Reengaging Dropouts: Lessons from the Implementation of the Los Angeles Reconnections Career Academy (LARCA) Program

Interim Report for the Evaluation of the LARCA Program
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Too many young Americans drop out of high school. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that as of 2009, approximately 3 million people in the United States between the ages of 16 and 24—8 percent of the people in that age group—were not in high school and had not obtained a diploma or alternative credential.\(^1\) Within the City and County of Los Angeles, the percentage of dropout youth for that same period of time was approximately double the national average.\(^2\) Recognizing the importance of re-engaging these youth in education and connecting them to career pathways, the US Department of Labor (US DOL) awarded the Los Angeles Economic Workforce Development Department (EWDD) a Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant to implement a program designed to address the education and employment needs of high school dropouts, ages 16–24, within the City and County of Los Angeles. This program, known as the Los Angeles Reconnections Career Academy (LARCA), aims to address the needs of over 1,000 dropout youth by providing participants with access to education and employment programs using a career pathways model, alongside case management services and other supports.

EWDD awarded Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) a contract to evaluate the LARCA program in order to determine its overall effectiveness and identify lessons from its implementation to inform future programming for its target population. The evaluation includes a random assignment impact study, an implementation study and a cost study. This report summarizes the findings from the implementation study, specifically from two rounds of site visits to entities implementing LARCA, and reviews the implications of these findings for the impact and cost studies that will be addressed in the evaluation’s final report.

LARCA Program Structure

EWDD and the Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board managed the LARCA program and funded the following six provider agencies, responsible for delivering services to participants:

\(^1\) Chapman, C., et al. (2011).

• The Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD)
• LA Conservation Corps
• Youth Opportunity Movement – Boyle Heights (YO! Boyle Heights)
• Youth Opportunity Movement – Watts (YO! Watts)
• Youth Policy Institute – San Fernando Valley (YPI San Fernando)
• Youth Policy Institute – Pico Union (YPI Pico Union)

EWDD selected each provider based upon its experience in working with the dropout population, its geography, its experience delivering services similar to those prescribed by the LARCA program, and its own network of partner providers. In addition to EWDD and the six providers, the LARCA program also relied on partnerships with other organizations that operated both system-wide as well as with individual providers. These partners connected EWDD and the providers to critical resources in education and training, economic and workforce development, and supportive services. A key partner at both the system and provider level was the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), which split funding with EWDD for Pupil Service and Attendance (PSA) counselors co-located at each provider to assist with the recruitment and enrollment of potential participants, guide the educational planning of participants, and connect them with LARCA program services.

Implementation of The LARCA Program Model

The LARCA program employed an innovative and potentially effective model for successfully re-engaging dropout youth. While providers had some leeway in structuring the content and sequence of their LARCA program elements, they adhered to a standard set of activities: recruitment and intake, including eligibility and suitability screening; delivering case management and comprehensive services, including opportunities for work readiness training, life skills workshops, youth development activities; and providing participants with education, vocational training, and placement services.

Recruitment and Enrollment

To be eligible for LARCA, youth needed to be low-income dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 living within the City or County of Los Angeles and otherwise eligible for youth WIA services. To enroll youth in the LARCA program, provider staff engaged in a series of three activities.

• **LARCA provider staff members recruited youth from the target population using a variety of new and existing techniques and relationships.** The LARCA program providers had long-standing histories of serving at-risk youth and other individuals within their communities and already had a number of reliable methods for recruitment (such as word of mouth and referrals from other
community partners). With the implementation of LARCA, providers had to increase the intensity of their outreach efforts in order to recruit enough youth for random assignment. In this effort they were assisted by the PSA counselors, who helped with school-based recruitment, eligibility determination, and conducting assessments.

- **Provider staff members conducted a multi-stage assessment process to determine eligibility and suitability.** These activities included holding program orientations to answer questions about the program and the study, conducting educational and service planning assessments, and conducting individual screening interviews. The providers also administered several assessments, including both a basic skills test and a career preference inventory, although not each provider used these assessments for the same purpose. Basic skills testing served an important function as an academic diagnostic for each of the providers, helping the providers to assess participants’ remediation needs, while the career preference inventory was useful for conducting career exploration and helping youth apply for jobs during the transition phase of the program.

- **Providers randomly assigned eligible and interested youth who consented to be part of the impact study.** In total, the study randomly assigned 2,082 youth: 1,067 to the program group and 1,015 to the comparison group. Program group members were considered enrolled in the LARCA program and eligible to receive the full array of LARCA program services. Comparison group members, by contrast, were ineligible for LARCA program services but were provided a referral list and could still access any other services for which they were eligible, including other programs operated by the providers.

### Case Management and Comprehensive Services

LARCA participants faced multiple barriers to successful program participation and job placement, such as inadequate housing and transportation, lack of familiarity with workplace and job search etiquette, and limited understanding of how to budget financial resources, be parents, and maintain relationships. The LARCA program model included three components aimed at helping youth overcome such barriers: case management (including supportive services referrals), work readiness training, life skills workshops, and youth development activities.

- **Case management services played a critical role in assisting participants with navigating LARCA program elements and alleviating barriers to program participation.** Case managers helped participants set personal, education, and career goals; connected them with supportive services such as housing, transportation, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment services; and coordinated and/or delivered work readiness, life skills, and youth development workshops. Case managers also assisted participants in planning their education and vocational training programs and monitored their progress.

- **Work readiness training helped participants develop skills for both the job search process and navigating workplace culture.** Most of the programs implemented a curriculum developed by the LA Chamber of Commerce
specifically for the LARCA program. This curriculum covered topics such as professionalism and communication, job search and retention strategies, resume and cover letter development, and interviewing techniques.

- **Life skills workshops and youth development activities aimed to help youth develop self-confidence and learn skills to navigate life challenges.** Life skills workshops covered topics such as financial literacy and budgeting, parenting, conflict resolution, and time management. Youth leadership activities included serving on youth councils and speaking at community events. While each of the providers offered some life skills courses and youth development and leadership activities, these elements of the program were often voluntary (unlike required components like vocational training and work readiness training) and implemented to varying degrees.

**Secondary Education, Vocational Training, and Placement Services**

The LARCA program also provided participants with the secondary education, vocational training, and postsecondary and employment placement services needed to support their career pathways.

- **Education services, leading to a high school diploma or a credential from one of three High School Equivalency Tests (HSETs), helped students remediate any basic skills deficiencies and complete their secondary education.** These services were usually provided by a partner organization, such as a charter school, adult school, or other agency, and most of the time participants attended classes not on the provider’s premises. Participants typically completed HSETs or obtained diplomas within a matter of months, depending somewhat on how many credits they needed and the particular sequencing of the educational services at the provider. Some providers had participants pursue secondary education certificates prior to other activities, while others interspersed the secondary education component with vocational training and/or work experiences.

- **Vocational training introduced LARCA program participants to careers in the health, construction, or green technology fields.** Like education services, vocational training coursework was typically offered by a partner organization, such as a community college. The training also resulted in some form of certificate or degree and often involved some kind of paid work experience component to help build participants’ resumes, provide them with income and, ideally, provide them with the opportunity to apply skills learned in the vocational training program. Vocational training fields available to LARCA participants varied both across and within providers, with some connecting all participants to the same training program and others allowing more choice.

- **Employment and postsecondary education placement services aimed to connect participants to the next steps in their chosen career pathways, be it additional education or training-related employment.** Partway through implementation, EWDD began de-emphasizing the originally planned focus on employment placement and instead began encouraging providers to promote additional vocational training or postsecondary education, to help further
participants’ training in a particular career pathway. By Fall of 2014, many of the providers had begun to engage in postsecondary education placement services, assisting participants with applications and financial aid forms for local community colleges, but the placement services component of the program was still largely being developed by providers.

**Key Accomplishments and Challenges**

EWDD and the six LARCA providers were able use the WIF grant to implement an innovative model for re-engaging dropout youth in Los Angeles and for aligning the efforts of city departments and community-based organizations serving this population. The accomplishments these organizations realized during the implementation of LARCA included the following.

- **EWDD strengthened its relationships with other city and community entities, bolstering the network of agencies committed to serving Los Angeles’ disconnected youth.** A key outcome of LARCA implementation is a deeper relationship between EWDD and LAUSD. The LARCA program helped Los Angeles scale up the nascent model of placing school-district-employed PSA counselors in workforce system settings. Additionally, the grant allowed EWDD to pilot the work readiness curriculum developed by the LA Chamber of Commerce. This curriculum, which culminates in a work readiness certificate, has been adopted by the LARCA providers and will become part of other workforce system operations in the future. Finally, implementing the LARCA program provided EWDD with a chance to either form or strengthen relationships with the six providers, which represent key contacts for future community-based initiatives. In fact, two of the providers will now be implementing EWDD’s second Workforce Innovation Fund grant.

- **LARCA providers connected dropout youth with providers of critical support, education, and training services and, in the process, strengthened these providers’ capacity for serving this population.** In many cases, LARCA provider agencies sought out new partners to deliver the supportive, educational, and vocational training components of the program, creating relationships that may be leveraged for providers’ future work with dropout and other hard-to-serve populations.

- **The education component of LARCA was largely successful in re-engaging youth in learning.** Feedback from participants indicates that the secondary education component of LARCA was of particular value, offering youth a chance to feel more supported and stimulated than they had in their previous academic experiences.

Despite these accomplishments, both LARCA providers and EWDD reported numerous challenges to starting up and implementing the program within the timeframe of the WIF grant.

- **Providers found it challenging to adhere to a common program model.** Providers had significant autonomy in implementing the program model developed by EWDD, and ended up offering somewhat different types of
programs in terms of the types of education and vocational training offered and the intensity and sequence of case management and comprehensive services. Additionally, providers that developed entirely new programs had some difficulty implementing the numerous components of the LARCA program. Providers that used the grant to expand existing or previous programs had an easier time implementing core elements of the LARCA program, but they were less nimble in making the changes needed to align their existing infrastructure with the LARCA program model.

- **The compressed start-up period gave providers little time to develop new systems, and so they often had to rely on existing models and relationships.** The Workforce Innovation Fund grant used to finance the LARCA program combined with the program model required EWDD and the providers to move from finalizing their program design to enrolling participants in just under six months. LARCA providers therefore made a series of strategic decisions about program implementation that were heavily influenced by the compressed timeframe. With limited time to develop new relationships, for example, providers fell back on existing partnerships for delivering supportive services and vocational training. While the LARCA program certainly benefitted from drawing on existing infrastructures and relationships, the program’s rapid start-up limited opportunities for both innovation and the refining of existing structures.

- **To buy the time needed to develop and implement components essential for start-up, providers often delayed planning the later-sequenced services until participants needed them.** The short planning period meant that EWDD and the providers could afford to focus only on the elements of the program that were essential for start-up—e.g., recruitment and enrollment, case management, and supportive services and, in some cases, secondary educational services. As a result, nearly two years into implementation, some later-stage components of the program—such as some vocational training options at some providers and participant follow-up practices—were still in development.

- **Some providers struggled to meet their recruitment and enrollment goals due to limited staff time for outreach, competing programs serving the same population, and lack of eligible youth in their catchment areas.** Some providers struggled with enrollment because they did not have staff members dedicated to recruitment or because they experienced staff turnover in these positions. Other providers struggled because a large proportion of the youth in their catchment areas were undocumented and therefore ineligible for LARCA. Additionally, providers that operated multiple programs often channeled potentially eligible youth into other programs due to pressure to meet enrollment goals for those programs.

- **Providers struggled to both engage and retain youth with significant barriers to successful participation in the LARCA program.** LARCA participants had to contend with a variety of barriers, including low education levels, caretaking responsibilities for their children and other family members, the stresses of exposure to community violence, poverty, and the challenges of navigating the job market with a criminal record. While the prevalence of barriers such as these
was part of the reason the LARCA program was necessary in the first place, providers still struggled with how manifestations of these barriers impacted the program: otherwise eligible youth often dropped out of the recruitment and enrollment process due to other responsibilities; participants frequently lacked the critical foundational knowledge and skills needed to succeed in high school; and case managers had to address complicated supportive service needs that required intensive, tailored assistance. As a result of these challenges, LARCA providers had to spend time developing and implementing additional strategies to help the members of this high-need population stay engaged.

**Evaluation Next Steps**

In the coming months, the evaluation will collect additional program and cost data including data on educational attainment, completion of certificates and degrees, employment, earnings, and other outcomes of potential societal benefit such as level of criminal justice activity. These data will allow the evaluation to identify the ways in which the program most benefited the lives of the young people it served and to assess the effectiveness of the program given its cost. Importantly, the evaluation will also consider the impact and cost study findings in light of the findings of this implementation study report. The variations in approaches taken by the providers and overall levels of implementation described in the report may help to explain key impact study findings. An update on program implementation and results from the impact and cost studies will be presented in the evaluation’s final report in late 2016.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Too many young Americans drop out of high school. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that as of 2009, approximately 3 million people in the United States between the ages of 16 and 24—the ages of 16 and 24—8 percent of the people in that age group—were not in high school and had not obtained a diploma or alternative credential. These youth do not fare well in the job market, have difficulty holding onto jobs when they get them, and experience low overall earnings in the jobs they are able to acquire. Furthermore, because they are often disconnected from institutions that can help them overcome these challenges, they often continue to fare poorly over the course of their lives.

While finding ways to reengage youth who do not complete high school has become an issue of national importance, it is also one of particular concern for the City and County of Los Angeles. In that region, the percentage of dropout youth is approximately double the national average, and many of the social problems correlated with a large population of dropout youth are intensified as a result. To address this concern, in 2012, the US Department of Labor awarded the Los Angeles Economic Workforce Development Department (EWDD) a Workforce Innovation Fund

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3 Chapman, C., et al. (2011) distinguishes between several different ways of defining the dropout rate, but two of the more prominent methods are the “event” dropout rate and the “status” dropout rate. The event dropout rate is the percentage of public school students who were enrolled in grades 9–12 at some point during one school year but were not enrolled in school in the subsequent year and had not earned a high school diploma or completed a state- or district-approved education program. This rate is typically used for gauging the performance of public high schools and does not include information on individuals outside the public school system. The “status” dropout rate—the one cited here—measures the percentage of individuals in a specific age range who are not enrolled in high school and who do not have a high school credential. The status rate encompasses a larger population than the event rate since it includes all individuals in a given age range regardless of when or where they last attended school. The status rate is appropriate for use in this chapter because it captures more fully the extent of the dropout problem and thus better informs the types of policy issues being addressed here.

4 The California Department of Education Data Reporting Office (2015) uses four different dropout rates: a one-year rate, which is the equivalent of the “event” rate; a four-year, derived rate, which is the estimate of the percent of students who would drop out in a four-year period based on data collected for a single year; and an adjusted rate for both the one-year and four-year rate, which takes into account re-enrolled and “lost” students. The four-year dropout rate is not the same as the status dropout rate since it is calculated somewhat differently, but like the status rate, it does reflect the fuller extent of the dropout problem. The data cited here refer to the four-year derived dropout rate for LAUSD for 2009-2010, which was 17.7 percent. The adjusted four-year rate was 24.1 percent.
(WIF) grant to implement a program designed to address the education and employment needs of high school dropouts, ages 16–24. EWDD developed this program, known as the Los Angeles Reconnections Career Academy (LARCA), alongside a number of key partner organizations, including the Workforce Investment Board (WIB), the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), several area community colleges (with support from the Community College District Office) and a group of committed provider organizations throughout the city and county. Through the LARCA program, EWDD hoped to address the needs of over 1,000 dropout youth in the City and County of Los Angeles by giving them increased access to education and employment programs using a career pathways model, and by providing them with case management services and other supports.

In order to learn from their implementation of the LARCA program, but also because they were required to hire an independent evaluator as a condition of receiving the WIF grant, EWDD commissioned Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to conduct an evaluation of the LARCA program. Designed to measure LARCA’s overall effectiveness and to glean lessons from its implementation, the evaluation includes a random assignment study, an implementation study, and a cost study. This report summarizes the findings from the implementation study and sets the stage for discussion of the findings of the impact and cost studies in the evaluation’s final report, due in 2016.

This introductory chapter covers a variety of topics that together serve as context for the rest of the report. The chapter begins by providing background information on the policy challenges that dropouts present to the public and which the LARCA program plans to address. Next, it provides some background on other programs EWDD has operated that have influenced the design of the LARCA program and the research that has implications for the program and this evaluation. After that, it provides an overview of the LARCA program itself, including a brief description of the services and key players involved in delivering it. Next, come descriptions of the overall evaluation and the different studies that comprise it, the research questions driving the implementation study, and the methods the study team used to collect and analyze data for this implementation study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the remainder of the report.

**Challenges Presented by High School Dropouts**

High school dropouts present a public policy problem of considerable magnitude. As noted above, the National Center for Education Statistics estimated that the number of dropouts nationwide, ages 16–24, was approximately 3 million in 2009. Although the dropout rate has been decreasing nationwide, falling from around 12 percent of all 16–24 year olds in 1990 to
around 7 percent in 2012, within California—and Los Angeles in particular—the dropout rate has been and continues to be higher than the national average. One study reported that in 2007 there were 710,000 dropouts within California, a number that represented 14.4 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds at the time. Another source noted that the California (four-year) dropout rates in 2009-2010 were between 13.3 and 17.7 percent, depending upon which specific method was employed for calculating the rate. Within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the second largest school district in the country and the largest within California, the comparable dropout rates for 2009-2010 were 17.7 percent to 24.1 percent.

There are several reasons why this population presents such a significant public policy challenge, but foremost is the poor set of economic outcomes with which it is associated. Those without a diploma or equivalent degree earn many thousands of dollars less every year than high school graduates, and this deficit adds up to many hundreds of thousands of dollars over a lifetime. Additionally, those without a diploma or equivalent degree are finding it increasingly difficult to find employment. Between 2000 and 2008, for example, the share of all 16- to 24-year-olds with employment during the summer fell from 65 percent to 58 percent, and then to 49 percent during the recent recession. In Los Angeles specifically, high school dropouts have been shown to have lower rates of employment, lower hourly wages, and lower lifetime earnings than those with a high school diploma. This loss of earnings means less economic stability for these individuals. As a result, compared to individuals with diplomas or an equivalent degree, these individuals will use more public assistance and be far more likely to end up in jail or prison.

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6 Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies (2009).
7 Taylor, L. (2011). This brief indicates that the California grade 9-12 four-year derived dropout rate for 2009-2010 was 13.3 percent while the adjusted four-year rate was 17.7 percent and the cohort rate was 18.2 percent.
8 California Department of Education Data Reporting Office (2015). As noted in footnote two, above, 17.7 is the four-year derived dropout rate for 2009-2010 while 24.1 percent is the adjusted four-year rate.
9 Chapman, C., et al. (2011) reported that median wages are approximately $18,000 lower than for individuals without a diploma, which amounts to approximately $630,000 over a lifetime. Kena, G., et al. (2014) reported a lifetime earnings difference of approximately $400,000. Doland, E. (2001) reported that dropouts earned approximately $9,200 less per year and nearly $1 million less over a lifetime than those with a diploma. No matter the specific estimate used, the differences in earnings for those with diplomas are staggering.
Part of the reasons why this population experiences such bad outcomes is that a large portion of dropouts do not go on to complete their secondary education or, if they do, to receive further education beyond that. A recent study documented that among dropouts from low-income families, only half went on to earn either a high school diploma or a GED within eight years of scheduled graduation. While the GED by itself has not been found to have much return in the labor market, there is evidence that it may lead to earnings increases in the longer term for some groups. The GED can also be a route to post-secondary education, even though only a minority of GED recipients go on to enroll in college and even fewer complete a degree.

Another feature of the dropout problem with important public policy implications is the disproportionate number of dropouts who are people of color and come from low-income backgrounds. Nationwide, dropout rates tend to be about five times higher for low income families than they are for high income families and a little more than twice as high as they are for middle income families. LAUSD staff members noted during interviews with the research team that a considerable number of LAUSD students live below the poverty line. While poverty is often linked with numerous other issues, LAUSD staff members are particularly concerned about the significant role that dropping out of high school plays in perpetuating a cycle of poverty. This concern is founded on both research findings and personal observations. One LAUSD administrator, for instance, discussed a student she had visited during a recent door-to-door student recovery campaign. The youth confided he had dropped out take a job at a car wash so that he could help support his mother who had cancer. Without his diploma, observed the administrator, that youth was likely doomed to stay low-income and to father children who would also become dropouts.

Race is also an important issue when considering the dropout population. Nationally, the dropout rate was 5.2 percent for white youth, 9.3 percent for black youth, and 17.6 percent for Hispanic youth in 2009. In California, African-Americans and Hispanics tend to graduate at a rate of about 60 percent, compared to a rate of 80 percent for whites. Within Los Angeles,

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16 This statistic from Chapman, et al. (2011) is based upon the event dropout rate rather than the status dropout rate.
where the majority of youth are non-white, another study found that rates of disconnection for youth (not being engaged in school or work) were higher for black and Hispanic youth (21 percent) than for white youth (18 percent).\(^\text{20}\) LAUSD staff members also noted that that the high number of immigrants in the district is a significant challenge. This sentiment is reflected in national statistics, which find that approximately 25 percent of dropouts are born outside the United States or come from first-generation families.\(^\text{21}\) According to LAUSD staff members, these youth, frequently in poverty and often facing numerous other issues such as domestic violence and substance abuse, are simply unable to obtain the extensive supportive services needed to aid them in completing their education, especially in a district that is already facing significant challenges due to such a high dropout population on the whole.

Addressing the complex set of needs presented by the dropout population is not simple. Already stretched thin, the education system can ill afford to make re-engaging these former students a priority, especially given their high need for numerous supportive services. Instead, school systems often have to focus on maintaining a safe and engaging environment for the students they still have. Nor is it easy for the workforce system to assist these individuals with obtaining employment. To qualify for many jobs, they need additional education, but the adult basic education system, often handled by the community colleges, is also stretched thin and not set up to provide the supportive services that many dropout youth need to be successful in completing education or training programs. In short, a gap in services between the educational system and the workforce system often leaves a great many dropout youth unserved.

**Assets for Building the LARCA Program**

Over the years, a number of organizations, both around the country and in the Los Angeles area, have implemented programs designed to address many of the issues highlighted above. These programs range from large nationwide networks like Job Corps, YouthBuild, and the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program to smaller programs run by community-based organizations. Within Los Angeles, the list includes a number of programs operated through collaboration among workforce system agencies, the public education system, and the private sector. Both sets of programs—those national in scope and those implemented within Los Angeles—were valuable assets for EWDD as it designed and developed the LARCA program model. Likewise the lessons learned from implementing these programs helped to inform the evaluation design.


The following are several lessons taken from the implementation of programs serving at-risk youth from around the country.

- **Diploma-based programs and post-secondary education were important for youth outcomes.** Several studies found that while programs serving at-risk youth often helped them earn alternative credentials such as GEDs, the employment earnings of the youth who earned these credentials were often significantly less than the earnings of those with high school diplomas. Other research has shown that while youth who earn a GED and then complete post-secondary education may go on to earn more, only a small minority of dropout youth begin the path to higher education and earn a degree. These findings suggest that offering services focused on helping youth earn GEDs or the equivalent cannot simply be assumed valuable. These findings also suggest that providing participants with opportunities to earn certificates and degrees beyond the high school level—as the LARCA program does by putting youth on a career pathway—ought to help mitigate many of the limitations of participants who only earn a GED or the equivalent.

- **Impacts on employment and earnings tended to fade after a few years, after participants left their programs.** Evaluations of programs noting this particular issue suggested that longer-term involvement in program services and post-participation activities may provide the additional boost needed to continue the gains produced by the programs. Since the LARCA program was designed to serve youth for a year or more and emphasize career pathways, the program may be able to overcome some of these long-term employment challenges. It may be able to do so by helping participants to stay engaged longer in program services and to stay employed once they leave the program by providing them with skill sets suitable for careers rather than just jobs. To assess the LARCA program’s success in meeting this challenge, it will be important for the evaluation to understand how participants move through the different service phases defined in the service delivery model, and to what effect.

- **Programs serving at-risk youth all seem to experience many of the same types of challenges.** These challenges included compressed startup phases

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24 As is discussed in Chapter V, California recognizes three different High School Equivalency Tests (HSETs). The GED is only one of these.


26 The evaluation plans to collect data on study participants one year out from their point of random assignment, with the possibility of collecting data for up to 18 months from random assignment for a smaller group of participants. Longer-term follow-up of participants would be useful for understanding the extent of any impacts, especially considering this finding from prior research, but is not possible given the timing of the evaluation and the program design.
leaving too little time to plan and implement programs, insufficiently adaptive leadership, weak partnerships, limited adoption of core program elements by providers, and insufficient adaptation of services to meet the complex needs of the high-barrier population being served. The evaluation will therefore need to closely observe each of these aspects of program implementation and be sensitive to any indications that the LARCA program faced similar pitfalls.

In addition to these lessons from programs implemented throughout the country, the City of Los Angeles also designed and planned the LARCA program based on its own experience in operating programs for at-risk youth, including those partnered with education providers and provided career pathways training. The following Los Angeles programs and partnerships provided key insights that influenced and laid the groundwork for the current LARCA program.

- **The Youth Opportunity Movement program**, which began in the early 2000s, placed city staff members at several trade schools throughout Los Angeles in order to better integrate supportive services with the vocational training services that students received at these schools. The program helped to lay the foundations for LARCA by providing EWDD with insight into how the supportive services needed by youth might be integrated into an educational setting. This program also helped EWDD staff members realize that it was possible to serve youth facing challenging circumstances successfully.

- **EWDD’s strategic partnership with LAUSD** began in 2009, when staff members from EWDD began meeting with staff members from LAUSD’s Student Health and Human Services division (which oversees alternative programming and aims to re-enroll out-of-school youth). Together, these two agencies developed a system by which Pupil Services and Attendance (PSA) counselors from LAUSD would be co-located at American Job Centers for youth (known locally as YouthSource Centers) to more readily re-engage attending out-of-school and dropout youth with the school system. After a successful pilot implementation of this setup, EWDD decided to incorporate the use of PSA counselors into the LARCA program and leverage grant dollars to expand this particular partnership.

- **Previous career pathways programs operated by EWDD** also helped to lay the foundations for LARCA.

  - The **Stand and Deliver** program, which was funded through US DOL’s High Growth Job Training Initiative, lasted from 2006 until 2009. The program helped youth, ages 17 to 24, train for jobs in the healthcare sector by establishing relationships with health care workers, conducting internships at hospitals, engaging in skill-building trainings, drafting personal development plans, and creating employment portfolios.

