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NC WORKS Commission Local Innovation Committee

FINAL REPORT

Workforce Development Board: Building
Hope

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Executive Summary

The Building Hope program, a partnership between the Capital Area Workforce Development Board and Hope Renovations, was funded by the NCWorks Commission through the Local Innovation initiative to expand opportunities for women and gender minorities in the construction trades.

Supported by a \$225,000 grant, the program aimed to train approximately 40 participants across Chatham, Orange, Wake, Johnston, and Lee counties—preparing them for stable, living-wage employment in skilled trades while addressing systemic barriers such as childcare, transportation, and housing.

Strategic Evaluations, Inc. (SEI) served as the external evaluator from May 2024 through June 2025. Using an Outcome Mapping and participatory approach, SEI collaborated closely with program leaders to assess implementation, outcomes, and early impact. The evaluation focused on program reach, training completion, participant confidence, employment outcomes, and alumnae engagement. Data were drawn from program records, participant and alumnae surveys, and qualitative interviews with staff and partners.

Key Findings

Training & Credentials:

40 participants completed the four-week trades training program, earning NCCER Core, Pre-Apprenticeship, and OSHA-10 certifications.

Confidence & Readiness:

All participants (100%) reported increased confidence, and 92% felt more capable of succeeding in construction-related careers.

Career Advancement:

75% reported heightened educational and career goals, with nearly 80% enrolling in or planning additional training.

Employment & Wages:

75% of graduates secured jobs, apprenticeships, or continued education; 45% reported wage gains of \$2/hour or more, and 25% reported salary increases over 25%.

Economic Stability:

One-third reported greater financial independence, and half of participants with children said they could now better support their children's educational or career goals.

Satisfaction & Engagement:

85% of alumnae referred others to the program, and 75% remained engaged post-graduation, reflecting strong community trust and program reputation.

Lessons and Recommendations

Building Hope's success demonstrates that structured case management and financial support are essential to participant retention and completion. Recruitment should be treated as a core program activity, tracked and refined as part of continuous improvement. For long-term sustainability, strengthening employer engagement and documenting supportive services will further enhance workforce outcomes. Future replication efforts should prioritize alumni tracking with modest incentives and maintain the program's focus on connecting women to living-wage careers through practical, hands-on learning and sustained mentoring.

Introduction

In 2023, the Commission awarded funds to two grantees (Local Innovation Funds). Both of the grantees were North Carolina Workforce Development Boards (WDB). The two funded grantees were: Capital Area WDB / Hope Renovations and Western Piedmont WDB / OPT-IN and J.E.T. (Opportunity Internship and Jobs, Education, & Training).

