Engaging Disconnected Young People in Education and Work

Findings from the Project Rise Implementation Evaluation

Michelle S. Manno
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October 2015

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Project Rise is one of five evidence-based programs that were incorporated as part of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant to the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the Center for Economic Opportunity. The SIF is a federal program administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. It catalyzes a unique public-private funding model in which each federal dollar must be matched by private and local contributions. Matching funds for Project Rise have been provided by Bloomberg Philanthropies, Open Society Foundations, The Rockefeller Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Goldman Sachs, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, the Haas Foundation, Hall Family Foundation, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, Kansas City Power and Light District, Newark Public Schools, New York Community Trust, Nicholson Foundation, The Pinkerton Foundation, the Prudential Foundation, Tiger Foundation, United Way of Greater Kansas City, United Way of Kansas City Young Leaders Society, the Valentine Perry Snyder Foundation, and Victoria Foundation.

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Overview

Educational attainment and early work experience provide a crucial foundation for future success. However, many young adults are disconnected from both school and the job market. Neglecting these young people can exact a heavy toll on not only the individuals but also society as a whole, for example, through lost productivity and tax contributions, increased dependence on public assistance, and higher rates of criminal activity.

Project Rise served 18- to 24-year-olds who lacked a high school diploma or the equivalent and had been out of school, out of work, and not in any type of education or training program for at least six months. After enrolling as part of a group (or cohort) of 25 to 30 young people, Project Rise participants were to engage in a 12-month sequence of activities centered on case management, classroom education focused mostly on preparation for a high school equivalency certificate, and a paid part-time internship that was conditional on adequate attendance in the educational component. After the internship, participants were expected to enter unsubsidized employment, postsecondary education, or both. The program was operated by three organizations in New York City; one in Newark, New Jersey; and one in Kansas City, Missouri.

The Project Rise program operations and evaluation were funded through the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a public-private partnership administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity led this SIF project in collaboration with MDRC.

Key Findings

This report describes how the Project Rise program operated at each local provider, including the extent to which the participants were engaged and achieved desired outcomes.

- Participants were attracted to Project Rise more by the education component than by the internship opportunity.
- More than 91 percent of program enrollees attended at least some high school equivalency preparation or, less commonly, high school classes. On average, those who attended class received almost 160 hours of instruction. About 72 percent of enrollees began internships; over half of the internship participants worked more than 120 hours.
- Although participants received considerable case management and educational and internship programming, the instability in participants' lives made it difficult to engage them continuously in the planned sequence of activities. Enrolling young people in cohorts with their peers, as well as support from case managers and other adult staff, seemed to help promote participant engagement. The education-conditioned internships appeared to have had a modest influence on encouraging engagement for some participants.
- Within 12 months of enrolling in Project Rise, more than 25 percent of participants earned a high school equivalency credential or (much less commonly) a high school diploma; 45 percent of participants who entered with at least a ninth-grade reading level earned a credential or diploma. Further, about 25 percent entered unsubsidized employment in this timeframe.
- It may be important to consider intermediate (or perhaps nontraditional) outcome measures in programs for disconnected young people, since such measures may reflect progress that is not apparent when relying exclusively on more traditional ones.

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Preface

Educational attainment and positive early work experience provide an important foundation for future success, yet too many high school dropouts (and some graduates) become seriously disconnected from further school and work. Developing effective ways to reengage this population is a pressing public issue, since some employers find it difficult to attract qualified workers, and taxpayers face financial and social costs if large numbers of young people are unemployed.

The search for solutions must account for the diversity within the population of disconnected young people. This group of 16- to 24-year-olds, for example, includes individuals with a high school degree or equivalency certificate who are neither seeking work nor further education; those who left high school without earning a degree or credential; those who may find sporadic, low-wage work; and those facing specific challenges, such as child care responsibilities, substance abuse, or involvement with the juvenile justice or criminal justice systems.

Project Rise, which operates under the auspices of the federal Social Innovation Fund, focuses on disconnected young people ages 18 to 24, offering them a combination of case management, community projects, classroom education, and internships. All enrollees lack a high school degree or equivalency certificate, have been out of school and out of work, and have not engaged in any other sustained program activity for at least six months. This report presents important findings for policymakers, program operators, and funders on the experiences of the five local providers that offered Project Rise to these disadvantaged young people.

The providers' experiences demonstrate both the promise and the challenges of serving disconnected young people. Enrolling individuals in groups (or cohorts) of 25 to 30 participants, for example, appeared to promote bonding through a combination of peer support and positive peer pressure. Nevertheless, Project Rise staff found, as have others, that it can be difficult to continuously engage disconnected young people with limited skills in a planned sequence of activities that leads directly to the desired educational and employment outcomes.

The Project Rise experience thus underscores the value of exploring interim measures that document participants' active engagement and improved educational, work, and social skills, as opposed to relying solely on traditional program outcome measures of degree or certificate attainment and sustained unsubsidized employment. Any such standards would still need to hold providers accountable for helping participants make genuine progress, but would recognize that young people who experience extended periods of disconnection confront significant challenges in making the transition to mainstream adulthood.

Gordon L. Berlin
President, MDRC

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At MDRC, Gayle Hamilton led the evaluation activities. Christine Johnston served as a liaison with Project Rise programs and provided valuable information about program operations. Alissa Gardenhire led the early qualitative research design, data collection, and analysis efforts. Alexandra Bernardi and Leila Kerimova assisted in acquiring, processing, and analyzing the quantitative data.

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The Authors

Executive Summary

In the United States, 6.7 million young people ages 16 to 24 are neither in school or college nor working.[1] As many as 1.6 million of these "disconnected" young people have reached age 18 yet lack either a high school diploma or the equivalent.[2] Their disconnection from both school and work means that they are not accumulating the important human capital and labor market skills that provide a critical foundation for future success. Neglecting these young people can exact a heavy toll on not only the individuals but also society as a whole, for example, through lost productivity, increased dependence on public assistance, and higher rates of criminal activity. In recognition of this concern, Congress recently passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which places increased emphasis on employment and training services for disconnected young people who are out of school.[3]

This report presents program implementation findings from an evaluation of Project Rise, a program launched in mid-2011 that drew on the research and operating experiences from other programs for at-risk, out-of-school young people. The Project Rise programs, which enrolled a new group (or cohort) of participants approximately every six months, were still operating as of fall 2015. The operators included three organizations in New York City and one each in Newark, New Jersey, and Kansas City, Missouri. The program model was designed to facilitate the reconnections of young people ages 18 to 24 who do not have a high school degree or the equivalent, read at least at a sixth-grade level (but with half required to read between sixth- and eighth-grade levels), have been out of school and work for at least six months, and have not participated in any other education or training programs in that time. The intent was to attract participants who had limited skills and were among the more disadvantaged individuals within the overall disconnected young adult population; program staff were expected to refrain from actively screening out difficult-to-serve applicants who satisfied program eligibility criteria.

In cohorts of 25 to 30, participants were expected to engage in a sequence of activities over 12 months, including case management, high school equivalency instruction,[4] job-

[1]Clive R. Belfield, Henry M. Levin, and Rachel Rosen, *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* (Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012).

[2]Michael Bangser, *Reconnecting Young Adults: The Early Experience of Project Rise* (New York: MDRC, 2013).

[3]Kisha Bird, Marcie Foster, and Evelyn Ganzglass, *New Opportunities to Improve Economic and Career Success for Low-Income Youth and Adults: Key Provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)* (Washington, DC: CLASP, 2014).

[4]During the study period reflected in this report, there were significant changes to high school equivalency testing. In January 2014, as is described in more detail in the report, new test options were introduced in several states along with a revised General Educational Development (GED) test. In this report, the term "GED" refers specifically to the official GED test or preparation for the GED test; the term "high school equivalency" is an umbrella term used to refer collectively to all test, preparation, and instruction options.

readiness training, and a paid 18-week internship that was conditioned on maintaining adequate attendance in the educational component. After the internship, participants were expected to make the transition to unsubsidized employment, postsecondary education, or both; this transition was supposed to occur about six months after program enrollment for most participants, though some were expected to require more time. The core elements of Project Rise were the cohort structure, case management for the full 12-month program length, the education-conditioned paid internship, and financial incentives (for example, $100 for taking a high school equivalency test or a gift card for completing a certain number of internship hours).

This report is based on work supported by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service. SIF combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the United States. Project Rise was part of the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) SIF project, which was led by CEO and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City in collaboration with MDRC.

Overview of Project Rise

Project Rise was a newly designed program when adopted by the program providers. Each program operator was a large, well-known nonprofit with experience serving disconnected young people. (Table ES.1 presents the characteristics of each organization operating Project Rise.)[5]

Although the designers envisioned Project Rise as a specific set of activities, they deemed some flexibility in program flow as essential to allow the providers to tailor the program components to their organizational context and to individual participants' particular circumstances. The cohort approach was intended to foster group cohesion and peer support among the participants as a means to bolster program engagement. In addition, case managers were expected to meet regularly with participants throughout the 12-month program period, in order to identify supports needed to promote participants' program engagement; case managers were responsible for either providing the supports or coordinating referrals to appropriate services.

As the first step in the program, the young adults engaged in a three- to six-week "pre-internship" period, with activities such as goal setting, career exploration, and job-readiness

[5]The FEGS Bronx Youth Center, which housed Project Rise and other youth programs, transferred the oversight of Project Rise to another New York City multiservice agency, The Door, in spring 2015.

Table ES.1

Project Rise Providers and the Youth Services They Offer

	FEGS[a]	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Program location	South Bronx, New York City.	Lower East Side, Manhattan, New York City.	Southern tip of Brooklyn, New York City.	Inner city Newark, New Jersey.	Kansas City, Missouri.
Description of organization	Multiservice organization. Offers home care, housing, employment, workforce development, education, counseling, and prevention programs for young people and adults, including recent immigrants and those with disabilities.	Multiservice organization. Offers a range of social services and arts and health care programs, including transitional and supportive housing, job training and placement, and senior services.	An initiative of the Center for Economic and Workforce Development at the City University of New York Kingsborough Community College. Provides workforce training and college-readiness programs.	Rutgers (the State University of New Jersey) Transitional Education and Employment Management (T.E.E.M.) Gateway provides education, employment assistance, and other support services to at-risk and disconnected youth.	An American Job Center (One-Stop) for the greater Kansas City area. Provides federally funded job training for youth and adult job-seekers; also serves employers.
Other youth services and programs offered by organization	Programs for out-of-school, unemployed young adults including Young Adult Internship Program, mentoring, transitions to college.	Young Adult Internship Program, Summer Youth Employment Program.	Skills and career training for hospitality, food service, and health care industries.	Programs to increase work-readiness skills. Youth Education Center and Employment Success Center offer youth development services.	Education with job training/experience, juvenile offenders program, Workforce Investment Act, summer youth employment.

(continued)

Table ES.1 (continued)

	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Special resources available to Project Rise participants	Certified Human Resources Administration (HRA) provider,[b] mental health counseling, clothing closet.	Certified HRA provider.	Certified HRA provider and various support services, such as food pantry, clothing closet.	—	Computer lab, job club, hiring fairs.

SOURCE: MDRC staff interviews and organization websites.

NOTES: [a]The FEGS Bronx Youth Center, which housed Project Rise and other youth programs, transferred the oversight of Project Rise to another New York City multiservice agency, The Door, in spring 2015.

[b]Participants receiving cash assistance can use their participation in programs to fulfill the cash assistance requirements for New York City.

preparation (which included workshops on resume writing, interview skills, and "soft" workplace skills). The young adults also took part in community service activities during the pre-internship period, which were designed to build relationships among members of the cohort, as well as help the community. Moreover, participants began attending education classes for about 15 hours a week during this period, to prepare for the General Education Development (GED) or other high school equivalency tests.

After about six weeks, and once participants had demonstrated "adequate attendance" in their education classes (each provider determined the policies defining adequate attendance), program staff placed participants into internships, paid at the rate of the state minimum wage, for approximately 10 to 15 hours a week. The internships could last up to about 18 weeks or a total of 180 hours. Participants had to maintain satisfactory attendance in academic instruction to continue the internship, thereby rendering the internship an incentive for participants to engage in education. As part of their paid work time, participants were expected to attend weekly group sessions, which provided an opportunity to reflect on work experiences, reinforce job-readiness skills, continue to explore careers, and foster peer support.

By about six months after program enrollment, participants were supposed to have completed their internships, and it was hoped that some would have passed a high school equivalency test. At that point, the staff facilitated participants' transition into unsubsidized employment, postsecondary education or training, or both, although this stage of the program was less structured than earlier ones. Program staff expected young people who had not passed a high school equivalency test — often those who started with lower baseline reading levels — to continue to work toward that goal. (Figure ES.1 depicts the program model as designed.)

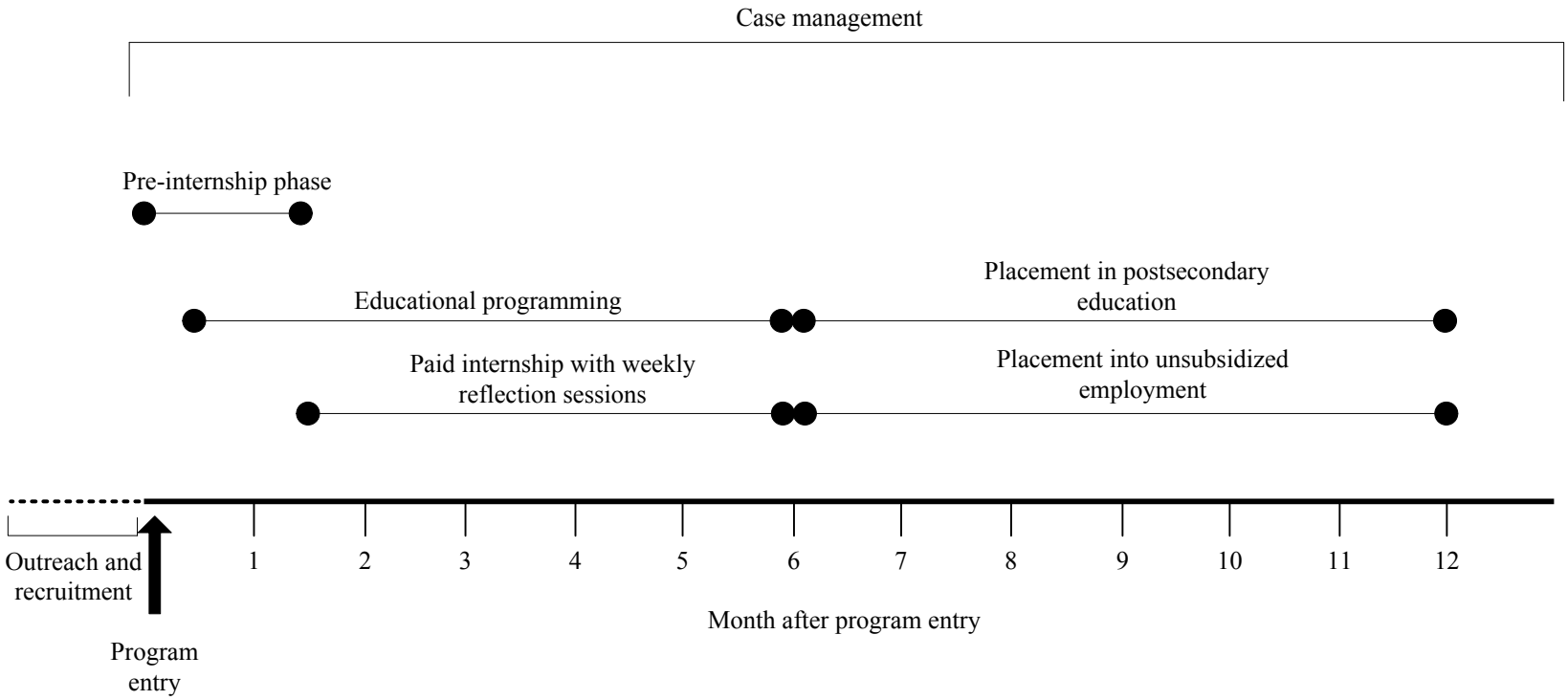
Project Rise staff at all sites benefited from ongoing technical assistance to strengthen their program services. Most of the technical assistance used a youth development approach, which emphasizes the strengths of every young person and opportunities to develop social, cultural, and civic competencies to help them achieve desirable outcomes.

The Evaluation

The Project Rise evaluation is an implementation analysis, which focuses on understanding how each provider operated the program and engaged the young people it served. The evaluation sheds light on the intervention's potential to engage disconnected young adults in education and work and presents practical lessons for policymakers, funders, and program operators who may be interested in implementing a program similar to Project Rise. The evaluation, however,

Figure ES.1

Schematic Depiction of the Project Rise Model



cannot determine the *impacts* of the program — that is, the extent to which participants' employment and educational outcomes can be attributed to Project Rise — without a control or comparison group.

The evaluation focuses on answering three primary sets of questions:

- Within the overall population of disconnected young adults, what were the characteristics of the participants who entered Project Rise, and what drew them to the program?
- How did the different providers implement the program model, and what adjustments did they make over time?
- What were the duration and intensity of the participants' engagement in the program, and what outcomes did participants achieve during the 12-month program period?

In answering these questions, the report examines the providers' recruitment processes, the characteristics of the young adults who enrolled, and how the organizations adapted the multi-component model to their local environments and individual participants. In particular, it documents providers' efforts to address a key challenge that programs serving disconnected young adults typically encounter — how to substantially engage young people who have been disconnected from school and work for an extended period of time. Finally, the report describes the levels of participants' engagement in the program, the points at which engagement was most likely to drop off, the characteristics of those most likely to continue or cease engagement, and participants' outcomes 12 months after entering the program. (Appendix B presents a cost analysis of Project Rise.)

Implementation of Project Rise

The implementation analysis of Project Rise used a mix of quantitative and qualitative data collected on enrollees from the first through sixth cohorts. (Appendix C describes the data collection in more detail.) Quantitative data presented in this report include enrollees' individual characteristics at the time of enrollment, program participation data through 12 months after enrollment for participants in the second through fifth cohorts, and detailed data on recruitment and enrollment for young people who showed interest in participating in the third cohort. (Appendix A presents aggregate baseline information on all participants in the first through eighth cohorts.) MDRC also gathered qualitative information about program operations from program staff at several points in time, collected participant perspectives about the program and their experiences on multiple occasions, and observed program operations.

- **The five Project Rise programs attracted disadvantaged young adults; the participants were demographically diverse with low educational attainment, limited job experience, and a variety of potential barriers to school and work.**

While Project Rise program staff used both objective and subjective (such as staff assessments of young people) criteria to screen applicants, relatively few applicants who satisfied the eligibility criteria were screened out from program enrollment because they were considered less work-ready. Project Rise program operators did, however, require interested participants to comply with multiple steps in the enrollment process, and a number of potential enrollees essentially screened themselves out by failing to attend scheduled appointments.

By design, the young people enrolled in Project Rise between August 2011 and December 2013 had notably low educational attainment, low reading levels, and limited job experience. Their average reading levels (from Tests of Adult Basic Education, or TABE) were below ninth grade and their average math levels were below seventh grade, indicating that their academic skills at baseline were generally not near the level needed to pass a high school equivalency test. Participants were evenly distributed by age (18 to 20 and 21to 24), and about half of them were female. About one-third were Hispanic, and half were black. Most lived with family members, and many were custodial parents (27 percent) or expectant parents (8 percent). About half of Project Rise participants had been arrested in the past, although only 15 percent had been convicted. Participants were also low income, with 60 percent living in households receiving food stamps and more than half having public health insurance. (See Table ES.2.)

- **Contrary to expectations, participants were motivated to join Project Rise primarily by the educational component, rather than by the paid internships. However, some participants viewed the paid internships as an added "bonus" that set Project Rise apart from other high school equivalency programs.**

More than 90 percent of participants reported that they came to Project Rise at least in part to get their high school diploma or equivalency certificate, whereas 54 percent cited the paid internships as a goal of their participation. It was originally expected that internships would be the primary motivator for participants to engage in education. While most participants interviewed in focus groups or individually described the program primarily in terms of their educational classes, many also saw the internships as something that set Project Rise apart. Typical GED and high school equivalency courses do not include a work experience component.

Moreover, program staff had mixed reviews of whether they thought the education condition of the internship increased participation in the education component. Some thought that it did not make a difference, while others believed that it may have helped motivate some

Table ES.2

Characteristics of Study Participants at Time of Enrollment, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5

Characteristic	Full Sample
Highest grade completed was 10th grade or lower (%)	57.5
Ever employed (%)	65.0
Average number of months of employment	6.1
Worked part time (1-34 hours per week) (%)	61.5
Earned less than $200 per week (%)	44.7
Gender[a] (%)	
Female	50.6
Male	49.3
Age (%)	
18-20 years old	55.0
21 years and older	45.0
Race/ethnicity (%)	
Hispanic/Latino	36.4
Black/African-American	53.6
Has children (%)	34.2
Lives with children at least half the time (%)	26.8
Self, spouse, or partner currently pregnant (%)	7.5
Lives with parent or other relative (%)	73.2
Receives food stamps/SNAP (%)	57.9
Receives welfare/TANF (%)	14.8
Receives publicly funded health coverage (%)	60.4
Ever arrested (%)	48.8
Ever convicted of a crime (%)	15.4
Sample size	628

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Project Rise baseline information forms.

NOTE: [a]One sample member provided a response of "other" to the baseline question on gender.

participants to attend classes but not across the board. The fact that the internships were short term and minimum wage, with little chance of becoming permanent jobs, may have limited the desired effect of encouraging class attendance.

- **Each provider's somewhat different organizational purpose, institutional history of serving particular populations, staffing structure, and staffing interests influenced how they each implemented the model's components.**

While variations in program components across sites were modest, collectively and cumulatively they made programs "feel" a bit different at each site, particularly when combined with the institutional settings in which they operated. Rather than having a unified character, the Project Rise programs tended to adopt the culture of the individual host organizations. For example, the Kingsborough Community College program placed more emphasis on postsecondary education, partly by encouraging participants to engage in various college activities such as credit classes and campus-wide lectures or activities. Despite these differences, program participants described roughly similar experiences with Project Rise, suggesting that the program could be operated in a variety of contexts by different types of organizations.

- **Project Rise scheduled and delivered more hours of high school equivalency instruction than do most adult education programs. About one-fourth of participants earned a high school equivalency credential or (much less commonly) high school diploma within 12 months of enrolling in Project Rise.**

While participants who entered the program with at least a ninth-grade level more commonly earned this credential (45 percent earned it within 12 months), almost 13 percent of participants with reading levels below ninth grade also attained this credential. Project Rise staff and participants viewed completing high school or earning a high school equivalency certificate as an important milestone in the reconnection process, particularly since it is a prerequisite for enrolling in postsecondary education or training and is a minimum requirement for many entry-level jobs. However, since the average reading and math levels of entering Project Rise participants were generally not close to the level needed to pass a high school equivalency test, it is not surprising that more participants did not earn a high school equivalency credential within 12 months. A very limited analysis of available educational gains data based on TABE scores showed some increases in math and reading levels for participants who began the program with low reading or math skills, despite their not earning a credential while in Project Rise.

Except at one provider, the classes offered to Project Rise participants were for Project Rise participants only. Common instructional methods included group projects, peer learning, worksheets, independent work, and some one-on-one teaching. Instructors heavily emphasized

math, as it was often the weakest subject for participants. In later cohorts of the program (those after cohort five — the last one examined in this report), staff adjusted instruction to account for changes in the GED test and the addition of other high school equivalency test options; starting in January 2014, the focus of the tests changed from reading comprehension to content knowledge. With the new test, students must possess some background knowledge in areas such as social studies and science to successfully complete the test. This change is widely considered to have made the tests more difficult.

More than 90 percent of Project Rise participants attended at least some high school equivalency preparation or, less commonly, high school classes. Those who participated in educational instruction attended classes, on average, for 161 hours over 50 days. Project Rise participants engaged in much more education instructional hours than did participants in most other adult education preparation courses or programs that have been studied.[6] Many participants cited the instructors as the key ingredient in making Project Rise's classes different from (and preferable to) their former high school classes.

- **Project Rise participants received a large dosage of internship experience, although the internships were implemented unevenly. Internships largely reinforced the soft skills needed in the world of work, such as punctuality and professionalism, rather than developing specific career paths.**

To identify Project Rise internships, providers tended to leverage existing relationships with employers involved in the organization's other internship programs, but also actively sought to develop new employer relationships, particularly if a participant's interest warranted it. While staff made an effort to connect internship placements with a participant's career interests, this connection was sometimes tenuous. Participants reported mixed feelings about their internships, often describing situations of unexpected duties and supervisors who did not serve as mentors, contrary to what was intended.

Almost three-fourths of participants began an internship. Among those who started internships, 51 percent worked for more than 120 hours. On average, participants who were placed in internships worked 34 days and earned more than $900 in wages. The reasons for par-

[6]For example, the Young Adult Literacy program, also supported by CEO, offered an average of 96 hours of literacy, math, and job training instruction to young adults to prepare them for a GED class. See Westat and Metis Associates, *Evaluation of the Young Adult Literacy Summer Internship Study: Final Report* (New York: NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, 2011). In addition, although not a perfect comparison, La Guardia Community College's GED class — a textbook-based adult GED preparation course — is a 60-hour class taught over nine weeks. For more details, see Vanessa Martin and Joseph Broadus, *Enhancing GED Instruction to Prepare Students for College and Careers: Early Success in La Guardia Community College's Bridge to Health and Business Program* (New York: MDRC, 2013).

ticipants either not starting or starting but not completing internships were similar: insufficient attendance in education classes, lack of interest in or satisfaction with their internship placements, or barriers — such as child care needs or other responsibilities or appointments — that limited their ability to sustain engagement with Project Rise. A few participants moved into unsubsidized employment before their internships were over.

- **The Project Rise model included multiple components designed to encourage participant engagement, including peer relationships within the cohorts and connections with caring adults. Many participants credited these program aspects for their continued engagement or reengagement throughout the program period.**

As desired, enrollment in cohorts appeared to have benefits, in part because it provided a vehicle to promote bonding among participants through a combination of peer support and positive peer pressure. Bonding was promoted, in part, by organized group activities such as community service. Participants described peer connections as a motivating factor for staying involved, and some participants described their lasting connections with cohort members beyond their active program engagement. Participants also touted connections with caring adults — including case managers, instructors, and other staff — as promoting their continued program participation. Participants used adjectives such as "invested," "relentless," "kind," and "passionate" to describe the Project Rise staff — adjectives that they would not often use to describe adults they encountered in school or other programs.

- **Despite these efforts to promote engagement, it was difficult for the Project Rise providers to engage participants continuously in the planned sequence of activities. Forty percent of the participants exited the program before the end of the 12-month program period.**

Project Rise participants took multiple pathways to reconnect with school and work, and most of them did not proceed continuously or at the same pace through the planned sequence of program components. Many participants encountered life issues such as child care problems or housing instability. Some participants had lapses in education attendance that precluded their placement in internships, although they continued to attend education classes, albeit less regularly. Some began internships but did not complete them and still reconnected to postsecondary education or unsubsidized employment.

Overall, participants who were placed in an internship were less likely to leave the program and more likely to stay engaged, attain a high school equivalency credential, and make the transition to unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education. (The internship placement did not necessarily *cause* the continued engagement; it is quite possible that the participants who were more able to consistently engage in the program were also more likely to be placed into an

internship.) However, general program attrition was high; 40 percent of all Project Rise enrollees exited the program before the end of the 12-month program period.[7] The reasons for program exits reflected a mix of staff- and participant-initiated actions, with the most commonly reported reasons being participants' poor attendance, loss of interest in the program, and behavioral problems.

- **Within the 12-month program period, more than one-fourth of participants reported achieving the longer-term goals of obtaining unsubsidized employment, enrolling in postsecondary education, or both.**

About one-fourth of Project Rise participants reported beginning an unsubsidized job within one year, and 7.5 percent entered postsecondary education, which could include college courses or job-skills training. These outcomes are not surprising, particularly since only slightly more than one-fourth of participants earned a high school equivalency credential during the program period. Moreover, research suggests that it often takes longer than 12 months for disconnected young adults with limited skills to reach these milestones, and reaching them may require more intensive case management or other supports than Project Rise provided; it is also possible that young adults who failed to reconnect with work or school within 12 months did so later, or that those who initially reconnected within 12 months became disconnected again later.[8] Data limitations preclude more long-term analysis of the extent to which these young adults may have later reconnected and stayed connected. (As noted in Appendix A, estimates of unsubsidized employment and postsecondary education rates are likely conservative because it was difficult for program staff to track participants' progress once they were no longer engaged in the program.)

- **Child care responsibilities seemed to be the characteristic most associated with reducing a participant's ability to engage continuously in the program. Individuals who reported, at baseline, that they had child care responsibilities had lower program attendance rates, fewer internship placements, and lower rates of high school equivalency certificate attainment.**

[7]Project Rise's attrition rate is lower than that of the Young Adult Literacy program, from which 53 percent exited for a reason other than graduation or employment. See Westat and Metis Associates (2011). This finding echoes the data from the Young Adult Internship Program, also supported by CEO, in which about 50 percent of participants completed their internships (defined as attending overall 50 percent or more of the assigned hours, and staying with the program through week 11). See Westat and Metis Associates, *Evaluation of the Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP): Analysis of Existing Participant Data* (New York: NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, 2009).

[8]Dan Bloom, Saskia Levy Thompson, and Rob Ivry, *Building a Learning Agenda around Disconnected Youth* (New York: MDRC, 2010).

Several subgroups of young adults, including those defined by participants' gender, age, enrollment cohort, and whether they were custodial parents, were analyzed. In general, the analyses showed larger differences in program engagement than in program outcomes (including high school equivalency certificate attainment, finding unsubsidized employment, and enrolling in postsecondary education) across subgroups. The largest differences in participation and outcomes occurred between participants who were custodial parents and those who were not. Staff across all providers highlighted inconsistent child care as a significant factor in the ability of participants to fully engage in the program.

Conclusion

The Project Rise evaluation provides important findings about one approach to reconnecting young people who have been out of school and work for a significant period. The findings come at a time when states, local authorities, and providers are implementing the WIOA and expanding programs and services for out-of-school youth, a population that overlaps with the one Project Rise serves.

In general, this evaluation sheds light on the challenges of engaging young people in a multi-component program and equipping them to enter (or reenter) the workforce, continue their education, or both. The finding that few disconnected young people progressed straightforwardly through the specified sequence of program components underscores the importance of providing individualized services. It also appears worthwhile to continue experimenting with enrolling participants in cohorts of their peers. And while combining education and work with other supports is important, the Project Rise experience suggests that the education-conditioned internship that was a core feature of the model may be of limited interest to program providers.

Policymakers, practitioners, and funders interested in implementing programs for young people similar to Project Rise should recognize the need for an adequate level of staffing, especially for case management and the internship component. However, if the program is operating in a less resource-rich environment than existed during the SIF study period, it could be difficult to preserve the low client-to-staff ratio that Project Rise providers enjoyed. In addition, Project Rise staff received technical assistance of a scope and intensity not available to most organizations serving youth.

Other lessons from the Project Rise experience suggest that:

- Individualized plans and services, when balanced with standards and clarity of expectations, are critical to the sustained engagement of disconnected young people.

- Many disconnected young people are interested in enrolling in a program to earn a high school equivalency certificate, but they may need additional motivation during the process to stay engaged.
- Caring staff members and positive relationships with peers, primarily developed through cohort enrollment, promote participant retention.
- Reducing logistical barriers, such as transportation and child care, is critical to persistently engaging disconnected young people in a program.
- Work experience can be valuable for disconnected young people, but providers and funders should support the infrastructure needed to implement quality internships and other workforce components; this infrastructure includes employing staff with job development expertise and with both the time and skill sets needed to effectively coordinate with employers.
- Attention must be paid to helping young people make the transition from program services to long-term employment and education opportunities.
- A 12-month program may not be long enough for many disconnected young people to earn an education credential and secure stable unsubsidized employment.

Interim or nontraditional performance measures should be considered to mark progress in programs for disconnected young people. Such measures may help demonstrate participants' progress that is not apparent in the traditional outcomes of degree or certificate attainment and unsubsidized employment. The youth development field has not yet identified intermediate or nontraditional measures that are acceptable to both practitioners and funders.[9] Developing such measures might help stakeholders establish meaningful milestones that can assess disconnected young people's progress on their paths to the educational, economic, and social mainstream.

In the three cities where Project Rise was operated, leaders and other members of the youth development field have begun to incorporate lessons from the evaluation into their ongoing initiatives. For example, Full Employment Council in Kansas City used its Project Rise experience to help win major grants to expand services. In Newark, where programs have typically served out-of-school young people until the age of 21, Project Rise has provided lessons to local service providers on extending educational programming to young people ages 22 to 24. In New York City, CEO has used the lessons from Project Rise in current initiatives to overhaul

[9]Richard F. Catalano, M. Lisa Berglund, Jean A. M. Ryan, Heather S. Lonczak, and J. David Hawkins, "Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Findings on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development Programs," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 591, 1: 98-124 (2004).

the city's workforce development system. The New York City Career Pathways initiative includes restructured work-based learning opportunities for disconnected young people. In addition, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development is currently conducting a pilot program in which participants in the Young Adult Literacy Program can move into the Young Adult Internship Program if they achieve certain education gains.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

In the United States, 6.7 million young people ages 16 to 24 are neither in school or college nor working.[1] As many as 1.6 million of these "disconnected" young people have reached age 18 yet lack either a high school diploma or the equivalent.[2] In 2011, less than 30 percent of high school dropouts ages 16 to 19 worked in any given month. In the same year, 44 percent of dropouts ages 20 to 24 old experienced year-round joblessness, whereas younger people with higher levels of education were more likely to have worked.[3] As a result of limited work experience and academic attainment, disconnected young adults face significant challenges to achieving labor market success and self-sufficiency in adulthood. Neglecting these young people can exact a heavy toll on not only the individuals but also society as a whole, for example, through lost productivity and tax contributions, increased dependence on public assistance, and higher rates of criminal activity.[4]

Project Rise seeks to reconnect young people ages 18 to 24 who do not have a diploma or certificate, read at least at a sixth grade level,[5] have been out of school and work for at least six months, and have not participated in any other education or training program in that time. With these combined characteristics, the young people that Project Rise serves are among the more disconnected individuals within the overall disconnected young adult population. Five local organizations, including three in New York City and one each in Newark, New Jersey, and Kansas City, Missouri, operated the Project Rise program. Launched in June of 2011, Project Rise was still operating in these three cities as of fall 2015. The design of the Project Rise program model drew on the research and operating experiences from other programs that have served at-risk, out-of-school young people.[6] These experiences revealed the challenges of operating programs serving this population and suggested that Project Rise should aim to: engage young people long enough for them to make a genuine difference in their lives; combine well-implemented education, work, and other constructive activities; connect participants with caring adult role models; create a positive group identity among participants; give participants oppor-

[1]Belfield, Levin, and Rosen (2012).

[2]Bangser (2013).

[3]Sum, Khatiwada, Trubskyy, Palma (2014).

[4]Belfield, Levin, and Rosen (2012).

[5]Half of Project Rise participants had to read above sixth grade but below eighth grade levels. This requirement ensured that the Project Rise providers did not enroll only young people who were already near the education level needed to pass a high school equivalency test.

[6]"At-risk" can be defined as individuals whose background (environmental, social, and family conditions) hinders their personal development and successful integration into the economy or society, putting them at risk of undesirable outcomes such as incarceration, young parenthood, substance abuse, and unemployment. Koball et al. (2011).

tunities to act as leaders and contribute to the community; and promote a smooth transition to post-program employment, continued education, or both.[7]

Building on prior program experiences, the main elements of the Project Rise model, described in more detail later, were enrolling young adults into the program in a series of small groups (called cohorts) of their peers at regular intervals, assigning participants to a case manager who maintained a supportive relationship with them throughout their program stay, using financial incentives to encourage program engagement (for example, rewarding participants with a New York City transit system MetroCard[8] for meeting attendance requirements or a gift card for completing a certain number of internship hours), and placing participants into paid internships if they maintained satisfactory attendance in the program's classroom education component. Although the framework for these program elements was defined for the organizations in the three cities, the providers were given some flexibility to adapt the model to local conditions and to their Project Rise operating experiences. That said, all Project Rise providers offered education, work, and social support as a pathway to a more successful future.

In cohorts of about 30, participants were expected to engage in a sequence of activities over a 12-month period, including case management, high school equivalency instruction,[9] work-readiness training, and a paid 18-week, 180-hour maximum internship that was conditional on maintaining adequate attendance in the educational component. After the internship, participants were expected to transition to unsubsidized employment, postsecondary education, or both; this transition was supposed to occur about six months after program enrollment for some participants, though others were expected to require more time. The second six months of the program were less structured, as participants transitioned to activities outside of Project Rise. (Figure 1.1 depicts of the Project Rise model as designed.)

