



OPERATION SPARK ADULT WORKFORCE IMMERSION PROGRAM

THE PROJECT

In 2018, Operation Spark was awarded a three-year grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) to address obstacles to adult participation and program completion through development of participants' academic and life skills, as well as provision of financial support.

PRG served as the external evaluator for the grant and designed an implementation and outcome evaluation of Operation Spark's Adult Workforce Immersion program.

SETTINGS & PARTICIPANTS

- Adults in the Greater New Orleans area
- Emphasis on improving program graduation rates for participants who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, low-income, women



THE PROGRAM

Operation Spark is a nonprofit organization based in New Orleans, Louisiana, that prepares low-income and underserved individuals for high-wage careers in software development. The program begins with seven weeks of part-time instruction in the Introduction to Programming Bootcamp. Bootcamp prepares students for the rigorous Immersion program, which aims to give students the skills they need for careers in software development. Immersion runs for four months, with more than 60 hours of programming each week.

Operation Spark planned a combination of financial, academic, and life-skills support systems for students based on need. During grant funding, academic and life-skills support systems addressed students' struggles with patterns of academic productivity, as well as their mental and emotional health. Tuition scholarships and living stipends increased the likelihood that students could enter employment with little or no debt incurred during program participation. Finally, a team dedicated to employment outcomes offered support before and during the students' search for employment.

THE EVALUATION

Operation Spark contracted with The Policy & Research Group (PRG) in 2020 to perform the evaluation of these supplemental, WKKF-funded initiatives. The evaluation intended to assist Operation Spark in assessing progress toward short-term goals that aim to provide students a path to financial stability by removing barriers to program completion.

Outcome objectives are concerned with student-level outcomes (e.g., measures of well-being and employment outcomes after program participation). The implementation evaluation gathered information on the characteristics of students who graduated and gained employment, support services provided, outreach efforts, and staff experiences with the program.

FINDINGS

Graduate respondents to the Former Student Survey reported an average salary increase of 137% after graduating from the Immersion program ($n = 53$). Graduate respondents also reported an average score of 4.1 out of 5 on the economic stability scale ($n = 68$) and an average score of 3.9 on the overall sense of stability scale ($n = 69$). Among all graduate respondents to the survey, 51% indicated that the skills they learned at Operation Spark allowed them to pursue new educational opportunities and 82% indicated that the skills they learned allowed them to move up in a job or pursue new job opportunities.

In addition to an increase in income among all graduates, Operation Spark was particularly interested in the percentage of underserved graduates (i.e., graduates who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, women, and low-income) who experienced an increase in earnings. Most underserved graduates experienced an increase in income after graduation. This includes 90% of graduates who identified as Black, Indigenous, or people of color ($n = 39$), 90% of graduates who identified as women ($n = 19$), and 94% of graduates who were classified as low income ($n = 66$).