

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EQUITY PROJECT

Z. Smith Reynolds
Foundation Initiative

RESULTS AND LEARNINGS FROM YEARS 1-5

Prepared by:
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Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation's
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EQUITY PROJECT
Results & Learnings from Years 1-5
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Project Aims and Approach: The Women's Economic Equity (WEE) Project aim was to support low-income, rural women to move into jobs that paid the Living Income Standard (LIS). Central to the Foundation's approach was the role of networks -- connecting available resources rather than creating new organizations -- in building economic opportunity for women. Participating sites were to identify employment sectors (e.g., high-tech manufacturing and health care) that were understood to have living income standard jobs in the designated counties or regions. Sites were then to target career pathways -- the requisite steps of education/ training/ certification and a series of jobs -- within those sectors to help women chart a course toward targeted jobs that would facilitate financial self-sufficiency.

To these ends, the WEE Project envisioned a series of supports for participants including:

- a peer network of participants
- a network of engaged employers
- a network of resource organizations to provide other services and supports

In addition the Foundation envisioned that these networks would help leverage change in the way education-training-job development-employer-support service systems operated individually and collectively to facilitate living income career pathways for participants.

The Foundation invested roughly \$1.64 million in the WEE Project over the planning and implementation time period of 2004-2011. Grantees also leveraged other funding sources to support this work which were not tracked by the Foundation. Calculations for an estimated cost per participant were not completed as part of the WEE Project.

Grantees: The Foundation funded four sites based at the following organizations: the Center for Community Action (CCA); Franklin Vance Warren Opportunity, Inc. (FVW); HandMade in America; and the Roanoke Center. HandMade made a successful case to the Foundation that the sector-based, career pathways approach that was to be used at the other sites was not the most promising approach to working with rural, low-income women in western North Carolina. Instead, HandMade used a micro-enterprise

development approach. By mutual agreement of the Roanoke Center and the Foundation, that site withdrew from WEE in Year 2 and is not reported on here.

This report focuses primarily on the work of the two remaining career pathways projects at CCA and FWW with a separate section devoted to HandMade's Appalachian Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) project.

Overall Context: The WEE Project unfolded with all of the following appearing to play significant roles:

- the Foundation's WEE Project emerging in relatively uncharted territory
- the evolving and sometimes organic nature of this work for the Foundation and for grantees
- the massive economic downturn beginning in 2008

PARTICIPANT RESULTS

Notable Participant Progress: One-Quarter of Career Pathways Participants Advanced to Near Living Income Standard (LIS); Others Doubled Income But Remained in Poverty

Income Gains: The WEE Project career pathways approach tested at two sites (CCA and FWW) showed advancement for its rural, low-income participants, even during a massive economic downturn. Of the 399 participants included in the results:

- 12% (49) advanced their annual earnings to 100% or more of the LIS, with a mean annual income of \$33,700.
- 12% (48) advanced their annual earnings to 75-99% of the LIS, with a mean annual income of \$25,634.
- Looking only at the Early Years participants (enrolled in 2007-2008) who were, as possible key context, enrolled the longest and when the economy was the strongest: 41% (79) advanced their annual income to 75% or more of the LIS, with an average increase of \$20,000 per participant.
- 76% (302) who earned 74% or less of the LIS increased their mean annual income by 59%. However, these participants remained well below the federal poverty threshold.
- These gains were almost exclusively in the health care sector, the chosen sector of almost all WEE participants, particularly after the high-tech manufacturing and bio-tech sectors dried up at one site where those sectors had been targeted. While all participants who chose the education sector (9%) were working within

the sector, gaining the required education to obtain living income jobs in education takes more time than most participants had had to date in WEE.

Education and Pathway Gains: Two-thirds of career pathways participants made substantial gains in career-related educational achievement -- gains that these participants would likely not have made had they not been part of the WEE Project. When first enrolled, the highest level of education completed for 83% of participants was a high school diploma or GED or neither. This dropped to 17% in 2011. Moreover, one-quarter of all participants completed technical school or earned an associate or bachelor degree.

Micro-Enterprise Participant Gains: In addition 107 participants engaged in micro-enterprise development were part of the AWE project. Of the 50 participants included in the results, there was an average increase of 28% in marketing skills/actions, 20% in technical skills/actions, and 15% in financial skills/actions.

KEY ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES

Grantee capacity areas -- at various stages of development -- that held promise to significantly strengthen career pathways work included:

- cultivating and using relationships
- supporting participants
- changing larger systems that impact participants
- collecting and using data

A fifth capacity area related primarily to the Foundation's capacities was:

- using strategic, outcomes-based planning and reflection

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Intended Outcomes and Project Realities: The Foundation did not formally adjust the original WEE Project outcomes and output of "400 women achiev[ing] economic equity; at minimum, a majority of the women are in living wage jobs and the remainder are on career pathways towards living wage jobs" and 1,000 women enrolled. However, the Foundation recognized from early on that these outcomes were not being met. Not only did one site terminate, but other sites did not meet their benchmarks, with AWE shifting away from income gains entirely. Given the trailblazing nature of this work, grantee capacity levels, a rural context where jobs and resources are in short supply even in a healthy economy, and the overall tall order of recruiting and supporting low-income women to achieve the Living Income Standard, it appears that the above outcome and

output and timeline of three – or even five – years were overly-ambitious, even if the economy had remained relatively robust.

And what can be said is that the career pathways approach, tested under unexpectedly dismal economic conditions, did produce some notable progress among some participants. Presumably, the career pathways approach would have demonstrated even stronger participant progress in a more robust economic climate. Therefore, this approach would benefit from further testing in different economic and geographic contexts.

Select other considerations for the future include:

- A. Inclusion of AWE in WEE – An Open Question:** As a micro-enterprise development project, AWE called for different conceptualization, resources, support, and expectations than the career pathways projects.
- B. Outcomes Development/Benchmarking as Learning and Planning Framework May Be Useful:** The Foundation’s commitment to developing its initial outcomes and to grantees developing benchmarks was wise and a bold first step into this territory. Areas for strengthening included earlier development of outcomes to guide benchmark development and ongoing revisiting and potentially revising of outcomes to keep pace with evolving learning about grantee capacity, the economy, and results to date.
- C. Program Officer Time on Project Key:** Foundation commitment of significant program officer-level time to the WEE Project was an important investment. Additional program officer time would have been even more beneficial given the complex and collaborative nature of the work.
- D. Site Coaches Value-Added:** Site coaches helped strengthen sites’ work and the overall quality of the WEE Project.
- E. Further Capacity Building Needed for Grantees to Be Most Successful:** Site results would, likely, have been strengthened by early assessment of and capacity building for grantees around how to: plan projects, cultivate relationships, provide support to participants, collect and use data for program strengthening, and impact larger systems. Having a tailored database to track participant progress was essential for understanding what was being accomplished by the WEE participants.
- F. Investing in More Extensive Learning and Evaluation Worth Consideration:** Given the significant investment the Foundation made in the WEE Project, it might be worth considering a stronger focus on capturing data and analyzing results.

G. Opportunity to Share Learnings with Broader Audience: Given the Foundation's investments and learnings related to the WEE Project, the Foundation appears well-placed to advance the conversation taking place more broadly about sector-based career pathways initiatives – particularly as related to rural women.

H. Foundation Role in Influencing Policy and Practice: The Foundation might also consider how to formally and/or informally influence broader policy and practice change that would bolster WEE-related efforts and WEE-type rural women who remain an often-overlooked population throughout the state and, indeed, far beyond.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Brief History of WEE

Genesis of Project: The Women's Economic Equity (WEE) Project grew out of the two-year Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation's Women's Initiative (2002-2003) that examined a variety of ways that the Foundation might continue to offer focused and strategic support to women as a distinct population. The Initiative gathered data about and from women and girls throughout the state. As a result of the Initiative's findings and reflections, the Women's Initiative Committee developed recommendations for next steps for the Foundation. Two projects grew from the Initiative: one on domestic violence and the other on women's economic equity. The latter came eventually to be known as the Women's Economic Equity Project (the WEE Project). The WEE Project was designed as a three-year initiative. As discussed in greater detail below, this report examines a portion of the WEE Project to capture **Year 1-5** (2006-2011) participant results and **Year 1-3** learnings.

The Foundation invested roughly \$1.64 million in the WEE Project over the planning and implementation time period of 2004-2011. Of this total, approximately \$1.34 million (82%) was expended in direct grant support to the four grantees, including both investigative phase (planning) grants and implementation grants. The remaining approximately \$300,000 (18%) was spent on technical assistance to the sites (e.g., convenings) and consultant support in WEE Project design and coaching of sites. Grantees also leveraged other funding sources to support this work which were not tracked by the Foundation. Calculations for an estimated cost per participant were not completed as part of the WEE Project.

Project Aims: The WEE Project aim was to support low-income, rural women to move into jobs that paid the Living Income Standard (LIS). (*See Section 2.1: Introduction, for a discussion of the LIS.*) Participating sites were to identify employment sectors (e.g., high-tech manufacturing, telecommunications, and health care) that were understood to have living income standard jobs in the designated counties or regions. Sites were then to target career pathways -- the requisite steps of education/ training/ certification and a series of jobs -- within those sectors to help women chart a course toward targeted jobs that would facilitate financial self-sufficiency.

To these ends, the WEE Project envisioned a series of supports for participants including:

- one-on-one participant coaching and other supports from the grantee
- a peer network of participants

- a network of engaged employers
- a network of resource organizations to provide other services and supports

Foundation Broke New Ground with Project and Ways of Operating: Even with a great deal of thought about the needs of women and with research about approaches that might work, the Foundation had still hoped to find other successful replicable models that were bridging networks and moving rural, low-income women into self-sufficiency. In the absence of finding a focused model to be replicated, the Foundation launched its own unique WEE Project.

In addition there were several other “firsts” for the Foundation in how it approached the work. These included the focus on data collection, analysis, and data-focused program results; benchmarking; and greater grantee-Foundation collaboration. As a result, the Foundation and grantees embarked on a process of trying new approaches, reflecting, and revising as they went.

Grantees: The Foundation funded – including for an investigative grant – four sites based at the following organizations: the Center for Community Action; Franklin Vance Warren Opportunity, Inc.; HandMade in America; and the Roanoke Center. (See *Table 1-1: Sites, Names Used in Report, and Locations.*)

Table 1-1: Sites, Names Used in Report, and Locations

| Site | Name Used in Report | Project Location |
|---|--|---|
| Center for Community Action | CCA | Robeson County |
| Franklin Vance Warren Opportunity, Inc. | FVW | Franklin, Vance, and Warren counties |
| HandMade in America (HandMade) | AWE (Appalachian Women Entrepreneurs) | Ashe, Graham, Madison, Mitchell, Rutherford, Swain, and Yancey counties |
| Roanoke Center | Roanoke Center | Halifax and Northampton counties |

HandMade’s project, Appalachian Women Entrepreneurs, featured a micro-enterprise approach that was distinct from the employment sector-based, career pathways approach used by CCA, FVW, and the Roanoke Center. The Roanoke Center was included because it was a strong player in its region willing to partner with the Foundation on this project, despite its limited experience in related work. However, by mutual agreement of the Roanoke Center and the Foundation, the site withdrew from WEE in Year 2 and is not reported on here.

While both CCA and FVW embraced WEE and the need for the participant supports highlighted earlier, the grantees constructed these supports in somewhat different ways. The distinct ways that WEE evolved at each site were influenced by both internal factors, such as the culture of the organizations, and external factors, such as the economic conditions in each region.

FVW had a strong culture of case management. And case management became a central building block for developing FVW's participant coaching approach. The economic downturn, beginning soon after project launch, had a dramatic impact on this region. Promising emerging work opportunities for FVW participants in the bio-tech and high-tech manufacturing sectors disappeared.

CCA's WEE work to some extent reflected its more macro-focused, organizational advocacy culture that was oriented to targeting the institutions, policies, etc. that stood between participants and success. Initially, CCA aimed to develop networks that would address these more structural barriers. At CCA and in Robeson County, a "persistent-poverty" county as measured nationally, many would say that the economic downturn had already hit years before. However, unemployment continued to increase significantly over the course of the project. With few employment opportunities in manufacturing left in the area, CCA focused on what it anticipated to be more stable sectors of health care and education.

After the initial planned three years of funding, both CCA and FVW requested and received additional but smaller grant support from the Foundation in Years 4 and 5. This funding gave grantees additional time and resources to continue testing and refining the approach and advancing toward their benchmarks. Both projects also received funding during Years 4 and 5 from the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center.

HandMade made a successful case to the Foundation that the sector-based, career pathways approach was not the most promising approach to working with rural, low-income women in western North Carolina. Instead, AWE used a micro-enterprise development approach. AWE, too, launched just in time to be impacted by the economic downturn. AWE staff elected to spread the three years of Foundation funding out over five years, wrapping up funding around the same time as CCA and FVW in 2011.

In summary the WEE Project unfolded with all of the following appearing to play significant roles: the Foundation's WEE Project emerging from relatively uncharted territory, the evolving and sometimes organic nature of the work for the Foundation and for grantees, the unique grantee organizational cultures in play, and the economic realities that emerged.

1.2 Report Scope

How this Report is Organized: Some additional details about the scope of the report are featured in this sub-section. Thereafter, this report introduces readers to the WEE Project and its main components. The report then offers key context in which this work took place. The report goes on to highlight WEE sector-based, career pathways participants' income and education results and related analysis and interpretation. Essential capacities for supporting career pathways work are lifted up, along with some additional foundation inputs (e.g., site coaching). AWE's micro-enterprise participant results and project are also explored. Finally, the report offers some conclusions and future considerations emerging from the WEE Project.

Site Focus: This report focuses primarily on the WEE Project sites that completed the project and used the sector-based, career pathways approach: the Center for Community Action (CCA) and Franklin Vance Warren Opportunity, Inc. (FVW). As above, a separate section of the report highlights HandMade's AWE project.

Terminology: Unless otherwise noted, and in the final considerations, “**grantees**” refers to CCA and FVW. The sector-based, career pathways approach is often called “**career pathways**.” The rural, low-income women enrolled at a WEE Project site are referred to as “**participants**.” The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation is referred to as “**the Foundation**.”

Learning Project: The WEE Project was a complex endeavor. The Foundation contracted with New Perspectives Consulting Group, Inc. to complete a WEE Project Learning Project. The work was of a limited scope tailored to the size of the investment the Foundation made in the Learning Project. A 2010 interim Learning Project report captured more of the individual stories of grantees CCA and FVW. This final, more macro-level Learning Project report was designed to:

- report basic findings about the progress of career pathways WEE participants to earn the living income standard
- document major WEE Project approaches and learnings
- offer areas for consideration for the Foundation in how to strengthen and further reflect on this work

In addition, Wilson Consulting Group and New Perspectives created a guidebook for the Foundation that provides guidance for those who may wish to pursue rural, sector-based career pathways work. The guidebook, *Paving the Path: Guidebook to Launching a Career Pathways Initiative for Women Living in Rural Areas*, has two main sections: one written for community-based organizations and the other for funders.

Limitations: Limitations of this analysis and reporting include:

- The perspectives of WEE participants, employers, resource organizations, and those who study workforce or micro-enterprise development are not included in this report.
- Three of the four sites are reported on.
- The data highlighted in this report heavily relies on self-reporting from grantees, with additional perspectives from Foundation staff including site coaches.
- All the data used to complete the analysis of the career pathways projects was collected during Year 3 with the exception of the CCA/FVW participant results.
- All HandMade/AWE data was collected during its third, eighteen-month phase, roughly corresponding to Year 5.
- The extensive initial Foundation planning work completed by staff and the WEE Project Board Committee is not explored.
- The WEE Project Board Committee members were not interviewed.
- The investigative (planning) phase of the WEE Project is also not examined.

Primary Data and Analysis Sources: The Learning Project used both quantitative and qualitative data. CCA and FVW participant data (quantitative) came from a grantee-maintained database that tracked participant progress. AWE participant data came from a spreadsheet the grantee created and maintained. Qualitative data for all projects came from individual and focus group interviews with grantee staff and Foundation staff, including coaches. In addition, an observation of an AWE participant gathering was conducted. A limited amount of data from grantee written materials – primarily Year 4 applications – was also reviewed. *(See Appendix A: Data Collection Details.)*

Finally, FVW and CCA staff, Foundation staffer Mary Fant Donnan, program design consultant and site coach Pam Wilson, site coach Tobi Lippin, and Learning Project facilitator Kristin Bradley-Bull convened for a “making meaning” retreat in January 2010 to further deepen the analysis and to surface implications emerging from Years 1-3 of the career pathways work.

Report Revision: Soon after the end of Year 3, CCA and FVW staff were offered the opportunity to review a draft of appropriate narrative sections of the interim version of this report to complete fact-checking and to submit alternative viewpoints on any of the report’s contents. At the end of Year 5, AWE was given a similar opportunity for the AWE section of this report. All sites were also welcomed after their review to send the Foundation any alternative interpretations to what is discussed below.

1.3 Foundation’s Original Vision for WEE

The Foundation’s original vision for WEE is described below, outlining the sector-based, career pathways focus to reach a living income; the overarching support structure for participants; WEE Project outcomes; and key Foundation inputs.

1.3.1 Sector-Based, Career Pathways Focus to Achieve Living Income

The Foundation aimed to address low-income rural women’s economic inequity. Central to the Foundation’s approach was the role of networks – connecting available resources rather than creating new organizations – in building economic opportunity for women. The Foundation assumed that there would be a model project somewhere else in the U.S. that would have developed relevant best practices. The Foundation contracted with the Rensselaerville Institute to research best practices and to develop an RFP. The Rensselaerville Institute’s southern office staff member, Pam Wilson, managed the contract. The research phase uncovered several ideas that indicated that the sector-based, career pathways approach was timely and working. However, there were no models that surfaced that focused on low-income rural women and that also included networks of support along with connections to resource organizations and employers. Thus, the project shifted gears from focusing on replication to focusing on development.

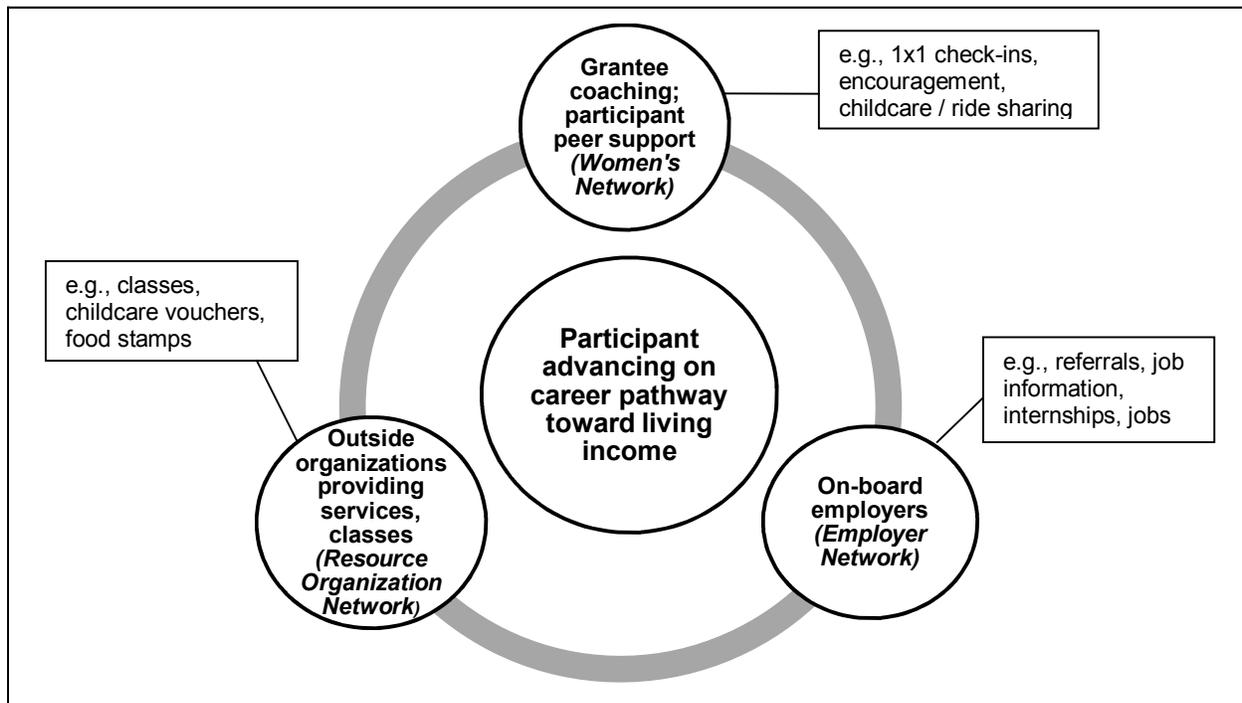
In a nutshell, a sector-based, career pathways approach facilitates participants getting necessary training, education, and other supports to help them secure specific types of jobs within a targeted employment sector (e.g., bio-technology). Sectors are targeted in part because they appear to be stable and growing. Over time, participants continue to advance within that sector by obtaining successively higher levels of education and employment – in this case aiming for employment providing a sustainable livelihood, as measured by reaching the Living Income Standard (LIS). For example, a participant in the healthcare sector might be on a pathway as follows: Certified Nursing Assistant to Licensed Practical Nurse to Registered Nurse. (See *Section 1.4: Challenges and Opportunities of Employment Sectors in Rural Settings and Appendix B: Career Pathways Maps*.)

Living Income Standard (LIS): The Living Income Standard (LIS) is a market-based approach to estimating how much income a family needs to pay for their most basic expenses. It is a conservative measure about what true living costs are (rent, utilities, food, child care, transportation, health care, etc.). (See *Section 2.1: Introduction*.)

1.3.2 Overall Participant Support Structure

Figure 1-1, *Direct, Individual-Level Supports for Participants*, highlights the primary individual-level supports for participants envisioned by WEE Project developers.

Figure 1-1: Direct, Individual-Level Supports for Participants



Systems Change: In addition, the Foundation envisioned that these networks would help leverage change in the sector-based, career pathways systems in a community. Systems change, in this context, refers to changes or improvements in the way education-training-job development-employer-support service systems operate individually and collectively to facilitate living income career pathways for participants. Here, systems change is referring to changes in structure, policy, practice, linkages, and resource allocation primarily at organizational or inter-organizational levels. Examples are below.

The Women's Network, Employer Network, and Resource Organization Network are described in greater detail next.

Women's Network: WEE Project developers envisioned a number of ways that grantees would offer support directly to WEE participants in addition to developing and cultivating employers and resource organizations. The Women's Network was defined broadly as the direct supports that would be offered to participants in the form of emotional, educational, material, and logistical support to facilitate their journey to a living income. An important assumption of the WEE Project developers was that peers in the project were well-placed to support each other and to increase one another's success rates.

Employer Network: Embedded in the WEE project approach was thinking from the earlier Women's Initiative that top-down (employer-worker) does not usually reach all the

way down, and bottom-up (worker-employer) does not usually reach all the way up. The WEE Project sought to demonstrate that this goal of growing this connective tissue could be achieved without creating new organizations. Instead, sites were to act as intermediaries between job seekers and employers, able to reflect both parties' interests in a way that typical employment agencies did not. In this reciprocal relationship, employers would find trained workers to hire. And workers would develop job skills, build their training and education credentials, overcome other barriers to employment, and find appropriate jobs. Moreover, employers would be engaged where possible in changing their own policies and structures and supporting change in workforce development systems.

