

What is the community challenge?

Low-income youth face obstacles in achieving college and career success. Postsecondary education and meaningful early employment experiences are strong predictors of future success and earning potential, and youth from low-income households—especially those who would be first in their family to attend college—often do not have access to these educational and employment opportunities.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Genesys Works

Subgrantee: Genesys Works Bay Area

Intermediary: GreenLight Fund

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Low-income, first generation high school students

Community Served: San Francisco Bay Area, CA

What is the promising solution?

The Genesys Works program model aims to address obstacles to achieving college and career success faced by low-income youth through a combination of professional skills training, paid internship opportunities, and long-term college and career support for high school students as they transition into and through college. The program provides high school students with in-depth summer training and year-long professional internships and includes more than 1,200 hours of programming over 14 months.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

As a subgrantee of GreenLight Fund, Genesys Works engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate its program. The evaluation of Genesys Works by Harder+Company began in 2013 and finished analysis and reporting in 2018. Using a quasi-experimental between-groups design with groups formed by propensity score matching, the evaluators examined whether participants had higher high school graduation rates, college enrollment rates, and college persistence rates than matched students. The impact study used two comparison groups- one comprised of students in the same year as Genesys Works participants but from similar schools, and a second comprised of students in the same schools who were seniors the year before Genesys Works programming started in their schools.

What did the evaluation find?

In addition to analyses of impact on high school and college outcomes, the evaluators examined program implementation and whether changes occurred among participants in terms of skill development, college and career aspirations, and preparation and resources to achieve goals.

- Participants reported high levels of satisfaction with all program components.
- Participating students reported improvements in school and classroom confidence, comfort in professional settings, and optimism about career options. They also knew more about postsecondary options and opportunities.
- Genesys Works had a positive impact on high school graduation rates versus both comparison groups (99% versus 84% and 89% respectively), and a positive impact on college enrollment and persistence rates in comparison to one group (75% versus 49% for enrollment; 72% versus 56% for persistence).

Notes on the evaluation

The study identified two relevant comparison groups and attempted to create matched groups from de-identified administrative data from all high school students in the same districts. However, unobserved characteristics might have biased estimates of program impacts. The data available for propensity score matching did not include variables likely to be related to motivation to participate in the program. Given the significant time commitment that Genesys Works requires, the treatment group was likely to be more motivated than the comparison groups to attend college and pursue a professional career. Additionally, exploratory analyses revealed that the program seems to be achieving stronger impacts for young men than it is for young women.

How Genesys Works using the evaluation findings to improve?

The report notes that the program may consider additional research to strengthen and add to the findings of this evaluation. For example, a study with a similar quasi-experimental design could be conducted with a larger sample size and longer follow-up period. Accessing employment records for students once they graduate from college would provide evidence about whether the program is achieving long-term impacts on entry into professional jobs and higher earnings. The program may also consider a randomized control trial (RCT) if the demand for the program exceeds the number of available student slots. The report notes periodic surveys could be conducted with a control group of "wait list" students, which would provide a more accurate measure of impact on short-term outcomes as well as long-term success.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design: Quasi-experimental between-groups design with groups formed by propensity score matching

Study Population: High school students

Independent Evaluator:
Harder+Company Community Research

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*:
Moderate

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

Study Locations: Oakland and San Francisco, CA



The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.