

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR MOVING CASH ASSISTANCE APPLICANTS AND RECIPIENTS TO WORK: FINDINGS FROM THE JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES EVALUATION

THE JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE
STRATEGIES EVALUATION



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The Effectiveness of Different Approaches for Moving Cash Assistance Recipients to Work: Findings from the Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation

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Contents

Overview..... 1

Executive Summary i

1. Introduction 1

2. Program Approaches Studied 2

3. Populations Served 5

4. The JSA Evaluation: Theory of Change and Research Design 6

 4.1 Theory of Change..... 6

 4.2 Research Design..... 8

5. JSA Evaluation Findings 9

 5.1 Impacts on Service Receipt and Other Short-Term Outcomes..... 9

 5.2 Longer-Term Impacts on Employment, Earnings, and Public Benefit Receipt 15

6. Implications of Findings..... 20

Appendix: Description of JSA Evaluation Sites..... 24

References 27

List of Exhibits

Exhibit 1: Populations Served and Programs Studied in the JSA Evaluation	4
Exhibit 2: Characteristics of Study Participants in the JSA Evaluation, by Site	6
Exhibit 3: Short- and Longer-Term Outcomes Measured for the JSA Evaluation, by Site	7
Exhibit 4: Impacts on Receipt of Employment-Related Assistance, by Site.....	10
Exhibit 5: Impacts on Receipt and Frequency of Group Job Search Assistance, by Site.....	11
Exhibit 6: Impacts on Receipt and Frequency of One-on-One Job Search Assistance, by Site	12
Exhibit 7: Impacts on Receipt of Assistance with Job Search Skills and Workplace Behaviors/Soft Skills in Any Setting (New York City and Sacramento County).....	14
Exhibit 8: Impacts on Receipt of Assistance with Workplace Behaviors and Soft Skills in a One-on-One Setting (Michigan)	15
Exhibit 9: Impacts on Employment and Earnings, by Site.....	16
Exhibit 10: Impacts on Approval, Receipt, and Amount of Cash Assistance (New York City)	18
Exhibit 11: Impacts on Receipt of Cash Assistance and Amount of Cash Assistance Received, by Site (Michigan and Sacramento County).....	19

Overview

This paper summarizes the findings from an evaluation of the relative effectiveness of different approaches to assisting individuals applying for or receiving cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in finding and keeping jobs. It also discusses the implications of these findings for policymakers, program administrators, and researchers. The evaluation, called the Job Search Assistance Strategies (JSA) evaluation, was conducted in three sites—Genesee and Wayne Counties in Michigan; New York City; and Sacramento County in California. The evaluation uses an experimental design: in each of the three sites, TANF applicants or recipients were randomly assigned to one of two programs providing employment-related services (primarily job search assistance). The study measured “differential impacts,” or differences in outcomes between individuals assigned to each of the two programs in each site, comparing their employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt.¹

The two programs evaluated were different in each of the three sites in the study. The New York City and Sacramento County sites are most similar in that they compared programs with more and less demanding participation requirements, although the New York City site served cash assistance applicants and the Sacramento County site served cash assistance recipients. The evaluation in Michigan compared a new goal-oriented coaching program that was designed to help cash assistance applicants and recipients identify employment-related goals and break them into smaller, achievable tasks to one that focused on participation in activities to meet the federal work participation requirement.

The JSA evaluation finds that, for the most part, there were no detectable effects on employment, earnings, and receipt of public benefits over a two-quarter (six-month) follow-up period in any of the sites. While the programs resulted in many of the expected changes in service receipt, none of programs studied were able to alter the employment levels and earnings trajectories of this disadvantaged population of cash assistance applicants and recipients.

Primary Research Questions

- What are the differences in the frequency, mode, and content of the employment-related services received by TANF applicants and recipients in the two programs studied in each site?
- What are the differential impacts of the two programs in each site on employment and earnings outcomes?

¹ The JSA evaluation also includes an implementation study in each of these three sites. In addition, the JSA evaluation includes stand-alone implementation studies, documenting the operation of a promising approach, in Ramsey County, MN and Westchester County, NY.

- What are the differential impacts of the two programs in each site on the quality of jobs obtained?
- What are the differential impacts of the two programs in each site on public benefit receipt? Specifically, what is the effect on receipt of TANF and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits?

Purpose

The TANF program provides cash assistance to low-income families with children, as well as employment-related services to help them increase their earnings and reduce their public benefit receipt. Balancing the provision of cash assistance with individual responsibility, TANF requires states to engage a target share of work-eligible cash assistance recipients in a specified set of employment-related activities, primarily job search assistance, as a condition of benefit receipt. In addition, some states and localities provide employment-related assistance (and require participation in those activities) during the application process. The approaches that states and localities use to provide job search and other employment services in TANF programs vary widely and differ in their content, service delivery mode, and duration and intensity of services.

Past studies have shown that job search assistance services provided as part of a cash assistance program are effective in increasing employment, primarily by helping people find jobs more quickly. But the effects on earnings have been modest, and many families remain in poverty despite the assistance provided. Moreover, job search assistance can be implemented in different ways— in for example group classes, one-on-one, or in self-directed activities—but there is little evidence regarding which ways are more effective. To help bridge this knowledge gap, the Job Search Assistance Strategies (JSA) evaluation was launched in 2015 to identify and rigorously test different approaches to helping TANF applicants and recipients find jobs.

Key Findings and Highlights

Impacts on Service Receipt

- In all three sites, participation in employment-related services, particularly job search assistance, was high, with no differences detected between the program groups.
- In all three sites, the different approaches resulted in some expected differences in the mode, frequency, and content of job search assistance services received by study participants, although some of the differences were small.

- The more demanding programs and the goal-oriented coaching program generally increased the receipt of assistance on job search skills and/or workplace behaviors and soft skills as expected given their program design.

Impacts on Employment, Earnings, and Public Benefit Receipt

- In all three sites, there were no detectable impacts on employment (the confirmatory outcome) or earnings over the six-month follow-up period.
- Among those who worked during the follow-up period, earnings were low in all three sites.
- In New York City, the more demanding participation requirement reduced the proportion of applications that were approved for cash assistance.
- In Michigan and Sacramento County, no impacts on the receipt of cash assistance or SNAP benefits were detected.
- In New York City and Michigan, no differences in job quality as measured by the characteristics of study participant's current or most recent jobs, including wages and benefits, were detected. In Sacramento County, there were impacts on some measures related to job quality.
- Across all three sites, the cash assistance applicants and recipients were a disadvantaged population with low earnings prior to study enrollment, and none of the programs evaluated resulted in changes in their earning trajectories.

Implications of Findings

- Different approaches can be used to achieve similar employment and public benefit outcomes for cash assistance recipients. Given that no one approach yielded unambiguously stronger results, other considerations, such as cost or program preferences, may appropriately drive choices in providing employment-related assistance as part of cash assistance programs.
- The evidence from New York City suggests that a program with a more demanding participation requirement as part of its cash assistance application can reduce the proportion of applicants meeting the requirements for approval. As a result, the more demanding program reduced their cash assistance receipt.
- The programs with higher operational costs did not yield better employment, earnings, or public benefit outcomes.

Methods

Conducted between 2015 and 2018, the JSA evaluation used a random assignment research design to compare outcomes for the two programs in each site. After being determined eligible for a site's programs and consenting to the study, cash assistance applicants and/or recipients were randomly assigned to one of the two programs at that site. The evaluation pre-selected

employment in the second quarter (at six months) after random assignment as the confirmatory outcome for the study. The impact study also estimated effects on earnings, public benefits receipt, and job characteristics.

The evaluation randomly assigned 2,081 cash assistance applicants in Michigan, 2,700 applicants in New York City, and 493 recipients in Sacramento County. The evaluation uses several types of data, including data from the National Directory of New Hires, administrative data on cash assistance and SNAP benefit receipt, and a survey administered to study participants approximately six months after random assignment.

Executive Summary

Policymakers and program administrators have had a long-standing interest in identifying effective strategies to help cash assistance recipients find and keep jobs. Low-income families with children can receive cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and in exchange may be required to participate in employment-related activities, primarily job search assistance, to help them improve their employment and earnings. States are required to engage a target share of families with work-eligible cash assistance recipients in employment-related activities to meet the federal work participation rate (WPR). The approaches that states and localities use to provide job search and other employment services in TANF programs vary widely and differ in their content, service delivery mode, and duration and intensity of services.

This paper synthesizes the key findings from the Job Search Assistance Strategies (JSA) evaluation to identify and rigorously test different approaches to helping cash assistance applicants and recipients find jobs, and discusses the implications of these findings for policymakers, program administrators, and researchers. The study was conceived and funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, within the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Abt Associates, in partnership with Mathematica, conducted the evaluation. The JSA evaluation was conducted in three sites—Genesee and Wayne Counties in Michigan; New York City; and Sacramento County in California. The study uses an experimental design: in each of the evaluation’s three sites, TANF applicants or recipients were randomly assigned to one of two programs designed to help them increase their employment and earnings.

Program Approaches Studied

The two program approaches studied were different in each of the three sites in the evaluation. Each site developed the two programs to be evaluated, in collaboration with the study team, based on specific state or local policy and program interests. Moreover, each site varied in the extent to which the two program approaches served TANF applicants, recipients, or both.

Michigan. Conducted in Genesee County (includes the city of Flint) and parts of Wayne County (excluding Detroit), the evaluation in this site studied an enhancement to the state’s existing TANF program that used goal-oriented coaching to improve employment outcomes. This new approach, called **Michigan Goal Progress Success (MI-GPS)**, was designed to help cash assistance applicants and recipients identify employment-related goals, and break them into smaller, achievable tasks. It also provided flexibility in allowing recipients to participate in activities that do not count toward the WPR, so that they could pursue activities to achieve their goals. This approach was compared to the state’s existing TANF program, which focuses on participation in employment-related activities that meet the WPR requirement. The existing program begins with a 21-day Application Eligibility Period (AEP), during which cash assistance

applicants receive help addressing barriers to work until their case is approved, followed by the “Partnership. Accountability. Training. Hope.” (PATH) program, during which approved recipients are required to participate in employment-related activities. The two-step program is called **AEP/PATH**.

New York City. With the aim of helping cash assistance applicants find jobs before they start receiving benefits, the site compared two approaches for helping “job ready” applicants (using a definition it developed as part of the program design) find employment in the six-week period while their applications are being processed. One approach, the existing **Back to Work** program, required *daily* meetings with staff and participation in job search activities at the program office. A less demanding approach, called **Independent Job Search**, required applicants to search for employment on their own, with no restrictions on timing or location and only one *weekly* meeting with staff at the program office. Cash assistance applicants who did not comply with the participation requirements of the relevant program during this period were denied cash assistance.

Sacramento County. This study site compared two eight-week programs that differed in the content and frequency of the job search assistance provided. Serving cash assistance recipients who were required to work, the **Standard Job Club** required *three weeks* of group classroom instruction on job search and workplace behavior skills and up to *five weeks* of on-site supervised job search. The **Fast Track Job Club** required *three-and-a-half days* of group classroom instruction on job search skills followed by *seven weeks* of independent job search, with *weekly* on-site meetings. Recipients who did not comply with participation requirements could have their cash assistance reduced.

The JSA Evaluation

The JSA evaluation included both an implementation study to examine design and operation of the two programs in each site and an impact study to examine the differential impact of the two programs in each site. The impact evaluation used a random assignment research design to compare outcomes for the two programs in each site. After being determined eligible for a site’s programs and consenting to the study, cash assistance applicants or recipients (depending on the site) were randomly assigned to one of the two programs at that site. The evaluation pre-selected employment in the second quarter (at six months) after random assignment as the confirmatory outcome for the study. A significant positive difference in this outcome between the two programs identifies one as being more effective than the other. The impact study also estimated effects on earnings, public benefits receipt, and job characteristics.

JSA Evaluation Findings

This section discusses the findings of the JSA evaluation in the three sites. This section first discusses the short-term impacts on service receipt. This is followed by longer-term impacts on employment, earnings, public benefit receipt, and job quality.

