

# Piloting Platform to Employment® in San Francisco

**Lessons from a Formative Case Study of a  
Program to Address Long-term  
Unemployment**

Leela Hebbar  
Ursula Bischoff  
Staci Wendt

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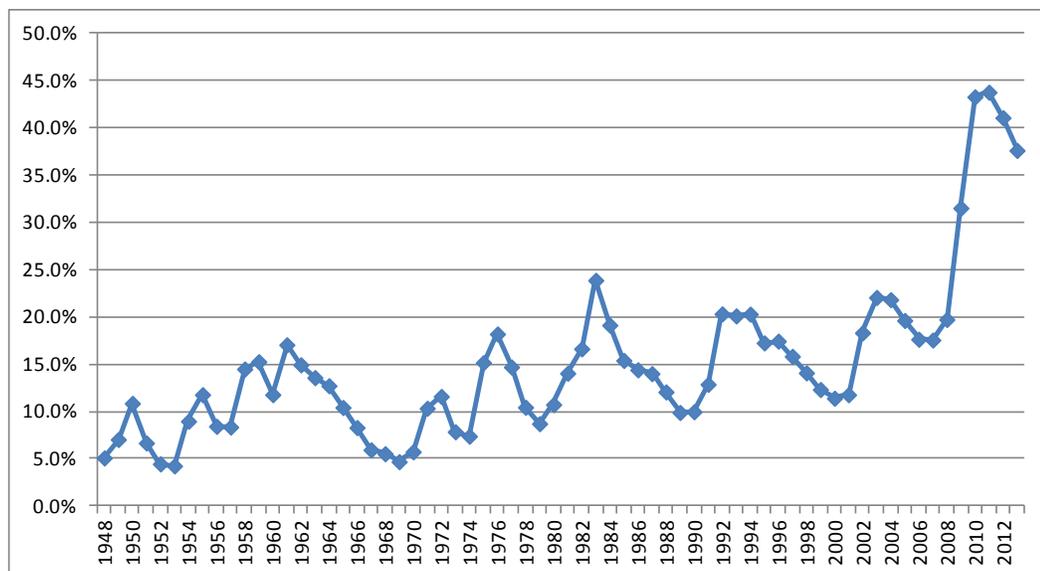
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## Introduction: Piloting Platform to Employment® in San Francisco

“Recent research suggests that the long-term unemployed face significant disadvantages in the labor market *simply by virtue of their status as being long-term unemployed.*” — *Executive Office of the President, January 2014.*

Since the financial crisis of 2008, long-term unemployment in the United States has remained at historically high levels. In 2011, three years after the financial crisis began, 43.8% of the unemployed were unemployed 27 weeks or longer (Exhibit 1).<sup>1</sup> In 2013, the percentage fell to 37.6%, but was still significantly higher than the previous high of 23.9% in 1983. In July 2014, over 550,000 Californians had been unemployed for 27 weeks or longer, representing 37.2% of all the unemployed.<sup>2</sup>

**Exhibit 1: Share of Unemployed that Are Unemployed 27 Weeks or More, 1948–2013**



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Series ID LNU03025703 (2013)

The long-term unemployed are at a disadvantage in today’s labor market. A recent study found that long-term unemployed job seekers with industry experience are less likely to be called for an interview than short-term unemployed job seekers without any industry experience.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, without a regular paycheck and the structure

afforded by a job, the long-term unemployed are more likely to face financial and psychological challenges that can present challenges to finding and keeping steady employment.<sup>4</sup>

Platform to Employment® (P2E) is a program designed specifically to address the crisis of long-term unemployment. It offers job seekers five weeks of instruction to help them update job search skills, develop new professional networks, and build interviewing skills; it also offers personal and financial counseling to help them address potential challenges and barriers to finding work. In addition to the classes and counseling, P2E facilitates matches with employers, and includes the option of subsidized work experiences in a field for which participants are qualified. The program offers an eight-week wage subsidy to incentivize employers to interview and hire participants on a low-risk basis.

San Francisco is one of 10 sites in which P2E has been piloted since it was launched in 2011. The San Francisco P2E pilot represents the first time mental health services, financial literacy services, and a wage subsidy have been offered to individuals participating in workforce programs sponsored by the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD).

### **Purpose of this Study**

As part of a workforce system improvement initiative funded by a U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovation Fund grant, the San Francisco OEWD is considering incorporating the P2E program model, or elements of it, into additional pilot projects. This case study of P2E in San Francisco is intended to provide formative feedback to the OEWD to support funding decisions and the design of future pilot projects.<sup>5</sup>

The research questions guiding this formative study are:

1. How did implementation of Platform to Employment® in San Francisco unfold, and how did it compare to the original Platform to Employment® program model?
2. How did providers and participants perceive P2E program elements?
3. What were employers' opinions of the P2E program?
4. What lessons about P2E implementation can help improve the program and/or inform the design of other workforce programs in the future?

# Research Methods Overview

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## Interviews

A total of 11 interviews were conducted: six interviews with staff from San Francisco partnering agencies (Jewish Vocational Service, Family Service Agency of San Francisco, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of San Francisco, and San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development); three interviews with staff from partnering agencies in Connecticut (The WorkPlace and Career TEAM); and two interviews with staff from other cities implementing P2E.

## Surveys

Ten of 18 (55%) San Francisco P2E participants completed a survey about their perceptions of the program and the program elements. The survey included questions about perceived satisfaction and helpfulness of the program components.

Three of eight employers that reviewed a San Francisco P2E candidate's resume and/or qualifications completed a survey about their perceptions of the program and the wage subsidy.

## Document Review

Documents reviewed include a daily participant survey conducted during the five-week training, the five-week training curriculum, marketing materials describing the wage-subsidy, The WorkPlace's program orientation presentation, and media and other reports describing the Connecticut P2E program.

