



**EXPLORATION OF COACHING
SERVICES IN SKILLWORKS
FINAL REPORT**

Prepared for:

The SkillWorks Funders Group

By:

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Introduction

A signature component of SkillWorks Phase II was the investment in coaching services, which encompasses career, academic, and college navigation coaching. Career and academic coaching provide an important source of support for participants pursuing workforce development goals through three of the SkillWorks partnerships: financial services and information technology at Year Up, hospitality at the Hotel Training Center (HTC), and healthcare at the Healthcare Training Institute (HTI). The college navigator supports students from all three partnerships who apply to or enroll at Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), the community college most frequently attended by SkillWorks participants. SkillWorks recognizes the important role of coaching by coordinating capacity-building workshops, presentations, and peer learning groups for coaches, as well as funding the coaching positions to different degrees.

This special report highlights the coaching services provided to SkillWorks participants in order to address the following questions:

- What does coaching involve?
- How did coaching services vary within SkillWorks?
- What is the value of coaching for participants and for employers?

Mt Auburn applied both quantitative and qualitative methods for this analysis. The following research provided the basis for the findings:

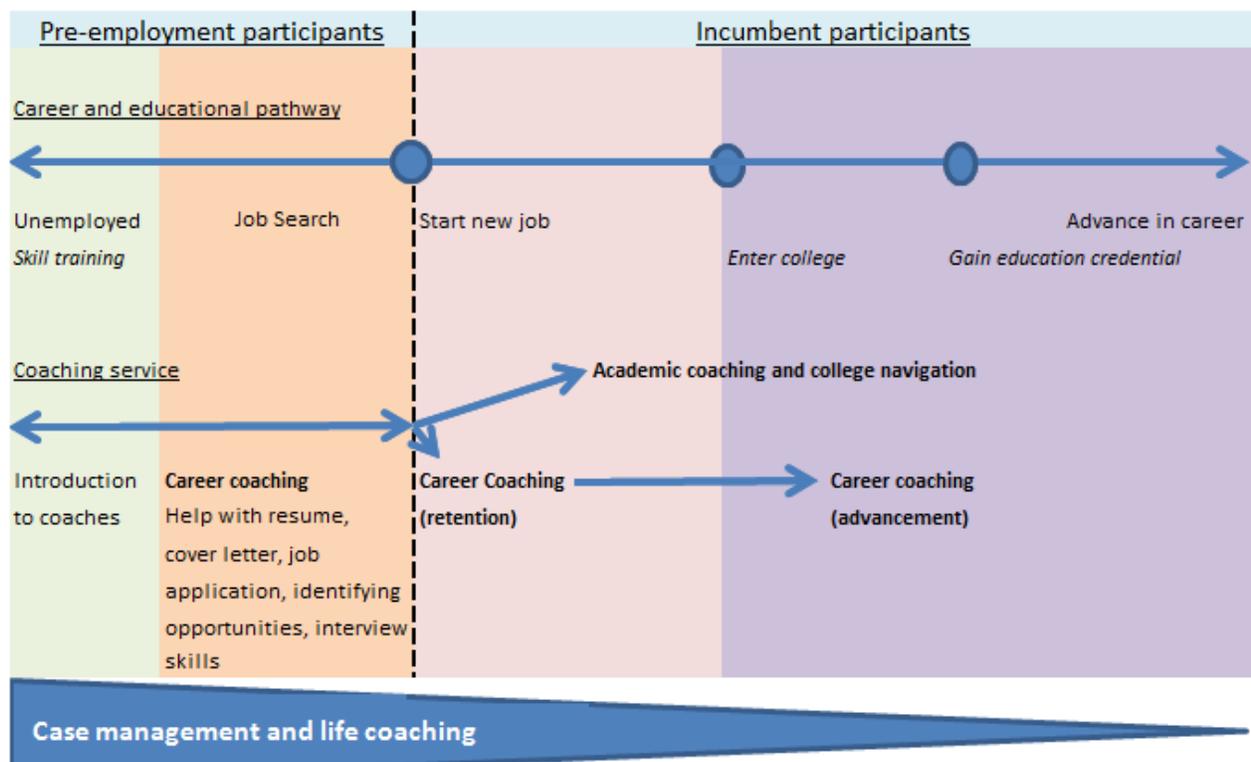
- analysis of the SkillWorks database, supplemented by data provided by the partnerships, when available, and student performance data provided by BHCC;
- interviews with 12 coaching staff and coaching peer group members, the college navigator, partnership directors, seven partnership employers, and three BHCC staff people; and
- interviews and focus groups with 27 participants, 21 who are representative of the three partnerships and have received academic or career coaching, and six participants representative of the college navigator's clients.

The quantitative data are limited, primarily because each of the three partnerships and the community college defined and tracked their coaching activities differently. This report discusses these differences and their implications as they apply to the analysis.

SPECTRUM OF COACHING SERVICES

The term coaching is often applied generically to refer to an array of services provided to workforce development participants, but, in fact, the needs of the participants, the services provided, the intensity and duration of the service, and the measures of success vary widely.

Coaching services most closely correlate to a participant's position along a workforce development pathway. The figure below illustrates a representative participant pathway, starting with job seeking, and progressing through placement and career progression as an incumbent, and the type of coaching needed at the different points on the pathway. Incumbent coaching services will vary depending upon whether a participant requires additional education in order to advance in a career or if there are opportunities to advance through internal promotions.



Not only do coaches provide highly individualized coaching according to participant need, but the SkillWorks partnerships also provide coaching as part of a larger program. Consequently, the variety of types and intensities of coaching participants receive, and the range of additional program services in which participants enroll, complicate the process of establishing the relative impact of coaching. This report describes how coaching is administered to SkillWorks participants through three partnerships, Year Up, HTC, and HTI, and through the SkillWorks-funded college navigator co-located at the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) and at BHCC. This report illustrates the similarities and differences in the coaching approaches and examines the value coaching offers to participant and employers.

Overview of SkillWorks Coaching

Over the course of the five years, SkillWorks tested multiple approaches to coaching. Most broadly, the coaching fell in two categories, academic and career, but within each of those categories there were variations worth noting. This report does not separate case management and life coaching into distinct categories of coaching because discussions with SkillWorks coaches suggest that such support transcends all categories of academic and career coaching and is an element in all services provided by SkillWorks coaches. The following two tables offer a framework to consider the different coaching approaches pursued over the past five years.

	Range of SkillWorks Career Coaching		
	Pre-employment	Retention	Advancement
Types of Service	Case management, job search assistance, resume development, interview preparation, job application support.	Periodic check-ins around adjustment to work environment, guidance on managing work/life balance. Deeper engagement if specific problem identified. Transition support if exit employment.	Development of career or academic plan. Guidance or support on specific advancement opportunity.
Type of Participant	Unemployed or dissatisfied with current job and seeking to enter new career that offers good pay and job stability. Often has limited English and is unaccustomed to job search process.	Recently hired graduate of pre-employment program or established incumbent facing new expectations in the workplace.	Established incumbent or workforce development program alumnus with 1-5 years of experience, looking for next step.
Duration/frequency	Less than 6 months Weekly	Varies by employer and client need	Varies by client but generally 1-5 meetings total
Key Transitions	Completion of training program Application(s) Interview(s)	End of probation period Performance review	Performance review New job opportunity
Anticipated Outcomes	Job placement	Retention in current position, or gets new job	Promotion, new job, or enrollment in college
SkillWorks Examples	HTC Room Attendant Program	Year Up HTC	Year Up HTC

Range of SkillWorks Academic Coaching			
	Short-Term Credential	College Preparation	College
Types of Service	Assistance on logistics (class schedule, exam schedule). Could include arrangement of study groups, tutoring. Coaching sometimes provided to cohorts or groups of participants.	Instilling skills needed to excel in college. Support to persist in pre-college preparation. Coaching sometimes provided to cohorts or groups of participants.	Coaching and navigation on multiple topics: matriculation guidance—completing enrollment and financial aid applications; academic advising—selecting program of study, choosing classes, planning next steps after program completion.
Type of Participant	Established incumbent looking for incremental advancement or to retain current position.	Established incumbent, often with experience in other employer-sponsored workforce development classes, but not ready for college-level work.	Established incumbent or graduate of a workforce development program looking to make a major career transition or advancement.
Duration/frequency	2-18 months 1-2x per month (but shorter meetings than college/pre-college coaching)	6 -18 months 1-2x per month	Multi-year 1-2x per month
Key Transitions	Class selection Certification exam	College placement test	Initial enrollment Financial aid application Course selection (each semester) Start of college-level prerequisite classes Transition to certificate program or academic major
Anticipated Outcomes	Certification related to current job/employer	Score on the college placement test that allows placement in college-level classes	College-level certificate or degree
SkillWorks Examples	HTI – Bay Cove Human Services C.N.A. Certification	HTI-MGH and Boston Children’s Hospital	HTI or College Navigator

This report explores coaching in greater depth in three SkillWorks partnerships and in a cross-partnership coaching provided by the college navigator. While the following section provides an introduction to the coaching services, Appendix A presents a more in-depth look at all of the coaching activities.

YEAR UP

At the outset of Year Up's SkillWorks-supported initiative, SkillWorks funded a part-time coach to work with a select group of Year Up alumni. In 2012, Year Up expanded its focus on coaching, using SkillWorks funds to create a new career coach position to accelerate its shift toward a focus on the long-term success of its graduates. While the coaches' primary role is to work with Year Up alumni on issues related to professional development, career advancement, skill development, and job retention, alumni also sometimes need help dealing with personal matters. Since mid-2013, when Year Up's higher education specialist left, the coaches have also served as a resource for alumni questions about higher education.

One-on-one meetings with alumni comprise the majority of the coaching time. The content of career coaching at Year Up centers on professional issues such as workplace behavior, job performance, and corporate visibility. The coaches often help their clients to access professional development resources and find mentors. Most Year Up coaching is client-driven, depending heavily on where clients are in their career and what they want to get out of coaching. Alumni seek out coaching for varied reasons: approximately 50 percent were seeking advancement (including education), a little over 30 percent were applying for jobs, and about 15 percent were in danger of losing their jobs and were getting retention-focused support.

In addition to individualized coaching, the career coaches coordinate workshops onsite at partner employers on topics such as work/life balance, career advancement strategies, academic planning, goal setting, time management, and financial planning.

HOTEL TRAINING CENTER (BEST CORP.)

Coaching was the primary investment made by SkillWorks in its five years of funding of the Hotel Training Center. HTC has three SkillWorks-supported career coaches, plus a small portion of time from an additional staff member for academic coaching. While the primary role of the three career coaches is securing employment for the graduates of the hospitality training programs, the coaches also work with incumbent workers. They provide a diverse set of services for participants, depending on participant needs. HTC coaches describe close relationships with participants, and consider themselves invested in building up participants' lives and cultivating a sense of community at HTC.

HTC career coaches primarily work one-on-one with pre-employment and incumbent participants on career-related issues. The coaching provided to pre-employment candidates is the most structured and intensive of HTC's coaching services. Coaches get to know participants when they are still attending classes, but when participants apply to jobs, the coaching becomes much more intensive. Coaches generally find themselves helping pre-employment participants through each step of the job application process, from setting up an email account so the participants can access hotels' online application systems, to advising the participants on how to conduct themselves during phone screens and in-person interviews. Incumbents might want assistance writing a resume, and some might just be looking to take another class to be

eligible for a different job in the hospitality sector. Coaches also engage in case management, helping clients to access resources such as GED classes and offering guidance on issues such as housing. Coaches often help participants improve their soft skills, especially English language skills, if needed.

HEALTHCARE TRAINING INSTITUTE

Coaching has also been the primary focus of SkillWorks' activity within HTI since 2009 with an emphasis on academic coaching. The three HTI academic coaches provide support for incumbent workers at employer partners in the healthcare sector interested in academic advancement, usually in a health-related field. Some are already in college, while others are still preparing for college. The coaches help clients prepare for college, apply to college, make a successful transition, and provide ongoing support until participants graduate or complete a certificate. This involves working on core skills as well as hands-on help with particular issues and questions.

HTI coaches customize services individually for their clients based on where the client falls on a continuum of academic needs, but the three coaches describe the service they provide as a hybrid of academic, financial, and career coaching and social work. The core skills HTI coaches work on with clients include areas such as test taking, organizing, scheduling, research, critical thinking and problem solving, study skills, computer skills, and soft skills. Once a participant finishes an academic program, the HTI coach often continues to work with the client on professional development, improving his or her resume, identifying job opportunities, and keeping the participant's confidence up, until the person is able to find a new position.

While the primary focus is on academic credentials requiring at least two semesters of work, HTI has also applied the academic coaching model to shorter-term educational advancement pathways such as CNA certification.

COLLEGE NAVIGATOR

The SkillWorks college navigator is a special coaching position created by SkillWorks with funding from the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and the Social Innovation Fund in 2011 in order to provide enhanced support for SkillWorks participants across the different partnerships entering Bunker Hill Community College. Although staff at the Boston PIC provide oversight for the navigator, she works relatively independently and spends most of her time on the BHCC campus. To date, she has had over 90 intensive coaching clients and has also met with hundreds of other students on a shorter-term basis to prepare them for the enrollment and registration process, introduce campus resources, answer questions, or solve problems.

