

Executive Summary

THE SECOND GENERATION OF JOBS-PLUS PROGRAMS

IMPLEMENTATION LESSONS FROM
SAN ANTONIO AND THE BRONX

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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

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CEO Response to MDRC’s Report on Jobs-Plus: “The Second Generation of Jobs-Plus Programs: Implementation Lessons Learned from San Antonio and the Bronx”

October 2015

Policymakers and scholars have long recognized that many public housing residents, to varying degrees, are not fully connected with labor markets and professional networks, and that there is a need for targeted programming to improve economic opportunity in public housing.¹ Jobs-Plus is a program model for increasing earnings and employment for residents of public housing with evidence of success, although potentially complex to implement. Jobs-Plus saturates target housing developments with job and career support, rent-based and other financial incentives that “make work pay,” and community organizing activities that support a culture of work.

Jobs-Plus was designed in the 1990s by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a demonstration project in cities across the country to enhance economic opportunity and combat concentrated poverty in public housing. MDRC studied the program and found that it increased resident earnings by approximately \$1,300 per year both during program operations and after the program ended.²

Jobs-Plus did not become a national program when the study was complete, but the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) was impressed by the evidence and invested in a pilot Jobs-Plus site in East Harlem in 2009. Encouraged by the evidence base and early strong performance at that site, CEO and the Mayor’s Fund to Advance NYC won a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service’s Social Innovation Fund (SIF) to replicate Jobs-Plus in the South Bronx and in San Antonio, TX. The SIF replication also added a financial counseling component to Jobs-Plus at the Bronx site. This report includes the findings of research conducted by MDRC on those programs’ implementation and costs. Additional funding for the cost study portion was provided by HUD.

Any locality replicating Jobs-Plus can learn from the best practices and challenges identified by MDRC in this report; in fact, these findings have already informed Jobs-Plus program development in New York City and beyond. For example, the report notes that while both SIF Jobs-Plus sites successfully enrolled a majority of target households in the program, the sites generally placed residents in low-wage work. For many participants, most of whom were unemployed and many of whom lacked even a high school diploma, these job placements were appropriate first steps. At the same time, the lack of connection to jobs with higher wage potential both made it hard for participants to advance in employment and made the program less attractive to public housing residents who were already employed. In response to this challenge, CEO and the sites added an advancement outcome goal and also worked to adapt the sites to New York City’s shift to a “career

¹ For instance, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) data show that 56% of all working-age residents do not report income from employment and 84% of NYCHA households earn below New York City’s median income.

² Riccio, James. “Sustained Earnings Gains for Residents in a Public Housing Jobs Program.” MDRC, 2010.

pathways” framework in its workforce programs. As part of this process, the sites received technical assistance focused on building more connections to higher-quality jobs.

Additionally, the report finds that the integration of financial counseling into the Jobs-Plus model was successful. Programs and policies that promote personal financial empowerment and asset building are popular today, and the findings in the report contribute to the evidence base by documenting the positive experience of financial counseling integration that CEO has observed during this program. CEO and its City agency partners have now added financial counseling to all the New York City Jobs-Plus sites, and HUD is including financial counseling as a feature of its national Jobs-Plus expansion.

The evaluation also discusses the challenge of implementing the Earned Income Disallowance (EID) rent incentive, a central component of the model designed to address potential disincentives to work in the rent regulations. Despite the EID’s importance, and despite the fact that the Housing Authority was a partner or, in the case of San Antonio, directly implementing the project, the sites faced substantial challenges in getting participants to take up the EID. There were a variety of reasons for this, including lack of resident knowledge about the EID, questions about how valuable the incentive was, and administrative challenges surrounding Housing Authority implementation. Because of the EID lessons learned through the SIF Jobs-Plus, HUD has developed a more simplified version of the EID for its national replication.

This report is timely because Jobs-Plus is continuing to be replicated across the country. New York City added Jobs-Plus to seven new public housing developments in 2013, with funding from the Young Men’s Initiative, and all of these sites are still operating. The federal government is now funding an expansion of Jobs-Plus to nine new cities through HUD, and as of this writing, HUD has a NOFA out for further expansion as well. CEO is also engaging in several other place-based studies and initiatives, and looks forward to continuing to build evidence for strategies that improve community-wide outcomes.

