

2011-2012 Evaluation of the Partnership for Automotive Career Education (PACE)

Funded by the Green Jobs Innovation Fund at the
U.S. Department of Labor through Jobs for the Future

INTRODUCTION

The Partnership for Automotive Career Education (PACE) seeks to provide opportunity to low-income, low-skilled individuals by training them for entry-level jobs in the automotive industry. At the same time, PACE aims to meet the employer demand for trained entry-level workers in this field. Through a five-and-a-half-month training course, PACE prepares individuals to work in the automotive sector by offering both technical training and other skills and services, including English and math, financial literacy/counseling, case management, professional development, job search assistance, and two years of post-placement services. PACE is led by the Asian American Civic Association (AACA), a workforce training provider, and includes other educational institutions and nearly a dozen automotive employers.

HISTORY OF THE PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE AND FUNDING SOURCES

History

SkillWorks has a long history of involvement with PACE. PACE got its start in 2003, when SkillWorks awarded a one-year planning grant to AACA and two other community-based partners to develop the program and create curriculum. SkillWorks then funded PACE as one of its Phase I workforce partnerships, and continued funding the implementation of PACE for four years. When SkillWorks' initial funding commitment ended in 2008, AACA and the other program partners were able to sustain PACE programming, albeit with a significantly reduced budget. The partnership was bolstered in 2007 by a three-year \$500,000 grant from Commonwealth Corporation under the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund (WCTF). AACA continued as the lead agency, maintaining relationships with employers, providing support to program participants, and managing the partnership. Madison Park Technical Vocational High School (Madison Park) provided the majority of the occupational training. PACE's relationship with Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (BFIT) during this time was minimized with BFIT providing only one or two classes to PACE participants and offering a four-credit articulation agreement for PACE graduates. PACE's budget depended first on the WCTF grant, and then primarily on filling seats with students holding Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) funded through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). AACA's staff size was reduced, and PACE was only able to run one cohort a year rather than two.

In 2011, a new opportunity arose that would both expand PACE's service delivery and enhance its core curriculum to address new skills demanded in the automotive service sector. Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national workforce organization, applied for funding from the Green Jobs Innovation Fund (GJIF) at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to expand job training in seven

cities across the country through the development or enhancement of skills training in green jobs in four industry sectors. SkillWorks partnered with JFF on the DOL grant to secure funding to enhance PACE's automotive technician workforce partnership through the addition of a hybrid and alternative fuel component to the pre-existing training program. SkillWorks' rationale for selecting PACE drew heavily on grantmaking lessons learned during the collaborative's three-year Green Collar Career Pathways Initiative.

The Department of Labor awarded a grant of \$8 million to Jobs for the Future to administer programs in several cities. Of that \$8 million, \$850,000 was awarded to SkillWorks: \$600,000 was passed through to PACE, and \$250,000 was used for SkillWorks' administration, evaluation, and capacity building for the partnership. The three-year grant of \$600,000 was made to develop and implement a 45-hour hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles component to the PACE curriculum and to run five cohorts of the enhanced PACE program. Jobs for the Future and SkillWorks administer the grant.

Because the PACE program started in 2005 with the support of SkillWorks, the early years of the partnership have already been evaluated as part of SkillWorks' Phase I annual evaluations. These reports include information on the PACE program during the partnership's nascent years and can be found at <http://www.skill-works.org/resources-evaluation-reports.php>. This current evaluation focuses on the changes in the partnership since those initial evaluations, the value of the enhanced hybrid and alternative fuels curriculum component, and the outcomes related to this enhanced program for participants, employers, and the workforce system. This evaluation of the expanded PACE program is the first of three.

Structure

Asian American Civic Association, a designated workforce training provider, leads the partnership, which includes 14 employer partners: Direct Tire and Auto Service, Bridgestone Firestone, Sullivan Tire and Auto Service, Herb Chambers Honda, Bernardi Acura of Boston, Auto Service and Tire, Expressway Toyota, Ira Toyota of Danvers, Village Automotive Group, Boston Automotive Service, South Boston Auto and Heavy Truck Repair, A & B Auto, Monro Muffler Brake and Service, and NSTAR. Other partners include the following training providers and postsecondary educational institutions: Boston Public Schools (BPS) Department of Adult Education and Community Services, Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology, and Massachusetts Bay Community College (MassBay).

AACA is responsible for the program design, coordination, and implementation, including outreach and assessment. Additionally, AACA offers participants basic skills, life skills, and case management services. AACA's PACE director manages the partnership with oversight from AACA's chief operating officer. Services are provided to the participants by an outreach and recruitment coordinator, a case manager, a professional development instructor, and an employment specialist. BPS and BFIT are responsible for the automotive curriculum development and delivery. BPS provides the general automotive training at Madison Park Technical Vocational High School, while BFIT provides the hybrid technology and alternative fuel training. The postsecondary institution partners, MassBay and BFIT, offer college credits to

graduates of PACE through articulation agreements with AACA. Employer partners are expected to be engaged in the PACE program by offering assistance with curriculum and program design and making recommendations to participant eligibility requirements. Additionally, they are expected to identify career pathways for entry-level workers to advance, hire qualified PACE graduates as vacancies allow, and mentor PACE graduates for the first six months they are on the job. AACA convenes two advisory meetings each year with PACE partners where they discuss the curriculum, progress of the program, and trends in the field as related to opportunity areas for PACE.

Over the course of this three-year grant, PACE will offer training to five cohorts of participants: two cohorts in Year 1, two in Year 2, and only one in the final year of the program. The first cohort started in September 2011, and the second cohort started in February 2012.

As part of this grant, AACA is working towards creating a sustainability plan for the PACE partnership. Currently, the PACE program is funded almost entirely by the Department of Labor grant. If PACE is to continue beyond the three-year grant, new fundraising strategies will be needed. SkillWorks has provided AACA with a small amount of a consultant's time to assist PACE in this effort.

BASELINE CONTEXT AND DESCRIPTION OF PARTNERSHIP SERVICES

Individual Program Participants

Goals for Individuals

PACE intends to enroll 70 participants (five cohorts) over the three-year grant period, beginning with 30 individuals in Year 1. The goal is for 65 of those 70 participants to complete the training. The diploma received upon completion is considered by PACE and SkillWorks as a credential that is recognized locally by automotive service employer partners. Fifty of those individuals are expected to find new unsubsidized employment in the automotive sector. The main mission, as articulated by one AACA representative, is "to get people jobs."

While pre-employment training and preparation is the primary focus of PACE, career and academic advancement are considered important longer-term goals for participants. PACE's grant agreement with SkillWorks does not specify academic or career advancement targets for participants although PACE is expected to provide post-placement support that includes coaching around career advancement. PACE also encourages graduates to prepare, take, and pass the Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certification in order to ensure advancement. To support participants' academic advancement, PACE has been focused on increasing the number of BFIT credits available to graduates due to the new hybrid component of the curriculum.

Participant Characteristics

Target Population

PACE's target population of participants has been low-income, economically disadvantaged individuals, particularly immigrants with limited English skills. As part of this grant, PACE is now also focusing outreach efforts to attract women and veterans to the program and is receiving support from JFF and Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) to do so.

