiative seeks to reduce the inequities in life chances of young people who are experiencing homelessness or systems involvement and support their success. LEAP focuses on building the educational and work-related skills of these young people and connecting them to opportunities through postsecondary and career pathways that improve their long-term earning potential.

The scale of this population is substantial. In 2016, nearly 65,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 20 were in foster care, and, though declining in recent years, about 45,000 young people were held in residential placement facilities each day.[4] In 2017, more than 50,000 young people under 25 were homeless, including 10,000 who were homeless while parenting.[5] Latino and African-American youth are overrepresented in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In 2017, more than 50

1. Measure of America (2016).
2. The Annie E. Casey Foundation received funding from the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) to support a portion of this initiative. SIF was a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) that received funding from 2010 to 2016. Using public and private resources to find and grow community-based nonprofits with evidence of results, SIF intermediaries received funding to award subgrants that focus on overcoming challenges in economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development. Although CNCS made its last SIF intermediary awards in fiscal year 2016, SIF intermediaries will continue to administer their subgrant programs until their federal funding is exhausted. Federal funding support for LEAP was initially slated to last for five years. However, a decision by Congress in 2017 to discontinue funding for most SIF projects means that federal funding for LEAP through SIF will instead end after three years of services.
3. Sum et al. (2009).
4. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2018).
5. Henry et al. (2017).

percent of youth in the foster care system were youth of color.[6] Youth of color with delinquency cases are more likely to be petitioned (similar to a complaint or charging document in adult court) than cases involving white youth, and Latino and African-American youth are more likely to be placed in detention if their case is adjudicated delinquent, which is comparable to being convicted and sentenced to jail time in the adult criminal justice system.[7] In turn, disparities in the justice system are more acute for adults: African-American men are incarcerated at six times the rate of white males.[8]

Young people exiting foster care or juvenile justice placements often make the transition to adulthood with relatively little family support, while their peers in the general population often remain dependent on parental care and support well into their twenties and beyond.[9] The circumstances that lead young people to experience systems involvement or homelessness often co-occur with disrupted schooling. Furthermore, these individuals are particularly at risk for experiencing trauma, which can have many adverse short- and long-term effects on children and adolescents.[10]

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that young people experiencing homelessness or systems involvement may face troubling outcomes as adults across a wide range of areas. Young adults with a history of foster care or juvenile justice custody are less likely than their peers to obtain a high school credential or to be employed.[11] Few foster care youth (only 20 percent of those who graduate high school) go on to college, and even fewer former foster care youth (less than 10 percent) obtain a four-year degree.[12] In addition, according to one study, fewer than 25 percent of young people formerly in foster care are consistently employed.[13] Among youth over the age of 18 who are homeless, fewer than 15 percent have received a high school diploma.[14] In addition, youth with previous systems involvement experience high rates of homelessness and fare worse than the general population in terms of criminal justice involvement, mental health challenges, substance use, and social support, and are far more likely than their peers to become parents at a very early age.[15]

Additional considerations may be necessary for systems-involved young people who are "crossover" or "dually involved" youth — that is, young people involved with both the child welfare and justice systems, either at the same time or sequentially. Research has shown that there is considerable overlap in the individuals served by these two systems and that an even higher proportion of crossover youth are persons of color than in either system individually. Because of challenges with data sharing between these systems, the actual percentage of dually-involved youth is difficult to confirm. Young

6. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018).
7. Hockenberry and Puzzanchera (2018).
8. Osgood, Foster, and Courtney (2010).
9. Schoeni and Ross (2005); Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut (2005).
10. Filitti et al. (1998).
11. Bullis et al. (2002); Courtney et al. (2011).
12. National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (2014).
13. Hook and Courtney (2010).
14. Osgood, Foster, and Courtney (2010).
15. Chapin Hall Center for Children (2012); Courtney et al. (2007).

people who are involved in multiple systems may face heightened challenges that require specific strategies to help them embark on educational and employment pathways.[16]

ABOUT LEAP

By targeting systems-involved and homeless youth specifically, LEAP aims to connect these young people with much-needed services and supports to directly address the inequalities of race, ethnicity, and economic standing that program participants experience. Through two education- and employment-focused program models, the LEAP initiative aims to improve young people's connections to school and work, and thus improve longer-term economic outcomes. One program, Jobs for America's Graduates, or JAG, focuses on young people who have not completed high school and provides them with services that aim to help them gain a secondary credential and that equip them with work and life skills to transition into quality jobs or postsecondary education. The second, JFF's Back on Track model, aims to help young adults transition to postsecondary education and persist through their crucial first year of school. These two models were developed for young people but, prior to LEAP, neither specifically targeted young people who experience homelessness or systems involvement.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation chose the JAG and Back on Track programs for LEAP because of preliminary evidence of their successes, their potential for replication in diverse contexts, and their history of reaching young people with multiple risk factors. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the LEAP models, showing the main activities of each model, and its intended in-program and long-term outcomes. As shown, LEAP grantees were to provide JAG or Back on Track core services but adapt them in a way that addressed the needs of the local LEAP population. These LEAP enhancements, informed by prior research about what this population of young people might need, included additional supports to promote participant success — often through cross-system partnerships, leadership activities, and staff training on using a trauma-informed approach. The immediate goals of these activities were to help participants attain their high school credential and embark on a postsecondary education or employment pathway that would ultimately lead to higher earnings.

Implementing the two models in LEAP are 10 grantees in eight states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, and New York.[17] Table 1.1 provides an overview of the LEAP grantees and the local program structure. (Appendix D displays the LEAP SIF Organizational Network developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.) LEAP grantees reflect a wide diversity of local contexts — from a statewide initiative in Maine; to programs in the large urban areas of New York, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Minneapolis; to programs that operate in multiple locations within their states.

16. Haight et al. (2016).

17. As part of the LEAP initiative, sponsor agencies are implementing one or both program models within their state. Five agencies operate JAG programs, three run Back on Track programs, and two offer both JAG and Back on Track.

FIGURE 1.1

LEAP Services and Expected Outcomes

LEAP adapts two established programs for a special population: young people ages 15-25 with involvement in the child welfare system, juvenile or criminal justice, or homelessness…

...with the aim of producing positive short-term and long- term outcomes in young people's lives.

Program	Program core components	+ LEAP enhancements	In-program outcomes	Long-term outcomes
Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) Targets young people who have not yet completed high school	**JAG** ▪ Curriculum on career and personal skills develop, basic skills, and job skills ▪ Simultaneous enrollment in high school or equivalency program ▪ Personalized goal setting and support ▪ Connections to employers and job placements ▪ Student-led career association ▪ 12 month of follow-up support services	▪ Staff members trained to work with young people who have experienced trauma ▪ Case managers to connect participants to support services to meet their housing, child care, and basic needs ▪ Opportunities for participants to develop leadership skills and take on leadership roles in their program ▪ Cross-system partnerships to harness local resources and address gaps in services	▲ Attainment of high school diploma ▲ Attainment and retention of quality jobs ▲ Enrollment in postsecondary education	▲ Attainment of postsecondary credential ▲ Employment status and earnings
JFF's Back on Track Targets young people making the transition to post-secondary education	**Back on Track** ▪ Bridging curriculum and experiences to build college and career success skills ▪ Academic skill development to prepare for postsecondary study ▪ Personalized guidance and exploration of college and career training programs ▪ Help navigating enrollment and financial aid ▪ Connection to post secondary resources, student organizations, and activities ▪ Continued support during the first year of college or advanced training		▲ Enrollment in post-secondary education ▲ Persistence in first year of postsecondary education	▲ Attainment of postsecondary degree or certification ▲ Employment status and earnings

TABLE 1.1

Introduction to LEAP Grantees

LEAD GRANTEE	CONTRACTED SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERS	LOCATION	MODELS	LEAP SERVICES DELIVERED BY PARTNER OR GRANTEE	PRIMARY TARGET POPULATION	GRANTEE AND CONTRACTED PARTNERS' PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH MODEL
Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES)	None	New York, NY	JAG Out-of-School	Grantee	Justice-involved	New to JAG program
Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD)	Los Angeles Trade Technical College Youth Opportunity Movement Watts Boyle Heights Technology YouthSource Center	Los Angeles, CA	JAG Out-of-School Back on Track	Grantee and partners	Foster care Justice-involved	New to JAG program Adapted existing college bridge model for Back on Track
Covenant House Alaska	Nine Star My House	Anchorage and Wasilla, AK	JAG Out-of-School	Grantee and partner	Homeless	New to JAG program
The Door	None	New York, NY	Back on Track	Grantee	Justice-involved, foster care, homeless	Adapted existing college and vocational bridge models
Jobs for Arizona's Graduates	Local charter and alternative high schools	Phoenix and Tucson metro areas, AZ	JAG Out-of-School and Alternative Education	Grantee and partners	Justice-involved, foster care, homeless	New to JAG Out-of-School and Alternative Education applications
Jobs for Michigan's Graduates	Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation GST Michigan Works!	Benton Harbor, Detroit and Flint, MI	JAG Out-of-School	Grantee and partner	Justice-involved, foster care, homeless	Prior experience with JAG Out-of-School application

(continued)

TABLE 1.1 (continued)

LEAD GRANTEE	CONTRACTED SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERS	LOCATION	MODELS	LEAP SERVICES DELIVERED BY PARTNER OR GRANTEE	PRIMARY TARGET POPULATION	GRANTEE AND CONTRACTED PARTNERS' PRIOR EXPERIENCE WITH MODEL
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	Avenue Scholars Foundation Central Plains Center for Services The Hub	Omaha and Lincole, NE	Back on Track	Partners	Foster care	Adapting exsiting college pathway models
Project for Pride in Living (PPL)	Contract Alternative Schools Hennepin County Medical Center	Minneapolis, MN	JAG Out-of-School Alternative Education	Grantee and partners	Justice-involved and foster care	New to JAG Out-of-School and Alternative Education applications
South Bay Community Services (SBCS)	None	San Diego, CA	Back on Track	Grantee	Justice-involved, foster care, homeless	New to Back on Track
University of Southern Maine (USM)	Office of Children and Family Services Jobs for Maine's Graduates Goodwill of Northern New England Community Care	Maine – statewide	JAG In-School Back on Track	Partners	Foster care	Prior experience with JAG In-School application Adapting existing college pathway models

Each LEAP grantee operates in partnership with other organizations, such as the K-12 educational system, postsecondary education and training institutions, employers, workforce development organizations, child welfare and justice agencies, and other local nonprofit organizations and government entities. About half of the LEAP grantees involved in the initiative had prior experience operating the JAG or Back on Track models, but not specifically with the LEAP population. The other grantees began operating the programs when they joined LEAP. Two LEAP grantees functioned as intermediaries overseeing implementation of the initiative and contracting with local partners to deliver LEAP services. LEAP grantees began implementing services in summer 2016, and the SIF phase of the initiative, which is the focus of this evaluation, operated through June 2019.

LEAP grantees had a substantial task before them in Year 1. Launching a new initiative requires intensive start-up efforts, including building up recruitment channels, learning new interventions, designing service delivery, recruiting and training staff, collaborating with new partners, and navigating new data collection and reporting requirements. Grantees received assistance from the LEAP National Partners during their start-up phase and throughout the SIF period. (See Box 1.1.) Back on Track grantees were paired with a coach from JFF to provide technical assistance. Several of the JAG grantees had established state programs (for example, Arizona, Michigan, and Maine); the remaining sites were paired with a coach from JAG national. Each LEAP grantee was also paired with a liaison from the School & Main Institute to receive additional technical assistance to support overall management, including monthly check-in calls. There were also annual LEAP convenings and quarterly learning community calls or webinars to support implementation and provide opportunities for cross-initiative learning. The Anne E. Casey Foundation's advisory team of national partners and foundation staff included four young leaders who had experienced public systems.

BOX 1.1

LEAP National Partners

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Launched LEAP initiative in 2016, partially funded by a Social Innovation Fund grant. Selected grantees and provided overall direction and oversight. Also engaged four National Young Leaders to provide guidance on the initiative.

School & Main Institute

Organized technical assistance at the grantee and initiative-wide level. Provided grantees with assistance on recruitment, partnerships, grant management, and reporting; organized initiative-wide calls on topics related to implementation; and held annual LEAP convenings.

JFF

As the developer of Back on Track, provided technical assistance on implementation to LEAP Back on Track grantees.

Jobs for America s Graduates

Provided technical assistance to LEAP JAG grantees on model implementation and use of the national JAG database, e-NDMS.

ABOUT LEAP PARTICIPANTS

LEAP grantees could enroll young people ages 15-25 who had current or prior involvement in the foster care system, juvenile or criminal justice system, or who were recently or currently homeless.[18] During the first three years of the initiative, programs enrolled nearly 2,800 young people. Eighty-two percent of enrolled participants were youth of color. (Figure 1.2 shows the breakdowns by JAG and Back on Track.)[19] Approximately 51 percent of enrollees had current or prior foster care involvement, 37 percent had current or prior justice system involvement, and 50 percent had experienced homelessness. (Figure 1.3 shows the breakdowns by JAG and Back on Track.) This section describes the characteristics of LEAP participants drawing from baseline information and interviews with staff and participants.

The demographic breakdowns varied a good deal across LEAP grantees, reflecting the local context. Grantees operating in predominately white communities served mostly white young people. Programs in Michigan and Minnesota served predominately black participants, and those in the large urbanized cities of New York and Los Angeles served a mix of black and Hispanic participants. There was also variation across locations in terms of the percentages of young people by type of system involvement, which reflected the focus and history of the LEAP grantee.

Educational Experiences

Participants came into the LEAP program with a range of educational experiences. JAG is geared toward those who do not already have their secondary credential, and nearly all JAG participants (96 percent) lacked this credential at the time they enrolled. In interviews, they described nonlinear educational experiences that often included jumps between traditional high schools, alternative schools, General Educational Development (GED) programs, homeschooling, and periods of being disconnected from school. Each participant had a unique pathway, but common reasons for switching schools included moving, becoming a parent, difficulty with academics, being asked to leave the school, or not getting along with peers at school. JAG staff members described how these winding educational pathways caused some young people to be behind on grade level or credit accumulation and some to have negative associations with school.

Back on Track targets those who have completed or are nearing completion of high school, and most Back on Track participants enrolled in LEAP with a high school credential (73 percent) or were likely to receive one in the near future. Some participants had not yet identified a career or college pathway, while others had already applied to or enrolled in college. Some participants had attempted college before and were looking to reconnect. Staff reported that many had transitioned to several schools throughout their academic careers. They also noted that compared with other young people

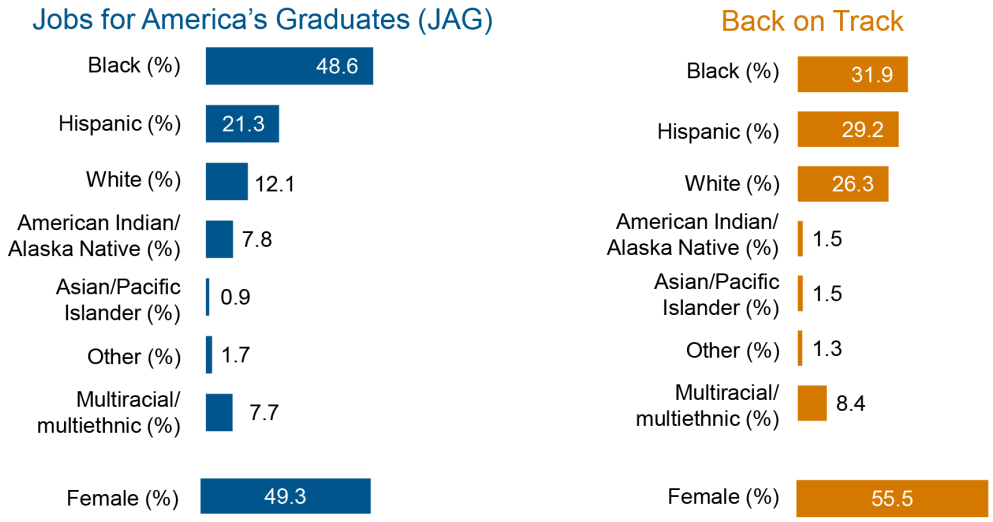
18. Young people who were currently or ever involved with the foster care or juvenile justice systems were eligible for the program, including those who have exited either system and foster youth who have achieved permanent placement. LEAP grantees were responsible for verifying this eligibility. Self-reporting from a participant was acceptable in cases where no other documentation was available. LEAP used the Housing and Urban Development definitions of homelessness, including young people who experience homelessness with, or without, a parent or guardian.

19. Specifically, 42 percent are African-American, 25 percent Hispanic, 18 percent white, and 14 percent other, including 5 percent American Indian, 1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 8 percent multiracial.

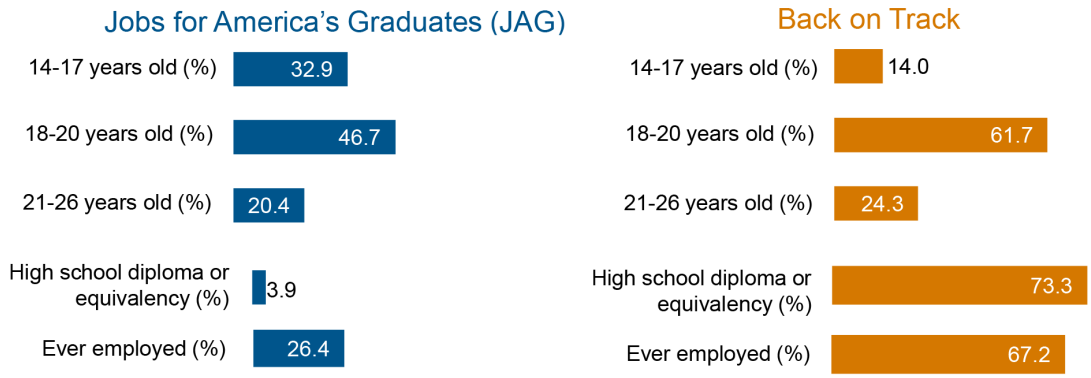
FIGURE 1.2

About LEAP Participants

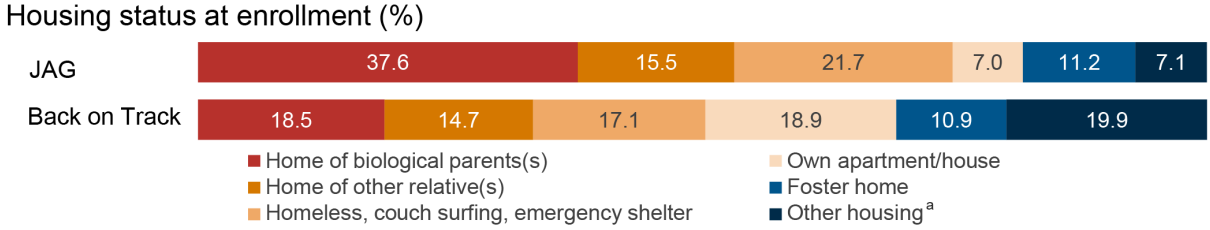
The majority of LEAP participants were young people of color. **JAG** and **Back on Track** participants differed in important ways.



Back on Track participants were older and most already had their high school equivalency, compared with **JAG** participants. More **Back on Track** enrollees had worked.



The majority of participants did not live with their biological parents. The diversity of housing arrangements reflected the housing instability that many participants experienced.



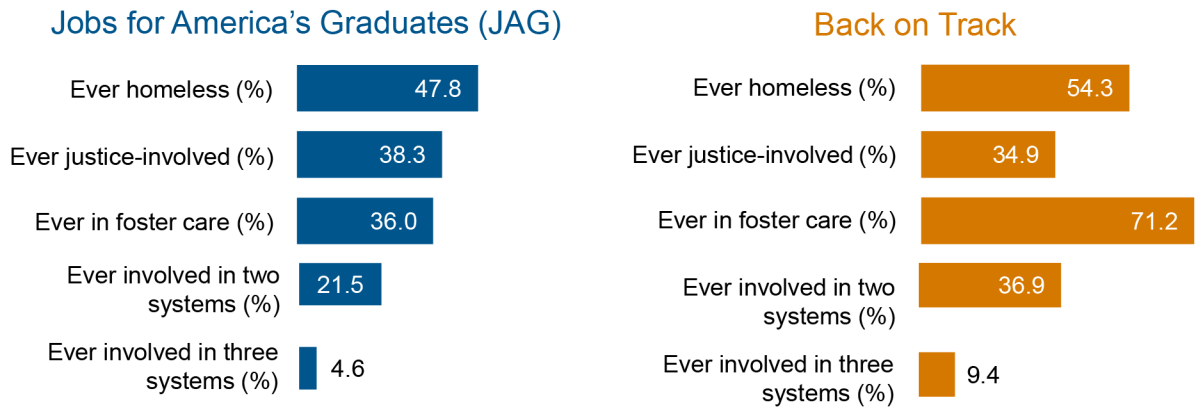
SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS and Back on Track sites' management information systems. Reflects individual-level demographics on 2,238 individuals who enrolled prior to October 1, 2018.

NOTE: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.
[a]"Other" category in housing includes home of friends, group home, or other placement (only tracked by Back on Track grantees) and housing recorded as "other."

FIGURE 1.3

Systems Involvement and Homeless Background of Participants at Enrollment

Back on Track participants were more likely to have been involved in foster care compared with **JAG**, reflecting several of the **Back on Track** grantees' focus on the foster care population.



53 percent of **JAG** participants and 60 percent of **Back on Track** participants had current systems involvement or were experiencing homelessness at the time of enrollment.

SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS and Back on Track sites' management information systems. Reflects individual-level demographics on 2,238 individuals who enrolled prior to October 1, 2018.
NOTE: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

served by LEAP grantees, LEAP participants tend to have lower reading and math skills than their peers and need more support with time management and study skills. About a quarter of Back on Track participants reported having been in special education (compared with 11 percent for JAG).[20]

Employment Experience

About 40 percent of participants had work experience when they enrolled in the program, but there were also differences between JAG and Back on Track participants. About two-thirds of Back on Track participants had employment experience compared with just over one-fourth of JAG participants. This may be a result of JAG participants being comparatively younger than Back on Track participants. Common jobs for participants included entry-level retail, food service, and administrative

20. These were based on self-reported information by participants and were not verified by LEAP staff.

positions. JAG staff members reported that participants often lacked an adult in their lives to provide instruction in work-readiness skills or support for finding employment or identifying career options.

Living Arrangements

LEAP staff members reported that homelessness and housing insecurity were prevalent among participants. Seventy percent of LEAP enrollees lived somewhere other than with their biological parents. (Not living with biological parents was more common for Back on Track participants than for JAG participants.) About a fifth of participants were homeless. These numbers also represent status at a point in time; participants and staff members described how a young person's living situation could change quickly and unexpectedly. Housing instability was named as the largest challenge participants faced. Staff members said there was often a lack of space in shelters or transitional housing, or affordable housing options. "When you're not sure where you're sleeping, basic needs are the most important," said one staff member. "It's hard to focus on education or employment without those basic needs met," said another staff member.

Parenting

Overall, 17 percent of participants were parents at the time they enrolled in the program. Most program staff said that it was not uncommon for participants to be parents or to become pregnant while in the program, and they reported that access to child care could be a barrier to participation in school. Some participants who were interviewed said they were taking time away from school during their pregnancy or to care for a child. Given these challenges and the overall lack of support, it is not surprising that young parents in the United States are much less likely to earn a high school credential, and single parents are less likely to earn a degree or certificate within six years of postsecondary enrollment compared with other students who are not parenting.[21]

Other Challenges

Staff members report that the systems-involved young people they work with often do not have a safety net to fall back on for financial support, or a trusted adult to lean on for counsel and encouragement. The effects of a lack of family support can be amplified for young adults who, as they reach the age of majority in their state, may age out of services that offer protective features for minors.[22] For example, homeless young adults may feel uncomfortable seeking shelter in adult facilities, foster youth may age out of living supports available to them through child welfare, and justice-involved young people may face stiffer penalties and fewer opportunities for diversion programs such as those that offer an opportunity to redirect individuals who commit an offense to an intervention program in lieu of a conviction. Many staff members described how mental health challenges such as anxiety and stress affected many young people.

Another layer of stress and responsibility for participants involved their role in financially supporting their families and households, meaning they had to prioritize earning money in the short term rather than obtain an educational credential or pursue a career path. They may also have caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings or relatives that could pull them away from their educational

21. Only 53 percent of young women who gave birth as teens received a high school diploma compared with 90 percent of those who did not; see Manlove and Lantos (2018). See also Noll, Reichlin, and Gault (2018).

22. Council of State Governments Justice Center (2015).

goals. Many staff also reported a lack of transportation to the program as a major barrier because participants did not have a car, access to public transportation, or a driver's license. This was particularly prevalent in LEAP locations that lacked robust public transportation systems.

Participant Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity

An analysis of baseline participant characteristics by race and ethnicity suggests that there were differences by subgroups in terms of prior systems involvement and educational background. See Appendix C for participant characteristics disaggregated by race and ethnicity. These differences should be considered with caution, however, since each LEAP grantee had a particular target population, and the differences may not be the result of a systematic difference between these characteristics across all the LEAP grantees, but rather driven by the focus population for an individual program. Black participants in the JAG program tended to be older on average and had a greater frequency of justice system involvement. Perhaps because they were older, black participants reported more employment experience upon enrollment and were slightly more likely to report that they were parents. Hispanic JAG participants were slightly younger than average and were more likely to report they had experienced homelessness than foster care or justice involvement. They reported lower levels of prior work experience, and fewer of them were parents.

There were a few differences between Back on Track participants by race or ethnicity. Hispanic Back on Track participants reported lower rates of foster care overall. The prior employment experience and parenting status of black and Hispanic participants at enrollment was similar to the average profile of all Back on Track LEAP enrollees.

Participant Characteristics by Gender

An analysis of baseline gender characteristics of LEAP participants suggests that there were some differences in terms of parenting status and the type of systems involvement. Females enrolled in JAG were slightly younger and had greater rates of foster care involvement than male JAG enrollees, who had greater rates of justice involvement. Females enrolled in JAG were more likely to report that they were parents (27 percent compared with 12 percent of males). Males and females had similar rates of prior employment experience at enrollment. Among Back on Track enrollees, females were also more likely to report that they were parents (19 percent compared with 6 percent for males). Females had higher rates of foster care involvement and males had higher rates of involvement in the justice system.

Participant Assets

The characteristics of LEAP participants point to the unique challenges they faced as they embarked on LEAP pathways. However, participants had many strengths as well. Program staff members across all LEAP grantees consistently pointed to LEAP participants' resiliency and resourcefulness as key strengths.

Staff members said that participants are resourceful — they are good at accessing supports and asking for help. Staff members at all program locations described participants as self-motivated, driven, and determined to achieve their goals. In the words of one JAG staff person: "Youth experiences are often traumatic but [these experiences] are also the biggest forces in their lives as to why they do

things that they want to do….Their experiences empower them to take back their lives and put in the blood and sweat to get to where they want to be."

