



EVALUATION OF THE LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND HISPANIC WORKER INITIATIVE

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The past several decades have seen a significant increase in the number of people immigrating to the United States, not only from Latin America but also from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and other regions of the globe. Many of these recent immigrants are limited English proficient (LEP), which affects their ability to succeed in the workforce. Continued growth in the numbers of individuals in the United States who are LEP will affect the social features and economic conditions of our country into the foreseeable future.

To compete against foreign and domestic producers of goods and services, U.S. employers require workers with appropriate communication, literacy, and occupational skills. The resulting demand for training in English language proficiency and occupational skills is generating new challenges for employers, educators, and the public workforce investment system. Most LEP workers need access to training opportunities in Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) in order to fill both the existing and the emerging labor requirements of employers. In 2006, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) created the Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Workforce Initiative (LEPHWI) to support five demonstration grants intended to address these challenges.

THE LEPHWI

The LEPHWI was intended to help Hispanic Americans and other LEP persons develop language and occupational skills to prepare them for jobs in high-demand industries. Under this initiative, USDOL awarded five LEPHWI demonstration project grants in February 2006 to pilot learning strategies that simultaneously taught English language acquisition and occupational

skills. Successful applicants were able to demonstrate the ability to create partnerships among employers, the education and training community, and the public workforce investment system. Project effectiveness was to be measured primarily by the outcomes of participants in each project.

Table A provides information on the grantees and their planned activities.

**Table A:
LEPHWI Grantees and Their Original Participant Targets**

State	Grantee	Industry	Project Name	Target Population	Number to be Served	Amount of Award
CA	San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council	Construction	Words for Workforce	Spanish-speaking incumbent workers at a local shipyard (NASSCO)	150	\$1,000,000
MN	Resource, Inc.	Health Care	Career Launch	Recently arrived refugees and immigrants, as well as other LEP and Hispanic job-seekers in three cities	200	\$1,000,000
NE	Metropolitan Community College	Construction Health Care Transportation	STEP-UP	Incumbent workers and high school students in four counties	1,389	\$801,130
NY	CUNY Research Foundation	Retail Food Service Hospitality	LEP for Retail Industry	New and incumbent Hispanic/LEP workers in New York City	240	\$1,000,000
TX	SER – Jobs for Progress National, Inc.	Hospitality Food Service	<i>Sed de Saber</i>	Hispanic/LEP incumbent workers in four Texas sites	2,430	\$1,105,914

Source: Table information from grantee proposals and USDOL announcement (<http://www.doleta.gov/sga/awards/05-02%20Grants%20Awarded.pdf>).

The LEPHWI Evaluation

In 2007, USDOL’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA) selected Coffey Consulting, LLC, and its partner *Excelencia* in Education, to undertake an implementation

evaluation of the LEPHWI demonstration. The evaluation was designed to answer research questions in six primary areas:

- Who were the LEPHWI grantees and their partners?
- What were the principal approaches to organizing, implementing, operating, and administering the LEPHWI projects?
- What methods of language acquisition and what strategies for occupational training evolved from the LEPHWI projects and their partners?
- Who were the participants in the LEPHWI projects, and what services did they receive?
- What were the short-term outcomes of LEPHWI participants, including participation, job placement, and advancement?
- What lessons learned from implementing the LEPHWI demonstration projects can inform the replication and sustainability of these types of efforts or strategies?

Two products were called for in the evaluation plan: an interim evaluation report and a final evaluation report.

Interim Report Findings

The interim evaluation report (Andrade et al., 2008) was based primarily on interviews conducted during the first round of site visits, which took place in the second half of 2007, and on grantee progress reports submitted through the end of that year. The interim report summarized the status of the projects shortly after their mid-point of operation. The primary

findings in that report identified challenges, recommendations, and general findings from the effort. They are as follows:

Challenges

- It was difficult to place participants at appropriate levels of instruction and to match the needs of participants with the programs' offerings.
- Participants often could not maintain their participation in training, particularly in the face of such external factors as work schedules and a lack of economic resources.

Recommended Practices

- Situating training at convenient locations appeared to increase the participation and continuity of participants.
- Discussing and documenting arrangements with employers for VESL instruction is essential for project success, as is widely communicating those plans within participating firms.
- Engaging employers and securing their support were critical factors for success in serving incumbent workers.
- Adapting or developing curricula specific to the situation and needs of the workers and employers
- Being able to adapt to unanticipated challenges and to be flexible and resilient throughout the project greatly contributed to an organization's success.
- During the projects' early stages, participant enrollments lagged behind application plans, but sites were able to adjust their strategies to create additional enrollments.

Neutral Findings

- No clear pattern emerged concerning educational partners' involvement.
- The involvement of One-Stop Career Centers and other parts of the publicly funded workforce investment system in project activities was generally limited.

THE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Data for this report were collected from site visits, grantee data on project operations and participants, grantee cost data, project-related documents, and secondary data sources. Site visits represent the most significant source for this report. Grantees built their systems for collecting data on participant characteristics, project services, and program outcomes. Each site provided Management Information System (MIS) data for the evaluation. However, the absence of a common approach to participant tracking resulted in disparate information systems and data that were often not comparable across sites. Grantees also faced challenges in tracking participants in order to collect retention data, making comparisons between planned and actual performance problematic in many cases.

The evaluation was not designed to assess the effectiveness of LEPHWI efforts to achieve particular participant outcomes, and as such it does not include a control or comparison group. Each of the five projects operated in its economic and social environment. ETA's, expectations were focused on learning about how to design and implement innovative approaches to serving LEP individuals. The report describes the experiences of the LEPHWI grantees as they implemented and adjusted project plans to provide employment-related language skills to LEP individuals. It also provides comparative information across the five

sites, describes the challenges projects faced and their responses to those challenges, and suggests some implications for future efforts to provide workforce services to LEP individuals.

OVERVIEW OF THE LEPHWI PROJECTS

San Diego, California: *Words for the Workplace*

Operated by the San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council (the Labor Council), the San Diego, California *Words for the Workplace* project began with two key partners: one major area corporation, the National Steel and Shipbuilding Company shipyard (NASSCO), and one community college system's continuing education department in the San Diego Community College District. Initially, the project adapted an existing community college curriculum for English as a Second Language (ESL) with input from supervisors at the shipyard to focus directly on VESL training in topics of critical relevance to the employer (e.g., safety, security, and welding). A community college instructor taught primarily monolingual, Spanish-speaking incumbent workers on-site at NASSCO.

Due to attendance issues, the class-size attendance requirements of the state community college system, and the changing needs of the employer, the grantee modified the project, terminating its relationship with the community college and hiring a college professor to provide VESL instruction. The grantee also modified and shortened the instructional program to eliminate less relevant material and to increase attendance. As well, the grantee supplemented its original approach by offering classes to different groups of dislocated workers and jobseekers at the Labor Council's administrative offices. In the latter phase of the project, a one-week VESL class was provided to LEP individuals prior to their joining the grantee's ongoing vocational preparation program, which also served non-LEP jobseekers.

The project had originally aimed to enroll 150 incumbent workers. With the adjustment in its service strategy, the project ultimately enrolled 61 incumbent workers and 91 jobseekers for a total of 152 participants. Over 95 percent of the incumbent workers completed the program and received a credential. Data provided by the grantee indicate that 61.5 percent of the jobseekers served were reported to have entered employment at the time the project ended.

Promising practices included the design of the second phase of the project, for which the grantee developed a one-week primer for LEP individuals, after which the LEP learners were integrated into the grantee's ongoing, four-week worker preparation classes. A feature that supported participant recruitment and engagement was the stationing of case managers on-site at the shipyard several days per week.

Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota: *Career Launch*

Resource, Inc., a not-for-profit organization located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was the grantee for *Career Launch*, the Minneapolis-St. Paul LEPHWI project, which served primarily immigrant communities in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. A small subproject operated in St. Cloud, about 65 miles away. Services were focused on unemployed and underemployed LEP individuals, with the majority of referrals coming from the Minneapolis Adult Basic Education (ABE) program and by word of mouth from former participants. This project was unlike the other four in that the majority of its participants were from Africa, and many were refugees who had recently arrived in the United States.

The project used multiple levels of training, an approach that allowed participants to leave after completing a program module. This was a major benefit to learners, since many had personal challenges that interfered with their ability to attend a complete, long-term training program. Developed with input from Minneapolis ABE and the Minneapolis Community and

Technical College, project curricula included accent reduction, an introduction to the workplace, financial literacy, study skills, and an introduction to customer service. Job-search skills were also taught to support participant placement efforts. Placements ranged among a variety of businesses, including employers who had previously hired graduates of the grantee's other workforce preparation programs.

Although the project exceeded its goal of enrolling 225 participants, successful job placement occurred for only 48.4 percent of the participants who were not incumbent workers. Retention in employment was close to the goal of 80 percent, as 78.4 percent of those placed were reported to be working 180 days later.

Promising practices included the tiered levels of training, close linkages with the public ABE program, and the project's sensitivity to participants' cultural backgrounds.

Omaha, Nebraska: *STEP UP*

Metropolitan Community College (MCC), the project grantee in Omaha, Nebraska, provided classroom and literacy lab space at two MCC campuses, at Fort Omaha and South Omaha. MCC also provided projects services at employers' sites and through a community-based organization. The project established rather ambitious goals, targeting services to four distinct groups of LEP individuals: providing VESL training to support career advancement for incumbent workers, teaching basic English and workplace skills to the general LEP population through community-based labs and peer mentors, enhancing dislocated workers' readiness for work through a new Employment and Skills program, and introducing high school students to targeted industries through a Career Academy. Ultimately, services focused on the learning labs and incumbent workers, as the local workforce system found no LEP dislocated workers in the area, and LEPHWI administrators decided to limit youth involvement in its project.

Outcome goals were established for all of the target groups and service strategies. Among participating adults, 86 percent were expected to enter employment, with an earnings gain of \$3,400 for each participant. Among participating incumbent workers, 76 percent were expected to earn a credential, and 50 percent were expected to transition into related employment or advance in a career pathway. According to the grantee's final report, the project achieved an entered employment rate of 67 percent and a retention rate of 77 percent. Entered employment, advancement, retention, and earnings data were not included in the project's MIS reports.

Promising practices included the project's close relationship with employer partners in developing customized VESL classes on-site to promote worker retention and advancement, its partnering with community-based organizations for recruitment and off-site learning activities, and its use of peer mentors to help participating incumbent workers learn and practice their English skills and explore pursuing additional education.

New York, New York: *LEP for the Retail Industry of New York City*

The Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) was the lead administrator for this grant, formally awarded to the Research Foundation of the City University of New York (CUNY). Four community colleges, including BMCC, were responsible for delivering services to participants through this project: *LEP for the Retail Industry of New York City*. The project proposed to create a curriculum for area retail and hospitality industries, focusing on ESL and customer-service skills and modeled after the Equipped for the Future Customer Service curriculum developed by the National Retail Federation Foundation (NRFF). Training was to incorporate instructional technologies to prepare incumbent and dislocated worker participants with skills sought by employers. This model could then be adapted for a broad range of employers in the New York City metropolitan area. The project's use of instructors both at work

sites and in college classrooms provided options for meeting the different needs of specific groups of participants. The grantee also planned to develop an assessment tool to measure LEP workers' ability to communicate in English.

The project planned to provide VESL instruction to 240 adults in 12 training cycles. It ultimately served a total of 362 adults in 17 training cycles. Data from the project's reports indicate that 19 of the 53 participants who sat for the NRFF examination (35.8 percent) passed, which led the grantee to determine that the NRFF certificate was an unrealistic goal for the LEPHWI model. Not counting those whose outcomes were missing from the project's database, 93.8 percent of participants were employed when they left the program, a figure that likely overstates the project's actual performance.

Promising practices include the project's flexibility in establishing venues for training, the collaborative relationships among the staff on four community college campuses, and the customization of training to meet the needs of participating employers.

Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas: *Sed de Saber*

SER-Jobs for Progress was the grantee for the *Sed de Saber* (Thirst for Knowledge) project, which served Hispanic incumbent workers primarily in the Dallas Metroplex. Each participant was provided a hand-held electronic unit or "book" (LeapFrog), programmed for self-paced ESL instruction and geared to the food service and hospitality industries. The curriculum had been developed by the project's key corporate partner and subcontractor, Retention Education, LLC, specifically for Spanish speakers with limited English fluency. The grantee initially planned to recruit workers through hospitality employers, referring potential participants to their nearest One-Stop Career Center for assessment and orientation. However, this proved unworkable, and Retention Education assumed almost all recruiting and assessment

responsibilities, relying on grantee staff for orientation support. The original plan also called for participants to receive assistance from mentors and to be referred to such support services as transportation, childcare, and General Education Development (GED) studies, but staffing limitations, difficulty in recruiting mentors, and employer reluctance to facilitate the mentoring process were factors that adversely affected the implementation of these components.

Sed de Saber staff worked intensively with a group of food service and hospitality corporations to implement its demonstration project. The grantee expected to serve 2,430 participants, but enrolled a total of 1,417 individuals (58.3 percent). Project outcomes included a completion rate of 26.3 percent (compared to a projected rate of 90 percent).

Promising practices included the use of an electronic teaching device that allowed participants considerable flexibility in selecting the time and place for instruction; a partnership with a private, for-profit corporation that had sales experience and strong relationships with employers; and the concept of supporting learning through the use of mentors.

PROJECT CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Each grantee experienced several challenges and successes in implementing and operating projects to serve LEP individuals. Sites faced a number of common challenges, and others were unique to each project and community. Sometimes grantees arrived at similar solutions to their common challenges. The major areas in which the sites encountered problems were in project organization, outreach and recruitment, assessment, curriculum and instruction, and tracking project outcomes.

Project organization

The grantees encountered three major organizational challenges throughout the implementation process. Establishing and maintaining the active involvement of employer or corporate partners from the outset of the project until its completion was a common challenge. When employer support wavered or did not fully materialize, grantees revisited the original partnership arrangements, and at times determined that it was necessary to end or circumscribe a relationship and make alternate plans. Some projects faced difficulties due to changing project management; when the individuals who had cultivated the relationships and partnerships for the project were no longer involved, new management had to reestablish connections or review the operations plan to determine an appropriate course. A third organizational challenge confronted by several of the grantees was rooted in decisions to change the services they offered. When the original designs proved unworkable, sites were forced to revise staffing plans and occasionally to change partners to reflect new or revised service strategies.

Outreach and Recruitment

The major outreach and recruitment challenges that grantees encountered involved designing appropriate outreach and recruitment strategies that matched the needs of employers while retaining project flexibility; revising outreach plans in response to the needs, characteristics, and suitability of potential participants; and recognizing that the original proposal had set unrealistically high recruitment and participation goals.

As the number of employers associated with a project increased, outreach and communication challenges grew, in part, due to the widely varied needs and expectations of multiple company partners and the heterogeneity in the characteristics of their employees. Grantees discovered unanticipated issues when they considered the full range of participants'

needs when conducting recruitment, and they found it beneficial to identify the characteristics that made candidates unsuitable for the grantees' VESL programs. One project had established an unrealistically high enrollment goal; as a result, staff experienced greater challenges in recruitment than had been anticipated.

Assessment

Assessing the competencies of participants was an important step in ensuring that the content of VESL instruction was suitable for the individual learners. Several sites encountered difficulties in carrying out their assessment plans because of logistical, practical, and procedural considerations. Because employers frequently selected which employees would participate in the project before any project-related assessment took place, assessments did not always determine which candidates could enter a training program. As a result, participants with widely ranging levels of English proficiency and literacy were enrolled, making instruction much more challenging.

Shortly after project implementation, sites found that many participants experienced difficulties in their first VESL component or were hard-pressed to achieve passing scores on placement or competency tests. In response, project administrators decided to raise the minimum entry-level score to better target training to those who could benefit from the LEPHWI services. Some sites revised project goals toward more realistic indicators.

Curriculum and Instruction

Although most of the VESL training undertaken by the LEPHWI demonstration projects involved adapting existing curricula to the unique needs of employers and participants, two sites (Metropolitan Community College in Omaha and SER-Jobs for Progress in Texas) used

commercially available software for some or all of their participant instruction. Sites had not anticipated the degree to which the VESL instruction would require them to address employer needs and to respond to participants' varied levels of competency.

Projects took several steps to improve participant attendance and ensure program completion. Once programs were underway, sites made adjustments in the places and schedules of instruction, the focus and length of the curricula, the instructors, and the types of instructional support services provided. Attendance issues related to scheduling conflicts at work sites and to participants' domestic issues made the choice of training venue particularly important. Although projects that held classes and support sessions at community-based organizations reported improved attendance and completion, other sites were satisfied with training venues at workplaces and community colleges.

Curriculum content was also adjusted in response to participant needs. To reduce participant attrition, many projects decreased the duration of instruction and the number of classroom hours. Sites also recognized the importance of providing instructional support in the form of mentors, drop-in labs, and other means of helping participants maintain progress in their studies.

Project Outcomes

Four of the five LEPHWI grantees met their recruitment or enrollment objectives, with only the Texas site falling short. Grantee performance was decidedly mixed, however, regarding project outcomes, such as entered employment rates and wage gains and/or promotions. Relationships with corporate partners and the roles those partners played appear to be the key factors in an LEPHWI demonstration project's ability to effectively adapt its implementation

procedures to the needs of both employers and workers and to achieve its targets of VESL learner success.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE LEP-FOCUSED INITIATIVES

Based on the experiences of the LEPHWI grantees, the evaluation team has identified a number of considerations that may apply to future efforts to provide workforce assistance to LEP individuals:

1. Because many LEP individuals are already working, programs might consider targeting incumbent LEP workers. The organization of VESL training, in cooperation with and with support from employers, was effective in several of the demonstration projects as a viable means of responding to the income and personal needs of the target group, while providing training to improve their English language and vocational skills.

2. LEP individuals who participated in the VESL training were motivated to do so for diverse reasons. Programs aimed at LEP individuals can reach a broader audience if their design reflects a recognition of the interests and needs that compete for each participant's time. Approaches that incorporate flexible scheduling, convenient training locations (at an employment site or near public transportation), and curricula that address both workplace and non-workplace topics appear to be relatively more successful in attracting targeted participants.

3. Employers decided to participate in the LEP training for a range of reasons. Some employers anticipated an improvement in their bottom line, either directly or indirectly (e.g., through improved worker safety or reduced attrition), while others saw themselves in a more supportive role, improving the citizenship skills of their LEP workers. Although this information

is from a small sample of employers, it suggests that employer outreach efforts must consider the full range of reasons why they decide to participate in LEP training programs.

4. VESL programs that offer flexibility and/or options in the scheduling, location, and level of instruction appear the most promising (i.e., avoiding one-size-fits-all designs). Because learners enter with different levels of English fluency and educational attainment, as well as with varying personal needs and obligations, VESL projects should incorporate approaches that ensure that participant and (for incumbent workers) employer needs are reflected in program designs. The locations of VESL instruction should be convenient for participants, timing should be flexible (within reason), and curricula should be tiered for different levels of language proficiency and educational attainment. Learners who are jobseekers should have opportunities to exit successfully when they need to enter the job market (i.e., classes should be modularized or otherwise adapted to meet this objective).

5. Learners benefit from personalized assistance. Projects found that direct engagement of and assistance to participants tended to improve their persistence and outcomes. Even highly motivated LEP participants confronted barriers, but these were often overcome with assistance from one or more of the aforementioned individuals or entities.

6. Particularly for programs serving unemployed LEP individuals, incorporating a job-search assistance component into their VESL training appears promising. To the extent that programs served LEP jobseekers among their participants, providing job-search assistance training for non-native English speakers appeared to be a valuable aspect of service provision. This type of training exposed learners to the basics of using a computer, a skill that appeared less common among this population, perhaps due to their limited economic resources and lack of access.

7. Measuring the performance of LEP programs may require innovative approaches to calculating program outcomes. Performance may be best measured on a program-by-program basis, using measures designed to capture relevant outcome goals that are meaningful to distinct stakeholder groups: participants, employers, and investors. Educational partners might represent a fourth stakeholder to be considered in designing a measurement system.

8. Efforts to market an LEP program should address the diversity of positive outcomes that employers and LEP individuals seek from such a program. Many LEP individuals cite benefits of VESL instruction that go beyond the workplace, such as improving their ability to interact with other members of their community and to help their children with schoolwork. Employers also have diverse reasons for participating. Outreach efforts should attempt to reflect this multiplicity of reasons for different groups of LEP individuals and for a variety of employers to participate in LEP programs.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The LEPHWI demonstration program represents an important early step in the design and delivery of vocational training to individuals who are limited English proficient and Hispanic workers. Participating projects achieved a degree of success by being flexible and ready to adapt their programs and service plans when confronted with unanticipated challenges. Interest was high among employers and potential participants, both incumbent workers and the unemployed.

The factors critical to the success of LEPHWI demonstration projects included active engagement of employers in creating or adapting a VESL curriculum to meet their workplace requirements; employers' support in recruiting and maintaining participants; instruction located at the worksite or in an otherwise convenient location; the awareness and enthusiasm of a

participant's immediate supervisor; and the employer's ability and willingness to provide incentives for the participation in and completion of the VESL training.

I. Introduction: The Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Workforce Initiative (LEPHWI)

A. The LEPHWI

1. Background

Over the last 20 years, increasing numbers of Hispanic workers who are from Latin America and for whom Spanish is their native language, as well as other immigrant populations from Europe, Asia, and Africa, have entered the U.S. labor market. Hispanics represent the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population. Participation in the U.S. workforce by Hispanics and other recent immigrant populations who are limited English proficient (LEP) is projected to continue to grow in the coming years. Many of these individuals are not sufficiently proficient in English to attain work outside a limited set of occupational fields or to progress in employment responsibilities. These LEP adults face unique challenges in acquiring the education and skills they need to successfully participate in the workforce.

To remain competitive, U.S. employers require workers with appropriate communication, literacy, and occupational skills. Employers also need continued access to all potential sources of new workers who possess these skills. Trends in population demographics and workplace skill requirements are combining to create a high demand for training in English language proficiency and occupational skills, generating new challenges for employers, educators, and the public workforce investment system. To help ensure that LEP workers can meet the labor requirements of employers, these individuals need access to training opportunities in Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL). In 2006, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) created the Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Workforce Initiative (LEPHWI) to support five demonstration grants intended to address these challenges.

2. Purpose of the LEPHWI

The LEPHWI was a strategic effort of the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) at USDOL to improve access to employment and training services for LEP persons and to better serve Hispanic workers through workforce investment programs that address the specific employment challenges faced by these individuals.

The LEPHWI was intended to help Hispanic Americans and other LEP persons develop language and occupational skills to prepare them for jobs in high-growth/high-demand industries. Under this initiative, USDOL awarded five LEPHWI demonstration project grants in early 2006¹ to pilot learning strategies that simultaneously teach English language acquisition and occupational skills. To be awarded a grant, applicants were required to demonstrate the ability to create partnerships among employers, the education and training community, and the public workforce investment system, all of which were required to be actively involved in the project's design and implementation. The effectiveness of the demonstration program's strategies was to be assessed primarily on the individual outcomes of the LEP and Hispanic participants in each project.

This report discusses the design of the five LEPHWI projects. It describes each site's implementation activities to recruit participants and employers and to develop and deliver training. It also describes partnerships developed to address the needs of LEP individuals during training and placement. The report presents the outcomes for each project and explores the lessons learned from their design, participant engagement, and replicability. To the extent possible, the evaluation also attempts to draw comparisons across all five projects in key program areas and identifies potential promising VESL practices.

¹ The ETA grant announcement was February 14, 2006. http://www.doleta.gov/reports/dpld_lep.cfm.

3. Framework for the LEPHWI Demonstration Projects

The Solicitation for Grant Applications (SGA) was the vehicle through which USDOL provided a context for the LEPHWI demonstration activities and established project requirements and expectations.² The SGA identified five areas of USDOL's expectations for the grantees' implementation of the demonstration projects: instructional design, engagement of project partners, generation of leveraged resources, targeting of eligible participants, and the resulting outcomes and benefits of the demonstration projects.

a. Teaching Methods and Strategies

Under the LEPHWI demonstration program, occupationally oriented training for LEP individuals required the use of VESLs and/or contextualized language instruction. In the SGA, USDOL cited a U.S. Department of Education source³ for its description of VESL programs: VESL programs are vocational training programs that provide fundamental English language instruction to enable students to be successful in their vocational training and careers. In these programs, students are expected to become proficient in the basic English required to successfully interact in a workplace with customers and co-workers. As such, VESL training often utilizes workplace contexts to impart occupational language skills relevant to the subject matter under study. According to the description in the SGA, this contextualized language instruction focuses on topics familiar to the learner, utilizing real objects and situations to

² 70 *Federal Register* 35118–35136.

³ Buchanan, Keith. "Vocational English-as-a-Second-Language Programs." *ERIC Digest*, ED321551. ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. Washington, DC 1990. (Available at <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9216/vocational.htm>.)

provide a practical context for learning. Contextualized language instruction allows English learning opportunities to be incorporated into occupational education coursework.⁴

LEPHWI applicants were required to develop unique and innovative instructional models and to implement teaching strategies that accelerated and focused the learning processes for both English language skills and the basic and occupational skills in demand by local industries. In addition to the use of creative teaching strategies, applicants were also required to provide flexible settings and schedules to ensure that participants could take part in the proposed training programs while successfully balancing the demands of work and personal life.

Definitions of the requirement for program models that were “unique and innovative” included any one or a combination of the following parameters:

- Merging English instruction with occupational skill training;
- Accelerating the attainment of both English language and occupational skills by using technology in the instruction/curriculum;
- Customizing English language and occupational skill training to meet the specific needs of a high-growth industry; and
- Providing new technological platforms for learners to attain English language and occupational skills at the participants’ own pace.

b. Project Partner Roles

Each of the mandated project partners—employers, the education system, and the workforce investment system—was required to have clearly defined roles, depending upon the

⁴ Tharp, Roland G. From *At-Risk to Excellence: Research, Theory, and Principles for Practice*. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence. 1997. <http://crede.ucsc.edu/products/print/reports/rr1.html>.

issues being addressed and the scope and nature of the activities undertaken. Employer partners were expected to be actively engaged and to participate in every aspect of the grant activities, including defining the program's strategy and goals, identifying the needed skills and competencies, designing training approaches and curricula, implementing the program, contributing financial and in-kind support, and hiring qualified graduates. The education system was expected to lead in developing curricula and delivering contextualized training to prepare participants for employment opportunities. The local workforce investment system was encouraged to provide a range of services to project participants that included outreach, recruitment, assessment, training, and placement.

c. Leveraged Resources

LEPHWI applicants were also required to leverage non-federal resources. The SGA described leveraging resources within a strategic partnership as pursuing additional funds, increasing stakeholder investment at all levels, and broadening the impact of the project. Applicants were required to identify the amounts and types of leveraged cash or in-kind resources from non-federal sources that would augment their project's implementation and development. Each project's partnership as a whole was expected to contribute resources totaling at least 50 percent of the amount of funding requested.

Applicants were instructed to consider the awarded funding as seed money, and grantees were expected to sustain successful projects once grant funds were expended. Projects were also to be designed with the expectation that successful training and curricula models would be shared with the public workforce system, and that the projects would provide recommendations for replicating the models throughout the workforce investment system.

