Riverside County Economic Development Agency

Evaluation of the Linking Innovation, Knowledge, and Employment Program

Process Study Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

In July 2012, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), through the Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF), awarded a grant to the Riverside County Economic Development Agency (EDA) in Riverside, California. The purpose of the grant was to implement the Linking Innovation, Knowledge, and Employment (@LIKE) program in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties. The original program design sought to serve young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 who are unemployed and not in school, and any one of the following: low-income, gang-involved, or an ex-offender, receiving public assistance, or a recently separated veteran. The level of disconnectedness was defined to be young adults who were not in school or unemployed for at least 90 days. As the program evolved over the past 2 years, the definition of "disconnected" for young adults 22–24 years of age was changed to consider individuals who, within the preceding 90 days, had worked for 100 hours or less in a sporadic manner. The original definition of "disconnected" determined at the beginning of the program continues to apply for individuals 18-21[1].

The program has three main goals:

1. To help participants achieve educational and employment goals.
2. To create a network through which the three consortium counties can collaborate to better serve this hard-to-reach population.
3. To develop a service delivery model that can be replicated in other areas and used to improve the lives of other disconnected young adults throughout California and the United States.

As part of the WIF funding requirements, grantees are required to engage a third party independent evaluator to evaluate the grant initiative. In November 2012, the Riverside County EDA awarded a contract to IMPAQ International, LLC (IMPAQ) to conduct the evaluation of the @LIKE program. The evaluation was designed to address the following research questions:

- Does @LIKE improve the education and employment outcomes for disconnected young adults? If so, what improvements are achieved?
- How do the education and employment outcomes of @LIKE participants compare to the outcomes of disconnected young adults who did not participate in the @LIKE program, but participated in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Youth program?
- How effectively are participating organizations able to implement the @LIKE program model? What are the strengths and challenges of the approach?

[1] @LIKE Policy Guidance #14-02, Modified Definition of Disconnected Young Adults Ages 22-24.

- What does it take to build effective partnerships across three large and distinct counties to create institutional change and improve the employment and education outcomes for disconnected young adults? What strategies for sharing information and expertise are most beneficial? What are the challenges? What are effective ways of overcoming the challenges?

- What costs are associated with @LIKE? What is the cost-benefit of implementation?

The evaluation of @LIKE consists of three phases. In the first phase, the research team conducted an implementation study and a process study that thoroughly documented the program's operations and services. The implementation study, completed in December 2013, identified the following accomplishments and challenges of the @LIKE program during its first year of operation:

- ***The @LIKE program was successfully implemented across all program sites in the tri-county area.*** The @LIKE program successfully implemented a single program model and brand across the tri-county area of Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties. In the first year of operation, each county had a different local workforce investment board (WIB) and multiple service delivery sites.

- ***A uniform data collection system was established across all @LIKE Sites.*** Each of the three participating counties agreed to collect an identical set of data elements on program participants. The program thus promoted uniformity among the @LIKE sites, which helps to ensure ongoing, consistent data collection for both the program and the evaluation.

- ***Program staff developed a well-defined role for the Life Coach.*** Prior to program implementation there was no definition of a Life Coach, and the role was referred to as a mentor. During program implementation, the Project Director and the Grant Coordinators made a clear distinction between the role of the Life Coach and other roles such as Career Coach and Case Manager.[2]

- ***Program staff were concerned about meeting the recruitment and certification performance measure targets***. Staff across the program sites expressed concern in the first year about their ability to meet the performance measurement targets for recruitment and the National Career Readiness Certification.

- ***Staff found it difficult to engage and retain @LIKE participants***. Program staff indicated during the first on-site visit that it has been difficult to engage and retain participants, particularly those aged 22–24.

- ***The definition of disconnected young adults was constraining and lacked flexibility.*** Sites initially agreed to a definition of disconnected young adults that required a potential

[2] @LIKE Life Coach Description and Duties Final – 9.17.12.

participant to be between 18 and 24 years of age, unemployed, not in school, and any one of the following: low income, or gang-involved, or ex-offender, or on aid, or recently separated veteran; and the young adult must have been disconnected from education, employment and any services for at least 90 days. During the implementation study site visits, program staff reported issues with the requirement that a potential participant must have been disconnected from the education and workforce system for 90 days and must not be currently on probation or parole. The program revised the definition to include the provision that if a potential participant is enrolled in a system such as probation, parole, or foster care, but has not received any substantive, ongoing assistance with education or employment over the preceding 90-day period, that individual is eligible for @LIKE.

The present report completes the process study. The final two phases of the evaluation are an impact evaluation and a cost-benefit analysis that will capture the effectiveness and socioeconomic costs and benefits of the program. The implementation and process studies will provide context and understanding for interpreting the impact evaluation findings. The process study, in particular, will complement the impact evaluation by examining the factors that affect program impacts.

1.1 Workforce Innovation Fund Overview and Objectives

USDOL established the WIF in fiscal year 2011, with the goal of helping the workforce development system improve the quality of its services to ensure that they are cost-effective, demand-driven, and high-impact. The WIF also enables USDOL to test and expand strategies that have been particularly successful in reaching populations with significant barriers to accessing employment and educational institutions, such as the disconnected young adults served by the @LIKE program.

To be eligible for WIF funding, potential grantees had to demonstrate that their program designs considered relevant evidence in serving specific populations, would collect better data on program participants to effectively guide program services, and would leverage limited Federal workforce development funds effectively.

In June 2012, USDOL awarded $147 million in WIF grants to a total of 26 grantees that were a combination of state workforce agencies and local workforce investment boards, as well as one Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Section 166 grantee serving Indian and Native American communities.[3] The grants ranged in value from $1 million to $12 million. The Riverside County EDA received a $6 million grant to implement the @LIKE program in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties.

[3] An initial solicitation announced the availability of approximately $98.5 million in Workforce Investment Fund grants. However, because of the great response, the quality of applications received, and the immediate need for additional resources, the Department elected to provide $49 million in additional grants using funds from fiscal years 2011 and 2012.

1.2 Report Purpose and Structure

This report comprehensively documents the @LIKE program operations, policies, and processes across the tri-county service area in Southern California. Additionally, it identifies lessons learned and best practices at the 2-year point of the program. The report is informed primarily by in-depth site visits to each of the three participating counties, which were completed in October 2014. During the site visits, the research team conducted interviews with key program staff, gathered information from participants through focus groups, and reviewed relevant documents, including program guidelines, marketing materials, and implementation manuals.

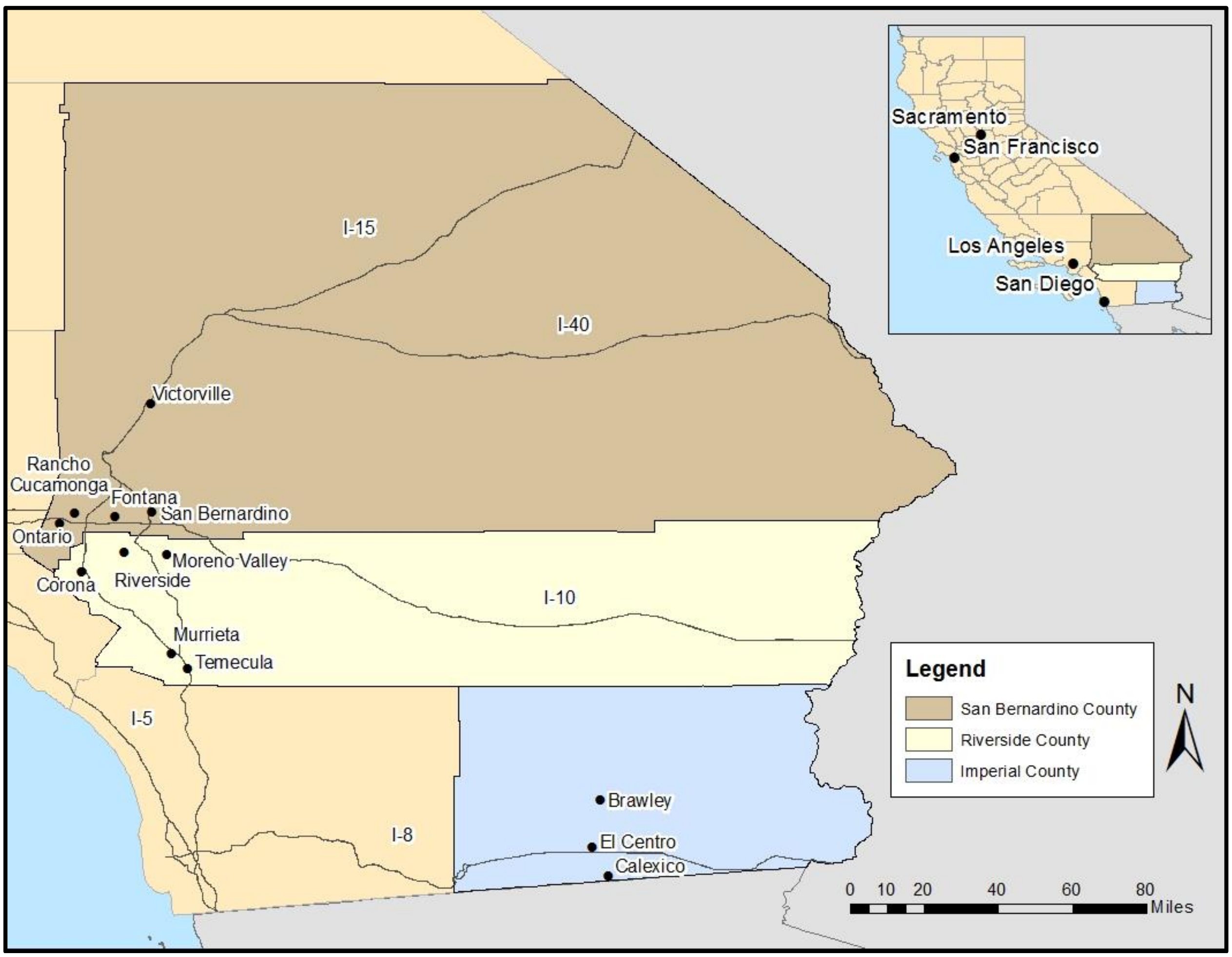
In documenting each component of the @LIKE program in detail, this report may also serve as a user's guide for successfully implementing similar programs in other areas. The descriptions of the most effective and best practices observed at one or more of the nine individual service delivery sites are reported here and should serve as a valuable resource to institutions and workforce investment areas interested in serving disconnected young adults. In this way, the report will help inform the implementation and program delivery models of future efforts to provide effective services to disconnected young adults through the public workforce system. Specific program implementation variations across sites are presented in detail in Appendix B.

The report is structured to include the components of the Baldrige Quality Standards and criteria, which were used in the design, implementation, management, and delivery of the @LIKE program. The Baldrige criteria include seven key standards whose purpose is to define and ensure a culture and practice of continuous quality improvement (CQI) for an organization and its customers: (1) Leadership, (2) Strategic Planning, (3) Customer and Market Focus, (4) Information and Analysis, (5) Workforce Focus, (6) Process Management, and (7) Business Results. Chapter 2 presents a general overview and description of the unique features of the @LIKE Program, together with information on program enrollment and participant demographics. Chapter 3 describes the data collection activities, the data analysis approach, and the mechanisms for sharing information with program partners. The program leadership structure and its ability to strategically plan to meet the needs of its customers are covered in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 describes each component of the program, including assessments, life coaching, case management, and program activities. Chapter 6 concludes the report with a set of recommendations and lessons learned. A series of appendices provide information on the process study methodology (Appendix A), a cross-site comparison of program activities (Appendix B), program forms and other documents (Appendix C), program reports (Appendix D), the program's implementation history (Appendix E), and a summary of the Baldrige Quality Standards (Appendix F).

2. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Linking Innovation, Knowledge, and Employment (@LIKE) program is a collaborative effort among three WIBs in Southern California—the Riverside County EDA Workforce Board, the San Bernardino County Workforce Board, and the Imperial County Workforce Board. The WIF grant is led by the Riverside County EDA. The EDA manages the overall program across nine service delivery sites in the three counties. The staff of the Workforce Investment Board is part of the EDA. Exhibit 1 shows the three counties participating in the @LIKE program. These counties vary greatly in area size as well as population: San Bernardino is the largest, spanning 20,062 square miles, with a population of 2,088,371; Riverside County is 7,208 square miles in area, with a population of 2,292,507, and Imperial County is 4,175 square miles in area, with a population of 176,584[4].

Exhibit 1: County Consortium Map



Note: In San Bernardino and Riverside counties, cities with a population of over 100,000 are marked on the map. In Imperial County, which has no cities with 100,000 or more people, cities with a population of more than 20,000 are identified.

