



Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Vermont Final Report

Evaluation of Pilot Projects to Promote Work and Increase State Accountability in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program



(Evaluation of USDA, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Pilots)

May 2022

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May 2022

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Glossary

ABAWD	Able-bodied adult without dependents. 18- to 49-year-old adult who is not disabled and does not have dependents
ACCESS	AHS in-house integrated data system
AHS	The Vermont Agency of Human Services
CAA	Community Action Agencies
CARES Act	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. An economic stimulus bill signed into law on March 27, 2020 that implemented a variety of programs to address issues related to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic
CCV	The Community College of Vermont
Control group	A group of individuals enrolled in a SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) pilot that was eligible for services available through existing SNAP E&T programs if such programs were available to the control group in the pilot location
EAP	Employee Assistance Program. A department of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation providing clinical counseling services
Food security	Having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Individuals who experienced food access limitations due to lack of money or other resources are said to be food insecure
GCRC	Governor's Career Readiness Certificate
GED	General Education Development. A group of subject tests which, when passed, certify that the test taker has high school-level academic skills
HMO	Health maintenance organization
ICP	Individual career plan
ITT	Intention-to-treat analysis. An analytical method where individuals are evaluated based on their initial random assignment group regardless of whether they received the treatment
JFI	Jobs for Independence
LWIA	Local workforce investment area. A group of one or more counties that provide workforce development services
MIS	Management information system
PPO	Preferred provider organization
Random assignment	An experimental technique for assigning individuals enrolled in a SNAP Employment and Training pilot into research groups (a treatment or control group)
Research group	A group of individuals enrolled in a SNAP Employment and Training pilot that was either eligible for enhanced services (a treatment group) or eligible for services available through existing SNAP E&T programs where available (a control group)

SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. A Federal nutrition assistance program
SNAP E&T	A program that assists SNAP participants in obtaining employment by providing services, such as job search assistance, job skills training, education, work experience, or workfare, and supports, such as assistance with transportation and child care costs
SSI	Supplemental Security Income. A Federal income supplement program
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. A Federal grant program designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency
Treatment group	A group of individuals enrolled in a SNAP Employment and Training pilot that was eligible for the enhanced set of services developed under the pilot
UI	Unemployment insurance. A Federal program to provide unemployment benefits to eligible workers
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
VABIR	The Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation
VDOL	The Vermont Department of Labor
Very low food security	A severe form of food insecurity characterized by disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake
VR	The Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
WIA	Workforce Investment Act Gold Standard Evaluation. The most recent national study of the Adult and Dislocated Worker program services conducted in 2012
WIC	Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. A Federal assistance program that provides food, health care referrals, and nutrition education to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
Work registrant	SNAP participant who has not met any Federal exemptions from SNAP work requirements and is therefore required to register for work
WorkKeys	A workplace skills assessment that measures a range of hard and soft skills

Overview

This report presents findings from the evaluation of a SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) pilot—Jobs for Independence (JFI)—that was implemented in Vermont from March 2016 to December 2018. This was one of 10 pilots Congress authorized and funded under the Agricultural Act of 2014 that offered enhanced SNAP E&T services to assist SNAP participants in obtaining employment. The Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) enrolled 3,031 SNAP participants in the pilot, with roughly half randomly assigned to the JFI group (eligible for enhanced services and any other employment and training services available in their communities) and the other half assigned to the control group (eligible for existing SNAP employment and training services and any other employment and training services available in their communities). AHS primarily targeted individuals who struggled to find employment—people with substance use disorders, housing instability, mental health disorders, or criminal histories. JFI services were voluntary and available statewide through providers that collaborated to offer clinical assessments and counseling services, support services, and referral to employment services appropriate for an individual’s readiness for work with either a vocational rehabilitation counselor, an employment counselor, or a case manager. Individuals in JFI also could access community college services to obtain a Governor’s Career Readiness Certificate (similar to the National Career Readiness Certificate). JFI group members could also receive incentive payments for attending meetings or meeting milestones.

AHS worked with new partners and providers to create regional teams to coordinate and deliver services for JFI. JFI staff faced challenges with keeping individuals engaged in services but were able to tailor employment or training-related activities to individuals’ disabilities and address some barriers through support services. JFI staff reported that the flexible and robust support services were key to keeping individuals engaged in services and activities. Despite the challenges in getting JFI group members to engage in services, they were more likely than control group members to start an activity, complete an activity, and receive a support service. However, their increased engagement did not lead to an increase in earnings over time. Because JFI group members did not earn significantly more than control group members, the overall cost of implementing the pilot outweighed its benefits.

Although JFI did not lead to increased earnings or reduced participation in SNAP, it successfully increased the percentages of individuals who received case management and support services relative to the control group, as well as the percentage of individuals who participated in employment or training-related activities. The higher rates of case management and support services receipt among JFI group members may have allowed individuals to overcome barriers associated with obtaining employment, because JFI led to higher employment rates (based on survey data). Considering that JFI increased employment rates but not earnings, it suggests that although the pilot may have increased the chances of finding employment, these jobs did not pay appreciably more than those obtained by the control group. This could be due in part to the severity of barriers that the JFI group members faced. Many JFI staff discussed the difficulty of overcoming barriers related to substance use, mental health, criminal histories, and homelessness. It takes time to reduce severe barriers, become employed, and obtain higher-paying jobs. With many JFI group members participating in activities in Year 3 and employment impacts just beginning to emerge in that year, a greater amount of time may be required in which to observe earnings impacts among such a highly-barriered population.

Executive Summary

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the primary source of nutrition assistance for many individuals and families with low incomes. SNAP provides monthly benefits to help participants obtain adequate access to food; for some program participants, it also provides work supports through SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) programs to help them become economically self-sufficient. Although States are required to administer a SNAP E&T program, they have flexibility in determining and designing its services and activities. States typically offer SNAP participants some case management and support services, and a range of activities, that include job search assistance or training, occupational skills training, and basic education.

Because SNAP E&T programs are so varied and are administered at the State or local level, information about the most effective approaches for helping SNAP participants gain skills and find work is limited. For this reason, as part of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress authorized and funded the SNAP E&T pilots to test innovative strategies for connecting SNAP participants with jobs that would increase their incomes and reduce their need for public assistance. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) awarded grants to 10 States—California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington—which represented diverse service areas and populations. The pilots varied in whether they operated statewide or only in selected areas, and whether they focused on urban communities, rural communities, or both. The majority of individuals the pilots targeted were unemployed or underemployed and faced significant barriers to employment, such as being homeless or having a criminal history or substance use disorder. Pilots generally expanded the types and amounts of services provided through States' existing SNAP E&T programs. Services typically included (1) a comprehensive skills or clinical assessment to determine an individual's work readiness, skills, and barriers to employment; (2) case management services that developed and supported a detailed individualized work and barrier-reduction plan; and (3) support services,¹ such as transportation assistance, child care, housing assistance, and training or work supplies that helped reduce barriers to both engagement in the pilot and employment. The pilots also offered a range of employment and training-related activities, such as independent job search, job readiness training, job search assistance, basic education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning opportunities (such as subsidized employment, work experience, internships, and work study). Each pilot enrolled 3,000 to 7,000 individuals, for a total of 44,359 individuals across the 10 pilots.

Services are resources provided or administered to individuals, such as assessments, case management, and support services.

Activities are employment or training-related events in which individuals participate, such as job search assistance training, basic education, occupational skills training, or work-based learning.

The authorizing legislation also required a rigorous, longitudinal evaluation of the pilots to assess whether the innovative strategies they used were successful in connecting SNAP participants with jobs that increased their incomes and reduced their need for public assistance benefits. This report summarizes evaluation findings for one State—Vermont.² It provides a detailed description of the pilot's design and

¹ Referred to as participant reimbursements in the SNAP E&T program; however, for this report, we describe the package of services as support services.

² Similar reports for each pilot and a summary report are available at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.

implementation and, using data for up to three years following random assignment, examines the services individuals received and assesses the effectiveness of those services in improving individuals' outcomes. The report also includes findings from the cost-benefit analysis, which itemizes specific monetary costs and benefits of pilot services, and assesses whether the benefits of the services and activities offered through the pilot were large enough to offset their costs.

Vermont pilot background

In March 2016, the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS), which administers SNAP, began enrollment in its pilot, Jobs for Independence (JFI), statewide. From March 2016 to March 2018, AHS enrolled 3,031 SNAP participants into the pilot, mostly targeting individuals who struggled to find employment—people with substance use disorders, housing instability, mental health disorders, or criminal histories.

JFI services were voluntary and included clinical assessment and counseling services, support services, and referral to employment services appropriate for an individual's readiness for work with either a vocational rehabilitation counselor, an employment counselor, or a case manager. Individuals in JFI also could access community college services to obtain a Governor's Career Readiness Certificate (GCRC, similar to the National Career Readiness Certificate).

Evaluation overview

The evaluation included the following four components:

1. An *implementation analysis* that documented the context and operations of each pilot
2. A *participation analysis* that examined the characteristics, participation levels, and service paths of individuals in the pilots
3. An *impact analysis* that identified what works, and for whom, by examining impacts on employment and earnings; public assistance receipt; and other outcomes, such as food security, health, well-being, and housing
4. A *cost-benefit analysis* that estimated the return on each dollar invested in the pilots

The evaluation used an experimental research design in which individuals eligible for SNAP E&T who were enrolled into the pilot were randomly assigned into the JFI group or a control group in roughly equivalent numbers. Individuals assigned to the JFI group were eligible for the enhanced set of services developed under the pilot, whereas control group members were eligible for services available through the existing SNAP E&T program in the State. Individuals in both the JFI and control groups continued to be eligible for any other employment and training services available in their communities. Through random assignment, the two groups were, on average, similar across a range of characteristics at the time they enrolled in the pilot. They differed only in the services they subsequently were eligible to receive. This research design allows us to confidently attribute differences in outcomes between the groups to the JFI services rather than to other potential causes.

For the evaluation, we collected and analyzed several types of data including the following:

- **Implementation data** from interviews with JFI staff and JFI group members to understand the planning and implementation of the pilot and provide context for other analyses

- **Administrative service use data** to describe participation in services and activities
- **Unemployment insurance (UI) wage records** to measure employment and earnings
- **SNAP administrative data** to measure participation in SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid, and the amount of SNAP and TANF benefits
- **12- and 36-month follow-up survey data** to provide additional information about individuals' service receipt, employment, and earnings, as well as food security, health, well-being, and housing status
- **Cost data** from grantees and providers and time-use data to estimate the cost of services and net costs and benefits to individuals, the government, and society

JFI overview

AHS developed JFI to provide more robust services to targeted individuals who struggled to find employment—people with substance use disorders, housing instability, mental health disorders, or criminal histories. AHS offered JFI statewide (to any eligible SNAP participants in the State's 12 regions) and contracted with five key partners: the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL), Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR), Community College of Vermont (CCV), and Vermont's Community Action Agencies (CAA).

Individuals assigned to the JFI group met with a VR Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselor to complete a comprehensive clinical assessment. This could take one to three appointments to complete. JFI group members received a \$25 gift card for attending the first appointment and a second incentive payment (\$25 or \$50 randomly assigned at the time of enrollment) at the end of the clinical assessment or when the individual met an important milestone, such as acquiring stable housing. Following the clinical assessment, most individuals continued to receive ongoing EAP counseling services and extensive support services throughout the service period. Typically, individuals were also referred to employment and training-related activities. Most individuals within JFI's target population had a disability as defined by VR based on factors such as a mental health or substance use issue, or another physical or learning disability. One or more of these disabilities qualified individuals to receive employment services through VR (which provided vocational counseling and job search assistance), and VABIR (which provided job search assistance and progressive employment services, similar to work-based learning). Individuals who were more ready for work received employment services from VDOL and received referrals to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs or adult basic education. Individuals were also referred to GCRC classes at CCV to build job readiness skills, though enrollment in this activity was lower than AHS and CCV staff anticipated.

Services and activities offered to JFI group members included:

GCRC course. CCV offered JFI group members the GCRC course, a four-module certification course focused on employer-specified skills. The modules focused on job readiness skills; basic workplace computer skills; applied math for the workplace, which included a WorkKeys assessment (a workplace skills assessment that measures hard and soft skills); and job seeking skills, which included mock interviews. Most modules lasted one to two weeks and required in-person attendance for several half-day sessions each week. During the first year, few individuals were referred to CCV and those who were referred often did not begin services because they did not complete the required enrollment paperwork for

CCV. In early 2017, changes were made to mitigate some of these challenges, and participation in GCRC classes increased but remained below expectations.

Education and training. JFI offered referrals to basic and postsecondary education services for individuals who wanted to complete their high school degree or obtain a higher-level degree. Most frequently, individuals were referred to Vermont Adult Learning to obtain their General Education Development (GED) equivalency diploma, but some also enrolled as students at CCV in a degree program. In addition, JFI group members who wanted to enter a new profession could enter occupational skills training, such as those that provide a commercial driver's license or a nursing assistant certification, or training in culinary skills, commercial cleaning, manufacturing, or farming.

Work-based learning. JFI offered work-based learning opportunities to individuals through VR and VDOL. VR worked closely with employment counselors at VABIR to provide dedicated employment counselors to facilitate progressive employment services for JFI group members. Progressive employment is similar to work-based learning but focuses more on matching individuals with career paths, or even with specific employers, to engage in progressively more involved work experiences. For example, an individual might begin with an informational interview, followed by a job shadow, and if the opportunity makes sense for both the individual and the employer, the individual progressed to a subsidized work experience or an on-the-job training placement. Individuals also received work-based learning opportunities through VDOL's referral to WIOA services. VDOL had a network of employers in which to place individuals. Most of the placements were paid and lasted several weeks to several months.

Job search assistance. JFI group members who were determined to be work ready—meaning they had fewer barriers or disabilities needing accommodation—were referred to VDOL for job search assistance. JFI group members who were not determined to be work ready because of significant barriers or disabilities requiring accommodation were referred to VR counselors for employment counseling and job search assistance. VR counselors could assist individuals with identifying local jobs, applying for jobs, and receiving accommodations for disabilities. VR counselors also referred individuals to VABIR employment counselors for help developing a resume, writing a cover letter, securing references, or conducting mock interviews.

Counseling and support services. JFI offered extensive counseling services from multiple agencies, working together to provide an individualized, team-based approach to counseling and service delivery for each JFI group member. EAP and VR staff conducted most of the counseling, with coordination among other agencies within the same region, such as VABIR and VDOL. After the clinical assessment, individuals continued to meet weekly with their EAP counselor. The frequency of EAP appointments generally transitioned to biweekly, then monthly as the relationship and goals progressed. There was no limit to the number of EAP counseling sessions a JFI group member could attend—an individual's needs and interest were the primary drivers. Although the coordinated counseling model worked well in most regions, staff across agencies agreed that a separate, dedicated case manager would have improved service delivery and engagement of JFI group members. Some staff thought EAP counselors were best suited to deliver effective case management to the target populations because of their counseling background, and that having more EAP counselors would have increased agencies' ability to deliver intensive case management.

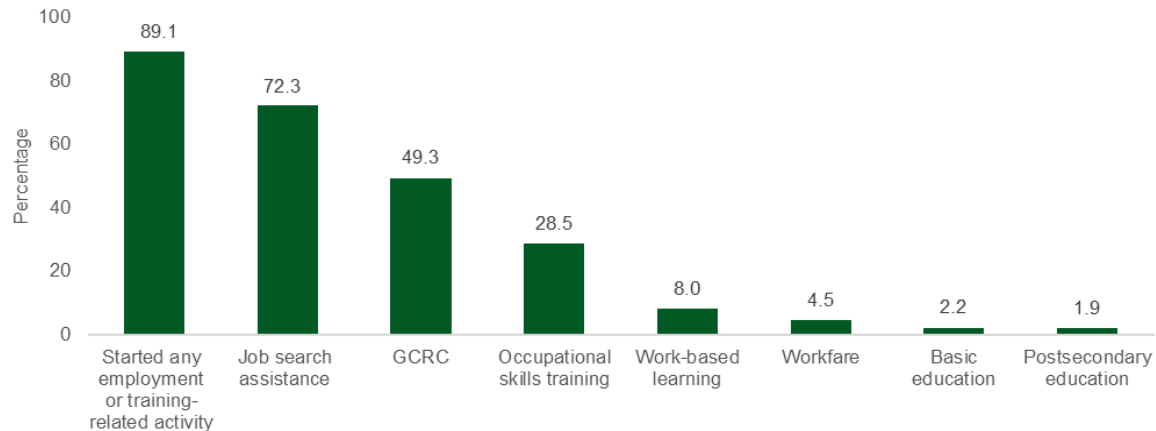
EAP counselors had discretion in offering support services to mitigate related barriers. The EAP counselor could provide a support as long as it would help reduce a barrier to work and the individual was engaged in services and making progress toward employment goals. Support services ranged from small

payments for work or interview clothing to larger payments for health services, a car repair, or rental assistance. Individuals commonly received some type of support payment during each counseling session with EAP, as their needs became evident. EAP leadership offered written guidelines on support services, but most EAP counselors had the autonomy to manage their own monthly budget. EAP counselors had a benchmark of spending approximately \$1,500 per JFI group member, and EAP leadership estimated that counselors disbursed \$50,000 per month statewide, on average. Funding and disbursement of support services remained stable until June 2018, when EAP counselors received guidance that support service funding from the grant was almost exhausted. They each received a final budget they could use for remaining support services through the end of 2018.

Participation in JFI services and activities

Virtually all of the individuals randomly assigned to the JFI group engaged in some type of service, meaning they started an assessment, or started an employment or training-related program. Most JFI group members (89 percent; Exhibit ES.1) ultimately started an employment or training-related activity such as job search assistance, the GCRC course, and occupational skills training after they completed intake and assessments. Among individuals who started an activity, completion rates were highest for occupational skills training (71 percent) and lowest for the GCRC course (6 percent). JFI staff did not track obtainment of credentials or certifications by individuals except for two types of certifications related to the GCRC course (GCRC and WorkKeys). Only 7 percent of JFI group members earned one of these certifications.

Exhibit ES.1. Many JFI group members started an employment or training-related activity, with most starting job search assistance, or the GCRC course



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,510 JFI group members.

Most JFI group members had at least one contact with an EAP counselor (87 percent), and 70 percent received a support service. About 58 percent received employment or training supplies, almost half (49 percent) received transportation assistance, and 34 percent received housing assistance. On average, JFI group members who received support services received \$1,639 in total support service payments. JFI offered individuals incentive payments ranging from \$25 to \$75 for participation in services or meeting milestones. Individuals were offered \$25 for attending their first meeting, and an additional \$50 (high incentive group) or \$25 (low incentive group) for meeting a milestone. Most JFI group members (96 percent) received the first incentive payment, but fewer (31 to 35 percent) received the second.

Individuals spent an average of eleven months in JFI. The majority exited JFI within their first year (67 percent), with most exiting after the first quarter. Most individuals exited before completing services (either because they chose to stop participating or case managers lost contact with them and closed their cases) or because they became ineligible for JFI (generally due to losing SNAP benefits).

Differences in service receipt for the JFI and control groups

Whether JFI impacted individuals' employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance depends, in part, on whether there were differences between the JFI and control groups in their receipt of services and their participation in and completion of activities. To provide context for the impacts of JFI, we examined differences in service receipt between the two research groups.³ Data were collected in the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys and captured all types of services and activities, regardless of whether they were provided through JFI, through existing SNAP E&T, or were generally available in the community through programs such as WIOA or through community colleges, nonprofits, or other organizations.

During the three years following random assignment, the JFI group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search training activities and in education and training activities. Sixty seven percent of the JFI group participated in a job search training or assistance activity or in an education or training activity compared to 56 percent of the control group (Exhibit ES.2). In addition, the JFI group was more likely than the control group to participate in job search training or assistance activities (9 percentage point difference) and education or training activities (15 percentage point difference).

Exhibit ES.2. Over a three-year period, the JFI group participated in activities offered by JFI, existing SNAP E&T, or the community at higher rates than the control group



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

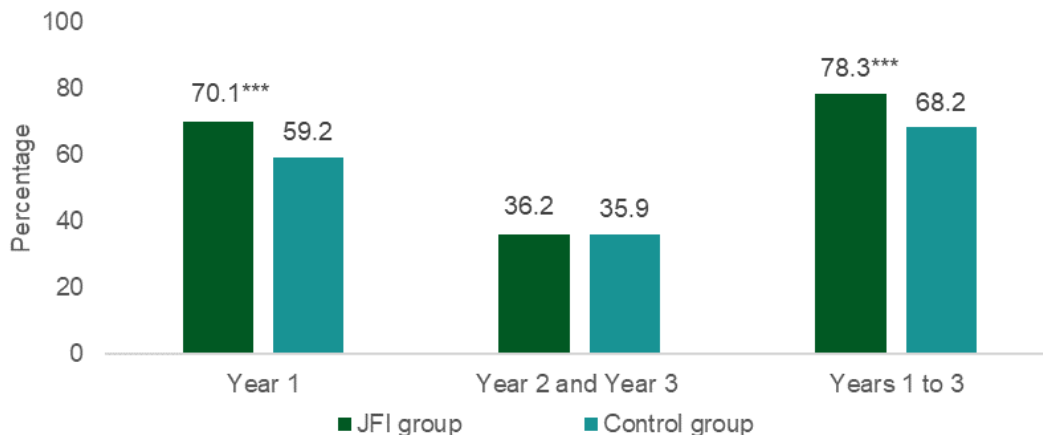
***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

³ In this analysis, “service receipt” includes both services (assessments, case management, and support services) and employment and training-related activities.

Differences in service receipt between the JFI and control groups were largest in the first year after random assignment and decreased in size over time. However, the significant difference between the JFI and control groups in rate of participation in education or training-related activities was observed for all three years, even after JFI services ended. The JFI group also had higher rates of participation over the three-year period than the control group in most types of activities, including occupational skills training (14 percentage point difference), education (14 percentage point difference), and general job skills training (13 percentage point difference; Appendix Table E.1). There was no difference between the two groups in rates of participation in work-based learning.

JFI group members also were more likely than control group members to complete an activity and receive an occupational certificate or license. Compared with individuals in the control group, individuals in the JFI group were 16 percentage points more likely than control group members to complete an activity and 7 percentage points more likely to receive an occupational certificate or license. JFI group members were also more likely than the control group to receive case management (78 versus 68 percent; Exhibit ES.3). On average, JFI group members had three additional contacts with an employment professional or case manager than control group members (11 versus 9 contacts, with rounding).

Exhibit ES.3. JFI group members were more likely than control group members to receive case management



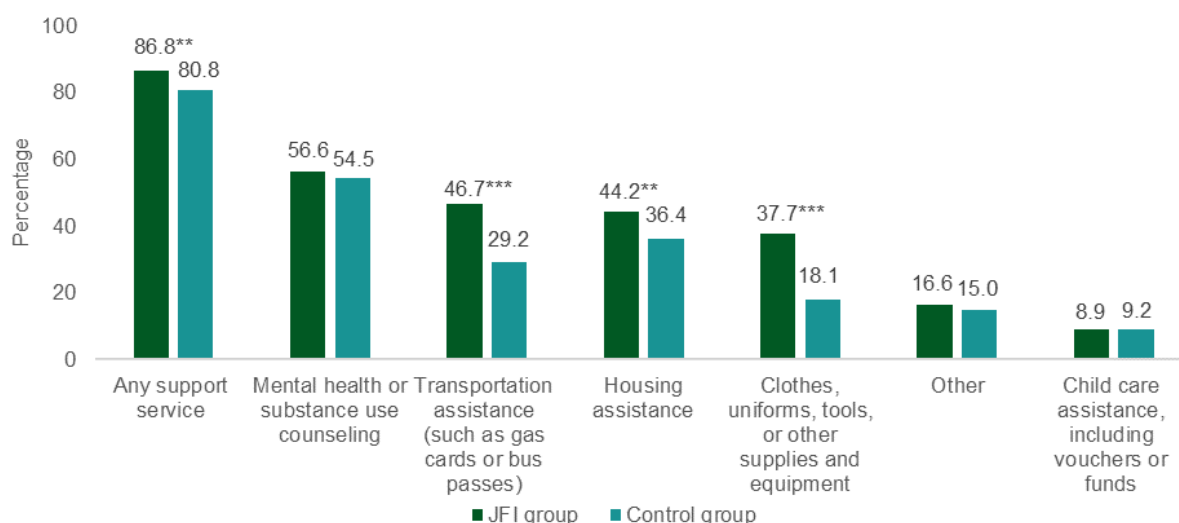
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members. The 12-month survey requested information about receipt of case management and support services between the date of random assignment and the date of the 12-month interview. The 36-month survey requested information about receipt of case management and support services between the date of the 12-month interview and the date of the 36-month interview. As a result, it is not possible to estimate receipt of assistance separately in Years 2 and 3.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

JFI group members also were more likely than control group members to receive support services. About 87 percent of individuals in the JFI group received a support service compared to 81 percent in the control group (Exhibit ES.4). The largest differences were for the receipt of clothes, uniforms, tools, or other supplies and equipment; and for transportation assistance.

Exhibit ES.4. JFI group members were more likely than control group members to receive support services



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members. “Other” included assistance with payment of utilities such as electricity, phone, heat, or gas; food assistance; and assistance with medical care.

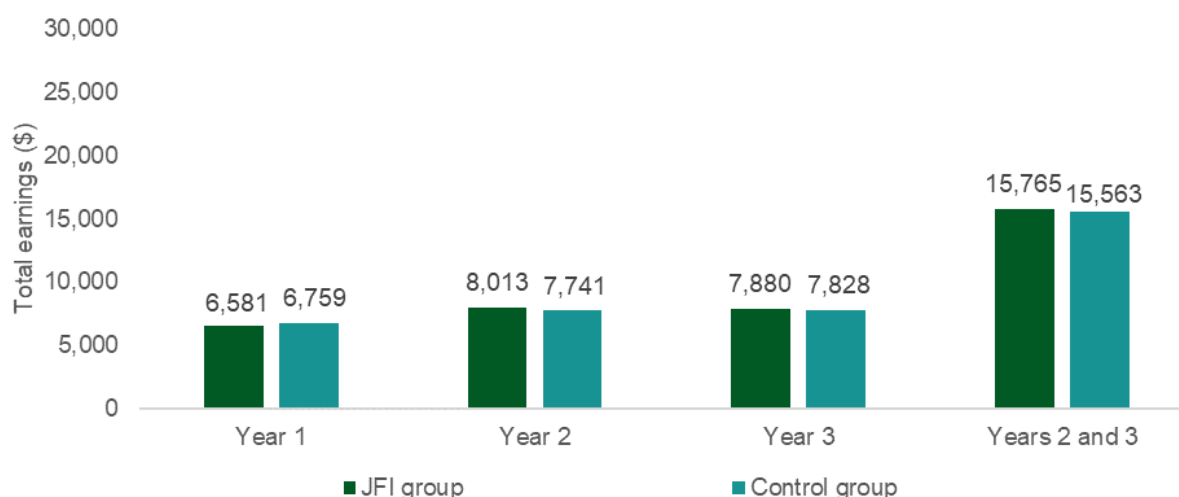
***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Impacts of JFI on employment and SNAP participation outcomes

We estimated the impacts of JFI on individual outcomes over the three years following random assignment. Before analyzing the data, we selected two primary outcomes: earnings (based on both the UI and survey data) and SNAP participation. Analyses of earnings and employment were based on both UI and survey data due to differences in data coverage or quality, or in the analysis samples and time periods covered in the data. Instead of focusing on outcomes in Year 3, we focused on those over a two-year period consisting of Years 2 and 3 after random assignment. This approach balanced potential concerns about how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected outcomes in Year 3 with measuring impacts on outcomes after individuals had sufficient time to participate in JFI activities in Year 1. The estimated impacts on other outcomes are considered exploratory and are used to support findings for the earnings and SNAP participation outcomes by examining whether they had similar impacts.

Earnings. Based on both UI and survey data, JFI had no impact on earnings. This lack of impact was true for Years 2 and 3 combined and separately for Years 1, 2, and 3 (Exhibits ES.5 and ES.6). Based on each data source, both research groups generally experienced increases in average earnings over time. The JFI group had greater average earnings over the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) relative to the control group, but this difference was not statistically significant.

Exhibit ES.5. JFI did not affect earnings (UI data)

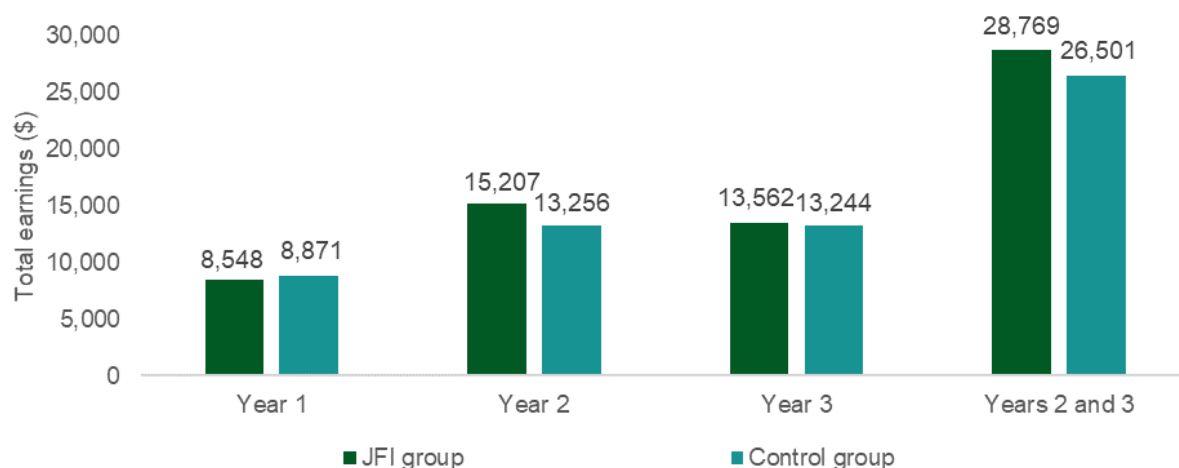


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,378 JFI group members and 1,378 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit ES.6. JFI did not affect earnings (survey data)



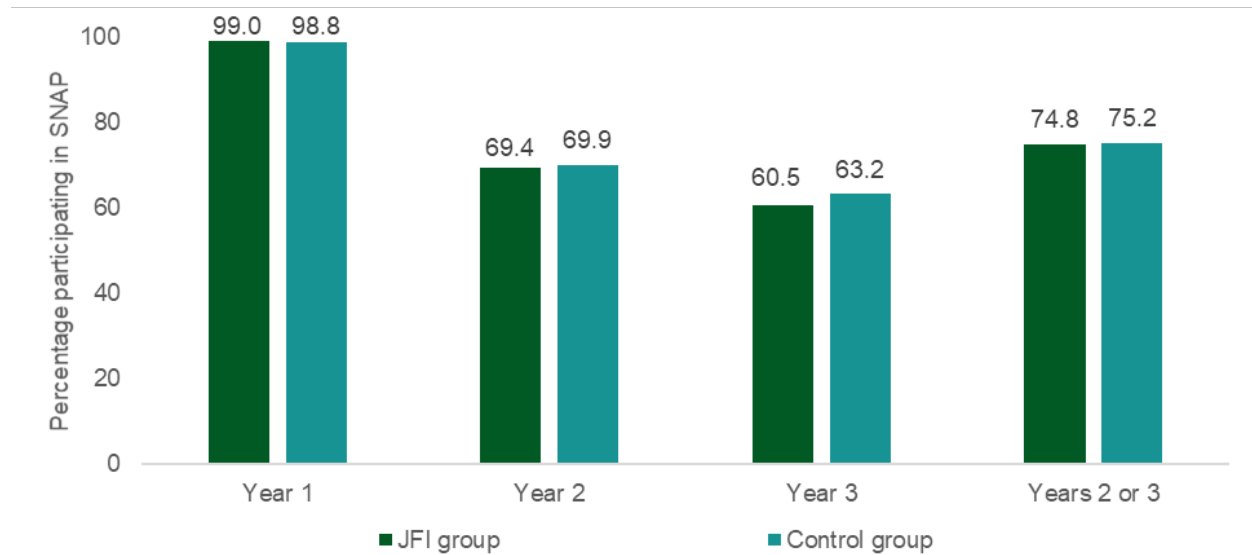
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

SNAP participation. JFI did not affect SNAP participation. About 75 percent of both JFI and control group members participated in SNAP at some point during this period (Years 2 and 3) after random assignment (Exhibit ES.7). The lack of impacts of JFI on SNAP participation reflects similar decreases each year in the rate of SNAP participation for the JFI and control groups. For example, SNAP participation rates decreased from about 99 percent for both groups in Year 1 to 61 percent for JFI group members and 63 percent for control group members in Year 3.

Exhibit ES.7. SNAP participation rates based on SNAP administrative data were similar for the JFI and control groups in each year



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,378 JFI group members and 1,378 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Employment, hours worked, and other job characteristics. JFI led to an increase in employment in the two-year period following random assignment from Year 2 to 3, based on survey data. There was an impact in Year 3, but not in Years 1 and 2. These findings were not corroborated by the UI data; based on those data, there were not impacts in Years 2 and 3 combined or in each individual year.

Employment rates provide information about the percentage of individuals employed during a given time period but do not describe the extent or duration of employment. To assess these employment characteristics, we examined the average amount of time individuals were employed each year. Both data sources showed that the JFI and control groups were employed for similar numbers of quarters/months in each year. Also, there were generally no impacts of JFI on hours worked or on the characteristics of jobs among the employed. The majority of employed individuals in both research groups received an employer-offered benefit, but those in the JFI group who were employed were 11 percentage points less likely than employed control group members to receive an employer-offered benefit. They also were less likely than control group members to receive dental insurance, paid vacation, and paid sick leave.

SNAP benefits and exit. There were no impacts of JFI on the average SNAP benefits received, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount. The average SNAP benefit amount in Years 2 and 3 for the JFI group was \$80 less than for the control group, but the difference was not statistically significant.

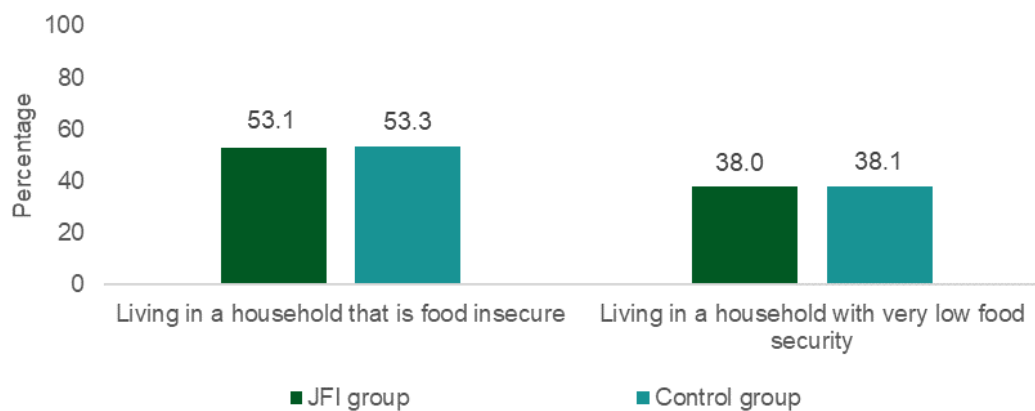
The JFI group and control group had similar likelihoods of exiting SNAP across the three years following random assignment—79 percent of the JFI group and 77 percent of the control group exited SNAP at some point during this period. Individuals who exited SNAP included those who left and did not re-enter SNAP in the three-year period, as well as those who left and re-entered before the end of the period. Thus, even though 21 percent of the JFI group participated in SNAP for the full three years, SNAP participation

at the end of this period was 49 percent, reflecting that individuals left and re-entered SNAP during the three-year period. These patterns of exiting and re-entering SNAP resulted in both research groups generally having a similar number of SNAP spells. About 57 percent of the JFI group had a single SNAP spell (meaning they either remained on SNAP for the full three-year period or exited and did not re-enter), 30 percent had two spells, and 13 percent had three or more spells. For the control group, these percentages were 58, 27, and 15, respectively.

Impacts of JFI on other outcomes

Rates of food insecurity were similar in the JFI and control groups. About 53 percent of both JFI and control group members lived in food insecure households (Exhibit ES.8). Rates of very low food security (a severe form of food insecurity) were also similar between groups (38 percent each).

Exhibit ES.8. JFI did not affect food insecurity



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 36-month survey, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

There were few statistically significant differences between the JFI and control groups for other outcome measures related to health, well-being, and housing status. Both research groups had similar levels of health and self-esteem and self-efficacy scores. However, JFI group members were 7 percentage points more likely to screen positively for depression. JFI group members also were more likely to live with family or friends (6 percentage point difference), and less likely to share housing with roommates (3 percentage point difference). Other measures of housing status were similar across research groups. The majority of each research group owned or rented a home or apartment (69 versus 72 percent), and similar percentages of each group were homeless (6 versus 4 percent).

