An Evaluation of AB 1111: The Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative

Implementation and Early Outcomes Report

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

In December 2019, the California Workforce Development Board (State Board) awarded 26 Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative (Breaking Barriers or the initiative) grants. Each grant went to either a community-based organization (CBO) or a workforce development board (WDB) with each grantee also having a named WDB or CBO partner organization (respectively). These grants, which began in April 2020 and ended in March 2022, were designed to help individuals with barriers to employment learn the skills and gain the experience and support needed to find and retain employment. At that time, the State Board also commissioned the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce and Social Policy Research Associates to conduct an evaluation that examined what Breaking Barriers programs looked like, how they operated, participants' outcomes, and program-level outcomes. Data sources included grantee background documents and narrative reports, a grantee survey, phone interviews with selected grantees, and workforce system administrative data (from CalJOBS).

The study team found that, overall, grantees accomplished much of what they had set out to do, despite having started just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These programs collectively exceeded their enrollment goals, served the barriered populations intended, offered a wide range of services, met most of their self-identified program implementation goals, developed plans to sustain their programs, and identified important strategies for meeting participant needs. Furthermore, about 50 percent of participants were employed at about six months after leaving the program, and about one-third showed measurable skill gains. That said, these early outcomes reflect only a small portion of all program participants. Also, the strength of CBO-WDB partnerships increased for only a small number of grantees, with co-enrollment into other workforce programs reported infrequently and primarily for programs with WDB grantees.

With these findings in mind, the study team recommends that in future rounds of funding, the State Board find ways to strengthen CBO-WDB partnerships, explore ways to standardize program elements (e.g., services provided and target populations), refine and target technical assistance efforts, and provide a longer follow-up period for conducting evaluations after the end of program grants.

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Executive Summary

In December 2019, the California Workforce Development Board (State Board) awarded 26 program grants and a technical assistance grant as part of the Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative (Breaking Barriers or the initiative), which was originally authorized under the California Legislature's Assembly Bill (AB) 1111. This initiative was designed to help individuals with barriers to employment ("target populations") learn the skills and gain the experience and support needed to find and retain employment. Importantly, Breaking Barriers services were to be delivered through a collaborative partnership between local workforce development boards (WDBs) and mission-driven community-based organizations (CBOs) with experience in providing services to the target populations. The Breaking Barriers grantees included 20 CBOs (or organizations that operated effectively as CBOs) and six WDBs, all of which operated within 16 of the state's 45 local workforce development areas. Alongside these program grants, the State Board also awarded an evaluation grant to the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) and Social Policy Research Associates (SPR). Grantees began enrolling participants on April 15, 2020 and ended services on March 31, 2022.

Evaluation Overview

The evaluation examined whether and how grantees were able to work with partners across many systems to enroll individuals with high barriers to employment into services that prepared them for entry into the larger workforce and educational systems. More specifically, the evaluation was designed to answer questions organized into three lines of inquiry: 1) an analysis of grantee programs' service delivery and design, intended to better understand what Breaking Barriers programs looked like and how they operated; 2) an analysis of participant outcomes, including the rates at which participants achieved outcomes such as skill gains and employment; and 3) an analysis of program outcomes, designed to look at overall grant-level progress by grantees and their partners, including efforts made to sustain Breaking Barriers programs. Data used to address each line of inquiry included grantee background documents, quarterly narrative reports, a survey of all 26 grantees, phone interviews with a select group of 13 grantees, and administrative

data involving two different datasets derived from CalJOBS, the state's system of record for most workforce programs.

Evaluation Key Findings

Based on the data sources outlined above, the study team found that grantees accomplished much of what they set out to do in implementing their Breaking Barriers programs. This was despite various challenges they faced, mostly related to starting a program as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning. An important caveat to the findings below is that most are based on information gathered at a point in time, or measure activity at a point in time, which is before or even well before grantees completed their programs. The evaluation considers these findings preliminary as they would likely change if information for all participants or the entire grant period could be included.

Enrollment and Program Participants

Part of addressing the evaluation's first line of inquiry—understanding what programs looked like—is understanding how many and what types of participants Breaking Barriers grantees enrolled. The following is what the evaluation found on program enrollment and the populations that grantees served.

- **Breaking Barriers grantees exceeded their collective enrollment goal.** By January 2022, with two months still left to enroll and serve participants, grantees had enrolled 2,510 participants which exceeded their collective goal of 2,301 participants. That said, this collective enrollment goal reflects individual enrollment goals that many grantees negotiated downward given the challenges they faced (closures, capacity limits, etc.) related to COVID-19.

- **Individual grantees were split on their ability to meet enrollment goals.** Twelve grantees exceeded their individual enrollment goals, while the other 14 had yet to reach theirs. Given that grantees were still operating when this information was gathered, some of these 14 may have met or exceeded their goals by the end of the grant.

- **Grantees enjoyed relatively steady enrollment over the course of the grant.** However, enrollment was especially slow in the first quarter due to some initial startup challenges and challenges related to starting to recruit at the beginning of the pandemic.

- **Enrollment by the target population was both better and more complicated than anticipated.** Overall, grantees enrolled participants in all 21 target populations outlined by the initiative, and for most populations, more grantees provided services to these populations than planned. At the same time, many more participants (83 percent) were included in the largest of these groups as compared to the smallest (0.5 percent) so the distribution of participants across populations was uneven.

Program Services

Also part of the evaluation's first line of inquiry was understanding the wide variety of services grantees used to address participant barriers and the implications of COVID-19 on service delivery.

- **Grantees provided a wide range of services to all participants.** Most participants (84 percent) received basic career services, such as job search assistance and labor market information. More than a third received training services (36 percent) followed by supportive services (32 percent).

- **Grantees found several service delivery strategies particularly useful for addressing participants' barriers to employment**. These included work-based learning, job placement services, English language learning services, and case management services.

- **COVID-19 disrupted the delivery of Breaking Barriers services in several ways,** including by reducing class sizes, limiting the timing or availability of services, and forcing grantees to pivot from providing in-person services to virtual or remote services (which many grantees planned to sustain).

Partnerships

One goal of the initiative was to deliver services through collaborative CBO-WDB partnerships, although other partnerships played a role in delivering services as well. The following is what the evaluation found about these partnerships.

- **The strength of CBO-WDB partnerships increased for only a small number of grantees over the course of the initiative.** While most grantees indicated that they had a strong or moderately strong partnership by the end of the grant, the number of grantees indicating that their CBO-WDB partnership was limited or weak only decreased by three compared to the start of the grant. Similarly, only

three additional grantees, compared to the start of the grant, indicated that their CBO-WDB partnership was strong to very strong.

- **Co-enrollment was not widespread or extensive.** Only 15 percent of Breaking Barriers participants were co-enrolled in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth programs (13 percent) and/or in Title III Wager-Peyser or other workforce programs (2 percent), and most of these participants were enrolled with programs where the WDB was the lead grantee. Factors that may have supported co-enrollment for these grantees or limited it for others included levels of communication between partners, CBO access to other funding, more accessible/less burdensome funding, the amount of information offered by CBOs about co-enrollment, and pressures on the workforce system agencies to meet performance requirements.

- **Grantees developed and maintained scores of other partnerships to help them implement their programs.** While not as central to the goal of the grant, these partnerships were nevertheless often important for recruitment, service delivery, and employment placement.

Early Participant- and Program-Level Outcomes

The second and third lines of inquiry for the evaluation considered participant- and program-level outcomes. The findings from the research are as follows.

- **About 50 percent of Breaking Barriers participants were employed in the second calendar quarter after the quarter in which they left the program.** This percentage is somewhat lower than what is found in other WIOA programs but reasonable given the substantial barriers these populations face. Importantly, at the time of this evaluation, only a small subset of Breaking Barriers participants had left the program long enough for the evaluation to measure their employment. Therefore, this preliminary look at employment rates includes only about 20 percent of all Breaking Barriers participants.

- **As of 22 months into the 24-month Breaking Barriers grant, about one-third of participants in training had accomplished a measurable skill gain.**

- **Grantees made considerable progress toward meeting their self-defined goals.** With three to four months left in their grants, 92 percent of grantees had completed most or all of their program activities, and 44 percent had met most or all of their goals or outcomes.

- **Despite not being a stated goal of the program, nearly two-thirds (16) of grantees reported they were planning to sustain their Breaking Barriers programs.** Most of the others were still determining whether to do so.

Recommendations

Breaking Barriers program grants presented two new opportunities to the State: 1) additional support for and exploration of services and approaches for helping individuals with multiple barriers find and retain employment and 2) greater coordination and integration of employment-based services provided by WDBs and CBOs. The results of this evaluation suggest that grantees and the State Board were able to make progress toward both goals: they were able to set up services, enroll participants, and show promising early participant-level outcomes, and they made progress toward growing CBO-WDB partnerships, even though these partnerships were less well-developed due to the grant than initially hoped. With the State Board planning to provide a new round of Breaking Barriers funding in 2022, and with increased interest nationwide in providing workforce system services to populations with high barriers to employment, the study team has the following recommendations.

- **Find ways to strengthen CBO-WDB partnerships.** Examples include: defining clearer expectations for how CBO and WDB partners should work together; asking these partners to define ways in which they can grow their partnerships, including specifying the extent of any plans for co-enrollment; distinguishing different tiers of partnership strength or interest in co-enrollment into which it makes sense to group grantees; and providing financial support to both CBO and WDB partners around planning and partnership building activities.

- **Explore ways to standardize program elements.** Doing this might include developing ways to standardize the number of participants relative to grant size, the types of services that they provide (ideally grounded in research), and the focus on different target populations. Doing this would also include having grantees utilizing CalJOBS fields to define their goals, to create uniformity and to provide an easier means of tracking goal completion.

- **Refine and target technical assistance (TA).** Doing this means modifying TA to reflect the changes noted above, namely having the TA provider build on grantee

efforts to strengthen their CBO-WDB partnerships, provide information around co-enrollment, and guide grantees toward enacting more standardized program elements.

- **Improve the potential for evaluation.** Doing the above will improve grantee capacity for evaluation by clarifying expectations and focusing on the program design, which will allow research to better determine the ways in which program elements might be associated with different outcomes. Furthermore, this recommendation includes ensuring there is ample time after the close of the program grant for an evaluator to collect and analyze outcomes.

Overall, this evaluation of the Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative was able to accomplish much of what it set out to do. The study team was able to provide a detailed description of program implementation, including information about program enrollment, service delivery, and the development of program partnerships. While many results are preliminary and outcomes are only for a subset of participants, the study team was able to provide some insight into participant skill gains and employment and the extent to which grantees were able to strengthen their CBO-WDB partnerships. With the lessons learned from this evaluation and with the most intense effects of COVID-19 ebbing, the next round of Breaking Barriers funding, as well as other programs serving individuals with high barriers to employment, are ideally positioned to help these individuals find and retain employment.

I. Introduction

In October 2017, the California Legislature approved Assembly Bill (AB) 1111, the Removing Barriers to Employment Act (Statutes 2017, Chapter 824), which established the Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative (Breaking Barriers or the initiative) to be administered by the California Workforce Development Board (State Board). In July 2018, Senate Bill (SB) 856 funded the initiative at $15 million. After a series of statewide stakeholder engagement meetings to solicit feedback on its design, the State Board issued a request for applications for the initiative in 2019. Then, in December 2019, the State Board awarded AB 1111/Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative program grants to 26 partnerships between community-based organizations (CBOs) and local workforce development boards (WDBs), a technical assistance grant to the California Workforce Association (CWA), and an evaluation grant to the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) and Social Policy Research Associates (SPR). Most contracts, including the evaluation contract, began in April 2020.

Program Goals

According to Assembly Bill No. 1111, Breaking Barriers was designed to:

What is Breaking Barriers?

The Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative was designed to provide services to populations who are often not well-served by other state and federal programs. Eligible activities are inclusive of basic education, adult education, on-the-job training, and supportive services and must be delivered through a collaborative partnership between mission-driven community-based organizations (CBOs) with experience in providing services to the target population and local workforce development boards (WDBs). Twenty-six grantees operated around the state having been awarded grants, totaling just over $10 million.

- Provide supplemental funding "aligned with the broader workforce and educational system in the State of California" that does not "duplicate or replicate existing programs" and that leads to "the success of individuals either preparing to enter or already enrolled in workforce and education programs."

- "Provide individuals with barriers to employment the services they need to enter, participate in, and complete broader workforce preparation, training, and education programs aligned with regional labor market needs," giving them "the skills and competencies necessary to successfully enter the labor market, retain employment, and earn wages that lead to self-sufficiency, and eventually, economic security."

- Deliver services "principally through a collaborative partnership between mission-driven [CBOs]...and local [WDBs] to strengthen the America's Job Center of California (AJCC) system."

As such, each of the 26 Breaking Barriers program grantees, as supported by the technical assistance (TA) grantee, sought to implement service components for individuals with barriers to employment that relied upon CBO-WDB partnerships and were designed to prepare these individuals to engage with other state systems and ultimately find employment.

Program Grantee Overview

As is shown in Exhibit A-1 (Appendix A), the 26 Breaking Barriers program grantees included a wide range of organization types operating in various locations throughout the state and relied upon various types of partnerships.

- Breaking Barriers grants ranged in size. Eleven of the 26 grants were $500,000, while the remainder were between $168,075 and $500,000.[1]

- Breaking Barriers grantees were primarily CBOs. Nineteen were CBOs, six were WDBs, and one was a regional occupational center/program (like a CBO, this ROCP had a WDB partner).[2]

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[1] Breaking Barriers program grant funding came to $10,254,010 out of the $15 million for the initiative.

[2] Regional occupational centers and programs (ROCPs) are programs that provide career technical education to students in California that are operated by school districts or county offices of education. There are 74 ROCPs in California that serve almost 520,000 high school students and adults annually.

- Of California's 45 WDBs, just over one-third (16) were either grantees or the named WDB partners of a Breaking Barriers grantee, and six of these WDBs were affiliated with more than one grant.[3]

Most Breaking Barriers grants began in April 2020 and were given some latitude in terms of when they wanted to end their grants due both to initial funding delays and because grants began right at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. One grantee ended its grant in October 2021, and two others ended their grants in December 2021. The other 23 ended their grants in March 2022.

Evaluation Goals and Approach

The central objective of the evaluation was to determine the extent to which Breaking Barriers achieved the above-stated program objectives. To do so, the study team designed the evaluation to examine whether and how grantees were able to work with partners across many systems to enroll individuals with high barriers to employment into services that prepared them for entry into broader workforce and educational systems and, ideally, into (long-term) employment or education and training programs. However, an important supplemental objective was to learn about the implementation process, not only to inform findings related to program outcomes but also to provide insight into, and lessons learned for, building and sustaining similar programs both within California and in the rest of the country.

Alongside these objectives was a more practical one: preparing materials for the State Board to help it meet its reporting requirements under SB 856. These requirements included summarizing, in the aggregate, the outcome data collected pursuant to Unemployment Insurance Code (UIC) section 14033, including any available information on the following:

- grantees' ability to provide the services they proposed to the number of individuals specified, as evidenced by, among other things, whether they completed the work they proposed

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[3]   WDB grantees had to have a named CBO (non-WDB) partner and the other grantee types had to have a WDB partner. As such, each Breaking Barriers program was affiliated with a specific California WDB.

- participants' successful completion of programming funded under the grant, as demonstrated by measures related to the purpose of the program

- participants' transition or integration into the broader workforce and education system, as evidenced by enrollment in relevant programs

- participants' success in the broader workforce and education systems and the labor market once they transitioned into these systems, as measured by tracking individuals through existing performance monitoring systems and metrics

- the number of individuals served under Breaking Barriers and the number served who qualified under each target population as specified in section 14034 of the UIC, as organized by workforce region

To address these evaluation objectives the CSW and SPR study team set out to answer several research questions, organized into three main lines of inquiry.

1. **An analysis of grantee programs' service delivery and design.** This line of inquiry was designed to examine what programs looked like and includes a range of questions: What types of participants did programs serve? What services did programs deliver? What partnerships did they put in place and how did these grow or change? What indicators were there? To what extent were grantees able to meet their goals? How did implementation vary? How did they adapt to COVID-19? What implementation lessons did grantees learn?

2. **An analysis of participant outcomes.** This line of inquiry was designed to examine the extent to which participants achieved various outcomes: To what extent did participants complete grant programs? To what extent did participants transition into or become integrated into the broader workforce and education system? To what extent did initiative participants meet relevant performance metrics (e.g., employment, credential attainment, etc.)?

3. **An analysis of program outcomes.** This line of inquiry was designed to examine the ways in which programs helped the workforce system better address the needs of target populations: To what extent did grantee programs supplement and align workforce system services with those provided by CBOs? To what extent did grant-funded programs help the state make progress in achieving its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) strategic plan goals? To what extent have grantees taken steps to sustain programs and partnerships (particularly between WDBs and CBOs)?

