




 The James Irvine Foundation

BETTER CAREERS 2018–2020 DEEP DIVE ASSESSMENT: WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

DECEMBER 2020





The Irvine Foundation hosted our Better Careers grantee convening (in person) in Newport Beach, CA in September 2019. At that time, we could not have envisioned that the world would change so drastically. Last year was a very challenging year, yet we remain hopeful. And we continue to be grateful for the partnership with grantees and their dedication to our collective efforts.

Irvine's vision is ***a California where all low-income workers have the power to advance economically***. We believe that every worker should have the access and opportunity to earn wages that can sustain their families and the chance to advance in their careers. Hence, the Better Careers goal is to help 25,000 low-income job seekers secure employment that pays at least \$18 per hour, to improve training opportunities that lead to quality jobs and advancement, to identify successful models of matching employers with middle-skill workers, and to build and grow a diversified pool of talented workers. We are pleased to share that we are well on our way to achieving these goals.

This Deep Dive Assessment provides a glimpse into our impact, learnings, and the strategic implications of our work since the inception of the Better Careers initiative in 2018. Thank you for taking the time to read it.

The Better Careers Team,

Caroline, Cindy, Karen, Kelley, Kim A.H., Kim J., Leslie, Mikaela, and Sabrina



INTRODUCTION

Much has changed in the world since the Better Careers initiative launched in January 2018. Most notably, COVID-19 has replaced a tight labor market with unemployment rates not seen since the Great Depression. COVID-19's impacts are unparalleled for Better Careers grantees.

Grantees have had to be nimble, responsive, and innovative, including swiftly moving to virtual operations. The health pandemic and resulting economic crisis have been compounded by persistent racial injustice, protests in response to Black people being killed by police officers and white vigilantes, and wildfires that create unhealthy air quality for all. And yet, our grantees are staying the course — on the frontlines of advocating for racial equity and justice, meeting the workforce and basic needs of low-income workers, and pursuing innovative models and cross-sector partnerships to grow and sustain workforce development programs.

Almost three years into the seven-year, \$110.8 million initiative to connect low-income Californians to careers with family-sustaining wages and advancement opportunities, we share some key learnings:

- Thousands of low-income Californians have gained access to middle-skill, middle-wage jobs through career pathway programs that are now pivoting in the COVID context.
- Grantees have effectively partnered with employers, far exceeding expectations, including implementing their own ways of recognizing employers for enhanced impact.
- Integrating an industry-focused approach to engage employers can leverage industries that will remain stable or grow in spite of the pandemic and, importantly, increase racial and gender equity.
- Innovative efforts by grantees to explore new models are not only building the skills of workers and strengthening their opportunities for advancement, they hold great promise for the growth and sustainability of workforce development programs.

The purpose of this document is to provide a substantive look into Better Careers investments and the progress of our portfolio of grantees, including highlighting key examples from their work.

BETTER CAREERS AT-A-GLANCE

INITIATIVE GOAL



Job seekers have jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage

- **Hiring:** 25,000 low-income jobseekers get jobs that pay at least \$18 an hour
- **Retention:** Employment is sustained at least one year postplacement for 75% of participants
- **Equity:** 4,000 (of the 25,000) low-income job seekers get jobs that pay at least \$15-\$16 an hour and are on track to earn \$18 an hour

KEY INITIATIVE LEARNINGS

- Grantees are making progress:
 - 10,554 completed training
 - 9,067 placed in jobs
 - \$18.66 average hourly wages
 - 61% retained employment @ 12m
- Strengthening retention percentages is a continuing challenge exacerbated by COVID-19
- Access to quality jobs, despite the loosened labor market, continues to be an area of grantee concern and focus

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

- Career pathway grantees will stay the course while integrating necessary programmatic and fiscal adjustments to respond to COVID-19
- Many low-income workers are forced to “start over” due to layoffs, business closures, and increased competition for jobs with those who have 4-year degrees
- Greater focus on improving quality of jobs and career pathways is critical



Employers recruit, hire, and retain formerly low-wage workers in family-sustaining jobs

Current goals

- 350 employer partnerships
- 35 employer-partners become champions for hiring and retaining low-income jobseekers

Draft revision to goal

- Implement an intentional industry-focused approach in healthcare, manufacturing, construction, and/or information & communications technology (ICT) that centers on race and gender diversification

- Better Careers grantees far exceeded the goal, reporting 1,942 employer partnerships
- Career pathway grantees have employer partnership and champion strategies as an integrated part of their programs
- The employer champion goal was not met, as we did not directly implement an employer champion strategy

- Eliminate the current employer engagement numerical goals yet continue to learn about and strengthen grantees' ongoing partnerships with employers
- Employer engagement practices and impact will be tracked through the developmental evaluation and supportive grantmaking efforts in tandem with interested grantees

- Economist forecasting that healthcare, manufacturing, construction, and information & communications technology industries will remain stable or will grow despite the pandemic
- 14 of 23 career pathway grantees are working in at least one of the named industries and experiencing success
- There is opportunity to access both public and private sector jobs in these industries
- Lack of gender and racial diversity in these sectors keeps women and people of color locked out of opportunity