Impacts on Service Receipt

- *Across all sites, participation in employment-related services, particularly job search assistance, was high, with no differences detected between the program groups in each site.*

The difference in program approaches in each site did not change the overall levels of employment-related assistance received in any of the sites. The overall level of participation in any employment-related activities ranged from 70 to 85 percent across the sites. Job search assistance was the predominant activity in all of the sites; accounting for more than 95 percent of participation.

- *In all three sites, the different approaches resulted in some of the expected differences in both the mode and frequency of job search assistance services received by study participants, although some of the differences were small.*

In New York City, the more demanding approach increased overall receipt and frequency of both group and one-on-one job search assistance. In Sacramento County, overall receipt levels of group job search assistance were similar between its two programs, but group job search was more frequent in the more demanding program and the use of one-on-one assistance was higher for the program with the shorter group job search class. In contrast, in Michigan, where the program under study emphasized a collaborative relationship with a trained coach and more flexibility in participating in activities that counted toward the WPR, participation in group job search assistance was less frequent compared to the standard program.

- *The more demanding programs and the goal-oriented coaching program generally increased the receipt of job search skills and/or workplace behaviors and soft skills as expected given their site-specific program designs.*

In New York City, cash assistance applicants in the more demanding program received more assistance with both job search skills and workplace behaviors and soft skills compared to those in the less demanding programs. In Sacramento County, more of those assigned to the more demanding program received assistance with workplace behaviors and soft skills compared to those assigned to the less demanding program. However, there were no differences in the receipt of assistance with job search skills. In Michigan, study participants in the goal-oriented coaching program received more one-on-one assistance in workplace behaviors and soft skills than did those in the program focused on the WPR requirement.

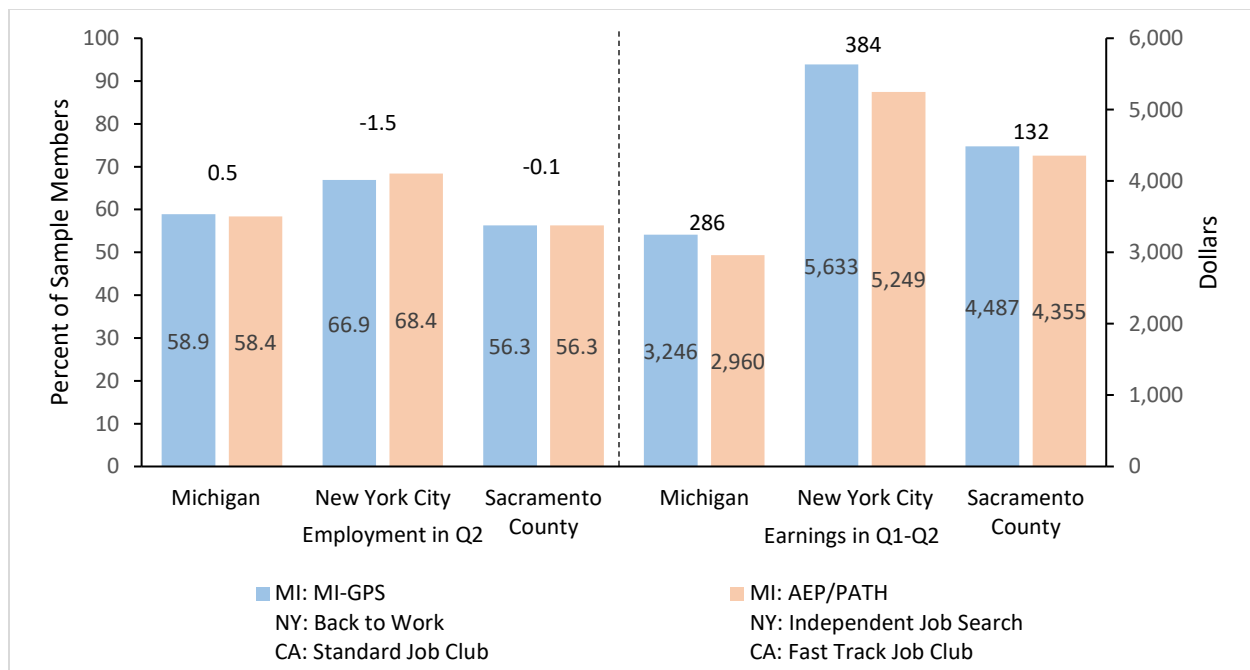
Impacts on Employment, Earnings, and Public Benefit Receipt

This section summarizes the relative impacts of the two programs in each JSA evaluation site on employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt.

- *We did not detect an impact on employment or earnings for the programs studied in any of the sites.*

The JSA evaluation used *employment in the second quarter (at six months) after random assignment* as the confirmatory outcome for the impact study. As shown on the left panel on Exhibit ES-1, by this measure, about 59 percent of study participants in Michigan, 68 percent of those in New York City, and 56 percent of those in Sacramento County were employed, with no differences detected between the two programs studied in each site. Thus, with respect to the confirmatory outcome, the evaluation does not identify one program as more effective than the other in any of the sites. We also did not detect an impact on cumulative earnings during the six-month follow-up period in any of the sites (right panel of Exhibit ES-1). These data were also available for a longer, one-year (four-quarter) follow-up period in all sites, but we did not detect impacts on earnings during this period.

Exhibit ES-1. Impacts on Employment and Earnings, by Site



Source: National Directory of New Hires.

Sample Sizes (study participants): Michigan (MI): 1,908 (950 MI-GPS; 958 AEP/PATH). New York City (NY): 2,686 (1,335 B2W; 1,351 IJS). Sacramento County (CA): 479 (240 Standard Job Club, 239 Fast Track Job Club).

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Individuals who were not employed in the two quarter follow-up period are included in the earnings impacts with earnings of \$0.

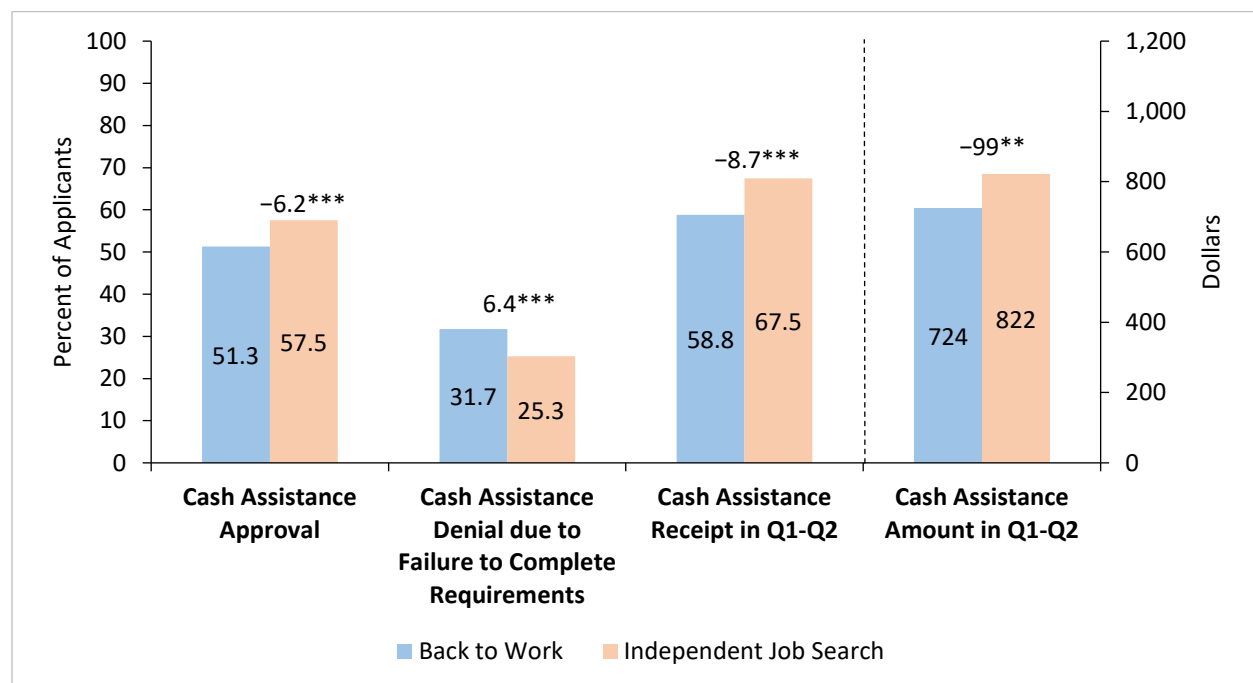
- *Among those who worked during the follow-up period, earnings remained low in all sites and no impacts on measures of job quality were detected.*

Examining average earnings for just those who worked during the follow-up period, we found that earnings were low, ranging from about \$4,700 in Michigan to over \$7,000 in New York City. The JSA evaluation also examined the self-reported characteristics for those study participants who worked during the follow-up period. No impacts on job quality in terms of hourly wages and paid sick leave and holidays were detected.

- *In New York City, the more demanding participation requirement for cash assistance reduced the proportion of applications that were approved for cash assistance.*

The more demanding Back to Work program decreased the approval rate of applications for cash assistance by six percentage points relative to Independent Job Search (Exhibit ES-2). This difference in approval rates between the programs appears to be linked to the more rigorous requirements of the Back to Work program: the Back to Work program increased the proportion of applications declined for failure to complete requirements by almost seven percentage points relative to Independent Job Search. As a result, as also shown on Exhibit ES-2, the Back to Work program lowered cash assistance receipt by almost nine percentage points and reduced the amount of cash assistance received during the follow up period by \$99, compared to Independent Job Search.

Exhibit ES-2. Impacts on Approval, Receipt, and Amount of Cash Assistance (New York City)



Source: New York City Human Resources Administration records.

Sample Size (study participants with administrative records): 2,684 (1,336 B2W; 1,348 IJS).

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

- *In Michigan and Sacramento County, no impacts on the receipt of cash assistance benefits were detected.*

Given the lack of employment and earnings impacts, this finding is not surprising. However, these results also suggest that program differences did not affect the rate at which sanctions for noncompliance were imposed. These sanctions, which could result in benefit reduction (Sacramento County) or benefit termination (Michigan), might be expected given the more demanding participation requirements in Sacramento's Standard Job Club and Michigan's AEP/PATH. Overall, however, we did not detect evidence that this occurred.

Implications of Findings

There is a considerable interest at the federal, state, and local levels in the effects of job search assistance services and participation requirements on employment, earnings, and public benefits outcomes for recipients of cash assistance and other public benefits such as SNAP. The JSA evaluation results have a number of implications for policymakers, program administrators, and researchers to consider.

- *This study shows that different approaches can be used to achieve similar employment and public benefit outcomes for cash assistance applicants and recipients. Given that no one approach yielded unambiguously stronger results, other considerations, such as cost or program preferences, may appropriately drive choices in providing employment-related assistance as part of cash assistance programs.*

The JSA evaluation did not detect that any of the programs studied improved employment and earnings for cash assistance applicants and recipients, but none of the programs negatively affected their economic outcomes either. This suggests that policymakers and program administrators can achieve similar results using different approaches, and preferences may be based on other considerations. The requirement to participate in job search assistance established by the TANF program is designed to achieve multiple objectives, including moving individuals to work, establishing a quid pro quo for receiving benefits, and reducing cash assistance expenditures.

The results of this evaluation suggest that there is a tradeoff among these goals; programs that are effective in achieving one goal are less effective achieving other goals. For example, if reducing cash assistance expenditures is a primary goal, a more demanding participation requirement for cash assistance applicants might be the more attractive option. The Back to Work program in New York City reduced cash assistance expenditures without decreasing employment rates. However, because this reduction in benefit receipt occurred without increasing employment, there are remaining questions about how applicants denied benefits are supporting themselves and their families without jobs.

The study shows that imposing rigorous participation requirements for the purposes of establishing a reciprocal obligation for receiving benefits is possible; however, those more demanding requirements do not increase employment and earnings or reduce public benefits receipt and are likely to cost more than less demanding approaches. For example, Sacramento County's Fast Track Job Club resulted in similar outcomes as the Standard Job Club, which required more staff and recipient time spent in the program office. That these additional efforts may cost more raises questions about the efficacy of establishing participation requirements as a condition of benefit receipt when the requirements do not achieve other TANF program goals, such as improved employment outcomes.