Overall, much of the report focuses on the first line of inquiry. As is discussed in the "Factors Affecting Analysis" section, there were important limitations to this evaluation, given the timing and the nature of the data. As such, the second and third lines of inquiry were much less fully developed than originally planned and would benefit from additional attention in the future.

Data Sources

The evaluation relied on several data sources to address the evaluation's multiple lines of inquiry and research questions.

- **Grantee background documents**, obtained from the State Board, included grantee proposal narratives, work plans, and contract updates (such as modifications around timing, service levels, partners, etc.).

- **Quarterly narrative reports**, obtained from the State Board, included information on overall progress and activities engaged in while implementing the grant, technical assistance received, participant goals and outcomes, fiscal activity, and promotional/marketing activities.

- **A grantee survey**, administered by the study team, asked grantee coordinators about implementation progress, the services programs provided, strategies used to address participant barriers, the CBO-WDB partnership, the impact of COVID-19 on implementation, and plans for and progress toward sustainability. The online survey was administered from November 2021 to January 2022 with all 26 grantees responding.

- **Grantee interviews**, conducted by the study team, asked directors and/or program coordinators about grantee approaches to designing their program, the nature of the CBO-WDB partnership, co-enrollment of Breaking Barriers participants into other workforce system services, additional information about the target populations served, implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, and overall lessons learned. These 90-minute phone interviews were conducted with half the grantees from December 2021 through February 2022.

- **Administrative data**, obtained from the State Board in coordination with the California Employment Development Department, included two datasets on Breaking Barriers participants from CalJOBS, the state's system of record for most workforce programs. Both datasets included demographic data, but the first contains detailed data on the services participants received, while the

second includes data on their outcomes calculated in accordance with WIOA following the Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL). The first dataset (hereafter "detailed services dataset") includes 2,468 Breaking Barriers participants who enrolled in the program from April 15, 2020, through December 31, 2021. The second dataset (hereafter "PIRL dataset") includes an additional 42 participants (for a total of 2,510) who enrolled during January 2022.

Additional information on data sources and evaluation design can be found in Appendix B.

Factors Affecting This Analysis

There are two primary factors that affected the analysis and interpretation of the results of this evaluation: the timing of the evaluation and the fact that the program was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Timing of the Evaluation

The first factor involves the evaluation's timing. The evaluation began in April 2020, at the same time Breaking Barriers program grants began, and it ended in May 2022, only two months after most program grants ended.[4] To have sufficient time to analyze and report on findings, the study team collected data as late as possible but at a point when nearly all grantees were still operating their programs. Thus, all findings presented in this report are preliminary and do not reflect information for all program participants or on the full period of the grants.

In addition, the outcomes measures and the administrative data used to examine those outcomes further limited the number of participants for whom the study team could calculate outcomes. For example, one outcome measure the study team calculated was employment during the second calendar quarter after the calendar quarter in which participants exited the program, which can only be measured for participants from about three to nine months after they stop receiving program services (exit). Furthermore, some types of data (namely employment data) are

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[4]   The State Board offered grantees the opportunity to extend what were originally 18-month grants to a period of up to 24 months primarily due to challenges grantees faced while starting programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Twenty-three grantees opted to extend their grants the full 24 months, ending them in March 2022. One grantee ended their grant at the originally scheduled 18-month time point, in October 2021, while two others ended their grants in December 2021.

lagged such that data are only available for some minimum period (typically two quarters) prior to when they are collected, thus pushing back even further the date by which a participant can exit the program and still have sufficient data available for examining outcomes. The result is that the study team was only able to report on outcomes for a subset, sometimes a small subset, of Breaking Barriers participants. Ideally, there will be a point in the future when additional data on the full cohort of Breaking Barriers participants can be examined.

The Impact of COVID-19

The other factor that affected this analysis was the set of operational challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most grantee contracts began in April 2020, just as COVID-19 restrictions were starting to take hold. In March 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom issued a shelter-in-place order to slow the spread of COVID-19 across the state of California, making it the first state in the country to implement such a measure (Mervosh and Swales, 2020). As such, these grantees were faced with the initial challenge of implementing services, often including building new partnerships and establishing new services, within a pandemic environment. Furthermore, the pandemic outlasted these grants. As will be addressed throughout this report, these restrictions and the steps grantees took to protect the health of their staff and participants heavily influenced their operational decisions, leading to numerous changes such as adjusted grant target numbers or methods of delivering services. This study paid close attention to the ways in which Breaking Barriers programs were affected by the pandemic, from social distancing requirements to the unusual implications it had for the job market. There is no doubt, based on the information provided by grantees, that the pandemic was a difficult environment in which to start up and operate a program.

Overview of the Report

The rest of this report is organized as follows. Chapters II through IV focus on the first line of inquiry. Chapter II describes program enrollment, participant characteristics, and the strategies programs used to address participant barriers. Chapter III examines the services the programs delivered and the overall operational challenges and successes that grantees reported encountering, including many of those brought on by COVID-19. Chapter IV examines the partnerships that supported Breaking Barriers programs, including the CBO-WDB

partnerships that were a primary program goal. Chapter V explores the second and third lines of inquiry, including reporting on early participant outcomes and efforts around program sustainability. Chapter VI then summarizes the findings of earlier chapters and makes recommendations for operating similar programs in the future.

II. Breaking Barriers Enrollment and Participants

Part of addressing the evaluation's first line of inquiry—understanding what programs looked like—is to understand how many and what types of participants Breaking Barriers grantees enrolled. This chapter presents information on program enrollment and the populations that grantees served.

> ## Key Findings
> - Breaking Barriers grantees enrolled 2,510 participants, which exceeded their collective enrollment goal of 2,301 participants (although, many grantees negotiated their individual rates downward due to the impact of COVID-19).
>
> - With two months remaining for enrollment in most grants, 12 grantees had already exceeded their enrollment goals, while 14 had yet to reach theirs.
>
> - Despite a rough start to enrollment due to COVID-19–related disruptions, grantees enjoyed relatively stable enrollment after the first quarter of the initiative.
>
> - Grantees served individuals from all of the initiative's 21 target populations, although many more participants (83 percent) were members of the largest of these groups (economically disadvantaged individuals) as compared to the smallest (0.5 percent were TANF/CalWORKS exhaustees).

Program Enrollment

The first Breaking Barriers programs began operating in April 2020, with the first participant enrolled on April 15. From that date through January 31, 2021 (22 months into a 24-month grant timeline), grantees enrolled 2,510 participants.[5] The evaluation team anticipates that the final number of individuals enrolled into

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[5]   This count of 2,510 participants comes from the PIRL dataset. Most of the remaining analyses in this chapter using administrative data come from, or primarily involve, the detailed services dataset, which includes only 2,468 Breaking Barriers participants—those enrolled through December 2021. See the prior chapter for an explanation of both datasets.

Breaking Barriers will be higher since 23 grantees were able to continue enrolling participants for two more months, until their contracts ended on March 31, 2022.

Enrollment Over Time

As shown in Exhibit II-1, enrollment across grantees was generally steady except during the initiative's first quarter, which was affected by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as initial planning and startup challenges for new grantees. Within a year of the initiative's start (May 2021), enrollment had further leveled out with new enrollments remaining above 100 per month.

Exhibit II-1: Number of Breaking Barrier Participants Enrolled Quarterly
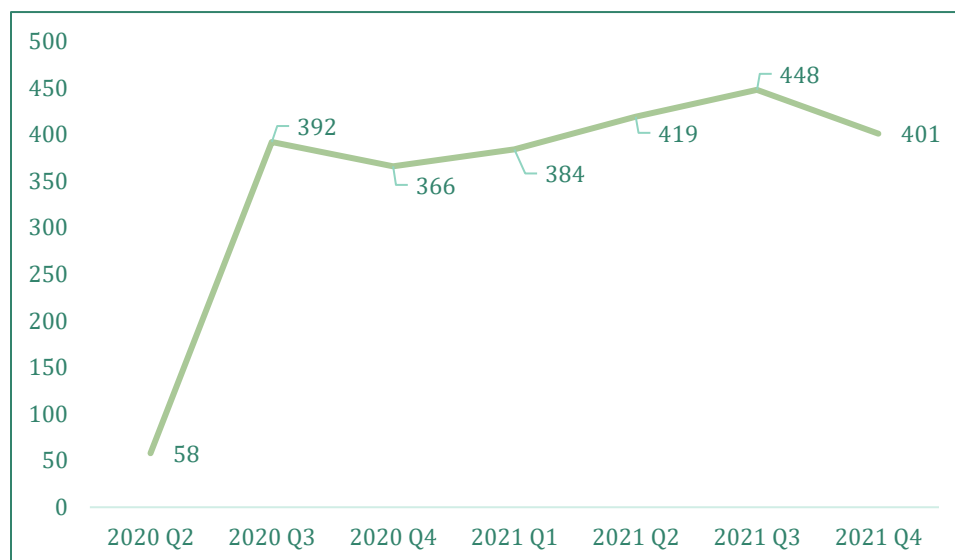
Source: Detailed services dataset
Notes: The dataset includes 2,468 participants.

COVID-19 and Enrollment

As noted above, the first quarter of enrollment for Breaking Barriers grantees was particularly difficult. Grantees began implementing their programs just as the COVID-19 pandemic began shutting down much of California. As a result, the pandemic had a major effect on grantees' ability to enroll participants, especially at the start of implementation. In the survey, grantees reported that one of the biggest impacts of COVID-19 was on program enrollment, whether in terms of delaying (21 grantees) or slowing the pace of enrollment (20 grantees) or leading to lower than initially anticipated enrollment (19 grantees). In interviews, grantees explained that the pandemic had the effect of making outreach efforts even more

challenging than they already might have been (given the difficulty of identifying, connecting with, recruiting, and enrolling individuals with high barriers to employment). Because many grantees' recruitment partners—including CBOs, high schools, adult schools, colleges, libraries, and AJCCs—were closed for in-person services for much of the pandemic, grantees were unable to rely on their usual approaches for obtaining referrals from these partners or doing outreach at these locations. In addition to these challenges, grantees highlighted how outreach was also affected by geographic issues stemming from how the pandemic affected areas of California differently—some areas had higher and more severe restrictions in place that made outreach even more difficult. They also reported staffing challenges related to COVID-19 and issues with partner and participant access to technology that made quickly switching outreach modalities difficult.

> *"[T]he partner organizations that were primed to serve as a source of referrals were also working remotely, resulting in further diluting [our] efforts to engage this hard-to-reach population."* —Grantee

Modifications to Enrollment Goals

Due to COVID-19–related enrollment challenges, many grantees modified their original enrollment goals. The State Board allowed grantees to request such contract modifications (and other service delivery pivots), which aided them in accomplishing their enrollment (and other implementation) goals. In fact, according to grantee background documents, 15 grantees negotiated modifications to lower their planned enrollment goals (sometimes more than once), while one grantee actually increased its enrollment goal. Two grantees praised the State Board's flexibility related to enrollment as being a key factor that supported their program implementation efforts.

Enrollment Relative to Enrollment Goals

Due to decreased enrollment goals discussed above, as well as the considerable efforts they put into outreach and recruitment, Breaking Barriers grantees had exceeded their collective (modified) enrollment goal of 2,301 participants[6] by

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6   This collective goal was calculated by summing up each grantee's individual final enrollment goals.

January 31, 2022, enrolling 2,510 individuals. Since 23 grantees continued to operate their Breaking Barriers programs through March 31, 2022, the final enrollment number for the initiative is expected to increase.[7]

Exhibit II-2: Number of Breaking Barriers Grantees in Groups Defined by the Percentage of Actual to Planned Enrollment
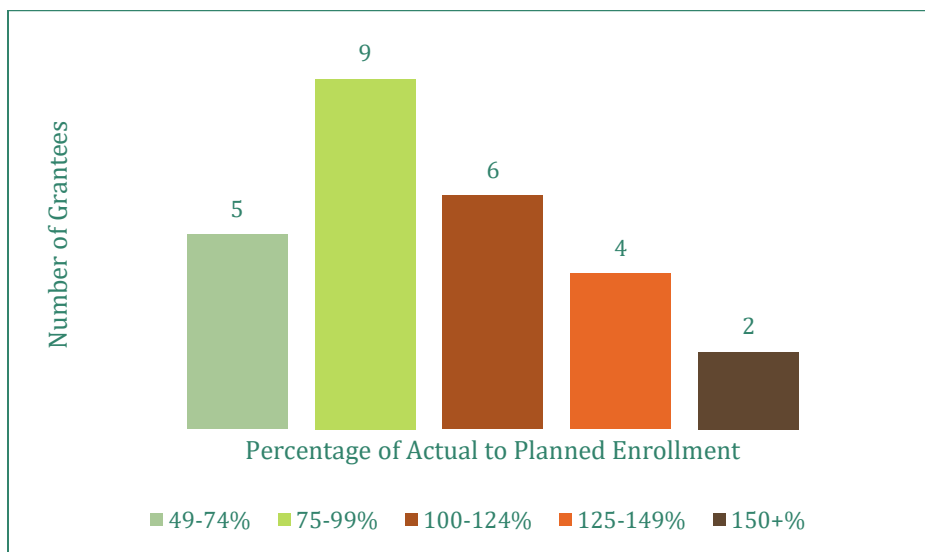
Source: Detailed services dataset
Note: The exhibit shows the number of grantees falling into different bands representing the percentage of each grantee's enrollment goal as of December 31, 2021. The dataset includes 2,468 participants.

The extent to which grantees had met their individual enrollment goals by the end of 2021 was mixed. As is shown in Exhibit II-2, 12 grantees (as of December 2021) had met or exceeded their enrollment goal, and of these, six had achieved 125 percent or more of their goal. Two had even enrolled more than 150 percent of their goal.[8] Nevertheless, the other 14 grantees had yet to meet their enrollment goals with just three months left in their grants.

Participant Demographics

Grantees enrolled a broad spectrum of individuals. Exhibit II-3 provides aggregated participant demographic information.

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[7]   The three grantees that completed their grants by December 31, 2021, met their enrollment goals.

[8]   These two grantees, in fact, approximately doubled their goals.

Exhibit II-3: Participant Demographics

Age

Age	Percent
18-24	24%
25-32	23%
33-44	25%
45-54	16%
55-64	10%
65+	2%

Gender

Female; 42%
Male; 58%

Race/Ethnicity

Latinx/Hispanic	41%
Black/AA	27%
White	16%
Asian	9%
Other	4%
Nat Amer/AK Nat	2%
Nat HI/Pac Is	1%
Multiracial	3%

Education Levels

No High School Diploma or Equivalent	26%
Secondary School Graduate	56%
At least one year of Post-Secondary Education	7%
Recieved Postsecondary Certificate	3%
A.S. or A.A. Degree	3%
B.S. or B.A. Degree	4%
Beyond a B.S. or B.A. Degree	1%

Source: Detailed services dataset
Notes: Age: N=2,466; two individuals were under 18 and were excluded from the exhibit. Gender: N=2,452. Race: N=2,378; the multiracial category is tabulated independently of the other race/ethnicity categories. Education: N=2,463. Any values less than 2,468 indicate no response within the dataset for that number of participants for that demographic category.

Some of the key features of Breaking Barriers participant demographics included the following:

- Most participants were under the age of 44; the median age was 34. The youngest participant was 16, and the oldest participant was 79.

- More program participants identified as male (58 percent) than female (42 percent).

- Most grantees identified as Latinx/Hispanic (44 percent), followed by Black/African American (28 percent), and White (16 percent).

- The majority of participants had a high school diploma or equivalent (56 percent), and a few had completed some higher education; however, a large number had not graduated high school or earned an equivalent credential (26 percent).

Target Populations

The initiative emphasized the delivery of services to 21 often overlapping target populations defined by their different barriers to employment.

Planned and Actual Numbers of Grantees Serving Target Populations

Collectively, grantees planned to serve each of the initiative's target populations, with most grantees (22 of 26) planning to serve more than one target population.[9] As shown in Exhibit II-4, the three target populations grantees most frequently planned to serve[10] were economically disadvantaged individuals (20 grantees), ex-offenders (15 grantees), and under-skilled, low-wage workers (13 grantees).[11]

Exhibit II-4 also shows how, toward the end of the grant period, the actual number of grantees that served each target population typically met or exceeded the number of grantees that had planned to serve those populations. Only two populations were served by slightly fewer grantees than planned: migrants and seasonal workers and transgender and gender nonconforming individuals.

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[9] The initiative initially included one additional target population referred to as "any other groups as the Governor determines to have barriers to employment." However, while one grantee planned to serve this group, this population was not further defined or tracked by the initiative.

[10] Exhibit II-4 shows the final numbers of grantees planning to serve each target population. Some grantees modified their original plans as they began operating their grants. Two populations—women seeking non-traditional training or employment and migrant or seasonal workers—saw a small decrease in the number of grantees planning to serve them while nine others saw an increase in the number of grantees planning to serve them.

[11] The terms "unskilled" or "under skilled" are codified in the legislation for the Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative. However, much has been said about the appropriateness of these terms given the often essential and difficult roles of "unskilled" workers. While we have referred to the language in the original text here, we acknowledge that this term is inadequate to describe workers in low-wage jobs.

