



SkillWorks Support of Participant Pathways

*Analysis of Longitudinal Participant
Survey: Perceptions of and
Progress toward Long-Term Goals*

FINAL REPORT

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August 2014

Abstract

This report examines the impact of SkillWorks' services on participants by analyzing the experience of a subset of the pre-employment and incumbent participants from four partnerships over three years.

Over the three years of the study, most pre-employment participants interviewed (95 percent) gained employment, and close to all pre-employment participants interviewed (90 percent) were satisfied with the SkillWorks services they received. However, advancement toward participants' longer-term career and academic goals was slow, and very few people had achieved them by the end of the study. This is largely due a number of factors: to the large percentage of people who had goals outside the sector (60 percent), the lack of clear career pathways in some of the targeted sectors, the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities, and a difficult economy during the study period.

Incumbent participants mainly sought the services of SkillWorks-funded workforce partnerships to help them pursue the educational goals necessary to achieve their career goals. The participants interviewed acknowledged SkillWorks was helping them make progress, but none had reached their academic goals and only three had reached their career goals over the course of the study, reflecting the reality of the length of time needed to achieve most of these goals.

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Introduction

The SkillWorks' theory of change is based on a dual customer approach to workforce development that aims to help low- and moderate-income individuals attain family-supporting jobs and help businesses find and retain skilled employees. While previous evaluation reports have focused on one of the sector partnerships or system change strategies that SkillWorks applies to fulfill those goals, this special report examines the participant experience to understand the SkillWorks program from their perspective. By analyzing participants' long-term career and academic goals, their use of SkillWorks' services, the outcomes they have achieved, and their perceptions about the process, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What did participants gain from the SkillWorks program?
- What factors made a difference, either positively or negatively, for participants in their path toward advancement?
- What lessons can be learned about career advancement training programs from participants' experience in SkillWorks?

Although participants' career and academic goals often require years of preparation and classes, tracking a subset of SkillWorks' pre-employment and incumbent participants over three years provides insight into individual trajectories and the specific impact of SkillWorks' services. SkillWorks retained Mt Auburn Associates as the third-party evaluator to conduct the evaluation of Phase II of the Initiative, including this report on SkillWorks' participants.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The primary source of information for this study was a series of interviews conducted with a subset of SkillWorks' participants from the four largest workforce partnerships funded in Phase II. While Mt. Auburn structured the interviews in a qualitative format to document participant perceptions of the value of the services they received, the interview protocol also included some closed-ended questions with predefined response sets. Information from the SkillWorks' database (participant demographics at the time of participant enrollment) supplemented data gained from the interviews.

To select the subset of participants for this evaluation, Mt Auburn Associates asked the Hotel Training Center (HTC), Healthcare Training Institute (HTI), Emergency Medical Careers Partnership (EMCP), and Year Up Financial Services Partnership (Year Up) to provide the names and contact information of 15 participants who enrolled in Year 1 and Year 2.¹ Mt. Auburn asked the partnerships to select a range of participants that reflected the diversity of their

¹ Year Up only provided participants in Year 2 since it received a planning grant during Year 1 and did not enroll participants until Year 2. EMCP only provided participants in Year 1 since the partnership was discontinued in Year 2.

population served and that could speak to the variety of services provided by the partnership. Mt Auburn Associates interviewed participants by phone each summer between June 2010 and June 2012. Of the 29 pre-employment participants contacted, seven were not included in this report’s analysis because five did not respond and two only responded in one year. Of the 54 incumbent participants contacted, 14 were not included in this report’s analysis because two did not respond and 10 only responded in one year. This report only includes participants who responded to the survey in two or more years.

Exhibit 1. Subset of Total Participants

	Total	# Participants Surveyed	
		2 years	3 years
	# Participants who responded 2 or more years		
Pre-employment ²	22	22	7
Incumbent	42	42	14

Mt. Auburn staff contacted participants who enrolled before June 2010 in the HTC, HTI, and EMCP partnerships three times over the study period, while staff interviewed an additional set of participants from HTI, HTC, and Year Up who enrolled after June 2010 twice over the study period. The 22 pre-employment and 42 incumbent participants who consented to interviews in at least two or more years were from the programs shown in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2. Participant Subset by Program

	# Pre-employment	# Incumbent
EMCP	N/A	8
HTC	14	6
HTI	N/A	26
Year Up	8	2

Mt. Auburn analyzed participant responses based on whether it was their first, second, or third year of speaking to an interviewer. Participant responses were not grouped based on enrollment date. Two incumbent participants responded in the first and

third years of the interview process, so their responses were included in the first and third years of participant data.

This report summarizes Mt. Auburn’s findings on participant progress during Phase II of the SkillWorks initiative. The document will discuss the pre-employment and incumbent experiences separately, though after a certain point, when pre-employment participants gain employment, the distinction between the two groups is minor.

² Individuals who are employed outside the SkillWorks partnership sector in which they enrolled or who are unemployed are considered pre-employment participants.

Pre-Employment Survey Findings

PROFILE OF PRE-EMPLOYMENT PARTICIPANTS

Demographic Profile

This report includes pre-employment participants from two of the SkillWorks partnerships, HTC and Year Up. HTC, with BEST Corp. as the lead agency, provides skills training and job placement services in the hospitality industry. Year Up offers young adults an intensive one-year program that includes postsecondary classes and an internship in the financial services industry. Consequently, the pre-employment participant profiles of the two programs are markedly different.

Exhibit 3. Subset of Pre-employment Participants Included in this Study

	HTC Participants (n=14)	Year Up Participants (n=8)
Average age	40	20
% Female	86%	25%
% Born in US	14%	75%
% with HS diploma*	50%	100%

* Assumes participants in college or postsecondary training have high school diploma.

Compared to the overall pre-employment population for the two programs, the participants interviewed are comparable in terms of in age. The HTC pre-employment subset is somewhat similar to HTC’s greater population in education and gender, but the percentage of people born in the United States in the subset is half that of the greater population. For Year Up, the subset also exactly matches the greater population for the variable of education, but the percentage of people born in the United States is 10 percent lower and the percentage of female participants in the subset is half the percentage in the greater participant population. While these disparities may skew the interview responses, the research design does not offer the opportunity to determine whether a subset of participants with a more similar profile would produce different responses.

