

Detroit at Work Program Evaluation: Lessons from JumpStart and Skills for Life



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Authors

Michele Abbott, Chrissy Steigelman, Mariama Badjie,
Laura Meyer, Matt Darling

Submitted to

Kevin Naud
Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation
115 Erskine St, 2nd Floor
Detroit, MI 48201

Point of Contact

Michele Abbott; michele.abbott@mefassociates.com

Submitted by

MEF Associates
1330 Braddock Place, Suite 220
Alexandria, VA 22314

Project Director

Michele Abbott, PhD

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Executive Summary

Detroit’s economy is rebounding from the COVID-19 recession and experiencing a business and building boom that is bringing job opportunities and investment to the city. Since exiting bankruptcy in 2014, Detroit’s employment and per capita income have grown steadily. During the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment in Detroit peaked at 39 percent in May 2020. Although it rebounded relatively quickly, employment did not return to pre-pandemic levels until early 2023 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025a). Still, many Detroit residents continue to struggle to make ends meet (Boudette, 2024). Detroit’s poverty rate is over 30 percent, and the typical household’s income was just under \$40,000 in 2023 (U.S. Census, 2024). In 2024, Detroit’s unemployment rate was 9.5 percent, higher than the Michigan state and national rates of 4.0 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025b). Many Detroit residents experience barriers to employment, such as not having a high school degree, lack of reliable access to transportation, or having a disability (Holzer & Rivera, 2019). As employment opportunities grow in the city, residents are seeking the skills and experience needed to fill those jobs. Detroit’s distinctive economic history and labor market conditions require a tailored approach to workforce development strategies.

Federal funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) enabled Detroit at Work to test two new programs aimed at boosting residents' skills, education, and employment outcomes on a large scale: JumpStart and Skills for Life (detailed in Exhibit ES.1 below). Representing substantial new investments, these programs were largely designed from the ground up and implemented rapidly. This approach required intricate coordination between numerous city departments and community-based partners.

Exhibit ES.1. Overview of JumpStart and Skills for Life programs

	JumpStart	Skills for Life
Eligibility Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detroit residents, 18 years or older • Have not been employed or received education or training for at least six months. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detroit residents, 18 years or older • Physically capable of doing program jobs (primarily outdoor labor).
Program Overview	Local community organizations provided participant recruitment and mentorship. Participants received monthly cash stipends while engaging in at least one of four program tracks: Skills Refresh, High School Diploma/GED, Job Training, or Employment. They also received career advising and support from career coaches, access to education and training partners, and referrals to supportive services for up to 18 months.	Participants received compensation to work for the City of Detroit three days per week and attend educational activities or occupational training two days per week. Participants earned an hourly wage (\$15.00-\$15.30, with potential small increases) for all 40 hours and received career coaching and supportive services. City jobs included working for Grounds Maintenance or Blight Remediation teams.
Number of Enrollees	1,842	835
Dates of Operation	February 2023 – June 2025	August 2021 ^a – April 2025

a. Note: A Skills for Life pilot started in August 2021; the main program launched in January 2022.

This program evaluation, utilizing a mixed-methods approach, drew on retrospective program data from Detroit at Work, staff and partner interviews, and participant focus groups. It aimed to describe and assess program implementation challenges and successes, as well as participant experiences and outcomes. The evaluation identified lessons learned and developed recommendations that can inform future strategies for Detroit at Work’s workforce development programming.

JumpStart Results

The JumpStart program was designed as a multifaceted approach to supporting Detroit residents experiencing long-term unemployment. It weaved together recruitment and mentorship provided by community-based “in-Detroit organizations” (IDOs), monthly stipends and supportive services for participants, and individually tailored referrals to education, occupational training, and job search services. Exhibit ES.2 summarizes JumpStart participants’ quantitative results related to program engagement across different components, rates of track completion, and participant outcomes. Exhibit ES.3 summarizes overall implementation findings, including strengths, challenges, and lessons learned.

Exhibit ES.2. JumpStart By the Numbers

	Engagement	Completion	Outcomes
	<p>Enrollment & Reach: 1,842 participants enrolled across four tracks: 87 Skills Refresh, 487 High School Diploma/GED, 992 Job Training, and 276 Employment. 79% of Jumpstart participants (n=1,454) enrolled in more than one track during their tenure.</p>	<p>Career Readiness was required of all enrollees; however, 76% started and 60% of starters completed it (n=842). Rates were lower than expected due to changes in the enrollment process.</p>	<p>On average, participants received monthly stipends for 12 months. However, stipend payments dropped substantially after a new compliance policy was adopted in March 2024. Additionally, 1,401 participants received in-kind supportive services, including laptops and transportation aids.</p>
	<p>Education tracks: 580 participants enrolled in an education course. As of June 2025, 24 (4%) successfully completed a course and 30 (5%) were still enrolled. Completion data was missing for 192 (33%) participants from one partner. 270 (47%) transferred to another track and 64 (11%) were incomplete.</p>	<p>Job Training track: 840 participants enrolled in an occupational training course. 62% (n=519) had completed their training by May 2025. Construction, healthcare, and IT/Cybersecurity courses were most popular.</p>	<p>Employment track: 1,703 participants were ever enrolled in the employment track and 75% (n=1,374) of participants across all tracks received any career advising service. Individual advising, job search assistance, and financial coaching were most common.</p>
	<p>Milestones: Completion varied by track. As of April 2025, 24 (5%) education enrollees completed GEDs; 393 (43%) training enrollees completed programs; and 769 (64%) employment enrollees completed 30 days on the job.</p>	<p>Education: Among participants in education courses with pre- and post-tests (n=172 reading and n=195 math), modest average gains in reading (+0.5 grade levels) and math (+0.3 grade levels) were observed.</p>	<p>Employment: 1,099 JumpStart participants (60%) reported post-program employment; full information was available for 821 of those reports (45%). Median hourly wage was \$17.00 (average: \$17.40).</p>

Exhibit ES.3. JumpStart Implementation Findings

Strengths & Successes	Challenges & Lessons Learned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptability: Detroit at Work demonstrated notable flexibility, reducing enrollment wait times, adjusting compliance policies, and shifting roles and responsibilities to manage staff capacity better. Valued Components: Participants and staff highly praised Career Readiness and Digital Literacy courses for building essential skills. Barrier Removal funds were valued for addressing critical needs. Overall, participants expressed satisfaction and appreciation of the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning & Partnerships: A compressed planning period strained initial implementation and partner coordination. Better role clarity for coaches and mentors was needed. IDO Payment Model: The milestone-based payment structure proved insufficient to support the intensive mentorship needed, hindering IDO capacity and stability. Staff Capacity: High caseloads, particularly after a period of mass participant enrollment events, hindered staff. Track Progression & Training Quality: Education tracks had low completion rates and long durations. Concerns were raised about some training programs' quality, relevance, and job placement support.

Skills for Life Results

Skills for Life was a career development program that hired and compensated Detroiters to work on City projects three days a week and attend education activities or occupational training two days a week. After completing occupational training, participants returned to work their program job full time while they searched for employment outside of the program. Throughout the program, participants had access to career advising and other supportive services to reduce barriers to program activities. Exhibit ES.4 summarizes Skills for Life participants’ quantitative results related to program engagement across different components, rates of track completion, and participant outcomes. Exhibit ES.5 summarizes overall implementation findings, including strengths, challenges, and lessons learned.

Exhibit ES.4. Skills for Life by the Numbers

Engagement	Enrollment & Reach: 835 participants enrolled in Skills for Life. Of these, 728 (87%) enrolled in either educational or occupational training activities and are called “engaged participants.”	Career Readiness was required of all enrollees. 751 enrollees (90%) attended any career readiness training. Of these, 409 (73%) completed career readiness after the course transitioned to one week in October 2022.	Career coaches provided 714 participants (98%) with an average of 12 career advising sessions per person and referrals to supportive services . 632 (87% of participants) received gas cards, the most common support provided.
Completion	Participants were employed three days per week. 275 engaged participants (43%) worked as Environmental Techs and received \$15-16/hour. 371 engaged participants (57%) worked as Blight Remediation Techs and received \$15.30-16.30/hour.	Participants could attend educational activities two days per week. 418 engaged participants (57%) enrolled in education activities. Of these, 209 (50%) completed them, though completion rates varied by activity: 77% skills refresh, 28% GED, 20% tutoring, and 93% ESL.	Participants completed training activities two days per week (after education, if necessary). 486 engaged participants (67%) enrolled in training. Trainings for heavy equipment, electrical, and CDL licenses were most popular. Of those enrolled, 371 (76%) successfully completed training.
Outcomes	Education: Of the participants who took pre- and post-tests (n=130 reading and n=248 math), there were average gains in both reading (+0.9 grade levels) and math (+1.4 grade levels).	Employment: 349 engaged participants (48%) secured post-program employment. This varied by training (e.g., 81% for CDL-B vs. 27% for Carpentry). 63% of employed participants earned ≥\$17/hour.	Patterns in successful program completion: 65% successfully completed the program. Participants without a HS diploma had lower completion rates (37%) compared to those with some college (81%) or HS grads (73%).

Exhibit ES.5. Skills for Life Implementation Findings

Strengths & Successes	Challenges & Lessons Learned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training Completion: Participants achieved high rates of successful completion across most occupational trainings offered. Education Gains: Participants in education activities showed substantial average improvements in CASAS scores. Hybrid Training & Employment Model: Both staff and participants praised the program model as it provided participants with real work experience, soft skill development, and income stability, all while pursuing education or training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program Launch & Scale-up: Rushed program launch led to early organizational challenges of partner communication, causing inefficiencies and participant frustration. Participant Needs: Broad eligibility led to challenges serving individuals facing significant barriers to employment (e.g., learning disabilities). Services could be better tailored. Training & Job Placement: While training completion rates were high, participants raised concerns about accessibility (long waits for CDL), relevance (some certificates insufficient for employment), and lack of adequate job search support from training providers. Many participants aimed to keep City jobs rather than searching for external job placements.

Data limitations

The operational program data included in this evaluation did not cover the whole implementation period. Participation data was collected from January 1, 2022 (program launch) through June 10, 2025. Some JumpStart participation data, such as completion of educational courses and receipt of barrier removal services, were collected in external data systems and were not included in this evaluation. In general, program staff noted that post-program hire records are not systematically collected (participants voluntarily reported this data) and may underestimate actual employment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The JumpStart and Skills for Life programs capitalized on the substantial ARPA funding to invest in providing robust and flexible employment supports for Detroit residents. Overall, Detroit at Work did an admirable job of designing and launching two complex and large-scale workforce development programs on a very rapid timeline. However, this rapid launch led to many implementation challenges. The findings of this evaluation provide valuable insights for Detroit at Work's future strategic planning processes, particularly regarding program design, participant targeting, and operational structures.

- **The career readiness course was a success.** Although there were minor differences in the career readiness curricula across JumpStart and Skills for Life, both provider and participant feedback was unanimous in highlighting the utility and value of this program component.
- **Occupational training programs should be vetted by employers and aligned with employer needs.** Ongoing efforts to ensure that training programs meet employer demand and provide skills sufficient for employment in related fields should be continued and strengthened.
- **Skills for Life's hybrid employment and training model, which provides participants with full-time compensation, has potential.** This model appears promising and was highly valued by participants. However, future iterations will require careful integration of work and training activities and the development of strong partnerships between program staff and potential employers.
- **JumpStart's financial assistance strategy could be revised to better align with program goals.** Different forms of financial assistance can be used to support financial stability and stress reduction (monthly stipends), remove barriers that block participants from engaging in the program or gaining employment (in-kind supports and barrier removal payments), or incentivize program engagement and progress (milestone payments or transitional benefits). The structure of financial assistance should be adapted based on the program's goal.
- **The community-based mentorship model faced many implementation challenges, but it worked well for the IDOs that figured it out.** The milestone-based funding structure for IDOs was inadequate remuneration for the amount of labor required. In addition, a centralized management system (i.e., having IDOs contract directly with Detroit at Work rather than the City) would likely have supported better coordination and program operation. However, IDOs that figured out the system were very successful and praised by participants.

Both JumpStart and Skills for Life demonstrated successes and provided critical lessons that can inform future investments and programming. Future programs should prioritize clear goals and strong partner alignment, build sustainable operational structures and data-sharing systems, ensure that job training programs are vetted by employers and aligned with their needs, and further tailor participant pathways to different levels of need and employment readiness.

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1. Introduction

Federal funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided the City of Detroit with a unique opportunity to test out new workforce development programs on a large scale. With this funding, Detroit at Work implemented six programs: Skills for Life, Learn to Earn, JumpStart, Community Health Corps, Justice-Involved Programs, and Grow Detroit’s Youth Talent (GDYT).

Two of these programs, JumpStart and Skills for Life, were designed to increase Detroiters’ skills and educational attainment and improve their employment outcomes. JumpStart provided mentorship and monthly cash stipends to participants who had been out of work for at least six months as they pursued education, job training, and job placement support. Participants in Skills for Life earned a full-time salary while splitting their time between occupational training or educational programming and working for the City of Detroit. A brief overview of the two programs is provided in Exhibit 1.1 below.

Exhibit 1.1. Overview of JumpStart and Skills for Life programs

	JumpStart	Skills for Life
Eligibility Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detroit residents • 18 years or older • Eligible to work in the U.S. • Have not been employed or received education or training for at least six months. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detroit residents • 18 years or older • Eligible to work in the U.S. • Physically capable of doing program jobs, which were primarily physical labor outdoors.
Program Overview	Participants are referred and mentored by local community organizations. Participants are paid a monthly stipend for participating in one or more program tracks, including education, job training, or employment activities.	Participants receive compensation to work for the City of Detroit three days per week and attend training or education activities two days per week.
Number of Enrollees	1,842	835
Dates of Operation	February 2023 – June 2025	August 2021 ^a – April 2025

a. Note: A Skills for Life pilot started in August 2021; the main program launched in January 2022.

These programs represent substantial new investments, and they were largely designed from the ground up and implemented rapidly. This approach required intricate coordination between numerous city departments and community-based partners from the outset.

Detroit Employment and Wages

Detroit’s economy has rebounded from the COVID-19 recession and is experiencing a business and building boom that has been steadily growing since the city exited bankruptcy in 2014. As investment and new businesses move into Detroit, employment opportunities have grown. Since 2012, the unemployment rate has fallen dramatically, from about 20 percent to 9.5 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025b). Per capita incomes have increased by 71 percent since 2012, and employment increased by 18 percent to reach 242,000 Detroiters employed in 2023 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024a and 2024b). Detroit’s population grew for the first time in decades in 2022, and population growth in the city from 2022 to 2024 exceeded the rate in Michigan overall (University of Michigan Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics).

Still, many Detroit residents continue to struggle to make ends meet (Boudette, 2024). In 2023, 43 percent of Detroit residents said they had an unmanageable amount of household debt, and 70 percent paid more than 30 percent of their income for housing (Wileden, 2023). Incomes remain low in Detroit: Detroit's poverty rate is over 30 percent, and the typical household's income was just under \$40,000 in 2023 (U.S. Census, 2024).¹ In contrast, the national poverty rate in 2023 was 11.1 percent, and the typical household income was nearly \$80,000 (U.S. Census, 2025).² The average hourly wage in the Detroit metro area (which includes higher-income suburbs) is about \$31 per hour. However, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's measure of the living wage in the Detroit metro area—the hourly wage a full-time worker would have to cover their family's basic expenses—is nearly \$48 per hour for one adult with two children (Glasmeier, 2024). Michigan's minimum wage increased from \$10.10 per hour to \$10.33 per hour in 2024; in early 2025, it will increase to over \$12 per hour (Michigan Dept. of Labor and Economic Opportunity, n.d.; Michigan Dept. of Labor and Economic Opportunity, 2024).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment in Detroit peaked at 39 percent in May 2020, then fell dramatically (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025b). Although it rebounded relatively quickly, employment did not return to pre-pandemic levels until early 2023 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025a). In 2024, Detroit's unemployment rate was 9.5 percent, roughly around pre-COVID levels according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), higher than the Michigan state and national rates of 4.0 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025b).³ However, the standard unemployment measure only includes those actively searching for work. Many Detroit residents are not actively looking for work and, therefore, would not be included in the unemployment rate. The Detroit labor force participation rate, which measures workers and those looking for work among the population aged between 18 and 64, was 67 percent in 2022. This was lower than comparable cities such as Cleveland (71 percent) and Pittsburgh (78 percent) (Holzer & Rivera, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023b).⁴

Many Detroit residents experience barriers to employment, which may contribute to low levels of labor force participation (Holzer & Rivera, 2019). For example, 17 percent of Detroiters lacked a high school degree as of 2022, far higher than in Michigan overall, where 9 percent lack a high school degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023a). More than half of people without a high school degree were out of the workforce, as were nearly 40 percent of high school graduates as of 2017 (Holzer & Rivera, 2019). Prior to the pandemic, there were relatively few new job openings for people with lower levels of education compared to those with higher levels of education, like a bachelor's degree (Wu et al., 2020).

Other barriers associated with unemployment were not having a car and having a disability (Holzer & Rivera, 2019). In Detroit, car transportation is often the most reliable way to travel, yet it is also the most expensive mode of transportation, and one-third of Detroiters do not own or share a car (Gerber et al., 2017). Car ownership is associated with higher income and education levels, and a lack of transportation is associated with a higher chance of missing an appointment or work (Gerber et al., 2017). Another barrier to work, disability, is common among those who are out of the workforce: 80 percent of those with a disability are out of the workforce, and 43 percent of those out of the workforce have a disability (Holzer & Rivera, 2019). The quick post-pandemic recovery shows that Detroiters are ready and eager to find skilled, stable jobs. However, barriers to work, such as low education levels and

¹ Median household income of \$39,575 in 2023 dollars.

² Median household income of \$78,538 in 2023 dollars.

³ The monthly unemployment rate ranged from 7.2% to 10.4% in 2019; the rate in 2024 ranged from 7.4% to 10.7% as of November 2024.

⁴ The BLS measure includes everyone aged 16 and older who is actively searching for work, while the measure of labor force participation includes every person who is aged 18-64.

transportation challenges, are still common. In many cases, Detroiters seeking better employment need costly education or upskilling, which is where JumpStart and Skills for Life come in.

Earlier Research on Workforce Development Programs

Workforce development programs—sometimes called employment and training programs or active labor market policies—are designed to help individuals find jobs and increase wages and skills. Although numerous variations exist across federal, state, and local levels, these programs can often be categorized by their primary activities. Given the wide variety of approaches, this section briefly reviews prior research on workforce development programs to help contextualize the evaluation of Skills for Life and JumpStart within the broader knowledge base. Common categories of employment and training include:⁵

- **Skill Development:** Enhancing participant productivity through (1) classroom training, including basic skills like GED attainment or technical skills for specific industries, or (2) on-the-job training, which can involve subsidized short-term private sector employment.
- **Employability Development:** Preparing individuals for the workforce through means other than direct skill training, such as job search assistance (e.g., resume help, career counseling) and building soft skills. This also includes public labor exchanges (e.g., job fairs) that connect employers and job seekers.
- **Work Experience:** Providing temporary, often part-time, employment opportunities, typically in the public or non-profit sectors, to introduce individuals to the workforce without the expectation of permanent placement.
- **Public Sector Employment:** Directly creating jobs, often targeting experienced adults in areas or times of high unemployment, though these roles may differ from typical private-sector jobs.

Effectiveness and Outcomes of Workforce Development Programs Similar to JumpStart and Skills for Life

Evaluating the success of programs like JumpStart and Skills for Life can be informed by understanding the typical outcomes observed in broader workforce development research. However, it is crucial to note that effectiveness varies substantially by program type, specific design elements, and local context. JumpStart and Skills for Life reflect strategies used by earlier workforce development programs while also incorporating their own unique features.

Skill Development and Training Programs. Both JumpStart and Skills for Life contain training components ranging from basic education to occupational training. A recent meta-analysis of studies on workforce development programs from the U.S. and other countries concluded that training programs generally have minimal immediate employment effects as participants often reduce job search during training. However, it can yield modest medium-term gains: about a six percent employment rate increase two to three years post-program (Card et al., 2018). However, studies focused on populations with barriers to school or work show mixed results; some large-scale initiatives such *Health Profession Opportunity Grants* and *Ready to Work* increased credential attainment but failed to impact earnings

⁵ Adapted from Butler, T. W., & Hobbie, R. (1976). *Employment and training programs*. Congress of the United States, Congressional Budget Office; LaLonde, R. J. (2003). *Employment and training programs*. In *Means-tested transfer programs in the United States* (pp. 517-586). University of Chicago Press.

within the study timeframes (3-6 years and 12-18 months, respectively) (Klerman et al., 2022; Klerman et al., 2023). Within the public workforce system, offering training did not significantly boost earnings over 30 months compared to less intensive services such as job search assistance, case management, and career counseling, according to the Department of Labor’s “WIA Gold Standard” study (Fortson et al., 2017). A notable exception is “sectoral” training programs (e.g., *Year Up*, *Project Quest*, and *Work Advancement and Support Center*), where job seekers are trained for specific high-demand industries. These programs have demonstrated statistically significant and meaningful lasting gains in annual earnings and employment rates (Fein & Dastrup, 2022; Roder & Elliott, 2024; Miller et al., 2012). However, sectoral training programs often screen heavily and have not demonstrated success with individuals facing barriers to work (Fishman et al., 2020).

Employability Development. JumpStart and Skills for Life were intended to help participants find permanent employment. The meta-analysis discussed earlier found that job search assistance typically provides immediate but small employment increases (around two percentage points in some studies) (Card et al., 2018). Intensive job search services from the WIA Gold Standard Study led to higher earnings over 30 months compared to core services alone (Fortson et al., 2017). In welfare-to-work contexts, programs with job search components increased employment and earnings; and in the Unemployment Insurance system, job search assistance consistently reduces the duration of benefit receipt (Klerman et al., 2012). Ultimately, job search assistance offers short-term help but lacks the longer-term potential often associated with skill development.

Work Experience: Skills for Life utilized a subsidized employment model. Research shows these programs almost always increase employment during the subsidy period. However, long-term impacts are less consistent. A review of 13 programs found only four of the 13 improved earnings for more than two years, with no clear features distinguishing the more successful programs from the less successful ones (Cummings & Bloom, 2020).

Performance-Based Payments: JumpStart's milestone payments to community-based organizations in Detroit align with efforts to incentivize provider performance. Some evidence suggests performance incentives correlate with better youth program outcomes, although optimal incentive design is unclear (Kluve, et al., 2016).⁶ A key concern is "cream-skimming" (providers selecting clients most likely to improve performance over others). However, some studies suggest this risk may be overstated or does not necessarily exclude high-need individuals (Heckman et al., 1997).

Other Program Features: There is mixed or limited evidence on program components such as stipend payments, community partnerships for referrals and mentorship (as in JumpStart), and wraparound support services. While programs like *Year Up* include mentorship and show positive earnings impacts initially, isolating the effect of mentorship is difficult, and long-term employment advantages may fade (Arnold Ventures, 2021). Wraparound services are often considered integral to the success of sectoral programs, but their specific impact has not yet been rigorously isolated (Katz et al., 2020).

Overall, Detroit’s distinctive economic history and labor market conditions require a tailored approach to program implementation and evaluation. While past studies may provide general expectations for

⁶ These findings held for high income countries in particular.

program success, the ultimate effectiveness of Skills for Life and JumpStart will depend on their ability to address Detroit’s unique challenges and capitalize on local opportunities.⁷

Evaluation Methods

The Detroit Employment Services Corporation (DESC), Detroit at Work’s administrative body, engaged MEF Associates to evaluate the implementation of JumpStart and Skills for Life programs. This evaluation had three primary aims:

- Describe implementation partners, activities, and services provided by the two programs.
- Assess participant engagement, service utilization, and outcomes for the two programs.
- Identify lessons learned and develop recommendations.

MEF conducted a mixed-methods implementation evaluation, drawing on Detroit at Work’s operational program data, in-person staff and partner interviews, and participant focus groups. Exhibit 1.2 lists the research questions organized under each evaluation aim.

Exhibit 1.2. Implementation Evaluation Research Questions by Aim

Aim	Research Questions
<p>1. Describe implementation partners, activities, and services provided by the JumpStart and Skills for Life programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What services were implemented as part of the JumpStart and Skills for Life programs, and how were they implemented? • What are the roles and responsibilities of all organizations and staff involved in implementing the JumpStart and Skills for Life programs? • What innovations or adaptations were made to program design and implementation over time or by community?
<p>2. Assess participant engagement, service utilization, and outcomes for the JumpStart and Skills for Life programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the characteristics of participants who enrolled in the JumpStart and Skills for Life programs? • To what extent does JumpStart achieve (1) recruitment and enrollment, (2) retention in and completion of program tracks, and (3) employment outcomes for long-term unemployed participants? • To what extent does Skills for Life achieve (1) retention in and completion of the program, (2) attainment of GED or other credentials, and (3) post-program employment outcomes? • What are participants' experiences with, and responses to, JumpStart and Skills for Life services and program staff? What are the key facilitators or barriers to program engagement?
<p>3. Identify lessons learned and develop recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key facilitators and barriers to implementing the JumpStart and Skills for Life programs effectively? • To what extent does DESC’s program data collection and management system provide information supporting program implementation analysis and outcome evaluation? How could this be improved? • What recommendations or lessons learned were identified by program staff and implementing partners?

⁷ It is also important to note that most of the studies discussed above use impact evaluation methodologies, such as randomized controlled trials, that measure the difference a program makes to its participants’ employment-related outcomes, relative to a counterfactual or control group. The current evaluation of JumpStart and Skills for Life is a descriptive study that does not measure impacts in that way and instead focuses on outcomes alone.

Data Sources

For this evaluation, four data sources informed our analysis: (1) early interviews with key informants, (2) Detroit at Work program data, (3) provider interviews, and (4) participant focus groups. Appendix A provides additional information on the methods used throughout this report.

Key Informant Interviews

The study team also interviewed key informants in the summer of 2024 via videoconference, conducting six interviews with nine individuals. The interviewees included program staff from both programs, including leadership, managers, and those responsible for managing the Detroit at Work training and the IT/program data platform. The goal of these early interviews was to understand the complexities of the two programs and to inform evaluation design and data collection strategies.

Detroit at Work Program Data

Detroit at Work provided de-identified program data from Launchpad, the Salesforce database that captures operational data for all workforce development programs.

- Most of the JumpStart and Skills for Life program data covers the period from program launch on January 1, 2022, through June 10, 2025.
- Data on JumpStart stipend payments to participants covers the period from March 31, 2023, through May 2, 2025.

Detroit at Work also provided data on JumpStart participants' employment in cases where the employment had not yet been verified. In these cases, the employment form submitted by participants was missing information or the employment could not be verified because the business was not registered or the participant was self-employment. We report these employment records separately from verified employment records.

The study team used Stata to clean and merge datasets and produce descriptive summaries of participant characteristics, service delivery by program component, participant completion by program component, and participant outcomes related to education and employment.

Qualitative Data Collection

In addition, the study team conducted interviews with DESC program staff, staff at partner organizations, and focus groups with program participants. Interviews and focus groups took place in person in January 2025.

Provider Interviews. For JumpStart, we interviewed three Detroit at Work program administrators, three career coaches, and three IDO staff (two who participated for the full program and one who ended participation early). For Skills for Life, we interviewed two Detroit at Work program administrators, one career coach, one training provider, one education provider, and two City of Detroit supervisors.

Participant Focus Groups. For JumpStart, we held three focus groups, two with participants who completed the program and one with participants who dropped out. For Skills for Life, we conducted three focus groups: two with participants who completed the program, one each with participants who

worked on the Grounds Maintenance and Blight Remediation teams, and one with participants who dropped out.

All interview and focus group recordings were professionally transcribed. We developed a thematic coding scheme aligned with research questions and iteratively revised the codebook based on emerging themes. Qualitative coding was conducted using Dedoose.

Study Limitations and Considerations

Data quality and missing data presented several limitations for the analysis. Appendix B provides recommendations on improving data quality.

