

Advancing Economic Mobility in Manufacturing:

Results from an On-Ramp Training Program for Recruiting Black Workers into the Sector

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Submitted by



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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Advancing Economic Mobility in Manufacturing (AEMM) project which aimed to understand and mitigate disparities in economic mobility between Black and White participants in the ACCESS to Manufacturing (ACCESS) program in Northeast Ohio. The research, funded by WorkRise, was conducted in partnership with MAGNET, Towards Employment, PolicyBridge, and The New Growth Group.

Key Objectives

The AEMM project was launched to evaluate the ACCESS program's effectiveness in reducing racial disparities in job placements and wages within the manufacturing sector. The project sought to:

1

Understand and address the factors contributing to lower placement rates among Black participants.

2

Implement rapid-cycle interventions to improve program results.

3

Collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data to inform continuous improvements in the program.

Methodology

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights from participant focus groups and employer interviews. The interventions were tested across three cycles from January 2023 to February 2024, with modifications to program structure, recruitment strategies, and retention support.

Key Findings

Program Impact

The ACCESS program was successful in recruiting and placing a higher proportion of Black participants compared to the regional manufacturing workforce. Over 75% of job placements were secured by Black participants, a significant increase from the 17% representation in Cuyahoga County's manufacturing sector.

Participant Experiences

Focus group feedback highlighted several strengths of the program, including the quality of training and the support provided by staff. However, participants from both racial groups reported challenges such as discrimination from peers, transportation issues, and the need for additional curriculum enhancements like more blueprint reading and hands-on practice.

Employer Perspectives

Interviews with local manufacturing employers revealed that Black employees' performance and retention rates were comparable or better than their White counterparts, though it should be acknowledged that some employers had not hired White participants.

Addressing Disparity in Outcomes

Differences in job placement rates between Black/African American and White participants were not statistically significant. With that said, when comparing placement rates for both Black/African American participants and White participants to other programs in the state with similar models, ACCESS placement rates are stronger.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

The ACCESS program has demonstrated success in increasing the representation of underrepresented groups in the manufacturing sector. The targeted recruitment efforts, paid training, and sector partnership model were critical in achieving these outcomes. However, continuous improvement is necessary to address ongoing challenges and better meet the needs of employers and participants. For policymakers, this research underscores the importance of investing in demand-driven, comprehensive workforce services that include targeted outreach and long-term coaching for underrepresented populations. For employers, engaging in sector partnerships can provide access to previously underrepresented populations, with workers who are perceived to have equivalent or better performance and retention.

Introduction and Background

Introduction and Background

Introduction to WorkRise

WorkRise, hosted by the Urban Institute, is a national platform for identifying, testing, and sharing bold ideas for transforming the labor market.¹ In 2022, WorkRise released a Request for Proposals for pilot projects that test and evaluate public- and private-sector interventions designed to improve the economic mobility of low-wage workers under an initiative titled *Pilot Projects for Advancing Economic Mobility*.

The Advancing Economic Mobility in Manufacturing (AEMM) proposal was awarded an 18-month grant beginning in January 2023, with the goal to collect and analyze data and make program improvements to a Cleveland, Ohio-based program titled ACCESS to Manufacturing (ACCESS), leading to the reduction of observed disparities between Black and White participants.



¹ For more information on WorkRise, please visit: <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/about-workrise>

Organizational Background

The AEMM project team consisted of the Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network (MAGNET), with research partners Towards Employment, PolicyBridge, and The New Growth Group (New Growth). More information on each partner can be found below:



Towards Employment



As the grant recipient, **MAGNET** was responsible for overall grant management and project implementation, including employer engagement, spread and scale of best practices from the employer/workplace perspective, and project deliverable marketing and communications. MAGNET is the Northeast Ohio partner of the Ohio Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Ohio MEP), helping the region's 10,000+ small and medium-sized manufacturers increase sales, create jobs, and generate cost savings through technological innovation, workforce training, and improved management practices. MAGNET is also a leader in workforce development and serves as the intermediary of the Manufacturing Sector Partnership in Cuyahoga County (the largest county in Ohio in terms of manufacturing establishments and workers). In this role, MAGNET brings together manufacturers and community partners with the common goal to meet the employment and skill needs of workers and manufacturers.

As MAGNET's ACCESS operating partner, **Towards Employment** led the primary data collection efforts and assisted with community engagement outreach. This included recruiting focus group participants, collecting and tracking data for ACCESS cohorts, implementing interventions, and providing career readiness services. Towards Employment's mission is to champion the potential of every person to succeed in a rewarding career today, while working to create an equitable and inclusive workforce for tomorrow. Using the WorkAdvance model as a solution, annually Towards Employment increases opportunities for 1,800 of Cleveland's workers providing skill development for in-demand jobs, comprehensive supports to address social determinants of work, direct connections to employers and extended career coaching to support advancement, while meeting the talent needs of more than 300 local business.

PolicyBridge was engaged by MAGNET to lead the qualitative research work to gain insights and perspective from both local ACCESS manufacturing employers and participants on potential reasons for the observed economic mobility

outcome disparities between Black and White participants. PolicyBridge is a research and advocacy think and action tank that illuminates public policy issues affecting African Americans and other underserved communities and prompts and sustains high quality discourse, which enlightens fellow community members and catalyzes action.

New Growth was engaged by MAGNET to lead the quantitative research aspects and provide overall research and data collection project management. New Growth is a workforce development firm based in Cleveland, Ohio, specializing in research and evaluation of education and training programs.

MAGNET brings together manufacturers and community partners with the common goal to meet the employment and skill needs of workers and manufacturers.

ACCESS to Manufacturing Careers

Northeast Ohio is a powerhouse of manufacturing with nearly 10,000 highly concentrated manufacturing companies. Through MAGNET's Manufacturing Extension Partnership survey process with hundreds of local manufacturers, and deep insight from a Manufacturing Leadership Team that represents 20% of the manufacturing workforce, we have come to understand the talent shortage faced by the region's manufacturing sector. MAGNET estimates that there are 8,000 open jobs that on average provide salary and benefits totaling \$70,000. To address this shortage, MAGNET partnered with local manufacturers through the Cuyahoga County Manufacturing Sector Partnership to launch ACCESS to Manufacturing Careers (ACCESS) in 2020. ACCESS is a three-week credential-based training program. Over the life of the program, ACCESS has enrolled 391 individuals, and placed 200 in manufacturing jobs on career pathways.

ACCESS is designed to reach populations underrepresented in local manufacturing roles, working within the workforce development ecosystem to identify and recruit candidates for