- Support and learn from current grantees already working in these industries
- Given finite capacity and resources, partner with grantees to determine how many industries to focus on and what it means in practice
- No pressure for other grantees to change course to focus on these industries
- Industry-focused, equity-centered efforts will include some new partners



There is sustained opportunity for low-income jobseekers to find family-sustaining work

- **Revenue models:** There are two new sustainable and replicable public/private revenue models, including employers-as-payers (tested and on a path to scale, where viable)
- **Training models:** There are at least three effective and scalable middle-skill training models and recruiting networks that meet employer demand

- 13 of 23 career pathway grantees reported 325 employers-as-payers (contributing revenues via grants, paid internships, apprenticeships, etc.)
- Many promising revenue and training models are being pursued by grantees
- Grantees are involved in a variety of efforts to improve workforce development policies and systems
- Collaborative efforts with Labor Secretary Julie Su's office have resulted in two joint Better Careers/Fair Work projects to implement systems change efforts in state workforce development and in public sector state employment

- Better Careers innovations in progress will offer keen insights into which models are ripe for replication and/or scaling
- Additional supportive investments being considered for this work include:
 - Co-designed, equity-centered, industry-focused efforts
 - Strategic narrative & communications advisory pod
 - Data and measurement pod

BETTER CAREERS BY THE NUMBERS

BETTER CAREERS: KEY METRICS

\$110.8M

7-YEAR INITIATIVE THAT AIMS TO CONNECT LOW-INCOME CALIFORNIANS TO CAREERS WITH FAMILY-SUSTAINING WAGES



MAJORITY OF GRANTS PROVIDE LONG-TERM, FLEXIBLE INVESTMENTS TO BUILD CAPACITY



OF BUDGET FOR GRANTEE-ADVISED SUPPORTIVE GRANTS

BETTER CAREERS HAS INVESTED OVER \$51 MILLION¹ TO DATE, INCLUDING:



\$31M
IN CAREER PATHWAYS



\$7M
IN EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT



\$13.5M
IN THE FIELD

BETTER CAREERS HAS SUPPORTED 36 GRANTEES

28 CORE GRANTEES

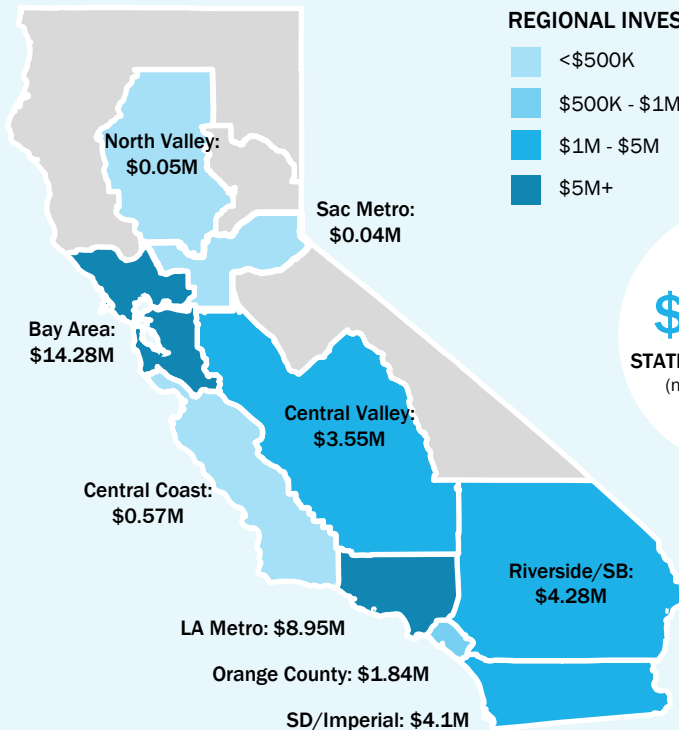
8 SUPPORTIVE GRANTEES

CORE GRANTEE RECESSION RESILIENCE GRANTS

\$750K
IN PHASE ONE EMERGENCY GRANTS

\$6.8M
IN PHASE TWO FINANCIAL RESILIENCE GRANTS (IN PROCESS)

LOCATION OF INVESTMENTS



\$13.4M
STATEWIDE INVESTMENTS
(not reflected on map)

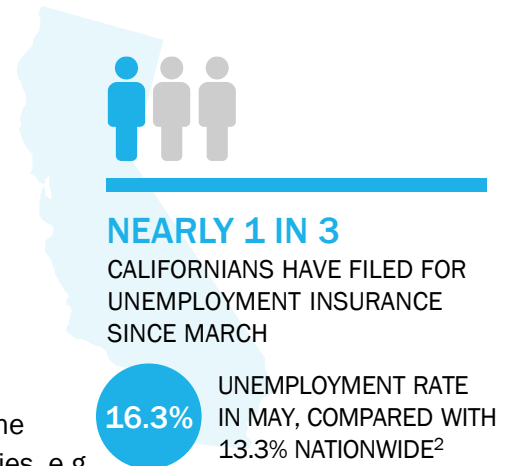


HOW GRANTEES ARE RESPONDING TO THE MOMENT

IMPACT OF COVID-19

COVID-19 has had a significant and devastating impact on California, Better Careers grantees, the ecosystems in which they operate, and the people whom they serve. Many low-wage workers who obtained middle-skilled, middle-wage jobs are having to begin again.

