



Escalating Gains: Project QUEST'S Sectoral Strategy Pays Off

Mark Elliott and Anne Roder
Economic Mobility Corporation

April 2017



M O B I L I T Y

Board of Directors

Cynthia Shoss *Chair*

Plinio Ayala

Harry J. Holzer

Mary Pena

Russ Pomeranz

Mark Elliott

The Economic Mobility Corporation (Mobility) identifies, develops and evaluates programs and policies that enable disadvantaged individuals to acquire the education, skills and networks needed to succeed in the labor market so that they can support themselves and their families.

Mail

Economic Mobility Corporation, Inc.

50 Broadway, Suite 1604

New York, NY 10004

Telephone

212.280.6975

Email

info@economicmobilitycorp.org



Acknowledgements

This report is dedicated to our colleague and great friend Jack Litzenberg, who believed in this project when no one else did. With his passing in 2014, we lost a visionary of the workforce development field. We're sorry that Jack never saw the results we're sharing here—he would have been very proud.

Principal funding for this evaluation came from Jack's employer, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. We're very grateful to the foundation and particularly Neal Hegarty, who ensured that we would be able to complete the project. Additional support was provided by the Department of Health and Human Services through a contract with Abt Associates. Many helped make this happen, particularly Brendan Kelly and Howard Rolston. We also received a grant to conduct in-depth interviews with QUEST participants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, where Irene Lee was instrumental.

And we're very grateful to all of the QUEST staff as well as the COPS and Metro Alliance leaders who were so generous with their time. Your 25 years of hard work has paid off.

We thank the individuals who took part in the study and completed interviews about their experiences.

We appreciate the work of those who contributed to this report. Melissa Bradley of the RAND Survey Research Group led the effort to locate and interview study participants. Howard Rolston, Karen Gardiner at Abt Associates, ACF staff members, and Harry Holzer at Georgetown University provided useful comments on a draft of this report. Caitlin van Dusen edited the report, and Penelope Malish designed the publication.

Table of Contents

5	Project QUEST
6	Study Participants
8	Program Impacts
15	QUEST Participants' Experiences
17	Program Costs
19	Conclusion
20	Endnotes
21	Appendix

Figures

6	Figure 1: Study Participants' Characteristics at Program Entry
8	Figure 2: Average Annual Earnings during the Six Years after Random Assignment Among All Study Participants
9	Figure 3: Project QUEST's Impact on Average Annual Earnings during the Six Years after Random Assignment
9	Figure 4: Percent of All Study Participants Employed Year-Round during the Six Years after Random Assignment
10	Figure 5: Average Hourly Wage Among Those Employed Six Years after Random Assignment
11	Figure 6: Percent Who Reported Having Various Financial Difficulties in the Last Six Months, Among All Study Participants, at the Time of the Six-Year Follow-Up
11	Figure 7: Percent Who Reported Having Various Financial Difficulties in the Last Six Months, Among Those Who Reported Having Each Item, at the Time of the Six-Year Follow-Up
12	Figure 8: Percent of All Study Participants Who Obtained Health-Care Certifications during the Six Years
12	Figure 9: Percent of All Study Participants Employed in Health Care Six Years after Random Assignment
13	Figure 10: Percent of All Study Participants Who Earned a College Degree during the Six Years
14	Figure 11: Percent Who Had Earnings of \$24,000 or More in Year Six by Education Level at Program Entry
14	Figure 12: Percent Who Had Earnings of \$24,000 or More in Year Six by Age at Program Entry
15	Figure 13: Percent of QUEST Participants Employed in Health Care Six Years after Random Assignment
15	Figure 14: Average Annual Earnings in Year Six Among QUEST Participants
16	Figure 15: Residential Location of QUEST Participants at the Time of the Six-Year Follow-Up
17	Figure 16: Project QUEST's Costs Averaged \$10,501 per Participant
23	Figure A1: Estimated Regression Coefficients for the Probability of Being a Respondent to the Six-Year Follow-Up Survey
24	Figure A2: Comparison of the Baseline Characteristics of Treatment and Control Group Members in the Final Sample

Project QUEST

Prompted by the rapid erosion of low-skill manufacturing jobs in the 1980s, two community-organizing groups in San Antonio, Texas, led a grassroots effort to help residents gain skills to meet employers' needs in growing sectors of the local economy. The two groups, COPS (Communities Organized for Public Service) and Metro Alliance, founded Project QUEST in 1992. In its 25 years of operation, QUEST has served more than 6,000 job seekers in the San Antonio area.

QUEST provides comprehensive support and resources to help individuals complete occupational training programs at local community colleges, pass certification exams, and obtain jobs in targeted industries. QUEST's services include the following:

- financial assistance to cover tuition and fees for classes, books, transportation, uniforms, licensing exam fees, and tutoring
- remedial instruction to improve math and reading skills to help individuals pass college placement tests
- counseling to address personal and academic concerns, provide motivation and emotional support, and refer participants to other agencies for assistance with utility bills, child care, food, and other services as needed
- weekly meetings that focus on life skills, including time management, study skills, critical thinking, and conflict resolution. QUEST holds participants accountable by requiring attendance at these meetings and submission of attendance sheets signed by instructors in order to continue receiving support
- job placement assistance, including help with writing résumés and interviewing, as well as referrals to employers that are hiring

In 2005, QUEST agreed to take part in a randomized controlled trial (RCT) study to assess its impacts on participants' earnings. The evaluation focused on individuals who were pursuing training for health-care jobs, including licensed vocational nurse, registered nurse, medical records coder, and surgical, sonography, and radiology technician. Between April 2006 and October 2008, 410 individuals enrolled in the study, of whom 207 were assigned to the treatment group and 203 to the control group. The results are based on surveys completed with 175 treatment group members and 168 control group members who completed a baseline survey at the time of enrollment and a follow-up survey six years later. The overall response rate on the six-year follow-up survey was 83.7 percent. Details regarding the study design and the final sample are provided in the appendix. This brief highlights the main findings regarding Project QUEST's impacts. A future report will provide additional details about the QUEST services, the participants and their program experiences, and QUEST's impacts.

Study Participants

During the study enrollment period, QUEST sought to serve individuals who were interested in but not currently attending college, including those who needed to improve basic reading and math skills before they could enroll in college-level classes and those who were ready to enroll. As shown in Figure 1, most participants were Latino women with children under the age of 18. Nearly half had attended college in the past but had not earned a degree. Nearly all participants had worked at some point prior to applying to QUEST. While 84 percent had worked in the previous year, the work had been inconsistent. Only 42 percent had worked during all 12 months of the year, and average annual earnings among all participants were \$11,387. Figure A2 in the appendix compares the baseline characteristics of the QUEST group and control group.

Figure 1		Study Participants' Characteristics at Program Entry	
		N=343	
Female		89.5%	
Race			
Latino		74.3%	
African American		13.1%	
White		9.6%	
Age			
18 to 24		29.4%	
25 to 34		44.9%	
35 to 64		25.7%	
Had any children under age 18		72.0%	
Marital status			
Married		29.4%	
Separated, divorced, or widowed		26.2%	
Never married		44.3%	
Highest degree earned			
GED		24.8%	
High school diploma		70.6%	
College degree		4.7%	
Attended college but did not earn a degree		46.4%	
Had any health-care certificates or licenses		20.1%	
Recent employment			
Employed at any time during the past year		84.4%	
Employed during all 12 months of the past year		41.5%	
Average annual earnings during the past year		\$11,387	

COPS, Metro Alliance, and Project QUEST

“If we can educate Shamu, we can educate the people! If we can educate Shamu, we can educate the people!” chanted the several hundred San Antonio residents massed in front of city hall. SeaWorld had recently opened, bringing Shamu the killer whale along with hundreds of low-wage jobs. These residents, however, were advocating for local investment in skills training that would enable people to get better-paying jobs.