Work and Training Experience Prior to SkillWorks

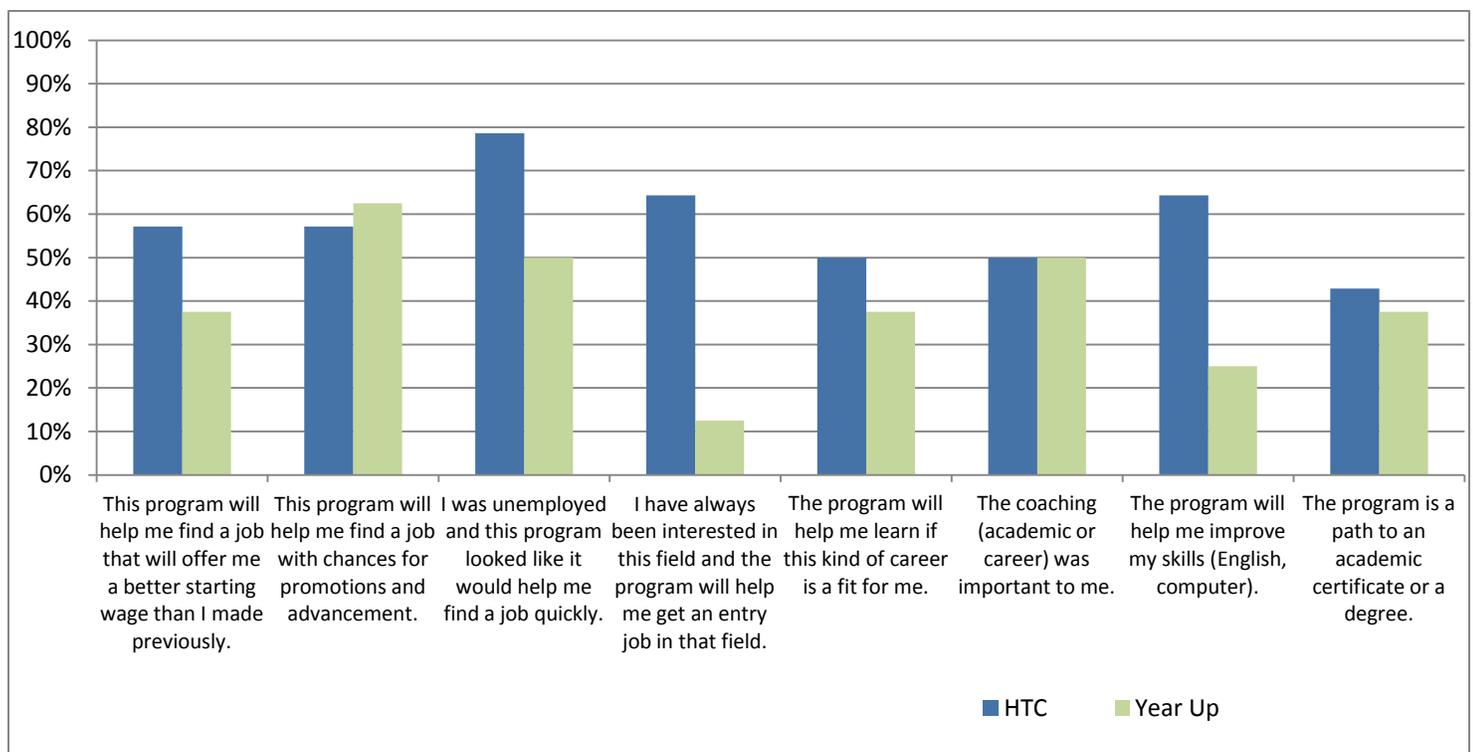
The majority of pre-employment participants (73 percent) have not taken part in other employment or training programs in the past. However, five HTC participants in the study have gone through a previous program. They describe participating in programs on subjects as varied as accounting, English for Speakers of Other Language, becoming a certified medication technician, interview skills, customer service, and computer skills. Only one Year Up participant mentioned going through a previous program and it was on leadership skills. Most HTC participants (79 percent) in this subset were not employed prior to joining the HTC program. Half the Year Up participants were employed. However, of those employed, participants described themselves as working part-time, or in an internships, or at minimum wage jobs.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT REASONS FOR ENROLLMENT AND INITIAL GOALS

- Participants' rationale for engaging in the workforce development services varied by sector. Hospitality participants generally enrolled to achieve shorter-term employment goals, while financial services participants sought pathways for career advancement.

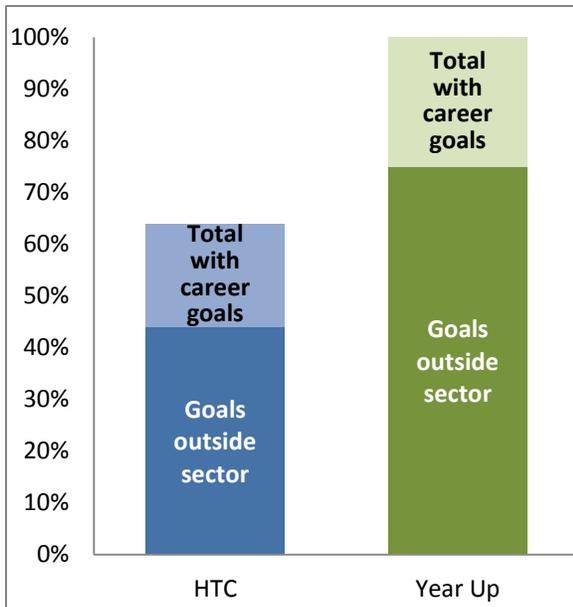
The focus and structure of the two programs likely contribute to the differences in pre-employment participant reasons for enrolling. The sector partnerships also serve different populations, so the two partnerships have participant profiles that differ in age, education level, and immigration status. These demographic characteristics influence what, if any, career goals participants have. The older, often less educated, more likely to be immigrant HTC participants are looking primarily to find a job quickly and to improve their skills, though they also say they enrolled because they are interested in the hospitality industry. The younger, more frequently U.S.-born Year Up participants, who all have at least a high school diploma, are most interested in finding a job with opportunities for advancement.

Exhibit 4. Pre-Employment Reasons for Enrollment



- ➡ Although they had enrolled in sector-based workforce partnerships, many participants' career goals are outside the SkillWorks partnership's sector.

Exhibit 5. Percentage with Career Goals



Separate from participants' reasons for enrollment, Mt. Auburn asked participants if they had long-term career or academic goals. Over the three years of interviews, staff inquired as to whether participants changed, achieved, or dropped the career and academic goals they mentioned the previous year.

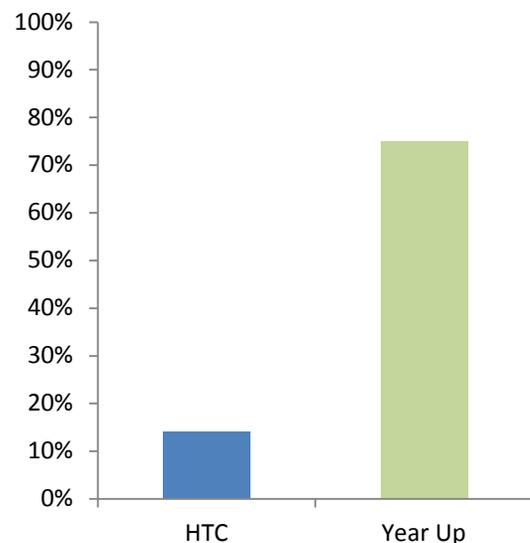
While the majority of participants named career goals by the third year of the study, a surprising portion of the goals were not tied to the sector in which they received training, particularly among Year Up participants. At HTC, 64 percent of respondents had a career goal. Of those, 44 percent had goals outside the sector. While 100 percent of Year Up participants had career goals, 75 percent had career goals outside the financial services sector. For example, HTC participants

mentioned wanting to work as an engineer, in social work, or at a hospital. Fifty percent of the Year Up participants interviewed wanted to own their own business. The other Year Up participants' career goals included working as a criminal forensic analyst and in real estate.

- ➡ Academic goal setting differed depending on the SkillWorks partnership sector.

In the last year in which participants responded, 14 percent of HTC participants and 75 percent of Year Up participants stated they had an academic goal. The unionized hospitality industry that HTC works with is known for providing family-supporting jobs that do not require higher education degrees. It follows that far fewer HTC participants have academic goals. The two HTC participants who did describe an academic goal wanted to get their GED. Other HTC participants responded to this question by naming skill-related goals they wanted to attain rather than academic goals, such as improving English, obtaining citizenship, and going to a culinary program. One person was writing a book and hoping to get it published.

Exhibit 6. Percentage with Academic Goals



Year Up, on the other hand, places participants in the financial services industry where postsecondary education is often necessary for advancement. One of the requirements for applying to Year Up is a high school diploma or GED, so Year Up participants' academic goals are targeted toward a bachelor's degree or higher. Two participants wanted to get a bachelor's degree, two people wanted to get a bachelor's degree and then a master's degree, one person wanted to get an MBA, and one wanted to get a Ph.D.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE WITH SKILLWORKS SERVICES

- ➔ Overall, participants are enthusiastic about and satisfied with their experience in their SkillWorks-funded program.