THE LEAP EVALUATION

There is limited evidence about what are effective interventions for young people who have experienced systems involvement or homelessness. Among evaluations of education and employment programs for young people, very few have targeted this specific population. For programs that focus on a broader, low-income youth population, findings from rigorous impact studies of comprehensive or employment-focused programs have shown some promising findings, but impacts that often fade over time as well.[23] A smaller pool of programs focused on postsecondary pathways have been rigorously evaluated and have shown some promise with respect to postsecondary enrollment and academic persistence.[24]

For youth involved in foster care, independent living services have expanded over the past 15 or so years; however, rigorous evaluation has shown few programs to be effective at improving young people's outcomes. Only five moderately sized random assignment evaluations have tested independent living programs for young people with a history of foster care, and, among those, three did not find any statistically significant impacts — that is, impacts that are larger than would generally be expected if the program had no true effect.[25] Rigorous evaluations of programs for young people involved in the juvenile justice system have been more common. Cognitive behavioral therapy programs, in particular, are supported by a fairly strong research base, which has found these programs to be effective in reducing criminal recidivism and substance abuse.[26] However, previous studies of programs for juvenile justice-involved young people have focused little on measuring impacts on employment, education, or housing.

Specific to JAG and Back on Track, prior research studies of their effectiveness specifically with systems-involved or young people experiencing homelessness are not available. For JAG, a prior study utilized a quasi-experimental evaluation to examine the impact of the JAG high school program for in-school youth on employment rates among graduates of its senior and multiyear programs and found positive impacts.[27] This study did not include either the Out-of-School or Alternative Education applications that are implemented in LEAP. For Back on Track, an outcome study found promising rates of enrollment into postsecondary education among participants, but without an impact study, it is not possible to know how Back on Track compares with other programs that have similar goals.[28]

23. See Treskon (2016) and Miller et al. (2016). Examples of these programs include Year Up, Per Scholas, Job Corps, YouthBuild, and National Guard Youth ChalleNGe.
24. Treskon (2016).
25. Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (n.d.); Skemer and Valentine (2016).
26. Lipsey, Landenberger, and Wilson (2007); Botvin, Baker, Filazzola, and Botvin (1990).
27. Sum, Khatiwada, and McLaughlin with Palma (2009).
28. Center for Youth and Communities (2013).

The LEAP evaluation is primarily an implementation study, seeking to understand how the LEAP grantees launched their programs and adapted the two program models to serve those who enrolled.[29] Underlying this main objective, the evaluation seeks to explain the process of adaptation, such as why programs chose certain adaptations and participant responses to these adaptations. Understanding participant experience in the program and the period following participation is also core to this evaluation, including how programs sought to facilitate engagement in the program. How LEAP grantees partnered with the local public agencies and nonprofit organizations to deliver services was also a focus. The evaluation also includes a limited outcomes study. (Specific research questions are listed in Appendix A.) Analysis of program participation data provided by grantees offers an initial view on engagement and outcomes, but without a control group, the study cannot assert causality.[30] Outcome measures are averaged across the LEAP grantees. Finally, a limited study of program costs of three LEAP grantees provides additional context for programs or policymakers seeking to understand the resources needed to replicate the LEAP programs. Data sources and the timeline for data collection are described in more detail in Appendix A.

While the evaluation draws on a range of data sources, it has some limitations. The implementation study, which focuses on how services were provided and adapted, covers the first 30 months of the SIF period (Years 1, 2, and midway through Year 3). The outcome study is mostly restricted to participants who enrolled in the first 18 months of the SIF period (Year 1 to midway through Year 2) due to the short follow-up period allowed during the evaluation timeline. This is because the analysis needs to allow time for participants to progress through the program, limiting the analysis to those who had at least a 12-month or 18-month follow-up period in the program participation data. Since programs were continuing to adapt their programs based on implementation experiences in the first years of LEAP, the participation rates and outcomes for the earlier cohorts may not be a good reflection of the experience of later cohorts. It is too soon to tell how the participation rates and outcomes for the later cohorts will compare with the earlier cohorts. Additionally, small sample sizes and the clustering by grantee of participants by race and ethnicity made it impossible to draw any conclusions about subgroup results.

29. SIF grantees are required to undergo an evaluation of their programs, with the goal of building evidence on effective interventions. The LEAP evaluation originally targeted a SIF "moderate" level of evidence which requires study designs that can support casual conclusions, such as impact studies using random assignment or quasi-experimental designs. However, the planned impact study of LEAP required a five-year period to allow for enrollment and follow-up of study participants. Once the SIF period was cut back to three years following the decision to discontinue funding for the SIF in 2016, the evaluation design was changed to an implementation study. Under SIF's evidence rubric, this implementation study is a "preliminary" level of evidence.

30. A random assignment design uses a process akin to a lottery to assign individuals to a treatment group whose members receive the specified intervention or to a control group whose members are embargoed from the program but free to receive other available services. If random assignment is done correctly, the members of both groups share the same characteristics. Then, when the two groups are followed up over time, the differences in their outcomes provide a reliable measure of the program's effects — or impacts.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the implementation of the JAG and Back on Track models in the LEAP initiative, respectively, and describe the models' services. Chapter 4 presents implementation lessons and efforts to improve the systems that affect the LEAP population. The cost analysis is presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 concludes with a summary of findings and five lessons for designing effective programs that service young people who may be experiencing homelessness or systems involvement.

CHAPTER
2

Implementation of Jobs for America's Graduates in the LEAP Initiative

This chapter details the implementation of the Jobs for America's Graduates, or JAG, program among seven grantees. It describes how JAG services were delivered and adapted for LEAP participants seeking employment pathways and a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. The chapter also highlights what was learned about participant experiences in JAG and their engagement in services. The last section highlights lessons learned from adapting JAG for the LEAP population.

JOBS FOR AMERICA'S GRADUATES

JAG targets young people who have not completed high school and aims to help them obtain their high school credential, pursue a postsecondary degree, and acquire work and life skills that will enable them to transition into quality jobs. The program operates in two phases. In the first phase, known as the Active Phase, program participants receive defined services and support that consist of the following: (1) instruction from a staff mentor using the JAG National Curriculum, which is a work- and college-readiness curriculum made up of a specific set of competencies that cover employability, career exploration, and independent living skills; (2) co-enrollment in a high school diploma or GED program; (3) individual counseling and guidance; (4) career development and postsecondary education placement services; and (5) leadership opportunities through the JAG Professional Association, a youth-led group. Participants complete the Active Phase once they have demonstrated mastery of a specific set of competencies in the JAG National Curriculum and have also obtained their high school diploma, GED certificate, or a quality employment opportunity. They next move into the second phase, known as the Follow-up Phase, which is a 12-month period consisting of monthly check-ins and support services.

Each LEAP-JAG program location implemented one of two applications of the JAG model: The Alternative Education application or the Out-of-School application. Program locations chose which application(s) they would deliver. The applications differ in three important ways.

- **Setting.** For the Alternative Education application, JAG is frequently offered at the alternative school where young people are enrolled. The JAG National Curriculum is typically delivered in a traditional classroom setting, and the JAG class is integrated into the students' school schedule.

Participants receive high school credit for the class, typically in the form of elective credit. The Out-of-School application is most often delivered to young people by an organization not attached to a school. The JAG curriculum is delivered by a JAG staff person through a variety of methods and settings. In the Out-of-School application, students may or may not be enrolled in school or a GED program.

- **Number of competencies to completion.** Both applications include all six components of the JAG model but differ in how young people move from the Active Phase into the Follow-up Phase. In the Out-of-School application, participants need to complete 20 competencies to transition to the Follow-up Phase, while participants in the Alternative Education application need 37 competencies.[1]

- **Active Phase completion requirement.** In the Alternative Education application, participants automatically complete the Active Phase and move into the Follow-up Phase when they are scheduled for graduation at their high schools. In the Out-of-School application, there is no set time that a participant is in the Active Phase. Participants are required to earn a high school diploma or GED certificate, or secure an employment opportunity that can lead to advancement in order to complete the Active Phase.

JAG PROGRAMS IN LEAP

As part of the LEAP initiative, grantees were asked to enhance the JAG model with additional features aimed at supporting the LEAP target population. These features included enhancing leadership opportunities for youth beyond the JAG Professional Association, providing wraparound support services focused on keeping participants engaged in programming, or coordinating support with child welfare or justice system caseworkers. Another enhancement was training staff members to work with young people who have experienced trauma, which is discussed further in Chapter 4. See Figure 2.1 for additional details about the JAG program model in LEAP.

The JAG model allowed for a lot of flexibility in how LEAP grantees could structure service delivery. Most programs worked with a coach from JAG National over the implementation period to make adaptations that met participant needs. All program locations layered various components of the JAG model with existing services. LEAP grantees who were new to JAG had a heavier lift during Year 1 to ramp up services while getting familiar with the model. LEAP grantees who were already implementing JAG built out or adapted their existing programs for the LEAP target population. All programs worked with partners in the community to deliver model services, provide supportive services, or create job opportunities. Table 2.1 outlines how LEAP grantees structured their JAG programs.

1. Program locations had discretion to determine the appropriate level of competency completion required for the Follow-up Phase. In general, participants can complete the Active Phase if they achieved the competency development goals as determined by their initial assessment and stated in their Individual Development Plans.

FIGURE 2.1

JAG Program Model in LEAP

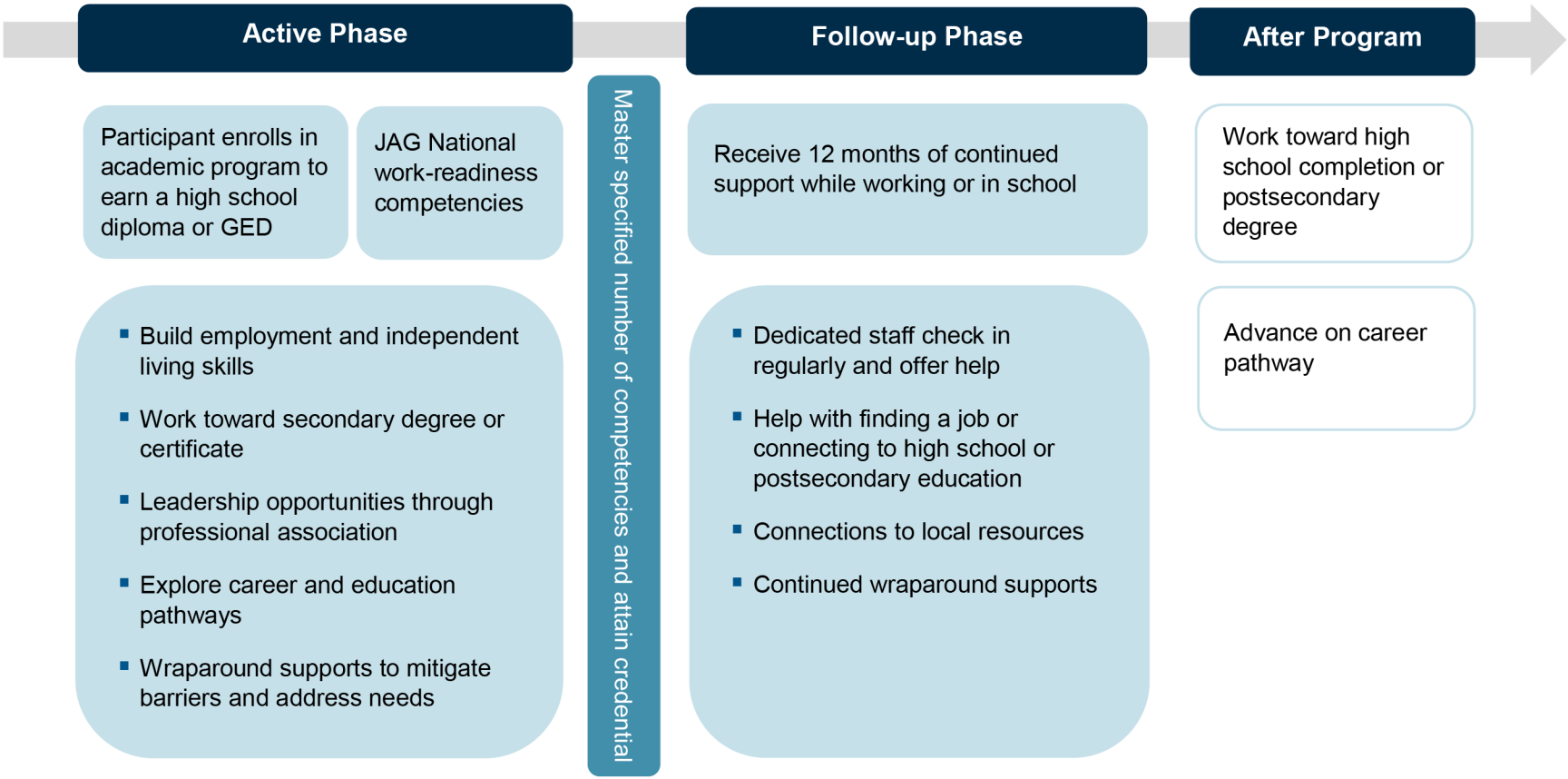


TABLE 2.1

JAG Program Structure in LEAP

	LEAD GRANTEE							
COMPONENT	**COVENANT HOUSE ALASKA**	**JOBS FOR ARIZONA'S GRADUATES**	**CASES**	**CRCD**	**USM**	**JOBS FOR MICHIGAN'S GRADUATES**	**PPL**	**PPL**
Model	OOS	OOS	OOS	OOS	Alt Ed	OOS	Alt Ed	OOS
Operated by partner or grantee	Grantee and partner	Grantee and partner	Grantee	Grantee	Partner	Grantee and partner	Partner	Partner
Competency delivery structure	Group classes 1:1 services	Group classes 1:1 services	Group classes 1:1 services	Group classes 1:1 services	Group classes	Group classes 1:1 services	1:1 services	Group classes
Curriculum	JAG National Curriculum	JAG Arizona curriculum	JAG National Curriculum	WOW curriculum	JAG Maine curriculum	JAG National Curriculum	In-house curriculum	HIRED curriculum
Academic component	GED program	Alternative school	GED program	By participant choice	Traditional high school	GED program	Alternative school	GED program
Leadership activities	Weekly discussions	Professional Association	Graduation committee	Community service activities	Professional Association	Community service activities	Youth governing board	Not implemented
Job development	Partner workforce center, in-house job opportunities, JAG Specialist's personal connections	JAG employer partnerships	JAG Specialist's personal connections	JAG Specialist's personal connections	JAG Specialist's personal connections	In-house workforce center	School-based staff person tasked with job development	JAG Specialist's personal connections
Wraparound services delivered by	Grantee organization	Staff person tasked with serving all participants	JAG Specialist	Grantee organization, partner referrals[a]	Varied partners, depending on location[a]	On-site, Mott, partners/ referrals[a]	School-based staff person	Grantee organization

NOTES: CASES is Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services. CRCD is Coaltion for Responsible Community Development. OOS is Out-of-School application. AltEd is Alternative Education application. WOW is World of Work.

[a]Connection to WIOA.

JAG RECRUITMENT, SCREENING, AND ENROLLMENT

Recruitment

The LEAP target population includes young people ages 14 to 24 who are involved in the foster care or juvenile justice systems, have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness, or both. LEAP staff looked for young people who were seeking employment or a secondary credential and would be able to attend the program regularly.

Program staff encountered challenges in identifying and recruiting systems-involved young people, particularly in the first year of LEAP. Because many young people who were eligible for LEAP had left school and may not have been enrolled in other programs, staff were unsure about where to find them for recruitment purposes. Identifying young people with current or prior foster care involvement was particularly difficult because young people can be unaware of their own foster care status (for example, in cases of kinship care or very young placements). In addition, staff at multiple program locations reported difficulty in balancing the demands of delivering services to the young people who were part of their current caseload with the significant time commitment involved in recruiting new participants and developing the necessary partnerships to build recruitment pathways. As a result, grantees developed strategies to reach young people by adding new staff whose role focused on recruitment, creating youth referral pathways, setting up data-sharing agreements with organizations that were able to identify systems involvement, and building new referral networks through strengthening relationships with systems and community partners.

Eligibility

Eligibility requirements were similar across program locations in terms of age and education level.[2] All requirements are laid out in Appendix Table A.1. Programs implementing the Alternative Education application typically had more eligibility requirements than those implementing the Out-of-School application. Some program locations required the young person to already be enrolled in the school that housed the JAG program. Some program locations also screened for educational level by looking at the young person's scores on the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) or school transcripts. However, staff reported that these requirements could be flexible, and were primarily used to determine the feasibility of a participant completing the program during a given time period. In alternative schools, some staff spoke about targeting young people with more credits, so they could complete the Active Phase of the JAG program in one or two years.

Program locations also reported using informal methods such as the initial intake interview or consistent attendance at appointments as screening tools for a young person's interest and motivation to commit to the program. One program developed a checklist to determine eligibility for young people, who were required to understand program expectations, connect to appropriate program staff, and complete the appropriate paperwork.

2. These requirements were informed by other eligibility requirements. The Annie E. Casey Foundation provided age range parameters for participant eligibility for JAG services. JAG national also had minimum and maximum age ranges for the Out-of-School and Alternative Education applications of the model.

JAG PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Participants came into the JAG program with a range of education and employment experiences. Most did not have employment experience; approximately one fourth (26 percent) of participants had been employed before enrolling in JAG. Interviews with young people indicated that they typically held these positions for six months or less. JAG participants were almost evenly split between male and female.

A very small percentage — 2 percent — had their high school diploma upon enrollment in the program. Eleven percent reported that they had received special education services. JAG participants said their educational experiences were nonlinear; that is, participants often attended multiple schools in succession including jumps between traditional high schools, alternative schools, GED programs, homeschooling, and periods of being out of school altogether. The reasons for switching schools included moving to a new town, becoming a parent, struggling academically, being asked to leave school, or having problems getting along with classmates. Staff reported that these educational experiences led some participants to develop negative associations with school and lag behind grade level or credit accumulation.

IMPLEMENTING AND ADAPTING JAG FOR THE LEAP INITIATIVE

Upon enrolling in the program, participants immediately entered the Active Phase of the JAG program. At the center of all the JAG program components was a staff member typically called a JAG Specialist, who carried an average caseload of 10 to 30 students in the Active Phase. The primary role of the JAG Specialist was to provide instruction on the JAG curriculum as well as job development. They also typically delivered case management services such as individual counseling, goal setting and planning, and support for connecting participants to any other services they may need. However, some program locations either hired or used other program staff members to deliver various components of the program model. Key components of the JAG program in the LEAP initiative are detailed below.

JAG Curriculum and Competencies

The JAG model centers around helping young people master "JAG Competencies," which are work and life skills that help young people transition to quality jobs. The competencies cover an array of topics, including goal setting, personal development, career exploration, job search skills, workplace etiquette, and life skills. Examples of competencies are provided in Appendix Table A.2.

To teach participants JAG Competencies, program staff could use the JAG National Curriculum, which consisted of a set of lessons with activities and videos for JAG Specialists to follow. Some locations used a JAG curriculum developed for their state. Program locations had flexibility to modify the curriculum, which some described as outdated. Across all program locations, staff reported adjusting to the JAG Competencies and curriculum in order to tailor them to modern workplace expectations. Several JAG staff members said they updated the material to align with technology-related job search processes, such as writing professional emails, conducting phone interviews, or texting managers. They integrated lessons on how to submit job applications online or used web-

based job search engines. In addition, staff integrated components of equity and inclusion into the JAG curriculum by facilitating discussions about the role of race in young people's lives, particularly as it relates to employment. Two program locations used alternative curricula with material that aligned with the JAG Competencies.

The structure of competency instruction varied widely across program locations and even within them. Some JAG Specialists taught the JAG Competencies in a group format during hourly sessions two to three times per week. Some delivered competencies in one-on-one meetings with participants. Participants could also gain exposure to competencies by taking part in speaker events, field trips, or working on their own on resumes and cover letters.

Per the JAG model, participants were marked as completing the Active Phase when they demonstrated mastery of several competencies. Grantees had flexibility to decide what mastery looked like, and staff members typically determined mastery through participants' achievements and observation of participants' skills. For a competency such as "conduct a job search," a JAG Specialist might schedule a class to help participants use a job search engine, marking everyone in attendance as beginning mastery (level 1) to reflect the fact that they were obtaining tools to progress toward that competency but were not yet able to conduct job searches on their own. Once participants were independently navigating job search engines and conducting job searches, a JAG Specialist would mark them as demonstrating mastery (level 3).

Education

Helping participants earn a high school credential is a key focus of JAG. Programs implementing the Alternative Education application typically did this by enrolling participants in LEAP if they were already enrolled in an alternative high school. The structure of classes differed by school, but they typically took place every day and were taught by a staff member, who assumed a traditional instructor role in a classroom setting. Students were awarded high school course credit for these classes. Programs implementing the Out-of-School application varied based on the capacity of the provider. If the provider routinely offered GED or high school diploma instruction through an in-house program, participants could enroll in that program. If the provider did not, the program helped connect participants to existing programs in the community, including traditional and alternative schools as well as GED programs. Participants' preferences for where they wanted to receive academic instruction were also taken into account. In some program locations, JAG Specialists also taught GED classes or provided academic tutoring and support as needed.

Career Development and Employment Services

The career development component of the JAG model aimed to help young people explore career paths, learn about skills for the workplace, and ultimately secure a stable and quality job. Career development and employment services were delivered in various ways, including individual support, classroom or group instruction, and experiential learning opportunities. Services were usually carried out by the JAG Specialist, but some program locations employed staff members with specialized skills in job development, or with personal connections to employers. Some of the career development and employment services included the following elements:

- *Career exploration:* JAG Specialists guided participants through an exploration of their skills and interests to help them identify one or more employment paths of interest. JAG Specialists used online self-assessment tools to find out what professions would be a good fit for participants. Most programs also coordinated field trips and tours to a company's offices or invited guest speakers from a company to the program to expose participants to local opportunities.

- *Employment planning and goal-setting:* JAG Specialists typically had one-on-one conversations with participants to help them further define their career goals and create a plan for achieving those goals. This typically included talking with the participant about the type of certification or training that a job might require.

- *Work-based experiences or learning opportunities:* Staff members at JAG program locations aimed to provide work-based learning opportunities for their participants with the goal of exposing them to different career options. Program locations varied in the opportunities that they offered based on their connections with local employers. Some program locations encouraged participants to apply for internship programs or paid summer employment experiences that offered short-term work experience and gave young people an opportunity to try jobs they found interesting; some programs made these connections for young people directly. Occasionally, JAG Specialists were able to connect participants to a job-shadowing opportunity or a group office tour with a local company. One grantee operating the Alternative Education application employed a staff member who was authorized to give school-based credit to participants for working during their school hours. As a result, participants were encouraged to acquire work experience without missing classes.

- *Employment services:* Program locations varied greatly in the services they offered to help participants find jobs. Some participants were interested in or needed to find employment while they were in the Active Phase of the program, so JAG Specialists provided employment services both throughout a participant's Active Phase and through the Follow-up Phase. All program staff performed online searches for job listings and sent them to participants. Most also brought participants to local job fairs. All programs worked hard to establish connections with employers and create direct pathways to jobs. For example, some program locations hosted networking events to create opportunities for employers and youth to meet and get to know one another. One program location created a partnership with a local grocery chain to create a pipeline for employing participants. Participant experiences securing jobs through JAG varied based on a variety of factors, which are described in more detail below.

- *Job support:* In some program locations, staff provided support to participants in their current jobs, both during the Active Phase and in the Follow-up Phase. This meant that they served as a reference for the participant in the job application process, counseled the participant through any job issues, or directly contacted an employer to discuss a participant's job performance.

Many participants said they received helpful assistance with career exploration, including learning about different types of jobs and the training they would need to obtain those jobs. Participants reported a range of experiences with employment services, which is reflective of the variation in services that program locations offered. Some programs had strong partnerships with American Job Centers or had in-house job opportunities. Participants in these programs typically got their jobs

through these connections. Some participants were focused on obtaining their high school certification and were not interested in applying for jobs. Overall, participants said they were comfortable working with their JAG Specialist to find a job. Many said they would return to the JAG program for help getting a job in the future.

Professional Association and Leadership Opportunities

All program locations were asked to provide leadership opportunities for participants as part of the LEAP enhancements to the JAG model. For some program locations, the Professional Association or the Career Association served this purpose. The Professional Association (as referred to by programs operating the Alternative Education application) – also known as the Career Association by programs operating the Out-of-School application – is a group of select participants that functions similarly to a student council. They are tasked with representing their peers, coordinating JAG events, assisting with JAG programming, or participating in community service events.

Some programs had a highly structured Professional Association, with elected members and monthly meetings where participants discussed improvements for the JAG program. Program locations with a history of serving JAG participants or operating out of schools had more success with implementing a structured Professional or Career Association. Not every program location implemented a Professional or Career Association.

Staff members reported that a challenge to creating the Professional or Career Associations was scheduling a time when all participants would be able to attend. As a result, staff members created alternative leadership opportunities that were typically less structured and more individualized. Some of these included peer mentoring, serving as a representative or speaker at an educational conference or advocacy event, or encouraging participants to take a leadership role in a group activity.

Individual JAG program locations also tried to integrate a "youth voice" into their program design and create avenues for youth feedback outside of the Professional or Career Associations. They did this by asking young people to help plan events or activities for the program, determine incentives, or help recruit participants.

Individualized Counseling and Wraparound Supports

As a supplement to the core JAG model components, program locations provided individualized support services aimed at mitigating barriers to participant success. These were typically carried out by both JAG Specialists and other local program staff and were highly dependent on each participant's circumstances. Some examples include intensive case management or individualized counseling and referrals to other in-house staff or partner organizations. These services were typically provided on an as-needed basis.

The most common wraparound, or comprehensive, supports that were offered by program staff included food, clothing, housing referrals, transportation assistance, help securing identification, and financial assistance to cover personal or professional costs. Many of these services were offered in-house at individual program locations, and others were provided through referrals or partner organizations. Participants who were interviewed shared the sentiment that they "knew staff could help them with anything they needed."

Follow-up Phase

In the Follow-up Phase, JAG Specialists attempted to contact participants at least once a month for one full year. Follow-up communication occurred through texting, phone calls, in-person meetings (either scheduled or when the staff member encountered the participant, which was more likely to happen in alternative schools), or Facebook messaging. The services provided during the Follow-up Phase were highly dependent on student circumstance and interest. Most commonly, participants reported getting the most support with their job search, postsecondary education options, and referrals to other programs or services. JAG Specialists also employed an "open door policy" so that participants could return for additional support at any point after the 12-month follow-up period.

Adapting and Enhancing JAG for LEAP

JAG program staff found that they had to modify their services to adequately suit the needs of LEAP participants, whose experiences with systems involvement and homelessness presented unique challenges and structural barriers to persisting in school and work. Ultimately, program staff came up with innovative adaptations to the delivery of the JAG model that offer promising practices for other programs that encounter similar challenges. The following points detail some of the common challenges and adaptive solutions that surfaced when JAG programs tried to address the needs of LEAP participants. Table 2.2 lists examples of these adaptations.

- **Participants had multiple demands on their time that made it difficult to attend classes on a regular basis.** Program locations, specifically those that did not offer JAG programming during scheduled classroom time, struggled to deliver JAG Competencies and curriculum instruction in a group-based format that accommodated individual participant schedules. As previously described, local program staff adapted by delivering the JAG Competencies on a one-on-one basis when participants missed workshops or classes. Over time, this structure successfully kept participants engaged, on track, and making progress toward mastering competencies. This approach did, however, involve a few compromises. For instance, JAG Specialists faced difficulty managing larger caseloads because they spent more time engaged in one-on-one meetings. Additionally, JAG Specialists had fewer chances to bring together program participants for group activities, such as the Professional or Career Association meetings. JAG Specialists were also unable to teach relationship-based competencies such as team building or communication in a one-on-one format given the need for this adaptation.