This report is based on work supported by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service. SIF combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the United States. Project Rise was part of the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) SIF project, which was led by CEO and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City in collaboration with MDRC. MDRC conducted the Project Rise evaluation and, jointly with CEO,

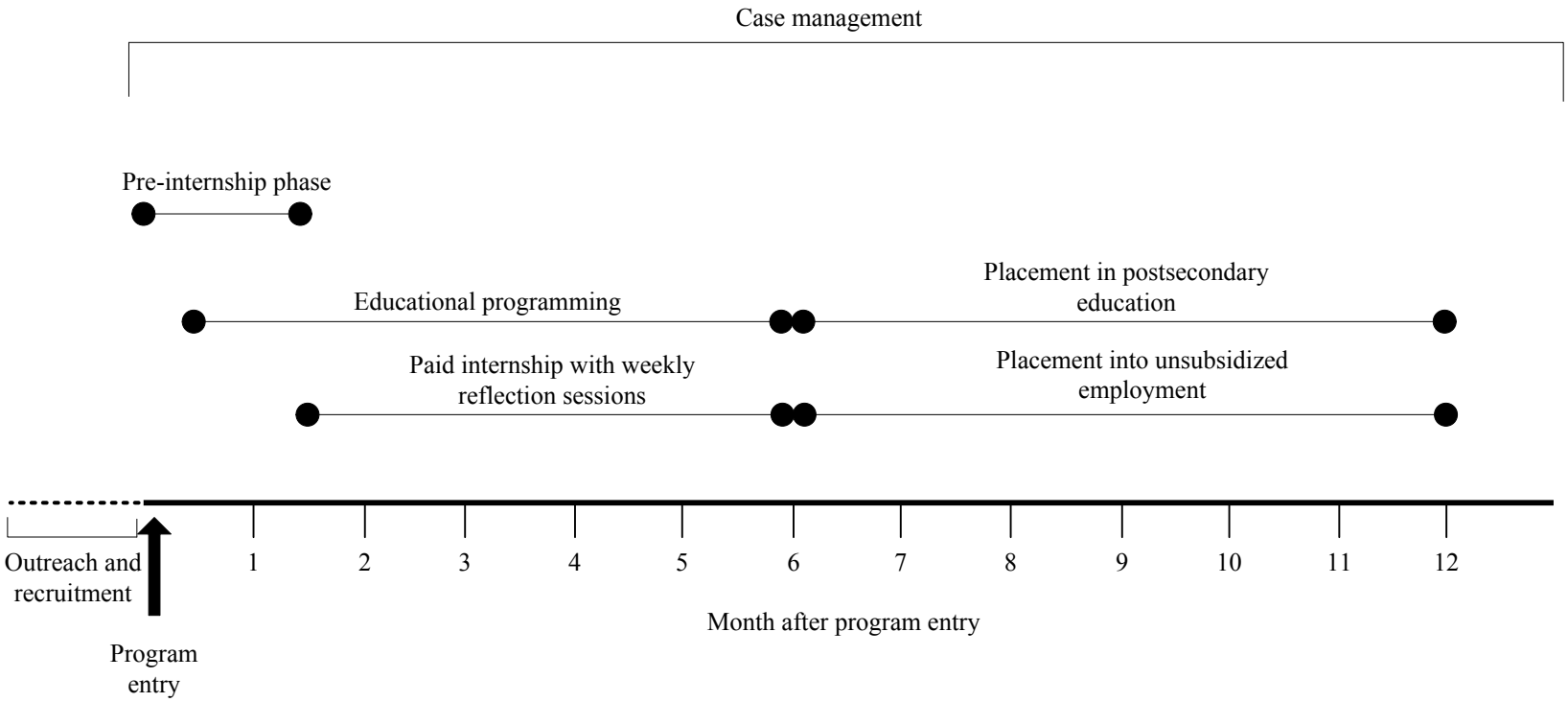
[7]Bloom, Levy Thompson, and Ivry (2010).

[8]MetroCard is the payment method for using the New York City subway and bus system.

[9]During the study period covered in this report, there were significant changes to high school equivalency testing. In January 2014, as is described in more detail later in the report, new test options were introduced in several states along with a revised General Educational Development (GED) test. In this report, the term "GED" refers specifically to the GED test or preparation for the official GED test; the term "high school equivalency" is an umbrella term used to refer collectively to all test, preparation, and instruction options.

Figure 1.1

Schematic Depiction of the Project Rise Model



monitored local program operations. The national SIF initiative and local matching provided the funding for Project Rise and the evaluation.

The evaluation focuses on the five local organizations' experiences operating Project Rise over a three-year period. It sheds light on the promise and challenges of this type of intervention for disconnected young adults, in part to determine the feasibility of operating such a program. In addition, the final chapter of the report reflects on a number of practical lessons for policymakers, funders, and program operators who might be interested in implementing Project Rise or a similar program.

The findings presented in the report have a particular limit. Since the study did not include data from a reliable control group who did not have the opportunity to enroll in Project Rise, it is not possible to determine the program's true impact on participants' levels of engagement and outcomes.

In brief, the report presents the following findings. Contrary to expectations, participants were motivated to enter Project Rise more by the educational component than by the paid internships. As in many programs serving a disconnected or out-of-school population, Project Rise staff found it difficult to engage participants continuously in the planned sequence of activities. The participants did, however, receive more hours of classroom instruction than is typical of adult high school equivalency preparation courses; about one-fourth of Project Rise participants earned a high school equivalency credential or (much less commonly) a high school diploma within 12 months of entering the program. Project Rise providers also delivered a large dose of internship experiences to participants in relation to other internship programs for young people: over two-thirds of participants began an internship, and over half of those who started internships worked more than 120 hours in them. About one-fourth of the participants began unsubsidized jobs within one year of entering Project Rise, and almost 8 percent of the participants entered postsecondary education during this period. Having child care responsibilities seemed to reduce a participant's ability to engage continuously with the program; individuals who reported having child care responsibilities at program entry had lower program attendance rates, fewer internship placements, and lower rates of high school equivalency certificate attainment than individuals who did not report such responsibilities.

The rest of this chapter presents the context for Project Rise in more detail. It describes the challenges that disconnected young people face and the implications of these challenges for public policy and the design of programs that serve this population, and it provides an overview of the Project Rise program model and the five local provider organizations that implemented it. The chapter concludes with more detail on the Project Rise evaluation and an overview of how this report is organized.

The Challenge: Disconnected Young Adults

The 1.6 million young people ages 18 to 24 who lack a high school diploma or equivalency certificate and are out of school and work[10] are disconnected for many different reasons. Some face multiple challenges to engaging in traditional educational or work-related commitments; others may have chosen not to participate in school or work.

A recent Tufts University study[11] suggests that there is no single reason why young people fall behind and drop out of high school. Often, students leave school not because of a particular event or factor, but because circumstances accumulate in ways that push school lower and lower on their list of priorities. Among the factors or events that influence their decisions about school are a lack of support and guidance from adults; a death or health problems in the family; gang involvement; issues with school safety, school policies, or peer influences; and the challenges of young parenthood.[12] One driving force behind the disconnection from work is the collapse of the youth labor market in recent years.[13] Disconnected young people with multiple barriers, and without a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, can feel as though they fail repeatedly because of limited opportunities, and at some point they simply give up.

Disconnected young adults are heterogeneous in the challenges they face and in the duration and extent of their disconnectedness. The characteristics of particular subgroups within this population may, in part, influence the challenges they confront. For example, men are more likely to have been involved with the criminal justice system, and women are more likely to experience the long-term effects of early parenthood. While disconnection can happen to anyone and young women historically were more likely to be out of school and work, today young men outnumber young women among the disconnected.[14] Young adults who are or have been involved in the foster care, juvenile justice, or special education systems are at greater risk of experiencing disconnectedness.[15] A 2008 study estimates that young people incarcerated before the age of 16 were about 26 percent less likely to graduate high school than those who were not.[16] Other risk factors include coming from families with incomes below the poverty line and that are receiving public assistance, having an unemployed parent, and living with stepfamilies, one parent, or neither parent.[17]

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[10]U.S. Census Bureau (2012). As many as 6.7 million 16- to 24-year-olds are not accumulating human capital in school or in the labor market.

[11]Hynes (2014).

[12]Hynes (2014). A 2005 study of dropouts found similar reasons for leaving school. See Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Burke Morison (2006).

[13]Sum, Khatiwada, Trubskyy, Palma (2014).

[14]Burd-Sharps and Lewis (2013).

[15]Hair et al. (2009).

[16]Hjalmarsson (2008).

[17]Hair et al. (2009).

Disconnection can be dynamic, with young people not necessarily being persistently disconnected throughout young adulthood. The National Center for Education Statistics found that 63 percent of dropouts obtained a diploma or GED credential within eight years after their scheduled graduation date, although the rates are lower for those who left school with more limited skills.[18] Another study found that while some 18- to 24-year-olds are persistently disconnected, the majority of young people reconnect to school or work but through different pathways. Some show promise of reconnecting at age 18 but that promise declines through the early 20s; others do not reconnect until their mid-20s.[19] A review of programs serving disconnected young adults suggests that those who reconnect in their teens may find it more feasible to continue their education, while those who reconnect in their 20s may need more work-focused strategies.[20]

Policy Context

As a result of limited work experience and low levels of academic attainment, disconnected young people face significant and compounded challenges to achieving labor market success and self-sufficiency, resulting in substantial long-term costs to both the individual and society as a whole. One study calculated that a single high school dropout costs the economy an average of $292,000 over his or her lifetime in terms of lower tax contributions and higher reliance on Medicaid, rental subsidies, food stamps, among other public benefits.[21] Furthermore, high school dropouts, particularly male dropouts, are incarcerated at higher rates (10 percent of dropouts compared with less than 4 percent of high school graduates), adding to the economic and social costs.[22] Indeed, the lifetime social burden estimates for a disconnected young person can reach upwards of $529,000.[23] In addition, an estimated 63 percent of all youth crime can be attributed to disconnected youth, even though they represent only 17 percent of the overall youth population.[24] The combined costs across disconnected youth total an annual fiscal burden of over $75 billion, without accounting for other social burden costs.[25] In light of these social costs, even relatively expensive programs for disconnected young people might be cost-effective. Concern about at-risk, out-of-school, and out-of-work young people has grown among policymakers, service providers, and other stakeholders. It has generated new policies and initiatives to better serve and reconnect this population to education, training, and ultimately good paying

[18]National Center for Education Statistics (2004).
[19]Kuehn, Pergamit, Macomber, and Vericker (2009).
[20]Bloom (2010).
[21]Sum, Khatiwada, and McLaughlin (2009).
[22]Sum, Khatiwada, and McLaughlin (2009).
[23]Belfield, Levin, and Rosen (2012).
[24]Belfield, Levin, and Rosen (2012).
[25]Belfield, Levin, and Rosen (2012).

jobs. For example, the recently enacted Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act mandates that state and local providers expand programs and services for out-of-school youth.

The multiple reasons why young adults experience disconnectedness suggest that a "one-size-fits-all" policy, reform, or program is unlikely to assist this population. Past research and experience indicate a need for multifaceted programs with a continuum of services, especially for the most vulnerable young adults facing numerous disadvantages.[26] Interventions should take into account the different educational skills and goals of young people. Research also shows that longer-lasting programs may yield better results, although engaging young people for the necessary duration remains a challenge.[27]

Service Models for Disconnected Young Adults

Community-based organizations often run programs serving disconnected young people, and very few of these programs have been rigorously evaluated.[28] Past and current program models vary considerably in terms of the subpopulations they target and the services they provide. As a program providing both education and job components, Project Rise shares similarities with national programs such as Job Corps and YouthBuild. Project Rise's emphasis on providing services to cohorts of participants and on using peer interactions and relationships to foster continued engagement in the program is also similar to these programs. YouthBuild, Job Corps, and others also include paid work experiences. Marketing of the education-conditioned internship appears to be unique to Project Rise, although other programs, such as YouthBuild, deploy a broadly similar strategy. Project Rise's bundling of specific components, its targeting a more disconnected population, and its somewhat less-involved enrollment requirements, however, are unusual. This section describes some well-known past and current program models for disconnected youth, in order to give Project Rise more context.

Unlike many other programs targeting disconnected young people, Job Corps is a national, primarily residential program for disadvantaged young people ages 16 to 24. It pairs GED or high school equivalency education with job skills training and case management. Job Corps also helps participants transition to employment after the program.[29] A random assignment study of Job Corps, released in 2008, found positive earnings and employment impacts in years three and four of the follow-up period, but the impacts faded after that time. The study found that results were better for older youth, those ages 20 to 24, compared with those ages 16 to 19.[30]

[26]Bloom, Levy, and Ivry (2010).
[27]Kleinbard (2013).
[28]Bloom (2010).
[29]Job Corps (2013).
[30]Schochet, Burghardt, and McConnell (2008).

YouthBuild, which is currently the subject of an MDRC random assignment study, is a national youth and community development program in which low-income young people ages 16 to 24 (often high school dropouts) are grouped in cohorts of 30 to 40 and receive a variety of services, including financial supports, for 8 to 12 months. Participants spend at least 50 percent of their work week[31] engaged in an array of educational services (high school equivalency, high school, or college preparation). Participants generally spend most of the remaining time in job skills training — primarily building or rehabilitating housing for low-income or homeless people. The program also involves a "mental toughness" orientation that screens for motivation, other assessments, leadership training and community service, counseling and support services, job placement, and follow-up services.

Other programs of varying intensity serve similarly disadvantaged populations. For example, the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program is an intensive residential program that serves high school dropouts, ages 16 to18, who are drug free and not heavily involved with the criminal justice system.[32] The program includes education, community service, mentoring, and other components in a quasi-military setting. A recent random assignment study by MDRC found that participation in ChalleNGe increased rates of GED certificate or high school diploma receipt, college credit receipt, and employment and earnings.[33]

Other examples include Roca in Massachusetts and Larkin Street in San Francisco, which serve particularly high-risk youth (such as those who are homeless, gang members, or young parents). The needs of some youth are so great that program staff may have to triage services before addressing academic or employment-related outcomes.[34] These programs, which provide high-intensity wraparound services for several years, offer a range of housing options, education, technology and employment training, health care, and case management.

In contrast to other aspects of Project Rise, there is little precedent of explicitly marketing an education-conditioned internship, although there are several examples of programs integrating education with work experiences (such as with YouthBuild and Job Corps). An early example is the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects, which operated in the late 1970s. This demonstration tested the feasibility and effectiveness of guaranteeing part-time and summer jobs for 16- to 19-year-olds, conditioned on school attendance and meeting academic and job performance standards. The young people involved were either out of school or still in high school at the time of the program intervention. An MDRC evaluation found large, short-term

[31]Each YouthBuild program had slightly different schedules but all scheduled at least 30 hours of program services each week.

[32]Bloom, Gardenhire-Crooks, and Mandsager (2009).

[33]Millenky, Bloom, Muller-Ravett, and Broadus (2011).

[34]Bloom, Levy, and Ivry (2010).

increases in employment, but no impacts on school outcomes. Longer-term effects were not measured.[35]

Most notably, the designers of Project Rise built on the experiences of two pilot projects initiated by CEO and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. The first program is the Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP), which MDRC is evaluating using a random assignment study design. It serves young adults disconnected from school and work. However, unlike in Project Rise, many YAIP participants have high school diplomas or GED credentials.[36] YAIP also uses more extensive screening mechanisms to enroll more work-ready applicants, including a multistage intake and assessment process designed to identify those most likely to succeed in the program. The YAIP program uses a cohort structure and begins with a two- to four-week orientation that includes life skills and job-readiness training, team-building activities, developing an individual service strategy, and an internship interview and selection process. Job-readiness training and supportive counseling begin during orientation and continue throughout the length of the program. Participants work 20 hours per week in 10- to 12-week paid internships. One day a week, participants attend program workshops, which typically cover the orientation workshop topics in greater depth. After the internship ends, program staff work to place participants in education, advanced training, or employment during a nine-month follow-up period.

The second program is the Young Adult Literacy (YAL) program, which seeks to improve the literacy, math, and job-readiness skills of disconnected young people, ages 16 to 24, with reading levels between fourth and eighth grade. Most YAL participants need to advance several grade levels before entering high school equivalency programs or realistically competing in the job market. The program offers approximately 15 hours of literacy and math instruction each week. A 2009 study found that participants at YAL providers that included an internship component had higher average math scores and program retention rates than participants at YAL providers with no internship component.[37] Until 2013, all YAL programs placed participants in part-time internships at local businesses, organizations, or community projects. Starting in April 2013, all YAL providers modified the internship component, offering instead project-based and service learning opportunities, or job shadowing. Providers serve cohorts of approximately 20 participants and engage them as long as necessary to reach an eighth-grade reading level, enter a high school equivalency program, or both.[38]

[35]Gueron (1984).

[36]As of summer 2009, half of all YAIP participants had high school diplomas or GED credentials at the time of enrollment. Westat and Metis Associates (2009).

[37]Westat and Metis (2011).

[38]Hossain and Terwelp (2015).

The Project Rise Program Model

Launched in 2011, Project Rise was designed to provide a multifaceted package of services to the more disadvantaged individuals within the overall disconnected young adult population. This report addresses several of CEO's goals through analysis of outcomes at 12 months after enrollment and qualitative data collected throughout the life of the program. CEO's goals for Project Rise included:

- Productively engage disconnected young adults who have dropped out of school and have poor reading skills, math skills, or both.
- Offer quality paid work experience that provides the participants with needed income.
- Enable participants to obtain a high school equivalency certificate after six months; or, for those who enter at too low a reading and numeracy level, demonstrate literacy and numeracy gains to be on track for earning a high school equivalency certificate after one year.[39]

CEO envisioned a set of activities over a 12-month period to prepare participants for unsubsidized employment and continued education. Participants started in cohorts of 25 to 30 and engaged in activities together throughout the yearlong program; the cohort model was intended to foster cohesion among the participants that would encourage peer support and promote engagement. For the program's full duration, participants met regularly with case managers, who assessed their job readiness and interests, helped them develop individual plans with clear milestones, determined the supports they needed, coordinated referrals, and maintained supportive relationships.

While CEO expected providers to sequence program activities similarly, they allowed some flexibility in program flow in order to accommodate participants' individual needs and varying local circumstances. As described in subsequent chapters, differences across the provider organizations somewhat influenced the program variations, although all providers ultimately had similar experiences implementing Project Rise.

The program's first phase was a three- to six-week *pre-internship* phase, in which participants engaged in goal setting and career exploration activities, received basic job-readiness preparation (for example, instruction in resume writing, interview skills, and "soft" workplace

[39]CEO also set several other goals at the outset of Project Rise, which could not be directly assessed in this report but about which some mention should be made: increase participants' academic and job skills and positive attitudes toward education and employment; promote participants' long-term engagement in education and employment; and reduce the negative effects associated with dropping out of high school and not engaging in the labor market, such as early childbearing, homelessness, and incarceration.

skills) and participated in community service work as a group to promote teamwork and relationships within the cohort. During the pre-internship phase, participants also started *academic instruction* to prepare for a high school equivalency test. Participants were expected to spend approximately 15 hours a week for about six months receiving such instruction, although the exact activities and duration depended on individual participants' progress.[40] It was expected that some participants would earn their high school equivalency credential within six months; education supports could also extend to college preparation when appropriate.[41]

Participants began *paid internships* about six weeks after enrolling in Project Rise. The internship paid the state minimum wage[42] for approximately 10 to 15 hours a week, for about 18 weeks and a maximum of 180 hours. Importantly, participants could only start and keep their internships if they maintained satisfactory attendance in their education activities, according to each provider's attendance policy. Internships were expected to have clear job descriptions and expected duties, as well as a commitment from a supervisor to provide regular feedback and mentorship.[43] As part of their paid time, participants were expected to attend weekly group sessions to reflect on work experiences, reinforce job readiness, continue career exploration, and give and receive peer support. Participants could complete their internships either by working for 180 hours at their internships, or by transitioning directly to an unsubsidized job after 120 hours or more.

The post-internship phase of Project Rise was less structured than the earlier phases. In this phase, participants could continue to pursue a high school equivalency credential. For those who earned it, staff were expected to facilitate their transition to unsubsidized employment, postsecondary education or training, or both. Case managers remained available to make referrals and provide other supports to the participants throughout the 12-month program period. However, participants' day-to-day, on-site engagement in the program was difficult to define and track after they earned a high school equivalency credential or stopped participating in an internship.

[40]Unlike some other activities within Project Rise, academic instruction was not a paid activity for participants.

[41]Those who earned a high school equivalency certificate were expected to transition to other education programs not directly associated with Project Rise.

[42]The program request for proposal (RFP) stipulated that participants were to be paid the federal minimum wage while they engaged in internships; however, providers opted to pay the higher state minimum wage.

[43]Additional indicators of quality noted in the program RFP were: tasks appropriate to the field and the interns' skill level, a specific project that could be completed during the internship, and a required final presentation on their experience that the interns were to make to the employer, program provider, or both.

Organizations Implementing Project Rise

Three organizations in New York City, one in Newark, New Jersey, and one in Kansas City, Missouri, operated Project Rise. Each provider is a large nonprofit institution that is well-known locally. While each organization viewed Project Rise through its own lens, they all had experience working with young adults. To varying degrees, Project Rise staff also drew on the host organization's existing resources, including for job development services, classroom instruction, and programming capacity. CEO did not propagate a specific program culture and, as a result, Project Rise programs tended to adopt the culture of the program operators.

The following organizations were operating Project Rise as of fall 2015:

- *New York City* program operators include: FEGS,[44] a citywide multiservice agency that provides a range of health and human services programs (Project Rise was based in the Bronx); Henry Street Settlement, another multiservice provider of social services, health, and arts programming in the Lower East Side of Manhattan; and Kingsborough Community College, which offers a wide range of credit and noncredit courses in the liberal arts and career education on its campus at the southern tip of Brooklyn.
- The *Newark* program is run by Rutgers University's Transitional Education and Employment Management (T.E.E.M.) Gateway, which is an extension of the State University of New Jersey's community-based programs supporting at-risk and disconnected urban youth across the state.
- The *Kansas City* program is operated by the Full Employment Council, an American Job Center (formerly One-Stop), which is a business-led, private, nonprofit corporation whose mission is to provide federally funded job training opportunities to adults and young people and secure public and private sector jobs for unemployed and underemployed individuals.[45]

Table 1.1 provides more detail about the provider organizations, including the other services they offer young people and other organizational resources available to Project Rise participants.

Project Rise staff benefited from ongoing technical assistance, provided by the Youth Development Institute (YDI) and to a lesser extent the Workforce Professional Training Institute,

[44]The FEGS Bronx Youth Center, which housed Project Rise and other youth programs, transferred the oversight of Project Rise to another New York City multiservice agency, The Door, in spring 2015.

[45]A second Kansas City provider discontinued Project Rise operations after the third cohort; its caseload for future cohorts was assigned to the Full Employment Council.

Table 1.1

Project Rise Providers and the Youth Services They Offer

	FEGS[a]	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Program location	South Bronx, New York City.	Lower East Side, Manhattan, New York City.	Southern tip of Brooklyn, New York City.	Inner city Newark, New Jersey.	Kansas City, Missouri.
Description of organization	Multiservice organization. Offers home care, housing, employment, workforce development, education, counseling, and prevention programs for young people and adults, including recent immigrants and those with disabilities.	Multiservice organization. Offers a range of social services and arts and health care programs, including transitional and supportive housing, job training and placement, and senior services.	An initiative of the Center for Economic and Workforce Development at the City University of New York Kingsborough Community College. Provides workforce training and college-readiness programs.	Rutgers (the State University of New Jersey) Transitional Education and Employment Management (T.E.E.M.) Gateway provides education, employment assistance, and other support services to at-risk and disconnected youth.	An American Job Center (One-Stop) for the greater Kansas City area. Provides federally funded job training for youth and adult job-seekers; also serves employers.
Other youth services and programs offered by organization	Programs for out-of-school, unemployed young adults including Young Adult Internship Program, mentoring, transitions to college.	Young Adult Internship Program, Summer Youth Employment Program.	Skills and career training for hospitality, food service, and health care industries.	Programs to increase work-readiness skills. Youth Education Center and Employment Success Center offer youth development services.	Education with job training/experience, juvenile offenders program, Workforce Investment Act, summer youth employment.

(continued)

Table 1.1 (continued)

	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Special resources available to Project Rise participants	Certified Human Resources Administration (HRA) provider,[b] mental health counseling, clothing closet.	Certified HRA provider.	Certified HRA provider and various support services, such as food pantry, clothing closet.	—	Computer lab, job club, hiring fairs.

SOURCE: MDRC staff interviews and organization websites.

NOTES: [a]The FEGS Bronx Youth Center, which housed Project Rise and other youth programs, transferred the oversight of Project Rise to another New York City multiservice agency, The Door, in spring 2015.

[b]Participants receiving cash assistance can use their participation in programs to fulfill the cash assistance requirements for New York City.

to strengthen their program services. The technical assistance focused on helping providers implement particularly challenging aspects of the model. The YDI technical assistance used a youth development approach that emphasized the strengths of each participant as well as opportunities to develop civic, social, and cultural competencies to help achieve desirable outcomes.[46] The support was provided through a variety of means, including periodic site visits to each local provider and regular group meetings and conference calls. Partway through the SIF funding period, Workforce Professionals Training Institute began working with the Project Rise program operators, specifically to improve job development and other employment-related program elements. In addition, CEO and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City offered other cross-site learning, convening staff from all Project Rise programs and from providers involved in other SIF projects for periodic learning networks in which attendees shared lessons and heard from national policymakers and experts.

Alternatives to High School Diplomas

The GED test was originally developed in 1942 as an alternative high school equivalency test when high school education was sufficient for many jobs. Still today, a high school diploma is considered a minimum (though increasingly not a sufficient) requirement for entry-level jobs and a prerequisite for postsecondary education. The GED underwent multiple revisions over the years to reflect the changing needs of test takers, including most recently in January 2014.[47] This change accompanied the adoption by many states of the Common Core State Standards, which are designed to better prepare students for college and careers. At the same time, two new alternative high school equivalency tests were released: the HiSet and the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC). States chose which test options to make available to their students. New York chose the TASC, Missouri chose the HiSet, and New Jersey allows students to take any of the three tests to earn their high school equivalency credential.[48]

The Project Rise Evaluation

While programs for disconnected young people have served a variety of subpopulations, provided different interventions, emphasized different routes to reconnection, and varied in their intensity and duration, most programs have struggled to engage disconnected youth, both initially and over time. The design of Project Rise sought to draw on the experiences of other programs to boost engagement, including by enrolling participants in relatively small cohorts, assigning them to case managers, and placing them in paid internships in which they could con-

[46]The opposite approach would be to focus on ameliorating participants' behavioral problems, such as delinquency, violence, drug and alcohol use, and so on.

[47]GED Testing Service (2015).

[48]Smith (2014).

tinue only if they actively participated in education activities. The Project Rise evaluation is an implementation study that addresses three primary sets of questions:

- **Within the overall population of disconnected young adults, what were the characteristics of the participants who entered Project Rise, and what drew them to the program?** Since Project Rise was intended to focus on a particular segment of the disconnected young adult population, key research questions include: What were the local providers' experiences in conducting a recruitment and selection process using specific criteria? Did the local providers actually attract especially hard-to-serve young people? What participant characteristics and experiences presented particular challenges to reconnecting them to education and the workforce? Why did participants want to enter Project Rise, and what influence did these reasons have on their program experiences?

- **How did the different providers implement the program model, and what adjustments did they make over time?** The Project Rise program model incorporated elements that research and previous program operating experience suggested would be beneficial, but it gave local providers some leeway to adapt the model, subject to CEO's approval. Questions thus include: How did the designers of Project Rise initially envision that specific program components would help reconnect participants with productive activities? What operational challenges did providers encounter during implementation? How and why did providers adapt the program model, including adjustments that they made over time as they gained operating experience? How would providers adapt the model if they were no longer subject to any restrictions as part of the CEO SIF demonstration?

- **What were the duration and intensity of participants' engagement in the program, and what outcomes did participants achieve during the 12-month program period?** A main concern in many programs similar to Project Rise is whether young people who are disconnected from school, work, and other productive activities can sustain program participation. Questions thus include: For how long and with what intensity were Project Rise participants engaged in specific program components? At what point and why did participants drop out of the program? To what extent did participants earn a high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma, or reach the ultimate goals of unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education within the 12-month program period? Did participation levels and outcomes vary

among different subgroups of participants? In what ways did participants believe they benefited from the program?

MDRC also performed a limited analysis of costs incurred in connection with Project Rise. These findings are presented in Appendix B.

Data Sources

The analyses in this report draw on a mix of quantitative and qualitative data sources.[49]

Using MDRC-developed data collection templates, providers shared with MDRC detailed individual-level information during the recruitment and enrollment periods, as well as throughout program operations. These quantitative data included:

- Details of the *recruitment to enrollment* process for one selected cohort (cohort three), including data on every interested young adult's progress through, or drop off from, each stage of the recruitment to enrollment process, and reasons for drop off.
- Information on *demographics and barriers to school and work* for every young adult who enrolled in Project Rise. The characteristics analyzed in detail in this report cover participants in cohorts two through five, the same cohorts for which participation patterns are analyzed. Tables showing the characteristics of all participants, cohorts one through eight, are included in Appendix A.
- *Participation data* for every young adult enrolled in Project Rise in cohorts two through five, collected from each provider's management information system data. These data include case management contacts, attendance in high school equivalency or high school classes, internship participation dosages, and postsecondary and employment outcomes. These data were collected for each participant beginning at program enrollment and over the following 12 months.

MDRC also collected descriptive information from provider staff at several points in time during the study period. The data collected include snapshots of program implementation

[49]MDRC's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved all project data collection plans at the start of the project and on an ongoing basis. There were no issues with the IRB over the course of the project.

from mid-2011 through the end of 2014, which corresponds to the periods during which cohorts one through seven operated. The qualitative data[50] include:

- *"Facts" about program operations* supplied by provider staff, covering aspects of and adjustments to operations, at three points in time (cohorts two, three, and six).
- Data on the *Project Rise staff's demographics and work experience* collected during cohorts one or two.
- Four rounds of *in-person staff interviews* to gain staff perspectives on program implementation. MDRC researchers conducted *interviews and focus groups with program participants* to gain participants' perspectives on Project Rise and their experiences or engagement with the program.[51] MDRC researchers also conducted *observations* of high school equivalency classes and talked with internship site supervisors to gather more information.
- *Written documentation* from programs, including grant continuation applications and monthly and quarterly reports submitted to CEO.
- *Documentation from the study team staff* who monitored program operations.

Organization of this Report

As described above, the Project Rise evaluation is an *implementation analysis* that explores the experiences of the five organizations operating Project Rise, reflects on the characteristics of disconnected young adults enrolled in the program and their reasons for doing so, and assesses their levels of participation and outcomes. This evaluation should be distinguished from an *impact analysis*, or an evaluation that uses a reliable control or comparison group to show how outcomes of participants in the program differ from those of individuals who did not enter the program.

Chapter 2 describes the providers' recruitment strategies and enrollee selection processes for cohort three, summarizes why young people decided to enroll in the program, and pro-

[50]Members of the MDRC research team conducted all interviews and focus groups. Notes from interviews were analyzed by MDRC researchers using Dedoose, a secure web-based mixed-methods analysis software; the notes were coded for themes identified by the research questions noted above. Interviews were conducted with all available and relevant staff working for the program at the time of each visit. Program participants were selected for participation in interviews and focus groups largely based on their availability on the days of the research team's visits. For more detail regarding interview methods, see Appendix C.

[51]Participants in focus groups and interviews were determined largely based on their program attendance on the day the research team visited the program. Therefore, they are not representative of all Project Rise participants.

vides a demographic portrait of all individuals who enrolled in Project Rise in cohorts two through five.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed picture of how participants progressed through the program, highlighting points at which enrollees dropped out of the program or took divergent paths. It then describes the early stages of program involvement, including strategies for encouraging engagement.

Chapter 4 describes the core components of education and internship activities and documents transitions to unsubsidized employment and continued education.

Chapter 5 assesses whether the program experiences and outcomes may have differed for particular subgroups of participants.

Chapter 6 reflects on the lessons and challenges that the Project Rise experience suggests for policymakers, funders, and practitioners interested in multi-component programs for disconnected young adults.

Chapter 2

Project Rise Enrollment and Participant Characteristics

Project Rise served a particular subset of the disconnected young adult population in a yearlong, multi-component program. To be eligible, the young adults had to have been out of school and work for at least six months and could not have earned their high school diplomas or high school equivalency certificates. What is not immediately apparent from these basic eligibility requirements are the tumultuous life experiences that often precipitated the young people's disconnection from school and work. In interviews and focus groups, Project Rise participants described a wide range of challenging life circumstances, including years of unstable living situations, poor relationships with parents or other family members, histories of drug or alcohol use, parenting at a young age, negative foster care experiences, and medical issues.

At roughly six-month intervals over a four-year period, Project Rise staff needed to enroll and engage cohorts of about 30[1] disconnected young adults for the 12-month program.[2] This chapter examines whether sites attracted eligible young adults who could engage meaningfully in the program and describes the strategies and processes the site staff used. It then describes the characteristics of the Project Rise enrollees at the time they entered the program. The description of the recruitment and pre-enrollment process rests heavily on a special study of recruitment efforts conducted for cohort three; the analysis of the participant characteristics at the time of enrollment covers cohorts two through five.[3]

Specifically, the chapter first reviews the recruitment methods and marketing strategies that the site staff used to reach young adults who qualified for the program. Next, it describes the processes by which providers narrowed the pool of young adults who were interested in Project Rise to the individuals who ended up enrolling (using cohort three as a case study). The chapter also examines participants' perspectives on why they found Project Rise appealing. Finally, it describes the background characteristics, including potential barriers to school and work, of all the young adults who enrolled in Project Rise and participated in at least one program activity in cohorts two through five.

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[1]The goal was to engage a cohort of 25 young adults, but program staff enrolled about 30 individuals per cohort in anticipation of some program attrition.

[2]Kingsborough Community College's first and second cohorts overlapped more closely than other cohorts, which typically started every six months. By cohort three, Kingsborough was on the same schedule as the other sites.

[3]Appendix A presents the background characteristics of participants in cohorts one through eight.

Key Findings

- Each Project Rise site developed outreach and recruitment strategies that worked best for its particular community and organization. Over time, site staff adjusted their recruitment practices to address challenges they faced in attracting interested and eligible young adults and, beginning with cohort five, to respond to the rollout of the new GED and high school equivalency tests.

- The case study of cohort three suggests that the providers eventually offered program spots to about two-thirds of all interested and eligible young adults, indicating that a moderate amount of applicant screening took place before program enrollment. Most of the drop-off that occurred between eligibility confirmation and program enrollment was due to individuals not attending interviews or orientations during the selection process (serving as a *de facto* assessment of the young adults' interest and motivation levels).

- Almost all Project Rise participants cited getting a GED certificate or a high school diploma as a reason for their interest in the program. In contrast, only about half of them cited the paid internship as a reason for enrolling.

- Participants entered Project Rise while dealing with multiple potential barriers to school, employment, and consistent program participation, such as child care needs and transportation costs.

- Most participants did have some (albeit limited) work experience in the past — about two-thirds reported having been employed. Roughly one-third of participants were involved in an education or training program in the past year (but not within the previous six months), indicating that a substantial number of the young adults had actively tried to reconnect to school or work.

Recruitment and Enrollee Selection

Project Rise specifically sought to engage young adults who had not been in school or employed for at least six months, thereby disqualifying more "work-ready" individuals. (Box 2.1 describes the basic eligibility requirements in more detail.) Program designers also stressed that the sites should minimize subjectively screening out applicants who satisfied the Project Rise eligibility criteria. This section describes the strategies that program staff used to recruit eligible

Box 2.1

Project Rise Eligibility Requirements

Project Rise sought to engage a segment of the disconnected young adult population who had been disengaged from school and work for a prolonged period of time. In order to enroll in Project Rise, individuals had to:

- Be between the ages of 18 and 24.
- Not have been employed or in school for at least the previous six months. In addition, they could not have been in a GED or high school equivalency program within three months of enrollment.
- Have neither a high school diploma nor a GED or high school equivalency certificate.
- Have a reading level of at least sixth grade, as assessed by a nationally recognized assessment tool. However, at least half of all the enrollees had to have been reading below eighth grade levels.

Sites were also expected to screen for employment- or education-related program attachment. Young adults could not have a history of participating in numerous educational or job training programs.

Initially, the Project Rise providers in New York City were also required to enroll only individuals from targeted community districts, with high numbers of residents living in poverty and possessing less than a ninth grade education. These districts included community district numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9 in the Bronx; 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, and 16 in Brooklyn; 3, 9, 10, 11, and 12 in Manhattan; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 12 in Queens; and community district 1 in Staten Island. This requirement was dropped after cohort four.

young adults, the processes they used to narrow down the pool of interested and eligible individuals to a cohort of about 30 young adults,[4] and the approaches they adopted to identify potential barriers to program participation.

Recruitment

Each Project Rise site developed outreach and recruitment strategies that staff considered to be the best fit for its community and organization. Sites used various recruitment methods to find disadvantaged young adults and a variety of messages to motivate them to participate in the program. Since each of the providers was known in its community, program referrals

[4]Site staff enrolled more than 25 individuals for each cohort to account for some expected drop-off during the first few weeks of the program.

from participants in earlier Project Rise cohorts and advertising through their community partners were common.

As shown in Table 2.1, while the five providers for the most part adopted similar recruitment strategies, a handful of them stood out at individual sites. For example, Kingsborough Community College promoted Project Rise in the college's course catalogue, which, through word-of-mouth at the school, drew in many eligible young adults. According to the program coordinator at Kingsborough, the vast majority of young adults showing interest in the later Project Rise cohorts learned about Project Rise through either the catalogue or Internet (Google) searches. Staff believed that this recruitment approach attracted young adults whose peer group was in college, or who were socially connected to students in postsecondary education.

Several providers recruited young people through street outreach. Full Employment Council organized a street team of staff who visited popular hangouts among young people, such as shopping malls, barber shops, and blood plasma donation banks (where young people earned money relatively easily by selling plasma). The staff highlighted the importance of this approach, but also emphasized its dependence on maintaining credibility in the community. "Ultimately for us, it's just being credible. If we can demonstrate that we deliver, then that becomes one of the best marketing tools you can use," one staff member said. Henry Street Settlement and Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway also recruited young adults for Project Rise through street outreach.

All providers benefited from their relationships with other agencies and networks. FEGS, for example, leveraged its existing partnerships by using an in-house liaison to the foster care system to tap into that population. FEGS also made presentations to staff at other youth service organizations to educate them about the program and to build rapport with them. "Often our relationships with other agencies are key because we know who to speak to, which is hugely important. ... It's also a reciprocal relationship for both agencies," explained one FEGS staff member.

With regard to recruitment messaging, staff across all providers typically presented an overview of the services available at the provider and in the program. Staff stressed the importance of framing the program with clarity from the onset — that is, describing Project Rise as a yearlong commitment and other program expectations up front to avoid confusion and later push-back from applicants. Staff also found that it was valuable to distinguish Project Rise from other options by highlighting its components, such as goal-setting activities, working as a team with peers, and case management, as well as free high school equivalency preparation and paid internships. Staff used a variety of approaches to introduce Project Rise to individuals who showed interest. "[T]here is no shortage of programs. [The young adults] don't have to be here,

Table 2.1

Recruitment and Enrollee Selection Strategies, by Site

Process	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M Gateway	Full Employment Council
Recruitment	Used existing relationships with other agencies and networks. Used weekly enrollment days to enroll applicants in Project Rise and other programs.	Street outreach and billboards. Used existing relationships with other agencies and networks. Social media presence (Facebook/ Craigslist).	Used appeal of earning college credits in messaging. Used flyers on campus and advertising in course catalogue. Social media presence (Craigslist).	Street outreach. Used existing relationships with other agencies and networks (YES Center).	Street outreach. Used existing relationships with other agencies and networks (urban youth centers, communty organizations, churches).
Enrollee selection	Includes group or individual interviews to clarify program details and need for applicants' commitment. "No eject, no reject policy" means no applicant is turned away unless he/she does not meet eligibility criteria.	Includes a group interview stage in which applicants are asked tough personal questions.	Includes a thorough one-on-one interview with staff to identify applicants' goals, interests, and barriers.	Staff try to put applicants at ease during pre-enrollment and do not pressure them to share personal information until they are ready.	Includes a 2-week orientation that is much more intense than those at the other sites.