- **Proxy measure for education and training credential attainment.** One key outcome of interest for this evaluation is the attainment of education credentials (e.g., high school diploma or GED) and completion of training programs (e.g., a certificate or license). However, the data for credential receipt is based on voluntary document submission by external partners and is therefore not an accurate record of actual completion rates. In addition, what records are submitted are uploaded to the Launchpad system as PDF files, which is challenging to retrieve and, in collaboration with Detroit at Work, we decided not to include these files in the data analysis. Instead of credential attainment, we use course completion status, which providers were required to update to receive payment for services.
- **Incomplete hire records.** Post-program employment data were not systematically collected. Participants could voluntarily report their employment status, which was recorded in the hire records. However, many participants did not report their employment status. The hire records dataset only included data about employment, not unemployment, so we could not make assumptions about whether missing hire records were unemployed vs. non-responsive.
- **Missing JumpStart program data.** The JumpStart program data had a couple of additional limitations, including high rates of missing participant demographic information, service delivery data for additional supportive services, and completion status for education activities.
 - JumpStart changed the enrollment process around August 2023, reducing the data collected on program intake forms. Revisions to the Basic Intake Form, in particular, reduced the amount of demographic information collected. Because of this, this evaluation focuses on the demographic information collected through the Basic Intake form (e.g., race, gender, education). Other participant characteristics are reported in the appendices.
 - In addition, some JumpStart participation data are stored in systems outside of Launchpad and, therefore, were not included in this evaluation. These data include completion status for education activities and receipt of additional financial supports through the Barrier Removal and Cliff Benefit programs.

2. JumpStart Evaluation

This chapter uses a mixed methods approach to report findings of JumpStart implementation, including participant engagement and completion, successes, challenges, and adaptations. Evaluation findings incorporate the analysis of JumpStart program data as well as experiences of staff, partners, and participants. The chapter is organized into the following subsections:

- 2.1. The **Program Background** provides an overview of the JumpStart program design, goals, partnerships, and timeline.
- 2.2. **Program Launch and Scale-up** discusses the program planning period and launch efforts. It also covers the recruitment and enrollment process, challenges, and adaptations.
- 2.3. **Participant Characteristics** provides a short overview of JumpStart participants. Appendix C provides further participant details.
- 2.4. The **Implementation of Program Activities** section covers (1) career readiness training; (2) participant engagement and completion of the four JumpStart program tracks, including Skills Refresh, High School Diploma/GED, Job Training, and Employment; (3) monthly cash stipends; and (4) additional support services.
- 2.5. **Participant Outcomes** reports participant education and employment outcomes.
- 2.6. Finally, the **Discussion** summarizes the evaluation results, highlighting key findings and recommendations.

2.1. Program Background

The JumpStart program was designed as a multi-faceted approach to supporting Detroit residents experiencing long-term unemployment, which was defined as having at least six months of no engagement in any employment or job training activities. JumpStart weaved together community-based recruitment and mentorship provided by In-Detroit Organizations (IDOs), monthly stipends and supportive services for participants, and individually tailored referrals to education, occupational training, and job search services. Participants could remain in the program for up to 18 months. JumpStart was administered by Detroit at Work, in partnership with IDOs, Career Center coaches, and existing training providers in the Detroit at Work network.

Program Design

JumpStart Program Tracks. There were four program tracks available to JumpStart participants: (1) Skills Refresh, (2) High School Diploma or GED, (3) Job Training, or (4) New Employment, described in Exhibit 2.1 below. At sign-up, IDOs referred applicants to one of the four tracks. At enrollment, participants worked with a career coach assigned to them from Detroit at Work Career Centers, who supported the completion of required paperwork, confirmed the most appropriate program track for enrollment, and ensured they met requirements for that chosen track.

If participants completed a track, they could advance to the next one, progressing consecutively from the Skills Refresh or GED to New Employment tracks. The program was designed so that participants typically did not move backwards through the tracks (i.e., if the participant started JumpStart in the New Employment track, that was the only one they could engage in).

Exhibit 2.1. Description of JumpStart Program Tracks

JumpStart Tracks

1. Skills Refresh	Individuals with low reading and math skills aim to improve by two grade levels. Classes are provided through five Detroit at Work educational partners. CASAS tests are administered regularly to assess progress.
2. High School Diploma/GED	Individuals without a GED or high school diploma attend GED classes at Detroit at Work's educational partners with the goal of achieving their GED.
3. Job Training	Individuals attend occupational training to achieve an industry-recognized credential. Training is provided through Detroit at Work training partners.
4. New Employment	Individuals work with a Career Center employment specialist to identify employment opportunities, apply to jobs, and maintain employment once they obtain a job.

Monthly Stipends. JumpStart participants who complied with program requirements received monthly stipends, which could total up to \$7,200 throughout the 18-month program. Monthly stipends decreased throughout an individual's participation in the program and varied based on whether participants were engaged in the program full-time or part-time. Exhibit 2.2 shows the monthly stipend amounts. Program compliance requirements varied by track, but all participants were expected to maintain contact with their IDO mentor and career coach, progress towards their track goal, and meet weekly hour requirements (35+ hours weekly for full-time participants and 20-34 hours per week for part-time participants).

Exhibit 2.2. Monthly Stipend Amounts

	Full time	Part time
Months 1-6:	\$600	\$300
Months 7-12:	\$400	\$200
Months 13-18:	\$200	\$100

Mentorship. IDOs provided ongoing mentorship to JumpStart participants by maintaining regular contact, providing encouragement and motivation, and supporting participants' success through problem-solving and referrals to external services as needed (e.g., resource navigation). Staff members at the IDOs served as mentors for JumpStart participants. Mentors at most IDOs had other organizational responsibilities outside the JumpStart caseload. Mentors were also responsible for verifying participant program compliance by collecting logs of participants' program engagement hours (and assisting them in filling them out, if needed) and submitting the logs to Detroit at Work for payment of the participant stipends.

Additional Supports. JumpStart's focus on residents with long-term unemployment meant that participants faced substantial barriers and unmet needs that could undermine their successful engagement with traditional job training and career services. Therefore, the program incorporated a range of additional supports to help meet these needs. For Detroit at Work, this represented a departure from the way they historically provided services to job seekers.

Program Goals

The JumpStart program aimed to achieve three participant-level goals (Exhibit 2.3, left). For this evaluation, we attempted to assess JumpStart’s progress towards these goals using metrics available in the Detroit at Work program data (Exhibit 2.3, right):

Exhibit 2.3. JumpStart Program goals and Evaluation Outcomes

JumpStart Program Goals	Evaluation Outcomes Measured
Attainment of a credential or degree, such as an industry-recognized certificate or a GED.	Attainment of a training credential. Due to data limitations, we use training course completion as a proxy metric. This was a participant milestone tied to IDO payments and thus was reliably complete.
Increase in reading and math levels, as measured through CASAS ⁸ test scores throughout the program.	Change in reading and math scores. We calculated the change in CASAS test results from the first to the most recent test for participants who completed at least two tests.
Increase employment for previously unemployed Detroit residents, ideally in jobs that pay at least \$15 per hour.	Employment after JumpStart enrollment. We summarized employment outcomes based on any hire record for a job that started after JumpStart enrollment. Participant Milestone Achievement. This was not an explicitly stated JumpStart goal. However, the program was designed so that milestone achievement is the most complete outcome metric of participant progression through program tracks.

Program Partnerships

The City of Detroit contracted with Detroit at Work to provide overall program administration as well as education, training, and employment support services. The City also contracted 18 community-based organizations referred to as IDOs (In-Detroit Organizations) to recruit and provide mentorship to participants. Detroit at Work was not involved in selecting the IDO contracts; however, after all contracts were awarded, Detroit at Work worked closely with the City of Detroit to finalize the program's design, plan for implementation, and launch the JumpStart Program.

- **In-Detroit Organizations (IDOs):** Mentors at 18 IDOs⁹ recruited and referred JumpStart program participants and provided ongoing mentorship. IDOs received performance-based incentives, called milestone payments, when individuals they referred met key benchmarks in program participation and outcomes. Six IDOs dropped out of the program over its lifespan.
- **Detroit at Work Career Centers:** Career Coaches at nine Career Centers supported participants during enrollment by completing required paperwork, reviewing referrals, finalizing the appropriate program track, and ensuring participants met all requirements for that chosen track. Career coaches also provided case management and supportive services to JumpStart participants enrolled in the Job Training and New Employment tracks.

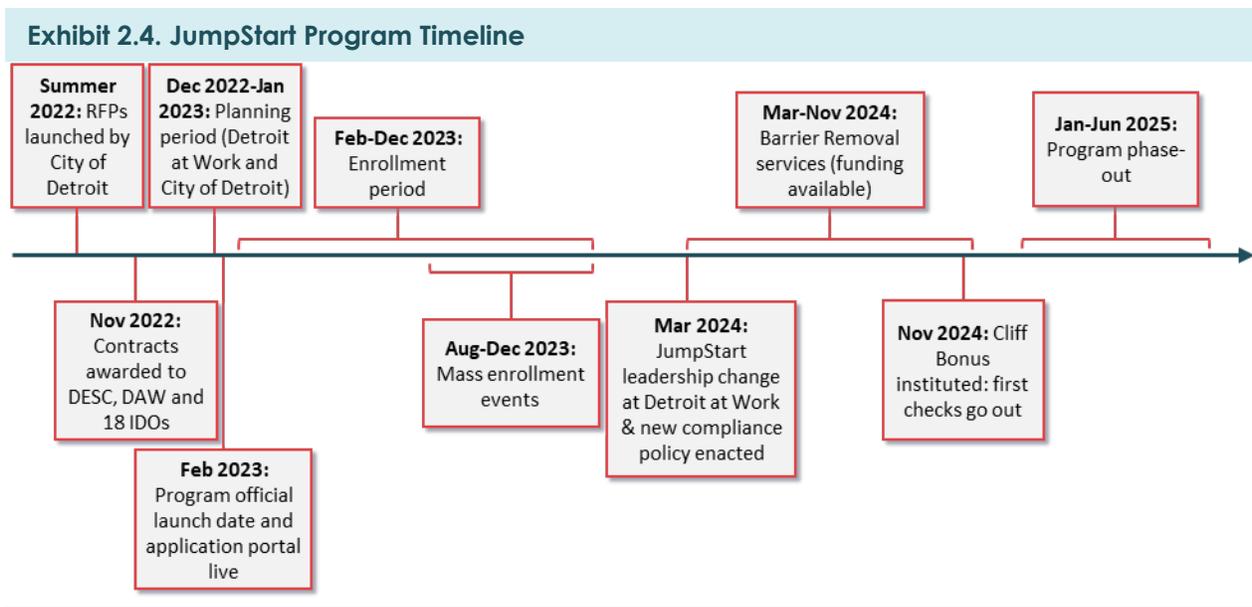
⁸ Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) provides exams to assess adult learners’ academic skills in core subjects. All JumpStart participants were required to take CASAS exams in reading and math to establish their baseline and determine whether they met the eligibility criteria for their desired trainings.

⁹ Active IDOs included: Focus Hope; Fit4Life Health and Fitness; The Open Door COGIC; TMI Detroit Inc.; Emerging Industries Training Institute; The Black Bottom Group dba Blast Detroit; Urge Imprint - Detroit Friends and Family; Church of the Messiah Housing; Teach Empower Achieve (T.E.A); Center for Employment Opportunities; Spectrum Human Services Inc.; and The People’s Action. IDOs that did not remain in the JumpStart program included: International Institute of Metro Detroit; St. Vincent & Sarah Fisher Center; Family Assistance for Renaissance Men; Detroit Hispanic Development Corp; Alkebu-Lan Village; and Southwest Detroit Business Association.

- **Detroit at Work Educational Providers:** JumpStart participants in the Skills Refresh and High School Diploma / GED tracks were eligible to enroll in classes offered by five educational partners: St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center, Wayne County Community College, Payne-Pulliam School, Detroit Public Schools Community District, and Siena Literacy Center Inc.
- **Detroit at Work Training Providers:** JumpStart participants were eligible to enroll in programs offered by existing Detroit at Work training providers in mixed classes with other Detroit at Work customers.¹⁰ Training courses varied in length, but all were expected to lead to an industry-recognized credential. Upon completion of the instructional course, training providers were also expected to help students schedule any relevant certification exams and support job placement in the industry.

Program Timeline

The City of Detroit identified implementing partners and awarded contracts in the fall of 2022. After a short planning period, JumpStart launched at the beginning of February 2023. Participant enrollment continued through the end of 2023. Participants could remain engaged in the program for up to 18 months. Program phase-out continued through June 2025. Exhibit 2.4 illustrates the program timeline and highlights key events.



2.2. Program Launch and Scale-Up

This section describes the early stages of the JumpStart program, including the planning period, official program launch, participant recruitment and enrollment, and scale-up of service delivery. Findings are based on document review and interviews with Detroit at Work staff members and implementing partners.

¹⁰ The full list of trainings provided by Detroit at Work is available at <https://detroitatwork.com/training>.

Program Planning and Launch

After the JumpStart contracts were awarded, Detroit at Work collaborated closely with the City of Detroit to create a program implementation plan. This involved finalizing the details of each program track and the milestone payment structure for IDOs, developing training materials for partner organizations, and establishing the data and financial infrastructure necessary for program implementation. Reflecting on this planning period, both Detroit at Work and IDO staff noted it was challenging to develop processes and prepare capacity for an exciting and ambitious program within the limited timeframe.

In particular, program administrators reported that the seven-day training and orientation for IDO staff members tried to fit too much information into too few days. The training included program-specific topics such as an overview of the JumpStart program, administrative and billing procedures, and implementation plans for the recruitment and enrollment processes for JumpStart applicants. It also included training on broader topics such as overviews of Detroit at Work occupational training and career services, community resources related to food security, housing, and childcare, and strengths-based and trauma-informed coaching strategies. One JumpStart administrator said that, in hindsight, it was too much information in a short period and recommended focusing on one or two topics per day spread over a longer timeline.

On the other hand, IDO staff said that while the training was beneficial, it covered responsibilities for mentors that were more extensive than what was included in the original RFP. For example, IDOs had interpreted the “mentorship” role as providing accountability and light-touch motivation to participants to keep them engaged in the program. However, the training presented a more expansive version of IDO mentorship that included components such as trauma-informed coaching, wraparound support services, and providing referrals to external childcare providers or other benefits programs. As one IDO staff member said, “The training was excellent. However, it is not what was presented in the RFP.”

The expansion in mentorship responsibilities was primarily a concern because of how the IDO payments were structured. IDOs received payments when their participants hit pre-established milestones and did not receive any salary reimbursement for the staff labor required to provide robust and sustained case management throughout a participant’s time in the program.

Referrals and Enrollment

JumpStart recruitment and enrollment began in February 2023 and continued through November 2023. The standard JumpStart enrollment was a three-step process—participants were referred by IDOs, accepted by Detroit at Work, and enrolled into the program by Career Coaches. The process worked as follows:

- **Referred:** IDOs recruited and referred eligible participants to JumpStart by submitting participants’ I-9 and proof of residency, as well as a self-attestation agreement that they met the income, employment, and training criteria for the program. However, Detroit at Work also provided a general interest form for interested applicants through social media messaging and outreach, and completed the referral process by assigning individuals recruited that way to IDOs based on capacity and sign-up rate.

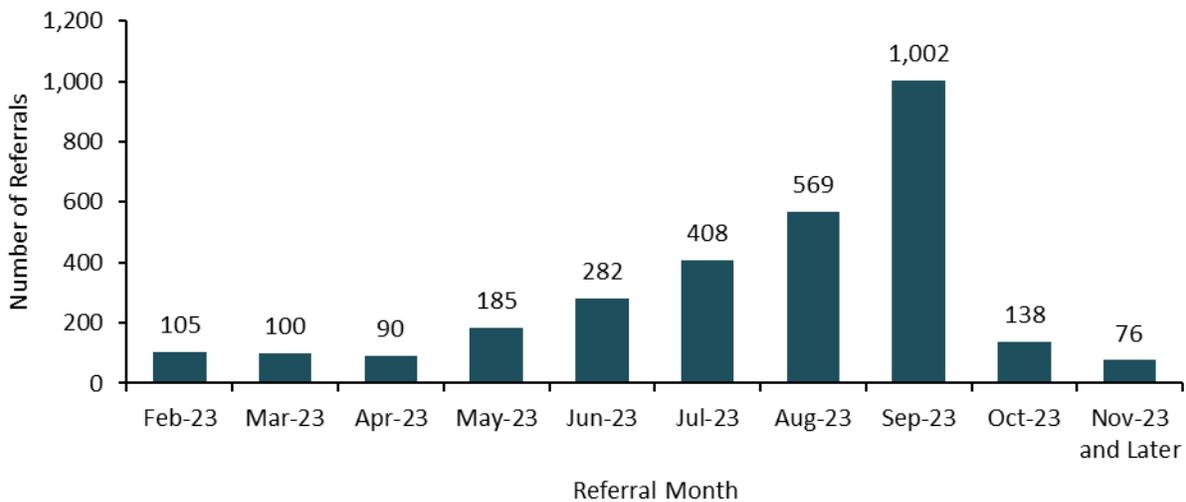
- **Accepted:** Upon receiving the referral, Detroit at Work reviewed the referral documents to confirm eligibility and accepted the participants into the program, assigning them to a Career Coach. Detroit at Work conducted monthly audits on 10 percent of applicants to verify the income reported on the self-attestations.
- **Enrolled:** The Career Coach then contacted the participant to schedule a meeting to sign the program participation contract, take the behavioral health screening, and sign up for the baseline CASAS tests and Career Readiness course. Upon completion of this meeting, participants were officially enrolled in the program.

JumpStart was designed with the expectation that IDOs were already connected to and providing services to community members eligible for JumpStart, which is why they were responsible for recruiting and referring participants. In practice, this was not always the case. Mentors at one IDO reported that their client base mainly was employed or actively seeking employment and did not qualify for the JumpStart program. This led to a wide variation in the number of JumpStart referrals sent by IDOs. More than half of all JumpStart referrals were referred by just two IDOs, TMI Detroit and Detroit Peoples Community, which each referred over 780 participants. (Appendix Exhibit D.1 shows the number of participants referred and enrolled by IDO.)

Some IDOs could not meet referral targets and received most of their clients from Detroit at Work’s online general interest pool. Staff from these IDOs found the process inefficient: they would receive the contact information of potential applicants from Detroit at Work, contact them and walk them through the initial application process, then refer them back to Detroit at Work for verification and enrollment. Still other IDOs engaged in more expansive recruitment activities, including canvassing on the street and city buses. At least one IDO also ran its own radio ads, featuring an original jingle, for JumpStart recruitment.

The JumpStart program’s original goal was to enroll 1,200 participants by July 2023. However, early referrals were slower than expected and took a while to ramp up, as shown in Exhibit 2.5 below. The enrollment deadline was extended through September. However, once Detroit at Work met enrollment targets, the City of Detroit encouraged them to continue enrollment through the end of the year.

Exhibit 2.5. Total JumpStart Referrals by Month

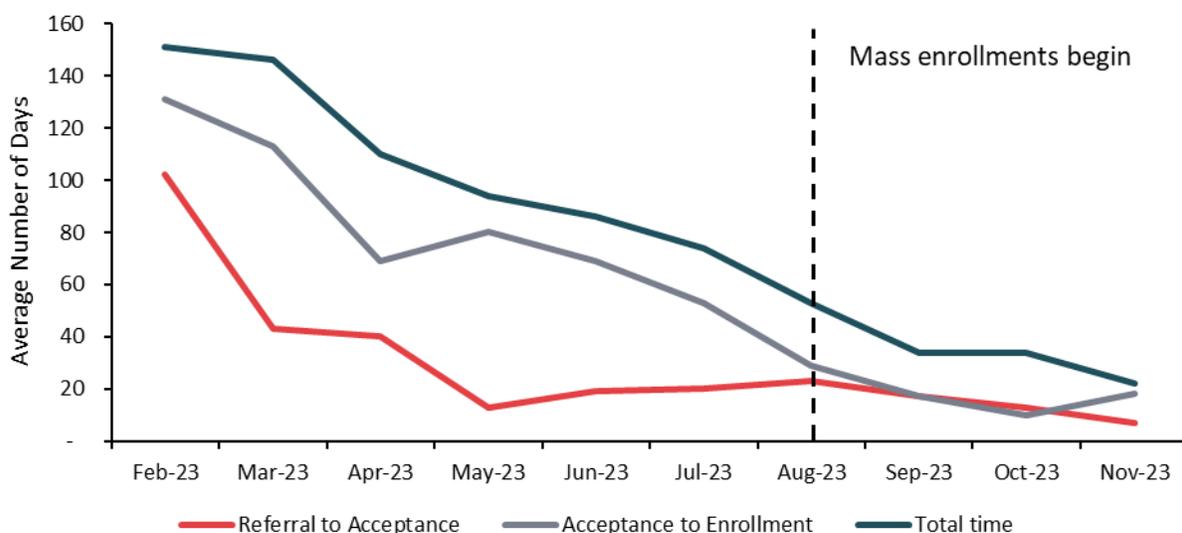


By the summer of 2023, JumpStart providers had identified two bottlenecks that were slowing down the enrollment process: (1) moving participants from referral (by IDOs) to program acceptance (by Detroit at Work), and (2) moving participants from acceptance to program enrollment (by Career Coaches).

The initial slow rate of processing referrals and accepting participants into the program was due to a stringent verification process, causing a backlog in applications. Detroit at Work reviewed the application procedures and collaborated with partners to identify the level of due diligence for eligibility verification. Detroit at Work then implemented a series of adaptations to the review process. It successfully reduced the time from referral to acceptance from an average of 102 days (median: 61) in February 2023 to an average of 17 days (median: 9) in September 2023, when JumpStart referrals peaked, as shown in Exhibit 2.5.

In addition, two changes were made to the enrollment process. First, JumpStart simplified the steps required to enroll in the program, including adopting a streamlined Basic Intake form and waiving the completion of the Career Readiness course (participants could now complete career readiness after enrollment). Second, JumpStart hosted five mass enrollment events, beginning in August 2023. Mass enrollments occurred at the larger career centers, with representatives from all nine career centers in attendance. At these events, accepted applicants met with a career coach to complete their paperwork and be moved to “enrolled” status. The mass enrollment events successfully moved a backlog of accepted participants through to complete the enrollment process. On the positive side, this reduced the average time from acceptance to enrollment from 131 days (median: 137) in February 2023 to an average of just 17 days (median: 9) in September 2023, see Exhibit 2.6 below.

Exhibit 2.6. Average Number of Days for Participant Acceptance and Enrollment, by Month



Detroit at Work staff and JumpStart participants reported long wait times for the first mass enrollment event. However, the paperwork collection process was streamlined, data staff were brought in to support data entry and uploads, and subsequent enrollment events were implemented smoothly. While successful, these events created a few implementation challenges:

- Waived enrollment requirements, including a shortened version of the data intake form, led to missing program data.

- Participants did not have to schedule their CASAS test, behavioral health assessment, and Career Readiness course before being considered fully enrolled. This sometimes led to a misunderstanding of program requirements, and delays in attending the Career Readiness course until after training or education activities were started put participants in noncompliance.
- Mass enrollment events replaced the first 1:1 meeting between participants and their career coaches, which led to participant confusion about whether they were assigned a career coach at all or who their coach was.

JumpStart received 2,955 referrals, accepted 2,234 applicants, and enrolled 1,842 participants. Exhibit 2.7 shows the breakdown of referrals and enrolled participants based on the first program track they were referred to and enrolled in. Over half of the participants enrolled in the Job Training track to start, about one-third enrolled in the education-focused tracks (either Skills Refresh or High School/GED), and the remaining 15 percent enrolled in the New Employment track.

Exhibit 2.7. Number of Participants Referred to and Enrolled in the JumpStart Program, by Track

	# Referred	# Enrolled	% Enrollment by Track
Skills Refresh	113	87	5%
High School Diploma/GED	756	487	26%
Job Training	1,635	992	54%
New Employment	451	276	15%
JumpStart Overall	2,955	1,842	100%

Enrollment in Multiple Tracks

Once participants completed a track, they could advance to the next track, moving consecutively from the education tracks to Job Training to New Employment. Almost 80 percent of JumpStart participants (n=1,454) enrolled in more than one track, but only 7 percent (n=124) had enrolled in three or more. In the most common trajectory, participants started in the Job Training track and moved into the Employment track: almost half (48 percent, n=880) of participants took this path. The second most common trajectory, where participants moved from the HS/GED track into the Employment track, was taken by about a quarter (22 percent, n=398) of participants. Another 14 percent of participants (n=253) enrolled in the Employment track alone.

JumpStart also tracked participant status: whether they were currently enrolled, transferred to a different track with or without completing the first track, and whether they had exited or successfully completed the JumpStart program. Exhibit 2.8 shows that, for participants who started the program in one of the first three tracks (Skills Refresh, HS/GED, or Job Training), most participants transferred to a new track without completing the first one (63, 85, and 57 percent, respectively). For those who started in the Employment track, 80 percent completed the JumpStart program in that track.

Program administrators pointed out that the Skills Refresh track was designed to be short-term: participants were trying to raise their CASAS score by a few points to move on to training. On the other hand, completing a GED took participants longer than program administrators had anticipated. In many cases, participants spent most of their time in JumpStart working towards attaining a GED, but then transferred into the Employment track as the JumpStart program began to wind down.

Exhibit 2.8: First Track Status by First Track Enrolled

		First Track Status					Total
		Enrolled as of May 2025	Transferred without Completing Track	Transferred after Completing Track	Exited JumpStart	Completed JumpStart	
First Track	Skills Refresh	0%	63%	23%	11%	2%	100%
	HS/GED	0%	85%	3%	10%	2%	100%
	Training	0%	57%	36%	6%	1%	100%
	Employment	8%	6%	0%	6%	80%	100%

Cross-Agency Partnerships

Detroit at Work and IDO staff said there were challenges in navigating the differentiation between roles and responsibilities at both the organization and staff levels (i.e., between mentors and career coaches). Multiple IDOs reported discrepancies between the description of mentor roles in the initial RFP and the expectations set at the program's launch. Some Detroit at Work staff said that if the program administrator RFP had been solicited first, they could have played a more active role in selecting partner IDOs, potentially applying more stringent screening criteria and mitigating issues arising from these shifting role descriptions.

Compounding these role clarity issues were significant challenges related to staff capacity and caseloads across the partner organizations. IDOs, in particular, faced infrastructural and administrative capacity limits. As one JumpStart administrator noted,

“The IDOs themselves were not computer-savvy, technology-savvy. And this was... I think it was kind of known because that was part of that training. Paperwork, invoicing, the first six months had to have somebody 100% on teaching them how to do invoicing. Infrastructural capacity”

—JumpStart administrator

Furthermore, the program's milestone-based payment structure created financial instability for the IDOs, making it challenging to hire and retain the full-time staff needed for intensive mentoring, especially given the inconsistent income stream and the high risk of participant dropout inherent in serving this population.

Career coaches at Detroit at Work career centers experienced immense pressure from overwhelming caseloads. Most centers assigned only one or two coaches to their entire JumpStart population, leading to caseloads far exceeding typical benchmarks. One career coach described the situation:

It was like the caseload and it was super stressful. And I think this program was... the first of its kind. And then you have a high volume because the enrollments, the average amount of clients a career coach is supposed to have, actually it's 87, no more than 87. Well, they bumped it up to 100. But me as JumpStart was like 360, a little over 360.

—JumpStart Career Coach

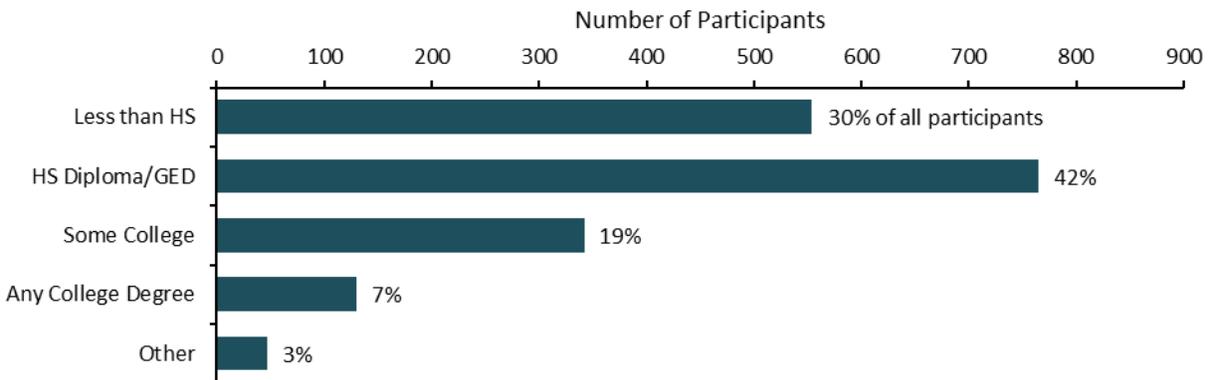
This burden was even greater for coaches who simultaneously managed other responsibilities within the career center. As another coach emphasized, the JumpStart workload alone was substantial: “It was

difficult because I think both of us still had other roles outside of JumpStart, but JumpStart was enough to be a full-time job, easy. It could have easily been a full-time job.”