Resource Organization Network: WEE Project developers envisioned a number of ways resource organizations (e.g., community colleges, departments of social services, food banks) in a region or county would be engaged to help coordinate and advance WEE participants' access to training and to employment. As with the Employer Networks, Resource Organization Networks would work on multiple levels. Resource Organization Networks would support individual participants (e.g., providing needed classes, helping participants secure transportation to class or work, or supplying childcare vouchers). Resource Organization Networks would also endeavor to address more structural or systems-level changes (e.g., community colleges adapting their offerings and policies to better serve part-time, working students).

(For more details, see Appendix C: Foundation's Original Vision of Women's, Employer, and Resource Organization Networks.)

1.3.3 Foundation Outcomes

The Foundation's WEE Project Board Committee, staff, and program design consultant Pam Wilson developed the original WEE Project outcomes. *(See Appendix D: ZSR WEE Project Outcomes.)* This document outlined what the Foundation anticipated the overall outcomes of WEE would be, across the four original grantees. The change in WEE participants' economic status was targeted as:

- 400 women achieve economic equity; at minimum, a majority of the women are in living wage jobs and the remainder are on career pathways towards living wage jobs
- 1,000 women are enrolled by end of project

In addition, the outcomes document also gave significant attention to the role of Employer, Resource Organization, and Women's Networks.

Grantees were each required to develop their own benchmarks for their projects. These benchmarks were to parallel the Foundation's overall outcomes. As discussed later, while the Foundation was, certainly, party to the changes made in the grant program, it did not revise its formal overall outcomes to keep pace with its evolving thinking or the circumstances that evolved among grantees. Factors impacting achievement of outcomes and benchmarks included: one grantee withdrawing from the project at the end of the second year, other grantees adjusting their benchmarks to serve fewer participants than originally targeted, and the steep decline in the economy.

1.3.4 Key Foundation Inputs

Some of the key Foundation inputs planned for the WEE Project included:

- **Investigative phase funding:** while beyond the scope of this report, a period of time for prospective grantees to assess the feasibility of this work and to consider various strategies for approaching the work.
- **Grantee convenings:** gatherings of grantees, Foundation staff, and site coaches for learning and exchanging information. Some convenings also featured outside experts to supplement the internal learning.
- **Site coaches:** a consultant or Foundation Fellow assigned to work with a grantee to support its benchmarking, project design, project implementation, data, and overall learning efforts. Site coaches were the primary link between the Foundation and the grantees. The program design consultant also served as a site coach, lending additional continuity to these links.

As above, the original WEE Project timeline extended for three years of work. In the end, the Foundation agreed to continue funding the work for another year – and then another – when approached by CCA and FWV. Inputs including site coaching and convenings ended at the close of Year 3. Because AWE was on an extended timeline, its site coaching continued through Year 5.

Finally, while perhaps not a formal input, the WEE Project Board Committee provided guidance during the design and implementation phases of the WEE Project. This structure lent additional expertise to the Project and helped keep the work and progress of the WEE Project in front of the Board.

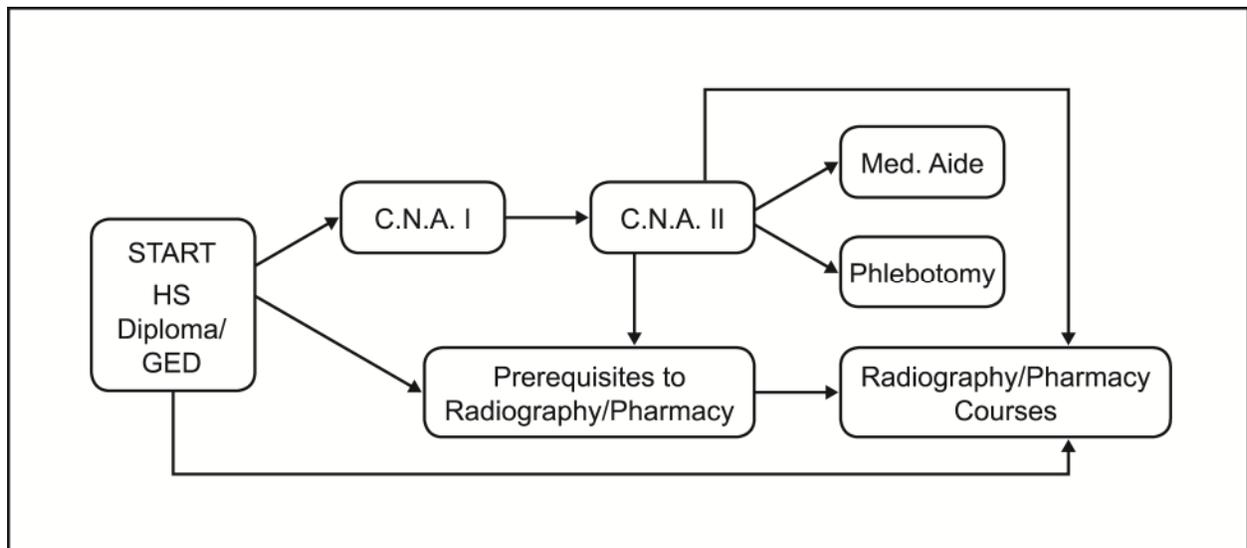
1.4 Challenges and Opportunities of Employment Sectors in Rural Settings

Reader's Note: This section of the report is unique in that it reflects the results of an in-depth facilitated dialogue with sector-based, career pathways grantees, their site coaches, and Foundation staff around the fundamental WEE focus on rural sectors discussed above.

Targeting specific employment sectors (e.g., healthcare and education sectors) was central to how the grantees constructed their work. During an investigative phase of the WEE Project, grantees researched the employment sectors in the county(ies) or region in which the project would operate to determine which sectors offered viable employment opportunities. This research was aimed at identifying sectors that: offered living income wages with a career pathway; were attainable in a reasonable timeframe given necessary training, etc.; would likely remain in the community; would employ a sizeable number of WEE participants in an ongoing way; and were sufficiently appealing to participants (see below).

Grantees then sketched out career pathways that participants could pursue to advance to a living income standard. (See *Figure 1-2: Sample FVW Career Pathway Diagram: Radiography Tech. or Pharmacy Tech.*) As part of the enrollment process, participants were briefed about relevant sectors' career pathway options including employment opportunities, potential earnings, required education, and other factors.

Figure 1-2: Sample FVW Career Pathway Diagram: Radiography Tech. or Pharmacy Tech.



As grantees endeavored to use this sector-based approach over the course of time, questions emerged regarding whether a sector approach – particularly a multi-sector approach – was feasible in many rural areas, given the current weakness of many rural sectors in part due to economic realities.

Initially, one grantee was focused on high-tech manufacturing, bio-technology, and health care, only to see the economic downturn eliminate the high-tech manufacturing and bio-technology sectors in the region. The other grantee concentrated on health care and education, each of which remained viable. Both the health care and education sectors were seen as less exportable sectors and sectors with a strong tradition of female workers.

No one ever expected the economy to do what it did. ...If we'd foreseen the economic [collapse] coming, maybe we would have put [all our participants] in the safest place: [healthcare]. {grantee}

Whether a sector approach is realistic in rural areas remains an open question. In an extended Year 3 summary dialogue around this fundamental question, grantees still advocated for this approach and identified significant benefits such as:

- helping grantees focus their limited energy on a narrow set of sectors and jobs rather than be spread thinner across more sectors
- facilitating staff developing in-depth knowledge of a limited range of career and education areas so that staff coaching of participants was well-grounded
- providing participants with common ground (often working in or pursuing education toward work in the same sector) to build peer connections
- developing more significant relationships where true give-and-take was possible with targeted employers
- creating a local system of employers, other organizations, participants, and the broader community all focused on analyzing and strengthening a sector, with grantees as convener of this new local system
- promoting healthy competition for employees among employers in a sector

Grantees also raised the possibility of expanding the scope of their work within existing sectors. For example, health care sector jobs could include ordering, billing, or inventory management. Similarly, health care sector jobs could extend to other broader roles at a health care facility such as facility management and maintenance as long as other criteria were met related to the living income standard and career pathways.

Learnings from employment sector work were many, including the following:

- Projects needed to be as well-grounded as possible in local data about sectors before making choices on sectors. This included collecting information on all of the sector criteria highlighted above – some of which grantees were unsuccessful at gathering during the investigative phase and beyond. These challenges were, seemingly, due both to grantees' lack of expertise in this type of data gathering and the limited accessibility of some of this data as discussed below.
- Based on the data, grantees needed to ensure they included some most-stable sectors and had a plan for how to re-route participants to another sector if necessary.
- When cultivating employers, grantees were advised to use networks to reach the top worksite manager to ensure that top management appreciated how partnership could be value-added for the employer. After that, it became top management's responsibility to communicate partnership expectations to more front-line employees acting as liaisons. (This approach was seen as more successful than cultivation, for example, of the Human Resources director.)
- Participants' employment interests often included a desire for work relatively close to home (due to family obligations and lack of reliable transportation), non-rotating shift work (due to childcare needs), and limited physical labor demands.
- Necessary education and training needed to be reasonably accessible in terms of distance and cost.

1.5 Severe Challenges of the Economic Downturn

Reader's Note: This sub-section includes unemployment information relevant not only to the career pathways grantees but also to HandMade/AWE, the micro-enterprise grantee.

Massive Increases in Unemployment in Counties Served by WEE: Except for a short honeymoon period, over its five years, the WEE Project was overshadowed by the dramatic economic downturn. While use of secondary data is beyond the scope of this report, unemployment rates help illustrate the severity of the downturn in which the WEE grantees were working and in which participants were seeking higher paying jobs than they had previously held – or, in the case of AWE, seeking markets for their products.

All primary counties in which WEE projects operated experienced massive increases in their rates of unemployment during this period. Each WEE county's rate – with the exception of Mitchell – more than doubled between August 2007 and August 2011. (See *Table 1-2: Unemployment Rates for WEE Counties: 2007-2011.*)

Table 1-2: Unemployment Rates for WEE Counties: 2007-2011

| Location | Aug '07 % | Aug '08 % | Aug '09 % | Aug '10 % | Aug '11 % | Difference in % Rate: 2007 & 2011 |
|----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---|
| National | 4.6 | 6.1 | 9.7 | 9.6 | 9.1 | +4.5 |
| Statewide | 4.7 | 6.7 | 11.0 | 10.1 | 10.4 | +5.7 |
| Career Pathways Counties | | | | | | |
| Franklin | 4.6 | 6.8 | 10.4 | 9.0 | 10.1 | +5.5 |
| Robeson | 6.1 | 8.5 | 12.9 | 12.4 | 13.5 | +7.4 |
| Vance | 6.8 | 10.0 | 14.0 | 12.5 | 14.3 | +7.5 |
| Warren | 6.2 | 9.1 | 13.7 | 12.0 | 13.9 | +7.7 |
| Micro-Enterprise Counties | | | | | | |
| Ashe | 4.4 | 6.3 | 10.6 | 11.0 | 10.7 | +6.3 |
| Graham | 6.6 | 10.1 | 15.3 | 12.6 | 14.6 | +8.0 |
| Madison | 3.7 | 6.0 | 9.8 | 8.7 | 9.2 | +5.5 |
| Mitchell | 6.6 | 8.0 | 11.5 | 10.5 | 11.6 | +5.0 |
| Rutherford | 6.3 | 8.6 | 16.9 | 15.4 | 14.8 | +8.5 |
| Swain | 4.9 | 6.2 | 9.4 | 10.2 | 11.3 | +6.4 |
| Yancey | 5.2 | 7.8 | 11.5 | 10.5 | 11.6 | +6.4 |

Source: NC Employment Security Commission and US Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011

Preliminary Economic Implications for Career Pathways Projects: Noting again that grantee, Foundation staff, and coach reflections on the economy were collected in late 2009, the following economic implications were already in play, according to career pathways grantees:

- As discussed above, two of the three sectors – bio-technology and high-tech manufacturing – that one grantee had targeted and its participants had already invested in evaporated.
- Career pathway jobs were scarcer. Employers froze positions or filled open positions with temporary employees who received no benefits.
- Prospective participant numbers grew as unemployment and part-time employment grew.
- Some participants had to take a second job to make ends meet. Other participants who were students saw their Department of Social Services child care vouchers terminated. And rising gas prices made traveling to and from education and training difficult. All of these situations impacted participants' abilities to advance their education and training as quickly as they had planned.
- Other supports that employers had been offering (e.g., internship opportunities) to WEE participants became scarcer because employers eliminated such programs due to belt-tightening or shutdowns.
- Resource organizations saw a heightened demand for their services and, at times, a decreased budget and staff to respond to this demand.

In summary it appears essential that the WEE Project be examined in light of this unexpected massive economic downturn.

2. PARTICIPANT RESULTS FROM CAREER PATHWAYS, SECTOR-BASED PROJECTS

2.1 Introduction

Results Section Organization: This section highlights income, employer benefits, and education results of participants in the two sector-based, career pathways grantee projects. This section first defines the living income standard (LIS) and how it was specifically applied to this project. The section goes on to outline how the findings from both grantees were combined to present the results, how the results were organized by time periods related to participant enrollment dates, and by participants' economic standing vis a vis her advancement toward the LIS. This is followed by reminders about limitations of this data for the reader, after which the findings are presented. A section then explores the most likely factors contributing to the most successful participants, followed by a concluding examination of the potential influences of the economy on these results.

Living Income Standard (LIS): The Living Income Standard (LIS) is a market-based approach to estimating how much income a family needs to pay for their most basic expenses. It is a conservative measure about what true living costs are (rent, utilities, food, child care, transportation, health care, etc.). The actual dollar amount of the LIS varies among individuals depending on each person's household situation, specifically the number of children under 18 years old and the number of other wage earners in the household. In addition, the LIS is tailored for each geographic area. For example, one might expect the LIS to vary between Henderson, N.C. and New York City because New York City is known for having such a high cost of living. However, the LIS also varies significantly even among North Carolina's rural counties. See the N.C. Justice Center's report on the 2010 LIS in North Carolina to better understand the geographic variation of the LIS within North Carolina: <http://www.ncjustice.org/?q=node/916>.

LIS Standing of WEE Participants: The LIS varied, considerably, among the four N.C. counties in which these WEE grantees operated. The WEE database, developed with the support of the Foundation and the input of the two grantees, was designed to collect data from program participants over time and then to compare the data. For simplicity, the WEE database used 200% of the 2007 US Census Bureau's Poverty Threshold to calculate the LIS in all counties¹. The WEE database adjusted for family size and the number of wage earners.

¹ The Poverty Threshold is one of the primary measures of poverty in the U.S., and it is the measure used by the Census Bureau to describe the extent of poverty in the country. It is updated annually.

During development of the database, WEE grantee staff explained that *many women are only a man away from poverty*. Two income households surely facilitate achieving the LIS more quickly. However, to get a more precise measure of the influence of WEE in helping women secure living income jobs, these results include only the incomes of participants when calculating the LIS. Furthermore, to assess a participant’s progress toward the LIS, the database calculated each participant’s standing as a percent of the LIS tailored to her household.

To get to 100% of the LIS used in the WEE database, a woman with no children in her household would need to earn \$21,574 while a woman with three children in her household would need to earn \$42,200. This is a notable difference of \$20,626. The WEE database calculated each participant’s LIS standing using her earnings as a percentage of her tailored LIS at enrollment and at other points throughout her participation in the program. Changes in participants’ LIS standings are a key component of the results presented in this section. (See Table 2-1: *Examples of LIS Standing and Poverty Threshold in Dollars for Households with Different Numbers of Children Under 18 Years Old*).

Table 2-1: Examples of LIS Standing and Poverty Threshold in Dollars for Households with Different Numbers of Children Under 18 Years Old*

| Number of Children | 100% LIS | 75% LIS | Poverty Threshold |
|--------------------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| 0 children | \$21,574 | \$16,181 | \$10,787 |
| 1 child | \$28,582 | \$21,437 | \$14,291 |
| 2 children | \$33,410 | \$25,058 | \$16,705 |
| 3 children | \$42,200 | \$31,650 | \$21,100 |

*Includes only participant income. Income from other wage-earners in the household is not included here. These figures are based on 200% of the 2007 Poverty Threshold, developed annually by the U.S. Census Bureau. For more information about Poverty Thresholds: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/thresh07.html>

(See Appendix E: *Selected Living Income Standard Data Used*.)

About Data Collection: The first data point was at enrollment and then subsequent data was collected periodically for up to 48 months depending on the program, frequency of coach and participant contact, and the length of a participant’s participation in WEE. This analysis was able to assess participant progress over time. The following data were collected:

- Participant income (and additional income if there was a second wage earner)
- Household composition including number of children and wage earners

- Employment status, and if employed, number of hours and jobs worked
- Employment sector if employed (health care, education, high-tech manufacturing, etc.)
- Employer-provided benefits received, such as health insurance, paid leave, pension or 401k
- Demographics (age, race, educational achievement)
- Educational study status (whether participant was enrolled in education or training program, as well as what type, career pathway, and sector that participant chose as goal)

This variety of data was collected because the WEE Project was built around the assumption that the successful achievement of the Living Income Standard (LIS) and a career was a process that participants would engage in over time both through employment and advancing their education. While achieving the LIS was an end point, the database allowed changes in all variables to be considered to assess participants' progress along the way. WEE program staff collected data as it was reported to them by participants.

About the Data:

Combined Data from Two Grantees: Data combined from the databases of the two WEE grantees, FVW and CCA, are presented together in this analysis. The results section aims to highlight and understand the overarching results and trends in the five years of the career pathways WEE projects. So, while these results present the combined story of the two WEE career pathways grantees, there were notable differences between the grantees. *(See Appendix F: Program Policy and Participant Pool Differences between WEE Grantees: CCA and FVW.)*

Participant Pool: Out of 521 total participants, 399 were included in this analysis with 71% from CCA, and 29% from FVW. The difference in CCA-FVW participant numbers stems from the facts that a) FVW elected to limit participant enrollment to match staff capacity and b) FVW had more exclusions from their participant pool than CCA. *(See Table 2-2: Participant Enrollment by Program, Time Period, and Exclusion from Results). (See Appendix G: Explanation of How Career Pathways Data Set was Limited: by Issue, Program, and Number of Participants.)*

Table 2-2: Participant Enrollment by Program, Time Period, and Exclusion from Results

| Enrollment Factors | Number of Participants | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|
| | CCA | FVW | All |
| Time Period | | | |
| Early Years (2007-2008) | 130 | 121 | 251 |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | 183 | 66 | 249 |
| 2011 | 20 | 1 | 21 |
| Total Enrollment | 333 | 188 | 521 |
| Excluded from Analysis | 48 | 74 | 122 |
| Total in Analysis | 285 | 114 | 399 |
| Percent in Analysis | 71% | 29% | 100% |

Because the combined participant pool included more than twice as many CCA as FVW participants, any unique differences of FVW participants would likely be muted in these findings. However, because these results were focused on the overall WEE outcomes, the authors determined that any differences between grantees were not relevant for this analysis.

Limitations: The findings may be limited in the following ways:

- Grantee staff gathered data directly from WEE participants. The integrity of the data is based on the reliability of participant self-reports and the quality of grantee staff documentation. Typically, grantees did not verify income or other data.
- This data speaks to the experiences and achievements of particular participants enrolled in CCA's and FVW's projects. Results from this analysis cannot be generalized to other WEE-type projects.
- The number of participants in the combined databases is relatively small (521) and has been adjusted downward (399) to assure a more accurate analysis. It is not known how the data from the excluded participants may have influenced these findings. The scope of this analysis was limited to examining overarching trends and results.

Many issues beyond the scope of this analysis could be studied such as:

- the pace at which participants advanced in education or income

- which education and work strategies or combinations were most effective and rapid (e.g., full-time schooling and no work versus part-time schooling and part-time work versus part-time schooling and full-time work, etc.)
- the influence, if any, on the pace of advancement toward the LIS of a single wage earner household or a household with two or more wage earners
- consideration of the influence of age on participant earnings and the pace of advancement
- differences in participant progress as related to targeted careers or sectors

These analyses require resources beyond the scope of this project and, in some cases, beyond the available data.

2.2 Participant Findings and Interpretation

Content: Participant data was collected from each participant at two points in time, allowing the analysis to compare participants' economic and educational achievement between two data points. The first data point marked when participants first enrolled in WEE. In these results, this data point is referred to as "**enrollment.**" The second data point was in 2011 and is referred to as "**most recent.**" The comparisons in these results measure any change (or lack thereof) in participants' income, employer benefits, and education from enrollment to most recent.

Terms Used in Results Presentation: To streamline the below presentation and discussion, participants are organized into different groups. One group describes participants' achievement: LIS Standing. The other group describes the time period in which participants enrolled and the length of time they participated in the program. It will be useful for the reader to become familiar with these concepts because they are used throughout these results.

LIS Standing places participants into two broad categories to describe their economic achievements. These two categories are referred to as:

- **75+ LIS:** The 75 plus (75+ LIS) category includes participants who earned from 75% to 100% or more of LIS. Income for participants in the 75+ LIS category ranged from \$16,800 to \$52,000.
- **74- LIS:** The 74 minus (74- LIS) category includes participants who earned 74% or less of LIS. Income for participants in the 74- LIS category ranged from no income to \$37,310.

Time Period for enrollment places participants into two categories to describe when a participant entered the project and her length of time in the project. These two categories are referred to as:

- **Early Years:** Participants who enrolled in 2007 and 2008, before the full impact of the economic recession hit, are grouped together into one category called the "Early Years." These participants also experienced the WEE program for a longer time period than those in the Later Years.
- **Later Years:** Participants who enrolled in 2009 and 2010, in the midst of the economic recession, are grouped together into one category called the "Later Years." These participants also experienced the WEE program for a shorter time period than those in the Early Years.

Sequence of Results: Participant achievement differed significantly between Early Years participants and Later Years participants. Early Years participants achieved notably greater success than those in the Later Years. (See Table 2-3: LIS Standing by Time Periods.)

Table 2-3: LIS Standing by Time Periods

| LIS Standing | Time Frame | | | | ALL Participants | |
|----------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| | Early Years (2007-2008) | | Later Years (2009-2010) | | | |
| | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| 75+ LIS | 79 | 41 | 18 | 9 | 97 | 24 |
| 74- LIS | 115 | 59 | 187 | 91 | 302 | 76 |
| TOTAL | 194 | 100 | 205 | 100 | 399 | 100 |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194
 Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

These findings begin with a summary of economic and educational achievements of all 399 WEE participants regardless of time frame or LIS standing. Then, due to the marked differences described above, the remaining findings are presented in three sub-sections. These are organized by time period and LIS standing and start with the participants who had the greatest achievements. These three-sub-sections are as follows:

- Early Years (2007-2008) 75+ LIS participants
- Early Years (2007-2008) 74- LIS participants
- Later Years (2009-2010) All LIS participants

Within each of the above sub-sections, the analysis focuses on changes in three areas:

- income
- employer benefits
- education

2.3 All Participants: Summary of Findings

This sub-section provides an overview of the combined economic and educational achievements of all 399 WEE participants. One of the “big picture” questions to consider is:

To what extent did WEE participants move out of poverty and into a career pathway job earning 100% of the LIS?