[4] 2013 United States Census Bureau Population Estimates

Unemployment rates in San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial counties were 7.7, 8.2, and 22.6 percent, respectively, in November 2014, with rates in all three counties above the state average of 7.1 percent.[5] For young adults across the State of California, unemployment rates were significantly higher than those for the general population: young adults between the ages of 16 and 19 had an unemployment rate of 26.6 percent, while those between the ages of 20 and 24 years had a rate of 11.5 percent.[6]

High school dropout rates in the three counties ranged from 9 to 12.1 percent in the 2012-2013 school year.[7] The combination of high unemployment and high dropout rates has led to a significant proportion of young adults in these counties who are disconnected from employment, school, and other community institutions. These youth often find it extremely difficult to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to become self-sufficient and to develop an employment history that will boost future employability and earnings. Moreover, they often lack strong social networks, thus limiting their connections to housing and financial assistance.[8]

In the @LIKE program, disconnected young adults are defined as individuals who are disconnected from education and employment (including current disconnection from the penal and foster care systems) for at least 90 days. If a young adult is on aid, that aid must not be accompanied by any services such as pre-employment training, job training, educational training, or coaching.[9] Each of the three WIBs, through programs in addition to @LIKE, serves disconnected young adults aged 18–21 who are not enrolled in school, working, or serving in the armed forces.

The @LIKE program uses a collection of diverse strategies to reconnect these youth to educational and employment opportunities. The program design seeks to help disconnected young adults explore their internal resources by focusing on psychological elements of resiliency and self-efficacy through life coaching. In addition to assigning the participant to a Case Manager, as is typically done in workforce programs, the @LIKE program pairs each participant with a trained Life Coach.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. Section 2.1 provides a descriptive analysis of participants enrolled in the @LIKE program from January 1, 2013 through October 31, 2014. Section 2.2 presents the program's underlying "theory of change," depicting the theoretical relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Section 2.3 describes the unique activities and services provided by the @LIKE program. Finally, Section 2.4 compares

[5] California. Employment Development Department. Monthly Labor Force Data for Counties, November 2014.
[6] California. Employment Development Department. California Demographic Labor Force Summary Tables, November 2014.
[7] California Department of Education. 2012-2013 Data Reporting Office DataQuest Search Tool. Dropout rates for Imperial, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties were obtained by selecting county level dropout rates for the 2012-2013 school year.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Grant Coordinator Planning Meeting, August 10, 2012.

the @LIKE performance measures and those mandated in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014.

2.1 Program Enrollment (Enrollment Data by Site)

A total of 664 young adults have enrolled in the @LIKE program at nine sites across the three counties. As Exhibit 2 shows, half of the participants are 22–24 years of age. San Bernardino County enrolled a higher percentage of participants in the 18–21 age group (53%), while the other two counties enrolled nearly the same number of participants in each age group. More than half (56%) of all @LIKE participants are male. Males constitute 57 and 58 percent of the participants in Riverside and Imperial counties respectively, and 52 percent in San Bernardino County.

More than half of all participants are Hispanic (61%). The percentage of Hispanic participants is highest in Imperial County (77%), followed by Riverside County (56%) and San Bernardino County (54%). More than half of all participants (53%) have obtained a high school diploma or high school equivalency diploma. Participants in San Bernardino County are more likely to have obtained a high school diploma or high school equivalency diploma (74%) than those in Riverside County (43%) or Imperial County (48%). Thirty-two of the 664 participants (5%) have received some postsecondary training, either college-based or vocational.

Exhibit 2: Characteristics of Enrolled Participants by County

Participant Characteristics	Riverside County		Imperial County		San Bernardino County		Program Totals	
Age								
Ages 18-21	160	49%	87	49%	84	53%	331	50%
Ages 22-24	165	51%	92	51%	76	47%	333	50%
Total	325	100%	179	100%	160	100%	664	100%
Gender								
Female	140	43%	76	42%	77	48%	293	44%
Male	185	57%	103	58%	83	52%	371	56%
Total	325	100%	179	100%	160	100%	664	100%
Hispanic								
Yes	183	56%	138	77%	86	54%	407	61%
No	142	44%	41	23%	74	46%	257	39%
Total	325	100%	179	100%	160	100%	664	100%
Race[1]								
Black	69	20%	4	2%	27	16%	100	14%
Hispanic	185	53%	133	74%	85	50%	403	58%
White	67	20%	7	4%	51	30%	125	18%
Asian	6	2%	1	>1%	1	>1%	8	1%
American Indian	11	3%	4	2%	4	2%	19	3%
Pacific Islander	3	>1%	0	0%	0	0%	3	>1%
Unknown	6	2%	32	18%	2	1%	40	6%
Total	347	100%	181	100%	170	100%	698	100%
Educational Attainment								
Non-High School Graduates	160	49%	83	46%	41	26%	284	43%
High school diploma	128	39%	79	44%	109	68%	316	48%
High school equivalency diploma	14	4%	8	4%	10	6%	32	5%
One year of college/technical or vocational school	10	3%	7	4%	0	0%	17	3%
Two years of college/technical or vocational school	5	2%	1	>1%	0	0%	6	>1%
Three years of college/technical or vocational school	1	>1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	>1%
Bachelor's degree	1	>1%	1	>1%	0	0%	2	>1%
Vocational certification	6	2%	0	0%	0	0%	6	>1%
Total	325	100%	179	100%	160	100%	664	100%

[1] Participants may be of more than one race. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

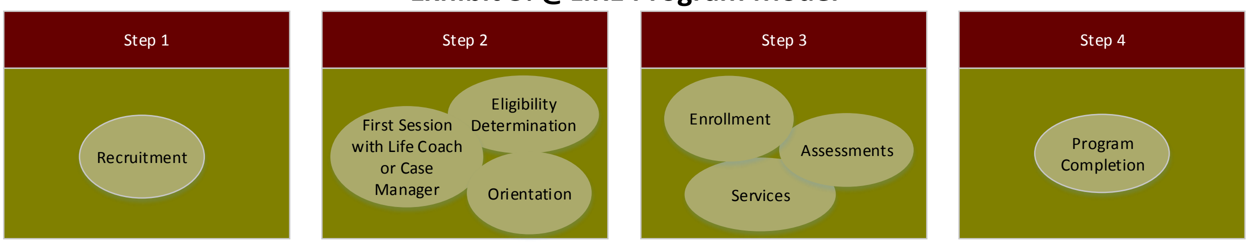
2.2 @LIKE Program and Logic Models

This section presents the @LIKE program model and the program logic model.

2.2.1 @LIKE Program Model

The @LIKE program model can be described in four steps, as shown in Exhibit 3. Each step contains an activity or set of concurrent activities in which the participant engages through the course of their involvement with @LIKE.

Exhibit 3: @LIKE Program Model



The first step is the recruitment of disconnected young adults aged 18–24. Once a potential participant has been identified, a Life Coach or Case Manager meets with the individual to provide further information about the @LIKE program, set expectations, and discuss desired outcomes. If the potential participant is interested in enrolling, the staff member verifies the individual's eligibility using an Eligibility Checklist Worksheet. A potential participant is not required to provide any documentation initially to determine eligibility. Self-attestation is sufficient. An eligible participant then completes a one-page enrollment form with the assistance of the staff member.

In Step Three, eligible participants are enrolled and can immediately begin to participate in program activities and receive program services, such as academic and employment services, which include résumé building, soft skills training, and academic tutoring. The program also provides case management, life coaching, and assistance with child care, transportation, and work clothes as needed. Also, within the first 60 days of enrollment, participants are given four assessments: an academic assessment to assess basic skills and three social/psychological assessments that give program staff greater insight into the participant's personality and barriers.

Step Four is participant closeout, which occurs when a participant is designated as a completer or non-completer. The program defines successful completers as young adults who achieve their desired outcomes, including earning the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC), and who no longer need the day-to-day-services provided by the program to stay connected to school, work, community, and their own support systems. Non-completers are participants who have been "absent" from the program and the Site Director has determined that every effort was made to re-engage those individuals.

2.2.2 @LIKE Program Logic Model

The @LIKE Program Logic Model (Exhibit 4) builds on the service delivery model. It provides an outline of the program's main features and relationships in five distinct categories: inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. The program logic model evolved to include new components added since the program was proposed—a reflection of the dynamic, innovative nature of the WIF grants.

Core @LIKE program elements include standardized assessments, pathways to postsecondary education, career exploration, preparation for obtaining the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC), and support services. Key differentiating inputs of the @LIKE program compared to the traditional WIA Youth program are immediate enrollment (no initial paperwork required) and the availability of individual Life Coaches for program participants.

@LIKE undertakes a variety of *activities* using the resources described in Exhibit 4. These include providing skills development services such as standardized assessments, work readiness certifications, vocational education, basic skills development, and paid work experiences such as internships or pre-apprenticeships. Other program activities include support services, guidance from Life Coaches, academic and social/psychological assessments, and education and employment services.

These activities result in program *outputs*, which include the number of participants completing each program activity. The targeted outcomes for the program include the following:

- 85 percent of young adult participants to be retained within the program.
- 80 percent of participants to be placed in paid internships or paid work experience.
- 65 percent of participants to be subsequently placed in unsubsidized employment while enrolled in the program.
- 50 percent of participants to be subsequently placed in college or vocational training while enrolled in the program.
- 60 percent of participants to have completed a high school diploma or a high school equivalency diploma within a 2-year period while enrolled in the program.
- 90 percent of participants to have completed a career awareness component through Roadtrip Nation, My IE Youth Portal, or Career Cruising—to include résumé building, pre-employment skills, and a career portfolio.[10]
- 100 percent of participants to have obtained the NCRC.

These outcomes lead to program impacts. The intended program impacts are:

[10] Roadtrip Nation, My IE Youth Portal, and Career Cruising are online software platforms that provide guided career exploration activities to match skills and interests with potential occupations; see http://roadtripnation.org/about.php; http://public.careercruising.com/us/en/products/ccspringboard/features/

- To reduce dependency on public supportive services by increasing employment, wages and salaries, and improved education and employment outcomes compared to other disconnected young adults in the community.
- To have a positive cost-benefit ratio to society as a whole through a reduction of dependency on public supportive services on an individual and a population level.

As part of the third phase of the evaluation of the @LIKE program, the research team will conduct an impact evaluation and a cost-benefit analysis of the performance of @LIKE participants compared to similar WIA Youth program participants.

Exhibit 4: @LIKE Program Logic Model

Inputs

- Experienced program staff
- Life Coaches and Case Managers
- Grant funds and resources
- Equipment
- Material and supplies

- Participant cohorts
- Infrastructure (technology for program management and service delivery, space in buildings)

- Consortium partner staff
- Project Director
- Grant Coordinators
- Business partners
- Education partners

Activities

Core program elements for all enrollees:

- Standardized assessments
- Personal coaching and case management
- Pathways to post-secondary education
- Career exploration
- National Career Readiness Certificate
- Support services

Recruit participants

Develop Individual Service Strategy (ISS)

Educational Activities:

- ABE, GED, ESL
- Computer skills
- Vocational training
- Entrepreneurship training

Employment Activities:

- Skills development (e.g., preparation for certification)
- Work-based learning opportunities (e.g., Work experience, internships, on-the-job training, apprenticeships)
- Workshops (e.g., resume writing, interview skills)

Outputs

- Participants complete pre-test and post-test assessments
- Participants are assigned a Life Coach and Case Manager

- Participants complete career exploration
- Participants obtain the NCRC

- Participants receive support services, as needed
- Participants complete education or employment activities

Outcomes

- Participant retention in the @LIKE program
- Placement into paid internships
- Increase in participant confidence

- Entrance into unsubsidized employment
- Entrance into vocational training or college
- Decrease in barriers perceived by participant

- Dropouts complete a high school diploma or GED
- Completion of career awareness component

Impacts

- What is the cost-benefit ratio for implementing and running the @LIKE program?

- What are the strengths and challenges in administering the @LIKE program?
- What is the impact of the @LIKE program on (1) wage and salary employment; (2) earnings; and (3) retained employment?

- How are @LIKE participants faring in education and employment outcomes compared to disconnected young adults not in the program?

2.3 Approach to Serving Disconnected Youth

Under the WIA Youth formula program, local workforce investment areas (LWIAs) are given funds to deliver an array of services that assist low-income youth aged 14 to 21 who have barriers to employment to obtain skills and training credentials and to prepare them for postsecondary education or employment. The WIA Youth program model includes the following sequence of steps in serving eligible youth.[11,12]

- **Outreach and Recruitment –** WIA Youth program staff reach out to community and faith-based organizations, leverage referrals from current participants, and advertise services on traditional and social media.
- **Registration –** WIA Youth program staff are required to collect all information necessary to determine the potential eligibility of an individual before enrollment.
- **Eligibility Determination –** Individuals are determined to be eligible for WIA Youth services if they are between the ages of 14 and 21, are low-income, and have one or more of the following barriers: deficient in basic literacy skills; school dropout; homeless, runaway, or foster child; pregnant or parenting; offender; or require additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment (including youth with a disability).
- **Objective Assessment –** Registered WIA Youth participants must complete an assessment that objectively evaluates academic skill levels, occupational skill levels, and service needs.
- **Individual Service Strategy (ISS) –** WIA Youth participants must have an Individual Service Strategy plan that includes an employment goal, skills achievement objectives, and an outline of the services to be received based on the assessment.
- **Service Delivery Elements –** After the ISS has been developed, WIA Youth participants are eligible to receive the following services: tutoring, alternative secondary school offerings, summer employment opportunities linked to academic and occupational learning, paid and unpaid work experiences, occupational skills training, leadership development opportunities, supportive services, mentoring, follow-up services, and comprehensive guidance and counseling.
- **Program Exit –** Individuals are exited from the WIA Youth program after 90 days during which they have not received any services funded by the program.
- **Follow-up Services –** WIA Youth program staff are required to follow up with exited participants within 12 months and provide services (any or all of the above-mentioned service delivery elements) based on the needs of the participant.

