Career Advancement Project
Exploring new solutions to
unlock economic mobility

JOBTRAIN   OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION   JVS   TIPPING POINT COMMUNITY

Executive Summary

In a workforce system optimized for placement, we need services that are designed for worker mobility and that steward long-term career advancement.

Tipping Point Community embarked on a 12-month partnership with 3 Bay Area skills-training providers—JobTrain, JVS, and Opportunity Junction—to explore and test career advancement services that support alumni of skills training programs in reaching self sufficient wages ($31.00/hr*).

The results of our research bring to light a new way of understanding the diverse experiences of low-wage, high-barrier workers as they strive to advance in their careers. We consider those experiences in juxtaposition to the expansive workforce system trying to connect talent to good jobs, but leaving too many people behind.

The CAP team and broader workforce community identified several opportunities with potential for high impact on outcomes of skills training alumni. Community work sessions narrowed CAP's focus to testing a new remote career coaching service. The prototype produced a high rate of career advancement progress and positive feedback from participants and CAP partners, making a case for additional investment in longer term pilot.

*California Family Needs Calculator ($31.00/hr is defined as a self-sufficient wage for a single parent with one school age child living in Alameda County), Insight Center

The career advancement challenge: an unmet promise of mobility

Our workforce development systems don't deliver on supporting the economic mobility of workers. They are designed for placement, but not mobility. Many middle-skill workers experience plateauing wages or get caught in a cycle of low-wage work that prevents career momentum and reaching self-sufficient wages.

Workers face systemic barriers that limit economic mobility	Racial and gender disparities define the opportunity divide	Middle skill opportunities are available but just out of reach	Skills training program alumni also see stifled advancement
Only 27% of low-wage earners with no more than a high school diploma escape low-earnings during a 9 year period*.	Only 20% of White men are working in low-wage jobs, versus 40% of Black women, 46% of Latinx women, and more than 60% of Latinx women noncitizens**.	Middle-skill jobs account for 50 percent of California's labor market in 2015, but only 39% of the state's workers were trained to the middle-skill level***.	38% of Tipping Point Community skills training program participants are earning self-sufficient wages.

*Better Workers for Better Jobs, The Brooking Institution
**Restoring the American Dream, U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty
***California's Forgotten Middle, National Skills Coalition

Training programs are the cornerstone of our workforce

Nonprofit and community college training programs are a major component of our workforce development infrastructure. California's future workforce is reliant on quality services and training provided by a range of providers and institutions.

Between 2015 and 2016 at least 158,000 low-income adults received intensive employment or training services nationally, funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)*.

3 out of 10 Californians aged 18-24 are currently enrolled in a California community college, and more than 100,000 people are trained annually in industry-specific skills **.

In 2018 Tipping Point Community Employment grantees served 4,778 clients intensively.

An estimated 40,000 people graduate annually from 96 Bay Area adult job training programs***.

*Workforce Development and Low Income Adults and Youth, Urban Institute
**California Community Colleges Facts and Figures, Foundation for CA Community Colleges
***Cal PASS Plus 2017-2018 data on job training programs. Cal PASS Plus 2016-2017 data on Community College CTE programs

Centering community voice to drive the work

Our community-centered approach engaged a diverse set of stakeholders with an emphasis on skills training alumni. While research uncovered a range of opportunities from systems change to new direct services, workers with lived experience were our barometer for what ideas to test as they could vouch for what would be useful, usable, and desirable in their lives. The results pointed to solutions that would bridge silos in our fragmented workforce development system.

The **research phase** included **22 alumni** interviews and convened workforce experts and employers.