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The Reconnections program, funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, provided educational and career assessments, vocational training, and employment placement for out-of-school youth aged 21 to 24. The academies developed for this program took place at eight separate locations, where participants trained for green construction and healthcare jobs. EWDD staff members consider this program an early iteration of LARCA, and two of the LARCA providers were Reconnections sites.

EWDD also began a healthcare intermediary program, run in partnership with the LA Chamber of Commerce, in 2012. This program, which has helped support the LARCA program, was primarily formed to help health care employers give training providers information about the types of employees they needed and the training that would be most relevant.

The LARCA Program Model

Drawing upon the assets above, EWDD designed the LARCA program to be an innovative model for re-engaging low-income dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 residing in the City or County of Los Angeles who were eligible to work in the United States. The model, seen in Exhibit I-1, illustrates how the LARCA program planned to serve these youth.

The left-hand portion of the model illustrates how the program was designed to respond to a particular context—a set of related problems such as high unemployment, crime, and dropout rates in Los Angeles, particularly among youth—by drawing upon a set of assets—the experiences, knowledge, and collaborative relationships gained or established through the implementation of similar past programs.

The program technically required that youth meet the WIA eligibility criterion of being low-income and having at least one of six barriers to employment (dropout, deficient in basic skills, homeless, runaway or foster child, pregnant or parenting, or offender), which they met by being dropouts. The program later expanded the definition of the program to allow for “chronically absent” youth performing below grade level (regardless of formal dropout status) in addition to dropouts as long as they had one of the other five barriers.
Exhibit I-1: LARCA Program Model

Exhibit 1: Conceptual Framework for the Evaluation of LARCA

**Context**
- Deficits
  - Many young adults are both out of school and out of work
  - High unemployment rate in Los Angeles
  - Significant high school dropout rate in Los Angeles
  - High rate of gang-related crime
- Assets
  - City’s strategic partnership with the Los Angeles Unified School District
  - Experience reaching hard-to-serve youth through schools in the Youth Opportunity Movement program
  - Previous career pathways grants including Reconnections, a 2009 ARRA demonstration grant for the first iteration of LARCA
  - Strategic engagement of employers through work with the Chamber of Commerce

**LARCA Structure**
- Grantee
  - LA Economic and Workforce Development Department
  - LA WIB
- Partners
  - LAUSD
  - LA Community College District
  - LA Chamber of Commerce
  - LA Workforce Collaborative
  - LA Economic Development Corporation
- LARCA Providers
  - Coalition for Responsible Community Development
  - LA Conservation Corps
  - LA Youth Opportunity Movement – Boyle Heights
  - LA Youth Opportunity Movement – Watts
  - Youth Policy Institute – San Fernando
  - Youth Policy Institute – Pico Union

**Service Delivery**
- Phase I
  - LAUSD recruitment by PSAs
  - Outreach and orientation
  - Eligibility determination
  - Random assignment to program or comparison group
  - Educational and psychosocial assessments
  - Development of individualized service plan
  - Assignment to case manager
- Phase II
  - Counseling and Supportive Services
  - Educational Services
  - Literacy and Numeracy Development
- Phase III
  - Bridge Training
  - Work Readiness Skills
  - Youth Development
- Phase IV
  - Paid Work Experience
  - Occupational Skills Certificate Training
- Phase V
  - Job Placement
  - Degree or Certificate Attainment
  - Literacy and Numeracy Gains
  - Follow-Up

**Outcomes/Cost-Effectiveness**
- Participant Outcomes
  - Educational Attainment
  - Literacy and Numeracy Gains
  - Entered Employment Rate
  - Employment Retention Rate
  - Incarceration Rate
- Costs
  - Program cost per participant
  - Costs of occupational skills training and educational services
  - Shifts in costs as a result of using blended funding
- Partnership and System Outcomes
  - Partnership capacity and functioning
  - Sustainable partnerships and service delivery system
Central to the model is LARCA’s *organizational structure*, which included three major parts: 1) the grantees, EWDD and the Workforce Investment Board, served as program leaders; 2) several city-level partner organizations assisted EWDD in designing and implementing program services; and 3) six provider agencies were responsible for delivering services to participants. These six providers, on which much of the rest of the report focuses, are as follows:

- The Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD)
- LA Conservation Corps
- Youth Opportunity Movement – Boyle Heights (YO! Boyle Heights)
- Youth Opportunity Movement – Watts (YO! Watts)
- Youth Policy Institute – San Fernando Valley (YPI San Fernando)
- Youth Policy Institute – Pico Union (YPI Pico Union)

Each provider had experience working with the dropout population, a strategic geographic location, experience delivering similar services, and/or its own network of partner providers. Chapter II provides further details on EWDD, the partner organizations, and the providers. Short profiles summarizing each of the providers and their LARCA program service delivery models can be found in Appendix A.

The LARCA model also illustrates the plan for *service delivery*, which includes the services providers were to deliver and their specified sequence. The sequence starts with the recruitment and enrollment activities listed under Phase I (these are described in greater detail in Chapter III of this report). Phases II–V outline the key services providers delivered to program participants in hopes of improving their overall outcomes. These services, described in greater detail in chapters IV and V, include:

- **case management services**, designed to support and guide participants through the program and keep them on track;
- **work readiness training**, culminating in the issuance of a work readiness certificate;
- **supportive services**, including transportation assistance, health care services, child care services, and housing services;
- **life skills workshops and youth development opportunities**, including workshops on financial literacy and conflict resolution, and opportunities to serve on youth councils or represent the program at conferences;
- **educational services**, including high school coursework and testing for a diploma or equivalent degree;
- **vocational training**, through certificate-based programs offered at local community colleges, including exposure to career ladders in health care, conservation, and green technology and construction; and
• placement in employment and/or additional education and training at the
post-secondary level, ideally in an identified career pathway.

The last section of the model—the outcomes/cost effectiveness section—highlights the goals of
the LARCA program, which, because of their close relationship with the evaluation, are
described further below.

Overall, the research suggests that the LARCA program model holds real promise for helping
high school dropouts so long as it overcomes some specific challenges. The LARCA program is
different from many of these previous programs, operated nationally and by the City of Los
Angeles in that it exclusively focuses on dropout youth, tries to provide them with both
secondary and post-secondary educational opportunities, and does so with a long-term
perspective. It also does this with a wide network of partners who bring to the table an extensive
reservoir of skills and experience. As such, the LARCA program has the potential to address
many of the limitations noted in previously implemented programs.

Overview of the Evaluation and its Goals

The evaluation is designed to rigorously assess how well the LARCA program achieves its
objective of re-engaging youth who face daunting odds to achieving educational and
employment success. This evaluation seeks to build upon the lessons learned through prior
research of programs serving at-risk youth and lessons EWDD learned and incorporated into this
program from managing the programs that heavily influenced this one. To accomplish these
research goals, the evaluation consists of three main studies: a random assignment impact study,
a cost study, and an implementation study.

The impact study, intended to gauge the overall impacts of the program, uses a randomized
control trial design. Over the course of 22 months, starting in January 2012, each of the six
providers used an online computer system, developed by the study team, to assign at random all
youth who were interested and eligible to participate in the LARCA program to two different
groups. Approximately half of these youth were assigned to the program group, thus becoming
LARCA program participants. These participants were able to access the full array of LARCA
program services offered by the provider. The other youth were assigned to a control group.
These individuals became ineligible for LARCA program services but could still access any
other services for which they were eligible, including other programs operated by these providers
and by contractors of EWDD, such as WIA youth services. In other words, through random
assignment, the study created two equivalent groups, one of which received program services,
and one of which did not, creating an opportunity to obtain an unbiased estimate of the impact of
the LARCA program.
In total, the study randomly assigned 2,082 youth: 1,067 to the program group and 1,015 to the control group. Accompanying the findings of the random assignment impact study will be those of a cost study, which will estimate the cost of operating and running the LARCA program. The cost study will also analyze the cost-effectiveness of the LARCA services by relating their costs to their measured impacts. Costs will include administrative costs, salaries, and materials; the impacts will be calculated from observed differences between the program and control groups in program outcomes. The study team will provide additional description of the methodologies used in the impact and cost studies when it reports the findings for these studies in the evaluation’s final report, planned for 2016.

The subject of this interim report is the implementation study, which examines the structure of the organizations charged with running the program, the partnerships employed in delivering services, the flow of participants through the program, the service design and delivery strategies used, and the successes and challenges encountered in implementing the program. The implementation study also seeks to gain an understanding of how the LARCA program operates as a whole and how each LARCA provider operates individually, comparing differences in service delivery across providers. One purpose of conducting these assessments and analyses and compiling the findings in this report is to share implementation lessons with a broader audience—to identify practices that were more successful and less successful in implementing LARCA so that future programs with similar goals can make use of what was learned. A second purpose is to inform the findings of the impact study and provide information that may help the evaluation team understand the possible causes and mechanisms behind any improved outcomes measured in the impact study.

Data Collection and Analysis for the Implementation Study

In order to accomplish its goals, the implementation study addressed the following research questions.

Further information on the enrollment process, as well as the composition of the program group, is provided in Chapter III. Information comparing the program and control groups will be provided in the evaluation’s final report, scheduled for 2016.
• What services were provided? How were these services coordinated with various partner organizations? How did these services vary across provider organizations? What was their overall quality, intensity, and duration?

• What partnerships and linkages did EWDD and each of the providers develop and how did these partnerships aid in delivering services? Who were these partners and in what ways did they work with the primary providers of the program?

• How did the services received by program group members compare to those received by comparison group members from other sources in the community? Were there any problems with crossovers (comparison group members receiving services they should not be allowed to receive)?

• What performance outcomes were most meaningful to program operators? How did site-level performance on these outcome measures influence program planning?

• What system-level outcomes were achieved as a result of LARCA implementation (e.g. new partnerships, greater efficiency in the delivery of services and their quality, strong cooperation between programs and funding streams, new recruitment strategies, and new uses of technology)?

• What implementation challenges did the program experience? Did implementation of the program reveal any methods or approaches that might be classified as best practices? What are the lessons learned for other organizations that wish to implement and scale-up similar programs?

To address these questions, the study team collected data during two rounds of multi-day site visits, conducted during the Fall of 2013 and Fall of 2014. The team also collected documentation on program policies and practices throughout the period of the evaluation, as team members worked with EWDD, provider organizations, and partner organizations to conduct the impact evaluation. Overall, the study team engaged in three types of qualitative data collection activities for the implementation study: 1) conducting semi-structured interviews of program administrators, provider staff members, partner staff members, and program participants; 2) making detailed observations of program services; and 3) reviewing program documentation.

The semi-structured interviews were the key form of data analyzed and an important means of capturing the perspectives of four main groups of program stakeholders:

1. **LARCA program administrators** at EWDD and the WIB were the individuals responsible for administering the grant and overseeing the operations of the program. Interviews with these individuals gave the study team a good understanding of how the program was developed, how it was being administered, what these management staff members saw as the intended design for eligibility determination and program service delivery, and what differences across program providers may have influenced program implementation.
2. **LARCA program provider staff members** were the individuals involved in the oversight and delivery of program services at the provider organizations. Study team members spoke to people in leadership positions, program coordinators, case managers, and other service-provider staff members. These interviews gave the study team insight into how the LARCA program was implemented by each provider and the ways in which implementation differed from the initial plans. During interviews, site visitors asked about various programmatic issues: 1) program and service access (i.e., how potential participants are recruited and screened); 2) service receipt (i.e., the range and type of pre-release and post-release services); 3) the overlap and coordination of LARCA and other provider services; 4) system-level and individual-level outcomes; and 5) challenges to implementation.

3. **Program partner organization staff members** included key individuals from organizations that provided program services to participants in partnership with EWDD or a given provider. Organizations included those that partnered primarily with EWDD, such as LAUSD and the WIB, as well as organizations such as charter schools or community colleges that partnered with the individual LARCA providers. Through these interviews, the study team learned about the nature of these partnerships, how the linkages were developed, and the role of partners in providing services.

4. **Program recipients** were individuals enrolled in the program at the time of the visit. Study team members conducted focus groups of 3–5 participants at each of the six providers during both rounds of site visits. Questions addressed participants’ experiences with the LARCA program and their perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses. These groups were not representative of the larger participant populations; the focus groups were intended to gather rich qualitative data rather than to provide a survey of participant experiences.

The observations of program services were conducted to get a truer sense of the nature of these services. During program provider site visits, study team members observed orientations, classroom and vocational training sessions and some employment-related services activities, focusing on both the delivery and management of the services as well as participants’ experiences. These observations allowed the study team to better understand the ways in which program staff members put into practice the strategies and approaches they had discussed as crucial to the program and to gain richer details about the services provided.

The study team collected and reviewed documentation on program policies and practices throughout the process of working with EWDD and the provider sites. Materials that the study team collected and reviewed included program planning documents, enrollment and application forms, staffing and organization charts, statements of program policies, class and service delivery schedules, case planning and service delivery documentation, and tracking and data collection tools. Study team members reviewed these documents to prepare for site visits and to examine more closely the policies and practices discussed by respondents during site visits.
After each round of data collection, study team members analyzed the data through a two-stage process. During the first stage, the team shaped the “raw” data—i.e., notes and materials gathered from site visits and from the various LARCA program organizations—into detailed write-ups. These write-ups grouped information according to the different geographic levels at which the program operated (i.e., EWDD and other city-level organizations on the one hand and the six individual providers on the other) and the different ways in which program services were organized (i.e., case management services, education services, etc.). These write-ups also highlighted effective program practices and challenges encountered. In addition, the team collated close-ended data about each of the six program providers gathered during site visits, using a tool built for this process that allowed high-level comparison of program elements. These modified data sources then formed the basis for the second analysis stage, whereby team members grouped providers according to the services they offered, identified key themes and trends across providers, and considered how different program structures or context affected specific service delivery strategies and decisions.

Overview of the Report

Subsequent chapters of this report present the key findings from the implementation study. Chapter II presents an overview of each of the organizations involved in developing and operating the LARCA program: EWDD, city-level partners, the six providers, and the provider-level partner organizations. This chapter summarizes program leadership, staffing, funding, and the nature of the different types of partnerships used in the delivery of program services. Chapter III summarizes the recruitment and enrollment process, covering the procedures used by each of the six provider organizations, the results of enrollment, and the next steps participants engaged in immediately following enrollment. Chapter IV examines the case management services that formed the unifying element of the program and helped participants navigate the full slate of program services. This chapter also presents information on the comprehensive services providers offered participants, including supportive services, life skills workshops, and youth development and leadership activities. Chapter V provides details about the education, vocational training, and placement services that LARCA program participants received and how these services varied across the provider agencies while still adhering to the career pathways-based program model. Finally, Chapter VI discusses the notable accomplishments of the various agencies implementing the LARCA program as well as the challenges they experienced. This chapter also draws important conclusions about program implementation and notes the implications they may have for the impact study.

Together, these chapters provide a detailed account of the ways in which each of the six LARCA providers both adhered to the overall program model and provided some unique variations based upon their particular expertise. These chapters also highlight the ways in which EWDD and city-
level partnerships supported overall program operations. This interim report thus provides important lessons for those wishing to implement programs serving out-of-school and/or dropout youth. It also provides an important foundation for the final report of this evaluation. That report will summarize any impacts of the program, offer explanations for those impacts, and discuss any variation in impacts across programs or types of participants should they exist.
II. LARCA OPERATING STRUCTURE AND PARTNERSHIPS

By design, the LARCA program engaged multiple actors in both program design and program implementation. The Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department (EWDD) oversaw the implementation of the LARCA program; six agencies (hereafter referred to as “providers”) delivered their own versions of the LARCA program to participants; and various other agencies and community organizations provided resources or services to the program and its participants. This chapter describes the relationships among these entities (the “structure” of the LARCA program), the management responsibilities of both EWDD and the LARCA providers, and how the partners were engaged (at both the system level and the provider level) to facilitate program implementation.

The chapter includes the following key findings:

- The LARCA program benefitted from EWDD’s access to existing employer engagement strategies and labor market planning resources. Because the LARCA program fell under the oversight of the Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board (WIB), LARCA program administrators at EWDD had access to several WIB-funded resources. These resources included a source of labor market information and a health care intermediary group, which facilitated long-range planning around vocational training for youth as well as ready access to key actors in workforce policy in the city.

- The LARCA program strengthened existing partnerships at both a citywide level and a provider level. The program depended on several partnerships including those involving education and training providers, the city’s workforce development system, and community-based providers of supportive services. Many of these partnerships—with community-based organizations at the provider level and with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) at the system level—had been in place prior to LARCA. In many cases, the LARCA program provided both city-level and provider-level actors an opportunity to grow and build existing partnerships in ways that demonstrated their value to larger workforce efforts. The grant mainly supported the strengthening of these existing relationships rather than the formation of new partnerships.

- The main challenge in implementing the LARCA program, for both providers and EWDD, was adhering to a common program model. While EWDD developed a model for the LARCA program, providers had significant autonomy in how to implement it. Although EWDD selected the providers...
because of the resources they brought to the initial development of their programs, some providers did not implement certain program elements until well after the program had begun. Similarly, EWDD issued updated guidance on several key program issues midway through implementation, changing the direction of the overall model in subtle but discernible ways. While these shifts speak to LARCA’s dynamic implementation, it was sometimes a challenge for providers and EWDD to accommodate these changes.

**EWDD and Program Leadership**

In designing the LARCA program, EWDD developed a logic model, introduced in the previous chapter, which laid out the key elements of the program. The model also specified the three key actors in the LARCA program: EWDD, the six providers, and the partners engaged at both the system level and the provider level. These actors, and the relationships between them, are the focus of this chapter.

EWDD provided guidance to the six LARCA program providers and managed relationships with key system partners. EWDD staff members provided two primary types of assistance to providers: programmatic support (i.e. technical assistance and capacity building related to LARCA) and administrative oversight (i.e. fiscal and performance monitoring). EWDD also partnered with other public agencies in economic development, workforce development, and education to pursue system-level changes through LARCA, often leveraging existing relationships and committees.

**Programmatic Support**

The two primary LARCA staff members at EWDD were the LARCA Program Manager (who works full-time on LARCA) and the YouthSource System Director for LARCA (who spends approximately one-third of her time on the LARCA program). These staff members assisted providers with challenges, provided training on key LARCA processes, and facilitated partner and provider meetings. For the first year of implementation, EWDD also had a Senior Project Coordinator who spent approximately 25 percent of her time on LARCA, providing technical assistance and capacity building services to the provider organizations. This Senior Project Coordinator took over as Executive Director at one of the LARCA providers during the second year of the grant, so while she remains involved in LARCA at the provider level, she no longer provides overall technical assistance or capacity building (and has not been replaced at EWDD).

EWDD provided initial programmatic guidance by reviewing LARCA service plans submitted by each provider at the start of LARCA program implementation. These plans—presented in graphic form as PowerPoint presentations—detailed provider-level versions of the overall LARCA program logic model introduced in the previous chapter. It is apparent from these provider-level plans that services varied by provider in several key ways: whether youth pursued
a GED or a high school diploma, what type(s) of vocational training were provided, the content and intensity of life skills and work readiness training, the overall length of the program, and how follow-up was practiced. (These variations, as they were actually implemented, are discussed in more detail in later chapters of this report.) EWDD had to approve these provider-level plans, though the Program Manager noted that EWDD did not want to be “too prescriptive” and let providers have flexibility in identifying their service models and partners.

Beyond this initial guidance, EWDD also provided ongoing program oversight and assistance through several other avenues. First, EWDD held regular program implementation meetings with key stakeholders from LAUSD, a key partner on the grant. During these meetings, participants discussed issues that were affecting the youth and provided updates on program-related issues and decisions. For example, in the summer of 2014, EWDD updated the definition of dropout youth for LARCA program eligibility purposes to include “chronically absent youth performing below grade level” (not just those who have formally dropped out), which was critical information for LAUSD to know for referring students to the LARCA program. These meetings initially occurred quarterly, but EWDD and LAUSD leaders began meeting on a monthly basis during the second half of 2014.

Second, EWDD held semi-regular meetings with LARCA providers to answer questions, provide updates on programmatic issues (e.g. guidance on recording supportive service referrals) and share success stories, especially those involving program participants. These meetings occurred monthly during the first year of the grant, but dropped down to quarterly once LARCA was well underway. LARCA provider staff members reported that these meetings were helpful, but offered divergent perspectives on how frequently such interactions should occur. Staff members at two LARCA providers expressed that they would have preferred to continue more frequent contact with staff members from other LARCA provider organizations and EWDD. However, a staff member from another provider pointed out that as her program developed, she found these meetings less essential than when LARCA first started, when providers didn’t know how to implement it. In addition to these update meetings, EWDD also hosted several content-specific trainings for LARCA providers on required program practices. These included a training on administering participant assessments, a training on best practices in case management, and a training on using the Efforts to Outcomes (EtO) database, a cloud-based participant information system designed for use by providers in recording services received and outcomes achieved by LARCA program participants.

Finally, EWDD provided one-on-one assistance, as needed, when provider sites requested or displayed a need for guidance around LARCA program development. For example, one program manager reported that she initially thought her agency would only be able to offer a specific type of healthcare training, but EWDD staff members reviewed the WIF grant for her
and determined that the grant allowed a wider array of vocational training than she realized, enabling her to reach out to and finalize agreements with several vocational training partners.

**Administrative Oversight**

In addition to the programmatic support described above, EWDD also offered administrative support and oversight in the form of budget monitoring, reimbursement and approval of LARCA spending, and performance measurement. Again, the staff members primarily responsible for these oversight activities were the LARCA Program Manager and the YouthSource System Director. Additional EWDD staff members who assisted with administrative oversight included the General Operational Manager (responsible for performance of all workforce system programs) and an accountant from EWDD’s finance department, though both of these staff spent only a small amount of their total time on the LARCA program.

Financial oversight activities included monitoring the LARCA budget overall and at the provider level, approving subcontractors, and reimbursing providers for LARCA expenses. Monitoring and approving expenditures helped EWDD accomplish two key oversight roles. On a basic level, these activities helped EWDD ensure that programs used WIF funding only for costs allowable under that grant. Additionally, monitoring grant expenditures helped EWDD stay abreast of the extent to which providers were implementing LARCA on schedule.

EWDD staff members also provided administrative oversight by monitoring participant progress and outcomes and reporting the status of these variables to the United States Department of Labor (US DOL) for the WIF grant. LARCA providers tracked participant outcomes and the achievement of intermediate goals through the EtO database into which they entered participant data on a monthly basis. EWDD extracted information from this database for quarterly reporting to US DOL on the following outcomes: number of youth enrolled, number to achieve WIA-defined common measures, number back on track, number placed in employment or education, number that attained a degree or certificate, literacy and numeracy gains, and the number completing work readiness training.

In addition to using LARCA performance data for reporting to US DOL, EWDD staff members also used these data to report performance metrics, as they do for all workforce programs, to the Mayor and City Council. EWDD evaluates all of its workforce programs using a standardized SOFA (Satisfaction, Outcomes and Flows, and Administrative Capability) system, and then presents these performance metrics twice a year to the Mayor and City Council to determine contract compliance.30

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30 EWDD also contracts with California State University at Northridge for a separate satisfaction survey of customers served both by YouthSource and WorkSource centers (the name in Los Angeles for American Job
LARCA Program Providers
The six providers operating LARCA include two city programs and four community-based organizations:

- **The Coalition for Responsible Community Development** (CRCD) is a faith-based, non-profit organization in the Vernon-Central neighborhood. The organization provides a range of services including housing, workforce and youth development, neighborhood and community beautification, and supportive services. One of its largest programs is YouthBuild, a program providing educational and construction training for out-of-school youth.

- **LA Conservation Corps** is a non-profit organization providing environmental and conservation work and service opportunities for youth. LA Conservation Corps has locations in Northeast Los Angeles, South Los Angeles, and East Los Angeles. LA Conservation Corps offers work and service programs for out-of-school youth and middle and high school students, and also operates an after-school program at LAUSD elementary and middle schools.

- **Youth Opportunity Movement – Boyle Heights** (YO! Boyle Heights) is one of three Los Angeles Youth Opportunity Movement (LAYOM) grant sites in the city of Los Angeles. It is considered a program within the city government, and therefore all staff members are employed by the city. YO! Boyle Heights is located in the Eastside and serves youth through several longstanding programs, including WIA Youth, a Community Development Block Grant to serve in-school youth, and programs for youth in the criminal justice system. Depending on the program, youth have access to educational classes as well as supportive services and youth development activities. YO! Boyle Heights previously operated Reconnections, an earlier iteration of LARCA described in the previous chapter, from 2009 through 2011.

- **Youth Opportunity Movement – Watts** (YO! Watts) is another LAYOM grant site in the Watts neighborhood of South Los Angeles. Other programs on site include a WIA Youth program, a Community Development Block Grant to serve in-school youth, and programs for youth who are either incarcerated or under in-school probation. As with YO! Boyle Heights, depending on the program, youth have access to educational classes as well as supportive services and youth development activities. Also, like YO! Boyle Heights, YO! Watts previously operated Reconnections from 2009 through 2011.

- **Youth Policy Institute – San Fernando Valley** (YPI San Fernando) is one of two offices of Youth Policy Institute, a non-profit organization providing education, career training, and case management for at-risk youth. YPI San Fernando is located in the Northeast San Fernando Valley. This provider has a WIA Youth program and a YouthBuild program.

Centers), so the three LARCA providers that also operate YouthSource centers are evaluated through this survey in addition to being evaluated by SPR with regard to their role in the LARCA program.
• **Youth Policy Institute – Pico Union** (YPI Pico Union) is located in Central Los Angeles. In addition to LARCA, this provider offers a program to reduce gang involvement and a program for youth transitioning out of foster care. YPI Pico Union did not open until March of 2013, when LARCA implementation was already underway, so it did not have nearly as much time to start up and refine its program as other providers did.

Additional information on each of the providers and their LARCA program service delivery models can be found in Appendix A.

**LARCA Provider Characteristics**

The providers chosen to operate LARCA have strong ties to their local communities and are accessible to high-need communities throughout Los Angeles, as shown below in Exhibit II-1. One of the main benefits of the LARCA grant, as reported by both EWDD and provider staff members, was that it enabled the system to serve youth from the entire county (whereas WIA services require that youth be from the city of Los Angeles itself). Two of the providers, LA Conservation Corps and YPI San Fernando, had prior experience serving youth from parts of Los Angeles County that are not part of the city, so EWDD engaged those organizations explicitly to ensure that LARCA would reach these areas.