PACE sets some basic requirements around age, income, and education, although it has recently lowered its requirements around education in order to reach a harder-to-serve population. Participants are required to be 18 years of age or older, have legal work authorization, and have a valid driver's license. Income eligibility is determined based on the WOW economic security BEST calculations¹ and differs based on a participant's family size, county of residence, and existing benefits. The income cap for a participant with a family size of one in Suffolk County receiving no benefits would be \$45,420. In reality, most PACE participants with this demographic makeup have annual income that is less than \$21,000, significantly less than this cap.

PACE prefers participants to have a high school diploma or GED and a clean driving record. While it used to require participants to have a high school diploma or GED, this is no longer a requirement because it was screening otherwise qualified candidates out of the program. AACAA learned early on that its initial stated educational goals were too rigorous to serve the hard to reach population it was trying to serve. Consequently, throughout the history of the PACE program, the stated goals and requirements related to education have been flexible. AACAA takes applicants with low literary scores because staff believe that English skills are not important for entry into the automotive industry. PACE used to have a stated goal that participants have a 7th or 8th grade literacy level, but that has been reduced to a 5th grade reading level² and a 5th grade math level, and even then there is flexibility. The educational requirement modifications have allowed PACE to serve more immigrants, a key component of AACAA's mission. AACAA realizes that these lower literacy levels may hurt participants' chances of moving up the ladder because written tests will be more difficult. It is considering ways to mitigate this issue, such as offering continuing education to graduates, but it is also open to revisiting the literacy level requirements at intake, if necessary.

Participant Demographics

A more detailed description of the first two cohorts funded through the GJIF grant is provided below. Immigrants make up nearly half of PACE participants (47 percent), and nearly 90 percent of participants are non-white. Participants are largely men (91 percent), under 44 years of age (78 percent), and just over half of the participants live within the city of Boston. While none of the participants had a job in the automotive sector upon entering the program,

¹ <http://www.basiceconomicsecurity.org/best/>

² For non-native English speakers, this would be a Student Performance Level 4 (SPL4).

13 of 32 were employed outside of the automotive sector upon entering the PACE program (41 percent).

		GJIF Cohorts 1 & 2
Country of Origin	Immigrant	47%
	United States	53%
Race/Ethnicity	Black/African American	44%
	Hispanic/Latino	9%
	Unknown/Other	22%
	Asian	13%
	White/Caucasian	13%
Gender	Male	91%
	Female	9%
Age	18-24	22%
	25-44	56%
	45+	22%
Current Place of Residence	Boston	56%
	Outside Boston	44%
Employment Status upon PACE Entry	Unemployed	59%
	Employed Outside Automotive Sector	41%

Of the 13 individuals from the first two cohorts employed outside of the automotive sector, none had fringe benefits. On average, these individuals were earning \$9.90/hour and working approximately 28 hours a week. The following table indicates the average hourly wages and the average hours worked each week for these individuals.

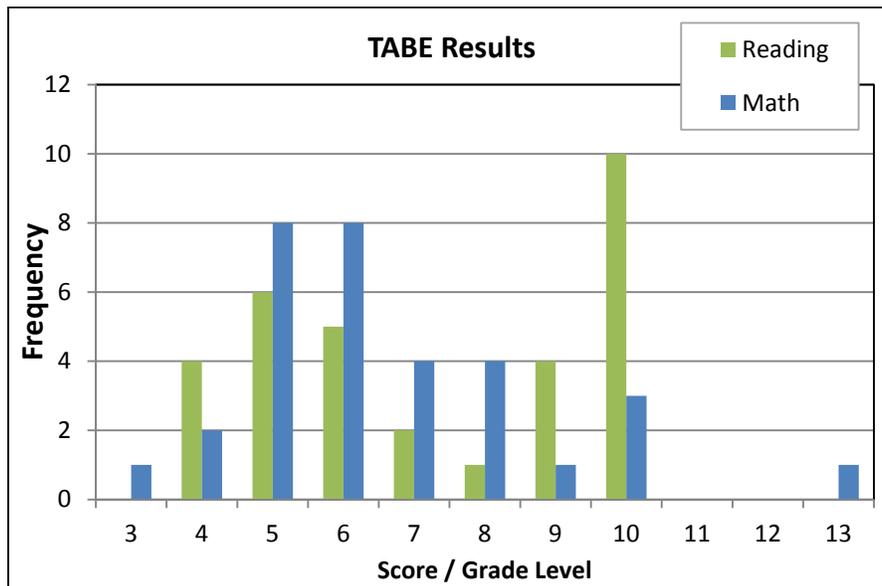
	Average Hourly Wage	Average Weekly Hours
Cohort 1	\$ 9.44	25
Cohort 2	\$ 10.29	31
Aggregate Average	\$ 9.90	28

The following tables detail annual household income and level of educational attainment for participants in cohorts 1 and 2.

Yearly Household Income	Number of Participants in Year 1 (n=32)			
	Family of 1	Family of 2	Family of 3	Family of 5
\$0 - 21,000	20	1	2	-
\$21,001 – 28,000	0	1	3	-
\$28,001 – 35,000	1	-	-	1
Data Unavailable	3	-	-	-

Level of Educational Attainment	Number of Participants (n=32)
9 th -12 th Grade, no Diploma	1
High School Diploma	19
High School Diploma Equivalent (e.g., GED)	2
Some College, no Degree	7
Foreign Postsecondary Credential	2
Associate's Degree	1

Although most PACE participants have a high school diploma or higher, pre-tests suggest that actual proficiency for many is well below high school level. The following figure details the pre-test TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) results for cohorts 1 and 2, a test given to applicants to assess reading and math levels.



*Scores for non-native speakers are included in the graph above.
 All scores have been rounded to the nearest whole number.
 Scores for individuals who did not complete the full PACE program are also included.

Grade levels in reading for participants in cohorts 1 and 2 ranged from 4 to 9.9+, with an average of 7.3. Grade levels in math ranged from 4.3 to 9.9+, excluding one anomaly of 2.8. On average, the math level among all participants was 6.6. Participants' reading capabilities overall were slightly more advanced than their math skills.