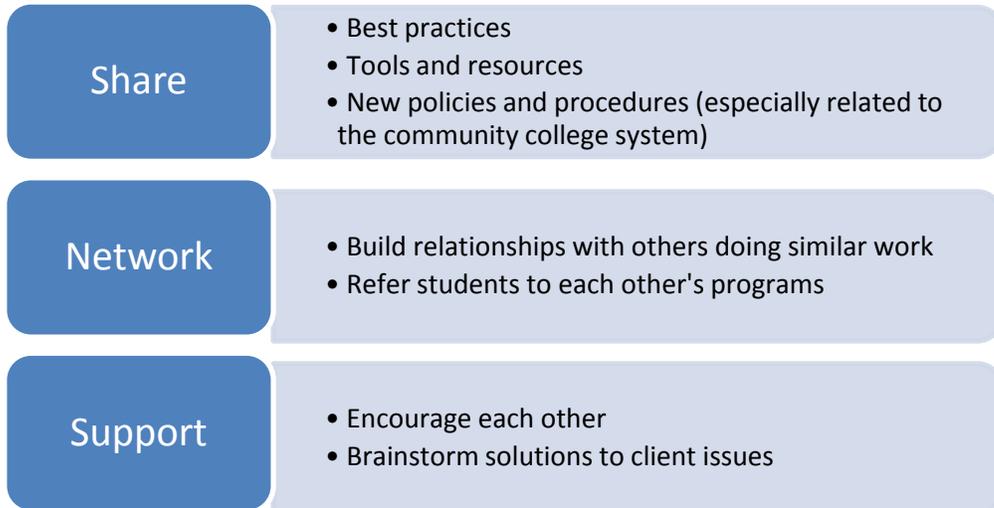
The navigator's focus on a single school has allowed her to specialize in a way that other SkillWorks coaches cannot, building relationships with college staff and developing a deep understanding of the school's policies and practices, which frequently change.

The role the navigator plays with her students depends on their needs and the resources they are able to access. Most of the navigator's intensive clients begin communicating with the navigator before they apply to BHCC. The navigator answers questions and assists students in gathering paperwork, applying for financial aid, and transferring credit, and advises them on how to avoid taking developmental classes. The navigator explains what they need to do and whom they need to talk to when issues arise, and she also "stays on top of" students with check-ins, reminders, and encouragement.

Once they enroll, the navigator continues to check-in with students to help ensure that their transition is successful. Typically, she will speak with students several times during the first semester, but for most students the frequency of interaction tapers off once they adjust to school. For many students, the navigator functions as an academic advisor, helping them decide on their program of study, determine what classes to take when, and plan ahead for after they complete their associate's degree. She also helps students deal with administrative questions and academic problems, but, when possible, she refers them to appropriate resources at BHCC. Like the HTI coaches, the college navigator sometimes also functions as a life coach or a career coach, particularly when there are outside barriers that are preventing a student from succeeding in school.

SKILLWORKS INVESTMENT IN COACHING BEYOND DIRECT SERVICES

In addition to direct support of the partnerships' activities, SkillWorks established capacity-building opportunities for coaches through the creation of a peer-learning network. The peer-learning group formed in 2009 as a "forum for practitioners to meet and define a set of issues, tools... to help further their work." A consultant from the Commonwealth Workforce Coalition facilitates at least quarterly discussions among coaches from the three SkillWorks partnerships (HTI, HTC, and Year Up), the college navigator, as well as an academic advisor and career counselor from a number of other non-SkillWorks organizations, and representatives of the Boston PIC. The following graphic captures the goals of the peer group:



The peer group supports coaches and offers them access to resources that are especially useful for those whose organizations might not have prior experience with coaching or the infrastructure to support it. The group provides a sense of mentorship and institutional memory of knowing what coaches had done in the past and what worked well. Coaches value the opportunity to ask each other questions about specific client cases and to hear how others interact and problem-solve with participants. By describing issues they face and discussing strategies, coaches receive confirmation that “they are going in the right direction and using the right tools.” Coaches often find they can directly apply the information they learn to their work, and they share the new tools they acquire with co-workers to broaden their dissemination. The presence of the college navigator, especially, provides the group a much clearer understanding of how to guide clients through the community college system. The college navigator’s knowledge and experience improves coaches’ ability to stay up-to-date on changes in college policies, and the navigator assists coaches in tracking and guiding clients enrolled in college classes.

Value of Coaching

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES¹

Year Up

Year Up coaching had mixed results in terms of helping alumni achieve their specified goals. Year Up reported that less than half, seven of the 16 participants, who had a coaching meeting focused on getting a promotion, got a promotion. Similarly, less than half of the 33 unemployed participants who met for a job search session found a new job. Only a quarter of those who sought help with retention were able to keep their existing job. Of the 24 clients who had a retention-focused session, six were able to keep their existing jobs, one got a new full-time job, and 17 left their positions. Of those 17, employers let 10 go for performance-related reasons, laid off five for reasons not related to performance, and two left voluntarily. Outcomes were not reported for other participants who were mostly seeking advancement through education, skill building, or a job search, rather than promotion. It is worth noting that while every outcome has a plausible connection to coaching activities, these participants are, in many cases, meeting with a coach because they are already on the cusp of a promotion or of losing their job. In this context, it can be difficult to judge what constitutes a coaching success or failure. For instance, the coaching for the 17 students who left their positions may have been successful if it supported them in their transition to the next opportunity.

Hotel Training Center (BEST Corp.)

HTC appears to have had greater success related to pre-employment coaching than incumbent career coaching. HTC's largest pre-employment program, the room attendant training course, was successful, placing 75.3 percent of the 146 individuals who had enrolled in the program in hospitality sector jobs at an average starting wage of \$14.77/hour. The two other major HTC programs with pre-employment trainees, the culinary skills and professional food server tracks, reported lower placement rates. Both placed just above 40 percent of their pre-employment participants in jobs in hospitality or food services, many of which were either part-time or low-wage. Coaching hours were similar across the three partnerships, so factors other than coaching likely drove these differences.

There were very few positive job advancement outcomes to report for HTC incumbents, who usually have relatively well-paid, secure union jobs but very few opportunities to advance. HTC has limited detail available on the specific goals of incumbent career coaching or outcomes related to those goals. Promotions, wage increases, or new employment are the only outcomes

¹ There are several limitations to the outcomes data: First, coaching is one of the many factors that contribute to participants' successes, so achievement cannot be directly attributed to coaching without some sort of comparative analysis. Because of bundling of services and the ways in which participants were selected or self-selected for coaching, there were very few potential comparisons to be made where a difference in outcomes could be plausibly attributed to coaching. Second, differences in how outcomes were measured across partnerships and even within partnerships (over time or for different subsets of participants) limited comparative analysis. A fuller discussion of data limitations is addressed Appendix B.

by which to measure coaching success for HTC. Just four out of 161 incumbents were recorded as receiving promotions during the five years of Phase II. Seventeen incumbents received new jobs at new employers, but about half of the jobs were part-time or on-call employment supplementing an existing job. Forty-three incumbents reported raises not associated with promotions, but, in most cases, these were small and likely established by the collective bargaining agreement. There are other, more difficult to measure areas, like job performance, retention, and overall financial stability, where HTC coaches likely have a positive impact on their incumbent clients, but coaches have limited success moving clients along traditional career pathways for advancement.

Healthcare Training Institute

HTI regularly collects data on college enrollment and college completion for the purposes of tracking clients on academic tracks and reporting on their outcomes. In terms of the coaching that focused on helping participants prepare for and enter college, outcomes were mixed: about 59 percent of the 192 students who had pre-college coaching went on to enroll in college. Another 7 percent were still working toward their goal with a coach in fall 2013, at the end of Phase II. In terms of program completion,² the outcomes from students in shorter-term programs were promising: about 73 percent of the 85 college coaching participants who sought a college certificate received one. The 47 students who met with coaches as part of the separate Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) track had a 68 percent certificate completion rate, but the coaching they received was shorter in duration and less intense. As of the end of SkillWorks Phase II, the completion rate among the 59 students seeking academic degrees (17 percent) was much lower than the other two rates, but it is hard to draw conclusions from this since most of them were not expected to have graduated by this point. A number of the students had started college as late as 2012 or 2013, in some cases, because they needed pre-college remedial support. Additionally, slow progress was expected because the students were generally working full-time and pursuing academic goals on a part-time basis, and many had to complete a large amount of prerequisite coursework before entering their chosen program. HTI's records indicate that most of the degree-seeking students have not given up on their goals: in the second half of 2013 about half of the participants who had not graduated were still actively attending classes, and about 60 percent were still meeting with a coach.

College Navigator

To date, student persistence is the most notable result related to the college navigator. Of the 70 students who started intensive coaching between the fall of 2011 and the spring of 2013, three had completed their program, four had transferred to another institution, and only 20, or 29 percent, had left school without earning a credential. Forty-three were still attending BHCC

² Sixteen participants had college coaching, but there was no information on their course of study, and so are not included in these figures. None of these students were known to have completed a credential, but this may be due to lack of complete information. Because of this, the true success rates may be slightly smaller than the figures reported here.

in the fall of 2013.³ This represents a notably high level of persistence at a school with spring-to-spring and fall-to-fall one-year retention rates of about 50 percent. The completion rate appears to be very low as of June 2014, but this is explained by the fact that most working students take just one or two classes at a time.

SkillWorks and the Boston PIC were also able to gain access to some student data from BHCC, which provided information on course success rates. The figures indicated that the college navigator's clients probably pass classes at a similar rate to the general BHCC student body, which has an average success rate of about 73 percent.⁴ While one would hope that the students would perform better than average, there may be reasons why, even with the college navigator's support, they do not, such as they frequently work full-time, and, in many cases, the reason the college navigator is coaching them intensively in the first place is because they have been struggling with school.

PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVE

The variety of participant experiences with coaching is representative of the diversity of SkillWorks. Participants described a range of experiences with coaching, including different focus areas, meeting frequencies, and lengths of engagement with the coach. Despite the diversity in the specifics of the coaching, there were some commonalities. Participants are most appreciative of the general encouragement and more specific guidance coaches give as participants balance responsibilities in their career, education, and life. In line with the personalized nature of coaching, participants report a variety of benefits they have gained through coaching. Whether participants are thinking about changing jobs, retaining their current job, advancing their career, or getting more education, they use the support and resources coaches provide to help reach their goals. Coaching participants are in different industries, are in different stages of their lives, and use coaches for different purposes. From the initial goal setting to regular check-ins, participants appreciate that coaches work with them on their own terms and, therefore, offer a wide range of services from motivational encouragement to specific problem solving.

➡ Participants highly value the motivational and emotional support coaches give them. Without that support, many feel they would have given up.

Many participants attribute their progress to working with a supportive coach. One participant commented that the coach “[is] keeping me on point” and “motivating me with her spirit.” Analogies were common—one participant said that the coach “supports me as if she was someone in my family,” another said her coach was like a therapist, and several mentioned coaches being like friends. In cases where participants were in a job or college program without many friends, these relationships were especially meaningful.

³ Because the college navigator primarily tracked status changes, all students lacking any record of leaving before fall 2013 were assumed to be still enrolled. While the navigator made every effort to maintain contact with students, it is possible that some of these students left school without her knowledge.

⁴ Appendix A, the College Navigator section, provides more explanation of the BHCC data.

Participants feel coaches helped them persevere where they would have otherwise given up. When interviewers asked participants where they would be without the support of their coach, many responded without hesitation that they would not be at their current school or in their current job. In many cases, participants pointed to something concrete—an application their coach fixed, a job opportunity they found, a reminder email they sent, etc.—while in other cases it was the ongoing support that they felt made a difference. One participant described the impact of his coach as, “Working with a coach felt like someone helped push me up a mountain.” One student said, “Coaching makes the difference between me wanting to go back to school and actually doing it,” and several others said essentially the same thing. For those for whom college is a struggle, especially participants who have dropped out of school in the past, the continuing support of coaches helps them avoid becoming discouraged. “My biggest challenge is school, and with the coach’s help it is like somebody is holding my hand.”

➔ **Participants recognize the value of specific tools and strategies coaches offer.**

Time management, goal setting, and step-by-step planning are skills participants frequently mention working on with coaches. Participants receiving academic coaching cite the difficulty in affording college and finding time for schoolwork as some of their biggest challenges. Juggling different combinations of full-time or multiple jobs, college classes, and family responsibilities, participants identify coaches’ time management recommendations—and interventions—as very important to their success. One participant commented that his coach “teaches me how to prioritize and manage my time, focus on what I want, and to be more organized.” Participants also recognize the assistance coaches give in career and academic planning by helping participants clarify their goals and identify the steps they need to take to reach them. This assistance ranges from helping participants rearrange their weekly schedules to find time for class work, to helping participants think through each of the steps they would need to take to achieve their 10-year career goals.

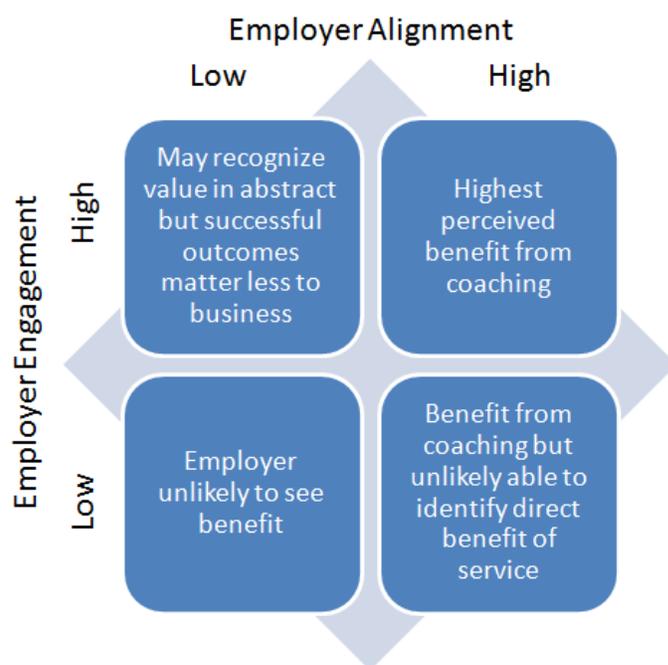
➔ **Participants value that coaches can be a “one-stop” resource to assist on variety of topics.**

Coaches serve as a key resource for participants who go to them for the tools and information they need for career and academic advancement and personal development. Since the career, academic, and personal aspects of participants’ lives are closely intertwined, they often call upon coaches for assistance in all three areas, regardless of a coach’s area of specialization. Participants look to their coach to help them with 1) *job-related issues*, including understanding tax forms, filling out job applications, communicating in the workplace, finding networking and job opportunities, and improving their cover letter, resume, and LinkedIn profile; 2) *academic issues*, including how to apply to and pay for college, how to choose courses, and how to deal with challenging assignments; and 3) *personal or outside interest issues* such as managing stress, stabilizing personal finances, and dealing with family emergencies. One participant commented, “My coach makes information more accessible for me. I could have found it on my own, but it is more convenient and faster to ask the coach.”