4. Eligible Participants

USDOL stated in the SGA that the demonstration funding was to target “individuals with Limited English Proficiency” (as previously defined) and “Hispanic Americans, specifically those who lack basic occupational skills needed by high-growth occupations.”⁵ Individuals targeted by projects could be incumbent workers, transitioning workers (including dislocated workers), new job entrants, and/or youth or adults who lacked the language skills and the basic and occupational skills in demand in the local labor market.

5. Project Outcomes

LEPHWI applicants were required to fully describe the outcomes and benefits they expected to achieve through the project in relation to the workforce challenges to be addressed. Grantees were encouraged to mirror those outcomes defined by the Office of Management and Budget’s common measures for all federal job-training and employment programs. Although the SGA identified three measures that grantees were expected to address, a USDOL directive issued before the grants were awarded modified the relevant common measures to be as follows: an entered employment rate, a retention rate, and the average earnings for participants who were retained in employment.⁶ ETA recognized that other outcome measures were possible, including English literacy gains, employer satisfaction, and credentials received; and it encouraged applicants to identify other measures appropriate to their proposed projects.

Applicants were also required to describe the extent to which successful approaches would be continued after the grant expired, as well as the extent to which the project would be of significant and practical use to the public workforce investment system. The maximum period of

⁵ 70 *Federal Register* 35118.

⁶ Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 17-05. <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-05.pdf>.

performance for each project was up to 24 months from February 24, 2006, the date the grant documents were executed.

B. The LEPHWI Demonstration Project Evaluation

USDOL contracted with Coffey Consulting, LLC, assisted by a subcontractor, *Excelencia* in Education, Inc., to evaluate the five LEPHWI demonstration projects. The goal of the evaluation was to examine the effectiveness of instructional methodologies that simultaneously enhanced both English language and occupational skills of LEP workers to respond to workforce challenges identified by employers in each grantee community. To achieve this goal, the evaluation team engaged in the following activities:

- Described the innovative approaches adopted by the grantees for the acquisition of language and occupational skills;
- Compared the language acquisition and occupational strategies among the five grantees to identify common elements or practices;
- Examined the strategies employed by each grantee for improving the language acquisition and occupational skills of participants using data already collected in accordance with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA);
- Identified lessons learned from each of the five grantees (in implementation and outcomes) that can inform others interested in the replication of the strategies used; and
- Assessed the sustainability or institutionalization of each initiative beyond the current funding.

These activities were guided by the development of six key evaluation questions, along with several supporting questions, and the use of five sources for collecting data.

1. Key Evaluation Questions

The evaluation was designed to address six key evaluation questions:

a) Who were the LEPHWI grantees and their partners? What types of participants had they served in the past, what services had they provided, and what outcomes had they achieved? What were the characteristics and qualifications of their staff? To what extent had grantees collaborated with other local organizations and agencies in the past, and what collaborative strategies worked well? What were the demographic and economic characteristics and workforce conditions of the grantees' communities? What types of relationships did grantees develop with local employers?

b) What were the principal approaches to organizing, implementing, operating, and administering the LEPHWI projects? What organizational roles and linkages were developed during the planning phase? What array of services was planned? How did those services change over time? To what extent did project designs provide for the simultaneous acquisition of language and occupational skills? What were the start-up and ongoing challenges, and what strategies did projects develop to overcome them? What factors facilitated or impeded implementation? How did grantees track participants, what barriers did grantees face in tracking them, and how did the staff attempt to overcome those barriers? How did grantees and project partners change during their involvement in the LEPHWI project?

c) What methods of language acquisition and what strategies for occupational training evolved from the LEPHWI projects and their partners?

How did instructional sites, time periods, durations, and strategies vary across the LEPHWI demonstration projects? Did the projects have specific interventions for targeted national origin/language groups? Were new curricula created, or were existing curricula for English as a Second Language (ESL) used, adapted, or supplemented to meet the VESL goals of employer partners? Was the primary emphasis on attaining skill in English oral fluency, literacy, or both? To what extent was technology used in the VESL approaches, and how effective were those approaches? What types of orientation and training were provided to project instructors and to support personnel (e.g., lab supervisors, mentors, volunteers)?

d) Who were the participants in the LEPHWI projects, and what services did they receive? Did projects' eligibility prerequisites, recruitment techniques, and enrollment patterns evolve over time? If yes, how did these features correlate with participation and services received? How did frequency of service and program completion vary, based on participants' backgrounds? What barriers did participants face to entering into the project, to receiving services, and to achieving employment gains? What were grantee, partner, and participant perspectives about the success of projects in addressing these barriers? How did the grantee determine the barriers faced by participants? How did the grantee address any barriers to participant success? Besides performance outcomes, how

did the grantees determine if barriers had been addressed? What preliminary benchmarks did the projects use?

e) What were the short-term outcomes of LEPHWI participants, including participation, job placement, and advancement? What common elements or practices existed among the grantees? How did performance vary among the grantees? What were the outcomes achieved by the new learning strategies as indicated by improvements in participants' occupational skills, placement and retention in jobs, increased wages, and advancement in employment? How did each grantee promote and measure language acquisition? How did these outcomes vary for different types of LEPHWI participants? How did the LEPHWI outcomes compare to outcomes for other programs seeking to place LEP participants?

f) What lessons learned from implementing the LEPHWI demonstration projects can inform strategies to replicate and sustain these types of efforts? What in-kind resources were projects able to leverage from the community and for what services? What are the plans to sustain these projects beyond the end of the grant period? How can project models be replicated across the workforce investment system? What are feasible options for disseminating replication strategies?

2. Interim Report Findings

Many of the above evaluation questions were explored at the approximate mid-point of the demonstration through an initial round of site visits and data analyses. The descriptions of project implementation experiences and preliminary analyses of program designs and lessons

learned were published in the *Evaluation of the Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Worker Initiative Demonstration Projects Interim Report* (Andrade et al., 2008; hereafter, *Interim Report*). The following summarizes the initial findings described in the *Interim Report*:

Placing participants and matching their needs with program offerings were constant challenges. It was not always feasible to group participants based on their differences in English language fluency in order to foster their skill development. For that reason, instructors and project staff were confronted with diverse levels of English proficiency among participants. In response, they instituted small-group work, individual or paired assignments, the use of computers and electronic programs, or the support of peer mentors and volunteers. In addition, instructors identified and piloted a wide variety of instructional strategies to work with participants who had varying levels of education and literacy in their native languages. Some projects, however, found it difficult to create and maintain instruction for different levels of VESL skills development.

Learners faced challenges to maintaining their participation. External factors (including variations in work schedules, limited transportation, lack of childcare, family illnesses, and other emergencies outside their control) and lack of economic resources caused some committed participants to leave a program before completion. Even highly motivated individuals frequently struggled to participate in VESL training, primarily because of workplace schedules that were demanding and frequently variable.

Multiple factors appeared to affect individual participation and continuity. Locating training activities at a single site of employment generally proved to be the most feasible and convenient approach for incumbent workers, and this approach appeared to increase the retention of participants. However, when there were small numbers of participants and when the site did

not have training space, this approach was less feasible. Participant motivation, commitment, and self-discipline appeared to play important roles in the success of individual learners. The presence and involvement of positive role models also contributed to the success of participants. The effectiveness of employee compensation (either in terms of financial compensation or in work release) on participant retention was inconclusive.

Project staff found it was essential to discuss and document arrangements with employers for VESL instruction and to communicate those plans widely within participating firms. Oftentimes initial discussions with employers did not include individuals whose buy-in was critical to successful LEP training. After agreements were made, communications with general managers and immediate supervisors were necessary to ensure their understanding of the project and the benefits expected for the company. This step increased the commitment of local managers to encourage the active engagement of participants.

No clear pattern emerged concerning educational partners' involvement and curricular adaptation or development. In three projects, community colleges used or adapted existing ESL curricula to meet the needs of employer partners. The colleges' involvement did not eliminate the challenges of matching curricula to workers and employer needs, nor did it allow grantees to overcome scheduling and location issues. For example, California's requirements related to attendance consumed considerable time in the early implementation of that project and resulted in the grantee's ultimate decision to replace the community college with an independent ESL instructor, who then served as the educational provider. This change also made it possible for the grantee to be able to offer classes in locations and times convenient for participants.

Employers were critical factors for success in serving incumbent workers. Employer support for VESL training manifested itself in various forms. Some participating employers strongly encouraged workers to sign up for the program, provided space for classes, and offered incentives for successful program completion. Projects whose staff met with employers to develop specific plans to address mutual expectations of and responsibilities for instructional activities, including location and scheduling of classes, appeared to encounter fewer problems with project implementation.

One-Stop Career Centers and other parts of the publicly funded workforce investment system were involved in project activities in generally limited ways. Oftentimes, collaboration between the two entities involved referring LEP individuals from the One-Stop to the project.

During the projects' early stages, participant enrollments lagged behind application plans. All of the projects struggled to attain their enrollment targets in the early phases of implementation, some because of instructional space and scheduling difficulties (California), others because of challenges in gaining employer participation (New York), and still others due to unexpected challenges faced by participants who were engaged at the worksite and/or participants who were managing a self-paced learning approach (Texas). Two sites experienced recruitment difficulties because of unanticipated barriers affecting the original target populations, and they had to modify the demonstration project models to respond to community needs (Nebraska and Minnesota). Thus, each project faced some significant challenges, and each attained some reasonable, early successes.

Organizational flexibility and resilience contributed to project success. Project staff described having to respond to unexpected circumstances of employers, participants, and

participants' family members. Recruitment methods turned out to be less effective than anticipated and/or new methods emerged. Classes sometimes had to be relocated due to employers' new workplace requirements. Carefully planned curricula sometimes had to be revised in length, number of lessons, or schedules. Even the most dedicated participants sometimes had to temporarily interrupt their instructional program because of shifts in work schedules or family crises. For adult VESL programs to succeed, project staff needed to be flexible and resilient in their commitment to participants' long-term progress, in spite of what appeared to be short-term setbacks. Having sufficient staff to perform case management and "dropout recovery" was also identified as an important contributing factor to success.

3. Data Sources for the Final Report

Data for this report (hereafter, *Final Report*) were collected from five sources: site visits, grantee data on project operations and participants, grantee cost data, project-related documents, and secondary data sources.

- *Site Visits.* Qualitative and quantitative data on project operations were collected during two visits to the demonstration sites. Site visits included interviews with staff members from the grantees and project partners, observations of activities, interviews with participants, and interviews with employers.
- *Grantee Data on Project Operations and Participants.* The grantees collected information on the characteristics of LEPHWI participants at enrollment, as well as ongoing data on the services received and employment and other outcome-related measures. Examples of types of program data varied across projects but included program completion rates, job placement rates, job retention rates, credential acquisition rates, placement wage rates, wage gains, and promotion rates.

- *Grantee Cost Data.* Grantees provided information on the costs required to operate the LEPHWI projects. The costs included staff salaries, fringe benefits, purchased services and other direct costs, administrative expenses, and indirect costs. Information on in-kind contributions was also provided by some sites.
- *Project Documents.* The grantees' original proposals contained information about the organizations, histories, and implementation plans for the LEPHWI demonstration projects. Other relevant documents (such as grantee quarterly reports and grant amendments) produced during the course of the demonstration contained information on project progress and on the successes and challenges that accompanied program implementation.
- *Secondary Data Sources.* Data on the socioeconomic characteristics (including employment data) of the local LEPHWI communities were examined as the context for the demonstration projects. Research on other initiatives serving LEP populations or programs offering similar services to different populations also provided a basis for comparison when examining the findings of the evaluation.

4. Limitations of the Data

Although the evaluation was designed to provide a detailed analysis of the experiences of the LEPHWI grantees within the framework of the research questions cited above, the study design and available data sources have several key limitations.

- Time constraints limited the amount and nature of qualitative information that could be collected through site visits. In addition, changes in project staff and the potential

for biased or faulty recollections among interviewees also affected the quality of site visit data.

- Grantees built their systems for collecting data on participant characteristics, project services, and program outcomes, which resulted in disparate information systems and data that were often not comparable across sites. For example, the category of national origin for participants was recorded differently across and within sites.
- Data reporting and recording processes, although adequate for the purposes of project management, were not designed for the purpose of producing unbiased, error-free data. For example, data on participant characteristics, to the extent it was recorded, was usually based on self-reported information. Projects were not required to validate data to ensure its accuracy. The absence of rigorous statistical validation processes should not hinder all uses of the data but argues for interpreting the information with a clear understanding of its limitations.
- Grantees found it difficult to track participants, particularly after they left the program (either as completers or dropouts), resulting in missing outcome data for some participants.
- The study does not include a control or comparison group and, therefore, is not intended to assess the effectiveness of LEPHWI efforts to achieve particular participant outcomes.

Within these limitations, the report describes the experiences of the LEPHWI grantees as they implemented and adjusted project plans to provide employment-related language skills to LEP individuals.

C. Organization of the Report

This report focuses on the implementation experiences of the five LEPHWI demonstration projects, including how they addressed the needs of their widely varied participant groups to acquire the skills to achieve the program's stated objectives and outcomes. While the *Interim Report* detailed the initial successes and challenges experienced by the sites in developing meaningful and productive partnerships with employers, educational institutions, the workforce development system, and other stakeholders, the *Final Report* summarizes the outcomes of the demonstration projects and the lessons learned from their implementation that are of relevance to future VESL programs.

This chapter provided background on the LEPHWI, described the overall framework for the evaluation, and summarized the findings from the *Interim Report*. Chapter II of this report describes each of the projects in detail, including the grantee organizations, the communities where the projects operated, and each project's model or design, including approaches to outreach and recruitment, assessment, curricula and instruction, job placement, and program outcomes. Chapter III contains a cross-site analysis, which describes similarities and differences in key project attributes. Section IV presents lessons learned from the demonstration, and Section V provides concluding observations related to the replication of project activities to serve LEP individuals.

II. Description and Analysis of the Five LEPHWI Projects

A. Overview of Project Designs

Five organizations received LEPHWI awards to pilot innovative approaches to improve the English language and workforce skills of Hispanic workers and individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) in their communities. This chapter contains a brief overview of the five projects, followed by in-depth descriptions of the models and the implementation experiences of each site. This mini-case-study format was chosen as the best way to organize and provide information on the five sites that, for the most part, chose significantly different approaches to identifying, serving, and tracking their LEP participants.

The grantees varied in organizational structure and mission, type of intervention, and scope of outcome measures (Table II-1). The table presents information on the projects as originally proposed by the successful applicants and does not reflect the changes in target groups that were made during the course of project operations. For example, as explained below, the California grantee expanded the target group beyond incumbent workers to include jobseekers.

The five demonstration projects each aimed to simultaneously improve the English language and vocational skills of LEP and/or Hispanic workers. The grantees sought to do so through different models, and some sites used multiple approaches. In three of the projects, community college instructors consulted with employers to adapt an existing ESL curriculum to a more occupationally oriented model. One project adapted an English skills program for recently arrived immigrants and refugees. Two projects used technology-based language training programs, with one piloting a self-paced instructional model that delivered its curriculum through a portable electronic teaching tool.

**Table II-1:
LEPHWI Grantees and Their Original Participant Targets**

State	Grantee	Industry	Project Name	Target Population	Number to Be Served	Amount of Award
CA	San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council	Construction	Words for Workforce	Spanish-speaking incumbent workers at a local shipyard	150	\$1,000,000
MN	Resource, Inc.	Health Care	<i>Career Launch!</i>	Recently arrived refugees and immigrants and other LEP and Hispanic job-seekers in three cities	200	\$1,000,000
NE	Metropolitan Community College	Construction Health Care Transportation	STEP-UP!	Incumbent workers and high school students in four counties	1,389	\$801,130
NY	CUNY Research Foundation	Retail Food Service Hospitality	LEP for Retail Industry	New and incumbent Hispanic/LEP workers in New York City	240	\$1,000,000
TX	<i>SER</i> -Jobs for Progress National, Inc.	Hospitality Food Service	<i>Sed de Saber</i>	Hispanic/LEP incumbent workers at four Texas sites	2,430	\$1,105,914

Source: Table information from grantee proposals and USDOL announcement (<http://www.doleta.gov/sga/awards/05-02%20Grants%20Awarded.pdf>).

The remainder of this chapter contains profiles of each of the five projects. Cross-site comparisons of project designs and experiences are included in Chapter III.

B. San Diego, California: *Words for the Workplace*
San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council

Summary

The San Diego, California, project began with one major local corporation, the National Steel and Shipbuilding Company shipyard (NASSCO), and one community college system's continuing education department in the San Diego Community College District as its key partners. Initially, the partnership adapted an existing community college curriculum for English as a second language (ESL) to focus directly on Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) training in topics of critical relevance to the employer (e.g., safety, security, welding); a community college instructor taught primarily monolingual, Spanish-speaking incumbent workers on-site at the shipyard. However, due to attendance issues, the class-size requirements for reimbursement at the state community college system, and the changing needs of the employer, the grantee modified the project, terminating its relationship with the community college and hiring a college professor to provide VESL instruction. The grantee both modified and shortened the instructional program to eliminate less relevant material and to increase attendance. As well, the grantee supplemented its original approach by offering classes to different groups of displaced workers and jobseekers at the San Diego-Imperial County Labor Council's administrative offices.

The project had originally aimed to enroll 150 incumbent workers. After adjusting its service strategy, the project ultimately enrolled 61 incumbent workers and 91 jobseekers for a total of 152 participants. Over 95 percent of the incumbent workers completed the program and received a credential. Data provided by the grantee indicate that 61.5 percent of the jobseekers served were reported to have entered employment at the time the project ended.

Promising practices included the development of a one-week primer for LEP individuals, which was followed by integrating LEP learners into the grantee's ongoing worker preparation classes and locating case managers on-site at the shipyard.

1. Grantee Overview

The San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council (Labor Council) consists of 124 affiliated labor groups within the two California counties. Since the late 1990s, the Labor Council has run job-training programs to prepare area residents for employment, receiving funding from the U.S. Department of Education, the State of California, and the San Diego Workforce Partnership (the local WIA entity). The Labor Council's four-week course, the Career and Apprenticeship Preparation Program (CAPP), trains qualified candidates in job search skills, such as resume preparation and interviewing techniques. The program also covers employer and workplace expectations and basic skills in math, language arts, and mechanical education. Technical skills relevant to several trades are also taught so that participants can be placed with some of San Diego's largest union employers. In addition, the Labor Council provides placement assistance to individuals who complete the CAPP course.⁷

At the time of the LEPHWI grant application, the Labor Council had previous experience in serving LEP individuals. For example, it had provided support for collaboration between the San Diego Community College District and the UCLA Labor Occupational Safety and Health program to offer the first health-and-safety training for Spanish-speaking workers in the San Diego area.⁸

2. Context

a. Population Profile

In 2007, almost 15 percent of individuals 25 years or older in San Diego, California, were not high school graduates (Table II-2). In its grant application, the Labor Council noted

⁷ <http://www.unionyes.org/training> (accessed February 2009), site visit interviews, and grantee documents.

⁸ San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council, *Labor Leader* newsletter 99 (June 2006), p. 5.

challenges it faced in finding skilled and qualified workers to fill high-demand union positions due to rapid technological advances and a competitive global economy.

Table II-2
Profile of the San Diego Metropolitan Statistical Area:
Selected Population Characteristics

	MSA	USA
Educational Attainment (individuals over 25 years)		
Total population over 25	1,887,786	
Percent less than high school graduate	14.8%	15.5%
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	33.5%	27.5%
Place of Birth		
Native	77.3%	87.4%
Different state	28.8%	27.3%
Foreign born	22.7%	12.6%
Foreign-born population, not a U.S. citizen	55.3%	57.5%
Foreign-born population, entered in 2000 or later	23.5%	27.7%
Region of Birth of Foreign Born		
Europe	8.0%	13.1%
Asia	33.2%	26.8%
Africa	2.1%	3.7%
Latin America	54.1%	53.6%
Language Spoken at Home (population 5 years and over)		
Total population 5 and over	2,753,401	
English only	65.1%	80.3%
Language other than English	34.9%	19.7%
English less than "very well"	15.5%	8.7%
<i>Language spoken at home by those speaking English less than "very well"</i>		
Spanish	11.1%	5.8%
Other Indo-European languages	0.7%	1.2%
Asian and Pacific Islander languages	3.3%	1.4%
Other languages	0.4%	0.2%
Poverty and Language (population 18 years and over)		
Below poverty level (overall)	9.8%	11.6%
<i>For each primary language group, proportion below poverty level</i>		
Speak only English	7.8%	10.6%
Speak other than English	13.5%	18.7%
Speak Spanish	15.2%	18.4%
Speak other Indo-European languages	11.6%	10.8%
Speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages	8.9%	11.5%
Speak other languages	19.1%	19.3%

Source: Bureau of the Census, 2007 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

The population originally targeted by the Labor Council project was Spanish-speaking incumbent workers from the National Steel and Shipbuilding Company (NASSCO) shipyard. Later, the target group was broadened to include unemployed LEP individuals in the San Diego area who required intensive English language training to secure employment.

b. Goals of the Project/Model

The model of the Labor Council's *Words for the Workforce* project was to enroll 180 participants and provide VESL training to 150 Hispanic incumbent workers at the NASSCO shipyard. In the past, work teams at NASSCO had been segregated by language fluency. While this had been effective, changes in work requirements for security and safety and the need to adequately supervise employees led management to decide to integrate the shipyard employee teams without respect to English skills. To assist NASSCO in implementing the new, integrated-teams approach, the LEPHWI project was to support simultaneous language acquisition and skills development for the shipyard's LEP workers.

In addition to addressing the anticipated workforce needs of its corporate partner, the grantee was also aware of important demographic issues in California. For example, the Labor Council's newsletter publicized the fact that Latino worker injuries and fatalities had increased in 2004, in contrast to national trends.⁹ Project training was intended to increase participants' workplace literacy (in an effort to reverse the aforementioned trend in California) and assist participants in entering a career path in high-wage/high-growth construction trades. The goal was for participants to advance from low-skill positions to higher-wage, higher-skilled jobs by reaching an apprentice's level in the construction industry.

⁹ San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council, *Labor Leader* newsletter 99 (June 2006), p. 5.

The grantee articulated the following specific outcome goals for the project:

- Program completion (NASSCO incumbent workers): 80 percent of 150 participants would complete the program.¹⁰
- Earnings gain: 80 percent of project participants would receive raises from a base of \$8 an hour to \$12 an hour in six months after program completion.
- Skill acquisition: 70 percent of participants would successfully enter trades as welders and cutters, electrical technicians, or machinists after completing NASSCO's pre-apprenticeship program.

When the project was eventually modified to focus enrollments on jobseekers instead of incumbent workers at the shipyard, the original outcome goals became less relevant for measuring project success. It is not clear, however, whether supplemental goals were formally established for the new target group.

c. Project Partners

The Labor Council's primary partner for the LEPHWI grant was the NASSCO. On its website, NASSCO outlines its experience in designing and building ships since 1959, specializing in auxiliary and support ships for the U.S. Navy and oil tankers and dry cargo carriers for commercial markets.¹¹ The NASSCO shipyard in San Diego is one of three in the Marine Systems group of General Dynamics Corporation. In 2007, the San Diego shipyard employed more than 4,600 people and was the only major ship construction yard on the West Coast of the United States.

The original proposal identified the Continuing Education department of San Diego City College, part of the San Diego Community College District, as its key education partner. However, during implementation, the Labor Council decided to end the partnership. The grantee

¹⁰ In its application for funding, the grantee indicated that it would enroll "at least 180 participants." It is unclear what attrition occurred to reduce the 180 enrollees to 150 participants. This evaluation report utilizes the 150 figure as the presumptive planned goal for participant enrollments.

¹¹ General Dynamics NASSCO. <http://www.nassco.com/>.

did not introduce another institutional educational partner to the project, but instead hired an independent instructor to provide training to project participants.

3. Outreach and Recruitment

a. Employer Outreach and Recruitment

NASSCO supported the Labor Council's grant application because of the company's specific interest in VESL training for its incumbent workers. Due to unforeseen challenges in implementation during the project's first year—primarily low attendance rates among LEP individuals, changes in partnerships, and shifting employer needs—the Labor Council proposed to modify the project, allowing it to serve “pre-hires” for positions at the shipyard and other jobseekers. While it retained the partnership with NASSCO, the Labor Council also recruited other companies, including the Metropolitan Transit System (which operates light rail, bus, and freight rail services in the San Diego area) and the San Diego Gas & Electric Company, as potential employers of successful project participants.

b. Participant Outreach and Recruitment

Incumbent Workers. For the initial phase of the project, NASSCO facilitated the outreach efforts of grantee staff to recruit incumbent workers, for example, by providing access for the Labor Council's staff to disseminate bilingual English/Spanish materials at the shipyard and in parking areas during work hours, despite those being secure locations. In addition, several company supervisors made special efforts to identify potential participants and to encourage them to apply. The Labor Council also bought advertising space in a local Spanish language newspaper to publicize the LEPHWI project and to recruit participants.

Recruitment of incumbent workers interested in participating in on-site training at NASSCO was challenging. For example, when production requirements were high, the availability of overtime work at premium pay competed with VESL training classes. At the time the LEPHWI incumbent worker training at NASSCO was concluded, 61 of the planned 150 incumbent workers (41 percent) had been served by the project, and nine additional workers there had expressed interest in taking the class.

Unemployed and Underemployed Workers. In spring 2007, NASSCO requested that the Labor Council begin to provide VESL-type training to individuals who were prospective candidates for hire at the shipyard, due to the company's shortages of qualified applicants for entry-level positions. The grantee proposed a change in their project and adjusted its recruitment procedures to meet the emerging needs of the employer.

Under the revised training program, NASSCO provided "reverse referrals," that is, when individuals applying for jobs at the shipyard appeared to be potential candidates for employment but lacked some of the knowledge or skills to successfully complete the application process, the company referred them to the Labor Council. Project staff then assessed the applicants to determine whether they qualified to participate either in the CAPP training program or in the expanded version of the program, called V-CAPP, which began with intensive VESL instruction. Applicants with limited English proficiency who qualified for entry into the Labor Council's training program were directed to the V-CAPP program.

The Labor Council also used its traditional referral entities to promote the VESL training opportunity. In addition to NASSCO, several other organizations also referred individuals to the Labor Council for assistance, including two local One-Stop Career Centers.

4. Assessment and LEP Instructional Levels

a. Description of Processes

The *Words for the Workforce* project staff collected general background from NASSCO participants about their education, work history, native language, and literacy. The ESL proficiency of these individuals was assessed through the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) reading appraisals, writing and listening assessments, and oral competency levels. Project staff created individual files for each participant to track their progress based on the aforementioned assessments. In addition, staff members documented the revision and implementation of the initial curriculum developed by the community college staff. In the second phase of the project, the Labor Council supplemented its existing CAPP program with a one-week preparatory class for unemployed and underemployed workers who were limited English proficient. The grantee offered twice-a-month orientations for these programs to groups of about 30 jobseekers at its administrative office. As the project transitioned the focus of its recruitment to unemployed and underemployed workers and shifted recruitment from participants with low levels of English ability to those with a midlevel of English fluency, comprehensive assessments of prospective participants for the second phase of the project aimed to ensure that the enrolled individuals possessed sufficient English oral and reading skills to succeed in the V-CAPP training.

b. Participant Characteristics

The project's MIS data did not identify participants by gender, native language, or national origin. Interviews and observations by the evaluation team during the site visits, however, suggested that the initial on-site incumbent worker program included mostly Hispanic, monolingual Spanish speakers, the majority of whom either resided in or had immigrated to the

United States from Mexico. In addition, the group was made up almost entirely of men, a fact that largely reflected the characteristics of the shipyard's workforce. The Labor Council's proposal suggested that participants' hourly wages would average \$8 at the time of enrollment. Since the wage levels of the incumbent worker participants averaged just under \$20 an hour post enrollment, it appears that participants possessed significantly more advanced skills than originally anticipated. Data on the wages of incumbent worker at the time of their enrollment were not provided by the grantee.

