Riverside County Economic Development Agency

Evaluation of the
Linking Innovation, Knowledge, and Employment Program

Implementation Study Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), through the Workforce Innovation Fund, awarded a grant to the Riverside County Economic Development Agency (EDA) in Riverside, California to implement the Linking Innovation, Knowledge, and Employment (@LIKE) program in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties. The @LIKE program serves disconnected young adults aged 18–24 who are not enrolled in school, working, or serving in the armed forces. The project's three main goals are to: 1) help participants achieve educational and employment goals, 2) create a network by which the three consortium counties can collaborate to better serve this hard to reach population, and 3) 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.

In September 2012, the Riverside County EDA awarded a three-year contract to IMPAQ International (IMPAQ) to conduct an independent evaluation of the @LIKE program to document grant implementation and assess the impact of the grant on participants' education and employment outcomes. This report presents the major findings from the first round of site visits conducted by IMPAQ for the implementation study component of the contract. IMPAQ conducted site visits to each of the three participating counties in August 2013. During the site visits, IMPAQ conducted interviews with key @LIKE program staff, gathered information from @LIKE participants through focus groups, and reviewed relevant documents (which included program guidelines, marketing materials and implementation manuals). By examining information collected via multiple modes, this report:

- Documents how effectively the participating organizations are implementing the @LIKE program
- Compares and contrasts program process implementation across the tri-county region
- Describes challenges the program faced and the successes achieved during the first year of program implementation.

This chapter provides an overview of the WIF grant program and then describes the @LIKE program model, the evaluation's objectives and design, and the methodology used to prepare this Implementation Report.

1.1   Workforce Innovation Fund Overview and Objectives

USDOL established the Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) in FY 2011 with the goal of helping the workforce system improve the quality of its services to ensure they are cost effective, demand driven, and of high impact. The WIF also enables USDOL to test and expand strategies that have been particularly successful at reaching populations with the most significant barriers to employment, including disconnected young adults. Specifically, WIF was established to:

- Deliver services more efficiently and achieve better outcomes, particularly for vulnerable populations (e.g., low-wage and less-skilled workers) and dislocated workers, especially those who have been unemployed for many months

- Support both system reforms and innovations that facilitate cooperation across programs and funding streams in the delivery of client-centered services to jobseekers, young adults, and employers

- Emphasize building knowledge about effective practices through rigorous evaluation and translating "lessons learned" into improved labor market outcomes, the ability to bring such practices to scale in other areas, and increased cost efficiency in the broader workforce system.[1]

Additionally, WIF incentivizes states and local agencies to consider evidence in designing their programs, collect better data to know what is working well and what is not, and find ways to make program dollars stretch further.[2]

In FY 2011, USDOL announced the availability of approximately $125 million through the WIF. This was shortly followed by the announcement of an additional approximately $50 million in FY 2012 funding. In FY 2011, USDOL initiated a two-part grant competition. In June 2012, USDOL awarded $147 million to a total of 26 grantees—with grants ranging in value from $1 million to $12 million—to 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] Among these 26 grants, the USDOL awarded a $6 million grant to the Riverside County EDA to implement the @LIKE program in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties.

1.2   @LIKE's Innovative Approach to Serving Disconnected Young Adults

Three to four million American young adults are estimated to be disconnected from the labor market and not in school.[4] These disconnected young adults are "non-institutionalized 16 through 24 year olds who did not work or attend school anytime during a previous year and are presently not working or in school."[5] These disconnected young adults face serious challenges as they attempt to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to become self-sufficient.

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[1] U.S. Department of Labor (2011). Employment and Training Administration, Notice of Availability of Funds and Solicitation for Grant Applications for *Workforce Innovation Fund* Grants.

[2] U.S. Department of Labor (2012). FY 2013 Congressional Budget Justification, Employment and Training Administration, Training and Employment Services.

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

[4] http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/11_0603_whccs_june3_effectiveness.pdf

[5] Fernandes, A. L., and T. Gabe (2009), "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.

Moreover, being unemployed, they fail to develop an employment history to boost future earnings and employability. Such young adults often lack strong social networks, thus exacerbating their lack not only of employment connections, but also of housing and financial assistance.[6] In line with these concerns, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 included provisions that pertained to disconnected young adults, such as a Work Opportunity Tax Credit to businesses that employ disconnected young adults.

In 2000, the state of California found that disconnected young adults accounted for 15.9 percent of all young adults in the state and 14.3 percent of all young adults in the nation.[7] To assist this population, the WIA authorized the Workforce Development Centers in California to offer services deemed crucial to helping disconnected young adults enter the workplace. These services include training in work-readiness skills such as resume building, tutoring and volunteer opportunities, and work experience and internship programs.[8] @LIKE provides many of these services as part of its service delivery model.

The @LIKE program expands upon the WIA model by providing participants several additional services, including: 1) the use of a Life Coach assigned to each participant, 2) provision of innovative assessments given to all participants that assist the Life Coach and Case Managers in developing a customized service delivery plan for each participant, and 3) coaching/case management approaches tailored to the unique personality of each participant. In addition, while the @LIKE program focuses on employability and academic skills, it expands on this by helping participants become more self-aware and gain personal insights to help them overcome barriers to reconnecting to education and employment institutions.

The @LIKE approach includes five main programs features:

- Standardized assessments
- Life Coaches
- Career exploration opportunities
- National Career Readiness Certificates (NCRCs)
- Provision of support services.

@LIKE promotes a customized approach for participants. It allows participants to go through the program at their own pace and embraces different timelines and paths to meet each participant's individual needs. Furthermore, participants are able to change their academic and/or career goals at any time during the program.

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[6] *Ibid.*

[7] http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/yci/separateyideas/Ch6MeasureQualityandImpact/Los%20Angeles%20and%20Long%20Beach%20WIBs%20Collaborate%20on%20Study%20of%20Out-of-School%20and%20Outof-Work%20Youth%20in%20Their%20Communities.pdf

[8] http://www.rivcoworkforce.com/Youth.aspx

1.3   Objectives and Design of the Evaluation

WIF mandates that all projects include a formal and rigorous evaluation component. In June 2012, Riverside County EDA awarded a contract to IMPAQ to design and conduct a rigorous evaluation of @LIKE to address the following primary research questions:

- Does @LIKE improve the education and employment outcomes for disconnected young adults? If so, what improvements are achieved?

- How do 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 WIA program?

- How effectively are participating organizations able to implement the program model? What are the strengths and challenges of the approach?

- 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?

To address these fundamental research questions, IMPAQ is implementing an evaluation design consisting of three principal components:

- *Implementation and Process Analysis*—Based on exploratory site visits to the three participating counties, IMPAQ is monitoring implementation of the @LIKE program model during the first year, and over the course of the evaluation will be developing a thorough descriptive context of the program's operations and services.

- *Impact Analysis*—Based on data drawn from existing management information systems, IMPAQ is analyzing critical labor market and educational outcomes among participants, including employment status, duration of employment, employment retention, earnings, and additional measures such as earnings growth and attainment of credentials.

- *Benefit-Cost Analysis*—Based on analysis of key program outcomes among participants and program cost data obtained from Riverside County EDA, IMPAQ is determining the extent to which @LIKE returns a combined value of economic and social benefits that exceeds the value of costs.

The implementation analysis, which is the focus of this report, constitutes the first phase of the evaluation.

1.4　Methodology for the Implementation Analysis

The implementation and process analyses are based on similar methods of data collection, although each analysis will capture information at different stages in the program's life cycle. IMPAQ will routinely monitor the status of program implementation to document the transition from planning and development to an actual operational phase during which services are first delivered. As @LIKE reaches a "steady state" and throughout its life cycle, IMPAQ will monitor ongoing operations, addressing questions related to operational strengths and weaknesses, synergies and partnerships across the tri-county region, strategies for sharing information across the partnership, and opportunities and conditions for replication.

The purpose of this implementation analysis is to provide a thorough description of the status of the @LIKE program one year following start up, including: conditions prevailing in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties that have shaped the external environment in which the program operates; the program's organizational structure; and how the jurisdictions are collaborating to manage local program operations and functions. This analysis will inform future evaluation efforts designed to address the primary research questions detailed above.

To complete the implementation component of the @LIKE evaluation, IMPAQ conducted a one-week site visit to the tri-county consortium area in August 2013, during which the project team met with administrators, staff, program service providers, and local employers across all three counties. In addition to in-person interviews with key stakeholders, IMPAQ collected documents relevant to the operation of the workforce system and conducted focus groups with a small number of @LIKE participants at various stages of the @LIKE program process. The steps taken to conduct the first round of @LIKE site visits were as follows: 1) developing site visit protocols and a focus group guide, 2) coordinating and conducting the site visits, and 3) analyzing the data.

Development of Site Visit Protocols and Focus Group Guide. IMPAQ prepared site visit protocols that included a site visit interview guide for use in semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. This guide contained customized interview protocols for each respondent group. The interview questions focused on three areas: 1) program design, including recruitment, assessments, training curricula, and program partnerships; 2) challenges encountered and strategies developed to address those challenges; and 3) best practices and lessons learned that may be applied to other programs for disconnected young adults. A focus group guide for participants was also prepared, centering on participant experiences with the @LIKE program and recommendations for improvement.

To gain insights needed for the development of comprehensive site visit protocols, IMPAQ gathered and reviewed a variety of documents from key staff and other stakeholders that provided relevant context about the @LIKE program. These documents included: organizational charts, memorandums of understanding, budgets, data reports, outreach materials, and other program documentation. Following this review of available materials, the site visit protocol was

developed with specific attention paid to the @LIKE research objectives and research questions.

Coordinating and Conducting the Site Visits. Prior to visiting each site, IMPAQ worked with the @LIKE program director and grant coordinator to identify key @LIKE stakeholders to be interviewed. Both IMPAQ staff and @LIKE personnel agreed that the first round of site visits should take place at the same time as @LIKE's second annual all partners meeting to debrief activities and progress made during year one of the program, to make scheduling more efficient and ensure greater participation.

The first round of site visits also included a visit to each of multiple sites in each Consortium county – Riverside, Imperial, and San Bernardino. Interviews were scheduled for one hour each. In addition, IMPAQ was able to observe the programs annual Steering Committee meeting. With permission of the respondents and focus group participants, the interviews and focus group discussions were recorded using a portable audio recorder for later reference. An in-depth interview with the @Like Program Director was conducted at a later date.

Exhibit 1 provides the agenda for the site visits and a list of individuals interviewed along with their location. On Day 1, IMPAQ traveled to the Imperial County @LIKE point of service delivery to meet with their WIB Director, Life Coaches, Case Managers, and other individuals. On Days 2 and 3, IMPAQ visited the Riverside County service delivery locations and met with several individuals; including Life Coach/Case Managers, several program participants, and local employers. IMPAQ visited San Bernardino county service delivery sites on Days 4 and 5 and met with their Program Coordinator, Case Managers, Life Coaches, Site Directors, and others. While only three individuals were interviewed on Day 5, two of them had multiple roles. In addition, IMPAQ toured each county's service points of delivery.

Analysis of Site Visit Data. Upon completion of the site visit, IMPAQ reviewed all audio recordings and notes taken during the interviews and focus group sessions. Where our review revealed gaps in the information collected or raised additional questions, the site visit team followed up with the relevant interviewee to clarify issues or solicit additional information. To facilitate comparison across sites, positions, and counties, a standardized template for the site visit notes was developed, which contained the following sections:

- Economic and labor market characteristics of the areas served by the program
- Participant characteristics
- @LIKE processes (recruitment, application, assessment, educational and academic training, job placement, and closeout)
- Communication across the three @LIKE counties
- Communication within a county across key individuals and partners
- Program challenges
- Comments on best practices and lessons learned.