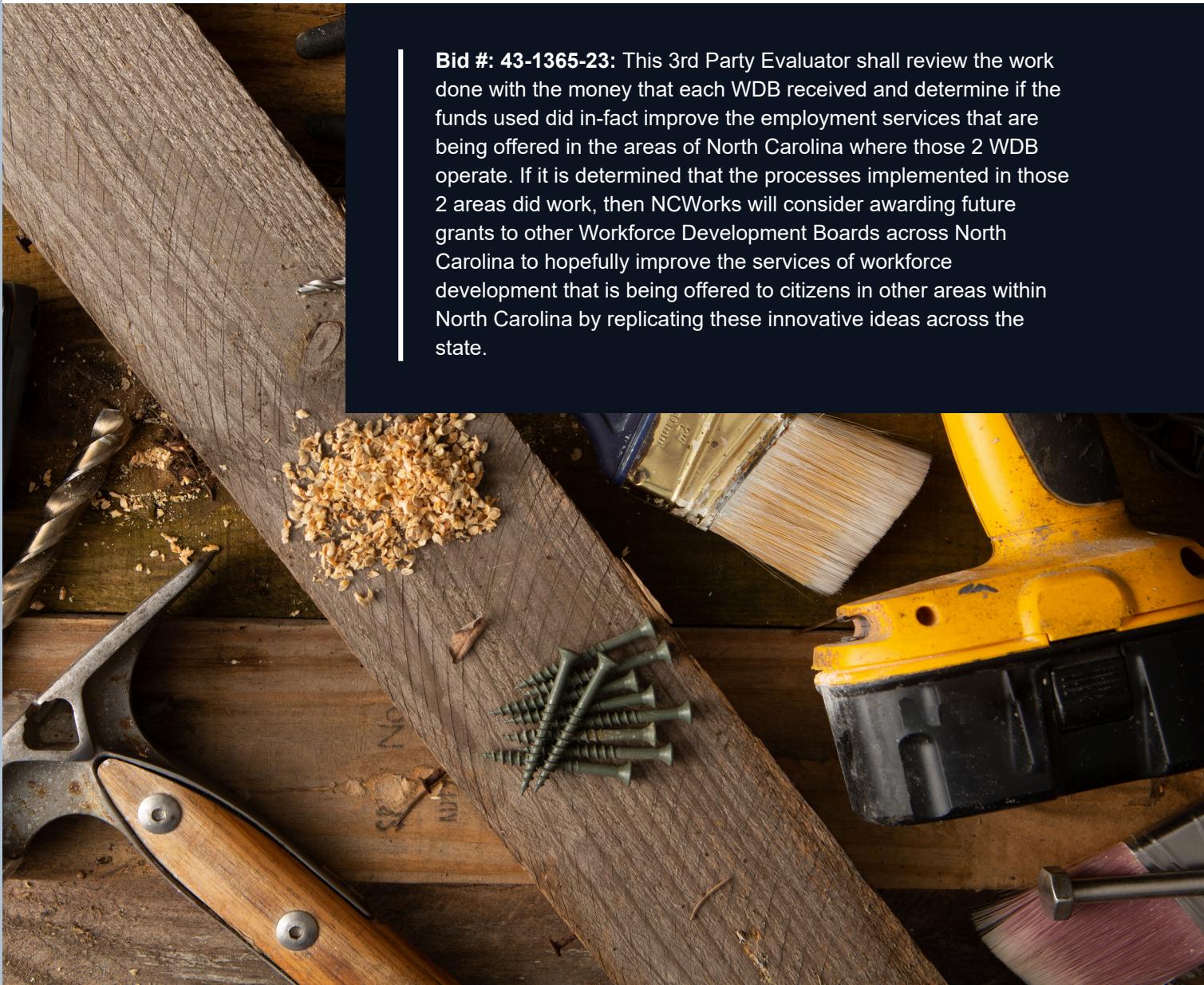
Evaluation Context, Purpose, and Scope

The scope of the external evaluation was four-fold:

- Address the extent to which the Building Hope program met stated outcomes

- Identify challenges and suggest solutions around these challenges
- Search for statistical correlations between program components and outcomes
- Strengthen capacity and develop evaluation tools and mechanisms that could be internally sustained beyond the time the external evaluation team was involved.

This document serves as the final evaluation report and presents summative findings for stakeholder review and reflection.



Bid #: 43-1365-23: This 3rd Party Evaluator shall review the work done with the money that each WDB received and determine if the funds used did in-fact improve the employment services that are being offered in the areas of North Carolina where those 2 WDB operate. If it is determined that the processes implemented in those 2 areas did work, then NCWorks will consider awarding future grants to other Workforce Development Boards across North Carolina to hopefully improve the services of workforce development that is being offered to citizens in other areas within North Carolina by replicating these innovative ideas across the state.

Approach to Evaluating Impact

Our evaluation strategy primarily followed an Outcome Mapping approach, designed to explore and clarify the program's theory of change. This approach enabled us to systematically gather data on immediate, foundational changes that served as precursors to more transformative impacts, while also assessing the program's contributions to the broader goals and outcomes of its stakeholders.

Additionally, our strategy incorporated a participatory and empowering approach, engaging the Building Hope leaders in the decision-making processes of the evaluation. This involvement not only enriched the evaluation with insights from project leaders but also helped

build their capacity for ongoing monitoring and assessment, potentially reducing the need for future external evaluation resources from the NCWorks Commission.

The evaluation was conducted by a team of four, comprising two senior and two junior team members. One senior-junior pair primarily supported the Building Hope evaluation efforts, while another senior-junior pair supported the similarly funded grantee (OPT-IN / J.E.T.). To ensure cohesive insights and continuity, the two sets of senior-junior pairs collaborated closely, sharing notes and findings to facilitate flexibility and interchangeability in evaluation responsibilities as needed.



Outcome Mapping was used to track foundational changes leading to impacts and the assessment of outcomes, while using a **participatory approach** engaged leaders in the evaluation decision-making to enrich findings and empower project leadership.

Background

As stated on the NCWorks Commission's website

Building Hope - Preparing Gender Minorities for Careers in Construction (Chatham, Orange, Wake, Johnston, and Lee counties) - A \$225,000 grant was awarded to help address both a critical need for workers in the construction industry and gender pay disparities by increasing the number of women trained in various skilled trades. A Chapel Hill-based nonprofit organization, Hope Renovations, provides pre-apprenticeship training in construction trades, case management to help resolve employment barriers like childcare, internships, and additional coaching services to help women succeed on the job. This grant will allow Hope Renovations to expand services beyond Orange County and support the training of approximately 40 participants. Partners include Capital Area Workforce Development Board, Hope Renovations and Wake Technical Community College.

As part of the external evaluation team, our work began with drafting an evaluation logic model to provide a foundational structure for assessing the Building Hope program. This initial phase focused on mapping the inputs, activities, outputs, and anticipated outcomes of the program, setting the stage for a focused evaluation strategy. A current version of the logic model is pasted below and also viewable at a larger scale at this [link](#).