- *The evidence from the New York City site suggests that a program with a more demanding participation requirement as part of its cash assistance application can reduce the proportion of applicants meeting the requirements for approval, and as a result, reduce their cash assistance receipt.*

In New York City, the more rigorous program reduced the proportion of applicants who were approved for cash assistance compared to the less rigorous program. Because the requirement to be approved for assistance was more burdensome, more applicants failed to meet it, resulting in an automatic denial of cash assistance. This led to an overall reduction in both the level and amount of cash assistance received as well as SNAP benefits.

- *Programs with higher operational costs did not yield better employment, earnings, or public benefits outcomes.*

The JSA evaluation did not specifically estimate program costs, but in two of the sites—New York City and Sacramento County—costs were likely greater to operate the more intensive programs as compared to the less intensive programs. The Back to Work program in New York City and the Standard Job Club in Sacramento County required more staff to provide group job search classes and one-on-one assistance than did their alternative. However, the additional financial investment required by the more intensive programs did not result in better economic outcomes for cash assistance applicants and recipients.

- *At all three sites, the cash assistance applicants and recipients generally were a disadvantaged population with low earnings prior to study enrollment, and none of the programs resulted in changes in their earning trajectories.*

Past studies of cash assistance programs have shown that in general, despite the employment assistance provided, applicants and recipients struggled to find and keep jobs and families remained poor. The results of the JSA evaluation confirm those from earlier studies, with the job search assistance provided generally having a limited to no effect on getting people “better” jobs with higher wages and benefits. While differences in the mode, frequency, and content of employment services received were detected between two groups across the sites, these relatively small differences in service provision may not be sufficient to change the

employment and earnings trajectories of these disadvantage populations. This indicates that different strategies, potentially those that address skills deficits or other barriers to employment, may be needed.

- *Michigan's GPS program did not produce impacts on employment, earnings, or public benefits receipt. However, the program is an early iteration of the goal-oriented coaching approach, and the model has continued to be refined.*

Providing goal-oriented coaching within a TANF program is a relatively new approach to improving employment outcomes, and MI-GPS is one of the first such programs implemented and the first rigorously evaluated. While no impacts were detected, it is notable that Michigan's goal-oriented coaching approach produced similar results to the existing program with a strong focus on the WPR. Since the JSA evaluation launched, there continues to be interest and investment in implementing and evaluating this program model. Newer and developing coaching programs continue to modify and enhance coaching approaches, tools, and coach training methods based on earlier program experiences, and perhaps may produce different results. It is also possible that the time horizon expected for impacts from this approach is longer than the one available for this study.

In summary, the JSA evaluation provides new, rigorous experimental evidence on the differential effects of different approaches to providing employment assistance for cash assistance applicants and recipients. The JSA evaluation finds that it is possible to produce changes in service receipt through different service options. However, for the most part, these changes did not affect employment, earnings, and public benefit outcomes. Many of the differences between programs resulted in only small differences in service receipt, and they did not alter the earnings trajectories of this disadvantaged population of cash assistance applicants and recipients.

1. Introduction

Policymakers and program administrators have had a long-standing interest in identifying effective strategies to help cash assistance recipients find and keep jobs. Low-income families with children can receive cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and in exchange may be required to participate in employment-related activities, primarily job search assistance, to help them improve their employment and earnings. States are required to engage a target share of families with work-eligible cash assistance recipients in employment-related activities to meet the federal work participation rate (WPR).² The approaches that states and localities use to provide job search and other employment services in TANF programs vary widely and differ in their content, service delivery mode, and duration and intensity of services.

Past studies have shown that job search assistance services provided as part of a cash assistance program are effective in increasing employment, primarily by helping people find jobs more quickly. But the effects on earnings have been modest (Klerman et al., 2012), and many families remain poor despite the assistance provided (Hendra & Hamilton, 2015). Moreover, little of this research indicated what approaches to providing job search assistance foster improved employment and earnings.

To help bridge this knowledge gap, the Job Search Assistance Strategies (JSA) evaluation was launched in 2015 to identify and rigorously test different approaches to helping cash assistance applicants and recipients find jobs. This paper synthesizes the key findings from the JSA evaluation and discusses the implications of these findings for policymakers, program administrators, and researchers. The study was conceived and funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, within the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Abt Associates, in partnership with Mathematica, conducted the evaluation.

The JSA evaluation was conducted in three sites—Genesee and Wayne Counties in Michigan; New York City; and Sacramento County in California. The study uses an experimental design: in each of the evaluation’s three sites, TANF applicants or recipients were randomly assigned to one of two programs designed to help them increase their employment and earnings.³ The study measured “differential impacts,” or differences in outcomes between individuals assigned to each of two programs in each site, comparing their employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt.⁴

² The TANF statute set the required work participation rate of 50 percent for all families, but that target can be reduced by the credit the state qualifies for under the TANF caseload reduction credit. This credit lowers the target for states that experienced caseload decreases.

³ The JSA evaluation also includes an implementation study in each of these three impact sites. In addition, the JSA evaluation stand-alone implementation studies, documenting the operation of a promising approach, were conducted in Ramsey County, MN and Westchester County, NY.

⁴ For more information about the JSA evaluation and site-specific reports, see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/job-search-assistance-evaluation>.

2. Program Approaches Studied

The two program approaches studied were different in each of the three sites in the evaluation. Each site developed the two programs to be evaluated, in collaboration with the study team, based on specific state or local policy and program interests. Moreover, each site varied in the extent the two program approaches served TANF applicants, recipients, or both. Exhibit 1 summarizes the program approaches evaluated in each of the three sites; the approaches are described below.

Michigan

Conducted in Genesee County (including Flint) and parts of Wayne County (excluding Detroit), the evaluation in this site studied an enhancement to the state's existing TANF program that used goal-oriented coaching to improve employment outcomes (see the text box).⁵ This new approach, called **Michigan Goal Progress Success (MI-GPS)**, was designed to help cash assistance applicants and recipients identify employment-related goals, and break them into smaller, achievable tasks. It also provided flexibility in allowing recipients to participate in activities that do not count toward the WPR, so that they could pursue activities to achieve their goals.

This approach was compared to the state's existing TANF program, which focuses on participation in employment-related activities that meet the WPR requirement. The existing program begins with a 21-day Application Eligibility Period (AEP), during which cash assistance applicants receive help addressing barriers to work until their case is approved, followed by the "Partnership. Accountability. Training. Hope." (PATH) program, during which approved recipients are required to participate in employment-related activities. The two-step program is called **AEP/PATH**. Those not complying with MI-GPS or AEP/PATH program requirements could be sanctioned and have their cash assistance terminated.

Goal-Oriented Coaching: Studied in Michigan JSA Site

Policymakers and program operators have been exploring the potential of goal-oriented coaching approaches to help cash assistance recipients improve their employment outcomes. These approaches are based on psychology and neuroscience research that suggests chronic stress associated with living in poverty hinders the development of planning, decision-making, and organizational skills. Sometimes called *executive* or *self-regulation* skills (Blair & Raver, 2016), these skills are considered critical for adult success in goal attainment related to employment and other areas of life.

Goal-oriented coaching uses trained coaches to work with recipients to identify employment-related goals, break them into small tasks, and provide support to help them achieve the tasks. Recipients have ownership over goal setting and activities needed to attain goals. Coaches also help recipients reflect on their strengths rather than weaknesses so that they can select and work toward goals and tasks that are a good fit with their abilities, interests, and needs.

⁵ See <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/job-search-assistance-evaluation> for the Michigan JSA evaluation report.

Michigan's MI-GPS program is one of the early efforts to incorporate a goal-oriented coaching approach into a TANF program, and the JSA evaluation provides the first rigorous evidence on the impact of an employment program that explicitly addresses goal achievement.

New York City

With the aim of helping cash assistance applicants find jobs before they start receiving benefits, the site compared two approaches for helping “job ready” applicants (using a definition it developed as part of the program design) find employment in the six-week period while their applications are being processed. One approach, the existing **Back to Work (B2W)** program, required *daily* meetings with staff and participation in job search activities at the program office. A less demanding approach, called **Independent Job Search (IJS)**, required applicants to search for employment on their own, with no restrictions on timing or location and only one *weekly* meeting with staff at the program office. Cash assistance applicants who did not comply with B2W or IJS participation requirements during this period were denied cash assistance.⁶

Sacramento County

This study site compared two eight-week programs that differed in the content and frequency of the job search assistance provided. Serving cash assistance recipients who were required to work, the **Standard Job Club** required *three weeks* of group classroom instruction on job search and workplace behavior skills and up to *five weeks* of on-site supervised job search. The **Fast Track Job Club** required *three-and-a-half days* of group classroom instruction on job search skills followed by *seven weeks* of independent job search, with *weekly* on-site meetings. Recipients who did not comply with participation requirements could have their cash assistance reduced.⁷

Overall, the New York City and Sacramento County are most similar in that they compared more and less demanding participation requirements, although the New York City site served cash assistance applicants and the Sacramento County site served cash assistance recipients. Michigan is different from the other two sites in that it examined a new goal-oriented coaching-focused enhancement to its existing TANF program that provided flexibility in meeting the WPR.

⁶ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/implementation-and-relative-impacts-of-two-job-search-assistance-programs-in-new-york-city>

⁷ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/implementation-and-relative-impacts-of-two-job-search-assistance-programs-in-sacramento-county-california>

Exhibit 1: Populations Served and Programs Studied in the JSA Evaluation

Site	Population Served	Programs Studied	
		Goal-Oriented Coaching	Existing Program Focused on Compliance with WPR
Michigan (Genesee County, including the city of Flint; and Wayne County, except the city of Detroit)	TANF applicants and recipients who were required to work, including single- and two-parent families.	<p>MI-GPS. A new, goal-oriented coaching approach developed as an enhancement to the existing TANF program. Program included (1) a redesigned orientation emphasizing collaboration between coaches and recipients; (2) goal-oriented coaching by trained coaches that emphasized recipient-driven goal identification and task planning to attain goals; (3) new tools to help coaches facilitate goal setting and monitor activities; and (4) flexibility to allow participation in activities that do not count toward the federal work participation requirement. Program started at application and continued if applicant was approved to receive benefits.</p> <p>Noncompliance could result in benefit termination, although recipients were given several warnings to comply.</p>	<p>AEP/PATH. The state's existing TANF employment services program, primarily focused on participation in required work activities (through the PATH program) after an initial period of addressing employment barriers (through the AEP program). The AEP/PATH orientation focuses on program requirements and compliance. Staff assign recipients to activities designed to fulfill the federal work participation requirement, and monitor recipients' compliance with these requirements.</p> <p>Noncompliance could result in benefit termination.</p>
		More Demanding	Less Demanding
New York City (Brooklyn and Queens)	"Job ready" applicants to New York City's cash assistance programs, including those for single parents and childless adults.	<p>B2W. Required 35 hours of participation in job search activities per week provided primarily at the Back to Work program office, with attendance at the program office required daily. Services included group classes and one-on-one meetings to improve job search skills and workplace behaviors and soft skills. Provided during the six weeks after applicants applied for benefits and while their applications were being processed.</p> <p>Applicants who did not comply were denied cash assistance.</p>	<p>IJS. Required cash assistance applicants to search for employment independently for 35 hours per week and to meet with staff at the program office once a week. The group classes and other job search assistance provided by Back to Work were available as options, but not required. Provided during the six weeks after applicants applied for benefits and while their applications were being processed.</p> <p>Applicants who did not comply were denied cash assistance.</p>
Sacramento County, California	TANF recipients who were required to work, including single- and two-parent families.	<p>Standard Job Club. Three weeks of group classroom instruction (consisting of one week of instruction on soft skills designed to help individuals succeed in the workplace and two weeks of instruction on job search skills), followed by up to five weeks of supervised job search, with daily one-on-one assistance from staff.</p> <p>Noncompliance could result in benefit reduction.</p>	<p>Fast Track Job Club. Three-and-a-half days of group classroom instruction primarily focused on job search skills, followed by up to seven weeks of independent job search, with weekly one-on-one assistance from program staff.</p> <p>Noncompliance could result in benefit reduction.</p>

3. Populations Served

The three sites in the JSA evaluation designed the two programs to serve different segments of the cash assistance population (see Exhibit 1). Specifically, the programs studied in Michigan served both cash assistance applicants and recipients who were required to work as defined by the TANF statute.⁸ As discussed above, the New York City site served “job ready” cash assistance applicants. Sacramento County served cash assistance recipients, and who were required to work as defined by the TANF statute. Michigan’s and Sacramento County’s programs served two-parent and single-parent families.⁹ New York City’s programs served single parents as well as childless (primarily male) adults.

