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Integrating Workforce and Child Care Systems and Promoting Sustainability

Strengthening Working Families Initiative

The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) 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
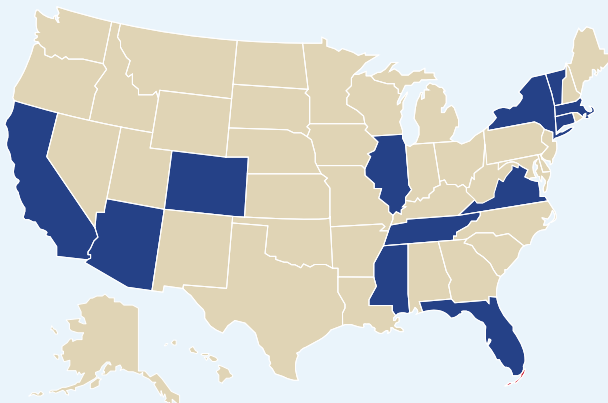
Required partners: Workforce entities, education and training providers, child care services, business entities

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

To create and operate a SWFI program, grantees had to navigate two separate systems—child care and workforce development—that often do not interact. USDOL considered this *systems integration* to be a key feature of the SWFI grant program. Working across the two systems, grantees attempted to simplify and expand access to services and resources so that parents with skills gaps and child care needs could participate in and complete training during the grant period. With a forward-looking focus, USDOL also required that grantees work toward *sustainable systems change* in their communities or regions to make it easier for working families to access child care resources after the SWFI grants ended.

Grantees faced challenges in their efforts to create and sustain systems change. Connecting the child care and workforce development systems required establishing new partnerships and progress sometimes stalled due to organizational change and staff turnover. Most grantees focused on systems integration to meet SWFI programmatic needs and began working on sustainability efforts in earnest later in their grants. Still, grantees made some progress in their efforts to build more permanent change in their communities. In this brief, we share strategies and lessons learned from grantees' efforts to integrate local workforce and child care systems during their grant and to sustain that integration.

Strategies and lessons learned

Systems integration

Improved and streamlined processes for accessing child care resources. To address challenges in connecting participants to child care supports, several grantees created navigator positions to walk participants through the process of applying for child care subsidies and identifying providers. Other grantees worked with local child care resource and referral agencies to streamline SWFI participants' access to child care subsidies. The WorkPlace included a child care concierge as a separate position from career counselors and employment specialists in their SWFI grant. The child care concierge met with each participant to create

a child care plan at the point of enrollment and communicated that plan and any potential disruptions to the other staff working with the participant. After seeing how effective this approach was, The WorkPlace strategized on how they can embed child care concierges into future grants.

Engaged community stakeholders for supportive services. Some grantees worked with local community-based organizations and agencies through their SWFI grants. Total Action for Progress (TAP) partnered with the local United Way to improve policies and practices for families at their One-Stop Center for families experiencing poverty. Together, TAP and the Western Virginia Workforce Development Board developed a referral system for workforce and supportive services so partners could refer families and give them access to additional services for which they were eligible.

Getting creative with partnerships

Alachua Bradford Regional Workforce Board (doing business as CareerSource North Central Florida [NCFL]) worked with its local department of corrections to station one of its case managers at the workforce board that ran SWFI. This promoted case management continuity for previously incarcerated SWFI participants in an effort to make them feel more comfortable visiting the SWFI office. CareerSource NCFL also partnered with a local hair salon to provide haircuts for participants before job interviews.

Leveraged work groups to further the goal of integrating workforce development and child care systems. Some grantees used new or existing work groups to highlight the value of child care supports in their communities. For example, Moore Community House regularly discussed the importance of child care during state Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) planning meetings to reinforce its value for parents in training. The Community College of Aurora (CCA) co-led a child care learning community with its state department of human services that focused on identifying systems barriers to accessing child care supports and creating solutions.