HTC Participants:

- *BEST is the best.*
- *I am so happy with the HTC program. I recommend it to everybody I know who needs help finding a job. I still talk to some of the teachers because they are very nice people and they are always willing to give me advice or to help me out.*
- *200% satisfied with this program. I am very happy with everything they've done for me.*

Year Up Participants:

- *Year Up changed my life. I had very few expectations for the program, but I am very thankful now. I will certainly give my time and money to Year Up in the future*
- *The quality of the teachers and leaders really surprised me. They are able to take fairly under-motivated kids and help to motivate and teach them.*

One hundred percent of pre-employment participants were satisfied with how SkillWorks was meeting their needs and expectations, though one person clarified his satisfaction and said, “[The program came] 80 percent to meeting my needs. I think if they work with alumni a little bit more as much as they work with students it would be perfect.” Participants continued to be happy with their experience over all three years of interviews.

Most of the surprises participants described were positive surprises. One participant said, “When they call us up and talk to us to hear how it's going, that's a nice surprise.” Another mentioned, “The biggest surprise was the personal development I got from the program. I knew the basics, getting paid, college credits, internship. I wasn't expecting the personal development I got from the program.”

Participants also commented on elements that they thought SkillWorks could improve. HTC participants suggested changes in the schedule and selection of classes (adding advanced English and leadership classes), and mentioned that not having enough staff, teacher turnover, and the wide variability of classmates' English comprehension were sometimes problematic. The only area Year Up participants mentioned wanting was additional alumni support.

➡ **Pre-employment participants value job-related services rather than academic services.**

When asked which program activities used over the past year helped them in their job, HTC participants most often mentioned the industry-specific skills taught in their training programs (culinary, banquet, and room attendant), career coaching, and English classes, in descending order of frequency. When asked in Year 1 interviews how important a certain activity was in achieving their goals, HTC participants indicated they valued job skills training and job search assistance as most important. By Year 3, when the interview rate for participants was less than half, ESOL classes were the most valued activity. Participants who provided other responses mentioned that they considered their food safety certificate, Red Cross certification, and citizenship class as helping them meet their goals. Over the three years of the study, not all HTC participants continued to use program services; the number of services participant used decreased by about 60 percent over the three years.

Exhibit 7. Services HTC Participants Thought were “Very Important”

Year 1 n=14	# ppl	Year 2 n=14	# ppl	Year 3 n=6	# ppl
Job skills training	10	Job skills training	8	ESL classes	5
Job search assistance	10	ESL classes	6	Job skills training	2
ESL classes	7	Job search assistance	5		
Computer classes	7	Career counseling	3		
Career counseling	7				

Year Up participants, on the other hand, mentioned communication and soft skills equally frequently when asked which skills learned through the program helped them in their job. When asked how important a certain activity was in achieving their goals, Year Up participants noted in the first year of the study that they valued career counseling and job skills training.³ However, in the second year, participants only mentioned job skills workshops as very important to achieving their career goals. However, 63 percent of the Year Up participants interviewed did not continue to use any program services in the second year of the study.

Exhibit 8. Services Year Up Participants Thought were “Very Important”

Year 1 n=8	# ppl	Year 2 n=8	# ppl
Career counseling	5	Job skills training	3
Job skills training	3		

³ “Job skills training” was a predetermined answer choice offered to participants for this question. Participants may have interpreted it in different ways, but Year Up participants’ responses to similar questions indicate that they value the professional skills they learned in the program.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Career Outcomes

- ➔ **Almost all pre-employment participants found a job as a result of the SkillWorks-funded program.**

Over the course of the three years of interviews, 100 percent of HTC participants and 88 percent of Year Up participants responded that they got a new job as a result of the program. The Year Up participant who did not yet have a job was planning to go to a temporary agency to seek job placement. Although 93 percent of HTC participants are still employed in the job they held the previous year, only 57 percent of Year Up participants are similarly still employed.

All three of the Year Up participants who changed jobs now have new jobs, but only one of the three continues to work in financial services. These three participants explain they left their jobs because they did not like it, because they found a better job, or because their company had outsourced their previous position.

Exhibit 9. Pre-employment Participant Outcomes

	HTC		Year Up	
	Percentage of participants	Number of participants	Percentage of participants	Number of participants
Obtained a job as a result of the program	100%	14	88%	7
Were still employed in that job	93%	13	57%	4
Achieved their long-term career goal	11%	1	38%	3

- ➔ **Participants achieved few long-term career goals during the three-year study.**

Pre-employment participants reported that they have been making progress in their careers as demonstrated by receiving wage increases, an increase in hours, or a new position during the study period. However, only three participants can be considered to have achieved their career goals.

The HTC participants who identified sector-related career goals wanted to make both lateral position changes, such as shifting from a room attendant to a cook or server or from a food runner worker to a housekeeper, and vertical position changes, such as from a housekeeper to a hotel manager. Approximately 56 percent of the goals they named require a GED or college degree, 33 percent do not require any additional academic education, and 11 percent require an industry certification. The HTC participant who reached his goal was able to begin working part-time as a banquet server.

The two Year Up participants who had sector-related career goals wanted to be a finance professor and auditor. They are included in the 63 percent of Year Up participants who had goals both in and outside of the sector that require advanced academic degrees. For the 38 percent of Year Up participants who wanted to open their own business, no academic degree would be required, but additional inputs, such as capital or assistance with a business plan, would be needed. The remaining 13 percent of Year Up participants would likely need an industry certificate, but no further academic education.

Two Year Up participants met their long-term career goals. One participant was able to start his own business and another began working in real estate. The other Year Up participant stated he was close to his goal of launching his business and noted, *“After graduation, I received a \$200,000 grant... for [the company I founded].”*

The factor that likely played the biggest role in participants’ lack of goal achievement is the amount of time their stated career goals required. Although the time in which HTC participants believed they would achieve their goals varied, most Year Up participants thought their goals would take more than four years. About one-third of the participants’ career goals are dependent on an academic credential. For those working full-time and also going to school, it is not realistic to expect they can earn a degree in three years. It will take more than the time included in the study period to complete coursework, graduate, and then be ready and eligible for employment in a new position or to pursue the next step in their careers.

Another factor contributing to the low level of career advancement specific to the hospitality industry is that as secure and as well compensated as entry-level jobs are, the unionized structure disincentivizes employees to seek promotions into management positions because they lose their union membership and the associated benefits.

➡ The biggest barriers pre-employment participants cited in reaching their career goal are the slow economic recovery and the challenges of family responsibilities.

Participants mentioned a number of barriers to their ability to achieve their career goal. The most commonly cited barriers were family responsibilities and the bad economy, which prolong the time needed for goal attainment or, in some cases, prevent participants from achieving their goals entirely. HTC participants named an increasing number of barriers during the three

- Barriers Cited to Reaching Career Goal**
- Bad economy
 - English language skill
 - Family responsibilities
 - Lack of family support
 - Limited time
 - Financial constraints
 - Age

years of interviews, increasing from 0.64 barriers per respondent to 1.67 barriers. Year Up participants slightly decreased the number of barriers from 1.50 barriers per respondent to 1.17.

In the last year of interviews, Mt. Auburn asked participants what else could help them reach their career goals. HTC participants requested more English practice, more soft skill training, and help applying to jobs, while Year Up participants mentioned wanting to find a mentor.

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRESS

➔ Participants believe their SkillWorks-funded program helped them make progress toward their career goals.