We thank MDRC for this report, and we greatly appreciate the support of our partner agencies and funders in our ongoing Jobs-Plus collaboration.

Patrick Hart

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Overview

The Jobs-Plus Public Housing Revitalization Initiative (1998-2003) was designed to raise and sustain the employment and earnings of residents of public housing developments. It had three parts: (1) employment services offered at on-site job centers, (2) changes in rent rules that provided financial incentives to work, and (3) community support for work through neighbor-to-neighbor conversations. The initiative was subject to a rigorous evaluation, which found that where implemented fully, Jobs-Plus boosted residents' annual earnings by 16 percent, or \$1,300 per year, an effect that endured seven years without abating. This report investigates how Jobs-Plus was replicated in more contemporary settings, analyzing the early implementation experiences of a community-based provider in the Bronx and the San Antonio Housing Authority in Texas, both funded by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Main Findings

- Providers in the Bronx and in San Antonio were able to enroll substantial proportions of residents of very large housing developments. This represents a strong early indication of program “saturation,” or offers of services. At the same time, providers found that the three components of Jobs-Plus — and especially their integration and coordination with each other — were difficult to manage in practice. Both providers generally placed residents in low-wage work, and struggled to find ways of helping residents who were already employed.
- Rent-based financial incentives were very seldom used by Jobs-Plus members, for reasons largely out of the control of program implementers. In the original demonstration, housing authorities could develop a variety of rent incentives, because they had legal authority to do so. However, in the SIF version of Jobs-Plus, the only rent incentive available to the providers in both the Bronx and San Antonio was the Earned Income Disregard (EID). During early implementation, EID receipt was very low (at about 1 percent of residents in the Bronx and 3 percent in San Antonio), despite providers' extensive efforts to promote its use.
- Jobs-Plus cost \$672 per household per year in the Bronx and \$503 in San Antonio. These costs would likely have increased had residents made greater use of the EID.
- In the SIF version of Jobs-Plus, neither the community-based organization nor the housing authority appeared to have a clear advantage in providing services. Instead, organizations' ability to implement the program appeared to depend on their administrative flexibility, their front-line staff members' ability to work as a team, their ability to tailor their strong workforce development experience to a variety of participants, their ability to conduct vigorous outreach and marketing, and the strength of their connection to property managers.
- The Jobs-Plus “Collaborative,” a support and accountability body made up of local city agencies involved in workforce services, income support, and other social services, emerged as an important entity promoting strong implementation in the Bronx.

Preface

After a rigorous evaluation shows that a program has a positive impact on the lives of low-income people, what happens next? How do funders, program managers, and practitioners collaborate to expand the initiative? How do they remain true to the proven model, while also making changes necessary to accommodate local policies and meet local populations' needs? How do service providers learn to operate differently than in the past, and how can technical assistance support their efforts?

This report explores these questions through an extensive implementation analysis of the expansion of Jobs-Plus under the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) of the National Corporation for Community Service. In 2011, MDRC, working with the Center for Economic Opportunity, part of the New York City's Mayor's Office, helped launch a replication of Jobs-Plus with a community-based provider in the Bronx and with the San Antonio Housing Authority in Texas.

Public housing residents are some of the most disadvantaged households in the country, and the original Jobs-Plus demonstration (1998-2003), is the only employment initiative targeting all of a development's residents to show impacts on their earnings. MDRC's Jobs-Plus research found that, where implemented fully, Jobs-Plus boosted the annual earnings of residents by 16 percent, or \$1,300 per year, an effect that endured for seven years without abating. Evidence from the initial demonstration suggested that all three core elements of Jobs-Plus — employment services, changing rent rules to help “make work pay,” and neighbor-to-neighbor conversations about work and services — needed to be adopted to achieve good impacts.