JFI costs relative to benefits

JFI costs. AHS and its partners and providers reported spending \$8,868,903 from April 2015 to December 2018 on the planning and implementation of JFI (\$197,050 during the planning period, \$1,367,357 for recruitment, and \$7,304,496 for JFI services and activities). The FNS grant funded 77 percent of these costs; partners and providers leveraged other funding sources for the remaining 23 percent. Administration costs accounted for 33 percent of total costs, including time for staff meetings,

supervision, and other activities (\$2,951,537). Direct services accounted for 49 percent of total costs (\$4,352,958), with support services and case management being the largest share of those costs.

Costs relative to benefits. In the cost-benefit analysis, we measured the difference in the average costs of all services received by JFI and control group members—that is, the differential costs of JFI services—and compared the differential costs of JFI to the value of benefits received by JFI group members. As in the analysis of services received, we considered costs associated with all services and activities, including those delivered by JFI as well as community programs and organizations. This approach reflects the fact that impacts of JFI on individuals' outcomes, such as earnings, were influenced by *all* services individuals received during the 36-month follow-up period, not just those received through JFI.

Based on data from the survey, the estimated total costs of all JFI group services were \$9,549,204, including costs for both direct services and ongoing administration. This estimate is about 31 percent higher than the costs of JFI services alone (\$7,304,496), which indicates that some JFI group members received services from community programs and organizations while they were enrolled in JFI. The services received by the control group measure what services would have been available to JFI group members if JFI were not in place. The estimated costs of all control group services received by the JFI group members were \$3,717,716, including costs for direct services and ongoing administration. On average, the total costs of all direct services and activities received by JFI group members was \$7,113 per individual, on average. The total costs of all services control group members received through existing SNAP E&T and the community were \$2,229, on average.

Estimates of the benefits received by JFI group members reflect earnings and fringe benefits they accrued during the 36-month follow-up period. These data were obtained from the two sources of data used in the impact analysis: (1) UI wage records and (2) 36-month survey data. For the cost-benefit analysis, we used a framework to comprehensively list JFI group benefits and costs relative to the control group from multiple perspectives, including those of (1) individuals enrolled in JFI, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole—the sum of the other two perspectives. For each perspective, we estimated the net benefit (the difference between total benefits and total costs). A positive net benefit means the benefits outweighed the costs, whereas a negative net benefit means the costs outweighed the benefits. The net benefits of all services JFI group members received were positive for JFI group members but negative for government and taxpayers and for society during the 36-month follow-up period based on both data sources. The net benefit to society was negative by \$4,096 per JFI group member according to UI wage records and by \$1,900 per JFI group member according to 36-month survey data. These findings were robust to changes in assumptions about benefits and costs from all perspectives, such as the values of fringe benefits, taxes, and present values.

Main conclusions and discussion

The goal of the 10 SNAP E&T pilots was to test innovative strategies for increasing SNAP participants' employment and earnings and reducing their need for public assistance benefits. Through its comprehensive data collection and rigorous experimental design, this evaluation assessed whether JFI—the innovative SNAP E&T program Vermont designed and implemented targeting SNAP work participants with significant barriers to employment—was effective in achieving these goals.

AHS worked with new partners and providers to create regional teams to coordinate and deliver services for JFI. The pilot targeted individuals with severe barriers to employment, including those who had

unstable housing, substance use disorders, mental health issues, and criminal histories. JFI staff faced challenges with keeping individuals engaged in services but were able to tailor employment or training-related activities to individuals' mental health or substance use issues, or other physical or learning disabilities and address some barriers through support services. JFI staff reported that the flexible and robust support services were key to keeping individuals engaged in services and activities. Despite the challenges in getting JFI group members to engage in services, they were more likely than control group members to start an activity, complete an activity, and receive support services. However, their increased engagement did not lead to an increase in earnings over time. Because JFI group members did not earn significantly more than control group members, the overall cost of implementing the pilot outweighed its benefits.

JFI impacts in context of employment and training literature. The JFI study findings are consistent with the previous literature that has often found small or no labor market effects of employment and training programs for low-income populations offering similar services as JFI. The literature suggests that programs serving low-income populations can typically engage individuals and increase their receipt of services relative to those received by the study control groups in their local areas. The differences for service receipt can be large, especially for receipt of occupational skills training and subsidized employment, translating into positive effects on the percentages of individuals who participate in training activities and the attainment of associated certificates and credentials. However, few of the studies have found that the programs lead to long-term increases in earnings or independence from public assistance (at least over the time period covered by many studies, which is typically less than four years).

There are notable exceptions, however, that show that the types of services (such as intensive case management and support services) offered by JFI could be effective. As a result, it is important to understand how receipt of services, as well as challenges experienced in implementation may have contributed to the evaluation findings.

Discussion of JFI impacts. Although JFI did not lead to increased earnings or reduced participation in SNAP, it successfully increased the percentages of individuals who received case management and support services relative to the control group, as well as the percentage of individuals who participated in employment or training-related activities. This accomplishment is notable given the prevalence and extent of barriers JFI group members faced—only 14 percent were employed at the time of random assignment, and 19 percent did not have a high school diploma. The higher rates of receipt of case management and support services among JFI group members may have allowed individuals to overcome barriers associated not only with starting employment or training-related activities, but also sustaining participation over time and ultimately completing those activities. The mitigation of barriers for JFI group members may have also contributed to their ability to continue participating in employment or training-related activities in the community even after the JFI service period ended.

In addition, JFI led to higher employment rates (based on survey data) in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3). This finding suggests that although the pilot may have increased the chances of finding employment, these jobs did not pay appreciably more than those obtained by the control group, resulting in no impact on earnings.

Information collected from pilot and provider staff underscored the severity of barriers that the JFI group members faced. Many JFI staff discussed the difficulty of overcoming barriers related to transportation, substance use, mental health, criminal histories, and homelessness. In particular, JFI staff reported that the opioid epidemic and shortage of affordable housing were at historic rates during the JFI service period.

They also reported that many individuals were not ready for employment or were severely constrained in the types or locations of employment for which they could apply. For example, an individual receiving substance use treatment could have daily medical appointments that would interfere with their work schedule; an individual with unstable housing could have difficulty accessing the hygiene or transportation resources they needed to obtain a job; and an individual with a criminal history could have very few local employers willing to hire them, particularly in rural areas.

Because both the JFI and control group members were equally affected by these types of barriers, both groups needed and received case management and support services. However, JFI intended to offer more robust case management and support services as a core component of the pilot, compared with control group services received through existing SNAP E&T and the community, so the similarity in service receipt between research groups is surprising. We expected larger differences in the percentages of JFI and control group members who received case management and support services, especially given JFI's focus on barrier reduction. It is possible that despite having differences across research groups in the receipt of case management and support service that were smaller than expected, there were differences between groups in the type and intensity of case management and support services. For example, the JFI group received case management through meetings with EAP and VR counselors, while the control group received it through meetings with VDOL. JFI case management generally focused on longer-term counseling, stabilization, and employment planning, while control group case management often focused on shorter-term job search assistance. The array and amounts of support services offered to the two groups were also different. For example, the JFI group had access to a robust array of support services including reimbursement for medical care, license fees, housing and transportation supports, while the control group had access only to support services available in the community. These differences in the type and intensity of case management and support services may have contributed to the higher rates of participation in and completion of activities among the JFI group relative to the control group, and ultimately to the impacts of JFI on employment. In addition, rates of participation in education and training activities and completion of activities remained higher for the JFI group than for the control group through Year 3 after random assignment, even after JFI group services ended.

These differences translated into a higher rate of employment among for the JFI group, but not into higher average earnings. This may reflect the amount of time required to reduce severe barriers, become employed, and obtain higher-paying jobs. With many JFI group members participating in activities in Year 3 and employment impacts just beginning to emerge in that year, a greater amount of time may be required in which to observe earnings impacts among such a highly-barriered population. This highlights the need to learn more about sustained barriers that prevented JFI group members from moving into higher-wage, intermediary jobs.

It is also possible that, while the JFI group was more likely than the control group to start and complete employment or training-related activities, the differences between research groups were not large enough to translate into impacts on outcomes. Indeed, JFI staff expressed concerns early in the pilot period that the program could have limited impacts without a greater focus on employment or training-related activities. The GCRC was selected as the main employment or training-related activity offered through JFI, but take up of GCRC services was lower than AHS and CCV staff expected throughout the service period. VR and VABIR offered employment-related counseling and progressive employment activities, but staff reported those services and activities typically took over a year to complete. VDOL offered employment-related services such as job search assistance and made referrals to training opportunities

through WIOA, but staff reported there were not many slots available for these types of long-term training opportunities.

To assess the possibility that impacts were diluted due to the size of the difference between research groups in participation in employment or training-related activities, we compared impacts for individuals who did and did not start an employment or training-related activity and those who completed or did not complete an activity. These exploratory analyses showed that there were no impacts on earnings for individuals who started an activity or for those who did not start one, as well as no impacts on earnings based on completion status, suggesting that the take-up and completion of JFI employment or training-related activities was not the main factor behind the lack of impacts on earnings. The analysis did reveal impacts on employment based on the survey among individuals who started an activity, but no impacts among those who did not start one.

When considering the overall findings from the JFI pilot, there are a few additional factors that may have contributed to the results, including the following:

- **Earnings impacts might depend on the type of activities in which individuals participated.** Earnings impacts may not be apparent for all JFI group members, but that finding does not mean specific activities, such as occupational skills training or work-based learning, were ineffective. Assessing the effectiveness of services and activities separately and in combination would help identify promising practices for improving outcomes.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic which began during the 36-month follow-up survey period may have affected the magnitude of the impacts found in Year 3.** Outcomes measured in Year 3 for participants who were randomly assigned in the pilot between April 2017 and December 2017 could have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which began to dramatically affect life in the United States in March 2020. We found evidence of employment-related impacts in Year 3, but not Years 1 or 2. Given that employment rates were higher in the JFI group than the control group in the period overlapping with the pandemic, it is possible that the pandemic impacted the JFI group less than the control group. However, we cannot identify what these impacts would have been in the absence of the pandemic.
- **JFI costs were higher than the financial benefits of the program, but this primarily reflects the absence of an impact on earnings.** The net benefit was negative for JFI due to the differential costs of JFI group services not being offset by the benefits accrued through earnings and fringe benefits during the 36-month follow-up period. When interpreting this finding, it is important to consider that JFI services were new and experimental. Even though we excluded the costs of planning and recruitment in considering the cost differential between JFI and control group services, the costs of JFI group services were likely higher for the three years of the pilot than they would have been if administered over a longer period of time.

Although outcomes for JFI were mixed, SNAP E&T program administrators can learn from the implementation of the JFI model, particularly for serving populations with significant barriers. The JFI model relied heavily on forming regional teams to coordinate service delivery for individuals with severe barriers. This process was not easy in some regions, as many of these organizations had not worked together before and had different cultures and approaches to employment and training. Early uncertainty around processes and coordination of services likely created gaps in services which caused individuals with significant barriers to disengage. However, over time a true team-based model emerged in many regions and JFI staff were able to collectively identify the best service plan for each individual.

Ultimately, Vermont created a model that benefitted not just the SNAP E&T program but the way providers in each region worked together, communicated, and served their customers. All of the providers wanted to continue the regional teams formed under the JFI model after the pilot ended. However, they reported that even without JFI, the collaboration and partnerships they created would continue informally.

I. Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the primary source of nutrition assistance for many individuals and families with low incomes. SNAP provides monthly benefits to help participants obtain adequate access to food; for some program participants, it provides work supports through SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) programs to help them become economically self-sufficient. Although States are required to administer a SNAP E&T program, they have flexibility in designing and determining its services and activities. States typically offer participants assessments and support services, and a range of activities, including job search assistance or training, occupational skills training, and basic education.

Despite the importance of SNAP E&T programs, information about the most effective approaches that help SNAP participants gain skills and find work is limited. For this reason, as part of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress authorized and funded SNAP E&T pilots to test innovative strategies for connecting SNAP participants with jobs that would increase their incomes and reduce their need for public assistance benefits. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) awarded grants to 10 States—California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington.⁴ This legislation also funded a rigorous, longitudinal evaluation of these pilots.

The pilots varied in their target populations, geographic reach, and the number of individuals enrolled. The majority of individuals the pilots targeted were unemployed or underemployed and faced significant barriers to employment, such as being homeless or having a criminal history or substance use disorder. Some pilots operated statewide, whereas others operated in select areas of the State, such as counties, community college districts, or local workforce investment areas. Most pilots offered services in both rural and urban areas, but a few focused only on rural or urban communities. Each pilot enrolled 3,000 to 7,000 individuals, for a total of 44,359 individuals across the 10 pilots.

The SNAP E&T pilots generally expanded the types and amounts of services provided through States’ existing SNAP E&T programs. Services typically included (1) a comprehensive skills or clinical assessment to determine an individual’s work readiness, skills, and barriers to employment; (2) case management services that developed and supported a detailed individualized work and barrier-reduction plan; and (3) support services,⁵ such as transportation assistance, housing assistance, and training or work supplies (for example, uniforms, books, clothes, or tools) that helped reduce barriers to both engagement in the pilot and employment. The pilots also offered

Services are resources provided to or administered with individuals, such as assessments, case management, and support services.

Activities are employment or training-related events in which individuals participate, such as job search assistance training, basic education, occupational skills training, or work-based learning.

⁴ SNAP in California is administered by the counties. The FNS grant was awarded to the State SNAP agency and the State oversaw the pilot, but only Fresno County conducted and primarily administered it. We refer to the Fresno pilot as “California.”

⁵ Referred to as participant reimbursements in the SNAP E&T program; however, for this report, we describe the package of services as support services.

a range of employment and training-related activities, such as independent job search, job readiness training, job search assistance, basic education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning opportunities (such as subsidized employment, work experience, internships, and work study).

The activities the pilots offered generally were more expansive than those offered under existing SNAP E&T programs, which in most States tended to focus on less intensive independent job search and job search assistance. Moreover, while the pilots were operating, existing SNAP E&T programs could not fund some of the activities and services the pilots provided, such as subsidized employment,⁶ substance use disorder counseling, and mental health counseling. Appendix A provides a summary of each pilot's characteristics, including the target population, pilot location, and pilot start and end dates, and Appendix B provides more detail about the SNAP E&T program and work requirement policies.

This report summarizes evaluation findings for one State—Vermont.⁷ It provides a detailed description of the pilot's design and implementation, the services individuals received, and the effectiveness of those services in improving individuals' outcomes. The report also includes findings from the cost-benefit analysis, which itemizes specific monetary costs and benefits of pilot services, and assesses whether the benefits of the services and activities offered through the pilot were large enough to justify their costs.

A. Overview of Vermont's pilot

Vermont began statewide enrollment in its pilot, Jobs for Independence (JFI), on March 7, 2016 (Exhibit I.1). The State includes 14 counties that are organized into 12 regions for delivering human services programs. Vermont is primarily rural, with only one urban area—Burlington, the State's capital. In the year before Vermont began JFI enrollment, the average unemployment rate in the State was 3.6 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019).

Exhibit I.1. JFI locations



The Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) administers SNAP. Its SNAP E&T program is voluntary. At the time of the evaluation, SNAP E&T was offered to all SNAP participants, but those who participated generally were able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs)—adults ages 18 to 49 who are not disabled and have no dependents. All ABAWDs, and others interested in the program, were referred to the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL), which provided SNAP E&T services statewide. Because of limited funding, the program primarily focused on job placement, offering job search assistance and workfare for ABAWDs. Participation in the program was relatively low.

AHS developed JFI to provide more robust services to targeted individuals who struggled to find employment—people with substance use disorders, housing instability, mental health disorders, or criminal histories (Exhibit I.2). JFI services were voluntary and offered statewide through service providers in the State's 12 human services regions. AHS administered the pilot and contracted with five key providers—the Vermont Division of Vocational

⁶ The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334) made subsidized employment an allowable SNAP E&T component; the final rule published in January 2021 (FNS 2021) permitted States to begin offering it as an E&T component in March 2021.

⁷ Similar reports for each pilot and a summary report are available at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.

I. Introduction

Rehabilitation (VR), VDOL, the Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR), the Community College of Vermont (CCV), and Vermont’s community action agencies (CAAs).

These providers collaborated to offer clinical assessment and counseling services, support services, and referrals to employment services appropriate for an individual’s readiness for work with either a VR counselor, a VABIR employment counselor, or a VDOL case manager. Individuals in JFI also could access services through the CCV if they wanted to obtain a Governor’s Career Readiness Certificate (GCRC, similar to the National Career Readiness Certificate).

Exhibit I.2. Pilot characteristics

Characteristic	
Pilot operation period	March 2016 to December 2018
Location	Statewide
Grantee agency	Vermont Agency of Human Services, Economic Services Division
Key providers	Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Vermont Department of Labor Community College of Vermont Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation Community action agencies of Vermont
Target population	New work registrants ^a with self-identified barriers, including substance use disorders, mental health disorders, housing instability, and/or criminal histories
Number enrolled	3,031
Program type	Voluntary
Existing SNAP E&T program	Vermont offered limited services through its voluntary SNAP E&T program; the control group received Vermont Department of Labor services, which included basic case management, job search assistance, workfare for able-bodied adults without dependents, and job placement assistance
Key JFI services	Clinical assessment and counseling Ongoing barrier reduction through support services Referral to employment services with a vocational rehabilitation counselor or Vermont Department of Labor case manager Classes through Community College of Vermont to obtain a Governor’s Career Readiness Certificate Referrals to education or occupational skills training providers

^a Work registrants are SNAP participants who have not met any Federal exemptions from SNAP work requirements and are therefore required to register for work. Federal exemptions apply to individuals who are younger than 16 or older than 59; physically or mentally unfit for employment; subject to and complying with work requirements for another program; a caretaker of a dependent child younger than 6 or an incapacitated individual; participating in a drug or alcohol treatment and rehabilitation program; employed at least 30 hours a week; or enrolled at least half time in a recognized school or training program.

From March 2016 to March 2018, Vermont enrolled 3,031 SNAP participants into the pilot. Individuals enrolled were randomly assigned in roughly equivalent numbers to a treatment group (that received enhanced services; referred to as “the JFI group”) and a control group (that received existing SNAP E&T services). AHS continued providing services until December 2018.

B. Evaluation of SNAP E&T pilots

The evaluation included the following four components:

1. An *implementation analysis* that documented the context and operations of each pilot
2. A *participation analysis* that examined the characteristics, participation levels, and service paths of individuals in the pilots
3. An *impact analysis* that identified what works, and for whom, by examining impacts on employment and earnings; public assistance receipt; and other outcomes, such as food security, health, well-being, and housing
4. A *cost-benefit analysis* that estimated the return on each dollar invested in the pilots

The evaluation of each pilot used an experimental research design in which individuals eligible for SNAP E&T who were enrolled into the pilot were randomly assigned into treatment and control groups that were offered differing arrays of services. Random assignment ensures that any differences in outcomes between the two groups are a result of the enhanced services and not driven by the differences in the characteristics of the individuals who did and did not receive those services. Treatment group members were eligible for the enhanced set of services developed under the pilot, and control group members were eligible for services available through existing SNAP E&T programs in the State; both the treatment and control groups continued to be eligible for any other services available in their communities. Through random assignment, the treatment and control groups within a pilot were, on average, similar across a range of characteristics at the time they enrolled. They differed only in the services they subsequently were eligible to receive.

FNS published an evaluation report that presented interim findings in Vermont for each component of the evaluation (Mabli et al. 2021). The implementation and cost analyses described the planning and early implementation periods of the pilots, and the participation and impact analyses focused on the 12-month period following random assignment for those enrolled through 2017. We reported these findings for most of the individuals (2,756, or 90.9 percent) who eventually enrolled in the pilots.

The interim report described several notable findings:

- **Implementation.** Vermont successfully developed services, teamed with several providers throughout the community, enrolled individuals within a year of receiving the grant, and implemented the pilot model mostly as intended, with JFI providing intensive counseling and support services that were viewed by pilot staff as key to helping individuals overcome barriers. Although many services were delivered, providers experienced challenges related to keeping individuals engaged in services and coordinating services across providers.
- **Participation.** Almost all individuals in the JFI group met with a counselor, started an assessment, or received a support service. Most individuals started an employment or training-related activity, although fewer individuals completed activities and received a credential, certification, or degree. About two-thirds of individuals left the pilot within the first year, with about half of those who exited leaving within six months after enrollment, often before completing services.
- **Impact.** Although the JFI group was more likely than the control group to start and complete job search training activities and education and occupational skills training activities, JFI did not affect employment or earnings and did not lead to changes in the likelihood of participating in SNAP within the first year after individuals enrolled.

This final evaluation report builds on the interim report to provide more conclusive evidence about the effectiveness of the pilot's services. The full effects of the enhanced services may not have materialized

during the short-term, 12-month follow-up period examined in the interim report, especially for some individuals still receiving services at the 12-month point. Therefore, this report focuses on individuals' outcomes over a period of up to 36 months after random assignment, allowing an assessment of relatively longer-term impacts including, for some individuals, those measured after AHS stopped providing services in December 2018. In addition, the final evaluation report includes participation and impact analyses for all individuals who enrolled in the pilot, including those who enrolled in 2018. Finally, the implementation and cost analyses in the interim report described the planning and early implementation periods of the pilots but did not cover the full period during which the State offered services and incurred costs. This report expands the implementation analysis to include the full period during which the pilot was implemented and discusses the potential for its sustainability and replicability. It also builds on the interim cost analysis to determine the net benefit (relative to costs) of providing JFI services.

C. Organization of this report

The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

- Chapter II presents the data and methodology used to conduct the analyses in the evaluation.
- Chapter III describes how enrollment changed over time and the characteristics of the individuals who enrolled.
- Chapter IV describes the pilot's planning and implementation, the ways in which its implementation differed from the original design, challenges experienced, and responses to these challenges. It also describes the sustainability and replicability of JFI.
- Chapter V presents findings from the participation analysis, which describe the services that individuals in the JFI group received.
- Chapter VI describes differences in the services received by the JFI group and the control group.
- Chapter VII presents findings from the impact analysis, which describes the impact of JFI on employment, earnings, benefit receipt, and other outcomes.
- Chapter VIII describes the costs of services the JFI group received and compares the costs and benefits of those services.
- Chapter IX offers conclusions.
- Appendix A describes the primary characteristics of the 10 pilots; Appendix B provides an overview of the SNAP E&T program; and Appendices C to H present detailed findings from the analyses described in Chapters V through VIII, as well as additional subgroup analyses.

II. Data and methodology

This chapter describes the sources of the data we collected for the evaluation and how we used them in the analyses. We discuss how we obtained the data and the types of information each source contained. We also explain which individuals we included in each analysis and the methods we used to address the evaluation's research objectives. A technical supplement in a separate volume describes the data and methodology in detail (Dotter et al. 2022).⁸

A. Data sources

We collected data to support the evaluation from a variety of sources:

1. **Baseline registration form.** After obtaining study consent, pilot intake staff collected baseline information about individuals in the pilot, including their demographic characteristics, employment histories, and receipt of public assistance. We collected baseline data for all JFI and control group members.
2. **Implementation data.** We collected most of the implementation data during three rounds of site visits to the State, during which we collected information about implementation, challenges, and lessons learned during different periods of pilot operation:
 - Round 1 (April 2016): The planning and early implementation periods
 - Round 2 (May 2017): The first full year of pilot operations
 - Round 3 (September 2018): The last year of pilot operations, as well as planning for the end of the pilot and sustainability of its services

We also collected information during technical assistance and monitoring site visits and telephone calls throughout the planning and service delivery periods.

The site visits included interviews with AHS and State-level staff, and JFI partners and service providers; structured observations of service provider operations; in-depth interviews with four JFI group members who participated in activities and received services; four focus groups that included either JFI group members who were engaged in services or those who never engaged or stopped engaging before completing services; and targeted discussions with seven employers that provided work experience opportunities to JFI group members.

3. **Administrative service use data.** AHS and its partners and providers collected and shared administrative data that documented the types of training, education, and services they provided to JFI group members and, where applicable, control group members. The administrative data analyzed for this report included information on service receipt from the date of random assignment for each individual through either the last known date of service or the end of JFI's service period (December 2018).

⁸ The supplement provides additional information about the analysis approach, including details on the study design, analytic weights, approach to addressing missing data, and the impact estimation approach.

4. **Unemployment insurance wage records.** We obtained data on employment status and earnings from State unemployment insurance (UI) wage records. We obtained data for each individual in the pilot who had earnings for 8 quarters (two years) before the date of random assignment, at least 12 quarters after random assignment for individuals randomly assigned through September 2017, and at least 8 quarters after random assignment for individuals randomly assigned after September 2017. The data contained earnings amounts for each quarter, which we also used to construct indicators of quarterly employment status.
5. **SNAP administrative data.** AHS provided SNAP administrative caseload data. We used these data to construct measures of receipt of public assistance (receipt of SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]), SNAP and TANF benefit amounts, and income. We also used these data to characterize individuals' recent history of SNAP participation. AHS provided monthly data for all individuals in the pilot from one year before random assignment through December 2020.
6. **12- and 36-month follow-up surveys.** The 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys were important sources of service receipt and outcomes data examined in this report. We conducted telephone surveys about 12 months after random assignment with individuals enrolled in the pilot through December 2017 (1,251 JFI and control group members). We also conducted telephone surveys about 36 months after random assignment among individuals who responded to the 12-month survey (849 JFI and control group members). The 12-month survey asked for information about individuals' service receipt, employment, and earnings in the 12 months after random assignment. The 36-month survey asked for similar information for the period between the 12- and 36-month surveys. These surveys also provided data for measures of household food security status, health, well-being, and housing status around the time of the interview. The survey data complemented the UI wage records and provided more detail on individuals' employment and earnings, including the number of jobs they held over time; the job start and end dates (if applicable); and characteristics of the jobs, such as hours worked per week, weekly earnings, job type, fringe benefits, and occupation.
7. **Cost data.** To estimate JFI costs, we collected data from cost workbooks completed by AHS and its partners and providers through the end of the JFI service period. The workbooks were the basis for calculating total costs and describing the categories of costs for the JFI group, including those for staff, direct services, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operations. In addition, to estimate the total cost of each type of service, we administered a time-use survey to collect data on the percentage of time direct service providers spent on each type of service for JFI group members. As described in the technical supplement, we used data from other sources to estimate the costs of control group services and the dollar values of benefits included in the cost-benefit analysis.

B. Analysis approach

The findings presented in this report are based on a comprehensive set of analyses.

1. Implementation analysis

The implementation analysis summarized and synthesized the data collected through the site visits and during technical assistance and monitoring. The analysis focused mainly on the data collected from formal interviews, but we incorporated the information from technical assistance and monitoring into findings when appropriate. Information from the focus groups and case studies is included to provide context; however, it is important to note that we collected these data from small numbers of JFI

individuals and employers, and their experiences and opinions are not necessarily representative of the entire JFI group or all employers.

We organized the data by topic, interviewee, and pilot office to facilitate analysis by type of respondent (for example, AHS or provider). We developed tables and synthesized information across respondents to describe the flow of services and how they changed over time, the challenges staff faced, and lessons learned.

2. Participation analysis

The participation analysis used administrative service use data recorded by service providers to summarize engagement and participation in services and activities following random assignment for JFI group members (control group members were not included in this analysis). The data measured individuals' receipt of services and participation in activities during the entire service period in which individuals could have been engaged in services (March 2016 through December 2018). All individuals enrolled in JFI (through March 2018) are included in the main analysis presented in the report. However, to understand service receipt patterns in the group of individuals on which the impact analysis is based, we re-estimated several participation analyses in the appendix using individuals randomly assigned through December 2017 (Appendix Table D.1).⁹

We created timelines for each JFI group member to describe when they started to receive services and, for those who completed services, end dates. These timelines allowed us to estimate the order in which individuals typically proceeded through activities and the length of time they spent on each one and in JFI overall.

3. Analysis of differences in service use between JFI and control groups

This analysis statistically compared receipt of services among JFI and control group members over the 36 months following random assignment. Comparing the differences between JFI and control groups in service use provided context for understanding the impacts on employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance.

The analysis was based primarily on 12- and 36-month survey data, which were available for both JFI and control group members randomly assigned through December 2017.¹⁰ The 12-month survey data provided information on service receipt and participation in activities from the date of random assignment through approximately 12 months later, whereas the 36-month survey provided similar information from the date of the 12-month interview until about 36 months after random assignment. We combined these 12- and 36-month survey data to form a single longitudinal data file that describes, for each member of the JFI and control groups, the employment-related services and education and training activities in which they participated during the 36-month period following random assignment, including type and

⁹ Due to the limitation of available data, the main impact analyses restricted the individuals included to those randomly assigned through December 2017 so we could have a long enough period to analyze 36-month outcomes.

¹⁰ The analysis also used administrative data analyzed in the participation analysis when information on the use of specific services was available for both JFI and control group members; we present some statistics in Appendix E.

duration.¹¹ The survey data captured any type of service received, regardless of whether it was provided through JFI; existing SNAP E&T; or providers in the community, such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs, community colleges, nonprofits, or other organizations.

We compared regression-adjusted averages of measures of service receipt for the JFI and control groups. To improve the precision of the estimates, the regressions controlled for the characteristics of individuals as measured at the time of random assignment, including demographic characteristics (such as age, educational attainment, and number of children in the household) and economic characteristics (such as employment status and earnings). We weighted the observations to ensure that the differences were representative of all individuals enrolled in the pilot before the end of 2017. We constructed the weights to reflect the random assignment process, survey design, and survey nonresponse, and used t-tests to determine whether service receipt differences between the JFI and control groups were statistically significant.

4. Analysis of impacts on employment and well-being outcomes

To estimate how JFI affected individuals' outcomes, we compared the average outcomes of the JFI and control groups over the 36 months following random assignment. Because JFI and control group members' baseline characteristics on average were the same at the time of random assignment (see Chapter III and Appendix C), differences in their outcomes after random assignment can be attributed to differences in the services offered to individuals in each group.

We used three data sources to measure outcomes: (1) UI wage records, (2) SNAP administrative data, and (3) 12- and 36-month follow-up survey data. The outcomes examined included employment status, earnings, and job characteristics, such as hours worked and occupation. We measured employment and earnings by quarter and year, using the start and end dates of jobs reported in the surveys. Household food security status was measured over the 30 days before each survey period, whereas health, well-being, and housing status were generally measured at the time of each survey interview.

We estimated impacts for most outcomes for individuals randomly assigned through December 2017. However, because UI wage records were available only through September 2020, estimates of impacts on employment and earnings measured using UI wage data include only those individuals randomly assigned through September 2017.

We analyzed outcomes related to earnings and employment using both UI wage records and survey data. Findings for these parallel analyses may differ because of differences in data coverage or quality, or in the analysis samples and time periods covered in the follow-up data. For example, UI wage records are not subject to the recall error that presents a potential problem in surveys. However, UI wage records do not cover all types of jobs, exclude jobs in certain industries, do not contain information on job

¹¹ The activities measured in the survey included (1) job search assistance or job search training and (2) education and occupational skills training. Job search assistance or job search training activities included those that helped individuals with resume writing, interviewing, and networking. Education and occupational skills training activities included education in the form of adult basic education or General Education Development (GED) courses, English as a second language (ESL) classes, or college courses; occupational skills training programs that prepared individuals for specific occupations; general job skills training programs that helped individuals learn widely applicable job skills and readied them for work; and work-based learning activities, such as paid or unpaid internships and apprenticeships.

characteristics, and are subject to other reporting errors.¹² The omissions are nontrivial, and workers in sectors with no or partial coverage in UI wage records comprise about 10 percent of U.S. employment (Hotz and Scholz 2002; Kornfeld and Bloom 1999). Additionally, UI wage records do not cover workers who are casually employed, such as day laborers or part-time helpers, and exclude most cash-only work and work that is part of the “gig economy” (Abraham et al. 2018; Katz and Krueger 2016, 2019). Survey data also have limitations. In addition to the potential for recall error, these data were not available for everyone enrolled in the pilot because some individuals did not respond to the survey. Also, the characteristics and experiences of individuals who responded to the survey may have differed from those who did not respond.¹³

Further, the time periods for which data were available differed for the UI and survey data, which means that analysis samples for 36 months of follow-up were different for the two data sources. Survey data included individuals randomly assigned from March 2016 through December 2017, whereas UI wage records for JFI included individuals randomly assigned from March 2016 through September 2017. The shorter time frame for the UI wage records reflects a typical lag in the availability of these administrative data associated with employer reporting schedules and the need for State agencies to process data after employers have reported them. Finally, we note that even though there are differences between the data sources, each should provide unbiased estimates of the impacts of JFI on the outcomes they measure because the JFI and control groups were balanced on individual characteristics at the time of random assignment.

With an experimental design, unbiased impact estimates are attainable from the differences between average outcomes of the JFI and control groups. We estimated impacts on outcomes by comparing regression-adjusted averages for each research group to improve the precision of estimates and adjust for small baseline differences between groups that may have arisen by chance or because of survey nonresponse or missing administrative records data. Regressions controlled for individuals’ characteristics as measured at the time of random assignment.¹⁴ We used t-tests to determine whether there were significant differences between the JFI and control groups that were unlikely to have occurred purely by chance.¹⁵

¹² In particular, UI wage records do not cover self-employed workers, railroad employees, workers in service for relatives, most agricultural labor, some domestic service workers, and part-time employees of nonprofit organizations (U.S. Department of Labor 2014).

¹³ An analysis of the differences in individual characteristics of survey responders and nonresponders, and the differences between research groups, is in the technical supplement.

¹⁴ The full set of characteristics and additional information on their selection can be found in the technical supplement.

¹⁵ Analyses in this report tested for statistical significance at the 0.01, 0.05, and 0.10 levels. We used the 0.10 level because the evaluation was assessing the effectiveness of new interventions for which there was no previous evidence of effectiveness for SNAP participants. A more stringent statistical significance threshold often is used when evaluating ongoing programs for which there is an established literature on program effects based on prior studies. Using a more stringent statistical significance threshold in the current evaluation would have reduced statistical power and limited our ability to identify and highlight promising sets of services offered through the pilots. By using a 0.10 statistical significance level, the evaluation aimed to build knowledge in the field of workforce development for SNAP participants on which future SNAP E&T evaluations can expand, and eventually apply more stringent tests of effectiveness once programs and service models have been established for a longer period of time.

We calculated average outcomes for research groups by applying weights to each observation to help ensure that estimated differences between the JFI and control groups were representative of all individuals enrolled in the pilot in the State. We constructed these weights to reflect the random assignment process and, for analyses based on the survey data, adjust for survey nonresponse bias based on observable characteristics recorded prior to random assignment.

We estimated the impact of JFI on many outcomes and across several subgroups, performing statistical tests for each. However, the likelihood that some estimates are found statistically significant simply by chance increases with the number of estimates tested, potentially leading to the false discovery of impacts not really caused by JFI. To help guard against this problem, known as multiple comparisons bias, we selected two primary (confirmatory) outcomes before analyzing the data: (1) earnings (based on both the UI wage records and survey data) and (2) SNAP participation in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) after random assignment. We defined the primary outcomes over this period of available data because many JFI group members were expected to be engaged in education and training in the first year, which could have reduced their opportunity for employment during that time. Although it is typical to examine longer-term effects of employment and training programs on outcomes by using a time period farthest from when individuals participated in activities, we did not consider Year 3 outcomes among our primary outcomes due to concerns about the adverse effects of COVID-19 on individuals' outcomes in that year. (For about 52 percent of individuals who were randomly assigned through December 2017, the COVID-19 pandemic took place during their third year after random assignment [with the start of the pandemic defined by the nationwide enactment of the CARES Act on March 27, 2020].) Although JFI's effect on employment was important to assess in the evaluation, we excluded employment from the set of primary outcomes due to our focus on the two-year period (Years 2 and 3); the rate of employment is a more suitable outcome when measuring impacts over a narrower period of time such as a month or quarter. For example, employment was included as a primary outcome for the interim evaluation of this study, which focused on the fourth quarter from random assignment only. In the final evaluation, we used the estimated impacts on employment and other outcomes, as well as for subgroups, to support findings for the primary outcomes by examining whether they fit within a pattern of similar impacts. We view these analyses as exploratory, providing policy-relevant but less rigorous evidence about the effects of JFI. This information could be valuable for continuous program improvement and identifying potential hypotheses for more rigorous examination in the future.