HTC participants named the skills training gained through their participation in the SkillWorks-funded program as helping them toward achieving their long-term career goal. Eighty percent of HTC participants who responded to this question mentioned skills training at least once during the three years of interviews, though the skills mentioned ranged from general skills like English, CPR, citizenship, and computer training to industry-related skills like food preparation and banquet serving. *"They offer classes that will help me learn more about the hotel industry and about food preparation. I will take these classes and hopefully get a full-time job at a hotel."* Others mentioned the benefits of English tutoring and having the hotel pay for college courses as helping them reach their career goal.

Year Up participants had more varied responses. Thirty-eight percent mentioned career coaching in the first year, while in the second year 67 percent credited the motivation and the support they received from the program for helping them move toward their long-term career goal. *"Yes, they helped me get on my feet initially. Also, I know they are there for support moving forward."* Others mentioned the leadership skills they learned, and the confidence and network they gained. Two Year Up participants stated that they felt they were working toward their career goal on their own, so they no longer considered their participation in the program as helping them.

➔ Pre-employment participants with career goals believe they understand what it will take to achieve them. Year Up participants see a long-term path to achieving their goals.

During the two years of interviews, the majority of participants responded that they understood the steps needed to achieve their goals. Only HTC participants were interviewed for all three years. All seven of the participants who responded for three years had career goals and believed they understood the steps necessary to achieve their goals, though the time they thought they would need varied between less than one year and more than four years. However, upon examination of HTC participants' responses, the time participants thought they would need seemed incongruous with their stated goal.

Spotlight on HTC Participant with Hospitality Career Goal

First I have to familiarize myself with the hotel and learn all I can about opportunities...I want to learn enough to become the best qualified person to move ahead when the time comes.

Exhibit 10. Pre-employment Career Goal Expectations for Those with Career Goals

Career Goals		HTC			Year Up		
When did you develop this career goal?	Before program	25%			63%		
	During program	38%			13%		
	After program	38%			25%		
I have a clear sense of the steps needed to take to achieve my career goal	Year 1	88%			88%		
	Year 2	63%			83%		
	Year 3	100%			-		
How long do you think it will take to complete these steps?		< 1y	1-4y	> 4y	< 1y	1-4y	> 4y
	Year 1	29%	43%	29%	14%	14%	71%
	Year 2	13%	63%	25%	0%	33%	67%
	Year 3	33%	33%	33%	-	-	-

For example, the participants who wanted to work in a hotel office or be a hotel manager said they thought it would take less than a year to achieve their goal. On the other hand, the participants who wanted to be a server thought it would take more than four years. HTC participants believed that their career goals required better English and more knowledge about the sector obtained either through hands-on experience in the hotel or through HTC training classes, in keeping with the low percentage of goals that needed a postsecondary degree.

Spotlight on Year Up Participant with Financial Services Career Goal

I met with an auditor during the speaker series at Year Up. After talking to him, I decided that's what I wanted to do. Yes, I know what I need to do to become an auditor. I should start my second semester at Cambridge College in January. I will then transfer to UMass Boston accounting program. They will prepare me for my CPA exam. And then I go for my master's to become an auditor.

Year Up participants recognized their career goals would largely take more than four years to complete. They set their goals mostly on employment outside of financial services, and for more half the participants, the steps they identified to achieving their goals required obtaining further education. In one extreme example, one of the participants who wants to own his business estimated that it would take 15 to 20 years to finish a college degree and then write and execute a business plan.

➡ Pre-employment participants also credit the SkillWorks-funded program for helping them make progress toward achieving their academic goal.

Fewer pre-employment participants had academic goals than career goals—14 percent of HTC participants and 75 percent of Year Up participants. Of those who did have academic goals and responded to the question, 75 percent believe that the SkillWorks-funded program has helped them make progress toward achieving their goals. Those participants were divided as to what service they found helpful. HTC participants thought the classes would help them make

progress toward their academic goals. Year Up participants initially agreed that academic advising was helping them make progress, but, in the second year of interviews, far fewer people responded. Of those who did, 40 percent said networking would help them most, which is likely a reflection of the many people who wanted to start a business, since it is less likely to be of immediate assistance to those pursuing an academic degree.

Neither HTC nor Year Up participants named many barriers to achieving their academic goal. The barriers that participants mentioned were similar to participants' barriers to reaching their career goals. They included not having enough time, needing money to pay for school, and having family responsibilities. One Year Up participant commented that he wished he "had access to a 'guidance counselor' and closer alumni connections." Though there is a college navigator affiliated with Year Up, it does not appear that the participants in the study were clients of hers.

CONCLUSIONS ON PRE-EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

Over the three years of the study, almost all pre-employment participants gained employment, but few achieved their longer-term career or academic goals. The challenges participants encountered with achieving their career and academic goals predominantly revolved around the need for an academic credential and the length time required to earn it, the high percentage of participants in both programs who wanted to start their own business, and the constraints against career advancement in the hospitality industry.

Despite the obstacles, all pre-employment participants expressed satisfaction with their SkillWorks-funded program at some point during the study. They value the job-related services especially for helping them make progress toward their career goal, though the type of service differed between HTC (whose participants most often credited skills training) and Year Up (whose participants found career coaching and staff support helpful). Though this study found that participants generally had not yet met their goals, 68 percent of participants enrolled in the SkillWorks-funded program in order to find a job quickly and fulfilled this expectation. This represents a success and the first step for participants to progress toward their long-term goals.

Incumbent Survey Findings

PROFILE OF INCUMBENT PARTICIPANTS

Demographic Profile

This report includes incumbent participants from a subset of four of the SkillWorks partnerships: HTC, HTI, EMCP, and Year Up. The previous section described the HTC and Year Up programs. The Healthcare Training Institute, with Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) as its lead agency, provides a continuum of career advancement services in allied health and nursing pathways. The Emergency Medical Careers Partnership, with Northeastern University as the lead agency, seeks to fulfill the employment needs of the emergency medical services industry by providing opportunities for employees to advance up the emergency medical technician and paramedic career ladders.

Exhibit 11. Subset of Incumbent Participants Included in this Study

	EMCP Participants (n=8)	HTC Participants (n=6)	HTI Participants (n=26)	Year Up Participants (n=2)
Average age	29.6	36.7	41.3	22.5
% Female	25.0%	66.7%	84.6%	100%
% Born in US	87.5%	33.3%	42.3%	50%
% with HS diploma*	100%	66.7%	84.6%	100%

* Assumes participants in college or postsecondary training have high school diploma.

