



Highlights of *The Final Report on Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry's Micro-credentials: Opportunities through Stackable Achievements Project*

Project Overview

- **Grantee:** PA Department of Labor and Industry
- **Intervention Focus Area:** Career Pathways
- **Target Population:** Students with Barriers to Education and Employment
- **Area Served:** Allegheny, Bucks, Delaware, Montgomery, Northampton, Lehigh, Philadelphia, and Westmoreland Counties, Pennsylvania
- **Congressional District:** PA 1st, 5th, 7th, 14th, & 17th
- **Grant Round:** Round 3

Evaluation Overview

- **Evaluation Types** Process Study – Type A
- **Evaluator Organization:** Thomas P. Miller & Associates
- **Date of Final Report:** September 2019
- **Title:** *Final Evaluation Report 2019*

Evaluation Period

- May 2016 – May 2019

This brief, one of a series highlighting findings from final Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) evaluation reports,¹ summarizes information from the study conducted by Thomas P. Miller & Associates on the Micro-Credentials: Opportunities through Stackable Achievements project.

The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry used its WIF grant (a Type A project for new and untested ideas) to design, implement and test the Micro-credentials: Opportunities through Stackable Achievements project. The project was implemented by partnerships between the local community colleges and workforce development boards (WDB) in seven workforce areas. The aim of the project was to create opportunities for students with barriers to education and employment to earn credentials within a short timeframe. Each partnership worked closely with local employers to develop micro-credentials programs, using a career pathways model. All micro-credential programs embedded instruction on technical and soft skills into the curriculum and provided students with support services. Overall, total of 700 individuals were enrolled in 19 micro-credential pathways offered across the seven partnerships.

The evaluation consisted of an implementation study, outcomes study, and cost study. Data came from in-person interviews and focus groups, surveys, a curriculum study and review, program documents, and administrative and wage data from the PA Center for Workforce Information and Analytics. Findings included the following:

- The partnerships made modifications and adjustments to the original project model throughout the grant period in order to meet the needs of students and employers.
- Collaboration within the partnerships as well as between partnerships and employers facilitated the development of curricula and micro-credentials that met local needs.
- Most participants (80.1%) enrolled in one micro-credential pathway. A small portion of participants enrolled in two or three pathways (14.5% and 4.7%, respectively). Most participants (92.1% of participants) completed at least one micro-credential.
- Participants who completed at least one micro-credential and were employed 12 months before and 3- or 6-months after the program experienced an increase in wages.

The evaluator offered several recommendations for implementing similar projects in the future. These included: 1) hire or identify specialized staff early in the grant period will help the project to meet grant timelines; 2) create opportunities for collaboration and sharing across the partnerships; 3) explore innovative methods for engaging employer partners; 4) document institutional knowledge throughout the grant to counteract possible delays due to staff turnover; 5) leverage existing resources and structures within partner organizations; 6) prioritize the needs to the target population; and 7) develop marketing strategies early in the grant period.

¹ Under the Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF), the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) provided 43 competitive grants to States, regions, Tribal entities and localities to design and evaluate new approaches in the public workforce system. Using a “tiered evidence” model (which builds on past research), WIF projects tested a variety of new service combinations, technological innovations, and systems changes (with a focus on program coordination and integration). ETA required grantees to procure independent third-party evaluations to document project implementation, costs, and results, all in order to inform future experimentation and to promote continuous improvement in operations and performance in the public workforce system.