Although the majority of participants in both phases of the project were males, women were more common in the V-CAPP groups. This V-CAPP group also had more bilingual, English-Spanish speakers, as well as a few speakers of other languages (in addition to English). Because the grantee required that V-CAPP participants possess at least a minimal level of conversational English and English literacy (in order to use the instructional materials), fewer monolingual Spanish speakers participated.

5. Curriculum and Instruction

a. Curriculum Development

The primary content of the *Words for the Workplace* VESL curriculum addressed oral English communication and comprehension (i.e., understanding and transmitting critical workplace information), as well as basic English literacy (e.g., the ability to read warning signs or related brochures). For example, the project partnered with the San Diego Community College District's Continuing Education department, which adapted its basic ESL curriculum, customizing the topics and learning activities to address the shipyard's needs for training that focused on safety and security. NASSCO supervisors and management staff who oversaw workers in each of the trades provided the expertise necessary for determining the occupational

language skills necessary and the minimum levels of proficiency required to perform the jobs successfully. The curriculum combined such features as conversational skills, technical vocabulary building, and problem solving with a “hard skills” job training program, where workers were taught specific trades at the beginner’s level. At this stage, participants’ VESL training allowed them to practice and apply enough occupational, contextual English to demonstrate their growing competencies in their trades.

The Continuing Education department suggested that classes be 18 weeks in length, in keeping with semester-based educational programs in higher education. Training was to occur daily, based on the premise that language instruction requires intensity and repetition to achieve lasting learning. After two, 18-week sessions, the grantee documented notable absenteeism and concluded that the instructional duration was too long for shipyard workers. The program was shortened to ten weeks in length, and the frequency of classes was reduced to two classroom sessions per week. Under the revised schedule, participants could choose from two classes running Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday. Since both classes followed the same curriculum, students could make up a missed class by attending on the correlating day of the other class. To increase access to computer-assisted practice and assistance, the grantee additionally arranged to provide instruction every Saturday at a language lab located within walking distance of the shipyard at the Cesar E. Chavez Center. Participants interviewed during the site visits stated that the accessible location and the opportunity for additional practice were beneficial.

After the decision was made to pilot a second model of instruction for unemployed and underemployed workers, the Labor Council created an intensive VESL instructional program. The five-day, eight-hours-a-day, one-week program incorporated portions of the shipyard’s

curriculum and was held at the grantee's administrative offices. Participants in the LEPHWI project received this initial training as a prelude to participating in the Labor Council's existing four-week CAPP program of training in job preparation and job search skills, with the combined VESL and CAPP instruction entitled V-CAPP.

b. Use of Technology

By partnering with a neighborhood library and community center, the San Diego project provided modest technological support for VESL instruction to the initial groups of incumbent workers who participated in the on-site training at NASSCO. With the development of the second, classroom-based model at the Labor Council's administrative office, more emphasis was placed on participants interacting with English-proficiency computer software. This occurred primarily during the first intensive week of VESL instruction, but participants also had opportunities to practice their English skills during the following four weeks of the CAPP program.

c. Instructors

The initial phase of the LEPHWI project relied on instructors from the local community college. However, strict State of California regulations on community college class size and attendance¹² became difficult to meet, given the fluid participation by the early groups of incumbent workers who struggled to maintain their frequently changing job schedules at the

¹² Community colleges and other public educational entities in California receive funding through a process that utilizes Average Daily Attendance (ADA) data to apportion funds. See

http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/StateAgencyBudgets/0010/0850/mission_statement.html and http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_104PMR.pdf for general background.

According to Labor Council staff, ADA required a minimum of 26 students per class, and the college reportedly charged the grant based on the minimum size. Since the classes were non-credit and the costs of the training were paid with grant funds, it is unclear why ADA was an issue. As the college was no longer a service provider at the time of the second site visit, college officials were not interviewed for this report.

shipyard while attending the on-site VESL classes. The last phase of incumbent worker training at NASSCO was completed in December 2007.

With a goal of increasing and stabilizing participation in the classes, the grantee hired an independent ESL instructor who adapted and used the project's VESL curriculum to teach at the shipyard. This approach was continued in the second model, where unemployed workers participated in V-CAPP training at the grantee's administrative office.

d. VESL Components

The San Diego VESL curriculum included ten modules that directly addressed NASSCO's concerns for employee safety and shipyard security; for example, the modules included Hazards Communication, Safety in Confined Spaces, Personal Protective Equipment, and Blueprint Reading. Thus, participants learned critically important workplace information, even as they expanded their English vocabulary and practiced communication skills.

The curriculum used a variety of instructional techniques, including job-related conversation practice, the study of technical vocabulary, role-playing with words and phrases to assist in resolving problems on the job and clarifying job processes, and job-related reading, especially about safety and security. For the incumbent workers, real-life workplace scenarios were used, incorporating actual objects such as tools and equipment into the lessons.

The V-CAPP curriculum placed a one-week, intensive English language review at the beginning of the Labor Council's traditional four-week CAPP course. It used the NASSCO content to help participants take advantage of the math, mechanics, and soft-skills instruction of the CAPP course, while developing the basic, interpersonal communication skills and cognitive abilities necessary at the shipyard.

e. Training Venues

This LEPHWI grantee implemented its model initially on-site with incumbent workers at the NASSCO shipyard. Project staff reported that they almost immediately encountered problems due to the employer's difficulty in providing a designated space for instruction and to the frequent changes made in the workers' schedules, which resulted in some workers missing several VESL sessions and dropping out. For example, the laboratory at the community college (the initial training provider) was open for only three and one-half hours on Saturdays. In addition, when extra work was available at the shipyard, incumbent workers would work on Saturdays to earn double-time rates—and not be able to attend their VESL training. However, the addition of the computer lab at the Chavez Center improved the access that learners had to equipment for studying and practicing their language skills. When the second (V-CAPP) model was instituted, classes were located at the grantee's administrative offices.

6. Job Development and Placement Activities

Incumbent Workers. The LEPHWI participants were already employed at NASSCO, and with the shipyard's integration of employee work groups (eliminating language-segregated teams), participants were placed in new teams. Some participants took advantage of opportunities to develop into team leaders, a phenomenon that project staff attributed to the interests and skills of those individuals, rather than to the curriculum provided.

Unemployed and Underemployed Workers. Many of the unemployed individuals who completed the V-CAPP training in the second phase of the project were hired at NASSCO. Because the Labor Council worked with a range of jobseekers through its ongoing CAPP program, job development and placement activities for LEPHWI participants took place in conjunction with the placement services routinely offered by the grantee. Some workers were

placed with employers with whom the grantee already had relationships, others were with employers with whom the Labor Council established new relationships, and still other placements were the result of job-development efforts for specific participants. In addition to the numbers of participants placed at NASSCO, the Metropolitan Transit System, and the San Diego Gas & Electricity Company, individuals were also placed in jobs in construction, office administration, accounting, and kelp processing.

7. Other Components

a. Support Services

Interviews with staff indicated that some participants received assistance from the Labor Council and partner agencies in the form of food, transportation vouchers, tools, uniforms, and rental assistance to facilitate their participation in the LEPHWI project, as well as to support their employment retention. United Way Labor Participation was the principal partner in this activity. Data were not available on the number of LEPHWI participants assisted, the program in which they were enrolled, or the types of services provided. For this reason, it is not clear to what extent incumbent workers received support services or what service was the most common.

b. Use of Incentives

The training for LEPHWI incumbent workers at the shipyard was conducted after most workers' shifts ended. Anticipating fatigue on the part of the students, the instructors and case workers strived to make the classes interesting; to encourage steady attendance, they also provided incentives for participants. These efforts included hosting classes on-site and offering refreshments and prize drawings for participants who had achieved certain benchmarks of attendance or had attained certain skills. Prizes included movie passes, tickets to San Diego

Padres baseball games, and gift certificates to restaurants and fast-food chains. Although participants indicated appreciation of these incentives, the efforts did not appear to provide sufficient incentive to offset the problems in participant attendance caused by changes in shifts, inconvenient location, and inconsistent support from team leaders.

Support services and the possibility of employment were the primary incentives provided to participants of the V-CAPP training model that served unemployed individuals.

c. Support Outside the Classroom

As previously described, the LEPHWI grantee took steps to ensure that computer-assisted instruction would be more readily available for self-paced training and tutorials. The Labor Council partnered with a community organization near the shipyard to provide this instruction, thus increasing access to computers at times and in a location convenient to the learners. This dedicated facility had 15 laptop computers, and at least one case manager was present to assist the incumbent worker participants on Saturdays. For unemployed participants in the V-CAPP program, the Labor Council offered flexible hours at its administrative site for learners to access similar equipment and services.

8. Project Outcomes

a. Skills Acquisition

The two areas of skills acquisition were examined in the LEPHWI projects: (1) English language skills and (2) vocational skills and certification. Table II-3 summarizes the planned and actual project outcomes for the San Diego grantee.

English Language Skills. The grantee did not incorporate an assessment of gains in language skill into its measurement system.

**Table II-3
San Diego: Planned and Actual Project Outcomes**

Indicators/Measures	Target Group	Planned		Actual	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
	<i>Incumbent Workers</i>			61	N/A
	<i>Jobseekers</i>			91	N/A
Enrollees	Total	180	N/A	152	N/A
Entered Employment / Rate				56	61.5%
Retention / Rate				43	93.5%
Earnings Gain	Incumbent Workers		50.0%	N/A	N/A
Achieve Credential or Diploma	Incumbent Workers			59	95.2%
Achieve Credential or Diploma	Jobseekers			47	51.6%

Notes:

- According to the grant solicitation, project outcome measures were to mirror ETA's common measures (Entered Employment Rate, Retention Rate, and Earnings Gain), "to the extent possible."
 - The project originally intended to enroll 180 individuals and serve 150 in the program. Jobseekers became the primary target group approximately half-way through the period of performance.
 - Entered employment is based on the 91 nonincumbent participants for whom placement is a relevant measure.
 - Retention is based on remaining in the job for 90 days. The grantee provided retention data for 46 of the participants who were employed at exit.
 - Earnings Gain was to be measured for incumbent workers 180 days after program completion; expected gains were from a base of \$8 per hour to \$12 per hour.
 - Credential or diploma: 59 incumbent workers received a certificate of completion from San Diego Community College District and/or NASSCO. For jobseekers, 47 received a certificate of completion from the grantee for their V-CAPP training programs.
- Sources: Grantee proposal (planned data), Grantee Final Report and MIS (outcome data)

Vocational Skills and Certificates. The project offered certificates specific to the two training programs. Incumbent workers who successfully completed the training program at NASSCO received a certificate from NASSCO and/or initially from the San Diego Community College District, until the latter ceased providing instruction. The Labor Council also provided its own certificate to many of the same individuals. Participants who completed the V-CAPP program received a certificate of completion from the Labor Council.

b. Employment Outcomes

Grantee reports showed that 61 incumbent workers entered the NASSCO portion of the training program, and 91 individuals entered the V-CAPP component at the Labor Council, for a total of 152 enrollees.

Entered Employment. The entered employment outcome was not an appropriate measure for the incumbent workers served by the project. Grantee data indicate that 56 of the 91 V-CAPP participants, or 61.5 percent, were placed in jobs when they exited the program. Some of the remaining 35 individuals who were served in V-CAPP can be considered to have had positive exits; however, based on notations in the grantee's MIS, several individuals who were not placed in employment went into another educational or training program. For those placed, data on wages and number of hours worked per week were also included in the MIS.

Table II-4 provides outcomes data (wages and hours worked) for participants in the Labor Council's LEP (V-CAPP) and non-LEP (CAPP-only) programs during 2007 and early 2008. Slightly more than 35 percent of the participants were enrolled in the V-CAPP *Words for the Workplace* program. The average wage for those V-CAPP participants who were placed after completing the program was \$11.56, which was slightly higher than the wages of the CAPP participants who did not participate in the V-CAPP program but were placed upon completion. The average number of hours worked per week, however, was slightly higher for CAPP participants who were not part of the V-CAPP program. These data suggest that, on average, the LEPHWI participants fared as well as other program completers in their post-participation employment outcomes. Interviews with grantee staff indicated that employers were primarily concerned with finding qualified candidates for their positions, regardless of their native language or nationality.

Table II-4
San Diego: Outcomes for LEP and non-LEP Participants
Comparison of Hours Worked and Wages

	V-CAPP	CAPP only	Total
Number of Participants	56	101	157
Average Hours Worked	39.21	40.23	39.87
Average Wage	\$11.56	\$11.36	\$11.43

Source: Grantee MIS

Advancement. The project provided data on advancement/promotion for the 61 participants who were incumbent workers. According to the data, all received at least one promotion, and 17 workers attained three promotions, while one was promoted six times. Retention data were not available.

Earnings. Initial earnings data showed that the average wage for incumbent workers was \$20.03 following program participation. Average wage for the V-CAPP workers was \$11.56. Data on the wages of incumbent workers at enrollment were not included in the data provided by the grantee. Based on the earnings of incumbent workers, the NASSCO workers served by the project were more highly skilled than the proposal had anticipated. Because wages at entry into the program were not included in the grantee’s MIS for the NASSCO workers, it is not possible to determine whether the earnings goal was met for that portion of the project’s participants.

c. Progress Toward Sustainability

In its final project report, the Labor Council reported that the major employer connected to the *Words for the Workplace* LEPHWI demonstration project, the NASSCO shipyard, “will continue to pay to perpetuate these VESL classes on the job site beyond the terms of the grant.” Further, the Labor Council case manager was to continue to be available on-site at the shipyard two days a week to address any need for support services or workplace issues. Officials at the

Labor Council expressed their commitment to continuing to assist low-wage LEP workers in their effort to acquire English-language skills so that they would have viable opportunities for career advancement. These officials also described the Labor Council's plan to incorporate the VESL-immersion week or V-CAPP (the second model of the demonstration grant) into future training programs with new employer partners, with whom they were currently in negotiation.

C. Minneapolis- St. Paul, Minnesota: *Career Launch*
Resource, Inc.

Summary

Resource, Inc., a not-for-profit organization located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was the grantee for *Career Launch*, the Minneapolis-St. Paul LEPHWI project, which served primarily immigrant communities in the Twin Cities area. A small subproject operated in St. Cloud, about 65 miles away. The project focused its services on unemployed and underemployed LEP individuals, with referrals coming primarily from the Minneapolis Adult Basic Education (ABE) program and by word of mouth from former participants. This project was unique in that the majority of its participants were from Africa, and many were refugees who had recently arrived in the United States.

The project used multiple levels of training, an innovation that allowed participants to leave after completing a program module; many participants had personal challenges that interfered with their ability to attend a complete training program. Developed with input from Minneapolis ABE and the Minneapolis Community and Technical College, project curricula included accent reduction, an introduction to the workplace, financial literacy, study skills, and an introduction to customer service. Job search skills were also taught to support participant placement efforts. Placements ranged among a variety of businesses, including employers who had previously hired graduates of the grantee's other workforce preparation programs.

Although the project exceeded its goal of enrolling 225 participants, successful job placement occurred for only 48.4 percent of the participants who were not incumbent workers. Retention in employment was close to the goal of 80 percent, as 78.4 percent of those placed were reported to be working 180 days later.

Promising practices included the tiered levels of training, close linkages with the public ABE program, and the project's sensitivity to participants' cultural backgrounds.

1. Grantee Overview

Resource, Inc., states that its mission is “to empower people to achieve greater personal, social, and economic success.” The organization serves more than 15,000 individuals annually through a variety of human services and employment services programs. Resource, Inc., career training programs have assisted more than 8,500 persons who faced barriers to employment through its vocational evaluation, career training, placement, and job retention services. Its employment programs are supported by a variety of state, federal, and local funding sources. As an example of employment outcomes achieved in 2004, Resource, Inc., placed 2,919 participants with 2,035 employers, in jobs with wages ranging from \$9 to \$36 per hour.

The organization has four divisions, each one specializing in a particular type of service. The division that managed the LEPHWI grant, the Employment Action Center, assists people who are unemployed or underemployed in their search for a new job, a better job, or a new career. Another division, the Minnesota Resource Center, provides training and employment for individuals with disabilities or other barriers to employment. This division also participated in the LEPHWI project. The other two Resource, Inc., divisions help individuals recover from chemical dependency and assist people with serious mental illness to live and participate actively in the community.¹³

2. Context

a. Population Profile

Resource, Inc., is located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the LEPHWI project served residents of the Minneapolis-St. Paul (Twin Cities) area. A satellite office in St. Cloud,

¹³ <http://www.resource-mn.org/learn-more> (accessed February 2009), site visit interviews, and grantee documents.

Minnesota (approximately 65 miles to the northwest), served a small number (12) of the 253 participants enrolled in the project.

Table II-5
Profile of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area:
Selected Population Characteristics

	MSA	USA
Educational Attainment (individuals over 25 years)		
Total population over 25	2,103,892	
Percent less than high school graduate	7.5%	15.5%
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	36.8%	27.5%
Place of Birth		
Native	91.0%	87.4%
Different state	26.0%	27.3%
Foreign born	9.0%	12.6%
Foreign-born population, not a U.S. citizen	57.6%	57.5%
Foreign-born population, entered in 2000 or later	37.6%	27.7%
Region of Birth of Foreign Born		
Europe	13.3%	13.1%
Asia	38.4%	26.8%
Africa	21.2%	3.7%
Latin America	24.1%	53.6%
Language Spoken at Home (population 5 years and over)		
Total population 5 and over	2,977,943	
English only	87.8%	80.3%
Language other than English	12.2%	19.7%
English less than "very well"	5.2%	8.7%
<i>Language spoken at home by those speaking English less than "very well"</i>		
Spanish	1.9%	5.8%
Other Indo-European languages	0.6%	1.2%
Asian and Pacific Islander languages	1.8%	1.4%
Other languages	0.9%	0.2%
Poverty and Language (population 18 years and over)		
Below poverty level (overall)	7.5%	11.6%
<i>For each primary language group, proportion below poverty level</i>		
Speak only English	6.5%	10.6%
Speak other than English	15.4%	18.7%
Speak Spanish	15.6%	18.4%
Speak other Indo-European languages	7.4%	10.8%
Speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages	11.7%	11.5%
Speak other languages	31.2%	19.3%

Source: Bureau of the Census, 2007 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

As shown in Table II-5, the population of the Minneapolis area is more highly educated than the rest of the country. In 2007, the area had a lower proportion of foreign-born residents than the United States as a whole. The area's largest number of foreign-born residents originated in Asia (38.4 percent). Compared to national averages, fewer came from Latin America (24.1 percent versus 53.6 percent), but significantly more came from Africa (21.2 percent versus 3.7 percent). More than one-third of its foreign-born residents (37.6 percent) had entered the United States since 2000, almost 10 percentage points more than the national rate.

About one in eight Minneapolis residents five years of age and older (12.2 percent) spoke a language other than English at home, and 5.2 percent reported speaking English "less than very well." These proportions were smaller than the national averages. The highest numbers of LEP respondents in this group stated they spoke Spanish at home (1.9 percent) or an Asian/Pacific Islander language (1.8 percent).

More than 15 percent of the individuals 18 years of age and older in the Minneapolis area who did not speak English had incomes below the poverty level, a figure double the rate for English speakers. The disparity in poverty rates was more severe in the Twin Cities than for the United States as a whole. Among individuals who did not speak English, those who spoke Spanish and "other languages" were more likely to be below the poverty level than speakers of "other Indo-European languages" or Asian and Pacific Islander languages.

b. Goals of the Project/Model

The original project description for *Career Launch* stated that it would accomplish the following:

. . . develop, implement, and deliver employer-driven workplace training to 200 Somali, Ethiopian, Southeast Asian, and Hispanic participants for customer service and healthcare office support positions. Participants will be placed in high growth healthcare and customer service positions, with career assistance and follow-up. The program will begin in the Twin Cities for the first year and will be replicated in St. Cloud the second year. The curriculum will include customer software simulation, worksite experiences and coaching. Other services will include case management, ESL testing, and online work readiness lessons.

The expected outcomes for *Career Launch* included:

- Job placement: 85 percent of participants, or 170 individuals, would be placed in employment with an average hourly wage between \$11 and \$13.50.
- Employment retention: 80 percent of those placed would still be working 180 days later.
- Earnings gain: participants would experience a minimum 6 percent average wage gain (six months after placement).
- Credentials: 65 percent of program completers would earn credentials or diplomas.

c. Project Partners

The principal partners for the *Career Launch* project were the Public Schools Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs for Minneapolis and St. Cloud. These organizations referred to the grantee significant numbers of individuals who enrolled in the project. Other partners included the Minneapolis Employment and Training Program, the Minneapolis Community and Technical College, and several area employers. Resource, Inc., is well known in the Twin Cities area, and many of the entities with which it regularly collaborates, particularly employers, were involved in the LEPHWI project, as well.

3. Outreach and Recruitment

a. Employer Outreach and Recruitment

Since its founding in 1979, Resource, Inc., has built several active Employer Advisory Councils that guide and direct the success of customized training programs by providing feedback on curricula, contributing resources, and hiring program graduates. For the LEPHWI project, employer partners provided curriculum development support, work readiness training, job shadowing opportunities, equipment, and job placement support.

Employer partners for the LEPHWI project included Wells Fargo, which worked with Resource, Inc., to help recruit and develop its workforce. Well Fargo staff identified the various skills the firm needed in its employees and the levels among available customer service positions through which a new hire might progress. The accent-reduction training program was identified as especially relevant for Wells Fargo employees.

Another employer partner, the University of Minnesota, also worked with the project's job development staff to identify project graduates who had been hired, as well as to help these new workers with continued career development once they became employed. The university's Dining Services hired several project graduates and offered specific career development opportunities once the graduates successfully completed a probationary period. In addition, after completing the probationary period, new hires could join the union, which also provided career development and enhancement assistance.

The LEPHWI project also included a small component to train entry-level workers in the healthcare industry in a Health Core Training curriculum. However, as instruction got underway and participants attempted the college placement test with minimal success, it became evident

that most participants would not be able to learn enough English to gain entry to the program. As a result, this component was dropped from the project's plans.

b. Participant Outreach and Recruitment

Given the Minnesota LEPHWI project's focus on unemployed and underemployed workers, staff established referral relationships and conducted participant recruitment through entities where LEP individuals tended to seek assistance. The project planned to recruit participants through the local One-Stop Centers and adult education programs in the Minneapolis and St. Cloud areas. Project reports indicated that over 90 percent of participants were referred by the Minneapolis ABE program or had heard about it from former participants who had been successful and who spoke positively about the program.

The engagement with the ABE program involved both referral from ABE staff and active recruitment by *Career Launch* staff visiting ABE classes. Grantee staff made presentations on the LEPHWI project at ABE classes in various parts of the city and then followed up with interested individuals. This approach was part of the project's recruitment strategy from the start and appears to have been successful.

For LEP individuals, the selling points of the project included not only the assistance it offered in basic skills but also the help it provided with job search. Although many of the participants were already employed, they enrolled in the project to improve their employability for better and higher-paying jobs, based on the perception that improved English language skills were the vehicle to job advancement.

During its early stages, the project experienced an unexpectedly high rate of participants dropping out. Management identified and focused on where "drops" were occurring. Two of the

reasons for the dropouts involved poor matches between the participants' circumstances and the project's offerings, and participants "disappearing" because they did not want to confide in project staff about their personal situations.

To address the challenge of establishing a good match between the circumstances of the participants and the project's offerings, grantee staff reviewed pre-enrollment activities to ensure that they were recruiting individuals who were likely to stay with the project. They came to realize that intake staff needed to better understand the individual situation of each participant and to validate that those circumstances were not incompatible with project particulars, such as the services available and their duration. Possible complicating factors for prospective participants included not only their deficiencies in the English language, but also their family situations and backgrounds. Staff provided an example of a candidate with an advanced degree whose spouse encouraged her to enroll. This individual dropped out after two days because her educational needs were not compatible with those of other participants.

In an effort to boost participant engagement in project activities, particularly post-program follow-up, grantee staff made a concerted effort to build trust between the participant and the employment specialists. Staff felt that by doing so participants would feel more comfortable discussing any changes in their situation with project staff.

4. Assessment and LEP Instructional Levels

a. Description of Processes

Career Launch used the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) instrument to assess applicants' basic understanding of English (requiring a minimum score of 190–210 to participate) and the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) Plus assessment instrument to

determine whether participants had English skills that were sufficient to allow them to comprehend classroom instruction and materials (requiring a minimum score of 50 to participate). During early implementation, project staff noted the difficulties that participants experienced in their first VESL component and decided to raise the minimum CASAS score to better target participants who could benefit from the LEPHWI services. Individuals with lower scores were referred to ABE programs in the area. The grantee used CASAS testing at the end of its job readiness curriculum as the only post-testing instrument. It did not include project assessment test results as part of its participant data.

b. Participant Characteristics

Most *Career Launch* participants were recent immigrants who had different cultural backgrounds, who needed immediate employment, and who did not have sufficient English skills to succeed at the higher levels of the original LEPHWI instructional model. The majority of participants were from Africa, with 57 percent from Somalia and 14 percent from Ethiopia; and they primarily spoke Somali, French, and Oromo. Many of the individuals spoke English with an accent that was difficult for local residents to understand, and/or they did not speak English fluently enough to become employed in most occupational fields.

Almost two-thirds of the participants were women (65 percent). Project staff reported that African females in particular had to make cultural adjustments in the American workplace related to employer expectations about schedules, appropriate dress, customer service, and other factors.

Despite significant participant interest, the original expectations of a relatively smooth transition path from community college training to careers in the health sector proved unrealistic for most of the applicants. In response, project staff adapted the LEPHWI curricula,

instructional tracks, and support services. As a result, the project met its intake target, with staff recognizing the need for completion and transition goals that were more realistic.

5. Curriculum and Instruction

a. Curriculum Development

Career Launch was partially based on the existing VESL programs of Resource, Inc. Curriculum for the introductory-level class, Job Launch, was developed by the grantee and by project partners from Minneapolis ABE and the Minneapolis Community and Technical College. Content for the class focused on accent reduction, introduction to the workplace, financial literacy, study skills, and an introduction to customer service. The LEPHWI project created multiple levels of training, beginning with the four-week, *Career Launch* component. These levels gave participants the opportunity to accomplish noticeable, if minor, progress when their circumstances required them to leave the training after a short period of time. Some of those who had to leave the program later returned to resume their classes. Under this approach, participants could see progress, which boosted their confidence. This segmentation of the curriculum was part of the design going into the grant, and it may help to explain the relatively high completion rates for enrollees in each component of the program. Table II-7 in the Project Outcomes section on placements by program type displays the number of participants in each level of the *Career Launch* project.

The LEPHWI project anticipated that as many as 90 percent of the participants who successfully completed Job Launch would continue on to the next component, Customers First. This training in customer service was provided with potential employers at worksites where participants could learn English skills by applying them directly to required job skills. Trainees

who enrolled in this portion of the VESL project were to receive additional customer service training in both simulated and actual work settings for up to an additional 180 hours.

