REDF : Social Enterprise

Corporation for
NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE ★★★

What is the community challenge?

Across the U.S. over half of all unemployed adults with a disability report their disability being a barrier to employment. The individuals served by organizations REDF funds face similar barriers as well as lack of stable housing (own or rent their home for the entirety of a year), a conviction and jail sentence on their record, or no high school diploma. As a result, 80 percent of their income on average comes from government benefits and support from others.

What is REDF's promising solution?

REDF has been funding non-profit organizations running social enterprises since 1997. As part of its five-year strategy to transform how people with many employment barriers transition into the workforce, REDF partnered with the Social Innovation Fund to support and evaluate this strategy. Social enterprises are mission-driven businesses focused on hiring and assisting people who face barriers to work.

Program At-a-Glance

Intervention: Social Enterprise

Grantee: REDF

Subgrantees: 10 non-profit organizations running social enterprises

Focus Area: Economic Opportunity

Focus Population: Adults with barriers to employment

Communities Served: California (San Francisco Bay Area; Los Angeles)

What did the evaluation of REDF's social enterprise portfolio find?

As a grantee of the Social Innovation Fund, REDF engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate its portfolio of social enterprises. Life and work-related outcomes were tracked for 282 workers at seven social enterprises over the course of the study, which found:

- Social enterprise workers moved toward economic self-sufficiency and life stability
  - **employment up from 18 to 51%**
  - **in stable housing up from 15 to 53%**
  - **dependence on government support down from 71 to 24%**

- **Social enterprises produced $2.23 in social benefits for every $1 they spent** (by reducing dependence on government support and increasing tax revenue)

Results from the Impact Evaluation generally support the tracked outcomes listed above, although the statistical significance of these observations is mixed. This is perhaps due to unobserved characteristics of the sample that could not be controlled for or small sample sizes, a common difficulty when working with people experiencing instabilities such as histories of homelessness, unstable housing, and incarceration.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit nationalservice.gov/research.

Evaluation design, timeline and study locations

Evaluation of these social enterprises by Mathematica Policy Research began in 2010 and finished reporting in 2014. The evaluation included both assessing reported outcomes at multiple grantee sites as well as more closely observing the impact on employees of one of the social enterprises in REDF's portfolio.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Level of Evidence before* Evaluation: Preliminary+/Moderate

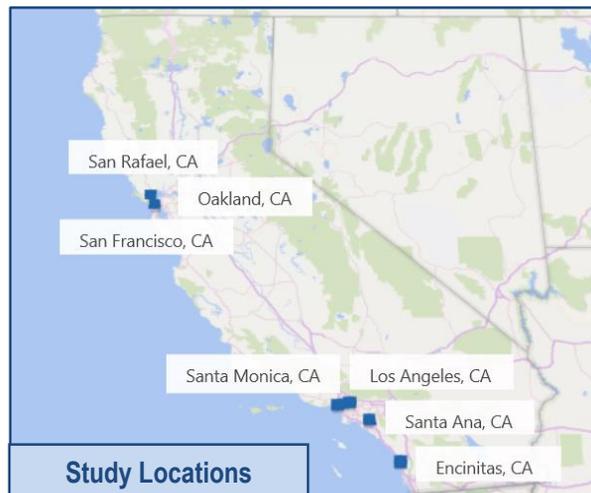Level of Evidence** after Evaluation: Moderate

Evaluation Designs: Implementation Evaluation; Outcomes Analysis; Impact Evaluation (Quasi-Experimental Design); Cost-Benefit Analysis

Study Population: Workers at seven social enterprises (Eight social enterprises in Implementation Evaluation; one in Impact Evaluation)

Evaluator: Mathematica Policy Research

* SIF-supported interventions undergo a level of evidence assessment at the point of program entry and are expected to advance that base of evidence through rigorous evaluation during the grant period.

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

San Rafael, CA
Oakland, CA
San Francisco, CA
Santa Monica, CA
Los Angeles, CA
Santa Ana, CA
Encinitas, CA

Study Locations

How is REDF using the evaluation findings to improve?

REDF supports a data-driven, continuous improvement and learning approach that involves REDF staff, consultants, and senior leadership of subgrantee organizations. Findings from the Final Report have been shared, reviewed and discussed, and together, social enterprise stakeholders are identifying the specific relevance and application of the findings, considering overarching lessons, and prioritizing areas of focus for the future.

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.

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 United States. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.