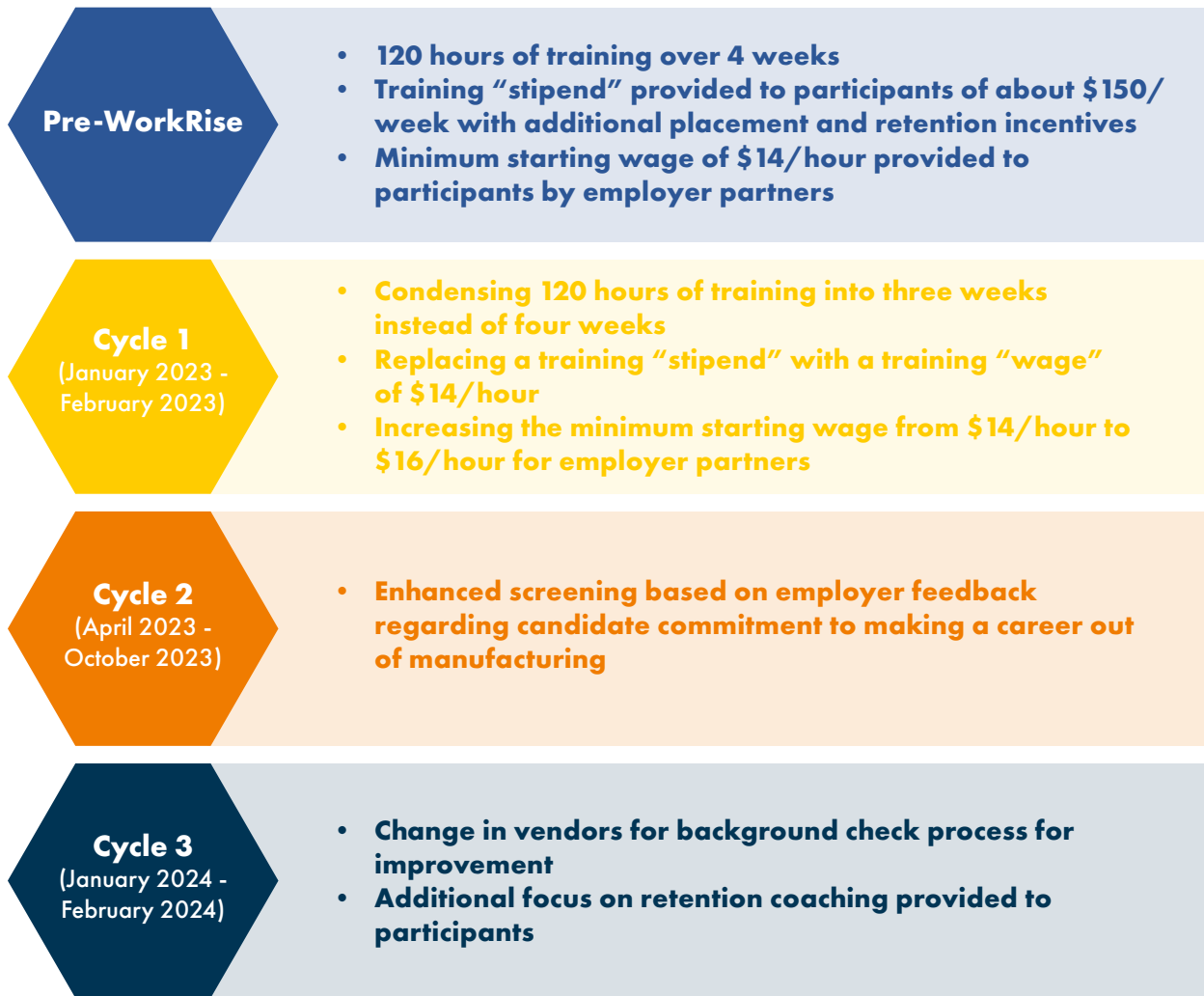
entry level manufacturing jobs on career pathways to family-sustaining wages. Target populations include Blacks/African Americans, women of all races, re-entering citizens and young adults ages 18-24. ACCESS includes technical training through the Precision Metalforming Association, job readiness skills, and long-term coaching focused on career advancement. A demand-driven program, participating companies inform the program curricula, teach hands-on lessons and conduct employer showcases, and interview during class time. They also participate in peer learning to influence their hiring and retention practices.

The ACCESS program has been the model for the Entry-Level Learn-and-Earn (ELLE) programs that have been spread through the state of Ohio via the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration Good Jobs Challenge grant to the Ohio Manufacturers' Association. To date, 1,449 people have participated in ELLE programming in Ohio through the grant. ACCESS itself was based on the lessons learned from WorkAdvance, a sectoral training and advancement initiative launched in 2011 and rigorously evaluated by MDRC in a randomized, controlled trial in Cleveland and three other sites around the country.

AEMM Background

Building on the experiences of the first years of the ACCESS program, the project team tested interventions to improve program results. Researchers scrutinized the program outcomes and the factors that might be driving previously observed disparities between Black and White workers. These findings have been informative for workforce development service providers, industry intermediaries, and employers seeking to equitably diversify their workforce and retain employees.

Over the duration of the project, ACCESS had three rapid intervention “cycles.” A timeline and description of intervention changes over the duration of the project is described below:



A scientist wearing a white lab coat and a white cap is operating a Chatillon DFM 100 force gauge. The scientist is holding a small component being tested by the gauge. The background is a blurred laboratory setting. The entire image has a blue tint.

Methodology

Methodology

The research utilized a mixed-methods, rapid-cycle approach to identify, implement, and assess interventions. The quantitative research collected and analyzed the outputs and impacts of the ACCESS program on program completion and job placement. The qualitative research captured participant and employer feedback, including nuances that may not be apparent in the quantitative data.

Culturally Responsive Approach

The research was conducted through a culturally responsive lens. Intentionality was given to engaging with Black/African American participants to ensure voices are heard, and feedback gathered and provided back to those who have the power to affect change. Additionally, recruitment into participation of qualitative inquiries actively involved ACCESS program implementors who are trusted and familiar to the participants to ensure representation of all perspectives, priorities, and experiences.

Qualitative Research Methodology

PolicyBridge was engaged to spearhead the qualitative research component of the project. Their work included leading community stakeholder engagement and offering perspectives that scale best practices based upon the feedback received and analyzed. Qualitative research is a type of research that aims to gather and analyze non-numerical (descriptive) data to gain an understanding of individuals' social reality, including understanding their attitudes, beliefs, and motivation. This type of research typically involves in-depth interviews, focus groups, or observations to collect data that is rich in detail and context. Qualitative research is often used to explore complex phenomena or to gain insight into people's experiences and perspectives on a particular topic. It is particularly useful when researchers want to understand the meaning that people attach to their experiences or when they want to uncover the underlying reasons for people's behavior. Qualitative methods include ethnography, grounded theory, discourse analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis.

After convening four (4) cohorts of Black/African American and White ACCESS participant focus group sessions and conducting three (3) cohorts of employer interviews, PolicyBridge used a research methodology called content analysis to assess the feedback from program participants and employers to identify important highlights and key takeaways. Content analysis is the study of documents and communication artifacts, which might be texts of various formats, pictures, audio, or video. Researchers use content analysis to examine patterns in communication in a replicable and systematic manner. One of the key advantages of using content analysis is to analyze social phenomena in their non-invasive nature, in contrast to simulating social experiences or collecting survey answers.

Qualitative research is often used to explore complex phenomena or to gain insight into people's experiences and perspectives on a particular topic.

Quantitative Research Methodology

New Growth led the quantitative research component of the project, analyzing individual-level, de-identified ACCESS participant data to evaluate the impact of new interventions across ACCESS cohorts. Data was collected directly from Towards Employment, which tracks ACCESS participant demographics, training information, and job placement information on internal data systems.

Regarding sample size, all ACCESS participant data was collected and analyzed, avoiding the need for random sampling. It was the intention of the project to conduct a parallel comparison analysis between Black/African American participants and White participants, examining the impact of each intervention cycle on the two demographic groups. However, due to enrollment patterns over the duration of the project, it was not feasible to conduct statistically significant analyses from cycle to cycle. A full description of caveats and limitations is found in the following section.

To contextualize program outcomes, key benchmarks were utilized to compare ACCESS to other regional and state data. Specifically, data was pulled from the labor market analytics tool Lightcast, as well as data gathered from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge (GJC) statewide grant focused on training and job placement using a similar WorkAdvance model.

Caveats and Limitations

It is important to understand the caveats and limitations, such as research design, population size concerns, and potential data gaps. Below is a list of caveats and limitations that should be acknowledged:

Population Size

When comparing cross-tabulations of data between demographic groups, small population sizes may result. In cases where less than three participants are identifiable in a given category, the data has been suppressed.

Qualitative Inquiries

Securing participant engagement for focus groups and interviews presented challenges. Recruitment strategies incorporated targeted efforts by key Towards Employment staff to ensure equitable representation of students.

Data Gaps

Potential data gaps may arise due to:

- Participants' nondisclosure of sensitive information, such as previous felony or misdemeanor records.
- Inability to connect with participants post-completion regarding follow-up outcomes, such as job placement.