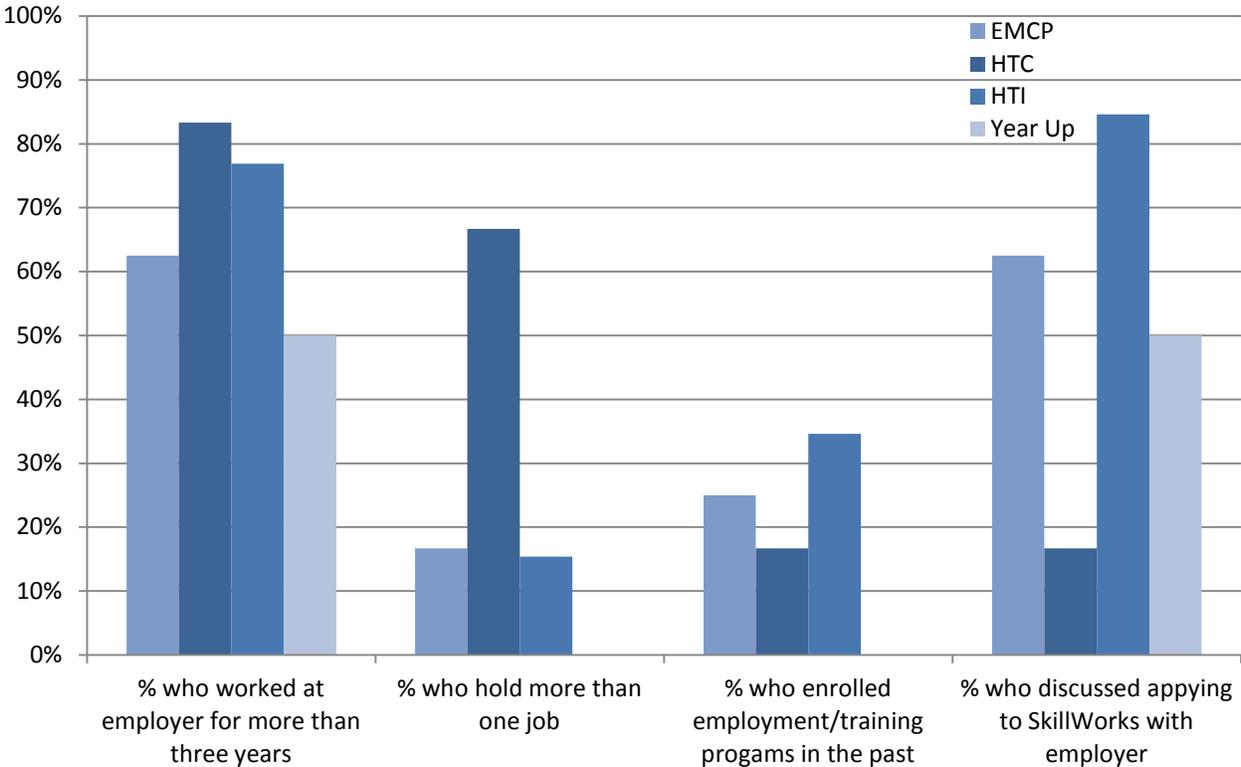
Survey participants' demographic characteristics (including gender, age, and educational attainment) were similar to the overall population of SkillWorks' incumbent workers.

Work and Training Experience Prior to SkillWorks

➔ **Participants had a relatively long tenure with their employers before engaging in workforce development.**

At the time of enrollment in SkillWorks, at least half of the incumbent participants in this study had worked for their employer for more than three years, including 83 percent of HTC participants and 77 percent of HTI participants.

Exhibit 12. Participant Tenure



➡ Second jobs were prevalent among hospitality participants.

HTC had the highest percentage of participants who worked more than one job. Although it is not surprising that employees in the hospitality sector work multiple jobs, HTC participants mentioned a wide variety of second jobs including, *“starting my own business,” “acting 30 hours/week,”* and *“working part-time at the Boston Convention Center.”* Participants in the other programs described working second jobs such as moving and storage, UPS, landscaping, and counseling people with disabilities.

➡ The majority of participants were new to workforce development programs.

One-third of HTI participants and one-quarter of EMCP participants indicated they have previously participated in an employment training program. Many of the HTI participants remarked that they had previously participated in health-related employment programs. Several commented that the earlier program helped them get the jobs they currently held. *“I participated in a 13-month program to do administrative work. That is how I became employed at Children’s Hospital.”* Two others HTI participants mentioned they learned about computers in previous programs.

- ➡ **The level of employer involvement in participants’ decisions to pursue additional education and training varied widely by partnership.**

It is likely that the culture of the four partnership sectors, as well as the design and structure of the four partnerships, influenced whether participants discussed enrolling in SkillWorks with their employer. Those in the healthcare sector more often consulted with their employer—85 of HTI and 83 percent of EMCP participants discussed enrolling—while none of the Year Up participants and only 17 percent of HTC participants discussed their enrollment in the SkillWorks program.

INCUMBENT REASONS FOR ENROLLMENT AND INITIAL GOALS

- ➡ **The majority of incumbent participants enrolled in the SkillWorks-funded program as a path to an academic certificate or a degree.**

The reasons for enrollment varied widely among participants in the four partnerships. In general, HTC participants were most interested in switching jobs, while HTI participants were most interested in certificates or degrees as a path to advancement or promotions. EMCP and Year Up participants wanted to serve as a role model for their families in pursuing their education, but were also interested in career and financial advancement.

Exhibit 13. Incumbent Reasons for Enrollment

	EMCP n=8	HTC n=6	HTI n=26	Year Up n=2
The program is a path to an academic certificate or a degree.	88%	50%	54%	100%
To advance in my career/to get a promotion.	88%	17%	35%	50%
To earn more money, so I am seeking a job with better pay.	88%	17%	12%	50%
To serve as a role model for my family in pursuing education/skill enhancement.	50%		4%	100%
To get a new job with different daily responsibilities (for example, I want a job that gets me off my feet).	38%	33%	31%	50%
The coaching (academic or career) was important to me.	50%	33%	15%	50%
To get a raise while in my current position.	50%	17%	4%	50%
The program will help me learn if this kind of a career is a good fit for me.	50%		4%	50%
The program will help me improve my skills (English, computer).	38%	33%	27%	
To improve my skills to perform my current job well.	38%		15%	
To get a new position with different/more/regular hours.	25%		4%	

Mt. Auburn asked incumbents about their long-term career and academic goals throughout the three years of the study period in order to document the evolution of their thoughts and how the surveyed participants approach goal attainment.

➡ **Almost all incumbent participants identified career goals.**

Only three of the participants interviewed did not have career goals in the first year, though one of the three decided on a career goal later in the study period. Another three participants became unsure about their career goals over the three years of the study. Almost all HTI, EMCP, and Year Up participants developed their career goal before beginning their SkillWorks program, while only 60 percent of HTC participants had decided on a career goal before starting the program.

Sample Incumbent Reasons for Enrolling

“I thought I should go back to school. I always admired nursing. It was something I wanted to do even back in Africa.”

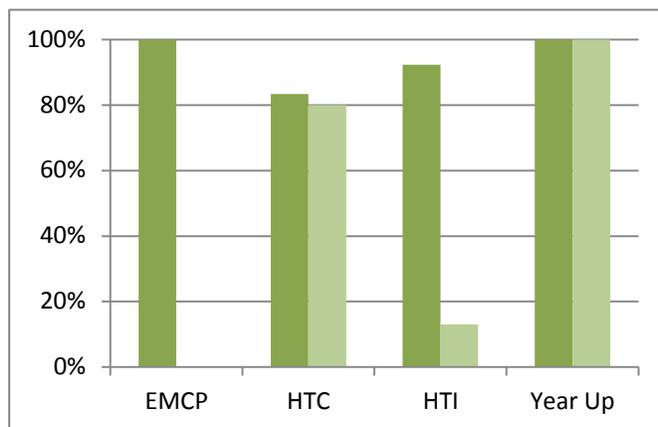
“I had started the pre-requisites for the nursing program five years ago. Then I stopped when I was pregnant. This was an opportunity to restart goal.”

