



# Creating and Expanding Regional Workforce Partnerships for Skilled H-1B Industries and Occupations

## Implementation of America's Promise Job-Driven Training Grants

**September 2022**

Brittany English, Lindsay Ochoa, Andrew Krantz, Linda Rosenberg, Samantha Zelenack, Ellen Bart, Jeanne Bellotti, Skye Allmang (SPR), Kate Dunham (SPR)

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### Other study publications

1. Sector Training Strategies During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Issue Brief: Lessons from the America’s Promise Partnerships
2. Employer Perspectives on Regional Workforce Partnerships Issue Brief: Lessons from America’s Promise
3. Employer Engagement Strategies in Regional Partnerships: Lessons from America’s Promise
4. Experiences of America’s Promise Participants During the “COVID-19 Recession”: Examining Gender Differences in Labor Market and Training Program Outcomes

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## Acronyms List

CAN	Certified Nursing Assistant
DOL	U.S. Department of Labor
DSI	Division of Strategic Investments
ESOL	English to Speakers of Other Languages
FOA	Funding opportunity announcement
HGJTI	High Growth Job Training Initiative
HPOG	Health Profession Opportunity Grants
IT	Information technology
JIAC	Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge
MSA	Metropolitan statistical area
LMI	Labor market information
LPN	Licensed practical nurse
MSA	Metropolitan statistical area
OJT	On-the-job training
RN	Registered nurse
SNAP E&T	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training
TAA	Trade Adjustment Assistance
TAACCCT	Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training
TABE	Test of Adult Basic Education
TANF	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
WIPS	Workforce Integrated Performance System
WIRED	Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development

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## Executive Summary

Throughout the United States, businesses continue to struggle with a persistent skills gap in which the qualifications of American workers do not align with workforce needs (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2020). To address the shortage of skilled workers in high-demand industries, U.S. firms sponsored more than 100,000 nonimmigrant H-1B visas annually from 2013 to 2018 to hire foreign workers into skilled positions (U.S. Department of State 2021). To reclaim some of these jobs for the American workforce, in 2016 the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Division of Strategic Investments (DSI), awarded more than \$111 million to 23 grantees for the America’s Promise Job-Driven Training Grants program (America’s Promise). These four-year grants aimed to create or expand regional partnerships to (1) identify the needs of industry sectors that typically rely on the H-1B visa program to hire skilled foreign workers and (2) implement sector-based training strategies and career pathways to prepare a domestic workforce for middle- to high-skilled jobs in those sectors (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a, 2016b).

The America’s Promise grants represent a continuation of DOL’s commitment to supporting sector-based strategies and regional partnerships that meet employers’ needs and prepare American workers for middle- and high-skilled jobs. The America’s Promise grant program encouraged

regional partnerships to come together with a commitment—or a “promise”—to create a pipeline of trained workers to address regional labor market needs. To that end, the grants aimed to help prepare job seekers for locally in-demand and high-growth employment by connecting them with classroom training and work-based learning opportunities in addition to supports such as case management, job placement services, and necessary wraparound supportive services. To achieve this goal, the grants required the development of regional workforce partnerships that prioritized employers’ voices in the development of career pathways and associated education and training offerings (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a).

DOL’s Chief Evaluation Office awarded the America’s Promise Job-Driven Grant Program Evaluation to Mathematica and its partner Social Policy Research Associates. To understand the implementation experiences of grantees and the services and partnerships established through the America’s Promise grant program, the evaluation team aimed to answer five broad research questions developed in consultation with DOL:

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### Overview of the evaluation

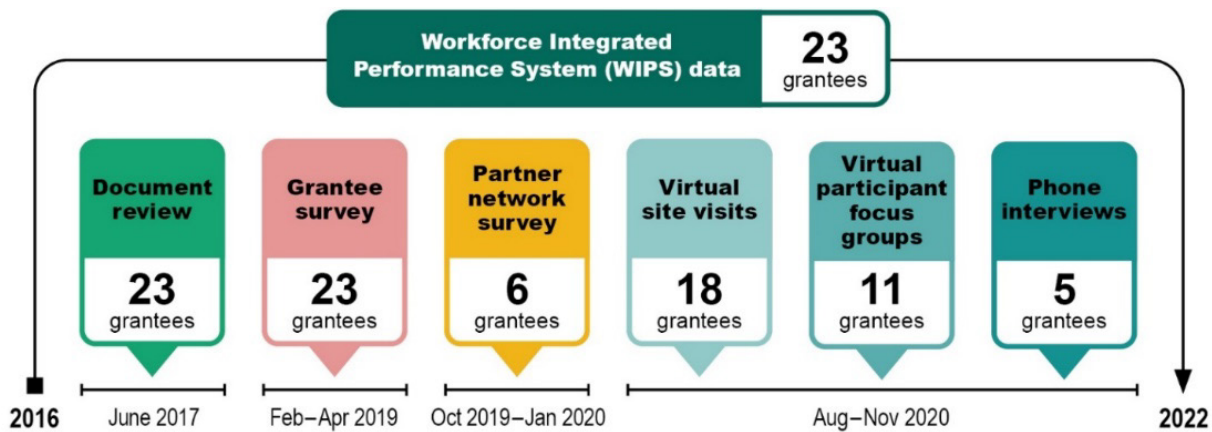
In May 2017, DOL’s Chief Evaluation Office contracted with Mathematica and Social Policy Research Associates to conduct an evaluation of the America’s Promise Job-Driven Training grants. The evaluation examines the implementation and impact of grants awarded to 23 organizations in 2016. These grants, funded by DOL’s Employment and Training Administration, support creating and expanding regional workforce partnerships—including workforce development agencies, institutions of higher education, economic development agencies, employers, and community-based organizations—aimed at preparing workers for careers in middle- to high-skilled industries and occupations. Through virtual site visits, phone interviews, a grantee survey, partner network survey, and grantees’ performance data, the evaluation examines the approaches America’s Promise grantees used to establish regional partnerships and provide services to unemployed and underemployed individuals, and incumbent workers.

Beyond this report, the grantees’ implementation experiences are further explored in a series of issue briefs examining how the partnerships responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, employer voices, and employer engagement.▲

1. What was the regional and community context for the America’s Promise partnerships?
2. How were regional workforce systems and partnerships developed and maintained over the life cycle of the grant? What factors influenced the development of regional partnerships and employer engagement?
3. What types and combinations of services and approaches did the partnerships provide? How were they implemented? What successes and challenges did partners face during implementation?
4. What changes did America’s Promise grantees and their partners make to their programs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What were the characteristics of the participants?

This report presents the findings from the implementation study, which included virtual site visits, telephone interviews, a grantee survey, partner network survey, and Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) data analysis, using data from 2017 to Q2 2021 (Figure ES. 2) and describes how the 23 America’s Promise partnerships used America’s Promise grants to provide sector-based employment and training services and form regional partnerships, including how the partnerships changed over time to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure ES.1. America’s Promise evaluation activities**

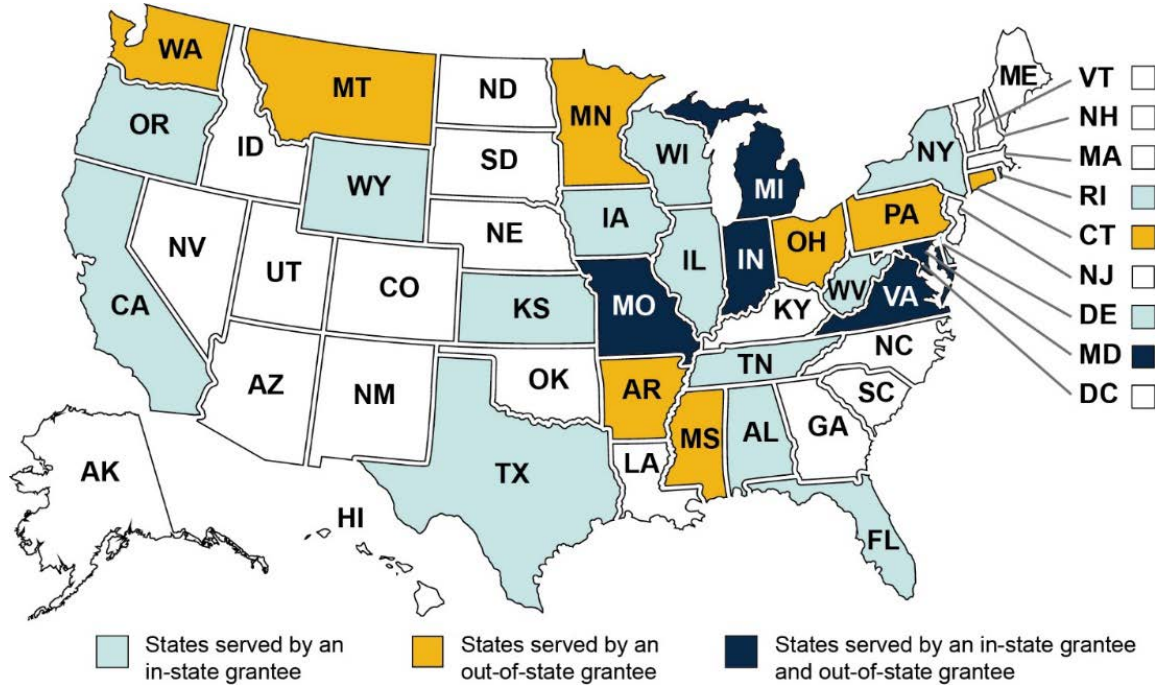


### A. Characteristics of the America’s Promise grantees

The America’s Promise funding opportunity announcement (FOA) laid out the requirements associated with the grant, including eligible industries, eligible populations, required partners, and service delivery requirements (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a). Community colleges (nine grantees) and local workforce development agencies (seven grantees) most often received grant funds to establish and lead regional partnerships. The remaining partnerships were led by nonprofit organizations (four grantees), a four-year college or university (one grantee), a higher education administrative entity (one grantee), and a state workforce agency (one grantee). The 23 America’s Promise grantees focused on one or more eligible industries, as defined in the FOA. Among the 23 grantees, 13 grantees focused on one industry only, while 10 focused on multiple industries. Most grantees provided education and training in three primary industries: advanced manufacturing (16 grantees), information technology (IT) (12 grantees), and health care (nine grantees). America’s Promise partnerships served participants in a total of 28 states

(Figure ES.2). Six grantees established regional partnerships that crossed state boundaries and served participants in multiple states.

**Figure ES.2. State locations of America's Promise grantee organizations**



Source: America's Promise grant applications (N = 23).

## B. Establishing the America's Promise workforce partnerships

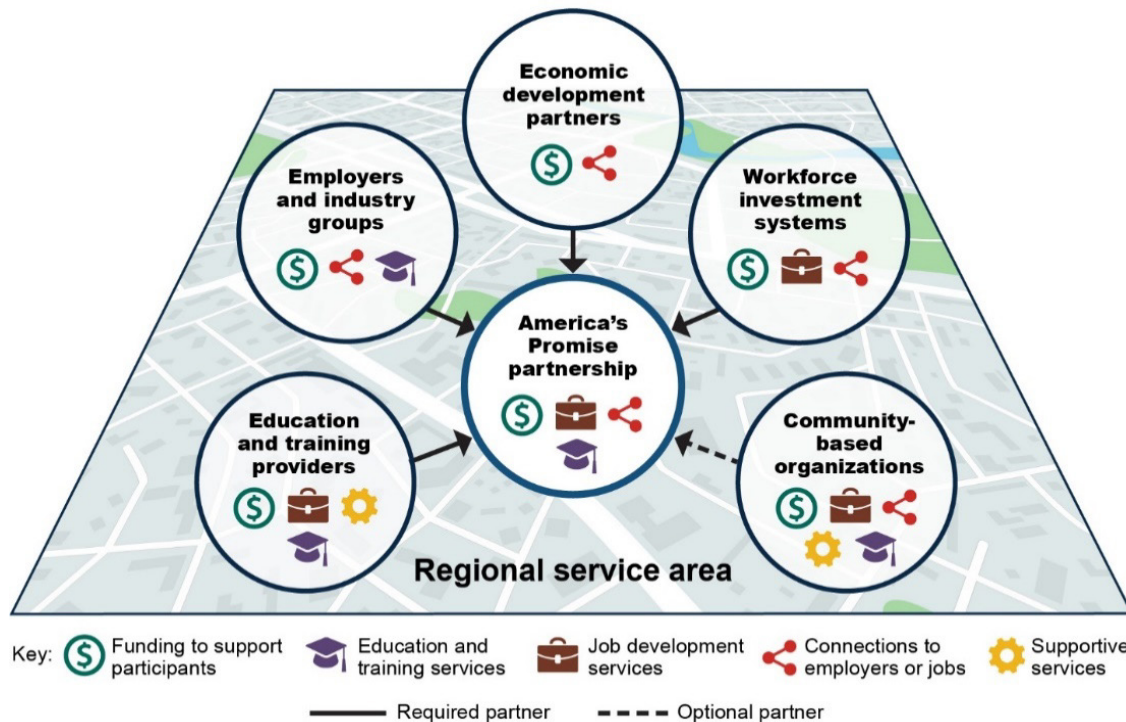
Study findings from the America's Promise implementation study highlight the regional and community contexts that shaped the partnerships, considerations for establishing and operating partnerships, and efforts to design services aligned with industry needs.

- Partnerships sought to establish their America's Promise regions to align with existing workforce areas, as well as prevailing labor markets.** More than half of the partnerships (13 of 23 partnerships) considered Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) workforce areas when defining service areas.<sup>1</sup> The areas' local workforce development boards were often key partners in America's Promise, according to America's Promise grantees, so aligning service areas supported coordinated service delivery. The remaining 10 partnerships considered how to define their regional areas to align with prevailing labor markets, focusing on aligning their service areas with Metropolitan Statistical Areas or regions used for prior grant efforts instead.
- Partnerships included workforce agencies, education and training providers, employers and industry groups, economic development agencies, and community-based organizations, each of**

<sup>1</sup> Under WIOA and the preceding Workforce Investment Act, states are divided into local workforce development areas for the purposes of administering WIOA-funded workforce development activities. Local workforce development boards then set policy to guide the provision of workforce development activities in their associated local areas. See the WIOA final rule for additional information (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-08-19/pdf/2016-15975.pdf>)

which played multiple roles in their partnerships (Figure ES.3). Workforce and education entities most often led daily operations for the partnerships (18 of 23 partnerships), including coordinating service delivery and facilitating communication and collaboration. Employers also played major roles in the partnerships, according to site visit respondents.

Figure ES.3. Types of organizational roles in America’s Promise regional partnerships



Source: Synthesized from data collection activities by the authors.

Notes: Workforce investment systems might include state workforce agencies, local workforce boards, and American Job Centers. Economic development partners might include local economic development agencies or chambers of commerce. America's Promise grantees were required to partner with a minimum of five employers or industry groups that represent at least five employers. (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a)

- **America’s Promise partnerships built from existing partnerships forged for prior federal grants and other initiatives focused on sector strategies while also bringing in new partners.** Nineteen of the 23 partnerships described prior experiences in response to the grantee survey with one or more federal H-1B or other relevant grant opportunities. Ten had experience with more than one program. Most partnerships (17 of 23 partnerships) reported benefitting from many of the partners’ involvement on prior federal, state, or local initiatives or their day-to-day communications on behalf of the industry or job seekers. New partners described entering the partnerships to further their organizational missions. Organizations involved in seven partnerships joined because of America’s Promise’s alignment with their missions and interests in supporting job seekers and employers.
- **Maintaining engagement among required partners appeared to be challenging for some partnerships.** Fourteen partnerships lost partners over the grant implementation period, with these changes typically occurring as the partnerships shifted from planning to implementation. Respondents

from four partnerships described limited workforce partner involvement. This was reported to have implications for participant recruitment in one partnership, but the workforce partners' roles did not appear to be clearly defined in the other three. Continued engagement with economic development partners appeared to vary, with at least five grantees describing lack of involvement by economic development agencies/organizations in their partnerships.

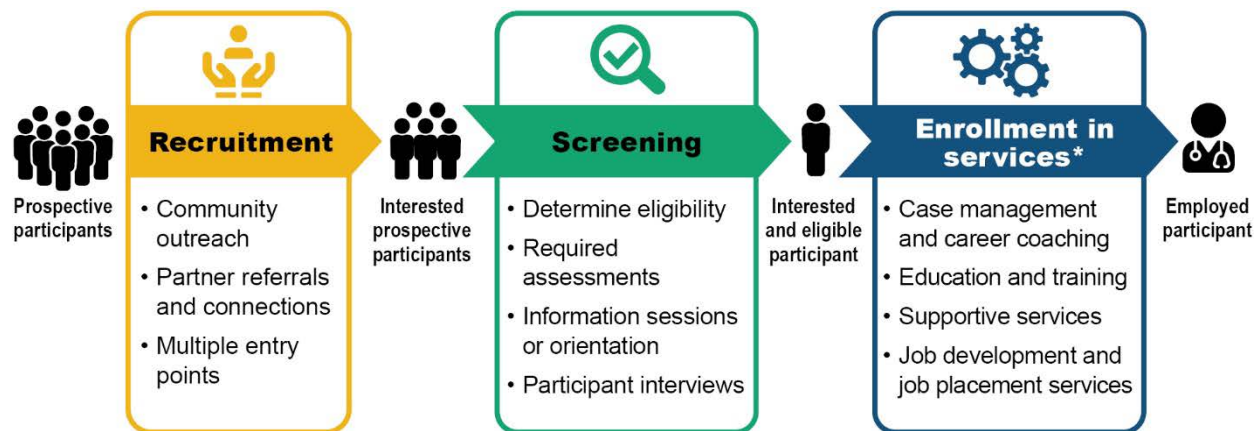
- **To select their focal industries and occupations and design their service delivery approaches, the partnerships often focused on engaging stakeholders and analyzing labor market information.** Twenty of the 23 grantees selected their focal industries based on their knowledge of their regions' major industries, with 19 of the 23 partnerships engaging directly with employers to learn about hiring and training needs to identify focal occupations and associated education and training needs. Seven partnerships conducted labor market analysis to identify potential focal occupations and supplemented their understanding through employer engagement.
- **Most partnerships included in virtual site visits (11 of 18) indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped their local economies.** Upon grant award in 2016, these partnerships' local economies were characterized by low unemployment and labor shortages, as described by respondents. Strong local economies were reported as creating opportunities for the partnerships to help employers address critical hiring needs but also presenting challenges for connecting job seekers with education and training, given the local demand for workers. For these partnerships, increased unemployment amidst the height of the pandemic in 2020 reshaped employer and job-seeker needs. See Bellotti et al (2021) for additional information.
- **When designing their service delivery models, the partnerships took advantage of existing collaboration and education and training offerings or approaches.** Respondents from 11 partnerships believed that prior collaboration between organizations in their partnerships laid the groundwork for developing their service models, as they had experience designing career pathways or sector strategies that could also be used for America's Promise. Most partnerships included in the virtual site visits (16 of 18) integrated or adapted some existing education or work-based learning offerings for their service delivery models.
- **Partnerships described relying on employer input when designing new training offerings.** Respondents from at least seven partnerships worked with employers to identify hiring needs and local training gaps. The partnerships then worked closely with employers, as well as education and training partners to design training offerings.
- **To support partnership operations, some grantees engaged advisory boards while others used a hands-on management approach.** At least eight partnerships convened advisory boards to support implementation and ongoing decision making with six of these partnerships using boards created for prior workforce development efforts. In eight partnerships, the grantee organization took primary responsibility for operational decisions and guiding implementation.
- **Partnerships used leveraged funds and in-kind contributions to support their operations and activities.** Leveraged funding sources included WIOA (six partnerships), Pell Grants (five partnerships), and employer contributions (four partnerships) to support participants' training enrollment. Partnerships also relied on in-kind supports, such as staff time, office space, and equipment to support their operations.
- **Most partnerships implemented similar staffing models in which the lead grantee employed a grant manager who then oversaw the work of frontline staff from one or more partners.** All partnerships designated or hired a staff person to oversee the work of the partnerships. At least four

grantees engaged other staff such as data managers to support reporting or campus coordinators to facilitate implementation across community college campuses. In addition to in management, partnerships engaged staff such as outreach coordinators, case managers or career coaches, and job developers or job placement specialists. Perceived staffing challenges included staff turnover (10 partnerships), hiring challenges (two partnerships), limited staff bandwidth (three partnerships), and limited funding for staff (two partnerships).

### C. Serving America’s Promise participants

Understanding who the regional partnerships aimed to serve, the approaches they used to recruit participants, and who successfully enrolled in services provides important context for the implementation of America’s Promise. Most partnerships followed a similar sequence and approach to recruit, screen, and enroll eligible participants (Figure ES.4).

Figure ES.4. Sequence to linking participants to America’s Promise services



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).

- America’s Promise partnerships sought to serve disadvantaged populations and underrepresented groups.** The America’s Promise grants served 25,056 participants from 2017 through 2020. Regarding the specific populations of interest to partnerships, 50.2 percent of participants identified as female and 52.4 percent were from racial minority groups (Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; or other race, non-Hispanic). Nearly all partnerships (21 of 23) indicated they sought to engage workers with low incomes for services. Seventeen partnerships indicated they aimed to recruit veterans for services. At least six partnerships sought to engage racial minority groups and women because they are underrepresented in certain H-1B fields and industries.
- Partnerships employed multiple approaches to recruit potential participants and sought to create multiple entry points for enrollment.** Of the 23 partnerships, 16 used community outreach as a recruitment method. During the virtual site visit focus groups, participants shared that the potential to earn credentials in a high-growth industry and the opportunity to receive tailored job search support are the features that attracted them to America’s Promise. Sixteen of the 23 partnerships used referrals from education and training partners or workforce system partners as a recruitment method. According to respondents, employer referrals were reported as essential to engaging incumbent workers in America’s Promise services.



- **To ensure that potential participants were interested in and eligible for services, partnerships created processes to screen and then enroll participants.** Approaches included information sessions or orientations prior to enrollment (six partnerships), implementing and assessing standard eligibility requirements (23 partnerships), administering assessments (16 partnerships), or conducting interviews (20 partnerships). When considering eligibility, partnerships established eligibility criteria outside of the DOL-specified criteria. Additional criteria included minimum level of educational attainment, residency in designated locations, income thresholds, and minimum skill levels and aptitudes. Interviews focused on assessing fit for the training offerings, as well as potential barriers that participants might face.
- **Partnerships followed centralized or decentralized models for providing participants with case management services.** Ten partnerships provided centralized case management in which one partner was responsible for case management. Seven partnerships used a decentralized approach in which multiple partners provided case management services. One partnership did not report providing case management services.
- **Case management services included connecting participants with training and providing participants with ongoing support while enrolled in training.** Case managers interviewed during the virtual site visits, commonly consulted with participants about their training options, supported their enrollment in education and training, and connected them with supportive services (Figure ES.5). Common supportive service offerings included transportation assistance, training materials support, and child care support, among others. In response to shutdowns and closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, some partnerships helped participants address technology-related needs, such as helping them obtain devices or reliable Internet. Case managers used multiple modes of communication, including phone, text messaging, email, or videoconferencing (such as Zoom), in addition to in-person meetings.

Figure ES.5. Number of grantees offering case management at various points in service delivery



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).




Note: The counts in this figure are not mutually exclusive. Partnerships may be counted twice if they offered case management at multiple points throughout service delivery.

- **When providing case management, partnerships appeared to encounter common challenges.** These commonly reported challenges included staying connected with participants and balancing

competing responsibilities with case management for America’s Promise participants. For example, staff from two partnerships bore additional responsibilities, such as job placement assistance, in addition to their case management responsibilities.

- All 23 partnerships provided some form of short-term or accelerated training to participants; 18 provided long-term, intensive training; and 20 provided training to upskill incumbent workers.** The duration of training, across all strategies and partnerships, ranged from less than three months (reported by seven grantees) to 25 or more months (reported by one grantee). The most common credentials America’s Promise participants attained were occupational certificates (73 percent of all credentials awarded), followed by occupational licensures (11 percent), associate degrees (7 percent), and bachelor’s degrees (3 percent). Nearly 18 percent of participants received some other type of recognized diploma, degree, or certificate through the America’s Promise program (WIPS 2017 - 2021). The approach to classroom training varied across partnerships but was typically offered through courses, boot camps, or academies. Classroom training commonly preceded or occurred alongside work-based learning components. At least four IT- or advanced manufacturing–focused partnerships also discussed having industry-related equipment for classroom training in which participants received hands-on training in a classroom setting (Figure ES.6).

**Figure ES.6. Examples of America’s Promise classroom training, by industry**

Advanced manufacturing	Health care	Information technology
		
<p>Seven-day employability skills training that focused on resume building, interview skills, and technology skills. It was designed to precede and complement work-based learning opportunities for advanced manufacturing participants.*</p>	<p>Six-week certified nursing assistant program included classroom training and work-based learning components designed to prepare participants for state certification. The classroom-based components included courses on medical terminology and other fundamentals of health care.</p>	<p>Two 14-week classroom-based boot camps—one in coding and another in data analytics. Each boot camp addressed specific topics and skills relevant to the course, but the content of these boot camps was adapted to meet the needs of local employers. Classes were held Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.*</p>

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).

Note: The exhibit includes examples from individual partnerships in the selected industries.

\* These offerings shifted to a virtual format due to COVID-19 in March 2020.

- Work-based learning was reported to take place in the form of apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training hours.** As identified through virtual site visit interviews, work-based training opportunities were more common in partnerships that focused on the advanced manufacturing and health care industries than in IT industries. Incumbent worker training was available across all America’s Promise industries. Depending on the partnership, incumbent workers participated in the same training as other America’s Promise participants, or the incumbent worker training was aligned to the specific needs of the employer partner.

- **Partnerships cited numerous challenges in providing education and training services, many of which stemmed from participants' supportive services needs.** Respondents from nearly all partnerships (15) in the site visits believed that barriers, namely limited child care availability and lack of public transportation options, prevented at least some participants from fully engaging in or completing the education and training available through America's Promise. Respondents from six partnerships indicated the lack of money for other expenses (that is, inability to give up an income) as one of the primary challenges participants faced while enrolled in education or training.
- **After training ended, all partnerships provided job development and placement services to prepare participants for employment or connect them to available employment opportunities.** All of the 23 partnerships offered one or more services to prepare participants for the application and interview process, including resume writing workshops or assistance (23 partnerships), mock interviews (20 partnerships), and soft skills training (21 partnerships). All 18 partnerships in the virtual visits connected participants with open jobs.
- **Establishing meaningful hiring partnerships with employers was a perceived challenge related to job placement.** Six partnerships described a range of issues including a lack of clear communication from employers about their hiring standards (one partnership), limited job vacancies (one partnership), economic downturns that slowed hiring (five partnerships), and the loss of employer partners for reasons outside their control (one partnership).
- **Interviewed employers generally expressed satisfaction with the America's Promise participants they hired.** These employers noted that the training offered through America's Promise taught participants the skills needed for workplace success. In the words of one employer, "It is a win-win for us.... It is a joy for us to be able to hire someone through a program like this." Employers particularly praised the work-based experience that participants gained, reporting placement rates in full-time employment from 60 percent to almost 100 percent.

## D. Conclusion and looking forward

The America's Promise grants helped regional partnerships address the needs of their local communities, including job seekers and employers, through sector-focused workforce development, according to virtual site visit respondents. During virtual site visits, respondents from the grantee organizations, partners, and employers offered their insights on potentially promising practices developed through their partnerships to meet the needs of employers and job seekers:

- **Emphasizing employer voices.** Respondents from most partnerships highlighted that the efforts to prioritize employer voices by "placing employers in the driver's seat" differentiate America's Promise from similar workforce development efforts. According to respondents, the high degree of employer engagement in selecting and developing training offerings appeared to ensure that the services available through America's Promise addressed demonstrated employer needs and could help participants enter employment in focal industries.
- **Supporting program participants through wraparound services.** As respondents in the virtual site visits described, providing wraparound services, including case management, job placement, and supportive services, to participants differentiated America's Promise from other employment and training programs and appeared to be a promising approach for meeting participant needs. For example, the grant manager from one partnership indicated that its approach to providing work readiness and case management services allowed the partnership to meet participants where they were. This approach helped "participants get through the red tape and access help."

- **Developing strong partnerships to address participant and employer needs.** The America's Promise grants prioritized the formation of strong partnerships, and as we heard from site visit respondents, the partnerships themselves served as one of the most important promising practices. As respondents from at least two partnerships mentioned, partnerships allowed them to better reach and serve their intended populations. Other partnerships emphasized that their networks allowed them to better meet the needs of employers by bringing education, workforce, and industry to the table when designing training offerings.
- **Providing training offerings that help participants access high-wage jobs while also addressing employer needs.** Respondents pointed to the trainings offered as a promising practice emerging from the America's Promise grants. As they noted, because employers had a seat at the table during the planning phases, the developed offerings aligned with and addressed their hiring needs. In addition to addressing employer needs, the trainings were reported to address participants' needs. Earn-and-learn models including apprenticeships, OJT, and incumbent worker training also helped participants meet their immediate needs for income while preparing them for higher-wage employment.

Through the America's Promise grants, DOL hoped to support the development of regional industry partnerships that could address the ongoing needs of employers, as well as unemployed and underemployed people. Respondents of the virtual site visits offered their insights on the lasting value created through the grants and associated partnerships:

- **Strengthened partnerships.** The America's Promise partnerships typically built upon prior collaborative efforts. Site visit respondents recognized that America's Promise helped partner organizations strengthen their existing partnerships while also establishing new partnerships to support their sector strategies.
- **Training infrastructure, including infrastructure for providing virtual training.** Through America's Promise, some partnerships developed new training offers, and respondents from these partnerships highlighted that the training infrastructure created will outlast the America's Promise grants. In addition to new training offerings, America's Promise partnerships' efforts to pivot to virtual learning during the pandemic allowed them to establish the infrastructure necessary to support virtual or hybrid training offerings in the future.
- **Lasting career pathways.** America's Promise emphasized the development of career pathways, and partnerships recognized that the career pathways established through the grants will continue to benefit their target industries and communities.
- **Blueprints for developing future sector partnerships.** Partnerships focused their efforts on select industries through the America's Promise grant but recognized that the approaches generated through America's Promise are applicable across industries. As a grant manager emphasized, "The programs and partnerships established by the America's Promise grant can be duplicated in other sectors."
- **Models for prioritizing underrepresented groups in workforce development programs.** Through America's Promise, many partnerships prioritized serving underrepresented groups. Respondents from these partnerships stressed that their work to engage underrepresented groups in their services provided lasting value to their communities. For example, three health care partnerships discussed America's Promise's important role in helping them diversify their health care workforces to better reflect the communities served and to promote community health models. One workforce partner noted that their success in serving diverse and underrepresented groups through America's Promise led them to adapt their priority population for WIOA Title I services.

The America's Promise grants and resulting partnerships helped create regional infrastructure to support sector-focused workforce development. As respondents in the virtual site visits described, all partnerships plan to sustain their collaboration in some capacity after the grants end, with continued training offerings dependent upon funding. The experiences of the America's Promise partnerships offer important considerations for future regional workforce initiatives, including the WIOA regional planning process. WIOA regions and local boards could consider the approaches the America's Promise partnerships used as they develop plans for creating career pathways and sector strategies that emphasize the needs of the workforce system's employer customers. Further, the America's Promise partnerships also explored strategies for serving people with low incomes and underrepresented groups, as emphasized by WIOA. The partnership experiences offer insights on the types of strategies and supports that workforce programs could consider implementing to meet the needs of these job seekers.