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

The potential benefit employers receive from coaching varies by the type of coaching provided, how that coaching aligns with employer goals, and how engaged the employer is in the provision of services. The variation in coaching services described in this report makes it clear that the possible benefit to employers will vary, and how an employer benefits from pre-employment job coaching as compared to postsecondary academic coaching will be different. In addition, not all businesses or industries are the same, and that variation in occupational structure, pathways to advancement, and even the depth of human resource capacity, all influence employers' perspective on the value of certain types of coaching.

Based on interviews completed for this coaching study as well as previous evaluations of the workforce partnerships, research suggests the following relationship between coaching value, employer engagement, and employer alignment.



In the healthcare sector, Boston Children's Hospital (BCH) is an example of an employer that has all of the factors in place to recognize the highest value of coaching. Through HTI, BCH employees have received academic coaching while pursuing postsecondary certificates or degrees. It is not a surprise that BCH has been a champion of coaching when one considers some of the factors that place BCH in the upper-right-hand-quadrant of the matrix above:

BCH Goals/Interest <u>Aligned</u> with Coaching Outcomes	BCH <u>Engaged</u> in the Coaching Process
BCH is an academic hospital that sees learning and education as part of its mission	BCH selected the “in-demand” occupations/certifications that employees could pursue as part of the postsecondary pathway program
BCH has a goal that its patient-facing staff should reflect the diversity of the patient population served	BCH is involved in selection process of participants
BCH places a high value on retaining employees, citing industry standards that the cost of replacing an employee is a year’s salary	BCH workforce development staff works closely with HTI staff receiving updates on employee progress
BCH provides a tuition reimbursement program to support postsecondary education	Through tuition reimbursement program, workforce development staff receive actual grades of coached (and non-coached) employees
Similar to other hospitals, BCH has a diverse occupational structure with several job titles that can be accessed with a one- or two-year postsecondary certificate or degree	

In contrast, it is more difficult for hospitality employers to champion HTC’s incumbent career coaching for their employees. The industry structure does not easily lend itself to aligning employer goals with the goals of incumbent coaching. The hotel employers served by HTC have a fairly flat organizational structure, far fewer job titles, and offer few advancement opportunities that necessitate one- or two-year postsecondary certificates. Retention is not a major challenge in this sector. The level of hospitality employer engagement in HTC coaching is also different. In many cases, employers are unaware that employees are working with a coach. Employers do not receive regular updates on their employees’ goals or their coaching progress. In this context, it is far more difficult for employers to champion this service.

Year Up’s services fall somewhere between the other two partnerships in terms of engagement and alignment. Discussions with employers suggest that their commitment to the Year Up program and its goals means that they are well aligned with coaching goals particularly around retention of new hires. Employers are not opposed to academic and career advancement for their Year Up alumni, but recognize that, based on the nature of the industry, it is less common for someone to advance at a single employer. Employers suggested that advancement often involves movement from one company to another. While this is an industry-accepted norm, it does reduce the direct benefit that employers see from coaching aimed at academic and career advancement.

In terms of engagement, Year Up also lies between the other two partnerships. Year Up coaches have developed close relationships with human resource staff at some partner employers. Employers are aware and supportive of the coaching provided to their Year Up alumni. Three partner employers provide regularly scheduled onsite coaching. Employer discussions did not suggest that employers focus their Year Up alumni to pursue specific degrees linked to in-demand financial service occupations, nor do they receive regular progress updates documenting the specific outputs and outcomes of coaching for their employees.

While the differences among the industry sectors served and the type of coaching provided make it more difficult to generalize the value to employers, several themes emerged from the research.

➔ **Employers value coaching as a supplement to and leverage for their internal staff resources.**

Coaches working with participants at partner employers provide the individual support that employees might not otherwise receive. SkillWorks partnerships have successfully worked with employers to carve out unique niches of service so as not to overlap with existing employer human resources. In some partnerships, coaches provide feedback loops to employers offering a unique perspective on workforce and supervisory issues. For Year Up, the partnership coaching distinguishes itself from employer coaching by focusing on the needs of a group of workers generally known to have higher barriers to advancement. Year Up employers mentioned that they particularly encourage managers to direct employees to coaching. For HTI, the role of the partnership coaching was primarily to provide assistance on academic issues, with the agreement that employers would provide career coaching.⁵

Throughout a participant’s interaction with employers—during the job application process, the initial placement period, and beyond—coaches represent a bridge to the training organization as well as a support to help the participant transition to a new environment and to raise awareness of services available both through the employer and through other external sources. In the workplace, employees can consider coaches as a safe space, while employers see coaches as a resource to triage emergent issues. Employers cite a number of areas where coaches complement existing services:

- *Unique understanding of the population.* Employers at multiple partnerships mentioned the value of having coaches who particularly understand the needs and barriers of the SkillWorks population. Many of the employer partners are large institutions with tremendous breadth in the skill sets and experience of employees. Partnering with staff who are uniquely skilled at supporting individuals in entry-level positions who face additional challenges to achieving their professional or academic goals is an asset to individual managers as well as human resource and workforce development staff.
- *Professional development:* Coaches enhance and reinforce the available internal and external resources by bringing in special trainings and alerting employees to scheduled workshops, mentorship programs, and employee benefits. At times, the coach can also supplement the role of the employee’s direct supervisor, who may be too stretched to offer guidance on professional development. For example, while employers can identify career pathways and provide tuition reimbursement, coaches help remind employees of available resources, and connect employees to the appropriate resource at different times of need. Coaches also guide clients on how to represent themselves professionally and assist clients to improve their professional communication skills.

⁵ HTI does provide career coaching for some employers on a fee-for-service basis.

- *Retention/career advancement:* Coaches can play a distinct role from employer human resources in helping new employees retain their new jobs and then later assist with advancement. In terms of retention, coaches work with participants on personal issues as well as workplace interpersonal challenges, discussions that would be difficult for the employer to tackle. Coaches can intervene with employees *before* problems become insurmountable. Similarly, in terms of advancement, coaches help employees find internal and external advancement opportunities. While managers or other staff may hesitate to recommend that their employees move to other departments, coaches can work in the employee's interest to learn what types of roles may be available and understand what steps they would need to take to advance.
- *Work/life balance counseling:* Employers appreciate having the coach available to advise employees on issues that are outside the purview of human resources or employee assistance programs. Coaches can counsel clients on how to manage responsibilities in the various areas of their lives and can offer more social service supports than employers are usually able to provide.

➔ **Employers see coaching as helping to achieve a number of organizational goals, but are not yet tracking those outcomes systematically.**

A commitment to the SkillWorks mission drives employers, but they also see coaching as a critical tool for addressing key organizational objectives. Employers highlighted various ways in which they believe coaching has the potential to improve their operations, including:

- improved retention;
- improved productivity and performance;
- reduction in overtime costs;
- protection of employer investment in scholarships and tuition reimbursement; and
- increased employee satisfaction and happiness.

At the same time, very few employers have developed methods for quantitatively tracking the benefit of coaching on those measures, in part because the number of individuals receiving coaching is small relative to the overall organization and it is difficult to move the needle organization-wide. As a result, an anecdotal sense of coaches' contributions forms the basis for employer satisfaction.

- ➡ **A small number of employers noted a couple of challenges related to offering coaching to SkillWorks employees, though they did not feel the problems represented considerable barriers.**

A few employers mentioned that coaching has the potential to cause some internal tension as it is a service available to only a few and is not made available to all who seek it. This is likely more of an issue where the coach is a visible presence at the worksite and employees visit with the coach during work hours.

Some managers, distinct from human resource personnel, see possible downsides to coaching. Some managers feel vulnerable to criticism that they thought employees might express in coaching sessions. Others fear that successful coaching might cause them to lose a good employee through transfer to another department, promotion, or a new outside job opportunity. Overall, however, employers were pleased with the many benefits SkillWorks coaching brought to their organizations.

Findings

Despite the differences among the four coaching efforts profiled in this evaluation, several important findings have emerged regarding the benefits coaches from across the different programs provide and the challenges they face.

➔ **Coaches provide critical ongoing support that allows participants to stay focused on their goals.**

By cultivating strong relationships with participants and communicating with them in an ongoing manner even after they complete their partnership training programs, coaches enhance and prolong participant engagement in partnership programs, services, and events, which connects them to an ongoing web of support. The coaching model offers a promising, if labor-intensive, alternative to the model of workforce development that has been prevalent for decades, particularly among federally-funded efforts that have focused heavily on rapid job placement. The coaching model creates an ongoing support system for participants during training, in college, and in the workplace. The benefit is a more robust system to support individuals when challenges arise and help keep them on as steady a path as possible toward advancement. SkillWorks coaches recognize that personal and professional issues intertwine, which is why case management and life coaching are so often combined with the academic and career coaching. At their best, the SkillWorks coaches go beyond just working with participants on getting a particular job or credential, by helping participants develop a sense of self-efficacy and independence, by expanding their horizons, and by giving them tools, strategies, and knowledge they can use to improve their lives.

➔ **Coaches go to great lengths to build strong relationships, maintain engagement, and offer clients a high level of accessibility.**

Interviews with coaches and participants made it clear that the more accessible and available the coaches are, the stronger the relationship becomes. Approaches vary, however, to achieve the same goal. Some coaches maintain these relationships by applying a very consistent meeting schedule and assigning “homework” to keep the participant engaged. Other coaches develop these relationships through a sense of warmth, proximity, and informality, and encourage unstructured and unplanned interactions. Still others structure their relationships differently for different participants. Other avenues coaches take to develop closer ties to participants include traveling to employers to meet incumbent workers, holding office hours or similar open meeting times, incorporating academic counseling into their usual career coaching (or vice versa), and using each participant’s preferred method of communication (whether email, text message, phone, or in-person conversation). Whatever their style, coaches find that regular contact is critical, especially around important deadlines and during periods of transition.

- ➡ **To efficiently support the array of participant needs, coaches require additional information on what resources are potentially available to clients, and need more training on how and when to make a referral.**

Since coaching encompasses so many aspects of client life, clients often present coaches with questions or problems outside their area of expertise. While it may be sufficient at certain times for a coach to help a participant learn by having the participant look up information and find answers on his own, there are times when coaches would also find it beneficial to know more about available resources. Coaches mention mental healthcare, student services, and housing assistance as examples of areas where they would like more information on available resources or better access to outside professionals who could accept referrals. In some cases, coaches know that participants are receiving services from outside organizations and believe that it would be valuable to coordinate participant care with other providers. However, if this sort of professional development is offered, particular topics should be carefully targeted to coaches who find them relevant. Several coaches suggested that they were already feeling the effects of information overload from different groups and networks.

- ➡ **While coaching remains “more art than science,” SkillWorks has encouraged the experimentation as well as the exchange of ideas and best practices. Through discussions within partnerships and in the larger peer-learning group, coaches have found value in sharing their perspectives on the effectiveness of varied tools and techniques.**

Efforts are underway to spread best practices and systematize approaches across SkillWorks. While there will likely never be one right way to serve participants, coaches valued the opportunity to test approaches, learn from successes and mistakes, and then exchange lessons and ideas with each other. Coaches described the following learnings based on their work with SkillWorks participants:

- *Balancing teaching versus doing.* One challenge for coaches is deciding how far they should go in providing advice or even acting on behalf of clients. Different coaches have very different tendencies—some try to avoid any form of “hand-holding” and ask clients to find answers to their own questions, while others are willing to do hours of behind-the-scenes work to solve problems and answer questions for a client. Coaches all learn to use different approaches for different situations as they become more experienced, and the most effective coaches have found ways to “teach” and “do” at the same time.
- *Providing timely reminders.* Coaches realize that even while participants truly intend to follow through on something, they will often miss deadlines, forget appointments, and lose track of important documents. Coaches have found that staying on top of clients and reminding them of important deadlines, coaching meetings, and other commitments, can make a big difference in participant outcomes. While coaches are trying to teach time management skills and be clear about participant accountability, coaches find that the extra outreach to confirm coaching sessions continues to be necessary.

- *Communicating frankly.* Coaches report that they have learned how to be more direct with participants. Rather than answering participant questions in a way that might spare their feelings, but may lead them down paths they are not yet prepared to take, coaches can present choices in a realistic way so participants are clearly aware of their options and what each one would entail. One coach also commented that she got better at distinguishing when someone was telling her something she wanted to hear versus what he was actually doing. Learning when to push someone for the truth helped this coach better understand the participant and determine how best to help.

While SkillWorks' choice to support relatively small coaching efforts in several different contexts has learning advantages, it also has learning disadvantages. On the positive side, it provides valuable learnings about the diversity of coaching tools and techniques, and it demonstrates how partnerships implement programs based on different goals. The downside of this type of experimentation is that with such a low number of cases and high number of variables, it is hard to separate the effectiveness of a given technique or process from the effectiveness of a particular coach. It definitely seems that individual factors, including a coach's skill set, knowledge base, and, perhaps above all, personality, matter a great deal. Expanding the network of coaches that exchange ideas may prove beneficial as a means of creating some scale across which to share experiences and effective techniques.

- ➔ **While preserving the “art” of coaching and allowing for individualized approaches, practitioners need a stronger focus on how to achieve results in ways that can stretch coaching resources further.**

The premium placed on a high level of personal interaction, flexibility, and accessibility creates a challenge for funders and workforce development providers—how can such personalized services that depend on person-to-person contact be delivered effectively at scale? There is a tradeoff between the value of one-on-one contact and its cost in terms of staff resources. At both the partnership level and the individual coach level, there has been some experimentation aimed at stretching coaching resources further. For example:

- *Provide group or cohort service delivery.* Coaches find that grouping people together can be empowering for participants. Cohorts can be designed so that participants at different stages in their education or career can counsel and mentor one another. The affinity group of Year Up alumni at State Street Corporation is one example of a group that has proven effective as a means of delivering services not only at scale but also in partnership with an employer to further leverage resources. Group work, such as workshops, present additional possibilities to scale up coaching, but the success of these events depends on whether there is a critical mass of clients with an interest in the skill or training that is presented as well as the ability to attend. HTI had initially intended to make greater use of such models for participants enrolled in college, but found it difficult to actually execute given the diversity of clients, their academic courses, and employment constraints including the timing of work shifts.