These differences in program design resulted in differences in the characteristics of the study participants across the three sites (see Exhibit 2). All the populations served were disadvantaged, which was expected given they were applying for or receiving cash assistance, but there are important characteristic differences. Reflecting the extent to which the programs did or did not serve members of two-parent families and childless adults (both more likely to be male), Michigan served a predominantly female population, whereas New York City and Sacramento County served a larger portion of men. All programs served a substantial portion with less than a high school diploma (about one-quarter), although almost half of the study participants in New York City had some college, reflecting its “job ready” eligibility requirement. Sacramento served a more racially diverse population, while those served in Michigan and New York were predominantly black.

Sacramento County served a population with a longer cash assistance history, with almost two thirds reporting they received cash assistance for two years or more. In contrast, more than half of study participants in Michigan and New York City reported they had never received cash assistance prior to their application. Similarly, one third of study participants in Sacramento County had not worked in the year prior to study enrollment, compared to less than one quarter in Michigan and New York City. Regardless of the site, average annual earnings in the year before study enrollment (including for those who did not work) were low, ranging from about \$6,800 in Sacramento County to about \$11,000 in the higher-cost region of New York City.

⁸ Cash assistance recipients can be exempted from work requirements (and are not required to participate in work activities) if they are ill or incapacitated; caring for an infant younger than 12 months old or an ill or incapacitated family member; pregnant and medically unable to work; or age 60 or older.

⁹ The Michigan two-parent FIP program was funded by state resources rather than federal TANF funds.

Exhibit 2: Characteristics of Study Participants in the JSA Evaluation, by Site

Characteristic	Michigan	New York City	Sacramento County
Female (%)	91.7	57.0	69.5
Race/Ethnicity (%)			
Black	60.3	74.4	35.4
White	32.6	6.7	33.9
Hispanic	3.9	15.3	15.4
Education (%)			
Less than high school diploma or GED or equivalent	27.9	20.0	24.2
Some college or greater	35.9	47.1	41.6
Public Benefits Receipt (%)			
Never received TANF	54.7	59.9	2.9
Received TANF for 2 years or more	23.0	21.1	65.6
Employment and Earnings			
No earnings in 4 quarters prior to random assignment (%)	22.8	17.2	35.5
Earnings in 4 quarters prior to random assignment (\$)	7,186	10,856	6,812
Earnings in 4 quarters prior to random assignment for those who worked (\$)	9,308	13,111	10,561

Resources: Baseline Information Form (demographics in Michigan and Sacramento County; TANF history in all sites). New York City Human Resources Administration records (demographics in New York City). National Directory of New Hires (Employment and Earnings).

Sample Sizes (study participants): Michigan: 2,081, New York City: 2,698, Sacramento County: 493.

Notes: Each category shows selected responses and do not sum to 100 percent. Sample sizes vary by characteristic due to item nonresponse.

4. The JSA Evaluation: Theory of Change and Research Design

The JSA evaluation is designed to build on and strengthen the research evidence on effective strategies to help cash assistance applicants and recipients find employment and reduce their public benefit receipt. The theory of change motivating the research design and the evaluation design are described below.

4.1 Theory of Change

A *theory of change* underlies the research design for the evaluation in each site. Because the three sites differed in the two programs that were studied, each site had a different theory of change. That is, each site had its own hypothesis regarding the mechanisms by which its two programs would—if successful—produce longer-term changes related to employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt. Given that the interventions were designed to move individuals to work quickly (e.g. relative to other strategies such as occupational training), longer-term outcomes were defined as those that occurred within a six month (two quarter) follow-up period.

In each site, the evaluation compared two programs that varied in several dimensions of the employment-related services that cash assistance applicants and recipients received.

Differences in service receipt was the key short-term outcome expected to affect longer-term outcomes, and the JSA evaluation measured several aspects of service receipt:

- *The level and type of activities received*: overall participation levels in employment-related activities, particularly job search assistance, but also other types of activities such as work experience or education and training.
- *Mode and frequency*: whether services were provided in group or one-on-one settings and how often applicants and recipients attended (weekly or more often).
- *Content*: the extent to which applicants and recipients received assistance with (1) job search skills, such as how to fill out a job application or preparing for an interview; and (2) workplace behaviors and soft skills, such as communication and time and stress management, that help people succeed in the workplace as well as in their job search.

In Michigan, additional short-term outcomes were measured, but the longer-term outcomes each site expected to produce were the same: **increased employment and earnings, decreased public benefit receipt, and improved job quality**. For each site, Exhibit 3 below shows (1) the expected changes in service receipt and other short-term outcomes; and (2) the resulting longer-term outcomes expected.

Exhibit 3: Short- and Longer-Term Outcomes Measured for the JSA Evaluation, by Site

Site	Short-Term Outcomes	Longer-Term Outcomes
Michigan MI-GPS compared to AEP/PATH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased participation in activities designed to meet goals (versus to meet WPR) • Increased assistance from trained coaches with developing skills for setting and meeting goals • Improved goal-related skills • Increased motivation to pursue goals and accomplish tasks • Increased grit • Increased self-efficacy • Reduced barriers to employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased employment • Increased earnings • Decreased public benefit receipt • Improved job quality
New York City B2W compared to IJS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher level and frequency of participation in group and one-on-one job search assistance services • Increased receipt of assistance with developing job search skills • Increased receipt of assistance with workplace behaviors and soft skills 	
Sacramento County Standard Job Club compared to Fast Track Job Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher level and frequency of participation in group and one-on-one job search assistance services • Increased receipt of assistance with developing job search skills • Increased receipt of assistance with workplace behaviors and soft skills 	

The theory of change was similar for New York City and Sacramento County. The studies in these sites also were similar in that they compared the effects of programs with *more demanding* versus *less demanding* participation requirements: one program that required applicants and recipients to participate in a range of job search assistance services at the

program office was compared to a program allowing them to spend more time looking for jobs on their own with minimal assistance from program staff. As a result, it was expected that the more demanding program's short-term outcomes would be increased receipt of group job search activities that were provided at the program office (many of which had a focus on workplace behaviors and soft skills) and increased frequency of one-on-one job search assistance provided by program staff.

In these two sites, it was not clear at the outset which program would produce better longer-term outcomes. On the one hand, the greater amount of instruction on job search and workplace skills provided through the more demanding programs was expected to increase employment and earnings levels. On the other hand, the additional time and more rigorous attendance requirement might cause some to participate sporadically or drop out of the program without finding a job, and possibly resulting in benefit denial (New York City) or benefit reduction (Sacramento County) due to noncompliance. In these cases, cash assistance receipt could decline without an increase in employment.

In contrast, the Michigan site had a different theory of change to produce the longer-term outcomes. That evaluation examined effects of a *goal-oriented coaching* program compared to one more *focused on meeting the WPR*. In that site, short-term outcomes related to improved goal setting and achievement were expected to lead to longer-term impacts on employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt. These short-term outcomes included participation in a broader range of activities to meet employment-related goals; greater assistance on developing goal-related skills; increased motivation; increased perseverance to attain long-term goals despite challenges, sometimes called “grit” (Duckworth et al., 2007); greater belief in one's ability to perform at a high level, known as “self-efficacy” (Bandura, 2012); and reduced barriers to employment.

4.2 Research Design

The JSA evaluation included both an implementation study to examine design and operation of the two programs in each site and an impact study to examine the differential impact of the two programs in each site. (This paper focuses on results from the impact study). The impact evaluation used a random assignment research design to compare outcomes for the two programs in each site. After being determined eligible for a site's programs and consenting to the study, cash assistance applicants/recipients were randomly assigned to one of the two programs at that site. The evaluation *pre-selected employment in the second quarter (at six months) after random assignment as the confirmatory outcome* for the study. A significant difference in this outcome between the two programs identifies one as being more effective than the other. The impact study also estimated effects on earnings, public benefits receipt, and job characteristics.

The evaluation randomly assigned 2,081 cash assistance applicants in Michigan, 2,700 applicants in New York City, and 493 recipients in Sacramento County. The evaluation used several types of data. The Baseline Information Form completed by study participants at

enrollment provided information on their demographic characteristics, education, and employment history (Exhibit 2). The National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) provided employment and earnings data for a two-quarter (six-month) follow-up period.¹⁰ Each site provided administrative data on cash assistance receipt as well as receipt of food assistance benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for a three-quarter (nine-month) follow-up period. A study participant follow-up survey at six months after random assignment provided information on other outcomes not available through administrative data. (Sample sizes vary for each of the data sources.)

5. JSA Evaluation Findings

This section discusses the findings of the JSA evaluation in the three sites. We do not report the full results of the implementation study, which examined program designs and operations in the three sites. However, it is important to note that the implementation study found that in each of the sites, the two program approaches were implemented with overall fidelity to their specific designs and differed as intended. Thus, the impact study provides a fair test of the effects of the two program approaches at each site.

This section discusses impacts on service receipt and other short-term outcomes expected to drive impact on longer-term outcomes. It then turns to those longer-term impacts on employment, earnings, public benefit receipt, and job quality. Due to differences in program design and populations served at the three sites, it is not appropriate to compare the outcomes of one site to the outcomes of the others. Rather, this summary reports on differential impacts of the two programs studied in *each* site. In general, we report impacts when the statistical tests clearly imply the result is not due to chance. Exceptions are explicitly noted. “No difference detected” does not necessarily mean that no difference exists; impacts too small to be detected may exist.¹¹

5.1 Impacts on Service Receipt and Other Short-Term Outcomes

This section describes the impacts on service receipt and other short-term outcomes measured for the three sites in the JSA evaluation.

¹⁰ While the evaluation focuses on a six-month follow-up period, NDNH data was available for a longer-follow-up period of one year.

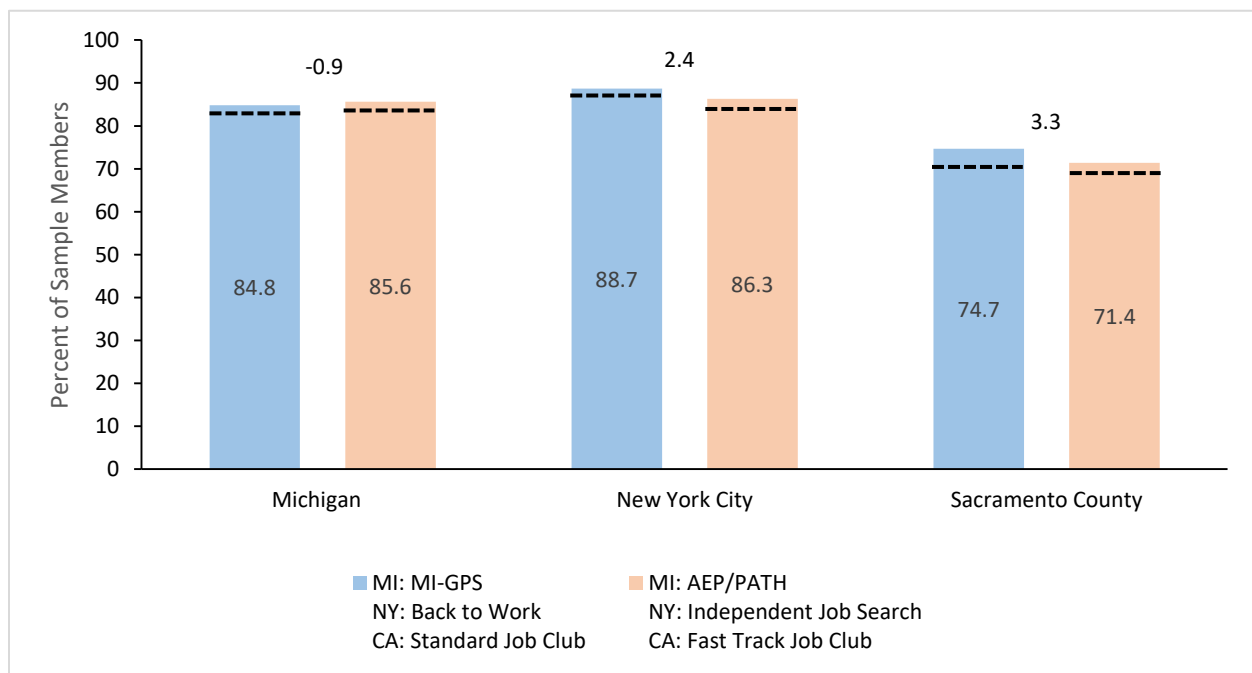
¹¹ For the study’s confirmatory outcome, employment in the second quarter (at six months) after random assignment, (shown in Exhibit 9), sample sizes for the NDNH data limit the ability to detect differences, particularly those that are small. Due to survey nonresponse, impact estimates for service receipt and other short-term outcomes are less precise than impact estimates for employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt, which rely on administrative data. See individual site reports for details on confidence intervals for each measure.