What Resource, Inc., staff discovered, however, was that a significant number of participants struggled in early stages of the Customers First training, and the number who completed the training was extremely low. LEPHWI staff responded by bringing in Minneapolis ABE teachers who could incorporate more English language skills development into the Customers First training. The first major adjustment to the curriculum was to station an ABE instructor in the classroom four hours per week to work with the students on their English skills, which lengthened the course by one week.

Resource, Inc., staff reported that this adjustment helped to improve student achievement and advancement, but they found that more participants than anticipated needed to begin full-time employment and were leaving the class because they had to spend their time securing work. In response, the second adjustment to the program involved giving participants job search assistance immediately after they completed Job Launch if they needed to begin working, while enrolling fewer participants in the Customers First component. The staff reported that these changes helped raise the number of participants who completed the introductory Job Launch training but lowered the numbers in advanced training.

When the project was in its early stages, staff realized that many new enrollees had dropped out of their ABE/ESL classes in order to participate in the LEP program.¹⁴ In addition, the number of participants in the most advanced training was also low, because the project's Health Care Support curriculum proved too difficult for most VESL participants. Their inability to score adequately on the community college placement exam proved a barrier to their

¹⁴ Most of the participants queried explained that they needed to work and had limited time available for classes and related activities.

proceeding with the training program in healthcare support. In response, the project enhanced its job readiness component and emphasized finding full-time employment for participants.

b. Use of Technology

To help participants become more familiar with personal computers (PCs), the LEPHWI project provided an introduction to PCs and Windows 2000 computer systems for participants. To improve the hiring prospects for participants who decided to look for work after completing the Job Launch (level 1) training module, the curriculum was revised for the project's second year. The number of class hours was increased by 16 (one additional week), and developing computer skills was added to the curriculum.

c. Instructors

Resource, Inc., instructors taught most components, supplemented by ESL instructors from the ABE system.

d. VESL Components

Because many of the participants spoke at least some English, the LEPHWI project focused on English pronunciation and accent reduction. The other major components included study skills, life-management and job-seeking skills, *Career Launch* services in simulated work setting and situations, and a follow-up phase of customer service.

The basic *Career Launch* curriculum was supplemented by ESL instruction when it became apparent that applicants needed more intensive support in developing their English skills. The project also incorporated an intensive Dialect Modification Training program for a small group of participants at one major employer to enhance their chances of career mobility. This program averaged four weeks in length.

e. Training Venues

The grantee provided classroom space for most VESL instruction for the project and for other project activities. The sole project-sponsored class that dealt with accent reduction for incumbent workers was held at the employer's location.

6. Job Development and Placement Activities

Resource, Inc., had a network of employers with whom they had partnered in the past for job placements. To place a participant with an employer, the project's employment specialist would first contact existing business partners to determine whether any of them had job openings that would be appropriate for the candidate. If that did not produce results, or if a participant's placement plan identified employers outside the normal scope of the grantee's employer relationships, the specialist would reach out to non-partner companies, beginning with companies that hired Resource, Inc., participants in the past. Employers who had had successful experiences with prior candidates from Resource, Inc., were often willing to hire others referred by the grantee. Some employer recruitment took place through the grantee's participation in a local Job Development Alliance.

During a site visit interview, the project's employment specialist (who was relatively new in the position) described looking for employers with a history of hiring immigrants—"immigrant friendly." For example, individual job-development activities were required to help place a woman from Sri Lanka who was looking for work as a furniture upholsterer. Because this was a position outside the scope of the grantee's usual relationships with business partners, placement efforts required outreach to new employers.

During the grant period, employment specialists continued to work to find new employers as they nurtured and maintained their relationships with old ones. Grantee staff stressed the importance of establishing contact with the right person at a business, someone who understood the challenges faced by LEP individuals and who would be supportive of new hires. Staff made presentations to businesses, in which they explained the cultural backgrounds of recent immigrants and attempted to raise the awareness of hiring officials so that they would not inadvertently screen immigrant applicants out of the process. At the time of the second site visit in August 2008, staff expressed concern that rising unemployment rates created additional competition for available openings, thus making it more difficult to place project participants.

7. Other Components

a. Case Management

Like those of most other LEPHWI projects, case management responsibilities for *Career Launch* were carried out in combination with employment counseling and job placement. Staff with these duties were involved in training activities that provided job search skills to participants, and through these activities staff were able to develop a better understanding of the participants. In an interview, one staff member described efforts to work with participants to address cultural barriers to employment, specifically dress codes and behavior, because employers tended to screen out people who dress differently. Coupled with these efforts was a community outreach component designed to enlighten employers about the cultures of the job applicants and new employees. In this way, the participants gained a better understanding of employer expectations, and employers learned about foreign cultures, including the backgrounds, histories, and strengths of the participants.

Because a notable percentage of the participants were immigrants from regions that had experienced severe political and military conflict, some participants initially demonstrated a degree of fear and distrust about the LEPHWI project and its requirements for follow-up with employers. In response, the project staff invested considerable energy in developing trust among participants. LEPHWI staff and employers also had to learn about the major cultural and religious clashes experienced by participants in Minnesota workplaces and assist the trainees in adapting to their new circumstances.

b. Support Services

The project provided support services to some participants. By monitoring participants' training progress, counselors sought to ensure that no major needs, such as transportation assistance, were going unmet. Data were not provided on the number of project participants assisted or the types of services provided. As a result, it is not known what type of supportive service was the most common.

c. Use of Incentives

Since the project served primarily unemployed and underemployed workers, employer-provided incentives were not a component. Interviews during the site visits indicated that modest incentives might have made a difference in the participants completing advanced training.

A manager at the training location for incumbent workers noted that providing the dialect modification training on-site made it much easier for employees to participate, even though the class time was not compensated. He believed that the training increased their confidence, and that this improved the possibilities for promotion of people who were already performing well.

However, a company employee participating in the class who described the LEPHWI accent reduction instruction very positively also noted that she did not have a driver's license, and she spoke about the struggles and costs of using public transportation to get to work and to participate in the training.

In another case, a former participant in the job search training who was from Somalia described her on-going struggle to find better-paying employment while she did cleaning work. She aspired to increase her computer skills and to find a technology-related job. It is possible that modest financial incentives (e.g., childcare) might have allowed her to persist with more advanced training.

d. Support Outside the Classroom

Project staff cited the importance of the general support provided to participants through the use of case managers. Interviewees suggested that it was not necessarily important for someone from the participant's culture to be the case manager, but rather that the individual simply be able to take the time necessary to get to know the participants. This relationship building also facilitated project tracking and follow-up. Most significantly, the participants' ability to achieve positive outcomes, particularly long-term retention, seemed to be enhanced when they viewed project staff as supportive of their general well being.

8. Project Outcomes

a. Skills Acquisition

The two areas examined for skills acquisition were English language skills and vocational skills and certification.

English Language Skills. The project’s MIS system did not include participant data on their assessment post-test results.

Vocational Skills and Certificates. The project’s original proposal included an objective for 65 percent of participants to obtain a healthcare support credential or diploma. As discussed above, participants were not able to pass the community college placement exam for entry into that program. Thus, the MIS system did not report any outcome data on this indicator.

b. Employment Outcomes

Table II-6 provides a summary of planned and actual project outcomes for the grantee in Minnesota.

**Table II-6
Minnesota: Planned and Actual Project Outcomes**

Indicators/Measures	Planned		Actual	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Enrollees*	225	N/A	253	112.4%
Enrollees (Job Launch component)	205	N/A	192	93.7%
Entered Employment (Rate)	191	85.0%	125	49.4%
Retention (Rate)	151	80.0%	98	78.4%
Earnings Gain		6.0%		6.0%
Achieve Credential or Diploma		65.0%		

NOTES: According to the grant solicitation, project outcome measures were to mirror ETA's common measures (Entered Employment Rate, Retention Rate, and Earnings Gain), "to the extent possible."

** - Proposal indicated 225 candidates for intake and testing, 205 enrolled in Job Launch.*

Actual data include 7 incumbent workers

Retention was based on remaining in the job for 90 days

Earnings Gain was measured after 90 days on the job.

SOURCES: Grantee proposal (planned data), Grantee Final Report (outcome data).

Entered Employment. Overall, of the 253 participants enrolled in the project, a total of 123 were placed in jobs, according to grantee reports. When the outcomes for incumbent worker

participants are excluded from these data, the placement rate was 48.4 percent. Table II-7 shows the total number of participants placed for the four types of training programs offered.

Table II-7
Minnesota: Participants and Placements
By Program Type

Program	Participants	
	Total	Placed
Job Launch	192	61
Customers First	72	37
Healthcare Support	27	19
Incumbent Worker Training	7	6
Total	298	123

Note: Because many participants enrolled in multiple programs, the enrollment totals are higher than the 253 participants served by the project.

Source: Grantee MIS

Advancement. According to the final report provided by the grantee, five of the seven individuals who participated in the incumbent worker training “received advancement opportunities” due to the training they received.

Earnings. The grantee provided initial and follow-up wage data for their participants, as well as information on whether or not participants were employed full- or part-time. These data are presented in Table II-8. Overall, average wage gains for full-time workers were nominal. The participants in the Job Launch component (the first level of the program) made up the group with the largest gains; they saw their wages increase 1.2 percent, on average, in the first 90 days after placement. Incumbent workers had the highest average wages. However, the grantee’s MIS data indicate that these 6 workers, along with the 17 full-time workers in the healthcare support program, did not receive a raise after 90 days on the job.

Table II-8
Minnesota: Wages and Earnings Gains
By Program Type

Program	Number of Participants		Wage		
	Entered Employment	Full-time, with Data	at Exit	at Follow-Up	Percent Gain
Job Launch	61	44	\$9.95	\$10.07	1.2%
Customers First	37	28	\$9.86	\$9.94	0.8%
Healthcare Support	19	17	\$9.72	\$9.72	0.0%
Incumbent Worker Training	6	6	\$11.03	\$11.03	0.0%

Note: Placement and wage gain data calculated only for participants who were reported to be working full-time.

Source: Grantee MIS

Retention. Data on the number of participants employed for 90 days after placement or after leaving the program indicate that participants in all components of the project retained employment (Table II-9). The lowest level of the program, Job Launch, achieved a success rate of 82.7 percent on the retention measure when participants with missing data are excluded from the calculation. Participants in the more advanced levels of the program, Customers First and Healthcare Support, were retained at rates of 94.3 percent and 88.9 percent, respectively. However, missing data for participants at each of the three levels suggest that these outcomes may not be representative of all project participants.

Table II-9
Minnesota: Participant Retention
By Program Type

Program	Employed 90 Days			
	Yes	Percent	No	No Data
Job Launch	43	82.7%	9	9
Customers First	33	94.3%	2	2
Healthcare Support	16	88.9%	2	1
Incumbent Worker Training	6	100.0%	0	0
Total	98	88.3%	13	12

Note: Percentage employed based on participants with data in the MIS.

Source: Grantee MIS

c. Progress Toward Sustainability

Project staff indicated the components of the LEPHWI project would be integrated into the grantee's ongoing service strategy. An employer representative who was interviewed spoke highly of the project and its ability to respond to the needs of the immigrant community in the Twin Cities area. Although specific commitments had not surfaced by the time this *Final Report* was submitted, Resource, Inc., staff planned to explore options for state funding and the possibilities of some support from area foundations. Thus, it appears possible that VESL services may continue to be available to LEP individuals in the areas served by the grantee.

D. Omaha, Nebraska: *STEP UP*
Metropolitan Community College

Summary

Metropolitan Community College (MCC), the project grantee in Omaha, Nebraska, was created in 1974 by the Nebraska State Legislature. For the LEPHWI grant, two MCC campuses, at Fort Omaha and South Omaha, provided classroom and literacy lab space. The project established rather ambitious goals, targeting services to four distinct groups of LEP individuals: providing VESL training to support career advancement for incumbent workers, teaching basic English and workplace skills to the general LEP population through community-based labs and peer mentors, enhancing dislocated workers' readiness for work through a new Employment and Skills program, and introducing high school students to targeted industries through a Career Academy. Ultimately, services focused on the learning labs and incumbent workers, as the local workforce system found no LEP dislocated workers in the area, and LEPHWI administrators decided to limit youth involvement in its project.

Outcome goals were established for all of the target groups and service strategies. For adult participants, 86 percent were expected to enter employment, with an earnings gain of \$3,400 for each participant. For incumbent workers, 76 percent were expected to earn a credential, and 50 percent were expected to transition into related employment or advance in a career pathway. According to the grantee's final report, the project achieved an entered-employment rate of 67 percent and a retention rate of 77 percent. Entered employment, advancement, retention, and earnings data were not included in the project's MIS reports.

Promising practices included the project's close relationship with employer partners in developing customized VESL classes on-site to promote worker retention and advancement, its partnering with community-based organizations for recruitment and off-site learning activities, and its use of peer mentors to help incumbent worker participants learn and practice their English skills and explore pursuing additional education.

1. Grantee Overview

Metropolitan Community College (MCC) is a comprehensive, full-service public community college in Nebraska, serving the counties of Dodge, Douglas, Sarpy, and Washington. MCC focuses on providing career preparation and general education programs and services to people of all ages and educational backgrounds. In 2006–07, the college had over 30,000 credit students and more than 13,000 non-credit students.¹⁵

MCC’s Learning Design and Support Department assumed responsibility for the administration of the LEPHWI grant. This unit provides learning opportunities and special support for students who may need to improve their skills in reading, writing, and mathematics; obtain a General Educational Development (GED) certificate; learn English as a Second Language (ESL); and/or acquire computer skills. For the largest component of the LEPHWI project, employer-centered services for incumbent workers, the college adapted its ESL curriculum with input from a number of employers to create vocationally oriented training.

Classes were offered both on the college’s campuses and at job sites, with businesses providing classroom space for the VESL training. Classes usually took place at the end of the workday, and in one case sessions were offered on Saturday mornings at the employer’s headquarters. Two major innovations in these classes involved the creation of literacy labs and the availability of peer mentors. The peer mentors not only assisted with VESL issues but also helped LEPHWI participants understand the “college culture” and academic requirements and encouraged them to consider additional options for continuing their education.

¹⁵ <http://www.mccneb.edu/businessandcommunity/metrofacts.asp> (accessed February 2009), site visit interviews, and grantee documents.

Table II-10
Profile of the Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Area:
Selected Population Characteristics

	MSA	USA
Educational Attainment (individuals over 25 years)		
Total population over 25	528,165	
Percent less than high school graduate	9.8%	15.5%
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	31.3%	27.5%
Place of Birth		
Native	94.3%	87.4%
Different state	35.4%	27.3%
Foreign born	5.7%	12.6%
Foreign-born population, not a U.S. citizen	61.5%	57.5%
Foreign-born population, entered in 2000 or later	35.2%	27.7%
Region of Birth of Foreign Born		
Europe	11.6%	13.1%
Asia	25.7%	26.8%
Africa	7.9%	3.7%
Latin America	51.4%	53.6%
Language Spoken at Home (population 5 years and over)		
Total population 5 and over	765,922	
English only	91.4%	80.3%
Language other than English	8.6%	19.7%
English less than "very well"	3.5%	8.7%
<i>Language spoken at home by those speaking English less than "very well"</i>		
Spanish	2.6%	5.8%
Other Indo-European languages	0.2%	1.2%
Asian and Pacific Islander languages	0.6%	1.4%
Other languages	0.2%	0.2%
Poverty and Language (population 18 years and over)		
Below poverty level (overall)	9.0%	11.6%
<i>For each primary language group, proportion below poverty level</i>		
Speak only English	8.5%	10.6%
Speak other than English	14.6%	18.7%
Speak Spanish	16.7%	18.4%
Speak other Indo-European languages	5.4%	10.8%
Speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages	13.0%	11.5%
Speak other languages	31.9%	19.3%

Source: Bureau of the Census, 2007 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

2. Context

a. Population Profile

The population of the Omaha metropolitan area was by far the smallest of the five project areas. As shown in Table II-10 above, residents in the Omaha area in 2007 were, on average, more highly educated than those in the rest of the country. More than 31 percent of the population held at least a bachelor's degree, and approximately 90 percent had completed high school. Less than 6 percent of the area's residents were foreign born, compared to 12.6 percent in the rest of the United States. As is the case nationally, the majority of foreign-born residents in Omaha originated in Latin America (51.4 percent). Immigrants from Africa made up a small proportion of the area's foreign-born residents but represented significantly more than the national average (7.9 percent versus 3.7 percent). More than one-third of metropolitan Omaha's foreign-born residents (35.2 percent) had entered the United States since 2000, compared to the national rate of 27.7 percent.

About one in 12 Omaha residents five years old and older (8.6 percent) spoke a language other than English at home, and only 3.5 percent reported that they spoke English "less than very well," the lowest rates reported for these indicators in the five LEPHWI project regions. The majority of LEP respondents in the Omaha group (2.6 percent) stated they spoke Spanish at home.

b. Goals of the Project/Model

The *STEP UP* project initially aimed to accomplish the following:

. . . focus on learning basic English and workplace skills through community-based labs and the use of peer mentors; enhancing readiness for work through a

new Employment and Skills program; expanding the labor pool by introducing high school students to the target industries through an expanded Career Academy program and ensuring more students graduate; and promoting career advancement by developing and implementing Vocational English as a Second Language training for incumbent workers that is offered at employer sites. Participants will be recruited through participating employers, One-Stop Career Centers and community organizations.

The MCC set ambitious goals for the *STEP UP* project, consistent with its plan to offer multiple service strategies for discrete target groups. The project's expected outcomes included the following:

➤ Youth participants:

- Graduation: the graduation rate of LEP and Hispanic youth participants would rise from 58 to 75 percent.
- Credential/skill acquisition: 83 percent of youth participants would attain targeted skills.

➤ Adult participants:

- Entered employment: 86 percent of adult participants would enter employment.
- Employment retention: 87 percent of adult participants would retain employment.
- Credential: 67 percent of adult participants would earn a credential.
- Earnings gain: adult participants would each experience an earnings gain of \$3,400.

➤ Dislocated worker participants:

- Entered employment: 91 percent of dislocated workers would enter employment.
- Employment retention: 93 percent of dislocated workers would retain employment.
- Credential: 76 percent of dislocated workers would earn a credential.
- Earnings gain: dislocated worker participants would each experience an average wage gain of \$2,245.

➤ Incumbent worker participants:

- Credential: 76 percent of incumbent worker participants would earn a credential.
- Advancement: 50 percent of incumbent worker participants would transition into related employment or advance in a career pathway.

c. Project Partners

The initial primary partners for *STEP UP* included the Applied Information Management Institute, the Cesar Chavez Institute, and the Southern Sudanese Community Development Foundation (SSCDF). The Chavez Institute and SSCDF came to play key roles in recruitment and outreach, as well as in providing community-based services through literacy labs. MCC also partnered with a local church that housed a small literacy lab designed to assist primarily African refugees. Several local employers including a construction company, a landscaping company, a meat processor, and a building maintenance firm became engaged in order for their workers to receive project services.

3. Outreach and Recruitment

a. Employer Outreach and Recruitment

The grantee had been involved in English language training for incumbent workers for two years prior to receiving the LEPHWI grant. Through this previous experience, the grantee had developed a procedure for helping employers interested in ESL training. Other departments at MCC were familiar with the services available through the Learning Design and Support Department. Interested employers would be referred to the department head or to the college's ABE director.

MCC also conducted outreach to recruit employers who might be interested in the project, sending letters to area businesses to inform them of project services. After interested businesses were identified, department staff would work with officials at each business to

understand the employer's objectives, and the two parties would attempt to reach an agreement on what the college could provide to support these objectives. Factors that were considered in creating the plan included the number of classes that would be necessary to meet the training objectives, the location or locations for training (i.e., identifying space at the place of employment or at MCC), and technical issues, such as Internet access in the classrooms. One employer representative, whose firm ultimately participated in the project after being contacted by MCC, used the jointly developed plan for the VESL activities as the basis for a presentation to the company's executive committee, which approved the firm's participation. The company took part in the project because it wanted to maintain and promote a quality workforce and to help its LEP workforce become better communicators. Its ultimate goal was to increase the number of multilingual supervisors. To achieve that end, many of the workers who completed the VESL training had to enroll in GED classes, since the firm required a high school degree or equivalent for promotion to supervisor.

The training arrangements were defined by memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between the employers and MCC, with the MOUs spelling out the expectations of each party. One topic covered in discussions and often included in the MOUs was that of incentives: what the employer would offer to employees who took part in and/or successfully completed the training. After agreement was reached through the MOU process, the college set up the training, assigned or hired instructors (new hires were usually necessary for VESL classes), and initiated training. MCC project staff conducted follow-up and assessment activities.

b. Participant Outreach and Recruitment

Incumbent Workers. For employer-based project activities, the grantee usually relied on the employer to undertake the initial outreach to workers. According to project staff, the

employers typically had pre-identified a number of workers whom they wanted to enroll in the training, and other employees could sign up until the class was full. One employer confirmed that administrators for his company had selected workers who possessed most of the requisite occupational skills, had good rapport with their peers, and demonstrated good work habits (e.g., punctuality).

Employer-based training programs were open to all limited-English employees, regardless of their level of English language skills. Given the size of the workforce of participating employers, the grantee found it necessary to provide multi-level training activities so that the optimal class size could be achieved. The goal was to have at least 15 workers in a class, although some classes had as few as 10 students and others as many as 18. Rosetta Stone software was used to address the multiple language skill levels of participants.

After candidates had been identified and/or expressed interest in the training, MCC staff presented to potential students an information session in which staff described course content and expectations.

Unemployed and Underemployed Workers. Literacy lab participants were recruited in several ways. The grantee placed advertisements for the lab in Spanish-language newspapers and also distributed bilingual brochures and flyers. Two of the partner organizations where labs were planned, the Chavez Institute and the SSCDF, also advertised the program within their respective communities. The Chavez Institute was successful in both recruiting participants and providing local services, in part because their literacy lab was established early in the project period. Staff cited several logistical challenges, including space issues, as barriers affecting the ability of the SSCDF to fully participate, but credited the organization with success in its referral role, as the foundation was able to reach portions of the LEP population that MCC could not.

The original project proposal contained a component that focused on dislocated workers¹⁶ who were to be recruited through the Greater Omaha One-Stop Career Center system. The goal was for 50 or more dislocated workers to complete VESL training. This component was later dropped from the project, because workforce development staff informed MCC that they were not serving any dislocated workers who were LEP.

The project also included a component to address the needs of immigrant youth. The objective was to increase the high school graduation rates of local LEP youth through the development and implementation of a VESL Career Academy at MCC, with training in several of the area's high-demand, high-growth occupations. This component experienced numerous challenges and delays and was never fully implemented.

4. Assessment and LEP Instructional Levels

a. Description of Processes

The *STEP UP* project used the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) oral and literacy assessments for its testing and placement process. These instruments made it possible to conduct assessments in the areas of reading and writing, as well as speaking. The results of these tests were not included in the grantee's MIS database.

Over two-thirds of the 802 participants in the Omaha LEPHWI project received services in the literacy lab (Table II-11). The remaining participants were spread out fairly evenly across the five other programs—employability skills, Transportation, Distribution, Warehousing and Logistics (TDWL), high school, construction and healthcare.

¹⁶ “Dislocated workers” are individuals whose employment has been terminated and who are unlikely to return to work in their previous industry or occupation.

Table II-11
Omaha: Distribution of Participants by Program

Program	Total	Percent of all Participants
Construction	100	12.5%
Employability Skills	118	14.7%
Healthcare	86	10.7%
High School	109	13.6%
Language Lab	277	34.5%
TDWL	112	14.0%
Grand Total	802	100.0%

Note: TDWL stands for Transportation, Distribution, Warehousing and Logistics.

Sources: Grantee Final Report and MIS data

The project used the commercial Rosetta Stone software for teaching English language skills to participants and for assessing their progress. The MIS contained results of Rosetta Stone assessments provided at the beginning and at the end of the language training for all participants except for those in the high school component. At enrollment, construction industry workers generally had the highest scores on the Rosetta Stone test (Table II-12). Participants in the TDWL and Employability Skills components had the lowest average scores at enrollment. Changes in test scores during the course of participation are described in the discussion of project outcomes (Section 8 below).

Participants demonstrated a considerable range in their levels of education and English ability, ranging from those who had minimal experience with the language to those who possessed some functional speaking skills but needed help developing their skills in workplace communication and literacy.

Table II-12

Omaha: Participants' Initial English Proficiency Test Scores on Rosetta Stone

Program	Distribution of Scores by Program (lowest (1) to highest (7))						Average Score
	1	2	3	4	5-6	7	
Construction	0%	18%	26%	13%	32%	11%	4.2
TDWL	12%	25%	41%	9%	6%	7%	3.0
Employability Skills	11%	31%	31%	15%	10%	2%	2.9
Language Lab	2%	33%	25%	14%	22%	4%	3.5
Overall Project	5%	29%	30%	13%	19%	5%	3.4

Note: TDWL stands for Transportation, Distribution, Warehousing and Logistics.

Source: Grantee MIS data

b. Participant Characteristics

The majority of participants in the Nebraska project were Hispanic (619 out of 802, or 78.3 percent), with some individuals of African and Asian descent, as well (Table II-13). For the project overall, slightly more than half (53.0 percent) of the participants were female. However, the two genders were not so evenly represented in specific components of the project. Females accounted for only 6 percent of the participants in the construction component and 33 percent of those in TDWL (Table II-14). By contrast, females were a significant majority in the healthcare component, accounting for over 71 percent of the participants in that portion of the project. These proportions mirror national employment data. In July 2009, females constituted 6 percent of the persons employed in the construction industry, 23 percent of those employed in the transportation and warehousing industry, and 79 percent of those employed in the health care and social assistance industry for the United States as a whole.¹⁷

¹⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, "Employed persons in nonagricultural industries by sex and class of worker" (Table A-23), household data: not seasonally adjusted.

Table II-13
Omaha: Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Total	Percent
Gender		
Male	370	47.0%
Female	417	53.0%
Unknown	15	
Region of Origin		
Africa	102	12.9%
Latin America	619	78.3%
Middle East	4	0.5%
Asia	61	7.7%
Eastern Europe	5	0.6%
Unknown	11	

Note: Percentages exclude participants whose records indicate their gender or origin is "unknown."

Source: Grantee Final Report (outcome data)

Although spouses could attend the English classes at the site of one of the project's employers, and an instructor reported having met with at least two spouses to discuss their participation in the LEPHWI program, no spouse ever attended a session. Spouses (primarily wives) and children sometimes came into the literacy lab.

Grantee staff identified a number of barriers that affected participation by the individuals targeted for project services, particularly those in the Literacy Lab component. Many of these challenges were related to the personal situations of participants. For example, two students were grandparents raising their grandchildren. Some other participants worked at least part-time and were the primary breadwinners for their extended households; their jobs often took precedence over the classroom activities, and they sometimes missed up to three consecutive weeks of classes as a result. In addition, staff reported initially encountering considerable fear and misinformation among potential participants. In response, project staff worked to adapt the college's intake process to respect and reduce those feelings.