A full presentation of the research questions, methods and data sources appears in Appendix A.

## *Analyzing Program Implementation*

Implementation science offers a useful framework to inform interpretation and analysis of the data. Implementation science holds that successful program implementation and replication depend on more than guidelines, policies, practitioner training, and/or educational information alone. Research has shown that multilevel implementation strategies more effectively support fidelity to program models over time.

Strategies and practices that function as “core implementation drivers” include: staff selection, pre-service and in-service training, ongoing consultation and coaching, staff and program evaluation, facilitative administrative support, and systems-level interventions. These drivers are affected by contextual factors, such as prerequisites that must be in place for a program or practice to operate (e.g., adequate resources,

staffing based on appropriate practitioner-to-consumer ratio) and feedback measures (e.g. fidelity measures associated with staff selection, training, and coaching) that are collected regularly to keep implementation on track.<sup>6</sup> While we recognize this is a case study of a five-week pilot, our analysis and presentation of findings is informed by an understanding of these key drivers and contextual factors.

### *Limitations of the Study*

This formative case study is intended to present a picture of what happened as the program was implemented and observations that can help improve future implementation efforts in San Francisco. While we used rigorous qualitative evaluation methods (i.e., multiple, objective data collection, and analytic strategies), the small numbers of individuals from whom we collected data (i.e., program partners, program participants, and employers) means that the findings presented in this report should not be generalized to other similar cases.

### **Structure of the Report**

This report begins with an overview of the Platform to Employment® (P2E) program model and how San Francisco was selected as a program pilot site. The next section reports findings regarding P2E program implementation in San Francisco and participants' and employers' perceptions of the program. The report concludes with a discussion of the findings and a summary of lessons learned that can help inform the OEWD's decisions about the design and delivery of programs serving the long-term unemployed in the future.

## Platform to Employment®: Program Design

Platform to Employment® (P2E) is a program designed by The WorkPlace, a regional workforce development board in the state of Connecticut, to help long-term unemployed individuals build confidence and skills that lead to rapid reemployment. Urgent, growing demand for services during the Great Recession prompted The WorkPlace to hold focus groups with people in the swelling ranks of the long-term unemployed to learn what they needed most. They learned that the long-term unemployed were often mature, educated, experienced workers who had been displaced during the recession and were facing numerous challenges, including trouble finding a job that matched their skills, significant financial issues, and the stigma of unemployment and depleted levels of self-confidence.

Recognizing the need to add a range of supports to its existing reemployment program, The WorkPlace partnered with Career TEAM, a service agency in Connecticut with which it had a strong partnership, to enhance its job search

curriculum. The partners added services designed to help job seekers manage personal challenges, learn new job search strategies, and take concrete steps toward a quick transition into an open job with renewed self-confidence.

The P2E program model offers a package of services: a five-week job readiness training class, facilitated peer support through which participants' work together as a cohort, group and individual mental health workshops, and financial literacy workshops. The program seeks to place participants in an eight-week work experience with a wage subsidy to incentivize employers to interview and hire participants on a low-risk basis. Employers are encouraged to provide feedback during the eight-week trial period, and they are not obligated to hire participants after the trial period/subsidy ends.

The P2E wage subsidy covers up to eight weeks of a participant's full salary, with employers often sharing or assuming costs in the last four weeks. The WorkPlace (not the employer) covers the participant's compensation during the trial period, before the participant is officially hired. The wage subsidy is only available for full- or part-time regular (not temporary) positions.

### **Piloting Additional Sites**

The WorkPlace collaborated with Citi Community Development, a division of Citibank, and the AARP Foundation to launch the program in 10 cities, including San Francisco, nationwide. The cities were selected after reviewing local labor market needs, unemployment data, funder priorities, and inquiries following a *60 Minutes* segment featuring the program that aired in February 2012. The WorkPlace collaborates with local workforce agencies and training partners in each city to establish the program.

The WorkPlace negotiates the site selection process with and through local workforce investment boards, economic development agencies, and other key public workforce system partners. The WorkPlace collaborates with local workforce system partners to select the job-readiness trainer and mental health service provider, or conducts an independent search and reviews prospective providers with the local workforce system partners. The financial literacy service provider is selected jointly by Citi Community Development and The WorkPlace. The wage subsidy is administered through The WorkPlace and is funded by Citi Community Development and the AARP Foundation. The WorkPlace uses a local staffing agency to run payroll for additional sites.

The WorkPlace manages contracts with the training, mental health, and financial service providers; coordinates launch activities with local workforce development system representatives; and retains broad oversight responsibilities for the local program. Career TEAM provides the curriculum and a train-the-trainer session under

contract to The WorkPlace. The local training provider attends a two-day in-person train-the-trainer session in Connecticut offered by Career TEAM to orient them to the instructional methods and curriculum, which also includes a meeting with The WorkPlace executive team to review program philosophy and expectations, and opportunities to observe and learn how the original program operates.

Local partners help The WorkPlace to recruit potentially eligible applicants, and The WorkPlace evaluates all applications and selects participants to enroll in the program. Once the cohort of participants has been enrolled, The WorkPlace and local partners jointly launch the program by holding three events on the same day:

1. A “business lunch” attended by local elected officials, program sponsors, providers, and employers to discuss skills in demand and promote awareness of the program;
2. A roundtable attended by the same group as well as participants, to allow them to share their stories; and,
3. A participant orientation.

The WorkPlace maintains communications with program providers and participants during and after the five-week program, and collects data on key program milestones, including attendance, progress on job search activities, completion, and employment. Participants are required to complete job logs in which they record information about job applications, interviews, target companies, recruiter contacts, and “prospecting” calls. The WorkPlace uses the logs to monitor job search progress and inform discussions with providers and employers to help support job development efforts.

