Minnesota Family Investment Program: Racial Equity Project

Preliminary findings for a 2014-2016 MFIP Innovation Project

September 2017
Table of Contents

Preliminary findings for a 2014-2016 MFIP Innovation Project ................................................................. 1
For more information about this report: .................................................................................................... 6
About the Minnesota Department of Human Services ............................................................................ 6

Executive Summary ...................................................................................................................................... 7

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 9

Background ............................................................................................................................................. 9
Supporting literature ................................................................................................................................. 13
Welfare reform efforts .............................................................................................................................. 13
Culturally specific practices ..................................................................................................................... 14
Methodology ........................................................................................................................................... 15
Data sources ........................................................................................................................................... 15

Results ...................................................................................................................................................... 17

Participation and project expenditures ................................................................................................... 17
Participant satisfaction and engagement ................................................................................................. 19
Education ............................................................................................................................................... 20
Participant stabilization ............................................................................................................................ 21
Employment and MFIP use ...................................................................................................................... 22
Project and project assets ........................................................................................................................ 24
Differentiation of services ......................................................................................................................... 24
Culturally specific or culturally competent staff .................................................................................... 24
Culturally specific programming and training ......................................................................................... 25
Intensive, compassionate case management .......................................................................................... 26
Family-focused services ........................................................................................................................... 27
Participant incentives and supports ........................................................................................................ 27
Project and project challenges ............................................................................................................... 28
Project implementation ............................................................................................................................. 28
Knowledge of and access to resources .................................................................................................... 28
Scheduling challenges and conflicts ........................................................................................................ 28
Ramsey County’s Families Achieving Success Today (FAST 2) ................................................................. 45
  Overview ............................................................................................................................................. 45
  Recruitment ....................................................................................................................................... 45
  Staff configuration .......................................................................................................................... 45
  Trainings .......................................................................................................................................... 45
  Activities .......................................................................................................................................... 46
  Incentives and support services ....................................................................................................... 46
  Successes as reported by staff .......................................................................................................... 46
  Challenges from a staff perspective ................................................................................................. 47

Red Lake Nation ...................................................................................................................................... 48
  Overview ............................................................................................................................................. 48
  Staffing configuration and support .................................................................................................. 48
  Recruitment ...................................................................................................................................... 48
  Incentives and support services ....................................................................................................... 48
  Successes from a staff perspective .................................................................................................. 49
  Challenges from a staff perspective ................................................................................................. 49
  Cultural activities ............................................................................................................................ 50

Saint Louis County Public Health and Human Services: Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency
(AEOA) ..................................................................................................................................................... 51
  Overview ............................................................................................................................................. 51
  Staff configuration and support ...................................................................................................... 51
  Recruitment ...................................................................................................................................... 51
  Incentives and support services ....................................................................................................... 51
  Activities .......................................................................................................................................... 52
  Project Successes ............................................................................................................................ 52
  Challenges ........................................................................................................................................ 52

Saint Louis County Public Health and Human Services: Community Action Duluth’s Bridge to
Employment Project ............................................................................................................................ 53
  Overview ............................................................................................................................................. 53
  Staff configuration and support ...................................................................................................... 53
  Recruitment ...................................................................................................................................... 53
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About the Minnesota Department of Human Services

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (department) provides Minnesotans with a variety of services intended to help people live as independently as possible. The department serves Minnesotans in all 87 counties and 11 tribes.
Executive Summary

The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) Equity Project, was funded from October 2014 through December 2016 to support the provision of culturally specific employment services in order to bolster employment outcomes for African American and American Indian MFIP participants. Selected projects were required to ensure that customized employment plans, intensive case management, the state’s Employability Measure\(^1\), and required data collection, were included in implementation of the Equity projects. Responders to the Request for Proposals were also encouraged to propose activities that promoted some or all core project components:

- Sector or industry-specific education, training and job matching
- Responsiveness to labor market and employer needs
- Economic stability and self-sufficiency
- Inclusion of key partners
- Culturally responsive activities focused on evidence-based and promising practices.

Six projects, carried out by seven county and non-profit agencies, were selected to participate.

The MFIP Equity Project served 754 participants over the 27-month funding period. The project served primarily African American (60 percent) and American Indian participants (30 percent), but also provided services to second parents in the household, regardless of their racial or ethnic identity (10 percent). Projects were carried out across the state, with each Equity project serving a slightly different audience. For example, Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency and Anoka County focused on serving individuals without post-secondary credentials, whereas Ramsey County worked exclusively with participants whose benefits had been extended beyond the 60-month time limit due to a documented hardship. The Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and Red Lake Nation worked exclusively with tribal members.

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\(^1\) The Employability Measure (EM) is a structured assessment used by a job counselor to facilitate a participant-centered discussion around areas that can be strengths or challenges in dealing with everyday life, and therefore with employment. An interview allows job counselors to measure and assign a level from 1 (low) to 5 (high) in 11 areas that affect a person’s ability to get and keep a job. The areas are: Transportation, dependent care, education, housing, social support, child behavior, financial, legal, safe living environment, health and workplace skills.
Sites spent $4,318,008 of their Equity grants in addition to the funds they receive to provide their regular MFIP services, bringing the additional cost per participant to $5,727.\(^2\) The average participant enrollment period was just over nine months.

Participants in the Equity Project had a positive reaction to the project and felt it was beneficial. Twenty-one percent of Equity participants engaged in a new educational activity after starting the project and, on average, Equity participants experienced a small, but statistically significant, movement towards job readiness as measured by the state’s Employability Measure assessment. Key aspects of the project which appear to be beneficial included hiring and retention of culturally specific or culturally competent staff, culturally specific programming and training activities, intensive and compassionate case management, family-focused services, and participant incentives and supports. While all sites offered employment training and job readiness programming, Equity-specific programming at most sites was most clearly differentiated from traditional MFIP by the inclusion of key partners and culturally responsive activities.

However, Equity participants did not fare as well with immediate employment outcomes. They were less likely to have wages during the first quarter of 2017 (44 percent of Equity participants compared to 49 percent of the comparison group created through propensity score matching), and when they had wages, they were significantly less than the wages earned by the comparison group.

Equity participants were more likely to remain on MFIP: 64 percent of MFIP Equity participants continued to receive MFIP benefits in March 2017 compared to 35 percent of individuals in the comparison group. Equity participants who still needed cash and employment supports were more likely than individuals in the comparison group to continue to receive these supports through the MFIP program.

A review of longer-term employment and exit outcomes will be possible as time passes.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for future work are included in the full text of the paper.

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\(^2\) Costs per person are additional costs incurred beyond the costs of traditional grant administration, program costs and MFIP case management.
Introduction

Background

The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) provides cash, food, and employment services for low-income Minnesota families who meet eligibility criteria. Families who meet eligibility requirements can also qualify for child care assistance and a small, $110 monthly housing grant. The primary MFIP outcome measure of participant success reported each quarter is the Self-Support Index, the percentage of individuals who are either working in paid employment at least 30 hours per week or are off the cash portion of MFIP three years after a baseline eligibility quarter. While the Self-Support Index is officially reported for the state, counties, tribes and racial/ethnic groups, it can be calculated for any MFIP subgroup. In recent quarters, while almost 70 percent of all MFIP participants have been successful as defined by the Self-Support Index, significantly lower values have been reported for African American and American Indian participants. These outcome disproportionalities – judged to be disparities by the department – have continued to be large over time, through economic downturns and upturns and spurred a decade of analysis and target efforts to understand and eliminate these disparities. In an attempt to reduce these disparities, the Minnesota Legislature has funded several efforts to improve outcomes for African American and American Indian participants.

The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) Equity Project was funded from October 2014 through December 2016 to support provision of culturally specific employment services to bolster employment outcomes for African American and American Indian MFIP participants. Selected sites were required to ensure that customized employment plans, intensive case management, the state’s Employability Measure, and required data collection were included in implementation of the Equity Projects. Responders to the Request for Proposals were also encouraged to propose activities that promoted some or all core project components:

3 Minnesota Statutes 119B.011, Subd.2
4 Minnesota Statutes 256J.35a
5 The subgroups reported are these major groups of MFIP participants: White, American Indian, Asians (divided into Hmong immigrants, non-Hmong immigrants and U.S.-born African Americans), blacks (divided into Somali immigrants, non-Somali immigrants and U.S.-born African Americans), those choosing multiple racial/ethnic groups and missing.
6 The Employability Measure (EM) is a structured assessment facilitated by a job counselor to promote a participant-centered discussion around areas that can be challenges or strengths in dealing with everyday life, and therefore with employment. An interview allows the job counselor to measure and assign a level from 1 (low) to 5 (high) in 11 areas that affect a person’s ability to get and keep a job. The areas are: transportation, dependent care, education, housing, social support, child behavior, financial, legal, safe living environment, health and workplace skills.
• Sector or industry-specific education, training and job matching
• Responsiveness to labor market and employer needs
• Components leading to economic stability and self-sufficiency
• Inclusion of key partners
• Culturally responsive activities focused on evidence-based and promising practices.

Six projects, carried out by seven county and nonprofit agencies, were selected to participate. Brief summaries of each grantee, including their unique model of service delivery, amount awarded, and participants served are listed below.

**Table 1: Summary of Anoka County’s Equity projects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anoka County Job Training Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Award: $445,496; 97 participants served</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anoka County’s person-centered intensive case management model targeted African American and American Indian participants with a criminal record and without a high school diploma or GED, post-secondary education training or recognized credential. Partners included Anoka Ramsey Community and Anoka Technical colleges, Metro North Adult Basic Education, Anoka County Economic Assistance, Minneapolis Urban League and Anoka County Community Action Project.