- Nearly one in three Californians have filed for unemployment insurance since March. Unemployment rates have shot up from 3.9 percent in February (the lowest on record) to 16.3 percent by May, compared with 13.3 percent nationwide.² This number does not include those who are no longer looking for work or the 23% of Californians who are underemployed.
- Experts predict that California will face a worse recession than the rest of the country due to the state's high unemployment and high cost of living.
- California's budget changes lessens and potentially eliminates the flexibility to invest in innovation and promising workforce strategies, e.g., the efforts of the Future of Work Commission and the State's reorganization of the Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LDWA) have been adjusted or delayed.



“I was hoping that my current job would turn into more of a supervisor and manager position. I was hoping for it to be a steppingstone, but I don't know where it's going to go now [because of the pandemic]. I don't even know if the company is going to be around by 2021.”

— Worker

HOW GRANTEES ARE RESPONDING TO THE MOMENT

- Better Careers grantees are dealing with the direct economic and health consequences of the pandemic on their participants, especially those serving Black and Latinx communities disproportionately impacted. Grantees are:
 - **Shifting their operations and keeping a close eye on their bottom lines in order to survive**, including changing strategies, reducing cohort sizes to allow for social distancing, cancelling or postponing events/programs, transitioning trainings to virtual platforms and shifting policy priorities.
 - **Providing or facilitating relief funds to meet basic client needs**, including cash-assistance programs, and establishing COVID-19 emergency-response funds.
 - **Taking advantage of shelter-in-place to strengthen online services and integrate new ways of training into regular programming**, including the use of chatbots or mobile applications for career preparation and coaching services.

RACIAL INEQUITIES

Current events have moved grantees to be more explicit about deepening and expanding racial equity efforts. This includes:

- **Bringing a racial equity lens to the forefront of their work**, with some grantees just starting discussions on formal, internal racial equity efforts, and others leaning into more established racial equity principles.
- **Holding employers accountable**, such as [LeadersUp](#) who is pledging to only work with employers who have a clear anti-racist stance.
- **Ensuring recovery, stimulus, and reinvestment efforts advance racial equity**, such as [LA Brotherhood Crusade](#) who is examining the reallocation of the city's LAPD budget to ensure law enforcement funds to support Black and Latinx youth go to the community.

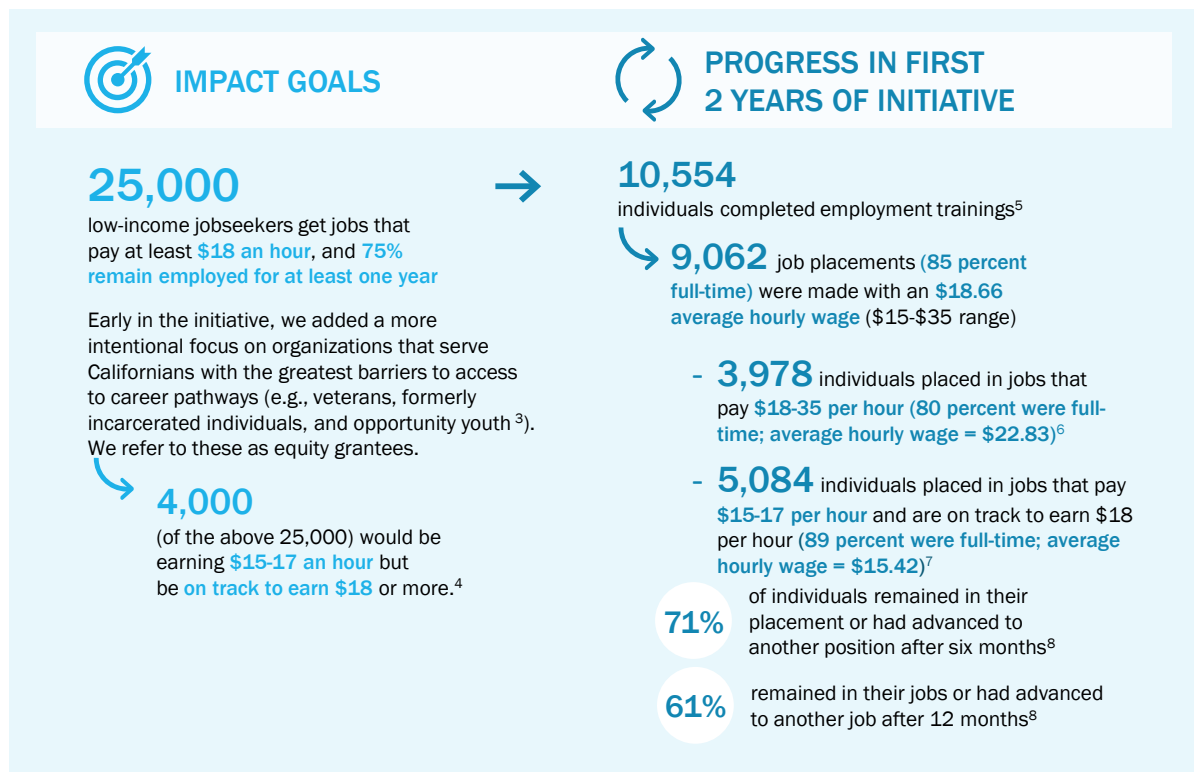
“While we’ve always tried to be intentional about our racial justice work, we can always do better, so we’ve formed a racial equity working group to develop a really strong and clear organizational, anti-racism stance that will guide everything we do moving forward.”