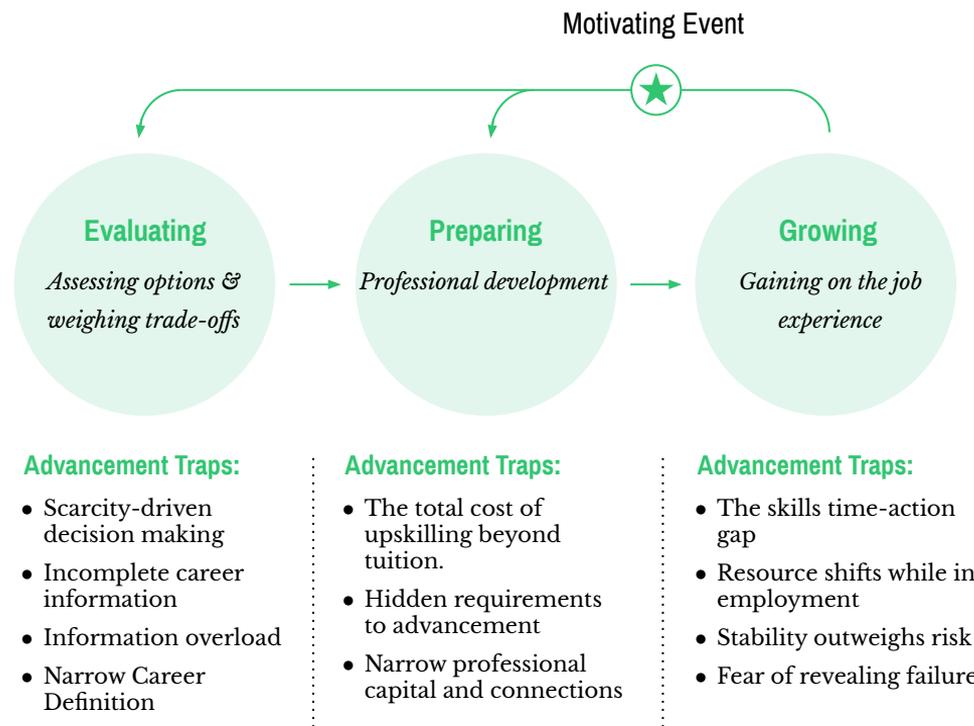The **concept development phase** included a survey with **104 alumni** and workshops with **19 workers**.

The **prototyping phase** engaged **21 alumni** in the creation and testing of a coaching service.

Career progression for workers follows a cyclical journey through 3 modes

Research surfaced patterns behind the advancement experiences of workers striving for middle-skill jobs and higher wages. Wage acceleration and career momentum happens when people cycle quickly through the three **Career Advancement Modes** to the right, while plateauing wages happen when people get stuck in one of three modes.

The reasons for getting stuck will vary but the research revealed a few common **Advancement Traps** that we saw many workers face and **Motivating Events**, like a rent increase or change in household size, that often catalyzed a change in advancement mode.

Motivating Event

Evaluating
Assessing options & weighing trade-offs

Preparing
Professional development

Growing
Gaining on the job experience

Advancement Traps:
- Scarcity-driven decision making
- Incomplete career information
- Information overload
- Narrow Career Definition

Advancement Traps:
- The total cost of upskilling beyond tuition.
- Hidden requirements to advancement
- Narrow professional capital and connections

Advancement Traps:
- The skills time-action gap
- Resource shifts while in employment
- Stability outweighs risk
- Fear of revealing failure

Advancement Example: Medical Assistant (MA) to Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN)

Motivating Event	Evaluating	Preparing	Growing
Works as a caretaker and wants to continue patient-oriented work	*Looks online for information on MA vs. CNA starting wages and job prospects*	*Takes MA course at a skills training organization, completes externship at Kaiser*	*Works as an Float MA contract position at Kaiser ($24/hr)*
Wants security and education benefits of permanent employment at Kaiser	*Talks to colleagues to get "insider tips" on how to convert to full time*	*Tries out tips, asking for feedback and building strong connections to get a referral*	*Converts to a full-time MA position at Kaiser that a manager identified ($30/hr)*
Partner gets into car accident and is unable to work, needs higher pay to support them	*Talks to Kaiser HR about how they help pay for school and how much time they give*	*Continues to work while fulfilling prerequisites at community college, quits job in order to fulfill clinical requirements*	*Accepted as an LVN at Kaiser ($33/hr)*