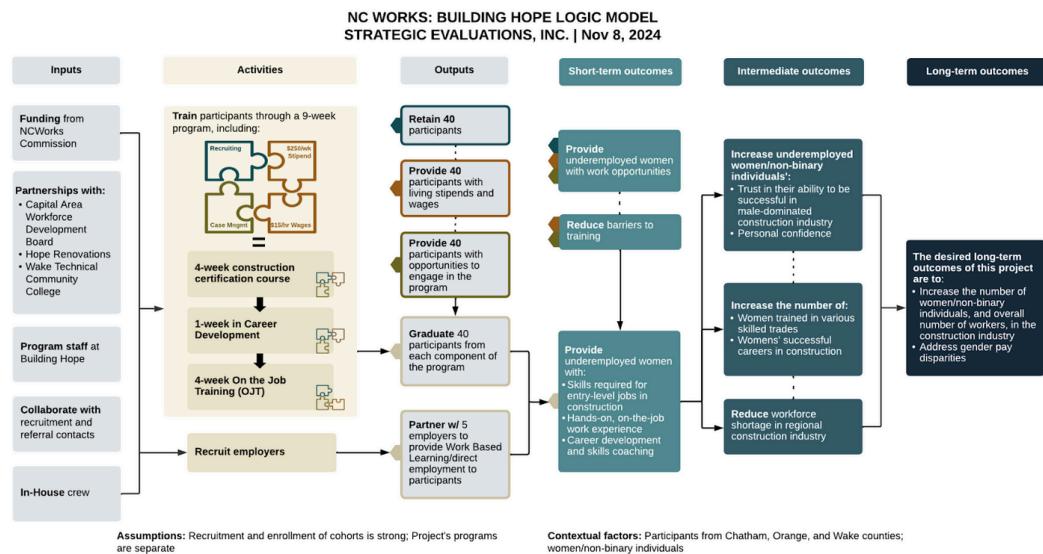
Evaluation Questions

Following the development of the logic model, the external evaluation team developed a broader evaluation framework. This framework incorporated 2–3 key evaluation questions for each logic model component that served as guides for the data collection and analysis. Similarly, a current version of the evaluation framework is pasted on the next page and also viewable at a larger scale via this [link](#).

The evaluation questions for each section were aligned with the logic model components based on the provided framework and are presented below, as well as in the figures below.

Input Questions

- How much total funding has the program secured, and how many unique funders contributed to this amount?
- What specific outcomes or benefits have resulted from the partnerships formed by the program?
- What are the characteristics (e.g., size, sector, focus area) of the partners who provide support, both financial and non-financial?
- What are key positions/functions among the program staff that equip the team to do the work?



Activities Questions

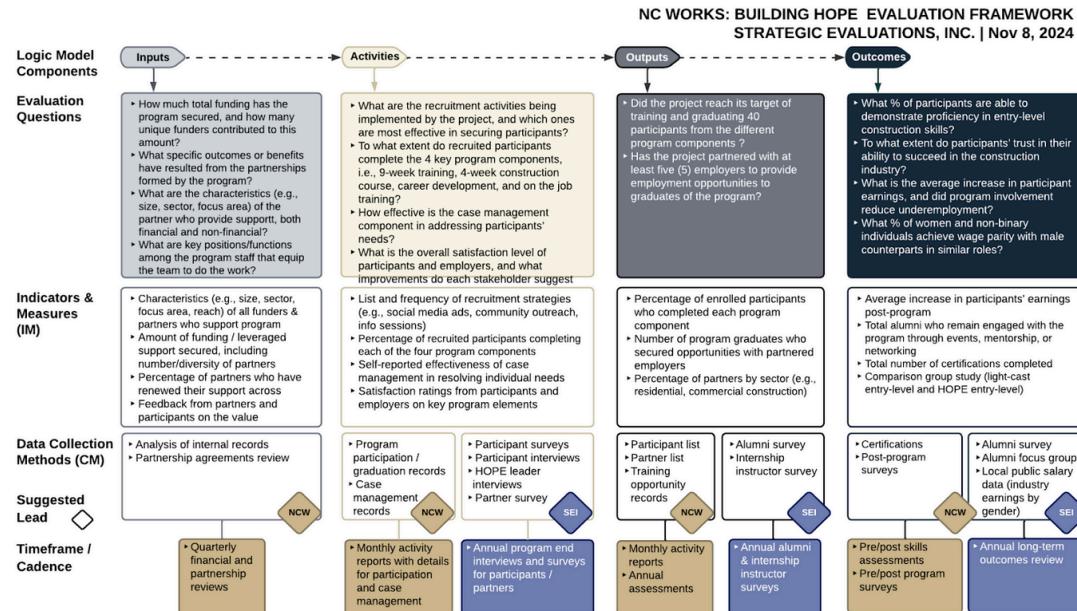
- What are the recruitment activities being implemented by the project, and which ones are most effective in securing participants?
- To what extent do recruited participants complete the 4 key program components, i.e., 9-week training, 4-week construction course, career development, and on-the-job training?
- How effective is the case management component in addressing participants' needs?
- What is the overall satisfaction level of participants and employers, and what improvements do each stakeholder suggest?