2.3. Participant Characteristics

As shown in Exhibit 2.9, nearly half of all JumpStart participants entered the program with their high school diploma or an equivalent, like a GED (42 percent, n=765). About one-third started without a high school diploma (30 percent, n=554). A quarter of all participants had some college experience (19 percent, n=342) or a college degree (7 percent, n=130).

Exhibit 2.9. Education Level of JumpStart Participants



Most JumpStart participants took a CASAS reading and math test at the start of the program. The typical result for the initial reading tests was a ninth-grade level (median: 9.1, mean: 9.0). Math test results were relatively lower than reading results, with the median score at a 6.3 grade level (mean: 6.2).¹¹

Other relevant participant characteristics included:

- Nearly all participants identified as Black or African American (87 percent, n=1,610)
- Almost two-thirds of JumpStart participants were women (62 percent, n=1,145).
- The median participant age was 36, and the average age was 38. Two-thirds of participants were between the ages of 25 and 44 (63 percent, n=1,156).
- Six in 10 participants (60 percent, n=1,112) reported being stably housed at the time of enrollment.
- Most participants reported that their primary transportation was reliable (70 percent, n=1,295), while almost a quarter said it was unreliable (421, 23 percent).
- Over half of the participants (59 percent, n=1,079) had at least one child. Of those who reported on their childcare reliability, one-third (33 percent, n=296) reported having unreliable childcare.

¹¹ Our analysis of CASAS test results for JumpStart participants includes only tests taken after January 1, 2023. We only include analysis of the grade-level score assigned to participants (from 1 to 12) and exclude any outliers outside of that scale.

- More than one quarter of JumpStart participants (28 percent, n=510) reported previous involvement with the justice system. Specifically, about 1 in 8 participants reported a previous felony conviction (14 percent, n=266).

Appendix C further describes the characteristics of JumpStart participants and includes full data tables for key demographics for JumpStart participants overall and by track.

2.4. Implementation of Program Activities

This section describes the quantity and distribution of JumpStart program services and activities using Detroit at Work program data, as well as the implementation challenges and successes gathered from interviews with program staff members, IDO partners, and participant focus groups. The section includes an overview of: (1) the two-week career readiness course required of all participants; (2) the four JumpStart program tracks, including Skills Refresh and High School Diploma/GED, Job Training, and New Employment; (3) monthly stipends, and (4) additional support services.

While the expectation may be that only participants enrolled in one of the JumpStart program tracks receive the services associated with that track, program data shows that this is not always the case. For example, some participants enroll in instructional courses even if they are not in an education track, and others receive career advising services even if they are not in the employment track. This section reports on all service delivery activities and identifies where they diverge from track enrollment when necessary.

Career Readiness Course

All participants were required to attend a two-week Career Readiness course, provided by Educational Data Systems Inc. At the start of the program, completion of Career Readiness was required before program enrollment. However, when JumpStart began mass enrollments, participants were only required to sign up for a Career Readiness course to be enrolled. Over three-quarters (76 percent, n=1,396) of all JumpStart participants enrolled in Career Readiness. Of the 1,396 JumpStart participants who enrolled in Career Readiness, 60 percent (n=842) successfully completed the course.

Participants, coaches, and mentors all spoke highly of the Career Readiness course and said it provided valuable skill-building for participants who had been disconnected from the workforce for long periods. In addition to financial coaching and soft skills instruction, such as professional communication, the course provided structure and the opportunity to practice establishing a work-like routine of arriving on time every day, five days a week. This course was roughly 35 hours per week and could be attended in person or via livestream. However, coaches reflected that these benefits were best accrued in person and recommended that future iterations minimize online options. JumpStart participants were more likely to complete the Career Readiness course if they attended in person: 42 percent (n=207) of participants who took the online course successfully completed it, while 70 percent (n=633) of participants who took the in-person course successfully completed it.

Education Activities: Skills Refresh & GED Tracks

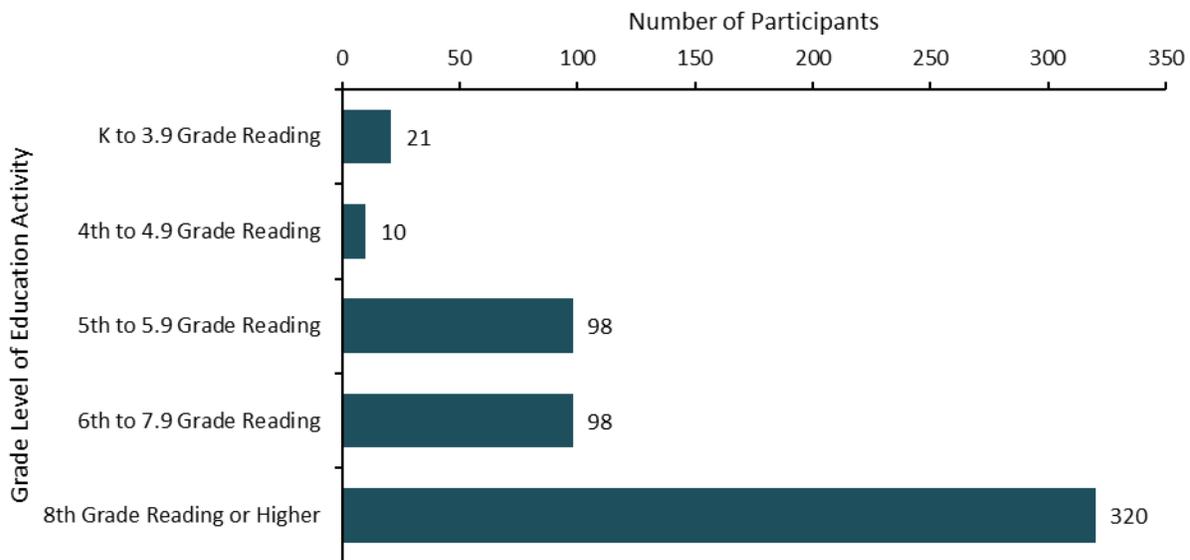
While 574 JumpStart participants enrolled in either Skills Refresh or High School Diploma/GED as their first track (n=87 and n=487, respectively; see Exhibit 2.7), some participants transferred into these tracks from the Training and Employment tracks. Thus, 627 participants were ever enrolled in the Skills Refresh

or GED tracks (n=116 and n=512, respectively). Participants in these tracks could enroll in adult basic education courses at various grade levels, ranging from elementary to GED.

However, there is a distinction between enrollment in the program *track* and participation in specific *courses*. In fact, of the 627 participants enrolled in either of the education tracks, 86 percent (n=539) ever enrolled in an education course. Additionally, program data indicate that 41 JumpStart participants from the Training or Employment tracks also enrolled in an educational course. This means that individual exceptions may have been made to allow participants enrolled in other tracks to take education courses. Otherwise, this was a data entry error, e.g., participant transfers into one of the education tracks were not recorded.

As shown in Exhibit 2.10, most of the education courses that JumpStart participants enrolled in were at the 8th grade reading level or above (n=320, 59 percent) and 41 percent (n=227) enrolled in education classes at a 7th grade level or below. Very few participants took education courses at an elementary school level of 4th grade or below. Of the participants who enrolled in an education course, the typical result for the initial reading test was an eighth-grade level (median: 7.9, mean: 7.8) and a fifth-grade level for the math test (median: 4.9, mean: 5.1).

Exhibit 2.10. Grade Level Distribution of Education Courses



Education tracks had low completion rates, but data were incomplete. JumpStart program data included the following completion status options: no status update (missing), successful start, incomplete,¹² or successful completion. The successful completion rate for JumpStart participants was very low: just 9 percent of participants had successfully started (5 percent, n=30) or completed (4 percent, n=24) the program. Although few participants completed an education course, 152 education participants saw improvements in CASAS math and reading scores. CASAS test results are summarized in the Education Outcomes section.

¹² We aggregated the following completion statuses as incomplete: incomplete, dropped, no show, or deceased.

One-third of participants (33 percent, n=192) were enrolled in education tracks but had no status recorded. A JumpStart administrator said that one of the providers of the GED course, Wayne County Community College, reported participant attendance and completion through a different data system, which likely accounts for most of the participants with missing statuses and suggests successful completion rates are underestimated. Still, more than half of participants (58 percent, n=334) who enrolled in education programs did not complete their program (recorded as incomplete, dropped, no show, or deceased). Of these participants, 81 percent (n=270) transferred to a different program track within JumpStart before completing the education course.

Detroit at Work staff recommended separating education activities from the training and employment side of the JumpStart program. The Learn to Earn model was suggested as a viable alternative for what this could look like. One staff member said,

I think that it was asking too much of the participant to obtain a GED in that small time period that they had, I don't think, and especially at the grade level that they were starting, I don't think that was possible. That's why our GED level is really, really low in this program if you go by, say, total enrollment at the beginning of the program to total GEDs obtained this time.

—JumpStart administrator

Participants' experiences echoed the pattern of high incompleteness rates. One focus group participant talking about the dwindling class size in her GED course said,

We were overloaded [in the beginning] to the point where we had to go into another classroom; they had asked to bring chairs over to the other side. But come the end of the year, there was only five of us.

—JumpStart participant

Another focus group participant said he decided to transfer out of the Skills Refresh track before completing the course due to incompatibility between the instructor's teaching style and his learning style. Other focus group participants confirmed that this was a common difficulty, especially given high rates of instructor turnover, when each teacher uses a different teaching method or set of materials.

The few focus group participants who participated in an education track had mixed experiences. Two participants were enrolled in GED courses since the start of the program and mainly reported positive experiences: they were happy to be making progress on their education and were excited to be close to completing their coursework and taking the exam. However, other participants were frustrated with instructor turnover and not making any progress on the CASAS tests. Both participants and a career coach recommended more tutoring and individualized support for Skills Refresh courses, particularly related to test-taking skills.

Some JumpStart participants were co-enrolled in the Learn to Earn program. Learn to Earn was another Detroit at Work initiative that paid participants \$10 per hour to complete GED and Adult Basic Education courses. Most JumpStart participants on an education track were co-enrolled in Learn to Earn at some point, as shown in Exhibit 2.11. These co-enrolled participants received both the JumpStart monthly stipend and the hourly wages from Learn to Earn. As established earlier, only 87 percent of JumpStart participants enrolled in an education track enrolled in classroom instruction. However, all the JumpStart participants who were co-enrolled in Learn to Earn also enrolled in classroom instruction

(even if they were not enrolled in an education track), suggesting that the Learn to Earn program may have been more effective at engaging participants in educational activities.

Exhibit 2.11. Number and Share of JumpStart Participants who Co-Enrolled in Learn to Earn

	# JumpStart Participants	# Co-enrolled in any Learn to Earn Event	% Co-enrolled
Ever enrolled in JumpStart education tracks	627	409	65%
Ever enrolled in classroom instruction	625	441	71%
All JumpStart Participants	1,842	441	24%

Job Training Activities

Of the 1,062 JumpStart participants who enrolled in the job training track at any time, three-quarters (76 percent, n=804) enrolled in at least one training course. An additional 36 participants who were not enrolled in the training track also enrolled in an occupational training program. This section summarizes data for every JumpStart participant who enrolled in a training program, regardless of their track enrollment (n=840).

The most popular training programs among JumpStart participants, as shown in Exhibit 2.12, were in the health care category, chosen by one-third (33 percent, n=278) of the 843 participants who enrolled in any training. The health care category included nursing-related training programs (14 percent, n=119) and other medical training programs (19 percent, n=159) for dental assistant and phlebotomy technician roles. Other popular training categories were in carpentry or building and industrial skills (23 percent, N=192). The most popular specific training course was an evening Cybersecurity Support Specialist course (n=59), followed by a CDL-A training (n=54) and a Dental Assistant Program (n=52).

Exhibit 2.12. JumpStart Training Enrollment by Category

Occupational Training Category	Number of Participants	% of Participants Enrolled in Training
Carpentry/Building and Industrial	192	23%
Other Medical	159	19%
Nursing	119	14%
Cybersecurity	107	13%
Information Technology	105	13%
CDL	92	11%
Call Center	38	5%
All Other	26	3%
TOTAL	840	100%

Over half of JumpStart participants who enrolled in a training program successfully completed it (62 percent, n=519).¹³ An additional 4 percent (n=35) had successfully started a training program as of May 2025. For those 11 participants who had enrolled in a training but had no completion status recorded, just one was enrolled in a training program that had not started as of the latest data exported for this

¹³ This section of the report includes one training per person – for those who enrolled in multiple trainings, it includes only the training with the best outcome. For example, the training with a successful completion; if they had no successful completion of a training, it is their training with a successful start; if they had no successful start of a training, it is a training with an outcome of dropped, incomplete, or no show. In the rare case that an individual had more than one training enrollment with the same outcome, this data includes the most recent training record.

report's analysis. Of the 275 participants who did not complete their training program, one quarter (24 percent, n=67) were recorded as "transferred" out of the training track, which suggests that they had moved on to the employment track before their training was complete.

While most JumpStart participants successfully started or completed their training programs, career coaches and participants highlighted several implementation challenges:

Poor training quality and alignment with industry requirements. Both participants and coaches expressed disappointment with the quality of the training programs. Frustrations included both instructor quality and curriculum content. For example, one participant said,

I was in Information Tech Pathways and it wasn't great. It was substandard because they said in the brochure it was 15 weeks long, but we got there and it was seven weeks. And they had to cram all of that teaching into seven weeks, and we didn't get a chance to really digest all the information. And I wanted it more hands-on too, and there was no way they could give us a hands-on training [with that timeline]. So, it was very lacking.

—JumpStart participant

In addition, participants said trainings often did not prepare students for certification in the relevant fields (citing the graphic design and digital marketing trainings in particular). Participants often felt that the training they received was too introductory to qualify them for full-time employment straight out of training. In addition, one coach said that employers do not just want to see a credential; they want to see experience in the field, so participants were not competitive hires in their fields directly out of training.

Participants were unable to find employment in industries related to their training. Coaches and participants both expressed frustration that participants who have successfully found jobs were often hired in industries or roles unrelated to the training programs they completed. One coach said, "I'm just not seeing a lot of individuals getting training and then finding employment related to the training that they got. And that should be something to think about if we were to move forward with another JumpStart program." He referenced a list of recent hires with employers like mortgage companies, security, cleaning, manufacturing, and Amazon factory work, though they did not train in related courses. Coaches did note, however, that participants who completed CDL training were more successful in obtaining related job placement with trucking companies.

Training providers did not support post-training job placement. As part of their engagement with the JumpStart program, training providers were expected to help students find jobs in the fields in which they were trained. However, this did not happen consistently. Participants left their training programs without job placements and instead relied on their career coaches for help with their job search. One Detroit at Work staff member said:

"For the training providers that do [job placement] effectively, they have employer round tables in the last three to four weeks of training... They would start having employers come and meet the participants and begin to do the informal kind of career fair, hire-on-the-spot kind of thing. For those that don't do [job placement] effectively, they might bring some people through, but then they just kind of say, 'Okay, we'll start sending you jobs after you've graduated and it's up to you to follow up on them.'"

—JumpStart administrator

Staff members and participants identified a number of concrete recommendations for improving the training track:

- Both coaches and participants recommended that apprenticeship and subsidized employment opportunities would help fill the experience gap participants faced after completing the training programs.
- Detroit at Work staff shared recent adaptations to improve communication and warm hand-offs between training providers and employer engagement business service representatives as participants move from the Training to Employment tracks.
- A participant recommended that Detroit at Work bring in external employers or industry professionals to review training program curricula, including actual assignments, and provide feedback on whether they would hire someone who completed this training. External reviewers could also recommend areas for improvement or curricula redesign.

One program adaptation that improved career coaches' ability to serve participants was the "My Career Journey with Detroit at Work" tool, which provided a framework for identifying training programs aligned with participants' values, interests, and needs. This tool included a self-assessment that personalized training program recommendations. It also provided participants with a roadmap for researching and thinking through which programs would be the best fit. For example, it had participants consider if the class environment fits their learning style, and encouraged touring the training providers beforehand.

Employment Activities

Participants in the employment track spent their time searching for employment. JumpStart provided career advising, staff-assisted job search, and other supportive services. Participants were expected to find employment within 90 days of enrolling in the New Employment track.¹⁴ Once employed, they could remain in the program, maintaining contact with their IDO mentor, and continue to receive the monthly stipend.

As seen in Exhibit 2.13, among all JumpStart participants, 75 percent (n=1,374) received any career service. The most common of these services was a comprehensive assessment, typically administered by career coaches at the start of Employment track enrollment, which 786 participants received. Career coaches also delivered individual career advising, with 1,252 sessions provided to 363 participants. Of these participants, 216 (60 percent) attended more than one session. Other common career services provided included barrier resolution (613 instances provided to 184 participants), staff-assisted job search (798 instances provided to 407 participants), and referrals to employer recruitment events (423 instances provided to 207 participants).

¹⁴ In August 2024, this was reduced from 90 to 45 days for participants in the Employment track that had not obtained employment and were considered non-compliant with program engagement expectations. This timing coincided with many JumpStart participants nearing their 18 month maximum time in the program and reinvigorated a focus on getting participants to employment.

Exhibit 2.13. Number and Share of JumpStart Participants Using Common Career Services

Type of Career Service	# of Participants Received	% of Participants Received	Total # of Services Provided
Any Career Service	1,374 ^a	75%	5,474
Comprehensive Assessment	786	43%	1,016
Individual Career Advising	363	20%	1,252
Detroit at Work Online Orientation	373	20%	389
Staff Assisted Job Search	407	22%	798
1:1 Financial Coaching	242	13%	271
Referral to Employer Recruitment Event	207	11%	423
Barrier Resolution	184	10%	613
Staff Assisted Resume Assistance	168	9%	203
Individual Career Navigation	129	7%	259
Other Activities ^b	218	12%	250

a. Participants could receive more than one type of career service.

b. Other career service activities include: career exploration, guidance, benefits navigation, and one-off referrals.

In addition to the above career services, a smaller percentage of participants also participated in employment-related workshops focused on resumes, workplace behavior, interview skills, and online applications (n=73, 4 percent).

The following themes were identified from participant focus groups and staff interviews:

Experiences with career coaches varied. Some participants reported that advising sessions with their career coaches provided much value. One participant said that even though he was only supposed to be in contact once weekly, he communicated with his coach two or three times per week. Another participant said,

“I feel like I have one of the best career coaches as far as the JumpStart program because she’s really been helpful...As far as her knowing that I’m a felon, she went out of her way to make sure I knew about Project Clean Slate, knew about other programs that was available for felons. So, I feel like everything that I brought to her, and asked or told her what was going on, she was able to help me in some type of way. So, I feel like that’s a definite upgrade.”

—JumpStart participant

However, other participants expressed a desire for more intensive job placement support. They felt that some of the coaches’ services, such as emailing job listings from the Detroit at Work portal, were not helpful because they could find those listings on their own.

Participants expressed frustration with the job fairs. Towards the end of 2024, the JumpStart program started requiring participants who were still unemployed to go to every job fair. Participants felt that their time was being wasted because they saw the same representatives at each fair, and sometimes those companies did not have any current openings but were only there to provide general information. One participant said, “When they started mandating their career fairs, we would see each other there all the time because everybody wants to be in compliance. And it became depressing because their career fairs was always a joke. It would be so sad.” Another participant had a similar experience and said, “it got to the point where it would be depressing...The numbers started dropping, not just for us, but for the employers who was attending the job fair. Once there was only two [employers].”

Participants were also frustrated that the job opportunities available at these job fairs did not align with the training programs that JumpStart had provided and were largely unhelpful. Participants who completed IT and graphic design trainings were especially disappointed with the offerings at job fairs and found little to no representation from their chosen industries at job fairs and Job Club days at the career centers. They reported employer tables representing law enforcement agencies, utility companies, and insurance companies. One employer table offered gig work at a temp agency, which did not qualify as a work activity towards meeting JumpStart compliance hours. Participants with previous felonies reported that very few employers were felon-friendly.

Maintaining program compliance in the Employment track was difficult. After compliance logs were instituted, participants reported that New Employment was the most challenging track to remain compliant due to difficulties meeting the required number of activity hours per week. Beginning in August 2024, participants were required to complete 32 hours per month of job placement activities, and the expected time-to-employment was reduced from 90 to 45 days. Eligible job placement activities included resume development, attending job fairs or interviews, and meeting with career coaches. Participants could supplement these activities with volunteering to meet the required hours. Participants said that maintaining compliance was easier in education and job training tracks, where class instruction time accounted for all activity hours. Compliance requirements changed in early 2024, which is explained in further detail under the following section on monthly stipends.

Monthly Cash Stipends

JumpStart participants who met compliance requirements received monthly cash stipends. Stipend amounts varied by full-time vs. part-time status and length of participation (i.e., full-time participants received \$600 per month for the first six months, decreasing by \$200 every six months; see Exhibit 2.2). Nearly every JumpStart participant received a stipend payment, and the average participant received stipends for 12 months, though they were eligible for up to 18 payments (see Exhibit 2.14). Almost one-third (31 percent, n=575) of all JumpStart participants received between \$6,000 and \$6,999 in stipend payments; another 31 percent (n=573) received \$7,000 or more. As of June 2025, JumpStart had paid out more than \$10 million in stipend payments to participants.

Exhibit 2.14. Number of Months that JumpStart Participants Received Stipend Payments



Evolving Compliance Requirements

JumpStart administrators hit a major implementation challenge about one year into the program. As focus shifted from enrollment to service delivery and moving participants towards employment, program staff members began to identify varying levels of engagement across participants. Monthly cash stipends were always conditioned on participant engagement, but without a tracking (or enforcement) process, consistent engagement was not always happening.

So after enrollment ended in December, January we really started concentrating on compliance. Who's doing what they're supposed to be doing? Who's not? And because we couldn't verify whether they were in compliance or not, there was a mass suspension of stipends I think in [March], I'm thinking, where we didn't provide the stipends for people that weren't in contact with the IDOs.

—JumpStart administrator

Generally, the weekly hours requirement could be met through the core activity in each track (attending classes and studying for the GED, training, or employment). In cases where the core activity did not meet the weekly hours requirement, participants could complete their hours requirement through several approved activities, such as conducting a job search, volunteering, or skill-building activities (such as attending Detroit at Work workshops).

Due to increasing reports that participants received stipend payments without meeting track requirements or staying in contact with their career coach or IDO mentor, Detroit at Work developed a new compliance policy that went live in March 2024. Stipends were paused for all participants who had not been in recent contact with an IDO mentor or career coach.

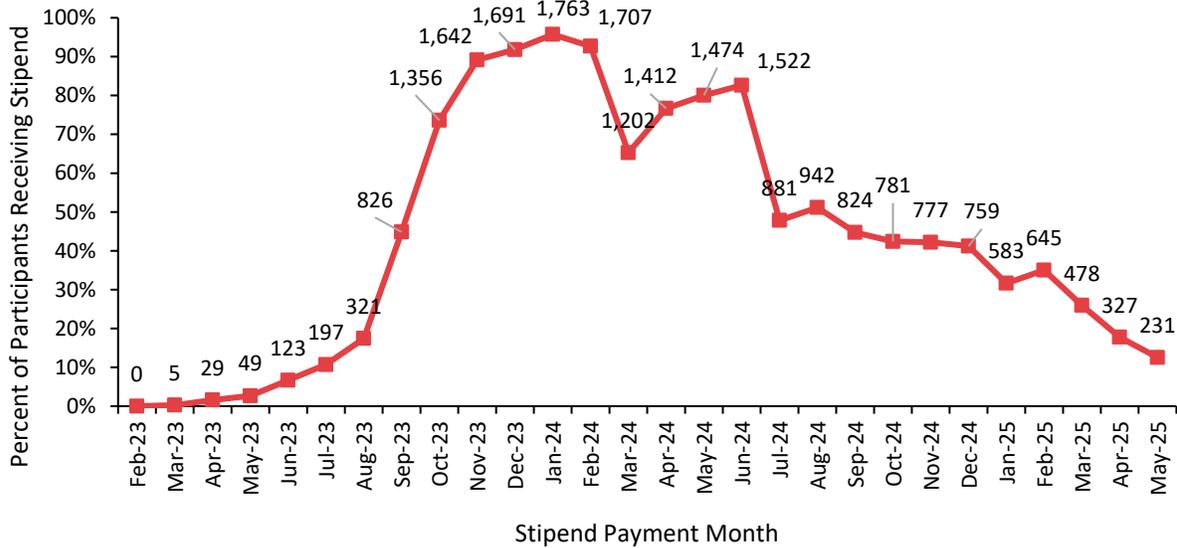
Under the new compliance policy, participants were required to submit monthly Employment Verification Forms (EVFs) to their IDO mentors. This effectively required them to check in with their IDOs at least once per month to continue receiving stipend payments. EVFs logged participants' time spent on JumpStart-eligible activities to meet the stipend requirement. As Exhibit 2.15 shows, there was a steep drop in stipend payments in March 2024, when inactive participants were cut off. The bounce back shows that the new compliance policy successfully incentivized the most inactive participants to meet program requirements.

I remember it was a big stipend suspension, and that was just to get everyone's attention. "Hey, you got to come in and you actually have to report. You have to meet with your IDO." Because everybody was like, "Where's my stuff? Where's the stuff?"

—JumpStart administrator

As seen in Exhibit 2.15, the share of overall JumpStart participants who received a stipend payment each month increased to a peak in January 2024, when nearly all enrolled participants received a payment. After that peak, the portion of participants receiving a stipend fell dramatically to about two-thirds when the new compliance requirements were instituted, and then to about half of participants in the second half of 2024 as they began hitting the 18-month mark.

Exhibit 2.15. Number and Share of JumpStart Participants Receiving Stipend Payments Monthly



Participants expressed much frustration over changing program requirements. The most frequent area for complaints was the compliance verification process for stipend payments. Participants said meeting the hours requirement while on the Education and Training tracks was easiest because of the set structure and regular class times. They had a harder time meeting the hours requirement while on the Employment track if they were still looking for employment, or their work hours did not meet the monthly requirements.

“They used to say if you got a job offer, you are automatically in Compliant. And I did notice now that it's not saying that. I'm going to talk to my IDO about that or whatever because I got a job offer and I got a job, but I'm like, does that mean that I'm not going to get my money because I didn't do 140 hours?...I got a job, you know what I mean? Am I not in compliance?”

—JumpStart participant

Some activities (such as gig work and volunteering) lost their designations as eligible activities over time, which frustrated participants. At one point, Employment track participants without a job were required to attend frequent job fairs to stay compliant, though participants found these job fairs largely unhelpful for reasons stated earlier. Participants also faced barriers to attending job fairs, like securing transportation or childcare. One program administrator said that the mass enrollment events also created misunderstandings about program enrollment requirements, such as completing the Career Readiness course. Focus group participants said they were unaware of the requirement until they received a notification towards the end of the program and thought that it was a new requirement.

Addition of the Fast Track course for noncompliant participants

Detroit at Work offered a “Fast Track” course to reinstate program engagement for those who fell out of compliance. Fast Track was a three-day course that included activities such as mock interviews, resume review, and mental health awareness discussions. Participants generally reported positive experiences and feedback for the Fast Track course, suggesting that providing career service advising and activities in a condensed boot camp format was better received and more beneficial than the self-driven and protracted compliance requirements participants had to meet previously. Participants who completed the course re-entered compliant status and could continue with the program.