IMPAQ used standard content analysis methods to draw out common themes and identify differences and areas of divergence across the participating sites.

Exhibit 1: List of Interviewees during the @LIKE Site Visit

Day 1 – Imperial County, CA	
▪ Case Manager (2) ▪ Life Coach (2) ▪ Local Employer ▪ Participants	▪ Program Manager ▪ Regional Partner ▪ WIB Director

Day 2 – Riverside County, CA	
▪ Assessment Consultant ▪ Life Coach/Case Manager ▪ Local Employers (2)	▪ Participants ▪ Regional Partner ▪ WIB Director

Day 3 – Riverside County, CA	
▪ Case Manager ▪ Grant Coordinators (4) ▪ Life Coach	▪ Steering Committee ▪ All Partners Meeting ▪ Advisory Council Officers (3)

Day 4 – Riverside & San Bernardino County, CA	
▪ Case Managers (2) ▪ Site Directors (2)	▪ WIB Deputy Director

Day 5 – San Bernardino County, CA	
▪ Case Manager ▪ Life Coach	▪ Program Coordinator ▪ Site Director

Day 6 – Washington, DC
▪ Project Director

2. PROGRAM AND REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The @LIKE program is a collaborative effort among three Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) located 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 ETA, which is also the county's WIB.

Each of the three WIBs serves disconnected young adults aged 18–24 who are not enrolled in school, working, or serving in the armed forces. For @LIKE participants who have not completed high school, the program will assist them in obtaining their high school diplomas or GEDs through alternative education and contextual learning. The program will also provide participants with pre-college workshops to help them prepare for college level work and enhance their potential eligibility for taking courses that offer college credit.

The @LIKE program design seeks to address key issues facing disadvantaged young adults by providing them with psychosocial assessments and supports. In addition to assigning @LIKE participants to a Case Manager as is typically done in workforce programs, @LIKE also pairs each participant with a Life Coach. @LIKE Life Coaches are trained practitioners whose role is to explore the young adults' strengths and weaknesses, help them develop a plan that outlines realistic benchmarks for achieving their goals, and provide encouragement and guidance in navigating the workforce service delivery system. The Life Coaches also work with participants in addressing any psychosocial barriers they may have in reconnecting to education and employment.

The remainder of this chapter first describes the program's underlying "*theory of change,*" depicting the theoretical relationship between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. It then proceeds with a high-level overview of the basic activity sequence through which each program participant passes, which is articulated in richer detail in subsequent chapters of the report. Because the @LIKE program design is a response to prevailing local conditions in which the program was implemented and now operates—many of which are idiosyncratic to this region of southern California—the chapter also describes the larger macroeconomic environment, which simultaneously presents obstacles, as well as opportunities.

2.1 Program Logic Model and Overview

The @LIKE program logic and overview models provide an outline of the program's main activities, as discussed below.

Program Logic Model. Exhibit 2 illustrates the @LIKE program logic model's program inputs, activities, outputs, and long-term outcomes.

Exhibit 2: @LIKE Program Logic Model

Inputs		
• Experienced program staff • Life Coaches and Case Managers • Grant funds and resources • Equipment	• Material and supplies • Infrastructure (space in buildings) • Business partners • Education partners	• Consortium partners' staff • Project Director • Grant Coordinators

Activities		
Core Program Elements for all Enrollees: • Standardized assessments • Personal coaching and case management • Career exploration • National Career Readiness Certificate • Support services	Develop Individual Service Strategy (ISS) Educational Activities: • ABE, GED, ESL • Computer skills • Vocational training • Entrepreneurship training	Recruit Participants Employment Activities: • Work experience/ internships/OJT • Apprenticeships

Outputs		
• Participants complete pre-test and post-test assessments • Participants are assigned a Life Coach and Case Manager	• Participants complete career exploration • Participants obtain a work readiness certificate	• Participants receive support services, as needed • Participants complete education or employment activities

Outcomes		
• Participant retention in the @LIKE program • Placement into paid internships	• Entrance into unsubsidized employment • Entrance into vocational training or college	• Dropouts complete a high school diploma or GED • Completion of career awareness component

The program inputs (i.e., the resources that go into the program), include experienced program staff; grant funds; equipment and infrastructure; business, education, and consortium partners; Project Director; and grant coordinators. Life Coaches are also key @LIKE program inputs. The Life Coaches assist program participants in navigating education and workforce options by helping participants create an educational plan and by providing personal coaching and career development services to participants.

@LIKE undertakes a variety of <u>activities</u> using the resources described above. These include vocational education, basic skills curriculum, and work readiness components. In addition, the core program elements, which are key activities implemented as part of the program for all participants, include:

- Standardized academic and social/psychological assessments on each participant, to reveal barriers that may hinder the reconnection process of education and employment

- Assigned Life Coaches and Case Managers to each program participant, to establish an Individual Service Strategy (ISS), a worksheet that outlines the @LIKE participant's educational and career goals, as well as personal development plans

- Career exploration, to interest participants and assist them in making informed career decisions

- A National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) to provide a standard for defining, assessing, and certifying that the participant is able to meet the demands of an entry-level job

- Support services as needed throughout program participation, including personal guidance, coaching, and assistance with childcare, transportation, and work clothes.

Program <u>outputs</u> include products, activities, and services produced through the activities described above. The program, as noted, states that each participant must be assigned a Life Coach and receive support services as needed. Additionally, participants must complete both pre- and post- academic and social/psychological assessments, as well as education, employment, and career exploration activities. Finally, *all* participants must obtain the NCRC.

The targeted <u>outcomes</u> for the @LIKE program model include:

- 85 percent of young adults to be retained within the @LIKE program

- 80 percent of young adults to be placed in paid internships or paid work experience

- 65 percent of young adults to be subsequently placed in unsubsidized employment

- 50 percent of young adults to be subsequently placed in college or vocational training

- 60 percent of young adults to have completed high school diploma or GED within a two-year period

- 90 percent of young adults to have completed a career awareness component through Road Trip Nation, My IE Youth Portal, or Career Cruising—to include resume building, pre-employment skills and career portfolio.

Program Model Overview. The @LIKE program model has six steps, as shown in Exhibit 3 and described below.

Exhibit 3: @LIKE Program Model

Step 1		Step 2		Step 3		Step 4		Step 5		Step 6
Recruitment	→	Orientation/ Interview	→	Eligibility Determination and Enrollment	→	Assessments	→	Services	→	Participant Closeout
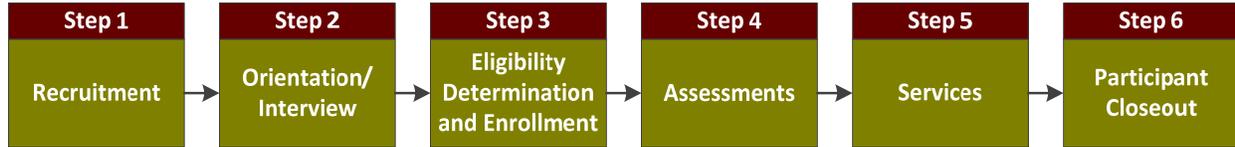
During <u>recruitment</u>, @LIKE program staff, as noted, target disconnected young adults aged 18–24. Once the staff has identified a potential participant, both the staff and potential participant complete an <u>orientation/interview</u>, in which program staff provides further information about the @LIKE program, sets expectations, and discuss desired outcomes. If the potential participant is interested in enrolling, the @LIKE staff verifies program eligibility via an Eligibility Checklist Worksheet. If the potential participant is eligible, the participant and @LIKE staff member complete a one-page <u>enrollment</u> form.

Once the enrollment document is complete, participants can immediately begin program activities. First, participants are given four <u>assessments</u>: one academic assessment to assess basic skills and three social/psychological assessments for @LIKE staff to gain greater insights into the participant's personality. After the assessments are completed, participants are then provided academic and employment <u>services</u>, which include resume building, soft skills training, and academic tutoring. The @LIKE program also provides case management, life coaching and assistance with childcare, transportation, and work clothes on an as needed basis.

Participant <u>closeout</u> is not well defined in the @LIKE program model. However, once participants have completed all program activates and requirements and are integrated into the education and/or workforce system, it can be assumed that they have completed the @LIKE program.

The following section describes the larger socioeconomic environment in which the @LIKE program is currently operating. Program staff members are operating in a region where unemployment remains stubbornly higher than in the state of California as a whole, yet there are growing and emerging industries toward which disconnected young adults may be counseled, trained, and ultimately prepared for placement.

2.2 Economic Indicators

As shown in Exhibit 4, the three counties participating in the @LIKE program (Riverside, Imperial, and San Bernardino) vary greatly in area size. San Bernardino is the largest of the three counties spanning 20,062 square miles. Riverside County is 7,208 square miles in area and is almost double the size of Imperial County at 4,175 square miles. In San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, those cities with a population of over 100,000 were included on the map. However, in Imperial County, there are no cities with more than 100,000 people and only cities with a population of more than 20,000 are identified.

Exhibit 4: County Consortium Map
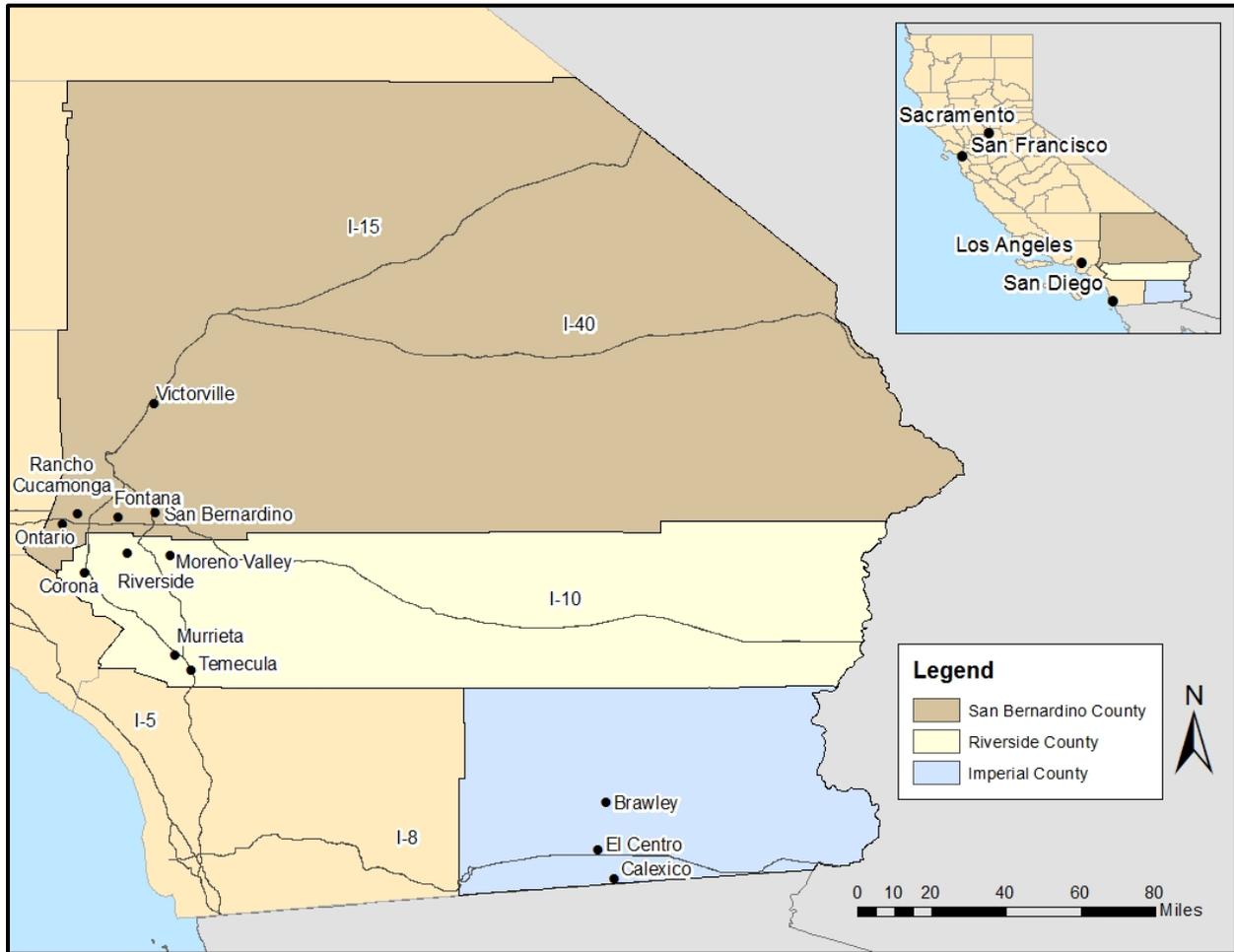
Exhibit 5 provides an overview of key demographics and economic indicators for each county in which the tri-county @LIKE consortium operates, along with statewide data. Both Riverside (2.3 million) and San Bernardino counties (2.1 million) have large populations (2012 estimates), while Imperial County's population was approximately 177,000 persons – which is much smaller than the other two counties.