- *Leverage coaching with mentors or tutors.* Coaches suggest that volunteer tutors could substitute for some of the coaches' time for students enrolled in classes. There have been some limited experiments in this area. An HTI employer partner identified employees (often residents completing their medical training) to tutor HTI students struggling with college-level biology classes. The college navigator often refers students to the school's tutoring center if they need help in their classes. Coaches suggest that if a tutor could stay on top of students, watch for barriers beyond academic issues, and alert the coach when non-academic issues arise, coaches could provide support more strategically. However, coaches wonder whether all tutors have the ability or time to reach the level of familiarity coaches have with participants. Similarly, some of the financial institutions that employ Year Up graduates offer mentorship programs for new employees. Year Up helped two of its employer partners, New York Life and Boston Financial Data Services, start up mentoring programs between late 2013 and early 2014, in order to leverage coaches' time and resources. Since implementation is so new, it is difficult to assess the impact. It is, however, a pilot worth watching so that if successful, partnerships could expand the model in other sectors as a means of leveraging coaches' time.
- *Rely more on phone and email.* Substituting some face-to-face coaching with phone calls or emails would be another way to stretch coaching resources further. Conversations with coaches indicate a high degree of variation in terms of how often they use the many forms of communication and for what purposes. Some coaches expressed a belief that these methods produce less effective coaching, while others saw them as critical tools. There is a potential opportunity here for peer learning, which the coaching network may wish to adopt.
- *Develop more rigorous standards to determine who receives coaching and when coaching should be discontinued.* In some partnerships or programs within partnerships, the client selection process is clear, but in others there are no clear criteria for when someone should receive coaching. Should anyone who wants to meet with a coach be able to do so? Partnerships should be clear about who should be coached and why in order to maximize results and stretch scarce resources.

Similarly, partnerships need greater clarity on when a coach should drop a client from his caseload. This is more of an issue with coaching of incumbent workers, which can drain coaching resources for years. HTI has developed fairly strict standards in this regard. If a student misses several appointments and does not follow up with his coach, HTI will "disenroll" him from the program in the data tracking system. If individuals reach out to their former coach and renew their commitment to continuing the work, they may be re-enrolled. Other partnerships as well as the college navigator are less formal in their enrollment policies. Maximizing coaching resources depends on some sort of churn that allows coaches to take on new clients. Partnerships and individual

coaches need to give more thought to when and how they can ramp down or discontinue coaching of a client altogether in order to make room for new clients.

- *Instill an ethos with coaches that more is not always better.* Partnership management as well as peer exchanges can encourage coaches to experiment and test approaches that require less coaching time without sacrificing client progress. Interviews suggest that while much time has been spent thinking of the best ways to deliver coaching, less focus has been on the best techniques given limited coaching resources. A number of coaches expressed pride in the lengths they will go to support a client. To achieve even modest gains in coaching's reach, there will need to be a switch in coaches' mindsets to set stronger limits, encourage client self-reliance, and to try new approaches that reduce required hours per participant. Discussions suggest that setting numeric targets of hours per participant is unlikely to be a productive method of stretching coaching resources since each participant's situation and needs vary tremendously. Establishing a mindset rather than a numeric target appears more likely to be successful.

➡ **Coaching can accelerate a client's progress, but it is not a substitute for the client's personal drive and persistence.**

Coaches recognize that participant success is reliant on a number of factors, some that coaches can influence, and some they cannot. Coaches have learned that, as much as they might want to help them, participants who are not yet ready for the commitment a program requires or who do not have stability in their personal lives are usually not able to advance, even with coaching. On the other hand, coaches also observe that similar circumstances can affect participants differently. Coaches recounted some instances where an individual, through perseverance, was able to address a personal or environmental factor that for many would be an insurmountable barrier, and other instances where people who appeared to be stable and successful still had cognitive barriers that prevented them from advancing. For these reasons, coaches look for personality characteristics such as internal drive and resilience in addition to an individual's circumstances when screening for admission. Coaching can channel and augment a client's efforts, but it cannot substitute for a sense of initiative and ambition.

➡ **While the partnerships have made attempts through their internal information management systems as well as through SkillWorks' reporting to track coaching efforts, existing data limit results-based decision-making.**

To draw conclusions about the effectiveness of coaching generally or to answer more nuanced questions such as how many hours are needed, what styles are most effective, or when intervention has the greatest impact, requires, first, detailed records about the coaching interaction; second, reports of demonstrable progress; and, third, an ability to control for the variety of other factors that can influence success or failure. It turns out that all three criteria are difficult to achieve.

- *Data on coaching activity:* Coaches explain that tracking individual coaching interactions is time-consuming and onerous, especially when participants frequently cancel,

reschedule, or contact coaches for five or 10 minutes of time. While some coaches appear to have recorded basic details about each interaction, others tracked the time they spent with clients irregularly or not at all. As a result, a lot of the coaching activity data amounts to counting the number of hours a participant was in coaching, and in a few programs there appear to be gaps even in that. The data are also incomplete in that they do not provide a picture of all the behind-the-scenes work of coaches. For example, a coach may spend hours researching answers to client questions (such as available scholarships) before explaining options to a participant in a 10-minute conversation, but only the 10-minute conversation will show up in the data. In most instances, coaches did not track emails and other electronic communications either.

- *Data on outcomes:* The biggest challenge appears to be sorting through the subtleties of participant achievement to determine the most meaningful measures of progress. For instance, HTI academic coaches report that existing tests, such as the college placement test, may not be the best assessment tool to document the skills students are gaining through pre-college classes or coaching. Coached participants gain core skills and organizational skills. Coaches may capture this progress in case notes, but currently used testing outcomes do not capture these skills.

The challenge of documenting outcomes, particularly interim progress, is most daunting when the participant's goals are long-term. For academic coaches, recording whether students have graduated, are still in school, "dropped out," or taken "time off" comes naturally. These variables can provide good outcomes data for students in shorter-term programs, but for the students working on academic degrees, it is difficult to draw any meaning from them. SkillWorks participants are often full-time workers taking one or two classes per semester. Since the vast majority of coaching clients seeking academic degrees were always expected to take at least four years to earn a degree, it is no surprise that so few have gotten their degrees. When tracked consistently, the enrollment status information can tell stories about student persistence, and major/program information can illustrate the pathways students take through college. Especially for the first few years of SkillWorks Phase II, however, the programs did not track this information in a consistent, thorough way. A better metric at this point would be one that provides insight into how students are progressing *within* their programs. While some of the programs did make limited attempts at collecting credit completion information from participants, going forward, a more systemic approach that establishes a partnership for sharing student data between either SkillWorks and the community college or between individual workforce partnerships and the college will provide more complete and accurate information.

- *Controlling for external factors:* An additional challenge in making meaning from the coaching data is taking into consideration the other factors influencing outcomes. The variation in participant needs or barriers is one such factor. For instance, the Year Up career coach had a number of fairly new graduates referred to him when they were

struggling or dissatisfied with their current employer. Given the population he was coaching, the fact that some of the participants left their position should not be a surprise and should potentially be viewed as a success, not a failure, for the coaching intervention. Another challenge is the fact that coaching is generally coupled with some other intervention, such as occupational training at HTC or college courses at HTI. It is difficult to unbundle the outcomes associated with coaching from those associated with other services, unless there is an appropriate control group that received the occupational training or college courses, but did not receive coaching.

It is likely unrealistic for the partnerships to implement the level of information management and research analytics to address all of these factors to wring the most meaning from the data. Perhaps the “proof” for the value of coaching will need to come from other studies that support quasi-experimental designs as an element of the evaluation design. For instance, some of the U.S. Department of Labor-funded Workforce Innovation Fund grants have supported coaching and have prioritized quasi-experimental designs in evaluation that may be able to determine more rigorously the value of coaching.⁶ Funders may want to look to findings from those studies when available, although the Department of Labor’s timeframe for documenting results may make it impossible to capture coaching’s actual value over the longer term.

➡ Research to date suggests some coaching approaches offer more promise than others do. Pre-employment coaching and academic coaching appear to be improving outcomes for participants, but the case for incumbent career coaching is less clear.

While it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions on the value of coaching given the data limitations and diversity of contexts and approaches applied throughout the SkillWorks Initiative, research suggests that two types of coaching clearly offer participants significant value and are leading to improved outcomes. The coaching provided in combination with pre-employment training appears to be an important element in the successful job placements seen with BEST Corp.’s room attendant program. The academic coaching provided to participants pursuing postsecondary education both through HTI and the college navigator also appears to be a critical element in instilling study skills, maintaining motivation, and sorting through the complexities of bureaucratic postsecondary institutions. Again and again, participants, coaches, and employers pointed to the tremendous value of these services when interviewed.

The partnerships that have tested incumbent career coaching have not yet demonstrated the value of this approach. BEST Corp. and Year Up have pursued this form of coaching during Phase II. While research yielded general support for the service, more consideration should be given to where, when, and how this service is most effective.

In the case of BEST Corp., the partnership has experienced fairly limited advancement outcomes for incumbent participants. As noted in previous evaluation reports, the

⁶ First DOL Workforce Innovation Fund evaluations should be available in early 2016.

organizational structure of the hotels, the relatively attractive entry-level wages and benefits in union hotels, and the value of seniority all make traditional advancement less common. Given these conditions that make advancement less of the norm, when viewed in combination with the high number of hours devoted to incumbent coaching, the cost-benefit equation appears to not adequately balance. BEST Corp. coaching supports participants in a more holistic set of goals such as homeownership and access to benefits, but it is worth reflection on the part of SkillWorks funders and staff whether that effort is closely enough aligned with SkillWorks goals of helping low-skilled workers advance in careers with family-sustaining wages.

Year Up's investment in career coaching is more recent, so there has been less time to see results from the intervention. However, the coaches' own data on meetings with clients suggest that the intervention is a fairly light touch. With an average of less than two meetings per client, according to the coaches' data, it is unclear just how much direction the coach is providing. The Year Up partner employers have fairly robust human resource infrastructures, so employees who avail themselves of those resources may need less support from an outside coach. However, interviews suggest that career coaching for Year Up alumni may be most valuable in the first year of employment, when coaching helps recent alumni adjust to their new work environment, address work-life balance issues, and deal with any other deficits or barriers that pose a threat to job stability. Career advancement pathways within a single employer can be limited, and career advancement for this sector often means leaving one company for another financial institution. For Year Up alumni, advancement often involves an exit from the current sector. Other participant research conducted as part of the evaluation of SkillWorks Phase II found that most Year Up participants have long-term career goals outside of the financial services sector,⁷ which raises some question as to whether a career coach focused on advancement within the sector best meets participant need. For those who do want to advance in the sector, postsecondary education is generally a necessity. It is not a surprise that Year Up referred so many of the college navigator clients. Academic coaching may be a more focused and relevant resource for Year Up alumni looking to advance than generalized career coaching.

While it would be premature to conclude that incumbent career coaching provided by workforce partnerships is not worthwhile, the SkillWorks' experience suggests that additional attention should be paid to industry conditions and the resulting implications for advancement, the common goals and challenges of participants, and alternative sources for support before deciding what type of coaching is needed.

➡ The addition of SkillWorks coaching resources located directly at the community college proved valuable for both SkillWorks participants and partnership coaching staff.

Given SkillWorks strong focus on postsecondary degree achievement in Phase II, the addition of the college navigator who maintains regular office hours at BHCC—the college enrolling the highest number of SkillWorks participants—has been a win for many stakeholders. Data and interviews suggest that the college navigator's assistance has helped participants in many ways,

⁷ Year Up is changing its admission process to identify more participants with a long-term interest in finance, so this trend may reverse itself in the future.

including the transition to college, the application for financial aid, the sequencing of courses, and the selection of degree programs. Taken together, the assistance appears to have impacted student persistence. Through her support of students at the college, the navigator has developed deep knowledge of college operations that she is then able to pass on to the partnership coaches, thus leveraging her work by building additional expertise in the coaching field around Boston.

➡ **SkillWorks' coaching investment has contributed to some system change beyond the individual participant outcomes.**

Coaching has cultivated new and deepened existing relationships among employers and providers. It has also had an impact on the broader field of workforce development in the metro Boston region by contributing to larger changes in policies, practices, and system capacity. In addition, the college navigator has formed a critical bridge between community-based organizations and BHCC, building understanding and increasing familiarity with the college, and helping the college better understand and address barriers and challenges faced by working adult students.

- *Employers:* Adding coaching to the SkillWorks-funded activities allowed the partnerships to strengthen their relationships with employers. The addition of a Year Up career coach has allowed the partnership to be more consistent in its interaction with employers. The coach provides onsite service and held onsite workshops for alumni at all four employers. One employer introduced the coach to senior managers and supervisors to raise awareness of available Year Up services. The employer also assigned a senior human resource manager to work with the career coach to implement support activities onsite and has written this work into the human resource staff person's job description to institutionalize the liaison. Another example of system change emerging from Year Up's coaching is a change in one employer's tuition reimbursement policy. Year Up graduates can count their time as interns toward the 12-month employment period required before employees can apply for tuition reimbursement.

One HTI employer adjusted its tuition reimbursement policy in response to the trust the coaches inspired. Instead of the standard practice of reimbursing employees after they completed training and received a certain grade, the employer provided funding upfront. The employer made the change because it was confident that the coach's work with the employee would secure the risk.

