



# Five-City Equitable Development Workforce Pilot

## Year Two Evaluation Report

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In 2021, 11th Street Bridge Park (Bridge Park) in Washington, DC, received a three-year, \$1.5 million grant from the JPB Foundation to establish a “five-city pilot” to expand its highly regarded workforce-development approach to similar equity-focused parks around the country. The Five-City Equitable Workforce Development Pilot brings together five equity-focused infrastructure-reuse projects with the goal of developing a scalable, replicable workforce-training model to ensure neighborhood residents benefit from new infrastructure-reuse projects. In addition to Washington, DC (Bridge Park), the pilot sites are located in San Francisco (India Basin Waterfront Park), Buffalo, New York (The Riverline), Grand Rapids, Michigan (Grand River Corridor), and Dallas, Texas (Trinity Park Conservancy). These sites represent a diversity of city sizes and geographies and a blend of high-growth and rust-belt economies.

This report documents the sites’ efforts in year two of the pilot, covering May 2022 to April 2023. The first section of the report discusses each of the five sites, concentrating on partnership structure, outreach strategies and results, and workforce development strategies and results. The second section details two key themes that emerged across sites in the pilot’s second year: commonalities in addressing barriers to employment and persistent challenges to data collection. The report concludes by looking forward to potential developments going into the pilot’s third and final year.

The information for this report comes from the following sources: site workplans and MOUs, mid-year and end-of-year reports submitted to the JPB Foundation, responses to the aggregate data-

collection framework, interviews with staff at each of the five pilot sites, the content of monthly pilot meetings, and, where applicable, site websites and press releases.

## Site-By-Site Overview

This section documents sites' year two approaches and outcomes in the following key areas:

- **partnership structure:** outreach, training, wraparound, and employer partners crucial to recruiting, retaining, and placing enrolled trainees.
- **outreach strategies and results:** sites' and their partners' approaches to and outcomes of engaging and recruiting trainees, with a particular emphasis on trainees from the sites' priority neighborhoods located near each park
- **workforce development strategies and results:** approaches and outcomes of the sites' workforce development programs

### India Basin Waterfront Park

The India Basin Waterfront Park (India Basin) is located in the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood of San Francisco, one of the city's most historically underserved communities. As of the end of year two of the Five City Workforce Pilot, India Basin was in the second of three phases of construction with plans to open the first half of the park in 2024. A primary goal of the India Basin project is to foster equitable economic opportunity for nearby residents. A core workforce strategy is to ensure that residents can access park-generated jobs at all stages of its development. Overall equitable development goals include increasing public access, social equity, recreation, resiliency, and environmental justice along San Francisco's southern waterfront (San Francisco Parks Alliance et al. 2022).

#### PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

The India Basin Waterfront Park project is led by a partnership between the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Trust for Public Land, the San Francisco Parks Alliance, the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department, and the Bayview-Hunters Point community. A. Philip Randolph Institute is the project's main workforce-development provider, offering training in partnership with the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development's CityBuild Construction Training Academy. The San Francisco Parks Alliance is the subgrantee of the Five-City Pilot grant. Other core project partners include Swinerton Construction Company, which serves as the project's general contractor and is a key employer partner, and the San Francisco Housing Authority, which supports the project's outreach efforts.

#### OUTREACH STRATEGIES AND RESULTS

The low-income community of southeast San Francisco's District 10 is the target population for India Basin's workforce-development efforts. Bayview Hunters Point, the District 10 neighborhood where India Basin is sited, is considered to be one of the few remaining Black communities in the city: in 2020,

40 percent of its residents were Black, compared to 5 percent city-wide. In year two, India Basin reported reaching over 3,000 residents, employing methods such as door-to-door outreach, job and resource fairs, and social media outreach with an eye toward reaching a younger audience. India Basin partners also focus on recruiting residents of nearby publicly subsidized housing. For example, in partnership with the local housing authority, the project distributed flyers to residents through rent statements. Of their outreach strategies, India Basin identifies word-of-mouth as the most successful. For example, 6 out of 14 participants who enrolled in the second cohort of the project's Specialty Skills Training program were referred by participants in the first cohort.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND RESULTS

Through A. Philip Randolph Institute and CityBuild, India Basin offers the "India Basin Construction Job Readiness Training" to community members. After completion, participants may enroll in the "India Basin Specialty Construction Skills Training" training program. After residents complete the specialty skills training, India Basin can refer them to the unions to be indentured and potentially placed to work on the park or other city-wide sites.

Initially, India Basin faced a challenge with placing training graduates into construction jobs on the park. In the first phase of construction, the project mostly needed technical marine work, which was beyond the scope of the job readiness and construction specialty skills trainings; therefore, they were not able to place graduates until other construction roles became available. Thus far, Swinerton, the project's general contractor, has committed to placing 15 people in jobs for construction on the park such as general carpentry and framing. India Basin partners are also exploring employment pathways other than construction, adding training for arborist, administration, and management positions.