**Exhibit II-1: Location of LARCA Providers**
LARCA providers share several key qualifications. First, as described above, all six providers have experience operating programs that serve out-of-school and dropout youth. In particular, all of the providers except YPI Pico Union operate WIA funded programs. This experience with operating programs specifically for out-of-school (as well as in-school) youth enabled the LARCA providers to leverage existing partner relationships and lessons learned from operating similar service models relevant to this population.

The six providers integrated the LARCA program into their operations in different ways, depending on the kinds of programs they were already operating or had operated in the past:

- CRCD and LA Conservation Corps were able to modify existing programs to accommodate LARCA participants, adding LARCA program elements such as the work readiness certificate and InnerSight assessment (described in subsequent chapters of this report). At CRCD, LARCA youth enrolled in YouthBuild, and at LA Conservation Corps they enrolled in Young Adult Corps.

- The two YO! sites resurrected a previous demonstration program—the Reconnections program they had operated from 2009 until 2011—using the LARCA grant as an opportunity to expand and refine that program and make it consistent with the LARCA program model.

- The two YPI sites offered a third model: they developed completely new, standalone LARCA programs.

Another important characteristic of these providers is that they operated existing programs that either served youth potentially eligible for LARCA or included elements of the LARCA model such as vocational training and life skills classes. For example, an alternative sentencing program at CRCD and a teen parenting support program at YPI San Fernando both served youth who might also be eligible for LARCA, and these programs therefore offered both an avenue for recruitment and a source of additional funding for youth who qualified for multiple programs. Additionally, offering other employment training programs enabled providers to refine their approach to youth workforce development. For example, the Summer Youth Employment Program, a city-funded summer jobs program for youth 14–18 in operation at all six provider sites, helped providers form valuable connections to local employers regardless of the fact that the population served under that program did not entirely overlap with LARCA.

**LARCA Provider Funding**

Each provider received a portion of the WIF grant to pay for case management staffing and services to participants. EWDD funded the four nonprofit providers (LA Conservation Corps, CRCD, YPI San Fernando, and YPI Pico Union) through subcontracts, and these providers were required to submit monthly expense reports to be reimbursed for LARCA staffing and program service costs (such as youth stipends). CRCD and LA Conservation Corps each received $1,450,000; YPI, as an organization, received $2.8 million to be distributed evenly between its
two different sites. YO! Watts and YO! Boyle Heights received a combined allocation of $2,020,000 to be divided evenly between their LARCA programs as well, but as city programs, these two providers did not need to submit expense reports for staffing: LARCA staff members at the two YO! providers simply submitted timesheets like other EWDD employees and charged to LARCA as appropriate. Each YO! provider, however, did have to submit expense reports for program service costs.

In addition to the funding from the WIF grant, providers leveraged funds from other sources within and outside their organizations. All providers except for YPI Pico Union received funding to serve youth through WIA and offered at least some WIA-funded services onsite. These WIA programs shared several key resources with LARCA: GED classes, job search classes and resources, and program staff time. In addition to leveraging resources from WIA, four of the providers leveraged funds from other programs within their organizations. For example, at CRCD and YPI San Fernando, funds from the YouthBuild grant directly benefited the LARCA program because CRCD enrolls all LARCA youth in YouthBuild and YPI San Fernando co-enrolls some LARCA youth in YouthBuild. YO! Boyle Heights reported leveraging other resources from organizational partners rather than from programs within the agency (for example, one of its vocational training providers offered 20 free slots in its CPR class for LARCA participants). At the time of the site visits, the only provider that did not report leveraging any funds was YPI Pico Union, which had only recently opened its location and was still starting up its other programs during LARCA implementation.

LARCA Program Management at the Provider Level

The providers used slightly different staffing structures to manage their individual LARCA programs. As shown in Exhibit II-, three types of staff members managed the LARCA programs at each provider—executive directors with jurisdiction over the entire organization, other intermediate managers with responsibility for particular departments, and program managers who focused on one or more specific programs—and the individuals in these roles had different responsibilities in the different providers.
CRCD and LA Conservation Corps, which integrated the LARCA program into existing core organizational programs, structured LARCA program management to reflect both LARCA’s small share of the overall organizational budget and the fact that program managers had other responsibilities besides LARCA. At these providers, management staff members included an overall program manager to oversee the program and an intermediate manager to actually manage the program; both of these individuals balanced their LARCA responsibilities with management and oversight of other programs. However, neither provider’s executive director billed time to LARCA specifically. The two YO! providers, where LARCA makes up a larger percentage of the budget, each had a full-time program manager to manage the program, a full-time position for an intermediate manager to implement the program (though this position was vacant at YO! Boyle Heights for much of the grant), and dedicated oversight from the organization’s executive director. The two YPI providers used a model intermediate between the two just discussed: while neither had support from an executive director, and the intermediate manager managed LARCA along with other organizational programs, each site had a full-time LARCA program manager, as well as half-time support from an assistant director who was responsible for overseeing the LARCA program.

In addition to overseeing the overall program and its budget within the organization, management of LARCA at the provider level involved regular reporting to EWDD. As discussed earlier, providers had to update EtO with participant data on a monthly basis for EWDD’s reports to US DOL. Because LARCA providers also had other grant reporting responsibilities, most providers tracked youth outcomes in other systems besides the LARCA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Executive Director Role</th>
<th>Other Intermediate Manager Role</th>
<th>Program Manager Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRCD LA Conservation Corps</td>
<td>(Not funded by LARCA)</td>
<td>Management of all workforce programs including LARCA</td>
<td>Oversight of all youth programs at the organization including LARCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Watts</td>
<td>Oversight of all programs, including LARCA</td>
<td>Full-time on LARCA, responsible for program implementation (position vacant at Boyle Heights for part of the grant)</td>
<td>Full-time management of LARCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Boyle Heights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI San Fernando</td>
<td>(Not funded by LARCA)</td>
<td>Management of all workforce and education programs including LARCA</td>
<td>Joint oversight by a full-time program manager and half-time assistant director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Pico Union</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exhibit II-2: LARCA Management Staffing Roles
The two YO! providers and CRCD used spreadsheets to track participant outcomes and transferred this data into EtO, and LA Conservation Corps exported data from its overall EtO system into the LARCA EtO database. At the YPI providers, staff members entered outcome data directly into the LARCA EtO system.

**LARCA Partnerships**

The primary actors in the LARCA program, EWDD and the six providers, relied on partnerships with other organizations that operated both system-wide as well as with individual providers. As described in this section, these partners connected EWDD and the providers to critical resources in education and training, economic and workforce development, and supportive services.

**System-Wide Partnerships**

In addition to providing oversight and guidance to the LARCA program providers, EWDD also took responsibility for convening and engaging partners across education, workforce development, and economic development. Formed with the goal of aligning and improving services to out-of-school youth at the city and county level, these partnerships played a key role in driving the systems-level change component of LARCA.

Three partner organizations that had been involved in prior EWDD efforts to serve disconnected and high-need youth were engaged by EWDD in the design and implementation of LARCA:

- **The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)** was a critical partner in the implementation of the LARCA program. LAUSD collaborated with EWDD (through program implementation meetings) to ensure the success of LARCA implementation at the district level. LAUSD also provided a Pupil Services and Attendance Counselor (PSA) to work at each of the six LARCA providers. LARCA funded half of each PSA’s salary and LAUSD provided the other half.

- **The Los Angeles Workforce Investment Board (WIB)** decides which workforce grants the city applies for, oversees all grants related to the workforce system, and served as a co-signatory on the WIF grant. In relation to its oversight role, it received biannual updates on LARCA’s progress toward meeting key performance measures. The WIB also helped EWDD connect with other resources within the city’s workforce system to help it more effectively implement the LARCA program. For instance, the WIB invited the LARCA Program Manager to participate in the healthcare intermediary group run by the LA Chamber of Commerce and funded by the WIB, and she has subsequently worked with the group to identify opportunities for youth to pursue entry-level opportunities in healthcare.

- **The LA Chamber of Commerce** designed the curriculum for the Work Readiness Certificate that LARCA participants complete as part of their training. EWDD also leveraged the Chamber’s services, particularly the health care sector intermediary group mentioned above, for the program’s own benefit. While the
Chamber did not have an official MOU with EWDD related to LARCA specifically, EWDD considered the Chamber to be a critical and strategic partner on LARCA. The LARCA Program Manager noted that employers often attend Chamber meetings and announce their hiring needs to the group, which allowed LARCA “to tap into those resources before they shared them with the larger community.”

In addition to these three key partners, EWDD also engaged several other organizations with a more limited scope of involvement in LARCA (and no formal MOU with EWDD for LARCA specifically). The Los Angeles Community College District was a named partner in the WIF proposal and created support letters for the grant, although partnerships specific to LARCA occurred between individual colleges and individual LARCA providers rather than through EWDD. Additionally, the LA Economic Development Corporation, under contract with the WIB, provided labor market information for EWDD that it was able to leverage for LARCA. When LARCA staff members at EWDD needed data on a particular sector—for example, to inform vocational training options or career exploration for youth—EDC provided this information, as it does for all city workforce programs. Similarly, LARCA, as part of being under WIB oversight, had access to the WIB-convened LA Workforce Collaborative, which held monthly meetings of staff members from the WIB, EWDD, the community college district and local vocational training providers. These meetings often provided information relevant for LARCA (for example, information about new collaborations within or of benefit to the youth workforce system).

Provider-Level Partnerships

At the provider level, partner organizations played an important role in providing educational, vocational and supportive services. Most providers had existing relationships with these partners that predated the LARCA program (the exception was YPI Pico Union, which opened its doors after LARCA implementation had begun).

Providers contracted with three key types of partners to assist with the implementation of LARCA:

- **LAUSD.** LAUSD shared funding with EWDD for the PSAs who assisted with recruitment, intake and assessment across the six LARCA providers (and, as mentioned earlier, funded half of each PSA’s salary). In addition to the PSAs, LAUSD funded a PSA Counselor lead and an additional trainer who provided assistance and capacity building to the PSAs. Having these PSAs on-site enabled

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31 Given this more limited system-level relationship, EWDD does not have a formal MOU with the community college district, though individual LARCA providers have MOUs with individual colleges to provide vocational training.
providers to monitor school leavers, have access to participant’s educational records, reconnect youth with the school system, and help youth tailor their educational plans to ensure academic success within the LARCA program. YO! Watts also referred youth to two different LAUSD adult schools for GED classes (as part of a contractual relationship).

- **Charter schools.** These entities provided high school course instruction accessible to LARCA participants at all six provider sites (though some youth could choose to enter adult schools or take on-site GED classes rather than enroll in charter schools). These charter schools have formal MOUs with the provider agencies and, at most provider sites, the charter school operates on the premises.

- **Community colleges and private training providers.** These partners primarily assisted with vocational training, but also provided work readiness training and assisted with job placement through their staff networks. Most of the LARCA providers already had existing partnerships with local community colleges or private training providers, and chose to modify these existing relationships to engage these partners in delivering services to LARCA participants. The provider sites were responsible for identifying training providers, and then had these providers submit bids for a procurement process through EWDD (as the official recipient of grant funds). LARCA providers had a formal MOU with each contracted training provider.

In addition to these formal contractual relationships, LARCA providers also drew on informal partnerships with **community-based organizations**—usually on a referral basis, without a formal MOU. Each of the providers referred youth to these partners for assistance with childcare, housing, mental health issues, and substance abuse, and some providers also offered connections to partners who could assist with legal services, transportation, and tattoo removal. In most cases, these relationships with community-based organizations predated LARCA—with the exception, again, of YPI Pico Union, which did not open until March of 2013 and needed time to develop relationships in its neighborhood.

**Challenges to LARCA Administration**

The LARCA program experienced several key challenges during the first two years of implementation, both within EWDD and at the provider level. Many of these challenges stemmed from the nature of the WIF grant itself: EWDD and the providers had the significant task of starting up and implementing an innovative demonstration program in a very short period of time.

**Challenges Faced by EWDD**

EWDD faced several challenges to administering the LARCA program:

- **The freedom afforded to providers in structuring their LARCA programs presented EWDD with challenges in management and reporting.** Because
providers had a fair amount of flexibility to design their programs, service delivery was not fully uniform across sites, both in the types of services provided (e.g. whether programs offered internship placements) and in how providers described these services. For example, youth at both CRCD and LA Conservation Corps engage in paid team-based community service projects (such as urban gardening and trail maintenance), but LA Conservation Corps refers to this component as vocational training while CRCD staff members consider it an internship. In reflecting on the program design, a staff member at EWDD noted that there would have been some benefit to them having been even more prescriptive up front about customer flow, program sequencing, and the components required in each specific service offered by the providers.

- **Because of the compressed program start-up period, EWDD and the providers did not have sufficient time to ensure that provider models were structured to meet participants’ longer-term educational and employment needs.** In retrospect, EWDD staff members felt that some elements of service delivery happened too quickly due to the rapid startup required by the grant. The LARCA program director wished that there had been more time to think through participants’ longer-term needs and how to meet them: “[W]e didn’t need to rush…looking at those outcomes, I want to know, ‘where is that student now, what do they still need from you?’ Could we have a little bit more time developing their skills.”

- **EWDD staff members often operated without the benefit of adequate prescriptive guidance from US DOL on implementing a WIF grant.** One staff member noted that while the goal of the WIF grant was to be innovative and generate best practices, more feedback from US DOL staff members about their vision and recommendations for such innovation would have been helpful in shaping EWDD’s implementation and monitoring of LARCA.

**Challenges Faced by LARCA Providers**

Providers also faced several obstacles to successful program implementation:

- **Some provider-level elements of the LARCA program either changed or did not occur on schedule.** One provider, which offered several vocational training options, stopped offering a solar installation training program during the first year of the grant since youth were not interested in this field. Another provider significantly overhauled its vocational training plan before any participants had actually enrolled in training, changing its focus from entry-level CNA training to a more career pathways-focused program in healthcare IT, which, in turn, shifted the desired outcome from job placement to enrollment in post-secondary education. These kinds of changes both impeded program implementation and created additional pressure on providers given the time-limited nature of the grant. Additionally, a lag in vocational training startup and partnership setup was a challenge for retention for three providers, as participants had to wait for so long to start training that some simply fell out of contact. Similarly, several providers struggled with staff turnover, which affected their ability to deliver LARCA services. At the time of the second site visit, some providers were concerned that
delays in implementation might make it difficult to spend out their LARCA budget within the grant period.

- **Providers struggled to respond to mid-course changes in guidance from EWDD in several key areas.** An example of this kind of shift was how EWDD clarified the definition of “dropout” in August of 2014 to include chronically absent youth performing below grade level. While this eligibility clarification was within EWDD’s purview, as WIBs are able to clarify definitions not specified in the WIA regulations, and while this change was ultimately helpful to providers by expanding the pool of potentially eligible youth, providers nevertheless noted that it was disruptive since they then had to modify their recruitment and enrollment procedures.

- **Providers did not always receive timely guidance from EWDD.** As an example of this challenge, providers explained that they were initially given no guidance on how to conduct the exiting process and were instead instructed not to exit any youth, even those who had had finished training, so that they could continue receiving services under the grant. Only after exiting participants became an issue (at the time of the second round of site visits) did EWDD begin discussions with the providers to think about what the exit and follow up processes might entail.

- **Providers had to adjust their LARCA data management and reporting processes midway through implementation.** Providers did not receive their EtO software or training on how to use it until well after the start of random assignment, which forced programs to retroactively enter data and resulted in services not being recorded consistently for a significant portion of the grant. Additionally, following a site visit from US DOL in June of 2014, EWDD requested that programs begin reporting leveraged funds, but since providers had not consistently tracked this information they did not always have the required documentation to report leveraged resources to EWDD.

**Conclusion**

The LARCA program involved a complex administrative system, with EWDD, providers, and partners all working together to implement the model. LARCA benefitted from the resources available to EWDD as a city grantee, the previous efforts by the city to streamline and prioritize services for out-of-school youth, and the existing partnerships and programs at the six provider sites. However, the program still faced the significant challenge of trying to develop, adhere to, and implement an innovative and multi-stage model at multiple sites during the limited period of the WIF grant. As is the case for many demonstration programs, the LARCA program and EWDD’s guidance of it shifted in response to the realities of program implementation; the fact that the program weathered these challenges speaks to the flexibility and responsiveness of the actors involved.
The remainder of this report describes how providers designed and delivered the specific elements of the LARCA model—recruitment and intake, case management and comprehensive services, and education, training and placement—and details the challenges encountered during implementation of these elements.
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III. RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT INTO THE LARCA PROGRAM

The process by which someone became a LARCA program participant involved multiple stages. Throughout this process, the LARCA program providers were responsible for recruiting and orienting potentially eligible youth, enrolling youth into the program through random assignment, and providing initial assessments to plan for program service delivery. As noted in the previous chapter, several providers had operated somewhat similar programs for youth prior to LARCA and they had all provided services to populations similar to those targeted by the LARCA program—low income individuals, often of color, needing considerable assistance in their lives. While the providers were able to draw upon their prior experiences, they also had to introduce some changes to their procedures to reflect the eligibility criteria and specific design of the LARCA program. The providers also had to ensure they recruited sufficient numbers of potentially eligible youth both to meet their enrollment targets and to ensure there would be enough participants to fulfill the needs of the random-assignment impact study.

This chapter begins by discussing the multi-staged process by which the providers recruited youth, detailing their most effective outreach methods, how their recruitment practices changed over time, and what challenges they faced in recruiting adequate numbers of youth. The chapter then describes the steps that each of the providers implemented to determine a youth’s eligibility prior to random assignment and the post-enrollment assessments they administered for service planning. The chapter then turns to discussing final enrollment numbers and presents some of the key challenges providers faced in recruiting, assessing, and enrolling youth as well as the practices they implemented to overcome these challenges.

Some of the key findings related to the intake and enrollment process include:

- **The PSA counselors added significant value to their providers’ recruitment and assessment efforts.** One of the major benefits the PSA counselors brought to the program was their easy access to student transcripts and academic records. This allowed them to determine the type of educational services youth needed, including any remediation services, and—depending on what the provider offered—whether a youth should seek a high school diploma or GED. The PSA counselors also contributed to the recruitment efforts across the providers by
leveraging their relationships with other PSA counselors, YouthSource centers, and FamilySource centers and by helping provider staff members contact Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)-identified dropouts.  

- **Recruitment was a challenge for some providers.** Three providers met or exceeded the program group enrollment target of 200 youth, while three others did not. The providers that were successful at meeting their enrollment goals had staff members dedicated to outreach and recruitment, geographic advantages that allowed them access to large sources of recruits, or both. The remaining providers either did not have staff members dedicated to outreach and recruitment, had difficulty finding eligible youth, or experienced organizational and staffing changes that caused them to reduce the frequency and intensity of their recruitment efforts.  

- **Providers were largely successful in implementing eligibility determination and assessment.** In addition to recruiting, the providers administered a number of steps to determine youths’ eligibility and suitability including holding program orientations, conducting educational and service planning assessments, and conducting individual screening interviews. The providers also administered several assessments, including both the CASAS and InnerSight Preference Inventory, although not each provider used these assessments for the same purpose. The CASAS served an important function as an academic diagnostic for each of the providers, helping the providers to assess remediation services for participants, while the InnerSight Inventory was useful for conducting career exploration, career pathway planning and helping youth apply for jobs during the transition phase of the program.  

**Recruitment**

The LARCA program providers had long-standing histories of serving at-risk individuals and youth within their communities and had, over time, developed a number of reliable methods for recruiting participants. With the implementation of LARCA, however, providers had to modify their outreach efforts in two key ways. First, they had to adjust some of their outreach and recruitment efforts to meet the LARCA program’s slightly different eligibility criteria and target population. Second, they had to recruit enough eligible participants to ensure that they would hit their enrollment targets, given that a portion of all eligible individuals would be randomly assigned to the comparison group.

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32 In Los Angeles, the WIA-funded American Job Centers for adults are branded as WorkSource centers and those for youth are known as YouthSource centers.
Recruitment Strategies

Providers used multiple strategies to attract youth. These strategies included conducting community-based canvassing, reaching out directly through schools, encouraging word-of-mouth referrals, and soliciting referrals through YouthSource and FamilySource centers. By far the most effective method for recruitment, as identified by both providers and youth themselves, was word-of-mouth. According to the program’s application form, 39 percent of all youth reported in their LARCA application that they had heard about the program through a family member or friend. This strategy was not necessarily as passive as the phrase “word of mouth” might suggest. For instance, staff members at YO! Boyle Heights, LA Conservation Corps, and YPI Pico Union gave participants an incentive to refer their peers by offering gift cards and small amounts of money to participants who referred qualified applicants to the program. At YPI San Fernando, if a youth that was referred to LARCA by a current participant submitted his or her application and eligibility paperwork, the youth that referred him or her received $10. Staff at YO! Watts identified one potential pitfall of relying on word-of-mouth referrals: youth do not always relate accurate eligibility information to their peers. That program had to turn away youth for this reason.

Although word-of-mouth was by far the most frequent source of referrals, providers also generated recruits through several other strategies:

- **School-based outreach** included outreach conducted through PSA counselors as well as referrals issued by high school counselors or other school staff members. According to the program’s application form, 15 percent of participants first heard about the LARCA program through LAUSD staff. PSA counselors located at the LARCA provider sites contributed to school-based outreach by leveraging their contacts and relationships with other PSA counselors and other LAUSD school staff members. PSA counselors spoke to their LAUSD colleagues at regular staff meetings, visited local high schools to speak directly with school counselors, or attended “Options Fairs” at local high schools to speak directly to youth.

  At all six LARCA providers, the PSA counselors also mailed out recovery letters to youth listed on LAUSD’s quarterly “dropout list.” These youth included both high school dropouts and students with senior status who lacked sufficient credits to graduate. As a supplement to this effort, some PSA counselors called youth on the lists themselves as well. However, staff members at some providers indicated that contacting youth through the LAUSD-generated dropout list did not yield a large number of recruits. At both YPI Pico Union and YPI San Fernando, for example, the issue was that most of the youth on the list were undocumented and therefore ineligible for LARCA. Staff at YO! Boyle Heights noted the same concern although they were able to use the dropout list in conjunction with a list generated by CalWORKs to confirm which youth on the dropout list were eligible for LARCA.
• **Community-based referrals** included referrals from other community-based organizations as well as YouthSource and FamilySource centers. According to the program application form, about 11 percent of all LARCA participants heard about the LARCA program through a YouthSource and FamilySource center, while 4 percent heard about LARCA through another community-based organization. These CBOs included transitional housing agencies, local community centers, and local churches. Cross referrals also occurred between LARCA providers. For instance, staff members interviewed at CRCD and LA Conservation Corps both stated that they received referrals from YO! Watts and YO! Boyle Heights.

• **Community-based outreach** was conducted by all the providers and typically consisted of posting flyers, canvassing local businesses and residential areas, and recruiting at various community events. Staff members at YO! Watts and YO! Boyle Heights attested to the particular effectiveness of spending time distributing flyers at popular shopping centers and grocery stores. By doing so, they were able to speak directly to 50–60 youth. Outreach at community events, conducted in some form by all six providers, consisted of attending job and resource fairs, attending student recovery events, participating in local church events, setting up booths at local music festivals such as Central Avenue Jazz Fest, and attending community events sponsored by other youth-serving organizations. Although only 1 percent of LARCA youth indicated that they heard about the LARCA program through providers’ “outreach efforts” it is possible that this form of contact was significantly under-reported, since youth may not have fully understood what the term means or what kinds of initial interactions with provider staff members qualified as “outreach efforts.”

• **Other sources of recruitment** included the following. About 10 percent of participants indicated that they first heard about the program through a “walk in” at the provider site (i.e. youth may have walked into the provider site for another reason and were referred to the program while there). In addition, about 17 percent of total participants indicated that they first heard about the program through some “other” means.

Staff members at each of the providers were clear that successful recruitment typically involved some level of person-to-person interaction. This suggests that sending out letters in the mail or posting flyers at local high schools, with no accompanying personal interaction between staff and potential recruits, did not contribute substantially to recruitment. In that same vein, staff members at some providers expressed their belief that using social media, such as Facebook or Instagram, was also not particularly effective for generating recruits. They noted that many young people do not respond to messages conveyed through social media.

**Recruitment Messages and Youths’ Reasons for Applying**

The providers used multiple messages in their recruitment materials and outreach activities. The most common message, used by all providers, was promoting the opportunity to obtain a high school diploma or equivalent certification while being able to earn money and obtain hands-on
training in a particular career field. The reasons participants gave for applying to the program were consistent with the primary recruitment messages used by the providers. For example, the majority of respondents noted that they were attracted to the LARCA program because it provided them the opportunity to obtain their high school diploma or an equivalent certification while being able to earn money. Several YO! participants, for instance, mentioned applying to LARCA partly out of interest in pursuing careers in the healthcare field. The LARCA program’s flexible hours also attracted youth—particularly parenting youth—who would have found it challenging to maintain a more conventional high school schedule.

**Recruitment Challenges**

As will be discussed below, total enrollment numbers fell short of the goal established during the program’s intake phase, particularly at certain providers. This shortfall in enrollment was due largely to difficulties the providers experienced in reaching and recruiting a sufficient number of eligible youth.

**Delayed Start to Recruitment**

The LARCA program’s relatively compressed startup period gave providers less time to prepare for and carry out their recruitment efforts than may have been ideal. Providers were originally to begin recruitment in November 2012, but recruitment was pushed back several months to allow them more time to design their programs. Even with this delay, the program experienced a relatively slow initial period of recruitment. From January to July 2013 only 430 total participants had been enrolled into the study (about 18 percent of the target enrollment). At YPI Pico Union, the start of recruitment was even more delayed because this provider opened for services in March 2013, two months after the other providers had begun recruiting for LARCA. In addition to getting a late start in recruitment, staff members at this provider had to spend considerable time developing relationships and familiarizing other community organizations with YPI Pico Union’s services before they could generate referrals for LARCA.

**Overly Optimistic Expectations**

Recruitment challenges were likely exacerbated by the fact that some of the providers may have initially overestimated the ease with which they would recruit eligible youth. For many of the reasons highlighted in Chapter I, dropout youth can been particularly challenging to locate and serve due to the many challenges they face in their lives. Also, providers may not have been prepared to recruit the larger number of youth needed for random assignment. One indication of having overly optimistic expectations is that three providers originally implemented narrower age restrictions than what were required by EWDD for the program, and eventually had to expand the eligible age range in order to enroll sufficient numbers of youth.
Inadequate Staffing

Not having staff dedicated to recruitment may have also affected recruitment. At one provider, for instance, almost all recruitment was carried out by either the LARCA program manager or the PSA counselor, even though the program manager was managing multiple program responsibilities and the PSA counselor worked only part-time. Although staff members tried to make up for these capacity constraints by expanding their outreach efforts to other high-need areas adjacent to the local neighborhood (i.e. to obtain more recruits by focusing on a larger geographic area), the program manager noted that the program was generally constrained by not having enough time to conduct outreach.