The consortium area is demographically mixed, and has a larger minority population than the state of California as a whole. In each of the three counties, at least 46% of the residents identify as either Hispanic or Latino; in Imperial County the proportion minority is higher than 80%. The area also has lower rates of educational attainment than the state as a whole: 30.1% of California residents have received a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 20.6%, 18.6%, and 10.8% in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties, respectively.

Exhibit 5: @LIKE Program's Key Demographic and Economic Indicators

Profiles of Program Counties	Riverside County	San Bernardino County	Imperial County	Statewide California
County Demographics				
Population				
Population, 2012 estimate	2,268,783	2,081,313	176,948	38,041,430
Population, 2010	2,189,641	2,035,210	174,528	37,253,956
Percent change	4%	2%	1%	2%
Age of Residents (2012)				
Under age 18	27%	29%	29%	24.30%
Age 18-64	60%	62%	60%	63.60%
Age 65 and over	12%	10%	11%	12%
Race/Ethnicity (2012)				
Hispanic or Latino	47%	51%	81%	38%
White, alone (not Hispanic/Latino)	39%	32%	13%	39%
Black or African American	7%	10%	4%	7%
Education (persons age 25 or older)				
High school graduate or higher	79%	78%	63%	81%
Bachelor's degree or higher	21%	19%	13%	30%
Foreign Born Persons	22%	21%	32%	27%
Economic and Labor Market				
Labor Force (July 2013)				
Labor force	933,600	850,100	75,900	18,690,400
Number employed	829,600	758,700	56,100	16,947,000
Unemployment rate	11%	11%	26%	9%
Income				
Per capita income (last 12 months)	$24,516	$21,932	$16,593	$29,634
Median household income	$58,365	$55,853	$39,402	$61,632
Persons Below Poverty Level	14%	16%	23%	14%
Homeownership Rate	69%	64%	56%	57%
Median Value of Owner-occupied Units	$284,100	$278,400	$169,600	$421,600

Sources: Profiles for Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties were assembled from U.S. Census Bureau data, available on line at www.quickfacts.census.gov. Data on the labor force and unemployment were obtained from the State of California, Employment Development Department, available on line at www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov.

The region has experienced mixed economic success. Unemployment stands at 11.1% in Riverside County, 10.8% in San Bernardino County, and 26.1% in Imperial County—all higher than the state average of 9.3%.[9] Median household income in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties is $58,365, $55,835, and $39,402, respectively—all lower than the state median of $61,632. Additionally, two of the three counties in the tri-state area have a larger share of its population living in poverty, with 16.0% and 23.3% of San Bernardino and Imperial County residents living in poverty, respectively, compared with 14.4% for the state (Riverside approximates the state average, at 14.2%). Somewhat surprisingly, given these statistics, homeownership rates in the tri-county area are either near or above the state rate of 56.7%, though the median value of owner occupied housing units in these counties are only 40–70% of the state median value ($421,600).

Exhibit 6 shows the occupations with the highest projected job growth across the counties through 2020, data that represent actual career pathways local agencies use to drive and shape the training curricula and employment support they make available to residents needing such assistance. For the entire area, medical and health-related professions are expected to experience the highest growth, with five of the top 10 fastest growing jobs in each county being in health-related occupations. This trend is particularly strong in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, where demand for biomedical engineers, home health aides, and veterinary technologists and technicians is expected to grow by more than 50% through 2020. In terms of net change, the fastest growing occupation in all three counties is personal care aides, with the number of jobs in this profession projected to increase by 8,770 in Riverside and San Bernardino counties and by 840 in Imperial County.

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[9] California Employment Development Department

Exhibit 6: Occupations with Fastest Projected Job Growth (2010-2020)

Occupations with Fastest Projected Job Growth	Estimated	Projected	Net Change	Percent Change
Riverside County and San Bernardino County				
1. Biomedical engineers	130	220	+90	69%
2. Home health aides	5,000	7,690	+2,690	54%
3. Veterinary technologists and technicians	670	1,020	+350	52%
4. Marriage and family therapists	240	350	+110	46%
5. Market research analysts and marketing specialists	1,850	2,650	+800	43%
6. Emergency medical technicians and paramedics	1,820	2,610	+790	43%
7. Meeting, convention, and event planners	440	620	+180	41%
8. Helpers, laborers, and material-moving supervisors	2,750	3,860	+1,110	40%
9. Diagnostic medical sonographers	360	500	+140	39%
10. Personal care aides	22,760	31,530	+8,770	39%
Imperial County				
1. Mobile heavy equipment mechanics, except engines	70	130	+60	86%
2. Home health aides	300	440	+140	47%
3. Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides	430	580	+150	35%
4. Purchasing agents	60	80	+20	33%
5. Interviewers, except eligibility and loan	60	80	+20	33%
6. Medical assistants	230	300	+70	30%
7. Healthcare support occupations	1,010	1,310	+300	30%
8. Dental assistants	170	220	+50	29%
9. Electrical power-line installers and repairers	70	90	+20	29%
10. Personal care aides	2,990	3,830	+840	28%

3. PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND INITIAL GRANT STARTUP

During the critical planning and development phase, Riverside County EDA developed policies to govern grant activities, designed standard operating procedures, and established supporting management systems before participants could be recruited and served in accordance with the @LIKE program design. This chapter describes the overall development and implementation phase of @LIKE within the following framework:

- Planning for the implementation phase

- Establishing a framework for overall project management

- Development of operating procedures

- Training of direct service staff

- Coordinating staff communication.

3.1   Planning for the Implementation Phase

Riverside County EDA moved immediately upon grant award to staff the @LIKE project, beginning in July 2012 with the hiring of a Project Director, who is functioning as the overall governing authority on the project. The Project Director helped mobilize an Internal Planning Team that held a series of planning meetings to initiate the project's crucial implementation steps in conjunction with key partners from Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial Counties.

The Internal Planning Team was convened by EDA Riverside during the early phases of the program to work on grant management issues.[10] The team was comprised of all EDA leadership level staff, the Project Director, and the Lead Grant Coordinator. Imperial and San Bernardino staff were not members of this team. The initial focus of the Internal Planning Team was on grant management. In the initial team meetings they decided there were issues which needed to be further explored prior to the development of the Steering Committee. These items needed to be worked thru at the early phase of grant implementation since they also affected the scope of work being written for the contracts with each county and the sub-contractors.

The Internal Planning Team established procedures for operationalizing key concepts and accomplished the following fundamental actions:

- Agreed on the composition of the Steering Committee

- Designed/developed the Life Coach program component

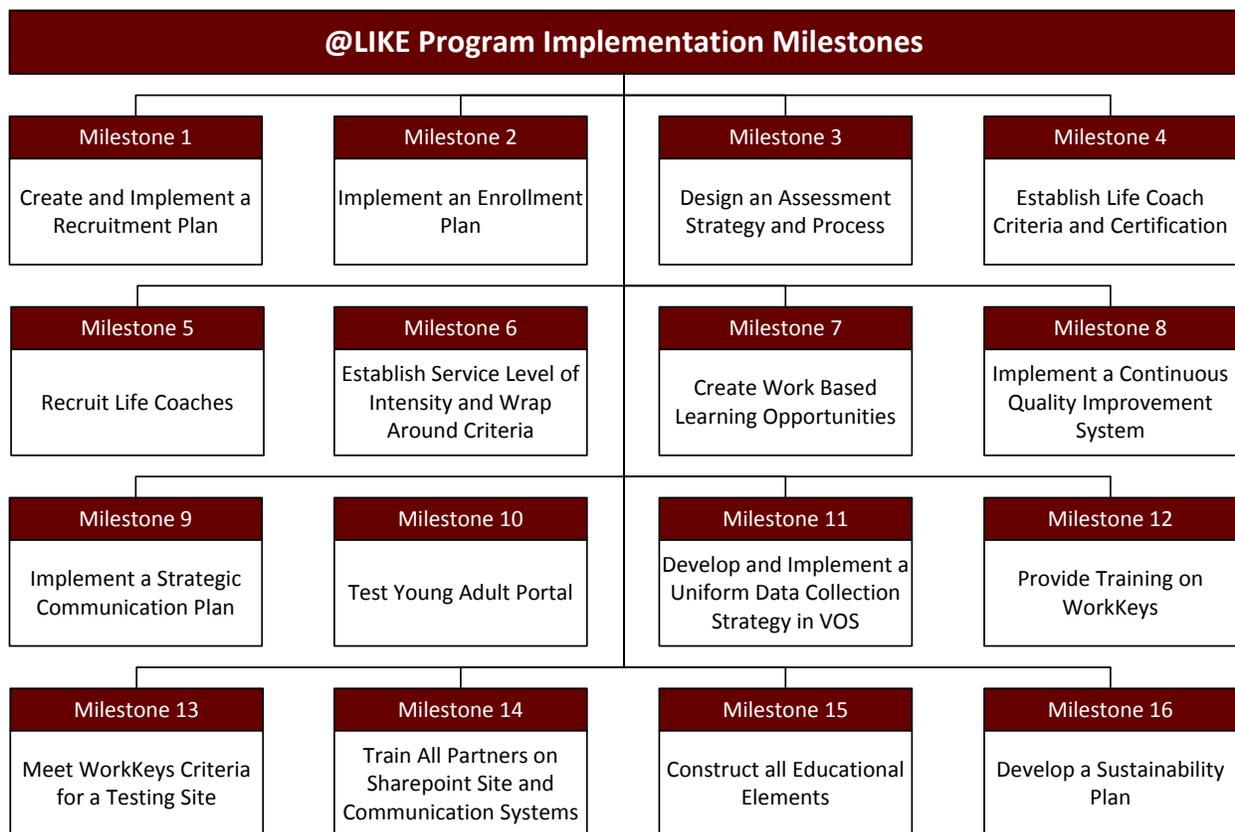- Created a SharePoint site to facilitate and enhance communication

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[10] The Internal Planning Team was an interim team that met monthly from July 2012 through December 2012 and was internal to EDA. It was disbanded once the Steering Committee began to meet regularly and all contracts had been written incorporating all up front planning work.