Exhibit 14. Career Goals

		EMCP	HTC	HTI	Year Up
When did you develop this career goal?	Before program	88%	60%	91%	100%
	During program	12%	40%	9%	-

➡ **HTC and Year Up had a very high percentage of participants with career goals outside of their partnership’s sector.**

Exhibit 15. Percentage of Incumbents with Career Goals



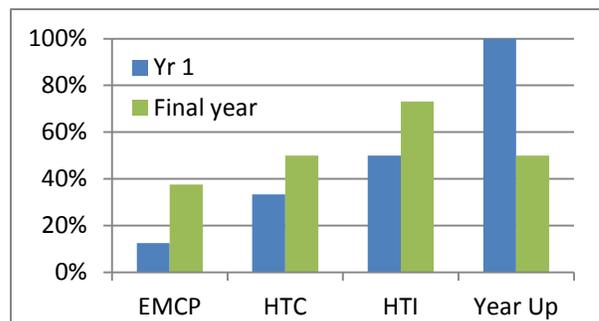
Like pre-employment participants, incumbents, mainly in HTC and Year Up, identified career goals that fell outside the sector of their SkillWorks-funded program. Similarly, four incumbent participants from HTC and Year Up wanted to start their own businesses. One planned to open a bakery or catering company, and another wanted to start a traveling hair and makeup salon. Three participants from HTI and Year Up wanted to become teachers. HTC

participants' other career goals outside the hospitality industry included working as an actor, private detective, and starting a nonprofit. HTI and EMCP participants, in contrast, almost all had career goals in the healthcare sector.

- ➡ **Fewer participants articulated an academic goal than a career goal, but participants' academic goals frequently provided the qualifications for participants to achieve their career goals.**

In the first year of the study, 43 percent of the participants interviewed stated they had an academic goal. By the last year of participant interviews, 62 percent of participants had academic goals, with HTI participants having the highest rate (73 percent).

Exhibit 16. Percentage of Incumbents with Academic Goals



Of those who had academic goals in the third year, 88 percent described degrees that were closely aligned with their career goals. For example, a participant who wanted to be a phlebotomist stated he had an academic goal of obtaining a medical assistant certificate, and a participant interested in becoming a nurse practitioner stated an academic goal of a master's in nursing.

INCUMBENT EXPERIENCE WITH SKILLWORKS SERVICES

Mt. Auburn asked participants what service(s) they used and whether they thought the service was important to achieving their goals. The services used by participants shifted over the course of the three-year study period. However, like the pre-employment participants, incumbents valued the services they used and rarely described any service they said they received as “not important.”

- ➡ **Incumbent service use varied depending upon in which SkillWorks program they were enrolled.**

Participants in different partnerships used a different mix of services. During the first and second years, HTC participants stated they received job skills training most frequently. In the third year, HTC participants said they used ESL and computer classes most frequently.

HTI participants used academic coaching and academic classes most frequently over the three years of the study. HTI service use dropped in Year 2. In the second year of interviews, 11 of the 26 HTI participants commented that they did not have time for classes or coaching. *“I want to take the math and college placement test prep classes, but I have not had time yet.”* And, *“I had to stop taking classes during the spring due to change in hours at work.”* Those who did use services mentioned they were helpful, for example, explaining, *“Without it, I’d have no clue on what to do.”*

Year Up's incumbent participants reported receiving limited services. Only one of the two Year Up participants said she received coaching in the first year, commenting, *"Due to scheduling constraints of people in the group, we didn't continue the program. That's always an issue."* In the second year, the person who had not received service in the first year received ESOL and business operations classes and thought they were helpful, though it is likely that a different organization provided these services.

➡ Incumbents generally felt that their SkillWorks-funded program met or exceeded their expectations.

Participants appreciated gaining soft skills, improving their English, and taking the classes offered through their SkillWorks-funded program. One person commented, *"When I was in the program I loved it. I recommend it to my friends. My friends have graduated from the program. For me it was awesome."* Participants also mentioned that the coaches, teachers, tutors, and academic advisors were more helpful, more supportive, and took more of a personal interest than participants had expected. For example, one said, *"The teaching was very surprising. I have always struggled to study before but the teachers made my life very easy and helped me to understand the material."*

However, some participants (20 percent on average over the three years) described being disappointed by the program. EMCP participants had the highest percentage of participants who had negative comments (38 percent) and HTC participants had the lowest percentage (6 percent).

Aspects of the classes, including the length, pace, requirements, and logistics frustrated EMCP participants.⁴ They also noted their surprise with program cancellations, the viewpoint of an instructor, and absence of alumni support.

HTI participants found the staff turnover disruptive. *"Every 4 or 5 months, it's like starting over. They don't know what you know, how fast you learn."* HTI participants also thought a broader set of classes, placement services, and coaches who were more proactive about giving advice might help improve their programs.

⁴ EMCP incumbents were working as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) at the time of participation. EMTs have variable and shift-based schedules, which presents challenges for attending trainings.

INCUMBENT OUTCOMES

Career Outcomes

- While the vast majority of incumbents interviewed received wage gains, and a significant portion saw career advancements, only 7 percent achieved their longer-term career goals during the three-year study. Like pre-employment participants, the main factor behind the lack of achievement was the long-term nature of the goals stated by incumbents.

The study only considers three of the 42 participants (7 percent) as having achieved their goal. Two participants were in the HTC partnership and their goals were outside the sector. They reached their goals as part-time or secondary jobs, while continuing their sector-related job. One reported that she works as a freelance actor about 30 hours a week, while continuing to work in the hospitality industry; the other has started her own bakery and catering business, but also continues to work in the hospitality sector. The third was in the EMCP partnership and became a paramedic in the second year of the study. At that time, he upgraded his goal from paramedic to working in critical care.

Exhibit 17. Incumbent Participant Goals

	Career Goals	Number of Participants	Academic Goals	Number of Participants
EMCP	Physician's assistant	2	MA	2
	RN	2	BA	1
	Critical care	1	MD	1
	Medflight	1		
	Paramedic	1		
	Pharmacist	1		
HTC	Own business	3	College	2
	Actor	1	GED	2
	Cook	1		
	International development	1		
	Private detective	1		
HTI	RN	10	BA	11
	Human services	2	AA	3
	Manager	2	MA	3
	Teacher	2	Certificate	2
	Central transport director	1	BS	1
	Medical assistant	1	GED	1
	Occupational therapist	1	MBA	1
	Office information management	1		
	Real estate broker	1		
	Respiratory therapist	1		
	Surgical technician	1		
Year Up	Own business	1	BA	1
	Teacher	1	MA	1

Another 14 of the incumbent participants (33 percent) interviewed changed jobs during the study period and, of those, three appeared to assume a new position that indicated progress along their career path. For example, like the EMCP participant mentioned above, four of the eight EMCP participants either passed the paramedic exam or are currently working as

paramedics, but all described career goals for higher job titles, such as being a physician’s assistant, registered nurse, or doctor. These long-term career goals were for positions that require more education, and the SkillWorks training began the process of advancing toward their goals.

The remainder of the incumbents have not changed jobs, but all but two (89 percent) of those who retained the same job had received wage gains over the course of the study.

The difficulty incumbents had reaching a career goal is not surprising given the long-term nature of participants’ goals. Most HTI participants did name goals in the healthcare sector, but they required academic credentials. Those in the EMCP partnership stated career goals that represent aspirations beyond what the program was supposed to address. Furthermore, when participants have goals outside the sector, as is the case for many of the HTC and Year Up participants, it is not realistic to expect the partnerships’ services to necessarily be of help.

