The Fund for Workforce Equity Evaluation

Evaluation Overview and Lessons Learned

June 2024

Agenda

EVALUATION BACKGROUND

Purpose of the Evaluation

Work collaboratively with evaluation partners to:

1) refine the Fund's theory of change;

2) document the activities and outcomes of all implementation partners;

3) assess the degree to which progress is made on project goals; and

4) compile and disseminate key findings that are engaging, accessible, and actionable.

Evaluation Activities

- **Refine the Fund's TOC and research questions** in collaboration with Workforce Matters and other implementation partners.

- **Finalize the evaluation's overall approach and design**, including data collection activities and analytical methods.

- **Begin data collection** to answer research questions.

- **Analyze data** to answer questions about, highlight key challenges with, and identify specific examples of activities and outcomes of while providing information around the impact of the funding model.

- **Share findings** through reports and presentations to partners.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Document Review — Reviewed key Fund-related documents, including grantee applications, reports, and websites.

Interviews & Focus Groups — Conducted interviews with Workforce Matters staff and grantee partners, and focus groups with project participants.

Field Partner Survey — Reviewed and incorporated findings from the Field Partner Survey.

Data Analysis — Coded data into key themes to surface learnings.
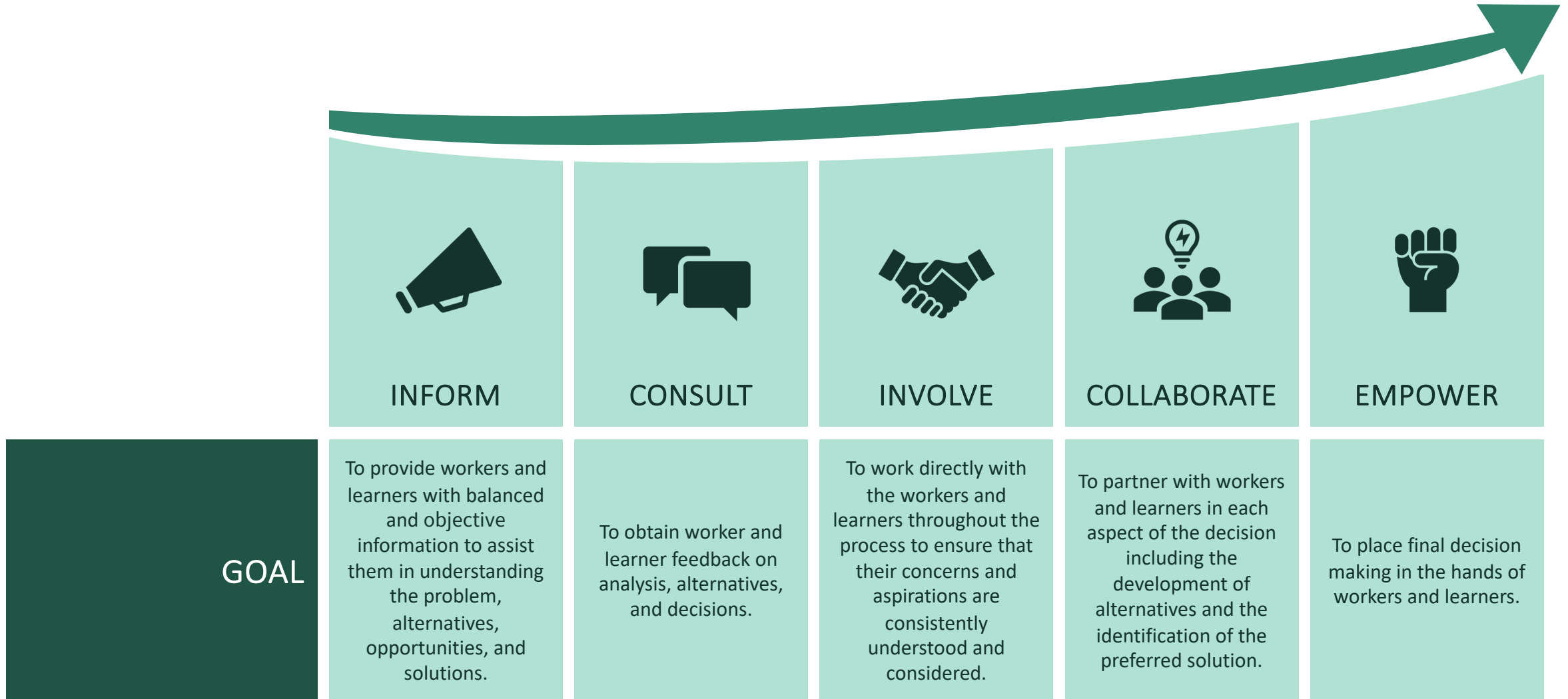
ENGAGING WORKERS AND LEARNERS