### **San Francisco P2E Pilot**

In San Francisco, P2E is a partnership between six San Francisco agencies, The WorkPlace, and Career TEAM. The six San Francisco partners are the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD), San Francisco Human Services Agency (HSA), Jewish Vocational Service (JVS), The Family Service Agency of San Francisco (FSA), Consumer Credit Counseling Service of San Francisco (CCCSF), and the California Employment Development Department.

P2E was offered under the auspices of OEWD’s Job Transition Assistance Services (JTAS) program for dislocated workers provided by JVS. The mental health and financial literacy elements were delivered by the Family Service Agency of San Francisco and Consumer Credit Counseling Service of San Francisco, respectively, under contract to The WorkPlace.

Approximately 100 individuals applied to the San Francisco P2E program, many of whom were already enrolled in JTAS and/or were receiving other JVS services. Nineteen participants began the program, and one found a job shortly after the program started, resulting in a final cohort of 18 participants. Fifteen of the nineteen were active JVS clients who had received JVS services prior to enrolling in P2E.

The cohort of participants began receiving P2E services on February 10, 2014, and completed the five-week P2E pilot program on March 13, 2014. The wage subsidy was available to participants for an additional 90 days and one participant had used the wage subsidy as of September 2014.

JVS, FSA, and CCCSSF conducted all of the group sessions with participants at JVS, where eight of the 18 participants also received dislocated worker services under the JTAS program.<sup>7</sup> JVS staff delivered the job-readiness training curriculum. Under the P2E program model, each participant was required to participate in the following activities during the five-week program service period:

- Twenty group job-readiness sessions, which covered career navigation, professional networking, role-playing, interviewing, and job search strategies.
- Three two-hour group support sessions and one individual mental health counseling session, with an option to participate in up to four total individual sessions.
- Three two-hour group sessions about financial literacy, with an option to participate in one individual financial literacy session.

## Findings

This section offers a closer look at how P2E was implemented in San Francisco, reports providers' and participants' perspectives about the experience, and concludes with a summary and suggestions.

### **Fidelity to Model**

The San Francisco Platform to Employment<sup>®</sup> pilot program was not implemented with fidelity to the P2E program model. The pilot implemented all components of the program yet departed from the manner in which the program model is typically implemented. This section outlines observed differences and challenges.

### *Provider Selection and Training*

- Usually, Career TEAM selects the trainer through its own recruitment process. In San Francisco, OEWD suggested JVS provide the training because JVS is an

experienced provider of specialized services to dislocated workers, many of whom are long-term unemployed and older job seekers.

- Negotiations concerning compensation were not conducted directly between The WorkPlace and the training provider, JVS. A miscommunication regarding compensation resulted in JVS receiving less money than initially expected to run the program, which generated concern among JVS staff regarding job-development goals.
- JVS staff did not attend the two-day train-the-trainer session in Connecticut. Due to limited lead time prior to the launch, JVS staff requested to attend, and Career TEAM agreed to provide, web-based trainings in lieu of the in-person session. Prior to delivering the P2E curriculum, JVS staff attended a three-hour training session conducted by Career TEAM with slides shown on a web-based meeting space and audio provided via telephone. The P2E train-the-trainer event typically includes a meeting with The WorkPlace executive team about program expectations, and opportunities to observe the parent program. The San Francisco video training session did not include a session with The WorkPlace or program observation.

### *Participant Recruitment*

- Usually, participants receive only the standard set of P2E services through the contracted P2E training provider. However, in the San Francisco pilot, many P2E participants also received non-P2E services from JVS. That is, participants received P2E services from JVS through the P2E program; in addition, many of these participants were also already clients of JVS, so they were also receiving WIA-funded services prior to enrolling in P2E that were similar to those offered through P2E. For example, many attended JVS job search preparation workshops and received individualized job counseling prior to enrolling in P2E. **Appendix B** provides a detailed breakdown of JVS services received prior to and during P2E.
- JVS ran a two-hour “application lab” to help potentially eligible JVS clients complete the P2E application, which includes many questions on topics such as job search history and salary requirements. JVS offered this application lab because they received questions about the P2E application from many clients.

### *Launch Activities*

- Due to logistical challenges scheduling the business lunch and roundtable, the local partners and The WorkPlace agreed to hold two launch events so the

participant orientation and start of the program would not be delayed. The business luncheon and roundtable occurred in the third week of the five-week training program. Executives from the WorkPlace attended both events.

### *Curriculum*

- San Francisco staff reported that the P2E curriculum provided by Career TEAM needed to be adapted and supplemented to be more suitable for San Francisco clients, who were highly skilled workers with significant work experience. The curriculum was perceived to have an “old-school self-help” framing and a personal growth agenda that was not embraced by the San Francisco participants; therefore, adjustments were made to deliver content using JVS materials.
- Adjustments were also made because participants had received similar information from JVS prior to enrolling in P2E. Overlapping topics included job search strategies, resume writing, and cover letter writing. Responses to the JVS daily feedback survey conducted during the five-week training program indicated overlap between the JVS and P2E curricula.

### *Job Search and Wage Subsidy*

- Participant job logs were not implemented successfully. The P2E recommended approach to using job logs conflicted with the instructional approach and curriculum delivered by JVS. While JVS instructed participants that job logs were required, several participants did not complete weekly job logs.
- The wage subsidy generated internal concerns and discussion among program staff focused on the propriety of encouraging job seekers to assume responsibility for promoting the wage subsidy as opposed to JVS or The WorkPlace promoting the wage subsidy in order to develop job leads. JVS staff modified the wage subsidy fact sheet provided by The WorkPlace to better fit the marketing preferences of San Francisco participants, reporting that many were offended by and/or uncomfortable with the “try before you buy” message in the P2E materials.
- Implementation of the wage subsidy created some challenges. A misunderstanding concerning the process and timing for contacting the staffing agency that runs payroll for the pilot sites led one participant who relied on the wage subsidy to contact the agency prior to a process being in place to handle such requests.