2.3.1 Income

By 2011, the most recent data point, WEE participants’ progress included:

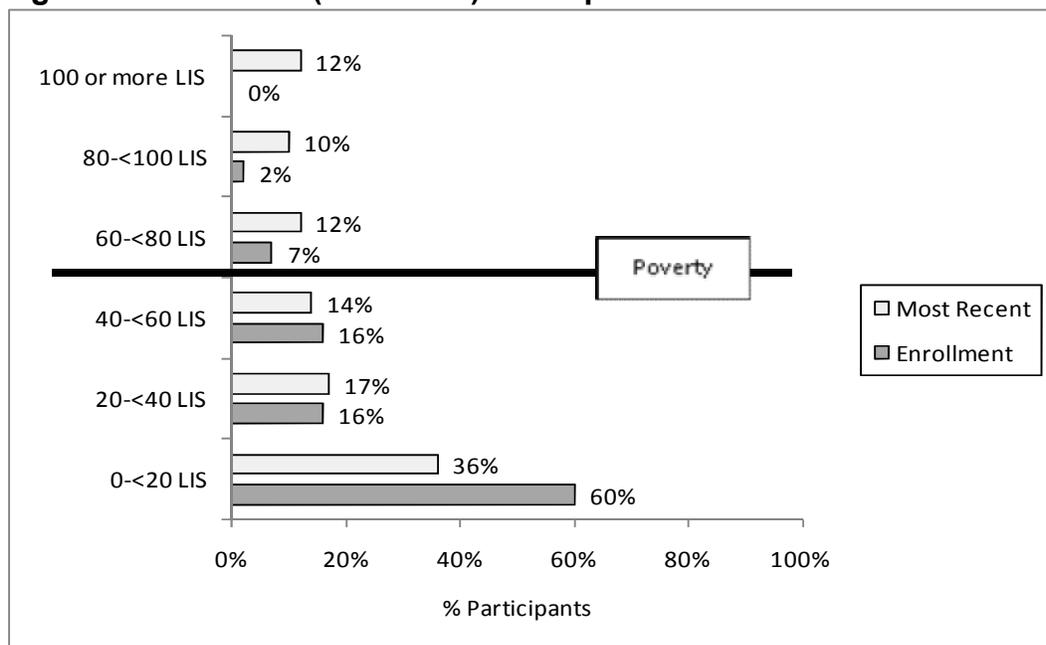
- **12% advanced their annual earnings to 100% of the LIS (49/399).** These participants’ mean annual income was \$33,900, with a minimum of \$21,734 and a maximum of \$52,000 in annual earnings.
- **An additional 12% advanced their earnings to between 75 and 99% of the LIS (48/399).** These participants’ mean annual income was \$27,550, with a minimum of \$16,800 and a maximum of \$41,600 in annual earnings.
- **The remaining 76% of WEE participants – those earning 74% or less of the LIS – increased their mean annual earnings by 68% (302/399).**
- **However, with mean annual earnings of \$8,760, the vast majority of the 74-LIS participants remained well below the federal poverty threshold in 2011.** (See above Table 2-1: Examples of LIS Standing and Poverty Threshold in Dollars for Households with Different Numbers of Children Under 18 Years Old.)
 - **Mean annual earnings and unemployment differed significantly between Early and Later Years 74- LIS participants:**
 - Early Years 74- LIS mean annual earnings were \$12,387. (24% were unemployed at most recent.)
 - Later Years 74- LIS mean annual earnings \$6,530. (51% were unemployed at most recent.)
 - **LIS standing increased to 36% of the LIS for Early Years 74- LIS participants and to 19% for the Later Years 74- LIS participants.**
 - **LIS standing for 60% of all participants was less than 20% of the LIS at enrollment. Participants in this lowest LIS range began WEE participation at the bottom of the economic ladder, far below the poverty threshold. They, therefore, had the greatest economic ground to cover to achieve 75% or more of the LIS.** (Participants

earning less than 20% of LIS at enrollment: Early Years: 44%, Later Years: 75%).

- **Almost three-quarters of employed participants were working in their chosen employment sector at most recent** (85% for 75+ LIS participants, 67% for 74- LIS participants). The health care sector was the primary sector for participants, particularly after the high-tech manufacturing and bio-tech sectors dried up at one site where those sectors had been targeted. A small percentage of participants chose the education sector (9%).

(See Figure 2-1: All Years (2007-2010) Participants: LIS Achievement; see also Figure 2-2: Early Years (2007-2008) Participants: LIS Achievement and Figure 2-3: Later Years (2009-2010) Participants: LIS Achievement.) Once again, these results should be reviewed in light of the major economic crisis that struck in 2008.

Figure 2-1: All Years (2007-2010) Participants: LIS Achievement

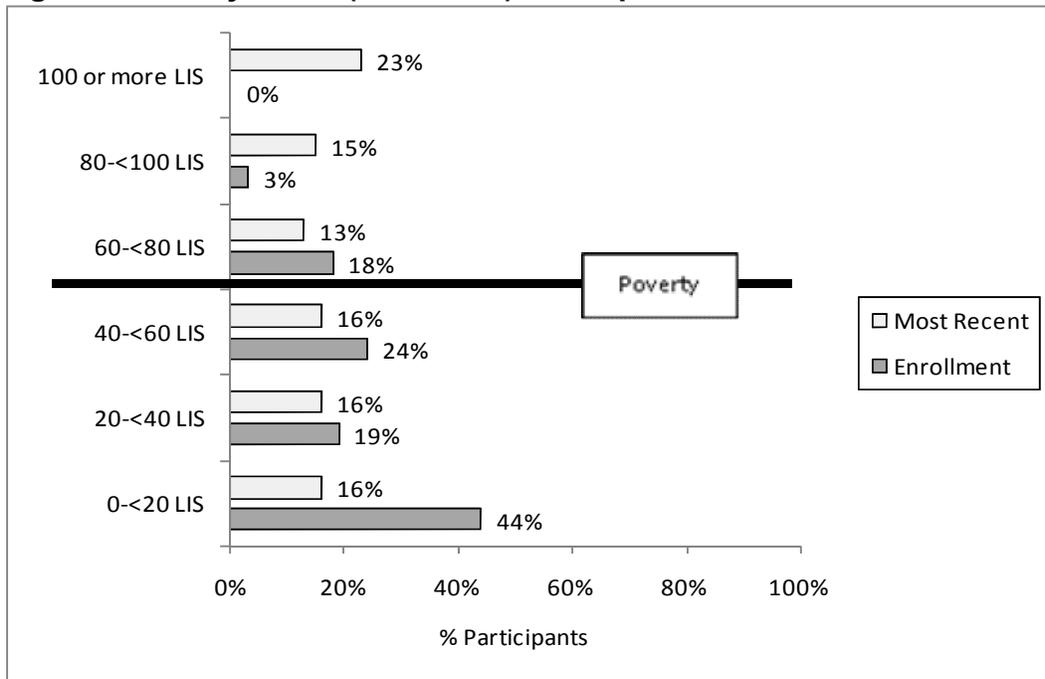


All Years n=399

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

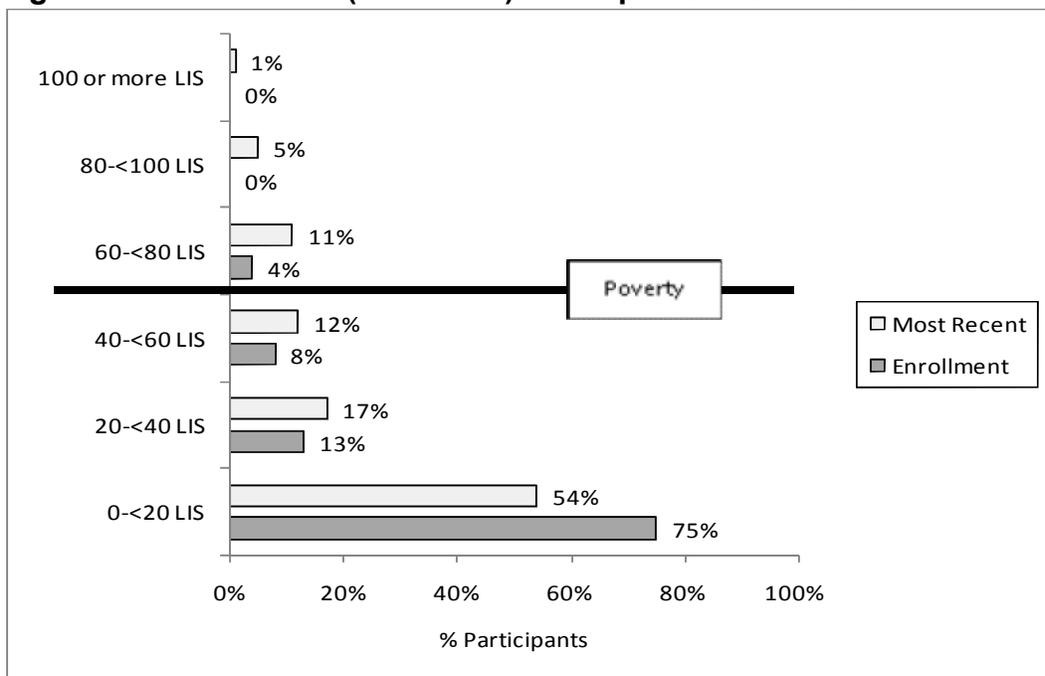
The two figures that follow compare Early and Later Years LIS participant achievement from enrollment to most recent. These figures provide an opportunity to examine the significant differences between participants' LIS standing at enrollment in the two time periods.

Figure 2-2: Early Years (2007-2008) Participants: LIS Achievement



Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Figure 2-3: Later Years (2009-2010) Participants: LIS Achievement



Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

2.3.2 Employer Benefits

Employer-sponsored benefits were generally unchanged for the vast majority of WEE participants with the exception of the Early Years 75+ LIS participants.

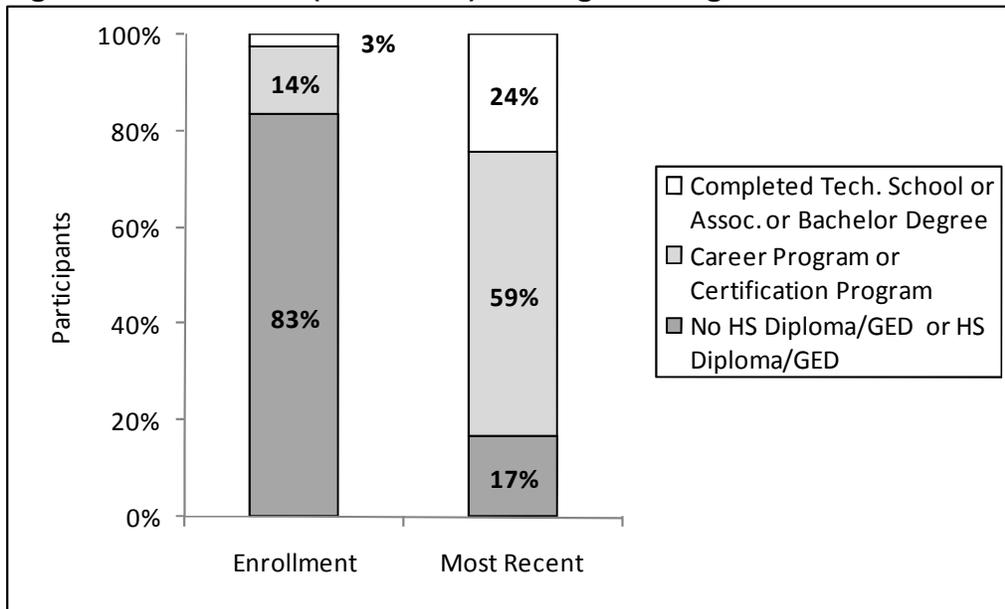
- Three-quarters of Early Years 75+ LIS participants received employer-sponsored benefits including health insurance and paid leave time including sick, vacation, and holiday time at most recent. This was a three-fold increase in these benefits since enrollment.
- 58% of Early Years 75+ LIS participants also had an employer-sponsored 401k program.
- For all other participants, 18% or fewer had any type of employer-sponsored health insurance, paid leave time, or 401k program. (See *Appendix H: Additional Career Pathways Results.*)

2.3.3 Education

Two-thirds of all WEE participants completed higher educational levels.

- **24% completed technical school or earned an associate or bachelor degree** compared to 3% at enrollment.
- **59% completed a career or certification program** compared to 14% at enrollment.
- **For 83% of participants, the highest level of education completed at enrollment was a high school diploma or GED or neither.** This dropped to 17% at most recent.
- **All participants (19) who did not have a high school diploma or GED at enrollment advanced to higher education levels at most recent.** (See *Figure 2-4: All Years (2007-2010): Changes in Highest Education Level Completed.*)

Figure 2-4: All Years (2007-2010): Changes in Highest Education Level Completed



Legend Note: "Career Program or Certification Program" is shorthand for "Completed Career Program Certification/ Diploma or Certification Exam / Requirements"

All Years n=399

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

2.4 Early Years 75+ LIS Participants: Summary of Findings

To most clearly illuminate the accomplishments of WEE participants with the greatest gains, this sub-section focuses solely on the Early Years (2007-2008) participants who achieved 75% or more of the LIS at their most recent data point in 2011. There were 79 participants in this group of the total 194 Early Years participants, or 41%.

2.4.1 *Income*

Early Years 75+ LIS participants advanced their annual earnings to 75% or higher of the LIS, an average increase of over \$20,000 per participant.

- **Achieved 100% of LIS:** 59% of the Early Years 75+ participants (47/79) increased earnings to 100% or more of the LIS.
- **Achieved 75-99% of LIS:** 41% of the Early Years 75+ participants (32/79) achieved 75-99% of the LIS.
- **Mean Annual Income Increased Substantially:**
 - **Most Recent:** Mean annual income increased an average of 66% (over \$20,000 per year) to a mean annual income of \$31,353.
 - **At Enrollment:** Mean annual income was \$10,767. (See Table 2-4, *Early Years (2007-2008) 75+ LIS Participants: Mean Annual Income and Mean LIS Standing.*)
- **LIS Standing Increased Considerably:**
 - **Most Recent:** Average LIS standing increased by 70%. This was a three-fold increase to a mean LIS of 105%. LIS standing was 35% of LIS when these participants began WEE.
- **Combined Annual Earnings Increased More than \$1.6 Million:** At the most recent data point, the 79 participants' combined annual earnings totaled almost \$2.5 million per year. This was nearly a three-fold jump, from the \$851,000 combined annual earnings at enrollment.

Table 2-4: Early Years (2007-2008) 75+ LIS Participants: Mean Annual Income and Mean LIS Standing

| LIS Standing | Mean Annual Income | | | Mean LIS Standing | | |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------|----------|
| | Enrollment \$ | Most Recent \$ | Change \$ | Enrollment % | Most Recent % | Change % |
| 75+ LIS | \$10,767 | \$31,353 | \$20,587 | 35% | 105% | 70% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, All Early Years n=194
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Furthermore, among the Early Years 75+ LIS participants:

- **Full-Time Employment Increased:** At the most recent data point, 92% of these participants were working full-time (40 or more hours/week). This was a 67% increase to full-time employment compared with 25% at enrollment.
- **Unemployment Dropped to Zero:** 32% of these participants were unemployed at enrollment. (See Table 2-5: Early Years (2007-2008) 75+ LIS Participants: Percent Employed a Minimum of 40 Hours/Week and % Unemployed.)

Table 2-5: Early Years (2007-2008) 75+ LIS Participants: Percent Employed a Minimum of 40 Hours/Week and % Unemployed

| LIS Standing | % Employed Minimum 40 Hrs/Week | | | % Unemployed | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------|--------------|---------------|----------|
| | Enrollment % | Most Recent % | Change % | Enrollment % | Most Recent % | Change % |
| 75+ LIS | 25% | 92% | 67% | 32% | 0% | -32% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+LIS Participants n=79, All Early Years n=194
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

2.4.2 Employer Benefits

Three-quarters of Early Years 75+ LIS participants received employer-sponsored benefits, including health insurance and paid leave time. For each of the benefits reported, there was a three-fold increase in the number of participants who received each of these benefits. (See Appendix H: Additional Career Pathways Results.)

- **Health Insurance: Significant advances in the number of participants receiving employer-sponsored health insurance.**

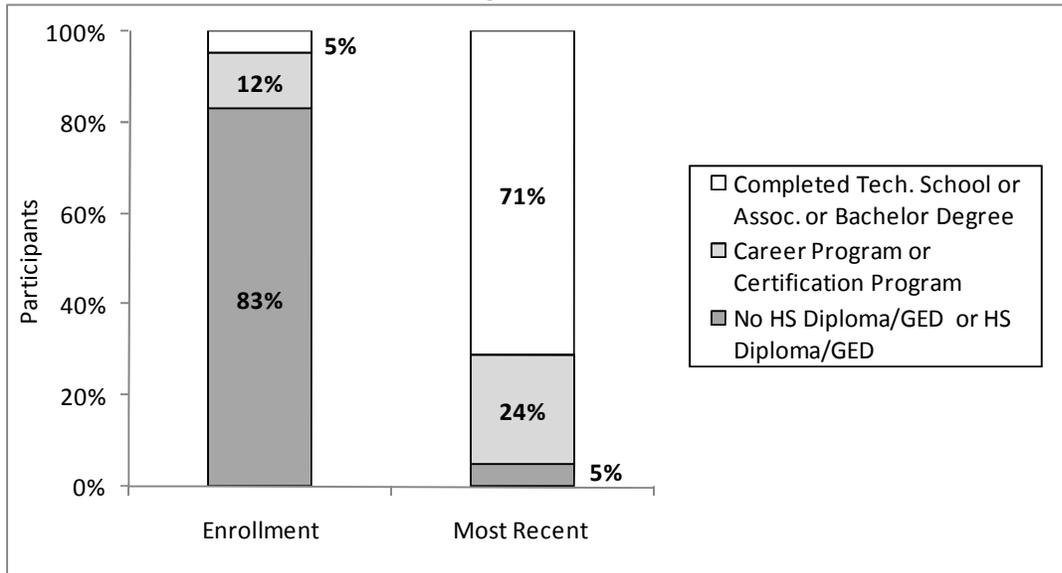
- **Most Recent:** 75% of these participants had employer-sponsored health insurance (59/79). Of employer-sponsored health insurance available to these participants, employers paid 100% of the health insurance costs for three-quarters of the participants (44/59). Employers paid 50% or less for 20% of participants (12/59).
- **At Enrollment:** 24% of these participants had employer-sponsored health insurance (19/79).
- **Paid Leave Time: Significant advances in the number of participants receiving employer-paid sick, vacation, and holiday time.**
 - **Most Recent:** Three-quarters or more of these participants received employer-paid leave time including sick (59/79), vacation (60/79), and holiday time (60/79).
 - **At Enrollment:** About one-quarter of these participants had employer-paid leave time (sick, vacation, and holiday).
- **401k: Notable advances in the number of participants receiving this employer benefit:**
 - **Most Recent:** 58% of these participants had employer-sponsored 401k programs (46/79). Of the employers with 401k programs, 63% offered an employer matching contribution (29/46).
 - **At Enrollment:** 11% of these participants reported employer-sponsored 401k programs (9/79).

2.4.3 Education

Early Years 75+ LIS participants made substantial advances in their highest education level completed.

- **Most Recent: 71% had completed technical school or earned an associate or bachelor degree.**
- **At Enrollment: 83% of these participants' highest level of education completed was a high school diploma or GED or neither.** At most recent this had dropped to 5% because so many had completed higher educational levels. (See Figure 2-5: *Early Years (2007-2008) 75+ LIS Participants: Changes in Highest Education Level Completed.*)

Figure 2-5: Early Years (2007-2008) 75+ LIS Participants: Changes in Highest Education Level Completed



Legend Note: "Career Program or Certification Program" is shorthand for "Completed Career Program Certification/ Diploma or Certification Exam / Requirements"

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, All Early Years n=194

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

2.5 Early Years 74- LIS Participants: Summary of Findings

This sub-section section focuses solely on the Early Years (2007-2008) participants who earned 74% or less of the LIS at their most recent data point in 2011. There were 115 participants in this group of the total 194 Early Years participants, or 59%.

2.5.1 *Income*

Early Years 74- LIS participants achieved a modest increase of \$4,672 per participant in their mean annual earnings.

- **Mean Annual Income Increased Modestly:**
 - **Most Recent:** Mean annual income increased to \$12,387 for these participants.
 - **At Enrollment:** Mean annual income was \$7,715 for these participants. (See Table 2-6: *Early Years (2007-2008) 74- LIS Participants: Mean Annual Income and Mean LIS Standing.*)
- **LIS Standing Increased Modestly:** LIS standing increased on average to 36% of LIS. This was a 12% increase for these participants. On average these participants earned 24% of the LIS when they began WEE. (See Table 2-6, *Early Years (2007-2008) 74- LIS Participants: Mean Annual Income and Mean LIS Standing*) below.
- **Combined Annual Earnings Increased by More Than Half a Million Dollars:** At the most recent data point, the combined annual earnings totaled \$1.4 million for these 115 participants. This was an increase of about \$537,000 from the \$888,000 combined earnings at enrollment.

Table 2-6: Early Years (2007-2008) 74- LIS Participants: Mean Annual Income and Mean LIS Standing

| LIS Standing | Mean Annual Income | | | Mean LIS Standing | | |
|----------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------|
| | Enrollment \$ | Most Recent \$ | Change \$ | Enrollment % | Most Recent % | Change % |
| 74- LIS | \$7,715 | \$12,387 | \$4,672 | 24% | 36% | 12% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194
May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Furthermore, among the Early Years 74- LIS participants:

- **Full-Time Employment Basically Unchanged:** At the most recent data point, 24% of these participants were working full-time (40 or more hours/week), compared with 20% at enrollment.

Unemployment Dropped: Unemployment among these participants dropped by 17% to 24% at the most recent data point compared to 41% at enrollment. (See *Table 2-7: Early Years (2007-2008) 74- LIS Participants: Percent Employed a Minimum of 40 Hours/Week and % Unemployed.*)

Table 2-7: Early Years (2007-2008) 74- LIS Participants: Percent Employed a Minimum of 40 Hours/Week and % Unemployed

| LIS Standing | % Employed Minimum 40 Hrs/Week | | | % Unemployed | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------|--------------|---------------|----------|
| | Enrollment % | Most Recent % | Change % | Enrollment % | Most Recent % | Change % |
| 74- LIS | 20% | 24% | 4% | 41% | 24% | -17% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

2.5.2 Employer Benefits

Less than one-fifth of these participants received employer-sponsored benefits of any type at the most recent data point.

