The PROMISE Center at AIR: Providing Equitable Opportunity for Economic Mobility to America's Workforce

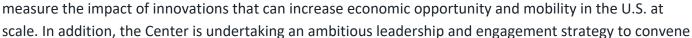**◆AIR®**

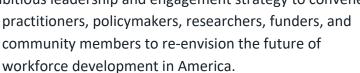Advancing Evidence.
Improving Lives.

Our Vision

The PROMISE Center, *Promoting Resilience, Opportunity, and Mobility in Support of Equity*, is committed to uncovering the most effective strategies to build a 21st century workforce development ecosystem that provides equitable access to economic mobility and resilience for millions of American people and the country overall.

Capitalizing on AIR's deep technical assistance and research expertise, PROMISE works to develop, build-up, and measure the impact of innovations that can increase economic opportunity and mobility in the U.S. at scale. In addition, the Center is undertaking an ambitious leadership and engagement strategy to convene practitioners, policymakers, researchers, funders, and community members to re-envision the future of workforce development in America.

Learning from the Evidence

Discovering How to Effectively Support Underserved Populations

Strengthening Community College Workforce Training Programs

Expanding the Reach of Effective Sectoral Training Programs

The PROMISE Center is shaped in collaboration with AIR leaders, partners, and our Advisory Group. The Promise Center is directly supported by the AIR Equity Initiative, AIR's $100+ million five-year investment to advance equity in several important areas: workforce development, education, public safety and policing, and health.

Learning from the Evidence

Recent rigorous research has revealed a small set of programs that have significantly impacted participants' earnings, even multiple years after their participation. However, to date, little systematic attention has been given to understanding why these few programs may have succeeded where so

many others have failed—and to consider how lessons from their work might be applied more broadly to the field. PROMISE is addressing this knowledge gap through two groundbreaking studies of rigorous research on best-in-class sectoral and related programs to develop a more comprehensive understanding of these programs' characteristics and how different program features may have contributed to these programs' success.

PROMISE Center Leadership

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Implementation Evidence Review of Sectoral Programs

PROMISE Center researchers are conducting a deep review of the implementation evidence and components of three programs that have demonstrated long-term impacts on participants' earnings through randomized controlled studies: Project Quest, Year Up, and Per Scholas. Using a systematic review process, researchers are working to identify common characteristics that these programs share as well as variability in their implementation conditions that may shed light on how these programs could be structured in alternative settings. The team is also investigating how these features are similar to or different from other workforce, sectoral, and community college programs that had fewer or no effects on participants' employment and earnings. The team will develop hypotheses about the strategies and approaches that may help explain successful programs to be further tested in our systematic meta-analysis.

Systematic Meta-Analysis

In partnership with AIR's Methods of Synthesis and Integration Center (MOSAIC), PROMISE researchers are conducting a comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis of rigorous research on workforce training programs. This review will identify components that may account for program effectiveness and examine the efficacy of the promising practices identified in the implementation landscape analysis. Researchers will identify both published and unpublished studies of relevant workforce development programs. Researchers will extract critical information from these studies including details of the program components, implementation, and impact findings. Using this information, the team will conduct a meta-analysis to understand the average impact of these programs and explain program variation. A key goal of this work will be to identify the components, strategies, and implementation conditions that explain why some programs outperform other programs and to share lessons from this work with the larger field.

Strengthening Community College Workforce Training Programs

Community colleges are one of the pillars of workforce development in the United States. Each year thousands of institutions across the country enroll millions of Americans in academic and workforce

training programs intended to help them gain skills to succeed in the workforce. However, research has shown that many community college programs face ongoing challenges, including student persistence and equity.

Through our work on community college workforce programs, the PROMISE Center at AIR aims identify lessons from successful sectoral programs and adapt them more broadly among community colleges nationwide. We are launching this work with a pioneering institution, the City Colleges of Chicago, which has already made strides in developing clearer workforce development pathways through their Centers of Excellence model.