5. Cost analysis

The cost-benefit analysis compares the benefits individuals enrolled in JFI received in dollar terms through changes in earnings and public assistance with the costs of the services provided during the JFI service period. The analysis estimates the extent to which the benefits exceeded the costs of providing services to the JFI group compared with the benefits and costs of providing services to the control group. In this section, we present the methods used for the cost-benefit analysis.

Description of costs. For the cost-benefit analysis, we estimated three groups of costs: (1) the costs of JFI; (2) the costs of all services provided to JFI group members through JFI and the community; and (3) the costs of all services provided to control group members through existing SNAP E&T and the community. For each group of costs, we estimated the total costs, costs by service type (such as case management or education), and costs per individual. The difference between the costs of all services JFI and control group members received is the basis for the cost-benefit analysis.

Costs of JFI. The costs of the JFI included those for planning, recruiting, and delivering services. We based the estimates of JFI costs on cost data provided by AHS and its partners and providers with direct subcontracts through the FNS grant. These data were reported through standardized cost workbooks submitted for the planning period and on a quarterly schedule during service delivery. AHS, VR, VDOL, CAAs, and CCV each submitted workbooks with their own cost information. They submitted workbooks for the planning period (April 2015–March 2016) and for 11 quarterly service delivery periods (April 2016–December 2018) through the end of services and closeout activities, which occurred in March 2019.

- **Total costs.** The workbooks captured data on a set of four core cost categories, or cost ingredients, including staff, direct services, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operating costs. These costs included those paid for with FNS grant funds and those paid for with funds leveraged from other sources. We used the cost ingredients to build an estimate of the total costs of JFI by summing them across the four cost categories.¹⁶
- **Costs by service type.** In addition to the cost workbooks, a web survey collected data on the percentage of time provider staff spent on key services for JFI group members—for example, management, assessments, and job readiness or life skills workshops (such as a job club or job readiness training). We allocated the costs of (1) staff, (2) supplies and equipment, and (3) overhead and operating costs to direct service costs using the percentage of time staff reported spending on these key direct services.
- **Costs per individual.** To estimate the costs of serving the average individual and the range of costs for serving all JFI group members through JFI, we used individual-level data on participation in services to attribute a cost to each service in which the individual engaged. We used administrative service use data collected by AHS and providers on participation in JFI services only. We used data on the unit (or per-service) cost of JFI services to estimate the total cost of services for each individual in the administrative service use data. We then estimated the mean cost of services for an individual.

Costs of all services received by JFI group members. In addition to estimating the costs of JFI, we estimated the cost of *all* services that JFI group members received from the JFI and the community. We used the costs of all JFI group services in the cost-benefit analysis because the benefits JFI group members could have accrued through changes in employment and earnings were a product of all services in which they participated during the follow-up period, not just the JFI services.

- **Total costs, costs by service type, and costs per individual.** We estimated the costs of all services JFI group members received per individual using the same method we used to estimate the per individual costs of JFI. We used individual-level data on participation in services to attribute a unit cost to each service in which each individual engaged and estimated the mean and range of costs per individual. We summed the individual-level estimates to get an estimated total cost of all services JFI group members received.

We used the unit costs of JFI services and individual-level participation data from the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys to estimate the costs of all services JFI group members received. We chose to use the

¹⁶ The ingredient, or build-up, methodology used for the cost data collection and analysis has been used in similar evaluations of public workforce programs and is detailed in Levin, Henry M., and Patrick J. McEwan. *Cost-Effectiveness Analysis: Methods and Applications*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2001.

survey data to estimate the cost differentials between the JFI and control groups because, unlike the administrative service use data, the survey data were collected for both the JFI and control groups. In addition, these data reflect all services both groups received, thus maximizing the comparability of the two sets of service costs.

Costs of all services received by control group members. Most grantees were unable to report detailed information on costs for the services received by control group members. As a result, we estimated the costs of all services control group members received using recently published data on the costs of similar services offered through the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. Services for the control group were generally similar to or a subset of WIOA services, including case management, assessments, job clubs, job readiness training, independent job search (called resource room visits), education, occupational skills training, work-based learning, and support services. For case management and all employment and training-related activities, we used cost data from the WIA (Workforce Investment Act) Gold Standard Evaluation, which were collected using the same methodology as this evaluation and the same workbook and cost ingredients (staff, direct service, supply and equipment, and overhead and operating costs).¹⁷ For cost estimates of support services, we used 2018 FNS-583 form data on reported costs of support services in existing SNAP E&T programs. We adjusted the cost estimates to 2016 dollars to facilitate a direct comparison with JFI group cost workbook estimates, which we also adjusted to 2016 dollars.

- **Total costs, costs by service type, and costs per individual.** We used the same method to estimate the costs of all control group services that we used to estimate the costs of all JFI group services. We attributed the WIOA unit cost of each service to individual-level data on participation in the services control group members reported receiving through the community in the 12- and 36-month follow-up survey data. We estimated the mean and range of costs per individual and summed the individual-level estimates overall and by service type to estimate the costs of all services control group members received.

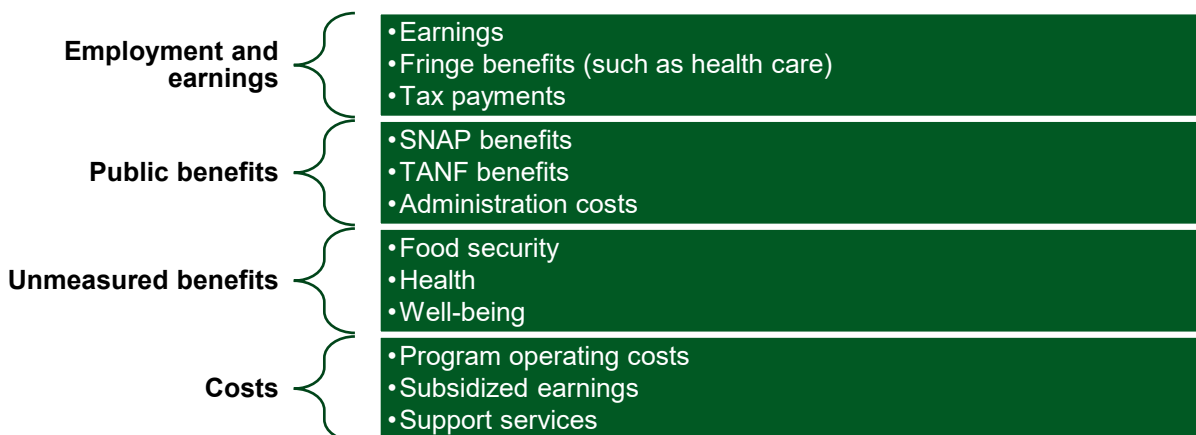
Approach to cost-benefit analysis. The cost-benefit analysis used a framework to present a comprehensive listing of JFI group benefits and costs, relative to the control group, from three perspectives: (1) individuals enrolled in JFI, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole, which represents the sum of the other two perspectives. The framework is similar to an accounting ledger, listing benefits and costs as dollar values that could be positive from one perspective or negative (a cost) from another. All costs and benefits are expressed as the difference between the JFI group and the control group, and reflect all services those individuals received during the 36-month follow-up period.

Measures of costs and benefits. Given FNS' and Congress's goals for the SNAP E&T pilots, the primary benefits of interest were (1) increased earnings (through increased employment), which reflect individuals' increased productivity from participating in services; and (2) reduced need for public assistance benefits, such as SNAP or TANF (Exhibit II.2). Additional benefits to government and taxpayers, as well as society, include taxes that individuals pay as part of their post-service employment and reductions in public assistance benefits. The primary costs of interest include costs for operating

¹⁷ The WIA Gold Standard Evaluation is the most recent national study of the Adult and Dislocated Worker program services, conducted in 2012 and with findings published in 2016. WIA was reauthorized in 2014 under the WIOA. Although WIOA made important changes to the workforce system, it did not significantly change the basic set of services offered, nor who was eligible to receive them. We refer to the WIA Gold Standard Evaluation as WIA because that was the name of the authorization at the time the data were collected.

program services and providing subsidized earnings and support services to individuals while they are engaged in services. While operating costs and resources provided to individuals are a cost to government and taxpayers, the latter are a benefit to individuals.

Exhibit II.1. Measures of costs and benefits



Although we can attribute a dollar value to benefits such as earnings, fringe benefits like health care, or SNAP benefits, there are other benefits and costs associated with changes in employment and earnings that are more difficult to value. Changes in the rates of food insecurity and well-being (such as improved housing or health status or lower rates of depression) are important outcomes that could be associated with a change in employment and earnings. It is challenging to quantify the dollar value of these benefits reliably—for example, it is difficult to attribute a dollar value to a one-point change on the depression or food security scales used to assess the presence and extent of these issues. Outcomes such as a change in depression or food security might have more value than can be represented by a change in earnings or expenditures, given the relationship of those outcomes to overall and long-term health and well-being. In addition, there are other potential costs to individuals related to employment, such as changes in child care or transportation needs. We did not make assumptions about the values of these benefits or costs because they could influence estimates with a high degree of uncertainty. However, it is important to recognize the potential value of these costs and benefits to individuals, government and taxpayers, and society.

Costs and benefits by perspective. The findings of the cost-benefit analysis depend on the perspective from which the costs and benefits are considered. For example, an increase in tax payments because of an increase in employment and earnings is a cost to individuals but a benefit to government and taxpayers. We considered variation in the costs and benefits by perspective:



Individuals enrolled in the JFI group could have realized benefits from increased post-program earnings and incurred costs from decreased benefit receipt. Individuals did not incur costs for services but benefitted from receiving subsidized wages and support services while receiving services.



Government and taxpayers (meaning everyone other than individuals) paid costs to fund the services and could have realized benefits from increased taxes from individuals and decreased benefit receipt and program administration costs.



Society as a whole experienced the overall effect of the costs and benefits to individuals and government and taxpayers. Costs or benefits to society were the sum of the costs and benefits to individuals and government and taxpayers. For example, if taxes were a cost to individuals and a benefit to government and taxpayers, there would be a net neutral (zero) benefit to society.

Summary measures. To estimate the net benefit, we took the difference between total benefits and costs for each perspective. A negative net benefit is a net cost from that perspective. We also estimated the return to society on each dollar invested by estimating the ratio of benefits to costs. A benefit-cost ratio greater than 1 suggests that overall benefits of all JFI group services exceeded their costs. A benefit-cost ratio less than 1 suggests that the benefits of all JFI group services, relative to the services JFI group members would have received otherwise, did not outweigh their costs within the 36-month follow-up period. In other words, the costs exceeded the benefits realized.

Accounting for benefits accruing later than costs. The costs of services were incurred during the time when individuals were enrolled in services, but the benefits of those services likely did not accrue fully until a later date. We adjusted the costs and benefits in two ways to make their dollar values comparable during the baseline year of 2016, when JFI started incurring service costs and individuals started accruing benefits.

- **Price deflator.** To account for inflation, we used the implicit gross national product price deflator from the Bureau of Economic Analysis to convert costs and benefits occurring in later years into constant 2016 dollars.
- **Discount rate:** A dollar in the baseline year was worth more than a dollar in later years because it could have been invested and earned interest. To account for this effect, we used a discount rate to convert all costs and benefits incurred in later years into constant 2016 dollars based on the 30-year Treasury bond rate on January 1, 2016 (approximately when JFI started), which was 2.98 percent.

Sensitivity analyses. Like most cost-benefit analyses, our estimates required many assumptions. We examined the sensitivity of our findings to changes in these assumptions to assess whether our results were robust to these changes. We assessed whether our results differed for each of the following changes:

- **Alternative discount rates.** We used an alternative Treasury bond rate to assess the sensitivity of estimates to different rates of return through the discount rate. We tested the sensitivity of our findings to using alternative discount rates of 2 percent and 4 percent.
- **Alternative fringe benefit rates.** We used an alternative fringe benefit rate to assess the sensitivity of estimates to the assumption that the average fringe benefits were worth 20.9 percent of earnings (according to the Department of Labor's National Compensation Survey). We tested the sensitivity of our findings to using fringe rates that were decreased and increased by 5 percent of earnings.

- **Alternative tax rates.** We used a single marginal tax rate based on the mean earnings impact and characteristics of individuals in JFI at enrollment. Because individuals' effective tax rates could vary based on their earnings and other deductions, we tested the sensitivity of our findings to using tax rates that were decreased and increased by 5 percent.
- **Alternative assumption that subsidized earnings are not included in UI wage record estimates of earnings.** We assumed that subsidized earnings provided to individuals engaged in work-based learning activities were reported to State UI agencies and were included in UI wage record estimates of earnings. It is possible that not all providers reported subsidized earnings to State UI agencies. We tested the sensitivity of our findings to the alternative assumption that subsidized earnings were *not* included in UI wage record estimates of earnings, but instead were a direct transfer benefitting individuals. We assumed subsidized earnings were included in 36-month survey estimates of self-reported earnings.
- **Alternative assumption that treatment group members only received services through JFI.** The main analysis assumes that JFI group members received additional services outside of JFI through existing SNAP E&T and the community during the pilot period. We use data from the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys to estimate service receipt for JFI group members and assume any difference in estimated costs of JFI and all services JFI group members received based on the survey is attributed to services received outside of JFI. Survey data are self-reported and could over or underestimate the services that JFI group members received. This sensitivity analysis uses the alternative assumption that JFI group members only received services through JFI and estimates the net benefits using these alternate estimates of costs.

6. Subgroup analyses

For many of these analyses, we examined subgroups that may have been affected differently by the services offered to the JFI group.

Subgroups defined by baseline characteristics. We analyzed a subset of service use and impacts among groups of individuals defined by their status at the time of enrollment, such as the presence of children in the household, work experience, income, age, and presence of severe barriers to employment. For all subgroup analyses, we conducted F-tests to assess research group differences in service receipt or impacts across subgroups. These findings are included in the appendices.

Subgroups defined by the timing of pilot enrollment. We analyzed a subset of service use and impacts by enrollment time period. We divided individuals enrolled through December 2017 into two groups based on when they were enrolled in the pilot—those enrolled before versus after the midway point of the pilot's full enrollment period (March 2016 to February 2017 versus March 2017 to December 2017). We meant the mid-enrollment distinction to capture differences between earlier and later cohorts, independent of how specific pilot operations changed over time. There could have been changes both within and outside of the pilot that contributed to differences in outcomes before and after the mid-enrollment point, including shifts in local labor market demand, changes in implementation policies or practices, or characteristics of individuals. We used t-tests to determine whether the magnitude of differences between JFI and control groups varied across enrollment periods.

Subgroups defined by whether individuals started or completed activities. The main findings presented in this report do not differentiate between individuals enrolled in the pilot who participated in activities and those who did not. These estimates provide information about impacts that can be expected for all

SNAP participants who were offered the JFI activities. However, because some individuals did not engage in JFI or start an activity, these estimates mask how well individuals who did participate in such activities may have fared. For this reason, we conducted additional analyses to examine impacts among SNAP participants who did engage in the pilot and participate in activities.

We grouped activities into (1) job search or job search training activities (consisting mostly of independent job search) and (2) education or training activities (consisting of occupational skills training, basic education [GED class and the National Career Readiness Certificate], and work-based learning). We estimated differences in service receipt between JFI and control groups, as well as impacts on outcomes among individuals who started a pilot activity compared with those who did not, and among those who completed a job search or job search training or education or training activity compared to those who started but did not complete an activity.

To conduct this non-experimental analysis, we used a rich set of baseline data collected from all individuals enrolled in the pilot to estimate JFI group members' propensity for starting an activity using regression-based predictive models. These models were then used to predict control group members' propensities to start an activity had they been in the JFI group. The resulting propensity scores were then used to define subgroups of individuals in each research group based on the percentages of the JFI group that started an activity. We repeated this process for JFI group members who did not start an activity, completed an employment or training activity, completed a job search or job search training activity, or started but did not complete an activity.¹⁸

C. Study limitations

This evaluation of the SNAP E&T pilots used an experimental design, rigorous analysis methods, and a multifaceted longitudinal data set to assess whether the pilots were effective in connecting SNAP participants with jobs that increased their incomes and reduced their need for public assistance benefits. Because individuals were randomly assigned to JFI and control groups, we can confidently attribute differences in outcomes between the groups to JFI services rather than differences in the characteristics of the two groups when they enrolled in the pilot, such as differences in education, work readiness, or barriers to employment.

Nonetheless, the evaluation has several methodological limitations:

- 1. Some analyses did not include all individuals who enrolled in JFI.** We have about three years of follow-up data for most, but not all, individuals who enrolled into the pilot. Because the reporting and data collection schedules did not always align, we had to limit some analyses to a subset of the individuals enrolled in the pilot. For example, we collected survey data only from individuals randomly assigned through December 2017. Similarly, although we collected UI wage records for all individuals who were randomly assigned, those randomly assigned later in the enrollment period contributed less than three years of data to the analysis. Thus, it is possible the analyses that included a full three years of data for all individuals who were randomly assigned might produce different findings. We assessed the sensitivity of our findings to these limitations by using the UI wage records for *all* individuals who were randomly assigned to estimate two-year impacts of the pilot on outcomes and compared these impacts to those for individuals randomly assigned through September 2017—

¹⁸ Additional information regarding these procedures can be found in the technical supplement which accompanies the report.

those for whom we had three-year observation periods. Our findings were robust to this restriction, suggesting that the need to restrict the populations included in some analyses did not affect the main conclusions of the evaluation.

- 2. Survey nonresponse may have led to potential bias in estimates of service receipt and outcomes.** Data collected from the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys played an important role in understanding differences between the JFI and control groups in receipt of services available through SNAP E&T and in the community, as well as estimating impacts on employment, earnings, and food security and well-being outcomes. With the exception of employment and earnings data in the UI wage records, much of this information is not available through other data sources. Even when it is available, there are fundamental differences between UI and survey data in the types of jobs covered and the information available to assess job quality. However, because we collected survey data from individuals 12 and 36 months after random assignment, we were unable to locate a nontrivial percentage of individuals enrolled in the pilot via telephone or residential address; thus, they could not participate in the survey. (The response rates of the 12- and 36-month surveys were 61 and 69 percent, respectively.) As a result, characteristics of individuals who responded and did not respond to the survey could have differed between JFI and control groups. If true, this situation would bias the estimates of pilot impacts. To address this possibility, we performed a comprehensive nonresponse bias analysis, using information collected before random assignment, and constructed and applied survey weights based on these analyses to ensure that findings were representative of all individuals who enrolled in the pilot.
- 3. Having incomplete control group data in the cost-benefit analysis led to the use of estimated costs of control group services.** The cost-benefit analysis compares the costs of JFI group services with their counterfactual—those services individuals would have received in the absence of the JFI group services. Most grantees were unable to report detailed information on costs for the services received by control group members, so we estimated those costs using the unit costs of services that were similar to those the control group received, using data from a recently published evaluation of the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker program. As a result, the difference in the costs of services represented in the cost-benefit analysis could be over- or underestimated.
- 4. The assessment of JFI’s effectiveness on individuals who participated in activities was not based on an experimental research design.** The subgroup analysis examining differences in pilot impacts among individuals who did and did not start or complete an activity was important for assessing pilot effectiveness among individuals who engaged in the pilot. However, an important limitation of this analysis is that it was not based on an experimental design. The experimental design in the main analysis randomly assigned individuals who enrolled in the pilot to the JFI group or the control group. Individuals in the JFI group chose whether to start an activity and/or complete one based on factors we could not necessarily observe. Thus, because individuals were not randomly assigned to start or complete activities, there is a risk that the factors predisposing individuals to greater participation in activities may have influenced their likelihood of gaining employment or earning higher wages, independent of their starting or completing an activity. To account for this potential bias, we used a rich set of baseline data available for all individuals enrolled in the pilot to generate weights that balanced the characteristics of JFI group members who started or completed an activity and control group members who would have had a high propensity to start or complete one had they been in the JFI group, thereby reducing the risk of selection bias.

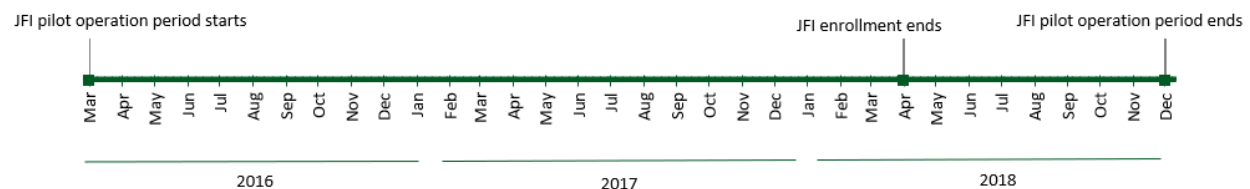
III. JFI enrollment and characteristics

This chapter describes patterns of enrollment into the pilot and the local economic context in which the pilot operated. It also describes the characteristics of enrolled individuals at the time of random assignment, and compares the characteristics of those who enrolled in the pilot earlier to the characteristics of those who enrolled later.

A. Patterns of enrollment

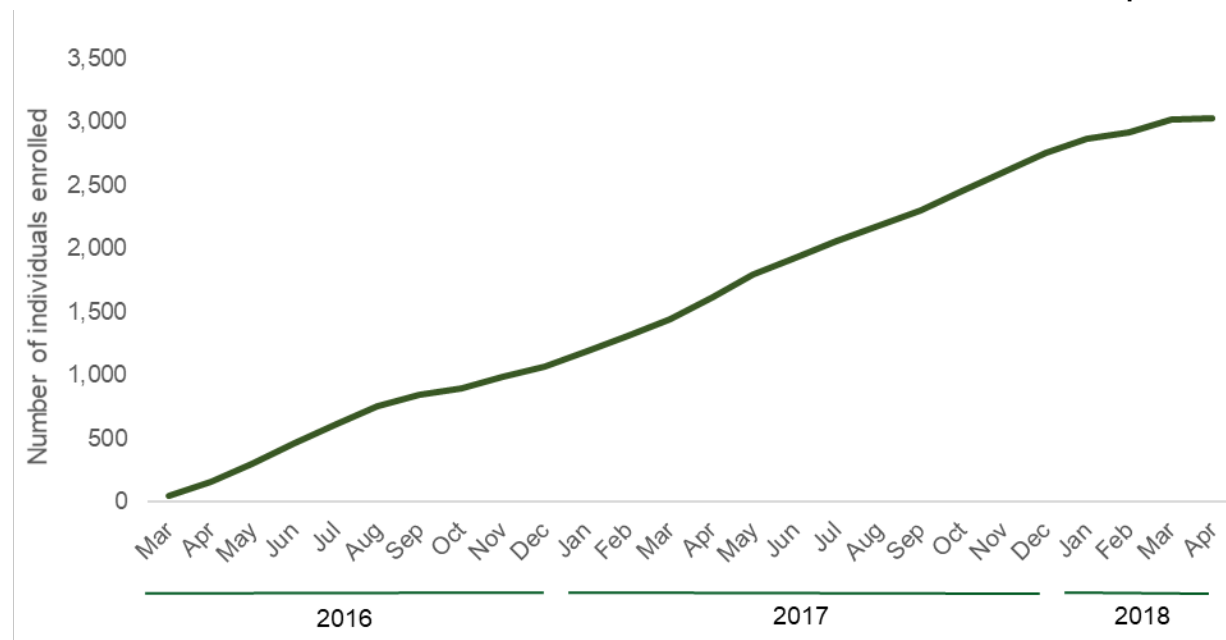
From March 2016 to April 2018, Vermont enrolled 3,031 individuals into the pilot (Exhibit III.1). SNAP participants who enrolled in the pilot were randomly assigned in roughly equivalent numbers to the JFI group and a control group. The number of individuals enrolled increased steadily through 2017, averaging about 107 individuals per month in 2016, 140 individuals per month in 2017, and 67 individuals per month in 2018 (Exhibit III.2).

Exhibit III.1. Overview of pilot enrollment



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation enrollment data (March 2016 to December 2018).

Exhibit III.2. Cumulative number of individuals enrolled in each month of the enrollment period



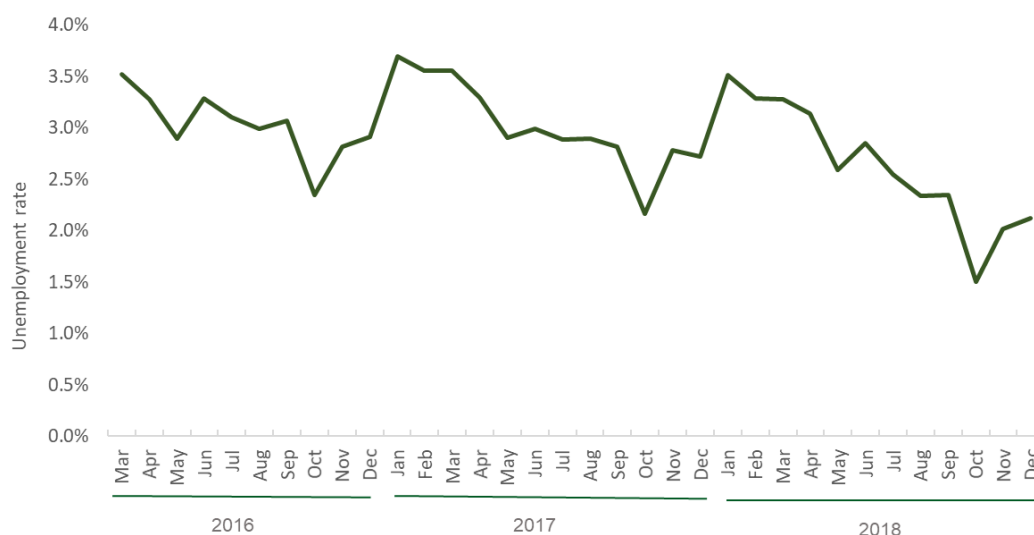
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation enrollment data (March 2016 to April 2018).

Note: All values are numbers of individuals enrolled and include both JFI and control group members. Individuals enrolled in the pilot include all JFI and control group members who completed baseline enrollment registration and did not subsequently revoke their consent to participate in the evaluation of the pilot (3,023 out of the 3,031 enrolled individuals).

B. Local economic context in the JFI pilot area over time

Vermont experienced unemployment rates that were consistently low, with average monthly unemployment fluctuating between 1.5 and 3.7 percent during the pilot operation period (Exhibit III.3). For much of the pilot operation (between March 2016 and April 2018), the average monthly unemployment rate hovered between 2.2 and 3.7 percent. From May 2018 until the pilot stopped offering services in December 2018, unemployment was between 2.9 and 1.5 percent.

Exhibit III.3. Local unemployment rate in the JFI pilot area for each month of pilot operation



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (March 2016 to December 2018).

Note: All values are average monthly unemployment rates across all counties in the State.

Common occupations among the general population in the region of the pilot remained fairly consistent from 2016 through 2019 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020). The most common occupations throughout this period were office and administrative support such as customer service representatives, administrative assistants, accounting and auditing clerks, and office clerks; sales and related occupations such as cashiers and retail salespersons; education, training, and library occupations such as teaching assistants, elementary or secondary school teachers, and substitute teachers; food preparation and serving related occupations such as fast food and counter workers, waiters and waitresses, and restaurant cooks; and production occupations such as assemblers and fabricators, tool operators, supervisors of production workers, and packaging and filling machine operators (Exhibit III.4).

Among the general population, median hourly wages for these occupations in 2016 ranged from \$11.90 (food preparation and serving related occupations) to \$17.02 (office and administrative support occupations), but were higher for education, training, and library occupations (\$20.82) which typically require credentials and licenses. Wages generally grew by \$0.90 to \$1.89 per hour from 2016 to 2019, with education, training, and library occupation workers experiencing an increase of \$3.11 over this period.

Exhibit III.4. Common occupations and median wages in Vermont over time

Wage (hourly in dollars)	2016	2019
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	17.02	18.53
Sales and Related Occupations	13.23	14.43
Education, Training, and Library Occupations	20.82	23.93
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	11.90	13.79
Production Occupations	16.87	17.77

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Note: Data in this table represent the most common jobs per one thousand individuals in the state of Vermont.

C. Characteristics of enrolled individuals

The baseline registration form captured demographic, residential, and economic characteristics at the time of random assignment for individuals who enrolled in the pilot. Exhibit III.5 and Appendix Table C.1 show the key characteristics of individuals who enrolled from April 2016 to December 2017—the individuals on whom many of this report’s analyses are based.¹⁹ Almost all of these enrollees were White (86 percent); a majority were male (56 percent). The average age was 39, with 65 percent between 25 and 49 years old, and 18 percent between 50 and 59 years old. Almost one-fifth did not have a high school diploma or equivalent education.

Individuals primarily lived in either a micropolitan (37 percent) or rural area (37 percent) while approximately one quarter lived in metropolitan areas (26 percent);²⁰ 11 percent were married or cohabiting. Over half (57 percent) were ABAWDs, while 14 percent lived in households with children.

Almost all individuals had been employed at some point in the past (97 percent), but only 14 percent were employed at the time of random assignment (Exhibit III.5). About one-fifth were employed consistently in the two years preceding random assignment, meaning they were employed for at least seven out of the preceding eight quarters, whereas 44 percent either were not employed or were employed for only one of the preceding eight quarters.

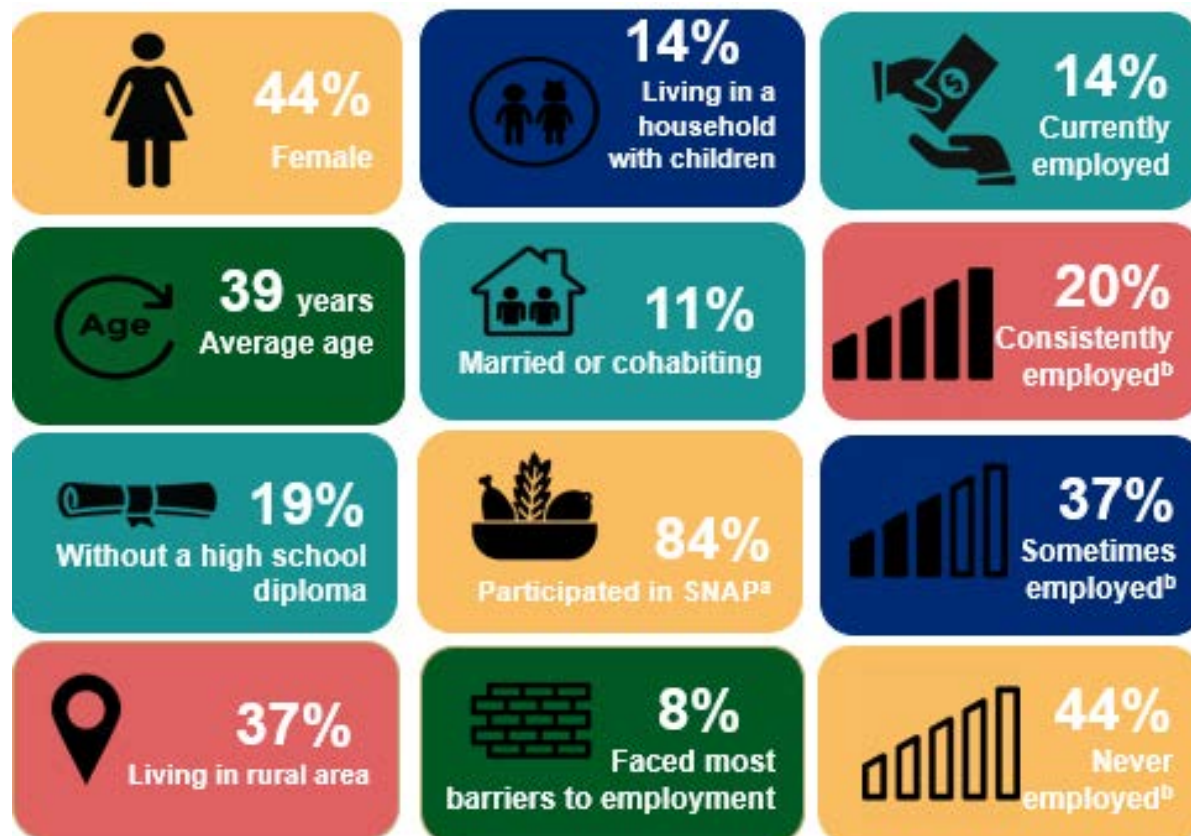
We also assessed individuals’ barriers to employment based on whether they completed high school and if they were employed in the 12 months before random assignment. Although 92 percent faced the fewest or moderate numbers of barriers, 8 percent faced the most barriers, defined as not being employed in the past 12 months and not completing high school or the equivalent.

¹⁹ Compared to analyzing outcomes for all enrolled individuals, analyzing them for individuals who were randomly assigned through December 2017 allows for a longer period of about three years in which to observe service receipt and impacts on outcomes. As shown in Appendix Table C.1, the characteristics of this group of individuals were similar to those for all individuals who enrolled in the pilot.

²⁰ Urbanicity is measured using the Economic Research Service’s 2010 Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes. Micropolitan areas are large urban clusters of 10,000 to 49,999 or areas in which most commuters in the area commuted to a large urban cluster. Rural areas are defined as small urban clusters of 2,500 to 9,999 people or areas in which most commuters in the area commuted to a small urban cluster. This definition includes areas outside of urbanized areas and urban clusters. Metropolitan areas are urbanized areas of 50,000 people or more or areas in which most or many commuters in the area commuted to an urbanized area.

Most individuals (84 percent) had participated in SNAP in the year before enrolling in the pilot. About a third of individuals participated for one to six months of the year, and slightly more than half (53 percent) participated for more than six months.

Exhibit III.5. Baseline characteristics of individuals enrolled in the pilot



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation baseline information registration form (March 2016 to December 2017 data).

Note: All values are percentages unless otherwise noted. Individuals enrolled in the pilot through December 2017 include all JFI and control group members who completed baseline enrollment registration and did not subsequently revoke their consent to participate in the evaluation of the pilot (2,756 out of the 3,031 enrolled individuals).

^a Participated in SNAP reflects any SNAP participation in the year before random assignment based on SNAP administrative records. All individuals who enrolled into the pilot were required to be on SNAP at the time of random assignment.

^b Employment experience is defined using UI wage record data for the two years before random assignment. "Consistently employed" includes individuals who were employed for at least 7 out of 8 quarters preceding random assignment. "Sometimes employed" includes individuals who were employed for 2 to 6 quarters preceding random assignment. "Never employed" includes individuals who were employed for at most 1 quarter preceding random assignment.

D. Characteristics of individuals who enrolled earlier versus later

Some analyses in this report examine differences in service receipt and impacts between individuals who were enrolled earlier versus later in the enrollment period. Below we summarize differences in baseline characteristics of JFI group members in these two groups of individuals.

III. JFI enrollment and characteristics

Earlier and later enrollees in the JFI group were similar on most characteristics, although later enrollees were more likely than earlier enrollees to be married or cohabiting (15 versus 9 percent). Later enrollees were also more likely to live in rural areas (40 versus 34 percent) and metropolitan areas (28 versus 24 percent), and less likely to live in micropolitan areas (31 versus 42 percent; Appendix Table C.4). Rates of SNAP participation were similar for earlier and later enrollees, with approximately 85 percent of individuals in each group participating in SNAP in the year before random assignment, and the remaining 15 percent were newly enrolled in SNAP at the time of random assignment.

IV. Implementation analysis

In this chapter, we describe the implementation of the JFI pilot based on qualitative analysis of data collected through staff interviews, focus groups, and case studies of individuals in JFI. Data presented in this chapter were collected during the planning, implementation, operational, and close-out periods, from March 2015 through September 2018 (Exhibit IV.1 provides a pilot timeline).

Exhibit IV.1. Pilot timeline

Pilot activity	Date
Grant awarded	March 2015
Enrollment began	March 2016
Enrollment ended	April 2018
Services ended	December 2018

In the following sections, we provide information about the pilot background and describe the planning and early implementation process. We then detail services and operations, including the recruitment and enrollment processes; control group services and pathways; and JFI group services and pathways, management and collaborations, service receipt patterns, barriers among JFI group members, staffing, and performance reporting. We also discuss the sustainability and replicability of JFI services after the pilots ended, and summarize the key findings discussed in this chapter. Unless otherwise noted, each section describes the policies implemented, not what was planned.

A. Pilot background

Since 2006, AHS has administered a SNAP E&T program through a contract with VDOL. This voluntary program has traditionally served work registrants who are ABAWDs. VDOL is the single service provider and typically offers job search-related activities. Because the existing SNAP E&T program offered limited services, AHS viewed the pilot as an opportunity to offer more robust services and target populations with high barriers to employment, including those struggling with substance use disorders, mental health issues, homelessness, or criminal histories. In addition, AHS wanted to create new connections across employment and training service providers in the State. AHS decided to create a statewide pilot because of Vermont's small size and the goal of improving service collaboration across State agencies.