Output Questions

- Did the project reach its target of training and graduating 40 participants from the different program components?
- Has the project partnered with at least five (5) employers to provide employment opportunities to graduates of the program?

Outcomes Questions

- What % of participants are able to demonstrate proficiency in entry-level construction skills?
- To what extent do participants' trust in their ability to succeed in the construction industry?
- What is the average increase in participant earnings, and did program involvement reduce underemployment?
- What % of women and non-binary individuals achieve wage parity with male counterparts in similar roles?



Methodology

Within the evaluation framework, we also specified indicators and measures for each evaluation question, outlined appropriate data collection methods, recommended timeframes and cadence for data collection activities, and clarified responsibilities between the internal program leaders and our external team. To refine these elements, we held one-hour, Zoom-based work sessions with project leaders. During these work sessions, both teams collaborated to adjust the evaluation questions to ensure alignment with program goals and operational context. Lastly, the team discussed feasibility and agreed on the timing, and responsible party for each data collection effort. Below are additional details on the methodology that guided the approach for evaluating the program's progress and impacts.

Sampling Strategy and Priorities

Given the nature of our role as external evaluators of the Building Hope program, our sampling strategy prioritized comprehensive data collection across stakeholder groups. Our approach centered on representativeness, aiming to capture insights from the full range of participants. Consequently, we sought data from all participating students.

Our sampling prioritized individuals directly engaged in the most recent program activities, specifically all participating cohorts of students funded by this initiative and all recent alumni.

One limitation to our sampling strategy and priorities is the lack of externally collected data directly from internship partners and training facilitators, whose perspectives may have enhanced the evaluation by providing more insights on professional development/training outcomes.

Data Collection Methods & Sources

The evaluation strategy for the Building Hope program incorporated a blend of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to assess program outcomes, participant satisfaction, and long-term impact. These methods were structured to gather information from multiple stakeholders, including participants, program administrators, and local data sources.

The evaluation leveraged both internally collected data, as well as externally collected data.



Internally Collected Data

- **Internal Records Analysis:** Review of internal documents to track resource allocation, partnership engagement, and program implementation details.
- **Program Participation/Graduation Records:** Collection of data on participant enrollment, attendance, and graduation rates to monitor program engagement and completion.
- **Participant Surveys:** Surveys administered to participants to gather feedback on their experiences and satisfaction with the program.
- **Post Skills Assessments/Certification Results:** Evaluation of participants' skills after the program to measure skill acquisition and development.
- **Partner Surveys:** Surveys distributed to program partners to assess their satisfaction, engagement, and feedback on program outcomes.
- **Internship Instructor Surveys:** Feedback from instructors and employers hosting internships to evaluate participant performance and program preparedness.

Externally Collected Data

- **Alumnae Surveys:** Follow-up surveys with program graduates to understand long-term outcomes and ongoing engagement with the field. A total of 17 alumnae completed the survey, making for a response rate of roughly 43%.
- **HOPE Leader Interviews:** Interviews with program leaders to capture their insights on program implementation, challenges, and areas for improvement.

- **Local Public Data (Industry Earnings by Gender):** Analysis of local salary data by gender to assess potential impacts on earnings and wage parity among program alumni.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis techniques employed in this evaluation were designed to provide a rigorous assessment of program impacts and identify areas for improvement across key outcomes.

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Survey data and program records underwent quantitative analysis to calculate employment rates, wage changes, and retention percentages among program participants. When appropriate, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to draw comparisons across participant cohorts and assess any significant economic impacts.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Participants' open-ended survey data, along with interview data from program leaders, were analyzed thematically to identify common experiences, challenges, and recommendations. This qualitative approach helped ensure that nuanced feedback was integrated into the evaluation reporting.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Data from alumni were analyzed for trends in employment, wage growth, and continued program engagement. Cross-industry comparisons were made to gain additional insights into the program's broader community impacts.



Findings

Training Experience

Key Evaluation Questions:

To what extent did participants complete key components of the program (Trades Training, Career Development, Internship)?

What elements of the training did participants attribute most to their success in employment and education?

All 40 participants (100%) successfully completed the 4-week Trades Training Program and earned three industry-recognized credentials: the Pre-Apprenticeship certificate, NCCER Core Certificate, and OSHA-10 Certification. Additionally, 75% completed the on-the-job Internship Program, and 50% completed the Career Development component.

When asked to reflect on what aspects of training contributed most to their success, 30% of alumnae cited on-the-job learning, while another 21% pointed to the importance of networking.

These results affirm the program's multi-tiered training model, which blends classroom instruction with hands-on skill development and real-world exposure to the trades industry. The high completion and credentialing rates also indicate the program's strength in retaining and preparing participants for employment or further training pathways.