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Process	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M Gateway	Full Employment Council
Orientations	Occurred after enrollment. Gear Up engaged enrollees before program started; included youth in other Bronx Youth Center programs.[a] 1-day session to help transition from Gear Up to pre-internship.	Part of enrollee selection process.	Occurred after enrollment.	Part of enrollee selection process.	Part of enrollee selection process. Intense 2-week period during which young adults complete career assessments, learn interview skills, discuss work-readiness, practice essay writing and presentation skills, and set goals (includes group and individual work).

SOURCE: MDRC staff interviews.

NOTE: [a]Gear Up reintroduced enrollees to a classroom setting to prepare them for academic work and work-readiness preparation.

[they] should be choosing to be here because [they] can always be somewhere else," emphasized one staff member. Staff at another site avoided using terms like "test" or "exam" in early conversations with interested young adults because potential applicants might misconstrue these terms as relating to background checks.

Challenges to Recruitment

Although all sites encountered some common challenges recruiting young adults for Project Rise, many challenges were site specific. Since providers recruited on an ongoing basis for four years, staff adjusted their approaches over time to attract more young adults who better "fit" the program. For example, in the summer of 2011, when recruiting for the first cohort of Project Rise, staff across all sites identified the summer months as the most difficult time to engage young people in structured activities. As a result, some sites moved their target start dates to the fall to align with the start of the school year.

At FEGS, Rutgers, and Kingsborough, some young adults who were recruited well in advance of the program's start date sometimes had to wait several weeks before the program began. As a result, staff had to proactively maintain contact with these enrollees during this time. FEGS addressed this concern by having participants attend a program called Gear Up during this waiting period. Gear Up, which was open to more than just Project Rise participants, reintroduced young people to the classroom environment and covered basic academic study skills and work-readiness.

Program staff also faced site-specific recruitment challenges. For example, staff at Kingsborough found it difficult to find eligible young adults for the early cohorts, since it was not located near any of the high-poverty community districts where CEO required Project Rise participants in New York City to live. (CEO dropped the community district residency requirement that it had set for the New York City providers after cohort four. This chapter later describes the resulting adjustments that Kingsborough made to its enrollment process.)

At the end of 2013, when sites began to prepare for the nationwide change in GED standards beginning in 2014, program staff said that they more aggressively recruited individuals who wanted to take the GED test before the new one was introduced. This push occurred during the recruitment period for cohort five. Staff reported that they especially focused on eligible young adults who had already passed portions of the GED test and would lose all those scores if they did not retake and pass their remaining sections before January 2014. These efforts appear to have attracted more work-ready individuals to cohort five; a higher proportion of participants earned their high school equivalency certificates within 12 months of enrolling in Project Rise — a situation that Chapter 5 describes in more detail.

Enrollee Selection Process

For every cohort, the number of interested and eligible young adults exceeded the number of available slots for Project Rise. Program staff thus needed to develop a process to narrow down the number of applicants. However, CEO required that providers minimize screening out individuals in order to avoid "creaming," a practice by which staff select the individuals who are perceived to be most likely to achieve positive outcomes. To select applicants without creaming, each site developed a pre-enrollment process that consisted of one or more stages — including some interviews and orientation sessions — for applicants to follow after staff determined they met the Project Rise eligibility requirements.

The decision not to enroll in Project Rise was sometimes applicant initiated. For example, an applicant might decide at some point in the selection process that he or she was no longer interested in the program and "self-select" out of the enrollment pool. Sites also built in extra assessment steps in the selection process to screen out individuals or refer them to a different program.

Program staff reported that most decisions not to enroll reflected a young person's self-selection, rather than the staff's assessment. "We're not selecting them for the program; [they are] deciding to participate," explained one staff member. Staff informed applicants about the expectations and demands of the program and allowed them to make their own decisions about whether to enroll in Project Rise. However, the multiple pre-enrollment stages served as *de facto* additional screening for motivation and ability to commit to Project Rise. Additionally, if a young adult's goals clearly aligned better with another program, or if staff thought that another program could better address an individual's barriers to program engagement, staff would refer the applicant to that program. In both individual and group interviews, staff across all providers agreed that they often could not predict which applicants would do well in the program just from observing their behavior or interactions in interviews or by assessing their work-readiness. As a result, staff relied heavily on the individual's choice during the enrollee selection process.

The entire enrollee intake process served as an opportunity for staff to assess the applicants' commitment level and motivation. The multiple pre-enrollment stages also gave staff time to identify and address barriers that might otherwise interfere with regular program engagement. Finally, the selection process served as an early opportunity for staff and prospective participants to develop a relationship. In interviews, staff across all providers stressed that gaining and building on the trust of the young adults before program enrollment was critical to sustaining participant engagement throughout the program. Box 2.2 describes some of the specific approaches that providers used in the selection process and participants' perceptions of these approaches.

Box 2.2

Staff and Participant Perspectives on the Selection Process

Participant interviews and focus groups made it apparent that the various ways providers messaged and conducted the enrollee selection process shaped the way the program participants viewed it. For example, the individual and group interviews at Henry Street Settlement were more intensive than at other sites, asking applicants very personal questions. Staff at Henry Street Settlement believed that, because of the interview process, individuals who proceeded with the pre-enrollment process after their interviews took more ownership of what Project Rise had to offer them. In contrast, during the interview stage at Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway, staff tried to put applicants at ease before asking personal questions.

Some participants at the same site saw the pre-enrollment stages a little differently. For example, at Henry Street Settlement, one participant recalled that "[the] group interview is basically to find out how you can answer them and see if you are eligible for the program, and to figure out if you are really prepared for this program and what you really want to do." Another countered, "I thought it was more of them trying to see what we want, and how we got here, and what they themselves can do to help us do what we want to do."

Pre-Enrollment Stages and Drop-Off Points for Young Adults Interested in Project Rise

For cohort three, MDRC researchers conducted an analysis of the pre-enrollment process to assess the extent of and reasons for young adults dropping out of the selection process at different points, as well as the specific points at which the drop off was most likely to occur. For this analysis, MDRC researchers asked the providers to collect detailed information on all individuals who expressed interest in enrolling in the third cohort between April 2012 and September 2012.[5] Staff documented individuals' engagement at each stage of the process described in this section, recording the points at which each of the young adults was no longer interested in enrolling in Project Rise and the staff members' understanding of the reason for the drop-off.

The analysis suggests that program staff rarely made explicit judgments about which young adults to enroll or not enroll. An overwhelming number of drop-offs resulted from interested applicants failing to meet eligibility requirements or not showing up for interviews or orientation activities. According to program records, once interested young adults met the program's eligibility requirements, applicants were much more likely to initiate selecting out of enrollment than were staff. The program data, however, are limited because they do not include

[5]Programming for this cohort began between July 2012 and October 2012, depending on the provider.

information on whether the program staff encouraged or discouraged individuals from continuing in the application process.

Figure 2.1 depicts the experiences of the 953 young adults who were interested in Project Rise in mid-2012 across the five providers. The first column presents aggregate numbers from all sites, and the columns to the right break the numbers down by site. The first row shows all the young adults who expressed interest in enrolling in Project Rise, and the second row shows that only 272 of these young adults met the eligibility criteria. The vast majority of the drop-off between the first and second rows was a result of Kingsborough's broad recruitment process, which brought in many individuals who were not eligible for Project Rise. Kingsborough staff also had more difficulty than staff at other sites in finding enough lower-level readers — possibly because the program was operated at a community college. (In fact, staff at other sites reported that one of the most common reasons for turning away interested applicants was that their reading scores on Tests of Adult Basic Education, or TABE, were too low — below the sixth-grade level requirement for Project Rise.)

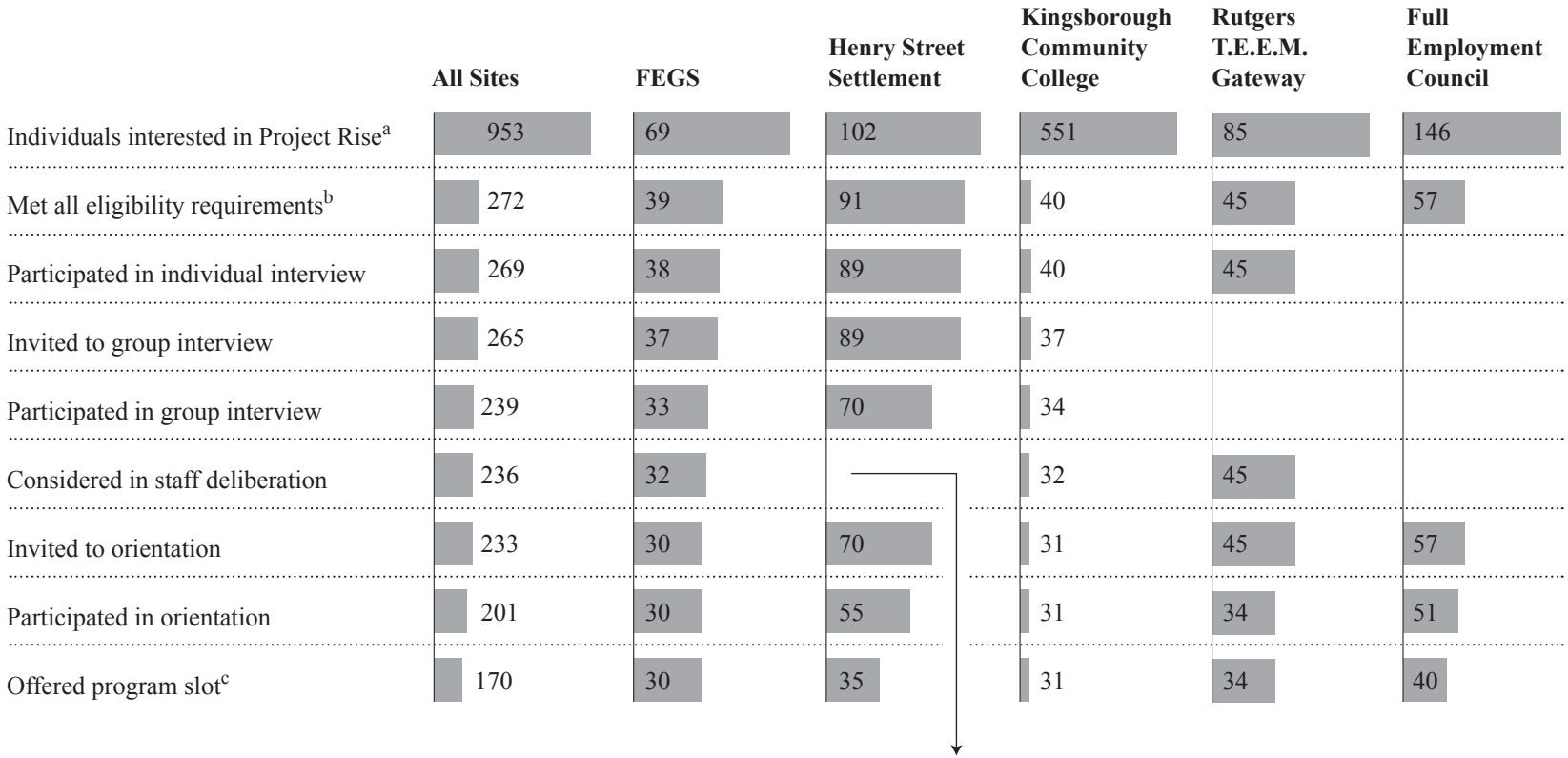
The rest of Figure 2.1 shows how the 272 *eligible* young adults moved through the post-eligibility screening process (second through ninth rows). This process differed slightly across providers, with various combinations of interviewing, staff deliberation, and orientations. (Box 2.3 describes these stages in more detail.) The site columns in Figure 2.1 show that no provider used more than three stages to screen out applicants. Full Employment Council, for example, did not hold any interviews, but staff invited all eligible young adults to an intense and structured two-week orientation, during which individuals participated in leadership workshops, attended speaker sessions, and formed and led support groups. After orientation, staff offered the applicants a program slot if they were still interested and the staff thought they were appropriate for Project Rise. The other providers created more intermediate stages in their selection processes but had fewer orientation activities before enrollment. (See Figure 2.2.)

After the staff screened individuals for program eligibility, the rest of the selection process served as a *de facto* assessment of the young adults' interest and motivation levels and helped identify and address potential barriers to program engagement. Almost all (99 percent) of the eligible individuals participated in at least one additional stage, as shown in the third row of Figure 2.1. At the end of the process, 170 applicants for cohort three, or more than 6 in 10 of the *eligible* young adults, were offered the opportunity to enroll in Project Rise (ninth row).[6]

[6]Some programs express this ratio by including all interested individuals, as opposed to the narrower group of just those who met the eligibility criteria. Expressed this way, and excluding Kingsborough, which received many inquiries from young adults who did not live in designated districts and thus were not eligible for the program, more than 3 in 10 of the individuals who were interested in Project Rise were offered the opportunity to enroll in the program.

Figure 2.1

Pre-Enrollment Screening Analysis for Cohort 3



The bars representing numbers of individuals at each stage are shown to scale within individual sites, but not across sites. Absence of bars indicates that the recruitment activity did not occur at the site.

(continued)

Figure 2.1 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the MDRC-designed Project Rise recruitment tool.

NOTES: Recruitment for cohort 3 began in April 2012 and concluded in September 2012. Individuals enrolled in cohort 3 between July 16, 2012, and December 21, 2012.

The dashed line denotes recruitment activities that were not held at the site outlined.

At Kingsborough, individuals with lower reading skills (defined as those who scored between the sixth and eighth grade levels on the TABE) were considered for cohort 4, not cohort 3, and are not included in the first row of the figure. However, individuals who dropped off before taking the TABE are included in the figure since their reading levels were unknown.

After individuals were screened for eligibility, the majority of remaining drop-offs before orientation were a result of individuals not attending the next stage of the pre-enrollment process.

[a]Of those interested, 105 were "no shows" to the initial eligibility confirmation activity, namely, individuals who did not attend and whose ages could not be confirmed. These individuals did not undergo any screening by program staff. Fifteen percent of the drop-off that occurred between the first and second stages of the eligibility screening process can be attributed to these no shows. At each stage of the funnel, not attending for the subsequent stage continued to be the primary reason for drop-off.

[b]Individuals who met the eligibility requirements were invited to the next pre-enrollment stage.

[c]Individuals who were not offered a program slot after participating in orientation were not extended offers for the following reasons: disinterest in program components (N=7); barriers related to child care (N=4); lack of emotional readiness (N=3); insufficient documentation (N=2); barriers related to family responsibility (N=1), health/medical issues (N=1), housing issues (N=1); and other (N=12).

Box 2.3

Description of Post-Eligibility Screening Stages

The various stages of post-eligibility screening, shown in Figure 2.1, gave site staff and interested applicants additional opportunities to learn about each other. Staff could begin to assess whether a young adult's needs and barriers to education or employment could be addressed with on-site resources, and the young adults could decide whether they were willing to make the necessary commitment to this yearlong, intensive program.

Individual interviews were conducted by a program coordinator or case manager and served in some sites as a starting point for the staff to learn more about an individual's personal history and discuss program expectations with the applicant. FEGS, Henry Street Settlement, Kingsborough Community College, and Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway scheduled individual interviews for each eligible young adult at their sites.

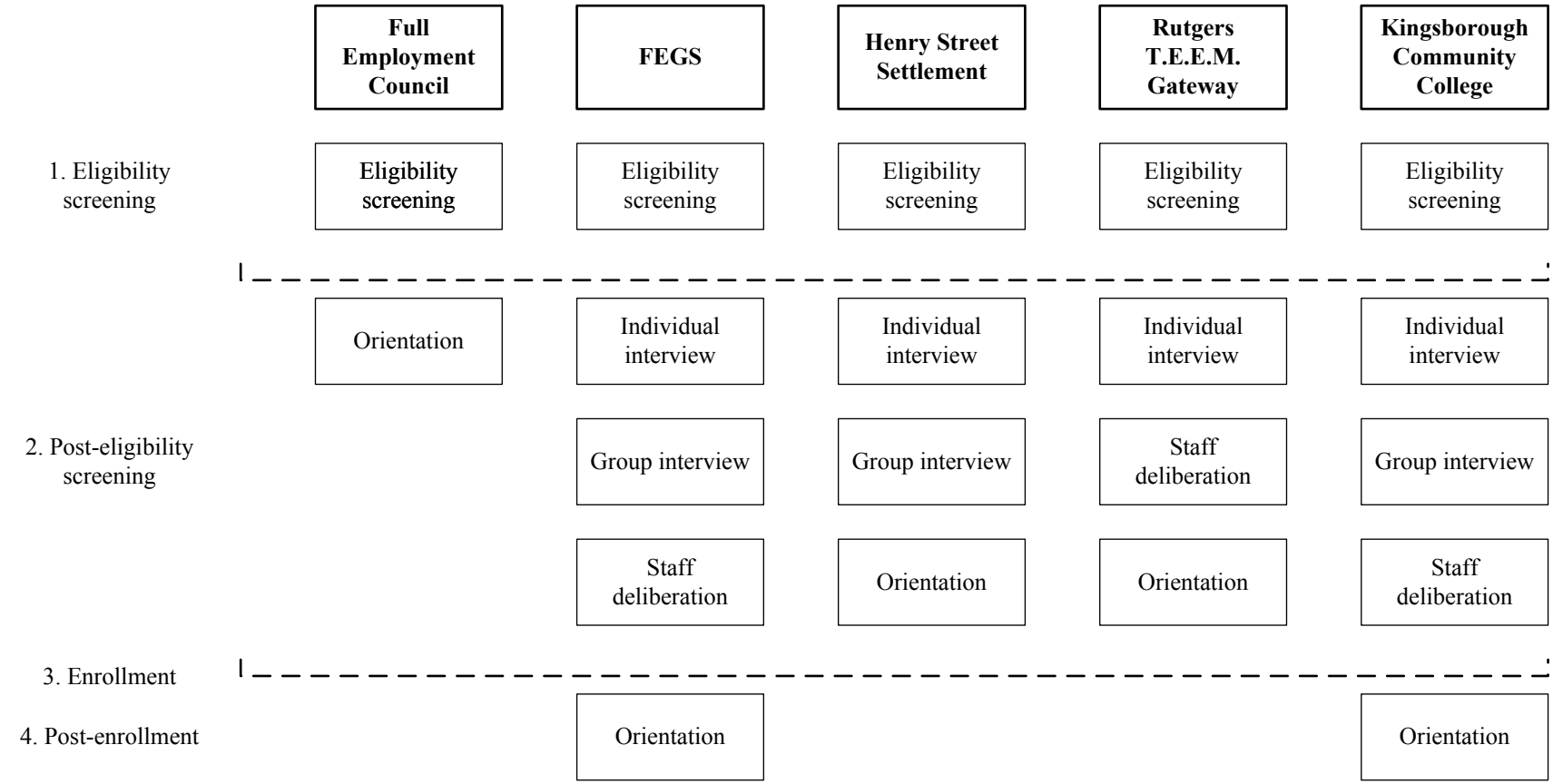
Group interviews were conducted by staff members with several eligible young adults at a time and allowed staff to see how the young adults interacted with staff and peers. FEGS, Henry Street Settlement, and Kingsborough held group interviews after the individual interviews. Sites took different approaches to conducting the group interviews for cohort three. For example, Henry Street Settlement staff used an intense interview process to address personal barriers in a group setting. Kingsborough used a more formal group interview process in earlier cohorts but adjusted the interview questions in cohort three to foster natural conversations that allowed them to get to know the applicants better.

Staff deliberation occurred after the interview stages in Kingsborough and Rutgers, but rarely did the deliberation result in excluding applicants (among the few cases that did, two applicants did not provide required documentation and one was deemed by site staff not to be emotionally ready for the program).

Orientations primarily focused on identifying applicants' barriers to program engagement and addressing them, although they varied in content and duration across sites. Although there was drop-off after the orientation period, the purpose of the orientation was not to screen out interested applicants. Staff described program expectations and used the orientation period to keep the young adults engaged before the program began. Staff also assessed applicants' career and education interests and addressed their barriers to school and work during orientation. Full Employment Council, Henry Street Settlement, and Rutgers held orientations as part of their enrollment selection processes. (FEGS and Kingsborough offered young adults program spots after the group interviews, and all young adults who were offered a spot were invited to an orientation session. Program enrollment for cohort three at these sites occurred prior to or during orientation and before the program start date.)

Figure 2.2

Participant Selection Process, by Site, Cohort 3



SOURCE: MDRC-designed Project Rise recruitment tool.

NOTE: Recruitment for cohort 3 began in April 2012 and concluded in September 2012. Individuals enrolled in cohort 3 between July 16, 2012, and December 21, 2012.

More than two-thirds of the drop-off among eligible individuals was the result of applicants not attending the next stage of the process. The largest drop-off occurred at the last stage of the process (eighth row). (For the sites that held orientations as part of the pre-enrollment selection process, this stage is the orientation stage.) Only one individual who was offered enrollment in the third cohort turned it down (not shown in the figure).

Project Rise Orientations

All Project Rise sites operated an orientation before Project Rise began. The orientations were part of the enrollee selection process at Full Employment Council, Henry Street Settlement, and Rutgers; most of the applicants who attended orientation at these sites were offered a spot in the program. FEGS and Kingsborough held program orientations after program enrollment. Across all providers, the orientation gave staff an opportunity to further identify and address personal issues that might affect the ability of young adults to participate fully in Project Rise. (The third row of Table 2.1 lists when each site held orientation.) At the providers that held orientations prior to enrollment, a small number of individuals who *did* attend orientation were not offered the opportunity to participate in the program, primarily due to personal challenges that program staff were able to identify.[7]

Changes to Enrollee Selection Process Over Time

Providers made slight adjustments to their selection processes to better communicate the expectations of the program and target eligible young adults. As time passed and more young people became aware of Project Rise, recruitment became easier and site staff needed to be more selective in order to maintain small cohorts. This change happened in part because participants in earlier cohorts referred friends and relatives to the program. All the providers reported that word-of-mouth about Project Rise from participants in the earlier cohorts was important to their ability to recruit for later cohorts.

Providers made some adjustments to their recruitment processes to both better target eligible young adults for the program and better identify individual situations that staff thought would likely affect program engagement. In particular, when CEO dropped the community district residency requirement after cohort four, Kingsborough had a much larger pool of eligible young adults. As a result, staff recruiting at the site shifted their focus from targeting specific agencies within the eligible community districts to using information they gathered from the applicant interviews to either address barriers to engagement or refer individuals to other pro-

[7]The pre-enrollment analysis shows that 31 young adults who attended orientation were not offered a slot in the program, due to loss of interest in the program (7), child care and family issues (5), incomplete documentation and lack of emotional readiness (5), health issues (1), or unstable housing (1). The remaining 12 people dropped off of the enrollment process for reasons that were not easily categorized; of these, 5 reflected staff-initiated decisions not to enroll the applicants in Project Rise.

grams. They also added a second group interview to their selection process. Staff at Kingsborough acknowledged that they could not predict how well the individuals would do in the program based on how they presented themselves during the pre-enrollment process. The staff appeared to focus their screening efforts on what they thought would be potential barriers to program engagement (such as ongoing child care issues) rather than on perceived ability to earn a high school equivalency certificate or obtain employment quickly (work-readiness).

In separate staff interviews during later cohorts, program staff from the other providers generally indicated that their selection processes had become slightly more targeted over time, as they had learned what characteristics made an applicant a better fit for the program. Staff found that these characteristics generally related to potential barriers to program engagement. For example, staff at Henry Street mentioned looking for "red flags," including housing instability or child care needs, that could limit an individual's ability to fully participate in the program. Child care issues also resonated with staff at other programs, and staff at several sites expressed a need to change their usual approach when working with young parents. Staff referred young adults with these types of barriers to other programs that could better address their needs and, in some cases, gave them the option to return to Project Rise at a later date.

Data on the enrollee selection process for Project Rise suggests that its screening was more extensive than it is in some youth programs but not as extensive as it is in others. For example, organizations such as Roca and Larkin Street (mentioned in Chapter 1) recruit the young adults who are hardest to reach and most difficult to serve and provide a pathway for any young adult who is seeking services to enter their programs. On the other hand, YouthBuild, another program that aims to develop work-readiness for disconnected young adults, recruits four young adults for every available slot, since its screening process is demanding and includes a Mental Toughness Orientation, which screens out all but the most highly motivated — those who demonstrate a clear "readiness to change."[8]

At the end of the enrollee selection process, usually during or immediately following the last screening stage, individuals who had not dropped off enrolled in the program. The report refers to these individuals as "enrollees." In cohorts two through five, a total of 671 individuals enrolled in Project Rise, and 43 of them subsequently did not attend the first program activity. These "no-shows" are briefly discussed in Chapter 3 and are included in some participation analyses, as specified throughout the report. Unless otherwise noted, however, the rest of the report provides information only on Project Rise "participants" — individuals who enrolled in the program and participated in at least one post-enrollment program component or activity.

[8]Wiegand et al. (2015).

Reasons for Enrolling in Project Rise and Prior Year Activity

As described in Chapter 1, Project Rise's education-conditioned internship component was partially influenced by the Youth Entitlement programs that were tested in the 1970s[9] and its other components were influenced by CEO's other programs for young people who are out of school. Based on the implementation findings from the Youth Entitlement demonstration, Project Rise's designers anticipated that the paid internship might be an incentive that attracts disconnected young adults to Project Rise, and that conditioning it on an educational requirement could serve as a retention tool to keep individuals engaged in the program for the duration of their internships. The Project Rise data, however, tell a different story.

Table 2.2 provides information on young people's reasons for entering Project Rise. At the time of enrollment, staff gave the young people a list of five possible reasons for enrolling and asked them to choose all the reasons that applied to them. Nearly all participants (93 percent) chose earning a high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma, while only about two-thirds of the enrollees selected other reasons for participating in the program — which included long-term goals such as continuing education, obtaining employment, and getting their lives back on track. Notably, the paid internship, one of the program's key components, was the least commonly reported reason for enrolling (only half of all enrollees reported it as a reason).[10] However, these data were collected before any program activity occurred, and therefore interest in the internship could have increased once participants began Project Rise. (Chapter 3 describes participants' internship experiences in more detail.)

These data are consistent with what participants reported in focus groups and interviews conducted throughout the study period; a few participants described the program as a "two-in-one" opportunity to earn a high school equivalency certificate and work in a paid internship, but most were primarily focused on the former. Along with the goal of attaining a high school equivalency credential, participants spoke about their family members as motivators for enrolling and continuing in the program; many spoke about wanting a better life for their children, setting a good example for their siblings, and making their parents proud. One participant stated,

[9]Gueron (1984).

[10]It is possible that since the majority of Project Rise participants had worked in the past, they may not have valued the paid internship as a way of gaining job experience as much as they did the educational component of the program. However, a separate analysis, not shown in this report, found no statistically significant differences between those who had and those who had not been employed in the past in terms of the proportion of young adults who reported that they had enrolled in the program for the paid internships. Staff reported that program expectations were made clearer to interested young adults over time, so it is possible that participants' greater interest in a GED or high school equivalency certificate over a paid internship was a result of initial staff messaging that did not stress the internship. A larger proportion of the young adults in later cohorts than in early cohorts reported being interested in the paid internship, but earning a high school equivalency credential was still the dominant reported reason for enrolling in Project Rise even for later cohorts.

Table 2.2

Reasons for Enrollment and Prior Year Activity, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5

Characteristic	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Project Rise participation						
Goals for participation (%)						
Paid internship	54.0	77.1	46.9	65.7	39.4	45.6
High school diploma or equivalency certificate	92.8	94.9	87.5	99.1	100.0	85.0
Go to college or get more training	65.5	78.0	49.2	81.5	66.1	57.1
Get a job	67.5	84.8	58.6	75.9	71.7	51.7
Get life back on track	65.9	84.8	63.3	55.6	67.7	59.2
Career interest[a] (%)						
Health care	22.2	29.1	18.3	25.0	13.9	25.4
Arts, entertainment, media[b]	15.7	7.3	18.3	17.3	23.8	11.6
Child care and social service	12.5	16.4	12.5	6.7	15.6	10.9
Construction and extraction	7.4	4.6	5.8	1.9	8.2	14.5
Food preparation	6.6	2.7	2.5	18.3	3.3	7.3
Legal	4.7	8.2	1.7	6.7	4.1	3.6
Office and administrative support	2.7	1.8	3.3	0.0	6.6	1.5
Referred to Project Rise by (%)						
Self	26.6	20.3	25.0	34.3	28.4	25.9
Family member or relative	26.1	27.1	19.5	38.9	15.8	30.6
Friend	18.5	22.9	22.7	21.3	14.2	12.9
Other program participant	10.4	5.1	7.8	0.9	15.8	19.1
Someone else	18.5	24.6	25.0	4.6	26.0	11.6
Prior year activity						
Participated in education or training program in past year (%)	32.6	27.1	38.4	29.6	40.9	27.2
Education program outside of school	23.3	21.2	20.6	18.5	35.4	20.4
Job training program	18.1	9.3	30.2	14.8	24.6	11.6
How most of time was spent in past year (%)						
Caring for a child	28.4	23.5	26.1	27.4	30.3	33.6
Caring for an adult family member	7.7	5.2	7.0	6.6	13.5	6.4
Looking for a job	45.6	33.9	48.7	45.3	45.4	52.9
Doing nothing	6.6	22.6	4.4	1.9	3.4	1.4
Other	11.8	14.8	13.9	18.9	7.6	5.7
Sample size	628	118	128	108	127	147

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Project Rise baseline information forms.

NOTES: [a]These career interest sectors were the most commonly selected sectors. These categories are not mutually exclusive because verbatim responses that included multiple sectors were backcoded into multiple sectors.

[b]Includes careers in sports and athletics.

"I want to prove people wrong who said I wouldn't graduate, wouldn't make something of myself." Others echoed the same sentiment.

Project Rise participants engaged in a variety of non-school and non-work activities before they joined the program. In focus groups and interviews, many participants mentioned that they were involved in negative or unproductive activities before they heard about Project Rise, such as "hanging out," sleeping, drinking alcohol, and smoking. Overall, however, individuals involved in these negative activities were more the exception than the rule. Table 2.2 shows that only about 7 percent of participants indicated that they were idle or unproductive in the year before they began Project Rise.[11] About a third of participants had been in an education or training program in the past year (but not within the previous six months), indicating that a substantial number of Project Rise participants were actively trying to reconnect. The majority of participants — about 81 percent — had been either looking for a job or caring for a family member.

Characteristics of Project Rise Participants

Between August 2011 and December 2013, 628 young adults across the five providers enrolled and participated in Project Rise.[12] Although all participants had both low educational attainment and limited job experience, data from the baseline information forms — which collected a variety of information on participants' demographics, educational and employment histories, public assistance receipt, housing, and health — indicated that the Project Rise sample was demographically diverse and faced a variety of potential barriers to school or work. Participant interviews and focus groups revealed that participants' challenges to attending school or participating in the labor market often stemmed from chaotic life experiences, such as unstable living situations, histories of drug or alcohol use, bad relationships with parents, or parenting their own children at a young age.

[11]Staff did not explicitly ask participants whether they were unproductive, nor did they probe for that response. This percentage was calculated after categorizing the participants' verbatim responses.

[12]This number excludes individuals who may have completed all the enrollment requirements (including signing the study's informed consent form and filling out a baseline information form) but did not attend any Project Rise program activities.

This section of the report describes the Project Rise participants and highlights the key barriers to school and work that these young adults faced when they entered the program. Table 2.3 presents the characteristics of all Project Rise participants in cohorts two through five, overall as well as separately by site.

Education, Employment, and Training Background

By design, no one who enrolled in Project Rise had a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate. More than half of the young adults in Project Rise had not progressed beyond tenth grade when they enrolled in Project Rise. Not surprisingly, school achievement and reading and math levels were low among the Project Rise sample. Most of the Project Rise participants had experienced some difficulty in school in the past — 54 percent had been held back or repeated a grade, and over 70 percent had been suspended from school at some point. In interviews and focus groups, participants described many reasons for falling behind their peers in school: frequently changing schools for a variety of reasons and subsequently falling behind in their coursework, not being held accountable by their parents and ceasing to fully participate in their education, or avoiding being bullied by other students, among others.

Since recent unemployment was also an eligibility requirement for Project Rise, no one in the sample had been employed during the six months prior to enrolling in the program.[13] Most of the young adults did have some (albeit limited) work experience in the past — about two-thirds reported having been employed at some point, and those who had been employed had worked an average of about six months in their last jobs. These jobs were primarily low paying, and part time; about 61 percent of the most recent jobs were part time, and about 90 percent of them paid less than $400 a week.

The participant characteristics described below — covering demographic information, family structure, receipt of public assistance, and interactions with law enforcement — shed some light on the challenges that program staff experienced encouraging program engagement and helping participants find a job or continue their education.

Demographic Characteristics

Half of Project Rise participants were men and half of them were women, although the gender ratio differed at a few sites, as discussed in the final section of this chapter. The participants were also evenly distributed by age, with slightly more individuals under age 21 (55 percent) than age 21 or older (45 percent) when they began Project Rise. About a third of the Pro-

[13]Site staff sometimes allowed young adults who had very brief periods of employment to apply for Project Rise.

Table 2.3

Characteristics of Study Participants at Time of Enrollment, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5

Characteristic	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Education and training status						
Highest level of education (%)						
Grade 8 or less	8.6	11.9	4.7	11.1	7.1	8.8
Grades 9-10	48.9	44.9	49.2	45.4	43.3	59.2
Grade 11 or higher, no high school diploma or equivalency certificate	42.5	43.2	46.1	43.5	49.6	32.0
Ever held back or repeated a grade (%)	54.2	63.3	68.9	53.7	46.5	41.8
Ever suspended from school (%)	71.4	69.2	59.4	50.0	83.5	89.0
Employment status						
Ever employed (%)	65.0	63.6	60.2	77.8	63.0	62.6
For most recent job, among those ever employed						
Average number of months of employment	6.1	6.7	6.7	6.2	4.4	6.6
Hours per week of work (%)						
Part time (1-34 hours)	61.5	61.6	54.1	63.4	73.1	55.6
Full time (35 or more hours)	38.5	38.4	46.0	36.6	26.9	44.4
Weekly earnings (%)						
Less than $200	44.7	46.0	44.6	42.7	53.3	38.2
$200 to less than $400	45.2	43.2	46.0	45.1	37.7	52.8
$400 or more	10.1	10.8	9.5	12.2	9.1	9.0
Demographic characteristics						
Gender (%)						
Female	50.6	61.0	48.4	59.1	48.0	40.1
Male	49.3	38.1	51.6	41.0	52.0	59.9
Age (%)						
18-20 years old	55.0	60.2	54.7	44.9	66.1	49.0
21-24 years old[a]	45.0	39.8	45.3	55.1	33.9	51.0
Race/ethnicity (%)						
Hispanic/Latino	36.4	57.8	57.5	44.4	21.4	8.2
Black/African-American	53.6	36.2	37.0	36.1	71.4	79.5
Other	9.9	5.9	5.5	19.4	7.1	12.2

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

Characteristic	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Language spoken at home (%)						
English	76.4	66.7	70.3	65.7	79.0	95.2
Spanish	18.8	33.3	27.3	18.5	13.7	4.1
Family structure and living arrangements						
Unmarried, not living with partner	88.0	89.0	87.2	90.7	90.2	84.0
Has children (%)	34.2	27.4	25.0	29.0	37.0	49.0
Lives with children[b] (%)	26.8	18.8	18.1	25.5	28.4	40.4
Self, spouse, or partner currently pregnant (%)	7.5	6.8	2.5	2.8	11.9	12.0
Ever in foster care (%)	19.8	33.6	22.4	9.4	17.3	16.6
Currently in foster care (%)	3.1	12.1	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Housing arrangement (%)						
Own place	9.6	6.8	4.0	12.0	11.8	12.9
Parent's or relative's home	73.2	80.5	72.2	75.9	77.2	62.6
Homeless	2.2	0.9	1.6	0.0	0.0	7.5
Lives in public housing (%)	36.7	42.0	60.2	18.9	45.1	19.2
Receives Section 8 or other housing voucher (%)	19.5	36.5	10.6	26.9	20.8	7.1
Number of household members (%)						
1	1.6	1.0	2.0	1.9	1.7	1.5
2 to 5	82.9	77.1	78.4	83.5	86.0	87.7
6 or more	15.5	21.9	19.6	14.6	12.4	10.8
Always feels safe in own neighborhood (%)	65.8	76.3	70.5	71.3	57.1	56.6
Moved in the past 6 months (%)	42.8	41.5	37.0	37.0	43.6	52.8
Public benefit receipt						
Receives food stamps/SNAP (%)	57.9	62.3	57.1	59.6	49.2	61.4
Receives welfare/TANF (%)	14.8	5.0	2.9	19.0	22.0	21.6
Receives publicly funded health coverage (%)	60.4	79.5	75.6	70.6	54.4	29.8

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

Characteristic	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Health status						
Referred to substance abuse treatment program in past year (%)	9.4	9.3	12.6	2.8	9.5	11.6
Referred to psychological or emotional counseling in past year (%)	23.6	29.9	31.8	19.4	22.8	15.1
Criminal justice status						
Ever arrested (%)	48.8	50.0	49.6	32.1	42.5	64.8
Ever convicted of a crime[c] (%)	15.4	12.0	20.0	6.7	13.5	22.1
Misdemeanor	10.1	10.3	15.2	5.8	9.6	9.0
Felony	4.9	0.9	4.8	0.0	3.2	13.1
Sample size	628	118	128	108	127	147

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Project Rise baseline information forms.

NOTES: [a]One participant's birthday was near the cutoff date and therefore the person was permitted to enroll in the program at age 25.

[b]Refers to at least half the time.

[c]Conviction categories may not add up to the total percent of participants who were ever convicted due to missing values.

ject Rise sample was Hispanic, and about half was black and non-Hispanic. About three-quarters of the sample spoke English as the primary language at home, and about one-fifth of the sample spoke primarily Spanish.

Family Structure and Living Arrangements

While most of the Project Rise participants were living with family members at the time program enrollment, many participants were the sole caretaker of their children or had unstable housing arrangements.

Nearly 90 percent of the sample was unmarried and not living with a partner at the time of enrollment. Most of the young adults (83 percent) reported living in households of between two and five people. Many of the Project Rise participants were also parents or were expecting

children. About a third of the young adults had children when they enrolled in Project Rise, and about one-fourth lived with their children. About 8 percent of participants were expecting a child at the time of enrollment.