**Table 2: Summary of NorthPoint’s Equity project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NorthPoint’s “OnPoint” Project, Hennepin County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Award: $1,201,637; 127 participants served</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NorthPoint’s OnPoint project was a culturally responsive, holistic approach which incorporated an integrated health and wellness model alongside employment services that emphasized sector-based career pathways, family health and wellness and peer support in hopes of leading to livable wage employment and careers that begin to provide long-term stability for African American families and community. Partners included Turning Point, Hope United CDC, Minneapolis Public Schools and Summit Academy OIC.
### Table 3: Summary of Minnesota Chippewa Tribe’s Equity project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (MCT)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Award:</strong> $965,223; 60 participants served</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Disparities Fellowship Project targeted American Indian participants served by MCT, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and White Earth Nation. The Equity Project required education for American Indian clients about historical trauma. Optional programming for clients in the Equity Project included a GED completion track and career-related internships. Clients participating in classes and internships received a wage subsidy. Partners included: Cass County Health, Human and Veterans Services; Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Employment Services program; Leech Lake Tribal College; White Earth Human Services Division; White Earth Tribal College, and Northwest Indian Opportunities Industrialization Center.

### Table 4: Summary of Ramsey County’s Equity project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ramsey County Workforce Solutions: FAST2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Award:</strong> $894,639; 199 participants served</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ramsey County Workforce Solutions expanded on its Families Achieving Success Today (FAST) model to serve 199 randomly-assigned African American and American Indian participants who have used more than 60 months of MFIP assistance, having received an extension to the MFIP time limit. Partners included: Ramsey County Community Human Services, Goodwill Easter Seals of MN, Ramsey County Children’s Mental Health, Open Cities Health Center, Network for the Development of Children of African American Descent, YWCA of Saint Paul, the American Indian Family Center, and cultural community consultants.
Table 5: Summary of St. Louis County’s Equity project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>St. Louis County Public Health and Human Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Award: $989,120; 175 participants served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis County offered American Indian and African American participants a continuum of services as well as small caseloads with an emphasis on strategies focused on institutional barriers. Partners included: Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, Community Action Duluth and Duluth Adult Basic Education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Summary of Red Lake Nation’s Equity project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red Lake Nation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Award: $1,021,013; 97 participants served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ganawenindiwag (taking care of each other) project delivered a trauma-informed approach using an on-going support and education model for American Indian MFIP recipients. Red Lake Nation partnered with the Northwest Indian Opportunities Industrialization Center.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sites spent $4,318,008 of awarded grants – an average across the sites of $5,727 per participant. This actual cost per participant ranged significantly by site: The site with the lowest cost per participant was Ramsey County with an additional cost of $4,496 per person, while the site with the highest cost per participant was the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, with an additional cost of $16,087 per person.

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7 Costs per person are additional costs incurred beyond the costs of traditional grant administration, program costs and MFIP case management.
Supporting literature

Welfare reform efforts

Welfare projects and reform efforts have generated a considerable body of research. The following section provides a high-level overview of strategies which have been found to be promising for the general Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)\(^8\) participant population, and later, for African American and American Indian project participants. Prior random assignment evaluations have shown that many of the TANF programs most successful at helping individuals return to work have promoted a mixed service strategy which offers participants the opportunity to engage in a variety of activities including job search, education, employment-training and work activities [Freedman et al., 2000; Michalopoulos, et al., 2000]. These projects are also often characterized by provision of individualized services, high expectations for participation, and strong connections to local employers [Strawn, 1998]. Additionally, a 2009 random assignment evaluation of a sectorial training initiative showed positive results for a project that provided industry-specific training for participants along with job-matching assistance to employers [Maguire et al., 2010]. Projects that implemented a work-first policy helped participants secure employment more quickly than projects which incorporated an education or training first philosophy, and participants who enrolled in these work-first projects were no less likely than participants in the education-first project to get a “good” job or boost long-term earnings growth [Hamilton, 2002; Freedman & Smith, 2008]. However, the first job a participant takes when on welfare matters. Participants who immediately secure a “good” job, here defined as a position that starts at a higher wage and includes health insurance and paid leave benefits, have been shown in random assignment evaluations and longitudinal studies to be more likely to maintain employment over time [Rangarajan, Meckstroth, & Novak, 1998; Rangarajan, Schochet, & Chu, 1998].

Within these general project philosophies, relationships between service providers and participants can strongly influence participant perception of service delivery and services provided. A 2003 qualitative study by the Wilder Research Center suggested that participant relationships with their job counselors played a significant role in shaping the participants’ perception of the project. Participants responded best to counselors who encouraged them, cared about them, were easy to talk to, and were helpful in guiding the participants’ job search process. Participants in this study also noted the importance of having a counselor who understood their experience and, ideally, shared a common cultural background [Owen et al., 2003].

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\(^8\) TANF is the federal block grant funding for state family cash assistance programs.
Culturally specific practices

While circumstances do not always allow for the demographics of service providers to mirror the demographics of their participants, it is important that case managers are able to work successfully with individuals from differing ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Weaver [1999] defines practitioners as being culturally competent when they align their skills and work practices to integrate culturally specific knowledge and values. Culturally competent social work practices for American Indian communities must include an understanding and appreciation of diversity among and within American Indian communities, an understanding of American Indian history and contemporary realities, good social work practice skills, willingness to learn and willingness to be aware of individual and societal biases [Weaver, 1999]. It is also important that practitioners develop, implement and evaluate therapeutic efforts collaboratively with the participant and that process and outcomes be considered and evaluated using an appropriate cultural lens [Gone, 2004].

Researchers have identified strengths-based case management as a positive and beneficial way for case managers to provide individual and family case management services [Hill, 1999; Morgan & Ziglio, 2007; Saleebey, 2006]. Using a strength-based approach requires a practitioner to draw upon an individual’s strengths and assets to collaboratively develop an approach to service planning and delivery. The literature posits the existence of six common strengths in African American families: A strong achievement orientation, flexible family roles, a strong work orientation, strong kinship binds, strong religious orientation and resiliency [Hill, 1999; Hildreth, Boglin & Mask, 2000]. For strengths common in American Indian families, the literature identifies the following: tribal loyalty, respect for elders, humility, giving and sharing with extended family members and across generations, love of the land and a strong focus on children’s wellbeing [London & Devore, 1988]. Single African American mothers were found to have strengths that included substantial involvement by those individuals who were single parents, additional support from external caregivers, parenting skills that emphasize and enhance achievement, respect for others, self-respect and racial pride for children [Woody & Woody, 2003].

In addition to building on a family’s strengths, it is also important to address current inequities and past trauma. Recent studies have provided empirical support for the concept of historical trauma, the idea that significant past trauma against a group of people may accumulate over generations and interact with everyday stressors to reduce cognitive well-being [Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2014]. Exploratory research on First Nations communities in Canada has found positive benefits from a study conducted which explored the benefits of combining western and traditional treatment models to heal this intergenerational, historical trauma amongst individuals with chemical dependency disorders [Marsh, Coholic, Cote-Meek, & Najavits, 2015]. Exploratory work has also examined historical trauma in the context of African
American identity and the effects of slavery, as well as police brutality during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement [Alexander et al., 2000; Eyerman, 2001].

In addition to building from the above evidence-based practices, defined here as practices based on the best available research for whether and why a program or program component works, all sites have chosen to implement lower counselor to participant ratios as necessary for required intensive case management. Studies show that reduced caseload sizes can help improve project outcomes if case managers change the way they serve participants, and focus on introducing supplemental, evidence-based practices [Jalbert, Rhodes, Kane, Clawson, Bogue, et. al, 2011]. This project is also grounded in past research from the department which shows that positive effects can come from targeted, culturally appropriate case management and participant training. A 2009 to 2011 study of the department’s targeted innovation funds found that at several implementation sites, African American and American Indian participants had positive employment outcomes in a project which offered culturally appropriate training and case management services, especially for participants who had received cash assistance for an extended time [Kleczewski, 2012].

Methodology

The evaluation of the MFIP Racial and Ethnic Disparities project used a mixed method approach designed to answer three major questions:

- To what extent does Equity programming differ from traditional MFIP case management services?
- How do MFIP outcomes for Equity participants compare to outcomes for non-participating African American and American Indian participants?
- What did participants and staff find to be the most effective and important aspects of the Equity service delivery model?

To answer these key questions, evaluators used a variety of methods and data sources, including questionnaire research, site visits, analysis of administrative data, document review, file reviews and participant interviews.

Data sources

Data used for this study came from a variety of different sources. Feedback from the people served was solicited through 63 in-depth interviews as well as a questionnaire which was completed by 18 percent (134) of the people served. Evaluators conducted two site visits to
each project site where they observed the project, watched classes and interviewed supervisory and front-line staff. File reviews for each of the six sites included looking at case notes and participant Employment Plans. Administrative data came from the department’s Data Warehouse where Workforce One data are stored (Employment Services’ project data), Wage Detail (the information system storing wage data from employers in Minnesota), and MAXIS (the eligibility determination and benefit issuance system). Document review consisted of analyzing training curricula, promotional materials and activity schedules.
Results

This section details the findings of research conducted for the MFIP Equity project. Findings provide information about project implementation and early outcomes in the areas of participant stabilization, engagement, education and employment. Because these projects emphasized stability and long-term healing, it is recommended that a future review of administrative data be conducted to assess potential longer-term impacts.

Participation and project expenditures

The MFIP Equity project served 754 participants over the course of the 27-month funding period. The project served primarily African American (60 percent) and American Indian participants (30 percent), but also provided services to second parents in the household (10 percent), regardless of their racial or ethnic identity (Table 7). Each Equity project served a slightly different target population: AEOA and Anoka County focused on serving individuals with limited education, whereas Ramsey County worked exclusively with participants who had benefits beyond the time limit due to economic hardship. Although individuals could choose whether or not to participate in the Equity project services, three sites, St. Louis County, Ramsey County and Red Lake Nation, directly enrolled participants and gave them the choice to opt out. The average participant enrollment period was just over nine months.