AHS selected several key providers and partners to implement JFI services based on their success in working with similar populations in the past. AHS selected VR's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as a provider because it developed a program for the Vermont Office of Child Support that successfully helped parents with significant barriers meet their employment and child support goals; AHS saw this program as a model for JFI. VR was identified as a primary provider for JFI because many of those in the target population—SNAP work registrants with significant barriers to work, including a criminal history, housing instability, substance use disorder, or other mental health issues—were appropriate for vocational rehabilitation services. VDOL and CCV, the other primary services providers, had existing contracts with AHS to serve individuals in its programs. VDOL provided all of the existing SNAP E&T services; CCV already was providing GCRC classes to individuals receiving TANF in Vermont. VR added counseling services in 2016 after it began implementing JFI. VR counselor services were delivered to individuals who were eligible for vocational rehabilitation (because they had a qualifying disability) and were supported by VR's other funding sources. In addition, after the pilot began, VABIR—a provider of job search assistance and progressive employment services (similar to work-based learning for individuals

eligible for vocational rehabilitation services)—began providing JFI services in 2016 and early 2017 through a subcontract with VR; VR has a longstanding partnership with VABIR, and VABIR staff worked in VR’s offices despite being a separate organization. AHS also included the CAAs as partners that did not provide direct services but helped with pilot recruitment. The CAAs had deep connections to the community and the populations the pilot targeted.

For JFI group members, AHS and the providers developed an intensive set of coordinated services designed to identify and reduce barriers to work, and strengthen job readiness. An EAP counselor conducted a comprehensive clinical assessment with and provided counseling to all JFI group members, and connected them to appropriate barrier reduction services at housing, substance use, mental health, and other agencies. Individuals were then referred to job readiness services, including the GCRC classes at CCV. Individuals with qualifying disabilities received employment services through VR and VABIR. Those individuals more ready for work received employment services from VDOL and referrals to WIOA programs or adult basic education. There were no designated case managers for JFI services; rather, services for each individual were coordinated jointly by these providers through a monthly regional team meeting and more frequent communication by phone and email.

B. Pilot planning and implementation

AHS coordinated the planning process from June 2015 until the start of services in March 2016. AHS designated a planning director to lead the planning process until a full-time pilot director and support staff were hired in December 2015. The planning director was supported by lead staff from each partner and provider organization throughout the entire process.²¹ VR led the design of services based on the Vermont Office of Child Support program. Most of the services (including EAP counselors, support services, VABIR progressive employment specialists, and CCV classes) were funded using grant funds, but counseling and support services received at VR were funded with VR resources because anyone in the community who qualified would receive these services. VDOL case management was funded under the grant, but other activities, such as job search, workfare, or job placement activities, used existing VDOL funding. AHS also contracted with five CAAs to lead community-based recruiting for the pilot.

AHS, partners, and providers hired staff in January and February 2016 after partner and provider contracts were finalized in late 2015. Provider staff were assigned to deliver services in 1 of 12 regions throughout the State.²² A statewide staff training outlined the framework for JFI services but lacked specific guidance on many elements of how the pilot would operate. Many staff reported that in retrospect, additional training and more guidance would have helped staff understand the policies and ensure consistency across regions and providers.

AHS planned to develop an integrated data system that all providers could access so their staff could work together to serve JFI group members as a unified case management team, eliminating the need for a single case manager. After negotiations with the vendor became untenable late in the planning period,

²¹ VABIR was not part of the planning or early implementation; it became involved in JFI after the start of services in 2016 and early 2017.

²² A region may include one or more counties. Vermont’s 12 regions are centered on the following towns: Barre, Bennington, Brattleboro, Burlington, Rutland, Middlebury, Morrisville, Newport, Springfield, St. Albans, St. Johnsbury, and White River Junction. Each region’s central town is roughly an hour from the closest adjoining region’s central town. Individuals can choose which town is most convenient to reach if they live in a rural area outside of one of the central towns.

AHS developed an in-house system (called ACCESS). Only EAP counselors had full rights to the ACCESS system and were responsible for tracking services. (The other provider staff could view only the demographic information within the system.) Staff reported that although the ACCESS system was adequate for tracking information, it did not facilitate communication among providers as had been envisioned.

For more information about pilot planning and implementation, please see the Expanding Opportunities & Reducing Barriers to Work: Vermont Interim Report (Mabli et al. 2021).

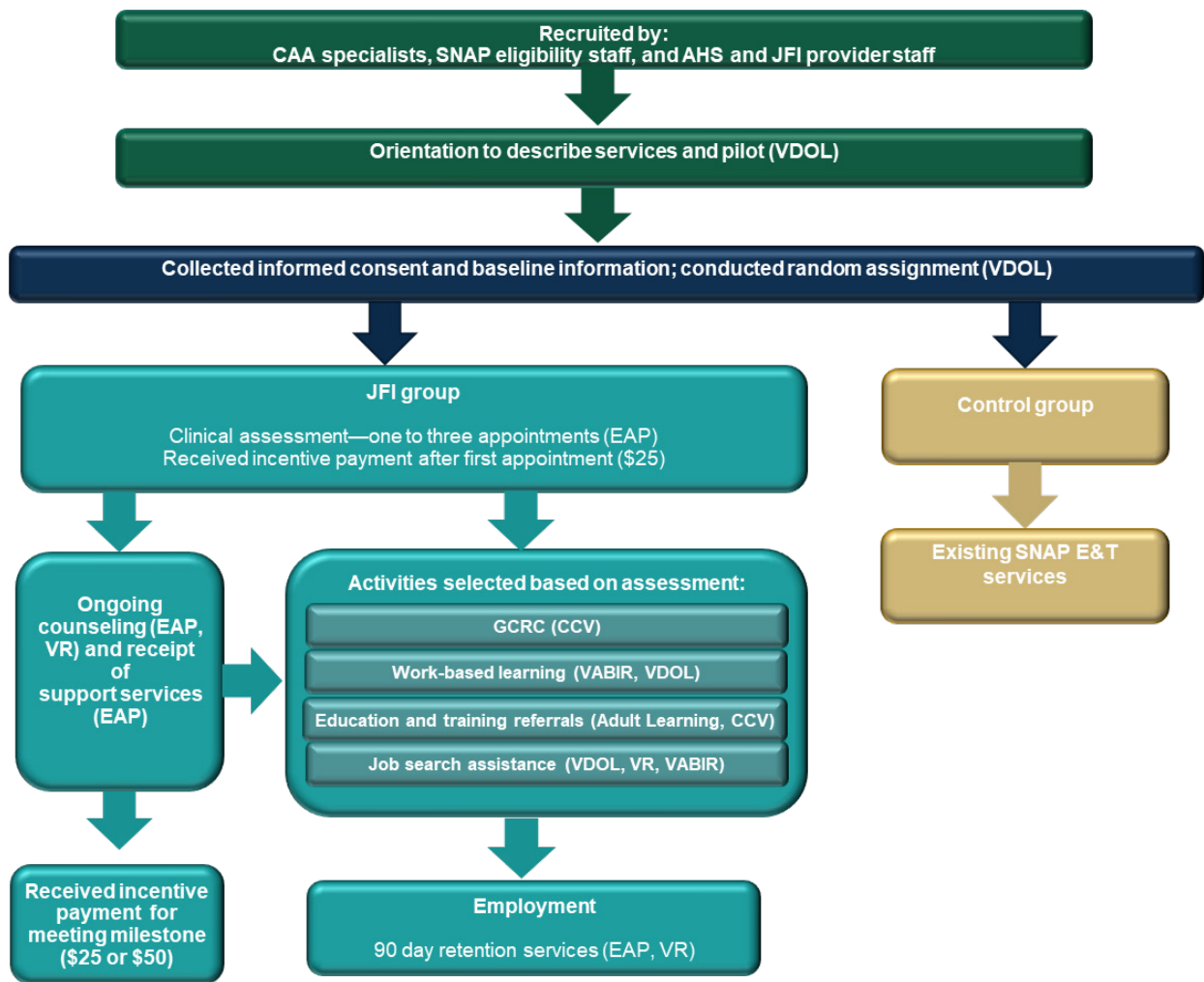
C. Pilot services and operations

JFI enrolled individuals between March 7, 2016 and April 15, 2018. Exhibit IV.2 shows the pilot recruitment, enrollment, and service flow. Recruitment specialists employed at the CAAs recruited eligible individuals from the target populations and invited them to attend a group orientation session, followed by a one-on-one enrollment and random assignment appointment at the closest VDOL office. Individuals assigned to the control group received existing SNAP E&T services; those assigned to the JFI group were scheduled for a first appointment with an EAP counselor and informed that they would receive a \$25 gift card for attending it. The first meeting with an EAP counselor began the clinical assessment process; in some cases, one or two additional meetings were required to complete the assessment. Following the initial clinical assessment, most individuals were referred to employment and training services appropriate for them. EAP counselors provided ongoing counseling throughout the service period and offered extensive support services to reduce barriers to work.

There were three primary entrance points into the pilot:

- 1. Community recruitment efforts by CAA recruitment specialists.** CAA staff reached out to individuals in the community to describe the benefits of the pilot. The CAA recruiters used the existing network to inform other community-based organizations about the pilot and solicit referrals for eligible individuals. The recruiters put up flyers at community-based organizations, presented an overview of the pilot to staff, and attended local events that might serve eligible individuals. CAA recruiters were active through November 2017, when the CAA contracts ended.
- 2. Referrals by SNAP eligibility specialists during SNAP certification interviews.** SNAP eligibility staff helped inform SNAP participants about the pilot. Over time, AHS increasingly encouraged SNAP eligibility workers to incorporate screening for the pilot into their eligibility interviews. AHS provided SNAP eligibility workers with a guide that directed them on how to ask screening questions and refer eligible individuals to VDOL. VDOL conducted additional pilot eligibility screening of individuals who were referred to them by SNAP eligibility workers, including ABAWDs referred to VDOL to help them meet their work requirements and other individuals referred for pilot eligibility.
- 3. Direct outreach through AHS and JFI providers.** AHS and JFI providers identified individuals they were already serving who would be eligible for the pilot (those receiving SNAP benefits and in the target population) and referred them to a pilot orientation. Starting in 2017, AHS conducted direct outreach to eligible SNAP participants through mailings, radio advertisements, and community-based forums such as Vermont's Front Porch Forum, a website for communities to use to communicate and post local advertisements and messages. Outreach materials directed individuals to contact AHS by telephone or through a short web survey to express interest.

Exhibit IV.2. Pilot flow and pathways



1. Recruitment and enrollment

Individuals interested in the pilot were referred to VDOL for enrollment. VDOL offered group orientation sessions twice a week in most locations. The orientation sessions provided an overview of both JFI and control group services, and explained the evaluation and random assignment process. Those who wanted to enroll in the pilot met one on one with a VDOL case manager who answered questions about the pilot, obtained informed consent, completed the baseline registration form, and conducted random assignment. Staff gave individuals assigned to the JFI group a card that outlined the next steps for attending an EAP appointment and receiving a \$25 gift card. The card also listed contact information for the regional EAP counselor. The VDOL case manager was also able to log into a data system to see available EAP counselor appointments and schedule the first meeting. Typically, appointments with an EAP counselor were available within one to two weeks. Individuals assigned to the control group were told about available services and scheduled an appointment with the VDOL case manager within one to two weeks.

During the early implementation of the pilot, recruiters generally met their targets statewide, though some regions exceeded expectations, whereas others were slower to enroll. Regions with higher-than-expected enrollment experienced some challenges in serving all of the JFI group members. For example, in one larger region where an abundance of people attended orientations, staff could not complete all of the

subsequent one-on-one enrollment meetings in the same day. In some areas with higher enrollment volumes, EAP counselors had wait-lists for first appointments with individuals in the JFI group; these wait-lists were sometimes weeks or even months long (in rare cases).

Although recruitment targets were met statewide, staff described some challenges associated with the process. First, staff reported that some recruiters focused on the robust array of support services available to the JFI group when trying to convince individuals to enroll. Consequently, many of these individuals came to the orientation session expecting to receive support services and were disappointed if they were assigned to the control group. Second, AHS planned to recruit any SNAP participant that met the pilot criteria instead of focusing on work registrants (the traditional target population of the existing SNAP E&T program and a requirement for the pilots). It turned out that many individuals in the target populations were exempt from work registration—for example, individuals dealing with substance use disorders are exempt from work registration if they are participating in treatment. AHS attempted to limit the number of exempt work registrants enrolled in the pilot to about 15 percent, which was FNS's guidance for all pilots. This limit suppressed enrollment, so AHS opened it up to anyone in the target populations receiving SNAP, regardless of whether they were a work registrant, to ensure the pilot met its overall target of 3,000 individuals. Staff reported that the changing guidance around eligibility complicated recruitment messaging to community organizations, JFI staff, and eligible individuals.

JFI achieved its enrollment target of 3,000 individuals in April 2018. AHS originally planned to end enrollment in December 2017 but extended enrollment to reach the target of 3,000 individuals. CAA recruitment contracts ended in December 2017, so the remaining months of enrollment relied on the other two entrance points to the pilot.

2. Control group services and pathways

Individuals assigned to the control group received services from the existing voluntary SNAP E&T program provided statewide by VDOL. Because the program is voluntary, it generally served ABAWDs who would be time limited if they did not meet work requirements. VDOL services included an up-front assessment and development of an individual employment plan. Individuals then had access to ongoing case management, job clubs, job search assistance, and some work experience and job placement services. VDOL also hosted job search training workshops on topics such as interviewing skills and resume and cover letter writing. In addition, individuals could access online job databases and assessments through VDOL's One Stop system resources. If the individual demonstrated readiness for work by showing up to weekly case management meetings and focusing on longer-term employment goals, VDOL case managers made referrals to case management and services funded by WIOA programs. VDOL provided funds through WIOA programs for licenses and certifications, on-the-job training, and work experience. VDOL case managers also referred individuals to services such as adult basic education and to CAA for housing, transportation, or other support services. Individuals did not receive support services directly through VDOL.

In addition, all ABAWDs were required to attend monthly meetings with a VDOL case manager to remain in compliance with their ABAWD work requirements. In some regions, VDOL case managers reported that ABAWDs were encouraged to attend weekly meetings. Individuals who were not ABAWDs were not required to attend monthly meetings with a VDOL case manager, but the case managers were encouraged to keep in touch with and meet regularly in person with control group members. Generally, if individuals did not show up to scheduled appointments, VDOL case managers followed up one or two times before closing the case. There were no guidelines or requirements for ongoing case management for

control group members. Most VDOL case managers suggested they tried to follow best practices for employment-related case management, but approaches varied. Generally, VDOL case managers indicated that services were self-directed, but they offered guidance on what was available and assisted people in identifying next steps in their job search or education or training needs.

3. JFI group services and pathways

All individuals assigned to the JFI group began with a comprehensive clinical assessment conducted by a trained EAP counselor during one to three hour-long appointments. The number of appointments needed to complete the clinical assessment was determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the individual's history with various barriers to employment. During the first appointment, the EAP counselor used a clinical assessment tool to collect information about the individual's medical, mental health, educational, employment, and criminal histories. JFI group members received a \$25 gift card for attending the first appointment. By the second appointment, the EAP counselor typically had finished the clinical assessment and provided or made referrals to appropriate support services for reducing barriers, including housing assistance, substance use treatment, and mental health treatment. EAP counselors provided a second incentive payment (\$25 or \$50; the amount was determined by random assignment at the time of enrollment) at the end of the clinical assessment or when the individual met an important milestone, such as acquiring stable housing. After the assessment period, individuals entered a variety of education, occupational skills training, or work pathways based on their eligibility for those activities and readiness for work. Individuals typically continued counseling with EAP and received support services to reduce barriers while they received other services and participated in activities.

During the planning process, AHS, partner, and provider leadership assumed JFI services would last six to eight months. This timing also reflected the plan to have no designated exit point from JFI services. The initial EAP assessment and counseling services typically lasted a month or more, followed by referrals to services that were progressive in moving individuals toward employment, including work with a VR counselor and VABIR employment counselor or VDOL case manager, and referrals to GCRC services. If individuals remained engaged, they would continue to receive services to help them make progress toward their employment goals. If they did not continue to engage or work toward obtaining employment, they would exit JFI but could always return if they chose to re-engage. EAP counselors reported that many individuals would disengage from services for a period of weeks or months, only to reconnect when they needed additional support services or overcame a challenge related to their health, family, or housing needs that had been preventing them from engaging.

Education (basic and postsecondary). JFI offered referrals to basic and postsecondary education activities for individuals who wanted to complete their high school degree or obtain a higher-level degree. Most frequently, individuals were referred to Vermont Adult Learning to obtain their GED equivalency diploma, but some also enrolled as students at CCV in a degree program. EAP, VR, VABIR, and VDOL all made referrals to education activities. Educational activities generally were not funded with pilot funds; either Vermont Adult Learning or the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation covered the costs.

Training. JFI group members who wanted to enter a new profession could receive support from VR, VABIR, or VDOL for an occupational skills training placement. All three providers connected individuals to occupational skills training, such as training for a commercial driver's license; nursing assistant license; or culinary, commercial cleaning, manufacturing, or farming skills. All three providers used a combination of pilot funds and available community resources to pay for individuals' occupational skills training fees. Although VR and VABIR were able to use pilot funding to support occupational skills

training fees, VDOL training opportunities were provided exclusively through WIOA program funding or available community resources.

Work-based learning. JFI offered work-based learning opportunities to individuals through VR and VDOL. VR worked closely with employment counselors at VABIR to provide dedicated employment counselors to facilitate progressive employment activities for JFI group members. Progressive employment is similar to work-based learning, but focuses more on matching individuals with career paths, or even with specific employers, to engage in progressively more involved work experiences.²³ For example, an individual might begin with an informational interview, followed by job shadowing, and, if the opportunity makes sense for both the individual and the employer, the individual would progress to a subsidized work or on-the-job training placement. VABIR employment counselors liaised directly with local employers on behalf of, or even together with, individuals. Those individuals who had substance use issues that would prevent them from finding or keeping employment could be placed at substance use recovery centers, such as Turning Point (a statewide treatment center), to learn skills and acclimate to the work environment. VABIR employment counselors provided one-on-one employment counseling through regular meetings with individuals and worked independently to arrange progressive employment opportunities. In addition, employment counselors provided job retention or accommodation services (adjustment to a work environment that makes it possible for individuals with a disability to perform their duties). For example, if someone obtained employment and later had a

A JFI group member's experience

This individual had no children and had lived in the same region of the State for most of her life. She was participating in occupational skills training to prepare her for a career in food service and was working part time at a local restaurant.

She was living with one of her parents and her partner. Her parent and partner were both disabled; her partner worked part time. She had an associate's degree from the Community College of Vermont but was not able to drive, which limited her job choices. She had been enrolled in JFI for approximately one year at the time of the interview.

She enrolled in JFI after being referred by AHS because she received SNAP. While in JFI, she completed the initial clinical assessment and met regularly with her EAP counselor for several months. During these meetings, she and her counselor discussed her housing needs, mental and physical health, employment, and family situation. They discussed how to make progress toward obtaining stable housing.

Her EAP counselor referred her to VR to develop an employment plan and receive vocational counseling. She met regularly with VR staff and occasionally with VABIR staff to prepare a resume. VR and VABIR helped her find and apply for jobs. She obtained a job in food service about three months after enrolling in JFI but left the job for health reasons. She later obtained a new job in food service and started an occupational skills training program, from which she obtained managerial ServSafe and alcohol ServSafe certifications. She participated in a week-long internship and met with local restaurants as part of the training program. VR provided her with a bus pass to help her get to her job and training.

²³ More information about the VR progressive employment service model is available at <https://www.explorevr.org/content/vermont-progressive-employment-model>.

challenge in receiving an accommodation for his or her disability from the employer, the VABIR employment counselor assisted both parties to remediate it.

Individuals also received work-based learning opportunities through VDOL's referral to WIOA programs. VDOL had a network of employers in which to place individuals. Most of the placements were paid work opportunities and lasted from several weeks to several months. ABAWDs in the JFI group could also complete workfare to meet their work requirement, which included volunteering at a community-based organization for 20 hours per week.

Job search assistance. JFI group members who were determined to be work ready—meaning they had few barriers or disabilities needing accommodation—were referred to VDOL for job search assistance. Individuals participated in activities similar to those offered to the control group members (described above). In addition, all ABAWDs were required to attend monthly meetings with a VDOL case manager to remain in compliance with their ABAWD work requirements. JFI group members not determined to be work ready because of significant barriers or disabilities requiring accommodation were referred to VR counselors for employment counseling (described below) and job search assistance. VR counselors could assist individuals in identifying local jobs, applying for jobs, and receiving accommodations for disabilities. They also referred individuals to VABIR employment counselors for help in developing a resume, writing a cover letter, securing references, or conducting mock interviews.

GCRC course. CCV offered JFI group members the GCRC course, a four-module certification course focused on employer-specified skills. The first module was a 15-hour course on ways to conduct yourself in a work setting and on job readiness skills. The second module was a 15-hour course on basic workplace computer skills. The third module was a 15-hour course on applied math for the workplace, which also included a WorkKeys assessment (a workplace skills assessment that measures hard and soft skills). The final module was an 8-hour course on job-seeking skills, which included mock interviews. Most modules lasted one to two weeks and required in-person attendance for several half-day sessions each week. The GCRC certificate was awarded for completing all four modules. However, if the cohort members collectively decided that only a subset of the modules were useful to them, the instructor would teach that subset and those in the cohort would not earn a certification. Some regions started their GCRC courses on a set schedule (generally monthly) because the flow of individuals enrolling was constant, whereas others had difficulty finding enough individuals to form cohorts and only offered the courses when they could form a group of 5 to 10 people.

During the first year, EAP counselors were responsible for referring individuals to CCV for GCRC classes but did not refer many individuals; those who did receive referrals often did not begin services because they did not complete the required enrollment paperwork for CCV. Reaching out to referred individuals required much more time than CCV coordinators anticipated, and many individuals stopped responding to coordinators during this process. In early 2017, VDOL began making referrals and completing CCV enrollment paperwork. Although this change increased the number of individuals starting GCRC classes, enrollment remained below expectations (AHS planned to serve half of JFI group members). Provider staff across agencies reported that individual barriers, such as homelessness, substance use, and mental health issues, were greater than anticipated and made it difficult to refer individuals to GCRC and serve them once they were enrolled. Given these low participation rates, it was difficult to fill classes with enough students, so CCV canceled some classes and offered fewer classes than expected.

Counseling. JFI offered extensive counseling services from multiple agencies working together to provide an individualized, team-based approach to counseling each JFI group member. EAP and VR staff conducted most of the counseling, with coordination among other agencies. After the clinical assessment, individuals continued to meet weekly with their EAP counselor; the discussions focused on meeting goals and used motivational interviewing techniques. The frequency of EAP appointments generally transitioned to biweekly, then monthly, or as needed as the relationship and goals progressed. There was no limit to the number of EAP counseling sessions a JFI group member could attend—an individual's needs and interests were the primary drivers. EAP counseling appointments usually included a general update on the individual's life, progression through services, and barriers encountered related to health and work. EAP counselors also referred individuals to other core employment services and activities at VR, VABIR, or VDOL; the GCRC classes at CCV; or additional barrier mitigation support services, such as mental health or substance use counseling, as appropriate. Generally, health insurance (Medicaid) or other providers paid for mental health or substance use treatment, but pilot funds would cover these costs if needed.

EAP counselors' capacity to see individuals weekly varied across the State. In some regions (primarily Burlington and Rutland), enrollment exceeded expectations and limited the availability of appointments. Many EAP counselors worked part time in multiple regions, spending one or two days per week in a small region and the other days in a larger region. Although EAP counselor availability generally improved following the end of enrollment in April 2018, it remained a challenge in some regions through the end of the JFI service period.

In addition, VR counselors worked with individuals who received vocational rehabilitation. The counselors specialized in helping individuals with disabilities (including issues with substance use or mental health) develop the skills necessary for employment. In addition, these counselors helped to identify and mitigate barriers preventing individuals from being successful in work, including physical accommodations or issues like learning disabilities or intellectual functioning. VR counselors conducted an initial assessment to understand individuals' skills, work experience, and needs for employment. The counselors then developed an employment plan that accommodated those skills and needs. The counselors typically met with individuals weekly or biweekly to conduct vocational and skills assessments, discussed strategies for work readiness, and explored available occupational skills training opportunities in the community.

The various providers met frequently to facilitate case coordination and services. Providers used these meetings to coordinate services either at a high level or case by case because there was no central case manager. They held an all-partner monthly meeting and a more frequent meeting of the regional EAP counselor, VR counselor, and VABIR employment counselor, who were all co-located in the region's VR office. Regions used the monthly all-partner meetings in different ways. Some discussed specific cases and made service delivery decisions, whereas others focused on high-level service flows. A few regions regularly invited other agencies, such as the Department of Corrections or the local housing authority, to join as informal partners. Staff reported these meetings were useful in improving program flow and service delivery. Some regions began holding these all-partner meetings right after the pilot began, but the meetings became standard practice in all regions over the first year. The VR partner meetings typically included a discussion of individual cases and how to dispense support service funding for larger requests. Staff reported that the coordinated counseling model worked better in some regions over time. JFI group members in these regions worked primarily with one partner at a time, but the entire regional or VR team received updates about the individual's progress and would provide additional services or outreach as

needed. Staff reported that the model evolved from sequential services, in which an individual moved from one partner to another without much communication between providers, to a “*team sport*,” in which individuals remained engaged with several providers who all contributed to service planning over the course of the JFI service period in most regions.

Although the coordinated counseling model worked for JFI, staff across agencies agreed that a separate, dedicated case manager would have improved service delivery and engagement of JFI group members. Some staff thought EAP counselors were best suited to deliver effective case management to the target populations because of their counseling background, and that having more EAP counselors would have increased agencies’ ability to deliver intensive case management. Others suggested that a separate case management role under AHS or VDOL would have been more appropriate for the more procedural work, such as following up with individuals to ensure they attended appointments and received needed support services. All agreed that having a single point of contact for individuals would have improved service delivery and engagement. Instead, many individuals had to juggle contacts with EAP, VR, VABIR, VDOL, and CCV simultaneously.

Support services. EAP counselors had discretion in offering support services to mitigate related barriers. For example, if someone needed a coat so he or she could walk to work in the winter or needed a fee paid to reinstate a driver’s license, the EAP counselor could provide them. EAP leadership offered written guidelines on support services, but most EAP counselors had the autonomy to manage their own monthly budget. The written guidelines suggested an average dollar amount per type of support service. For example, health services guidelines included eyeglasses (\$400 on average), physical therapy (\$1,000), and dental work (\$3,500). Housing guidelines included housing deposits (\$1,000), household materials (\$250), and utilities (\$500). Transportation guidelines included vehicle repairs (\$1,000), driver’s license reinstatement classes (\$650), or bus tickets or cab rides (for up to six months). Support services also included tools and equipment for work (\$1,200 to \$2,500, respectively). As long as support services focused on reducing barriers to work and the individual was engaged in services and making progress toward employment goals, the individual would receive the needed support. Support services ranged from small payments for work or interview clothing (up to \$300) to large payments of more than \$2,000 for specific services like inpatient or outpatient mental health or substance use treatment, dental work, or housing payments. Individuals commonly received some type of support payment during each counseling session with EAP as their needs became evident. There was no limit on payments to a specific individual, but EAP counselors had a benchmark of approximately \$1,500 per JFI group member. EAP leadership estimated that counselors disbursed \$50,000 per month, on average.

In addition, VR counselors had access to vocational rehabilitation support services for employment barriers such as transportation or clothing. Such services were provided in-kind and were more limited than EAP support services funded by the pilot.

Funding and disbursement of support services remained stable until June 2018, when EAP counselors received guidance that support service funding from the grant was almost exhausted. EAP counselors each received a final budget they could use for remaining support services through the end of 2018. Counselors reported they handled this change by providing fewer support services and focusing mostly on the support services that would enable an individual to secure or keep a job. Some counselors kept lists of requests or needs and disbursed support services more slowly as they assessed the level of need across their caseloads. In September 2018, AHS reallocated some unspent funding from other partners and providers to EAP to fund additional support services through the end of the JFI service period (December 2018). JFI group members reported during the focus groups in September 2018 that the change in support

service funding availability after June 2018 had a major impact on their engagement in JFI. Some had the impression that JFI services had ended because of this change. (*“The program ran out of money.”*)

Staff at all organizations reported that most individuals in the JFI group had very significant barriers to work that were extremely challenging to resolve while preparing for and finding employment. Some staff suggested that recruitment messaging during the early implementation of the pilot might have implied to other organizations and individuals that JFI services would completely resolve these issues through support services; these services were robust but could not always mitigate all barriers. Staff developed relationships with community organizations to supplement available resources—for example, involving the Department of Corrections, Legal Aid, Project CRASH (driver’s license reinstatement). In addition, the housing authority helped EAP counselors connect individuals to support services for more significant legal, transportation, and housing issues. Still, according to some staff, the barriers to work were extreme for many individuals and presented a persistent challenge to developing long-term employment plans.

JFI staff and individuals interviewed during focus groups thought that one of the strengths of JFI services was the availability and ability of staff to access support services to help mitigate barriers. Other local programs have strict eligibility criteria for support services that screen out the target populations the pilot serves. Using grant funding, JFI staff had more flexibility to meet the needs of individuals in removing barriers to employment. The most valuable uses of support services included driver’s licenses, car repairs, rental assistance, and work clothing and materials. At the same time, many EAP counselors, who managed funding for these support services, reported that this effort was a challenge while they were trying to develop a counseling relationship and maintain a focus on work. Some EAP counselors felt that a case manager would have been better suited to manage support services.

4. JFI group services management, partnerships, and communication

A designated lead from AHS and each of its partners and providers jointly managed the pilot. The leads from AHS, VR, VDOL, CCV, and the CAAs attended monthly meetings, during which they discussed service delivery statewide and potential changes to processes to facilitate service take-up. The EAP project director was responsible for passing along information to VR and VABIR leadership and staff across the State, as those organizations did not attend monthly leadership meetings. AHS and partner leadership organized annual trainings to foster regional teams and collaborative case coordination to ensure individuals were connected to services. The first annual training in fall 2016 focused on the challenges of service delivery and staff questions.

Although AHS staff were in contact with leadership at all of the providers, they had limited interaction with direct service staff, preferring that each organization manage its own staff. EAP counselors had regular meetings with the EAP lead, including a monthly in-person meeting with all EAP counselors statewide. During these meetings, EAP staff discussed processes and challenges, and received training on topics such as motivational interviewing and other clinical techniques. Other organizations, such as VDOL, CCV, and the CAAs, had meetings as needed on processes and issues. Some staff from these organizations felt they could have received more training and support, whereas others thought their support was adequate.

Many provider staff reported that an integrated database, as originally planned, would have facilitated communication between providers and reduced the number of emails and phone calls by staff to collect information on services and referrals. Staff reported that getting a complete picture of the services an individual was receiving could be challenging because detailed case notes and service information were

stored in each individual provider's own database. The coordinated counseling model was supposed to facilitate this communication, but teams in some regions did not meet as frequently or work as collaboratively as others. Some staff reported that interpersonal issues between staff or organizations could sometimes interfere with effective communications across organizations, whereas others said that not being co-located with other providers was a barrier to collaboration. In these regions, some staff reported feeling isolated from those in their own organizations (such as management) or other providers. In-person contact was important in making the coordinated counseling model function smoothly.

5. JFI group services and participation trends

JFI staff reported that most individuals who started the clinical assessment and counseling process with EAP counselors continued to meet with them for multiple sessions. Although some individuals attended only a few EAP counselor meetings before moving on to work with an employment service at VR or VDOL, others worked with EAP and employment services simultaneously over many months. Individuals tended to either be engaged in services with VR's in-house providers (EAP, VR, VABIR) or participate in a service such as occupational skills training or education while only attending check-in meetings with one or two of those staff. Staff thought that access to support services through EAP and VR counselors was key to keeping individuals engaged in services: to receive support services, individuals had to attend appointments and continue making progress toward their employment goals.

Although all individuals in the JFI group participated in the EAP clinical assessment and some amount of EAP counseling, the progression to other services for each individual differed, often based on region. In some regions, EAP, VR, and VABIR staff met simultaneously with individuals to provide services, whereas in others an individual transitioned from EAP to VR and VABIR sequentially. In some regions, the EAP counselors referred almost all individuals to a VR counselor while they were still in EAP counseling, whereas in other regions, the VR counselors were less involved and EAP counselors provided most of the services. ABAWDs frequently engaged in both VR services and VDOL services to remain in compliance with their work requirements, but non-ABAWDs did not necessarily work with both agencies. CCV's GCRC classes were most frequently attended in larger regions, such as Burlington; smaller regions had fewer available classes.

Drop-off points and exits. Most JFI group members attended at least one meeting with an EAP counselor, which signaled the beginning of services. This first step was the most identifiable drop-off point in the JFI pathway: staff suggested one in five individuals did not attend the appointment. Many staff cited transportation as a key barrier to initial engagement in services, as public transportation did not exist outside of major town centers. In addition, individuals in the JFI group might have been deterred by the many steps involved in even getting to the first meeting—from a CAA to a VDOL orientation to the EAP counselor—all in different locations. Anecdotally, staff suggested that only about half of those referred attended a VDOL orientation.

Individuals struggling with significant mental health, substance use, or homelessness issues often faced setbacks that prevented them from attending appointments. Staff said there was a very common pattern for individuals facing these challenges: the individual would miss an appointment and stop responding to their counselors. Staff said persistent follow-up by telephone and email was key in re-engaging these individuals. Eventually, after weeks or months, some of the individuals responded. Offering to provide assistance, whether counseling, referrals, support services, or for other challenges for which the individual needed help, was typically the most effective method of re-engaging individuals. Staff reported that many individuals would go through this cycle repeatedly over the JFI service period.

The JFI services had no designated exit point and were driven by each individual's circumstances. If an individual reported that he or she had obtained employment or no longer needed assistance, EAP counselors told the individual that he or she had completed services but could return if the individual ever needed additional help. During the focus group, JFI group members suggested that they exited the pilot because they did not have transportation to get to classes or appointments; had found a job to help them make ends meet; or had personal issues, such as a physical or mental health problem. Some individuals reported that changes in staff (primarily at EAP) left them confused about whom to call and made it difficult to schedule appointments. In addition, when funding for support services became more limited after June 2018, staff reported that higher numbers of JFI group members disengaged from services.

Participation trends. Staff reported that major barriers to participation in JFI services included homelessness, substance use, and mental health issues, and many individuals had more than one of these barriers simultaneously. Staff pointed out that housing was extremely limited across the State (one staff member referenced a 2 percent vacancy rate in housing statewide) and noted that trying to find housing, given the limited resources, would be a full-time job. In addition, staff emphasized that the State faced an opioid crisis during implementation of the pilot. Some staff estimated that half of the individuals comprising their caseloads were opioid dependent or taking methadone or suboxone while engaged in JFI services. Some regions of the State had no substance use treatment facilities locally, so individuals had to travel long distances to receive services. Transportation issues also posed a common problem, as the State is very rural and services were provided in person. Staff reported that many JFI group members did not have a driver's license because of previous impaired driving convictions, criminal histories, or unpaid fines. This problem was challenging and expensive to solve, leaving individuals with very few transportation options. Many staff and individuals cited this issue as a primary barrier to engaging in services and work.

6. Staffing

Staff capacity was the biggest challenge in implementing the pilot. Of all providers, EAP faced the most significant staffing shortage. The staffing plan required most EAP counselors to cover multiple regions, leaving them with limited time to meet with individuals at each location. When staff left, the distribution of EAP counselors would be spread out to cover more regions until new staff were hired, exacerbating the coverage problem. To address this issue, VR, VABIR, and VDOL assumed some responsibility for scheduling and conducting case management meetings.

The number of individuals with very significant barriers to work also contributed to staff burden. Staff reported that these individuals required intensive counseling, support services, and time to address their wide-ranging issues. Some EAP staff felt it was difficult to provide the intensive support the target populations needed, given their time limitations. Several staff in leadership positions reflected that underestimating the need for EAP staff time was the greatest oversight of the planning period. Leadership believed that each region should have had a dedicated full-time EAP counselor to serve the number of individuals being enrolled.

CCV also encountered staffing constraints over the first two years. CCV leadership underestimated the amount of time its coordinators in each region would spend contacting individuals to schedule new classes. Staff reported that much of this time was not reimbursable because of the contract structure; therefore, there was a constant tension between preserving CCV's available resources for the classes themselves and ensuring CCV had students signed up for the classes—a very time-consuming process. By the end of the first year, VDOL staff took responsibility for referring new JFI group members to CCV,

and the latter began scheduling classes more consistently and running the classes with fewer individuals, though challenges persisted.