## Perspectives on Pilot Implementation

This section summarizes the program partners' and participants' perspectives on the P2E San Francisco pilot. It outlines the San Francisco and Connecticut partners' views on factors that facilitated implementation, issues that presented challenges, and activities that could be handled differently in the future.

### *Strengths and Challenges*

All program partners believed the existing relationships among the San Francisco program partners, their knowledge of the local labor market, and their expertise and experience in working with long-term unemployed individuals facilitated implementation of the program. Partners' efforts, high levels of interest in participant success and willingness to implement P2E in San Francisco further facilitated program implementation.

When discussing factors that presented challenges during implementation, the program partners in San Francisco and Connecticut raised an almost identical set of issues. Their perspectives on the issues reflect knowledge obtained through their experience and their unique roles in the program implementation activities.

All partners suggested that factors affecting expectations, communications, and program planning created challenges during implementation. Specific factors included:

- *Exposure to media coverage of P2E:* This influenced San Francisco partners' and participants' expectations about the role of The WorkPlace and the design of the program prior to the train-the-trainer session and enrolling in the program, respectively.
- *Early miscommunication about contract terms:* This resulted in misunderstandings about which organization would be responsible for generating job leads and the level of compensation that would be provided to JVS under contract to Career TEAM for program services, which were not clarified until services were underway.
- *Variation in how the train-the-trainer session was conducted:* The move from an in-person to a web-based train-the-trainer session did not include the opportunity for local partners to meet with all Connecticut partners. This change limited chances for partners to discuss roles, responsibilities, program philosophy, history, and experiences, which likely contributed to the communication challenges that surfaced during the program, such as expectations about the job logs and job development.

- *Delays in scheduling the business luncheon and roundtable:* Due to logistical challenges, the San Francisco partners and The WorkPlace agreed to split launch events into two events, so the participant orientation and start of the program would not be delayed. The business luncheon and roundtable occurred in the third week of the five-week training. Press coverage and employer attendance at the business luncheon were not as strong as hoped, which was disappointing to program providers and participants.
- *Differences in program philosophy and messaging:* While subject matter was similar, the program materials and curriculum provided by the Career TEAM presented motivational and instructional themes and messages different from those used in the JVS/JTAS program. These differences surfaced during implementation, and JVS decided to use its own curriculum and modified P2E program materials, which they viewed as necessary in order to more successfully engage participants.
- *Insufficient focus on communicating about and planning the introduction of key P2E program elements:* While many elements of the P2E program were similar to existing JVS services, job logs and the wage subsidy were not. In addition to the values and messaging concerns, insufficient information about these program elements and lack of time to plan how to roll-out the job logs and job development responsibilities prior to the launch presented challenges.
- *Heavy reliance on technology to structure communications:* Pre-program and ongoing communications among eight partner organizations were conducted primarily through email, and did not include a meeting between all partners. Ongoing communication between the Connecticut partners and JVS were conducted by email and video conference, as opposed to phone discussions and in-person meetings.

The factors listed above were viewed as contributing to the following challenges:

- A missed opportunity to engage employers at the time of the program launch, in an effort to increase awareness of the pilot, cultivate champions to promote the program in the community, and help develop job leads.
- Participant frustration with program materials and the curriculum related to instructional themes regarding “self-help” that conflicted with their values, and content that duplicated their recent experience at JVS. This prompted JVS to revise materials and the curriculum to better match participants’ experience with prior JVS services and avoid duplication where possible.

- Participant frustration resulting from misalignment of expectations about access to paid work experiences (whether an internship or a job) through the program. JVS and The WorkPlace reacted quickly to dispel assumptions the pilot would place participants directly into paid internships and to manage the resulting disappointment among participants. JVS staff reported that some participants adjusted quickly, but others were very focused on this disappointment throughout the program.
- Provider and participant dissatisfaction with materials promoting the wage subsidy. JVS staff and participants were concerned with the tone and use of materials promoting the wage subsidy, some of which referred to “internships” and some of which were viewed as marketing participants like a “commodity” with a “try before you buy” message. Participant dissatisfaction with the wage subsidy — stemming from confusion and concerns with how the subsidy was “branded” — was not altogether successfully resolved. Some partners linked this dissatisfaction to participants’ reluctance or refusal to use the wage subsidy.
- Lack of clarity about roles, responsibilities, and program costs, most notably regarding which partner (JVS, OEWD, the third-party subsidy manager, or The WorkPlace) would engage with employers to cultivate job leads and potential placements for program participants. This resulted in differing perspectives on the question of whether funding to cover job development and placement was adequate to serve the 11 participants not eligible for JTAS services.
- Inconsistent participant engagement with job logs (a key program activity) and drop-off in participant contact with the program after the five-week session ended. This resulted in gaps in information typically available to The WorkPlace to facilitate ongoing support for participants’ progress in their job search, access to the wage subsidy, and outreach to local employers to help create awareness of the program and cultivate job leads.
- Gaps in communications among all program partners and a lack of shared understanding about pre- and post-implementation plans, activities, and progress. This contributed to San Francisco and Connecticut partners’ disappointment and confusion when challenges emerged. Because the program is designed to be brief (five weeks), there was relatively little opportunity for partners to work together to resolve challenges and strengthen the pilot.

## Summary and Suggestions

Partners valued the collective experience of the program team and positive motivation that facilitated implementation. Challenges arose primarily due to misaligned expectations and unclear communications that affected program planning and implementation. Challenges experienced during implementation led the local program team to decide to modify material elements of the P2E program model.

