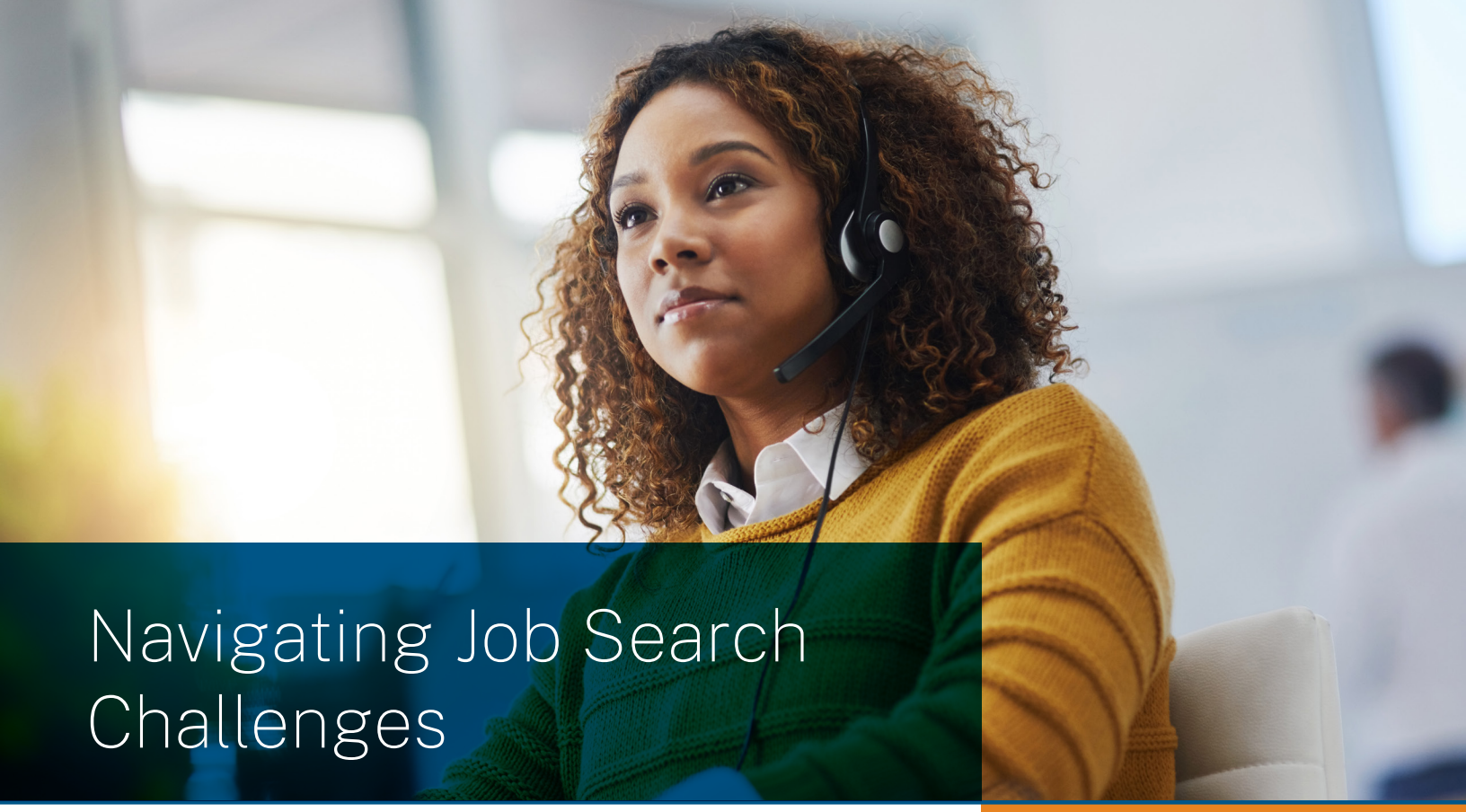

Navigating Job Search Challenges

Insights from Tech Training Graduates

FEBRUARY 2025

Kelsey Schaberg
Annie Utterback
Richard Hendra

For some job seekers, finding a quality job that pays well, offers benefits, and presents advancement opportunities can seem daunting. The job search process requires applicants to not only hone an in-demand skill set but to also demonstrate flexibility during the search, preparation, application, and interview stages. The job search process may be unpredictable, and even qualified applicants may face structural barriers outside of their control, such as discrimination in hiring practices or occupational segregation.[1] Job seekers may have an even harder time during a recession or period of economic uncertainty when there are fewer jobs available or employers are more selective.

