

# CHANGING SYSTEMS, CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of One Baltimore for Jobs Executive Summary:  
Job Opportunities for Disconnected Young Adults

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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The full evaluation, "Changing Systems, Changing Lives. Evaluation of One Baltimore for Jobs: Job Opportunities for Disconnected Young Adults" can be downloaded at <http://www.aecf.org/resources/evaluation-of-one-baltimore-for-jobs-executive-summary/>.

## Executive Summary

In June 2015, following the uprising in response to the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody, the U.S. Department of Labor selected Baltimore as one of seven cities to receive a two-year, \$5 million *Urban Employment for Youth and Young Adults Demonstration* grant. The aim of the demonstration was to develop innovative approaches to reengage disconnected youth and young adults ages 16-29 who live in distressed communities and increase their access to high-quality jobs in growing industries.

The Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) implemented the Baltimore demonstration in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR). Known as One Baltimore for Jobs (1B4J), the demonstration specifically focused on young adult black males who were unemployed or underemployed, lacked a high school credential and/or had a criminal record. More broadly, 1B4J also sought to lay the groundwork for a stronger workforce system that brings together the public sector and training and service providers as partners to offer integrated services that better meet the needs of residents and employers.

1B4J was designed to connect young adults to potentially life-changing sector-based training programs that also provided critical support services to participants. These programs offer career pathways to middle-skilled jobs, but typically require that participants have a postsecondary credential, strong basic skills and job readiness skills. Many of Baltimore's young adults, particularly people of color, cannot meet basic academic requirements and face other barriers to participation in these programs. 1B4J not only sought to connect young adults to specialized barrier removal and support services, but to specifically align these programs with career pathway programs.

There is also scarcity of employment programs that specialize in serving youth and young adults. Service providers focused on these populations are generally disconnected from workforce development and sectoral employment projects. Adult-serving programs are less likely to employ positive youth development and other practices proven to be successful with young adults.

The ability of sector training programs to absorb more young adults is not simply a matter of having more training slots; it also depends on identifying capable partners who can engage young adults and provide customized barrier-removal services. This allows sector training organizations to do what they do best – provide high-quality, industry-recognized training and customized services to employers – and creates an efficient division of labor within the workforce development system. 1B4J's approach offers lessons for both young adult- and adult-focused components.

1B4J offered an opportunity to connect high-barrier young adults to the workforce, build organizational capacity and increase coordination between sector-based training providers, neighborhood-based support organizations and specialized barrier removal providers. The demonstration led to impressive participant-level outcomes, programmatic improvements for grantees and systems-level enhancements that will strengthen Baltimore's job pipeline. It also

underscored the complexity of this work and identified challenges that will require ongoing attention and resources.

### Overview of 1B4J

Key components of 1B4J included:

**Targeted Training for In-Demand Careers.** Program grants were awarded to 13 sector training providers to deliver occupational skills training and job placement services to disconnected young adults. Partnerships with neighborhood-based organizations helped expand recruitment in low-income neighborhoods and specialized service providers focused on barriers to work. Targeted industry sectors included construction, healthcare, manufacturing, office administration and transportation/logistics.

**Neighborhood-Based Outreach Services and Youth/Young Adult On-Ramps to Work (Community Connections).** To strengthen the workforce development infrastructure in distressed neighborhoods and expand the pool of partners available to occupational skills training providers, four program grants were made to community-based organizations to build outreach, recruitment, assessment and case management capacity and connect participants to sector-based training and jobs.

**Barrier Removal Pilots.** To augment the program grants, 1B4J supported pilot projects to test innovative barrier removal strategies and strengthen connections between workforce development, adult education, legal services and child support organizations.

**Practice Advisory Network.** Partnerships were built into each 1B4J programmatic component and reinforced through network building activities designed to cultivate relationships, explore best practices, align and coordinate services and build capacity through peer learning and data sharing. The primary vehicle for these activities was a learning community convened by MOED for 1B4J grantees and partners.