Inside city hall, Mayor Nelson Wolff was informing community leaders that he didn't have the \$2 million for Project QUEST he had promised during his campaign. “Go out and tell them that we don't have the money,” Wolfe said to the group. “No,” responded one of the leaders, Pat Ozuna. “*You* go out there and you tell them.” So everyone marched to the front of city hall, where a big ceremonial check was awaiting the mayor's signature. “Well,” said Ms. Ozuna, “will you invest in us?” The mayor took a moment to look out at the crowd, then said yes and signed the check.¹

For years COPS and Metro Alliance had focused primarily on infrastructure issues because many streets in San Antonio's less prosperous communities were unpaved and had serious drainage problems. Hundreds of millions of dollars were invested to address those concerns as a result of their advocacy. When Levi-Strauss closed its San Antonio plant in 1990, laying off 1,100 low-skill workers, COPS and Metro shifted their focus to jobs. At the time, San Antonio was marketing itself as a major tourist and convention destination featuring the Alamo and the city's famed Riverwalk. San Antonio's hotel, restaurant, and retail sectors were booming, but typically offered low-wage opportunities.

COPS and Metro leaders held dozens of meetings with business leaders, educational institutions, and elected officials. They found that there were good paying jobs, particularly in health care, that employers were having a hard time filling. In fact, many were recruiting staff from outside the metropolitan area and, in some cases, from overseas. QUEST was created to connect residents of San Antonio's low-income communities to the training that would enable them to compete for these opportunities. Employers committed to hiring San Antonio residents once they were trained, and Governor Ann Richards and Mayor Wolff agreed to provide the capital needed to support QUEST.

COPS' and Metro's involvement didn't end at the check signing outside city hall, however. Their team held more than 30 meetings in the community to finalize QUEST's design. They concluded that prospective participants would have to have a high school degree and at least 20 working years ahead of them. They also decided that recruitment would take place mainly through parishes and churches. As one COPS leader explained:

We just told people at the parishes that this new job training was established and that we'd be recruiting for candidates. We were quite strict. We would bring them in; we would tell them how difficult the program was going to be but it was really worth it. What kind of family support would they have? We were going to invest in them and we didn't want them to fall through the cracks. We really wanted them to be successful. Then we sent them down to the QUEST office.

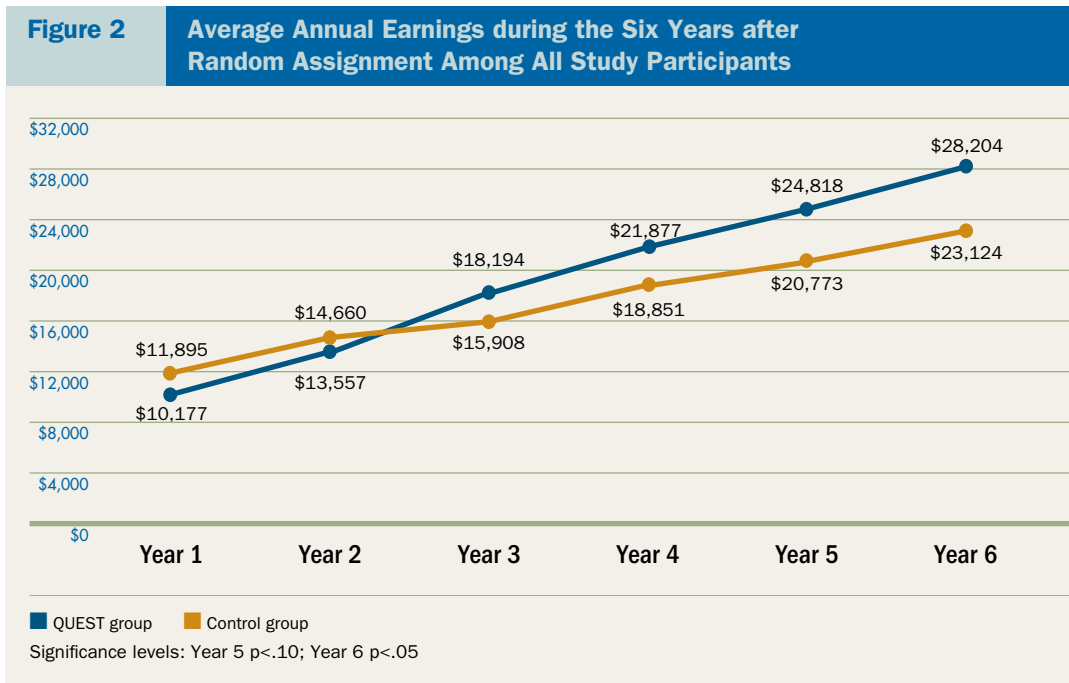
Throughout the quarter century since QUEST was launched, COPS' and Metro Alliance's roles have changed, but their leaders still have to advocate for continued funding from the city. Each year they meet with members of the city council and ensure their votes for continued support. San Antonio's support comes out of the city's general fund—QUEST has received little funding from the public workforce system—and provides the organization with a critical source of flexible resources.

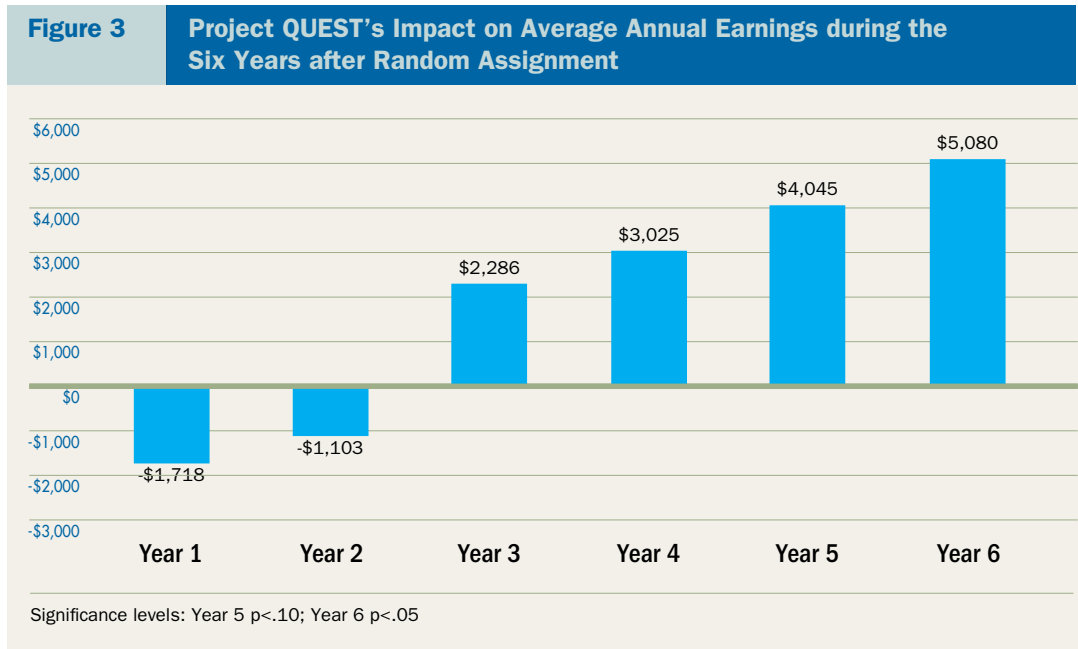
Program Impacts

QUEST had a large, sustained impact on participants' earnings.