Sector programs—training programs that align with the needs of local employers and prepare workers for in-demand jobs with higher earning potential—are one of the most promising, evidence-based forms of workforce development. To help participants find the right jobs, these programs offer guidance on how to search for jobs and provide connections to vetted employers that are looking to hire. Research shows that sector programs can help connect job seekers to quality jobs and increase their earnings, both at their initial job placement and several years later.[2] One of the sector

1974–2024
mdrc
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

programs with the most promising evidence to date is operated by Per Scholas, a national nonprofit that provides tech-focused training and employment services. Per Scholas' program has led to some of the largest and most enduring earnings effects ever measured in a rigorous study.[3]

The current evidence on sector programs—including the evidence on Per Scholas' program—however, focuses on the effectiveness of the programs at raising participants' earnings *on average*. Even in the most successful programs, not all participants benefit. Some participants do not find jobs in their target sector.[4] Others may land positions that lack key quality-of-life attributes, such as good pay, benefits, and opportunities for advancement.[5] Further, the available evidence focuses on the effectiveness of the overall sector program model, and not the individual components of the model, such as job search assistance. Additional research is needed to better understand how to effectively help participants find jobs that match the new skills they have after graduating from the program, particularly given that the ability of sector programs to place participants in *better jobs* is a key mechanism behind their impact.[6]

To begin to fill this evidence gap, MDRC partnered with Per Scholas to explore the job search experiences and needs of a set of Per Scholas graduates. The graduates in the analysis are not necessarily representative of all Per Scholas graduates or graduates of sector programs more generally. Rather, the findings in this brief illustrate a set of job search experiences and highlight difficulties that job seekers may encounter. Graduates in the analysis completed Per Scholas' Information Technology (IT) Support course, a tech training course that lasted from 13 to 16 weeks and began looking for jobs at a time when the technology labor market was weak (roughly October 2023 to March 2024). The findings from this analysis reinforce and present new insights into the successes, challenges, and needs of a group of sector program participants during a difficult and uncertain time.

Sector program staff members and researchers can use the insights in this brief when considering how to strengthen the job search services offered by sector programs, both during and after training. They can also use these insights to see how labor market changes and shocks in specific sectors may affect the outcomes of participants in sector programs, and how services may need to be tailored to meet participants' unique needs.

Background

How do sector programs help participants with their job searches?

Most sector programs offer career readiness services to complement training programs and better prepare graduates to conduct their own job searches. Services commonly include developing résumés, conducting mock interviews, and offering career coaching or job search guidance, including where to look for jobs, what to expect from the process, and how to set personal goals related to the job search. To facilitate job placements, some sector programs leverage employer relationships to streamline application processes or guarantee interviews for graduates. The Per Scholas curriculum, for example, combines technical training with professional development, ensuring career readiness services are

embedded in the curriculum. Participants also work with a Learner Support Team to create customized success plans and set personal goals.[7]

Some sector programs also prioritize career advancement and offer advancement coaching, further training opportunities to support upskilling or refreshing skills, or job placement support beyond the first job. Per Scholas graduates, for example, can find a job through employer partners and an alumni network. Graduates may also work with career coaches for job search guidance and support.

It is an open question as to which strategy can best move people into quality jobs: strengthening personal job search skills or connecting participants directly with employers. Some research suggests the latter. For example, one exploratory analysis found that variation in the effectiveness of sector programs is better explained by improving the quality of jobs participants initially obtain, rather than building career skills (like career-relevant knowledge) or nurturing character traits like confidence and grit.[8] This suggests that one of the key benefits of sector programs is the ability to connect people with employers, vouch for job seekers, and help move them into quality jobs. It is also possible that sector programs have both benefits, and different people need different supports.

How have changes in the tech labor market affected participants' job searches?