The vast majority — 73 percent — of the Project Rise participants lived with either their parents or another relative when they started the program, and another 10 percent of them had their own place. A very small proportion of the participants were homeless or in foster care when they started Project Rise. These overall percentages were low because most sites did not enroll such vulnerable individuals.[14] However, as discussed in the final section of this chapter, at least two providers recruited larger numbers of young adults with very unstable living arrangements.

About 37 percent of the sample lived in public housing, and 19 percent were in households receiving a Section 8 or other housing voucher. Roughly 40 percent of the sample experienced housing instability, reporting to have moved at least once in the six months before the start of Project Rise. About 18 percent of the sample reported that they often felt unsafe or never felt safe in their own neighborhoods.

Other Risk Factors

About half of the Project Rise participants had been arrested in the past. Fifteen percent of them had been convicted of a crime — 10 percent for a misdemeanor, and 5 percent for a felony.

Most of the participants in Project Rise lived in households that relied on means-tested public benefits, suggesting that they were from very poor households. Nearly 60 percent of the participants were in households that received food stamps, and 15 percent reported that they were receiving TANF. (Some young adults may not have been TANF recipients but may have been living with a relative who was.) More than half of all participants had public health insurance (Medicaid).

Mental health and substance abuse issues appear to have affected a significant number of Project Rise participants. About 10 percent had been referred to or attended a substance abuse treatment program in the past year. All sites had sizeable proportions of participants who had been referred to or received psychological or emotional counseling in the past year, ranging from 15 to 32 percent of participants.

The participant characteristics described in this section suggest that many of the young adults in Project Rise had complex life experiences, which may have contributed to their initial

[14] As discussed in the enrollee selection section of this chapter, providers often referred vulnerable individuals with child care or housing issues to other programs.

disconnection from school and work. Box 2.4 highlights the challenges of three participants before they enrolled in Project Rise. Because difficult family situations and struggles do not disappear when participants begin Project Rise, many of these challenges continued to affect their ability to consistently engage in the program.

Variations in Participant Characteristics Across Sites and Over Time

Overall, the characteristics of participants did not differ systematically across sites in unexpected or surprising ways. Many of the notable differences that appeared are consistent with regional differences, and some other differences might be attributed to the different ways in which site staff marketed the program, recruited individuals, and selected enrollees. Major differences among providers include: Kingsborough enrolled young adults who were slightly less disadvantaged than participants at the other providers, and Full Employment Council enrolled young adults who were slightly more disadvantaged than participants at the other providers. Box 2.5 highlights some of the differences between the participants at Kingsborough and at the Full Employment Council, compared with the participants at the other providers.

Other differences in participant characteristics across providers were consistent with the providers' recruitment and enrollment strategies. About two-thirds of the Rutgers participants were younger than age 21, compared with 55 percent of the overall sample. Staff at Rutgers reported that they targeted the younger end of the age range because they had found in early cohorts that younger participants tended to be more motivated to persist in the high school equivalency component.

Another notable difference across providers is that a higher proportion of FEGS and Henry Street Settlement participants had been or were still in foster care, primarily because staff from these providers recruited from agencies that provided services to youth in foster care. Over a third of the young adults at FEGS and over 20 percent of those at Henry Street Settlement had been in foster care in the past, and these two providers also enrolled several individuals who were still in the foster care system. None of the other providers enrolled participants who were still in foster care when they began the program.

The characteristics of Project Rise participants remained fairly consistent over time — later cohorts generally looked neither more nor less disadvantaged than earlier cohorts. This consistency indicates that the adjustments to the recruitment and enrollee selection processes that the providers made over time did little to affect the diversity of the Project Rise sample. The push to recruit individuals who were closer to attaining their GED certificate for cohort five also did not seem to greatly affect the demographic mix of Project Rise participants, although participants in cohort five were more likely to have had some past employment experience than participants in earlier cohorts. Chapter 5 discusses these comparisons in more detail.

Box 2.4

Participant Profiles: Overcoming Challenges

Teresa was 23 years old and had a young child when she enrolled in Project Rise. She described being frequently picked on in high school, and as a result switched schools often. At her last school, she was doing well and almost made the honor roll, but then "lost complete focus and ended up dropping out." Around the same time, she was having issues with her mother; she started hanging out with a "fast crowd" and started using drugs and got involved in other illegal activities. Teresa described how she acted impulsively, "I didn't see, I was just lost." Teresa enrolled in a residential substance abuse treatment program a few months prior to enrolling in Project Rise, and subsequently lost custody of her child to the father. Program staff referred Teresa to Project Rise several months after she began treatment, though she voluntarily enrolled in Project Rise. In April 2013, less than a year later, Teresa earned her high school equivalency credential and, shortly after, graduated from the treatment program.

Erica was 23 years old when she enrolled in Project Rise. She had a history of traumatic childhood events, including severe bullying in school, sexual abuse by a family member, and unpleasant foster care experiences. Being teased in high school contributed to her decision to drop out of school. Soon after she left school, she had her first baby, but lost custody shortly after because the relevant state authorities judged her to be an unfit parent. Erica subsequently had several more children, all of whom were similarly taken from her. Prior to Project Rise, Erica had participated in a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program and was two months from earning her certificate, but she stopped attending after accumulating over $30,000 in student loan debt. Erica thought that the CNA program did not do anything to address her lack of GED certificate, saying that"[she] couldn't get anywhere with a CNA without a GED." Erica was pregnant with another child when she enrolled in Project Rise.

Katrina was 18 years old when she enrolled in Project Rise. At the time, she had been out of school for approximately two years. According to Katrina, her school was "crazy" and there were always distractions and interruptions in class. Combined with violence and criminal activity on the school premises, she did not think the environment allowed anyone to function normally or learn. Katrina acknowledged that she fell in with the wrong crowd and "went off track," which included smoking and drinking. She was suspended for fighting on multiple occasions. With no adult holding her accountable for her school attendance, she eventually stopped going toward the end of her senior year. In addition to the violence at her high school, gang violence was prevalent in Katrina's community; her own father was in a gang. One of her brothers had been killed as a result of street violence and shortly before the start of Project Rise, Katrina was hit by a stray bullet. Katrina's living situation was unstable; she alternatively lived in two different neighborhoods, sometimes with her mother and siblings and sometimes with her partner. Katrina had some previous work experience as a dishwasher, cashier, and in stocking. She also participated in other programs she described as "job training" or "workforce" programs.

Box 2.5

Characteristics of Project Rise Participants in Kingsborough Community College and the Full Employment Council: Notable Differences in Context

Kingsborough Community College

Project Rise participants at Kingsborough Community College were slightly less disadvantaged than participants at other sites. The location of the Project Rise program on a community college campus and far from the highest poverty community districts in New York City likely contributed to some of the differences between the Project Rise young adults at Kingsborough and those at the other sites. The program heavily marketed the community college setting, and consequently the program tended to draw young adults who were aspiring students, possibly with social connections to others who attended the college.

Furthermore, Kingsborough enrolled applicants who were also less likely than those at other sites to indicate that they or their partners were pregnant. Its participants were, on average, reading at higher levels than individuals who enrolled in Project Rise elsewhere. It also enrolled a notably higher proportion of young adults who had past employment experience and the smallest proportion of young adults who had been referred to or had attended a substance abuse treatment program in the past year.

Full Employment Council

The Full Employment Council had a history of serving young men, many of whom were ex-offenders. During field visits, Full Employment Council staff talked about the prevalence of gang affiliation among participants, and the characteristics of the young adults in Project Rise at the site reflected this gang affiliation. Full Employment Council tended to enroll more men than did the other sites. It also enrolled a lot of individuals who had prior arrests. Nearly two-thirds of Project Rise participants at Full Employment Council had been arrested in the past, and 13 percent had been convicted of a felony. (In contrast, the Project Rise sample as a whole averaged a 50 percent arrest rate and 5 percent felony conviction rate.)

In addition, 8 percent of Full Employment Council's young adults were homeless when they enrolled in Project Rise, compared with less than 3 percent across all sites. It enrolled a much smaller proportion of young adults who had access to public health insurance than did the other sites, possibly due to differences in public health insurance policies across states. The site also enrolled an especially high proportion of young adults who were parents or expecting children, compared with other sites.

Chapter 3

Flow of Young Adults Through the Program and Ways the Program Encouraged Engagement

All Project Rise enrollees[1] had been out of school and work for at least six months prior to starting the program. Differences in their life challenges and needs, however, likely influenced their ability to engage in the program. For this reason, the Project Rise model was reasonably flexible in accommodating enrollees' particular circumstances; case management supports were also built into the model to promote engagement. In part because of this flexibility, most participants did not move through all the program components continuously, and many participants had lapses in attendance for a variety of reasons.[2] This chapter explores how participants engaged in Project Rise and the ways in which aspects of the program encouraged participant engagement and persistence.

The chapter begins with an overview of how program participants in cohorts two through five progressed through the full program model: pre-internship (which included program engagement activities and the start of education classes); internship (which was concurrent with education classes); and transitions to unsubsidized employment, postsecondary education, or both. Program participants who did not persist through the full 12 months of the program exited at different phases of the program, and the chapter examines the reasons for and rates of program attrition during each phase. Finally, the chapter discusses the sites' case management practices, use of financial incentives, and other ways to encourage engagement and persistence.

Data analyzed in this chapter come from the Project Rise providers' management information systems, which all tracked the same measures for the study, and from staff and participant interviews and focus groups. The quantitative analyses combine cohorts two through five across all five Project Rise providers and reflect program activities between January 2012 and November 2014. Qualitative data draw from interviews conducted through cohort six.

Key Findings

- Most enrollees participated in the pre-internship, education, and internship components of Project Rise. Over 85 percent began the education component, about two-thirds began internships, and about a third worked for more than 120 hours in their internships.

[1] "Enrollees" refers to all individuals who enrolled in Project Rise, whether or not they attended any program activity. "Participant" signifies those individuals who participated in at least one program activity.

[2] Bangser (2013).

- Over the course of the program, 40 percent of enrollees exited Project Rise, mostly due to inadequate attendance.
- About 27 percent of enrollees entered either unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education within 12 months. Most transitioned to unsubsidized employment; very few enrolled in postsecondary education.
- About 45 percent of enrollees did not exit the program but also did not transition to unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education after working more than 120 hours in their internships. Chapter 4 will describe participants' engagement and outcome patterns in each program component.
- Project Rise providers used a variety of strategies to build relationships with participants. Participants had access to case managers and other caring adults for the duration of the program. The cohort-based approach also encouraged engagement in the program, in part through organized group activities. Additional strategies included financial incentives, activities taking place during the pre-internship phase, and other resources for participants.

Flow of Young Adults Through Project Rise

Figure 3.1 shows the number of individuals enrolled in cohorts two through five who progressed through or completed each phase of the program model. The diagram presents the pathways through and out of the program for all enrollees, including both participants and those who enrolled in Project Rise but did not attend any program activity. Some individuals did not progress through all the program phases but also did not entirely leave the program.[3]

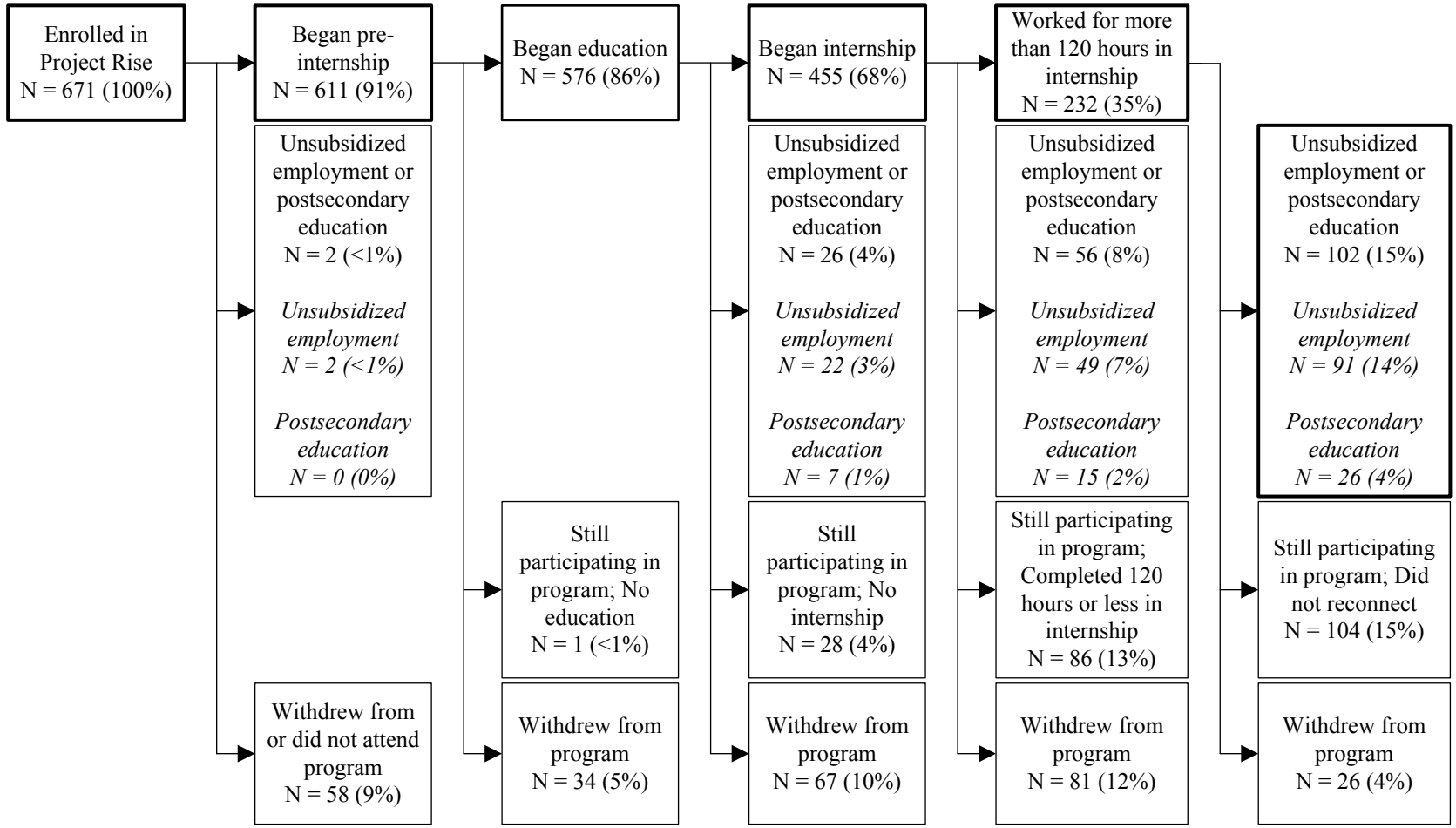
The boxes across the top of the figure depict the full sequence of program components, as they were designed. The first box, at the top left, shows that 671 young adults enrolled in cohorts two through five. Of them, 611, or 91 percent of enrollees, began the pre-internship phase of the program. Since the education classes did not begin immediately, some participants left the program before beginning education classes. As a result, only 86 percent of Project Rise enrollees began education classes.

Participants typically began their internships after a pre-internship phase that included some initial cohort group activities and a few weeks of education classes. The pre-internship

[3]Since the nature of day-to-day on-site participation was not as well defined after a young adult either earned a high school equivalency certificate or stopped participating in an internship, some individuals in this analysis appeared to be still participating but may not have been actively engaged in the last few months of the program.

Figure 3.1

Flow of Young Adults Through Project Rise Over the 12-Month Follow-Up Period, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5



SOURCES: MDRC calculations from Project Rise baseline information forms and sites' program data.

NOTE: In this figure, individuals who formally withdrew from the program after starting unsubsidized employment or continuing education are included in the "unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education" boxes and not in the "withdrew from program" boxes.

phase was intended to last up to six weeks, but many participants did not start their internships until well after the six-week mark. Program staff placed participants into internships when the young adults had demonstrated a sufficient pattern of regular attendance in the education classes. About 68 percent of enrollees began internships, which provided up to 15 hours of work per week for about 18 weeks. About a third of enrollees worked for more than 120 hours in their internships.

The box at the top right of Figure 3.1 shows that 102 young adults, or about 15 percent of enrollees, transitioned to an unsubsidized job or postsecondary education after they completed their internships. The rest of the figure, however, shows that a number of individuals started unsubsidized jobs or postsecondary education without progressing through all the planned phases of Project Rise. Most of the individuals who found unsubsidized employment or began postsecondary education had started an internship but did not work more than 120 hours. Overall, participants placed in an internship were less likely to leave the program and more likely to stay engaged, attain a high school equivalency credential, or transition to unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education within 12 months of enrollment. (The internship placement did not necessarily increase program engagement; more likely, people better able to consistently engage in the program were more likely to begin an internship.)

Within 12 months of enrollment, about 40 percent of the Project Rise enrollees left the program for a variety of reasons, and 15 percent progressed through the full program sequence as designed and found unsubsidized employment or enrolled in postsecondary education. This outcome means that 45 percent of enrollees did not leave the program but also did not complete all phases of the program. Some of these individuals eventually transitioned to unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education, but most did not. The next section of this chapter discusses the reasons that staff recorded for young adults leaving Project Rise in each phase of the program, and Chapter 4 summarizes the various pathways individuals took through the program, regardless of whether they ultimately transitioned to unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education.

Program Attrition

Interviews with program staff suggested that a number of reasons contributed to participants' difficulty in adapting to the intensive program engagement required by Project Rise. Staff often cited child care issues, housing instability, and transportation difficulties as factors that contributed to program attrition. Less frequent reasons included appearances in criminal court, mental health and substance abuse issues, and sanctions from public assistance or social support systems. Furthermore, the rapid change from an extended period of disconnection before the program, to engaging in up to 30 hours per week of combined education, internship, and other ac-

tivities, could be challenging.[4] Staff and participant interviews confirmed that many young adults found it difficult to reestablish a routine after an extended period of disconnection from school or work.

Figure 3.1 illustrates that some young adults left Project Rise during each phase without progressing to the next phase, and most of the program exits occurred before or during participants' internship placements. A young adult formally withdrew from Project Rise if he or she enrolled in the program and: (1) he or she did not attend any program activity; (2) staff could identify when and why he or she left; or (3) he or she stopped coming to program activities and staff were unable to reestablish contact with him or her. For each program withdrawal, staff provided MDRC researchers with their understanding of the participant's reasons for exiting the program.

Table 3.1 shows program attrition reasons by program phase. A total of 40 percent of enrollees left the program over the course of 12 months (not shown). About 90 percent of those who withdrew did so before or during the internship phase.[5] Inadequate attendance was the most common reason that individuals exited the program — 35 percent of all program withdrawals.[6] Individual-level data do not specify the particular reasons for this inadequate attendance. Since program participants needed to meet provider-defined attendance standards[7] in their education classes in order to be placed in an internship, some participants may have lost interest in the program once they could no longer work in an internship.[8] However, staff often allowed individuals with poor attendance to continue in other program activities, including education classes and group reflection sessions.

Staff also recorded that 17 percent of all participants who left Project Rise did so because they lost interest in the program. Most of those who left for this reason did so fairly early, before being placed into internships. Some individuals exited the program because staff report-

[4]Bangser (2013).

[5]The number of program withdrawals presented in Table 3.1 differs slightly from the numbers in Figure 3.1 because some participants withdrew after finding unsubsidized employment or enrolling in postsecondary education. These withdrawals are formal program withdrawals and are thus included in Table 4.1, but they are counted in the unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education boxes and not in the program withdrawals boxes in Figure 4.1.

[6]The data do not distinguish between whether individuals left the program voluntarily or were asked to leave the program due to inadequate attendance.

[7]Project Rise participants needed to maintain a minimum attendance rate specified by the particular site — generally 80 percent — in order to be placed in and continue their internships. Staff enforced the standard in different ways, described later in this chapter.

[8]It is not possible to tell from the data whether an individual's inadequate attendance occurred in the education classes, the internship, or both.

Table 3.1

Reasons for Leaving the Program, by Phase, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5

Reason (%)	No-Shows	Left Before Starting Pre-Internship or Education Classes	Left Before Starting Internship	Left During Internship	Left After Completing More Than 120 Internship Hours	Total
Looking for or found unsubsidized employment	—	1.5	1.9	3.0	0.7	7.1
Attendance problems	—	5.6	9.3	14.6	5.6	35.1
Changed mind	—	3.0	7.5	4.1	2.2	16.8
Behavior problems	—	3.4	3.4	4.9	—	11.6
Housing problems	—	0.7	1.1	1.1	—	3.0
No contact	—	—	1.5	1.9	1.1	4.5
Moved away	—	0.7	0.7	1.9	—	3.4
Criminal justice issues	—	0.7	0.4	2.2	1.5	4.9
Family/child issues	—	0.7	1.9	1.9	1.5	6.0
Enrolled in another program	—	—	0.4	0.7	0.4	1.5
Health issues	—	0.4	1.5	1.9	0.4	4.1
Internship	—	—	—	0.4	—	0.4
Other	—	0.4	—	1.1	—	1.5
Total	16.8	18.3	25.0	30.2	9.7	100.0
Sample size	45	49	67	81	26	268

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

NOTE: Some young adults left the program for multiple reasons and some did not provide a reason for leaving, and therefore the reasons within each program phase are not mutually exclusive and may not add up to the total.

ed behavioral problems — 12 percent of all program withdrawals.[9] Some less common reasons that individuals exited the program occurred in all program phases and reflected the challenges that enrollees faced in their lives, including involvement with the criminal justice system, family issues, and health problems. A few individuals left Project Rise because they enrolled in another program.

Encouraging Project Rise Engagement

Several program activities encouraged participants to remain engaged throughout the program period. These activities largely relied on the relationships built among participants and with staff, especially case managers, which started early on in the program period and were an anchor for keeping young people engaged. Case management, incentives, and access to other resources also contributed.

While each Project Rise site had a slightly different staffing structure, all covered the same roles: program management, case management, high school equivalency instruction, and workforce development (paid internships and unsubsidized jobs). This chapter primarily describes the roles of case managers; Chapter 4 describes other staff roles in more detail. Case managers generally defined their role as building relationships with participants in order to encourage and support them. These staff members were responsible for monitoring attendance and helping participants overcome barriers that could prevent them from achieving personal and program goals. Some staff wore several hats, particularly case managers, who, for example, were also responsible for preparing participants for their internships and sometimes even contacted internship employers to check on participants' progress. Staff's case management experience varied quite a bit across providers, with staff at several sites possessing little experience in the field prior to joining Project Rise. The more experienced case managers also had previous experience with job development and workforce readiness.

According to program staff, small caseloads were an important feature of the Project Rise model. Providers typically employed more than one case manager, and by design each case manager was limited to a caseload of no more than 25 participants, which is small compared with caseloads at typical youth employment programs, thereby allowing them to have more frequent or meaningful interactions with participants. The typical caseload included participants from the current cohort and an earlier one.[10] Each Project Rise site served about 50 participants at any given time (about 25 from the current cohort and about 25 from the previous

[9]The data on specific behavioral issues are not detailed, but behavior that staff cited as reasons for program termination included violence or threats of violence toward staff members or other participants and failure to follow program rules.

[10]Exceptions occurred when there was staff turnover; new case managers had difficulty connecting or engaging with participants from earlier cohorts.

cohort); however, not all of these participants engaged with the program simultaneously. Each program site employed more than one case manager, which meant that individual caseloads were small compared with those at a typical youth employment program.

Cohort Approach

One way Project Rise facilitated engagement was by using the cohort approach, whereby groups of 25 to 30 participants started program activities together at the same time. Staff reported that the cohort approach was integral to Project Rise's success. Positive peer relationships allowed participants to challenge and push one another and helped them stay more connected to the program. Staff also found the cohort size to be manageable and helpful in keeping case management caseloads relatively small.

As described in the next section, Project Rise staff organized a variety of group activities, such as community service projects, to facilitate bonding and teamwork in the program's first days and weeks. While staff encouraged interaction and bonding among participants, they found that the camaraderie within the group often developed organically as participants shared similar struggles — such as poor relationships with family members, transient living arrangements, or substance use — and bonded over common goals. Participants described how they relied on and learned to motivate one another — a stark contrast to the types of peer relationships that many of them had experienced before entering Project Rise. Participants reported that they became friends with people with whom otherwise they "would have never been friends." Describing his cohort, one participant said, "we were all pretty tight, ya know, pretty cool. Really stuck together. Like if one fell down — we'd say, no, get up. When I 'messed up' they definitely helped me." Another participant said that her cohort was a "backbone" for her as she worked to stabilize her life.

The bonds that the young adults built during the pre-internship phase and fostered throughout the other stages of Project Rise often remained intact beyond the program. The research team repeatedly heard stories of participants staying in touch with members of their cohort after their 12-month program period ended.

While the cohort-based approach received overwhelmingly positive reviews from Project Rise staff and participants, it did present some possible drawbacks. For instance, the cohort-based approach made individualization of program features — such as placing a participant in an internship only when he or she demonstrates sufficient work-readiness and attendance — potentially more challenging, because not all participants went through the program components simultaneously. In addition, both positive and negative behaviors were magnified by the group dynamics of cohorts. For example, strong personalities who were unhappy with staff or the program sometimes negatively affected the tone of a class; when some individuals ex-

pressed a lack of interest in the group activities, it sometimes caused the cohort as a whole to engage in them less.

Pre-internship Activities

The first several weeks of Project Rise were referred to as "pre-internship." Program staff largely planned the pre-internship to occur over two to six weeks for at least a few hours a day. While program staff across sites approached the pre-internship differently, the activities that they organized all involved classroom and community service elements, and all fulfilled the same purposes: building group cohesion; reacquainting participants with the demands of a structured routine, studying, and work; reinforcing soft skills and goal setting for the program and life more generally; and ultimately preparing the young adults for their internship placements. Table 3.2 presents more information about the pre-internship structure and activities at each site. Another element that staff included in the pre-internship was gender-based programming; Box 3.1 describes this programming in more detail. Given the wide scope of pre-internship activities, all program staff members took part in them to some extent.

As outlined in Chapter 1, case managers met with each participant during the first week of pre-internship to conduct an initial assessment, which was used to determine the participant's job-readiness level and interests, educational attainment, and needed social supports such as child care or food resources. Case managers used this information to develop individualized plans for each participant. The plans included educational, employment, and personal goals, such as earning a high school equivalency credential by a certain date, finding an apartment by a certain date, or toilet training a child. These plans served to guide case managers throughout the program. Participants also explored various career interests and inventories.

Kingsborough Community College's pre-internship activities were particularly noteworthy; Project Rise partnered with the college's Urban Farm to teach participants about different foods and how they grow, among other related topics. Group discussions and teambuilding exercises centered on topics related to food, which program staff described as an equalizer since all participants could connect to food.

As Table 3.3 shows, 93 percent of Project Rise participants began pre-internship activities, averaging 11 days of attendance and 33 hours of engagement. Box 3.2 presents participants' perspectives on their pre-internship experiences.

Case Management

Case managers addressed barriers to program participation and supported participant engagement in productive activities throughout the entire program period. They met with participants, assessed their needs and barriers, and coordinated referrals. Case managers and other

Table 3.2

Pre-Internship Implementation

	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Pre-internship duration	3 weeks[a]; 4 days a week for 1 hour.	3 weeks[b] daily; half days for the first week; whole days thereafter.	4 weeks daily for whole days.	5 weeks daily for whole days.	2 weeks daily for half days.
Example topics and activities	Team-building activities, program rules, goal setting, identifying skills and interests, setting internship expectations, developing resumes, working on professionalism and communication skills, interview skills and mock interviewing, community service project, academic reengagement.	Interviewing and networking skills, resume and cover letter development, interview etiquette and attire, time management and goal setting, accountability, group community project, team building, financial literacy, sensitivity training.	Bridge orientation,[c] ice breakers, urban farm activities, family and friends meet and greet, geographic information system mapping exercises on computer, discussions about food, cooking, group community service project.	Ice breakers, team-building activities, keeping a journal and writing activities, personality tests and other assessments, resume development, professionalism and other work-readiness skills, program rules, fundamental math, developing a business plan with team, identifying career and internship interests.	Team-building activities, setting expectations, financial literacy and time management, dealing with stereotypes in the workplace, identifying skills and career interests, learning about healthy lifestyles and postsecondary education, group community service project.
Group community project examples	Helping out at a soup kitchen.	Visiting a local park and discussing repurposing public or abandoned spaces.	Creating a business proposal that promotes healthy food/farm market within the community.	Volunteering at a food bank.	Spending a day helping out at a homeless shelter.

SOURCES: MDRC staff interviews, fact sheets, continuing applications to New York City Center for Economic Opportunity.

NOTES: [a]FEGS shortened their pre-internship duration from 5 weeks in early 2013, and began holding meetings more frequently (up from 2-3 times a week).
[b]Henry Street Settlement shortened their pre-internship duration from an original 5 weeks.
[c]Bridge orientation takes place the first week of the program and serves as an orientation to Project Rise. Activities include meeting program staff, familiarizing participants with Kingsborough's campus, setting a program timeline, goal development, and workshops in stress and time management.

Box 3.1

Gender-Based Programming

Gender-specific programming was often integrated into activities throughout Project Rise. Based in part on mounting interest in the different challenges that young men and women tend to face, one of the funders of the New York City Project Rise sites required the providers to integrate some gender-specific programming, particularly for women, into program activities. However, the other sites also implemented similar programming.

Project Rise enrollees were evenly split by gender — overall, 50 percent of the young adults were male and 50 percent were female. As of enrollment, the two gender groups had some noticeable differences.* For example, women reported many more child care-related responsibilities: they were 20 percentage points more likely than men to have a child (44 percent of women versus 24 percent of men) and over 30 percentage points more likely to have identified child care responsibilities as how they had spent most of their time over the past year (42 percent of women versus 12 percent of men). In another striking difference, almost twice as many men as women reported that they had been arrested in the past (62 percent of men versus 37 percent of women), and more than twice as many men as women reported that they had been convicted of a crime (22 percent of men versus 9 percent of women).

As part of Project Rise activities, gender-specific programming was delivered in different ways, sometimes as separate activities or sometimes integrated into the regular program components, such as the GED instruction or work-readiness curriculum.

Providers took different approaches to implementing gender-specific activities. FEGS, Henry Street Settlement, and Full Employment Council hosted separate men's and women's discussion groups — sometimes facilitated by an outside organization. The weekly groups at FEGS were permanent features of the Bronx Youth Center, and anyone could participate (not just Project Rise participants). In contrast, at Henry Street Settlement, the groups were exclusive to each Project Rise cohort and did not meet as regularly as the groups at FEGS. Regardless of their frequency and duration, the women's groups tended to cover a variety of topics, such as healthy eating, sexual education, healthy relationships, and self-esteem. Participants described the groups as an opportunity to open up and speak their mind without fear of judgment. The men's groups seemed somewhat less defined and structured across the sites, although staff at Full Employment Council described the men's group as addressing issues related to identity, fatherhood, and communication skills, namely getting the young men to open up more. One male participant at another site described his men's group favorably, particularly because he was able to talk about topics he was not comfortable bringing up with his female case manager. A participant at a third site, however, was not as supportive of the gender-based programming; as someone who does not conform to gender stereotypes, he did not always agree with the topics discussed in the group or the emphasis placed on them.

(continued)

Box 3.1 (continued)

Unlike the other providers, Kingsborough Community College purposefully avoided gender-based breakout groups in order to respect gender nonconforming individuals. Instead, gender topics were integrated into GED instruction classes and workshops. For example, one advocacy group facilitated conversations with Project Rise participants about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning issues and how they related to gender. Program participants were also encouraged to attend on-campus events, such as those related to women's history month.

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*According to staff, Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway did not do a great deal of gender-based programming. Although members of a women's association did organize some job-readiness workshops geared toward women, these workshops did not seem to be a regular occurrence. The female case manager also tried to get the women in the program to occasionally meet as a group.

staff identified common needs across the Project Rise participant population — chief among them were child care, transportation, and stable housing. If Project Rise staff could not provide the needed services or access them within the providers' network, they referred participants to appropriate external organizations or agencies. This chapter later describes the resources that case managers leveraged within their organizations.

Many case managers reported that they initially intended to have regularly scheduled formal meetings with participants during the internship stage, but they eventually found this approach to be ineffective because participants had trouble keeping to the schedule. Instead, case managers primarily relied on unscheduled meetings or drop-ins before or after classes and daily interactions with participants while they were engaged in classroom activities to build a rapport. Multiple staff mentioned using the individualized plans developed in the first weeks of the program to refocus participants and remind them of why they enrolled in Project Rise. One case manager described conversations with participants in these terms: "'We're at month X — how do you feel about achieving that goal you said you wanted to achieve?'" Several providers reported formally updating the plans at three- or six-month intervals, though the staff updated the plan at more frequent intervals if the participant's life circumstances changed.

Table 3.3 shows that Project Rise participants across sites experienced a high level of contact with case managers. In fact, 98 percent of participants met with a case manager at some point in the 12 months after enrolling in the program. Case managers recorded nearly one contact

Table 3.3

Case Management, Financial Incentives, and Early Engagement Activities Within 12 Months of Entering Project Rise, by Program Site, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5

Outcome	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Pre-internship activities						
Began pre-internship phase (%)	92.5	87.3	99.2	97.3	100.0	81.0
Average number of days attended	11	5	13	6	19	11
Average number of hours attended	33	6	39	12	71	31
Completed pre-internship (%)	79.1	83.1	93.7	74.3	84.3	62.6
Case management						
Met with case manager after enrollment (%)	97.6	99.2	97.6	98.2	100.0	93.9
Average number of meetings with case manager	45.4	22.1	27.8	27.0	89.2	55.1
Distribution of meetings with case manager (%)						
Fewer than 25 meetings	39.5	63.6	52.0	43.1	12.6	29.9
26-50 meetings	30.6	33.1	36.2	56.0	15.8	17.7
51-100 meetings	18.2	3.4	11.8	0.9	29.1	38.8
101 or more meetings	11.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	42.5	13.6
In contact with case manager as of month 12 (%)	33.9	29.7	11.8	34.9	52.0	40.1
Financial incentives						
Received financial incentives (%)	78.7	98.3	41.7	100.0	85.8	72.8
Average amount of financial incentives received[a]	$258	$330	$101	$577	$150	$195
Distribution of financial incentives received (%)						
$0	21.3	1.7	58.3	0.0	14.2	27.2
$0.01-50	6.2	17.8	0.0	3.7	8.7	2.0
$50.01-100	6.7	8.5	0.0	3.7	13.4	7.5
$100.01-200	20.5	14.4	5.5	13.8	31.5	34.0
$200.01 or more	45.2	57.6	36.2	78.9	32.3	29.3
Average incentive amount among those who ever received an incentive	$328	$336	$241	$577	$175	$267
Sample size[b]	628	118	127	109	127	147

(continued)

Table 3.3 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

NOTES: Unless otherwise noted, outcomes are calculated among all Project Rise enrollees in cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5 who attended at least one program activity.

[a]Average incentive amounts are calculated among all participants, including individuals who never received one.

[b] One participant is not included in this table because of missing program data.

Box 3.2

Participant Perspectives on Pre-Internship Experiences

Kyle described the pre-internship phase as a screening mechanism of sorts meant to "find out about different people," since not everyone is "ready" to engage in Project Rise. According to Kyle, the goals of pre-internship were: (1) to improve self-esteem, (2) to get participants used to working with others in a team, and (3) to get the participants to realize similarities among one another. He initially found it challenging to adjust to a daily routine and arrive on time, but was encouraged by the incentives offered during this phase. Kyle's pre-internship classroom activities included educational and work-readiness assessments and mock interviews. He also participated in group activities — some of which focused on community service and others on enhancing teamwork and critical thinking.

From Brandon's perspective, the goal of the pre-internship experience was to "get participants out of their comfort zones" and "let [us] know [we] need to make sacrifices to be productive members of society." He learned that it is necessary to "change your manners, speech, [and] attitudes when you're talking to an employer or coworkers." He explained how staff pushed participants to be punctual, even turning them away if they were late for class. He now understands that is how the real world works and has taken the lessons he learned to heart. Reflecting on his group community service project, Brandon said its objective was to "get participants open to doing new things, to open up a soft spot in their hearts." He felt good about himself for having helped those less fortunate, and thought volunteering with other participants helped them bond.

per week, on average, with each participant over the 12 month period.[11] Meetings with case managers were particularly frequent in the early months of the program, with an average of 23

[11]The number of meetings with case managers varied greatly across providers, ranging from 25 per participant to over 100 per participant in a year. Staff were instructed to record any "substantial," one-on-one conversations with each participant in their databases, and evidence from field visits and staff interviews suggested that this variation reflected inconsistent perceptions about what were "substantial" interactions. Thus, the num-

meetings per participant recorded over the first three months (more than twice a week). In contrast, participants who had not withdrawn from the program averaged just six meetings with case managers in the last three months of the program (not shown). These data do not capture, however, the even more frequent contact that participants had with the high school equivalency instructor, which was often nearly daily for the first six months or so.

One reason for the high level of contact is that case managers were responsible for monitoring attendance and reaching out to absent participants. Recalling how often her case manager called her, one participant said: "Every day! … someone cares and wants to see [me] succeed, [I] like that someone is checking in." Staff commonly reported that participants did not have many caring adults in their lives, and that case managers and other staff filled this role. One staff member explained, "I don't think this program could function without designated [case managers] to be there for the students, especially because a lot of them have never had that adult supportive figure."

Indeed, participants described the staff as the reason they returned to the program each day, stressing the staff's persistence and its value on promoting engagement in the program. According to one participant, the case managers "don't give up on you, they want to push you. If they see the good in you, they don't give up; they want to see you succeed more than you want to see yourself succeed." More generally, participants described all Project Rise staff — not just case managers —as caring and willing to help them overcome their problems. These descriptions contrasted with the ones they gave of staff with whom they dealt in other programs or education systems.

The percentage of participants who interacted with their case manager progressively decreased over the life of the program. At the end of the first six months, 63 percent of participants were still in touch with their case manager (Appendix Table A.2); by 12 months after the start of the program, only about 34 percent of participants were still in touch with their case managers. Although participants praised case managers for their part in keeping them engaged, several sites experienced frequent turnover in the case manager (and other) positions, which made it especially difficult for members of the previous cohorts to stay engaged with program staff. One participant recalled, "You gotta get used to one person and then someone new who doesn't know you well enough. You get connected, and you know, you're starting over then… it's kind of hard on people."

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ber of meetings is more useful as an indicator of how frequently case management was conducted over the course of the program, and less useful for provider-by-provider comparisons.

Incentives

Each site offered incentives — often in the form of cash or bus or subway fare — to participants meeting certain criteria, as a means to positively reinforce their participation and as interim marks of progress throughout their engagement in the program. In general, interviewed participants appreciated the incentives, especially the transportation-related ones, and noted that even the small incentives, such as free food or in-kind gifts, helped motivate them to persist in the program.