By designating employer liaisons, some of whom are coaches, HTC has worked to increase communication and interaction between employers and HTC. Employers can notify their HTC liaisons when employees are having difficulties with their job so HTC can work with the person before it is too late. While employers do not know whether employees are working with a coach, the liaisons provide a mechanism for greater partnership between employers and HTC.

- *Providers:* Some providers have increased or formalized their coaching services after realizing the positive benefits to participants. After seeing how the SkillWorks' coaching supported participants, HTI started using coaching in a second, non-SkillWorks department. At Year Up, the request from alumni and the coaching pilot demonstrated that hiring a dedicated career coach would allow the partnership to continue to support alumni as well as to have more of an investment in longer-term career advancement.

The college navigator's work with administrators at BHCC has led to changes in some practices at that institution, particularly in areas where the navigator has developed expertise. One BHCC staff person reported that the navigator found that an important item on an admissions form concerning in-state residency was not being accurately explained, which prevented some students from knowing to apply for in-state tuition. The navigator was able to bring the issue to the appropriate staff people, who realized they had been misinterpreting the question and subsequently changed the way they were explaining it. The staff person also described a second, similar situation in which the college navigator offered useful feedback regarding confusing language of a rule about foreign transcripts. Given how active the college navigator is in working with BHCC staff, it is likely that her work has led to other small, but significant, changes that were not documented.

- *Broader field of workforce development:* SkillWorks' investment in coaching has catalyzed a systemization of coaching activities, increasing the field's understanding and capacity for coaching, and has also led to changes in the perception of coaching by outside entities, such as funders.

The peer networking group, with leadership and support from the group's facilitator, produced the *Coaching for College and Career Toolkit*, a compilation of career exploration and college navigation tools, including existing tools developed by others doing similar work around the country as well as new tools developed by SkillWorks coaches. It includes various coaching tips, lessons, and recommendations as well as things that the SkillWorks coaches found helpful in their own work and wanted to share, including instructions for clients, example cases, sample documents, and worksheets and exercises. Members of the peer-networking group have also sponsored workshops and presented their work at regional and national conferences. SkillWorks has also partnered to a limited extent with coaching efforts in other initiatives, like SuccessBoston, to share peer learning and co-host events and workshops.

While it is impossible to directly attribute to SkillWorks, there does appear to be increasing interest in and attention to coaching within the workforce system. Whether noted as the inclusion of coaching as a possible service within funder RFPs or the high attendance at coaching workshops at area conferences, coaching has taken on increased prominence over the course of SkillWorks Phase II. While this follows national trends as well, SkillWorks has likely contributed to the interest not only through the

direct pilots and support of field capacity building but also through a five-year spotlight on coaching at the funders collaborative composed of key workforce funders in the region and state.

- ➔ **Despite SkillWorks' contribution to incremental system change related to coaching, the investment does not appear to have generated sufficient system change within the college, employers, or within the public sector to make philanthropic support of coaching unneeded.**

Since neither SkillWorks nor its funders have the resources to support coaching at a scale that can serve all entry-level workers seeking to advance in their careers, the ultimate goal of coaching-related system change needs to be financial sustainability beyond philanthropy or changes in the system that make coaching unnecessary. Some SkillWorks partnerships hoped that by demonstrating the value of coaching, employers would be willing to sustain coaching services after the completion of Phase II, but there has been limited movement on this front. While employers see the value of coaching, few have assumed financial responsibility for the service going forward. In fact, two of SkillWorks early Phase III investments are to support ongoing coaching service at two of the Phase II partnerships.

While, the pilot of the SkillWorks-supported college navigator planted within the system at BHCC was at least in part to produce system change within the college system, in addition to helping participants, the system has been quite slow to change. Interviews found limited changes in administrative practices at BHCC related to the navigator's work. Some suggest that the navigator position, a practitioner role, was not senior enough to engage college leadership in the types of discussions that might lead to system change. Ultimately, the navigator had a high impact on participants, but a low impact on changing systems within the college. While the Massachusetts community college system appears to have expanded its coaching offering, in part through the Massachusetts Community College Transformation Agenda, the model of college navigation services added through that initiative is quite different from the SkillWorks model and appears more focused on getting students to enroll in community college than on improving their persistence.

Conclusion

SkillWorks demonstrates the range of coaching in terms of goals of participants and in terms of services delivered. Despite the range, there are common elements across SkillWorks coaching. Coaches, regardless of their official area of coaching, all address academic, career, and life issues. Coaches form strong relationships with participants and have a deep investment in participants' success. Employers, providers, and the participants all recognize the advantages associated with coaching.

While the SkillWorks' experience shows the promise and potential of coaching, it also points to a need for further thought and refinement in certain areas. Although employers and participants both value coaching, this evaluation found that coaching is most impactful at specific points along a participant's career pathway. The research points to coaching in combination with pre-employment training or postsecondary education as particularly valuable, but further experimentation may be needed to determine whether targeted incumbent career coaching (specific sectors, participant populations, or career junctures) can also be highly impactful. Generally, the research found wide agreement on the utility of coaching, but given how resource-intensive coaching is, the question of how to scale up efforts remains unresolved.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDERS

Further philanthropic investments in coaching should explore ways to make coaching more sustainable by using investments to push the field in four areas:

1. Refine assessment of where and when coaching adds the greatest value.

This evaluation found the greatest value in pre-employment career coaching and postsecondary focused-academic coaching.

Coaching as part of a pre-employment program, whether it is actually called coaching or goes by another name—wraparound services, case management, job search assistance, post-employment services—is widely accepted as a critical component of a pre-employment program. The basics of coaching are commonplace enough that funders should question why a pre-employment program seeking funding does *not* offer some form of coaching.

Academic coaching, whether in the form offered by HTI or that offered by the college navigator, appears to be valuable to participants. The challenge is that many of the beneficiaries of such coaching are pursuing long-term goals making such coaching lengthy and costly given the multi-year commitment. Future funding should focus more specifically on how to structure academic coaching to maintain the positive benefit while leveraging existing resources by piloting new methods such as deploying new technology, focusing coaching time on the critical transition points, shifting more responsibility to the existing support resources at postsecondary institutions, developing stronger peer support groups, and developing participant self reliance.

Finally, funders should continue to support reform efforts focused on improving systems within colleges that, if successful, should minimize the need for external navigation services.

The case for general incumbent career coaching during SkillWorks Phase II was less clear. Providers seeking resources to support such coaching in the future need to be able to articulate a very clear value proposition and likely set of outcomes and be held accountable for those outcomes by funders. Based on the evaluation of incumbent career coaching in SkillWorks Phase II, providers will likely be able to make the most compelling case for retention-focused coaching. In addition to the one-on-one coaching, funders may consider explicitly supporting efforts that build on Year Up and HTI's work in which provider coaching resources tightly integrate and complement employer human resource services.

2. Encourage innovation that stretches coaching resources.

The resource-intensive nature of coaching poses a hurdle to its expansion and sustainability. If Phase II of SkillWorks was about demonstrating the value of coaching, then Phase III should be about incenting ways to achieve coaching outcomes with fewer resources. Even in the early months of Phase III, it is evident SkillWorks is already embracing that challenge. SkillWorks is poised to support pilots with a number of service providers to test different technology-based approaches to scaling up academic coaching. The pilots will serve between 600-800 students over two years, most of whom are attending community college in Boston. While the pilots will test multiple tools, each uses text messaging or application-based messaging to help coaches and programs provide "just-in-time" information to students about financial aid, enrollment, course registration/withdrawal processes and deadlines, and campus resources.

While the management of service provider organizations is often aware of and concerned with the resource intensive nature of coaching, this evaluation found little evidence that coaches themselves gave it much consideration. Future funding may want to engage the frontlines of coaching in the brainstorming and experimentation to develop new approaches to achieving efficiency. Engaging frontline staff as partners may reduce resistance to adopting new methods. Interviews suggested some skepticism among coaches about the use of technology tools intended to leverage one-on-one interaction. Implementation of new technology may be more effective if seen as one approach of possibly many that coaches are empowered to explore as a means of achieving greater efficiency.

3. Use data to more clearly quantify the benefit of coaching.

The use of existing data was a challenge for this evaluation and highlighted some ways in which future funding could encourage practices that might yield better data going forward. The overriding principle to improve data quality and meaning is strategic thinking and design at the outset. First, any program or organization seeking funds to support coaching should have to be very explicit about the measurable outcomes anticipated and the interim data points to be tracked to measure progress. Second, the program or organization should have to demonstrate its data tracking systems and codify practices to ensure that they will accurately maintain the data. Third, where possible, grantees should identify an opportunity to track a comparison group, similar in population and services received, who will not receive coaching. Such a

comparison group will allow for some insight into the differential value of coaching, which can be difficult to assess when combined with other services such as occupational training or academic coursework. Finally, the funders and providers should agree on a timeframe for a program to demonstrate measurable progress, and funders should be willing to pivot away from programs not demonstrating results and to redirect resources to programs that are.

4. Embed institutional system change to lessen the need for supplemental coaching.

The college navigator has proven to be a valuable asset for SkillWorks students pursuing degrees at BHCC. Data suggest that with the help of the college navigator, students are persisting toward their long-range goals. The college navigator has also added value to the workforce partnerships by sharing her knowledge of BHCC with partnership staff, enabling them to better guide their clients along the pathway to college. No doubt many more individuals who are not SkillWorks participants would benefit from this type of support. But what is the strategy to bring this service to scale beyond the hundred SkillWorks participants to the thousands of working adults in the Boston area or beyond? What is the strategy to embed the valuable service within the institution? What is the system change strategy that would change college policies and practices to minimize the additional support and navigation services a student requires to succeed? Without clear answers to these questions, SkillWorks funders will need to sustain what is in many ways a band-aid or work-around rather than building systems that might improve successful college completion not only for SkillWorks participants but also for a broader population seeking postsecondary credentials as a path to career advancement.

Future support of onsite coaching at postsecondary institutions should place a stronger emphasis on the college itself with a focus on simplifying processes, testing models of coaching more embedded in the institution, and incenting institutional behavior to produce the types of outcomes coaching is intended to achieve—higher persistence, shorter timeframe to goal attainment, better employment outcomes.

The challenge for funders moving forward is determining how to sustain the worthy coaching already underway while building the knowledge, support, and system change strategies so that future public, private, and philanthropic funding for coaching can be stretched further so that even larger cohorts of individuals can achieve their workforce goals in the future.

Appendix A: Coaching Activities

YEAR UP

Year Up		
Coaching Structure	# Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.5 Career Coaches • (1 Higher Education Specialist)*
	Caseload per coach	Approximately 30
Participant Profile	# participants coached during Phase II	134
	% of SkillWorks participants getting coaching through partnership	~ 15%
	Clients	Alumni of Year Up program (both employed and unemployed)
Coaching Activity	Typical length of engagement with participant	Variable
	Frequency of coaching meetings	Generally monthly
	Mode of Communication	In-person, by email, or by phone
* Position no longer exists		

Background

Year Up’s approach to career coaching evolved over the life of the SkillWorks’ grant. Year Up currently has one full-time career coach and one staff member who does career coaching part-time. Year Up created the coaching position in early 2012 with SkillWorks funds as part of a broader SkillWorks-funded shift at Year Up toward a focus on the longer-term services for its graduates. Starting with a SkillWorks’ planning grant in 2009, Year Up experimented with several different efforts designed to help improve career advancement outcomes for alumni. During the implementation of these activities, which included SkillWorks-funded professional development services for a small group of older alumni, Year Up found that a broad group of alumni could benefit from enhanced and extended support. Following a positive experience with a youth development consultant Year Up hired in 2011 to provide coaching services, Year Up decided to formalize its coaching services and utilized SkillWorks funding to support the new, permanent position.

Year Up focuses its coaching services on success in the workplace, but the organization also provides coaching support for alumni interested in applying for a job or accessing education. In mid-2013, Year Up's higher education specialist left, and advancement through postsecondary education became a more integrated component of the career coaching work. This transition reflected a deeper change in Year Up programmatic thinking, which was exemplified by the decision to make higher education one of five organization-wide goals for 2014, a first for Year Up.

Career Coaching

The Year Up career coach mainly guides alumni on professional development, career advancement, and job retention issues, but also acts as a resource for alumni questions about higher education and personal matters. The coach spends the majority of his time in one-on-one meetings with alumni. In addition to individual coaching, the career coach coordinates workshops onsite at all four employer partners. Programming at State Street has been most extensive, since it employs the most Year Up alumni. Recently, State Street has opened its workshops to include Year Up alumni working at other financial service companies. The coach identifies workshop topics through feedback from alumni and also through conversations with employers' human resource staff, in order to ensure that the topics complement employer offerings. Past topics include work/life balance, career advancement strategies, academic planning, goal setting, time management, and financial planning. Coaches offer the workshops monthly at a lunch or break time so employees do not have to make special arrangements to attend. At employers that employ fewer Year Up graduates, the career coach refers alumni to professional development resources and emphasizes the importance of skill enhancement and professional visibility.

The career coach is not entirely focused on alumni activity and spends about one-quarter of his time in an advising role to Year Up's pre-employment participants, through Year Up's learning communities, giving workshops on topics such as time management, career planning, smart goal setting, and resume building.

The director of Career, Higher Education, and Alumni Services also spends a portion of his time on coaching. In addition to his other responsibilities, he works with mid-career alumni wanting advancement services/coaching, recent graduates who are interested in pursuing higher education, and walk-ins (graduates who are voluntarily looking for coaching—recent or older alumni). The focus of his work, both on the coaching side and the strategy side, is on mid-career alumni, but a significant amount of his time is also spent on more recent graduates. There is strong collaboration between the director of Career, Higher Education, and Alumni Services and the career coach; they coordinate their work with alumni as the need or opportunity arises in order to serve as many clients as possible.

Coaching Population

Recent Year Up graduates compose the majority of coaching participants. The primary focus of coaching at Year Up has been to provide support to new graduates, though the creation of the Long-Term Graduate Success team has enhanced organizational attention on advancement for

older cohorts of alumni. Year Up provided data that indicated that at least 81 SkillWorks participants and 55 non-SkillWorks participants received coaching from the Year Up career coach or the director of Career and Alumni Services/Graduate Success. Some of the alumni graduated as early as 2002, but about 70 percent of the coaching clients graduated in 2011 or later.

