

Using Big Data to Understand What Works: Measuring the Impact of Workforce Training with Matching Methods

Training Provider Partner Community of Practice

The Social Finance Institute and Opportunity Insights (OI) are inviting workforce training providers to join a community of practice (CoP) focused on better techniques to measure the economic returns to workforce training. This CoP is a key component of the Social Finance Institute and Opportunity Insights partnership to build the base of knowledge about the [effectiveness of non-degree workforce training](#).

Using an innovative matching estimation methodology pioneered by OI and access to anonymized federal administrative data on individual earnings and demographics, this work analyzes the causal impacts of workforce programs on long-term economic outcomes of learners. Unlike prior matching approaches, this approach has been validated against gold-standard evidence from randomized control trials. Through this project, OI will estimate the impacts of training programs, including examining outcomes on employment and wage gains by sectors, program type, and learner characteristics.

Project learning questions include: (1) what types of training programs lead to positive economic mobility outcomes; (2) which individuals are better served by training providers; (3) what key factors improve economic outcomes for different types of learners; and (4) what is the return on investment for training programs by industry/sector. The answers to these questions will not only increase the base of knowledge about the effectiveness of non-degree workforce training programs, but will also help learners, training providers, and policymakers make more informed decisions about program offerings.

Community of Practice

This is an invitation-only community that is intended to create new opportunities for networking, information sharing, and learning.

In joining this Community of Practice, providers will gain the following:

- Aid in interpretation of analysis results from this project
- A forum for sharing learnings and best practices in program delivery
- Increased connections to better serve learners
- Opportunities to guide additional learnings and future research

The project's learning questions will inform the initial discussions within the CoP, but ultimately the quarterly convenings – including one in-person gathering per year – will serve as a forum to further advance the national conversation regarding workforce training. Unique to this CoP, participants will gain insights from OI's innovative methodology for making *causal estimates* of the returns to workforce training, and how this approach can contribute to the broader landscape of efforts to measure economic impact for program participants.

Who Should Participate?

Each training provider invited to participate in the CoP should designate at least one person to serve as their representative. This person should have enough subject-matter expertise and seniority to engage within the CoP around the research project and topics of discussion. Providers may designate two representatives, which could include organizational leadership and the project leader. Note that for the annual in-person meeting, the Social Finance Institute will cover the costs of travel and accommodations for one representative of each participating CoP member.

Commitment

The Community of Practice will be held via quarterly virtual meetings scheduled for one hour, with one half-day in-person gathering per year. The first digital meeting will be hosted in early March 2026 (date TBD), and the first in-person meeting will convene on Wednesday, July 15, 2026, adjacent to the JFF Horizons conference in Washington, DC.

Sample programming includes:

- Peer Learning Session:** Providers will have the chance to share recent success and innovations in program delivery
- Expert Presentations:** Guest speakers from research and policymaking organizations will present on topics such as workforce trends, data use, or instructional strategies
- Data & Insights Sharing:** Discussions on Opportunity Insights' research findings, including lessons tied to key learning questions
- JFF Horizons Convening:** An in-person session with our partner training providers and state government leaders on July 15, 2026, adjacent to the annual JFF Horizons conference

For more information, please contact Institute@Socialfinance.org.