- *Across all sites, participation in employment-related services, particularly job search assistance, was high, with no differences detected between the program groups in each site.*

The difference in program approaches in each site did not change the overall levels of employment-related assistance received in any of the sites. In Michigan and New York City, about 85 percent of study participants participated in any employment-related activity; in Sacramento County, about 70 percent participated (Exhibit 4). Of the employment-related assistance received, job search assistance was the predominant activity in all of the sites; accounting for more than 95 percent of participation (levels of participation in job search assistance are indicated by dotted lines in Exhibit 4). The high levels of participation for both groups across the sites are not surprising given that all of the programs required participation in employment-related services in order to receive cash assistance.

In Michigan, we observed no differences in the types of activities attended between its two programs (MI-GPS versus AEP/PATH), with job search being the primary activity for both groups. This finding is noteworthy because the goal-oriented coaching program was flexible in allowing activities that did not meet the WPR, which may have resulted in lower participation in employment-related activities.

Exhibit 4: Impacts on Receipt of Employment-Related Assistance, by Site



Source: Six month follow-up survey.

Sample Sizes (survey respondents): Michigan (MI): 1,325 (675 MI-GPS; 650 AEP/PATH). New York City (NY): 1,580 (768 B2W; 812 IJS).

Sacramento County (CA): 240 (120 Standard Job Club; 120 Fast Track Job Club).

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

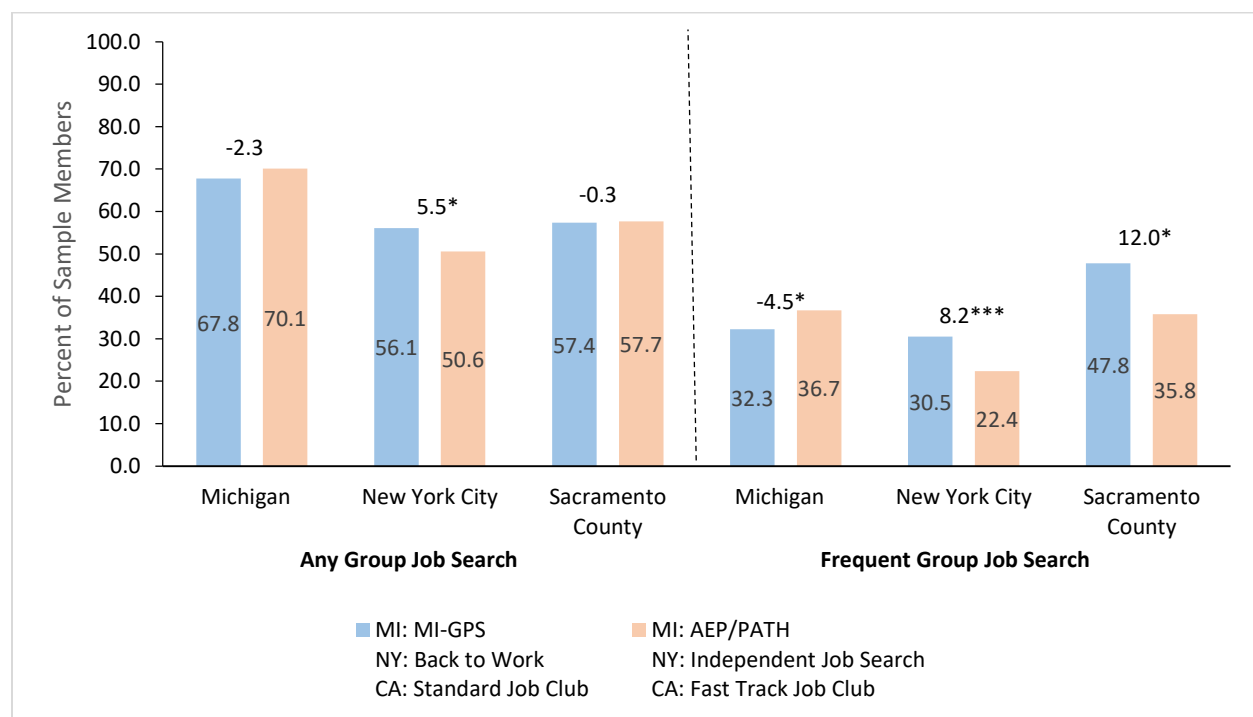
Dashed lines appear at the level of receipt of job search assistance. Michigan: 83.1% vs. 84.1%; New York City: 87.7% vs. 84.9%; Sacramento County: 71.1% vs. 69.2%. None of the differences is significant.

- *In all three sites, the different approaches resulted in some expected differences in both the mode and frequency of job search assistance services received by study participants, although some of the differences are small.*

Job search assistance could be provided through two modes: (1) group job search classes, typically using an established curriculum or addressing a specific topic; or (2) one-on-one meetings with program staff. Moreover, job search assistance could be required at different frequencies; for example, daily or weekly. Based on responses to the follow-up survey, Exhibit 5 shows the levels and frequency of participation in group job search classes; Exhibit 6 shows this same information for one-on-one job search assistance.

As shown on Exhibit 5, in New York City, the more demanding approach increased overall receipt and frequency of group job search assistance receipt by 5 percentage points. In Sacramento County, overall receipt levels of group job search assistance were similar between its two programs, but group job search was more frequent (more than twice a week) in the more demanding program. In contrast, in Michigan, where the study examined the impact of providing goal-oriented coaching through a collaborative relationship with a trained coach and flexibility in participating in activities that counted toward the WPR, participation in group job search assistance was less frequent.

Exhibit 5: Impacts on Receipt and Frequency of Group Job Search Assistance, by Site



Source: Six month follow-up survey.

Sample Sizes (survey respondents): Michigan (MI): 1,325 (675 MI-GPS; 650 AEP/PATH). New York City (NY): 1,580 (768 B2W; 812 IJS).

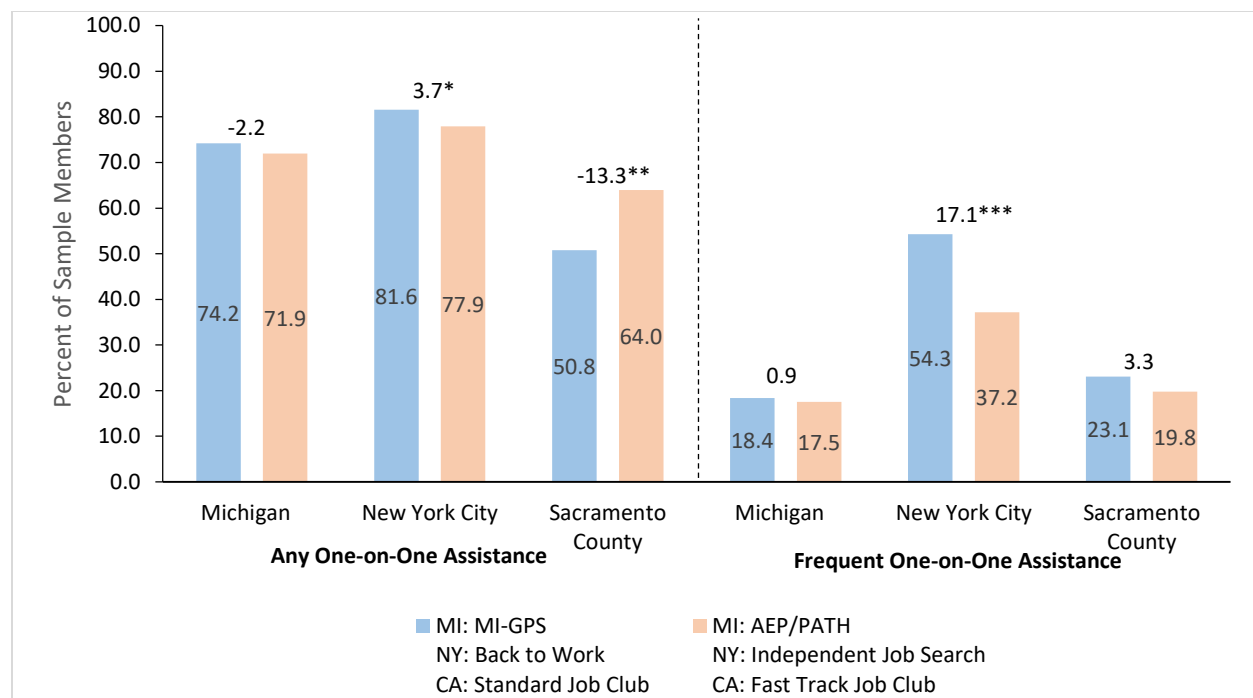
Sacramento County (CA): 240 (120 Standard Job Club; 120 Fast Track Job Club).

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Frequent participation is defined as at least twice a week during the early weeks after random assignment. This time period roughly aligns to when participation in job search assistance activities was required.

Exhibit 6 shows similar results across the sites for receipt of one-on-one job search assistance, with differences that are largely consistent with program design. Receipt of one-on-one job search assistance was higher for the more demanding program in New York City, as was the frequency at which it was received. In Sacramento County, which examined approaches that varied in the duration of group classes, receipt of any one-on-one assistance was higher for the program with the shorter group job search class (three-and-a-half days versus three weeks), but the frequency of one-on-one assistance was indistinguishable for the two programs. In Michigan, the goal-oriented coaching approach did not differ significantly from the existing approach in the level or frequency of receipt of one-on-one assistance.

Exhibit 6: Impacts on Receipt and Frequency of One-on-One Job Search Assistance, by Site



Source: Six month follow-up survey.

Sample Sizes (survey respondents): Michigan (MI): 1,325 (675 MI-GPS; 650 AEP/PATH). New York City (NY): 1,580 (768 B2W; 812 IJS).

Sacramento County (CA): 240 (120 Standard Job Club; 120 Fast Track Job Club).

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Frequent participation is defined as at least twice a week during the early weeks after random assignment. This time period roughly aligns to when participation in job search assistance activities was required.