The majority of project participants (82 percent) were female. The average MFIP family size of an Equity participant was 3.37 and 8 percent of these families were two-parent households. Participants at the start of the Equity project had received an average of 75 months of MFIP benefits, with the number of benefit months received ranging from two to just over 19 years. Approximately 41 percent of Equity participants were coded as also participating in the Family Stabilization Services9 track.

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9 The Family Stabilization Services track of MFIP was created during the 2007 legislative session to help families with additional barriers, to receive more flexible set of services so that they could get and keep employment, improve family stability, increase economic stability, and remove barriers [MFIP Bulletin, 07-11-07].
Table 7: Demographic information MFIP Equity participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Count/ percentage of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American — 452, 60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian — 224, 30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino — 16, 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple races — 38, 5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White — 22, 3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANF months ¹⁰</td>
<td>Mean — 67, median — 54, range — 2-206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service track within MFIP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Stabilization Services — 41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General MFIP — 59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female — 82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male — 18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant age</td>
<td>29.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-parent cases</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of youngest child</td>
<td>(Mean) 3.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁰ All numbers are calculated for October 2014, and represent cases active during that month.
Participant satisfaction and engagement

The majority of Equity project participants (90 percent) reported that they were satisfied with the project. Participants who responded to a survey about the project noted that they decided to enroll for a variety of reasons: Interest in extra classes and trainings offered through the project (40 percent), interest in activities specially designed for their culture/ethnicity (32 percent), and interest in receiving a custom employment plan (30 percent). Although project participation was designed to be voluntary, almost 33 percent of individuals reported that they only participated because they were told that they needed to participate by their county or tribal financial worker.

Administrative data show that Equity participants engaged in a variety of activities during their time in the Equity project. The most common activities included job search (which also included participation in cultural activities), full and part-time employment, assessment, social services, and other activities defined as activities not otherwise listed (Figure 1).
Figure 1: Equity participants engaged in a wide range of activities.

While working with the Equity Projects, many participants engaged in job search, cultural activities, employment and social service activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job search, including cultural activities</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary education</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED training</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctioned</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child under 12 months exemption</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABE/ Remedial Training</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training directly related to employment</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school completion</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncompensated work experience</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the job training</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing child care (community service)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education

Twenty-one percent (162) of Equity participants enrolled in a new education or training program after beginning work with the Equity project. Almost 80 percent of survey respondents noted that they knew more about local education and training opportunities after participating in the project. The same percentage (80 percent) reported that they would feel more comfortable enrolling in a training or education project after participating in the Equity project. The most common education activities for MFIP participants were Postsecondary education (44 percent) and General Equivalency Diploma training (34 percent). Other activities, and the number who participated, are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Educational activities of MFIP participants
Participants enrolled in postsecondary education pursuits attended a community or tribal college (50 percent), a private, for-profit institutions (38 percent), or community-based nonprofit certificate programs (13 percent). When compared to a group of MFIP recipients not enrolled in the Equity project, Equity participants were slightly less likely to attend community colleges and slightly more likely to enroll in private, for-profit institutions.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Participant stabilization}

Many of the Equity sites had a strong focus on helping participants to heal from historical trauma and move towards stability and job readiness. To measure movement towards job readiness, researchers analyzed results of the state’s Employability Measure Assessment, an instrument developed to gauge status and progress in 11 key areas of life functioning that have been shown to be important to getting and keeping a job: Child behavior, dependent care, education, financial, health, housing, legal, personal skills, safe living environment, social support and transportation. The assessment rates participants using a five point scale which is compressed into three categories: Barrier to job readiness, Job ready, or strength — job ready. The Equity contracts required counselors to administer the Employability Measure assessment at the beginning of the project, and then every six months while a participant remained in the project. As a result, 366 participants completed two or more assessments during their time in the project.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Educational activities of MFIP Equity participants} & \\
\hline
Postsecondary education & 87 \\
GED Training & 67 \\
Adult Basic Education & 22 \\
Job skills training & 12 \\
High school completion & 9 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Educational activities of MFIP Equity participants}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{11} Data pulled from Workforce One shows that MFIP recipients engaged in post-secondary activities and not enrolled in the Equity project enrolled in community or tribal college (60 percent), private, for-profit institutions (28 percent), community-based nonprofits (8 percent), four-year public colleges or universities (2 percent), and private, not-for-profit schools (2 percent).
Equity participants who completed at least two assessments made small positive and statistically significant movement towards job readiness. Overall, scores increased from an average starting score of 3.12 to an average follow-up score of 3.21. The categories in which participants showed the greatest improvement included dependent care, social support, housing and health. The chart below lists all of the categories, median starting and ending scores and median difference (Figure 3). Use of this tool to gauge participant stability has several limitations: the group of individuals who completed at least two assessments may be different than individuals who were only assessed once. Additionally, all MFIP programs are ideally structured to support increased participant stability and job readiness. Without a reliable control group, we cannot assess if this intervention was more effective than traditional MFIP services in helping participants move towards job readiness.

Figure 3: Employability Measure assessment scores: MFIP Equity participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Average First EM Score</th>
<th>Average Second EM Score</th>
<th>Difference(^\text{12})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent care</td>
<td>3.064</td>
<td>3.208</td>
<td>0.145*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>2.777</td>
<td>2.896</td>
<td>0.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>3.003</td>
<td>3.112</td>
<td>0.110*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>3.234</td>
<td>3.330</td>
<td>0.095*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>2.678</td>
<td>2.770</td>
<td>0.093*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>3.003</td>
<td>3.093</td>
<td>0.090*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe living</td>
<td>3.674</td>
<td>3.748</td>
<td>0.074*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child behavior</td>
<td>3.435</td>
<td>3.509</td>
<td>0.074*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2.667</td>
<td>2.732</td>
<td>0.066*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>3.011</td>
<td>3.055</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>3.869</td>
<td>3.910</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employment and MFIP use

Almost 77 percent of surveyed participants felt that the Equity project helped them become better prepared to both find and keep a job. Three-quarters (75 percent) of respondents felt that the project helped guide them towards the career they wanted. To test the employment and exit outcomes of Equity participants, researchers carved out a subset of those enrolled in the project to create a treatment group. Individuals were assigned to the treatment group because they were the most likely to benefit from services offered. Treatment group members identified as either African American or American Indian, and were enrolled with an Equity project for 90 days or more.

\(^{12}\) Asterisks designate differences that are statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05.
Using Propensity score matching\textsuperscript{13}, researchers compared project participants who engaged in at least 90 days of Equity programming with a similar group of non-Equity MFIP participants. The control group was selected after matching on key predictors of treatment group inclusion: Race/ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, education level, recipient of Family Stabilization Services (yes/no), child under six (yes/no), number of children, two parent family (yes/no), number of months receiving MFIP benefits and wages prior to the start of the project (yes/no). Propensity score matching has been shown to be an effective way of eliminating systematic differences between treatment and comparison groups when a random assignment trial is not possible (Dehejia & Wahba, 2008; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). A logistic regression found that the most important predictors of a participant earning income were if an individual had earned income prior to the project, project status (Family Stabilization Services yes/no), and gender. Our current systems do not collect reliable data about people with criminal backgrounds, and therefore, this was an omitted variable in the matching process.

Equity participants were less likely to have wages during the first quarter of 2017 (44 percent of Equity participants compared to 49 percent of the control group). When they had wages, incomes were significantly less than the wages earned by the control group. Equity participants were more likely to remain on MFIP: 64 percent of MFIP Equity participants continued to receive MFIP benefits in March 2017 compared to 35 percent of individuals in the control group. Table 8 provides more detail about the measures and assigned outcomes.

\textsuperscript{13} Propensity score matching is a statistical technique that attempts to estimate the effect of an intervention by accounting for known characteristics of participants that are predictors of which individuals received treatment.
Table 8: Comparison of earnings and project exit outcomes: Equity treatment, control, and all eligible non-participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Treatment Group</th>
<th>Control Group(^{14})</th>
<th>All Eligible Non-equity Participants(^{15})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wages quarter 1, 2017(^{16})</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median quarterly wage, working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participants(^{17})</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$1527/ quarter;</td>
<td>$2,370/ quarter;</td>
<td>$2,123/ quarter;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$509/month</td>
<td>$790/ month</td>
<td>$708/ month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active MFIP Cases as March 2017</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Project and project assets

Differentiation of services

Equity service providers were differentiated from traditional MFIP service providers by providing culturally specific, intensive, and family-focused case management services. Through the grant, many service providers were also able to provide participants with additional incentives and support services. Three sites, Community Action Duluth, Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, and Red Lake Nation used a portion of their funding to provide participants with wage-subsidized employment opportunities. This allowed participants to engage in short-term paid internships. Many internships involved working on culturally specific projects, like harvesting wild rice or gardening, opportunities which allowed participants to learn about small business ownership while gaining culturally specific skills. Other internship opportunities included working in tribal offices to learn and assist with basic program administration.

Culturally specific or culturally competent staff

Project partners used a variety of different approaches to refocus existing programming in a culturally specific way, as well as to create new culturally supportive activities and trainings. All sites focused on

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\(^{14}\) Control group created using Propensity score matching. See notes in the text of this paper.

\(^{15}\) A group created by looking at participants who would have been eligible for Equity programming but did not participate.

\(^{16}\) Participant wage information from DEED unemployment wage detail data.

\(^{17}\) DEED wage detail data is uploaded quarterly. A monthly estimate is created by dividing quarterly wages by three.
hiring staff whose race and ethnicity mirrored the populations they were hired to serve, or were culturally competent. One site, Ramsey County, employed cultural consultants who attended regular meetings to help provide a cultural lens and perspective on cases and situations related to African American and American Indian populations.