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## I. Introduction

Throughout the United States, businesses continue to struggle with a persistent skills gap in which the qualifications of American workers do not align with workforce needs (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2020). To address the shortage of skilled workers in high-demand industries, U.S. firms sponsored more than 100,000 nonimmigrant H-1B visas annually from 2013 to 2018 to hire foreign workers into skilled positions (U.S. Department of State 2021). To reclaim some of these jobs for the American workforce, strengthen the pipeline of skilled workers among regions' workforces, and thereby by create economic opportunities for America's workforce, in 2017 the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Division of Strategic Investment (DSI), awarded more than \$111 million to 23 grantees for the America's Promise Job-Driven Training Grants program (America's Promise). These four-year grants aimed to create or expand regional partnerships to (1) identify the needs of industry sectors that typically rely on the H-1B visa program to hire skilled foreign workers and (2) implement sector-based training strategies and career pathways to prepare a domestic workforce for middle- to high-skilled jobs in those sectors (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a and 2016b). The definitions of sector-based training, career pathways, regional partnerships, and middle- to high-skilled jobs are included below.

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### **Sector-based training, career pathways, and regional partnerships**

**Sector-based training and strategies** prepare people to work in jobs or industries that align with both employer and labor market needs in particular sectors. This approach aims to meet the needs of employers or industries that struggle to find skilled workers by creating partnerships that support workers who require additional education or training to progress in their careers or attain higher wages. Sector-based strategies are typically implemented at the regional level to ensure alignment with the needs of workers, employers, and industries within economic regions that may cross city, state, or other geographic boundaries.

**Career pathways** are frequently associated with sector-based training and sector strategies. This approach provides a combination of education and training, work-based learning, and credential attainment to advance individual workers along a sequence of jobs and occupations within a sector as they upgrade their skills.

**Middle- to high-skilled jobs** are those that require greater education than high school. These jobs may require varying levels of postsecondary education and training or industry-recognized credentials. Source: Holzer (2015) and U.S. Department of Labor 2016a.

**Regional partnerships** are integral to sector-based training and career pathways initiatives because a variety of stakeholders must come together to effectively recruit workers, identify employer or industry skill needs, train and educate workers, and facilitate employer placements in a region. ▲

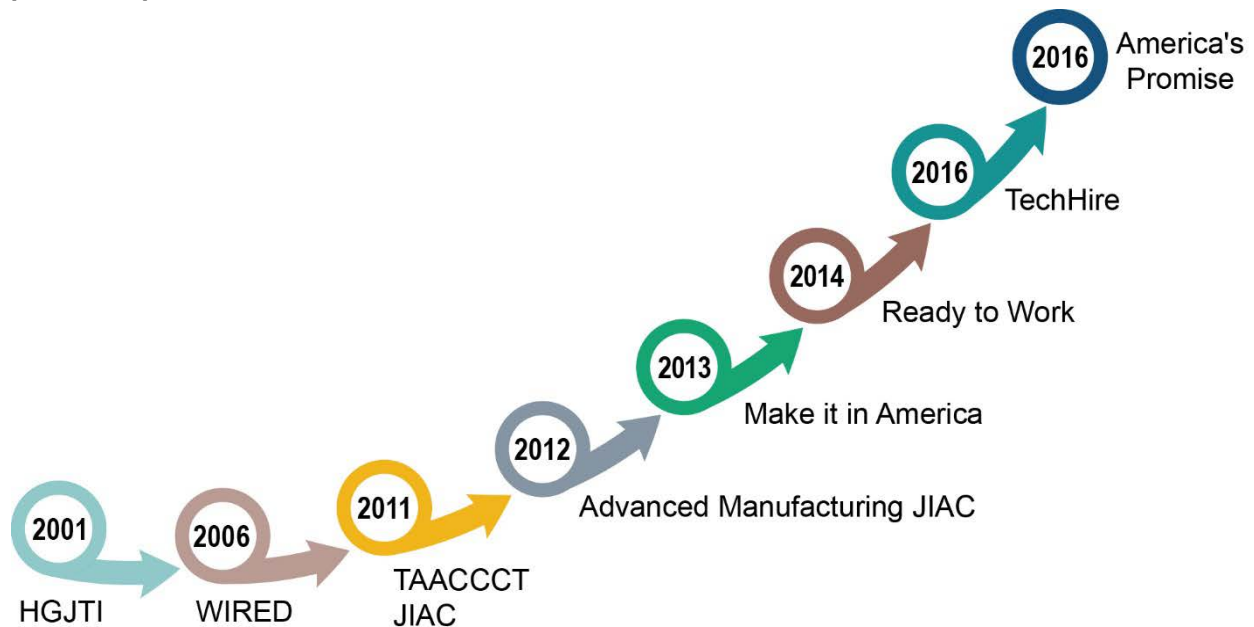
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### A. Support for similar programs and partnerships

The America's Promise grants represent a continuation of DOL's commitment to supporting sector-based strategies and regional partnerships that meet employers' needs and prepare American workers for middle- and high-skilled jobs. These strategies have developed with support from earlier DOL initiatives, including Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grants, Jobs Innovation and Accelerator Challenge (JIAC) grants, Advanced Manufacturing JIAC grants, Make It in America grants, the High Growth Job Training Initiative (HGJTI), Ready to Work, TechHire, and Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grants (see Figure I.1).

Regional partnerships have benefitted from the support of other federal initiatives, such as the [U.S. Economic Development Administration’s Investing in Manufacturing Community Partnership](#), as well as from philanthropic sources such as the [National Fund for Workforce Solutions](#). The [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014](#) (WIOA) recognizes the importance of sector strategies and regional partnerships and requires states to define regions and develop regional plans. The legislation also requires states to collaborate with businesses to develop and implement industry- or sector-based strategies that meet employer demand and prepare workers for available jobs (King and Prince 2019).

**Figure I.1. Timeline of recent DOL grants focused on sector-based strategies and regional partnerships. 2001-2016.**



Source: DOL provided grant information

Note: HGJTI=High Growth Job Training Initiative; WIRED= Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development; TAACCCT= Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training; JIAC=Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenges Grants

Dates only reflect the year the grants were first awarded. TAACCCT, JIAC, Advanced Manufacturing JIAC, Ready to Work, and TechHire are further described in Table II.1 of this report.

Sector-based training programs have grown over the past decade and are being increasingly studied (Schaberg 2020). A recent paper by Kelsey Schaberg of MDRC, highlighted results from seven rigorous impact studies of programs with a sector focus, including the Sectoral Employment Impact Study, Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education, WorkAdvance, Project Quest, Year-Up, Accelerated Training for Illinois Manufacturing, and Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) (Schaberg 2020). All seven studies included in the synthesis used a randomized controlled trial design and tracked the outcomes of treatment and control group participants over time. The synthesis examined outcomes related to participants’ certificate and credential attainment, employment, and earnings. Based on these studies, the paper found that sectoral employment programs consistently had a positive impact on training completion and attainment of credentials and certificates, as well as employment in the target sector.



However, effects on overall employment and earnings were mixed. A growing body of research on career pathways programs that offer education and training as well as support services to help workers progress through occupations in an industry sector also suggests that the career pathways approach may hold merit. A 2020 scan of career pathways research projects conducted by Maureen Sarna and Tara Adam of Abt Associates included impact results from 96 impact evaluations. Of the 96 impact evaluations, 31 percent used an experimental design and 65 percent used a quasi-experimental design to measure the effects of career pathways strategies on education, employment, and earnings outcomes. The scan found mostly positive effects on short- to medium-term education, employment, and earnings outcomes, although some studies had inconclusive results. (Sarna and Adam 2020).

## B. Overview of the America’s Promise grants

The America’s Promise grant program encouraged regional partnerships to come together with a commitment—or a “promise”—to create a pipeline of trained workers to address regional labor market needs (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a). The FOA laid out the requirements associated with the grant, including eligible industries, eligible populations, required partners, and service delivery requirements.

### 1. Eligible industries and populations

The industries targeted by the America’s Promise grants include information technology (IT) and IT-related industries, advanced manufacturing, health care, financial services, and educational services. The grant was designed to fund education and training for “high-growth” jobs within each of these industries. According to the FOA, high-growth jobs are those that were projected to (1) add new jobs to the economy, (2) have job vacancies, (3) require workers to learn new skills because of changes caused by technology and innovation, or (4) have an impact on the overall economy or on the growth of other industries and occupations (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a).

The grant eligibility criteria required grantees to serve unemployed, underemployed, and incumbent workers interested in pursuing further education and training in these fields. America’s Promise grantees were also encouraged to serve disadvantaged populations, which included people with low incomes, dislocated workers, underrepresented groups in the target industry (for example, women and racial minority groups), and those with barriers to employment (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a).

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#### Definitions of America’s Promise eligible populations

- **Unemployed workers:** People who are without a job and who want and are available to work
- **Underemployed workers:** People who are not currently connected to a full-time job commensurate with the person’s level of education, skills, or wage or salary earned previously, or who have obtained only episodic, short-term, or part-time employment
- **Incumbent workers:** People who are employed but need training to upgrade their skills to secure full-time employment, advance in their careers, or retain their current occupation in an H-1B occupation or industry ▲

Source: U.S. Department of Labor 2016a

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### 2. Required partners

As detailed in the FOA, eligible America’s Promise grantees included workforce development organizations, education and training providers, economic development agencies, or industry groups. The

required regional partners were employer and industry representatives, workforce investment systems, economic development agencies, and education and training providers, including community and technical colleges as well as community-based organizations that offer job training (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a). To ensure employers in the targeted industries were adequately involved, grantees were required to partner with a minimum of five employers or industry groups that represented at least five employers. Throughout this report, we use the following terms to refer to the organizations engaged as part of America's Promise:

- **America's Promise partnership** is the group of organizations that work together to implement an America's Promise grant.
- **America's Promise grantee** refers to the organization that leads the America's Promise partnership.
- **America's Promise partners** include both grantees and other members of America's Promise partnerships.

### 3. Grantee funding and service delivery requirements

In addition to funding partnership activities, America's Promise grant funds were intended to cover the costs of education and training in the target industries and occupations, including participants' tuition and program fees. Within their regional partnerships, America's Promise grantees had to implement one or more of the following strategies: short-term or accelerated training, longer-term intensive training, or upskilling incumbent workers. Figure I.2 further defines each of these strategies as specified in the FOA. Within each strategy, America's Promise partnerships could fund various work-based learning and classroom training activities, such as registered apprenticeships, on-the-job-training, paid work experience, paid internships, classroom training, distance learning, and competency-based programs. Chapter VII elaborates on the different types of education and training activities the partnerships offered within each of these strategies.

**Figure I.2. America’s Promise training strategies**



Source: U.S. Department of Labor 2016a America’s Promise promoted the effective and efficient leveraging of other federal, private, public, and philanthropic financial and in-kind resources to adequately meet participants’ full range of training and service needs. Grantees were encouraged to identify other sources of financial aid to fund supplies, books, and other training-related expenses as well as offer job placement activities to support employment in the target industries and occupations. In addition, grantees could use up to 10 percent of grant funds to provide supportive services, such as child care and transportation, to participants to support their completion of education and training. Grantees were also encouraged to leverage the supportive services available through WIOA and other providers in the region (DOL, 2016a).

#### 4. Period of performance and COVID-19

The America’s Promise grants were awarded in January 2017 and had a performance period of 48 months. The COVID-19 pandemic influenced implementation in the final grant year as states and jurisdictions began implementing stay-at-home orders in March and April 2020. Recognizing the challenges presented by the pandemic, DOL allowed grantees to request a period of performance extension for up to one year. The pandemic appeared to create more education and training challenges c in the advanced

manufacturing and health care sectors that prioritize hands-on experience during training, whereas IT grant partnerships were well positioned to shift to virtual instruction. Within each chapter of this report, we briefly highlight changes to implementation that occurred as a result of COVID-19. See the issue brief entitled [Sector Training Strategies During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) for additional information about how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the America’s Promise program.

#### What are supportive services?

Supportive services are strategies that support people by addressing barriers that would otherwise prevent them from participating in or completing their education and training. These services commonly include assistance with transportation, child care, health care, and training supplies such as books. ▲

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, 2016a.

### C. Characteristics of the America’s Promise partnerships

The America’s Promise partnerships included diverse organizations serving a range of H-1B industries and urban, suburban, and rural regions around the country. The information presented in this section relies on several data sources collected throughout the duration of the America’s Promise Job-Driven Grant Program Evaluation and is further detailed in Section D of this chapter.

#### 1. Types of grantees

The America’s Promise grant program included 23 total partnerships, each led by one grantee organization. The majority of grantee organizations were either community colleges or workforce development boards or agencies, with community colleges being the largest share of grantees, representing 39 percent of the grantee sample. Table I.1 presents the number and types of grantee organizations.

**Table I.1. America’s Promise grantee organization types**

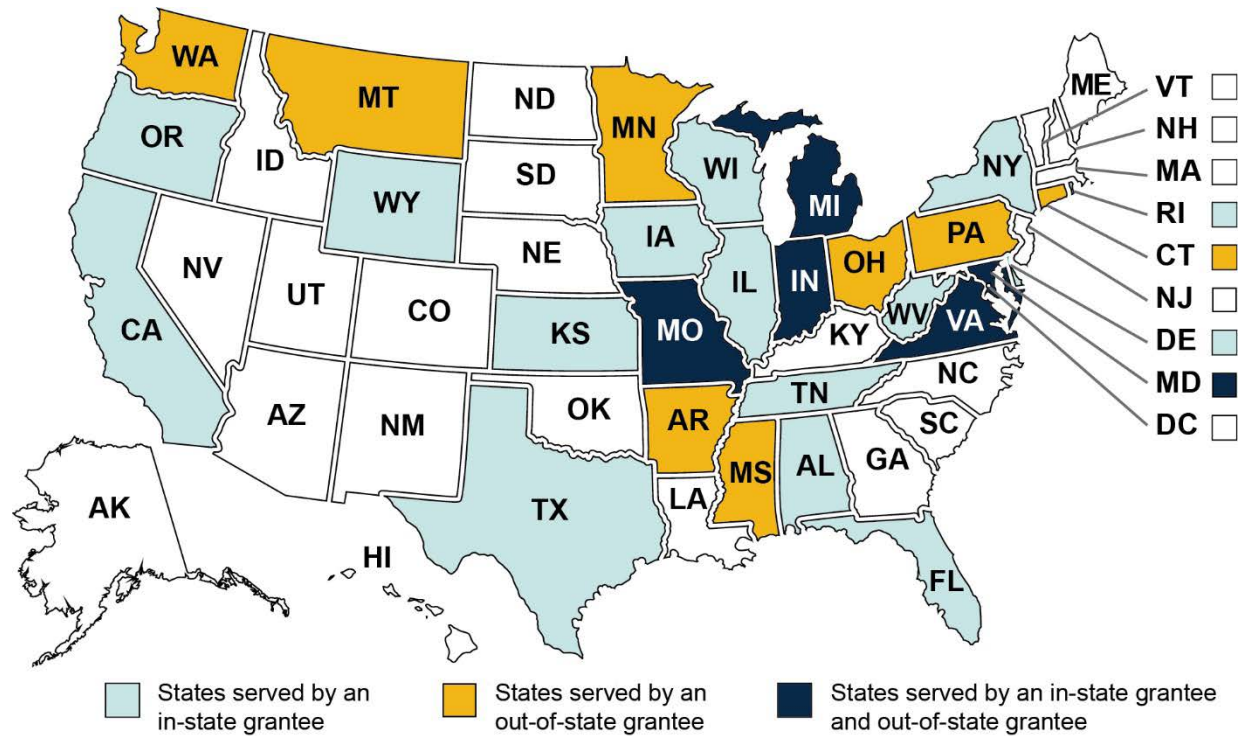
Organization type	Grantees	Share
Community college	9	39%
Workforce development agency or workforce development board	7	30%
Nonprofit organization	4	17%
Four-year college or university	1	4%
Higher education administrative entity	1	4%
State workforce agency	1	4%
Sample size	23	

Source: Grantee survey (N = 23).

#### 2. Location of grantees and states served

The 23 America’s Promise partnerships served participants in a total of 28 states (see Figure I.3) Six grantees established regional partnerships that crossed state boundaries and served participants in multiple states. Chapter II further discusses how grantees identified and defined their regions. Five states (Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, and Virginia) were associated with more than one America’s Promise grant because, in addition to having a lead grantee in each of these states, partnerships with lead grantees in other states served other geographic areas of the state.

Figure I.3. State locations of America’s Promise grantee organizations



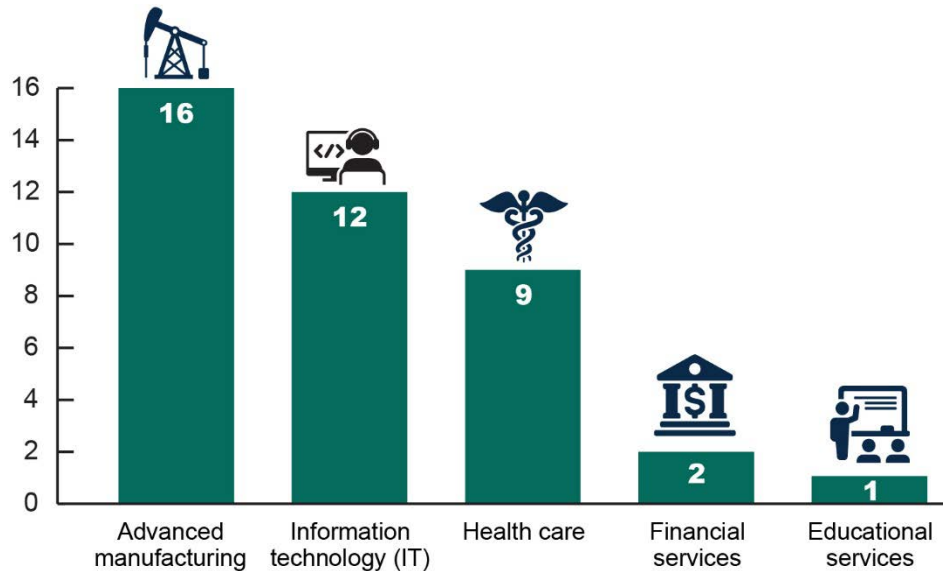
Source: America’s Promise grant applications (N = 23).

### 3. H-1B industries of interest to grantees

As specified above, America’s Promise grantees could focus on one or more of the following H-1B industries: IT and IT-related industries, advanced manufacturing, health care, financial services, and educational services. According to the grantee survey, most grantees provided education and training in three primary industries: advanced manufacturing, IT, and health care (see Figure I.4). Only two grantees reported providing education and training related to financial services, and one grantee reported focusing on educational services.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Figure I.6. describes the various data sources referenced throughout this report, including the sample for and the timing of each data collection.

**Figure I.4. Number of America's Promise grantees focused on each industry**



Source: Grantee survey (N = 23).

Note: Totals add up to more than 23 because some grantees focused on more than one industry.

Based on follow-up information collected during virtual site visits and phone calls, most grantees (13 grantees) chose to focus on one industry while 10 grantees focused on multiple industries. Among the 10 grantees that focused on multiple industries, five were able to identify one predominant industry of focus within the partnership. For example, a site that targeted both the IT and advanced manufacturing sectors indicated that it shifted its focus and resources to IT over time after it struggled to meaningfully engage employers and identify eligible advanced manufacturing participants. For the other four grantees that targeted multiple industries, the prominent industry varied across the partnership region to align with local needs or the grantee placed equal emphasis on multiple industries. Chapter III further discusses how and why lead grantee organizations selected their industry or industries.

#### **4. Funding for America's Promise partnerships**

The average America's Promise grant was \$4.8 million and America's Promise budgets ranged from \$2 million or less (four grantees) to \$14 million or more (one grantee). More than half of grantees (14 of 23) had program budgets under \$6 million. Although the grant did not require grantees to cost share or match funds, it did encourage grantees to make use of other resources to support grant activities. Beyond the grant, most grantees used other sources of federal funding to support their America's Promise programs. According to the grantee survey, 19 of the 23 grantees reported using other financial or in-kind support from the federal government through Pell Grants, WIOA, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T), GI Bill, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), HPOG, or TAACCCT funding. In addition to other sources of federal support, grantees reported receiving financial or in-kind support from employers, institutions of higher education, state and local governments, industry associations, and private foundations. Chapter IV provides additional information about the financial and in-kind resources leveraged to support partnerships' activities.

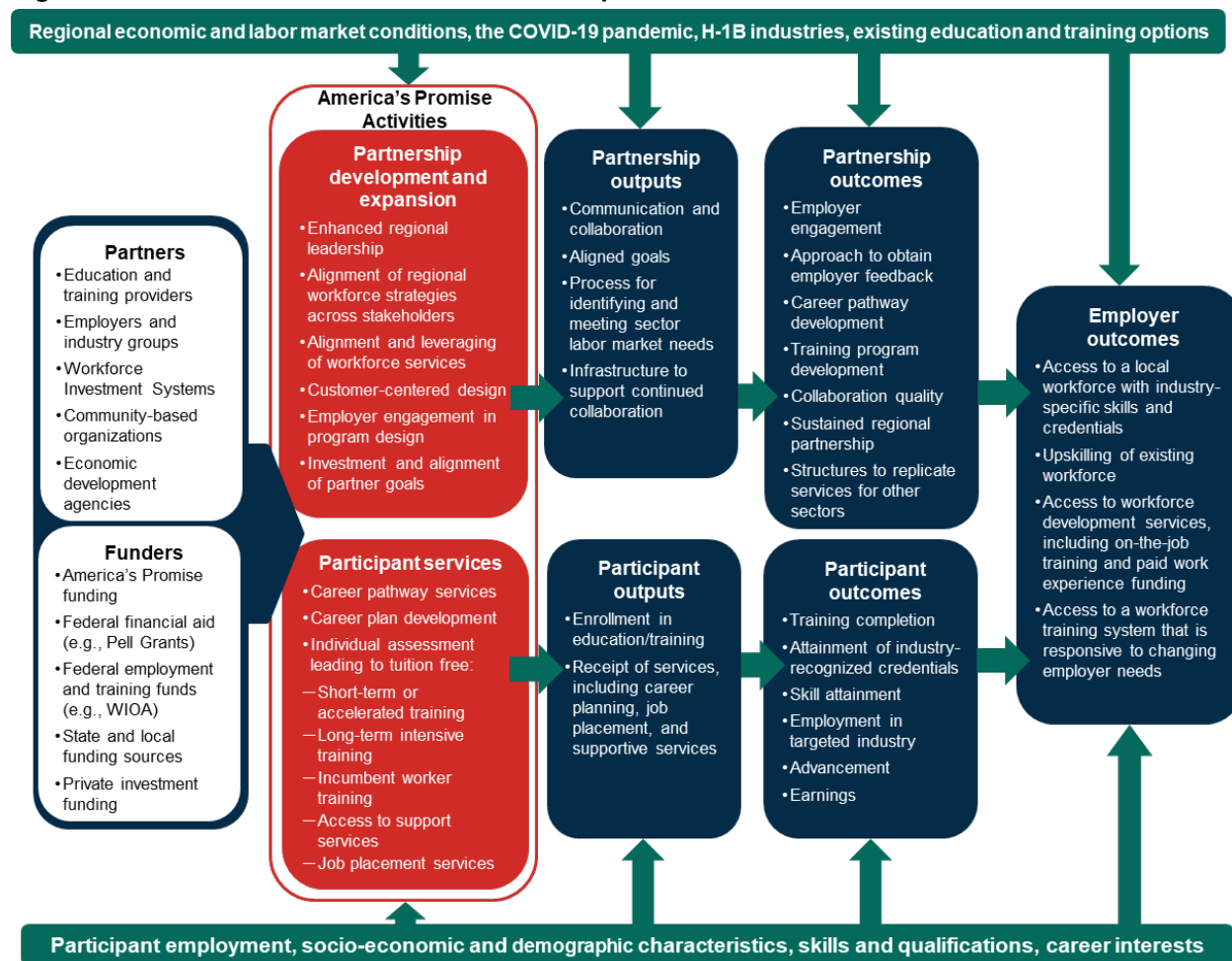
## D. Evaluating America's Promise

Although some promising research evidence suggests that sector-based training and career pathways approaches may be successful (Schaberg 2020, Sarna and Adam 2020), there remains much to be learned about strategies for successfully implementing regional partnerships and the effectiveness of those efforts in combination with regional training strategies. The America's Promise Job-Driven Grant Program Evaluation aims to fill some of the existing research gaps related to regional workforce partnerships and sector-based strategies through a rigorous mixed-method approach that evaluates the implementation, outcomes, and impacts of such approaches.

DOL's Chief Evaluation Office awarded the America's Promise Job-Driven Grant Program Evaluation to Mathematica and its partner Social Policy Research Associates. The evaluation includes rigorous implementation, outcomes, and impact studies of America's Promise. This report presents the findings from the implementation study and describes how the 23 America's Promise partnerships used America's Promise grants to provide sector-based employment and training services and form regional partnerships, including how the partnerships changed over time and because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It describes our findings and identifies successes and challenges experienced by America's Promise partnerships that can inform future efforts to improve regional partnerships and sector-based strategies.

A conceptual framework (Figure I.5) guided the evaluation's design, data collection, and analysis and was refined throughout the study. The framework represents the complex array of factors that influenced the design and implementation of grant activities as well as grantees' ability to achieve desired outputs and outcomes. It shows how key regional stakeholders came together under America's Promise to use federal, state, and local funding sources and develop partnerships to create a sustainable customer-centered service delivery system that achieves positive participant and employer outcomes. Within the framework, the integral America's Promise activities that focused on regional partnerships and sector-based participant services are showcased in the red boxes. Within the framework, regional context and participant characteristics influence the design and implementation of grant activities as well as grantees' ability to achieve desired outputs and outcomes.

Figure I.5. America’s Promise evaluation conceptual framework



Source: Synthesis by authors based on review of relevant documents.

### 1. Implementation research questions

To understand the implementation experiences of grantees and the services and partnerships established through the America’s Promise grant program, the evaluation team aimed to answer five broad research questions developed in consultation with DOL:

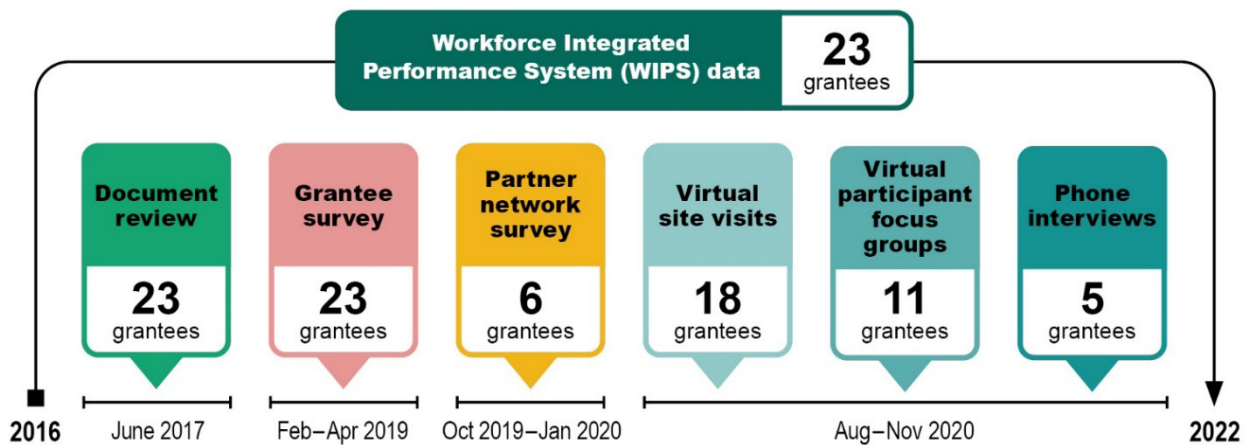
1. What was the regional and community context for the America’s Promise partnerships?
2. How were regional workforce systems and partnerships developed and maintained over the life cycle of the grant? What factors influenced the development of regional partnerships and employer engagement?
3. What types and combinations of services and approaches did the partnerships provide? How were they implemented? What successes and challenges did partners face during implementation?
4. What changes did America’s Promise grantees and their partners make to their programs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What were the characteristics of the participants?



## 2. Study data sources and timeline

To answer these questions, the evaluation team used multiple approaches to collect data from a variety of sources at different points throughout the grant period. Figure I.6 outlines our data collection methods, including the timing of each and how they varied across grantee partnerships. The implementation findings in this report were drawn from the following data sources: (1) a grantee survey administered to all 23 grantees to collect information on grantee characteristics, services, and operations; (2) a partner network survey administered to 6 grantees to examine regional partnership systems and how they change over time<sup>3</sup>; (3) in-depth interviews with grantee staff and partners, including employers, carried out during virtual site visits with 18 of the 23 grantees;<sup>4</sup> (4) focus groups with America’s Promise participants conducted during the virtual site visits with a subset 11 grantees;<sup>5</sup> (5) telephone interviews with key staff from the 5 grantees that were not part of virtual site visits<sup>6</sup>; and (6) Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) data that summarize participant characteristics and performance outcomes for each of the 23 grantees. Additional information on the study data sources, analysis methods, and limitations is available in Appendix A.

**Figure I.6. America’s Promise evaluation activities**



## 3. Analysis methods

This report draws on data collected through the activities described in Figure I.6. The study team first extracted information from grantees’ applications to understand each partnership’s features and planned

<sup>3</sup> To identify grantees for the partner network survey, the research team used data from the grantee survey to assess grantees on the three primary criteria for site selection: (1) the number of overall partners, (2) the number of employer partners, (3) and the level and types of engagement with partners.

<sup>4</sup> Grant managers identified the grantee staff, partners, and employers to participate in virtual site visits during site visit planning calls with Mathematica staff. During the virtual site visits, we spoke to an average of 11 respondents per partnership.

<sup>5</sup> Focus groups participants were identified by grantee or partner staff. During the focus groups, we spoke to an average of three participants per partnership.

<sup>6</sup> Grant managers identified the key grant staff to participate in the phone interview. During the phone interviews, we spoke to an average of 6 respondents per partnership. Phone interviews with key grant staff focused on a subset of topics addressed through the virtual site visits. Throughout this report, findings from the phone interviews are presented with findings from the site visits to the extent possible.

activities. For the grantee and partner network surveys, the study team examined descriptive statistics to summarize quantitative data, including grantee characteristics, key implementation information, grantee-partner relationships, and frequencies across all 23 grantees. Qualitative data collected through virtual visits and telephone interviews were documented in detailed summaries to support systematic analysis examining topics of interest including the economic context; regional and industry considerations; implications for partnerships; implications for services; and participant perspectives. To determine the findings included in this report, the study team triangulated across data sources to understand common implementation experiences.