Searching for and finding jobs has been challenging and unpredictable in recent years as the economy continues to mend and evolve following the labor market turbulence brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The tech sector, in particular, has experienced notable disruption.[9] Large companies began laying off thousands of workers in the years following the onset of the pandemic, cutting around 93,000 jobs in 2022, 191,000 jobs in 2023, and over 87,000 jobs in 2024 (through mid-October).[10] Unemployment within the industry grew in 2023 (to 4.3 percent), surpassing the overall unemployment rate at the time (3.8 percent).[11] The layoffs in 2023 were thought to be driven by cost-cutting strategies at a time when revenues were projected to decrease.[12]

The number of active and new job postings in the industry dropped between mid-2022 and mid-2024 (with some fluctuation during that period).[13] One estimate put the decline in tech job postings at 26 percent in 2023, outpacing the decline in overall job postings.[14] The percentage of tech job postings not requiring a four-year degree also declined from over 50 percent of jobs in mid-2020 to around 45 percent of jobs in mid-2024.[15] There have also been shifts in (1) the types of jobs available to tech workers, with more tech jobs shifting to temporary or contractor roles rather than salaried, full-time roles; and (2) in-demand skills, with more job postings asking for generative artificial intelligence (AI) skills.[16] The pace of recent developments in AI suggests that more labor market adjustments are likely, continuing a growing demand for new and more advanced skills.[17]

These combined factors have made it harder to break into the tech field. For programs like Per Scholas that provide tech training, this underscores the urgency of figuring out how to best support people in finding quality jobs that take advantage of the training provided. The tech workforce is expected to

grow in the coming years, making it even more important for sector programs to figure out how best to adapt to labor market changes and prepare job seekers for good jobs.[18]

Findings

The findings presented in this brief draw on data from three sources. First, MDRC analyzed data provided by Per Scholas staff members on participation in a pilot program that offered job search and advancement coaching to graduates of a set of IT Support training classes that ended between October 2023 and March 2024. The coaching was offered to 230 graduates in 14 classes. (The MDRC research team originally intended to study the effectiveness of this coaching pilot program. However, due to low enrollment, it was determined that it would be difficult to get a good test of the effectiveness of the program.)[19]

Second, MDRC and Per Scholas fielded a survey to a set of IT Support training participants who graduated between April 2023 and March 2024, including the graduates who were offered the job search and advancement coaching services. The survey launched in August 2024 and was completed by 127 people who graduated from their training course between 5 and 16 months before the survey was conducted.

Third, MDRC conducted a focus group with a small subset of people who responded to the survey to better understand the job search experiences of training program graduates not currently working in the tech sector. The research team used the survey to recruit focus group participants and randomly selected invitees from the pool of graduates who reported that they were either unemployed or working in a non-IT job or sector. The focus group took place in September 2024 with five Per Scholas graduates who completed IT Support training in 2023 or early 2024. All focus group participants received Per Scholas services in New York, Atlanta, or Houston.

The survey and focus group participants are not representative of all participants at Per Scholas or sector programs more generally. Instead, the results are meant to provide descriptive evidence on the job search experiences of a particular group of people who participated in a sector program and identify how programs may be able to better provide support in this area in the future.

How do training graduates search for and find jobs after participating in a sector training program?

- Most training graduates who responded to the survey said they felt prepared to search for a job on their own when graduating from Per Scholas. Graduates spent 15 hours per week, on average, searching for a job and undertook a range of job search activities.

As shown in Table 1, almost 90 percent of graduates who responded to the survey felt prepared to search for a job after completing training, highlighting the value of the in-program career readiness

Table 1. Support and Guidance Received from Per Scholas Staff Members

Outcome (%)	Survey Respondents
Felt very or somewhat prepared to search for a job on respondent's own after graduating	87.8
Feelings about job search support provided by Per Scholas[a]	
Was relevant and improved the job search	48.3
Increased confidence in the job search	36.2
Timing and method were convenient	33.6
Felt generic and not tailored to needs	22.4
Unaware of or could not access support	1.7
Tried to engage with Per Scholas staff members but had communication issues	9.5
Satisfied but felt it could be improved	20.7
No support was offered	6.0
Prefers Per Scholas staff members reach out…	
Less often	12.6
As often as they are right now	53.2
More often	34.2
Prefers Per Scholas staff members reach out by[a]…	
Emails only to respondent	86.4
Emails to respondents' training cohort	32.8
Emails to all Per Scholas alumni	43.2
Phone call	25.6
Text message	49.6
Sample size	127

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from WorkRise survey.