Table II-14
Omaha: Distribution of Participants by Program and Gender

Program	Total	Female		Male	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Construction	100	6	6.0%	94	94.0%
Employability Skills	109	60	55.0%	49	45.0%
Healthcare	83	59	71.1%	24	28.9%
High School	109	61	56.0%	48	44.0%
Language Lab	277	148	53.4%	129	46.6%
TDWL	109	36	33.0%	73	67.0%
Grand Total	787	370	47.0%	417	53.0%

Notes: Totals include only those participants whose genders were recorded in the grantee's records. Among project participants, 15 lacked gender data: 9 in Employability Skills, 3 in Healthcare, and 3 in TDWL.

Sources: Grantee Final Report and MIS data

5. Curriculum and Instruction

a. Curriculum Development

The *STEP UP* project built on the existing ESL curriculum of its lead agency, Metropolitan Community College. Using the specifications of its various employer partners, the project adapted the curriculum and gave it a VESL design. MCC staff worked with employers to clarify each company's needs and the ultimate objectives of the VESL instruction. For example, the program at a cleaning company was based on a national certification examination that the company wanted its employees to pass. In another case, the curriculum at a construction company incorporated elements from the mathematics GED examination, because employees needed to be proficient in basic geometry. Thus, the instructor devoted part of the course to teaching geometry in conjunction with the English language.

In addition to developing new curricula for training incumbent workers, MCC used commercially available software from Rosetta Stone to provide English language training to individuals and to assess their progress in the LEPHWI literacy labs.

b. Use of Technology

The project was notable for its use of technology-enhanced teaching in VESL classrooms. This approach was accomplished by creating literacy labs at several locations and by instructors encouraging participants to use the available software programs in those settings. Interviews with participants and instructors during site visits indicated that the project's support of student mentors who were familiar with the VESL model and its objectives was a major asset. Mentors staffed the literacy labs, where they helped students use the hardware, responded to students' questions about curriculum content, and otherwise helped participants to progress through the Rosetta Stone program. At least one of the tutors was a recent immigrant himself, and he explained in an interview that in addition to providing students with assistance on the Rosetta Stone course material, he also used the computers in the lab to assist students with online job searches and helped them become familiar with the job readiness training tools available online.

c. Instructors

To provide the VESL training, the grantee used one instructor who had been with MCC for several years and hired a second individual to train incumbent workers and to staff the literacy lab. The project sponsored professional development activities for both credit and non-credit faculty in team-teaching techniques that instructors reported as being helpful in strengthening their instructional activities. At least one instructor received training on how to use the Rosetta Stone software. Project staff, including a peer mentor and a case manager,

provided training on cultural issues related to participants, such as suggestions for how to interact with students. Training also covered the course materials, including job search techniques.

d. VESL Components

Project staff developed an innovative VESL curriculum with multiple tracks of study, which focused on short-term training across several occupational areas (e.g., call centers, office technology, and welding). Instructional components included accent modification, math skills, and computer skills, as well as healthcare vocabulary. The literacy labs provided an opportunity for applicants to start their VESL training immediately, without having to wait to register for a formal college class; thus, participants could learn at their own pace and by so doing gained an early appreciation of the technological support available to them for practicing their English skills.

e. Training Venues

Most of the incumbent workers were trained on-site at employer facilities, although this was not always feasible because of space constraints. Training also took place on two community college campuses. The main campus housed a literacy lab. Two additional labs were located off-campus in churches in neighborhoods of recent immigrants.

6. Job Development and Placement Activities

Training for workers not taking part in employer-affiliated LEP classes included job-search skills. Instruction in these skills provided additional opportunities to familiarize participants with English language terms and vocabulary. Placement services were undertaken through several means. The grantee worked with the local Workforce Investment Act Board, the

Tri-County Workforce Investment Board, to facilitate placement. Some job development also took place through the local Refugee Task Force. Several academic deans at MCC and some faculty had strong connections to area employers. These connections provided a foundation for the grantee to include in the program skill training in information technology and welding. As a result, after eight weeks of training, several participants began working part-time at a local steel supplier. The business services unit, responsible for corporate education and training, also had useful connections to area employers.

7. Other Components

a. Case Management

Case managers and peer mentors were available to assist and guide participants through the *STEP UP* programs. LEPHWI staff noted that implementing the demonstration project involved more case management than anyone had anticipated. While student services departments in community colleges typically deal with a range of issues among the student population, these departments at MCC were not designed to help immigrants address the full range of issues that they commonly face, such as understanding how to set up class schedules and complete the necessary institutional paperwork. Staff believed that the grantee had to establish its ability to produce results early in the program because if the college had not been able to help the first group of participants successfully navigate the process, those initial enrollees might have given up and spread the word that the project did not work.

The LEPHWI project took an innovative approach toward case management through the use of peer mentors. Like the participants, the primary peer mentor was an immigrant to the United States; however, unlike the participants, the mentor's home country was in the Middle

East rather than in Latin America. However, the experience of immigrating provided the mentor with a connection to the participants, despite the difference in cultural backgrounds.

The primary peer mentor also served as an instructor in the Learning Lab and at some of the employer-based programs. He described one of his functions as trying to get participants to recognize the need to learn English in order to advance.

b. Support Outside the Classroom

The project made a limited range of support services available to participants. The case manager/mentor helped students navigate the local social service system and provided other support and assistance to the students. Although most of the assistance was through public services, a private funder provided childcare for parents who were enrolled in VESL training; this was made available at one of the local, intermediate schools.

Staff noted, however, that the needs of participants seemed to vary from year to year. In the first year of the project, participants needed help with childcare, but that need was not evident in the second year. Transportation then became the most important need because classes for call-center training had to take place at the main community college campus. All of the women in that class had children, complicating their transportation requirements. There were two lessons learned from these events, according to project staff: “Don’t assume anything” regarding participants’ support service needs; and the requirements of each individual participant must be assessed individually.

c. Use of Incentives

Grantee staff and employer representatives discussed employer-provided incentives during the project-planning phase to ensure that companies had considered using incentives.

These discussions also allowed staff and officials to share relevant information during the recruitment phase. Employers took diverse approaches to the issue.

One of the participating firms offered a bonus to workers who finished the initial class. Amounts ranged from \$100 for those finishing with a grade of C to \$350 for those receiving an A. These incentives had not been announced in advance. So when workers signed up for the program, they were not influenced by the possibility of receiving a bonus. Because of financial reasons, however, incentives were discontinued for subsequent classes. Workers at a second firm were to receive a bonus of \$500–\$1,000, as well as reimbursement for fees and books if they successfully completed GED programs following their LEPHWI training.

One employer representative who was interviewed commented that the firm provided a graduation ceremony and increased opportunities for successful students to be promoted, but it offered no other incentives. The company was considering other low-cost activities to serve as incentives, such as inviting graduates to lunch with the company president. In this company, workers were not paid to take the class, and the classes were not conducted on company time.

8. Project Outcomes

a. Skills Acquisition

The two areas examined for skills acquisition were English language skills and vocational skills and certification.

English Language Skills. The results of the BEST placement tests for reading, writing, and speaking were not included in the project's MIS database. The primary assessment of participants' progress in English language skills involved a comparison of their scores on the Rosetta Stone's pre- and post-tests. By the end of the project, the college had comparison scores

for 593 participants, and the Language Lab was the only program with missing data (14 participants). Gains of at least one level were demonstrated by half or more of the participants in all of the major program components: Construction (84 percent); TDWL (81 percent); Employability Skills (73 percent); and Language Lab (66 percent; Table II-15). Percentage gains of three or four levels were documented in every program, most notably in the TDWL, and 2 percent of the Language Lab participants gained five levels. More than one-third of the participants in the Language Lab, however, demonstrated no difference in their pre- and post-scores; and data were not available for participants in the healthcare support program or for the high school participants.

Table II-15
Omaha: Participants' Improvement in Rosetta Stone Score
By Program
Gain in Test Score
(Difference between Pre- and Post Test Scores)

Program Component	0	1	2	3	4	5	Number of Participants with Scores
Construction	16%	51%	25%	4%	4%	0%	100
TDWL	19%	35%	17%	16%	13%	0%	112
Employability Skills	15%	58%	17%	7%	3%	0%	118
Language Lab	34%	41%	20%	2%	2%	2%	263
Grand Total	18%	33%	14%	4%	3%	0%	
Number of Participants	145	266	116	34	28	4	593

Notes:

- The Grantee's MIS did not include these data for participants in the Healthcare and High School components of the program.

- Percentages are based on participants with pre-and post test scores (blanks omitted). The only program with missing data was language lab, and data were missing for 14 participants.

Sources: Grantee Final Report and MIS data

Vocational Skills and Certificates. Out of 86 participants, 72 (84 percent) in the healthcare training program completed their certification program. Certification data were not available for the other training programs or cohorts.

MCC had previously developed and was implementing a new, college-wide system of supports to help transition ESL students into vocational education programs and employment. *STEP UP* program participants were able to take advantage of this support. The project's final report stated that 77 literacy lab participants moved from the LEPHWI project into college credit programs, and thus put themselves on a track for achieving additional career mobility and advancement.

c. Employment Outcomes

Entered Employment. According to its final report, the *STEP UP* program's entered employment rate was 67 percent and its retention rate was 77 percent. Entered employment, wage, and retention data were not provided.

Advancement. Advancement data were not included in the project's MIS report. One project staff reported that many students were promoted shortly after completing their training.

Earnings. Data on participants' wages were not included in the project's MIS report.

Other Outcomes. One employer representative commented that workers who improve their English language skills become better employees. He believed that such workers fit better into U.S. society and appeared to be happier at home. Within the workplace, he said, improved performance is difficult to measure, and he had not seen a measurable increase in productivity among those workers who had gone through the *STEP UP* program. However, his impression was that the attitudes of these workers were better, and they seemed to feel better connected to the company. This individual believed that the LEPHWI program contributed to the positive staff retention that the entire company was experiencing. He saw the company as responsible for creating a good work environment and for helping employees feel that the firm was a good place

to work. This representative saw improved safety as one consequence of helping workers to improve their English language skills (this firm was in an accident-prone industry), as increased language competency made them better communicators.

d. Progress Toward Sustainability

The grantee, Metropolitan Community College, reported general satisfaction in its ability to sustain training activities for LEP individuals in the Omaha metropolitan area, taking advantage of the lessons learned and the momentum of its LEPHWI demonstration project. The administrator reported that local leaders recognized MCC's successful piloting of a college-wide system to transition ESL students into vocational education programs and employment. This success led the college to establish procedures for recruiting and retaining ESL students. The college was committed to continuing to monitor the progress of the LEPHWI students currently enrolled. As the project was winding down, officials suggested that individuals in the college's Corporate Education and Training Division had to become more involved in programs such as the LEPHWI incumbent worker training activities.

The second evaluation site visit took place in February 2008, immediately prior to project completion. At this time, the position of transition coordinator had been formalized as an ongoing resource for ESL and LEP individuals who wanted access to additional adult education and training and support for the development of a career plan. The peer mentoring program remained in place at the literacy labs as a permanent part of the college's ESL program. The college also intended to maintain and update regularly the *STEP UP* website as an on-going resource for students and others in the region. Finally, an academic scholarship fund had been established to support continued professional development of *STEP UP* graduates, although no information was available about the number of awards or the amounts of money involved at the

time the evaluation concluded. In general, the probability appeared strong for sustaining the Nebraska LEPHWI model.

**E. New York, New York: *LEP for the Retail Industry of New York City*
Research Foundation of the City University of New York (CUNY)**

Summary

The Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) was the lead administrator for this grant, formally awarded to the Research Foundation of the City University of New York (CUNY). Four community colleges, including BMCC, were responsible for delivering services to participants through this project: *LEP for the Retail Industry of New York City*. The project proposed to serve new and incumbent workers and to create a curriculum for area retail and hospitality industries focused on ESL and customer service skills. This curriculum was to be modeled after the Equipped for the Future Customer Service curriculum, developed by the National Retail Federation Foundation (NRFF). Training was to incorporate instructional technologies in order to provide participants with the skills sought by employers. This model could then be adapted for a broad range of employers in the New York City metropolitan area. The project's use of instructors both at work sites and in college classrooms provided options for meeting the different needs of specific groups of participants. The grantee also planned to develop an assessment tool to measure LEP workers' ability to communicate in English.

The project planned to provide VESL instruction to 240 adults in 12 training cycles. It ultimately served a total of 362 adults in 17 training cycles. Data from the project's reports indicate that only 19 of the 53 participants who sat for the NRFF examination (35.8 percent) passed, leading the grantee to determine that the NRFF certificate was an unrealistic goal for the LEPHWI model. Not counting those participants whose outcomes were missing from the project's database, 93.8 percent were employed when they left the program, a figure that likely overstates the project's performance.

Promising practices include the project's flexibility in establishing venues for training, the collaboration among the staff on four community college campuses, and the customization of training to meet the needs of participating employers.

1. Grantee Overview

The Research Foundation of the City University of New York (CUNY) acted as grant recipient for the LEPHWI Project in New York City. The Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Development of the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) served as the operations manager for the grant. BMCC is the largest community college in the CUNY system of 21 colleges and the only community college in Manhattan. The additional educational partners were three colleges in the CUNY system located in other boroughs of New York City: LaGuardia Community College in Queens, the New York City College of Technology in Brooklyn, and the Kingsborough Community College, also in Brooklyn.

Table II-16
Profile of the New York, NY/NJ/CT Metropolitan Statistical Area:
Selected Population Characteristics

	MSA	USA
Educational Attainment (individuals over 25 years)		
Total population over 25	12,647,448	
Percent less than high school graduate	16.0%	15.5%
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	35.1%	27.5%
Place of Birth		
Native	71.7%	87.4%
Different state	14.3%	27.3%
Foreign born	28.3%	12.6%
Foreign-born population, not a U.S. citizen	47.8%	57.5%
Foreign-born population, entered in 2000 or later	23.7%	27.7%
Region of Birth of Foreign Born		
Europe	18.6%	13.1%
Asia	26.7%	26.8%
Africa	3.7%	3.7%
Latin America	50.0%	53.6%
Language Spoken at Home (population 5 years and over)		
Total population 5 and over	17,585,055	
English only	62.6%	80.3%
Language other than English	37.4%	19.7%
English less than "very well"	17.1%	8.7%
<i>Language spoken at home by those speaking English less than "very well"</i>		
Spanish	9.0%	5.8%
Other Indo-European languages	4.4%	1.2%
Asian and Pacific Islander languages	3.1%	1.4%
Other languages	0.6%	0.2%
Poverty and Language (population 18 years and over)		
Below poverty level (overall)	10.7%	11.6%
<i>For each primary language group, proportion below poverty level</i>		
Speak only English	8.0%	10.6%
Speak other than English	15.1%	18.7%
Speak Spanish	18.5%	18.4%
Speak other Indo-European languages	11.1%	10.8%
Speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages	12.4%	11.5%
Speak other languages	15.7%	19.3%

Source: Bureau of the Census, 2007 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

2. Context

a. Population Profile

CUNY's proposal cited a 2004 New York City Department of Planning report that indicated that foreign-born workers made up 43 percent of New York City's total labor force, yet they accounted for two-thirds of the city's low-wage earners. Half of these foreign-born residents were not English proficient and were less likely to have graduated from high school than their native-born counterparts, thereby negatively impacting their potential for socioeconomic attainment. In 2007, 16 percent of individuals 25 years or older in the New York City metropolitan area were not high school graduates (Table II-16). In the same year, 28 percent of the residents of New York City were foreign born, more than double the proportion for the United States as a whole. Half of those who were foreign-born originated in Latin America (50 percent) and 26.7 percent were from Asia. Another 18.6 percent were from Europe, again a figure significantly higher than the overall U.S. rate of 13.1 percent.

About one-fourth of the area's foreign-born residents (23 percent) had entered the United States since 2000. Of the area's residents five years of age and older, 37 percent spoke a language other than English at home, and 17 percent reported speaking English "less than very well." Both of these figures were roughly double the national rate. The highest numbers of LEP respondents stated that at home they spoke Spanish (9 percent), another Indo-European language (4 percent), or an Asian/Pacific Islander language (3 percent).

In its grant application, CUNY stated that each of the boroughs in New York City was experiencing retail development and expansion on an unprecedented scale, creating growth and job opportunities in the areas of retail and customer service. While being multilingual and multicultural in an area as diverse as New York City was sometimes an advantage, the lack of

English skills prevented many immigrant workers from communicating effectively with English-speaking employers, co-workers, and customers. The combination of limited English skills with the lower levels of education of some immigrant workers meant that these workers often remained in low-wage positions. The CUNY project set out to address these workforce development challenges by partnering with employers primarily in the retail and customer service industries to identify and serve LEP workers in need of skill enhancements.

b. Goals of the Project/Model

In its proposal, CUNY articulated the project's overarching goal as follows:

To facilitate the entry, retention, and advancement of new and incumbent Hispanic workers and those with limited English proficiency in the retail and food service industries across the five boroughs of New York City.

The project also sought to create a curriculum to serve the needs of Hispanic/LEP workers and their employers and to make the LEPHWI curriculum available to all of CUNY's continuing education divisions. The project expected the following outcomes:

- Recruitment: 260 new and incumbent workers would be recruited.
- Program completion: 240 participants would complete the full, 240-hour program of training.
- Job placement: 85 percent of participants would be placed within 60 days of program completion.
- English language skill gains: 85 percent of program completers would demonstrate gains.
- Credentials: 50 percent of program completers would take and pass the test for the National Professional Certification in Customer Service.

c. Project Partners

The CUNY project partnered with the National Retail Federation Foundation (NRFF) to adapt curricula that had been originally developed as part of the Foundation's Equipped for the Future program and designed to train workers to achieve the National Professional Certification in Customer Service. The National Retail Federation (NRF) was to support the recruitment of employer members whose workers would participate in the project. To recruit participants, the project also worked with the Local 338 of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, the McDonald's Corporation, and the Queens Center Mall.

Participating businesses—area retail and food service establishments and area business associations—partnered with one of the four colleges. These employers included McDonald's restaurants, the Church Avenue Merchants Block Association, Net Cost Supermarket, Eckerd Drugs, the Chinatown Partnership Local Development Corporation, Crystal Windows, and Duane Reade Drug Stores. The city's Department of Small Business Services, which operates Workforce Investment Act services in the boroughs, also participated in the project.

3. Outreach and Recruitment

This LEPHWI project did not target a specific group with any particular racial/ethnic or language backgrounds to recruit for training. In addition, while employers from several different sectors were served, the project focused on companies in the retail sector. The locations of these diverse companies within New York City often influenced who their workers were, given the city's widely various communities made up of residents from different backgrounds and national origins. For example, project participants included entry-level Russian immigrant employees from a grocery store and Chinese middle managers from a window wholesaler/distributor, as well as other incumbent workers from diverse groups whose native language was not English.

a. Employer Outreach and Recruitment

In part because four different CUNY campuses operated components of the LEPHWI project, employer recruitment and referral processes encompassed a wide range of approaches. Project staff anticipated that the NRF would play a more active role in recruiting its member companies to participate in the project than the NRF in fact did. At least one employer was referred to the project after visiting a local One-Stop Career Center and requesting information and assistance. Because the project targeted the retail sector, college staff made presentations at the owner-operator meetings of fast-food franchises in the five boroughs prior to the grant application being submitted; they also conducted cold calls to individual stores to drop off flyers about the program. Staff reported that between six and nine months of contacts with a single company were necessary before that company signed on as a project partner. The grant application was then written in collaboration with the management of the corporation.

Another participating employer entity, the Chinatown Partnership, became involved in the LEPHWI project when officials there recognized an opportunity to improve their workers' ability to provide information to English-speaking tourists.

b. Participant Outreach and Recruitment

Incumbent Workers. The CUNY project provided 17 cycles of VESL classes for incumbent workers from a wide range of firms. With so many participating employers, the processes of selecting or identifying employees to participate in the VESL training followed diverse patterns. Site visit interviews revealed that employers wanted to select certain incumbent workers to participate in the project, but that their selections were sometimes inconsistent with the efficient and effective delivery of training. Specifically, many employers wanted to select the employees who would participate. The colleges, however, wanted to be able to assess

prospective participants before enrolling them to ensure appropriate placement according to the participant's level of English skills. A common compromise was that employers chose whom to invite to participate, and then the college would assess the candidates who were interested in the VESL training. One consequence of this compromise was that students with different levels of education and language skills were often included in the same class, which made instruction more challenging.

The owner-operators of fast-food franchises usually selected a front-line manager or crew member who needed to improve his or her English language skills. After assessing the first cohort of candidates for this part of the program, LEPHWI staff found that some individuals had very low skill levels. Training for those workers with the lowest skills was delayed until a later class could offer instruction at an appropriate level. The second training cycle was then designed to deliver a lower-level curriculum.

In selecting potential project participants, employers acted in part out of self-interest. One owner-operator described as his objective the selection of candidates who seemed to be moving up within the organization. He cited as one benefit the fact that employees in the LEPHWI program seemed to “buy in” to the corporation and to view themselves as being valued by their employers.

After candidates were identified, project staff visited employers who signed on to the program to conduct orientations for prospective participants. In these orientation sessions, the staff explained the commitment needed to complete the class.

Unemployed and Underemployed Workers. The college that ran the program for dislocated workers bought advertisements in Spanish language newspapers, undertaking what was described as “a big recruitment” effort. The program worked with the local One-Stop

Career Center, Workforce One, and was able to be somewhat selective in whom it enrolled. Staff cited the benefit of enrolling participants who were at a level appropriate for the training.

4. Assessment and LEP Instructional Levels

a. Description of Processes

The State of New York mandates the use of the BEST Plus Oral English Proficiency Test (hereafter BEST Plus) to assess the English language skills of entering students; therefore, the LEPHWI project administered the BEST Plus as its primary pre- and post-measure of English knowledge and skills, using the Functioning Level Table of the National Reporting System for Adult Education.

In addition, the NRFF adopted the National Institute for Literacy's *Equipped for the Future Content Standards* and developed the national standards for the retail industry: the National Professional Certification in Customer Service. One of the project's original expected outcomes involved project participants achieving a specific passing rate on the NRFF Equipped for the Future exam.

b. Participant Characteristics

Reflecting the New York City metropolitan area, LEPHWI participants varied widely in their national origins and native languages. About two out of every five participants were from Latin America (41 percent), with Russia (19 percent) and China (14 percent) being the other major regions of origin (Table II-17). The project tabulated ten categories of native languages (Bengali, Chinese, Creole, Eastern European languages, Farsi, French, Georgian, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu), in addition to those unknown. Almost half of the participants reported Spanish as their primary language (48 percent).

Table II-17
New York City: Project Participants
By National Origin/Ethnic Group

National Origin/Ethnicity	Number of Participants	Percent	Average Age
Asian	10	2.8%	32
Caribbean	16	4.4%	37
Chinese	49	13.5%	35
Eastern European	3	0.8%	35
Latino	149	41.2%	36
Russian	70	19.3%	53
Other	4	1.1%	34
Not indicated	61	16.9%	43
Total	362	100.0%	36

Source: Grantee MIS

The grantee collected data on participants' educational levels (Table II-18). Fewer than 13 percent reported that they had less than a high school education, whereas over 28 percent of participants had some college education, including 11 percent with post-graduate degrees. Educational information was missing for nearly one-third of all participants, creating uncertainty regarding whether the available data are representative of participants as a whole. The majority of participants were women (232 of the 357, or 65 percent of those whose genders were recorded in the MIS).

Table II-18
New York City: Project Participants
By Educational Attainment and Gender

Educational Attainment	Female	Male	Total	Percent
Under 8 years	19	12	31	8.6%
8–11 years	10	4	14	3.9%
12 years/High School	74	21	95	26.2%
13–15 years/some College	7	5	12	3.3%
16 years/College Degree	35	17	52	14.4%
Post-college/MA	27	13	40	11.0%
Not indicated	60	53	118	32.6%
Total	232	125	362	100.0%

Note: Gender information was missing for 5 participants whose educational attainment was not indicated.

Source: Grantee MIS

5. Curriculum and Instruction

a. Curriculum Development

The core curriculum package completed by *LEP Initiative for the Retail Industry of New York City* targeted primarily incumbent workers at companies willing to host and support the project. The curriculum was customized for each campus and target employer, as well as adapted for each cohort of participants in light of their widely varied native languages, educational backgrounds, and literacy skills. The consortium also produced a video explaining how the model can best be used to improve the English language skills and enhance the career mobility of prospective learners.

The original model for the New York VESL project called for 180 contact hours in classroom instruction. After early implementation difficulties in maintaining attendance, this was modified to 160 contact hours of classroom instruction, plus computer lab activities, essentially entailing 20 weeks of VESL training. The project also began issuing special

certificates of merit to those who had 100-percent attendance at graduation. The instructors characterized this certificate as being modestly effective in increasing attendance. By the end of the LEPHWI project, the model had reduced instructional time to 120 contact hours, or 15 weeks.

b. Use of Technology

Participants received varying levels of exposure to technology. In general, their use of technology was at the discretion of the instructors of the core curriculum, in part because curricula were modified to meet the needs of each group of participants. Overall, technology-based learning tools did not appear to be pervasive within the instructional classes, but there were exceptions. All of the participants were given e-mail addresses and flash drives. In several instances, MP3 players or tape recorders were used to record pronunciation, and one of the college's curricula used online blackboards. Through the LEPHWI project, most participants who had lacked basic computer skills were able to acquire enough knowledge to utilize this tool. One former participant stated that, although he was familiar with computers prior to enrolling in the project, many of his fellow students had not known how to use the Internet and various software programs.

A noteworthy example of the use of technology involved a group of participants from Crystal Windows. These workers were computer-literate, so instructors experimented with on-line learning. Many of the company's employees were required to use computers to make sales presentations, which provided a valuable context for learning and applying VESL knowledge in a technology-based setting.

c. Instructors

Community college instructors from the four campuses provided the VESL training. Instructors attended a three-day (20–24 hour) program to prepare them for teaching the NRFF core curriculum to participants. During the project, many of the instructors offered training on-site at the employers' locations, and they incorporated appropriate content and references to reinforce the customer service and language training for participants.

d. VESL Components

The core curriculum used an ESL model for language acquisition, and it integrated customer service criteria established by the NRFF. In addition, instructors constructed a worksite-contextualized VESL curriculum at the different campuses and company settings with the help of employer input. Instructional activities included customer service activities and situational role playing that applied the curricula content learned.

e. Training Venues

Generally, the VESL classes were provided on-site for incumbent workers. Augmented on-line instruction was provided for workers at one company, and one college offered classroom instruction to continue ESL development beyond the VESL training. Nonetheless, attendance was identified as a constant problem due to scheduling conflicts at the work sites. However, domestic and family issues seemed to present the greatest difficulty to attending classes that the participants faced (especially the challenge of finding care for children, spouses, and/or older adults during instructional periods).

6. Job Development and Placement Activities

For workers who were not employed and those who were looking for better jobs, the colleges periodically held job fairs, and grantee staff stated that prior cohorts were often invited to these fairs. Most of the job search skills and placement assistance provided to dislocated worker participants took place through the local One-Stop Career Center, which worked in conjunction with the BMCC campus that offered project services to dislocated workers.

7. Other Components

a. Case Management

LEPHWI staff identified case management as a critical function and one having a positive impact on project outcomes when done appropriately. Case managers helped to ensure that participants remained involved in project activities, and they assisted in addressing participants' needs. They maintained contact with participants through what was described as a "hands-on" relationship.