Advancement Example: IT IMAC Technician to Systems Administrator

Motivating Event	Evaluating	Preparing	Growing
Wants to leave retail job, has friends in tech, and wants to try it out	*Searches online for free local skills training organizations and chooses an IT course over other program options*	*Takes Google IT certification class at skills training organization, continues to work part time in retail*	*After getting certification and applying to 8 jobs, begins working as an IMAC technician ($16/hr)*
Wants higher wages, no upward mobility from IMAC inside of company	*Looks at Help Desk job descriptions on LinkedIn and explores what skills are most in demand*	*Takes Apple Mac Technician Certification after work and has informational chats with LinkedIn connections*	*After a job tip from skills training org and applying, works as a Help Desk Tech at Managed Service Provider ($24/hr)*
Wants to continue in IT, is bored of doing the same work every day, and wants to apply skills in new ways	*Asks managers and peers what systems, security, and network admin entails and what kinds of certifications and projects are needed for those roles*	*Takes on systems projects at work and completes a Udemy course to bolster skills outside of work to understand systems.*	*Promoted to Junior Systems Administrator ($33/hr)*

Build career momentum by cultivating 4 career advancement assets

Career advancement is made possible by a combination of four assets that a worker can grow and develop over time. CAP set to explore services or program offerings that developed each of these **Career Advancement Assets** in workers so they can be harnessed when confronting common barriers on their advancement journey.

Skills & Experience Assets
Valued skills, credentials, and job experience

Social Assets
Professional network and social capital

Career Information Assets
Actionable job information

Foundational Assets
Income, savings, time, well-being
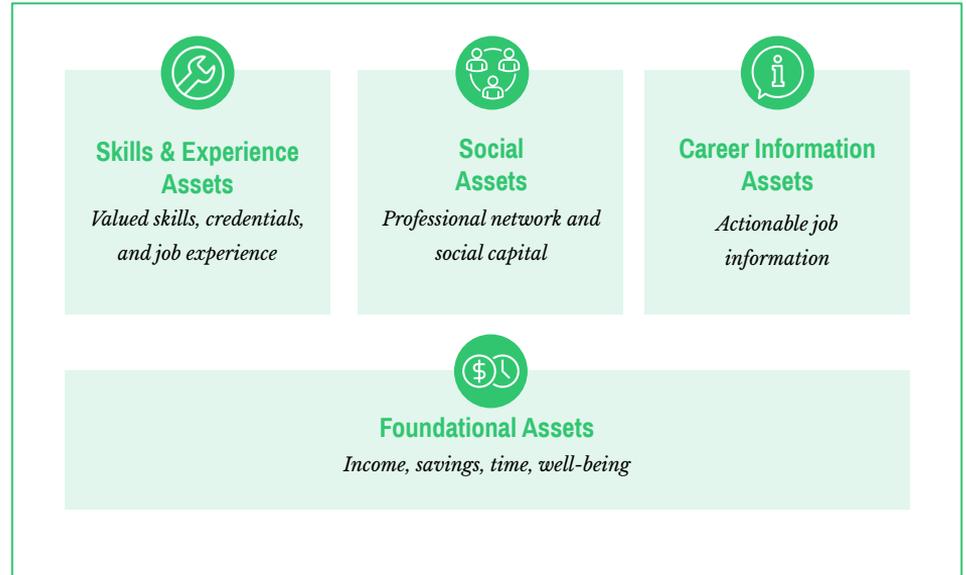
Addressing barriers to advancement through career coaching

CAP identified career coaching as a promising intervention that can flexibly respond to the needs of training program alumni and develop advancement assets. To further define how career coaching can be responsive to these needs, the CAP team developed and tested a career coaching service offered to workers in healthcare, IT, and administration fields. The 4-week test used a collaboratively developed coaching methodology that addressed personal and life factors, helped identify and navigate local career resources, and kept workers accountable to their goals.