7. Performance management

To monitor the progress of partners and providers, AHS collected quarterly reports that included narrative, budget, and participation information on activities over that period. AHS staff noted that their communication with providers was strong, so they were never surprised about any of the information that appeared in the quarterly reports.

AHS relied primarily on the ACCESS database to monitor participation in services and drop-off points. VDOL case managers entered demographic information and information about the target population and JFI groups directly into the ACCESS database following a one-on-one enrollment meeting with each new JFI group member. EAP counselors entered the remaining information on service use into the ACCESS database, which recorded referrals and service use. VR and VABIR reported on services received to EAP counselors at monthly meetings, internal VR meetings, and by email and phone; EAP counselors also recorded this information in the ACCESS database. In addition, VR and VABIR recorded services in their own internal database. VDOL used its existing database (Vermont JobLink) to track participation in services such as case management and job search assistance.

AHS developed several management reports through the ACCESS database, including one on new employment and earnings. It prepared a monthly report for senior agency managers to summarize enrollment, recruitment efforts (for example, the number of radio advertisements), estimated referrals resulting from recruiting efforts, and any key issues with partners and providers.

D. Sustainability and replicability

Near the end of the JFI service period, AHS and its partners and providers discussed how JFI group members would be served once JFI ended, and what services and policies they might incorporate into their existing SNAP E&T program. All individuals who were still active in JFI at the end of the service period (December 2018) would be transitioned to the existing SNAP E&T program. They would continue to be served by the JFI provider if it was also an existing SNAP E&T provider. If the provider was not an existing SNAP E&T provider (such as VR), staff would refer the individual to VDOL for existing SNAP E&T services. Although VR was not an existing SNAP E&T provider, many JFI group members were eligible for regular VR services and could also continue to receive services through a VR counselor or employment counselor.

AHS planned to make several changes to the existing SNAP E&T program to incorporate JFI services and activities. The primary element of JFI that AHS wanted to sustain was the regional team structure across organizations. Existing SNAP E&T services already started with an orientation at VDOL, followed by assessment and case management services, but VDOL planned to start offering some of the types of support services offered under JFI, such as work-related supplies and transportation support services. (VDOL historically had not offered support services as part of the existing SNAP E&T program.) In addition, VDOL case managers planned to more proactively identify and refer individuals who were eligible for VR services, as they had under JFI. AHS also planned to form new third-party partnerships, including with Vermont Adult Learning (to provide adult basic education services), Vermont Technical College (to provide occupational skills training), and Community Kitchen Academy (to provide occupational skills training for the culinary industry).

Although the changes to the existing SNAP E&T program were still in development during the JFI service period, AHS did not plan to fully replicate the JFI model. The existing SNAP E&T services targeted work registrants and ABAWDs, whereas JFI targeted any individuals who had a criminal history, substance use issues, mental health issues, or were experiencing housing instability. Some of these individuals were also work registrants or ABAWDs, but many (likely about half) would have been exempt from work registration requirements and thus would not have been included in the existing SNAP E&T target population. For the existing SNAP E&T program moving forward, AHS anticipated fewer individuals would have disabilities, so VR would have less of a central role than under the JFI model. In addition, there was less funding available for support services under existing SNAP E&T compared with JFI, so although AHS planned to continue offering some support services, it could not sustain the higher amounts of support services offered under JFI.

AHS and its partners and providers reflected on what aspects of JFI they would need or change if they were to implement it again. To serve the same target population, staff felt that the counseling services based on motivational interviewing, paired with flexible support services, were essential in keeping individuals engaged and reducing their barriers to work. To provide the intensive services the target population required, the organizational leadership felt they needed more than 10 additional staff across partners (EAP, VR, VABIR, and VDOL). In addition, EAP had exhausted funding for support services before the end of the JFI service period and felt that it could have met additional needs if more funding had been available. Some staff felt that JFI would have benefitted from having additional activities focused on education and training to support long-term career development. The third-party partnerships developed under existing SNAP E&T could help address this need.

E. Key implementation analysis findings

Key findings from JFI's planning, implementation, operations, and close-out periods are summarized below.

- **Counseling was key to helping individuals overcome barriers.** EAP counselors provided up-front clinical assessment of JFI group members and ongoing counseling and barrier mitigation through support services. Most individuals were subsequently (or simultaneously) referred to VR counseling services because they needed employment services tailored to a disability (such as a mental health or substance use issue, or another physical or learning disability). For individuals with significant barriers, this type of counseling was essential to help prepare them for activities and employment. Many EAP and VR counselors emphasized the importance of using motivational interviewing techniques with the target population as a way of identifying barriers and outlining goals.
- **Support services were important to JFI group members and staff.** EAP counselors had access to many types of support services with relatively few limits and could help individuals with barriers to employment (for example, transportation, legal, and housing issues). EAP counselors said that the most important types of support services included small payments for work clothing (\$50 to \$100); payments for driver's license reinstatements (\$100 to \$600); larger payments for housing, such as first month's rent (\$500 to \$1,500); or health needs, such as substance use treatment (\$2,000 or higher). EAP counselors described the role of dispensing these services as challenging but tried to ensure individuals were on a sustainable path to solving the problems the support services were intended to address. Some JFI group members perceived support services as the key purpose of JFI, reporting that

it was important to keep individuals engaged in long-term employment planning while offering these services.

- **Forming regional teams took time but was important for service delivery.** The JFI model did not include a dedicated case manager—instead, it relied on partner and provider organizations to coordinate services for each individual. Staff received limited guidance on how to coordinate services during the initial training, and all staff found it challenging to develop these processes and relationships while delivering services. Over time, regional teams developed strategies that worked for their areas, but it took some regions a year to fully establish the procedures. As a result, each region had a unique service model; some collaborated closely in teams co-located and founded on strong interpersonal relationships, whereas other regions found it challenging to establish the team-based model across organizations. However, in regions where the team-based model worked well, staff felt JFI group members were more engaged because they felt supported by a team. In addition, staff on these teams were able to leverage their unique local knowledge and contacts to help individuals obtain the services and jobs they needed.
- **Progressive employment was a useful activity for individuals with barriers to employment.** Many provider staff said that progressive employment services offered through VABIR were an important offering for individuals with barriers to employment, such as a criminal history, substance use, or homelessness. Staff said that individuals who did not have strong resumes could benefit from participating in progressive employment activities. The VABIR employment counselor acted as a liaison to employers and could help build the relationships and trust needed to get an individual a work-based learning or employment opportunity. The activity was tailored to individuals with multiple barriers to employment because it started with activities requiring a lower commitment, such as an informational interview or job shadowing, and proceeded to more intensive activities, such as work experience or on-the-job training activities. Staff said this model built confidence and helped clarify job interests among individuals who participated. Some staff suggested that progressive employment was challenging or not appropriate for individuals with more barriers to employment, who instead needed to focus on stabilizing their basic needs before engaging in employment-related activities.

V. Participation analysis

In this chapter, we present findings on the services that JFI group members received and the employment or training-related activities in which they chose to participate. Using the administrative service use data recorded by service providers, we examine overall engagement in JFI, the types of activities in which individuals participated, the order in which they typically proceeded through them, and how long they spent in each type of activity. The chapter also presents details about participation in education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning activities; support services received; receipt and intensity of case management services; and the timing of and reasons for exiting JFI. In addition, to account for potential differences in the implementation and availability of services for those enrolled at different times, we estimated several service receipt measures by enrollment timing and describe differences in participation between those who enrolled in JFI earlier compared to those who enrolled later.²⁴ Appendix D contains additional data on the characteristics of those who did or did not complete activities and a discussion of service receipt among subgroups, based on characteristics at the time of random assignment, as indicated in the baseline registration form.

A. Participation in JFI

After random assignment, JFI group members were scheduled for their first appointment with an EAP counselor to begin a clinical assessment. The full assessment generally took place over one to three meetings. After assessment, individuals could receive case management and support services as needed. They also could participate in a range of activities, including job search assistance, education (basic and postsecondary), occupational skills training, work-based learning, GCRC classes, workfare, and employment counseling. JFI also provided financial incentives for participating in certain services or meeting milestones, such as completing the clinical assessment or acquiring stable housing.

1. Overall engagement in JFI

Most (96 percent) of the JFI group members received at least one service, including clinical assessments or any of the employment and training-related activities JFI offered (Exhibit V.1).²⁵ The first step in the JFI pathway was to meet with a counselor to start an assessment; most of the JFI group members (89 percent) received an assessment. When comparing the baseline characteristics

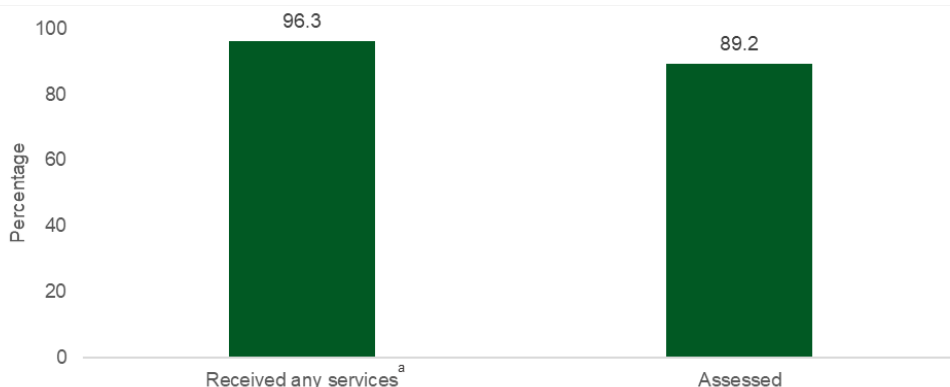
After random assignment, most JFI group members received services and completed assessments.

²⁴ The pilot extended enrollment over a 25-month period, but the service period was fixed. Consequently, the service period for individuals who enrolled later was shorter than for those who enrolled earlier. For example, individuals who enrolled in 2016 could have received services for up to 34 months. In contrast, those who enrolled in 2017 could potentially receive services up to 24 months, and those who enrolled in 2018 could receive services up to 12 months. This range is large across the entire pool of JFI group members (Appendix Table D.2), but most of the group members (91 percent) had a potential window of at least 12 months in which to receive services, and 36 percent of the group was enrolled early enough to allow for 24 months of services. However, the actual participation rates show that only 33 percent of JFI group members participated in services for 12 months, and 6 percent participated for 24 months. Therefore, the variation in service period does not appear to have affected actual participation in services (Appendix Table D.2).

²⁵ The measure does not include case management and support services because individuals often engaged once to meet with a case manager or get a support service but did not return for more meaningful activities and services.

(age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, employment status, and presence of children in the household) of individuals who did and did not receive services or an assessment, we found few differences between the two groups (Appendix Table D.12).

Exhibit V.1. Percentage of JFI group members who engaged in services



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,510 JFI group members.

^a "Received any services" measures engagement in activities, including clinical assessments and employment or training-related activities; the measure does not include orientations, case management, or support services.

Length and timing of engagement. On average, individuals in the JFI group who engaged in services spent about 11 months (317 days) in JFI (Appendix Table D.5). Overall, most individuals began receiving services within the first quarter after random assignment (94 percent), and few additional individuals first engaged after Quarter 1 (Appendix Table D.6).

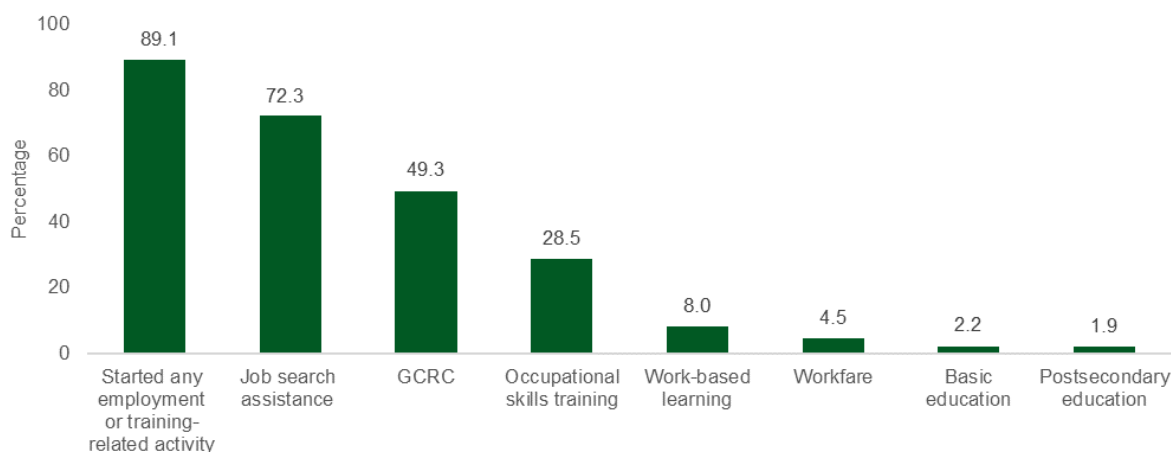
2. Engagement in activities

Most JFI group members (89 percent) started an employment or training-related activity (Exhibit V.2). Individuals most commonly started job search assistance (72 percent) followed by the GCRC course (49 percent), and occupational skills training (29 percent). A lower percentage of individuals participated in work-based learning or workfare activities (8 percent and 5 percent, respectively), and few individuals participated in basic or postsecondary education.

Most JFI group members participated in an activity, and almost half of those who started one completed it. Occupational skills training and work-based learning activities were those most commonly completed among those who started.

Among those who started an activity, 47 percent of individuals completed at least one (Appendix Table D.3). Completion rates by type of activity varied, however. Completion rates were highest for occupational skills training (71 percent), work-based learning (63 percent), and workfare (60 percent; Exhibit V.3). Despite the GCRC course being a central component of JFI, the completion rate (6 percent) was much lower than JFI staff expected (see Chapter IV for some of the reasons start and completion rates were lower than anticipated). There were few significant differences in characteristics between those who did and did not complete the most common activities among those who started (Appendix Table D.13).

Exhibit V.2. Percentage of JFI group members who started an activity

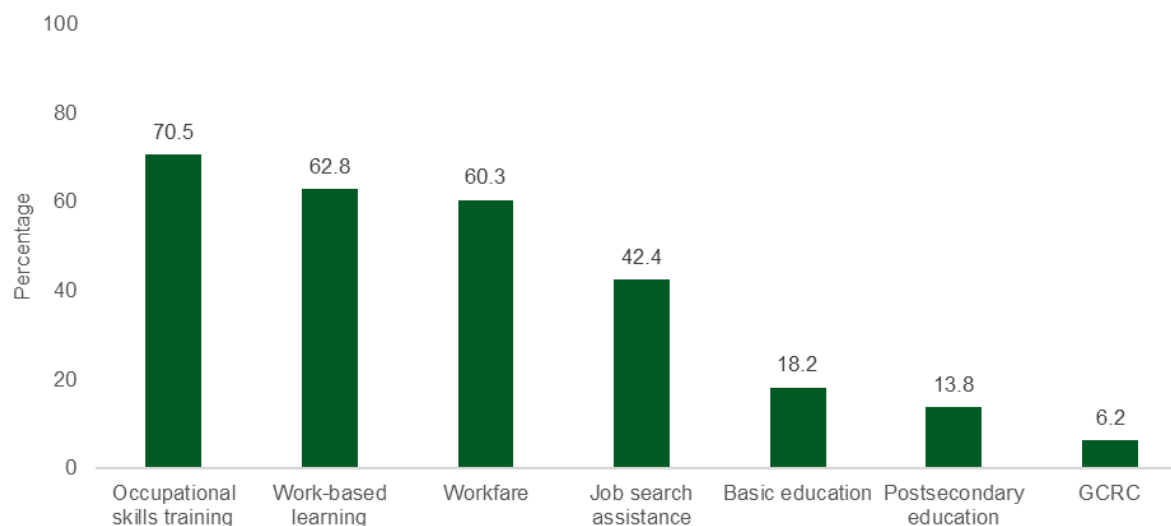


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,510 JFI group members.

GCRC = Governor's Career Readiness Certificate

Exhibit V.3. Percentage of JFI group members who completed an activity among those who started one



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,345 JFI group members.

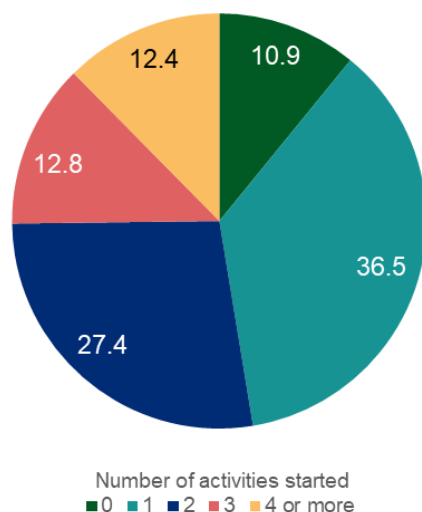
GCRC = Governor's Career Readiness Certificate

Length and timing of engagement. Individuals in the JFI group who started an activity spent an average of two to six months participating, depending on the activity (Appendix Table D.5). They spent about six months (169 days) in basic education, four months (117) in job search assistance, and two months (47 days) in the GCRC course. Individuals spent two to three months on average in work-based learning, postsecondary education, workfare, or other activities. Most individuals started an activity in the first quarter after random assignment (84 percent); few additional individuals first engaged after Quarter 1 (Appendix Table D.6). There was a similar trend for rates of completion, with the largest percentage of

those who started an activity completing it in the first or second quarter (30 percent and 7 percent, respectively), and 1 to 3 percent completing them in each quarter between Quarters 3 and 7.

Number and order of activities. Exhibit V.4 shows that most of the individuals assigned to JFI participated in either one (37 percent) or two (27 percent) employment-related activities. Most JFI group members who participated in activities first started either job search assistance (56 percent) or the GCRC course (33 percent); fewer first started occupational skills training (7 percent), workfare (3 percent), or work-based learning (1 percent; Appendix Table D.5). Among those who participated in just one activity, most participated only in job search assistance (67 percent) or the GCRC course (24 percent).

Exhibit V.4. Number of activities started by JFI group members (percentage)



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,510 JFI group members.

For JFI group members who participated in more than one activity, the most common combination of activities was GCRC and then job search (17 percent), and job search and then GCRC (14 percent; Appendix Table D.5). In general, for individuals who started more than one activity, there was more than a month—sometimes three months—between starting the first and second activities. This finding suggests that individuals generally were not engaging in multiple activities at the same time but rather finishing one and then moving to the next.

Earlier versus later enrollment. Because some service and JFI policies changed over time, we examined whether there were differences in start and completion rates of employment or training-related activities for those enrolled in JFI earlier versus later. JFI group members who enrolled later were more likely than those who enrolled earlier to start an employment and training-related activity (93 versus 85 percent) or the GCRC course (66 versus 28 percent; Appendix Table D.4). These findings suggest that the changes to the process for referrals and enrollment in the GCRC course, as described in Chapter IV, could have been effective in improving the rates of GCRC enrollment. JFI group members who enrolled later also were slightly more likely to complete the GCRC course (4 versus 2 percent), although these completion rates remained below expectations.

B. Education, occupational skills training, and work-based learning

Among just education, occupational skills training, or work-based learning activities (excluding job search assistance, GCRC classes, and workfare), 35 percent of individuals started one of these activities, and 68 percent of those who started completed at least one of them (Appendix Table D.7). Thus, only about one-third of all individuals starting an employment or training-related activity participated in an education, occupational skills training, or work-based learning activity. This section describes the types of education and occupational skills training JFI group members started and completed, as well as certifications they earned. It also describes the types of work-based learning in which individuals participated and the average value of any subsidies employers received.

1. Education and occupational skills training

JFI group members could participate in basic education or postsecondary education activities, but few did so. Two percent of JFI group members started adult basic education, and less than 1 percent completed it (18 percent of those who started). JFI staff did not track the type of postsecondary education individuals started or completed, so no information was available on degrees resulting from education activities.

More JFI group members participated in occupational skills training activities (29 percent) than educational activities (Exhibit V.2). However, JFI staff did not document the types of occupational skills training programs in which individuals started, or whether they earned a credential. JFI tracked obtainment of only two types of certification related to the GCRC course—GCRC and WorkKeys (this certification was earned as part of the first module of the GCRC course). Only 7 percent of JFI group members earned one of these certifications (Appendix Table D.7); all of them earned the WorkKeys certification, and about 42 percent received the GCRC certification. Almost all of these credentials were earned within the first quarter after random assignment (Appendix Table D.6).

2. Work-based learning

Few JFI group members participated in work-based learning (8 percent), the majority of which was work experience (75 percent; Exhibit V.5). Almost 35 percent of JFI group members who started work-based learning conducted job shadowing or job tours (generally before obtaining work experience or an internship), which was part of the progressive employment model VR used to ensure a good fit between individuals in JFI and employers. Among those who started work-based learning, 63 percent completed it. Employers received an average of \$2,764 in subsidies per person employed in work-based learning opportunities. Subsidies were paid to employers for individuals who participated in subsidized work experience and on-the-job training (most of these opportunities were subsidized).

The majority of JFI group members who started work-based learning participated in work experience. Employers were paid an average subsidy of \$2,764 per person.

Exhibit V.5. Percentage of JFI group members who participated in work-based learning and average amount of subsidy received

Type of service	JFI group
Started work-based learning (%)	8.0
Type of work-based learning, among those who started (%)	
Work experience	75.2
Job shadowing/tour	34.7
On-the-job training	15.7
Volunteer	5.8
Internship	2.5
Completed work-based learning (%)	5.0
Completed work-based learning, among those who started (%)	62.8
Average amount of subsidy per person, among those who started (\$)	2,764.10
Sample size	1,510

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

C. Support services

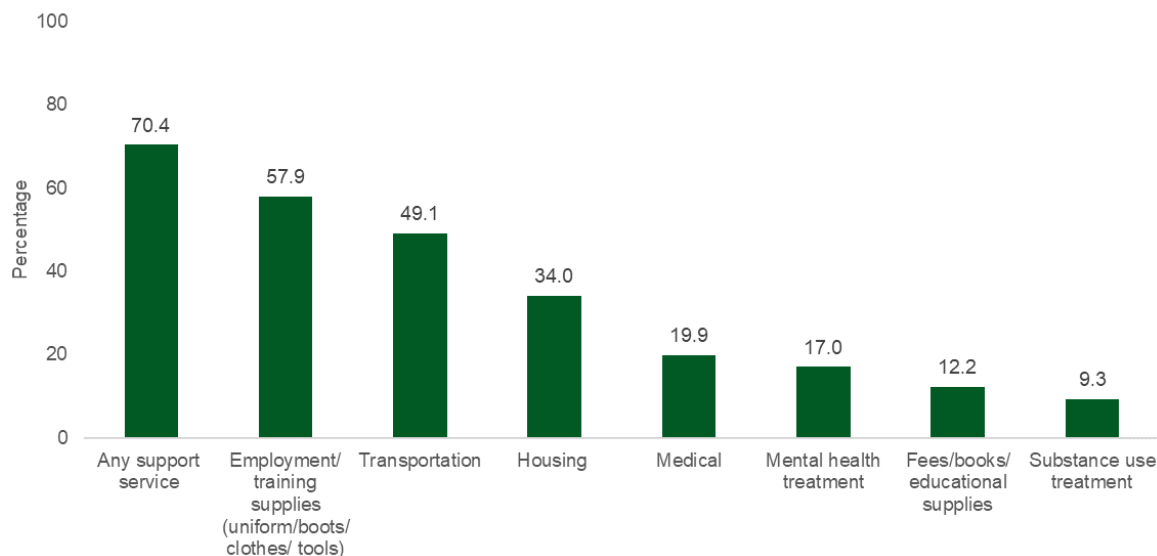
Most JFI group members received at least one support service (70 percent; Exhibit V.6). Individuals most frequently received employment or training supplies (58 percent), transportation assistance (49 percent), and housing (34 percent). Twenty percent or fewer of the JFI group members received medical support, mental health treatment (paid for by JFI), educational supports, or substance use treatment (paid for by JFI).

Note that a much higher percentage of JFI group members received mental health and substance use treatment paid for by health insurance, Medicaid or Medicare, or other agencies' funds; the data reported here reflect only the portion of treatment paid for using JFI funds. Most individuals started receiving support services within their first quarter after random assignment (56 percent), whereas 1 to 6 percent of individuals first received a support service in Quarters 2 through 4 (Appendix Table D.6).

Seventy percent of JFI group members received a support service, receiving a total of \$1,639 on average.

Individuals who received a support service received some type of support service in three months, on average (Appendix Table D.8).²⁶ Individuals received transportation assistance and employment or training supplies for three months each; and housing, educational supplies, and medical support for one to two months each.

²⁶ Individuals who received support services in more than one month did not necessarily receive them in consecutive months.

Exhibit V.6. Percentage of JFI group members who received support services, by type


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,510 JFI group members.

On average, JFI group members who received support services each received a total of \$1,639 in support services payments (Exhibit V.7). The average total amount by type of support service was largest for housing (\$1,680). The average total amounts for other support services were much lower, ranging from \$304 (employment-related materials) to \$648 (educational supplies).

Exhibit V.7. Amount of support services received among those who received support services

Type of service	Average amount
Average total amount of support services paid per person (\$)	1,638.90
Average total amounts of support services paid per person, by type (\$)	
Housing	1,679.70
Fees/books/educational supplies	648.10
Transportation	534.90
Medical	495.40 ^a
Employment/training supplies (uniform/boots/clothes/tools)	373.20
Substance use treatment	364.00 ^a
Employment-related materials	304.30
Sample size	1,063

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

^aThese values are not representative of the total cost of these services because most individuals used Medicaid to pay for treatment, or costs were paid by VR or through other means. The amounts in this table are the average paid with JFI funds only.

Support services in relation to other measures. We assessed whether participation in JFI and employment or training-related activities differed for those who did and did not receive a support service. On average, individuals who received a support service remained in JFI for an average of 154 days longer than those who did not (Appendix Table D.8). In addition, 75 percent of individuals who started an employment or training-related activity received a support service, compared with only 25 percent of individuals who did not start an activity. Most of those who completed an activity received a support

service (80 percent). Individuals who started and completed an employment or training-related activity received a few hundred dollars more than those who started but did not complete an activity (\$1,960 versus \$1,670; Appendix Table D.8). This difference likely reflects that those who completed activities were in JFI longer (which resulted in more monthly assistance).

Earlier versus later enrollment. Those who enrolled in the pilot later were less likely to receive support services than those who enrolled earlier (66 percent compared to 76 percent; Appendix Table D.4). Changes to the policies related to support services in 2017 and 2018 may have contributed to this difference.

D. Financial incentives

As described in Chapter IV, JFI offered individuals incentive payments ranging from \$25 to \$75 for those participating in services or meeting milestones. All JFI group members who attended their first meeting received \$25; those randomly assigned to the “high value” incentive group received an additional \$50 for meeting a milestone, whereas those assigned to the “low value” incentive group received an additional \$25 for doing so. Most individuals received the first incentive (96 percent), but fewer of them received the second incentive for meeting their milestone, such as acquiring housing (35 percent of the high value incentive group and 31 percent of the low value incentive group; Exhibit V.8). On average, those in the high value incentive group received about \$43 in incentive payments; those in the low value incentive group received about \$33.

Exhibit V.8. Percentage of JFI group members who received a financial incentive and average amount of incentives

Incentives	JFI group
Assigned to “high value” incentive group	50.2
Received first incentive payment in high value incentive group (%) ^a	96.2
Received second incentive payment in high value incentive group (%)	35.0
Average amount paid to high value incentive group (\$) ^b	43.2
Assigned to “low value” value incentive group	49.8
Received first incentive payment in low value incentive group (%) ^a	96.4
Received second incentive payment in low value incentive group (%)	31.1
Average amount paid to low value incentive group (\$) ^b	33.1
Sample size	1,510

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

^aJFI staff did not document receipt of the first incentive payment but indicated that everyone who attended their first meeting received the \$25 payment. Therefore, we used those who attended at least one appointment as a proxy for receipt of the first payment. JFI staff did track who received the second incentive, which was less prevalent.

^bThe high value incentive group was eligible to receive up to \$75 (\$25 for the first incentive and \$50 for the second); the low value incentive group was eligible to receive up to \$50 (\$25 for the first incentive and \$25 for the second). This measure calculates the average amount of the total incentives received among those who received the first incentive.

E. Case management

The JFI model was designed to provide EAP counseling appointments or VDOL case management to JFI group members; all contacts were made in person. The frequency of EAP counseling appointments generally transitioned from weekly to biweekly, and then to monthly, as the relationship and the individual's goals progressed. Eighty-seven percent of individuals had at least one contact with a counselor or case manager while participating in JFI after the assessment period (which generally consisted of one to three counseling appointments).²⁷

Most JFI group members had contact with an EAP counselor.

Earlier versus later enrollment. Those who enrolled in JFI later were less likely to have any contact with their case manager than those who enrolled earlier (84 percent compared to 90 percent; Appendix Table D.4).

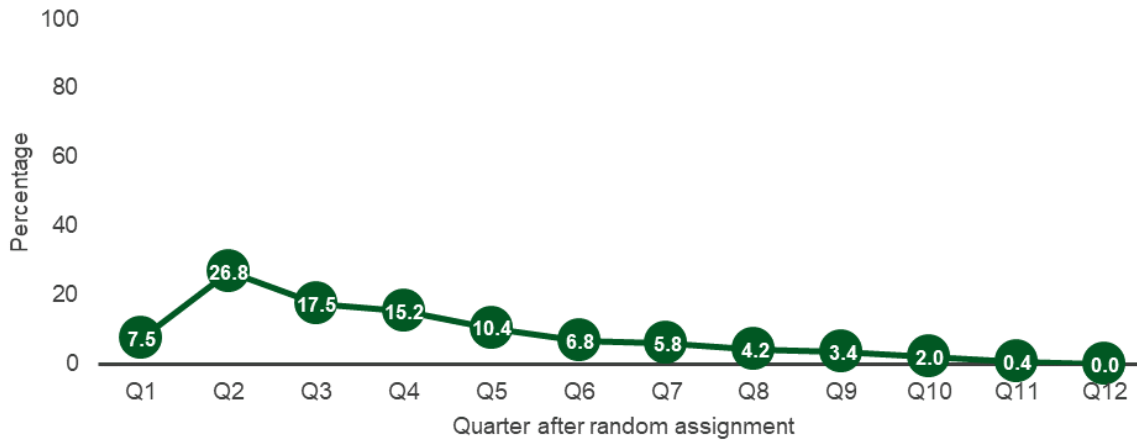
F. Extent and timing of JFI exits

The majority of individuals (67 percent) exited JFI within 12 months of random assignment (Exhibit V.9). Another 27 percent left JFI in their second year, and the remaining 6 percent exited in their third year. Most individuals left in the second quarter after random assignment (27 percent); more than 10 percent left in each of Quarters 3, 4, and 5 after random assignment. Among those who exited within 3 months, 40 percent received a support service, compared to 62 percent of those who exited within 12 months (Appendix Table D.10). Most of the JFI group members exited after they participated in an employment or training-related activity (88 percent); only a small percentage (8 percent) of those who exited later re-entered JFI.

The majority of individuals exited JFI within their first year after random assignment; 6 percent exited in their third year.

There were few differences in the characteristics of those who left JFI early (within Quarter 1) and those who left later (after Quarter 1). Those who exited earlier were more likely to be 18 to 49 years old (12 percentage point difference) and live in a household without children (5 percentage point difference; Appendix Table D.11).

²⁷ JFI staff did not document the number of contacts, time spent with individuals during each contact, or the type of contact.

Exhibit V.9. Percentage of JFI group members who exited within each quarter

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,510 JFI group members.

Most JFI group members completed services before exiting (36 percent), but a similar percentage (35 percent) left before completing services (this percentage includes those who chose to stop participating and those with whom case managers lost contact; Exhibit V.10). Thirty percent left because they became ineligible for JFI (generally due to losing SNAP benefits). This finding aligns with those using SNAP administrative data only, which show that 43 percent of individuals exited SNAP around the same time they exited JFI (in the month before, the month of, or the month after; Appendix Table D.10).

Using UI wage data, we examined the employment patterns around the time of exit from JFI. About 42 percent of JFI group members were already employed at the time of exit (at least three months before exit), and 18 percent were employed around the time of exit (between two months before to two months after the exit date); 40 percent of individuals were not employed around the time of exit (Appendix Table D.10).

Exhibit V.10. Percentage of JFI group members who exited, by reason

Exits	JFI group
Completed services	35.5
Discontinued services	34.9
Ineligible	29.6
Sample size	1,510

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data.

VI. Differences in service receipt for the JFI and control groups

In this chapter, we describe how JFI and control group members differed in their receipt of services based on participation in JFI, existing SNAP E&T, or other services and programs available in communities. Understanding differences in service receipt is important for interpreting findings about the impacts of JFI on employment, earnings, and receipt of public assistance (discussed in Chapter VII). Impacts on these outcomes are unlikely to occur without a meaningful difference in the services received by the JFI and control groups.

In presenting findings, we begin with a description of differences between the research groups in participation in job search training or assistance activities and education or training activities. We also examine differences in participation in specific components of education or training activities, including general job skills training, occupational skills training, education, and work-based learning activities.²⁸ We then examine differences between the two groups in rates of completion, the amount of time spent in different activities, and receipt of case management and support services. (We discuss how these differences varied across a select number of subgroups in Appendix E.) Unless noted otherwise, participation in activities and receipt of services are measured over the 36-month period after random assignment.

A. Differences between research groups in participation in activities

Individuals in the JFI group participated in activities at higher rates than individuals in the control group. About 67 percent of the JFI group participated in a job search training or assistance activity or education or training activity compared to 56 percent of the control group (Exhibit VI.1). Relative to individuals in the control group, individuals in the JFI group were more likely to participate in job search training or assistance activities (9 percentage point difference) and education or training activities (15 percentage point difference).

Relative to the control group, the JFI group was more likely to participate in job search training activities or education or training activities during the three years following random assignment.

²⁸ The survey collected information on education or training activities or programs. For simplicity, we refer to them as “activities” in this chapter.

Exhibit VI.1. Participation in any JFI, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

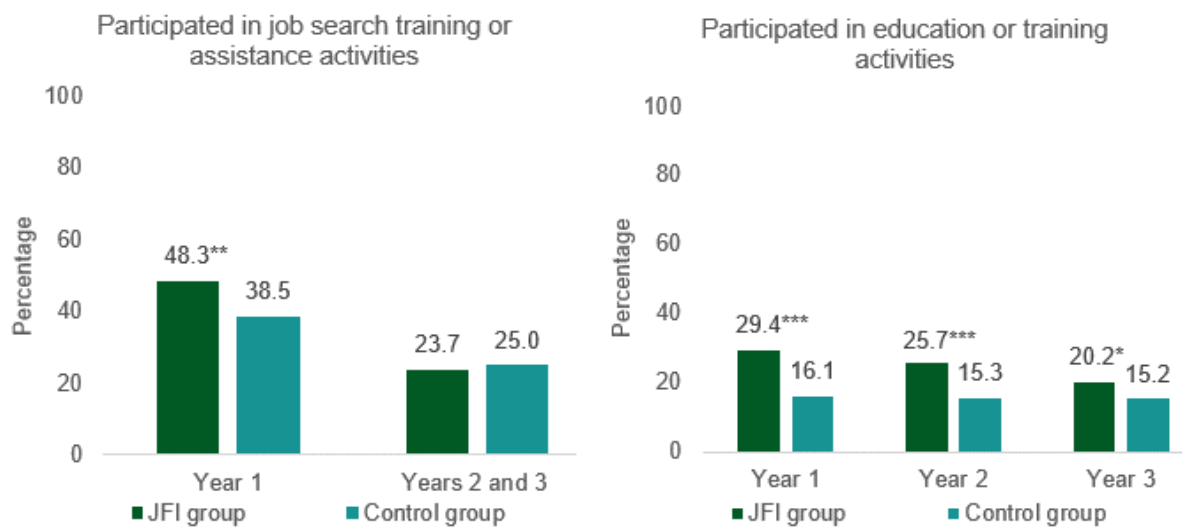
Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Differences in service receipt between the JFI group and the control group were largest in the first year after random assignment and decreased in size over time (Exhibit VI.2). For example, in Year 1, there was a 13-percentage point difference between the JFI group and the control group in the percentage of individuals who participated in education or training activities. By Year 3, this difference had decreased to 5 percentage points. Notably, although the average individual in the JFI group participated in the pilot for about five months on average, a significant difference in service receipt remained in the third year after random assignment. Even after JFI stopped providing services, JFI group members continued receiving services in existing SNAP E&T and the community at higher rates than control group members—24 percent of JFI group members participated in an education or training activity after the pilot ended compared to 15 percent of control group members (Appendix Table E.2a). The differences between the two groups in rates of participation for individuals randomly assigned earlier in the pilot period were similar to those randomly assigned later in the period (Appendix Table E.10).