NOTE: [a]Respondents were allowed to select more than one response so percentages add up to more than 100 percent.

support provided to participants. Table 2 shows the most common job search activities for these graduates: applying for a job (80 percent), looking at job postings online (75 percent), contacting employers online or via email (66 percent), and interviewing for a job (66 percent).

Table 2. Job Search Activities and Support

Outcome	Survey Respondents
Job search activities since graduation[a] (%)	
Contacted an employer online or via email	66.4
Contacted friends or relatives	39.2
Contacted other Per Scholas alumni	40.8
Reached out to people on LinkedIn or other online platforms	51.2
Looked at job postings online	75.2
Looked at job postings in other places	64.0
Attended job fairs	32.8
Posted resume online or posted in a career networking website	53.6
Used ChatGPT or other AI tools to create resumes or cover letters	39.2
Contacted Per Scholas staff members	61.6
Applied to a job posting	80.0
Had at least one job interview	66.4
Received at least one job offer	47.2
Average hours spent on job search activities per week (No.)	14.6
Has received guidance on finding a job or advancing in a career[a] (%)	86.9
From Per Scholas staff members	66.4
From someone in a professional network	27.9
From friends or family	33.6
From reading articles or guidance online	40.2
From somewhere else	23.0
Could use support with[a] (%)	
Creating or updating resume or cover letters	38.5
Creating or updating LinkedIn page	33.3
Preparing for interviews	53.0
Identifying jobs to apply to	57.3
Identifying or setting up informational interviews	36.8
Networking	61.5
Feels somewhat or very likely to receive an offer for an IT or technology field job in the next four months (%)	71.7
Sample size	127

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from WorkRise survey.

NOTE: [a]Respondents were allowed to select more than one response so percentages add up to more than 100 percent.

- Almost all training graduates who responded to the survey reported being contacted by Per Scholas staff members who offered support after the training course was completed. However, take-up of the job search coaching pilot was low among the training graduates it was offered to.

Of the graduates who responded to the survey, 94 percent said Per Scholas staff members reached out to them to offer support after they completed training, with around two-thirds of those graduates accepting job search or career guidance. (Only 6 percent of respondents said they received no support.) The respondents most desired support around networking, identifying jobs they could apply to, and preparing for interviews. Only 2 percent of graduates who responded to the survey said they were unaware of or could not access support from Per Scholas staff members. Two focus group participants stated that outreach from Per Scholas staff members declined or ceased after they reported landing an initial job, even if they shared that the job was temporary or unrelated to their skills, interests, or the tech sector.

Thirty-four percent of graduates who were invited to participate in the job search coaching (offered as part of the pilot program) attended a coaching session. Of those who participated, more opted to attend a group coaching session than a one-on-one session. This suggests that not all of these graduates were looking for job search coaching from Per Scholas. It is unclear why roughly two-thirds of graduates who were offered the coaching did not opt to participate. One possible explanation is they felt they were already prepared to search for a job on their own and did not think they needed additional support (as evidenced by the survey findings discussed above).

- Training graduates who responded to the survey varied regarding how much contact they wanted from Per Scholas staff members after graduation and through what means. Respondents also differed in their assessments of the support that was offered.

A little over half of the graduates who responded to the survey felt that Per Scholas staff members contacted them at the right frequency after graduating, while around a third of graduates wanted Per Scholas staff members to reach out more frequently. These graduates preferred contact through personalized emails (86 percent), followed by text messages (50 percent), and emails sent to all alumni (43 percent).

Almost half of the graduates who responded to the survey said they received job search support that was relevant and improved their job search after completing the program. Around a third of these graduates said the job search support offered to them increased their confidence and the support was offered at a time and through a method that was convenient for them. Fewer graduates who responded to the survey said the support offered felt generic (22 percent) and that they had communication issues when trying to engage Per Scholas staff members (10 percent).