Case managers stationed at the individual colleges also worked with employers to assist incumbent workers with training-related issues. They telephoned employers to resolve scheduling and compensation problems to find out why a participant was not attending class, and in general to see if the participant had any issues that needed to be addressed. Case managers visited some worksites to check on participants. One case manager described a situation in which he had contacted the supervisor to learn why an employee was not attending class. In response, the supervisor intervened with the worker and told him that he needed to go to class because he had the potential to move on to a better job. After the call, the participant resumed attending classes and completed the VESL training.

Attendance seemed to be a particular problem with the first cohort of participants at each campus. One interviewee stated that participants were initially skeptical about getting something “good” for free. Common problems also related to scheduling (both those related to work and to other commitments) and family issues. Several participants dropped out because they found better jobs. For “no shows,” LEPHWI staff attempted to reach workers at home via telephone, with varied success.

b. Support Services

Staff at all four campuses reported investing considerable time in tracking the progress of participants and contacting participants and employers to determine what the LEPHWI participants needed in order to succeed in the training. Staff stressed the importance of ongoing case management and effective wrap-around services to enable participants to complete their VESL training.

Case managers reported that participants were interviewed after the initial language assessment took place. One of the goals of this interview session was to determine whether there would be any possible challenges for participants to attend class. Issues such as transportation, childcare, and health concerns would often surface during these discussions. Staff worked with participants to address problems identified in these discussions. The case managers usually followed up during the training program.

c. Use of Incentives

The original New York LEPHWI proposal had assumed that all incumbent workers would be compensated for their time spent in class. Project staff cited several different

approaches taken by employers, however, to provide meaningful incentives to VESL participants; these approaches had emerged during the demonstration project:

- At some companies, participants worked 32 hours, went to class for 8, and got paid for 40; others worked 40 hours, went to class for 8, and got paid for 48.
- Other employers did not offer monetary incentives but worked with participants to adjust their work schedules to allow them to attend class.
- Participants from one company signed a “student responsibility agreement,” or learning contract, at the beginning of the program, which served to establish mutual obligations and expectations; it also helped participants know that both the employer and the college were committed to their success.
- At another site, time in class was “on the clock”; the employer at this site also held a graduation ceremony.

One employer representative stated that incentives were necessary to get the right people to participate. Many of the workers needed to pay for childcare, and they often could not afford to take time off from work to study. However, the payment alone was not seen as a sufficient incentive independent of other factors because an individual employee’s motivation was very important in his or her decision to invest time in VESL training. Nonetheless, one staff member noted that many of the participants were paid minimum wage, so that receiving compensation to attend training might be an important incentive to keep them motivated and persistent in their efforts to complete the training.

d. Support Outside the Classroom

Some grantee staff and participants cited two important factors in supporting employee participants: the employers' commitment to the VESL training and the degree to which employers encouraged workers to continue their education. This support came in various forms. For example, some of the owner-operators attended "graduation" ceremonies for participants. In addition, cohorts of participants were described as meeting on the worksite beyond instructional time to continue practicing and engaging in language and skills development, which suggests that employers allowed or encouraged this activity. This practice also suggests that participants provided support for each other and for themselves. As well, some participants reported communicating more frequently with family and children in English to develop their language skills beyond the classroom.

8. Project Outcomes

The New York LEPHWI demonstration project successfully provided VESL instruction for 17 training cycles or groups of participants, which included 362 adults, according to the grantee's MIS database (see Table II-19). Compared with the project's original target of 12 cohorts and 240 participants, these numbers indicate that the project delivered training to almost 51 percent more participants than planned.

**Table II-19
New York City: Planned and Actual Project Outcomes**

Indicators/Measures	Planned		Actual	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Enrollments	260		362	
Program Completers	240			
Entered Employment Rate		85.0%		N/A
Retention Rate				
Earnings Gain				
English Literacy Gains		85.0%		N/A
Achieve Credential or Diploma		50.0%	16 *	N/A

Notes:

- N/A = not applicable

- According to the grant solicitation, project outcome measures were to mirror ETA's common measures (Entered Employment Rate, Retention Rate, and Earnings Gain), "to the extent possible."

* - The grantee MIS indicates that 16 participants passed the National Retail Federation Foundation's Equipped for the Future exam. Due to uncertainties regarding the actual number of participants who sat for the exam, the percentage that passed has not been calculated.

Sources: Grantee proposal (planned data), Grantee MIS and Final Report (outcome data).

a. Skills Acquisition

The two areas examined for skills acquisition were English language skills and vocational skills and certification.

English Language Skills. Data from the MIS database provided by the grantee after the conclusion of the project documented pre-test scores on the BEST Plus exam for 258 participants and post-test scores on BEST Plus for 229 participants. The average pre-test score on the BEST Plus exam was 436 (characterized by the National Reporting System for Adult Education as an educational functioning level of "high literacy"), while the average post-test score was 508 (characterized as "advanced ESL"). It was possible to calculate a change in scores for 199 of these individuals, and the average gain by its VESL participants was 75 points in English proficiency.

CUNY set a goal for 85 percent of the project participants to increase their scores on the BEST Plus test. According to data provided by the grantee, 160 out of 169 participants with pre- and post-training BEST Plus test scores, or 96.7 percent, increased their scores. The minimum gain in scores was 2 points; the maximum gain was 501 points. Median improvement for participants with both BEST Plus test scores was 52 points.

Vocational Skills and Certificates. In the first year of implementation, the New York City LEPHWI project staff learned that they had overestimated the ability of participants to improve their English proficiency—particularly their literacy skills—sufficiently to attain one of the project’s key expected outcomes: passing the National Retail Federation Foundation’s Equipped for the Future examination. The project’s first quarterly report noted that experience gained from administering the exam during the period following the submission of the LEPHWI proposal indicated notable problems for English language learners. Successive quarterly reports, as well as interviews during the first site visit, continued to show participants’ low success rates.

The project’s sixth quarterly report stated that 19 of the 53 participants who had sat for the credentialing exam at the conclusion of their training, or 35.8 percent, passed the exam.¹⁸ Individuals who were successful on the test were those who had been more highly educated in their home country, were more proficient with the English language and its nuances, and were much more familiar with the technology used in the program.

After unsuccessful attempts by several cohorts of LEPHWI training completers to pass the exam, the project staff decided to take more time to assess participants’ readiness to take the exam, in advance of scheduling them for the test. The project administrator explained during a

¹⁸ Data from the project MIS database showed that 22 participants sat for the examination, and 16 (or 73 percent) passed. According to the former project manager, because many participants took the test after the conclusion of training, it is likely that the MIS undercounts both numbers.

site visit that staff determined the NRFF test was not a realistic objective for recent immigrants involved in VESL training, nor was their degree of success on it an accurate measure of their progress. This conclusion grew out of instructor feedback explaining that the VESL instruction completers had sufficiently improved their oral English to succeed in the workplace, as well as out of the project’s successful experiences with participants’ placement and retention in employment.

b. Employment Outcomes

Entered Employment. Data from the MIS database indicated that 305 of the 362 LEPHWI participants were employed after they completed their training. Information on 37 participants was missing. Including only data from those participants whose employment status was known results in 93.8 percent of participants employed when they left the program.

**Table II-20
New York City: Employment Outcomes**

Employment Status	Total	Percent	
		Of Total	Of Known
Employed	305	84.3%	93.8%
Not Employed	20	5.5%	6.2%
Not Indicated	37	10.2%	
Total	362	15.7%	6.2%

Note: Five participants whose gender was not indicated were employed.

Source: Grantee MIS

Earnings. The grantee did not identify earnings gains as a goal of the project. Data on participant earnings following completion of the project were not included in its MIS.

Other Outcomes. One employer representative reported observing a perceptible increase in the confidence of program graduates. He also believed that investing in the employees made them more loyal to the corporation, even though some had left after completing

the training. One of the Chinatown Partnership's process measures tracked how many tourist visitors were assisted by their workers. Partnership representatives reported that workers provided information in 2007 to almost 8,300 pedestrians and motorists.

c. Progress Toward Sustainability

In 2008, the New York State Department of Labor awarded CUNY a \$500,000 grant to train the staff of one of the major employers participating in the LEPHWI project. The 24-month project was to expand the college's VESL activities with McDonald's Corporation franchises in New York City, beginning in March 2008. In addition, the NRFF was to host training courses for crew members and front-line management, with both kinds of courses supported by the VESL curriculum on one community college campus. One other major employer was seeking funding in support of continuing the VESL training. Based on these indications of additional funding for LEP training for incumbent workers, continuation of the New York LEPHWI model appeared possible.

F. Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas: *Sed de Saber*
SER-Jobs For Progress, Inc.

Summary

SER-Jobs for Progress was the grantee for the *Sed de Saber* (Thirst for Knowledge) project, which served Hispanic incumbent workers primarily in the Dallas Metroplex. Each participant was provided a hand-held electronic unit or “book” (LeapFrog), programmed for self-paced ESL instruction and geared to the food service and hospitality industries. The curriculum had been developed by the project’s key corporate partner and subcontractor, Retention Education, LLC, specifically for Spanish speakers with limited English fluency. The grantee initially planned to recruit workers through hospitality employers, referring potential participants to their nearest One-Stop Career Center for assessment and orientation. However, this proved unworkable, and Retention Education assumed almost all recruiting and assessment efforts, relying on grantee staff for orientation support. The original plan also called for participants to receive assistance from mentors and to be referred to such support services as transportation, childcare, and GED studies, but staffing limitations, difficulty in recruiting mentors, and employer reluctance to facilitate the mentoring process were factors that adversely affected the implementation of these components.

Sed de Saber staff worked intensively with a group of food service and hospitality corporations to implement its demonstration project. The grantee expected to serve 2,430 participants but enrolled a total of 1,417 individuals (58.3 percent). Project outcomes included a completion rate of 26.3 percent (compared to a projected rate of 90 percent).

Promising practices included the use of an electronic teaching device that allowed participants considerable flexibility in selecting the time and place for instruction; a partnership with a private, for-profit corporation that had sales experience and strong relationships with employers; and the concept of supporting learning through the use of mentors.

1. Grantee Overview

SER-Jobs for Progress National, Inc., (SER) is a national network of employment and training organizations.¹⁹ A private, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation headquartered in Dallas, Texas, SER was established in 1964 to address education, employment, and economic concerns and inequities among Hispanics in the United States. The organization develops initiatives and advocates for programs that result in the increased development and utilization of America's human resources, focusing on education, training, employment, business, and economic opportunity.

SER provides technical assistance, research and planning, program and policy development, and fundraising support to enhance the employment and training capabilities of the SER Network of Partners. This network consists of 38 affiliates operating through more than 200 offices in 19 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. Locally, SER operates community development programs, targeting Hispanics and other underrepresented groups, and also serves the business community by providing qualified applicants for job openings.

¹⁹ Background on SER is from their LEPHWI grant application and their website, accessed through <http://www.ser-national.org/> on April 13, 2009.

Table II-21
Profile of the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metropolitan Statistical Area:
Selected Population Characteristics

	MSA	USA
Educational Attainment (individuals over 25 years)		
Total population over 25	3,865,374	
Percent less than high school graduate	18.4%	15.5%
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	29.9%	27.5%
Place of Birth		
Native	82.2%	87.4%
Different state	26.5%	27.3%
Foreign born	17.8%	12.6%
Foreign-born population, not a U.S. citizen	71.3%	57.5%
Foreign-born population, entered in 2000 or later	30.9%	27.7%
Region of Birth of Foreign Born		
Europe	4.5%	13.1%
Asia	20.8%	26.8%
Africa	4.6%	3.7%
Latin America	68.6%	53.6%
Language Spoken at Home (population 5 years and over)		
Total population 5 and over	5,628,628	
English only	70.8%	80.3%
Language other than English	29.2%	19.7%
English less than "very well"	14.4%	8.7%
<i>Language spoken at home by those speaking English less than "very well"</i>		
Spanish	12.0%	5.8%
Other Indo-European languages	0.6%	1.2%
Asian and Pacific Islander languages	1.5%	1.4%
Other languages	0.3%	0.2%
Poverty and Language (population 18 years and over)		
Below poverty level (overall)	10.4%	11.6%
<i>For each primary language group, proportion below poverty level</i>		
Speak only English	8.4%	10.6%
Speak other than English	15.5%	18.7%
Speak Spanish	17.0%	18.4%
Speak other Indo-European languages	10.9%	10.8%
Speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages	8.6%	11.5%
Speak other languages	16.9%	19.3%

Source: Bureau of the Census, 2007 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

2. Context

a. Population Profile

In 2007, almost one in five of all of individuals 25 years or older in the Dallas Metropolitan Statistical Area had not graduated from high school (Table II-21). The Dallas Metroplex region of Texas is home to a large hospitality industry, and Hispanics represent a significant portion of workers in that industry. This low-wage industry attracts a large percentage of immigrant workers with low levels of English fluency, and retention of these employees is generally low.²⁰

In 2007, almost one in five of the residents of the Dallas Metroplex was foreign born (18 percent), with about two out of three coming from Latin America (69 percent) and another 21 percent from Asia. Almost one-third of the area's foreign-born residents (31 percent) had entered the United States since 2000. Not quite one-third of the Dallas population five years of age and older spoke a language other than English at home (29 percent), and 14 percent reported that they spoke English "less than very well." Of the latter group, the highest number of LEP respondents spoke Spanish at home (12.0 percent), while another 1.5 percent spoke an Asian/Pacific Islander language.

b. Goals of the Project/Model

The original goals of the *Sed de Saber* demonstration project were to improve the retention, wage, and promotion of 2,430 participants from the hospitality industry in four sites in Texas. The project expected the following four outcomes:

- Program completion: 90 percent of participants would complete the program.

²⁰ One large employer in the hospitality industry who was a partner in the *Sed de Saber* project provided contrary information during a site visit interview, indicating that the organization's retention rate was a healthy 92 percent.

- Employee retention: 70 percent of program completers would be employed after 180 days.²¹
- Wage gain: participants would experience an average wage gain of 20 percent after six months on the job.
- Promotion: 20 percent of participants would be promoted from their beginning positions.

c. Project Partners

The major partners for SER's LEPHWI project were a curriculum development and marketing corporation and several food service and hospitality companies that sought VESL training for their employees. Retention Education, LLC (RE), was the corporate partner that created the electronic curriculum kit used by participants. Through its relationship with LeapFrog Enterprises, Retention Education was able to provide a portable, computerized tool that delivered English language training to participants.

Most of the employers participating in the LEPHWI project signed up to offer training that would enhance the customer service skills of company workers and improve their earnings and promotion potential, thus improving employee retention.

3. Outreach and Recruitment

a. Employer Outreach and Recruitment

The employers whose workers were targeted for assistance were those in food service or hospitality industries. Within this framework, the corporate educational partner, RE, selected the companies that would be approached and recruited for participation. For example, a large hospitality firm was already an RE customer, so the RE local salesperson connected the hospitality company with a SER representative, who then encouraged that customer to become

²¹ The grant application was silent as to whether this goal related to participants or completers. Also, the application was not clear on whether the 180-day period began at program entry, at program completion, or at some other point in time.

part of the LEPHWI project. RE recruited 35 of the 36 employers who participated in the project. All of these firms were customers of RE. Through cold calls, SER staff identified one employer who agreed to participate in the program.

Many of RE's clients were hospitality and food service firms that wanted to promote from within. Their workers, however, needed to learn English in order to move into assistant manager positions and other higher-paying jobs that required customer interaction. The RE products provided a foundation for future advancement for these workers. A training official with one participating employer stated in an interview that the workplace language skills acquired through the LeapFrog device were a good starting point for additional English language acquisition and training. Many of the participants from this firm had relatively low levels of education prior to immigration, and the project's intervention was one part of a lengthier staff development process.

b. Participant Outreach and Recruitment

The project targeted incumbent workers in the food and hospitality industries. Companies whose leaders agreed to participate generally identified the specific sites and the managers they wanted to be involved. The managers were, in turn, to recruit employee participants. Thus, managers or supervisors generally had the responsibility of choosing which incumbent workers would be invited to participate in the project, but workers voluntarily chose whether or not to participate.

After an employer made a commitment to the project, grantee staff visited the company with a RE representative to conduct a "roll-out," which was a function designed either as a recruitment session for potential participants or as an orientation for workers whom the employer had invited to participate. LEPHWI staff reported that while these roll-outs were taking place,

other employees who were not part of the group attending the session would inquire about participating. This was especially common in restaurant settings, where sessions were usually conducted in open areas and other workers passing by could hear part of the presentation. Interest grew in the program as employees became aware of the project's offerings through word-of-mouth reports from participants and/or from their own observations of co-workers.

4. Assessment and LEP Instructional Levels

a. Description of Processes

The enrollment of participants took place at a company-specific "roll-out" event facilitated by an RE staff person. At these two-hour functions, prospective participants completed self-assessments of their English comprehension skills, and LEPHWI staff conducted assessments of candidates' English comprehension and speaking skills and collected background data. Invitees were expected to have completed a separate assessment of English comprehension prior to the roll-out through a telephone call to RE's tracking center. During the project's early stages, candidates who had not completed this self-assessment were given instructional kits with the electronic learning tool. The grantee soon determined, however, that they had to require the pre-assessment as a condition of entry before providing participants with the kit.

Participants' worksite managers were responsible for monitoring their employees' completion of the curriculum and of the assessment processes. *Sed de Saber* project staff did not have direct contact with participants. Notably in cases where companies had designated trainers who were accountable for program results and/or when managers were bilingual themselves, participants were monitored more closely and encouraged to complete their instructional books and the assessment process.

Follow-up assessments of language ability were made through use of RE's automated response system. After the initial assessment, participants voluntarily made the telephone calls at times convenient to them at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the self-paced instructional program as they completed each of these three designated sections. Participants dialed into the RE system, entered their personal identification number, and, using their telephone's touchpad, provided keyed responses to questions from the automated system. Callers also provided verbal responses to some questions. Assessment scores were calculated and stored electronically. Results collected by RE were shared periodically with SER. LEPHWI project staff reported that the corporate partner's procedures for locating and sharing individual scores for project participants were time consuming and resulted in delayed and sometimes incomplete feedback to SER, which created challenges for monitoring the participants and managing the project overall.

b. Participant Characteristics

All of the Texas LEPHWI participants identified Spanish as their primary language, with Latin America being their region of origin. Additional demographic information is presented in Tables II-22 and II-23. Nearly 62 percent of the *Sed de Saber* participants were women (Table II-22). The population served was characterized by low levels of educational attainment; however, a number of participants had college degrees. Over one-quarter of the participants reported that they had six or fewer years of education. Another 49.2 percent had seven to 12 years of education.²² Forty-seven participants, or 3.3 of the total served, reported that they had an associates degree or higher.

²² Because the MIS provided a specific category for participants who had achieved a high school diploma or GED, it is assumed that those in the category that includes 12 years of education did not receive a diploma.

Table II-22
Texas: Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	872	61.7%
Female	542	38.3%
Unknown	3	
Educational Attainment*		
No school	71	5.0%
0-6 years	323	22.8%
7-8 years	254	17.9%
9-12 years, no diploma	443	31.3%
GED or high school diploma	183	12.9%
Vocational/technical degree	69	4.9%
Some college	27	1.9%
Associates degree	23	1.6%
Bachelor's degree	21	1.5%
Masters or doctoral degree	3	0.2%
Total	1417	

Note: Percentages exclude participants whose records indicate their gender is "unknown."

** - Highest grade completed*

Source: Grantee MIS

The language skills of participants prior to beginning the program were assessed by grantee staff at the roll-out events and through a telephone response process with the educational partner. Despite their relatively low levels of formal education, a majority of participants were determined to have “Excellent” reading skills in their native language, Spanish (Table II-23). Less than one in five scored “Fair” or “Poor” on this assessment. However, participants were found to have low speaking and reading skills in English, as over 90 percent scored “Fair” or “Poor” in these areas.

Table II-23
Texas: Language Skills of Participants at Enrollment

	<u>Assessment</u>				Number Assessed
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	
Spanish Reading Skills	51.8%	28.8%	16.3%	3.0%	1,414
English Speaking Skills	0.4%	6.1%	36.5%	57.0%	1,410
English Reading Skills	0.8%	7.6%	37.2%	54.4%	1,413

Source: Grantee MIS

According to the project’s MIS, over 87 percent of project participants worked full-time at the businesses of the participating employers (Table II-24). Full-time workers earned an average wage of \$9.38 an hour. Men working full-time earned more than a dollar an hour above the average wage of women working full-time. There was no gender gap in wages for part-time workers.

Table II-24
Texas: Participant Wages at Enrollment
By Gender and Employment Status

Gender		<u>Employment Status</u>		Total
		Part-time	Full-time	
Female	Average Hourly Wage	\$8.09	\$8.95	\$8.83
	Total Participants	119	753	872
Male	Average Hourly Wage	\$7.95	\$10.04	\$9.82
	Total Participants	59	483	542
Missing Information	Average Hourly Wage		\$9.75	\$9.75
	Total Participants		3	3
Overall Average Hourly Wage		\$8.04	\$9.38	\$9.21
Total Participants		178	1,239	1,417

Source: Grantee MIS

5. Curriculum and Instruction

a. Curriculum Development

The VESL curriculum, or “*Sed de Saber: English for Hospitality*,” was developed by RE, the corporate partner and subcontractor to the grantee. The curriculum focused on incumbent workers in food service and hospitality industries, and it included six electronic “books” that addressed appropriate English language skills for the workplace. The curriculum specifically targeted Spanish-speaking workers and included attractive and culturally appropriate graphics. The six components (or books) and selected examples of topics in each included the following:

- 1) Getting Started (introductions, schedules, being a prep cook)
- 2) Learning New Things (taking orders, responding to requests)
- 3) Meeting Challenges (talking on the phone, being a cook)
- 4) Solving Problems (requesting time off, being a server)
- 5) Hard Work Pays Off (changing shifts, receiving feedback)
- 6) Continued Success (taking complex orders, being a general manager)

The curriculum was delivered through a hand-held, electronic device (see Figure 1 for an illustration of a *Sed de Saber* kit).

Figure 1

Retention Education's LeapFrog Device and Instruction Package



b. Use of Technology

The curriculum was transmitted to learners via the Quantum LeapPad technology of LeapFrog Enterprises, Inc. Thus, the *Sed de Saber* instructional tool was a portable, interactive, and self-paced system that offered participants maximum flexibility, allowing them to use it during breaks while at work or, more typically, at home. One of the key advantages of this instructional system was its interactive voice recording mechanism that allowed participants to record their voices multiple times until satisfied that their pronunciation was correct. Because participants could return to any of the lessons whenever they needed to review that material (unlike most classroom instruction in which learners have only have a predetermined amount of time in a particular instructional setting), this tool reinforced English language acquisition in ways that were specific to individual needs. For the assessments, participants called a toll-free

number when they felt they were prepared to move on to the next level of the curriculum, and they took the appropriate test over the phone. This automated assessment facilitated RE's data collection.

c. Instructors

Because it used an electronic, self-paced instructional system to deliver the curriculum, the project did not need instructors. However, some of the participating employers complemented this self-paced instructional system with additional "wrap-around" training, or they gathered participants at least once a week to check in on the status of their learning. The grantee coordinator stated that, according to reports, the few employers that supplemented the self-paced instruction with personal interaction generally saw the most progress in their employees.

As the number of LEPHWI users of the LeapFrog device grew, RE realized that additional services would help to improve the success rate of participants. This specifically called for providing additional engagement and more "touch points" to keep participants in the program. The corporation thus decided to offer learner support to participants of the project. According to reports, a learning coach was given the task of calling students four times throughout the program. These calls were designed to ensure that participants understood how to use the software, how to take the pre-assessment, and how to access the toll-free number for periodic assessment and check-in. The initial call focused on the pre-assessment. Another call reminded students of the target dates for other activities, such as the post-assessment and graduation. Another objective of the calls was to learn whether any events were taking place that could affect the participants' progress (e.g., personal or family illness, job changes).

d. VESL Components

The *Sed de Saber* curriculum focused on food preparation and customer service skills and on the ESL skills related specifically to the food services and hospitality industries. These focuses served the overall goal of increasing the productivity of incumbent workers on the job.

e. Training Venues

Training was delivered through an electronic learning tool with a curriculum and learning activities that were almost entirely self-paced and that participants usually accessed at home. LEPHWI project staff soon recognized the importance of regularly following up with employers and participants in an effort to directly and indirectly encourage employees to complete the curriculum. Because the mentoring activity anticipated in the proposal was not fully implemented, the self-paced model attempted in Texas meant that many participants may not have experienced the external support and guidance that could possibly have facilitated their continued skill acquisition. This was particularly true in smaller establishments that lacked personnel who were dedicated to training and human resource development. For these reasons, the initial model evolved into one with additional supports, such as the learning coach described above.

6. Job Development and Placement Activities

All of the participants in the Texas LEPHWI project were incumbent workers, and the grantee did not establish or pursue job development or placement activities.

7. Other Components

a. Support Services

The Texas LEPHWI project did not provide significant support services to participants, a situation attributed by project staff to the limited funding available for case managers to offer such services. Mentoring had been the primary support planned at the outset of the grant. However, early in the project the grantee learned that most of the participating companies were not interested in hosting mentoring activities at their establishments, due usually to a lack of dedicated space and to the pressured work schedules of their employees.

In addition, efforts to attract students from area colleges and universities to work as mentors appear to have been unsuccessful because supervisors of interns assigned to outside agencies are required to have, at minimum, a bachelor's degree and certification in social work.

It is unclear whether additional interpersonal assistance or other forms of support services might have been necessary for participants, since they continued to earn income while in training and could choose the most convenient time and place to use the instructional tool. However, the project coordinator believed that many more participants would have completed the curriculum if they had been both monitored and encouraged to persist. She suggested that the low educational levels and unfamiliarity with learning processes of many participants led them to doubt their ability to complete the VESL instruction on their own.

b. Use of Incentives

The self-paced and portable instructional system was considered an incentive for participation. The expectation was that self-motivated employees would seize the opportunity and take advantage of the flexibility provided by the electronic learning tool. The electronic

learning systems became the property of the employers, and participants were expected to turn them in once they had completed the curriculum or dropped out of the project.

c. Support Outside the Classroom

The curriculum was offered in a non-classroom setting. Additional support was largely dependent upon individual employers who could augment curricular information with workplace-specific activities.

The grantee's original plan called for mentoring to be a key strategy to help participants learn English. SER was going to work with its private and public partners to identify mentors and encourage "worker leaders" to become part of a peer-support system. In the project's early stages, workplace-mentoring activities did take place. Grantee reports describe group-mentoring sessions held for participating workers at one large employer partner, where attendees played team-oriented games, such as *Family Feud* and tic-tac-toe. They also played bingo using vocabulary words and/or phrases in place of numbers.

Mentoring sessions at another employer partner were individual, one-on-one sessions with someone called the training coach. In these sessions, the coach and a participant reviewed material previously studied. The employer offered this service to workers who were "on the clock," thus demonstrating to the workers the employer's commitment and support for their continued English language learning.

Most employers did not have the space to support mentoring activities. Further, once the partnership between SER and RE evolved in 2006, the grantee felt compelled to focus its staff services on orientation and data collection to meet its ambitious recruitment and completion

goals rather than on mentoring activities. In addition, the original plan to enlist college students as mentors did not materialize. As a result, this project feature was not fully implemented.