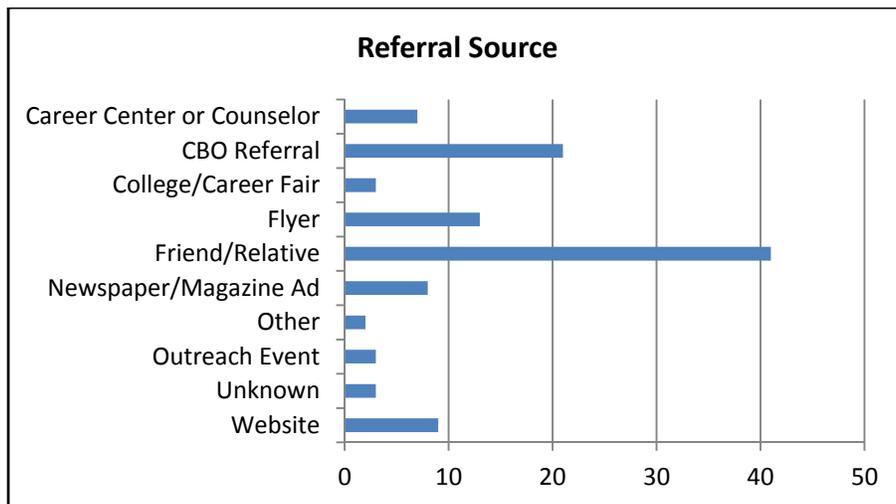
The population served by PACE programming faces additional challenges beyond academic proficiency. Interviews suggest that individuals in PACE have more felony or CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) issues than other workforce training program participants. This is likely because there are employment opportunities in the automotive sector for that

population. The strong placement rate for PACE participants indicates that as far as job placement goes, criminal history is not a barrier. Nonetheless, staff interviews indicate that compared to the other AACA programs, the PACE participants are consistently the hardest to serve participants and the program has the highest attrition rate. As a result, the program places a strong focus on case management and support.

Outreach and Assessment Practices

AACA is responsible for the outreach and assessment for PACE. The outreach strategy is a multifaceted approach and includes distribution of flyers on the streets and subways, posting on bulletin boards at community-based organizations (CBOs) and career centers, presenting at CBOs twice a month, contacting counselors at career centers, exhibiting at career fairs, and advertising in seven newspapers targeting the immigrant population.

The figure below depicts the referral sources for applications received between May 2011 and July 2012.



Beyond referrals from friends and relatives, the most successful form of outreach comes from sending flyers out by email to career counselors at the career centers and to CBOs to post on their job boards. PACE gains many referrals through these connections to the counselors and CBO staff.

Assessment is a multi-step process. The first screening involves an application and TABE test. Staff then conduct a phone screening followed by an in-person interview. After the interview, an initial meeting with the case manager allows for collection of all of the documents necessary to prove program eligibility. In a second meeting with the case manager, the case manager collects references and sets appropriate expectations about job availability and wages in the industry.

Services

The PACE program offers participants a suite of services and trainings over the course of the five-and-a-half-month training period. These services include contextualized ESOL and math, financial literacy/counseling, case management, and professional development, job search assistance and employment services, and two years of post-placement services. The technical trainings provided include general automotive maintenance, hybrid/alternative fuel vehicles, and job shadowing. Starting with cohort 1 graduates, AACCA has been able to leverage funds to provide a set of tools to graduates placed in employment.

PACE is a 400-hour, 20-week program with 16 hours dedicated to orientation led by AACCA, 195 hours dedicated to automotive technical training at Madison Park, 45 hours dedicated to hybrid training at BFIT, 65 hours dedicated to reading and math skills at Madison Park, and 80 hours dedicated to soft skills training led by AACCA.

The inclusion of training for hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles began before the Department of Labor grant as just a brief overview of hybrids at BFIT. AACCA staff saw that there was an interest and an emerging need for technicians to have an understanding of hybrid vehicles. PACE partners agreed that a more involved introduction to hybrids was necessary for PACE participants, particularly the safety aspects of hybrid technology. With the renewed funding in 2011, PACE was able to expand the hybrid component of the curriculum. The hybrid training for cohort 1 participants was structured as a hybrid class at BFIT one day per week over the course of 15 weeks. Cohort 2 hybrid training was offered as a three-week block at the end of the training in order for participants to have a foundation of basic automotive repair before getting into the hybrid elements.

Case Management and Employment Services

Case management and employment services are an important component of the services provided to participants. The case manager is involved in intake and assessment and sits in on most interviews. She then meets with students in week two of the program, just after orientation, to go over the participant's housing situation, food/nutritional situation, or other potential issue areas. If necessary, the case manager works with the client to create an action plan to address issues. If an action plan is not needed at that time, the participant and case manager monitor these potential issue areas over the course of the program. Because AACCA has a multiservice center, food stamp needs and low-income housing needs can be addressed in-house. Other social service needs, such as addressing homelessness and accessing childcare vouchers, are referred elsewhere.

The employment specialist is in frequent communication with employer partners and regularly searches dealership listings and job boards, such as craigslist and indeed.com. During the program, the employment specialist coordinates job shadowing opportunities for PACE participants with employer partners to give them a sense of the industry and where they might fit. She then works with each student on a resume and cover letter. Based on each graduate's strengths and personality, she reaches out to employers that may be a good fit. The

employment specialist assures all employers hiring PACE graduates that she will provide retention and supportive services to recent hires if issues arise.

Employer Partners

Goals for Employers

PACE's overall goal with regard to employers is meeting their entry-level workforce needs with a high degree of satisfaction. A strong partnership with employers is a key strategy to achieve that goal as it provides a vehicle for employer engagement. PACE aims to engage employers not only to hire PACE graduates for entry-level positions, but also to provide ongoing input and support for the PACE training program by offering feedback on curriculum, suggestions for additional technical or professional skills necessary for entry-level staff, opportunities for job shadowing, and, in some cases, guest speakers to help prepare students for interviews. Employer partners help AACA understand what skills are really valued and needed among entry-level staff, information that strongly influences the emphasis of various topics during the PACE trainings.

Employer Characteristics

The characteristics of employer partners range from small auto shops, like Superior Auto Center, to large dealerships, such as Bernardi Acura of Boston and Herb Chambers. Some employer partners have been in operation for decades, though as new automotive repair shops open, AACA tries to reach out, connect, and make the new employers aware of PACE and the benefits of being a partner. Some employer partners have a number of shops in the area and, therefore, employ far more employees. Direct Tire and Auto, for instance, has four shops in the Boston area, with approximately 85 employees in total. Over the last 14 months, Sullivan Tire and Auto Service has opened five locations with two more opening soon in the Boston region. With that scale, Sullivan employs approximately 50 entry-level workers, with a much larger overall staff size. In contrast, another partner employer has just one shop run by only three employees. The larger employers clearly service a larger number of vehicles each year; however, specific data on number of vehicles serviced per year were unavailable. While at this point in time dealerships are generally the exclusive servicers of hybrid vehicles, that is subject to change as warranties run out. Many of the non-dealer employers do not service hybrids at this time.

Services

Employer partners are asked to attend biannual advisory board meetings, offer job shadowing opportunities, and call on AACA should there be issues with any of their PACE graduate hires. AACA offers a suite of retention services to employers by working with graduates on a number of potential issue areas, including attendance/punctuality, on-the-job performance, productivity, communication, interpersonal issues, customer service skills, problem-solving abilities, additional training needs, and recruitment for future openings. While some employers may take advantage of this assistance, particularly with regard to communication and language skills, interviews suggest that demand is fairly low.

Baseline Context of Career Pathways

Although there are no specific career advancement outcomes expected of this grant (such as wage gains and promotions), there is a focus on career pathways and coaching participants to prepare for and think about advancement. Advancement of program graduates is the ultimate goal of the PACE funders; it is a major tenet of the SkillWorks model, and it is also an overarching goal of the Green Jobs Innovation Fund. Employer partners are expected to both identify and build career pathways as part of their responsibilities of being a PACE partner.