#### 4. Limitations

It is important to recognize the limitations associated with the implementation study. Although the study draws on multiple data sources, thereby allowing us to triangulate across them, it is not possible to document every aspect of program implementation. Virtual site visit, phone interview, and focus group protocols were designed to collect as much information as possible in the time available for each activity. The virtual approach to data collection due to COVID-19 may have further limited respondents' openness because virtual visits did not allow interviewers to establish the same level of rapport with respondents as in-person visits. The grantee survey, administered to all 23 grantees, served as an opportunity to collect structured information about America's Promise services and partnerships. To minimize burden on respondents, the survey was designed to take 30 minutes to complete and included questions focused on topics relevant to all partnerships. America's Promise grantees are implementing varied service delivery models in different industries, so survey questions had to be broad enough to apply to all 23 grantees, limiting the amount of targeted information we were able to collect.

While we will draw on insights provided by participants, these insights are anecdotal and not representative of or generalizable to the individual partnership or all America's Promise partnerships. Due to the nature of the virtual site visits and phone interviews, the interview team was not able to document their firsthand observations and interactions while on site. Additionally, given the timing of the virtual visits, data collected through these visits likely did not fully capture implementation of the grants as envisioned in 2017. Turnover among grantee staff limited our ability to collect complete information on early planning and implementation experiences. Data collected through the visits may also have been biased toward recent implementation experiences shaped by the pandemic. The single telephone interviews conducted with 5 of the 23 grantees used a streamlined interview protocol focused on overall experiences, high-level takeaways, and top challenges and facilitators. For these partnerships, we only learned about the perspectives of the grantee and not their partners. Therefore, many sections of this report focus on the experiences of the 18 partnerships included in virtual site visits, rather than all 23 partnerships.

#### 5. Structure of the report

This report describes the experiences of grantees and their partners in implementing education and training programs, supportive services, and job placement services under the America's Promise grant. The challenges the partnerships faced, including reported challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as potential solutions, are embedded throughout each chapter. A previously released [issue brief](#) describes changes the America's Promise grantees and their partners made to their programs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bellotti et al, 2021). Findings from that issue brief are embedded in highlight boxes throughout this report. The report is organized as follows:

- Chapter II describes regional contexts and the processes involved in initiating the America's Promise partnerships, including changes that occurred after the grant was awarded.
- Chapter III details the processes involved in designing America's Promise services, including the strategies used to ensure the offerings met the needs of participants, the target industries, and area employers.
- Chapter IV describes the processes involved in managing and operating partnerships, including funding, partner communication, and staffing for America's Promise.
- Chapter V describes the processes grantees used to determine eligibility and enroll participants, and provides information about the participants whom America's Promise partnerships served.
- Chapter VI elaborates on the case management and career coaching services offered as part of the grant, including common supportive services.
- Chapter VII describes the different types of education and training opportunities offered across partnerships and industries.
- Chapter VIII details the approaches partnerships used to connect with employer partners and help America's Promise participants find employment.
- Chapter IX concludes with lessons learned, potentially promising practices, and plans for sustainability following the grant period.

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## II. Initiating the Partnerships

Before applying for the America's Promise grants, lead grantee organizations needed to form regional partnerships aligned with the workforce needs of identified regions. The America's Promise FOA provided flexibility in how the partnerships defined their regions but specified required partner types, as previously described (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a). In this chapter, we discuss these two central components of initiating the partnerships: (1) defining and understanding regional and economic context and (2) identifying and involving partners. This discussion sets the stage for Chapter III, which describes the partnerships' plans and designs, including identifying the partnerships' focus industries and occupations.

### A. Regional and economic context

The 23 partnerships awarded America's Promise grants provided services in areas across the country (Figure I.3). The partnerships defined the regional service areas at the application stage and sought to better understand their economic contexts during grant planning efforts. Following grant award in late 2016 and early 2017, the identified regional service areas were experiencing similar and strong economic conditions, characterized by low unemployment, as described by site visit respondents. However, as discussed during the virtual site visits conducted in summer 2020, all partnerships experienced disruptions to their local economic stemming from the pandemic and other local factors. Here, we discuss how the regional and economic context shaped partnerships' service areas and their partnerships.

#### 1. Defining the partnerships' service areas

As specified in the FOA, partnerships' service areas had to be a single economic area, defined as an area that, regardless of political jurisdiction, had similar industries and employment characteristics. As such, a partnership's area could encompass several counties and go across states lines. Indeed, six partnerships provided services to more than one state (see Figure I.3). When defining their service areas, partnerships considered the following:

- **Existing local workforce areas used to support WIOA implementation.** More than half of the partnerships (13 of 23 partnerships) considered WIOA workforce areas when defining service areas. Workforce development areas defined by states for the administration of WIOA services (hereafter, called WIOA workforce areas) were natural regions for the America's Promise partnerships. The areas' local workforce development boards were often key partners in America's Promise, according to grant managers, so aligning service areas supported coordinated service delivery. One grant manager explained that they purposefully based their service area to align with the state's definition of economic regions as defined by its workforce areas. One partnership, over time, adapted its economic area to fit the local WIOA workforce area. In this partnership, an administrator noted that the service area initially covered only one county, which turned out to be too small to fill its America's Promise classes. About a year into the grant, it expanded the service area to include additional counties, which aligned with the state's newly defined WIOA workforce area.
  - **Covering multiple WIOA workforce areas.** At least four of the 13 partnerships had service areas that covered more than one WIOA workforce area, and in two instances included workforce areas from two or more states. One partnership aligned its service area to a newly established region to support WIOA's regional planning process. Two other partnerships served workforce areas in two or more states. One of these partnerships reached out to 13 workforce development

boards that serve areas with similar workforce development needs about forming a region and partnership; seven local boards representing workforce areas in six states opted to join the partnership. Local board respondents appreciated the opportunity to learn from other boards confronting similar workforce challenges and economic conditions, despite their different locations and state policy contexts.

- **Alignment with existing regional labor markets.** When determining their regions, partnerships considered how to define their areas to align with prevailing labor markets. Of the 10 partnerships with service delivery areas that were not aligned with WIOA workforce areas, five perceived that the differently defined areas better met their partnership needs. Three partnerships noted that the WIOA workforce areas did not align well with their labor market, especially for the target industry and commuting patterns. For example, a respondent from one partnership explained that, after looking at commuting patterns, they settled on a service area aligned with the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) rather than WIOA workforce area. This service area also had been used for a prior WIRED partnership. In one partnership that defined its region by three community colleges' service areas, respondents shared that the colleges' service areas had similar economic drivers and workforce development needs that worked better for the partnership. Three of these 10 partnerships with non-WIOA service areas encompassed areas of more than one state. In these instances, the relevant labor market crossed state lines, and according to grant managers, meeting the needs of employers in the target industries required working across state lines to help address employers' hiring needs.
- **Serving economically disadvantaged areas.** At least five partnerships sought to include areas experiencing high poverty rates and limited economic opportunity in their service areas. Respondents from one partnership, for example, noted that they served a federally designated Promise Zone focused on creating jobs, training, and educational opportunities for residents that increase economic activity and develop ladders of opportunity.<sup>7</sup> Other partnerships targeted specific zip codes to ensure that they served people with low incomes.

Respondents identified a few common challenges they encountered related to developing partnerships to meet the needs of their selected service areas. As previously described, partnerships often served large geographic areas spanning multiple counties and, in some cases, states. Identified challenges included the following:

- **Developing partnerships and services for rural areas.** Service areas of respondents from six partnerships encompassed urban and rural areas, which from their perspectives presented challenges for partnership development and service delivery. As they noted, rural areas included fewer partnering options, which limited the service offerings available in rural areas. As a result, these partnerships faced challenges connecting participants to robust supportive services or offering a range of training options aligned with participants' needs. Beyond challenges developing partnerships, respondents said that rural areas in their regions often lacked broadband Internet access and public transportation options, creating additional barriers for serving participants.
- **Capturing the full labor market in their service areas.** Although some partnerships developed service areas that crossed state lines, others opted against this. Respondents from two partnerships

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<sup>7</sup> As defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Promise Zones are "high poverty areas in select urban, rural, and tribal communities. The associated federal Promise Zone Initiative includes federal collaboration with local leaders to support efforts to promote economic activity and job growth and educational opportunity, among other goals. More information is available here: [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/field\\_policy\\_mgt/fieldpolicymgtpz](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/field_policy_mgt/fieldpolicymgtpz)

mentioned that working across state lines would have allowed them to better represent their labor market; however, they believed it would have been too challenging to do so due to data reporting requirements and differing state policies for programs, such as WIOA. For example, one partnership that did not serve multiple states suggested it would have benefited from recruiting participants within a certain mile radius in nearby states because the partnership struggled to identify enough unemployed and underemployed people in their own state due to the low unemployment rate.

## 2. Understanding regions' economic contexts

The economic context changed drastically in the four years from when the partnerships developed their America's Promise applications in 2016 to the virtual site visits in 2020. Much of this change resulted from the onset of the global coronavirus pandemic in early 2020.

**Respondents from 15 of the 23 partnerships noted that their local economies were strong before the pandemic, with low unemployment rates.** Low unemployment rates presented opportunities and challenges for the partnerships. For example, respondents in one partnership reported that they initially targeted robotics and automation because of the industry's high projected need for skilled workers and, because of low unemployment, focused on serving incumbent workers. In another partnership, several respondents said that, due to the tight labor market, employers were in such need of labor that they were willing to hire new employees without training and leave the local area's training courses unfilled. And, in another partnership, the workforce partner noted that the period of low unemployment led them to focus their efforts on promoting health care careers because demand for labor is always high in all facets of the health care industry. The grant managers of two other partnerships, both of which focused on the advanced manufacturing, health care and IT industries, said that employers' demand for workers was so high that they were willing to hire people who might have otherwise screened out, such as those with prior justice involvement.

Still, low unemployment rates did not necessarily capture the full picture of the labor market in the partnerships' service areas. As a respondent in one partnership noted, the workforce area's low unemployment rate belied a struggling workforce. The respondent said the area had one of the lowest labor force participation rates in the country because of transportation and health challenges among the local labor force. Similarly, respondents in another partnership perceived that the area's low unemployment rate meant that those still seeking jobs faced barriers to employment.

**In six partnerships, at least one respondent noted that the America's Promise regional service area was facing growing labor shortages due to demographic shifts.** These respondents expressed concern that the industries important to the area's economy, particularly health care and advanced manufacturing, were going to soon face labor shortages, because so many employees were nearing retirement age. They indicated that America's Promise was an important resource to help address these future labor shortages. In one health care-focused partnership, several respondents spoke to the staffing shortage facing the industry and expressed concern that the shortage would only grow because as the health care workforce is aging and retiring, the need for long-term health care will continue to rise as the population ages. Respondents from one IT-focused partnership pointed to "brain drain" from their region as creating labor shortages. They indicated that many trained IT workers leave their region in pursuit of higher wages in other areas of the country, creating labor shortages for the region's IT firms.



### Shifting industry conditions due to COVID-19

The pandemic created challenges for certain industries as states began shelter-in-place orders and the demand for products and services shifted. Across the 18 partnerships in virtual site visits, 11 focused on advanced manufacturing, nine focused on health care, and 10 focused on IT. Unemployment was below 4 percent in these industries before the pandemic, but each experienced a spike in spring 2020. Per U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021 Current Population Survey data, nationwide, unemployment in the manufacturing sector jumped to more than 13 percent in April 2020, while health care and social assistance reached 10 percent and professional and technical services (which includes the IT industry) rose to 6 percent. Although respondents described variation within and across regional economies, industry patterns influenced their approaches to both training and job placement, according to respondents. ▲

## B. Efforts to establish partnerships for the America's Promise grants

To align resources, increase collaboration, and create education and job training responsive to employer needs, the grants required lead grantees to establish or enhance workforce partnerships with several stakeholders in their program's target industries and regional service area.

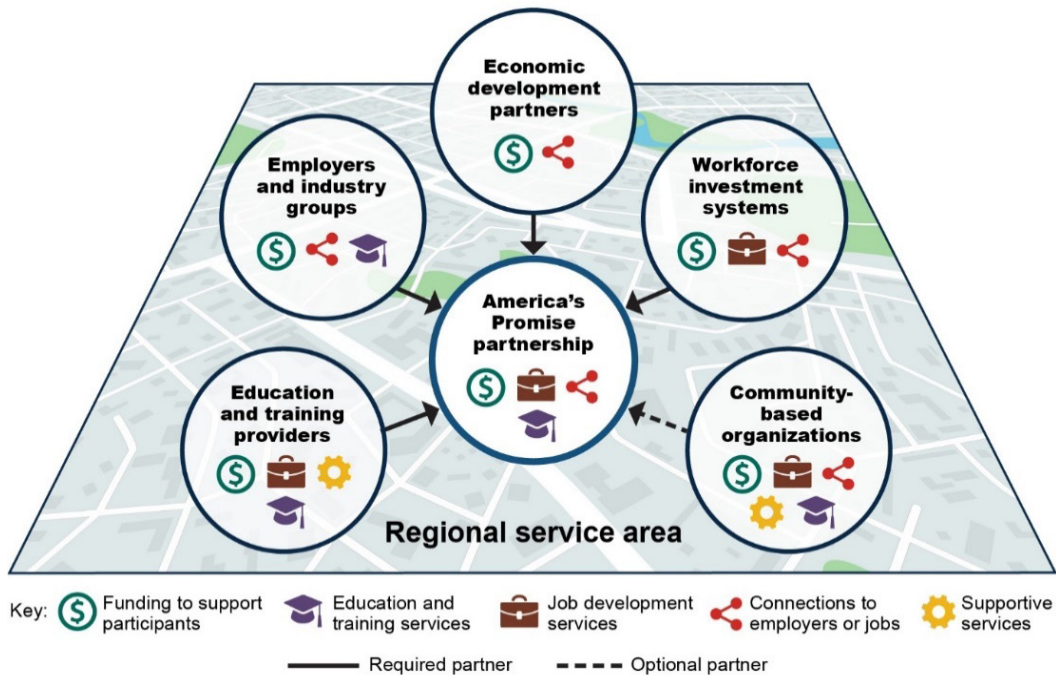
### 1. Types of partners and level of involvement

As discussed in Chapter I, each partnership had to include at least one workforce agency, institution of higher education, economic development agency, and five employers or equivalent representation through industry groups. Community-based organizations were optional partners but were commonly included in America's Promise partnerships. Figure II.1 illustrates an example of how the required partners came together to form an America's Promise partnership, including the resources that each partner might bring to the partnership.

**At the time of the survey, all grantees had at least one partner of each type, with an average of 42 partners per grantee.** All grantees reported in the survey that they had at least one partner of each of these required types: workforce development, education and training, and employers and industries. Three grantees did not have an economic development partner, such as local economic development agencies or Chambers of Commerce, at the time of the survey. The average number of partners of each type ranged from one to 31 (Figure II.2).



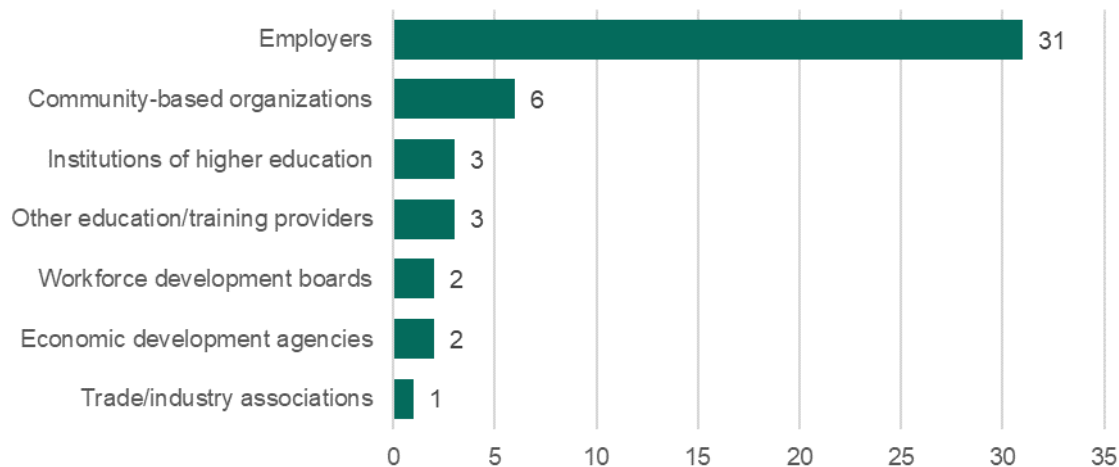
Figure II.1. Types of organizational roles in America’s Promise regional partnerships



Source: Synthesized from data collection activities by the authors.

Notes: Workforce investment systems might include state workforce agencies, local workforce boards, and American Job Centers. Economic development partners might include local economic development agencies or chambers of commerce. America’s Promise grantees were required to partner with a minimum of five employers or industry groups that represent at least five employers (DOL 2016a)

Figure II.2. Average number of required partners per America’s Promise grantee



Source: Grantee survey (N = 23).

**Other than employers, grantees rated institutions of higher education and workforce development agencies as their most involved partners.** Rating these partners as most involved is not surprising, given that most America’s Promise grantees (18 of 23) responding to the survey were either an education or workforce entity. Still, these partner types were reported to contribute the most to daily operations of the America’s Promise partnerships, as reflected in their communications with the lead grantee organization.

Data from the virtual site visits indicated that at least one institution of higher education and one workforce partner, such as a workforce development board or agency, served as essential partners in 20 of the 23 virtual visits partnerships. Respondents from two partnerships specifically credited America’s Promise with deepening the relationship between the workforce and education entities. In one instance, the grant administrators described how workforce agencies typically prioritized customer choice and so were not attuned to community colleges’ need to enroll participants into particular programs. However, because the grant focused on a particular set of training programs, workforce partners focused on enrolling participants in specific community college training programs. Through the grant, these workforce and community college partners had aligned goals, which strengthened their existing partnership. Chapter IV includes a sociogram for this partnership (Exhibit IV.1) that illustrates the strong relationship and communication that existed between the community college grantee and its work force partner.

Despite their high levels of involvement across partnerships, there were still perceived as challenges, mostly with the continued involvement of the workforce partner in five partnerships:

“**[We are] blessed to be in a situation where partners are all focused on helping people become employed.**”

— *Frontline worker at lead grantee organization*

- In one partnership, the higher education grantee and workforce partner experienced poor communications. The grantee noted that changes in the workforce partner’s leadership that seemed to affect their engagement in the grant, and the workforce partner noted that the grantee was not forthcoming about reopening plans after stay-at-home orders were lifted.
- In another partnership with limited involvement of workforce partners, the grant manager shared that the workforce partner was expected to dedicate staff to recruit participants. However, in part due to administrative changes, the workforce partner did not provide this expected support.
- In three partnerships, the workforce partner was no longer actively involved in the partnership at the time of the virtual site visits in summer 2020. In one, where the grantee was an institution of higher education, the grant manager reported being unable to identify a value-added role for the workforce development boards. The workforce partner also said that communications ended when the grant’s leadership changed. In the other partnership, the workforce partner had an early role in planning but was no longer engaged at the time of the virtual site visit due to its other responsibilities and priorities during the pandemic.

**Across the partnerships, the continued engagement with economic development partners appeared to vary.** Three grantees indicated in the survey that they did not have an economic development partner. Respondents from seven of the 23 partnerships reported lack of or a change in the involvement of the economic development partner identified at the application stage. Reasons for their lack of engagement varied. For example, in one partnership, the grant administrators indicated that their economic development partner was not involved because the partnership focused on small businesses. Because the workforce partners had an existing relationship with the small business, they reported that they did not

need to involve the economic development partner. In another partnership, the economic development agency brought into the partnership focused its efforts on the manufacturing industry. Because that was not the target industry for the grant, the economic development agency's input was not needed during implementation of the grant.

However, in at least two other partnerships, respondents perceived that the economic development partner was very involved in and important for the partnership's work. For example, in one IT-focused partnership, the economic development partner noted regular cooperation between the agency and the local workforce development boards because of their similar mission to support job growth in technology.

## 2. Building on existing partner relationships

To apply for the America's Promise grant opportunity, grantees generally did not need to seek out and forge entirely new partnerships. As noted in their grant applications and site visits, all grantees had a prior relationship with at least one of their major partners. Even though they could rely on their previous collaborations and relationships, they still sought partners, both non-employers and employers, to further the mission of the America's Promise grants.

**In their grant applications and during site visits, partnerships that were awarded America's Promise grants noted their prior experiences with federal grants and other initiatives that helped prepare job seekers for in-demand occupations.** In their grant applications, 19 of the 23 awarded partnerships described their prior experiences with one or more of the federal H-1B and other grant opportunities made available since 2010 (Table II.1). In their applications, 10 grantees indicated experience with more than one prior grant program.

**According to respondents, most partnerships (17 of 23 partnerships) benefited from many of the partners' involvement on prior federal, state, or local initiatives or their day-to-day communications on behalf of the industry or job seekers.** Grantee and partner respondents from one partnership in the virtual site visits discussed their prior involvement in four different grant programs, including HPOG, Ready to Work, TAACCCT, and TechHire. They reported that these prior grant programs had many of the same partners, and, according to the grant manager, the America's Promise grant built on their TechHire and TAACCCT grants. In at least four of these partnerships, grant managers reported that America's Promise was a continuation of a previously developed program. For instance, one partnership had been operating its employer-led state partnership around advanced manufacturing for many years; it implemented its America's Promise grant as a follow-on to the work and used its existing administrative structure. As the workforce partner said, "[The] America's Promise grant itself had very little to do with the existence of the partnership but was able to help scale those programs." The grant manager of another partnership indicated that they did not develop new partnerships, only strengthened their existing ones through America's Promise. This respondent indicated the grantee already had a long-

**"The America's Promise Grant is not our program...but we need to use it as an asset to support our industry base so that they can...continue to hire. That is one of the reasons that they have had a long-standing relationship with [workforce partner] because we know they have a number of tools in their toolbox.... It is our job to understand what those tools are and to implement them into our program of work, whether it is recruiting a business in that may have a big need for IT or supporting that existing base that is already here that is going to have that need."**

— *Economic development partner*

standing partnership with a health care association as well as with the higher education partner with whom they wrote the grant application.

**Table II.1. Prior federal grants received by America’s Promise grantees or regional partners**

Grant	Description	Number of partnerships
Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT)	This \$1.9 billion DOL initiative awarded a total of 256 grants from 2011 to 2018 to eligible institutions of higher education (mainly community colleges) to build their capacity to provide workforce education and training programs (DOL n.d.).	12
Jobs Innovation and Accelerator Challenge (JIAC) & Advanced Manufacturing JIAC	DOL, along with four other federal agencies, allocated \$58 million in grants for two initiatives in 2011 and 2012 to promote regional economic growth and employment in high-wage occupations (Hague Angus et al. 2017).	6
Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG)	An initiative of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that awarded 32 grantees in each of two cohorts in 2010 and 2015 to provide education and training to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients and other people with low incomes for health care occupations that pay well and are in high demand (Administration for Children and Families 2021).	4
TechHire	In 2016, DOL awarded nearly \$150 million H-1B TechHire grants to 39 partnerships providing services in 25 states to provide employment and training assistance to workers to equip them with the skills required for well-paying, middle- and high-skilled, and high-growth jobs across a diversity of H-1B industries (DOL 2015).	4
Ready to Work	In 2014, DOL awarded \$170 million in grants to support and scale innovative collaborations among employers, nonprofit organizations, and federal job training programs to help connect ready-to-work Americans with ready-to-be-filled jobs (DOL 2013).	4
Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI)	In 2016, DOL awarded \$54 million to 14 grantees to address education and training barriers for low- to middle-skilled parents by prioritizing the needs of this population; addressing child care needs for parents seeking education and training; increasing access to child care resources; and bridging the gap between the workforce development and child care systems (DOL 2016c).	1
None mentioned (based on applications)		4

Source: America’s Promise grant applications (N = 23); DOL-provided grant award information.

Respondents from five health care-focused partnerships also noted that America’s Promise benefited from prior consortia or other efforts, such as HPOG. For example, respondents in one partnership said that many of the America’s Promise partners had worked together on an active health care industry panel that communicated regularly and often discussed America’s Promise. Most partners in this same partnership were actively involved in a previous HPOG and another grant that sought to diversify hospitals.

**“We already had an existing network of partners before America’s Promise and were doing great work; the partners work well together.”**

— Education and training provider partner

### 3. Developing new partnerships

**Most partnerships engaged with new partners, who often saw the potential for America's Promise to further their missions.** Even though the America's Promise partnerships built on prior efforts, as reported in the grantee survey, almost half of grantees' partners (46 percent) were newly engaged in an effort to further develop their America's Promise partnerships. Many of these new partnerships were with employers; the 23 grantees reported that 74 percent of the total 593 employer partners were newly established for the grant.

Two reasons appeared to resonate most with partners as to why their organization joined the America's Promise partnership. First, at least one partner from seven partnerships indicated that the purpose of the America's Promise partnership aligned with their mission and interests in supporting participants or employers. New partners in one partnership said the grantee was able to articulate how the partnership could support their services and mission. Specifically, the grantee offered to support the educational partner's students to take their licensure tests. In another partnership, one partner noted that the agency's mission is to provide unemployed and underemployed people with career pathways in IT, and the grant funding would provide participants with the financial means to access the necessary training. Second, respondents from six of the 18 virtual site visit partnerships said they joined because they were motivated to diversify or build the pipeline for good jobs or expand the scope of their training and their ongoing work. An employer partner of one partnership saw America's Promise as an opportunity to create a pipeline of younger talent for the IT industry.

### 4. Changes to partners during the grant period

**Fourteen grantees lost partners over the course of the grant implementation period.** Seven of the 14 partnerships with reported partner changes that occurred as the partnership shifted from planning to implementing the America's Promise services. Respondents from two partnerships worked with partners early in the implementation period to inform industry or training selection, but those partners did not have a role in providing services through the grant. For example, one partnership engaged a research partner to inform career pathways development before implementation. Five other partnerships experienced partner changes early in implementation. In these instances, the initial set of partners provided very similar or duplicative services so the lead grantee organizations opted to streamline its partnerships. For example, one partnership initially had two partners on board to recruit participants and conduct case management. During implementation start-up, the grantee determined that it did not need both organizations in this role.

Respondents from four of the 14 partnerships mentioned that identified partners never engaged with America's Promise. For example, one educational partner was nonresponsive to the grantee's efforts to engage the partner to help recruit participants. In another partnership, the economic development partner submitted a letter of intent at the application stage but did not participate in the partnership after grant award. Respondents in another three of the remaining 12 partnerships shared their perceptions that grant management and leadership issues resulted in a limited role of certain partners, such as the workforce and economic development partners. In another, respondents perceived that mismanagement of the grant resulted in the loss of several partners, including the economic development agency.

**At least three partnerships added partners over the course of the grant.** In one of these three partnerships, a new economic development partner replaced one that was no longer participating. In another partnership, the grantee received permission from DOL to bring on a new education partner that would provide further education and training to its participants. In a third partnership, the grantee brought

on new training providers in a reported effort to correct management issues that had occurred in the first two years of the grant's implementation.

### C. Partnerships' identified successes and challenges

Generally, grantees and their partners reported positive experiences working within the partnership. As discussed previously, a reason for these good working relationships was the partners' past collaborations on behalf of the industry and the workforce. Still, respondents discussed some challenges their partnerships faced.

- **Respondents reported mostly positive experiences working across partners.** Interviewed grant managers and partner managers in at least 14 of the 23 partnerships expressed that the partnership had demonstrated “strong” collaboration that was generally built upon respect and past relationships. In one partnership, the grant manager said the partners' long-standing relationships allowed for easy collaboration during the grant and were strengthened by the grant. In almost all partnerships included in the virtual visits (17 of 18 site visit partnerships), at least one respondent expected that the partnerships would continue in some form after the America's Promise grant (see Chapter IX).
- **Grantees or their partners in six partnerships reported challenges engaging with partners due to partnership structure.** In one partnership, the former grant manager noted that they did not begin the grant with sufficiently clear roles for the partners. The manager said that, in hindsight, the grantee should have more clearly delineated the roles and responsibilities of each partner and held them accountable. In another partnership, the grant director said that coordination and collaboration across many partners is hard to maintain.



### Employer voices: Engaging employers as partners

The grants placed special emphasis on engaging partners in the resulting partnerships to ensure that the planned services and training offerings met the needs of both employers and job seekers. Critical to that effort is understanding what motivates employers to engage. Interviews with 31 employers conducted through the virtual site visits asked them about their reasons for joining regional workforce partnerships and the goals they hoped to achieve through those partnerships. The following themes emerged from these discussions:

1. **Continuing partnerships that ensure the employers' voices help shape workforce system strategies.** Twenty-three employers had participated in regional or sector-focused workforce partnerships—such as industry-focused workforce councils or similar grant efforts like the HPOG—before America's Promise. In these instances, the employers recognized that contributing to partnership efforts demonstrated their continued engagement in the workforce system and helped ensure employers had a voice in shaping local training strategies to align with industry needs.
2. **Opportunity to strengthen talent pipelines and address critical hiring needs.** Fourteen employers viewed this regional partnership as an opportunity to work with key community partners to strengthen regional talent pipelines for their industries. These employers identified challenges related to their local workforces, including aging workers preparing for retirement, lack of qualified and trained local workers, and competition among local employers for qualified workers. By participating in the partnership, the employers in this study hoped to upskill their local and regional workforces and gain access to qualified talent to address workforce shortages.
3. **Funds to develop training plans and offer work-based learning.** Six employers indicated that funding available to support the development of training programs and work-based learning opportunities had motivated them to participate. They noted developing training offerings—including apprenticeships—can be costly, and employers often lack the extra resources needed to develop these approaches.
4. **Ability to demonstrate employers' commitment to their communities.** Five employers explicitly referred to these partnerships as an opportunity to make positive contributions to their communities. These employers framed the partnerships as win-win arrangements that enable communities to benefit while supporting employers' workforce needs.
5. **Support for diversifying the health care workforce.** Having a workforce that reflects the community appeared most salient for the health care industry. Six health care employers viewed the regional partnership as an opportunity to train a clinical health care workforce that better represents the demographics of their local communities while propelling local community members to high-wage jobs. One employer connected efforts to diversify the health care workforce with improved staff retention and improved outcomes for patients because “staff culturally and linguistically mirror the population we serve.” ▲

Source: See English et al. [2022] for more information.

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### III. Designing America's Promise Services

Designing services for America's Promise required the partnerships to identify target industries and occupations aligned with helping job seekers enter employment in high-growth and high-wage pathways (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a). As outlined in the FOA, the grants prioritized supporting sector-based career pathways aligned with the needs of the workforce systems' dual customers: job seekers and employers. Given this sector focus, partnerships needed to identify in-demand H-1B industries and middle- to high-skilled occupations, particularly middle- to high-skilled H-1B ones, that would benefit from additional training resources to build locally competitive workforces.

Recognizing this goal, partnerships developed service delivery approaches focused on equipping job seekers with the training and supports necessary to enter employment in the target industries and occupations. When designing their service delivery approaches, partnerships had to be responsive to the priority the FOA placed on developing career pathways and providing supportive services. Through the FOA, DOL encouraged partnerships to develop career pathways models that included classroom and work-based learning opportunities. The FOA also emphasized the importance of including strategies for connecting participants with supportive services to address barriers they might face entering and completing training. This chapter describes how the America's Promise partnerships developed their service models to be responsive to the needs of their communities and target industries. Chapters VI – VIII elaborate on the range of services provided across partnerships.