Additional Support Services

The JumpStart program provided a number of additional support services to participants throughout their engagement. The most common was in-kind supportive services, which were offered from the beginning of the program and included participant laptops, gas cards or Lyft tickets, and other material goods to support participant success. Later in the program, JumpStart also added other forms of financial assistance and a digital literacy course.

In-Kind Supportive Services

Three-quarters (76 percent, n=1,401) of JumpStart participants received an in-kind supportive service. The most common supportive service was a laptop, which was available to all active participants to support their education or training activities and their job search. Most JumpStart participants (70 percent, n=1,290) received a laptop for \$540 each. Transportation support, such as gas cards or Lyft rides, was also a common service, with 607 transportation services provided to 197 participants. Less commonly, participants also got support with other training expenses (like a background check or drug screening), calculators and GED books, hygiene services, and interview clothes. Exhibit 2.16 shows the share of JumpStart participants using JumpStart-funded supportive services.

Exhibit 2.16. Number and Share of JumpStart Participants Receiving Supportive Services

	# of Participants	% of Total Participants	# of Services Provided
TOTAL (Any Supportive Service)	1,401	76%	4,165
Laptop	1,290	70%	1,306
Any Transportation (Lyft, Bus Ticket, or Gas Card)	197	11%	607
Other Training Expenses	83	5%	113
Calculators	52	3%	52
GED Book and Math Guide	51	3%	51
Hygiene Service	28	2%	33
Work/Interview Clothing	13	1%	15

Participants mentioned that the JumpStart-provided laptop helped them complete education and training coursework. Some had issues getting their laptops from their career coaches and expressed frustration with that process.

Transportation support was mainly provided in the form of bus tickets, though sometimes Lyft rides to enrollment events and digital literacy classes were paid for. Participants, coaches, and mentors all said that the bus tickets provided were insufficient for participants' needs. Transportation was one of the

most common barriers for participants. Receiving only a few bus tickets at a time did not provide sustainable transportation support.

Other Financial Assistance Services

In the second year of program implementation, JumpStart participants were able to access additional sources of financial assistance. These included the Barrier Removal Program, funded by the Community Health Corps, and the Cliff Bonus program. Service delivery data for these programs was not collected by Detroit at Work’s Launchpad system, therefore we do not provide information on participant utilization rates. Exhibit 2.17 below provides further program details and participant experiences.

Exhibit 2.17. Additional Supports Added Later in Program Implementation

Barrier Removal Program	Cliff Bonus Program
<p>Beginning in March 2024, JumpStart participants were eligible for additional financial support through the Barrier Removal program coordinated by Community Health Corps (CHC), another Detroit at Work initiative. Under the Barrier Removal program, IDOs referred participants to CHC, which paid up to \$5,000 per participant to cover expenses related to basic needs and barriers to work. Typical expenses covered by the program included household appliances, arrears on bills and traffic tickets, and car repairs. Participants shared many positive stories about how helpful the assistance they received through the program was. A few participants express frustration with the program, mainly related to specific financial needs not covered under the list of eligible expenses, or because they could not apply for assistance before funding ran out in November 2024.</p>	<p>In the fall of 2024, the City of Detroit approved a new financial support for JumpStart participants: a one-time payment of \$1,800 for those who were fully up-to-date on their compliance requirements and had been employed for at least 30 days. This “Cliff Bonus” was meant to help participants transition through the expected decline in benefits due to their new employment and higher earnings. The Cliff Bonus was not announced to participants, but sent out with the November 2024 stipend payroll. During focus groups, participants who received the bonus said they were pleasantly surprised. Others who had not heard of the program were confused; there was a general lack of understanding among participants interviewed about what this payment was for.</p>

Digital Literacy Course

JumpStart participants were required to take a digital assessment and, depending on their score, the NorthStar Digital Literacy course. This course covered digital skills needed for job searching and retention, such as basic computer skills, using email or word processing software, and online career search skills. The course could be completed online or in person with an instructor. Initially, the course was to be facilitated by IDOs. However, many IDOs lacked the necessary staff capacity or skills to deliver this course, and Detroit at Work expanded course offerings through the Career Center computer labs.

Participants, mentors, and coaches all spoke highly of the digital literacy curriculum and found it beneficial for participant success in the program. Coaches and mentors said that the course was necessary for many participants, who had lower proficiency with computers and digital literacy. For example, some participants had fallen out of compliance simply because they were not in the habit of regularly checking their emails and did not respond on time.

2.5. Participant Outcomes

This section summarizes outcomes for JumpStart participants. We used milestone payments to IDOs and CASAS test results to measure education outcomes and hire records to measure employment outcomes.

To align with the goals of JumpStart, we analyzed the following outcomes:

- **Milestone Achievement.** This was not an explicitly stated JumpStart goal, but the program was designed so that milestone achievement is the most complete outcome metric. This is because IDOs were paid by participant milestones.
- **Attainment of a training credential.** Due to data limitations, we use the proxy metric of course completion, which was a participant milestone that triggered IDO payments.
- **Change in reading and math scores.** We calculated the change in CASAS test results from the first to the most recent test for participants who completed at least two tests.
- **Employment after JumpStart enrollment.** We summarized employment outcomes based on any hire record for a job that started after JumpStart enrollment.

Appendix D, JumpStart in Context, provides additional analysis of education and employment outcomes compared to non-JumpStart Detroit at Work clients. Due to major differences between JumpStart participants and other Detroit at Work customers (e.g., JumpStart targeted participants with long-term unemployment), we cannot interpret the differences in outcomes between the two groups as the result of the JumpStart program alone. However, we use the outcomes for the participants of non-JumpStart programs to provide context for “status quo” outcomes in Detroit at Work programming.

Participant Milestone Achievement

Another metric of participant achievement is milestone attainment. Milestones were the basis of the IDO payment schedule. Different participant milestones were established for each program track. Track specific milestones are a mix of program engagement and completion outputs as well as certification and employment outcomes.

Exhibit 2.18 shows, for each program track, the number and percentage of participants who achieved the first milestone, which was enrollment in each program track, as a share of participants who were recorded as enrolled according to program participation data. While these two datasets measure the same enrollment data, the totals do not align because of different data cut-off dates and a delay in IDO invoicing for milestone payments relative to participant completion dates. The data for the milestone payments measures enrollment through April 2025, while the program data measures enrollment through the end of the JumpStart program in June 2025.

Exhibit 2.18. Enrollment Milestone Payments Made to IDOs by JumpStart Track, as of April 2025

Track	Payment	Participants Completing	
		#	%
Skills Refresh (n=116)	\$300	80	69%
High School Diploma/GED (n=512)	\$300	437	85%
Job Training (n=1,062)	\$300	919	87%
New Employment (n=1,703)	\$300	1,205	71%

Exhibit 2.19 shows, for each track, the number and percentage of participants who went on to complete the remaining milestones, as a share of those who reached the first milestone. This data counts the number of milestone payments that were paid to the IDOs as of April 2025.

Exhibit 2.19. IDO Milestone Payments by JumpStart Track, as of April 2025

Milestone	Payment	Participants Completing	
		#	%
Skills Refresh (n=80)			
Complete First Six Weeks	\$300	53	66%
Improve 2 grade levels in reading	\$800	6	8%
Improve to 8th grade level (if needed)	\$800	2	3%
High School Diploma/GED (n=437)			
Complete First Six Weeks	\$300	311	71%
Get HS Degree/GED	\$1,600	24	5%
Job Training (n=919)			
Complete First Six Weeks ¹⁵	\$300	618	67%
Certificate for Completion of Program	up to \$1,600	393	43%
New Employment (n=1,205)			
Complete 30 Days on New Job	\$600	769	64%
Complete 3 Months on New Job	\$300	638	53%
Complete 6 Months on New Job	\$300	450	37%
Complete 1 Year on New Job	\$700	167	14%

Since milestones in the employment track are time-based, some participants may not have had the opportunity to meet all milestones. Since many participants enrolled in the employment track near the end of the JumpStart program, they may not have had the opportunity to complete six months or a full year on the job as of April 2025. Thus, the percentage of participants completing each milestone in Exhibit 2.19 may underrepresent how many participants saw success in each track.

As mentioned earlier, IDOs contracts were structured such that they would receive payments of up to \$8,800 per successful participant (or \$2,200 per participant per track). IDOs were under the impression that most participants would move consecutively through all four tracks. In reality, most participants (80 percent) enrolled in two tracks, and just 7 percent enrolled in three or more. In addition, the milestone completion rates shown above show that few participants completed all milestones within each track, though most completed the first one or two milestones of each track.

Education Outcomes

Education outcomes included attainment of training credentials (we also included GED completion) and improvement in reading and math grade levels.

Attainment of a Training Credential

As shown above in Exhibit 2.19, out of 919 participants who completed the first milestone in the Training track, 393 (43 percent) received a certificate of completion for a training course. For the 437

¹⁵ For participants in job training courses with a curriculum that lasted less than six weeks, IDOs were paid this milestone around halfway through the training program.

participants who completed the first milestone in the High School Diploma/GED track, just 24 (5 percent) received their GED.

Reading and Math Test Results

A key outcome for the education tracks in JumpStart is a change in CASAS reading and math scores. We tracked this by comparing the first CASAS test results after program enrollment with the most recent CASAS test results recorded for those who enrolled in an education program. Exhibit 2.20 presents a summary of findings on test results.

Reading Test Results. Although many participants took an initial CASAS reading test, only 172 JumpStart participants who enrolled in an education course completed a follow-up test. About half of the participants improved their reading grade level (52 percent, n=90), while 17 percent had no change (n=30), and 30 percent declined (n=52). Overall, participants improved their reading by an average of 0.5 grade levels (median: 0.2); the top quartile improved by 1.6.

Math Test Results. Of the 195 JumpStart participants who enrolled in an education course and took more than one CASAS math test, 58 percent of participants improved their math grade level (n=113), while 8 percent had no change (n=16), and 34 percent declined (n=66). Overall, participants improved their math by an average of 0.3 grade levels (median: 0.3); the top quartile improved by 1.2.

Exhibit 2.20. Change in Reading and Math Grade Level^a

	Change in Reading Test Results (n=172)		Change in Math Test Results (n=195)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Grade Level Improved	90	52%	113	58%
No Change	30	17%	16	8%
Grade Level Declined	52	30%	66	34%

a. Based on the difference from first to last CASAS test results, for all JumpStart participants enrolled in any education activities.

Overall, of the 210 JumpStart participants who enrolled in an education course and took more than one reading or math CASAS test, 152 (72 percent) improved at least one of their scores.

Employment Outcomes

Another key outcome for JumpStart is whether participants gained employment. For those who did have a post-program job hire, we also looked at the wages of participants who gained employment and other job characteristics. Employment outcomes include both verified and unverified hire records.

Employment Rate

Most JumpStart employment records were verified by IDOs by completing an Employment Verification Form and collecting a paystub. 821 JumpStart participants (45 percent) had verified employment records. Employment outcomes reported in the hire records suggested slightly better outcomes than the milestone records, in which 769 participants achieved the second milestone (see Exhibit 2.19). However, milestone data measures 30 days of employment, while hire records are a binary measure of any employment.

Detroit at Work also tracked job reports that lacked information, so could not be verified (i.e. if the verification submitted by participants was incomplete and the participant could not be contacted for confirmation, or the job was paid in cash). An additional 278 JumpStart participants (14 percent) had employment records that lacked some information. These records did not include job titles, employer names, or wages. Across all employment records, including those that lacked information, 1,099 JumpStart participants (60 percent) reported employment.

The employment rate varied by IDO, ranging from 31 to 68 percent, as shown in Appendix C.¹⁶ Though JumpStart administrators were concerned that high caseloads would result in lower-quality mentorship, the hire records suggest that was not the case in practice. The two IDOs with the highest caseloads, TMI Detroit (about 570 participants) and Detroit People’s Community (about 450 participants), had higher employment rates (68 percent and 61 percent, respectively) than IDOs with smaller caseloads.

Wages from Verified Employment Records

Among the job records that JumpStart participants attained post-enrollment and included wage data, the average hourly wage was \$17.40 (median: \$17.00). Exhibit 2.21 shows that most participant jobs (54 percent, n=443) had hourly wages between \$15 and \$18.99; one-fifth of employed participants (n=158) were paid less than \$15 per hour, and 27 percent (n=218) were paid \$19 or more per hour.

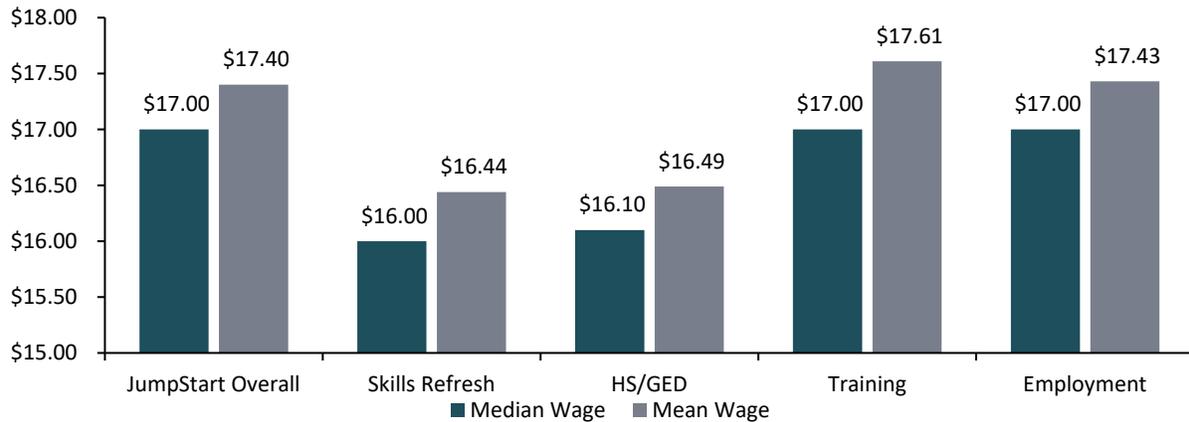
Exhibit 2.21. Distribution of Hourly Wages for Post-JumpStart Employment

Wages per Hour	# of Employed (n=821)	% of Employed
Wage less than \$15	158	19%
Wage \$15-\$18.99	443	54%
Wage \$19 or more	218	27%
Missing wage data	2	0.2%

While most participants ended their time in the JumpStart program in the Employment track, hourly wages for post-enrollment jobs varied based on the first track they enrolled in (which provides context on where participants were when they enrolled in the program). Exhibit 2.22 displays the median and mean post-enrollment wages for JumpStart overall and for those who ever enrolled in each track. For example, participants who found employment after starting in the Skills Refresh or GED tracks earned less (with median hourly wages of \$16.00 and \$16.10, respectively) than those who found employment after starting in the Training or Employment tracks (with a median wage of \$17.00 for both).

¹⁶ Including both verified and unverified employment records

Exhibit 2.22. Median and Mean Post-Enrollment Wages for JumpStart Participants by Track



For participants who provided pre-JumpStart wage data and found a job (n=770), 57 percent of participants' hourly wages increased (n=438), while 36 percent decreased (n=277), and 7 percent did not change (n=55), as shown in Exhibit 2.23. On average, participants' hourly wages increased by \$2.15 (median: \$1.00). The bottom quartile decreased by \$1.50, and the top quartile increased by \$4.50.

Exhibit 2.23. Change from Most Recent Hourly Wage to Post-JumpStart Hourly Wage

Change in Hourly Wage	# of Participants (n=770)	% of Participants
Decreased	277	36%
No Change	55	7%
Increased	438	57%

Participants in focus groups and one career coach said that many participants' employment attained after the program was unrelated to the training programs they completed in the JumpStart program. During an interview, one career coach reviewed the previous month's employment list and found that participants who completed CDL training were often employed in that field (trucking), but many others took jobs unrelated to their JumpStart training.

The coach noted that obtaining a credential was often insufficient for employers; they also wanted to see related experience, which meant participants did not meet hiring requirements. It is possible that participants decided to take any job offer they received to remain in compliance and continue to receive the JumpStart stipend, which could partially explain why 36 percent of participants reported earning less in their post-program jobs than they did before the program.

2.6. Summary of Key Findings

JumpStart sought to improve skills, employment, and wages among Detroit residents experiencing long-term unemployment through community-based mentorship by IDOs, monthly cash stipends and other supportive services, along with four distinct program tracks designed to meet participants where they were. This evaluation revealed valuable insights into the program's ambitious design, implementation challenges, and overall outcomes. While administrators, partners, and participants recognized the

program's potential and appreciated Detroit at Work's ability and willingness to make continuous improvements, key structural and operational elements can be built upon for future initiatives.

- **JumpStart could have benefited from a longer planning period to finalize program design, establish implementation processes, and improve coordination among partners.**

A primary implementation challenge arose from the compressed planning timeline. JumpStart was a large and ambitious program, and—with only about two months between contract award and public launch—time for detailed program design, procedure development, data system setup, and partner role definition was limited. Staff and partners interviewed felt some implementation challenges could have been mitigated with a longer planning horizon and potentially a pilot phase. The short planning period contributed to initial confusion across IDOs, which was further exacerbated by disconnected city contracts and a lack of pre-existing partnerships between Detroit at Work and IDOs. For many IDOs, JumpStart marked their first engagement with workforce development programming. Improved coordination could have been supported by a centralized management structure overseeing IDOs (e.g., IDOs contracting directly with Detroit at Work, similar to other training and education providers), a shared case management data system, or formalized participant management protocols between coaches and mentors.

A few months into the program, the City of Detroit hired a staff member to manage communication with IDOs, which improved cross-partner coordination. In the second year of implementation, Detroit at Work made a concerted effort to reduce staff caseloads by redistributing tasks such as compliance tracking, which further improved coordination.

- **Other implementation challenges included the IDO funding structure, distinction between the IDO mentor and career coach roles, and overall staff capacity.**

The IDO mentorship model, which aimed to leverage existing community ties to provide tailored and ongoing support to JumpStart participants, faced significant capacity and funding constraints. The payment structure, in which IDOs received payments as their participants achieved pre-established milestones, was not conducive to funding the labor input required to provide the continuous level of support expected from IDO mentors. Most participants enrolled in only two program tracks, and few achieved all the milestones in each track. This meant the potential maximum funding available to IDOs (\$8,800 per participant) rarely materialized. The milestone-based model was deemed insufficient for the intensive, long-term (up to 18 months) support JumpStart participants required, making it difficult for IDOs to hire and retain full-time staff.

A need for clearer delineation of the distinct roles and responsibilities between IDO mentors and Detroit at Work career coaches became evident. Adopting a structured and evidence-based coaching model (e.g., Empath Mobility Mentoring) could provide better training and clearer expectations for mentors, enhance operational planning support for IDOs, and potentially strengthen grounds for negotiating adequate funding (perhaps using a cost-reimbursement model).

Some interviewees suggested that most of the JumpStart functions could have been housed with the Career Center, making it a “one-stop shop” for the participants’ official program requirement needs and reducing the sense of “hot potato” that participants reported. However, career coaches also faced significant workload challenges, with ballooning caseloads (particularly following mass enrollment events) often managed by only one or two individuals per Career Center, sometimes alongside other job responsibilities. Coaches emphasized that the JumpStart workload alone was equivalent to a full-time position.

- **Participants did not progress through the JumpStart program tracks as expected, suggesting that the education track and job training or employment tracks could have been separated.**

JumpStart's intended four-track roadmap (with participants progressing successively through Skills Refresh, High School/GED, Job Training, Employment) did not reflect participant journeys in practice. While most participants (80 percent) enrolled in two tracks, participants often transferred into the employment track before officially completing their initial track. In particular, the educational tracks proved less successful as pathways to subsequent stages. Skills Refresh was the least utilized track, as many participants met the CASAS baseline requirements to enroll in training programs. GED attainment often took longer than the program's duration, preventing participants from advancing. JumpStart participants were more likely to successfully complete the shorter Job Training track and advance to the subsequent Employment track. Interviewees suggested that the education- and employment-focused tracks might function more effectively as separate programs or pathways.

While Job Training completion rates were higher than other tracks, there were concerns about the quality and relevance of some existing training options available through Detroit at Work,¹⁷ particularly in the IT and graphic design industries. Participants and coaches felt that certain training programs did not meet industry standards or adequately prepare individuals for immediate employment without additional on-the-job experience. Participants generally found career advising and other services provided by coaches in the Employment track helpful. However, they also reported that the hours-based requirements were difficult to meet, sometimes distracting them from spending time on more practical activities related to their job search. In particular, participants expressed frustration when required to attend job fairs with limited opportunities available.

JumpStart also offered supplemental courses, such as Career Readiness and Digital Literacy, which were well received and beneficial for a program population that had been disconnected from the workforce long-term. Interviews with coaches and mentors indicated that ongoing or intermittent refreshers throughout the program could be advantageous.

- **Detroit at Work should ensure that financial support programming is intentionally structured to achieve clearly defined and distinct goals, such as providing financial stability, incentivizing specific behaviors, or removing concrete barriers.**

JumpStart provided participants with a range of cash and near-cash supports, including monthly stipends, in-kind supportive service payments, barrier removal support, and a benefit cliff bonus. Different types of financial support target different goals. For instance, in-kind supportive services and barrier removal payments explicitly focus on eliminating participant barriers to engaging in educational or training activities and future employment, such as access to transportation, childcare, and housing security. The cliff bonus was sent to participants who had been employed for at least 30 days and was intended to support their transition by offsetting the loss of government benefits due to increased income.

Cash and near-cash supports need to be evaluated in the context of the goals they aim to achieve. The goal of JumpStart's monthly cash stipends was not clearly stated (i.e. to incentivize participant engagement or to provide financial stability), which may have diminished their effect. In participant focus groups, stipends were discussed as not being large enough to provide financial stability (though they certainly helped), but instead acted more as an incentive to enroll in the program. Other monthly cash transfer interventions, such as guaranteed income, typically serve as a form of income support to

¹⁷ It is worth noting that these job training programs are offered to all Detroit at Work clients and are not specific to the JumpStart program.

increase financial stability and offset some costs associated with program engagement. However, JumpStart's later focus on participant compliance suggests the program intended to use these stipends as incentives. Both participants and IDO mentors reported that the diminishing stipend amount became less effective over time, especially in the less-structured Employment track, where \$200 per month was insufficient motivation given compliance burdens. This suggests that exploring alternative incentive models, such as a progressive stipend that increases over time or tying payments to concrete milestones, may be more productive than the compliance-focused middle ground. Alternatively, providing a higher, unconditional monthly payment might offer more financial stability for participants, freeing up time or capacity for program engagement and job seeking.

Participants reported that the Barrier Removal Program funds were highly valued for providing tangible support (laptops, transportation aid, rent payments) that directly addressed critical needs. Although data on the utilization of these payments was not included in this evaluation, qualitative data suggest that this type of financial assistance achieved its intended goal.

- **Detroit at Work's continuous adaptation of implementation strategies was a key strength, contributing to a more successful program over time.**

JumpStart was an ambitious program that combined (1) a particularly disconnected participant population, (2) a fast pilot launch with large enrollment targets, and (3) a complex program design. This complexity involved integrating multiple partner organizations, distinct program tracks, and various supportive services. Despite challenges, Detroit at Work's continual adaptation of implementation strategies was successful.

Partners acknowledged that while more initial planning time would have been beneficial, they appreciated Detroit at Work's receptiveness to feedback and commitment to making continuous adjustments to improve program operations. This adaptability was evident in several concrete examples. For instance, when IDOs lacked the capacity to conduct Digital Literacy classes, Detroit at Work brought these sessions in-house. Adjustments were also made to policy, such as creating a new compliance policy to enhance participant accountability and increase contact with coaches and mentors. Furthermore, significant improvements were made to the enrollment process itself. By increasing staff capacity, streamlining verification systems, and adopting mass enrollment events, DESC successfully removed bottlenecks. This dramatically reduced the median wait time from referral to acceptance from two months to just 9 days, and the period from acceptance to enrollment plummeted from over three months to only 9 days.

Beyond these operational adaptations, specific program components proved highly successful. The Career Readiness and Digital Literacy courses were particularly well-received, with participants and staff alike praising their effectiveness in addressing crucial soft skills, professional habits, and digital navigation for individuals long disconnected from the workforce. Indeed, staff suggested that integrating these elements more consistently throughout the entire program duration, perhaps as intermittent refreshers, could be even more beneficial. While participants provided ample mixed feedback and recommendations for improvement, they all agreed that they found the program helpful and said they would do it again.

3. Skills for Life Evaluation

This chapter employs a mixed methods approach to present the findings of the Skills for Life program implementation, using program operational data¹⁸ alongside the experiences of staff, partners, and participants collected through interviews and focus groups. The chapter is organized into the following subsections:

- 3.1. The **Program Background** provides an overview of Skills for Life program design, goals, partnerships, and timeline.
- 3.2. **Program Launch** covers the brief pilot, program planning phase, and launch.
- 3.3. **Recruitment & Onboarding** discusses the recruitment and onboarding process, including successes and challenges, and completion of the career readiness course.
- 3.4. **Participant Characteristics** provides a short overview of Skills for Life participants. Appendix E provides further participant details.
- 3.5. The **Career Coaching** section reports on the role of career coaches, as well as service delivery activities related to career services and other supportive services.
- 3.6. The **Implementation of Program Activities** section covers
- 3.7. **Participant Outcomes** reports participant education and employment outcomes.
- 3.8. The **Patterns in Successful Program Completion** section provides a supplemental analysis that explores participant trajectories and successful program completion by various characteristics.
- 3.9. Finally, the **Summary of Key Findings** summarizes the evaluation results, highlighting key findings and recommendations.

3.1. Program Background

Skills for Life was a career development program that hired and compensated Detroiters to work on City projects three days per week and participate in educational activities or occupational training two days per week. It was implemented from late 2021 to early 2025 as a partnership among Detroit at Work, the City of Detroit, and various community partners. The program included the following components:

- **Employment:** Participants worked three days per week for the City of Detroit’s General Services Department (GSD) as either Environmental Technicians or Blight Remediation Technicians. These jobs were similar, involving maintaining city facilities and outdoor spaces throughout Detroit. Participants were paid \$15.00 per hour (\$15.30 for Environmental Technicians).
- **Education:** For two days per week, participants who needed additional educational support to qualify for their selected occupational training participated in tutoring, Skills Refresh classes, or a GED.
- **Training:** Once education requirements were met, participants selected from several occupational training programs they attended twice weekly.¹⁹ Participants who did not require additional educational support started training immediately.

¹⁸ Skills for Life program data was retrieved at two time points. Data on participant characteristics, enrollment, and program activity engagement covers the period February 1, 2022 through October 24, 2024. Data on employment outcomes was collected December 10, 2024.

¹⁹ The CDL training was the one exception, with participants attending full-time. Additional information is provided later in the chapter.

After completing occupational training, participants returned to their program job full-time while searching for employment outside of the program. Throughout the program, participants had access to supportive services aimed at reducing barriers to participation and employment. These supportive services included gas cards and individual career advising.

Program Goals

The Skills for Life program aimed to achieve three community-level goals:

1. Increase employment of Detroit residents by: (a) supporting the screening and hiring of participants for the City of Detroit GSD, and (b) providing career readiness training and occupational training programs.
2. Reduce poverty by connecting participants to external resources, providing robust and flexible employment supports, partnering with the Community Health Corps, and offering access to education activities (such as GED/high school completion and literacy education).
3. Improve economic mobility by establishing industry partnerships and providing participants with occupational training that leads to industry-recognized certifications, providing financial literacy coaching, and offering job retention services after program graduation.

In addition, Skills for Life had participant-level goals of interest. Exhibit 3.1 provides an overview of these goals and the evaluation outcomes that were measured.

Exhibit 3.1. Skills for Life Program Participant-Level Goals and Evaluation Outcomes

Skills for Life Program Goals	Evaluation Outcomes Measured
Attainment of a credential or degree, such as an industry-recognized certificate or GED.	Attainment of a training credential. Due to data limitations, we use training course completion as a proxy metric. Training providers recorded this information.
Increase in reading and math levels, as measured through CASAS test scores throughout the program.	Change in reading and math scores. We calculated the change in CASAS test results from the first to the most recent test for participants who completed at least two tests.
For participants who complete occupational training or education, obtain employment that pays \$17 or more per hour. ²⁰	Employment after Skills for Life Participation. We summarized employment outcomes among participants, including post-program pay.