### Key Outcomes

1B4J achieved remarkable outcomes at the grantee and participant level, with most grantees meeting or exceeding goals for enrollment, skills training and other benchmarks. Among the seven DOL grant recipients, Baltimore not only served the largest number of participants, but also exceeded its targets by the biggest margins. Grantees enrolled 1,355 participants, of whom 1,057 completed programs. Three-fourths of those who completed a program were placed in jobs at an average wage of \$12.22. Notably, completion, placement and retention rates for young adults ages 18-29 were quite strong. Just as important was the demonstration's impact on Baltimore's overall workforce development system, including MOED's ability to serve as a workforce intermediary. 1B4J did not collect data on long-term outcomes such as job retention and career advancement, and without a comparison group, it is not possible to depict the impact of 1B4J. Additional evaluation efforts would be beneficial in understanding why 1B4J participants had these outcomes.

What follows is a summary of programmatic outcomes, as well as an overview of MOED's systems change work through 1B4J.

### **Targeted Training**

1B4J's Targeted Training grantees achieved impressive participant-level outcomes, exceeding MOED's original goals. The proportion of enrollees who completed training was quite high – roughly 84%, compared to the 60% projected – and wages for enrollees who were placed at jobs exceeded the goal wage. The relationship between completions and industry-recognized credentials was also strong.

Targeted Training grantees were also generally successful at reaching 1B4J's priority populations: black males and ex-offenders ages 18-29 who lived in distressed neighborhoods.

Full results for the Targeted Training programs can be found in the complete evaluation starting at page 7.

### **Community Connections**

One of MOED's priorities was to strengthen neighborhood job pipelines. Neighborhood job pipelines are designed to increase access to good jobs for residents living in distressed communities. They are anchored by formal and informal networks that bind communities. Pipeline organizations have deep, trusted relationships with residents and are essential components of effective, equitable workforce development systems.

Nine months into the demonstration, MOED observed that the Targeted Training providers were having difficulty reaching 1B4J's priority populations. MOED developed the Community Connections component to identify neighborhood-based organizations that worked closely with those populations, providing customized job readiness training and supports.

Community Connections grantees were able to reach jobseekers often overlooked or unprepared to participate in occupational skills training programs and achieved respectable enrollment, completion and placement outcomes. They built important relationships with sector training providers and became better connected to the workforce development system.

Full results for the Community Connections programs can be found in the complete evaluation starting at page 25.

### **Adult Education Pilot Program**

1B4J's adult education pilot program was designed to bridge disconnections between the adult education and workforce development systems that limit opportunities for low-skilled jobseekers.

With ambitious outcomes targets and a population with considerable basic skills gaps, overall outcomes for the pilot were marginal. However, the adult education partners made programmatic and operational changes that increased their capacity to serve individuals with very low basic skills. They also discovered that conventional adult education methods are less effective in a

workforce development context. The relationships formed with 1B4J's occupational skills trainers exposed the adult education providers to models that accelerate enrollment of low-skilled jobseekers into sector training programs.

Full results for the Adult Education pilot program can be found in the complete evaluation starting at page 36.

### **Legal Services and Child Support Pilot Programs**

1B4J included two pilot programs that tested whether expanded access to legal and child support services could improve outcomes for disconnected jobseekers. The pilots were lauded for efficiently providing high-quality services and considered the most important and enduring innovations of the demonstration. Embedding these types of services in the workforce system is more efficient and leads to a more coordinated delivery process.

The pilots were open to all 1B4J grantees. Sixteen of 19 grantees referred over 60% of participants to specialized barrier removal services that addressed child support arrears, criminal record expungements, housing and family issues, consumer and financial matters, public benefits and other issues that affect participants' employability and quality of life. With more than 800 cases opened, the legal services support proved to be especially valuable to training providers who lacked resources to provide these services directly.

Full results for the Legal Services and Child Support pilot programs can be found in the complete evaluation starting at page 45.

### **1B4J and Systems Change**

Although the demonstration designed by DOL was not a systems change initiative, MOED used 1B4J to address gaps in Baltimore's workforce systems. Previous efforts to reform Baltimore's workforce development system overlooked many of 1B4J's objectives, which in addition to dismantling institutional silos placed considerably more emphasis on reaching disadvantaged young adults and integrating neighborhood-based organizations into the workforce system.