“I think the program does a great job of preparing its participants.”

Building Hope Participant

40

participants completed the Trades Training Program (with additional credentials)



Confidence and Skill to Succeed

Key Evaluation Questions:

To what extent did participants report confidence in their ability to succeed in the construction industry?

Did participants develop the core competencies required for success in entry-level construction work?

Internal surveys show that 100% of participants reported increased personal confidence by the end of the program. This finding is reinforced by external alumnae survey data, where 92% of respondents agreed that the program increased their confidence to succeed in the construction industry.

Narrative responses also speak powerfully to this theme. One alum shared, “It has provided me with the confidence in my own abilities to further

my career, and the knowledge that I needed to get the ball rolling.” Another reflected, “When I get down on myself, I hark back to the time I spent in the program... and think to myself, ‘you can do Hope Renovations and you can do anything.’”

These perspectives confirm that the program not only imparted technical skills but also helped cultivate a resilient mindset and belief in personal potential—both essential for long-term success in the construction industry.

“ After participating I know I can succeed in any field with the right mindset, training and support. ”

Building Hope Participant

100%

of participants reported an increased sense of confidence



Career Pathways & Advancement

Key Evaluation Question:

To what extent did participants enroll in additional training or education, and report advancement toward long-term career goals?

Findings indicate that the Building Hope program played a catalytic role in expanding participants' educational and career ambitions. Seventy-five percent of alumnae reported that the program increased their educational goals, and nearly 80% (at the time alumnae were surveyed) had either already enrolled in additional training or coursework or planned to do so. These figures suggest that the program is not only building skills for immediate employment but also motivating participants to pursue longer-term pathways for advancement.

Participants also credited the program with shifting their outlook on career mobility and professional possibilities. Nearly 80% attributed their current employment or economic outcomes to their time in the program, pointing to the program's role in career decision-making and job acquisition. Taken together, these findings underscore the program's success in helping participants view skilled trades as a viable and aspirational career path, rather than a stopgap option.

“It has given me the confidence to further my education and make a career change.”

Building Hope Participant



Employment, Wages, and Economic Stability

Key Evaluation Question:

What was the average increase in participant earnings, and did program involvement reduce underemployment?

The Building Hope program shows strong outcomes related to workforce entry and economic advancement. Three out of four program graduates (75%) reported securing employment in the skilled trades, entering an apprenticeship, or enrolling in further education. This outcome suggests that the program's training components are effectively aligned with participants' career trajectories and with workforce needs.

Wage progression also demonstrates meaningful gains. Forty-five percent of Building Hope participants reported an hourly wage increase of at least \$2, while one in four (25%) reported an overall salary increase of more than 25%. A closer look at the subgroup achieving this higher wage gain revealed that 75% were working in construction, 75% reported that their work was directly related to Hope training, and 75% were employed full-time—highlighting the program's impact in facilitating stable, relevant employment.

Participants' qualitative responses reinforced these quantitative gains. One alumna shared, "Hope gave me the opportunity to learn new skills, improve my self-confidence, and helped me secure a job through the career catalyst program. This made it so I didn't have to worry about money anymore." This comment exemplifies how employment outcomes are linked not only to financial stability but also to broader well-being.

Additionally, about one-third of participants reported improved financial stability, including reduced reliance on family for support and increased ability to support others. Among alumnae with children, half (50%) reported that the program improved their capacity to support their children's educational or career aspirations—pointing to generational impacts that extend beyond individual economic gains.

“Hope gave me the opportunity to learn new skills, improve my self confidence, and helped me secure a job... so I didn't have to worry about money anymore.”

Building Hope Participant



25%

of participants reported an overall salary increase of more than a quarter

Key Highlights for participants who reported an overall salary increase of more than 25%

75%
of participants
work in
construction

75%
of participants
are employed
full-time

75%
of participants
attributed their
job to Hope



Nearly 33% of participants indicated they are **more stable** financially after participating in the program