Impact Variability

It should not be assumed that each intervention cycle had an equal impact. Some cycles included multiple sizeable adjustments, while other cycles involved only minor changes.

External Factors

External forces, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market, should be taken into consideration when considering the results.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative Findings

Over the grant period, PolicyBridge engaged a wide array of Black/African American and White ACCESS Program participants and companies working closely with the ACCESS Program to gain their insights and perspectives about their program experience.

We convened four (4) cohorts of Black/African American and White program participants. The total number of focus group attendees resulting from the four (4) cohorts was twenty-five (25) people. The feedback received from the twenty-five program participants who were mostly formerly incarcerated, provided information that was used to modify and improve the program to increase the number of both Black/African American and White participants who successfully complete the training program and find employment in the local manufacturing sector in Northeast Ohio.

During the same grant period, PolicyBridge conducted interviews with three (3) cohorts of local manufacturing companies working with the ACCESS training and placement program. PolicyBridge interviewed a total of seven (7) local manufacturing companies whose representatives offered insightful opinions about the program and their participation in it.

Black/African American Participant Focus Group Demographics

There were 17 total Black/African American focus group participants in across the four (4) cohorts during the grant period. Of those Black/African American participants, there were seven (7) males and ten (10) females. The ages for Black/African American participants ranged from 18-65.

The participants’ income levels ranged from \$0.00 for a person who had not yet found employment to \$40,000 for those who were employed. In terms of the educational attainment levels for participants, those ranged from less than a high school diploma to some college. As for their current employment status, fifteen (15) were employed and two (2) were unemployed.

Number of Participants	Gender	Age Range	Income Range	Educational Attainment Range	Employment Status
17	Males - 7 Females - 10	18-65	\$0-\$40,000	Less than High School - Some College	Employed - 15 Unemployed - 2

White American Participant Focus Group Demographics

There were 8 White focus group participants in the four (4) cohorts during the grant period. Of those White participants, there were four (4) males and four (4) females. The ages for White participants ranged from 30-67. The participants’ income levels ranged from \$10,000 to \$40,000. The educational attainment levels for participants ranged from some college to a 4-year degree. As for their current employment status, seven (7) were employed and one (1) was unemployed.

Number of Participants	Gender	Age Range	Income Range	Educational Attainment Range	Employment Status
8	Males - 4 Females - 4	30-67	\$10,000-\$40,000	Some College - 4-yr College Degree	Employed - 7 Unemployed - 1

Employer Interview Highlights and Supporting Feedback

In addition to conducting focus groups sessions with Black and White ACCESS program participants, PolicyBridge conducted interviews with representatives of local manufacturing companies involved in the program. Beginning in January 2023, PolicyBridge interviewed 7 local manufacturing companies that have participated in the program. These companies are diverse in terms of size (ranging from about 50 to more than 12,000), geographical location within Greater Cleveland, and manufacturing vertical. While some were involved in the design of ACCESS, others have begun hiring from the program more recently.

All the employer interviews were conducted via telephone and the perspectives shared were organized, analyzed and a summary report provided to the project team. We have included the highlights and key takeaways from the three (3) cohorts of local manufacturing companies in the Appendix of this report.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

ACCESS Participant Focus Groups

Focus group discussions addressed participants' motivation to enter the program, their perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the program, and the advantages and disadvantages of manufacturing careers in general and the jobs for which graduates were hired in particular. Feedback from Black/African American participants and white participants did not differ meaningfully and therefore did not yield actionable program modifications. Specific comments are summarized below:

Motivation to enter the program

Black participants entered the program to gain access to jobs and, particularly, career opportunities. The training wage was also a significant draw. They were also attracted to the training wage. White participants were mainly attracted to the manufacturing environment itself.

Program strengths

Both Black and White participants had high praise for the skill and care of the program staff. Black participants pointed out that they learned how to address their criminal backgrounds in interviews, and that the training helped them get a job.

Program challenges

Both groups suggested enhancements to the curriculum, including additional content on financial literacy, blueprint reading, and hands-on practice to make the experience more impactful. Both groups expressed disappointment about jobs that were not offered. Black participants noted that the content was challenging, and the pace could be overwhelming.

Advantages of manufacturing careers and post-ACCESS jobs

Black participants noted that manufacturing careers offer growth opportunities without the requirement of lengthy training. White participants acknowledged the stability and security offered by manufacturing employers as an advantage, and pointed out overtime and the pay that accompanies it as an attractor. Both groups noted that wages were important but that benefits were also critical. Black participants commented that they had not experienced racial discrimination from the supervisors/leaders at their companies and that these leaders took steps to correct discriminatory behavior from peers when it occurred.

Disadvantages of manufacturing careers/post-ACCESS jobs

Both groups had experienced some discrimination from their peers at work – racial discrimination for Black participants, and discrimination based on criminal background for White participants. Both groups noted that work environment was important to them – Black participants noting that greater diversity and inclusion was valued, and White participants stating that environment would be a determining factor in taking or leaving a job, with sexual harassment and substance abuse called out specifically. White participants also commented that higher wages would help with recruitment, but that wage couldn't be the only factor. Black participants noted that transportation was a barrier, based on the location of the participating companies, and that the lack of flexibility and high number of work hours expected could be a detractor.

Employer Interviews

Company representatives noted that Black/African American employees' performance and retention rates were either as successful or more successful than their White counterparts. Some participating companies had only hired Black/African American participants from the program. This positive outcome underscores the effectiveness of the program's targeted recruitment and support strategies. It also suggests that with the right resources and support systems, disparities in job performance and retention can be mitigated.

Key Points - Participant and Employer Findings

1

Most participants reported a positive experience with the program and found the supports helpful.

2

Both groups reported experiencing discrimination from work peers, not from supervisors or employer leaders. Employers were responsive to workplace concerns.

3

Participants shared a clear view of entry level manufacturing roles' advantages and disadvantages.

4

Employers did not report differences in hiring or retention between racial groups, though it should be acknowledged that some employers had not hired white participants.



Quantitative Findings

Quantitative Findings

The data presented in this section of the report encompasses participants enrolled in ACCESS training cohorts starting in January 2023 through the final cohort, which ended in March 2024. Follow-up data on job placements was collected through May 31, 2024. Over the duration of the project, three intervention cycles occurred:

Cycle 1

January 2023 - February 2023

2 cohorts/20 participants:

19 Black/African American
1 White

Cycle 2

April 2023 - October 2023

7 cohorts/109 participants:

91 Black/African American
18 White

Cycle 3

January 2024 - February 2024

2 cohorts/35 participants:

26 Black/African American
9 White

The following graphic summarizes participant counts, completion rates, and placement rates for ACCESS participants across all cycles, disaggregated by race.

