

Weinberg Sector Skills Academy

One-Year Post-Completion Summary Report

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Introduction

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation in partnership with The Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative (**AWSI**) and with additional support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and The Abell Foundation launched the Weinberg Sector Skills Academy (**WSSA**) in May 2015. The WSSA was a year-long learning and leadership experience for senior professionals who provide workforce development services and technical training in the Baltimore metropolitan area. The Academy consisted of nine retreats, meetings, and webinars; and concluded in May 2016 with three capstone presentations to the Weinberg Foundation, the Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative (**BWFC**), and the broader community.

The original objectives of the WSSA were:

- To expand the set of leaders with the full set of competencies to succeed in using sector approaches in the Baltimore area.
- To help managers of Baltimore programs using a sector approach strengthen the capacity of their institutions to achieve sectoral change and to collaborate with a variety of potential partner organizations.
- To create a learning community of leaders in the Baltimore area who are using the sectoral approach who have a sense of the broader field and who are able to articulate the sector approach to those within and outside of the field.
- To connect leaders from the Baltimore region to a range of national experts with knowledge and experience of relevance to the work of organizations in Baltimore.
- To transfer knowledge and best practices among Baltimore sector leaders and to provide them with opportunities for continuous learning and renewal of their passions for the work.

In July 2017, a one-year post completion analysis was completed to determine the ongoing impact of the WSSA. The analysis included a survey to all WSSA graduates and a series of small focus groups that included 2-3 graduates and the funders of the Academy. The survey elicited feedback on the long-term impact that the Academy had on the participants and the focus groups allowed an opportunity to have a more in-depth dialogue among graduates and between the graduates and funders.

This report will highlight key findings and takeaways from the survey and focus groups and provide recommendations for next steps.

Findings

A one-year post-completion survey was distributed to all 18 WSSA graduates on June 28. To date, Weinberg has maintained regular communication with seventeen of the eighteen WSSA graduates. The one graduate we did not maintain contact with resigned from her position in January 2017 and has not been in touch. Sadly, one of the graduates, Jackie Buedel of the Caroline Center, unexpectedly passed away July 10th.

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Today, fifteen of the eighteen graduates continue to work in the field of workforce development within Baltimore City. One graduate is now following his passion and working on health care policy for a national organization in Washington, DC. Twelve of the eighteen graduates completed the survey. Key findings from the survey were as follows:

- 83% of the respondents have been promoted, taken on a position of greater responsibility since completing the Academy.
- 75% of the respondents have shared what they gained from the SSA with their staff and/or colleagues through structured meetings, informal trainings, and/or distributing readings/texts.
- More than half of the respondents feel that the Academy has changed their daily work in at least one of the following areas: communications, constituent needs, industry needs, leadership, sector fundamentals, and job quality. When asked what they do differently as a result of the WSSA, respondents said:
 - “As a result of WSSA, we have expanded the outcomes we track to include job quality indicators among our employer partners. This includes average wage for frontline workers, paid leave policies, level or employer subsidy for health benefits, percent of frontline workers provided with additional training, and percent of frontline workers promoted within one year.”
 - “I have sought and been given an opportunity to work on a national platform.”
 - “I have gained credibility for my sector skill strategies. Others now see me as more of an expert in this area.”
 - “As a result of the WSSA, I approach all of my work projects, initiatives with a strategic and systems focus/lens.”
- Three-quarters of the respondents feel that the Academy has significantly changed partnerships and collaborations in their daily work. Several respondents discussed new partnerships and collaborations:
 - “I developed an advisory board to advance job quality in consumer-facing sectors. The board included 5 WSSA members, as well as other community stakeholders.”
 - “I partner on several grants and other projects with multiple graduates.”
- Respondents felt that they improved the following skills as a result of the Academy:
 - 50% - Strategic Thinking (more able to examine complex issues and formulate effective strategies and plans, determine objectives, set priorities, and anticipate threats and opportunities)
 - 42% - Envisioning (more able to see the “big picture,” conceptualize far-reaching goals and lead others to share in the vision and act as a catalyst for change)
 - 42% - Sector Expertise/Credibility (technical knowledge and interest in the sectoral approach to workforce development)
 - 33% - Negotiating (negotiating new partnerships, projects and initiatives)
 - 100% of the respondents collaborated on at least one project with WSSA alumni since graduating. Collaborations have included:
 - Capstone follow-up
 - Sharing employment/training opportunities
 - Development of an advisory board