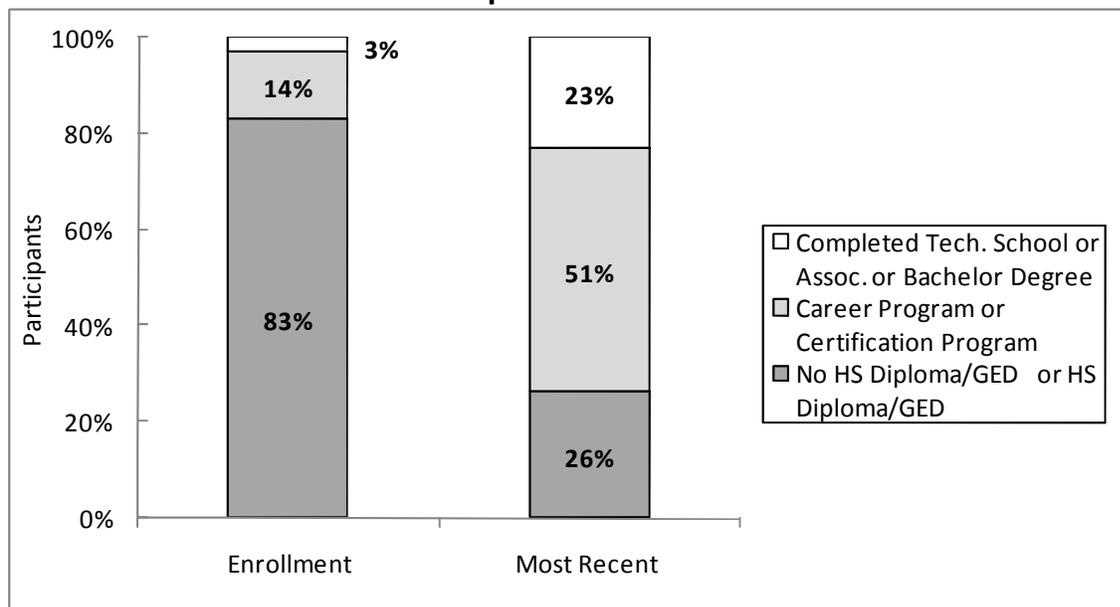
- **Health Insurance and Sick and Holiday Time Limited Advancement:** These participants had only limited advances in each of the following employer-sponsored benefits:
 - **Health Insurance:** 15% of participants received health insurance from employers at most recent. It had been 10% when WEE began.
 - **Sick time:** 18% of participants received employer-paid sick leave. This was up from 9% at enrollment.
 - **Holiday time:** 16% of participants received employer-paid holiday time. This was up from 9% at WEE enrollment.
- **Vacation Time and 401k Unchanged:** 9% of these participants received vacation time and 4% of these participants had an employer-sponsored 401k benefit. (See *Appendix H: Additional Career Pathways Results.*)

2.5.3 Education

Early Years 74- LIS participants made ample advances in their highest education level completed.

- **23% completed technical school or an associate or bachelor degree and 51% completed a career or certification program.**
- **At enrollment, the highest level of education completed by 83% of these participants was a high school diploma or GED or neither.** At most recent, this category had dropped to 26% because large numbers of participants had completed higher educational levels. All 11 participants who, at enrollment, lacked a high school diploma or GED had advanced to higher education levels at most recent. (See Figure 2-6: Early Years (2007-2008) 74- LIS Participants: Changes in Highest Education Level Completed.)

Figure 2-6: Early Years (2007-2008) 74- LIS Participants: Changes in Highest Education Level Completed



Legend Note: "Career Program or Certification Program" is shorthand for "Completed Career Program Certification/ Diploma or Certification Exam / Requirements"

Early Years (2007-2008): 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

2.6 Later Years All Participants: Summary of Findings

This sub-section focuses solely on the Later Years (2009-2010) participants. There were 205 participants who enrolled in this time period. Since there were only 18 (9%) of participants who achieved earnings of 75% or more of the LIS, they are folded into the “All” analysis below. Some select highlights of the 75+ LIS participants are also shared in this analysis. All participants from the Later Years are featured here. As with previous sub-sections, this analysis compares results from enrollment to the most current data point in 2011.

2.6.1 *Income*

All Later Years participants doubled mean average annual earnings, but earnings were so low that these participants remained in poverty.

- **Mean Annual Income Doubled and Participants Remained in Poverty**
 - **Most Recent:** Mean annual income was \$7,931 for these participants. (75+ LIS participants: mean annual income \$22,492).
 - **At Enrollment:** Mean annual income was \$3,897 for these participants. (75+ LIS participants: mean annual income \$6,303)
- **LIS Standing Increased Minimally:** LIS standing increased on average by 13% to 25% of the LIS. On average these participants earned 12% of the LIS when they began WEE. (75+ LIS participants: LIS standing increased by 64% on average rising from 25% of the LIS at enrollment to 89% of the LIS at most recent.) (See Table 2-8: *Later Years (2009-2010) All Participants: Mean Annual Income and Mean LIS Standing.*)
- **Combined Annual Earnings More than Doubled:** At the most recent data point, these participants’ combined annual earnings totaled \$1.6 million for the 205 Later Years participants. This increase was close to \$827,000, more than doubling the combined annual earnings at enrollment of \$799,000.

Table 2-8: Later Years (2009-2010) All Participants: Mean Annual Income and Mean LIS Standing

| LIS Standing | Mean Annual Income | | | Mean LIS Standing | | |
|--------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------|----------|
| | Enrollment \$ | Most Recent \$ | Change \$ | Enrollment % | Most Recent % | Change % |
| All | \$3,897 | \$7,931 | \$4,034 | 12% | 25% | 13% |
| 75+ LIS | \$6,303 | \$22,492 | \$16,189 | 25% | 89% | 64% |
| 74- LIS | \$3,666 | \$6,530 | \$2,864 | 11% | 19% | 8% |

Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

- Full-Time Employment Increased Slightly:** At the most recent data point, 14% of these participants were working full-time (40 or more hours/week), compared with 6% at enrollment. (75+ LIS participants: 45% working full-time most recent, 11% at enrollment.)
- Unemployment Dropped Modestly and Almost Half Remain Unemployed:** Unemployment among these participants dropped by 19% to 46% at the most recent data point compared to 65% at enrollment. (75+ LIS participants: 0% unemployment most recent, 50% at enrollment.) (See Table 2-9: Later Years (2009-2010) All Participants: Percent Employed a Minimum of 40 Hours/Week and % Unemployed.)

Table 2-9: Later Years (2009-2010) All Participants: Percent Employed a Minimum of 40 Hours/Week and % Unemployed

| LIS Standing | % Employed Minimum 40 Hrs/Week | | | % Unemployed | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------|--------------|---------------|----------|
| | Enrollment % | Most Recent % | Change % | Enrollment % | Most Recent % | Change % |
| All | 6% | 14% | 8% | 65% | 46% | -19% |
| 75+ LIS | 11% | 45% | 35% | 50% | 0% | -50% |
| 74- LIS | 5% | 11% | 6% | 67% | 51% | -16% |

Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n= 205
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

2.6.2 Employer Benefits

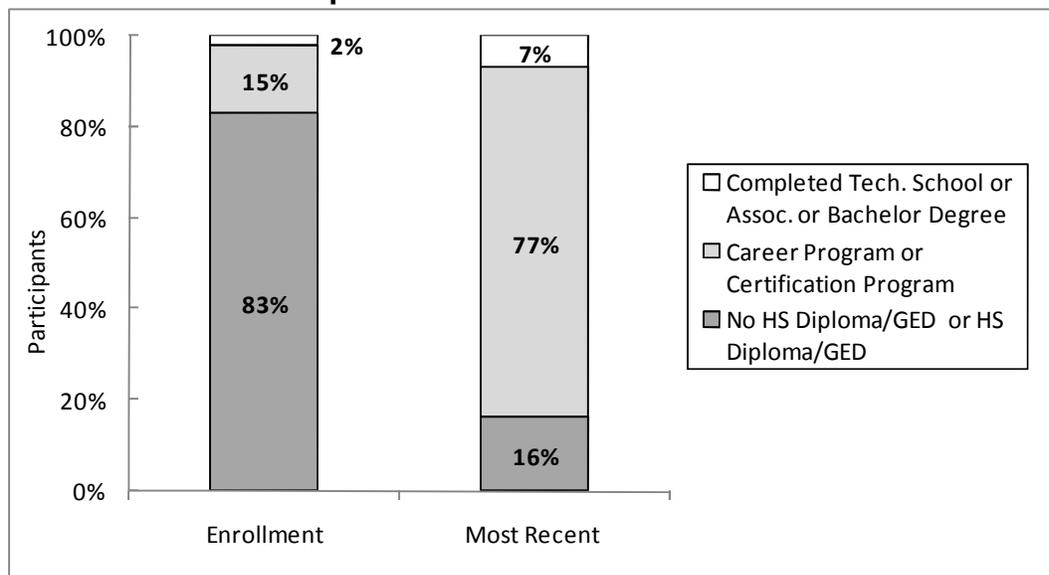
Almost none of the 205 Later Years participants received employer-sponsored benefits of any kind.

2.6.3 Education

Later Years All participants made important advances in their highest education level completed.

- 77% of these participants completed career or certification programs at most recent.
- At enrollment the highest level of education completed by 83% of these participants was a high school diploma or GED or neither. At most recent this category had dropped to 16% because large numbers of participants had completed higher educational levels. All 8 participants who, at enrollment, lacked a high school diploma or a GED had advanced to higher education levels at most recent. (See Figure 2-7: Later Years (2009-2010) All Participants: Changes in Highest Education Level Completed.)

Figure 2-7: Later Years (2009-2010) All Participants: Changes in Highest Education Level Completed



Legend Note: "Career Program or Certification Program" is shorthand for "Completed Career Program Certification/ Diploma or Certification Exam / Requirements"

Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

2.7 Influence of Demographics on Participants' Achievements

A brief summary analysis of the influence of the number of children in participants' households, participant race, and participant age on achievement follows:

- **Number of Children: Participants with one child or no children were significantly more likely to achieve 75% or more of the LIS.** The percentage of participants who achieved 75% or more of the LIS and the number of children in their households was as follows:
 - **One Child or No Children: 74% of 75+ LIS** (vs. 57% of *all* participants)
 - **Two or More Children: 26% of 75+ LIS** (vs. 44% of *all* participants)
 - **Three or More Children: 3% of 75+ LIS** (vs. 16% of *all* participants) *(See Table 2-10: Demographic Factors of 75+ LIS Participants: Number of Children Under 18 in Participants' Households.) (See Appendix H: Additional Career Pathways Results.)*
- **Having More Children Notably Increases Earnings Necessary to Reach the LIS: Because LIS calculations are based on the number of children under 18 living in the household, participants with more children had to earn higher incomes to achieve the LIS.** For example: a participant with no children who earned \$21,574 would be at 100% of the LIS. If that participant had three children, she would need to earn \$42,200 to be at 100% of the LIS.

Table 2-10: Demographic Factors of 75+ LIS Participants: Number of Children Under 18 in Participants' Households

| | Number of Children | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 or more |
| | % | % | % | % |
| % of All Participants | 33% | 24% | 28% | 16% |
| % of 75+ LIS Participants | 35% | 39% | 23% | 3% |

All Years n=399, All Years 75+ LIS=97
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

- **Race or Age: Generally speaking, it did not appear that the demographic factors of race or age were major factors in determining a participant's success in earning 75% or more of the LIS.**

- **The race / ethnicity and ages of participants who achieved 75% or more of the LIS appeared to be roughly the same as the representation of that race / ethnicity or age among all participants.** Readers are reminded that the numbers of participants in the 75+ LIS group are relatively small (97) and that once subdivided further, it becomes more difficult to make claims about small variations. (See *Table 2-11: Demographic Factors of 75+ LIS Participants: Race / Ethnicity*, and *Table 2-12: Demographic Factors of 75+ LIS Participants: Age at Enrollment*.) (See *Appendix H: Additional Career Pathways Results*.)

Table 2-11: Demographic Factors of 75+ LIS Participants: Race / Ethnicity

| | Race / Ethnicity | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------|
| | African American/ Black | Native American/ Indian | European American/ White | Other* |
| | % | % | % | % |
| % of All Participants | 58% | 25% | 15% | 2% |
| % of 75+ LIS Participants | 51% | 28% | 21% | 1% |

*Other includes: Latina/Hispanic, Bi-racial/Multi-racial, Asian American/Asian

All Years n=399, All Years 75+ LIS=97

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table 2-12: Demographic Factors of 75+ LIS Participants: Age at Enrollment

| | Age at Enrollment | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|------------|
| | 18-24 | 25-29 | 30-34 | 35-39 | 40 or more |
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| % of All Participants | 27% | 17% | 16% | 14% | 27% |
| % of 75+ LIS Participants | 25% | 12% | 11% | 22% | 30% |

All Years n=399, All Years 75+ LIS=97

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

2.8 Most Likely Factors Contributing to the Most Successful Participants: Early Years Participants

As discussed in detail above, Early Years participants had significantly greater advancement in income as well as employer benefits and education than Later Years participants. While beyond the scope of this analysis and the data available to drill down on contributing factors, it appears that the following factors may have influenced the success of those Early Years' participants who achieved earnings of 75% or more of the LIS:

- the time period in which participants enrolled
- participants' status as full-time workers
- degree of educational achievement

2.8.1 Early Years Time Period

The relative success of the Early Years participants suggests that the time of enrollment contributed to the success of the 41% of participants enrolled in the Early Years who advanced to earning 75% or more of the LIS. In addition, the 115 Early Years 74- LIS participants had considerable gains in income, LIS, and education that far outpaced all Later Years participants, with the exception of the 18 Later Years participants who earned 75% or more of the LIS. In addition to the strong possible influences of the economic downturn, which are discussed below, other possible explanations for these higher income and education achievements by the Early Years participants include:

- Stronger overall economic status at enrollment including:
 - Early Years participants having significantly higher at enrollment incomes, higher LIS standing, and lower unemployment rates. The Later Year participants experienced the corollary of lower incomes, lower LIS standing, and higher unemployment at enrollment. This difference in income and unemployment may relate to different economic conditions.
 - At enrollment, Early Years 75+ LIS participants earned on average 32% of the LIS; Early Years 74- LIS participants earned 24% of the LIS. This is considerably more than all the Later Years participants who earned 12% on average. Participants who enrolled in WEE at these low levels of LIS standing were well below the poverty threshold and had the greatest economic ground to cover to achieve 75% or more of the LIS.
- The requirements of an additional funder of both WEE grantees impacted the participant pool. The North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center required grantees to target enrollment toward women who were unemployed or

had been having difficulty in the economic downturn. This may have contributed to the Later Years' participant pool having substantially lower incomes and higher unemployment rates at enrollment. However, another explanation of the status at enrollment of Later Years participants was, simply, that the economic downturn had significantly worsened the status of prospective participants as a whole.

- Longer periods of time in WEE to launch and advance themselves on career pathways
- More time to further their education
- More coaching sessions from WEE staff over a longer time period
- Longest participation in peer support via regular group sessions or individual relationships
- Sufficient education gains to launch careers prior to the economic downturn

2.8.2 Full-Time Employment

It appears that gaining sufficient hours as well as employment compensation at a higher wage were key to moving toward higher income levels. Of the Early Years 75+ participants, 92% worked 40 or more hours each week while only 24% of the Early Years 74- LIS participants worked 40 or more hours each week. This is in stark contrast to the 14% of all Later Years participants who worked 40 or more hours each week.

2.8.3 Educational Achievement

It appears that achieving higher educational levels contributed to participants' success.

- **Early Years 75+ LIS:** Participants advanced their education considerably further than their peers with 71% completing technical school or earning an associate or bachelor degree at the most recent data point.
- **Early Years 74- LIS and Later Years All:** While these groups did make notable educational advances, they were of a lower magnitude than the most successful subgroup, described earlier. Only 13% of participants in this combined group completed technical school or earned an associate or bachelor degree at the most recent data point. These findings suggest that advancing to at least completion of technical school or earning an associate degree are key to earning 75% or more of the LIS. (See *Appendix H: Additional Career Pathways Results*.)

2.9 Potential Influences of Economy on Results

Most of the WEE Project's five years of operation overlapped with the economic downturn. More data collection (review of economic data, another round of interviews with grantee staff, and interviews with participants and employers) might have shed some light on the economy's likely impact. However, like other historic economic trends, this one may best be understood in hindsight. In the end, it is not possible to say how participants would have advanced under other economic circumstances. Presumably, participants would have made greater gains. Some possible impacts of the economy on WEE participant prospects and results may have included:

- WEE participants' attainment of living income standard jobs might have been seriously compromised in this economy.
- The number of participants who succeeded or their degrees of success toward the LIS might have been reduced.
- Unemployment rates might have seriously limited the number of WEE participants who could gain or retain LIS employment perhaps in a new career.
- More senior employees might have been retained in LIS jobs or the actual number of jobs in key careers might have been reduced in this economic downturn, hence limiting opportunities for newer employees to be hired.
- Employment of any type, for participants, might have been more difficult to attain and maintain.
- High unemployment rates and a larger than usual pool of low-wage workers might have depressed wage rates.
- Attendance in educational programs might have risen if participants were unable to find employment.

3. KEY BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CAREER PATHWAYS WORK

This section features five capacity areas that appear to significantly strengthen career pathways work:

- Cultivating and Using Relationships
- Supporting Participants
- Changing Larger Systems that Impact Participants
- Collecting and Using Data
- Using Strategic, Outcomes-Based Planning and Reflection

The first four of these capacities are profiled as key grantee capacities and are discussed from this vantage point, with an eye toward how the Foundation can better support this capacity area. The final capacity, using strategic, outcomes-based planning and reflection, is profiled as a key Foundation capacity and is discussed accordingly. Each discussion features:

- an overview
- successes
- challenges
- larger Foundation implications and considerations for the future

(For a complete listing of this last item: See Appendix I: Compilation from Report of “Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future”.)

3.1 Cultivating and Using Relationships (Building Block 1)

3.1.1 Overview

Grantees invested significant effort in relationship-building, particularly with participants. Cultivating of employer and resource organizations and of participants is highlighted below.

Employers and Resource Organizations:

Grantees demonstrated capacity to cultivate many key organizational relationships. However, grantees did not always have the staffing priority, staffing levels, skill, and/or the benefit of a healthy economic climate to transform these relationships into robust, mutually beneficial partnerships.

Central to the relationship-building that did take place was the overall organizational reputation of grantees, primarily as can-do and trustworthy organizations.

People knew that if this was a program that [our organization] was putting on, then it was credible, that it was going to be successful by any means necessary, and they were willing to partner with us on this project because they were already partnering with us... {grantee}

Also central – perhaps particularly with employers, some of whom were previously unfamiliar with the grantees – was grantees’ ability to make a compelling case for coming aboard. More generally, operating in communities where there was a basic level of trust among key players also facilitated relationship-building.

Grantees structured their employer and resource organization networks differently. One grantee combined sectors but kept an employer network and a resource organization network while the other grantee created a combined employer-resource organization network for each sector. One grantee worked to build links among network members while the other worked to make itself more the hub of a wheel of network members. One grantee used its employer network relationships to establish job shadowing opportunities for participants. (See Appendix J: FVW and CCA Employer and Resource Organization Network Overview). Neither grantee came close to facilitating a direct dialogue between Employer Network and Women’s Network.

At least at one site, the economic downturn meant much greater challenges getting employers to the table when demand for employees was low or non-existent and many employers had closed their doors.

Originally, there were thirty to forty employers... Over half the employers... are no longer in [business now]... [Especially]...major manufacturers... they're gone. Their commitment to internships, hiring, calling us when they have an opening – they're not here. {grantee}

And grantee investment in building networks waned over time. Overall, the networks tended to operate at a limited level, primarily focused on information-sharing rather than joint plan-making and action-taking.

Participants:

The positive organizational reputations of the grantees also appeared to be in play with prospective participants who came forward to join these programs. Referrals of prospective participants from other programs and organizations might also in part have been a sign of a positive organizational reputation – or, at the very least, successful outreach or promotion of a unique approach to support low-income women. Grantees invested significantly and consistently over the course of the project in building relationships with their participants, one participant at a time. These relationships – largely between the coaches of participants and individual participants – appeared to be strong and “real,” with participants able to have candid conversations about what was going on in their lives that might impact their WEE efforts. (See Section 3.2: Supporting Participants.)

[As a coach], you have to be more involved with it than just a job. It has to be something within you that has a burning desire [to do this work]. ...You may... have to call that lady or receive a call at 8 or 9 o'clock at night. {grantee}

3.1.2 Key Successes

- **Prospective Employee Assessment:** A grantee’s use of a job skill assessment tool, WorkKeys, seemed to hold some promise, though the economic downturn ultimately limited the tool’s use. WorkKeys appeared poised to help bridge the bottom-up and top-down gap between workers and employers by building a more transparent path to mutual benefit. The tool is a national tool developed by ACT and used extensively throughout the North Carolina Community College system. WorkKeys is used to profile specific skills needed for a particular job, assess the extent to which a job candidate’s current skills match those needed for the job, and develop a training/skill-building program to bridge the gaps for a particular job. Working through a local community college, some participants were able to

get a clearer picture of their strengths and gaps. And the grantee was able to talk with prospective employers in terms of these participants' job preparedness.

- **Appropriate Participant Coaches:** Grantees appeared to select coaches for participants who had the commitment, life experience, and overall relational skills to connect effectively with participants. Oftentimes, such coaching work involved off-hours calls, responding to crises, serving as a more general sounding board, and extended reaching-out to participants who had gone missing from the program. In many ways coaches seemed to provide the relational glue that kept participants connected to and invested in the program.

3.1.3 Key Challenges

- **Value-Added of Employer/Resource Organization Networks:** In the end it did not appear that grantees or employer or resource organization network members necessarily saw significant benefit from the networks as they were currently functioning. Particularly during times when resources are stretched thin, parties may be more likely to stay at the table if there is a clear sense of a shared mission and relatively near-term mutual benefit.
- **Demand for Employees Associated with Employer Collaboration:** Not surprisingly, it appeared that employers were often more willing to be an active part of a network when they were experiencing a high need for employees. In many cases, the economic downturn dramatically reduced or eliminated employer needs for employees or caused employers to close their doors.

3.1.4 Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future

- **If key, plan and invest in employer and resource organization network building.** Foundation outcomes and grantee benchmarks reflected expectations that grantees would build robust employer and resource organization networks. However, there did not appear to be a significant exploration at the Foundation or at the grantee level of the strategies and investment in relationship-building with employers and resource organizations that would be necessary. Building connectivity, particularly in terms of networks, is time-intensive and requires dedicated and skilled staff time and, perhaps, site coaching support.
- **Maintain dialogue about the relative importance of networks.** Related to the above, grantees were unclear if employer and resource organization networks were seen by the Foundation as a means to an end or an essential end unto themselves. When all was said and done, grantees had thrown most of their energy behind achieving their commitments to the Foundation regarding numbers of participants and participant progress. And grantees had let go of much focus on the networks helping to pave the way. Additional conversation

about the evolving role and potential of these networks and where to focus project resources might have been useful.

3.2 Supporting Participants (Building Block 2)

3.2.1 Overview

Grantees invested their most significant efforts in providing direct support to participants. In the end, this was the most fully implemented component of the Foundation's original approach. Grantees provided coaching on career pathways and related education, peer support opportunities, tuition and other financial support, referrals to other programs and agencies, general encouragement, facilitation of participant gatherings, and brokering of information and training sessions. (See *Appendix K: FVW and CCA Women's Network Overview*.) As discussed above, highly-committed grantee staff who served as coaches appeared to be central to these efforts.