- *The more demanding programs and the goal-oriented coaching program generally increased the receipt of job search skills and/or workplace behaviors and soft skills as expected given their program design.*

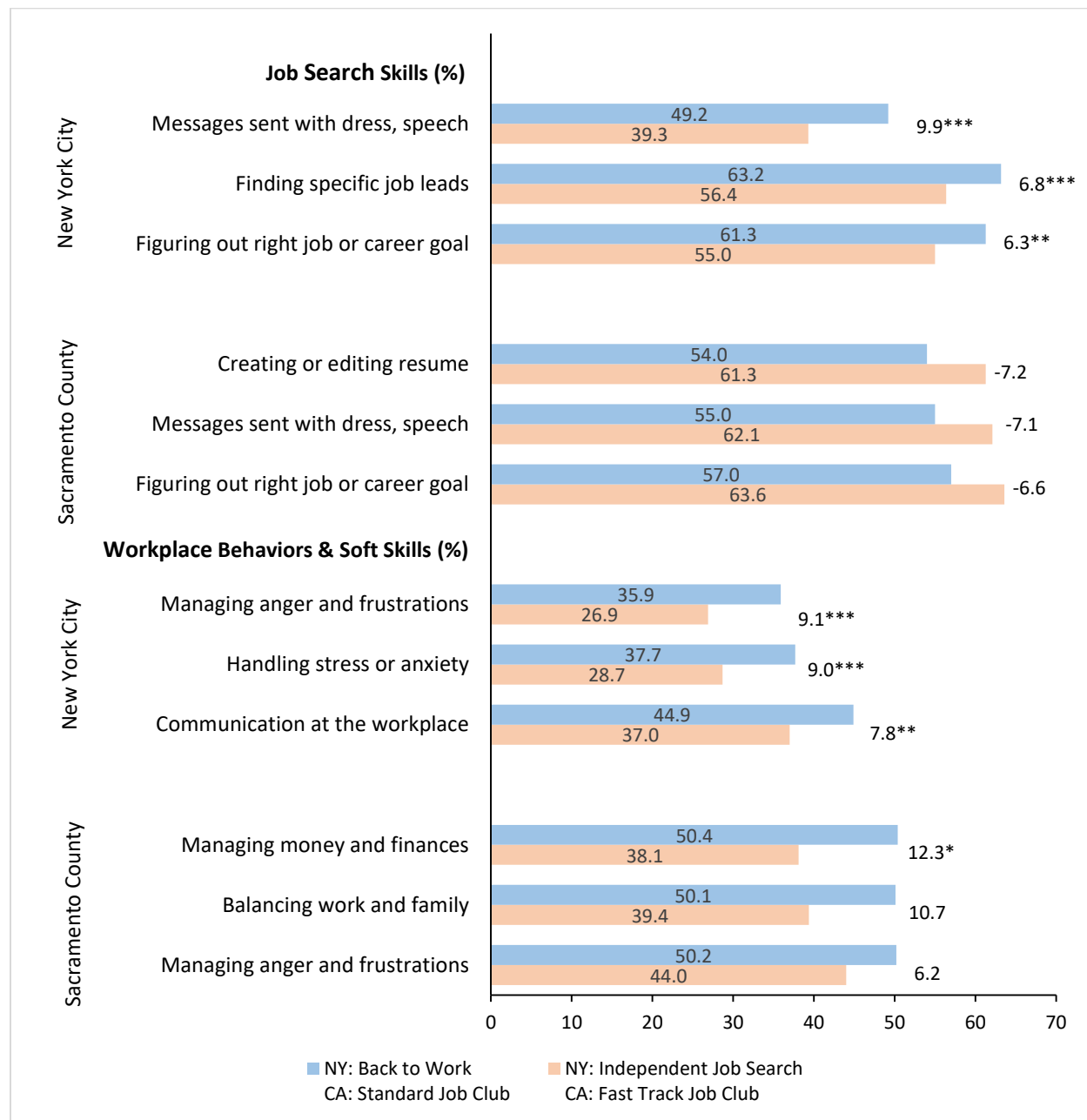
Job search assistance could help cash assistance applicants and recipients develop two types of competencies: (1) Job search skills designed to help them find and apply for jobs. The JSA evaluation measured the receipt of eight skills in this area, including practicing for interviews, developing resumes, and learning about appropriate speech and dress. (2) Workplace behaviors and soft skills that help people succeed in the workplace as well as in their job search. The JSA

evaluation measured the receipt of 10 skills in this area including setting and managing goals, balancing work and family, problem solving in work or personal life, and handling stress or anxiety.

For New York City and Sacramento County, Exhibit 7 shows the impact on receipt of both job search and workplace behaviors and soft skills provided in either a group or a one-on-one setting. For illustrative purposes, the skills in each category with the largest differences are shown. In New York City, cash assistance applicants in the more demanding Back to Work program received more assistance with both job search skills and workplace behaviors and soft skills compared to those in the IJS program.

In Sacramento County, more of those assigned to the more demanding Standard Job Club received assistance with workplace behaviors and soft skills compared to those assigned to the Fast Track Job Club.¹² However, there were no differences in the receipt of assistance with job search skills. The observed difference reflects the week-long group class provided as part of the three-week Standard Job Club focused specifically on workplace behavior and soft skills.

¹² The evidence for the impact on workplace behaviors and soft skills is a joint statistical test that combines results across the measured workplace behaviors and soft skills. Given the small sample size in the Sacramento County site, only a relatively large difference on individual survey items could be detected.

Exhibit 7: Impacts on Receipt of Assistance with Job Search Skills and Workplace Behaviors/Soft Skills in Any Setting (New York City and Sacramento County)


Source: Six month follow-up survey.

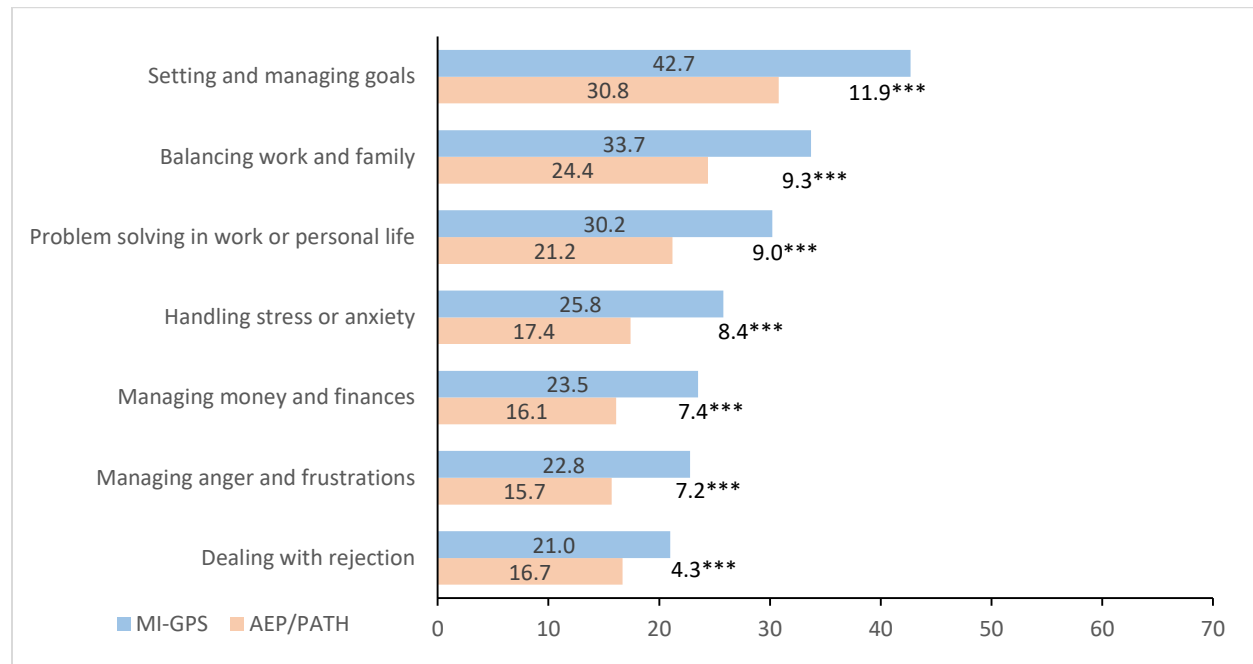
Sample Sizes (survey respondents): New York City (NY): 1,580 (768 B2W; 812 IJS). Sacramento County (CA): 240 (120 Standard Job Club; 120 Fast Track Job Club).

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent. Test of null-hypothesis that all *New York job search skills* impacts are zero: $F(8,1563) = 2.41$; p -value = .01. Test of null-hypothesis that all *New York workplace behaviors and soft skills* impacts are zero: $F(10,1561) = 3.02$; p -value < .01. Test of null-hypothesis that all *Sacramento workplace behaviors and soft skills* impacts are zero: $F(10,230) = 1.74$; p -value = .07.

In Michigan, as shown on Exhibit 8, study participants in the goal-oriented coaching program, MI-GPS, received more one-on-one assistance in workplace behaviors and soft skills than did those in AEP/PATH. The MI-GPS program did not detectably affect the level of receipt of

assistance with job search skills (not shown). Given the nature of the goal-oriented coaching approach, we would expect greater assistance in these skills through the one-on-one meetings with program staff compared to the AEP/PATH program.

Exhibit 8: Impacts on Receipt of Assistance with Workplace Behaviors and Soft Skills in a One-on-One Setting (Michigan)



Source: Six-month follow-up survey.

Sample Size (survey respondents): 1,325 (675 MI-GPS; 650 AEP/PATH). Sample sizes vary for individual outcomes due to item nonresponse.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Test of null-hypothesis that all one-on-one workplace behaviors and soft skills impacts are zero: $F(10,1315) = 2.95$; $p\text{-value} < .01$.

- ***The goal-oriented coaching program in Michigan, MI-GPS, increased self-efficacy compared to the AEP/PATH program. However, MI-GPS did not affect other short-term outcomes related to goal-oriented coaching.***

Self-efficacy is the belief in the ability to exert control over one's own life; we measured this outcome using a composite score of responses to questions on the follow-up survey. As predicted by the theory of change, the MI-GPS group reported higher levels of self-efficacy compared to the AEP/PATH group. Although the theory of change suggested improvements in in other outcomes, including grit, motivation, and reductions in barriers to employment, we detected no impacts in these areas based on responses to the follow-up survey.

5.2 Longer-Term Impacts on Employment, Earnings, and Public Benefit Receipt

This section summarizes the relative impacts of the two programs in each JSA evaluation site on employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt based on NDNH and site administrative data.

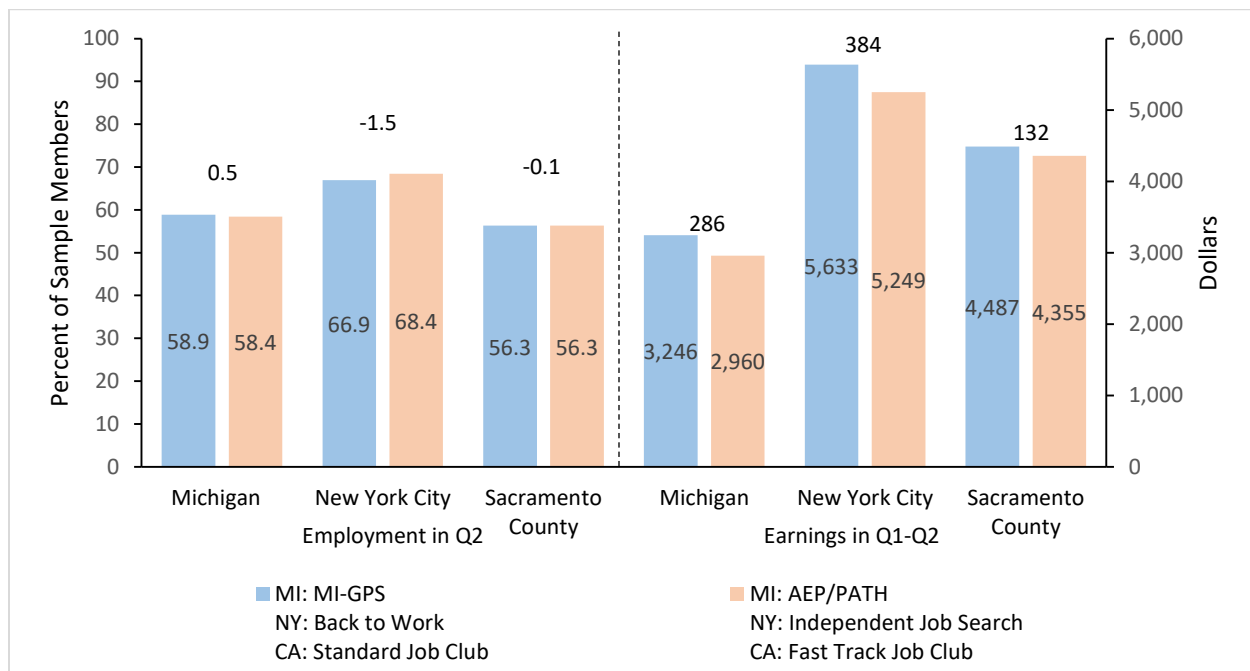
- *We did not detect an impact on employment for the programs studied in any of the sites.*

The JSA evaluation used *employment in the second quarter (at six months) after random assignment* as the confirmatory outcome for the impact study. By this measure, about 59 percent of study participants in Michigan, 68 percent of those in New York City, and 56 percent of those in Sacramento County were employed, with no differences detected between the two programs studied in each site (left panel of Exhibit 9, lower boxes). Thus, with respect to the confirmatory outcome, the evaluation does not identify one program as more effective than the other in any of the sites.¹³

- *We did not detect an impact on cumulative earnings for the programs studied in any of the sites.*

Averaging across the two programs in each site, cumulative earnings during the follow-up period were \$3,102 for Michigan, \$5,440 for New York City, and \$4,421 for Sacramento County (right panel of Exhibit 9). These data were also available for a longer, one-year (four-quarter) follow-up period in all sites. Even with this longer follow-up period, however, we detected no impact on earnings in any of the sites.