All Participants

175

Participants

(January 2023 -
January 2024)

85%

Completion Rate

97

**Manufacturing Job
Placements**

66% of completers

55% of participants

Average Starting Wage: \$17.35/hr

Black or African American Participants

134

Participants

(January 2023 -
January 2024)

83%

Completion Rate

71

**Manufacturing Job
Placements**

64% of completers

53% of participants

Average Starting Wage: \$17.35/hr

White Participants

28

Participants

(January 2023 -
January 2024)

100%

Completion Rate

21

**Manufacturing Job
Placements**

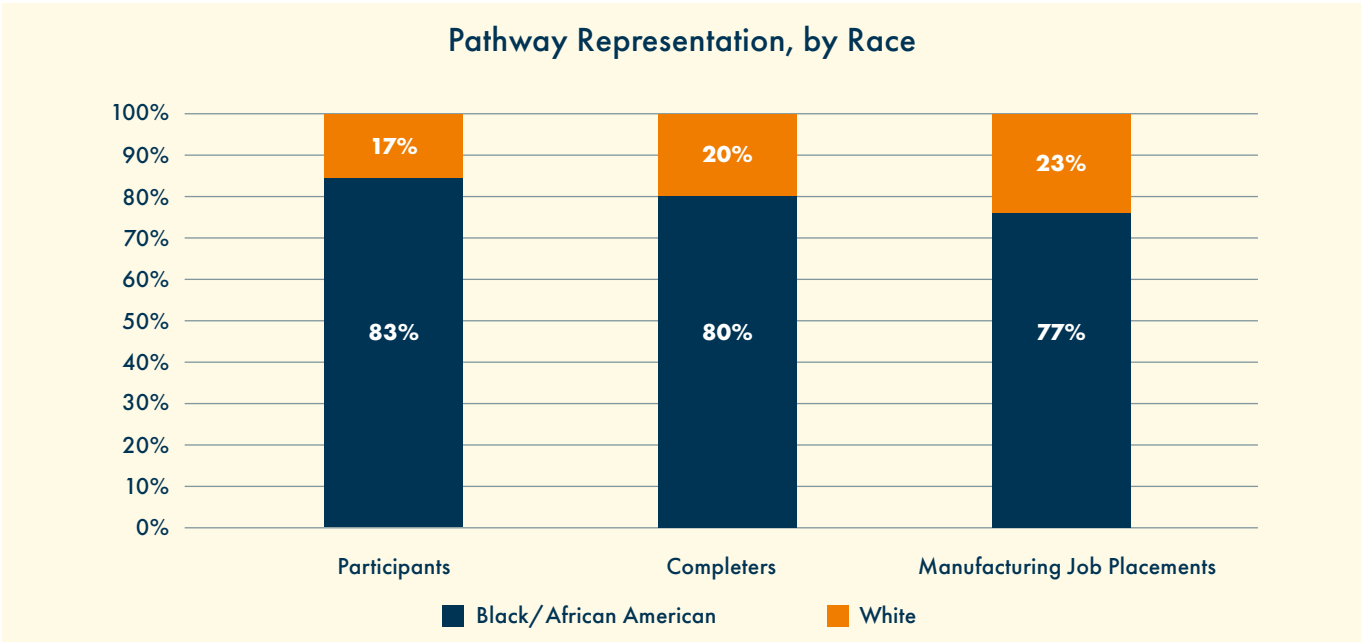
75% of completers

75% of participants

Average Starting Wage: \$17.18/hr

Over 3/4th of ACCESS participants identified as Black/African American. In comparison, just 30% of Cuyahoga County residents identify as Black/African American.² Of the 97 manufacturing job placements, 73% identified as Black/African American, and 22% identified as White. This demographic breakdown of ACCESS manufacturing job placements is drastically different than the Cuyahoga County workforce overall, where just 17% of manufacturing workers identify as Black/African American.³

The following graph depicts the share of ACCESS participants, completers, and job placements who identify as either Black/African American or White. (In other words, those who identify as another race are excluded from this, and subsequent analyses.)



Although the share of Black/African American participants declines from participant to completer to manufacturing job placement, **over 75% of all placements are by Black/African American participants.** As mentioned previously, this is nearly **sixty percentage points higher than what is seen in the manufacturing workforce in the region and a reflection of the community outreach efforts underway.** (For more information on cohort-to-cohort completion rates and placement rates, see Appendix.)

² Source: Lightcast 2024 Demographic Overview Data (Most recent data available at time of report)

³ Source: Lightcast 2023 Manufacturing Industry Data (Most recent data available at time of report)

Additionally, wage parity was achieved by the end of the research period, with the average wages of \$17.35 for Black/African American manufacturing job placements, and \$17.18 for White manufacturing job placements.

There are similarities across demographic groups that might suggest an increased likelihood of successful placement. Manufacturing job placements are similar across Black/African American and White participants regarding age (mid-30s), average number of people living in the home (1.9), and educational attainment (over 3/4th of participants with a High School Diploma or GED). Additionally, over 70% of job placements across both participant groups were males. Although a higher share of White participants (71%) had a felony or misdemeanor, many of these same participants were referred through Oriana House or Reach Success, which offer additional complementary supports to facilitate participant success. (See Appendix for additional demographic information on participants and manufacturing job placements.)

There are similarities across demographic groups that might suggest an increased likelihood of successful placement.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

The ACCESS program was successful in recruiting and placing a higher share of Black/African American workers compared to the representation traditionally seen in Northeast Ohio's manufacturing sector (75% Black/African American placements vs. 17% Black/African American workers in manufacturing jobs in Cuyahoga County).

Despite the overall success in recruitment and job placement, White participants have higher rates of placement than Black/African American participants. With that said, several factors limit the ability to attribute differences in job placement solely to race, such as:

Small cohort/cycle sizes

The program operated with relatively small cohort sizes, which limited the ability to conduct statistical tests from cohort to cohort, or even cycle to cycle. The small sample sizes increase the likelihood of random variations influencing the observed outcomes.

Small population size

The overall number of participants in the program was modest, further restricting the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the impact of race on placement rates. A larger participant pool would provide more robust data for analysis.

Statistical significance

When grouping all cohorts and cycles together and conducting tests to determine the association between race and job placement, there were no statistically significant findings.⁴

Extraneous variables

Numerous extraneous variables could influence the likelihood of successful placement, such as educational attainment, background, and age, among others.

⁴ A Fisher's Exact Test was performed to determine the significance of job placements between Black/African American and White participants. The results included a p-value of 0.3718, much higher than an acceptable threshold for statistical significance. Furthermore, the 95% confidence interval (0.1955781 to 1.6121548) of the odds ratio (0.5938) indicates no difference between demographic groups.

A woman with her hair in a bun, wearing safety glasses and a dark lab coat, is working in a laboratory. She is focused on a large, complex metal mesh structure that resembles a dome or a large-scale filter. The background shows shelves with various laboratory equipment. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

Conclusions

Conclusions

The AEMM project sought to understand and improve early perceived racial disparities in job placements and wages for participants in the ACCESS to Manufacturing program. The research demonstrated that ACCESS has been successful in bringing underrepresented groups (Black/African Americans, women of all races, people with criminal justice involvement) into manufacturing careers.

Further analyses revealed that differences in job placement rates between Black/African American and White participants were not statistically significant. With that said, when comparing placement rates for both Black/African American participants and White participants

to other programs in the state with similar models, ACCESS placement rates are stronger. For example, the EDA Good Jobs Challenge grant to the Ohio Manufacturers' Association has facilitated the expansion of the ACCESS/WorkAdvance model across the state. When comparing placement rates, ACCESS participants enrolled through the Good Jobs Challenge grant achieve an 80% placement rate versus 52% for other Entry-Level Learn and Earn programs associated with the Good Jobs Challenge grant.⁵ Furthermore, targeted recruitment of Black/African American participants combats inequitable employment patterns observed in Cuyahoga County.

⁵ Note that the data provided from the Ohio Good Jobs Challenge grant includes a period of performance of 11/23/2022 through 6/10/2024.

We elevate these aspects of the program as critical factors in the program's success in launching manufacturing careers among previously untapped populations:

1

Investment in targeted outreach and paid training allowed us to reach candidates who may not otherwise have considered manufacturing careers. We conduct outreach among a broad network of referral partners across human services, re-entry, workforce, behavioral health, housing, and community organizations, as well as direct appeals to job seekers or their contacts at community events of all kinds. Paid training allowed us to attract higher numbers of candidates who could be matched with employers.