QUEST participants achieved substantially greater earnings than control group members in the third through sixth years after random assignment. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, the earnings impacts grew over time, from \$2,286 in year three to \$5,080 in year six, and were statistically significant in the fifth and sixth years after random assignment. The earnings gains correspond to when QUEST participants completed training. Only 23 percent of treatment group members had completed or left their QUEST-supported training by the end of the first year. This figure increased to 65 percent by the end of the second year and to 94 percent by the end of the fourth year after random assignment.

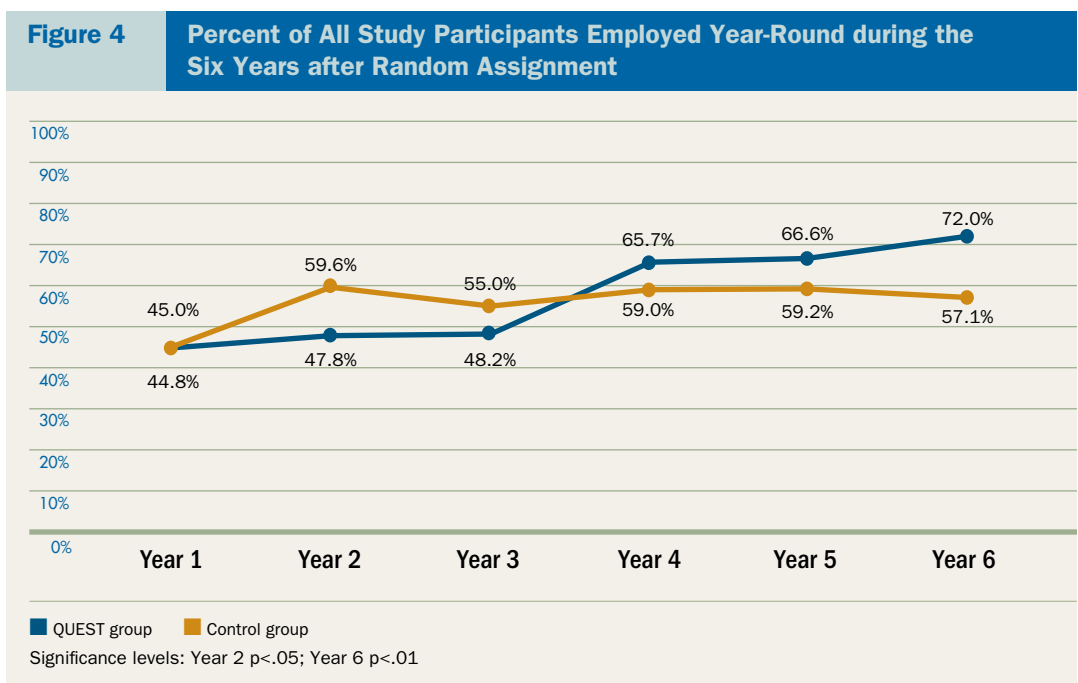
The size of the earnings gains and fact that they continued to grow over the six years are important for the workforce development field. Past studies of sector-based training programs have only followed participants for two years. Questions remained about whether the large earnings impacts found in these studies would fade over time due to the control group catching up to the program group, as has been found in other studies of job training programs.² The fact that the QUEST earnings impacts not only did not fade but continued to increase through the sixth year underscores the impressiveness of the findings and QUEST's approach.



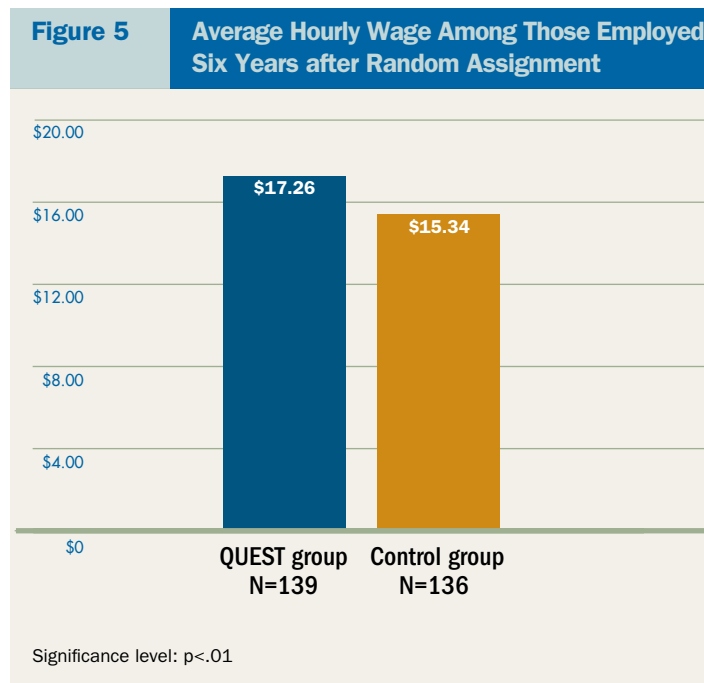


QUEST participants earned higher hourly wages and were more consistently employed than control group members.

The percentages of QUEST participants and control group members who were employed at any time during each year after random assignment were similar.³ Figure 4 presents the percentage of all participants who were employed year-round, that is, during all 12 months of the year. QUEST participants worked more consistently than control group members did in the fourth through the sixth years after random assignment.

