

HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY

A Catalyst for Action to Increase Employer Investments in Frontline Workers

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

By Lisa Soricone

This report describes the evaluation findings from the first cohort of the Healthcare Workforce Development Academy. The evaluation was conducted by JFF. The full evaluation report can be found [here](#).



Introduction

Frontline, entry level healthcare workers are in high demand. In today's competitive labor market, healthcare employers are searching for evidence based strategies to recruit and retain these essential workers. Although many entry level positions are low paying, the healthcare industry offers career pathways to positions that provide family sustaining wages. However, industry leaders sometimes fail to recognize the valuable contributions of frontline staff and underinvest in their development.

CareerSTAT is leading to change this. An employer-led healthcare initiative of the National Fund

for Workforce Solutions, CareerSTAT seeks to increase employer investment in the skills and careers of frontline healthcare workers. The initiative achieves its goals by engaging a national network of over 300 professionals in peer learning, documenting industry practices, recognizing "champion" organizations, and providing technical assistance.

To accelerate the adoption of evidence based practices and increase investment in frontline workers, the National Fund created the CareerSTAT Healthcare Workforce Development Academy (Academy).

Healthcare Workforce Development Academy Overview

Launched in 2017, the Academy's first cohort included 11 organizations, from multi-state health providers to individual long-term care facilities, that collectively employ over 40,000 frontline workers. Participants were recruited from the CareerSTAT network, targeting organizations previously recognized as CareerSTAT Emerging Champions and organizations that demonstrated commitment to increasing investments in frontline workers through existing initiatives.

The Academy provided a year-long peer learning experience for mid-level human resources and workforce development professionals to expand their knowledge, develop skills, and plan and implement specific organizational goals to advance their frontline workforce.

The Academy has two goals. The first is to increase individuals' capacity to facilitate change at their organization. The second is to accelerate the adoption of best practices that promote frontline worker advancement. The CareerSTAT [Guide to Investing in Frontline Health Care Workers](#) outlines these practices and provided Academy participants with a framework to drive change, improve the quality of frontline jobs, and create economic opportunity for underserved populations.¹

Healthcare Workforce Development Academy Participants

Advocate Aurora Health Downer's Grove, IL & Milwaukee, WI	Methodist Healthcare System San Antonio, TX
Ascension Seton Austin, TX	Mercy Health Grand Rapids, MI
Baystate Health Springfield, MA	Parkland Hospital Dallas, TX
Boston Children's Hospital Boston, MA	Tufts Medical Center Boston, MA
Guardian Elder Care & SEIU Training & Education Fund PA Harrisburg, PA	UC Davis Health Sacramento, CA
Loretto Syracuse, NY	

CareerSTAT Best Practice Framework

Programmatic Best Practices

Engage frontline workers directly in training and education to make learning and career advancement accessible and expand talent pipelines.

1. Inclusive Hiring
2. Accessible Learning
3. Career Advancement

Organizational Best Practices

Ensure the needed infrastructure and support are in place so that education and training programs have the greatest impact on organizations and individual workers.

1. Leadership Engagement
2. Infrastructure Development
3. Leveraged Resources

¹ See the CareerSTAT [Guide to Investing in Frontline Health Care Workers](#), p. 4

CareerSTAT leaders designed the Academy around a four-part theory of action to facilitate organizational change:

1. **Structure and accountability** through self-assessments, the creation and implementation of action plans, and progress reports
2. **Expertise** from CareerSTAT network members and leadership, a team of experienced technical assistance providers, and Academy participants as peer mentors
3. **Peer exchange** to promote learning by sharing strategies and experiences
4. **Resources** such as the CareerSTAT *Guide*, an online platform for information exchange, funds to support travel to meetings, and microgrants to support plan implementation

Evaluation Findings

Evaluation data was gathered through observation of Academy convenings, document review, and interviews with participants and technical assistance providers. The evaluation examines Academy participant achievements, the business impact of increased frontline worker investments, and the value of the Academy and larger CareerSTAT network.

Academy Achievements

The Academy served as a catalyst for action. Participants succeeded in establishing programs and services and creating the infrastructure to support frontline worker advancement over time. Every participating healthcare provider made progress on their organizational goals during the 12 month Academy and accomplished numerous achievements that reflect CareerSTAT best practices.