Most surveyed participants reported that their participation in the MFIP Equity project helped connect them to their cultural or ethnic group (80 percent). Survey respondents were also likely to say that the project made them feel comfortable and respected, supported their spiritual needs, and worked well for their cultural and ethnic group. Equity participants who had a counselor with a shared cultural or ethnic background were more likely to feel like the project connected them to their ethnic cultural group (89 percent versus 38 percent) and supported their spiritual needs (88 percent versus 54 percent). A participant interviewed from Anoka County noted the importance of having a counselor with a shared racial/ethnic background: “the worker was really helpful and wanted to connect on a deeper level. Our relationship was much easier than my relationship with my white case manager because he understood how it is to be a black person. They understand us more, and it’s easier to make the connection.” However, other participants noted the importance of having a compassionate, knowledgeable and accessible case manager, regardless of race or ethnicity.

**Culturally specific programming and training**

Several sites adapted core employment-based curricula to ensure that it was culturally specific and responsive. A participant from Anoka County noted the difference: “most of the classes in MFIP are more geared towards looking at jobs and applying to jobs. This is more about real life situations and problems that a minority might face in the workplace. I felt open, I could talk about what I wanted without being judged.” This sentiment was echoed by a participant from NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center, Inc.: “It was supportive to see others in the community going through the same stuff (as me).”

Project funding was used by many sites to create partnerships with culturally specific groups and individuals. Tribal nations like the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe funded training and mentorship positions for knowledgeable elders in the community. Ramsey County’s FAST2 project partnered with the American Indian Family Center (AIFC), the Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD) and YWCA of St. Paul. One site, Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA), used some of their project funding to support culturally specific activities that were open to both Equity participants and the general community. A participant noted how bringing an African storyteller to a local nursing home facilitated community-building and cultural awareness, where people were said to have “really enjoyed it and sang along.”

Sites such as AEOA, Community Action Duluth, Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, and Red Lake Nation created new culturally specific offerings to connect individuals to the culture and community. These project-funded offerings include activities specific to American Indian culture such as water ceremonies, regalia and canoe making, as well as activities specific to African Americans, such as the African American Culture of Hair event. Eighty-five percent of surveyed participants engaged in at least one project-sponsored activity, and almost half of these individuals participated in two or more offerings (49 percent). The most common activities that participants engaged in were focused on family support or
community engagement (46 percent), job or employment (42 percent), cultural engagement (36 percent), or education (17 percent). Individuals who had participated in a culturally specific activity were more likely to report a stronger connection to their racial/ethnic community (90 percent).

Participants who engaged in these activities were likely to find them beneficial, and in some cases, life affirming. In several cases, participants stated that they enjoyed the activities and classes so much that they tried to recruit others to participate. A participant from Red Lake Nation noted that she wanted to participate in almost everything that was offered and that “it was all a great experience, we talked about it all of the time. I even tried to have family members and other friends join in!” A participant from the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe reported that these cultural activities had changed the ways in which she and her children viewed the world: “I am now much more in tune with my religion. Before this I wasn’t really culturally active. I now burn sage in the morning. I bead at night, I’m more in tune with our thoughts, and spiritually, it just paints me all around. I am learning more about the past and what we’ve been through – it changed the way I look at certain things.”

Partners providing services as part of this project were encouraged to allow cultural activities to count as “core” participation hours under the job search category, which also includes job readiness activities such as participant treatment and rehabilitation. Under this framework, cultural activities were interpreted to count as job readiness assistance, as they were helping participants to rehabilitate from historical trauma. This interpretation more closely adheres to the federal definition of job search and job readiness assistance which includes “the act of seeking or obtaining employment, preparation to seek or obtain employment, including life skills training, and substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, or rehabilitation settings”.

**Intensive, compassionate case management**

To allow for intensive service delivery, case managers worked with between 20 and 40 participants at a time. In many locations, these case managers worked alongside support staff who assisted with job/career development, health care navigation, and life-skills/social services support. Most case managers were able to provide home visiting services as well as a variety of non-traditional supports, including participant advocacy, transportation assistance, and social service referrals for the entire family.

Many participants reported through the survey that they had frequent contact with their Equity case managers. Forty-two percent of respondents connected with their case managers at least once a week, and 19 percent connected twice a month. Participants who responded to the Equity survey noted that their case managers contacted them in a variety of ways: via phone calls (75 percent), individual meetings (66 percent), text messaging (38 percent), and email (37 percent). Less common ways of connecting to equity staff included group meetings (28 percent), mailings (27 percent) and Facebook (5 percent).

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18 From Minnesota Employment Services Manual: 290278 9.12)
19 TANF Final Rule 45 CFR 261.2
Participants across all sites noted positive characteristics of their case managers. These characteristics included compassion, willingness to have a personal relationship, supportive, accessible and responsive, knowledgeable about community resources and good listening skills. A participant from Ramsey County noted that her relationship with her case manager is “more like a friendship, I almost forget that she is a professional person,” and this compelled the participant to drop in more frequently to update paperwork or “just say hi.”

**Family-focused services**

Project partners provided Equity participants with intensive, comprehensive, and family-focused case management services. Case managers worked closely with parents receiving MFIP benefits to provide services and referrals for all members of family. Through these projects, the children of parents receiving benefits were connected to culturally specific community groups, academic supports, and physical and mental health providers. In many, if not all of the Equity sites, family needs and activities were acknowledged and accounted for in participant employment plans.

Many sites also made ongoing efforts to engage both parents and children. Most sites made efforts to welcome children during facilitated trainings and individual appointments by providing onsite child care, or often by having child-appropriate toys in the counselors’ office or training room. “Family fun” nights afforded another opportunity for sites to engage parents alongside their children. These evening events were intended to promote community-building and generally included dinner, games and activities.

Participants noticed the difference in project focus. One participant described her provider as “family oriented,” and noted her appreciation of Community Action Duluth’s (CAD) child-focused play area. The importance of a full family focus was reiterated by another CAD participant: “involving my family is important, family comes first. On my plan (employment plan) I’m asked to study with kids: math and reading – 90 minutes a day.”

**Participant incentives and supports**

Participants engaged in the Equity project were eligible for traditional MFIP supports (transportation assistance, child care and work readiness supports), as well as additional Equity-specific financial incentives. Additional financial incentives were most commonly gift cards to reward participation and progress, or funding and supplies to facilitate participation in cultural activities. Many Equity providers also leveraged Equity funding to help provide stability for families in crisis. Stabilization assistance included using Equity dollars to assist with insurance payments, auto repair, assistance with paying utility bills, emergency food or household needs support, supplies for training or work, funding for conferences, and financial support for educational activities.
Over the course of the Equity project, most participants (62 percent) received support services\textsuperscript{20} averaging $580 per participant. Additional participant supports accounted for approximately 5 percent, or $270,000 of the total Equity budget.

**Project and project challenges**

**Project implementation**

The MFIP Equity projects got off to a slow start, and sites did not always feel they had clear guidance on how policies could be interpreted or money could be spent. These slow starts and ambiguities led to $1,199,120 of unspent Equity funds. While the beginning of the project was slow, project grantees appreciated the grantee gatherings and more regular communication, which marked the second half of the project. In interviews, project staff mentioned that they benefitted from working across projects to learn about different strategies and promising techniques.

**Knowledge of and access to resources**

During interviews, participants across sites noted that benefits and services received were dependent on who you asked, and when you asked. Participants believed this was because knowledge of resources was staff-specific. These participants lamented that they often heard about services and activities from other participants in the project, and found it difficult that there was not a specified place they could look to see a list of services and financial benefits of which they might avail. This individual discretion is seen in the distribution of support services: Only 62 percent of Equity participants were awarded support service dollars, and for those who received financial support, the amounts of total support per participant ranged from $10 to $5,500. Twenty percent of recipients received total support services of $1,000 or more. Participant challenges with understanding and accessing support services were also a key finding in the 2003 Wilder study.\textsuperscript{21}

Furthermore, 35 percent of surveyed participants who did not engage in Equity activities said they did not engage because they were unaware of the additional opportunities.

**Scheduling challenges and conflicts**

Another 35 percent of individuals who did not participate in Equity activities did not do so because of scheduling conflicts. Several participants mentioned that they were unable to finish creating regalia or other cultural activities they had started with support of the Equity project. At some sites, participants found it difficult to attend scheduled activities and classes that occurred during times when they were

\textsuperscript{20} These numbers are likely understated, as not all sites tracked all support services expenditures in Workforce One.

\textsuperscript{21} Owen, G., Shelton, E., Barker, M., Chase, R., Heineman, J. et al. (2003).
scheduled to be at work or school. At other sites, participants noted that activities were not regularly scheduled, and they had difficulty making time for activities when they received short notice.

**Singular approach**

While the majority of MFIP participants enrolled in the Equity project were satisfied with the project, not all participants chose to engage in cultural activities or offerings. Only 36 percent of surveyed participants engaged in a culturally specific training or activity, and 18 percent of participants chose not to participate in any Equity activities because they were not interested in what was offered. One staff member noted that a few participants found some of the spiritual undertones of some activities to be inconsistent with their personal beliefs; this could discourage their participation in more overtly spiritual activities. One participant noted that a training facilitator assumed that all participants had grown up in the same circumstance, “they geared the class for those brought-up in poverty-stricken situations – that didn’t click for me – I’m from a stable, two-parent family.”

Other participants wanted to see more of a work-readiness focus to the project, with one participant stating “Make this project more geared towards actually getting a job, not just bettering yourself!” Other individuals noted that cultural activities were often scheduled during the same times as onsite interviews and work-readiness training opportunities. For example, one participant stated, “I haven’t benefitted from going every week ... I see it as being pointless. It’s hard to go and visit the job fairs when I am stuck in the classroom.”