Local program staff and participants' initial perceptions and expectations of the P2E program were informed by depictions of the parent P2E program in high-profile television media and reports.<sup>8</sup> Many participants expected the program would facilitate placement in paid work "internship" experiences and/or "direct connections" to local companies. As the program was being implemented, The WorkPlace clearly communicated that participants were not guaranteed a job through the program. However, disappointed expectations created challenges that may not have been fully resolved during the pilot.

Partners agreed that additional pre-program planning and more frequent, structured ongoing communication would have improved planning and implementation. One of the partners observed that multiple staff participating in multiple phone conferences over the course of almost a year contributed to miscommunications on all levels. Although contracts were in place, partners indicated that, in addition, written agreements that elaborated on or more fully described the roles of each partner in greater detail could have been helpful. Misunderstandings included issues surrounding compensation and roles and responsibilities, in particular about how to implement employer involvement in the program and how to implement the wage subsidy.

Suggested planning activities that might have contributed toward a smoother implementation included a pre-program meeting between all providers to facilitate understanding of individual and collective roles in the program; detailed written memorandums-of-understanding (MOUs) to outline the responsibilities of each partner organization as well as participants' roles and responsibilities, more frequent and better structured communication among all partners before and during the five-week program. Specific suggestions are presented in Exhibit 2.

**Exhibit 2. Partners’ Suggestions to Improve P2E Program Implementation**

Implementation Activity	Suggestion
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement MOUs outlining functions, roles, and responsibilities</li> <li>• Set up communications infrastructure that includes periodic voice communication/discussion/feedback</li> <li>• Ensure budget addresses all program costs/allocations</li> </ul>
Provider selection & training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require in-person pre-program meeting among all partners</li> <li>• Provide ample advance notice and require provider to attend train-the-trainer session in person</li> <li>• Check for alignment of expectations, roles, and responsibilities.</li> </ul>
Participant recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider whether to enroll previous and/or current clients of the main training provider</li> <li>• Implement more transparent/collaborative selection process</li> </ul>
Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider ways to leverage events to maximize employer engagement and job leads</li> </ul>
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify position on program fidelity versus permitted adjustments</li> <li>• Tighten links across job search, mental health, and financial content</li> </ul>
Job logs & subsidy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devote more time to planning how these are to be introduced and used</li> </ul>

**Perspectives on Program Benefits**

In this section we describe the San Francisco team’s views on whether program elements were helpful to participants, and participants’ views on aspects of the program they considered most helpful or beneficial.

*San Francisco Partner Perceptions*

San Francisco partners (JVS, FSASF, and CCCSSF) believed the P2E cohort structure (i.e., having a group of people in the program who were all facing similar employment challenges) was helpful and likely strengthened participants’ confidence in their job search. Some partners weren’t sure whether the P2E pilot helped participants build skills, as many participants had already received similar services at JVS. Exhibit 3 summarizes the San Francisco partners’ perceptions regarding the helpfulness of key program elements and suggestions for improvements.

**Exhibit 3. San Francisco Partners' Views on Program Benefits**

Program Element	San Francisco Partner Perceptions
<b>Cohort structure</b>	<b>Cohort approach was beneficial.</b> Benefits reported include: moral support from other participants, safe environment, sense of belonging from being part of a program group.
<b>Mental health workshops</b>	<b>Addressing psychological issues was somewhat helpful.</b> Partners thought this program element would be more helpful if implemented differently. Suggested changes include: increasing the number of counseling sessions, scheduling the mandatory session before the five-week training begins, and weaving mental health elements more closely within the five-week curriculum.
<b>Financial counseling workshops</b>	<b>Not enough information to support a general finding.</b> Possible improvement: learning what participants already knew about the topic and structuring workshops to provide new information.
<b>Wage subsidy</b>	<b>Mixed views — more careful planning needed.</b> Participants had mixed feelings about the relevance and use of the wage subsidy in the San Francisco job market. At the same time, JVS staff recognized that wage subsidies were a tool for job development with employers, and informed many employers about the wage subsidy opportunity.

*Participants' Perceptions*

Ten of the 18 P2E participants completed an online survey in May 2014. While the survey results represent views of only about half of all program participants, their insights and experiences highlight findings outlined previously in this report, and may help inform future program plans.

Participants' overall satisfaction with the pilot program and interaction with program partners varied. Half of the ten respondents were satisfied with the program, while the remaining were either dissatisfied (n=3) or neutral (n=2). Respondents were generally satisfied with their interactions with all service provider partners, and were somewhat more likely to report frustration or dissatisfaction with The WorkPlace.

Participants were also generally satisfied with all the P2E program elements except the job search logs and the wage subsidy (see Exhibit 4). They acknowledged that aspects of P2E were different from their prior experience at JVS, including offering a place for them to go every day and meet people who were sharing similar experiences, a self-help oriented “find-your-passion” theme, psychological counseling, and wage subsidy. Most participants thought there was considerable overlap in the JVS services they received outside of the P2E program and the job search services provided through P2E; they indicated that the five-week training was similar to information and services provided at JVS workshops. Overlapping topics included: job search strategies, resume

writing, and cover letter writing. One wrote that the P2E program “was way too long!!! I feel I spent five weeks hearing mostly the same thing I heard before.”

**Exhibit 4. Participant Satisfaction with Program Elements**

Program Component	Very Satisfied or Satisfied	Neutral*	Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied	Not Applicable	Total Survey Responses
Working in a cohort**	8	1	1	0	10
Job search assistance	4	2	4	0	10
Mental health workshop/services	5	4	1	0	10
Financial counseling workshop/services	5	5	0	0	10
Wage subsidy	1	5	4	0	10
Using the wage subsidy as a job search tool	1	4	5	0	10
Job search logs	3	2	5	0	10

Source: WestEd participant survey. May 2014. Notes:  
 \*Neutral is neither “Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied”.  
 \*\*On the survey it is phrased as: “Working together as a group on activities.”