Between July 2022 and April 2023, 38 residents who live in nearby neighborhoods enrolled in the eight-week job-readiness training. India Basin also held two cohorts of the construction specialty skills training during this period. Nine residents enrolled in the first cohort and 14 enrolled in the second. Across both cohorts, 15 participants graduated and, of those, eight were indentured into the general laborer's union. Three other participants were placed in what project leadership has termed "family-sustaining" jobs either on the park or on other construction sites in San Francisco.

India Basin has achieved notable improvement in the completion rate for the construction specialty skills training. In the second cohort of the training, 79 percent of participants completed the program, a vast improvement compared to the previous cohort, where only 44 percent graduated. The site attributes this gain to the introduction of a few key supports for participants, such as food during the trainings and a \$400 cash stipend. By providing breakfast and lunch, the project ensured that participants were not hungry during the morning session and that they would not have to leave the area to get lunch, potentially causing them to arrive late to the afternoon session after traveling off-site to eat. In addition, each participant was eligible to receive a \$400 stipend upon completing the program and passing a drug test, creating an additional incentive for program completion. These stipends were awarded at the graduation ceremony in May, during which 16 participants were awarded certificates for completing the training.

## 11th Street Bridge Park

11th Street Bridge Park (Bridge Park), a project of Building Bridges Across the River (Building Bridges), is located in the Anacostia neighborhood of Ward 8 in Washington, DC. The project will convert the pylons of a demolished commuter bridge into an elevated park featuring recreation, arts, and culture. Once complete, the park will span the Anacostia River to connect some of DC's most historically disinvested neighborhoods in Ward 8 (e.g., Anacostia, Congress Heights) with some of DC's highest income neighborhoods in Ward 6 (e.g., Capitol Hill, Navy Yard). Construction on Bridge Park has not yet started, but the site aims to break ground in late 2023. The project's equitable development plan focuses on advancing opportunity for Ward 7's and Ward 8's majority Black population, who have long experienced barriers to accessing prosperity blooming in other parts of the city (Building Bridges Across the River 2018). Bridge Park leaders implement equitable development plan strategies across four areas: housing, arts and culture, workforce development, and small business. Skyland Workforce Center (Skyland) leads Bridge Park's workforce development efforts by training skilled and unskilled jobseekers for construction positions with Bridge Park and on other job sites across the region. Because Skyland is also a project of Building Bridges, which manages the Five-City Pilot overall, the Skyland manager is often called upon to lead pilot planning and strategy sessions.

### PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

Skyland hires instructors and consultants to provide training directly to enrollees, and, at present, does not formally engage other workforce training partners. Skyland's programming often benefits from relationships cultivated via Building Bridges' extensive partner network; for example, Skyland leverages relationships with employer partners to identify hiring and apprenticeship opportunities for their program graduates. Skyland engaged 12 employer partners in 2022.

### OUTREACH STRATEGIES AND RESULTS

Skyland's outreach efforts focus on recruiting residents from DC's Wards 7 and 8. The main method of community outreach is word-of-mouth. The site also conducts outreach via social media and a biweekly email newsletter that reaches around 4,000 people. Skyland experienced an upsurge in enrollment when two younger staff members, who grew up in Southeast DC, posted about the training on their personal Instagram accounts. The Skyland team also hosts regular community dinners, during which program graduates share their experiences and challenges related to construction work. Skyland also reaches local trainees by collaborating closely with over a dozen partners located in THEARC (Town Hall Education, Arts, and Recreation Center), a bustling Ward 8 community center managed by Building Bridges.

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Skyland expects to have trained 40 individuals through their two-week "Construction Safety Training" course by the end of year two. To date, this course has been offered four to six times per year. Skyland leaders plan to increase the frequency of the training to once per month now that they have received a \$280,000 grant from local employer Washington Gas. To support participants in their transition to employment, Skyland partners with the National Capital Area Food Bank to provide groceries and

transportation reimbursements for graduates who have been hired, but who have not yet received their first paycheck.

In year two, Skyland began offering a financial incentive to enrollees to improve retention and graduation rates for the construction safety course. Skyland also offers participants a gift card at the end of each successful week of programming, allowing participants to decide how to spend the additional funds. Skyland noted that most participants use the gift card to cover transportation costs.

In year two, Skyland completed four cohorts of their construction safety training course, bringing the total to nine cohorts since the inception of the Five-City Pilot. Across the four cohorts, 36 participants successfully completed the course and earned CPR, Flagger, and OSHA 30 certifications. Fourteen graduates coming from the target population were hired into full-time jobs and one graduate secured a part time job.