- Developed a set of standard forms and a case management file organization checklist to be used across the consortium.

The Internal Planning Team, Grant Coordinator Team, Partners and Project Director worked to develop 16 key program implementation milestones. Currently the program has completed 15 of the 16 milestones, with half of them being completed during the first six months of program planning. Each of these entities played an important role in activating and/or completing the majority of these milestones.

Even though the Steering Committee did not have their initial meeting until November 2012, since the Steering Committee members were involved in all partner meetings and a third of the Committee is comprised of individuals who were on the Internal Team or Coordinators, the Steering Committee was in essence a part of this process. Exhibit 7 illustrates the 16 milestones. Exhibit 8 shows the timeline and completion date for each milestone. Appendix A provides the activities and timelines for each milestone.

Exhibit 7: @LIKE Program Implementation Milestones

@LIKE Program Implementation Milestones			
Milestone 1 Create and Implement a Recruitment Plan	**Milestone 2** Implement an Enrollment Plan	**Milestone 3** Design an Assessment Strategy and Process	**Milestone 4** Establish Life Coach Criteria and Certification
Milestone 5 Recruit Life Coaches	**Milestone 6** Establish Service Level of Intensity and Wrap Around Criteria	**Milestone 7** Create Work Based Learning Opportunities	**Milestone 8** Implement a Continuous Quality Improvement System
Milestone 9 Implement a Strategic Communication Plan	**Milestone 10** Test Young Adult Portal	**Milestone 11** Develop and Implement a Uniform Data Collection Strategy in VOS	**Milestone 12** Provide Training on WorkKeys
Milestone 13 Meet WorkKeys Criteria for a Testing Site	**Milestone 14** Train All Partners on Sharepoint Site and Communication Systems	**Milestone 15** Construct all Educational Elements	**Milestone 16** Develop a Sustainability Plan

The Internal Planning Team first ensured participant access to the Youth Portal (milestone 10) and discussed the need to clearly define the target customer—disconnected young adults—and the role of the Life Coaches. To confirm that the @LIKE program was enrolling participants who are truly disconnected from educational, workforce, and social systems, the Internal Planning

Team proposed that the Grant Coordinator Team further refine parameters for the term "disconnected young adults" for purposes of participant intake and enrollment (milestone 2).

Once the definition of disconnected young adults was established, the Internal Planning Team established the @LIKE participant enrollment process to create consistency across all three counties through use of the Eligibility Check List and a streamlined application process (milestone 2). The Internal Planning Team also used the definition of disconnected youth to effectively recruit @LIKE participants, by creating a strategy that draws from best practices for enlisting young adults, specifically those between aged 22–24 (milestone 1).

The Grant Coordinator Team was also asked to define the role of a Life Coach within the @LIKE program and established a set of competencies and certifications required to become a Life Coach. These competencies and certifications were highlighted in the @LIKE Life Coach job description and used in Life Coach recruitment (milestones 4 and 5).

To further ensure consistency across the three counties, an assessment strategy and process was also created by the Internal Planning Team, who agreed to require three specific social/psychological assessments to be completed by participants in all of the counties. Each county was allowed to choose its own basic academic assessment tool (milestone 3). The Internal Planning Team also developed and implemented a uniform data collection strategy through the Virtual One Stop (VOS) system (milestone 11) and established a list of VOS quantitative data elements to track. A SharePoint site was created by the Internal Planning Team to facilitate electronic communication (milestone 14) among staff and key stakeholders. The SharePoint site maintains all relevant program documents and allows staff to share best practices and lessons learned.

To facilitate an effective wraparound service the Internal Planning Team, in consultation with the partners thru all partner meetings and coordinator feedback, established the level of intensity of services offered by the @LIKE program (milestone 6). It was agreed that the program would track the number of hours per week a participant would meet with @LIKE staff, with participants required to interact with their Life Coaches for a minimum of four to six hours a week.

Additionally, the Internal Planning Team, in consultation with the partners, established all educational elements (milestone 15) along with a system of internships, work experience OJT, and other work based learning opportunities (milestone 7) during the first six months of program planning. It was decided that each county would independently recruit and monitor quality worksites and on-site trained supervisors, as well as monitor evaluations of each participant.

The original grant submission specifies that 100 percent of the program participants will get the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC – see Section 4.5 for further detail). For participants to obtain this certificate, the Grant Coordinator Team established approved ACT/WorkKeys testing sites and provided training to @LIKE staff and ACT/WorkKeys test administrators (milestones 13 and 12).

Exhibit 8: Timeline of @LIKE Key Project Start-Up Achievements

Task / Activity	Program Year 1												Program Year 2											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	2012						2013												2014					
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
1. Recruitment plan in place						▲																		
2. Enrollment process in place, including eligibility criteria and streamlined application process						▲																		
3. Assessment strategy/process in place						▲																		
4. Establish Life Coach criteria and knowledge, skills and abilities						▲																		
5. Recruit and have Life Coaches on board								▲																
6. Establish level of intensity of wraparound services offered						▲																		
7. Develop a system of internships, work experiences, OJT and other work-based opportunities						▲																		
8. CQI/Quality Assurance System in place								▲																
9. Communication Plan in place								▲																
10. Ensure access to the Youth Portal	▲																							
11. Develop and implement a uniform data collection strategy						▲																		
12. Provide training on WorkKeys for the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC)								▲																
13. Meet WorkKeys criteria for testing sites, trained proctors										▲														
14. All partners are trained on how to use SharePoint, the electronic communication system				▲																				
15. All educational elements are in place						▲																		
16. Sustainability Plan developed																			▲					

Key: Completed ▲

The Internal Planning Team also asked the Steering Committee to create a strategic communication plan which would include the development of uniform recruitment materials to be used by each county (milestone 9) and includes a @LIKE logo and uniform messaging. The Committee also developed a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) plan which established a set of quality standards to define quality measures and guide CQI (milestone 8), as discussed further in Section 3.3. The final milestone—the @LIKE Sustainability Plan—is projected to be completed in January 2014 and is being overseen by the Steering Committee (milestone 16).
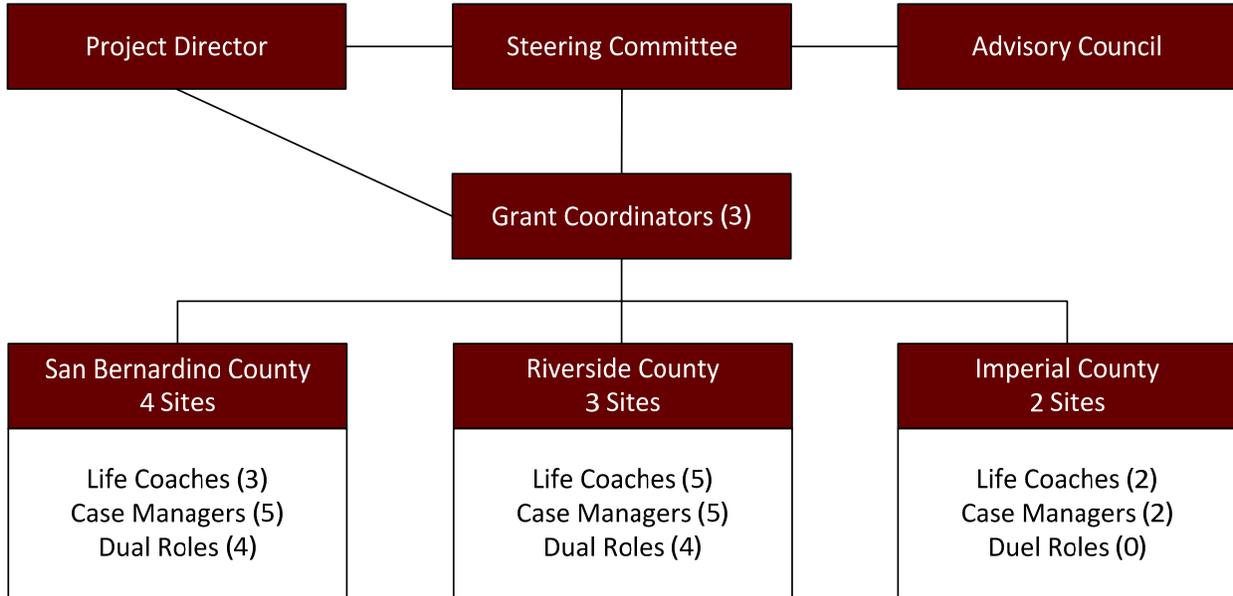
In addition to achieving these milestones, it was important for the program to put into place contracts and subcontracts between the counties and all necessary partners so that the program could begin to providing services. Given that this is a regional effort, contracts were needed across the counties. Creating, finalizing and entering into these contracts and subcontracts proved to be a long and difficult task. The last contract with one of the counties was not signed until April 2013, roughly 10 months after starting the pre-implementation activities.

Riverside County EDA completed the planning and development phase in December 2012, six months after critical pre-implementation activities began. A "soft start" began in early November of 2012, with initial outreach to potential participants. The first cohorts of @LIKE participants began enrollment on January 2, 2013.

3.2   Establishing a Framework for Overall Project Management

Riverside County EDA, the lead agency for the @LIKE project, was responsible for negotiating sub-grant contracts with the County of San Bernardino Department of Workforce Development and the Imperial County Workforce Development Board. To ensure effective coordination of efforts across the tri-county area, Riverside County's approach to project governance, as noted, included a Steering Committee, Grant Coordinator Team, and an Advisory Council. Exhibit 9 depicts the organization and staffing structure of the @LIKE program, followed by a description of each entity of the management team and their roles during program implementation.

Exhibit 9: Organizational Chart of the @LIKE Program

Project Director	Steering Committee	Advisory Council

Grant Coordinators (3)

San Bernardino County 4 Sites	Riverside County 3 Sites	Imperial County 2 Sites
Life Coaches (3) Case Managers (5) Dual Roles (4)	Life Coaches (5) Case Managers (5) Dual Roles (4)	Life Coaches (2) Case Managers (2) Duel Roles (0)

Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was formally convened in November 2012, consisting of representatives from all three counties. Its members include, but are not limited to: WIB Directors, Grant Coordinators, Advisory Members, Assessment Consultant, Project Partners, Site Managers, Life Coaches, and Case Managers. The committee is responsible for all policy and business issues associated with the project that are essential to ensuring the delivery of outputs and attainment of outcomes. The committee also ensures ongoing learning across the partnerships in addressing the needs of disconnected young adults. To guide the committee's principal functions, the Steering Committee established a charter to:

- Create a communications plan for internal and external communications

- Provide oversight to ensure grant goals are being met

- Create a CQI plan

- Provide oversight and feedback to the program evaluation plan.[11]

The Steering Committee initially focused on identifying its external audiences (disconnected young adults, the public, employers, elected officials, funders, stakeholders and Workforce Investment Boards), appropriate messaging, methods for delivering messages, and messaging frequency. Visibility, buy-in among stakeholders, and sustainability were considered crucial factors in program performance. The Committee developed the CQI plan, as discussed further in Section 3.4, and is providing ongoing oversight of execution and compliance.

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[11] Steering Committee Minutes November 8th, 2012

The Steering Committee also created a Communication sub-group to develop recruitment materials and the Communication Action Plan, with the goal of creating a standard program message and logo. Included were a recruitment flyer, presentation talking points and slides aimed at stakeholders, and press releases aimed at young adults and their families. The committee also created the @LIKE website to support its community-facing strategy.