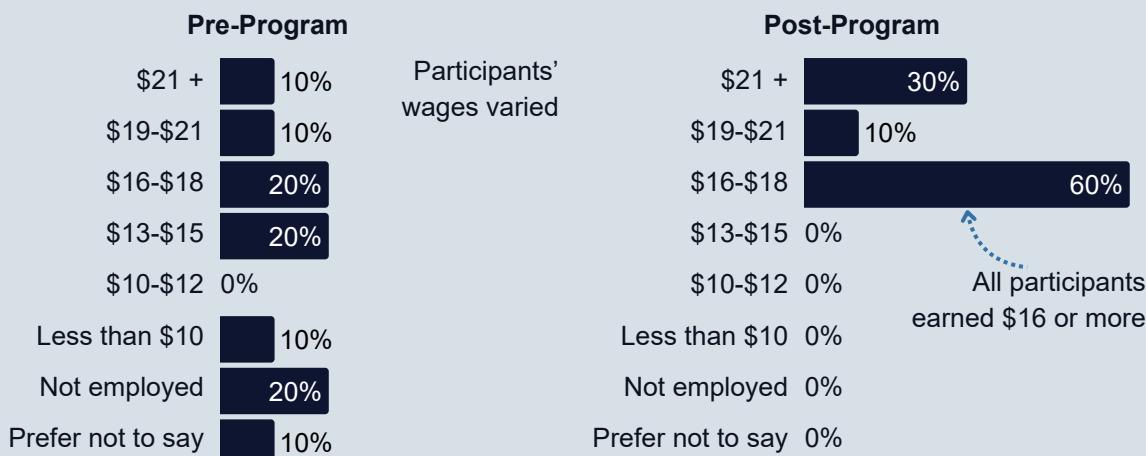


Roughly 33% of participants indicated they are **less dependent** on others or can provide **more support**



Half of the alumnae who had children reported their improved ability to **support their children's** educational or career aspirations

After participating in the Building Hope program, all alumnae (100%) who responded to the survey earned **\$16 or more** in wages per hour.



Satisfaction and Continued Engagement

Key Evaluation Questions:

What was the overall satisfaction level of program alumnae?

To what extent did alumnae remain connected to the program and refer others?

Survey results suggest high levels of alumnae satisfaction and continued involvement with the Building Hope program. Over 75% of alumnae reported ongoing engagement with the program after graduation, and 85% said they had referred others to either the program or similar employment and training opportunities. These indicators reflect a strong sense of trust in the program and endorsement of its value.

Open-ended responses reinforced these patterns of satisfaction, with participants praising the

program's structure, impact, and relevance. One respondent shared, "I think the program does a great job of preparing its participants," while another noted, "It opens a wide variety of opportunities you may not have ever realized... It connects to the culture and society more, not just science and facts." These sentiments underscore the program's holistic value—not just as a training ground for technical skills, but as a community and catalyst for personal and professional growth. The high rate of alumnae referrals also speaks to the perceived credibility and reputation of the program within participants' networks.

“Overall, Hope is an amazing program with an amazing mission! ”

Building Hope Participant



Conclusions

The Building Hope program has demonstrated measurable success in advancing women's participation and progression within the construction trades. Through its integrated model —combining classroom-based instruction, career development workshops, and on-the-job training —the program equipped participants with both technical skills and workplace readiness. The inclusion of a living stipend during training and hourly pay during the on-the-job component proved essential, enabling participants to remain engaged without sacrificing financial stability. This design, paired with individualized case management, addressed critical barriers such as transportation, childcare, and housing, supporting consistent participation and strong completion rates across cohorts.

Partnerships were another defining strength of the program. Collaboration with local employers, community organizations, and NCWorks career advisors created a network of support that linked training directly to employment opportunities.

Program data indicate that graduates entered positions with competitive wages, many exceeding local living-wage thresholds. Additionally, participants reported increased confidence, stronger career direction, and a greater sense of community belonging. Overall, Building Hope has emerged as a well-coordinated, participant-centered model that effectively connects workforce training to tangible employment outcomes, while contributing to the broader effort of diversifying the construction workforce and advancing economic mobility for women. The results from Building Hope provide a model that can inform replication by other Workforce Development Boards across North Carolina.

“A viable internship program that will provide a clearer path into the construction industry.”

Building Hope Participant



Recommendations

Participant Recommendations

The section below contains recommendations from the program's recent graduates. Direct quotes are also included (in italics) to help stakeholders better understand the context in which the recommendation emerged.

Extend Training and Employment Support:

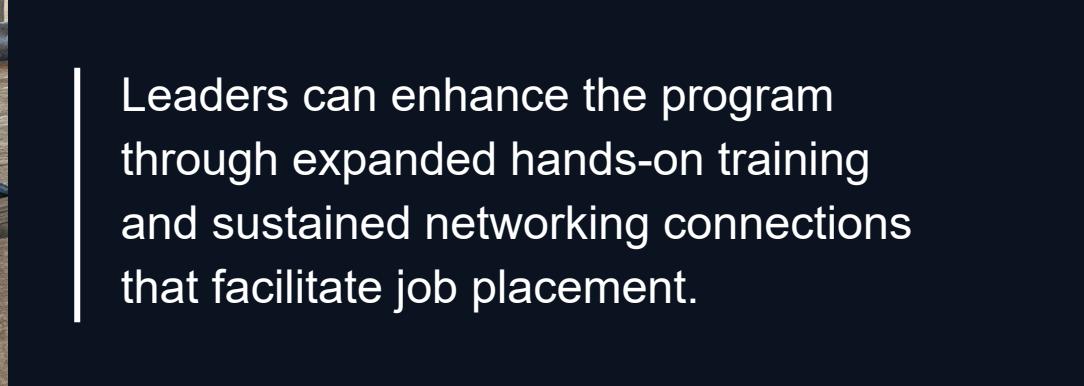
Participants expressed interest in additional time for hands-on training and post-program coaching. Many felt that continued mentorship or structured follow-up could help sustain their career progress and confidence once they enter job placements.