— Grantee



INITIATIVE PROGRESS

Expanding and Strengthening Career Pathways Strategies



SUMMARY

Better Careers has had the opportunity to collect two full years of data (2018 & 2019) from grantees. We are encouraged that data indicates that if grantees were to stay the course, impact goals for job training and placement would be met. We must, however, consider the pandemic-impacted context that is threatening this progress. It will also impact job retention rates, which remain an area to strengthen.

INITIATIVE PROGRESS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Work-based learning (apprenticeships, internships, and transitional jobs) is a critical career pathways strategy because of the hands-on learning, income (if paid), and on-the-job experience desired by employers. Most Better Careers grantees have launched or continued to integrate and strengthen one or more of these approaches:

- **Apprenticeships:** Better Careers grantees are developing and operating apprenticeships in new industries, such as early care and education, technology/STEM, and advanced manufacturing. The **Foundation for California Community Colleges** (FCCC)'s California Apprenticeship Initiative is supporting a network of new apprenticeships across the state (for more on this effort, see this [CAI brief](#)). These apprenticeships involve unique partnerships with employers who hire, pay, and mentor apprentices during their on-the-job training. But growing apprenticeships faces multiple challenges:
 - The heavy employer investment
 - Some industries lack experience with apprenticeships
 - Securing approval and funding for programs via the CA Department of Apprenticeship Standards
 - Limited State funding for community colleges to serve as the classroom training providers
- **Paid internships by career pathways programs** provide trainees with important experience. As with apprenticeships, many Better Careers grantees use an “earn and learn” approach and persuade employers to have “skin in the game” by covering most or all of the cost of paying interns (and other program costs), even if many employers do not hire interns directly. A key grantee challenge is recruiting enough employers willing to pay for interns and dealing with the legal requirements. Grantees often work to minimize internship-related liability by formalizing agreements, serving as the employer-of-record, and assuming liability and insurance responsibilities.

“A benefit I have received is the clinical approach of actually working with patients hands-on. I really like how I am becoming resourceful and knowledgeable in ways to help patients.”

— Apprenticeship participant

2,493

APPRENTICESHIP PLACEMENTS BY GRANTEES IN 2018-19

2,215

INTERNSHIP PLACEMENTS BY GRANTEES IN 2018-19

APPRENTICESHIPS — A “GOLD STANDARD”

Apprenticeships are often considered a “gold standard” because they require paid on-the-job learning and classroom instruction to attain skills that meet rigorous national standards. After one to four years, participants have an industry-recognized credential. Most apprenticeships must meet certain quality jobs standards, including progressive increases in an apprentice’s skills and wages.

INITIATIVE PROGRESS

- **Transitional jobs** are particularly important for jobseekers facing multiple barriers, with little to no job experience (e.g., formerly incarcerated Californians). These short-term, subsidized jobs offer a more sheltered work environment that enables participants to become accustomed to “the world of work,” including soft-skills training, understanding organizational culture and practice, and managing on-the-job relationships. Provided through social enterprises, such as **Goodwill SoCal** clothing stores, these transitional employers are interested in both worker success and business profits.

Improving program quality and career pathways training continues to be a top priority. Critical to these efforts is determining the right metrics to collect and then using them for continuous improvement. Although most Better Careers grantees use data sophisticatedly, many are in the process of improving these efforts — or want to. For example,

- **Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)** is strengthening processes for giving feedback to and getting feedback from transitional workers, seeing both as essential components for continuous improvement.
- **San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP)** has a well-articulated job quality [framework](#) informed by listening sessions with low-wage workers. Participants defined a quality job as encompassing multiple elements beyond just a living wage. As one participant stated, “*Being a single mom and having my two boys, I will sacrifice my pay for the flexibility of my hours.*”

Many Better Careers grantees have already begun to expand their programs, target groups, or geographies in California. For example, **CEO** expanded its area of operations from Alameda County to 10 sites across California.⁹ However, many grantees also report challenges in growth and scaling. For example, **Early Career and Education Pathways to Success (ECEPTS)** noted that its biggest challenge it faces is that there is no source of sustainable funding for sector intermediaries to support scaling efforts. Another challenge mentioned by other grantees is maintaining relationships when key partner contacts turnover.

“Just because I know how to do what I'm doing well [training and placement programs for jobseekers], doesn't mean that I know how to scale well.”

— Grantee

“I love working with JVS youth interns. They are prepared with basic skills, such as customer service, and they're eager to learn and motivated to work. JVS even takes care of payroll and worker's compensation.”