#### A. Identifying target industries and occupations

To identify target industries and occupations for America's Promise services, the partnerships sought to understand the needs of their regions by engaging stakeholders and analyzing labor market data. Partnerships specified their target industries and occupations at the grant application stage and focused on serving locally in-demand or emerging industries and occupations, with some partnerships targeting multiple industries. Among the 23 partnerships, 10 focused on more than one industry. Grant managers from these 10 partnerships suggested that they did so to meet the needs of large geographic regions or to offer a range of in-demand training options.

The most commonly targeted industries included advanced manufacturing, information technology (IT), and health care (Figure I.4). For example, one partnership provided training in aviation manufacturing to align with the labor market needs of the local economy in the “aviation capital of the world,” while another focused on medical device manufacturing because its location was home to one of the largest orthopedic and spinal medical device companies in the country. Although most partnerships focused on industries that were already prevalent in their regions, at least three partnerships said that they selected their education and training offerings based on the projected future growth of certain H-1B industries or occupations within their region. One partnership used the IT training provided through America's Promise as an incentive to recruit companies to the area because it would generate a pool of skilled IT workers.

When selecting these target industries and occupations, respondents from lead grantee organizations relied on input from key stakeholders, including workforce boards and employers, to inform the selection process. In conjunction with stakeholder input, lead grantee organizations often considered labor market information (LMI), as well as other research, to understand locally in-demand occupations. Among the 23 partnerships, interviewed grant managers from 20 partnerships described selecting their target industries and occupations based on their knowledge of their regions' major industries.

**Thirteen partnerships focused on one industry.**

Grant managers from all 13 partnerships noted that the selected industry dominates their regions, making it the natural industry to focus on through their grants. In these instances, grant managers described their efforts to be responsive to existing in-demand industries by engaging employers during the grant application and early planning phases. Among the partnerships included in virtual visits, employers from all partnerships noted that their motivations to participate stemmed from challenges they faced filling critical and in-demand staff positions. These employers described their desire to gain the partnerships' help to expand and strengthen their local talent pipelines through the development and expansion of training programs aligned with their hiring needs (see sidebar).

Among these 13 partnerships, respondents from the lead grantee organizations provided additional insights on how they finalized their industry selections.



**Employer voices: Meeting hiring needs**

Interviews with 31 employers conducted through the virtual site visits highlighted how the partnerships sought to address employer needs. Fourteen of these employers viewed the regional partnership as an opportunity to work with key community partners to strengthen regional talent pipelines for their industries. These employers identified challenges related to their local workforces, including aging workers preparing for retirement, lack of qualified and trained local workers, and competition among local employers for qualified workers. By participating in the partnership, the employers hoped to upskill their local and regional workforces and gain access to qualified talent to address workforce shortages. ▲

- **Four of these partnerships focused on the health care industry due to the industry's significance in their regions and anticipated hiring needs.** Beyond health care's large presence in these regions, the grant managers also noted that the health care industry provides a wide range of positions aligned with career pathways and earning family-sustaining wages. Given the breadth of occupations included in the health care field, partnerships also described helping existing employees transition to higher-wage positions in the field. For instance, one partnership helped its culinary and maintenance employees enter higher-paying clinical fields by connecting those employees with certified nursing assistant (CNA) training. Additionally, respondents from at least two of these partnerships pointed to demographic trends driving industry selection. Their health care workforces were entering retirement age and their region's population was aging, highlighting the need to promote health care careers, especially as the population in long-term care facilities increases.
- **Four of these partnerships selected advanced manufacturing because their regions are considered manufacturing hubs.** Due to their geographic locations, the grant managers noted that advanced manufacturing was a natural fit. The grant manager for one of these partnerships noted that although its industry selection allowed the partnership to be responsive to the region's dominant industry, the selection also allowed the partnership to promote growth among the region's small manufacturers that struggled to compete with the region's large employers. A large employer participating in this partnership also highlighted the need to support small manufacturers in the region through the grant: "It's going to help our area; it's going to help our industry; it's not just about us. The stronger our community is, the stronger it is going to be for us and our labor force."
- **Three partnerships focused only on IT but did so for differing reasons.** One partnership engaged with a partner to conduct in-depth analysis of LMI. This analysis helped the partnership identify its focal industry and associated occupations that could lead to high-wage employment aligned with career pathways in the IT industry. Another partnership sought to build on existing workforce

development efforts focused on IT by examined LMI to identify exactly which occupations to focus on for America's Promise. The other partnership selected IT as the focal industry to help build the region's reputation as an emerging IT hub. The lead grantee organization and local employers viewed the America's Promise partnership as an opportunity to build a local IT workforce that could advance economic development efforts by drawing additional employers to the area.

- **The remaining two partnership focused on specialized industries that drive local economic activity.** One of these partnerships focused on advanced manufacturing occupations within the aviation industry. Respondents from the grantee organization noted that “aviation drives the local economy,” making it a logical fit for the grant. The other partnership focused on the defense industry, given its large presence in the region.

**The remaining 10 partnerships focused on serving more than one industry.** Partnerships focusing on multiple industries appeared to do so to be responsive to the needs of large geographic regions and to ensure that the grant helped address community needs rather than just employer needs. According to grant managers, the partnerships focusing on multiple industries most often did so to ensure that participants could receive training aligned with in-demand occupations within smaller geographic areas of their larger regions. For example, one partnership operated within multiple counties and each county served a different industry, based in part on locally in-demand occupations, as well as training availability at each county's community college. Another partnership operated across multiple states, and local workforce boards within each state selected an industry to focus on, based on locally in-demand occupations.

At least three partnerships also targeted multiple industries to address community needs. For example, the grant manager from one partnership targeted the in-demand advanced manufacturing industry, but also included health care due to the high health care needs of its community members. Two other partnerships included the health care industry, which was not necessarily considered in demand but in which a high portion of the local workforce would soon be entering retirement age. Grant managers from these partnerships sought to ensure that the grant could help address anticipated community needs.

### B. Determining target occupations and associated training offerings

To determine training offerings aligned with target industries and occupations, America's Promise partnerships sought to understand labor market conditions and engage key stakeholders in program design. When selecting training offerings, respondents from the partnerships relied on multiple data points to ensure that training offerings met employer needs. Beyond considering employer needs, the partnerships also aimed to identify training offerings that would allow participants to enter career pathways aligned with high wages and career growth opportunities. Here, we describe the data sources partnerships used to inform training offerings, as identified through virtual site visit interview and interviews with grant managers.

#### 1. Reviewing and analyzing LMI

To select training offerings, respondents from 11 lead grantee organizations reviewed and analyzed LMI as part of their grant applications. As interview respondents described, analysis of LMI typically involved reviewing hiring projections to identify potentially in-demand and emerging occupations within target industries. Partnerships continued this analysis during the early planning phase of grant implementation. As grant managers from these partnerships noted, because of the grant timing, their analysis focused on understanding and addressing the needs of employers in particularly tight labor markets. For example, one grant manager noted that because of the low number of unemployed and underemployed workers in their

region, the partnership developed its planned service delivery model to focus on incumbent workers. By doing so, the partnership hoped to help these workers advance so that entry-level positions would become available for new labor market entrants.

## 2. Soliciting input from key stakeholders

In addition to reviewing LMI, partnerships solicited input from key stakeholders on their region's labor market and training needs. Respondents from 19 of the 23 partnerships described engaging stakeholders, most often employers, to identify and develop training offerings.

- **Using LMI to guide employer engagement.**

Of these 19 partnerships, 7 partnerships first conducted labor market analysis and then engaged employers to further understand their needs. These seven partnerships used LMI analysis to get a sense of the appropriate occupations to focus on through the grant. By then engaging employers, the partnerships sought to determine whether those were the appropriate occupations to focus on and whether the partnerships should address other occupations through grant-funded training.

- **Engaging employers to learn about hiring and training needs.** Eighteen of the 23 partnerships engaged employers to inform the selected target occupations and associated training offerings. During these conversations, the lead grantee organization and workforce partners met with employers to discuss their hiring needs, review existing training, and identify training gaps. The employers discussed the extent to which they agreed with the selected target occupations and what they perceived as training needs in the area. Through these conversations, the employers from at least two partnerships identified hard-to-fill positions. These employers noted that lack of locally available training made it hard to fill some critical positions for their operations.

- **Bringing together critical partners.** The grant managers from 22 partnerships described their efforts to engage and bring together their critical partners for America's Promise. The grant manager from the final partnership was not involved in the planning stage and therefore could not speak to initial efforts to convene partners. Grant managers collaborated with education and training partners, such as community colleges, to understand the range of available training options, identify training options that could be developed to respond to employer needs, and assess training provider capacity to expand offerings funded through America's Promise. For example, two partnerships sought to develop work-based learning offerings in collaboration with major employer partners. During the design and planning phase, one partnership engaged its education partner to develop on-the-job training (OJT) plans with the employer. Another connected a community college partner with an employer partner to co-create a behavioral health specialist training program. At least three other partnerships brought in community college partners to develop new training programs funded by the grant after consulting with employers about their training needs.



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### Using human-centered design to inform service planning

During the design phase, one partnership employed human-centered design techniques to develop its approach for serving America's Promise participants using a "no wrong door" service delivery model. The workforce partner used human-centered design techniques to understand and streamline the partnership's approach for conducting intake and providing career coaching. ▲

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- **Conducting a needs assessment.** One partnership conducted a formal needs assessment to understand where training gaps existed and to identify occupations that had opportunities to support economic growth and career development. Through its needs assessment, the lead grantee organization consulted employers to identify training gaps and consulted training providers about capacity. The grantee then designed services based on the findings from the needs assessment.

### 3. Challenges reported when determining training offerings

Though partnerships actively engaged employers in designing their offerings, partnerships faced challenges during this engagement. One partnership actively engaged employers from its target industries when selecting occupations and training offerings but did not include human resources representatives in this engagement. As a result, the grant manager noted that the selected training offerings ultimately did not align with the needs of large employers in the area because they captured the perceived needs of high-level leaders rather than the actual needs that hiring managers identified. Another partnership hoped to engage employers during the planning process but struggled to do so. Education partners from this partnership suggested that forming an industry advisory council would have benefitted the program design and increased job placement opportunities.

## C. Developing service delivery models

The partnerships drew on their experience from sector partnerships and similar grants when developing and planning their service delivery models. The partnerships used their prior grant experience, as discussed in Chapter II, to engage employers to understand their needs and to inform training options. America's Promise partner organizations often applied for or received funding through other DOL H-1B and TAACCCT investments. Among the 23 partnerships, 16 partner organizations received or participated in two or more DOL-funded grants in addition to America's Promise. This experience often laid the groundwork for or supported America's Promise service delivery models, according to respondents of the virtual site visits. According to the grantee survey, lead grantee organizations possessed, on average, 12 years of experience engaging employers in sector strategies, making them well positioned to facilitate their partnerships. Here, we describe how the partnerships developed their models.

### 1. Leveraging prior collaboration

Grant managers for 16 of the 23 partnerships mentioned their participation in existing partnerships or other related efforts informed their approaches for designing their America's Promise service delivery models. Among these partnerships, partners worked together through various collaborative efforts to promote sector strategies or career pathways:

- **Organizations from eleven partnerships worked together on prior, related grants.** Members of these partnerships described prior collaboration on DOL-funded grants, including TAACCCT grants, TechHire, and Ready to Work, as well as the HPOG program funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Through these prior grant efforts to develop sector-focused employment and training programs, the partners developed service delivery models or approaches that could be built upon through America's Promise.
- **Respondents from four partnerships discussed their participation in sector partnerships focused on the selected target industries.** These America's Promise partnerships drew on work conducted as part or on behalf of established sector partnerships when designing their service delivery models.

- **Two partnerships described other existing efforts that informed their service delivery approaches.** One partnership formed through a consortium of urban workforce boards that regularly work together to address job seeker and employer needs. The America's Promise partnership emerged through that consortium. The other partnership was an extension of an existing state program focused on creating high-wage, high-growth job opportunities.

In the case of these 16 partnerships, past collaboration appeared to mean that the America's Promise partnerships integrated existing service delivery approaches and training offerings into the models they developed for America's Promise. When considering components of their America's Promise offerings, respondents from 16 of these described using their experience to inform training offerings and case management approaches. A grant manager from one partnership noted that to design services, "the quick application process almost requires that communities already have an existing [training] partnership that matches the grant [announcement]." Grant managers from these 16 partnerships stressed that leveraging existing groups and advisory boards supported smooth grant implementation and start-up. For example, one partnership relied on existing advisory board meetings, established through the Ready to Work grant to plan and design its services; the advisory board reviewed and selected existing training offerings for the grant and helped design a service delivery approach comprising career coaching, employability skills training, and job placement support.

## 2. Engaging employers in designing services

The America's Promise initiative prioritized elevating employer voices when designing service delivery approaches. Thirty-one employers from 17 of the 18 partnerships in the virtual site interviews provided insights on their roles in designing services. Six of the 31 employers reported playing a role in grant application development, including helping the grantees select potential training offerings aligned with their hiring needs. About half (14) of the employers interviewed described involvement in planning activities after receiving their grant. Of these 14 employers, seven worked closely with partners to develop career pathways and design training curricula. These seven employers identified positions they struggle to fill due to lack of relevant training in their regions and worked with their workforce or local community college partner to develop classroom training and work-based learning designed to fill training gaps. The employers that were not actively involved in planning and design often offered their input on proposed plans and services through participation in advisory boards. Ten employers described their involvement contributing to service design and refinement through these boards.

## 3. Selecting and developing service offerings

Respondents of the virtual site visit interviews indicated that the partnerships often used existing infrastructure when selecting training offerings and service delivery approaches. Although most partnerships (16 of the 18 in the virtual site visits) included some existing training offerings or approaches in their service delivery models, five partnerships also developed new training offerings through America's Promise funding. Here, we describe the partnerships' approaches for selecting and designing training offerings, as described during virtual site visits and grant manager interviews. Additional details on the partnerships' training offerings are in Chapter VII.

The partnerships built on or used existing training approaches as part of their service delivery models by:

- **Identifying existing classroom training offering that could be supported through America's Promise funds.** Respondents from lead grantee organizations, education partners, and workforce

partners from at least 11 partnerships used grant funds to connect and enroll participants in existing training offerings. In at least three cases, these training offerings were created through prior grant efforts. For example, one partnership established its training model through a prior TAACCCT grant and sustained the model through America's Promise funding. Another partnership designed its model as a follow-on to prior grants, including TechHire, Ready to Work, and TAACCCT. Respondents from a third partnership noted that America's Promise served as another funding source for existing training offerings; the partnership braided funding to support its existing workforce development efforts.

- **Offering expanded work-based learning opportunities using America's Promise funding.** Of the 18 virtual visit partnerships, 15 included work-based learning offerings, most often OJT, in their models. Among these partnerships, respondents from the lead grantee organization or workforce development partner noted that their organization always offered OJT. Through America's Promise, they hoped to expand the use of OJT as an offering in their target sectors. Two partnerships focused on integrating employers more in the OJT process through America's Promise. For example, one partnership regularly offered OJT; however, under America's Promise, it developed a model that allowed interested people to apply for OJTs directly through an employer. Those people would then be enrolled, if eligible. Another partnership worked closely to develop OJT plans in partnership with an employer partner and local technical college. This ensured that training delivered through an OJT also aligned with core competencies targeted by similar classroom training offerings.
- **Creating boot camps based on existing offerings.** One partnership created IT training boot camps based on existing community college training offerings. For America's Promise, the partnership then paired training with wraparound supportive services, including job placement assistance and funding to address employment barriers such as lack of child care.

In addition to drawing on existing training offerings, at least seven partnerships sought to develop new training offerings through America's Promise. In these instances, lead grantee organizations collaborated closely with employers and education partners to understand training gaps in their local workforces and to identify appropriate approaches for filling those gaps. These approaches included:

- **Developing work-based learning offerings.** At least five partnerships developed new work-based learning offerings. These offerings included OJT, apprenticeships, and internships. The partnerships often selected these offerings to meet employer needs and to equip participants with work experience. For example, one partnership noted that hospitals in its area struggled to fill some of the same clinical roles. They developed apprenticeship offerings to address these gaps in their local workforce, in partnership with employers. America's Promise provided the funding to support program development to address ongoing industry needs. Another partnership built on existing classroom offerings by connecting participants to internships. Two partnerships developed OJT offerings in partnership with employers. Although OJT was not a new approach, the close partnerships with employers resulted in tailored OJT offerings to meet specific employer needs.
- **Involving employers or industry groups to design new classroom training programs.** Several partnerships used various approaches to involve employers or industry groups in the development of classroom-based education. Education partners included in the visits discussed consulting with employers or industry partners about their training offerings or during the curriculum development process. For example, a community college grantee focusing on IT explained that a technology industry advisory board reviewed and vetted its curriculum, which ensured the industry partners were knowledgeable about participants' skills and training so they could serve as internship sites. This

partnership used the grant to develop new offerings for the college rather than fund existing offerings. Another partnership focusing on advanced manufacturing collected feedback from 15 manufacturers throughout the state to identify the nine core competencies that its training should cover.



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## IV. Operating the Partnerships

Operating the America's Promise partnerships required grantees to work with their partners in several facets: managing the partnership activities, identifying additional funding and in-kind resources to support their activities, developing effective communication strategies, and ensuring sufficient staffing. This chapter describes how the partnerships included in virtual site visits reported operating to meet the needs of participants and employers. This chapter also includes sociograms of select partnerships that provide a visual depiction of the relationships and communications among the grantee and its partners, as reported by respondents on the partner network survey (Exhibits IV.1 and IV.2).<sup>8</sup>

### A. Partnership management

In analyzing data from the virtual visits, we identified three main practices that partnerships used to collaborate with their members to provide services to participants. The America's Promise partnerships often operated across jurisdictions and involved numerous partners with varying levels of involvement. As a result, the partnerships could and often did use more than one of the identified strategies.

**Major partners participated in advisory boards or committees.** Among the eight partnerships in which this occurred, grantee and partner staff discussed providing their voice in partnerships' decision making or advising implementation through newly established or existing advisory boards or committee.

Two partnerships convened a partner committee that met regularly to discuss grant implementation and partnership decisions. In one partnership, the leadership team, comprising the community college grantee and its education, workforce, and nonprofit training partners, initially met regularly to discuss grant design and implementation. The workforce partner offered that, despite staff turnover within some partners, the partnership remained strong because of the grant leadership. However, by the time of the virtual site visit, only the grantee and main workforce partner were still meeting as part of the leadership team. They noted that they had to make fewer decisions as the grant neared its end, so engaging as many partners was not necessary. Exhibit VI.1 further describes this partnership's network. Additional information on the partner network survey and associated analysis can be found in the Appendix.

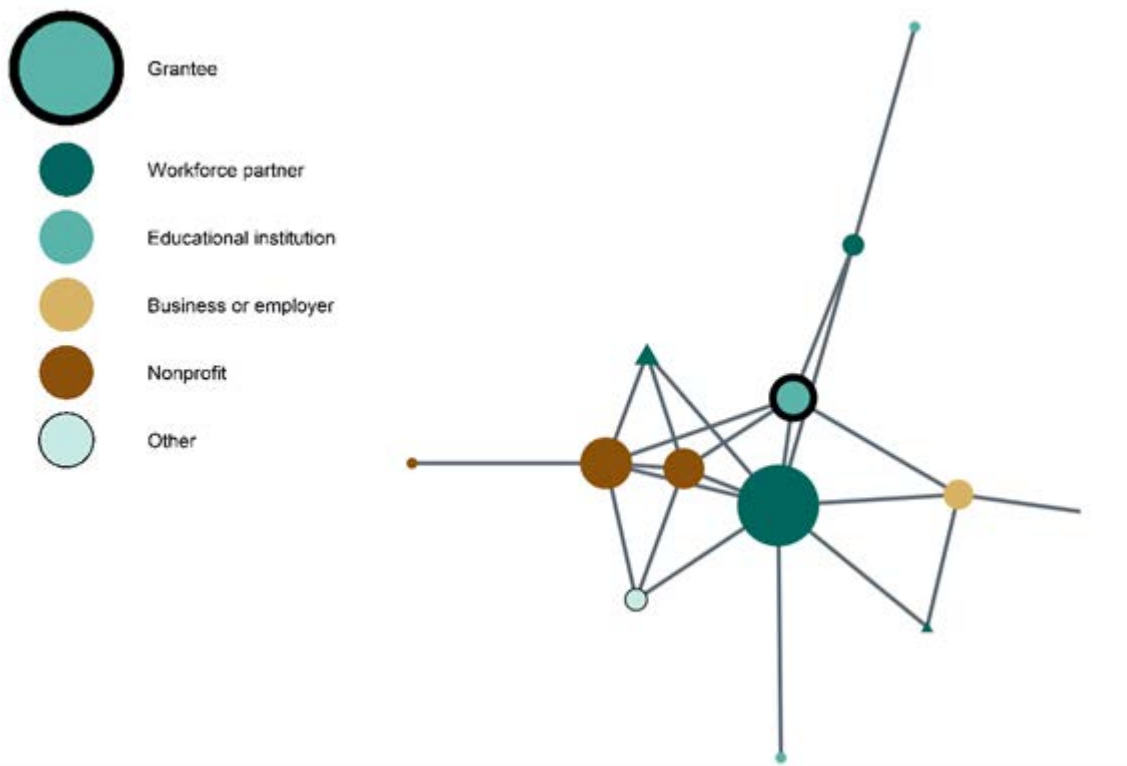
In another six partnerships, grant and partner managers noted that, during grant implementation, an advisory board established for or that existed before America's Promise supported the partnership. For example, one partnership convened quarterly advisory meetings with partners, initially established under the region's Ready to Work grant, and, in another partnership, an industry advisory group met every other month and included America's Promise as one of its agenda items. Another partnership established a board of directors, consisting of the grantee and employer partners, that provided oversight and guidance to the partnership. Refer to Chapter III for more on partnerships' efforts to involve advisory boards when designing their service delivery models.

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<sup>8</sup> Sociograms provide visual displays of network structures by defining organizations included in a network and showing the nature of relationships within a network. Organizations are represented by nodes and lines are used to show connections between organizations. Sociograms provide qualitative and quantitative assessments of these network relationships making them useful for understanding partnership development, identifying prominent members of the network or essential partner, and can provide insights on strategies to improve networks or partnerships (Honeycutt 2009). Given the America's Promise grants' focus on partnership development, sociograms and the partner network analysis were included to provide insights on partnership formation, membership, and strength.

**Exhibit IV.1. Illustration of an America’s Promise partnership with active grantee and partner leadership using partner network survey responses**

This partnership was led by an institute of higher education and focused on the health care industry. Initial members of the partnership’s leadership team were its workforce partner and two nonprofit organizations that were enrollment partners. The grey lines show which partners communicated with one another and the size of the icons indicate the amount of communication reported with each partner.



At the time of the partner network survey, the grantee and workforce partner continued to closely work together to implement the program. Their partner managers noted having regular meetings to discuss the grant’s implementation, which is illustrated in the sociogram. The outlined teal circle represents the prominent role of the grantee, as it is centrally located within the network. The large green circle represents the workforce partner, which is also located centrally within the network. The line connecting the grantee and workforce partner represents their regular communication. Here, the two entities communicate frequently with each other as well with most of the other key partners selected for the survey, as represented by the lines extending to the other circles, including two nonprofit organizations represented in brown circles. In this partnership, the workforce grantee provided training and support for all partner organizations, in collaboration with the grantee organization. Because of their role training partner programs, the workforce grantee participated in regular bidirectional communication with all partners. As a result, they are shown as the most prominent partner.

The workforce manager commended the grant agency’s leadership for communicating with partners so that “everyone is aware of their benchmarks and where they are.” This included clearly articulating the grant’s purpose so that enrollment partners understood that “this was [about] career-focused systems not just money for job training.” ▲

Source: Partner network survey (N = 6) and virtual site visits (N = 18).

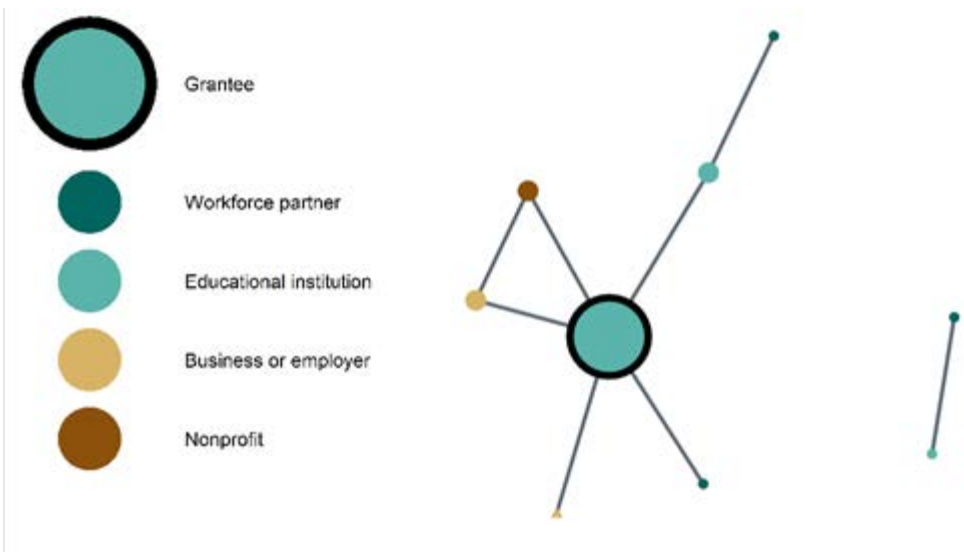
Note: See the Appendix for additional details on the network analysis. Circles show partners that responded to the survey. Triangles show partners that did not respond to the survey.

**Grantees actively worked with partners to help manage their activities.** In the eight partnerships in which this occurred, grantee and partner respondents noted that the grantee met one-on-one with partners to discuss their activities and drove the partnership's engagement with employers and other partners. As an example, grantee respondents in one partnership said they had an advisory team, but the grantee facilitated and initiated engagement with each of its partners. In another partnership, grant managers leveraged personal relationships with staff of community agencies and employers to promote and implement the grant.

**Subgrantees reported having autonomy to manage and operate their own programs.** The seven partnerships reporting this typically addressed multiple industries or served large geographic areas. These seven grant managers described relying on partners to operate autonomously to implement grant-funded services. As an example, one partnership consisted of three community college partners, and each developed and implemented its own program, focused on different training programs. Another partnership operated across many states, and workforce boards in each state took responsibility for overseeing grant operations, including coordinating with local education and training providers, to deliver services to participants. The grant administrators said they connect individually with their partners to ensure they are adhering to the grant guidelines but that each partner has ownership over its program. Exhibit IV.2 further discusses this partnership and its structure. In another partnership, the grantee subcontracted with two workforce boards, which, in turn, contracted with their community-based organizations and training providers. One workforce partner manager described the grantee as having a hands-off approach to managing the grant.

**Exhibit IV.2. An America’s Promise Partnership with less frequent communication**

This partnership focused on the health care, advanced manufacturing, and IT industries. The community college grantee and each of its two community college partners developed their own training programs to meet the needs of employers in their service areas.



The sociogram below shows both the collaboration across partners and the colleges’ separate America’s Promise systems. During the virtual site visit, partner managers described how the America’s Promise grant built upon a foundation of “solid relationships” established through the TAACCCT grant. They also attributed their success to “long-term partnerships” with partners that are all “motivated to reach the same goal.” At the same time, each community college maintained its own system, as shown by the one community college that was in frequent communication with the grantee as well as its employer partner selected for the survey. The third community college did not indicate frequent communications with the grantee but maintained frequent communications with its own employer partner. Under this partnership, each community college operated relatively independently and build connections associated with its target industry. The sociogram represents communication at the time of the partner network survey. So, the isolated community college and workforce partner may have been more connected with the grantee earlier in the grant period when planning for implementation. ▲

Source: Partner network survey (N = 6) and virtual site visits (N = 18).

Note: See the Appendix for additional details on the network analysis. Circles show partners that responded to the survey. Triangles show partners that did not respond to the survey.

**B. Financial and in-kind resources leveraged to support partnerships’ activities**

As described in Chapter I, the average America’s Promise grant was \$4.8 million, and DOL required the partnerships to leverage other funding sources or resources to support their activities.

**In addition to their grant award, the partnerships received financial and in-kind support from their partners to support their operations and activities.** In the survey, most grantees reported that they received financial and in-kind support such as use of physical spaces, from at least one source, including federal government programs, employers, institutes of higher education, and state or local government (Table IV.1). Federal government sources, such as WIOA and Pell Grants, were the main source of financial contributions, and only 10 percent of grantees reported receiving no support from federal

government sources. Half of grantees reported that industry associations provided in-kind support, and almost half (45 percent) reported receiving in-kind support from their employer and institutes of higher education partners.

**Table IV.1. Provision of financial and in-kind support by partner sources**

Source	Sample size (n)	Type of support			No financial or in-kind support (%)
		Financial (%)	In-kind (%)	Financial and in-kind (%)	
Federal government <sup>a</sup>	21	33	10	48	10
Employers	20	5	45	35	15
Institutes of higher education	20	5	45	25	25
State or local government	19	11	26	32	32
Industry association	20	0	50	5	45
Community-based organization	18	0	39	17	44
Private foundation	18	11	0	17	72

Source: Grantee survey (N = 23).

<sup>a</sup> Federal government resources could include Pell Grants, WIOA funding, SNAP E&T funding, the GI Bill, TAA funding, and other grant programs, such as HPOG and TAACCCT grants.

Respondents of the site visit interviews provided additional insights into other funds used to support partnerships activities. Leveraged sources reported to support participants’ training included co-enrollment in WIOA or other federal programs (six partnerships), Pell Grants (five partnerships), and employers’ contributions toward OJT and other tuition assistance (four partnerships). Respondents in one partnership noted that, before using grant funds to pay for training, they sought to match participants with other existing funding sources, such as WIOA funds, financial aid through Pell

Grants, and college scholarships. Another grantee braided America’s Promise funds with funding available through other federal grants, such as SWFI and HPOG, so that they could serve more people and meet more of their participants’ needs. In a third partnership, a state job development fund provided supportive services to participants and paid training tuition costs for participants ineligible for America’s Promise. Respondents from four partnerships encompassing three community college systems each described relying on multiple funding sources to support their activities. They leveraged state and other scholarship funds, Pell Grants, WIOA and TAA funding, and employers’ training resources.

During the virtual site visits, partnerships noted that common in-kind supports included staff time, office space, and equipment. One partner manager viewed staff time as a critical leveraged resource because none of the partnership’s staff was fully funded by the grant. Office space was donated across partnerships for meetings and classrooms, and according to one grant manager, the partnership’s industry



**Leveraging multiple funding sources**

Grant administrators in one partnership counted the following as leveraged funding: Grantee agency manager and financial staff time, staff partners’ time at meetings, financial aid, Pell Grants, state scholarship funds, and office space. According to the grant manager, “We blew our matching funding goals out of the water.” ▲

partners donated equipment. Another partnership cited an existing data system as a key resource; this allowed partners at any location to enroll and track participants.