The coaching participants were evenly split by gender and highly racially diverse. The largest groups were black or African-American (about 30 percent) and Hispanic/Latino (about 20 percent). Because Year Up only accepts people between 18 and 24 years old, the typical coaching participant is in his or her 20s. About 70 percent were born in the United States, and only a handful had reported that English language proficiency was a significant barrier. While ESOL was not a need for this population, Year Up staff report that the majority still found their English skills a barrier for postsecondary work with the majority testing at the developmental English level of the college placement test. Virtually all had a high school diploma or GED, since that is another requirement for admission into the Year Up program. Roughly 20 percent were enrolled in college (nearly all studying part-time) when they first met with a coach.

Most participants (71 percent) had jobs at the start of coaching. The reasons alumni initially sought coaching varied. About 50 percent were seeking advancement (including promotions and education), a little over 30 percent were applying for a job, and about 15 percent were in danger of losing their jobs and were getting retention-focused support.

Coaching Process

The career coach first meets participants during the 11-month training at Year Up through the workshops he presents in the learning communities on topics such as time management, career planning, goal setting, and resume building. The coach then tries to meet the participants as they start their internship to make sure they are aware of the available coaching resources. Alumni often face a significant adjustment after they complete their internship and start a job or school, and typically need to learn cope with new challenges that arise and hold themselves accountable. It is during this transition time after graduation that the coach tries to engage most deliberately with alumni.

- *Assessment/Intake:* While alumni usually initiate the coaching relationships, the coaches, the Year Up internship team, or staff at employers will often reach out to alumni who they

Before Year Up, Christopher* was working full-time and attending college. He decided to take a break from his education to focus on supporting his growing family. When he heard about Year Up, he thought it was too good to be true. After graduating from the program in 2011, an employer partner offered him a permanent position. For the past three years, he has been working with the career coach every two or three weeks. They focus on professional and personal development. Professionally, Christopher wants to advance his career in the financial industry, but he is also interested in starting his own business. The career coach advises Christopher how to revise his resume and how to talk to upper management about opportunities for promotion. The coach also passes along information on entrepreneurship and has worked with Christopher to search for investors to help launch his business idea. Whenever Christopher asks the coach a question, the coach finds the answer or points Christopher to someone who can help. Although Christopher acknowledges he could research questions on his own, he appreciates that the coach helps him save time and directs him to accurate information. Christopher is also starting to think about going back to school because he knows that he will need a degree to move forward in corporate America. He talks to the coach to think through what degree to get and how to finance his education.

**Name has been changed.*

think would benefit from coaching to raise awareness of the service. During the first meeting with alumni, the career coach collects basic intake information and answers questions around career and academic development. The coach then records the activities in which the individual is participating and assesses his job situation, relationship with management, performance, as well as short- and long-term plans. In subsequent meetings, the coach will work with the alumnus to construct an individual career plan with “smart goals” and will make sure the alumnus clearly understands the steps needed to move forward.

- *Coaching Content:* The majority of career coaching at Year Up centers on professional issues such as workplace behavior and performance, corporate visibility, accessing professional development resources, and helping alumni find a mentor, if they want one. The career coach recognizes the importance of balancing work, school, and personal responsibilities and is intentional about spending time talking to alumni on areas outside of career development, taking a holistic approach.

- *Client-Coach Interaction:* Incomplete recordkeeping makes it difficult to fully assess the intensity and duration of client-coach interaction. According to the Year Up coach, the frequency of coaching meetings varies depending on the client’s preference and need. About 65 percent of the alumni who received coaching services had just one recorded meeting, though some probably had additional meetings outside the 18-month period for which coaching session data are available. Active clients may meet with the coach once a week or once a month; participants on a stable path meet less often—for example once every six months. A participant experiencing a crisis can meet with the coach multiple times in a week.

Coaching Activities at Year Up	
# Coached	134*
Avg Duration (months)	2.23
Avg # Meetings/Participant	1.78
Avg # Hours/Participant	1.58
Avg Meeting Length (hrs)	0.89

*Averages are based on the 124 participants w/coaching session data

- *Engagement Duration.* The participant’s ongoing interest in receiving coaching is a determining factor in the duration of the Year Up coach’s engagement with the alumnus. Participants work with the coach as long as they like and can update their goals during the process. Since coaching is available to all Year Up Boston alumni, they can contact their coach whenever they have questions or want assistance, dropping in and out of coaching on an as-needed basis.

Because the majority of the clients had just one documented meeting, and because there are only 18 months of data, the average duration of coaching engagement is very low, just over two months. However, if the calculation excludes clients who had just one meeting, the average jumps to more than six months.

Client Outcomes

Year Up staff tracked and reported coaching outcomes in a targeted way, limiting outcomes for each participant to the issue(s) the participant met with a coach to discuss. Year Up reported that seven of the 16 participants who had a coaching meeting focused on getting a promotion, got a promotion, and 13 of the 33 unemployed participants who met for a job search session found new jobs. Of the 24 clients who had a retention-focused session, six were able to keep their existing jobs, one got a new full-time job, and 17 left their positions. Of those 17, employers let go 10 for performance-related reasons, laid off five for reasons not related to performance, and two left voluntarily. One hundred twenty-four clients met with a coach during the 18-month period in which meeting topics were recorded, but only those who met with a coach for the above purposes had outcomes recorded. Those who only met with a coach regarding education, skill building, or finding a new job while still employed, were not included.

However, while it is likely coaching is responsible for a portion of the outcomes described, coaching is just one of the many factors that contribute to participants' successes. Without comparative data for a group of participants who did not receive coaching but was otherwise similar to the coaching group, achievements cannot be directly attributed to coaching. While there are plenty of Year Up students who did not receive coaching, there are two important reasons why their data are not comparable. One is that there are complex selection biases at work—at one end, students are usually meeting with a coach because they are at great risk of losing their job, while at the other end it is usually because they are up for promotions. This means that some outcomes, like job retention, would likely lead to an underestimation of the value of coaching if compared to another group, while others, like promotions, would likely lead to an overestimation. For those seeking coaching to avoid losing a job, a higher rate of turnover than the normal population would be expected. In some cases, if the fit was not right, exit might even be a successful outcome.

The other issue limiting the ability to make comparisons has to do with Year Up's data collection methods. While there are surveys sent out to participants about one year after graduation, the sample size of coached participants is extremely small due to low response rates. Except for this survey, most of the Year Up outcomes data are based on informal updates from alumni who are still in contact with the program, a group that includes a disproportionately high number of coached clients.

Use of Data

In April 2012, Year Up began capturing coaching activities using a program-specific spreadsheet. The spreadsheet collects information on the alumni receiving coaching (including their employment status, employer, the type and length of employment, and whether or not they are participating in professional development or postsecondary education) and tracks the coaching meetings (including the date, length, and the issues covered). Year Up intends to use the data to systematically understand the characteristics of successful alumni and how coaching might relate to career success. But since data collection started so recently, almost 90 percent of the alumni tracked have three or fewer meetings recorded.

Relationship with Employer Partners

The career coach rotates between prescheduled onsite visits at three employers (as needed at a fourth employer): the Boston and Quincy State Street Corporation locations, New York Life Insurance Company, and Boston Financial Data Services. Employers sign an agreement detailing what services the career coach will provide to employees and establishing the logistical parameters (where the coach will meet with alumni and how the coach visits the location). At organizations with a smaller number of Year Up alumni, the coach communicates with the human resource department on alumni performance issues. Employers know the coach can assist alumni with topics like advancement and career and college planning, but when problems arise with job performance or layoffs, employers also appreciate that the coach can help the alumnus apply for unemployment benefits and search for a new job.

HOTEL TRAINING CENTER (BEST CORP.)

		HTC
Coaching Structure	# Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Career Coaches • 1 Academic Coach
	Caseload per coach	Approximately 65 (with 3 levels of engagement intensity)
Participant Profile	# participants coached during Phase II	429
	% of SkillWorks participants getting coaching through partnership	100%
	Clients	Mix of pre-employment and incumbent
Coaching Activity	Typical length of engagement with participant	<i>Pre-employment:</i> Until participant placed in job (usually 3 months), then tracked for SkillWorks for 2 years after start of program
	Frequency of coaching meetings	<i>Incumbent:</i> Variable <i>Pre-employment:</i> Weekly
		<i>Incumbent:</i> Variable
	Mode of Communication	Mostly in-person

Background

Coaching was the primary investment SkillWorks made in its five years of funding of the Hotel Training Center. Prior to receiving SkillWorks support, HTC ran two cohorts of pre-employment room attendant training. For one of the training cohorts, participants received pre-employment preparation through a partnership with the Urban League before going through the HTC skills training, while the other cohort received skills training at HTC exclusively. The greater job placement success for the cohort with a more comprehensive set of pre-employment services, the Urban League cohort, convinced HTC that coaching was a necessary element for its pre-employment training going forward.

Career and Academic Coaching

While titled career coaches, the three main HTC coaches provide a diverse set of services for participants, depending on participant needs. In addition to their primary role of securing employment for the graduates of the pre-employment training programs, coaches sometimes provide case management services or academic guidance to program participants and graduates. They also work with incumbents workers at the employer partners—since HTC is a resource open to all Massachusetts UNITE HERE! Local 26 unionized hotel workers, HTC has a built-in relationship with these workers. However, the structure of the industry (discussed in previous HTC evaluations) does not lend itself to career advancement for workers who already have union jobs, so there has been less uptake from incumbents seeking guidance on career pathways within the hospitality sector.

In terms of their coaching style, HTC coaches describe themselves as forming close relationships with participants, and consider themselves invested in improving participants' lives and cultivating a sense of community at HTC. The three HTC career coaches vary in how hands-on they are with participants. Coaches generally find themselves helping pre-employment participants through each step of the job application process from setting up an email account so the participants can access hotels' online application systems, to advising the participants on how to conduct themselves during phone screens and in-person interviews. Coaches work with incumbent workers on a more variable basis, providing answers or offering advice to specific one-time questions and meeting over a longer period to guide participants through more involved career advancement, though fewer incumbents engage in this latter service.

In addition to its three career coaches, HTC also has one part-time academic coach. The academic coach has additional job duties and only spends about five hours a week on coaching.

Coaching Population

All 429 SkillWorks participants at HTC have received coaching services. The majority (268) were pre-employment participants, at least initially. One hundred forty-six attended HTC's pre-employment room attendant classes, where every participant receives coaching, but many pre-employment clients also come from HTC's culinary and professional food server programs. HTC has provided SkillWorks coaching services to a total of 161 incumbent workers. Many had been participating in a GED class or a professional food server class open to incumbents.

The SkillWorks HTC population is predominantly immigrant with 80 percent of the participants born outside the U.S. About 60 percent are female. SkillWorks HTC participants come in with much lower levels of academic achievement than participants at the other partnerships do. Over 30 percent did not finish high school or complete a GED, and over 35 percent finished high school but never took any college classes. Just 13 percent had earned a postsecondary degree.

Coaching Process

- *Assessment/Intake:* In pre-employment programs, coaches are involved starting with participants' very first contact with HTC. Each prospective candidate for an HTC training interviews three times with different HTC coaches or instructors. During the screening process, staff ask the candidates what their short- and long-term goals are and they encourage candidates to think about how they will reach their goals, what barriers they may face, and what to expect in the hospitality industry. Once clients enter the pre-employment training, staff assign each of them a career coach.

Most incumbent participants enter coaching as a result of engaging in an HTC class. The coach meets the participants to determine their needs and the level of coaching they want. The academic coach works with three groups of participants: 1) participants who want to enter a GED program, but first might need to improve their English language skills, 2) those who enroll in a GED program, and 3) a handful of HTC participants who enroll in college. If they enroll at BHCC, the college navigator generally takes on the coaching role and stays in touch with the HTC academic coach to keep the coach informed of student progress.

- *Coaching Content:* HTC career coaches primarily work one-on-one with pre-employment and incumbent participants on career-related issues, but also engage in case management when helpful. The coaches help pre-employment participants improve their soft skills, such as interviewing, and help them with their English language if that is a need. When participants of the training programs are ready to apply to jobs, coaches help them understand the hiring process and assist them with navigating job application paperwork and technology. Career coaches also play a cheerleading role to build participants' confidence, which has been found to be critical to success in the job search process. But the coaches also provide resources outside the workforce arena, offering guidance on issues such as housing or direction to a GED program.

Incumbents meet with coaches for a wide variety of reasons. Some might want assistance writing a resume, and some might just be looking to take another class to be eligible for a different job in the hospitality sector. Although incumbents can go to the hotels' human resource departments for generalized help, HTC coaches are able to offer a wider range of career development support because they are oriented towards supporting what is in the person's best interest, even if it means the participant might leave the hospitality sector.

The academic coach's work with participants starts with helping them identify their goals, and then understand the steps necessary to reach their goals and how long their plans will

take. Participants can then make decisions about whether to continue to pursue the academic goal based on realistic expectations. If they choose to move forward, the academic coach will then direct the participants to appropriate classes or academic programs and assist them in accessing any resources they need.

- *Client-Coach Interaction:* HTC career coaches interact with pre-employment participants throughout the training course by teaching certain segments in the class related to professional skills.

Coaches’ one-on-one sessions with both pre-employment and incumbent participants address individual needs and goals, and there is no set structure for the coach-client relationship. Pre-employment participants received, on average, about 18 hours of coaching. Incumbents received just 12 hours.

Coaching Activities at HTC	
# Coached	429
Avg hours/client	14.85*

* 72 of the 429 participants did not have reliable data on coaching hours. These participants were excluded from this average.

Each career coach typically has an active caseload of approximately 65 participants, who represent a mix of pre-employment and incumbent participants and people at varying levels of engagement, including some who only receive a check-in call quarterly. The most intensive are those in the midst of an active job search. For example, at the conclusion of the six-week pre-employment training, the HTC career coaches work closely with each of the graduates until they find a job placement. At other times of the year, the career coaches’ focus is more of a balance of incumbent and pre-employment participants.