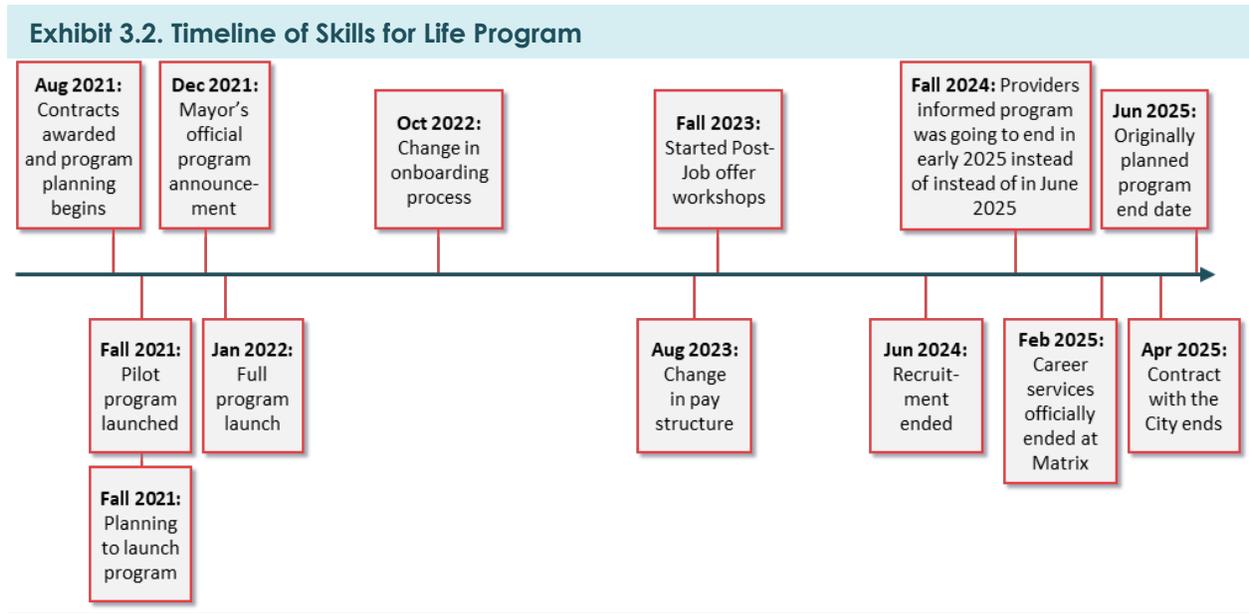
Program Partnerships

Detroit at Work partnered with multiple entities for the Skills for Life program, including two divisions within the City of Detroit GSD (Grounds Maintenance and Blight Remediation) and a partnership between Matrix Human Services (Matrix) and Education Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) for career coaching services. In addition, there were two education providers and four training providers. Some provider partnerships were established before the launch of Skills for Life, while other providers, including Matrix, were new to working with Detroit at Work.

²⁰ The Skills for Life logic model specifies \$15 per hour as the target wage, but program staff specified their goal as jobs paying \$17 per hour in conversation.

Program Timeline

The Skills for Life planning period began in 2021, including a pilot, and the program was fully launched in early 2022. Detroit at Work adapted the program design to accommodate challenges throughout program launch and implementation. The program was initially supposed to last until June 2025, but it officially ended in April 2025 due to limited funding. One education provider estimated that roughly 13 percent of their participants would have completed the education program they were attending if that program had not ended prematurely. Exhibit 3.2 presents a timeline of key program activities. The events and activities implemented by Skills for Life will be discussed in more detail throughout this chapter.



3.2. Program Launch

During the spring and summer of 2021 planning period, the City of Detroit and Detroit at Work worked together to establish the program budget; the City was responsible for purchasing equipment and hiring any additional supervisory staff. Detroit at Work identified providers for the program.

Pilot and Planning

Detroit at Work ran a pilot of Skills for Life in Fall 2021 with a small group of incumbent GSD workers. These workers were given the opportunity to participate in the training component of the program and, in turn, had their Commercial Driver's License (CDL) coursework paid for while remaining in their role at GSD for three days per week. Detroit at Work partnered with the American Job Center for pilot career coaches.

Detroit at Work was simultaneously planning the full program launch for Skills for Life while the pilot phase was ongoing. Detroit at Work program administrators noted that it would have been beneficial to: (1) run a pilot that was more closely aligned with the Skills for Life design (the pilot differed from the program in that it recruited from existing city employees), and (2) wait until the pilot was complete to

incorporate lessons learned into planning for the official program launch. Some program providers felt the program launch was rushed and could have benefited from additional planning and input from providers up front. For example, one education provider said,

I think that the biggest frustration that we would have had is if we had been at the beginning when this [Skills for Life] was first created, we would have appreciated to be able to have input up front then. Instead of figuring out how to work around it later on.

—Education provider

Detroit at Work staff acknowledged the difficulties posed and noted that the funding timeline, political pressure to launch the program, and large recruitment targets did not leave much time to refine the program based on findings from the pilot or incorporate provider feedback.

So, [participants] were hired as we were writing the contract with our providers. There was very little chance for [the provider] to build out a team, to train up a team, to have any dry runs, to stress test our model, to start with a small group of people.

—Skills for Life administrator

Detroit at Work identified and procured Career Services and Career Readiness Providers, GED/HS diploma, and literacy and occupational training providers. Providers responded to an RFP to participate in the program. Matrix and EDSI were the only providers that responded to the career service procurement; Matrix and EDSI were co-grantees. At the time the program was launched, Matrix did not have experience running a workforce development program and primarily provided social services. Detroit at Work staff felt that Matrix emphasized providing support services rather than helping participants get jobs. In addition, Detroit at Work staff noted that other Career Centers may not have applied due to not having the capacity to maintain their operations and start a new program. Detroit at Work conducted procurement from among the existing training and education providers.

Program Launch

Overall, providers and GSD supervisors felt that Detroit at Work was supportive and communicative throughout the launch. Providers and GSD supervisors had weekly virtual meetings with Detroit at Work staff. During these meetings, they could provide feedback on input on the program. The Blight Remediation supervisory staff also reported meeting more frequently (up to 4 times a week) during program launch. Interviewees from Matrix did not always feel like Detroit at Work was responsive to their challenges, including not being able to accommodate large groups of participants for orientation.

Providers and Career Coaches also had to collaborate to understand everyone's role in the process and address early challenges and miscommunications. For example, education provider staff reported that career coaches sometimes sent participants who were below the education level they could accommodate. The education provider and career coach had to engage in some back-and-forth once the program was launched to ensure that career coaches made accurate referrals. This was an instance of something that providers wished they had the time to resolve during the planning phase rather than after the program launched.

"The partners worked very, very well together once we all knew who to talk to."

—Education provider

3.3. Recruitment and Onboarding

The Skills for Life program served Detroit residents 18 years or older who were eligible to work in the United States and physically able to conduct the work required by the program job, which was mostly manual labor outside. There were no participation requirements other than living in the City of Detroit. In addition, recruitment did not target specific populations.

Skills for Life participant enrollment started in January 2022 and ended in June 2024. Detroit at Work used several methods for advertising the program, including radio and television commercials, social media, and word of mouth. Participants could apply for a Skills for Life job via the City of Detroit website. City of Detroit Human Resources would take applicants through the typical City recruitment process, including an interview. In addition, there were Skills for Life job fairs where participants could learn about the program, interview, and receive a job offer on the spot. Training providers, city staff, and career coaches were present at job fairs to discuss their role in the program. Detroit at Work staff did not believe the mass job fairs were necessarily the best approach. While the job fairs enticed enough people to attend, it did not always result in recruiting individuals who were the best fit for the program.

“So I would say that our hiring events were always stressful situations that we tried to impart information to a large number of people, but at a certain point, the focus was on, “Let’s get these people into interview and then let’s get them out the door because they’ve been here for six hours.””

—Skills for Life administrator

Participants interviewed wanted to enroll in the program for various reasons, including the opportunity to better themselves and change paths in life. Most participants wanted to join because of the opportunity to get paid to complete a training and/or education program.

“We can’t stop and drop life to go through college..., so that attracted where I can earn and learn.”

—Skills for Life participant

Overall, 835 people completed an initial enrollment in the program. However, not all enrollees engaged in further activities (see Exhibit 3.3). For example, only 728 enrolled in an occupational training and/or education program.²¹

Exhibit 3.3. Skills for Life Program Engagement

	# of enrollees (n=835)	% of enrollees
Skills for Life enrollees	835	
Completed Career Readiness training	751	90%
Enrolled in either an occupational training or education activity	728	87%
Enrolled in education activity	418	50%
Enrolled in occupational training	486	58%
Enrolled in education AND training	176	21%

107 participants (13 percent) enrolled in Skills for Life, but never engaged with an education or training program. In some instances, participants may have had to wait for several weeks or months before

²¹ Throughout this chapter we refer to “engaged participants” as those that enrolled in an occupational training and/or education program.

starting a training program due to limited availability or a start date after they initially enrolled and dropped out before starting. This was more common among those in earlier cohorts (i.e., those enrolled in 2022; see Appendix Exhibit E1). Challenges launching the program and getting it off the ground may have contributed to higher disengagement among earlier cohorts.

“The challenges were the participant because they just want what they wanted and we were still new. Still trying to figure out everything, didn't have the answers to all their questions, and so they were frustrated and they fell off. But we just knew we had to keep going because it was a new program and something new. You don't have the answers to everything right away. So you learn as you move on and understand more as you go on.”

—Matrix staff

To address disengagement early in the program, Matrix started offering enrollment workshops in Fall 2023 at Skills for Life hiring events. During the workshops, Matrix staff would provide an overview of the Skills for Life program before enrolling participants; this allowed participants to think about whether the program would be the right fit for them.

Interviewees reported that the program faced political pressure emphasizing the volume of participants rather than identifying individuals who would benefit most from it. Program administrators, providers, city employees, and program participants noted that while broad inclusion was important, accepting anyone into the program resulted in some implementation challenges. For instance, Skills for Life was not designed to accommodate individuals with significant learning or mental disabilities. City staff and Career Counselors described situations where they had to act as social workers, which they felt unequipped to do. Program participants mentioned that certain individuals' behavior became distracting, hindering their progress and experience in the program. Staff and participants suggested a more thorough vetting process before enrolling individuals in Skills for Life; Detroit at Work staff believed this would lead to better outcomes.

“So as much as we say people who were differently abled in our target populations, the job and the program were not the best fit for people who are differently abled, including those with learning disabilities. But there were other Detroit at Work programs that are good fits, and had we done a programmatic filter, instead of just pushing them into employment, maybe we could have gotten people onto an exit ramp at a more appropriate place. I think that to me was, on reflection, one of the biggest areas for improvement, was doing programmatic screening”

—Skills for Life administrator

“We want as many people in the city to get their training so they can go into the workforce or whatever. But everybody that was here, the standards were so low”

—Skills for Life participant

When Detroit at Work launched the program, there was an influx of Skills for Life participants that required program providers to scale up their operations, including hiring additional staff and finding larger spaces. Matrix reported that they were initially sent 40 to 50 people, even though they could only accommodate 25 people at one time due to staffing and space constraints.

Some GSD supervisors reported similar challenges scaling up operations. Blight Remediation supervisors reported challenges accommodating roughly 180 people starting at the same time because there was

not enough supervisory staff for additional hires. In addition, they had to acquire more equipment and lease more vehicles. Grounds Maintenance supervisors felt prepared to accommodate the influx of new hires since they typically hired 200 individuals a season. Staff reported that instead of hiring 200 for the season, they offset about half of those positions with Skills for Life program participants. However, there were still some challenges adapting to a new program.

“So a lot of things that we had to have in place just to make it flow for us in day-to-day and to keep it homogenous and everything in order, it took a while to get that going. So still doing the work, but it's kind of building a plane as you're flying it.”

—Grounds Maintenance supervisors

Onboarding

Matrix oversaw the onboarding activities, which included CASAS testing, developing an employment plan, meeting with a career coach, and identifying potential barriers to program participation. EDSI led career readiness training, which also occurred during the onboarding period. Additionally, Matrix delivered a presentation describing each occupational training program and assisted participants in determining which would be the best fit.

There were several changes to the onboarding process implemented by Detroit at Work in October 2022. Initially, participants were organized into cohorts, and onboarding occurred over a two-week period. Detroit at Work and Matrix found that because the career coaches were so busy with onboarding, they could not assist the existing participants during those two weeks. Matrix staff reported feeling overwhelmed by the onboarding process while trying to maintain communication with existing participants throughout the two-week period. In addition, Detroit at Work staff explained that individuals did not need to complete onboarding before starting at GSD because the city aimed to achieve rapid attachment to employment. Detroit at Work staff reported that the goal was to ensure that participants were not waiting to start the program until they could get onboarded; after a few weeks, they were brought into Matrix to complete the onboarding process.

After October 2022, Detroit at Work shortened the onboarding period to one week and required participants to get onboarded before starting their jobs. Having the onboarding process come first helped to ensure that participants' workflow was not interrupted after working for a few weeks. Program administrators felt this was a moderate improvement from the original onboarding setup.

Career Readiness

During the onboarding period, participants attended part-time career readiness training before starting employment. The training focused on soft skills, such as punctuality and effective communication with an employer.

Almost all engaged participants (92 percent, n=673) had at least one attendance record for a career readiness event. The remaining participants (8 percent, n=55) lacked an attendance record for career readiness but did engage in the program by enrolling in Skills for Life education or occupational training activities. These participants may have been part of an earlier cohort that allowed individuals to start working and participating in training or education activities before onboarding.

Among those who participated in Career Readiness following the change in the onboarding process in October 2022 (n=561), nearly three-fourths (n=409; see Exhibit 3.4) completed the program, defined as attending at least 30 hours. The remaining participants, accounting for 27 percent (n=152), completed fewer than 30 hours.

Exhibit 3.4. Career Readiness Course Completion for Participants Joining the Program After October 2022

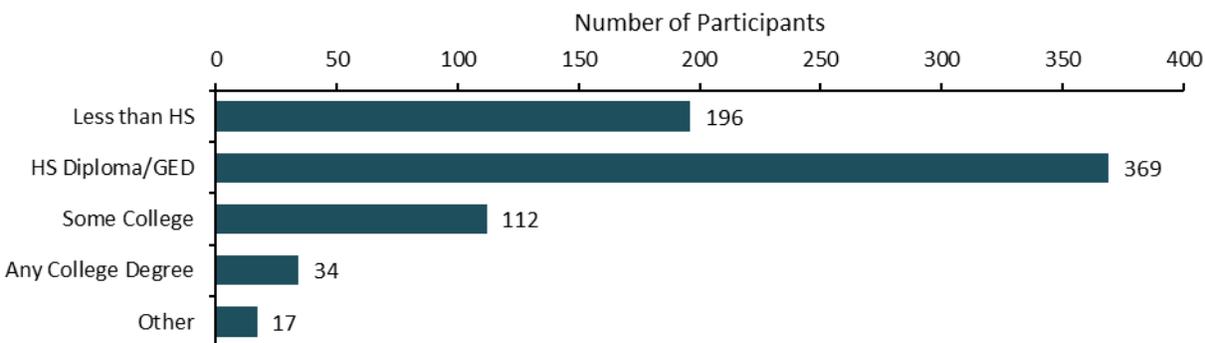
	# of Participants (n=561)	% of Participants
Completed at Least 30 Hours of Career Readiness	409	73%
Did Not Complete Career Readiness (Fewer than 30 Hours Attended)	152	27%

Note: Detroit at Work transitioned to tracking attendance as sixteen two-hour modules in October 2022 when the Career Readiness course condensed to one week. The exhibit reflects findings from participants who participated in the course after the change.

3.4. Participant Characteristics

Out of all engaged participants (n=728), half (51 percent, n=369; see Exhibit 3.5) entered the program with their high school diploma or equivalent, such as a GED. One quarter began with less than a high school diploma (27 percent, n=196), while smaller shares entered with some college (15 percent, n=112), a college degree (5 percent, n=34), or another type of education such as vocational school (2 percent, n=17).

Exhibit 3.5. Education Level of Skills for Life Participants



Nearly all Skills for Life participants took a CASAS reading and math assessment at the program's start.²² At enrollment, average reading scores were higher than math scores (9 and 6.5, respectively).²³

Other relevant participant characteristics included:

- Most engaged participants (90 percent, n=652) identified as Black or African American.
- Nearly three-quarters of engaged participants (73 percent, n=530) were men.

²² Sixteen participants did not take a reading test and 19 participants did not take a math test.

²³ Our analysis of CASAS test results for Skills for Life participants includes only tests taken after June 1, 2021. We only include analysis of the grade-level score assigned to participants (from 1 to 12) and exclude any outliers outside of that scale.

- The median age of participants was 36, and the average age was slightly higher at 38 (range 18 to 75); the largest proportion of participants was between 25 and 34 (32 percent, n=231).
- Most participants (79 percent, n=574) reported their housing was stable; some participants reported having unstable housing (13 percent, n=95) or being homeless during the intake process (3 percent, n=25).
- Over half of participants (52 percent, n=376) reported using their own car as their primary mode of transportation. Bus (19 percent, n=137), carpooling (11 percent, n=83), and borrowing a car (9 percent, n=64) were other common modes of transportation.
- Over one-third of participants (37 percent, n=266) reported having at least one misdemeanor or felony conviction.

Appendix Exhibit E.2 provides additional information on participant characteristics.

3.5. Career Coaching Services

Matrix provided career coaching services as part of Skills for Life. Career coach responsibilities included completing onboarding activities and intake forms, finding resources for participants, administering CASAS math and reading assessments, enrolling participants in education/training courses, addressing barriers, handling supportive service requests, tracking data (including employment outcomes), and hosting post-offer workshops.

Career coaches generally acted as the middleman between participants, GSD, and training or education providers. Some staff noted that this structure generated frustration among participants. In addition, staff noted that career coaches took the brunt of participants' frustrations, which resulted in high turnover among career coaches. However, program leadership staff noted that high staff turnover is common across Detroit at Work programs and was not unique to Skills for Life.

"They have to go to a career coach for intake. Then they're being sent here, plus a job, and then they have to go here and, "Oh, by the way, you don't qualify for this." Then you've got to go back to the career coach. It's going to send you back to another organization, that's four or five stops, and they're saying, "I'm doing everything that you're asking me to do, and you keep booting me around."

—Education provider

"And a lot of times I feel bad, the career coaches, and I'm sure Matrix will tell you this, there was a lot of turnover because they were getting it from both sides. And a lot of times students were taking out their anger and their frustration on the career coaches, which isn't right."

—Education provider

Skills for Life participants could reach out to their career coach throughout the program to check in on their progress, ask questions, request support services, or receive career services. Additionally, one GSD supervisor reported that there was a flyer with a QR code that participants could scan to submit questions to a career coach. Participants had mixed experiences regarding how frequently they communicated with their career coach; some noted that they spoke with them weekly, while others expressed difficulty in getting in contact with their career coach. Several participants wished career coaches would check in on program participants more often.

Career Services

Exhibit 3.6 shows the number and percentage of engaged participants who received three common career services: advising, job search, and resume assistance. Career coaches provided career advising services throughout the program. The average number of individual career advising sessions participants attended was 11.6 (median: 9; IQR 4-16).

Exhibit 3.6. Use of Common Career Services by Skills for Life Engaged Participants

	# of Engaged Participants	% of Engaged Participants Using (n=728)	Total Number of Service Provided
Individual Career Advising	714	98%	8,314
Job Search – Staff Assisted	222	30%	563
Resume Assistance – Staff Assisted	87	12%	110

Supportive Services

Career coaches connected participants with support services, including transportation support and clothing. Gas cards were the most common support service participants received (see Exhibit 3.7); most Skills for Life engaged participants received at least one gas card (87 percent, n=632). Of those receiving at least one gas card, most received more than one (see Appendix Exhibit E.3), for a total number of 3,972 gas cards distributed. Each card was initially worth \$30 and then lowered to \$25. For more expensive support services (e.g., car purchase), Matrix needed to receive approval from Detroit at Work.

Exhibit 3.7. Use of Supportive Services by Skills for Life Engaged Participants

	# of Engaged Participants	% of Engaged Participants (n=728)	Total Number of Services Provided
Gas cards	632	87%	3,972
Bus tickets	158	22%	529
Other transportation assistance	69	9%	136
Utility assistance	22	3%	22
Car insurance	10	1%	11
Clothing assistance	8	1%	9
Car purchase or car maintenance	8	1%	8
Hygiene assistance	7	1%	8

Participants reported that the availability and knowledge of support services largely depended on who their career coach was. Several participants noted that they were unaware the program offered support services, and their career coach did not inform them about any of these services. Most learned about the availability of support services through other participants. Additionally, some participants felt they had to jump through hoops to access support services (e.g., contacting the coach multiple times) or would reach out to their career coach regarding barriers without receiving any support. However, others who had a good relationship with their career coach reported that they were very accommodating and helpful, providing support.

3.6. Implementation of Program Activities

The program had three primary components: Employment, Education Activities, and Occupational Training. Of the engaged participants, two-thirds (67 percent, n = 486) enrolled in occupational training and more than half (57 percent, n = 418) enrolled in an educational activity. Roughly one-fourth engaged in both education and training activities (24 percent, n = 176).

Schedule

Skills for Life participants worked three days per week and spent two days per week in either education or occupational training activities, depending on their level of education. Overall, providers felt that students could have benefited from more direct contact and participation in training or educational activities more than two days a week. Additionally, attending classes less frequently meant that training programs extended over a longer period, making it more likely for extenuating circumstances to arise and cause individuals to drop out. Participants agreed that having training spread over several weeks made it harder to retain information.

However, providers and participants recognized that this was a good setup because it allowed them to get paid for 40 hours a week while attending school or training for 16 of those hours. A few participants also noted that this schedule helped provide structure, especially for those who may not have much experience in the workforce.

“it was the first program that took into account the fact that these students were in survival mode, which is critically important. If you're in survival mode, you're worried about how you're keeping your heat on, how you're feeding your kids. You're worried about, can I get to a job because I don't have the money for transportation. By being employed, it eliminated a lot of those preliminary concerns.”

—Education provider

Participant Compensation

Participants were paid an hourly wage for their program-related employment, the education or occupational training they attended, and hours at certain career services activities like job fairs and workshops. Blight Remediation Techs were paid \$15 per hour; Environmental Techs were paid \$15.30 per hour. Initially, hourly wages were increased by \$1 with the achievement of a GED and/or a credential, so those who completed their GED and a credential program could be paid up to \$17 per hour (\$17.30 for ETs). Partway through the program, the pay scheme changed so that individuals who started the program with their GED would start at \$16 per hour. In August 2023, the program removed the \$1 pay bonus for achieving an additional credential, maximizing pay at \$16 (\$16.30 for ETs).

Participants expressed frustration with the inconsistencies in what they were initially told about expected wages compared to what they actually received. This felt like “another promise that never got done.” There were unclear guidelines about who received wage increases and when, with some participants getting increases while others did not. Participants sometimes reached out to HR regarding the wage increase and were told they would receive retroactive pay for the additional wage; however, only a few actually received the retroactive pay.

"The pay that they advertised and the pay that we got wasn't the same. And when we said something about it, they like, "Oh, y'all never supposed to get that to start." But that's what they advertised."

—Skills for Life participant

Employment

Engaged participants were employed by the City of Detroit’s General Services Department (GSD) in one of two divisions. The first, Grounds Maintenance, employed participants as Environmental Techs. The second division, Blight Remediation, employed participants as Blight Remediation Techs. Both positions provided similar services to maintain and clean up the city of Detroit. Exhibit 3.8 provides an overview of both positions. Detroit at Work staff felt that both positions should have been under one division, and both should have been non-unionized to ensure equity.

Exhibit 3.8. Overview of GSD Positions

Job Title	Environmental Tech	Blight Remediation Tech
Division	Grounds Maintenance	Blight Remediation
Job Responsibilities	Maintains city facilities like parks, recreation centers, and police and fire stations	Handles outside cleanup activities, such as cleaning up illegal dumping and graffiti, and handling site cleanup and land bank management
Number of Skills for Life Employees ^a	275 (43 percent)	371 (57 percent)
Base Hourly Wage	\$15.30	\$15.00
Union Representation	Unionized	Not unionized

Note: The study team did not have access to GSD employment records for 10 participants.

^a Data reflects number and percentage of engaged participants (n=728).

Some participants said they could select what department they wanted to work for, while others were assigned to a position based on the division's needs. Each department would start by providing participants with a one-week orientation that included an overview of the department, job responsibilities, and tool training. Participants felt that the equipment training could have been more comprehensive. Some noted they were given tools with little to no instruction; they often relied on other program participants to teach them how to use them.

GSD supervisors and career coaches were supposed to communicate frequently about participant progress. The Grounds Maintenance supervisor noted that sometimes there were behavioral issues that career coaches did not always communicate to her. GSD supervisors and Matrix tried to address this by having more frequent check-ins and developing relationships with career coaches to encourage more open lines of communication. However, participants did not always feel like communication occurred as effectively as it should have. One participant reported that their GSD supervisor was supposed to tell their career coach they completed the 100 days of work required to start the CDL course, but never did; the participant had to communicate this information to ensure they were enrolled in the course.

"I don't know, the communication just wasn't there all the time."

—Skills for Life participant

Overall, participants took pride in cleaning up the city and enjoyed their work. A few noted some tasks that they felt were outside the job scope they had signed up for (e.g., working at City events).

Education

While the original intention was for participants to engage in specific occupational training programs that would lead to credential attainment (e.g. a Commercial Driver’s License), Matrix referred some participants to educational activities—GED classes, Skills Refresh, or tutoring—because they either did not have a high school diploma or GED or did not meet the minimum educational threshold for participating in occupational training (e.g., having a 6th grade reading level on the CASAS test).

Over half of the engaged participants (57 percent, n=418) enrolled in educational activities before starting a formal occupational training program. Career Coaches assigned participants to these activities when they lacked a high school diploma or equivalent or scored below a threshold on the CASAS assessment. Educational providers could also offer tutoring for individuals with very low CASAS results. Participants also had access to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes through GSD.

Almost half of enrollees in education activities (n=201; see Exhibit 3.9) enrolled in GED classes, while a smaller share enrolled in Skills Refresh (40 percent, n=169), and few used tutoring services (n=44, 11 percent) or ESL courses (n=14, 3 percent). Most participants engaged in just one education activity—only 10 enrolled in more than one.

Exhibit 3.9. Educational Activities		
	# of Participants (n=418)	% of Education Participants
Enrolled in GED	201	48%
Enrolled in Skills Refresh	169	40%
Enrolled in Tutoring	44	11%
Enrolled in ESL	14	3%

Note: Percents do not add to 100 because 10 participants enrolled in more than one education activity.

One education provider offered services for 60 participants simultaneously, with two concurrent cohorts of 30 Skills for Life participants each. The cohorts consisted of individuals with varying levels of education. For instance, one cohort might include Skills Refresh students alongside those pursuing their GED. Education providers enrolled participants by reviewing test scores and understanding their goals. Participants worked both in small groups and individually, receiving assistance from staff to accomplish their objectives. If a participant graduated and departed, the education provider would inform Matrix, allowing them to replace that individual with a new student; both cohorts accepted participants on a rolling basis as spots became available.

Individuals' time in the program varied by their starting point and end goal. Education provider staff noted that all funders (not just Detroit at Work) had unrealistic expectations of what it takes for people to get through school.

“Yeah, [Detroit at Work] wanted the people pushed through. Particularly, they were a little bit easier at the beginning because they were still trying to figure it out, the first full year, maybe just a little bit longer. And they got it the second year. And by going into the third year of the larger Skills for Life program, towards the end, they were very, “They got to be done next week.”

—Education Provider

Education provider staff felt that their one-on-one relationship with students and bonding helped to encourage students and help them achieve their goals. Participants in the education programs had positive things to say about their experience; they appreciated the ability to complete or brush up on education skills.

“The opportunity for the people that were lacking in educational areas was nice to have. It wasn’t just you are off the list, because you don’t know this, you don’t know that.”