**Partnerships had mixed reactions to the level of funding available through the America’s Promise grants.** Respondents from 10 partnerships in the virtual site visits said the grants provided sufficient funding to support participants. Among these partnerships, grant managers from four reported underspending their grant. They attributed underspending to:

- **Conservative funding for supportive services.** One grant manager noted that they were initially conservative in approving supportive services, such as gas cards, and participants had been reluctant to request them. As a result, they had underspent their supportive services budget.
- **Lower-than-anticipated training costs.** Grant managers from the two partnerships believed they underspent their training budget due to leveraged funding from other programs. Participants received more training support than anticipated from sources such as WIOA, Pell Grants, and Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment grants.<sup>9</sup>
- **Shorter work-based learning experiences.** One partnership funded paid internships and ultimately offered internships for a shorter period than anticipated, leading to some underspending.

As a grant manager from one of these 10 partnerships noted, providers could always use more money to support their participants, but at least one respondent, despite the perspectives of their grant managers from these partnerships said the grant funds were sufficient to fund training and other services that participants needed.

**Several partnerships viewed the grant funding as inadequate or inflexible.** As outlined in the FOA, DOL intended for awarded grantees to leverage additional funding sources to offer participants education and training and supportive services, in addition to case management and job placement support (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016a). Despite this vision, seven respondents viewed the grant funding as inadequate or inflexible. Five shared their perspective that more funds were needed to support participants while they engaged in the partnership’s activities. For example, one grant manager explained that they faced challenges recruiting for a 14-week IT program because prospective participants could not work during the training and the partnership could not provide them with a stipend while participating in this full-time activity. Similarly, in another partnership, the grant manager regretted that they could not help participants with their housing costs or offer more stipends to training participants. In two other partnerships, partner respondents felt that the partnerships did not adequately cover important supportive services, such as transportation and child care, which participants needed to remain in training. Although the grants could fund these services, the lead grantee organizations limited the amount of funding available for supportive services to prioritize funding to serve more participants. In the fifth partnership, the grant manager expressed frustration in facing pressure to enroll participants with low incomes, but then not being able to provide them with the full funding necessary to help them become successful. Within this partnership, a partner manager also expressed frustration about not receiving grant funding to support training enrollment and instead was expected to support training costs for enrolled participants using leverage funding sources.

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<sup>9</sup> The Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment Grants provide funding to support programs that “address individual reemployment needs of Unemployment Insurance claimants.” Additional information is available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/american-job-centers/RESEA>

Other respondents noted additional ways they would have liked to use grant funds, particularly to respond to shifting employer needs due to the pandemic, as identified in spring and summer 2020. For instance, one employer partner offered that the grant covered only partial tuition for its apprenticeship program, while the employer covered the remaining tuition costs and wages and provided the trainer for the OJT portion. This partner would have liked the grant to cover all the tuition costs or a stipend for participants so that the burden fell less on the employer who was already experiencing challenges due to the pandemic. Respondents in two partnerships perceived that the grant disallowed or impeded their ability to fund incumbent training. For example, a community partner from one such partnership reported that DOL disallowed grant funding to cover training costs for an employer partner's incumbent training. Employers from at least two partnerships intended to participate in OJT, but due to layoffs and furloughs conducted at the start of the pandemic, they were no longer eligible to receive grant funding. As a result, they worked with their partnerships to participate in incumbent worker training to the extent the grants allowed.

### C. Partnerships' communication strategies

Establishing methods of communications across partners was important for the partnerships' ongoing implementation. As a result of partners' collaboration that predated America's Promise (see Chapter II), grantees and their partners mostly described effective communication across partners.

**Communication strategies ranged from formal regular meetings of partners (10 partnerships) to mostly one-on-one communications between the grantee and individual partners (six partnerships).** Respondents in at least five of these partnerships also mentioned regular email correspondence among all partners. According to respondents in a different set of five partnerships, the frequency of communication depended on the stage of implementation, with more communications occurring in the early months of the partnership to plan for implementation. In one of these partnerships, even though the full partnership no longer met regularly, each of the partner workforce boards continued to hold monthly meetings with its local partners. In another partnership, the regular steering committee met consistently in the first year of the grant and eventually transitioned to an ad hoc basis.

**Although respondents generally were satisfied with the level of communications, at least one partner in five partnerships was dissatisfied with the frequency of communications.** In three partnerships where some respondents expressed dissatisfaction, there had been turnover in the lead grantee organization's staff. For example, in one partnership, communication started off strong but then suffered due to staff turnover at the lead grantee organization. At the time of the virtual site visit, they reported improved communications. In two partnerships, the grantee tended to manage the partnership by communicating one-on-one with partners. A grant manager in one of the partnerships lamented that the grantee had not set up a formal communication mechanism and, as a result, their communications with an important training provider were more akin to communications with a subcontractor than with an equal partner.

### D. Partnership staffing models

Operating the partnerships required engaging a range of staff including organizational leaders and frontline staff to plan for and implement grant-funded services. Here, we describe their staffing structure and staffing-related successes and challenges as identified by site visit respondents and phone interview respondents.

### 1. Staffing structure

Despite the variation in the composition of and services delivered by the partnerships, most partnerships followed a similar staffing structure to support grant implementation. The partnerships typically relied on staff employed by the lead grantee organization to facilitate, convene, and manage the work of the partnership. In addition to staff tasked with coordinating and managing their work, partnerships relied on frontline staff to provide services to identify prospective participants, provide case management services to America's Promise participants, and facilitate connections between participants and employers. The partnerships all trained staff on the specifics of the grants and their eligibility requirements.

All 23 partnerships relied on one person, or several people employed by the lead grantee organization to oversee partnership management and operations. These people often held titles such as project director, grant manager, or program director. Their responsibilities included facilitating communication and engagement with partner organizations, ensuring compliance with the grant requirements, overseeing reporting, and monitoring implementation. Half of these partnerships hired staff to serve in these roles due to the amount of time and coordination required to operate the partnerships. The other half relied on existing staff employed by the lead grantee organizations to serve in these roles. In these cases, the partnerships were often building on existing work and leveraging existing community partnerships, minimizing the amount of coordination required to implement the America's Promise grants.

In addition to staff tasked with overseeing the grant and its partnerships, the lead grantee organizations engaged other types of staff to facilitate the partnerships' work. These roles varied across partnerships. One partnership employed a data manager tasked with supporting data reporting and coordinating with partners on their data submissions. Three partnerships led by institutes of higher education employed site or campus coordinators who oversaw America's Promise operations at their individual campuses. These partnerships also tended to operate over larger geographic areas, requiring an additional level of location-specific management. Three partnerships employed sector strategists or directors of engagement who focused entirely on connecting with employers and developing relationships on behalf of the partnerships.

Given America's Promise's focus on meeting the needs of job seekers and employers, partnerships relied on frontline staff across partners to engage these dual customers. During virtual site visit interviews, respondents described three primary frontline staff roles:

- **Outreach or recruitment coordinators.** These people, represented at least three partnerships, conducted community outreach to identify potential participants for America's Promise services. These roles were funded by the grant, and outreach efforts were unique to America's Promise.
- **Case managers, career coaches, and workforce navigators.** Grant managers from nineteen partnerships relied on staff employed as case managers, career coaches, or workforce navigators to connect participants to America's Promise services. These staff often recruited, assessed, and enrolled participants in services. Eight partnerships hired dedicated staff for these roles. In doing so, these partnerships described having more specialized case management services. For example, one health care partnership employed a case manager who focused on only on serving participants enrolled in CNA programs. Another health care partnership hired dedicated career coaches employed by the education and workforce partners to provide specialized case management and support for their participants enrolled in health care training. Ten partnerships relied on existing staff to provide these services. Workforce-led grantees described tasking their existing case managers to provide services to America's Promise participants, following the same case management or career coaching approaches used for their other workforce development programs, most often WIOA. In two partnerships, these



staff also trained participants in work readiness. Chapter VI provides more information about case management services provided by partnerships

- **Job developers or job placement specialists.** Twelve partnerships described job developers or job placement specialists who connected job seekers with employers and employment opportunities. Of these 12 partnerships, respondents from four hired grant-funded job developers or job placement specialists. Staff hired specifically for America’s Promise provided more specialized job development services for the partnerships’ target industries. For example, one IT-focused partnership employed job developers for each community college campus providing America’s Promise training. Each campus specialized in a different type of training so job developers were tasked with building employer connections relevant to those training offerings. The eight remaining partnerships relied on existing job development staff or business services teams to provide these services to participants and employers. Across these 12 partnerships, job developers typically helped participants prepare for interviews with identified employers and served as a bridge between participants and employers. Chapter VIII provides more information about the organizations and staff responsible for connecting with employers and helping participants find employment.

In addition to these common frontline staff roles, partnerships worked closely with instructors who trained participants. Instructors typically taught America’s Promise participants, as well as other students. However, three partnerships employed dedicated instructors for classes or cohorts limited to America’s Promise participants. For example, one partnership developed boot camps that ran for 40 hours per week. It relied on existing instructors to deliver the trainings and employed grant-funded teaching assistants to give participants additional, individualized support. The teaching assistants were often former America’s Promise participants who successfully completed the boot camps, making them well-positioned to understand participants’ experiences and potential challenges.

### 2. Reported staffing successes and challenges

Staffing played an important role in the operations of the partnerships, and site visit respondents offered their insights on staffing-related successes and challenges. Identified staffing successes included the following:

- **Staffing models aligned with participant and employer needs.** Respondents from four partnerships cited their staffing models as successes. These respondents viewed the structures they created as being aligned with customer needs. For example, one partnership pivoted its approach so that participants worked with one case manager for the duration of their enrollment, which appeared to help promote engagement. The grant manager from another partnership that hired numerous staff for the partnership believed that “the staffing level was awesome for running the program.” Another partnership employed program alumni as teaching assistants, an action they believed was positive because participants found the alumni more accessible than other staff when needing help. The teaching assistants also provided additional support when courses shifted to virtual instruction due to the pandemic. A final partnership out stationed staff at training provider locations, which respondents said appeared to help promote participant engagement.
- **Partnerships hired the right staff for their roles.** Grant managers from three partnerships highlighted their successful hiring efforts. Two grant managers pointed to the background and experience of the grant staff. Another grant manager discussed how hiring and employing staff through the community college enabled them to attract highly qualified candidates because they could offer a strong benefits package, despite positions being grant-funded.

- **Partner connections strengthened staffing.** At least three partnerships pointed to the strength of their partnerships as staffing successes and perceived that participants and employers benefitted by having access to staff across organizations.

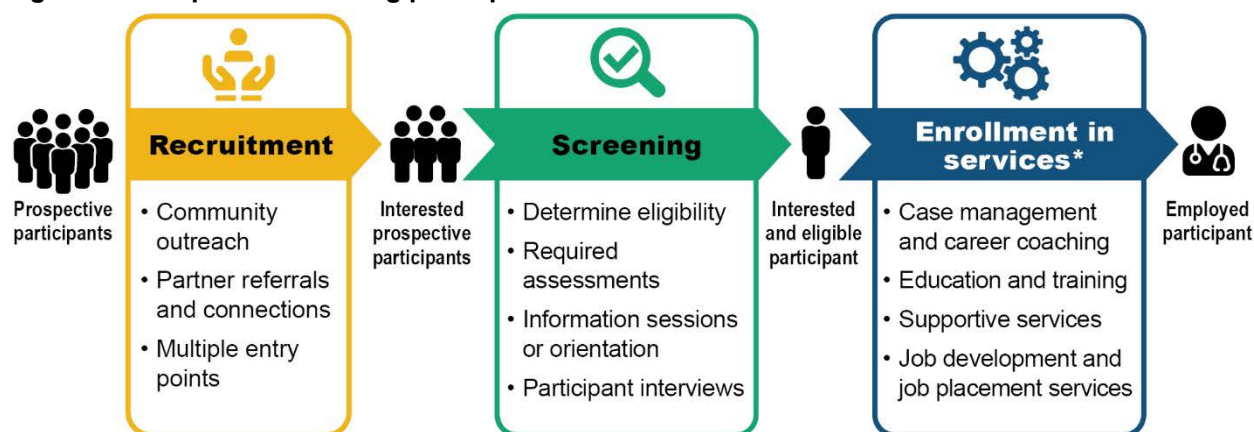
Although the partnerships described staffing successes, they also identified a common set of challenges related to staffing the partnerships:

- **Turnover among key partnership staff.** Respondents from 10 partnerships pointed to turnover as their primary staffing challenges. Half experienced turnover in grant manager or program coordinator positions. According to respondents, turnover in these positions influenced coordination with partners, and in some cases created implementation delays due to leadership vacancies. Respondents noted that because of turnover, new staff regularly needed to get up to speed on the grants and the partnerships. Respondents attributed some of the turnover to the nature of grant-funded positions. Because of uncertainty around continuing funding for their roles, one respondent noted that staff sought permanent employment.
- **Difficulty hiring for key roles.** Two partnerships experienced challenges hiring for key partnership roles. One grant manager noted that the tight labor market coupled with the temporary nature of grant-funded positions made it challenging to hire staff for frontline roles. The grant manager from the other partnership highlighted challenges finding candidates who possessed the right skills and experience for job developer roles. The grant manager from this partnership suggested that they should have considered an alternative staffing structure in which job developers focused only on employer outreach and participants worked with a job placement specialist.
- **Limited staff time or support.** Respondents from three partnerships mentioned limited bandwidth or buy-in among their staff for America’s Promise services. These partnerships all relied on existing grantee and partner staff to implement America’s Promise services. Respondents suggested that competing priorities impeded staff’s ability to fully engage in or support America’s Promise. For example, a partner manager noted that their staff have many existing responsibilities and support participants spanning a large geographic area, so adding responsibilities under the grant created new challenges for staff.
- **Limited funding to support staff positions.** Respondents from two partnerships pointed to funding challenges related to staffing. These respondents highlighted that frontline staff are critical to the success of efforts like America’s Promise, but funding is necessary to ensure that staff are available to support participants and engage employers. One grant manager noted that “case managers are critical to connecting participants to training and scholarship resources. Without funding for these roles, our program would have to end.” The grant manager from the other partnership said that if their partnership had not been able to leverage funding for case management services, they would have struggled to provide these services, as they underestimated the needs and costs of those services during the grant application and planning stages.

## V. Recruiting and Enrolling Participants in America’s Promise Services

Understanding who the regional partnerships aimed to serve, the approaches they used to recruit participants, and who successfully enrolled in services provides important context for the implementation of America’s Promise. Figure V.1 illustrates the sequence and approaches most partnerships used to recruit, screen, and enroll eligible participants in America’s Promise. Drawing on interview data from the virtual site visits and grant manager phone interviews, the grantee survey, and WIPS data analysis, this chapter further describes the processes grantees used to recruit, screen, and enroll participants, including common challenges faced, and provides information about the participants served through America’s Promise.

Figure V.1. Sequence to linking participants to America’s Promise services



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18.)

Note: The goal of partnerships was to provide services that lead to participants’ employment in target industries; however, these processes do not necessarily always lead to employment.

\* Each of these services is further described in Chapters VI–VIII of this report.

### A. Populations sought for recruitment

As discussed in Chapter I, partnerships were required to serve unemployed, underemployed, and incumbent workers with America’s Promise grants. The FOA also instructed recipients to serve disadvantaged populations, such as people with low incomes, populations underrepresented in the target industry (including women and racial and ethnic minority groups), dislocated workers, and other populations.

According to the grantee survey, America’s Promise partnerships most commonly sought to engage the following disadvantaged populations:

- **People with low incomes.** Nearly all partnerships (21 of 23) indicated they seek to engage workers with low incomes for America’s Promise services. These 21 partnerships developed their own definitions for what constituted a low income, such as hourly wages or family incomes as a percentage of the poverty level. Many grantees and their partners were already serving this population in other workforce development programs, such as SNAP E&T and WIOA Title I

programs, and incorporated America's Promise grants into their service offerings. During the virtual site visits, one grantee described extreme poverty in its region and noted that it sought people with low incomes for careers in the advanced manufacturing, health care, and IT industries because these fields offer secure, well-paying occupations locally.

- **Veterans.** Seventeen partnerships indicated they aimed to recruit veterans for America's Promise services. Three of these partnerships mentioned having large military presences in the regional service areas and strong veterans' programs within local American Job Centers as reasons for seeking out veterans. During the virtual site visits, a partnership targeting the advanced manufacturing and IT industries noted that the partnership aimed to recruit veterans because their past service and ability to receive the security clearances required for many Department of Defense jobs are advantages to jobs in the defense sector.
- **Underrepresented groups in the target industry.** Many partnerships sought to engage racial minority groups and women because they are underrepresented in certain H-1B fields and industries. Sixteen partnerships provided racial minority groups with the education and training necessary for IT, advanced manufacturing, and health care industry positions. One site, for example, stated that it aimed to recruit racial minority groups because the site is committed to diversifying the local health care workforce, ensuring that people of color continue on health care career pathways and can advance beyond entry-level positions, such as CNAs. Meanwhile, 11 partnerships engaged women for careers in IT and advanced manufacturing. Across the 23 partnerships, women accounted for 35% of participants in IT programs and 19% of participants in advanced manufacturing programs (Spitzer et al. [forthcoming]).

**During the site visits, six partnerships discussed recruiting and prioritizing additional populations of interest to promote other regional or strategic priorities.** For example, in addition to people with low incomes, one partnership aimed to enroll English language learners, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ people through its network of partners. Another partnership had an education provider partner that focused on enrolling first-generation college students. At least three partnerships served people with prior justice involvement. Three others prioritized people from certain zip codes or neighborhoods, primarily those that are underserved or have residents of low socioeconomic status. One of these partnerships sought to engage the "hardest to serve" people and tried to connect with prospective participants through local SNAP offices and community centers in low-income neighborhoods.

### B. Approaches to participant recruitment

On the grantee survey, grantees identified their partnerships' methods for recruiting America's Promise participants. The grantees reported that they most commonly used community outreach and referrals from education and training partners, workforce system partners, and employer partners to recruit participants. Figure V.2 illustrates the recruitment methods partnerships used.

**Figure V.2. Recruitment methods America’s Promise partnerships used**



Source: Grantee survey (N = 23).

### 1. Community outreach

Of the 23 partnerships, 16 indicated through virtual site visits or phone interviews that they used community outreach as a recruitment method. During the virtual site visit focus groups, the participants shared that the potential to earn credentials in a high-growth industry and the opportunity to receive tailored job search support are the features that attracted them to America’s Promise. However, in their community outreach to potential participants, America’s Promise partnerships involved in site visits described emphasizing low-cost or free services and wraparound services, such as rent and child care assistance. Partnerships reported marketing supportive services in this way to demonstrate how America’s Promise services could address common barriers job seekers face when entering training or employment. One partnership noted that it struggled to find a balance of advertising for supportive services. It felt supportive services were a key incentive to encourage applicants but found that if it focused on those services, the applicants they received were not committed to the training.



#### How the participants heard about America’s Promise

- Informed by lead grantee or partner after they enrolled in eligible training
- Discovered on education and training provider website or workforce board website
- Discovered through newspaper advertisement or article
- Informed by lead grantee or partner during community event, such as American Job Center workshop, meeting at local library for job search support, or English as Second Language course ▲

Source: Virtual focus groups with participants (N = 11).

## 2. Partner referrals and connections

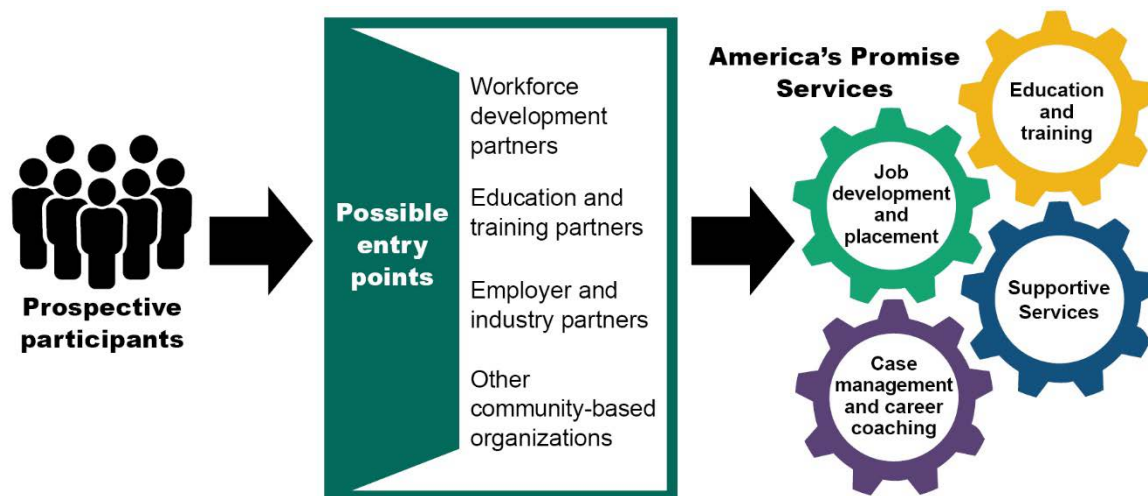
According to the grantee survey, 16 of the 23 partnerships used referrals from education and training partners or workforce system partners as a recruitment method. Because they have similar goals and serve similar populations, many of the workforce boards and education and training providers had existing partnerships before the inception of the America’s Promise grant (see Table II.I, Chapter II). Grantees used these partnerships for recruitment because both entities generally provide services to the grant’s intended populations and have established staff and methods for recruitment. Employer referrals were reported as key to engaging incumbent workers in America’s Promise services. During site visits, three grantees attributed their successful recruitment of incumbent workers to having strong partnerships with employers in the area. One partnership noted that incumbent workers are hard to serve without a referral because they typically are not seeking out employment services, as they are already employed.

**“We were really good at sourcing from a variety of partners, from employers, community colleges, training providers, to [community-based organizations], that were recruiting participants in from various partnerships at the community level. So, there was a very robust pipeline of folks going into [America’s Promise] training programs.”**

— Program administrator at lead grantee organization

**Almost all virtual site visit partnerships structured America’s Promise so that potential participants could be connected to America’s Promise services through the lead grantee and its various partners.** Figure V.3 illustrates the different entry points into America’s Promise services. During the virtual site visits, two partnerships attributed their recruitment success to having multiple partner entry points from which participants could be recruited and enrolled.

Figure V.3. Participant entry points into America’s Promise



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).

Notably, three grantees referenced delays in recruiting and enrolling eligible participants due to miscommunications between lead grantees and partners during the referral process. Two grantees enrolled a large number of participants who were later deemed to be ineligible. During the site visits, respondents

attributed this mistake to former grant staff who disregarded the grant requirements to meet enrollment targets and a former grant manager who either did not understand the grant requirements or failed to effectively communicate them to partners. Grantees noted that, in the early stages of the grant, partners were referring or enrolling ineligible people because they did not fully understand the eligibility criteria for America's Promise. One respondent emphasized the importance of communicating clearly with partners about the eligibility requirements during the initial stages of the grant to avoid future administration challenges related to ineligible participants. A grantee that did not report delays in participant recruitment attributed its success to using project management software, which enabled transparency, accountability, and collaboration across partners.



### **COVID-19 and America's Promise participant recruitment by industry**

COVID-19 reshaped the grant's training programs and hiring by industry, which in turn presented changes to recruitment for those activities. For some programs, the pandemic was a barrier for recruiting but for others was a facilitator. For example, recruiting for advanced manufacturing occupations slowed because local manufacturers had initial shutdowns with mixed demand for products upon reopening. Also, many industry trainings require in-person participation. However, interest in an IT training program that previously struggled with recruitment due to geographic isolation increased when it began offering services online. ▲

Source: Bellotti et al. (2021).

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## C. Screening and enrolling participants

After recruiting interested participants, partnerships had to ensure they were interested and eligible to receive services. To do this and ensure that the partnerships goals were met, grantees and their partners established processes for screening and enrolling participants. Partnerships reported conducting the screening and enrollment process online, over the phone, or in person with a staff member depending on the partnership and the activities involved. Some partnerships used a combination of approaches and had a multi-step process for screening and selecting America's Promise participants. For example, one IT-focused partnership used an intensive process in which interested participants filled out an online application; an initial phone screen followed to verify eligibility information. If interested participants met the eligibility criteria during the phone screen, they had an in-person interview, after which a committee voted on whether to accept them.

Although the order and approach varied, during the grantee survey and virtual site visits, partnerships reported using several common processes to ensure participants were well-suited for America's Promise prior to their enrollment. Common approaches included holding information sessions with prospective participants (six partnerships), implementing and assessing standard eligibility requirements (23 partnerships), administering assessments (16 partnerships), or conducting interviews (20 partnerships).

### **1. Information sessions and group orientations**

During the virtual site visits, at least six partnerships reported holding information sessions or group orientations during which prospective participants received an overview of the available training and education programs and services. One partnership's information session covered the employment growth and opportunities in the target industry and the America's Promise education and training opportunities, including the schedule, intensity, and expectations of each program. An information session or orientation was often the first step in the enrollment process among partnerships that offered it. At least two

partnerships required interested participants to attend one before they could move further along in the screening process. At one of these two partnerships, all interested participants had to attend a group orientation to schedule an eligibility appointment with a career specialist. Partnerships that did not offer information sessions or group orientations relied on one-on-one meetings or interviews to share this information with participants.

### 2. Eligibility requirements of partnerships

All 23 partnerships had application or other processes in place to determine whether participants met their eligibility requirements. This often included the criteria outlined in the FOA as well as added eligibility requirements applied by select partnerships. Four partnerships included in the virtual site visits used an initial intake form or eligibility check list during one-on-one conversations with participants to collect their basic information and ensure they met the partnership’s eligibility standards before enrolling them in America’s Promise services.

Partnerships had to ensure that prospective participants met the minimum age requirements. Although the FOA allowed grantees to serve participants older than age 16, at least five partnerships in the virtual site visits had a minimum age requirement of 18 (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a). However, at least one partnership allowed participants as young as 17 to engage in America’s Promise services. Partnerships also had to confirm that participants were unemployed, underemployed, or incumbent workers. Although the FOA defined each of these groups, it did not set strict income thresholds or processes that partnerships should use when determining whether a participant was underemployed, so partnerships were able to establish their own. One partnership noted this as a benefit of the America’s Promise grant because it could serve some people who were just above the income limits for other programs such as SNAP E&T but would still struggle to pay for training on their own. Three partnerships used or adapted WIOA Title I eligibility standards to determine participant eligibility for America’s Promise. This ensured they collected the information DOL requires for programs like America’s Promise and allowed them to match participants with appropriate funding sources. For example, one partnership applied WIOA Title I eligibility criteria so that it could leverage WIOA training funds to support enrollment in America’s Promise services; doing so enabled it to maximize the number of people it could enroll.

Beyond the standardized eligibility criteria specified by DOL, partnerships also imposed their own eligibility criteria:

- **Minimum level of educational attainment.** Most partnerships set minimum education requirements for America’s Promise participants. According to the grantee survey, 14 partnerships specified that participants had to have at least a high school diploma or GED to participate in America’s Promise services. Although secondary education was not an allowable activity under the grant, the FOA did not specify any minimum education requirements for participants. It did, however, encourage partnerships to work with K–12 and K–16 organizations to “bridge secondary and post-secondary pathways” (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a). During the site visits, at least two partnerships noted that the minimum education requirements set by the partnership considered or aligned with those of industry employers. For example, an education provider from one partnership explained that its CNA to licensed practical nurse (LPN) pathway required participants to have a high school diploma or GED because health care employers require applicants to have those minimum education requirements. Another advanced manufacturing–focused partnership did not require a high school diploma, but case managers made it clear to participants that employers may require one as a prerequisite to employment.



- **Residency requirements.** According to data from the virtual site visits, at least seven grantees also had residency requirements in which only people from certain zip codes, cities, or counties were eligible for America’s Promise services. Partnerships used this requirement to align with WIOA regions, ensure participants resided in the partnership’s target region, or to recruit participants from disadvantaged populations. For example, one partnership aimed to serve participants residing in certain zip codes within a low-income and historically underserved community that is a designated Promise Zone.<sup>10</sup> Another partnership reflected on its need for a strict residency requirement after improperly enrolling participants who lived more than four hours away from their training, a mistake it described as a “disservice” to potential participants living in the grant’s regional service area.
- **Income thresholds.** During the virtual site visits, five partnerships reported income thresholds that prospective participants had to meet to enroll in America’s Promise services. Two partnerships used income as a measure of participants’ employment status, requiring that eligible participants have either no income or make less than a certain amount to be classified as unemployed or underemployed, respectively. One site initially required that all participants have an income below the federal poverty line to participate; it later increased the income threshold because it was too restrictive and hindered recruitment.
- **Minimum skill levels and aptitudes.** Based on the responses to the grantee survey, 16 partnerships required participants to take a basic skills or academic assessment and achieve a minimum score before enrolling. Specific assessments partnerships mentioned during the virtual site visits include the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), ACCUPLACER test, WorkKeys, and CASAS. During the site visits, four partnerships described a process for referring applicants to alternative programs that better suited their needs if they did not pass the assessments required for America’s Promise. For example, one site said that it referred participants to other training programs that did not require the TABE while another referred interested individuals to English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs. Despite this, three partnerships suggested that low scores on these types of academic and skills assessments disqualified many interested people who were otherwise eligible to participate.

### 3. Additional assessments partnerships used

As discussed above, 16 partnerships required prospective participants to complete an assessment to ensure they were well-qualified for the education and training programs they wanted to pursue. In addition to the basic skills and academic assessments, some partnerships used other types of assessments during the screening process to ensure participants had the prerequisite skills and met the requirements necessary to pursue employment within a particular industry:

- **Drug tests.** Two partnerships conducted either formal or informal drug screenings because employers in the target industry required clean drug tests when offering employment.
- **English language assessments.** At least one partnership administered a language assessment to ensure participants’ English language skills were strong enough to enroll in their CNA, LPN, or registered nurse (RN) programs because of the complicated medical terminology the training and profession requires.

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<sup>10</sup> Promise Zones are high-poverty communities where the federal government partners with local leaders to increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities, leverage private investment, reduce violent crime, enhance public health, and address other priorities identified by the community (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2021).

- **Technical assessments.** At least two IT-focused partnerships required participants to take prerequisite or preliminary technical assessments before their enrollment. For example, one site required people who were interested in cybersecurity or CompTIA (Computing Technology Industry Association) training to take an online class and submit their score. Another partnership's IT boot camp provider administered its own technical assessments unique to each boot camp offering.

#### 4. Participant interviews

On the grantee survey, 20 of the 23 grantees reported conducting an intake interview when screening potential participants. During the virtual site visits, at least ten partnerships described the interview process and the purpose of the interviews in greater detail. According to most of these partnerships, the interviews involved participants meeting one-on-one with a case manager or career coach to discuss their interests in the career pathway and their reasons for enrolling in the program.

Participant interviews were described as occurring at different points in the screening process based on their intended purpose. At least four partnerships used interviews as a strategy early in the screening process to share detailed information about program, assess prospective participants' interest, and identify potential barriers they might face. One partner explained how, through these interviews, case managers ensured that future participants understood they were committing to a 14-week class that met every day and ensured that they had a reliable means of transportation to and from the training location before proceeding with the screening and enrollment process.

For at least six partnerships, interviews occurred later in the screening process to select participants for enrollment after they had verified their eligibility and completed other required steps. Employers or instructors joined in participant interviews in at least three of these partnerships. These six partnerships tended to describe the interview process as a way to determine whether the candidate was a "good fit" for the program and assess their level of commitment and passion for their chosen career pathway. A respondent from one partnership noted that the interview assessed whether applicants "will be a durable student" who makes it to the end of the program.