It's "will" more than "skill" that makes the difference – motivation to change their life. ... You have to become sick of being sick. {grantee}

To elaborate on an above item, grantees researched and then clearly articulated to participants various career pathways options (e.g., high school diploma or GED to Bioprocess Technology course work to Biotechnology associate degree to Biotechnology living income job). Participant coaches worked through the likely educational and certification steps, job steps, and timeline with participants, factoring in participants' current training and employment status, course availability and costs, family responsibilities, and the like. The visual "maps" of various career pathways appeared to increase participants' sense of the journey. (See *Appendix B: Career Pathways Maps*.) Participant coaches and other staff also served as an information portal around relevant job openings, changes in community college course offerings, and worksite downsizing or closing. For one grantee, as one sector dried up, participant coaches had to shift participants to another sector. Coaches also looked more holistically at participants' situations and sometimes brokered financial assistance for participants.

Fixing one problem doesn't do the trick. If you go down a level or two, people have one or more basic existence [or] survival problems. All the way down to home repair... [and] Head Start. {grantee}

Grantees organized many participant gatherings, sometimes bringing in resource people to lend additional expertise to these gatherings. Other gatherings focused more on informal sharing among participants.

[It's important to have] social support and [to] hear how other women are dealing with the challenges. Family crises and responsibilities are a real challenge. For many women, it's their main concern -- especially for single parents [solely] responsible for their children. {grantee}

Grantees also provided meeting space and some equipment (e.g., computers) for participant use. One site provided a dedicated space, the “WEE Den,” solely for participant use.

3.2.2 Key Successes

- **Peer Support:** Along with coaching, peer support appeared to be a key program component. This support took a number of different forms including sharing challenges and getting encouragement or advice for overcoming them, reinforcing and celebrating successes, and having at least a few informal mentoring relationships develop. In addition participants provided some assistance for one another with childcare and transportation.
- **Opportunities for Participant Leadership Development:** Grantees focused some attention on more general participant empowerment. This took a variety of forms including: a) participants being encouraged to see themselves as a group and as individuals as contributors of time, talent, and/or treasure; and b) participants being encouraged to self-organize around mutual aid (e.g., childcare sharing), as noted above. This strategy aimed to support participants building a sense of individual and collective strength and purpose in helping other women and themselves.
- **Participant Confidence Building:** It appeared that the attitudinal support offered both by peers and participant coaches was central to participant advancement.
- **Participant Space:** Having a physical space specifically for participants to use also appeared to facilitate connecting and to provide a peaceful place – a luxury for many participants – for studying, decompressing, or using a computer/the internet.

3.2.3 Key Challenges

- **Participant Support Management Capacity at Start-Up:** Grantee ability to rapidly and comprehensively implement a participant support management system varied. It was a tall order for one grantee at start-up to begin at square one of developing an approach to working one-on-one with community members, creating individual participant record-keeping systems, establishing follow-up

protocols, and developing an extensive knowledge of the array of services and resources available to participants.

- **Coaching Focus:** There is growing focus on moving beyond just “managing cases” to putting participants in charge and equipping them with supports to succeed in articulating action steps and advancing toward their aims. Grantees did not have an articulated model of how to coach participants or a significant grounding in coaching practices. The Foundation offered a highly regarded day-long session on coaching at a WEE convening, bringing in a national trainer of coaches to demonstrate one coaching model. However, by that point in time, grantees were far along in their work. In addition, no resources were made available to facilitate WEE coaches obtaining certification.

3.2.4 Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future

- **Address coaching capacity-building and record-keeping needs.** Skillful coaching and record-keeping for the purpose of tracking participants are essential to this career pathways approach. Therefore, early assessing of these capacities and provision of appropriate training and technical assistance would likely strengthen programs. Since WEE’s inception, there are now several coaching models that offer both training and certification for working with participants who seek to make major investments in their economic futures. Adopting a coaching model and seeking certification for staff may be a wise investment. As well, as discussed below, a database that, in part, tracks contacts and the types of services and supports provided to participants, is an important tool that works hand in hand with a coaching model.

3.3 Changing Larger Systems that Impact Participants (Building Block 3)

3.3.1 Overview

There were early high hopes that WEE grantees would, through their employer and resource organization networks, leverage systems changes. (See *Section 1.3, Foundation's Original Vision for WEE, for more information on systems change.*) These would be changes in the way parts of the education-training-job development-employer-support service systems operated individually and collectively so that participants would be better supported in their career pathway toward economic stability. Examples include: employers instituting some non-rotating shift positions to accommodate single parents, community colleges offering a part-time or evening nursing program so participants could continue to work the day shift, or workforce development programs working more closely with a community college.

In summary grantees placed very little emphasis on seeking these types of changes. The results that can be considered somewhere in the realm of systems change included the following:

- a few agencies (e.g., community college, local Employment Security Commission) that did not traditionally partner with frontline programs began collaborating with grantees on WEE
- a college began offering additional support services to its students studying in one of the WEE sectors
- a home health agency that learned during a WEE network meeting that a competing agency was offering an education benefit to its employees began offering a similar benefit

For one grantee, its WEE work also provided an education for its staff about how much of what would assist WEE participants was related to what was *not* being done rather than what was being done “wrong” within systems that should have been supporting participants.

...So much in the literature [about systems] is about restructuring existing institutions' policies and practices. So, the [typical] strategy is about organizing a base of power and organizing and advocating for change. A more systems development approach is to focus on institutional neglect and what's not being done [as opposed to] institutional abuse and what needs to be halted. Both are needed. ...So much of injustice is institutional neglect, but abuse gets the attention. I've learned a lot about systems development through this project even though that's not where we've put our resources, mostly. {grantee}

3.3.2 Key Successes

Along with the above examples of progress on systems change efforts:

- **Dialogue Initiated:** It appeared that some relationships were being cultivated and some dialogue had been initiated around how to support WEE participants and others in similar situations. At least in the case of one grantee, employers and resource organizations were convening for the first time to discuss these issues.

3.3.3 Key Challenge

- **Systems Change Back-Burnered:** Systems change appeared to be a secondary focus for the grantees, though it remained an interest of the Foundation. This type of systems change work tends to be long-term, collaborative, macro-focused, and linked to broader trends at the state and national levels. In addition, this type of work requires a different skill set. Shifting linkages and ways of working to achieve this type of systems change typically calls for significant investment. It appeared as though, even for the more systems change-oriented grantee, grantees were stretched too thin to embrace their full potential as agents of systems change. Again, the economic downturn placed even greater pressure on grantees to somehow facilitate participants' income growth, and the more immediate individual-oriented work of coaching and the like appeared to absorb the limited staff time and energy that was available.

3.3.4 Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future

- **Clarify degree of emphasis on systems change.** Clarifying expectations about systems change would, likely, have been useful for all parties. As it was, it did not seem feasible for these grantees – given their capacities, the tall order of project start-up and their ambitious participant benchmarks, project budgets, and the economy – to comprehensively take on systems change work.

- **Invest in systems change capacity building.** Ideally, grantees would have joined with other key WEE players (employers, to the extent possible; resource organizations; participants; etc.) to analyze the systems impacting participants, identify the most “actionable” systems changes that would most support participants and others treading in similar waters, and work with other parties to try to leverage change. Such efforts typically benefit from:
 - staff capacity-building or direct technical assistance on systems change work
 - additional research support
 - capacity-building around coalition-building
 - more financial support for the needed staffing of the effort
 - an appreciation for the long-term nature of systems change efforts
 - where appropriate: partnering with another organization more skilled at advocating for systems changes

Particularly given the Foundation’s commitment to broader change, more investment in this type of effort (e.g., even the modest changes of getting a local community development corporation to add an education Individual Development Account (IDA) or getting a community college to offer evening courses) in concert with the service delivery work might have increased WEE Project impact.

3.4 Collecting and Using Data (Building Block 4)

3.4.1 Overview

The WEE Project outcomes emphasized the use of data to capture change and guide project development. More specifically, the WEE Project relied on skillful collection and interpretation of data in two main areas:

- Assessing employment sector and career pathways feasibility
- Tracking participant supports and employment, income, and education progress

In order to select employment sectors and career pathways, grantees searched for data. Grantees collected and examined employment and workforce data, as well as data regarding the accessibility (distance, costs, timeframes, etc.) of education and training and other supports needed to help participants advance on career pathways. Grantees experienced limited success in finding the data they sought, particularly more specific employment data.

To track participant supports and outcomes, grantees each created their own tracking devices using Excel spreadsheets. Grantees used these spreadsheets to collect participant demographic data, contacts with participants, wages, types of jobs, and the like. While grantees had developed these spreadsheets to document and track data to share with the Foundation, they had not made plans about how they would assess participant movement over a multi-year time frame – a more complex endeavor.

After identifying a need for such a tool and working with grantees on the overall design, New Perspectives developed a tailored database to collect participant data early in Year 3. The database was developed in Microsoft Access because grantees had that software available to them. The database became a central WEE Project component and was considered of great value by all parties. Grantees received a modest amount of training and technical assistance in using the database, generating reports, and analyzing and interpreting the data just as site coaching was wrapping up.

3.4.2 Key Successes

- **Transition to Quality Participant Data Collection and Analysis:** The Foundation made a successful investment in developing the WEE site-level database. Without it, very few detailed results such as those highlighted in this report would be available to the Foundation and to the sites for assessing progress, identifying areas of program strength and program challenge, and showcasing results to garner support.

- **Improved Site Capacity around Participant Data:** Grantee ability and commitment to collect, enter, and analyze data increased somewhat following the development of the tailored database and technical assistance.

3.4.3 Key Challenges

- **Insufficient Sector/Employment-Related Data:** Grantees found it challenging to collect employment sector and career pathways data relatively quickly and comprehensively. The types of data that would have been useful included:
 - sector vulnerability to an economic downturn
 - sector and employer capacity to employ a steady stream of employees via clear and distinct career pathways
 - typical sequence, timing, pay, benefits, and training availability for various positions
 - position turnover rates

Grantees were not always successful at gathering this data during the investigative phase in part because of the limited accessibility of some of this data. For example, private corporations do not as a rule make this type of information accessible to the public. As a result, sites proceeded without the benefit of some data that would have best helped them select employment sectors and career pathways. The limitations of this data also reduced the Foundation's ability to assess the viability of the approaches proposed by each site.

- **Limitations of Database and Technical Assistance:** While the database development and implementation advanced grantees' abilities to collect and report data, their data capacities remained at a fairly basic level. Only one staff member per site entered data and used the database. This arrangement was, perhaps, reinforced by the database's user limits: only one staffer could use the database at any given time. In the end, grantee data capacity was mostly limited to that one staff person.

Furthermore, due to the configuration of MS Access, the WEE database reports were not particularly user-friendly. Moreover, the database and reports were designed to focus primarily on data needed for Foundation reporting and not on other areas that would have better informed program development. The Grantees also received limited data technical assistance. All of this appeared to contribute to grantees not digging into their data as a means of building a stronger project.

3.4.4 Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future

- **Provide early capacity assessment and support around data.** Early assessment of grantees' data capacities and development of tailored supports would likely strengthen this work. For employer data collection and interpretation, grantees might benefit from how-to materials, specific technical assistance, and/or partnering with a community-oriented researcher or other party well-grounded in workforce development. However, as described above, some important employer data might still remain out of reach. For participant data analysis, interpretation, and use, grantees would likely benefit from Year 1 initiation of technical assistance and of database use and ongoing support throughout the project.
- **Invest in a more sophisticated database.** As discussed, the database was modest. Other commercially available programs (e.g., Salesforce or Social Solutions) integrate more functions with traditional database tools. Such programs can be accessed by multiple staff within an organization and can integrate participant communication, note keeping, and the like into one system. These programs can also generate more grantee-friendly reports. Such an investment holds promise for facilitating stronger data analysis, interpretation, and use among grantees.
- **Consider grantee staffer focus on data.** Many prospective grantees do not have sufficient data capacity. Along with assessment and capacity-building, it may be useful to consider dialoguing with grantees and investing in dedicated grantee staff member time on data-related work. The most appropriate staffer may not be a current program person. While such a strategy fails to address the broader need for organizations to undergo a culture change around data analysis and use, it can help institutionalize the function and provide an opportunity to build from there.

3.5 Using Strategic, Outcomes-Based Planning and Reflection (Building Block 5)

3.5.1 Overview

The Foundation included an investigative phase prior to Year 1 where sites conducted research (e.g., promising employment sectors) and explored approaches to the work. Following the investigative phase, the Foundation dove deeper into articulating its WEE Project outcomes and determining how to complete more macro-level planning with grantees. The Foundation engaged the WEE Project Board Committee, staff, and a program design consultant in the process. Grantees were required to develop specific benchmarks (their outcomes) for their WEE work that paralleled the Foundation's overall WEE outcomes. However, the timing was not aligned. Grantees were required to develop and submit their projects' benchmarks before seeing the Foundation's overall WEE outcomes and without benefit of operating their projects for period of time to assess progress. Over time, the Foundation focused more attention on grantee benchmarks rather than on Foundation outcomes.

3.5.2 Key Successes

- **Investigative Phase:** While beyond the scope of this report, having an investigative phase appeared to provide a valuable opportunity for grantees to examine in-depth which approaches were most feasible in their communities. One site used this phase to conduct a cohort study, examining three different participant cohorts (e.g., participants who already had a high school diploma or GED) to consider which would best succeed in getting to a living wage in the WEE Project over the intended timeframe.
- **Thoughtful Outcomes Development:** The Foundation engaged a strong board-staff-consultant team in an extensive process, grounded in what research and expertise was available, to articulate its outcomes and to be transparent about them.
- **Grantee Focus on Benchmarks:** By working within a benchmarks context, grantees focused more concretely on their intended outcomes rather than on outputs, as required in some of their other projects. Part of this process also involved considering what progress toward benchmarks looked like in a career pathways approach. In other words this project approach was not about helping participants get any job – a shift in strategy and in outcomes thinking.
- **Dialogue around Benchmark Progress:** The Foundation, typically via site coaches, engaged in at least an annual dialogue with grantees about progress toward benchmarks. While it was not always a comfortable position for them,

grantees understood that they, like the Foundation, were making the path largely by walking it.

3.5.3 Key Challenges

- **Overly-Ambitious Outcomes and Benchmarks:** Both Foundation outcomes and grantee benchmarks reflected all parties' best – and often overly-ambitious – prediction of the types of changes and the number of participants actively enrolled that might be possible over three or even more years. To state the obvious, there were many challenges inherent in this type of start-up work with rural, lower-income women; in rural settings where resources were more limited; with grantees that needed capacity-building; and given the systems and structures that impacted these participants. Three to five years – even in a robust economic climate – was a relatively short timeframe.
- **Foundation Outcomes Trailing Grantee Benchmarks:** The Foundation put forward its outcomes relatively late, which did not assist in guiding grantees as they were setting their benchmarks.
- **Clarity of Terminology:** Foundation outcome-related terminology such as “scale” did not necessarily get defined and reinforced in such a way that it was interpreted consistently across all parties. Foundation outcomes also interwove indicators (indications that outcomes have been achieved), which may also have muddied the waters.
- **Use of Outcomes:** Included in the WEE Project Final Project Outcomes (see *Appendix A: Data Collection Details*) was the intention to use data to adjust outcomes and the work overall as needed. However, the Foundation did not use its full set of outcomes as a touchstone throughout the life of the project to measure progress and to adjust course as needed.

3.5.4 Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future

- **Prioritize planning and reflection.** The Foundation was operating in relatively uncharted territory in planning the WEE Project. In many ways the same was amplified for the grantees. The Foundation certainly did invest board, staff, program design consultant, site coach, and grantee time and expertise in outcome and benchmark development. Still, an outcomes and benchmark development and reflection process that was ongoing throughout the life of the project and that used a more collaborative planning and learning process would likely have been better suited to this project. (*See Section 6.2: Foundation Inputs and Capacity Building.*)

- **Decide what to do when outcomes or benchmarks are significantly off-base.** The Foundation and the grantees did their best to develop their aims. However, in all cases and to varying degrees, Foundation outcomes and grantee benchmarks were significantly over-ambitious, particularly following the economic downturn. More attention to regularly revisiting the outcomes and benchmarks, considering changes as needed, and articulating how grantee success and overall WEE Project success would be assessed in light of any revisions would have been useful for all parties. (See *Section 6.2: Foundation Inputs and Capacity Building.*)

4. ADDITIONAL FOUNDATION GRANTEE SUPPORTS

Along with the funding awards themselves, the Foundation offered additional supports to the grantees including:

- site coaching
- grantee convenings
- flexible funding

CCA, FVW, and AWE staff provided feedback on these supports. These perspectives are featured in this section.

4.1 Site Coaching

Site coaches offered both expertise and time and energy that Foundation staff was not in a position to provide. These “staff extenders” helped to facilitate grantees advancing their work, with each site coach working closely with a grantee -- or two. Coaching concluded at the end of Year 3.

Site coaching was highly valued by grantees.

[Our two coaches over the course of the WEE Project] could come up with ideas from a different approach than we had. They could see the big picture when sometimes we couldn't. They focused a lot on the future – like the ability for the project to be self-supporting and what it would take to do it, while we focused on the day-to-day. If you stay on the day-to-day without the future, you ain't going nowhere. ...I couldn't say enough about what both of them did in terms of encouraging us, coming up with ideas – and a lot of those ideas we are now doing. {grantee}

Coaches were appreciated by grantees for their planning, strategy development, results orientation, translation of Foundation wishes, accessibility, convening capacities, data knowledge, benchmark development, and the like. Coaches also served as a forcing event, helping grantees advance their work. Thus, overall, the coaching appeared to be significantly value-added.

Grantees noted some areas of improvement regarding the site coaching process. Some grantees commented on the lack of clear expectations about the role of coaches. For example, one grantee was unclear about how much coaching time was available, and as a result, hesitated to ask for assistance. Another grantee was disappointed by the amount of coaching time that was spent on the benchmarking process itself, to the neglect of other program planning and implementation priorities. Finally, a third grantee had expected its coach to do the work of bringing employers and other partners to the table – something that was not considered within the general scope of work for coaches.

More clarity from the Foundation up-front about the site coaches' scope of work and about coaches communicating with grantees about availability might have helped smooth some of these rough edges on what was, generally, a very well-received input.

4.2 Grantee Convenings

Grantees held a variety of views on the usefulness of convenings, which concluded at the end of Year 3. Generally speaking, there was a sense that the convenings were worthwhile and improved over time but, evaluated as a whole, still needed strengthening. Grantees saw the primary uses of the convenings as: helping clarify the Foundation's vision for WEE, assisting grantees in better knowing the Foundation and its staff, learning about one another's work, and learning to better use the database and understand sites' data.

For most grantees, the most noteworthy conversations focused on sharing program challenges and getting feedback as well as hearing about other sites' strategies and activities that might be applicable to them. In addition, for the two remaining career pathways projects, the process of reflecting together on participant results was helpful. Some early dissatisfaction with convenings appeared to be linked to some grantees' more general confusion about the overall focus of the WEE Project and the Foundation's expectations and the sense that convenings could have better helped clarify things. In addition, many parties noted that it was challenging to ensure that convenings were equally relevant and inclusive of AWE, since it was using such a different approach to the work.

4.3 Flexible Funding for Participant Support

Because of the flexibility provided by the Foundation, grantees were able to make what they considered to be more strategic investments in their participants. Grantees chose at various points in time and under varying participant circumstances to help pay for books, tuition, training fees, uniforms, certification exam fees, gas vouchers, and the like. From time to time sites provided emergency assistance to help participants stay on track.

[There's the] increased costs of books, gas, tuition, and broke-down-no-brakes. [We're] not going to let [a WEE participant] get three-quarters through the course and then [let her drop out due to] no brakes [to drive to school]. We have to be able to address that or else we've lost everything. {grantee}

5. RESULTS AND CONSIDERATIONS FROM MICRO-ENTERPRISE PROJECT: AWE

Reader's Note: Because AWE is notably different in approach from the career pathways projects described above and has not been reported on previously, some additional background is provided here. Also, because there is only one micro-enterprise project to report on, this section of the report has a more specific focus on AWE as a program. As background for this section, the reader is reminded that the data are primarily from AWE staff and Foundation staff, including the Foundation's site coach for AWE.

This section features:

- Overview
- Participant Results: Introduction
- Participant Results: Findings and Interpretation
- Key Successes
- Key Challenges
- Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future

5.1 Overview

HandMade in America, a prospective WEE grantee, made the case that the best way to achieve the goals of the WEE Project in rural western North Carolina was to support the development of very small businesses. A career pathways approach was not seen as a good fit for western North Carolina, given the lack of LIS job opportunities and the priorities of the rural women it sought to target. The Foundation agreed to support this micro-enterprise approach that HandMade's Appalachian Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) project represented.

AWE launched its program in 2007 and chose to extend its original three-year timeline and funding to four and one-half years. This was based on the learning that small business development requires a long-term approach and investment. AWE worked with 107 women-owned small businesses – craft-related, specialty agriculture, retail, and service sector. AWE worked primarily in seven counties: Ashe, Graham, Madison, Mitchell, Rutherford, Swain, and Yancey.

In terms of participant benchmarks, AWE initially aimed by the end of Year 1 to have at least 30 of its participants' small businesses showing an income gain of 20% or a positive cash flow for new businesses. From a financial perspective, most of these businesses were to serve the function of providing supplemental income.

For our group of ladies, the definition of success has not necessarily been monetary or the bottom line, but more a quality of life. That you can live in an extremely poor county in the state and use your talents for supplemental income or as a primary source of income. {grantee network facilitator}

As the economy took a dramatic downturn (See Section 1.5, *Severe Challenges of the Economic Downturn*), and as AWE staff, AWE site coach, and Foundation staff realized that the original AWE benchmarks were unrealistic (e.g., 20% increased business income for established businesses), AWE and the Foundation agreed to refine the measurement of AWE success. The primary benchmark shifted from increasing business income to building business development skills of participants. The assumption was that business skill development would increase participants' household income sometime in the future, presumably after an economic upturn.

AWE focused on connecting low-income, rural women with:

- other women running very small businesses
- training and technical assistance

- links to markets for their products

To these ends, AWE established five local networks so that participants could gather more locally to share support and build their skills.

I think the overriding benefit of this group...has been the camaraderie and having the fellowship and the clearinghouse of where you come and you lay it all on the table. ...Business is not just business. I mean, we have families, we have kids, we run houses, we juggle other businesses, we've got partners and husbands and just all kinds of stuff that it's all a big picture. ...To have that group of women that takes everything into account and you can just... get perspective and advice and some technical assistance... The whole ball of wax. {grantee network facilitator}

AWE staff also invested significant effort in brokering relevant training and technical assistance, particularly in marketing, and worked to connect participants to markets.

[AWE's niche is that it] reaches the women throughout the rural areas in ways that other programs don't on a regular basis and brings the resources from the greater world and the changing marketing strategies to the women. It's that connection piece. {grantee}

AWE staff also served as an advocate with organizations that were used to serving larger businesses (e.g., Chambers of Commerce) for the needs of very small businesses.

(More details on both the Women's Network and the Resource Organization Network are found in Appendix L: AWE Women's Network Overview and Appendix M: AWE Resource Organization Network Overview.)

In addition, AWE staff partnered with other organizations to advocate for issues of significant concern to AWE participants and other very small businesses. These issues included high-speed broadband expansion throughout the region and affordable health insurance (namely, efforts to develop a cooperative health care insurance organization).