Key service components in the test included:

- Video chat and proactive coach outreach over text message
- An app-based action plan that identified strengths, growth areas and career goals in 4 key career advancement areas
- Embedded training, job market, and occupation information
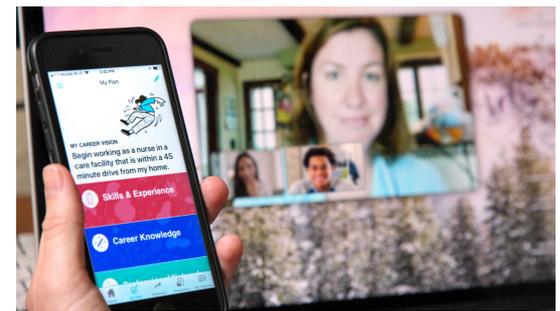
Promising results in a four-week career coaching test

19 people participated in a **4-week** career coaching service test with the support of **5 coaches** across **3 organizations**.

The Coaching Commitment:

On average coaches spent 4 total hours supporting each participant.

Engagement highlights:

217 texts and emails sent from coaches

166 texts and emails returned by participants

31 unsolicited texts and emails by participants

23 video chats between coaches and participants

Advancement Outcomes:

13 out of 19 participants took steps toward career advancement.

Participant highlights:

4 applied for jobs

3 mock interviews with coaches

2 got job offers

1 went on 2 interviews

1 applied for and enrolled in training and received financial aid

"It took 4 years to reapply [to nursing school]. I got more done in these 4 weeks than I have done in those 4 years." - **Prototype Participant**

"I constantly went back to the goals and to-dos; I found it helpful... and it was encouraging when you had something checked off." - **Prototype Participant**

"She did follow up with me, and it lit a fire to REALLY finish." - **Prototype Participant**
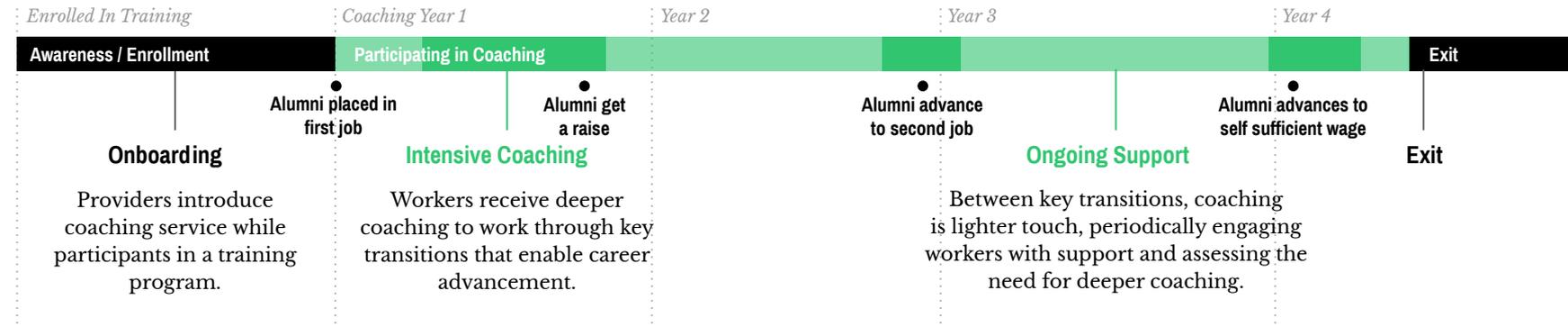
"I really liked the framework, and it worked well with my clients... I've already taken it and made it into a 1-page handout for staff." - **Coach**
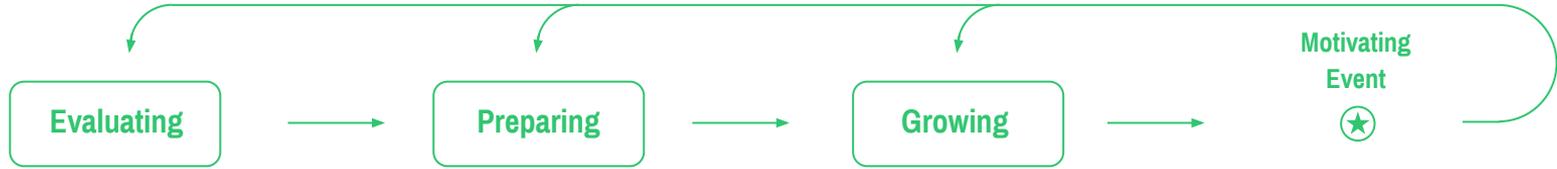
A vision for a scaled coaching service: Bridge multiple worker transitions

Training program graduates face a range of challenges – from personal to professional – as they advance and require a service that intervenes at high-leverage moments that either propel or hinder their momentum to self-sufficient wages. Coaching should be structured around **multiple cycles of intensive coaching and ongoing support** to bridge transitions through these moments. We estimate a program "exit" would happen when self-sufficient wages are achieved, after an estimated 3 to 5 years.