Exhibit II-4: Numbers of Grantees Planning to and Actually Serving Each Target Population

Target Populations	Number of Grantees Planning to Serve	Number of Grantees Actually Serving
Economically disadvantaged individuals	20	26
Individuals with disabilities	5	26
Displaced workers/long-term unemployed	8	25
Homeless individuals	10	24
Disconnected youth[†*]	9	24
Under skilled, low-wage workers[†**]	13	23
Individuals over 50 years of age	4	22
Ex-offenders	15	21
English language learners[†]	11	20
Single parents (include single, pregnant women)	5	19
Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians	3	18
CalWORKs participants[†]	8	14
Returning veterans	3	11
Immigrants	9	10
Displaced homemakers	1	10
Foster youth	7	8
Women seeking nontraditional training/employment	4	8
Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals	7	6
Individuals exhausted eligibility Part A, Title IV of Social Security Act (TANF)	1	5
Migrants or seasonal workers	2	1

Source: Grantee background documents, the detailed services dataset, and the PIRL dataset

Note: The first column was derived from grantee background documents and shows the number of grantees that *planned to enroll* any individuals from the given target population. The second column was derived from the detailed services dataset and shows the number of grantees that *actually enrolled* individuals from that target population.

[†] The detailed services dataset did not include the information needed to identify participants as members of this target population. The study team therefore drew this information from the PIRL dataset for participants present in the detailed service data set. For additional information on data sources and this process, see Appendix B.

[*] "Disconnected Youth" is not a category in the PIRL dataset. To identify these individuals, the study team, based on guidance from the State Board, identified participants who were ages 16 to 24, unemployed, and out of school at program entry.

[**] "Under skilled, low-wage workers" is not a category in the PIRL dataset. To identify these individuals, the study team, based on guidance from the State Board, identified participants who were shown in the data to be both employed and low income at program entry.

Enrollment by Target Population

The results presented above on the populations that grantees planned to serve versus those they actually served highlight their success in conducting outreach and enrollment to at least some members of their targeted service populations. However, as is shown in Exhibit II-5, the proportion of the populations enrolled across grantees showcases that most participants were from only a few target populations. Unsurprisingly given the number of grantees that aimed to serve economically disadvantaged individuals, 83 percent of participants enrolled were part of this population. The second most common population of enrolled participants was displaced workers and the long-term unemployed (39 percent). Ex-offenders were the third most common population of enrolled participants (33 percent). Importantly, participants could be classified as part of more than one population, and they often were.

Exhibit II-5: Number and Percentage of Participants Enrolled by Target Population

Target Populations	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Economically disadvantage individuals	2,052	83%
Displaced workers/long-term unemployed	949	39%
Ex-offenders	810	33%
Homeless individuals	649	26%
English language learners[†]	575	23%
Disconnected youth[†*]	379	15%
Individuals over 50 years of age	300	12%
Individuals with disabilities	275	11%
Under skilled, low-wage workers[†**]	249	10%
Immigrants	224	9%
Single parents (include single, pregnant women)	191	8%
CalWORKs participants[†]	97	4%
Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians	63	3%
Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals	62	3%
Migrants or seasonal workers	56	2%
Foster youth	55	2%
Women seeking nontraditional training/employment	45	2%

Target Populations	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Returning veterans	16	1%
Displaced homemakers	16	0.6%
Individuals exhausted eligibility Part A, Title IV of Social Security Act (TANF)	13	0.5%

Source: Detailed services dataset and the PIRL dataset

Note: The numbers and percentages were derived using the detailed services dataset, which includes 2,468 participants. Percentages total to more than 100 since participants could belong to more than one target population.

[†] The detailed services dataset did not include the information needed to identify participants as members of this target population. The study team therefore drew this information from the PIRL dataset for participants present in the detailed service data set. For additional information on data sources and this process, see Appendix B.

[*] "Disconnected youth" is not a category in the PIRL dataset. To identify these individuals, the study team, based on guidance from the State Board, identified participants who were ages 16 to 24, unemployed, and out of school at program entry.

[**] "Under skilled, low-wage workers" is not a category in the PIRL dataset. To identify these individuals, the study team, based on guidance from the State Board, identified participants who were shown in the data to be both employed and low-income at program entry.

Grantee Reasons for Selecting Target Populations

In interviews, grantee representatives indicated a few reasons why they chose to target certain populations. First, many grantees, especially CBOs, had served these target populations prior to Breaking Barriers; one of the reasons these grantees were selected was for their expertise and ability to reach and enroll these populations. A few grantee representatives also noted that they chose their intended target populations, especially when they were new groups, because these were groups that had been traditionally left out of the public workforce development system or in some cases excluded from particular industries or sectors, and addressing this inequity was something they had identified in their work. For instance, one staff member observed that the farmworker population presents with high needs but has not been traditionally served by the local public workforce system. Another staff member noted that their organization aspired to diversify a certain industry by focusing on services for women, people of color, foster youth, ex-offenders, and immigrants. Finally, two grantees chose their target populations to test a service strategy for a new population. For example, one grantee piloted stipends to test their success in increasing training completion among people with justice-involved backgrounds (ex-offenders).
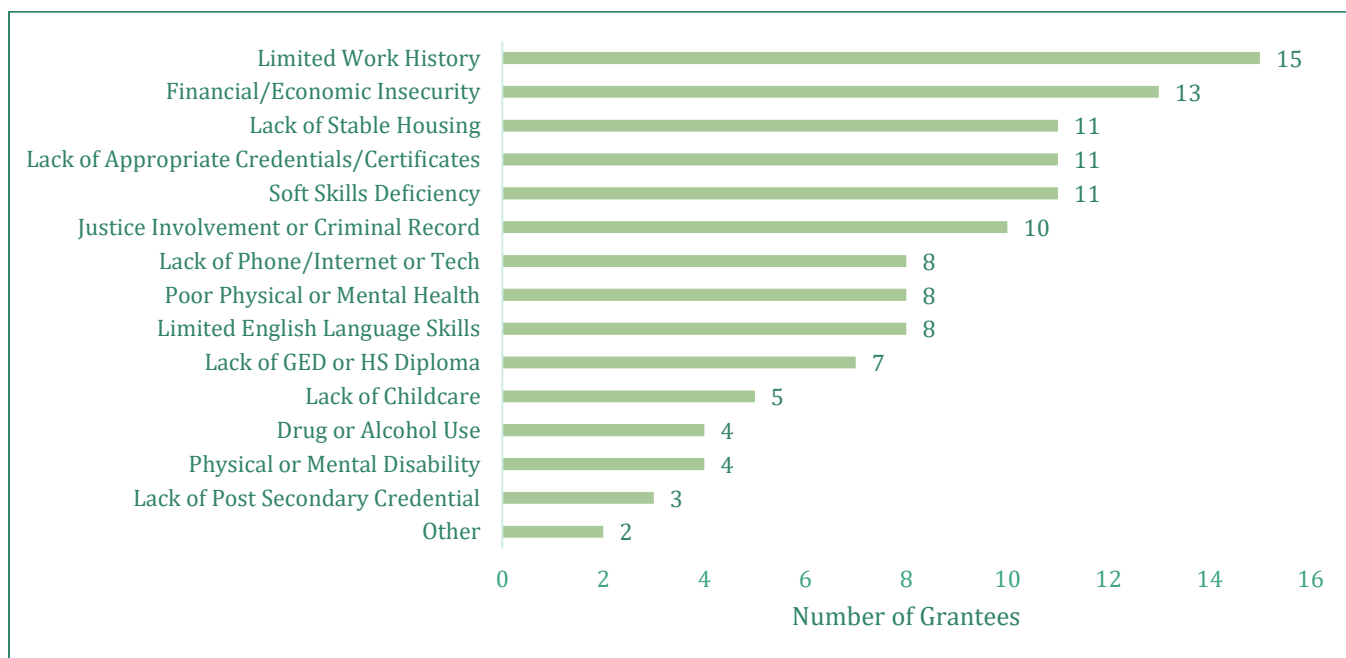
Addressing Participant Barriers

Membership in one or more of these target populations does not fully capture all of the barriers to employment faced by target populations nor all of the issues that grantees needed to consider when determining what services to offer. As grantee representatives pointed out, program participants often faced many different life and career challenges, often belonged to more than one target population, and often faced multiple barriers related to these intersectional identities. One example of how an individual may be part of more than one target population is that 15 percent of individuals in all U.S. jail populations report a history of homelessness within the year before incarceration (Metraux and Culhane, 2006). Other examples include that disconnected youth are more likely to rely on public assistance (Harlow, 2003), and that dropping out of high school (which is one definition of a disconnected youth and is also associated with being under-skilled) has been identified as a risk factor for both homelessness (Caton et al., 2000) and incarceration (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009).

> *"None of them are coming in with just one single barrier. There are many things that they must deal with, overcome and we're helping them try to address those issues. The more you get to know them, the more things can get revealed to you."* —Grantee

To get at common barriers across participants, regardless of their identification with one or more target populations, we asked grantees to identify the biggest barriers participants faced. As shown in Exhibit II-6, grantees identified having a limited work history (15 grantees) as the most common barrier, followed closely by financial or economic insecurity (13 grantees) and having a soft skills deficiency, a lack of appropriate credentials or certificates, and a lack of stable housing (each selected by 11 grantees). To clarify, these survey results do not imply that the barriers shown at the bottom of the list were any less frequently observed in participants than those at the top, but rather that these were the barriers that most frequently got in the way of finding and retaining employment and thus were (at least ideally) where grantees often directed services to help program participants.

Exhibit II-6: Biggest Barriers to Employment Among Participants as Identified by Grantees

Barrier	Number of Grantees
Limited Work History	15
Financial/Economic Insecurity	13
Lack of Stable Housing	11
Lack of Appropriate Credentials/Certificates	11
Soft Skills Deficiency	11
Justice Involvement or Criminal Record	10
Lack of Phone/Internet or Tech	8
Poor Physical or Mental Health	8
Limited English Language Skills	8
Lack of GED or HS Diploma	7
Lack of Childcare	5
Drug or Alcohol Use	4
Physical or Mental Disability	4
Lack of Post Secondary Credential	3
Other	2

Source: Grantee survey
Notes: Survey results are based on 26 grantees.

In interviews, grantee staff members expanded upon and added to the list of barriers they first identified in the survey.

Lack of Training or Work Experience. Grantee staff members described their participants as generally lacking either the training or work experience necessary to acquire a job. A staff person from a WDB explained that most of their participants had low incomes and so were unable to pay for either training or necessary work supplies, such as work boots or uniforms. During the pandemic, even more so than in a typical job market, employers often required workers to be digitally literate, but participants often lacked those skills as well as computers and internet access. Finally, participants transitioning to new careers often lacked the soft skills needed to be successful.

Unmet Basic Needs (e.g., unstable housing or financial/economic insecurity). Grantee staff reported in interviews that many Breaking Barriers participants had unmet basic needs. For example, many participants were homeless or housing insecure, faced mental health issues or food insecurity, had insufficient financial resources, lacked transportation, or suffered from substance abuse issues. Staff members from two grantees expressed concerns over increases in domestic

violence for their participants during the pandemic. A staff member for another grantee explained that a major barrier faced by homeless participants was difficulty in completing online job applications given their lack of access to a computer or internet. Ultimately, helping participants meet these basic needs through supportive services was an important step in helping participants secure employment, whether it involved stabilizing them prior to their seeking employment or helping to meet their needs while searching for employment to make it possible for them to continue to do so.

> *"Participants' key barriers are lack of experience, technology, housing. If you don't have a stable home, how can you maintain a job? There's nowhere to shower or get ready or rest."* —Grantee

Vulnerable Populations. Grantee staff also expressed concerns that participants often experienced cultural barriers, stigma, and discrimination in the workplace. Grantees reported that people of color, transgender and nonconforming people, women, individuals with physical disabilities, individuals struggling with mental health disorders, veterans, and formerly incarcerated individuals all experienced different stigmas when entering the workforce. They highlighted how transgender and nonconforming people often face overt discrimination in the workplace, and similarly, women seeking careers in traditionally male-dominated skilled trades face stigma and cultural issues when seeking training or applying for jobs. Moreover, a staff member from one CBO explained that formerly incarcerated individuals feel a sense of being "given up on by society." Finally, in addition to facing language barriers, migrant seasonal farmworkers are often reluctant to accept government assistance due to cultural norms. According to one grantee staff member, cultural barriers and stigma in the workplace often were discouraging to participants and required extra case management support (sometimes from organizations specializing in serving particular populations) and partnerships with open-minded employers.

III. Program Services

Grantees provided Breaking Barriers participants with a wide variety of services designed to address their barriers and help them obtain employment. This chapter describes those services, the strategies grantees used to address participant barriers, and the implications of COVID-19 on service delivery.

> ## Key Findings
>
> - Most participants (84 percent) received basic career services, such as job search assistance and labor market information. About a third received training services (36 percent) and supportive services (32 percent).
>
> - Grantees found work-based learning, job placement, English classes, and various types of case management services particularly useful for addressing participants' barriers to employment.
>
> - COVID-19 disrupted service delivery, reduced class sizes, and forced grantees to pivot from providing in-person services to virtual or remote services, which many grantees will likely sustain in the future.

Program Services

Breaking Barriers grantees provided participants with multiple types of services. As shown in Exhibit III-1, most participants received some form of career services, including basic career services (84 percent) and individualized career services (68 percent), while a little more than one-third of participants received training services (36 percent) and about one-third received supportive services (32 percent). Details on each of these types of services are provided below.[12]

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[12] Two percent of participants were also provided with "youth services." Because this was such a small percentage, these services are not described further below.

Exhibit III-1: Percentage of Breaking Barriers Participants Receiving Different Types of Services
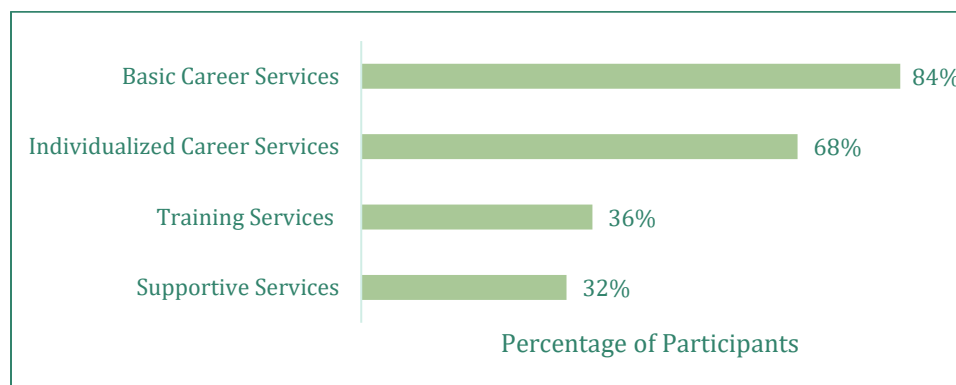
Source: Detailed services dataset
Notes: The dataset includes 2,468 participants. Not shown are 2 percent of participants who received youth services.

Basic and Individualized Career Services

Breaking Barriers participants could receive three types of career services. As shown in Exhibit III-2, more than two-thirds of Breaking Barriers participants received basic career services with assistance from staff members (70 percent), nearly half received basic, self-guided services (48 percent),[13] and about 68 percent of participants received individualized career services.

Exhibit III-2 also shows the most commonly provided examples of each of these three types of career services. Notable is that for each of these main types of career services, there was at least one that was relatively commonly accessed or used (by one-third to one-half of participants) and others that were less frequently used.

The three most common staff-assisted basic career services that grantees provided were as follows:[14]

- an *initial assessment* whereby staff assessed a participant's skill level, aptitude, interests, and needs

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[13] These two groups are overlapping, and together 84 percent of participants received some form of basic career services, as indicated in Exhibit III-1.

[14] Additional staff-assisted basic career services that grantees provided to five percent or fewer participants (for each category) include resume prep, job referral services, proficiency testing, referrals, job search workshops, job development services, placement in training services, resume writing, and 11 other services where 10 or fewer people (zero percent) engaged.