Participants’ dissatisfaction with the job logs and wage subsidy appeared to be related to disappointed expectations concerning placements in internships, employment directly after completing the program, and differences in the JVS and P2E curricula. While one participant credited JVS staff with quickly dispelling assumptions about the internships, several responses to open-ended questions described frustrated expectations concerning the wage subsidy. One participant wrote, “We were misled [sic] by the promise of connections with local companies that would be informed about the program and opportunities to use the wage subsidy as well.” On the subject of the job logs, one respondent indicated “the 15 job applications per month is in direct conflict to JVS’s strategy of 65% networking.”

Participants were also asked for their views on the degree to which the program elements supported their efforts to return to the workforce. They rated working in a cohort of people facing similar challenges as helpful, with half rating it as the most helpful component of the program.<sup>9</sup>

When asked to rate the helpfulness of each program component, about half of the participants indicated that working in a cohort and job search assistance were either helpful or very helpful. Some (4) respondents indicated that the wage subsidy and job search logs were not very helpful or not at all helpful; this is consistent with reported dissatisfaction with these elements.

Most participants (n=6) agreed that the program improved their job search skills, increased their confidence in networking, and improved their ability to answer interview questions. They were divided about whether the program helped them cope with the psychological challenges of being unemployed: four of ten participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped, another four disagreed or strongly disagreed, and two were neutral or skipped the question.

Two participants agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them cope with the financial challenges of being unemployed. The other six disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, and two responded with neutral or skipped the question.

### **Summary and Suggestions**

Participants generally reported positive experiences with program staff, working with a cohort of others in similar circumstances, and with job search services. They had mixed views on the degree to which mental health and financial services help their job search and return to the workforce, and reported that they did not find job logs or the wage subsidy helpful. The majority of program participants did not complete the job logs or access the wage subsidy. Dissatisfaction with the job log and wage subsidy appeared to be related to disappointed expectations about potential relationships with employers who would support the P2E wage subsidy. Some participants had assumed the subsidized work experience would already be in place at the start of the program based on their exposure to media about P2E prior to enrollment.

Participants suggested the program could be improved by being customized to meet individual needs. For example, one participant wrote, “[T]he problem with the P2E format is it was one size fits all. The program was geared as if everyone had the same needs...It would have been great to have gone through a goal-setting process, a mock interview, and a resume review session in the very beginning and received feedback. Armed with the information where I need to improve, I could have spent the five weeks improving on those areas.” Another participant suggested, “P2E needs to first examine what skills participants have (i.e., skills assessment) to help determine what kinds of jobs they are qualified for, and where there's deficiencies.”

Three participants suggested a need for better connections with employers. For example, one wrote that “P2E should be better connected with local companies and pitch the subsidy to them.” One respondent suggested the program should “Set expectations upfront with regard to what P2E will do and not do. Better coordination between P2E and SF City Offices and JVS.”

### *Employers' Perceptions*

Three of eight employers completed a survey asking them to rate which factors were important when deciding whether to interview a candidate and whether to hire a candidate referred through the P2E San Francisco pilot. Given the small sample size, these findings are anecdotal and provided for descriptive purposes.

When asked about their decision to interview a candidate, two employers considered JVS staff's description of the candidate's fit for the job, "very important." One employer also considered work experience "very important." The offer of the wage subsidy was "not so important" (n=2) or "not applicable" (n=1). Their views on the wage subsidy when considering whether to hire a candidate were identical (i.e., the wage subsidy had no impact on the decision whether to hire).

These results are similar to a finding in another report about Platform to Employment® in Connecticut: "While many employers were enticed by the wage subsidy offered during the trial period, this was less important relative to the factors mentioned above [(i.e., the risk-free trial employment period for employers, and their cost savings in recruiting and hiring)]. In fact, half of the employers in the program did not take the wage subsidy."<sup>10</sup>

## Discussion and Conclusions

This section offers a summary of the findings and suggests lessons that could help improve implementation of P2E and inform the design and delivery of other San Francisco workforce programs in the future.

Overall, all project partners and most participants who responded to our survey considered the P2E pilot a successful implementation effort and thought the program helped build participants' job search skills. Outcome data appear to support this general conclusion. Four and a half months after the program ended, approximately 75% of all participants had secured employment.<sup>11</sup>

However, in practice, implementation of the P2E pilot in San Francisco departed from The WorkPlace program model and the process The WorkPlace typically follows to support implementation. Provider/staff selection, provider training, the sequence of launch activities, and ongoing communications all unfolded somewhat differently than outlined in the design of the original program model. Gaps in communication and miscommunication during a compressed program-planning phase contributed to a lack of shared understanding about partners' roles, responsibilities, and resources, particularly in connection with job development activities.

These differences affected implementation activities. As participants learned that direct placement into internships would not be provided as part of the program, they expressed general dissatisfaction with the program to San Francisco program staff. As program staff learned they were responsible for initiating and developing job leads, they had to invest more effort than initially anticipated to manage participants' expectations and job development responsibilities, for which they were provided less resources than expected. This resulted in concern among staff with some aspects of program implementation.

All partners reflected on the importance of communicating about program expectations and developing a more detailed project work plan prior to the launch of the program, agreeing that more frequent communication could have improved initial implementation as well as their ability to monitor and troubleshoot concerns during implementation.

## Lessons

The following lessons from this experience may help inform efforts to implement future sessions of P2E or to incorporate elements of the program design in other pilot programs.