- **One grantee implementing the Alternative Education application addressed the challenge of access to classes by issuing high school English credit for participants who attend JAG classes.** Staff at the program location worked to align the JAG class curriculum and competency delivery with the district course codes and state expectations of a standard English course. Given that LEAP participants may not have room in their schedules for an elective class if they are behind in credits, earning credit in a core field made JAG more accessible to the LEAP population.

- **Participants faced a long path to earning a high school diploma or high school equivalency credential.** Program staff found that many participants were behind on credits when they enrolled in LEAP, and their life circumstances could hinder their progress. This had the effect of extending the time it takes these young people to complete high school and limiting the number of new participants that a program could enroll each year to keep its caseload manageable. As a

TABLE 2.2

JAG Program Challenges and Adaptations

CHALLENGE	ORIGINAL STRUCTURE	ADAPTATION	EXAMPLE OF A UNIQUE APPROACH
Participants had multiple demands on their time that made it difficult to attend classes.	Group-based classes	One-on-one competency delivery at times convenient for participants	Covenant House Alaska's JAG Specialists created a checklist using the competencies and one-on-one appointments with participants to figure out which competencies they want to work on.
Participants had a long horizon to obtaining a high school credential.	Participants focused on earning a high school credential to complete the Active Phase	Participants are encouraged to explore opportunities to earn an occupational or employment skills certification to complete the Active Phase	CRCD coordinates short-term skills training opportunities for participants, such as guard card, construction, and flagger trainings. Participants earn a certificate for their participation while gaining exposure to other JAG Competencies.
Staff turnover and fit could interfere with staff's ability to build relationships with participants.	Programs hired JAG Specialists with a variety of traits and experiences	Programs defined the necessary attributes for a JAG Specialist	PPL switched from hiring their JAG Specialist through the district school system to hiring individually by alternative school, in order to find better fits to the culture of each school
Participants need resources and experiences outside of the core JAG services.	JAG programs have limited resources to provide stipends, supplies, and other financial supports	Programs offer credit-bearing work experiences, paid work experiences, or internships Programs co-enroll participants in other programs to increase wraparound supports (incentives, clothing, supplies, internships)	PPL's Work-Based Learning Coordinator was certified to award credits to participants for working during their school schedule CASES co-enrolled participants with their Justice Plus program which provided stipends to their participants for completing goals

NOTES: CRCD is Coalition for Responsible Community Development. PPL is Project for Pride in Living. CASES is Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services.

result, program staff members began to place greater emphasis on meeting employment-related requirements for completing the JAG program, rather than high school completion. These requirements included getting a job or completing work-related training. For example, staff at one site encouraged participants to consider completing an industry-recognized certificate program such as security guard training, an apprenticeship, or bartender licensure training to move from the Active to the Follow-up Phase. Program locations found that creating more opportunity to achieve short-term wins was helpful in keeping participants engaged and advancing toward completion of the JAG program.

- **Relationships between the JAG Specialist and LEAP participants were key to program delivery.** Over time, local programs fine-tuned the qualities and experiences they were looking for in a JAG Specialist. Most program locations sought specialists who had experience working with this populaton. Some programs preferred a specialist with a background in teaching while others emphasized a background in social work. One JAG program transitioned the role of hiring the JAG Specialist from the school district administration to the staff of individual alternative high schools in an effort to secure a good fit for each high school. Staff turnover could compromise staff members' ability to build relationships with program participants.

- **Participants need resources and experiences beyond core JAG services.** Program staff members realized that they needed to provide a robust set of wraparound supports to help address the circumstances in young people's lives that prevented them from progressing in the JAG program. Often, additional supports were required, but they fell outside of core program services. Some of these supports include mental health referrals and support with housing or child care. Program staff also came up with creative and innovative ways to establish partnerships in their communities and layer JAG model components with resources outside of LEAP. Several program locations co-enrolled participants in other programs, such as YouthBuild or Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act services, with similar goals but with the added capacity to provide financial incentives to young people. In addition, two local programs built partnerships with summer internship programs to cultivate more opportunities for work experience.

Table 2.2 captures the adaptations described above and provides examples of unique and innovative approaches from various JAG program locations.

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES IN JAG SERVICES

In summer 2017 and fall 2018, 83 JAG participants across all program locations took part in interviews with MDRC researchers to document their program experiences. The majority of participants were in the Active Phase of the JAG program, while others were in the Follow-up Phase, had completed the program, or had left the program without completing it.

Participants said they were initially interested in enrolling in the JAG program for several reasons, such as getting a job or a secondary credential, learning financial skills, securing extra support in their lives, and feeling drawn to specific program staff.

All those who were interviewed had generally positive feedback about the LEAP program. The academic component of the JAG program was important to many participants. Participants who were interviewed and enrolled in a GED program or alternative school typically reported that they were motivated to obtain their diploma or GED certificate and had a clear timeline for achieving their goals. One participant said "JAG was the turnaround for me. I didn't care and didn't want to do anything — it got to the point where my mom almost pulled me out of school. JAG gave me a reason to look forward to coming to school."

While all participants who enrolled in JAG were interested in gaining education and employment, some participants prioritized getting their GED or high school diploma over finding a job. They reported that this was often due to pressure from their family members or a lack of the necessary credentials to gain employment. Many participants expressed the sentiment that picking up work-readiness skills was helpful, but their primary goal was to complete their education.

Although not all participants were focused on immediately obtaining employment, many said the JAG Competencies provided them with an important set of tools they had never before received at school or anywhere else. One participant said, "I wasn't even thinking about a job before I got [to JAG]. My JAG Specialist changed how and when I would think about a career." Participants said the most useful competencies were resumé development, interviewing, and developing their communication skills. Participants who completed the JAG program reported using the skills they had learned long after the program ended.

Participant experiences with JAG leadership opportunities varied. Some participants said they were not interested in taking on leadership roles because they were busy, focused on achieving other goals in the JAG program, or did not feel comfortable in a leadership position. These reasons may be reflected in the challenges that staff faced to implement leadership activities. Participants who were involved in leadership activities during their time in LEAP commonly reported that it helped them to come out of their shell and feel empowered to use their voices and make a difference.

In reflecting on the program, many participants spoke about their relationship to staff as a key part of their experience. They felt that the staff understood their needs, pushed them to do things like get a job or go to college, and were flexible with their schedules and treated them like adults. Many participants said that LEAP gave them a support system that they would not have gotten elsewhere. One participant said, "[JAG Specialists] are not like teachers in high school. Here, you feel like they actually care for you and want you to get your education." While some participants reported being unable to get in contact with their JAG Specialist because they were no longer with the organization, a majority reported that they remained in touch with their JAG Specialist or other LEAP program staff after completing the Active Phase of the JAG program.

Many participants across all sites said they would recommend the program to their friends and wanted more people to know about it. Of the participants who suggested improvements to the program, most focused on financial assistance, housing assistance, increasing field trips, and other activities.

PARTICIPATION AND IN-PROGRAM OUTCOMES

This section presents findings that relate to the participation and in-program outcomes of JAG participants. These findings are based on participant data entered by JAG program staff into the JAG National management information system known as e-NMDS. The timeframe of the analysis is mostly limited to participants who enrolled in the first year and a half of LEAP implementation. Therefore, the analysis largely does not include participants who enrolled after LEAP grantees had adapted service delivery to increase program engagement and completion among the LEAP population. Furthermore, program staff reported that they faced challenges navigating the database and were unable to enter all required data into the database. Participation and completion numbers may be lower than expected due to the data quality or missing data. Data are presented as averages across LEAP grantees, and there was variation across the program locations. Additional details about the JAG data and analysis are presented in Appendix A.

Active Phase Participation

The JAG program intends to deliver services to participants over a sustained period. For the Alternative Education application, Active Phase services generally span the senior year of school and then participants move to the 12-month Follow-up Phase, resulting in nearly a two-year period of participation. For the Out-of-School application, the length of participation in the Active Phase is driven by the level of participants' schooling and skills when they enter the program and the individual JAG program's requirements about what is required to move to the 12-month Follow-up Phase.

Most participants who enrolled in JAG received some services. Among participants in the Alternative Education application, 96 percent received at least one service.[3] Among participants in the Out-of-School application, 85 percent received at least one service.[4] The top panel of Figure 2.2 compares the activity participation percentages between the two JAG program applications. Not surprisingly, the JAG Competencies, the foundation of the intervention, had the highest participation compared with other activities in both the Out-of-School and Alternative Education applications. From there, participants in the Alternative Education application had higher rates of group activities (such as Career Association or field trips) than their Out-of-School counterparts, who participated in these activities at lower rates. Both groups received similar rates of guidance counseling, reflecting that even in the Alternative Education application, the JAG Specialist worked one-on-one with participants.

Participants who enrolled in the Alternative Education model spent, on average, more than four times the number of hours in program activities than those in the Out-of-School application (that is, 90 hours compared with 21 hours). This finding indicates that those in the Alternative Education application who were receiving services as part of their school day received a higher dosage of JAG services than their Out-of-School counterparts who received services on a more individualized schedule.

3. Among participants who enrolled prior to 10/1/2017.
4. Among participants who enrolled prior to 10/1/2017.

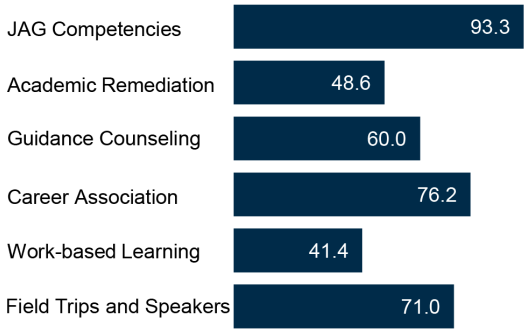
FIGURE 2.2

JAG Participation and In-Program Outcomes

LEAP participants who enrolled in JAG received an average of 42 hours of services.[a]

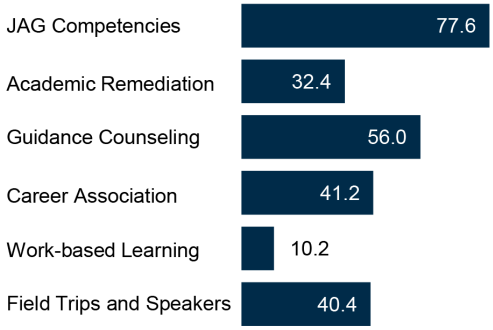
Alternative Education (Alt Ed) participants engaged in an average of **90 hours** of services.[b]

Alt Ed engaged by service type (%)

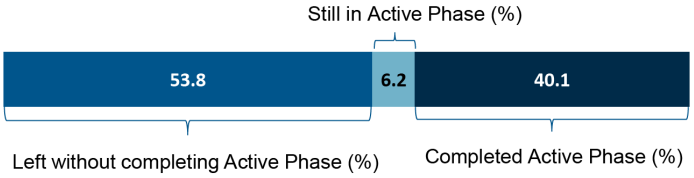


Out-of-School (OOS) participants engaged in an average of **21 hours** of services.[c]

OOS engaged by service type (%)



About 40 percent of JAG participants who enrolled in the **Out-of-School** application completed the Active Phase.[d]



JAG Out-of-School participants completed the Active Phase in an average of

7.2 months[e]

Most Out-of-School participants who completed the Active Phase were engaged in school or work during the first six months of the follow-up period.

76% reported they were in school, working or both during follow-up.[f]

51% Employed

51% In school

36% reported that they were not connected to school or work at some point.

Average hourly wages[g]

$12.00

Among those who were employed prior to JAG, wages increased by 29%[h]

Some earned credentials while in LEAP[i]

40%

Earned high school equivalency

21%

Obtained an industry-recognized credential[j]

SOURCE: Program data from JAG's e-NDMS management information system.

NOTES: [a]Among participants who enrolled on or before 10/1/2017. N = 683.

[b]Subsample of Alternative Education participants who enrolled prior to 10/1/2017. N = 210.

[c]Subsample of OOS participants who enrolled prior to 10/1/2017. N = 473.

[d]The measures in this section only report on the OOS application. Subsample of participants who enrolled prior to 4/1/2017. N = 307.

[e]Among OOS participants who completed the Active Phase regardless of when they enrolled. N = 272.

[f]Subsample of those in follow up, looking at status reported during the first 6 months of follow up among those who started follow up prior to 4/1/2018. School includes both secondary and postsecondary programs. Work includes both full- and part-time jobs. Categories not mutually exclusive. N = 153.

[g]Among OOS participants ever in employment during follow-up. N = 104.

[h]Among OOS participants with prior employment at enrollment into LEAP N = 27.

[i]Among OOS participants who were in follow up. N = 274. Categories not mutually exclusive.

[j]Defined in U.S. DOL Training and Employment Guidance Letter 15-10.

Active Phase Completion in the Out-of-School Application

Completion of the Active Phase occurs when a participant has earned a high school equivalency credential, received an employment skills training credential, or obtained a quality job. This section focuses on the data from the Out-of-School model. Given the long duration of expected engagement in program services for many JAG participants, the analysis of program engagement and completion patterns was limited to those who enrolled in services before April 1, 2017, allowing for a minimum of 18 months in the Active Phase.[5] As indicated by the middle panel of Figure 2.2, 54 percent of the participants who started JAG among this sample left the Active Phase without completing the program.[6] More than 40 percent completed the Active Phase and moved on to the Follow-up Phase, while 6 percent are still in the Active Phase. Of participants who finished the Active Phase (not shown), 35 percent completed the Follow-up Phase, 28 percent were still in the Follow-up Phase, and 37 percent went four months or more without contacts entered into the JAG database, indicating that they were not in contact with their JAG Specialist.

Several factors may be influencing these low completion rates in the Active Phase. Depending on a participant's age, educational level, or employment experience at enrollment, a multiyear engagement may be required for participants to complete the Active Phase. During this extended timeframe, JAG staff said participants could move, decide to focus on work, have a baby, find other services that they thought would benefit them more, or disengage for other reasons. Sometimes JAG Specialists did not know why participants disengaged, as staff were not able to locate them. One caveat to the findings on disengagement, however, is that enrolled participants in the Out-of-School application received an average of 21 hours of services, so they may have gained useful skills while they were in the program even if they did not complete it. Out-of-School participants who completed the Active Phase did so in an average of 7.2 months.

Follow-Up Participation in the Out-of-School Application

All participants who completed the Active Phase immediately moved into the Follow-up Phase. The findings in this section also only refer to participants of the Out-of-School application and are limited to those participants who entered the Follow-up Phase before April 1, 2018, to allow for a six-month follow-up period in the data. The findings here are based on the follow-up contacts that JAG Specialists entered into the e-NDMS database. Of those who began the Follow-up Phase prior to April 1, 2018, 88 percent had at least one contact with program staff during their first six months after entering the Follow-up Phase. On average, participants had 5.6 successful contacts during the first six months in the Follow-up Phase.

A separate analysis looked at the smaller sample of Out-of-School participants who entered the Follow-up Phase before October 2017, so would have had a full 12 months in the Follow-up Phase, as specified by the JAG model. Among these individuals (89 participants), about half (52 percent) completed the full 12 months and the remainder did not, as indicated by not having at least one follow-up contact in months 9, 10, 11, or 12 of the Follow-up Phase. This finding indicates that JAG Specialists may have had a hard time staying in contact with participants during the full 12 months

5. Grantees operating the Alternative Education application are excluded from these calculations due to issues with how follow-up services were tracked and entered into e-NDMS for two of the Alternative Education locations.

6. Defined as having more than 4 months without any services entered into e-NDMS.

of follow-up. Perhaps participants did not feel they needed the services or had other reasons for not being in contact with the JAG Specialist. In some instances, JAG Specialists said they had a hard time providing follow-up services to participants whom they had not served during the Active Phase.

In-Program Outcomes for Out-of-School Participants

This section describes lessons learned from outcomes related to education and employment among Out-of-School participants who entered the Follow-up Phase before April 2018 (so the data reflected at least six months of follow-up time). These findings draw from information JAG Specialists recorded about how participants were engaged in school or work during the Follow-up Phase. Thus, outcomes for participants whom the JAG Specialists could not reach were not recorded. This section examines the first six months of the Follow-up Phase rather than JAG's full 12-month period to increase the sample size.

The bottom panel of Figure 2.2 shows that, among Out-of-School participants who had a 6-month follow-up period, most (76 percent) reported being engaged in employment or school or a training program at one point in the follow-up period. About half reported being enrolled in school (secondary or postsecondary) and about half reported employment (full- or part-time) at a point in time. These categories are not mutually exclusive. Thirty-six percent reported at some point during the first 6 months of the Follow-up Phase that they were not engaged in school or work. The data indicate that these young people did not always maintain a stable job or postsecondary pathway after they completed the Active Phase. A small portion of participants in this sample, 8 percent, reported that they were engaged in employment for the full six-month period. Participants who were interviewed and identified as currently working were all in part-time jobs, mainly in retail, custodial, or fast food jobs, and had been there for less than six months.

Participants who were employed at any point during the 12-month follow-up phase reported earning an average hourly wage of $12.00. Analysis of the wages reported by Out-of-School participants who reported employment before enrollment and in the Follow-up Phase shows that participants' earnings increased. Among participants who reported a wage when they enrolled in JAG, their wages increased an average of 29 percent.[7] Many participants who were interviewed reported that they found their job with the help of the JAG staff.

The percentage of participants enrolled in postsecondary education upon leaving JAG was lower than those who were employed. Sixteen percent of Out-of-School participants who had six months in the Follow-up Phase reported being enrolled in a postsecondary program at one point. All reported they were in two-year schools versus four-year schools. Almost all participants who were interviewed who reported pursuing postsecondary education said they planned to earn their associate's degree through a two-year program before transferring to a four-year institution to get their bachelor's degree.

7. For comparison, minimum wage in January 2018 was $13.00 in New York City, $12.00 in Los Angeles, $9.84 in Alaska, $10.50 in Arizona, $9.25 in Michigan, and $10 in Minneapolis. Note that the minimum wage in New York, Los Angeles, Alaska, Minneapolis, and Arizona increased during the study period. New York City: New York State (2019); Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Consumer & Business Affairs (n.d.); Alaska: State of Alaska Division of Labor Standards and Safety (2018); Arizona: Industrial Commission of Arizona (n.d.); Michigan: Michigan Chamber of Commerce (2019); Minneapolis: City of Minneapolis (2018).

An analysis of the credentials recorded by JAG Specialists shows that some participants were successful in obtaining a high school diploma or equivalent, or other credentials such as those from employment skills training while in LEAP. Among those who completed the Active Phase, 40 percent earned a high school credential. This reflects the fact that many participants needed time to earn their high school credential, and it was not realistic for participants to reach this milestone within a year of enrollment. The credential earnings rate, 21 percent, includes credentials that meet the definition of industry-recognized credentials.[8]

Outcomes by Subgroups

Race and ethnicity, gender, and parenting status are all likely to play a role in program participation and outcomes. For example, parenting status may make it harder for young people to participate in JAG activities. Males are more likely to be affected by school disciplinary policies, and family expectations about the role of males in the household may contribute to a push toward working instead of pursuing school or further training.[9] Undocumented immigrants face barriers to employment and education.[10] For these reasons, further analysis of participation trends and employment and education outcomes by these subgroups would contribute to understanding more about the inequities in access to good jobs and educational opportunities that some groups experience. However, the sample sizes for subgroups were too small to draw any conclusions, and this is an area where further research is warranted. A limited set of participation rates and outcomes disaggregated by race, gender, and parenting status is included in Appendix C.

How Do These Outcomes Compare?

These JAG engagement outcomes should be viewed in the context that the JAG programs were serving young people who had likely faced many experiences in their lives before enrollment that had disrupted their career and educational pathways. Also, a third of JAG participants were 17 years of age or younger, and so they entered the program with less experience and a longer time horizon until high school completion, employment, or postsecondary education.

Comparing JAG outcomes with a program that serves a similar population, Project Rise, may provide a helpful context. Project Rise is a program aimed at reconnecting young people ages 18 to24 who do not have a high school credential, have been out of school and work for at least six months, and have not been in any type of education or employment training for the last six months. Participants in Project Rise were similar to those in JAG in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, and educational history. Project Rise participants also had experienced systems involvement, with about 20 percent either previously or currently in foster care, 50 percent previously involved with the justice system, and 3 percent currently homeless (compared with 100 percent of LEAP youth who were systems-involved or experiencing homelessness). Participants of Project Rise were expected to take part in 12 months of programming, including case management, high school equivalency instruction, work-

8. For this analysis in the report, only credentials that meet the definition of "industry-recognized credentials" as defined in U.S. DOL Training and Employment Guidance Letter 15-10 and U.S. DOL Training and Employment Guidance Letter 17-5 are presented. This excludes credentials like food handler's licenses and first aid training.
9. Rumberger (1987); Stearns and Glennie (2006).
10. Abrego and Gonzales (2010).

readiness training, and a paid internship. Similar to JAG, Project Rise was a newly designed program when adopted by the program providers. Within 12 months of entering Project Rise, 40 percent of participants withdrew from the program, compared with the 54 percent of JAG participants who left without completing the Active Phase.[11]

YouthBuild is another program that saw similar completion rates to JAG. YouthBuild offers educational and vocational training to young people ages 16-24 without high school diplomas and who are from low-income or migrant families, are in foster care (or aging out of it), were formerly incarcerated, have disabilities, or are children of incarcerated parents. An evaluation of YouthBuild found that about 50 percent of participants reported completing the program or graduating. This percentage is among those assigned to the program group of a random assignment study and is among the full program group who enrolled in the study, not just those who ultimately started YouthBuild services (74 percent of the program group received YouthBuild services).[12] In the JAG sample, all participants started the program.

KEY LESSONS

Examining the implementation of the JAG program in LEAP can lend insight into how programs can better serve the unique needs of the systems-involved youth population. Below are lessons specific to JAG and the segment of the LEAP population still working toward their high school credential.

- *Engagement:* JAG programs found that it was difficult to sustain engagement of young people for the extended time horizon envisioned by the model, and many participants left the program without completing it. However, many who completed the Active Phase obtained a credential or work experience. Providing interim milestones, such as certifications, for participants may be a way of promoting success when the time horizon to earning a high school diploma or GED certificate is long.

- *Setting:* Service delivery was structured very differently in the Alternative Education and Out-of-School applications, which ultimately affected the participants' level of activity in the programs. Schools provide an infrastructure of resources. Without that, programs need to be prepared to develop structures and partnerships in the community. Programs should be attentive to the role that a school setting can play in delivering services for this population of young people.

- *Adaptations:* LEAP grantees worked hard over the course of the three-year initiative to continually adapt their program structure and services to meet the unique circumstances of young people, as well as to address the structural barriers to persisting in school and work. Among these adaptations are restructuring program schedules, adjusting how much emphasis is placed on completing high school in favor of credential or employment requirements in order to complete the program, hiring staff who are the best fit for the programs' participants, and enhancing resources. Programs

11. Manno, Yang, and Bangser (2015).

12. Miller et al. (2016).

that are looking to serve a systems-involved young adult population will need to be flexible as needs arise for young people.

- *Work-readiness components:* Through the work-readiness skills instruction and learning opportunities, participants reported gaining a better understanding of career pathways for quality jobs and demonstrated an understanding of the credentials they would need to obtain those jobs. Programs looking to provide systems-involved young people with employment support may find success through providing similar career development services coupled with the work-readiness competencies laid out in the JAG curriculum.

CHAPTER
3

Implementation of Back on Track in the LEAP Initiative

This chapter details Back on Track implementation among the five LEAP Back on Track grantees. It focuses on how LEAP grantees shaped the way they delivered Back on Track services to better support participants in LEAP. The chapter also highlights lessons about participant experiences in the program, engagement in services, and in-program outcomes.

THE BACK ON TRACK MODEL

JFF's Back on Track model aims to help young adults transition to postsecondary education and puts them on a path toward obtaining a postsecondary credential, such as a college degree or an occupational skills training certificate. The model is divided into phases that focus on the skills and supports young people need as they prepare for and begin postsecondary education or training. In LEAP, participants start with the Postsecondary Bridging phase ("Bridging") during which they receive help identifying and applying to a program and gain postsecondary-readiness skills.[1] Next, participants enroll in a program of study and begin the First-Year Support Phase, which helps them persist in their first year of college or advanced training. LEAP enhances Back on Track with additional features aimed at supporting the LEAP target population, such as staff who are trained to work with young people who have experienced trauma and an increased focus on providing comprehensive supports to facilitate young people's success in school. Figure 3.1 provides additional details about the Back on Track program model in LEAP.

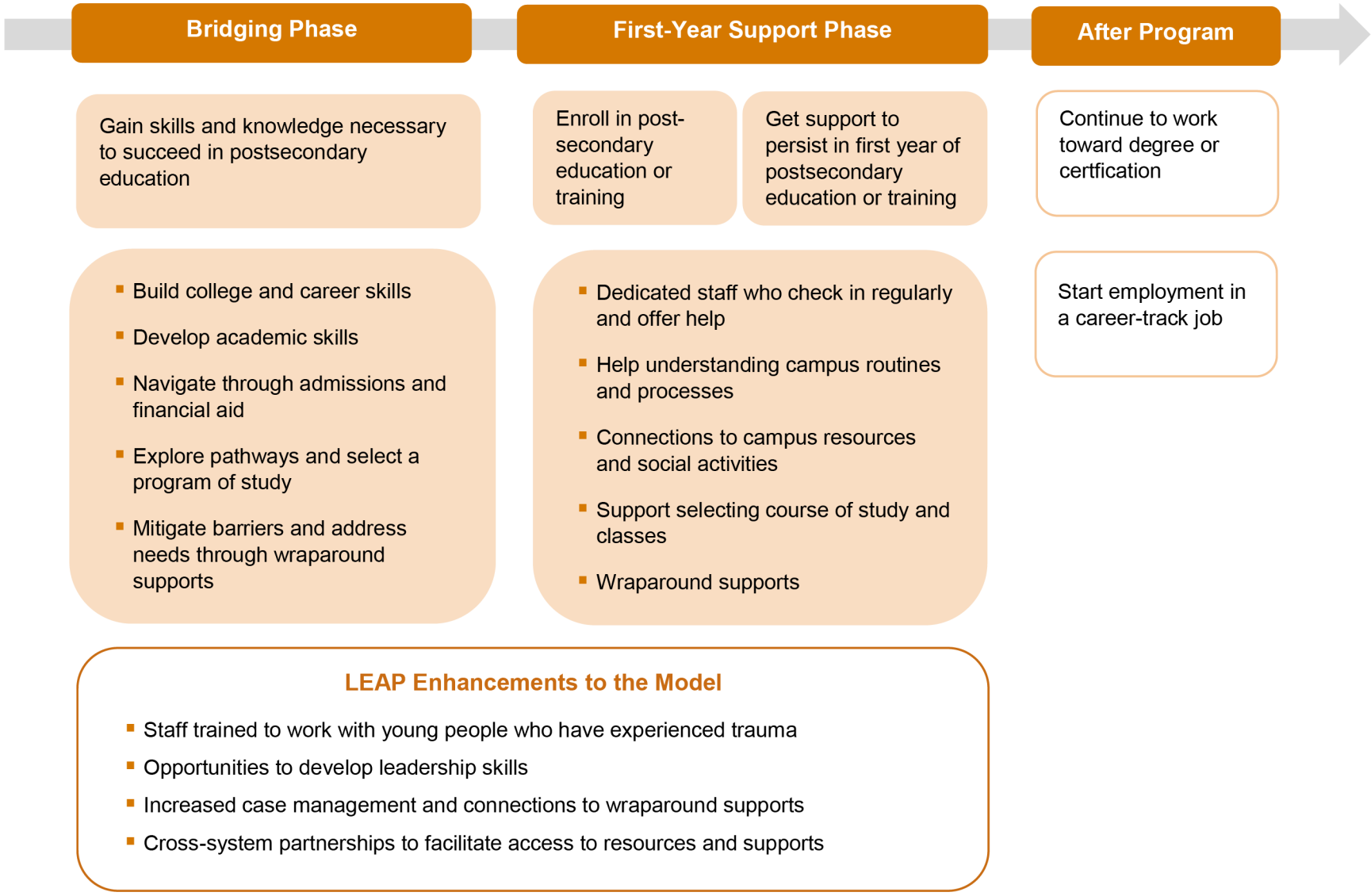
BACK ON TRACK PROGRAMS IN LEAP

Back on Track grantees structured their programs to align with the strengths of their service operators and the location of participants. Three out of the five grantees operated multiple program locations

1. Back on Track includes a phase called Enriched Preparation that was not offered as a part of LEAP. Enriched Preparation takes place prior to Bridging and aims to develop young people's college and career readiness skills while they are still in high school. Bridging and Enriched Preparation share overlapping elements, but Enriched Preparation has a greater intensity and focus on developing fundamental readiness skills. Several Back on Track grantees expressed that including this program phase would have allowed them to engage young people taking part in related services or offer support to individuals with longer-horizons to postsecondary education and training entry.