Grant Coordinator Team. The four-member Grant Coordinator team, which includes one member from each county and is facilitated by the Project Director, was created to ensure consistency across the consortium and within each county's program, with Riverside County holding the Lead Grant Coordinator position. The team was primarily empowered to transform the program's underlying philosophical and conceptual underpinnings into a functioning operation, by defining roles and responsibilities of management and direct services staff. The team also established standard operating procedures to govern and conduct day-to-day activities.

One of the first responsibilities of the Grant Coordinator team was to clearly define "disconnected young adult" and specify eligibility requirements in a manner that would clearly differentiate WIA participants from @LIKE participants. The Grant Coordinators, recognizing the importance of data integrity, determined that VOS would be used to support data collection for the evaluation, which would provide a common platform across counties with consistently articulated and defined underlying data elements. They also provided input to the Internal Planning Team as the Internal Planning Team established an internet portal using Microsoft SharePoint as a coordination, communication, and distribution mechanism for program staff, which went live in September 2012.

In April 2013, the Imperial County @LIKE Grant Coordinator submitted her two-week resignation. A new Grant Coordinator was immediately hired. She did not complete any formal training process, but brought herself up to speed by reviewing all documents on the SharePoint site and directly interacting with @LIKE staff. She also received guidance from the Lead Grant Coordinator, previous Grant Coordinator, and Program Director.

Advisory Council. After program operations began, 17 Advisory Council members were selected by each program site to provide input to the Steering Committee. These members, who are @LIKE participants, provide a formal mechanism for ensuring @LIKE participants' thoughts and concerns about operations are routinely vocalized, acknowledged, and considered. During the council's kickoff meeting, the young adult members prioritized the topics they felt were most important and formed three committees:

- *Advertising and Marketing Committee*: created to develop ways to reach out to more young adults and create an effective message

- *Workshops Committee:* created to identify workshop topics that will assist young adults in furthering their educations and/or careers

- **Community Awareness Committee**: created to present young adults to the community in ways that counteract the stereotypes of young people that adults, especially employers, may have.[12]

3.3 Development of Operating Procedures, Staff Roles, and Definition of the Target Population

@LIKE leadership developed standard operating procedures to ensure uniformity and consistency of effort across the three counties. These procedures, discussed below, include developing a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) plan, operationalizing the definition of disconnected young adults, defining the role of Life Coaches, and implementing the VOS.

Development of a CQI Plan. The Steering Committee established a set of quality standards to define quality measures and guide CQI. The intended outcome of a CQI culture is to ensure that customers consistently receive the highest level of quality, and that organizations have processes, systems, and methods in place to sustain high performance and exceed customer expectations. The indicators are based on Malcolm Baldridge quality standards, the universally accepted standard for a quality management system in the United States. This process intersects with two key elements contained in the region's @LIKE WIF proposal: 1) ensure sustainability after the grant funds end, and 2) promote CQI as the ongoing strategy to learn, practice, see what works, and develop 'new' knowledge.

Each county program will conduct a self-assessment annually against the CQI standards and indicators. Once the assessment is complete, each organization will conduct an opportunity analysis that will result in a CQI plan specifying methods and strategies for improvement. The Steering Committee established 7 CQI standards:

- ***Leadership***: Leadership refers to how the organization's senior leaders and their personal actions guide and sustain the organization. The organization's governance system and how the organization fulfills its legal, ethical, and societal responsibilities and supports its key communities are part of the definition of an overall leadership system.

- ***Strategic Planning***: Strategic planning includes how the organization sets strategic directions and determines key action plans. Also included is how the plans are translated into an effective performance management system, how the organization deploys strategic objectives and action plans, and how these are changed if circumstances require change.

- ***Customer and Market Focused***: Customer and market focused refers to how the organization engages its customers and stakeholders for long-term marketplace success. This engagement strategy includes how the organization builds a customer- and

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[12] Steering Committee Minutes November 8, 2012

stakeholder-focused culture. Also included is how an organization listens to the voice of its customers and uses this information to improve and identify opportunities for innovation.

- ▪ **Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management**: Measurements, analysis, and knowledge management refers to how an organization selects, gathers, analyzes, manages, and improves its data, information, and knowledge assets; how information technology is managed; and how the organization reviews and uses reviews to improve its performance.

- ▪ **Workforce Focus**: Workforce focus refers to how the organization engages, manages, and develops the workforce to use its full potential in alignment with the organization's overall mission, strategy, and action plans. Workforce focus is essential to the institution's ability to assess workforce capability and capacity needs, and to build a workforce environment conducive to high performance.

- ▪ **Process Management**: The key aspects of process management include 1) how the organization designs its work systems; and 2) how it designs, manages, and improves its key processes for implementing those work systems to deliver value to customers and stakeholders and achieve organizational success and sustainability.

- ▪ **Results**: Results include the organization's performance and improvement in all key areas—performance outcomes, customer-focused outcomes, financial and market outcomes, workforce-focused outcomes, process effectiveness outcomes, and leadership outcomes. Performance levels are examined relative to those of competitors and other organizations with similar workforce service offerings.

Defining Disconnected Young Adults. The original grant submission for the @LIKE program did not provide a final definition for who is a disconnected young adult. To ensure the @LIKE program enrolls participants who are truly disconnected from any institution, as noted, the Internal Planning Committee, Grant Coordinators, and Project Director discussed how to define a disconnected young adult. The definition they came up with was subsequently agreed upon by all the partners at a partner meeting.

Through this process disconnected young adults became defined as individuals who are disconnected from education and employment (including being disconnected from the penal and foster care systems) for at least 90 days. If the 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.[13]

Defining Life Coaches. The Grant Coordinator team developed a specific job description for @LIKE Life Coaches to distinguish between the Life Coach and Case Manager positions. The

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[13] Grant Coordinator Planning Meeting August 10, 2012

original grant submission contained no definition of a Life Coach and simply referred to this role as a mentor, which can take on a very specific meaning. During the implementation stage the Project Director and Grant Coordinator Team recognized that the role of mentor was not defined and set out to define it, in cooperation with the internal planning team.

The discussions amongst these entities about what a Life Coach is and their purpose led them to a deeper understanding of the job requirements and what was really needed. Since the required training was not discussed in the proposal, this meant there was no budget for training to the depth the program wanted. The Grant Coordinator Team, Project Director and Internal Planning Team did research to find a legitimate and widely recognized training source, and then EDA was flexible enough to find a way to pay for it.

The team defined a Life Coach as a trained practitioner who "guides an individual to maneuver through their internal landscape for the purpose of assisting them to explore, discover and attain their authentic desires and aspirations."[14] To be a @LIKE Life Coach, the individual must typically be trained and certified. An individual can still be hired as a @LIKE Life Coach without training, however, if s/he has the pre-requisite education (e.g., social work, coaching, and social services) and be certified through the Couch U's Core Essentials Program (CEP) Facilitated Self-Faced TeleClass Program[15] within three to six months of hire.

VOS Implementation. To replace an obsolete case management system, Riverside County EDA, as noted, purchased the VOS system in 2009. VOS is an Internet-based solution that was custom designed and built to provide a full range of one-stop services to job seekers, employers, providers, and agency staff. VOS includes client tracking software developed specifically for the WIA system, so all client services and data management can be provided via a single interface. VOS is fully integrated with the State of California's Job Training Automation system, enabling Riverside EDA to automate functional requirements that had been performed manually prior to 2009. VOS includes a reporting module with the capability of generating Federal and state reports across the 17 WIA core performance measures.

Riverside County EDA determined during initial planning meetings that VOS could serve as a unified platform to support data collection activities in each of the three @LIKE counties. In September 2012, Riverside County EDA's management information systems team began working to: 1) identify and operationalize the data elements to be collected to support both case management functions and evaluation requirements, and 2) customize VOS in accordance with that framework.

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[14] Life Coach Description and Duties September 17, 2012
[15] https://www.coachinc.com/CoachU/Programs%20and%20Services/Enroll/Program%20Information/default.asp?s=1&ProgramID={CE11AEB1-DEF3-47F9-B46E-05B9E43803CE}&tab=Information

3.4   Training of Direct Services Staff

To prepare @LIKE staff for service delivery, staff members were trained in a variety of areas that included professional development, VOS data collection, and interpretation of assessment results. Life Coaches also received training and were required to become certified (or have their pre-requisite training verified). Below is a description of the training in which @LIKE program staff participated.

Professional Development Training. All @LIKE program staff completed a 3.5 hour professional development training in October 2012 that was designed and presented by the Project Director. The training was designed for anyone involved with the program (fiscal staff, monitors, program providers, and partner staff) to become grounded in the core elements of the @LIKE program model. It provided an overview of the program and highlighted the individuals who will support the program's operational functions. It also highlighted the differences between @LIKE and WIA and reviewed program expectations and outcomes.

VOS Training. Riverside County EDA provided training on the VOS system on December 11-12, 2012, with 22 users from Riverside and Imperial Counties participating. San Bernardino's MIS team had already been using VOS, so was not required to participate in the training. The MIS teams in each county continue to receive ongoing information about the customized data collection site created for the @LIKE program. Riverside County EDA's MIS manager is providing ongoing technical assistance on data entry, as well as creating training webinars on special topics, as needed.

Training to Interpret Assessment Results. The results of the assessments taken by @LIKE participants are used by Life Coaches during life coaching sessions. In January 2013, the Assessment Consultant provided an in-person assessment training for each county. In May 2013, five months after @LIKE began operations; it became apparent that @LIKE staff needed additional coaching and training on using assessment results to tailor a specific development plan and to identify an appropriate framework of activities with which to engage participants. An additional 2.5 hour training was conducted on these topics by the Project Director and Assessment Consultant. Case Managers, Life Coaches, and Program Managers all attended this training.

Life Coach Training and Certification. As noted, each Life Coach must be trained and certified to fulfill the role unless they had the appropriate pre-requisite education and can be certified through the Couch U's Core Essentials Program (CEP) Facilitated Self-Faced TeleClass Program within three to six months of hire. CEP teaches beginner and intermediate courses via the internet, allowing Life Coaches to set their own pace. None of the Life Coaches had completed the CEP prior to being hired. Thus far, two out of 10 @LIKE Life Coaches have successfully

graduated from the CEP online Life Coach training course; the remaining Life Coaches are expected to complete their training before December 31, 2013.[16]

There is also a mandatory orientation conference for all @LIKE Life Coaches, with oversight provided by the Lead Grant Coordinator. This enables the Life Coach to develop core competencies and skills required to effectively coach others.[17]

3.5   Role of Life Coaches and Case Managers

The Life Coach serves as a personal coach to the @LIKE participant and identifies each client's existing internal and external assets, strengths, and resources—helping him/her develop an individualized plan that outlines realistic benchmarks for achieving specified goals. The Case Manager focuses on the outcomes and tasks each @LIKE participant must complete to fulfill the program's requirements and meet the participant's personal goals. While the Life Coach is considered the personal coach to the participant, the Case Manager also steps in at times to coach participants.

Nine sites implemented the @LIKE project across the three counties, with San Bernardino operating four sites, Riverside operating three, and Imperial County operating two. The organizational structure of the nine sites varies in how the roles of Life Coaches and Case Managers were actualized. Some sites maintained separation between the two roles, while others combined them into a dual role. San Bernardino County, for example, elected to combine the role of Life Coach with that of Site Director or Program Manager. Exhibit 10 compares the roles of Life Coach and Case Manager by county, followed by a description of each role as currently implemented.