## **Trinity Park**

The Trinity Park Conservancy (TPC) is the nonprofit organization leading the development of Harold Simmons Park, which will be built along the Trinity River in Dallas, Texas. Separating downtown Dallas from comparatively underinvested neighborhoods to the southwest, the river geographically and economically divides Dallas, as it has in the past. The park will serve as a connection between the two sides and provide economic, social and environmental value for nearby residents (Trinity Park Conservancy 2019). Construction on the park has not yet started; however, site leadership hopes to break ground in 2024.

### **PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE**

Since the start of the pilot, TPC has engaged several workforce development partners to provide trainings. In year one, TPC partnered with three different organizations focused on workforce development. By the end of year two, TPC identified four new community-based workforce partners: Ready to Work, Lone Star Justice Alliance, Southern Dallas Link, and Professional Opportunity Connection for All. Each of these organizations specialize in workforce training, job placement, and barrier removal, and all four are minority led. Lone Star Justice Alliance is equipped to serve returning citizens and Professional Opportunity Connection for All is equipped to serve undocumented communities. In addition to these newly formed workforce partnerships, TPC engaged at least 20 employers in 2022.

### **OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES**

Outreach and recruitment are another component of Trinity Park's program that is largely supported by partner organizations. Trinity Park partners prioritize outreach to Black and Latino residents in the West Dallas and Oak Cliff neighborhoods, both adjacent to the project's footprint. Trinity Park partners have utilized online job-posting platforms, flyers and job fairs in their outreach efforts. Partners have also worked with local CBOs to engage potential participants from their target populations. With two full-time community engagement directors, TPC prioritizes a culture of collaboration among program

partners and other community groups to better source new participants and equip existing participants with the tools to successfully complete trainings and sustain employment.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

As mentioned above, Trinity Park's workforce training is conducted by partners. Their goal is to provide training so that participants are qualified for "high-purpose," high-pay, and high-demand careers. Trinity Park works to better meet the needs of program participants by providing wraparound services. The transition in workforce development partners from year one to year two intentionally added a layer of local expertise to service delivery. The four community-based partners already had experience serving low socioeconomic areas. Through their partnership, TPC has been able to better understand the barriers to employment that residents face and the necessary wraparound services to address those challenges.

TPC indicated that they would like to see the following successes through their program implementation:

- more than 40 job seekers are trained, certified and employed
- more than 50 percent of job seekers maintain employment for more than 90 days
- more than 100 workers have reliable transportation to living wage jobs

Trinity Park exceeded its training goals in year two, estimating that 60–80 participants completed training, with 50–60 individuals receiving NCCER and OSHA 30 certifications. Additionally, 20 people earned credentials to become HVAC technicians, 16 trainees are currently working full-time as certified maintenance technicians, and about 50–60 participants are employed in the construction industry.

## The Riverline

The Riverline is a 1.5-mile-long nature trail that was formerly the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western railroad in Buffalo, New York. Adjacent to downtown Buffalo and the Buffalo River, The Riverline extends through three historic working-class neighborhoods: the Old First Ward, Perry, and the Valley. The Western New York Land Conservancy is a land trust that is developing The Riverline, aiming to transform it into an inclusive gathering space that enhances the quality of life of neighboring residents (University at Buffalo Regional Institute et al. 2020).

## PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

The Riverline's primary partners are the Western New York Land Conservancy, the Buffalo Center for Arts and Technology, and the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy. The Buffalo Center for Arts and Technology provides training through the Landscape Maintenance Technician program and Olmsted Parks provides the instructor for the programming. The Riverline will not need to hire landscape maintenance technicians for several years as development of the site is not yet underway. Instead, graduates are hired by Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy and other employer partners to work in other green spaces.

## OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

The site's target populations for recruitment are residents of the three historic neighborhoods along The Riverline: the Old First Ward, Perry, and the Valley. The three neighborhoods are characterized as having a less active housing market, higher levels of poverty, and fewer adults with a college education than other neighborhoods in Buffalo. These neighborhoods are on the edge of downtown, with many vacant lots and other properties that can be redeveloped, inviting commercial investment and potentially making these communities more vulnerable to displacement.

The Western New York Land Conservancy employs a wide variety of methods for community outreach to this population. Strategies include ads in local newspapers, radio stations, community newsletters, flyers, and door to door outreach. The Western New York Land Conservancy has partnered with WUFO (Power 96.5), a local radio station with high listenership among the project's target population, to support the project's outreach efforts—including attending job fairs hosted by the station. In an effort to better engage The Riverline communities, the site broadly publicizes the hiring rate and wages for landscape maintenance technicians and shares success stories through media and social media to attract new participants to trainings.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

In year two of the Five-City Pilot, The Riverline's primary goal for workforce development was to train at least 25 individuals from priority populations to be landscape maintenance technicians. Originally, the site's "Landscape Maintenance Technician" training ran from January to April every year, with three months of classes followed by one month of field training. After observing declining enrollment, the site replaced this classroom approach with an "Earn to Learn" model in spring of 2023.