By the end of the Texas LEPHWI demonstration project, the coordinator had identified several companies or “business champions” in the Dallas Metroplex that demonstrated particular success in the rates of their employees completing their instruction. She characterized the employers’ engagement as based on an ongoing commitment to the development of their workers and a recognition of the critical role that their Spanish-speaking employees would play in their companies’ future economic stability and earnings. Those incumbent workers were expected to provide better customer service with their improved English skills and also to respond to the needs of the growing number of Spanish-speaking customers frequenting their establishments. The *Sed de Saber* coordinator believed that the existence of a training director and/or supervisors on-site who invested time in monitoring the progress of their LEPHWI incumbent workers’ learning and who challenged and encouraged them to persist was the factor responsible for their companies achieving high levels of employee completion of the VESL instructional process.

8. Project Outcomes

The MIS database of the Texas LEPHWI demonstration project indicated that the project enrolled 1,417 participants, or 58.3 percent of the original goal of 2,430 participants (Table II-25).

a. Language and Vocational Skills Acquisition

Grantee MIS data indicate that, of the participants who began the self-paced, at-home curriculum as part of the LEPHWI demonstration project, about one-fourth (26 percent) finished

all six books along with the final assessment to complete the entire program. Fifteen percent of the participants completed only the first half of the curriculum (three books) and its midpoint assessment. It is inferred that the remaining participants completed even less of the curriculum.

**Table II-25
Texas: Planned and Actual Project Outcomes**

Indicators/Measures	Planned		Actual	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Enrollees	2430*	N/A	1417	N/A
Program Completion		90.0%	372	26.3%
Entered Employment Rate	N/A		N/A	
Retention Rate		70.0%	213	91.8%
Earnings Gain		20.0%	\$0.43	4.7%
English Literacy Gains			14.9	
Participants Earning Promotion		20.0%	N/A	N/A

Notes:

- According to the grant solicitation, project outcome measures were to mirror ETA's common measures (Entered Employment Rate, Retention Rate, and Earnings Gain), "to the extent possible."

- N/A = not available.

- Entries in italics are estimated and are based on incomplete data.

- Retention was based on remaining in the job for six months. Data are based on a sample of 231 participants; therefore, the results are not intended to be representative of the project's overall performance on this measure.

- Earnings Gain was measured after six months on the job. Earnings gain was calculated using the 43-cent per hour gain reported for 213 individuals for whom wage data are available who were still employed after 6 months and the average wage of \$9.21 for all participants in the project.

- English literacy gains are based on 327 individuals who completed the program and have pre- and post-program test scores. The scores on the Retention Education instrument averaged 66.62 and 81.53, respectively.

* - The proposal indicated that a total of 2,830 LeapFrog devices would be purchased in a 1:1 cost-sharing scheme with participating employers. However, the total number of planned participants was stated as 2,430. It is not clear how the additional 400 Leap Frog devices were to be used.

Sources: Grantee proposal (planned data), Grantee Final Report (outcome data)

SER’s final project report emphasized that the *Sed de Saber* curriculum supported the attainment of job-specific, entry-level English language, workplace, and life skills relevant to food service and hospitality industries, and that the curriculum was not a comprehensive ESL language program. Therefore, the assessment results are not directly tied to comprehensive language acquisition.

Table II-26 shows the gains in test scores from the pre-assessment to the midpoint assessment; from the pre-assessment to the final assessment; and from the midpoint assessment to the final assessment. According to the project’s MIS data, 1,045 participants did not complete the entire program; 372 did complete it, and thus had final assessment scores.

Table II-26
Texas: Average Score Increase for Program Completers

Testing Interval	Participant Gains		
	All	Male	Female
Pre-assessment and midpoint assessments	13.5	11.5	14.0
Pre-assessment and final assessments	14.9	12.5	15.5
Midpoint and final assessments	2.6	1.0	3.1
Total Participants	372	80	291

Notes: Total includes one participant for whom gender was not entered.

Source: Grantee MIS

To collect follow-up information on the status of participants, SER staff members attempted to call participants 180 days after they enrolled in the program. Although the project coordinator noted that staff members had been successful in contacting many participants, MIS follow-up data are available for only approximately 16 percent of participants. For non-completers, common reasons for not completing the program related to the participants missing a deadline. The project had established a six-month, post-enrollment target for participants to complete the program and to take the final assessment test. In some instances, employers established internal deadlines that were shorter than those of the project. SER staff were unable

to contact many individuals who did not take the midpoint or final assessment test; in these cases, the information was entered as “unable to contact” or “failed to meet deadline.”

b. Employment Outcomes

Entered Employment. The *Sed de Saber* project focused solely on incumbent workers; therefore, placement data were not provided by the grantee.

Advancement and Retention. The *Sed de Saber* project established a goal that 20 percent of participants would earn a promotion from the positions held at the time of enrollment into the project. An additional goal was that 70 percent would be employed after 180 days.²³ Of the 231 participants with follow-up records in the project’s MIS, 215 participants were working in the restaurant industry.²⁴ Approximately 10 percent of this limited sample of participants had received a promotion. More than 92 percent of these 231 participants were still employed after six months. Advancement and retention outcomes for the other 1,186 participants are unknown.

Earnings. The Texas LEPHWI goal was a 20-percent earnings gain for all participants who completed the VESL curriculum. Data in the project’s MIS, however, only cover 231 of the project’s 1,417 participants and 372 program completers. It is unclear how many of the participants with follow-up data completed the learning process. For those individuals with follow-up data, 218 were employed after six months. The 22 individuals who were promoted had an average wage increase of 20.6 percent, while those who were not promoted had an average increase of 2.9 percent (Table II-27). Earnings outcomes for the other 1,186 participants are unknown.

²³ As noted previously, the grant application is silent as to whether this goal relates to participants or completers, and it is not clear whether the 180-day period began at program entry, program completion, or some other point in time.

²⁴ These results are not based on a representative sample of the project participants. For this reason, the outcomes cannot be considered to be reflective of the project as a whole.

**Table II-27
Texas: Promotions and Wage Increases**

Received Promotion	Number	Wage		Wage Change	
		Beginning	Follow-Up	Amount	Percent
Yes	22	\$8.00	\$9.65	\$1.65	20.6%
No	196	\$9.39	\$9.66	\$0.27	2.9%

Notes: Data based on sample of 218 participants with follow-up records who were employed with wages at enrollment and at follow-up. Results are not necessarily representative of all participants.

Source: Grantee MIS

c. Progress Toward Sustainability

Employer partners in Texas were required to purchase *Sed de Saber* electronic learning systems for their workers. In return, each company received an equal number of learning systems free as a match for their participation in the LEPHWI project. At the end of the grant, those machines became the property of the partners to use or reuse as they saw fit. The learning systems can be recycled multiple times and used by employees who did not have a chance to participate in the demonstration project, as well as by employees at different sites during different time periods.

The LEPHWI project coordinator was optimistic about the positive response of employers, especially the “business champion” companies, and their intent to continue the program. Interviews with representatives from two such companies indicated that they were planning to continue the project to make this language-learning opportunity available to more of their current employees and, in one case, to expand the VESL project to another business site in a different state.

III. Cross-Site Comparison and Analysis

Although the grantees' approaches to project operations and service delivery varied considerably, each project dealt in some form with several key LEPHWI program components. This chapter presents a brief overview of how the sites approached six key program areas: 1) project organization and partnering; 2) outreach, recruitment, and assessment; 3) curriculum development and participant instruction; 4) job development and placement; 5) participant support; and 6) use of incentives.

Each project responded to its unique community context and objectives. Yet several similarities were evident in program design and experiences. This chapter's description and analysis across sites is intended as a prelude to the discussion in the next chapter on project challenges, solutions, and lessons learned.

A. Project Organization and Partnering

To organize and operate the LEPHWI projects, grantees worked with entities involved in education, with employers, and to some extent with local workforce systems. Table III-1 displays information on these principal partners and their respective roles for each project.

Educational institutions were the primary partners for each grantee and were involved in each LEPHWI project. In two instances, the grantees themselves were community colleges. In the other three cases, educational entities were involved as part of the original project proposals.

**Table III-1
Project Grantees and Partners of the LEPHWI Demonstration Projects**

Grantee	Grantee Organization	Primary Project Partners		
		Employer	Educational	Other
San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council San Diego, CA	Regional association of labor unions	- One employer of incumbent workers (NASSCO shipyard)	- Continuing Education Department, San Diego City College (curriculum and instruction for incumbent workers)	- Cesar E. Chavez Center (instructional space and computer access)
Resource, Inc. Minneapolis, MN	Local community-based organization	- Existing employer partners (support for curriculum development and other project activities)	- Minneapolis Adult Basic Education program (referral and instructional support) - Minneapolis Community and Technical College (instruction)	- None
Metropolitan Community College Omaha, NE	Higher education institution	- Employers of incumbent worker participants in maintenance, construction, food preparation, and other businesses	- Grantee Coordinator: Learning Design and Support Department, Metropolitan Community College (MCC) - Other MCC Divisions	- Cesar Chavez Institute (referrals and computer lab) - Southern Sudanese Community Development Foundation (referrals) - Local Workforce Investment Board and One-Stop Career Center (referral and placement)
City University of New York New York, NY	CUNY Research Foundation	- Multiple employers of incumbent worker participants in retail and food service businesses	- Grantee Coordinator: Borough of Manhattan Community College, with support from three other CUNY community colleges (curriculum adaptation and instruction)	- National Retail Federation Foundation (curriculum adaptation and credentialing) - NYC Department of Small Business Services and One-Stop Career Center (referral, training space, and placement)
SER - Jobs For Progress, Inc. Dallas, TX	Non-profit organization with a national network of employment & training organizations	- Multiple employers of incumbent worker participants in hospitality and food service businesses	- Retention Education, a private educational corporation (proprietary electronic learning tool and curriculum, as well as recruitment of employers and assessment of participants)	- None

Sources: LEPHWI grantees' applications, project reports, and site-visit interviews

In the two projects administered by community colleges (Nebraska and New York), instructors and staff adapted existing curricula to create vocationally oriented training that addressed the needs of participating employers. In these sites, the colleges also provided the institutional framework available through post-secondary institutions for student assessment, tracking, and support.

The other three grantees (California, Minnesota, and Texas) were not formal educational organizations, but each had some experience in providing training in job search and occupational skill training to area residents, and all of these grantees worked with entities whose primary mission was education. The California grantee originally partnered with part of the San Diego Community College District to develop a curriculum for incumbent workers at the NASSCO shipyard. In Minnesota, the local community college and the adult educational system were both partners in the project design. The Texas grantee partnered with an educational corporation to deliver instructional programs.

For the four projects that served significant numbers of incumbent workers (California, Nebraska, New York and Texas), employers were key project partners. In two projects (California and New York), employers were involved in preparing the project plan prior to the submission of the proposal. However, all of the sites also worked with employers who were recruited to participate in the projects only after the funds from USDOL had been awarded. Based on interviews with some participating employers and project staff, three primary factors motivated businesses to become involved in the projects: to improve customer service by improving their workers' English language skills; to increase worker retention by helping workers be more comfortable in their work environments by learning vocational English; and to help their workers become better persons and better citizens.

B. Outreach, Recruitment, and Assessment Practices

When incumbent workers were part of the target group, grantees typically relied on employers to identify those workers for whom project services were appropriate. The sites that served jobseekers relied upon the access points of local workforce investment systems to identify potential participants. These sites also purchased advertising and secured Public Service Announcements in foreign-language media and used immigrant social groups and community organizations to gain access to LEP individuals in the groups targeted for their projects (Table III-2).

As required by USDOL, the five LEPHWI demonstration projects used some type of initial assessment of participants' English skills to help them place participants into appropriate instruction; the projects also used a variety of outcome measures to help determine the effectiveness of their models in teaching English language skills. Because there were wide variations in approaches to assessing English proficiency gains, however, it is not possible to make comparisons across projects.

Sites had mixed success in their attempts to collect the kind of employment-related outcome data proposed in their grant applications. Data on participant retention in employment and average earnings were particularly problematic, as former participants often were reluctant to share such information and staff encountered difficulties staying in contact with some program graduates. Grantees that had previously operated WIA-funded programs were more prepared to carry out the outcome-tracking function.

Staff at several projects were disappointed with the results of their assessment activities, especially those in the Minnesota and New York projects, as they discovered either that participants were not able to meet the expected placement criteria or that the instrument was too

challenging for VESL learners. The Texas project had the advantage of relying on its corporate partner's assessment process and metrics for its proprietary electronic device, although motivating participants to complete their assessments proved somewhat difficult and grantee staff reported delays in receiving data from the partner.

**Table III-2
Implementation Processes of LEPHWI Demonstration Grants**

Grantee	Outreach, Recruitment and Assessment	Curriculum Development and Learner Instruction	Job Development and Placement
San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council San Diego, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incumbent workers at NASSCO shipyard were recruited through on-site flyers, supervisor referrals, and former participants. - Jobseekers were recruited through established Labor Council processes, reverse referrals from NASSCO, and flyers and advertisements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The community college adapted curriculum with employer input and provided initial instruction (to incumbent workers). - The Labor Council shifted to an external instructor (for incumbent workers) and project staff (for jobseekers). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not applicable for initial model, which served only incumbent workers - Grantee provided job-search assistance. - Jobseekers were placed through generic Labor Council program methods and connections with NASSCO.
Resource, Inc. Minneapolis, MN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants were referred from Minneapolis Adult Basic Education (ABE) and former participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grantee adapted existing curricula with help from ABE and community college partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grantee provided job-search assistance. - Grantee developed job opportunities and assisted jobseekers.
Metropolitan Community College Omaha, NE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employers were recruited through letters. - Employers identified incumbent worker participants. - Participants were recruited through community-based organizations and advertising. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grantee adapted an existing ESL curriculum with guidance from employer partners. - Commercial (Rosetta Stone) software was used. - Components were customized to meet employer needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grantee provided job-search assistance.
City University of New York New York, NY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple avenues were used to recruit employers. - Employers identified incumbent worker participants. - Advertisements and referrals from One-Stop Center (for dislocated workers) were used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grantee adapted an existing curriculum with assistance from the National Retail Federation Foundation. - Colleges created customized components to meet employer needs and participant characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One-Stop Center and one of the community colleges assisted jobseekers.
SER - Jobs For Progress, Inc. Dallas, TX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The corporate educational partner recruited employers. - Employers identified incumbent worker participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grantee used a commercial product (Retention Education proprietary product). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not applicable (project served only incumbent workers)

Sources: LEPHWI grantees' applications, project reports, and site-visit interviews

C. Curriculum Development and Participant Instruction

Table III-2 displays the projects' principal approaches to developing program curricula and instructing participants. In most cases, projects serving incumbent workers created curriculum content that was specific to the needs of their participating employers. For example, in California supervisors and management staff in each of the trades at the shipyard assisted in determining the occupational language skills required for successfully performing tasks on the job. This involvement allowed the community college staff to customize the topics and learning activities to meet the employer's specific needs. Employer input was also a strong component at most other sites, with the notable exception of Texas, where Retention Education's proprietary program was provided to all participants through the LeapFrog device.

When employers identified workers who showed potential for success in VESL training, project staff and instructors faced major challenges due to the widely varied levels of the workers' English language competency. As a result, individual workers selected by their employers were not necessarily well suited to sharing the same instructional setting. Projects such as New York's attempted to place participants into educational tracks, based on their pre-test fluency scores, but the opportunities for providing even just two tracks of instruction for the same content were uncommon. Promising approaches that could help to address this dilemma include mentoring and coaching activities, such as those in the Nebraska project and the self-paced instructional model piloted in Texas.

In sites that served jobseekers (primarily the grantees in California, Minnesota, and Nebraska), substantial components of the VESL instruction involved providing a practical context for training that focused on job search skills and accent reduction for non-native English speakers. These project components appeared to be somewhat less structured than the more

occupationally oriented curricula provided through the other demonstration projects. The job search training was nonetheless perceived to be an important component of preparing participants to succeed in their efforts to find satisfactory employment with higher wages and opportunities for advancement.

D. Job Development and Placement Activities

Most projects did not devote significant resources to job development and placement services for participants, since they primarily served incumbent workers. However, the limited information on job development and placement strategies for LEP individuals does show some emerging trends. The sites with noteworthy services in this area were those that recruited participants who were jobseekers and underemployed individuals. Table III-2 summarizes the approaches used by each site for this activity.

The Minnesota, Nebraska (Literacy Labs), and California (V-CAPP component) projects integrated job search training into their VESL instruction. These projects sought to provide learners with some of the knowledge and tools they would need to look for and obtain employment, either on their own or with limited guidance and staff assistance. This job search training component, which incorporated VESL instruction, is one of the innovative approaches that the projects generally had not anticipated in their applications.

E. Participant Support

Most sites planned to provide some level of support or assistance to learners through either case managers or mentors (Table III-3). Although the support was planned to help participants directly with their language acquisition and related learning, most sites anticipated that participants would require assistance with other needs, as well. Project staff in Minnesota

and New York specifically indicated that the needs for ongoing participant support were greater than they had initially anticipated. These and other sites took steps to increase the types of support they offered and/or to expand participants' access to supports that had been previously planned. The exception was the Texas project, which was not able to support case management because of its large number of participants.

F. Use of Incentives

Although prospective participants were offered a learning opportunity that held intrinsic value, many of them were encouraged to become engaged in the LEPHWI projects through various incentive schemes. These steps were in addition to any hints of promotions and advancement opportunities that may have accompanied employers' invitations to participate in the program. Table III-3 displays the principal means undertaken by employer partners of providing incentives to participants.

The greatest diversity of incentive schemes was displayed at two projects that served workers at multiple firms. In the Nebraska project, one approach provided performance-based bonuses for completers (from \$100 for those finishing with a grade of C to \$350 for those receiving an A). These incentives, however, had not been announced in advance and were offered only to the first cohort of workers to enter training. Workers at a second firm were to receive a bonus if they successfully completed GED programs following their LEP training. Another firm provided a graduation ceremony and increased opportunities for promotion for successful students but offered no other incentives.

The project in New York served incumbent workers at more than six firms, plus numerous franchises of a major fast-food corporation. Workers at some companies were paid for their time in class, typically eight hours a week. Other employers did not offer monetary incentives but did

work with participants to adjust their work schedules to allow them to attend class. Some participants received a contract at the beginning of the program to establish mutual obligations and expectations.

**Table III-3
Assistance to and Incentives for Participants in LEPHWI Demonstration Projects**

Grantee	Training Venues	Participant Support	Incentives (for incumbent workers)
San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council San Diego, CA	- Initially at and near the worksite (incumbent workers) - Grantee administrative offices (jobseekers)	- On-site case management was provided at employer worksite.	- Grantee offered nominal inducements for attendance and achievement.
Resource, Inc. Minneapolis, MN	- Grantee administrative offices (jobseekers) - One incumbent worker class at the worksite	- Employment specialists provided case management services, including assistance after placement.	- None
Metropolitan Community College Omaha, NE	- Grantee campus (learning labs) - Worksites (incumbent workers) - Community-based organization (computer lab)	- Case managers and mentors provided support for instruction and other participant needs.	- A few employers offered a bonus to some participants for successful completion.
City University of New York New York, NY	- Mix of grantee campuses and worksites (incumbent workers)	- Case manager provided support during and after participation.	- Some employers offered paid time for training. - Some employers gave a bonus for successful completion.
SER - Jobs For Progress, Inc. Dallas, TX	- Flexible venues through participant use of portable learning device - Some employer-offered space for group activities	- Some participants received limited assistance from a few employers.	- None

Sources: LEPHWI grantees' applications, project reports, and site-visit interviews

For the incumbent worker portion of the California project, instructors and staff provided refreshments and prizes as incentives for participants to encourage steady attendance.

Two projects made little if any use of explicit incentives. Although the Texas project served incumbent workers, most employers did not provide time off or other incentives for their workers to participate in or complete the program. In some ways, providing a self-paced and portal instructional system might be considered an incentive for participation because this approach provided learners with the flexibility to schedule the instructional time and place that would be most convenient for them. The Minnesota project served mostly jobseekers, so there were no explicit incentives provided by employers.

Interviews with project staff revealed differences of opinion regarding the importance of incentives. Because workers in many of the projects were earning close to minimum wage, several interviewees believed that some form of incentive was critical to compensate participants for the practical costs of attending classes. Other staff felt that the training itself, without any explicit enticements, was appropriate for workers who were sufficiently motivated to attend and work hard at improving their English skills.

IV. Project Challenges, Solutions, and Lessons Learned

This section describes the major challenges to effective implementation of the LEPHWI demonstration projects, to whole-scale participation, and to documentation of project outcomes. This section also describes solutions or accommodations by the projects for these challenges.

A. Project Organization

Grantees of LEPHWI demonstration projects encountered three major organizational challenges throughout the implementation process:

- Reinforcing effective partnerships to support the project;
- Maintaining project continuity with changing project management; and
- Aligning and modifying project services in response to the needs and priorities of both employers and participants.

1. Reinforcing Effective Partnerships

LEPHWI project coordinators identified partnering as a critical challenge. Overall, this challenge referred to the active involvement of and support from their employer or corporate partners from the outset of the project until its completion. The corporate representatives' support, or lack of it, generally determined whether local managers were sufficiently committed to encouraging the active engagement of participants. Most projects reported that their partner agreements could have been developed with more careful attention of all partners.

For several of the grantees, the partnerships initially created for the demonstration projects were revisited upon program implementation. For example, the New York grantee's initial partnership with the NRFF was intended to facilitate participation by their members in the demonstration project. However, the grantee had difficulty garnering participation from the

federation's regional representatives once the project began. In another example, the Texas grantee reported the need to address the lack of a clear MOU with its corporate educational partner on such issues as outreach, recruitment, and support services. For the California grantee, the original partnership with the education partner was complicated because of state requirements regarding average class size and the changes the project effected to address the evolving needs of the employer and participants.

To resolve these challenges, staff from several projects reengaged their partners to redefine the goals and clarify expectations for project completion and reporting. Several staff also reported spending more time with corporate representatives to ensure that general managers and immediate supervisors understood the goals of the demonstration project, as well as the expected benefits for the company and its employees. Specifically, the New York grantee responded to the lack of participation by the federation's members by recruiting its own set of local employers to participate in the demonstration project. The Texas grantee and partner both reconfigured their staff roles to more effectively support the project and clarified mutual responsibilities in meeting the project's goals. The California grantee eventually dissolved the partnership with its original education partner when the levels of participation and funding expectations were not met and chose to hire an instructor to provide VESL training in collaboration with its corporate partner.

2. Maintaining Project Continuity

Several of the grantees identified changes in project management as another obstacle to maintaining project continuity in their demonstration activities. In some cases, the relationships and partnerships developed for the project were based upon those cultivated by the original grantee administrators; changes of personnel in these positions required the grantees to revisit

their operations plan to ensure project continuity. For example, the Texas grantee experienced the unexpected death of the project administrator early in the project's initiation; the lack of documentation and establishment of responsibilities for the project presented major difficulties. The San Diego grantee also had a change of management after the project was initiated; this challenged its continuity, as well.

The Texas and California grantees hired new coordinators and worked to reestablish with the partner organizations the relationships that were necessary to continue the goals of the demonstration project. The coordinators also revisited and articulated staff needs and roles to ensure project continuity and completion.

3. Aligning and/or Modifying Project Services

A third organizational challenge confronted by several of the grantees involved their need to change the services they offered. These adjustments often affected the staffing configuration for the LEPHWI project or required alterations in how services were provided. For example, the original proposal for the Texas grantee included a position for a mentor coordinator to provide case-management support for participants' language-skills development and for referrals to social services. Few of the participating companies were interested, however, in hosting mentoring activities, primarily due to a lack of dedicated training space and the revolving work schedules of their employees. The New York grantee faced a similar challenge in providing instruction and support services to participants because of its numerous partners, locations, and the fluctuations in participants' work schedules.

To address the challenge of aligning project services to actual implementation needs, the Texas grantee revised its mentor-coordinator position, changing it to one that involved managing participant data and strengthening the grantee's role in participant intake assessments, but this

was done at a cost of not being able to provide case-management services to participants. The New York grantee was able to extend some classes into locations provided by community-based organizations after the first year, which reduced participants' travel time to instruction and was especially beneficial when participants faced heavy workplace demands that affected their class attendance and project completion rates.

B. Outreach and Recruitment

Grantees of LEPHWI demonstration projects encountered three major outreach and recruitment challenges throughout the implementation process:

- Designing appropriate outreach and recruitment for employer needs while remaining flexible to project adaptations;
- Revising outreach plans in response to the needs, characteristics, and suitability of potential participants; and
- Recognizing that the original proposal had included unrealistically high recruitment and participation goals.

1. Designing Appropriate Outreach and Recruitment

The outreach and communication challenges faced by projects appeared to grow as the number of employers increased. Projects that relied on one or a small number of employers, such as those in California and Nebraska, put proportionately less effort into this activity than other sites, such as New York and Texas, which recruited and interfaced with numerous employers.

For example, the New York project confronted widely varied needs and expectations of its company partners and the considerable heterogeneity in the characteristics of their employees.

As a result, the grantee faced challenges related to communicating and to facilitating a concerted outreach and recruitment plan. In contrast, the incumbent worker program in California initially included mostly Hispanic, monolingual, Spanish-speaking men. At first, all participants were recruited on-site at the corporate partner's shipyard. However, the focus of the project evolved from recruiting incumbent workers to recruiting potential new hires, and the grantee was challenged to design an appropriate recruitment plan for this change in the target population.

To resolve their challenges in creating appropriate outreach and recruitment plans, the LEPHWI demonstration projects modified their original models for outreach and recruitment to respond to the preferences or requirements of their major employers. For example, the New York grantee developed individual, campus-based plans to adapt to the complex organizational structure of the project—with its four community colleges and individually recruited employers as partners. The grantee's four community colleges relied on existing relationships within their various communities to identify employers and potential participants when efforts to recruit members of the National Retail Federation lagged. This resulted in different, but effective recruitment plans, which ranged from relying on an employer's management to identify participants who could benefit from the VESL instruction, to disseminating flyers and general employer announcements of the training offered, to using the initial set of participants to recruit colleagues for participation in future training.

The California grantee, the San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council, designed a second model of classroom instruction at its administrative offices in response to the project's changed needs for recruitment. Outreach activities for potential new hires were already in place, and recruitment involved providing an orientation about the benefits of the VESL program during the agency's general intake sessions for job-seeking applicants.

2. Integrating Participant Needs and Suitability Considerations into Outreach Plans

In addition to their need to modify recruitment plans based on the needs of employers, the grantees also had to take into account the needs of participants when conducting recruitment activities.

The Texas project was challenged by the need to modify its recruitment plans due to the relatively low threshold set by some employers for worker participation. Overall, the grantee's corporate partner encouraged participating companies to target the training on employees who had been with the company for some time, whom the employer wanted to promote, and who were loyal to the firm. Project staff reported that most participating employers used these selection criteria effectively for participation. However, one company's managers selected some kinds of employees who tended to have a high turnover rate—individuals who had been with the company only a short time and in entry-level positions (e.g., dishwashers). Not only did the high turnover rate continue and limit skill advancement, but it also appeared to have had an adverse affect on the morale of workers who had been at the firm for many years and who had not been selected to participate. This company's experience helped LEPHWI staff convince other employers of the importance of selecting participants who had reasonable potential for success in the program.