Career pathways in the automotive industry are closely tied to employees passing the ASE certification tests, although the time to advance varies by employer. For example, Auto Service and Tire and Sullivan Tire and Auto Service expect employees to spend one to two years in a lower-level position before moving up the ladder, while Direct Tire expects it would take two to three years to advance from an entry-level position. Similarly, dealerships find that entry-level technicians or apprentice technicians work two to three years before moving up.

Some employers, like Sullivan Tire and Auto, have a specific career pathway delineating the ASE certification needed for advancement. The figure below illustrates Sullivan Tire's advancement expectations.

Job Title	Education/Certification Required
General Service Technician	No ASE certifications needed
Retail Automotive Technician	1-3 ASE certifications
Certified Automotive Technician	4-7 ASE certifications
Master Automotive Technician	8 or 9 ASE certifications plus other courses
Service Manager*	4-8 ASE certifications plus additional courses
Retail Manager	Promoted from retail sales or service manager position

*Employer interviews noted that it would take approximately five years to move up to this position.

Smaller shops tend to be less formal and base advancement more on experience. At Auto Service and Tire, a small shop of 25 employees, there are no traditional pathways or hierarchies for advancement beyond “the more time you spend here, the more experience you have, the more different types of cars you work on. Pay will reflect that.” Pay increases as the employee progresses in his or her career, and annual reviews of job performance are conducted to determine salary. ASE certifications gain employees automatic pay increases (in most cases by one dollar per hour) in addition to a \$100 bonus in some cases. However, while individuals can take and pass ASE certification tests at any point, individuals are required to have two years of experience before the certification is actually provided.

At Direct Tire, that pathway begins with employees working first in the tire shop, changing tires, changing oil, checking fluids, belts, filters, and learning. Employees can then advance to an alignment technician and then to a brakes technician.

While most employees advance through a technical pathway, another career pathway is advancement to a sales/office position. For this work, some employers find it is helpful to know the car systems, have automotive knowledge, and have good customer service skills. Other

employers, however, do not see it as necessary to have that background automotive knowledge. One representative from Sullivan Tire outlined the pathway in this sales role by explaining, “If they perform well at the sales counter entry-level position, then they move up to an assistant manager position, and then a manager position at a retail location.” Based on discussions with employer partners regarding these pathways, the sales pathway has appealed to more women than the general service technician pathway. Sullivan Tire has had women climb that sales ladder, while very few employer partners have seen any interest at all from women in general service technician positions.

Employers interviewed as part of this evaluation³ did not have a set pathway to become a hybrid specialist, though one suggested that dealerships may have more set pathways for advancement to this type of position since, at the moment, more dealerships service hybrids as the majority of those vehicles are still under warranty.

Technicians in the automotive service sector may have additional opportunities for income enhancement based on experience rather than promotion-based advancement. Some employers in the sector use flat rate as opposed to salaried pay. Flat rate pay bases income on a technician’s productivity. Interviews with AACA staff indicated that flat rate pay for an entry-level worker was approximately \$45,000 to \$50,000 per year, compared to approximately \$30,000 a year for salaried employees. Staff also mentioned that the goal for many participants is to “move up” to flat rate pay. Staff and some graduates acknowledge, however, that flat rate pay is not the best option for everyone. AACA staff stated, “If you are not quick or comfortable with the technology, the flat rate would kill you.” One graduate agreed with this comment and noted, depending on how much business there is, the flat rate pay is not always better for the employee.

While flat rate pay is an attractive option for some, it is unclear how many PACE graduates have the opportunity to access this method of compensation. Interviews for this evaluation suggest that this form of pay may not be commonplace throughout the industry and may be found more often at dealerships as opposed to smaller shops. The three employers interviewed as part of this evaluation reported that they do not pay employees at a flat rate. PACE graduates employed with two other employers reported that they were paid an hourly wage, though one was hoping to work towards flat rate pay. Overall, interview findings suggest that flat rate pay is not a viable option for all PACE graduates either because they would not benefit from productivity-based compensation or, even if they would, the number of employers offering the flat rate option is a limited subset of worksites. Flat rate pay is, therefore, one opportunity for advancement, but not *the* opportunity for advancement.

³ Three employers were interviewed for this evaluation, though seven were contacted to be interviewed.

OUTCOMES

Participant Progress

Program Completion

In Year 1, 160 individuals were assessed as potential program participants, well beyond the goal of 140. Of those assessed, PACE enrolled 32 participants in the first year of this enhanced program curriculum, 15 in the first cohort and 17 in the second cohort. The figure below compares the number of participants enrolled, dropped, graduated, and placed, as related to the target goals. Cohort 2 graduation and placement rates had not been reported at the time this report was written. These outcomes will be included in the Year 2 Evaluation Report.

	Cohort 1				Cohort 2	
	Enrolled	Dropped	Graduated	Placed	Enrolled	Dropped
Goal	15	2	13	10	15	2
Actual	15	4	11	9*	17	4**
# of Women	1	1	0	0	2	0**
# of Veterans	1	1	0	0	1	1

*As of June 2012. In July 2012, one additional graduate was placed.

**As per SkillWorks database on 8/15/2012.

The actual enrollment in Year 1 is on target; however, the number of individuals who did not complete the program is higher than expected. Participants' reasons for discontinuing the course were largely due to life/family issues that could not have been foreseen during the recruitment and assessment process. Intentional over-enrollment in cohort 2 attempted to address this issue and bring the target number of graduates back on track. Unfortunately, four participants decided midway through the course not to continue for personal/family reasons. AACA staff find that after a few months of the program, some participants hit a wall and find they cannot make it through the last few months. In cohort 1, the participants who dropped did so between the first and third months of the program, while in cohort 2 they did so between the third and fifth months. A consultant from SkillWorks worked with AACA over the summer of 2012 to assess the current intake process and modify it to identify participant issues upfront. This new assessment process and any other techniques to improve retention will be used for cohort 3 and will be reported in next year's evaluation.

Placement and Wages

With assistance from AACA's employment specialist, six PACE graduates from cohort 1 were placed within one month of finishing the program. The remaining three placed graduates found employment within four months of completing the program. Even before the final two graduates are placed, this cohort has a placement rate of 82 percent, far above the 70 percent placement rate for PACE graduates from past years.

The following figure indicates the job titles of the PACE graduates from cohort 1.

Job Title	Number of PACE Graduates with Title
Technical Positions in Total	7
<i>Auto Mechanic</i>	3
<i>General Service Technician</i>	2
<i>Service Technician</i>	1
<i>Mechanic</i>	1
Non-technical Positions in Total	2
<i>Attendant</i>	1
<i>Driver</i>	1

Of the nine participants placed in cohort 1, hourly wages range from \$8.15 to \$15, with an average of \$10.10/hr⁴. Two employees work part-time (20 hours a week), three work full-time (40 hours a week), and the remaining four individuals work between 32 and 35 hours a week. Five of these individuals were also getting benefits, including retirement, health insurance, paid vacation, and paid sick time.⁵

Of these nine participants who were placed, three had been employed outside of the sector prior to enrollment. The figure below compares their wage, hours, and benefits at that job outside the automotive sector to the automotive job they acquired after they completed PACE. While wage either stayed the same or decreased for these three individuals, two of them increased the number of hours worked and also received benefits with their new job, something they did not have in their prior job.