Under this approach, participants secure jobs through employer partners and receive training while employed. This approach addresses a common barrier for participation in workforce development programs: the lack of income while training. Additionally, employers are compensated for the days that the participant attends class and are therefore unavailable to work. After a delayed start, the Earn to Learn program started in early May. While The Riverline believes this strategy is promising, only nine individuals enrolled and several employers withdrew from the program saying they were short staffed and could not afford to lose staff time to training time.

Because the Earn to Learn program was delayed to May 2023, The Riverline did not conduct any workforce trainings during year two of the pilot. Since year one, 12 people have completed trainings and received certifications to become a Landscape Maintenance Technician. Of these graduates, 11 were hired into full time jobs and have retained employment for more than 90 days.

## Grand River

The Grand River Restoration project (Grand River) in Grand Rapids, Michigan, seeks to generate significant and sustained interest in the region through the redevelopment of opportunity sites along the river, including parks and other publicly owned sites (Grand River Voices 2023). Lyon Square, an urban riverfront park in the heart of Grand Rapids, is the first site in this redevelopment initiative and

will be the first public space improvement project along the Grand River Corridor. Construction has not yet begun due to project permitting delays; however, Grand River completed the construction bidding process in September 2023.

### **PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE**

Key partners in the restoration effort include the City of Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Community College, and Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc. The city is developing equitable solutions to ensure that the river is accessible for everyone in the community. Grand Rapids Community College provides tailored training in various construction skills, while Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc. manages grants and coordinates collaborative efforts across the community. By the end of year two, Grand River had a total of 13 employer partnerships, 4 of which were brought on between February and April 2023.

### **OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES**

In year two, given the continued challenges with delays in project permitting, Grand River's partners prioritized community outreach efforts and fostering relationships between companies and community service organizations. Grand River identified several "neighborhoods of focus" within two miles of the river corridor revitalization area as targets for their workforce development programming. These neighborhoods are characterized as having a higher nonwhite population and a lower median household income compared with the rest of Kent County. Within these neighborhoods, Grand River also focuses on a subset of communities on the south/south eastern side of the project area. Additionally, the project intends to target residents who are 18 to 24 years old with its marketing and recruitment efforts.

Grand River Restoration partners regularly connect with grassroots organizations throughout the community to share information about the Grand River corridor project and training programming. Grand River launched a community event "River Construction, Coffee, and Conversations," which connects community members, owners of Micro-Local Business Enterprises and Woman-owned Business Enterprises, and service providers with major construction firms to learn about available jobs and training programs. This event series started in November 2022 and is held bimonthly. Grand River also established the Grand River Restoration Workforce Council to explore ways to incorporate wraparound services into programming, including job placement services, financial literacy training, and mentorship opportunities.

Grand River's partners also conducted outreach at 58 engagement events in year two, reaching an estimated 514 individuals. These events included the City of Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit, two college open houses, and ten community events.

### **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

Grand River emphasizes a training model that supports residents through wraparound services and removal of barriers to employment. Of the 37 participants enrolled in residential construction and electrical trainings in Q4 of program year two, 22 completed and received certifications such as OSHA 10, first aid/CPR, and a builders license. These participants also received soft skills training through their enrollment in the program.



## Cross-Site Themes

Despite being at different stages of development and adopting different approaches to achieving their equity goals, the Five-City Pilot projects share some programmatic experiences and challenges. For example, word-of-mouth and the use of peer messengers emerged as particularly effective outreach strategies for reaching participants. And, on the workforce side, for projects located in cold-weather climates along the Great Lakes (The Riverline and Grand River), cold winter temperatures often depressed program participation.

In this section, we explore two major themes that emerged across the pilot sites in year two. First, we detail sites' approaches to resolving common barriers to employment and participant retention in trainings. Next, we discuss challenges related to collecting program data, highlighting the importance of partnership structures, and describing potential paths forward.

### Barriers to Employment

As part of their effort to reach and support individuals who they consider “harder-to-employ,” the member sites and organizations of the Five-City Pilot have worked to identify and resolve four key barriers to employment in year two: reliable access to transportation, mental health, substance abuse challenges, and childcare. Individuals who are harder to employ are disproportionately more likely to face these barriers, and barriers to employment also tend to be barriers to successful course completion. In many cases, sites discussed these challenges through the lens of participant retention. However, because barriers to employment are better established in the workforce development literature, we adopt a similar perspective in this section.