The @LIKE program expands upon the WIA Youth model in the following ways.

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[11] U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Workforce Investment. Workforce Investment Act – Youth Program. Retrieved from http://www.doleta.gov/Youth_services/pdf/WORKFORCE_INVESTMENT_ACT_YOUTH_PROGRAM_8-13_13.pdf

[12] Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development WIA Youth Program Orientation.

- **Outreach and Recruitment –** To target a hard-to-reach population that does not congregate at one place, staff members recruit participants by visiting homes and non-traditional locations such as tattoo parlors, skate parks, and convenience stores.
- **Registration –** Potential participants fill out a one-page application to enroll in the program. The program allows individuals to self-attest if they do not have all the required documents so that they can enroll and begin receiving services without delay.
- **Eligibility Determination –** @LIKE focuses on disconnected young adults between 18 and 24 years of age who are not connected to, or have only sporadically engaged in, employment, education, or any other institution or social services during the preceding 90 days. Eligibility can be determined by extensive use of self-attestation.
- **Objective Assessment –** Individuals do not need to complete any assessment before enrolling in the program although academic and social/psychological assessments play an important role in providing services. Assessments must be completed within the first 60 days.
- **Individual Service Strategy (ISS) –** All participants create an ISS, which is updated over the course of the program.
- **Service Delivery Elements –** @LIKE assigns a Life Coach to each participant in addition to a Case Manager, to provide wraparound services. The program provides access to career pathways by connecting participants to postsecondary education and industry-based certifications.
- **Program Exit –** Participants exit the @LIKE program either as "successful completers" or "non-completers." @LIKE policy guidance states that sites should allow young adults to cycle through periods of engagement, disengagement, and re-engagement, and does not establish a time limit on re-engaging participants after periods of absence. Participants are not automatically "exited" after 90 days. Extensive outreach is conducted to try to reengage young adults who may have been "absent" from the program.
- **Follow-up Services –** @LIKE program staff are responsible for following up with program completers at 30, 60, 90, and up to 180 days after completion to find out if they are still working or enrolled in school and if they have stability in housing and their family situation.

The unique features of the @LIKE program are described in the next section.

2.3.1 Features Unique to the @LIKE Program

The following six features are unique to the @LIKE Program.

One-page application and self-attestation. One of the key points in the design of the @LIKE program is the focus on immediate and continuous engagement with the participants. Part of this strategy is predicated on simplifying and streamlining several program processes including program enrollment. Potential participants fill out an initial one-page application. The application is much shorter than the WIA Youth program application, and also allows applicants to self-attest regarding their status as low income or not working or not attending school for the past 90 days. Enrollees then are immediately engaged in the program's activities.

Dual role life coaching and case management. A core component of the @LIKE program model is the availability of a trained Life Coach as well as a traditional Case Manager. Case Managers are responsible for much of the program's administrative duties, including program enrollment and eligibility determination, tracking the progress of participants as they complete activities throughout the program, and interacting with employers that provide work experiences for participants. The Life Coach role complements the tasks performed by the Case Manager through the establishment of personal relationships and trust, and the building of self-efficacy on the part of program participants to solve problems or work toward their goals. While the Life Coach and Case Manager roles both assist participants to reach their personal goals, life coaching focuses more on personal issues, while case management emphasizes the coordination of service needs and meeting the requirements of the program.

> *"Life coaching can solve the problems or work towards goals identified during case management."*
>
> *–@LIKE Life Coach/Case Manager*

Many of the program participants interviewed by the research team cited how vital the Life Coach was to their continued engagement throughout the program and their achievements. The Life Coaches often provided positive reinforcement and support that many disconnected young adults did not have.

Flexibility in length of service and participant re-engagement. Participants are able to proceed through the program at their own pace and determine their own goals with assistance from program staff. This is different from the WIA Youth program, where individuals are often required to conform to the services and goals the program makes available, and must make predetermined skill gains, acquire certifications, or obtain employment to remain eligible. Moreover, under the WIA Youth program, young adults who are absent for 90 days are exited from the program and are ineligible to receive services. @LIKE participants are permitted to re-engage with the program at any time after periods of absence and can receive program services again.

Use of social/psychological assessments to better understand participants and the barriers they face. The @LIKE program uses social/psychological assessment tools to gauge the needs of program participants, track participant progress, and identify effective wraparound services. The assessments help Life Coaches to understand participants' needs, personality, and assets, and to guide their interactions with participants. The Life Coaches use the assessments to track progress over time and adjust participants' personal, educational, and employment goals included in their ISS.

Tailored program services to meet the needs of each participant. The @LIKE program has the capability to respond to the needs of each participant. The customization of the services participants receive helps to make the participants feel personally empowered, which is key to serving the complex needs of disconnected young adults. In many one-on-one meetings, participants, with the assistance of a Life Coach, identify areas of strengths and challenges, and then outline short-, medium-, and long-term goals, both personal and external, that could be achieved while they are in the program. Life Coaches help participants focus on personal goals, and they support Case Managers in managing participants' external goals. The program also tailors the way it addresses any barriers to participation by providing accommodation through such services as transportation assistance and child care.

Use of data tools to continuously improve the program. To respond to the needs of program participants and for continuous quality improvement, @LIKE employs a uniform data collection and reporting system. The data tools are used at all levels of program delivery. Program activities are reported weekly into a common case management system, the Virtual OneStop (VOS) system. The Project Director uses this information to generate reports (a dashboard report and scorecards) that provide the delivery sites with information and guidance for meeting the overall program goals. Sites then use this information to improve performance to meet benchmarks and to make necessary process improvements.

2.3.2 @LIKE and WIOA Youth Performance Measures

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was enacted in July 2014, formally overhauling and reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, including the WIA Youth program. One of the major reforms is the creation of a common set of performance measures across the four primary WIA programs: WIA Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth; Adult Education; Wagner-Peyser Employment Service; and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Under the Act, the WIOA Youth performance measures were expanded. State and local areas are required to report the number of program participants placed into employment and education and training programs 6 months and 1 year after program exit; the median earnings of completers after 6 months; the number of participants who are enrolled in or have completed programs leading to a postsecondary credential/secondary school diploma; and how effectively the program is meeting employers' needs. As Exhibit 5 shows, each performance measure captured by the @LIKE program would fall into at least one of the six performance measures under WIOA.

Exhibit 5: Comparison of WIOA Youth Performance Measures and @LIKE Performance Outcome Measures

WIOA Youth Performance Measures	@LIKE Performance Outcome Measures
Education and Training	
Percentage of youth: ▪ In education and training programs ▪ In education or training program for postsecondary credential or employment ▪ With measurable skills gains toward credential ▪ Obtain high school diploma/GED or recognized postsecondary credential 1 year after exit and are employed or in an education/training program leading to credential within 1 year after exit	▪ Number of participants ▪ Participant retention ▪ Complete GED/high school diploma within 2 years ▪ Complete Career Awareness Component ▪ Enter vocational training or college ▪ Improve basic skills by two educational levels within 1 year ▪ Receive WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC)
Earnings	
Median earnings of youth in unsubsidized employment 6 months after exit.	Not measured in @LIKE
Employment	
▪ Percentage of youth in: –Unsubsidized employment 6 months after exit –Unsubsidized employment 1 year after exit ▪ Indicators of effectiveness in serving employers	▪ Paid internship placement ▪ Enter unsubsidized employment ▪ Employers' expectations of and satisfaction with participants were exceeded.

Note: WIOA Employer Performance measures are to be determined through USDOL consultation with workforce system stakeholders, including state and local representatives, business and industry, employees, eligible service providers, researchers, participants, lead state agency with responsibility for programs, and individuals with expertise in serving individuals with barriers to employment. All WIOA performance measures are scheduled to take effect July 1, 2016.

3. LEADERSHIP SYSTEM

This chapter outlines the @LIKE program's key leadership positions and responsibilities and the system for providing leadership through continuous articulation of the program's vision, mission, and values and ensuring alignment at all levels of program operations. Next, the program's communication processes and information sharing forums are delineated. The final section describes how the program's leadership engages its customers, including young adults, employers, and program partners, in responding effectively to their needs for effective program delivery.

3.1 Leadership and Strategic Planning

***Leadership*.** Leadership is a fundamental component of the @LIKE Program and its overall governance system. Through their personal actions, program leaders guide, align, and sustain the program. Riverside County EDA, the lead agency for the @LIKE project, recognized the need for strong leadership and convened an Internal Planning Team during the early phases of the program to work on grant startup and management issues. The agency also hired a Project Director with expertise in youth program design and delivery to work with the Internal Planning Team,[13] provide leadership and vision to the program, manage program operations, and ensure effective coordination of efforts across the tri-county area. The following teams provide additional leadership: the Steering Committee (made up of the WIB directors, the Project Director, and leaders of most of the delivery sites), the Grant Coordinator Team (coordinators for each county, who also serve on the Steering Committee), and the Advisory Council (made up of young adults from each county, with representatives also on the Steering Committee). Together with the Project Director and the Site Directors, these teams constitute @LIKE's leadership.

"[Leadership is] setting a direction and being consistent about this direction."

–@LIKE Project Director

Strategic planning. Strategic planning includes the following elements: how program leaders set strategic directions and determine key action plans; how leaders translate plans into an effective performance management system; how they deploy strategic objectives and action plans; and how they adjust if circumstances require changes. Strategic planning shapes how the program fulfills its legal, ethical, and societal responsibilities. It also includes planning for sustainability—the long-term continuation of services to disconnected young adults in the three program counties.

The program's leaders, and the regular strategic planning activities in which they engage, constitute the @LIKE's leadership system. Exhibit 6 depicts the organization and staffing

[13] The Internal Planning Team was disbanded once the Steering Committee convened.

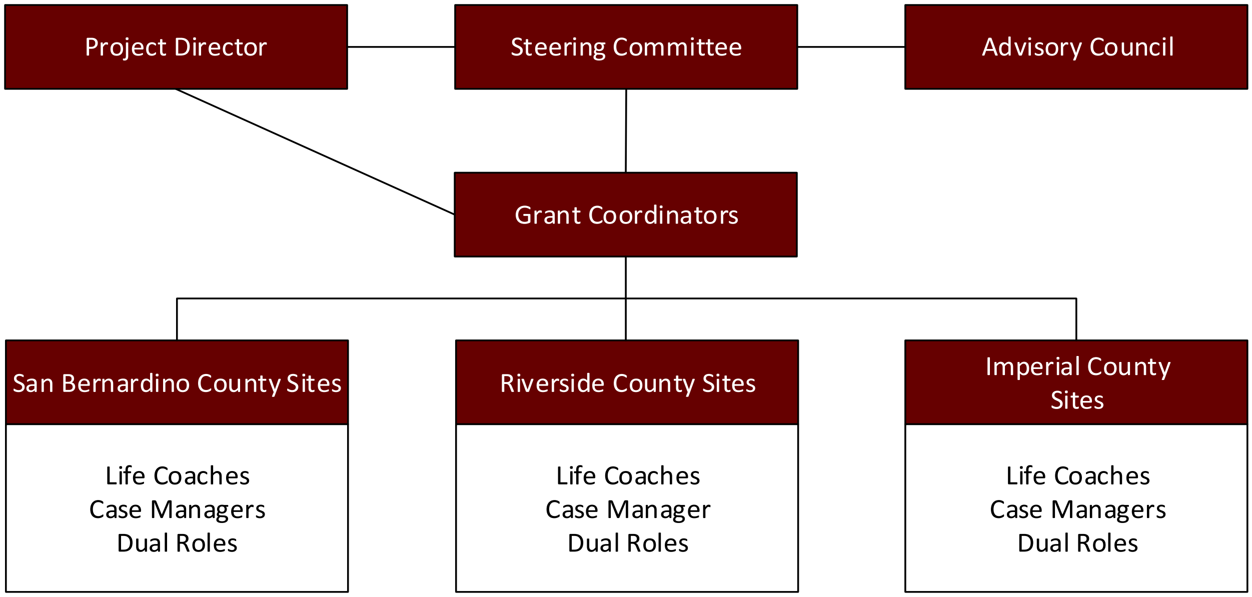
structure of the leadership system. Descriptions of each leader or leadership entity, and the associated strategic planning activities for which each is responsible, are presented below.

Project Director. The Project Director leads the Steering Committee and facilitates the system-wide Advisory Council and Grant Coordinator Team. The Project Director is involved in every component of the @LIKE project and is responsible for oversight of all day-to-day operations of the program. The Project Director consults with the Steering Committee to issue formal program policies and procedures. These are communicated to the Grant Coordinators, who in turn inform the Site Directors, all of whom are involved in the development of the policy before it is formalized. The Project Director relies on additional components of the governance system, described below, to inform policies and procedures, and on program staff to execute and implement them.

Lead Grant Coordinator. The Lead Grant Coordinator works closely with the Project Director to carry out day-to-day activities associated with ongoing grant management such as coordinating strategies and plans among partners and ensuring high quality data collection and timely reporting. The Lead Grant Coordinator also works closely with the other Grant Coordinators to help ensure grant goals are met and coordinates regular reports to the Steering Committee on the status of project outputs, enrollment and expenditures.