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- Submitting grants together in partnership
- Improvement between interagency referrals
- Providing letters of support
- New and expanding partnerships
- 67% of the respondents said that the SSA changed their career trajectory in some way including:
 - “It widened my network of colleagues, increased my credibility as a leader in workforce, and increased my career opportunity through the network and the connections that were made.”
 - “Improving my knowledge of the workforce development landscape as well as the ability to work for systems change with employers and local or even state government.”
 - “More interested in the research into sector strategies.”
 - “Strengthened my partnerships, relationship, and credibility within the Baltimore City workforce development community.”
 - “Confidence and passion to address workforce policy and structural racism issues on a national level.”

A series of focus groups were held throughout the month of July. The structure of the focus groups were informal which allowed for open and direct discussion among the graduates and between the graduates and funders. Fifteen out of eighteen of the WSSA graduates participated a focus group. Marci Hunn attended and facilitated all focus group sessions. Melanie Styles, from The Abell Foundation, attended 2 out of 5 sessions; Sara Muempfer attended 2 out of 5 sessions on behalf The Annie E. Casey Foundation; and Linda Dworak, from the Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers, participated in 3 of 5 sessions. The primary objectives of the focus groups were to:

- Facilitate continuing dialogue and collaboration between the WSSA graduates.
- Take a deeper dive into the findings of the post-completion survey.
- Elicit recommendations for next-steps from funders and WSSA graduates.

The participants also discussed challenges they are currently facing in the workforce development field. Many of the challenges identified were shared amongst several of the graduates. They include:

- Providing wrap around services to address mental health, substance use, and trauma
- Difficulty placing individuals who have criminal backgrounds, particularly re-entry individuals
- Lack of affordable housing
- Funding for remediation services for those at or below literacy and numeracy
- Addressing structural racism and how it plays into workforce development
- Creating real systems change

Additional discussion points included:

- The One Baltimore For Jobs program was stronger because of the relationships forged through the WSSA the year prior.
- Discussion about workforce development professionals and organizations operating in silos without an intentional effort to bring them together in a

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strategic, collaborative way. One graduate said, “the trainings end and then we go back to our offices and get tunnel vision. We need to be more intentional about meeting with other graduates and exploring professional what’s next in order to make real progress.”

- There was general discussion around how funders can be more supportive. The following suggestions were made by the graduates:
 - “We need to be able to provide more staff support and team building. Many of the frontline staff don’t have the “bigger picture” understanding of what we are trying to accomplish in workforce development. And we often lack the capacity to provide this within the constraints of our current programs.”
 - Provide opportunities for project management training and development.
 - Funders should become more understanding of how difficult the workforce development work. “We have to report all of these outcomes and show successes, but sometimes the successes are not in the numbers. It is in the work we do and the small accomplishments we make that will eventually lead to the larger successes.”
 - Support with data collection and outcomes reporting and also to expand data to reflect outcomes through a racial equity lens.

“I think all of us wish we were able to get together more often. I feel like we would have more collaborations if we had some catching up time, brainstorming time or social informal gatherings.”

Overall, the focus groups highlighted the need to facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaboration among senior professionals who provide workforce development services and technical training in the Baltimore metropolitan area. There is also a desire among the professionals to engage this ongoing collaboration.

Next Steps

There is little doubt that WSSA has significantly increased the connectedness of Baltimore’s workforce development network by forging new partnerships and collaborations between organizations and their leaders. Even one-year

post completion, the Academy graduates continue to collaborate on projects and initiatives with the ultimate goal of building a strong and effective workforce development network for Baltimore City. Moving forward, there needs to be intentional steps taken in order to effect longer term results for organizations, clients, employers and the overall workforce system. Based on feedback from the survey and focus groups, it is recommended that:

- Casual monthly or quarterly social gatherings held for WSSA graduates to facilitate ongoing collaboration
- Periodic trainings/workshops for graduates to address shared challenges across the field
- Partnerships through collaborative grantmaking, which needs buy-in from the funding community
- Partner with the funding community to explore ways to partner nationally