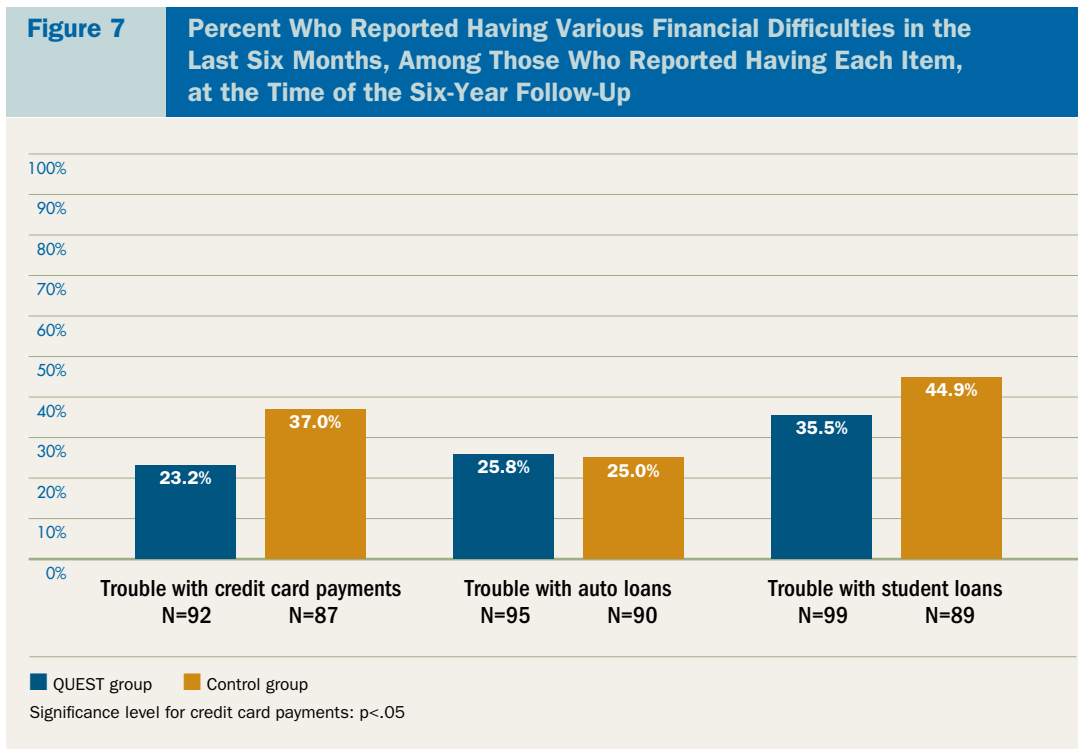
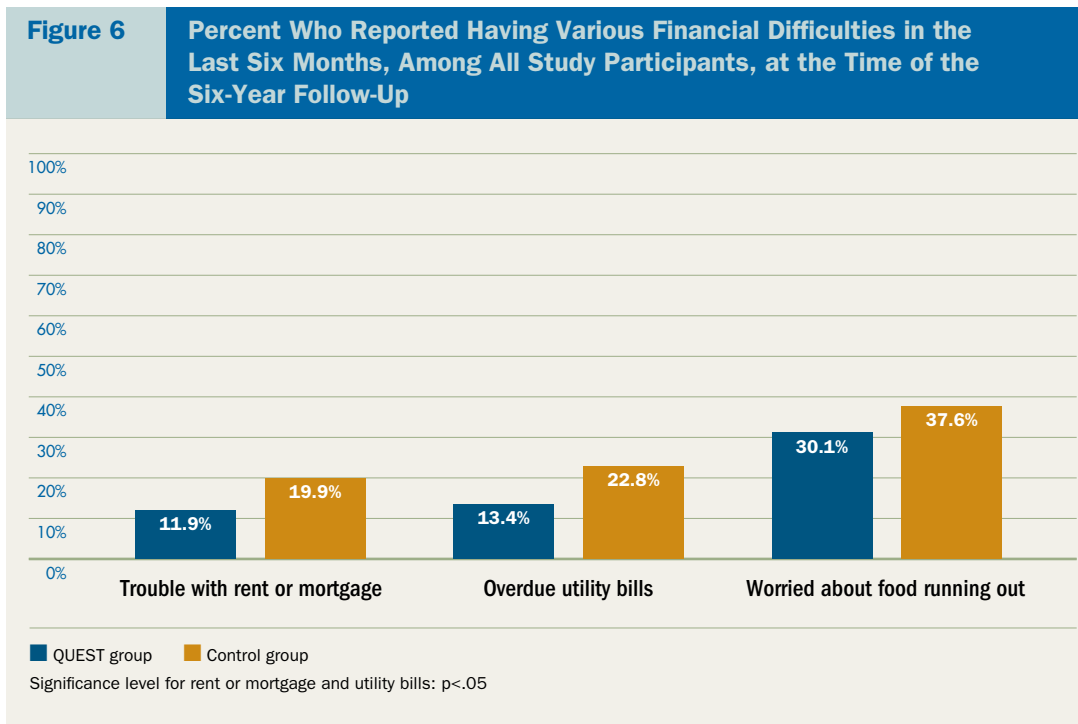


Among participants who were employed at the end of the six years, QUEST participants earned nearly \$2 an hour more, on average, than control group members did (Figure 5).⁴



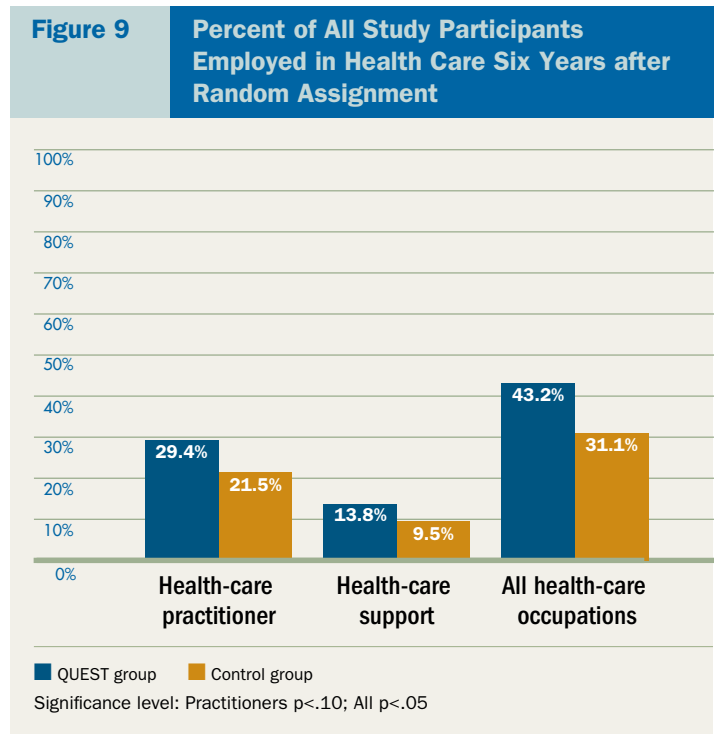
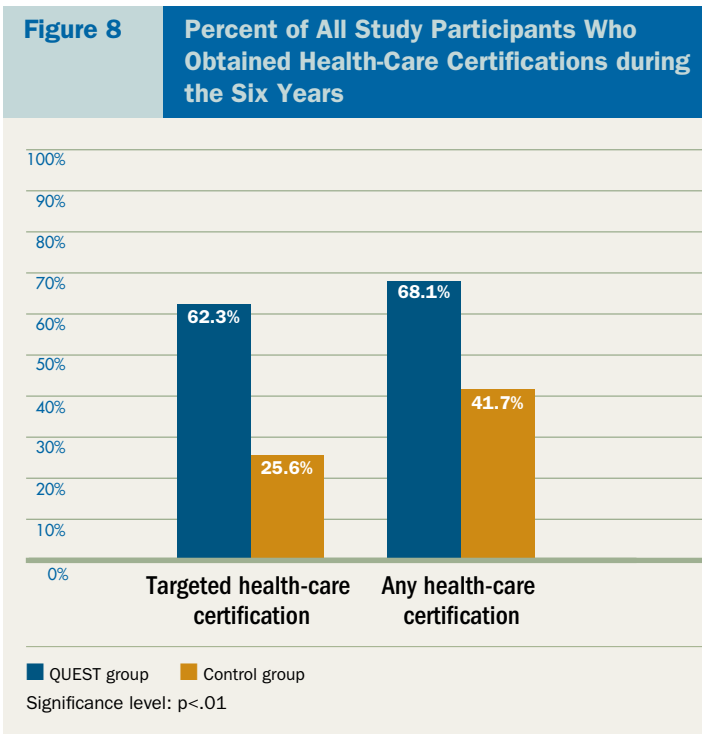
At the time of the six-year follow-up survey, QUEST participants reported greater financial stability than control group members.