CEO gave providers the freedom to determine the extent and structure of the incentives; as a result, there was a great deal of variation across the providers. Common interim marks that merited incentive awards included maintaining high attendance and taking or passing a high school equivalency exam. For example, at Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway, participants could earn $200 for every month of perfect attendance in education classes and internships. At Henry Street Settlement, participants received $150 for passing a high school equivalency test. Providers also awarded in-kind incentives, such as school supplies or college apparel, and supported participants by covering (or partially covering) fees associated with high school equivalency tests for those with high practice test results. Additionally, Full Employment Council leveraged Workforce Investment Act funding to allocate about $3,000 toward each participant's postsecondary education or training.[12]

Table 3.3 shows that 79 percent of all participants across sites received financial incentives during the program, averaging $328 per participant over 12 months among those receiving any incentive ($258 per participant among all program participants including those who did not receive any incentives). At Henry Street Settlement, 42 percent of participants received a financial incentive, while 98 percent of FEGS participants did. This difference is largely the result of the providers' different incentive structures; FEGS provided daily MetroCards (subway and bus fare) for every day that participants attended class prior to the start of their internship and thus participants had more opportunities to earn an incentive, whereas Henry Street Settlement awarded MetroCards for high monthly attendance (90 percent or above). Among all participants including those who did not receive any incentives, participants earned an average high of $577 in incentives at Kingsborough and an average low of $101 at Henry Street Settlement.

Other Resources

Each Project Rise provider had different resources within the host organization that staff could leverage to help keep participants engaged in the program. In general, Project Rise programs benefited from the providers' existing stability and infrastructure, such as human resources and information technology support. The resources available to participants typically

[12]This incentive was available to any Full Employment Council participant, not just those in Project Rise.

reflected the organization's overall mission. For example, Full Employment Council is an American Job Center and as such has extensive job development resources, including a convenient computer lab, which Project Rise participants could use for job searches, completing applications, and resume development. Project Rise at Full Employment Council also benefited from the larger organization's infrastructure, including recruitment and fundraising support.

Kingsborough offered a wide array of supports to all its students, including Project Rise participants. These resources included mental health counseling, assistance with citizenship or immigration issues, food and clothing resources, and connections to New York City's cash assistance program. FEGS participants had access to many of the same resources, including free professional attire, mental health counseling, and workforce development supports through the Workforce1 Career Center, which FEGS operates off-site. One particularly attractive benefit offered at FEGS, Kingsborough, and Henry Street was that participation in Project Rise fulfilled the participation requirements for cash assistance. When participants needed additional resources, Project Rise case managers referred participants to other agencies.

Project Rise staff could also consult with staff within the organization for advice, support, and professional development. For example, at Kingsborough, staff reported consulting with another office on campus about learning disability issues and also with public safety officers about the best ways to handle potentially dangerous situations. Similarly, FEGS staff described how interacting with staff in other departments resulted in professional development.

Chapter 4

Project Rise Education and Internship Activities and the Transition to Employment and Postsecondary Education

As Chapter 3 discusses in detail, Project Rise providers used a variety of strategies to sustain participant engagement throughout the program period. These efforts continued through the education and internship components, which are the subject of this chapter. The combination of supports — with the internship as the incentive to attend the education classes — was designed to help participants find unsubsidized employment or enroll in postsecondary education or training, critical steps toward achieving labor market success and self-sufficiency.

This chapter describes Project Rise's education component and the education-conditioned internship. It presents data about participation in each component and examines whether the education condition was a useful strategy in motivating participants to engage in the program. The chapter then discusses the transition to unsubsidized employment and postsecondary education or training, and presents and analyses data about the extent to which participants made this transition successfully. Table 4.1 highlights features of the education and internship components at each of the five Project Rise providers.

Key Findings

- Project Rise delivered an average of more than 160 hours of education instruction to participants over 12 months — more than typical adult high school equivalency preparation courses deliver.
- Project Rise internships largely reinforced the soft skills that are needed to succeed in the workforce; they largely did not serve as a direct connection to career interests or permanent jobs. As is the case in many youth programs, the internships were implemented unevenly.
- Project Rise delivered a large dose of internship experiences to participants. Over 70 percent of participants began an internship, and among those who started one, about half completed more than 120 hours.
- More than one-fourth of participants earned a high school equivalency credential or (much less commonly) a high school diploma within 12 months of entering the program. While 45 percent of individuals who entered the pro-

Table 4.1

Project Rise Education and Internship Implementation

	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Education structure and staffing	Instructors for multiple education levels, not just for Project Rise.	Instructor just for Project Rise.	Subject-specific instructors just for Project Rise.	Instructor just for Project Rise.	Instructor just for Project Rise, with class divided by reading levels.
Unique aspect of education programming	Tiered classes allow participants to progress through different academic levels.	Instruction was intially led by a partner organization, though it was eventually taken over by an in-house instructor.	Cohort-specific classes are scheduled for 12 months, as opposed to 6.	Case managers devote much of their time to instructional assistance in the classroom.	Offered off-site high school diploma preparation pathway, in addition to on-site high school equivalency instruction.
Internship or employment placement staffing	Internship coordinator (not just for Project Rise) with support of case manager.	Case managers with support from workforce development staff (not just for Project Rise).	Job developer/ internship coordinator just for Project Rise.	Job developer, later replaced by support from program coordinator.	Workforce developer (not just for Project Rise) with support of case manager.
Example approaches to developing internships	Leveraged robust existing networks with other nonprofits and agencies to develop internship placements.	Leveraged internal connections to place individuals at internships within the organization.	Leveraged internal connections to place individuals at internships within the organization.	Concentrated internship development efforts on a few locations.	Leveraged robust existing networks with other nonprofits and agencies to develop internship placements.

SOURCE: MDRC staff interviews, Fact Sheets, continuing applications to New York City Center for Economic Opportunity.

gram with a reading level of at least ninth grade earned this credential, almost 13 percent of participants with reading levels below ninth grade also earned this credential.

- About one-fourth of Project Rise participants began unsubsidized jobs and 8 percent entered postsecondary education within 12 months of their enrollment, though these rates are conservative estimates.[1]

Education Activities

The education component of Project Rise sought to increase participants' academic skills, foster positive attitudes toward education, and promote long-term engagement in education. In the shorter term, the education goal was to prepare participants for a high school equivalency test within 6 to 12 months of enrollment, depending on the participants' literacy and numeracy levels at program entry. New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) granted providers a degree of flexibility in designing the education component, including pedagogy, curriculum, and class structure. CEO suggested, however, that providers aim to deliver about 15 hours of instruction per week. CEO also encouraged providers to include contextualized learning related to the internships and also to "bridge" participants to their next stage of employment or education development.[2]

At all sites, staff with years of experience teaching in public schools, other adult education programs, or both led the high school equivalency instruction. Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway, Henry Street Settlement, and Full Employment Council each employed one instructor for Project Rise. Full Employment Council divided cohorts in half, roughly by reading levels, and the instructor taught one group in the morning and the other in the afternoon; instructors at the other two providers taught the whole cohort in one class. In contrast, Kingsborough Community College employed multiple instructors for much of the study period, each teaching a different subject. The cohort was divided by reading level into groups and the groups switched classes each day so that, for example, one group was in language arts while the other was in math.[3] Unlike

[1]These rates are calculated from management information system (MIS) data that staff recorded. In recording events in the MIS, staff used both information provided by program participants and information obtained by staff from employers or postsecondary institutions. Since the data collection effort depended in part on access to participants, data for participants who left the program early are less likely to be as complete as data for participants who persisted in the program for the full year.

[2]In some sites, lower-level readers began high school equivalency preparation with more introductory or remedial material and typically moved into more traditional high school equivalency instruction within a few weeks. By the end of cohort five, only FEGS had distinct pre-high school equivalency and high school equivalency classes. At Kingsborough Community College and Henry Street Settlement, pre-high school equivalency and high school equivalency classes had the same instructor and material.

[3]At the time of the last field research site visit — shortly after cohort six started classes — there was only one teacher due to turnover.

the other providers, FEGS employed three instructors to accommodate three levels of learning based on participants' scores on Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) (described more below). Also different from the other providers, some Project Rise participants at FEGS attended class with participants from other FEGS-operated programs.[4] While instructors across the five providers did not fill other formal roles in the program, they did often serve as additional supportive adults to participants.

Structure of and Participation in the Education Component

As shown in Table 4.2, 92 percent of participants began education activities. Participation in instruction declined dramatically over the first six months, with 57 percent of participants attending at the end of three months and 31 percent attending at the end of six months (Appendix Table A.2). Some of the drop-off between the third and sixth months can be attributed to participants earning a high school certificate credential;[5] about 4 percent of participants earned their high school equivalency certificate by the end of the third month and nearly 11 percent of participants earned a high school equivalency certificate between months three and six, which represents the biggest quarterly gain across the 12-month program period.

Most sites generally structured the education component for the same amount of time each week; typically education activities were scheduled for four days a week for a few hours in the morning or afternoon, with a fifth day reserved for job-readiness or group activities. The education component was typically scheduled to last six months in a cohort setting, at which point any students who had not yet passed the test would be directed to attend instructional classes with the next cohort; this rollover occurred in all providers except Rutgers, where members of a former cohort engaged more in tutoring-based work.

Participants who engaged in the education component attended classes for an average of 50 days and 161 hours over 12 months. Unlike the other providers, Kingsborough structured its classes to last the full 12 months for all participants needing support rather than rolling students still studying for a high school equivalency test into a new cohort. Given the lengthened structure of the classes, it is not surprising that Kingsborough had the highest average number of hours of class attended (227 hours per student). Regardless of the length of the education component at each provider, all participants in Project Rise were both scheduled for and attended

[4] FEGS staff identified and enrolled a small percentage of Project Rise participants in an alternative high school program to recover credits rather than attend the high school equivalency classes. These participants would have had classes with non-Project Rise participants.

[5] Among participants who permanently left Project Rise in this period, only 3 percent earned a high school equivalency certificate during the 12 months that Project Rise programming was available to them.

Table 4.2

Education and Internship Participation Within 12 Months of Entering Project Rise, by Program Site, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5

Outcome	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Education classes						
Began education program (%)	91.6	98.3	93.7	100.0	80.3	87.8
Pre-GED or high school equivalency	25.2	50.9	12.6	48.6	0.0	19.7
GED or high school equivalency	73.1	69.5	83.5	51.4	80.3	76.9
Other	9.1	14.4	0.0	11.0	0.0	19.1
Attendance among participants who began the education program						
Average number of days attended	50	41	59	57	33	56
Average number of hours attended	161	136	178	227	97	165
Internships						
Began internship (%)	72.3	57.6	80.3	91.7	74.0	61.2
Food preparation	9.1	0.0	3.2	41.3	2.4	3.4
Installation, maintenance, and repair	5.9	1.7	4.7	0.0	13.4	8.2
Office and administrative support	16.9	17.8	26.0	22.9	2.4	16.3
Arts, entertainment, and media	9.7	0.0	11.0	2.8	29.1	4.8
Building and grounds maintenance	5.4	2.5	3.2	7.3	0.8	12.2
Sales	5.7	19.5	0.0	4.6	4.7	1.4
Education, training, and literacy	6.4	7.6	3.9	23.9	0.0	0.0
Child care and recreation	8.8	7.6	15.0	6.4	11.0	4.1
Internship attendance and earnings among participants who began internships						
Average number of days worked	34	37	37	27	33	38
Average number of hours worked	128	134	163	120	107	116
Average internship earnings	$943	$1,003	$1,188	$892	$774	$852
Distribution of internship hours among participants who began internships (%)						
90 or fewer hours	39.2	30.9	31.4	43.0	47.9	41.1
91-120 hours	9.9	7.4	8.8	4.0	12.8	16.7
More than 120 hours	50.9	61.8	59.8	53.0	39.4	42.2
Completed internship among participants who began internships (%)	35.0	38.2	45.1	38.0	24.5	28.9
Sample size[a]	628	118	127	109	127	147

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

NOTES: Unless otherwise noted, outcomes are calculated among all Project Rise enrollees in cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5 who attended at least one program activity.

Participation rates in the classes and internship types may add up to more than the combined rates because some sample members switched between classes or jobs.

[a]One participant is not included in this table because of missing program data.

more hours of class than do participants in most adult high school equivalency preparation programs — compared with, for example, the scheduled in-class time in the Young Adult Literacy program[6] and other textbook-based adult high school equivalency preparation courses.[7]

Each instructor reported using a variety of instructional methods in the classroom, including group projects, peer learning, worksheets, independent assignments, and one-on-one teaching. At Rutgers, the teacher placed a heavy emphasis on group work, in which students were encouraged to help teach their classmates. In contrast, at Henry Street Settlement, the teacher tended to limit the amount of group learning, with the intention of building self-motivation and individual problem-solving skills. The MDRC research team observed these differences during site visits and generally saw participants engaged in their learning at all the providers.

Many participants cited the teachers as the key ingredient in making class different from (and preferable to) their previous high school classes. Perhaps most striking was the level of individualized attention students reported receiving across the providers, in large part due to the small class size. One student explained, "[The] teacher doesn't move on to a new subject until everyone understands." Such accounts contrasted sharply with those participants gave of teachers in high school, who "never really took time to explain anything to us" or "would let students run wild." Some students who had previously taken high school equivalency courses also used similar language to describe the difference between Project Rise instructors and those from the other programs. "[At the other program] they were just there to teach. At Project Rise, staff make you want to come to the program. They make it fun to learn," explained one student. "When you're here, you don't even know that you're learning," said another student. Participants also described how different the classroom atmosphere felt from a traditional classroom, since teachers treated them with more respect. "Teachers respect you here; [we are] expected to

[6]The Young Adult Literacy program offered a minimum of 96 hours of literacy, math, and job training instruction to young adults to prepare them for a GED class. See Westat and Metis Associates (2011).

[7]Although not a perfect comparison, La Guardia Community College's GED class — an adult textbook-based preparation course — is a 60-hour class taught over nine weeks. For more details, see Martin and Broadus (2013).

be and are treated like adults," reported one participant. The stark contrasts that participants described between their previous education experience and the one in Project Rise resemble those found in some other MDRC evaluations of programs for disconnected young people, such as YouthBuild.[8]

Instructors varied in how they saw their role relating to the internship component of the program. Some instructors placed a great deal of emphasis on civil discourse as it related to job skills; for example, one instructor reported teaching students how to disagree without attacking each other's character, which was a valuable job skill. Another instructor described how the classroom rules reinforced soft skills important to career preparation, including promptness, making a legitimate effort on assignments, and not using cell phones in class. In contrast, other instructors saw their role as more singularly focused on high school equivalency certificate attainment.

Other Educational Offerings

Some providers offered other instruction in addition to high school equivalency preparation. At FEGS, students were separated into various levels of coursework — pre-GED, GED, Bootcamp, and College Prep — based on their TABE scores or how much of the high school equivalency test they had passed. Students retook the TABE every three months to determine whether they should move to a higher class level. Individuals who passed all sections of the high school equivalency test could move into College Prep for support in transitioning to postsecondary education. Those who passed part of the high school equivalency test could attend Bootcamp, which allowed them to work with instructors on just the sections they still needed to pass.

At Kingsborough, cohorts attended Freshman Seminar, an extended college orientation class. Participants were eligible to earn college credit by taking up to two student development classes and one Virtual Enterprise course for free; all were 12-week courses that took place during the 12-month program period. Other optional courses included Career and Life Planning (which provided additional support in career planning, resume writing, and interviewing and job-seeking skills) and Virtual Enterprise (an interdisciplinary course to foster skills needed for the transition from school to work). Participants could also take a noncredit computer literacy course.

Changes to the GED Test

Although the data presented in this report do not reflect the cohorts primarily affected by states' adoption of the new GED and other high school equivalency tests, the test changes

[8]Wiegand et al. (2015).

were a common theme in site visits in 2014. Regardless of which high school equivalency test the state adopted (the new GED, TASC, or HiSet), staff at all sites described the changes similarly: the new tests were more difficult and changed the emphasis from one on reading comprehension to one on content knowledge. Staff also reported that they were initially ill-equipped to prepare Project Rise participants for the new tests because they received study materials and practice tests later than expected.

In anticipation of the changes, Project Rise staff strongly encouraged students to take the GED before states adopted the new tests in early 2014, particularly if students had passed some but not all sections of the "old" GED test. This push could explain the elevated GED certificate attainment among cohort five participants (discussed in Chapter 5).

According to the GED Testing Service, the number of test takers nationwide in 2013 rose by 21 percent relative to the previous year — likely as test takers hurried to take the exam before the new tests went into effect.[9] A total of 816,000 individuals took the test in 2013, and 76 percent of them passed. In contrast, just 250,000 individuals took the GED in 2014, and only 60 percent of them passed.[10] This variation represents close to a 70 percent drop in the number of test takers in 2014 and a 76 percent drop in the number of those who passed.

Internship Activities

Project Rise participants engaged in job-readiness training as part of the pre-internship; this training was largely led by case managers who had limited prior experience teaching job-readiness skills. How each provider staffed the internship component varied considerably overall. For example, at Henry Street Settlement, case managers were largely responsible for placing participants in and managing internships,[11] while Kingsborough employed a full-time staff member with years of previous experience to administer the internship and job development components. Other providers employed a separate staff member with experience in job development experience (usually called an internship coordinator or equivalent), who worked part time on Project Rise's internship component and part time on the provider's other programs. Case managers typically supported the internship coordinators. How providers structured and staffed the internship component as well as their relative experience with workforce development often affected the internship placement process.

[9]GED Testing Service (2014).

[10]Porter (2015).

[11]Initially, workforce development staff set up and placed participants in internships and followed up with them and the employers. Case managers later took over these tasks, though they received some support from workforce development staff.

Participants' placement in the paid internship was conditioned on their adequate attendance in high school equivalency classes; staff at each provider established the attendance policies for the program. Project Rise participants and staff expressed mixed opinions about the education-conditioned internship. Some participants spoke enthusiastically about it, suggesting that, as designed, the internship motivated participants to attend the classes and may have made the education component more effective; others prioritized the education component over the internship, suggesting that the internship may have been more of a distraction rather than a motivator. Participants reported these conflicting views in focus groups and interviews. For example, one participant stated, "being [in] that internship is exactly what I want to do; that gave me the incentive to come to class," while another said, "I really could care less about the internship; I'd rather get my GED." Some staff expressed this latter sentiment as well. For instance, one staff member said, "It's hard to use the internship as a condition when [participants] don't want it anyway." However, staff overall tended to believe that the education condition was helpful for some participants but not for others.

Each Project Rise provider established its own attendance policy requirements, which took some time to finalize during the first two cohorts of the program, and providers continued to revise the requirements thereafter based on operational lessons. Examples of policies included: not allowing participants to go to their internship on a day when they missed class without an excuse, allowing participants to miss four days a month (30 percent of class) before putting them on a corrective action plan, and placing participants on probation after three consecutive unexcused absences.

The attendance policies received mixed reviews from participants and staff. Some participants reported that the attendance policies held them accountable and helped them develop the time management skills needed for the workforce, and that concern about losing their internship motivated them to attend and stay on task in class. However, the policies were only effective for the participants interested in the internship. Even though staff overwhelmingly considered the attendance policies as necessary to hold participants accountable, the enforcement of them was uneven. Many program staff were reluctant to interrupt or end participants' internships as soon as their attendance faltered. One staff member explained, "[f]lexibility around attendance for this group is important; [without it], the program would be empty." Project Rise staff sometimes struggled to maintain the integrity of the education-condition requirements without harming relationships with employers or disengaging participants. Staff also noted that participants who stopped attending class often stopped going to their internship as well, suggesting that enforcing an attendance policy was less important than reengaging absentee participants.

To create an inventory of internships for Project Rise, staff early on leveraged providers' existing connections with employers involved in their other programs. (For example, Pro-

ject Rise staff at Henry Street Settlement reached out to employers participating in the Young Adult Internship Program or Summer Youth Employment Program in New York City.) Based on the available internships and goal-setting discussions with participants in the pre-internship phase, program staff offered participants several internship options from which they could choose. Although employers typically interviewed participants, they usually offered them the internship.

Over time, Project Rise staff modified the structure and timing of internship placement to maximize the benefit to participants. For example, Kingsborough used a staged model, whereby participants often began internships on campus and later moved to different internships off campus once staff decided they were ready to work in a setting with less intensive supervision.[12] Other providers staggered participants' placement in internships based on whether they were work-ready, as demonstrated by good attendance, behavior, or both.

Internship Participation

If participants met the attendance requirements, they were eligible to begin their paid internships, which were scheduled to last approximately 18 weeks for 10 to15 hours per week. The high school equivalency classes typically took place in either the morning or afternoon to accommodate half days at the internship sites.

Table 4.2 shows that 72 percent of participants began an internship, and most started within the first three months of enrolling in the program (shown in Appendix Table A.2). This percentage varied across sites, with 58 percent of participants at FEGS starting an internship and over 90 percent at Kingsborough. The high percentage at the latter likely reflects the site's model of first placing participants in on-campus internships, which would have made it easier for participants since they were already coming to campus for classes.

Rather than provide participants with specific career paths or knowledge sets, Project Rise internships primarily focused on developing and refining participants' soft skills and work habits, such as punctuality and professionalism, in order to prepare them for success in future unsubsidized employment.[13] That said, if an internship was not of great quality or the participant did not engage for a significant amount of time, it is unlikely the person would significantly develop any soft skills.

[12] The concept of Kingsborough's staged internship model is similar to transitional and subsidized job models studied for ex-offender, noncustodial fathers, and other low-income populations. See Bloom (2015).

[13] Murnane and Levy (1996). The Partnership for 21st Century Skills also notes the importance of young people learning soft skills, such as working collaboratively and communicating effectively, for success in the workplace and elsewhere.

Most internships were in retail and other businesses or nonprofit social service organizations, sometimes within the organization operating Project Rise. Table 4.2 shows that internship placements largely clustered in several fields of work: office and administrative support (duties included filing, data entry or other computer work, and answering phones or other customer support); arts, entertainment, and media (employers were a glass-making studio and a recording studio); food preparation;[14]child care; and recreation. Sometimes more than one participant was placed at the same internship site. For example, at Rutgers, many participants from the same cohort were placed in an internship at a recording studio, which had both advantages (participants could rely on one another for support or motivation) and drawbacks (employers could not meaningfully engage multiple interns at the same time). Box 4.1 presents examples of internships.

Although staff made an effort to place participants in internships related to their career interests, this connection was sometimes tenuous. Some participants, however, appreciated the work experience in a field that they would not have considered otherwise. One participant reported, "[t]he internship is not what I wanted, but I gained a lot." Participants gave mixed responses when asked about their involvement in the internship selection process. At some providers, participants reported that they felt very involved in the internship placement process; at others, they said they had no involvement in the process or were critical of it, citing a lack of options in fields related to their interests.

Some participants reported considerable satisfaction with their internships, describing a wide variety of benefits. They said the internship was an opportunity to explore career paths that were inaccessible outside of the program, build their resumes and acquire references for future job applications, and learn new skills, such as computer and other office skills. Participants also mentioned many of the soft skills they developed during their internships: time management, interpersonal and organizational skills, professionalism, and self-confidence. Even participants placed in unsatisfactory internships reported that the experience taught them how to identify the settings in which they would like and not like to work in the future. However, other participants did not as easily connect their internship experiences to future careers. Some expressed frustration that the tasks that supervisors assigned them were different from what they expected. For example, one participant reported that her worksite supervisor incorrectly assumed that she had a working knowledge of Microsoft Word and other software. While the employer eventually trained her, she was unproductive for a significant amount time early in her internship while she waited for the training.

[14]In early cohorts, staff at Kingsborough emphasized food service and culinary arts programming, which largely drove the placements in this field.

Box 4.1

Description of Sample Internships

- Office assistant at a nonprofit organization working to reduce disparities in the African-American community
- Stocking donations, delivering items, and performing general cleaning and organizational duties at the warehouse of a nonprofit that delivers meals, clothing, and other donations to homeless individuals in the community
- Data entry at a local Workforce One center
- Sales representative at a national retail chain
- Taking orders and stocking shelves at a local retail store
- Child care support for a local day care center
- Production assistant, using camera and recording equipment, at a nonprofit media company
- Clerical work at a business organization
- Information technology computer education assistant at a local nonprofit serving homeless and economically disadvantaged individuals

Length and Duration of Internship

The young adults who started internships worked an average of 128 hours over 34 days and earned an average of $943.[15] Participants worked the majority of these hours and days within the first six months of program enrollment (Appendix Table A.2). While the wages did not necessarily attract participants to Project Rise, participants generally appreciated them. Some participants reported that the wages were valuable and motivated them to stay in the internship; others thought that the money was a nice perk, but ultimately insufficient. One participant said, "The money doesn't keep me here. […] I have bills, I have a car, I have rent, I have a family. […] That $120 a week, that's nothing. But, it's a help."[16]

[15]The program model and data collection efforts focused on recording the number of hours that participants worked. Since many participants were unable to maintain a consistent schedule because of family responsibilities and other life situations, it is difficult to estimate the number of weeks that participants spent in an internship. If a participant worked for an average of 10 hours a week, as intended, he or she would have stayed in the internship for about 13 weeks, or 3 months.

[16]In addition to internship wages, participants received support from family members and public assistance. According to the baseline form, most participants lived with family and received Supplement Nutrition

CEO considered participants who persisted through 180 hours of internship, or had completed at least 120 internship hours before finding an unsubsidized job, to have "completed" their internships.[17] At most sites, close to half of the participants who began internships completed at least 120 hours of internship. Reasons why the other half did not complete as many hours included: participants experienced barriers that prevented them from going to their internship (such as child care issues), the internship did not fulfil participants' expectations or was unrelated to their career interest, or less commonly participants found unsubsidized employment. Some program staff thought that if an internship was a quality one, then completing 120 hours in it would be a sufficient amount of time for participants to gain work experience and end the internship.

Weekly Reflections

As required by CEO, Project Rise providers held weekly group sessions during the internship, in which participants reflected on and discussed their internship experiences, reinforced their job-readiness skills, continued career exploration, and gave and received peer support. Participants earned internship wages for attending the sessions, which were considered part of the internship component. Often, the sessions were the only time during the internship component that the cohort met as a group. Participants described the weekly meetings as an opportunity to both reflect on their work experiences and reassess their goals. Staff sometimes used the weekly sessions for general administrative purposes, such as reminding participants about program rules related to timesheets or requests to change internships, or to reinforce the job-readiness and career exploration curriculum. On a few occasions, staff used the session for an extracurricular purpose, such as inviting a guest speaker to address the cohort, or presenting on and discussing a topic in current events. Overall, participants described the weekly sessions as valuable to their personal and professional development.

Transitions to Unsubsidized Employment and Postsecondary Education

Participants entered Project's Rise final phase once they earned a high school equivalency credential, completed their internships, or both. In this phase, staff were expected to help participants transition to unsubsidized employment, postsecondary education or training, or both. Staff initially emphasized transitioning to unsubsidized employment over continued education, but

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Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Some participants received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). It is likely that some of the participants may have also had other sources of financial support, such as off-the-books work.

[17]This particular definition of internship completion was developed to balance a number of factors, including not wanting to set unrealistically high performance benchmarks or encourage participants to leave the program for just any unsubsidized job before making a real investment in their education or internship.

encouraged both options more equally in the later cohorts. Participants who had not yet earned a high school equivalency credential were expected to continue working toward that goal. Case managers, with support from the internship coordinator, were largely responsible for facilitating participants' transitions. After about the sixth program month, participants were no longer regularly coming to the site for education classes and therefore had to take greater initiative to receive support. To accommodate participants' new schedules, case managers often gave advice and guidance over the phone. These phone meetings were often held around the same time case managers were working with a new cohort to engage them in pre-internship, education, or internship activities. However, the biggest impediment to retaining participants' engagement in the second half of the program period seemed to be staff turnover, especially in the case manager position, since participants' personal relationships with these staff members often contributed to their motivation and persistence.

High School Equivalency Certificate Attainment

As Table 4.3 shows, at least 28 percent of participants earned a GED or high school equivalency certificate (or, much less commonly, a high school diploma) by the end of the 12-month program period; 19 percent earned it within six months of program enrollment and 25 percent did so within nine months. While those with higher baseline TABE scores had higher high school equivalency certificate attainment rates, compared with individuals with lower baseline TABE scores, a good portion of individuals with lower baseline TABE scores also earned a high school equivalency certificate (Figure 4.1).[18] Although Project Rise participants spent more time in high school equivalency classes than participants in other programs, the attainment rate is comparable to the rate found in a GED course that served as the control group in another MDRC evaluation, in which 22 percent passed the GED test within 12 months of program entry.[19] However, the background characteristics of Project Rise participants indicate that they were more disadvantaged, with lower initial TABE scores, lower levels of school completed, and higher rates of public assistance receipt (a proxy for low income), than the sample members in this other GED preparation evaluation.[20]

It may not be reasonable to expect the young adults in Project Rise — especially those who enrolled with reading or math below the ninth grade — to earn a high school equivalency credential within 12 months. Box 4.2 looks at improvements in reading and math scores on the TABE among participants who began the programs below ninth-grade levels of reading and math who did not earn a GED certificate or high school equivalency credential while they were

[18]Thirteen percent of those with baseline reading scores lower than 9.0 and 24 percent of those with baseline math scores lower than 9.0 earned their GED certificate.

[19]Martin and Broadus (2013).

[20]Martin and Broadus (2013).

Table 4.3

Education and Employment Outcomes Within 12 Months of Entering Project Rise, by Program Site, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5

Outcome	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
High school equivalency attainment (%)						
Received high school diploma or equivalency certificate	28.3	22.0	36.2	25.7	33.9	23.8
In high school equivalency program as of month 12	4.8	10.2	4.7	1.8	0.0	6.8
In high school as of month 12	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4
Continuing education and unsubsidized employment						
Began postsecondary education (%)	7.5	3.4	11.0	4.6	5.5	11.6
2-year college	5.9	2.5	10.2	3.7	5.5	6.8
4-year college	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
Vocational or training program	1.1	0.0	0.8	0.9	0.0	3.4
In postsecondary education as of month 12 (%)	4.5	1.7	3.2	4.6	5.5	6.8
Began unsubsidized employment (%)	25.8	27.1	32.3	23.9	18.1	27.2
Full time (%)	6.4	5.1	3.2	0.9	0.8	19.1
Part time (%)	20.2	22.0	29.1	23.9	18.1	10.2
Average hourly wage	$8.32	$8.06	$7.66	$9.03	$8.29	$8.76
In unsubsidized employment as of month 12 (%)	15.6	15.3	32.3	0.9	13.4	14.3
Sample size[a]	628	118	127	109	127	147

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

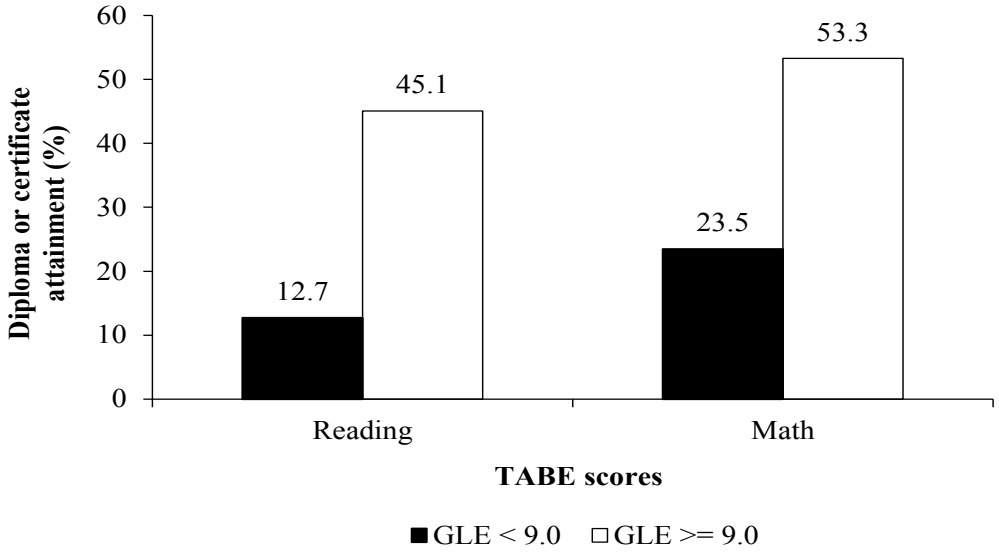
NOTES: Unless otherwise noted, outcomes are calculated among all Project Rise enrollees in cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5 who attended at least one program activity.

Participation rates in the part-time and full-time employment categories may add up to more than the combined rates because some sample members held both types of jobs during the study.

[a]One participant is not included in this table because of missing program data.

Figure 4.1

High School Diploma or Equivalency Certificate Attainment Rates Within 12 Months of Entering Project Rise, by Baseline TABE Grade Level Equivalent (GLE) Scores



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

in Project Rise. The limited analysis found that at two of the Project Rise sites, a good number of these participants made progress in their reading and math levels, despite not earning a credential before the program ended.

Across providers, Kingsborough delivered the highest average number of classroom hours; however, this additional instruction did not translate into a higher high school equivalency certificate attainment rate in the 12-month program period. Henry Street Settlement had the highest attainment rate, with 36 percent of participants earning a credential. FEGS had the lowest attainment rate, with 22 percent of the participants earning a credential.

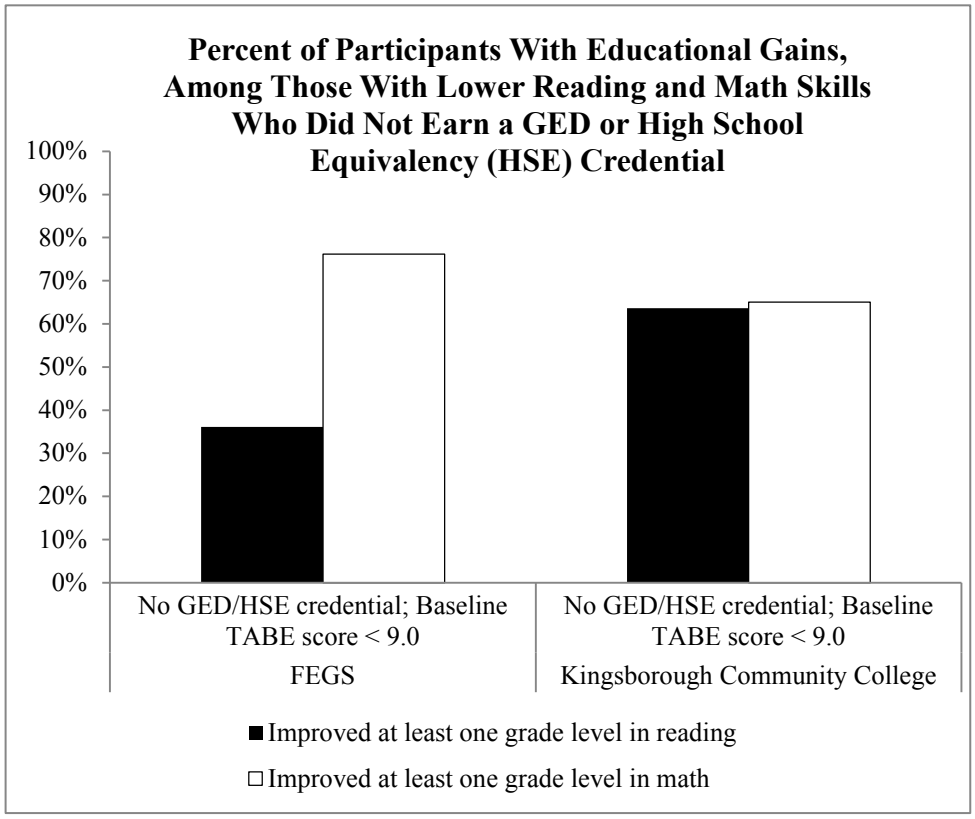
Staff at all Project Rise sites encouraged participants who had not earned a high school equivalency certificate within six months to continue engaging in test preparation services, whether they were classes or tutoring. In most programs, some participants were still engaged in education services at the 12-month mark, though the overall percentage was relatively small (5 percent of all participants). Several participants, interviewed by the study team well after they exited the program, reported that their work schedules and other obligations after the 12-month program period ended often left little time to attend class.

Box 4.2

Measuring Educational Gains Using TABE Scores

About one-fourth of Project Rise participants earned a GED or high school equivalency credential within 12 months of entering Project Rise. Among participants who scored at the ninth grade level or higher on their TABE reading and math assessments at baseline, about half earned a credential. A much smaller proportion of participants who entered the program with reading and math levels below ninth grade earned a GED or high school equivalency credential within this period. It is not realistic to expect that individuals who were further behind academically to earn a credential in this limited time frame, and not earning a credential within a year does not necessarily mean that no academic progress was made.

Even though making grade level gains is not equivalent to earning a credential — especially from the perspective of employers looking for skilled employees — it may nevertheless be an important indicator of progress toward a credential. The bar graph below shows the percentages of participants at FEGS and Kingsborough Community College who entered the program with less than a ninth grade reading or math level and who did not earn a GED or high school equivalency credential while in Project Rise. About a third of these participants at FEGS and two-thirds of them at Kingsborough improved at least one grade level in reading within 12 months. At both sites, most participants who tested at lower math levels when they enrolled made math gains; over 60 percent improved at least one grade level in math.



(continued)

Box 4.2 (continued)

These numbers must be interpreted with caution; only two sites are presented here, and over a third of the participants from these sites are missing post-enrollment TABE data — likely due to early program attrition or non-attendance on test days — and are not included in the analysis. Nevertheless, this subset of participants in Project Rise with lower academic skills did make some educational progress while in the program, despite not earning a GED or high school equivalency credential during the year.

Postsecondary Education and Training

Given that approximately three-fourths of participants did not earn a high school equivalency credential within the 12-month program period, it is not surprising that relatively few participants (8 percent overall) began postsecondary education or job training in the same period. (These figures are likely conservative since it was difficult to track and verify the outcomes of participants who were no longer actively engaged in the program.[21]) By the same token, young adults who did earn a high school equivalency certificate might still have had trouble enrolling in postsecondary education or training programs since program staff did not place much emphasis on these pursuits in the early cohorts, and college or training program enrollment cycles often did not correspond to those of Project Rise. FEGS was the only provider that offered a structured class for participants who had earned a high school equivalency credential and were preparing to enter college. In its College Prep class, instructors prepared participants for college entrance exams and provided guidance on and assistance with filling out school and financial aid applications. Full Employment Council was the only provider that offered participants who had earned a high school equivalency credential scholarships (of about $3,000 each) toward postsecondary education or training.[22] Kingsborough, for its part, was the only provider that offered participants the opportunity to earn college credits while still enrolled in Project Rise.