Local employers in Nebraska supported the LEPHWI project by identifying incumbent workers as possible participants. The staff, however, initially encountered considerable fear and misinformation among these workers, many of whom were recent immigrants. To address this challenge, the project adapted Metropolitan Community College's intake process in ways that were designed to respect and reduce those fears. Community-based organizations also provided

important assistance in recruiting unemployed and underemployed workers, reaching out to individuals whom the grantee would not have been able to contact.

3. Modifying Unrealistic Recruitment Goals

The Texas project's original proposal included a very ambitious participation goal, but staff experienced greater challenges in recruitment than they had anticipated. The project depended on its corporate educational partner (which sold the electronic learning device) for outreach to employers. Project staff had to coordinate with this corporate partner to reach participation target numbers for the LEPHWI program, and recruitment took place at corporate partner "roll-out" events, with minimal involvement by project staff. To address this challenge, the grantee deferred recruitment to its corporate partner and realigned its staff to focus on intake assessment information and coordination with the corporate partner.

C. Assessment

In the same way that the LEPHWI demonstration projects learned that their outreach and recruitment activities needed to be adapted, several projects discovered that their assessment criteria or processes were not appropriate for many participants. There were two common challenges in this area:

- Problems with the assessment process itself; and
- Recognition of the need to change assessment and/or placement criteria.

Projects responded by adapting their assessment practices in a variety of ways.

1. Problems with Assessment Processes

All projects attempted to assess prospective participants' competencies, particularly their fluency in English, prior to the beginning of their formal learning process. Many sites encountered difficulties in completing the assessments, due to logistical, practical, and procedural considerations.

The initial California assessment process was a challenge to implement with incumbent workers at the shipyard site because of problems obtaining a regular space for the project and participants' struggles to locate and enroll in the program. Assessments became easier when the project piloted its second VESL model at the grantee's administrative office and incorporated ESL assessment instruments into routine testing and interview procedures for applicants.

Recruitment of LEPHWI participants in Texas took place at events within participating companies. These "roll-outs" included a quick oral assessment of the English comprehension and speaking skills of interested applicants. This did not always prove to be effective due to time pressures, the large number of applicants whose speaking skills needed to be tested, and the sometime inadequate number of grantee staff available to complete the oral testing. Follow-up assessments were made through telephone interviews with participants by staff from the corporate educational partner. These assessments were conducted at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the self-paced instructional program. Participants voluntarily made the telephone calls at times convenient to them when beginning the program and as they completed each of the three designated sections of the curriculum. Results were then shared with the grantee, although staff reported frequent, long delays before they received results.

As part of recruitment strategies for the New York project, the four colleges planned to assess the ESL levels of incumbent workers before they became participants in the LEPHWI

project to ensure they would benefit from VESL instruction. However, employers almost always selected those employees who would participate, and only then did the college assess candidates. The result was that the students who participated had widely ranging levels of English proficiency and literacy, which made effective instruction much more challenging.

2. Changes in Assessment Criteria

During early implementation of its project, the Minnesota project staff noted that many participants experienced difficulties in their first VESL training component. They decided to raise the minimum entry-level score to better target participants who could benefit from the LEPHWI services. Individuals with lower scores were referred to ABE programs in the area.

The New York LEPHWI project quickly determined that it had been overly optimistic about the ability of applicants to improve their English proficiency, particularly their literacy skills. The major question the project faced was whether it would be able to attain one of the key expected outcomes: certification in customer service. The NRFF had adopted the National Institute for Literacy's *Equipped for the Future Content Standards* and had developed national standards for the retail industry, the National Professional Certification in Customer Service. One of the project's original expected outcomes was the achievement of a 50 percent pass rate by LEPHWI participants on the NRFF *Equipped for the Future* exam. After several unsuccessful attempts by project participants to pass the NRFF exam, when these same participants had been successful in their VESL efforts, it was reluctantly concluded that the certification was not an appropriate objective for recent immigrants involved in VESL programs. The project coordinator reported that this decision was based on feedback from instructors, who confirmed that their LEPHWI completers had sufficiently improved their oral English communication skills

to succeed in the workplace and/or and to secure successful placement and retention in employment.

D. Curriculum and Instruction

As with recruitment and assessment, the adaptation or development of curriculum and the implementation of VESL instruction required the LEPHWI demonstration projects to address the needs and concerns of employers and to respond to participants' efforts to succeed. With the objective of improving attendance and ensuring program completion, changes were made in the following:

- Places and schedules of instruction;
- Focus and length of the curricula;
- Instructors; and
- Types of instructional support services.

1. Changes in Training Venues

The demonstration projects offered several different options for training sites, and adaptive changes seem to have improved participation in and completion of VESL training. For example, most LEPHWI project staff believed that, as often as an employer's space permitted, VESL classes should be taught at the work site to help maintain attendance. Staff worried that educational campuses might be difficult to reach for many participants because of their lack of dependable transportation. Several sites extended and/or eliminated instructional sites in response to the circumstances of employers and participants. Thus, each project responded to the demands, limitations, and opportunities of its workplace settings and the characteristics of its participants in slightly different ways, all seeking to be effective.

The California LEPHWI demonstration project implemented its initially proposed model on-site with incumbent workers at the NASSCO shipyard, but it almost immediately encountered problems due to the employer's difficulty in providing a regular, designated space for instruction and to frequent changes in the workers' schedules that resulted in their missing several VESL sessions and not completing their training. In response, the LEPHWI staff modified the project design several times by moving instruction around the employer's facility, shortening the curriculum, and changing instructors. As the needs of the employer changed from training incumbent workers to finding and training jobseekers, the sponsoring Labor Council developed a second model of classroom instruction at its administrative offices. This model consisted of an intensive week of VESL classroom instruction that preceded participation in the existing CAPP program that prepared participants to find and maintain steady employment. Throughout the project's various changes and adaptations, the major employer partner, the shipyard, remained committed to the training effort and to hiring completers.

Staff at the New York project identified attendance as a constant problem primarily due to scheduling conflicts at the work sites and to participants' domestic issues (especially their need to care for children, spouses, and/or older adults during instructional periods). Staff at the project came to recognize the value of scheduling some classes in partnership with community-based organizations, in addition to offering classes at a variety of campuses and work sites. In both cases, the results were encouraging in terms of improved participant attendance and completion.

2. Changes in Curricula

At the outset of the projects, the grantees developed an initial curriculum for their vocational skills and English language development programs. However, several projects made

changes to their curricula to accommodate the needs of employers and to adapt to the characteristics of the participants. The Minnesota project provided some notable examples of this adaptation process. Many Minnesota LEPHWI participants encountered stronger language and cultural barriers than the grantee had anticipated, and staff had to incorporate ways to address these barriers into their project curriculum and job search training. The majority of its participants were recent immigrants from Africa who spoke some English but not fluently enough to attain employment.

Minnesota participants and project staff also reported that some participants had to make major cultural adjustments to accommodate the norms of the American workplace, such as employer expectations about schedules, appropriate dress, and customer service. LEPHWI staff and their partner employers had to learn about the “culture shock” experienced by participants in Minnesota workplaces and how to assist the trainees in adapting to their new circumstances. These issues were more pronounced for some female participants who were not accustomed to men and women working together.

In addition, because a notable percentage of the Minnesota participants were from regions that had experienced severe political and military conflict, these participants demonstrated some initial fear and distrust of the project and its requirements for follow-up with employers. The project staff adapted the LEPHWI curricula, instructional tracks, and support services accordingly in an effort to respond to these participants’ situation.

The Minnesota project staff also found that participants who completed the first phase of job preparation training were inadequately prepared for the advanced skills course in the customer service component of the training. In response, the project staff incorporated more ESL instruction into their curriculum. Additionally, despite high participant interest and

motivation, almost none of the participants were able to meet the stringent community college admissions requirements for the Health Care Support program. As a result, the project's emphasis shifted to one of strengthening the job readiness component and to finding full-time employment for participants.

The New York LEPHWI project had the benefits and the challenges of piloting its initiative within a huge metropolitan service area. Staff encountered a wide variety of employer needs and expectations, and project participants represented a wide range of language groups. Each of the four community colleges involved in the project adapted the ESL curriculum to the needs of both the employers and the participants. As a result, there was no single pattern, schedule, or VESL content that was consistent across the campuses or participating employers. Instead, the project adapted its instructional core in a flexible manner in response to the characteristics of participants and to the requirements or limitations of employers and their sites. After early difficulties in maintaining attendance, the management of the New York project shortened its curriculum, twice reducing instructional time from 180 to 160 contact hours, and then to 120 contact hours, and reducing the duration of its course from 20 to 15 weeks.

3. Changes in Instructors

The initial phase of the California LEPHWI project relied on instructors from the local community college district. However, strict state regulations on class size and attendance were difficult to meet, given the fluid nature of the early cohorts, when incumbent worker participants struggled to maintain their job schedules and participate in the on-site training. The grantee subsequently hired an ESL instructor who used the adapted curriculum to teach right at the shipyard. This approach was continued in the second model, when unemployed workers participated in VESL training at the administrative offices of the sponsoring organization.

4. Challenges in Providing Instructional Support

The Texas demonstration project, with its electronic VESL learning kits, encouraged employers to provide a place and time at the work site for participants to work on developing their English communication and customer service skills.²⁵ The original project design also included mentors who would assist participants in the learning process. But the project staff quickly learned that the limited space and the fast, demanding pace of its company partners, primarily in the food preparation and hospitality industries, did not allow employers to accommodate this feature. In addition, the project was unable to recruit volunteer mentors, and there were not enough staff members to provide oversight or mentoring. Thus, the instructional experience became almost exclusively a self-paced process for the employee at home, with minimal supervision unless managers and co-workers made concerted efforts to encourage participants to practice their skills at the work site.

Texas LEPHWI project staff recognized the importance of regular follow-up with employers and participants, the former involved making sure that supervisors knew the importance of their encouraging employees to be persistent; and the latter involved encouraging employees to believe that they could indeed complete the curriculum through self-discipline and motivation. This intervention required more case management than the grantee had anticipated or budgeted for, however, and the staff did not have enough direct contact with participants to monitor their progress in completing the VESL curriculum. The project set a very high goal for participation and funded a relatively low level of staff support for case management activities. Because so much effort went into outreach and recruitment, the project's ability to contact and encourage participants to persist and complete their VESL training was limited. Notably, where

companies had designated trainers to be accountable for program results, participants were monitored more closely and encouraged more vigorously to complete their instructional components and the assessment process.

The Nebraska LEPHWI project started with the idea of offering VESL instruction at the work site, on educational campuses, and in community settings. The staff quickly discovered that one community partner had neither the space nor the infrastructure to manage the instructional support responsibilities that had been originally proposed. Staff also learned that many potential applicants and participants did not have regular access to the Internet. In response, the project strengthened its campus offerings, emphasizing the use of literacy labs with peer mentor support for VESL practice; sought additional support from its community partners with outreach and recruitment; and expanded production and dissemination of printed materials. The project's comprehensive approach of providing training and support at work sites and community college campuses served participants well, and employers indicated high rates of satisfaction with their employees' training. In addition, the Nebraska grantee developed additional programs using innovative VESL curriculum to allow multiple tracts of study for short-term training across several occupational areas that lead to high-demand careers with career paths.

E. Project Outcomes

Four of the five LEPHWI grantees met their recruitment or enrollment objectives. However, performance related to planned project outcomes was decidedly mixed, specifically, the number or proportion of participants who completed the training, those who were placed in employment, or those who received increased wages and/or promotions. Relationships with and roles played by corporate partners appear to be the key factor in an LEPHWI demonstration

project's ability to effectively adapt its implementation procedures and achieve its targets of success for VESL learners.

Employer engagement and support often determined the success of grantees' activities in outreach, recruitment, assessment, and adaptation of curricula in response to employee characteristics. As well, employer engagement contributed significantly to the motivation of participants to persist in completing their coursework. In part, this engagement provided important advice and feedback to LEPHWI staff, as well as access to worksites; and it made overseeing the progress of employees possible. Finally, employer engagement often resulted in concrete incentives for employee participants. When these elements of employer engagement and support were accessible to grantee staff, staff members could modify or correct project activities quickly and participants were more engaged in learning activities. However, when these elements were missing, project staff often were not able to recognize and correct a problem in time to make a difference in terms of employee progress and success. Consequently, a wide variety of incumbent workers and unemployed individuals completed VESL training with measurable positive outcomes as a result of strong employer engagement.

As outlined in the above sections, flexibility and resiliency characterized the responses of the five grantees in adapting their demonstration models in order to recruit participants and assist them in completing the VESL training.

F. Conclusion

In summary, the factors critical to the success of the LEPHWI demonstration projects included active engagement of employers in creating or adapting a VESL curriculum to meet their workplace requirements; employers' support in recruiting and maintaining participants; the presence of a director of training from the employers and the presence of on-site instruction; the

awareness and enthusiasm of a participant's immediate supervisor; and the employer's ability and willingness to provide incentives to the workers for their participation in and completion of the VESL training.

Very large employer operations and national corporations and franchises benefited from having several of these factors. For example, the California shipyard had a director of training who played a significant role in the grantee work in adapting the curriculum, as did the four community colleges in the New York CUNY system. Four of the companies that the Texas project coordinator identified as most supportive and the one in New York for which the LEPHWI project received additional funding for training were national fast-food franchises or major grocery chains with training directors. In contrast, many of the relatively small companies in these and other project areas did not have the infrastructure that provided personnel who could play such an active, supportive role in the LEPHWI projects.

V. Implications for the Future

The trends described in Chapter I, such as continued growth in the numbers of LEP individuals in the U. S. population and workforce, will affect the social and economic features of our country into the foreseeable future. Immigrants from Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe continue to enter the United States, many of them seeking employment in the labor market. Those who are relatively proficient in English generally find employment opportunities that are more diverse and remunerative than those available to immigrants who are not fluent in English. Immigrants who lack occupational skills and advanced education in their native language face even more constrained options.

It is generally accepted that, in both national and regional economies, workers who lack advanced skills and competencies will encounter considerable challenges in achieving secure employment at good wages, regardless of their LEP status. Employers in the United States are seeking workers who have not only the requisite education and experience but also the relevant soft skills, such as interpersonal communications and analytical skills. When their position is that of breadwinner and head of households, most LEP adults must overcome time constraints, family obligations, and other challenges to acquire the education and skills they need to successfully participate and advance in the workforce.

The skill requirements of employers and the country's current demographic trends are, therefore, creating a high demand for training in English language proficiency, especially in relation to occupational skills. In part because many of the consumers of this training are working adults who cannot forego current income to improve future earnings capabilities, these trends are generating significant new challenges for employers, educators, community- and faith-based groups, and the public workforce investment system. Service providers and workforce

system intermediaries, along with the consumers themselves, are finding new ways to meet the emerging demand for relevant and timely programming that addresses these challenges.

The LEPHWI demonstration program was designed to improve VESL training and access to employment for LEP persons and to better serve Hispanic workers through workforce investment programs that address the specific employment challenges faced by members of LEP groups. Demonstration projects were designed to help Hispanic Americans and other LEP persons develop English language and occupational skills to prepare them for jobs in high-growth/high-demand industries. Because five projects were funded and each operated in a unique economic and social environment, the expectations for the projects focused modestly on exploring workable models and learning about designing and implementing innovative approaches. The program was not designed to produce definitive findings on the relative effectiveness of different services or training techniques. It may not be possible to generalize the lessons learned from these projects across all LEP subpopulations or local economies. The experiences of the five sites and the observations from the evaluation, however, may indicate factors that bear consideration in designing VESL programs for LEP individuals. The findings may also suggest legislation or policies that can affect the implementation of effective educational and social service programs designed to assist LEP populations.

This chapter summarizes the observations of the evaluation team, based on the experiences of the LEPHWI grantees.

1. Because many LEP individuals are already working, programs that addressed the needs of incumbent LEP workers appeared to be more successful than those targeted on other subgroups within the LEP and Hispanic population.

One of the more promising ways to provide relevant vocational education to LEP individuals may be through incumbent worker training. Most LEP individuals are adults who cannot forego income in an attempt to improve in their earnings and employment prospects. These individuals also have significant family demands on their time that affect their ability to attend long-term, formal training. Organizing and offering VESL training in cooperation with and support from employers proved effective in several of the demonstration projects as a viable means of responding to the income and personal needs of the target group, while helping to improve their English language and vocational skills.

One challenge associated with this approach, however, is that many employers do not perceive the value of investing their company time and resources in such a training venture. Thus, outreach to employers and workers alike must be crafted in a manner that recognizes and uses the factors that drive them to participate. Furthermore, since most traditional job-training programs are aimed at unemployed adults or dislocated workers (only a small proportion of individuals served by publicly funded programs are incumbent workers), issues related to participant eligibility and performance measurement would have to be addressed before significant numbers of LEP individuals could be served through such programs.

2. LEP individuals who participated in the VESL training were motivated to do so for diverse reasons.

Some LEPHWI demonstration project participants anticipated financial rewards from their involvement, in terms of promotions and/or higher pay. Others sought to improve their English language skills, with less regard to the potential impact on job and earnings; they wanted to be able to function better in English-dominated settings in their communities and to help their children with their school work. Conversely, some potential participants did not enroll because

they could not discern the value of participating. Still others saw value in the program but did not enroll or ceased participating because of the loss of earnings caused by the time they had to spend in class. Work schedules almost always took precedence over class schedules. Many potential participants also struggled with transportation issues and their need to care for family members. In general, many eligible individuals chose not to participate or ended their participation in VESL training for a wide range of reasons, including those related to finances, family obligations, job demands, and other personal considerations.

Programs aimed at LEP individuals can reach a broader audience if their design reflects a recognition of the competing interests and needs of prospective participants. Approaches that incorporate flexible scheduling, convenient training locations (at an employment site or a place convenient to public transportation), and curricula that address workplace and non-workplace topics appear to be relatively more successful at attracting targeted participants.

3. Employers decided to participate in the LEP training for a range of reasons.

Some employers stated that they anticipated an improvement in their bottom line, either directly or indirectly, through their involvement in programs that provided VESL training to their LEP workers. Indirect reasons dominated their explanations; these included improved worker safety (fewer on-the-job injuries would mean less paid time off, lower worker's compensation costs, and lower insurance premiums), reduced attrition rates (happier workers would be more likely to remain with their employer), and better customer service skills (leading to more satisfied customers who would be more likely to make repeat purchases). Some employers saw themselves in a supportive role and felt that by providing VESL training they would be improving the citizenship skills of their LEP workers. Although this information is from a small

sample of employers, it suggests that employer outreach efforts must consider the full range of reasons why employers decide to participate in LEP training programs.

Although another group of employers may have wanted to participate but could not, the evaluation did not collect sufficient information to suggest how providers could address these “willing but unable” employers. However, it is possible that since most of the demonstration projects assumed that on-site training was preferable for both employers and incumbent workers, businesses without available space may have hesitated to commit to such an undertaking.

4. VESL programs that offer flexibility and/or options in the scheduling, location, and level of instruction appear the most promising (i.e., they avoid one-size-fits-all designs).

Because learners enter training programs with different levels of English fluency and educational attainment, as well as with varying personal needs and obligations, VESL projects should incorporate approaches that ensure that the needs of both participants and employers (in the case of incumbent workers) are reflected in program designs. To the maximum extent possible, projects should incorporate the following:

- **The location of VESL instruction should be convenient for participants.** For many learners, this meant holding classes at the worksite; for others, it meant holding classes at sites that are accessible by public transportation. The portable LeapFrog device allowed learners in Texas to undertake instruction when and where they chose.
- If learners cannot be given options as to when and where the instruction takes place, **instruction should occur immediately before or after work**, and/or there should be opportunities for make-up classes.

- **Curricular content should reflect participants' assessed English language fluency levels.**
- **Curricula should be tiered** to accommodate groups of learners with different English language abilities.
- **Programs of instruction that offer either open-entry/open-exit or multiple opportunities to exit after achieving specific levels of competency are recommended.**

These approaches provide learners with an incentive to participate, and they lessen the negative effects of having to leave a course of instruction early due to personal reasons.

5. Learners benefit from personalized assistance.

Projects found that direct, personal engagement of and assistance to participants tended to improve their persistence and outcomes, whether the engagement and assistance was through mentors, case managers, involved instructors, supervisors, community-based groups, or other means. Even highly motivated LEP participants faced barriers, but they could often overcome these barriers with assistance from one or more of the aforementioned individuals or entities.

6. Incorporating a job search assistance component into the VESL training programs, especially those that serve unemployed LEP individuals, appears to be a promising strategy.

Many LEP individuals are already working to maintain an income and usually are supporting family members. To the extent that programs include LEP jobseekers among their participants, the provision of job search assistance training for non-native English speakers appears to be a valuable aspect of service provision. This component could also be relevant for incumbent workers, although it may be less appropriate in the eyes of employers who may be providing space, release time, or other resources so that their employees can participate. The

experiences of the LEPHWI demonstration projects suggest that LEP jobseekers appear to benefit from exposure to and training on how to look for employment in the United States. Relevant topics that were unfamiliar to many participants included aspects of Internet-based job searches, the preparation of a resume using computer software, interviewing skills, and similar traditional components of a job search program. In particular, LEP individuals who come from cultural backgrounds significantly different from those in the United States benefitted from exposure to and discussion of this country's norms of interpersonal behavior (e.g., looking someone in the eye, shaking hands), ways that genders typically interact in workplace settings, and related topics.

This type of training offers an additional advantage: it exposes learners to the basics of using a computer. Although some LEP individuals have had experience with computers, computer literacy is a skill that appears less common among this population, perhaps due to their limited economic resources and lack of access.

7. Measuring the performance of LEP programs may require innovative approaches to calculating program outcomes.

Given the experiences of the five LEPHWI sites, measuring the performance of programs serving LEP individuals exclusively may best be done on a program-by-program basis, using measures designed to capture outcome goals that are relevant to each program effort. The measures should be meaningful to three distinct stakeholder groups: participants, employers, and investors. Educational partners might represent a fourth stakeholder to be considered in designing a measurement system.

The standard performance measures for WIA programs (as contained in the USDOL's common measures) may not be the most appropriate means of measuring performance for

programs focused on LEP individuals. To the extent that such programs serve incumbent workers, the entered employment measure and the wage gain measure appear to be less useful. Retention in employment could be meaningful if that outcome were compared to a norm that was derived from data for non-participating incumbent LEP workers who were similar to those served.

8. Marketing of an LEP program should address the diversity of positive outcomes that employers and LEP individuals seek from such a program.

In addition to occupationally relevant gains (employer approval, possible wage increases, potential promotions), many LEP individuals identify several benefits of VESL instruction: improved interaction with other workers and community members through improved language skills, protection from unemployment through skills training, and exposure to strategies for finding new employment. The motivation to participate very likely varies across diverse groups of LEP individuals, just as it does for companies in different sectors of the economy. Employers have different reasons for participating: They want to invest in the long-term economic resilience of their companies; they have concerns about workforce shortages; they want to improve service to their customers; they want to contribute to the civic well-being of their communities; and so on. Outreach efforts should attempt to reflect this multiplicity of reasons for different groups of LEP individuals and for the variety of employers interested in participating in LEP programs.

Areas Requiring Additional Research

Information collected from the LEPHWI demonstration projects was insufficient to identify promising practices in several critical areas. These topics for which additional research would be valuable are described below.

1. Additional research is needed to determine which type of VESL training is most effective in specific circumstances.

VESL curricula used in the projects included those created to meet the specific needs of workers at a single firm, general programming aimed at workers in a specific sector, and generic programming for individuals seeking to learn English. Training typically consisted of curricula adapted in some manner to the specific needs of the employers and/or the participants. Most common were vocational components created to meet the objectives of participating employers (e.g., helping workers pass a credentialing examination). Two sites used off-the-shelf electronic learning programs, one of which (from Retention Education, LLC) was designed for hospitality and retail sectors, and the other (Rosetta Stone) a generic language-training program. Sufficient information is not available to determine which of these approaches is most effective.

Two projects were led by community colleges that adapted their basic ESL curriculum. They succeeded in attaining their target numbers but encountered considerable frustration in trying to prepare participants for continued occupational training and credentials. If expanding the access of LEP individuals to higher levels of vocational training is a goal, more needs to be understood about the resources of these individuals and the institutional barriers they face in seeking entry to academic and technical degree programs.

2. The full potential for on-line, electronic tools and other kinds of self-paced VESL instruction continues to be unknown. More needs to be learned about how these kinds of tools can best support low-income LEP workers and jobseekers pressured by distracting demands on their time and energy.

LEPHWI project staff and instructors suggested that many of the LEPHWI projects had had minimal opportunities to familiarize themselves with computers or other electronic devices.

Those projects that provided commuter access and/or partnered with community organizations to offer some opportunities in a language lab reported widespread satisfaction for their efforts. Applied research that looks at expanded opportunities for such support of VESL learners, including the use of funds to ensure structured partnerships with neighborhood schools and libraries that already have computer labs, are worth considering.

Another relevant research topic would be to contrast how hand-held electronic devices, such as that of the Texas demonstration project, might be more realistically supported. This topic begs two critical questions: what should expectations be for the number of LEP individuals served using these devices; and how could mentoring and encouragement for completion of the curriculum be incorporated into ventures that employ these devices. Any plan to use hand-held electronic devices for LEP educational efforts, however, would require greater certainty about how to accurately assess the language gains of those using the device, as well as greater certainty about the instructional effectiveness.

3. The eight “implications” enumerated earlier in this chapter are drawn from an extremely small sample. Additional research leading to the development of evidence-based practices for helping Hispanic Americans and other LEP persons develop language and occupational skills would represent a positive step.

The experiences of the five grantees and the activities conducted through the evaluation constitute a modest addition to the body of knowledge regarding how to design and provide effective workforce and English language services to non-native English speakers. From the information gathered for the evaluation, it is clear that the individuals in the target population have diverse needs and expectations, barriers and levels of preparedness; that service providers design interventions which may include forms of assistance beyond the required language and

vocational skill components; that the vocational skill components themselves may be off the shelf or custom-designed or a hybrid; and that, in considering the business community, employers become involved in this activity for different reasons.

Research through projects with experimental designs could assist in uncovering information about a substantial number of program design and management issues, such as how much specific services are connected to particular outcomes, whether certain subpopulations of LEP individuals are more effectively served through particular service strategies, and in identifying how the needs of LEP individuals diverge from those of other low-income adults or immigrants who are not limited English proficient. There is, no doubt, an ample number of topics on which to develop evidence-based practices concerning workforce services for LEP individuals.

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List of Acronyms

ABE	Adult Basic Education
BEST	Basic English Skills Test
BMCC	Borough of Manhattan Community College
CAPP	Career and Apprenticeship Preparation Program
CASAS	Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System
CUNY	City University of New York
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETA	Employment and Training Administration
GED	General Education Development
LEP	Limited English Proficient
LEPHWI	Limited English Proficiency and Hispanic Workforce Initiative
MCC	Metropolitan Community College
MIS	Management Information System
MOU	Memoranda of Understanding
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
NASSCO	National Steel and Shipbuilding Company
NRF	National Retail Federation
NRFF	National Retail Federation Foundation
PC	Personal computer
RE	Retention Education, LLC
SGA	Solicitation for Grant Applications
SSCDF	Southern Sudanese Community Development Foundation
TDWL	Transportation, Distribution, Warehousing, and Logistics
USDOL	U.S. Department of Labor
V-CAPP	Vocational-Career and Apprenticeship Preparation Program
VESL	Vocational English as a Second Language
WIA	Workforce Investment Act