2

The sector partnership model allowed us to move beyond the typical approach to employer engagement in workforce programs. ACCESS was designed to meet the full talent cycle needs of employers from the start. The collaborative approach to problem solving enabled through the sector partnership has been core to the model. Working with the insights gleaned from MAGNET's annual surveys of 400+ local manufacturers, MAGNET was well-positioned to make the case that employers' labor needs were deeply understood. As the sector partnership formed, MAGNET recognized that all successful sector partnerships relied on manufacturers having ownership over the initiatives and their outcomes. The effort therefore recruited higher level individuals (not HR, but CEOs) from a wider range of companies than sector partnerships typically have. MAGNET launched a Manufacturing Leadership Team with the requirement that its members had full operational control over people so that they could commit themselves and their companies to the jointly developed strategy. Companies were identified and recruited based on longstanding relationships established through the organization's growth advisory and consulting services. Partnering at the time with Greater Cleveland Partnership, the local chamber of commerce, expanded MAGNET's reach. MAGNET also hired a Managing Director for the effort from industry, with experience as a manufacturing CEO, plant manager, and manufacturing operations consultant, which furthered MAGNET's legitimacy in this space. Once the sector partnership was formed, the intermediary team interviewed over 60 manufacturers, 45 workforce organizations, and over 30 other sector partnerships around the country to deepen the understanding of the need and possible solutions. ACCESS grew out of this and other robust strategy-setting processes that unfolded over the first year of the partnership.⁶

⁶ Further information about the manufacturing sector partnership in the context of local collaborative workforce efforts can be found in the [Cuyahoga County Workforce Funders Group Case Study, October 2020](#).

3

ACCESS and other workforce programs exist within the societal context from which they arise, and even carefully tailored program designs may not fully address the racially inequitable circumstances from which people enter the program. Furthermore, ACCESS works at both the participant and employer levels, but participants nevertheless reported experiences of discrimination based on race and criminal justice involvement. This underscores the need for ongoing evaluation and refinement of workforce programs to ensure they effectively serve all segments of the population, address underlying systemic inequities, and carry supports to address the social determinants of work forward into the work environment.

4

Continuous improvement has been a hallmark of the program since its launch. The rapid cycle interventions described here are just some of the changes that have been implemented to better meet the needs of employers and participants. We see that a program of this level of quality and investment will need to continue to evolve as labor market conditions, funding levels, and other dynamics shift. Though it may be difficult to attribute these programmatic successes to any one intervention or cycle, the prioritization of stakeholder feedback and continuous improvement drives the continued success of the program. The work is never done, and these rapid cycle changes will continue in the future, with the participants, employers, and community at the forefront.

A person wearing a blue uniform and a cap is working at a desk in a control room or office. The person is looking down at a laptop screen. The background is a blurred office environment with shelves and equipment. The entire image has a blue tint.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Implications for Policy and Practice

These findings have several implications for policy and practice across various stakeholder groups:

For employers

Participating employers are committed to creating productive environments for underrepresented populations, but participants still experienced discrimination based on race or criminal justice involvement. Some employers who have adopted strategies to create a more diverse workforce at the leadership or management level may need to embrace shifts in practices related to training, supervision, and performance reviews. Engagement with collaborative approaches, such as industry sector partnerships, may be successful not only in creating a pipeline from populations that

employers may otherwise struggle to reach but also in stimulating the adoption of new practices that allow them to implement inclusive practices that allow new workers to thrive.

For workforce practitioners

High quality service delivery with fidelity to a proven model is a key contributor to the success of the program. ACCESS was based on the program tested through the WorkAdvance study, which showed that comprehensive, coordinated services result in better employment and wages than typical community services. Along with that, consistent attention to the social determinants of work must be addressed to ensure employee success and well-being. These factors, which extend beyond the workplace, significantly impact an individual's ability to perform

and thrive in their role. Additionally, consistent and effective screening is a critical component of employer-driven programs. Finally, this project revealed that targeted outreach within Black/African American communities through a large network of referral organizations and reinforced by consistent communication, plant tours, and manufacturing engagement activities for career coaches results in positive employment outcomes.

For Industry Sector Partnerships

The ACCESS model is inextricably linked to the sector partnership that launched it. The coordinated, data-driven strategy setting process that led to its program design ensured a high-level of employer commitment and engagement in all aspects of the program, demonstrating value for both employers and job seekers. The employers who participate in the Manufacturing Sector Partnership serve as owners, sponsors, and “clients” of ACCESS, as they hire from the program. Working with a variety of employers who were willing to commit to collective problem solving created significant alignment and contributed to positive outcomes for the targeted

populations. As many workforce programs struggle to maintain consistent engagement from a diverse set of employers, the sector partnership that fuels ACCESS should be understood as a key contributor to the successes of the program. Although we have experienced dips in demand for entry level workers as the labor market shifts, we have not struggled with employer engagement even if an individual company is not able to hire from any given cohort.

For policymakers

Demand-driven, comprehensive workforce services have been associated with higher wages, suggesting that tailoring programs to specific industry needs can lead to better worker outcomes. Such programs require significant investment. ACCESS pays training wages, which, along with targeted outreach, led to higher levels of interest from previously underrepresented populations. It also requires the coordination and partnership of multiple components of the workforce development ecosystem. It relies on long-term coaching, to keep people in jobs and moving along career pathways. All of these program components contribute to the successful outcomes but are not fully supported by traditional training dollars. ACCESS' success has required the braiding of funding from Federal, state, local, and philanthropic sources.

It [ACCESS] also requires the coordination and partnership of multiple components of the workforce development ecosystem. It relies on long-term coaching, to keep people in jobs and moving along career pathways.

Appendix

Black/African American Participant Focus Group Highlights and Key Takeaways

Protocol Areas

Highlights/Key Takeaways

Section 1 ACCESS Participation

- The potential for a career, as opposed to just a job, and the possibility for growth was a major incentive for seeking training and employment in the manufacturing sector.
- Focus group participants attributed their success in completing the program and getting a job to the training they received in the ACCESS program.
- Respondents overwhelmingly praised staff members who worked directly with them.
- Participants stated that they felt authentically supported by the team members and staff members working with them to help them move forward and build new lives for themselves.
- Getting paid and trained at the same time was a major incentive to participate.
- Some participants felt that the timeline for program completion was truncated and that more time was needed to master learning objectives.
- The pace of the training was overwhelming.
- Participants also stated that financial literacy is needed as part of the ACCESS training curriculum.

Section 2 Recruitment and Retention

- Participants stated that their main goal was to get a job.
- Some participants were challenged when getting to their employment location because using public transit was difficult.
- One participant stated that they experienced age discrimination in the ACCESS program.
- Participants expressed the importance of being self-directed as a key element in successfully completing the program and getting a job.
- Formerly incarcerated program participants felt fear when interviewing and knowing what to say about their past.
- These participants expressed the improved confidence they felt interviewing because their incarceration issues were addressed during the training.
- The location of manufacturing companies added to the stress level of some participants.
- Participants stated that wages and benefits were very important but there were other factors that influenced recruitment and retention.
- Many participants stated that manufacturing jobs were appealing because an education was not needed, and the jobs are doable.

Protocol Areas

Highlights/Key Takeaways

Section 3 Wages and Benefits

- Most participants stated that wages were the most important factor when deciding to take a manufacturing job.
- Most participants also said that health insurance, other benefits, and the opportunity to gain experience were particularly important.
- Some participants believed that higher wages would be a great incentive for employment in the manufacturing sector.
- Most participants believed that health insurance, education reimbursement, and on-the-job training were great benefits.
- Many participants had access to 401K retirement benefit programs, but few enrolled in the program.

Section 4 Employment Climate

- Most participants felt that the need for greater racial and gender diversity and inclusion in the work environment was important.
- None of the participants experienced racial discrimination from employers.
- Three participants expressed that they had experienced racial discrimination from their work peers who were White, leading two of the three participants to leave their jobs.
- Each of the three participants stated that when racial discrimination issues were made known to their employer supervisor the issues were immediately addressed and resolved.
- Two participants discussed frustration with employers not offering employment opportunities after receiving an interview and site visit.
- These participants felt they were misled about the employment opportunity and that touring the work site without receiving an offer of employment was a waste of their time.
- Some participants expressed safety concerns about their work environments though no specifics were expressed.
- Participants stated that the “old image” of what manufacturing was viewed as in the past would keep them from taking or pursuing a manufacturing job.
- Participants stated that they did not want to be overworked with the working hours in the manufacturing sector can be daunting.
- Overall, participants felt that working shifts were manageable.
- Many participants believed that employers could make work environments better by having more flexibility (i.e., 32-hour work week).