The barrier to meeting enrollment goals posed by a lack of staff members dedicated to the recruitment task is highlighted by the experiences of the providers who did have such individuals on their staffs. The two providers that enrolled the most youth, YPI San Fernando and the LA Conservation Corps, both had dedicated outreach and recruitment staff members (the LA Conservation Corps employed two outreach coordinators and an intake specialist, while YPI San Fernando had one full-time outreach coordinator). Having staff members dedicated to outreach enabled these providers to conduct more intensive outreach and to respond more quickly to short-term enrollment deficits. For instance, staff members at the LA Conservation Corps noted that they had “done some heavy outreach when numbers [had] been low at orientations.” In such instances, the recruitment coordinators would attend additional resource fairs or community events while the LARCA program manager would email LARCA brochures to various community-based organizations.

Another provider experienced a different kind of staffing challenge that affected its recruitment. Although this provider had a full-time outreach coordinator and intake specialist for the entire duration of the LARCA program, it went through a period with many staff transitions and structural staffing changes from the last part of 2013 into the first part of 2014—a period that corresponded to a reduction in outreach efforts, recruitment, and enrollment.

Location in an Area with Large Numbers of Ineligible Youth

Several of the providers were located in areas with a high proportion of undocumented youth, who were ineligible for participation in LARCA. This challenge was perhaps most pronounced at YPI Pico Union. The LARCA program manager believed that close to 70 percent of all Pico Union youth on the LAUSD dropout list were undocumented. As a result of having such a high concentration of undocumented youth, staff members at YPI Pico Union had to conduct “near daily” outreach efforts to try to generate a sufficient number of recruits. Although YPI Pico Union had a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Ambassador on site who encouraged youth to apply for DACA authorization, which would make them eligible for participation, few youth pursued this option because of its cost (about $465 according to the
assistant director at YPI San Fernando) and the length of time it took to complete (several months). YPI Pico Union did, however, take a number of steps to try to address the challenge of reaching an adequate number of eligible youth, including hiring an Outreach Coordinator to attend public events and resource fairs and offering an incentive program for youth to refer their friends and family to the program.

**Eligibility Determination**

Once provider staff members contacted youth, they invited them into the program offices to begin the processes of verifying their eligibility for LARCA, providing them with information about the expectations of the program, and assessing their suitability for the program. At this time, potential participants were also invited to a program orientation at which one or more of these processes might occur or be continued.

**Eligibility Criteria**

EWDD established a set of criteria for LARCA eligibility that included the following:

1. The individual must be 16 to 24 years old.
2. The individual must be a resident of Los Angeles County.
3. The individual must have dropped out of high school or be designated as a “chronically absent” student performing below grade level (the latter designation was added by EWDD in August 2014).
4. The individual must be low-income, eligible to work in the United States and otherwise eligible for WIA youth services.\(^{33}\)

Some of the providers implemented more restrictive geographic criteria, requiring that youth live either within the City of Los Angeles or within certain zip codes. Also, some of the providers originally implemented more restrictive age criteria to try to attract older youth to the program but eventually allowed the full age range of 16 to 24 years old to apply in order to increase the chances of meeting their enrollment targets.

**Steps in Determining Eligibility and Suitability**

Providers administered three basic steps to determine eligibility and suitability: they provided an applicant with information about the program, collected eligibility paperwork and documentation, and interviewed and assessed the applicant. Although all providers employed

\(^{33}\) According to U.S. DOL (2002): “To be eligible for youth services under the WIA, young people must be between the ages of 14 and 21, low-income, and meet at least one of the six specified barriers to employment (e.g., deficient in basic skills; a school dropout; homeless; a runaway, or a foster child; pregnant or parenting; an offender; or require additional assistance to complete their education or secure employment.”
these basic steps, there was some variation among providers in terms of both sequencing and the use of additional steps to determine suitability, such as administering vocational and psychosocial assessments.

Providers did not track the numbers of youth who were ultimately deemed ineligible for program services, but staff members at CRCD and YO! Watts noted that “most” of the youth that attended initial orientations ended up being eligible for LARCA. When youth did not meet the eligibility requirements, it was usually because they already had a high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate, did not have a right-to-work due to immigration issues, or did not meet the age range requirements. Four of the providers mentioned that ineligible youth were typically referred to local YouthSource and WorkSource centers, although some were also enrolled into other provider-operated programs such as WIA or Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) youth programs. Undocumented youth were often referred to community organizations that could assist them. For instance, the two YPI providers referred undocumented youth to local organizations that could help them obtain employment authorization under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) determination, which allows certain undocumented youth to obtain employment for up to two years. Programs’ PSA counselors also worked with ineligible participants, sometimes guiding them to additional services and educational options.

**Program Orientations**

Providers held regular orientations to inform potentially eligible youth about the program and its many services and at some providers, to begin the process of collecting the information needed to determine participant eligibility. Although all providers held orientations continuously throughout the program cycle, the frequency of orientations varied somewhat by provider. The LA Conservation Corps held them four times per week, CRCD once per week, and the other four providers twice per week.

At the beginning of the program, LA Conservation Corps conducted orientations twice a week at all four of their locations, but soon decided to hold all orientations at their headquarters in South Los Angeles and to increase the number of orientations from two per week to four per week. These changes allowed more applicants to meet with the PSA counselor directly after orientation to begin completing eligibility paperwork, which reduced overall attrition during the intake process.

Across the providers, orientations also served as the point where potentially eligible youth first learned about the impact study and the random assignment process. During orientations, provider staff members presented youth a video that explained the purpose of the study and what it meant to participate in it. Youth were also provided the opportunity to ask questions about study participation. Youth were then asked if they wished to consent to participate in the evaluation should they be found eligible to enroll in the program. Those that consented signed a
consent form and completed other program application paperwork that provider staff members needed to determine a potential participant’s eligibility and which the evaluation used for baseline data collection.

**Additional Steps in Determining Eligibility**

Each of the providers held a somewhat different sequence of meetings and activities following the program and study orientations. During these meetings, youth might submit additional or previously incomplete paperwork such as the LARCA application, study consent form, and other documents like social security cards, driver’s licenses, proof of eligibility to work, and proof of residence. Each provider conducted one or more of the following steps between orientation and random assignment.

- **Youth met with a PSA counselor.** Youth at four providers met with a PSA counselor to submit eligibility documentation and to confirm their eligibility status directly after program orientations. The PSA counselors confirmed youth were out-of-school by checking their records with LAUSD. Youth at the other two providers usually met with PSA counselors only after random assignment, as part of the education assessment, although typically a PSA counselor still had to verify a youth’s status and eligibility before random assignment, even if not in person.

- **Provider staff interviewed potential participants.** Both LA Conservation Corps and YO! Watts conducted interviews with youth prior to random assignment. At YO! Watts, staff members noted that the point of these interviews was not only to assess the youths’ suitability for the program and their interest in the healthcare field, but also to determine whether the youth possessed enough motivation to succeed in the program.

- **Youth took the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) test.** The CASAS was administered at each of the providers in order to assess participants’ literacy and numeracy baseline levels. The CASAS was supposed to be administered prior to random assignment as a part of WIA eligibility determination. While all providers administered the CASAS, only CRCD, YO! Boyle Heights and YO! Watts reported administering it prior to random assignment. Staff members at some of these providers mentioned using the CASAS as an eligibility screening tool—requiring that youth score above a certain level in order to proceed with the next stage of the enrollment process.  

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34 CRCD, whose LARCA program was integrated with its YouthBuild program, employed an additional screening tool known within YouthBuild programs as a “Mental Toughness Orientation.” This orientation required youth to show up daily for two weeks, engage in physical exercises, hear about basic services available at the program offices, and engage in other program assessments and activities to determine eligibility and suitability.
Attrition During Eligibility Determination

Staff at three providers explicitly mentioned youth dropping out during intake as a substantial barrier to meeting their enrollment goals. Youth often failed to bring the requested documentation to meetings or failed to show up to appointments they had made. The problem became more pronounced if there was a considerable delay between the time a youth submitted an application and the time the provider began enrollment. As noted above, LA Conservation Corps tried to alleviate this issue by consolidating intake at its single headquarters site in South Los Angeles, relocating all recruitment and intake staff members to the same floor, and holding more frequent orientations. Although this seemed to help, staff members noted that applicants would still fail to show up from time to time. The PSA counselor at CRCD believed that it was not uncommon for youth who are not truly interested in a program to go through the motions until they had to show up for an appointment, at which point they dropped off without warning.

Another factor affecting post-recruitment enrollment was that most providers were under pressure to meet their enrollment numbers for concurrent programs such as WIA, and would at various times channel potential LARCA recruits into these programs—particularly if those programs had more stringent eligibility requirements. The providers that experienced these challenges would generally intensify their recruitment efforts for LARCA once they met the enrollment needs of the other programs. At the same time, staff members at other providers said that the decision to enroll youth in LARCA or another program was generally left up to the applicant. Staff members at still another provider noted that because the LARCA program was longer-term than their WIA program, they encouraged youth who needed more time to complete high school to apply to LARCA instead of WIA.

It is difficult to determine how many youth dropped out during the eligibility determination phase, and therefore difficult to determine the relative contribution of this phenomenon to the lower-than-expected enrollment numbers. However, given that the recruitment challenges highlighted above appear to have been extensive, it is likely that they affected enrollment numbers more than youth dropping off between orientations and program enrollment.

Random Assignment and Enrollment

Once staff members determined, through the various means described above, that a youth was eligible and suitable to participate in the LARCA program, he or she was randomly assigned to either the program group or the comparison group, thereby entering him or her into the impact study. Random assignment was accomplished by entering information on each participant into the computer-based random assignment system designed for the study and then allowing the system to randomly generate an assignment to one of the two groups. Youth assigned to the program group were enrolled into the LARCA program, whereas youth assigned to the
comparison group were provided a list of referral services and often pointed towards a local YouthSource or WorkSource center or another program in the community. Across all providers, youth were considered officially enrolled into the LARCA program the moment they were assigned to the program group.

Assessments Employed by LARCA Providers

While the placement of different assessments, before or after random assignment, varied somewhat by LARCA providers, staff members employed a variety of such tools in helping to plan for services upon entry into the LARCA program.

PSA-based Assessments

PSA counselors located at each provider were responsible for reviewing participants’ academic records to determine what additional academic work they needed to complete to obtain a secondary education degree and to help them plan their educational path through the program. Because they were LAUSD employees, PSA counselors were able to access LAUSD transcripts—which included grades and accumulated credits—and, for participants who had taken the exam, California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) scores. After reviewing these documents, PSA counselors created a schedule for participants that outlined the credits they needed to obtain a diploma. For providers that offered both high school equivalency tests and high school diploma programs (described in Chapter V), PSA counselors also helped participants decide which type of certification would best fit their needs.

As part of the educational assessment and planning process, PSA counselors were also responsible for placing participants into either a “Fast Track” or “Back on Track” path, based on their completion of academic credits. This designation helped guide a participant’s educational planning. The original program model states that participants who had more than 120 total credits were placed in Fast Track, while participants with fewer than 120 total credits were placed in Back on Track (210 credits are required to graduate in Los Angeles School District High Schools). As is discussed further in Chapter V, this designation did help guide the educational planning for participants even though providers used a slightly different metric. Staff members in programs that offered High School Equivalency Test (HSET) options, found that participants needing more than 60 credits were typically the ones best served by enrolling in HSET program programs (thus these were effectively the Back on Track participants).

The PSA counselors’ access to student transcripts and academic records was a major value-added component of the LARCA program. Without the PSA counselors and their access privileges, provider staff members would have had to rely on participants themselves bringing in their academic records because LARCA staff members had no access to them due to privacy restrictions. This situation would have been problematic because youth often have difficulty
remembering to bring in their documentation to begin with and because youth who have dropped out of school often have difficulty approaching their former place of attendance for academic records. Having PSA counselors onsite who could immediately access student records likely streamlined what would have otherwise been a much more cumbersome intake process that may have lead to additional attrition.

**Service Planning Assessments**

Following random assignment, participants also met with additional program staff members, such as case managers and intake specialists, to undergo some type of service planning assessment. These assessments covered supportive-services needs and were generally used by case managers for early service planning and making referrals (see Chapter IV for additional discussion of case management services). For instance, participants at CRCD completed an Intake Assessment form that covered housing needs, family finances, and involvement with the criminal justice system.

However, some of the providers conducted additional assessments for needs other than supportive-services during the service planning phase. For example, YO! Watts, for example, administered an additional vocational assessment known as the “Most Benefits” assessment that helped to determine whether a participant was genuinely interested in pursuing a job in the medical field and included a subjective evaluation of the youth’s motivation. This assessment was useful for some participants who wanted to pursue non-health-related fields—as they were then able to enter training other than the standard CNA training offered by YO! Watts.

**CASAS Reading and Math Assessment**

As a program requirement, all providers administered both the CASAS reading assessment and the CASAS math assessment. The results of the initial round of assessments were used to help determine participants’ academic needs, including the need for remediation classes or other additional academic support. Providers also used the initial score as a baseline for evaluating participants’ literacy and numeracy gains. For three providers, participants who received CASAS scores below a certain level (7th grade for the YPIs) in reading or math were placed in basic remediation classes. At YO! Watts, participants also needed to receive at least 9th grade reading and math CASAS scores to be eligible to take high school or GED classes at local Adult Schools. In addition to the CASAS, several providers administered other academic assessments. YO! Boyle Heights used the TABE as an additional measure of participants’ reading and math levels and both YPI providers administered GED practice tests during intake to youth who were enrolled in their GED program.
InnerSight Preference Inventory

The InnerSight Preference Inventory is a psychosocial assessment developed by InnerSight, a firm that specializes in vocational assessments, that matches youths’ occupational interests and demonstrated learning styles to potential career fields. The assessment includes both an online testing component and a group session (known as the InnerSight Experience) facilitated by an InnerSight employee. Five of the providers administered the online portion within one to two weeks following random assignment. The sixth provider, LA Conservation Corps, originally administered the InnerSight assessment on the same day as the CASAS but switched to administering the assessment several weeks after participants attended their high school orientation due to the high volume of LARCA enrollees. After taking the inventory, participants were then scheduled for the InnerSight Experience. The Experience is a three-hour group session where an InnerSight facilitator interprets the results of the inventory, discussing how career options and work-style preferences align with test results. Since the Experience requires a group of 20 participants per session, the providers usually scheduled it whenever they had sufficient numbers of enrollees.

The providers used the results of the InnerSight assessment for different purposes. Staff members at four providers indicated that the assessment helped them to decide which vocational program participants should be enrolled in, although they also clearly weighed the assessment against other factors such as the participant’s expressed interests, timing, and funding availability. Staff members at several providers also noted that the results of the InnerSight were used to help youth identify their career interests or determine if their current vocational track was a good long-term career fit. CRCD and YPI San Fernando also used the assessment to help participants decide which jobs to apply to—and both mentioned incorporating language from the test results into participants’ resumes. Overall, it appears that the results of the InnerSight assessment were used primarily for helping youth identify and reflect on their long-term career goals, and feedback from youth focus groups suggested that youth generally found the assessment to be useful for such purposes.

Enrollment Outcomes

Target enrollment for the evaluation was 2,400 youth. Using a one-to-one ratio, the target number was 1,200 youth in each of the program and comparison groups. Each provider was tasked with enrolling 400 youth: 200 youth in the program group and 200 in the comparison group. Providers began enrolling participants in January 2013 (except for YPI Pico Union, which began in March 2103) and ended enrollment in October 2014.

Exhibit III-1 shows that one provider, YPI San Fernando, exceeded its study enrollment target while two others—LA Conservation Corps and YO! Watts—came close. These two providers
did manage to enroll at least 200 individuals in the program group, which was the funded number of slots for the program, but fell short of the study enrollment target of 400 individuals. The other three providers reach approximately three quarters of their study enrollment target.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Group</th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>CRCD</td>
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<td>148</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA Conservation Corps</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Boyle Heights</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>148</td>
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<tr>
<td>YO! Watts</td>
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<td>180</td>
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<td>YPI Pico Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>YPI San Fernando</td>
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<td>235</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1067</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

**Factor Affecting Enrollment Numbers**

Two factors significantly affected the providers’ abilities to meet their enrollment goals. The first of these—whether or not a provider had staff members dedicated to outreach and recruitment—was discussed above as a recruitment challenge for the providers lacking such staff members. The second important factor was a provider’s proximity to sources of potential recruits.

The location of the provider site seemed to have a large effect on overall recruitment and enrollment. Although YO! Watts did not have staff members dedicated to outreach and recruitment, its location next to the Jordan Downs Housing Projects and its long-standing presence in the community provided it with access to large sources of recruits. Further, its location in a densely populated, high-need area meant there were a large number of other community-based organizations in the area that could potentially refer youth to the provider. Indeed, staff members at YO! Watts noted that they received a significant number of referrals from the Urban League, local community centers, public housing coordinators, and local churches.

Two other providers, LA Conservation Corps and YPI San Fernando, also benefited considerably from their proximity to large sources of potential recruits. In particular, local high schools were co-located at their central sites. YPI San Fernando appeared to have struggled to meet its enrollment targets in the early phases of the program until Mission View Public Charter moved into its headquarters building. The co-location of the charter school allowed the provider to
begin offering youth the option of obtaining their high school diplomas in addition to completing an HSET. Staff members reported that offering students this option greatly increased overall enrollment numbers. LA Conservation Corps not only had a school co-located onsite, but could also recruit youth from its large service area, which included much of Los Angeles.

Summary and Conclusions
The LARCA providers (with the exception of YPI Pico Union, which was newly created for the program but which was a part of the larger YPI organization) were long-standing organizations in their communities with considerable experience recruiting and enrolling populations often similar to those targeted for the LARCA program. However, the LARCA program introduced to the providers two novel factors related to recruitment and enrollment: PSA counselors employed by LAUSD were placed onsite and relatively large numbers of participants had to be recruited in order to be able to conduct random assignment. The PSA counselors proved to be an asset for the providers since they provided additional staffing support to assist with recruitment, eligibility determination, and conducting assessments, and they also provided streamlined access to students’ transcripts and academic records. However, this asset was not sufficient at all providers to enable them to meet their enrollment targets.

The providers generally struggled with recruitment and enrollment during the early phases of the program due to a relatively short ramp-up period as well as having to conduct more active recruitment than they may have otherwise been used to due to the need for a comparison group. The providers that were most successful in recruiting eligible youth had staff members dedicated to outreach and recruitment, were close to large sources of potential recruits, or both. The other providers had too few staff members for conducting outreach, experienced periodic organizational turnover and staffing changes, or were located in areas with a high proportion of ineligible, undocumented youth. There were some issues with youth attrition during the eligibility determination and enrollment process, but these challenges seemed to have had less of an effect on overall enrollment numbers than some of the challenges involving recruitment.

In addition to conducting recruitment, the providers administered a number of steps to determine youths’ eligibility and suitability, including holding program orientations, conducting educational and service planning assessments, and conducting individual screening interviews. The providers also administered several assessments, including the CASAS and InnerSight Preference Inventory, although not each provider used these assessments for the same purpose. The CASAS served an important function as an academic diagnostic for each of the providers, helping the providers to assess needs for remediation services among participants, while the InnerSight Inventory was useful for conducting career exploration and helping youth choose which jobs to apply for during the transition phase of the program.
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Participants in the LARCA program faced multi-faceted and complex barriers that affected their ability to complete their education and find steady employment. Common barriers included a lack of access to transportation, unstable housing situations, a lack of childcare, limited soft skills needed for education and employment, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. In order to help participants overcome challenges such as these and navigate through the LARCA program successfully, the six LARCA program providers offered a comprehensive array of services: supportive services, designed to address the life barriers that might prevent participants from succeeding; work readiness training, life skills workshops, and youth development activities, designed to provide participants with the soft skills they would need to succeed in education and employment; and case management services, designed to guide participants through these services as well as connect them with educational and employment opportunities. This chapter describes these services as well as the challenges and successes providers had in implementing these program components.

Key findings for the chapter include the following:

- **Case management services played a critical role in the delivery of other program services to LARCA participants.** Case managers helped participants navigate the comprehensive network of services that LARCA providers and their partners provided.

- **LARCA participants had extensive supportive service needs.** Across all LARCA providers, staff members noted that participants often requested and utilized transportation support, housing, childcare, and mental health counseling support.

- **All LARCA providers offered work readiness trainings.** In most of the programs implemented curriculum developed by the LA Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with EWDD specifically for the LARCA program. Providers did vary, however, in who provided this training.

- **Life skills workshops and youth development activities were one of the least robust components offered by LARCA providers.** While each of the providers offered some form of life skills workshop and some youth development and
leadership activities, these elements of the program were often voluntary for participants and implemented to varying degrees across providers.

Case Management Services
Case management services were a key component of the LARCA program. While the program providers referred to the positions responsible for delivery of case management services differently, using job titles such as “youth advocate” or “career coach,” these staff members played the same critical role in helping to facilitate the delivery of LARCA program services. They provided intensive one-on-one and group support to help participants overcome life challenges or barriers. They helped participants set personal, education, and career goals; obtain needed supportive services such as housing, transportation, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment services; and coordinated or delivered work readiness, life skills, and youth development workshops. Case managers also helped participants choose their education and vocational training programs.

Case Management Staffing
As articulated in the LARCA program model, all of the LARCA providers offered case management services to participants. Half of the providers had three staff members providing case management services, while the other three had two. Consistent with the flexibility providers had in designing their programs, four providers had staff members who solely provided case management services, while the other two had staff members with dual roles, managing cases while carrying out other program responsibilities such as program coordination, career placement coordination, and grant management. In an example of the latter case, the program manager at one of the providers maintained an active caseload in addition to carrying out her program manager responsibilities.

Exhibit IV-1 shows the average caseloads for case managers at each LARCA provider along with their total program enrollment. On the higher end, case managers at YPI San Fernando, YO! Boyle Heights, and LA Conservation Corps had average caseloads above 60 participants. On the lower end, CRCD and YPI Pico Union had average caseloads between 30 and 40 participants per case manager. YO! Watts fell in the middle with a caseload of 50 participants per case manager. Since caseload is a function of both the number of participants and the number of staff members providing case management services, and the number of case managers varied across providers, average caseload does not track total enrollment.
Although case managers across all six LARCA providers reported that their average caseloads were manageable, they also said that they could at times be overwhelming and raised three main concerns. First, they explained that managing such high caseloads often made it challenging to maintain high-quality support. Case managers mentioned that LARCA participants’ complex needs required a “heavy-touch” approach that involved continuously checking in with participants. One case manager, for instance, noted that some LARCA participants required substantial one-on-one support and gave as an example the time she spent six hours in one day working with a LARCA participant on developing a resume. She stated that because participants “have become disengaged from education or work,” they often needed more individualized attention than other youth, but this was difficult to do with a large caseload. However, she also added that the dynamic relationships with LARCA participants that resulted from providing the “hand-holding” support helped to empower youth with the skills needed to develop self-sufficiency.

Second, case managers at five of the providers noted that their additional responsibilities in their organizations (such as conducting outreach and recruitment, designing and delivering workshops, and coordinating aspects of the program) often made it difficult to dedicate sufficient time to the many participants on their caseloads. For instance, case managers at two providers mentioned that they had difficulty providing individualized support to participants while also coordinating and facilitating life skills and work readiness workshops and assisting participants with career and post-secondary education planning and placement.
Third, with relatively high caseloads as the baseline, staff turnover could lead to unmanageably large caseloads for the remaining case managers. Staff members at four providers mentioned that staff turnover contributed to case managers feeling overwhelmed with increasing caseloads.

**Case Management Roles and Responsibilities**

The case management role included several different responsibilities. At the beginning stages of program implementation, case managers were typically heavily active in outreach, recruitment, and enrollment activities. As enrollment levels increased, however, case managers increasingly assumed their primary responsibilities: service planning and setting education and career goals; assessing basic life needs and coordinating supportive services; and counseling participants individually and in small groups. In order to monitor and document services and outcomes, case managers were also responsible for entering case notes, service activities, and participant outcomes into the LARCA program’s management information system, Efforts to Outcomes (EtO).

As noted in Chapter III, participants met with program staff members shortly after enrollment to plan their LARCA services and activities. At most of the providers, formal meetings between case managers and participants continued on a regular and consistent basis thereafter. CRCD’s youth advocates saw participants at least twice a week, both through one-on-one meetings and in scheduled cohort sessions. Case managers at LA Conservation Corps, YPI Pico Union, and YPI San Fernando held monthly meetings while case managers at YO! Watts met with participants at least once a quarter. In some cases, case managers met with participants more frequently when they needed help with unexpected crises such as housing issues or applying for emergency public benefits. At YO! Boyle Heights, in contrast, staff members did not schedule regular meetings with all participants and instead encouraged participants to “drop-in” whenever they needed any assistance. In addition to scheduling regular meetings, case managers at all providers practiced open-door policies, encouraging participants to stop by and request help. Across all providers, case managers would also actively check in with participants throughout the day. At CRCD, for example, youth advocates would travel between different program locations to facilitate their meetings with participants. Staff members noted that these approaches helped to develop rapport and fostered an open flow of communication between the staff and participants.

Case managers met with participants for varying lengths of time. In general, formal, scheduled meetings lasted 15 to 30 minutes and centered on a wide variety of personal and program-related topics, such as housing and family situations, supportive service needs, and program attendance issues. Case managers also informed participants of upcoming program events or activities, discussed progress toward reaching goals, and, in some cases, provided individual counseling. One case manager mentioned that she helped participants with “any and every issue” that had the potential to thwart their progress in the LARCA program.
Case managers and participants worked together to develop an Individual Service Strategy (ISS) form, or a plan of action, that set career and education goals and described service needs and program activities. The form also delineated tasks and responsibilities for both case managers and participants. These initial meetings typically involved case managers meeting one-on-one with participants and asking them about their education background, housing situation, personal and family issues, and needs for supportive services, and talking with them about their short- and long-term program goals. The ISS form was useful in providing case managers with a tool that described participants’ challenges, strengths, and accomplishments.

Case managers updated participants’ ISS forms on a quarterly basis. During meetings, case managers met with participants to check in about their progress, review and update their goals, and make modifications to their ISS forms. Case managers would also update ISS forms as participants achieved their set goals, like receiving their GED or high school diploma or if new needs came up.