FIGURE 3.1

Back on Track Program Model in LEAP



with different program structures and providers. Most program locations layered the framework onto an existing program (or group of programs) by aligning Back on Track service elements with existing practices; however, a couple of program locations launched programs from scratch. All grantees brought together partners to deliver services, offer different program tracks, or provide supportive services. Service delivery partners included community-based organizations, training providers and colleges, and, in one program location, the state child welfare agency. Table 3.1 provides an overview of how each Back on Track program structured its service offerings.

TABLE 3.1

Back on Track Program Structure

	LEAD GRANTEE				
	CRCD	**THE DOOR**	**USM**	**NEBRASKA FAMILIES AND CHILDREN**	**SOUTH BAY COMMUNITY SERVICES**
POSTSECONDARY PATHWAYS					
Degree	Postsecondary degree Associate's degree	Postsecondary degree Employment or certificate program	Postsecondary degree Employment or certificate program	Postsecondary degree	Postsecondary degree Employment or certificate program
Specified tracks	Liberal Arts Advanced Transportation & Manufacturing	EMT certificate IT certificate College Success Program[a]	Certificate, two-year or four-year program of choice	Certificate, two-year or four-year program of choice Avenue Scholars Foundation: specific high-demand paths	Certificate, two-year or four-year program of choice
POSTSECONDARY BRIDGING PHASE					
Duration	5 weeks	5-10 weeks, varies by pathway	Individualized	Individualized, varies by program location	4-8 weeks
Structure	Group classes	1:1 services Group classes	1:1 services	1:1 services Group classes	1:1 services Group classes
FIRST-YEAR SUPPORT PHASE					
Frequency	1-2x/month + weekly class	1x/month	1-4x/month, by provider	1-4x/month + monthly events	1-2x/month + monthly gathering
Structure	1:1 services Group classes	1:1 services	1:1 services	1:1 services	Group classes

NOTES: CRCD is Coaltion for Responsible Community Development.
[a]College Success Program participants could enroll in a two- or four-year program of their choice.

Back on Track program locations primarily offered postsecondary pathways focused on college degree attainment, with participants choosing from associate's, bachelor's, and certificate programs. Some limited the academic pathways available to enrollees, offering tracks linked to locally in-demand jobs or geared toward successful transfer to a four-year program. Two grantees developed pathways focused on occupational skills training for participants who were interested in pursuing career training rather than a two- or four-year college education.

Program locations had levels of connection to postsecondary institutions that varied based on their approach to working with participants. Some programs offered Back on Track at select colleges or training providers. Staff typically had deep knowledge of the systems and resources available at those postsecondary institutions. In some cases, they were embedded on campus or obtained adjunct faculty or advisor status that granted them access to campus information systems. Other program locations worked with young people across many postsecondary institutions. Staff at these program locations typically had looser ties with postsecondary institutions and developed their knowledge of campus resources along with participants.

Back on Track program locations typically had one or two direct-service staff who served as participants' primary contact and brokered services by other staff and partners. In about half of the program locations these staff also delivered services across both the Bridging and First-Year Support phases of the program, provided case management, and connected participants to college and community resources. In other cases, different providers were involved in implementing key program elements. For example, The Door's TechBridge program, designed to help participants prepare for an information technology training program at Per Scholas, was co-taught by a staff person from The Door and a staff person from Per Scholas. A staff person at The Door with expertise in a specific system (justice or foster care) provided First-Year Support services. Programs had more specialized staff roles when different providers offered separate phases of the program or if the providers specialized by expertise in a system or a sectoral employment pathway.

BACK ON TRACK RECRUITMENT, SCREENING, AND ENROLLMENT

To enroll young people into Back on Track, local Back on Track programs needed to figure out how to identify young adults who had experienced involvement with foster care, the juvenile or criminal justice systems, or homelessness, *and* who would be ready to transition to postsecondary education in the near future — with the support of a program like Back on Track. Identifying young adults who met these criteria could be challenging: There may not be a central location to find young adults, as they may no longer be in traditional programs or service settings (such as a high school or child welfare services), and not all systems-involved young adults are interested in postsecondary education or training.

Recruitment

Recruitment was difficult for Back on Track programs, especially at the beginning. Program locations improved their recruitment pathways over time, by focusing on strategies to find systems-involved young adults who, with the support of a program like Back on Track, could be ready for postsecondary

education or training soon. A key way that program locations identified young people with systems involvement was by strengthening their relationship with systems partners, such as child welfare agencies, juvenile or criminal justice agencies, homeless services, and schools. Some facilitated their access to information about candidates through data-sharing agreements, while others developed relationships with caseworkers who sent direct referrals. On the other hand, program locations also focused on developing recruitment pathways that highlighted young people's status in school. For example, some programs recruited young people who were slated to graduate from high school or were taking part in General Educational Development (GED) programs. Figure 3.2 provides additional details about the various ways in which local Back on Track programs recruited young people.

Eligibility

In general, program locations tried to make it easy for young people to access LEAP. Most grantees required candidates to either have a high school credential or be poised to receive one soon. Programs that offered select training or academic pathways required participants to show an interest in these pathways in order to enroll in them. However, all but one program that offered pre-specified training tracks also offered support for participants seeking degrees or certifications of their choosing through a different service partner. Appendix Table A.1 summarizes the Back on Track program locations' target population and eligibility criteria.

The eligibility determination process varied with each program location's structure and goals. Program locations used the intake process to screen applicants for their motivation and alignment with the goals of the program, and to gauge their ability to take part in services. Candidates demonstrated their interest in the program by completing the required intake activities. Fit was further assessed through one-on-one interviews with candidates about their interest in the program's services and potential barriers to participation. Assessments, which were not always administered, were primarily used for diagnostic purposes and were rarely used to disqualify candidates. However, a few locations and training providers had stricter requirements related to age, education, and minimum reading and math skills.

BACK ON TRACK PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Back on Track participants came to the program with different secondary and postsecondary experiences. Most enrolled with a high school credential (73 percent), and most who did not were typically expected to receive one soon after enrollment. Staff reported that prior to Back on Track, many participants attended several schools throughout their academic careers. They also noted that compared with young people who were served by other programs offered by grantees, Back on Track participants tended to have lower reading and math skills and needed more support with time management and study skills.

Back on Track participants at any program location could be at different stages along the pathway to postsecondary education or training. At one end of the spectrum, young people entered Back on Track unsure of which postsecondary programs they would apply to and what their course of study would be. At the other end, participants entered Back on Track already accepted by or enrolled in the college of their choosing. It was not uncommon for participants to have attempted to earn a

FIGURE 3.2

Back on Track Recruitment Challenges and Methods

Young adults who are systems-involved and ready to transition to postsecondary education can be hard to find.

There's **no central location** to find young adults. Not only do young adults have diverse interests and goals, they may no longer be attached to traditional programs or service settings (such as a high school). In addition, systems-involved youth may be more transient.

Young adults may **not know their status or self-identify with the target population**. For example, young people who live on a friend's couch may not consider themselves to be homeless.

Confidentiality requirements prevent agencies from disclosing young people's status.

As young adults **transition out of services for minors**, agencies may lose contact with them, making it hard to find young people with former involvement in foster care, the justice system, or with homelessness.

Back on Track sites leveraged a wide range of recruitment pathways focused on young people's status in school and systems involvement.

School status

Spread the word on local **college campuses**.

Target **high school or GED students** who are near graduation and interested in college.

Take **referrals from teachers** and school staff who may know a student is a good candidate.

Build up referral pipelines in programs that prepared young people for postsecondary education or training, such as GED or college-readiness programs.

Systems involvement

Develop data-sharing agreements with systems partners who can provide lists of young people in their care statewide.

Get **referrals from case workers** at agencies serving the LEAP populations.

Strengthen **ties with community-based organizations** that serve similar populations.

Recruit at places systems-involved youth have to be such as **non-minor dependent court** or want to be such as **advocacy programs.**

postsecondary credential in the past. These prior attempts could saddle participants with defaulted student loans that might prevent them from enrolling in classes.

IMPLEMENTING BACK ON TRACK FOR LEAP

With flexibility built into the model, the LEAP Back on Track program locations varied in their approaches to Back on Track. Service providers could use multiple approaches to implement Back on Track's defined components, known as core "features" and specific "elements." The program developer, JFF, worked with program locations to develop tailored approaches to service delivery. Program locations typically used a combination of one-on-one and group formats to deliver services, with an increased emphasis on individualized services over time. They generally offered all Back on Track service elements. However, because services were often customized for an individual client, some elements were omitted or covered in a different phase of the program. Across program locations, there were differences in the intensity and strength of services.

Bridging Phase

The Bridging Phase has several key features that aim to help young people develop success strategies for postsecondary education or training and receive personalized guidance.

- **Academic or technical skill development to prepare young people for entry into postsecondary programs.** JFF takes a broad view of academic skill development that includes opportunities to gain content area knowledge, develop academic behaviors (such as self-directed learning or critical thinking skills), and prepare for college placement exams. In LEAP, formal academic services often sought to prepare participants for college placement exams so they could test out of remedial classes. Most program locations helped participants develop their academic skills by supporting direct-service staff or through referrals to community services such as adult education. A few program locations embedded academic skill development into their Bridge programming. They brought in content area experts who could teach reading or math classes or, in one case, help participants gain exposure to dense technical concepts that were covered in their training program. Program locations also included services that were aimed at increasing participants' problem-solving skills.

- **Development of skills, behaviors, and knowledge to facilitate postsecondary success for participants.** To bolster the postsecondary and career pursuits of participants, program locations helped them develop study skills, technology proficiency, and time and stress management strategies. Areas of focus varied by program location and individual participants.

- **Development of postsecondary and career navigation skills and strategies, including understanding admissions criteria, financial aid processes, campus culture and resources, as well as career credential and advancement pathways.** Program locations routinely talked about the different postsecondary pathways available to participants. They provided participants with information about college admission and financial aid requirements, and often guided them through the application process. Even when they offered group-based services, most program locations tackled the details of applications and financial aid during one-on-one meetings with participants.

- **Exposure to postsecondary experiences and expectations.** Several program locations were structured like colleges to get participants used to interacting with faculty, reading a syllabus, or using campus technology. One program location attempted to create a college atmosphere by keeping instruction to standard course times and encouraging participants to sign up for staff "office hours." Program locations also focused on making connections between students and campus resources, such as tutoring or disability services. They made face-to-face introductions to these services for participants along with other "warm hand-offs" to facilitate connections to services.

- **Intentional career exploration and planning to enable young people to set short- and long-term goals.** Participants received support to develop their career plans by exploring their interests in conversation with staff, completing strength and career assessments, and conducting Internet research. Job search skills, such as interviewing and resumé development, were a common focus, and several program locations that offered Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act services or had strong connections with local employers leveraged their connections to help young people find jobs.

- **Guidance in selecting a postsecondary program or course of study.** Career exploration activities helped participants understand the degrees and certifications necessary for their chosen field, which could help participants choose a course of study. Three program locations offered select training or academic pathways, which narrowed the courses available to participants and made it easier for staff to become well-versed in course offerings.

- **Provision of wraparound supports to help participants focus on their studies.** Program locations emphasized the importance of wraparound supports during the Bridging phase. Wraparound supports focused on removing barriers that would keep participants from succeeding in school, such as access to food, housing, transportation, or child care. In some cases, supports were offered by Back on Track staff; in others, programs leveraged services provided by their partners or other programs at their organization.

Program locations used some approaches to service delivery more frequently, as is shown in Figure 3.3. Frequency may have varied due to the design and goals of a program model, as well as the strengths of an individual service provider. In general, programs excelled in providing case management and barrier removal services, making connections to campus resources, and steering participants through the college application and financial aid processes. It was harder for programs to offer robust academic services, and a few direct-service staff felt this was beyond their area of expertise.

Completing Bridging and Transitioning to the First-Year Support Phase

Program locations worked with their JFF coach to define what it meant for a participant to complete Bridging. Some required participants to finish a set percentage of Bridging classes, while others tailored the requirements to individual participants. Staff members at some program locations expressed uncertainty about whether and when participants were ready to complete Bridging. One staff member explained that she wasn't sure what to do when she thought young people wanted to start college but may need more time to get ready: She didn't want to hold them back or set them up for failure if they weren't ready.

FIGURE 3.3

Back on Track Approaches to Service Delivery and Frequency of Implementation

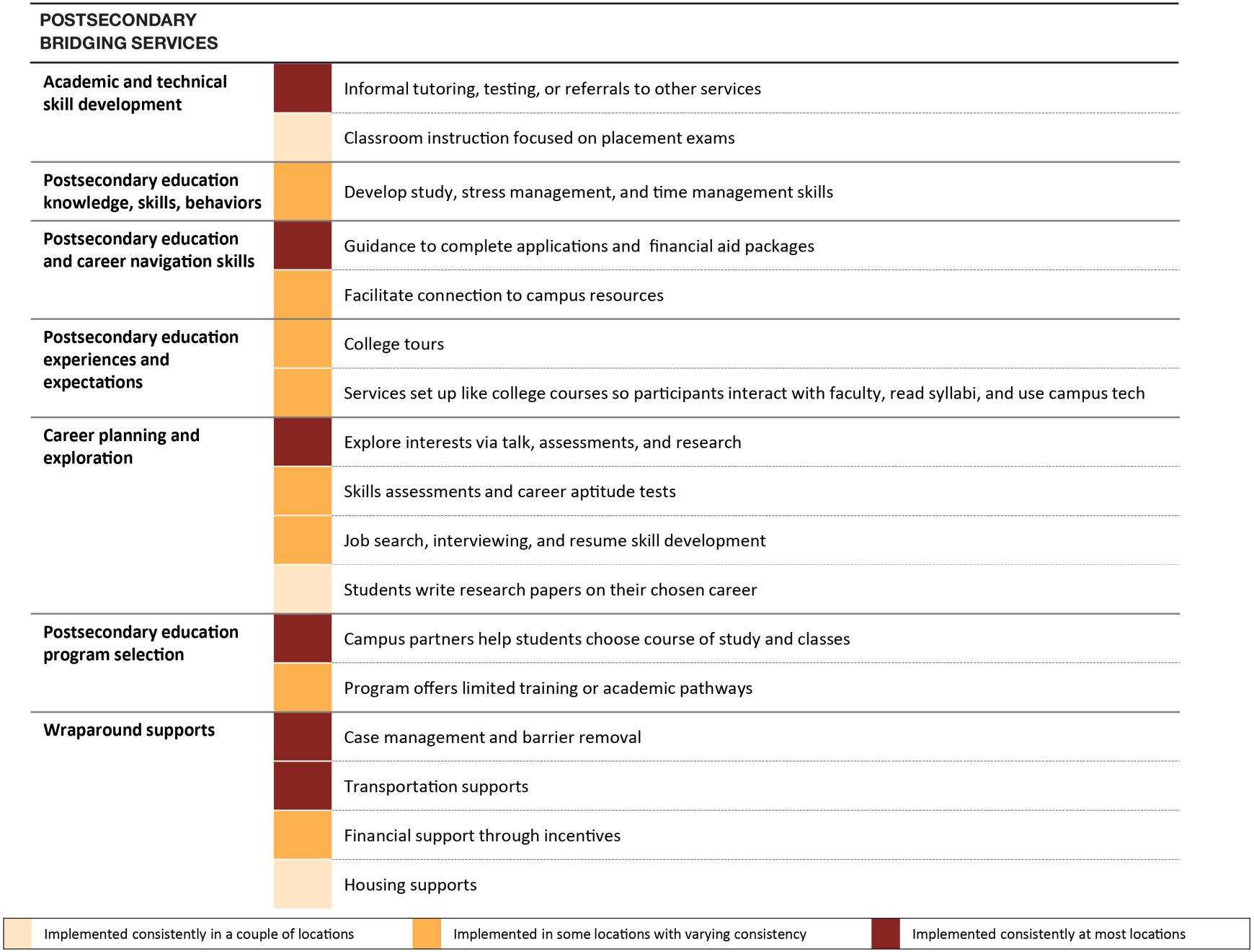
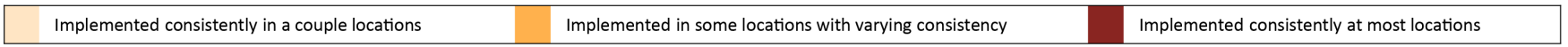


FIGURE 3.3 (continued)

FIRST-YEAR SUPPORT SERVICES	
Development of independence and agency	Meetings about goals and how program can help reach them
	Participants set goals and earn cash incentives for completing them
Connection to postsecondary education resources, networks, supports	Warm hand-offs and attending meetings with campus staff
	Encourage participants to take up resources
	Attend meetings with participants to advocate or interpret information
	Tell participants about campus activities and student groups
Guidance in selection of coursework	Informal advice in meetings
	Refer to campus experts like professors and advisors
Monitor grades and progress to credential	Check in about grades during meetings
	Have participants collect academic progress reports
	Participants sign release so staff can talk with instructors, advisors, and other service providers
	Gain advisor status to access grades
Supports for coursework success and removal of barriers	Regular check-ins with trusted, supportive staff person
	Connections to campus or community resources
	Transit support
	Financial support for tuition, books, or stipends



Participants transitioned to the First-Year Support Phase when they enrolled in a postsecondary program. A few participants entered First-Year Support without taking part in Bridging services. Participants in some programs might start First-Year Support right away if they enrolled near the start of the academic term. These program locations aimed to offer Bridging and First-Year Support services together rather than as sequenced phases.

While distinct, JFF's design assumes overlap between phases to allow for elements to be introduced or revisited as needed. Staff in the majority of program locations carried forward elements of Bridging into First-Year Support, noting that participants needed continued exposure to these concepts. However, direct service staff in some program locations reported feeling confusion or frustration about what they thought were supposed to be distinct boundaries between the phases. This may have occurred for a few reasons. It is possible that these staff received limited training from their supervisors on how these phases were meant to overlap. In addition, data collection and reporting requirements for the Social Innovation Fund may have hardened the analytic demarcations between these phases in LEAP. Staff were asked to track participants' status and activities by phase. They reported that it could be hard to figure out, especially if the participant was taking developmental courses or if a student who was enrolled in college continued to complete elements of Bridging. Since the Back on Track program model allows for fluidity between the phases, it is likely that the data requirements — rather than the program design — made the phases appear more distinct.

First-Year Support Phase

Approaches to delivering First-Year Support elements were more consistent across program locations than their approaches to delivering Bridging elements. (See Figure 3.3.) During this phase, individual meetings with participants formed the backbone of service delivery. These meetings were springboards for learning about everything from what was going on in participants' lives to their grades and service needs. Meetings took place at least once per month and could be supplemented with weekly or monthly group activities.

First-Year Support has several features that aim to help participants attach to postsecondary education or training, facilitate earning credits toward completing their credential, and persist in the program.

- **Development of increasing independence and self-agency as learners.** Program locations met regularly with First-Year Support participants one-on-one to talk about how they were doing, their progress toward their goals, and any barriers they were experiencing.

- **Connection to postsecondary resources, networks, and support providers.** Program staff frequently guided participants to supportive services (such as counseling or tutoring) or programs for first-generation or systems-involved college students. Programs also helped participants learn about different student groups and activities on campus and encouraged them to take part. Staff who weren't based at a college campus or worked with participants across several program locations tended to rely on campus partners to connect participants to services and supports, as it was hard to become an expert in all campus offeri ngs and personnel. In some cases, grantees partnered with these campus-based programs to have them offer First-Year Support. In addition, some program locations attempted to help participants feel connected to campus by building camaraderie among LEAP participants through group meetings, workshops, and field trips.

- **Use of technology to provide follow-up and coaching support.** Program staff routinely used text messaging, phone calls, email, and social media to communicate with participants. This was especially important with young people attending programs in other states or cities.

- **Ongoing guidance in the selection of postsecondary courses and a program of study.** During check-ins, staff members talked with participants about their courses and schedules. However, they generally relied on college or training advisors to help young people select and sequence courses.

- **Use of data to monitor student progress.** The majority of program locations did not have formal agreements that would grant them access to participants' academic or training records. Staff learned about participants' academic standing through conversations with participants, by having participants sign release forms that were honored by academic advisors or instructors, or by logging on to student accounts (with permission).

- **Intensive supports to succeed in credit-bearing or technical program coursework.** Program providers continued to offer intensive wraparound supports during this program phase, primarily by providing access to caring, supportive staff. A couple of program locations also provided support by covering all or part of costs for tuition, books, and supplies.

- **Address critical barriers to success.** All program locations had regular check-ins with participants to assess how they are doing and address any barriers that arise. The frequency of meetings varied but typically took place weekly, biweekly, or monthly. If young people were struggling with classes, the program staff tried to connect them to services (such as tutoring or disability services) that could help them succeed. Access to housing, transportation, clothing, and child care were among the most common barriers Back on Track participants faced. Experience with trauma and problems with mental health, especially depression and anxiety, were also challenges for participants.

Participants complete First-Year Support and the Back on Track program by finishing their first year of postsecondary education or training.

Adapting and Enhancing Back on Track for LEAP

A central goal of LEAP was to learn how to adapt the Back on Track model to serve a population that had experienced systems involvement and homelessness. LEAP program locations identified some adaptations they would make to the model early on and integrated them into initial service plans, such as enhancing wraparound supports, providing tuition remission, or offering financial incentives. Over the implementation period, they also encountered challenges to implementation that prompted them to make further adaptations. Many of these adaptations aimed to make it easier for participants to access and take part in services, by changing how and when services were delivered, by encouraging participation, and by lessening financial pressures on participants. The adaptations used by LEAP grantees provide practical lessons for serving the LEAP focus population through Back on Track. Select examples of adaptations are summarized in Table 3.2.

- **Facilitating access.** Changes in life circumstances and busy schedules limited young people's access to classes or Back on Track services. Most grantees increased the amount of services that were provided to participants individually over the implementation period to make it easier for

TABLE 3.2

Back on Track Challenges and Adaptations

Challenge		Adaptation	Unique Approaches
Busy schedules limited access to classes or Back on Track services	→	One-on-one service delivery at convenient times	• The Door and South Bay Community Service (SBCS) originally offered group-based Bridging services. Over time, they added individual Bridging services, which gave participants the choice of group or individual settings. • The Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD) changed their policy so that students could take classes online, making it easier for pregnant and parenting participants to keep up with schoolwork. • SBCS created online Bridging and First-Year Support programs using Google Classroom so participants that could take part in programming anywhere and at any time.
	→	Increased online service offerings	
The pathway to postsecondary credential attainment is long	→	Financial incentives to encourage persistence in the program and postsecondary education or training	• Maine offered participants financial incentives for reaching program milestones—customized goals that the participant and program agree to work on. Milestones might include things like writing a college admissions essay or talking to a professor about how anxiety has affected attendance. • The Door changed its incentive policy to reward engagement rather than accomplishment. LEAP participants receive an incentive payment for checking in with a staff person during the First Year Support phase. The goal was to keep participants talking with staff so they could get the help they need to succeed in class or training.
Financial pressures can require participants to work or cause them worry	→	Enhanced focus on connecting participants to the financial supports available to them	• Maine and Nebraska Families and Children routinely created linkages to matched savings programs that could increase the value of financial incentives such as Opportunity Passport, a matched savings program for foster youth that could help them more quickly purchase items such as books or auto repairs. • Though CRCD paid for the cost of tuition, books, and supplies, staff members learned that it was necessary to help participants apply for financial aid. Financial aid could provide participants with funds to cover everyday expenses.
Difficulty accessing postsecondary resources and information	→	Increased emphasis on accompanying participants to meetings and making face-to-face introductions	• CRCD staff persons routinely attended meetings with the campus registrar's office or bursar's department. They facilitated communication between participants and campus administrators and made sure participants' concerns were addressed.

young people to access services. One-on-one service offerings allowed staff to accommodate participants' schedules and tailor services to their interests. But it could also reduce the intensity of services they provided.[2] Some also used other approaches to facilitate participants' access to program services, such as developing online tools so that participants who could not reach the program could continue to participate in Back on Track services. This was especially important for participants who were pregnant or parenting.

- **Encouraging persistence.** Several grantees refined how they used financial incentives to encourage persistence in the program, which they hoped would facilitate participants' persistence in postsecondary education or training. For example, participants could receive an incentive payment for meeting with a staff person who could help them address challenges affecting their coursework.

- **Reducing financial pressures.** Staff report that young people in Back on Track often worry about finances and feel pressure to earn money, and several participants who took part in interviews noted that their finances had kept them from entering or succeeding in college prior to LEAP. To help alleviate financial pressures, some grantees leveraged matched savings programs to increase the value of incentives provided to participants. Another strategy used by grantees was helping participants navigate financial aid.

- **Facilitating connections.** Figuring out how to access resources on a new campus or understanding the nuances of campus routines can be overwhelming for new students. Back on Track grantees emphasized the importance of making face-to-face introductions, guiding participants around campus, helping young people communicate with campus administrators, and connecting them to peer networks.

The LEAP program design also enhanced Back on Track to build opportunities for participants to develop leadership skills. Program locations developed formal and informal leadership opportunities. More formal leadership opportunities were often used by a subset of highly engaged participants, while informal arrangements could be accessed by a wider range of participants. Grantees took three general approaches to leadership opportunities that could be used together or in isolation. Box 3.1 provides more details about leadership activities in select program locations.

- **Building new leadership programs for LEAP.** Two grantees launched leadership programs through which select young people could represent LEAP in public speaking events, coordinate events and activities for other participants, and take on community service projects. The grantees developed these opportunities in years two and three of the initiative, after they had worked out the nuts and bolts of program operations.