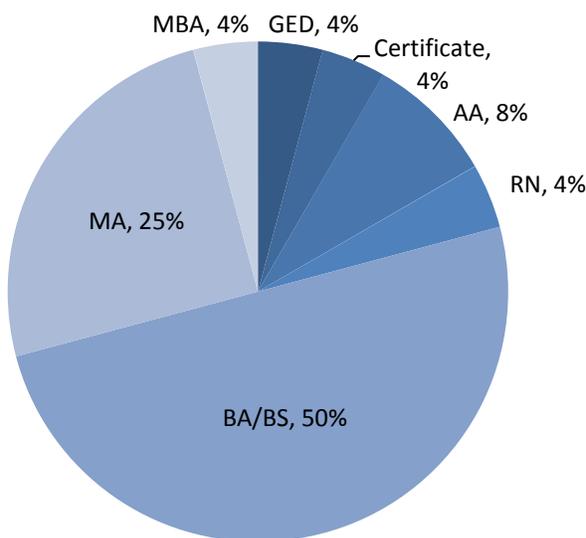
Exhibit 18. Incumbent Participant Outcomes

	EMCP		HTC		HTI		Year Up	
	% of ppl	# of ppl						
Changed jobs since enrolling in program	38%	3	50%	3	27%	7	100%	2
Achieved their long-term career goal	13%	1	33%	2	0%	0	0%	0

Academic Outcomes

➡ **Of the 24 participants who had academic goals, it appears that none have achieved their goal.**

Exhibit 19. Academic Goals



Most participants who had academic goals were pursuing college or postgraduate degrees. It would not be possible to complete the coursework for a four-year degree, such as a bachelor’s degree, while working full-time over the three years of the study, so it follows that no participants have achieved this goal.

However, for participants who wanted to obtain a professional certificate or their GED, it would be expected that three years would be

a sufficient period of time in which to do so. But, the two participants who are aiming to get their GED or a certificate are not native English speakers. Before studying for the GED or certificate, they must learn the language well enough to begin studying for the test, which adds time and is a likely reason why they have not reached their academic goals.

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRESS

➤ Participants frequently cited academic classes and support when describing how the SkillWorks-funded program helped them make progress toward their career goals.

Mt Auburn asked participants to reflect on how their participation in the program furthered their career goals. Though responses from the four partnerships were slightly different, participants referenced the program's academic resources most often, underlining the importance of academic progress to career advancement. HTC participants appreciated the English and GED classes, and HTI participants mentioned academic coaching most frequently as what helped them make progress. EMCP participants valued the academic classes and the teachers because they provided an academic foundation. Of the two Year Up participants, one appreciated her employer paying for her bachelor's degree, and the other did not provide a reason.

Family Influence

"My children's education comes first. If I have to make a choice, I will put my money toward my children's education first."

"I have kids and an 80-year-old father who lives with me."

"My family is supportive. That's the reason I'm going into it. I have a 10-year-old and one on the way. This [goal] would enable me to be at home and run my business. My husband is completely supportive."

➤ While the majority of participants remain optimistic that there is nothing that would hinder progress toward their career goals, those responding in the third year of the survey more frequently reflected that they had experienced obstacles to progress.

In the first year of the study, a large percentage of participants claimed they could predict no barriers to reaching their career goals. That optimism even increased between the first and second years of the study. The percentage of HTI participants who could foresee no problems reaching their career goals increased from 43 percent to 70 percent, and EMCP participants increased from 14 percent to 67 percent between the first and second years of the study. When participants did predict possible barriers to progress, they cited financial concerns and family responsibilities. Financial worries include rent and childcare, and deciding how to prioritize expenses. Family responsibilities present themselves in the form of sickness, death, and the time needed to take care of children or elderly relatives.

By the third year of the survey, a higher portion of participants noted that barriers had, in fact, impeded their progress. For HTI participants, the biggest problem cited was family responsibilities. For EMCP participants, it was financial concerns. Other barriers mentioned by participants from the four partnerships include the bad economy, limited time, their English

ability, ageism against older people or attitude against not having a college education, physical injuries, and waiting for current senior staff to retire.

Incumbent participants say they understand the steps needed to achieve their career goals and generally anticipate that it will take two years and longer to reach their goals.

All incumbent participants in the HTI, EMCP, and Year Up partnerships had a clear sense of the steps needed to achieve their goals in the last year of the study they were interviewed. However, the six HTC participants were less certain of what they needed to do. One HTC participant said, *“Pursuing my dream of opening a business is a long way off,”* and another stated, *“I have an idea of what I have to do but am not completely sure.”*

Exhibit 20. Incumbent Career Goal Expectations for Those with Career Goals

Career Goals		EMCP			HTC			HTI			Year Up		
I have a clear sense of the steps needed to take to achieve my career goal	Year 1	100%			100%			82%			100%		
	Year 2	83%			60%			83%			100%		
	Year 3	100%			*0%			100%			N/A		
How long do you think it will take to complete these steps?		< 1y	1-4y	> 4y	< 1y	1-4y	> 4y	< 1y	1-4y	> 4y	< 1y	1-4y	> 4y
	Year 1	-	50%	50%	-	80%	20%	9%	70%	22%	-	50%	50%
	Year 2	17%	33%	50%	-	40%	60%	10%	90%	-	-	-	100%
	Year 3	-	60%	40%	-	-	*100%	14%	86%	-	-	-	-

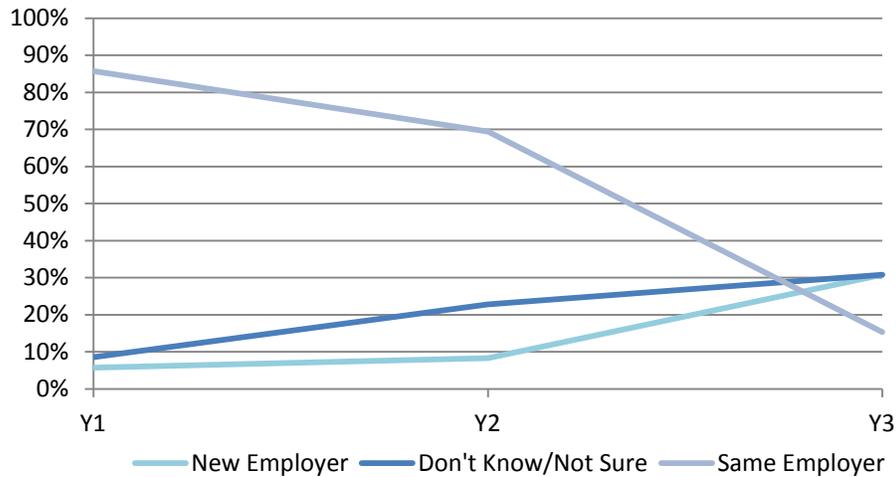
* Only one response.

By the third year of the survey, HTC and Year Up participants generally anticipated it would take longer to reach their career goals than they thought in the study’s first year. Participants from the two partnerships anticipated needing four years or more to reach their goals. Although almost all HTC and Year Up participants had career goals outside the sector, it is possible that the variation in HTC goals and the goals’ dissimilarity from the hospitality industry contributed to making it more difficult for HTC participants to understand how to reach their objectives than it was for Year Up participants.

Over the three years, HTI and EMCP participants were more consistent than participants in the other programs in estimating the amount of time they thought they would need to achieve their goals. This consistency in expectation is likely because these partnerships had sector-related goals, so they could more accurately envision their career path. Most HTI and EMCP participants anticipated reaching their goal in a one- to four-year timeframe because that is how long they thought it would take to finish the certification or degree required by the job they sought and be eligible for the new position. But because no HTI and only one EMCP participant achieved his goal during the study, it was more time consuming than predicted to obtain the credential.