White Participant Focus Group Highlights and Key Takeaways

Protocol Areas

Highlights/Key Takeaways

Section 1 ACCESS Participation

- Most participants had high praise for the staff members and applauded the attention of the staff to their needs.
- Formerly incarcerated participants learned about the ACCESS Program at their halfway house.
- Participants were emphatic about how detailed the training was and how staff members really assisted them with moving through the process and learning what they needed to know.
- Participants specifically stated that the trainers were a good fit.

Section 2 Recruitment and Retention

- Participants stated that they enjoyed working in a manufacturing environment as a reason for taking and keeping their jobs.
- One training competency area participants thought could be improved in the future was knowledge about and using blueprints.
- More hands-on training is needed as the program participants all expressed that they were not confident in the skill set and competencies they acquired.
- Program participants questioned the validity of the certificates in terms of the skill set and the knowledge base they represent (more hands-on training needed).
- Participants felt like the purpose of the program was not being achieved arguing that the program was supposed to improve their ability to secure employment and that this was not always the outcome, stating that job placement rates were not what they should be.
- Participants felt like there should be a post-graduation bridge (process) created to keep people engaged and to assess ultimate programmatic outcomes.

Protocol Areas

Highlights/Key Takeaways

Section 3 Wages and Benefits

- Participants believed employers could offer higher wages as a recruitment strategy.
- Participants felt like overtime hours and the associated pay were both great employment incentives.
- Participants were confirmed in the idea that “higher wages” were not the most important incentive for them.
- Participants stated that the employer’s stability and job security were both extremely important to them.
- Participants argued that health insurance, employee stock options, tuition reimbursement, and signing bonuses were all very important benefits.

Section 4 Employment Climate

- Participants stated that a hostile work environment would factor into a decision to leave a job or not take a particular job.
- Participants also stated that issues related to sexual harassment would stop them from taking a job.
- Some participants expressed that they felt discrimination from older work peers based on being formerly incarcerated.
- Participants noted that known substance abuse on the job would stop them from taking a position because of the inherent safety risks.

Employer Interview Highlights and Supported Feedback

Protocol Areas

Highlights/Key Takeaways

Section 1 ACCESS Participation

- Company representatives interviewed stated that their participation in the ACCESS program was a positive experience.
- Company representatives stated that they were involved in the ACCESS program to supplement and improve the pool of potential candidates for employment.
- Companies, based on their experiences, have identified areas that could be improved to help support participants and discussed these improvements with the ACCESS Program’s leadership team.
- Companies valued the program bringing them quality candidates who have a background in the work.
- They do not see differences among different groups of people and would say that their employee pool is diverse.

Section 2 Recruitment and Retention

- Company representatives interviewed stated that the African American employees’ performance and retention were either as successful or more successful than their White counterparts.
- Company representatives stated that their retention rate for ACCESS program employees varied.
- Each company representative stated that none of the ACCESS program employees were terminated, leaving of their own accord for various reasons.
- Transportation and childcare are both recurring issues that are barriers to employment and retention.
- Transportation and company location are a huge factor in employment since they both impact the work life balance of employees.

Protocol Areas

Highlights/Key Takeaways

Section 3 Wages and Benefits

- Company representatives believed that ACCESS program candidates were interested in more than just good wages.
- They believed that many candidates were as interested in work life balance; work culture; opportunities for advancement; and benefits.
- Company representatives stated that their company increased wages to recruit and retain workers, including ACCESS program participants.
- Company representatives stated that the increase in wages now being offered makes them more competitive with other manufacturing companies in the region.
- Although each company offers their employees a 401K retirement opportunity, they have observed that ACCESS program employees seldom avail themselves of the opportunity to participate in the program.

Section 4 Other

- Companies offer an Employee Assistance Program to support employees who need assistance navigating their difficulties.
- Companies provide their employees with on-the-job training to assist with advancement in the company.
- Company representatives discussed how owners of their company's and management constantly discuss strategies and tactics to make employees feel appreciated, especially since the onset of the pandemic and with the difficulty recruiting and retaining employees.
- Company representatives believed that their company was very good at handling and addressing employee complaints and concerns, expressing that this was an area of specific focus with new strategies and tactics being implemented by owners and management.
- Company representatives believed that their workspace was welcoming for potential and present employees.
- Companies expressed that the competition for workers has become another mandate for specific attention and constant monitoring by ownership and management.
- Company representatives agreed that maintaining a positive work culture in the manufacturing sector was critically important to the company's and employees' success.
- Company representatives identified some of the factors they described as important to sustaining a positive work culture such as a safe work environment; worker and management/ownership collaboration; mutual respect; and being family oriented.
- Companies are focused on being a non-toxic work environment that has open communication between managers and employees.

Participant Demographics

Demographics	Black/African American		White	
	#	%	#	%
GENDER				
Male	91	68%	21	75%
Female	41	31%	6	21%
Non-binary/Transgender	*	*	*	*
AGE				
Average Age	34.6	N/A	35.8	N/A
FAMILY STATUS				
Noncustodial Parent	35	26%	11	39%
Single Individual	58	43%	12	43%
Single Parent	23	17%	*	*
Other (Married; Multi-generational; Two Parent Family)	18	13%	*	*
NUMBER IN HOUSEHOLD				
Average Number in Household	2.1	N/A	1.8	N/A
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT				
No High School/GED	21	16%	*	*
High School/GED	100	75%	20	71%
Post High School/GED	13	10%	*	*
BACKGROUND				
Felony	83	62%	19	68%
Misdemeanor	79	59%	19	68%
REFERRAL SOURCE				
Oriana House/Reach Success	22	16%	13	46%
Total Participants	134	-	28	-

*Note: Totals may not equate to 100% due to other categories comprising of 3 or less people, therefore risking disclosure of individual participants.

Black/African American Participant Demographics, by Cycle

Demographics	Black/African American		
	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
GENDER			
Male	79%	64%	73%
Female	21%	34%	27%
AGE			
Average Age	28.7	35.2	36.5
FAMILY STATUS			
Noncustodial Parent	16%	25%	38%
Single Individual	37%	49%	27%
Single Parent	26%	13%	23%
Other (Married; Multi-generational; Two Parent Family)	21%	12%	12%
NUMBER IN HOUSEHOLD			
Average Number in Household	1.9	2.1	1.8
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT			
No High School/GED	21%	17%	8%
High School/GED	68%	74%	81%
Post High School/GED	11%	9%	12%
BACKGROUND			
Felony	53%	65%	58%
Misdemeanor	37%	65%	54%
REFERRAL SOURCE			
Oriana House/Reach Success	*	15%	31%
Total Participants	19	89	26

*Note: Totals may not equate to 100% due to other categories comprising of 3 or less people, therefore risking disclosure of individual participants.

Cycle 1 = January 2023 – February 2023 (2 cohorts)

Cycle 2 = April 2023 – October 2023 (7 cohorts)

Cycle 3 = January 2024 – February 2024 (2 cohorts)

White Participant Demographics, Cycle 2

Demographics	Cycle 2
GENDER	
Male	72%
Female	22%
Non-binary/Transgender	*
AGE	
Average Age	34.8
FAMILY STATUS	
Noncustodial Parent	*
Single Individual	*
Single Parent	*
Other (Married; Multi-generational; Two Parent Family)	*
NUMBER IN HOUSEHOLD	
Average Number in Household	1.8
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	
No High School/GED	*
High School/GED	78%
Post High School/GED	*
BACKGROUND	
Felony	67%
Misdemeanor	67%
REFERRAL SOURCE	
Oriana House/Reach Success	39%
Total Participants	18

*Note: Totals may not equate to 100% due to other categories comprising of 3 or less people, therefore risking disclosure of individual participants.