City Colleges of Chicago and the Centers of Excellence

The Centers of Excellence model at CCC provide a unique and promising strategy for blending effective community college and sectoral practices in service of helping learners obtain living wage jobs. CCC has established Centers of Excellence across its seven campuses, with each college responsible for building capacity across the district in a high-demand career field. The campuses serve as the central focal points for quality, innovation, access, and partnership building for the district in 9 workforce areas: (1) Healthcare; (2) Transportation, Distribution & Logistics; (3) Business & Professional Services; (4) Computer Science & Engineering; (5) Advanced Manufacturing; (6) Information Technology; (7) Education, Human & Natural Sciences; (8) Culinary Arts and Hospitality; and (9) Construction Technology.

The PROMISE Center at AIR has established a multi-year partnership with the City Colleges to further strengthen the effectiveness of their Centers of Excellence and workforce training opportunities. We are working with CCC to help them develop, adapt, and strengthen these training pathways by assessing CCC's current work and considering whether and how effective sectoral training practices can be adapted and integrated in community college workforce training programs. PROMISE is also working with district and college leaders to advance critical aspects of this pipeline, including how to effectively harness labor market predictions for program planning, build strong employer partnerships, and expand work-based learning opportunities for students. As new strategies and interventions are developed, AIR researchers will seek to document their promise and effectiveness at increasing students' successful program completion, employment, and earnings, with the goal of replicating the model around the country if it is shown to work.

Expanding the Reach of Effective Sectoral Training Programs

Sectoral training programs aim to give workers the skills they need to secure good jobs in growing industries, and a handful of programs have resulted in long-term earnings increases. The PROMISE Center at AIR is working with these proven sectoral training programs to strengthen their models, improve implementation, and broaden participation by underserved populations. We are

beginning our partnership with two of these programs, Per Scholas and Year Up, with a goal of identifying ways the models can be scaled to reach an even greater share of the American workforce.

Per Scholas

Per Scholas has a proven track record of lifting the earnings of low-income workers over the long-term. Per Scholas is a no-cost technical training program that has prepared and matched more than 15,000 graduates for tech careers with leading businesses. The Per Scholas model was analyzed via the WorkAdvance RCT-based evaluation and was found to have large earning gains that were maintained six years after program participation. With programs offered in 14 locations across the country, Per Scholas is seeking to further enhance the quality and reach of their programs by developing new adaptable models of online learning and consider ways in which high-cost program elements could be further streamlined and made more cost-efficient.

AIR's PROMISE Center is partnering with Per Scholas to help them strategize, implement, and test new program designs that will help them meet these goals. Currently, PROMISE's technical assistance and research teams are working with Per Scholas to (1) strengthen the design and delivery of Per Scholas' online Borderless Classroom Learning experience; (2) research and understand the optimal blend of online and in-person activities for hybrid programming; and (3) consider how intelligent tutoring systems can be used to support learning. AIR plans to research the effectiveness of these new approaches as they are integrated within Per Scholas' current programming.

Year Up

First established in 2000, Year Up has more than 20 years of experience helping young adults ages 18 to 24 build careers in information technology and business services that lead to meaningful advances in their employment and earnings. Year Up provides six months of industry-specific and career readiness training in a high-demand, high-wage career field, which is followed by a six-month paid internship with a local employment partner. Evaluated as one of 9 programs in the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) RCT study, Year Up's training model was found to create a 38% boost in individuals' earnings five years post-participation. Year Up has served more than 34,000 students since its inception and has ambitious goals of doubling its size over the next five years.

AIR is partnering with Year Up to support, strategize, implement, and study the effectiveness of their growth efforts. Current priorities for the partnership include (1) assisting with the development and implementation of modified Year Up models that allow for quicker time to employment for students; (2) strengthening online learning through the deployment of expert instructors and the creation of adaptive learning models and harnessing the growth in remote working opportunities for student internships and employment; and (3) developing more streamlined mechanisms for assessing students' strengths and needs during program intake and participation and offering more tailored training and supports to accelerates time-to-employment. AIR will also research and assess the effectiveness of these program alterations through the implementation and scaling process.

Discovering How to Effectively Support Underserved Populations

AIR's PROMISE Center is committed to learning how best to support the many individuals who are often left out of successful workforce programs. Far too few of our most vulnerable citizens are able to reap the benefits of participating in our most effective training programs because these programs are limited in their capacity or their ability to provide intensive or specialized supports for individuals with important barriers to participation and success.