- *job search and placement assistance* in which staff provided participants with help searching for employment, including providing information on in-demand careers

- *workshops* where staff provided group instruction on skills related to finding and keeping employment, such as interviewing skills

Exhibit III-2: The Three Most Common Types of Basic Careers Services

Basic Career Services (staff-assisted) **70%**	Basic Career Services (self-service) **47%**	Individualized Career Services **68%**
Initial Assessment (49%)	Orientation (46%)	Individual Plan Development (33%)
Job Search Placement (19%)	Labor Market Research (4%)	Individual Counseling (15%)
Workshops (10%)	Job Fair (2%)	Career Guidance (13%)
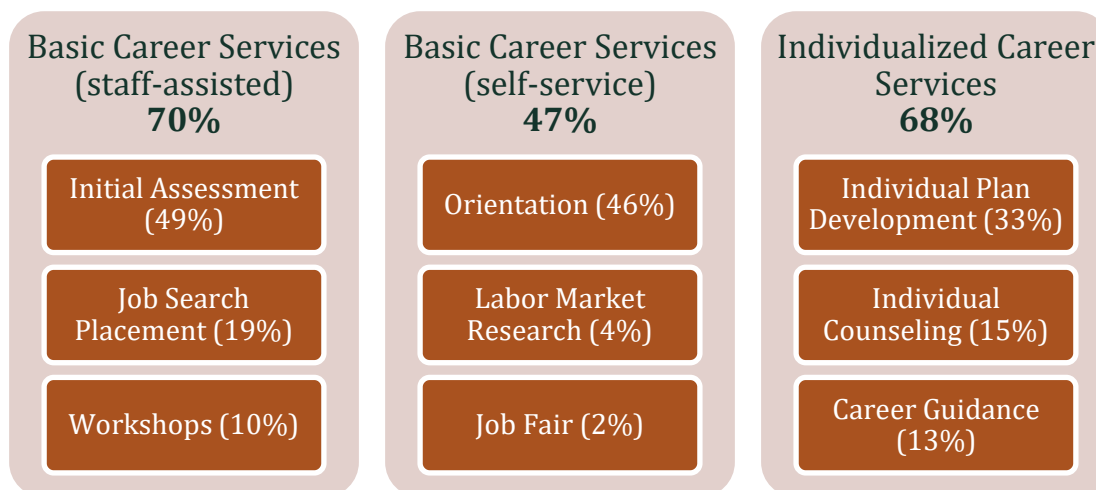
Source: Detailed services dataset
Notes: The dataset includes 2,468 participants. The percentages in the figure are derived from the total dataset population. For example, 49 percent (1,209) of the 2,468 participants in the dataset received an initial assessment.

As for self-service basic career services, the most common services consisted of these three:[15]

- attending a group *orientation* during which a participant learned about available services

- sharing of basic *labor market information*

- providing information about an approaching *job fair*

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[15] Additional self-service basic career services that grantees provided to one percent or fewer participants included: access to a resource room, information on training providers, weblinks to job referrals and unemployment compensation information.

The three most common more intensive or individualized career services were the following:[16]

- the *development of an individual plan or service strategy*[17] whereby a staff member and a participant jointly identified and created a strategy for achieving the participant's educational and employment-related goals, including appropriate services

- *individual counseling* in which staff provided one-on-one counseling related to finding and maintaining employment to a participant

- *career guidance* where staff provided advice to a participant to assist them in making occupational or career decisions
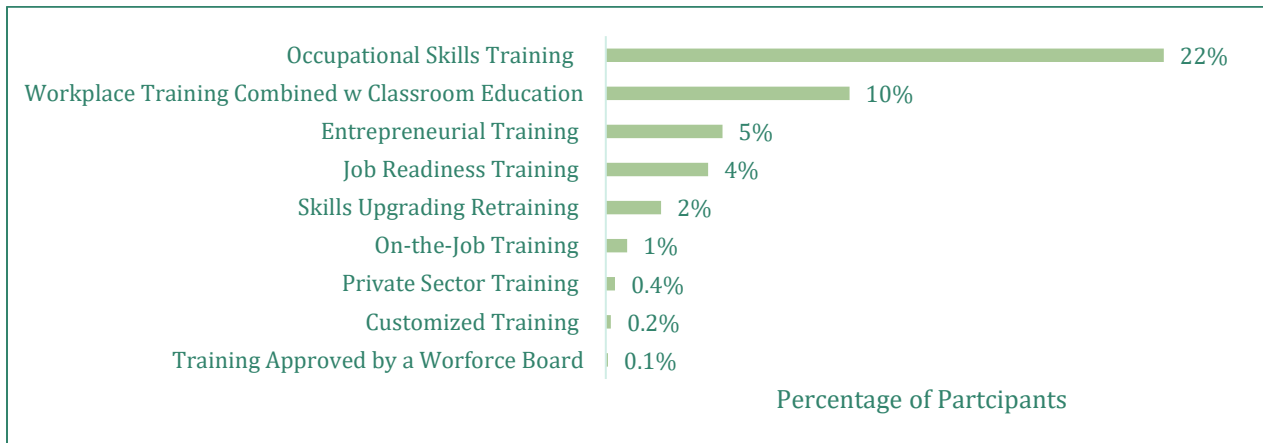
Training Services

As is shown in Exhibit III-1, 36 percent of all participants received some type of training service. Exhibit III-3 expands on these services and shows what types of specific training services participants received. The most common of these were classroom-based occupational skills training (22 percent), training provided in a workplace combined with classroom-based skills training (10 percent), and entrepreneurial training (5 percent), which typically covered elements of starting and operating a small business.[18]

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[16] Additional individualized career services that grantees provided to 12 percent or fewer participants (for each category) include short-term prevocational services, mentoring, assessments, work experience, English language learner services, transitional employment, financial literacy, GED prep, pre-apprenticeship training, and others.

[17] These plans sometimes have specific names such as individual employment plan (IEP) or individual service strategy (ISS).

[18] More information about how training services are defined can be found in the CalJOBS Activity Codes Dictionary (WSD 19-06) and the Employment Development Department Directive on WSD 19-06.

Exhibit III-3: The Percentage of Breaking Barriers Participants Receiving Different Types of Training Services

Training Service	Percentage
Occupational Skills Training	22%
Workplace Training Combined w Classroom Education	10%
Entrepreneurial Training	5%
Job Readiness Training	4%
Skills Upgrading Retraining	2%
On-the-Job Training	1%
Private Sector Training	0.4%
Customized Training	0.2%
Training Approved by a Worforce Board	0.1%

Percentage of Partcipants
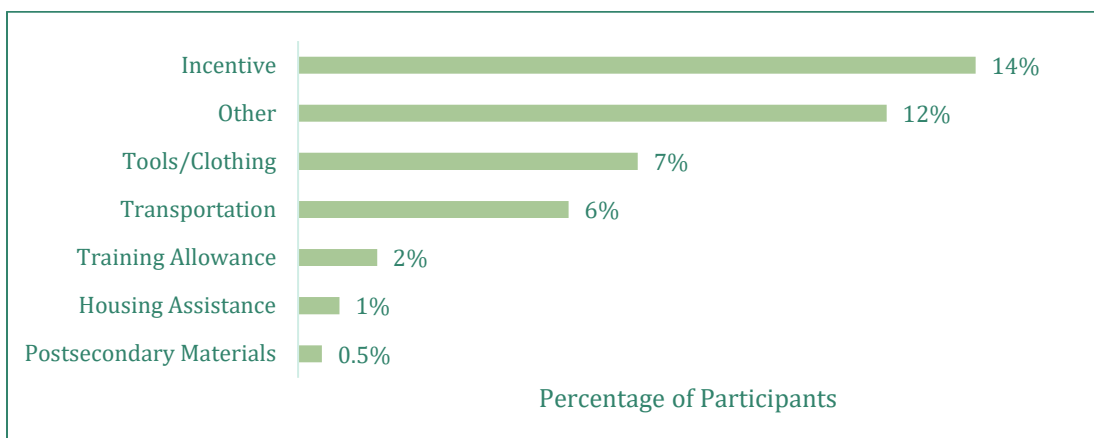
Source: Detailed services dataset
Notes: This dataset includes 2,468 participants. Since participants can receive more than one type of training service, percentages do not sum to the 36 percent that received at least one type of training service.

Supportive Services

Thirty-two percent of Breaking Barriers participants also received supportive services. These services, such as incentives or transportation assistance, were aimed at providing participants with the resources or supports they needed to successfully participate in training or retain employment. As shown in Exhibit III-4, the most common type of supportive service provided was an incentive payment (14 percent), which participants received for completing training or reaching an employment milestone. The second most common supportive service provided did not fit the list of pre-assigned codes and was marked as "other" (12 percent).[19] The third most commonly provided supportive service was tools/clothing (7 percent), which included assistance with obtaining employment-related attire or tools. Transportation assistance (6 percent) was the fourth most common supportive service.

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[19] Details on this category of supportive services are included in case management notes but were not available to the study team for analysis.

Exhibit III-4: Percentages of Participants Receiving Different Types of Supportive Services
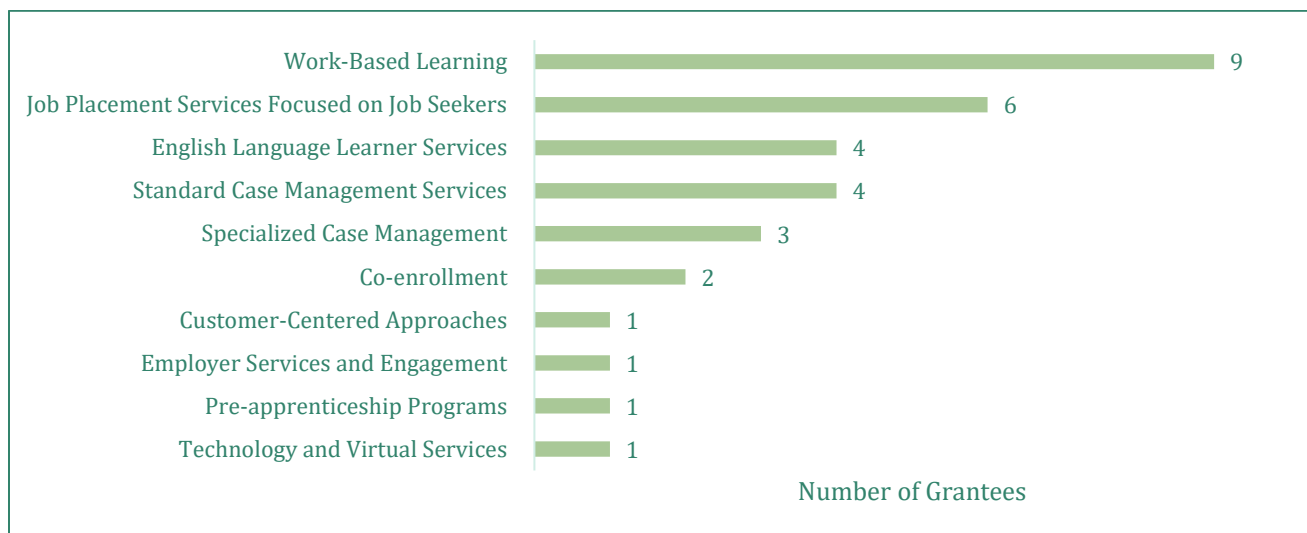

Source: Detailed services dataset

Notes: This dataset includes 2,468 participants. Since participants can receive more than one type of supportive service, percentages do not sum to the 32 percent that received at least one type of supportive service. Breaking Barriers programs provided other supportive services (not shown) to a small number of participants (fewer than 10) including medical supportive services, job search allowance, needs payments, educational testing, temporary shelter, utility support, and a seminar allowance.

Importantly, not all grantees provided supportive services. Only 19 of the 26 grantees reported providing any supportive services and only seven grantees set clear goals around providing supportive services in their original proposals. This may explain the relatively low number of participants who received supportive services as compared to those who received career services.

Promising Strategies for Addressing Participant Barriers

While the evaluation could not determine which strategies were associated with positive outcomes, the study team surveyed grantees to gather insight into strategies that seemed more effective than others at addressing participant barriers and helping them find and retain employment. Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of the strategies shown in Exhibit III-5, but these results provide insight into what services grantees found useful for Breaking Barriers participants and a starting point for future research of this type.

Exhibit III-5: Number of Grantees Identifying Various Service Strategies as the Most Important for Reducing Participant Barriers

Work-Based Learning — 9
Job Placement Services Focused on Job Seekers — 6
English Language Learner Services — 4
Standard Case Management Services — 4
Specialized Case Management — 3
Co-enrollment — 2
Customer-Centered Approaches — 1
Employer Services and Engagement — 1
Pre-apprenticeship Programs — 1
Technology and Virtual Services — 1

Number of Grantees

Source: Grantee survey
Notes: These data include responses for 26 grantees.

As shown in Exhibit III-5, nine grantees reported that work-based learning was one of the most useful service strategies in addressing participant barriers, along with job placement services, English language learner services, and case management services. Not that "work-based learning" is itself a service. Rather it is a broader strategy that includes a loose collection of services that were in fact provided by Breaking Barriers programs to only a small percentage of participants. These included "work experience" (provided to eight percent of participants), "transitional jobs" (provided to five percent of participants), and "on-the-job training" provided to one percent of participants.

> *"...in this city..., people can't afford to just be in a training program and not be earning wages at the same time. And if they're committing the majority of their time to these programs...they have to have some income." —Grantee*

In interviews, grantee staff members elaborated on how paid work experience specifically helped participants, including how it provided participants with income to support themselves and their families while still participating in training.

Grantees emphasized in their discussions around service delivery that not all of the barriers and challenges that participants faced needed a direct service delivery strategy. As several staff members pointed out, participants, despite their many barriers, were motivated, ready to learn, and ready to improve their lives; they had a well of strengths to draw upon. One WDB staff member explained that "as long as [the participants] come into the building, and they start the process, they will want to do good for themselves." Moreover, other grantee respondents noted that participants were often resilient and hopeful for the future.

> *"One of the commonalities amongst all of them, no matter their demographics, is they're here looking for assistance, which means that they still have some type of hope that change can happen."* —Grantee

Implications of COVID-19 on Service Delivery

COVID-19 severely impacted service delivery as much as it did recruitment, outreach, and enrollment. One grantee noted when talking about the pandemic:

> *"This [Breaking Barriers] plan was so well-written in the land of pre-COVID. However, COVID created all these unanticipated issues. There were a lot of outside forces that were really impacting our plan. We would come back to the table and redesign, and then something else would happen, and then we'd come back and redesign."*

Service Delivery Challenges and Adaptations

COVID-19 resulted in service changes for many grantees. For example, 18 grantees indicated that the pandemic created technology issues for participants, 16 indicated that it required smaller classes or group sizes (making it harder for grantees to deliver services as they once did), and many other grantees noted how COVID-19 reduced their participants' abilities to engage in services (15 grantees).

Shelter-in-place orders required grantees and other service providers to quickly change the ways in which they operated. For some training providers, this meant completely halting or delaying training during the early days of the pandemic. For most grantees, the pandemic required pivoting from providing in-person services or training to providing these services remotely, which required a tremendous learning curve and sometimes resources (e.g., computers and internet access) on

the part of both staff and participants to adjust and adopt. This was particularly challenging for healthcare training providers, who were much less likely to have provided online training prior to the pandemic due to the need for participants to practice certain hands-on skills in lab settings. Several grantee staff members also explained during interviews that as health restrictions lessened and then tightened with new COVID-19 variants, training providers were forced to quickly shift from in-person to virtual training to hybrid models and then back again at a moment's notice. The mandated health requirements also limited the number of individuals who could train together in groups, further impacting enrollment numbers.

> *"…Moving from that in-person classroom training to the online model, then later to a hybrid model: there was a ton of work that had to go into doing that. And that was doing it as things were happening. It wasn't like we've got six months to figure this out and get the structure and foundation in place. It was like, no, we got to do this now."* —Grantee

An assessment shared by many grantee staff was that virtual programming made it generally difficult to engage and retain participants, particularly when programming modalities had to shift so many times. They explained that building trust and rapport with participants was difficult in virtual environments.

Remote learning helped grantees recognize the importance of supporting barriered individuals with digital literacy, as indicated by several grantees during interviews. For example, one WDB and one CBO recognized during COVID-19 that participants needed extra support with digital literacy and added additional course content, such as assisting learners on how to operate computers and attach Word documents to emails. Another grantee provided participants with iPads, Chromebooks, or hotspots to help them successfully navigate online training.

Despite having to make these pivots amid the pandemic, grantees reported that some adjustments ultimately benefited participants and will likely persist after the grant. Several grantees reported that after successfully building the infrastructure needed to provide remote training, they would likely maintain some kind of hybrid approach in the future as it "allows for flexibility in participant schedules." A WDB partner also explained that they hoped to continue to provide virtual services in their AJCCs while still continuing to provide in-person services for those who

prefer it "because just having that access to our center, having access to job leads or even to their case managers virtually, is a huge advantage for jobseekers." Lastly, one CBO warned that as virtual programming continued, digital literacy was a service that must continue to combat the digital divide.

Navigating Vaccine Requirements

Another pandemic-related challenge was due to state and employer-mandated vaccination requirements. These requirements often affected programs offering healthcare training but affected many other types of training providers and participants when trying to enter the workforce as well. These requirements meant that participants who were unable or unwilling to be vaccinated could not complete their training or find employment unless they received an exemption. And even for those participants who were willing to be vaccinated but had not yet received their shots, grantees had to work with them to be vaccinated and then re-enroll them in training. As one grantee explained, the low-income communities of color her organization recruited from with were especially skeptical about vaccines, so working with their participants around these requirements was especially challenging. Another grantee reported that "resistance to COVID-19 vaccinations coupled with [our organization's] requirements to have COVID-19 vaccinations for employment meant there were additional challenges and new barriers to employment."