Similar percentages of QUEST participants and control group members had student loans, auto loans, credit cards, and rent or mortgage payments at the time of the six-year follow up. But QUEST participants were less likely than control group members to report having various financial difficulties during the six months prior to the follow-up survey. Figure 6 presents the percentage of all participants who reported difficulty with housing payments, utility bills, or food. QUEST participants were significantly less likely than control group members to have trouble with rent or mortgage payments or with utility bills. Figure 7 presents the percentage of participants who had difficulties with payments among those who had each item. Among those who had credit cards, QUEST participants were significantly less likely than control group members to report having trouble with their payments.⁵



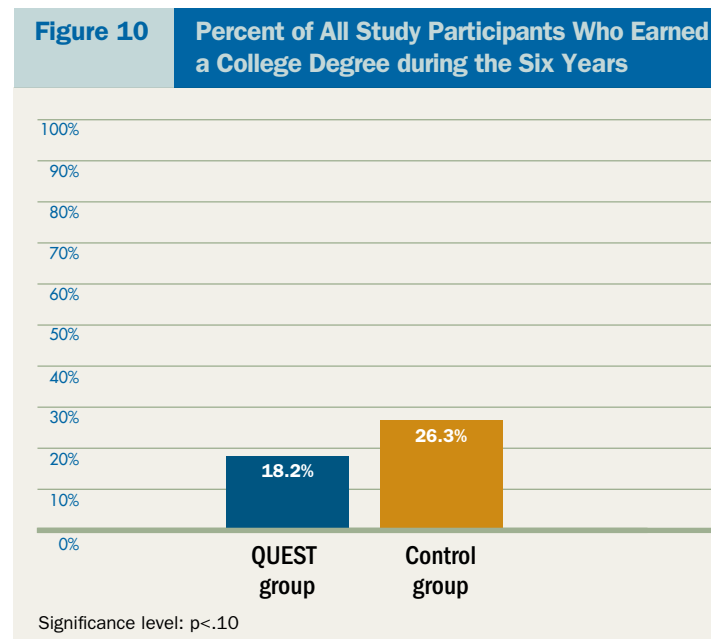
After six years, QUEST participants were more likely than control group members to have obtained a health-care certificate or license and to be working in a health-care occupation.

The results suggest that QUEST's success in helping people obtain certifications and employment in the targeted health-care sector contributed to its impacts on earnings. QUEST participants were substantially more likely than control group members to obtain either the targeted health-care certification or any health-care certification, including those at a lower level than the one initially targeted (Figure 8). QUEST participants were also more likely than control group members to be employed in a health-care occupation six years after random assignment, particularly as health-care practitioners, such as nurses and technicians (Figure 9).⁶ QUEST participants who were working in health-care occupations at the end of the six years earned \$20.01 an hour, on average, compared to \$13.84 an hour among QUEST participants not working in health-care occupations.



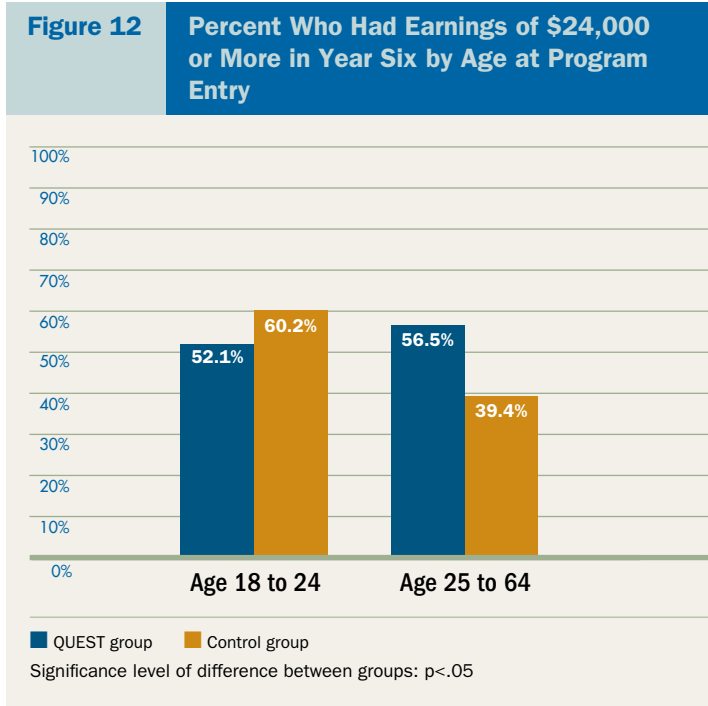
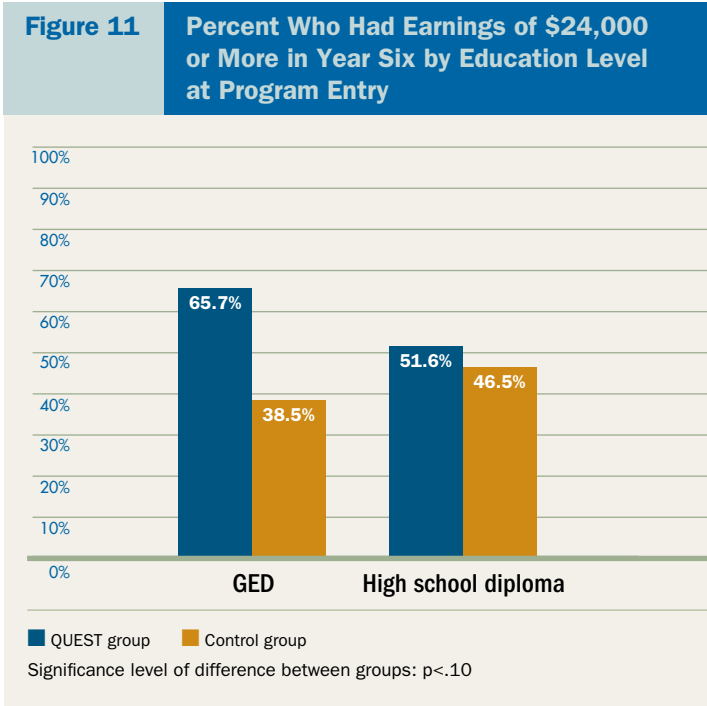
QUEST participants were less likely than control group members to have earned a college degree during the six years.

Slightly less than 5 percent of all study participants had a college degree at the time they applied to QUEST. While the participants were seeking to attend training programs at local colleges, most were not pursuing degree programs. Overall, 98 percent of QUEST participants and 77 percent of control group members reported attending any college classes or training programs during the six years after random assignment. While QUEST participants were more likely to obtain health-care certifications, control group members were somewhat more likely to obtain a college degree (Figure 10). Most study participants who obtained college degrees obtained associate's degrees (97 percent of the QUEST participants and 89 percent of the control group members who obtained college degrees). A similar percentage of QUEST participants (18.3 percent) and control group members (16.7 percent) were attending college or training programs at the time of the six-year follow-up survey.



QUEST had greater impacts on the earnings of nontraditional college students and those who had struggled with completing education in the past.

QUEST's earnings impacts were greater for people who had dropped out of high school and earned a GED and for individuals ages 25 to 64.⁷ As shown in Figure 11, QUEST's impact on the percent of GED holders who earned \$24,000 or more in year six was 27.2 percentage points—significantly greater than its impact on the percent of those with a high school diploma who earned this amount. As shown in Figure 12, QUEST's impact on earning \$24,000 or more in year six among individuals ages 25 to 64 was 17.1 percentage points—significantly greater than its impact on the earnings of those ages 18 to 24.

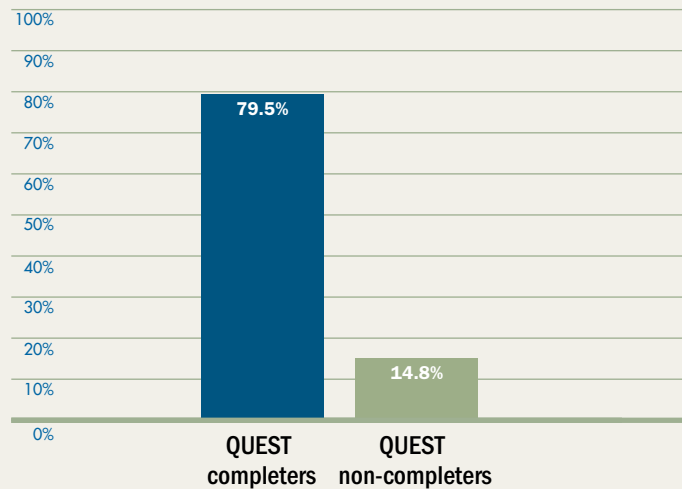


QUEST Participants' Experiences

QUEST program completers were highly likely to remain in health-care occupations after six years and had higher average earnings than those who did not complete the program.