Exhibit 10: Life Coach and Case Manager Role by County[18]

Individuals Serving As:	Imperial	Riverside	San Bernardino
Only a Life Coach	✓	✓	✓
Only a Case Manager	✓	✓	✓
Both a Life Coach and Case Manager		✓	
Both a Project Director and Life Coach			✓
Both a Project Director and Case Manager			✓

3.6   Staff Communication

During program planning and development, communication occurred frequently between program staff at all levels, via management team meetings and training/support sessions. This section summarizes the communication strategies used during program implementation and

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[16] Final DOL Report 3Q13
[17] Grant Coordinator Meeting Minutes January 2013
[18] Information was gathered from the site visit interviews and the August 2013 Steering Committee sign in sheet.

start-up, which included face-to-face meetings, development of the @LIKE SharePoint site, and Affinity Group conference calls.

Face-to-Face Meetings. The Steering Committee, Advisory Council, and Grant Coordinator Team, including the Project Director, conduct standing meetings that allow for sharing best practices and lessons learned. This includes the Monthly Steering Committee meetings. When appropriate, Grant Coordinators disseminate key findings to all @LIKE staff via email, as well as post such information on the @LIKE SharePoint site, as described below.

Due to the sheer size of the geographic area occupied by the three counties, @LIKE staff is unable to attend all face-to-face meetings, particularly those involving San Bernardino County's Workforce Development staff. To help keep everyone informed, the Project Director asks all Project Leaders to have their staff share information, notes, handouts, and materials disseminated at all meetings and trainings. Program staff is also exploring using WebEx or other electronic means to reduce travel time and costs associated with face-to-face meetings.

SharePoint Site. As @LIKE's primary communication tool, the SharePoint site is used as a repository for all programmatic documents (including meeting minutes, marketing tools and guides, training guides, grant documents, assessment training guides, WorkKeys NCRC guides, and updated participant demographic reports).

Affinity Groups. Affinity groups consist of Life Coaches, Case Managers, Grant Coordinators, and service delivery agency leaders, who meet four times per year via conference call. These hour-long conference calls were established to facilitate discussion amongst grant staff regarding shared challenges and best practices.[19]

3.7   Implementation Challenges

Several implementation challenges were noted by program staff during the course of the interviews conducted. These challenges are described below.

Lack of a Clear Distinction Between Life Coach and Case Manager in Some Sites. The interaction between Life Coach and Case Manager varied from site to site depending on the prevailing organizational structure and the understanding of each staff member as to the roles and responsibilities of each position. Sites with distinct and clearly defined roles for Life Coach and Case Manager have a very structured approach to program implementation, whereby the Life Coach provides coaching and the Case Manager sets deadlines and provides program structure. In sites where staff did not clearly distinguish between the role of a Life Coach and Case Manager, participant received coaching and case management services from <u>both</u> positions, which is inconsistent with the @LIKE program model.

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[19] WIF 1Q13 Narrative Report RivCoEDA, 05.14.2013.

The staff with the dual roles found the combination complicated. It detracted in some cases from life coaching because of the time required for case management tasks. But in other cases lie coaching duties detracted from completing tasks associated with case or program management.

Communication Frequency and Meeting Participation has Diminished Over Time. The frequency of general communication among program staff has varied across groups and over time. General cross-county communication was much more frequent during program implementation and the early months of operations, decreasing as the program advances toward greater stability and continuity.

While respondents noted that the amount of general communication is adequate, some specific issues persist. Attendance at program-wide meetings has become prohibitive for some @LIKE staff in terms of both cost and time due to the distances between sites in the tri-county area, with commutes exceeding two and even three hours each way in some instances. While some staff is participating via conference call, others are choosing to contribute and remain current following critical meetings by awaiting written meeting minutes that routinely follow. There is some concern that incomplete attendance might inhibit interaction, networking, and positive synergy among the partners. As distance itself cannot be obviated, and will remain a real obstacle, program staff are currently exploring whether or not a webinar format might suffice as an effective work-around.

Secondly, with staff encountering some problems in navigating the Sharepoint site, many are not logging on at all and not accessing essential material centrally stored there. Several respondents mentioned the heavy time commitment involved in obtaining documents from the website, indicating they would prefer information to be placed directly in an email. There is consequently some shared concern that this creates otherwise avoidable risks to implementation due to uneven staff knowledge and awareness. A conclusion that "it is posted, so therefore they know" may not be an entirely safe one under the circumstances.

While respondents are generally satisfied with communications, most believe there is room for improvement, especially in communications with the Steering Committee and other direct services staff. One respondent noted that direct service staff not able to attend the Steering Committee meetings is often left out of the loop when it comes to @LIKE program development. Generally, however, all respondents reported that their communication with program management and direct services staff within and between counties has been valuable.

4. PROCESS FOR DELIVERING DIRECT SERVICES TO PARTICIPATING YOUNG ADULTS

The @LIKE program's critical direct services are provided by program staff operating in centers located in nine sites across the participating counties. This chapter describes the sequence of programmatic steps between staff and participants, corresponding to the key touch-points that define the program's innovative approach. The following framework guides the discussion:

- Recruitment
- Orientation, eligibility, and enrollment
- Assessments
- Support services
- ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC)
- Participant close-out.

Exhibit 11 highlights the process and compares the similarities and differences in the @LIKE service delivery model by county in the sections below.

Exhibit 11: Service Delivery Key Findings by County

	Imperial	Riverside	San Bernardino
Recruitment Strategies	*Common Findings:* ▪ Active recruitment - boots on the ground and word of mouth ▪ Direct contact with the community ▪ Utilization of common @LIKE marketing materials (flyers, etc.) developed by Steering Committee		
	▪ Announcements at community meetings ▪ Social media	▪ Walk-Ins	▪ Schools ▪ Local contacts within community
Orientation/ Interview	*Common Findings:* ▪ Informal and flexible ▪ Program explanation and expectations ▪ Assessment of commitment level ▪ Assess program eligibility		
	▪ One-on-one ▪ Discuss goals	▪ No paperwork, focus on potential participant	▪ Emotional meeting that helps to build trust
Determining Eligibility & Enrollment	▪ American Job Center	▪ Generally the @LIKE Life Coach	▪ @LIKE staff who conducted orientation/ interview
Assessments	*Common Findings:* ▪ Difficulty interpreting the Smooth Transition assessment results ▪ Assessment results enhanced life coaching effectiveness		
	▪ All assessments taken shortly after program enrollment ▪ TABE – academic	▪ All assessments taken shortly after program enrollment ▪ CASAS – academic	▪ CASAS – academic assessment taken shortly after program enrollment

	Imperial	Riverside	San Bernardino
	assessment ▪ Smooth Transitions assessments ▪ Assessments appear to be used throughout the county.	assessment ▪ Smooth Transitions assessments ▪ Assessments appear to be used throughout the county.	▪ Smooth Transitions assessments taken several weeks into program ▪ Assessments do not appear to be used throughout the county.
Services	**Common Findings:** ▪ Completed in workshops or in one-on-one meetings		
Services	▪ Tailored workshops to needs of participants ▪ Topics covered include interview preparation, time management, etc.	▪ Topics covered include resume writing, interview preparation, career exploration, academic tutoring, soft skills training, etc.	▪ Work Ready 101: soft skills training ▪ Job Boot camp: soft skills training ▪ Monetary incentive to finish soft skills training
Cohorts	▪ Not discussed	▪ Not discussed	▪ Using cohort model
Certifications	**Common Findings:** ▪ The majority of participants have not taken the NCRC		
Certifications	-	-	▪ Concerns about certification
Successful Completion / Participant Closeout	**Common Findings:** ▪ All sites are unclear on what constitutes a successful completion/exit from the program		

4.1 Recruitment

Disconnected young adults are typically unaware of resources and opportunities available in their communities to assist them. To generate interest that will ultimately result in actual engagement and participation in seizing their own future, the @LIKE program "meets them where they are." That is, rather than awaiting their arrival, every site deploys a proactive recruitment strategy that involves sending an @LIKE staff member into communities where potential disconnected young adults are known to congregate. This @LIKE staff member is generally the Life Coach and/or Case Manager.

Every site also relies heavily on word of mouth and referrals, which have proven the most effective strategies for recruitment. Many program participants indicated during focus groups that they joined the program after hearing about it from a friend, family member, or other person within their social circle. Some sites located in high traffic areas with a large disconnected young adult population have had several walk-ins who, on noticing the sign outside, signed up for the program that very day. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as flyers, have also been used to promote the program; however, sites are finding these less effective than going out into the community and talking directly with potential participants.

Even with the variety of recruitment strategies being implemented across sites, recruitment continues to be difficult, particularly for adults aged 22–24 compared with those 21 or younger. When discussing recommendations for recruitment strategies, many participants commented on the lack of @LIKE marketing to the public and on the fact that many "people do not know

about the program." One even went so far as to suggest the program was "too secret." Currently, all sites are refocusing their efforts on attracting more young adults, which is essential to meeting targets and maximizing output.

4.2 Orientation, Determining Eligibility, and Enrollment

Procedures for participant enrollment differ by county and site. Below is a description of the enrollment process, highlighting similarities and differences across counties.

Pre-Application Screening and Orientation/Interview. All sites conduct a one-on-one orientation/interview with prospective @LIKE participants, either at the center or in the field. This session is conducted by either the Case Manager or the Life Coach, and sometimes both. During the orientation/interview, staff explains the program, sets expectations, discusses the rules, and highlights recent success stories to encourage program participation. The orientation/interview session also allows staff to get to know the potential participant and determine eligibility.

Determining Participant Eligibility. The program developed an eligibility check list worksheet for program staff to determine whether a participant meets the criteria of being defined as disconnected and is thereby eligible to participate. The worksheet is used as part of an interview and must be completed prior to the @LIKE program application. The checklist includes age, education status, employment status, and selective service status (if a male). There is also a section that asks whether the potential participant is low-income, gang-involved, an ex-offender, on aid, or a recently separated veteran.

The @LIKE program adopted a definition of disconnected that states that the young adult will be disconnected from any system (not just school and work) for at least 90 days. Some of the young adults being recruited have been out of school and work for 90 days, but are also on probation or parole and thus in a system. However, program staff noted that young adults who are on probation or parole were not receiving any services or support even though they were considered to be in a system. Thus the definition that was being used to decide if a young person was eligible was having the effect of suppressing program enrollment, particularly for those aged 22–24. One respondent explained that potential participants currently in the probation system do not receive any one-on-one services and therefore should be considered disconnected. The Steering Committee was planning to discuss this topic at its October 2013 meeting.

If a potential participant meets the program eligibility qualifications, staff must write a brief explanation as to why they think this individual is disconnected versus being simply "at-risk." In Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, the Life Coaches, Case Managers, or dual role staff members determine the eligibility of each potential participant during the participant's pre-application screening by reviewing the eligibility checklist worksheet on site. Imperial County, in contrast, directs potentially eligible participants to their job center to make the final eligibility determination. The job center sets up a meeting with the potential participant, makes the final eligibility determination, and, presuming s/he meets the eligibility requirements, proceeds with

enrollment. Several respondents in Imperial County commented on participants getting lost in the enrollment process and attributed this to potential participants being sent to the job center.

@LIKE Program Application. Once the participant is deemed eligible, the Life Coach, Case Manager, or dual-role staff assists the participant in filling out the one-page @LIKE Program Application and self-assessment. Once completed, @LIKE staff can immediately begin providing @LIKE services and leveraging available funds. After enrollment, the participant is given two weeks or 30 days, depending on the required form, to provide necessary information (such as a social security number and valid government identification). In many cases, @LIKE staff helps participants by walking them through the application process and providing transportation to obtain the required forms.