IV. Partnerships

One of the central goals of Breaking Barriers was to deliver services through collaborative partnerships between CBOs and WDBs. This chapter discusses the successes grantees had in developing strong CBO-WDB partnerships, including communication, more effective service delivery, and co-enrollment, as well as the challenges they faced in establishing these partnerships. It ends with a brief discussion of other types of partnerships that grantees used to help deliver their Breaking Barriers programs.

Key Findings

- While developing a strong CBO-WDB partnership was a key goal of Breaking Barriers, and most grantees indicated having a strong or moderately strong partnership by the end of the grant, the strength of these relationships changed relatively little over the course of the initiative.

- Only 15 percent of Breaking Barriers participants were co-enrolled in WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth programs (13 percent) and in Title III Wager-Peyser or other workforce programs (2 percent). Factors that may have limited additional co-enrollment include grantee use of more easily accessible funding, limited information on co-enrollment, and pressures on workforce system agencies to meet performance requirements.

- While not as central to the goals of the grant, grantees developed and maintained other partnerships to help them implement their programs.

CBO-WDB Partnerships

As outlined in the introduction, an important goal of Breaking Barriers was to encourage collaboration between local WDBs and CBOs to strengthen the AJCC system. The theory behind this goal is straightforward. CBOs bring expertise in reaching the initiative's target populations—individuals with barriers to employment who are not always well-served by the workforce development system—while local WDBs bring expertise in connecting jobseekers to the full range of workforce services and employment opportunities in the local labor market. By marrying these CBOs and WDBs, the initiative sought to increase the delivery of

career and employment services to individuals with high barriers to employment while improving the workforce system's ability to serve diverse populations.

Grantee Assessment of CBO-WDB Partnership Strength

Unsurprisingly, given the requirement that services be provided collaboratively, more than two-thirds of grantees (18 of 25) reported that they began their grants with strong or moderately strong partnerships with their CBO or WDB partner (Exhibit IV-1). In fact, some grantees indicated in interviews that they explicitly chose to build on already strong partnerships with their CBO or WDB partner, rather than try to develop new partnerships that might not succeed.

By late 2021 (when grantees were surveyed), as compared to before the grant, grantee assessments of the strength of their CBO-WDB partnership had changed only a little. There was a small increase in the number of grantees (three grantees) that reported having a strong to very strong partnership and a slight decrease in the number of grantees (three grantees) that reported having a limited or weak partnership, but otherwise no changes.

Exhibit IV-1: Grantee Self-Assessment of the Strength of Their CBO-WDB Partnership Before the Breaking Barriers Grant and at the Time of the Survey
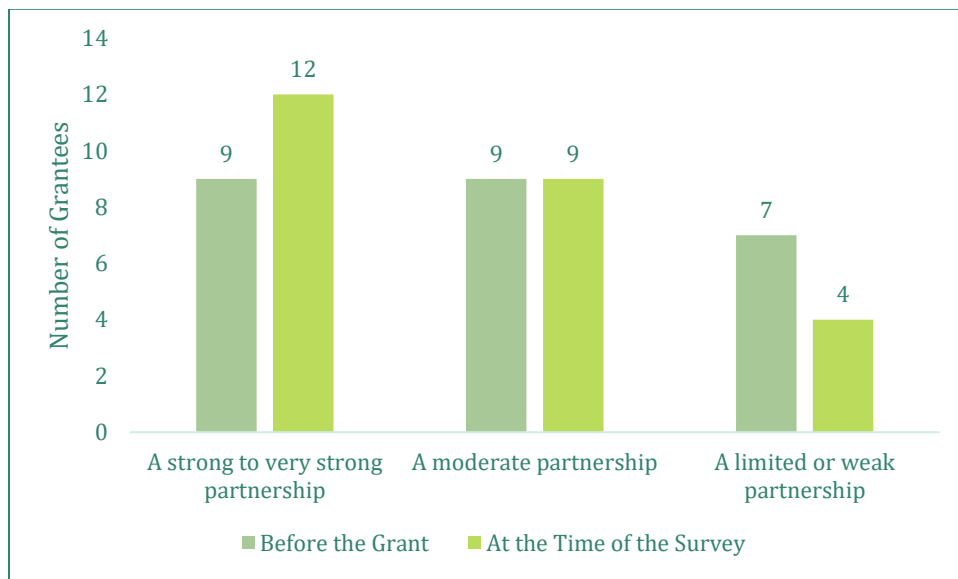
Source: Grantee survey
Notes: Survey results are based on 25 grantees. One grantee did not provide information to answer this question.

Communication as an Indicator of Strong Partnerships

In addition to asking grantees about the overall strength of their WDB or CBO partnerships, the study team also asked grantees about the elements that helped to strengthen these partnerships. One item that stood out in survey responses and interview discussions was regular communication between partners throughout the life of the grant, whether via scheduled meetings (typically virtual due to the pandemic) or through ad hoc communication via phone, text, or email.

Also important was the content of this communication. For example, grantees with stronger partnerships often held project design or kickoff meetings to discuss partner roles and planned programming. These meetings helped the partners to understand each other's services better, which helped their grants operate more effectively. For example, representatives of one CBO grantee explained that their organization conducted partnership meetings to discuss the services assigned to each partner to reduce duplication of services.

In some cases, these meetings were integrated into regular regional planning unit (RPU) or WDB-related meetings. For example, representatives from one CBO explained that some of its Breaking Barriers program planning had occurred during local RPU meetings. In these sessions, WDB and CBO RPU partners discussed gaps in services and how to address participant barriers, which helped shape their Breaking Barriers planning.

Another way that WDB and CBO partners communicated regarding their respective roles was through formal documentation of their relationships, such as memoranda of understanding or contracts. At least 11 grantees reported developing such agreements with their partners.

Weaker CBO-WDB partnerships tended to face communication challenges, often characterized by infrequent communication. Sometimes this was due to staffing changes and turnover at partner organizations that led to communication breakdowns. For example, representatives from one CBO explained that their point of contact at their WDB partner changed partway through the grant due to turnover and that the first point of contact was more responsive than the second. This resulted in less frequent communication with the WDB partner.

Co-enrollment as an Indicator of a Strong Partnership

Another possible indicator of the strength of CBO and WDB partnerships is co-enrollment of Breaking Barriers participants in other workforce or education system programs that are part of the state's AJCC system, such as any of the six WIOA core programs: the Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth programs; the Title II Adult Education Family Literacy Act program; the Title III Employment Service program; or the Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation program. Although co-enrollment of Breaking Barriers participants in these and other workforce programs was not required by the initiative, this service delivery approach has the potential to widen participants' access to services not otherwise available through Breaking Barriers alone. For example, by co-enrolling eligible Breaking Barriers participants in WIOA Title I programs, grantees could leverage those WIOA funds to provide more career, training, or supportive services than might be available through Breaking Barriers funded programs alone. Co-enrollment strategies are highly encouraged by the California Unified Strategic Workforce Development Plan and can have other benefits such as helping to maximize agencies' resources, enabling greater efficiencies in service delivery, and encouraging more intentional coordination of services (California Workforce Development Board, 2020).[20]

Because the study team only had access to CalJOBS data, the administrative system of record for Breaking Barriers and the WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and Title III (Employment Service) programs, the analysis only includes co-enrollment of participants in these five programs.[21] In examining these data, the study team was able to determine that co-enrollment of Breaking Barriers participants into these programs did not occur frequently. As shown in Exhibit IV-2, as of January 2022, grantees had co-enrolled only about 16 percent of Breaking Barriers participants. Of these participants, most (about 13 percent of all

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[20] For a more detailed discussion on this issue, please see the California Workforce Services Directive on Strategic Co-Enrollment (WSD 19-09).

[21] The evaluation team did not have access to reliable data on co-enrollment of Breaking Barriers participants in other WIOA core or partner programs, including WIOA Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation, TANF/CalWORKs, or others.

participants) were co-enrolled into one of the WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth Programs.[22]

Exhibit IV-2: Percentage of Participants Co-Enrolled in Breaking Barriers and Either WIOA Title I Adult/Dislocated Worker/Youth programs or Title III

Breaking Barriers Participants: 13% | 2% | 86%

■ Co-Enrolled in WIOA Title I   ■ Co-enrolled in WIOA Title III   ■ Not Co-Enrolled in any of these programs

Source: PIRL Dataset
Notes: This dataset includes 2,468 participants. Percentages in the chart add up to more than 100 percent because some participants were enrolled in both Title I and Title III programs. Forty-six of the 395 co-enrolled participants (about 1 percent) were co-enrolled in an unspecified program in CalJOBS and are not included in the exhibit.

As shown in Exhibit IV-3, it is notable that nearly all instances of co-enrollment happened among the six WDB grantees.

Exhibit IV-3: WDB Grantees and CBO Partners Where Most Co-enrollment Occurred

WDB Grantee	CBO Partner	PERCENT Breaking Barriers Participants co-enrolled in Title I or III	NUMBER of Breaking Barriers Participants co-enrolled in Title I or III
North Central Counties Consortium (administers the WDB for the counties of Colusa, Glenn, Sutter and Yuba)	Hands of Hope	90%	137
Merced County WDB	Central Valley Opportunity Center	66%	124
Southeast Los Angeles County WDB	Field of Dreams	100%	40
County of Orange Community Resources/Community Investment Division (administers the WDB for Orange County)	Goodwill Industries of Orange County	38%	25
WDB of Solano County	Caminar	86%	18
San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development (administers the WDB for San Francisco)	Jewish Vocational Services of San Francisco	53%	17

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[22] Some participants were co-enrolled in more than one program.

Thirteen CBO grantees also had Breaking Barriers participants who were co-enrolled, but only for a very small number of participants (between one and seven individuals). The other seven CBO grantees did not co-enroll any participants.

Reasons for High Co-enrollment

In interviews, grantees that actively co-enrolled Breaking Barriers participants into Title I or III programs attributed their high co-enrollment to two primary reasons. First, they stated that the staff members who enrolled participants into their Breaking Barriers grants were familiar with procedures for enrolling participants in WIOA Title I programs prior to the grant. As such, these staff simply had to be trained on how to add enrollment in Breaking Barriers into their Title I enrollment processes. In fact, in several cases, these grantees were able to build their Breaking Barriers-Title I co-enrollment process into their intake procedures.

> *"It's about leveraging the funding. For [Breaking Barriers], we didn't pay for any of the training that was done. That was paid for through WIOA co-enrollment."* —Grantee

Second, these grantees recognized that co-enrollment would allow them to leverage their Breaking Barriers funding with WIOA funding for training and supportive services, enabling them to provide these services to more participants and with greater intensity. For example, one of these grantees noted that it did not use any of its Breaking Barriers funding on training but instead used WIOA Title I funds to cover those costs.

Reasons for Low Co-enrollment

Grantees cited multiple reasons for co-enrolling few or none of their Breaking Barriers participants in WIOA Title I or III programs. These included the level of burden on both participants and staff involved in enrolling in WIOA programs; the availability of other, more flexible sources of funding to meet participant needs; a lack of understanding of when co-enrollment was appropriate; and concerns that

Breaking Barriers participants would not be able to achieve WIOA performance indicator goals.[23] Each of these is discussed below.

Co-enrollment in WIOA Title I was burdensome for staff and participants. Staff members from multiple grantees mentioned that co-enrolling participants in WIOA Title I programs required both participants and staff to complete several complicated forms and submit multiple eligibility documents, so they avoided doing so when possible. For example, one staff member stated that some participants chose not to move forward with enrollment in a WIOA program because of the paperwork burden, while other raised confidentiality concerns due to the large amount of personal information required to complete enrollment forms. Another grantee representative stated that his agency did not co-enroll its Breaking Barriers participants in WIOA Title I because it was concerned that doing so would add requirements or restrictions on participants that they would be unable to meet. A third grantee stated that it took a lot of time for staff members from her agency to learn how to correctly fill out the WIOA Title I application, making co-enrollment difficult.

Availability of other more flexible sources of funding. Respondents from two grantees reported that they did not often co-enroll their Breaking Barriers participants in WIOA because they had other more flexible sources of funding for services that could be accessed more quickly. For example, one of these respondents reported that her agency preferred to use a non-WIOA source of funding to cover the cost of participant supportive services. It did so because this other source of funding allowed her agency to quickly provide upfront cash to participants for immediate needs—such as emergency car repairs. She stated that using WIOA funds took more time and paperwork, which resulted in participants dropping out of the program to earn money to cover these expenses.

> *"We have discretionary money that we have been able to use, that isn't too restrictive in terms of policy."* —Grantee

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[23] Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 10-16 establishes six primary performance accountability indicators (Employment Rate 2nd and 4th quarter After Exit, Median Earnings, Credential Attainment, Measurable Skill Gains, and Effectiveness Serving Employers) and performance reporting requirements to assess the effectiveness of states and local areas in achieving positive outcomes.

Lack of knowledge about when and how to co-enroll participants. Another reason some grantees did not pursue co-enrollment strategies was that they lacked experience and clear procedures for enrolling participants in WIOA programs. For example, one grantee staff member reported that it was difficult for her staff to understand when and how to optimally co-enroll Breaking Barriers participants into the WIOA Title I programs operated by their local WDB partner. Some grantees also noted that the short timeframe for the grants also made it difficult to work out clear co-enrollment procedures with their partners.

WIOA Title I Performance indicators. In interviews, two respondents reported that they did not co-enroll Breaking Barriers participants in WIOA programs due to the WIOA performance requirements, which one grantee staff member called "unforgiving." Another grantee staff member asserted that due to the high level of barriers these participants faced, it would be impossible for them to achieve the performance goals expected of WIOA Title I participants.

> "We could never meet WIOA performance measures [with our Breaking Barriers participants], but these people are in need." —Grantee

Other Program Partnerships

While CBO-WDB partnerships were a key component of Breaking Barriers, many grantees also developed or strengthened partnerships with other agencies to successfully operate their programs. Grantees reported plans to develop partnerships with over 200 CBOs, employers, or public agencies to assist them with recruiting participants, providing program services, and training participants. As part of these relationships, grantees reported planning to distribute about $6 million from their grants to partners of all sorts (including their primary CBO or WDB partner as well as other partners) and reported that partners would provide an additional aggregated in-kind match of $5 million and a cash match amount of almost $3 million for the program year. Not surprisingly, then, as shown in Exhibit IV-4, just under half of the grantees in the grantee survey noted that partnerships outside of the CBO-WDB partnership were a high priority.

Exhibit IV-4: Number of Grantees Indicating Different Priority Levels of Their Other (Non-CBO-WDB) Partnerships
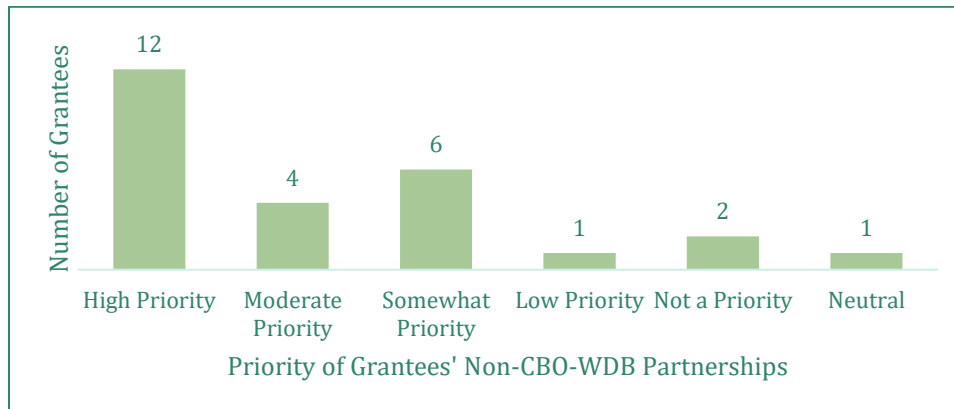
Source: Grantee Survey

Toward the end of their grant terms, grantees shared that most of these other partnerships worked moderately to extremely well and cited strong communication and collaboration as reasons why their partnerships succeeded. Those grantees for which the partnerships worked only moderately or slightly well cited COVID-19 challenges, such as partner closures and availability, as the main reason why these other partnerships did not go as expected. Indeed, COVID-19 had a distinct effect on employer partnerships. For some employers, shelter-in-place requirements and vaccine requirements meant that they were no longer able to sponsor or host on-the-job training or work experience. Partnerships with healthcare employers that provided work-based learning opportunities were particularly strained as employers instead turned their focus to providing COVID-19 care to their communities during the height of the public health crisis. Across most industries, especially early in the pandemic, grantees found that many employers had a need for fewer employees, making engagement with employers regarding job placements difficult. Engagement with restaurant and hospitality industry employers was particularly challenging during shelter-in-place, when those employers no longer had a need for new employees since their businesses were closed or providing few services.

V. Early Participant- and Program-Level Outcomes

This chapter describes early or preliminary outcomes for Breaking Barriers. It begins by discussing employment and skill gains outcomes for individual participants. It then describes the overall progress of grantees in implementing their programs, as well as the likelihood of sustaining them.