How do training graduates' job search experiences and needs differ when there is a shock to the labor market sector they were trained in?

- Only about a third of training graduates who responded to the survey were working in an IT role or in the tech sector.

As shown in Table 3, about two-thirds of graduates were employed at the time they completed the survey. These graduates had been out of the training program for at least 5 months and up to 16 months. Of those respondents that were employed at the time of the survey, fewer than half (48 percent) reported working in IT-related jobs—or 31 percent of all training graduates who responded to the survey.

Table 3. Employment Status and Perceptions of the Future

Outcome (%)	Survey Respondents
Current employment status	
Employed in an IT role or in the IT/technology field	30.9
Employed in a non-IT role or in another field	32.5
Not employed and looking for a job	30.9
Characteristics of current job, among those employed	
Hired after starting Per Scholas course	*75.0*
Found job through	
Per Scholas	*26.9*
Online platform or website	*38.5*
Friends or family	*7.7*
Feels job is a poor or very poor fit with experience and skills	*23.1*
Feels job is a good or very good fit with experience and skills	*50.0*
Perceptions of the future, among those not employed	
Somewhat or very likely to continue searching for an IT or technology job	*92.1*
Feels it is somewhat or very likely respondent will be employed in an IT or technology job 4 months from now	*77.1*
Sample size	127

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from WorkRise survey.

NOTE: Outcomes in italics are among only a subset of survey respondents and not the full survey respondent sample.

The most common way employed graduates found jobs was by searching online (39 percent found a job this way, with Indeed.com being the most common website mentioned). A little over one-fourth of respondents who were employed found a job with the help of Per Scholas, either by being referred to a job posting or getting a more direct connection to an employer. Among those who responded to the survey, around half who were working felt their job was a good fit with their experiences and skills, while 23 percent felt their job was a poor fit.

- The rate of reported IT-related employment at the time of the survey is lower than has been observed in previous analyses of Per Scholas graduates, suggesting that graduates are having difficulty finding IT-related jobs, likely due to labor market disruptions.[20] It is possible that additional graduates will obtain IT-related jobs in the future, increasing the overall rate.

This recent difficulty in finding tech jobs is likely related to larger trends in the tech sector. Per Scholas staff members noted recently it has taken longer than it used to for participants to find tech jobs following their completion of training. As the currently unemployed graduates continue searching for jobs, it is possible that the rate of IT-related employment will increase.

- Around a third of graduates who responded to the survey reported they were currently looking for a job. Many of them were still interested in looking for a job in the IT sector.

Most people who reported not currently working when they were surveyed planned to keep looking for an IT job (92 percent) and felt hopeful that they would find such a job within the next four months (77 percent). This suggests that graduates are still interested in tech jobs and see opportunities for entering the field. It is likely that both the overall employment rate and the rate of employment in the tech sector among these graduates will increase over time.

Why do some training graduates accept jobs outside of the sector they were trained in?

- Four of five focus group participants described taking jobs out of necessity, even when the jobs were not a match for their goals, skills, or interests.

Focus group participants described taking jobs out of necessity after graduating from training, even if the jobs did not pay well or were not good matches in terms of goals, skills, or interests. While Per Scholas offers training at no cost, some learners may have difficulty covering living expenses while enrolled in full-time training programs. Learners who do not work while in the programs may feel a sense of urgency to begin working as soon as they graduate after living day-to-day without a paycheck. (In response to this, starting in mid-2023, Per Scholas began offering the option for learners in many of its IT Support classes to apply for a Zero Percent Loan to cover their personal expenses while in training.)[21]

Some graduates from the focus group described feeling a surge of momentum upon graduation only to be stymied by sluggish communication with employers. One graduate said, “[Employers]

would make it seem like they need somebody [as soon as possible]," but would end up reposting the same job listing the following month, which made the graduate feel not taken seriously as an applicant. Not all graduates in the focus group could wait for slow employer responses or lengthy application processes, with one graduate sharing, "Three weeks can be a long time just to have a couple of interviews."

- Some graduates in the focus group described challenges landing IT jobs — even entry-level positions — without having a college degree or prior experience working in the industry.