Exhibit 9. Impacts on Employment and Earnings, by Site



Source: National Directory of New Hires.

Sample Sizes (study participants): Michigan (MI): 1,908 (950 MI-GPS; 958 AEP/PATH). New York City (NY): 2,686 (1,335 B2W; 1,351 IJS).

Sacramento County (CA): 479 (240 Standard Job Club, 239 Fast Track Job Club).

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Individuals who were not employed in the two quarter follow-up period are included in the earnings impacts with earnings of \$0.

¹³ We cannot rule out the possibility of differences too small to be detected at the 10 percent level of confidence. Plausible values of impacts on employment in the second quarter after random assignment range from -3.0 to +4.0 percentage points in Michigan, -4.3 to +1.5 percentage points in New York City, and -7.6 to +7.5 percentage points in Sacramento County.

The following employment levels for the two-quarter follow up period are directly comparable to the earnings figures in the exhibit: Michigan: 66.0% vs. 65.8%; New York City: 77.0% vs. 76.8%; Sacramento County: 65.0% vs. 65.6%. None of the differences is significant.

- *Among those who worked during the follow-up period, earnings remained low in all sites and no impacts on measures of job quality were detected.*

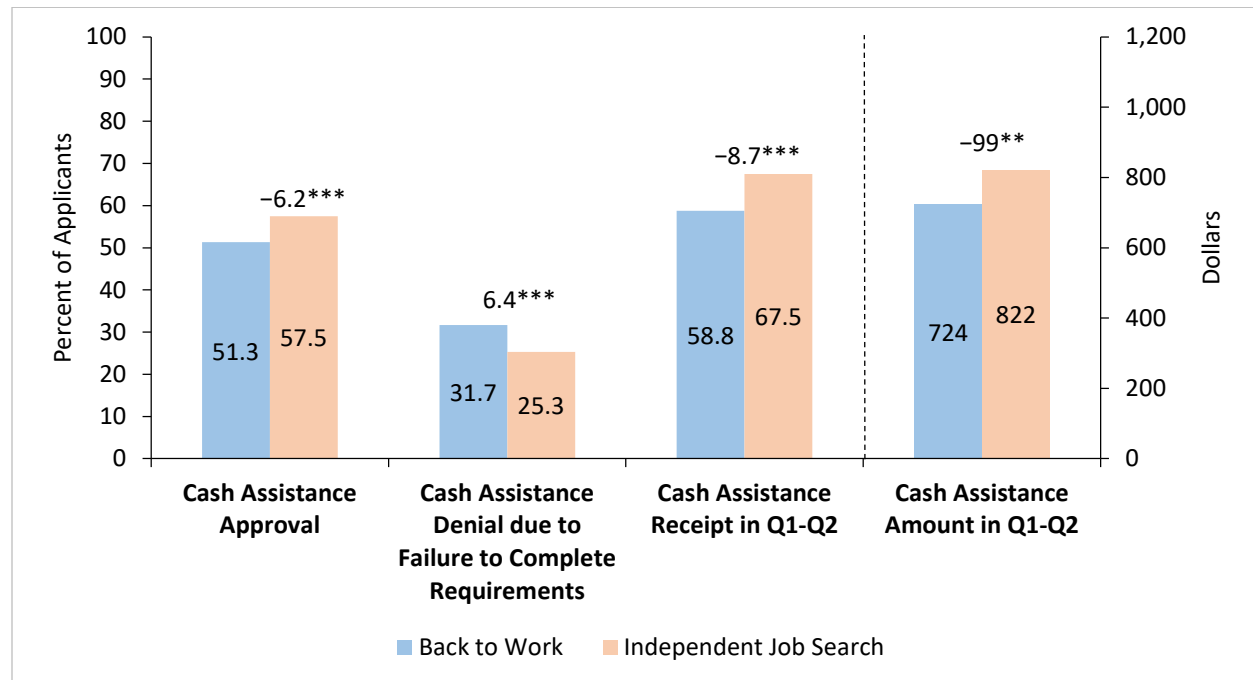
The average earnings levels reported on Exhibit 9 include both study participants who worked and those who did not (i.e., zero earnings for those who did not work). When we examined average earnings for just those who worked during the follow-up period, we found that earnings were low, averaging \$4,709 in Michigan, \$7,074 in New York City, and \$6,771 in Sacramento County (not shown). Thus, the low earnings observed at enrollment (see Exhibit 2) continued throughout the follow-up period for this study.

Through the six-month follow-up survey, the JSA evaluation also examined the self-reported characteristics for those study participants who worked during the follow-up period (results not shown). Across the sites, the jobs that study participants obtained were of relatively low quality. Those who worked reported average wages of \$10.50 per hour in Michigan, \$13.50 per hour in New York City, and \$15.50 per hour in Sacramento County, and a low proportion (about one third or less) worked in a job that provided access to health insurance.

We detected no differences between the two programs on measures related to job quality, except in Sacramento County, where impacts on some survey-based measures (specifically, hourly wage and paid sick leave and holidays) related to job quality were detected. However, these impacts were not large enough to affect earnings impacts as measured by the NDNH data.

- *In New York City, the more demanding participation requirement for cash assistance reduced the proportion of applications that were approved for cash assistance.*

As shown on Exhibit 10, the more demanding Back to Work program decreased the approval rate of applications for cash assistance by six percentage points relative to IJS. This difference in approval rates between the programs appears to be linked to the more rigorous requirements of the Back to Work program: the Back to Work program increased the proportion of applications declined for failure to complete requirements by almost seven percentage points relative to IJS. As a result, as also shown on Exhibit 10, the Back to Work program lowered cash assistance receipt by almost nine percentage points and reduced the amount of cash assistance received during the follow up period by \$99, compared to IJS.

Exhibit 10. Impacts on Approval, Receipt, and Amount of Cash Assistance (New York City)

Source: New York City Human Resources Administration records.

Sample Size (study participants with administrative records): 2,684 (1,336 B2W; 1,348 IJS).

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The study in New York City also found that those assigned to the Back to Work program received \$92 less in SNAP benefits during the follow-up period (not shown). Because approval for SNAP benefits was not contingent on participation in either Back to Work or IJS—only cash assistance required participation—the reduction in SNAP benefits is likely not directly due to the enforcement of program requirements. Nevertheless, it is possible that applicants who were not compliant with Back to Work or IJS stopped pursuing SNAP benefits as well when their cash assistance application was denied.

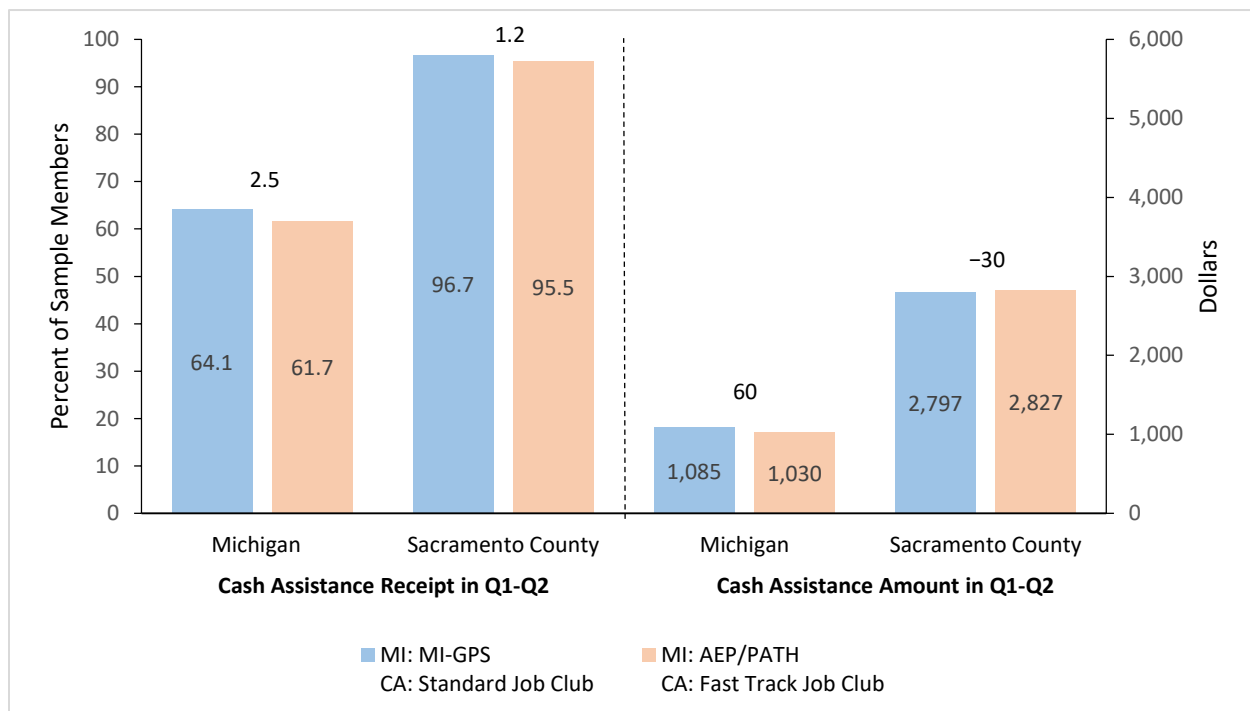
- *In Michigan and Sacramento County, no impacts on the receipt of cash assistance benefits were detected.*

As shown on Exhibit 11, about 63 percent of study participants in Michigan received cash assistance at the end of the follow-up period, as did more than 95 percent of study participants in Sacramento County.¹⁴ We detected no differences in cash assistance benefit amounts or receipt of SNAP benefits (not shown).

¹⁴ Differences in the populations served in Michigan versus Sacramento County account for the different levels of benefit receipt across the two sites. The Michigan site enrolled study participants as they applied for cash assistance, and some applicants were not subsequently approved to receive benefits. In contrast, the Sacramento County site enrolled cash assistance recipients who already had been approved to receive assistance, hence the higher receipt rates and cumulative benefit amounts.

Given the lack of employment and earnings impacts, this finding for cash assistance is not surprising. However, these results also suggest that program differences did not affect the rate at which sanctions for noncompliance were imposed. These sanctions, which could result in benefit reduction (Sacramento County) or benefit termination (Michigan), might be expected given the more demanding participation requirements in Sacramento County's Standard Job Club and the more stringent WPR requirements in Michigan's AEP/PATH program.¹⁵ Overall, however, we did not detect evidence that study participants in the more demanding programs were deterred from receiving assistance due to the program requirements (i.e., that they left assistance without finding a job).

Exhibit 11. Impacts on Receipt of Cash Assistance and Amount of Cash Assistance Received, by Site (Michigan and Sacramento County)



Source: Michigan Department of Health and Human Services administrative records; Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance Administrative records.

Sample Sizes (study participants): Michigan (MI): 2,053 (1,020 MI-GPS; 1,033 AEP/PATH). Sacramento County (CA): 431 (220 Standard Job Club; 211 Fast Track Job Club).

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

¹⁵ The lack of effects on sanction rate is confirmed by an analysis of administrative data on sanctions in Sacramento County, which also found no difference in sanction rate between its two programs. Sanction administrative data are not available in Michigan.

6. Implications of Findings

There is a considerable interest at the federal, state, and local levels in the effects of job search assistance services and participation requirements on employment, earnings, and public benefits outcomes for recipients of cash assistance and other public benefits such as SNAP. The JSA evaluation results have a number of implications for policymakers, program administrators, and researchers to consider.

