

Jumpstart

Location: Baltimore, Maryland

Host Organization: Job Opportunities Task Force, a local nonprofit organization that works to develop and advocate policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-income workers and job seekers.

Partner Organizations: Catholic Charities, Associated Builders and Contractors, Vehicles for Change

Target Population: Low-Income Adults in Baltimore, Maryland

Program Innovations

- Performance-based contract with the Associated Builders and Contractors that incentivizes trainee placement into employer sponsored apprenticeships
- Use of Community Services Block Grant funding to subsidize Jumpstart graduates' wages
- Advocated for a Maryland State Bill, which established a State Apprenticeship Training Fund to help promote pre-apprenticeship programs within Maryland's public secondary schools and community colleges

Program History

The Jumpstart program was born out of research conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that highlighted the barriers low-income Maryland residents face in gaining entry into a career in the construction trades. The research showed that low-wage and unemployed residents of Baltimore faced barriers entering construction due to obstacles such as low math skills and a lack of awareness about opportunities in construction. An initial steering committee, led by the Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) and including local community colleges, nonprofit organizations, the Workforce Investment Board, and representatives from the construction sector, formed in 2006. The committee distributed a Request for Quotation to launch a pre-apprenticeship program targeting low-income adults in Baltimore to help address the problems highlighted in the Casey Foundation's research. The steering committee awarded the contract to the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) to provide the training, career counseling, and job placement services while JOTF manages and monitors the overall operation of the program.

Program Summary

By the end of 2009, Jumpstart had graduated ten classes of participants. The program is offered three times a year and trains approximately 60 to 70 participants each year. Jumpstart trainees are recruited through community outreach conducted by Catholic Charities. Participants in the program must be drug free and a Baltimore City resident. In addition, participants are required to have a GED or High School Diploma, and pass a math examination. Reading and math skills at the 9th grade level, a valid driver's license and a car are also screening criteria the program uses to select program participants. Nearly 99% of trainees are African-American and nearly 80% have a criminal background.

Trainees, once recruited and screened, participate in 13 weeks, or 87 hours, of part-time training provided by ABC. Participants attend evening training sessions twice a week for three hours. The training **curriculum** is divided into three components.

During the first component students participate in job readiness training. Like the other two components, this first component is heavily contextualized around working in the construction sector. As a result, trainees learn about the culture and working conditions present in the construction industry. In addition, broader topics, such as punctuality, attendance and professionalism are covered to help prepare trainees for the world of work.

The second training component is focused heavily on building the trainees' math skills. According to Jason Perkins-Cohen, Executive Director of JOTF, the research conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that spurred the creation of Jumpstart also found that employees who lost their job in the construction field were often let go due to insufficient math skills. To help prepare trainees for construction work and to help avoid situations like this, Jumpstart focuses on developing participants' measurement skills, including how to read, add and subtract fractions. Moreover, to ensure participants develop the necessary skills over the course of the program, they are tested on their math

“We’re trying to give them a jumpstart so that when they’re put on the job and the first time they’re asked to cut a board 3 and 3/8 inches, they cut it correctly.”

--Jason Perkins-Cohen, Executive Director of JOTF

skills both prior to entry into the program and prior to graduation. Students need to pass a math test to enter State Apprenticeship. Additional assistance and tutoring is available to those who do not demonstrate sufficient math skills

The third and final training component involves hands-on training. During this stage, participants learn various construction-related skills such as laying flooring, running wiring, and installing piping. These hands-on activities allow students to further contextualize the math skills they have developed. Students also learn about workplace safety and receive OSHA 10 certification during this component.

The training curriculum is continually being analyzed and adjusted to meet trainee and employer needs. For example, employers requested a green component be added to the curriculum. As a result, trainees are given an overview of **green construction**, including a basic introduction to green materials. Trainees learn about some of the newer materials being used on construction projects to improve energy efficiency and receive education about the proper disposal of various materials they would encounter while working in the field.

“We are very analytical in terms of what we’re offering. We’re constantly evaluating what we’re doing and tweaking it to make it better.”

--Jason Perkins-Cohen, Executive Director of JOTF

During their training, students receive a \$50 per week stipend to help with transportation and other expenses and may access a variety of **support services**. Catholic Charities provides case management and coordinates support services to include driver’s license obtainment or remediation, legal assistance, and help with work expenses, such as testing fees or supply purchases. And, because access to transportation is so vital to work in the construction sector, JOTF has developed a partnership with Vehicles for Change to help participants purchase cars at low prices and interest rates. Approximately 35 participants have purchased cars through this program as of November 2009.

At the time of graduation, students enter into ABC’s employee pool. ABC is contracted to provide Jumpstart graduates’ **job placement** and retention services, and as a result, most students are placed in a position with an ABC contractor. To help graduates climb the career ladder, ABC, through its performance based contract with JOTF, is incentivized to place students in apprenticeships. For instance, ABC receives a small amount of funding for each

student enrolled in training and a slightly larger amount if a student completes the training. In turn, ABC is awarded a much larger amount of funding for each student placed in an apprenticeship. With this incentive in hand, ABC's strong advocacy on behalf of Jumpstart graduates and its follow-up retention services lead most Jumpstart graduates into an employer-sponsored apprenticeship where they become licensed in their trade.

Program Funding

The Jumpstart program is funded primarily through foundation money though government funding is beginning to play a role as well. For example, Workforce Investment Act (WIA) training dollars from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will be used to fund the January 2010 class. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Open Society Institute and the Weinberg Foundation are the primary funders of Jumpstart, with the Abell Foundation and the Thalheimer Foundation providing necessary resources for the program to operate.

Though not funding Jumpstart directly, JOTF has leveraged a Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) to help subsidize wages for Jumpstart graduates working on remodeling a house in Baltimore. Community Block Services Grants, provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services help local governments such as Baltimore City fund organizations to help build suitable and affordable housing, while employing low- and moderate-income individuals in the construction of that housing. JOTF has also secured a grant from the Mayor's Office of Employment Development to provide additional training. JOTF is continually exploring creative funding approaches such as this to expand and improve its program and to incentivize local contractors to hire Jumpstart graduates.

Industry Engagement

JOTF, which serves as Jumpstart's administrative and fiscal lead organization, engages the construction industry at several levels. As mentioned previously, JOTF contracts ABC, a non-union association, to run the programmatic operations of the Jumpstart program and to place trainees in employer sponsored apprenticeships. This has presented challenges for job placement with unionized employers. On the other hand, JOTF's advocacy and policy work often crosses paths with union leaders in the construction industry. In seeking higher wages, better benefits, and improved working conditions and opportunities for families in Maryland, JOTF and unions are naturally allied. In the past, some Jumpstart graduates went to work for unions, but because of the recession fewer graduates have entered organized labor, though graduates are still encouraged to register with the local unions. Despite the typical struggle in working across the union and non-union divide, JOTF remains committed to engaging union and non-union contractors and associations both in the policy and advocacy arenas, and in job development for Jumpstart graduates.

To further engage industry, JOTF is increasing efforts to build collaboration with developers working in Baltimore in 2009 and 2010. Though still in the initial stages of development, JOTF hopes these partnerships will lead to better enforcement and acceptance of local hiring ordinances, more job opportunities for Jumpstart graduates, and help developers create a workforce representative of the local community, which for them would create a better reputation and more credibility within Baltimore.