- **Getting participants involved in existing leadership opportunities offered by the agency or within the community.** Other grantees connected participants to existing leadership opportu-

2. For example, one program brought math tutors into its classes to provide weekly academic instruction and help participants prepare for college placement exams. Young people who took part in individual service delivery tracks had to seek out the tutors on their own time to receive similar support.

BOX 3.1

Select Back on Track Leadership Opportunities for Young People

Back on Track LEAP program locations focused on creating opportunities for participants to develop leadership skills and shape program services.

NEW LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS FOR LEAP

LEAP Scholars Ambassadors Leadership Program provided select participants in Nebraska's LEAP program with an opportunity to develop and use leadership skills. Ambassadors took part in activities aligned with their interests and skills. They were selected through a competitive process and were compensated for their time.

LEAP Ambassadors of Hope in South Bay, California, was a youth-run leadership program that aimed to improve educational and career opportunities for young people. During the study timeframe, the group met monthly to improve the LEAP program and the child welfare, justice, and homeless services systems with which participants interact.

EXISTING LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The Door's Youth Council in New York City is made up of young leaders from programs across The Door who focus on making positive changes to The Door and its broader community. In addition to facilitating group activities and planning events, the Council serves as a liaison between staff and participants.

nities such as youth councils or advocacy groups. It does not appear from staff and participant interviews that many young people participated in these opportunities.

- **Providing participants with opportunities as they arose.** Most program locations created informal and ad hoc leadership opportunities for participants. These included one-off volunteer events, representing the program at speaking events, or leading a class discussion.

Program staff expressed the idea that leadership opportunities helped build young people's confidence, sense of self, and ability to advocate for themselves. As can be seen in the examples, program locations saw a close relationship between the ideas of leadership and "youth voice" — a common element of youth development programs that posits that young people thrive when their opinions are respected and they are treated as equal partners in their own case planning and in program development.[3] Several grantees regularly solicited feedback from participants about their experiences in the program through formal channels (such as surveys and focus groups) and informal channels like check-ins. For example, the Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD) offered only two educational tracks and held focus groups to gather feedback about whether these tracks met participants' needs and determine which additional tracks would be of interest.

3. Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2014).

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES IN BACK ON TRACK SERVICES

Fifty-eight Back on Track participants took part in interviews with MDRC researchers about their experiences and perceptions of the program in summer 2017 and fall 2018. They were evenly distributed across the five Back on Track grantees. Most interviewees were engaged in program services; however, some had completed or dropped out of program services.[4]

The idea of hands-on support to transition to postsecondary education or training was a key reason that interviewees were drawn to the program. One participant explained, "Foster care kids have a really hard time going to school. [LEAP] is just this big support system, which is something that I needed." Participants also valued the program's ability to support them with financial resources for things like tuition, books, and transportation vouchers. Several participants noted that financial barriers had kept them out of school in the past. Back on Track interviewees said that it was easy for them to participate in Back on Track services. They appreciated that staff paved the way for them to take part in services by meeting around their class schedule, helping with transportation, and allowing them to make up missed sessions.

Interviewees reported being satisfied with their experience in Bridging. Bridging activities and hands-on guidance from staff helped them feel supported as they transitioned to postsecondary education or training. Participants highlighted the benefit of the support they received to determine a course of study and apply to college. One participant in Nebraska explained, "I didn't know how to even go about going to college. My family didn't go to college, so having this resource to figure out what to do with my life, I definitely appreciate it."

Financial planning for college was also key to participants, and some participants said that financing postsecondary education or training had previously seemed impossible and overwhelming. Financial education lessons felt relevant at this time in their lives. Some participants noted that taking time to learn about the living expenses in their area as well as the projected salaries in their chosen career path helped them understand the value of a postsecondary credential.

Exposure to services designed to academically prepare participants for postsecondary education or training was more uneven. Some participants took part in daily or weekly cohort-based classes offered in-house, while others were referred to services. Most young people who took part in regular classes said the classes helped them "get the brain muscles working," or get back in the rhythm of school and refreshed them on topics they had long forgotten or never learned. However, a few participants wanted more individualized attention in classes and flexibility to work at their own pace. Some participants noted that despite participating in academic services, they did not qualify to take credit-bearing classes. This frustrated some participants; however, others thought their chances of passing college placement exams would have been lower without the class.

Young people reported more diverse experiences in First-Year Support services that varied based on the program they took part in. Most interviewees maintained a close connection with Back on Track staff and saw them as a trusted resource for help with advice, course selection, financial aid, and

4. Data limitations do not allow for a comparison of interviewees with the overall Back on Track population.

accessing campus resources. Some participants continued to rely heavily on the program's support in their first year while others were more independent. Suggestions for improvement were driven by program location and are not generalizable. They included a desire for more proactive monitoring of grades, greater participation from their peers, and improved processes for stipend payments.

Interviewees expected to have some contact with the program after their first year in school — for example, through informal check-ins to let staff know how they are doing. Young people who maintained contact with program staff in their second year of college reported that they had largely adjusted to the routines of college and needed less intensive support.

ENGAGEMENT IN SERVICES

Back on Track program locations employed different strategies to promote participant engagement in services. If needed, they would also help participants reconnect with the program or with postsecondary education or training if they stepped away at any time.

Staff and participants described many factors that could prevent a participant from progressing in the program or postsecondary education. Participants may not have entered First-Year Supports if they could not enter a postsecondary program, enrolled in a course of study or school not supported by the program, realized they weren't interested in the services or supports offered by the program, or encountered challenges related to past attempts at college such as difficulty enrolling in college due to academic probation.

It could also be hard for participants to balance college postsecondary education or training with work, child care, and other responsibilities. Participants who took part in interviews reported feeling like they had a lot on their plate and that staying on top of school work could be difficult. One young woman explained, "Waitressing is not the greatest job, and I'm really tired when I come home. I have to manage my time really well in order to do all my homework and make sure that I'm going to my job on time and that I'm not behind on my school work."

Some participants took a break from their postsecondary education or training. Staff report that changes in life circumstances were a primary reason for students to step out of college or training programs. When participants were in crisis, essential immediate needs (such as housing or food) trumped their ability to take part in school or other program services.

Some commonly used strategies to support participant engagement in the program are outlined below.

- **Using flexible attendance polices.** Back on Track programs tended to have flexible attendance policies that allowed participants to step away and reengage with services at any point. Schools and training providers, on the other hand, may have strict attendance requirements. Bridging services often aimed to help familiarize participants with the expectations.

- **Staying connected when participants cannot attend program services.** Programs typically tried to continue providing case management services to participants who stopped attending school, training, or other services with the hope that it would facilitate young people's return to the pro-

gram. For example, CRCD created a program status called "inactive" in which young people could take a 90-day break from school and continue to receive case management from the program to help them stabilize and make plans to return to school. Inactive status was particularly helpful for pregnant participants and new parents.

- **Proactively reengaging participants who stop attending.** Exact policies varied by program location, but Back on Track staff were generally expected to reach out to disengaged participants for around 90 days. They attempted to connect with participants by phone, text, and social media; offered incentives; and leveraged social events. Programs report that reengagement was driven by staff effort; therefore, staff must be persistent in their efforts to contact participants and draw them back into program services.

PARTICIPATION AND IN-PROGRAM OUTCOMES

This section presents findings on participation and in-program outcomes of a sample of Back on Track enrollees based on service records from management information systems from Back on Track program providers. (See Appendix A for more information about the data and limitations of the analysis.) The evaluation timeframe limits the sample to those who were enrolled in the first year of implementation to allow for at least an 18-month follow-up period. The grantees continued to refine their approach to implementation during the subsequent implementation years, including many adaptations designed to facilitate engagement in services, as described above. This follow-up period includes a time in which participants may have still been working toward their postsecondary credential; the timeframe is not long enough to report on degree attainment. The outcomes presented on attaining certificates, which can be earned more quickly than the time it takes to earn a postsecondary degree, may not be indicative of long-term program outcomes. There were variations in program participation and in-program outcomes at each program location; however, the findings in this study are averages across the locations.

Figure 3.4 shows that Back on Track programs enrolled 315 participants during Year 1. Many of them took up services, enrolled in college, and persisted in their first year of school. Nearly all participants who enrolled started the Bridging phase and about two-thirds moved into the First-Year Support Phase. Just over 40 percent completed Back on Track by finishing their training program or second term in college. Across the Back on Track program locations, participants who completed the program spent an average of 16 months in it.[5]

More than two-thirds of participants enrolled in school during the follow-up period. Among those who enrolled in school, 73 percent had full-time status. Five percent of Back on Track participants earned a certificate within 18 months of enrollment. Grantees defined what it meant to earn a certification. The majority of certificate earners took part in one of two short-term certificate programs offered by The Door.

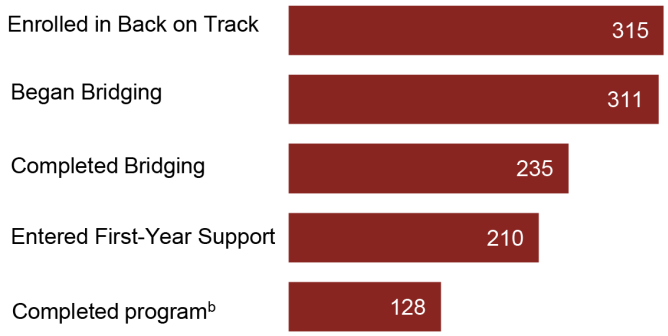
5. The programs continued to refine the program model after the period captured here, including tweaks to the length of Bridge and First-Year Support Phases. For example, one program location switched from a semester-long (16 week) program to a shorter, five-week program.

FIGURE 3.4

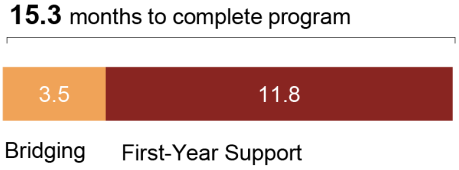
Back on Track Participation and In-Program Outcomes

Participants progressed through the Back on Track phases…

Number of participants, by program phase[a]



Average months in program



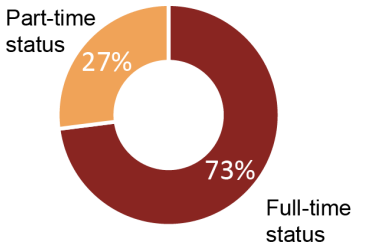
enrolled in postsecondary education…

Participants enrolled in postsecondary education…

68%

Enrolled in post-secondary education

…pursued a full-time course load…[c]



among those enrolled in postsecondary

…and worked toward a credential[a]

5%

Earned a certificate within 18 months[d]

…and might have worked at the same time.

34 percent of participants were ever employed while in LEAP

Some participants had full-time jobs with benefits.[e]

Of those who were employed:
33% had full-time jobs
23% worked in jobs that offered health insurance

Average hourly wages[e]

$11.29

(continued)

FIGURE 3.4 (continued)

SOURCE: Program data from Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: All measures shown among those who enrolled in Back on Track with at least 18 months of follow-up (enrolled before 4/1/2017). N = 315.

[a]Participation in Bridging course may happen concurrently with First-Year Supports phase or during remedial education.

[b]Participants complete Back on Track by completing their first year of postsecondary college or training in their first year.

[c]Among those who enrolled in postsecondary education. N = 214. Measures are for a youth's first credit-bearing postsecondary institution in the follow-up period, if a youth enrolled at multiple postsecondary institutions during this time. "Postsecondary" includes credit-bearing postsecondary education, vocational schools, and training/job development programs.

[d]It is too early to report on postsecondary degree attainment.

[e]Among participants ever employed during LEAP. N = 109.

Although it is common for college students to work — nationwide, 43 percent of full-time students and 81 percent of part-time students worked in 2017 — evidence suggests working too much in college can negatively affect completion rates, especially among disadvantaged students.[6] About one-third of Back on Track participants worked during their time in the program. Some employed participants held full-time jobs (33 percent) and jobs that offered benefits (23 percent) at some point during the follow-up period. The average wage among employed participants was $11.29 per hour.[7] Typically, participants who worked did so for less than six months. It is not clear whether young people struggled to gain and maintain jobs or whether they prioritized school over work. Participants who were interviewed commonly expressed a desire to be financially independent, while staff noted that balancing school and work was a challenge for participants.

These early results show promising levels of participation in Back on Track services and corresponding enrollment in postsecondary education and training.

Outcomes by Subgroup

Race, ethnicity, gender, and parenting status affect participant experience in postsecondary education and training and work. Racial disparities in college enrollment and persistence are prevalent.[8] Immigration status can affect access to financial supports.[9] Parenting status can constrain a student's time to focus on school or work.[10] LEAP grantees operated their programs in particular contexts, some in rural and predominantly white communities, and others in diverse urban areas. Although

6. For more about how many students work, see McFarland et al. (2019); for more about the impact of working on students, see Carnevale et al. (2015).
7. For comparison, the minimum wage in January 2018 was $13.00 in New York City, $12.00 in Los Angeles, $11.50 in San Diego, $10.00 in Maine, and $9.00 in Nebraska. The minimum wage in several program locations increased during the study period. NYC: New York State (2019); LA: Los Angeles County Consumer & Business Affairs (2019); Maine: State of Maine Department of Labor (2019); San Diego (South Bay): The City of San Diego (2019); NE: Nebraska Department of Labor (2019).
8. Shapiro et al. (2017).
9. Peréz (2010).
10. Wladis, Hachey, and Conway (2018); and Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007).

it is important to understand how the background of participants may have affected postsecondary enrollment and persistence, it is not possible to conduct subgroup analyses by race, ethnicity, or parenting status due to the small sample size of participants with an 18-month follow-up period. For reference, participation and outcome measures are presented in Appendix C and disaggregated by race, gender, and parenting status.

How Do the LEAP Back on Track Outcomes Compare with Other Studies?

Two studies of programs that offered Back on Track, or similar services, provide useful comparisons with participant outcomes from the LEAP Back on Track program. The first study, Pathways to Postsecondary (PPS), evaluated the implementation and outcomes of participants taking part in Back on Track programs that offered Enriched Preparation, Bridging, and First-Year Support services. The model was operated through 15 YouthBuild USA and National Youth Employment Coalition providers.[11] The second study looked at 75 YouthBuild USA programs that took part in an evaluation measuring the impact of YouthBuild services. Some YouthBuild sites also implemented Back on Track and participated in the PPS study. YouthBuild provides educational services, vocational training, youth development services, and supportive and transition services.[12]

Participants in both studies share demographic characteristics with LEAP Back on Track participants. Direct comparisons with the share of participants in PPS and YouthBuild who had ever experienced systems involvement or homelessness is not available; however, both programs also routinely served this population. Eight percent of PPS participants experienced current or recent homelessness and 23 percent were court-involved at enrollment. About 4 percent of YouthBuild enrollees were homeless or living in transitional housing at the start of the study.

LEAP Back on Track participants show higher levels of academic attainment at baseline than participants in PPS and YouthBuild, which were designed to target young people without a high school credential. While only 27 percent of LEAP Back on Track enrollees lacked a high school diploma or equivalency credential when they entered the program, 79 percent of PPS and more than 90 percent of YouthBuild participants did not have a high school credential.

LEAP participants' enrollment in postsecondary education and training compares favorably with national averages, PPS, and YouthBuild. Sixty-eight percent of LEAP Back on Track participants entered postsecondary education and training, which is on a par with the national college enrollment rate for high school graduates (69 percent) and higher than the rate for high school graduates with involvement in foster care (32 percent).[13] A higher percentage of LEAP Back on Track participants enrolled in college than PPS participants who enrolled in any postsecondary program (50.3 percent) and YouthBuild participants who enrolled in college (23.6 percent). However, the PPS and YouthBuild programs include many young people who entered the program without a high school credential and may not have been eligible for postsecondary enrollment during the study follow-up periods.

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11. Center for Youth and Communities (2013).

12. Miller et al. (2016).

13. FosterEd (2018); Note that the percentage of youth in foster care who graduated from high school and enrolled in college differs slightly by age.

Full-time status in college is correlated with higher GPA and degree attainment.[14] The percentage of LEAP Back on Track participants who achieved full-time status (73 percent) is comparable with the national average for college students (77 percent)[15] and higher than that of PPS participants (59 percent).

Students nationwide are taking longer to graduate: Just 20 percent of first-time, full-time students earned a one- to two-year postsecondary certificate within three years (150 percent of normal time).[16] Therefore, the 18-month follow-up period in LEAP limits what can be said about participants' certificate and degree receipt.

KEY LESSONS

The implementation of Back on Track for LEAP offers lessons about helping systems-involved and homeless young adults transition to and persist in postsecondary education and training.

- Back on Track's framework made it easy to adapt to many contexts and afforded flexibility to program locations on how they delivered services. However, the quality, frequency, and intensity of services that participants received varied among participants and program locations. Model developers should consider how to balance flexible models with clear standards of service to better understand the dosage needed to support systems-involved young adults' transitions to college, especially when Back on Track is layered onto existing programs.

- Strong partnerships with postsecondary institutions can strengthen Back on Track implementation. Embedding staff on campuses may facilitate deeper knowledge of campus systems and resources and make it easier for program staff to facilitate connections between participants and campus resources. Programs located off-campus that draw participants from across a region, especially those in rural locales, may need to develop close ties with several postsecondary institutions to serve geographically diverse participants.

- Back on Track participants had high levels of Bridging completion, enrollment in postsecondary education and training, and full-time education status. While a longer follow-up period is necessary to evaluate degree and certificate attainment among participants, early results indicate that Back on Track may be a promising strategy to help participants enroll and persist in postsecondary education and training.

14. Adelman (2006).

15. McFarland et al. (2018).

16. Complete College America (2017).

CHAPTER
4

Lessons on Implementation and Systems Change

This chapter focuses on cross-initiative lessons that relate to the implementation of the LEAP initiative, first focusing on staffing strategies and staff relationships with participants. Next, the chapter discusses how LEAP grantees worked with partners across the local system (including nonprofit organizations, school districts, and various government agencies such as those concerning child welfare and juvenile justice) to implement the LEAP initiative and connect participants to other supports. The chapter concludes with examples of how some grantees worked to foster improvements to local practices that affect young people who are experiencing systems involvement or homelessness.

STAFFING LEAP TO SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT

At the core of both Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) and Back on Track are one or two staff members who work directly with young people to deliver core services, provide guidance, and connect participants with supports. Since one or two staff people serve as the primary connection to the young people who are receiving services, the qualities of these staff members are paramount to effectively implementing, promoting, and sustaining the engagement of participants. This section examines the way in which LEAP grantees staffed their programs and the larger role that staff-participant relationships played in program implementation.

Staff Roles, Training, and Management

LEAP staff roles varied by grantee and program model. Across grantees, staff members described how staff roles changed over time as grantees adapted their program implementation. For example, in cases where cohort-based services did not proceed as planned, staff members adjusted by providing one-on-one services to participants. In some instances, staff turnover drove changes in the roles that staff members played and informed what key tasks existing staff members did, or did not, have the capacity to handle. As grantees adapted and fine-tuned their service delivery model, the roles of staff members became more defined.

Grantees needed to build out staff for their programs in the initial year of LEAP; they recruited both from within their organizations by moving existing staff members to new roles and made new hires. Grantees that were already providing JAG or Back on Track services often used existing staff

members for LEAP roles. When hiring, grantees strove to find personnel whom participants would find relatable, and some program locations said they had trouble finding the "right fit" for staff members, meaning those who had the right combination of experience to implement JAG or Back on Track and the ability to form strong relationships with participants. Staff members who were not the right fit often left the program or were let go. One grantee used the strategy of engaging participants in the hiring process to find candidates who were compelling to young people.

Once on board, staff members described that they generally did not receive formal training on JAG or Back on Track. For the most part, they were trained by shadowing a current staff member, if someone was available. Staff members also received technical assistance from LEAP national partners and LEAP learning community activities. Training in trauma-informed approaches to service provision was common among LEAP grantees. In recognition of the role that trauma plays in the lives of the LEAP population, the initiative required that grantees integrate trauma-informed practices into their service delivery. Grantees had varying levels of training with trauma-informed practices prior to LEAP.[1] Some providers had a long history of integrating trauma-informed practices into their services, while others only began this work through LEAP.

The management of staff members was highly dependent on the structure of the local partnership. Nearly all LEAP grantees implemented some services through a partner, so the lead agency may not have had direct responsibility over staff members who were implementing LEAP services. Managing staff members who report to different organizations was challenging at times. Formal and informal communication channels across staff members and partners was key to aligning the work, as was a shared understanding of the initiatives' goals. Many program locations held formal case conferences on a monthly or daily basis to discuss the progress of the young participants under their care. Staff members noted that physical proximity to other staff members, such as sharing an office or location with staff who were working with the same young people, facilitated communication. Some grantees, particularly those with locations and staff members who were spread out over a larger geographic area, had more difficulty managing staff around the goals of the initiative. Some grantees, recognizing the difficulties inherent in managing across partners, implemented regular, formal check-ins with partners.

Relationships Between Participants and Staff

Participant-staff relationships were key to delivering the content of services and supporting participant engagement. This finding aligns with prior research about youth program quality.[2] Some staff members believed the ability to easily connect with participants was more important than having technical credentials or clinical degrees. Box 4.1 showcases some of the strategies staff members used to cultivate supportive relationships with participants.

Staff members strove to develop relationships that were authentic, positive, focused on strengths, and led by the participants. Staff members reported that a key part of working with young people was seeing each of them as individuals and recognizing that they need to approach each case in a unique

1. Trauma-informed practices refers to training staff members to recognize the symptoms of trauma and to understand its effects on behavior.
2. Ungar (2013); Ungar et al. (2013); and Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2015).

BOX 4.1

Developing Positive, Supportive Relationships with LEAP Participants

LEAP programs used these specific strategies to build rapport with participants:

Engage authentically. Staff members talked about the importance of sharing their own experiences and finding points of connection with new participants. Programs emphasized the importance of hiring staff members who had backgrounds and experiences similar to those of participants.

Be supportive. Staff members aimed to be compassionate, nonjudgmental, trustworthy, and to validate participants' feelings and experiences.

Allow young people to lead. The importance of making sure young people feel ownership over their academic and professional goals was important to their success. This sometimes required program personnel to refrain from solving problems for young people so they could lead themselves through the process.

Develop a strengths-based approach. A common strategy for program personnel was to focus on the individual strengths and positive attributes of participants to cultivate a supportive and positive culture.

Build a positive rapport early on. Since relationships take time to build, some programs aimed to build connections with young people before they even enrolled in the program.

Commit to consistency. Young people may be hesitant to trust a staff member due to past experiences with adults. Establishing consistent and regular communication with young people via text, email, and phone call was an effective way for program staff members to show participants that they could count on them.

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE HAS CHALLENGES…

Staff members reported several barriers to building relationships with youth:

- Staying in touch with a highly mobile population
- Mitigating the effects of staff turnover
- Being limited in the kinds of expertise they could provide (i.e., not a therapist or math teacher)
- Drawing a line between being a strong support and maintaining professional boundaries

way. Staff members often got to know participants through one-on-one interactions, such as during case management sessions or during one-on-one service delivery, in which their relationships were forged through discussions about participants' goals, personal experiences, and challenges. Staff members said they shared their own personal stories with participants, including vulnerabilities reflected in their own struggles and limitations. Some staff members shared their experiences with systems involvement, which was often similar to the experiences of program participants. In this way, program personnel acted as role models and provided success stories for young people.

A key part of relationship-building with participants involved building trust. Staff members reported hearing that participants lacked supportive adults in their lives, leaving them hesitant to trust and rely on others. To bond with participants, staff members regularly kept in touch with them through text, phone, and social media. Staff members also served as advocates for young people outside of the program. To manage the demands of being on-call in a crisis management role, staff members established professional boundaries by turning off their phones, leaving work at a set time, and setting manageable expectations with LEAP participants.

Staff members described several ways that a trauma-informed approach influenced how they worked with participants. For instance, gathering information from participants to complete enrollment paperwork or develop care plans was one potential trigger point for young people who have experienced trauma, as questions about housing status, educational background, and family history could prompt negative reactions or feelings. So, staff members modified questions to avoid triggering past traumas. Questions were therefore framed in more open-ended terms to invite conversation and convey safety. Staff asked questions such as, "Is there anything you want to tell me, or is there anything I should know?" rather than specific, direct queries that may have evoked bad memories. "Do you live with your father?" was the type of question they avoided. Staff also commonly described that understanding the effects of trauma allowed them to better understand and respond to participants' reactions to situations or behaviors.

Participants who had positive experiences with the program often cited a strong connection to a staff member as a primary reason for enrolling and staying engaged in LEAP. Participants appreciated that staff members checked on them if they were absent and frequently reached out, which made them feel supported. Some Back on Track participants said close relationships with staff members motivated them to remain in school and make them proud.

Young people liked that they could ask staff members for help with anything from generalized advice about life to math tutoring. Participants also shared that it was important for a staff member to acknowledge a young person's feelings when they felt they were being treated incorrectly, including outside of the LEAP context. A participant from the Coalition for Responsible Community Development said:

> Staff are like our parents. And that's what I need. I didn't grow up with my parents and being supported like that in my childhood…Now that I have this support system, they're gonna make sure I graduate. As long as I know I'm committed, I have my support system next to me.

When a young person's connection to a program is driven by the relationship with one or two staff members, how well staff members fit with the participants they are working with, along with staff turnover, will have outsized effects on young people's engagement in the program. If a staff member is not the right fit and is not able to build relationships with participants, participants may not commit to the program. In the context of the LEAP initiative, where program duration can be 18 months or longer, it was not uncommon for participants at many program locations to experience staff turnover. At the time of the evaluation site visits in Year 3, about one-fifth of direct service staff members had been in their role for less than one year. Grantees said staff turnover did affect

engagement, and JAG personnel mentioned the challenge of providing follow-up services to participants with whom they had no prior relationship.

CROSS-SYSTEM PARTNERSHIPS IN LEAP

LEAP grantees found that partners, including child welfare agencies, juvenile justice and criminal justice agencies, school districts, nonprofit organizations, workforce systems, and local vocational and postsecondary institutions, were vital to LEAP implementation. LEAP grantees worked with partners to deliver JAG and Back on Track services to participants. This section describes how the grantees worked with cross-system partners to support recruitment and connect participants to additional supports.

Building networks within the system was key for recruitment. Connections to foster care agencies or the justice system provided strong referral pathways for participants. In New York, the JAG program partnered with Probation and Parole to receive referrals for those leaving detention. While participating in the JAG program was not a mandated condition of a young person's parole, participation satisfied parole conditions. Referral relationships were typically informal and often evolved from specific relationships between a LEAP staff person and a staff person at the referring agency. Staff members pointed out that because referral partnerships often depend on independent staff relationships, they can get sidelined when programs experience staff turnover.

Formal referral relationships may help guard against the negative effects of staff turnover. Although it is difficult to establish recruitment pipelines with foster care agencies and justice partners, given the need to protect private information, two LEAP grantees were able to establish formal recruitment relationships with the local foster care agency. Maine's local JAG affiliate, Jobs for Maine's Graduates, established an agreement with the Office of Children and Family Services to receive a quarterly "Kids in Care" report so they could recruit youth for the JAG program from the report's listing of high school students in foster care.