- *More hands on tool training, more time spent on reading plans and more practice with the Hands-on portion. I wish I had more experience on job sites.*
- *Additional internship opportunities*
- *Get more hands-on experience using the tools*
- *I think [the program] could be longer and a bit more hands on. More work in the lab*

Strengthen Post-Graduation Employer and Alumni Connections:

Participants emphasized the importance of continued engagement after program completion to sustain career growth and reinforce the supportive community established during training

- *[I recommend] after graduation employer connections.*
- *[I recommend] continued connections, mentorship, check-ins, coaching, and career opportunities. A monthly or bi-monthly alumni Zoom call to check in, network, meet more people, cheer each other on, and consider other possibilities.*
- *Continuing to know what companies are affiliated with the program, who is involved and what internships, sponsorships and job opportunities are available.*



Leaders can enhance the program through expanded hands-on training and sustained networking connections that facilitate job placement.

Evaluator Recommendations

The section below contains recommendations directly from the evaluation team. While these recommendations may not have emerged explicitly from Building Hope participants, the evaluation team offers them for consideration based on data and/or prior experience with similarly funded projects.

Enhance Recruitment Strategies:

Collaborate with local community organizations, develop targeted outreach campaigns, and explore incentives for participants to address the recruitment challenges. Consider evaluating current recruitment methods to identify the most effective approaches and adjust strategies accordingly.

Increase Documentation of Case

Management and Support Services - Case management and wraparound support (childcare, transportation, and counseling) have been key to participant persistence, but documentation of these supports was inconsistent across sites. We recommend expanding tracking of supportive services—type, duration, and outcomes—to help quantify their contribution to program success and inform future funding requests.

Link attrition patterns to support needs:

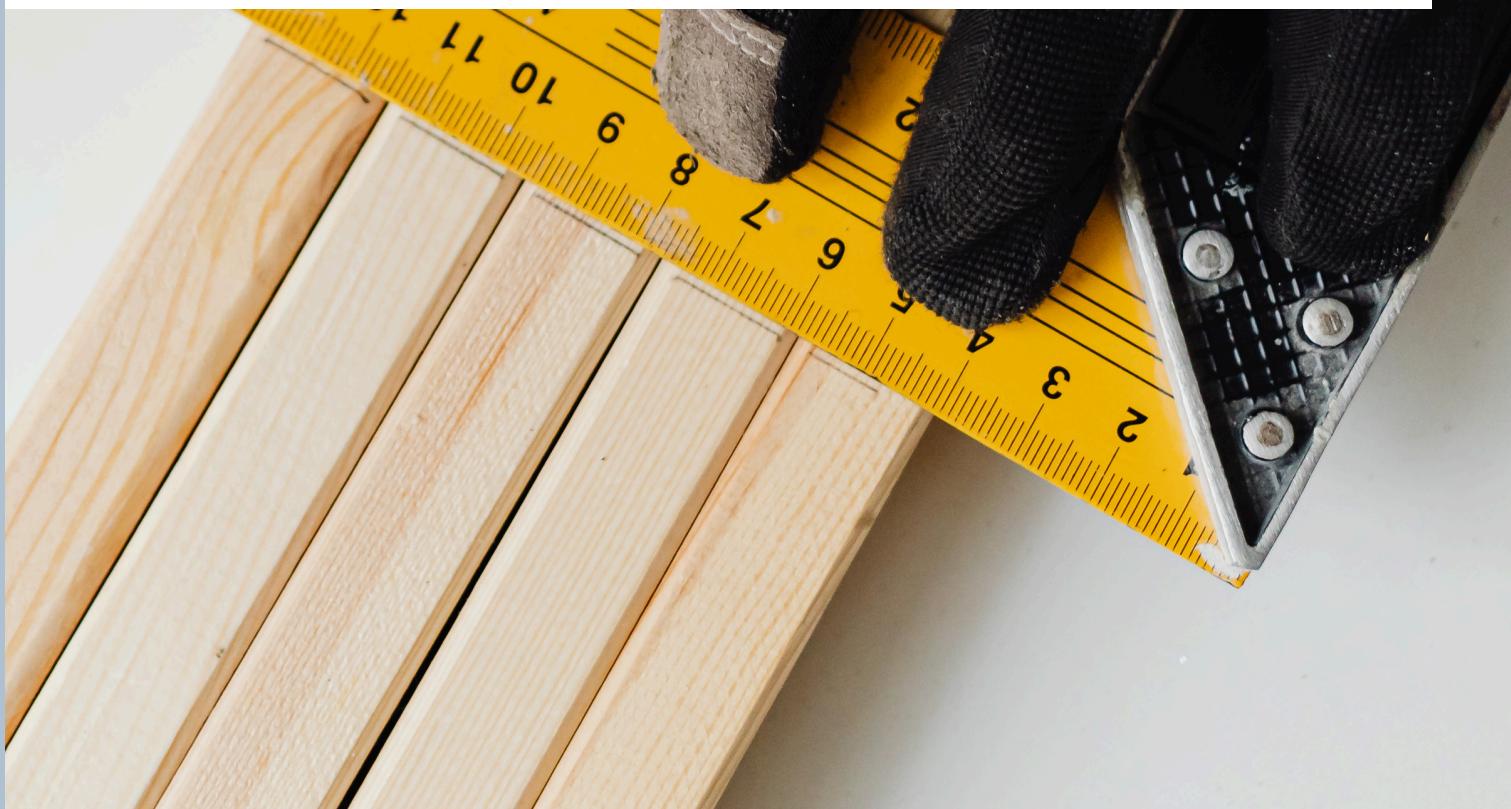
Take time to correlate non-completion with specific support needs (e.g., food or housing insecurity). Even a basic internal analysis would inform resource targeting and future proposals.