Unsubsidized Employment

While helping participants obtain unsubsidized employment was a central goal of Project Rise, program staff did not emphasize this goal as much as other program components, such as high school equivalency classes or the internship. At most sites, the internship coordinator was responsible for connecting participants to unsubsidized employment. In a few cases, workforce development staff outside of Project Rise shared this responsibility. At Henry Street

[21] Appendix C explains this finding in more detail.

[22] These scholarships were available to any Full Employment Council client, not just participants in Project Rise. Staff made them possible by leveraging Workforce Investment Act funding.

Settlement, for example, workforce development staff (who sometimes supported internship placement) were responsible for developing and sustaining relationships with employers and communicating with case managers about job openings. These staff members presented job candidates to an employer using asset-based marketing techniques, focusing on how participants' skills met the needs of the employer; they generally did not include Project Rise in their pitch to employers. Case managers were typically responsible for preparing participants for their jobs. If a workforce developer determined that a participant was not work-ready — for instance, he or she did not interview well — the case manager would work with the young adult until he or she gained the necessary skills. After placement, workforce developers stayed in touch with employers to check in on participants and to help resolve any problems that arose.

Although program staff were expected to assist participants in their job search, many reported that they conducted their own job search. One participant explained that he had waited awhile for help but began his own search because "he couldn't wait for Project Rise counselors to look for work" for him. Another participant who conducted his own job search credited Project Rise staff with motivating him to do so. Across all providers, participants transitioned to unsubsidized employment more often than postsecondary education, with 26 percent of all participants starting a job within 12 months of entering the program.[23] In a few exceptional cases, participants' internships led to permanent jobs. While Project Rise staff at every site reported growth in the local job market over the last years of the study period, participants still competed for jobs with older adults with more education or experience.

The job placement rate was relatively high at Henry Street Settlement, Full Employment Council, and FEGS. This high rate was particularly noteworthy at Full Employment Council because its participants appeared to be slightly more disadvantaged at baseline than those at the other Project Rise providers. It is possible that Full Employment Council's participants were more motivated since the Project Rise screening process at the site was more intensive than at the others. The narrower focus on employment at Full Employment Council may have also contributed to its high placement numbers. Full Employment Council is an American Job Center; workforce development is its area of expertise, and Project Rise staff leveraged staff and resources from other departments and programs to help participants. This leveraged support included invitations to hiring events and notifications about available work opportunities, both of which were exclusive to Full Employment Council clients. The council also ran job clubs, which met weekly and where young job-seekers could learn about in-demand industries or meet with recruiters from partner companies.

[23]For this analysis, participants who worked in informal jobs, such as babysitting or some food service positions, were not recorded as "employed," since the program's ultimate goal was to help individuals secure formal employment. Although not as desirable as full-time jobs with benefits, these informal jobs allowed participants who were pursuing postsecondary education to earn some money and gain additional work experience.

Participation and Outcomes of Enrollees During Education, Internship, and Post-Internship Phases

This section examines the program engagement and outcomes of several subsets of the Project Rise sample, defined by how far individuals progressed through the program phases within the 12-month follow-up period. About 45 percent of the individuals who enrolled in Project Rise participated and persisted in the program, but did not complete all the phases. Some of these individuals eventually reconnected to school or work, but many did not. Box 4.3 presents the story of one participant and the challenges she faced to stay consistently engaged in Project Rise and achieve positive outcomes, such as earning a high school equivalency certificate and finding a job.

Table 4.4 presents participant activity for different subsets of the study sample, defined by whether members progressed from one program phase to the next. It shows that, overall, young adults who enrolled in Project Rise took a variety of pathways through the program. The young adults who were more likely to earn a high school equivalency certificate were those who did not drop off from the intended program pathway before starting their internships.

Once placed in an internship, participants were less likely to leave the program and more likely to stay engaged in the education and internship components, even though program withdrawals were still high. About 67 percent of all enrollees were placed in a Project Rise internship — 34 percent worked for more than 120 hours, and 33 percent worked 120 hours or less.

Participants who were able to persist through the internship component had the most opportunity to take advantage of what Project Rise could offer — individualized case management, more preparation for the high school equivalency tests, and more job experience. As expected, these young people were the most likely to transition to unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education within 12 months of starting the program. More than 40 percent of all participants who worked 120 internship hours or more also earned a high school equivalency certificate within 12 months, and about 39 percent of them found unsubsidized employment or started postsecondary education.

Among participants who began an internship and worked 120 hours or less, almost 28 percent earned a high school equivalency certificate and 25 percent reconnected to postsecondary education or work before the program year ended.

The bottom three panels of Table 4.4 show engagement and outcomes of individuals who did not start an internship. Program attrition was higher for these subsets of participants. Before Project Rise education classes started, 14 percent of the participants — including young adults who enrolled in Project Rise but did not attend any program activity — withdrew from

Box 4.3

One Participant's Pathway Toward Achieving Program Outcomes

Alicia, who was 18 when she enrolled in Project Rise, had low initial TABE scores, and staff described her as lacking direction and not having a good sense of her interests or talents. Alicia encountered multiple obstacles to successful program engagement throughout her time in Project Rise.

During orientation, Alicia 's sister had a baby who did not survive. The loss of the baby traumatized Alicia and her family, particularly because she had already experienced the death of a sibling. In response, staff temporarily pulled her out of program activities and allowed flexibility with respect to her attendance. As a result, she did not participate much in pre-internship activities.

Early on in the program, staff were primarily concerned about Alicia because she often came to class or program activities hungry. They got food for her from a local food pantry, gave her snacks whenever possible, and set her up with an internship that would provide a meal. They described a hierarchy of needs, saying that if she has not eaten, she cannot focus on education.

While participating in Project Rise, Alicia was also wrongly accused of a serious crime. Her relationship with her immediate family became strained and she struggled with how to deal with the situation; she had to take time away from the program.

Despite the ongoing challenges, Alicia still managed to complete 180 internship hours in a day care position that she developed for herself. Staff acknowledged that the experience gave her the opportunity to take on a lot of responsibility, which left her feeling empowered and more confident. While she continued to make gains in education, however, she did not earn a high school equivalency certificate within 12 months. As she transitioned out of her internship, her immediate focus shifted from education to finding a job, with which the job developer helped her. Nevertheless, Alicia continued to see the high school equivalency certificate as the most important part of the program and a long-term goal for herself. Nearly a year after completing Project Rise, Alicia had a full-time job as a security guard. She was still in contact with Project Rise staff, still planned to earn a high school equivalency certificate, and hoped to eventually enroll in college.

the program. About one-fifth of Project Rise participants began education classes but were never placed in internships. Of these, more than half (62 percent) ended up leaving the program. The young adults who left Project Rise early were the least likely to reconnect with school or work, according to the providers' management information system data.[24]

[24]As noted earlier, enrollees who dropped out of the program may have been more difficult to contact for updates or to verify educational attainment and employment status.

Table 4.4

Progress of Young Adults Through Phases of Project Rise, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5

Outcome	Percent of Subsample	Percent of Enrollees
Enrollees who completed more than 120 internship hours	100.0	34.6
Withdrew from program	14.2	4.9
Participated in education in months 7 through 12	58.2	20.1
Participated in education in month 12	16.8	5.8
Earned high school diploma or equivalency certificate	42.2	14.6
Started postsecondary education or unsubsidized employment	44.0	15.2
Started postsecondary education	11.2	3.9
Started unsubsidized employment	39.2	13.6
Subsample size		232
Enrollees who began but completed 120 or fewer internship hours	100.0	33.2
Withdrew from program[a]	39.9	13.3
Completed 90 or fewer internship hours	79.8	26.5
Completed 91-120 internship hours	20.2	6.7
Participated in education in months 7 through 12	35.9	11.9
Participated in education in month 12	4.0	1.3
Participated in internship in month 12	0.0	0.0
Earned high school diploma or equivalency certificate	28.3	9.4
Started postsecondary education or unsubsidized employment	25.1	8.3
Started postsecondary education	6.7	2.2
Started unsubsidized employment	22.0	7.3
Subsample size		223
Enrollees who began education but were not placed in internships	100.0	18.0
Withdrew from program[a]	62.0	11.2
Participated in education in months 7 through 12	18.2	3.3
Particpated in education in month 12	2.5	0.4
Earned high school diploma or equivalency certificate	14.9	2.7
Started postsecondary education or unsubsidized employment	21.5	3.9
Started postsecondary education	5.8	1.0
Started unsubsidized employment	18.2	3.3
Subsample size		121

(continued)

Table 4.4 (continued)

Outcome	Percent of Subsample	Percent of Enrollees
Enrollees who did not begin education	100.0	5.2
Withdrew from program	97.1	5.1
Started postsecondary education or unsubsidized employment	0.0	0.0
Started postsecondary education	0.0	0.0
Started unsubsidized employment	0.0	0.0
Subsample size		35
Enrollees who did not begin pre-internship	100.0	8.9
No show	75.0	6.7
Withdrew from program	25.0	2.2
Started postsecondary education or unsubsidized employment	3.3	0.3
Started postsecondary education	0.0	0.0
Started unsubsidized employment	3.3	0.3
Subsample size		60
Total sample size		671

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

NOTES: Outcomes within each program phase are not mutually exclusive.
[a]Some people withdrew from the program after obtaining unsubsudized employment, enrolling in postsecondary education, or both.

Longer-term outcomes of the program, however, remain unclear. Interviews with a small group of participants just under two years after enrollment suggest that while participants continued to face barriers and challenges well after the program year, participants were often still working toward program outcomes, such as a high school equivalency certificate, further education, and securing employment. Indeed, several participants had achieved primary program outcomes after their 12-month program period ended. Box 4.4 details the experiences of three program participants up to two years after they enrolled in Project Rise.

Box 4.4

Life After Project Rise

Jamal received his GED certificate in November 2013, just over a year after enrolling in Project Rise in the fall 2012. As of July 2014, almost two years after entering the program, Jamal was still looking for work. He also had been thinking about going back to school to prepare for a career in the dental field. At the time, Jamal had been dealing with an injury that put him on crutches for several weeks, which hampered his job search. He was also dealing with some challenges in his community, where he owed people money. He described his situation as people trying to "catch him" and put him in a "bad situation." He also said he was recovering from a recent bout of depression. Well over a year after his program period ended, Jamal was still in touch with staff from his internship site, and had been recently offered a position at a local store, which is connected to the site. He was also in contact with Project Rise staff, and felt comfortable reaching out to them. He said that the program had made him more dedicated, persistent, and determined to "get things that he needs and [to] do things he's supposed to do."

As of July 2014, about 22 months since enrolling in Project Rise, Lee was working full time as a food delivery driver and pursuing certification in commercial driving to find a better job within the industry. He had not yet earned a high school equivalency credential. Although he changed internships midway, he was able to complete his internship hours and still kept in touch with staff from both internship sites. Lee stayed in regular contact with Project Rise staff, who offered him the option of taking high school equivalency classes with later cohorts of students. While his busy work schedule made attending classes challenging, he nonetheless hoped to modify his schedule to make time to do so. Lee noted that the support of his classmates motivated him and helped him leave Project Rise with confidence. "People came in with nothing, changed, and left with something," he told the research team. Lee also felt that his internships helped him learn about different career tracks and the importance of being on time and communicating with supervisors about possible absences or tardiness.

Despite prior attempts to gain a high school equivalency credential in other programs, Brianna did not succeed. She came to Project Rise in late 2012 with unstable housing because of domestic violence and lived in a homeless shelter during much of her time in the program. Nonetheless, Brianna earned her GED certificate in early 2013 while still enrolled in Project Rise. She subsequently found multiple jobs with the help of Project Rise staff at several major drugstores, though she eventually left those positions to begin a part-time job in administration at a different company in the summer of 2014. She thought that overall Project Rise and its staff helped her earn her GED certificate as well as become more open-minded, self-respecting, and patient. "With Project Rise," she said, "it's more like a family, whereas with other programs it feels like a program."

Chapter 5

Selected Subgroups of Project Rise Participants: Characteristics, Program Engagement, and Program Outcomes

The disconnected young adults in Project Rise were a diverse group, entering the program with a variety of potential barriers to engagement in education and work. In field research interviews, program staff across all providers identified some individual characteristics that they thought affected participants' engagement in the program. Thus, some participants may have been better able than others to engage in the program. This chapter compares and contrasts several subgroups of Project Rise young adults to determine how and why they might have differed in their background characteristics, program engagement levels, and outcomes. The analysis across subgroups sheds light on the advantages and disadvantages of focusing recruitment efforts on particular subgroups of young adults and on the possible benefit of providing participants different types of supports based on their background characteristics and needs. It does not provide insight into differences in program effectiveness across subgroups, since Project Rise's impacts, or effects, on employment and other outcomes were not examined in this evaluation.

The subgroups examined were defined by gender, custodial parent status,[1] age, and cohort. The research team chose the first three characteristics because Project Rise staff reported that these characteristics might affect program engagement and outcomes. The team selected the fourth, cohort, in order to determine whether the changes to the GED and high school equivalency tests and to the program as it matured were consistent with expected patterns of differences in characteristics, engagement, and outcomes across cohorts. The analyses mentioned in earlier chapters that included outcomes based on other differences in background characteristics, such as math and reading levels and employment histories at the time of enrollment, are not included in this chapter because staff did not report that these characteristics might have affected program delivery or engagement.[2]

[1]Less than 2 percent of the Project Rise participants were married when they enrolled in Project Rise. For the purposes of this subgroup analysis, the young adults who reported being married when they enrolled are not included in the custodial parent subgroup, regardless of whether they lived with their spouses or had children.

[2]For example, as mentioned in Chapter 4, young adults who began Project Rise with lower scores on Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) were less likely to earn their high school equivalency credentials than those who began the program with higher TABE scores. However, this finding does not show whether the program increased the rates of credential attainment for either group. A random assignment study that included a control group could calculate this sort finding. This evaluation, however, did not use random assignment.

Key Findings

The subgroup analyses found that while program engagement and high school equivalency certificate attainment sometimes varied across a characteristic, unsubsidized employment and postsecondary education enrollment rates were largely similar across all subgroups — with the exception of higher rates among the young adults in cohorts four and five. The analyses revealed two primary background characteristics — parenting status and age — that may have influenced how participants engaged in the program. Key findings include:

- In program staff interviews, staff across all providers cited child care needs as a factor that could potentially impede participants' ability to engage in Project Rise activities. According to program data, child care responsibilities seemed to be the characteristic that affected participants' program engagement and outcomes the most. Custodial parents had lower attendance rates, fewer internship placements, and lower rates of high school equivalency certificate attainment than participants who were not custodial parents, even though, at enrollment, custodial parents appeared to have more work experience and fewer negative school-related experiences than the other young adults.

- Staff had mixed views about how age might have affected participants' engagement and outcomes. Some thought that older participants may have been more mature and may have had more consistent schedules than younger participants. However, older participants were more likely to be custodial parents. They also received higher doses of education classes but were less likely than younger participants to earn a high school equivalency certificate. Despite differences between older and younger participants in background characteristics and program engagement, a participant's age did not seem to affect his or her likelihood of finding unsubsidized employment or entering postsecondary education.

- Staff also reported how changes to the GED test prompted them in the fifth cohort to recruit participants who were likely to pass the test before the changes took effect in 2014. These recruitment efforts did appear to affect the characteristics of participants in cohort five; they were more "work-ready" — as defined by number of school grades completed and past employment — when they enrolled in the program. Program delivery and implementation may have also improved over time. Participants in cohorts four and five were more likely than those in earlier cohorts to earn a high school equivalency credential within 12 months of program enrollment. They were

also more likely to find unsubsidized employment within 12 months of enrollment, compared with earlier cohorts.

When analyzing subgroups defined by characteristics that can be correlated with one another, it is helpful to understand how these subgroups overlap. For example, if all the female participants in Project Rise were custodial parents, the findings on gender and parental status would be the same and it would be difficult to determine the extent to which differences in outcomes resulted from differences in gender, differences in parental responsibilities, or both. Table 5.1 shows the extent of overlap in the participant characteristics used to define the subgroups in this chapter.[3] Not surprisingly, custodial parenthood correlated highly with the female gender — nearly three-fourths of custodial parents were female. Custodial parents were also commonly older individuals — only one-fifth of young adults under 21 were custodial parents.

Table 5.1

Distribution of Project Rise Participants Across Subgroup Categories

Characteristic	Female	Male
Gender by age group (%)		
Age 18-20	26.2	29.4
Age 21-24	24.7	19.7
Gender by parenting status (%)		
Custodial parent	19.1	6.6
Not custodial parent	31.7	42.6
Characteristic	Age 18-20	Age 21-24
Age group by parenting status (%)		
Custodial parent	10.2	15.5
Not custodial parent	45.4	28.9

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

[3]The cohort subgroups are not included in Table 5.1 because they are defined according to when an individual enrolled in Project Rise, not by a participant characteristic.

Gender Subgroups

The Project Rise sample was evenly distributed across gender. (See Table 2.3.) According to Current Population Survey data, among the general young adult population, women dropped out of high school slightly less often than men.[4] Disconnected young men and women, nevertheless, deal with different risk factors. Over a third of disconnected young women are mothers, while only 10 percent of connected young women experience motherhood.[5] The ability of a young mother to continuously participate in an intensive yearlong education and internship program may depend on her ability to find and retain consistent child care. Disconnected young men, on the other hand, are much more likely than their female counterparts to have been involved in the juvenile justice or criminal justice system. Most of the men in Project Rise are young men of color, who across the nation have been disproportionately affected by the enforcement of "zero tolerance" policies in schools, which punish minor infractions with school suspensions and expulsions.[6]

To address the different barriers that young men and women face, Project Rise providers included gender-based programming in the pre-internship activities. (See Box 3.1.) The next two sections examine whether men and women faced different challenges to program engagement when they started Project Rise, whether they participated in the program any differently, and whether they achieved different education and employment outcomes.

Participant Characteristics, by Gender

At the time of program enrollment, men and women had similar levels of educational attainment and achievement, although men entered the program with higher math scores than women. (See Appendix Table A.3.) Their experiences in school may have been different as well — over 80 percent of men had been suspended from school at some point, compared with about 60 percent of women.

Women were 20 percentage points more likely than men to report having a child. While the vast majority of the women with children lived with their children, only about half of the male parents were custodial parents. As a result, women were also much more likely to have been receiving public assistance — particularly food stamps (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) — than men at enrollment. About twice as many men as women had been arrested or convicted of a crime in the past.

[4]U.S. Census Bureau (1967–2012).
[5]Burd-Sharps and Lewis (2013).
[6]Holzman (2010). American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008).

Program Engagement and Outcomes, by Gender

In general, differences in program engagement and outcomes between men and women were not statistically significant, though women met with their case managers and participated in the internship component less often than men. (See Table 5.2.) About two-thirds of female participants were placed in internships, compared with three-fourths of the male participants. Women were also less likely than men to earn a high school equivalency certificate within 12 months of enrollment; less than one-fourth of the female participants earned a high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma within 12 months, compared with a third of the male participants. This difference may be due in part to the fact that the men started Project Rise with higher math scores than the women, and in part to the high percentage of women who were custodial parents. Rates of securing unsubsidized employment or enrolling in postsecondary education did not differ at statistically significant levels between men and women.

Parenting Status Subgroups

Staff across all providers reported that the need for consistent child care was one of the most challenging barriers to participants' program engagement. (Only one provider offered free on-site child care, through a partner agency, and to only one cohort.) Since one-third of the young adults in Project Rise had children, and about one-fourth of all participants lived with their children when the program started, finding adequate and consistent child care for the duration of the program may have been crucial for a large proportion of the sample.

The next two sections examine whether the young adults who were custodial parents — those who at enrollment reported to be unmarried, not cohabiting, and living with their own children — engaged in the program and achieved employment and education outcomes at the same rates as those who were not custodial parents.

Participant Characteristics, by Parenting Status

Custodial parents did not differ in educational attainment or math or reading levels, compared with young adults who were not custodial parents; more than half of the participants in both groups had not progressed beyond tenth grade. (See Appendix Table A.3.)

However, there were big differences between custodial parents and young adults who were not custodial parents in other background characteristics, many of which might correlate to gender rather than parenting status, *per se*: custodial parents were less likely to have been held back in school, less likely to have been arrested or convicted of a crime, and much more likely to be caring for a child in the past year than young adults who were not custodial parents. They were also more likely to have been employed in the past — nearly three-fourths of custodial

Table 5.2

Selected Measures of Program Participation and Outcomes, Within 12 Months of Entering Project Rise, by Gender

Outcome	Male	Female	P-Value
Ever withdrew from Project Rise (%)	38.0	42.1	0.297
Began education (%)	91.2	91.8	0.810
Average attendance hours	143	151	0.407
Began internship (%)	75.3	69.0 *	0.078
Average internship hours	98	87	0.167
Worked more than 120 internship hours (%)[a]	52.2	49.1	0.516
Completed internship (%)	25.3	24.7	0.854
Average number of meetings with case manager	49	42 **	0.027
Received high school diploma or equivalency certificate (%)	32.8	24.1 **	0.015
Began postsecondary education (%)	8.1	7.0	0.585
Began unsubsidized employment (%)	27.0	24.4	0.461
Sample size	308	316	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

NOTES: A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between outcomes for each subgroup. The p-value indicates the likelihood that the difference between the subgroups arose by chance. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a]This measure is calculated only among the sample members who began an internship.

parents, compared with 62 percent of other young adults. This difference in employment history may have been due in part to age — most custodial parents were older than 20 when they enrolled in Project Rise.

Program Engagement and Outcomes, by Parenting Status

Custodial parents engaged in the program substantially less than did other participants, despite reporting fewer problems in previous schools and less involvement with the criminal justice system. (See Table 5.3.) About 49 percent of custodial parents had exited Project Rise early, compared with 36 percent of other participants. Fewer custodial parents than other participants began the education and internship components, and custodial parents completed internships at less than half the rate of other participants. The struggle to participate consistently in

Table 5.3

Selected Measures of Program Participation and Outcomes, Within 12 Months of Entering Project Rise, by Parenting Status

Outcome	Custodial parent	Not custodial parent		P-Value
Ever withdrew from Project Rise (%)	49.0	36.4	***	0.005
Began education (%)	87.3	93.2	**	0.020
Average attendance hours	131	155	**	0.029
Began internship (%)	63.1	75.9	***	0.002
Average internship hours	67	103	***	0.000
Worked more than 120 internship hours (%)[a]	41.4	54.1	**	0.027
Completed internship (%)	14.0	29.6	***	0.000
Average number of meetings with case manager	46	45		0.886
Received high school diploma or equivalency certificate (%)	15.3	33.1	***	0.000
Began postsecondary education (%)	5.1	8.6		0.161
Began unsubsidized employment (%)	22.9	27.0		0.320
Sample size	157	456		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

NOTES: A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between outcomes for each subgroup. The p-value indicates the likelihood that the difference between the subgroups arose by chance. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a]This measure is calculated only among the sample members who began an internship.

Project Rise as a custodial parent highlights an area of additional supports that young parents may need to consistently attend an education or work program.

Custodial parents were also half as likely as other young adults to earn a high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma (15 percent versus 33 percent). However, there was no statistically significant difference between the rate at which custodial parents and other participants secured unsubsidized employment or enrolled in postsecondary education.

Age Subgroups

The Project Rise sample was evenly distributed across age ranges. Some staff reported that younger participants were perhaps less mature but more motivated than older participants. On the other hand, some staff noted that older participants had more life experience, but may have become more jaded. Older participants may also have had more opportunities for contact with the criminal justice system. Some Project Rise staff described older participants as having engaged in the program with a greater sense of urgency, since they may have perceived it as the last chance to earn a high school equivalency certificate. The next two sections examine whether age differences correlated with participants' engagement and persistence in the program.

Participant Characteristics, by Age Group

Older participants (ages 21 to 24) were almost twice as likely as younger participants (ages 18 to 20) to have children and to live with their children. (See Appendix Table A.4.) They were less likely to have been suspended from school and more likely to have been employed in the past. The older participants began Project Rise with lower math scores than the younger participants — possibly because they had been out of school for a longer period.

Program Engagement and Outcomes, by Age Group

Older participants attended more hours of education classes. (See Table 5.4.) However, younger participants were 10 percentage points more likely than older participants to earn a high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma — 33 percent of younger participants, compared with 23 percent of older participants. It is not surprising that this difference was similar to the one found between custodial parents and other participants, since, as mentioned earlier, most custodial parents were older than age 20. Rates of securing unsubsidized employment or enrolling in postsecondary education, however, were similar across the two age groups.

Cohort of Enrollment Subgroups

In mid-2011, when Project Rise staff began recruiting the first cohort of young adults, the providers had a very short time frame in which to implement the 12-month education and internship program. Although all providers worked with disconnected young adults, engaging Project Rise participants with such limited educational attainment and work histories proved to be more challenging than most Project Rise staff had anticipated. Over time, staff made adjustments to recruitment and implementation practices as they gained experience in the program.

Two events, external to Project Rise but relevant to how individuals would experience the program, occurred during the study period. The first was Hurricane Sandy, which happened

Table 5.4

Selected Measures of Program Participation and Outcomes, Within 12 Months of Entering Project Rise, by Age Group

Outcome	Younger (18-20)	Older (21-24)	P-Value
Ever withdrew from Project Rise (%)	38.4	41.5	0.429
Began education (%)	90.4	92.9	0.264
Average attendance hours	133	165 ***	0.001
Began internship (%)	71.8	73.1	0.729
Average internship hours	89	98	0.256
Worked more than 120 intership hours (%)[a]	47.8	54.9	0.134
Completed internship (%)	23.6	27.7	0.240
Average number of meetings with case manager	47	44	0.296
Received high school diploma or equivalency certificate (%)	32.9	23.1 ***	0.007
Began postsecondary education (%)	8.4	6.4	0.334
Began unsubsidized employment (%)	26.5	25.2	0.717
Sample size	344	282	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

NOTES: A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between outcomes for each subgroup. The p-value indicates the likelihood that the difference between the subgroups arose by chance. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a]This measure is calculated only among the sample members who began an internship.

shortly after staff had enrolled their third cohorts and devastated many areas of New York City and coastal New Jersey. The storm thus directly affected many Project Rise participants, particularly those enrolled in the Kingsborough Community College and Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway programs. Staff at these sites indicated that, because of the disruption, outcomes for the third cohort were especially low.

The second event was the nationwide introduction of the new GED test in January 2014, which occurred while providers were running Project Rise for cohort five. Project Rise staff reported that, in anticipation of this change, they made a concerted effort to enroll young people in cohort five who had already passed one or more parts of the pre-2014 GED test in order to quickly prepare them to pass the remaining parts that they needed before that version of the test expired. The research team thus hypothesized that cohort five may have experienced

different GED or high school equivalency certificate attainment outcomes, and perhaps may have been a more motivated than earlier cohorts.

The final sections of this chapter examine whether the earlier cohorts (two and three combined) or later cohorts (four and five combined) differed in background characteristics or in program outcomes, as a result of adjustments to the program over time, Hurricane Sandy, or changes to the GED and high school equivalency tests.

Participant Characteristics, by Cohorts

Young adults in cohorts four and five completed more years of school (although this difference is not statistically significant) and had higher math scores at program entry but were more dependent on public assistance and less likely to have had prior employment than young adults in cohorts two and three. (See Appendix Table A.4.) Participants in the later cohorts were also more likely to have expressed interest in both the education and the paid internship components of Project Rise than the young adults in the earlier cohorts.

Program Engagement and Outcomes, by Cohorts

Participants in cohorts four and five were less likely than participants in earlier cohorts to leave Project Rise before completing the program — about 31 percent of participants in the later cohorts left the program, compared with almost half in cohorts two and three. (See Table 5.5.) However, participants in both groups were equally likely to complete their internships. Participants in the later cohorts were more likely to earn a high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma than participants in earlier cohorts, in part because of the heavy focus on passing the GED test during cohort five. They were also more likely to find unsubsidized employment within 12 months of enrollment; almost 30 percent of participants in cohorts four and five began unsubsidized employment in that period, compared with just over 20 percent of participants in the earlier cohorts.

Because staff reported that they recruited differently for cohort five, the research team conducted a separate analysis (not shown in this report) to see whether these recruitment efforts resulted in a cohort of young adults with different background characteristics than those who enrolled in earlier cohorts, and whether these young adults engaged differently in the program. Participants in cohort five were slightly more "work-ready;" they had higher standardized math scores, were more likely to have been previously employed, were less likely to have been idle in the year before the program, and were more likely to express interest in the paid internship than participants in earlier cohorts. As staff had expected, cohort five participants had higher rates of high school equivalency certificate attainment than participants in earlier cohorts; almost 40

Table 5.5

Selected Measures of Program Participation and Outcomes, Within 12 Months of Entering Project Rise, by Cohort Status

Characteristic	Early Cohorts (Cohorts 2 and 3)	Late Cohorts (Cohorts 4 and 5)	P-Value
Ever withdrew from Project Rise (%)	47.6	31.4 ***	0.000
Began education (%)	92.5	90.5	0.386
Average attendance hours	147	148	0.896
Began internship (%)	72.0	72.6	0.857
Average internship hours	94	91	0.658
Worked more than 120 internship hours (%)[a]	50.2	51.6	0.763
Completed internship (%)	25.3	25.3	0.992
Average number of meetings with case manager	44	46	0.530
Received high school diploma or equivalency certificate (%)	25.0	32.1 **	0.049
Began postsecondary education (%)	6.6	8.5	0.388
Began unsubsidized employment (%)	22.9	29.1 *	0.078
Sample size	332	296	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

NOTES: A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between outcomes for each subgroup. The p-value indicates the likelihood that the difference between the subgroups arose by chance. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a]This measure is calculated only among the sample members who began an internship.

percent of cohort five participants earned a high school equivalency certificate within 12 months, compared with one-fourth of participants in earlier cohorts.

In addition to changes in recruitment practices in cohort five, staff also made adjustments to program delivery and implementation over time, which may have better addressed participants' barriers and improved program engagement.

Chapter 6

Lessons and a Look Ahead

The Context for Interpreting the Lessons from Project Rise

Young adults who have been disconnected from school and work for a prolonged period of time face a range of challenges that greatly limit their future prospects. Moreover, neglecting these young people can exact a heavy toll on not only the individuals but also society as a whole. Project Rise represents a concerted effort to reconnect these disadvantaged young adults with the educational, economic, and social mainstream. This final chapter draws on the Project Rise experience to highlight issues to consider when designing, funding, and operating multi-component programs for this critical population.

The Project Rise evaluation provides important findings on the participants' level of engagement and outcomes during the 12 months after they entered the program. In addition, insights about operating multi-component programs can be gleaned from the five Project Rise providers' experiences. As noted earlier, however, the results for Project Rise participants should be interpreted cautiously since the evaluation did not include a control or comparison group to determine the program's net impact; that is, how much difference Project Rise *caused* in its participants' activity levels and outcomes.

The findings should also be considered in the context of the particular segment of the young adult population that Project Rise served: 18- to 24-year-olds who do not have a diploma or certificate, read at least at a sixth-grade level, have been out of school and work for at least six months, and have not participated in any other education or training programs in that time. Unlike some other programs, the Project Rise providers largely refrained from screening out applicants whom they thought may be less work-ready. On the other hand, Project Rise participants were presumably relatively motivated: they chose to enter what was described to them as a yearlong program, and the multiple steps in the enrollment process at some of the Project Rise providers may have served as a *de facto* screening for applicants' motivation and ability to make at least an initial commitment.[1]

Different programs tend to serve and address the needs of particular (although sometimes overlapping) segments of the disconnected young adult population. For example, the young people that Project Rise and its two precursor programs in New York City each serves

[1]The multiple steps in the enrollment process gave the program staff an opportunity to begin developing plans to address participants' child care, transportation, and other needs. The staff and participants also began forging relationships with one another during this early period.

differ in terms of critical background characteristics. The Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) screens applicants for work-readiness, and many enrollees already have a high school degree or equivalency certificate and even some postsecondary education.[2] In contrast, the Young Adult Literacy Program (YAL) serves participants who in many cases have even lower reading levels (between fourth and eighth grade) than participants in Project Rise; YAL therefore focuses on readying participants to *enter* a high school equivalency preparation class.[3] Building on the promising elements of YAIP and YAL for related but not identical populations, the designers of Project Rise sought to transition participants relatively quickly from an extended period of disconnection to up to 30 hours per week of education, internships, and other activities aimed at earning a high school equivalency credential and entering unsubsidized employment or postsecondary education.

Project Rise's specific components also drew on other research and the operating experience of prior programs,[4] which indicated the services that disconnected young people might need. The five Project Rise providers were able to offer an integrated package of these services because they enjoyed stable national and local funding during the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) evaluation period. Even though the providers had relevant programmatic experience — for example, both FEGS and Henry Street Settlement already ran YAIP programs — they had never implemented the full package of Project Rise components. In particular, the education-conditioned internship was new for them.

Earlier chapters of this report presented key findings from the Project Rise evaluation. For example, contrary to expectations, participants said that they were motivated to enroll in Project Rise more by the educational component than by the paid internships. As in many similar programs, Project Rise staff found it difficult to engage participants continuously in the planned sequence of activities. The participants did, however, receive more hours of classroom instruction than is typical of most adult high school equivalency preparation courses. About one-fourth of Project Rise participants earned a high school equivalency credential or (much less commonly) a high school diploma within 12 months of entering the program. While earning this credential was more common among participants who entered the program with reading levels of at least a ninth-grade level (45 percent of whom earned a credential within 12 months), almost 13 percent of participants with reading levels below the ninth-grade level also attained this credential. Furthermore, in a separate analysis, some participants who did not earn a credential nevertheless showed improvements in their reading and math levels. Project Rise providers also delivered a large dose of internship experiences to participants: almost three-fourths of participants began an internship, and half of those who started internships worked more than 120 hours in them. About one-fourth of participants began unsubsidized jobs within one year of en-

[2]Westat and Metis Associates (2009).
[3]Hossain and Terwelp (2015).
[4]Bloom, Levy, and Ivry (2010).

tering Project Rise, and 7.5 percent of participants enrolled in postsecondary education during this period.

Overall Lessons for Policymakers, Funders, and Practitioners

With the above discussion as context, it is possible to identify a number of considerations relating to the design and implementation of multi-component programs such as Project Rise.

- Individualized plans and services, when balanced with standards and clarity of expectations, are critical for disconnected young people.
- Many disconnected young people are interested in enrolling in a program that helps them earn a high school equivalency credential but they may need other motivations during the program period to keep them engaged.
- Caring staff members and positive relationships with peers, primarily developed through cohort enrollment, promote participant engagement and retention.
- Reducing logistical barriers, such as transportation and child care, is critical for disconnected young people to engage and persist in a program.
- Work experience can be valuable for disconnected young people, but providers and funders should support the infrastructure needed to implement quality internships and other workforce components; this infrastructure includes employing staff with job development expertise as well as the time and skills sets needed to effectively coordinate with employers.
- Attention needs to be paid to effectively transitioning young people from programs to long-term employment and education opportunities.
- A 12-month program may not be long enough for the most disconnected young people to make measurable gains to secure stable unsubsidized employment and attain educational credentials.
- Meaningful interim or nontraditional performance measures should be considered as markers of progress.

The appropriate application of these considerations necessarily depends on the specific characteristics of the young people served, the funders' and providers' priority interests, and other local circumstances.

- **The reality that relatively few disconnected young people in programs such as Project Rise are likely to proceed straightforwardly through the full sequence of program components underscores the importance of individualization in providing services.**

While schematics such as Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 can help define a pathway through a program such as Project Rise, participants rarely proceed through the components in the uninterrupted linear sequence and timeframe that the figure depicts. The resulting need for individualization can influence management and staffing decisions, potentially making the program more challenging to implement and more expensive than a model that can be implemented more uniformly for all participants. Program staff, however, did find that they had to balance responsiveness to individual participants' needs and strengths with clarity about expectations related to attendance, punctuality, and other rules.

The timing and duration of particular components — and the program as a whole — can be expected to vary for different participants. For example, Project Rise staff needed to adjust the timing and types of internship assignments for some participants. The 12-month duration of Project Rise was also too short for many disconnected young adults to earn a high school equivalency credential.[5] Moreover, although many participants left Project Rise before the 12-month point, it could be important to offer them an opportunity to return if and when they are ready to recommit.

The Project Rise model included several elements designed to increase participant engagement. While hard data on the relative effectiveness of particular elements are lacking, the staff and participants stated in interviews that promoting bonding and peer support within cohorts; keeping case managers' caseloads relatively small, at about 25 participants; and nurturing other supportive relationships with adults were especially important. They also said financial incentives were useful but somewhat less of a factor. The Project Rise experience also suggests that ensuring the appropriate child care arrangements are in place to support custodial parents is important.

A corollary of fostering supportive and stable relationships between participants and adult staff is that turnover of trusted staff can present problems. This scenario occurred, for example, when one of the Project Rise sites lost several key employees during a later cohort. However, turnover can also be beneficial if certain staff are not well-suited to the program; for

[5]Facile assumptions about which participants will earn their high school equivalency certificate should be avoided. As described in Chapter 4, although higher baseline reading and math levels were correlated with attainment of a high school equivalency credential within 12 months, a number of participants who entered the program reading below the ninth-grade level did earn a high school equivalency credential. More generally, Project Rise staff said that they could not reliably predict at the outset of the program which participants would achieve favorable educational and employment outcomes.

instance, administrators at one provider replaced a weak classroom instructor with a much stronger, more engaging one.

Sustaining participants' engagement has proven to be a challenge in many programs for disconnected young people, and for a variety of reasons. One factor that contributed to this challenge in Project Rise was that the later phases of the 12-month program had much less structure than the earlier phases. The model assumed that participants would transition relatively smoothly from internships to unsubsidized employment; but they often did not, in part because of job development challenges and in part because, according to staff, some participants "took a break" after earning a high school equivalency certificate or completing their internship. Programs lasting a year or more need to incorporate continued structured services into the later phases, above and beyond the case management that Project Rise offered.

- **Project Rise staff and participants considered enrollment in cohorts to be valuable, though the cohort approach can also present operational challenges.**

The consensus among Project Rise staff and participants was that the cohort approach facilitated bonding among participants, positive peer pressure and support, and participants' engagement in the program. The opportunity for participants to interact regularly with a positive peer group can offer a bit of relief from negative influences in their communities. Cohorts served as a vehicle for specific program elements that drew on participants' common experiences, for example, group activities in the pre-internship, group lessons in the classroom instruction, and weekly reflection sessions. Provider staff viewed the cohort approach as sufficiently positive; the Full Employment Council adopted it for a juvenile offender program in Kansas City, and FEGS began using it for several of its Bronx Youth Center programs.