All respondents agreed that the limited paperwork required was a big advantage in streamlining the process, permitting smoother enrollment.

Assignment of Life Coaches and Case Managers. After @LIKE participants complete the enrollment application, they are assigned a Life Coach and Case Manager or a dual role staff member. Generally, participants are placed according to staff availability; however, in some sites, participants may be placed with particular Life Coaches with whom they "click." Each participant is required to meet with his/her Life Coach for one hour a week for a set time specified in the participant's ISS. The Life Coach also generally administers the assessments, as discussed in the next section.

4.3   Assessments

Once the participant has applied to the program, s/he must complete the basic academic skills assessment and three social/psychological assessment tools.

Basic Academic Skills Assessment. All three counties administer a basic academic skills assessment to determine a program participant's academic ability and highlight any subject areas with which participants are struggling. If it is determined that a participant is struggling in a specific subject area, @LIKE staff provide support services to improve the participant's score. This may include tutoring in areas such as math or reading comprehension, or testing for a learning disability.

Across the three counties, different basic academic skills assessment tools are being used. Riverside and San Bernardino counties use the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) to determine each participant's basic skill level after enrollment into the program. Imperial County uses the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment.

The CASAS and TABE—the two most widely used basic academic skills assessments—both provide valuable information to jobseekers as well as employers, but they are functionally different. The purpose of the CASAS is to obtain information on an individual's <u>basic academic functioning level and life skills</u>, and focuses on reading and listening in a workplace context —

identifying adult competencies such as basic communication, consumer economics, and independent living skills. The TABE obtains information on an individual's <u>basic academic skills</u>, and covers reading comprehension, mathematical literacy, and language skills. Additionally, because the TABE measures academic skills, it is not recommended for assessing English skills for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners. CASAS has been approved by the U.S. Department of Education and USDOL to assess both native and non-native English speakers.[20][21]

Social/Psychological Assessment Tools. Once the academic skills assessment is completed, @LIKE participants are administered the three social/psychological assessments:

- ***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 personality and career profile assessment.

The three tools together are used by Life Coaches to assess internal drivers for each @LIKE participant. The program is flexible as to when the assessments are administered to participants. Informal guidance was provided to sites suggesting that they administer these assessments within the first 3 months of a participant enrolling in the program; however the sites have been instructed to be sensitive to the needs of these disconnected young adults and to administer the assessments at a later time if deemed appropriate. One reason the assessments may be administered to the participant outside of this 3 month window is if the site feels the assessment will drive the participant out of the program causing the participant to become disconnected again.

The Self-Appraisal and Perceived Barriers Assessment was designed by the Assessment Consultant, who works closely with the Project Director. The other two tests, CenterMark Personality Profile and Career Development Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form, were developed by outside organizations and purchased using @LIKE grant funds. @LIKE staff contact the Assessment Consultant via email and ask for a user name and password, which enable the participant to complete it.

Assessments and Life Coaching. Once the assessments are completed, the Life Coach or dual role staff receives a report that provides an overview of each participant's personality type, strengths, and perceived barriers, plus a list of careers that match the participant's personality. These results facilitate conversations surrounding life coaching and educational/career short- and long-term goals. The results also help the Life Coaches and Case Managers gain greater

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[20] Minnesota Adult Basic Education Assessment Training CASAS and TABE Side-by-Side: www.mnabeassessment.com/CASAS-TABE-SidebySide2011.ppt

[21] Hillsbrough County Public Schools Assessment for Adult Students: http://ace.mysdhc.org/assessment#CASAS

insights into each participant's personality, which assists them in life coaching and goal setting. The results are also placed in the @LIKE participant's individual service strategy (ISS) plan.

Once the key elements of the ISS are discussed, participants must sign an agreement: 1) stating they participated in the development of their ISS and agree with the support services to be provided and 2) affirming they will meet the requirements of the plan to the best of their ability. The ISS worksheet contains:

- Participant contact information

- List of assessments and their completion date

- Career goals/interest(s)

- Program participation plans with a list of activity codes that include life coaching contact hours, goal setting, internships, and on-the-job training (the last only for participants that are co-enrolled in @LIKE and WIA)

- Support service plan, which includes transportation, childcare, clothing, medical or other supports.

It is unclear as to when in the @LIKE process the ISS is created. Some sites are completing the document before or after the assessments, while others are only completing it after the assessments are completed. Notably, only a few participants from the focus group were aware of an ISS, suggesting that they may not be exhaustively used.

The assessments allow participants to "get a better perspective of themselves." All Life Coaches and program participants interviewed for this study reported the assessment tools to be useful and effective. Many of the program participants stated that at first they had mixed feelings towards the usefulness and value of the assessments, with some program participants stating they thought the assessments were a "waste of time." These program participants went on to say that over time they began to see how helpful these assessments were in identifying their goals and learning about their unique talents, skills, and strengths.

Overview of Completed @LIKE Assessments. At the time of the site visits, the majority of participants had completed both the basic academic skills and social/psychological assessments. As reported in Exhibit 12, the CASAS appraisals for both math and reading had been administered to all 99 participants enrolled in the @LIKE program in Riverside County. Through August 2013, the TABE pre-tests for both math and reading had been administered to 38 of the 50 participants enrolled in the @LIKE program in Imperial county (76%), while 34 (68%) had taken the CenterMark Career Personality Profile, the self-appraisal, and the self-efficacy scale.

More than three-quarters of enrolled participants in Riverside County had taken the CenterMark Career Personality Profile (87%), the self-appraisal (77%), and the self-efficacy scale (77%). In San Bernardino County, the CASAS pre-tests for both math and reading, the CenterMark Career Personality Profile, the self-appraisal, and the self-efficacy scale had been administered to 26 of the 30 enrolled participants (87%).

Exhibit 12: Assessments of Enrolled Participants Conducted by County
(January 1, 2013 – August 31, 2013)

Participant Characteristics	Riverside County (n=99)		Imperial County (n=50)		San Bernardino County (n=30)		Program Totals (n=179)	
CASAS								
Appraisal Math	99	100%	0	0%	0	0%	99	55%
Math Pre-Test	77	78%	0	0%	26	87%	103	58%
Math Post-Test	16	16%	0	0%	0	0%	16	9%
Appraisal Reading	99	100%	0	0%	0	0%	99	55%
Reading Pre-Test	64	65%	0	0%	26	87%	90	50%
Reading Post-Test	7	7%	0	0%	0	0%	7	4%
Test of Adult Basic Education								
TABE Pre-Test Math	0	0%	38	76%	0	0%	38	21%
TABE Pre-Test Reading	0	0%	38	76%	0	0%	38	21%
@LIKE Pre-Test								
CenterMark Career	86	87%	34	68%	26	87%	146	82%
Self-Appraisal	76	77%	34	68%	26	87%	136	76%
Self-Efficacy Scale	76	77%	34	68%	26	87%	136	76%

Inconsistencies Surrounding Assessment Administration and Utilization. There were several inconsistencies across counties related to the timing of assessment administration and the utilization of test results. Riverside and Imperial County participants all took the assessments shortly after the academic assessment. San Bernardino County, however, was not able to provide access to the assessments until many participants had already been in the program for several weeks and had completed some soft-skill training and attended meetings with their Life Coach. Additionally, it surfaced during an affinity group call that @LIKE staff members were having trouble interpreting the assessment results. Consequently, the assessment results were not being used in life coaching sessions and career exploration activities. In response, the Project Director and Assessment Consultant provided a half-day training session for all @LIKE Life Coaches giving greater clarity to ensure proper and consistent use of the assessment tools.

4.4 Training and Career Services

Program participants are able to receive services immediately upon completion of the @LIKE application. This is in stark contrast to the WIA program, which first requires supporting documents to be certified before an individual can be enrolled in the a WIA program. This process can take a few days to a few weeks to complete. Initial support services generally consist of transportation subsidies such as bus passes and soft skills training; but once participants have developed their education and/or career goals, their services are tailored accordingly.

Soft Skills Training. Soft skills training generally focuses on the participant's interpersonal and self-management abilities by teaching responsibility, time management, workplace and interview etiquette, and teamwork. The mode of training varies among sites, with some offering workshops while others provide computer access so participants can complete online courses or webinars. Some sites have a business liaison or separate staff member on site who meets with participants one-on-one. During this meeting, the participant and staff member generally review the participant's resume and prepare him/her for a job interview.

Career Exploration. Once participants identify a career track of interest, they can research the local labor market to identify career demands and estimated salary, ensuring an informed decision at this pivotal stage. Participant in some instances have changed career tracks as a result. If the career requires further education, the Life Coach will help the participant research local education programs and internships/employment opportunities that align with overall career goals.

@LIKE participants are also placed into paid internships as part of the program. The internships vary depending on the relationships each site has with local employers and the interest of each @LIKE participant. The internships require approximately 10 hours per week over a period of up to five weeks. For many @LIKE participants, opportunities to intern, representing for some a first-ever job, were a major contributing factor in the decision to enroll. Several respondents reported delays with contracting that were delaying their placement. One staff respondent was particularly worried that this would cause participants to drop out of the program.

Educational Development. @LIKE participants may be offered tutoring if the basic academic skills assessment identifies an area with which they may be struggling. Additionally, GED preparation is provided for those who have not graduated from high school. Finally, for those interested in attending higher education, program staff helps them research their options and walks them through the higher education application process. In some cases, @LIKE staff goes with the participant to visit the college and help them register for classes.

4.5 ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC)

The ACT NCRC is a job skill assessment that allows employers to select, hire, train, develop, and retain a high-performance workforce by demonstrating achievements and the applicant's level of workplace employability skills. Upon successful completion of the three WorkKey assessments (Applied Mathematics, Locating Information, and Reading for Information), an individual can obtain an ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC).[22]

The @LIKE grant performance metric states that 100 percent of @LIKE participants will leave the program with an NCRC; however, several staff expressed concerns about their ability to meet the 100 percent participant completion due to the low academic standing of some

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[22] NCRC Training by Lori Strumpf February 2013.

program participants. Some respondents also raised concerns about the fact that many local employers are not familiar with the NCRC.

4.6   Participant Closeout

Program guidelines lack sufficient clarity as to what precisely constitutes program completion, causing @LIKE Life Coaches, Case Managers, and other staff to raise concerns about the effect this could have on their caseloads over time. Many @LIKE staff are finding that while communication decreases once participants complete their paid internships, are enrolled in school, or have found steady employment, they are permitted to return if/when they need further education or career assistance. As a result, all Case Managers and Life Coaches keep all @LIKE participants files open.

4.7   Summary of Major Issues or Challenges to Service Delivery

The following highlight the major challenges the program has faced over the first nine months since delivery of services began in January 2013.

- *Recruitment*. Sites are experiencing difficulty in locating and recruiting disconnected young adults ages 22-24, resulting in overall participation that is lower than anticipated for this point in the program's operational path. As many @LIKE participants feel the program is not being effectively marketed to the public, potential course corrections in the program's community outreach strategy may be productive going forward.

- *Orientation, Determining Eligibility, and Enrollment*. Determining eligibility based on the current restrictive definition of disconnected young adults may also be suppressing participation below expected targets. In Imperial County, where participants must be processed at the One Stop Center, difficulty with enrollment was further exacerbated by the fact that participants were turned away if they were late for scheduled appointments.