Focus group members suggested that a lack of relevant industry experience and credibility in the field are the biggest barriers to landing a job in the tech sector. An analysis of 3.8 million job postings found that 35 percent of entry-level roles across sectors required at least three years of relevant work experience; the rate swelled to 60 percent of entry-level roles for software and IT services jobs.[22]

One training graduate felt that she was unable to get even an entry-level IT job because she didn't have relevant on-the-job experience, despite her related certification and a robust work history in other areas. Another graduate shared that she applied to an IT position through a staffing agency on Per Scholas' recommendation, but that the agency instead re-routed her to a non-IT role. "After doing a lot of applying, I wasn't seeing any results or feedback," the graduate shared. "I wasn't sure what I was doing wrong." Similar sentiments have been expressed by both participants and employers working with comparable training programs.[23]

Another graduate shared that she was referred to Per Scholas because, despite her background working as a technician, she was considered a "beginner" since she did not have a college degree. "I just never had all the paper, you need a piece of paper," the graduate shared. "Even though there were a lot of jobs I [was] qualified for, [employers] wanted to see [a degree]." In 2022, 73 percent of workers in the tech sector were employed in occupations that required at least a bachelor's degree.[24]

Although some U.S. employers have eliminated bachelor's degree requirements for certain roles in favor of skills-based hiring, this trend does not necessarily transform hiring practices. One study found that companies who removed college degree requirements for some roles only increased the average share of workers without bachelor's degrees by 3.5 percentage points.[25]

Some focus group participants suggested creating paid internships or other earn-and-learn opportunities as a component of training to help graduates gain industry experience. (In 2023 and 2024, Per Scholas started codifying and offering paid apprenticeship opportunities. These options are currently limited due to low interest from partnering employers.)

Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis in this brief supports the well-established effectiveness of sector programs, including Per Scholas, in helping participants develop the skills needed for in-demand jobs. Yet, even as one of the most successful sector programs, some of the Per Scholas graduates in this analysis faced challenges—at least in the first 5 to 16 months after completing the training program—finding jobs in the tech sector during a time of labor market disruption and change. For some graduates, especially those without prior experience in the field, this journey was at times discouraging.

For example, Iyanna enrolled in Per Scholas' IT Support training after watching a family member graduate from the same program and build a successful career in the tech sector.[26] "I thought I could do the same thing," she shared, noting that the relative has maintained a steady career in the tech sector for four or five years, "but it wasn't the same story for me." Iyanna graduated from the IT training program in early 2024 and, over the last six months or so, has had difficulty landing a job in the tech sector. In late 2024, she was working as a retail manager. Other graduates were able to find jobs that utilized their newly developed tech skills. Many others felt hopeful that they would find a tech job in the next few months.

Graduates of sector programs must be prepared for both the technical and emotional journey that comes with finding a job in a new industry. As one Per Scholas graduate shared, "You're going into a whole different field. So, you have to have patience with yourself, you have to have grace with yourself." Sector programs should ensure they support participants not only in skill acquisition but also in long-term resilience, job placement, and career development.

Recommendations

The snapshot of findings presented in this brief highlights the various experiences of the people who participate in sector programs. The findings—many of which reinforce findings from MDRC's broader work in this area—point to several recommendations for both sector program staff members and researchers looking to better understand how these programs can operate more effectively.

For Sector Program Staff Members:

- The job search process can take a long time, especially during periods of greater economic uncertainty. Setting realistic expectations about the time it can take to get a job may help reduce discouragement among job-seeking graduates.

- Many participants rely on program staff members for job search support, which should be seen as a core component of the sector program and its value. Communicating the availability of post-training job search support early and often, while participants are still in training, may help increase participation in these services.

- Some participants prefer more post-training contact with program staff members while others prefer to navigate their job searches more independently. Programs should tailor their follow-up approaches to the different needs and preferences of participants.

- Not all participants find jobs in the sector in which they were trained, including those who receive post-training services, highlighting the need for broader support from programs around initial job placement. This also highlights that preparing graduates for independent job searches is unlikely to be sufficient, especially during weaker economies. Programs should continue and even expand their efforts in job placement and employer engagement during these times. For example, given the value these programs provide to employers—by doing much of the initial training—it is reasonable to ask for a more direct pipeline to jobs, including employer commitments to interview or hire a certain number of graduates.