**Dual roles: Employer and case manager**

Several sites, Community Action Duluth, Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and Red Lake Nation, used portions of their Equity grants to provide participants with paid work experiences. Although these experiences received mainly positive reviews, employing participants at the same sites from which they were receiving financial benefits and case management services, brought about a few unique challenges. Some participants working in these supported jobs had difficulty determining where they could go to voice concerns. Several of these participants mentioned tensions associated with having their employer responsible for both their wages and TANF or MFIP benefits. Several staff employed in traditional roles at these sites expressed concerns about the lack of formal training required for participants in these support roles.

**Staff transition and turnover**

Some sites, particularly sites which had hired new counselors to work on the project, experienced higher rates of staff turnover. This turnover was challenging for several reasons. New staff members were challenged by learning the rules and requirements of MFIP in a short period of time. Participants noted that newer staff were sometimes unaware of system requirements. In a few cases, these misunderstandings had a negative impact on participants who believed that they were incorrectly informed about the ways in which income was counted and needed to be reported. Changes in Employment Services staff also meant that some participants in the Equity project needed to develop relationships with as many as three new employment counselors throughout the duration of this two-
and-a-half-year project. Positive counselor/participant relationships were a foundational component of all projects, and staff transitions make it more difficult for participants to connect with their workers. Some participants interviewed near the end of the project noted that their transitions out of the project were difficult and not well-structured.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. The first was timing of the project and the study. Because many sites focused on long-term healing and stability, it is expected that employment and exit outcomes might require more time. Future studies will revisit these indicators at one- and five-year periods. Another limitation was lack of a control group from which researchers could have drawn better comparisons. While researchers were able to use propensity score matching to approximate a control group when looking at employment outcomes, lack of data prevented them from using a similar process when looking at Employability Measure assessment results. Restrictions and limitations around data collection meant that researchers had access to three administrative data sources: MAXIS, WorkforceOne, and wage detail. As a result, they also did not have information on other potentially important predictors of success, such as past criminal convictions, that would have improved the matching process. It is also plausible that individuals who participated in the Equity project are different in ways other than can be measured by indicators in administrative data.

Last, not all workers received the same level of training, and because of this, data entry into the system was not consistent across sites. Because of this, researchers decided that surveys and interviews were a more reliable source of information of employee engagement than were numbers of case notes or logged activity hours.

**Recommendations**

The following changes are recommended by the research team, based on findings from the Equity project evaluation.

1. **Foster stability and opportunities for project success with longer-term funding.**

   New projects take time to start and fully implement. Many of the sites implementing Equity projects needed time to create new culturally specific programming, hire and train staff, and understand the differing rules and expectations of the Equity project. It is recommended that funding for any new projects be provided for a longer time period to allow for projects to become fully established and
show success – for complex projects such as this, five-year funding would better allow for project development, improvement and continuity of services.

2. Support inclusion of culturally specific activities and trainings.

A majority of participants felt that they benefitted from available cultural trainings and activities. Staff across sites noted that the department’s reinterpretation and guidance around counting cultural activities so they could be included in the core participation category of job search/job readiness activities\(^{23}\) changed the nature of the project, and allowed them to focus on meeting the needs of the entire participant. Promoting flexible and inclusive ways of working with individuals and writing employment plans helped to promote positive participant engagement, and when possible, should be incorporated into MFIP statewide.

As part of the project, many MFIP staff members participated in culturally specific education and anti-racism activities. Staff noted that these trainings were beneficial and helped them to better serve participants.

3. Continue to encourage two-generation-focused, more holistic programming for the entire family throughout implementation of all MFIP projects.

Although all partnering sites implemented Equity projects in very different ways, participants at each site responded very positively to the MFIP Equity projects. Many sites implemented programming that incorporated the entire family. To provide services for the entire family, staff at many sites offered family nights and children’s activities while parents engaged in Equity programming. Many counselors also counted time needed to assist children, whether with homework or medical appointments, as part of hourly requirements when crafting an employment plan. Two-generation approaches are currently being supported through demonstration projects being funded through the Division’s MFIP Innovation grants.

4. Standardize the process for receiving incentives and additional support services.

The dollar amount of participant incentives varied both within and across sites, and several participants noted that they either didn’t know what additional resources were available, or that what you got depended on “who you asked.” Creating standard guidelines about incentives’ issuance and publicizing these guidelines could help to create a more transparent process. Guidelines could also be created at the state level to ensure consistency throughout participating sites.

Furthermore, when thinking about participant incentives, the department should also be mindful about the importance and benefit of cash (as opposed to services or gift cards). At different sites, participants noted that they could receive generous benefits, but that these benefits were directed towards a single purpose like creating a jingle dress. Directing money towards specific services is difficult for participants who are living off of small MFIP grants and can barely make their rental

\(^{23}\) Section 9.12, MFIP Combined Manual
payments or afford necessary supplies for their children. Another participant noted that she had a “stack of gift cards” but couldn’t afford her rent that month. Providing cash incentives increases flexibility of use and could help participants better meet their most pressing needs. It is currently a challenge to provide cash incentives without it negatively impacting a participant’s grant amount.

5. **Support and study system-level interventions.**

This project, like many others, used a participant-centered approach to address racial disparities and inequities. However, racial inequity is a systemic issue that shows up regularly when analyzing statewide data in the areas of income, homeownership, educational attainment\(^{24}\), rates of incarceration, and health outcomes\(^{25}\). The elimination of racial disparities must be addressed at a systems level, both within the MFIP system, and statewide communities. Within the MFIP system, several equity projects reported success when providing their staff with anti-bias training. It is recommended that the state continue to support and study these initiatives. It is also recommended that future efforts partner with community-focused efforts to study and support work to change public perception and willingness to support a diverse workforce.

**Conclusion**

The MFIP Equity project provided an innovative model for embedding culturally specific and responsive services into a traditional model of employment service delivery. Findings from this study should be viewed in the context of other TANF-related studies on subsidized employment, education, and participants with multiple challenges to employment, and can be applied more generally to the provision of all MFIP programming. Much of the work can and should continue to be adopted, even without additional funding. A longer-term study is required to determine whether or not Equity interventions will have a longer-term impact on employment outcomes and MFIP use.

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\(^{24}\) American Community Survey 2015

References


Appendix A: Site-specific Equity Projects

Anoka County

Overview

Anoka County’s Equity project provided participants with person-centered, intensive case management services, customized employment plan development, culturally focused career counseling and training opportunities, and tailored employment supports and referrals. Anoka’s Racial Equity project focused on serving individuals with criminal records and limited educational backgrounds by providing them with individualized, relationship-based services. To provide these services, Anoka County partnered with Anoka-Ramsey Community and Anoka Technical College, Metro North Adult Basic Education, Anoka County Economic Assistance and Anoka County Community Action Project. The Minneapolis Urban League was introduced to these partnerships to provide culturally specific workforce development services and staff development training. Staff members from the Urban League were also asked to sit on the advisory team. As part of this grant, staff from Anoka County went through a variety of training sessions focused on racism and racial equity.

Recruitment

African American and American Indian participants who were receiving MFIP through Anoka County were offered the opportunity to enter into this project.

Trainings

Participants who were not working were required to attend a 12-week session of two-hour learning circle classes. Participants were also offered an opportunity to participate in the Parent Support Outreach program (PSOP). The PSOP program was offered to clients once a week for three weeks. Other opportunities for client participation included:

- Job club
- Partnership for Family Success (PFS)
- Accuvision Assessment
- Short-term skills/professional training or certification
- Adult Basic Education
- GED preparation or testing
Incentives and support services

The Anoka County site did not provide Equity participants with support services or incentives outside of what was offered through traditional MFIP programming. Participants who attended Learning Circle classes and were on time were put into a weekly drawing for a $5 gift card.

Successes as reported by staff

Anoka County provided consistent and intensive services to participants in the Equity group. Smaller caseloads and increased flexibility allowed staff to provide additional, and better coordinated client services. Project staff felt they had more time to listen to participants, and to build relationships and fully address participant needs. Better relationships between staff and participants allowed for more honest conversations. Counselors felt they could speak frankly with their clients about their challenges and opportunities. One Anoka County participant noted that this “tough love” was hard to hear, but helped her to make choices that would ultimately benefit both her and her family. Counselors and participants both noted the importance of having resources co-located. Anoka County is in many ways a "one-stop shop," offering participants assistance with food, employment services, and financial assistance. Counselors also worked to connect participants with onsite resource navigators who could help participants navigate the complexities of mental health, housing and other supportive service systems.

Another key success was provision of staff training. Anoka County's Employment Services staff benefitted greatly from four intensive and challenging staff trainings which focused on racism and implicit bias, including the history of racism, the personal journey of a person of color, interpersonal and Intrapersonal communication. These trainings helped staff to think differently about the way they understood race and privilege. They also helped county staff encourage difficult conversations, which may have been previously ignored.

Finally, staff noted the importance of a partnership with the Minnesota Urban League. Staff added that Anoka County has traditionally been somewhat homogenous, and working with the Urban League brought in staff with diversity of experience. Trainings facilitated by the Urban League provided MFIP participants with training experiences unique to this project. Instead of an employment focus, these trainings helped participants understand and process their lived experiences as a member of an under-represented population in society. Like many new partnerships, this union was logistically challenging, but beneficial overall.