⁴ Wage data for one of these nine individuals were not available.

⁵ The 10th participant of cohort 1 was placed in the summer of 2012; he works 40 hours a week at \$9.15/hour, with benefits.

	Before PACE	After PACE ⁶	Difference
Wage	\$ 10.00	\$ 9.00	\$ -1.00
	\$ 8.15	\$ 8.15	\$ -
	\$11.00	\$ 9.00	\$ -2.00
Hours	35	40	5
	20	20	0
	25	32	7
Benefits	None	Retirement Health Insurance Paid Vacation Paid Sick Time	Increase
	None	None	None
	None	Retirement Health Insurance Paid Vacation Paid Sick Time	Increase

In cohort 1, five different employer partners hired a PACE graduate. These employers are A & B Auto, Herb Chambers, Bridgestone Firestone, Monro Muffler, and Bernardi Acura of Boston. Two participants were placed at dealerships, which are considered particularly desirable placements because of the robust advancement pathways.

The other four PACE graduates from cohort 1 who were placed found employment in the sector from non-employer partners. These employers are Enterprise Rent A Car, Good News Garage, Medfield Auto Center, and JSC Transportation Services. The number of PACE graduates hired by non-partner employers may indicate that the PACE graduates have skills respected industry-wide, making them competitive candidates for employment across the sector.

Job Retention and Advancement

Three months after placement, seven of the nine placed cohort 1 graduates remained working for their initial employer. Two of the graduates from cohort 1 were laid off as a result of the companies' slow business. The employers have provided feedback noting that this was not a result of poor work habits or work ethics, but rather as a result of needing to let the newest hire go when business was slow.

Of the nine participants placed in cohort 1, one individual received a wage increase of one dollar and moved from part- to full-time. According to staff interviews, as of the summer of 2012, one cohort 1 student sat for the ASE brakes test and passed, though more field

⁶ Of the six participants in cohort 1 who had employment outside the automotive sector prior to enrollment in PACE, three found employment in the automotive sector (reflected in figure) and two did not complete PACE. No data were available for the final individual as to whether or not he completed PACE.

experience is necessary before he is deemed ASE certified. To assist with advancement, AACA will offer an ASE Test Preparation Course to PACE graduates in the fall of 2012.

Impact of New Hybrid Training

Employers value the addition of the new hybrid training for PACE participants, especially in regards to the safety aspects of the training. Though the employers see value in the hybrid safety skills their PACE employees possess, few, if any, of the PACE employees will work on hybrids in the field in the short term. This is because either their employer does not service hybrids at this time, or there are more qualified, experienced technicians on staff that will repair hybrid vehicles. In the summer of 2012, the PACE instructors discussed the significant amount of hours spent on the hybrid training and, given the graduates' limited use of these skills in the field, agreed to make the class cover more automotive electric rather than just hybrid training. The instructors believe that with a focus not *only* on hybrids, but also on other electrical components, such as headlights, batteries, and alternators, PACE graduates will be set up for success and gain competitive skills in servicing all automotive electrical components.

Successes and Challenges

➡ *PACE graduates are highly satisfied with the program.*

PACE graduates interviewed for this evaluation⁷ were enthusiastic about the training program, stating that the program was better than even expected, partly due to the excellent teachers. They were able to support themselves during the program, albeit with jobs that employed them in middle-of-the-night hours. The PACE graduates definitely felt prepared for their jobs and, in some cases, did not call upon all the skills they learned in PACE because higher-level employees were tasked with jobs that required those skills in brakes, alignment, and hybrids. Considering these AACA graduates had skills beyond their entry-level positions suggests that advancement would be feasible. AACA seems to have set realistic expectations of the training and the entry-level positions participants would be able to obtain upon graduating. PACE graduates' expectations of when they might advance or get a wage increase also seem to be consistent with employers' opinions of advancement. Overall, PACE has had a great deal of success in placing graduates soon after the completion of the training course.

Nonetheless, there are several challenges facing PACE that are impacting the number of graduates in each cohort and also the advancement of graduates once placed in the field.

➡ *Finding and keeping interested, qualified candidates is a challenge for PACE.*

As discussed above, PACE suffers from a high attrition rate. Additionally, staff report that attendance has been an issue for some PACE participants, especially as compared to the other programs run by AACA. The focus on case management can be helpful for both those individuals considering dropping out and those who have poor attendance. Irregular attendance is thought to be a challenge for advancement for these participants. One instructor

⁷ Two PACE graduates were interviewed as part of this evaluation, though five graduates were contacted.

believes that a better screening process would improve the attrition rates. To that end, AACA has worked with the SkillWorks' consultant to reassess the intake questions and modify them to screen applicants more effectively.

Part of the attrition challenge may actually be rooted in a deeper issue—attracting qualified, interested applicants. Various PACE partners have acknowledged the difficulty PACE has had in recruiting participants who are both eligible and truly interested in making a career in the automotive industry. While instructors believe that the quality of the applicants and, therefore, the participants has improved over the years, it is important to have committed, dedicated participants involved in the program if it is going to be of value to the partner employers.

➡ *Low starting wages in the industry is not only a problem that impacts attraction to the program, but is also a fundamental barrier to PACE meeting intended program outcomes.*

The low starting wage in the auto industry may contribute to the quality of the candidates applying to enroll in PACE. If employer partners could offer an incentive of an increased starting salary to PACE graduates earning high marks, the quality of the candidates applying for PACE may improve. A low starting wage, comparable to graduates' wages in the non-automotive jobs they held prior to enrolling in PACE, is a fundamental barrier for PACE to truly achieve the program's desired outcome "to provide opportunity to low-skilled, low-wage workers." This is especially true if PACE has a limited or ancillary focus on participant advancement. Particularly for those participants already employed outside the sector, there is a question of the value of the five-and-a-half months of training. Employee benefits, such as health insurance and paid time off, appear to be part of the value of the new positions; though starting wage was low for those participants placed in the first cohort, five of nine graduates placed did receive benefits, which is not reflected when focusing on hourly wage alone. Additionally, the number of hours worked increased for two of the three individuals who held a job prior to enrolling in PACE. Nonetheless, hourly wage for those two individuals decreased. Further research is needed on the long-term advancement and financial gains of previous PACE graduates to understand whether PACE's current strategy positions graduates sufficiently for future gains.

➡ *PACE's program eligibility criteria around education level may be sufficient to gain an entry-level automotive job, but it poses a barrier to advancement.*

PACE currently accepts applicants with limited English language skills. While this has not created a job placement problem, there is a sense that *low literacy may hurt individuals' chances of moving up the ladder and advancing in the automotive industry.* Many employers offer wage increases and promotions to those employees who have passed the ASE certification test, but written tests are inherently more difficult for those with low literacy levels. Additionally, one employer partner noted that a vital skill set is for employees to be able to read and write, which he noted was sometimes a problem. Low literary skills may prevent some employees from advancing.