- During labor market downturns and changes in market demand, programs should consider offering additional services, such as internships and apprenticeships, to keep participants engaged and progressing toward employment in their desired field. Incorporating or expanding paid internships and earn-and-learn opportunities can also give participants valuable industry experience, addressing the barrier often heard from both participants and employers that is the lack of prior experience.

For Researchers:

- Disaggregate results by participant demographics, skills, and other relevant factors to better understand which groups benefit most from sector programs and where challenges remain. This practice can allow programs to better tailor services to participants with different experiences and needs.

- Conduct more human-centered research focused on improving job development strategies and job search processes. Understanding how different participants navigate these processes can inform more personalized support strategies.

- Build on prior research and do rigorous A/B testing of alternative job placement strategies to help determine which approaches best support participants in finding quality jobs.[27]

- Work with program staff members to translate research findings into practice. Programs must differentiate their services based on participant needs, especially in a sector as dynamic and volatile as the tech sector.

Notes and References

1 See, for example, Darrick Hamilton, Algernon Austin, and William Darity, Jr., *Whiter Jobs, Higher Wages: Occupational Segregation and the Lower Wages of Black Men* (Economic Policy Institute, 2011) and Lincoln Quillian, Devah Pager, Ole Hexel, and Arnfinn H. Midboen, "Meta-Analysis of Field Experiments Shows No Change in Racial Discrimination in Hiring Over Time," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, 41 (2017): 10870–10875.

2 See, for example, David Fein and Samuel Dastrop, Benefits that Last: Long-Term Impact and Cost-Benefit Findings for Year Up (Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022); Henry Kanengiser and Kelsey Schaberg, Employment and Earnings Effects of the WorkAdvance Demonstration After Seven Years (MDRC, 2022); and Anne Roder and Mark Elliot, Eleven Year Gains: Project QUEST's Investment Continues to Pay Dividends (Economic Mobility Corporation, 2021).

3 Kanengiser and Schaberg (2022).

4 As part of the WorkAdvance study, Per Scholas' program was shown to increase employment in the IT sector. However, only 61 percent of participants obtained an IT job. Richard Hendra, David H. Greenberg, Gayle Hamilton, Ari Oppenheim, Alexandra Pennington, Kelsey Schaberg, and Betsy L. Tessler, *Encouraging Evidence on a Sector-Focused Advancement Strategy: Two-Year Impacts from the WorkAdvance Demonstration* (MDRC, 2016).

5 In that same study, 66 percent of Per Scholas participants reported that their jobs offered opportunities for advancement. See Hendra et al. (2016).

6 Lawrence F. Katz, Jonathan Roth, Richard Hendra, and Kelsey Schaberg, "Why Do Sectoral Employment Programs Work? Lessons from WorkAdvance," *Journal of Labor Economics* 40, S1 (2022): S249–291.

7 The Learner Support Team at Per Scholas facilitates goal setting and offers personalized guidance on financial wellness and managing life challenges and stressors.

8 Namrata Narain and Kadeem Noray, "Whose Bridge to Opportunity and Why? Unpacking the Impacts of Sectoral Job Training," unpublished paper (2023).

9 The tech workforce consists of both workers in tech-related jobs within any sector and all jobs within the tech sector. This can make it difficult to describe trends in the sector.

10 Crunchbase, "The Crunchbase Tech Layoffs Tracker," (website: https://news.crunchbase.com/startups/tech-layoffs/, 2024).

11 Belle Lin, "IT Unemployment Soars to 4.3% Amid Overall Jobs Growth," (website: https://www.wsj.com/articles/it-unemployment-soars-to-4-3-amid-overall-jobs-growth-2bbb1140, 2023).

12 Lareina Yee, Michael Chui, and Roger Roberts, *McKinsey Technology Trends Outlook 2024* (McKinsey & Company, 2024).

13 CompTIA, *CompTIA Tech Jobs Report: September 2024 Release* (CompTIA, 2024a).

14 Yee, Chui, and Roberts (2024).

15 CompTIA (2024a).

16 George Anders, "Why Tech's Hiring Pendulum is Swinging Toward Contractors," *Workforce Insights* (https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-techs-hiring-pendulum-swinging-toward-contractors-george-anders/, 2022). Callam Pickering, "Rapid Growth in GenAI Job Postings: Expectations and Surprising Trends," (website: https://www.hiringlab.org/2024/11/21/growth-in-ai-job-postings-trends-and-surprises/, 2024).

