

# WORKER-CENTERED BENCHMARKING PROJECT

*Rethinking how workforce program success is measured*



The Worker-Centered Benchmarking Project was designed to answer two questions: 1) How do we know if workforce programs are achieving their intended impact within the communities where they operate; 2) How do we know what communities want from workforce programs or even how success is defined? To answer these questions, CSW recruited six workforce development participants and alumni to form an advisory council and to serve as the project's primary researchers.

## PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

### Focus Groups

15 focus groups in two languages with more than 55 participants and alumni attending workforce programs in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and New York.

### Survey

Completed by 121 participants and alumni attending workforce programs in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and New York.

## KEY PROJECT OUTCOMES

Co-development of an online worker/learner survey

Activation of an 8-14 worker/learner advisory council



## ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

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For more information on the Worker-Centered Benchmarking Project and the full recording of the advisory council's presentation of their research and findings, follow the link in the QR code.

## RECOMMENDED METRIC #1

Participant's sense of safety and belonging in a workforce development program

### WHY USE THIS METRIC:

- Participant sense of safety and belonging is directly linked to learning, career preparedness, and barrier removal.
- Feeling safe and belonging fosters trust, engagement, and motivation.
- Inner growth is nearly impossible to achieve when participants do not feel safe.
- Participant sense of safety and belonging is a key motivating factor for participants to overcome barriers that might prevent workforce program completion.
- Participants who feel safe are more likely to recommend the program to their networks and more likely to participate in alumni, mentorship, and community engagement activities.

### METHODS TO COLLECT:

- Disaggregated participant survey data before, during and after workforce program participation.
- Focus groups (particularly those facilitated by workforce program alumni)
- Pulse surveying about safety, belonging, inclusivity

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- To what degree do you feel seen and understood in your workforce program?
- To what extent do you feel welcome at your workforce program after you graduate?
- Do you trust workforce program staff?
- Do you feel supported by workforce program staff?

## RECOMMENDED METRIC #2

Participant's sense of safety and belonging in a job

### WHY USE THIS METRIC:

- Participants, particularly women, and persons of color, expressed significant concerns entering industries that are white, male dominant, or historically plagued by harassment.
- Participants who feel safe at work are more likely to retain employment, maintain a mindset of advancement, and progress along a career pathway, making this a great predictor of long-term economic mobility.
- Understanding participant sense of safety and belong could inform future internship and job placements.

### METHODS TO COLLECT:

- Alumni reporting and surveys
- On-site visits with hiring partners
- Focus groups with program alumni, those participating in work-based learning activities

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Do you feel respected at your job?
- To what extent do you feel physically and emotionally safe at work?
- Do you feel comfortable raising a workplace concern to your supervisor?
- Do you feel informed of your rights and protections at work?

## RECOMMENDED METRIC #3

Change in participant self-confidence/self-esteem

### WHY USE THIS METRIC:

- Building self-confidence and self-esteem is fundamental for personal and professional growth. It empowers individuals to take on challenges, pursue opportunities, and succeed in their careers.
- By creating more confident participants you create more confident and effective ambassadors for your program.
- Change in self-confidence and self-esteem will better predict economic mobility than how much you make after three months in a job.
- Participants are more likely to successfully complete programs, gain and retain employment, and advocate for themselves with a positive shift in self-confidence.

### METHODS TO COLLECT:

- Surveys before, during, and following program completion
- Self-reporting scales like the Employment Hope Scale
- Interviews conducted by trained peers and not program staff (due to sensitive nature of subject)

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How confident do you feel in your abilities to perform the tasks required for your desired job?
- To what extent do you feel able and confident to be the authentic version of yourself?
- Do you feel confident and prepared to participate in a professional interview?

## RECOMMENDED METRIC #4

Growth in emotional intelligence, regulation/shift in mindset

### WHY USE THIS METRIC:

- This metric is a direct reflection of a participant's growth because of workforce program participation.
- Positive shifts in emotional regulation allow participants to look beyond the now and toward long-term success.
- This metric is key given the near universal educational and labor market traumas experienced by workforce program participants.

### METHODS TO COLLECT:

- Qualitative interviews by peers or workforce program staff.
- Assessments of perceived employment barriers or "the shift from not possible to work to very possible to work."
- Pre-, mid-, and post-focus groups.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Have you noticed any changes in your mindset or attitudes towards learning, growth, and resilience since participating in the program?
- To what extent are you able to see things from different perspectives?
- To what extent are you able to look beyond the now and towards long-term success?
- How confident do you feel in navigating workplace challenges, and using them as opportunities to learn, grow, and improve?

## RECOMMENDED METRIC #5

Career preparedness/readiness

### WHY USE THIS METRIC:

- Our survey confirmed that most of the participants we spoke to prioritize learning over job placement.
- Preparedness directly reflects a program's ability to train and empower participants for employment.
- In focus groups, participants expressed a need to be informed and trained in a way that is relevant to the jobs they were going into, beyond the surface-level idea of being "job-ready."
- When participants are presented with real-world information and industry-level training, they are more likely to complete, attain employment, and thrive.

### METHODS TO COLLECT:

- Simulated work scenarios
- Employer feedback
- Performance assessments

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How comfortable are you explaining your training to someone outside of your workforce program?
- How prepared are you to have professional interviews after your workforce program?
- What percentage of your workforce program training do you use in your job?

## RECOMMENDED METRIC #6

Social Capital

### WHY USE THIS METRIC:

- In our survey of workforce participants and alumni, professional networks and relationships were prioritized over placement in a job.
- In focus groups, participants expressed the importance of networking. Often, networking transcends things that may have hindered participants such as lack of experience or a criminal record.
- Participants who have found value and have been able to use their network and gain opportunities, despite such barriers, directly reflect the effectiveness of a program's overall reputation.

### METHODS TO COLLECT:

- Peer-lead one-on-one and/or group interviews
- Participant and alumni surveys
- Pre- and post-program questionnaire compare/contrast

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Has participation in your workforce program opened additional opportunities for you either personally or professionally?
- Do you notice a change in the way that you communicate now versus before the program?
- How comfortable do you feel communicating your goals and interests after the program versus before and during?