Some LEAP grantees developed a strategy with cross-system partners to bring LEAP services to wherever young people were receiving other services. In Minneapolis, the LEAP initiative expanded from alternative schools and brought JAG to two General Educational Development (GED) programs where there was a large share of LEAP-eligible young people. In San Diego, the Back on Track program developed a partnership with the county's juvenile justice schools, where they provided LEAP services to participants in-house before they were released.

Once young people were receiving LEAP programming, helping them navigate the system to access supports that could be beneficial to them became a key role of staff members. Supports included those through extended foster care programs, through colleges where the young person was enrolled, or other supports like transportation or housing assistance. About half of the LEAP grantees partnered with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) staff to connect participants with additional funds for training and other assistance. Staff members and participants said they were unaware of the breadth of supports available to young people, and that navigating the paperwork or procedures to access services was challenging.

To help participants effectively navigate support systems, staff members needed to become experts at navigating the system, often providing a hands-on strategy of guiding participants through the process of accessing services. Staff members described how networking with staff at local agencies and other nonprofits, sometimes through formal meetings of cross-system working groups, uncovered new resources they could share with their LEAP participants. In general, staff members did not have any formal training on how to navigate youth support systems. A few staff relied on knowledge from prior jobs. In Los Angeles, a LEAP staff member benefited from a valuable training, run by a local nonprofit organization, on support services for young people aging out of foster care.

Many LEAP partnerships developed out of relationships that existed before the initiative was launched. But grantees emphasized that forming strong and productive partnerships across systems still took time and resources. In locations with a high density of services where programs may compete to "meet their recruitment numbers," grantees described how competition could become a barrier to forming these partnerships. In response, grantees developed a strategy of establishing a shared understanding from the outset about how programs and organizations can leverage their respective strengths and work together to benefit participants. In this way, partners viewed JAG or Back on Track services not as competition, but as a means for increasing access to needed supports for young people experiencing systems involvement or homelessness. LEAP grantees and partners described how partnerships continued to grow and improve during the LEAP initiative. A case study describing how the Maine LEAP program established a range of partnerships during the evaluation period follows at the end of this chapter.

LOOKING BEYOND LEAP

Some LEAP grantees are using the initiative as a catalyst for wider change in the youth-serving system. Many of these efforts are just beginning and will continue through a second round of multiyear grants to a subset of the initial grantees through the next phase of LEAP. During this next phase, six of the original LEAP grantees will expand their work to deepen relationships with system partners to replicate services and reach more young people who are experiencing systems involvement or homelessness, and to promote change in public system practices and policies. This section highlights some initial grantee successes during the SIF period.

In Minneapolis, Minnesota, the LEAP initiative is influencing how the school system and city agencies are thinking about the issue of career pathways and workforce development for the broader population of young people ages 16 to 24 who are not connected to work or school. Local LEAP convenings have become a way for actors engaged in issues of youth workforce development more broadly to coordinate efforts across the city. Aligning the JAG curriculum with course requirements so that participants can earn nonelective credits for their time in JAG has increased interest in the program. As a result of LEAP, students at local alternative schools in Minnesota can receive English credit for their time in JAG, allowing more young people to take advantage of the program. Project for Pride in Living (PPL), the LEAP lead, has expanded upon this strategy of enabling young people to receive credit for their LEAP program activities. In partnership with the city, PPL has helped make it possible for most young people to receive academic credit for their participation in the city's

summer youth employment program. In PPL's next phase of the initiative, they are expanding the LEAP program to new areas in Hennepin County, Minnesota's most populous county.

In Nebraska, LEAP has helped promote collaboration and change in practices around the state's approach to young people in foster care. The lead LEAP grantee in Nebraska, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, was recently chosen to administer the Chafee and Education and Training Voucher programs statewide and they are using this opportunity to embed Back on Track practices into the administration of these supports.[3] Colleges that have worked with local LEAP partners are also starting to embed aspects of Back on Track, such as Bridging activities, to help new students transition to college, into the services they offer.

Covenant House, the LEAP grantee in Alaska, was awarded a Homeless Youth Demonstration Grant in 2017. The project, which is a holistic and collaborative approach to end the experience of homelessness for young people in Anchorage, will embed aspects of LEAP into their work. The project will include an education and employment focus that will be using the JAG Competencies that Covenant House embedded into their practices through the LEAP initiative.

KEY LESSONS

The implementation of the LEAP initiative discussed in this chapter yielded three important takeaways:

- **Finding and retaining staff members to whom participants can relate is key to keeping young people engaged in LEAP programming.** Staff members across locations and program models identified similar strategies to developing strong and productive relationships with participants. Organizations should consider how to promote staff retention and build redundancies in participant-staff relationships to mitigate the potential effects of turnover.

- **Strategically partnering with institutions and other nonprofit organizations in the youth-serving system is key to recruiting eligible young people.** LEAP points to some promising strategies for identifying young people like those in LEAP who may benefit from additional supports but who may be unaware of available services. Establishing data-sharing agreements with local or state child welfare, justice, or housing agencies can also help connect eligible participants to services.

- **Partnerships are crucial to LEAP implementation, both in delivering JAG and Back on Track services and connecting participants to other services or supports that could benefit them.** Grantees built strong partnerships by developing a shared understanding of the initiative's goals among partners, focusing on the mutual benefits of the partnership to address potential worries about competition for funding or participants, and establishing formal mechanisms for planning and feedback.

3. The federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program Education provides funding to states to help current and former foster youth transition to adulthood. Education and Training Vouchers are part of the Chafee supports; they provide financial resources of up to $5,000 a year for individuals to spend on postsecondary education and training.

LEAP Case Study

Supporting Maine's Foster Population Through Partnerships

The Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP) program, a nationwide project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, aims to improve education and employment outcomes for young people ages 15 to 25 who have been involved in the child welfare and justice systems, or who have experienced homelessness. Through two education- and employment-focused program models, LEAP aims to improve young people's connections to school and work, and thus improve longer-term economic outcomes. One program, Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), focuses on young people who do not have a secondary credential, providing a set of services aimed at helping them earn their high school credential and equipping them with work and life skills to transition into quality jobs or postsecondary education. The second, JFF's Back on Track model, aims to help young adults transition to postsecondary education or training and supports their persistence in the crucial first year.

Maine LEAP was one of two LEAP sites to implement both JAG and Back on Track, and when the initiative was designed, Maine LEAP aimed to use the two models to serve the state's entire population of current and former foster youth (ages 15 to 25). Led by the Muskie School for Public Service at the University of Southern Maine (USM), Maine LEAP tapped into long-standing partnerships to serve young people across Maine's rural landscape. Building off prior initiatives, such as the Maine Youth Transition Collaborative,* USM and its partners aimed to increase education and employment outcomes for foster youth by integrating LEAP model services and enhancements across partners with different missions, populations, and service areas. Meeting regularly as an implementation team, the partners designed Maine LEAP together. Over the three-year Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant period, they refined plans for service delivery, adapting their strategies to meet systems-involved young people across the state where they were — both in terms of their location and their postsecondary and employment interests.

To reach young people across the state, Maine LEAP integrated JAG and Back on Track into existing statewide and local service networks. Maine LEAP's JAG program operated through the existing programs run by the local JAG affiliate, Jobs for Maine's Graduates (JMG), which implements these programs in high schools across the state. Their Back on Track model was implemented through several channels: select JMG College Success Program locations, a bridging and retention program operating at colleges throughout the state; at the Youth Transition

Specialists (YTS) Unit at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), workers with the state's child welfare system who are dedicated to supporting transition-age youth; Goodwill Industries Northern New England; and other community-based service providers operating in the Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor areas. Maine LEAP enhanced standard service offerings with individualized support, increased coordination with the state child welfare system, and financial incentives.

As the lead grantee organization, USM served as an intermediary among the partners by coordinating service delivery, providing technical assistance and training to partners, managing data collection and reporting, and monitoring performance and benchmarks. USM provided guidance on implementing program services, working with the priority population, and coordinating with child welfare. In addition, USM offered training on the experiences of foster youth and on trauma-informed, youth-centered service approaches.

Because the initiative aimed to serve all LEAP-eligible young people who had been involved with the foster system, Maine LEAP needed to support young people at different points in their education and employment pathways. The program created pathways for three broad subsets of the foster population, each with distinct goals and service trajectories: (1) high school students who may benefit from taking part in services available at their school that traditionally had not targeted foster youth, (2) high school graduates transitioning to two- or four- year colleges looking for support as they transitioned to college, and (3) young people who wanted help figuring out their next steps, including career training and college pathway options. Over the implementation period, Maine expanded its service offerings to bring LEAP to young adults who had experience in the juvenile justice system or with homelessness. As noted above, the Maine LEAP intiative grew out of the Maine Youth Transition Collaborative (MYTC), a Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative site that for more than a decade has been bringing together public and private partners across the state to support youth transitioning out of the state's foster care system. The core Maine LEAP implementation partners — USM, OCFS, JMG, and Goodwill — have long-standing partnerships through MYTC, allowing them to coordinate initiatives such as Opportunity Passport, a matched savings and financial education program; the Southern Maine Youth Transition Network, an Aspen Opportunity Youth Forum partner; and the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT), a leadership and advocacy program for young people involved with the child welfare system. MYTC members report that Maine LEAP pushed their work forward by bringing them into the conversation about the specific needs and trajectories of LEAP participants. A member of the MYTC and LEAP leadership team explained:

> The LEAP work really evolved and came out of the work we were already doing. It aligned with our goals and values around supporting youth in [foster] care to gain self-sufficiency through postsecondary education and training — those essential core components to being able to successfully transition to adulthood.

JAG IMPLEMENTATION

Maine LEAP's JAG Alternative Education application enrolled LEAP participants in existing JMG high school classes during the school year, which were also attended by non-LEAP students. JMG programs are known for supporting students with barriers to success in school, but they were not serving many foster youth prior to LEAP.[†] They established a data-sharing agreement between OCFS and JMG that provided JMG with an unpublished and confidential report listing all "Kids in Care." JMG used this list to recruit foster youth into JMG services.[‡] JMG's JAG programs went from serving a handful of young people known to be involved in the foster care system to more than 60 by the end of the study period three years later. JMG reports that taking part in LEAP encouraged its staff to serve the foster care population with greater intensity and focus — something they plan to continue after LEAP ends. For example, JMG has started using the "Kids in Care" list to serve students in their middle school programs even though they are ineligible for LEAP. In addition, Maine LEAP created an opportunity for JMG to change how it works with foster youth by investing in staff training to help them deepen and expand their strategies to support these young people. All current and new JMG Specialists receive a minimum of 16 hours in Adverse Childhood Experiences training on trauma-informed approaches to working with young people. "The LEAP initiative has really pushed us to formalize and elevate this target population," said a member of the JMG and LEAP leadership teams. "It's been a big change."

BACK ON TRACK IMPLEMENTATION

Over the grant period, Maine LEAP tried different approaches to working with Back on Track participants across the state. Some approaches proved successful early on, such as connecting young people to JMG services on college campuses. While foster youth can be served by any of JMG's nine College Success programs, three of these programs had a coordinator with funding from LEAP so staff could work more intensively with LEAP participants. At one college, the specialist gained "advisor status," which provided her with access to information about students' academic standing (including early warnings about grades and absences). Maine LEAP also facilitated communication between JMG Specialists and YTS staff. For example, having a set contact at a college helped YTS staff stay informed about young people's enrollment in school.

As with any new intervention, some approaches were harder to implement or did not work as envisioned. These experiences yielded lessons that helped Maine LEAP refine its plans for offering Back on Track services.

- **Cohort events:** In Years 1 and 2, Maine LEAP offered cohort events, through which participants could develop college-readiness skills to help them bridge to postsecondary education and training. These events also provided opportunities for participants to come together with other young people who were involved with foster care.[§] In Year 1, the program offered some events for young people enrolled in colleges in Portland, where a critical mass of young people was receiving services. In Year 2, however, LEAP college students were more spread out around the state. Maine LEAP hosted events that targeted young people in regional clusters.

However, these events were not well attended. Program staff described events with more staff present than participants, and they expressed concern about the amount of effort required to plan events for so few attendees. The dispersion of participants across the state coupled with poor access to transportation contributed to problems with attendance. Participant interest also played a role: Several participants reported that they were not interested in attending events focused on their foster care status.

- **Back on Track for career training:** As noted above, to serve all youth in foster care, Maine LEAP needed to support young people at different stages in their postsecondary pathway. The initiative partnered with Goodwill to offer Back on Track services for young people who already had a high school credential but wanted to pursue career training rather than a traditional two- or four-year college education. The program aimed to help participants develop career interests, explore postsecondary training, and find and keep jobs. Participants in more than six counties were served by a single Goodwill staff person who traveled to participants to find and connect them to locally available resources, often driving hours to meet with a single young person. Staff report that the circumstances of young people made it hard for them to progress in the program. Program services primarily focused on removing barriers to participants' success and connecting participants to supportive services. Due to the large geographic region and service needs of youth served, the Maine LEAP service partners agreed that this approach was not successfully implementing the full set of Back on Track service elements.

Adaptations

By Year 3, these experiences prompted Maine LEAP to increase its focus on individualizing and integrating Back on Track into established service offerings by partnering with organizations that serve eligible participants. Instead of developing cohort events, the program offered individualized services through which participants could learn postsecondary-readiness skills with a staff person from JMG, OCFS, or Goodwill. To gain support from peers with similar experiences, the program encouraged participants to take part in existing activities for foster youth, such as the statewide Youth Leadership Advisory Team.[‖] Rather than having a Goodwill staff person work with young people over a wide geographic range, Maine LEAP began a partnership with two YouthBuild programs in the Portland and Lewiston areas where concentrations of LEAP-eligible young adults were connected to an existing program. Operating through YouthBuild allowed the program to adopt a cohort-based approach, in which groups of young people at YouthBuild could receive additional supports through Goodwill to help them plan for their transition out of YouthBuild, develop a career path, and access other services available through the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). Working with YouthBuild also provided an opportunity for Maine LEAP to broaden its systems change work by increasing collaboration between one of the state's largest WIOA providers and YouthBuild, as well as expanding their target population to include young people with involvement in the justice system and experience with homelessness.

IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORTS

In the final year of the LEAP SIF grant, Maine LEAP focused on how partners can layer Back on Track onto existing services. USM developed tools and trainings to equip providers from multiple agencies to deliver Back on Track with increased quality and consistency. These included a Back on Track implementation guide and a digital career planning platform customized for Maine. While some interviewees reported that the implementation supports were helpful, it is too early to assess the extent to which staff members used these supports and how well they supported implementation.

- **Implementation guide.** The Back on Track Implementation Guide was created to crosswalk between partners' standard service offerings and Back on Track. It suggested activities to help participants set goals, explore career and postsecondary pathways, and other key Back on Track service elements; partners were expected to select activities that aligned with participants' needs and service goals. One YTS staff person described the guide as "11 pages of ideas" for working with young people that brought structure to the work she was already doing with clients.

- **Digital career planning resources tailored to Maine.** One challenge for partners implementing Back on Track was knowing what resources were available to young people throughout the state to help them progress toward their career and education goals. Maine LEAP began using MyBestBets (MBB), an online platform developed by JFF. USM developed a database of high-quality, locally available resources for training and education that could be accessed through MBB. This online tool made information highly portable; however, staff comfort using the new tool limited its use early on.

- **Ongoing implementation coaching.** USM also coordinated ongoing training to help partners more deeply understand the Back on Track model and use the implementation tools. For example, USM coordinated several trainings and offered one-on-one technical assistance to help staff feel comfortable with the MBB platform and understand how to use it with participants. They provided training to inform how their partners work with systems-involved youth, including how to develop strategies for healing-centered engagement with youth who have experienced trauma.

These implementation supports facilitated Maine LEAP's goal to create a lasting impact on how providers work with systems-involved young people. Looking forward, the Maine LEAP partners will build on their experience to highlight the service needs of foster and other systems-involved youth, increasing collaboration between systems, and informing how providers work with young people. The initiative has strengthened relationships between the partners and is leading to sustainable changes that will continue to benefit systems-involved youth after funding for LEAP ends.

NOTES

*Partners from the public and private sectors work together in the Maine Youth Transition Collaborative to ensure that youth transitioning from foster care have the resources and opportunities they need to be successful adults. Youth and adults focus together on improving outcomes for youth in transition from foster care in the areas of employment, education, housing, mental and physical health, and lifelong personal and community connections. For example, see https://www.maine-ytc.org/.

†Two primary factors kept foster youth out of JMG: (1) the perception that foster youth did not need JMG because they were already getting supports through OCFS or other providers, and (2) the idea that foster youth would likely be undercredited and unable to take the elective class.

‡OCFS is also a key recruitment partner for Back on Track. They provide USM with a list of "Kids in Care" who are graduating from high school so they can be recruited into Back on Track services.

§Maine LEAP also offered cohort events for JAG participants, based around a school or group of nearby groups of schools attended by LEAP participants. These events suffered from similar challenges to cohort events offered for Back on Track. The program stopped offering them in Year 2, favoring existing group and leadership opportunities offered through JMG such as the Career Association.

‖Encouraging participation in YLAT was also one approach Maine LEAP took to providing opportunities for participants to develop leadership skills, a key "LEAP enhancement."

#Healing-centered engagement takes a strengths-based, culturally informed approach to well-being. For more, see Ginwright (2018).

CHAPTER
5

Costs of Implementing LEAP

This chapter explores the cost of layering LEAP services on top of existing services in the community. Although LEAP grantees helped participants access other community supports, this analysis does not factor in those additional costs. Instead, this chapter focuses on costs incurred by LEAP grantees and partners to provide LEAP-specific services. The findings make clear that different program and partnership structures result in different resource requirements and variation in how these resources were distributed across program activities.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis examines the total costs of providing LEAP services, not just the budgeted costs, providing an assessment of what resources would be required to replicate LEAP in other contexts. LEAP grantees received a grant of up to $190,000 annually. Grantees were required to match each dollar locally. In general, grantees thought that the LEAP budget was adequate, provided they were able to leverage additional supports within their organizations and through partnerships. Grantees leveraged resources in multiple ways. They took advantage of resources within their organization to provide such things as bus passes, field trip transportation, food, and other supports. Within organizations, some staff contributed time to the initiative beyond the share of their salary that was covered by the budget. Partners donated personnel and space for activities. LEAP programs that ran other youth programming co-enrolled youth in these other programs to help pay for their services — this included Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds and YouthBuild.

The costs presented in this chapter focus only on the costs for Social Innovation Fund (SIF) Year 2, so start-up costs are not included in these estimates. Still, even in Year 2, programs were still in the process of adapting their implementation of services and building partnerships, so Year 2 should not be considered yet a "steady state" as the LEAP grantees continue to refine the model. This cost study examines three LEAP grantees that exemplify different contexts (urban and rural), different models (Back on Track and Jobs for America's Graduates, or JAG), and different program structures. More details about how the cost analysis was conducted are included in Appendix B. The cost study did not include an estimate of the benefits of LEAP to individuals and society (benefit-cost analysis) nor did it include an assessment of the cost of producing a target outcome, such as a high school credential, through LEAP compared with the cost to produce that same outcome through another program (cost-effectiveness analysis).

The costs of providing LEAP services primarily fell into three categories: staffing costs, costs related to participant supports, and other direct and indirect costs. Costs for participant supports included direct payments to participants for incentives or stipends, and other supports for participants like payments for training activities, college application fees, or transportation costs. Other direct and indirect costs include facilities, supplies, rent, technology, utilities, human resources, and insurance.

LEAP is a staff-intensive intervention, and staffing costs were the largest share of costs. The staffing costs include those incurred by both the lead grantee and partner organizations that were directly providing LEAP services. Many staff had split roles across different programs, and the cost study only includes the costs related to the share of time they spent on LEAP. The cost estimates also value the costs of in-kind or volunteer staff time, such as staff members who had a direct role in LEAP but did not directly bill their time to LEAP. Staffing costs associated with non-LEAP services that participants may have received through referrals (such as the cost of mental health services) are not included in these estimates. Staff involved in LEAP include both direct service staff and management staff. Direct service staff provided JAG or Back on Track services to participants, including individual supports and classroom instruction. Management staff costs include time spent managing direct service staff, as well as time related to data collection and reporting.

This analysis estimated enrollment and recruitment costs for LEAP by program model. These costs cover activities related to outreach, building referral relationships, and enrolling participants. For JAG, costs were estimated separately for the Active Phase and the 12-month Follow-up Phase. Participants are enrolled in what is known as an Active Phase until they earn a secondary or other credential and fulfill a specified list of competencies. For Back on Track, costs were estimated separately for Bridging, which focuses on helping young people access and prepare for postsecondary education and training, and First-Year Support activities, which support young people during their first year.

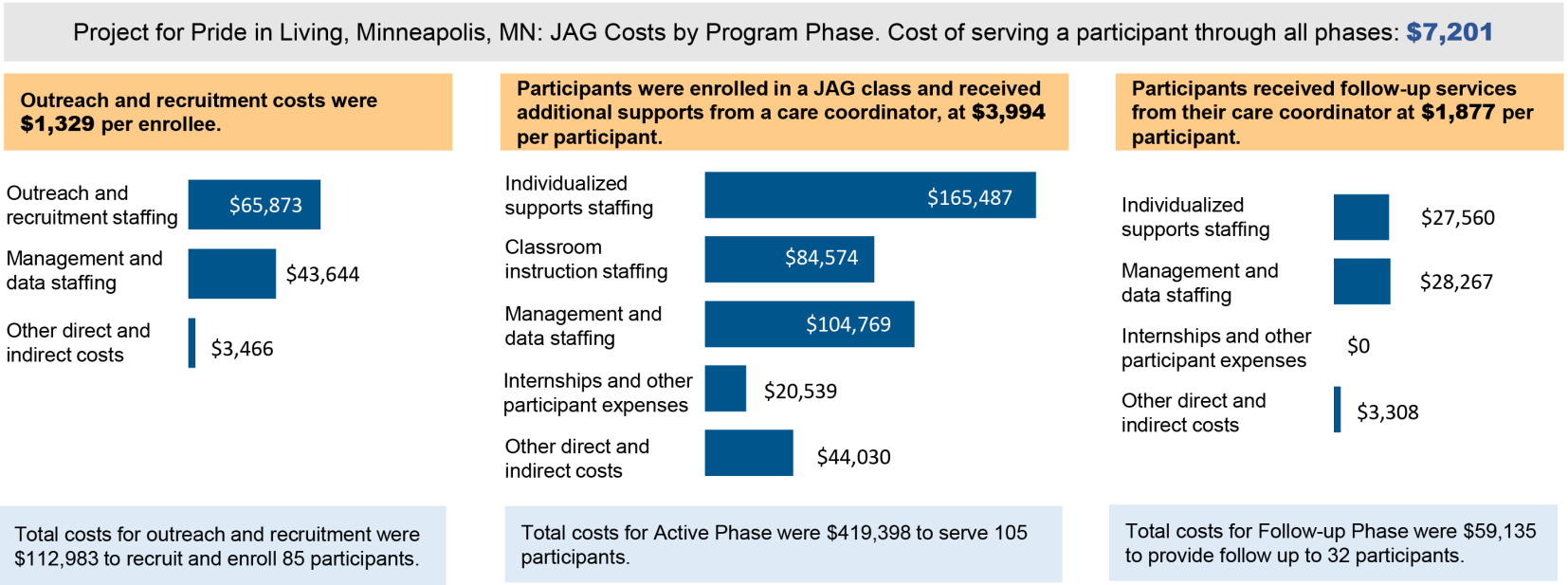
JAG COST ESTIMATES

The program structure for each LEAP grantee drove costs. Figure 5.1 shows the costs for Maine's LEAP JAG program and for Project for Pride (PPL's) in Living's JAG program, by phase. Costs to complete the full JAG program ranged from about $5,300 to about $7,200 per participant. In Maine, the LEAP initiative's focus for JAG was to recruit foster care youth into existing JAG classes in their schools. The cost analysis reflects the additional costs of providing LEAP services and therefore does not include the cost of existing JAG classes. Recruitment and enrollment costs, which include staffing to manage a data-sharing agreement with the Office of Child and Family Services and individual outreach to eligible young people, account for the majority of the total costs for Maine's LEAP JAG program. Active Phase costs centered primarily around providing additional supports to LEAP JAG participants and incentives for completing milestones. Follow-up Phase activities were similar to Active Phase activities. However, because young people in Maine started JAG when they were sophomores or juniors, only a few had reached the Follow-up Phase by Year 2. Maine also provided both models, so their overall budget was split between JAG and Back on Track.

PPL, on the other hand, had the most intensive model of all the JAG programs, as each participant was staffed with an Alternative Learning Center (ALC) Plus Coordinator, a school-based case man-

FIGURE 5.1

JAG Program Costs



NOTE: Costs based on Year 2 expenditures and participation data provided by the program.

ager whose role was to support county-involved youth, and a classroom-based JAG Specialist.[1] This higher intensity of LEAP-specific services, compared with Maine's program structure, comes with higher costs. Most of these services occurred in the Active Phase. Similar to Maine, PPL had few participants in the Follow-up Phase during Year 2.

BACK ON TRACK COST ESTIMATES

Program structure also drove costs for all Back on Track locations. (See Figure 5.2.) Costs per participant ranged from about $6,000 to about $7,300. The Door operated three different Back on Track program models (Bridge to College, Emergency Medical Technician [EMT] Bridge, and TechBridge) at two locations in New York City. Costs are estimated across The Door's Back on Track programs, not separately. Bridging services were the most intensive component of the LEAP services provided by The Door. Costs for First-Year Support services, which included 10 months of check-ins with The Door staff and incentive payments for attending these check-ins, also included costs for continued training for EMT and TechBridge participants. The Door was an urban site that served a high concentration of youth at each of its locations and this led to cost efficiencies.

Maine LEAP's Back on Track program structure, with multiple pathways and rural locales, affected its cost structure. The largest costs involved supporting the intermediary role and direct service providers at Goodwill, Community Care, and JMG. Though Office of Child and Family Services staff members were involved in providing Back on Track services, their costs are not included in this analysis because transition workers were existing roles at the agency. Maine's statewide scatter site design, which requires staff to provide services mostly one-on-one throughout a large geographic area, meant they served fewer youth overall. These factors all led to higher costs.