- ➔ **Over the three years of the study, participants' confidence that they could achieve their career goals at their current employer decreased.**

Exhibit 21. Percentage of Incumbents Who Thought They Could Achieve Career Goals with Current Employer



While incumbent participants initially thought they would achieve their career goals while working at their current employer, by the third year of the study they were much less certain that would be possible. All Year Up participants were not sure whether they could achieve their career goals at their current employer or whether they would need to find a new employer by the end of the study period, and HTC participants were equally divided between thinking they could achieve their goal at the same employer and not knowing whether they would need to change employers. Meanwhile, HTI participants retained the highest percentage, 60 percent in Year 3, who thought they could achieve their goals at their current employer. During the study, about 40 percent of EMCP participants changed their response from believing they could stay with the same employer to thinking they would have to find a new employer, though one EMCP participant was not sure about whether to stay with or change employers.⁵

- ➔ **Incumbent participants generally believed the SkillWorks-funded program did and would continue to help them make progress toward their academic goals, though some became less confident as time progressed.**

In the final year of administering the interviews, Mt. Auburn asked participants if they thought their program had helped them make progress toward achieving their academic goals. Of those who responded, 74 percent thought the SkillWorks-funded program did help them. Participants reiterated that they appreciated the coaching and classes offered and described

⁵ Two of the three participants who changed their response to thinking they would have to find a new employer worked for an ambulance company, so it follows that participants who want to be a RN or physician's assistant would not be able to fulfill those roles at that employer.

the program as helping them understand what it would take to get an education credential. Participants said, *“It laid the foundation for me,” “They gave me the idea and the motivation to pursue further degrees,”* and, *“Without them it might not have been as smooth a transition. That support made me more confident.”* In one example, after a coach illustrated the requirements for a degree, an HTI participant refined his goal stating, *“We talked about the biology program, but it was 3-4 years—too long for me! Some other programs were shorter.”*

Mt. Auburn also asked participants each year whether or not they expected the program to help them achieve their academic goals in the future. Although more than half the incumbents who responded to the question agreed the program would help them, the percentage declined over the three years from 76 percent to 50 percent. Those who found SkillWorks helpful cited the academic advising, coaching, and the classes offered through the program most frequently. *“[The program staff] say that she can call and talk to them and they can help her. They try to find classes that fit her schedule. She can never thank those people enough.”*

Participants mentioned similar barriers to achieving or even making progress toward their academic goals as they cited for their career goals. Participants explained that their time was limited because of work and scheduling conflicts and caring for family members. Other participants mentioned the challenge of “tough classes,” “feeling overwhelmed,” and having “so much to deal with.”

CONCLUSIONS ON INCUMBENT PATHWAYS

For incumbent participants, career advancement is largely contingent on obtaining an academic credential. The pursuit of educational goals drove incumbent participants to seek the services of the workforce partnerships. However, by the end of the study period, incumbent participants were still in the process of working toward their academic goals. Only three people met their career goals and, of those, just one person’s goal required a credential.

Participants made slow progress toward reaching their academic goals. Given that most people had at least a high school or equivalent degree, the academic qualifications participants pursued were for certificates or degrees that could take many years to complete, especially when going to school part-time. Even if a credential program was relatively short, the study revealed that participants needed more time than expected to complete the classes. Evidence of participants’ setbacks with completing their goals was reflected in participants’ identification of more barriers in the third year of the study than in the first year. At first, participants did not think they would have difficulty reaching their career goals; by the third year, more participants mentioned the constraining effects of family responsibilities and concerns about money. While participants remained satisfied overall with the support they received from SkillWorks partnerships, practitioners will clearly need to continue to reflect on how best to support participants whose optimism and persistence might falter in light of an even longer than expected time horizon to meet their career and academic goals.

Final Thoughts on Participant Tracking Study

- ➔ **SkillWorks participants benefit both from the specific job skills they gain through their programs and the personal support SkillWorks staff provide as participants work toward career advancement.**

The job training pre-employment participants received through the SkillWorks partnerships was successful in leading them to gain employment. Pre-employment participants then were able to engage in additional workforce development services to advance in their new industry. For example, participants found communication and soft skills training beneficial as they began their career. For incumbents, educational credentials are most often the key to career advancement, so participants relied on SkillWorks staff to help them understand what academic path to take and what resources are available, and to provide academic and motivational support.

- ➔ **Participants value both SkillWorks coaches and consistency in staffing for giving them the structure and support they need. Participants want even more consistency and continuity. The individual support that participants receive is based on the strong relationships between participants and program personnel, so frequent staff turnover is disruptive and affects the quality of participants' experiences. Individual circumstances vary widely and exert a strong influence on participants' ability to advance in their careers.**

There is no monolithic SkillWorks participant in terms of background or aspiration. Participants' motivation plays a significant role in their success with career advancement, especially for participants concentrating on furthering their education. By setting clear expectations, anticipating barriers, and helping participants maintain momentum, SkillWorks partnerships acknowledge the support needed to sustain the participants through the long process of both career progression and academic achievement. While the SkillWorks partnerships cannot address all external barriers, the frequency with which family responsibilities, time limitations, and financial restrictions affect participants represents broad issues that SkillWorks could examine in order to increase coordination or improve alignment with other support systems.

- ➔ **Career advancement is different from goal attainment.**

Although SkillWorks' focus is on participant career advancement, participant response to this study revealed a disparity between the process of career advancement and the career goals participants articulated. On the one hand, some participants advanced through promotions or job changes, but had aspirations that represented more distant goals. While they might not be considered as achieving their goals, they certainly have advanced their career through SkillWorks services and their own capabilities. The industry-specific differences in career advancement also contribute to the variation in how participants are able to improve their economic stability.

On the other hand, some participants had career goals that were not actually contingent on career advancement at their current employer or even within their current industry. Measuring the advancement for those who had goals outside their sector, such as owning a business or becoming a teacher, looks unlike the advancement of those who want to progress in their current industry. The diversity of participant goals raises a larger structural question about the universal applicability of career advancement support that is sector-based and directly tied to employer partners. Does a dual customer model work when participant advancement goals and employer needs do not always match? This study, in combination with previous evaluations, demonstrates the effectiveness of SkillWorks-supported services in moving participants up the rungs on a career ladder. How many rungs likely depends on the participants' interest and opportunity to advance within their current industry and likely at their current employer. When a participant's career pathway is more of a lattice than a ladder, and involves shifts in employers and even industries, this study raises the questions about whether a sector-based employer partnership is always the best model for serving participants' long-term goals.

CONCLUSION

Although examining the impact of SkillWorks' services on the subset of pre-employment and incumbent participants over three years revealed some differences between the four partnerships, it is evident that sector partnerships help pre-employment participants secure employment and provide valued skills training and support services to support incumbent participants in a very long-term process toward career advancement. Further philanthropic investment in sector-based workforce development should consider the following factors:

1. Clear definitions of participant and program expectations.

This evaluation compared participant goals to participant outcomes after three years. It is not surprising that assessing the success of long-term objectives in such a short time period found limited outcomes. Program impact can be better tracked by identifying immediate, mid-term, and long-term goals. Participant progress should then be measured in relatively short increments aligned with the near-, mid-, and long-term agreed-upon goals.

2. Explicit connections between partnership services and participant goals.

Just as there should be a strong match between participant expectations and the measurement of success, there should be a match between partnership services and participant goals. SkillWorks partnerships exhibited many of the critical elements needed to support participants in their long-term career advancement goals. Still, the services could be further strengthened by:

- adjusting the participant screening process to ensure that the participants' long-term goals are very closely aligned with the specific sector career pathway the partnership can support;

- ensuring that the partnership service offerings are able to pivot and adjust rapidly to changing sector conditions that can influence needed skills and in-demand occupations; and
- providing supportive services to help participants to weather the unexpected obstacles that can derail the long-term progress toward academic and career advancement.

3. Long-term horizon of both philanthropic investment and evaluation.

This study continues to demonstrate that there are no silver bullets, no shortcuts, when supporting low-income, low-skilled individuals on a path to economic self-sufficiency. A career pathway approach to lifting individuals out of poverty is a long-term endeavor that requires corresponding philanthropic funding to support program design, staffing, ongoing connections to employers, and the larger labor market; and, finally, it requires an evaluation design that is able to look over a long enough timeframe to sufficiently capture the outcomes of the approach.