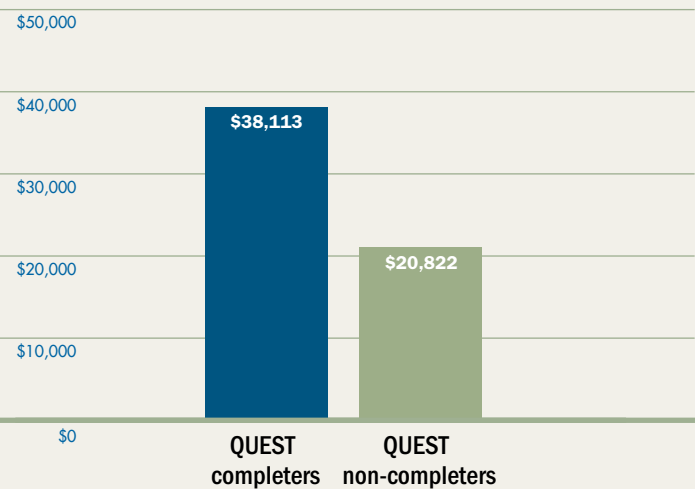
Overall, 69 percent of treatment group members completed training and 63 percent of training completers earned the targeted health-care certification while receiving support from QUEST. Participants who completed nursing programs were substantially more likely than participants who completed the medical coder and technician programs to earn the targeted certification (86 percent versus 26 percent, respectively). Nearly 80 percent of those who earned their certification while in QUEST (“the QUEST completers”) were working in a health-care occupation six years after random assignment (Figure 13). The average annual earnings of QUEST completers in the sixth year were just over \$38,000 (Figure 14).

Figure 13 Percent of QUEST Participants Employed in Health Care Six Years after Random Assignment



Significance level: $p < .01$

Figure 14 Average Annual Earnings in Year Six Among QUEST Participants

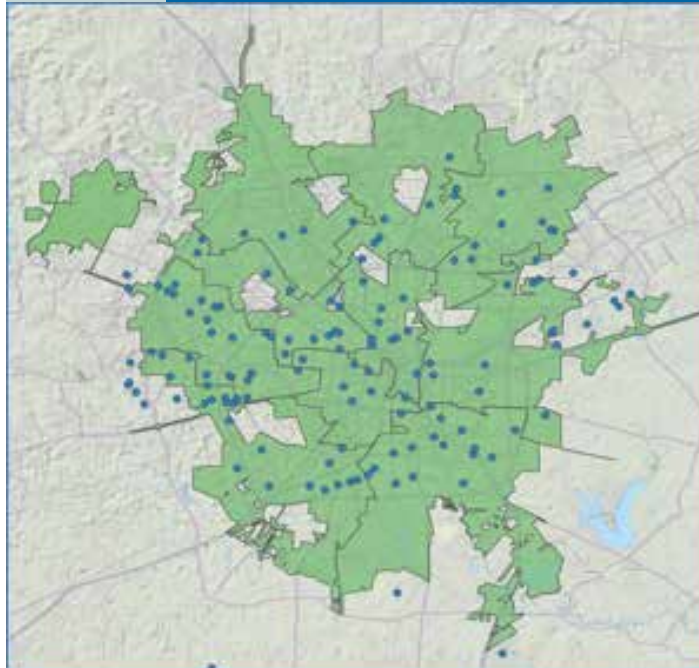


Significance level: $p < .01$

Nearly all QUEST participants remained in Texas and 85 percent were still living in San Antonio after six years.

Nearly all study participants were living in San Antonio at the time they applied to the program. After six years, 96 percent of QUEST participants were still living in Texas, and 85 percent were living in San Antonio. Figure 15 shows where the QUEST participants who remained in the San Antonio area lived at the time of the six-year follow-up.

Figure 15 Residential Location of QUEST Participants at the Time of the Six-Year Follow-Up

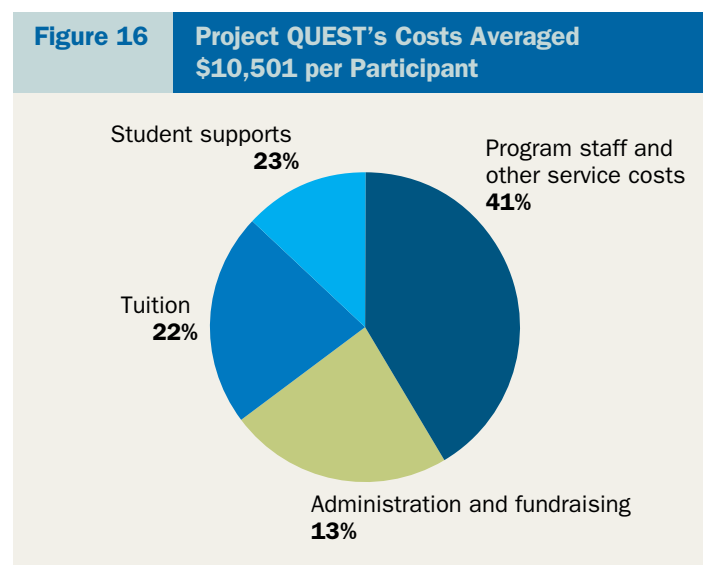


Each dot represents one person. Boundaries of green shaded areas denote City of San Antonio council districts.

Program Costs

QUEST made a substantial investment in participants.

Study participants received support from Project QUEST for an average of 22 months, and the average cost per participant was \$10,501. Figure 16 presents the breakdown of these costs. Tuition costs—that is, the portion of participants' community college tuition that QUEST paid—accounted for 22 percent of the overall costs.⁸ The additional supports that QUEST provided participants made up another 23 percent of costs—the most common of which were covering the costs of books, transportation, certification exam fees, review courses, uniforms, and vaccinations required to enter the health-care field. Program staff, including the counselors who supported participants from college enrollment through job placement, and other direct program costs accounted for 41 percent of the overall costs.



Proven Practitioners Fund

Project QUEST, along with three other organizations, was included in the Sectoral Employment Impact Study that we launched in 2003 while leading Public/Private Ventures' Labor Market department. Each of the four organizations that were part of the study has demonstrated large, statistically significant earnings gains for their participants.⁹ At the time the demonstration was launched, it was generally believed that skills training for low-income people was ineffective and that public employment policies should emphasize a work-first approach. These findings refute that view. Enabling low-income people to gain the skills and credentials needed to land good jobs in growing sectors of local labor markets *can* pay very substantial dividends.

Effective workforce development organizations are not common, however. Just a few have demonstrated meaningful earnings gains in a randomized controlled trial evaluation. One reason is that these organizations cannot be sustained by current federal workforce programs and must rely on private philanthropy, special demonstration grants, earned revenue, individual gifts, and local tax levy resources. Project QUEST, for example, never received support through local Workforce Investment Act dollars for the 16 years the legislation was in existence.

In 2011 a funding shortfall nearly forced QUEST to close; only the generosity of a few donors and organizational partners allowed it to survive. If these donors had not stepped in, this report would be highlighting the achievements of an organization no longer in existence. Even today, funding limits have forced QUEST to restrict enrollment primarily to individuals who are already attending community college. With additional resources, QUEST could resume recruitment of a broader range of people from the community and prepare them for college as well.