Their goals included building local and inclusive worker pipelines, improving retention of frontline workers, and improving support for workers' advancement. Organizations also sought to build or strengthen internal structures and systems, including their capacity to measure the impact of workforce programs, conduct workforce planning analysis, and make the case for investing in frontline workers. Academy goals were often tied to organizational priorities to improve the quality of frontline jobs and address health disparities by offering economic opportunity to low income workers and local job seekers. While much of their work is ongoing, participants can point to specific achievements during the 12 month period. Some of these achievements are outlined in the table below.

Programmatic Achievements

- Made learning more accessible by establishing onsite learning facilities and training programs (8*)
- Improved communications and transparency to help frontline workers understand and pursue available advancement opportunities (7)
- Established new technical training programs for incumbent workers (6)
- Established career coaching and mentoring services for frontline workers (5)
- Developed frontline workforce pipelines that intentionally expand diversity (4)
- Established competency-based apprenticeship programs (1)
- Redesigned onboarding process for frontline workers (1)
- Created an internal frontline worker recognition program (1)

Organizational Achievements

- Established or strengthened external partnerships with educational and training organizations to leverage resources (7)
- Trained supervisors and frontline managers to better support workers (5)
- Broke down silos to better align workforce development efforts across multiple departments (4)
- Revised human resource policies to enhance job quality and reduce financial barriers to continuing education (3)
- Expanded dedicated workforce staff, including one VP-level position, to coordinate business strategy and maximize opportunities (2)

*Value in parentheses indicates number of organizations engaged in the strategy

Impact of Investments

In addition to establishing new frontline worker development programs, Academy participants shifted organizational boundaries, altered the perspectives of leaders and workers themselves, and changed practice and policy in their organizations. These efforts to change organizational systems and structures create the conditions for expanding investments in frontline workers over a longer period of time. The initial impact of the Academy accomplishments includes increased business impact, culture change, and greater integration of individual workforce development programs with overall organizational priorities.

Business Impact

Sustaining frontline workforce investments requires ongoing demonstration of business impact using both quantitative and qualitative measures. Each organization's action plan identified key metrics to assess the business impact of changes made, including frontline worker retention, turnover, time to fill positions, engagement, productivity, career advancement/promotions, and benefits associated with career coaching. While the timeline did not permit all organizations to report on impact, all participants plan to assess the impact of their efforts into 2019.

Culture Change

As organizations establish new programs and build infrastructure, new norms, values, and practices take hold and transform a work environment. Participants reported that as leaders and managers became more informed about the contributions and needs of frontline workers, their willingness to prioritize workforce development increased. In addition, frontline workers themselves felt more empowered and optimistic, knowing their organizations actively support personal growth and career development.

Integrated Strategies

As outlined in the *CareerSTAT Guide*, healthcare organizations with sustained workforce development programming demonstrate a high level of integration between organizational strategy, workforce investments, and impact measurement. Of the 11 participants, 80% demonstrated a shift to better integrate workforce investment strategies with organizational priorities and business impact analysis. In some cases, organizational priorities and investments moved frontline workforce development from a grant-funded project to an embedded function in the organization – a key metric of a sustainable investment strategy.

Business Impact

Three participants provided early results:

- **Parkland Hospital**, which benefits from an especially strong analytic capacity, documented a **26% increase in employee satisfaction**, as well as a **200% increase in retention** among employees who participated in workforce development programs, which translates into savings of \$1.4 million for the organization.
- As **Advocate Aurora Health** rolled out a more comprehensive workforce development strategy to its incumbent workers, the organization reports a reduction in first year turnover from **29% to 10%**.
- For **Baystate Health**, adding a full-time internal recruiter and career advisor brought benefits that have implications for both cost and productivity. They reduced the time to fill select administrative support and entry clinical support positions from an average of **47 days to 27.5**, and time to start was reduced from **75 to 51.5 days** on average.