#### Changes to screening and enrollment processes caused by COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic led many partnerships to revise their screening and enrollment processes. Of the 18 partnerships in the virtual site visits, five grant managers indicated that they briefly paused new enrollments during the early months of the pandemic and focused on modifying strategies to best serve existing participants. For example, one site needed to develop virtual components of its programming before it could enroll new cohorts. Many partnerships shifted from in-person information sessions or interviews to online meeting platforms (such as Zoom, WebEx, and Google Meet), and others began using recorded videos to describe America's Promise grantee service offerings and eligibility criteria to potential applicants. Several partnerships adjusted their standard processes and procedures for assessing eligibility and enrolling. For example, frontline staff from one partnership replaced a formal assessment with an essay requirement because the formal assessment had to be administered in person. Frontline staff from five partnerships struggled with the logistical challenges that hard-copy enrollment paperwork posed. Two met with participants in outdoor locations such as gas stations and parking lots to complete paperwork, and the other three used programs such as DocuSign to complete paperwork remotely. ▲

Source: Bellotti et al. (2021).

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### D. Characteristics of population served through America’s Promise

According to the WIPS data, in program years 2017 through Q2 2021 across all partnerships, America’s Promise grants enrolled a total of 25,440 participants: 13,472 unemployed workers, 9,402 underemployed workers, and 2,566 incumbent workers. The 23 partnerships served a range of 244 to 5,363 total participants across the three work status categories: 111 to 3,411 unemployed workers, 79 to 1,952 underemployed workers, and 3 to 299 incumbent workers. On the grantee survey, partnerships indicated that their target for overall enrollment ranged from 400 to 1,366 participants. The targeted numbers for enrollment by work status are: zero to 964 unemployed workers, zero to 803 underemployed workers, and zero to 344 incumbent workers. Roughly 62 percent of America’s Promise partnerships met their target enrollment (13 of the 21 grantees that indicated target enrollment on the grantee survey).

Table V.1 lists the sample characteristics of participants at program entrance from program years 2017 to Q2 2021. Regarding the specific populations of interest to partnerships, 49.8 percent of America’s Promise participants identified as female and 52.3 percent were from racial minority groups (Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; or other race, non-Hispanic). Another 5.0 percent of participants were veterans. Reflecting on the eligibility criteria discussed above, only 8.1 percent of participants were age 19 or younger. Approximately half of participants served had at least some postsecondary education (49.3 percent), 46.9 percent had a high school diploma or GED, and 3.7 percent did not have any degree.

**Table V.1. Sample characteristics at program entrance, program years 2017–Q2 2021**

Characteristic	Value (percentage if not otherwise specified)
Sample size (number of participants)	25,440
<b>Age (years)</b>	33.2
19 or younger	8.1
20–24	21.5
25–29	18.5
30–39	24.5
40–49	14.3
50–59	10.0
60–69	2.7
70 or older	0.2
Female	49.8
<b>Race and ethnicity</b>	
Hispanic	15.0
White, non-Hispanic	47.7
Black, non-Hispanic	28.4
Other race, non-Hispanic	8.9
<b>Education level</b>	
No high school diploma or GED certificate	3.7
High school diploma or GED certificate	46.9
Some postsecondary education	30.1
Bachelor’s degree or more	19.2

Characteristic	Value (percentage if not otherwise specified)
Employed at program entry	47.0
Eligible veteran	5.0
Justice system involvement	6.0
English learner	6.7
Disability	4.3

Source: WIPS data, N = 25,440 participants (across 23 grantees).

### E. Reported recruitment and enrollment challenges

On the grantee survey, nearly half of the partnerships (10 grantees) reported difficulty recruiting participants. During the virtual site visits, partnerships highlighted the following areas of challenge in recruitment and enrollment that appeared to influence the types and number of people they were able to serve through America’s Promise:

- Reaching the underrepresented populations originally sought for America’s Promise services.** Five partnerships struggled to recruit women or people of color for education and training in particular industries. Two partnerships had difficulty attracting women to careers in advanced manufacturing, noting that men tended to be more interested in shipbuilding and welding occupations. Another three partnerships noted challenges in recruiting women or people of color for IT occupations, with one attributing its limited success to the fact that these groups did not believe they would succeed in the IT field.
- Struggles to recruit and serve low-income populations possibly because partnerships were unable to provide the necessary employment supports.** Two partnerships reported that, despite their efforts, they struggled to adequately provide supportive services to participants facing multiple barriers, namely transportation, child care, housing instability, justice involvement, and substance use disorders. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenge of child care for many participants.
- Recruiting participants remained a challenge even after implementing additional eligibility criteria to better align with partnerships’ intended populations or their partners’ requirements.** Respondents from three partnerships suggested that the assessments or high school diploma requirements that education providers or local employers established disqualified many people who lacked the basic reading or math skills necessary for the H-1B industries and occupations. Two other grantees set strict income thresholds in their effort to serve underemployed people or those with low incomes, which greatly limited their pool of potential participants. An employer partner from one of these partnerships noted that the tight labor market in the region meant that very few participants met the income requirements the partnership had set forth.
- Service areas with low unemployment rates.** At least two partnerships stated that when the economy is strong, employers are willing to hire people with less experience and they struggle to recruit for training programs. One stated, “With the economy booming, people just want to work and not get training, but we are trying to get people [individuals and employers] to look long term.”
- Training programs in geographically isolated areas.** Four partnerships struggled to fill training programs that were not easily accessible by public transportation. Three of these partnerships were in rural areas and one in an urban area. Although participants were eligible for transportation assistance, potential participants were sometimes discouraged by the commute distance or commute time.

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## VI. Case Management Services

Following the enrollment process, the next step in the America’s Promise training programs was to connect participants with case management and career coaching services. For the purposes of this chapter, the term case management will broadly cover all individualized services that participants received, either supportive services they received during their training or services to prepare them for employment following their training, such as career coaching.

### A. Approaches to providing case management

Partnerships used different approaches to staffing case manager roles to serve America’s Promise participants (see Chapter IV), but case management was a common component across most partnerships. According to the grantee survey, 19 of the 23 partnerships had at least one staff member who provided case management services, and 17 partnerships had at least one employee whose sole responsibility was to provide individualized case management services. However, some partnerships offered case management services without a designated case manager. Our virtual site visits showed that of the remaining four partnerships that did not have a designated case manager on staff, three partnerships shared case management duties among multiple staff members and still delivered individualized case management services. The remaining partnership was unable to provide case management services due to a change in state policy that redirected resources from the grantee location, ultimately eliminating the full-time employee position that would have been dedicated to case management.

#### 1. Case management approaches

America’s Promise partnerships carried out case management services using one of two approaches: centralized case management or decentralized case management, as identified through virtual site visit interviews. This distinction was made based on the partners’ roles within the partnerships and the number of partners providing case management to participants. Figure VI.1 describes each of these approaches along with key features of each as implemented by select partnerships. Among respondents of the virtual site visits, 10 partnerships used a centralized approach to case management and seven used a decentralized approach.



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### What is case management and career coaching?

Case management is one-on-one assistance or individual counseling focused on providing supports and information to assist people with immediate and long-term goal achievement. Career coaching is one-on-one assistance or individual counseling catered to pursuing job placement (Deutsch et al. 2021). In practice, case management within the America’s Promise partnerships was reported to vary in scope, but still adhered to these basic definitions.



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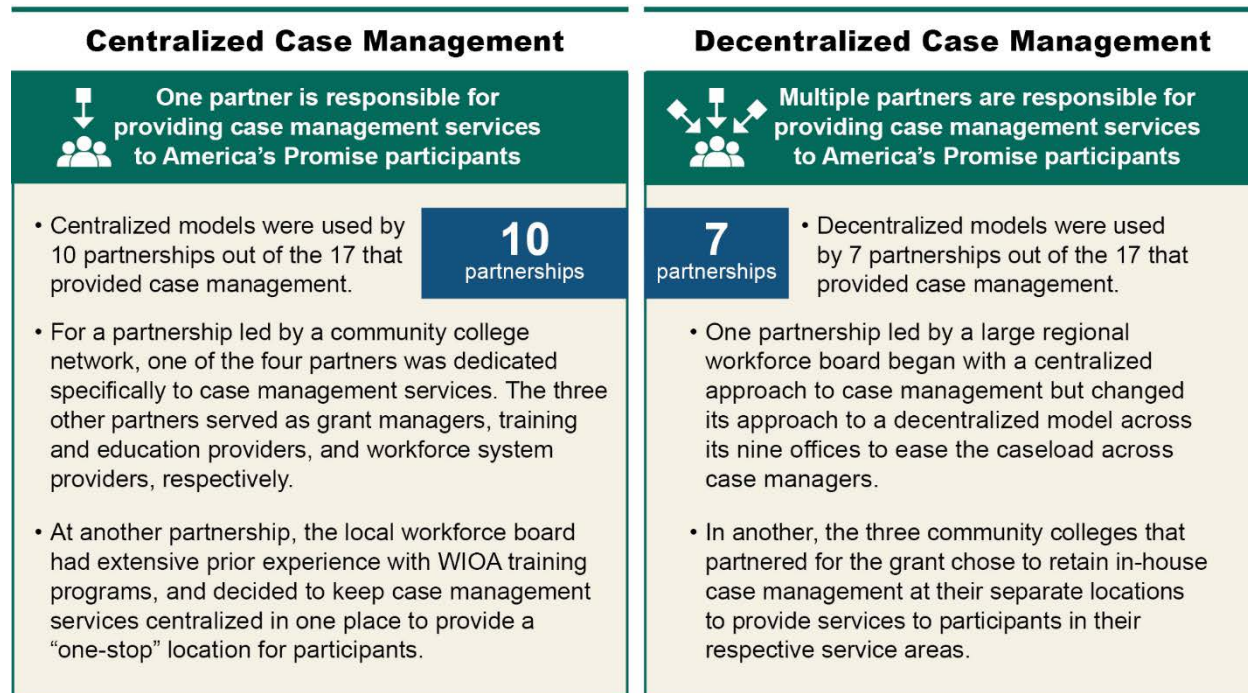
### Job titles for case managers across partnerships

Partnerships used different terms to describe the job title, referring to staff with case manager duties as a career coach, job counselor, workforce navigator, or success coach. ▲

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 17).

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**Figure VI.1. Case management approaches among America’s Promise partnerships**



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 17).

Note: One partnership included in the virtual site visits was unable to provide case management services due to a change in state policy that redirected resources from the grantee and eliminated the full-time employee position that would have been dedicated to case management.

A partnership’s approach to case management was described as depending on a range of factors, including size of the partnership’s service region, partners’ experience providing case management, and the number of partners and their relative capacity for managing different roles in the grant. Although it may appear that grants serving multiple states would be more likely to employ a decentralized case management approach based on the size of their region, only three of the six partnerships that served multiple states used a decentralized case management approach. Five of the seven partnerships that had a partner with experience in workforce development programs (such as WIOA and Wagner-Peyser) used a centralized case management approach, which might suggest this experience informed their case management approach.

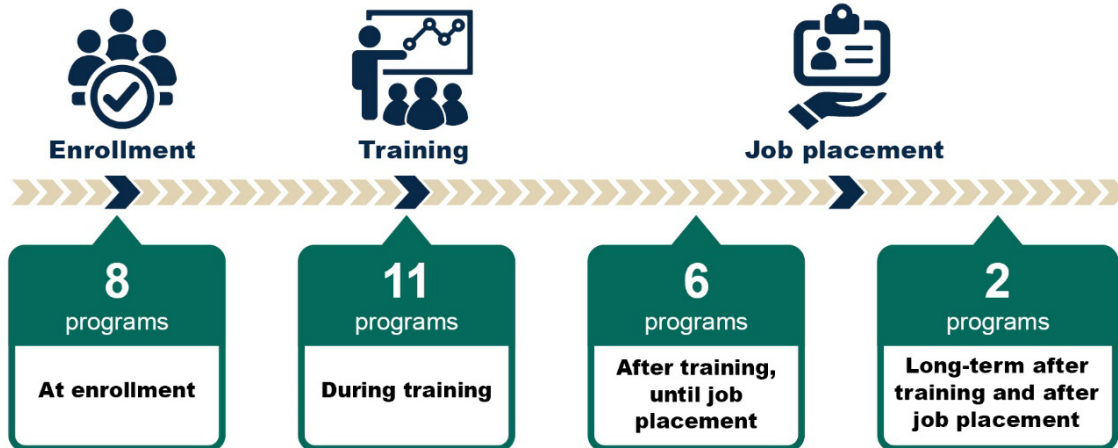
## 2. Case management services offered

Case managers provided individualized support to America’s Promise training participants as they progressed through the screening and enrollment processes. Common case management services, as described during virtual site visits, included individual employment plans, resume writing and review, and interview preparation. Some partnerships also conducted virtual job fairs, connected participants to employers, and assisted participants with job applications.

Although the case management services offered were similar across partnerships, differences existed in the timing of when they were offered and available to participants (see Figure VI.2).

- **At enrollment.** At eight of the partnerships visited, case management services started at enrollment. Among these partnerships, case managers met with participants as they entered the program and helped determine eligibility and training placement.
- **During training.** Case management services were most frequently offered to participants during training, as 11 of the 23 America’s Promise partnerships noted. For these partnerships, case managers ensured that participants had necessary supports to complete training, including tracking progress toward individual employment plans.
- **After training.** Only six partnerships offered case management services beyond the duration of the America’s Promise training and throughout employment searches. These services included employer outreach, interview and application preparation, and ongoing employment preparation in anticipation of job placement. For example, one partnership led by a local workforce board required case managers to contact participants weekly after training completion until the participants found employment; this enabled the partnership to capture employment outcomes needed for performance reporting purposes.
- **Long-term, after training and job placement.** Long-term case management that extended beyond job placement was infrequent, with only two partnerships communicating with participants after job placement. One of these partnerships, led by several community colleges, expected case managers to follow up with participants once per quarter for five quarters after their training ended to keep track of participant outcomes.

Figure VI.2. Number of grantees offering case management at various points in service delivery



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 17).

Note: The counts in this figure are not mutually exclusive. Partnerships may be counted twice if they offered case management at multiple points throughout service delivery.

### 3. Communication with participants

As described in virtual site visit interviews, case managers communicated with participants before, during, or after their training to determine their need for supportive services, assess training progress and difficulties with training material, and to help participants prepare for job placement. However, as discussed during interviews, partnerships' communication approaches varied, particularly the frequency with which case managers contacted their participants.

**“Constant and transparent communication with participants was a promising practice for the delivery of case management services.”**

— Career coach at partner organization

Case managers, along with other partnership staff, communicated with participants in a variety of ways to ease communication barriers, including by phone, text messaging, email, or videoconferencing (such as Zoom), in addition to in-person meetings. During the virtual site visits, respondents from nine of the partnerships described their approach to communicating with participants. Five used multiple means of communication, and four partnerships each noted that they communicated with participants through text messaging, email, phone, or in-person meetings. Among the 18 partnerships that participated in the virtual site visits, three offered Zoom or other videoconferencing to deliver case management services, and four provided job placement services virtually, such as posting documents and recordings of job readiness workshops to partnership websites.

**Although most partnerships did not mention expectations about communication frequency during the virtual site visits, four partnerships expected their case managers to communicate with participants weekly, and another four partnerships mentioned monthly communication.** Three partnerships said their case managers only communicated with participants a handful of times during the initial training process and did not maintain communication afterwards. Three partnerships explicitly mentioned changing their methods of communication because of COVID-19, and eight partnerships mentioned other methods of communication besides in-person meetings that allowed for a transition during the pandemic.



#### **Providing case management services during COVID-19**

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic during the America's Promise grants was reported to influence partnerships' ability to deliver case management services and keep participants involved in training. Most workforce development programs have previously relied heavily on in-person contact, career coaching, and OJT as part of their program design. Programs were forced to quickly adapt—without additional resources—to delivering services virtually or otherwise altering their programs to fit public health guidelines and the changing needs of program participants. Although the COVID-19 pandemic likely presented challenges to all partnerships, only six partnerships explicitly mentioned switching to virtual service delivery during the pandemic. As mentioned above, these changes mostly involved new means of communication to stay in contact with participants, including videoconference calls and checking in with participants through emails, phone calls, and text messages. One partnership described how participants were more proactive in contacting case managers due to the switch to virtual case management services. ▲

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 17) and Bellotti et al. (2021).

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## B. Placing participants in training offerings and developing career plans

After making an eligibility determination for participants seeking to join a training program, partnerships enrolled participants in the program and placed them in training (see Figure V.I). Practices around enrollment, training placement, and career plan development appeared to vary among partnerships, as well as the involvement of case managers in each phase of the process.

**Participants' level of involvement in choosing their own training or career pathway appeared to be a difference in grant design and planning among partnerships.** According to information gathered during the virtual site visits, the case managers commonly consulted with participants about their training options. This was typically done through creating career plans (or individual employment plans, as some partnerships called them), which consisted of documenting the participant's goals for training, establishing participant agreements or commitments to meet training requirements, and detailing jobs that participants wanted to pursue upon training completion. Four partnerships provided more individual autonomy to participants and allowed them to determine their own training path without any involvement from a case manager, career coach, or other program staff.

After enrolling participants and developing career plans, case managers typically assisted participants as they began their training programs. As noted above, participants at four partnerships chose their training programs as part of the screening and enrollment process, but nine partnerships relied on case managers to help place participants in trainings. Case managers did this through one-on-one meetings or skills assessments that would inform their decision on which training programs would best suit each participant. Of the partnerships visited, nine relied on case managers to match participants with the best available training offering. Chapter VII further details the education and training offerings available to participants through America's Promise funding.

## C. Reported challenges providing case management and career coaching

Although partnerships identified a range of challenges related to implementing education and training services and helping participants find employment (detailed further in Chapters VII and VIII), only a few partnerships in the virtual site visits identified specific case management issues. These challenges varied across partnerships, but issues of communication, resources, and grant planning were described as potential challenges to delivering successful case management services:

- **Staying in contact with participants.** Three partnerships cited this challenge. The case managers at one partner location mentioned that when they were able to maintain weekly communication with participants, it was a “strong suit” of the program but participants were often not responsive.
- **Allocating resources to support case manager staffing.** Two partnerships cited this challenge. One partnership led by a workforce board noted that changes to the economic development area and state policies related to the provision of WIOA Title I services shifted the grantee's available resources, ultimately resulting in a discontinuation of case management services. This change in resource allocation from the state led to staff shortages, and current staff did not have the available time to cover case management needs. As mentioned, a partnership led by a large workforce board had to change its case management approach because it had too few case managers. At this partnership, only two case managers handled the caseload responsibilities for nine partner locations, ultimately causing the case managers to feel overwhelmed by the work.

- **Balancing grant planning and those responsible for providing these services.** For example, at one partnership led by a local workforce board, the grant partners decided that a local community college should provide case management services, despite the workforce board having extensive experience with case management through WIOA. Staff from another training partner felt that workforce development personnel who had previously worked with WIOA grants at the municipal level should have provided case management services, rather than less experienced community college staff.

“The grant is doing so much important work, not only for getting good quality people into some of these industries, but just seeing the life-changing events that can happen with these people that come in, not only to get them a good job, but also to give them a good sense of self-worth.”

— Case manager at partner organization

#### D. Supportive services and common supportive services needs

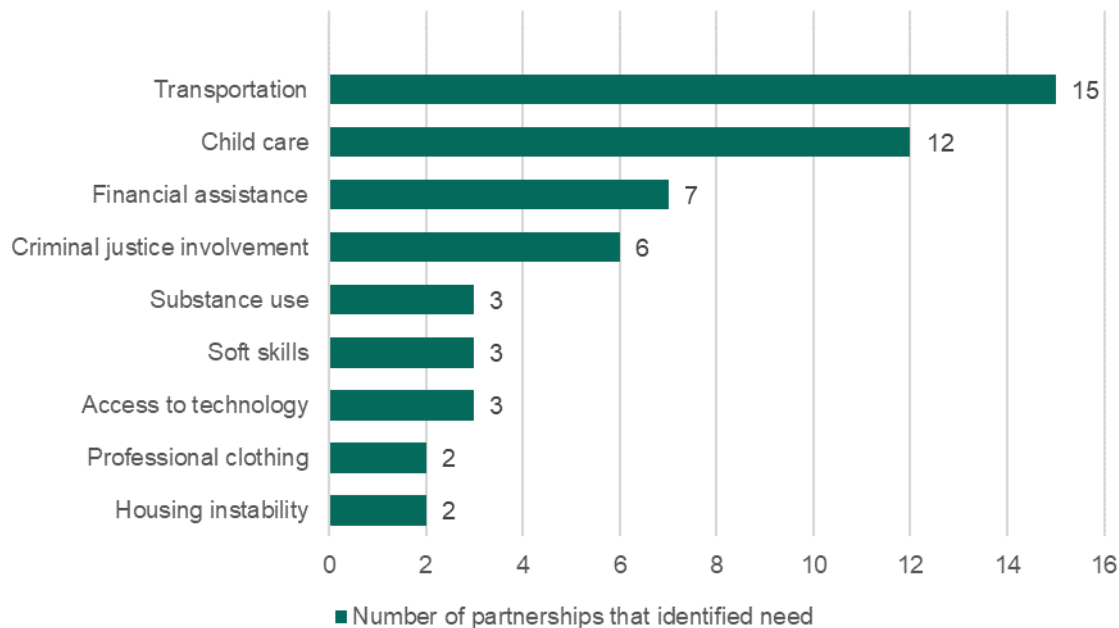
A key component of case management in the America’s Promise partnerships was providing supportive services to participants during and after their training. As outlined in the FOA, grantees could use up to 10 percent of grant funds for supportive services (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a). Of the 18 partnerships in the virtual site visits, 17 connected participants to supportive services. Among those, 14 partnerships provided supportive services directly to participants and three referred participants to community organizations that could connect them with supportive services. One manufacturing-focused partnership did not connect participants to supportive services; however, it followed the Earn and Learn model of job training, in which participants earned a wage while in training. As a result, few participants requested supportive services, and the partnership shifted funding for supportive services to additional trainings.

##### 1. Participants’ supportive services needs

The participants’ needs for supportive services depended on the context in which each partnership operated and on participants’ unique needs, according to virtual site visit respondents. Despite the differences across partnerships and participants, three supportive services needs stood out, apart from COVID-19 concerns: transportation, child care, and financial assistance. Participants’ supportive needs, as reported during the virtual site visits, are represented in Figure VI.3.

Overall, the frequency with which partnerships mentioned these needs generally were observed not to differ by industry, although some respondents noted that certain industries faced greater challenges overcoming these barriers. For example, one partnership staff person noted that child care was particularly challenging for those going into the health care industry, in that “it’s a 24-hour, 7 days a week job.” Child care was reported to be a major issue within the advanced manufacturing industry due to the shift schedules, particularly the second- and third-shift jobs when it is difficult to find child care. Similarly, concerns about COVID-19 health risks were noted for employment in health care and advanced manufacturing. As one grant administrator said, “We’d had people who may have—or someone in their household has—a health condition say, ‘We’re concerned about whether it’s a safe environment for me to go into.’”

**Figure VI.3. Participant barriers to and needs for supportive services**



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).






## 2. Supportive services offerings

Partnerships attempted to align their supportive services offerings to address participants' needs. Partnerships most often provided transportation support, training materials, and child care assistance to participants, according to grantee survey responses. Partnerships in the virtual site visits indicated that they offered housing support and food assistance to participants as well. Figure VI.4 describes the most common types of assistance partnerships offered participants and their approaches to doing so.

In addition to these common supportive services, partnerships offered other services to address the following barriers:

- **Criminal justice involvement.** Staff members at two partnerships worked with participants with justice involvement to help them become more comfortable talking with employers about their criminal justice history. They also connected them to a legal aid program to see if they could get their records expunged.
- **Substance use and homelessness.** Staff members at one partnership referred participants experiencing these circumstances to other programs that could assist with these services.
- **Assuaging COVID-19 concerns.** Partnership staff spoke with employers about their policies to maintain worker safety, and then communicated that information to participants.
- **Access to computer technology/Internet.** Staff members from three partnerships provided laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots to participants.

Figure VI.4. Common supportive services available across America’s Promise partnerships

Type of service	Number of partnerships offering	Description
 <b>Transportation support</b>	<b>19</b> of 23	This assistance commonly included pre-paid gas cards, public transit passes, and emergency funds for vehicle repairs. One partnership even described coordinating carpools between participants and working with Uber to offer participant rides to a training site that was not on a bus route.
 <b>Training materials</b>	<b>16</b> of 23	These materials often included books, work and safety equipment, and uniforms or other work-appropriate clothing. Two partnerships focusing on the advanced manufacturing industry provided participants with safety goggles, gloves, welding kits, and steel-toe boots. One partnership focusing on the health care industry provided scrubs, stethoscopes, and textbooks to participants.
 <b>Child care support</b>	<b>10</b> of 23	Child care assistance often took the form of funds or vouchers to help participants cover the cost of child care or through in-kind partnerships with child care providers.
 <b>Housing support</b>	<b>6</b> of 18	Partnerships described forgoing a wage to participate in trainings as a significant challenge for participants. As an effort to alleviate this challenge, six partnerships indicated during the site visits that they offered rent and utility payment assistance to participants. One partnership noted it never gave cash directly to participants for cost-of-living expenses; rather, it paid the leasing or utility company directly.
 <b>Food assistance</b>	<b>3</b> of 18	To further assist participants throughout the program, three partnerships offered food assistance to participants in the form of financial support or food pantry access.

Source: Grantee survey (N = 23) and virtual site visits (N = 18).

### 3. Gaps in supportive services offerings

Although America’s Promise partnerships connected participants to a wide range of supportive services to help them complete their training, partnerships in the virtual site visits identified some gaps in supportive services offerings through the grant:

- Additional child care assistance.** Six partnerships, three of which offered some form of child care assistance, said that additional funding through the grant for child care support would benefit participants. In addition to the cost of child care, the limited availability of child care providers posed a challenge to participants. Two partnerships that provided financial support for child

**“The financial stuff can be tough. It affects more than just yourself; your wife and kids are broke. A little more attention to ease that part of it would be helpful.”**

— America’s Promise participant

care noted that this type of support remained a problem due to a shortage of child care providers in the grant regions.

- **Financial subsidies during training.** Three partnerships indicated that stipends would have been a beneficial supportive service for participants, noting that many people are unable to participate in trainings because they cannot afford to forgo a salary for an extended period.
- **Additional transportation assistance.** Although most partnerships (19 of 23) provided transportation support to participants, four partnerships identified funding for transportation as a remaining supportive services gap given that transportation represents one of the largest barriers to accessing training opportunities.

In addition to specific supportive services offerings, several partnerships identified a more general need for additional supportive services funds as part of the grant. Three partnerships in the virtual site visits said that the lack of funding for supportive services was a weakness of the grant. One specifically stated that economically disadvantaged people do not come to its trainings because they know the program does not provide the income support or related resources to assist them throughout training. Another partnership noted that the America's Promise supportive services policy was more restrictive than the supportive services policies for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and WIOA programs.



### Addressing participants' supportive services needs during COVID-19

New needs among participants quickly emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the transition to virtual services highlighted the digital divide. Access to technology and reliable Internet connections, as well as a technology knowledge gap, were reported to pose challenges in many areas. To help fill this technology gap, three partnerships used available resources to provide laptops and Internet access to participants. During the virtual site visits, five partnerships indicated that because of the pandemic's exacerbation of the digital divide, participants would have benefitted from receiving supportive services funding for technology, such as laptops, tablets, hotspots, and ethernet cables. Even when partnerships provided this technology to participants, they described the need for additional funding to help participants use the technology effectively. ▲

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18) and Bellotti et al. (2021).

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## VII. Providing Education and Training Services

The education and training services offered through America’s Promise were described by interview respondents as central to each partnership’s efforts to equip participants with the skills required to move into or progress along middle- to high-skilled careers within the target H-1B industries. Among the participants who completed training programs, 89 percent attained at least one credential. The most common credentials America’s Promise participants attained were occupational certificates (73 percent of all credentials awarded), followed by occupational licensures (11 percent), associate degrees (7 percent), and bachelor’s degrees (3 percent). Nearly 18 percent of participants received some other type of recognized diploma, degree, or certificate through the America’s Promise program (WIPS 2017- Q2 2021).

Grantees and their partners worked together to ensure their offerings and approaches to education aligned closely with regional employer needs and resulted in sector-specific certifications, credentials, or experience that supported job placement after training completion, as described in Chapter III. Although the specifics of the education and training services varied depending on the partnerships’ target industry and the requirements of industry employers, all partnerships used the America’s Promise grants to create or enhance available offerings and provide tuition assistance to strengthen the pipeline of skilled workers in their regions.

### A. Selection, development, and content of America’s Promise offerings

Within the eligible H-1B industries, partnerships provided different types of education and training that aligned with certain skill sets or industry occupations. As described in Chapter III, partnerships typically selected education and training programs based on the needs of the local labor market, regional employers, and employer partners. Figure VII.1 presents the most common types of certifications and training programs offered through America’s Promise partnerships, as mentioned during the virtual site visits, within each of the three industries of focus.

Although most partnerships (16 of 23) implemented new programs or partnerships specifically for the America’s Promise grant, they were also experienced in providing education and training services (as described in Chapters II and III).




#### 1. Variations within partnerships

As described through virtual site visits, the types of education and training programs available to America’s Promise participants sometimes varied within partnerships based on the following:

- **Differences across multiple providers.** The available programs were described as varying depending on which provider was delivering the education and training services. This was often the case when multiple partners or industries were involved because the numerous education providers were responsible for overseeing and implementing their own offerings. One grantee that served multiple states and focuses on four America’s Promise industries explained that the education and training services vary within the partnership because so many providers are involved, including different types of institutions of higher education and for-profit providers.

- **Affiliated requirements.** The education and training offerings could also look different across providers if the requirements affiliated with certain certifications and credentials varied within the partnership region. For example, if the number of required classroom hours or OJT hours for licensure differed across state lines, then OJT plans also differed. Similarly, within the health care industry, licensing requirements varied by state, which could create training differences within partnerships.

Figure VII.1. Common education and training programs offered, by industry

 <b>Advanced manufacturing</b>	 <b>Health care</b>	 <b>Information technology</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certified production technician</li> <li>• Quality assurance inspector</li> <li>• Logistics technician</li> <li>• Machinist</li> <li>• Industrial machinery mechanic</li> <li>• Instrument and electrical technician</li> <li>• Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machining</li> <li>• Welding</li> <li>• Ship fitting</li> <li>• Pipe fitting</li> <li>• Medical device packaging</li> <li>• Medical device finishing</li> <li>• Aviation manufacturing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certified nursing assistant (CNA)</li> <li>• Licensed practical nurse (LPN)</li> <li>• Registered nurse (RN)</li> <li>• CNA to LPN bridge</li> <li>• LPN to RN bridge</li> <li>• Home health aide</li> <li>• Medical assistant</li> <li>• Physical therapy assistant</li> <li>• Respiratory care assistant</li> <li>• Pharmacy technician</li> <li>• Phlebotomy technician</li> <li>• Emergency medical technician</li> <li>• Medical technologist</li> <li>• Clinical technologist</li> <li>• Laboratory technologist</li> <li>• Radiology technologist</li> <li>• Respiratory therapist</li> <li>• Behavioral health specialist</li> <li>• Peer support specialist</li> <li>• Medical records and coding</li> <li>• Medical billing</li> <li>• Medical equipment repair</li> <li>• Massage therapy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help desk technician</li> <li>• Computer systems analyst</li> <li>• Software developer</li> <li>• Computer programmer</li> <li>• Data science</li> <li>• Cisco certification</li> <li>• VMware certification</li> <li>• Coding</li> <li>• Data analytics</li> <li>• A+ (plus) certification</li> <li>• Net+ (plus) certification</li> <li>• Security+ (plus) certification</li> <li>• Cybersecurity</li> <li>• Computer networking</li> <li>• Internet and information technology</li> <li>• Multimedia design</li> <li>• Full stack web development</li> </ul>

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).