There remained a significant difference between the JFI and control groups in rates of participation for all three years, even after the end of the pilot period.

Exhibit VI.2. Participation in JFI, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services, by year after random assignment



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

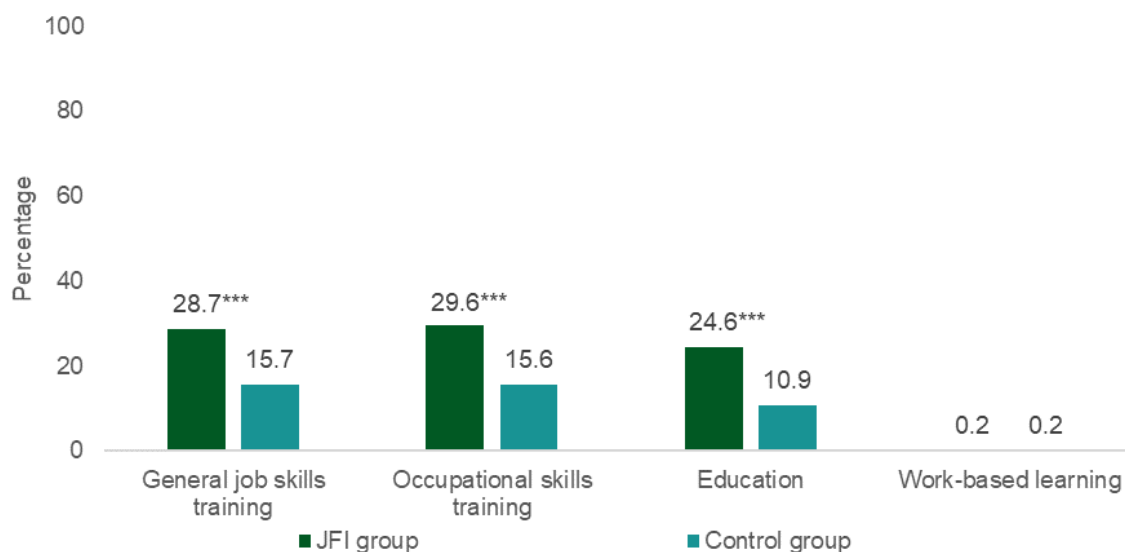
Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members. The 12- and 36-month surveys collected the start and end dates for participation in education or training programs, but not for participation in job search training or assistance activities. As a result, annual estimates of participation in job search training and assistance activities cannot be estimated separately for Years 2 and 3 after random assignment.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

JFI group members were more likely than control group members to start specific components of education or training activities (Exhibit VI.3). The largest differences between the two groups were for occupational skills training (14 percentage point difference), education (14 percentage point difference), and general job skills training (13 percentage point difference). There was no difference between the two groups in rates of participation in work-based learning.

The JFI group had higher rates of participation than the control group in general job skills training, occupational skills training, and education activities.

Exhibit VI.3. Participation in specific JFI, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered services



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

B. Differences between the research groups in activity completion

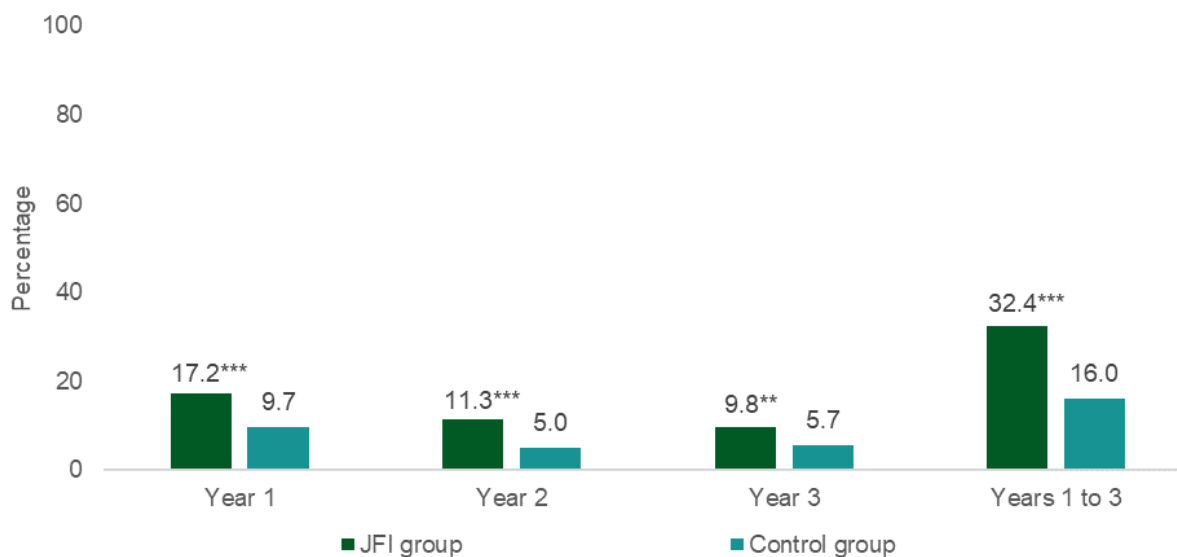
In addition to being more likely than the control group to start education and training activities, the JFI group was also more likely to complete them (Exhibit VI.4). Overall, JFI group members were 16 percentage points more likely than control group members to complete any type of education or training activity.

Differences between the two groups in rates of completion were largest in the first year after random assignment (8 percentage point difference) and grew smaller in the second and third years (6 and 4 percentage point difference, respectively; Exhibit VI.4). Some individuals—11 percent of JFI group members and 7 percent of control group members—reported that they were still participating in the activity at the time of the 36-month follow-up survey (Appendix Table E.3). If an individual was engaged in an activity at the time of the 36-month survey, that individual was most commonly still in occupational skills training, as reported by 6 percent of JFI group members and 3 percent of control group members.

JFI group members were more likely than control group members to complete activities and earn an occupational certificate or license.

Individuals in the JFI group were also more likely than those in the control group to complete specific types of activities, such as general job skills training (14 percentage point difference), occupational skills training (12 percentage point difference), and education (10 percentage point difference; Appendix Table E.3). There was no significant difference between the two groups in the percentage who completed work-based learning activities.

Exhibit VI.4. Percentage of JFI group members who completed education or training activities, by year after random assignment



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

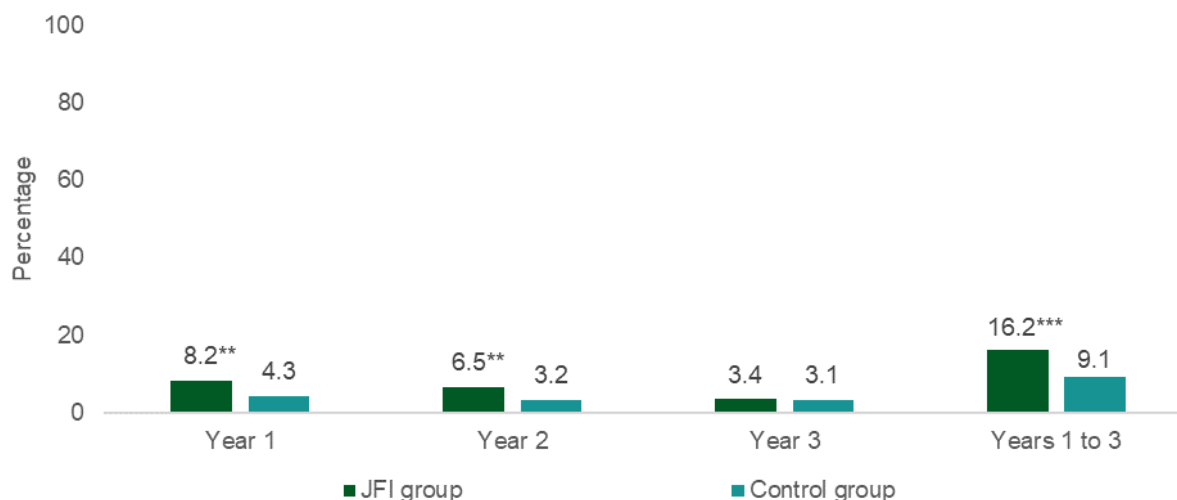
***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Individuals in the JFI group spent, on average, about two months longer in activities than individuals in the control group (Appendix Table E.3). JFI group members also spent about three hours more per week in activities than control group members. In the first two years following random assignment, the JFI group spent more time per year and more hours per week in activities relative to the control group. In the third year after random assignment, JFI group members spent more hours per week in activities than the control group, but there was no difference between groups in the mean length of time spent in activities.

Individuals in the JFI group were also more likely than those in the control group to receive an occupational certificate or license (7 percentage point difference; Exhibit VI.5). There were significant differences in the percentages of individuals who received one in Years 1 and 2 following random assignment, but not in Year 3.

The differences between the two groups in rates of completion and receipt of a certificate or degree were larger for individuals randomly assigned later in the enrollment period compared to those randomly assigned earlier (Appendix Table E.10).

Exhibit VI.5. Percentage of JFI group members who received an occupational certificate or license, overall and by year



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

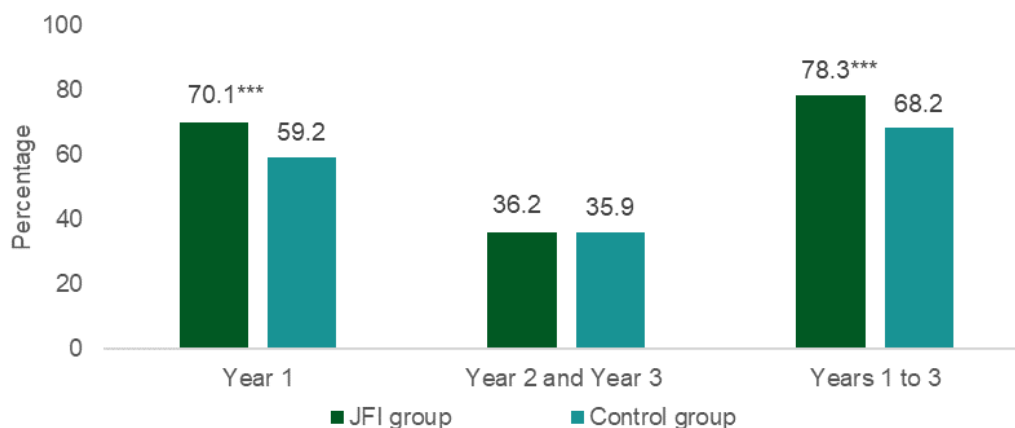
C. Differences between research groups in receipt of case management and support services

JFI group members were more likely than control group members to receive case management services, including career counseling and one-on-one assistance from employment professionals or case managers (10 percentage point difference; Exhibit VI.6). The difference between the two groups was largest and statistically significant in the first year after random assignment (11 percentage point difference); it was approximately zero and not statistically significant in the second and third years following random assignment. The differences between the two groups in receipt of case management services were similar for individuals randomly assigned earlier versus later in the enrollment period (Appendix Table E.10).

JFI group members were more likely than control group members to receive case management and support services.

On average, JFI group members had 3 additional contacts with an employment professional or case manager relative to control group members (11 versus 9 contacts; Appendix Table E.6). Differences in the mode of contact (in person versus by phone) between the two groups varied over time after random assignment. The JFI group was less likely than the control group to communicate mostly by phone in the first year after random assignment (5 percentage point difference); in the second and third years, the JFI group was more likely than the control group to report communicating equally in person and by phone (8 percentage point difference; Appendix Table E.7).

Exhibit VI.6. Receipt of case management through JFI, existing SNAP E&T, or community-offered programs, overall and by year



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members. The 12-month survey requested information about receipt of case management and support services between the date of random assignment and the date of the 12-month interview. The 36-month survey requested information about receipt of case management and support services between the date of the 12-month interview and the date of the 36-month interview. As a result, it is not possible to estimate receipt of assistance separately in Years 2 and 3.

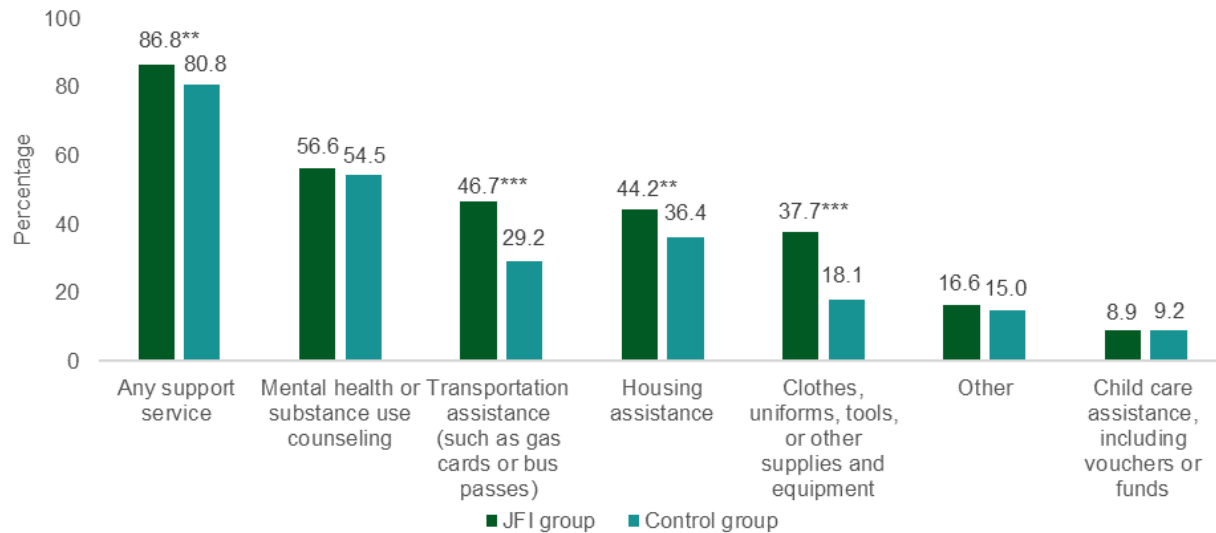
***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

JFI group members also were more likely than control group members to receive support services. About 87 percent of individuals in the JFI group received a support service compared to 81 percent in the control group (Exhibit VI.7). The largest differences between the two groups were observed for transportation (47 versus 29 percent) and clothes, uniforms, tools, or other supplies and equipment (38 versus 18 percent). JFI group members were also more likely to receive housing assistance than the control group (44 versus 36 percent). There were no statistically significant differences between the JFI group and the control group in receipt of child care assistance, mental health or substance use counseling, or other support services.

Individuals in the JFI group were more likely than those in the control group to receive support services in the first year following random assignment and the ensuing two years. Differences between the two groups were largest in the first year (10 percentage point difference; Appendix Table E.7). Differences between the two groups in receipt of support services were similar between those randomly assigned earlier compared to later in the enrollment period.

VI. Differences in service receipt for the JFI and control groups

Exhibit VI.7. Receipt of support services through JFI, existing SNAP E&T or community-offered programs, overall and by type



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates cover the 36 months following random assignment. Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members. "Other" included assistance with payment of utilities such as electricity, phone, heat, or gas; food assistance; personal care and hygiene products, and assistance with medical care.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

VII. Impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and well-being outcomes

In this chapter, we examine whether the generally higher rates of engagement and service receipt among individuals in JFI, as described in Chapter VI, translated into impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and key measures of well-being, including food security, health, well-being, and housing. We also examine whether impacts differed according to whether individuals started or completed JFI activities. In Appendix F, we present information about how impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and food security varied across subgroups.

As described in Chapter II, we focus on impacts in the two-year period consisting of Years 2 and 3 after random assignment. We aim to balance any concerns about how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected outcomes in Year 3 with measuring impacts on outcomes beyond Year 1 following random assignment after many individuals had time to participate in JFI activities.

A. Impacts of JFI on labor market outcomes

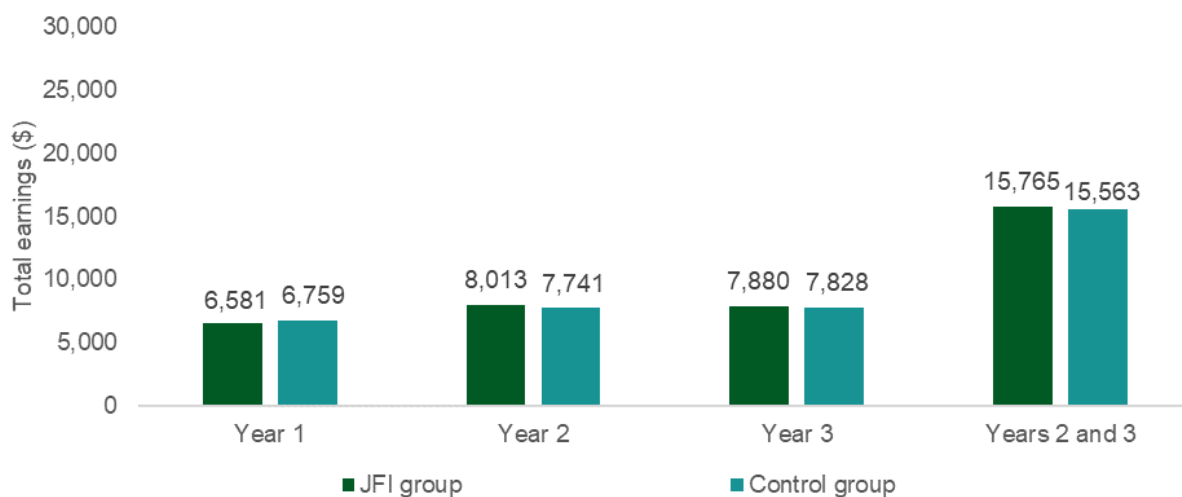
This section presents impacts on key labor market outcomes. Outcomes from both the UI wage records and survey were measured by year and quarter after random assignment. Some outcomes based on the survey data were measured at the time of the survey, approximately 36 months after random assignment.²⁹

1. Impacts on earnings, employment, and hours worked

Earnings. Based on both UI and survey data, JFI had no impact on earnings (Exhibits VII.1 and VII.2). Based on each data source, both research groups experienced increases in average earnings over the first two years after random assignment, then a slight decrease over Year 3. The JFI group had greater average earnings over the two-year period (Years 2 and 3), based on UI data, but these differences were not statistically significant. Based on survey data, the JFI group had greater average earnings in Year 2, but lower earnings in Year 3, than the control group. These differences were not statistically significant.

²⁹ For survey-based outcomes, we defined the quarter after random assignment as the first three months after the month of random assignment. The months included in this quarter sometimes differed from the calendar quarter, which we used to define the first quarter after random assignment for outcomes based on UI wage records.

Exhibit VII.1. Total earnings based on UI wage records, by year

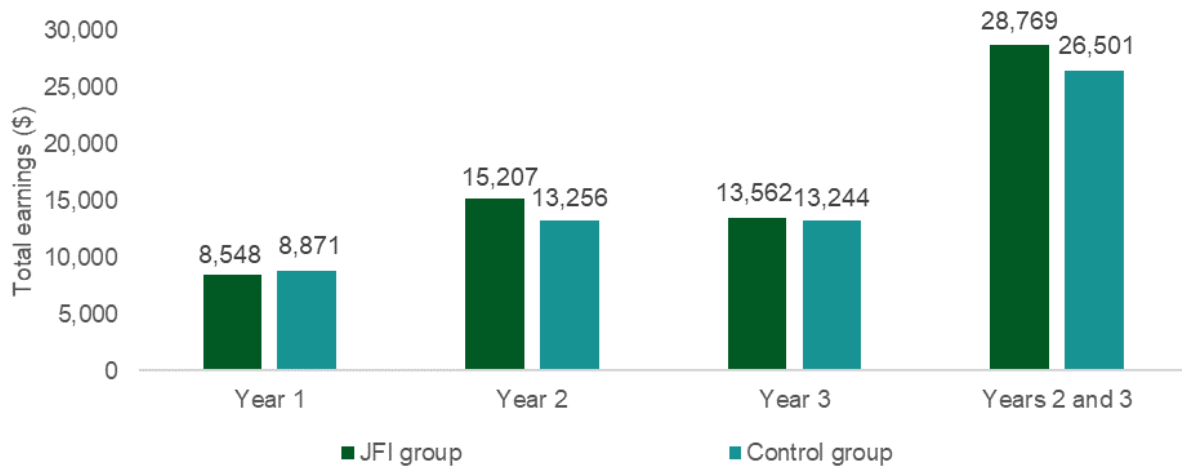


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,378 JFI group members and 1,378 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit VII.2. Total earnings based on survey data, by year



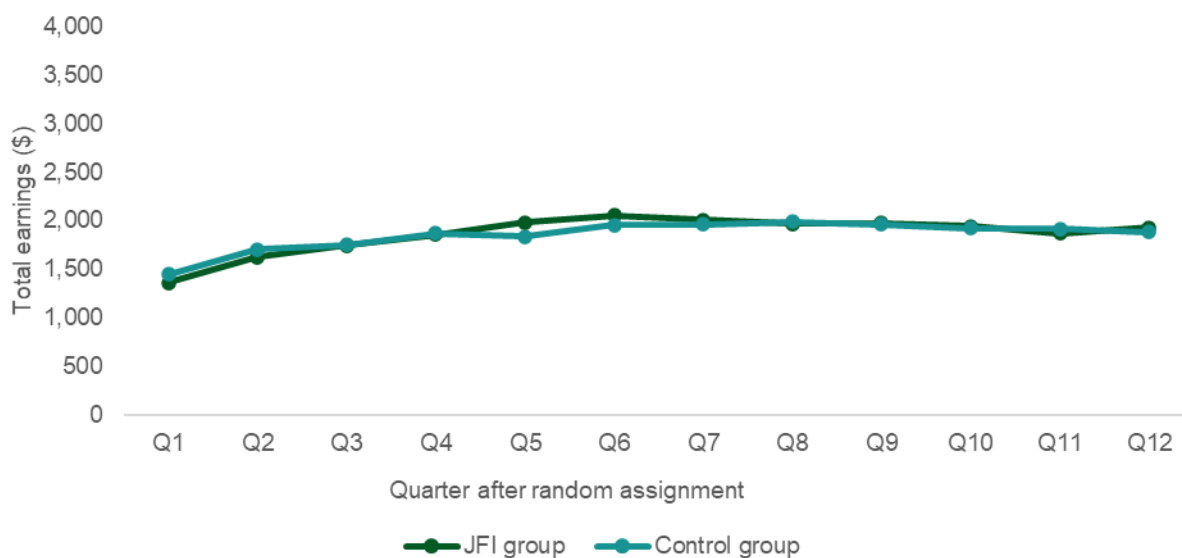
Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Based on UI data, there were no statistical differences between the research groups in earnings in any quarter (Exhibit VII.3). Based on survey data, earnings differences between the research groups were significant only in Quarter 5 (Exhibit VII.4). These findings were similar for individuals who were randomly assigned earlier versus later in the enrollment period (Appendix Table F.19).

Exhibit VII.3. Total earnings based on UI wage records, by quarter

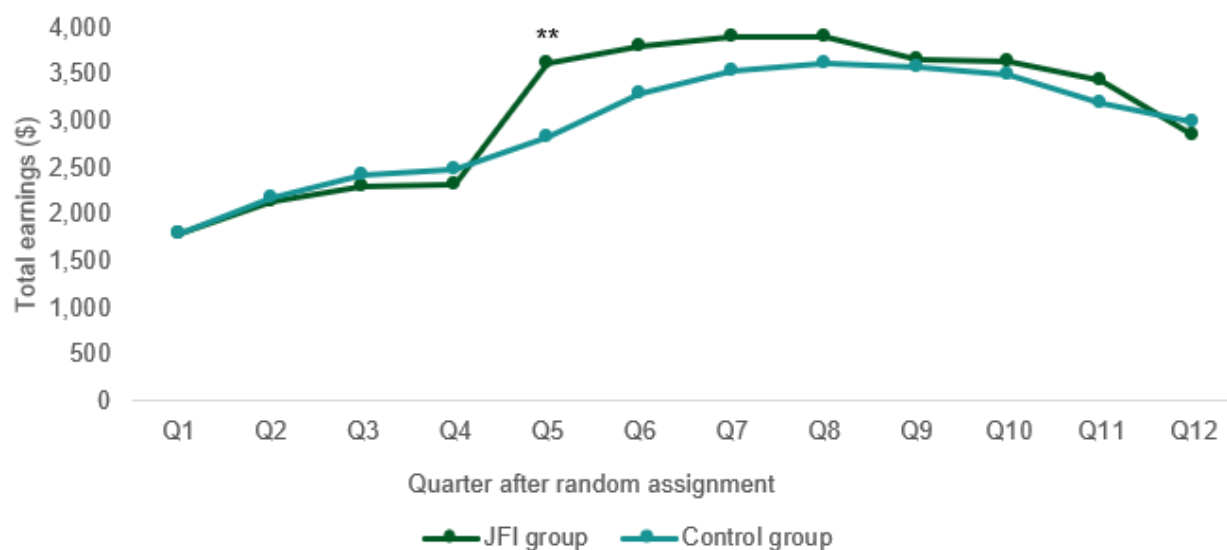


Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,378 JFI group members and 1,378 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Exhibit VII.4. Total earnings based on survey data, by quarter



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

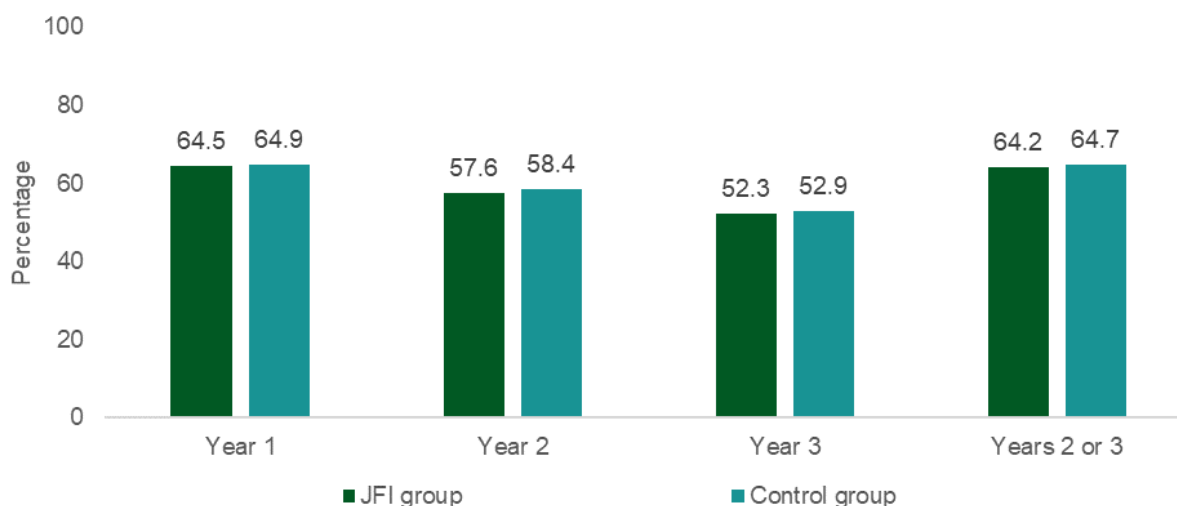
***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Employment. Based on UI data, there were no impacts of JFI on employment in the second and third years after random assignment (Exhibit VII.5). Employment rates for both research groups were 65 percent in Year 1 and 58 percent in Year 2, and were 52 percent for the JFI group and 53 percent for the

VII. Impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and well-being outcomes

control group in Year 3. Impacts on employment based on UI data were small and not statistically significant for all quarters after random assignment (Appendix Table F.1).

Exhibit VII.5. Employment rates based on UI wage records, by year



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,378 JFI group members and 1,378 control group members.

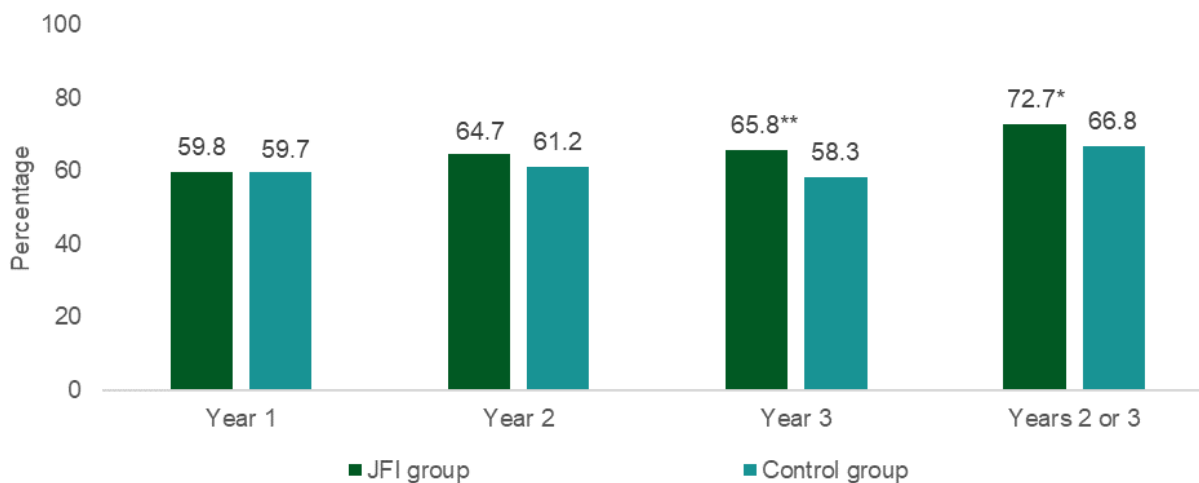
***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Based on survey data, JFI led to impacts on employment over the two-year period from Year 2 to 3 after random assignment (73 versus 67 percent, p -value = 0.07; Exhibit VII.6). The largest impact was in Year 3 (8 percentage points); there were smaller differences in employment rates across research groups in Years 1 and 2 (0 and 3 percentage points, respectively) that were not statistically significant. Quarterly differences between the JFI group and the control group were positive for Quarters 5 through 12, but were not statistically significant (Appendix Table F.4). Separately examining impacts according to whether individuals were randomly assigned earlier or later in the enrollment period showed larger impacts based on survey data for individuals who enrolled later (11 versus 1 percentage point; Appendix Table F.19) but the difference in impacts by enrollment timing was not statistically significant. There were no impacts on employment for either set of individuals based on UI data.

JFI led to an increase in employment in the two-year period following random assignment from Year 2 to 3, based on survey data. There was an impact in Year 3 but not Years 1 and 2. These findings were not corroborated by UI data.

In both the UI and survey data, the employment rates for both research groups generally increased across the first seven quarters, then began to decrease over time.

Exhibit VII.6. Employment rates based on survey data, by year



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Employment rates provide information about the percentage of individuals who were employed during a given time period, but do not describe the extent or duration of employment. To assess these employment characteristics, we examined the average number of quarters (UI data) and months (survey data) individuals were employed each year. Both data sources showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the JFI group and control group in the number of months or quarters employed in any year after random assignment (Appendix Tables F.2 and F.4).

Hours worked. Individuals in the JFI group worked roughly the same number of hours per week as individuals in the control group (Appendix Table F.5). JFI group members worked an average of 13 hours per week in Year 1, increased to 19 hours per week in Year 2, and decreased to 17 hours per week in Year 3. Similarly, control group members worked an average of 13 hours per week in Year 1, 18 hours per week in Year 2, and 16 hours per week in Year 3.

2. Impacts on characteristics of current jobs

Exhibit VII.7 presents characteristics of jobs at the time of the 36-month survey.³⁰ This information was collected in the 36-month follow-up survey and was available only for individuals employed at the time of the 36-month survey (40 percent of the JFI group and 42 percent of the control group). For this reason, the measures in Exhibit VII.7 are nonexperimental and the results do not represent the causal effects of JFI on job characteristics.

³⁰ For individuals who were employed at the time of the survey, these measures capture the job in which they were working at that time (their “current job”). If sample members were working two or more jobs at the time of the survey, the job where they worked the most hours was considered their “current job.”

VII. Impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and well-being outcomes

Exhibit VII.7. Characteristics of current jobs, among individuals employed at the time of the 36-month survey

Characteristic (%)	JFI group	Control group	Difference
Employed at the time of the 36-month survey interview	40.4	42.1	-1.6
Hours worked per week			
Less than 20	18.1	13.6	4.5
21 to 34	27.0	21.7	5.2
35 or more (employed full time)	55.3	64.3	-9.0
Average	33.1	35.2	-2.0
Weekly earnings			
\$1 to \$499	58.4	46.3	12.1
\$500 to \$999	40.8	47.5	-6.7
\$1,000 to \$1,499	0.8	6.2	-5.4
\$1,500 to \$2,000	0.0	0.0	0.0
\$2,000 and above	0.0	0.0	0.0
Benefits available at job			
Any benefit	62.9	73.4	-10.5*
Health insurance or HMO/PPO plan	47.1	57.0	-9.9
Dental insurance	32.8	43.4	-10.6*
Paid vacation	48.0	59.8	-11.7*
Paid holidays	47.6	57.6	-10.0
Paid sick leave	43.9	59.3	-15.4**
Any paid time off	59.6	69.0	-9.5
Pension or retirement benefits	39.9	53.2	-13.3**
Tuition assistance or reimbursement	11.1	23.9	-12.8***
Type of employment			
Regular full or part time	81.7	84.1	-2.4
Temporary or on call	4.5	2.8	1.7
Self-employed or independent contractor or consultant	10.8	11.3	-0.6
Day laborer	3.0	1.8	1.2
Occupation			
Food preparation and serving	11.6	11.8	-0.3
Sales	13.1	9.8	3.3
Office and administrative support	4.7	11.8	-7.0**
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	5.2	10.0	-4.9
Transportation and material moving	5.7	7.6	-1.9
Production	6.7	7.3	-0.6
Construction and extraction	5.9	6.2	-0.3
Personal care and service	2.5	4.4	-1.8
Community and social service	2.7	1.4	1.2
Management	3.2	2.4	0.8
Sample size	249	219	

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 36-month survey, weighted data.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

HMO = health maintenance organization; PPO = preferred provider organization.

Among individuals who were employed at the time of the 36-month follow-up survey, JFI group members and control group members held jobs with generally similar characteristics. In both research groups, about 55 to 64 percent of individuals were employed full time, and 46 to 59 percent earned less than \$500 per week (Exhibit VII.7). Employed JFI group members were less likely than employed control group members to receive an employer-offered benefit (63 versus 73 percent, p -value = 0.09). In particular, employed JFI group members were less likely to receive dental insurance (33 versus 43 percent, p -value = 0.09), paid vacation (48 versus 60 percent, p -value = 0.06), paid sick leave (44 versus 59 percent), pension or retirement benefits (40 versus 53 percent), and tuition assistance or reimbursement (11 versus 24 percent). Most employed individuals in both research groups were regular status employees working full time or part time. Common occupations included food preparation and serving, sales, and office and administrative support.

3. Impacts on changes in earnings and employment over time

The findings presented above describe employment, earnings, and hours worked in each quarter and year since random assignment. Although these findings allow us to assess changes in the average value of the outcomes over time across all JFI or control group members, they obscure changes over time for each individual. In this section, we examine these types of changes or “dynamics” in employment, earnings, hours worked, and job characteristics.

As presented in Exhibit VII.5, based on UI data, employment rates were similar in all three years after random assignment. Based on UI data, both research groups generally experienced similar employment patterns and job spells throughout the three year period after random assignment (Appendix Table F.20).

As presented in Exhibit VII.6, based on survey data, employment rates were higher for the JFI group than the control group in Year 3, but similar in Years 1 and 2. Despite the higher rate of employment in Year 3, the JFI group was more likely than the control group to have two or more unemployment spells over the three-year period (43 versus 34 percent; Appendix Table F.22). JFI group members were also more likely to experience a job loss in Year 3 than control group members (40 versus 31 percent).³¹

Although there were differences in the likelihood of losing a job, similar percentages of individuals in the JFI and control groups who were not employed at the time of the 12-month survey were employed at the time of the 36-month survey (22 versus 21 percent). This suggests that the likelihood of finding a job was similar for the JFI and control groups. Job retainment rates were also similar in magnitude and not statistically different across research groups. Sixty-four percent of JFI group members were employed at both points in time, compared to 68 percent of the control group.

At the time of both the 12- and 36-month surveys most employed individuals in both research groups worked a single job (Appendix Table F.23). About 39 percent of the JFI group had one job at the time of the 12-month survey; 5 percent had two or more jobs. At the time of the 36-month survey, these percentages were 39 and 4 percent, respectively. For the control group, 42 percent had one job and 4 percent had two or more jobs at the time of the 12-month survey. At the time of the 36-month survey, these percentages were 38 and 4 percent, respectively.