Connecting Participants to Supportive Services
Consistent with the LARCA program model, the providers offered participants supportive services, either directly or through referrals to external organizations, in order to eliminate any barriers preventing participants from completing their education and vocational training and finding and maintaining employment. Case managers were the staff members responsible for helping identify the need for these services through the work they did in developing participants’ ISS forms, and then they were ones who connected participants with the services that could address these needs.

By far, transportation support—in the form of public transportation passes or helping participants receive a driver’s license—was the most utilized service that programs provided. Other highly requested services included housing, childcare, and mental health counseling. In focus groups, several participants noted that their case managers helped secure needed services such as transportation tokens, diapers and baby clothes, and permanent housing.

Transportation
Across all LARCA providers, case managers noted that a lack of means of transportation was one of the more significant barriers for participants. In order to help participants reduce the cost of transportation, case managers provided bus tokens and monthly public transit cards for LARCA participants, who often had to travel long distances to reach the program or to attend their trainings and classes. For example, at YO! Boyle Heights, staff members provided transportation passes to all participants interning at Kaiser Permanente hospital, which was located far from their neighborhoods. At YPI San Fernando, if a participant showed that he or she spent more than $70 a month on transportation, the program would provide them with a
monthly metro card. YO! Watts offered a Driver’s Education course for participants and LA Conservation Corps helped participants pay a reduced fee for their driver’s license or identification card application.

**Housing**

Housing was another highly requested and well-utilized service among LARCA participants. Case managers at each of the LARCA providers connected participants with local nonprofit organizations, shelters, or transitional housing facilities. However, case managers also noted that securing housing was very difficult as the housing organizations often had long waiting lists or restrictive eligibility criteria, such as only serving women with young children. On the other hand, case managers at four providers referred participants to programs within their organizations or to organizations with which they had established partnerships to guarantee housing for participants. For example, CRCD referred eligible participants to their Real Estate and Economic Development Department, which provided permanent housing for transition-age participants with disabilities. LA Conservation Corps established a partnership with the Weingart Family Solutions Center to reserve housing slots for LARCA participants. YPI Pico Union and YPI San Fernando also provided emergency, one-time vouchers to provide participants monetary assistance with rental deposits or short-term housing.

**Childcare**

Case managers cited childcare services as another common supportive service need among LARCA participants. While some participants could rely on their relatives or close friends to help with childcare, most parenting participants did not have access to affordable and reliable childcare. Because providers typically did not provide these services on their own, they referred participants to other organizations. Usually, participants who received public assistance were eligible to receive childcare vouchers or subsidized childcare through their social service caseworker or at local childcare providers.

**Mental Health Care and Counseling Services**

LARCA providers provided both in-house and external mental health care and counseling services. Case managers noted that the need for such services was relatively high because many LARCA participants lived in unsafe, poorly resourced, violent neighborhoods that often lead to participants experiencing several forms of trauma. Through their meetings with participants, case managers could detect if they needed mental health support. At some providers, such as CRCD, LA Conservation Corps, and YPI Pico Union, staff members had built robust mental health components and arranged to have interns in Masters of Social Work and PhD graduate programs work directly with participants who needed counseling support. These interns would assess LARCA participants’ mental health needs and provide a safe space to help participants discuss personal issues in individual or group-based settings. Across all LARCA providers, case
managers also referred participants to outside mental health organizations and agencies for more in-depth support and counseling. In addition, after the program enrollment period ended, PSA counselors (who held graduate degrees in counseling or social work) shifted their responsibilities from primarily conducting education assessments to providing counseling and advising support to LARCA participants.

**Other Services**

In addition to the services mentioned above, LARCA providers offered other services to help participants. Among the most commonly cited of these additional services was assistance with legal issues. For example, CRCD youth advocates provided guidance on issues such as child custody cases, logged participants’ required community service hours, and accompanied them to court proceedings. Other providers, such as LA Conservation Corps and YO! Boyle Heights, worked with low- and no-cost nonprofit legal-services organizations to provide participants with assistance in expunging their records. One participant noted that his case manager helped him get the cause of unpaid fines removed from his record so that he could earn his driver’s license. Additionally, some providers also noted that they provided referrals for participants needing assistance with substance abuse counseling and treatment. At one provider, LARCA participants were referred to a substance abuse counselor if they failed the drug test required at intake. Case managers at other providers also noted the difficulties in securing substance abuse treatment and counseling. If LARCA participants had health insurance or received CalWORKs, they could access behavioral health services through the county.

**Work Readiness Training, Life Skills Workshops, and Youth Development Activities**

In order to help participants achieve their program goals, LARCA providers offered a work readiness course, life skills workshops, and youth development activities such as peer mentoring and leadership development. As a whole, these activities were not merely supplemental; learning some of the related skills was considered central to the program. According to the program model, LARCA participants were required to complete work readiness training and to participate in financial literacy workshops by the time they exited the program.

**Work Readiness Training**

To ensure that participants acquired some of the skills and knowledge required to succeed in post-secondary education and employment, the LARCA program model required that providers offer work readiness training. Rather than obligate providers to develop their own trainings, the Economic and Workforce Development Department (EWDD) collaborated with the LA Chamber of Commerce to develop a youth-centered, eight-hour work readiness training and certificate that would help participants master workplace social and professional skills. Staff
members at each of the providers were trained in this curriculum, which covered topics such as professionalism and communication, job search and retention strategies, resume and cover letter development, and interviewing techniques.

The central components of work readiness training were the following:

- **Resume and cover letter development.** LARCA participants learned to develop resumes and cover letters and were required to submit a completed resume in order to receive their certification. In addition, program staff members worked one-on-one with participants to edit and review their resumes before they used them for actual job applications.

- **Interview skills development and support.** One workshop in the training focused on interview skills and strategies. During the workshop, participants learned about “commonly asked interview questions” and proper interview dress attire, and participants role-played in pairs or small groups. Participants also had to complete and pass a mock interview with a local business partner. Chamber of Commerce staff assisted LARCA program staff in setting up interviews with participants.

- **Soft skills development.** Various work readiness workshops focused on helping participants develop their soft skills. One workshop, for example, covered workplace behavior, effective communication and public speaking skills, positive attitude, and flexibility. Some LARCA providers mentioned that they encouraged participants to continue to develop their soft skills by requiring them to keep their program appointments, maintain good attendance, and speak in a professional and respectful manner.

LARCA participants began work readiness training at different points in the program. While some providers, such as YPI San Fernando, YPI Pico Union, and YO! Watts, had participants begin work readiness training as soon as they enrolled in the program or shortly thereafter, CRCD had participants take the class well after enrollment, at some point prior to completing their high school education. At YO! Boyle Heights, participants took the work readiness training after high school completion. The last provider, LA Conservation Corps, exposed participants to general topics in work readiness, such as workplace behavior, job retention strategies, and ethics, during the last week of the second or third academic semester, depending on availability.

As shown in Exhibit IV-2, the duration of work readiness training varied across LARCA providers, ranging from 8 hours to more than 30 hours.
Exhibit IV-2:
Duration of Work Readiness Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LARCA provider</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRCD</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Conservation Corps</td>
<td>30 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Boyle Heights</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Watts</td>
<td>32 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI San Fernando</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Pico Union</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LARCA providers offered these programs most often in the course of a several weeks, with classes lasting two and six hours per day. Three providers, CRCD, YPI San Fernando, and YPI Pico Union, primarily used the LA Chamber’s 8-hour work readiness curriculum that covered a wide variety of topics and culminated in a mock interview; the two YPI providers integrated this curriculum into a two-week College and Career Exploration class in which participants began to explore their career and education interests in addition to developing their soft skills and work readiness skills. Building off the LA Chamber’s work readiness curriculum, LA Conservation Corps provided a more in-depth, five-day training for participants. Using a rather different approach, YO! Watts worked with community college instructors to provide a 32-hour work readiness training over a four- to five-week period.

Providers also differed in how they delivered work readiness training. The majority of providers (CRCD, LA Conservation Corps, YPI Pico Union, and YPI San Fernando) offered this training in-house, with their own staff members using the LA Chamber’s curriculum to deliver the training. The staff members would also work with LA Chamber staff to seek out business partners and staff members from other organizations to assist with the mock interviews. Two providers outsourced their work readiness training and had instructors from local community colleges deliver work readiness training, reasoning that this approach provided greater flexibility for in-house staff and for LARCA participants. A staff member from one of these providers noted that the majority of their LARCA participants needed more extensive work readiness training than what they would receive from the relatively short 8-hour training provided through the LA Chamber.

In delivering work-readiness training, LARCA providers mentioned three primary challenges. First, at least one provider said that it could provide work readiness training to no more than 25 participants at one time due to a lack of available laptops and space. Second, staff members struggled with keeping work readiness activities engaging and interactive. They had to provide a variety of activities to keep participants interested and noted that it helped to connect activities to
job searches and job retention. Third, one provider noted that the mock interview component in the work-readiness training offered by the LA Chamber of Commerce was too challenging for participants. In response, the provider sought to lengthen the training to provide participants with a more solid foundation in which to draw for the mock interview. This was one reason why the provider worked with instructors from two local community colleges to provide a similar work-readiness training that also provided participants with a work readiness certificate.

**Life Skills Workshops**

All of the LARCA providers offered life skills workshops. While some components, such as Financial Literacy workshops, were required as part of the LARCA program, providers also had flexibility to offer training on a variety of other topics. Life skills training was intended to provide participants with skills helpful for meeting their short-term goals in the LARCA program as well as for leading successful lives after the program. The most common life-skills training topics were the following:

- **Financial literacy and budgeting.** As noted above, the LARCA program required that participants attend and complete financial literacy training. Each of the providers used financial literacy curricula or collaborated with other organizations to deliver financial literacy and budgeting workshops. The curriculum taught LARCA participants about money management, earnings and asset building, credit cards and the credit system, and savings and checking accounts. At some providers, such as CRCD, YO! Boyle Heights, YO! Watts, and LA Conservation Corps, LARCA participants had to complete financial literacy and budgeting training before receiving their vocational training stipends.

- **Conflict resolution and anger management.** The majority of LARCA providers offered conflict resolution and anger management workshops for participants. For the most part, outside organizations provided these workshops, which covered topics such as healthy relationships, communication skills, and strategies for diffusing tense situations. At CRCD, for example, the workshop covered anger management strategies and coping methods.

- **Sexual health.** Four providers offered sexual health workshops. At two of these providers, organizations brought in certified counselors, while at two other providers, interns and case managers (trained by Planned Parenthood) gave workshops on teen and sexual health, sexually transmitted infections, and birth control methods.

- **Other life-skills topics.** Some LARCA providers identified the need for other life-skills topics and assistance. At least four providers delivered nutrition and wellness workshops to help participants learn about healthy eating habits, health-related illnesses, and the importance of maintaining a healthy body. YO! Watts also provided a Driver’s Education course to help LARCA participants earn their driver’s licenses.
The frequency and structure of life skills workshops varied across providers. Half of the LARCA providers—LA Conservation Corps, YPI Pico Union, and YPI San Fernando—held scheduled life skills workshops that were key components of their programming. For example, at LA Conservation Corps, participants participated in a “Success Camp” shortly after enrollment and before they began their high school education classes. During Success Camp, LARCA participants were involved in daily life-skills activities as part of their orientation to the program. After these participants began their education component, they were provided with four life skills trainings during the eight-week academic term. Other LARCA programs either integrated life skills activities into cohort meetings or provided a more flexible schedule of life skills workshops to suit LARCA participants’ schedules and availability. At CRCD, for example, life skills workshops were generally not provided as a stand-alone activity, but was instead incorporated into the weekly meetings staff members held with all participants.

The intensity of life skills training also differed across providers. Some providers built comprehensive and robust life skills workshops that covered a wide assortment of topics. Other providers did not require participants to attend all life skills workshops other than the financial literacy training. One provider required participants to complete only financial literacy training and did not offer training in other life skills topics.

Youth Development Activities

All of the providers offered youth development activities, which included leadership opportunities, peer mentoring, serving on youth councils, or giving presentations to community members. The LARCA program model encouraged providers to offer these opportunities within the classroom, at the worksite, or in some element throughout the program, but gave them flexibility as to what courses to offer or how to structure them. As a result, there was wide variation in the depth and quality of youth development activities, as described below.

- **Peer mentoring.** Two LARCA providers, YPI Pico Union and YPI San Fernando, developed informal peer mentoring sessions for LARCA participants. At one provider, staff developed a peer-mentoring group for participants with young children, and at the other, staff developed gender-specific mentoring groups. These groups provided a safe space for participants to discuss sensitive topics, share their experiences, and provide guidance and support.

- **Leading a work crew.** At CRCD and LA Conservation Corps, several participants had the opportunity to serve as work crew leaders. CRCD appointed work crew leaders to lead beautification work projects and ensure that other participants were performing their required duties. At LA Conservation Corps, participants could apply to become Assistant Crew Leaders (ACL). These positions paid a higher hourly wage and participants could work in this role for approximately one year.
• **Serving on a youth council or leadership committee.** Four LARCA providers mentioned that their participants could serve on youth councils or advisory boards. Three of these providers (CRCD, YO! Boyle Heights, and YPI San Fernando) co-enrolled LARCA participants into their YouthBuild programs, which incorporate the youth council structure. As a result, participants had the opportunity to participate in organizational leadership, provide input, and take part in making decisions about the program. At two providers, YPI Pico Union and YPI San Fernando, participants had the opportunity to join an advisory board, which involved creating and completing a documentary that dispelled common misconceptions about youth who had not completed high school.

Across the LARCA providers, staff members noted that youth development activities were beneficial for participants. Moreover, staff members believed that youth development activities strengthened participants’ acquisition of soft skills by providing opportunities for learning about cooperation, managing opposing perspectives, and negotiating conflict. Additionally, LARCA providers mentioned that youth development activities help to give all participants, especially those who are not typically recognized as “shining stars,” the motivation to continue pursuing their educational and career goals.

However, staff members at the majority of LARCA providers also mentioned that creating opportunities for youth development, leadership, and mentorship could be challenging. The most common challenges were similar in nature to challenges identified in providing other services. For example, at one provider staff turnover was cited as a challenge to building a robust youth development program. Similarly, the fact that staff had multiple roles sometimes prevented them from focusing on building strong youth development activities.

**Challenges for Delivery of Services**

Staff members from the six providers noted several challenges to implementing the services discussed in this chapter—case management, connection to supportive services, work-readiness and life-skills training, and youth development activities.

• **Case managers found it difficult to provide the intensive support need to address LARCA participants’ complex issues.** At the majority of LARCA providers, case managers had trouble balancing their case management duties with other program roles. Case managers stated that they often did not have sufficient time to assist youth with multifaceted personal issues. At some LARCA providers, high caseloads often made it difficult to devote individualized attention to LARCA participants. However, case managers were committed to working with LARCA participants and focused heavily on establishing trusting, positive relationships.
Restrictive eligibility and scarce resources at external organizations sometimes prevented participants from gaining access to the supportive services they needed. While case managers were heavily active in connecting participants with supportive services in-house and at external organizations, staff members also noted that participants often encountered long waiting lists or were not eligible for some programs, such as housing support. To counter the challenge in finding housing, some LARCA providers offered one-time housing stipends to assist LARCA participants, while other organizations established formal partnerships with local housing organizations that guaranteed housing for some LARCA participants.

LARCA providers had some difficulties implementing work-readiness training workshops. While work-readiness training appeared to be well developed at the majority of sites, staff members across all LARCA providers identified several challenges. A lack of space and technology limited the number of participants one provider could accommodate at a time. Staff members from several providers noted difficulties in holding participants’ attention and keeping them engaged; they found that this could be countered by keeping activities relevant to participants’ experiences in searching and applying for jobs. Finally, one LARCA provider noted that because participants in its program struggled with passing the mock interview component of the LA Chamber of Commerce’s curriculum, it opted to work with local community college instructors to offer a similar work readiness workshop that also gave participants a certificate.

Some providers were not able to design and implement life skills trainings and youth development activities that were as robust as other LARCA program components. Relative to case management, education, and vocational training, some providers’ offerings in the areas of life skills training and youth development activities were limited. While life skills workshops and youth development activities were key components of the programming at half of the LARCA providers, other LARCA providers’ focus on assisting participants in completing their education and vocational training led them to give life skills training and youth development activities less emphasis. In most cases, these activities were also voluntary. Providers that did offer robust life skills and youth development activities noted that providing varying formats and interactive activities helped to maintain participant engagement in the program.

Summary and Conclusions
In order to support participants with a variety of complex personal issues and barriers to success in education and employment, LARCA providers designed a comprehensive system of support consisting of case management, supportive services, work-readiness training, life skills workshops, and youth development activities. Case management was an integral component of the LARCA program and case managers played a key role in supporting participants. All LARCA providers provided or were in the process of providing work readiness trainings, with four of the six using the LA Chamber of Commerce’s curriculum at the time of the second visit.
LARCA providers’ implementation of life skills workshops and youth development activities varied across sites. Some providers fully integrated life skills workshops into their current programming, while other providers offered limited life skills activities or offered them less frequently than other providers. The majority of programs had developed peer mentoring and youth leadership activities for LARCA participants, but overall youth development activities were less robust than other services. In summary, while LARCA providers faced several challenges in fully implementing case management and a broad array of services, all providers offered a comprehensive set of supports and resources for guiding participants toward a vocational career or post-secondary education.
In addition to the services described in the previous chapter, the LARCA program also offered participants education, training, and placement services needed to access a career pathway. While the six providers had some flexibility in how they structured these services, they all provided three core elements:

- **education services**, leading to a high school diploma or High School Equivalency Test credential (see the text box on HSETs) from one of a variety of educational institutions, including traditional, charter, and adult schools or community colleges, as well as tutoring and basic skills remediation as needed;
- **vocational training** in the health, construction, or green technology fields, with associated occupational skill certificates; and
- **employment and postsecondary education placement services** designed to connect participants to the next steps in their chosen career pathways, be it additional education or a job.

This chapter highlights the different approaches the six providers took to offering education, vocational training, and employment and postsecondary education services. It notes the challenges providers encountered while offering these services, as well as strategies they took to overcome them.

Key findings discussed in this chapter include the following:

- **Providers offered a robust secondary school education.** While there was variation in the provision of these services, nearly all participants who attended focus groups said that they were learning more than they had in their prior high school.
- **Establishing new partnerships and program elements took time.** While some providers already had well defined vocational training, education, and work experience programs in place prior to the start of the LARCA program, providers that did not took considerable time to

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**High School Equivalency Tests (HSETs) are the three tests approved by the State of California, individuals can take in lieu of a diploma: the General Education Development Test (GED), the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET), and the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC). More information is available at [http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/gd/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/gd/).**

Throughout this report, the term HSETs refers to these three alternative credentialing methods.
develop them. In addition to needing time to procure outside providers, LARCA provider staff members grappled with the type of training to offer and how to build relationships with potential work experience employers.

- **Nearly two years into program implementation, some later-stage elements of the LARCA program, such as policies for exit and follow-up, were not well defined.** Waiting on instructions from EWDD about how to proceed slowed down the LARCA providers and meant that participants had not yet spent much time meeting with staff about their post program plans.

- **Despite challenges, the LARCA program launched participants onto clear career pathways.** Most participants accessed vocational training and work experiences in in-demand fields and were encouraged by staff members to enroll in postsecondary education, often while also earning income with a job.

Providers had some choice in how they arranged these services, but participants typically entered educational programming almost as soon as they enrolled in the LARCA program. From there, some participants took concurrent vocational training while others first completed their secondary school credential or rotated between academic classes and vocational training. Most providers connected participants to employment and postsecondary education services only towards the end of their time in the LARCA program.

**Secondary Education**

The LARCA program model required participants to complete a high school level of education. To accomplish this, providers could choose to connect participants to either preparation for one of the HSETs or classes leading to a high school diploma. EWDD gave the LARCA providers the flexibility to use traditional high schools, charter schools, adult schools, community colleges, one of the on-line HSET preparation classes, and independent learning to deliver the program’s academic component. The providers that offered a choice of academic options gave participants counseling to determine their best educational pathway given their academic skill level, the number of credits they had already earned, and any potential barriers to achievement.

**Prior Educational Experiences and Academic Preparation**

Prior to enrolling in the LARCA program, participants had a variety of educational experiences, but all had failed to achieve a high school credential. A staff member at one provider noted that some participants had been “pushed out” of their former schools for behavior reasons. Another staff person said that many participants had already tried alternative educational institutions, such as continuation schools, and a third staff member explained that LARCA was often the “absolute last resort” for participants. In focus groups, participants highlighted both personal issues and institutional challenges as reasons why they struggled in their former academic environments. For example, participants mentioned needing to take care of their own children or
other family members, involvement with gangs, and immaturity as issues that got in the way of their achievement. They also noted that in their former schools, they often dealt with crowded classes, teachers that “clocked out,” and uninspiring educational material. Provider staff members added that some participants came from schools that focused more on standardized tests than learning, were underfunded, and lacked appropriate educational materials.

Program provider staff members and educational partners said that most LARCA participants were below grade level when entering the program, although providers varied somewhat in their estimations of average grade level. At the low end, participants at one provider were said to enter with an average of fifth grade reading and math levels. At the higher end, it was estimated that participants in another program entered with levels that averaged around ninth grade. Staff members reported minimum grade levels for individuals as low as second grade in reading. Provider staff emphasized that success in the academic component of the program could be a struggle given participants’ low education levels.

**Models of Secondary Education Provision**

Each of the providers offered participants access to a variety of classes that taught subjects traditionally offered in high school, including math, science, history, and English. However, with the flexibility afforded to them within the LARCA program model, providers were able to design their secondary education component with choices along a number of key dimensions. Exhibit V-1 summarizes these choices and highlights some characteristics of the different educational programs. The sections that follow provide further detail on these decisions and explain the implications they may have had for participants’ outcomes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRCD</th>
<th>Credential(s) Offered</th>
<th>Component Provider and Location</th>
<th>Degree of Teacher Direction</th>
<th>Number of Secondary Options</th>
<th>Estimated Time to Achieve Credential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA Conservation Corps</td>
<td>Diploma Only</td>
<td>Partner only, all off site</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>8-16 weeks</td>
</tr>
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<td>YO! Boyle Heights</td>
<td>Diploma or HSET</td>
<td>Partner only, choice of on or off site</td>
<td>High at charter school, lower in other programs</td>
<td>Numerous</td>
<td>Varied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Watts</td>
<td>Diploma or HSET</td>
<td>Partner and in-house, choice of on or off site</td>
<td>High at charter school, lower in other programs</td>
<td>Numerous</td>
<td>1-8 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Pico Union</td>
<td>Diploma or HSET</td>
<td>Partner and in-house, all on site</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>7-15 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI San Fernando</td>
<td>Diploma or HSET</td>
<td>Partner and in-house, all on site</td>
<td>High at charter school, lower in other programs</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>4-7 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Credentials Offered**

Providers had the choice of offering classes towards a high school diploma, classes preparing students for one of the HSETs, or both. Overall, LARCA providers prioritized the acquisition of a high school diploma over one of the HSETs. Five providers offered this credential from the start of the program, and the sixth added a charter school partner during the study specifically to offer this option. Both LA Conservation Corps and CRCD chose only to offer classes leading to a high school diploma. While this was in part because these well-established programs had been offering a diploma-based program for years, staff members also indicated that it was important for participants to get a rigorous enough education to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), and that a diploma-based program was the best way to achieve this goal. Staff members from nearly every provider emphasized the value of participants continuing with postsecondary education and believed that a high school diploma was the best preparation for this further academic work.

Despite the fact that HSETs (or at least the GED, one of the three HSET options) by themselves have been found in research studies not to have much return in the labor market, both YPI and both YO! providers also offered preparation for one of the HSETs as an option in addition to diploma-based programs. Staff members at these providers explained that HSETs could be good choices for participants who struggled with a traditional academic schedule or curriculum. For example, participants with children could balance childcare needs by doing preparation for one of the HSETs in the evenings at adult schools or online through the program offered by YPI San Fernando. Because participants could achieve one of the HSET credentials more quickly than a diploma, both program and partner staff members at YO! Watts and YO! Boyle Heights also said that the HSETs could be good options for those participants who would still need more than 60 credits (out of the required 230) to earn their diplomas. In fact, Pupil Services and Attendance (PSA) counselors at programs using both HSETs and high school diploma options often steered participants who needed more than 60 credits to achieve a diploma towards one of the HSETs. An instructor at YO! Boyle Heights explained that while there was some stigma surrounding the HSETs, it was better for participants to complete one of the HSET credentials than to languish in a high school diploma program and never finish. That PSA counselor added that as long as the program pushed participants towards additional training after achieving one of the HSETs, they should still be able to access career pathways.

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**Academic Component Providers and Location**

All six LARCA providers relied on outside partners for at least some of their educational programming, and no provider offered high school diploma services without the aid of an education partner. In general, providers continued to partner with the same educational institutions that they had used prior to LARCA, including charter schools, LAUSD Adult Schools, and local community college programs. This made implementing the education component straightforward, though perhaps not particularly innovative.

Providers relied heavily on charter schools. By the fall semester of 2014, all six had an affiliation with one. Of note, YO! Boyle Heights and YPI San Fernando added charter schools as partners during study implementation. One program administrator explained that connecting with a charter school was a priority for her because she felt youth would benefit from the direct instruction charter schools provided. She added that such individual attention could be lacking at other types of academic institutions.

Unlike the others, both YO! providers sent substantial numbers of participants to LAUSD Adult School credit recovery and classes that offered preparation for one of the HSETs, citing those programs’ increased flexibility. For example, adult schools offered classes at night, and participants could choose to attend more or fewer hours of class each week depending on their schedules. Similarly, YO! Boyle Heights offered credit recovery and preparation for the HSETs through a community college provider that gave participants a great deal of independence in how they structured their class work.

Three of the LARCA providers also offered some educational programming themselves. For example, the YPIs provided their own preparation class for one of the HSETs. Providing education in-house may have allowed program staff members more opportunities to connect with participants and made it easier to track participant progress.