Cycle 1 = January 2023 – February 2023 (2 cohorts)

Cycle 2 = April 2023 – October 2023 (7 cohorts)

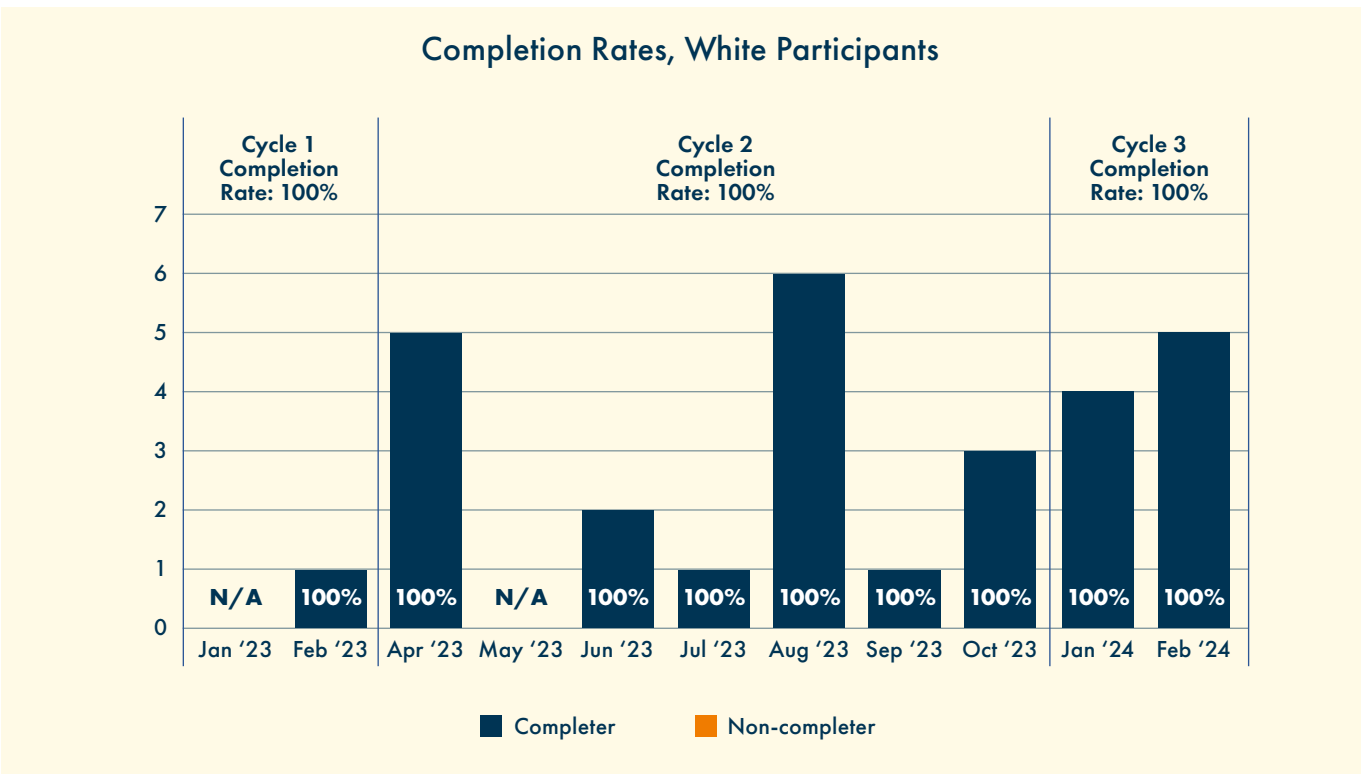
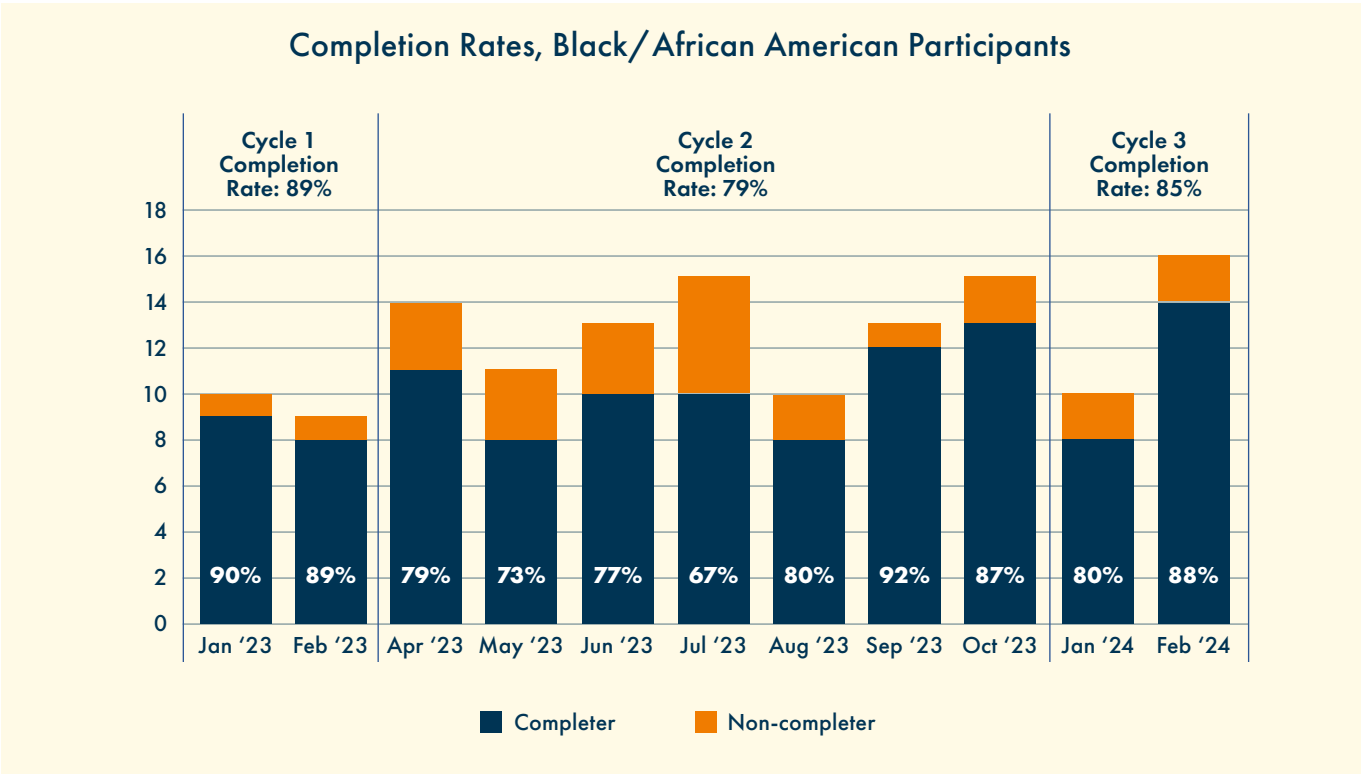
Cycle 3 = January 2024 – February 2024 (2 cohorts)

Manufacturing Job Placements, by Participant Demographics

Demographics	Black/African American		White	
	#	%	#	%
GENDER				
Male	51	72%	17	81%
Female	20	28%	4	19%
Non-binary/Transgender	0	0%	0	0%
AGE				
Average Age	35.0	-	36.9	-
FAMILY STATUS				
Noncustodial Parent	20	29%	10	48%
Single Individual	25	36%	7	33%
Single Parent	14	20%	4	19%
Other (Married; Multi-generational; Two Parent Family)	12	17%	0	0%
NUMBER IN HOUSEHOLD				
Average Number in Household	1.9	-	1.9	-
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT				
No High School/GED	9	13%	0	0%
High School/GED	55	77%	17	81%
Post High School/GED	7	10%	4	19%
BACKGROUND				
Felony	43	61%	15	71%
Misdemeanor	39	55%	15	71%
REFERRAL SOURCE				
Oriana House/Reach Success	12	17%	10	48%
Total Manufacturing Job Placements	70	-	21	-