17 Yee, Chui, and Roberts (2024).

18 Nate Paynter, Manoj Mishra, Brad Kreit, Monika Mahto, and Sue Cantrell, *Navigating the Tech Talent Shortage* (Deloitte Center for Integrated Research, 2024) and CompTIA, *State of the Tech Workforce | Cyberstates 2024* (CompTIA, 2024b).

19 The MDRC research team discovered early on that (1) not all alumni were taking up the offer of pre-employment coaching and (2) few program alumni were finding jobs and getting to the point where they could be offered the advancement coaching. The latter was thought to be related to the drastic shifts seen in the IT and tech labor market in the past few years, as discussed. Due to these low participation rates, the team ultimately decided to refocus the study on learning about the job search experiences of participants during these labor market conditions.

20 See, for example, Hendra et al. (2016). That analysis found an in-IT employment rate of 61 percent between 18 and 24 months after participants started the program (which is around 12 to 18 months after participants completed the program).

21 Per Scholas is now offering the option for learners in many of its IT Support classes to apply for a Zero Percent Loan to help cover their personal expenses while in training. The Zero Percent Loan is offered through a partnership between Per Scholas and Ascent, a private student loans company. Repayment plans begin after a three-month grace period following graduation. Payments may be deferred until the graduate lands a job with an annual salary of $40,000 or more. See more information here: https://perscholas.org/zero-percent-loan/.

22 George Anders, "Hiring's New Red Line: Why Newcomers Can't Land 35% of 'Entry-Level Jobs,'" *Workforce Insights* (https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/hirings-new-red-line-why-newcomers-cant-land-35-jobs-george-anders/, 2021).

23 See, for example, Joseph Gasper, Joshua Vermette, Kevin Baier, Kelsey Schaberg, and Richard Hendra, *Evaluation of Strategies Used in the TechHire and Strengthening Working Families Initiative Grant Programs: Two-Year Impacts Report* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023).

24 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Occupational Outlook Handbook, Field of Degree: Computer and Information Technology" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024).

25 Matt Sigelman, Joseph Fuller, and Alex Martin, *Skill-Based Hiring: The Long Road from Pronouncements to Practice* (Burning Glass Institute, 2024).

26 Name has been changed to protect the participant's identity.

27 A/B tests compare two versions of something to see which version leads to better results. People are assigned at random to receive either Version A or Version B of the thing being tested, and their outcomes are then compared. See, for example, Karin Martinson, Eleanor Harvill, and Deena Schwartz, *The Effectiveness of Different Approaches for Moving Cash Assistance Recipients to Work: Findings from the Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation* (Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank WorkRise for supporting this research and the many individuals who came together to make this work possible. We would like to thank the Per Scholas training graduates who participated in the survey and focus group, and who provided generous insights. This paper benefitted greatly from feedback by leaders at Per Scholas including Tamara Johnson, Sierra Harvey, Alanna Hughes, and Chad Marshall.

We would like to thank our thought partners and contributors at MDRC. Donna Wharton-Fields provided invaluable guidance and direction. Polina Polskaia contributed significantly to earlier work on this project. Mary Bambino oversaw the budget. Alex Ubalijoro co-led the focus group. Luisa LaFleur edited this paper and Ann Kottner prepared it for publication.

The following organizations support dissemination of MDRC publications and our efforts to communicate with policymakers, practitioners, and others: Arnold Ventures, Ascendium Education Group, Yield Giving/MacKenzie Scott, and earnings from the MDRC Endowment. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our website: www.mdrc.org.

New York
200 Vesey Street, 23rd Flr.
New York, NY 10281
Tel: 212 532 3200

Washington, DC
750 17th Street, NW
Suite 501
Washington, DC 20006

Oakland
475 14th Street, Suite 750
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel: 510 663 6372

Los Angeles
11965 Venice Boulevard
Suite 402
Los Angeles, CA 90066