However, programs that adopt the cohort approach should be aware of some operational challenges. For example, some Project Rise applicants had to wait, sometimes several weeks, for enrollment to begin.[6] The character of cohorts can vary significantly from one to the next, sometimes driven by a few strong personalities in the relatively small group. It can also be difficult to balance the need for individualized services with the desire to maintain cohort cohesiveness, especially later in the program, when participants — having proceeded through components at different paces — are less likely to have the same daily activities. Depending on the size of the cohorts and the frequency that a program enrolls them, case managers might serve participants from several cohorts at once. Finally, scaling up a program by expanding the size of cohorts could compromise the participants' sense of group cohesiveness.

[6]FEGS instituted "Gear Up" for all Bronx Youth Center programs to keep young people engaged while they waited for a new program cohort to start.

- **Although classroom instructors used a variety of approaches, strong instructors appeared to share some common characteristics.**

The quality of the education component and the instructors appeared to be especially important in Project Rise, given the priority that participants placed on attaining a high school equivalency certificate and the fact that this instruction was an early component of the program in which participants typically spent about three hours per day for four days a week. Satisfactory attendance in the classes was also a requirement for placement and retention in an internship.

Notably, classroom instructors were key members of the Project Rise team; at some providers, these instructors participated in case conferencing — a meeting during which all staff exchange information about the participants and help solve specific problems. Many participants cited the instructors as the principal ingredient that made the classes different from (and preferable to) their former high school classes. Although the stronger instructors did not always use the same approach, they all held students to high expectations, exercised control over the classroom, and paid individual attention to students at a level that students felt went well beyond what they had experienced in previous educational environments.

Programs such as Project Rise need to prepare participants for the reality that, in the current economy, individuals will often need more than a high school equivalency credential or high school degree to obtain and succeed in well-paying jobs; that is, postsecondary education is important. The Project Rise program that operated on the Kingsborough Community College campus was better positioned than the others in this respect since participants could more easily transition from Project Rise into college courses. For its part, the Full Employment Council provided participants some scholarship support and took the step of adding a staff position for the agency (not just Project Rise) dedicated to strengthening participants' connections with postsecondary education.

- **The uneven implementation of Project Rise internships mirrors the experience of many other programs for youth and young adults and underscores the challenges of implementing this component effectively.**

The original request for proposals (RFP) for Project Rise providers envisioned quality internships characterized by clear job descriptions and expected duties; the commitment from a supervisor to provide regular feedback and mentorship; tasks appropriate to the field and the intern's skill level; a specific project that could be completed during the internship; and a required final presentation that the intern makes to the employer, program provider, or both, reflecting on the experience. However, developing internships of this scope and quality can be quite challenging, and the Project Rise internships for the most part did not include the full range of elements outlined in the RFP.

The internship component requires sufficient dedicated time of program staff with job development skills, the ability to forge strong relationships with worksite supervisors, and the commitment to monitor the quality of the internships. However, some sites assigned the internship function to busy staff members, including those with limited specific training and experience working with employers. Reflecting staff's assessment of participants' skill levels, the internships tended to focus mostly on the important, but more limited, goals of developing soft skills and reinforcing positive work habits; the internships generally had a limited connection to participants' expressed career interests and were not designed with significant potential to lead to regular unsubsidized jobs.[7]

The Project Rise staff found it important to present the internships to participants as a positive opportunity rather than an obligation, but some participants still viewed the internship as a diversion from their primary interest in earning a high school equivalency certificate. When participants' performance suggested that they were not ready for regular internships in the workplace, the Project Rise staff found it necessary to delay placement, by first engaging them in an internal internship within the Project Rise host organization or by using an otherwise tiered approach in which the expectations are increased over time as participants gradually improve their work-readiness skills.

- **Although combining education and employment was important, Project Rise staff and participants had mixed reactions to the education-conditioned nature of the internships.**

The underlying rationale for the education-conditioned internships — that a paid internship would attract applicants to Project Rise and help motivate participants to attend the education classes — did not materialize, since most participants expressed greater interest in the classes than the internship. Staff were also reluctant to enforce the condition, particularly if it meant pulling participants off the worksite and potentially alienating employers. Given these realities, the education-conditioned internship received mixed reviews, with some staff seeing it as useful for certain participants and others believing that it should be eliminated or at least altered. Moreover, conditioning the internship in this way for all participants seemed to be at odds with providing for individualization within the program.

Nevertheless, combining education and work remains an important programmatic goal, since research shows that limited work experience can have deleterious long-term effects on young people's life chances.[8] Caution should also be exercised in interpreting the finding that

[7]New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) reported that YAIP internships were typically better quality than those in Project Rise. Factors that may contribute to the quality of YAIP internships include participants' high level of work-readiness, their interest primarily in a paid internship, and the staff's ability to focus more narrowly on internships than is the case in multi-component programs such as Project Rise.

[8]Sum, Khatiwada, Trubskyy, Palma (2014).

participants were motivated to enroll in Project Rise more by the educational component than by the paid internships. Many Project Rise participants viewed attaining a high school equivalency certificate as a necessary first step toward securing gainful employment; participants may well have judged the short-term, minimum-wage internship, with limited likelihood of becoming a permanent job, to be less important to their future job prospects than attending the high school equivalency classes. The interests of Project Rise participants might have also differed from those of the more work-ready young adults in programs such as YAIP, which focuses primarily on providing internships rather than a broader range of services.

- **Traditional educational and employment outcome measures may not fully capture participants' progress in programs designed to help young people reconnect.**

Efforts to transition young adults from prolonged periods of disconnection to education or employment will not always succeed and can take more than 12 months even when they do. Policymakers, funders, and program operators should therefore consider whether interim or partial measures along the way can assess meaningful progress.

In this regard, Project Rise staff cited milestones, such as improvements in GED predictor scores,[9] improved attendance and engagement in the classroom, participation in internships for a threshold number of hours, and other indicia of active participation in program activities, as possible interim measures. Staff also mentioned markers of participants' personal growth, such as improved ability to set priorities and deal with conflicts and adversity, wearing appropriate attire in business settings, and communicating more effectively (for example, by making eye contact when speaking or by calling ahead if they will be late for an appointment), as other potential measures.[10]

However, if interim measures are used to assess programs such as Project Rise, they should reflect genuine progress toward reentering the educational, economic, and social mainstream. Further thought and research are needed to define the standards of and data to be used in these interim measures.

Particular Lessons for Replication, Scale-Up, and Evaluation

The federal SIF initiative aims to identify lessons for replication and scale-up of promising programs, as well as strengthen the evidence base for these programs. Although many aspects of the Project Rise experience are encouraging, they do not provide a sufficient basis for replicat-

[9]Staff used the official GED Practice Test to assess participants' readiness to take high school equivalency tests.

[10]Ferguson, Snipes, Hossain, Manno (2015).

ing or scaling up the specific Project Rise model discussed in this report, particularly since this study found limited support among staff and participants for the education-conditioned internships — a central element of the model — and did not include impact findings. Nonetheless, Project Rise operations provide important lessons related to broad programming for disconnected young adults. For the most part, multi-component programs for this population can expect to face similar or greater challenges when operating outside the SIF context.

- **Since many programs will experience more limited and less stable program funding than that which prevailed during the SIF evaluation period, it may be necessary to decide which components to eliminate or cut back in multi-component models such as Project Rise.**

The Project Rise providers benefited from a sizeable and stable funding stream — from the national SIF initiative and local matching — that is normally difficult for programs of this type to secure. When asked to assess the value of certain Project Rise components in terms of their costs, staff said that they would preserve internship opportunities but at a reduced number of hours and keep case managers' caseloads small, at not much larger than 25 participants. Project Rise staff believed that the small caseloads provided case managers critical opportunities for more timely, meaningful, and personal interactions with participants; a greater degree of responsiveness to crises in participants' lives; and opportunities to observe classes. However, it is not clear from the evaluation what the most effective balance is between small caseload size and higher associated costs.

Project Rise staff also favored maintaining the cohort approach (although there could be challenges in staffing multiple cohorts and maintaining cohesiveness among participants in larger cohorts). However, they generally did not view the education-condition of the internships as a necessary part of the program. They also believed that awarding financial and in-kind incentives to participants who achieved certain milestones was useful (although less so than the cohort approach and small caseloads), with MetroCards and other transportation subsidies considered to be the most effective incentives.

- **The receipt of technical assistance and participation in a "learning network" helped the Project Rise staff address operational challenges.**

In addition to receiving input from New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) and MDRC staff, the Project Rise providers benefited from ongoing technical assistance from the Youth Development Institute (YDI) on issues such as case management, positive youth development principles, classroom instructional practices, and supervision of program staff.[11] YDI

[11]Later in the SIF period, the Workforce Professionals Training Institute was brought in to provide specialized training on job development and other employment-related program elements.

regularly convened group conference calls and made visits to each local provider. The SIF learning network periodically brought staff from the five Project Rise providers together to share lessons and hear from other SIF project staff as well as national policymakers and experts.

These supports helped staff from each of the five local providers, which would have otherwise operated in isolation, connect with one another and share challenges and ways to overcome them. This interaction and feedback can be particularly important in programs such as Project Rise, which during the study period underwent adjustments related to how it responded to participants' needs, nationwide policy changes (such as introduction of the new, more difficult high school equivalency tests and the Common Core State Standards), and unexpected local developments (such as Hurricane Sandy).

- **The fact that all five providers were well-established, relatively large entities offering a range of services facilitated the operation of a comprehensive program such as Project Rise.**

The Project Rise programs benefited from the host agencies' infrastructure for fundraising, human resources, and information technology. The host agencies' existing networks and reputation in the community, as well as the ability of Project Rise to attract referrals from within the agencies themselves, likely made recruitment of participants easier. Project Rise also drew on the host agency's program services in areas such as instruction, counseling, and job development. (Project Rise staff at Kingsborough, for example, used the college's urban farm program for the pre-internship group activity and established links with other on-campus offerings.) When appropriate, some Project Rise participants also transitioned to other programs operated by the host agency.[12] This reliance on the host agencies' infrastructure and resources suggests, however, that the SIF program budgets understated the full cost of operating Project Rise. (Appendix B presents a cost analysis for Project Rise.)

- **The Project Rise experience also highlights a number of lessons about program evaluation, including the importance of conducting the right type of evaluation at particular points in a program's evolution.**

The Project Rise evaluation includes an implementation analysis focused on several operational questions: how did the five local programs adapt the comprehensive program model, how actively did the participants engage in the various program components, and what outcomes did participants achieve within 12 months of enrollment. It is important to address these preliminary questions before conducting a rigorous impact analysis to determine how much the program

[12]As noted earlier, the host agency also benefited from operating Project Rise; for example, the Full Employment Council's juvenile offender program and some programs at the FEGS Bronx Youth Center adopted the cohort approach after observing its success in Project Rise.

model may have *improved* the participants' outcomes.[13] During the SIF period, the research team considered whether it would be appropriate to conduct a randomized controlled trial (RCT) at a later time to test the impact of Project Rise. The team concluded that such an evaluation of the specific Project Rise model was not necessary, since it is unlikely that the program would retain its distinctive education-conditioned internship component. MDRC is, however, conducting RCTs of YouthBuild and New York City's YAIP,[14] programs that serve disconnected young adults and focus on work-readiness.

For multi-component programs serving participants who are difficult to engage continuously, careful analysis of program participation data can help providers improve operations by identifying the points at which (and reasons why) participants drop out of components, are less engaged than expected, or fail to make the transition to the next phase.[15] Tracking participants (and members of the control or comparison group, if an impact study is being conducted) for longer than one year helps capture the changes that can occur during this dynamic period of young people's lives and account for the fact that some of them may need more than one year to achieve positive outcomes such as earning an educational credential.

These lessons from the Project Rise experience should inform policy and practice for disconnected young people. For example, the lessons may help providers implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which now requires increased spending for out-of-school youth.[16] At the local level, Full Employment Council in Kansas City used its Project Rise experience to help win major grants to expand services. In Newark, where programs have typically served out-of-school young people until the age of 21, Project Rise provides lessons on extending educational programming to young people ages 22 to 24. In New York City, CEO has used the findings from Project Rise in current efforts to overhaul the city's workforce development system. The city's Career Pathways initiative includes work-based learning opportunities for

[13]Other random controlled trials have shown that programs serving comparatively disadvantaged participants may produce relatively modest outcomes but still have positive net impacts; conversely, programs that serve more skilled participants who would have done just as well without the program may produce little or no positive net impacts. Gueron (2005) and Bangser (2014).

[14]YAIP is a precursor of Project Rise that has operated a less intensive model for a somewhat more job-ready population since 2007. The YAIP evaluation is part of the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration project funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

[15]It is important to note that the Project Rise evaluation received the necessary resources to generate these data. Funders of other programs should consider providing the support needed for programs to collect, report, and analyze operational and outcome data that can help improve program operations.

[16]Bird, Foster, and Ganzglass (2014).

disconnected young people. The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development is also conducting a pilot program, in which participants in YALP can transition to YAIP if they achieve appropriate educational gains. In this way, New York City's programming for young people have come full circle, insofar as the Project Rise experience informs changes to programs upon which it was largely based.

Appendix A

Supplementary Tables

Appendix Table A.1

Characteristics of Study Participants at the Time of Enrollment, Cohorts 1 Through 8

Characteristic	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Education and training status						
Highest level of education (%)						
Grade 8 or less	7.4	9.3	6.7	8.9	5.4	7.1
Grades 9-10	49.9	46.1	50.0	47.0	47.3	57.3
Grade 11 or higher, no high school diploma or equivalency certificate	42.7	44.6	43.3	44.1	47.3	35.6
Ever held back or repeated a grade (%)	52.3	61.1	62.8	53.6	48.7	38.6
Ever suspended from school (%)	69.9	65.5	63.9	46.9	81.7	87.0
Employment status						
Ever employed (%)	62.4	60.8	53.4	77.9	66.1	56.2
Employment in most recent job, among participants ever employed						
Average number of months of employment	6.4	6.1	7.8	6.4	5.3	6.4
Hours per week of work (%)						
Part time (1-34 hours)	59.3	61.3	50.8	62.9	64.1	56.2
Full time (35 or more hours)	40.7	38.7	49.2	37.1	35.9	43.8
Weekly earnings (%)						
Less than $200	42.0	45.5	38.5	40.0	47.6	38.5
$200 to less than $400	46.0	44.6	50.0	49.4	37.9	48.3
$400 or more	12.0	9.9	11.5	10.6	14.5	13.3
Demographic characteristics						
Gender (%)						
Female	51.6	61.1	48.7	60.0	46.4	44.7
Male	48.3	38.4	51.3	40.0	53.6	55.3
Age (%)						
18-20 years old	53.0	61.3	52.9	43.1	62.8	46.4
21 years and older	47.0	38.7	47.1	56.9	37.2	53.6
Race/ethnicity (%)						
Hispanic/Latino	34.7	55.7	54.2	39.9	22.4	7.2
Black/African-American	55.1	36.3	38.1	42.3	68.6	83.3
Other	10.2	7.8	7.6	17.8	8.9	9.4

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

Characteristic	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Language spoken at home (%)						
English	76.0	69.3	68.1	67.0	77.3	94.7
Spanish	18.2	29.2	28.6	19.3	13.6	3.0
Family structure and living arrangements						
Unmarried, not living with partner	85.8	87.3	88.8	87.7	84.8	81.3
Has children (%)	35.2	27.9	24.8	31.1	37.5	51.3
Lives with children[a] (%)	27.9	20.4	16.5	27.5	29.9	42.7
Self, spouse, or partner currently pregnant (%)	6.7	7.0	2.2	1.9	8.5	13.1
Ever in foster care (%)	17.7	34.3	20.3	7.1	15.6	13.1
Currently in foster care (%)	2.8	9.6	5.2	0.0	0.5	0.0
Housing arrangement (%)						
Own place	12.8	8.9	7.2	9.9	15.2	21.3
Parent's or relative's home	70.5	74.9	72.5	78.4	73.7	56.3
Homeless	2.5	2.0	1.3	0.0	0.5	7.6
Lives in public housing (%)	35.9	43.2	61.1	21.6	38.2	20.1
Receives Section 8 or other housing voucher (%)	17.7	34.9	11.2	20.6	20.0	7.0
Number of household members (%)						
1	3.0	1.7	5.1	1.5	2.4	4.4
2 to 5	81.9	79.0	78.3	81.1	83.0	86.8
6 or more	15.1	19.3	16.7	17.5	14.6	8.8
Always feels safe in own neighborhood (%)	61.5	72.6	62.8	67.6	51.6	55.2
Moved in the past 6 months (%)	40.6	42.3	29.2	37.1	45.3	48.5
Public benefit receipt						
Receives food stamps/SNAP (%)	55.4	62.4	49.1	53.7	49.1	62.3
Receives welfare/TANF (%)	15.1	9.6	5.7	16.2	20.3	21.8
Receives publicly funded health coverage (%)	62.2	78.5	76.7	72.8	53.9	34.8

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

Characteristic	Full Sample	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Health status						
Referred to substance abuse treatment program in past year (%)	9.0	7.4	13.5	4.3	8.5	10.3
Referred to psychological or emotional counseling in past year (%)	21.1	28.6	29.2	15.6	20.5	13.0
Criminal justice status						
Ever arrested (%)	48.1	52.0	48.1	36.4	44.8	57.5
Ever convicted of a crime[b](%)	13.9	9.0	15.0	9.2	15.5	19.4
Misdemeanor	8.6	6.5	10.0	6.8	10.2	9.0
Felony	4.6	2.0	3.9	1.9	3.7	10.1
Sample size	1146	204	238	213	224	267

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Project Rise baseline information forms.

NOTES: [a]Refers to at least half the time.
[b]Conviction categories may not add up to the total percent of participants who were ever convicted due to missing values.

Appendix Table A.2

Quarterly Participation Outcomes, Within 3 to 12 Months of Entering Project Rise, Cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5

Outcome	Within 3 Months	Within 6 Months	Within 9 Months	Within 12 Months
Ever withdrew from Project Rise (%)	20.5	28.5	36.2	40.0
Average number of meetings with case manager	23	35	42	45
In contact with case manager as of end of quarter (%)	82.0	62.6	46.5	33.9
In high school diploma or equivalency certificate program as of end of quarter (%)	57.0	30.6	15.0	4.8
In high school as of end of quarter (%)	1.9	1.6	0.6	0.3
Began internship (%)	65.9	72.0	72.3	72.3
Internship attendance and earnings among enrollees who began internships				
Average number of days worked	15	31	34	34
Average number of hours worked	54	115	126	128
Average internship earnings	$394	$843	$926	$943
Worked more than 120 hours in internship among enrollees who began internships (%)	4.1	44.9	49.8	50.9
Completed internship among enrollees who began internships (%)	0.5	28.1	33.0	35.0
Received high school diploma or equivalency certificate (%)	7.6	18.5	24.8	28.3
Began postsecondary education (%)	1.0	3.7	4.6	7.5
Began unsubsidized employment (%)	3.5	11.5	22.1	25.8
Sample size[a]				628

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from sites' program data.

NOTES: Unless otherwise noted, outcomes are calculated among all Project Rise enrollees in cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5 who attended at least one program activity.

[a] One participant is not included in this table because of missing program data.

Appendix Table A.3

Selected Characteristics of Program Participants, by Gender and Parenting Status

Characteristic	Male	Female		Custodial parent	Not custodial parent	
Has children (%)	24.4	44.1	***	100.0	11.0	***
Lives with children[a]	14.1	39.4	***	100.0	1.5	***
Self, spouse, or partner currently pregnant (%)	7.4	7.8		9.2	7.1	
Highest level of education (%)						
Grade 8 or less	7.8	9.2		8.3	8.6	
Grades 9-10	47.1	50.3		51.0	48.5	
Grade 11 or higher, no GED or diploma	45.1	40.2		40.8	43.0	
Average TABE reading score	9.0	8.9		9.0	8.9	
Average TABE math score	7.2	6.1	***	6.4	6.7	
Ever held back or repeated a grade (%)	56.6	51.6		44.2	58.0	***
Ever suspended from school (%)	82.1	60.7	***	67.7	73.0	
Ever employed (%)	60.7	68.9	**	73.3	62.1	**
Currently receiving public assistance (%)	78.4	91.2	***	91.8	82.8	**
Food stamps/SNAP	47.3	67.6	***	77.4	51.2	***
Welfare/TANF	6.3	22.8	***	36.9	6.9	***
SSDI or SSI	9.8	19.3	*	4.8	18.9	**
Ever arrested (%)	61.8	36.5	***	38.7	52.2	***
Ever convicted of a crime (%)	22.4	8.7	***	11.0	17.1	*
How most of time was spent in past year (%)						
Caring for a child	12.0	41.5	***	72.6	10.5	***
Caring for an adult family member	9.1	5.4	*	1.3	9.2	***
Looking for a job	51.0	35.4	***	21.0	51.8	***
Doing nothing	8.0	5.2		1.3	8.4	***
Other	14.3	9.5	*	3.2	15.2	***
Goals for participation (%)						
Paid internship	54.9	52.9		52.2	54.6	
High school diploma or equivalency certificate	92.9	92.4		93.6	92.5	
Sample size	308	316		157	456	

(continued)

Appendix Table A.3 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Project Rise baseline information forms.

NOTES: A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between characteristics for each subgroup. The p-value indicates the likelihood that the difference between the subgroups arose by chance. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a]Refers to at least half the time.

Appendix Table A.4

Selected Characteristics of Program Participants, by Age Group and Cohort Status

Characteristic	Younger (18-20)	Older (21-24)		Cohorts 2 and 3	Cohorts 4 and 5	
Has children (%)	24.2	46.6	***	34.9	33.6	
Lives with children[a]	19.0	36.6	***	25.6	28.2	
Self, spouse, or partner currently pregnant (%)	7.4	7.6		7.4	7.7	
Highest level of education (%)						
Grade 8 or less	7.6	9.9		9.0	8.1	
Grades 9-10	52.9	43.6	**	48.2	49.3	
Grade 11 or higher, no high school diploma or equivalency certificate	39.5	46.5	*	42.8	42.2	
Average TABE reading score	9.0	8.9		8.8	9.1	
Average TABE math score	7.0	6.3	***	6.5	6.8	*
Ever held back or repeated a grade (%)	54.0	54.5		55.9	51.9	
Ever suspended from school (%)	77.3	64.3	***	70.4	72.5	
Ever employed (%)	57.3	74.5	***	68.7	61.0	**
Currently receiving public assistance (%)	83.5	87.6		81.4	90.9	***
Food stamps/SNAP	52.6	64.1	***	58.6	57.0	
Welfare/TANF	12.4	17.8	*	14.2	15.6	
SSDI or SSI	9.9	19.6	*	13.9	17.7	
Ever arrested (%)	47.8	50.4		48.8	49.0	
Ever convicted of a crime (%)	12.9	18.5	*	13.4	17.7	
How most of time was spent in past year (%)						
Caring for a child	20.9	34.0	***	26.8	26.7	
Caring for an adult family member	7.3	7.1		6.9	7.4	
Looking for a job	46.2	39.4	*	44.0	42.2	
Doing nothing	7.7	5.2		6.4	6.8	
Other	13.5	10.4		11.8	12.5	
Goals for participation (%)						
Paid internship	53.2	55.3		46.7	62.2	***
High school diploma or equivalency certificate	91.3	94.7		90.4	95.3	**
Sample size	344	282		332	296	

(continued)

Appendix Table A.4 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Project Rise baseline information forms.

NOTE: A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between characteristics for each subgroup. The p-value indicates the likelihood that the difference between the subgroups arose by chance. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

[a]Refers to at least half the time.

Appendix B

Project Rise Cost Analysis

Introduction

Evaluating the costs of a program such as Project Rise can offer valuable insights into aspects of its operation, both for entities that have already delivered it and for those considering undertaking a similar initiative. For that reason, the MDRC research team performed a limited analysis of the costs incurred in connection with Project Rise. The analysis placed the greatest emphasis on estimating the value of tangible resources needed to deliver the program, since these costs will be of particular interest to any organization contemplating a similar program.

As with the rest of this report, the cost analysis concentrates on cohorts two through five and considers costs associated with the programs run by the five providers: Full Employment Council, FEGS, Henry Street Settlement, Kingsborough Community College, and Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway. These cohorts are most representative of the Project Rise program operating in its "steady state" — when it is no longer incurring significant start-up costs — and the estimates provide a reasonable snapshot of ongoing program costs. However, while technical assistance and in-kind contributions both played prominent roles in the delivery of Project Rise at all providers, the analysis did not incorporate their costs.

Since program implementation varied across providers, the research team calculated the costs separately for each provider. Specifically, measurable financial costs associated with program activities are broken down into per-cohort (Table B.1) and per-enrollee (Table B.2) costs, with cross-site averages computed based on those figures. As Table B.1 indicates, the cost of a typical cohort varied considerably by site, ranging from $190,314 to $244,605, with an average cost of $222,637. Table B.2 shows that per-enrollee costs varied even more drastically, with the cost of serving an individual participant ranging from $4,614 to $8,976 (nearly twice as expensive as the least costly site) and averaging $6,636. Both tables clearly suggest that personnel-related expenses accounted for nearly two-thirds of the costs and that internship wages and other supports represented substantially less significant costs.

Data Sources

Estimated costs were limited to those expenses incurred expressly for the purpose of delivering the program. Throughout the study period, each of the providers was required to submit periodic financial reports enumerating all pertinent monetary expenditures.[1] Financial reports incorporated a certification statement, were substantiated by additional fiscal oversight, and

[1]Full Employment Council submitted financial reports monthly; all other providers submitted financial reports quarterly.

Appendix Table B.1

Cost Per Cohort

	Average Cost	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Personnel						
Staff salaries						
Management	$34,846.02	$46,501.21	$32,662.37	$38,100.05	$29,268.72	$27,697.76
Case managers	$39,692.17	$38,850.43	$47,733.40	$47,415.89	$32,759.57	$31,701.57
Job developers	$10,333.57	$8,049.90	$9,069.50	$6,015.03	$11,537.11	$16,996.32
Instructors	$19,533.78	$6,563.51	$25,023.16	$33,241.46	$20,670.17	$12,170.61
Other	$6,487.86	$7,622.13	$302.74	$14,241.51	$8,289.07	$1,983.82
Total salaries	$110,893.40	$107,587.19	$114,791.17	$139,013.93	$102,524.64	$90,550.09
Fringe benefits	$35,969.36	$36,044.26	$32,495.54	$44,448.83	$41,763.24	$25,094.94
Total personnel	**$146,862.77**	**$143,631.44**	**$147,286.71**	**$183,462.76**	**$144,287.88**	**$115,645.03**
Other than personnel services (OTPS)						
Internship wages	$24,004.43	$16,319.64	$30,374.01	$25,247.21	$18,228.19	$29,853.09
Participant support and engagement	$15,334.30	$13,569.17	$24,779.00	$10,434.92	$11,494.11	$16,394.32
Other	$16,640.42	$21,730.49	$18,103.61	$11,737.31	$22,358.25	$9,272.46
Total OTPS	**$55,979.15**	**$51,619.30**	**$73,256.61**	**$47,419.44**	**$52,080.55**	**$55,519.87**
Overhead	**$19,795.04**	**$30,366.37**	**$17,643.47**	**$13,723.12**	**$18,092.97**	**$19,149.29**
Total per cohort	**$222,636.96**	**$225,617.11**	**$238,186.79**	**$244,605.32**	**$214,461.40**	**$190,314.19**

SOURCES: Financial reports submitted to The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City through the Grants Management System.

NOTE: Financial reports are submitted periodically, and sites do not attribute costs to specific cohorts. MDRC developed estimates of total costs for cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5, and then used those estimates as a basis for per-cohort and per-enrollee calculations.

Appendix Table B.2

Cost Per Enrollee

	Average Cost	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Personnel						
Staff salaries						
Management	$1,038.63	$1,550.04	$871.00	$1,398.17	$921.85	$671.46
Case managers	$1,183.08	$1,295.01	$1,272.89	$1,740.03	$1,031.80	$768.52
Job developers	$308.01	$268.33	$241.85	$220.73	$363.37	$412.03
Instructors	$582.23	$218.78	$667.28	$1,219.87	$651.03	$295.05
Other	$193.38	$254.07	$8.07	$522.62	$261.07	$48.09
Total salaries	$3,305.32	$3,586.24	$3,061.10	$5,101.43	$3,229.12	$2,195.15
Fringe benefits	$1,072.11	$1,201.48	$866.55	$1,631.15	$1,315.38	$608.36
Total personnel	**$4,377.43**	**$4,787.71**	**$3,927.65**	**$6,732.58**	**$4,544.50**	**$2,803.52**
Other than personnel services (OTPS)						
Internship wages	$715.48	$543.99	$809.97	$926.50	$574.12	$723.71
Participant support and engagement	$457.06	$452.31	$660.77	$382.93	$362.02	$397.44
Other	$495.99	$724.35	$482.76	$430.73	$704.20	$224.79
Total OTPS	**$1,668.53**	**$1,720.64**	**$1,953.51**	**$1,740.16**	**$1,640.33**	**$1,345.94**
Overhead	**$590.02**	**$1,012.21**	**$470.49**	**$503.60**	**$569.86**	**$464.23**
Total per enrollee:	**$6,635.98**	**$7,520.57**	**$6,351.65**	**$8,976.34**	**$6,754.69**	**$4,613.68**

SOURCES: Financial reports submitted to The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City through the Grants Management System.

NOTE: Financial reports are submitted periodically, and sites do not attribute costs to specific cohorts. MDRC developed estimates of total costs for cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5, and then used those estimates as a basis for per-cohort and per-enrollee calculations.

were submitted using the online Grants Management System (GMS) that included official Project Rise line item budgets for each program year. Each report listed expenditures as total amounts spent per line item during the designated reporting period, and total expenditures for each line item were aggregated in GMS. The reported information was then exported from GMS for further analysis.

Cost Categories

Program costs were organized by personnel-related expenses (salary and fringe benefits) and non-personnel expenses. Personnel-related expenses were broken down into four categories to reflect the staff effort in delivering the various program components: management (including the program coordinator and some more senior staff at each site), case management, GED instruction, and job development. An "other" category captured the remaining program delivery functions that were not associated with a specific program component but were essential to its operation (such as administrative support). Non-personnel costs consisted of other than personnel services (OTPS), which include internship wages, participant support and engagement (including financial incentives), and other program-related costs (including programmatic overhead), as well as a general overhead category.[2]

Estimation Methods

Costs were estimated for cohorts two through five, each of which operated for twelve months between September 2011 and November 2014. However, since financial reports did not break down costs by cohort and each site ran overlapping cohorts (typically one that started near the beginning of the calendar year and another that began in the fall), MDRC researchers made several assumptions to attribute costs from each reporting period to the appropriate cohort. Considering that the program was most intense during a cohort's first six months, the research team estimated that 75 percent of expenditures for each cohort were spent in the first six months of the program and 25 percent of expenditures were spent in the second six months. MDRC researchers calculated the cost estimates presented in Tables B.1 and B.2 by assigning proportional weights to reported expenditures based on the months of operation of each cohort and then allocating costs accordingly.[3]

[2]Programmatic overhead (such as travel, supplies, and so on) was assigned to the OTPS category, and institutional overhead (costs associated with the indirect costs charged by each provider) was allocated to a general "overhead" category.

[3]Individuals who enrolled in Project Rise but ultimately withdrew from the program prior to the end of their cohort's 12-month program period were counted as enrollees for the purposes of the cost-per-enrollee calculation.

Cost Estimate Limitations

Some data limitations affect the precision of the cost estimates presented in Tables B.1 and B.2. First, as mentioned in the introduction, the estimates include only the providers' tangible costs of delivering the program. They do not include the extensive technical assistance provided by the Youth Development Institute and the Workforce Professionals Training Institute that Project Rise staff received throughout the program. They also do not include the substantial in-kind resources from internal supports and partner organizations that all of the providers implementing Project Rise leveraged. These in-kind contributions, which included some job development costs and facility rental and utility costs, varied by site.

Second, given that Project Rise required enough participants to fill two cohorts per year, outreach and recruitment activities were ongoing and played an important role in the delivery of the program. The costs of outreach and recruitment and the reporting of these costs varied considerably across sites and were not specified in a consistent manner. Consequently, MDRC researchers could not easily isolate and classify these expenses separately. Outreach and recruitment costs, such as print and digital media costs, are therefore grouped under the OTPS category, though it is possible that these costs might have slightly inflated the other cost categories in the tables. Among the sites that separately identified Project Rise outreach and recruitment costs, expenditures ranged from $878 to $4,846 per cohort, which accounted for anywhere from 1.6 to 6.6 percent of total per-cohort OTPS costs.

Third, small teams generally ran Project Rise programs and some staff members may have performed multiple functions beyond their job titles. For example, some program coordinators had case management responsibilities in addition to their management and coordination roles, and as a result some case management costs might have fallen under management costs for those sites. Similarly, some staff may have dedicated some time to collecting data for the Project Rise evaluation, and since it could not be separated based on information from financial reports, these research-related staff time expenses may have inflated actual operational costs.

Project Rise Costs

Tables B.1 and B.2 provide insight into general cross-site and site-specific trends that emerged during the delivery of Project Rise. For instance, case managers accounted for the largest share of salary expenditures across sites, with an average of $39,692 allocated to salaries of staff fulfilling that function for each cohort, which is equivalent to an average cost of $1,183 per enrollee and a 35.8 percent share of all direct salary costs. Management costs constitute nearly as large a share (though they are likely artificially inflated for the reasons mentioned earlier). Combined, the two cost categories accounted for more than two-thirds of all salary expenditures. The cost of education instructors appears to have been nearly twice that of job developers,

though it should be kept in mind that the providers and their partners often subsidized the job development services and that the job developer position was not as well defined in some sites as it was in others. Other positions accounted for the smallest share, and the three lowest cost categories combined are roughly equivalent to each of the two most expensive categories. Salaries and fringe benefits (such as total personnel costs) made up roughly 66 percent of all costs across the sites.

Overall, actual internship wages accounted for only 10.8 percent of the total cross-site program costs, while various other costs that were directly attributable to participant support and engagement accounted for 6.9 percent of total program costs. Expenditures on these core elements of the program varied considerably across Project Rise providers.

Looking at individual sites, Full Employment Council appears to have run the lowest cost program, in both absolute terms and per enrollee. It had the lowest aggregate costs and also served the most participants in cohorts two through five, which suggests that the marginal cost of additional participants is minimal when greater capacity is available. The aggregate costs of Kingsborough's Project Rise program slightly exceeded those at every other site, in part because it served the fewest participants and therefore appears relatively expensive on a per-enrollee basis. In addition, it paid staff high salaries, which was likely because the college operated the program. FEGS's substantial management costs resulted in large part from staff charging a project coordinator's salary entirely to management.

Appendix C

Project Rise Technical Appendix

The Project Rise evaluation is an implementation study. MDRC researchers collected a mix of quantitative and qualitative data for enrollees in the providers' first through eighth cohorts and used several methods of analysis to produce the findings in this report. This appendix describes each data source in detail, including the data collection process, data items collected, and data quality. It also describes the methods of analysis used throughout the report.

Quantitative Data Sources

Recruitment Data for Cohort Three

For all young adults who showed interest in Project Rise during the application process for cohort three, which began as early as July 2012, MDRC asked sites to track their experiences. Staff provided information on: the stages that the sites had developed to select program applicants; the stage at which each interested young adult who did not eventually enroll in the program left the process; the reasons that the young adult did not continue in the enrollment process (from the staff members' perspectives); and whether the participant, staff, or both mutually decided against enrollment. Staff recorded whether each interested young adult dropped out or stayed in at each point of the screening process, with the following guidelines provided by MDRC:

- **Stage 1** included screening for Project Rise's basic eligibility requirements (age, employment status, and educational status and attainment level).
- **Stage 2** included screening for eligible reading level on the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE).
- **Stage 3** included any screening undertaken after participants' eligibility for the program had been determined and before enrollment, including individual interviews, group interviews, staff discussions, and orientation sessions.

Baseline Data for All Enrolled Young Adults

All young adults who enrolled in cohorts one through eight completed a baseline information form (BIF) at the time of their program enrollment. The BIF is a questionnaire that MDRC developed. Site staff administered it beginning on June 6, 2011. (Appendix Table C.1 shows the enrollment time frames for each site and cohort.) The BIF, included as an attachment at the end of this appendix, asked questions about the enrollees' demographic characteristics, educational and employment histories, potential barriers to school and work (including math and reading levels, criminal history backgrounds, and number of children), career interests, and reasons for enrolling in Project Rise. (See Appendix Figure C.1.)

Appendix Table C.1

Baseline Data Collection Dates for Each Cohort, by Site

	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Cohort 1	June 6, 2011-August 15, 2011	June 6, 2011-June 16, 2011	July 12, 2011-July 13, 2011	July 11, 2011-July 15, 2011	August 24, 2011-September 13, 2011
Cohort 2	December 7, 2012-February 2, 2012	January 10, 2012-March 14, 2012	September 14, 2011-September 28, 2011	February 6, 2012-February 9, 2012	January 9, 2012-February 27, 2012
Cohort 3	August 7, 2012-October 2, 2012	October 1, 2012-December 21, 2012	October 1, 2012-October 10, 2012	July 16, 2012-July 18, 2012	August 31, 2012-October 4, 2012
Cohort 4	February 19, 2013-March 6, 2013	February 27, 2013-April 10, 2013	February 20, 2013-May 28, 2013	February 6, 2013-Febraury 12, 2013	April 8, 2013-May 28, 2013
Cohort 5	February 26, 2013-December 5, 2013	October 1, 2013-October 16, 2013	September 6, 2013-October 22, 2013	July 16, 2013-August 2, 2013	October 14, 2013-December 23, 2013
Cohort 6	March 2, 2014-May 5, 2014	March 14, 2014-March 18, 2014	January 16, 2014-April 18, 2014	February 10, 2014-February 20, 2014	April 15, 2014-July 16, 2014
Cohort 7	October 1, 2014-November 3, 2014	September 25, 2014-November 25, 2014	October 6, 2014-October 29, 2014	August 7, 2014-October 2, 2014	October 8, 2014-November 7, 2014
Cohort 8	April 28, 2015-July 7, 2015	April 16, 2015	May 27, 2015-July 30, 2015	February 17, 2015-February 24, 2015	July 6, 2015-August 13, 2015

Appendix Figure C.1

Project Rise Baseline Information Form

1A. SITE:
1 FEGS (NY)
2 HENRY ST SETTLEMENT (NY)
3 KINGSBOROUGH CC (NY)
4 CATHOLIC CHARITIES (MO)
5 FULL EMPLOYMENT COUNCIL (MO)
6 RUTGERS (NJ)

RESEARCH ID: _____

Project Rise Baseline Information Form

ELIGIBILITY SCREENING QUESTIONS

1B. TODAY'S DATE: ___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ (MM / DD / YYYY)

1C. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER: ___ ___ ___ - ___ ___ - ___ ___ ___ ___

1D. DATE OF BIRTH: ___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ (MM / DD / YYYY)
(IF AGE < 16 OR AGE > 24, THEN NOT ELIGIBLE)

1E. WHAT IS YOUR WORK STATUS?
1 CURRENTLY WORKING FOR PAY
2 NOT CURRENTLY WORKING FOR PAY, BUT PREVIOUSLY WORKED
3 NEVER WORKED FOR PAY (SKIP TO 1H)

1F. IS YOUR CURRENT OR MOST RECENT JOB AN IRREGULAR, ODD, OR SIDE JOB (MEANING, A JOB THAT DID NOT GIVE YOU A REGULAR PAYCHECK)?
1 YES
2 NO
(IF 1E=1 AND 1F=2, THEN NOT ELIGIBLE)

1G. PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION ON YOUR CURRENT OR MOST RECENT JOB.