During the SIF version of Jobs-Plus, contemporary policies and economic realities suggested some adaptations to the original model. For example, practitioners during the initial demonstration had the ability to design a variety of rent incentives, but in the replication they needed to build on a federal policy known as Earned Income Disregard, which proved very challenging. The providers also had to wrestle with ways to promote economic mobility in a market where low-wage work often offers few opportunities for advancement. Finally, they successfully integrated financial counseling into the array of Jobs-Plus services.

This report is particularly timely, as policymakers and practitioners are currently involved in building the next generation of Jobs-Plus through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Jobs Plus Pilot Program, a \$24 million initiative launched in 2015. As MDRC was involved in both the initial demonstration and the SIF version, this report provides a rare examination of what it takes to translate research evidence into broader practice.

Gordon L. Berlin
President, MDRC

Acknowledgments

Many hands contributed to this report, and more took part in the vital work it describes.

The report would not be possible without the efforts of practitioners in New York and San Antonio to implement Jobs-Plus and make it their own; many of these practitioners also contributed to reviews of the document. We especially thank Glenn Bullock, Denise Major, Jessica Nathan, Betty Ann Tamaisar, and Tiara Williams at BronxWorks, and Larry Carter, Joe Dyer, Mary Jane Flores, Aiyana Longoria, and Muriel Rhoder at the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA). Tiara Williams at BronxWorks and Mary Jane Flores at SAHA also provided MDRC with administrative data and technical assistance for analyzing study participants' characteristics and their use of Jobs-Plus services and financial incentives. Adrian Paling and John Weed at BronxWorks, and Hjal Frane and Linda Le at SAHA, also provided valuable information for the cost study.

We thank residents of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and SAHA developments who took the time to speak to researchers about their lives and experiences with the program.

Kate Dempsey and Patrick Hart at the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity brought valued insight to reviews based on their management of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant, their engagement with providers through several generations of Jobs-Plus, and their deep knowledge of the field.

The report also benefited from the comments of representatives from New York City agencies involved in the next generation of Jobs-Plus implementation. These include Sideya Sherman at NYCHA, Sarah Haas and Shanee Helfer at the New York City Human Resources Administration, and Sara Schlossberg at the New York City Department of Small Business Services. In addition, Jose Calderon and Michelle Raymie of NYCHA provided extensive administrative data for the cost study. We also thank reviewers from JBS, who on behalf of the Corporation for National and Community Service commented on two drafts of the report.

At MDRC, many contributed to data collection, analyses, and project implementation. Donna Wharton-Fields was MDRC's director for the SIF Jobs-Plus project and led technical assistance efforts. Stephen Friedman led analyses of management information system data, with Rhiannon Miller. Alice Anigacz and Tojuana Riley provided invaluable data collection, qualitative analyses, and general project support. John Padilla worked on technical assistance for both providers and commented on report drafts, and Kristen Cahill initially provided technical assistance for BronxWorks. Rachel Pedraza collected data and performed analyses of implementation in San Antonio. Jaya Varma assisted with operations work for both providers.

Gordon Berlin, John Hutchins, Beatriz Gil, and Caroline Schultz read and commented upon drafts, and James Riccio provided detailed feedback from his experience as a primary investigator of the original Jobs-Plus demonstration. Johanna Walter helped fact-check cost analyses.

Many thanks to Emma Saltzberg for ably coordinating the report and conducting multiple analyses. Joshua Malbin edited the document, and Carolyn Thomas prepared it for publication.

The Authors

Executive Summary

Jobs-Plus and the Need for Strong Implementation

This report provides extensive implementation analyses of the early experiences (2011-2014) of the Jobs-Plus scale-up and replication under a grant from the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) of the Corporation for National and Community Service to the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City. This effort was conducted in partnership with the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, which oversaw program implementation. Like the original Jobs-Plus Public Housing Revitalization Initiative (1998-2005), the SIF version of Jobs-Plus is designed to raise and sustain the level of employment and earnings among residents of public housing developments. Jobs-Plus has three parts: (1) employment services offered at on-site job centers, (2) changes in rent rules that provide financial incentives to work, and (3) community support for work through neighbor-to-neighbor conversations. The original demonstration was subject to a rigorous evaluation, which found that, implemented fully, Jobs-Plus boosted annual earnings by 16 percent relative to the earnings of residents in comparison developments, an effect that endured for seven years without abating.