Project Activities – I

Project activities generally included:

- **Data collection to get a better sense of community needs**, which included designing and administering surveys, facilitating focus groups and listening sessions, and training workers and learners in data collection and analysis.

- **Worker and learner leadership development**, which was a means for both personal and professional growth for individuals.

- **Advisory boards and other vehicles for worker and learner input**, where groups played diverse roles, including providing feedback, designing program services, and advocating for their communities.

Project Activities – II

GOAL	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
	To provide workers and learners with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and solutions.	To obtain worker and learner feedback on analysis, alternatives, and decisions.	To work directly with the workers and learners throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with workers and learners in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of workers and learners.

Project Outcomes – I

Workers and learners grew personally and professionally through grant activities.

- Gained a sense of empowerment from engaging in program design and implementation.

- Gained valuable skills from project activities, leading to personal and professional growth.

Project Outcomes – II

Developing and expanding partnerships better centered and amplified worker and learner voices.

- Involving individuals with firsthand experience as authentic partners was critical in centering worker and learner voice.

- Strategic and inclusive partnerships offered workers and learners different perspectives and new ways to engage in workforce programming.

Project Outcomes – III

Organizational polices and practices changed due to input from grantee employees stimulated by grant activities.

- Grantees began to incorporate the perspectives of their workers and learners, and to examine and attempt to better embed equity within their own organizational practices.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges

- Balancing the need to implement impactful programs with resources constraints, such as limited time and funding.

- Administrative and organizational challenges, such as staff turnover and working with multiple stakeholder organizations.

- Workers and learners had limited capacity to participate in more involved or long-term grant-funded activities.

- Workers and learners faced significant systemic barriers to participate in grant activities.

Opportunities

- Strong partnerships and collaborations facilitated project implementation and expressions of worker and learner voices.

- Building trust with workers and learners helped reduce engagement barriers, as did offering flexible meeting times and providing compensation.

Necessary Institutional Supports

- A clear articulation and shared understanding of "workforce equity" would allow organizations to set goals and metrics.

- Hiring staff with lived experience and making space to review and revise internal policies and guidance.

- Equity resources, tools, and networks were key for deepening staff readiness to engage in equity work, including the centering of worker and learner voice.

LEARNINGS FROM THE INITIATIVE

Learnings for Workforce Organizations

- Approaches to address capacity and resource challenges included transparent communication, trust building, understanding the organization's role in workforce development, and levering additional funding sources.

- Consistent feedback loops reflected grantees' commitment to understanding worker and learner experiences.

- Compensation was an important way to value worker and learner's time and expertise.

- Grantees shared project findings widely both internally and externally.

Learnings Related to Workers and Learners

- Workers and learners balance family responsibilities, educational pursuits, and career goals when making decisions about their future.

- Flexible and inclusive engagement, and support systems, made it easier for workers and learners to participate in grantee projects.

- Workers and learners' definition of "good jobs" included multiple dimensions like pay, schedules, flexibility, benefits, and community-oriented values.

Learnings for Funders

- Grantees emphasized the value of flexible, unrestricted, and general operating funds.

- Holistic metrics may be better suited to capture the value grantees bring to their communities.

- Approaches for improved funder supports include flexible timelines, multi-year grants, and strengthened partnership dynamics.

- Fund-provided learning sessions, coaching, and TA supports offered a space for grantees to learn and iterate.

Learnings for the Field

- The need for a paradigm shift in the perception of skills gained by formerly incarcerated individuals while within correctional facilities.

- Increasing the focus on engaging young adults in workforce programs, particularly those in low-wage jobs.

- Drawing more attention to the recurring gap in the availability of mental and behavioral health services for young adults.