In implementing 1B4J, MOED strived to emulate the characteristics of a workforce intermediary. Workforce intermediaries do not implement jobs projects but instead knit together networks of implementing partners that provide training or support services and collaborate with employers involved in sector initiatives. Intermediaries often use these experiences to develop policy and systems changes that will improve outcomes for low-income jobseekers and workers and stabilize firms and communities. They provide technical assistance, capacity building and blend public and private funding streams to advance organizational and systems-level improvements.

The absence of a local workforce intermediary in Baltimore had not only restricted access to various funding streams but also perpetuated systemic disconnections and fragmentation that had contributed to suboptimal results for disadvantaged jobseekers, workers and employers. MOED used 1B4J to address these gaps. Some of the systems change objectives implicit in the initiative included:

- Shifting the way public funds are allocated and diffusing more resources throughout the workforce system.
- Using competitive grantmaking to stimulate innovation, capacity building and systems integration.
- Fostering equity and inclusion at the participant and institutional levels.
- Rationalizing funding streams and duplicative services to generate efficiencies.
- Directing resources to underserved populations.
- Shifting the perspective of workforce development stakeholders toward partnerships, shared learning and translating programmatic and administrative lessons into concrete policies and systems changes.

MOED and grantees also expanded their administrative capacity, putting Baltimore in a better position to leverage public funding.

The relationships and partnerships formed through 1B4J's Practice Advisory Network created a culture of collaboration and inclusion and helped unify grantees around a common vision. The Practice Advisory Network survives the demonstration and provides a platform for ongoing information sharing, peer learning, technical assistance and policy advocacy.

1B4J's systems change impacts can be found in the complete evaluation on pages 4-5 and pages 54-60.

### Lessons Learned

1B4J provided valuable insight for improving employment outcomes for high-barrier young adults, organizational performance and the workforce systems. Notable lessons and challenges affecting success include:

- **Outreach and Recruitment Practices.** Participant outcomes were affected by outreach and recruitment practices. Relying on existing partners, community networks, in-house resources, canvassing and word of mouth referrals was effective for organizations that have deep neighborhood roots or connections to organizations that do. Outreach practices that were customized to young adults and specific subpopulations – including targeting underserved neighborhoods, social media outreach, community fair recruitment and referrals from community organizations – were more effective.
- **Barrier Removal Services.** Various circumstances in participants' lives interfered with training, job search activities, placement and retention. These included homelessness and housing instability; access to transportation; child care; failed or missed drug tests; the need for income; and mental health and substance abuse issues.
- **Documentation.** Publicly-funded grant programs have strict eligibility rules that require participants to provide extensive documentation, and all employers must submit employment eligibility criteria to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Meeting

documentation and verification rules can be difficult, especially for young jobseekers, homeless individuals and returning citizens who often do not have proper identification. Identification clinics and legal services that help participants obtain documentation were critical to enrollment and placement outcomes.

- **Customized Job Readiness Training.** Embedding job readiness training in sector programs or customizing standalone readiness programs to specific occupations led to better completion outcomes, as did longer job readiness programs and sector training programs that built soft skills training into each module. Job readiness programs that incorporated life skills training and career exploration were especially effective with young adults.
- **Bridging Basic Skills Gaps.** Several training providers offered math or literacy bridge programs prior to occupational skills training. The bridge programs were contextualized to employers' needs and industry standards and credited with helping grantees meet or exceed their completion targets. The adult education providers shifted their perspective away from conventional literacy practices toward integrated basic skills training and other proven practices that facilitate labor market entry.
- **Workplace Bias.** Jobseekers of color, women, people with disabilities, non-English language speakers and others who face discrimination need to know how to recognize and deal with workplace bias and not let it derail their career aspirations. Similarly, employers often need help creating safe workplaces and understanding how implicit and explicit biases in employment processes affect employee turnover. 1B4J's legal services included know-your-rights training for participants, and a couple of training providers addressed retention and workplace bias through job-quality strategies; however, considerably more work is needed in these areas.
- **Adult Education is a Critical Component to Workforce Development.** A large number of Baltimore city adults lack a high school diploma, and many others have one but do not have the reading or math skills to enter occupational training. Adult education is a key tool in expanding access to workforce development, but traditional education practices have not been very successful at moving large numbers of adults towards their GED quickly. 1B4J attempted to more seamlessly connect adult education and occupational skills training but had only modest success. Nevertheless, important lessons were learned and this should remain a priority for the future.