Increased partners' understanding of potential child care needs. Grantees shared information with partners about their programs and the value of combining workforce development and child care support. CCA developed a toolkit to train other community college staff members, including counselors, on how to engage all students using a two-generation approach.[1] CCA planned to share this toolkit with other local community colleges to improve child care access for parents pursuing training or education in their broader community. Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD) educated its training partners on how to assess participants' child care needs during intake and enrollment. Staff hoped this approach would better equip training partners to support participants with children.

Sustainability

Dedicated staff time to sustainability planning. Grantees dedicated time to work with their SWFI TA coaches through a structured sustainability planning process to help onboard a team for sustainability planning, use data to make decisions, and focus on long-term capacity and systems change. TA coaches facilitated human-centered design activities to help grantees brainstorm and prioritize their most promising sustainability strategies. Highly prioritized strategies included expanding family, friend, and neighbor child care access; building relationships with child care providers near training providers; seeking accreditation to provide their own in-house trainings; and designing and implementing a direct and formalized referral process between agencies. OAI, Inc. also hired a consultant to facilitate sustainability planning; the consultant helped grantee staff prioritize components of their SWFI program to sustain and applied for additional funding opportunities that aligned with those priorities.

Created referral systems and maintained partnerships to continue supportive services. Some grantees focused their sustainability efforts on maintaining the relationships they had developed for their SWFI grant. For example, as an advisory board member for the Rochester Technology and Manufacturing Association, the Rochester Rehabilitation Center identified ways to increase the participation of people of color in the region's Registered Apprenticeship

programs. Some grantees focused their efforts on maintaining relationships to help participants access child care. Moore Community House engaged with local and state workforce and child care stakeholders to improve SWFI participants' access to child care services and planned to continue these partnerships after the grant ended. Through a partnership with the Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative, Moore Community House developed and implemented an information and referral infrastructure to link participants to child care services. The City of Phoenix focused on its relationship with a local Head Start program and regularly co-enrolled participants into WIOA and Head Start. The physical proximity between Head Start and job centers enabled convenient coordination between staff and for parents accessing services at both locations. Because the City of Phoenix integrated SWFI with many of its existing WIOA services, the enhanced relationship between Head Start and staff at the job centers will continue even after the SWFI grant ends.

Defined and evaluated program models to demonstrate outcomes and garner support. For most grantees, an important step toward sustainability was finding ways to communicate their program model to stakeholders, potential partners, and future funders. During the 2019 SWFI convening, USDOL and the SWFI coaches invited a philanthropic leader in the field to share tips on how to pitch their SWFI programs to potential funders to support sustainability. The leader explained that grantees should be able to clearly describe their model, share concrete evidence of how their model affects participant outcomes, feature participant success stories to add a human element, and explain how further investment would inform the field. The session helped grantees think about how they could share this type of information with potential funders and other stakeholders. For example, to describe how its program worked, ABCD developed a logic model that described its SWFI program

and shared this model with the governor. CareerSource NCFL and TAP conducted evaluations to describe their programs in detail, which they referenced in conversations with potential new funders. Grantees also developed two-page case studies with their coaches that distilled their SWFI program offerings and achievements to share with local stakeholders and potential funders.

Advocated for additional funding. Grantees identified and advocated for additional funding to sustain the progress they made integrating their child care and workforce systems through SWFI. For example, two grantees applied for and received grants from an organization that presented at an in-person SWFI convening. For its SWFI grant, Moore Community House leveraged state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant funds to support participants' access to child care for one year. With the support of state funds, Moore Community House also partnered with state workforce and child care entities to map where and how child care could be used as a work support. Vermont Technical College received a U.S. Department of Defense grant to extend and expand its manufacturing training, which featured the employer partnerships the grantee had established during SWFI. The governor's office also invited the grantee to participate in the National Governors Association Reskilling Network, an opportunity for the grantee to strengthen its approach to serving working parents in the future.

Endnotes

[1] A two-generation approach intentionally combines services to children with services to adults, typically the child's parents, to increase the well-being of the family. See: Sama-Miller, E., C. Ross, T. Sommer, S. Baumgartner, L. Roberts, & P.L. Chase Lansdale. "Exploration of Integrated Approaches to Support Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security". OPRE Report 2017-84. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation..

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.