Steering Committee. The Project Director leads the Steering Committee with Riverside EDA acting as the convener. The Steering Committee consists of representatives from the three counties, including WIB Directors, Grant Coordinators, Advisory Council young adult members, the assessment consultant, Site Directors, and the external evaluator. The Committee's core purpose is to ensure continuous improvement, alignment, and realignment of processes based on learning that is occurring through the implementation of @LIKE. The committee helps ensure that the program engages the most disconnected participants and that their needs are being met. In addition, it identifies opportunities for continuous improvement to the program design and structure, provides feedback to ongoing evaluation activities, and oversees and informs a comprehensive program communications plan.

Exhibit 6: @LIKE Program Organizational Chart



Note: Several sites across the three counties reported that one individual fulfils the roles and responsibilities of Life Coach and Case Manager. The program provides the flexibility to do so.

Advisory Council. The Advisory Council is composed of 15 to 20 @LIKE participants, successful program completers, and representatives of disconnected young adults in the community who are selected by each program site to provide input to the Steering Committee. The Advisory Council is a formal mechanism designed to ensure that @LIKE participants' thoughts and concerns about program operations are routinely vocalized, acknowledged, considered, and acted upon. The Council has also provided assistance in creating and managing the @LIKE Facebook page and in providing ideas on recruiting older young adults to the program.

Grant Coordinator Team. The Grant Coordinator Team consists of the three Grant Coordinators, one from each county, and the Project Director, who facilitates the team. The Grant Coordinator from Riverside County is the Lead Grant Coordinator, which reflects Riverside County's position as the lead fiscal agency for the WIF grant. Initially, the team guided @LIKE's transformation from concept to reality by defining the roles and responsibilities of management and the direct services staff. Currently, the Grant Coordinator Team ensures consistency across the consortium and within each county's program by establishing standard operating procedures for day-to-day activities.

Site Directors, Life Coaches, and Case Managers. Each county's program site is led by a Site Director.[14] The Site Director is the delivery site point person and the direct link between the Grant Coordinator Team and the Life Coaches, Case Managers, and other program delivery staff at the county level.

[14] The sites use various terms for this role, including Site Manager and program manager.

3.2 Communication

Internal communication across multiple channels is critical in any program. Communication has been a key component of aligning processes and procedures across @LIKE's nine sites. Email messages, policy and procedures memorandums, a SharePoint site, affinity group conference calls, quarterly Steering Committee meetings, and regular site visits by the Project Director all help facilitate continuous, real-time interactions among program leaders and staff. Each of these communications channels is described in detail below.

Email. Each week, via email, the Project Director and the Lead Grant Coordinator send data scorecards to each Site Director that include an analysis of key items to be attended to. This information provides real-time feedback to each local site on the quality and accuracy of the participant data the site enters into the VOS system. It also provides a regular channel for Site Directors to alert the Project Director and Lead Grant Coordinator of any programmatic issues. The Project Director and the Lead Grant Coordinator also use email to send out program policy guidance. These emails relay policy and procedural direction to the Steering Committee, Site Directors, and Grant Coordinators (see Appendix C for an example).

Phone Calls. Program staff with similar roles across sites engage in regularly scheduled teleconferences to discuss any challenges faced by a particular site and to share effective strategies in serving disconnected young adults (see the description of affinity groups below). These meetings, which are known as "Affinity Calls," are an essential tool in ensuring that the program continually responds to the needs of the target population. Additionally, the Project Director also uses phone calls for regular and ad hoc communication with Grant Coordinators, Site Directors, and WIB Directors.

> *"Affinity calls have been beneficial. They help me to think about issues that I may or may not have had to deal with."*
>
> *–@LIKE Site Director*

@LIKE SharePoint. The @LIKE program uses SharePoint, a web application developed by Microsoft, as a tool for program coordination and communication. The SharePoint website is an Internet portal that can be accessed by all program staff. It serves as a repository and centralized distribution center for materials related to best practices research; policies, procedures, and forms; continuous quality improvement; Steering Committee activities; marketing materials; customer satisfaction data reports; success stories; evaluation reports; professional development training resources; meeting notes, and the consortium sites. In addition, the portal has a program calendar, discussion board, and FAQs. Difficulty in navigating the SharePoint site was identified by some staff members as one of the challenges of the program during the implementation study. Detailed instructions provided by the Lead Grant Coordinator to navigate the site may be found in Appendix C.

Affinity groups. Affinity groups are forums that exchange information on promising practices and challenges across program sites. The Project Director established these groups—one each for Life

Coaches, Case Managers, and Site Directors—as a mechanism for small groups of program staff with similar roles to meet virtually. The Project Director hosts quarterly conference calls with each affinity group. If one affinity group member is having difficulty with a particular aspect of the program, that person can reach out to the other members in the group for help in finding solutions to the problem.

Quarterly meetings. The Steering Committee offers additional channels for regular communication among leaders. The content of these meetings has evolved based on the stage of the program. An initial focus of the committee was to encourage sites to communicate about deployment and launch of the program. Since implementation, the meetings have focused on analysis of the data presented on the dashboard; data analysis to identify and eliminate obstacles to meeting outcomes; consultation on the development of new policies and procedures; and collaboration on changes to existing policies and practices that may be needed based on lessons learned. The Steering Committee collaborated to create the Sustainability Plan and continues to make course corrections as required. As a regular agenda item, Advisory Committee representatives who serve on the Steering Committee present issues, successes and ideas from the full Advisory Committee.

Site visits. The Project Director makes regular site visits to each program site, which provide an opportunity to observe frontline activities and to meet with local program staff.

Sustainability plan. The @LIKE Plan for Sustainability is a blueprint for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the program's approach to serving disconnected young adults. It articulates a vision for the program's future, identifies desired future results, and specifies strategies for achieving those results. The plan identifies external and internal capacities to be maintained or developed and the resources required to realize the articulated vision. The plan also includes implementation planning—the "how to" for turning plans into action.

3.3 Customer Focus

Management and leadership ensure a customer focus is practiced and sustained at all levels of the project. Customer focus means how the program engages its customers and stakeholders for long-term marketplace success. Focusing on customers and stakeholders, and building a culture that values this behavior, is an engagement strategy. How a program listens to the voice of its customers and uses this information to improve and identify opportunities for innovation are major components of customer focus.

To monitor performance in this area, the program uses a customer satisfaction data collection system, which consists of data collected electronically from businesses and from young adult participants. The Project Director has set the expectation for @LIKE staff to provide customer focused services to participants and that policy setting and strategic planning are carried out with a customer focus. The Steering Committee has set a target of 100 percent customer satisfaction. The expectation is that staff members will immediately address and remedy any issues that result in customer dissatisfaction.

The program serves three major groups of customers or stakeholders—young adult participants, employers who provide paid work-based learning experiences, and program partners who provide services to young adult participants (e.g., community colleges and local non-profit organizations). Building and maintaining a customer focus includes the work that goes into maintaining relationships with these customers.

Young adults. Disconnected young adults are the primary customers of @LIKE. The program's customer focus approach includes using Life Coaches, streamlining participant enrollment, surveying participants, including participants on the Steering Committee, and providing a flexible program structure. Life Coaches provide participants with a program resource with whom they can provide real-time feedback. To collect participant feedback, program staff survey participants about their experiences during the program and after workshops. Participants may also fill out and submit electronic comment cards at any time. The Project Director collects all participant feedback and disseminates the results to sites in a weekly report.

The program's flexible structure reflects its approach to focusing on young adults. Not only does the program try to schedule appointments and trainings at times convenient for the participants, but its re-engagement policy provides sites with the flexibility to re-engage with individual participants who disengage for 90 days or more. Young adult participants also have representation on the @LIKE Steering Committee.

Employers**.** Employers who provide paid and unpaid work-based learning experiences for participants are also program customers. Local program staff work to maintain close contact with each employer. In an effort to meet employers' needs, program staff conduct monthly check-in calls with employers and regularly ask for their feedback about what is working and what is not. Sites also solicit this feedback through an electronic survey sent via email. The survey is anonymous and is essentially a virtual comment card that asks employers to indicate their level of agreement (i.e., strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree) with 13 statements related to their satisfaction with their interactions with program participants and staff. The survey also includes an open-ended question asking employers to share their ideas for improvements to the program and its services. The individual sites determine how frequently they survey their employers and partners.

Another tool that program staff use is employer evaluations of participants. Evaluation forms are sent to employers during the first 2 weeks that participants begin their work experience and then again at the end of the work experience. Employers may also fill out and submit electronic comment cards at any time. Responses from all survey methods are collected, reviewed, and acted on at the program level. The Stoplight Dashboard Report includes comment card feedback from employers.

Program partners. A wide range of partners provide services to participants. Each program site develops and maintains partner relationships, often utilizing a mix of pre-existing and new partnerships to meet participants' needs. Site staff frequently communicate with partners to help them remain engaged with the program. Partners are critical to the program's wraparound service delivery model because they provide diverse services and opportunities that local program sites may not have the capacity to provide on their own. Partners may also reinforce, or offer additional capacity for services already being provided by @LIKE. The program partners provide services such as education and training, and employment options aimed at teaching participants skills they will need to sustain employment in the labor market and increase their wages. Exhibit 7 lists the service opportunities provided by each partner.

Exhibit 7: Opportunities Provided by Partners

Education and Training Partners	Employment Partners
▪ GED preparation ▪ Community college courses and programs ▪ Certification classes ▪ Life skills trainings	Work-based Learning: ▪ Job shadowing ▪ Work experience ▪ Internships ▪ On-the-job training ▪ Apprenticeships

4. INFORMATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The @LIKE program uses principles of continuous quality improvement (CQI) and quality management for program and process management. The purpose of implementing these principles is to build a service delivery culture that ensures customers consistently receive the highest level of quality, and that processes, systems, and methods are in place to sustain high performance and exceed customer expectations.[15,16] The program uses indicators and components of the Baldrige standards to promote CQI as an ongoing strategy to learn, practice, effectively measure, and develop new knowledge.

> *"We are making a data driven system that produces usable data in real time—a data out system, not just data in."*
>
> *–@LIKE Project Director*

To facilitate CQI, the program follows a data-driven approach and gathers, analyzes, and manages real-time data for team-based decision-making. The program uses these data to continuously assess its progress, benchmarks, and targets, and to regularly take corrective action and make improvements. This chapter describes the data management system created for the program, the type of data elements collected and analyzed, the data quality checks put in place to ensure high quality data, and how this information is used to drive program improvement and innovation.

4.1 Data Tools and Analysis

The establishment of an efficient data collection and data analysis system includes four main steps: (1) use or customize an existing data management system, or design a new one; (2) create a user-friendly format to present information and analyze the data; (3) incorporate feedback from data users; and (4) update the system based on user feedback.

Early on, the program recognized the need for a common data management system that all nine delivery sites across the three counties could use starting from the launch of the program. Riverside EDA modified its existing data management system, Virtual OneStop (VOS), to manage @LIKE participants' cases and collect quantitative data elements specific to services provided at all sites.[17] Despite concerns expressed by program staff with experience using VOS in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties—specifically about limitations related to ease of access and analytics—the program decided to use VOS instead of developing a new system. The @LIKE data elements collected through VOS help with the on-site management of day-to-day operations and with project-wide strategic management. The data management system is customized to provide

[15] Dean, J. W., and Bowen, D. E. (1994). Management theory and total quality improving research and practice through theory development and practice. *Academic Management Review*, 19(3): 392-418.
[16] Decker, M. D. (1992). Continuous quality improvement. *Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology*, 13(3): 165-169.
[17] For details on the VOS system, see https://www.geographicsolutions.com/virtual-onestop-solutions-overview.asp

site- and program-level information, as well as scorecards and dashboards used by each of the sites and the leadership.

Scorecards and dashboards. The Project Director and the Lead Grant Coordinator use scorecards and dashboards to turn program data into information that can be analyzed to guide future direction and inform CQI. These key process management tools create a common decision-making structure. They have been designed by the Project Director in consultation with program staff to be simple and easy to use. The scorecards and dashboards communicate the information visually, minimizing confusion in the interpretation of program data. They support strategy and operations by providing meaningful and useful data for program staff to make improvements on a regular basis rather than using lag data elements to make mid-course corrections. The scorecards and dashboards provide real-time information and at-a-glance views of key performance indicators related to participation, educational attainment, work experience, and skills improvement.

Weekly Activity Hours Reports. The Lead Grant Coordinator creates and disseminates weekly scorecards by pulling data from VOS. The Weekly Activity Hours Reports detail the time spent on each service activity—a proxy measure of the intensity of services each participant receives. This report allows the Project Director, Grant Coordinators, and Site Directors to monitor whether participants are receiving an appropriate mix of program services. The standard for data entry into VOS is 100 percent accuracy. All nine delivery sites are required to enter these data into VOS as soon as they are recorded. Each service activity is coded in VOS (e.g., life coaching, GED preparation), and each week the Project Director and Lead Grant Coordinator review the reports for accuracy. The reports are disseminated on the same day each week to each site, and include some site analysis by the Lead Grant Coordinator, levels of activity for each participant, and other information.

For example, there are standards for the minimum number of activity hours (4 hours per week) each participant should have, the number of days (60) within which a participant should be given a pretest, and the number of hours required for completing three WorkKeys assessments and obtaining the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). The Grant Coordinator uses weekly management messages, which include a description of the accuracy and timeliness of the data entered into VOS, to provide feedback to the Site Directors, including positive reinforcement.