Providers offered educational services both onsite and at other locations, regardless of whether they provided these services themselves or whether they used an outside provider. Provider staff members saw benefits and drawbacks to both locations. At CRCD, all participants took high school classes at a charter school located at the nearby Los Angeles Trade Technical College campus. A program administrator noted that this location benefitted participants by giving them exposure to a postsecondary environment and access to college resources, particularly since the participants were also eventually enrolled as students there for their vocational training component. Program staff members and administrators at YO! Watts noted benefits to both approaches—they said that some participants, particularly those who were younger, felt more comfortable being able to stay in one place with one group of people all day, while those with gang affiliations appreciated being able to attend schools located at a distance from any gang territories. However, program staff members from both YO! Watts and YO! Boyle Heights
mentioned that it could be harder to keep track of participants’ progress when they attended classes at another location. For example, one program staff person who used an “open door” case management policy acknowledged that the participants taking classes off site were less likely to be around, and therefore less likely to visit him and receive support than their peers who were taking classes at the LARCA site. Because participants were spread out among several different educational providers at YO! Watts, program staff members there explained that even collecting transcripts for everyone could be administratively difficult.

**Instructional Strategies: Teacher-Directed versus Independent Study**

Within LARCA educational programming there were two main models of instruction across the different types of programs: teacher-directed and independent. In the teacher-directed model, used at the charter schools and the HSETs preparation courses at the YPIs, there was a high degree of teacher direction and a more traditional academic calendar. An advantage of the programs using this model was that instructors could endeavor to make participants excited about learning through relevant course content and project-based learning. For example, at CRCD’s charter school, courses explored equality, immigration, and racial justice, and participants worked on “micro projects” that culminated in a “macro project,” such as presenting at a local art festival. At YO! Watt’s charter school, different topics, such as poverty, became central to learning in every class. Participants might look at income levels in different countries in math, for example, and read about poverty in social studies. Instructors hoped that providing these types of hands-on learning opportunities would capture participants’ attention and engage them in academic work.

The classes offered at adult schools or through community college programs generally used the independent study model, in which participants progressed through the material at their own pace. Participants in these programs could complete course packets and worksheets quickly with little peer or teacher interaction. In such programs, geared towards taking one of the HSETs or CAHSEE exams, participants could bypass traditional academic schedules and complete up to a year of coursework in several months. Instead of lecturing the class or facilitating group discussions, teachers in these classes simply made themselves available for grading set assignments and answering student questions. Participants focused only on core subjects. This model of education was most prominent in the YO! programs. According to program staff members, it was selected most frequently by participants who were older, had fewer prior credits, or had children. Staff members at program providers noted that these more independent options were valuable for participants with conflicting priorities or who needed the ability to make substantial progress. For example, at YPI San Fernando, participants in the program geared towards the HSETs could choose to do some of their class work on a computer. Rather than coming in every day, participants could upload assignments for their instructors to review
online. Participants with children often took advantage of this option due to childcare constraints. However, at least one downside to academic instruction with fewer teachers, noted by a provider staff member, was that participants in the more independent options often did not progress as quickly as those in teacher-directed programs.

**Number of Secondary School Options**

Providers varied greatly in terms of the number of secondary school options they offered to participants. As discussed above, both YO! providers and both YPI providers allowed participants to decide whether to work towards one of the HSET credentials or a high school diploma, and the YO! programs additionally offered participants the choice between several different high school diploma and HSET options. For example, a participant could take classes towards a high school diploma at the onsite charter school or work more independently at an adult school. Conversely, LA Conservation Corps and CRCD offered only a charter school (diploma-based) program. In both of those programs, with the rare exception, all enrolled participants attended the same educational component.

Giving participants a high level of choice had trade-offs. The more choice providers offered participants, the more spread out over the various options the participants became. This resulted in a program that, while more individualized for the participant, was also more solitary. Participants were not necessarily taking classes in a cohort with LARCA peers, but instead might be in a larger class of adult school students. In addition to reducing the community feel of the program and producing a sense of isolation, this may also have increased the administrative burden on LARCA staff members. For example, program staff at YO! Watts noted that they had to keep track of enrollment forms, scheduling details, and transcripts from multiple educational partners. Providers such as CRCD and LA Conservation Corps had only to coordinate with one institution.

**Characteristics of the Secondary Educational Component**

Because there were multiple educational options both across and within LARCA programs, educational component characteristics like class size and average length of time in the academic component varied.

- **Class size.** Student-teacher ratios varied by program, but there were two main clusters. Program administrators from the YPI programs and LA Conservation Corps said that class sizes ranged between 10 and 12 youth, while program staff members and program administrators from the YO! programs and CRCD said that their class sizes ranged from around 25 to 35 youth. Students in larger classes received much less teacher direction, which may have reduced their engagement. An administrative staff person noted that many students in these classes struggled with the motivation needed to keep up their pace without much teacher direction. Larger classes also tended to have fewer interactive activities, like discussions,
and more of a reliance on worksheets. Note that YO! program participants had the option of smaller classes if they enrolled in charter schools.

- **Time to complete credential.** Because participants came to the LARCA program with varied academic backgrounds, the length of time spent in the secondary school component also varied greatly. Whether participants chose to study for one of the HSETs or their high school diploma was also a factor, with the HSETs generally achievable in a shorter timeframe. That said, at some programs, like LA Conservation Corps, participants rotated between three months of doing academics at the charter school and three months of vocational training, which accounts for the longer length of time they spent achieving an academic credential. In general, participants who chose diploma-based programs were governed more by traditional academic calendars than participants who chose one of the HSET programs. The amount of time participants spent in class in a given week ranged from 12 to 35 hours.

**Secondary Education Staffing**

PSAs, instructors, and support staff members, such as academic coaches and tutors, made up the educational staff within LARCA programs. PSAs provided entry into the educational component for all programs, counseling participants on their academic options. In cases in which participants had more freedom to choose their academic paths, PSAs were instrumental in helping them decide what and where to study. PSAs took into account participant scheduling, childcare needs, and transportation limitations in addition to factors like number of credits needed and age when counseling participants about this choice.

Since all LARCA programs relied on partner institutions for at least some educational programming, many of the instructors who worked with participants were actually employees of these institutions. Although instructor requirements varied by LARCA program and also among these partner institutions, for the most part all instructors had teaching credentials, master’s degrees, or both. During focus groups, participants from every LARCA program emphasized the quality of their teachers, using words like “supportive,” “caring,” and “engaged” to describe them and saying that they made their classes interesting and were always available to talk. Positive interactions with teachers seemed to be a highlight of the program for participants.

**Vocational Training**

The LARCA program required providers to connect all participants to vocational training that led to industry-recognized certificates. EWDD specified that training be in one of several in-demand fields, including healthcare, construction, and green technology, but individual providers could choose in which of these fields to provide training as well as the specific type of training to offer. Combined with a high school diploma or one of the HSET credentials, having this
vocational training would, it was hoped, make participants strong candidates for jobs and prepare them not just for employment, but a particular career pathway.

**Career Pathways**

As detailed in Exhibit V-2 below, LARCA providers chose to offer vocational training in different fields, with some connecting all participants to the same training program and others allowing more choice. Several of the LARCA providers chose fields at least partially based on the program’s prior experience providing vocational training. For example, CRCD had an already-established YouthBuild program, which made it easy to connect LARCA participants to the same construction training they had already used. While CRCD offered little choice in trainings, program staff members emphasized that the construction training was a chance for participants to gain experience and general skills, and that they would be able to transfer these skills to different types of jobs or training opportunities. In contrast to providers like CRCD that had a well-developed training program already in place, other providers had to design and implement their programs from scratch.

**Exhibit V-2: Vocational Training Fields and Programs by Provider**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Vocational Training Field(s)</th>
<th>Vocational Training Program(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRCD</td>
<td>Construction, Conservation</td>
<td>YouthBuild carpentry class at LATTC (some green building topics covered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Conservation Corps</td>
<td>Conservation (plus ability to enroll in other trainings if exited)</td>
<td>Green training and work experience organized by the provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Boyle Heights</td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>HIT training at East Los Angeles College, other health related trainings also in development at time of second site visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Watts</td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>CNA training at proprietary school, alternative health trainings for those with academic credentials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI San Fernando</td>
<td>Construction, Conservation, Healthcare, Other</td>
<td>Range of programs in construction, conservation, and healthcare plus child development and culinary arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Pico Union</td>
<td>Construction, Conservation, Healthcare, Other</td>
<td>Range of programs in health, automotive, conservation, and construction fields</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Healthcare**

Four LARCA providers offered health-related vocational training. YO! Watts connected the bulk of its participants to a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training and allowed those with a
high school diploma or one of the HSET credentials access to alternative, more advanced health trainings, such as those for jobs as a pharmacy technician or physical therapy assistant. YO! Boyle Heights planned to connect most participants to a Health Information Technology (HIT) program focused on working with Electronic Medical Records at East Los Angeles College. While the YPI programs offered an array of possible trainings in different fields, these included trainings to be a CNA, home health aide, or medical assistant. Staff members at two providers explained that they felt healthcare was an in-demand field with lots of potential for participants to eventually access high-paying jobs, though they noted that prior criminal records or a lack of experience could be hindrances. One topic of conversation that arose between providers and EWDD staff members was whether CNAs were actually in demand in the Los Angeles area. However, through guidance from various health care field experts organized by the LA Chamber of Commerce, a group with whom EWDD staff members coordinate, LARCA program staff members determined that the CNA job would give participants a chance to start working in healthcare and gain valuable experience, even without postsecondary academic credentials.

**Construction**

Two LARCA providers, CRCD and YPI San Fernando, offered construction training through their YouthBuild programs. Participants in CRCD’s construction training took a 10-week carpentry class at Los Angeles Trade Technical College and received instruction in topics such as carpentry, weatherization, and green building. YPI San Fernando became a YouthBuild grant recipient during study implementation and, as such, was still figuring out exactly what that training would entail at the time of the site visits. YPI Pico Union also planned to offer participants construction training. For the most part, the decision to offer participants construction training was tied to having prior programming in this area rather than the result of planning specific to the LARCA program.

**Conservation/Green Technology**

LA Conservation Corps, YPI San Fernando, YPI Pico Union, and CRCD offered or planned to offer trainings in the green technology or conservation fields. At LA Conservation Corps, conservation training was the focus, while in the YPI programs, participants could choose conservation-related trainings from a host of options. Conservation and green technology training involved a variety of topics, such as learning about and participating in community gardening, graffiti abatement, recycling, and solar panel installation. LA Conservation Corps already had a well-established conservation training program, so that provider was able to simply funnel LARCA participants into that component.

**Other**

While EWDD asked that the LARCA program offer vocational trainings in the three fields highlighted above, some providers also connected participants to additional trainings in other
areas. EWDD allowed this deviation from the model as long as participants were connected to training in a chosen career pathway. Notably, both YPI programs provided or planned to provide training in automotive technology, child development, and culinary arts. Program administrators from other providers noted that some youth accessed other training, such as in the law enforcement field, when they had both achieved their academic credential and outlined why an alternative field was the right match for them. In order for youth At LA Conservation Corps to access these trainings, they were first exited from LARCA, even though they continued to receive support from the program. Having the flexibility to enter training in alternative fields was valuable for those participants who were not interested in the fields promoted by LARCA.

**Sequencing of Vocational Training**

EWDD recommended that a participant begin vocational training after achieving an academic credential, completing work readiness training, and participating in youth development activities. However, at individual providers, this sequence was not always preserved. Each of the providers primarily required that participants complete some program elements before starting vocational training, but none required that participants have one of the HSETs or high school diploma for all vocational training options. For example, YO! Watts required participants to complete life skills and work readiness training before beginning CNA training. The reasoning behind this requirement was that the skills learned in the prerequisite trainings (for example, financial literacy) would contribute to participants’ success in the vocational training. Participants also had to complete the InnerSight assessment prior to enrolling in vocational training to learn what career path might be best for them. While there was usually little choice in vocational training, the assessment helped guide participants in thinking about long-term goals and how to use a degree.

Over the course of the program, multiple providers adjusted exactly where vocational training fell in the sequence of components. While most providers initially planned to require various prerequisites before participants could enroll in vocational training, this led, at some providers, to lower enrollment in training than desired. Originally, both YO! providers planned to require that participants achieve their GED or high school diploma before beginning vocational training. However, by fall 2014, both providers had dropped this requirement. Program administrators from YO! Watts explained that because a GED or high school diploma is a requirement for the California CNA license, they believed that participants would be motivated to achieve this academic credential once they were ready for the CNA exam; otherwise, they were finding it hard to encourage participants to complete their academic credential. Thus, by lowering the vocational training prerequisites, YO! Watts hoped to increase participant engagement both in the academic and vocational training components.
Aside from provider requirements, some participants experienced delays in starting vocational training due to implementation challenges. While LA Conservation Corps and CRCD had well-established training programs they could use for the LARCA program, the other providers had to put more effort into designing this component. Because of this, participants who enrolled in the LARCA program at the beginning may not have been able to access training until as late as the fall of 2014.

**Vocational Training Credentials**

Participants in most LARCA programs took vocational training that led to occupational credentials, though the actual or planned credentials varied along with the training options. At some providers, participants chose which credential to pursue, while at others, most participants received the same credential whether it was in an area of interest or not. Table V-3 summarizes the credentials offered by each provider.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRCD</th>
<th>Occupational Credentials</th>
<th>Other Credentials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homebuilder’s Institute</td>
<td>OSHA, CPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate/Building Professional Institute Certificate (start of program)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HBI-PACT (end of program)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Conservation Corps</td>
<td>Varied construction and conservation-related, such as forklift operator and chainsaw training</td>
<td>OSHA, CPR, First-Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Boyle Heights</td>
<td>Classes towards an HIT Coding Specialist Certificate</td>
<td>OSHA (start of program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YO! Watts</td>
<td>CNA certification for most, additional health credentials for others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI Pico Union</td>
<td>In planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPI San Fernando</td>
<td>Varied, included HBI-PACT, Child Development Skills Certificate, Food Handler’s Permit</td>
<td>OSHA, CPR, First-Aid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, program administrators at some providers expressed a preference for college credits as opposed to standalone occupational certificates or credentials. There was a divide between program administrators who felt that participants should get a certificate that could immediately lead to work and those who thought they should aim for postsecondary education. For example, one program administrator decided to shift the program away from having participants earn a certificate so that they could instead take coursework that would lead to college credits. This administrator noted that even if participants did not follow through and earn an associate’s degree, they would still have earned some college credits, which she thought
would be beneficial in the long term. At least one program offered a training that may have met both needs. Participants at CRCD received three college credits from Los Angeles Trade Technical College as well as the HBI-PACT credential after completing their carpentry course. In addition to the occupational credentials that LARCA participants achieved through their vocational training, half of the providers also had youth attend more basic trainings in safety, leading to credentials in OSHA, first-aid, and CPR. Providers generally offered such classes so that participants would be able to safely use the equipment and tools necessary for construction and conservation trainings.

Work Experience

Another element of vocational training offered by all six providers was paid work experience, designed to give participants income they needed to cover their costs of living while in the program and to help them build experience for their resumes. However, not all the providers directly connected paid work experiences to the specific vocational training offered and work experience was a less central part of the program for some providers compared to others. Establishing work experiences was easiest for those providers that hosted participants themselves and more challenging for the providers that had to build relationships with outside employers. At CRCD and LA Conservation Corps, work experience was designed to be an integral part of the vocational training program. Both of these providers operated as social enterprises and thus served as the employers for their participants. The providers paid participants to do hands-on work connected to their training. LA Conservation Corps participants worked around the city on projects like community gardening and river revitalization. In the past, CRCD had secured a Habitat for Humanity construction site at which youth could practice carpentry and construction skills. However, CRCD was unable to do this during study implementation, so youth worked on tasks more tangentially related to that program’s construction training, like graffiti abatement and neighborhood cleanup.

YO! Boyle Heights also offered paid work experience to all youth. The provider was technically the participants’ employer, paying each participant a $2,400 stipend with LARCA funds, but youth spent 10–12 weeks at Kaiser Permanente. There they volunteered in different medical departments at the hospital and were supervised by the organization’s Director of Volunteer Services. Through this work experience, participants gained experience in departments as diverse as pharmacy, nursing, and diagnostic imaging. While these work experiences were not technically related to the HIT vocational training offered by the provider, they were in the health field, and provider staff members thought that having this medical experience would be valuable for participants’ resumes.
The other three LARCA providers also offered paid work experiences mostly similar to YO! Boyle Heights where participants worked at other job sites but were paid a stipend through the provider. However, the take-up rate for participants of the paid work experience at these providers was reportedly lower and the experience was less central to these providers’ program designs. At YO! Watts, for instance, most youth were able to find an unsubsidized job after completing the CNA training, so staff members reserved work experiences for youth having trouble getting hired as a CNA. The YPI programs similarly connected youth to paid work experience on a case-by-case basis. At YPI San Fernando, participants enrolled in YouthBuild were easily connected to work experiences, similar to the model at CRCD. However, in discussing their work experiences, staff members from both YPI providers noted that finding other potential work experience employers had been difficult. One staff person explained that building relationships with employers took time and effort.

**Vocational Training Providers**

All six providers used outside partners to provide at least some of their vocational training, and most used outside partners for all vocational training. Only LA Conservation Corps provided its own training. Staff members from nearly all of the providers that used outside training providers indicated that setting up this training was a time-consuming process, involving both selection of the appropriate type of training and provider and then negotiation of the details of the contract.

Most providers relied on local community and state colleges for at least some of their vocational training. Program administrators from several programs noted that attending training at colleges had residual benefits for participants, such as exposing them to the college atmosphere and connecting them to college resources. In addition, participants often earned college credit for their trainings.

Providers also used adult schools, occupational centers, and proprietary schools for some trainings. YO! Watts connected the bulk of its participants to a proprietary school that focused on providing CNA training, for example. A program administrator from YO! Watts explained that they picked this school because they had worked with them before and had seen positive employment placement results. She added that they also liked that LARCA participants could be in their own cohort at this school. However, an administrator from another provider noted a potential downside to using such a proprietary program—participants do not earn any college credit for their classes, so they cannot build on their CNA certificate at a later point.
Employment and Postsecondary Education Placement Services

After participants earned academic and vocational credentials, the LARCA program model called for them to be placed in employment or postsecondary education. The goal of this “placement” was to further the progress participants were making along their designated career pathways and to help ensure that they would be able to continue moving along that trajectory on their own in the future. The key elements that varied across providers with regard to this program component were how they staffed this particular service, whether they emphasized employment or postsecondary education, and the nature of follow-up services that they offered, if any.

Postsecondary Education Placement Services

Staff members from five of the LARCA providers indicated that the major goal for most of their participants was postsecondary education rather than immediate employment, or postsecondary education coupled with a job on the side. In this light, providing postsecondary education counseling—such as helping participants fill out financial aid forms and making visits to colleges—can be seen as an important aspect of the program. A program administrator from YO! Boyle Heights explained that she thought it shortsighted to connect youth only to a short-term training that might lead to initial employment but not a strong career path. Instead, she decided it would be better to put participants on track towards college and higher salaries. Other program administrators confirmed this sentiment. For example, a program administrator from LA Conservation Corps said that participants could easily get entry-level conservation jobs after going through their vocational training, but that these jobs generally did not provide a living wage.

In addition to helping participants with college applications, providers encouraged postsecondary education in other ways. Five providers said that they organized college visits for participants. Most providers also held at least one LARCA education or training component on a local college campus. Program and program administrator staff members explained that this offered participants valuable exposure to the college environment. For example, YO! Watts held a GED prep math class at Los Angeles Trade Technical College partly for this reason. Two programs, LA Conservation Corps and CRCD, also held college readiness classes that covered topics like letters of recommendation and portfolios. LA Conservation Corps also brought in an outside partner called “Cash for College” to teach participants about the FASFA and applying for Cal Grants. These types of activities increased the accessibility of college for participants.

Program and administrator staff members from some providers indicated that they expected at least some participants to continue to postsecondary education in a field related to the LARCA...
vocational training. For example, a program staff person at CRCD estimated that 40% of LARCA participants continued coursework in a construction-related field, often at Los Angeles Trade Technical College, where the LARCA vocational training took place. A program administrator at YO! Boyle Heights said she hoped some participants would continue studying Health Information Technology (HIT) after the program, perhaps earning an associate degree. It remains to be seen whether participants will want to continue in these fields if given more choice. While admittedly a small sample size, none of the focus group participants at CRCD said they actually wanted to continue in the construction field.

**Employment Placement Services**

While the original LARCA program design emphasized employment placement services as the final program element, as time went on, most LARCA providers, through encouragement from EWDD, began to shift towards an equal emphasis on employment services and postsecondary education. Since most providers began encouraging postsecondary education they had less need for traditional job search and placement services than originally planned. However, even these providers still helped participants find part time jobs, often unrelated to their vocational training, so that they could earn money while in school. For many LARCA participants, concurrent placement in postsecondary education and employment became the goal.

Employment and placement staff members at four LARCA providers said that they mostly assisted participants in finding part-time jobs in retail, fast food, grocery stores, and hotels with wages ranging from about $9 to $10 an hour. Staff members from these providers said that they generally helped participants find these jobs through a combination of internet searching, YouthSource center visits, job fair attendance, and provider connections. As an example of the latter, staff members at YO! Boyle Heights and CRCD both explained that some employers (such as local hotels) called them directly when they needed employees. Staff members at YPI Pico Union mentioned getting participants temporary jobs through EWDD’s Summer Youth Employment Program. Program staff noted that these retail, fast food, and hotel jobs provided some participants with income to support their participation in higher education.

While YO! Watts and LA Conservation Corps also connected participants to similar entry-level, part-time jobs, they differed from the other providers in that they also sometimes linked participants to full-time, permanent positions. One staff member from LA Conservation Corps noted that while the majority of their participants went on to postsecondary education, a “substantial, small minority” ended up getting permanent jobs. While these jobs were not all related to conservation, at least some sprang from connections that LA Conservation Corps had built with the California Parks Department and other related organizations through their Corps program.
YO! Watts was unique in that it connected most participants to jobs directly related to their vocational training rather than emphasizing post-secondary education. A staff member explained that after spending around $1,000 per participant on the CNA training, she felt it was her duty to find participants related employment. To do this, YO! Watts primarily leveraged the proprietary school that provided the CNA training. Through prior connections with local convalescent homes, assisted living facilities, and home health agencies, this proprietary school claimed it was able to place almost every participant in a job within just a few months. However, the staff members at this partner noted that the average starting CNA wage for participants was about $10 an hour, which was not that different from the entry-level positions in retail and fast food that participants from other programs found.36

**Staffing and Sequencing of Placement Services**

All providers had staff members who assisted participants with their next steps, whether those steps involved conducting a job search or enrolling in further education. Four providers mentioned having dedicated postsecondary placement staff members with titles like “postsecondary education counselor.” At other providers, participants meet with other staff members, such as case managers or PSAs, when they wanted to discuss postsecondary education. Across providers, anywhere from one to four staff members helped participants with employment and post-secondary educational placement, and doing so was often just one part of the staff member’s larger set of responsibilities at the organization.

Participants began connecting with staff members for purposes of employment and education placement at different points in their sequence of services. Participants at CRCD and YPI Pico Union first met with placement staff at the very end of their academic component, whereas participants at LA Conservation Corps only began employment and post-secondary placement services once they had received a diploma or a certification through one of the HSETs and were in work readiness training. Participants in the YO! programs began these services only after they completed vocational training. The timing of these first interactions varied at YPI San Fernando.

**Follow-up Services**

As of Fall 2014, providers had mostly not yet developed many formalized follow-up services for participants after their placement in postsecondary education or employment. EWDD has not actually established the terms for program exit, but then again, few participants had actually completed all program requirements. Knowing that the longer participants stayed enrolled, the easier it would be for providers to serve them and to ensure that they made progress along their

36 Staff members from two other providers noted that they had heard the local CNA market was saturated, which is part of the reason why they stopped offering that training.
career pathways, EWDD decided to discourage the formal exiting of participants for as long as possible. This decision had some positive aspects. One program administrator explained that by keeping participants in the program for the length of the grant, it was easier to offer additional supports, such as transit passes or uniforms, even to participants who had already achieved their academic and vocational training credentials. However, the lack of a definitive exit definition was the cause of some concern on the part of provider staff members; they were left unsure how to manage ever-expanding participant numbers and unclear about what follow-up services should entail. Two providers, LA Conservation Corps and CRCD, were better situated in this regard because their LARCA programs were developed out of existing programs that already had more clearly defined terms for exit and formalized follow-up services. CRCD, for instance, exited all participants upon graduation from their academic and vocational training components, even if they continued to receive case management or other supports. While LA Conservation Corps was waiting on EWDD’s definition to formally exit participants, informally they considered as exited those participants who had achieved their academic credential and who were in postsecondary education or employment.

Both CRCD and LA Conservation Corps had started conducting some form of follow-up as of fall 2014. LA Conservation Corps continued to meet with the participants they had informally exited. These participants were required to meet with case managers monthly to receive supportive services and to discuss any barriers they experienced, though more traditional follow-up services had not yet been developed. CRCD’s career placement coordinator checked in with exited participants using phone, Google Voice, and text messages every two weeks. She planned to do this for a period of two years, which is a YouthBuild standard. In addition to verifying participant employment or education, she also made referrals to supportive services. Through follow-up—and efforts such as sending out holiday cards every year—she hoped to show participants that CRCD still cared about them.

On March 18, 2015, EWDD formally released a memo defining exit and follow up procedures for the program. The document notes that follow-up services should start on October 1, 2015 for all participants. Follow-up services for the program consist of “regular contact, job retention services, assistance in furthering education, work-related peer support groups, supportive services, and tracking of youth post-placement.”37 The follow-up period is supposed to last until June 30, 2016. SPR’s final report will indicate how this guidance affected providers and participants.

Challenges in Delivering Services

This section highlights some of the major challenges that cut across secondary education, vocational training, and employment and postsecondary placement services. It also explores strategies providers used to deal with some of these challenges.

Participant Population

All providers experienced several challenges related to serving a population whose members, by definition, had had difficult educational experiences. First, many participants lacked critical academic skills. Most of the providers said that participants did not have the foundational knowledge needed to succeed in high school. Even though they were motivated to learn, participants often had skill deficiencies such as not knowing multiplication tables or how best to study. Providers dealt with this issue by providing supplemental support, such as tutoring and placement in workshops on topics such as study habits and time management.

Second, it was not easy for the LARCA providers to encourage attendance and effort among participants who had already demonstrated that showing up for a formal learning experience and remaining engaged in it was difficult for them. Staff members explained that participants dealt with multiple complex issues at home, such as caring for children or families, experiencing community violence and poverty, or living with a criminal record. All of these factors affected participant attendance and ability to concentrate on the academic and vocational training components. Providers implemented a variety of strategies to encourage participants to attend programming. For example, YPI Pico Union scheduled two “back to school” workshops to help participants get back in the academic mindset. As discussed above, YO! Watts eliminated the requirement that participants obtain an academic credential before enrolling in vocational training in an effort to incentivize participants to achieve their academic credential, reasoning that once participants completed the CNA training, they would be motivated to eliminate the final barrier between them and CNA licensure—the lack of a diploma or one of the HSET credentials.