Establish a Peer Mentorship and Alumni Network:

Look to facilitate a peer mentorship model pairing new trainees with graduates working in the field. Quarterly alumni calls or social media groups could reinforce community, provide informal coaching, and maintain visibility of job leads.

Incorporate an Employer Recognition Program:

Introduce a “Building Hope Employer Partner” designation for companies that consistently hire or mentor participants. Public recognition (e.g., at graduation events or NCWorks meetings) can deepen commitment and attract new partners.



Lessons

The lessons learned were developed by synthesizing data from the quarterly reports, analyzing patterns in participant experiences, program challenges, and observed preliminary outcomes. Here's a breakdown of the process:

Recruitment should be documented as a core activity:

Team members discussed with the evaluation team how recruitment is not a background task—it directly determines program reach and quality. Treating recruitment as a formal activity in the logic model supports closer tracking of outreach methods, referral sources, and participant pipelines for future replication.

Case management is central to retention:

Case management—covering barriers such as transportation, housing, childcare, and mental health—was identified as essential for participant persistence. Without it, staff estimated far higher attrition. Programs seeking to replicate the model should consider this a structural, not optional, component of workforce readiness.

Using living-wage is a more practical metric versus wage parity:

For workforce stakeholders, “moving participants to living-wage, retainable jobs” proved to be more of the core story. Comparing participant wages to male wages in construction is a valuable context but should be considered more exploratory, not a required performance target.

Alumnae outcome tracking is feasible with incentives:

Reaching graduates directly (with modest incentives) proved to be the most practical path to document employment status and wages.



Limitations

Time Limitations

One minor limitation in this evaluation stems from the timing of our involvement as external evaluators. Although the Building Hope project began receiving funding in 2023, SEI's evaluation contract was not established until May 2024—approximately one year into implementation. This delayed start constrained our ability to capture early process data. However, we believe we've mitigated this limitation by ensuring the Building Hope leaders had strong internal data collection processes and leveraging some of those data for our reporting.

Limitations on Wage Data

A second limitation involved access to comparison wage data. The evaluation team initially planned to obtain wage information through the Local Innovation Fund or the Department of Commerce to compare participant earnings with those of a similar group of non-participants. However, those data were not being captured as anticipated, and subsequent efforts to locate a suitable alternative data source were unsuccessful. As a result, the evaluation could not conduct the planned comparative wage analysis, limiting the ability to contextualize participants' post-program earnings within a broader labor market framework.





About SEI

Strategic Evaluations, Inc. (SEI) has served as the third-party evaluator for the NCWorks Commission Workforce Development Board (WDB) Local Innovation Committee since May 2024. SEI is a HUB-certified, minority-owned evaluation consulting firm located in Durham, North Carolina. For more than 20 years, SEI has helped organizations and institutions apply for, win, and sustain funding for grants in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM), workforce development, and community advancement.

Our team specializes in designing, reviewing, and implementing rigorous evaluation frameworks that strengthen evidence-based decision-making and demonstrate measurable impact. Beyond STEMM and higher education, SEI's portfolio includes extensive experience evaluating initiatives that advance workforce development, reentry and employment readiness, housing stability, and nonprofit capacity building.

We frequently partner with state agencies, workforce boards, and community-based organizations to assess outcomes that improve economic mobility and quality of life for underrepresented populations.

Across more than 40 active evaluations nationwide, SEI supports projects that build the performance, capability, and career trajectories of trainees and participants ranging from high school students to justice-involved adults. Our clients span large public universities, small liberal arts colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), workforce development boards, and nonprofit organizations. This range of experience enables SEI to deliver culturally responsive, utilization-focused evaluations that link program design, implementation, and outcomes—helping partners strengthen their impact, secure future funding, and scale their success.

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