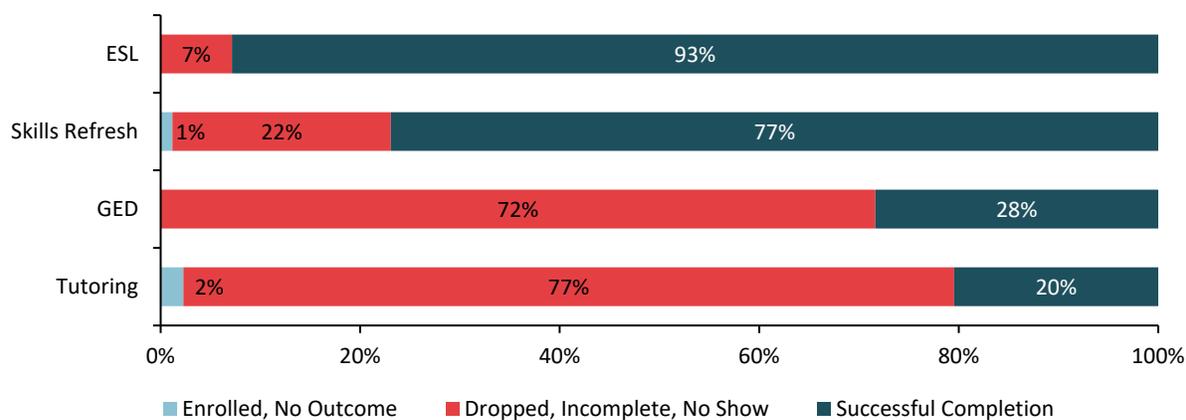
—Skills for Life participant

Education Completion

When an individual completed an education program, the provider informed the career coach, who enrolled them in a training program. Participants worked full-time until their training courses began. Half (50 percent, n=209; see Appendix Exhibit E.4) of participants successfully completed the education activity.

Completion status varied by education activity (see Exhibit 3.10). Most enrollees in Skills Refresh classes completed their program (77 percent, n=130), while far fewer had successful completions in tutoring and GED (20 percent, n=9 in tutoring; 28 percent, n=57 in GED). Most ESL participants successfully completed their course (93 percent, n=13).

Exhibit 3.10. Participant Completion in Education Activities



Tutoring n=44; Skills Refresh n=169; GED n=201; ESL n=14

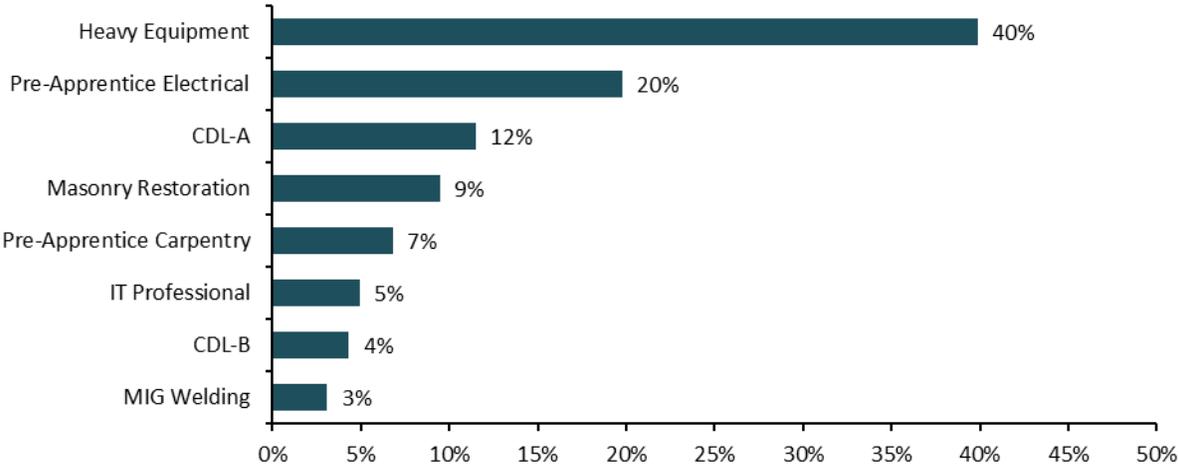
Note: 2 percent of Tutoring participants and 1 percent of Skills Refresh participants “Enrolled, No Outcome”

Training

Participants who qualified for occupational training, whether at enrollment or after completing educational activities, began attending an occupational training program as soon as it became available. Two-thirds of engaged participants (67 percent, n=486) enrolled in at least one occupational training program. A small percentage, 8 percent (n=39), enrolled in more than one occupational training program. This was typically due to scheduling conflicts or to finding a training opportunity that was a better fit.

Exhibit 3.11 shows enrollment in Skills for Life occupational training by engaged participant; for those who enrolled in more than one training, it includes only the training with the more successful outcome. Heavy equipment training was the most popular program, followed by pre-apprentice electrical and CDL-A. Detroit at Work terminated the contract with the IT provider because they were not adequately placing students in jobs.

Exhibit 3.11. Skills for Life Training Participation



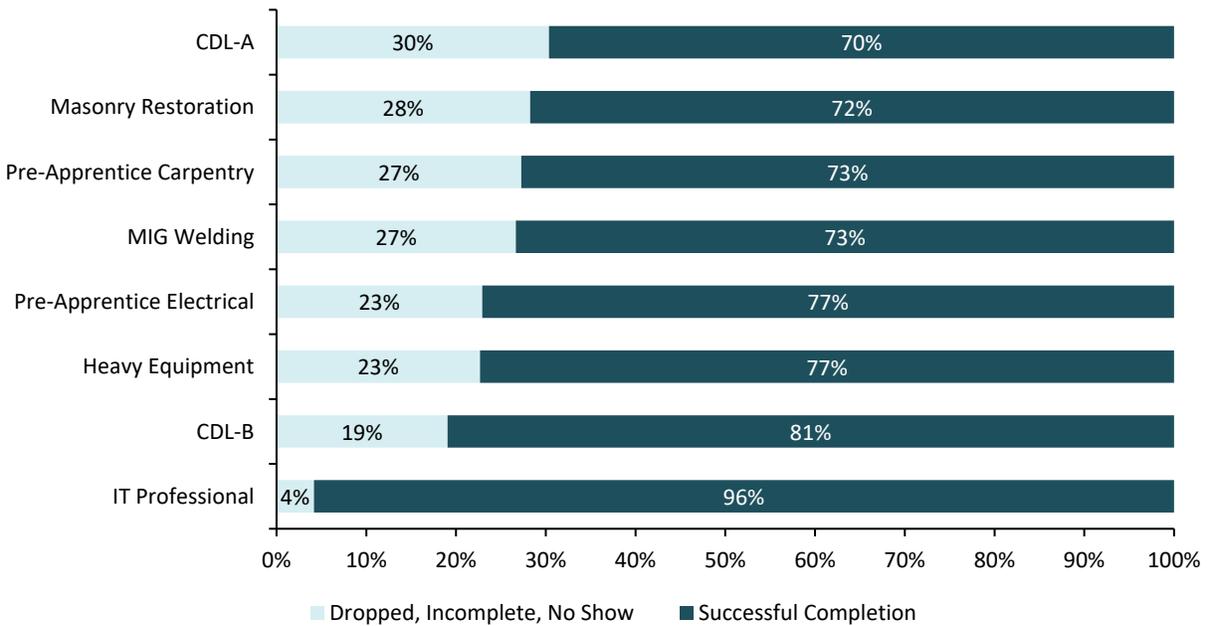
Some participants reported being unable to get into the training program they wanted, or could not start it for a long time. When space was not available in the desired training course, participants would either select a different training program or work full-time until there was availability. Specifically, availability in the two CDL courses caused challenges among participants; one participant waited a year to enroll. Several participants were frustrated that the program initially advertised many different training programs, but once they arrived at orientation, there were only five or six. Participants suggested additional training opportunities, including cybersecurity and IT.

Training programs started with an orientation, including an overview of the program, what the expectations are, and an overview of the equipment. Most training program curricula lasted between 10 and 23 weeks, during which participants attended part-time. The one exception was the CDL training, which participants attended full-time. The structure for CDL training was adjusted after feedback on the pilot indicated that CDL training was not compatible with a part-time schedule. Before starting the CDL program, participants had to work full-time at their city job for 800 hours. Grounds Maintenance supervisors noted that having participants pulled out after working the 800 hours was challenging and required advanced planning to ensure that work was equally distributed among teams. For example, roughly 20 percent of participants in the supervisor’s department were in the CDL training. Therefore, she needed to ensure that all of them were not on the same team to minimize disruptions to the workflow.

Training Completion

Most participants successfully completed their occupational training program. The share of participants with a successful completion status varied by training program (see Exhibit 3.12). Overall, most participants who enrolled in training (76 percent, n=371) had a successful completion status.

Exhibit 3.12. Skills for Life Participant Completion Status by Occupational Training Program

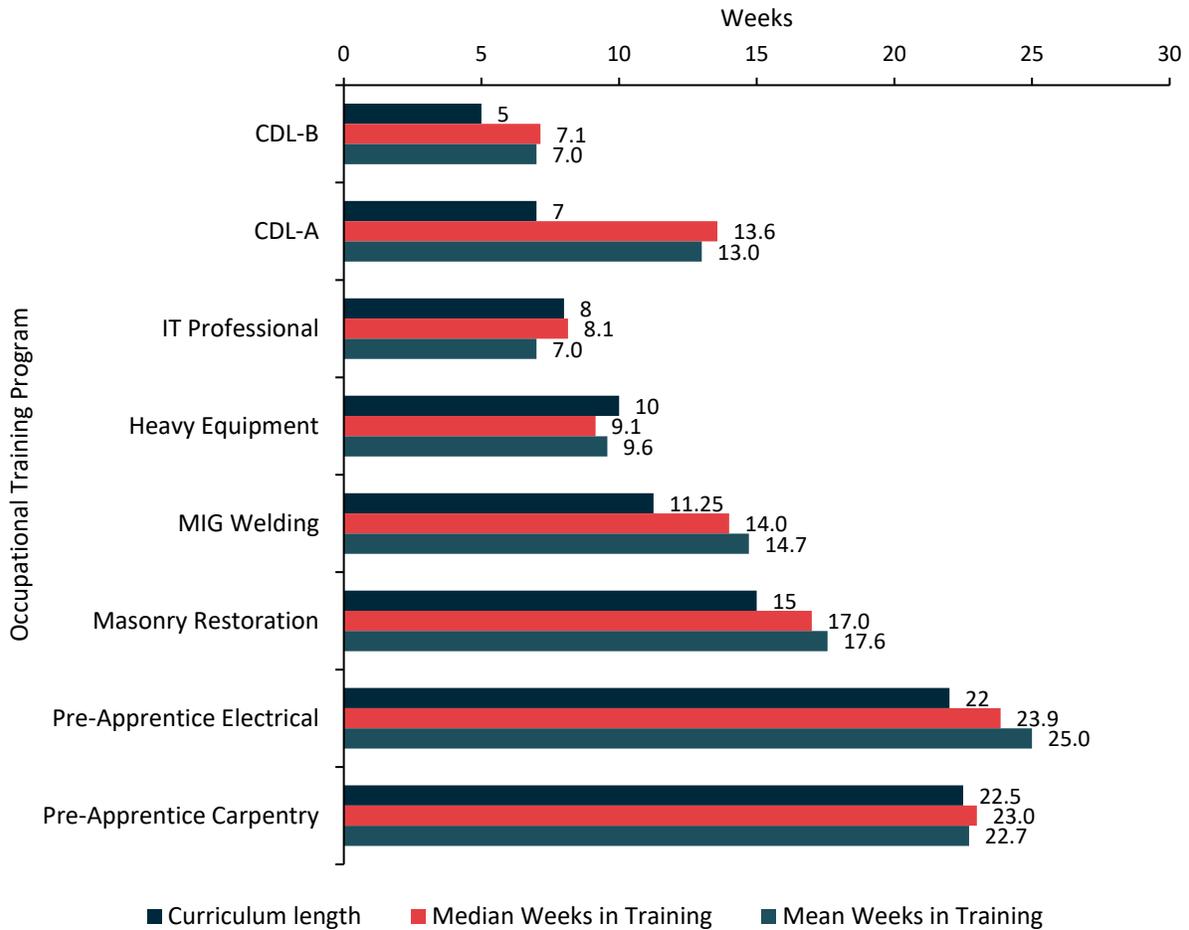


In general, participants who successfully completed their training spent close to the expected time in the training program (see Exhibit 3.13). One exception is CDL-A training, which, unlike the other training programs, was full-time (CDL-B training was also full-time); most participants stayed in that program for nearly double the curriculum length (a 7-week curriculum, compared to approximately 13 weeks to successful completion). One participant said that the CDL course lasted significantly longer because too many people were enrolled and not enough equipment was available to accommodate everyone. Another participant noted that the training equipment frequently broke, which caused delays.

“Yeah, like the CDL program was supposed to be what? Six or seven weeks? I was in there for five months. I got everything in one month, so that’s why I say I felt like I was being extorted because I went and told them something and the next day I was on the road, they were getting money out of us. Too many people, they couldn’t keep up.”

—Skills for Life participant

Exhibit 3.13. Number of Weeks in Occupational Training Curricula and Weeks to Successful Training Completion



One-third (34 percent, n=167) of those who enrolled in any occupational training program received an extension for the training program in which they had the most successful completion status. However, extensions varied substantially by training program, with CLD-A and CLD-B participants receiving the largest percentages of extensions (82 and 76 percent, respectively; see Appendix Exhibit E.5).

Program Off-Boarding

After completing an occupational training program, participants could continue to work full-time for 60 days. The off-boarding period allowed participants to retain employment with the city while searching for full-time jobs outside the program. In practice, the 60-day limit was flexible, and city supervisors granted extensions of up to six months if the participant demonstrated they were seeking employment and maintained good attendance records. Blight Remediation supervisors reported that they offered extensions less frequently at the beginning to give new participants an opportunity to join Skills for Life.

Among participants with an end date recorded for their occupational training and program job, less than half (45 percent, n=82; see Appendix Exhibit E.6) ended their program job within 60 days after training; the rest (55 percent, n=100) surpassed that threshold.

Job Search

Training providers were supposed to take on most job search services; however, program staff and participants indicated that this did not occur. One training provider indicated that their job search activities included reminding participants to update their resumes and send out jobs they could apply for.

“So, again, you finish your certificate program. They don't really connect the dots of helping you find a job in the field that you were hoping to go for. Then what happens next is that you return to being a [temporary] employee and you just ride it out.”

—Skills for Life participant

Training providers that did not connect participants to jobs did not face any consequences because of the limited timeframe of the program.

“There's no real sanction that we could bring down on them. We don't have a clawback mechanism. They knew that we were not going to not renew their contract, because you can't not renew somebody's contract during the middle of the program.”

—Skills for Life administrator

Matrix took on many job search activities during the off-boarding period. This included contacting individuals to provide job information and hosting post-grad workshops. The post-grad workshops aimed to re-engage participants in job searching after they completed their training program. This involved a group session reviewing resume writing, job applications, and computer lab sessions, along with individualized follow-ups based on participants' progress. Only 47 individuals (6 percent) ever enrolled in the post-grad workshop. If a program participant was in the off-boarding period, they were expected to attend the post-grad workshops during work hours. However, some participants mentioned that their GSD supervisor did not permit them to attend. Detroit at Work staff felt that the post-grad workshops were not implemented correctly and considered them largely ineffective.

Detroit at Work staff, GSD staff, and providers felt that most participants' goal was to get a job with the City rather than through the training provider, and thought that may contribute to the low placement by training providers and Matrix.

“People are angling for long-term jobs with the city. Maybe they fall away a little bit from the training provider job placement. So that doesn't happen, and by the time the career coach is ready to step in, maybe that person's already moved on or they're changed their phone number, and then you've got 12 other people who are on your caseload in the exact same spot that you're trying to manage.”

—Skills for Life administrator

Disengaging from the Program

GSD was responsible for determining whether someone should not continue in the program; education and training providers and career coaches had limited ability to drop someone from the program. GSD staff reported that attendance was typically the reason for discontinuing someone from the program. However, this was consistent across all employees, not just Skills for Life participants. The city had a policy that allowed for two days of absence and one day of tardiness. When participants did not comply

with this policy, GSD supervisors would begin with an oral or written warning, followed by a three-day suspension, a 10-day suspension, a 30-day suspension, and then six months of probation.

When GSD terminated a participant, GSD staff were supposed to communicate this to the education and training providers and career coaches. However, the training provider did not always feel that this information was conveyed effectively. Matrix staff echoed that they did not always feel there was optimal communication between training providers and GSD.

"But really it's just kind of a program where you got different entities kind of chopped up playing a different [roles]."

—Training provider

Participants who did not complete the program left for several reasons. Most were dissatisfied with the work environment, including difficult supervisors. Several participants from earlier cohorts reported that GSD was unprepared to handle the influx of people, which caused delays due to an insufficient quantity of tools for everyone.

"We're working eight hours, we've been sitting in that room for four hours. Two hours you're sitting in the van, and then you're going to go out in the field and work."

—Program participant

"It was a big waiting game. We were all excited, they're excited, but the communication and the prep wasn't there. I guess we was all learning at the same time. Even the higher ups."

—Skills for Life participant

A few participants had family or medical emergencies that required them to take a few months off work. Once they were ready to rejoin the program, they were no longer able to do so due to the program's timeframe.

3.7. Participant Outcomes

This section provides an overview of participant performance on educational and employment outcomes.

Education Outcomes

A key intended outcome of the Skills for Life program was a positive change in CASAS reading and math scores. We tracked this for engaged participants by comparing the initial CASAS test results after program enrollment with the most recent CASAS test results recorded for those who enrolled in an education program. Exhibit 3.14 presents a summary of findings on test results.

Reading Test Results. Most participants who enrolled in educational activities took more than one CASAS reading test (n=138). Among these participants, 62 percent (n=85) achieved a higher grade level on their most recent test. A small percentage (14 percent, n=20) showed no change, while the remainder (24 percent, n=33) had a lower reading score. The overall median change in score represented a full grade level improvement (median change of 1.0; mean change of 0.9 grade level).

Math Test Results. More participants took multiple CASAS math tests, possibly because math results at intake were generally lower than those for reading tests. Among the 252 Skills for Life participants who enrolled in an education course and took more than one CASAS math test, over 8 in 10 (81 percent, n=205) achieved a higher grade level on their second test. A small share (3 percent, n=8) showed no change, while the remaining 15 percent (n=39) had a lower math score. The median change in score was greater than one grade level (median change of 1.3; mean change of 1.4 grade levels).

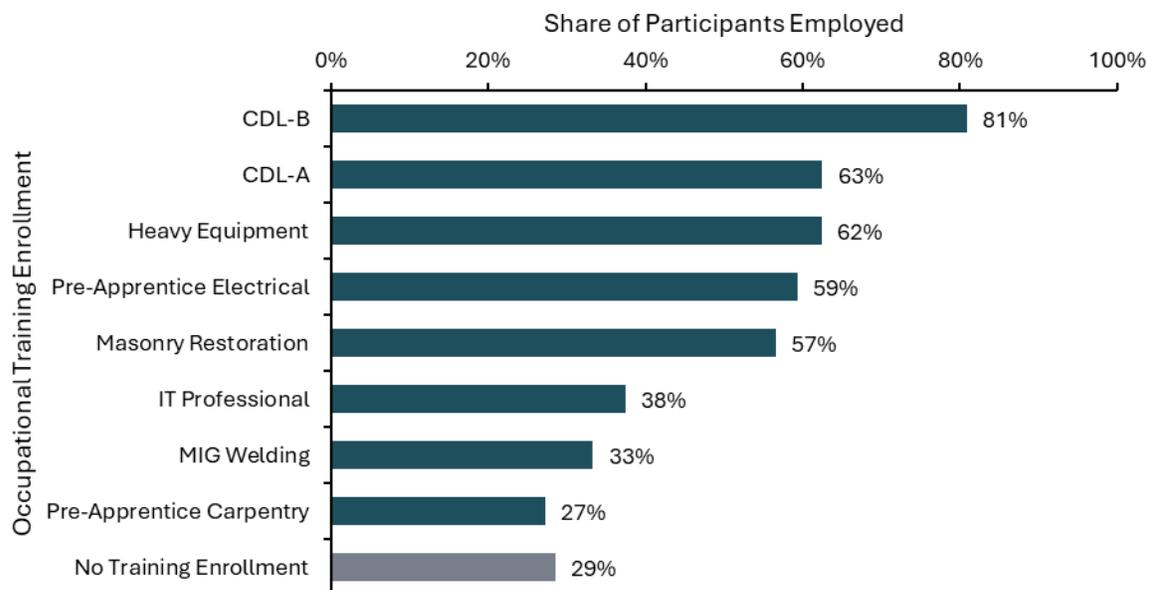
Exhibit 3.14. Change in Reading and Math CASAS Test Results for Skills for Life Participants Enrolled in Education Activities

Change in Grade Level	Change in Reading Test Results (n=138)		Change in Math Test Results (n=248)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Improved	85	62	205	81
No Change	20	14	8	3
Declined	33	24	39	15

Employment Outcomes

Among engaged program participants, slightly fewer than half (48 percent, n=349) secured post-program employment; nearly all post-program jobs (95 percent, n=330) were full-time. Post-program employment rates varied widely by the occupational training programs in which participants enrolled. Most CDL-B training enrollees (81 percent, n=17; see Exhibit 3.15) were employed after the program, while just over one-quarter of those in pre-apprentice carpentry (27 percent, n=9) had a job after the program. Participants who enrolled in heavy equipment, the most popular occupational training program, were employed at a rate of 62 percent (n=121).

Exhibit 3.15. Post-Program Employment Rate by Training Program Enrollment



As shown in Exhibit 3.16, nearly one-third (32 percent, n=112) of employed participants were employed by GSD after Skills for Life ended. Some Skills for Life participants secured jobs in other city departments, including Public Works, Transportation, and Water and Sewerage. Participants also found employment outside the city, including with a landscaping company and Amazon (across multiple sites). Some participants who worked for GSD noted that they had to reapply and interview for full-time positions after completing the program, while others transitioned immediately to full-time employment.

Exhibit 3.16. Common Employers of Skills for Life Participants

	# Employed (n=349)	% Employed
City of Detroit General Services Department	112	32%
City of Detroit Public Works	11	3%
Detroit Department of Transportation	9	3%
Payne Landscaping	8	2%
Amazon	7	2%
City of Detroit Water and Sewerage	6	2%
Other	196	56%

One key goal of the Skills for Life program was to prepare participants for well-paying jobs, specifically those paying at least \$17 per hour. Among participants who actively engaged and secured employment after the program, almost all were hired in a post-program job earning at least \$15 an hour (96 percent, n=333; see Appendix Exhibit E.7). Nearly two-thirds were hired at salaries of at least \$17 an hour (63 percent, n=218).

Most Environmental Techs interviewed secured full-time employment with the Grounds Maintenance team, while most Blight Remediation Techs interviewed held temporary positions after completing the program.²⁴ Blight Remediation Techs reported feeling like their temporary employment was a “ticking time bomb,” where any day could be their last.

While most participants felt that the program helped them take a step in the right direction, there were some significant limitations. For instance, although most CDL participants found employment after completing the program (81 percent for CLD-B, 63 percent for CDL-A), several noted that most CDL jobs required at least one year of work experience. Therefore, if GSD did not hire these participants, they were unlikely to gain this work experience elsewhere. Additionally, a few participants who completed the pre-apprentice electrical program reported that they could not secure a job in the field with that training alone; they would need to take additional electrical coursework that the program did not offer. These individuals were unaware that additional coursework would be required when they initially signed up for the training. Similarly, a participant who completed a masonry restoration program felt unprepared to work in the field after the training, noting that they had multiple instructors who joined and were fired throughout the training.

“Because we’re still stuck in that catch 22. I have a certificate. I graduated, but I can’t do anything with it. So my next step is McDonald’s in a sense. Instead of going to a higher paying job.”

—Skills for Life participant

²⁴ Administrative data on temporary versus permanent positions at GSD was not provided.

3.8. Patterns in Successful Program Completion

In this section, we use a statistical method called survival analysis to explore program completion across different participant characteristics and experiences.

This analysis focuses on the 728 engaged participants (i.e., program participants who enrolled in at least one educational activity or occupational training). Engaged participants in the Skills for Life program experienced widely varying times until successful completion. The following analysis examines the timing of program completion. Successful completion is defined as having a post-program hire record or achieving a successful completion outcome for a program-related occupational training. The population that has not successfully completed the program may still be engaged in program activities or may have dropped out. Appendix A provides additional information on the methodology used for this section.

How to interpret survival analysis

This section uses two types of graphs to show the survival analysis results. The first graph displays the *Time to Successful Completion* for the population, showing the cumulative percentage of individuals who have completed the program. It begins at 0 percent (no one in the engaged population has yet successfully completed the Skills for Life program) and increases as time passes from initial enrollment. This graph excludes those who dropped out of the program or who have not yet completed it, so it never decreases to zero.

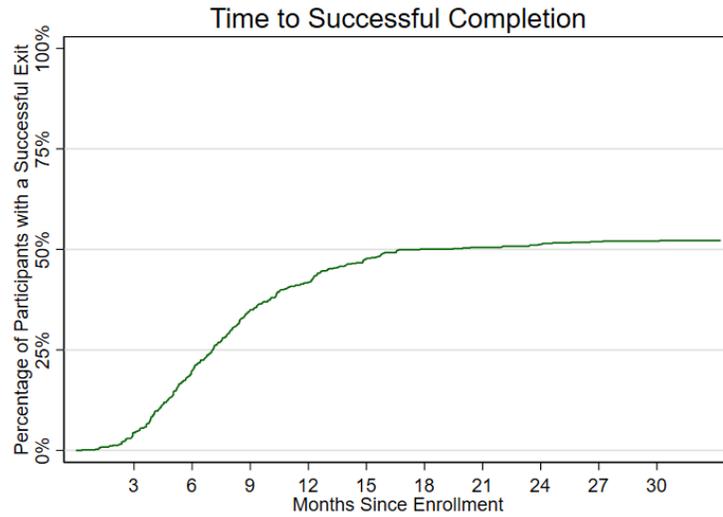
The second graph type, *Monthly Completion Rate*, shows the estimated probability that an engaged individual will successfully complete the Skills for Life program (conditional on not having already completed it) during any given month. This figure was initially calculated using the daily probability; however, since daily values are typically small—usually less than one percent—the figure was adjusted to monthly rates for easier interpretation. A 0.5 percent daily completion rate is equivalent to a 14 percent monthly rate.

For both graphs, the starting time is a participant's initial enrollment event, allowing us to compare the completion rates despite different enrollment dates. The graph covers the first thousand days after initial enrollment, though there is little change after the first 600 days.

Time to program completion – full population

Of the 728 engaged participants, one quarter of enrolled participants successfully exited the program within 184 days of enrollment (or about six months). Half of the participants successfully exited the program within 340 days of enrollment (about 11 months). Afterwards, relatively few people continued to exit the program, with 64.8 percent of the population successfully exiting the program after a thousand days. The last observed successful completion occurred 904 days after enrollment (about 30 months). Exhibit 3.17 shows the share of participants who successfully completed the program over time.

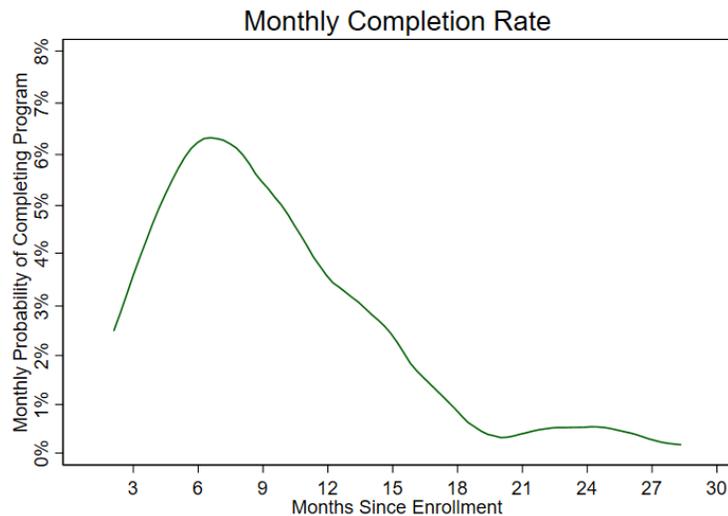
Exhibit 3.17. Time to Successful Completion, Full Population



Rate of program completion – full population

The rate at which people successfully completed the Skills for Life program peaked approximately 200 days after enrollment (about 6.6 months), as illustrated in Exhibit 3.18, which shows the likelihood of a participant completing the program by month. At that point, the daily probability of program exit for an individual participant was roughly 0.27 percent per day, which is equivalent to a monthly rate of 8 percent. After the peak, the rate of program exit dropped steadily, approaching zero after 600 days.