Almost exclusively, site leaders work with external partners to help resolve barriers to employment. The most common partnerships are with dedicated wraparound service providers although, in some cases, workforce training partners also provide wraparound services. We note that the barriers to employment discussed in this section are not exhaustive. In addition to the barriers listed here, sites also raised lack of food, identification, and appropriate work attire as barriers to employment and successful course participation, along with lack of soft skills such as timeliness and the ability to follow a schedule.

In year two, based on feedback received from the pilot sites in their end-of-year reports, JPB made an additional \$75,000 in funding (\$15,000 per site) available to the pilot sites to use to address barriers. To date, only the India Basin site has accessed the \$15,000 grant, which they used to increase stipend amounts offered to participants. These stipends are paid to trainees after successful course completion. Trinity Park Conservancy also applied for the additional funding, proposing to use the funds to mitigate transportation-related barriers to employment. Their application is currently pending.

#### ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION

Lack of access to reliable transportation is well established as a key barrier to stable employment. A survey conducted by the Chicago Jobs Council found that transportation was the top barrier to

respondents finding and maintaining employment.<sup>1</sup> This finding was consistent with the experience of the pilot sites, with all five projects mentioning transportation as a barrier to employment or course completion.

One approach pilot sites are using to mitigate this barrier is directly subsidizing transportation access. The Riverline subsidizes bus fares for program participants and Skyland Workforce Center covers public transportation costs for trainees who have secured employment until they receive their first paycheck. This approach is dependent on trainees living in areas with access to public transportation. In other words, while it may solve the spatial mismatch problem—wherein jobseekers and employment opportunities are not located near one another—subsidizing public transportation still depends on adequate transportation infrastructure.

Unfortunately, adequate transportation infrastructure is not a given for those living in disinvested communities. Research suggests that there are significant racial and economic disparities in transportation access: “white, highly educated, and high-income residents have greater access to public transportation, and wealth differences by race and ethnicity make it easier for white residents to purchase a car, allowing for increased access to jobs.”<sup>2</sup> The five cities comprising the workforce pilot are no exception. In Bayview Hunters Point, which houses India Basin Waterfront Park, a 2010 study found “Traveling to or within Bayview Hunters Point without a car is difficult ... Community members with minimal automobile access are challenged to reach jobs, schools, grocery stores, and other important destinations in a safe and timely manner” (San Francisco County Transportation Authority 2010). And in Dallas, home to Trinity Park Conservancy, one-third of transit-dependent riders did not live within a quarter mile of a bus stop or a half mile of a rail station, with most of Dallas’ transit-dependent riders living in the Trinity Park Conservancy priority area of South Dallas (Stacy et al. 2022).

In areas without adequate transportation infrastructure, sites are turning to different solutions to mitigate transportation-related barriers to employment. As part of their new slate of partnerships, Trinity Park Conservancy partnered with the Southern Dallas Link, a community-based organization that connects “job seekers of the Southern Sector with reliable transportation to livable wage jobs not on the DART transportation system.”<sup>3</sup> Though not a targeted approach, sites also reported that participants were using flexible funds, such as gift cards or stipends, to cover transportation costs.

In many ways, resolving transportation barriers cuts at the core of the pilot sites’ common mission. As equity-focused infrastructure reuse sites, the pilot members are working to undo legacies of infrastructural racism, legacies that manifest in present-day transportation disparities.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

For the pilot sites, the interrelated issues of mental health challenges and substance abuse were key barriers in year two of the pilot. Though related—substance use disorders can cause, co-occur with, or be instigated by other mental health challenges—we treat them as distinct in this section to acknowledge the two barriers’ differing causes and potential solutions.

Though largely framed as a medical issue, mental health challenges can have outsized influence on individual job readiness. Research finds that poor mental health can negatively affect many facets of employment, including job performance and productivity, engagement with one's work, communication with coworkers, and daily functioning.<sup>4</sup> In interviews, four of the five pilot sites mentioned mental health as a barrier to employment.

Mental health challenges are inextricably linked to patterns of sustained disinvestment, such as those present in the pilot sites' priority neighborhoods. Although mental health and disinvestment may seem unrelated, research finds that "the mental health of individuals is shaped by the social, environmental, and economic conditions in which they are born, grow, work, and age. Poverty and deprivation are key determinants of children's social and behavioral development and adult mental health" (Knifton and Inglis 2020). That mental health challenges are simultaneously causes and consequences of sustained poverty creates a vicious cycle. Knifton and Inglis (2020) state that "mental health problems can lead to impoverishment through loss of employment or underemployment, or fragmentation of social relationships."