Ideal Service Timeline:

| *Enrolled In Training* | *Coaching Year 1* | *Year 2* | *Year 3* | *Year 4* | |

| Awareness / Enrollment | Participating in Coaching | | | | Exit |

● Alumni placed in first job
● Alumni get a raise
● Alumni advance to second job
● Alumni advances to self sufficient wage

Onboarding
Intensive Coaching
Ongoing Support
Exit

Providers introduce coaching service while participants in a training program.

Workers receive deeper coaching to work through key transitions that enable career advancement.

Between key transitions, coaching is lighter touch, periodically engaging workers with support and assessing the need for deeper coaching.

Defining when a coach should intervene with intensive career coaching services

Evaluating → **Preparing** → **Growing** → **Motivating Event** ★

Advancement Modes	Evaluating	Preparing	Growing	Motivating Event
	Mode Activities: Assessing options & weighing trade-offs related to future career opportunities.	**Mode Activities:** Professional development with the intention to apply skills to a future job.	**Mode Activities:** Gaining on the job experience and applying skills through work.	**Mode Activities:** A discrete event or set of events that prompts a person to advance.
Provide Coaching at Key Transitions	**Challenges to mitigate:** - Maintaining confidence in the face of many options - Maintaining a long term career mindset and career momentum **Opportunities to harness:** - Navigating education options - Navigating career pathways	**Challenges to mitigate:** - Juggling work and training - Maintaining motivation to complete training **Opportunities to harness:** - Job search activities - Building professional relationships	**Challenges to mitigate:** - Juggling work and life - Handling complex workplace dynamics **Opportunities to harness:** - Performance reviews - Applying skills learned at a skills training org in an industry setting - Connecting with new colleagues to expand professional network	**Challenges to mitigate:** - Financial challenges - Mental health challenges - Unexpected unemployment - Needing a new job because of a wage ceiling in a current job and pressing financial demands **Opportunities to harness:** - Learning about a new job based on a referral - Financial flexibility

Operationalizing a scaled career coaching service

Based on the coaching commitment bore out through the prototype career coaching test applied to the hypothetical service model stages below, a coach would spend approximately 24.5 hours supporting one client over the course of a year. This estimate is based on 2 months of **intensive coaching** and 10 months of **ongoing support.**

Service Model Stages:

Stage 1: **Awareness**	Stage 2: **Onboarding**	Stage 3: **Intensive Coaching**	Stage 4: **Ongoing Support**	Stage 5: **Exit**
1. Introduce coaching service (ideally while client is enrolled in program)	1. Worker completes profile 2. Match with a coach (if more than one) 3. Determine level of support need (Stage 3 or Stage 4)	1. Assess goals and needs 2. Make career plan 3. Support progress 4. Refine plan 5. Decrease Level of Support (Stage 4)	1. Check-in (2x annually) 2. Light touch support 3. Increase level of support (Stage 3) or off-board	1. Off-board

Achieving scale through a full-featured coaching service

Coaching is constrained by the fixed amount of time required to support a client. We believe that quality coaching can be delivered at scale, with larger caseloads, when effectively integrating the four components below.

Service Model Components:

Coaches	Methodology	Curriculum	Tech Platform
A coach with local insight and lived experience that supports workers over multiple years, provides accountability, does research, and contextualizes information for clients.	A client-centered coaching methodology that addresses the individual holistically, but orients personal development specifically around career advancement.	A curriculum of career resources and activities that enable self-guided work that workers complete independently and build skills in workers, maximize 1:1 coaching time, and free coaches to serve more clients.	A platform that automates interactions and workflows for workers and coaches. It also facilitates the delivery of curricula to enable more efficient coaching and larger caseloads.