Note: This and subsequent figures in this chapter do not highlight the financial services or educational services industries because so few partnerships focused on them; however, partnerships in the site visits mentioned that the primary offerings in the financial services industry included education and training to become a financial analyst or personal financial advisor



## 2. Credential attainment and support

Most of the education and training services offered through America’s Promise resulted in an industry-recognized certificate, credential, or credits toward a degree within these programs. Twenty-two of the 23 grantees responding to the grantee survey offered preparation for a certification or licensing exam, and 20 grantees offered opportunities for stackable credentials that can be earned in a sequence over time as people advance their qualifications and progress along a career pathway. For example, at least two partnerships in the virtual site visits offered bridge programs for CNAs to become LPNs or for LPNs to become RNs within a health care career pathway.

**Notably, at least four partnerships in the virtual site visits offered both credit and non-credit education opportunities to participants across industries.**

Two education providers with a focus on the IT industry suggested that the lack of a formal industry credential following their boot camps did not prevent participants from finding a job upon completion. One provider even offered a 100 percent tuition refund if participants were not able to find a job in the field within six months of program completion.

“I am currently an LPN. Two years ago...I had been sitting and waiting for the night and weekend [RN] program to start at [education provider]. Fortunately, things just fell into place.... I was planning on paying out of pocket, then my advisor gave me the information about [the America’s Promise program]. I applied, I got in...it completely lifted a huge burden off me, and I’ve been running with them since. In two more classes, I’ll graduate with my RN, and I plan on going further into school.”

— America’s Promise participant

## 3. Duration of training

The education and training services offered through America’s Promise aimed to adequately address participants’ training needs within the target industries while balancing the often-pressing workforce needs of regional employers. The duration required to complete education and training varied across America’s Promise partnerships. According to the grantee survey, the training offered across partnerships would take an America’s Promise participant an average of six months to complete, assuming participants were engaged in training for 40

hours per week. The duration of training, across all strategies and partnerships, ranged from less than three months (reported by seven grantees) to 25 or more months (reported by one grantee).

**During the virtual site visits, partnerships described offering short-term or accelerated training that ranged in length from four weeks to six months.** Most accelerated programs required participants to make a full-time commitment in which they engaged in classroom-based or work-based learning components for up to 40 hours per week. Long-term, intensive training offerings were commonly offered on a per-semester basis with a certain number of classroom or working hours required each semester, depending on the program. The duration of incumbent worker training varied depending on the employer and the type of training. Figures VII.3–VII.5 describe several available offerings, including their durations, to show the range of education and training services across partnerships and industries.

“[Participant] took cybersecurity, and it took him a year. He was studying every day...he was taking it seriously, all those books. Then we got him an OJT and he finished his OJT, and he’s currently employed there.... To me, that’s what it’s all about.”

— Case manager at lead grantee organization

#### 4. Availability of alternatives

During the virtual site visits, when asked about alternatives to America’s Promise, only two partnerships indicated that there were no similar education and training offerings in their regions. These two partnerships explained how they intentionally avoid duplicative services by coordinating with other education and supportive services providers. For example, one IT-focused partnership explained that another similar education provider in the region referred people who had an aptitude for learning full-stack software to the America’s Promise boot camp offering. Although the other education provider also offered free technology training to adults, the topics of instruction did not overlap.

At least ten partnerships included in the virtual site visits had access to alternative funding and training through other grants and programs that existed in their region. Specifically, partnerships mentioned funding and service options provided through WIOA, SNAP E&T, TANF, HPOG, , and Ready to Work grants. Partnerships referred participants to other training funding or programs, when possible, to combine resources and supplement what was available through America’s Promise. Importantly, at least six of the 18 partnerships in the virtual site visits strategically made referrals to these and other programs to leverage as much funding and support for America’s Promise participants as possible. Partnerships also made referrals to these and other alternatives when interested people did not qualify for America’s Promise but were potentially eligible for other types of funding streams or programs. Three partnerships suggested that other funding opportunities available in their region could cover additional costs that the America’s Promise grant could not or had a higher dollar limit available for supportive services, including housing or income replacement through stipends, which made them more appealing to participants.

“I enrolled in the UI/UX training. I did a client project with four other students and also got a paid internship. I went to another program before [America’s Promise], but they lead you to the wolves and I didn’t get the services I got with [America’s Promise]. This was better organized than other training. I don’t know what I would have done without it.”

— America’s Promise participant

Despite this, respondents in the virtual site visits described ways the America’s Promise partnerships provided funding or services that set them apart from any available alternatives in their regions:

- **Associated costs and funding for education and training.** Six partnerships discussed competitors in the region that offer the same or similar options but noted that they are cost-prohibitive for participants because they are extremely costly and not grant-funded. This was particularly common in the IT industry, as several partnerships mentioned costly boot camps and other accelerated learning opportunities. For example, one partnership mentioned how other similar IT programs in its region might charge very little up front but take a portion of the participant’s salary after training.
- **Less restrictive than other funding streams.** Four partnerships noted how America’s Promise funding was less restrictive than other alternatives to funding education and training, which allowed them to serve people who did not qualify for other programs or cover the costs of trainings not supported by other funding streams. For example, one partnership discussed how the grant was unique from other funding because it allowed it to focus on middle- to high-skilled occupations.
- **Availability of other services beyond education and training.** According to six partnerships, alternative services options do not offer the other types of support available through the partnerships, namely case management, professional development, and job support and placement. One participant

contrasted her experience in an America's Promise education and training program with an alternative where "they lead you to the wolves" because they did not provide participants with the same level of supportive services during and after training. Only three partnerships had alternative providers in their region, such as nonprofits or training centers, that provided similar job placement and work experience supports.

- **Quality and accessibility of services.** During the site visits, partnerships discussed how the grants created new and unique offerings or improved the quality or accessibility of education and training services in ways that set them apart from alternative services in the region. Respondents from two partnerships suggested that the education and training offerings available through America's Promise were more competitive and aligned with industry needs when compared to alternatives in the region. Notably, both of these partners used the grant to start up new IT education and training offerings in their regions. Three partnerships explained how services were more accessible than similar alternatives because of America's Promise, noting that participants would have to travel far distances or to multiple places to receive services equivalent to those offered through the partnerships. Two partnerships noted how the America's Promise grant facilitated strong partnerships between staff across partner organizations, promoting seamless service delivery.

### B. Approaches to providing education and training services

As discussed in Chapter I, partnerships could implement the following three strategies to educate and train participants for occupations within select H-1B industries: (1) short-term or accelerated, (2) long-term intensive, and (3) training to upskill incumbent workers (see Figure I.2). Based on the results of the grantee survey, all 23 partnerships provided some form of short-term or accelerated training to participants; 18 provided long-term, intensive training; and 20 provided training to upskill incumbent workers.

Most partnerships focused on advanced manufacturing or health care, and these two industries tend to require hands-on learning because the associated occupations require skills that cannot be learned through a curriculum in a traditional classroom setting. Hands-on learning in either a classroom or on-the-job setting was key to most education and training programs offered through America's Promise, as described by site visit respondents. Within each strategy, partnerships used classroom-based training, work-based learning, or a combination of both approaches to serve participants and prepare them for middle- to high-skilled industry jobs and occupations (Figure VII.2).

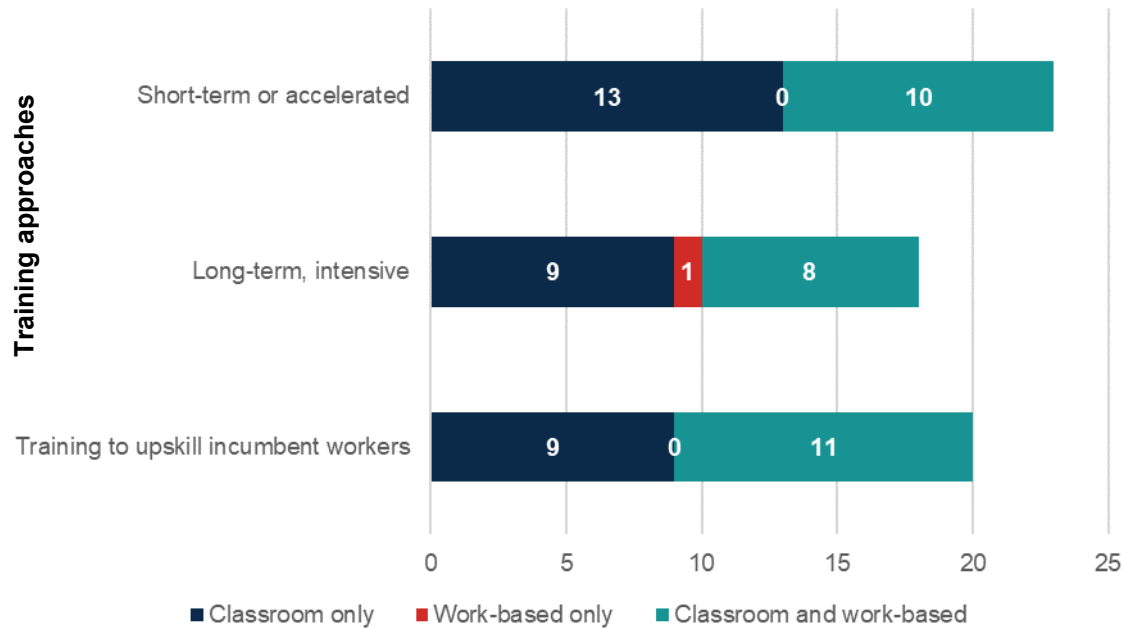
Classroom training was the most common approach America's Promise partnerships used. According to the WIPS data, the vast majority of participants (75 percent) who received training did so in a classroom setting, as opposed to contextualized learning<sup>11</sup> (1 percent), distance learning (7 percent), or OJT (5 percent).<sup>12</sup> Among those who received training, the most common training category was occupational skills training (67 percent), which is more than double the participation in upskilling training (23 percent).

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<sup>11</sup> Contextualized learning refers to an approach that "emphasizes problem solving; recognizes teaching and learning need to occur in multiple contexts; assists students in learning how to monitor their learning and thereby become self-regulated learners; anchors teaching in the diverse life context of students; encourages students to learn from each other; and employer authentic assessment" (Imel, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Setting of training was not reported for 18% of America's Promise program participants. Furthermore, grantees may report multiple settings to describe a participant's training.

Figure VII.2. Strategies and approaches to education and training implemented by partnerships






Source: Grantee survey (N = 23).

### 1. Classroom training

All 23 partnerships, regardless of target industry, provided some form of classroom training for America’s Promise. The partnerships described offering classroom training through courses, boot camps, or academies. Figure VII.3 describes select examples of the types of classroom training America’s Promise partnerships offered, as described during the virtual site visits. Classroom training commonly preceded or occurred alongside work-based learning components. At least four IT- or advanced manufacturing-focused partnerships also discussed having industry-related equipment for classroom training in which participants received hands-on training in a classroom setting. Most classroom training took place in person; however, providers from at least 13 partnerships shifted to virtual classroom instruction or a hybrid approach because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure VII.3. Examples of America’s Promise classroom training, by industry

Advanced manufacturing	Health care	Information technology
		
<p>Seven-day employability skills training that focused on resume building, interview skills, and technology skills. It was designed to precede work-based learning opportunities for advanced manufacturing participants.*</p>	<p>Six-week certified nursing assistant program included classroom training and work-based learning components designed to prepare participants for state certification. The classroom-based components included courses on medical terminology and other fundamentals of health care.</p>	<p>Two 14-week classroom-based boot camps—one in coding and another in data analytics. Each boot camp addressed specific topics and skills relevant to the course, but the content of these boot camps was adapted to meet the needs of local employers. Classes were held Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.*</p>

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).

Note: The figure presents examples from one partnership for each focal industry.

\* These offerings shifted to a virtual format due to COVID-19 in March 2020.

## 2. Work-based learning




Across partnerships, site visit respondents reported that work-based learning took place in the form of apprenticeships, internships, and paid and unpaid OJT hours. As identified through virtual site visit interviews, work-based training opportunities were more common in partnerships that focused on the advanced manufacturing and health care industries when compared to IT. This may be because many certifications in those two industries require hands-on equipment training or other work-based learning components. Figure VII.4 presents select examples of the types of work-based learning opportunities America’s Promise partnerships offered, as described during the site visits. Here, we describe common work-based learning offerings by partnerships’ target industries.

- Work-based learning opportunities were reported as most common within advanced manufacturing.** At least eight of 11 partnerships in this industry offered work-based learning opportunities, which included paid apprenticeships or paid internships with employer and industry partners. At least three partnerships reimbursed employers for a percentage of the wages participants earned. For example, one partnership that offered a five-week internship reimbursed internship employers \$5 per each hour worked.
- To receive the affiliated certification or credential, most health care education and training programs required participants to engage in a clinical placement in which they had to apply their skills in a health care setting, particularly CNA, LPN, and RN programs.** All nine of the health care partnerships in the virtual site visits offered clinical health care education and training offerings that included a classroom component—either in person or online—as well as required in-person clinical experience. Participants’ number of required clinical hours varied by program and state based on certification requirements. For example, the minimum number of clinical hours required for a CNA certification ranges from 16 hours to 100 hours, depending on the state (PHI 2016). Clinical placements were in local health clinics, area hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and long-

term care facilities. Although work-based learning was common in the health care industry due to these requirements, only three partnerships in the site visits offered paid work-based learning opportunities, which they did through apprenticeships. One partnership established an apprenticeship with a major hospital to train incumbent workers employed in culinary or housekeeping roles for employment in higher-paying clinical roles.

- **Although all ten IT programs included in the virtual site visits assisted with job placement in some way, work-based learning opportunities were reported as less common for participants in this industry.** Three of the 10 IT-focused partnerships in the virtual site visits offered participants IT internships or apprenticeship opportunities. Most of these opportunities were facilitated by employer or industry partners and did not serve all program participants. Partnerships cited a variety of reasons for this including few internship opportunities in IT, strict degree or certification requirements among certain employers, a lack of interest in internships among participants, or a greater focus within the partnership on full-time job placements after training completion. One partnership described not wanting to damage an employer relationship by referring an intern who was not ready, citing a concern about some participants’ employability skills. Another partnership noted that the shift to virtual work brought upon by the pandemic increased competition for roles at IT employers, making it more challenging to place participants in internships. According to site visit respondents, virtual work caused some IT firms to look outside of their local labor markets to identify and hire qualified workers.

**Figure VII.4. Examples of America’s Promise work-based learning, by industry**

Advanced manufacturing	Health care	Information technology
		
<p>An employer partner and an education provider worked together to offer several two- to four-year registered apprenticeship programs in lube certification, electrician certification, instrument repair, and machine repair. These programs included a classroom component and a 40-hour-per-week apprenticeship with the employer, for which pay started at \$25 per hour.</p>	<p>An employer partner with an assisted living facility employed select America's Promise participants as care assistants and paid them the state minimum wage (about\$12) for their clinical training hours during a six-week certified nursing assistant (CNA) training program. Participants were expected to work at least one weekend shift as a care assistant during their training and remain employed with the facility as a CNA for at least one year after program completion.</p>	<p>A provider offered a four- to six-month (500–900 hours) on-the-job training program that covered standard industry tools, workflow, databases, customer relationship management, and business management software. It also included a classroom component. Participants earned Certified Technology Specialist certifications within the first 90 days of the program and were paid \$15 to \$20 per hour.</p>




Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).

Note: The figure presents examples from one partnership for each focal industry.

### 3. Incumbent worker training

Incumbent worker training was available across all America’s Promise industries. As described during virtual site visits, depending on the partnership, incumbent workers were reported to participate in the same training as other America’s Promise participants, or the incumbent worker training was aligned to the specific needs of the employer partner. Partners described processes in which employers referred current employees to existing education and training opportunities, or more extensive relationships in which an employer worked with education and training partners to address specific education and training requests. Figure VII.5 presents some examples of the types of incumbent worker training opportunities partnerships offered, as described during the virtual site visits.

**Figure VII.5. Examples of America’s Promise incumbent worker training, by industry**

Advanced manufacturing	Health care	Information technology
		
Employer partner offered industrial maintenance training at its facilities. The training was provided by a current employee and included an on-the-job training component for incumbent workers. Employees spent about 30 hours per week on training activities and used the remaining time to work their normal jobs. The duration of the training varied	Local health center provided training for incumbent workers to become medical assistants through a paid, registered apprenticeship program.	Education provider offered training to a group of union workers to prepare them for a civil service exam on network infrastructure. The partnership offered courses in the evening to meet the needs of the workers and received a commitment from employers for people to advance upon training completion.

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).

Note: The figure presents examples from one partnership for each focal industry.

### C. Partners responsible for delivering education and training services

Across the America’s Promise partnerships, community colleges, universities, or technical schools most commonly provided classroom-based education and training, as reported during virtual site visits. However, partnerships also relied on employers and other types of organizations to help them develop or deliver education and training services, to ensure the offerings adequately address skills gaps identified by employers. At least three IT-focused partnerships relied on nonprofit or for-profit training providers to deliver accelerated or non-traditional training options in IT topics, such as boot camps. For example, one community college grantee offered traditional classroom courses in Network+ and Security+, designed to be followed by a certification exam and credential. To supplement its own IT offerings, the grantee relied on a separate technology education provider partner to deliver training through accelerated six-month training programs in data science and full-stack web development.

**“For me, personally...I wasn’t planning on doing college. I tried college and it wasn’t for me, so I figured getting some [IT] certifications was my next best bet.”**

— America’s Promise participant

Respondents from another partnership that used a similar approach to complement IT offerings indicated that the base courses the two- to four-year institutions offered provided basic learning, but they were less adaptable to changes in the labor market and required complementary training to ensure participants had the full range of skills employers needed.

Partnerships used multiple approaches to involve employers or industry groups in the development or delivery of classroom-based education, as described in Chapter III. In addition to consulting employers about their needs and the content of the education and training offerings, two advanced manufacturing–focused partnerships went so far as to use instructors affiliated with or provided by an industry employer. In one partnership, an employer partner who helped develop the curriculum and provided a trainer saw such value in the program that they began offering their own internal training when America’s Promise training was paused in spring 2020 due to equipment loss and COVID-19.

**Although some institutions of higher education offered work-based learning opportunities through internships or apprenticeships for America’s Promise participants, employers and industry partners were reported to facilitate these kinds of opportunities.** This was particularly common in the field of advanced manufacturing, where internships and apprenticeships were more commonly offered among partnerships. During the virtual site visits, at least six of the 11 advanced manufacturing–focused partnerships reported that employers or industry partners facilitated OJT (paid and unpaid), apprenticeships, or internships for participants. Among the 10 IT-focused partnerships, at least three had employers or industry partners that offered internship or apprenticeship opportunities. In the health care industry, at least three of the nine partnerships had employer partners that facilitated paid work experience or apprenticeship opportunities for participants.



### Adapting education and training services during COVID-19

Similar to recruitment, COVID-19’s influence on education and training services varied across industries. IT-focused partnerships reported fewer challenges than partnerships in the advanced manufacturing and health care industries. IT-focused partnerships suggested that they were largely able to shift instruction online because those programs and participants were well-suited for remote learning. The shift to virtual instruction even provided unexpected benefits for some of these partnerships. For example, an instructor affiliated with one of the IT partnerships explained that his students passed their certification exams at a higher rate after they shifted from face-to-face labs to online IT simulations because of the pandemic.

Most education and training components within advanced manufacturing and health care were often delayed, put on hold, or canceled because they required hands-on training, education in using machines or equipment, or in-person activities such as clinicals or in-person assessments. Even for the partnerships that continued throughout the pandemic, meeting social distancing and other safety requirements in education and training settings posed unique challenges for these programs. In advanced manufacturing, some providers limited the number of students allowed in each session and reconfigured equipment to allow for at least six feet of social distancing. In health care, providers reported reducing class sizes to ensure social distancing, rotating smaller groups of students for partial in-person instruction, and conducting regular COVID-19 testing. ▲

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18) and Bellotti et al. (2021).

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## D. Reported challenges related to education and training services

Partnerships cited numerous challenges in providing education and training services for America's Promise participants. Many of the challenges stemmed from participants' supportive services needs, which often prevented them from committing to or reliably attending the education and training services. During the virtual site visits, partnerships reported the following challenges:

- **Supportive services needs inhibiting participants' engagement in education and training services.** Respondents from nearly all partnerships (15) in the site visits believed that barriers, namely the lack of child care and transportation, prevented at least some participants from fully engaging in or completing the education and training available through America's Promise. Respondents from six partnerships indicated the lack of money for other expenses (that is, inability to give up an income) as one of the primary challenges participants faced while enrolled in education or training. One focus group participant described how one of their fellow students ultimately dropped out of the program because she was working the night shift in order to attend class during the day but could not be "in the right mindset to attend school after being up all night working." To address these issues, many partnerships attempted to co-enroll participants in other programs, when possible, to provide additional supports, but respondents suggested that doing so was not enough.
- **General lack of knowledge about the available training or careers in the target industries when offering education and training.** Respondents from six partnerships explained that people simply are not aware of the available training opportunities offered through America's Promise or have misconceptions about the industries and occupations the grant targets. For example, one respondent explained that participants do not think technical careers are a viable option that will pay enough to support their families. Another respondent suggested that people do not understand what jobs they could qualify for after they complete the available training.
- **Issues unique to some groups of people.** One partnership said that English language learners struggled to complete their health care trainings due to the technical language used in clinical settings. Another partnership suggested that older participants found it more difficult to be involved in IT education and training programs because the programs tended to serve people 40 and younger. Yet another partnership suggested that older participants struggled with the return to school more generally.
- **Education and training for incumbent workers.** Respondents from five partnerships discussed various problems, including receiving few incumbent worker referrals from employer partners, a lack of uptake in incumbent training by employers, difficulties understanding grant eligibility requirements as they related to incumbent workers, or failures to meet their enrollment targets for incumbent workers. Two partnerships explained that the required coordination between training providers and employers to serve incumbent workers contributed to their challenges, explaining that employed workers do not necessarily pursue training so the partnerships relied on employers to identify incumbent workers who might be eligible.

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## VIII. Helping Participants Find Employment

A key goal of the America’s Promise partnerships was to help participants find employment after training completion. To achieve that goal, DOL required that the partnerships “secure commitments for deep employer involvement” from at least five employer partners or a regional industry association. Partnerships used a range of strategies—and encountered numerous challenges—in their efforts to engage employers and help participants find employment, which we describe in this chapter (DOL, 2016a).

### A. Engaging with employers

Regional partnerships engaged employers for a variety of reasons, such as to gain employer input into the design and operation of training programs and to develop work-based learning opportunities (see Chapter III and Dunham et al. [2022]). Another key objective for engaging with employers was to help place America’s Promise participants in industry jobs by developing hiring partnerships.

#### 1. Strategies for recruiting employers for hiring partnerships

Regional partnerships invested substantial time and resources to develop and build job placement partnerships with employers. As part of their America’s Promise efforts, most partnerships described building on existing employer relationships, reached out to new employer partners, and created a workforce pipeline with employer partners.

##### *a. Building on existing relationships*

To engage employers in hiring, most partnerships reported building on existing relationships. Grant administrators from all but one of the 18 partnerships in the virtual site visits built upon existing connections with employers to help place America’s Promise participants in jobs. In doing so, the partnerships solidified existing partnerships and identified new ways to enhance their job development or job placement services, as described earlier in Chapters II and III. In another case, a grant administrator from a partnership that had long-standing relationships with manufacturing employers noted that “the America’s Promise grant itself had very little to do with the existence of the [employer] partnerships but was able to help scale [them].”

##### *b. Reaching out to new employer partners*

America’s Promise partnerships also reached out to new employers for hiring purposes, both before and during the grants. Grant administrators from 16 of the 18 partnerships included in virtual site visits reached out to new employers as part of their America’s Promise–related efforts. Some of the regional partnerships recruited many new employers, including two partnerships—one IT and one health care—that added new employer partners over the course of the grant. In some cases, they needed to recruit employer partners to increase placement rates. Others needed to add new employer partners because they lost placement partnerships due to challenges in hiring or changes in hiring processes. For example, one grantee had initially successfully collaborated with the employers to develop training in medical device manufacturing, but a major challenge arose when employers changed their hiring practices, recruiting from staffing agencies instead of the local workforce agency. As a result, the pipeline the grantee had expected would lead to a substantial number of placements in that industry did not materialize. In other cases, administrators needed to add new employer partners when partnerships pivoted away from an

industry due to changing economic conditions or when their focus on one industry seemed to limit job placement opportunities.

*c. Creating a workforce pipeline with employer partners*

The America’s Promise partnerships described using a range of strategies to engage employers in hiring participants. These included reaching out to industry employers to inquire about open positions, sharing participant resumes with employers, and setting up hiring events and job fairs. For example, one partnership stated that employer partners would help develop and provide feedback on curriculum and would attend career fairs and mock interview days.

**“I start by approaching companies with ‘Where’s your problem and what can we do?’ and then I go back and see which tool in my toolkit is appropriate.”**

— Business services coordinator at grantee organization

The partnerships also reached out to employers to learn what labor shortages they could address. For example, a staff member from a workforce organization asked employers open-ended questions about their needs.

Once partnerships connected with employers, they discussed the number of participants the employer was interested in hiring, ranging from one or two participants to hiring on a larger scale. Twelve of the 18 partnerships in the virtual site visits developed one or more “large-scale” placement partnerships with employers, where the employer would agree to interview and consider hiring multiple America’s Promise participants at a time.

Some employers reached out directly to the partnerships about their hiring needs, as three partnerships reported. In these cases, the employers wanted to get more involved with the partnerships because the training aligned with their hiring needs. For example, one grantee developed a new placement partnership when an employer reached out, wanting to obtain hiring referrals from one of the grantee’s training providers. The employer wanted to hire workers with the specific skills and aptitudes that they believed the training would help develop. This partnership produced at least six new hires as of October 2020.

**“We both trust one another to make good referrals. No set-in-stone [memorandum of understanding]. This ‘in good faith’ piece is helpful. The collaborative aspect makes it as enjoyable as it is because we are using strengths and connections to work toward a common goal.”**

— Training provider at partner organization

Overall, partnerships with employers frequently led to the hiring of America’s Promise participants, according to interviews with employers. In fact, more than two-thirds of surveyed grantees reported that their employer partners preferred hiring applicants who completed an America’s Promise training program. Some employers hired multiple program completers. One health care employer partner, for example, reported that it had hired nearly three-quarters of the graduates from a two-year behavioral health specialist training program that was supported by America’s Promise.

## **2. Partners and staff members that engaged with employers**

Across the regional partnerships, multiple types of regional partnership member organizations—and staff members within those organizations—connected with employers as part of their job development and job placement efforts. Regional partnerships reported that multiple types of member organizations made

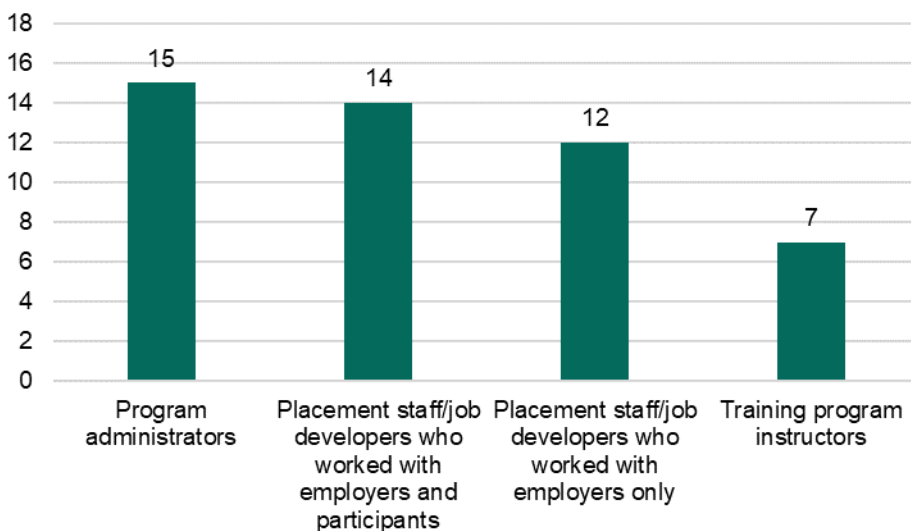
connections with employers, most commonly workforce organizations (14 of 18 partnerships), followed by higher education (most commonly community colleges) and economic development or employer membership organizations (chambers of commerce or industry associations) (both 11 of 18 grantees).<sup>13</sup> One partnership reported that employers conducted outreach on their behalf to other employers, which they described as an effective strategy for job development and job placement. In this case, the grant manager noted that employer-to-employer outreach helped ease potential concerns about collaborating with a federally funded grant effort.

**“Anytime it [the funding and the grant] is with the federal government, they [potential employer partners] get nervous...so it is really helpful to have people [from other employers] speak for you.”**

— Grant manager at grantee organization

Similarly, multiple types of staff within these partnership member organizations were reported to be responsible for developing employer and industry connections. In most regional partnerships (15 of 18 partnerships), multiple staff members conducted outreach to employers (Figure VIII.1). Program administrators were the most common (15 partnerships), followed by placement staff or job developers who worked with both employers and participants (14 partnerships) or with just employers (12 partnerships) or with just employers (12 partnerships) or with just employers (12 partnerships).

**Figure VIII.1. Types of partnership staff responsible for developing connections with employers**



Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18).

Note: Some partnerships had staff members in multiple categories.

<sup>13</sup> The partnerships frequently reported that more than one organization made connections with employers for the purposes of job development and job placement. For example, the workforce development organization and an economic development organization might both engage with employers.

## B. Strategies for helping participants find employment

America's Promise partnerships used a range of strategies to help participants find employment. These strategies involved connecting participants to available jobs through hiring partnerships (as described in Section A of this chapter), as well as working with participants to develop or improve their resumes, identify available jobs on their own, apply for open positions, and improve their interviewing skills.

### 1. Types of assistance partnerships provided to help participants obtain employment

All America's Promise partnerships provided job development and placement services to prepare participants for employment or connect them to available employment opportunities. On the grantee survey, all of the 23 partnerships reported offering one or more services to prepare participants for the application and interview process, including resume writing workshops or assistance (23 partnerships), mock interviews (20 partnerships), and soft skills training (21 partnerships). All 18 partnerships in the virtual site visits connected participants with open jobs, most commonly by sharing job descriptions with them via the Internet; all but one of the partnerships provided training on how to search for jobs independently via the Internet.

During the virtual site visits, partnerships described delivering these employment-related services to participants both individually and through group activities.