The structural causes of mental health challenges heighten the importance of a collaborative, multi-faceted approach to supporting participants and removing barriers to their participation in the labor market. This approach can be difficult to execute. An interviewee from Skyland Workforce Center observed that "We have a lot [of participants] who have mental health struggles and are already getting service from [Washington,] DC." although the interviewee acknowledged that this service is uneven in its quality. In year two, staff from Grand Rapids helped establish the Grand River Restoration Workforce Council in order to "build partnerships between training, job placement, and wraparound services." This approach builds on a philosophy of collaboration that an interviewee from Grand Rapids expressed during an interview.

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*"One of the biggest things has been to create a community of collaborative organizations so that if you have a mental health crisis, I can connect you to the appropriate individuals."*

*—Grand Rapids interviewee*

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Compared to mental health challenges, which were often discussed at a more general level, discussions of substance abuse tended to focus on the need for program enrollees to be able to pass a drug test which is standard in the construction industry. Speaking to this challenge, India Basin's year two end-of-year report describes how drug testing requirements affected a training cohort:

"In our Cohort 1 training in November, three of the nine participants failed their drug tests, terminating their spots in the OST. Four of the remaining six completed and graduated. One of

the four graduates failed his drug test after being sponsored by our general contractor ... and was not enrolled into the union or hired onto the job.”

It is important to note that drug testing itself can be understood as a structural barrier. Research suggests that drug testing occurs more often in workplaces with a higher fraction of racial and ethnic minorities and that Black employees are nearly twice as likely to be reprimanded for a failed drug test compared to their white counterparts.<sup>5</sup> In addition, all but one of the pilot sites (Trinity Park Conservancy) are located in jurisdictions where adult recreational cannabis use is either legal (The Riverline, India Basin, Grand River) or decriminalized (11th Street Bridge Park). The combination of inequitable drug testing, changes in the legal status of cannabis use, and a long latency period for trace marijuana in the human body may set some program participants up for failure.

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*“People don’t realize that you can still get tested and not offered a job because of marijuana. The other thing is marijuana stays in your blood stream for 30 days so you could smoke marijuana on Friday nights only, have no effect on a construction site and still get fired.”*  
—Skyland Workforce Center interviewee

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As they did with mental health support, sites primarily leaned on referrals to outside organizations to provide substance abuse counseling. However, because substance abuse is often downstream of broader, structural challenges, some pilot sites found that substance abuse challenges were especially difficult to solve.

For both substance abuse and mental health challenges, sites emphasized the importance of “extending grace” to program participants. While difficult to operationalize, this approach focuses on centering the humanity of participants and acknowledging that the structure associated with a training program may be unfamiliar to trainees. In specific terms, interviewees discussed being flexible with certain program requirements with participants who seemed committed to training and maintaining an “open door” so that individuals could retake a course after they’ve resolved personal challenges. However, even with an approach of extending grace, training programs still must hew to the industry standard of drug testing in the construction space.

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*“If you’re doing this [workforce development], it’s the balance of having rules from a training program and having grace for who we’re dealing with and that’s a tough line to straddle.”*  
—Trinity Park Conservancy interviewee

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## ACCESS TO CHILDCARE

Like other primary barriers to employment, a lack of reliable childcare can prevent a trainee from successfully completing training or maintaining employment, even absent other barriers. However, compared to substance abuse or mental health challenges, childcare presents a barrier that can be directly resolved by sites or wraparound service providers.

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*“One participant who was placed on a construction job is in danger of losing his placement because he has frequently shown up to work late because [of] early morning childcare issues.”*  
— India Basin end-of-year report

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Most sites reported that their program participants face challenges to accessing affordable, reliable childcare. Discussing retention challenges, an interviewee from Skyland Workforce noted, “you can’t miss the class, so if people have a doctor’s appointment or can’t get childcare, some of those come back but we lose two to three people from each class.” In total, four of the five sites mentioned that access to reliable childcare was a barrier to successful course completion or employment faced by their program participants.

In the pilot sites’ priority neighborhoods, widespread concerns about crime and public safety may exacerbate the challenges posed by a lack of access to reliable services like childcare. A survey conducted by the Ward 8 Community Economic Development Planning Process—a community-based organization in Washington, DC, whose service area includes Bridge Park’s priority neighborhoods—found that 58 percent of respondents believed public safety was their community’s greatest concern. And, in Bayview Hunters Point, India Basin reported that fears of “turf wars, gun violence, and [threats to] personal safety” have prevented potential participants from attending training sessions.