Monthly Assessment Score Reports. These monthly scorecards show participants' basic academic assessment scores and scores from participants' social/psychological assessments. These tests are administered to participants within the first 60 days of enrollment into the program and before program completion. Staff use these reports to determine the starting point for and progress of each participant. The assessments are not used to measure participants' basic academic skills, which is the approach of traditional WIA Youth programs, but rather to instill and reinforce the program goal of helping disconnected young adults identify and achieve their career goals. Additionally, basic academic skill assessments for @LIKE are not a requirement for enrollment as they traditionally are in the WIA Youth program, instead they are used to help participants identify goals and pathways mentioned above. The reports detail and track whether the program's interventions are working and whether participants are making progress. If post-tests have been completed, these reports allow program staff to analyze the changes that the participant has experienced over a period of time. The Project Director and the Lead Grant Coordinator report their observations in the Monthly Assessment Score Reports and suggest strategies to address any outstanding issues.

Demographics Scorecard. The Demographics Scorecard is a governance tool used by the Steering Committee to track participant demographic information. The scorecard reports data on participant age, gender, ethnicity, race, and education. The Project Director monitors the scorecard on a monthly basis, and the Steering Committee continually monitors performance to ensure that the program is serving the most disconnected young adults and meeting the benchmarks for the percentage of older youth being served.

Monthly tracking of performance outcomes. The Weekly Activity Hours Reports, Monthly Assessment Score Reports, and the Demographics Scorecard are analyzed by the Project Director and Lead Grant Coordinator to track progress toward the performance outcomes specified in the grant. Based on the results, the Project Director and Lead Grant Coordinator generate appropriate guidance for program staff and identify issues to be discussed at the Steering Committee meeting.

Stoplight Dashboard. The Stoplight Dashboard is a quarterly report that provides key stakeholders with at-a-glance summaries of cumulative progress made toward meeting key performance indicators in the current quarter (described below). The Project Director and Lead Grant Coordinator create the dashboard using data from VOS as the primary source. They designate progress made toward each indicator using traffic light color designations—green for "on or above target," yellow for "needs corrective action to meet goal," and red for "in danger of not meeting goals." This initial designation is then discussed at Steering Committee meetings, where a final determination is made based on additional factors beyond the metric of being within a certain range.

Stakeholders use the combined elements of the dashboard to identify key trends, make comparisons, and note exceptions. The dashboard helps the Steering Committee to be proactive regarding program needs and trends. The Site Directors and the Grant Coordinators recognize the utility of information shared via scorecards and dashboards, and use the dashboard to track program performance and identify and resolve issues. The following key performance indicators are displayed in the Stoplight Dashboard:

- Serving Older Disconnected Young Adults, Ages 22 to 24
- Complete Career Awareness Component
- Complete GED or High School Diploma within Two Years
- Enter Paid Internship
- Enter Unsubsidized Employment
- Enter Vocational Training or College
- National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) Attainment
- Participant Retention
- Improve Basic Skills by Two Education Levels within One Year

- Employers Report
  Satisfaction/Expectations Exceeded

Customer feedback. The program regularly asks participants and employers to provide their feedback via an anonymous online comment card survey. To facilitate the collection of feedback from participants, an icon with a link to the participant comment card survey is loaded on at least one computer at each delivery site. Program staff make participants aware that they are able to complete a comment card at any point, but they also encourage participants to complete the comment card survey as they leave each day.

For employers, the program proactively emails them a link to an electronic comment card survey, which employers use to provide anonymous feedback. Each delivery site has the flexibility to determine how frequently to send the electronic link to employers. The Project Director provides each Site Director and Grant Coordinator with weekly reports containing the feedback collected from the electronic comment cards. These survey responses are also shared anonymously during the quarterly Steering Committee meetings. Examples of the employer and participant surveys are included in Appendix D.

5. PROGRAM DELIVERY

The @LIKE program's ability to deliver services is based on three components: Workforce Focus, Outreach and Recruitment, and Program Services. This chapter presents promising practices related to these three components, which were observed at one or more service delivery sites. Section 5.1 discusses the training and technical assistance resources provided to site staff, including professional development activities, training on VOS data collection tools, and the interpretation of participant assessment results. Section 5.2 outlines the strategies the program uses to recruit disconnected young adults into the program, emphasizing differences in strategies across different age groups. Section 5.3 describes the roles of the Case Manager and the Life Coach, the assessments that are administered to participants, and the diverse activities that participants are engaged in, including educational development, work-based learning experiences, and career readiness certification. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the program's completion policy (section 5.4). Appendix B presents variations in program implementation across these sites.

5.1 Workforce Focus

Workforce focus is how a program engages, manages, and develops the workforce to use its full potential in alignment with the program's overall mission, strategy, and action plans. Workforce focus is essential to the program's ability to assess workforce capability and capacity needs, and to build a workforce environment conducive to high performance. The @LIKE program provides ongoing professional development opportunities to program staff through a variety of trainings. Trainings are an essential component in ensuring that program staff are able to provide participants with the appropriate level of service. Advisory Council meetings regularly include development opportunities as well, such as discussions on leadership best practices. They are also used to solicit feedback on such topics as how to retain young adults in the program and how to recruit those aged 22 to 24.

The trainings provided to the program staff are described below.

Professional development training. All program staff initially completed a 3.5-hour program overview training designed and presented by the Project Director. The training is designed for everyone involved in the program (program staff, program providers, and partner staff) to become grounded in the core elements of the program model. It provides an overview of the program and highlights the roles of individuals who support its operational functions. It also notes the differences between @LIKE and the WIA Youth program and reviews program expectations and outcomes. @LIKE staff participate in additional professional development trainings including how to write good case notes; career pathways—overview, discussion, and planning; recruiting disconnected young adults; and the National Career Readiness Certificate. The Lead Grant Coordinator posts all training materials on SharePoint so that new staff can have access to them. It is expected that Site Directors provide the overview training using the material for any new staff.

VOS training. The Riverside County EDA provides training on the VOS system for the counties that need this training. The Management Information System (MIS) team in each county receives regular updates about the customized data collection. The EDA MIS manager provides ongoing technical assistance on data entry and creates training webinars on special topics, as needed.

Training to interpret social/psychological assessment results. The assessment consultant and the Project Director provide training to facilitate the use of participants' assessment results by Life Coaches. The assessment consultant conducted an in-person assessment training for each county at the start of the program. Additional training was offered when it became apparent that staff needed further assistance in using the assessment results to tailor a participant's development plan and to identify an appropriate framework of activities with which to engage the participant. Assessment trainings provide opportunities for staff to develop their abilities to use these results and become comfortable using these tools with their clients.

Life Coach training and certification. Life Coaches must be trained and certified through the Coach U's Core Essentials Program[18] within 3 to 6 months of hire. This training provides @LIKE's Life Coaches with core competencies that are essential for providing individual coaching services. The Core Essentials Program provides a home-based program delivery option via facilitated TeleClasses. This delivery method allows Life Coaches to set their own pace to complete the 77-hour course within @LIKE's established timeline. Coaches enrolled in the program receive a course textbook and a set of resource materials and reference books.

5.2 Outreach, Recruitment, and Engagement Processes

The @LIKE program makes a concerted effort in conducting outreach, recruitment, and engagement efforts to ensure that the target population for the program is reached. Staff use a variety of strategies to reach disconnected young adults, such as reaching out to other governmental/non-profit entities serving similar populations, advertising via traditional and social media, and leveraging referrals from the friends and families of current participants. Once staff have identified individuals within the target population, an intensive effort is made to engage them fully and provide program services as soon as possible.

5.2.1 Outreach and Recruitment

Program staff undertake proactive and intensive outreach and recruitment activities to engage and enroll disconnected young adults in the @LIKE program. Since there is no common location where disconnected youth congregate, it is important to reach out to them at non-traditional places. This section details the various methods that counties, service providers, program staff, and participants employ to recruit disconnected young adults into the program. In addition, key differences in strategies across different age groups are described, including the strategies used

[18] www.coachinc.com

to keep disconnected young adults engaged with the program. Appendix C presents the @LIKE recruitment flier, a fact sheet, and a referral form.

"We have partnership meetings in the community, with city officials, Salvation Army, probation officers, school officials, and the Department of Social Services."

–@LIKE Life Coach/Case Manager

Outreach strategies to enroll target populations. The program uses a multifaceted strategy to recruit disconnected young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 into the program. The strategy employs a range of communication methods to reach these young adults, relying on entities inside and outside of the program and on home visits. The recruitment methods described in this section are also shaped by the intensity and amount of effort it takes to reach and recruit disconnected young adults into the program. During the research team's on-site visits, @LIKE staff indicated that in order to reach this target population, much of the recruitment effort is done on a case-by-case basis. To recruit young adults, staff members go to non-traditional locations such as tattoo parlors, skate parks, convenience stores, and make home visits.

Outreach and recruitment efforts fall into five categories:

- Governmental agencies and non-profit/faith-based organizations
- Advertising via traditional methods and social media
- Referrals from other workforce development programs
- Referrals from current program participants, family, and friends
- Intensive, non-traditional approaches.

Program staff reach out to local government entities that already provide support services to young adults who are disconnected, or at risk of becoming disconnected, from employment and educational institutions. Program staff maintain relationships primarily with three types of government entities to encourage recruitment: (1) local school districts, probation officers, and officials from the juvenile justice system; (2) local human and social services offices operating Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); and (3) public housing. Additionally, the program interacts with non-profit and faith-based organizations within the community that serve young adults in the area. These organizations refer disconnected young adults to the program, and, in turn, program staff often refer participants to these organizations for support services not available through the @LIKE program.

Program staff also advertise via traditional modes and use social media for outreach and recruitment efforts. The program tries to reach disconnected young adults by advertising in local communities through informational fliers and newspaper ads. Staff also conduct outreach on social media platforms. Snapshots of the @LIKE Facebook page, website and other outreach materials are presented in Appendix C.

Staff cited the leveraging of government and community partners, and advertising and direct outreach into community as important tools. However, both staff and participants emphasized that word of mouth referrals from participants and from disconnected young adults seeking services from the WIA Youth program are the most effective means of recruiting program participants. Site Directors, Life Coaches, and Case Managers focus on leveraging word of mouth not only between program participants and other disconnected young adults, but also through relatives and friends. A current participant indicated that "[my] brother brought me here, I had enough failing to find a job, I had no education, I didn't know anything. It's the ease of coming here. They help you step-by-step. They help me keep going with them."

As more disconnected young adults enroll in the program and obtain solid skills and employment, they are able to serve as local ambassadors for the program. They speak to their friends and relatives, who may also be disconnected, and share how the program has helped them and could also help others improve their educational and employment outcomes. As one participant said, "[I] heard [about @LIKE] through my girlfriend, I was out of school, so I came here. I'm back in school, and now I have my first paid work experience." A group of participants produced a video[19] that was presented at the October 2014 Steering Committee meeting, highlighting the challenges facing young adults in the area and their success stories. Many sites also offer small incentives to encourage participant referrals, such as gift cards or stipends.

> *"Word of mouth seemed to be the most effective method. One of the local news outlets interviewed our participant, and word of mouth from grandparents who viewed the news yielded us a lot of referrals."*
>
> *–@LIKE Site Director*

Referrals from the WIA Youth program continue to be an effective outreach and recruitment method, since many disconnected young adults who come into local One-Stop Centers looking for assistance are referred to the @LIKE program for more intensive and comprehensive services. WIA Youth program participants themselves make referrals to the @LIKE program; for example, one @LIKE Participant said that he "found out from a buddy in the WIA program, [who] said that I needed to talk to [the @LIKE Site Director]" about enrolling.

During on-site visits, staff described non-traditional, more intensive approaches to outreach and recruitment. Staff shared how their in-person outreach included visits to local parks, tattoo parlors, smoke shops, homeless shelters and other hangouts known to be places with disconnected young adults. Staff also reported that they had some success going into low-income communities and neighborhoods, knocking on doors, and speaking to friends, families, and young adults about the opportunities available through the program.

[19] @LIKE Participant Promotional Video.

Differences in strategies for the 18–21 and 22–24 age groups. @LIKE aims to serve disconnected young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. The program employs the outreach and recruitment efforts highlighted above for the entire targeted age group. It also differentiates strategies to reach out to specific age groups within this population to more effectively address their needs. For example, program staff focus on different hangouts based on age, such as convenience stores, skate parks, and tattoo parlors (especially for those aged 22–24).

Program staff separated the outreach and recruitment strategies into two primary age groups: 18–21 and 22–24. The needs and expectations of disconnected young adults change as they get older. The staff generally reported that it is easier to contact and recruit individuals in the 18–21 age group compared with those in the 22–24 age group. During site visits, staff indicated that the younger participant group is more ready to enroll in the program and not as much outreach is needed. Staff also noted that those aged 18–21 are "better advocates for themselves than the older ones. I feel they were more recently connected than the older ones and so they are able to draw upon their more recent experience."

Disconnected young adults aged 22–24 are more likely to have been unemployed or separated from educational institutions longer than those aged 18–21. Outreach and recruitment efforts are therefore more resource intensive and reliant on referrals from current participants or word of mouth. Another barrier known from the start of the program is that many in this age group see themselves as adults and are not interested in a "youth" program, which is why @LIKE uses the term "young adult" to refer to this population. To recruit from this age group, program staff emphasize the work experience and employment services available through the program rather than the educational and basic skill building component. They also use specific outreach methods to reach this group. The primary method has been word of mouth and referral from program participants in the same age range. Additionally, staff visit local hangouts such as tattoo parlors, make presentations at local libraries and social services offices, and place ads in newspapers, targeting ZIP codes with high poverty rates. Via email and project memorandums, the Project Director provided policy guidance regarding the recruitment of older young adults (included in Appendix C).