5.2 Participant Results: Introduction

Data Examined: This results analysis uses data collected at two points in time: summer 2009 (referred to below as, simply, “2009”) and spring 2011 (“2011”). Baseline data was collected from each participant as she entered the program. AWE had established a tracking system for measuring basic changes in business gross sales, loans, and the like. However, complications in interpreting changes in sales and revenue; defining assets; and, more basically, collecting this data proved to be major hurdles for AWE as discussed later. In the end, the business development skill data proved the most relevant and available.

Who Was Included in the Analysis: A total of 107 businesses participated in AWE. In the process of preparing the data for analysis, adjustments – similar to those for the CCA and FVW datasets – were made to facilitate a more accurate and usable dataset. (See *Appendix N: AWE Participant Data Set Inclusion Decisions*.) After these adjustments, there were 50 participants in the dataset.

Data Limitations: The data may be limited in the following ways:

- As with the career pathways grantees, data was collected and entered by AWE staff, so the integrity of the data is based on the quality of that process.
- The skills rankings reported were completed by participant self-report. Where participants did not respond, AWE staff completed a scoring on behalf of the participant, based on staff knowledge of the participants’ skill levels. Therefore, participant and staff capacity to accurately reflect skill level is central to the strength of this data.
- Because the business skill focus and related tracking was developed over time and women entered the program continuously over the course of the AWE project, some participants may have been in the project for one to two years before their first snapshot was captured. Therefore, some participants may have had greater skill gains over the course of their AWE participation than what is reflected in these results.
- The number of participants included in this dataset was relatively small.

5.3 Participant Results: Findings and Interpretation

AWE facilitated ratings of participant development in the areas of marketing, financial, and technical. Participants were rated on a point system to capture their level of expertise in each area. While AWE and, therefore, the Foundation, referred to these focus areas as “skill” areas, they largely represent an even greater accomplishment than skill-building: action-taking, of which skill-building is only one key component. Therefore, below, these changes will be referred to as “**business development skill/action.**” See *Table 5-1: Business Development Skill/Action Area Overview* for a summary of each skill/action area.

Table 5-1: Business Development Skill/Action Area Overview

| Business Development Skill/Action Area | Description | Maximum Score (Points) |
|--|--|------------------------|
| Marketing | marketing plan/calendar development, website/blog development and use, marketing materials updating and use, “creative networking” use | 12 |
| Financial | Schedule C filing, monthly income/expense records maintenance, financial counseling/assistance information seeking and use | 6 |
| Technical | business plan development, regulatory compliance, pursuit of current trends in product development/business concepts | 6 |

AWE Participants Reported a Notable Average Increase in All Three Business Development Skill/Action Areas. Increases were as follows:

- marketing: +28%
- technical: +20%
- financial: +15%

In 2009, participants reported their lowest scores in marketing, followed by technical, and, finally, financial. In 2011, the greatest score advances followed this trend of where there was the most room for improvement: in marketing, followed by technical, and finally financial. (See *Table 5-2: Change in Mean Participant Skill/Action Scores: 2009, 2011.*)

Table 5-2: Change in Mean Participant Skill/Action Scores: 2009, 2011

| Skill/Action Area | 2009 | | 2011 | | Change | |
|-------------------|------------|---------|------------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Mean Score | Percent | Mean Score | Percent | Score | Percent |
| Marketing | 6.0 | 50% | 9.4 | 78% | + 3.3 | 28% |
| Technical | 4.3 | 72% | 5.5 | 92% | +1.2 | 20% |
| Financial | 4.7 | 78% | 5.7 | 95% | +0.9 | 15% |
| Combined | 15.0 | 63% | 20.5 | 85% | +5.5 | 22% |

n=50

Top score for each skill/action area: marketing = 12; technical and financial = 6 each

Participant Skill/Action Area Increases Varied Notably Across Areas. Ninety percent of participants increased at least one point in marketing, 60% in technical, and 36% in financial skill/actions. A notable percentage of participants did not have any increase in financial (64%) and technical (40%) – noting that the 2009 ratings of these skills/actions were highest already, hence leaving the least room for improvement.

See Table 5-3: *Rankings of Participant Gains in Skill/Action Areas*, which highlights the percentage of participants at various levels of point gains:

Table 5-3: Rankings of Participant Gains in Skill/Action Areas

| Skill/Action Area | % with Greatest* Gains | % with Modest** Gains | % with No Gains |
|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Marketing | 36% | 54% | 10% |
| Technical | 6% | 54% | 40% |
| Financial | 8% | 28% | 64% |

n=50

Top score for each skill/action areas: marketing = 12; technical and financial = 6 each

*Greatest Gains: marketing: +5-8 points; technical and financial: +4-6 points

**Modest Gains: marketing: +1-4 points; technical and financial: +1-3 points

On a final note, being enrolled in AWE earlier and, therefore, having more time in AWE presumably during which to hone skills and take action, was not associated with greater increases in these skill/action areas.

5.4 Key Successes

- **Foundation Listening to a Prospective Grantee’s Analysis of Career Pathways Viability:** HandMade made its case to the Foundation that the best way to achieve the goals of the WEE Project in rural western North Carolina was to support business development with very small businesses, as opposed to the career pathways approach being implemented through the other WEE projects. The Foundation listened to this analysis. Given the employment landscape in the region, it appears to have been a wise decision on the part of HandMade and the Foundation not to move forward with a career pathways approach.
- **AWE Reaching an Under-Served Population:** At many turns, interviewees referred to AWE participants in terms such as “hidden gems in their communities.” AWE appeared to fill previously unmet needs including:
 - **Increased credibility:** AWE helped participants and their businesses be better recognized in their communities and in some more traditional business circles.
 - **Tailored business service training, delivered locally:** AWE brought appropriate training resources to participants to address their identified business needs.
 - **Peer networking:** AWE convened participants via local, professionally facilitated AWE network meetings. These meetings provided a forum for sharing valuable business information (e.g., new markets). The meetings also helped address the rural isolation which appeared to limit participants’ skill development and confidence to build their businesses. In some cases, these meetings inspired new business directions including the launch of some cooperative business ventures among participants.
- **AWE Staff’s Finger on Participants’ Pulse:** Both the project coordinator and the network facilitators used their personal and professional experience to gain the trust of prospective participants and, thereafter, to enroll participants in AWE and to support participants’ business development efforts. As part of this support, staff appeared to listen deeply to participants and met participants “where they were.”
- **AWE Staff Working on Larger Forces Impacting Participants:** AWE staff committed precious time and energy to doing some advocacy work (e.g., broadband access), as discussed above. While change in such arenas is typically slow, staff saw the importance of this work not only to its participants but also to the larger community of very small businesses.

5.5 Key Challenges

- **Organizational Transitions:** Over the course of this almost five-year project, HandMade had four executive directors – including an interim – and three board chairs as well as major staff turn-over. Such a climate inevitably saps time and energy from remaining staff, particularly those working on projects that may seem to be less central to the organization’s evolving mission. These broader contextual factors significantly impacted AWE planning and implementation efforts.
- **Economic Downturn:** As discussed at length earlier in the report, the economic downturn appeared to have a major impact on AWE business survival and growth. AWE staff reported that, even in this economic climate, more than 70 of the 107 businesses were still operating.
- **Program Planning and Implementation Capacity:** AWE represented HandMade’s first foray into developing a project relying on tailored, ongoing support and tracking of individual participants – an effort that required significant planning and diligent follow-through. Moreover, many AWE participants were at relatively low levels of business capacity, thereby requiring intensive support. In many ways AWE worked beyond its organizational capacity thanks to the commitment of its project coordinator, who was its only regular staffer. This single staffer was stretched across seven primary counties (up to two and one-half hours apart), with network facilitators providing some support despite limited compensation, little training, and some turnover. As described below, handling data was another staff responsibility, carried out with limited assistance from an AWE consultant. In sum, it appears that this project required more staffing than was available to cover the skills, miles, and time needed to operate AWE most successfully.
- **Participant Priorities:** AWE participants were, by and large, subsistence-oriented business owners, committed to maintaining their coveted rural lifestyle and location rather than committed to pursuing high-growth and income potential. When discussing their businesses, AWE participants often noted their priorities around doing their craft, being home with their families, not commuting, and working on their own terms. Thus, while having a livelihood was important, quality-of-life factors appeared to be central to many participants’ choices and sometimes trumped business factors such as product marketability and business growth opportunities. Thus, there was some divergence in priorities between AWE participants and the overarching project’s longer-term focus on increasing AWE participants’ business incomes.

- **Data:** AWE struggled with capturing the many, often highly individualized changes that occurred in participants' businesses. These changes included financial developments, skills acquisition, internal capacity, and long-term viability. In the end the AWE participant results-oriented data was limited, placing AWE in good company with many others in the micro-enterprise field and severely limiting the analysis of the promise of this approach. In general, quantitative impact measurement was neither a main priority nor a strength area for AWE. With encouragement from the Foundation and support from its site coach, AWE did develop some systems designed to capture business growth and to articulate program assumptions. However, the challenges of collecting and interpreting business and participant data that would provide a solid baseline from which to determine AWE's deeper impact on these businesses was a significant stumbling block. Later, when the participant benchmark focus shifted to the much more straightforward capturing of skill/action change, there was also room for improvement in determining how to best describe the desired changes, whether and how to use self-scoring, and the timing for capturing data to show greatest impact.

5.6 Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future

- **Plan for extended timeline for micro-enterprise development.** This timeline issue was explored through a literature review and discussed during WEE’s early stages by the WEE Project Board Committee, staff, and project consultant. That said, the Foundation might have benefited from probing this long-haul-to-growth concern more extensively to determine if this approach was a good fit under the umbrella of WEE. For example, the Foundation might have asked HandMade to more concretely respond to this concern and its implications via the emerging literature, local experience, and the like since even in a strong economic climate, much micro-enterprise development is a slow process.
- **Engage in ongoing dialogue and reflection and clarify expectations with grantees.** To state the obvious, micro-enterprise development is very challenging work. The AWE project would likely have benefited from more dialogue and/or, where appropriate, expectation-setting with the Foundation. For example:
 - **Participant selection and overall growth assumptions:** Given the initial AWE benchmark around business income increases:
 - Was it strategic to enroll any and all interested prospective participants versus aiming for at least some percentage of participants who had what appeared to be more viable business prospects or who were willing to pursue new, more viable products or services?
 - Similarly, 1) as the project considered a shift to a skills benchmark and had more information about its participants’ very limited capital, limited-to-no experience with other formal business ventures, and other lifestyle priorities (see above), and 2) given what is more generally known about the low success rate of very small businesses: would a focus on business skill development be enough to bring about significant business (and then household) income gain once the economy recovered? And if the answer appeared to be “no,” what then? Thinking about economic equity work in western North Carolina and the dearth of approaches to working in very isolated rural areas, what would the implications be for AWE and for the Foundation?
 - **Data:** Given the Foundation’s growing commitment over the course of WEE to tracking changes in participant status, might the Foundation have considered:

- specific data gathering and analysis requirements – despite the preferences of AWE staff – in order to continue as a grantee in the WEE Project?
 - assigning an evaluator to work with AWE to sharpen and quantify its benchmarks and develop a database, indicators, and data collection tools and processes?
 - building in other data support (e.g., data collection and data entry support) to strengthen the quality and consistency of the data?
 - ensuring expectations were set by AWE staff with prospective participants about the level of evaluation information (e.g., non-proprietary business income data) they would need to share in order to participate -- and any lingering participant privacy concerns were addressed?
- **Provide more Foundation staffing to support the later-stage work.** The Foundation invested considerable time with AWE staff over AWE's first few years. However, as noted by the parties themselves, during the last eighteen plus months of AWE, there was not sufficient program officer oversight and reflection and site coaching support provided to AWE. In addition, the final site coach was not involved at project start-up, which likely would have been useful. Particularly given the challenges noted above, it appears that AWE would have benefited from additional Foundation staff resources during this time.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Below are fifteen overarching conclusions and considerations as the Foundation reflects on the WEE Project and as the Foundation and/or others consider future WEE-related work or other initiative-level work. Other less macro-level considerations from the report are found in *Appendix I: Compilation from Report of “Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future”*.

What follows falls into these broad categories:

- WEE Approach Progress
- Foundation Inputs and Capacity-Building
- Toward a Deeper Impact

The considerations are lettered sequentially for easier reference. Unless otherwise noted, these considerations relate to both the sector-based, career pathways approach and the micro-enterprise approach.

6.1 WEE Approach: Progress

A. Notable Participant Progress: One-Quarter Advanced to Near LIS; Others Doubled Income But Remained in Poverty

Income Gains: The WEE Project career pathways approach tested at two sites (CCA and FVW) showed advancement for its rural, low-income participants, even during a massive economic downturn. Of the 399 participants included in the results:

- 12% (49) advanced their annual earnings to 100% or more of the LIS, with a mean annual income of \$33,700.
- 12% (48) advanced their annual earnings to 75-99% of the LIS, with a mean annual income of \$25,634.
- 76% (302) who earned 74% or less of the LIS increased their mean annual income by 59%. However, these participants remained well below the federal poverty threshold.
- Looking only at the Early Years participants who were, as possible key context, enrolled the longest and when the economy was the strongest: 41% (79) advanced their annual income to 75% or more of the LIS.

Education and Pathway Gains: Most participants made substantial gains in career-related educational achievement. These were gains that participants likely would not have made outside of WEE. And many participants were on a career pathway – often a seemingly new strategy for them – and a strategy that held promise of helping them ultimately advance to the LIS and beyond.

Micro-Enterprise Participant Gains: In addition, 107 participants engaged in micro-enterprise development were part of AWE. Of the 50 participants included in the results shared above, there was an average increase of 28% in marketing skills/actions, 20% in technical skills/actions, and 15% in financial skills/actions.

Intended Outcomes and Project Realities: The Foundation did not formally adjust the original WEE Project outcomes and output of “400 women achiev[ing] economic equity; at minimum, a majority of the women are in living wage jobs and the remainder are on career pathways towards living wage jobs” and 1,000 women enrolled. However, the Foundation recognized from early on that these outcomes were not being met. Not only did one site terminate, but other sites did not meet their benchmarks, with AWE shifting away from income gains entirely. Given grantee capacity levels, a rural context where jobs and resources are in short supply even in a healthy economy, and the overall tall order of recruiting and supporting low-income women to achieve the Living Income

Standard, it appears that the above outcome and output were overly-ambitious, even if the economy had remained relatively robust.

And what can be said is that the career pathways approach, tested under unexpectedly dismal economic conditions, did produce some notable progress among some participants. Presumably, the career pathways approach would have demonstrated even stronger participant progress in a more robust economic climate. (*For more AWE results, see Section 5.3: Participant Results: Findings and Interpretation.*)

B. Shift in Perspective for Career Pathways Grantees

The WEE Project provided an opportunity for sector-based, career pathways grantees to establish new, effective ways of working with low-income, rural women. The more case management-oriented grantee embraced the opportunity to shift from the process of pulling up someone's file to check follow-up on a referral to a process of intensive coaching and support involving partnering with participants to overcome barriers to their employment and income goals. The more advocacy-oriented grantee embraced the opportunity to engage in direct services work – a steep learning curve – and to more fully analyze the many systems issues that hold these participants back economically. Accordingly, the WEE work changed how each organization viewed itself and conducted its work.

C. Apparent Extended Timeline for Most Participants to Achieve LIS under Current Economic Conditions

The WEE Project led the Foundation and the sites into largely uncharted territory both in terms of a dearth of similar models to draw upon and in terms of grantees making a significant programmatic stretch to take on a new type of work. Moreover, WEE projects were designed to have many moving parts that interacted in complex and sometimes unexpected ways. Even under the best circumstances, the primary work of facilitating collaboration among many organizational players and identifying and supporting a cohort of low-income women with varying circumstances is challenging and long-term.

Early Foundation expectations of rapid and steady participant progress would likely have needed downward adjustment even in a strong economy. Foundation staff later came to understand growth as, perhaps, more resembling a sigmoid curve. This “S”-shaped curve reflects phases including a sometimes extended period of base-building where there is not much or any growth; followed by notable growth; then maturation (again, not much growth); and followed by decline. Given the many hurdles already noted, whether ultimately resembling a sigmoid curve or not, it is likely realistic to expect slower and more uneven progress.

At least during this economic downturn, the typical participant timeline appears to be longer than five years for most participants to achieve a living income standard, or, in the case of AWE, to significantly increase business income. Jobs – or, in the case of AWE, markets for products and services – dried up in the economic downturn. And, for career pathways projects, the time necessary for participants to complete additional education tended to be longer than anticipated, in part given 1) participants' competing needs regarding earning a living and taking care of family and 2) the lack of flexibility in some education tracks (e.g., having to wait 6-12 months for the next required course to be offered). (*For more AWE results, see Section 5.3: Participant Results: Findings and Interpretation.*)

Many questions related to a typical career pathways timeline in the current economic climate remain unanswered such as: For Early Years 74- LIS or Later Years 74- LIS, will an additional year or two of pursuing education or seeking a next position on the pathway get them to – or at least near – the Living Income Standard? In light of current wage declines, will some of the jobs that participants are currently working toward achieving no longer be at the LIS? Thus, further study over a longer period of time would be necessary to draw conclusions regarding career pathways timelines.

D. Further Career Pathways Piloting Warranted

The WEE Project career pathways approach warrants significant examination and consideration, as it focused on the deeply entrenched challenges of addressing poverty issues of women living in rural areas. The WEE Project held out that these women could – and should – earn a decent wage that provides stability for them and for their families and helps anchor their communities. The Foundation's career pathways approach was tested in a presumably atypical economic climate and with only two sites. This approach would benefit from testing in other economic climates, employment sectors, and parts of the state to further explore its effectiveness. Some of this type of work may take place in the form of grantee Center for Community Action's scaling-up efforts in collaboration with Workforce Strategy Center. These scaling-up efforts are, in part, being supported by the Foundation already. In addition, the Foundation's upcoming on-line publication, *Paving the Path: Guidebook to Launching a Career Pathways Initiative for Women Living in Rural Areas*, which includes a downloadable WEE-type database, may serve as an additional resource to funders and other organizations to facilitate exploration of this approach.

E. Inclusion of AWE in WEE – An Open Question

While other notable AWE-specific considerations are found earlier in the report, on the broadest level, it remains questionable whether AWE was an appropriate project to fund under the WEE umbrella. As a micro-enterprise development project, AWE called for different conceptualization, resources, support, and expectations than the career

pathways projects. Additional reflection, buoyed by the growing literature and dialogue around the efficacy and timeframe of micro-enterprise development, would likely help guide the Foundation regarding future consideration of micro-enterprise work.

6.2 Foundation Inputs and Capacity Building

F. Outcomes Development/Benchmarking as Learning and Planning Framework May Be Useful

Funder development of outcomes at project onset and grantee development of benchmarks that build from those outcomes together begin to provide a roadmap that lays out a set of shared expectations, progress mile markers, course adjustment opportunities, and assessment of results. The Foundation's commitment to developing its initial outcomes and to grantees developing benchmarks was wise and a bold first step into this territory. Operationalizing this commitment was challenging for all parties. Means of strengthening this process include:

- establish Foundation outcomes early to guide grantee benchmark development
- clarify the relative importance of various intended outcomes
- make Foundation terminology as accessible as possible (e.g., distinguishing between outcomes and indicators)
- build grantee capacity in benchmarking
- place coaches early enough to support initial benchmarking
- facilitate cross-grantee benchmark alignment and overall reality-checking on intended results

Over the course of the Project, in not consistently revisiting and potentially revising its original outcomes as more information emerged about grantee capacity, the economy, and results to date, the Foundation may have missed an opportunity to:

- further refine its outcomes development capacity
- set more realistic – yet still ambitious – aims for the WEE Project against which overall results and grantee-level results might have been more fully and more realistically assessed
- both model for and then guide its grantees in data-driven outcome/benchmark adjustment
- convene staff, site coaches, and grantees annually to take a step back and consider any significant shifts in outcomes, benchmarks, and/or strategy

G. Participant Enrollment Strategies Worth Discussion

Early dialoguing with grantees about enrollment decisions may also be fruitful. Questions include:

- Should there be some minimum participant qualifications (e.g., GED for career pathways participants or some product viability assessment for micro-enterprise participants, earnings no higher than a certain LIS standing)?
- Should there be intentional recruitment of participants at different points on the path (whether this is education/training, LIS, current employment, income level or current level of business development) so that all participants are not at stage 1 when they start?

Having different cohorts can also be useful for helping a program understand whom it is best serving. Similarly, cohorts can facilitate grantees exploring various program supports that are essential for different cohorts' success. Obviously, conversations about who is in and who is out can be loaded. But an early surfacing of values around inclusivity, strategic use of limited resources, organizational capacity, and focus on intended results can help grantees – and, of course, funders – make more grounded decisions.

H. Program Officer Time on Project Key

Foundation commitment of significant program officer-level time to the WEE Project was an important investment. Additional program officer time would have been even more beneficial. As above, the WEE Project aimed to address a major, complex gap and operated in relatively uncharted territory on multiple levels. The WEE Project Board Committee provided valuable, more macro-level guidance and leadership, as appropriate. Fellows played important roles and then left the Foundation, as planned. Consultants, including the program design consultant and site coaches, also played important roles but as external supports. Much visioning, championing, outcomes- and other expectations-setting, liaising, oversight and management, institutional knowledge-building, and the like are best carried out at the program officer level.

I. Site Coaches Value-Added

Site coaches helped strengthen sites' work and the overall quality of the WEE Project. Site coaches lent expertise in areas such as capacity-building and coaching, workforce development, organizational and community assessment, program development, benchmarking, data planning and use, proposal and report writing, and evaluation. These coaches also contributed to a deeper analysis of site and WEE Project progress overall. A site having a coach from the start and throughout the life of the project would, likely, further deepen the impact of the coaching.

J. Further Capacity Building Needed for Grantees to Be Most Successful

The ability to plan projects, cultivate relationships, provide support to participants, collect and use data, and impact systems are all important site capacities. For future such initiatives, the Foundation might assess final applicants' levels of capacity in each of these areas. Assessments might go beyond asking basic questions of the applicant and involve some on-site checking or requests for demonstration of capacity and/or assessment input from others with expertise in these capacity areas. At that point, the Foundation might plan for capacity-building as needed. Doing so might have implications for budgeting for the grantee and for the Foundation or might lead the Foundation to reconsider funding. In the case of WEE sites, this level of review seems warranted given the significant investment made by the Foundation.

K. Sustained Focus on Data is Strategic

Setting expectations with grantees up-front about data is important in terms of ensuring data-related efforts are properly planned and committed to from the start. Where needed, Foundation investment in the following may be wise to consider, particularly early on:

- database development or, better yet, purchase of an appropriate commercially available data system
- training and ongoing support of sites in entering, analyzing, interpreting, and using data

This type of data support strengthens WEE sites by a) highlighting areas of program strength to build upon and areas of challenge to address and b) by showcasing results. To the extent data was used by grantees, it appeared to be more in the service of the latter than the former. The WEE database was a key tool. Without it, very little would have been known about participant results over time. However, the WEE database's limitations (e.g., results focused primarily on data needed for Foundation reporting and generated reports were complex for grantees to interpret) likely contributed to grantees' limited use of their data. In addition, site coaches were not in a position to work on this next step of data use, as coaching wrapped up just as grantees were analyzing their first full set of participant data emerging from the WEE database.