Verbal communication skills are also noted as a challenge for some PACE graduates. AACAs goal of serving immigrants through the PACE program can at times mean that participants have limited English communication skills. But with a fast-paced operation like the automotive industry, language barriers slow the system down. One employer hoped that working on improving English skills is on the top of the AACAs agenda for participants as he really saw this as a major barrier to success for the participants. In a physical job that is oftentimes loud, communication needs to happen quickly and clearly.

Similarly, while limited math skills do not appear to be a major problem for participants to complete the PACE trainings and get a job, low-level math skills may be a barrier to passing the ASE exam and, therefore, advancing. AACAs is aware of this and is working to address this by adding several test prep workshops for graduates who have more hours in the field and are getting ready to take the ASE test. This should help address a need identified in the June 2012 employer advisory group meeting. Additionally, PACE is planning to offer more contextualized automotive math in the training at Madison Park and is also considering adding more test preparation during class time.

One employer mentioned that other basic skills, like using a computer and accessing the Internet to look up information, are crucial for entry-level hires, suggesting that these basic skills are not always commonplace among applicants. Computer skills relate directly to technician training as well. One Madison Park instructor similarly noted that nowadays “cars are so sophisticated. They are all about electronics, not old greasy hands on stuff. [Employees] must be computer literate.”

➡ *Transportation is a common barrier for PACE graduates that limits employment options.*

Many PACE participants do not own cars, which limits job placements to shops with T or bus accessibility. AACAs employment specialist finds it challenging to find T or bus accessible placements for all graduates. This transportation issue also means there is missed opportunity to create employer partnerships with employers located far from transit access. The benefits for a potential employer partner are reduced dramatically if the pool of potential applicants cannot feasibly get to work. Both AACAs staff and employers mentioned the transportation issue as a challenge.

Employer Progress

Employer Engagement

AACA outreach to employers has been extensive, and the AACAs employment specialist has been resourceful in her tactics to both initiate relationships with partners and then maintain those relationships. AACAs is regularly reaching out to potential new employer partners and explaining the value of the partnership, and AACAs efforts have been featured by the GJIF/JFF and been rewarded with new employers signing on.

Employers engage with PACE in a variety of different capacities. Some employers attend biannual advisory board meetings, provide job shadowing opportunities for participants,

sponsor guest speakers to help prepare participants for job interviews, and hire PACE graduates when new employees are needed. Some employers are engaged even when they do not have staff openings, so that when the time comes to hire a new entry-level staff, they can contact the AACA employment specialist and hire from the pool of PACE graduates.

Employers interviewed for this evaluation consistently noted that word-of-mouth referrals are the source of many new hires. This underscores that it is mutually beneficial for employers to be connected to the AACA employment specialist so they can get a referral from a trusted source as they are looking for new entry-level hires. The AACA employment specialist's number one goal is to have employers call her before they post a job opportunity publicly.

Satisfaction and Benefits of Participation

Employer partners find that there are a number of benefits to being involved in the PACE partnership. Partners gain access to a continuing pool of trained potential employees. Employers find it difficult to find entry-level workers, and a connection to this pool of employees is seen as an opportunity to fill those positions as there are openings. One employer partner noted, "I'm satisfied so far. When the time comes to get an entry worker, I'll go to them [PACE]." Hiring PACE graduates assures employers that their new hire will start the job with a set of tools in hand, a real asset to both the graduate and the employer. Employers find that a new hire coming in with his own tools is very valuable, making PACE graduates with tools more competitive than other candidates. Some of the other partner benefits mentioned by employers include having:

- a good resource if an employee needs tutoring, which PACE has offered for both PACE graduates and non-PACE graduates;
- a source that makes hiring easier at the time entry-level hires are needed; and
- trust in graduates' skills due to confidence in Madison Park quality instruction.

Not all employer partners have been completely satisfied with the PACE graduates they have hired for reasons presented in the challenges section above. Nonetheless, some employers who have not been satisfied are still very involved in the partnership, offering feedback, participating in classroom events, and mentoring students about the industry. For some employer partners, being a partner is not about the benefit to the company, but rather an opportunity for an industry professional to reach out to the community and help shape a program that will best serve the participants.

While PACE graduates have successfully found placements in the industry, it is important to note that PACE graduates make up a very small number of employees within each company. Many employers have only one to two PACE graduates as employees, if any. Smaller shops have hired only two or three new entry-level hires in the last year, none of whom are PACE graduates. Other employers, like Sullivan Tire, have been growing this past year, opening five stores in the last 15 months, with stores six and seven to come online soon. Because of this growth, Sullivan has hired approximately 50 new entry-level employees in the last year, but

only two of these hires were PACE graduates. Overall, PACE graduates make up a very small percentage of new entry-level hires in each company.

Value of Hybrid Training

The decision to enhance PACE's hybrid/alternative fuel training came out of in-depth discussions between AACA and employer partners. While both AACA and employer partners agree that hybrid vehicles are still only a small percentage of the cars they service, if they service any at all, the general sentiment is that as the warranties for hybrids start to expire, automotive shops will see more hybrid vehicles. Though employers and PACE trainers admit that only the most experienced technicians at each shop will actually perform the repairs on the hybrid vehicles, all parties see an overall benefit to having PACE participants understand how hybrids operate and understand the necessary safety components. Employers find the hybrid safety skills very important, especially for the larger shops that will see more hybrids. Some employers find that graduates with the hybrid safety skills are more attractive applicants than those with no hybrid safety skills. Though all employers find it to be an asset for an employee to have the hybrid safety skills, those companies that do not currently work on hybrids do not place a premium on those safety skills during hiring. Nonetheless, employers believe hybrid servicing will be the wave of the future, suggesting that in several years a potential employee with this skill set may be more desirable than a candidate without those skills. Similarly, the hybrid instructor from BFIT believes that PACE graduates will use the hybrid skills. He believes the exclusivity of dealerships servicing the hybrids is changing and that smaller shops will soon begin to see the hybrids as well.

Workforce System Change Progress

PACE articulated the following three system change goals:

- engage employers to share best practices and ideas related to career advancement and leverage each other's services;
- provide participants with more options, supports, and opportunities for success in postsecondary education; and
- develop a sustainability plan to ensure continued impact of PACE.

Other system change efforts emerging from the current work funded by GJIF and supported by SkillWorks include securing improved articulation agreements, developing strategies for attracting women and veterans to the automotive field, and potentially institutionalizing employer support for the purchase of tool sets for graduates as an incentive for job retention.