- *Different approaches can be used to achieve similar employment and public benefit outcomes for cash assistance applicants and recipients. Given that no one approach yielded unambiguously stronger results, other considerations, such as cost or program preferences, may appropriately drive choices in providing employment-related assistance as part of cash assistance programs.*

The JSA evaluation did not detect that any of the programs studied improved employment and earnings for cash assistance applicants and recipients, but none of the programs negatively affected their economic outcomes either. This suggests that policymakers and program administrators can achieve similar results using different approaches, and preferences may be based on other considerations. The requirement to participate in job search assistance established by the TANF program is designed to achieve multiple objectives, including moving individuals to work, establishing a quid pro quo for receiving benefits, and reducing cash assistance expenditures.

The results of this evaluation suggest that there is a tradeoff among these goals; programs that are effective in achieving one goal are less effective achieving other goals. For example, if reducing cash assistance expenditures is a primary goal, a more demanding participation requirement for cash assistance applicants might be the more attractive option. The Back to Work program in New York City reduced cash assistance expenditures without decreasing employment rates. However, because this reduction in benefit receipt occurred without increasing employment, there are remaining questions about how applicants denied benefits are supporting themselves and their families without jobs.

Michigan's goal-oriented coaching approach, which allowed participation in a wider range of activities as a path to employment, produced similar results to the existing program with a strong focus on the WPR. Moreover, the MI-GPS program increased self-efficacy, which may be a goal of importance to some program administrators, particularly if it can be achieved without negatively affecting employment, earnings, or public benefit outcomes.

The study shows that imposing rigorous participation requirements for the purposes of establishing a reciprocal obligation for receiving benefits is possible; however, those more demanding requirements do not increase employment and earnings or reduce public benefits receipt and are likely to cost more than less demanding approaches. For example, Sacramento County's Fast Track Job Club resulted in similar outcomes as the Standard Job Club, which required more staff and recipient time spent in the program office. That these additional efforts

may cost more raises questions about the efficacy of establishing participation requirements as a condition of benefit receipt when the requirements do not achieve other TANF program goals, such as improved employment outcomes.

- *The evidence from the New York City site suggests that a program with a more demanding participation requirement as part of its cash assistance application can reduce the proportion of applicants meeting the requirements for approval, and as a result, reduce their cash assistance receipt.*

In New York City, the more rigorous Back to Work program, which required 35 hours of participation in job search activities in the program office (compared to IJS's weekly in-person meetings) in the six weeks prior to benefit approval, reduced the proportion of applicants who were approved for cash assistance. Because the requirement to be approved for assistance in the Back to Work program was more burdensome, more applicants failed to meet it, resulting in an automatic denial of cash assistance. This led to an overall reduction in both the level and amount of cash assistance received as well as SNAP benefits.

Though a demanding participation requirement for applicants reduced cash assistance receipt in New York City, no impacts on cash assistance receipt were detected in Sacramento County, where similar requirements were imposed on those already receiving cash assistance. The findings from this site suggest that a more demanding program did not appear to deter cash assistance recipients from remaining on assistance or result in increased sanctions.

- *Programs with higher operational costs did not yield better employment, earnings, or public benefits outcomes.*

The JSA evaluation did not specifically estimate program costs, but in two of the sites—New York City and Sacramento County—costs were likely greater to operate the more intensive programs as compared to the less intensive programs. The Back to Work program in New York City and the Standard Job Club in Sacramento County required more staff to provide group job search classes and one-on-one assistance than did their alternative. However, the additional financial investment required by the more intensive programs did not result in better economic outcomes for cash assistance applicants and recipients. A benefit-cost analysis of the different approaches would be an important future research project. In particular, for the New York City site, it is important to determine whether the benefit reductions achieved by a more rigorous participation requirement for cash assistance applicants offset the increased costs of operating this type of program.

- *At all three sites, the cash assistance applicants and recipients generally were a disadvantaged population with low earnings prior to study enrollment, and none of the programs resulted in changes in their earning trajectories.*

Past studies of cash assistance programs have shown that in general, despite the employment assistance provided, applicants and recipients struggled to find and keep jobs and families remained poor. The results of the JSA evaluation confirm those from earlier studies, with the

job search assistance provided generally having a limited to no effect on getting people “better” jobs with higher wages and benefits. Although study participants met the requirements for being mandated to work under TANF rules, those served in all of the sites were a disadvantaged group. Though some found employment in the six-month follow-up period (across the sites, at least two thirds of study participants had worked for pay during this period), their cumulative earnings during this time remained low, ranging from about \$4,700 in Michigan to about \$7,000 in New York City. This is well below the annual poverty level of \$21,330 for a family of three (even when six-month earnings are adjusted to an annual level).¹⁶

Some differences in the mode, frequency, and content of employment services received were detected between two groups across the sites, but the differences were not large. Given the disadvantaged nature of the populations served, these relatively small differences in service provision may not be sufficient to change their employment and earnings trajectories, indicating that different strategies, potentially those that address skills deficits or other barriers to employment, may be needed. Testing the effects of these types of different approaches when provided as a condition of receiving cash assistance would be another important area for additional research.

- *Michigan’s GPS program did not produce impacts on employment, earnings, or public benefits receipt. However, the program is an early iteration of the goal-oriented coaching approach, and the model has continued to be refined.*

Providing goal-oriented coaching within a TANF program is a relatively new approach to improving employment outcomes, and MI-GPS is one of the first such programs implemented and the first rigorously evaluated. Since the JSA evaluation launched, there continues to be interest and investment in implementing and evaluating this program model, including ongoing projects at OPRE.¹⁷ Newer and developing coaching programs continue to modify and enhance coaching approaches, tools, and coach training methods based on earlier program experiences, and perhaps may produce different results.

It is also possible that the time horizon expected for impacts from a goal-oriented coaching program is longer than the six- to 12-month follow-up available for this study. Goal-oriented programs may need more time to allow cash assistance recipients to set and achieve incremental goals that may eventually lead to better economic outcomes. Additional ongoing studies that include refinements to the approach will provide critical information on the efficacy of goal-oriented coaching for improving employment, earnings, and public benefits outcomes.

¹⁶ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/2019-poverty-guidelines>

¹⁷ These projects include Goal-Oriented Learning in Self-Sufficiency (GOALS) and the Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations. See <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/goal-oriented-adult-learning-in-self-sufficiency-goals> and <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/evaluation-of-coaching-focused-interventions-for-hard-to-employ-tanf-clients-and-other-low-income-populations>

In summary, the JSA evaluation provides new, rigorous experimental evidence on the differential effects of different approaches to providing employment assistance for cash assistance applicants and recipients. The JSA evaluation finds that it is possible to produce changes in service receipt through different service options. However, for the most part, these changes did not affect employment, earnings, and public benefit outcomes. Many of the differences between programs resulted in only small differences in service receipt, and they may not be sufficient to alter the earnings trajectories of this disadvantaged population of cash assistance applicants and recipients.

Overall, the results indicate that program administrators can use different job search assistance strategies to help cash assistance applicants and recipients achieve similar results. However, implementing job search strategies that improve employment and earnings in a substantial way remains challenging.

Appendix: Description of JSA Evaluation Sites

Wayne and Genesee Counties, Michigan

Study Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jointly operated by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and the state's workforce agency, Michigan Talent Investment Agency (TIA). Five local Michigan Works! agency offices across Genesee and Wayne Counties participated in the evaluation. These offices covered the Detroit-adjacent cities of Southgate, Highland Park, Livonia, and Wayne in Wayne County, and Flint in Genesee County. Programs operated during 2016-2018 when the unemployment rate in Wayne and Genesee Counties ranged from 4.9 to 6.3 percent.
Study Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cash assistance (called Family Investment Program, or FIP) applicants who are required to work and who consented to the study (including single-parent and two-parent families). Randomly assigned 2,081 cash assistance applicants and recipients from 2016 to 2018. Six-month follow-up survey response rate is 64 percent.
Description of Programs Studied	<p>Michigan Goals. Progress. Success. (MI-GPS). Trained coaches using a new, goal-oriented approach to provide employment services that included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A redesigned orientation. The program started with an orientation, delivered by coaches, that focused on a collaborative approach to helping applicants and recipients set and achieve goals related to employment. Goal setting and monitoring driven by applicant/recipient. Coaches worked with applicants and recipients to identify employment-related goals, break goals into smaller steps by identifying weekly activities that build toward their goals, and provide support to help them achieve these tasks. Applicants and recipients had ownership over goal setting and activities needed to attain goals. Tools to support goal-oriented coaching. Coaches used a new comprehensive assessment and other tools to assist applicants and recipients in setting goals and the steps to achieve them. WPR and noncompliance. Coaches had the flexibility to allow recipients to engage in activities that did not count toward the WPR if the activities facilitated goal achievement. Recipients faced the same financial penalties for noncompliance as those in the AEP/PATH but got an additional warning before penalties were imposed. <p>Application Eligibility Period/ Partnership. Accountability. Training. Hope (AEP/PATH). Program staff worked with applicants and recipients using the existing approach to employment services. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard program orientation. The AEP/PATH orientation focused on program requirements and compliance. Directive assistance focused on participation in work activities. During AEP, staff worked with applicants to address barriers to employment. During PATH, staff assigned recipients to work activities for the designated number of hours each week. Standard state-mandated forms. Staff used a standard assessment to identify potential barriers to work, standard AEP forms to identify and track weekly activities during the 21-day application period, and PATH forms that specified and tracked recipients' participation in work activities. Focus on WPR. Staff assigned recipients to activities designed to fulfill the WPR. Recipients faced financial penalties for noncompliance with warnings before penalties were imposed.

New York City

Study Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overseen by New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA). Programs were operated by two organizations under contract to HRA: America Works and Goodwill Industries. Each organization operated the programs in both its Brooklyn and Queens offices (a total of four offices). Programs operated during 2015-2016 when the unemployment rate in New York City ranged from 5.0-6.0 percent.
Study Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicants to the state's cash assistance program, including single parents served through the state's TANF program (called Family Assistance) and the state-funded Safety Net program, which serves those who are ineligible for Family Assistance, generally because they have reached the federal time limit for cash assistance or because they do not have children. Included applicants who were determined "job ready" and who consented to the study. The criteria for being determined "job ready" included those who (1) had an Associate's degree or higher, or (2) were currently working or had worked in the past three months, and (3) expressed a readiness to look for and start a job, based on job search self-efficacy questions. Randomly assigned 2,700 cash assistance applicants from 2015 to 2016. Six-month follow-up survey response rate is 79 percent.
Description of Programs Studied	<p>Both programs generally required 35 hours per week of participation in job search activities during the cash assistance application period of six weeks in order to be approved to receive cash assistance benefits. Noncompliance could lead to denial of cash assistance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Back to Work required daily attendance (Monday-Friday) at the program office. The participation requirement was met through group job search classes; one-on-one meetings with case managers; referrals from job developers with access to labor market information, employers, and job openings; and short-term training. IJS required weekly attendance at the program office. The participation requirement could be met through independent job search. Applicant could access B2W services provided by the staff in the program office (i.e., group and one-on-one assistance, job development, and short-term training).

Sacramento County, California

Study Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed and operated by the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance (DHA). Eight DHA offices in Sacramento County participated in the evaluation. Programs operated during 2016-2017 when the unemployment rate in Sacramento County ranged from 4.6 to 6.0 percent.
Study Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cash assistance (called CalWORKS) recipients who were required to work, had not previously completed a DHA Job Club, were deemed appropriate for job search assistance by program staff, and consented to the study. Includes single and two-parent cash assistance recipients. Randomly assigned 493 cash assistance recipients during 2016 to 2018. Six-month follow-up survey response rate is 49 percent.
Description of Programs Studied	<p>Standard Job Club included three weeks of daily attendance (40 hours/week, five days/week: 120 hours total) and five weeks of supervised job search with daily one-on-one meetings with staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Week 1: Group instruction on workplace behaviors and soft skills. Weeks 2 and 3: Group instruction on both job search and workplace skills. Weeks 4 through 8: Supervised job search, requiring daily attendance at the program office, including access to job developers. <p>Fast Track Job Club included three-and-a-half days of daily attendance (28 hours total) and seven weeks of independent job search with weekly one-on-one meetings with staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Week 1, Days 1 to 3: Group instruction on job search skills. Week 1, Day 4: One-on-one meetings and activities with staff. Weeks 2 through 8: Independent job search, with weekly required meetings at the program office, including access to job developers. <p>For both programs, noncompliance could lead to partial reduction in cash assistance.</p>

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