Jobs-Plus is currently being replicated even further through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and this report provides important findings related to the implementation of community-based employment programs in low-income neighborhoods, and programs helping individuals who are receiving housing assistance to find work and advance economically. Importantly, the *next* generation of Jobs-Plus is under way through HUD's Jobs Plus Pilot Program, a \$24 million initiative that was launched in federal fiscal year 2015 and that may continue to expand. Insights from the early implementation of SIF Jobs-Plus are particularly important because there is considerable evidence that the strength of implementation determines whether Jobs-Plus has a long-lasting impact on residents. The original demonstration faced many implementation challenges, and only Jobs-Plus developments that fully implemented the model saw long-term earnings differences over control developments.

Implementing Providers

The SIF version of Jobs-Plus was launched in January 2011 as a five-year initiative in the Bronx, New York, and San Antonio, Texas. These programs provide an opportunity to see how Jobs-Plus fares under slightly different circumstances: in one the provider is a housing authority, while in the other it is a nonprofit community-based organization; one delivers services on-site, the other off-site. The two also illustrate different roles of the "Collaborative," a Jobs-Plus governance body and vehicle for interagency coordination.

- **The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA)** provides on-site Jobs-Plus services to residents of Alazan-Apache Courts and Mirasol Homes. Alazan-Apache Courts has 1,022 units in total, mostly in two-level, apartment-style buildings. Mirasol Homes has 174 mixed-use development units. SAHA’s Jobs-Plus program had up to 13 staff members, most of them working in an office at Alazan-Apache Courts.
- **BronxWorks**, a not-for-profit organization, began working in workforce development with the passage of the Welfare Reform Act in 1996. BronxWorks provides off-site Jobs-Plus services to the residents of three New York City Housing Authority developments located in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx. There are 1,516 households spread across the 34 buildings in these developments, and 1,701 working-age adults lived there when Jobs-Plus launched, according to their leases. The BronxWorks Jobs-Plus office is about a 10-minute walk from these development buildings, located in “the Hub,” a busy commercial section of the South Bronx. Generally 15 staff members worked there during SIF Jobs-Plus implementation.

Implementation Lessons from the Bronx and San Antonio

Providers in the Bronx and in San Antonio were able to deliver employment services to substantial proportions of residents. By the beginning of Year 3, SAHA had enrolled 72 percent of the residents in its targeted housing units in Jobs-Plus, while BronxWorks had enrolled 58 percent. These enrollment figures represent a strong early indication of program “saturation,” and are especially impressive given the large size of the developments compared with those in the original demonstration.¹

At the same time, the components of Jobs-Plus — and especially their integration and coordination with each other — were challenging to manage in practice.

Employment Services

- **BronxWorks and SAHA brought strengths to the Jobs-Plus model, including BronxWorks’ extensive job placement network and SAHA’s access to employment opportunities connected with agency contracting.**

Members in the Bronx were more likely to receive job-search help, while those in San Antonio received social services to overcome barriers to employment. Through previous programs BronxWorks had developed relationships with employers in the retail, food, health,

¹The developments in the original demonstration contained between 300 and 500 units.

security, and customer-service industries. SAHA was committed to complying with HUD's Section 3 regulation, which requires that low-income residents be the beneficiaries of job training, employment, and contract opportunities. While both providers developed some opportunities for members with higher levels of education and members who were already employed, both primarily focused on unemployed members with limited education.