Challenges as reported by staff

Anoka County had difficulty hiring and retaining African American staff to work in their project. Caucasian staff worked to learn about implicit bias and institutional racism, but were still challenged with the complexities of building trust and positive relationships with participants who may have previously struggled in the MFIP system. Staff turnover led to inconsistent relationships with project partners and Equity project participants. Transitions at the Urban League led to discontinuation of
Learning Circle trainings; participant recruitment was difficult when the project restarted several months later. Challenges with sharing curriculum meant that each change of staff caused a change in training offerings and structure. Likewise, turnover with Equity job counselors meant that participants were required to establish relationships with several workers over the course of this 30-month project.
Minnesota Chippewa Tribe

Overview

Minnesota Chippewa Tribe’s (MCT) Equity Fellowship Project focused on serving American Indian families enrolled with MCT, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and White Earth Nation. MCT’s primary office is in Cass Lake, but also employs staff in Duluth and surrounding area. The Equity project provided MFIP participants with intensive case management services and required all project participants attend courses about historical trauma. Optional programming included a GED (General Equivalency Diploma) completion track and career-related internships. Clients availing of these opportunities received supportive services (such as transportation and child care assistance), as well as a wage subsidy. MCT partners included: Cass County Health, Human and Veterans Services, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Employment Services project, Leech Lake Tribal College, White Earth Human Services Division, White Earth Tribal College and Northwest Indian Opportunities Industrialization Center.

Staffing configuration and support

The Equity Fellowship Project staff at Minnesota Chippewa Tribe consisted of eight individuals:

- Project director
- Employment Services project manager
- Employment Services supervisor
- Employment Services counselors (3)
- Cultural consultant (2)

Staff were hired to represent the communities in which they were working; staff felt that this was a key component of the project’s service delivery model. Throughout the project, several interns were hired from the MFIP Equity project to work as case aides.

Recruitment

MCT recruited participants from its Employment Services caseload and worked with St. Louis County to generate additional interest and referrals. Staff noted that other referrals were generated by word of mouth from satisfied participants.

Activities

Equity Fellowship Project staff were required to attend a six-week series of courses comprised of activities focused on helping individuals connect to their lost culture. These trainings and activities included:

- Historical trauma classes
• Creating beadwork (medallion, jingle dress, traditional outfit)
• Crafting baby quilts and moccasins
• Making dreamcatchers

Participants in the project could engage in Adult Basic Education classes, General Equivalency Degree preparation or testing assistance, and general job skills and work readiness training.

**Incentives and support services**

Equity Fellowship Project staff offered many incentives to class participants. For each class attended, they received a $40 gas card, a household item (laundry soap or hygiene items), and a $20 gift card. Upon completion of all courses, participants received $500. Staff were available to help transport participants to and from classes, and although daycare could be authorized for class attendance, MCT staff also created an area for children to attend classes alongside their parents when alternative care arrangements were not available.

**Successes from a staff perspective**

Staff felt that it was important to hire members of the community to help American Indian families served by MCT, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and White Earth Nation. They noted the importance of relationship-building, reiterating the importance of a common, shared background. Staff noted the great benefit of teaching history and cultural activities to families who may have not otherwise learned it. MCT’s project director noted that learning about historical trauma helps American Indian families "understand why they feel the way they do, do the things they do, and understand why things are as they are in their lives". Connecting people with their proud history provides a pathway to healing and positive self-efficacy.

Staff noted that participants who started attending classes were likely to return and complete the training project. Providing participants with incentives for class attendance was important because it allowed participants to make space in their lives for these significant teachings. Participants reported that they appreciated learning cultural activities and shared the information and skills they learned with their children.

Flexibility with programming and staff was another emergent theme. Staff noted the importance of allowing participants to take time to address their most pressing needs. They found it helpful that participation in cultural activities could be counted towards work participation hours, but wished that they could be granted additional flexibility to remove the performance-based requirements of the state and federal government. Staff also appreciated the availability of additional support service funding for their clients, and found it was helpful that they could assist onsite with emergent needs like food, transportation, and clothing assistance.
Challenges from a staff perspective

Staff and project leadership were initially challenged with learning the administrative and programmatic requirements of MFIP. They were also challenged by trying to address pervasive local issues, including high unemployment rates, the lack of family supporting jobs, and high rates of substance abuse. Even for participants engaged in activities, individuals were still challenged by inadequate transportation or child care arrangements. While participants enjoyed the classes and training opportunities, staff were often challenged to get participants to attend the first session.

Staff noted that they would like to see cultural activities and trainings expand in the future. They would also like to have formal permission from the department to create a more flexible and culturally responsive MFIP project. Finally, the large territory covered by the project challenged staff who would sometimes need to drive great distances to meet locally with participants. They suggested that it might be helpful to add staff and additional sites.
NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center, Incorporated (NorthPoint)

Overview

NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center provided targeted employment and support services to Hennepin County-based African American families receiving MFIP assistance. Services provided were under the framework of culturally responsive empowerment coaching, a model that focused on relationship-building and customized services. Empowerment coaches were asked to work individually with clients to create a "personal growth plan," on a personal assessment, career assessment and holistic evaluation. Through use of these evaluations, the strengths of each participant, along with the barriers which they faced, were identified in five domains: Employment, housing, education, wellness and relationships. Individual personal growth plans were reviewed and participants were directed towards one of four development tracks: Credentialed training, General Equivalency Diploma (GED) completion, career/employment ready, and employability/life skills improvement. Furthermore, NorthPoint provided work-ready participants with personal job-matching through an onsite employment matchmaker.

To facilitate this culturally responsive and strength-based process, empowerment coaches worked more intensively with a maximum caseload of 35 participants and their families. Smaller caseloads allowed empowerment coaches to build greater rapport with participants through home visits and a family-focused approach. The OnPoint project focused on engaging participants through outreach and positive engagement; when possible, empowerment coaches avoided using grant sanctioning as a negative motivator. Unlike traditional MFIP programming, OnPoint clients were offered “lifelong membership support” and could receive counseling and some financial support throughout the duration of the project, whether or not they were still receiving MFIP benefits.

Staffing configuration and support

OnPoint staff consisted of a project manager, three empowerment coaches, and one employment matchmaker. OnPoint staff could attend more than 17 trainings, some of which focused on adverse child experiences, historical trauma and generational poverty. Many OnPoint staff were new to working directly with MFIP, and were tasked with both learning MFIP and creating a new project. Throughout this two-year project, these five roles were filled by eight different individuals.

Recruitment

Participants were referred to the OnPoint project through Hennepin County and other employment services vendors. OnPoint staff also promoted the project in the North Minneapolis community through community events; radio advertisements; targeted flyers; and directed partnerships through the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) project; and Summit OIC, a local trade school.

Activities

OnPoint provided clients with a four-week empowerment class, comprised of four key sections:

- Psycho/social/physical health
- Relationships/parenting
- Financial awareness
- Vision and resource-building

OnPoint also referred participants to their many onsite projects which included medical, dental, health and wellness, parenting, housing, food support, and other family and community support projects.

**Incentives and support services**

Participants attending classes were offered a meal, either lunch or dinner, and onsite child care. To assist with transportation, participants got a bus or gas card, and in some instances, a ride to class. Individuals received a $25 gift card once they attended two classes, and were eligible for a total of $50 in Target gift cards upon completion of the series.

**Successes from a staff perspective**

OnPoint staff felt it important that they were able to provide intensive and more holistic services to participants. While guided by requirements of the MFIP project, staff attempted to deliver services in a way that “fit the service to the person and not the person to the service” (Lueben, S., October 2016). Through this project, staff were able to deliver services in ways that seemed most appropriate, noting that meeting participants "where they are at" can allow for a slow, but steady removal of barriers that impede client success. Staff showed their focus on positive engagement by trying many times, and in many ways, to connect with hard to reach participants. Staff noted that participants found services offered through the OnPoint project to be markedly different from what was offered at the county; participants liked that their project was person and not compliance based. A full-family focus was also important in terms of helping staff to understand and address all of the challenges that could limit a participant’s receptiveness to new opportunities. Staff were also able to provide continued services to clients no longer receiving MFIP assistance. Staff mentioned that this was an important component of the project, and said that the process of transitioning off of assistance can be difficult for MFIP clients, as they often lack individual support and are not always aware of how their benefits may be affected by employment or other income.

Because this project was created to serve African American participants, staff believed it was important that services were directed and provided by African American management and staff. In addition to providing culturally specific services, project managers felt it was important to hire staff who were "culture minded” and could best understand and engage participants. In addition to being knowledgeable and respectful of African American culture, staff who were "culture minded" were defined by their awareness of how history and family experiences influence a participant's ability to survive and thrive.

**Challenges from a staff perspective**

Although staff believed that this project was successful in engaging participants and moving them out of poverty, there were several challenges and caveats. First, the duration of the project was seen by staff
as too short to allow for full implementation and adequate service time for enrolled participants. Because of this, staff felt that it would be premature to make conclusions about the efficacy of this new model. Second, staff noted the importance of creating an equity-focused project that looked both internally and externally: in addition to supporting clients on an individual level, staff felt that it would be important to advocate for political and system changes in arenas which negatively impact the African American community. Staff noted that policy and advocacy work was particularly important in the areas of criminal justice, child protection, and affordable, accessible housing.

Staff were challenged by the technical and reporting requirements of the job. Many staff were new to the rules and requirements of MFIP and could have benefited from additional and timelier training. Staff also noted that there was a disconnect between the work that was necessary and what was reported. Although meeting the federal participation rate was not a focus of these Equity projects, they were still held accountable to this metric by county administrators. Staff noted that it would benefit them to have more frequent interaction with staff at the department and other Equity sites. Ongoing communication could have fostered a shared community and ongoing learning.
Ramsey County’s Families Achieving Success Today (FAST 2)

Overview

Ramsey County’s FAST2 project focused on providing “full-family” services to African American and American Indian parents receiving MFIP. FAST2 was the only Equity site to work exclusively with participants who had received more than 60 months of MFIP benefits and were working with Workforce Solution’s Extension Services. Case management services used the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment with FAST2’s Equity participants. Participants completed “Bridges of Strength” and “Goal action” plans to set goals, and career specialists used motivational interviewing practices to give participants more flexibility in directing their future and outcomes.