— Grantee

INITIATIVE PROGRESS

Employer Partnerships and Engagement — A Key Element of Career Pathway Programs



SUMMARY

Employer engagement is a critical component of developing and implementing career pathways programs. Better Careers grantees partnered with a significant number of employers, already achieving the employer engagement impact goal numerically. But grantees also deepened their expertise in how to engage employers to solidify placements in middle-skill, middle-wage careers — including developing sophisticated processes to recognize employer champions for enhanced impact.

Focusing on this goal since the start of the initiative has provided Irvine with a birds-eye view into effective employer-engagement strategies, a priority learning area of grantees. Grantees also have provided us with better insight into their industry-specific work, where there are ongoing opportunities for manufacturing, healthcare, construction, and information and communications technology despite the pandemic. These are also industries in which racial and gender inequities need to be addressed for low-wage workers to be successful.

Based on our learning, the interest of grantees, and the current context, we propose a shift away from the initial employer engagement goals towards integration of an industry-focused approach centered on racial and gender equity. Additionally, we have determined that it is not the Better Career's initiative's role to "champion" employer partners. Rather, we will continue to support and learn with grantees who are in close relationship with employers about the effective ways that they are directly championing their employer partners.

INITIATIVE PROGRESS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The success of Better Careers grantees necessitates engaging employers across multiple aspects of their career pathway programs. As part of their work in designing and operating their career pathway programs, grantees go far beyond merely appealing to employers to hire their program graduates. Instead, they partner with employers across a range of activities, including:

- **Engaging employers to participate in organizational governing boards or steering committees.** For example, [Hartnell College](#), in developing its blueprint for a new job placement and apprenticeship system, is convening an employer steering committee for education and training programs.
- **Reviewing or co-creating training curriculum with employers.** [Industrial Technical Learning Center \(InTech\) at Chaffey College](#) developed its first conventional machining training program in collaboration with California Steel Industries. During the pilot training, they collaboratively discovered and addressed initial problems with the training program's machine shop curriculum to meet employer needs.
- **Using employers as part of work-based learning opportunities** as instructors or guest speakers during classroom-based training, or during field trips to employer sites. For example, the [State Center Community College District](#) has employers visit its pre-apprenticeship cohort classes, while [Flintridge Center](#) takes its pre-apprenticeship students on site visits to construction union training facilities.
- **Consulting with and training employer staff members on ways to improve hiring practices or retention of diverse workforces.** [Goodwill SoCal](#) provided mentor "train the trainer" modules to Williams Sonoma, so 25 of their emerging leaders could better mentor the staff they supervise. [SFMade](#) provides feedback to employers on how to improve their job descriptions and collaborates with them on how to upskill current workers, including to access funding for training. This [SFMade -- Making It Work](#) video provides additional insight into the impact of their work.
- **Having employer champions promote grantee programs and "high road" approaches to other employers.** [JobTrain](#) holds an annual "[Bridge Awards](#)" ceremony to celebrate employers with innovative approaches to hiring, retaining, and investing in a more inclusive workforce, who also tell other employers about the training programs.

"They approached us to be a thought partner about how to incorporate a need that they had with a need that we had, which was to find talented, enthusiastic employees."

— Employer partner

"SDWP's Director of Business Services was a small business owner, which is important because she knows what businesses need; she was that person."

— Grantee

INITIATIVE PROGRESS

- **Having staff who are trained on how to work effectively with employers and ideally worked for a related employer.** This allows dedicated staff time to network with employers, serve as their primary point of contact, and to be responsive. **Hope Builders** recently hired new staff with business development experience and provide staff with training focused on effective employment engagement. **SDWP** developed a business needs assessment for staff to use when meeting with employers. Since employer-focused staff are still limited, grantees generally find it easier to engage with larger employers or employer intermediaries.
- **Industry-focused approaches allow staff and training programs to gain expertise for those specific sectors.** Some grantees have successfully engaged with employers when adopting an industry focus. Rigorous evaluations have proven this strategy effective.¹¹ An industry focus allows programs to customize their efforts; build specific expertise among staff about the industries' occupations, skill gaps, and hiring practices; and develop close relationships with employers.
- **Some grantees are shifting their sector foci.** **JVS-SF** recently ended its financial sector and early childcare career pathways when it realized that average wages for entry-level occupations were too low, especially outside of San Francisco. Instead, it is focusing on public utilities, such as water agencies, which pay significantly higher wages and with available jobs growing due to impending retirements.
- **Many grantees are already working in industries that are anticipated to remain stable or grow.** These include: **manufacturing** (9 grantees), **construction** (7 grantees), **information and communication technology** (7 grantees), and **healthcare** (6 grantees). Grantees also have the opportunity to push for race and gender diversity in these industries, which are overwhelmingly male and white. Although construction is more ethnically diverse, Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) typically are stuck in low-wage positions.

“Workforce training should never be its own end, it should really be driven by the demand for jobs... [it’s about] employers and employees coming together to come up with what the training should be for the jobs that are going to happen. They’re industry-led and very focused on... the equity issue.”

— Field leader

EVEN WITH THE PANDEMIC, THESE SECTORS ARE PROJECTED TO GROW¹²:



The information industry is expected to **grow 5.1% by 2021** and 15.6% by 2028.



Healthcare **employment growth** will be around **25% by 2024**.



