



NYC Opportunity Response to MDRC's *How Community-Based Organizations Can Use New York State Employment and Wage Data: Learning from New York City's Demonstration (2016-2018)*

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Workforce programs are often challenged by the effort required to stay in contact with program participants to track their employment status, earnings, and professional advancements over time, an issue that access to more sources of administrative records data, such as state employment and wage data, could potentially address. Similarly governments and funders need robust data on these program outcomes to assess the effectiveness of their investments, and make important program and funding decisions.

This report presents lessons learned through MDRC's work with grantees of the Change Capital Fund (CCF), a donor collaborative in which the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity) participates. MDRC, a social policy research firm, on behalf of CCF and NYC Opportunity helped four grantees access New York State unemployment insurance (UI) wage data for people who had participated in their workforce development programs. Ultimately the grantees did not gain access to individual-level data, which was the initial goal of the work, but access to and analysis of aggregate data did help them better understand employment trends for participants overall and key subgroups over time. We worked closely and collaboratively with New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) throughout this demonstration effort, and believe the lessons in this report should provide valuable guidance for other public agencies and their private partners to efficiently access and use administrative data to the benefit of workforce programs.

NYC Opportunity is continually looking for good ways to assess the effectiveness and impacts of its programs, and accessing wage data has been key to understanding the outcomes and impacts of our workforce programs over time. This fit well with the efforts of this CCF wage data project. Since 2014, CCF has been investing in community-based organizations (CBOs) to increase economic mobility in persistently low-income neighborhoods. A common service among the four organizations selected in the first four-year cycle is workforce development, for which all of the grantees track job placement and retention data.

NYC Opportunity was part of the effort to change New York State Labor Law in 2013 to open up access to wage data for research and evaluation purposes. The successful passage of the law presented an opportunity for NYC Opportunity and CCF to explore whether CCF's grantees could access and analyze state UI data. While we have used NYS wage data to evaluate the outcomes of several programs, this is our first project to focus on the utilization of the data by the nonprofits themselves. We selected MDRC through a competitive process to facilitate and document the process. This included providing technical assistance to the grantees to help them identify what they wanted to learn from the data and how to protect the security of participants' sensitive information. It also included acting as a data intermediary to collect participant data from the grantees, transmit them to NYSDOL, receive UI wage data from NYSDOL, and share back with grantees. This report documents the process to inform the efforts of other NYC agencies and CBOs to access UI wage data.

Overall the effort demonstrated that individual-level UI wage data remains challenging for community-based organizations to access and use. While the law has greatly eased access for local government agencies to access this data, more still needs to be done for most CBOs to directly access and use the data themselves. However,



the project showed there was value for the groups in seeking and obtaining access to aggregate data about their participants, especially with technical assistance to support the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Understanding participant outcomes over time is critical for workforce development programs participating in the City's Career Pathways framework, which connects jobseekers to jobs in growth industries with opportunities for advancement. Administrative data, if accessed, can help community-based programs understand how their clients have fared after receiving their services, which in turn can inform service design and planning. With its commitment to funding improvements to grantees' data systems and performance management practices, CCF built the capacity for its grantees to go beyond program data and participate in this wage data effort with MDRC.

The utilization of wage data to support learning by both policymakers and practitioners is a priority for the City. NYC Opportunity is working with multiple City agencies to build internal capacity to track workforce outcomes via a new research platform that will integrate data from across city workforce agencies. This system is built around common metrics established by the City to measure workforce programs the same way across programs, and includes data from multiple agencies as well as NY State wage data that was used in this project with MDRC. The platform will better equip program planners and decision makers with the tools to understand what programs work best for whom, how clients move between programs, and how clients fare after leaving their programs.

The lessons learned from this evaluation, and on our ongoing work to use administrative data to assess and improve workforce programs, will inform our work with City agencies and CBOs as we continue to invest in data solutions that will reduce poverty and advance equity citywide.

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