Staff reported that the Equity grant has allowed them to become more involved in the African American and American Indian communities, and also allowed the site to co-locate staff from different service areas who otherwise would be spread across multiple locations. This meant that participants could receive a holistic range of services in a single visit. In addition to making sure that staff were culturally competent, the FAST2 project employed community consultants to assist with case consultation, staff training and mentoring, and community relationship-building. They partnered with the American Indian Family Center (AIFC), YWCA YW Works, and the Network for the Development of Children of African Descend (NdCAD) for mentorship, consultancy, community relationship-building, and workshops rooted in cultural beliefs and identity.

Recruitment

This site was unique in its random selection of African American or American Indian extended services participants to enroll in the Equity project. Participants could opt-out, if desired.

Staff configuration

The site employs:

- Employment counselors (3), who are the first point of contact
- Career specialists (2)
- Onsite health navigator
- Trained psychologist
- IPS model site manager
- Two planners and one evaluator to support work
- Children’s mental health social worker
- Cultural consultants (2), who attended regular meetings to help provide a cultural lens and perspective on cases and situations related to African American and American Indian populations.

Trainings

FAST2 staff received training on the history and historical trauma of the African American and American Indian communities, as well as on how systemic racism continues to affect these communities, and the
participants staff serve. Executive skills development training also taught staff about the environments some FAST2 families have experienced and how this affects family dynamics. All staff are skilled in coaching and motivational interview techniques and applied them to ongoing case management. A detailed IPS training was also provided to ensure that the project adheres to the fidelity of the IPS model. Ramsey County also gave FAST2 staff information about community resources for participants to connect with. Counselors are expected to actively support participants’ connection to resources.

Activities

FAST2 offered traditional American Indian beading classes and a variety of support and service classes; staff said that calling these “groups” instead of “workshops” improved attendance and reduced stigma among participants. These groups provided personality and career self-assessments, and taught financial and family skills, among other topics.

Staff also referred participants to activities and events co-hosted by the American Indian Families Center (AIFC), YWCA of St. Paul and the Network for the Development of Children of African Descent (NdCAD). For example, NdCAD offered reading and literacy projects for African American participants and their children, and AIFC provided cultural activities and information for American Indian participants.

Periodically held family nights were the best attended of FAST2 activities, and allowed participants and their families to meet each other and staff members’ families. These events included a variety of food, games, music, and dancing. Other activities and offerings for participants and their families included:

- Family fun nights
- Parent Power/Sankofa sessions
- Y Works workshops
- Short-term professional skills training/certificate
- GED preparation and assistance
- Individual assistance from a placement specialist/career navigation services
- Health navigator services

Incentives and support services

Gas and gift cards, along with food and drink, were provided to participants and their families who attended classes. FAST2 also provided regalia and craft/jewelry making materials to participants engaged in those activities.

Successes as reported by staff

The co-location of staff from both employment, children’s mental health and adult physical and mental health services allowed staff to co-enroll and co-integrate services and work together with families to improve continuity of care, and allow participants and their children to have needs addressed in a single
Having a more family and holistic focus for participants has been successful in addressing underlying issues that contribute to challenges to employment, such as mental and chemical health issues. The smaller caseloads also allowed for staff to meet participants at home or outside the office, as needed, and to give more goal-driven and individualized case management services.

Staff felt that they greatly benefitted from having community consultants on board. These consultants provided staff with cultural context and provided guidance on how to move people forward in a culturally sensitive way. Partnerships with AIFC, YWCA of St Paul and NdCAD were equally well-received; staff felt that participants benefitted from their close connection with these organizations.

**Challenges from a staff perspective**

According to staff, it was challenging at first to get participants enrolled and motivated to attend support services and activities. This population presents the challenge of often needing more ongoing engagement from staff. As a result, participation in weekly groups has been sparse. Some FSS participants have been on public assistance for a long time, which makes inter-generational poverty a challenge. Staff also said that they were challenged in some cases to dispel false information about Like other sites, Ramsey County reported that the department was slow in administering grants and providing implementation guidance. This led to a delay in project implementation.
Red Lake Nation

Overview

Red Lake Nation’s Ganawenindiwag (taking care of each other) project served American Indian families receiving MFIP assistance by providing them with a culturally based and trauma-informed self-sufficiency project. Through the project, participants received intensive case management services, along with cultural education to strengthen the protective factors of families in the project. Cultural education classes included gardening, food gathering, cooking and traditional ceremonies, as well as crafting traditional items such as drums, cradle boards and canoes. As part of a mixed strategy job counseling approach, enrolled participants were encouraged to make progress towards either an employment or educational goal. To support participants interested in the employment track, Red Lake Nation used a portion of its Equity funding to provide participants with supportive and paid work opportunities. Participants engaged in these placements worked in Red Lake Nation at the hospital, community center, or social services building. Several individuals who were successful in their placements were eventually hired to perform full time jobs within the Equity project. Participants interested in targeted trainings were provided with onsite opportunities to become certified welders or nursing assistants.

Staffing configuration and support

Red Lake Nation prioritized use of Equity funds to both serve and employ individuals. Case managers and others selected to staff this project were selected based on their connections to Red Lake Nation and on their ability to be positive community leaders. Red Lake Nation’s Ganawenindiwag project staff consisted of a project director, two case managers, a parent educator, a cultural navigator, and an Ojibwe language instructor. Staff transition led to these six roles being filled by nine individuals over the course of the project.

Recruitment

Red Lake tribal members receiving MFIP assistance were automatically enrolled in the Ganawenindiwag project.

Incentives and support services

Participants attending classes through the Ganawenindiwag project were provided with child care and transportation assistance, and a healthy and culturally informed meal at their onsite cafeteria. Project supplies were provided at cultural training sessions so that participants could create and eventually take home a finished product. During this project this has included cultural regalia, gardening supplies, lacrosse sticks, and cradle boards. Participants were also provided with financial incentives for course completion. They receive $150 for completing six “Parents as Teachers” classes, $150 for working with career development services, and an additional $300 for passing their GED tests. When transportation was not available, staff gave participants rides or provided organization-sponsored van rides to work and school.
**Successes from a staff perspective**

The Ganawenindiwag project was created with the idea that healthy families want to work, and that families can become healthy by re-connecting with their cultural pasts. Staff reported that the project helped participants to re-establish a connection with their past and family history. Parenting classes and family activities, including ricing and lacrosse, taught families a way of positively engaging with each other and their history. A reintroduction to traditional cooking was meant to help re-connect participants to a healthier way of eating. Staff were optimistic that the activities offered were benefitting project recipients.

Staff worked hard to positively engage participants – they marketed activities to the entire community to ensure that offerings were accessible by providing transportation, child care and food. While the Ganawenindiwag project worked hard to hold participants accountable, the executive director tasked himself with personally reviewing all cases that were slated for case closure to make sure that all possible efforts by staff to prevent this had occurred. The Ganawenindiwag project was also willing to work with individuals “where they are at”. All participants hired into supported work experiences were required to take a urine analysis test to help project management determine whether or not chemical dependency was a challenge for an individual applying to work in the project. The progressive approach employed by this project allowed individuals to follow up with a Rule 25 assessment\(^{26}\), and to concurrently work while seeking treatment.

Another unique aspect of this project was the project’s intensive focus on internal training opportunities coupled with local job development. Project staff worked to train participants in high demand and well-paying skills, such as welding. A class was offered onsite for these individuals, and project staff worked to ensure that participants could be placed in stable job opportunities. When one of the placement sites was found to be difficult to access, Red Lake Nation staff took participants to and from work every day in a site-sponsored van. Furthermore, staff were focused on connecting skills learned through cultural activities to opportunities for entrepreneurship. Individuals learning to hand-craft lacrosse sticks were encouraged to think about ways in which they could market and sell their product.

**Challenges from a staff perspective**

Red Lake Nation, like all other project partners, pointed out the difficulty of implementing and conducting a new project in a two-year time period. Although site staff made many attempts at participant outreach, it was difficult for staff to get participants engaged and attending classes. Other challenges faced by staff were systemic issues, including a lack of child care, lack of local family-wage-supporting jobs, and individuals with mental health and chemical dependency challenges. Staff noted that the wide variety of cultural activities were both a positive and a challenge – it could be a challenge to recruit and organize all of the sessions, but ultimately, families who attended were able to learn a wide variety of important and meaningful skills.

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\(^{26}\) A Rule 25 assessment is chemical use assessment conducted by a Rule 25 assessor. The assessment is a prerequisite for a participant to receive public funds for chemical dependency treatment.
Cultural activities

- Anishinaabeg Zhooniya
- Birch harvesting
- Canning
- Canoe making
- Cradle board making
- Dewe'igaak (drum stick creation)
- Drum group
- Farmers bread
- Food gathering (blueberry, crab apple, etc.)
- Ganawenindiwag orientation
- Hazelwood
- Healing ceremony
- Jelly making
- Jingle dress creation
- Keep tobacco sacred training
- Knowledge keepers
- Manidoominensikaan (beading)
- Moccasin games
- Niibi monodah (water ceremony)
- Ojibwe language classes
- Ojibwemowin (gardening)
- Pancake making
- Pickling
- Quilting
- Straw bale gardening
- Sugar bush harvesting
- Waabooz snaring/beading
- Waatnabiin (apple sauce, spruce roots)

Traditional employment services activities

- GED tutoring
- Employment readiness classes (computer competency, communication, overcoming barriers and customer service)
- Building financial skills
- Driver’s license prep
- Behind the wheel training
- Credit repair

Health-related or family-focused trainings

- Keep tobacco sacred training
- Neo-natal opioid education
- Back to school routines
- Parents as teachers
- Family camp
- Holistic sexuality training
- Drug and gang summit
Overview

The Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA), located in Virginia, Minnesota, used its Equity grant to build upon the site’s existing disparities programming by hiring culturally specific staff and expanding cultural activities and events. To best serve project participants, AEOA staff were placed in both Virginia and Hibbing, Minnesota. As part of this project, clients were offered customized employment plans, intensive case management services with a culturally competent employment counselor, and a “mixed-approach” strategy that looked at both employment and educational needs. During this project, staff at AEOA focused on engaging both participants and the wider community in different ways. A part of the broader strategy included community-building and cultural awareness training. AEOA’s equity project expanded the site’s reach in the community and among local employers.