Per Scholas, a technology training organization headquartered in the South Bronx, which took part in the Sectoral Employment Impact Study, receives generous support from New York City foundations. Despite the fact that it has achieved large earnings impacts in two separate randomized controlled trial evaluations,¹⁰ it has struggled to find public and national philanthropic resources to replicate its technology training outside of New York City.

Foundations, businesses, and wealthy donors should create a fund dedicated to the expansion of workforce organizations that have demonstrated impacts in a rigorous evaluation. While it's important to continue to advocate for more-supportive public policy, it is essential that we strengthen proven organizations that are a beacon for what's possible in workforce development.

Creation of such a fund would also encourage leading practitioners in the field to consider undertaking an impact study, with the knowledge that if they demonstrate large earnings gains, resources would be available for the expansion and replication of their programs.

Conclusion

QUEST has demonstrated that investing in low-income individuals' skills can have a meaningful and lasting impact on their lives. Participants were typically poor when they enrolled in QUEST, but, six years later, were earning an average of \$28,000 per year. Program graduates who obtained a certification in one of QUEST's targeted fields were doing considerably better, making more than \$38,000 per year. (San Antonio is less costly than many cities. Equivalent salaries to achieve the same standard of living would be approximately \$51,000 in Chicago, \$61,000 in Los Angeles, and \$64,000 in Washington, D.C.¹¹) Steady employment and good wages meant less financial stress, as QUEST participants were much more likely to be able to pay their rent, utilities, and other bills on time.

- QUEST not only increased its participants' earnings; it enabled graduates to reach the middle class. Few workforce development programs have had as powerful an impact.
- QUEST had the most impact on job seekers ages 25 to 64 and on those who entered the program with a GED rather than a high school diploma. This suggests that QUEST was reaching into the community to engage people who were unlikely to navigate their way through the local labor market to a good job on their own.
- QUEST's program is an excellent local economic development strategy. The vast majority of participants who benefitted from the program have remained in the San Antonio area working for local employers.

Because training is conducted through local community colleges, QUEST's approach can easily be adapted to other sectors as employer demand changes. QUEST has supported students in manufacturing and diesel mechanics programs and is currently helping students who are preparing for jobs in technology. QUEST has continued to keep pace with the evolving needs of the health-care industry. For example, as most local hospitals now require nurses to have two- or four-year degrees, many current QUEST participants are pursuing degrees rather than certificates.

Project QUEST's strategies can be replicated in other communities. In fact, affiliated organizing groups have created similar organizations across the Southwest.¹² Nonprofit organizations should serve as intermediaries connecting residents, community colleges, and employers in growing sectors of the local economy. The key to such programs' success, of course, is considerable, reliable financial support that can be used flexibly to meet students' needs, which is rarely available through the nation's workforce system. Governors, mayors, corporations, and local foundations will need to look to their own resources to create local entities like Project QUEST.

Endnotes

1. As reported by Sister Pearl Ceasar (P Ceasar, personal interview, January 27, 2015). Sister Pearl was COPS' lead organizer at the time and was in the meeting with Mayor Wolff.

Nelson Wolff remembers the meeting a little differently. He says that he told the COPS leaders that the city didn't have all of the money he had promised. When they walked outside city hall and faced the protesters, Pat Ozuna leaned in and whispered to Wolff, "You better have the right answer." Wolff, who says he is a longtime supporter of COPS and Metro, claims he knew what his answer was going to be before they got there. "You can always find the money if the political pressure is good enough. They got what they asked for," he recalled, laughing at the memory (N. Wolff, personal interview, January 26, 2015).
2. An evaluation of the Job Training Partnership Act found that the significant earnings impacts for adult men and women in the second and third years after random assignment disappeared by the fifth year. (See: United States General Accounting Office. 1996. *Job Training Partnership Act: Long-Term Earnings and Employment Outcomes*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.)
3. The percent employed at any time during each year among QUEST participants and control group members, respectively, was: 73% versus 78% in Year 1, 82% versus 87% in Year 2, 85% versus 87% in Year 3, 86% versus 86% in Year 4, 87% versus 83% in Year 5, and 90% versus 87% in Year 6. None of these differences are statistically significant.
4. The outcome of hourly wages can only be observed for study participants who were employed. The QUEST program likely influenced which treatment group members retained employment. Therefore, impact estimates for the subset of participants who retained employment may be biased and should be given less weight than measures involving the full sample in assessing program effectiveness.
5. As noted, the outcomes of having trouble with credit card, auto loan, or student loan payments are conditional on participants stating that they had each of these items. At the time of the follow-up survey: 52.6% of QUEST group members and 51.8% of control group members reported having credit cards; 54.3% of QUEST group members and 53.6% of control group members reported having auto loans; and 56.6% of QUEST group members and 53.0% of control group members reported having student loans. The QUEST program likely influenced which treatment group members had credit cards, auto loans, and student loans. Therefore, impact estimates for the subset of participants who had these items may be biased and should be given less weight than measures involving the full sample in assessing program effectiveness.
6. Health-care support includes such occupations as certified nursing assistants, medical assistants, home health aides, and dental assistants.
7. We examined whether QUEST had greater impacts for a number of demographic subgroups of interest, including gender, age, race, immigrant status, education level, marital status, and whether participants had children under age 18 at the time of program entry. The study was not designed to ensure sufficient sample sizes for examining subgroup impacts. Therefore, this analysis was exploratory. Given the small sample sizes and the large variation in annual earnings, the study did not have sufficient power to examine subgroup differences in average annual earnings. Therefore, we examined the percent of participants who earned \$24,000 or more in year six, which were the median annual earnings for the full study sample.
8. During the first three years of the study, QUEST paid 100 percent of participants' tuition. Starting in the fall of 2009, QUEST paid 50 percent of participants' tuition—a change that affected about 41 percent of study participants.
9. The other three organizations are Per Scholas, JVS-Boston, and Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership as reported in: Maguire, Sheila, et al. July 2010. *Tuning In to Local Labor Markets: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.
10. In addition to Maguire, Sheila, et al. (2010), see: Hendra, Richard, et al., August 2016. *Encouraging Evidence on a Sector-Focused Advancement Strategy: Two-Year Impacts from the WorkAdvance Demonstration*. New York: MDRC.
11. Cost of living comparison data obtained from www.bankrate.com/calculators/savings/moving-cost-of-living-calculator.aspx.
12. Major sister organizations include Capital IDEA in Austin, Project ARRIBA in El Paso, Project VIDA in the Rio Grande Valley, and JobPath in Tucson.

Appendix

Study Design and Final Sample

The evaluation of Project QUEST uses a randomized-controlled trial design to assess QUEST's impacts on individuals' educational attainment, employment, earnings, and other indicators of financial well-being. The evaluation focused on individuals pursuing training for health-care occupations. At the time of study enrollment, 60 percent of participants intended to enroll in licensed vocational nursing programs, 7 percent in registered nursing, 25 percent in medical records coding, and 8 percent in various technician programs (e.g., surgical, sonography, and radiology). To assess program impacts, the study relies on data from a baseline survey conducted at the time of study enrollment and follow-up surveys conducted two years and six years after study enrollment. We used data from the baseline survey to examine the characteristics of treatment and control group members in the final sample and to control for any differences in characteristics between the groups in the analysis of program impacts. The six-year follow-up period allowed sufficient time for program participants to complete remedial, pre-requisite, and core program classes, pass the necessary certification exams, and obtain employment prior to measuring program impacts on annual earnings. We also analyzed data from QUEST on individuals' receipt of services, interviews with program staff, and in-depth interviews with a sample of QUEST participants to gain a richer understanding of the individuals and families QUEST serves and how the program helps them achieve their educational, career, and financial goals. The full report on the evaluation will include information from the in-depth interviews and more information about the services QUEST participants received.