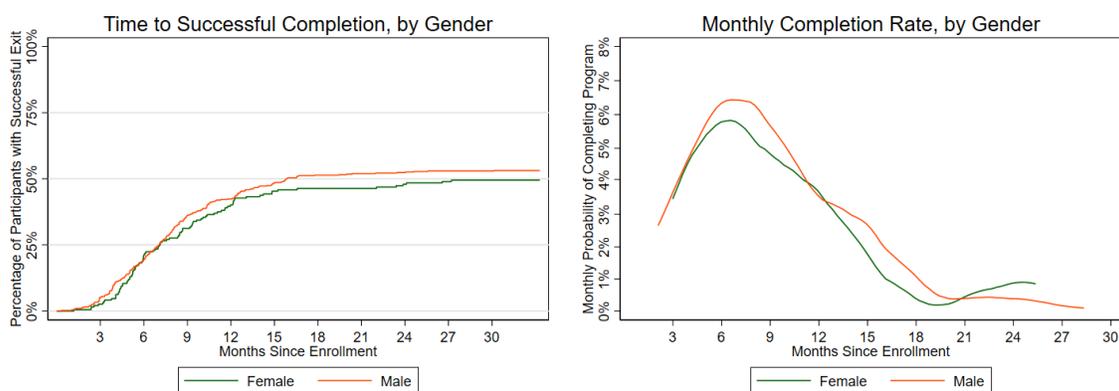
Exhibit 3.18. Monthly Probability of Program Completion, Full Population



Program completion and completion rate, by gender

Exhibit 3.19 (left) shows the share of men and women in Skills for Life successfully completing the program over time. Men tended to complete the program at a somewhat higher rate than women.²⁵ Over the length of the program, 66.2 percent of men successfully completed the program, compared to 61.0 percent of women. Exhibit 3.19 (right) shows the likelihood of successful completion by month for men and women. Completions for both groups peaked around 200 days, between six and seven months after program entry. Men also tended to complete the program somewhat faster than women, with a daily probability of completion approximately 19 percent higher for men than women. This difference does not necessarily reflect any difference in expected program completion, as it is a small enough difference that it can be attributed to random chance.

Exhibit 3.19. Time to Successful Completion by Gender



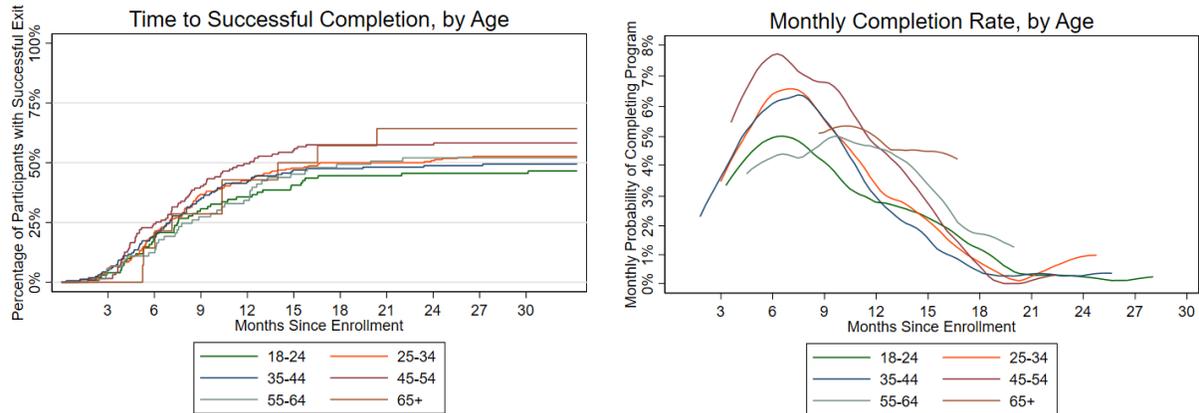
Program completion and completion rate, by age

Exhibit 3.20 (left) shows the share of Skills for Life participants by age successfully completing the program over time. Older populations were more likely to successfully complete the program, with the highest completion rates observed for the 45-54 (71 percent) and 65+ (87 percent) age bands. The youngest age band, 18-24, had the lowest completion rate (60 percent). These differences are relatively small and could be due to random variation.

Exhibit 3.20 (right) shows the likelihood of successful completion by month for different age groups. Despite their higher completion rate, older age bands tended to complete somewhat later than younger age bands. The completion rate peaks near 200 days (7 months) for the 18-25, 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54 age bands, just as we see in the full sample analysis. However, the completion rate of older participants peaks later, with the 55-64 population completion rate peaking at 10 months and the 65+ population completion rate peaking at 11 months.

²⁵ Fewer than five people in the sample identified as non-binary, they are excluded from this analysis.

Exhibit 3.20. Time to Successful Completion By Age

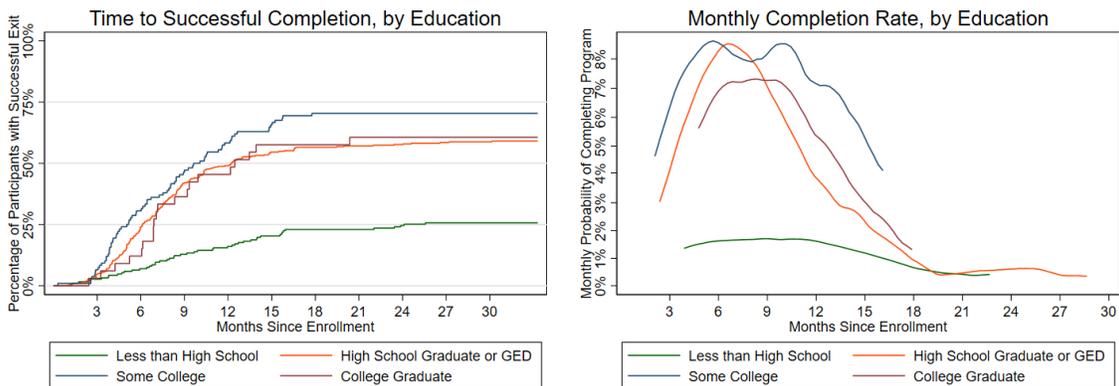


Program completion and completion rate, by education

There are substantial differences in final program completion by education level. Exhibit 3.21 (left) shows the share of Skills for Life participants by education level successfully completing the program over time. Most notably, enrollees who had not completed high school or a GED had a much lower completion rate than others, with only 37 percent of them completing the program. The highest completion level was for enrollees with “some college” (81 percent). Completion levels for high school graduates (73 percent) and college graduates (79 percent) were similar.²⁶ The differences between these groups are significant and unlikely to be due to random variation.

This pattern is also observable when looking at daily completion rates. Exhibit 3.21 (right) shows the likelihood of successful completion by month for people with different education levels. Enrollees who had not completed high school had a low daily completion rate throughout their enrollment. Other groups had a completion rate peak between 6 and 9 months after their initial enrollment.

Exhibit 3.21. Time to Successful Completion by Education



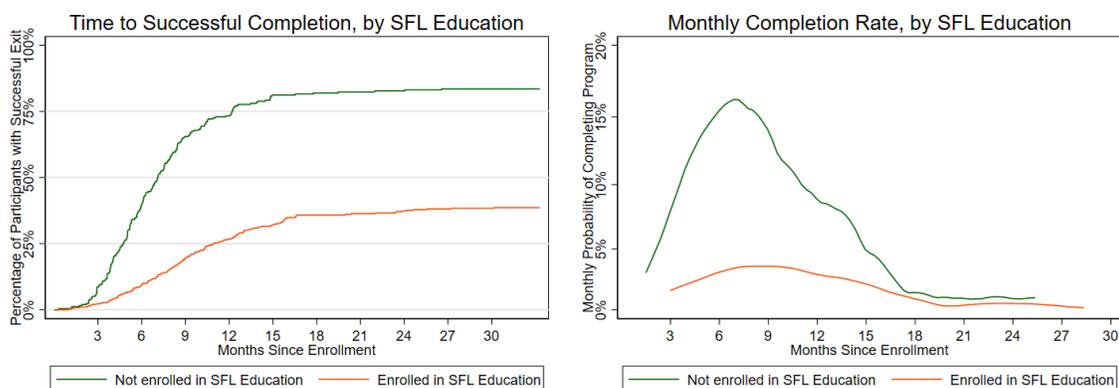
²⁶ 17 people had marked “Other” for their education, they are excluded from this analysis.

Program completion and completion rate, by enrollment in Skills for Life education activities

Participants who enrolled in Skills for Life education activities (i.e., those not yet ready to enroll in an occupational training program) tended to be less likely to complete the program successfully. This may be attributed to the fact that these individuals were required to meet CASAS score requirements or complete a GED course, which could extend the program timeframe. Exhibit 3.22 (left) shows the share of Skills for Life participants who successfully completed the program over time, by whether they had enrolled in an education activity. Fifty percent of education program enrollees completed the program, compared to 84 percent of non-enrollees. This difference is large and unlikely to be due to random variation.

Exhibit 3.22 (right) shows the likelihood of successful completion by month for people who enrolled in education activities and those who did not. The completion rate for non-enrollees peaked near 200 days after enrollment (between six and seven months after program entry), at a monthly probability near 16 percent. Education enrollees peaked somewhat later and at a lower rate of 4 percent monthly probability.

Exhibit 3.22. Time to Successful Completion by SFL Education

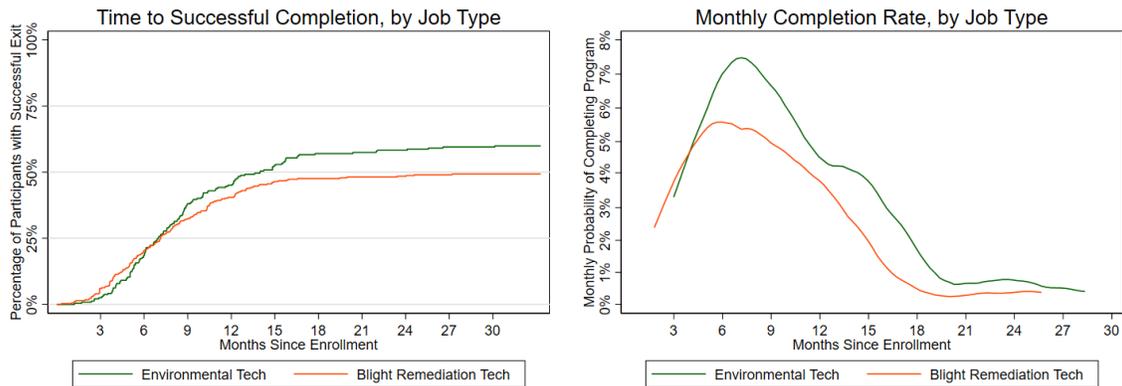


Program completion and completion rate, by job type

Exhibit 3.23 (left) shows the share of Skills for Life participants successfully completing the program over time, by program job type. Participants employed as Environmental Technicians had a higher final completion rate (68 percent) than participants employed as Blight Remediation Technicians (63 percent). These differences are relatively small and could be due to random variation.

The initial successful completion rate for BRTs peaked around 6 months, while the ET rate peaked slightly later at around 7 months after enrollment. Both groups saw consistent declines after peak completion, with the long run completion rate for the Environmental Tech program somewhat higher than the long run completion rate for Blight Remediation Technicians. Exhibit 3.23 (right) shows the likelihood of successful completion by month for people in each program job.

Exhibit 3.23. Time to Successful Completion by Job Type



Summary

Survival analysis can indicate how different groups complete the Skills for Life program at varying rates, but it cannot necessarily explain why those disparities exist or how the program should respond to them. For instance, one of the largest disparities observed is based on education; participants who had not completed high school or earned a GED had a significantly lower completion rate. Similarly, participants who enrolled in Skills for Life education activities (i.e., those who were not yet ready to enroll in an occupational training program) were less likely to successfully complete the program.

There are several ways this data could be practically interpreted:

- One potential conclusion is that people without HS degrees are more likely to struggle in the Skills for Life curriculum, and should be given additional resources and support to ensure their success.
- Another potential conclusion is that the Skills for Life program is best suited for students who have at least a high school degree or equivalent, and those students should be prioritized in recruitment efforts going forward.

Survival analysis alone cannot confirm which interpretation is correct. Making that decision requires additional information, stakeholder input, and judgment from program leaders.

3.9. Summary of Key Findings

Skills for Life aimed to improve skills, employment, and wages among Detroit residents through a career development program that hired and compensated participants to work on City projects three days a week while attending educational activities or occupational training two days a week. Although program administrators, partners, and participants generally felt positive about the program, they also highlighted several implementation challenges faced.

- **Staff and participants had an overall positive view of the program.** They believed that Skills for Life was a great initiative, despite the challenges faced. Providing full-time, hourly wages for participants while they completed their education and training programs, along with the three days of work, was essential for enabling participants to support themselves while advancing

their education. Furthermore, the combination of career readiness training and hands-on experience at GSD helped participants develop soft skills (e.g., communicating with employers and establishing a work schedule).

- **Additional time and resources for planning and piloting the program could ease implementation challenges.** The limited timeline afforded by the ARPA grant meant that Detroit at Work attempted to plan and launch the program in approximately six months, with the goal to complete program activities by June 2025. This timeline was ambitious; staff would have appreciated more time to scale-up program operations (e.g., hiring staff, obtaining necessary equipment) and communicate with other program providers to ensure that everyone understood their roles and responsibilities. Participant disengagement from the program was highest in early cohorts, and several participants from those cohorts expressed frustration with the disorganization. However, Detroit at Work succeeded in reducing the proportion of individuals who enrolled but did not engage with an education or training activity over time.
- **Staff and participants cited challenges posed by individuals with higher needs enrolled in the program.** Detroit at Work staff interviewed said that the Skills for Life program was not the best fit for participants facing certain barriers (e.g., mental disabilities). Both City staff and Career Counselors described situations in which they had to assume roles akin to social workers, which they did not feel prepared to do. Similarly, participants felt that the presence of some individuals in the program detracted from their progress. Staff and participants acknowledged the importance of inclusivity for people from all backgrounds but suggested that it would have been more beneficial for those applying if they were directed to another Detroit at Work program better suited to their needs. Conversely, research on transitional jobs programs indicates that initiatives placing individuals in fully subsidized, temporary jobs are most effective for those facing significant employment barriers (Cummings & Bloom, 2020). Therefore, it may be more important to prepare programs to support and more effectively incorporate such individuals rather than exclude them.
- **Effective communication among different program partners is essential.** Skills for Life involved partnerships with several organizations, including Matrix, training and education providers, and GSD, to complete the program. Staff and participants reported that they did not always feel that communication between the various entities was as effective as it could be, which sometimes forced participants to make those connections independently. For instance, one participant pointed out that they had to inform their career coach when they completed the required work hours to start the CDL training program because their GSD supervisor did not do so.
- **While nearly half of the participants who received services obtained employment, the training programs were often insufficient for them to secure jobs in their preferred fields.** Forty-six percent of program participants gained post-program employment, with most of those jobs paying at least \$17 an hour. However, while participants felt the program helped them take a step in the right direction, the training provided did not adequately prepare them for long-term employment in their desired fields outside of working for the City. CDL programs had some of the highest participant employment rates after the program ended. However, participants indicated that most CDL jobs outside the City of Detroit required at least one year of experience. Thus, if the City did not hire an individual full-time, they would be unable to use their certificate. Similarly, participants who enrolled in other programs (e.g., pre-apprentice electrical) mentioned that the training they completed in Skills for Life was merely the first step in a series of required trainings.

- **Detroit at Work should request more frequent feedback from participants throughout the program.** Several participants suggested that Detroit at Work should have had more frequent check-ins with participants to ensure that the program was operating effectively and to make adjustments as needed. One participant noted that Detroit at Work did request feedback through a survey, but that was not until the very end of the program.

4. Conclusion

Federal ARPA funding provided the City of Detroit with a unique opportunity to test new workforce development programs on a large scale. Two of these programs, JumpStart and Skills for Life, capitalized on this substantial funding to invest in robust and flexible employment supports. These programs were largely designed from the ground up, implemented rapidly, and had high participation targets. This approach required intricate coordination among Detroit at Work, City of Detroit departments, numerous training providers, and community-based IDO partners.

This study used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate JumpStart and Skills for Life, relying on retrospective program data, staff and partner interviews, and participant focus groups to describe and assess program implementation. This evaluation presents total program enrollment and engagement metrics, as well as challenges and successes in service delivery, delivery of program services, and participant outcomes for both programs. Staff and participant experiences and reflections are integrated throughout the report, offering additional insight into the local context, operational nuances, and program adaptations over time.

One key limitation of this evaluation is the incomplete program data. Some JumpStart participation data, such as barrier removal services or education course complete data from some providers, were stored in external data systems and were not included in this evaluation. Consequently, participant outcomes are likely underestimated.

Overall, Detroit at Work did an admirable job of designing and launching two complex and large-scale workforce development programs on a very rapid timeline. However, this rapid launch led to many implementation challenges. The findings of this evaluation provide valuable insights for Detroit at Work's future strategic planning processes, particularly regarding program design, participant targeting, and operational structures.

The career readiness course was well-regarded and had high completion rates. Although there were minor differences in the career readiness curricula across JumpStart and Skills for Life, qualitative feedback was unanimous regarding the utility and value provided by this program component. JumpStart providers suggested that intermittent refreshers on the career readiness courses would further enhance participant soft skills, communication, and expectation management. During implementation, the Skills for Life program extended the career readiness course to 30 hours to better prepare participants. Participants in both programs achieved high completion rates.

Occupational training programs should be vetted by employers and aligned with their needs. Ongoing efforts to ensure that training programs directly align with employer demand and provide skills sufficient for employment in related fields should continue. Participants recommended external employer reviews of training program curricula and stronger, or better enforced, performance expectations for training providers. Both participants and program staff wanted to see more involved job placement efforts by training providers. Apprenticeships or subsidized work programs could also help bridge the gap in post-training experiences.

Skills for Life's hybrid employment and training model, which provides participants full-time compensation, holds great potential. The Skills for Life model, which provides paid work alongside training and educational activities, was highly valued by participants for the financial stability it

provided. Program staff agreed that this structure was essential for ensuring participants could support themselves while advancing their education. This model appears promising but requires careful integration of work and training activities, along with strong partnerships between program staff and potential employers. Notably, program data suggest that participants entering without a high school diploma or GED have a significantly lower likelihood of successful program completion. Therefore, future programs may benefit from separating intensive GED education from shorter-term occupational training or employment-focused programs or considering additional ways to support the success of such participants through the program.

JumpStart’s financial assistance strategy could be revised and better aligned with program goals.

JumpStart offered a range of financial assistance, including monthly cash stipends, in-kind supports (i.e., laptops and transportation aid), as well as barrier removal payments and one-time benefits cliff payments (both of which were not included in this evaluation). Different forms of financial assistance can support financial stability and stress reduction, remove barriers that hinder participants from program engagement or employment, or incentivize program engagement and progress. The structure of financial assistance should be adjusted to align with the specific goals the program aims to achieve. For example, monthly cash stipends can support financial stability, reduce participant stress, and help them meet basic needs. To achieve these goals, stipends should be tied to as few requirements as possible (or even be unconditional), distributed regularly, and be large enough to make a difference. Alternatively, cash stipends can serve as an incentive for program participation and progress. If incentivizing engagement is the primary objective, then payment amounts that decrease over time will lower the incentive to remain enrolled, a theme that emerged in participant focus groups. Incentive payments may be more effective if linked to specific participant goals or milestones. Finally, JumpStart’s barrier removal program, which provided funds to pay for participant needs such as utilities, rent, or transportation, was perceived as highly effective in reducing barriers to engagement and employment.

The community-based mentorship model faced many implementation challenges, but for the IDOs that navigated these difficulties, it worked well. JumpStart's IDO mentorship concept was promising, yet it encountered several operational hurdles. First, the milestone-based funding structure proved inadequate for the level of effort required to meet expectations for mentorship and compliance tracking. Participants did not progress through as many milestones and program tracks as anticipated, which resulted in reduced funding for the IDOs. Second, for many IDOs, JumpStart was their first experience working with Detroit at Work or any workforce development program. Clarity regarding roles, processes, and expectations, along with more structured communication pathways and shared data systems, would have facilitated better implementation. Furthermore, centralized management (i.e., IDO contracts established with Detroit at Work rather than the City) would likely have improved coordination and program operations. Nevertheless, IDOs that successfully adapted to the system were able to recruit and provide ongoing mentorship to participants and received praise from those participants.

Both JumpStart and Skills for Life demonstrated successes and provided critical lessons that can be leveraged to inform future investments and programming. Future programs should prioritize clear program goals and strong partner alignment, build sustainable operational structures and data-sharing systems, ensure that job training programs are vetted by employers and meet their needs, and further customize participant pathways to various levels of need and employment readiness.

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Appendix A. Technical Methods

This appendix provides additional context and details to the study methodology used throughout the report.

Quantitative Data

The study team constructed variables at the person level in a single dataset to streamline analysis across multiple datasets. Variables were constructed for JumpStart and Skills for Life enrollees, as well as for other Detroit at Work clients, who were included in our analysis to provide context to the JumpStart program outputs and outcomes. The relevant program datasets, and the key corresponding variables used in this analysis are provided in Exhibit A.1 below.

Exhibit A.1: Overview of DESC Program Datasets and Key Variables in this Analysis

Table Name	Description	Key Variables from this Data
Account	Record for organizations, such as employers or partners	Employer name
Assessment	Records for CASAS (and other) tests	Math and reading test dates and scores
Contact	Records for individuals	Demographic information gathered at intake
Enrollment	Records for individuals' enrollment in programs operated by DESC	Enrollment date and status for Skills for Life
Event	Records for events, including trainings	Event name and date
Event Attendance Enrollment	Records of individuals' enrollment in paid activities like trainings	Training and education course name, provider, dates, and individual completion status
Event Attendance Tracking	Records of individuals' attendance at events	Dates and attendance for career readiness class (Skills for Life) ^a
Hire Records	Records for individuals' employment in specific jobs	Post-enrollment employment records, including job title, employer name, hire date, full/part time status, and wage. Also, information about Skills for Life program jobs
Invoice Line Items	Records about payments made to community-based mentor organizations (called IDOs) when individuals meet milestones in JumpStart programs	Milestone payment amount
Program	Programs operated by DESC	Program name
Referral	Records for referrals to programs; specifically used to track enrollment in JumpStart	Enrollment dates, status, referring IDO, and more for JumpStart tracks
Services	Records of supportive service receipt	Counts of receipt of common services, like career advising and gas cards
Stipends	Amount of stipend paid to individuals in each payroll	Total amount paid, months received stipend, and more

Constructing Variables

Once data was cleaned, we constructed variables at the person level in a single dataset to streamline analysis across multiple datasets. These variables were constructed for JumpStart and Skills for Life enrollees, as well as for the Detroit at Work clients that we use to provide context for JumpStart findings.

- Enrollment status for Skills for Life and JumpStart
- Reading and math assessments (CASAS test) results and dates
- Attendance at orientation events, particularly Career Readiness
- Education and training events and outcomes, including course name, course provider, and dates
- Supportive service receipt, including number of instances receiving common services and total dollar value of services
- Post-enrollment employment records, including job title, employer name, hire date, full/part time status, wage. Also includes a count of the number of post-enrollment hires
- JumpStart track referral and enrollment. Including the first track referred to, regardless of enrollment status, and all enrolled tracks in order. This data included information about referral status, dates, IDO referrer, and full/part time status
- JumpStart milestone achievement
- Skills for Life program job information, like job title, hire date, and end date

Constructing Key Outcome Variables

Our key outcome variables are completion of education and training and post-enrollment employment. We gathered data from the event enrollment and hire datasets at the person level to streamline analysis of outcomes.

To identify education and training outcomes, we gathered information for education and training events that program participants had enrolled in after enrollment in the two programs, or any events they had enrolled in that had “Skills for Life” or “JumpStart” in the name. For those with multiple event enrollments, we drew in the training or education event with the most successful completion status – a “successful completion,” followed by a “successful start”, and finally an unsuccessful completion status such as “dropped,” “incomplete,” or “no show.”

To identify post-enrollment employment, we identified all hire records that had a hire date after enrollment in the two programs. For those in Skills for Life, we excluded the program jobs, which had “Skills for Life” in the job title. For individuals with multiple jobs, we drew in the job record for their most recent hire, based on the hire date.

Qualitative Data

Exhibit A.2 provides an overview of the interviews the study team conducted during the January site visit.

Exhibit A.2. Overview of Qualitative Interviews from January Site Visit

Program	Interview Type
JumpStart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three interviews with DESC Program administrators • Three interviews with Career Coaches from different centers • Three interviews with IDOs • Two IDOs that participated throughout the program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – One IDO that stopped participating • Two focus groups with participants who completed the program • One focus group with 7 participants • One focus group with 8 participants • One focus group with 3 participants that did not complete the program
Skills for Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One interview with DESC Program administrator • One interview with a training provider • One interview with an education provider • One interview with career coaches • Two interviews with GSD staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – One interview with Grounds Maintenance supervisors – One interview with Blight Remediation supervisors • Two focus groups with participants who completed the program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – One focus group with 9 participants – One focus group with 10 participants • One focus group with 6 participants who did not complete the program

Skills for Life

Skills for Life Exclusion Decisions

As Skills for Life included several core activities, there were different pathways for determining program participation or “engagement.” Metrics we considered in defining the final sample included: enrollment in a specific education or occupational training activity (as opposed to simply the program overall), career readiness attendance, or a minimum number of days employed by the City of Detroit in a Skills for Life job.

Out of 835 participants that enrolled in Skills for Life, 107 (13 percent) attended career readiness and were employed for at least two weeks, but did not enroll in any education or occupational training activity. Of those 107, 29 did not attend any career readiness training, 25 did not remain employed for at least two weeks, and 8 enrollees did none of the above. This is illustrated in Exhibit A.3 below.

Ultimately, based on conversations with program staff, we decided to exclude the 121 enrollees who never enrolled in occupational training or education as our “engaged participants” group.

Exhibit A.3: Patterns of Engagement Used to Exclude Participants from “Engaged Participants”

Occupational Training Enrollment	Education Enrollment	Career Readiness Attendance	Employed in Skills for Life > 14 days	Number of Enrollees Excluded (%)
No	No	Yes	Yes	107 (13%)
No	No	No	Yes	29 (3%)
No	No	Yes	No	25 (3%)
No	No	No	No	8 (1%)

Training Completion Data

Occupational training completion data aggregates each participant's most successful training program. In other words, if a participant started one training program, but then switched to and completed a different program that was more aligned with their goals, then the figures below count that participant as one successful completion in the second program

Completion statuses for occupational trainings were recorded by training providers when a participant completes the training. We use this as a proxy for credential achievement because credential achievement is not recorded consistently, and relies on participants reporting their credential achievement voluntarily.

Survival Analysis

“Survival analysis” is a set of statistical methods that are often used in analyzing data that shows when a specific event occurs²⁷. It is called “survival analysis” because of its origin in the medical literature (where a common usage is looking at the effects of a drug or medical procedure on patient mortality). However, it can be used to examine other on-time events. In this case, it is being used to examine the rate at which people successfully finish the Skills For Life program.

An advantage of survival analysis is that it accounts for censored data (such as when an individual leaves a data collection process). This includes people who withdraw from a program, such that they no longer appear in any data collection. Survival analysis can help us learn about patterns associated with successful program completion. It can also help us identify what types of participants seem mostly likely to successfully complete the S4L program and can inform future program design – either in defining the best target populations, or in modifying the types of programming or supports provided to participant types that seem to struggle more.