- **Both providers generally placed residents in entry-level, low-wage jobs, and did not develop extensive ties to organizations that could provide training or other services to residents or help them advance along “career pathways.” This made it more difficult for Jobs-Plus to engage everyone in the target developments.**

About two in five placements in the Bronx were to positions that paid the minimum wage or slightly above it (\$7.25 to \$8.00 an hour).² About three in five of SAHA's placements were at this wage level. More than two-thirds of SAHA's and approximately half of BronxWorks' placements were to part-time work (less than 35 hours per week). While many residents might not have been adequately prepared for higher-wage work, the fact that SAHA and BronxWorks did not have extensive connections to training programs that could help prepare them for it meant the providers had less to offer residents who were interested in advancing, or who were already employed. (SAHA did make many education referrals, but these referrals did not tend to emphasize career advancement.) Ongoing member engagement was a challenge for both providers: Two months after members joined Jobs-Plus, the proportion who received any service from BronxWorks in a given month dropped by about half. For SAHA, it dropped to a third. Many voluntary programs experience this sort of drop-off, but the Jobs-Plus model emphasizes more regular engagement, even if some may be occurring between staff members and residents in informal settings.

- **BronxWorks successfully integrated financial counseling into Jobs-Plus, an innovation to the “original” Jobs-Plus model.**

This counseling was attempted because chronic financial instability affects many low-income people and was seen as a barrier to program engagement and good outcomes. Special funding allowed BronxWorks to hire two financial coaches. Financial coaches in the Bronx attended intensive training provided by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs' Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE), which provided instruction on how to assess the financial health of residents and repair poor credit. The delivery of financial counseling evolved and improved over time. Early in the initiative, BronxWorks provided budgeting assessments to

²These wages reflect placements before the New York State minimum wage was raised to \$8.00 an hour at the end of 2013.

jobless individuals who often did not have income to budget, making counseling less appealing to them. Over time, financial counseling became a sophisticated tool to engage and retain Jobs-Plus members before and after they found work. Before members found work, it helped some of them address poor credit issues that could prevent employment. After individuals found work, counseling involved more extensive budgeting help, referrals to tax-preparation services, and help navigating financial decisions to avoid future crises. It also became a way of helping employed individuals plan for career advancement, as they considered how to balance the need for income with the need to spend time (and money) on education and training.

Financial Incentives

In general, public housing authorities charge rents fixed at 30 percent of eligible household income. This practice means that as household income rises, rent also increases. While this system makes public housing units affordable to low-income people, some also see it as a “tax” that discourages employment, a claim supported by some studies.³ The financial incentive component of Jobs-Plus is an important way the model can reach beyond those residents directly served by employment services and influence the work behavior of *all* residents of a development, by adjusting rent rules to “make work pay.” In the original demonstration, housing authorities had the ability to develop a variety of rent incentives because they were all Moving to Work sites with legal authority to do so.⁴ In the SIF version of Jobs-Plus, Bronx-Works was only able to utilize a preexisting federal benefit known as the Earned Income Disregard (EID). The EID allows eligible public housing tenants to receive a once-in-a-lifetime exemption from any additional rent that would have been charged due to increased earnings. The EID is limited to two years, and decreases in value after the first year. SAHA has Moving to Work status, and when it recognized the limitations of the EID it developed a modified version that extended for a longer period.

- **The EID was very seldom used by Jobs-Plus members, for reasons largely out of the control of Jobs-Plus implementers.**

During early implementation, EID receipt was very low (at about 1 percent and 3 percent in the Bronx and San Antonio, respectively), despite providers’ extensive efforts to implement the rent incentive. In part, this low usage was because the incentive is not widely implemented across the country; most housing authorities (including those in New York and San Antonio) did not have regular systems in place to apply it, and most tenants were unaware

³See, for example, Brian A. Jacob and Jens Ludwig, “The Effects of Housing Assistance on Labor Supply: Evidence from a Voucher Lottery,” NBER Working Paper No. 14,570 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2008).

⁴The Moving to Work designation gives public housing authorities flexibility in how they spend federal funds and allows them to test innovative approaches.

of it. Over time, both providers developed connections between Jobs-Plus staff members and property managers to implement the EID, but by 2013 not many members had taken advantage of it. This problem is particularly significant because higher receipt of rent incentives (up to 77 percent but averaging around 50 percent) may have been a major factor contributing to the impacts in the original demonstration.