Intake, Baseline Survey, and Random Assignment

QUEST staff completed the program's intake and screening process to identify eligible candidates and obtained candidates' written consent to take part in

the study. Staff then sent their contact information to a survey firm, the Institute for Survey Research (ISR) at Temple University, which completed the baseline survey and conducted random assignment. Individuals were blocked according to their intended program track (i.e., registered nurse, licensed vocational nurse, medical coder, and the various technician tracks) and the survey firm randomly assigned 50 percent of study participants to the treatment group and 50 percent to the control group within these blocks. Between April 2006 and October 2008, 410 individuals enrolled in the study, of whom 207 were randomly assigned to the treatment group and 203 to the control group. QUEST staff invited those assigned to the treatment group to participate in the program. Those assigned to the control group were told that they would not receive support from QUEST but that they could enroll in college or training on their own or seek other services.

Follow-up Surveys

The impact data come from two follow-up surveys. ISR conducted a two-year follow-up survey that gathered information about study participants' employment since the time of the baseline survey. Mobility contracted with the RAND Survey Research Group to locate and interview study participants for the six-year follow-up survey. This survey gathered information about study participants' employment since the date of their last survey, their education and training experiences since the time of the baseline survey, their family and housing status, and other indicators of financial well-being. All interviews were conducted by telephone using computer-assisted interviewing software.

To capture the data upon which the earnings impact estimates are based, each survey asked respondents to list all full-time or part-time regular jobs, odd jobs, temporary jobs, or any other jobs at which they worked at least 10 hours during any single month during the period in question. Then for each job listed,

interviewers asked which months of the period respondents worked in the job, marking each month on a calendar. Based on the responses, the computer then displayed a list of the months in which the respondent had no jobs listed. For each month, interviewers asked what the respondent was doing during the month. If the respondent was working, the interviewer returned to the list of jobs and calendar and corrected the information. For each job, the survey then asked what the respondents' pay was before taxes when they started the job, pay before taxes either when they left the job or currently, if still employed in the job, the unit of pay, the number of hours worked in a typical week, the number of days worked in a typical week, and the number of weeks worked in a typical month. The survey asked how long respondents worked in a job to identify jobs held for less than a month.

We used the data collected to calculate monthly earnings for each job the respondents held. When the starting and ending pay differed, we calculated monthly starting earnings, average earnings, and ending earnings. We assigned monthly earnings to each calendar month in which the respondent held each job. For those whose pay changed over time, we assigned starting, average, and ending earnings based on the amount of time individuals held the job. We summed the earnings for all jobs held in each month to calculate total earnings in each month. We then converted the calendar months to months before and after the random assignment month and summed the monthly earnings to calculate total earnings for each year. We followed a similar process to calculate the total hours worked per month. We reviewed the total monthly earnings and hours worked data for each respondent to identify and clean outliers in the data (e.g., in months

in which individuals left one job and started another job, we used the average of the earnings in the month before and after the job change).

Sample Attrition

The final response rate on the six-year follow-up survey was 83.7 percent overall, 84.5 percent among treatment group members, and 82.8 percent among control group members for an overall attrition rate of 16.3 percent and differential attrition rate of 1.7 percent. We used regression analysis to examine whether there were systematic differences between those who responded to the 6-year follow-up survey and those who did not on baseline characteristics likely to affect participants' earnings outcomes. Figure A1 presents the regression coefficients estimating the effect of each variable on the probability of completing the survey and the p-value indicating the level of statistical significance of this relationship. The results show that only one characteristic—whether the participant had any health-care certifications prior to enrollment—was statistically significant at the $p < .10$ level. Overall, the regression results showed that differences in characteristics between survey respondents and non-respondents were not statistically significant. The findings imply that the survey results are not biased.

Figure A1 Estimated Regression Coefficients for the Probability of Being a Respondent to the Six-Year Follow-Up Survey

Variable	Coef.	P-value
Treatment group	0.166	0.562
Female	0.573	0.180
Age 25 to 34	0.186	0.586
Age 35 to 44	0.802	0.132
Age 45 to 64	0.832	0.278
Latino	0.191	0.631
Other	0.596	0.305
Immigrant	-0.436	0.405
High school diploma	0.338	0.324
College degree (Associate's or Bachelor's)	0.280	0.713
Had any healthcare certificates or licenses	-0.554	0.098
Average annual earnings in the year prior to enrollment (including zeros)	0.000	0.654
Rent home	0.000	1.000
Own home	0.093	0.870
Homeless	-0.911	0.509
Living in public or subsidized housing	-0.428	0.321
Had a valid driver's license	0.476	0.259
Rating of own health: Good	0.299	0.575
Rating of own health: Excellent	0.255	0.623
Formerly married	-0.124	0.742
Currently married	0.578	0.179
Any children under 18 in household	0.331	0.346
Wald statistic	26.63	0.272
Pseudo R-square (.0729)		

Figure A2 Comparison of the Baseline Characteristics of Treatment and Control Group Members in the Final Sample

	QUEST group (N=175)	Control group (N=168)	
Female	90.9%	88.1%	
Age			
18 to 24	27.4%	31.6%	
25 to 34	45.7%	44.1%	
35 to 44	17.1%	18.5%	
45 to 64	9.7%	6.0%	
Race/Ethnicity			*
Latino	69.1%	79.8%	
Black	16.6%	9.5%	
White	12.0%	7.1%	
Other	2.3%	3.6%	
Immigrant	9.7%	4.8%	
Highest Degree			
GED	24.0%	25.6%	
High school diploma	68.6%	70.8%	
College degree (Associate's or Bachelor's)	7.4%	3.6%	
Had any healthcare certificates or licenses	22.9%	17.3%	
Average annual earnings in the year prior to enrollment (including zeros)	\$11,670	\$11,092	
Housing Status			
Own	20.0%	14.9%	
Rent	62.9%	57.7%	
Live rent free	17.1%	27.4%	
Living in public or subsidized housing	16.0%	7.1%	**
Had a valid driver's license	94.9%	85.7%	***
Rating of own health			*
Excellent	47.4%	57.7%	
Good	46.3%	34.5%	
Fair or poor	6.3%	7.7%	
Marital Status			
Currently married	30.9%	28.0%	
Formerly married	25.1%	27.4%	
Never married	44.0%	44.6%	
Any children under 18 in household	70.3%	70.2%	

Significance levels of differences between groups ***p<.01, **p<.05, p<.10

Equivalency of the Groups on Baseline Characteristics

Figure A2 presents the baseline characteristics of the QUEST participants and control group members in the final sample. Differences in key characteristics—including gender, age, highest degree earned, annual earnings, housing status, marital status, and whether participants had children under age 18—were small and not statistically significant. There were a few statistically significant differences between the groups in terms of race/ethnicity, whether they lived in subsidized housing, whether they had a valid driver's license, and their rating of their health.

Analysis

To assess Project QUEST's impacts on participants' employment, educational attainment, and financial well-being, we used multivariate regression analysis and we report regression-adjusted results. The regression models included the baseline explanatory variables in the tables above to control for any differences between the treatment and control group members in the final survey sample. The models also included the baseline value of the outcome of interest and a binary variable for being a treatment group member.



M O B I L I T Y

Economic Mobility Corporation, Inc.
50 Broadway, Suite 1604
New York, NY 10004
212.280.6975

www.economicmobilitycorp.org