²⁷ Cleves, M. (2008). An introduction to survival analysis using Stata. Stata press.

Appendix B. Recommendations for Data Tracking

This appendix provides recommendations for improving data quality.

Clarify Employment Status. In employment records, distinguish between individuals who are non-responsive and those who are unemployed. Without this clarity, we cannot know why individuals lack an employment record, and assume everyone who did not respond is unemployed.

Standardize Intake Data Collection. Either collect intake data for everyone, or simplify the intake form. For JumpStart, a large share of participants did not complete the more comprehensive intake form. Thus, we were not able to do analysis based on the demographic data with high levels of missingness.

Standardize Credential Tracking. Establish a dedicated variable for credential attainment. Staff reported to us that they saved credentials in Launchpad as a PDF attachment, so we could not assess credential achievement on a wide scale.

Centralize Data Storage. Incorporate all data sources into Launchpad – we learned that some education course completion data was stored elsewhere with Learn to Earn data, and that some supportive service data was stored with CHC. If it's not feasible to store in Launchpad, consider creating a data sharing agreement with other entities for analysis purposes.

Incorporate an Evaluation Plan in Project Development. Include evaluation staff and data personnel in project planning from the outset. For example, Skills for Life staff sought to assess participants' most recent wages mid-program; however, wage data had not been collected at intake. Staff had to retroactively gather this information, but 65 percent of responses were \$15/hour, the program wage. An evaluation plan would have created consistency in data collection throughout the program.

Appendix C. JumpStart Supplemental Data Tables

This appendix provides supplemental data tables for the JumpStart program.

Exhibit C.1. JumpStart Referrals by IDO (First Referral, by Enrollment Status)

IDO	Enrolled	Referred but not Enrolled
TMI Detroit, Inc.	572	251
Detroit Peoples Community	443	346
Community Health Corps (CHC)	215	132
Fit4Life Health and Fitness LLC	130	64
Focus: HOPE	110	36
The Open Door COGIC - Detroit	80	28
Spectrum Human Services, Inc.	58	16
Emerging Industries Training Institute Inc.	57	45
International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit, Inc.*	51	24
The Black Bottom Group dba Blast Detroit	41	98
Church of the Messiah Housing Corporation	29	23
T.E.A.	28	19
St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center*	14	15
Family Assistance for Renaissance Men*	12	9
Alkebu-lan Village*	2	0
Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation*	0	4
Southwest Detroit Business Association, Inc.*	0	2

*These IDOs did not stay in the program

Exhibit C.4. Education Level by JumpStart Enrollees' First Enrolled Track

Education	Skills Refresh		HS/GED		Training		Employment	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than HS	27	31%	417	85%	75	8%	35	13%
HS Diploma/GED	41	47%	53	11%	546	55%	125	45%
Any College	14	16%	11	2%	339	34%	108	39%
Other	5	6%	6	1%	28	3%	8	3%
Missing	0	0%	1	0%	3	0%	0	0%

Exhibit C.5. Distribution of JumpStart Enrollees' Most Recent Wage, at Enrollment

Wage	No. (N=1,842)	% of Participants
<\$10	40	2%
\$10	76	4%
\$11	55	3%
\$12	95	5%
\$13	89	5%
\$14	80	4%
\$15	265	14%
\$16	163	9%
\$17	154	8%
\$18	135	7%

Wage	No. (N=1,842)	% of Participants
\$19	62	3%
\$20	114	6%
\$21	26	1%
\$22	25	1%
\$23	19	1%
\$24	10	1%
\$25+	94	5%

Exhibit C.6. Other Characteristics of JumpStart Enrollees

Characteristic	No. (n=1,842)	% of Enrollees
Housing Stability		
Housed, Stable	1,112	60%
Housed, Unstable	313	17%
Homeless at Intake	103	6%
Missing	314	17%
Children²⁸		
Has a child	1,079	59%
No children	655	36%
Missing	108	6%
Child Care Arrangements		
Family/Friend/Neighbor Care	314	17%
Me or My Partner are the Primary Caregiver	256	14%
Child Care Center	115	6%
Home-Based Care (Non-Family or Friend)	36	2%
Not Applicable	1,010	55%
Missing	111	6%
Child Care Reliability		
Reliable	592	32%
Unreliable	296	16%
Not Applicable	846	46%
Missing	108	6%
Transportation Reliability		
Reliable	1,295	70%
Unreliable	421	23%
Missing	126	7%
Disability		
Disability	275	15%
No Disability	1,256	68%
Missing	311	17%

²⁸ The source data included three variables related to children and child care, which often did not agree. We created a new variable that assumed that an individual had children in their care if they responded to any of those three questions with an answer that suggested they had children or needed child care. Between the three intake questions, just 9% of JumpStart participants provided no answers.

Characteristic	No. (n=1,842)	% of Enrollees
Justice Involvement		
Yes, One or More Felony Convictions	266	14%
Yes, One or More Misdemeanors	170	9%
Yes, Other	74	4%
No Criminal Record	1,118	61%
Missing	214	12%
Age		
18-24	179	10%
25-34	654	36%
35-44	502	27%
45-54	292	16%
55-64	155	8%
65+	60	3%

Exhibit C.7. Share of JumpStart Participants Reporting Their Primary Transportation as Reliable

Mode of Transportation	% Reporting Reliable
Car (Owned/Leased)	91%
Car (Borrowed)	80%
Car (Carpool)	78%
Bus	59%
Uber/Lyft/Taxi	59%
Bike/Walking	37%

Exhibit C.8. Employment Rate by IDO

IDO	Total Enrolled	No. Employed	% Employed
TMI Detroit, Inc.	573	389	68%
Spectrum Human Services, Inc.	59	38	64%
Fit4Life Health and Fitness LLC	139	86	62%
Detroit Peoples Community	446	273	61%
Church of the Messiah Housing Corporation	29	17	59%
The Black Bottom Group dba Blast Detroit	38	21	55%
Focus: HOPE	109	60	55%
Emerging Industries Training Institute Inc.	71	38	54%
Community Health Corps (CHC)	253	124	49%
The Open Door COGIC - Detroit	83	37	45%
T.E.A.	28	11	39%
Family Assistance for Renaissance Men*	13	4	31%

* Family Assistance for Renaissance Men did not stay with the program as an IDO. This figure draws IDO information from the first track that any participant enrolled in.

Exhibit C.9. Median Number of Days for Participant Acceptance and Enrollment, by Month

Month and Year	Referral to Acceptance	Acceptance to Enrollment	Total Time
Feb-23	61	137	110
Mar-23	33	52	75
Apr-23	28	41	81
May-23	3	40	56
Jun-23	7	42	60
Jul-23	7	31	56
Aug-23	10	18	36
Sep-23	9	9	22
Oct-23	3	4	17
Nov-23	7	4	14

Exhibit C.10. Number and Share of JumpStart Participants Receiving Stipend Payments Monthly

Month and Year	Number Paid	% Overall Enrollment
Feb-23	0	0%
Mar-23	5	0%
Apr-23	29	2%
May-23	49	3%
Jun-23	123	7%
Jul-23	197	11%
Aug-23	321	17%
Sep-23	828	45%
Oct-23	1,359	74%
Nov-23	1,645	89%
Dec-23	1,695	92%
Jan-24	1,764	96%
Feb-24	1,710	93%
Mar-24	1,205	65%
Apr-24	1,416	77%
May-24	1,476	80%
Jun-24	1,524	83%
Jul-24	881	48%
Aug-24	942	51%
Sep-24	824	45%
Oct-24	781	42%
Nov-24	777	42%
Dec-24	759	41%
Jan-25	583	32%
Feb-25	645	35%
Mar-25	478	26%
Apr-25	327	18%
May-25	231	13%

Exhibit C.11. Number of Months that JumpStart Participants Received Stipend Payments

Number of Months Receiving Stipend	Number	Percentages
0	6	0%
1	3	0%
2	8	0%
3	13	1%
4	38	2%
5	71	4%
6	85	5%
7	41	2%
8	76	4%
9	129	7%
10	176	10%
11	121	7%
12	128	7%
13	128	7%
14	149	8%
15	177	10%
16	158	9%
17	182	10%
18	153	8%

Appendix D. JumpStart in Context

To provide context for JumpStart outcomes, we also analyzed experiences and outcomes for non-JumpStart Detroit at Work clients, organized into groups that aligned with the JumpStart tracks. These groups were identified based on recommendations by DESC staff. Our goals were to capture participants with similar goals and activities to individuals in each track in JumpStart.

Exhibit D.1. Description of Detroit at Work Non-JumpStart Analysis Groups

Track	Track Description	Group for Comparison	Number in Group
Skills Refresh and High School Diploma/GED	Skills Refresh: Individuals with low reading and math skills aim to improve by two grade levels. HS/GED: Individuals without a GED or high school diploma attend GED classes to achieve their GED.	Learn to Earn: Individuals enrolled in a “Learn to Earn” (also called L2E) event in 2023 or 2024. Learn to Earn pays Detroiters without a high school diploma or GED \$200 per week to attend school for 20 hours per week.	1,466
Job Training	Individuals attend occupational training with the goal of achieving an industry-recognized credential.	Detroit at Work training: Individuals enrolled in a training event that started in 2023 or 2024.	3,445
Employment track enrollees who did not enroll in any training programs	Individuals seek employment opportunities with the aim of finding and maintaining employment.	Detroit at Work WIOA/PATH employment: Anyone who enrolled in WIOA or PATH (a barrier removal and employment program for TANF recipients) in 2023 or 2024, but did not enroll in any training or education events in 2022 or later.	3,289

Although these groups of non-JumpStart clients are similar to JumpStart participants in many ways, they differ in fundamental ways, limiting how we can interpret these results. For example, JumpStart participants were required to have been out of work, training, or education for six months before enrollment, making them fundamentally different from the non-JumpStart population seeking other services. Due to the underlying differences between JumpStart participants and the non-JumpStart Detroit at Work group members, **we cannot interpret the differences in outcomes between the two groups as the result of the JumpStart program alone.** Other differences between the two populations could also explain the differences in outcomes. However, we use the outcomes for the non-JumpStart Detroit at Work groups to provide context for “status quo” outcomes in DESC programming.

Among key demographics (education, gender, and age), the JumpStart group is very different from the group of similar non-JumpStart participants across most categories. In most cases, these differences are statistically significant ($p=.05$).

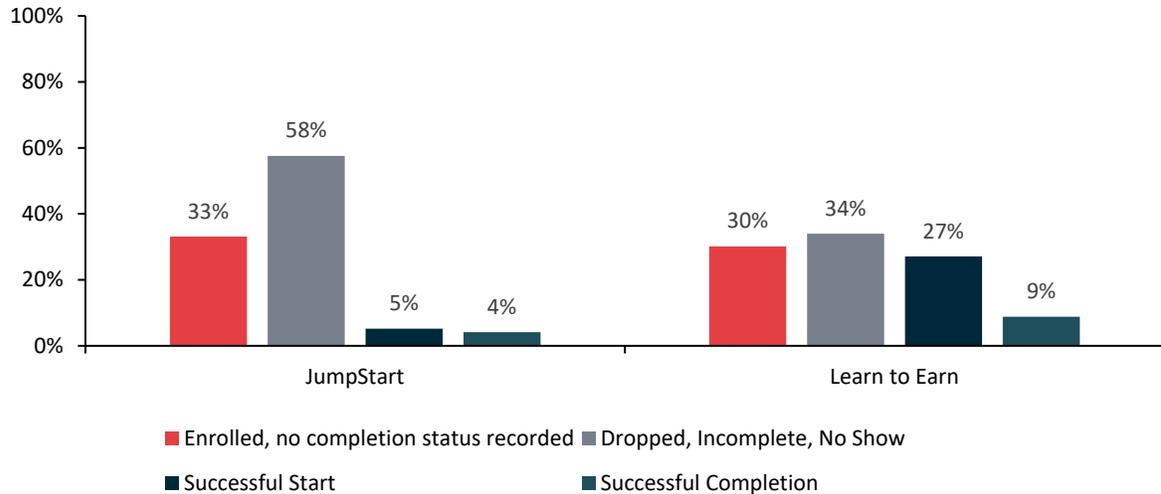
For example, 74 percent of the JumpStart education group (those who first enrolled in either Skills Refresh or HS/GED) had an education level of less than a high school diploma or equivalent; 88 percent of the Learn to Earn group had this education level. The gender breakdown also differed between the groups: for example, the JumpStart training group was 61 percent women, while the Detroit at Work

training group was 45 percent women. The JumpStart employment group was 63 percent women, and the Detroit at Work WIOA/PATH group was 83 percent women.

Education Activities

Exhibit D.3 shows education completion rates for JumpStart participants and those enrolled in Learn to Earn.

Exhibit D.3: JumpStart and Learn to Earn Group Education Completion Status

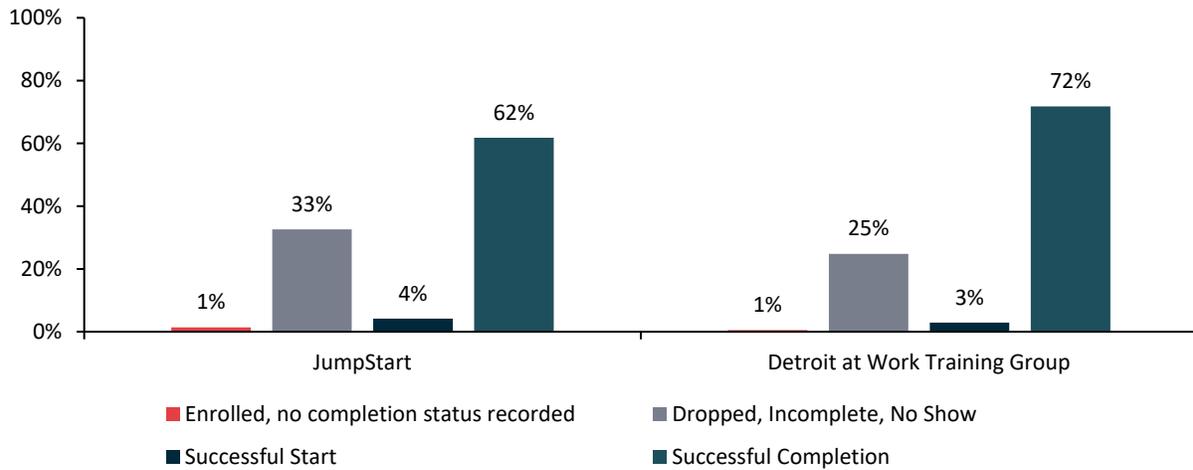


JumpStart participants were far more likely than those in the Learn to Earn group to have an unsuccessful status of dropped, incomplete, or no show for education activities, at 58 percent (n=334) compared to 34 percent (n=498) for the Learn to Earn group. More than one-third (36 percent, n=526) of participants in the Learn to Earn group had either a successful start or successful completion recorded, four times the rate in the JumpStart education tracks (9 percent, n=54). However, the share with an actual successful completion was very low for both groups, at 9 percent (n=129) for the Learn to Earn group and 4 percent (n=24) for the JumpStart group. A large proportion of participants in both groups did not have any completion status recorded.

Training Activities

As shown in Exhibit D.4, the Detroit at Work training enrollees had roughly similar program completion rates to the JumpStart training track. Most in each group had a successful completion. The Detroit at Work training group had higher rates of successful completion, while the JumpStart group had a higher rate of unsuccessful completion status.

Exhibit D.4. JumpStart and Detroit at Work Training Group Training Completion Status



JumpStart participants most often enrolled in carpentry, building, and industrial trainings, or in medical trainings such as nursing programs. In contrast, the most popular training category among the Detroit at Work training group, as seen in Exhibit D.5, was CDL, with 37 percent (1,266) of group members enrolled, mainly in CDL-A classes. Just one quarter (834, 24 percent) of participants enrolled in a healthcare-related training. By far, the most common training type was CDL-A training (1192 enrollees, which was one-third of all participants in the Detroit at Work training group).

Exhibit D.5: Detroit at Work non-JumpStart Training Group Enrollment by Category

Training	# in Detroit at Work Training Group (n=3,445)	% of Detroit at Work Training Group
CDL	1266	37%
Carpentry/Building and Industrial	675	20%
Nursing	533	15%
Other Medical	301	9%
Information Technology	216	6%
All Other	208	6%
Cybersecurity	192	6%
Call Center	54	2%

Education Outcomes: Reading and Math Test Results

One measure of success in education is a change in CASAS reading and math scores. We tracked this by comparing the first CASAS test results after program enrollment with the most recent CASAS test results recorded for JumpStart participants who enrolled in an education program and for all Learn to Earn group members.

Reading Test Results. The Learn to Earn group were more likely to improve their CASAS reading result if they took a second test. In both groups, more than half in each group improved their reading score on their most recent test. The typical change in grade level was similar, with slightly larger improvements for the L2E group: the median change in reading scores was 0.2 grade level for the JumpStart group and 0.4 for the L2E group (mean change of 0.5 grade level for JumpStart and 0.6 for L2E).

Math Test Results. The JumpStart and Learn to Earn groups also had similar results on their CASAS math test results – about 6 in 10 in each group improved their math scores with a second CASAS test. The typical change in grade level was the same: for the Learn to Earn group, the median change was 0.3 grade level (mean change of 0.3 grade level), and for the JumpStart group, the median change was 0.3 grade level (mean change of 0.3 grade level).

Exhibit D.6. Change in Reading CASAS Test Results for JumpStart and Learn to Earn Participants Enrolled in Education Activities

	JumpStart Change in Test Results (n=172)	L2E Change in Test Results (n=526)
Higher Grade Level Result	90, 52%	304, 58%
No Change in Grade Level	30, 17%	72, 14%
Lower Grade Level Result	52, 30%	150, 29%

Exhibit D.7: Change in Math CASAS Test Results for JumpStart and Learn to Earn Participants Enrolled in Education Activities

	JumpStart Change in Test Results (n=195)	L2E Change in Test Results (n=545)
Higher Grade Level Result	113, 58%	322, 59%
No Change in Grade Level	16, 8%	64, 12%
Lower Grade Level Result	66, 34%	159, 29%

Employment Outcomes

A note on employment outcomes

Participants’ employment was voluntarily reported by participants or their employers to Detroit at Work providers. JumpStart participants were encouraged to report their employment status through the possibility of monthly stipend payments and due to additional outreach from staff. In contrast, other Detroit at Work clients did not have the same incentives to report employment outcomes. This difference in incentives may help explain some of the variation observed between the JumpStart participants and the non-JumpStart clients.

To ensure we included all job records in our analysis, we measured program-related employment as any employment record with a hire date within a month prior to the participant’s first JumpStart acceptance, or within the two months prior to their first stipend payment. By including hires recorded just before the date of enrollment or first stipend payment, this measure of employment captures all program-related jobs, regardless of inconsistencies in data entry on enrollment or hire dates. For those with more than one job record, we drew information from their most recent hire record.

Among all JumpStart participants, 1,099 (60 percent) reported a job any time after JumpStart enrollment, shown in Exhibit D.8.²⁹ Among those in the PATH/WIOA group, 1,082 (33 percent) reported a job after their program enrollment.

²⁹ Includes unverified hire records.

Exhibit D.8: Share of WIOA/PATH Group and JumpStart Enrollees Employed After Program Enrollment

	Number of Participants in Group	Number of Participants Employed	% of Participants Employed
JumpStart Overall	1,842	1,099	60%
Detroit at Work WIOA/PATH Group	3,289	1,082	33%

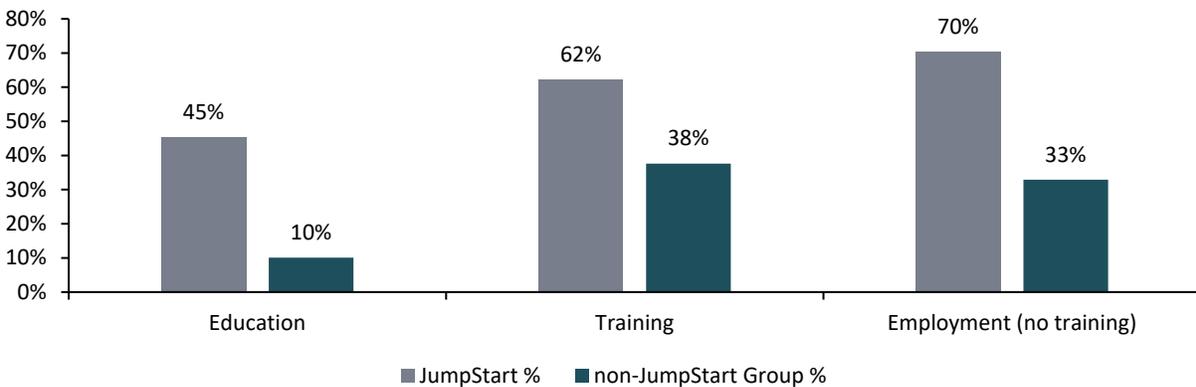
We can also look at the JumpStart participants who are in the most similar circumstances to the PATH/WIOA group, which is the 410 individuals who were enrolled in the employment track but never participated in training. Among this group, 70 percent (n=288) of participants found a job. Exhibit D.9 shows the number of participants in each group along with the share employed.

Exhibit D.9: Share of JumpStart Enrollees (by Category) and WIOA/PATH Group Members Employed After Program Enrollment

	Number of Participants in Group	Number of Participants Employed	% of Participants Employed
JumpStart Employment Track (Ever Enrolled)	1,703	1,085	64%
JumpStart Employment Track (No Training Enrollment)	410	288	70%
Detroit at Work WIOA/PATH Group	3,289	1,082	33%

Participants who were ever enrolled in the non-employment JumpStart tracks found employment at differing rates. For the 627 people who ever enrolled in the education tracks, 45 percent (n=283) reported employment; for the 1,062 people who ever enrolled in the training track, 62 percent (n=661) reported employment. These rates were much higher than the non-JumpStart group employment rates, as seen in Exhibit D.10.

Exhibit D.10: Share of Participants Employed after Program Enrollment



Among the post-enrollment jobs for JumpStart participants, the median wage was \$17.00 per hour, and the average wage was \$17.40.

Wages were similar for the education tracks and Learn to Earn group, but wages were lower for JumpStart participants who had enrolled in the training track. JumpStart participants who had enrolled

in the employment track but never enrolled in training had higher wages than those in the Detroit at Work WIOA/PATH group. Exhibit D.11 shows median and mean wages for those in JumpStart and in the non-JumpStart groups.

Exhibit D.11: Median and Mean Post-Enrollment Wages for JumpStart and Non-JumpStart Groups

	JumpStart			Comparison Groups		
	Median	Mean	Observations	Median	Mean	Observations
Education	\$16.00	\$16.48	176	\$16.00	\$16.06	148
Training	\$17.00	\$17.61	487	\$18.39	\$19.81	1,294
Employment (no training)	\$16.50	\$17.22	243	\$15.00	\$15.46	1,079

Appendix E. Skills for Life Data Tables

This appendix provides supplemental data tables for the Skills for Life program.

Exhibit E.1. Percent Enrolled in Skills for Life that Did not Enroll in Any Training or Education Activities

Year and Quarter	Total Number Enrolled (N =834) ^a	Total Number Did Not Engage (N = 107)	Percent
2022 Q1	89	30	34%
2022 Q2	124	14	11%
2022 Q3	25	8	32%
2022 Q4	129	21	16%
2023 Q1	55	6	11%
2023 Q2	89	8	9%
2023 Q3	76	8	11%
2023 Q4	100	7	7%
2024 Q1	45	2	4%
2024 Q2	102	3	3%

^a There is one data record missing.

Exhibit E.2. Skills for Life Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	No. (n=728)	% of Engaged Participants
Race		
Black/African American	652	90%
Multi-Racial	30	4%
White	10	1%
Other	24	3%
Missing	12	2%
Gender³⁰		
Female	195	27%
Male	530	73%
Other/Non-binary	<5	0%
Missing	<5	0%
Age Band		
18-24	94	13%
25-34	231	32%
35-44	177	24%
45-54	133	18%
55-64	78	11%
65+	15	2%

³⁰ Counts are rounded to the nearest 5 and counts less than 5 are suppressed to protect confidentiality. Totals may not match due to suppression.

Characteristic	No. (n=728)	% of Engaged Participants
Highest Wage Ever		
>\$12	6	1%
\$12	14	2%
\$13	4	1%
\$14	11	2%
\$15	86	12%
\$16	55	8%
\$17	76	10%
\$18	64	9%
\$19	38	5%
\$20	84	12%
\$21	26	4%
\$22	23	3%
\$23	14	2%
\$24	10	1%
\$25	25	3%
\$26	3	0%
\$27	10	1%
\$28	4	1%
\$29	3	0%
\$30<	30	4%
Missing	142	20%
Housing Stability		
Stable Housing	574	79%
Unstable Housing	95	13%
Homeless	25	3%
Missing	34	5%
Children		
Has a child	390	54%
No children	316	43%
Missing	22	3%
Child Care Arrangement		
Me or My Partner are the Primary Caregiver	94	13%
Family/Friend/Neighbor Care	91	13%
Child Care Center	48	7%
Home-Based Care (Non-Family or Friend)	6	1%
Not Applicable	467	64%
Missing	22	3%
Child Care Reliability		
Reliable	200	27%
Unreliable	90	12%
Not Applicable	416	65%
Missing	22	3%

Characteristic	No. (n=728)	% of Engaged Participants
Disability		
Has a Disability	48	7%
No Disability	648	89%
Missing	32	4%
Primary Transportation		
Bike/Walking	10	1%
Bus	137	19%
Car (Borrowed)	64	9%
Car (Carpool)	83	11%
Car (Owned/leased)	376	52%
Uber/Lyft/Taxi	36	5%
Missing	22	3%
Justice Involvement		
Yes, One or More Felony Convictions	185	25%
Yes, One or More Misdemeanors	81	11%
No Criminal Record	430	59%
Missing	32	4%

Exhibit E.3. Number of Gas Cards Among Skills for Life Engaged Participants

Number of Gas Cards	Number of Participants (n = 632)	Percent
1	43	7%
2	49	8%
3	43	7%
4	53	8%
5	49	8%
6	58	9%
7	70	11%
8	138	22%
9	61	10%
10	31	5%
11	19	3%
12	7	1%
13+	11	2%

Exhibit E.4. Education Completion

Completion Status	Number of Participants (n = 418)	Percent
Dropped, Incomplete, No Show, Deceased	206	50%
Successful Completion	209	49%

Exhibit E.5: Share of Skills for Life Participants who Received an Extension on Occupational Training Program

Share of Enrolled Training Participants Approved for an Extension on Training	
CDL-A	82%
CDL-B	76%
Pre-Apprentice Electrical	59%
IT Professional	42%
MIG Welding	33%
Masonry Restoration	33%
Pre-Apprentice Carpentry	33%
Heavy Equipment	4%

Exhibit E.6. Days from End of Occupational Training to End of Program Job Among Participants with Recorded End Dates

Time	Number of Participants (N=182)	Percent
Before training end to 30 days after	50	27%
31-60 days	32	18%
60-90 days	47	26%
90+ days	53	29%

Exhibit E.7. Post Skills for Life Wages Among Engaged Participants (N = 349)

	Number	Percent
Wage		
<\$15	14	4%
\$15	67	19%
\$16	48	14%
\$17	56	16%
\$18	57	16%
\$19	10	3%
\$20	44	13%
\$21	9	3%
\$22	13	4%
\$23+	29	8%
Missing	2	1%
Wage Overview^a		
Less than \$17/hour	129	37%
\$17/hour or more	218	63%
Less than \$15/hour	333	96%
\$15/hour or more	14	4%

^a Wage overview does not factor in missing value

Exhibit E.8. Number of Weeks in Occupational Training Curricula and Weeks to Successful Training Completion

Training	Curriculum Length	Median Weeks in Training	Mean Weeks in Training
CDL-B	5	7.1	7.0
CDL-A	7	13.6	13.0
IT Professional	8	8.1	7.0
Heavy Equipment	10	9.1	9.6
MIG Welding	11.25	14.0	14.7
Masonry Restoration	15	17.0	17.6
Pre-Apprentice Electrical	22	23.9	25.0
Pre-Apprentice Carpentry	22.5	23.0	22.7