- **Major problems with EID receipt included residents' lack of awareness of the EID's availability, administrative start-up issues, the limited value of the incentive itself, and a lack of trust between residents and housing authorities.**

Because it is such an underused policy, the basic structure of the EID was not initially clear at times even to some Jobs-Plus staff members. Many residents who were part of interviews and focus groups also did not remember the EID having been explained to them. Further complicating matters, during early implementation, property management staff members responsible for implementing the EID did not always know how to do so, and as a result, residents would either be turned away or would have to wait many months before they received it. A final major challenge related to the value of the incentive itself. Public housing tenants generally come to property management annually, to declare their income and determine their rent for the coming year. A household could achieve at least part of the same effect as the EID's one-year rent freeze by not reporting a gain in income until the next recertification.

- **Residents responded best when the EID was explained as simply as possible, when it was associated with a message about economic opportunity and the struggle of low-income households, and when it was directed toward households with enough work and family stability to take advantage of the incentive.**

Although the EID was complicated to explain, over time practitioners developed some innovative ways to explain it more simply. For example, in San Antonio practitioners began describing the EID using a cartoon character called "Mr. Freeze," to illustrate its ability to freeze rents. Better marketing might also improve EID reception. For example, residents believed it was important to acknowledge the struggles in their lives and to talk about how the EID could help alleviate them. Finally, residents and practitioners believed that the EID was most likely to appeal to people who were likely to retain desirable jobs for some time and to households where romantic partners were in a stable relationship — the former because of the once-in-a-lifetime nature of EID, and the latter because someone leaving the apartment could trigger a need to reappear before the housing authority, something that most tenants wanted to avoid.

Community Support for Work

One feature that distinguishes the Jobs-Plus model from traditional employment programs is its goal of implementing services at “saturation” levels. By avoiding strict eligibility criteria, the model aims to get as many residents as possible to use Jobs-Plus services and to infuse the entire housing development with messages about the availability of employment and the opportunity for help in obtaining it. The component of the Jobs-Plus model most directly designed to support saturation is Community Support for Work (CSW). CSW aims to contribute to saturation by connecting residents to Jobs-Plus services formally and informally, and by developing and strengthening resident networks related to employment. In the SIF version of Jobs-Plus, CSW strategies took different forms and evolved and improved over time, but relied primarily on “community coaches.” These were public housing residents hired to conduct outreach and other activities to promote the Jobs-Plus program.

- **As was the case in the original demonstration, resident networks in the SIF developments were not extensive, making it difficult to build on them and support work-related efforts.**

Most of the residents interviewed in both San Antonio and the Bronx described having limited contact with their neighbors. When residents were asked whether they talked to each other about employment opportunities, they often said things like, “People kind of stick to themselves,” or “I like to keep to myself though, like mind your business.” It is also possible that the stigma often attached to public housing limited practitioners’ ability to build community among residents and strengthen social ties on the basis of their common address.

- **Despite this preexisting limitation, providers experimented with a number of strategies that show promise for strengthening resident ties, spreading the word about program services, and supporting employment efforts.**

From the early stages of implementation, Jobs-Plus staff members in San Antonio embraced the goals of CSW, knocking on doors and posting flyers, and organizing and participating in community events. (It took BronxWorks more time to fully implement CSW.) Recently SAHA developed a strategy known as Grass Roots, which uses property management data to guide unit-by-unit outreach. SAHA has also tested a few strategies to support up-and-coming community coaches as “apprentices,” and to encourage resident-to-resident support (such as informal carpooling), some of which have shown promising results. Both providers used well-regarded community coaches, but these coaches required management and training that providers were not always able to supply. Providers also developed relationships with property managers, which proved important for outreach.

- **Findings from the SIF version of Jobs-Plus also demonstrate that CSW is dependent on the other two components of the model.**

If financial incentives are not viable (as was the case with the EID), then CSW cannot publicize their availability. If Jobs-Plus providers do not have access to higher-wage jobs or training opportunities related to career pathways, then working residents may not be interested in hearing about Jobs-Plus.

