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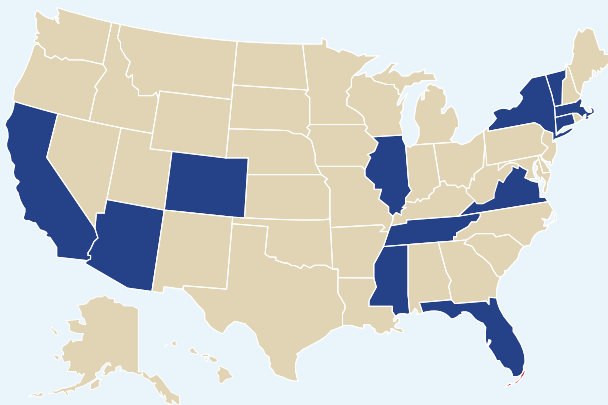
# Supporting Parents with Child Care During Training

## Strengthening Working Families Initiative

The U.S. Department of Labor established the Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) to help parents gain the training and education needed to increase their skills to obtain or advance in jobs in high-growth industries that often rely on visas to hire skilled foreign workers. SWFI grantees aimed to increase access to education and training by mitigating barriers that parents face, especially barriers to child care. To achieve SWFI's ambitious goals, grantees also sought to create sustainable local changes to help families navigate the workforce and child care systems after the grants end.

Mathematica's SWFI technical assistance (TA) team supported grantees in these ambitious efforts. This brief shares grantee strategies and lessons learned through TA and coaching activities.

**Grantees:** 13 nonprofit organizations, local workforce development boards, institutions of higher learning, and municipalities in 12 states



**Required partners:** Workforce entities, education and training providers, child care services, business entities

**Target industries:** Primarily information technology (IT), health care, and advanced manufacturing

**Timeline:** 2016–2021; grantees were providing services in the context of the public health emergency that began in March 2020

**Grant amount:** \$4 million maximum per grantee

Individuals who were eligible to receive SWFI services needed to increase their skills to obtain or advance in jobs and had child care responsibilities. Parents often have a hard time finding high quality child care that meets their needs for a flexible schedule.<sup>1</sup> They may not have enough information about the options available to them to make informed child care decisions. Child care is also unaffordable for many parents, and public funding for it is limited.<sup>2</sup> When developing programs, workforce systems and training programs may not consider parents' challenges or may face organizational or structural barriers to doing so.<sup>3</sup> These challenges are reflected in the fact that, of the 21 million parents with low income nationwide, only 1 in 10 participated in education and training.<sup>4</sup>

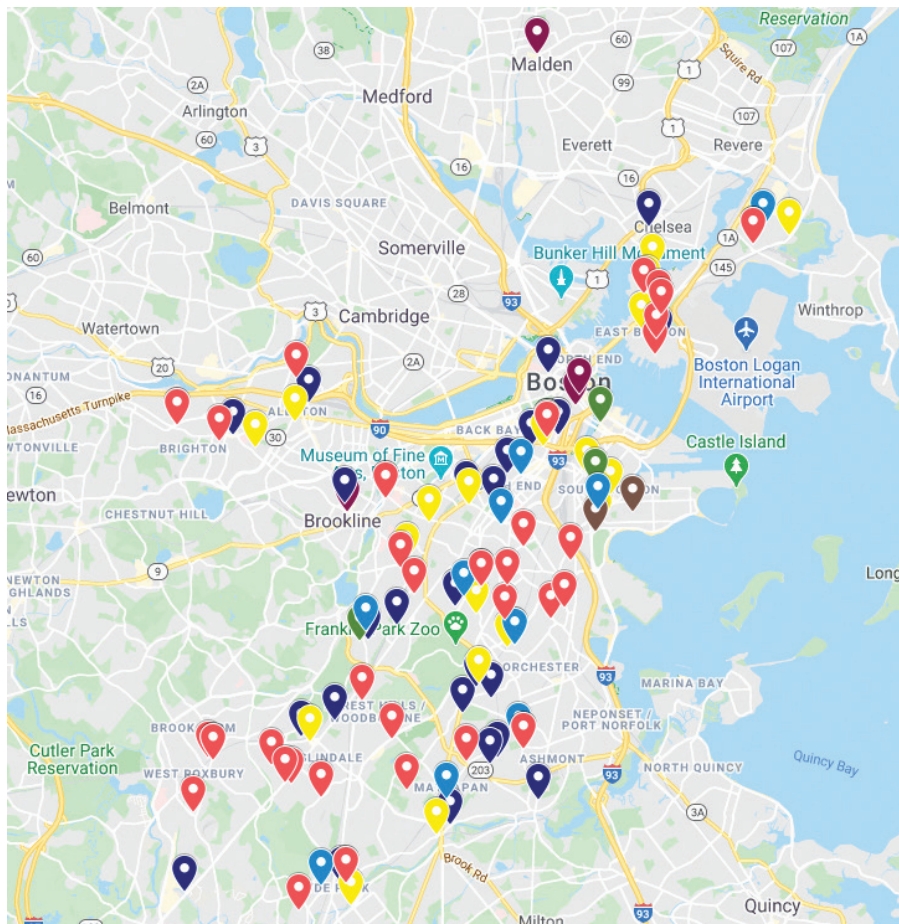
SWFI grantees worked toward the overarching goal of removing child care barriers faced by working families in need of training by facilitating parents' access to child care and child care subsidies. Addressing child care needs is crucial in helping parents access and succeed in training but is a relatively novel focus for workforce programs. As a result, grantees faced structural and community challenges to addressing parents' child care needs. This brief highlights some of the strategies that grantees developed to connect participants to child care and lessons learned that may be helpful to organizations implementing similar programs.