> *"We were like a little family. We had interactions with other participants when I was there, and I was there all the time. We kept each other on track. Other participants were experienced with finding work, and they would help other participants. It was a warm environment to share with other participants about life issues."*
>
> *–@LIKE Participant*

Strategies to keep participants engaged. As participants start to receive services, a key staff focus is to regularly and effectively communicate with participants to determine their progress in achieving the goals set and to identify any barriers that prevent them from fully engaging with the program.

Staff engage program participants to help build their sense of self-worth and empower them to accomplish their goals. When participants begin the program, they set early goals, such as basic skill building, including interview preparation or résumé development. Accomplishing these early goals provides positive self-reinforcement for the participants, increasing the likelihood that they will continue to progress and remain engaged with the program. The recognition of accomplishments with awards or certificates, as tangible evidence of the progress participants are making, provide positive reinforcement. The Life Coaches have a key role in keeping participants engaged with the program. They communicate with participants via phone, text, and social media—platforms that disconnected young adults are comfortable using.

Another key element in keeping participants engaged are the relationships that develop between individuals and their peers. Many program services are provided in group or classroom settings, where participants often become friends and gain a sense of togetherness. All @LIKE sites have been encouraged by the Project Director to use participant cohorts as a way to group and band participants together. Peer relationships frequently have the effect of encouraging individuals to remain engaged with the program in order to maintain these friendships. The participants also hold each other to certain standards in working toward educational and employment goals. In another successful strategy, staff demonstrate their belief in participants' abilities by providing opportunities to lead, such as tutoring other participants or giving presentations.

Accommodations are also made to help remove any barriers that would prevent participants from continuing with the program, including transportation subsidies and child care. Staff work with social services programs such as TANF to recognize the activities that participants are engaged in, so that they remain eligible for income assistance.

Although staff expend considerable effort to keep disconnected young adults engaged with the program, many participants become absent for extended periods of time. These reasons include periodic homelessness, ongoing issues with the criminal justice system, pressures to provide for their families, and substance abuse. A key program feature to accommodate such life obstacles is the flexibility given to participants to engage, disengage, and re-engage no matter how long they have been absent. This is different from the WIA Youth program, where participants are exited if they have been "out of service contact" for 90 days. The staff communicate to these individuals that they are welcome to return at any time and can pick up where they left off. This attitude creates a sense of permanence that many participants have not experienced before, enticing them to return to the program when they are able.

Once an individual has left the program, the Case Manager and Life Coach remain in contact with that person and encourage re-engagement through phone calls, texts, and social media. Sometimes they even go to find the individual at hangouts or at home. @LIKE has kept some absent young adults enrolled in the program for extended periods while they try and locate them. Many returned to the program. Staff also mentioned that they provide small incentive payments to participants to encourage them to come back upon completion of certain program activities.

5.2.2 Application Process

The program uses a streamlined application process to enroll individuals. Innovative features such as a one-page application and self-attestation make the application process simple and easy to complete. The first step in the enrollment process is a meeting with a program staff member, followed by determination of eligibility, completion of the application, enrollment in the program, and the assignment a of a Life Coach and Case Manager. The application, eligibility, and enrollment processes sometimes occur concurrently, especially if a disconnected young adult does not have all the documents to complete certain aspects of the application.

> *"The application was easy to go through. I would not have stuck with the program, if I had to fill out long applications."*
>
> *–@LIKE Participant*

Pre-application screening and orientation/intake interview. A staff member conducts a one-on-one orientation/interview with the prospective participant, either at the program site or in the field. This session is conducted by either the Case Manager or the Life Coach, and sometimes both. During the interview, the staff member explains the program, sets expectations, reviews the required paperwork, discusses the rules, and highlights recent success stories to encourage participation. The session also allows staff to get to know the potential participant and determine eligibility.

Determination of participant eligibility. Staff use a checklist during the interview, to determine whether a participant meets the criteria of being disconnected and is eligible to participate. The checklist includes age, education status, employment status, and selective service status (if applicable). Other criteria include whether the potential participant is low-income, gang-involved, an ex-offender, on aid, or a recently separated veteran. The eligibility checklist is included in Appendix C.

> *"If you do not have these [documents], do not let this stop you. We will start the process. We will help you get the documents."*
>
> *–@LIKE Program Staff*

The staff also use this opportunity to emphasize to potential participants that they can start the application process and become enrolled even if they do not have all the required documents. The direct involvement of staff in the application and enrollment process ensures that participants do not fall through the cracks as applications are processed.

One-page application and self-attestation. Eligible applicants fill out a one-page application (included in Appendix C) and self-attest to certain eligibility factors on the application if they do not have all the required documents. Self-attestation allows the applicant to enroll in the program and begin receiving services immediately. This is in contrast to the WIA Youth program, which first requires supporting documents to be certified before an individual can be enrolled, a process that can take a few days to a few weeks to complete.[20] Appendix C includes the application form and examples of the self-attestation forms.

After enrollment, the participant is given 2 weeks or 30 days, depending on the required form, to provide the necessary information (such as a Social Security number, selective service registration, and valid government identification). The staff helps participants obtain these documents by walking them through the application process and providing transportation to obtain the required forms. The focus groups of participants all agreed that the limited paperwork required was a big advantage in streamlining the process and permitting smoother enrollment. One participant stated, "I participated at ROP. I applied for another program, it was stressful."

> *"It was a very simple process, but on my part, it took a while for me to produce the documents I needed. I knew that I could just tell them that I have the documents to start."*
>
> *–@LIKE Participant*

Assignment of Life Coach and Case Manager. Once the application is complete, staff members immediately begin providing services and leveraging available funds. After enrollment, the new participant meets with staff the same day. During this meeting, the participant is given a refresher about the program, receives bus cards or gas cards, and is assigned a Life Coach and Case Manager. Participants are placed according to staff availability; however, an effort is made to place participants with particular Life Coaches with whom they "click."

5.3 Program Services

The services delivered by the program fall into four general categories: assessments, life coaching, case management, and activities. The majority of participants receive services in the order outlined earlier in this report, in Exhibit 3 (section 2.2.1, above). In this section, the assessments are described, followed by the role and responsibilities of the Life Coach and the Case Manager, and a detailed description of program activities.

5.3.1 Assessments

All participants complete the basic academic skills assessment and three social/psychological assessment tools. The Life Coaches use the social/psychological assessments to understand what assets each young adult brings, and their needs, personality traits, and challenges, in order to guide the support and wraparound services the program will provide.

[20] The WIA Youth program allows for self-attestation of all the barriers for eligibility (homeless individual and/or runaway youth, offender, pregnant or parenting youth, youth who needs additional assistance, and drop-out) except for the basic skills deficient barrier and factors that impact family size for the calculation of low income, such as whether a youth is a dependent or not. http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL_05-14_Acc.pdf

Basic academic skills assessment. @LIKE participants usually take the basic academic skills assessment within the first month of receiving services. The program has set a standard of 60 days after enrollment for all LIKE participants to complete the assessment. Each county uses the same basic academic skills assessment that they used for WIA Youth participants. Riverside and San Bernardino counties use the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), and Imperial County uses the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to determine participants' basic skill levels and uncover any subject areas requiring improvement. The flexibility to use assessments that staff are already familiar with allows staff to focus on using the results in providing services rather than trying to administer an unfamiliar assessment. Staff provide support services to educate the participants and improve their scores in the subject areas that they are struggling with. This may include tutoring in areas such as math or reading comprehension, or testing for a learning disability. Alternatively, program staff may engage dedicated tutors to provide assistance to participants. The results of the assessment also provide useful guidance in designing or updating the Individual Service Strategy (ISS). According to program staff, "having the CASAS result is the trigger to fill out the ISS." The tests are administered again toward the end of the program to determine progress in participants' skills during the course of the program.

Social/psychological assessments. Along with the basic academic skills assessment, program staff administer three social/psychological assessments to each participant:

- ***Self-Appraisal and Perceived Barriers Assessment*,** to measure resiliency through self-perception, self-worth, and perceived barriers
- ***Career Development Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form (CDSES-SF*),** to measure confidence in ability to complete major career decision tasks
- ***CenterMark Personality Profile Assessment*,** a Myers-Briggs type personality and career profile assessment.

"Participants respond to the [Social/Psychological] assessments – it is very empowering for them."

–@LIKE Program Staff

The Self-Appraisal and Perceived Barriers Assessment was designed by the assessment consultant. Program staff contact the consultant via email and ask for a user name and password, which enables the participant to complete the assessment. The other two tests were developed by outside organizations and were purchased using grant funds.

Timing of the social/psychological assessments. The three assessments are administered within 60 days of a participant's start and at the end of an individual's participation in the program to track progress over time. The program is flexible as to when the assessments are administered, but it is essential to administer the pre-assessments early, during the first 3 months that a participant is enrolled in the program. Life Coaches rely on these assessments to provide effective coaching, and any delay directly impacts that process. Program staff explain the goal of each assessment to participants and how the results will be used to help them define and achieve their goals. However, staff have the discretion to administer the assessments at a later time based on the needs of the participant, especially if the staff believe that taking the assessments will drive the participant out of the program, causing the participant to become disconnected again.

The post-assessment is ideally administered upon program completion, but staff have the flexibility to determine the exact timing. It is imperative that the staff understand the importance of these post-assessments and administer them when the participant is near completion or has competed the program. It is recommended that these assessments be given more frequently—at regular intervals—to track an individual's progress through the program. Such testing provides multiple opportunities to reassess the services provided and modify the ISS if needed. One of the participants commented that "it may be useful to have an assessment update—at enough time to see the growth."

Social/psychological assessment results and life coaching. Once the assessment pre-tests are complete, the participant's Life Coach receives a report that provides an overview of the participant's personality type, strengths, and perceived barriers, plus a list of careers that might best suit the participant's personality traits. Life Coaches receive training on how to interpret the assessment results consistently and use them to develop the ISS. The results are confidential and shared only with the participant. In a one-on-one meeting, the Life Coach discusses the test results with the participant and emphasizes how helpful they are in learning about the participant's unique talents, skills, and strengths and in identifying his or her goals regarding life coaching, education, and careers.

The assessments also allow participants to "get a better perspective of themselves." One program staff member reported, "Participants respond to the assessments—it is very empowering for them." All Life Coaches and participants interviewed for this study reported that the assessment tools were useful and effective. Participants identified these assessments as a useful way of recognizing their strengths and weaknesses so that they could build on them.

> *"It was like a game and then they would describe you. It was right on….. When you know your strengths, you can build on them. I am a good speaker. I am a hard worker. You can develop your weaknesses. The Life Coach worked with me on this."*
>
> *–@LIKE Participant*

Mental health and disability assessments. It is crucial that a program serving the disconnected young adult population recognize the importance of serving participants with disabilities. The 2011 data from the Current Population Survey indicate that approximately 30 percent of disconnected youth in the United States have some type of disability that prevents them from obtaining employment, and almost all respondents who reported a disability indicated that the disability was "severe" (27.6 severe vs. 2.7 percent "non-severe").[21] In order to serve the target

[21] Fernandes, A. L., and Gabe, T. (2011). *Disconnected Youth: A Look at 16- to 24-Year Olds Who Are Not Working or in School*. CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, R40535.

population successfully, it is important (1) to use assessments to identify whether the participant has a learning disability or a mental health need; (2) to create partnerships that offer services to meet these needs; and (3) to provide additional support through the Life Coach.

To meet participants' mental health and disability service needs, the @LIKE sites have developed partnerships with community organizations. These organizations provide participants with specialized assessments and services, which are outside the scope of the @LIKE program. Some participants may feel stigma and shame in availing themselves of mental health or disability services, and even though they recognize that they need these services, they might not seek them. The Life Coach can help them overcome any fear of stigma by engaging individuals in conversations regarding the importance of these services, visiting the office where services are offered to dispel any fears, and initially accompanying them to some of their appointments. One participant noted, "I have a mental disability. I have to check myself every day. I know what I need to work on. I have talked with [my Life Coach] about these things and what I want to work on. She helps me remember what I am working on. She keeps me focused."

Overview of completed assessments. As of December 31, 2014, at least three-quarters of enrolled participants in all three counties had taken the basic skills assessment pre-tests for reading and math through CASAS (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties) or TABE (Imperial County). As Exhibit 8 illustrates, in Riverside County, CASAS Math Pre-Tests were completed by 76.9 percent of participants, and the CASAS Reading Pre-Test by 74.2 percent. In San Bernardino County, 80.6 percent of participants completed the CASAS Math Pre-Test and 81.9 percent completed the Reading Pre-Tests. Imperial County completion rates through the TABE were 78.2 percent for the Math Pre-Test, and 82.1 percent for the Reading Pre-Test.

The social/psychological pre-tests were completed at a slightly lower rate compared to the CASAS and TABE assessments. Average completion rates of the CenterMark Career Pre-Tests ranged from 62.6 percent (Imperial County) to 74.4 percent (San Bernardino County), with an average of 69.4 percent for all three counties. Completion rates for the Self-Appraisal and Self Efficacy Pre-Tests averaged 65.2 percent and 66.6 percent, respectively, across all sites.