Sharing of Employer Best Practices

PACE was able to make some progress facilitating the sharing of best practices and ideas among employers, but discussion was limited this year with only one advisory meeting, with low turnout, held in June 2012. Nonetheless, this forum allowed employers the opportunity to engage in discussions around additional training that they felt should be offered, the possibility

of offering internships to PACE graduates, and the possibility of incumbent worker training. Unfortunately, only three employers attended the meeting. Regardless, AACA was able to take the feedback from this discussion and begin to make changes to the program, working towards implementing more contextualized math skills and adding new training components such as OSHA 10 to the curriculum.

While infrequent, the advisory committee meetings offer a setting to discuss industry trends and possibilities for future change. With PACE's new focus on attracting women and veterans to the program, the door is open for PACE partners to discuss barriers to success for these populations and to take steps towards eliminating those barriers.

Postsecondary Education Pathways

AACA's progress on postsecondary pathways has focused on articulation agreements. Specifically, AACA has negotiated an enhanced articulation agreement with BFIT due to the addition of the hybrid curriculum. Prior to the 2011 grant, the articulation agreement with BFIT allowed PACE participants to earn four credits. With the enhanced hybrid curriculum, PACE graduates are now eligible for seven credits. Though AACA explored the possibility of expanding its articulation agreement with MassBay Community College beyond five credits, AACA staff noted that they found this was not feasible because "the auto programs [at MassBay] are manufacturer specific and the BFIT course is a general course that doesn't cross-over with their programs." Therefore, the five-credit articulation agreement with MassBay Community College has not changed with the addition of the hybrid curriculum.

Beyond the articulation agreement, there appears to be limited movement on goals related to postsecondary educational pathways for PACE alumni. While an enhanced articulation agreement with BFIT structurally sets participants up for success if they pursue a degree, very few participants choose this path. There is little evidence of AACA effort to support graduates in continuing education, no materials outlining educational options or benefits beyond PACE, no current tracking for student educational outcomes, and general acknowledgment that most graduates do not choose this path. A review of the PACE Student Handbook does not reflect a strong emphasis on academic or career advancement pathways. In fact, the handbook makes no reference to academic progress or career advancement as direct goals of the program. Rather, the handbook reminds participants that PACE is a job training program and that "the ultimate goal of this program is to prepare you to get an automotive-related job and, hopefully, start a career."

Current results appear to mirror past results with little new progress to note. According to an AACA representative, "One student from cohort 1 is actively pursuing college, but is running into difficulty regarding financial aid and costs." MassBay Community College reported that no PACE students have used the articulation agreement or come to the college to date, and BFIT has seen only a handful of students pursue additional coursework over the last six years of the program.

While continuing education is certainly not the path for all students, there is a disconnect between AACA's efforts to ensure an enhanced articulation agreement for students at BFIT and AACA's lack of encouragement for students to actually pursue continuing education for the purposes of career advancement opportunities in the future. The Madison Park instructor asserts that scholarships are available for postsecondary educational programs such as those at BFIT, and evening courses for an automotive certification are available as well. Both of these options reduce barriers to entry, making further education a possibility for some PACE graduates, including those who have found employment directly after the PACE program. To achieve success related to this system change goal, AACA will need to offer more information and guidance to PACE graduates related to the benefits of and options to pursue postsecondary education.

Sustainability, Capacity Building, and Technical Assistance

AACA has begun to explore various options for continued sustainability of the PACE partnership, including a potential revenue generating component. The sustainability plan will be based on keeping the program at the same size, as AACA does not anticipate a significant growth in the market. Whether or not a revenue-generating component is included in the final sustainability plan, AACA staff are working closely with the SkillWorks consultant to begin to craft a more long-term plan. Together, they have identified a need for diversified funding so that PACE can stabilize a budget for the partnership without leaning on limited sources of funding from government programs like SNAP, WIA, and CDBG. As part of the planning process, AACA and the SkillWorks consultant are considering possible ways to leverage community college programs to support the partnership. The sustainability plan is in its nascent stage, and further development on this plan will be included in next year's PACE evaluation.

In addition to working with the SkillWorks consultant on creating a sustainability plan, PACE is benefitting from SkillWorks' capacity-building efforts that may indirectly support sustainability. AACA is making efforts to strengthen the PACE program, and is taking advantage of resources offered by SkillWorks by having staff attend a database training as well as project director and coaches' peer learning meetings. Beyond that, AACA is working with a different SkillWorks contractor, Julia Gittleman, on data use and tracking needs in order to identify a better database that can capture the most relevant data needs for AACA.

Women in the Automotive Field

While not stated as a system change goal directly, GJIF's emphasis on expanding opportunities for women and veterans provides an opportunity for PACE to foster system change in the automotive sector, particularly around this historically underrepresented population. While the opportunity is there, the barriers are substantial, especially as related to attracting women to the industry. AACA has started to work with a JFF-GJIF partner, Wider Opportunities for Women, a national organization working to increase access to career pathways for women, on exploring new methods to attract female and veteran applicants to PACE. A workshop with

WOW, initially set for April, has been delayed to October 2012, but will hopefully provide AACA with new outreach and recruitment ideas and strategies for future cohorts.

Beyond recruitment efforts to attract women, PACE is likely to find that broader cultural changes are needed within the sector to make automotive jobs attractive to women. Though the training provider partners may make their classrooms comfortable for all participants, including women, to date, other partners have not made a concerted effort to attract more women to the automotive field. Trainers are used to having women involved in their programs both at BFIT and Madison Park. Women are present in the automotive training offered in these locations to both general BFIT college students and vocational technical high school students. The instructors offer a professional program and, in one instructor's words, a program "geared with the intent of women entering the industry." Nonetheless, employer partners have hired very few women, if any, and several noted that these women gravitate towards the office manager or sales type positions rather than a technical position. Some employers have never seen an application from a woman to be a general service technician. The inclusion of women as a portion of the new target audience for the PACE program may require some system change related to the culture of the industry or the messaging to women about entering a historically male-dominated field. If more women are going to be drawn to this field in the future, some level of system change is going to be necessary.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The broad set of stakeholder interviews, paired with a full review of all PACE documentation to date, led to the following findings and recommendations.

Attrition, Placement, and Recruiting

➡ *PACE's high attrition rate is an acknowledged challenge.*

To address this, the intake process for cohort 3 has been modified from that used for cohorts 1 and 2. Employers find that the screening process is vital to success and that applicants should be screened not only for eligibility, but also for potential for sustained interest in the industry, willingness and interest to get their hands dirty, and physical ability to complete the tasks that will be required of them on the job. Improved screening may improve retention.

Part of the attrition issue relates to PACE having a difficult time attracting interested and eligible candidates. PACE may need to examine new channels for attracting students. For instance, students previously enrolled at Madison Park who dropped out but are working on their GED might be candidates for the program. With a background as a Madison Park student, these young adults may have more of a dedicated interest in the automotive field as opposed to other applicants who are responding to a flyer advertisement. Another thought is to use PACE to help advance partner employers' entry-level workers who do not yet work as technicians. One stakeholder interviewed as part of this evaluation suggested

that AACA work with business partners and employers to enroll their low-level employees who do not yet have much experience in the industry. Though this would offer them the opportunity to gain skills that help them advance, this would stray from PACE's current pre-employment model and revert back to incumbent training that had been offered in the past.