Staff configuration and support

AEOA initially staffed its Equity project with a full-time employment counselor, a business liaison and a participant advocate. Towards the end of this project, staff turnover led to a reduced staffing configuration consisting of a full-time counselor and a business liaison who spent 20 percent of his time on client advocacy. The business liaison’s primary responsibilities remained interacting with employers, doing community outreach, and planning cultural community events. To supplement the work of this core team, AEOA employed an intern and a cultural facilitator who taught regalia making.

Recruitment

AEOA had an agreement with St. Louis County so that the county agency refers area American Indian and African American MFIP participants to AEOA’s Equity project. AEOA does not work with American Indian participants who are enrolled members with the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe.

Incentives and support services

Participant incentives and support services were used to encourage participant engagement and attendance in a variety of activities and trainings. While some activities early in the project offered no incentives outside of counted activity hours, most cultural and other activities offered some combination of gas and/or grocery gift cards. These gift cards ranged from a $25 gas or grocery gift card to a $50 Target and $25 gift card to consistent attenders of cultural events and resume writing workshops. Participants attending culturally specific classes were provided with supplies so they could create and take home their final projects. In addition to providing support services and incentives, the Equity project also allowed AEOA to have some additional flexibility in helping families meet their basic needs. Counselors were able to help with one-time expenses to help families meet their housing, educational and other needs.
Activities

AEOA offered the New Leaf project for ex-offenders and Adult Basic Education (ABE). Their partnership with ABE allowed participants the opportunity to enroll in short-term, goal-directed education and/or vocational training, work experience or life-skills training to increase their employment prospects.

AEOA offered cultural activities and events directed at both American Indian and African American participants. For American Indian participants, AEOA offered activities related to natural medical plants and wild foods, and moccasin making and regalia classes. In addition to offering onsite classes, interested participants could attend out-of-town conferences. For African American participants, AEOA hosted three community events with a paid speaker to present African storytelling traditions. AEOA staff also helped organize a racial justice march in response to police shootings of African Americans and other related discriminations.

All participants had access to these events, and AEOA also offered historical trauma courses, and other events related to local and organic farming that appealed to both African American and American Indian participants.

Project Successes

Staff found that additional staffing and lower caseloads allowed them to meet participants outside of the office if they were unable to come in person. Staff suggested this improved relationships and trust with participants, and also improved compliance with MFIP requirements. The project also began a cultural dialogue in the community, which traditionally has not had many opportunities to share cultural experiences and perspectives. According to staff, having a person of color and someone from their culture helping participants enter the world of MFIP helped with that transition and improved participant engagement.

Participants noticed the increased flexibility and assistance with basic needs items like food, transportation assistance and diapers. Participants who were able to engage in cultural activities enjoyed them and spoke positively about them. Activities that received participant accolades included gardening, the “rutabaga project” involving fresh foods, regalia making and African story-telling and drumming.

Challenges

Transportation in the rural area is a systemic issue for participants, as is unemployment as a result of mining closures, homelessness and lack of available shelters, and chemical dependency. Child care availability is also an obstacle in the area, especially for participants who work non-traditional shifts. In small communities such as those AEOA serves, often everyone in the community knows one-another’s history, so it can be particularly hard for participants with criminal backgrounds to find employment in the area.

According to site staff, these complex and interacting challenges made it at times difficult to balance the tension of the project’s employment and job search requirements with addressing other barriers in participants’ lives. As a result, the project’s education services were not used to their full capacity.

Participants echoed staff members’ concerns about daycare and transportation. Many participants noted in interviews and surveys that they would have liked to participate in activities, but they were unable to do so because of scheduling, or lack of daycare and transportation.
Community Action Duluth’s Bridge to Employment Project

Overview

Community Action Duluth’s (CAD) Equity project was designed to provide African American and American Indian participants with multi-dimensional assistance to address cultural needs, as well as a wide-range of common participant challenges, including transportation, housing and child care needs. Staff received ongoing racial awareness training, and CAD held new cultural events and activities for participants as part of its Equity project. Ongoing financial and social support were identified by CAD staff as key in getting participants stabilized and self-sufficient. CAD used a portion of its Equity funding to give current and former participants internship and job opportunities.

Staff configuration and support

Community Action Duluth Equity project was staffed by four employment counselors who guided participants through employment plans and provided case management. Two family advocates worked to help participants access child care, housing and other community resources. A transportation advocate coordinates and connects participants to transportation resources and the employment specialist developed partnerships within the local workforce and connected participants to new opportunities. A director of contracts, grants, and partnerships helped secure funding and agency partners while the project manager oversaw the project with a “servant leadership” philosophy.

Recruitment

Prior to its start with the Equity project, CAD had a contract with St. Louis County to provide services in a smaller-scale project targeting Equity. St. Louis County referred African American and American Indian MFIP participants in the Duluth area to CAD.

Incentives

Participants received gift cards for attending classes. In addition, they received $25 in incentives for turning in job logs for four straight weeks. For attending farmer’s market and local food-related events, participants received $5 ‘tokens.’ For regalia making classes, CAD supplied fabric and craft materials, as well as food for participants and their children during the activity.

Staff also cited CAD’s free tax assistance and car ownership assistance projects as incentives to get participants onsite and engaged in Equity activities. CAD provided onsite childcare and meals for participants during trainings and other cultural activities.

Community Action Duluth was unique in the way it engaged participants to engage in community events as well as agency-wide planning efforts. In addition to connecting with participants through a Facebook page and newsletter, CAD hosts a quarterly “Solutions to Poverty” forum where project graduates presented their ideas.
on how to reduce barriers to getting out of poverty. Participants could also serve on an advisory counselor which provides ideas and direct feedback to agency leadership.

**Activities**

CAD facilitated cultural activities and events for both African American and American Indian participants. One event, ‘African American Culture of Hair’, was unique in that it incorporated entrepreneurial advice and skills with community. Staff reported that this event was greatly appreciated by bi-racial families and families who have recently adopted African American children.

CAD’s Family Freedom School is an ongoing set of classes aimed at the multi-generational African American community. The peer-led classes helped re-appropriate African American cultural identity and taught skills such as financial literacy and budgeting.

Cultural events for American Indian participants included weekly jewelry and regalia making sessions. With the reinterpreted job search readiness assistance policy, staff were able to count independent cultural activities, such as wild rice harvesting, which they believed taught entrepreneurial skills, as ‘job search’ to meet project requirements.

In Circles of Security classes, CAD staff discussed adverse childhood experiences (ACES) and trauma with participants from both an African American and American Indian cultural lens.

**Trainings and activities**

Racial awareness training helped staff become aware of historical trauma in African American and American Indian participants, and helped staff devise strategies to authentically engage participants. CAD staff also received training on how to avoid judging others as well as motivational interviewing.

For participants, CAD offers several training opportunities. Classes included a trauma-informed parenting class for families.

**Successes as reported by staff**

CAD intentionally gave staff smaller caseloads, which staff said were essential to opening time and flexibility to meet clients “where they are at,” both in location and in life. This meant providing high quality case management services and working to address underlying barriers to employment. Staff praised their weekly ‘drop in’ hours as a way to help participants meet project requirements while working around their busy schedules. Interviewed staff said that it made a “huge difference” in engaging some clients by having African American and American Indian staff who understood participants’ culture. Staff felt that their team approach to providing services worked well. The family advocate and employment specialist both played important roles in helping families address different needs.

CAD works diligently at being an equitable and culturally responsive agency. To provide additional oversight to the agency, it has a community advisory board which provides agency-wide oversight. Participants are also included in the project and have a voice in designing and orchestrating family nights.
Challenges from a staff perspective

Staff cited homelessness and lack of available and affordable child care as the two most challenging issues facing CAD’s participants in the Duluth area. In addition to a general lack of affordable housing, participants have difficulty finding housing due to evictions or having a criminal record. Getting consistent participation in activities and classes also challenged staff.

As with other Equity sites, CAD staff noted that it was a challenge to implement the Equity project quickly, which created delays and challenges in recruiting participants at the beginning of the project. These challenges included initial uncertainty by sites over what incentives or activities were allowed by the department for the Equity Project.
## Appendix B: Table of sites and project expenditures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Expended</th>
<th>% Expended</th>
<th>Proposed # of Participants</th>
<th># of Participants Served(^\text{27})</th>
<th>$ Expended per Participant Served</th>
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\(^\text{27}\) One participant was served by two sites during the course of the project, bringing the total number of people served to 754.
### Appendix C: Characteristics of survey respondents

**Characteristics of survey respondents**  
N= 134

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<th>Project identifiers</th>
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<td>—17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Location of project | Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency | —8 |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Anoka County | —14 |
| Community Action Duluth | —19 |
| Ramsey County | — 30 |
| Minnesota Chippewa Tribe | —21 |
| NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center, Inc. | —25 |
| Red Lake Nation | —17 |

| Racial characteristics | African American | —70, 52.2% |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| American Indian | —43, 32.1% |
| Multiracial | —16, 11.9% |
| Other | —5, 3.7% |

| Gender | Female | — 89% |
|        | Male | — 10% |
|        | Other | — 1% |

| Length of enrollment | 0-6 months | — 34% |
|----------------------|------------|
| 7-12 months | — 40% |
| 13+ months | —26% |
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