> ## Key Findings
>
> - About 50 percent of Breaking Barriers participants were employed six months after program exit. This percentage is somewhat lower than what is found in other WIOA programs but reasonable given the substantial barriers these populations face. Importantly, this percentage reflects the outcomes of fewer than 20 percent of all Breaking Barriers participants.
>
> - As of 22 months into the 24-month Breaking Barriers grant, about one-third of participants in training had accomplished a measurable skill gain.
>
> - With three to four months left in their grants, 92 percent of grantees had completed most or all of their self-defined program activities, and 44 percent had completed most or all of their self-defined goals or outcomes.
>
> - Nearly two-thirds (16) of grantees reported planning to sustain their Breaking Barriers programs; most others were still determining whether to do so.

Participant-Level Outcomes

The study examined two participant-level outcomes: employment six months post-program (specifically in the second calendar quarter after the quarter in which the participant left the program) and interim skill gains earned while still in a training program. The study team selected these outcomes because 1) they are two of WIOA's common indicators of performance, used to assess all six WIOA core programs, and 2) they were feasible to analyze with available data. Even though Breaking Barriers is not WIOA-funded, the study team adhered as closely as

possible to the guidance for how these two outcomes are calculated under WIOA to allow some comparisons with other WIOA core workforce programs.[24]
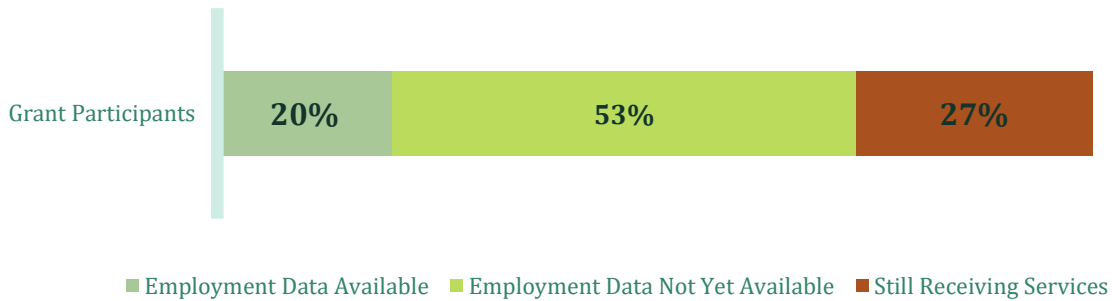
An important caveat to these participant-level outcomes, as noted in the introductory chapter, is that they are preliminary for two primary reasons. First, due to data lags and the length of the evaluation contract, they include results for only a small portion (500) of Breaking Barriers participants. Some participants were not included because the results had to be calculated based on data reported prior to the end of most grants, when many participants were still receiving services and some had yet to be enrolled. Further, due to the nature of these outcomes, even many enrolled participants were not included in the analysis. For example, the interim skill gains measure only included participants enrolled in a training or education service. Because the employment outcome measures participant employment from about three to nine months (two calendar quarters) after they stop receiving program services, and because data on employment only become available about six months after that, only participants who finished receiving services prior to March 31, 2021—a whole year prior to the end of most grants—could be included.

Employment Outcomes

As of January 31, 2022, 1,325 Breaking Barriers participants had finished receiving services or exited the program. However, as explained above, only the 500 of those former participants who had exited by the end of March 2021 could be included in the study team's calculation of employment outcome results. As shown in Exhibit V-1, only about 20 percent of Breaking Barriers participants could be included in this analysis of participant employment after exit.

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[24] In WIOA, these outcomes—*Employment at 2nd Quarter After Exit* and *Measurable Skill Gains*—are two of the Act's six common indicators of performance. Guidance on how these are calculated in California can be found in directive WSD 19-03.

Exhibit V-1: Percentage of Breaking Barriers Participants Included in Employment Outcome Calculations

| Grant Participants | 20% | 53% | 27% |

■ Employment Data Available ■ Employment Data Not Yet Available ■ Still Receiving Services
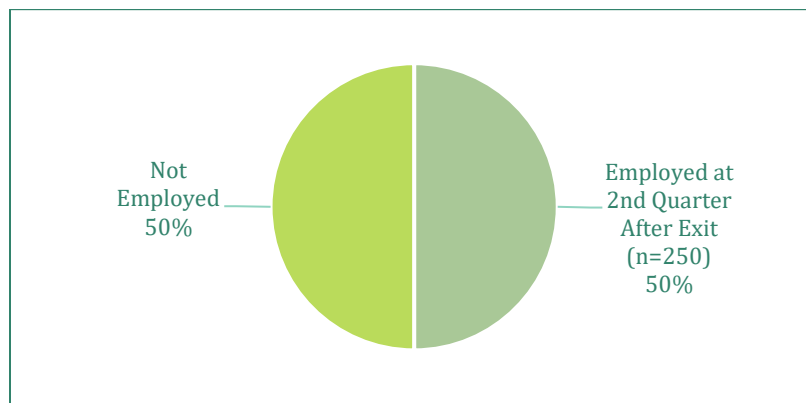
Source: PIRL dataset
Notes: This dataset includes 2,510 participants.

As Exhibit V-2 shows, of these 500 former participants, 50 percent were employed three to nine months after they left the program (within the second calendar quarter after the quarter they exited the program).

Exhibit V-2: Percentage of Breaking Barriers Participants Employed at Three to Nine Months Post-program

Not Employed 50%

Employed at 2nd Quarter After Exit (n=250) 50%

Source: PIRL dataset
Note: This dataset includes 2,510 participants, however, percentages are based on a subset of 500 participants for whom employment outcomes, based on the matched supplemental and state's base wage file, were available. Not all employment is included in the wage file because there are uncovered occupations (e.g., self-employed, some agricultural workers, private household workers, etc.).

Even though these findings are only preliminary, there is some value in examining how they compare to results for other California workforce system programs. According to California's most recent WIOA annual report, these results for Breaking Barriers participants were only three percentage points lower than the

Program Year 2020 results for the WIOA Title III Employment Service program (53 percent) and 11 percentage points lower than Title I Adult Program (61 percent) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020). Given that Breaking Barriers program participants were likely to have even more barriers to employment than many WIOA Adult or Employment Service program participants, a 50 percent employment rate for Breaking Barriers could be considered a positive result.

Another reason for an optimistic interpretation is that this subset of Breaking Barriers participants began and finished their programs during the grant's first year of implementation, when pandemic uncertainty was at its peak and finding employment was particularly challenging statewide. As California's WIOA annual report describes, one of the reasons California missed its negotiated goal for this performance indicator was due to the high unemployment that ensued during the pandemic (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020):

"...the actual rates in the first quarter of the PY [2020 were] on target to meet the negotiated rates for all programs. This trend coincided with California's record low unemployment rate of 3.9 percent in January 2020. By the spring of 2020, the impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on California's economy raised the unemployment rate to 16.4 in May 2020. Ultimately, the monthly average unemployment rate for 2020 was 10.1 percent, which is reflected in the significant drop in the employment rate for those reflected in the second quarter of PY 2020, and then the steady decline in the quarters after. As California recovers from the pandemic and the unemployment rate decreases, the expectation is that there will be an increase in the employment rates for all programs."

Certainly, the downward part of this pattern in the state report is reflected in what Breaking Barriers representatives shared in interviews. These staff noted that some participants were reluctant to look for or find employment, especially early in the pandemic, because they were fearful of contracting COVID-19 or infecting high-risk members of their households. Some of these staff members also mentioned that participants receiving pandemic-related assistance might have been less willing to seek employment or were unable to due to not having childcare. All this leads to the fact that it will be important to examine whether employment rates for

Breaking Barriers participants who exited later in the grant cycle are higher than those who exited earlier.

Interim or Measurable Skill Gains

The study team also examined Breaking Barriers participants' achievement of interim skill gains, using the WIOA performance indicator, Measurable Skill Gains (MSG).[25] This measure documents various academic, technical, occupational, or other types of skill gains.[26]

As shown in Exhibit V-3, preliminary MSG outcomes showed that 33 percent of Breaking Barriers participants accomplished some type of skill progression. However, as discussed above, these results are also for only a subgroup of participants: those who enrolled in a training or education service. It was also calculated based on skill gains recorded as of January 31, 2022, five months earlier than MSG outcomes are typically recorded.[27] It also may not have included all Breaking Barriers participants who enrolled in training or education services, since most grants did not end until March 31, 2022. Consequently, these results may change when they can be calculated for all Breaking Barriers participants who enrolled in a qualifying service after the end of program year 2021.

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[25] The study team calculated the MSG following guidance for how these outcomes are calculated under WIOA to the extent possible. Importantly, MSG is only measured for participants enrolled in a training or education service during each program year they are enrolled in such a service.

[26] Five types of skill gains are included in MSG measures: 1) achievement of at least one educational functioning level (EFL), 2) documented attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, 3) secondary or postsecondary transcript or report card for a sufficient number of credit hours, 4) satisfactory or better progress report toward established milestones, such as completion of on-the-job training, and 5) successful passage of an exam that is required for a particular occupation or progress in attaining technical or occupational skills.

[27] As noted in WSD19-03, MSG results are calculated for each program year, following the end of that year.
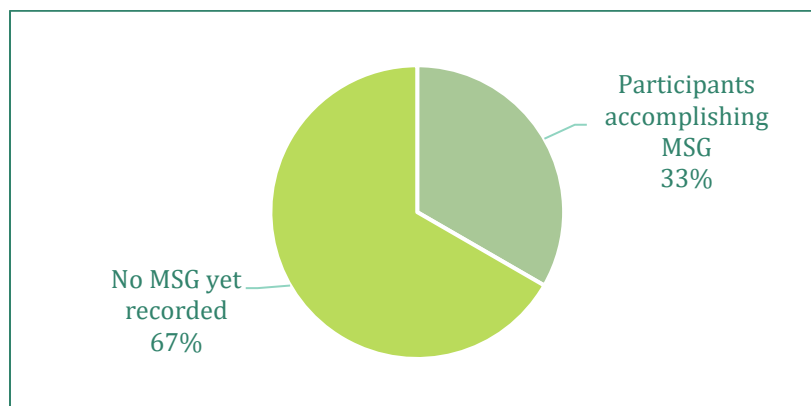
Source: PIRL dataset
Note: This dataset includes 2,510 participants. Percentages in the figure are based on a subset of 1,119 participants who were in training services.

As with employment, the MSG results for Breaking Barriers participants are lower than those for the Title I Adult Program (62.1 percent) in California in program year 2020 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).[28] However, as discussed above, Breaking Barriers participants were expected to face even more challenges than many Title I Adult program participants. In fact, some Title I participants who were members of certain common Breaking Barriers priority populations, including ex-offenders (a focus for 15 out of 22 Breaking Barriers grantees) and homeless individuals (a focus for 10 out of 22 grantees), had much lower MSG outcomes than other Title I Adult Program participants.

Program-Level Outcomes

The sections above describe the preliminary outcomes of the participants who engaged in Breaking Barriers services. This section addresses what the grantees were able to accomplish overall in terms of the programs that they put in place and their plans and ability to sustain these programs into the future.
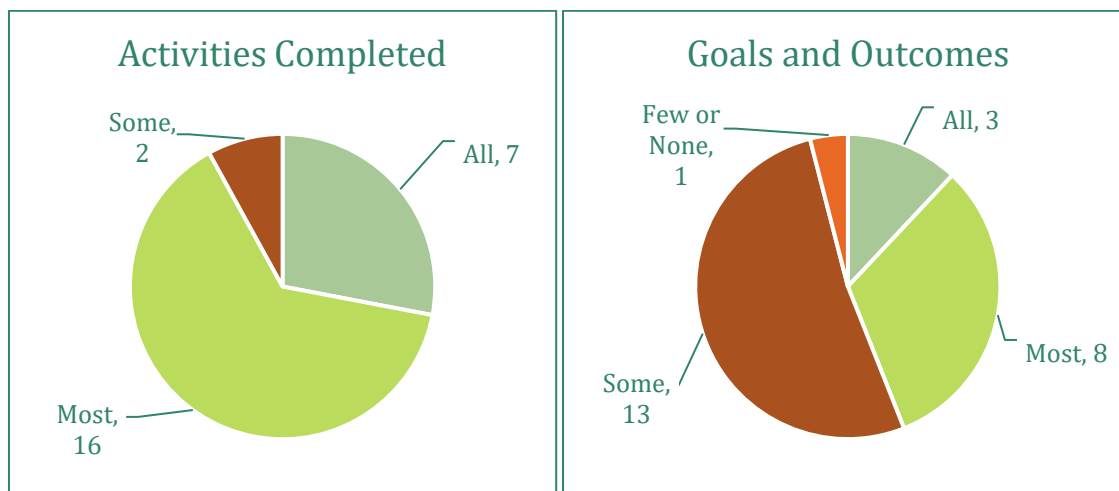
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[28]   For California's negotiated goals please see WSIN 19-48.

Overall Implementation Progress

The State Board required grantees to track their implementation progress in their quarterly progress reports, which included sections on progress toward a self-defined set of program activities as well as goals and outcomes. Program activities varied across grantees but tended to include steps grantees took to ensure operating efficiency, such as hiring or training new staff, establishing partnerships, creating referral pipelines, finalizing training programs, establishing career services, and setting up the provision of supportive services. Grantee goals and outcomes also varied but included quantifiable measures of success, such as meeting a planned number of new enrollments, helping a set number of individuals complete training or internships, helping participants earn a set number of credentials, or meeting a certain employment or education placement rate.

Overall, most grantees in the survey reported having made considerable progress toward their activities and goals/outcomes. As is shown in Exhibit V-4, 23 grantees (92 percent) indicated they had completed most or all of their planned program activities, while the other two grantees had completed at least some of their planned program activities. The exhibit also shows that 11 grantees (44 percent) reported having completed all or most of their goals and outcomes, while another 13 (52 percent) had completed at least some of them. While COVID-19 and shelter-in-place rules presented a major obstacle to program implementation, some other types of obstacles that grantee staff mentioned in interviews that may have impeded their progress included staff turnover, including the death of at least one project director; general "growing pains" of getting a new project off the ground; and the difficulties of learning new reporting and administrative systems and requirements, especially those surrounding CalJOBS. Nevertheless, since most grantees still had at least a few months left in their grants at the time of the survey, these results will most likely improve.

Exhibit V-4: Number of Grantees Self-Reporting Completion of Grant Activities and Goals/Outcomes

Activities Completed

Some, 2
All, 7
Most, 16

Goals and Outcomes

Few or None, 1
All, 3
Most, 8
Some, 13

Source: Grantee survey
Notes: Survey results are based on 25 grantees. One grantee did not provide information to these survey items.

Sustainability

While sustainability was not an explicit goal of Breaking Barriers, it is consistent with the larger strategic goals of the state workforce system in California. The State Board's strategic plan speaks to how "California is committed to developing a workforce system that enables economic growth and shared prosperity for employers and employees, especially those with *barriers to employment* [emphasis added], by investing in industry partnerships, job quality, and meaningful skills attainment rather than low wages, contingent employment, and minimal benefits" (California Workforce Development Board, 2020). Furthermore, one of the policy objectives stated in the plan—"aligning, coordinating, and integrating programs and services," which involves economizing limited resources through partnerships— aligns closely with the CBO-WDB collaborative partnerships at the core of the initiative. As such, the State Board has a vested interest in having these programs continue and in learning about factors that may support or hinder the sustainability of these and other similar programs.

It seemed likely that a considerable number of Breaking Barriers programs would continue past the end of the grant. In the grantee survey, 16 grantees (62 percent) indicated that they planned to continue their Breaking Barriers programs past the end of the grant period. Of these 16 grantees, 11 indicated that their programs

would either stay the same or mostly stay the same, with only slight differences in services or partnerships (excluding the central CBO-WDB partnership), while five indicated that their programs would have somewhat different services or partnerships, such as new or modified service strategies or new service delivery locations. Of the 10 grantees not clearly planning to sustain their Breaking Barriers programs, nine grantees were unsure of or were still determining whether they would sustain their programs and one had no intention of sustaining its program. Grantees indicated two main obstacles to sustainability. The first (true for 10 grantees) was an insufficient commitment to the CBO-WDB partnership at the core of the program. The second (true for eight grantees) was insufficient funding.

VI. Discussion and Recommendations

Breaking Barriers program grants operated from April 2020 to March 2022 and presented two substantial new opportunities to the state. These grants 1) offered additional support for and exploration of services and approaches for helping individuals with high barriers to find and retain employment and 2) helped coordinate and integrate employment-based services provided by WDBs and CBOs. The implementation and early outcomes presented in this report suggest that even with the disruptions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the grantees and the State Board were able to make considerable progress toward both of these broader goals. The information provided by grantees that is presented in this report also points to several important lessons around implementing similar programs. With the state gearing up to provide a new round of Breaking Barriers funding in 2022, and with increased interest nationwide in providing workforce system services to populations facing significant barriers to employment, the lessons learned from the implementation of Breaking Barriers and its early outcomes are extremely timely. This closing chapter summarizes grantees' successes and challenges and then puts forward lessons and recommendations for those wishing to run similar programs.