³¹ Because these estimates are based only on individuals who are employed at some point in the period, and are thus at risk of experiencing a job loss, they are not experimental impacts.

Exhibit VII.7 shows that JFI generally had no impacts on job characteristics around the time of the 36-month survey. There were no statistically significant changes in the distributions of these characteristics from the 12-month to the 36-month survey (Appendix Table F.24). The JFI group was less likely than the control group to work at a job at the time of the 36-month interview that provided tuition assistance or reimbursement, but these differences were not present at the time of the 12-month interview. JFI group members were more likely to work in a personal care and service or management job as of the 12-month interview, but these differences were not present at the time of the 36-month interview.

4. Conclusions

JFI did not lead to an increase in average earnings in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) based on UI or survey data.³² There were no statistically significant differences in earnings in any quarter. Based on survey data, JFI led to an increase in employment in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3). There was an impact on employment in Year 3, but not Years 1 or 2. Based on the UI data, the Year 2 or 3 impact was small, negative and not statistically significant. Based on both data sources, there were no statistically significant differences in hours worked per week between the JFI and control groups in any year.

B. Impacts of JFI on receipt of public assistance

This section presents findings on the impact of JFI on the receipt of public assistance, as measured by SNAP administrative records and survey data. Most of the outcomes measuring receipt of SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid are based on the administrative data and are measured for each year and quarter after random assignment. Receipt of other forms of public assistance are based on the survey and capture receipt during Year 1 and during Years 2 and 3 combined after random assignment.

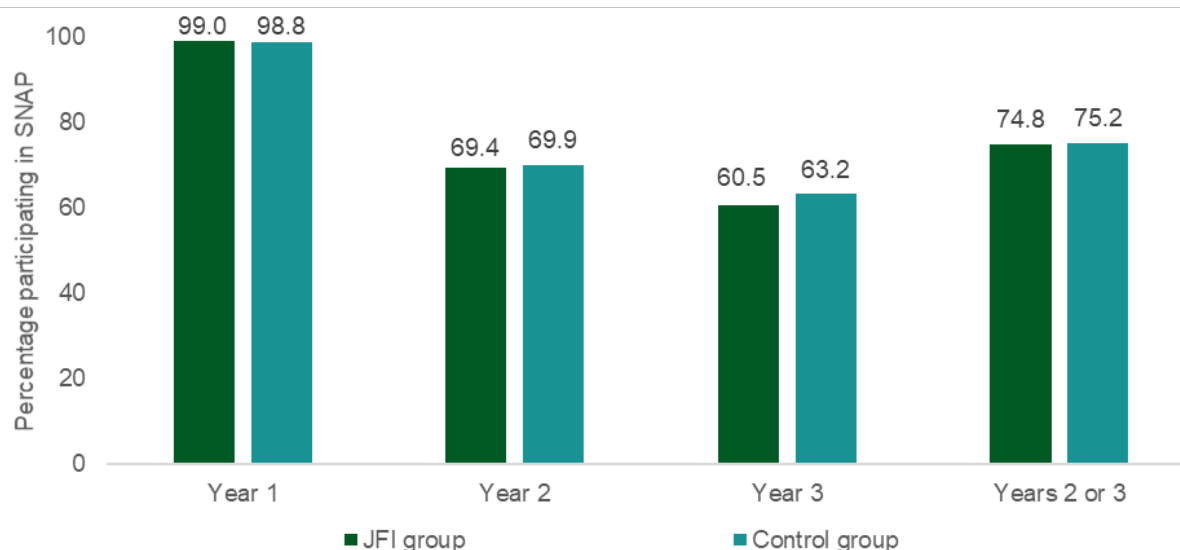
1. Impacts on SNAP participation

JFI did not lead to a statistically significant change in the likelihood of participating in SNAP in Years 2 or 3 after random assignment. About 75 percent of both JFI group members and control group members participated in SNAP in Years 2 or 3 (Exhibit VII.8). The lack of impacts of JFI on SNAP participation reflects similar decreases each year in the rate of SNAP participation for the JFI and control groups. For example, SNAP participation rates decreased from about 99 percent for both groups in Year 1 to 61 percent for JFI group members and 63 percent for control group members in Year 3. There were significant differences across groups in SNAP participation rates in Quarters 11 and 12, but nearly the same percentage of individuals in each group participated in SNAP in other quarters (Appendix Table F.8). Impacts on SNAP participation in Years 2 and 3 after random assignment were similar for individuals who enrolled earlier and later in the pilot (Appendix Table F.19).

*JFI generally did not affect
SNAP participation.*

³² The analyses for employment and earnings presented above measured outcomes over a three-year period and were based on individuals randomly assigned through September 2017 based on UI data and December 2017 based on survey data. The findings based on UI data for individuals randomly assigned through September 2017 were similar to those based on UI data for all individuals who were randomly assigned.

Exhibit VII.8. SNAP participation rates based on SNAP administrative data, overall and by year



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,378 JFI group members and 1,378 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

The impacts of JFI on the average SNAP benefits received, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount, were similar to those on SNAP participation rates. Average SNAP benefit amounts for the JFI group were small and not statistically significant in any of the three years after random assignment (Exhibit VII.9). Both JFI and control group members received an average of about \$1,800 in SNAP benefits in Year 1, decreasing to \$1,292 for JFI group members and \$1,350 for control group members in Year 3. Average quarterly SNAP benefit amounts were small and not statistically significant for all quarters after random assignment (Appendix Table F.9).

Looking at SNAP benefit amounts received as a percentage of the maximum possible benefit (based on SNAP unit size) provides a better comparison across SNAP units of different sizes than the nominal benefit amounts. The findings for benefits received as a percentage of the maximum possible benefit were generally similar as the findings for nominal benefits. There were no significant differences in the percent of the maximum possible benefit received by JFI group compared to the control group in Year 1, 2 or 3 (Exhibit VII.8). JFI group members received a higher percentage of the maximum possible benefit compared to control group members during Quarters 1 through 6, and a lower percentage relative to the control group in Quarters 7 through 12 (Appendix Table F.9), but the difference in Quarter 1 was the only one that was statistically significant. For all research groups, most of the decrease in the percentage of the maximum possible benefit received over time can be attributed to individuals exiting SNAP. For example, among the JFI group, the percentage of the maximum benefit amount received decreased by about 21 percentage points between Years 1 and 3. During this same period, the percentage of JFI group members participating in SNAP decreased by about 38 percentage points (Appendix Table F.8).

Exhibit VII.9. Impacts on average monthly SNAP benefit amount based on SNAP administrative data, overall and by year

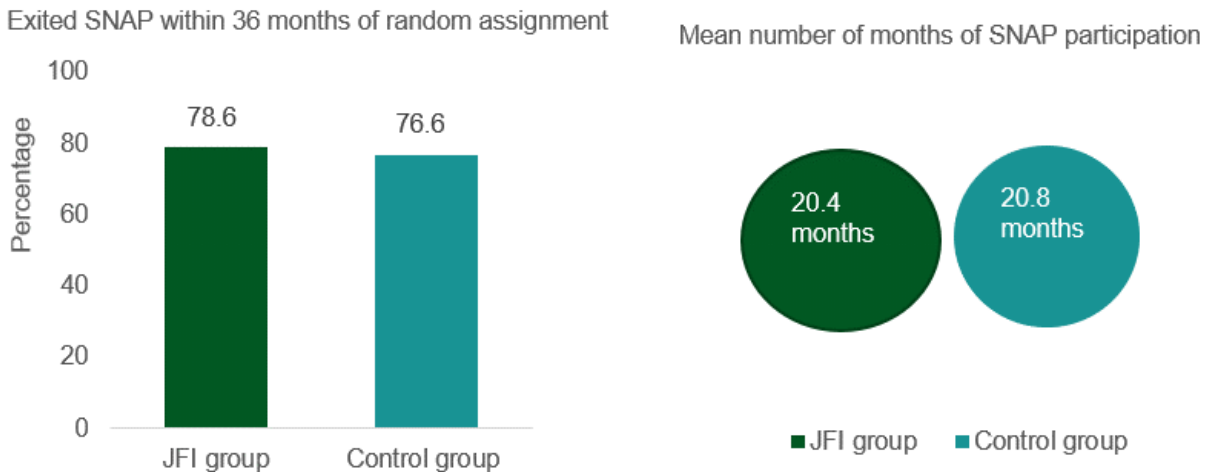
Average SNAP benefits	JFI group	Control group	Difference
Average SNAP benefits received (\$)			
Year 1	1,827	1,823	4
Year 2	1,350	1,371	-21
Year 3	1,292	1,350	-59
Years 2 and 3	2,641	2,722	-80
Average monthly SNAP benefits received as a percentage of maximum benefit amount ^a			
Year 1	61.6	60.4	1.2
Year 2	43.5	43.4	0.1
Year 3	40.7	42.1	-1.4
Years 2 and 3	42.2	42.8	-0.6
Sample size	1,378	1,378	

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

On average, the JFI and control groups participated in SNAP for a similar number of months in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3). Each group participated in SNAP for 12 of the 24 months, on average, during this period (Appendix Table F.25) and about 20 months during the 36-month period (Exhibit VII.10). The average length of participation differed slightly in Year 3 but was similar across research groups in Years 1 and 2. JFI group members had similar likelihoods of exiting SNAP across the three years relative to control group members—79 percent of the JFI group and 77 percent of the control group exited SNAP at some point during the three years after random assignment. Individuals who exited SNAP included those who left and did not re-enter SNAP in the period, as well as those who left and re-entered before the end of the period. Thus, even though 21 percent of the JFI group participated in SNAP for the full three years, SNAP participation in Quarter 12 was higher (49 percent), reflecting that individuals left and re-entered SNAP during the three-year period (Appendix Table F.8). The percentage of individuals who exited and then re-entered SNAP was similar for the JFI and control groups (56 versus 55 percent, respectively), with about 29 percent of each group re-entering within 4 months of exit (Appendix Table F.25). These patterns of exiting and re-entering SNAP resulted in both research groups having a similar number of SNAP spells (an individual with a single spell either remained on SNAP for the full three-year period, or exited and did not re-enter). JFI group members were more likely to have two SNAP spells compared to control group members, but had similar distributions of spells otherwise. About 57 percent of the JFI group had a single SNAP spell, 30 percent had two spells, and 13 percent had three or more spells. For the control group, these percentages were 58, 27, and 15 percent.

Exhibit VII.10. SNAP exit rates and mean number of months of SNAP participation based on SNAP administrative data



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,378 JFI group members and 1,378 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

2. Impacts on TANF and other forms of public assistance

Impacts on TANF participation were estimated using SNAP administrative data. Few individuals in either research group participated in TANF in each year (Appendix Table F.10). There was no impact of JFI on participation in TANF in any of the three years after random assignment. About 9 percent of both JFI group members and control group members participated in TANF in Years 1, 2 or 3. There were also no significant differences in average TANF benefit amounts received between the JFI group and control group in any year after random assignment (Appendix Table F.10).

We also used SNAP administrative data to estimate Medicaid participation. Based on SNAP administrative data, JFI had no effect on Medicaid participation in any quarter or year throughout the three-year period (Appendix Table F.10). Rates of Medicaid participation decreased from Year 1 to Year 3 for both the JFI and control groups, from 92 percent in Year 1 to between 77 and 78 percent in Year 3.

Using the survey data, we estimated impacts on receipt of other forms of public assistance, including receipt of general assistance; UI; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Section 8, Housing Choice Vouchers, or Public Housing Assistance; Medicaid; and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).³³ There were few impacts on the receipt of other forms of public assistance in Year 1, in Years 2 and 3, or during the three-year period (Appendix Table F.11). However, individuals in the JFI group were about 6 percentage points more likely than those in the control group to receive unemployment insurance benefits (p -value = 0.07) and 5 percentage points more likely to receive Medicaid in Years 2 and 3, and 5 percentage points less likely to receive housing assistance (p -value =

³³ Because the 36-month survey requested information about receipt of public assistance benefits between the 12- and 36-month survey interviews, it was not possible to separately estimate receipt of public assistance in Years 2 and 3.

0.09) based on survey data. The most commonly received benefit among JFI group members was Medicaid (96 percent).

3. Conclusions

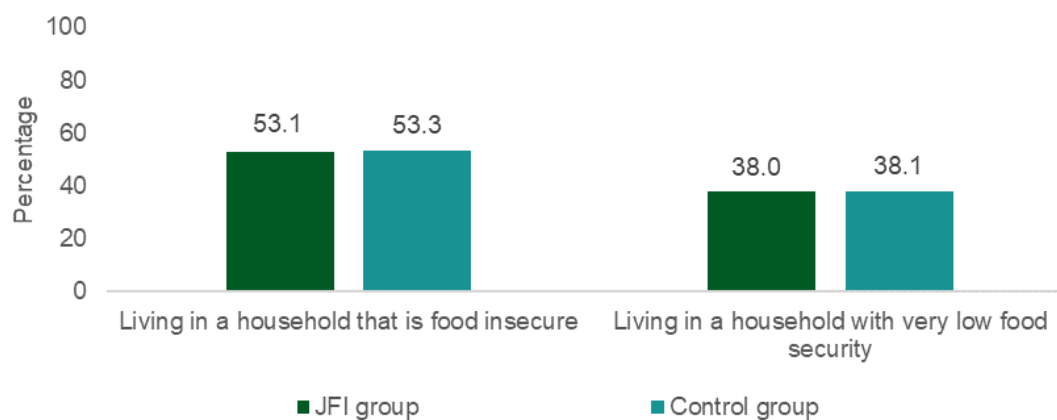
JFI generally did not affect SNAP participation. SNAP participation decreased by similar amounts for each research group in each year after random assignment, resulting in similar SNAP participation rates with no statistical differences in Years 1, 2 and 3. There were few impacts on the receipt of TANF or other public assistance.

C. Impacts of JFI on food security, health, well-being, and housing status

This section presents findings on JFI's impacts on food security, health, well-being, and housing status, as reported in the survey data. Most of these outcomes reflected individuals' circumstances at the time of the 36-month follow-up survey. An exception was food security status, which was reported based on the 30 days before the survey.³⁴

JFI and control group members had similar rates of food insecurity. About 53 percent of both JFI and control group members were food insecure (Exhibit VII.11). There were also no statistical differences in the rates of very low food security (a severe form of food insecurity; 38 percent for both research groups). There were no impacts on food insecurity for individuals who were randomly assigned earlier nor for those randomly assigned later in the pilot (Appendix Table F.19).

Exhibit VII.11. Impacts on food security, based on 36-month survey data



Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation 36-month survey, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 446 JFI group members and 403 control group members.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

³⁴ Food security is having access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Individuals who experience food access limitations due to lack of money or other resources are said to be food insecure. Those who cannot afford enough to eat may experience a particularly severe form of food insecurity referred to as very low food security. The outcomes of food insecurity and very low food security are based on responses to 10 questions about difficulty meeting basic food needs due to lack of money to be spent on food. Individuals who affirmed at least 3 out of 10 questions were classified as food insecure; those who affirmed at least 6 were classified as having very low food security.

Among individuals who were food insecure at the time of the 12-month survey, those in the JFI group were just as likely as those in the control group to be food insecure at the time of the 36-month interview (Appendix Table F.27). The percentage of individuals in the JFI group who were food insecure at the time of both the 12-month and 36-month survey was greater than the percentage in the control group (73 versus 69 percent), but these differences were not statistically significant. There also were no distinguishable differences between research groups in the percentage of individuals who had very low food security at both the 12-month and 36-month interviews (63 percent versus 59 percent). Together, these findings suggest that both research groups experienced similar changes in food security status between the 12- and 36-month interviews.

Among the other outcome measures related to health, well-being, and housing status, there were few statistically significant differences between the JFI group and the control group (Appendix Table F.12). Both research groups had similar levels of health (23 percent of the JFI group versus 21 percent of the control group reported having very good or excellent health at the time of the survey), and self-esteem and self-efficacy scores. However, JFI group members were 7 percentage points more likely to screen positively for depression (42 versus 35 percent, p -value = 0.06). JFI group members were more likely to live with family or friends (6 percentage point difference), and less likely to share housing with roommates (3 percentage point difference). Other measures of housing status were similar across research groups. The majority of each research group owned or rented a home or apartment (69 versus 72 percent), and similar percentages of each group were homeless (6 versus 4 percent).

D. Impacts of JFI on employment, earnings, and SNAP participation among individuals who started or completed an employment or training related activity

The findings presented in Sections A, B, and C do not differentiate between individuals enrolled in the pilot who participated in activities and those who did not. In the evaluation literature, this approach often is called an “intention-to-treat” (ITT) analysis. Impact estimates based on an ITT analysis provide information about expected effects for all SNAP participants to whom pilot activities were offered. However, because some individuals did not engage in the pilot or start an activity, ITT findings mask how well individuals who did participate may have fared. In this section, we present results of analyses that differentiate individuals in the JFI group who did and did not engage in JFI and participated in activities. This analysis, often referred to as a “treatment-on-the-treated” analysis, provides insights about how greater engagement in pilot activities may have translated into different participation experiences and, ultimately, into different impacts.³⁵

We assessed engagement in activities in three ways:

1. Comparing individuals who started an activity to those who did not
2. Comparing individuals who started and completed a job search or job search training activity to those who started but did not complete an activity

³⁵ Because individuals in the JFI group chose whether to start an activity and/or complete one based on factors we could not necessarily observe, the findings presented in this section are nonexperimental. The results do not represent the causal effects of JFI on outcomes.

VII. Impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and well-being outcomes

3. Comparing individuals who started and completed an education or training activity to those who started but did not complete one.³⁶

Earnings and employment. Based on both UI and survey data, there were no impacts on earnings in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) for individuals who started an activity or for those who did not start one (Exhibit VII.12; Appendix Tables F.13 and F.15).

Based on survey data, there was an 11 percentage point increase in the rate of employment for individuals who started an employment or training-related activity and no statistically significant change in employment for those who did not start one. This difference in impacts across groups was statistically significant. Based on UI data, there were no impacts on employment rates in the two-year period for either group (Exhibit VII.12).

Based on survey data, there was an impact on employment in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) for individuals who started an activity, but no impact for those who did not start one.

Exhibit VII.12. Impacts on total earnings and annual employment rates in Years 2 and 3, based on UI wage records and survey data, by whether individuals started an employment or training-related activity

Outcome	Started an activity			Did not start an activity		
	JFI group	Control group	Difference	JFI group	Control group	Difference
Total earnings (\$)						
Based on UI data	15,291	15,044	247	16,731	16,817	-86
Based on survey data	25,764	22,797	2,966	32,558	35,212	-2,655
Employment rate (%)						
Based on UI data	62.8	62.3	0.5	67.1	70.3	-3.2
Based on survey data	71.6	62.2	9.4***^^	70.8	78.3	-7.5

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data. SNAP employment and training evaluation 36-month survey, weighted data.

Note: Estimates based on survey data are from 331 JFI group members and 292 control group members who started an activity; and 115 JFI group members and 111 control group members who did not start one. Estimates based on UI data are from 1,007 JFI group members and 994 control group members who started an activity; and 371 JFI group members and 384 control group members who did not start an activity.

***/**/* Difference between the JFI group and control group is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

^^^/^^/^ Significantly different from individuals who did not start an activity at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

Based on both UI and survey data, there generally were no impacts on earnings and employment in the two-year period for individuals who completed an education or training activity, completed a job search or job search assistance activity, or started but did not complete an activity (Appendix Tables F.14 and

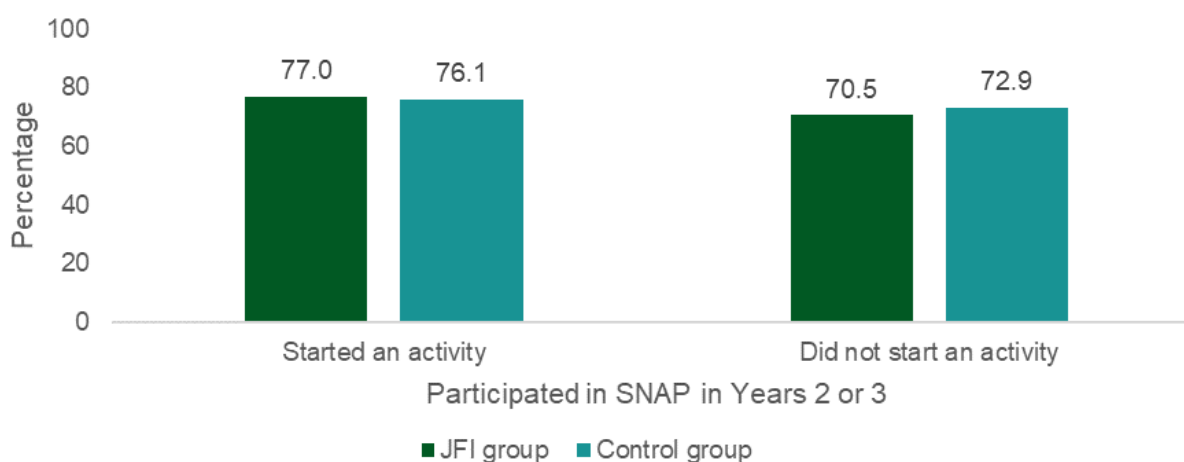
³⁶ There are many ways to quantify the extent to which those enrolled in the pilot engaged in activities—for example, the number of workshops in which someone participated, the number of hours an individual spent in an occupational skills training program, or the number of basic education courses an individual completed over time. Our approach for measuring engagement in pilot activities balanced the objectives of contrasting groups with well-defined, policy-relevant differences in participation across pilots with limiting the number of groups so that each analysis group had a sufficient number of individuals to yield informative estimates.

VII. Impacts on employment, earnings, receipt of public assistance, and well-being outcomes

F.16). Based on survey data, there were impacts on earnings and employment for individuals who started but did not complete an activity, but differences between these estimates and those for individuals who completed activities were not statistically significant. Thus, the pattern of findings suggests that completion of an education or training activity did not play a role in connecting individuals to meaningful employment.

SNAP participation. There were no statistically significant impacts on SNAP participation in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) among individuals who started an activity or those who did not start one (Exhibit VII.13). The same was true according to whether an individual completed an activity (Appendix Tables F.17 and F.18). Outcomes were also similar for SNAP benefits as a percentage of the maximum benefit amount and the length of time spent on SNAP.

Exhibit VII.13. SNAP participation rates based on SNAP administrative data, by whether an individual started an activity



Source: SNAP administrative data, weighted data.

Note: Estimates are based on data from 1,007 JFI group members and 994 control group members who started an activity; and 371 JFI group members and 384 control group members who did not start one.

***/**/* Difference between research groups is significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

^^/^/^ Significantly different from individuals who did not start an activity at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

VIII. Analysis of the costs and benefits of JFI group and control group services

In this chapter, we build on the findings from the impact analysis by comparing the benefits that individuals received in dollar terms through changes in earnings and public assistance with the costs of the services provided. This cost-benefit analysis describes the extent to which the benefits exceeded the costs of providing services to the JFI group when compared with the benefits and costs of providing services to the control group (referred to as the *net benefit*). The net benefit provides context for how well JFI group outcomes (benefits) offset the costs of administering the services. We calculate the net benefits from the perspectives of the individuals enrolled in JFI and of government and taxpayers. The benefit to society is the sum of the net benefits from the other two perspectives.

We first describe the costs of JFI, including those for planning, recruiting, and delivering services. We then present the estimated costs of all services provided to JFI group members through JFI, existing SNAP E&T, and the community and the costs of all services provided to control group members through existing SNAP E&T and the community. We estimate the costs of all services because any benefits individuals experienced through increases in employment and earnings are the result of all of the services they received during the follow-up period, not just those offered through JFI. We then present the findings from the cost-benefit analysis and estimate the net benefit of services provided to the JFI group, compared with services provided to the control group. We conducted sensitivity analyses to test the robustness of our findings to changes in key assumptions and present those findings together with the cost-benefit analysis. All costs and the dollar values of benefits presented in this chapter have been adjusted to 2016 dollars, as this was the year that JFI started providing services and individuals started accruing benefits.

A. Description of the costs of JFI

This section provides detail on the total costs JFI services, the costs of JFI services by type, and the average cost of JFI services per individual.

1. Total costs of JFI

FNS awarded AHS a grant of \$8,959,000 to develop and provide JFI services. AHS and its partners and providers reported spending \$8,868,903 on planning, recruiting, and delivering JFI services (Exhibit VIII.1).³⁷

These costs included \$197,050 for planning (2 percent of total costs) and \$1,367,357 for recruitment (15 percent). JFI service costs—for ongoing administration and delivering direct services—were \$7,304,496, which was 82 percent of total costs.³⁸ Ongoing administration, which included time

JFI cost a total of \$8,868,903, with service costs accounting for 82 percent of this amount.

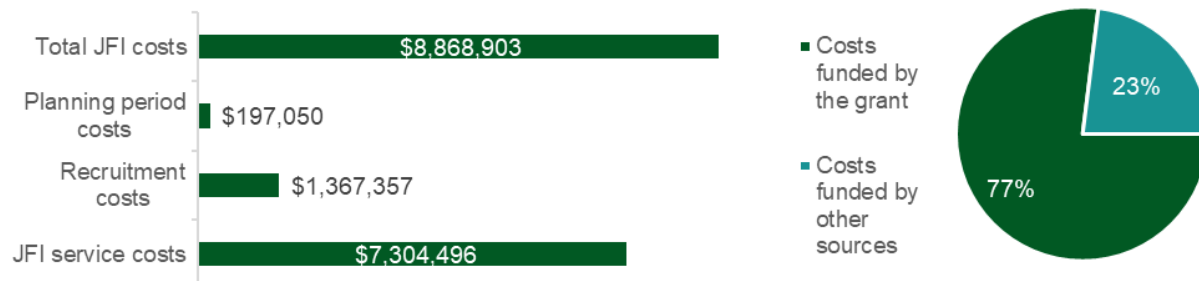
³⁷ The costs for planning and recruiting affected both JFI and control group members, whereas the costs for operating JFI services affected the JFI group only.

³⁸ Service costs included costs of both ongoing administration and delivering direct services and activities. Ongoing administration costs included time for staff meetings, supervision, and other activities. Direct service costs included time staff spent providing services and activities to individuals, including time for tasks such as writing case notes or recording administrative data, and direct costs for resources such as textbooks or support services. Both ongoing
(continued)

VIII. Analysis of the costs and benefits of JFI group and control group services

for staff meetings, supervision, and other activities, cost \$2,951,537 (33 percent of total costs). Direct service costs represented the remaining \$4,352,958 (49 percent, not shown). The FNS grant funded 77 percent of total costs, or \$6,828,175; 23 percent, or \$2,040,728 were leveraged from other sources.

Exhibit VIII.1. Summary of JFI costs



Sources: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by JFI grantee, partners, and providers, 2015-2018; and SNAP employment and training evaluation survey of direct service provider time use, 2016-2018.

Notes: The planning period was considered to encompass the time between when DCF-ESD and their partners began designing JFI (after grant award) and JFI started enrolling individuals (April 2015 to March 2016). Quarterly workbooks reported the costs of the planning period, and recruitment and JFI services following the start of JFI. We estimated the breakdown of recruitment, JFI direct service, and ongoing administration costs using data from a time-use survey of direct service provider staff. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

Appendix Table G.2. summarizes costs through December 2018 by cost category, including (1) staff costs (including volunteer time), (2) partner and provider direct service costs, (3) supply and equipment costs, and (4) overhead and operating costs. About one-third of all costs covered direct services for partners and providers (\$3,193,727). DCF-ESD and JFI partners and providers reported spending \$2,872,728 on staff costs and \$2,773,497 on overhead and operating costs. The remaining costs (\$28,951) covered supply and equipment costs. The FNS grant covered the majority of all costs (77 percent). Funding from other sources was used primarily for overhead and operating costs, accounting for 52 percent of the total overhead and operating costs (\$1,434,832).

2. Costs of JFI services, by type of service

Service costs accounted for the majority of JFI expenditures. We estimated the costs of specific types of services offered through JFI, including those of ongoing administration and direct services. The two largest service expenditures for JFI services were for support services, which accounted for \$2,276,006 or 26 percent of total JFI costs, and case management, which accounted for \$2,204,918 or 25 percent of total JFI costs (Exhibit VIII.2). Work-based learning and job readiness or life skills workshops accounted for smaller shares of total JFI costs—16 and 9 percent of total JFI costs, respectively.

administration and direct service costs included the costs of staff, supplies and equipment, overhead, facilities, and indirect costs.

Exhibit VIII.2. Costs of JFI services, by service type

	Total service costs	Percentage of total
Total costs	\$8,868,903	100.0
Planning period costs	\$197,050	2.2
Recruitment costs	\$1,367,357	15.4
Total JFI service costs ^a	\$7,304,496	82.4
Assessments	\$488,584	5.5
Case management ^b	\$2,204,918	24.9
Job readiness or life skills workshop	\$753,930	8.5
Education	\$29,852	0.3
Occupational skills training	\$105,505	1.2
Support services	\$2,276,006	25.7
Work-based learning	\$1,445,702	16.3
Other direct service contracts	\$0	0.0

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by JFI grantee, partners, and providers, 2015-2018; and SNAP employment and training evaluation survey of direct service provider time use, 2016-2018.

Note: The estimated costs of case management, job readiness or life skills workshop, and assessments include costs for staff, supplies and equipment, and overhead and operating costs, which were allocated using the average percentage of time spent on these activities in the time-use survey. We assumed the reported costs of support services, other direct service contracts, work-based learning, occupational skills training, and education already included costs for staff, supplies and equipment, or overhead and operating costs. Other direct service contracts included a contract to support collection of case management and participation data. We assumed these costs were either built into those payments or the associated staff time and costs fell under case management. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

^a Total JFI service costs included the costs of direct services and ongoing administration.

^b Case management included one-on-one meetings with JFI group members and time spent on case notes or referrals.

3. Costs of JFI services, per individual

JFI group members each received different combinations of services through JFI based on their needs and interests. As a result, the costs of serving each JFI group member varied based on the number and types of services in which they participated. Exhibit VIII.3 describes the cost of JFI services per individual. We separately present costs of operating JFI from the costs of resources that were provided directly to JFI group members—subsidized earnings provided to individuals for activities such as work-based learning, and support services provided to offset the costs of participation in JFI, such as transportation or training supplies.³⁹

The total estimated costs of JFI services per individual ranged from \$6 to \$23,985 but averaged \$4,843 per JFI group member. These costs were driven by the costs of operating JFI, with \$3,374

allocated to the costs of operating JFI, \$571 allocated to the costs of subsidized earnings provided to individuals while in JFI, and \$898 allocated to support services provided to individuals while in JFI.

JFI services cost an average of \$4,843 per individual.

³⁹ Operating costs included all service costs other than those provided directly to individuals through subsidized earnings or support services. These costs represent the time and resources required to deliver services.

Exhibit VIII.3. Costs of JFI services per JFI group member

Per individual costs of services	Mean
Total JFI service costs	\$4,843
JFI operating costs ^a	\$3,374
Subsidized earnings while in JFI	\$571
Support services while in JFI	\$898
Sample size	1,510

Sources: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by JFI grantee, partners, and providers, 2015-2018; and SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data

Notes: The cost of services per JFI group member are the means of the individual-level estimates of the costs of services for each JFI group member based on the services they received and the per individual costs by service type. The estimated mean costs per JFI group member include all individuals who enrolled in JFI, including those who disengaged soon after enrollment and those who participated in multiple services over a longer period of time. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

^a JFI operating costs are the estimated cost of direct services including the ongoing administration cost. We included the costs of any supplies and equipment incurred during the planning period in this estimate because those materials directly benefitted JFI group members once service delivery began. No other planning period or recruitment costs are included.

Cost per JFI group member, (JFI services only): standard error 70.41; range \$6–\$23,985; confidence interval \$3,236–\$3,512.

B. Difference in costs of all services received by the JFI and control group members

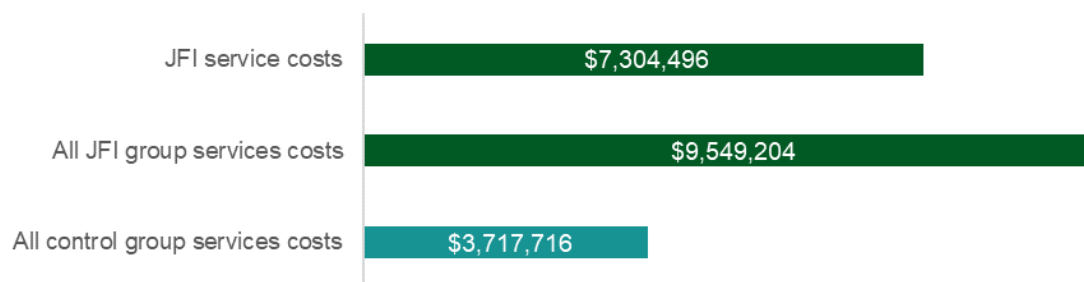
Whereas Section A describes the costs to AHS and their partners and providers for developing JFI and providing services to JFI group members, this section describes the costs of *all* services the JFI group members received through JFI and through existing SNAP E&T and the community during the JFI service period. In the cost-benefit analysis, we use the difference in the average costs of all services JFI and control group members received per individual through JFI, existing SNAP E&T, or the community and compare these costs to benefits. We use these differences in costs because impacts of JFI on individuals' outcomes, such as earnings, were influenced by all services the sample members received during the 36-month follow-up period, not just those received by the JFI group through JFI. In this section, we present estimates of the total costs of all services JFI and control group members received and examine service cost differentials overall, by service type, and per individual.

1. Total costs of all JFI group and control group services

Based on data from the 12- and 36-month follow-up surveys, the estimated total cost of all JFI group services was \$9,549,204, including costs for both direct services and ongoing administration (Exhibit VIII.4). This cost is about 31 percent higher than the cost of JFI services alone (\$7,304,496), which suggests that JFI group members might have received some services from community-offered sources while they were enrolled in JFI.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The difference between the costs of the JFI services in Section A and the costs presented for JFI group members in this section could reflect services that JFI group members received outside of JFI, but also could reflect the difference between administrative records of service use and each individual's recollection of services they received during the follow-up period. We examined the sensitivity of our findings to the use of these different data sources and found variation in reported participation in services by type, but the overall costs of services for the JFI group are similar and do not change the results of the cost-benefit analysis

Exhibit VIII.4. Total costs of all JFI group and control group services



Sources: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by JFI grantee, partners, and providers, 2015-2018; SNAP employment and training evaluation survey of direct service provider time use, 2016-2018; WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates 2012; FNS-583 data 2018; and SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: The estimates were calculated as the product of the costs per JFI group member for each type of direct service and the number of JFI group members who received each type of direct service in the SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36- month survey data. Control group cost estimates were calculated as the product of the WIA costs per individual for each type of direct service and the number of control group members who received each type of direct service in the SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month survey data. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

The cost-benefit analysis assesses whether the enhanced JFI services were effective enough to offset the difference in costs between the services received by the JFI and control groups. The services received by the control group measure what services would have been available to the JFI group members if JFI were not in place. The control group had access only to services available through the existing SNAP E&T program, which was available statewide, or to services available within the community. The estimated cost of all control group services received was \$3,717,716, including costs for direct services and ongoing administration (Exhibit VIII.4). This number was just over one-third the cost of all JFI group services.

2. Costs of all JFI and control group services, by type of service

The difference between JFI and control group costs of all services could reflect multiple factors, including how many services individuals received, how long the average individual spent in a given type of service or in services overall, or how much staff time or other resources those services required. Exhibit VIII.5 presents estimated costs of key JFI and control group services, by type of service.

- **All JFI group services.** Case management and support services were the largest expenditures among all of the services that JFI group members received through JFI, existing SNAP E&T, and the community. Case management accounted for \$4,626,037 or 48 percent of total service costs, and support services accounted for \$2,352,053, or 25 percent of total service costs. Work-based learning and job readiness or life skills workshops represented smaller shares of total service costs—20 percent and 4 percent, respectively.
- **All control group services.** Case management and education were the largest expenditures among all of the services that control group members received through existing SNAP E&T and the community. Case management accounted for \$2,424,098 or 65 percent of total service costs, and education accounted for \$517,110, or 14 percent of total service costs. Work-based learning, support services, and job readiness or life skills workshops represented smaller shares of total service costs—13 percent, 4 percent, and 3 percent, respectively.

VIII. Analysis of the costs and benefits of JFI group and control group services

The cost of occupational skills training was similar for the JFI and control groups (\$11,741 and \$12,886, respectively). The cost of education was higher for the control group (\$517,110) than for the JFI group (\$77,233). However, the costs of case management, support services, and work-based learning were higher for the JFI group, compared to the control group (\$4,626,037 compared to \$2,424,098 for case management; \$2,352,023 compared to \$162,995 for support services; and \$1,923,326 compared to \$497,366 for work-based learning, respectively).