Supporting Strong Implementation: Learning Jobs-Plus, Establishing Accountability, and Supporting Ongoing Performance

Operating as it did in developments that were larger than those in the original demonstration, the SIF version of Jobs-Plus provides insights as to how to implement the program at a greater scale. After they received their grant awards from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity in March 2011, both BronxWorks and SAHA began to start up their Jobs-Plus programs. Start-up was meant to be a six-month exercise in which the Center for Economic Opportunity worked with providers on their budget and staffing plans, developed service and performance expectations for each of them, and engaged MDRC to help each develop a program design document. BronxWorks ended up launching its Jobs-Plus program in August 2011, SAHA in February 2012.

- **The SIF version of Jobs-Plus had a slow start due to staff turnover and bureaucratic challenges.**

A one- to two-year ramp-up period also occurred during the original demonstration, which saw overall impacts on earnings over time.

- **The process of “learning” Jobs-Plus included a vital period when providers collaboratively developed detailed plans for delivering services.**

In the Bronx, staff members described a positive environment of communication and collaboration during these early months. In San Antonio, after a management shift, staff members at all levels eventually started to become more engaged in the program-design process, and reported that participating in program development and technical assistance helped them understand the Jobs-Plus model.

- **Technical assistance that provided concrete guidance while permitting local ownership of the model also helped providers learn Jobs-Plus.**

There is a continuing debate in the policy literature about the best way to replicate a successful program: Some people feel program administrators should ensure program fidelity

by making sure services are delivered the same way in an expansion effort as they were in the smaller-scale test. Others believe administrators can learn a model more deeply if it consists of “principles” intended to be adapted to local conditions. In the SIF version of Jobs-Plus, the most helpful approach appeared to balance these two extremes. For example, in the Bronx, a “work-book” provided by MDRC helped guide senior leaders as they identified a program director, developed process benchmarks and outcome goals, analyzed existing management information systems, identified office space, created a spending plan, developed consent forms, and devised a supervisory plan. Yet MDRC still prodded BronxWorks to create these plans itself. SAHA staff members, in contrast, felt they had less guidance and fewer templates to develop all the documents required for launch and start-up, and as a result sometimes tended to become stuck on broader and less concrete issues.

- **Providers should also attempt to adopt fully the Jobs-Plus “Collaborative,” a support and accountability body made up of local city agencies involved in workforce services, income support, and other social services.**

Only in the Bronx was the Collaborative fully developed, and there it played several important support functions for Jobs-Plus. New York City’s Center for Economic Opportunity, part of the Mayor’s office, led the formation of the Collaborative by convening a group of representatives from different city agencies with some stake in Jobs-Plus implementation. These included the Human Resources Administration (the city’s welfare agency), the New York City Housing Authority, the Department of Small Business Services (which runs the city’s workforce agencies), and the Office of Financial Empowerment within the Department of Consumer Affairs, which helped support the financial counseling component of BronxWorks’ program. While it took some time and extra effort for all the participants to establish their roles, ultimately city agency representatives and BronxWorks agreed that the Collaborative helped direct both resources and policy backing to BronxWorks’ Jobs-Plus program. This backing was especially important for BronxWorks’ interactions with the housing authority, as BronxWorks was a community organization with no formal standing to dictate housing authority policy.

The Gross Costs of Jobs-Plus

The current research was able to document the costs of operating Jobs-Plus — which was not done in the original demonstration. There are two ways of calculating these costs. “Gross” costs refer to the total outlays related to program operation, whereas “net” costs are calculated in comparison to what expenditures would be in the absence of the program. Because the SIF version of Jobs-Plus was not an impact study, it was not possible to calculate net costs, but gross costs are very important for budgeting and management purposes.

- **In the program’s third year (when operations were in a steady state, beyond the launch phase), the annual cost per household of operating Jobs-Plus was \$672 for BronxWorks and \$503 for SAHA.**

BronxWorks’ larger expenditures can be attributed to higher budgeted overhead (partially because office space for program operations was donated to SAHA but not BronxWorks) and to the financial counseling BronxWorks offered and SAHA did not.