Participant-Level Successes and Challenges

Grantees accomplished much of what they set out to do in implementing their Breaking Barriers grants. The following is a list of these successes along with some of the challenges grantees also encountered.

- At 22 months into the 24-month grant, Breaking Barriers grantees had enrolled more than 2,510 individuals, exceeding their aggregate enrollment target. Of the 26 grantees, 12 exceeded their enrollment goals, while the remaining 14 were still operating their programs with enrollment numbers expected to increase.

- Despite a rough start to enrollment due to COVID-19–related disruptions, grantees enjoyed relatively stable enrollment after the first quarter of the initiative. In large part, this stability and the success around meeting enrollment goals was likely due to the State Board and grantees reacting quickly to the pandemic by modifying downward the enrollment goals of more than half (15) of the grantees to numbers that better reflected their COVID-19 realities.

- Grantees enrolled and provided services to all of the initiatives' 21 target populations, even though the number of participants served from some populations was considerably larger than it was for others.

- By December 2021, Breaking Barriers grantees had provided participants with numerous employment-related services, including basic career services (84 percent of participants), individualized career services (68 percent), training services (36 percent), and supportive services (32 percent).

- No matter the extent to which they were actually offered, grantees found several service delivery strategies particularly useful for addressing participants' barriers to employment, especially work-based learning, job placement, English language learning, and various types of case management services.

- COVID-19 disrupted grantee service delivery, reducing class sizes and forcing grantees to pivot from providing in-person services to virtual or remote services, which many grantees will likely sustain in the future.

- By January 2022, about one-third of Breaking Barriers participants had accomplished a measurable skill gain and about one-half were employed during the second quarter after the one in which they exited services. These rates were somewhat lower than those reported for Title I and Title III programs during a similar time period, but given the numerous challenges Breaking Barriers participants faced, these outcomes seem reasonable. Furthermore, given the highly preliminary nature of these data, the fact that these outcomes are for the earliest enrolled participants in the program, and the fact that trends observed during COVID-19 suggest improvements in service delivery and employment opportunities over time, these outcomes will likely change and may improve once they can be examined for all participants.

To their credit, grantees accomplished all this against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions placed on public interactions through shelter-in-place orders (both statewide and locally) that limited their ability to provide services and work with partners and participants as they had originally planned. The pandemic meant that grantees delayed the start of enrollment, needed to adjust their enrollment goals, and had to adjust their overall approaches for working with partners and participants to ensure that they could continue to deliver services at all. In some cases, they also needed to find new partners, learn how to work with employer vaccine requirements—with populations reluctant to

get vaccinated—change the types of training being offered based on limited availability from certain providers, and consider new and entirely different ways of working with participants, such as virtual services. These COVID-19–related challenges were on top of the many preexisting challenges they faced in trying to address these participants' many barriers. For instance, making sure participants had the capacity to attend virtual services was difficult given some participants' already low computer literacy skills and limited access to computers and internet services.

Importantly, all of the outcomes shared above are interim findings based on the data that were available as of January 31, 2022. Twenty-three Breaking Barriers grantees planned to continue operating, including enrolling and serving participants up through the end of their grants in March 2022. As such, the study team anticipates that the final enrollment numbers will increase and the general profile of participants and the proportions of those either receiving services or achieving outcomes will change and quite possibly improve.

Program-Level Successes and Challenges

While the efforts of the State Board and Breaking Barriers grantees allowed them to accomplish much in terms of enrolling and serving individual participants and achieving positive outcomes, grantees also faced some notable challenges at the program level.

- Twenty-six grantees (19 CBOs, one ROCP, and six WDBs), representing 16 different workforce development areas across the state, enrolled participants and created service delivery models designed to help individuals with high barriers to employment find and retain jobs.

- By late 2021, 92 percent of grantees had completed most or all of their self-defined program activities and 44 percent had completed most or all of their self-defined goals or outcomes. With three to four months left in the grants, the study team anticipates that grantees will make even further progress.

- Grantees maintained and slightly increased the strength of their primary CBO-WDB partnerships. They also established, maintained, and grew scores of other program partnerships important for recruitment and service delivery.

- While most grantees indicated that their primary CBO-WDB partnership was strong or moderately strong by the end of the grant, the strength of these

relationships changed relatively little over the course of the initiative, which is notable given the emphasis placed on the importance of this primary collaborative partnership.

- Only about 16 percent of Breaking Barriers participants were reported to be co-enrolled, according to the initiative's administrative system of record. Most of these participants were co-enrolled in the WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth program (13 percent), with just a small percentage co-enrolled in the Title III Employment Service program (2 percent). Factors that may have limited additional co-enrollment included grantee access to more easily accessible funding, limited information on co-enrollment, and pressures on workforce system agencies to meet performance requirements. Importantly, Breaking Barriers participants may have been co-enrolled in other WIOA core or AJCC partner programs such as WIOA Title II, IV, or CalWORKS. However, the study team did not have access to reliable data on participant co-enrollment in those other programs.

- While overall implementation of the initiative started more slowly than anticipated due to COVID-19, two-thirds of grantees had plans for sustaining their programs after the grant's end.

An important goal of Breaking Barriers was to bring CBOs and WDBs together to leverage the funds, services, and expertise that each has available at its disposal. While there are many ways that such relationships could benefit both entities in the partnership, one important indicator was the nature and extent of the communication that happened. For some grantees, this communication was fairly limited, while for others, it was stronger. Another indicator was whether Breaking Barriers participants were being co-enrolled into both CBO programs and workforce system programs like Title I and Title III services, as delivered through AJCCs. However, the low number of co-enrolled participants and the fact that co-enrollment occurred primarily when a WDB was the grantee suggest that co-enrollment was not a useful strategy, grantees did not have the support needed to foster it, or, most likely, some of both. Further, while grantees reported making some inroads toward sustainability, which fits well into the state's overall strategic planning efforts focused on serving individuals with high barriers to employment, grantees nevertheless did not appear to always be doing so as part of a strongly coordinated effort between themselves and their CBO or WDB partners.

Lessons and Recommendations

Below, the study team offers several recommendations around operating future rounds of Breaking Barriers programs, which may also be applicable to other programs serving participants facing significant barriers to employment or those looking to improve partnerships between WDBs and CBOs, both within California and outside of it.

Building Stronger CBO-WDB Partnerships

The study team recommends that the State Board be more proactive when it comes to defining what CBO-WDB partnerships should entail and in identifying those that have the greatest potential to meet initiative goals. While the broad goal for CBO-WDB partnerships was embedded in the legislation that established the initiative, it lacked concrete expectations around what this partnership should entail and the ways in which the partners should work together. Starting with the Request for Applications but also including any program planning that occurs post-award, the State Board should further specify any requirements and expectations around this primary partnership, including the steps both partners could take to build and grow their relationship over the course of the grant. These steps might include creating a communication plan, developing a memorandum of understanding or another type of formal agreement detailing concrete plans for coordinating staffing, service delivery, and participant co-enrollment, including not only how many individuals might be co-enrolled but the circumstances under which co-enrollment should or should not take place and why. At the proposal stage, applicants should be asked to do more than provide a letter of support but rather to begin to spell out at least some details of this partnership plan that could then be picked up post-award when grantees are further refining their program plans and approach. Taking these extra steps should help to ensure that both partners are invested in building or strengthening this primary partnership throughout the life of the grant. The more concrete these steps can be, the easier it will be for State Board and TA provider staff to monitor and engage with grantees regarding these partnerships throughout the grant and the more likely it will be that these grants will yield stronger partnerships.

The State Board might also help to identify and cultivate CBO-WDB partnerships from the start. This could involve engaging CBOs and WDBs at the pre-proposal

stage to determine where potentially strong partnerships lie, perhaps by obtaining input from WDBs or tapping into known pairings that have demonstrated this potential through other projects and encouraging those pairings to apply. Another variation on this approach would be to designate certain tiers of partnership types to which grantees could apply. While it may not be in the interests of the initiative to foster entirely new CBO-WDB partnerships, it could be. It also will inevitably be true that some relationships will be newer than others. The State Board could harness this variation, designating certain tiers of grants based on the strength of the CBO-WDB partnership at the outset, with a different set of expectations and goals outlined for more limited, moderate, or stronger initial partnerships. These tiers would be a way to broaden the reach of the initiative and could create an opportunity for grantee peer learning sessions where more well-developed CBO-WDB partnerships could support the growth of less well-developed partnerships. Of course, all these steps would likely be easier if some amount of funding was also provided specifically to the CBO or WDB partner to help compensate staff for their time spent planning and engaging in partnership-building activities.

Standardizing Program Elements

Grantees and their partners have a great deal of expertise in working with the initiative's target populations, and the State Board has engaged them precisely for this reason. Nevertheless, the study team recommends that the State Board take additional steps to help grantees standardize and refine their program models. Doing so will help the State Board and its TA provider develop more targeted training and will make for more straightforward and informative program evaluations since it will mean that different approaches can be more easily grouped together to better assess overall program approaches.

The types of revisions the study team is recommending involve the development of additional guidance and clarification around some of the program elements discussed in this report: enrollment, services, and program goals. In terms of enrollment and services, there are several items the State Board should consider. One might be a way to standardize enrollment numbers across grantees, such as by tying the number more closely to grant size or even modifying it based on a formula considering service models or participant types. Another area of consideration might be the large numbers belonging to some target populations and the small numbers belonging to others. This may be acceptable, but there may also be some

reasons to select grantees that are more likely to enroll more participants from specific target populations, which might result in a more balanced, or simply a different, mix. Similarly, the State Board may wish to identify and recommend or promote particular service delivery approaches, either those that are better tested or those which might benefit from additional research.

In terms of program goals, the State Board needs to be able to monitor and evaluate the initiative by 1) grouping grantees together into like program types and 2) being able to ascertain whether grantees achieved their goals. However, for these two things to happen, grantees need a degree of uniformity in their goals and there needs to be a way to link these goals to data being collected on the program. At the moment, grantee goals are wide-ranging and difficult to link to data. The simplest way to achieve both these goals is to ensure that grantees are setting goals as defined by, and that can easily be tracked in, CalJOBS, where they are already required to report data on participants and their progress. By having grantees anchor any goals they have for the program to services and outcomes captured in state data, the State Board or a third-party evaluator can then group grantees together into those delivering similar services or seeking to produce similar types of outcomes and determine whether grantees met those outcomes. Grantees can still establish more customized interim service and outcome goals for their programs and participants that help to determine a person's progress toward a given outcome, such as having a goal for participants to attend a certain number of classroom sessions or pass practice assessment exams. Grantees can also refer to these goals in their own local program terminology. However, the important step would be that they also provide a crosswalk between these goals and CalJOBS, so that any goals can be easily identified and monitored in CalJOBS.

Refining Technical Assistance

By standardizing programs in the above-mentioned ways, the TA provider should be able to better target services to grantees. By grouping programs together by service type, target population, or certain goals they hope to achieve, the TA provider can work with these groups separately to provide assistance around each group's particular operational challenges, such as, for example, how best to address the challenges presented by ex-offender populations or how best to codify certain types of skill gains in CalJOBS. Central to the TA provider's role can also be helping grantees strengthen their CBO-WDB partnerships, particularly related to

developing co-enrollment strategies for WIOA Title I, Title II, and Title III and other programs. Around co-enrollment, in particular, the TA provider or the State Board might also provide workshops or sessions building on information such as is in the strategic co-enrollment Workforce Systems Directive 19-09,[29] discussing topics such as: 1) the use of strategic referrals and intentional strategies to support individuals with barriers to identify additional program resources, including CalWORKS, SNAP E&T, and refugee programs, and Department of Rehabilitation Programs; 2) partnership models with techniques to enhance coordination via co-case management and service alignment; and 3) data validation sessions to review co-enrollment data and outcomes to support tracking of progress toward performance goals and build a culture of shared outcomes. It may also be useful to have sessions to understand the different funding streams and eligibility requirements, to review what partners are able to bring to the table, and to have conversations about how to best align services across programs with or without co-enrollment. It should be noted that Breaking Barriers grantees expressed appreciation for the TA provided during this round of funding. The evaluation team coordinated with the TA team at various points over the course of the grant and was impressed with the depth and quality of assistance provided.

Improving Evaluation

Many of the recommendations outlined above, if implemented, will improve a program's readiness for evaluation. For instance, if grantees link their goals to codes in CalJOBS, an evaluator can more easily identify the extent and ways in which grantee programs have or have not met their goals and in what ways they may have fallen short. Similarly, if there are discreet groups of programs providing similar services, an evaluator may be able to group grantees together and look at their outcomes as a pooled group, making it easier to do more rigorous evaluations where participant outcomes can be compared to other groups.

The one new recommendation around evaluation is that the State Board and the legislature should plan for evaluation contracts to extend past the end of any grants for programs they are analyzing by an amount of time sufficient to examine

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[29] For more information, California's strategic co-enrollment Workforce Systems Directive can be found here: https://edd.ca.gov/Jobs_and_Training/pubs/wsd19-09.pdf

outcomes of interest for the desired sample size. The exact amount of time needed depends on several factors, including how long-term the outcome of interest are (e.g., short-term vs. a year or more post-program), at what point can these outcomes be measured (e.g., at the point of enrollment, during services, or after exit), how long it takes for the data needed to become available (e.g., there could be processing lags), and how many participants need to be included in the analytic sample (e.g., only half or the full sample). As noted in the prior chapter, this evaluation was only able to look at employment findings for about 20 percent of participants. If the study team had been given more time, more individuals could have been included, and the results would have been more final.

Closing Thoughts

This report presents the results of the study team's implementation study and early outcomes analysis of the Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative. While many of the results are preliminary and many of the outcomes should be examined again at a later date, the study was able to provide a detailed description of program implementation, including information about program enrollment, service delivery, and the development of program partnerships. The study was also able to provide some information on participant skill gains and employment, albeit for a limited number of program participants. Overall, the evaluation provides a promising take on Breaking Barriers programs. It shows that grantees were able to establish services, enroll participants, and provide a wide range of services to individuals with high barriers to employment, even despite the challenges presented by COVID-19 and the limited growth that happened with most grantees' key CBO-WDB partnership. With some modifications, the next round of Breaking Barriers funding promises to be able to deliver a similar and, ideally, increased number of operational successes and improved participant outcomes.

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Appendix A: General Grantee Information

The following exhibit provides basic information about each of the Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative grantees, including the full name of the grantee, a short name used throughout this report, its location, grant size, organization type, and the primary WDB or CBO partner required by the grant.

Exhibit A-1. Grantee Location, Grant Size, Organization Type, and Primary CBO or WDB Partner

Grantee	Location	Grant Size	Organization Type	Primary Partner
Center for Employment Opportunities, Inc. Riverside (CEO Riverside)	Riverside	$200,000	CBO	Riverside County Economic Development Agency/WDB
Center for Employment Opportunities, Inc. Solano (CEO Solano)	Solano County	$168,075	CBO	Solano County WDB
Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD)	Los Angeles	$500,000	CBO	Los Angeles City WDB
County of Orange Community Investment Division (Orange County)	Orange County	$500,000	County Office/WDB	Goodwill of Orange County
Foothill House of Hospitality (Foothill)	Grass Valley	$366,550	CBO	The Northern Rural Training and Employment Consortium (NoRTEC)
Goodwill of San Francisco, San Mateo, and Marin (Goodwill SF)	San Francisco	$253,864	CBO	North Valley Job Training Consortium (NoVa)
Goodwill Southern California (Goodwill SC)	Los Angeles County	$250,000	CBO	Los Angeles County WDB

Grantee	Location	Grant Size	Organization Type	Primary Partner
Hospitality Industry Training and Education Fund dba Hospitality Training Academy (HITEF)	Los Angeles	$500,000	CBO	City of Los Angeles WDB
Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program (IVROP)	El Centro	$500,000	Regional Occupational Center Program (ROCP) (Effectively the CBO partner)	Imperial County WDB
Jewish Vocational Services San Francisco Bay Area (JVS SF)	(Operating in) Contra Costa County	$365,468	CBO	Contra Costa WDB
Los Angeles Brotherhood Crusade, Black United Fund, Inc. (LA Brotherhood)	Los Angeles	$500,000	CBO	Los Angeles City WDB
Martha's Village and Kitchen, Inc. (Martha's Village)	Coachella Valley	$498,859	CBO	Riverside County WDB
Merced County Workforce Development Board (Merced WDB)	Merced	$500,000	WDB	Central Valley Opportunity Center (CVOC)
Mission Hiring Hall (Mission Hiring SF)	San Francisco	$350,000	CBO	Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD)
Nile Sisters Development Initiative (NSDI)	San Diego	$275,174	CBO	San Diego Workforce Partnership
North Central Counties Consortium (NCCC)	Yuba City	$500,000	WDB	Hands of Hope

Grantee	Location	Grant Size	Organization Type	Primary Partner
Pacific Asian Consortium in Employment (PACE)	Los Angeles	$500,000	CBO	Los Angeles County WDB
Rubicon Programs (Rubicon)	Contra Costa County	$500,000	CBO	Contra Costa County WDB
Safe Place for Youth (Safe Place)	Venice	$248,573	CBO	Los Angeles City WDB
San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development (SFOEWD)	San Francisco	$500,000	Economic Development Agency/WDB	Jewish Vocational Services
Southeast Los Angeles County Workforce Development Board (SELACO)	Los Angeles	$386,000	WDB	Field of Dreams/Youth Build
The TransLatin@ Coalition (TransLatin@)	Los Angeles	$249,746	CBO	Los Angeles City WDB
Transitions-Mental Health Association (THMA)	San Luis Obispo	$468,616	CBO	Santa Barbara County WDB & San Luis Obispo County WDB
Vision y Compromiso (VyC)	Santa Barbara	$353,676	CBO	Santa Barbara County WDB
Whole Systems Learning (Whole Systems)	Downey	$500,000	CBO	Los Angeles City WDB
Workforce Development Board of Solano County (Solano WDB)	Fairfield	$319,250	WDB	Caminar
Source: Grantee Background Documents				

Appendix B: Technical Appendix

This appendix provides additional details on the design, data collection, and analyses conducted for the Evaluation of the Breaking Barriers to Employment Initiative.