L. Facilitating Grantee Learning a Worthy Investment

There is much to be gained from providing intentional ways for grantees to learn from one another and from others (beyond staff and site coaches) with expertise and experience to share. Particularly when the convenings were more grantee-driven and had specific, practical aims, they contributed to grantees' – especially career pathways grantees' – sense of common cause and mutual support and sparked new ideas.

M. Investing in More Extensive Learning and Evaluation Worth Consideration

The Foundation invested in a “learning project” to surface some central themes from the WEE Project but did not invest in a full evaluation of the Foundation’s WEE Project’s results and process or the sites’ results and process. As above, the Foundation’s mid-Project development of the WEE database was the most essential tool for furthering an understanding of what was being accomplished by the WEE participants. That said, given the significant investment the Foundation made in the WEE Project, it might be worth considering a stronger focus on capturing data and analyzing results. This effort might include collecting data from more sources (e.g., WEE Project Board Committee members, WEE participants, resource organizations, employers, and WEE written materials); collecting data over the life of the project; and ongoing facilitation of the sharing-back of data and of meaning-making from the data as part of the planning and learning process.

6.3 Toward a Deeper Impact

N. Opportunity to Share Learnings with Broader Audience

Given the Foundation's investments and learnings related to the WEE Project, the Foundation appears well-placed to advance the conversation taking place more broadly about career pathways. The Foundation has a unique role to play in discussing rural career pathways work with women. The Foundation's upcoming sponsorship of a national webinar on the scaling-up of WEE mentioned above is an example of this role. And, as also above, *Paving the Path: Guidebook to Launching a Career Pathways Initiative for Women Living in Rural Areas*, with the downloadable database, contributes to this effort to share the Foundation's experience and resources. A convening of parties interested in rural/economic/workforce development holds potential for birthing a network that might have greater impact working collectively than alone. As related to micro-enterprise, there is also lively national and international dialogue around micro-enterprise development work that the Foundation can join if desired.

O. Foundation Role in Influencing Policy and Practice

The Foundation might also consider how it might formally and/or informally influence policy and practice change (for a bold example, see recent efforts of the Boston Foundation to advocate for state-wide community college changes to improve its response to the evolving needs of the state's workforce: http://www.tbf.org/uploadedFiles/tbforg/Utility_Navigation/Multimedia_Library/Reports/CommunityCollege_Nov2011.pdf) that would bolster WEE-related efforts and WEE-type rural women who remain an often-overlooked population throughout the state and, indeed, far beyond.

APPENDICES

Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation's

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EQUITY PROJECT

Results & Learnings from Years 1-5

New Perspectives Consulting Group

30 March 2012

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Appendix A: Data Collection Details

Primary Data Sources for Career Pathways Projects: The Learning Project used quantitative data from a grantee database that tracked the progress of CCA and FVW WEE participants. The Learning Project also used qualitative data provided by grantee staff and by Foundation staff including coaches. The qualitative data was collected primarily through individual and small group interviews conducted from February through September 2009. In addition, two focus groups were conducted with FVW and CCA staffers who attended May and June 2009 grantee-Foundation convenings.

Interviewees included:

Grantees:

CCA: Rhiannon Chavis-Wanson, Mac Legerton, Sallie McLean.

FVW: Felicia Gregory, Jennifer Gregory, Minnie Henderson, Bill Owens, Carmen Williams.

Foundation staff including coaches:

Mary Fant Donnan, Tobi Lippin, Pam Wilson.

A limited amount of data from grantee written materials -- primarily Year 4 applications -- was also reviewed.

Primary Data Sources for Micro-Enterprise Project: The Learning Project used the modest amount of quantitative data tracked on a spread sheet by HandMade's AWE project. The Learning Project also used qualitative data collected from grantee staff and by Foundation staff, including the AWE site coach. The qualitative data was collected primarily through individual and focus group interviews conducted between November 2010 and July 2011. In addition an observation of a participant gathering was completed.

Interviewees included:

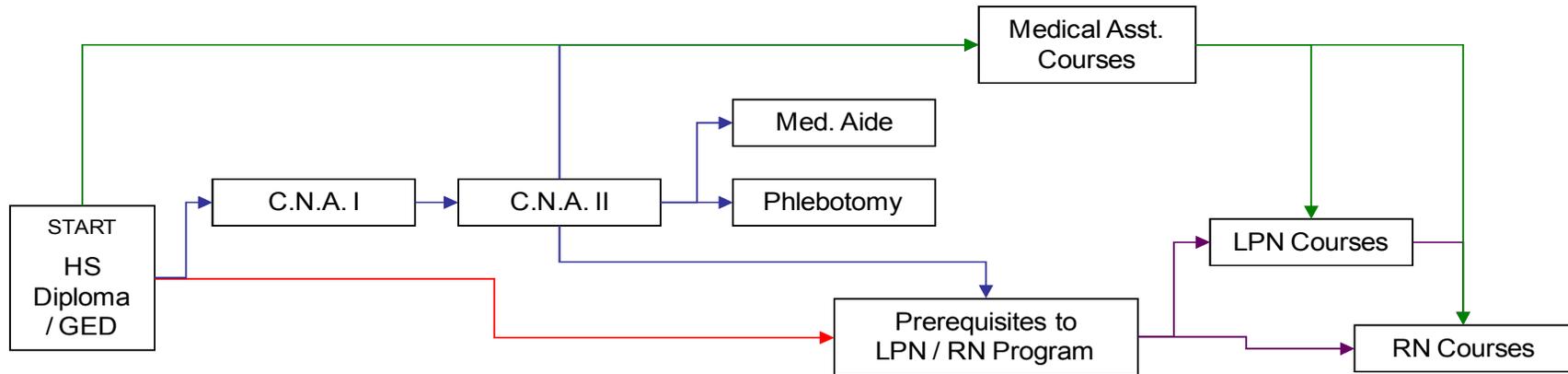
AWE: Betty Hurst, Morgen Yeakley, Frankie McWhorter, Beth Fields, Ronda Bertha.

Foundation staff including coaches:

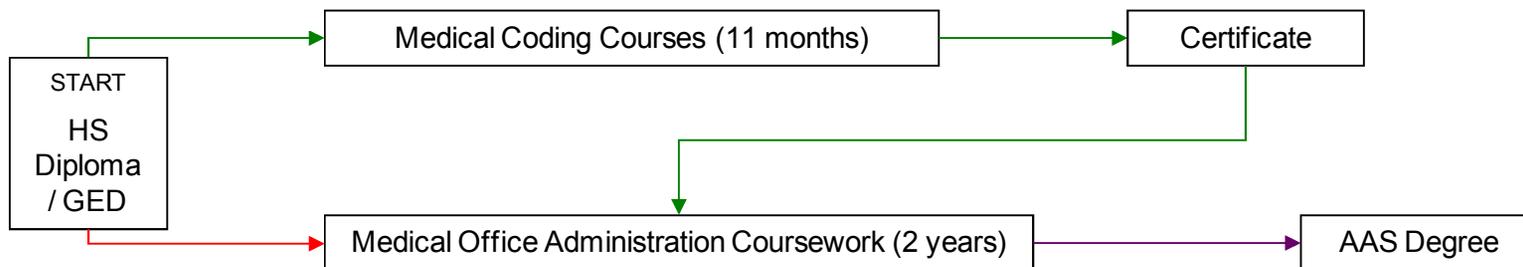
Mary Fant Donnan, Kim McGuire.

Appendix B: Career Pathways Maps

Career Pathways to Licensed Practical Nurse or RN

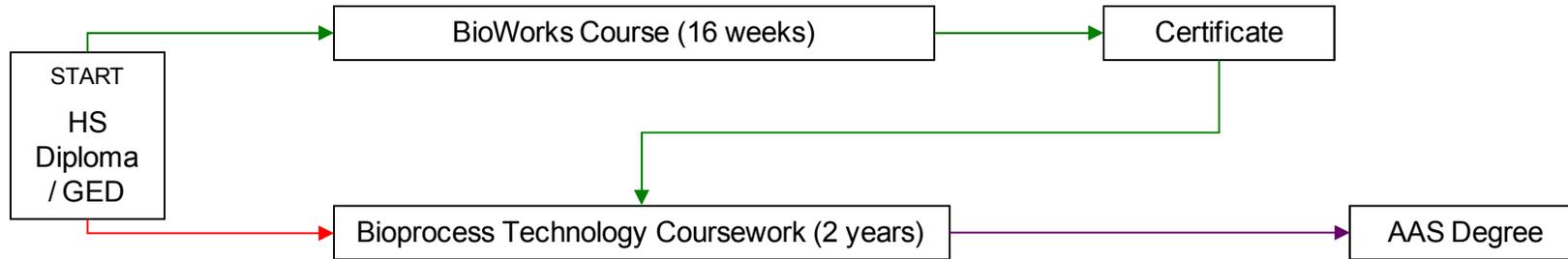


Career Pathways in Medical Office Support

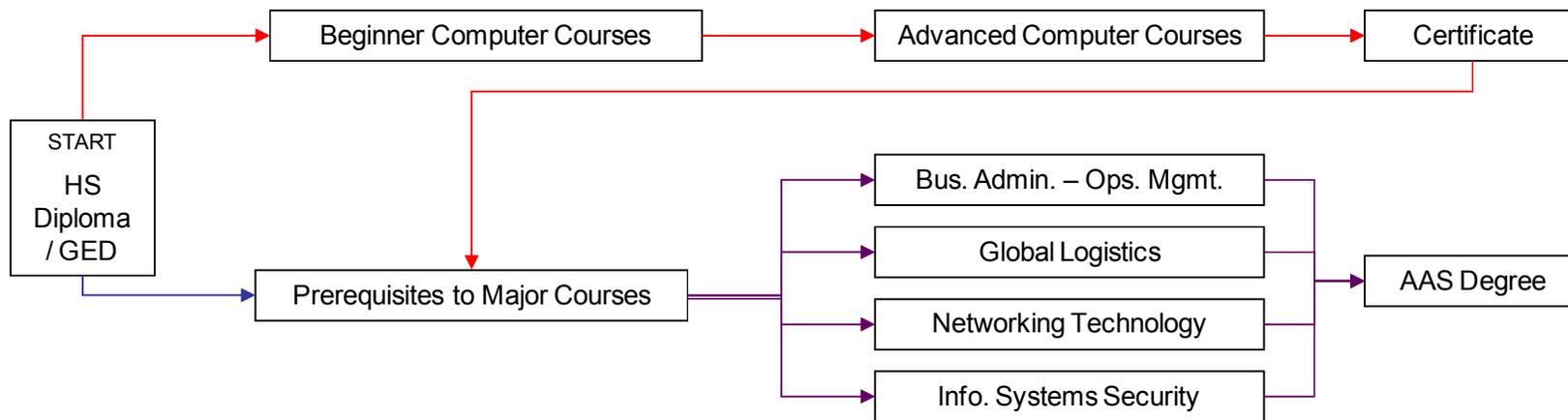


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Career Pathways in Biotechnology



Career Pathways in High-Tech Manufacturing



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Appendix C: Foundation's Original Vision of Women's, Employer, and Resource Organization Networks

The following is an extended examination of the original WEE vision for WEE's three networks: women's, employer, and resource organization.

Women's Network: WEE Project developers envisioned a number of ways that grantees would offer support directly to WEE participants in addition to developing and cultivating employers and resource organizations. The women's network was defined broadly as the direct supports that would be offered to participants in the form of emotional, educational, material, and logistical support to facilitate their journey to a living income. An important assumption of the WEE Project developers was that peers in the project were well-placed to support each other and to increase one another's success rates.

Support that fell under this broad definition of a "women's network" included:

- **Facilitate peer support by convening participants** (informal mentoring, advice exchange, encouragement, mutual assistance on childcare and rides)
- **Coach and provide related support:**
 - orient and educate participants about the WEE approach and strategies
 - provide support in finding and keeping a job on the path to a living wage
 - check in regularly on progress, challenges, and strategies for advancement
 - offer advice and support around education and training and brokering training
 - provide tuition and/or other financial support
 - provide referrals for other supports and services

Employer Network: Embedded in the WEE project approach was thinking from the earlier Women's Initiative that top-down (employer-worker) does not usually reach all the way down, and bottom-up (worker-employer) does not usually reach all the way up. The WEE Project sought to demonstrate that this goal of growing this connective tissue could be achieved without creating new organizations. Instead, sites were to act as intermediaries between job seekers and employers, able to reflect both parties' interests in a way that typical employment agencies did not. In this reciprocal relationship, employers would find trained workers to hire. And workers would develop job skills, build their training and education credentials, overcome other barriers to employment, and find appropriate jobs. Moreover, employers would be engaged where possible in changing

their own policies and structures and supporting change in workforce development systems.

Employer networks were intended to serve the following types of functions:

- **Advance opportunities for WEE participants:**
 - provide information on job candidate profiles, skills needs
 - identify barriers to employment (e.g., reliable transportation)
 - identify job openings
 - refer employees in need of support to WEE
 - refer WEE participants to employers
 - provide access to internships
- **Identify trends and changes in employment, workforce development, and training and education systems:**
 - study specific employment sectors
 - assess what employers need from employees, possibly addressing issues such as absenteeism and turnover
 - identify needed improvements in the above systems
 - leverage system changes where appropriate and in employers' self-interest
- **Facilitate employer-employer engagement:**
 - examine trends employers are seeing that impact them, the sector, etc.

Resource Organization Network: WEE Project developers envisioned a number of ways resource organizations (e.g., community colleges, departments of social services, food banks) in a region or county would be engaged to help coordinate and advance WEE participants' access to training and to employment. As with the Employer Networks, Resource Organization Networks would work on multiple levels. Resource Organization Networks would support individual participants (e.g., providing needed classes, helping participants secure transportation to class or work, or supplying childcare vouchers). Resource Organization Networks would also endeavor to address more structural or systems-level changes (e.g., community colleges adapting their offerings and policies to better serve part-time, working students).

As a primary focus, resource organizations would assist participants by providing the classes they needed, troubleshooting around transportation, providing childcare vouchers, and other similar supports.

Resource Organization Networks were intended to serve the following types of functions:

- **Advance access to workforce development, education, or employment services for individual participants:**
 - Identify resources in different workforce development, education, or support service programs
 - Strengthen ties, coordination, and communication among resource organizations so that WEE participants could more easily access a full range of programs that could support them
 - Encourage referrals among resource organizations to better serve participants seeking employment, training, or related services
- **Leverage and catalyze changes in workforce development, education, and support systems:**
 - Identify needed improvements and catalyze existing resource organizations to work to improve both the types of services and the ways resource organizations deliver services

Appendix D: ZSR WEE Project Outcomes

Below are the final intended outcomes that the Foundation developed in fall 2007 to guide the WEE Project.

A. Prototyping Career Pathways for Women

**Note: These are results that each site can track and report to the Foundation.*

1. Change in Economic Equity for Women in the Program

- 400 women achieve economic equity; at minimum, a majority of the women are in living wage jobs and the remainder are on career pathways towards living wage jobs.¹
- 1,000 women are enrolled by end of project.
- *Expectations Beyond*
 - *Scale:* a) Average cost per woman in the program who achieves a living-wage job with a career pathway is less than or equal to \$3,000,² and b) Some number of women achieve economic equity through a living wage and additional asset building, such as IDA or EITC participation, savings, home ownership, etc.
 - *Sustainability:* Resource providers³ target employment opportunities with living wages and career pathways at the outset of the job placement process.

2. Employer Network and Engagement

- Resource provider can cite the employer's recruitment, retention and career pathway needs amongst 100% of the employers related to the project.
- Employers report at least 50% decreased absenteeism.⁴
- Employers report at least 50% increased retention.

¹ The mandated numbers and percentages throughout these benchmarks are cumulative across all sites.

² \$3,000 is a standard number determined from Annie E. Casey Foundation workforce development research, as well as through interview conversations with workforce development staff- NEED ACTUAL CITATION.

³ *Resource Provider* refers to the host organizations of the Women's Economic Equity Project in each community, a.k.a. the Foundation grantees.

⁴ Staff considers 50% to be a reasonable expectation at the outset. This is a benchmark as well as a learning goal that can be tracked and adjusted based on project learnings.

- The organization has one structured employer network defined by the design and needs of each site's program (i.e. among sectors, connection between employers, employers connected through external convener, etc.)⁵
- *Expectations Beyond*
 - *Scale*: Resource providers standardize the process of targeting employers in order to become aware of employment needs and opportunities with living-wage jobs and career pathways in the community.
 - *Sustainability*: Employer partners contribute financially to their employees' extended education and/or training programs.

3. Women's Network

- 75% of participants can cite at least one way in which the women's network provides emotional, educational and/or logistical support.
- 75% of participants can cite at least one improvement regarding their employment that resulted from direct relationships and/or conversations between employers and the women's network.
- *Expectations Beyond*
 - *Scale*: The women's network increases the educational and/or workforce opportunities for women outside of the program (i.e. co-ops, female employers hiring others, etc.)
 - *Sustainability*: Resource partners secure additional funding directed specifically towards recruitment and initial training of women in the network.

4. Resource Network

- 100% of partners in the resource network can cite the goal of the project, their contribution to the project, and the role(s) of other partners.
- 100% of partners can cite at least one way in which their own work was enhanced through participation in the program.
- Partners can report how data was used to identify common customers and to engage with non-traditional partners to provide services and further common goals.
- At least one community college and/or another credible and existing training program is a partner in the resource network.

⁵ This is a long-term goal of this project and may not be visible or measurable in the first years of this project.

- *Expectations Beyond*
 - *Scale*: Resource partner identifies the partners that most effectively contribute to achievement of the project goal and adjusts the partnerships accordingly.
 - *Sustainability*: Partners contribute financially to the project and can cite their own return on investments.

B. Overarching Project Goals and Systems Change:

**Note: These are items that the Foundation will track through listening and connecting elements of each site's work. These are not results that sites can directly track, but the sites can be asked to provide data to address these results.*

5. Data Collection and Use

- Data is used to identify gaps and engage in partnerships within each network to increase the opportunities for low-income women to achieve living-wage jobs with career pathways.⁶
- Data is used to create and refine project benchmarks as needed.
- Data is used to adjust the project and anticipated outcomes as needed.
- Data is collected to determine the time required to convene participants within each network.

6. Scale

- Women directly served by the resource providers as well as women outside of the programs financially benefit from the project.
- Resource providers build infrastructure in their area that more efficiently moves low-income women into living wage jobs with career pathways.

7. Sustainability

- Resource providers serve the women, employers and partners in such a way that positions them as a vital link in the human resources system.
- Sites secure additional funding sources (either in-kind or cash funds).

⁶ This benchmark is to encourage sites to utilize data (i.e. skill sets, wages, employment opportunities in their area) as the driving force behind their project through its transitions.

Appendix E: Selected Living Income Standard Data Used

| Selected Living Income Standard Data Used | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Size of family unit | # of Related Children Under 18 | | | | | | | | |
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 1 | \$21,574 | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | \$27,768 | \$28,582 | | | | | | | |
| 3 | \$32,436 | 133,378 | \$33,410 | | | | | | |
| 4 | \$42,772 | \$43,472 | \$42,054 | \$42,200 | | | | | |
| 5 | \$51,582 | \$52,332 | \$50,728 | \$49,488 | \$48,732 | | | | |
| 6 | \$59,328 | \$59,564 | \$58,335 | \$57,158 | \$55,410 | \$54,374 | | | |
| 7 | \$68,264 | \$68,690 | \$67,223 | \$66,196 | \$64,288 | \$62,062 | \$59,623 | | |
| 8 | \$76,348 | \$77,022 | \$75,635 | \$74,420 | \$72,696 | \$70,510 | \$68,232 | \$67,654 | |
| 9 | \$91,842 | \$92,286 | \$91,058 | \$90,028 | \$88,336 | \$86,008 | \$83,904 | \$83,332 | \$30,170 |

200% of the 2007 Poverty Thresholds, developed annually by the U.S. Census Bureau, were used to calculate the Living Income Standard (LIS) when creating the WEE database. The database calculated the Living Income Standard for each participant's specific household based on number of wage earners and children. It did not differentiate by county nor update the database since its creation. Above are the LIS figures that were used. For more information on Poverty Thresholds: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/thresh07.html>

Appendix F: Program Policy and Participant Pool Differences between WEE Grantees: CCA and FVW

Participants in the WEE program totaled 521 and were served by CCA (333) and FVW (188). This appendix outlines the differences between these programs in terms of program policies and the participant pools. Key differences include, but were not limited to, the following:

- FVW capped enrollment; CCA's participant pool was considerably larger (CCA 333, FVW 188).
- FVW required participants to have a high school diploma or GED prior to enrollment, while CCA accepted women regardless of their prior educational level. As a result, there was a small pool of CCA participants (12) who began their educational advances in WEE by working toward a GED to get the minimum high school requirements behind them.
- Two differences in income were noted between CCA and FVW participants:
 - FVW did not include the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in its participants' income data, while CCA did. Hence FVW participant income levels may appear lower here than they truly were had EITC income been included. Furthermore, this may have led to under-reporting of FVW participants achieving the LIS because of the missing EITC income data.
 - Even though CCA participant income data included EITC income, CCA participant income at enrollment was notably lower than that of FVW participants. This is most likely attributable to differences in wages between Robeson County (CCA) and Franklin, Vance, and Warren Counties (FVW).

Appendix G: Explanation of How Career Pathways Data Set was Limited: by Issue, Program, and Number of Participants

One hundred twenty-two (122) participants were excluded from the data used in the WEE analysis to facilitate a more accurate and usable dataset. The exclusions are outlined in Table G-1.

Table G-1. Reasons for Participant Exclusion from Analysis

| Data Issue and Reason for Exclusion | | CCA | FVW |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Enrollment data only. Unable to calculate comparison. | 7 | 29 |
| 2 | Enrolled in 2011. Insufficient time to expect to see change. | 20 | 1 |
| 3 | Income 90% or more of LIS at enrollment. Inclusion would have inflated success rates because enrollment income was so close to 100% of LIS. | 1 | 16 |
| 4 | Labeled inactive (participants no longer actively participating in program) by grantee. | 20 | 28 |
| Total Excluded | | 48 | 74 |

Appendix H: Additional Career Pathways Results

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Table H-1: Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance Status: All

| | Enrollment | Most Recent |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 24% | 75% |
| 74- LIS | 10% | 15% |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 11% | 17% |
| 74- LIS | 1% | 4% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194
 Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-2: Employer-Sponsored Paid Sick Leave Time Status: All

| | Enrollment | Most Recent |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 24% | 75% |
| 74- LIS | 9% | 18% |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 6% | 11% |
| 74- LIS | 1% | 4% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194
 Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-3: Employer-Sponsored Paid Vacation Leave Time Status: All

| | Enrollment | Most Recent |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 24% | 76% |
| 74- LIS | 11% | 9% |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 6% | 11% |
| 74- LIS | 1% | 4% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194
 Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-4: Employer-Sponsored Paid Holiday Leave Time Status: All

| | Enrollment | Most Recent |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 24% | 76% |
| 74- LIS | 9% | 16% |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 6% | 11% |
| 74- LIS | 1% | 4% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194
 Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-5: Employer-Sponsored 401k Status: All

| | Enrollment | Most Recent |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 11% | 58% |
| 74- LIS | 3% | 4% |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 0 | 6% |
| 74- LIS | 1% | 2% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194
 Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-6: Employer Contribution to 401k Status: All includes only participants whose employers provide an employer-sponsored 401k program.