- *Assessments*. Assessments were completed by participants at different points following initial enrollment, making it sometimes difficult for Life Coaches and Case Managers to use results effectively at appropriate times. In addition, Life Coaches and Case Managers were having difficulty interpreting the meaning of assessment results, and therefore how to appropriately utilize them in developing individualized plans.

- *Contracting*. Sites needed to wait on a final contract from Riverside County before participants could begin their paid internships. Two of the counties internal processes for subcontracting and getting approvals delayed getting the contracts in place.

- *Services*. Because sites are experiencing delays associated with the above contracting issues, participants are dropping out of the program prematurely, before key individual milestones can be achieved.

- *ACT's National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC)*. The NCRC is proving too difficult to pass for participants functioning at a low reading level, meaning the compliance

benchmark the program has set for itself of 100 percent achievement is unlikely to be met.

- **_Participant Closeout_**. As there is no obvious threshold upon which participants are considered to have completed or graduated the program, cases once opened remain open indefinitely, with participants eligible to receive continuing services into the future.

Program staff is mindful of these issues and challenges as the @LIKE program prepares for its second year of operation beginning in January 2014.

5. CHARACTERISTICS OF ENROLLED PARTICIPANTS AND PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

This chapter provides a descriptive analysis of participants enrolled in the @LIKE program through the first eight months of program operations (January 1, 2013 through September 9, 2013), as well as preliminary data available on the program's critical early outcomes.

5.1   Participant Demographics

As Exhibit 13 illustrates, of the 179 total participants across the three counties, slightly more than half (53%) are aged 22–24. Riverside County enrolled a higher percentage of participants in this age group (59%), while Imperial county enrolled a higher percentage of participants aged 21 or younger (40%). More than half (56%) of all @LIKE participants are male. Riverside (59%) and Imperial (58%) counties enrolled more males than females, while San Bernardino County enrolled more females (53%) than males.

Two-thirds of all participants are Hispanic (68%). The percentage of Hispanic participants is highest in Imperial County (94%), followed by San Bernardino County (63%) and Riverside County (56%). More than half of all participants (59%) have obtained a high school diploma or GED. Participants in San Bernardino County are more likely to have obtained a high school diploma or GED (77%) than participants in Riverside (53%) and Imperial counties (60%). Of the 179 total participants enrolled in @LIKE, 11 have received postsecondary training, either college-based or vocational.

According to data reported by participants while enrolling for @LIKE, nearly all of the 179 total participants enrolled in @LIKE through August 2013 are low-income (98%) and nearly half are receiving some form of aid (46%). About one-fifth (21%) are ex-offenders and a similar percentage (18%) are single parents. More than one in 10 enrolled participants (13%) is considered to have a disability. Enrolled participants also include former foster care young adults (6%), homeless (5%), gang affiliated (5%), and veterans (1%).

Participant Characteristics	Riverside County		Imperial County		San Bernardino County		Program Totals	
Age								
Ages 18-21	41	41%	30	60%	14	48%	85	47%
Ages 22-24	58	59%	20	40%	16	53%	94	53%
Total	99	100%	50	100%	30	100%	179	100%
Gender								
Male	58	59%	29	58%	14	47%	1	56%
Female	41	41%	21	42%	16	53%	78	44%
Total	99	100%	50	100%	30	100%	179	100%
Hispanic								
Yes	55	56%	47	94%	19	63%	121	68%
No	43	43%	3	6%	11	37%	57	32%
Unknown	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	>1%
Total	99	100%	50	100%	30	100%	179	100%
Race[1]								
Black	23	22%	1	2%	6	18%	30	16%
Hispanic	55	52%	47	94%	18	53%	120	63%
White	20	19%	2	4%	8	24%	30	16%
Asian	3	3%	0	0%	0	0%	3	2%
American Indian	3	3%	0	0%	2	6%	5	3%
Pacific Islander	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Total	105	100%	50	100%	34	100%	189	100%
Education Attainment								
Non-High School Graduates	47	48%	20	40%	7	23%	74	41%
High School Diploma or GED	52	53%	30	60%	23	77%	105	59%
GED	4	8%	1	3%	1	4%	6	6%
HS diploma	39	75%	27	90%	22	96%	88	84%
One year college	3	6%	2	7%	0	0%	5	5%
Two years college	2	4%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%
Vocational certification	4	8%	0	0%	0	0%	4	4%
Total	99	100%	50	100%	30	100%	179	100%

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

5.2   Preliminary Participant Outcomes

Program records obtained from Riverside County EDA indicate that 22,797 activity hours had been logged across all active sites from January 1, 2013 through September 9, 2013, resulting in a raw average of activity hours per enrolled participant of approximately 127 hours. The typical participant is engaged in program activities and wrap-around services at a rate of approximately four hours per week. The average per participant of 127 hours reflects the fact that in addition to direct activities and wrap-around services, hours committed to both work and education are also logged and tracked in the total activity hours that Riverside EDA reports. In other words, though not actually reported separately, the average time spent by participants

engaged in work or education compared with the average for participants not yet engaged in work or education is therefore much higher.

Program staff reported some preliminary outcomes since @LIKE enrollment began, which are presented in Exhibit 14. As can be seen, a total of 39 participants had obtained some form of certificate of training, 37 participants had entered a paid internship, 33 had entered unsubsidized employment, and 25 had entered vocational training.

Exhibit 14: Preliminary Outcomes for Enrolled Participants

Preliminary Outcomes	Number of Participants
Participants who had obtained some form of certificate of training	39
Participants who had entered a paid internship	37
Participants who had entered unsubsidized employment	33
Participants who had entered vocational training	25
Participants who had entered an AA degree program	12
Participants who had earned a GED	3
Participant who had earned a high school diploma	1

Note: These outcomes are not mutually exclusive, meaning any individual could have accomplished more than one of these observed outcomes.

The next section synthesizes key findings from the development and implementation phase, including the early months of operations, and distills preliminary lessons learned from @LIKE experiences to date.

6. PROGRAM CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

This section reviews the challenges and successes during the first year of @LIKE program implementation. Since program staff continues to make adjustments in their approaches and procedures as they prepare to move forward into the next phase of operations, it should be noted that these findings are preliminary and represent the program at the point in time when the site visits were conducted (late summer 2013).

6.1   Program Challenges

This section summarizes the challenges identified through our site visits and review of project documents.

@LIKE Program Staff Were Concerned about Meeting the Recruitment and Certification Performance Measure Targets. Staff across the @LIKE sites expressed concern regarding their ability to meet the recruitment and certification performance measure targets. The recruitment performance measure requires at least 60 percent of @LIKE participants to be aged 22–24. To date, only 52.5% (94/179) are in this age range. @LIKE staff indicated that they are finding it difficult to locate and recruit participants in this age group. Several staff also expressed concerns about their ability to meet the 100 percent participant completion rate of the NCRC, due to the low academic standing of many program participants.

Staff Find It Difficult to Retain and Engage @LIKE Participants. Consistent with the previous finding, @LIKE project staff indicated that it has been difficult to engage and retain @LIKE participants, particularly those aged 22–24. Numerous interviewees reported cases in which @LIKE participants abruptly stopped contact with their Case Manager and/or Life Coach. In these situations, the Case Manager and Life Coach each reportedly had to spend several hours contacting and making house calls to find these participants and ask them to return to the program, with varying success.

Program Guidelines Surrounding Participant Completion Are Unclear. There are no clear guidelines on how or when to consider a @LIKE participant as having completed the program. @LIKE Life Coaches, Case Managers, and others raised concerns about what this means for their caseloads over time.

Inconsistent @LIKE Process Names Across Sites. Staff members at @LIKE sites use different names across the sites when describing certain processes or tools used for program implementation. One example of this is when staff discusses the assessment tools. Some sites referred to them as personality assessments; others only mentioned CenterMark and the basic academic assessment; still others just referred to them as the Smooth Transition assessments. This created confusion when discussing assessments during site visit interviews. It may also create miscommunication in the future between sites and stakeholders.

The Grant's SharePoint Site is Difficult to Navigate. The SharePoint site is difficult to navigate and would benefit from being reorganized to create a more logical information storage structure.

The Definition of Disconnected Young Adults May Be Overly Strict. Sites reported issues with the 90-day requirement that a potential participant must be disconnected from the education and workforce system, as well as not be on probation or parole, for 90 days. One respondent explained that potential participants currently in the probation systems do not receive any one-on-one services and therefore should be considered disconnected. This strict eligibility definition limits program enrollment, particularly for young adults aged 22–24.

6.2   Program Successes

Over the past year, the @LIKE program has had many successes, as described below.

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 a tri-county area, with each county having a different local workforce investment area and multiple service delivery sites. This was done through efficient and frequent communication among the key players and across sites, the effective use of policy directives and the ability of all key players to be flexible during program implementation. To create a singular brand and message for the @LIKE program, a common Strategic Communication Plan was created by the Steering Committee which helped facilitate consistency across the participating counties. Additionally, several committees and teams were created to foster effective communication with program stakeholders from each county.

A Uniform Data Collection System was Established Across All @LIKE Sites Which Allows for Consistent Data Collection on Program Participants. Each of the three participating counties agreed to collect an agreed- upon set of data elements on program participants. By forming a consensus over the data elements that are to be captured for every @LIKE participant, the program created uniformity among the @LIKE sites which helps to ensure ongoing, consistent data collection for the program and for the program evaluation being conducted.

Program participants are able to receive services immediately upon completion of their @LIKE application. Once a program applicant submits their @LIKE application, they are able to immediately begin receiving program services. This is in stark contrast to the WIA program which requires that all application materials be certified before the participant can start receiving services. The WIA application process can take a long time, ranging from a few days to a few weeks to complete.

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 Grant Coordinator Team made a clear distinction between the role of the @LIKE Life Coaches and other roles such as Career Coaches and Case Managers. The team also created a Life Coach job description that contained a set of

competencies used for hiring at each @LIKE site across the tri-county area. The job description requires that all Life Coaches be trained either prior to hiring or become certified during the first 6 months of hire via Coach U, a global provider of coach training programs.

Program Staff Successfully Utilized a Full Range of Program Services to Support Participant Growth and Development. While the program process varies from site to site, particularly when in the interpretation and utilization of the assessment tools in life coaching, all participants are receiving a full range of services and supports that focus on education and career development, as well as personal development. Additionally, respondents overwhelming agreed that the innovative features of the program—having a Life Coach and utilizing personality assessments—were useful in providing a holistic approach to assisting participants in obtaining academic and career advancement.

Engaged and Passionate Staff. All staff respondents were engaged and passionate about their role within the @LIKE program and viewed their work as having direct positive effects on each @LIKE participant's life.

There was Effective and Efficient Communication among Counties. @LIKE staff has taken an active approach to building and maintaining effective and efficient communication among the three counties by incorporating a variety of modes that meet different staff needs. Additionally, this communication has allowed for @LIKE leadership to easily share issues and concerns allowing the program to adapt accordingly. One example was Imperial County's One Stop Center, which was turning away potential participants if they showed up late to the initial intake appointment. Upon learning about this process, the Project Direct and @LIKE Leadership took immediate action and clarified the program in a conference call with the One Stop supervisor. Imperial County is now receiving a steady flow of new participants.[23]

Despite the efficient communication experienced during the early stages of program implementation, efforts need to be made to continue to ensure that program information is shared across all program sites. Because of the geographic dispersion of sites, it is often difficult for program staff to meet face to face with one another. Innovative approaches, such as the use of video conferencing, should be explored to support continued staff interaction across sites within the three participating counties.

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[23] WIF 3Q13 DOL Report