A. START DATE: ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ (MM / YYYY)

B. END DATE: ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ (MM / YYYY) (IF 1F=2 AND END DATE IS LESS THAN 6 MONTHS AGO, THEN NOT ELIGIBLE. SKIP IF 1E=1)

C. NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK (INCLUDING OVERTIME):
1 1-20 HOURS PER WEEK
2 21-34 HOURS PER WEEK
3 35 OR MORE HOURS PER WEEK
7 DON'T KNOW
9 DECLINE TO ANSWER

D. HOW MUCH DID YOU EARN PER WEEK, INCLUDING TIPS?
1 $1-$99
2 $100-$199
3 $200-$299
4 $300-$399
5 $400-$499
6 $500-$599
7 $600 OR MORE
77 DON'T KNOW
99 DECLINE TO ANSWER

1H. ARE YOU CURRENTLY ATTENDING SCHOOL? *(IF SUMMER BREAK, ASK: WERE YOU ATTENDING SCHOOL IN JUNE [CURRENT YEAR])?*
1 YES
2 NO
(IF 1H=1, THEN NOT ELIGIBLE)

1I. WHEN DID YOU LAST ATTEND SCHOOL? ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ (MM / YYYY)
(IF DATE IS LESS THAN 6 MONTHS AGO, THEN NOT ELIGIBLE)

1J. DID YOU EVER ENROLL IN A GED PROGRAM?
1 YES
2 NO (SKIP TO 1L)

1K. WHEN DID YOU LAST ATTEND THE GED PROGRAM? ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ (MM / YYYY)
(IF CURRENTLY ATTENDING, THEN FILL IN 88/8888. IF DATE IS 88/8888 OR LESS THAN 3 MONTHS AGO, THEN NOT ELIGIBLE)

1L. WHAT IS THE HIGHEST GRADE THAT YOU HAVE COMPLETED?
1 5TH GRADE OR LOWER
2 6TH GRADE
3 7TH GRADE
4 8TH GRADE
5 9TH GRADE
6 10TH GRADE
7 11TH GRADE
8 12TH GRADE, DID NOT RECEIVE A GED/HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
9 IEP DIPLOMA
10 GED/HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
11 HIGHER THAN GED/HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
(IF 1L > 9, THEN NOT ELIGIBLE)

1M. LITERACY GRADE LEVEL EQUIVALENT (GLE): _____ (RANGE: 0-12.9)
(IF GLE < 6.0, THEN NOT ELIGIBLE)

1N. NUMERACY GRADE LEVEL EQUIVALENT (GLE): _____ (RANGE: 0-12.9)

INFORMED CONSENT SCRIPT

1O. DID THE APPLICANT SIGN THE INFORMED CONSENT/AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM? 1 YES 2 NO (IF 1O=2, THEN NOT ELIGIBLE)

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(continued)

Appendix Figure C.1 (continued)

Project Rise Baseline Information Form

TODAY'S DATE:	RESEARCH ID:
___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ MM / DD / YYYY	_____

BASELINE INFORMATION FORM QUESTIONS

1. NAME:
   _____ ____ _____
   FIRST MI LAST

2. GENDER:
   1 O MALE
   2 O FEMALE
   3 O OTHER
   9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

3. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR CURRENT MARITAL STATUS?
   1 O MARRIED, LIVING WITH SPOUSE
   2 O MARRIED, NOT LIVING WITH SPOUSE
   3 O UNMARRIED, LIVING WITH PARTNER
   4 O UNMARRIED, NOT LIVING WITH PARTNER
   7 O DON'T KNOW
   9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

4. HOW MANY CHILDREN DO YOU HAVE (INCLUDING BIOLOGICAL, ADOPTED, OR STEPCHILDREN)?
   1 O 0 (**SKIP TO 6**)
   2 O 1
   3 O 2
   4 O 3 OR MORE
   7 O DON'T KNOW (**SKIP TO 6**)
   9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER (**SKIP TO 6**)

5. HOW MANY OF YOUR CHILDREN LIVE WITH YOU AT LEAST HALF THE TIME?
   1 O 0
   2 O 1
   3 O 2
   4 O 3 OR MORE
   7 O DON'T KNOW
   9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

6. AS FAR AS YOU KNOW, ARE YOU, YOUR SPOUSE, OR YOUR PARTNER CURRENTLY PREGNANT OR EXPECTING A BABY?
   1 O YES
   2 O NO
   9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

7. ARE YOU SPANISH/ HISPANIC/ LATINO?
   1 O YES
   2 O NO
   7 O DON'T KNOW
   9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

8. WHAT IS YOUR RACE? (**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**)
   A ☐ WHITE
   B ☐ BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN
   C ☐ AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE
   D ☐ ASIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER
   E ☐ OTHER RACE
   _____
   F ☐ DON'T KNOW
   G ☐ DECLINE TO ANSWER

9. DO YOU USUALLY SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME?
   1 O YES
   2 O NO (**SKIP TO A**)
   7 O DON'T KNOW (**SKIP TO A**)
   9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER (**SKIP TO A**)

10. WHAT LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH DO YOU SPEAK AT HOME?
    _____
    7 O DON'T KNOW
    9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

A. HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED SSI OR SSDI DUE TO DISABILITY?
   1 O YES
   2 O NO (**SKIP TO 11**)
   7 O DON'T KNOW (**SKIP TO 11**)
   9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER (**SKIP TO 11**)

B. DO YOU CURRENTLY RECEIVE SSI OR SSDI DUE TO DISABILITY?
   1 O YES
   2 O NO
   7 O DON'T KNOW
   9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

11. ARE YOU OR ANYONE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD CURRENTLY RECEIVING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING KINDS OF PUBLICLY FUNDED ASSISTANCE?

A. FOOD STAMPS/ SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)
   1 O YES 2 O NO 7 O DON'T KNOW 9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

B. TANF/SNA (NYC HRA/DSS, WORKFIRST NJ, TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE (MO))
   1 O YES 2 O NO 7 O DON'T KNOW 9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

C. MEDICAL INSURANCE FOR YOURSELF (MAP (NY), NJ MEDICAID, MO HEALTHNET)
   1 O YES 2 O NO 7 O DON'T KNOW 9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

D. **(SKIP IF Q4=1, 7, OR 9)** MEDICAL INSURANCE FOR YOUR CHILDREN (CHILD HEALTH PLUS (NY), NJ FAMILYCARE, MO HEALTHNET)
   1 O YES 2 O NO 7 O DON'T KNOW 9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

E. SECTION 8 RENTAL ASSISTANCE OR HOUSING VOUCHER
   1 O YES 2 O NO 7 O DON'T KNOW 9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

(continued)

Appendix Figure C.1 (continued)

Project Rise Baseline Information Form

TODAY'S DATE:	RESEARCH ID:
___ ___/___ ___/___ ___ ___ ___ MM / DD / YYYY	_____

12. WHO FIRST SUGGESTED THAT YOU APPLY TO PROJECT RISE (**CHECK ONE**)?

1 O I DECIDED MYSELF
2 O FAMILY MEMBER OR RELATIVE
3 O FRIEND
4 O PROGRAM PARTICIPANT (REFERRAL)
5 O SOMEONE ELSE
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

13. WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN PROJECT RISE? (**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**)

A ☐ I WANT A PAID INTERNSHIP
B ☐ I WANT TO GET MY GED/HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
C ☐ I WANT TO GO TO COLLEGE/GET MORE TRAINING
D ☐ I WANT TO GET A JOB
E ☐ I WANT TO GET MY LIFE ON TRACK
F ☐ OTHER
_____
G ☐ DON'T KNOW
H ☐ DECLINE TO ANSWER

14. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR LIVING SITUATION?

1 O YOUR OWN PLACE
2 O YOUR BIOLOGICAL OR ADOPTIVE PARENT'S HOME
3 O A RELATIVE'S HOME
4 O A FRIEND'S HOME
5 O A SUPERVISED INDEPENDENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT (**SKIP TO 16**)
6 O IN GROUP QUARTERS (**SKIP TO 16**)
7 O HOMELESS/LIVING ON THE STREET (**SKIP TO 16**)
8 O OTHER (**SKIP TO 16**)
77 O DON'T KNOW (**SKIP TO 16**)
99 O DECLINE TO ANSWER (**SKIP TO 16**)

15. HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVE HERE?

_____

(RANGE: 1-50. FILL IN 55 IF RESPONSE > 50)

77 O DON'T KNOW
99 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

C. DO YOU LIVE IN PUBLIC HOUSING?

1 O YES
2 O NO
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

16. HOW OFTEN DO YOU FEEL SAFE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

1 O ALWAYS
2 O USUALLY
3 O SOMETIMES
4 O NEVER
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

17. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU MOVED IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS?

1 O 0
2 O 1-2
3 O 3 OR MORE
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

18. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN FOSTER CARE?

1 O YES
2 O NO (**SKIP TO 20**)
7 O DON'T KNOW (**SKIP TO 20**)
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER (**SKIP TO 20**)

19. WHEN WERE YOU LAST IN FOSTER CARE?

___ ___/___ ___ ___ ___
MM / YYYY

(IF DON'T KNOW, THEN FILL IN *77/7777*. IF DECLINE TO ANSWER, THEN FILL IN 99/9999.)

20. WHAT KIND OF GRADES DID YOU GET IN SCHOOL?

1 O MOSTLY A'S AND B'S
2 O MOSTLY B'S AND C'S
3 O MOSTLY C'S AND D'S
4 O MOSTLY D'S AND F'S
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

21. HAVE YOU EVER REPEATED A GRADE OR BEEN HELD BACK A GRADE?

1 O YES
2 O NO
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

22. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN SUSPENDED FROM SCHOOL?

1 O YES
2 O NO
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

23. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN SPECIAL EDUCATION?

1 O YES
2 O NO
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

24. IN THE PAST YEAR, HOW MANY JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN?

1 O 0
2 O 1
3 O 2 OR MORE
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

25. IN THE PAST YEAR, HOW MANY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN?

1 O 0
2 O 1
3 O 2 OR MORE
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

26. IN THE PAST YEAR, DID YOU SPEND MOST OF YOUR TIME (**CHECK ONE**)

1 O CARING FOR A CHILD?
2 O CARING FOR AN ADULT FAMILY MEMBER?
3 O LOOKING FOR A JOB?
4 O DOING SOMETHING ELSE? SPECIFY:
_____
7 O DON'T KNOW
9 O DECLINE TO ANSWER

(continued)

Appendix Figure C.1 (continued)

Project Rise Baseline Information Form

TODAY'S DATE:	RESEARCH ID:
___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ MM / DD / YYYY	_____

27. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ARRESTED?	28. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONVICTED?	29. IF YES, FOR WHAT?
1O YES 2O NO (**SKIP TO 30**) 7O DON'T KNOW (**SKIP TO 30**) 9O DECLINE TO ANSWER (**SKIP TO 30**)	1O YES 2O NO (**SKIP TO 30**) 7O DON'T KNOW (**SKIP TO 30**) 9O DECLINE TO ANSWER (**SKIP TO 30**)	1O A MISDEMEANOR 2O A FELONY 7O DON'T KNOW 8O DECLINE TO ANSWER

30. WHAT IS YOUR CAREER INTEREST (**CHECK ONE**)?

1O ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA
2O BUILDING & GROUNDS MAINTENANCE
3O CHILD CARE & RECREATION
4O COMMUNITY & SOCIAL SERVICE
5O CONSTRUCTION & EXTRACTION
6O EDUCATION, TRAINING & LITERACY
7O FOOD PREPARATION
8O HEALTH CARE
9O INSTALLATION, MAINTENANCE & REPAIR
10O LEGAL
11O OFFICE & ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT
12O SAFETY & PROTECTIVE SERVICE
13O SALES AND RELATED
14O OTHER/DETAIL: _____
77O DON'T KNOW
99O DECLINE TO ANSWER

31. WHAT IS THE HIGHEST DEGREE YOUR MOTHER HAS COMPLETED?	32. WHAT IS THE HIGHEST DEGREE YOUR FATHER HAS COMPLETED?
1O NO DEGREE 2O GED 3O HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA (GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL) 4O TECHNICAL/AA/2-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE 5O 4-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE OR MORE 7O DON'T KNOW 8O DECLINE TO ANSWER	1O NO DEGREE 2O GED 3O HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA (GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL) 4O TECHNICAL/AA/2-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE 5O 4-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE OR MORE 7O DON'T KNOW 8O DECLINE TO ANSWER
33. WHAT IS YOUR MOTHER'S CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS?	34. WHAT IS YOUR FATHER'S CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS?
1O WORKS FULL-TIME (35 HOURS OR MORE PER WEEK) 2O WORKS PART-TIME (34 HOURS OR LESS PER WEEK) 3O NOT CURRENTLY WORKING 4O OTHER 7O DON'T KNOW 9O DECLINE TO ANSWER	1O WORKS FULL-TIME (35 HOURS OR MORE PER WEEK) 2O WORKS PART-TIME (34 HOURS OR LESS PER WEEK) 3O NOT CURRENTLY WORKING 4O OTHER 7O DON'T KNOW 9O DECLINE TO ANSWER
35. IN THE PAST YEAR, HAS ANYONE REFERRED YOU TO A DRUG ABUSE OR ALCOHOL ABUSE TREATMENT PROGRAM?	36. IN THE PAST YEAR, HAVE YOU ATTENDED A DRUG ABUSE OR ALCOHOL ABUSE TREATMENT PROGRAM?
1O YES 2O NO 7O DON'T KNOW 9O DECLINE TO ANSWER	1O YES 2O NO 7O DON'T KNOW 9O DECLINE TO ANSWER
37. IN THE PAST YEAR, HAS ANYONE REFERRED YOU TO PSYCHOLOGICAL OR EMOTIONAL COUNSELING?	38. IN THE PAST YEAR, HAVE YOU RECEIVED PSYCHOLOGICAL OR EMOTIONAL COUNSELING?
1O YES 2O NO 7O DON'T KNOW 9O DECLINE TO ANSWER	1O YES 2O NO 7O DON'T KNOW 9O DECLINE TO ANSWER

Participation and Outcomes Data for All Participants

Staff at all program sites collected detailed weekly information for each Project Rise participant on his or her progress in the program between June 13, 2011, and November 10, 2014. Appendix Table C.2 shows the data collection time frames for each cohort, by site. Staff recorded weekly activities on an MDRC-provided data template (Appendix Figure C.2), which included instructions to ensure consistent project-specific data definitions. The data were securely transferred to MDRC every four to six months. The participation data covered 12 months of activity for each participant in cohorts one through five. Site staff recorded data on program enrollment status, pre-internship dosage, attendance in education classes, internship hours worked and wages earned, GED or high school equivalency certificates earned, and whether participants found unsubsidized employment or enrolled in postsecondary education.

Sites also provided MDRC with dates of and reasons for program exits if participants withdrew or were terminated from Project Rise.

Qualitative Data Sources

Staff Background Forms Data

MDRC researchers used a background form to collect information on staff members' demographic information and professional background. Project Rise coordinators at each site administered the form to any program staff person who worked with participants between fall 2011 and spring 2012. The research team periodically collected these forms to compile "snap-shots" of staff. However, due to higher staff turnover than anticipated, the information collected during this time period did not reflect all staff; data were missing on many staff members who were hired later in the study period and therefore the research team did not include data on these individuals in this report.

Staff Interviews and Program Observations

The research team conducted five rounds of face-to-face interviews with program staff over the study period — one in the third quarter of 2011, covering staff experiences with the programs' first cohort and explanations of the program's logic model; the second in the second quarter of 2012, during the second cohort; the third in the fourth quarter of 2012, when staff were primarily working with cohort three; the fourth in the first quarter of 2013, during the latter part of cohort three; and the final round in the third quarter of 2014, when staff were working with cohorts five and six. Appendix Table C.3 lists the number of staff interviewed during each site visit.

Appendix Table C.2

Participation Data Collection Dates for Each Cohort, by Site

	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Cohort 1	June 13, 2011- July 30, 2012	June 13, 2011- June 4, 2012	July 11, 2011- June 25, 2012	July 11, 2011- July 9, 2012	August 29, 2011- August 27, 2012
Cohort 2	January 9, 2012- January 7, 2013	January 9, 2012- January 14, 2013	September 12, 2011- August 27, 2012	February 6, 2012- February 4, 2013	January 26, 2012- June 16, 2014
Cohort 3	September 9, 2012- September 23, 2013	September 10, 2012- December 30, 2013	October 1, 2012- September 30, 2013	July 16, 2012- July 15, 2013	September 17, 2012- September 29, 2014
Cohort 4	February 25, 2013- February, 24, 2014	February 25, 2013- March 10, 2014	February 11, 2013- February 17, 2014	January 28, 2013- Junuary 27, 2014	April 23, 2013- June 30, 2014
Cohort 5	November 4, 2013- November 10, 2014	September 9, 2013- September 8, 2014	October 15, 2013- October 13, 2014	July 15, 2013- July 14, 2014	October 18, 2013- October 27, 2014

Appendix Figure C.2

Management Information System Participation Data Template

Variable Label	Definition/Notes
Week of	Monday's date
Program status	Participant's status as of Friday. A=Active, H=On hold, C=Completed, W=Withdrew.
Number of conversations with case manager	Number of one-to-one conversations between case manager and participant that occurred outside of regularly scheduled program activities this week. Can be face-to-face or phone conversation.
Number of incentives received	Number of incentives received this week for any reason.
Incentive received for pre-internship activity	Y=Yes, N=No
Incentive received for educational activity	Y=Yes, N=No
Incentive received for internship activity	Y=Yes, N=No
Incentive amount ($ value) received	Dollar amount or value of incentives received this week for any reason.
Days attended	Number of days attended pre-internship phase this week.
Hours attended	Total number of hours attended pre-internship activities this week.
Hours spent in group activities	Number of hours spent in group activities this week (should be subset of hours attended in pre-internship phase).
Pre-internship status	Participant's status in pre-internship phase as of Friday. A=Active, H=On hold, C=Completed, E=Employed in internship, W=Withdrew.
Class type	Type of education class attended this week. PRE=pre-GED, GED=GED, OTH=Other.
Days attended	Number of days attended education class this week.
Hours attended	Number of hours attended education class this week.
Education status	Participant's status in education class as of Friday. A=Active, H=On hold , C=Completed, W=Withdrew.
Sector	1=Arts, Entertainment, Media, 2=Building & Grounds Maintenance, 3=Child care & Recreation, 4=Community & Social Service, 5=Construction & Extraction, 6=Education, Training, & Literacy, 7=Food Preparation, 8=Health Care, 9=Installation, Maintenance, & Repair, 10=Legal, 11=Office & Administrative Support, 12=Safety & Protective Service, 13=Sales and related, 14=Other
Days worked	Number of days (either partial or full) worked at internship this week.
Hours worked	Number of hours worked at internship this week.
Amount earned (pre-tax)	Amount earned this week for internship.

(continued)

Appendix Figure C.2 (continued)

Internship status	Participant's status in internship component this week. C=Completed, H=Hired, E=Employed in internship, T=Transitioned to unsubsidized employment this week, U=Left internship.
Literacy TABE score (GLE)	If follow-up TABE taken this week, GLE score (reading).
Numeracy TABE score (GLE)	If follow-up TABE taken this week, GLE score (math).
Official GED Practice Test score - Reading	If OPT GED taken this week, Reading score.
Official GED Practice Test score - Math	If OPT GED taken this week, Math score.
Official GED Practice Test score - Total	If OPT GED taken this week, Total score.
Attending GED class	Y=Yes, N=No
Attending high school	Y=Yes, N=No
Obtained GED	Y=Yes, N=No
Obtained high school diploma	Y=Yes, N=No
Obtained other credential (not HS diploma or GED)	Y=Yes, N=No
Attending post-secondary education	Y=Yes, N=No
Type of post-secondary education	2YR=2-year college, 4YR=4-year college, VOC=vocational/training,OTH=Other.
Employment (unsubsidized) status	H=Hired, E=Employed, U=Left employment
Sector	1=Arts, Entertainment, Media, 2=Building & Grounds Maintenance, 3=Child care & Recreation, 4=Community & Social Service, 5=Construction & Extraction, 6=Education, Training, & Literacy, 7=Food Preparation, 8=Health Care, 9=Installation, Maintenance, & Repair, 10=Legal, 11=Office & Administrative Support, 12=Safety & Protective Service, 13=Sales and related, 14=Other
Full time or part time	FT=35 or more hours/week, PT=Less than 35 hours/week, OTH=Other (if the job is seasonal, temporary, etc.)
Hourly wage (pre-tax)	Hourly wage or equivalent (e.g., annual salary converted into hourly wages).

MDRC researchers collected information on staff members' understanding of the goals and purposes of Project Rise; recruitment and enrollment; development and delivery of the pre-internship, education, and internship components; participant motivation and engagement; and any approaches to gender-based activities. Appendix Figure C.3 presents a list of selected interview questions asked during the study period.

Appendix Table C.3

Staff Interviewed During Each Site Visit

	FEGS	Henry Street Settlement	Kingsborough Community College	Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway	Full Employment Council
Visit 1 cohort 1	6	2	10	6	6
Visit 2 cohort 2	6	6	5	5	7
Visit 3 cohort 3	5	3	3	3	4
Visit 4 cohort 3	4	3	4	2	2
Visit 5 cohorts 5 and 6	8	7	8	4	6

NOTE: Staff included Project Rise direct service staff as well as other staff at the organizations who support Project Rise in various ways.

The research team conducted observations of high school equivalency instruction in the first and second rounds of site visits and observations of pre-internship activities in the fourth round of site visits.

Focus Group and Participant Interview Data

MDRC researchers conducted focus groups three times at each site: the first time in the fourth quarter of 2012, at the beginning of cohort three; the second time in the first quarter of 2013, when cohort three neared the end of its first six months in the program; and the third time in the third quarter of 2014, when cohorts five and six were enrolled in the program. The focus groups comprised a convenience sample of volunteers who were present at the provider that day (typically for their education instructional classes). Program staff informed participants of the optional focus group in advance. Participants in the focus group each received $10 in cash as a token of appreciation for their time. MDRC researchers asked participants about their life experiences, experiences with other programs, and their experiences with Project Rise.

During the first round of focus groups, MDRC researchers randomly selected 20 members for individual interviews: 4 each from Rutgers T.E.E.M. Gateway, Full Employment Council, and FEGS; 3 from Henry Street Settlement; and 5 from Kingsborough Community College. MDRC researchers interviewed all of these participants in the fourth quarter of 2012 and reached out to these same participants periodically over the next approximately two years for follow-up interviews. Researchers also conducted informal case reviews with staff most familiar with these participants.

Appendix Figure C.3

Sample Staff Interview Protocol Questions

Theory of Change

1. What are the goals of Project Rise?
2. What are key components of the program?
3. How would you know Project Rise is achieving its goals?
    a. What are the primary outcomes that would occur or changes that you would see?
    b. What do you think are the chief ways that Project Rise is trying to accomplish its goal or goals?

Marketing and Messaging

1. How do you describe the program to potentially eligible youth?
2. What are the marketing methods you use?
    a. Which have proven most successful?
    b. Where do you meet or reach out to potentially eligible youth?
    c. Who is involved in this process?
    d. What are the challenges to recruitment?
    e. What lessons from past messaging about Project Rise have you incorporated into newer efforts?

Participant Selection

1. What sorts of characteristics or qualities are you looking for in interested youth?
2. How do you assess the strengths and barriers of the youth interviewed?
    a. How do you go about addressing their barriers before and after invitation to participate in Project Rise?
3. What do you look for in terms of youth motivation when screening candidates? How do you assess this?
4. What reasons do youth give for wanting to participate in the program?
    a. What do the youth want most from the program?

Engagement and Motivation

1. How do you define successful engagement?
    a. Does this change over the course of the program?
2. What are your primary engagement strategies?
    a. Has your approach to engagement changed as the youth progress through the program phases—from early group projects, to the pre-internship phase, to the full program with education and internship?
    b. Do the youth need you differently or respond differently to your engagement efforts as the program progresses? How?
3. What in particular is challenging about engaging this youth population?
    a. How do you know when engagement is starting to slip?
    b. What do you do when you start to see this?
4. How does group work figure into your engagement strategies?
    a. Do you see a cohort effect with the youth? Please describe.
    b. How do incentives play a part in your engagement strategy?

(continued)

Appendix Figure C.3 (continued)

5. What role does "trust" between your staff and the youth play in maintaining engagement?
6. In your opinion, how important is internal motivation to youth success (persistence, trying hard, resilience — things you might call "grit")?
    a. How do youth show you they are motivated?
    b. How do youth motivate one another, if at all?
7. Have you observed youth motivation grow over time in some cases?
    a. What do you think is the source of this increase in motivation?
8. What do you do to encourage participation and attendance with the youth?
    a. Do you use both "carrots" and "sticks" to maintain youth participation and attendance? Like what?
9. Can you reflect on this idea or your observations and experiences with youth transitioning to program participation? What things do you find they struggle with?

Education

1. Who delivers educational services? Why did you choose this institution/person/ arrangement?
2. How is the instruction structured?
    a. How many days a week do classes meet?
    b. How long are classes each day?
    c. Are classes divided by reading level?
    d. How many weeks pass before youth begin the internship?
    e. When does instruction begin in the new cohort cycle?
    f. Where does instruction take place?
    g. What texts are used in GED instruction? What are the primary topics of instruction?
3. In your view, does the structure of the GED component work (i.e., are instructional times frequent enough, long enough, etc.)?
4. Are participants meeting benchmarks at satisfactory rates?
    a. What gets in the way of academic progress, if anything?
5. Originally, the attendance rule was 80% class attendance to qualify for the internship. Some sites have modified this rule or "condition."
    a. How have you implemented the education "condition"?
    b. Is the education truly acting as a "condition" on the behavior of the youth?

Case Management

1. How many case managers are there?
    a. How many youth are in each case manager's caseload?
    b. How are caseloads divided among case managers? Do different types of youth get assigned to different case managers (like by gender, career interest, cohort, or special need)?
2. What are the basic duties of case managers in the program?
    a. Do any case managers take on special duties or tasks within or outside of Project Rise?
    b. Have the case managers received any special training or technical assistance to be effective with this youth population? What sort?
3. Are case managers involved in the weekly reflection sessions?
    a. What are the goals of the weekly reflection sessions?

(continued)

Appendix Figure C.3 (continued)

4. How do case managers establish a rapport with the youth?
    a. Does trust play a role in your interactions with youth?
    b. How important is this?
5. Can you describe the formal case management (meeting) process?
    a. How often do these meetings take place and for how long?
    b. What is the structure of these interactions?
    c. What is the focus of these conversations?
    d. Are these conversations always documented in case files? How so?
6. What sorts of issues are you helping the youth with? What are the most common issues?
7. Is an individualized plan developed for each young person? What does this typically consist of?

Pre-internship

1. What is the purpose of the pre-internship phase?
2. How is the pre-internship part of the program structured?
    a. What is the exact schedule of the pre-internship? When does it start? How long does it last? What other activities (e.g., education) commence during pre-internship?
3. Describe the pre-internship classroom experience.
    a. What skills are participants taught?
    b. What are the dynamics among the participants during this time? The dynamics between the participants and staff?
4. Describe the group project (community service project).
    a. What were the goals of the project?
    b. Did the group project create a cohort effect among participants? If so, how? If not, why do you think not?
5. What were the greatest challenges that arose during this phase of the program?

Internship

1. How do you find/identify internship opportunities for Project Rise participants?
    a. What is the most challenging aspect of developing Project Rise internship placements?
    b. What strategies do you use to identify or attract employers?
    c. In what ways do you provide support to employers who offer internships to Project Rise participants?
    d. Do you find/identify internship opportunities for just Project Rise, or for other internship programs in addition to Project Rise?
2. To what degree are internship placements tailored to participants' interests?
3. What are the internship requirements for participants?
    a. Can you describe the time commitment required of participants?
    b. How many hours a week must they work?
    c. How long are participants allowed to participate in the internship until they complete the hourly commitment? Until the end of the first six months?
    d. To what extent is there an education condition to participating in internship? Do you know of any participants who were "pulled out" of their internships because they had dropped out of GED prep classes or had poor attendance in the classes? What exactly are the education attendance requirements that youth must meet in order to stay in their internships?

(continued)

Appendix Figure C.3 (continued)

Post-Internship

1. How is the interaction with participants different in the second six months?
    a. Frequency of contact?
    b. Reasons for interaction?
    c. Incentives to keep in touch?
2. How do participants transition out of internships? What are the conversations you have with youth or employers?
3. How do you support participants in finding employment after their internship? How active are you in finding and making placements (versus providing job listings)?

Gender-based activities

1. What is your understanding of the goal of the gender-based activities you've been asked to incorporate into your program?
2. Can you describe the gender-based activities you undertake or have planned?
    a. Is gender integrated into the weekly discussion sessions in any capacity?
    b. Are there male-only activities? Female-only activities? Describe.
3. What themes do activities focus on/build upon? (e.g., leadership/empowerment [Sadie Nash curriculum] versus actual non-traditional trades/fields)
    a. In your opinion, is there a need for gender-based services for these youth?

MDRC researchers interviewed 14 of the original 20 participants again in person at around six months after enrollment (first quarter of 2013); 7 participants by phone at around 10 months after enrollment (third quarter of 2013); and 6 by phone at a little under two years after enrollment (and about one year after their cohort had completed Project Rise, in the third quarter of 2014). In-person interviewees received $15 cash; participants received $15 gift cards by mail after phone interviews. MDRC researchers asked participants about their experiences in Project Rise and their views of various aspects of the program.

Appendix Box C.1 includes sample interview protocols for focus groups and one-on-one interviews. The convenience sampling and small sample sizes for focus groups and participant interviews limit the generalizability of findings from these sources.

Fact Sheets

MDRC researchers collected standardized information on staffing, partner agencies, pre-internship activities, internship placements, weekly reflection sessions, instruction and

Appendix Box C.1

Sample Participant Interview Protocol Questions

Engagement

1. How did you find out about Project Rise?
   a. What were you doing just before coming to Project Rise?
   b. What attracted you to Project Rise in the first place?
2. What is the main purpose of Project Rise, to you? What is your personal goal for the program?

Pre-Internship

3. Can you describe the pre-internship classroom experience?
   a. What skills did you learn?
   b. Did you feel it was valuable to your individual internship experience? If yes, why? If not, explain.
4. How do you feel you got along with staff during this time? What about the other participants?

Education

5. What was school like for you before you came to Project Rise?
6. Can you describe your GED class? What do you do in class? What is a normal day in class like?
7. What kinds of things in your life that you're dealing with, if anything, make it hard to come to class every day?
8. Have you ever felt like quitting the program?
   a. What was going on with you then that made you feel that way?
   b. What made you stay? How did you get through that?
9. Like the attendance policy, case management was also an important part of the design of Project Rise.
   a. What do you see as the role of the case manager?
      – What have you gotten from working with your Project Rise case manager?
      – What do you talk about with your case manager? Goals? Life issues?
10. Has case management made a difference to your experience in the program? How?

Internship

11. What were your expectations for the internship before you began?
    a. How has the internship been the same/different from what you expected it would be like?
    b. Did you have a field of interest/type of work you wanted to do?

(continued)

Appendix Box C.1 (continued)

c. What are your career goals? Do you feel this internship is assisting you in that goal?
d. Can you describe the things, if any, that are different between internships and part-time jobs?

12. How involved were you in choosing your internship placement?
    e. If your internship is not working out, how do you work with Project Rise staff to find a solution?
13. Where is your internship? Describe your experience interning here.
    f. What do you do there every day (what are your internship activities?) How long have you been interning here?
    g. Describe your responsibilities or a typical day there.
    h. How many hours a week do you work?
    i. Do you feel useful at your internship (active, if not busy)? Does your internship always have something for you to do when you're there? Do you have the opportunity to learn new things?
14. Do you believe that the tasks you complete through your internship are helping that organization?

After Internship

15. What are your plans going forward, related to education and employment, once you get your GED (or after a certain month, which would represent the six-month point)?
    j. Have staff helped you in planning those goals? If so, how?
    k. What type of contact and help do you expect to get from Project Rise staff throughout the course of the next several months?
16. How do you interact with Project Rise, if the day-to-day interactions (instruction and internship) are over?
17. Now that the instruction and internship are over, have you been able to find work?
    l. If so, what sort of work have you been doing?
    m. Did Project Rise help you get this/these job(s)? If so, how was the program helpful?
    n. What did you do on your own to secure employment?
18. Do you think being in Project Rise helped you become more ready for work?
    o. If so, how? If not, why not?

education components, incentives available to participants, and internship payment structures from all sites in May 2012, December 2012, and June 2014. Researchers used these fact sheets to track changes in specific arrangements or procedures over time.

Learning Network Session Notes

The lead partners for the New York City Social Innovation Fund (SIF) initiative — the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City — convened staff from all of the Project Rise sites once a year (typically in the first quarter) and staff from all the New York City SIF projects once a year (typically in the summer) to share experiences, network, and learn from each other. MDRC researchers took advantage of the meetings to hold sessions with program staff on topics that included perspectives of program components, program challenges and successes, implementation changes over time, and lessons learned for the future. MDRC researchers conducted these sessions at meetings held in March 2013, March 2014, and June 2014.

Data Analysis Methods

Recruitment: Pre-Enrollment Analysis

MDRC researchers conducted an analysis of sites' pre-enrollment process for young adults interested in Project Rise using the detailed recruitment data collected for cohort three, described earlier. The analysis tracked interested individuals from their first contact with the program until they either dropped out of the application process or enrolled in Project Rise. Researchers categorized and counted individuals according to the stage of the screening process that they were in when they left, and by the reasons they left. Program staff corrected and resolved most data inconsistencies and errors. Remaining data inconsistencies included drop-offs recorded at multiple stages and reason codes recorded at stages after an individual had already dropped out of the screening process. In these cases, researchers treated the earliest drop-off stage that staff recorded as the correct stage and associated the reason codes with that stage.

Participant Flow Analysis

MDRC researchers conducted the participant flow analysis to map the flow of participants through Project Rise in cohorts two through five. Using baseline and participation data, MDRC researchers followed all enrollees through each component (pre-internship, education, and internship) of the program and identified the points at which enrollees dropped out of components.

Program Attrition Analysis

Using participant data on program withdrawals described earlier, MDRC researchers categorized the reasons site staff provided for participants exiting the program. For participants

whose reasons for withdrawal fell into more than one category, researchers categorized their reasons in all applicable categories. Researchers then analyzed these categories by program component and presented each reason's percentage of total program withdrawals.

Participant Characteristics Analysis

Using the data collected from the BIFs, MDRC researchers calculated averages and percentages of all program participants with select characteristics for each site as well as across all sites. No statistical tests were performed on differences across sites.

Engagement and Outcomes Analysis

Using participation data from each site's management information system, MDRC researchers analyzed program participation, engagement, and outcomes for participants in cohorts two through five. The analysis covered program activities that occurred between January 2012 and November 2014.

Although these data contain a reliable record of program participation and dosage among program participants, the data had limits and require caution when interpreting program outcomes. First, the estimated rates of unsubsidized employment and postsecondary education outcomes are conservative because of the difficulty of tracking outcomes for inactive participants. For instance, employment and postsecondary education data for participants who left the program early are unlikely to be as complete as data for participants who persisted through the program year. Second, some data inconsistences remained after site staff helped researchers resolve data problems that were identified in their files. These inconsistencies included missing values, invalid codes, or typos for activities during various phases of Project Rise (pre-internship, education, internship, and post-internship); out-of-range values for attendance records, internship wages, unsubsidized employment wages, and test scores; and some discrepancies in educational outcomes. MDRC researchers made some reasonable assumptions from these common data inconsistencies:

- Observations with invalid or missing data for continuous variables (such as hours of attendance) were treated as if they were zero.
- If staff recorded days attended but not hours attended, researchers imputed hours attended based on staff-provided information on hours of programming per day. Researchers followed the same logic if staff recorded hours attended but not days attended.
- If participants were inappropriately missing class type for one week, researchers imputed the previous week's class type.

- If program staff provided a conflicting program exit status on the separate file of withdrawal reasons for a participant, researchers used the program exit status on the weekly participation file.

Some data items, such as TABE scores and GED practice test scores, had too much missing data for the full sample for researchers to use in the study. TABE scores from two sites that had less missing data than the others were used for a limited analysis of academic improvement in Chapter 4.

Summary participation outcome measures for pre-internship, education, and internship components, as well as for high school equivalency, unsubsidized employment, and postsecondary education outcomes, were calculated for all participants as well as by site. The main report describes the 12-month measures, and Appendix A shows the quarterly measures. Tests for statistical differences across sites were not performed.

Subgroup Analysis

The report includes subgroup analyses in Chapter 5. Baseline data were used to create subgroups based on certain demographic characteristics and enrollment dates: (1) gender, (2) parenting status, (3) age, and (4) enrollment cohort. Categorical variables were created to estimate participation and outcome differences between male and female participants, participants who were custodial parents and those who were not, participants ages 20 and younger and participants ages 21 and older, and participants who were enrolled earlier (cohorts two and three) and later (cohorts four and five). Two-tailed t-tests were conducted to test for differences between average outcome estimates for each subgroup.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected for the evaluation were analyzed and presented throughout the report to give context to the program and describe how providers implemented Project Rise. The interview and focus group data provided rich information that added to the quantitative baseline and participation analyses. Researchers coded interview transcriptions and notes into cross-cutting themes and trends. They developed codes based on key research questions, emerging themes and lessons, and other topics of inquiry. Sample codes included basic program features such as "pre-internship" or "case management" and implementation processes such as "recruitment," while other codes explored trends such as "group dynamics" and "institutional context." Researchers then compiled coded interview excerpts and analyzed them accordingly.

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About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.