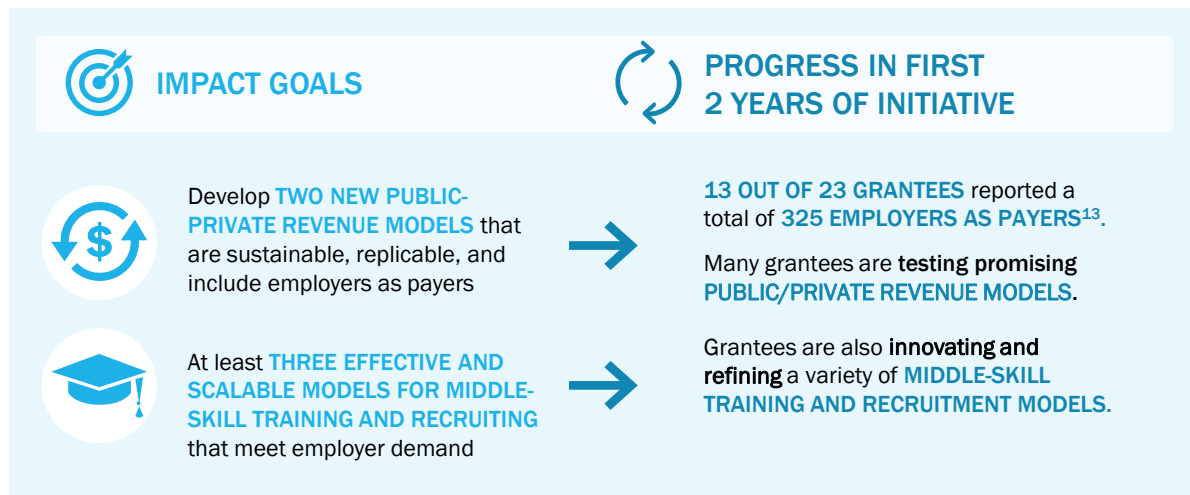
Construction will grow steadily — **6.3% by 2021** and **9.8% by 2028**.



Manufacturing will **grow slightly (0.8%) by 2021** and then decrease, but advanced manufacturing has had higher levels of annual employment growth than other manufacturing industries ([more here from SFMade](#)).

INITIATIVE PROGRESS

Sustainability through Innovative and Effective Models, Policies, and Systems Change



SUMMARY

We are excited about how grantees are testing and learning from new financing models to generate public-private revenue, as well as innovate and refine middle-skill training and recruiting models. A key role for Better Careers' staff is to closely track these models as they mature to determine which are the most effective and appropriate for replication and scalability.

Additionally, grantees have been involved in policy and systems change efforts to improve local and statewide workforce development processes, policies, and systems. Better Careers' staff will continue to partner with grantees to identify key opportunities to align investments, create learning opportunities, and to forge strategic partnerships and connections. Although scaling plans for many grantees will need to be adjusted due to the impact of COVID-19, opportunities to identify, capture, and share successful models for systems change and scalability hold great promise.

“I think Irvine is one of the top organizations that I’ve gotten to work with... they say, ‘Yes, yes, there’s a grant, there’s a set of deliverables’ But they also encourage [with], ‘let’s not be afraid to fail. let’s go after what [you] think is the right answer. Let’s adjust if we need to adjust.’”

— Grantee

INITIATIVE PROGRESS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Revenue models

Grantees are engaging in a variety of revenue models to create earnings while maximizing benefits to their participants. In addition to employer contributions to career pathway programs mentioned earlier, models include:

- **Social enterprise:** A few grantees employ an employment social enterprise strategy, in which they charge for their services and use the revenue to fund workforce programs. **Hope Builders**, operates a subsidiary business venture that offers staffing services to construction and IT employers throughout Southern California through a fee for service model. **REDF** is working with more than 37 employment social enterprises in California to provide technical assistance and deliver evidence-based on the job supports, skill-building, and training so that more individuals transition to competitive employment that pays \$18/hour or more.
- **Income Sharing Agreements (ISAs)** provide a way for individuals to finance educational investment, with participants paying back a percentage of their salary once they gain employment post-training. **San Diego Workforce Partnership** offers ISA trainees a 3-6 month grace period to pay back their training fund once their salary reaches \$40,000 per year. The face value of the TechHire ISA is \$6,500 per student and includes course fees, wrap-around services, internship wages, and job placement services for 5 years.
- **Maximizing public funding streams** allows grantees to connect to ongoing revenue sources.
 - **Community college funding.** **LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network** has been working to ensure that apprenticeship programs by its member community colleges garner as much state funding as other college programs (creating an incentive to do them). Since community college students in apprenticeships typically attend college only part-time (the other half is on-the-job training), colleges have not received the full amount of state enrollment funding (called apportionment) for these students. One of **LAUNCH's** member colleges has worked around this disincentive by gaining approval for academic credit for the employer-provided training portion of apprenticeships so it can access full apportionment funding.
 - **Access to WIOA funding via AB 1111.** **AB 1111** is a grant program using state funds to provide employment and training services to Californians facing employment barriers. Local workforce development boards must partner with at least one community organization to provide funds for these Californians as well as expand partnerships between workforce boards and community organizations, which opens access to additional public funding sources. Several Better Careers grantees — **CEO, LA Brotherhood Crusade, JVS-SF, Rubicon, and Goodwill SoCal** — have been awarded AB 1111 grants.