- Allocate lead time and other supports for planning activities to ensure that program plans are developed with fidelity to the model and prerequisites for successful implementation are in place. Activities could include developing a check list and assessing resources required to support each program element, and developing communications protocols and/or a memorandum of understanding to facilitate program planning discussions, confirm program design, and clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Conduct a needs assessment (informal or formal) to explore and document general and specific needs for the service. In the case of P2E, assessing participants' needs during the application lab or at another point prior to the program may have helped anticipate and avoid the overlap in some aspects of the services provided by JVS.
- Develop a clear process to promote alignment of implementation activities with the program model. Where departures are unavoidable, engage in an intentional, collective decision-making process to determine the way forward.
- Implement clear project milestones and feedback mechanisms to facilitate communication between and among partners prior to and during program implementation. Consider developing supports for ongoing consultation and

coaching for project leaders and staff, and program monitoring, measurement, or evaluation to support fidelity to the program model.

## Appendix A. Research Questions and Methods

P2E represents the first time mental health services, financial literacy services, and a wage subsidy have been offered to individuals participating in workforce services funded by the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD), including Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) dislocated worker services. These program elements, as well as the cohort-based program structure, are of interest to OEWD as it considers whether and how these program elements might be incorporated into other workforce services it offers.

### Research Questions

The research questions guiding this evaluation were:

1. How does implementation of Platform to Employment® (P2E) in San Francisco compare to the original Platform to Employment® program model?
  - a. How did the local San Francisco program team implement P2E?
  - b. How does implementation in San Francisco compare to implementation in other selected cities?
2. How do participants and providers perceive P2E program elements (i.e., the five-week job search/readiness training, working in a cohort, mental health services, financial literacy services, and availability of the wage subsidy)?
  - a. How did participation in both Workforce Investment Act services and P2E affect providers' and participants' perceptions of P2E?
  - b. What were their opinions of whether and how the program helped build skills?
  - c. What were their opinions of whether and how the program helped build confidence?
  - d. What are their perspectives on the relative benefit of each program component, individually or combined?
  - e. What was participants' level of satisfaction with services?
3. How do employers perceive the P2E program?
  - a. Did the subsidy factor into the decision to interview and/or bring on a candidate for an eight-week no-risk trial and/or to hire a candidate?
4. What lessons about P2E implementation can help improve the program and/or inform the design of other workforce programs in the future?

## Data Collection

The research team used multiple strategies to gather data for this report. We interviewed program partners, surveyed participants and employers, and interviewed program managers and staff in other (peer) cities that implemented P2E. We also reviewed program planning documents and data.

### *Program Partner Interviews*

WestEd staff interviewed individuals from The WorkPlace, JVS, FSA, CCCSF, OEWD, and the Career TEAM. Each interview was semi-structured and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews with JVS staff were conducted in person. The interviews with staff of The WorkPlace, FSA, CCCSF, OEWD, and the Career TEAM were conducted over the phone. WestEd conducted the interviews between April and July 2014. WestEd conducted nine interviews, involving 11 participants from partnering organizations.

### *Participant Survey*

P2E participants completed an online survey exploring their perceptions of the program elements listed in the research questions above. The survey included open- and closed-ended questions. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey was open for three weeks beginning May 7 and ending May 21, 2014. During this time period, 10 of 18 participants responded to the survey.

### *Employer Survey*

Eight employers were invited to complete a survey about their perceptions of the program and the wage subsidy. All eight were informed about the wage subsidy option.<sup>12</sup> These employers were selected because they either showed interest in a P2E candidate or reviewed a P2E candidate resume. This introduces response bias, but the strategy was chosen because the interest in feedback about P2E candidates and the wage-subsidy was the primary goal, as opposed to generalizing the results to a larger population. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete, and was accessible from July 22 to August 4, 2014. During this time, three of eight organizations responded to the survey.

### *Peer City Interviews*

WestEd invited program staff from three of the nine other cities implementing P2E to participate in an interview about program planning and implementation. The three cities were chosen because they represented a range of implementation experiences. One of the selected cities utilized an existing local provider to serve as the lead agency for the five-week training, like in San Francisco. The other two invited cities relied on

a trainer recruited in partnership with the Career TEAM. WestEd interviewed program staff in two of the three invited cities.<sup>13</sup> One of the two cities interviewed utilized an existing provider to conduct the five-week training, like in San Francisco.

### *Documents and Data*

WestEd reviewed existing documents and data provided by P2E partners. Documents reviewed include a daily participant survey conducted during the five-week training, the five-week training curriculum, marketing materials describing the wage-subsidy, The WorkPlace's program orientation presentation, program websites, and media and other reports describing the Connecticut P2E program.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis combined data from the survey and interviews to answer the proposed research questions. WestEd analyzed each data source to identify the main findings, combine the findings to answer the research questions, and synthesize the findings and salient themes in the discussion sections.

WestEd summarized the results of the participant and employer survey by question themes. Quantitative results were examined descriptively using frequencies, and standard deviations, where appropriate. The descriptive results were examined in tandem with summaries of qualitative themes identified from the open-ended questions.

WestEd analyzed the interview notes from the semi-structured interviews and organized the information into common themes that were structured by the research questions. For example, themes included program elements, implementation challenges, and success. Researchers compared and contrasted interview responses across the program partner interviews to identify commonalities, differences, and relevant program context. The two interviews with program staff implementing P2E in other cities were used to verify some of the partners' statements about program operations and implementation. The document review was analyzed in a similar manner, with specific attention to providing relevant program context and background.

## Appendix B. Participant Service History

To understand the overlap in services, WestEd’s participant survey included questions about services received at JVS prior to enrolling in P2E.<sup>14</sup> Eight of the 10 survey respondents indicated that the services they received prior to P2E overlapped with services they received during P2E. Some respondents indicated that the material was “basically the same material we learned in the JVS workshops.” Respondents did indicate that the psychological and financial services, and the process of “finding your passion” were unique to P2E.

A detailed breakdown of respondents’ concurrent enrollment in services is depicted in Exhibit B1, where survey respondents indicated whether they participated in the service *prior* to P2E or *while in* P2E. As seen in Exhibit B1, the majority of respondents reported receiving similar services to those received as part of P2E prior to their involvement in P2E. For example, six respondents reported attending job search preparation workshops prior to participating in P2E. Further, in some cases, respondents remained concurrently enrolled in services while they were in P2E. For example, two respondents received individualized counseling concurrent to their P2E enrollment. The findings suggest that the majority of respondents were familiar with the types of services provided by P2E.