Perceptions of neighborhood violent crime can affect child-rearing practices. A 2021 study published in *Social Science & Medicine* found that “caregivers in elevated violent crime neighborhoods did more than adjust routines or activities. They undertook comparatively drastic measures to protect children,” including eschewing neighborhood resources such as recreation centers and sequestering children in the home (Jespersen et al 2021). Taken together, these measures suggest that leaving mature, school-age children at home unsupervised may be a less-viable option for residents of sites’ priority neighborhoods, simultaneously increasing the importance of reliable childcare and heightening the barrier created by its absence.<sup>6</sup>

Compared to transportation, for which sites uniformly reported taking steps to mitigate the barrier, mitigation of childcare barriers was more uneven. Although Skyland Workforce Center reported offering vouchers for program participants to access childcare services through the city, characterizing

the issue as “an easier one to deal with,” no other site discussed specific steps to address the barrier in staff interviews. This suggests that sites have room to adopt new strategies for resolving barriers related to childcare, including approaches that factor in potential concerns related to neighborhood safety.

## Data Collection

Robust data collection is foundational to the Five City Pilot’s overall goal of creating a “replicable workforce training model.” For example, data collection can help pilot sites understand the “nuts-and-bolts” of program design through interviews and can track program effectiveness through quantitative reporting. However, in year two of the grant, meeting data-collection goals has been an ongoing challenge for the pilot sites. Only one site completed the aggregate data-collection form—the primary data-collection instrument for the pilot—in all four quarters of year two. A newly piloted individual data-collection form was similarly met with minimal uptake. To respond to these challenges, the sites and evaluation team have worked together to modify and streamline data reporting requirements. The evaluation team also developed a three-level framework to characterize each sites’ level of data sophistication, thus creating a tool to assess progress as the sites’ ramp up their data-collection capabilities.

First introduced in July 2021, the aggregate data-collection form is the primary data-collection instrument for the Five City Pilot. The form, which also aligns with JPB Foundation’s quantitative reporting questions, includes sections covering program development, partnership formation, outreach, training offerings, and job outcomes. Despite the importance of the aggregate data-collection form, completing it has been an ongoing challenge for the pilot sites. In year two, the overall submission rate for the aggregate data-collection form was only 50 percent, with four of the five sites failing to submit more than two quarters’ worth of data.

Based on staff interviews and information shared in the monthly pilot meetings, the central challenge to completing the aggregate data-collection form has been the sites’ partnership structures and their data-sharing agreements (or lack thereof) with partners. While a strong partner network is crucial to achieving each sites’ respective workforce development goals, the administrative burden of data collection and transference increases with the number of parties involved while also heightening the difficulty of identifying potential program improvements.

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*“Having a lot of community partners and collaborative efforts is great but [it means] you have to go through a lot of people to get data on things that [have happened] and what that may mean for the project as a whole.”*

*—Grand River interviewee*

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While two sites conduct workforce training either in-house (Skyland Workforce Center) or through a core partner (India Basin), the remaining sites rely on contractors to deliver workforce training services. Although partnership structure was not necessarily predictive of reporting compliance, sites that worked more closely with their workforce development partners (including those with in-house workforce development programs) tended to report smoother data-sharing processes. Describing their experience with data sharing, an interviewee from India Basin's leadership team reported "we're directly connected to the leadership and we're also providing the workforce services, capturing the data, day to day working with my team and the larger partnership." The integrated experience at India Basin stands in sharp contrast to the data-sharing structure at Trinity Park Conservancy, which contracted with three outside organizations to provide workforce training.

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*"What I've found in this process is that managing people and those that you don't see on a day to day basis is difficult for me and for them. Communication has been a struggle, information sharing has been a big barrier in this process."*

*—Trinity Park Conservancy interviewee*

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The challenges experienced when using the aggregate data-collection form have also extended to other data-collection instruments. Although the aggregate data-collection form has been the main source of quantitative data for the evaluation, its exclusion of individual-level data, particularly individual demographic data, has made assessing sites' progress on their equity goals challenging. To fill that gap, the evaluation team developed an *individual* data-collection form, which included individual demographic information, course enrollment, and postenrollment outcomes.

The form was introduced to pilot sites during a monthly meeting in the second quarter of year two and was met with limited uptake. During the period the form was open, only one site entered data for individual participants. Echoing challenges encountered with the aggregate data-collection form; sites raised that the data required for the individual-level form was difficult to collect from project partners. Data-collection challenges may also pose a barrier for sites intending to access funding under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. While no site has reported this challenge thus far, recipients of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act grant funding are required to submit regular reports that may include "quantitative information about the project's progress and impact."<sup>7</sup>

In light of these data-collection challenges, the evaluation team and Building Bridges have taken steps to provide greater support for the pilot sites. Staff at Building Bridges have taken an active role in ensuring sites are aware of data reporting deadlines and requirements. This effort has included holding time in monthly meetings to discuss data challenges and adding reporting deadlines to the calendars of site contacts. After consulting with Building Bridges and receiving feedback from the sites, the

evaluation team streamlined the individual data-collection form. Because the pilot sites have varying staff capacities and are at different stages of development, the revised form will be released only to sites with the capacity to use it once reintroduced.