A call to action: build evidence around the impact of career coaching

The 4-week prototype showed that coaching can be a career catalyst. However, further testing is needed to measure long-term advancement outcomes of a coaching intervention and generate evidence that catalyzes future investment in career coaching services.

Tipping Point believes a career coaching pilot should meet the following objectives:

①	**②**	**③**
Develop clear evidence about the impact of a career coaching service on wages.	**Refine a scaled service model** that provides a high quality service for the maximum number of clients.	**Build confidence in coaching** as a critical component of any worker-centered employment system.

Align partnerships to launch a pilot

Tipping Point Community is advocating for an 18-24 month career coaching pilot that brings together partners across the three groups listed below.

A pilot requires coordination across different types of partners:

Funders & Workforce Boards	Coaching & Tech Services	Training Providers
In a system optimized for placement, it is difficult to secure public or private funds for long-term services. Funders and coordinating bodies must commit financial resources and strategic interest in career coaching.	Coaching capacity and client-centered coaching software are the core needs to test coaching at scale. Existing coaching or tech services must consider adapting their platforms to serve clients of skills training programs.	Training providers play a valuable role in either delivering or introducing coaching services to alumni. Training providers must further invest in the long-term outcomes of their clients by supporting alumni with career advancement services.

Further information about the Career Advancement Project

Select project outputs are viewable by clicking the following links:

CAP Project Postcards

Regular, project updates that document the project process from May 2019 - May 2020

CAP Coaching Tools and Insights

A collection of coaching and program design resources and tools developed for the career coaching prototype

Career Coaching Pilot Planning

An introduction to 2 career coaching pilot proposals that outline objectives and budgets

Career Advancement Project
Acknowledgements

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Tipping Point Community, 2020

Career Advancement Project
Appendix

Advancement traps while workers are in the Evaluating mode

Scarcity-driven decision making

When the need for income supersedes career advancement, workers might skip the evaluation phase, leaving good jobs on the table in favor of any job that satisfies immediate needs and thus slowing down career momentum.

"At this point, I just needed to work. I was going into debt and it was scary and just took this job 2 months ago... They work you hard and the pay is bad... I'd like to apply to Kaiser or Stanford; I just need to apply."

- JobTrain MA Program Graduate

Incomplete career information

Career information seldom considers the whole-picture of employment (e.g benefits, upskilling costs, etc.). Without relevant information, workers jump into paths without knowing long term prospects or costs and revealing roadblocks later in a career.

"MA gets you in a hospital but CNA sets you up for a career."

- JobTrain CNA Program Graduate

Information overload

People are navigating a of maze job options, qualifications, and education opportunities, many of which don't align with their chosen career path. This leads to sunk effort when workers are already stretched for time and upskilling that is chance-based more than strategic.

"Different nursing schools have different prereqs, it's very hard... I have to take all of the classes because I don't know what nursing school I can get in."

- JVS MA Refresher Graduate

Narrow career definition

Role models and personal experiences can help provide career focus for workers but they can also narrow the scope of consideration for job advancement (status quo bias).

"After my own hospitalizations, I wanted to go into the medical field."

- Opportunity Junction Job Training Graduate

Advancement traps while workers are in the Preparing mode

The total cost of upskilling beyond tuition

Even when training is free, it can come at great cost. The start-up costs of upskilling (e.g. childcare, cost, time commitments, transport) in a chosen path are preventing people from starting or completing training.

"My externship was $19 per hour. I can't complain because I'm still learning and get paid... I can do it temporarily but not for the long run. We had to dip into savings to do that with SF's cost of living."

- JVS MA Refresher Graduate

Hidden requirements to advancement

Workers can feel fully prepared for a job, only to be surprised by new qualifications that are needed to secure a job (e.g. certifications, referrals, additional job experience, specific job requirements).

"I wish I could learn about opportunities to get ahead that I didn't know about, like volunteering, certificates, 4.0 student type things."