COMPARING LEAP COSTS WITH COSTS OF OTHER SERVICES

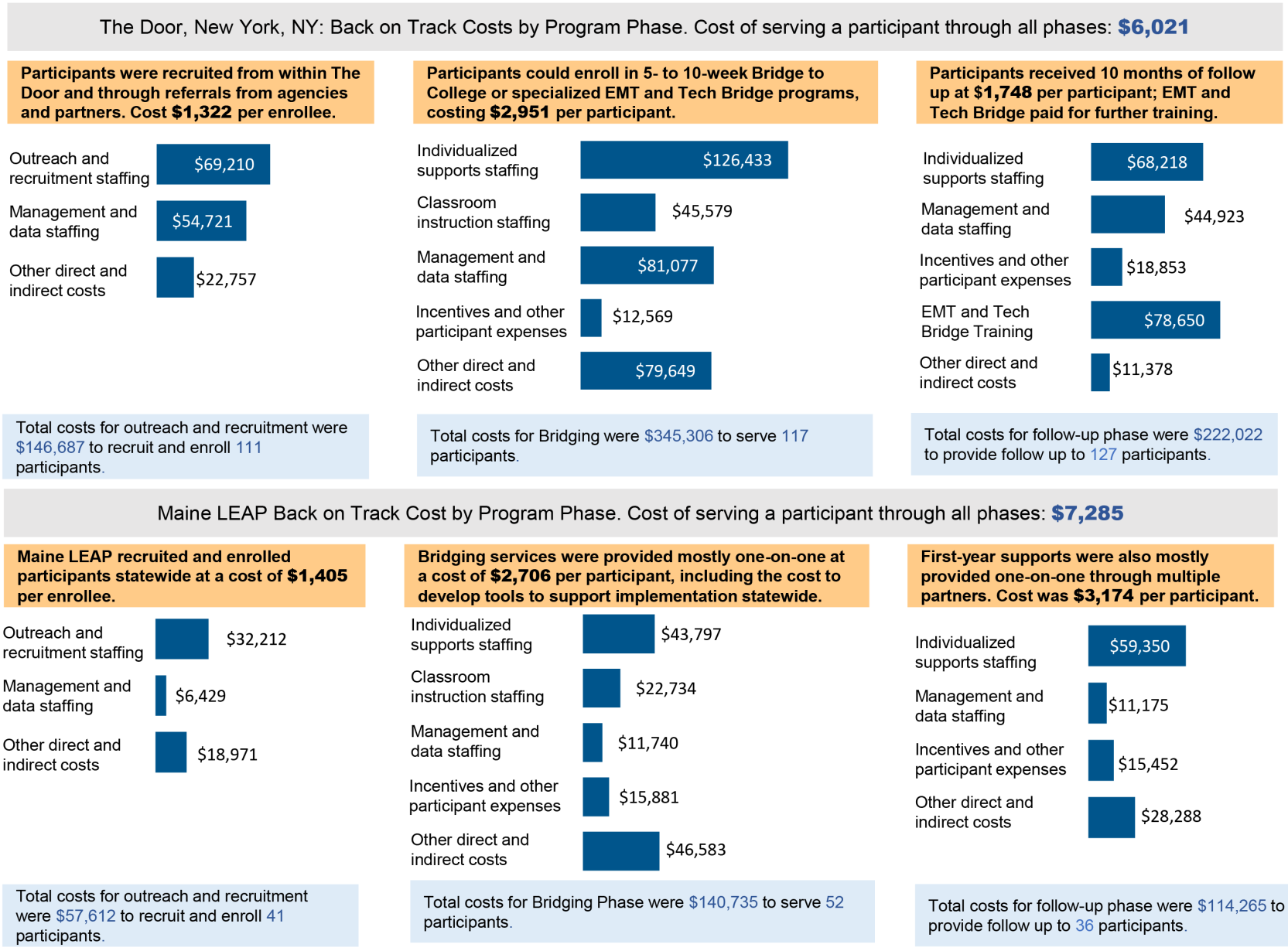
The estimated costs of serving a participant through all phases of the LEAP initiative were between $5,300 and $7,300 per person. There is limited information available about the costs of programs like LEAP, which layer services onto existing services in the community. Most of the cost estimates available for youth programs are of programs with a more intensive set of services. YouthBuild, a comprehensive program aimed at helping young people obtain a high school credential and vocational training, estimated the cost per participant for job or training-related services at approximately $24,500 per person. However, these services were more robust than those offered by LEAP, with participants receiving stipends and training for industry-recognized credentials.[2]

Many colleges now offer bridge programs for students — some aimed at first generation students — but the costs of these programs are not published. A separate JFF analysis of the cost of implementing Back on Track estimated that it would cost $1,600 to $3,250 per participant for Bridging, and $1,550

1. JAG classes existed at the contracted alternative schools prior to LEAP, but since JAG services were revamped specifically for LEAP, they are treated as LEAP services in this analysis. Salary costs for JAG Specialists and ALC Plus Coordinators were allocated to LEAP in proportion as there were LEAP participants on their caseload or classes.
2. Miller et al. (2018).

FIGURE 5.2

Back on Track Program Costs



NOTE: Costs based on Year 2 expenditures and participation data provided by the program.

to $2,700 per participant for First-Year Supports, which is largely in line with the estimates presented in this chapter.[3] In comparison, CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which combines a robust set of services including tuition waivers, costs about $14,000 per participant.[4]

Though LEAP has the potential to be cost-effective if it improves high school graduation rates, participation in the labor market, or college persistence, this study did not measure the impact of LEAP using a control group. Thus, it cannot be determined whether LEAP is cost-effective compared with other programs with similar goals.

3. Almeida, Steinberg, and Santos (2013).
4. Scrivener et al. (2015).

CHAPTER
6

Lessons and Looking Forward

The evaluation findings presented in this report provide important information for practitioners and policymakers about the type of supports that can benefit young people who have experienced systems involvement or homelessness as they transition to adulthood. The Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) and Back on Track models were flexible. This enabled LEAP grantees to adapt their program implementation to what they were learning on the ground about how best to support the young people who enrolled.

KEY FINDINGS

- Partnering strategically with public agencies and other organizations was key to reaching eligible young people, aligning resources, and opening access to services. Partners included child welfare departments, juvenile justice and criminal justice agencies, school districts, nonprofit organizations, workforce systems, and local vocational and postsecondary institutions.

- Particularly during the first year of implementation, LEAP grantees had difficulty identifying appropriate program participants. Strategic partnerships helped boost recruitment. LEAP grantees described how eligibility for LEAP could be "invisible" — organizations did not always have a good way to identify who in their programs might need additional support. A key recruitment strategy was strengthening relationships with partners in various state systems such as child welfare departments, justice agencies, homeless services, and schools.

- LEAP grantees adapted JAG and Back on Track services to focus on addressing the circumstances in young people's lives that constrained their potential. This included adapting how they planned to deliver core model activities to promote engagement. The JAG and Back on Track models are intentionally flexible in terms of how core activities can be delivered, which allowed LEAP grantees to change the format of service delivery to promote engagement and persistence. LEAP grantees reported that addressing the barriers young people faced had to be done before focusing on school or work. Working with partners to align resources was critical to addressing the circumstances of participants in order to support their pursuit of a high school or postsecondary credential, or to gain work experience.

- Staff-participant relationships were key to delivering services and supporting participant engagement. Participants who had positive experiences with the program often reported that their connection to a staff member was a primary reason for enrolling and staying engaged in programming.

- Back on Track participants had high engagement in services and high levels of enrollment in postsecondary education. While a longer follow-up period is necessary to evaluate degree and certificate attainment among participants, early results indicate that Back on Track may help participants enroll and persist in postsecondary education.

- Most participants who enrolled in JAG received the program's key services, but less than half fully completed the program. Among those who completed the program's core services phase, most were employed or in school at one point during the first six months of the follow-up period. JAG programs developed adaptations to promote engagement, but it is too soon to tell from the available data whether these adaptations led to increased completion in later cohorts.

- Per participant costs, including outreach and follow-up, ranged from $5,300 to $7,300. As staff-intensive interventions, personnel-related expenses made up the majority of JAG and Back on Track costs. The costs of adding LEAP services varied by how the programs were structured and their local context.

The findings on participation and outcomes for JAG and Back on Track should be considered preliminary since the analysis covers only those who enrolled in LEAP's initial years, when grantees were still testing programming adaptations and building partnerships to broaden support and opportunities for participants. An analysis of later cohorts, including how outcomes differ for various groups such as by race, gender, or parenting status, may shed light on how well adaptations worked to support engagement and whether there were differences in outcomes based on participant characteristics.

LESSONS

This report points to these five possible ways to advance programming for young people who have experienced systems involvement or homelessness.

- **Address barriers to opportunity.** Structural barriers, such as housing, transportation, child care, and financial needs, were very salient challenges for the young people who participated in LEAP. To promote engagement, programs must help address these barriers through partnerships or by changing local practices and policies. Additional support for these young people can help address the inequities they face when pursuing their educational and career goals.

- **Develop recruitment pathways through partnerships and data-sharing agreements.** LEAP points to promising strategies for identifying young people who may benefit from additional supports that they may not know are available to them. One promising strategy is partnering with other organizations who may already be connected to young people to align services and build referral relationships. Establishing data-sharing agreements with local or state child welfare, justice, or housing agencies can also help connect eligible participants to services.

- **Collaborate with agencies and other organizations to support implementation.** Partnerships were crucial to LEAP implementation. Grantees built strong partnerships by developing a shared understanding of the initiative's goals among partners, focusing on the mutual benefits of the partnerships to address potential concerns about competition, and establishing formal mechanisms for planning and feedback. Cross-system partnerships can also influence a community's broader approach to a challenge.

- **Staff-participant relationships are key.** Finding the right staff-to-participant fit and retaining key staff is central to participant engagement. Grantees sought to hire staff members with whom young people could identify and with whom they had something in common — such as a shared background. Staff intentionally focused on building strong relationships with participants. Staff received training in trauma-informed care, which gave them skills to work with participants who had experienced trauma. Organizations should consider how to promote staff retention and make sure that participants are connected to multiple staff members to mitigate the potential effects of turnover on staff-participant relationships.

- **Allowing flexibility in the delivery of program models can promote participant engagement and success.** LEAP programs found early on that they needed to adapt their original plans for service delivery to better serve participants, such as by offering incentives or one-on-one service delivery options. JAG participants, who tended to need a long horizon in the program, often did not complete the Active Phase of the program. Back on Track participants also left the program without completing it. This calls out the need for more research into how programs that serve young people can sustain engagement over a long period, as the path to a high school diploma or postsecondary degree is long. Offering interim milestones, such as shorter-term credentials or paid work experiences, may provide participants with more easily attainable successes that keep them engaged as they reach for long-term goals. LEAP grantees developed these adaptations and others to promote engagement, but a longer follow-up period is needed to assess whether these adaptations improved engagement among later LEAP cohorts.

LOOKING FORWARD

During the first three years of LEAP, programs made significant strides in developing partnerships and adapting JAG and Back on Track service delivery to better help young people persist on their educational and career pathways. These lessons will carry forward to the next phase of LEAP work, which began in summer 2019. During this next phase, all LEAP grantees will help current participants complete the program and will continue to participate in LEAP technical assistance and peer-to-peer learning activities in the community. A subset of the original LEAP grantees will also expand their work to deepen relationships with partners so they can replicate services that reach more young people who have experienced systems involvement and homelessness. Ultimately, the next phase of LEAP offers the promise of change to public practices and policies that touch these young lives.

APPENDIX

A

Data Collection and Analysis

This appendix describes the data used in the report, including the research questions, data sources, timeline for data collection, approaches used to analyze the data, and limitations of the data. Figure A.1 displays the timeline for implementation and data collection.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DATA SOURCES

The study was guided by the following research questions:

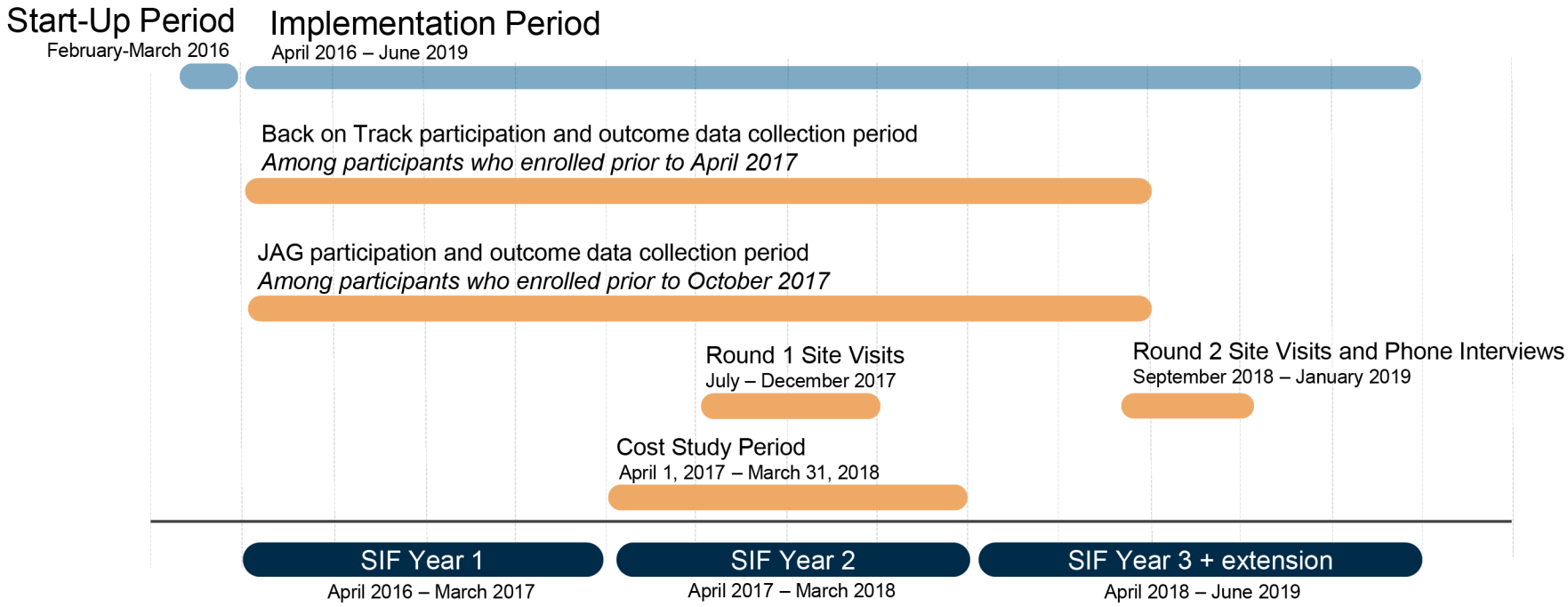
- How are the JAG and Back on Track models being implemented and adapted to serve the LEAP populations? How are the LEAP enhancements implemented?
- Who does LEAP serve? How are applicants recruited and enrolled in the program? How do the characteristics of LEAP participants vary by site?
- What are LEAP participants' perspectives on their program experiences and the period following participation?
- To what extent are youth engaged in LEAP program activities, and what factors facilitate or constrain their participation?
- What are the outcomes for the young people who participate in the program?
- What are the program costs of serving this population?

The analyses in this report draw on the following data sources:

- **Site visits:** Members of the research team visited each of the LEAP grantees twice to interview program staff members at all levels, interview key partners and stakeholders, and observe program activities. These visits occurred during summer and fall 2017 and fall 2018, covering the first two and a half years of LEAP implementation. Across both rounds of visits, the research team conducted 239 interviews, with an average of 24 interviews per LEAP grantee. Of those interviews, 126 were with staff of the LEAP grantee and 113 were with a partner or other stakeholder. Seven observations of program activities were conducted; only seven observations were possible because it was difficult to align visits with the timing of group activities.
- **In-person and phone interviews with participants:** During both rounds of site visits, MDRC interviewed program participants selected by the local programs. MDRC also conducted additional phone interviews with participants between November 2018 and January 2019 to gain perspectives on LEAP from participants who were not able to engage in on-site interviews, such as participants who may have already completed the program or left the program without completing it. In total, MDRC conducted 133 interviews with young people.
- **Program participation data:** LEAP sites collected participation and outcome data about program participants separately. These data were provided to MDRC in fall 2017 and again in fall 2018.

FIGURE A.1

LEAP SIF Timeline



Participation data cover the period from April 1, 2016, to September 30, 2018. The data are the most complete source of information on participant demographics, participation and engagement in LEAP program activities, and outcomes. Since each LEAP grantee collected the information separately in different types of databases, the knowledge gained from the participation data is somewhat limited. Data quality issues also limited the number of LEAP grantees and outcome measures that could be covered. Conclusions from subgroup analyses could also not be drawn because of small sample sizes and clustering of participant characteristics by LEAP grantee. More details on data analysis and limitations follow in the subsequent sections of this appendix.

- **Financial data:** MDRC collected budget and financial data from three LEAP sites in fall 2018 for the cost analysis. The cost analysis focuses on Year 2 of implementation.

As participation data for Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) and Back on Track were analyzed separately, the approach and analysis methods for each are presented separately.

ANALYSIS OF BACK ON TRACK PROGRAM DATA

The analysis presented for Back on Track sites reflects data collected from the LEAP grantees in fall 2017 and fall 2018. The five Back on Track grantees provided data separately. Each of the three Nebraska partners submitted a dataset, resulting in a total of seven separate datasets. Each dataset was analyzed on its own, and measures shown in the tables were produced separately for each grantee before they were combined in a master analysis file.

Because Back on Track grantees enrolled participants throughout the three years of the LEAP Social Innovation Fund (SIF) initiative, follow-up periods differ among participants. Based on an analysis of the full dataset to determine the typical amount of time that it took participants to complete both phases of the program, only participants with a minimum of 18 months since their enrollment date are included in the participation and in-program outcome analysis (those who enrolled before April 1, 2017). This is to restrict the analysis to only those who had a reasonable amount of time to progress through Bridging and First-Year Supports. One limitation of the findings is that they only represent cohorts who enrolled during the first half of implementation, meaning that they likely did not experience adaptations that grantees adopted in Years 2 and 3. One exception is the baseline dataset, which includes all participants who enrolled before October 1, 2018.

LEAP grantees were asked to collect data on a number of variables. Ultimately, grantees did not collect data on all the variables they were asked to, or they did not collect them in a systematic way. As a result, this report cannot present on all the SIF data elements. During data processing, quality issues were uncovered for some measures that made their associated data unusable. One common problem was that it was not always possible to determine whether data were missing because participants did not complete or engage in an activity, or because the grantee did not collect the information for that participant. MDRC discussed issues of missing data with LEAP grantees and made determinations about how to handle missing data on a case-by-case basis. For some variables, it was not possible to determine if data was not available because it was not recorded, or because an outcome or service

did not occur, and in these cases, program locations or variables were not included in the analysis. This report includes only those variables that did not have issues with data quality.

ANALYSIS OF JAG DATA FROM E-NDMS

The analysis presented here reflects data collected from the JAG Electronic National Data Management System (e-NDMS) at two separate points: fall 2017 and fall/winter 2018/2019. MDRC received separate files from JAG national for each LEAP grantee, and in cases where the LEAP grantee was implementing both the Alternative Education and Out-of-School applications, separate files were provided for each model. All files were combined before the analysis was conducted.

Like Back on Track, JAG LEAP grantees enrolled participants throughout the three years of the LEAP SIF time period, so the length of time for which participation and outcome data were gathered differed for each participant. Decisions about how to restrict the analysis to those who enrolled before a certain date (to ensure that they had enough time in the program to participate and achieve milestones) were determined by the JAG program model. For measures related to the Active Phase, the analysis was limited to those who enrolled before October 1, 2017, allowing for at least 12 months of follow-up during the Active Phase. For Follow-up Phase measures, analysis was limited to those who entered the Follow-up Phase before April 1, 2018, to allow them the opportunity to have at least six months of follow-up. Because only a small sample of participants had the opportunity to complete the full 12 months of follow-up specified in the JAG model, the analysis focuses on follow-up outcomes recorded in the first six months of follow-up. One limitation of the findings is that they only represent individuals who enrolled during the first half of LEAP implementation, meaning that they likely did not experience adaptations that grantees adopted in Years 2 and 3. One exception is the baseline data, which include all participants who enrolled before October 1, 2018.

Through the data analysis and interviews with staff about how they use the e-NDMS, MDRC learned that JAG locations do not all use the database in the same way. For example, some JAG Specialists may not record participants as having completed a competency if the participant had already mastered that competency upon entering the program, while other JAG Specialists do record that competency. For this reason, numbers of competencies achieved are not analyzed in this report. JAG Specialists are also using the database differently for activities in the Follow-up Phase. For these measures, only results for the Out-of-School application are shown because of small sample sizes and data quality issues associated with follow-up contacts in the Alternative Education models.

The JAG findings cover the percentage of participants who became inactive in the program during the Active Phase and the Follow-up Phase for Out-of-School participants. "Inactive" is defined as four months or more without receiving services. If JAG Specialists were not recording their contacts with participants, those participants could be defined as "inactive" or "dropped out," even if they were still receiving services. A number of participants were shown in the data to be receiving model services and follow-up contacts simultaneously. These individuals were defined as being in the Follow-up Phase at the point when their follow-up contacts started. The Follow-up Phase was considered complete when participants had been in that phase for 12 months, based on the JAG definition of follow-up. For the analysis presented in this report, participants who are inactive for four

consecutive months or more without reengagement are not counted among those who completed the program. This means that participants must have at least one successful contact in months 9, 10, 11, or 12 of the Follow-up Phase in order to count as "completers" in this analysis. Successful contacts are those in which the JAG Specialist was able to update the school and employment status of the participant in the e-NDMS. JAG national does not count participants as inactive in the Follow-up Phase, and instead applies an "unable to contact" if participants are not able to be located at the end of the 12-month Follow-up Phase.

The employment measures were calculated using a 90-day look-back period. These measures examine the characteristics of jobs that participants had during the Follow-up Phase. However, it was not always possible to determine whether the job was held during the Follow-up Phase or prior to it, as 70 percent of jobs were missing information about end dates. In other words, a JAG Specialist could have entered job information for a participant during the Active Phase, but never entered an end date for that job, so it would be impossible to know whether the participant still had the job during the Follow-up Phase. To address this data quality issue, jobs were counted only if they started during the 12-month Follow-up Phase or sometime during the 90 days before the Follow-up Phase began. (Ninety days was chosen because the average number of days in a job was 110 days for those who did have a start date and a reported end date.) If there were more than one job during the Follow-up Phase, the earliest job was used in the analysis.

An analysis of the credentials data also only presented for the Out-of-School participants, indicated that JAG Specialists used these fields to enter a variety of types of credentials. For this analysis, only credentials that meet the definition of "industry-recognized credentials" as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor are presented in this report.[1] This excludes credentials like a food handler's license and first aid training.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data were primarily gathered from interviews with staff members and participants using semistructured interview protocols. A team of eleven researchers participated in the site visits. After the visits, the researchers recorded the information gathered in structured write-up templates designed to ensure that similar data were collected across staff roles and LEAP grantees. All qualitative data were uploaded to Dedoose, a mixed-methods analysis software. In Dedoose, structural codes were applied to organize data by topic. A descriptor set was attached to each interview to identify the relevant grantee, model, and staff characteristics. Descriptor sets are categorical or numeric variables that can be used to create subgroups of grantees or staff members within Dedoose to aid in the analysis of the qualitative data. Data were exported to Microsoft Word documents organized by these structural codes, which a small team of three researchers used to identify key themes for each structural code. The team produced analysis memos for each structural code, which were reviewed by the lead researcher.

1. See U.S. Department of Labor Training and Employment Guidance letters 15-10 and 17-5.

TABLE A.1

LEAP Eligibility Criteria

PROGRAM AND SITE	AGE	EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS[a]	OTHER REQUIREMENTS
JOBS FOR AMERICA'S GRADUATES			
Covenant House Alaska	14-25		
Jobs for Arizona's Graduates (AE)	16-24	Enrollment in school where program occurs	Participant has room in schedule for elective credits
		Junior or senior standing	
Jobs for Arizona's Graduates (OOS)	16-24		
CASES	17-24	TABE score of 6 or higher	
CRCD	16-24		
Maine	15-24	Enrollment in school where program occurs	Participant has room in schedule for elective credits
Jobs for Michigan's Graduates	16-24		
PPL (AE)	16-24	Enrollment in school where program occurs	Participant has room in schedule for English or elective credits
PPL (OOS)	16-24	Enrollment in GED program where program occurs	
BACK ON TRACK			
CRCD	18-24	High school diploma or equivalency	15 college credits or fewer
			Interested in offered PSE tracks
The Door	18-25	High school diploma or equivalency	Training-specific requirements
Maine	16-25		
Nebraska Children and Families	16-25	High school diploma or equivalency[b]	Not currently enrolled in college
			Interested in PSE in specific schools in Omaha or Lincoln
			Provider-specific requirements
South Bay Community Services	16-25	High school diploma or equivalency	

NOTES: PSE is postsecondary education. TABE is Test of Adult Basic Education. OOS is Out-of-School application. AE is Alternative Education application.

[a]Blank spaces indicate no educational requirement or flexible requirement.

[b]One program location in Nebraska also enrolled candidates slated to graduate within six months.

TABLE A.2

Examples of JAG Competencies

JAG ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CORE COMPETENCIES	
Competency Group	**Example Competencies**
Career Development	Relate interests, aptitudes, and abilities to appropriate occupations
Job Attainment	Construct a resume
Job Survival	Understand what employers expect of employees
Basic Skills	Communicate in writing
Leadership and Self Development	Demonstrate team leadership
Personal Skills	Base decisions on values and goals

JAG OUT-OF-SCHOOL CORE COMPETENCIES
Example Competencies
Explore opportunities for personal development (e.g., further job training, postsecondary education, etc.)
Complete a job application and accompanying employment tests
Demonstrate effective conflict resolution skills
Demonstrate basic computer skills
Demonstrate effective independent living skills (e.g., renting an apartment, shipping, insurance, etc.)

APPENDIX

B

Approach to Estimating Program Costs

The cost study was conducted at three LEAP grantees. The LEAP grantees were chosen in consultation with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Decisions on which grantees to include were based on the need to include diverse contexts (urban and rural), different models (Back on Track and Jobs for America's Graduates, or JAG), and different structures for implementing services. The grantees chosen and the models they implemented were:

- Maine: Back on Track and JAG Alternative Education
- Project for Pride in Living: JAG Alternative Education
- The Door: Back on Track

Costs were estimated for LEAP Year 2 (April 2017 to March 2018), chosen because it represents a steadier state of implementation compared with Year 1, and complete financial and participation data were not available for Year 3 at the time the analysis was conducted. The primary data sources for the cost study were implementation data collected during site visits, Year 2 budgets and financial reports, and data about program participation (described in Appendix A).

The research team used a two-step process to estimate grantee-level costs. First, data gathered for the implementation study were used to specify a comprehensive list of ingredients that were required to implement LEAP at each of the three chosen locations in Year 2. The main categories of ingredients include staff and benefits (employed at both the lead agency and partners), participant incentives and other participant expenses (such as training costs, transportation, food, and other financial supports), and other direct and indirect costs, which included facilities, administration, supplies, and overhead costs.

The second step was to assign annual prices to each ingredient. The budget and financial data provided by grantees was used to assign prices to those inputs. In cases where a specific price was not available (for example, when a partner paid a staff member's salary, which then did not appear on budget documents), the price was imputed from data available about similar costs. Staff who worked only part of their time on LEAP had the share of their salary and benefits proportionate to their level of effort included in the costs.

For each model, costs were estimated separately for each phase. Each model had a recruitment/enrollment phase that included outreach activities like presenting about LEAP at community events, meetings with potential participants, and costs related to determining eligibility for LEAP, such as reviewing applications or transcripts. Costs related to enrollment, such as inputting enrollment and demographic information into databases, are also included in this category. For Back on Track, costs are further allocated across the Bridging Phase and the First-Year Supports Phase based on staff reports about how they spend their time and what was known about costs to implement those phases beyond staff costs (such as the costs of providing incentives or food for study groups in the First-Year Supports Phase). For JAG, costs were similarly allocated across the Active and Follow-Up phases.