The Urban evaluation team also developed a three-level data framework to help sites contextualize their data collection and to create measurable pathways to improvement. The framework is composed of the following levels:

- **Level one** consists of *aggregate* program direct-service or referral data (e.g., how many people total were enrolled in or sent to internal or external services or training classes) and insights gained from staff interviews. These data are often required for grant reporting purposes and are less likely to require data from external partners.
- **Level two** adds linked demographic and posttraining outcome data about *individual* participants. While these data require careful handling (e.g., deidentification) and can be harder to collect, often requiring data-sharing agreements with external partners, they are crucial for understanding equity. For example, data linked at the individual level can be analyzed by sites to find out if they are consistently failing to help particular groups (e.g., residents who live closest to the public space, women of color, people with disabilities) at the same rate as other groups.
- **Level three** incorporates data about a sites' partnership structure and its community network. Though often reliant on external sources (e.g., partner websites or memoranda of understanding), these data are relatively easy to obtain and add context for a more robust narrative about what the public space site is doing to bring opportunity to its surrounding neighborhoods.

The framework was presented to the pilot sites at the High Line Network's June convening, "Policy Lab San Francisco – Workforce Development and Infrastructure Reuse." There, the evaluation team led a workshop titled "Narratives of Data: Data Collection for Effective Storytelling." While generally aimed at helping practitioners build a robust impact narrative with data, the workshop was also geared toward addressing the specific challenges members of the Five-City Pilot experience in collecting data from partners. To that end, the evaluation team also conducted a mock data-sharing agreement negotiation and provided attendees with a template for data-sharing agreements.

Although data collection has been a challenge in year two, pilot members left the Policy Lab with a strong sense of momentum. As sites renew or renegotiate contracts with key partners, the inclusion of clear data-sharing agreements should help mitigate the most pressing data challenges experienced thus far.

## Conclusion and Looking Forward to Year Three

Over the course of year two, the pilot sites in the Five-City Equitable Development Workforce Pilot made significant strides in achieving their collective goal of developing a replicable workforce training



model. Sites piloted new workforce development approaches, forged new partnerships and, in many cases, moved closer to “shovel-ready” status and project completion. Nonetheless, as was the case in year one, the pilot sites remain at different stages of development. Some sites, such as India Basin Waterfront Park, are firmly in the construction phase, with robust workforce development programs to match. Meanwhile, others are awaiting final clearances or funding sources before they break ground.

Learnings from the first two years of the pilot will inform the approaches that the sites and evaluation team take going into the pilot’s third and final year. With a more nuanced understanding of the barriers to employment and successful course completion faced by participants, the pilot sites are better equipped to offer supports and form partnerships that can effectively mitigate these barriers. As a complementary effort, the evaluation team expects to put a greater emphasis on understanding the effects of partnership structure on site and participant outcomes. In addition, recognizing that a multisector approach is a prerequisite for an effective workforce development program, pilot leadership has expressed a renewed focus on engaging external experts in monthly pilot meetings. Finally, following the data-collection challenges in year two, the evaluation team and pilot leadership have had preliminary conversations about realigning data-collection timelines to increase participation.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> “Transportation Inequities in Access to Employment,” Active Transportation Alliance, accessed October 2, 2023, <https://activetrans.org/busreports/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/brief-3-employment-links-1.pdf>.
- <sup>2</sup> Christina Stacy, Alena Stern, Kristin Blagg, Yipeng Su, Eleanor Noble, Macy Rainer, and Richard Ezike, “The Unequal Commute,” Urban Institute, October 2020, <https://www.urban.org/features/unequal-commute>.
- <sup>3</sup> “Southern Dallas Link,” Serve Southern Dallas, accessed September 8, 2023, <https://servesouthdallas.org/southern-dallas-link/>.
- <sup>4</sup> “Mental Health in the Workplace,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/tools-resources/pdfs/WHRC-Mental-Health-and-Stress-in-the-Workplace-Issue-Brief-H.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> “Drugs at Work,” American Addiction Centers, accessed September 8, 2023. <https://detox.net/uncover/drugs-at-work/>; Helen Dodson, “Racial Differences Exist in Reports of Workplace Drug Testing,” YaleNews, September 25, 2013, <https://news.yale.edu/2013/09/25/racial-differences-exist-reports-workplace-drug-testing>.
- <sup>6</sup> Three states have established minimum ages for leaving children in the home unsupervised, and many state child welfare guidelines advise against leaving children below the age of twelve at home unsupervised.
- <sup>7</sup> “Oversight Process and Reporting,” WIOA Works Illinois, accessed September 8, 2023. <https://www.illinoisworknet.com/WIOA/Pages/oversightprocess.aspx>.

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