Table H-6: Employer Contribution to 401k Status: All

| | Enrollment | Most Recent |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | |
| 75+ LIS | 20% | 63% |
| 74- LIS | 60% | 20% |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | |
| 75+ LIS | NA | 100% |
| 74- LIS | 25% | 75% |

Includes only participants with employer-sponsored 401k
 Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=46, 74- LIS Participants n=5, All Early Years n=51
 Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=1, 74- LIS Participants n=4, All Later Years n=5
 May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-7: Highest Education Level Completed: All

| | Highest Education Level Completed | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|----|--|----|--|----|--|----|---------------------------|---|
| | No high school or GED | | Completed high school diploma or GED | | Completed career program (certificate/diploma) | | Completed certification exams / requirements | | Completed technical school or associate degree | | Completed bachelor degree | |
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 75+ LIS Enrollment | 1 | 1 | 65 | 82 | 7 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 75+ LIS Most Recent | 0 | 0 | 4 | 5 | 10 | 13 | 9 | 11 | 49 | 62 | 7 | 9 |
| 74- LIS Enrollment | 11 | 10 | 84 | 73 | 12 | 10 | 5 | 41 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| 74- LIS Most Recent | 0 | 0 | 30 | 26 | 38 | 33 | 21 | 18 | 25 | 22 | 1 | 1 |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 75+ LIS Enrollment | 0 | 0 | 11 | 61 | 6 | 33 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 75+ LIS Most Recent | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 33 | 10 | 56 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 6 |
| 74- LIS Enrollment | 8 | 4 | 151 | 81 | 19 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 74- LIS Most Recent | 0 | 0 | 32 | 17 | 70 | 37 | 72 | 39 | 12 | 6 | 1 | 1 |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194

Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-8: Key Results by Time Frame and Most Current LIS: Mean Annual Income, LIS Standing, Employed 40 or More Hours, and Unemployed

| Time Period & LIS Standing | Mean Annual Income | | | Mean LIS Standing | | | % Employed Minimum 40 Hrs/Week | | | % Unemployed | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------|----------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------|---------------|---------------|----------|
| | Enroll-ment \$ | Most Recent \$ | Change \$ | Enroll-ment % | Most Recent % | Change % | Enroll-ment % | Most recent % | Change % | Enroll-ment % | Most Recent % | Change % |
| Early Years (2007-2008) | \$8,958 | \$20,110 | \$11,153 | 28% | 64% | 36% | 22% | 52% | 30% | 37% | 14% | -23% |
| 100 or more LIS | \$9,073 | \$33,943 | \$24,870 | 30% | 118% | 88% | 15% | 94% | 79% | 38% | 0% | -38% |
| 75-99 LIS | \$13,255 | \$27,550 | \$14,295 | 43% | 86% | 44% | 41% | 91% | 50% | 22% | 0% | -22% |
| 74- LIS | \$7,715 | \$12,387 | \$4,672 | 24% | 36% | 12% | 20% | 24% | 4% | 41% | 24% | -17% |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | \$3,897 | \$7,931 | \$4,034 | 12% | 25% | 13% | 6% | 14% | 8% | 65% | 46% | -19% |
| 100 or more LIS | \$9,000 | \$28,000 | \$19,000 | 42% | 130% | 88% | 50% | 50% | 0% | 50% | 0% | -50% |
| 75-99 LIS | \$5,965 | \$21,803 | \$15,838 | 23% | 84% | 62% | 6% | 44% | 38% | 50% | 0% | -50% |
| 74- LIS | \$3,666 | \$6,530 | \$2,864 | 11% | 19% | 8% | 5% | 11% | 6% | 67% | 51% | -16% |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194

Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n=205

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-9: Number of Children Under 18 Years Living in Participants' Households: By Time Period and LIS Achievement

| | Number of Children | | | | | | | | | | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|--------|-----|-------|
| | 0 | | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 to 6 | | |
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 75+ LIS | 22 | 28% | 34 | 43% | 20 | 25% | 3 | 4% | 0 | 0% | 79 |
| 74- LIS | 25 | 22% | 26 | 23% | 36 | 31% | 16 | 14% | 12 | 10% | 115 |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 75+ LIS | 12 | 67% | 4 | 22% | 2 | 11% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 18 |
| 74- LIS | 71 | 38% | 33 | 18% | 52 | 28% | 19 | 10% | 12 | 6% | 187 |
| All Participants | 130 | 33% | 97 | 24% | 110 | 28% | 38 | 10% | 24 | 6% | 399 |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194

Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n= 205

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-10: Participant Age: By Time Period and LIS Achievement

| | Participant Age | | | | | | | | | | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|------------|------------|-----|-------|
| | 18-24 | | 25-29 | | 30-34 | | 35-39 | | 40 or more | | |
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 75+LIS | 22 | 28% | 10 | 13% | 9 | 11% | 15 | 19% | 23 | 29% | 79 |
| 74-LIS | 30 | 26% | 19 | 17% | 22 | 19% | 13 | 11% | 31 | 27% | 115 |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 75+LIS | 2 | 11% | 2 | 11% | 2 | 11% | 6 | 33% | 6 | 33% | 18 |
| 74-LIS | 52 | 28% | 35 | 19% | 29 | 16% | 22 | 12% | 49 | 26% | 187 |
| All Participants | 106 | 27% | 66 | 17% | 62 | 16% | 56 | 14% | 109 | 27% | 399 |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194

Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n= 205

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Table H-11: Participant Race/Ethnicity: By Time Period and LIS Achievement

| | African American/ Black | | Native American/ Indian | | European American/ White | | Other | | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|--------------------------|-----|-------|----|-------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| Early Years (2007-2008) | | | | | | | | | |
| 75+ LIS | 38 | 48% | 23 | 29% | 17 | 22% | 1 | 1% | 79 |
| 74- LIS | 83 | 72% | 17 | 15% | 13 | 11% | 2 | 2% | 115 |
| Later Years (2009-2010) | | | | | | | | | |
| 75+ LIS | 11 | 61% | 4 | 22% | 3 | 17% | 0 | 0% | 18 |
| 74- LIS | 99 | 53% | 57 | 30% | 27 | 14% | 4 | 2% | 187 |
| All Participants | 231 | 58% | 101 | 25% | 60 | 15% | 7 | 2% | 399 |

Early Years (2007-2008): 75+ LIS Participants n=79, 74- LIS Participants n=115, All Early Years n=194

Later Years (2009-2010): 75+ LIS Participants n=18, 74- LIS Participants n=187, All Later Years n= 205

May not add up to 100% due to rounding

Appendix I: Compilation from Report of “Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future”

| Report Section and Topic | Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future |
|---|--|
| <p>3.1.4 Cultivating and Using Relationships <i>(Career Pathways)</i></p> | <p>If key, plan and invest in employer and resource organization network building. Foundation outcomes and grantee benchmarks reflected expectations that grantees would build robust employer and resource organization networks. However, there did not appear to be a significant exploration at the Foundation or at the grantee level of the strategies and investment in relationship-building with employers and resource organizations that would be necessary. Building connectivity, particularly in terms of networks, is time-intensive and requires dedicated – and skilled -- staff time, and, perhaps site coaching support.</p> <p>Maintain dialogue about the relative importance of networks. Related to the above, grantees were unclear if employer and resource organization networks were seen by the Foundation as a means to an end or an essential end unto themselves. When all was said and done, grantees had thrown most of their energy behind achieving their commitments to the Foundation regarding numbers of participants and participant progress. And grantees had let go of much focus on the networks helping to pave the way. Additional conversation about the evolving role and potential of these networks and where to focus project resources might have been useful.</p> |
| <p>3.2.4 Supporting Participants <i>(Career Pathways)</i></p> | <p>Address coaching capacity-building and record-keeping needs. Skillful coaching and record-keeping for the purpose of tracking participants are essential to this career pathways approach. Therefore, early assessing of these capacities and provision of appropriate training and technical assistance would likely strengthen programs. Since WEE’s inception, there are now several coaching models that offer both training and certification for working with participants who seek to make major investments in their economic futures. Adopting a coaching model and seeking certification for staff may be a wise investment. As well, as discussed below, a database that, in part, tracks contacts and the types of services and supports provided to participants, is an important tool that works hand in hand with a coaching model.</p> |
| <p>3.3.4 Changing Larger Systems that Impact Participants <i>(Career Pathways)</i></p> | <p>Clarify degree of emphasis on systems change. Clarifying expectations about systems change would, likely, have been useful for all parties. As it was, it did not seem feasible for these grantees – given their capacities, the tall order of project start-up and their ambitious participant benchmarks, project budgets, and the economy – to comprehensively take on systems change work.</p> |

| Report Section and Topic | Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future |
|---|---|
| <p>(3.3.4. continued)</p> <p>Changing Larger Systems that Impact Participants</p> <p>(Career Pathways)</p> | <p>Invest in systems change capacity building. Ideally, grantees would have joined with other key WEE players (employers, to the extent possible; resource organizations; participants; etc.) to analyze the systems impacting participants, identify the most “actionable” systems changes that would most support participants and others treading in similar waters, and work with other parties to try to leverage change. Such efforts typically benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff capacity-building or direct technical assistance on systems change work • additional research support • capacity-building around coalition-building • more financial support for the needed staffing of the effort • an appreciation for the long-term nature of systems change efforts • where appropriate: partnering with another organization more skilled at advocating for systems changes <p>Particularly given the Foundation’s commitment to broader change, more investment in this type of effort (e.g., even the modest changes of getting a local community development corporation to add an education Individual Development Account (IDA) or getting a community college to offer evening courses) in concert with the service delivery work might have increased WEE Project impact.</p> |
| <p>3.4.4.</p> <p>Collecting and Using Data</p> <p>(Career Pathways)</p> | <p>Provide early capacity assessment and support around data. Early assessment of grantees’ data capacities and development of tailored supports would likely strengthen this work. For employer data collection and interpretation, grantees might benefit from how-to materials, specific technical assistance, and/or partnering with a community-oriented researcher or other party well-grounded in workforce development. However, as described above, some important employer data might still remain out of reach. For participant data analysis, interpretation, and use, grantees would likely benefit from Year 1 initiation of technical assistance and of database use and ongoing support throughout the project.</p> <p>Invest in a more sophisticated database. As discussed, the database was modest. Other commercially available programs (e.g., Salesforce or Social Solutions) integrate more functions with traditional database tools. Such programs can be accessed by multiple staff within an organization and can integrate participant communication, note keeping, and the like into one system. These programs can also generate more grantee-friendly reports. Such an investment holds promise for facilitating stronger data analysis, interpretation, and use among grantees.</p> <p>Consider grantee staffer focus on data. Many prospective grantees do not have sufficient data capacity. Along with assessment and capacity-building, it may be useful to consider dialoguing with grantees and investing in dedicated grantee staff member time on data-related work. The most appropriate staffer may not be a current program person. While such a strategy fails to address the broader need for organizations to undergo a culture change around data analysis and use, it can help institutionalize the function and provide an opportunity to build from there.</p> |

| Report Section and Topic | Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future |
|---|--|
| <p>3.5.4. Using Strategic, Outcomes-Based Planning and Reflection <i>(Career Pathways)</i></p> | <p>Prioritize planning and reflection. The Foundation was operating in relatively uncharted territory in planning the WEE Project. In many ways the same was amplified for the grantees. The Foundation certainly did invest board, staff, program design consultant, site coach, and grantee time and expertise in outcome and benchmark development. Still, an outcomes and benchmark development and reflection process that was ongoing throughout the life of the project and that used a more collaborative planning and learning process would likely have been better suited to this project.</p> <p>Decide what to do when outcomes or benchmarks are significantly off-base. The Foundation and the grantees did their best to develop their aims. However, in all cases and to varying degrees, Foundation outcomes and grantee benchmarks were significantly over-ambitious, particularly following the economic downturn. More attention to regularly revisiting the outcomes and benchmarks, considering changes as needed, and articulating how grantee success and overall WEE Project success would be assessed in light of any revisions would have been useful for all parties.</p> |
| <p>5.6 AWE <i>(Micro-Enterprise)</i></p> | <p>Plan for extended timeline for micro-enterprise development. This timeline issue was explored through a literature review and discussed during WEE's early stages by the WEE Project Board Committee, staff, and project consultant. That said, the Foundation might have benefited from probing this long-haul-to-growth concern more extensively to determine if this approach was a good fit under the umbrella of WEE. For example, the Foundation might have asked HandMade to more concretely respond to this concern and its implications via the emerging literature, local experience, and the like since even in a strong economic climate, much micro-enterprise development is a slow process.</p> |

| Report Section and Topic | Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future |
|--|---|
| <p>(5.6 continued)</p> <p>AWE</p> <p>(Micro-Enterprise)</p> | <p>Engage in ongoing dialogue and reflection and clarify expectations with grantees. To state the obvious, micro-enterprise development is very challenging work. The AWE project would likely have benefited from more dialogue and/or, where appropriate, expectation-setting with the Foundation. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participant selection and overall growth assumptions: Given the initial AWE benchmark around business income increases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was it strategic to enroll any and all interested prospective participants versus aiming for at least some percentage of participants who had what appeared to be more viable business prospects or who were willing to pursue new, more viable products or services? ▪ Similarly, 1) as the project considered a shift to a skills benchmark and had more information about its participants' very limited capital, limited-to-no experience with other formal business ventures, and other lifestyle priorities (see above), and 2) given what is more generally known about the low success rate of very small businesses: would a focus on business skill development be enough to bring about significant business (and then household) income gain once the economy recovered? And if the answer appeared to be "no," what then? Thinking about economic equity work in western North Carolina and the dearth of approaches to working in very isolated rural areas, what would the implications be for AWE and for the Foundation? ○ Data: Given the Foundation's growing commitment over the course of WEE to tracking changes in participant status, might the Foundation have considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ specific data gathering and analysis requirements – despite the preferences of AWE staff – in order to continue as a grantee in the WEE Project? ▪ assigning an evaluator to work with AWE to sharpen and quantify its benchmarks and develop a database, indicators, and data collection tools and processes? ▪ building in other data support (e.g., data collection and data entry support) to strengthen the quality and consistency of the data? ▪ ensuring expectations were set by AWE staff with prospective participants about the level of evaluation information (e.g., non-proprietary business income data) they would need to share in order to participate -- and any lingering participant privacy concerns were addressed? |

| Report Section and Topic | Larger Foundation Implications/Considerations for the Future |
|--|---|
| <p>(5.6 continued) AWE (Micro-Enterprise)</p> | <p>Provide more Foundation staffing to support the later-stage work. The Foundation invested considerable time with AWE staff over AWE's first few years. However, as noted by the parties themselves, during the last eighteen plus months of AWE, there was not sufficient program officer oversight and reflection and site coaching support provided to AWE. In addition, the final site coach was not involved at project start-up, which likely would have been useful. Particularly given the challenges noted above, it appears that AWE would have benefited from additional Foundation staff resources during this time.</p> |

Appendix J: FVW and CCA Employer and Resource Organization Network Overview

| ELEMENT | FVW | CCA |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| EMPLOYER NETWORK | | |
| Overview | Maintained a single employer network. | Combined employer and resource organization networks to form: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Careers Alliance (primary focus because greater job growth) • Education Careers Alliance (secondary focus). |
| Participants | Biotechnology, high-tech manufacturing, and healthcare employers; temporary employment agencies; local Employment Security Commission offices; etc. | Home health care agencies, hospitals, Robeson Community College, UNC-Pembroke, Workforce Development, Public Schools of Robeson County, Smart Start, Robeson County CDC, other service providers |
| Value-Added | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on hiring practices and trends. • Profile ideal characteristics in job candidates (leading to changes in WEE training). • Updates on job availability. • Access to facility tours. • Internship opportunities. | <p><i>From employers and/or resource organizations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant content and issues for education/training and coaching employees, prospective employees including on key barriers (e.g., transportation, ill child or elder parent) to overcome and key competencies to develop. • Referrals of participants to WEE. • Advice on WEE on priorities vis a vis services, program expansion, policy leveraging. • Among employers and/or resource organizations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support to one another re: sector shifts and changes due to public policy and the private market. • Raise the bar by hearing from one another about what “the competition” is offering to employees (e.g., health or education benefits). • Provide assessment of the sector and various systems; identifying needed improvements and how key players can leverage change. |

| ELEMENT | FVW | CCA |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over half the employers involved at the start have left the area due to economy. • Other employers still attended meetings and offered opinions but didn't have much to offer in terms of support (e.g., jobs, internships, etc.). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCA understaffed to fully cultivate the alliances for greatest benefit to all. • Alliance members tended to be the larger health care employers who did not employ the majority of WEE participants. Smaller health care employers who did employ many WEE participants often stretched too thin to attend. |
| Tips for Cultivation and Full Use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go to employers to meet one-on-one rather than expect them to attend full-network meetings. • Communicate back to them on FVW follow-through on their individual program recommendations to WEE. • Engage the smaller employers, as they often employ WEE-type participants. • Keep network's benefits to employers central in their minds. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use social service agencies' knowledge of their population, since there is significant overlap. • Think about how alliance members can make changes that support other community members, not just WEE participants. • Ensure alliance members' self-interest is being met. • Develop linkages among alliance members rather than only between alliance members and CCA. |
| RESOURCE ORGANIZATION NETWORK | | |
| Participants | <p>JobLinks, DSS, Salvation Army, Vance-Granville Community College, Work First, food pantry, etc.</p> <p><i>Note: Because FVW was the biggest resource organization in the area, many of the critical services were internal.</i></p> | See above. |
| Value-Added | Made services available to WEE participants that they wouldn't otherwise know about and/or access. | |
| Challenges | Additional constraints on these organizations due to the economy at the same time FVW was referring more participants to them for support. | |
| Tips for Cultivation and Full Use | Creation/coordination of Resource Organization Network e-mail distribution to relay changes in service offerings. | |

Appendix K: FVW and CCA Women's Network Overview

| ELEMENT | FVW | CCA |
|--|---|---|
| Number of Participants | 188 | 333 |
| Eligibility Requirements | At least a high school diploma or GED and interest in the project | No educational minimum and interest in the project |
| Offerings for Participants (<i>non-financial</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coaching (intensive and otherwise) and regular check-ins. Number of participants coached per month varied depending on traffic in the WEE Den (see below) and needs of clients. Clients required to make contact for coaching updates at least once/month. • “WEE Den:” women-centered location for socializing, using computers, having a (free) lunch, attending trainings, etc. • attitudinal trainings • testing support • self-organized peer support: peer tutoring, carpooling, childcare exchanges • social events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coaching: intensive one-on-one coaching (primarily phone). On average: ~100-125 coaching sessions per month; coaching session length: ~20-30 minutes by phone, ~30-60 minutes in-person. • support group and education/training services: Career Development Institute (CDI) held monthly and facilitated group support, network, activities planning, and special education and training sessions. • information sharing on educational programs and job opportunities (including employer, resource organization presentations) • institutional mediation and advocacy with and for WEE participants to help them access systems, services • referrals for services from other service providers • technical assistance in resume development, on-line college applications, word processing, etc. • self-organized peer support: study groups, carpooling, peer mentoring • social events • Women's Fund fundraising by WEE participants to “give back” to other women, build leadership |

| ELEMENT | FVW | CCA |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Financial support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scholarships for schooling (tuition, books, etc.) • gas vouchers for transportation to/from school • other support provided through other FVW programs to support “wrap-around” approach <p><i>Note: More financial assistance was originally being provided in “supportive services” (transportation assistance, emergency situations, etc.). But the site determined a better use of the limited funds was to focus more -- but not exclusively -- on school-specific needs.</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s Fund: scholarships and loans for schooling (tuition, books, uniforms, etc.) • travel stipends to attend CDI sessions • referrals to other programs for other financial assistance |
| Participation Requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 check-ins/month with staff and regular program event attendance required to remain officially “active.” • “Check-in” was defined as a contact via phone, email, or site-visit. If not “active,” then referred for intensive coaching and ineligible for financial assistance until participation increased. • Participants not employed in chosen field or not enrolled in further related training were assigned for “intensive coaching.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participants were defined as those having “regular” coaching sessions, attending CDI’s., or receiving financial assistance. • Participants were given a good deal of latitude to remain in the program due to their many life obligations. |

Appendix L: AWE Women's Network Overview

| ELEMENT | AWE DETAILS |
|----------------------------|--|
| Number of Participants | 107 |
| Eligibility Requirements | Ran a small business or interested in starting one. |
| Offerings for Participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly meetings via 5 local networks for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ networking with and getting encouragement from other participants ○ Formal and informal training and support around marketing and, to a lesser degree, technical (e.g., procurement, government regulations) and financial issues (e.g., bookkeeping) • Technical assistance on specific business needs (e.g. completing loan application, one-on-one bookkeeping, using social media/technology for marketing) • Information on and connections to markets • Individual business web presence via: http://www.appalachianwomenentrepreneurs.org/ • Referrals for food stamps, subsidized housing, etc.; advice on EITC; etc. • Two women's convenings (of all participants) |
| Participation Requirements | Had to be active monthly in some way in activities such as: monthly meetings, different workshops, one-on-one assistance, participation in evaluation. |

Appendix M: AWE Resource Organization Network Overview

| ELEMENT | AWE DETAILS |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Overview | Informal network of service providers, etc. that AWE tapped to support participants. Some of these providers would not, typically, have worked with these very small businesses except for the brokering of AWE. |
| Participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GREAT (Graham County Revitalization and Economic Action Team) • Land-of-Sky Regional Council, USDA Revolving Loan Fund • Mountain BizWorks • NC Cooperative Extension offices in Madison, Graham, Rutherford • Rutherford Connects • Regional Business Service Providers of Western North Carolina • SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) • Self-Help Credit Union • Small Business Centers at community colleges (AB Tech, Isothermal, Southwest, Tri-County) • Small Business Technology Development Center • Very Small Business Center of Madison County • WNC AgOptions Program |
| Value-Added | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering business support services in local rural communities. • Facilitating AWE participants having a seat at the table at traditionally larger-business support organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce). • Helping some organizations (e.g., Chambers, Economic Development Boards, community colleges) better understand how to adapt their services and supports to AWE participants and others like them (e.g., offering classes at more accessible times of day, offering training of greater relevance to AWE participants). • Brokering organizations typically serving larger or more established businesses supporting groups of AWE businesses. |
| Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term funding support for rural service delivery. • Maintaining network member interest in this population of very small business owners (small number to be served at a distance). • Getting network members to make their trainings, etc. relevant to these businesses. • Identifying marketing targeted to small rural businesses. |
| Tips for Cultivation and Full Use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make specific requests of network members. • Explore mutual interests as possible and build on those. |

Appendix N: AWE Participant Data Set Inclusion Decisions

A total of 107 businesses were enrolled in AWE. In the process of preparing the data for analysis, the following adjustments -- similar to those for the CCA and FVW datasets -- were made to facilitate a more accurate and usable dataset. Participants were omitted if they:

- had missing data points (27)
- were no longer active in AWE (29)
- were not enrolled long enough in AWE to have useful 2011 snapshot data (1)

After these adjustments, there were 50 participants in the dataset -- 47% of the participants.