- **Individual-level services included interview coaching or practice sessions and resume help.** These services prepared participants to apply for open positions and gave them opportunities to do career planning. For example, workforce staff did career mapping with participants, which involved discussing wage progression and the intermediate steps needed to achieve their ultimate career goals.
- **Group-level services included job clubs and job seeker groups, employer panels, and job fairs.** In addition, partnerships provided in-person and virtual workshops on topics such as resume writing, job search methods, and communication skills. Across all grantees, respondents reported that group-level events, in particular, such as employer panels, helped participants understand what working in the target industry was like and what regional employers were looking for in applicants.

Although all partnerships provided similar services in similar formats, the timing for when they offered these services to America's Promise participants was reported to vary. For example, some partnerships offered mock interviews before participants entered training, whereas others offered this support for participants after they completed training.



#### Adapting education and training services during COVID-19

Partnerships reported numerous COVID-19–related challenges that they believed affected their ability to help participants find employment. These included changes to employer demand for workers, such as the increased competition in IT because the pool for most open jobs is no longer restricted to candidates who live within commuting distance of the employer; participant concerns about contracting COVID in the workplace; and the move to virtual interviewing, which was challenging for some participants because they could not read the interviewer's body language and other social cues. ▲

Source: Virtual site visits (N = 18) and Bellotti et al. (2021).

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### C. Reported challenges helping participants obtain employment

Overall, respondents across partnerships described challenges in helping participants find jobs. During the virtual site visits, partnerships highlighted the following barriers in their efforts to place America’s Promise participants in employment:

- **Finding employment for some participants because they lacked the formal credentials, work experience, or soft skills necessary for employment in their target industry.** One partnership that offered IT training explained that many participants did not take the associated certification test because they struggled with testing anxiety or fear they would not pass the test. Without the required certification, their participants appeared to struggle to find jobs. Another IT-focused partnership explained that many employer partners wanted applicants with three to five years of experience in the field. Four partnerships said that certain participants struggled with interviewing and other soft skills even after receiving specialized counseling and support from regional partnership staff members.
- **Establishing or maintaining meaningful hiring partnerships with employers.** Six partnerships described a range of issues including a lack of clear communication from employers about their hiring standards (one partnership), limited job vacancies (one partnership), economic downturns that slowed hiring (five partnerships), and the loss of employer partners for reasons outside their control (one partnership). For example, one grantee lost multiple employers that were expected to serve as hiring partners; this occurred after the employers changed their hiring practices to recruit from staffing agencies instead of hiring workers directly. As a result, the job placement pipeline that the grantee anticipated never materialized.

### D. Employer experiences with America’s Promise

**Despite the challenges regional partnerships reported in helping participants find employment, the 31 employers that were interviewed as part of the virtual site visits generally expressed satisfaction with the America’s Promise participants they hired** (as described in further detail in English et al. (2022)). These employers noted that the training offered through America’s Promise taught participants the skills needed for workplace success. In the words of one employer, “It is a win-win for us.... It is a joy for us to be able to hire someone through a program like this.” Twenty-seven employers praised the work-based experience, in particular, that participants gained, reporting placement rates in full-time employment from 60 percent to almost 100 percent. Employers described the following benefits that contributed to their satisfaction with the partnerships:

- **Achieving their hiring and retention goals.** Two-thirds of interviewed employers cited the important role the partnerships played in helping their industries strengthen local talent pipelines or improve employee retention. An advanced manufacturing employer stated that, after hiring America’s Promise participants, “we saw over 60 percent reduction in turnover.... It’s about \$9,000 per person when it comes to turnover. If I can lower that cost by even a few percent, that’s huge. And when I can drop it by 60 percent, that’s enormous. That

“[America’s Promise] created an amazing source of talent for the tech industry. The partnership is a huge source of momentum for keeping [the region] growing as a tech hub. It put [the region] on the map as a tech hub. [The partnership] is helpful for understanding the local population interested in tech and is helping us tap into a population that we traditionally have not tapped into.”

— IT employer partner

allowed us to take off the glasses, clean them up, and really see clearly the opportunity of doing good training. To me, that's been the big benefit.”

- **Hiring employees who mirrored the demographics of their communities.** Health care employers noted this frequently. For example, one employer noted an association between a diversified health care workforce and improved staff retention and patient outcomes, stating that “staff culturally and linguistically mirror the population we serve.”

Employer partners also highlighted some additional areas for improvement related to meeting their hiring needs. Employer representatives spoke of needing more tailored training, and better screening and preparing participants for employment. For example, one employer noted that, although the training offered through America's Promise was helpful for covering industry standards, it did not include specialized training for the automation equipment the employer used. Employers also noted that they occasionally needed to dismiss participants from the job because of high absenteeism resulting from transportation or child care challenges.



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## IX. America's Promise's Lasting Value

The America's Promise grants helped regional partnerships address the needs of their local communities, including job seekers and employers, through sector-focused workforce development, according to virtual site visit respondents. As we described throughout this report, the partnerships in virtual site visits identified promising practices that respondents believe should be considered by programs interested in implementing sector strategies and developing associated career pathways and training programs. This chapter describes site visit respondents' views on potentially promising practices, sustainability of the America's Promise partnerships and offerings, and lasting value of the grants.

### A. Potentially promising practices as reported by the partnerships

During virtual site visits, respondents from the grantee organizations, partners, and employers offered their insights on potentially promising practices developed through their partnerships:

- **Emphasizing employer voices throughout program development and implementation.** Respondents from at least 12 partnerships highlighted that the efforts to prioritize employer voices by “placing employers in the driver’s seat” differentiate America’s Promise from similar workforce development efforts. The high degree of employer engagement in selecting and developing training offerings appeared to ensure that the services available through America’s Promise addressed demonstrated employer needs and could help participants enter employment in target industries. As one workforce partner noted, “Ongoing engagement with employers is critical to our overall success.” By continuing to engage employers throughout implementation, partnerships could make real-time adjustments to ensure that trainings continued to meet employers’ evolving needs, especially in light of the pandemic. For example, at least three partnerships shifted training offerings as employer needs evolved. These partnerships demonstrated a takeaway in relation to America’s Promise’s efforts to engage employers, as one workforce partner suggested: “Instead of postsecondary [education] saying if you build it, they will come, they should be asking employers what they need.”
- **Supporting program participants through wraparound services.** As site visit respondents from at least six partnerships described, providing wraparound services to participants differentiated America’s Promise from other employment and training programs and appeared to be a promising approach for meeting participant needs. For example, the grant manager from one partnership indicated that its approach to providing work readiness and case management services allowed the partnership to meet participants where they were. This approach helped “participants get through the red tape and access help.” Focus group respondents also emphasized supports in addition to education and training services as beneficial, noting, for example, that the strongest aspect of their program was their “incredible” instructor and support of the entire organization; the partnership “didn’t allow any to fall through the cracks.” Respondents from another partnership that offered training boot camps coupled with supportive services and case management noted that IT boot camps do not traditionally offer these additional services and that they seemed to help motivate participants and ensure their success.
- **Developing strong partnerships to address participant and employer needs.** The America’s Promise grants prioritized the formation of strong partnerships, and as we heard from site visit respondents, the partnerships themselves served as one of the most important promising practices. Through their partnerships, grantees offered more complete wraparound services, according to respondents. Additionally, as respondents from at least two partnerships mentioned, partnerships

allowed them to better reach and serve their intended populations. For example, one partnership enlisted the help of an immigrant and refugee services organization to provide English language instruction in preparation for CNA training. Another partnership employed a similar organization to help immigrant and refugee populations navigate the bureaucratic elements of education and training programs and certifications. Other partnerships emphasized that their networks allowed them to better meet the needs of employers by bringing education, workforce, and industry to the table when designing training offerings. The partnerships established through America's Promise also helped break down competition to better meet the needs of participants and employers. Respondents from one partnership noted that the grant brought together community colleges from their region; rather than competing for students, they worked together to establish offerings that met the needs of participants and employers.

- **Providing training offerings that help participants access high-wage jobs while also addressing employer needs.** In at least eight partnerships, respondents pointed to the trainings offered as a promising practice emerging from the America's Promise grants. As they noted, because employers had a seat at the table during the planning phases, the developed offerings aligned with and addressed their hiring needs. Further, the training approaches offered through the grants were perceived as being high quality compared to other training offerings. In addition to addressing employer needs, the trainings addressed participants' needs. As discussed earlier, boot camp approaches were reported to quickly prepare participants to enter high-wage employment. Earn-and-learn models including apprenticeships, OJT, and incumbent worker training also helped participants meet their immediate needs for income while preparing them for higher-wage employment. Respondents from one partnership noted that the earn-and-learn approach minimized reliance on supportive services and helped participants enter union employment with high wages and benefits. Participants also noted that hands-on experience "empowered" them to feel more confident as they entered employment.

## B. Sustainability of the America's Promise partnerships

The America's Promise grants were intended to support the development of lasting regional workforce partnerships (U.S. Department of Labor 2016a). As respondents of the virtual site visits described, all partnerships plan to sustain their collaboration in some capacity after the grants end. In many cases, the partnerships pre-dated the America's Promise grants, so their work will continue, regardless of the funding available. Site visit respondents also emphasized their plans to sustain new partnerships following the grant. Respondents from one partnership noted that through America's Promise, they grew new partnerships that will outlast the grant and further developed their existing relationships. A workforce partner from another partnership noted their partnership will continue and that the grant solidified the partnership by putting structure in place to support referrals and a "no wrong door" service delivery model. Of the 31 employers interviewed, 30 stressed that collaboration to advance workforce development issues would continue following the grants. For employers that had not been as involved in prior workforce partnerships, America's Promise was reported as helping them become invested in collaborative efforts.

Although respondents were optimistic about continued partnerships, given their history of collaboration, they also recognized some challenges associated with sustaining the partnerships and training offerings. Respondents from most partnerships said that funding would dictate their ability to sustain training offerings. Most employers (26 of 31) expressed a desire to continue participating in the training offerings, but they all highlighted the need to identify additional funding to do so. Respondents from partner organizations also noted that continued funding would be important for enrolling job seekers in the

training offerings developed or prioritized through America's Promise. At least three partnerships that developed training offerings through the grant and noted that this would sustain their efforts, as the offerings would now be integrated in their region's menu of available education and training offerings.

### C. Lasting value of the America's Promise grants

Through the America's Promise grants, DOL hoped to support the development of regional industry partnerships that could address the ongoing needs of employers, as well as unemployed and underemployed people. Recognizing that goal, respondents of the virtual site visits offered their insights on the lasting value created through the grants and associated partnerships:

- **Strengthened partnerships.** The America's Promise partnerships typically built upon prior collaborative efforts. Site visit respondents recognized that America's Promise helped partner organizations strengthen their existing partnerships while also establishing new partnerships to support their sector strategies. A respondent from one partnership noted that "the collaborative aspects make it [the work] as enjoyable as it is because we are using strengths and connections to work towards a common goal." The grant manager from another partnership noted that although the organizations included in their partnership regularly worked together, America's Promise made these "responsive and true partnerships" in which they collaborate to meet the needs of job seekers and employers. In addition to strengthening partnerships, the grants brought new partners to the table and, as site visit respondents noted, these new partnerships will help them better achieve their goals. For example, two grantee organizations established partnerships with new education and training providers that offer services that better meet the needs of their intended populations. One partnership reflected on America's Promise's lasting value by noting that "each new experience adds to [the partnership's] knowledge base and shapes what they can accomplish going forward."
- **Training infrastructure, including infrastructure for providing virtual training.** Through America's Promise, some partnerships developed new training offers, and respondents from these partnerships highlighted that the training infrastructure created will outlast the America's Promise grants. One grant manager noted that time or money is rarely available to develop employer-driven training offerings. Through America's Promise, their partnership developed classroom and work-based learning offerings that will help local employers address ongoing and critical hiring needs. Other partnerships noted that the trainings developed through America's Promise laid the groundwork for future offerings, including expanded options for associate degrees. In addition to new training offerings, America's Promise partnerships' efforts to pivot to virtual learning during the pandemic allowed them to establish the infrastructure necessary to support virtual or hybrid training offerings in the future. One grant manager noted that this work will allow them to "serve participants in multiple ways and enhance their approach to virtual service delivery" moving forward. Another grant manager noted that they "never thought we would have been able to initiate virtual offerings, but now that we've done it, it is something we will continue to explore to help our students."
- **Lasting career pathways.** America's Promise emphasized the development of career pathways, and partnerships recognized that the career pathways established through the grants will continue to benefit their target industries and communities. One grant manager noted that the "IT career pathways identified through America's Promise will have lasting impact, but we will need to keep reaching out to employers to ensure they stay up to date with their needs." Others recognized that their partnerships could continue to build upon and update their established pathways.

- **Blueprints for developing future sector partnerships.** Partnerships focused their efforts on select industries through the America's Promise grant but recognized that the approaches generated through America's Promise are applicable across industries. As one grant manager emphasized, "The programs and partnerships established by the America's Promise grant can be duplicated in other sectors."
- **Models for prioritizing underrepresented groups in workforce development programs.** Through America's Promise, at least nine partnerships described prioritizing serving underrepresented groups. Respondents from these partnerships stressed that their work to engage underrepresented groups in their services provided lasting value to their communities. For example, a respondent from one IT partnership believed that the grant helped community colleges position themselves as a pipeline for tech firms looking to engage underrepresented people in their workforces. Respondents from a manufacturing partnership noted that the grant enabled them to demonstrate that "manufacturing jobs are good, viable jobs, that they are not a man's job—anyone can do it and earn family-sustaining wages." Three health care partnerships discussed America's Promise's important role in helping them diversify their health care workforces to better reflect the communities served and to promote community health models. One workforce partner noted that their success in serving diverse and underrepresented groups through America's Promise led them to adapt their priority population for WIOA Title I services. This partner also noted that the grant was a learning opportunity for the involved hospitals, as it motivated them to engage in work to create equal employment opportunities.

### D. Looking forward

The America's Promise grants and resulting partnerships helped create regional infrastructure to support sector-focused workforce development, based on the views expressed by site visit respondents. The experiences of the America's Promise partnerships offer important considerations for future regional workforce initiatives, including the WIOA regional planning process. WIOA regions and local boards could consider the strategies the America's Promise partnerships used as they develop strategies for creating career pathways and sector strategies that emphasize the needs of the workforce system's employer customers. Further, the America's Promise partnerships also explored strategies for serving people with low incomes and underrepresented groups, as emphasized by WIOA (U.S Department of Labor, 2020). The America's Promise partnership experiences offer insights on the types of strategies and supports that workforce programs might consider implementing to meet the needs of these job seekers.

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**Appendix A:**  
**Implementation Study Methods**

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The America's Promise implementation study was designed to describe how the 23 America's Promise partnerships used America's Promise grants to provide employment and training services and form regional partnerships. The study documented the characteristics and unique context of each grantee and assessed how the regional partnerships for selected grantees changed over time. To achieve these objectives, the study team examined implementation successes, challenges, and solutions, as reported by the grantees and their partners, and explored how variations in approaches to providing services and establishing regional partnerships might be connected to implementation experiences and participants' outcomes. This appendix provides additional details on the specific research questions that guided the implementation study and details our approach to data collection, analysis, and reporting to inform this report and a series of America's Promise issue briefs.

### A. Research questions

To understand the implementation experiences of grantees and the services and partnerships established through the America's Promise grant program, the study team examined five broad research questions developed in consultation with DOL. The following research questions guided the data collection, analysis, and reporting activities conducted as part of the implementation study:

1. What was the regional and community context for the America's Promise partnerships?
2. How were regional workforce systems and partnerships developed and maintained over the life cycle of the grant? What factors influenced the regional partnership development and employer engagement?
3. What types and combinations of services and approaches did the partnerships provide? How were they implemented? What successes and challenges did partners face during implementation?
4. What changes did America's Promise grantees and their partners make to their programs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What were the characteristics of the participants?

### B. Data sources and sample selection

The implementation study involved multiple data collection methods to gather information from a variety of sources at different points in time. This allowed exploration of how the grants evolved, and changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how their regional partnerships matured over time. The implementation study used four main data sources described in detail below: (1) a grantee survey administered to all grantees to collect data on their characteristics, services, and operations; (2) a partner network analysis survey, administered to six grantees and their partners to examine regional partnership systems and how they changed over time; (3) qualitative data collected through virtual site visits and phone interviews; and (4) Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS) data on the characteristics of America's Promise participants and the services they receive.

#### 1. Grantee survey

The grantee survey was administered via the Internet to all 23 grantees in spring 2019 (upon Office of Management and Budget approval). The 30-minute survey collected information on service delivery models, staffing, staff development, partnerships, and implementation of the core program elements. One hundred percent of grantees responded to the survey.

## 2. Partner network survey

In fall/winter 2019, following the completion of the grantee survey, a 20-minute partner network survey was administered via the Internet to 6 America's Promise grantees and 94 of their key partners (for a total sample size of 100). The partner network survey instrument asked grantees and their partners to describe connections with one another. Each organization reported on their level of involvement in the grant, and the strength of their relationships and level of communication with each other organization involved in the grant.

Developing the sample for the partner network survey required a two-stage selection process. First, to recommend partnerships for the partner network survey, we developed three primary criteria and two secondary criteria, informed by grantee survey items. Primary criteria included:

1. **Number of overall partners.** We developed the partner network survey to collect information on partnership development and systems change. To identify partner relationships, selected grantees needed to have a sufficient number of partners to enable us to describe their relationships and how they may have changed over time. Using this criterion, we focused on grantees with larger partnerships based on grantee survey responses collected two years into the grant period. When examining partnership size, we also confirmed that the partnership included all required partner types, as specified in the grant solicitation and described in Chapter I, Section C.
2. **Number of involved employer partners.** The America's Promise grants require all grantees to partner with at least five employers. When applying this criterion, we considered the number of employer partners identified, as well as the number of employer partners with formal partnership agreements in place. To ensure that employer relationships were captured in the partner network survey, selected grantees must have reported at least the minimum of five required employer partners in their grantee survey responses. Employer partners also had to be sufficiently involved in the America's Promise partnership, as signaled by having partnership agreements in place or regularly participating in grant planning meetings or advisory boards. Because some grantees identified more than 100 employer partners, we sought to ensure that recommended grantees had established meaningful employer partnerships, rather than simply identifying potential employer placements for participants.
3. **Level and types of engagement with partners.** In addition to requiring a minimum number of employer partners, DOL required America's Promise grantees to establish partnerships with education and training organizations, workforce development agencies, and economic development agencies. As a result, grantees selected for the partner network survey had to have at least one partnership in place with an organization of each of these types. Beyond creating partnerships with these types of organizations, recommended grantees also had to engage these core partners in activities central to the grant, such as planning, developing service offerings, and service provision.

Secondary criteria included:

1. **Diversity in target sectors and geography.** Although the partner network survey sample is not meant to be representative of all America's Promise grantees, we considered each grantee's target sectors and geographic location to promote diversity in the recommended grantees. This diversity allowed us to understand how partnerships develop and operate in different settings.
2. **Grantee responsiveness.** The partner network survey required high response rates among partners to support a complete understanding of partnership development and systems change. For the successful fielding of the partner network survey, the grantee had to serve as a key resource for the study team

and help to identify points of contact for each partner and encourage their participation in the survey. Therefore, the study team's perception of grantee responsiveness was particularly important for identifying recommended partnerships. We considered each grantee's responsiveness to the grantee survey, as well as clarifying phone calls conducted early in the project with each of the grantees.

Based on these criteria, and recommendations from DOL, we selected six partnerships for inclusion in the partner network survey. Each of these grantees was also included in the virtual site visits, described in the next section. Study team members worked with lead grantees to select partners for inclusion in the survey. For each grantee, we selected up to 24 partners, in addition to the grantee organization, but only did so if all were actively involved in the partnership, based on the grantee's report. To understand relationship development within the partnerships, partners reported on how they interacted with each other and the nature of their collaboration. We achieved an overall response rate of 71 percent across all grantees. Two grantees achieved rates above our established 80 percent response threshold. Additionally, the response across partner entity type varied greatly from 100 percent response among lead grantee organizations to 17 percent among employer or industry partners.

### 3. Virtual site visits and phone interviews

#### *Virtual site visits*

A primary source of information on grant implementation was virtual site visits to 18 of the 23 partnerships, conducted between August and November 2020. These visits enabled the study team to better understand implementation experiences, partnership development and operations, and participant experiences. The 18 partnerships included:

- All six partnerships involved in the partner network survey, to provide additional context for responses to the survey.
- Eleven additional partnerships identified for the impact study (see Chapter IV, Section C), to provide context for impact study findings and to learn more about services available to comparison group members.
- One additional partnership, to identify potential promising approaches of interest to DOL, including how grantees responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each virtual visit included two study team members who were familiar with the America's Promise grant program. During each virtual visit, the study team conducted semi-structured, one-on-one or small-group interviews with administrators and frontline staff from grantees, employers, and other partners. At 11 of the 18 virtual visit sites, the study team also conducted a virtual focus group with America's Promise participants to learn directly from them.<sup>14</sup> For the participant focus groups, we prioritized partnerships recommended by DOL for inclusion in the virtual site visits and sought to learn from participants receiving training in a range of industry sectors. Each of the data collection activities included in the virtual site visits are described in detail below.

#### **One-on-one and small-group semi-structured interviews**

The study team conducted one-on-one and/or small-group semi-structured video interviews with managers and staff at the grantee and its key partners, including employers. For each site, we requested

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<sup>14</sup> Initially we selected 12 partnerships for focus groups but, ultimately, due to challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted only 11 focus groups.

interviews with (1) the grant manager; (2) staff from the lead grantee organization; (3) managers at up to six key partner organizations, including employer partners; and (4) staff affiliated with key partners.

Site visit teams used the semi-structured interview protocols to collect detailed information on the local context, recruitment and enrollment, participant characteristics, available employment and training services, supportive services, regional partnerships, and the impact of COVID-19 on grant implementation. Interviews ranged in length from one hour to one hour and 45 minutes, depending on the respondent and their availability. Table A.1 contains a full list of topics that the interviews covered with each respondent type.

**Table A.1. Site visit topic, by respondent**

Topics	Respondents					
	Grant administrator	Staff from lead organization	Key partner administrators	Key partner staff	Employer/industry partners	Participants
<b>Local context and grant management</b>						
America's Promise economic context	X	X	X	X	X	
Regional context and target sectors	X	X	X	X		
Business context					X	
Regional partnerships and communication	X		X		X	
Grant administration/leadership	X		X			
Grantee finances and matching resources	X		X	X	X	
Grant design and planning process	X		X			
Staffing	X		X			
<b>Recruitment, enrollment, and participant characteristics</b>						
Eligibility, recruitment, and application	X	X	X	X	X	X
Participant characteristics	X	X	X	X	X	
Participant motivation for participating						X
<b>America's Promise services</b>						
Overview of services	X	X	X	X		
Education and training services	X	X	X	X	X	X
Job development/job placement services	X	X	X	X	X	X
Supportive services	X	X	X	X		X
Strengths and weakness of services	X	X	X	X	X	X
Strengths and weaknesses of partnerships	X	X	X	X	X	
<b>Alternative services, outcomes, and sustainability</b>						
Alternative services	X	X	X	X		
Effectiveness of America's Promise					X	X
Participant outcomes	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sustainability plans	X		X		X	
Promising practices	X	X	X	X		X
<b>Impact of COVID-19</b>						
Overall changes to organization or program	X	X	X	X	X	X
Changes to partnerships	X		X		X	
Changes in education and training	X		X			
Changes in services or delivery methods	X	X	X	X		X
COVID-19 related barriers or needs		X	X	X	X	X

### Focus groups with participants

For 11 of the 12 virtual visits, the site visit team conducted one focus group with participants to collect in-depth information on their reasons for seeking services, their experiences with America's Promise, and their outcomes after they received the services. We relied on grantees to recruit focus group participants on our behalf, suggesting they invite 10 to 12 individuals with the expectation that 5 or 6 would participate. On average, each focus group included 3 individuals. Although we asked grantees to invite participants with varied backgrounds who represent a range of experiences with America's Promise, the selected participants were not intended to represent all participants who receive services.

### Phone interviews

To ensure that we gathered critical information from all grantees, we conducted small-group phone interviews with the grant managers for the five America's Promise grantees not selected for virtual site visits. The research team used a subset of questions from the same semi-structured protocols used for the in-depth site visits, with the questions focused on the following prioritized topics of interest to DOL: community context, organization, and administrative structure; recruitment, enrollment, and participant characteristics; America's Promise services; alternative services, outcomes, and sustainability; and the impact of COVID-19 on grant implementation. The five phone interviews were conducted in November and December 2020.

### 4. Workforce Integrated Performance System data

The implementation study drew on data from the Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS). WIPS data on America's Promise participants includes participant background information and service receipt data and was used to further describe these participants and the services they received.

## C. Analysis

Relying on the data sources described previously, the implementation analysis described America's Promise services and partnerships and identified barriers and facilitators to implementation, as well as successes and challenges experienced by grantees, partners, and participants. We used a variety of approaches and tools to combine, organize, and analyze information from multiple sources. When possible, we triangulated data across multiple respondents and sources to strengthen the reliability of the findings. Here, we describe our approach for analyzing collected data, by data source.

- **Grantee survey.** To analyze survey responses, our team cleaned the data, constructed the variables, and computed descriptive statistics. To prepare data for analysis, we ran a series of checks to examine frequencies and means and assess the extent of missing data. The study team then used descriptive statistics to summarize quantitative data from the grantee survey. We used these findings in conjunctions with findings from the virtual site visits and phone interviews.
- **Partner network survey.** For this survey, we also cleaned the data, constructed the variables, computed descriptive statistics, and then ran a series of checks to examine frequencies and means and assess the extent of missing data. For each partnership, we created visual representations of relationships (known technically as sociomatrices and sociograms) between organizations and within each partnership. Each partner is represented as a node, and connections between two organizations are shown with lines that vary in thickness to represent, for example, the frequency of communication. These visuals (based on survey responses) are used to describe the size of the

partnerships and to identify any organizations that are isolated from the network. We calculated a series of network statistics to examine various aspects of the partnerships. For example, a density statistic is the proportion of existing communication ties relative to all possible communication ties. A reciprocity statistic is the degree to which organizations agree on their shared relationships within the partnership. We interpreted these results at the partnership level and used partnership-specific findings from the virtual site visits to provide additional context for the associated sociograms. Findings from the virtual site visits will be used to provide additional context for each of the sociograms and to describe the steps grantees took to build their partnerships and the structures.

- **Virtual site visits and phone interviews.** Virtual site visit teams used templates to organize their detailed notes around key themes and topics addressed by each type of respondent. To understand how the America's Promise partnerships adapted to respond to the pandemic, we conducted targeted analyses using COVID-specific write-ups for each site. We organized the data using NVivo software, based on key topics of interest, including: the economic context; regional and industry considerations; implications for partnerships; implications for services; and participant perspectives. We used a two-part coding scheme to code the qualitative data from interviews and focus groups as captured in the write-ups. The first round of coding involved auto-coding the qualitative data by research question to organize the data by topics associated the research questions of interest. The second round of coding involved using the constructs included in Table A.2. Each write-up section was mapped to the research questions of interest and their associated constructs to increase coding efficiency and consistency across coders. When coding, coders considered whether the data should be coded as a facilitator, a barrier, or neutral within each construct. This approach allowed us to describe barriers and facilitators unique to specific grantees and to synthesize themes across grantees.

### D. Limitations

It is important to recognize the limitations associated with the implementation study. Although the study drew on multiple data sources, thereby allowing us to triangulate across them, it is not possible to document every aspect of program implementation.

#### 1. Virtual site visits and telephone interviews

Virtual site visit, phone interview, and focus group protocols were designed to collect as much information as possible in the time available for each activity. During interviews, we focused on soliciting candid responses related to the most important implementation topics as identified by the research questions. The single telephone interviews conducted with 5 of the 23 grantees using a streamlined interview protocol focused more on overall experiences, high-level takeaways, and top challenges and facilitators. This approach relies upon respondents' willingness to truthfully report on potentially sensitive topics. The virtual approach to data collection due to COVID-19 may have further limited respondents' openness because virtual visits did not allow interviewers to establish the same level of rapport with respondents as in-person visits. Regardless of the team's ability to conduct in-person versus virtual data collection, respondents might not feel comfortable being completely candid about the breadth or depth of the challenges they have experienced because they may want to avoid casting their grants in a negative light. We framed all our data collection activities to respondents as opportunities to share their lessons learned, instead of as auditing or monitoring exercises, and we are using caution in the specificity of our descriptions and attributions in project deliverables.

Focus group participants were selected by grantees and are a convenience sample; therefore, the data collected from focus group participants are not generalizable to individual partnerships or the broader universe of America's Promise program participants. We expected that 5 participants would attend each focus group, but attendance for the virtual focus groups was lower than anticipated. Across the 11 sites with virtual focus groups, we had an average of 3 participants in each focus group for a total of 32 participants overall.

### **2. Grantee and partner network survey**

Six of the 18 grantees included in the virtual site visits also participated in the partner network survey. Because this survey focuses on a subset of partnerships, responses to the partner network survey are not representative or generalizable to the partnerships as a whole. Rather, the partner network survey provides an opportunity to identify different partnership structures present among the America's Promise partnerships. Partnerships were purposefully selected based on the strength of their partnerships to show connections among active partners. However, response rates within partnerships varied greatly. Only 2 of 6 partnerships achieved response rates of 80 percent or higher. The survey also required respondents to be engaged and involved in grant activities to measure partnership strength. Therefore, it was especially important to identify appropriate respondents to produce high-quality survey data. Due to staffing changes among partners, however, identifying involved respondents proved challenging and limited response in some cases. Therefore, the findings from the network survey will not be able to show the partnership connections that were present earlier in the grant period. Further, partner network survey data collection occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so findings did not provide insights on how the pandemic reshaped partnerships, if at all.

The grantee survey, administered to all 23 grantees, served as an opportunity to collect structured information about America's Promise services and partnerships. To minimize burden on respondents, the survey was designed to take 30 minutes to complete and included questions focused on topics relevant to all partnerships. America's Promise grantees are implementing varied service delivery models in different industries, so survey questions had to be broad enough to apply to all 23 grantees, limiting the amount of targeted information we were able to collect. The grantee survey data collection also occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic so the information collected during the survey may have changed for some partnerships. Data collected through the virtual visits and interviews provided additional context for grantee survey responses and how partnerships changed in response to COVID-19.

### **3. Analyzing implementation data**

Analyzing responses to questions about implementation experiences required some subjective interpretation. To improve our ability to identify barriers and facilitators, we used multiple sources of data for information about the partnerships, allowing us to triangulate across respondents and data sources. Our primary informants were the grantees and program and partner administrators, but frontline staff and the participants themselves offered their perspectives.

While we drew on insights provided by participants, these insights are anecdotal and not representative of or generalizable to the individual partnership or all America's Promise partnerships. Due to the nature of the virtual site visits and phone interviews, the interview team was not able to document their firsthand observations and interactions while on site. Additionally, given the timing of the virtual visits and phone interviews, data collected may not fully capture implementation of the grants as envisioned in 2017. Rather, data collected through these visits may be biased toward recent implementation experiences

shaped by the pandemic. Starting a new program, regardless of the pandemic, creates many challenges that are unique to the partnership region, industry, and structure, so our analysis focused on identifying issues that can help staff improve their programs and on general lessons for future implementations of partnerships in other regions.



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