Value of the Academy and CareerSTAT Network

Participants described the Academy as a powerful peer learning opportunity that provided structure to advance organizational change. The extent of Academy achievements demonstrates an increased individual capacity to facilitate change at their organization. They reported that the unique peer community, connection to a national network, inherent accountability, and professional development opportunities were highly valuable catalysts for action. Together, participants shared struggles and successes, strategized on challenges, and celebrated progress. Even CareerSTAT leaders, whose organizations are recognized as Frontline Healthcare Worker Champions, reported value and continued learning from their roles as peer mentors in the Academy.

Key Lessons

The Academy experience points to several key elements that can facilitate or accelerate change to expand or sustain investments in the frontline workforce:

- > **Leadership engagement and support** to help stem resistance and encourage support and cooperation
- > **Clear plans** to set goals, identify resource needs, and establish benchmarks for success
- > **Resources** that include dedicated staff, funding, and partnerships with local organizations that can provide critical complementary services
- > **Champions** who help others see the value and opportunity in frontline investments
- > **Structure and routines** to institutionalize the work, such as worker retention teams and regular meetings to discuss efforts to advance frontline workers
- > **Analytic tools** that support the use of data to demonstrate the need for greater investments in frontline workers and the outcomes of efforts put in place
- > **Experts and information** to provide guidance and case studies
- > **Peer support** for inspiration, ideas, and motivation

Workforce Development is more of a sustainable function in the organization; it is no longer solely grant-funded, it is being integrated into the human resources strategy for Advocate Aurora Health.

- Clayton Pryor, Director, Workforce Development
Advocate Aurora Health

Moving Forward

With its two-pronged strategy to accelerate the adoption of best practices and increase individual capacity, the Healthcare Workforce Development Academy fills an industry need for structured learning, actionable goal setting, and peer support. The participating organizations made significant progress in implementing evidence based strategies to recruit and retain essential frontline workers while individual participants increased their knowledge, skill, and capacity to facilitate change. All organizations expressed a high level of satisfaction with the Academy experience and recommend offering the opportunity to more healthcare providers. In addition, they expressed a strong desire to maintain cohort connections as they continue to do this work.

Recommendations

To maximize the benefits of participating in the Academy, organizations should ensure senior leadership understands the value and daily reality of frontline workers, assemble a cross-functional team to participate, and mobilize the resources needed to carry out plans for change.

Going forward, the National Fund should maintain the Academy's overall structure but consider engaging with employers for at least two years. A longer engagement period will allow sufficient time to plan, implement, evaluate, and institutionalize programs and policies that promote frontline worker advancement. In addition, CareerSTAT leaders should intentionally engage with each organization's senior level leaders to support sustainable change and grow the network at multiple levels.

Conclusion

The Healthcare Workforce Development Academy was a successful vehicle to drive increased investments that support the advancement of frontline workers. Participating organizations made great strides to adopt programmatic and organizational best practices to increase and sustain frontline workforce investments. They successfully established or revised programs, services, policies, and infrastructure to expand opportunities for entry level healthcare employees. Academy participants also shifted organizational boundaries and perspectives, resulting in increased business impact, cultural changes, and greater integration of workforce development programs with organizational priorities.

A structured peer learning environment filled an important professional development need among workforce development practitioners in healthcare. Individual participants increased their competency to lead systemic change and nearly all participants experienced tangible progress towards actionable goals. These results reinforce the value of the CareerSTAT network to the broader field of workforce development in healthcare.

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CareerSTAT is a network of healthcare leaders promoting investment in the skills and careers of frontline workers. It supports healthcare organizations in using workforce development programs to increase business impact, improve health outcomes, and provide good jobs. CareerSTAT promotes innovative practices and policies for advancing frontline workers, produces an array of resources on the benefits of skill and career development, recognizes organizations leading the industry as Frontline Health Care Worker Champions, and supports organizations developing investment programs. CareerSTAT is an initiative of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. To learn more about CareerSTAT and its partners, visit: www.NationalFund.org/initiatives/careerstat/.



The National Fund for Workforce Solutions is a national network promoting economic opportunity and prosperous communities through investment and innovation. Based in Washington D.C., the National Fund partners with philanthropy, employers, workers, public and private community organizations, and more than 30 regional collaboratives to invest in skills, improve workforce systems, and promote good jobs. The National Fund supports civic and business leaders in promoting evidence based practices and policies that build shared prosperity. Learn more about the National Fund and its local partners at www.NationalFund.org.

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