We are launching this element of PROMISE's work with a focus on four groups: (1) opportunity youth; (2) justice-involved individuals; (3) adults with foundational skill needs; and (4) displaced workers. For each group, we are starting by taking a deep look at their assets, needs, and barriers and then assessing the knowledge base on existing programs and service strategies. Key goals of this work include to identify critical evidence- and field-building gaps and to identify promising yet untested approaches to better help these populations reach their fullest potential. As promising strategies are identified, PROMISE will seek to partner with field-leading organizations to assess the effectiveness of these approaches and support the growth and scaling of those that are effective. Additionally, we will consider how lessons from this work might be used to build stronger on-ramps into effective sectoral and community college workforce training programs for these underserved populations.

Opportunity Youth

Approximately 5 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 in the United States are not in school or working. Some programs to re-engage disconnected youth have seen modest success, but many programs screen out more underserved populations, such as youth with mental health challenges or those with basic skills needs. PROMISE is committed to finding ways to more effectively meet the needs of all opportunity youth. To this end, AIR staff are working to understand the challenges and barriers that opportunity youth commonly face when seeking services and identify promising strategies to effectively re-engage these youth and help them persist in skill-building and other needed support programs. Our goal is to identify opportunities to significantly expand the supports offered to opportunity youth while building the evidence base on effective strategies to help them successfully transition to adulthood. We also plan to leverage recent discoveries in brain science, socioemotional learning, and trauma-informed care that may help further promote their success.

Justice-Involved Individuals

Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth and adults face unique challenges to furthering their education and obtaining living-wage jobs, acquiring skills for in-demand occupations and industries, and obtaining living-wage employment. With justice-involved individuals facing complex and persistent barriers, PROMISE seeks to identify approaches with the potential to help many of these individuals gain access to living-wage jobs and successfully reintegrate into society. Our work is beginning with a focus on incarcerated and formerly incarcerated young adults (aged 18 to 24). We are conducting a landscape analysis of the current evidence base on programs that engage justice-involved young adults

in education and training, both pre- and post-release. Recognizing that these issues disproportionately affect individuals of color, we are paying close attention to programs explicitly designed to address the needs and strengths of young adults of color in culturally responsive ways. This research will help us identify "positive deviants"—that is, programs with notable track records of success engaging and helping justice-involved persons complete a credential, secure livable-wage employment, and achieve other positive outcomes—to examine further via in-depth case studies. Our hope is to identify promising programs with whom to co-develop learning agendas that will help expand the evidence base on and implementation of effective approaches to support justice-involved young adults.

Adults with Foundational Skill Needs

Approximately one in ten U.S. adults lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, and another 27 million adults do not have a high school diploma. Providing high-quality training and education to these adults is paramount for their integration into a thriving workforce system. AIR's previous research has shown that programs that integrate education and workforce training (IET) represent a highly promising strategy. Additionally, certain models for adult education, such as adult charter schools, are having unusual success in helping adults build the skills needed to gain meaningful employment or enroll in postsecondary education and training programs. AIR PROMISE researchers are currently reviewing adult education data from the National Reporting System, states, and current research to analyze the trends with IET, adult charters, and other promising adult education models, their outcomes, and identify promising programs. We will then undertake case studies of exemplary programs to investigate their recruitment, enrollment, implementation, and outcome trends. The ultimate goal of these efforts is to identify field-leading programs with whom to build learning partnerships, build the evidence base on effective practices, and significantly expand the scale of successful programs.

Displaced Workers

Displaced workers— adults who lose their jobs when their companies or industries relocate, close, or otherwise become obsolete – are of critical concern in our rapidly changing U.S. labor market, but they are not served well in our current all-or-nothing training models. PROMISE researchers are undertaking the development of a proactive knowledge- and field-building agenda to discover how best to significantly expand the availability of effective supports for displaced workers. We are beginning with a comprehensive landscape review to assess the knowledge base on dislocated worker needs and service approaches, identify critical evidence- and field-building gaps, and identify promising strategies to help these workers avoid job loss, quickly reconnect to employment, and/or offset their losses from dislocation. We are investigating approaches that hold promise such as competency-based education programs that award credit for previously learned skills; apprenticeships and other earn-and-learn approaches; and employer-training collaborations that offer workers opportunities to proactively advance their skills through tuition benefits, tailored programs, and flexible work arrangements.