## Recommendations

1B4J's results suggest that by investing in organizational capacity building, innovative barrier removal practices, multi-stakeholder partnerships and systems alignment, disconnected young adults – particularly young adults of color – can succeed in sector-based training programs and embark on meaningful career pathways. These improvements have strengthened Baltimore's workforce pipeline and hold promise for other communities, although additional evaluation will be needed to fully assess the impact of these efforts. Recommendations for sustaining and expanding these efforts include the following:



- **Set Common Workforce Development Goals.** 1B4J demonstrated what can happen when multiple organizations work toward a common objective that extends beyond an individual grantee's requirements. Proceed from a common results frame or overarching objective that guides all members of the workforce development and adjacent systems, such as: "All jobseekers and workers have equitable access to education, supports and job opportunities that keep them out of poverty." This guiding star – keeping the jobseeker front and center – will help stakeholders identify which investments, interventions, strategies and collaborations advance this result.
- **Invest in Building Organizational Capacity.** The ability to implement 1B4J program activities and manage administrative functions varied across grantees. Underdeveloped fiscal and contract management capacity resulted in inefficiencies and affected outcomes. Innovations occur when grantees have discretionary resources to create and follow a budget and invest in training, technical assistance, partnerships and self-assessment. Knowledge and use of best practices in young adult employment, positive youth development and sector-based workforce strategies is key.
- **Invest in Neighborhood Job Pipelines.** The organizations that are best able to reach and support hard-to-serve residents often do not have the institutional capacity to participate in large-scale initiatives, referral networks and learning communities or attract mainstream funders. The small Community Connections grantees faced capacity and funding challenges throughout the demonstration. Capacity building is critically needed for these integral partners.
- **Engage Employers.** Strong employer partnerships yield important resources for workers and training providers that go far beyond job placements, including internships, paid work experience, advancement opportunities, workplace mentors, tuition assistance, curriculum development, instructors, training equipment and machinery. Many training providers do not have the capacity to leverage these benefits, and few are equipped to help workers and employers address job quality issues, workplace bias and other factors that affect retention and advancement. Capacity building is needed to shift employer engagement from transactional requests for job slots to reciprocal partnership.
- **Adapt Programs to Serve Youth and Young Adults.** Adult-serving workforce development organizations can be key partners in engaging young adults if they are given the appropriate support and adopt workforce-oriented positive youth development practices, such as coaching, mentoring, career exploration, leadership development, preparing young adults to navigate workplace bias and providing work experience. Youth-serving organizations and neighborhood-based coaches are especially effective in supporting disconnected young adults prior to occupational skills training, particularly when working in tandem with specialized college and career navigators.
- **Invest in Specialized Services.** Referring participants to legal and child support services provided by specialized partners created efficiencies and cost-savings for training providers and improved the quality of services provided to participants. This model should be

expanded and adapted to other areas, such as mental health services, financial education and certain case management functions.

- **Develop Common Measures.** The use of common measures, reporting templates and processes to which funders hold workforce development organizations accountable would allow training and service providers to devote more time to participants and institutional capacity building. However, it is critical that workforce organizations and funders co-design assessment criteria. Shifting the perspective on monitoring and compliance and emphasizing learning and the strategic use of data would make these exercises more useful to organizations and the system.
- **Formalize Referrals Networks.** 1B4J's relationship and network building laid the groundwork for multi-directional referrals, but grantees did not have the staff capacity to formalize this work. The lack of integrated data systems also precluded action. Further investment is needed to ensure that participants can maximize opportunities and move through and across systems seamlessly.
- **Provide Stipends.** The need for immediate income is particularly crucial for 1B4J's jobseekers. Several grantees reported that the availability of stipends helped participants meet living expenses during training and contributed to completion outcomes. Notably, the lack of stipends forces many jobseekers to select shorter training programs. This has equity implications given the concentration of people of color in low-wage, low-quality jobs that typically require less training.

The full set of Recommendations can be found in the complete evaluation starting at page 61.