- *Engagement Duration:* Pre-employment participants actively engage with career coaches until they find a job placement, which generally occurs a couple of months after the training class ends. As they adjust to their new position, participants might rely on coaches when they have questions or face a challenge in the workplace, but generally they interact less frequently with coaches once they start working.

Depending on the reason for receiving career coaching, incumbent participants will generally work with a coach until they have achieved their goal. The academic coach becomes less involved with participants once they start an academic program, but she continues to be available as a resource for participants as they progress.

Client Outcomes

HTC has defined and attempted to measure job-related outcomes for incumbents as well as pre-employment participants. In pre-employment programs, the primary goal is to place participants in hospitality sector jobs, ideally at employer partners. HTC’s largest pre-employment program, the room attendant training course, was its most successful. Of the 146 individuals who enrolled in the room attendant program, 110 got a job working at a hotel or in

an occupation related to the training they received—a placement rate of 75.3 percent.^{8,9} The average starting wage was \$14.77, and 93 percent of those placed got jobs with HTC partners. The two other major HTC programs with pre-employment trainees, the culinary skills and professional food server tracks, had lower success rates. Each placed just above 40 percent of its pre-employment participants in hospitality or restaurant sector jobs, and, in both cases, many of the jobs that participants entered were either part-time jobs with partner employers or lower-wage jobs with non-partners.

These placement statistics are useful for thinking about the potential range of overall program impact, but they shed very little light on the impact of coaching specifically. In fact, the differences between the programs illustrate just how critical factors other than coaching can be—participants in the three programs had very similar coaching hours, so something else was clearly driving the differences.

HTC incumbent workers, as previously mentioned, are rarely interested in traditional career advancement, so the traditional job outcomes that HTC tracked do not provide evidence of coaching impact. HTC only recorded four of the 161 incumbents as receiving job promotions at their hotels. Seventeen incumbents received new jobs at new employers, but about half of the jobs were part-time or on-call employment supplementing an existing job. Forty-three incumbents received at least one raise not associated with a promotion, but, in most cases, these were small and likely established by the collective bargaining agreement.

Use of Data

HTC uses its own electronic database to keep a coaching log and maintain updated notes on participants. The database tracks when coaches meet with participants and what they discuss during the session. This system assists coaches in providing seamless service so participants do not have to wait for their assigned coach to receive assistance, but instead are able to meet with whomever of the three coaches may be available when the participant comes to the center.

HTC coaches do not have formal meetings to share information, but sit together on a weekly basis to discuss client needs, ask each other questions, and keep informed of participant progress. HTC does not use the database to analyze its coaching activities or to track participants' goal attainment.

The academic coach checks on participants' class attendance and performance, but does not tend to track the information in the HTC database. The coach relies on information from a combination of program administrators, teachers, students, and the college navigator to track participants, and does not use a data system.

⁸ Some participants took part in more than one pre-employment program, but each job was only counted as a placement for one program.

⁹ In PPV's *Apples to Apples: Making Data Work for Community-Based Workforce Development Programs*, the mean enrollee placement rate for programs offering skills training customized with input from employers was 55.1 percent at a wage of \$10.50/hour (and the 75th percentile placement is 73.8 percent at a wage of \$13.78/hour), so coaching in the HTC room attendant program appears to result in much higher than average placement rates and wages.

Relationship with Employer Partners

HTC is unique among the SkillWorks partnerships in that it is a partnership of the 29 unionized Boston-area hospitality employers and UNITE HERE! Local 26 (hotel employees and restaurant employees union). BEST Corp., an entity primarily supported by the education and skills training fund established by collective bargaining agreements, provides HTC's training services. Any member of UNITE HERE! Local 26 enrolled in health benefits can take education and skills training classes at BEST Corp. at no cost.

The labor-management partnership provides many benefits to HTC, including longstanding, stable relationships with employers and steady funding for education and training. However it appears to create boundaries around the communication between HTC coaching staff and the employers. Career coaches often work with employees at partner hotels, especially during the probationary period for recently hired HTC graduates, but employer partners are not specifically aware of how their employees avail themselves of the incumbent coaching services at HTC. If the employee is having trouble with his job, the hotel might alert the HTC liaison so the liaison can help the employee address the problem. With the exception of this type of interaction, there is generally no direct communication between BEST Corp. and the employers about individual employees without express permission.

HEALTHCARE TRAINING INSTITUTE (HTI)

HTI		
Coaching Structure	# Coaches	3 Academic Coaches
	Caseload per coach	Between 20-70 SkillWorks clients (plus non-SkillWorks clients)
Participant Profile	# participants coached during Phase II	307
	% of SkillWorks participants getting coaching through partnership	~ 50%
	Clients	Incumbents
Coaching Activity	Typical length of engagement with participant	<i>Pre-college:</i> averages 6 months <i>College support:</i> Until participant finishes certificate program or college degree. Ranges from 6 months for shorter certificates to 4+ years for associates degrees and higher.
	Frequency of coaching meetings	Averages 1-2 times a month
	Mode of Communication	Mostly in-person, regularly utilizing phone and email for follow up

Background

Coaching was the primary focus of SkillWorks activity within the Healthcare Training Institute in Phase II, but unlike Year Up or HTC, the emphasis was on academic coaching, not career coaching. HTI worked with employer partners interested in advancing entry-level workers into health-related, patient-facing professions, a trajectory that requires a long-term commitment to postsecondary education. The decision to focus on postsecondary education was a response, in part, to one of the lessons learned in SkillWorks Phase I: participants need a credential or degree, in addition to career coaching, to advance in healthcare. With support from SkillWorks Phase II, HTI provided academic coaching to these incumbent workers in their preparation for and transition to college. While the primary focus was on academic degrees and certificates requiring at least two semesters of work, HTI also applied the academic coaching model to shorter term educational advancement models such as CNA certification.

Academic Coaching

The three HTI coaches describe the service they provide as a hybrid of academic, financial, and career coaching and social work. One coach calls himself a success coach whose job it is to make sure clients are successful at reaching the goals they identify. The coaches consider

themselves as partners in accountability and believe they have “a hand at participants’ backs the whole way.”

The HTI coaching style varies depending on the coach, and the coach may adjust it based on each participant’s individual situation. The coaches mostly focus on skill-building and academic advising, but coaches can be tough and hands-on at times, for example, standing in a line for hours with participants to get them through the enrollment process at a community college.

Coaching Population

Though the HTI coaching participants are virtually all incumbent healthcare workers, the population varies widely in terms of income, household size, country of birth, and English language ability. Almost all of the workers have high school diplomas, and about two-thirds already had at least some college experience when they started coaching. Almost one-quarter had previously earned an associate or bachelor degree, but since half of those with a degree are foreign born, it is likely that a number earned their degrees in another country. In terms of race and ethnicity, about one-half identify as black or African-American, a little less than one-quarter identify as white, and a little less than one-quarter identify as Hispanic or Latino. The majority of participants—about 80 percent—are female.

Coaching Process

- **Assessment/Intake:** The HTI coaching process starts differently at the various HTI partner employers. When a coach is located onsite, new clients will meet the coach and have a two- or three-hour meeting to go through the intake steps. The steps may include a TABE assessment, a writing assessment, a discussion of the participant’s goals and current circumstances (to make sure it is the right time for the participant to take on a new responsibility), and an explanation of the academic programs available. Afterwards, the coach follows up with a phone call to discuss the test results and, if the person applying has been accepted, to ask the person if they would like to start the program. Coaches are involved in assessing not only academic readiness, but also life readiness when deciding whether a participant is a good fit for coaching. Coaches use a “life readiness” survey that looks at factors such as whether people have key supports like childcare and transportation in place, and whether they have enough free time to participate in the program without overloading their schedule.

Maria* is an incumbent worker who went through the HTI pre-college classes and academic coaching. She passed the College Placement Test and enrolled in an English class at Bunker Hill Community College. Maria is not a native English speaker and this is her first time in college. She meets with the academic coach one or two times a month. The coach helps Maria choose classes, teaches her where to look and how to find answers to questions, and occasionally reviews her school assignments. Maria’s biggest challenges are her English language skills and financing her education. Maria’s husband lost his job and she was not sure if she could afford to take classes. The academic coach talked to Maria’s employer and the community college to arrange a payment plan. Without the coach, Maria thinks she would have given up on college and would not be able to achieve her goals.

**Name has been changed.*

Incumbents at employer partners without coaches onsite may have their first interaction with a coach through workshops the coach will hold with a pre-college or Bridges to College class. If a worker wants to receive coaching, the coach assesses the person in a similar manner to the process described above.

Once a participant gains acceptance into coaching, the coach will meet with the person individually to identify goals, to assess the individual's skill set, and to determine what assistance the person needs.

- *Coaching Content:* HTI created a coaching manual that provides guidance on how to assist a participant based on where he/she falls on a continuum of academic needs, whether the participant is already in college, preparing to apply to college, or is interested in pre-college preparation, a GED, or better English language skills. The coach then customizes a plan for that particular participant. Coaches use templates and worksheets from the HTI toolkit to teach skills, readministering certain worksheets multiple times to keep up with clients' changing goals and action plans. The core skills HTI coaches work on with clients are test taking, organizing, scheduling, researching, critical thinking and problem solving, study skills, computer skills, and soft skills.

If participants do not have a clear plan for career advancement, HTI coaches guide them through preliminary career exploration and help them decide what they want to study. When participants have a plan in place, the coaches focus on helping them meet the academic requirements needed for their goals. Coaches assist participants who are ready for college with the logistics of entering an academic program by making sure participants have all the documents necessary for enrollment, assisting with accessing financial aid, helping to schedule entrance and state certification exams, following up when participants do not pass an exam, facilitating study groups of participants, and connecting participants with employer benefits like tuition reimbursement. Students who are in college continue to receive motivational support and help with class assignments from the coaches. Coaches are a resource for participant questions, but to make efficient use of their time, coaches try to model how to problem solve and teach participants to find their own answers by writing down the steps they will need to take.

The coaches will refer participants to the college navigator as needed to deal with questions specific to Bunker Hill Community College. Once a participant finishes an academic program, the HTI coach continues to work with the person on professional development, improving his or her resume, identifying job opportunities, and keeping the participant's confidence up, until the person is able to find a new position that makes use of his recently acquired credential.

- *Client-Coach Interaction:* While meetings are usually face-to-face, coaches also communicate by phone, email, and text message. A variety of factors influence the means of communication coaches use, including participant preferences and the participant's

English language abilities. In-person meetings can be at the employer site, at a nearby coffee shop, or at a location near a participant’s home, and they take place on weekdays or on weekends. Even when a group of coaching participants is located at the same employer, their work schedules can be at various times around the clock, which leads to these varied arrangements. If participants are transferred to a different site or change jobs in the middle of receiving coaching, the coach will continue to accommodate them, which can add further logistical challenges.

The frequency of meeting depends on the participant’s needs and level of independence. Coaches generally meet with participants at least once a month to work on academic skills (such as study skills and critical thinking), or to help them prepare for a specific task (such as an upcoming test). The HTI guidelines are that if a participant is “not actively engaged,” defined as being nonresponsive and out of contact for two to four months, the coach is to remove the person from his caseload.

College Coaching Activities at HTI		
	Pre-college Coaching	College Coaching
# Coached	192	155
Avg Duration (Months)	7.05	14.72
Avg # Meetings/Participant	8.56	16.32
Avg # Hours/Participant	5.27	8.02
Avg Meeting Length (hours)	0.61	0.49

- *Engagement Duration:* Unless the participant drops out or refuses services, the coaching relationship generally continues through college, and coaches usually continue to meet with participants even after they receive a credential. Coaching typically ends when the client gets a promotion or new job, and coaches report that it is rare for these participants to come back with new goals. The duration of HTI coaching depends on how prepared students are for college and how long their degree or certificate takes to complete. According to HTI’s data, pre-college coaching generally lasted for about seven months, but, in some cases, it went on for a year or more. College coaching lasted an average of about 15 months, but, as would be expected, students seeking an academic degree met with their college coaches for almost twice as long on average as students seeking a certificate only. Many of the academic degree students are still in school and are not expected to graduate for several years, so eventually this difference will become even more pronounced.

Client Outcomes

Of the 192 HTI participants who received pre-college coaching (defined as any coaching before beginning college classes, not just coaching during a pre-college class), 114 (60 percent) successfully entered college classes, either in a certificate or degree program. One hundred fifty-five of the 192 participants had been enrolled in the HTI pre-college track, which indicates that they needed extra help to get to this point and so just entering college was a significant outcome—these participants had a slightly lower rate of college entrance, 51 percent.

Of the 114 students who entered college, 100 continued with coaching. An additional 55 students began coaching after they had already started college, so there was a total of 155 participants who received college coaching. For the 85 coaching participants seeking certificates, an impressive 73 percent have successfully completed their program.¹⁰ A lower percentage (17 percent) of the 59 participants seeking academic degrees has received the degree.¹¹ This is not surprising considering that about 40 percent of the degree students entered college in 2012 or 2013, and also that, as previously mentioned, the majority of students take one or two classes a semester, so “two-year degrees” typically take four to six years. All 10 of the students who completed academic degrees already had some college experience when they started SkillWorks. HTI’s records indicate that most of the degree-seeking students have not given up on their goals. In the second half of 2013 about half of the participants who had not graduated were still actively attending classes, and about 60 percent were still meeting with a coach.