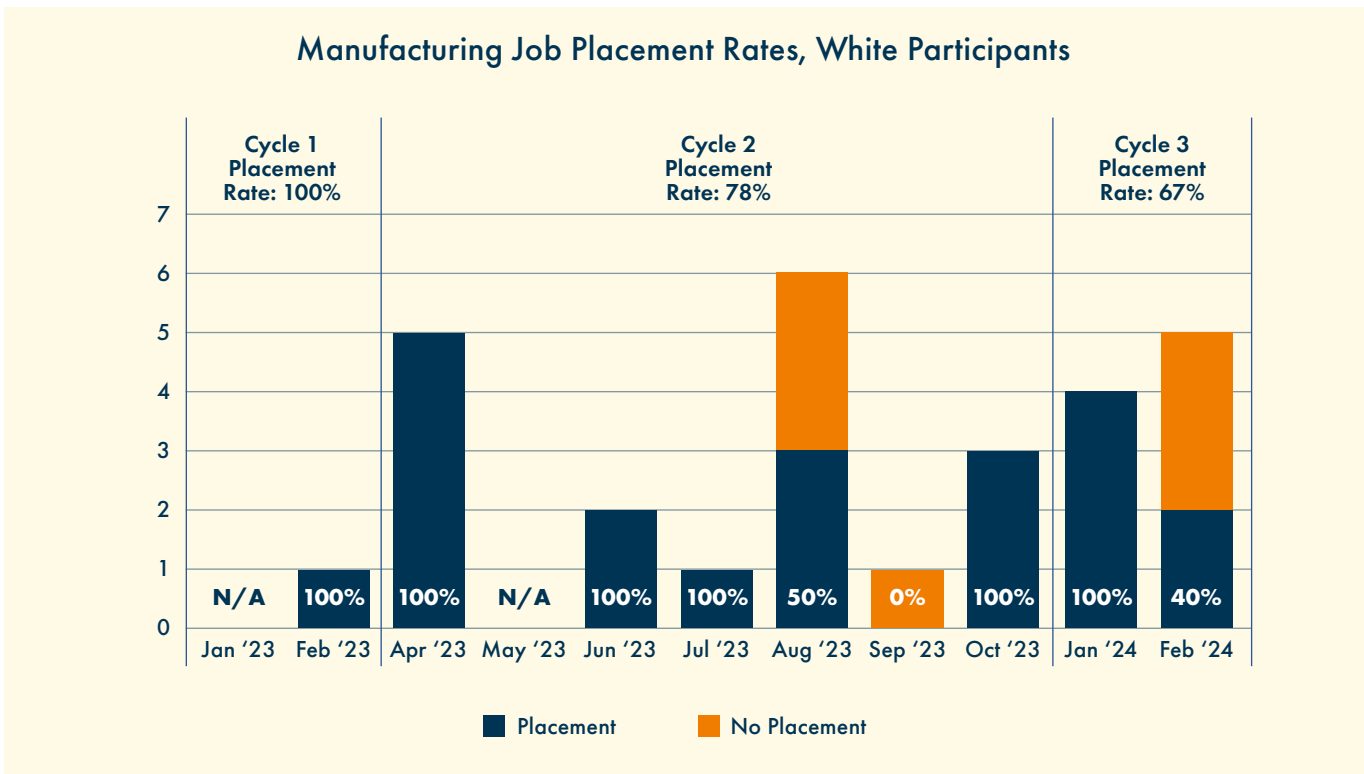
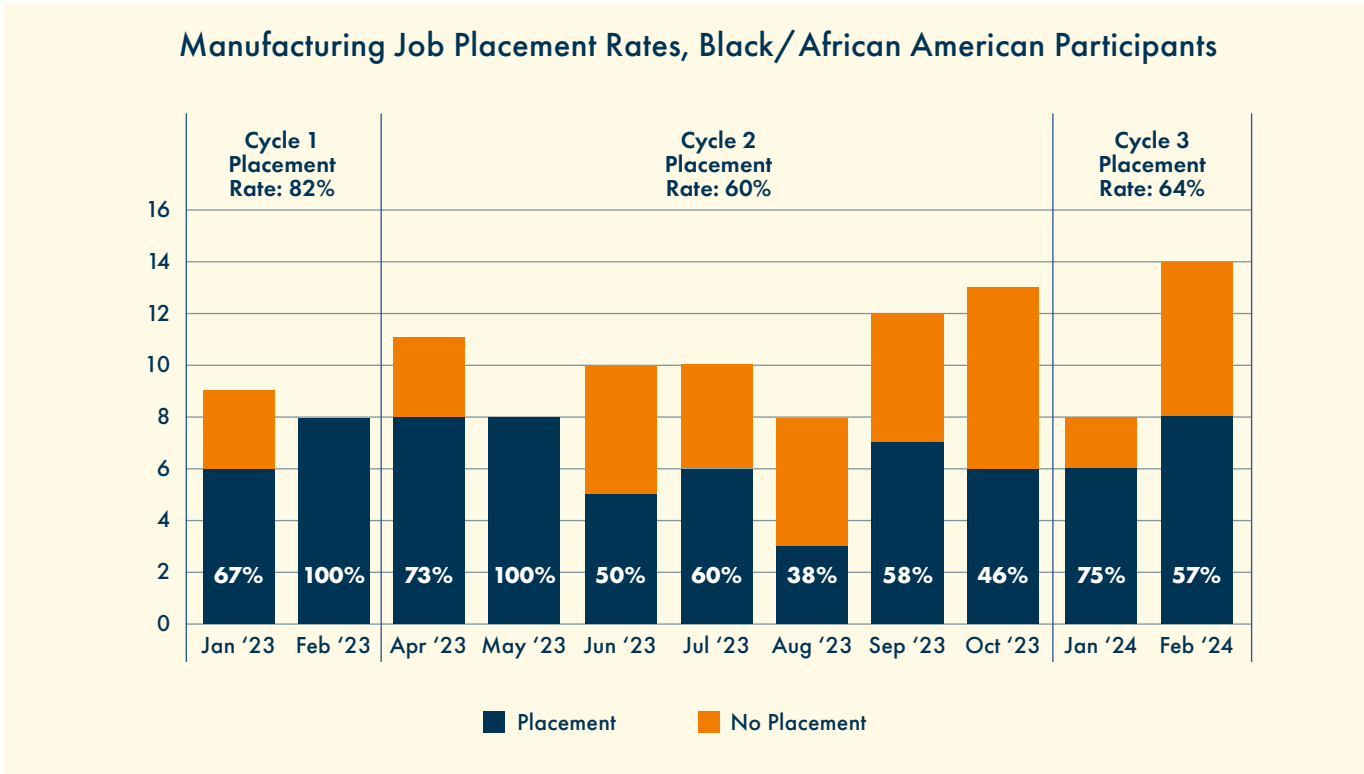
Completion Rates

The following graphs detail changes in completion rates across cycles, looking at both Black/African American and White participants.



Placement Rates

The following tables detail changes in placement rates across cycles, looking at both Black/African American and White participants.



Note: Placement rate is based on the number of participants who successfully graduate the ACCESS program.

A man with long dreadlocks and safety glasses is working in a factory setting. He is wearing a grey t-shirt and is focused on his work. The background shows industrial equipment and a control panel with various buttons and dials. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

Advancing Economic Mobility in Manufacturing:
Results from an On-Ramp Training Program for Recruiting
Black Workers into the Sector

Final Research Report