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Dear Colleague,

Even in good economic times, many low-skilled adults have difficulty obtaining jobs and advancing in careers that pay enough to support their families. At the same time, some employers report difficulty finding people with the right skills to meet their needs, even in periods of high unemployment. Addressing the needs of both workers and employers, in ways that will benefit both, has become a priority for public workforce systems and workforce development organizations.

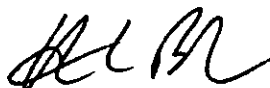
The WorkAdvance program and the related evaluation being conducted by MDRC were designed to test the effectiveness of a model that builds on lessons from previous research and practitioners' experience in (1) sectoral strategies, which prepare individuals for quality jobs that employers want to fill in specific high-demand industries or occupational clusters, and (2) job retention and career advancement strategies, which seek to improve workers' prospects for sustained employment and upward mobility. The WorkAdvance project is funded through the federal Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a public-private partnership administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. This SIF project is led by the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) in collaboration with MDRC.

WorkAdvance integrates the most promising features of sectoral and retention/advancement strategies. Specifically, it offers preemployment and career readiness services, occupational skills training, job development and placement, and postemployment retention and advancement services. WorkAdvance programs are operated by four organizations (two in New York City, one in Tulsa, and one in Greater Cleveland) that focus on a variety of sectors and bring different experiences and approaches to implementing WorkAdvance.

This report offers some lessons for practitioners about what it takes to launch and develop an advancement-focused, sector-based training and employment program. What are ways in which career readiness training and occupational skills training can be informed by employers? What does it mean to coach someone toward advancement, and how do you actually do it? What kinds of marketing and screening are necessary to recruit and select participants who will be a good "fit" for a given sector?

In late 2015, MDRC will report on the WorkAdvance's effects on employment and earnings, as well as its costs.

Sincerely,



Gordon L. Berlin
President



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