Post-test completion rates for the basic skills assessment and the social/psychological assessments were all relatively low in comparison to the goals established by the Steering Committee. These preliminary outcomes, however, may change because the horizon of services in @LIKE is considerably longer than that of the traditional WIA Youth program. Moreover, the administration of the post-tests is based on the staff's evaluation of the progress participants have made after receiving training and employment services. The variability in individuals' progress towards their goals and in the evaluation by program staff of progress towards those goals makes it difficult to compare the timeframe of skill gains for individuals who entered the program at the same time.

Exhibit 8: Assessments of Enrolled Participants by County

Participant Characteristics	Riverside County (n=325)		Imperial County (n=179)		San Bernardino County (n=160)		Program Totals (n=664)	
CASAS*								
Appraisal Math	156	48.0%	N/A	N/A	10	6.3%	166	34.2%
Math Pre-Test	250	76.9%	N/A	N/A	129	80.6%	379	78.1%
Math Post-Test	29	8.9%	N/A	N/A	53	33.1%	82	16.9%
Appraisal Reading	158	48.6%	N/A	N/A	10	6.3%	168	34.6%
Reading Pre-Test	241	74.2%	N/A	N/A	131	81.9%	372	76.7%
Reading Post-Test	15	4.6%	N/A	N/A	51	31.9%	66	13.6%
Test of Adult Basic Education**								
Pre-Test Math	N/A	N/A	140	78.2%	N/A	N/A	140	78.2%
Post-Test Math	N/A	N/A	2	1.1%	N/A	N/A	2	1.1%
Pre-Test Reading	N/A	N/A	147	82.1%	N/A	N/A	147	82.1%
Post-Test Reading	N/A	N/A	1	0.6%	N/A	N/A	1	0.6%
@LIKE Social/Psychological Tests								
CenterMark Career Pre-Test	230	70.8%	112	62.6%	119	74.4%	461	69.4%
Self-Appraisal Pre-Test	213	65.5%	111	62.0%	109	68.1%	433	65.2%
Self-Appraisal Post-Test	37	11.4%	10	5.6%	51	31.9%	98	14.8%
Self-Efficacy Scale Pre-Test	218	67.1%	112	62.6%	112	70.0%	442	66.6%
Self-Efficacy Scale Post-Test	37	11.4%	10	5.6%	51	31.9%	98	14.8%

***Completion rates for CASAS assessments reflect only Riverside and San Bernardino counties.**
****Completion rates for TABE assessments reflect only Imperial County.**

5.3.2 Life Coaching

Role of the Life Coach. Life Coaches are trained individuals who counsel and encourage young adults on matters having to do with careers and personal challenges. They work directly with participants to identify existing internal and external assets and resources. They help participants recognize their inherent strengths with the help of assessment tools and one-on-one conversations. Through the coaching process, Life Coaches guide participants to a deeper understanding of themselves. This process gives participants power and a sense of self-efficacy—an "I can do this, I can continue on" attitude that enables participants to successfully move through the program and achieve their personal goals. The relationship between the Life Coach and the participant is one in which the participant feels comfortable sharing personal challenges. Participants emphasized the importance of having a welcoming and trusting atmosphere to enable them to get over their

> *"Go to their immediate need and take care of it."*
>
> *–@LIKE Project Director*

initial nervousness. Many Life Coaches regularly hold sessions at the local Starbucks or on a basketball court.

Services provided by Life Coaches. Life Coaches provide and coordinate a number of services for participants. They work with each participant to develop an Individual Service Strategy (ISS), which includes realistic benchmarks to achieve goals identified by the participant. Life Coaches provide soft skills training, guide educational development, arrange support services, and explore careers and interests. These services are described in detail in section 5.3.4.

> *"It is not just what my Life Coach connected me to. It was having someone believe in me. It was the whole package. The people, the experience. They learn your name. Ask you about your day. They genuinely mean it."*
>
> *–@LIKE Participant*

Life Coach training. As described earlier, each Life Coach receives training and is certified to fulfill the Life Coach role. An exception is made for Life Coach candidates who possess applicable education and/or experience. These candidates may forgo formal training, but must be certified through a program such as Coach U's Core Essentials Program.[22] Training helps all Life Coaches understand their role in helping participants to recognize their strengths and to set and meet appropriate goals. Life Coaches also receive training in how to interpret and use results from the social/psychological assessments. The Project Director provides ongoing guidance to Life Coaches about how to most effectively fulfill their role. The Project Director asks the coaches to quickly identify new issues as they arise and then to be responsive and work with participants to create a plan for resolving those issues.

Strategies for engaging participants. Continuous and steady interaction is essential to keep this particularly disengaged and vulnerable population of young adults interested in the program. The Project Director emphasizes that to retain participants in the program "go to their immediate need and take care of it." The participants are engaged with the program within 2 or 3 days of enrollment. Soon after enrollment, a Life Coach meets with the participant to identify barriers, create a roadmap, and set goals. Early engagement allows the participants to see that they are working toward their goals, and that boosts their confidence.

> *"Accommodate activities to what participant needs, find ways to be accessible and available."*
>
> *–@LIKE Life Coach*

Life Coaches use a variety of techniques to engage young participants—mail, email, phone calls, text messaging, Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Kik, house calls, fundraisers, and field trips. The method of engagement is adapted to meet the needs of the participant; some participants prefer group settings whereas others prefer a one-

[22] http://www.coachinc.com/CoachU/

on-one conversation. Highlighting the flexibility integral to the overall program design and specifically to the Life Coach role, one participant during an on-site visit explained how easy it was to reach out to the Life Coach for guidance and support: "With my Life Coach I can walk [in] the door. We have the trust, the confidence. I chat with my Life Coach every day. We sit down once a week."

5.3.3 Case Management

Role of the Case Manager. Case management is an essential function of the program. Case Managers help participants focus on the outcomes and tasks that must be completed to fulfill the program's requirements, and they provide consistent program structure. They help participants achieve personal goals by setting and tracking applicable deadlines. They also generate resources for participants, such as connecting participants with appropriate training opportunities. While the Life Coach is considered the participant's personal coach, Case Managers also provide guidance to participants—an often-needed additional support to disengaged young adults.

Services provided by Case Managers. Case Managers work closely with Life Coaches and participants to ensure that accurate and current participant information is captured in VOS. They also coordinate support services such as bus passes and funds for child care or other immediate needs. Appendix C presents the program's case file organization guide, the review log, and an example of a case file.

Separate roles for Life Coach and Case Manager. Case Manager and Life Coach are complementary roles. Each role should retain its own focus and responsibilities, but having both positions provides an additional level of flexibility and support to meet participants' needs. This flexibility helps them arrive at the best way to help participants without compromising the integrity of the program. The program design proposed that two different individuals should perform the duties of Life Coach and Case Manager. Due to funding constraints, the program has allowed the same individual to have the dual role of Case Manager and Life Coach at some sites. The program provides a pilot to determine if Case Managers could also serve as Life Coaches. The Project Director emphasizes that "the Life Coach model being separate is the way to go." Separate roles for Life Coaches and Case Managers give the program the capability to provide more intense and effective wraparound services and to engage participants at multiple points.

> *"Having a separate Life Coach and Case Manager is important. They are complementary and supportive roles. They serve different purposes."*
>
> *–@LIKE Site Director*

5.3.4 Program Activities

Program participants are involved in a variety of activities to help them meet their goals and keep them engaged with the program.

Individual Service Strategy. Participants begin to develop an Individual Service Strategy (ISS) during the first meeting with their Life Coach. The ISS worksheet included in Appendix C and contains the following information:

- Participant's contact information
- List of assessments and their completion dates
- Career goals/interests
- Program participation plans together with a list of activity codes that include life coaching contact hours, goal setting, internships, and on-the-job training
- Support service plan, which may include transportation, child care, clothing, medical referrals, or other support services.

The ISS is a living document and is modified as participants receive pre-assessment results and revise their goals. After the key elements of the ISS have been discussed, participants sign an agreement stating that they participated in the development of their ISS and agree with the support services to be provided, and affirming that they will meet the requirements of the plan to the best of their ability.

Soft skills training. Soft skills training focuses on the participant's interpersonal and self-management abilities and teaches responsibility, time management, workplace and interview etiquette, and teamwork. Participants also receive help in creating their portfolio. One participant stated, "My job really liked my portfolio. They were amazed and liked it a lot. It is like my bible. Employers love to see it." Staff hold one-on-one meetings with participants to go over participants' résumés and prepare them for job interviews. The program provides an opportunity for participants to learn these soft skills in a safe environment. The training also helps them recognize that they need these skills and that their struggles are not unique. Soft skills training is provided through workshops, online courses, and webinars. To enable participants to complete the online courses and webinars, the program provides access to computers and the Internet. The Program Staff holds one-on-one meetings with participants to go over their résumés and prepare them for job interviews.

> *"I just finished the work experience. It was fun, I liked it. It was a pregnancy clinic. I learned a lot—about the office work environment, medical procedures.... I found out that I want to do office work in the medical field."*
>
> *–@LIKE Participant*

Exploration of careers and interests. Program staff help participants to identify their career of interest. One participant underlined the importance of this exercise: "Staff asked me direct questions and I really had to think, what do I want? Where do I want to go with my life? Went to a website that helped me think about things that I didn't even know to think about when it comes to picking a job." Once participants identify a career track they are interested in, they can research the local labor market to find out about career requirements and estimated salary, ensuring an informed decision at this pivotal stage. In some instances, participants have changed career tracks as a result. If a career requires further education, the Life Coach helps the participant to research local education programs and internships/ employment opportunities that align with the participant's overall career goals.

Work experience. Participants are also placed into subsidized employment for a maximum of 100 hours over the duration of the program. For many participants, opportunities to intern represent a first-ever job experience and are a major contributing factor in the decision to enroll in @LIKE. The staff maintain a database to track employment opportunities in the area and put substantial effort into identifying employment opportunities that match the interests of participants. All the employers interviewed during site visits expressed satisfaction with their experience with program participants during the internship and indicated that they would be willing to work with other participants in the future. One employer stated that @LIKE participants are "motivated, proactive, better trained, and have better life skills."

"We are currently looking for a graphic designer. I have asked [@LIKE Program Staff] if they have anyone interested in this area. I have the confidence in [the staff] and the Program to ask for someone who we could end up hiring."

–Employer

Certification, licensing, and educational development. Life Coaches and Case Managers are given flexibility to provide educational services as they deem appropriate. Participants may be offered tutoring if the basic academic skills assessment identifies an area in which they may be struggling. Program staff also emphasize the opportunities available to participants in obtaining stackable certifications and licenses as career pathways. Program staff arrange for participants to get certifications and licenses for entry into jobs such as customer service, security guard, and commercial driving. Many certifications and credentials involve staggered work experience components that appeal to participants who are not interested in obtaining a college degree. In addition, GED preparation is provided for those who have not graduated from high school. For participants interested in higher education, the staff help them research their options and walk them through the application process to help them attain their objectives. Staff members have gone with participants to visit colleges and help them register for classes. One Life Coach emphasized, "Pretty much anything that they need is what we try to provide." The program has cultivated several partnerships to meet the needs of the participants and to help them acquire needed skills.

ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). The ACT NCRC is a work readiness certification that demonstrates achievements and the applicant's level of workplace employability skills. Employers can use the NCRC to select, hire, train, develop, and retain a high-performance workforce. Upon successful completion of three WorkKeys assessments (Applied Mathematics, Locating Information, and Reading for Information) out of nine, an individual can obtain the NCRC.

"…pushed me to do [the NCRC]. I got silver. [Program staff] told me about the value of this. I am so thankful that I have that. I am focusing on school now, but knowing that I have it when I do look for a job is very important. It's also knowing that just because I didn't finish school that I am not stupid."

–@LIKE Participant

One of the @LIKE grant performance metrics is that 100 percent of participants will leave the program with an NCRC. It is the responsibility of program staff to explain the value of this certification to participants, motivate them to complete it, and help them to pitch it to employers. To ensure successful completion of the NCRC, the staff send reminders to participants, provide tutoring via a dedicated tutor or Life Coach, and offer incentives for completing each level of the NCRC (bronze, silver, and gold). One Site Director believes that the tutor is "a critical part" of achieving the NCRC. As a result of the efforts of the program staff, participants also recognize the value of the NCRC. In addition, program staff provide @LIKE participants with handouts to give to employers that describe the value of skills developed through the NCRC. The completion of the NCRC is a critical component in preparing @LIKE participants to become self-sufficient through employment. It is a part of a larger effort to provide individuals with multiple credentials that build on each other, known as "stackable credentials."

Continuous engagement and support services. The Project Director emphasizes the importance of continuously engaging participants and giving them reasons to keep coming back: "Take them on a picnic, stand on your head, have them meet with a Life Coach … keep them coming back." The staff arrange social activities such as picnics, movie nights, fundraisers, field trips, and camping trips. A combination of different activities helps participants to open up and plays a role in retaining them in the program.

"My biggest barrier was transportation. Having this broken down was very important."