Exhibit VIII.5. Costs for the JFI and control groups, by service type

	All JFI group services		All control group services	
	Total service costs	Percentage of total	Total service costs	Percentage of total
Total service costs ^a	\$9,753,163	100.0	\$3,717,716	100.0
Assessments	\$149,088	1.6	\$7,566	0.2
Case management ^b	\$4,626,037	48.4	\$2,424,098	65.2
Job readiness or life skills workshop	\$409,756	4.3	\$95,694	2.6
Education	\$77,233	0.8	\$517,110	13.9
Occupational skills training	\$11,741	0.1	\$12,886	0.3
Support services	\$2,352,023	24.6	\$162,995	4.4
Work-based learning	\$1,923,326	20.1	\$497,366	13.4
Other direct service contracts	\$0	0.0	--	--

Sources: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by JFI grantee, partners, and providers, 2015-2018; SNAP employment and training evaluation survey of direct service provider time use, 2016-2018; WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates 2012; FNS-583 data 2018; and SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: Cost estimates by service type were calculated as the product of the costs per individual for each type of direct service and the number of JFI or control group members who received each type of service according to survey data on participation. Hyphens indicate that there were no costs associated with the service type, according to the data on participation in services for this estimate, which came from the SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month survey data. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

^a Total service costs include the costs of direct services and ongoing administration.

^b Case management includes one-on-one meetings with JFI or control group members and time spent on case notes or referrals.

3. Costs of all JFI and control group services per individual

JFI and control group members each received different combinations of services, and the costs of serving each individual varied based on the number and types of services in which they participated. In addition to providing context on the costs required to provide these types of services to individuals, the per individual costs of all JFI and control group services are the basis for the cost differentials used in the cost-benefit analysis.

Using data from the survey, Exhibit VIII.6 describes the cost of all services JFI and control group members received during the JFI service period, per individual. We present operating costs separately from the costs of the resources provided directly to JFI and control group members – subsidized earnings provided to individuals for activities such as work-based learning, and support

All services JFI group members received through JFI, existing SNAP E&T, and the community cost \$7,113 per individual, on average.

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services provided to offset the costs of participation in services, such as transportation or training supplies.

The costs of all services received by JFI group members (from JFI, existing SNAP E&T, and the community) ranged from \$6 to \$40,555 but averaged \$7,113 per JFI group member. The largest component of these costs was for operating costs, which were \$5,157. The costs of subsidized earnings and support services accounted for a smaller share of the overall costs—\$880 and \$1,076 respectively.

Exhibit VIII.6. Costs of all services per JFI and control group member

	All JFI group services	All control group services
Total service costs	\$7,113	\$2,229
Operating costs ^a	\$5,157	\$1,793
Subsidized earnings while in services	\$880	\$329
Support services while in services	\$1,076	\$108
Sample size	1,510	1,513

Sources: SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by JFI grantee, partners, and providers, 2015-2018; SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data; WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates 2012; and SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: The cost of services per JFI and control group member are the means of the individual-level estimates of the costs of services for each JFI and control group member based on the services they received and the per individual costs by service type. All costs are presented in 2016 dollars.

^a Operating costs are the estimated cost of direct services, including the ongoing administration cost.

Cost of all JFI services per JFI group member: standard error \$283; range \$6–\$44,494; confidence interval \$5,402–\$6,515.

Cost of all control group services per control group member: standard error \$171; range \$0–\$29,180; confidence interval \$1,439–\$2,112.

The costs of all services control group members received ranged from \$0 to \$29,180 but were, on average, \$2,229 per control group member. Operating costs accounted for the largest share of this cost (\$1,793); subsidized earnings and support services represented smaller shares (\$329 and \$108, respectively). The cost of all services per control group member was less than one-third of the cost of all services per JFI group member, on average.

All services control group members received through existing SNAP E&T and the community cost \$2,229 per individual, on average.

C. Cost-benefit analysis of JFI group services

The purpose of the cost-benefit analysis is to estimate the benefits in dollar terms relative to the dollar costs of providing services. This section presents the findings of the cost-benefit analysis. We present results using the two sources of data on benefits used in the impact analysis: (1) UI wage records and (2) 36-month survey data.⁴¹ The cost-benefit analysis uses a framework to present a comprehensive listing of

⁴¹ We included impacts on cumulative earnings and SNAP and TANF benefit receipt in the cost-benefit analysis even if they were not statistically significant. These estimates are the best information we have on the qualitative differences in outcomes between the two groups. We noted statistically significant impacts where they were present in the exhibits.

JFI group benefits and costs, relative to the control group, from multiple perspectives, including those of (1) individuals enrolled in JFI, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole, which represents the sum of the other two perspectives. The primary cost-benefit finding from each perspective is the net benefit (the difference between total benefits and total costs). A positive net benefit means the benefits outweighed the costs, whereas a negative net benefit means the costs outweighed the benefits. In addition, we estimated the ratio of benefits to costs, which describes the return to society on each dollar invested. The benefit cost ratio is the quotient of the total benefit and the absolute value of the total costs. We also describe how our results differed according to changes in key assumptions for each of the cost-benefit accounting frameworks presented below.

1. Costs and benefits of all services for JFI group members, based on UI wage records

The net benefit of services for the JFI group compared to the control group were positive for JFI group members but negative for government and taxpayers during the 36-month follow-up period (Exhibit VIII.7). This resulted in an overall negative net benefit to society. The benefit-cost ratio, or return on investment to society, was close to zero (-0.05). The control group had higher cumulative earnings than the JFI group during the 36-month follow-up period. The services benefitted JFI group members through support service payments while they were in services, which resulted in a net benefit to individuals, but these services were a cost to government and taxpayers in the same amount.

*The net benefits of all services JFI group members received were **positive** for JFI group members but **negative** for government and taxpayers and for society during the 36-month follow-up period (UI wage records).*

- **Society.** On average, all JFI group services cost society \$4,096 more per individual than control group services. This negative net benefit primarily reflects the differential costs of JFI group services, which were \$3,915 more for JFI group members than for control group members, on average. In addition, JFI group member accrued fewer earnings and fringe benefits, compared with control group members (by \$158 and \$33, respectively), over the 36-month follow-up period.
- **JFI group members.** On average, JFI group members benefitted by \$716, compared with the control group. Support services accounted for most of the benefits to JFI group members, who received \$968 more than control group members did while they were engaged in services, on average. JFI group members also paid \$36 less in taxes than the control group, on average. These benefits to JFI group members were offset by lower cumulative earnings and fringe benefits compared to the control group (by \$158 and \$33, respectively). We assumed any subsidized earnings received while participating in work-based learning activities were included in the \$158 difference in earnings. In addition, JFI group members received less in SNAP and TANF benefits (by \$67 and \$31, respectively), compared to the control group.
- **Government and taxpayers.** Providing JFI group services cost government and taxpayers \$4,812 more per individual, on average, than providing control group services. This was mostly due to the costs of providing services to the JFI group (including JFI, existing SNAP E&T, and community services), which cost more than control group services by an average of \$4,884, including \$3,364 in operating costs, \$551 in subsidized earnings, and \$968 in support services. While the government and taxpayers benefitted from providing fewer SNAP and TANF benefits to JFI group members (by \$67

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and \$31, respectively, which saved \$10 in administration costs), these benefits were not enough to offset the costs of providing services.

Exhibit VIII.7 Benefits and costs associated with JFI services or community-offered services, for the JFI group compared to the control group, UI wage records

	Perspective		
	JFI group members	Government and taxpayers	Society
Benefits (\$)			
Employment and earnings			
Earnings (UI wage records)	-158	0	-158
Fringe benefits	-33	0	-33
Tax payments	36	-36	0
Use of public benefits			
SNAP benefits	-67	67	0
TANF benefits	-31	31	0
Reduced administration costs	0	10	10
Total benefits	-253	72	-181
Costs (\$)			
Net operating costs ^a	0	-3,364	-3,364
Net subsidized earnings while in services ^b	0	-551	-551
Net support services while in services ^b	968	-968	0
Total costs	968	-4,884	-3,915
Net benefit (\$)	716	-4,812	-4,096
Benefit-cost ratio			-0.05

Source: SNAP employment and training evaluation UI wage records, weighted data; SNAP administrative data; SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by JFI grantee, partners, and providers, 2015-2018; SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data; WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates, 2012; and SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data.

Notes: Earnings, SNAP benefits, and TANF benefits are the impact estimates presented in Chapter VII. The net benefit is the difference between total benefits and total costs. A negative net benefit is a net cost. The benefit-cost ratio is the quotient of the total benefits and the absolute value of the total costs. A benefit-cost ratio greater than one represents greater benefits than costs; a number less than one suggests fewer benefits than costs. All benefits and costs are presented in 2016 dollars. The standard error of the cost per JFI group member is \$70 and of the cost per control group member is \$174.

^a This estimate is the difference between JFI and control group costs per individual. This value excluded planning period costs but included the costs of supplies and equipment incurred during the planning period that supported ongoing services once they started.

^b Subsidized earnings and support services directly benefit individuals while they are enrolled in services. We assumed the subsidized earnings benefitting individuals were reflected in the earnings impacts presented as the first row in the benefits section of the exhibit. All earnings presented in the first row in the benefits section of the exhibit are included in the fringe and tax estimates, though we do not know the extent to which subsidized earnings would have translated into these benefits in practice. These subsidized earnings are offset by the costs to government and taxpayers, which is represented in the second row of the costs section of the exhibit. We presented the support services as a benefit (positive transfer) to individuals under the third row of the cost section of the exhibit and these support services are offset by the costs to government and taxpayers in the same row. Both subsidized earnings and support services are assumed to have a net neutral (zero) benefit to society because the benefits are offset by the costs.

VIII. Analysis of the costs and benefits of JFI group and control group services

***/**/* Difference in earnings between the JFI group and control group significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

We conducted sensitivity analyses to test the robustness of our findings based on UI wage records to changes in key assumptions, including (1) the values of benefits associated with increases in earnings, such as fringe benefits and taxes; (2) the values of costs and benefits when accounting for factors such as inflation and present value; (3) the assumption that subsidized earnings were reported to State UI agencies and are reflected in earnings impacts; and (4) the services JFI group members received were primarily through JFI and not from existing SNAP E&T and the community. These results were robust to changes in all of our key assumptions about benefits and costs from all perspectives (Appendix Tables G.10 – G.12). The JFI group services led to a positive net benefit for JFI group members based on changes to all assumptions related to fringe benefits, taxes, and discount rates. Estimated net benefits per individual ranged from \$538 to \$726. Assuming that subsidized earnings were *not* included in UI wage records resulted in a net benefit of \$1,267 per individual, compared to \$716 under our main assumptions. JFI group services resulted in a negative net benefit to government and taxpayers regardless of changes to key assumptions, ranging from \$2,542 to \$4,958 per individual. Because the costs to the government and taxpayers always outweighed the benefits to the JFI group members, there was a negative net benefit to society regardless of changes in assumptions, ranging from \$2,004 to \$4,232 per individual.

2. Costs and benefits of all services for JFI group members, according to 36-month survey data

The findings based on 36-month follow-up survey data were similar to those based on UI wage records. The net benefits of all JFI group services were positive for JFI group members but negative for government and taxpayers and for society during the follow-up period (Exhibit VIII.8). The benefit-cost ratio was 0.51. According to survey data, the cumulative earnings for the JFI group were greater than those for the control group. However, even when accounting for higher earnings among JFI group members, the benefits of JFI group services did not offset the costs of those services during the follow-up period, on average.

*The net benefits of all services JFI group members received were **positive** for JFI group members but **negative** for government and taxpayers and for society during the 36-month follow-up period, according to survey data.*

- **Society.** JFI group services cost society \$1,900 more than control group services per individual. JFI group members reported higher cumulative earnings than control group members by \$1,659, on average, according to survey data. This was different from findings based on UI wage records, which found cumulative earnings of the control group were higher than those for the JFI group (by \$158). These higher earnings for JFI group members according to survey data benefitted society (by \$2,015) but did not offset the costs of services (\$3,915) during the 36-month follow up period.
- **JFI group members.** According to survey data, JFI group members received a net benefit of \$2,473, relative to the control group. The JFI group had higher cumulative earnings and fringe benefits compared to the control group (by \$1,659 and \$347, respectively). We assumed any subsidized earnings received while participating in work-based learning activities were included in the \$1,659 difference in earnings. As a result of having higher cumulative earnings, JFI group members paid \$403 more in taxes compared to control group members, on average. Other benefits and costs to individuals were the same as those in the findings based on UI wage records, with support services

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accounting for about half of the benefits to JFI group members (\$968 more than control group members); JFI group members received lower SNAP and TANF benefits, compared to the control group.

Exhibit VIII.8. Benefits and costs associated with JFI services or community-offered services, for the JFI group compared to the control group, 36-month survey data

	Perspective		
	JFI group members	Government and taxpayers	Society
Benefits (\$)			
Employment and earnings			
Earnings (survey data)	1,659	0	1,659
Fringe benefits	347	0	347
Tax payments	-403	403	0
Use of public benefits			
SNAP benefits	-67	67	0
TANF benefits	-31	31	0
Reduced administration costs	0	10	10
Total benefits	1,504	511	2,015
Costs (\$)			
Net operating costs ^a	0	-3,364	-3,364
Net subsidized earnings while in services ^b	0	-551	-551
Net support services while in services ^b	968	-968	0
Total costs	968	-4,884	-3,915
Net benefit (\$)	2,473	-4,373	-1,900
Benefit-cost ratio			0.51

Sources: SNAP employment and training evaluation 12- and 36-month surveys, weighted data; SNAP administrative data; SNAP employment and training evaluation actual reported costs by JFI grantee, partners, and providers, 2015-2018; SNAP employment and training evaluation administrative service use data; and WIA Gold Standard Evaluation cost estimates, 2012.

Notes: Earnings, SNAP benefits, and TANF benefits are the impact estimates presented in Chapter VII. The net benefit is the difference between total benefits and total costs. A negative net benefit is a net cost. The benefit-cost ratio is the quotient of the total benefits and the absolute value of the total costs. A benefit-cost ratio greater than one represents greater benefits than costs, and a number less than one suggests fewer benefits than costs. All benefits and costs are presented in 2016 dollars. The standard error of the cost per JFI group member is \$70 and of the cost per control group member is 174.

^a This estimate is the difference between JFI and control group costs per individual. This value excluded planning period costs but included the costs of supplies and equipment incurred during the planning period that supported ongoing services once they started.

^b Subsidized earnings and support services directly benefit individuals while they are enrolled in services. We assumed the subsidized earnings benefitting individuals were reflected in the earnings impacts presented as the first row in the benefits section of the exhibit. All earnings presented in the first row in the benefits section of the exhibit are included in the fringe and tax estimates, though we do not know the extent to which subsidized earnings would have translated into these benefits in practice. These subsidized earnings are offset by the costs to government and taxpayers, which is represented in the second row of the costs section of the exhibit. We presented the support services as a benefit (positive transfer) to individuals under the third row of the cost section of the exhibit and these support services are offset by the costs to government and taxpayers in the same row. Both subsidized earnings and support services are assumed to have a net neutral (zero) benefit to society because the benefits are offset by the costs.

VIII. Analysis of the costs and benefits of JFI group and control group services

***/**/* Difference between JFI group and control group significantly different from zero at the 0.01/0.05/0.10 level, two-tailed test.

- **Government and taxpayers.** Government and taxpayers experienced a cost of \$4,373 per individual for providing all JFI group services, based on survey data. JFI group members benefitted from higher cumulative earnings, according to survey data, which resulted in higher tax payments to the government and taxpayers compared to control group members (by \$403). As presented in the UI wage record findings, providing services cost government and taxpayers an average of \$4,884 more for JFI group members, compared to control group members, and these costs were not offset by benefits to government and taxpayers during the 36-month follow up period.

We conducted a similar set of sensitivity analyses to test our key assumptions based on survey data, including (1) the values of benefits associated with increases in earnings, such as fringe benefits and taxes, and (2) the values of costs and benefits when accounting for factors like inflation and present value. These results were robust to changes in almost all of key assumptions about benefits and costs from all perspectives (Appendix Tables G.10 – G.12). Regardless of changes to all assumptions related to fringe benefits, taxes, and discount rates, JFI group members received a net benefit, whereas the government and taxpayers faced a negative net benefit. This resulted in a negative net benefit for society for most changes in assumptions, ranging from \$1,810 to \$1,984. There was one exception—assuming that JFI group members received services only through JFI and not through existing SNAP E&T or the community resulted in a positive net benefit for society of \$192 per JFI group member. Estimates of net benefits to JFI group members ranged from \$2,376 to \$2,641. Government and taxpayers faced a negative net benefit for JFI group services ranging from \$2,103 to \$4,508.

IX. Conclusion

The goal of the 10 SNAP E&T pilots was to test innovative strategies to increase SNAP participants' employment and earnings, and reduce their need for public assistance benefits. Through its comprehensive data collection and rigorous experimental design, this evaluation assessed whether JFI—the innovative SNAP E&T program Vermont designed and implemented targeting new SNAP work registrants with self-identified barriers to employment, including substance use disorders, mental health disorders, housing instability, and/or criminal histories—was effective in achieving these goals.

Several interrelated analyses have been the basis of this final report. Findings from the implementation analysis describe the planning and implementation of the pilot, its services and operations, and the components that may be sustainable or replicable. Findings from the participation and impact analyses describe receipt of services, participation in activities, and impacts on individuals' outcomes for up to three years after enrollment. Finally, the cost-benefit analysis describes the costs of services and compares the benefits of receiving services to the costs of providing them. In this chapter, we summarize and discuss key findings from all of these analyses.

A. Summary of findings

AHS worked with new partners and providers to create regional teams to coordinate and deliver services for JFI. The pilot targeted individuals with severe barriers to employment, including those who had unstable housing, substance use disorders, mental health issues, and criminal histories. JFI staff faced challenges with keeping individuals engaged in services but were able to tailor employment or training-related activities to individuals' disabilities and address some barriers through support services. JFI staff reported that the flexible and robust support services were key to keeping individuals engaged in services and activities. Despite the challenges in getting JFI group members to engage in services, they were more likely than control group members to start an activity, complete an activity, and receive support services. However, their increased engagement did not lead to an increase in earnings over time. Because JFI group members did not earn significantly more than control group members, the overall cost of implementing the pilot outweighed its benefits. We report these findings in detail below. Section C provides more context for the findings.

1. JFI implementation

JFI provided extensive support services and case management from a regional team of providers designed to help individuals overcome their barriers. EAP counselors provided up-front clinical assessment of JFI group members, ongoing counseling, and support services for barrier mitigation. In addition, most individuals received VR services, which included employment counseling tailored to each individual's disability. As barriers were identified, EAP and VR counselors could provide support services with relatively few limits, which were key to helping individuals mitigate barriers. Providers also suggested that the progressive employment services offered through VABIR were important for moving individuals with barriers into employment. However, providers did face some challenges in implementing the pilot. It took time for regional teams to fully establish strategies and procedures to effectively coordinate services for each individual. In addition, even with the available support services, staff found it difficult to address the severe barriers (criminal history, homelessness, substance use disorders, or mental health issues) many individuals had. Keeping these individuals engaged in services was also challenging, as their barriers often caused them to leave services unexpectedly.

2. Service receipt among JFI group members

Virtually all of the individuals randomly assigned to the JFI group engaged in some type of service, meaning they started an assessment, or started an employment or training-related program. Most JFI group members (89 percent) ultimately started an employment or training-related activity such as job search assistance, the GCRC course, and occupational skills training after they completed intake and assessments. Among individuals who started an activity, completion rates were highest for occupational skills training (71 percent) and lowest for the GCRC course (6 percent). JFI staff did not track obtainment of credentials or certifications by individuals except for two types of certifications related to the GCRC course (GCRC and WorkKeys). Only 7 percent of JFI group members earned one of these certifications.

Most JFI group members had at least one contact with an EAP counselor (87 percent), and 70 percent received a support service. About 58 percent received employment or training supplies, 49 percent received transportation assistance, and 34 percent received housing assistance. On average, JFI group members who received support services received \$1,639 in total support service payments. JFI offered individuals incentive payments ranging from \$25 to \$75 for participation in certain services or meeting milestones. Individuals were offered \$25 for attending their first meeting and an additional \$50 (high incentive group) or \$25 (low incentive group) for meeting a milestone. Most JFI group members (96 percent) received the first incentive payment, but fewer (31 to 35 percent) received the second.

Individuals spent an average of eleven months in JFI. The majority exited it within their first year (67 percent), with most exiting after the first quarter. Most individuals exited because they completed the program (36 percent) or before completing services—either because they chose to stop participating or case managers lost contact with them and closed their cases—(35 percent).

3. Differences between JFI and control groups in service receipt

The ability of JFI to impact employment, earnings, and individuals' receipt of public assistance benefits depended in part on whether there were differences between the JFI and control groups' receipt of services and participation in and completion of employment or training-related activities. Relative to the control group, the JFI group was more likely to participate in job search training activities and in education and training activities during the three years following random assignment. According to the survey data, rates of participation in these activities were 9 and 15 percentage points higher, respectively, among the JFI group relative to the control group. These differences existed despite the finding that 56 percent of control group members participated in job search training activities or in education and training activities. The significant difference between the JFI and control groups in rates of participation was observed for all three years, even after JFI services ended. The JFI group also had higher rates of participation than the control group in most types of activities, including general job skills training, occupational skills training, and education. There was no difference between the two groups in rates of participation in work-based learning.

JFI group members also were more likely than control group members to complete an activity. Overall, JFI group members were 16 percentage points more likely than control group members to complete any type of education or training activity. Differences between the two groups in rates of completion were larger in the first year after random assignment than in the second and third years. Relative to the control group, the JFI group spent, on average, about two months longer and three hours more per week in activities. The JFI group was more likely than the control group to receive an occupational certificate or license (7 percentage point difference).

The JFI group also was more likely than the control group to receive case management (10 percentage point difference) and support services (6 percentage point difference). The largest difference between the two groups was observed for clothes, uniforms, tools, or other supplies and equipment (38 percent for the JFI group versus 18 percent for the control group).

4. Impacts of JFI on individuals' outcomes

Findings from analyses of the two primary outcomes in the second and third year after random assignment show that JFI did not lead to an increase in earnings based on either the UI wage data or survey data, and generally did not affect rates of SNAP participation. Although the JFI group had greater average earnings over the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) than the control group did, average earnings increased in both groups over time, and the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. Related analyses of employment based on the survey data revealed that JFI increased the percentage of individuals who were employed, relative to the control group, in Year 3 (8 percentage point difference), with no statistically significant difference in employment between groups in Years 1 or 2, resulting in a 6 percentage point increase in employment in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3). These findings were not corroborated by UI data, which showed small, negative, and statistically insignificant differences between the JFI and control groups in each year after random assignment. There were also no impacts of JFI on the average amount of time individuals were employed in each year. With two exceptions, there were no statistical differences in impacts on earnings or employment in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) across subgroups defined by age, barriers to employment, employment history, presence of children in the household, and household income. Among individuals whose incomes were more than 50 percent of the poverty level, JFI increased earnings by \$8,131 relative to the control group, with no impacts for individuals with lower incomes. Earnings impacts over the two-year period (Years 2 and 3) were negative for individuals with the most barriers to employment, with no earnings impacts for individuals with few or moderate barriers.

Similar percentages of individuals in each research group participated in SNAP throughout the three-year follow-up period. SNAP participation rates decreased each quarter after random assignment by about the same amount for each research group, resulting in similar participation rates in Year 3 (61 percent of the JFI group and 63 percent of the control group). This pattern of findings is consistent with the fact that JFI did not affect earnings. Although JFI group members were more likely than control group members to be employed in the third year after random assignment based on survey data, earnings were similar for both groups across the three years. There were generally no significant impacts of JFI on SNAP participation across subgroups.

Changes to JFI policies and procedures after the pilot began increased the likelihood of JFI group members starting or completing activities, particularly the GCRC course. However, analyses comparing impacts among individuals who were randomly assigned earlier versus later in the enrollment period showed no differences among JFI group members who enrolled before or after changes were made to policies related to the type and amount of support services available to participants and the process for referrals and enrollment in the GCRC course.

5. JFI costs and cost-benefit analyses

AHS and its partners and providers reported spending \$8,868,903 from April 2015 to December 2018 on the planning and implementation of JFI (\$197,050 during the planning period, \$1,367,357 for recruitment, and \$7,304,496 for JFI services). The FNS grant funded 77 percent of these costs; partners

and providers leveraged other funding sources for the remaining 23 percent. The cost-benefit analysis compares the benefits individuals received through earnings and public assistance with the average costs of all services JFI and control group members received per individual. The costs of all services JFI group members received through JFI, existing SNAP E&T services, or the community were about 31 percent higher than the costs of JFI (\$9,549,204 or \$7,113 per individual, on average). The costs of all services control group members received through existing SNAP E&T and the community (\$3,717,716 or \$2,229 per individual, on average) were slightly more than a third of the costs of all services JFI group members received.

JFI group benefits and costs relative to the control group are presented from multiple perspectives, including those of (1) individuals enrolled in JFI, (2) government and taxpayers, and (3) society as a whole, which represents the sum of the other two perspectives. The net benefits of JFI group services were negative for society during the 36-month follow-up period according to UI wage records and 36-month follow-up survey data (by \$4,096 and \$1,900 respectively). JFI group services led to a net benefit for individuals due to higher earnings and receipt of support services while in services (\$716 and \$2,473, respectively). However, the services JFI group members received were a larger cost to government and taxpayers (\$4,812 and \$4,373, respectively), compared to the benefits. The benefits did not offset the costs of the services, on average, during the 36-month follow-up period.

B. Placing findings in the context of the workforce evaluation literature

The JFI study findings are consistent with the previous literature that has often found small or no labor market effects of employment and training programs for low-income populations offering similar services as JFI. Comprehensive literature reviews are provided in Barnow and Smith (2015), Card et al. (2018), Vollmer et al. (2017), and Goger et al. (2020). This literature covers a range of employment and training activities and support services offered by both ongoing programs as well as grant programs similar to JFI, using impact designs with rigorous control (or comparison) groups.

The literature suggests that programs serving low-income populations can typically engage individuals and increase their receipt of services relative to those received by the study control groups in their local areas. These differences can be large, especially for the receipt of occupational skills training and subsidized employment, translating into positive effects on the percentages of individuals who participate in training activities and the attainment of associated certificates and credentials. However, few of the studies have found that the programs lead to long-term increases in earnings or independence from public assistance (at least over the time period covered by the studies, which is typically less than four years).

There are notable exceptions, however, that show that the types of services (such as intensive case management and support services) offered by JFI could be effective. McConnell et al. (2021) found using nationally representative samples from a randomized control trial that had access to WIOA intensive services—one-on-one staff assistance such as assessments, coaching, career counseling, and service referrals—increased earnings by about 15 percent over a three-year follow-up period and yielded benefits that exceeded costs from the perspective of society. This evaluation, however, found no earnings effects of WIOA-funded occupation skills training. Further, several reviews of the existing literature on the role of supportive services in employment and training programs suggest that low-income populations receiving supportive services, in combination with technical training and other ancillary services, such as case management, can have more positive employment and earnings outcomes compared to groups that do not receive such wraparound services (Davis et al. 2013; Gueron and Hamilton 2002; Maguire et al. 2010; U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Education, U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services 2014). Another notable exception is the random assignment evaluation of STEP Forward (Walter et al. 2017) which found that the impacts of subsidized employment offered to the treatment group continued into the fourth year, well after the subsidies had ended. Similarly, Reed et al. (2012) found statistically significant positive impacts of registered apprenticeships, even nine years after program entry.

The literature also suggests that interventions that *combine* several strategies to help low-income individuals find and keep jobs appear more effective than any *single* strategy (Vollmer et al. 2017). Further, “meta-analyses”—that use regressions to combine and analyze impacts from different studies—find that total program effects are more than the sum of the effects of each of the program’s strategies. Thus, implementation and other factors that affect how well multiple components of a program are operationalized and delivered are crucial determinants of a program’s success. Relatedly, the literature has consistently found considerable diversity in program impacts across individuals (females and the long-term unemployed tend to experience larger benefits) and across labor market conditions (programs are less likely to show positive effects during periods of economic growth), but the patterns are not always consistent across studies.

Overall, the observed increases in the rates of take-up and completion of JFI activities and receipt of services, and the lack of earning impacts for JFI fit within the broader related literature. Although comparing the findings in this evaluation to those in the literature is informative, it is important to consider that differences in target populations, local economies, and varied experiences in implementing activities and services available in a pilot or program make it challenging to form direct comparisons to other studies. The next section provides context for the evaluation findings from this perspective.

C. Discussion

Although JFI did not lead to increased earnings or reduced participation in SNAP, it successfully increased the percentages of individuals who received case management and support services relative to the control group, as well as the percentage of individuals who participated in employment or training-related activities. This accomplishment is notable given the prevalence and extent of barriers JFI group members faced—only 14 percent were employed at the time of random assignment, and 19 percent did not have a high school diploma. The higher rates of receipt of case management and support services among JFI group members may have allowed individuals to overcome barriers associated not only with starting employment or training-related activities, but also sustaining participation over time and ultimately completing those activities. The mitigation of barriers for JFI group members may have also contributed to their ability to continue participating in employment or training-related activities in the community even after the JFI service period ended.

In addition, JFI led to higher employment rates (based on survey data) in the two-year period (Years 2 and 3). This finding suggests that although the pilot may have increased the chances of finding employment, these jobs did not pay appreciably more than those obtained by the control group, resulting in no impact on earnings.

Information collected from pilot and provider staff underscored the severity of barriers that the JFI group members faced. Many JFI staff discussed the difficulty of overcoming barriers related to transportation, substance use, mental health, criminal histories, and homelessness. In particular, JFI staff reported that the opioid epidemic and shortage of affordable housing were at historic rates during the JFI service period. They also reported that many individuals were not ready for employment or were severely constrained in

the types or locations of employment for which they could apply. For example, an individual receiving substance use treatment could have daily medical appointments that would interfere with their work schedule; an individual with unstable housing could have difficulty accessing the hygiene or transportation resources they needed to obtain a job; and an individual with a criminal history could have very few local employers willing to hire them, particularly in rural areas.

Because both the JFI and control group members were equally affected by these types of barriers, both groups needed and received case management and support services. However, JFI intended to offer more robust case management and support services as a core component of the pilot, compared with control group services received through existing SNAP E&T and the community, so the similarity in service receipt between research groups is surprising. We expected larger differences in the percentages of JFI and control group members who received case management and support services, especially given JFI's focus on barrier reduction. It is possible that despite having differences across research groups in the receipt of case management and support service that were smaller than expected, there were differences between groups in the type and intensity of case management and support services. For example, the JFI group received case management through meetings with EAP and VR counselors, while the control group received it through meetings with VDOL. JFI case management generally focused on longer-term counseling, stabilization, and employment planning, while control group case management often focused on shorter-term job search assistance. The array and amounts of support services offered to the two groups were also different. For example, the JFI group had access to a robust array of support services including reimbursement for medical care, license fees, housing and transportation supports, while the control group had access only to support services available in the community. These differences in the type and intensity of case management and support services may have contributed to the higher rates of participation in and completion of activities among the JFI group relative to the control group, and ultimately to the impacts of JFI on employment. In addition, rates of participation in education and training activities and completion of activities remained higher for the JFI group than for the control group through Year 3 after random assignment, even after JFI group services ended.

These differences translated into a higher rate of employment among for the JFI group, but not into higher average earnings. This may reflect the amount of time required to reduce severe barriers, become employed, and obtain higher-paying jobs. With many JFI group members participating in activities in Year 3 and employment impacts just beginning to emerge in that year, a greater amount of time may be required in which to observe earnings impacts among such a highly-barriered population. This highlights the need to learn more about sustained barriers that prevented JFI group members from moving into higher-wage, intermediary jobs.

It is also possible that, while the JFI group was more likely than the control group to start and complete employment or training-related activities, the differences between research groups were not large enough to translate into impacts on outcomes. Indeed, JFI staff expressed concerns early in the pilot period that the program could have limited impacts without a greater focus on employment or training-related activities. The GCRC was selected as the main employment or training-related activity offered through JFI, but take up of GCRC services was lower than expected throughout the service period. VR and VABIR offered employment-related counseling and progressive employment activities, but staff reported those services and activities typically took over a year to complete. VDOL offered employment-related services such as job search assistance and made referrals to training opportunities through WIOA, but staff reported there were not many slots available for these types of long-term training opportunities.

To assess the possibility that impacts were diluted due to the size of the difference between research groups in participation in employment or training-related activities, we compared impacts for individuals who did and did not start an employment or training-related activity and those who completed or did not complete an activity. These exploratory analyses showed that there were no impacts on earnings for individuals who started an activity or for those who did not start one, as well as no impacts on earnings based on completion status, suggesting that the take-up and completion of JFI employment or training-related activities was not the main factor behind the lack of impacts on earnings. The analysis did reveal impacts on employment based on the survey among individuals who started an activity, but no impacts among those who did not start one. These findings highlight the need to learn more about the challenges individuals faced in starting and completing activities after they enter the program, which could help administrators and providers identify strategies to support them in meeting these challenges. Also, understanding how receiving certifications, diplomas, degrees, or occupational licenses can differentially affect the prospect of employment for JFI group members should also be explored.

When considering the overall findings from the JFI pilot, there are a few additional factors that may have contributed to the results, including the following:

- **Earnings impacts might depend on the type of activities in which individuals participated.** Individuals in the JFI group were offered a wide range of services and activities. Earnings impacts may not be apparent for all JFI group members, but that finding does not mean specific activities, such as occupational skills training or work-based learning, were ineffective.

Assessing the effectiveness of services and activities separately and in combination would help identify promising practices for improving outcomes. Because many JFI group members participated in multiple activities, isolating the effect of a single type of activity can be challenging. It would be helpful to classify individuals who received different sets of services into mutually exclusive and distinct groups. For each group, describing participation in activities and estimating impacts on outcomes would help to identify specific services and activities, or combinations of them, that increase earnings and improve outcomes most effectively.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic which began during the 36-month follow-up survey period may have affected the magnitude of the impacts found in Year 3.** Outcomes measured in Year 3 for participants who were randomly assigned in the pilot between April 2017 and December 2017 could have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which began to dramatically affect life in the United States in March 2020. We found evidence of employment-related impacts in Year 3, but not Years 1 or 2. Given that employment rates were higher in the JFI group than the control group in the period overlapping with the pandemic, it is possible that the pandemic impacted the JFI group less than the control group. However, we cannot identify what these impacts would have been in the absence of the pandemic. Learning more about the effects of the pandemic on outcomes for each research group would deepen our understanding about the magnitude of employment increases and how long to expect employment impacts following participation in JFI activities. The pandemic likely affected individuals' outcomes differently based on their occupation if they were employed or the occupation they were training to enter. It would be useful to assess whether impacts on earnings and employment in Year 3 differed based on these factors.
- JFI costs were higher than the financial benefits of the program, but this primarily reflects the absence of an impact on earnings. The net benefit was negative for JFI due to the differential costs of JFI group services not being offset by the benefits accrued through earnings and fringe benefits during the 36-month follow-up period. When interpreting this finding, it is important to consider that JFI

services were new and experimental. The purpose of the SNAP E&T pilot was to test new approaches to services. JFI targeted individuals with high barriers to engaging in services and obtaining employment, and AHS led the development of new partnerships in communities between organizations that had not worked together previously, including VR, VDOL, and CCV. Even though we excluded the costs of planning and recruitment in considering the cost differential between JFI and control group services, the costs of JFI group services were likely higher for the three years of the pilot than they would have been if administered over a longer period of time. In addition, it is possible that some individuals realized benefits which do not appear in the cost-benefit analysis results – for example, increases in earnings that individuals earned after the observation period of 36-months, or unmeasured benefits such as changes in food security, health, or well-being.

Although outcomes for JFI were mixed, SNAP E&T program administrators can learn from the implementation of the JFI model, particularly for serving populations with significant barriers. The JFI model relied heavily on forming regional teams to coordinate service delivery for individuals with severe barriers. This process was not easy in some regions, as many of these organizations had not worked together before and had different cultures and approaches to employment and training. Early uncertainty around processes and coordination of services likely created gaps in services which caused individuals with significant barriers to disengage. However, over time a true team-based model emerged in many regions and JFI staff were able to collectively identify the best service plan for each individual. Ultimately, Vermont created a model that benefitted not just the SNAP E&T program but the way providers in each region worked together, communicated, and served their customers. All of the providers wanted to continue the regional teams formed under the JFI model after the pilot ended. However, they reported that even without JFI, the collaboration and partnerships they created would continue informally.

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