### Exhibit B1. Respondents Involvement in Similar Services

Service	Prior to P2E	While in P2E	Total Respondents
Individualized job counseling	7	2	9
Job search cohort	7	3	9
Professional networking sessions	7	2	8
Social media workshops on LinkedIn and Twitter	8	1	8
Metrix learning	5	3	7
Job search preparation workshops	6	3	8
Job search portfolio workshops	6	2	7
Job search strategy workshops	8	2	9
Mock interview sessions	6	5	9
Computer skills workshops	5	1	5
Employer spotlight events	7	2	8

Note. Respondents were able to select *Prior to* and *While in* P2E. Ten participants responded to the survey, but one survey respondent skipped this question.

### Comparison to Job Transition Assistance Services participants

For added context about the co-enrollment, Exhibit B2 compares the demographics of P2E participants and participants in the San Francisco OEWD’s Job Transition Assistance Services (JTAS) program for dislocated workers provided by JVS — because most P2E participants were also part of JVS’s JTAS program. Interview data indicates that 15 of the P2E participants were already JTAS clients. All San Francisco P2E participants tended to be older and more educated than the JTAS group (Exhibit B2).

## Exhibit B2. Participant Demographics

Characteristics	P2E (n=19)*	JTAS (n=99)**
<b>Age at enrollment</b>		
16-34	0%	6%
35-49	11%	24%
50-55	37%	25%
56-65	53%	39%
65+	0%	5%
<b>Highest level of education</b>		
-year degree +	84%	67%
Middle skill	11%	15%
High school diploma	0%	3%
No response	5%	15%
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
Asian	16%	11%
Black	11%	5%
Hispanic-Latino	11%	9%
Native American		
Indian	0%	1%
Multiracial	11%	4%
White	42%	47%
No response	11%	22%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	53%	52%
Male	42%	30%
Transgender	0%	1%
No response	5%	17%

\*Fifteen of these 19 P2E participants were also JTAS participants.

\*\*Number of JTAS participants from July 2013-March 2014.

Source: WestEd tabulations of OEWD data.

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- <sup>1</sup> The U.S. Department of Labor defines long-term unemployed as 27 weeks or longer.
- <sup>2</sup> California Employment Development Department, Labor and Workforce Development Agency. (July 2015). *California Labor Market Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/1fmonth/Calmr.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> Ghayad, R. The Jobless Trap: Job market paper. Retrieved from [http://media.wix.com/ugd/576e9a\\_f7ade4b6632949349fd75921699294fa.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/576e9a_f7ade4b6632949349fd75921699294fa.pdf). O'Brien, M. (April 13, 2013). The terrifying reality of the long-term unemployed. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/04/the-terrifying-reality-of-long-term-unemployment/274957/>.
- <sup>4</sup> (1) Krueger, A. B. & Mueller, A. (2011). Job search, emotional well-being, and job finding in a period of mass unemployment: Evidence from high-frequency longitudinal data (Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Spring 2011). 1–57. (2) Van Horn, C., Zukin, C., & Kopicki, A. (September 2014). *Left behind: The long-term unemployed struggle in an improving economy* (Work Trends: Americans' Attitudes About Work, Employers, and Government). Retrieved from [http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/products/uploads/Work\\_Trends\\_September\\_2014\\_0.pdf](http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/products/uploads/Work_Trends_September_2014_0.pdf). (3) Saad, L. (January 2011). *In U.S., one in four unemployed adults in financial distress* (*USA Today*/Gallup survey). Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/145772/one-four-unemployed-adults-financial-distress.aspx>.
- <sup>5</sup> Preliminary formative feedback was provided to OEWD in an unpublished memo on June 5, 2014. The WorkPlace is also collaborating with the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development to conduct a process evaluation of P2E at the national and local levels, which includes a participant-level evaluation.
- <sup>6</sup> Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M. & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature* (FMHI Publication #231). Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network.
- <sup>7</sup> Dislocated worker services are funded by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), administered by OEWD through a contract with JVS. Participation in dislocated worker services during enrollment in P2E was voluntary. P2E participation was not conditional on JTAS participation.
- <sup>8</sup> Media reports include: A segment on the *60 Minutes* news program in February 2012 (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/a-new-jobs-program-for-people-trapped-in-unemployment/>) and President Obama's reference to the program in a speech delivered on January 31, 2014 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/31/remarks-president-long-term>). The report about the Connecticut Program was published by the Fairfield Community Foundation in May 2013 (<http://www.fccfoundation.org/Library/FCCF%20Documents/Reports%20and%20Publications/FCCF-Back-to-Work-Report-2013.pdf>).
- <sup>9</sup> The elements in the survey question were: job search assistance, mental health workshop/services, financial counseling workshop/services, wage subsidy, using the wage subsidy as a job search tool, job search logs, participating in the program with people facing similar challenges to me, none of the above, and other.
- <sup>10</sup> Fairfield Community Foundation. (2013). *Back to Work: A summary of the lessons learned from the Platform to Employment® program*. Fairfield Community Foundation: Norwalk, CT. Retrieved from <http://www.fccfoundation.org/Library/FCCF%20Documents/Reports%20and%20Publications/FCCF-Back-to-Work-Report-2013.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> Data provided by The WorkPlace.
- <sup>12</sup> Information about the wage subsidy was shared with many employers through JVS emails, social media pages, and general outreach.
- <sup>13</sup> To preserve anonymity, the peer cities are not named.
- <sup>14</sup> The survey was emailed to respondents in May 2014. A total of 10 participants responded, yielding a response rate of 55%.