College Certificate Outcomes		
Credential	Attempted	Received
LPN	48	36
Central Processing	14	13
Medical Coding	14	10
Surgical Technology	5	0*
Other	4	3
Total	85	62

* Most of the surgical technology students started college in 2013. All five were listed by HTI as "in progress," and three were confirmed as still attending classes in January 2014

College Degree Outcomes		
Credential	Attempted	Received
AS (Nursing)	28	2
AS (Other)	14	0
BA/BS	7	5
AA	6	1
RN (degree unknown)	3	1
MBA	1	1
Total	59	10

CNA Track Coaching Outcomes		
Credential	Attempted	Received
CNA.	47	32

Another cohort of students benefitted from coaching services, but generally for a shorter duration than those seeking postsecondary certificates and degrees. Coaches supported 47 incumbent workers, primarily direct care staff from Bay Cove Human Services, in their effort to attain a Certified Nursing Assistance certification. Of the 47 enrollees, 32 (68 percent) received a CNA certification.

Use of Data

Like the other partnerships, HTI has instituted its own database in order to document coaching activities and analyze such questions as when people need coaching most and how coaching

¹⁰ For both certificates and degrees, actual success rates may be somewhat lower since there were 16 participants without a known course of study, all of whom had no reported completion.

¹¹ There are very little data on completion rates of particular types of certificate programs to benchmark HTI participants, but the Massachusetts Department of Public Health publishes numbers on annual admissions and graduations at LPN programs. There is no direct completion rate statistic, but between 2008 and 2012, the Department of Public Health found 71 program graduations for every 100 student admissions. The HTI coaching participants fared slightly better. Of the 48 clients who were in college and planned to get an LPN, 36, or about 75 percent, completed their program. Because LPN programs have several college-level prerequisites and the HTI data do not differentiate between students in college classes who are intending to enter a particular program from those who actually entered that program, this may actually understate the relative success of these clients. On the other hand, it is possible that some of the 16 clients whose academic program was unknown (none of whom were recorded as having received credentials) were LPN students, and several students were already midway through their LPN courses when they began coaching.

contributes to participant success. The database tracks the date and length of each coaching session, participant goals, academic and career coaching activities in progress, and academic and career activities completed. Coaches have regularly entered data since 2009, and HTI routinely evaluates its work using the data to better understand and refine its approach to coaching.¹²

While all coaches enter information about coaching sessions into the HTI database, they each have their own method for tracking participants on their caseload. One coach captures deadlines and check-ins on an online calendar to remind himself to call participants to check in on them. Another uses a spreadsheet to track participant details such as goals, phone numbers, and notes. A third coach takes notes on coaching sessions and emails the participant a summary of the session and what the next steps are, so there is an electronic record of the session.

Relationship with Employer Partners

Employers are engaged in HTI's coaching in a number of ways. Employers conduct outreach and encourage supervisors to recommend employees for coaching. Employers also stay abreast of participant progress through regular updates on the status of each employee engaged in an academic program. The Employer Perspective section of this report describes employer engagement in greater detail.

¹² HTI modified its database fields related to coaching activities midway through Phase II. Despite the continuous recordkeeping, the change rendered the comprehensive data on HTI coaching activities unusable for this analysis.

College Navigator

Coaching Structure	# Coaches	1 college navigator
	Caseload per coach	Approximately 50 clients but also serves dozens of others each semester on a one-time or short-term basis
Participant Profile	# participants coached during Phase II	91
	% of SkillWorks participants getting coaching through partnership	n/a
	Clients	Graduates of programs at SkillWorks partnerships and a small number of other students referred by graduates
Coaching Activity	Typical length of engagement with participant	Engagement does not have defined end, unless a participant breaks off contact.
	Frequency of coaching meetings	Varies greatly, but typically every few weeks in a student's first semester, and less frequently in subsequent semesters
	Mode of Communication	In-person, by email, or by phone

Background

In 2011, SkillWorks created the college navigator, a special academic coaching position, in order to provide enhanced support for SkillWorks participants entering Bunker Hill Community College. The Boston PIC is the grantee and its staff supervise the navigator. The navigator's office is at the PIC, but the navigator spends most of her time on the BHCC campus.

The college navigator is different from the other coaches profiled in this report in several important ways. The most fundamental difference is that instead of working with students from a single partnership, the navigator works with students from across the different partnerships attending BHCC. This narrow focus allows the navigator to specialize in a way that other SkillWorks coaches cannot, building relationships with college staff and developing a deep understanding of the school's policies and practices, which frequently change. For this reason, the navigator, in addition to her coaching responsibilities, was tasked with disseminating information and knowledge about the college's policies and practices to coaches and other staff at the partnerships so that they could provide more effective support and advice for clients transitioning into Bunker Hill specifically, or colleges more generally. There was also a hope that by providing feedback to administrators at BHCC and transmitting knowledge to SkillWorks and its partners, the college navigator would be a catalyst for changing administrative policies and practices at the college so it could better serve students.

Coaching Population

The college navigator has developed two categories for participants: “intensive” clients who have an ongoing relationship with the navigator and are officially “enrolled” in her services, and other students and prospective students who engage on a more short-term basis, usually as “walk-ins.” By the fall of 2013, the navigator had worked with 91 intensive clients and about 200 others informally.¹³ The college navigator has a caseload of about 50 intensive clients.

Most of the college navigator’s 91 intensive clients—about 64 percent—are from Year Up. About 20 percent are from HTI (or related programs at JVS), and 7 percent come from HTC. About 10 percent of the navigator’s clients either were involved in SkillWorks Phase I or a current SkillWorks participant referred them, but they are not directly engaged in SkillWorks services themselves.

The college navigator’s clients have a demographic profile similar to that of Year Up, since Year Up alumni make up such a large percentage of her students. Her clients are more-or-less evenly split by gender, nearly 50 percent are black or African-American, and nearly 25 percent are Hispanic or Latino.

Most of the college navigator’s clients are employed, and about 80 percent of them attend college part-time.

Coaching Process

- *Assessment/Intake:* Since the college navigator works independently and prefers to deal with students as individuals, there are few formal policies or processes in place to guide the trajectory of her work with each student. This allows for a great deal of flexibility in choosing clients and determining how best to serve them.

Most of the college navigator’s intensive clients began their relationship with the navigator after a staff member at one of the partnerships gave them a referral. A few of the intensive clients first heard about the navigator from friends or family and started as “walk-ins.” When coaches or other staff at the partnerships refer students, they often send the navigator an email telling her to expect contact from a student, and explaining what they need. If the student does not reach out to the navigator, she will sometimes try to contact the student herself.

Coaching Content: Most of the navigator’s intensive clients begin meeting with the navigator before they enter college for help in the application process. The navigator assists students in gathering and understanding the paperwork needed for enrolling, transferring credits, and applying for financial aid. The paperwork requirements are particularly difficult for foreign-born students, who often have to get transcripts translated

¹³ The 200 “walk-ins” figure understates the total number assisted by the navigator. It does not include students before November 2011 when she first began tracking these more informal consultations nor does it not include people who met with her but have never been associated with a SkillWorks partner.

and deal with other cross-cultural issues. The navigator “stays on top of” students with encouragement and reminders, which might sound minor, but often makes a big difference in the lives of participants who are stressed and not used to complicated paperwork and strict deadlines. The navigator also works with participants to find ways to avoid taking developmental classes, whether that means studying for placement tests, transferring credits, or taking part in a math “boot camp” over the summer.

Once they enter BHCC, the role the navigator plays depends on participants’ particular needs and also on their access to other resources. For many students, particularly those without much college experience, the navigator functions as an academic advisor. While BHCC has been improving its academic advising services, most students still cannot get the type of personalized advising that the college navigator provides unless they build a relationship with a professor. The college navigator’s advising work can involve helping students decide on their program of study, choose classes, and plan ahead for after they complete their associate’s degree. Often it involves working through the complexities of work schedules, class offerings, and major requirements so that a student is able to graduate on time. Sometimes the students come to the navigator with academic problems. In response, the navigator will usually suggest participants go to tutors for help with particular assignments, but the navigator is able to work with students on skills like time management, and advise them on things like how to interpret an assignment, how to talk to a professor, and whether to drop a class.

The college navigator sometimes plays a career-coaching role as well. Some of this is in the context of helping a student choose a major or make post-graduation plans. She will sometimes steer undecided students into programs that are a good fit for them and offer better opportunities for employment. The college navigator also works with students who are having trouble paying for college and are struggling to find a job. She assists students with thinking about their career options, developing a resume, finding job openings, or dealing with issues at work. In the short-term, she even alerts students to specific job and internship openings. In several cases, this is how students got their current jobs.

It is important to note that, like the other SkillWorks coaches, the college navigator inevitably deals with personal aspects of some students’ lives. This type of work can be as simple as chatting with them once a week, or it can mean helping them think through whether they should take a semester off, helping them sign up for a public benefit, or finding a source of funds that can pay for their books. Students interviewed felt that the college navigator became a source of emotional support for them by making them feel less alone and more confident.

- *Client-Coach Interaction:* For the most part, the amount of coaching a student gets is up to the student, as is the time, place, and manner of that coaching. The college navigator meets in person with some students, but there are many who communicate primarily by email and several who prefer to text message. While it is common for students to meet

with her every few weeks during their initial transition into college, some students settle into a “groove” where they only need the navigator’s services when an issue comes up where they need assistance. After the first semester, the navigator generally checks in with clients periodically to see if they are following their academic plans.

- *Engagement Duration:* Once students enroll at Bunker Hill, the college navigator will typically maintain contact with them indefinitely, until they break off contact or decline further services.

Client Outcomes

Of the 70 students who started intensive coaching between fall 2011 and spring 2013, three had completed their program, four had transferred to another institution, and approximately 43 were still attending BHCC by fall 2013. Only 20, or 29 percent, had left school without earning a credential. This rate of persistence is notable given that the BHCC’s fall-to-fall and spring-to-spring retention rates are both about 50 percent, meaning that each year around half of the school’s overall population leaves.

While the only outcomes the college navigator tracks comprehensively are retention and completion, SkillWorks and the Boston PIC were able to gain access to a limited amount of student data from BHCC, but only for students of hers who were still attending in fall 2013, and only in aggregate “snapshot” data. In fall 2013, BHCC reported that this group of students had an average course success rate (percentage of courses with grade C or better) of 68 percent. BHCC noted when it delivered the data that this number was probably low because at the time it gathered the data all the course grades were not available. In fall 2012, the previous semester for which this data were available, the same statistic was 79 percent, but this is probably an overestimation of the typical course success rate for the college navigator’s students since it excluded those who had left—in some cases due to lack of academic success—before fall 2013. Together, these two statistics indicate the success rate in the courses of the college navigator’s students is likely to be somewhere between 68 and 79 percent. The school’s productive grade rate (the percentage of course outcomes of C or better) in fall 2010, the most recent fall semester for which data were available, was 73 percent. This means that the college navigator’s clients probably perform similarly to the average BHCC student. While one would hope that the students would perform better than average, there may be reasons why, even with the college navigator’s support, they do not. Some reasons may be that they frequently work full-time, and, in many cases, the reason the college navigator is coaching them intensively in the first place is because they are struggling with school.

Use of Data

The college navigator uses a database developed specifically for the position by a staff person at the Boston PIC. This system records participant case notes and changes in participant status. It was not meant to track individual coaching sessions, and the focus is on the number of participants and their status, not on coaching activities. As the college navigator work evolved and the data needs became clearer, several changes were made and the number of fields the

database tracked expanded; unfortunately, this left an unwieldy system with lots of missing data. The Boston PIC staff are currently working on a new database system that will better serve the college navigator's needs.

One issue that has existed from the start of the college navigator's work is the difficulty in getting BHCC to share the data it keeps on students. Because federal law prevents schools from sharing student information without a waiver, there was no clear process in place for sharing data, even with waivers, and getting the school to cooperate took a long time. Eventually, BHCC agreed to share aggregate data, but due to issues with its reports and the parameters they were given, this data could not be fully analyzed.

Relationship with Bunker Hill Community College

Part of the college navigator's mission was to become aware of all the different resources BHCC offers, since one of the biggest challenges coaches at the partnerships faced was keeping up-to-date on all these services at different schools—the system was difficult for students *and* coaches to navigate. In addition to gaining familiarity with BHCC, the college navigator has developed strong relationships with administrators and student service staff people. This allows for a smooth hand-off of students to appropriate staff, but it also allows the college navigator to learn about important changes before they happen, which is critical for her students and for the other SkillWorks coaches.

Appendix B: Data Limitations

A number of factors constrained the analysis of the career and academic outcomes of participants working with SkillWorks coaches. Three interrelated problems are central:

- *Given that multiple factors that interact in complex ways determine client success, teasing out the quantitative impact of coaching is very difficult.* Though it is likely that coaches are responsible for a portion of the outcomes described in this report, coaching is one of the many factors that contribute to participants' successes, so achievement cannot be directly attributed to coaching without some sort of comparative analysis. Unfortunately, many of those other factors that influence success are likely to be associated with receipt of coaching or intensity of coaching, including the participants' use of other services, their baseline job or educational status, their goals, and certain personality traits.
- *Since coaching is often closely tied to certain programs and types of client goals, opportunities for comparison to other similar groups are few and far between.* Because of bundling of services and the ways in which participants were selected or self-selected for coaching, there were very few potential comparisons to be made where a difference in outcomes could be plausibly attributed to coaching. For example, almost all the college navigator's clients are workforce program graduates, and many work full-time. They also all go to the same college. Finding and collecting data on a group that was similar would require a great deal of planning and effort, especially given federal laws that make it difficult to share student data. Another example is at HTC—all the room attendant trainees receive coaching, so there is no internal comparison group that can shed much light on the value of coaching specifically. Finding and collecting data from an outside program that does not provide coaching but is otherwise very similar to the room attendant program would be difficult. Even then, there are outside factors such as the local job market that would be difficult to control.
- *Measurement and data collection limitations:* In the few cases where comparison looked like a possibility, differences in the way providers measured outcomes made comparison impossible. The different providers all used different measures and processes for collecting data on coaching activities and outcomes, and there was a great deal of variation not just across the providers, but also within them. Collection was often different for participants receiving different services, and tracking, in most cases, changed over time. Coaches oftentimes collected client outcomes, particularly long-term outcomes, in an informal, piecemeal fashion. This had an impact on the general quality of the data and, because there were not aggressive efforts to collect the same data from all participants, there is very little against which to compare coaching outcomes.