## Strategies and lessons learned

**Created a child care navigator role.** Many grantees began by creating full-time child care navigator positions to help participants access child care. These navigators often worked with participants to assess their child care needs, identify the appropriate child care options for their children, and help them access child care subsidies to be able to afford care.

**Leveraged additional child care funding sources.** Some grantees helped parents access local child care subsidies, thus reducing one of their key barriers.<sup>5</sup> Moore Community House used block grant funding from the state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to cover the total costs of child care for all of its participants. A local subsidy

## Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD)'s child care map



Source: Google map developed by Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD)

Color key: Maroon = training vendors; navy = child care providers with three or fewer locations; yellow = Head Start locations; green = Catholic Charities Child Care locations; brown = South Boston Neighborhood House locations; light blue = Imagine That (before/after school and summer academy offered in these schools for some grades); red = YMCA before- and after-school care, early education centers, and camps.

provider taught staff employed as system navigators at OAI, Inc. how to complete the subsidy application; under this approach, almost all subsidy applications were accepted.

**Used tools to support information about and access to quality child care.** Understanding the barriers parents face when accessing workforce development training, grantees developed tools and processes to help them access child

care. Two grantees developed online databases of local child care providers. For example, the picture above illustrates Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD)'s interactive map which helped participants identify child care options near their home and work. Total Action for Progress developed a health and safety checklist that participants could use when they considered unlicensed providers as child care options.

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## Developing a child care resource guide and a family friendly waiting room

The City of Long Beach, Pacific Gateway Workforce Investment Network (Pacific Gateway) developed a child care resource guide for participants to read while they waited to meet with program staff. It also redesigned its waiting room with family friendliness in mind by adding a designated area for children's tables and chairs, as well as educational activities and games. To help participants feel more comfortable bringing their children into the office, it established child-friendly office hours. This block of time showed that children were welcome to join parents during their appointments.

**Addressed structural and community challenges to providing child care.** Grantees faced structural and community challenges to addressing parents' complex child care needs, including flexible care or care during nontraditional hours. Some grantees found that there was minimal interest in using child care because only certain providers were approved or because participants preferred other kinds of supportive services. One grantee experienced challenges in providing child care because of a local government requirement that it undertake a procurement process for any child care partnerships. After several meetings between the SWFI team and the local procurement department, child care for SWFI participants was determined to be an emergency need. This allowed the grantee to use any child care provider approved by the state's child care assistance program and pay the provider directly.

**Responded to the public health emergency.** Several grantees noted that because of lockdown and quarantine requirements in 2020, participants were unable to access center-based child care. Therefore, participants tried to attend online training programs while caring for children at home and managing their children's virtual schooling. For some participants, it was impossible to maintain the level of commitment needed to complete training. To address these challenges, Pacific Gateway leveraged funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act to provide child care in participants' homes. Parents could attend training while being at home with their child and the provider. For some grantees, the public health emergency reemphasized the value of supporting family, friend, and neighbor child care providers. Grantees noted that during

this time, they worked to help participants access support for family, friend, and neighbor providers through local child care resource and referral agencies.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Adams, Gina, Teresa Derrick-Mills, Caroline Heller. "Strategies to Meet the Child Care Needs of Low-Income Parents Seeking Education and Training." Washington, DC: Urban Institute, September 2016. Available at <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/strategies-meet-child-care-needs-low-income-parents-seeking-education-and-training>. Accessed December 15, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Harding, J.F., and D. Paulsell. "Improving Access to Early Care and Education: An Equity-Focused Policy Research Agenda." Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 2018. Available at: <https://mathematica.org/publications/improving-access-to-early-care-and-education-an-equity-focused-policy-research-agenda>. Accessed on June 4, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Adams, Gina, Teresa Derrick-Mills, Caroline Heller. "Strategies to Meet the Child Care Needs of Low-Income Parents Seeking Education and Training." Washington, DC: Urban Institute, September 2016. Available at <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/strategies-meet-child-care-needs-low-income-parents-seeking-education-and-training>. Accessed December 15, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Eyster, Lauren, Tom Callan, and Gina Adams. "Balancing School, Work, and Family: Low-Income Parents' Participation in Education and Training." Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2014. Available at <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/balancing-school-work-and-family-low-income-parents-participationeducation-and-training>.

<sup>5</sup> Child care subsidies provide partial payments or reimbursements for child care expenses while parents are working or in training or education. Most child care subsidies are funded through the federal Child Care Development Fund. States receive block grants and have discretion in setting state rules and payment amounts. For more information, see Adams, G. "Accessing Child Care to Support Education and Training." Presentation at the H-1B Grantee Conference, Washington, DC, November 13, 2019. Available at <https://hibap-workforcegps.org/resources/2019/11/19/17/12/H-1B-Grantee-Conference-Accessing-Child-Care>. Accessed December 16, 2020.

## SWFI Brief series

This [series of briefs](#) presents strategies and lessons learned through the provision of TA and coaching to SWFI grantees by Mathematica and its partner, the Urban Institute. The briefs cover the following topics:

- Recruiting parents for entry into middle- and high-skilled employment
- Training and credentialing strategies to support working families
- Supporting parents with child care during training
- Expanding employer engagement and job placement
- Integrating workforce and child care systems and promoting sustainability
- Setting achievable training and employment goals and demonstrating progress

To learn more about how Mathematica provides program TA, see [this brief](#) on providing TA to grantees that helped families navigate the workforce and child care systems.

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