- JobTrain MA Graduate

Narrow professional capital and connections

Professional relationships are essential for access to next jobs but many people have networks limited to people in current jobs. This means that the referrals needed to differentiate in inflated candidate pools rarely form until later in someone's job experience, making earlier advancement more difficult.

"I wouldn't be able to get into UCSF without having been a contract employee. I worked hard and got good references to apply for a full time role."

- JVS MA Refresher Graduate

Advancement traps while workers are in the Growing mode

The skills time-action gap

The information people learn in training is often used later on in someone's job. This time-action gap means that essential information, skills, and supports aren't on hand when they are needed.

"[Support] is critical after you graduate because you're passing your resumes to jobs and not getting calls and want to give up, it dampens your confidence."

- JVS MA Graduate

Resource shifts while in employment

The longer someone is in work, the more one's previous support structure fades away and new bonds are forged. Our clients aren't well equipped to confront benefits utilization questions, career challenges, and cultural adjustments on the job.

"As soon as I got my first job... a temp job... it was three months and because of those three months everything was taken off. I didn't qualify for SSI or food stamps."

- JVS MA Graduate

Stability outweighs risk

The risks involved with changing jobs can outweigh the stability of a current job. If a client has retained a scarcity mindset while working, they are more likely to stay in a job longer, slowing advancement, and waiting for a motivating event to prompt a job shift.

"Right now I am just trying to be okay with where I am at. I try not to think about how much money I don't make. I feel like I have taken a big step. This job is stable and something I enjoy."

- Opportunity Junction Job Training Graduate

Fear of revealing failure

Skills training alumni are more likely to stay engaged and utilize CBO support if they are doing well. The fear of exposing failure means they move on to other resources.

"The trust we build helps people come back to us, but it can also might generate shame when things aren't going well."

- CBO Manager

Project opportunities uncovered during research

Program & Service Interventions

System Interventions

1. Long-term Worker Support

Opportunity: How might we utilize extended worker support services to enable better ongoing career decisions and put skills into practice post-program?

3. Social Capital and Career Exposure

Opportunity: How might we create opportunities for workers to grow their professional networks, build professional social capital, and gain career exposure?

5. New Upskilling Models

Opportunity: How might we rethink upskilling and training models to better align to incumbent worker needs, employer incentives, and long-term advancement?

7. Breaking the Bachelor's Barrier

Opportunity: How might we challenge the bachelor's degree requirement barrier so that more workers can access jobs based on skills instead of credentials?

2. Long-term Career Mindset

Opportunity: How might we grow a long-term client mindset early on, equipping them not only with hard skills, but the soft skills and outlook needed to navigate an open-ended job journey?

4. Resource and Referral Networks

Opportunity: How might we activate resources and services to provide current, relevant, and tailored career navigation support to workers?

6. Responsive, Demand-based Decision Making

Opportunity: How might we create more responsive career services that are data- and market-driven?

8. Systems Shift to Advancement

Opportunity: How might we cultivate WFD policies and practices that place more importance on long-term advancement than initial placement?

The 4-week prototype tested interactions between coaches and participants to assess participation and early indicators of advancement. Key prototype interactions included:

Coaches introduced the test service to their coachee during a 60-minute video chat session.

Coaches kept participants accountable to goals, answered questions over text message.

Coaches researched and shared career resources with participants over text and in the app.

Coaches were responsive to participant feedback and tailored their coaching accordingly.

Participants made an action plan where they identified strengths, growth areas, and career goals.

Participants were free to reach out to their coaches with questions or requests for support.

Participants left feedback for coaches; letting them know whether the resource was useful or not.
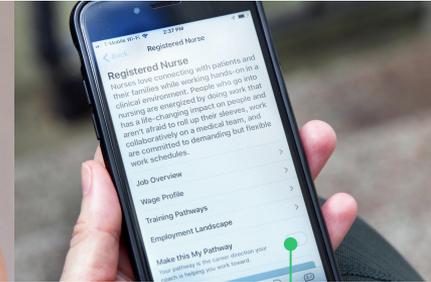
Participants could browse career information in the app with training, wage, and job market details.