Research Questions

This evaluation was designed to answer a series of research questions, organized into three main lines of inquiry. The sections below expand on the information provided on these lines of inquiry and their associated research questions that were described in Chapter I. Please note, as well, the inclusion of the *italicized* research questions. These are questions that the study team had originally intended to answer, but was unable to answer given the constraints the study faced around the timing both outlined in Chapter I and further discussed in this Appendix below. Ideally, these are questions that could be addressed in any subsequently funded evaluations of this or the next cohort of Breaking Barriers grantees.

Analysis of Grantee Programs' Service Delivery and Design

Central to our approach was developing an understanding of the programs that grantees implemented, including the services they delivered, the individuals they enrolled, and the factors that supported or hindered implementation. Our initial research questions for this line of inquiry included the following.

- What did programs look like? What services did they deliver? Are they proven or newly developed? What target populations did they serve? What partnerships did they have in place? What were the contexts these programs operated within (geography, WDB relationships, regional plans, etc.)?

- To what extent were grantees able to achieve their performance goals, including enrolling the desired numbers and types of participants, implementing planned program services, building partnerships, and delivering intended services? How did implementation vary across grantees and by program approaches, participant types, geography, etc.?

- In what ways did COVID-19 and shelter-in-place regulations affect the ways that grantees implemented and operated their programs? What changes did they

have to make to their proposed program plans and what changes did they have to make as the pandemic continued?

- *What programs and program models were implemented most successfully? Which were more successful at achieving their performance goals? What factors (e.g., partner support, supplemental funding, technical assistance, etc.) contributed to this success or hindered other grantees' efforts? What additional supports or lessons may be important for similar initiatives?*

Analysis of Breaking Barriers Participant Outcomes

Central to the study team's second line of inquiry was understanding what resulted from participants engaging in program activities. In other words, the study sought to understand the extent to which participants progressed through these services, whether they co-enrolled in other workforce programs or educational services, and whether they entered employment or made progress in, or completed, education or training services. This part of our evaluation involved examining the outcomes of program participants, utilizing individual-level data on enrollment in Breaking Barriers or other programs, service receipt, and employment and educational attainment, as well as quarterly reporting data, through methods described further below. The following were our initial research questions for this analysis.

- To what extent did initiative participants complete their programming funded under the grant?

- To what extent did initiative participants transition into or become integrated into the broader workforce and education system as evidenced by enrollment in other workforce programs?

- To what extent did initiative participants meet the relevant performance metrics for the systems they transitioned into (e.g., employment, credential attainment, etc.)?

- *Did initiative participants enroll in workforce or education services or meet performance metrics at a greater rate than other comparable individuals who were not initiative participants?*

- *To what extent were any outcomes or impacts associated with various aspects of implementation, including services delivered, target populations served, the overall effectiveness at implementing grant-funded programs, or pandemic/shelter-in-place adaptations (to the extent that such adaptations change over time)?*

Analysis of System Outcomes

The final line of inquiry considered lasting changes that resulted from the Breaking Barriers Initiative and whether it helped workforce system entities better address the needs of target populations. This line of inquiry addressed the following initial research questions.

- To what extent did grantee programs supplement and align workforce system services with services provided by CBOs to build the capacity of the workforce system to better serve individuals with barriers?

- To what extent did grant-funded programs help the State make progress in achieving its State Workforce Plan goals?

- To what extent have grantees taken steps to sustain programs and partnerships (particularly between WDBs and CBOs)?

- To *what extent did grantee programs successfully integrate individuals from target populations into career pathways programs in target industry sectors as specified in local, regional, and state planning efforts?*

Data Sources

Chapter I described the data sources used to answer the above research questions. Below is additional information on each data source including information on what each source contains and how these data were collected.

Grantee Background Documents

In managing Breaking Barriers grants, the State Board collected several types of grantee documents, both at the start of, and throughout the grant period. They provided these documents to the study team to assist us in better understanding the composition of grantee programs and the plans they had for their Breaking Barriers programs. These documents included grantee proposal narratives, grantee planning documents such as work plans and project matrices created after award receipt, and contract updates that reflected changes to these initial program plans.

Quarterly Narrative Reports

A requirement of the grant was that grantees needed to provide the State Board with quarterly narrative reports that provided progress updates on a wide range of topics, including overall progress and activities engaged in while implementing the

grant, the technical assistance received and utilized, participant goals and outcomes, fiscal and budgetary activity, and promotional and marketing activities. The State Board collected eight quarterly reports and provided the study team with the first seven (the eighth was due at the same time as this report). These reports helped to further clarify program goals and gave the study team a sense of the overall progress that grantees made as they implemented their grants.

Grantee Survey

The study team designed and administered an online grantee survey intended to capture information on high-level grant structure and the status overall implementation for all 26 Breaking Barriers grantees at a relatively late point in their implementation timeline. The survey asked grantee coordinators or lead grantee staff members about topics such as: their overall stage of implementation, the types of services their programs provided, the strategies typically used for addressing participant barriers, the overall nature of their relationship with their primary (CBO or WDB) partner, other partnership activities, the impact of COVID-19 on grant implementation, and plans for—and progress towards—sustainability. The study team administered this survey from late November 2021 to January 2022 with all 26 grantees completing surveys.

Grantee Interviews

The study team designed and conducted interviews with grantee directors and/or program coordinators for 13 of the 26 Breaking Barriers grantee organizations. These 90-minute video or phone interviews provided the study team with an opportunity to explore specific issues of interest to the State Board and to gather additional data on items of interest generated by the grantee survey. These interviews asked about grantee approaches to designing their programs, the nature of their CBO-WDB partnerships, co-enrollment of Breaking Barriers participants into other workforce programs, additional information about the target populations they served, the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of their programs, and overall lessons learned. The study team conducted one of these interviews in December 2021 and the remaining interviews in January and February of 2022.

Administrative Data

The State Board, in coordination with the California Employment Development Department (EDD), supplied the study team with two datasets on Breaking Barriers participants. Both datasets were derived from CalJOBS, the state's system of record for most workforce programs, but include slightly different information and cover slightly different time periods.

The first dataset offers key information about the services in which participants engaged. For this reason, the study team refers to it as the "detailed services dataset" throughout the report. This dataset contains detailed data on the services participants received—also known as activity codes (Employment Development Department – State of California WSD 19-06; Employment Development Department – State of California 2019). The data included in this dataset were derived from the activity codes entered by grantee staff on the different types of services they provided to participants including "Basic Career Services," "Individualized Career Services," Training Services," and "Supportive Services." Activity codes have a direct relationship to the dataset created for federal reporting purposes using the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL). To understand in more detail how activity codes are related to the PIRL, EDD provides a *CalJOBS Activity Codes Detailed Listing* which includes information about each activity, the reporting category it is associated with, and, what PIRL data element(s) are associated with it.

This detailed services dataset includes information on the 2,468 Breaking Barriers participants who enrolled from April 15, 2020, through December 31, 2021. In addition to participant-level activity codes, this dataset includes information on the target populations each participant belonged to, including some target populations created just for the grant and which are not available within CalJOBS for other programs. These target groups include immigrants, transgender or gender non-conforming individuals, and women seeking nontraditional training/employment.

The second dataset includes data for Breaking Barriers participants that is formatted per the PIRL specifications (for delivery to the U.S. Department of Labor) and is thus referred to as the "PIRL dataset" throughout the report. This dataset includes four main types of data on Breaking Barriers participants. The first includes data on participant demographics, prior employment and education, public assistance received, and information about barriers at the time of program

entry. The second type of data includes information about participant enrollment in WIOA core programs such as the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth (Title I) programs and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program (Title II), as well as enrollment in non-core workforce programs such as JobCorps, YouthBuild, or the Indian and Native American Program (Employment and Training Administration, 2020). It also includes enrollment in other federal programs authorized outside of WIOA such as such as the Trade Adjustment Assistance and the Senior Community Service Employment program (Employment and Training Administration, 2020). The third set of data included in the dataset is information on service receipt, organized into broad categories of services (without the level of detail included in the detailed services dataset). Importantly, the fourth type of data is information on outcomes such as employment, job retention, wages, and credential attainment, as well as the dates of attainment of such outcomes.[30] In terms of participants and timeframe, the PIRL dataset includes the same group of Breaking Barriers participants found in the detailed service dataset (n=2,468), but as it covers a slightly longer period of time (through the end of January 2022, rather than just to December 31, 2021), it includes an additional 42 participants who enrolled during January 2022.

Importantly, both datasets include a proxy identification (ID) number that allowed the study team to compare and merge data across the two datasets and utilize aspects of both datasets to answer the evaluation's research questions. Doing so was necessary to describe which grantees served (Chapter II) some of the select populations not identified in the detailed services dataset. To do so, the study team used information present in the PIRL dataset to create binary variables (0,1) identifying participants as members of special populations. Once these binary variables were created in the PIRL dataset, the study team used these participants' proxy IDs to locate observations and append the variables identifying participants belonging to those groups that were not included in the "detailed service dataset."

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[30] The WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL), ETA 9170, specifications from the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration are found here: https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/Performance/pdfs/PIRL_COMBINED_2.28.20_SP.pdf

Describing Participants' Co-enrollment

In Chapter IV, the study team estimated the levels of co-enrollment of Breaking Barriers participants in other workforce system programs using specific elements in the PIRL dataset. The co-enrollment of participants in more than one federal program, as mentioned in the report, was meant to provide additional opportunities for Breaking Barriers grantees to leverage funds and services to improve the experience of participants in their programs. For Breaking Barriers, the study team reviewed and estimated co-enrollment in WIOA core and non-core programs solely using the PIRL dataset.[31] These include:

- Adult program (WIOA Title I - PIRL 903)

- Dislocated Worker program (WIOA Title I - PIRL 904)

- Youth program (WIOA Title I - PIRL 905)

- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program (WIOA title II - PIRL 910)

- Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program (WIOA title III - PIRL 918)

- Vocational Rehabilitation program (WIOA title IV - PIRL 917)

- Job Corps program (PIRL 911)

- National Farmworker Jobs program (WIOA title I, section 167 Migrant and Season Farmworker Program - PIRL 912)

- Indian and Native American programs (WIOA title I, section 166 program, Indian and Native American Programs - PIRL 913)

- YouthBuild (WIOA title I - PIRL 919)

- Senior Community Service Employment program (PIRL 920)

As noted in Chapter IV, we observed that Breaking Barriers participants could be co-enrolled in one or more of these programs. Co-enrollment in the report

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[31] To obtain accurate counts of co-enrollment in programs that are not administered by the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, it would be necessary to access their systems of record. For example, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program in California is administered by the California Department of Education and uses a different system of record to capture data (e.g., TOPSpro Enterprise). Unfortunately, the study team did not have access to these other systems of record to validate counts included in the PIRL dataset, and consequently the accuracy of those counts is unknown.

includes a count of participants who were co-enrolled in at least in one of the programs listed above (n=395).

Describing Participants' Outcomes

Chapter V provides a descriptive analysis of two important outcomes for Breaking Barriers participants: "Employment Rate at 2nd Quarter After Exit" and "Measurable Skill Gains." These outcomes were selected because they are two of the six core performance indicators WIOA established to assess the effectiveness of States and local areas in achieving positive outcomes for individuals served. The other four outcomes include: 1) Median Earnings, 2) Employment 4th Quarter after Exit, 3) Credential Attainment, and 4) Effectiveness in Serving Employers. We did not analyze "Median Earnings," another indicator calculated during the 2nd quarter after exit, because it excludes all of those who are not employed in that quarter, 250 out of 500 participants, thus making the number of participants who could be included in this calculation even smaller, and making the results even less reliable. We also did not include the other three WIOA performance indicators in our analysis because not enough time had passed after most participants had exited grant-funded programs for the data to be available.

In general, each State is held accountable for targets negotiated with the federal government for all WIOA core programs. In addition, local WDBs are held accountable for achieving targets they negotiate with their States for the three WIOA Title I core programs. Breaking Barriers grantees, however, did not have specific targets for these indicators that they had to meet. Thus, outcomes for the Employment Rate at 2nd Quarter After Exit and Measurable Skill Gains reported in Chapter V were not calculated for performance accountability purposes and cannot be measured against a stated goal.

The study team estimated outcomes for both Employment Rate at 2nd Quarter After Exit and Measurable Skill Gains using the PIRL dataset and standard methodology for calculating these measures (Employment and Training Administration, 2017). The method used to calculate these indicators is as follows.

Employment Rate During 2nd Quarter After Exit

This indicator includes only participants who have exited their programs. Specifically, it includes participants who have not received services from any

program for at least 90 days, and for whom no future services are planned. This indicator measures the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second calendar quarter after program exit.

In calculating the results for the Breaking Barriers program for this indicator, the study team included all participants who exited from a grant-funded program between April 1, 2020 and January 31, 2022. To determine if any of these participants were unemployed during the second calendar quarter after the quarter in which they exited, they were matched with the State's unemployment insurance (UI) data for that quarter and federal and military employment records. And even if they were not found in those datasets, they could be shown to be employed via supplemental data entered by a program staff member directly into CalJOBS based on documentation provided by the participant or the employer. The number of those found to be employed via one of these sources were then divided by the total number of participants who exited during that quarter.

Measurable Skill Gains (MSG)

This performance indicator is a real-time, non-exit-based indicator designed to measure progress in skill-building made by participants enrolled in education and training programs. Depending upon the type of education or training program in which a participant is enrolled, progress may be documented in one of the following ways: 1) testing that shows an increase of an Educational Functioning Level (EFL); 2) attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent; 3) a secondary or postsecondary transcript/report card that shows that a participant is meeting expected academic standards; 4) achievement of training milestone, such as completion of an on-the-job training contract; or a 5) successful passage of an exam that is required for a particular occupation or progress in attaining technical or occupational skills.

In calculating the results for the Breaking Barriers program for this indicator, the study team included all participants who, during the period of time for which data was available (April 1, 2020 through January 31, 2022), were in an education or training program that led to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who achieved at least one of the types of documented skill gains described above. This number was then divided by the total number of participants during

that period who were in an education or training program that could lead to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment.

Limitations to the Outcome Analysis

As described in the report, the results for the MSG and employment in the second quarter after exit indicators for the Breaking Barriers Initiative are preliminary and should be interpreted with caution for two primary reasons: 1) the estimation of outcomes was conducted before the grant period had concluded and data available were incomplete and 2) UI, federal and military data on employment are incomplete, as those datasets do not include those who are self-employed or private household workers.

Another important limitation to this study is that these results are only outcomes and do not provide any information about causality or any measure of program impacts. Outcome studies are useful to identify patterns in the data to answer key questions about who, what, where, when, and to what extent certain individuals achieve certain outcomes, and these descriptions are essential to achieve a general understanding of what happened. However, outcome studies' main drawback is that they are not designed to provide evidence that the programs are effective. For example, if participants' outcomes are positive after they finish their program, it is possible that those outcomes are the result of engaging in the program, but it is also equally possible that other factors (even factors unrelated to the program) may have caused those positive outcomes.

To provide evidence that a program actually *causes* certain types of changes, one needs to be able to eliminate, as much as possible, other factors that may explain those changes. There are specific research designs aimed at rigorously examining such causal relationships and establishing credible causal inferences including randomized controlled trials (RCT)—considered the most rigorous design—as well as quasi-experimental designs (QEDs) that utilize a comparison group to estimate the effect of an intervention or program. An evaluation that uses an RCT or QED design would be able to provide rigorous evidence of the effectiveness of the service models used by Breaking Barriers grantees in a way that an outcome study such as this evaluation cannot. However, an RCT or QED design was not feasible for this study for multiple the reasons outlined in the report.