- ➔ *AACA has done an excellent job finding graduates of the PACE program placements in the field within a short timeframe after program completion.*

AACA staff are credited for their commitment to their students, their diligent case management work, and their ability to find graduates placements that are good fits for the individual's work style. Madison Park and BFIT teachers have an outstanding reputation among both graduates and employers, which helps motivate students to complete the training program and then makes these graduates more competitive applicants when looking for employment.

- ➔ *While placements are strong, starting wages are fairly low.*

PACE's emphasis on placement without intensive follow-up to support advancement may leave participants far from economic self-sufficiency. Entry-level wages for PACE graduates are on par or lower than wages for participants' previous jobs. Though increased hours and added benefits are an incremental gain, support for these employees to advance is an important component of providing these individuals opportunities to work their way up a career ladder.

- ➔ *To date, success in recruiting and maintaining active participation among women and veterans has been weak.*

Renewed efforts are needed to focus on these populations and related system change if they are to be drawn to and succeed in this industry. In order to target women and veteran populations more effectively, one instructor suggested running a Saturday program, open to the community, including family and friends of PACE participants and graduates. By opening up the shop to the community in this way, and making the industry more understandable and accessible, women or veterans may be interested or see this as a possible career path.

Employer Partner Engagement

- ➔ *The level of employer engagement is varied and could be increased by providing a specific set of expectations to employers from the start.*

Employer partners receive the significant benefit of having access to a pool of well-trained entry-level workers; however, while some employer partners truly are active in the partnership, giving lectures to students about the interview experience, offering feedback on curriculum components, scheduling opportunities for job shadowing, and attending the

advisory meetings, other partners give little to the partnership. Employers could increase engagement in a variety of ways, including offering internships to PACE participants or graduates or purposefully mentoring PACE graduates through advancement. In order to set appropriate expectations of “what it means to be a partner,” AACA may want to emphasize high-level engagement through these suggested means to encourage the type of engagement that is of most value to the partnership.

- ➔ *Employers need more of a stake in the PACE program to make their partnership role more meaningful.*

Relationships with employers have fluctuated over the years. At times, these relationships have been very strong, with PACE graduates finding placements and advancing. While perspectives differ on the current strength of the employer partnerships, all parties agree that these employer partnerships could always use more work.

One PACE partner suggested the possibility of employer partners having a monetary stake in PACE to encourage employers to continue to be active, involved, and of assistance to their own PACE graduate employees. One possible monetary contribution could be in the form of subsidizing the tool sets offered to PACE graduates once placed. Another potential area for a monetary commitment to the program could be for employers to offer an incentive of increased starting wage to PACE graduates who get a B or above. Because of the low starting pay in the industry, an incentive like this may enhance the quality of the PACE applicants. If partners were to have an interest in paying for incumbent employee trainings through PACE, this would offer yet another avenue for having employees have a monetary stake in PACE, and thus an enhanced interest in the curriculum and the success of the program. However, with many employers already offering their own training, or using their own subcontractors to provide their employees training, interest in incumbent services through PACE was seen as lukewarm at best, according to AACA.

Advancement

- ➔ *Supporting career advancement would benefit PACE not only by setting up its graduates for long-term success, but also by opening up more entry-level jobs for new PACE graduates.*

Career advancement and educational advancement are not stated goals of the PACE program, however, it is clear that PACE aims to set up its graduates for success. Job placement is not a barrier for the PACE program, but advancement is. As an element of a sustainable program, emphasis on advancement is necessary. With this in mind, services to support graduate advancement should be enhanced. To do this, continued training with incumbent workers might be necessary, including more ESOL tutoring and soft skill training, AACA’s “bread and butter” according to the PACE program director. Employers subcontract additional technical training at places like the Hunter Training School in Ashland, and it appears unlikely they will turn to PACE for these technical services. While ESOL and soft skills training may be a participant need not currently met by other vendors, it is not clear

whether employers would underwrite the cost of such training if AACA were to offer these services.

➔ *There are varying opinions on what is necessary for career advancement.*

Some PACE partners believe that an additional associate's degree at an institution like BFIT is essential to pursuing a career in the automotive industry, noting that when an individual graduates from BFIT he does not start at the lowest level in the industry. Others believe getting a job immediately after the program is most crucial to gaining experience and starting a career. Still other individuals believe that PACE graduates can advance without a degree, but that without that degree advancement will take a lot longer and be much more difficult. This individual sees the degree as a way to speed up advancement. One employer voiced that the value in the degree is not the degree itself, but the desirable skills that go along with an individual who pursued a degree—reading comprehension, communication, motivation, and desire to be in the industry long term. The degree itself does not help these individuals advance per se, but the skills that an individual with a degree possesses will help with advancement. That said, employers value employees with automotive experience in the field and, regardless of educational achievements, some employers will start new employees in entry-level positions until it is clear that they have enough experience to advance. These differing opinions on what is necessary for advancement suggest that there are many pathways to advancement and that all options ought to be presented to PACE participants. Hearing about these options by those in the industry, namely employers and former PACE graduates, could be particularly effective.

➔ *Support services offered to graduates for the two years “post-placement” do not have nearly the same emphasis as the training and placement services offered during the program.*

As covered earlier in this report, encouragement for graduates to pursue postsecondary education is very limited, though articulation agreements do exist should graduates decide on their own to enroll in continuing education. While options for such continuing education are available, guidance and support from PACE are minimal.

Additionally, there is little evidence that graduates placed in jobs actually receive support services for job retention and advancement. Graduates interviewed for this evaluation, who have been working for approximately five months, did not acknowledge AACA staff calling to check-in after three months or inviting them to quarterly workshops. However, supportive services may not appeal to graduates, as they may not believe that such services will help with advancement. Providing incentives for graduates to continue to be active and engaged with AACA may increase the strength of an alumni network while also offering graduates additional skills that may help them advance.

CONCLUSION

PACE is running an effective pre-employment program that is successfully placing a hard-to-serve population into jobs at a high rate. PACE benefits from longstanding employer partnerships that include a number of companies dedicated to the partnership since its inception. PACE can build on its foundation of employer relationships to strategize on addressing the program's particular challenges: starting wages and advancement. The relatively low starting wages in the industry suggest that PACE needs to place greater emphasis on preparing participants for advancement. PACE should work closely with employers to determine how best to support PACE graduates over time in their effort to climb the automotive service career ladder. Further research on the advancement paths of former PACE graduates would inform this effort.

The additional support of the GJIF funds has allowed the partnership to scale up its activities, better serving both participants and employers. While the additional training on hybrids is unlikely to translate into new responsibilities for graduates in the near term, employers appreciate the increased awareness of safety issues when handling hybrid vehicles and do feel that general knowledge makes PACE graduates more attractive. Enrollment figures do not reflect GJIF's focus on serving veterans and women, although efforts are underway to address this in Year 2. However, attracting women to the automotive service sector may involve more than new outreach strategies. PACE may need to work more closely with employer partners to think about system change needed to make the workplace approachable for women who are currently underrepresented in the sector.