Third, some participants were unsure about what career path to pursue. Program and administrator staff members from several providers acknowledged that not all participants were interested in the trainings they provided, or knew what career path they wanted instead. For example, a program administrator from YPI San Fernando noted that according to vocational training instructors, LARCA participants seemed unmotivated and uninterested in their chosen training. Upon learning this, the provider added a career exploration workshop that participants had to take before choosing their training. This strategy may have increased participant engagement.
Developing and Maintaining Partnerships

While the LARCA program’s reliance on partner organizations for provision of much of their academic and vocational training made for a rich participant experience, several challenges were associated with developing and maintaining these partnerships. Those providers that did not already have established secondary education and vocational training partners had to spend a great deal of time and energy identifying them and developing relationships with them. As of the final round of site visits, two providers had yet to enroll any participants in vocational training (though both had plans to start doing so) in part because of difficulties finding training providers. Even when they already had identified training and education partners, the LARCA providers had to spend significant amounts of time coordinating contracts with them and deciding what types of training they wanted to offer. Similarly, it took time for YPI San Fernando to find an appropriate charter school when staff members there wanted to offer high school diploma classes in addition to preparation for the HSETs. In addition, program staff members from at least half the providers indicated that they didn’t have enough time to build real relationships with employers with whom they wanted to make connections (for example, to place participants in work experiences).

Once partnerships were established, related difficulties still arose. LARCA providers could not always control or fix challenges that their partners faced. For example, program administrators from the two providers that worked most closely with adult schools, YO! Watts and YO! Boyle Heights, said that for a time, the schools stopped offering preparation for the HSETs, which reduced academic options for their participants. To deal with this, YO! Boyle Heights developed a new relationship with a charter school midway through the program in part because that school did offer preparation for HSETs. Being nimble enough to add another partner enabled them to overcome the challenge. Overall, working with partners required flexibility.

Coordination with EWDD

At times, coordinating with EWDD was challenging for providers, especially when the program model underwent somewhat substantial changes midcourse. Providers had to respond to changing messages from EWDD over the course of the study—such as to increase the focus on postsecondary education alongside work and away from just job placements. While changing guidelines or clarifying philosophies in a new program is not unexpected, dealing with these changes may have led to some delays. For example, YO! Boyle Heights originally planned to offer CNA training, which did not offer college credits, but then switched to an HIT program that earned credits and connected to an AA degree. In addition, some provider staff members wished that EWDD had provided clearer guidance about the exiting of participants, particularly as it applied to follow-up, before the spring of 2015.
Summary and Conclusions
Each LARCA provider developed distinct education, vocational training, and placement services. The providers’ degree of success in implementing these components aligned roughly along the continuum of component sequencing: education, which participants generally accessed first, was more fully developed than vocational training, which generally came next, and vocational training was in turn was more fully developed than the placement services components.

Each of the providers successfully offered participants the chance to achieve a high school diploma or one of the HSET credentials, though providers varied by which credentials were offered, where education was provided, who provided the component, and even how much teacher direction was involved. Despite these differences, nearly all focus group participants said that they felt they were learning more, and were more understood, in their LARCA educational placements than in prior academic learning situations.

All providers also offered or planned to offer vocational training that led to occupational credentials, but they exhibited variation on everything from the vocational training field to the level of participant choice in selecting a training. In general, those providers that already had vocational training in place for other programs had an easier time connecting LARCA participants to this component. Other providers struggled to determine exactly what type of training they wanted to offer and then needed time to find training-provider partners. This meant that some participants experienced delays in accessing vocational training.

At the time of study site visits, providers were still designing their placement and follow-up services. For the most part, however, providers had decided to encourage participants to access postsecondary education, or to work and enroll in postsecondary education concurrently, rather than to have them move only to jobs in their chosen career pathways. EWDD and most provider staff members supported this decision as a better option for participants’ long-term success.

Overall, the fact that the LARCA program had a fairly short timeline combined with a single round of funding made it challenging for all providers to fully implement education, vocational training, and placement services. Each had to develop new programs or program elements without the promise of future funding, which involved a lot of work without assured sustainability. Nevertheless, all providers developed programming that gave participants access to a bundle of services that connected them to at least the first steps on a career pathway.
VI. CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapters have provided an account of the implementation of the LARCA program. Chapter I outlined the challenges facing dropout youth that the LARCA program hoped to address, described the context in which the program operated, and detailed how this evaluation will provide lessons to both the workforce system in the City and County of Los Angeles and a broader, national audience. Chapter II discussed the administrative structure that oversaw the program as a whole and the key players involved in designing and delivering program services. Chapter III outlined the process by which the six individual LARCA program providers recruited and enrolled youth into the program and described the initial services received upon enrollment. Chapter IV described the case management services that helped unify and focus all of the services provided by the program as well as the various comprehensive services designed to support the success of participants while they were in the program and improve their lives after it. Chapter V outlined the secondary education, vocational training, and post-secondary education and employment placement services designed to move participants along a career pathway and help to ensure their long-term economic success.

This final chapter seeks to draw conclusions about the implementation of the LARCA program, based on the information provided thus far, and to explore the significance of the study’s findings. It discusses the overall implementation successes achieved by the program and its key players, as well as the challenges they encountered. The chapter also draws out some of the lessons learned during implementation, focusing on how they may apply to the development of other programs similar to LARCA. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications of the implementation study findings for the evaluation’s impact study.38

Implementation Successes

After two years of program implementation, EWDD, the partner organizations, and the provider agencies responsible for operating the LARCA program had accomplished a great deal. They

38 This chapter assumes that readers have read the previous chapters and have a general understanding of the findings those chapters reported. Readers needing a review the individual findings of the study are directed to the findings summaries provided with each of the chapters I through V.
had brought together a collection of agencies with a limited history of working together to implement a complex program serving dropout youth, a population that is both difficult to engage and challenging to serve. Through the LARCA program, these organizations helped well over 1,000 such youth receive a variety of services aimed at stabilizing their lives and providing them with both education and training and the credentials to show for it, positioning them well for future employment and careers.

The overall success of the program can be attributed to a series of smaller individual accomplishments that fall into two broad categories. The first success category has to do with the partnerships and system-wide changes produced through the implementation of the program. The LARCA program brought together organizations with only a limited history of working together to develop a robust system of services for a hard-to-serve population.

- **The partnership built between EWDD and LAUSD created a solid foundation for future system-level change.** Although this partnership had begun prior to the LARCA program, it was still new when the program started. Also new was the particular collaborative arrangement these two agencies were expanding as part of LARCA—the placement of jointly-funded PSA counselors (who were LAUSD employees) in workforce system settings (i.e., provider offices). The LARCA program further tested and lent credibility to this novel arrangement, about which many critics had initially been skeptical. The placement of PSA counselors in provider offices helped these two key program partners work out logistical issues and better understand the ways in which this arrangement was a mutual benefit to both education and workforce systems as well as to the individuals supported by it. Since the start of the grant, LAUSD and EWDD have expanded the use of PSA counselors, placing them in WIA-funded YouthSource settings as well as the city’s FamilySource centers.

- **The LARCA-mediated partnership between EWDD and the LA Chamber of Commerce brought an employer perspective to the city’s workforce system.** EWDD and the Chamber of Commerce had worked together previously through EWDD’s health care intermediary project and in other capacities. EWDD was able to leverage this relationship in the LARCA program, using the Chamber to inform the vocational training and career pathways decisions of providers offering health care-related training. Through this partnership, the Chamber and EWDD also developed the certificate-based work readiness curriculum that LARCA providers used with their participants. This curriculum has been adopted by the LARCA providers and will become part of other workforce system operations in the future. The deepening of this partnership through LARCA will serve the Los Angeles workforce system well in the years to come.

- **New relationships formed between EWDD and the LARCA program providers will help to expand the ways in which the workforce system can serve the City and County of Los Angeles.** The grant offered the opportunity for EWDD and many of the LARCA program providers to work together for the first time. As they came together with EWDD to collaborate on LARCA, the
providers all brought different, important assets to EWDD’s network of workforce system providers (e.g., experience with different populations, providing a range of services, networks of partners, and a presence in particular neighborhoods or in the County). These new relationships give the city’s workforce system the potential to serve individuals better and to serve a greater range of individuals, including those living outside the city but within the larger Los Angeles County area. The success of the relationships also opened the door for partnerships on future programs. In fact, two of the providers are now currently scheduled to become involved in the program being operated for EWDD’s second Workforce Innovation Fund grant.

The second category of accomplishments had to do with the implementation of program services. All six providers, with the aid of EWDD and city- and provider-level partner agencies, implemented an intensive, long-term program for a traditionally underserved population, providing a considerable degree of assistance to a large number of people.

- **The LARCA program recruited, enrolled, and served well over 1,000 dropout youth, helping connect them with needed services and improving their education and employment prospects.** Although recruitment, enrollment, and service delivery were not without their challenges (see the discussions below), EWDD and the LARCA program providers offered a rich set of long-term services to 1,067 dropout youth, along with various certifications. These services lasted well over a year for many youth and helped them not only find jobs, but also achieve longer-term success along career pathways. Providers were also there to support participants through the rigorous sequence of services demanded by the program.

- **The placement of PSA counselors at LARCA program provider offices added substantial value to the LARCA program experience.** Because they could access LAUSD system records (e.g., transcripts and dropout lists), PSA counselors were able to aid LARCA program provider staff members in various recruitment, enrollment, and assessment tasks. Furthermore, they were able to employ their skills in counseling and service provision to assist participants. Their presence in LARCA provider offices represented a complicated marriage of the workforce and educational systems and a confluence of three different organizational cultures. Through considerable dialogue and trial and error, EWDD, LAUSD, and the LARCA program providers demonstrated that this arrangement could work and bring considerable value to the program and its participants.

- **The LARCA program implemented a strong secondary school component that made a difference in participants’ lives.** The LARCA program providers implemented what appeared to be a strong system of secondary school options that engaged the youth they served and provided them with diplomas or equivalent credentials. In some cases, providers developed entirely new educational components, creating new partnerships with schools and educational providers. Across providers, youth expressed that these educational services were more supportive and engaging than the schools they had previously left. While
the impact study findings will reveal considerably more, the present data indicate that the educational component of the LARCA program was rich and robust.

- **The LARCA program launched participants onto defined career pathways.** LARCA providers began assessing participants’ career interests from the start of the program through tools such as the InnerSight assessment and InnerSight experience workshop. They also worked with youth to discover their capabilities and skills. While vocational training was often somewhat prescribed by the particular provider, consisting of training primarily in construction or health care, providers worked with participants to help them leverage this experience in ways that supported participants’ long-term interests (e.g., highlighting particular skills learned or certifications earned or focusing on features such as work ethic and willingness to take on challenging tasks). Finally, the providers helped participants pursue work experiences and/or additional education as needed to move them along particular pathways with the potential for long-term, steady, and gainful employment.

## Implementation Challenges

The implementation study revealed a number of challenges EWDD and the providers encountered in designing and operating the LARCA program. Some of these challenges stemmed from the nature of the funding and the grant while others were related to what the program was trying to accomplish and the population it served. In many cases, EWDD and the providers were able to overcome these challenges by developing new strategies and adapting their approaches to service delivery, but in some cases, the challenges proved resistant to attempts to remedy them, remaining as barriers to fully achieving the program’s goals. Understanding these challenges, as well as their causes and consequences, may help the designers and providers of this program—and others wishing to implement similar programs—avoid certain pitfalls in future efforts aimed at improving the life chances of dropout youth.

## Working with a Compressed Startup Period

The US DOL Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant provides funding for services for 40 months, from July 2012 up through October 2015. The LARCA program was designed to have a two-year intake period and more than a year of service delivery for each participant for a total of at least 36 months of program operations. Thus, the program had to begin operating as soon as possible after the receipt of the grant to ensure that all participants could be fully served. While the LARCA program moved with great alacrity from grant receipt to enrollment (the program began intake and enrollment in just under six months), this relatively short startup period posed several challenges for the implementation of the program.

- **Providers needed more time to foster innovative thinking.** While EWDD designed much of the program as part of its proposal, a longer startup period would have allowed for greater creativity and innovative thinking in
implementing key program components. One example was that EWDD, motivated by the time constraints to do what was most expedient, relied upon WIA eligibility criteria for LARCA program participants. This approach may not have been ideal given the additional time it took to train provider staff members unfamiliar with these criteria and the fact these criteria may have excluded youth who may have truly benefited from program services.

- **More time would have allowed for more input from US DOL.** EWDD appreciated the input it received from US DOL and the technical assistance provided to it as a grantee. EWDD staff members, however, would have appreciated having more time to solicit input on program design and evaluation from US DOL prior to the program start. All WIF grantees attended a conference in Washington, D.C. at US DOL headquarters that addressed several implementation issues and included additional planning discussions around evaluation, but the conference took place in March 2014, more than 18 months into the project.

- **Because many program elements were new, or new to providers, they took a significant amount of time to implement and the compressed startup period delayed their rollout.** The MIS system was new for EWDD. Many other service elements, such as the work readiness class, the InnerSight assessment, and various placement services, were new to many, if not most of, the providers. Together, these elements took a considerable amount of time to implement or integrate. Similarly, some partnerships, such as YPI San Fernando’s charter school partnership, which turned out to be a very successful recruitment and service relationship, took a great deal of time to establish. Many of these services and relationships were not developed or established until a year or more into program operations and some were still under development at two years into program operations.

**Meeting Recruitment and Enrollment Goals**

While the number of youth served by the program was considerable and sufficient for impact study evaluation needs, enrollment numbers were somewhat short of both program and study goals (as outlined in Chapter III). The implementation study identified several challenges providers faced when it came to recruiting and enrolling participants.

- **The compressed startup time put pressure on recruitment.** Providers began recruitment and enrollment approximately six months into the grant. Their original target had been four months, but providers simply needed more time to plan their programs. At the start of intake, providers were still developing and refining key program elements (primarily those that occurred late in the sequence of services) and navigating other program enrollment requirements. As a result, enrollment picked up somewhat slowly; providers were slightly behind their enrollment targets after the first six months.

- **Some providers had insufficient outreach staff capacity.** Providers that met their enrollment targets had dedicated outreach staff members. The providers that
did not meet their targets either did not have such dedicated staff, experienced
turnover of these staff, or only developed these positions well into the intake
period.

- **Other programs competed for potential LARCA program youth.** Under
  pressure to meet enrollment numbers for concurrently operated youth programs,
  such as WIA, some providers, at various times, channeled potential LARCA
  participants into these other programs rather than enroll them in LARCA. This
  was likely a minor issue, however, compared to other barriers to enrolling
  sufficient numbers of youth.

- **Many youth in provider catchment areas were undocumented (and thus
  ineligible).** This situation was an issue especially for the YPI providers (and
  YPI Pico Union in particular). Staff members at these providers believed that close to
  70% of all youth on the LAUSD dropout list that PSA counselors accessed for the
  local area were undocumented. As a result, these providers had to conduct
  extensive additional outreach efforts to generate a sufficient number of recruits.

**Engaging a High-Barrier Population**

The very factors that make serving the dropout population a priority also make it a challenging
population with which to work. Participants experienced a variety of barriers to completing
education and gaining meaningful employment, including low education levels, the need to care
for children and families, the stresses of exposure to community violence, poverty, and the
challenges of navigating a criminal record. While LARCA program providers anticipated these
barriers and applied their expertise and resources in confronting them, the challenges in serving
such a population are worth highlighting to better convey the types of issues that EWDD and the
providers had to overcome on a regular basis while serving dropout youth.

- **Youth had many barriers that affected program enrollment.** Providers found
  that throughout the recruitment and enrollment process, potentially eligible youth
  would often drop out of the process without warning or not deliver needed
  paperwork on time to begin a session of services. Providers often had to engage
  in considerable follow-up work to get these potential participants in the door to
  enroll.

- **Participants’ low levels of basic skills made it difficult for them to succeed.**
  Participants often lacked the foundational skills and knowledge needed to succeed
  in high school. Even though they were motivated to learn, participants did not
  often have basic math or reading skills and often did not know how best to learn
  and study. Providers dealt with this issue by providing supplemental support,
  such as tutoring, and by holding workshops on topics like study habits and time
  management.

- **Providers had to continually devise ways to keep youth engaged.** One
  provider offered “back to school” workshops to help participants reconnect to an
  academic environment. Another allowed participants to engage in vocational
  training sooner because the training was more appealing. Others devised ways to
help make work readiness activities engaging and relevant or allowed participants to mix work and education to keep them from becoming bored or distracted.

Adhering to a Common Program Model

The freedom EWDD afforded the LARCA providers structure their individual programs was both necessary and welcome given the particular sets of partner programs providers worked with and other pre-existing service elements they incorporated into their LARCA programs. Still, this latitude created some challenges for the program, especially in regards to ensuring that the program was still uniform in its overall goals and methods (an important factor the impact study, discussed below, will need to consider).

- **Existing programs had to be adapted to emphasize career pathways.** Many of the providers used their existing vocational training and employment programs as the basis for delivering their LARCA program services. However, these existing programs had not always emphasized guiding participants along a career pathway, so providers had to adapt these programs to fit the LARCA program model. Doing so involved adding up-front career interest planning, such as through the InnerSight assessment, and finding ways to connect participants with additional training and employment opportunities after vocational training was complete to further them along their areas of interest. The results were functional but not always ideal. One significant limitation was that some of the existing programs offered only a single vocational training option and therefore could not cater to the more diverse interests of their participants. To mitigate this limitation, some providers considered ways of leveraging existing training opportunities to take participants in a variety of related but distinct employment directions. For instance, a participant could enroll in some form of health care training but parlay that into a career in medical records.

- **Providers struggled to implement some mid-course changes by EWDD.** For instance, in August 2014, EWDD changed the formal definition of dropout to “chronically absent youth performing below grade level” (regardless of formal dropout status), which represented a change in the eligibility criteria. EWDD also shifted the primary goal of the program from placing participants in employment to placing them in post-secondary education (often alongside employment) in the belief that additional education was often needed to push youth into true career pathways. While these shifts can be seen as beneficial, providers had to shift their messaging and practices to accommodate them.

- **The use of different names for the same services generated some confusion.** Providers did not always use the same language to describe the program elements they provided, leading to some minor confusion about whether a provider had delivered a certain service or not. This issue arose primarily around the delivery of life skills workshops, youth leadership opportunities, and supportive services, which were often called different things by different providers.

- **The services that comparison group members could access varied by provider.** While all comparison group members were provided with a referral list...
for other services in the area, some providers also had other youth programming, such as WIA-funded programs, that comparison group members may have been able to access and which were broadly similar to LARCA. This issue was not relevant to program implementation per se, but the fact that comparison group members had widely varying experiences could affect the service contrast one might see in the impact study results.

**Timely Implementation of Program Elements**

The compressed startup period for the program combined with a complex design meant that EWDD and the providers had not fully developed all of the tools needed to administer the program and its various services by the beginning of program enrollment. In fact, several program elements, particularly those offered late in the sequence of services, were still being developed nearly two years into program operations.

- **Some providers had limited vocational training and placement services.** For those providers that did not already have established vocational training partners and placement services, a lot of time and energy had to be put into developing them. As of Fall 2014, two providers had yet to enroll any participants in vocational training (though both had plans to start doing so) in part because of how difficult finding training providers had been. These providers had to spend significant amounts of time coordinating contracts with training providers and deciding what types of training they wanted to offer. Other providers were late in implementing vocation training because they changed course late in their program cycle. One provider, for instance, originally planned to offer a certified nurse’s assistant training course, but then switched to a health information technology program that earned college credits, which took time to implement. More generally, program staff members from at least half the providers indicated that delays in implementing components of vocational training such as developing internship opportunities stemmed from the unexpectedly long amount of time it took to connect with employers and build relationships with them.

- **Policies for exit and follow-up took time to define.** Provider agency staff realized the benefit of prolonging program exit. A staff person at one provider, for instance, noted that achieving an academic credential quickly could actually be a disadvantage, because it might mean the participant would leave the program sooner and thus have less time to earn occupational credentials and receive case management and other support. Still, waiting on these definitions from EWDD proved challenging to LARCA providers since it meant putting off meeting with participants about post-program plans and ever-growing caseloads. EWDD began discussing policies for exiting participants and doing follow-up with them about two years into program operations, which some providers felt was too late.

- **Life skills and youth development program elements were not a priority.** All of the providers offered financial management training, but otherwise the life skills workshops and youth development activities offered by providers were typically not required and there was greater variation in them across providers. To be sure, these program elements were not emphasized in the LARCA program.
model, so providers were not expected to develop them as fully as, for example, their education services. However, it is instructive to see that that providers’ efforts to develop these program elements were proportional to the priority placed upon them in the model.

- **The LARCA program MIS was not available until more than a year into program operations.** The LARCA program began just as EWDD was beginning to transition to a new data tracking system. But because the timing for the new system did not align well with the needs of the program, EWDD developed a customized system using the Efforts to Outcomes platform that was managed by one of the program providers. This MIS appears to be useful to both program staff members and administrators. However, several providers gained initial access to the system more a year into program implementation, requiring additional training and back entry of records kept elsewhere up to that point.

### Sustainability of the Program

Under the WIF grant, there was no funding to extend the program in its current form. EWDD was considering ways to extend it, but as of October 2014, the program was no longer enrolling participants and the expectation was that the current program would not continue past October 2015 when funding ended. That said, EWDD is pleased with many aspects of the LARCA program and is planning ways to incorporate some of its elements into its other workforce system services. These elements include the placement of PSA counselors in workforce system settings; the focus on dropout youth (in LA, WIA youth programs already average close to 70 percent out-of-school youth); the work readiness course; and the emphasis on career pathways. In addition, the grant has created several new system-wide partnerships (as noted above) that are likely to endure. Two specific examples of ways this grant has influenced new programming within the Los Angeles area include: 1) the partnership with LAUSD designed to place PSA counselors within Los Angeles FamilySource centers (as noted above); and 2) EWDD’s recent award by US DOL, for the second round of WIF grants, which includes a program focusing on the integration of the workforce system and social enterprise employers, which not only draws from the lessons learned in implementing LARCA but includes two of the six LARCA providers.

### Lessons for Policy-Makers and Practitioners

The findings above reveal a number of important lessons for the designers and implementers of the LARCA program. These lessons may also be applicable to a larger audience of policy-makers and practitioners interested in implementing similar programs for out-of-school and dropout youth in the City and County of Los Angeles and nationwide. These lessons include the following.

- **While seemingly challenging to implement, partnerships between workforce and K-12 educational systems have great potential.** One of the more
prominent partnerships, at the center of the LARCA program, is the one between EWDD and LAUSD. This partnership required several years of coordination between the senior staff at EWDD and LAUSD’s Student Health and Human Services division and did not always look like it would work. The LAUSD school board did not want to fund LAUSD staff members (i.e., PSA counselors) to work at non-school facilities or to detract from teacher funding. The Workforce Investment Board did not want non-workforce system staff members placed it its WorkSource and YouthSource centers doing, ostensibly, what workforce system staff members viewed as their jobs. However, key staff members from within EWDD and LAUSD kept pushing for the opportunity to place PSA counselors in workforce system settings. After a brief trial, both sides came to agree that this arrangement was mutually beneficial. As one LAUSD staff member put it, “We all serve the families. It’s either the student or someone else in their family.” In part due to the expansion of this partnership brought about during the implementation of the LARCA program, both sides now speak about this partnership extremely favorably for the benefit it provides to so many of the individuals in the populations these two systems both serve. The implementation of this partnership in a city and school district as large and challenged as Los Angeles bodes well for the possibility of implementing something similar in other parts of the country.

- **Dropout youth can be recruited and effectively served.** As is discussed elsewhere in this report, dropout youth are notoriously difficult to locate and entice into programming due to the many challenges they face in their lives—the same challenges that drove them away from school in the first place. Although reaching, recruiting, and serving these youth did prove to have its challenges, EWDD and the providers nevertheless managed to enroll and serve a considerable number of disengaged youth. Knowing that it is possible to serve this population effectively is important in the current legislative context. The 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which replaces WIA, raises the upper age limit for out-of-school youth from 21 to 24. It also changes the funding requirements for serving out-of-school youth, increasing the percentage of statewide funds to be spent on out-of-school youth from 30 percent to 75 percent.39 These changes only heighten the need for workforce agencies to find ways to better serve this population.

- **Implementing service-intensive programs takes time.** The LARCA program, on the whole, was comprehensive and complex, and the providers came to the program with varied experience implementing similar programs. One provider was entirely new. Others were new to serving the specific population. Still others needed to develop new partnerships and new program components to be able to deliver the full LARCA program model. All this meant that much of the LARCA program infrastructure had to be built from scratch—and even under the best of circumstances such development takes considerable time to be done well. The

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compressed startup time associated with this grant meant that EWDD and the providers were forced to make tradeoffs, which often meant putting off consideration of program elements (e.g., the work readiness program, some of the vocational training programs, the MIS, etc.) until well into the life of the program. Planners considering similar programs should recognize that the circumstances facing the LARCA providers were not unusual, and should therefore not underestimate the time needed to develop new program elements, especially for complex programs involving new partnerships. Perhaps in recognition of the need for adequate planning time, the grantees in the second round of WIF grants have been allotted more time for program planning.

- **Eligibility criteria should receive a careful look.** EWDD opted to have providers use a slightly modified WIA youth program eligibility determination process for the LARCA program. These criteria do help identify the population EWDD desired to serve and using them was expedient given the compressed planning timeframe. However, these criteria may not have been the best fit for the program. First, they may have been overly stringent, excluding the large numbers of undocumented students served by both YPI providers. Second, the additional documentation they required was burdensome for providers. Third, as pointed out by EWDD staff members, they may have sent the message to providers early on that it was OK to treat the program much like WIA and not give participants the attention and depth of services the program prescribed. Fourth, since relaxing the eligibility criteria certainly helped the recruitment challenges some providers experienced, it appears that the original criteria may have been a barrier to reaching the program’s enrollment goals. Together, these factors suggest that eligibility criteria are more consequential than may appear at first blush and therefore deserve careful consideration.