- **The providers also differed in how they allocated their resources. BronxWorks spent the largest share of its budget on employment-related services, while SAHA emphasized Community Support for Work to roughly the same degree as employment-related services.**

Because the rent incentive was so little used, reduced rents accounted for relatively little of the expenditures in both locations, which means that more successful implementation of this aspect of Jobs-Plus could increase program costs substantially.

Service Provision and Provider Capacities

This evaluation benefits from the fact that the SIF version of Jobs-Plus included both a housing authority and a community-based organization as program implementers. While the experiences of only two providers do not provide definitive evidence about whether a housing authority or a community-based organization is better equipped to implement the model, qualitative analyses can lead to some conclusions.

- **Neither the community-based organization nor the housing authority had a clear advantage in implementation. Instead, several types of capacities that could be found in either type of organization emerged as important for Jobs-Plus.**

These capacities involved an organization’s administrative flexibility, its front-line staff’s ability to work as a team, its experience in workforce development and ability to tailor that experience to a variety of participants, its ability to conduct vigorous outreach and marketing, and the strength of its connection to property managers.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, program managers and practitioners should consider the following recommendations:

Employment Services

- **Focus on both the number and the quality of job placements.**

Providers should assess their existing relationships with employers, capitalize on those connections, and develop relationships with a wide array of new employers, particularly those that can offer living wages and opportunities for advancement. Public housing authorities should work with their contractors to generate job opportunities for Jobs-Plus members.

- **Create training opportunities for residents who are already employed.**

While it can be challenging to do so, it may be important to connect Jobs-Plus members with partners that can train people with limited education, as SAHA did with a local community college. Otherwise Jobs-Plus may have little to offer residents who are already employed and seeking advancement.

Financial Incentives

- **Where possible, do not use the EID as a financial incentive for work.**

The mechanisms of the EID, its complexity, and its limited financial value combined to make it little used. Some housing authorities might not have the Moving to Work status that would allow them to change rent rules, and might not be a part of the Jobs-Plus expansion, leaving them the EID as their only option for a rent-based work incentive. In this case they might consider working outside the rent rules altogether to provide an incentive for work. (This approach was attempted in MDRC's Work Rewards demonstration, in which housing voucher holders were given a supplemental cash incentive.) Fortunately, HUD has provided current replicators in the Jobs Plus Pilot Program with a longer-term, simpler rent incentive.

- **Keep rent incentives simple to explain, and integrate the marketing and receipt of the incentives into regular property-management procedures.**

HUD's new Jobs Plus EID, which essentially freezes rents for participating households for the duration of their time in the program, is an example of a rent incentive that is not difficult to understand. Senior leaders and front-line housing staff members should facilitate communication between Jobs-Plus and property management. Finally, housing authorities should assure tenants that the purpose of providing the disregard is not to discover existing housing violations, and change policies if necessary to support this assurance.

Community Support for Work

- **Allocate enough resources to support and train community coaches, and build close relationships with property managers.**

Community coaches are central to CSW. Programs need to allocate time to direct their activities, train them, and supervise them so as to maximize their potential. Property managers were important allies who helped spread the word about the program and the range of services it offered, and who referred residents directly to Jobs-Plus. Future replicators of Jobs-Plus are advised to develop relationships with property managers early on.

- **Develop multiple opportunities for residents to engage in the program.**

In addition to posting flyers and knocking on doors, providers should take advantage of existing community events and programs, and organize new activities to reach out to residents. CSW is not only a way for implementers to “push out” information, but also a way to receive information from residents that can make services more relevant, and a way for residents to share leads with each other about jobs and other opportunities.

Program Management

- **Extensive, detailed technical assistance and training may be necessary for many housing authorities and community organizations.**

Housing authorities may not have experience with workforce or outreach programs emphasizing saturation in targeted developments, or in developing financial incentives. Many community organizations may not have access to high-quality training programs that emphasize career pathways, apprenticeships, and other routes to career advancement.

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.