Finally, the annual costs of serving each participant by phase were calculated using the participation data for each site. Participation counts of the number of young people in each phase in Year 2

were generated from the Back on Track and e-NDMS data to make these estimates. In the case of PPL, Follow-up Phase activities were not recorded in e-NDMS for participants in Year 2 because of staffing changes and inconsistent use of the e-NDMS database. Instead, participants in the Follow-up Phase were estimated to be 30 percent of those who were in the Active Phase based on data that PPL provided about completion rates.

APPENDIX

C

Demographics, Participation, and Outcomes Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Parenting Status

This appendix presents the demographics of LEAP participants and a limited set of participation and outcome measures disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, and parenting status. Caution should be taken in drawing inferences from these tables. Participant characteristics varied a good deal across the LEAP grantees, reflecting the various local contexts. For example, 86 percent of the LEAP Michigan's participants were black, compared with 4 percent of Covenant House's LEAP participants in Alaska. Patterns in participation and outcomes by participant characteristics are likely influenced by each LEAP grantee's implementation of Jobs for America's Graduates or Back on Track, and therefore, it is not possible to assess from this evaluation whether there are differential outcomes by participant characteristics. (The results of statistical tests comparing the disaggregated outcome data are provided for informational purposes only.)

TABLE C.1

Characteristics of JAG Sample Members at Time of Enrollment, by Race and Ethnicity

Characteristic	JAG	Hispanic	Black
Age (years)	18.7	18.4	19.2
Age (%)			
14-17 years old	33.3	40.0	28.2
18-20 years old	46.6	44.1	44.6
21-26 years old	20.2	15.9	27.2
Gender (%)			
Male	50.7	49.3	52.0
Female	49.3	50.7	48.0
Race/ethnicity (%)			
Hispanic	21.3	100.0	--
White	12.1	--	--
Black	48.6	--	100.0
American Indian/Alaska Native	7.8	--	--
Other	1.7	--	--
Multiracial/multiethnic	7.7	--	--
Ever in foster care (%)	36.0	27.6	40.0
At time of enrollment	16.6	12.9	15.9
Ever justice-involved (%)	38.3	37.5	46.1
At time of enrollment	18.9	15.8	23.5
Ever homeless (%)	47.8	55.9	40.2
At time of enrollment	21.6	12.8	18.3
Ever foster care, justice-involved, or homeless (%)	91.6	96.7	92.1
At time of enrollment	52.6	38.3	53.4
Ever in foster care and justice-involved (%)	8.8	5.9	11.4
At time of enrollment	0.8	1.1	0.5

(continued)

TABLE C.1 (continued)

Characteristic	JAG	Hispanic	Black
Living arrangement[a] (%)			
Own apartment/house	7.0	5.3	8.1
Home of biological parent(s)	37.6	53.4	38.8
Home of other relative(s)	15.5	16.5	17.0
Home of friend(s)	7.1	7.9	7.2
Foster home	11.2	4.1	10.7
Homeless, couch surfing, emergency shelter	21.7	12.8	18.3
Group home, halfway house, or residential treatment center	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0
Ever employed (%)	26.4	21.3	31.5
Is a parent (%)	19.6	14.0	25.6
Ever in special education (%)	10.7	8.1	9.0
High school diploma or GED certificate (%)	2.1	3.3	1.6
Sample size	1,298	272	622

SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS and Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

[a]The "living with foster parents" category might include living in a group home, but the JAG data management system did not distiguish between the two.

TABLE C.2

Characteristics of Back on Track Sample Members at Time of Enrollment, by Race and Ethnicity

Characteristic	Back on Track	Hispanic	Black
Age (years)	19.3	19.5	19.6
Age (%)			
14-17 years old	14.0	12.1	12.2
18-20 years old	61.7	60.7	59.3
21-26 years old	24.3	27.2	28.5
Gender (%)			
Male	44.5	45.5	43.3
Female	55.5	54.5	56.7
Race/ethnicity (%)			
Hispanic	29.2	100.0	--
White	26.3	--	--
Black	31.9	--	100.0
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.5	--	--
Other	1.3	--	--
Multi-racial/multi-ethnic	8.4	--	--
Ever in foster care (%)	71.2	50.0	72.4
At time of enrollment	30.4	23.8	27.5
Ever justice-involved (%)	34.9	32.1	38.3
At time of enrollment	13.6	13.7	13.5
Ever homeless (%)	54.3	62.4	60.2
At time of enrollment	19.9	32.5	19.5
Ever foster care, justice-involved, or homeless (%)	98.0	97.4	97.6
At time of enrollment	59.9	67.6	57.6
Ever in foster care and justice-involved (%)	22.5	13.8	24.9
At time of enrollment	3.6	1.9	3.8

(continued)

TABLE C.2 (continued)

Characteristic	Back on Track	Hispanic	Black
Living arrangement (%)			
Own apartment/house	18.9	11.7	14.9
Home of biological parent(s)	18.5	16.5	17.7
Home of other relative(s)	14.7	14.6	14.4
Home of friend(s)	1.5	0.5	2.2
Foster home	10.9	8.7	8.3
Homeless, couch surfing, emergency shelter	17.1	34.5	14.4
Group home, halfway house, or residential treatment center	15.3	12.6	22.7
Other	3.1	1.0	5.5
Ever employed (%)	67.2	65.3	63.2
Is a parent (%)	13.5	13.8	14.0
Ever in special education (%)	24.6	17.3	21.7
High school diploma or GED certificate[a] (%)	73.3	75.8	66.8
Sample size	940	272	297

SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS and Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

[a]Some participants in some Back on Track sites may have been enrolled during their senior year of high school to begin the program after graduation. Therefore, the graduation rate in these measures may be understated for the sample members at the time they began to participate in program activities.

TABLE C.3

Characteristics of JAG Sample Members at Time of Enrollment, by Gender

Characteristic	JAG	Female	Male
Age (years)	18.7	18.5	19.0
Age (%)			
14-17 years old	33.3	38.4	28.4
18-20 years old	46.6	44.7	48.5
21-26 years old	20.2	17.0	23.1
Gender (%)			
Male	50.7	--	100.0
Female	49.3	100.0	--
Race/ethnicity (%)			
Hispanic	21.3	21.8	20.8
White	12.1	13.6	10.7
Black	48.6	47.2	50.1
American Indian/Alaska Native	7.8	7.1	8.5
Other	1.7	0.8	2.6
Multiracial/multiethnic	7.7	8.9	6.2
Ever in foster care (%)	36.0	57.4	30.1
At time of enrollment	16.6	18.7	14.4
Ever justice-involved (%)	38.3	25.2	51.1
At time of enrollment	18.9	10.6	26.8
Ever homeless (%)	47.8	54.5	41.1
At time of enrollment	21.6	23.4	19.9
Ever foster care, justice-involved, or homeless (%)	91.6	91.5	91.6
At time of enrollment	52.6	49.1	55.6
Ever in foster care and justice-involved (%)	8.8	7.6	10.1
At time of enrollment	0.8	0.8	0.8

(continued)

TABLE C.3 (continued)

Characteristic	JAG	Female	Male
Living arrangement[a] (%)			
Own apartment/house	7.0	9.2	4.8
Home of biological parent(s)	37.6	32.2	43.3
Home of other relative(s)	15.5	15.5	15.6
Home of friend(s)	7.1	7.7	6.3
Foster home	11.2	12.1	10.1
Homeless, couch surfing, emergency shelter	21.7	23.4	19.9
Group home, halfway house, or residential treatment center	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0
Ever employed (%)	26.4	25.5	27.3
Is a parent (%)	19.6	27.4	12.0
Ever in special education (%)	10.7	10.1	11.3
High school diploma or GED certificate (%)	2.1	2.2	1.8
Sample size	1,298	638	656

SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS and Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

[a]The "living with foster parents" category might include living in a group home, but the JAG data management system did not distiguish between the two.

TABLE C.4

Characteristics of Back on Track Sample Members at Time of Enrollment, by Gender

Characteristic	BOT	Female	Male
Age (years)	19.3	19.3	19.4
Age (%)			
14-17 years old	14.0	15.1	12.7
18-20 years old	61.7	60.5	63.3
21-26 years old	24.3	24.5	24.1
Gender (%)			
Male	44.5	--	100.0
Female	55.5	100.0	--
Race/ethnicity (%)			
Hispanic	29.2	28.5	29.5
White	26.3	26.3	26.6
Black	31.9	32.6	31.0
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.5	1.6	1.5
Other	1.3	1.4	1.2
Multiracial/multiethnic	8.4	8.1	8.8
Ever in foster care (%)	71.2	76.4	65.2
At time of enrollment	30.4	32.0	28.0
Ever justice-involved (%)	34.9	28.7	42.8
At time of enrollment	13.6	8.6	19.9
Ever homeless (%)	54.3	54.4	54.3
At time of enrollment	19.9	17.9	21.7
Ever foster care, justice-involved, or homeless (%)	98.0	98.8	97.1
At time of enrollment	59.9	56.5	63.2
Ever in foster care and justice-involved (%)	22.5	20.2	25.8
At time of enrollment	3.6	3.2	3.8

(continued)

TABLE C.4 (continued)

Characteristic	BOT	Female	Male
Living arrangement (%)			
Own apartment/house	18.9	21.8	15.0
Home of biological parent(s)	18.5	17.5	19.8
Home of other relative(s)	14.7	14.3	15.4
Home of friend(s)	1.5	1.7	1.4
Foster home	10.9	11.4	10.6
Homeless, couch surfing, emergency shelter	17.1	15.1	19.5
Group home, halfway house, or residential treatment center	15.3	15.5	14.7
Other	3.1	2.7	3.8
Ever employed (%)	67.2	69.0	65.4
Is a parent (%)	13.5	19.4	6.1
Ever in special education (%)	24.6	22.3	28.0
High school diploma or GED certificate[a] (%)	73.3	76.8	69.4
Sample size	940	514	412

SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS and Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTE: Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

[a]Some participants in some BOT sites may have been enrolled during their senior year of high school to begin the program after graduation. Therefore, the graduation rate in these measures may be understated for the sample members at the time they began to participate in program activities.

TABLE C.5

JAG Participation and Outcome Measures, by Race and Ethnicity

Participation Measure	Black	Hispanic	White/Other	
Among those who started the Active Phase prior to 10/1/2017				
Activity participation (%)	92.4	87.9	89.0	
JAG competencies	80.2	80.7	85.9	
Academic Remediation	39.2	22.9	43.1	***
Guidance Counseling	62.5	59.3	50.2	*
Career Association	45.5	54.3	58.0	*
Work-based Learning	18.4	15.7	23.5	
Field trips and speakers	51.4	49.3	48.2	
Time spent on activities (hours)	35.1	48.4	46.4	
Completed Active Phase (%)	31.3	43.6	23.1	***
Sample size (all sites)	288	140	255	
Among those who completed Active Phase (before 10/1/2018)				
Number of competencies completed	9.9	13.4	15.6	**
Time spent in Active Phase (months)	7.2	8.4	8.2	
Completed HSD or equivalency during LEAP (%)	43.6	41.8	54.1	
Completed other credential during LEAP (%)	19.2	16.5	17.7	
Sample size (all sites)	156	91	85	

(continued)

TABLE C.5 (continued)

Among those who started the follow-up phase before 4/1/2018			
Ever reported follow-up status in months 1-6 (%)			
Any education or employment	76.8	66.7	85.7
Any education	55.1	50.0	45.2
Postsecondary	23.2	9.5	9.5
GED or High School	23.2	21.4	19.1
Other/Unknown School	8.7	19.1	16.7
Any employment	47.8	38.1	69.1 *
Full-time employment	26.1	28.6	52.4 *
Part-time employment	27.5	11.9	26.2
Not connected to work or school	42.0	28.6	33.3
Sample size (OOS sites only)	69	42	42
Among those who started active on or before 4/1/17			
Still in active (%)	4.6	3.7	14.6 **
Still in follow up (%)	13.6	14.8	6.2
Left program without completing Active Phase (%)	56.5	40.7	56.9
Left program without completing Follow-up Phase (%)	14.3	25.9	7.7 **
Completed program (%)	11.0	14.8	14.6
Sample size (OOS sites + ME Alt Ed)	154	54	130

SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS.

NOTE: The statistical significance (p-value) of each outcome tested was adjusted to account for the number of tests that were conducted for AJG (i.e., all outcomes in Tables C.5 – C.7). Following the Benjamini-Hochberg approach, the p-values were ranked from largest (least statistically significant) to smallest, and each p-value was multiplied by M/(M-rank-1), where M is equal to the number of outcomes tested. (The largest p-value remains unchanged, since its rank minus one equals zero.) The resulting adjusted p-value provides a conservative test of the statistical significance of each estimate, in that it may somewhat understate its "true" significance. (Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995)

TABLE C.6

JAG Participation and Outcome Measures, by Gender

Activity participation (%)	89.2	91.2
JAG competencies	80.6	84.3
Academic Remediation	35.0	39.6
Guidance Counseling	57.3	57.1
Career Association	48.4	55.6
Work-based Learning	21.7	17.5
Field trips and speakers	49.6	49.9
Time spent on activities (hours)	38.6	45.3
Completed Active Phase (%)	31.3	30.2
Sample size (all sites)	351	331
Among those who completed Active Phase		
Number of competencies completed	12.1	12.7
Time spent in Active Phase (months)	7.9	7.7
Completed high school diploma or equivalency during LEAP (%)	47.3	44.0
Completed other credential during LEAP (%)	18.8	17.5
Sample size (all sites)	165	166

(continued)

TABLE C.6 (continued)

Among those who started the follow-up phase before 4/1/2018			
Ever reported follow-up status in months 1-6 (%)			
Any education or employment	69.3	83.3	
Any education	41.3	60.3	
Postsecondary	6.7	24.4	**
GED or High School	21.3	21.8	
Other/Unknown School	13.3	14.1	
Any employment	40.0	61.5	*
Full-time employment	25.3	42.3	
Part-time employment	18.7	26.9	
Not connected to work or school	36.0	35.9	
Sample size (OOS sites only)	75	78	
Among those who started active on or before 4/1/17			
Still in active (%)	8.0	8.6	
Still in follow up (%)	10.3	11.7	
Left program without completing Active Phase (%)	53.7	54.6	
Left program without completing follow-up phase (%)	16.6	10.4	
Completed program (%)	11.4	14.7	
Sample size (OOS sites + ME Alt Ed)	175	163	

SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS.

NOTE: The statistical significance (p-value) of each outcome tested was adjusted to account for the number of tests that were conducted for AJG (i.e., all outcomes in Tables C.5 – C.7). Following the Benjamini-Hochberg approach, the p-values were ranked from largest (least statistically significant) to smallest, and each p-value was multiplied by M/(M-rank-1), where M is equal to the number of outcomes tested. (The largest p-value remains unchanged, since its rank minus one equals zero.) The resulting adjusted p-value provides a conservative test of the statistical significance of each estimate, in that it may somewhat understate its "true" significance. (Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995)

TABLE C.7

JAG Participation and Outcome Measures, by Parenting Status

Participation Measure	Parenting	Not Parenting
Among those who started the Active Phase prior to 10/1/2017		
Activity participation (%)	93.1	89.7
JAG competencies	81.0	82.7
Academic Remediation	37.1	37.8
Guidance Counseling	56.9	57.8
Career Association	49.1	53.1
Work-Based Learning	15.5	20.9
Field Trips and Speakers	41.4	51.9
Time spent on activities (hours)	24.1	46.2 ***
Completed Active Phase (%)	32.8	30.7
Sample size (all sites)	116	561
Among those who completed Active Phase		
Number of competencies completed	10.2	13.0
Time spent in Active Phase (months)	7.3	7.9
Completed high school diploma or equivalency during	35.2	48.7
Completed other credential during LEAP (%)	21.1	17.2
Sample size (all sites)	71	261

(continued)

TABLE C.7 (continued)

Among those who started the follow-up phase before 4/1/2018		
Ever reported follow-up status in months 1-6 (%)		
Any education or employment	86.2	74.2
Any education	48.3	51.6
Postsecondary	27.6	12.9
GED or High School	10.3	24.2
Other/Unknown School	10.3	14.5
Any employment	69.0	46.8
Full-time employment	48.3	30.7
Part-time employment	34.5	20.2
Not connected to work or school	41.4	34.7
Sample size (OOS sites only)	29	124
Among those who started active on or before 4/1/17		
Still in active (%)	10.0	7.9
Still in follow up (%)	8.3	11.5
Left program without completing Active Phase (%)	61.7	52.5
Left program without completing follow-up phase (%)	11.7	14.0
Completed program (%)	8.3	14.0
Sample size (OOS sites + ME Alt Ed)	60	278

SOURCE: Program data from JAG e-NDMS.

NOTE: The statistical significance (p-value) of each outcome tested was adjusted to account for the number of tests that were conducted for AJG (i.e., all outcomes in Tables C.5 – C.7). Following the Benjamini-Hochberg approach, the p-values were ranked from largest (least statistically significant) to smallest, and each p-value was multiplied by M/(M-rank-1), where M is equal to the number of outcomes tested. (The largest p-value remains unchanged, since its rank minus one equals zero.) The resulting adjusted p-value provides a conservative test of the statistical significance of each estimate, in that it may somewhat understate its "true" significance. (Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995)

TABLE C.8

Back on Track Program Participation, by Race and Ethnicity

Characteristic	Black	Hispanic	White/Other
Enrolled in Back on Track	100.0	100.0	100.0
Began Postsecondary Bridging course (%)	99.0	100.0	97.7
Among those who began Postsecondary Bridging			
Completed Postsecondary Bridging course (%)	79.4	75.0	72.8
Entered First Year Supports Phase[a] (%)	71.8	59.5	67.2
Among those who entered First Year Supports phase			
Completed First Year Supports phase (%)	66.2	50.0	62.8
Completed First Year Supports phase (%)	47.6	29.8	42.2
Sample size (max)	103	84	128

SOURCE: Program data from Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: All measures shown among those who enrolled in Back on Track with at least 18 months of follow-up (i.e. before 4/1/17).

[a]Participation in Postsecondary Bridging course may happen concurrently with First Year Supports Phase or during remedial education.

TABLE C.9

BACK on Track In-Program Outcomes, by Race and Ethnicity

Characteristic	Black	Hispanic	White/Other	
Ever enrolled in school during LEAP	74.2	53.2	72.7	**
Among those who were ever enrolled in school				
School status[a] (%)				
Full-time	79.4	85.4	60.3	**
Part-time	20.6	14.6	38.5	**
Ever employed during LEAP (%)	31.6	31.2	39.0	
Among those who were ever employed				
Employed for at least 6 months[b] (%)	26.1	29.2	50.0	
Employed for 12 months[b] (%)	0.0	0.0	18.4	**
Employed full-time (%)	39.1	34.8	26.7	
Average number of months employed (months)[b]	3.4	4.1	5.5	
Average wage ($)	11.3	11.4	11.2	
Job offered health benefits (%)	21.1	14.3	29.0	
Earned certificate (%)	8.6	5.1	3.3	
Earned postsecondary degree (%)	1.1	0.0	1.7	
Sample size (max)	103	84	128	

SOURCE: Program data from Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: All measures shown among those who enrolled in Back on Track with at least 18 months of follow up (i.e. before 4/1/17).

[a]Measures below are for a youth's first credit-bearing postsecondary institution in the follow-up period, if a youth enrolled at multiple postsecondary institutions during this time. "Postsecondary" includes credit-bearing postsecondary education, vocational schools, and training or job development programs.

[b]Within 12 months of enrollment; includes employment that is split among different employers or jobs.

TABLE C.10

Back on Track Program Participation, by Gender

Characteristic	Male	Female
Enrolled in Back on Track	100.0	100.0
Began Postsecondary Bridging course (%)	99.2	98.3
Among those who began Postsecondary Bridging Completed Postsecondary Bridging course (%)	74.4	78.9
Entered First Year Supports phase[a] (%)	63.8	71.3
Among those who entered First Year Supports phase Completed First Year Supports phase (%)	55.4	64.6
Completed First Year Supports phase (%)	35.4	46.1
Sample size (max)	130	178

SOURCE: Program data from Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: All measures shown among those who enrolled in Back on Track with at least 18 months of follow-up (i.e. before 4/1/17).

[a]Participation in Postsecondary Bridging course may happen concurrently with First Year Supports phase or during remedial education.

TABLE C.11

Back on Track In-Program Outcomes, by Gender

Characteristic	Male	Female	
Ever enrolled in school during LEAP	64.8	73.2	
Among those who were ever enrolled in school			
School status[a] (%)			
Full-time	72.5	72.6	
Part-time	27.5	26.5	
Ever employed during LEAP (%)	33.0	37.2	
Among those who were ever employed			
Employed for at least 6 months[b] (%)	42.9	34.0	
Employed for 12 months[b] (%)	5.7	10.0	
Employed full-time (%)	43.3	26.1	
Average number of months employed (months)[b]	4.6	4.5	
Average wage ($)	12.3	10.6	***
Job offered health benefits (%)	29.6	18.2	
Earned certificate (%)	4.1	6.7	
Earned postsecondary degree (%)	0.8	1.2	
Sample size (max)	130	178	

SOURCE: Program data from Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: All measures shown among those who enrolled in Back on Track with at least 18 months of follow-up (i.e. before 4/1/17).

[a]Measures below are for a youth's first credit-bearing postsecondary institution in the follow-up period, if a youth enrolled at multiple postsecondary institutions during this time. "Postsecondary" includes credit-bearing postsecondary education, vocational schools, and training or job development programs.

[b]Within 12 months of enrollment; includes employment that is split among different employers or jobs.

TABLE C.12

Back on Track Program Participation, by Parenting Status

Characteristic	Not Parenting	Parenting
Enrolled in Back on Track	100.0	100.0
Began Postsecondary Bridging course (%)	99.2	96.3
Among those who began Postsecondary Bridging		
Completed Postsecondary Bridging course (%)	76.3	76.9
Entered First Year Supports phase[a] (%)	67.8	64.8
Among those who entered First Year Supports phase		
Completed First Year Supports phase (%)	58.4	71.4
Completed First Year Supports phase (%)	39.6	46.3
Sample size (max)	255	54

SOURCE: Program data from Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: All measures shown among those who enrolled in Back on Track with at least 18 months of follow-up (i.e. before 4/1/17).

[a]Participation in Postsecondary Bridging course may happen concurrently with First Year Supports phase or during remedial education.

TABLE C.13

Back on Track In-Program Outcomes, by Parenting Status

Characteristic	Not Parenting	Parenting	
Ever enrolled in school during LEAP	69.0	67.3	
Among those who were ever enrolled in school			
School status[a] (%)			
Full-time	77.5	50.0	**
Part-time	21.9	50.0	***
Ever employed during LEAP (%)	32.1	42.6	
Among those who were ever employed			
Employed for at least 6 months[b] (%)	41.8	23.5	
Employed for 12 months[b] (%)	10.4	0.0	
Employed full-time (%)	32.8	35.7	
Average number of months employed (months)[b]	4.7	4.0	
Average wage ($)	11.3	11.3	
Job offered health benefits (%)	20.4	29.4	
Earned certificate (%)	3.3	14.3	**
Earned postsecondary degree (%)	0.8	2.0	
Sample size (max)	255	54	

SOURCE: Program data from Back on Track sites' management information systems.

NOTES: All measures shown among those who enrolled in Back on Track with at least 18 months of follow-up (i.e. before 4/1/17).

[a]Measures below are for a youth's first credit-bearing postsecondary institution in the follow-up period, if a young person enrolled at multiple postsecondary institutions during this time. "Postsecondary" includes credit-bearing postsecondary education, vocational schools, and training or job development programs.

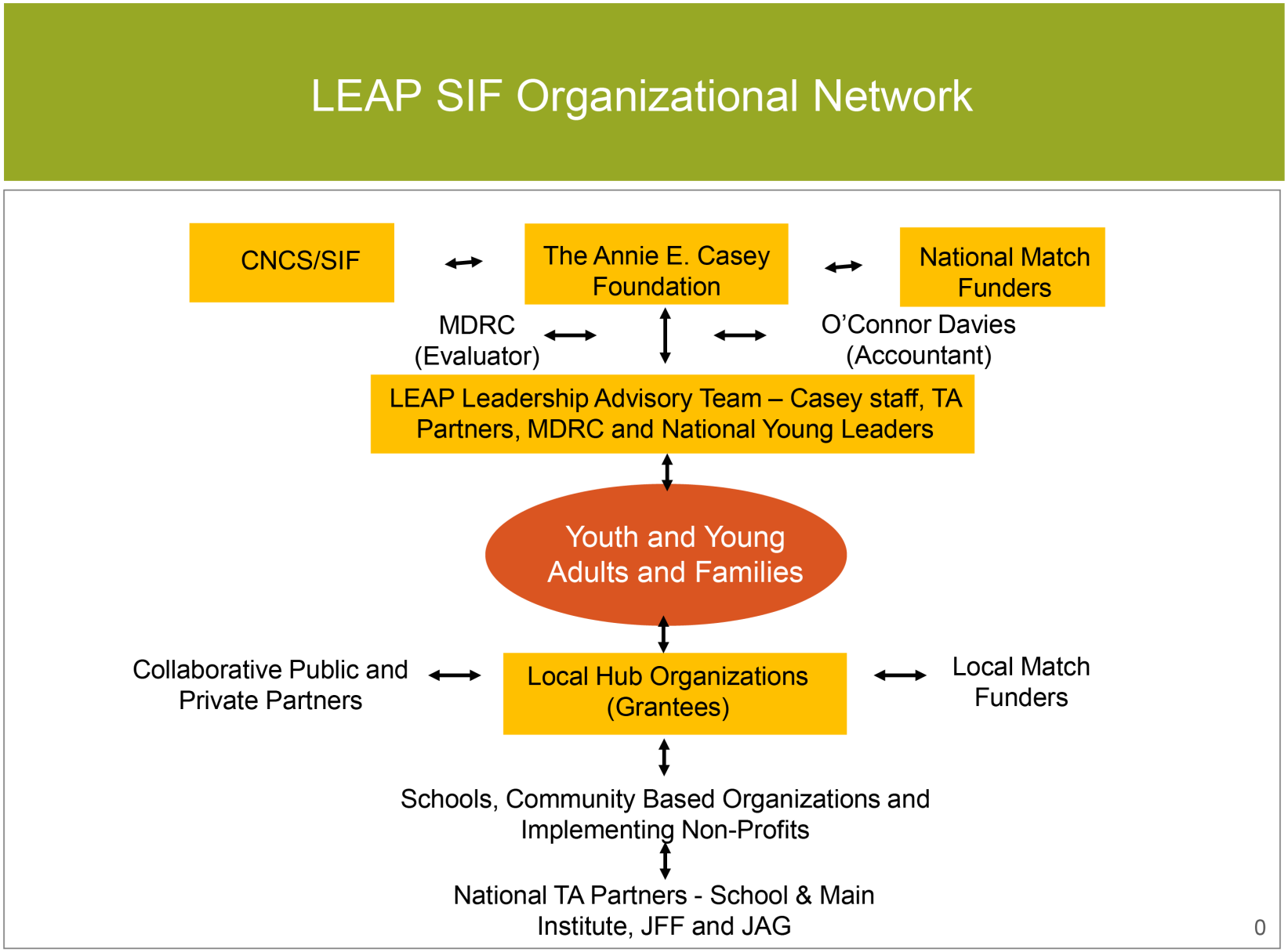
[b]Within 12 months of enrollment; includes employment that is split among different employers or jobs.

APPENDIX

D

LEAP Social Innovation Fund Organizational Network

FIGURE D.1



SOURCE: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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