- **It is important to understand program providers’ assets.** The six providers brought different strengths and weaknesses to the LARCA program. The providers with more experience operating programs similar to LARCA brought strong partnerships and well-established program elements to their individual program designs, but they were also less nimble and sometimes constrained in their ability to customize these elements due to other funding sources and their established ways. Providers developing new programs, in contrast, were highly flexible and more innovative in implementing prescribed program elements but often needed a great deal of time to build new elements, find new partners, and identify services for a population they had not previously served. It was important for EWDD to assess these differences and then to work closely with the providers with their different backgrounds and assets in mind, taking care to leverage the strengths for the program as a whole and find ways to compensate for the weaknesses.

- **Recruitment benefits from a flexible approach.** Relying on methods of recruitment that had worked well in the past, such as word of mouth and a location that favored youth drop-ins, worked well for some providers, but overall a willingness to try new methods and adapt to circumstances proved to be important for successful recruitment. LARCA providers expanded outreach to
new neighborhoods; adjusted the location of outreach staff members; expanded program-specific age criteria to allow those under 21 or under 18 to enroll; developed incentive structures to enhance word-of-mouth recruiting; and built new referral partnerships within the community. Without these adaptations, enrollment would likely have been much lower.

**Implications for the Impact Study**

In addition to providing important information about the how the LARCA program was planned, structured, and operated, the implementation study plays an important role when it comes to the random assignment impact study and the cost study. The impact study will compare the educational, employment, and other outcomes of program group members (i.e., program participants) to members of the control group to assess the ways in which the LARCA program improved the lives of the young people it served. The cost study will examine the effectiveness of LARCA program services relative to the cost of alternative services in which program participants might have otherwise engaged.

One important way the implementation study can inform the impact and cost studies is to describe the nature of the services the control group members might have accessed and how these differed from those provided to program participants. While the study does not provide extensive information on services alternative to the LARCA program, it does suggest that WIA services were a likely outlet for comparison group members. Individuals eligible for LARCA services were also eligible for WIA adult and/or WIA youth services, depending upon their age, and several of the providers also served as WorkSource and YouthSource centers for EWDD, providing WIA services. Fortunately, the evaluation will be able to identify which study participants (program and control group members) enrolled in WIA-funded services. More on this issue of service contrast will be provided in the final report.

Another way in which the implementation study findings can inform the impact study findings is by providing data that can be used to understand why and how impacts may have varied between subgroups defined either demographically (e.g., by age, race, or gender) or by type or nature of services received. While some subgroup comparisons—such as those based on age (are older youth are more likely to achieve greater impacts overall because they are more serious and ready to make life changes?)—may not benefit from implementation study data, many others will crucially depend on the findings that differentiate between providers. This is because the most relevant differences in service receipt were those that correlated with provider and because provider identity was often a proxy for demographic variables. The following provider differences—all documented well by the implementation study—may be used in impact-study analyses.
• **Providers varied by the demographic composition of their participants.** While the impact study will want to look at factors such as age, race, and gender within the larger population, these demographic characteristics also varied across providers. Certain providers had populations that were predominantly African-American or majority Hispanic. Some providers served older youth and some focused more on younger youth. Understanding the demographic differences in the youth populations the providers served may help to explain why impacts varied across providers.

• **Providers varied in their success at hitting enrollment targets.** One provider exceeded its study enrollment target and two others came close. Three providers only came within about 75 percent of the study enrollment target. It is possible that lower overall enrollment numbers could have helped providers by reducing caseloads, leading to more effective services. However, lower enrollment numbers may also be correlated with higher staff turnover or an inability to build the partnerships needed to recruit participants. It is difficult to say precisely how enrollment numbers might correlate with impacts, but it is a grouping worth additional attention.

• **Providers offered two types of secondary education credentials.** While the literature suggests that a high school diploma will lead to better outcomes than one of the HSET credentials, the providers that offered one of the HSET options to participants believed that it was the best option for certain participants. These participants needed either the schedule flexibility that an HSET program provided them, or they were missing enough credits that a diploma-based program would simply have taken too long to complete. Furthermore, these participants generally went on to receive some form of post-secondary education and training, which the literature also suggests may mitigate some of the differences in outcomes of individuals who only earned a diploma-equivalent credential. It will be useful to know whether this implementation and programming decision mattered for program impacts.

• **Providers offered three types of training.** Providers primarily offered training in three broad fields: construction, conservation and green technology, and healthcare. There are several reasons why impacts might vary across providers based on vocational training type: potential earnings and employment opportunities vary across fields, and there are differences in the ease with which the skills learned in one kind of training can be transferred to other career pathways. The potential influence of these different vocational training types on outcomes will need further examination.

• **Providers varied in the extent to which all of their program elements were implemented according to schedule.** As discussed above, some providers implemented certain program elements, such as vocational training and placement services, late in the overall cycle of implementation. It seems reasonable to anticipate that providers who were late to implement program elements may have produced lesser impacts than others, especially in outcomes related to the elements that were less extensively implemented (e.g., training-related certificates for providers with late implementation of vocational training programs).
In subsequent months, the study team will begin to address these issues along with the other research questions central to the impact and cost studies. The team will collect additional program and cost data from EWDD and the providers and administrative data on all study participants, including data on educational attainment, completion of certificates and degrees, employment and earnings, and other outcomes of potential societal benefit such as level of criminal justice activity. These data will allow the evaluation to examine the outcomes in these areas for study participants, indicating the ways in which the program most benefited the lives of the young people it served. An update on program implementation and results from the impact and cost studies will be presented in the evaluation’s final report in late 2016.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A: LARCA Provider Profiles
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Provider Overview

Type of Organization: Founded in 2005, CRCD is a non-profit organization that provides youth and adult services, primarily to residents in the Vernon-Central neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Amount: $1,450,000

LARCA Program Staff: 9 staff members, 6-7 FTE

Key Partners: LAUSD (PSA Counselors), Los Angeles Trade Tech College (vocational training), CRCD Academy YouthBuild Charter School (secondary educational services), and Chicago School of Psychotherapy (PhD interns facilitated group counseling and life skills workshops), USC School of Social Work (MSW interns provided counseling services).

Recruitment and Eligibility

Primary Recruitment Methods: Canvassing local neighborhoods, sending letters to youth on LAUSD’s dropout list, and conducting outreach at community events and local career and resource fairs.

Summary of Intake and Enrollment Process: Youth completed the LARCA application during the weekly program orientation and then met with the Intake Specialist to verify eligibility and take the CASAS assessment. Eligible youth then participated in a two week “Mental Toughness Orientation” (an element of the program’s YouthBuild affiliation) after which completers were randomly assigned. Program group participants were then assessed for supportive services and credit completion, took the InnerSight assessment, and met with their case managers to develop their individual service plans.

Provider-Specific Eligibility Criteria: Youth had to live in one of the 17 zip codes CRCD serves. Youth also needed to meet a minimum score on the CASAS to proceed to the Mental Toughness Orientation.

Case Management Services

Case Management: Case managers provided continuous support for all LARCA participants and helped them overcome barriers to employment.

Number of Case Managers/Average Caseload: Two case managers had a caseload of approximately 38 youth each.

Frequency/Duration of Scheduled Meetings: case managers met with LARCA participants as a cohort and individually on a weekly basis.
Comprehensive Services

Key Supportive Services Utilized: Housing support, transportation assistance (bus passes), substance abuse counseling (if needed), childcare services, legal assistance, and mental health counseling.

Work Readiness Training: Participants began their work readiness training shortly before earning their diploma. The career placement coordinator delivered the training, which employed the LA Chamber of Commerce curriculum, and consisted of two, two to three hour workshops in addition to a mock interview session.

Life Skills Workshops: CRCD staff, interns, and partner staff provided workshops on financial literacy, substance abuse counseling, anger management, sexual health, and CPR training.

Youth Development: Participants had the opportunity to serve as work crew leaders during their worksite experience, serve on a youth policy council, and connect with other YouthBuild sites to share successes and challenges.

Secondary Education

Type of Credential: Participants enrolled in high school diploma classes at a charter school.

Educational Provider(s): YouthBuild Charter School of California delivered the high school diploma classes on the campus of LA Trade Technical College.

Time to Complete: Participants achieved a high school diploma in 8-16 weeks. They rotated between classes and vocational training.

Vocational Training

Career Pathway(s): Construction and conservation training.

Vocational Training Provider(s): Los Angeles Trade Technical College and CRCD enterprises.

Vocational Training Services: The training, provided by LA Trade Technical College, consisted of a 10-week class that covered carpentry, weatherization, and green building and led to a HBI-PACT or Homebuilder’s Institute Certificate as well as OSHA and CPR credentials. Participants could also receive paid work experience, doing neighborhood cleanup and graffiti abatement through CRCD enterprises.

Employment and Post-Secondary Education

Employment Placement: CRCD emphasized post-secondary education over employment, but employment placement services were offered about 30 weeks into the program. One staff member assisted participants in finding positions, usually in retail or the service sector.

Post-Secondary Education Placement: A post-secondary education counselor started working with youth from the beginning of the program cycle to engage in college visits and college readiness classes. Participants often pursued postsecondary educational coursework at LA Trade Technical College.
LOS ANGELES CONSERVATION CORPS

Provider Overview
Type of Organization: Founded in 1986, LA Conservation Corps is a non-profit organization that provides services to at-risk youth throughout the City and County of Los Angeles.

Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Amount: $1,450,000
LARCA Program Staff: 10 staff members, 5-6 FTE
Key Partners: LAUSD (PSA Counselors), The Education Corps (secondary educational services), Los Angeles Trade Tech College (vocational training in construction), Creation World Safety (safety certification training), NATEC Inc (safety certification training), Forklift Academy (vocational training), University of Southern California (MSW interns provide counseling services), Baby Buggy and Baby2Baby (diapers and baby supplies), Public Counsel (legal services), Lincoln Park Driving School (driver’s education classes).

Recruitment and Eligibility
Primary Recruitment Methods: Visiting schools to engage potential dropouts, calling and sending letters to youth on LAUSD’s dropout list, soliciting referrals from other PSA Counselors and school staff, referrals from YouthSource and WorkSource center staff, and participating at local job fairs or other community events.

Summary of Intake and Enrollment Process: After attending one of the program’s four weekly orientations, recruitment coordinators met with youth to assess their readiness for the program, administered a psychosocial assessment, and collected eligibility documentation. Eligible and suitable youth were then randomly assigned. Program group youth then met with a career coach and PSA counselor to create an education plan and individual service strategy, and took the CASAS and online InnerSight Inventory.

Provider-Specific Eligibility Criteria: N/A

Case Management Services
Case Management: Case managers’ goal was to support participants throughout the program and mitigate barriers that could impede their success by helping participants set education and career goals, assess basic life needs, and make referrals for supportive services.

Number of Case Managers/Average Caseload: Three case managers served an average of 63 participants each.

Frequency/Duration of Scheduled Meetings: Case managers officially met with participants twice a month for at least 15-30 minutes.
Comprehensive Services

**Key Supportive Services Utilized:** Housing, transportation (reduced costs for drivers’ licenses and metro passes), substance abuse counseling (MSW interns), childcare services, legal services for traffic violations, and mental health services.

**Work Readiness Training:** Work readiness training was introduced after the first three months of school and then during the last week of the second academic semester (for secondary school). The vocational training and transitions coordinator delivered the training, which was based on the LA Chamber of Commerce’s curriculum.

**Life Skills Workshops:** LA Conservation Corps staff members and partner organizations offered workshops on financial literacy (conducted by New York Life and Operation HOPE), sexual health (led by case managers), and nutrition and wellness.

**Youth Development:** Participants had the opportunity to become assistant crew leaders on program work crews after they completed their vocational training. They could also represent the organization at conferences and at community events.

Secondary Education

**Type of Credential:** Participants enrolled in high school diploma classes at a charter school.

**Educational Provider:** LA Education Corps delivered the high school diploma classes on site.

**Time to Complete:** Participants achieved a high school diploma in 9-18 months. They rotated between 3 months of education and 3 months of vocational training.

Vocational Training

**Career Pathway(s):** Conservation and green construction-related training.

**Vocational Training Provider(s):** LA Conservation Corp offered its own conservation training and work experience at sites across the city.

**Vocational Training Services:** Training covered topics including recycling, graffiti abatement, solar panel installation, and community gardening and led to varied construction and conversation certificates, as well as OHSA, CPR, and First-Aid credentials. Participants received paid work experience related to the training through an internship with the provider.

Employment and Post-Secondary Education

**Employment Placement:** LA Conservation Corps emphasized post-secondary education over immediate employment, but one staff person provided employment placement services to participants after they had received their diploma and started work readiness training. While most participants went into post-secondary education, a staff person assisted participants in finding employment in conservation, construction, and culinary arts.

**Post-Secondary Education Placement:** LA Conservation Corps offered a course combining information on post-secondary education and employment, including information about financial aid. Participants also went on college tours.
YOUTH OPPORTUNITY MOVEMENT – BOYLE HEIGHTS

Provider Overview
Type of Organization: Founded in 2001, YO! Boyle Heights is a program within the Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department that provides services to at-risk youth, primarily in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Amount: $1,010,000
LARCA Program Staff: 4 staff members; 2-3 FTE
Key Program Partners: LAUSD (PSA Counselors), Kaiser Permanente (internships), Five Keys Charter School (secondary educational services), Los Angeles Trade Technical College (basic skills remediation to prepare youth for vocational training), El Centro de Ayuda (financial literacy training), Southwest College (safety certification training) and East Los Angeles College (vocational training).

Recruitment and Eligibility
Primary Recruitment Methods: Engaging staff at local adult schools, sending letters to youth on LAUSD’s dropout list, soliciting referrals from LAUSD high school staff, and canvassing local neighborhoods.

Summary of Intake and Enrollment Process: Youth attended one of two weekly program orientations and completed a pre-application. Youth then met with the Program Manager to submit additional paperwork and take the CASAS assessment. Eligible and suitable youth were then randomly assigned. Program group youth then met with the PSA Counselor to assess the number of credits they needed to graduate and whether they should pursue one of the HSETs or high school diploma. Participants then met with the LARCA Program Manager to discuss their supportive services needs and to take the InnerSight assessment.

Provider-Specific Eligibility Criteria: N/A

Case Management Services
Case Management: Case management staff assisted participants in setting career and educational goals and monitoring their progress in achieving these goals. Case management staff mentioned that their overall goal was to ensure that participants enrolled in and completed education, vocational training, and post-secondary education programs.

Number of Case Managers/Average Caseload: Two case managers served an average of sixty-four participants each.

Frequency/Duration of Scheduled Meetings: Case management meetings were held on a drop-in basis and typically lasted between 15-30 minutes.
Comprehensive Services

Key Supportive Services Utilized: Housing, transportation (metro passes and tokens), childcare support, legal assistance, mental health counseling, and tattoo removal.

Work Readiness Training: Participants began their work readiness training after they completed their HSET or diploma. YO! Boyle Heights was shifting from providing their own work readiness training toward working with local community colleges that provided training that employed the 8-hour LA Chamber of Commerce’s curriculum.

Life Skills Workshops: A counselor delivered a financial literacy workshop using four modules from a Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) financial literacy curriculum.

Youth Development: Participants had the opportunity to serve on a youth council.

Secondary Education

Type of Credential: Participants chose between high school diploma or one of the HSET preparation classes.

Educational Provider(s): Participants could attend high school diploma classes at Five Keys charter school on site, high school diploma or HSET prep classes at LAUSD adult schools, or high school diploma or HSET prep classes offered by LAUSD and East Los Angeles College instructors on site.

Time to Complete: Varied based on type of program and credits needed.

Vocational Training

Career Pathway(s): Health related training in Health Information Technology (HIT).

Vocational Training Provider(s): East Los Angeles College provided the HIT training.

Vocational Training Services: HIT training consisted of classes from East Los Angeles College’s HIT AA degree offered to a cohort of LARCA participants. Participants received college credit for the classes, and, if they continued, they could achieve an associate’s degree. Participants also received paid work experience through an internship at Kaiser.

Employment and Post-Secondary Education

Employment Placement: YO! Boyle Heights emphasized post-secondary education over employment, but provided employment placement services to participants who indicated an interest. A WIA career coach helped participants find minimum wage positions in the retail or service sectors.

Post-Secondary Education Placement: Participants could meet with a dedicated college counselor to get assistance with applications, financial aid, and conducting college visits.
YOUTH OPPORTUNITY MOVEMENT – WATTS

Provider Overview

**Type of Organization:** Founded in 2000, YO! Watts is a program within the Los Angeles Economic and Workforce Development Department that provides services to at-risk youth, primarily in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles.

**Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Amount:** $1,010,000

**LARCA Program Staff:** 8 staff members, 3-4 FTE

**Key Partners:** LAUSD (PSA Counselors), New Regal Health Career (vocational training), Maxine Waters Adult School (secondary educational services), Downey Adult School (secondary educational services), Inspire Academy (secondary educational services), Los Angeles Trade Tech College (work readiness classes), Los Angeles City College (work readiness classes) and Operation Hope (financial literacy classes).

Recruitment and Eligibility

**Primary Recruitment Methods:** Contacting youth on LAUSD’s dropout list, soliciting referrals from local community organizations, canvassing the local community, and conducting community outreach at local shopping centers.

**Summary of Intake and Enrollment Process:** Youth attended one of the twice weekly program orientations and then met with the PSA Counselor to verify school status. After submitting eligibility paperwork, youth were interviewed by the LARCA grant manager who assessed their level of interest. Eligible and suitable youth were then randomly assigned. Program group members then took the CASAS and the InnerSight Inventory.

**Provider-Specific Eligibility Criteria:** N/A

Case Management Services

**Case Management:** Case managers stated that their role was to serve as a mentor that could connect participants with supportive services. The overall goal was to ensure that participants earned a GED or high school diploma and completed vocational training.

**Number of Case Managers/Average Caseload:** At least two staff members provided case management services and had a caseload of approximately 50 participants each.

**Frequency/Duration of Scheduled Meetings:** Case managers met with participants formally once a quarter and otherwise as needed.
Comprehensive Services

Key Supportive Services Utilized: Housing, transportation, substance abuse counseling, childcare services, legal assistance, mental health care, and uniforms for CNA training.

Work Readiness Training: Program participants began work readiness training shortly after enrollment. YO! Watts worked with instructors from local community colleges to provide work readiness training. The classes were generally held for 8 hours a week for four weeks.

Life Skills Workshops: YO! Watts staff members provided workshops on financial literacy, time management, and healthy eating and nutrition.

Youth Development: Participants had the opportunity to become peer tutors and serve on youth leadership councils.

Secondary Education

Type of Credential: Participants chose between high school diploma or HSET prep classes.

Educational Provider(s): Participants could attend high school diploma classes at INSPIRE, an onsite charter school. They could also take high school diploma or HSET prep classes at LAUSD adult schools or do HSET independent study with YO! Watts tutors.

Time to Complete: 1-8 months, depending on the type of program and credit completion level.

Vocational Training

Career Pathway(s): Most participants enrolled in a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training. A few participants also enrolled in additional health related training (e.g., phlebotomy, pharmacy technician, etc.).

Vocational Training Provider(s): New Regal Health Career, a proprietary training provider, offered the CNA training. Local adult schools and community colleges provided the alternative health trainings.

Vocational Training Services: The CNA training enabled participants to pass the CNA certification exam, while other participants got alternative health credentials. A few participants had paid work experiences in health fields, but most pursued CNA employment.

Employment and Post-Secondary Education

Employment Placement: YO! Watts emphasized immediate employment after training was completed. The CNA training provider hosted a job fair and connected participants to jobs based on prior connections with convalescent homes, assisted living facilities, and in-home care providers. A dedicated LARCA career coach also helped participants.

Post-Secondary Education Placement: YO! Watts did not emphasize additional post-secondary education except for participants enrolled in alternative health trainings. However, interested participants could meet with the career coach or the PSA counselor to discuss postsecondary education, financial aid, and applications.
Provider Overview

Type of Organization: Founded in 1983, the Youth Policy Institute is a non-profit organization serving the Los Angeles County area. The Pico Union branch opened in 2013 to serve the Pico Union neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Amount: $1,475,000

LARCA Program Staff: 7 staff members, 5-6 FTE

Key Partners: LAUSD (PSA Counselors), SIATech High School (secondary educational services), Planned Parenthood (which provides guest speakers for weekly on-site life skills classes).

Recruitment and Eligibility

Primary Recruitment Methods: Word-of-mouth, visiting local schools to speak with PSA Counselors and academic counselors, presenting at school options fairs, sending letters to youth on LAUSD’s dropout list, soliciting referrals from FamilySource centers and other YPI programs, and attending resource fairs and other community events.

Summary of Intake and Enrollment Process: After attending one of the twice weekly program orientations, youth met with the PSA Counselor to verify their school status. Case Managers also met with youth to answer questions and collect eligibility documentation. Eligible and suitable youth were then randomly assigned. Program group participants then met with the PSA Counselor to determine their educational needs and a case manager to take the CASAS and the InnerSight Inventory.

Provider-Specific Eligibility Criteria: N/A

Case Management Services

Case Management: The goal of case management services was to provide participants with basic needs and supportive services, help them develop their education and career goals, and empower them to become self-advocates.

Number of Case Managers/Average Caseload: Two full time case managers and one senior case manager had an average caseload of 30 participants each.

Frequency/Duration of Scheduled Meetings: Case managers formally meet with youth on a monthly basis for 15-30 minutes.
Comprehensive Services

Key Supportive Services Utilized: Housing, transportation, substance abuse counseling, childcare, legal assistance, and mental health counseling.

Work Readiness Training: Participants began work readiness training as soon as they enrolled in LARCA. Using the LA Chamber of Commerce’s work readiness curriculum, the college and career specialist delivered a total of 8-hours of work readiness workshops.

Life Skills Workshops: YPI Pico Union staff members and partner organizations delivered life skills workshops on financial literacy, substance abuse issues, violence prevention workshops, parenting workshops for youth with small children, sexual health, and communication skills.

Youth Development: Participants had the opportunity to serve as peer mentors and on an Advisory Board to complete a community service-learning project.

Secondary Education

Type of Credential: Participants chose between high school diploma or HSET prep classes.

Educational Provider: Participants could attend high school diploma classes at SIATech, an onsite charter school. They could also do HSET prep onsite through 1st PERIOD, a program offered by YPI Pico Union.

Time to Complete: Participants took from 7-15 months to achieve their academic credential.

Vocational Training

Career Pathway(s): YPI Pico Union planned to offer training in the construction, conservation, and health fields, as well as in automotive technology (under development as of Fall 2014).

Vocational Training Provider(s): YPI Pico Union planned to connect participants to trainings at local community colleges. Participants could then choose from a variety of options, from medical billing and phlebotomy to construction.

Vocational Training Services: Participants would be able to receive a variety of credentials based on the training chosen. A few youth participated in paid work experiences.

Employment and Post-Secondary Education

Employment Placement: YPI Pico Union encouraged post-secondary education over employment, but four staff members offered employment services in a collective effort. This meant they could all assist youth with employment even if it was not their only job function. One of these staff members specialized in college and career placements. Most participants who found employment got minimum wage jobs. Participants usually started this process when they were close to receiving an academic credential.

Post-Secondary Education Placement: Providers staff arranged college visits and assisted participants with filling out applications and financial aid forms.
Provider Overview

Type of Organization: Founded in 1983, the Youth Policy Institute is a non-profit organization serving the Los Angeles County area. The San Fernando branch of the organization opened in 2012 to serve the San Fernando Valley.

Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Amount: $1,475,000

LARCA Program Staff: 9 staff members, 7-8 FTE

Key Partners: LAUSD (PSA Counselors), Mission View Public School (secondary educational services), Los Angeles Mission College (vocational training in childhood development), and Anderson College (vocational training in health careers).

Recruitment and Eligibility

Primary Recruitment Methods: Contacting youth on LAUSD’s dropout list, engaging LAUSD staff for potential recruits at schools, presenting at local community organizations and adult schools, distributing flyers, attending career and resource fairs and other community events, and soliciting referrals from Mission View Public School.

Summary of Intake and Enrollment Process: After attending one of two weekly LARCA program orientations, youth meet with the PSA Counselor to verify school status. Case managers then met with youth to answer questions and collect eligibility paperwork. Eligible and suitable youth were then randomly assigned. Case managers then scheduled appointments for program group participants to complete the CASAS and InnerSight Inventory as well as appointments to meet with the PSA Counselor to determine their educational needs.

Provider-Specific Eligibility Criteria: N/A

Case Management Services

Case Management: The goal of case management services was to connect participants with key supportive services and to measure their progress and completion of their education and vocational training goals.

Number of Case Managers/Average Caseload: Two full time case managers had an average caseload of 68 participants each.

Frequency/Duration of Scheduled Meetings: Case managers formally meet with youth on a monthly basis for 15-30 minutes.
Comprehensive Services

**Key Supportive Services Utilized:** Housing, transportation (Metro transit pass), substance abuse counseling (if needed), childcare support, legal assistance, group counseling, and mental health services.

**Work Readiness Training:** Participants began work readiness training shortly after they enrolled in the program. YPI San Fernando’s college and career placement specialists provided the training, which used the LA Chamber of Commerce’s curriculum.

**Life Skills Workshops:** YPI San Fernando staff members and partner providers offered workshops on financial literacy, substance abuse issues, violence prevention, anger management, parenting skills for participants with young children, sexual health, time management and computer literacy.

**Youth Development:** Participants had the opportunity to serve on a Youth Advisory Board, YouthBuild Youth Policy Council (if enrolled in YouthBuild), and as peer mentors.

Secondary Education

**Type of Credential:** Participants chose between high school diploma or HSET prep classes.

**Educational Provider:** Participants could attend high school diploma classes at Mission View Charter School, an onsite charter school. They could also do HSET prep onsite through 1st PERIOD, a program offered by YPI San Fernando onsite.

**Time to Complete:** Participants took 4-7 months to achieve their academic credential.

Vocational Training

**Career Pathway:** Construction, conservation, and health fields, as well as child development.

**Vocational Training Provider:** YPI San Fernando connected participants to trainings at local community colleges (Los Angeles Mission College) where they could choose from a variety of options. In addition, YPI San Fernando recently became a YouthBuild site and was planning to offer construction training through that program.

**Vocational Training Services:** Participants received a variety of credentials based on the training chosen, including HBI-PACT, child development certificate, and OSHA, CPR, and First-Aid credentials. Most participants did not do paid work experiences.

Employment and Post-Secondary Education

**Employment Placement:** YPI San Fernando encouraged post-secondary education over employment, but three staff members, including the case managers, offered employment services to participants. Most participants who found employment got minimum wage jobs in retail and fast food. Participants could start this process at any time.

**Post-Secondary Education Placement:** Provider staff members arranged college visits and assisted participants with filling out applications and financial aid forms.