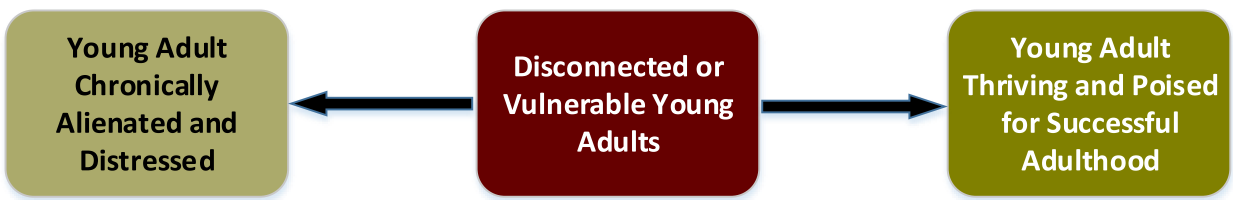
–@LIKE Participant

Program staff can decide whether to use a cohort model or one-on-one meetings for participant engagement. Although the cohort model offers accountability, creates a friendly warm environment, and provides opportunities for participants to learn from each other, some participants prefer a one-on-one setting. The program staff are keenly aware that this population is hard to engage and hence engage them based on their preference rather than imposing a rigid structure.

5.4 Program Completion

The program's longer term, more intensive design is intended to ensure that the focus is on the engagement, transition, and reconnection of disconnected young adult participants. The completion policy reflects the program's goal of reconnecting disconnected young adults and transitioning them into appropriate support systems. Completion is understood in the context of a participant's disconnectedness, which the program defines as being on a continuum from chronic alienation and distress to thriving connectedness. The @LIKE program model reflects research findings that disconnected youth, and youth at risk of falling into disconnection, occupy a broad middle ground on this continuum, as illustrated in Exhibit 9.

Exhibit 9: Disconnected Young Adult Continuum Definition



Source: MDC, Inc. (2008). *Disconnected Youth in the Research Triangle Region: An Ominous Problem Hidden in Plain Sight*. Raleigh, NC: GlaxoSmithKline Foundation.

The program's completion policy takes into account the fact that disconnected and vulnerable young adults may transition back to being connected at different rates. The policy stresses that it is critical for staff members to recognize that disconnected young adults may appear to be connected, but then proceed through repeated cycles of disengagement/disconnection and return/re-engagement. What may change over time is the length of time they disengage. Young adults are kept in the program as they go through this cycle. The program provides participants with an opportunity to sustain the course they began in the program toward thriving and successful adulthood. Appendix C includes the Successful Program Completion Guidance and Completion Form.

The program defines successful completers as young adults who achieve their desired outcomes and no longer need the day-to-day services provided by the program to stay connected to school, work, and their own support systems. Participants must obtain the NCRC to be considered a successful completer. Furthermore, participants must be able to sustain their engagement in program activities, including a job and any enrollment in postsecondary education and must have attained some stability in housing and with family issues. However, beyond these requirements, the completion policy instructs Site Directors to make completion determinations based on a participant's achievement of a mix of five individualized factors. Where applicable, these are:

- An increase in education level by two grade levels/grade level equivalency

- Completion of a GED program or high school diploma
- Completion of at least one paid internship
- Current work in unsubsidized employment
- Admission to postsecondary education (vocational training or college).

The completion policy states that all completion candidates are to be evaluated based on their individual goals and plans for reaching those goals. Exceptions to the policy are made on an individual case basis by the Project Director.

Non-completion. A request to identify a participant as a non-completer may be submitted to the Project Director only after the participant has been "absent" for a period of time and the Site Director has determined that every effort has been made to re-engage the individual. The reason for the determination and all efforts to re-engage the participant must be recorded in the participant's case notes. As with completers, each request to designate a participant as a non-completer is considered on an individual case basis by the Project Director.

Overview of preliminary participant outcomes. In its report to USDOL for the quarter ending December 31, 2014, the @LIKE program reported the following preliminary participant outcomes for the performance measures listed in Exhibit 10. Nearly half of all program participants (48.6%) have completed the Career Awareness Component, a critical piece in delivering customized individual services. Approximately one-quarter of participants have entered a paid internship placement (26.7%), entered unsubsidized employment (26.8%), or received the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate (25%).

Exhibit 10: Outcomes for Enrolled Participants, December 2014

Preliminary Outcomes	Number of Participants	Percent
Employers who report their satisfaction or expectations were exceeded	11	10.4%
Participants who completed a GED or high school diploma within 2 years	27	9.5%
Participants who completed Career Awareness Component	323	48.6%
Participants who entered paid internship placement	175	26.7%
Participants who entered unsubsidized employment	178	26.8%
Participants who entered vocational training or college	133	20.0%
Participants who improved basic skills by two educational levels within a year	67	11.0%
Participants who received ACT/WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC)	166	25.0%

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The primary purpose of this report is to comprehensively document the @LIKE program's operations, policies, and processes across the tri-county service area in Southern California. This report also identifies lessons learned, best practices, and continuing challenges confronting the program after 2 years. To gather information, the research team visited each of the three counties (Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial) during October 2014. During the site visits, the research team met with the Project Director; conducted interviews with the Site Directors, Case Managers, Life Coaches, and training provider partners; and conducted focus groups with program participants. In addition, the team reviewed documents used for program implementation and service delivery.

As a third-party evaluator, the research team has extensive experience in conducting site visits, implementation studies, and process analyses. The @LIKE program includes several innovative features that, based on anecdotal evidence, appear to be contributing to a successful program delivery model. Drawing on prior experience and based on observations and data collected through the site visits, the research team has identified recommendations and lessons learned. These recommendations and lessons learned document the successes and promising practices of the program. They can be used to inform recommendations to guide the planning and successful implementation of future programs seeking to serve disconnected young adults.

6.1 Leadership and Strategic Planning

1. Plan Strategically and Use a Leadership System

To successfully implement a program such as @LIKE, ensure that sufficient time and resources are dedicated to all phases of the program—planning, implementation, and transition. Because such programs are resource intensive, it is also important to make sustainability planning a part of the discussion from the start. Adopt a leadership system that includes distinct teams, such as a steering committee and an advisory council. A leadership system will help guide and sustain the program.

2. Include Young Adults in Strategic Planning

No policy should be decided without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy. The @LIKE program practices a "Nothing about us, without us" culture and involves participants in strategic planning through the Advisory Council, which has become an essential component of the program. The sites are able to engage in continuous quality improvement based on regular, immediate feedback from the participants.

6.2 Communication

3. Design and Use a Communication Structure

Develop regular, formalized processes for sharing information about program participants. Ad hoc and informal processes are necessary, but not sufficient. The program designed and uses a communication structure to provide leadership and communication channels across all actors. The Project Director regularly sends policy guidance memorandums to the site staff. The Steering Committee meetings also play an important role in keeping all partners informed, and affinity group calls have been helpful in enabling staff to share promising practices and discuss common issues. The staff uses SharePoint to facilitate information flow across sites.

6.3 Data Tools and Analysis

4. Collect and Use Program Data Early and Often

Use data tools to keep sites apprised of their progress, provide early warnings, and identify problem areas. The Project Director and the Lead Grant Coordinator rely heavily on data to guide the program, ensure customer satisfaction, and continuously improve quality. To accomplish this, the Steering Committee has created several scorecards that are sent to the sites, on a weekly basis, reports that provide information on various aspects of the program for tracking progress and continuous quality improvement. It is important to ensure 100 percent accuracy of data so that what is recorded in participant case files and assessment results matches what is in the data management system. The program also collects feedback from customers (employers and participants) to proactively address any problems. These best practices help the program to run smoothly.

6.4 Workforce Focus

5. Hire and Train Life Coaches

Life Coaches are a unique feature of the program and are essential to its success in serving disconnected young adult participants. All Life Coaches receive training and certification to fulfill the Life Coach role. These certifications should be made a priority, and dedicated resources should be assigned for this purpose. When speaking of their successes in the program, participants readily pointed to the role their Life Coaches played. Successful coaches were described as being non-judgmental, supportive guides who were available to participants whenever they needed help.

6. Use Two Separate Staff Positions for Life Coach and Case Manager

Use a separate, but collaborative approach to providing life coaching and case management. Life Coaches empower participants by helping them to understand themselves better. Case Managers empower participants by providing resources and structure. However, the interface between a Life Coach and a Case Manager provides participants with a more comprehensive support system, unparalleled by any other arrangement.

6.5 Customer Focus

7. Use Participant Cohorts

Sites should use participant cohorts as a way to group and band participants together. The @LIKE sites have used cohorts to facilitate positive peer group relationships. Cohort participants often become friends and gain a sense of togetherness that may provide encouragement to remain engaged with the program. Cohorts also provide a measure of accountability among participants as they work toward educational and employment goals.

8. Follow a Two-Pronged Approach to Recruit Participants—Go Where They Are and Use Participant Referrals

Site staff members should get out in their community to recruit participants and should also involve current or former participants in their outreach activities. Program staff successfully recruited disconnected young adults by going out into the field and making visits to bars, tattoo parlors, swap meets, and other known congregating spots for disconnected young adults in the community. Referrals from participants, their families, and staff members of local program partners were helpful in recruiting participants. Current or past participants who have benefited from this program provided the most effective outreach, although staff reported that all of these parties are excellent potential recruiters for the program.

9. Streamline Program Enrollment Process and Prioritize Participant Engagement

Use simple and rapid enrollment procedures. Sustain early engagement with ongoing, meaningful program opportunities that help participants understand their self-worth and build their confidence. These are important features for any program serving disconnected young adults for whom a lengthy, complicated application process would be a deterrent. Participant engagement begins the moment an applicant presents for enrollment. The program leadership created a uniform, streamlined enrollment process by using a one-page application and allowing applicants to self-attest to their eligibility. Easy enrollment leads to early engagement.

10. Provide Participants with Customized Services

Develop customized services for program participants with the understanding that different participants have different learning styles and goals. The @LIKE program uses various communication, teaching, and service strategies designed to suit the needs of each participant. This tailored, customer service-oriented approach allows participants to get the most of the program. It also contributes to participant engagement. Successful Life Coaches work to truly understand participants' goals and are creative in providing them with stepping stones and quick wins to achieve their goals. Participants benefit from having the purpose of each component of the program explained to them.

11. Provide Inactive Participants with the Flexibility to Re-engage

Be flexible in reconnecting participants with the program after life events separate them for extended periods. The @LIKE program gives sites the flexibility to re-engage participants at any point if there are extended periods of absence from the program—an important difference from WIA Youth program requirements. This is an essential feature of the program and enables staff to best serve disconnected young adults who may have recurring periods of engagement and disengagement.

12. Devise Specialized Strategies for Serving and Retaining Participants Aged 22–24

Use separate strategies for serving and retaining each age group. Participants aged 22–24 often have different needs than participants aged 18–21. Program staff have learned that it is difficult to retain older young adults in the program. Rather than focusing on short-term employment, program staff should have these participants focus on the program's educational component to improve their long-term employment prospects. Staff should emphasize the importance of self-exploration and the development of skills to fulfill long-term career goals.

13. Employ Social/Psychological Assessments as Tools to Facilitate Life Coaching

Use social/psychological assessments to provide staff with insights into participants' personalities, strengths, and barriers. These insights are integral to designing a meaningful program for participants. They enable Life Coaches to provide participants with customized coaching and support to help them overcome their challenges. Related best practices include having Life Coaches share assessment results with participants in a one-on-one setting and administering these assessments at regular intervals to track participants' progress in the program.

14. Include Mental Health and Disability Screening and Services

Build partnerships, rather than just referrals, to serve disconnected young adults effectively and to provide any needed mental health and disability services. Many participants come into the program with significant mental health issues and other disabilities. Both program staff and participants spoke of the need for training and services to identify and address participants' mental health issues and/or disabilities.

15. Emphasize Professional Development and Lifelong Learning

Support participants in developing traits and behaviors critical to career success. Program staff emphasize that lifelong learning is an essential component of personal growth, and adapting with the times is necessary to be successful in today's job market. The staff help participants to prepare for and earn the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) as an effective way to build skills and gain a nationally recognized credential that certifies those skills.

16. Provide Flexibility on Program Completion Procedures

Focus on participants' individual growth and achievement, while being flexible in keeping young adults in the program as they go through cycles of disconnectedness. These are critical program completion supports. The program's completion policy instructs program staff to use a mix of standardized and individualized factors to evaluate participants who are potential candidates for successful completion.

17. Forge Partnerships to Provide Services

Use a broad range of program partners to provide a variety of program services. @LIKE has created meaningful partnerships with community colleges at all sites. These partnerships are essential to the program's goal of serving disconnected young adult participants and creating career pathways to postsecondary education and training. Program partners help participants by providing services that supplement and reinforce the program's focus on participant engagement, transition, and reconnection. Partner services such as soft skills training, exploration of careers and interests, work experience, educational development, and support services help stabilize participants while providing them with pathways to other opportunities and strengthening their perseverance.

18. Cultivate and Nurture Employer Relationships

Employer relationship management is a critical component of any program to help unemployed young adults. Employers that have good experiences with program participants are those who have open lines of communication with the staff. Staff members make efforts to connect to employers, explain what the program offers, and encourage them to hire participants for the work experience component of the program. The ultimate goal is for these employers to provide long-term gainful employment to these individuals. To that end, it is also important to make employers aware of certifications such as the NCRC and the competencies it tests at each level. The NCRC is a signal to employers that the certificate holder has a certain level of skills.