“We are trying to eliminate the access gap that exists for workers in getting access to education, and for businesses in being able to grow inclusively, and for us that is all focused on funding.”

— Grantee

INITIATIVE PROGRESS

- [The Better Careers Design Group](#), facilitated by Third Sector Capital Partners, which involves 20 organizations – both local government or quasi-government agencies and 10 Better Careers grantees – is working to align flow of public funding streams through human-centered design and participatory workforce planning in four regions of California.

INNOVATIVE CAREER PATHWAY MODELS AND NETWORKS

Better Careers grantees are innovating and refining effective training models aimed at improving long-term career pathways for low-income Californians. They include:

“On-ramp” programs are offered to provide increased job readiness for Californians facing multiple barriers, such as citizens returning from incarceration ([ARC](#) has a 2nd Chance Pre-Apprenticeship Boot Camp and a Ride Home Program, [see video](#)) and opportunity youth. Barriers can include very little entry-level labor market experience, basic work readiness and/or basic (math or English) skills training, and lack of information about and access to other career pathways training programs. Examples of on-ramp programs include:

- **Pre-apprenticeship programs.** These are designed for participants who are unable to enter apprenticeships directly because they need support to pass entrance exams and build their basic employability and pre-requisite skills. [The State Center Community College Foundation’s](#) Central Valley Pre-Apprenticeship Training program creates pathways into construction apprenticeships for individuals with a history of incarceration.
- **Short-term training programs** for jobseekers who have some work experience but need technical skills training to get a career foothold. While some of these programs mimic a work environment, including a 6-8 hour work day, for five days a week; others offer evening classes for working adults. They also often use cohort approaches so that participants can receive support from peers.

EXAMPLES OF SHORT-TERM TRAINING PROGRAMS

Many of [JobTrain’s](#) programs, including its 11-week Certified Nurse Assistant and Home Health Aid Training program, which (with passing of a state certification exam) lead to credentials, including a Nurse Assistant certification and a Home Health Aid certification.

[Bitwise’s Geekwise Academy](#) offers various six-week evening classes two nights a week that cost \$250 and teach participants a new programming language or skill. Participation in one of these classes makes students eligible to participate in a cohort; a paid internship where interns work on projects for employers and co-teach evening classes.

INITIATIVE PROGRESS

POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

Creating a better workforce system requires strong organizations with workforce development knowledge to use that expertise for policy and systems change efforts. Many grantees are involved in one or more of these types of efforts. Examples include:

- **The Skills for California Network.** A [partnership](#) between [National Skills Coalition](#) and [California EDGE Coalition](#), the network hosts the California Skills Summit. In 2020, National Skills Coalition also led the California Advocacy and Policy Academy, an effort to enhance community leaders' capacity to engage in state-level workforce development policy discussions. This [policy academy](#) includes representatives from five Better Careers and three Fair Work grantees.
- **Development of a state apprenticeship system from the ground up.** This includes [LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network's](#) efforts to develop regional apprenticeship systems and advocate for systems change at the state level, as well as [Jobs to Move America's](#) work to push manufacturers into participating in the development of apprenticeships via local procurement policies.
- **Building public workforce agencies' ability to innovate.** The initiative contracted with California Workforce Association founder and workforce development expert [Virginia Hamilton](#) to explore how the skills of design thinking could help agencies better understand and serve community needs.
- **Supporting the state workforce board's Prison2Employment initiative.** This includes [ARC's](#) work with CAL Fire and other state agencies to create firefighter employment pathways for inmates with experience serving on fire crews while incarcerated. [The California Legislature passed AB 2147](#) that was signed by Governor Newsom to eliminate this barrier.



INITIATIVE PROGRESS

GRANTEE CAPACITY BUILDING

Better Careers is supporting grantees to strengthen their individual organizational capacity through their flexible general operating grants. Efforts range from designing new staff roles, professional development, and managing leadership transitions to long-term planning, strengthening financial systems, and developing new training programs. For instance:

- **LeadersUp** developed a multi-year organizational action plan that they presented to their board and recently revamped to take into account the impact of the pandemic (e.g., doubling down on digital services).
- **JVS-SF** used funding to increase their core infrastructure by improving their data and evaluation systems and conducting market research to align their models to high-growth sectors.

A more recent example during COVID-19 is determining new organizational structures due to necessary staff layoffs. Core grantees expressed great appreciation for the [Recession Resilience Project](#), which provided an immediate grant for emergency expenses and longer-term resources and technical assistance to strengthen internal programmatic and fiscal operations.

“When COVID hit, I was in a training and realized that all of these kids will need tablets immediately. We joined forces with two other nonprofits and gave out over 2000 HP Chrome tablets.”

— Grantee



Note: Images from Sept 2019 Better Careers Grantee Convening



STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS SUMMARY

Note: Image from Sept 2019 Better Careers Grantee Convening

1. **Integrate employer engagement within a career pathways approach.** Data shows that successful career pathways engage employers in all aspects of their programs and meet the needs of employers, workers, and jobseekers. Better Careers will prioritize supporting grantees' integration of employers into career pathways programs over a previous idea of developing/leading a separate employer champion strategy.
2. **Integrate an industry-focused approach in industries where grantees are seeing success, such as manufacturing, healthcare, construction, and/or information and communications technology.** These industries, even in the midst of COVID-19, lead to good jobs with family-sustaining wages and advancement opportunities. Most of our current career pathway grantees (14 of 23) indicated working in at least one of these sectors. This approach aligns with our interest in an equitable recovery, considering many of our grantees work with jobseekers facing the most barriers. Grantees with employer partners in other industries who are making great impact will *stay the course* in this work.
3. **Center racial and gender equity in our industry-focused work.** Better Careers understands the opportunity at hand with the shift in national consciousness regarding anti-Black racism and racial discrimination at large. This is especially true given the pandemic's disproportionate effect on Black and Latinx Californians. Better Careers will bring a racial and gender equity lens to diversify the industries noted above (as well as others that grantees may surface) and will seek to invest in solutions that are grounded in and emerge from the experiences of grantees.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

4. **Greater focus on quality jobs and connections across career pathways.** Grantees want to prioritize these efforts, including strengthening their current metrics (e.g., beyond wages and retention over longer time periods) to improve outcomes. As part of these efforts and due to grantee interest, we will look into convening a data and measurement pod for collective learning and advancing measurement efforts.
5. **Maintain flexibility and support grantees through COVID-19.** It is still unclear how much and for how long COVID-19 will reshape the job landscape. But we know there will be less demand for interns and access to internships will likely decrease, at least in the short run. Better Careers staff will listen to and partner with grantees to identify adjustments based on organizational capacity and program priorities. This includes surfacing and leaning into innovations that address challenges caused by the pandemic, including those of low-wage workers who may need to “start over” due to layoffs, business closures, and increased competition for jobs.

-
- 1 Five grantees also received flex funds ranging from \$25-\$75K, most frequently for executive transition.
 - 2 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/10/business/economy/california-economy-coronavirus.html>
 - 3 Opportunity youth are young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market.
 - 4 On track means there is a clear, structured pathway to obtain these jobs within a defined time period.
 - 5 Totals from 2018 and 2019. Grantees reported numbers that were made possible by their Irvine-supported grant except Bitwise (269 job placements) and Hope Builders (125 job placements) who reported numbers across all funding sources.
 - 6 All reported averages are weighted to the total number of jobs (weighting the averages helps create balance, so the average wages associated with the larger number of jobs have a higher weight than average wages associated with smaller number of jobs).
 - 7 In 2019. To keep in mind when reviewing retention numbers: 1) typically self-reported by grantee’s clients, 2) three grantees reported receiving low response rates from their client surveys, 3) two grantees reported it was too soon to report retention data, and 4) two grantees have been unable to track or do not track this data.
 - 8 Los Angeles, Marin, Oakland, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Jose, Sacramento, Fresno, Solano, and Riverside.
 - 9 In 2019
 - 10 See Maguire, S., Freely, J., Clymer, C., Conway, M., & Schwartz, D. (2010). Tuning in to local labor markets: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. Retrieved from <http://ppv.issuelab.org/resources/5101/5101.pdf>
Hendra, R., Greenberg, D. H., Hamilton, G., Oppenheim, A., Pennington, A., Schalbert, K., & Tessler, B.L. (2016). Encouraging evidence on a sector-focused advancement strategy: Two- year impacts from the WorkAdvance Demonstration. New York: MDRC. Retrieved from https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/2016_Workadvance_Final_Web.pdf; and evaluations by Abt Associates of Better Careers grantees, SDWP and Year Up’s sector programs, <https://www.abtassociates.com/insights/publications/report/bridging-the-opportunity-divide-for-low-income-youth-implementation> and <https://www.abtassociates.com/insights/publications/report/the-san-diego-county-bridge-to-employment-in-the-healthcare-industry>
 - 11 Source: [State of CA Employment Development Department Employment Projections](#).
 - 12 In 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Better Careers team would like to thank the organizations and individuals that contributed to the insights and knowledge presented in the Better Careers 2018-2020 Deep Dive Assessment. We are particularly grateful for the time and assistance given to us by grantees who were interviewed as part of this effort, as well those who agreed to serve on the initiative's grantee evaluation advisory group. These grantees include: Anti-Recidivism Coalition, Center for Employment Opportunities, Early Care & Education Pathways to Success, Flintridge Center, Foundation for California Community Colleges, Hope Builders, Jobs to Move America, JVS-SF, LeadersUp, Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade, National Skills Coalition, PolicyLink, REDF, Rubicon, San Diego Workforce Partnership, Small Business Majority, Third Sector Capital Partners, and Year Up.

We are also grateful to the following individuals who shared their ideas and advice with us: Secretary for the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, Julie A. Su, Virginia Hamilton, and Terri Feeley. And we extend our thanks to all of our Better Careers grantees for their tireless work to ensure low-income Californians have the power to advance economically.

Finally, we wish to thank our evaluation partner, Social Policy Research Associates, for their partnership in drafting this document.