

MIGIZI Green Jobs Pathway Program

Opportunity Reboot Evaluation Summary



MIGIZI Communications (MIGIZI) created the Green Jobs Pathway program to prepare Native American youth to become financially independent, responsible, and self-determined adults. The program, structured as three nine-week cohorts in the fall, winter/spring, and summer, provides education and support for youth, helping them create career pathways to secure a living-wage career in the green economy. MIGIZI received funding from Youthprise (via the Corporation for National and Community Service Social Innovation Fund) and participates in its Opportunity Reboot initiative as a sub-grantee. Based on MIGIZI's recommendation, Search Institute contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a two-phase evaluation of Green Jobs Pathway program. This report summary focuses on examining the Green Jobs Pathway's alignment with Youthprise's Opportunity Reboot model, as well as perceived program experiences and outcomes.

- Data for this summary were gathered through a focus group with youth from two cohorts in the first year (N=6), as well as staff key informant interviews in the first year (N=2) and focus group in the second year (N=4). In addition, MIGIZI staff were asked to complete a program mapping tool at three key points during implementation. The mapping tool includes spaces for MIGIZI staff to self-evaluate their work, document anticipated changes needed to better align with Youthprise's articulation of the Opportunity Reboot model, and (for the final program map) reflect on the effect of those changes and final alignment with the Opportunity Reboot model.
- Findings of the program evaluation were generally positive. The program was successful in engaging and retaining participants in the program, offering participants a wide array of learning opportunities and supports, and strengthening program alignment with the Opportunity Reboot model.
- The findings also pointed to areas that the Green Jobs Pathway program could be strengthened. Areas of improvement include recruiting more participants, extending the program length beyond its initial nine-week design, and continuing to use the practices and strategies they gained from their participation in the Opportunity Reboot initiative.

About Opportunity Reboot

Youthprise designed the Opportunity Reboot initiative to link and strengthen six existing intervention programs for “opportunity youth” – young people between the ages of 14 and 24 who are homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, or disconnected from the education system – and create greater conditions for educational, vocational, and life success. To this end, Youthprise developed a program model to reflect common aspects (including activities and immediate and long-term outcomes) of these six sub-grantee programs.

The Opportunity Reboot model has four primary features:

- Integrated positive mentoring relationships
- A coordinated career pathways framework
- Responsive and individualized goal supports
- Impactful cross-sector partnerships

Each of the four features contains one to four concepts; in turn, each concept is broken down into two to four strategies. Each sub-grantee program used its own tactics (activities) to meet each strategy.

After developing the initial model in early 2017, Youthprise revised the model in summer 2017 based on sub-grantee feedback.

Evaluating implementation of the Opportunity Reboot model

As a companion to the Opportunity Reboot model, Search Institute devised a program mapping tool to help each of the six sub-grantee programs measure implementation fidelity in each of the model’s four features. The program map asks staff from the sub-grantee programs to rate their program’s alignment to the strategies outlined in the Opportunity Reboot model on a scale from 0 (“not aligned”) to 3 (“strongly aligned”), with the goal of attaining strong alignment in each of the 27 strategies.

The findings in this report compare the second program map from November 2017 (the first program map with the revised and updated model) to the third and final program map from May 2018. This report also, where applicable, will integrate staff and youth perceptions of impact in each of the model’s four features.

Feature 1. Integrated Positive Mentoring Relationships

Mentorship is a central component of the Green Jobs Pathway program, with program staff acting as mentors to the youth in the program. In the interviews, staff identified being a mentor as building positive relationships with youth, providing support and encouragement, and being a role model to them.

I think a good mentor, and the mentorship piece of it, is modeling behavior for the student that you want them to aspire to as they grow and become more adult. And also helping them to find ways of solving problems.

I think that is something that's very important to them, is very empowering to them in a sense of understanding that they have somebody on their side as they take this journey, this pathway from school to careers and farther on.

...having a caring word and saying that I believe in them and that I'm here to help. Also that we have expectations of them to do well in their life and in their studies and in their progress toward a career. So, if that's mentoring,...that's a very big component of who we are.

Youth in the focus group shared that their interactions with staff were positive; they felt that staff went the extra mile, provided encouragement, and wanted the best for them. The youth also credited MIGIZI staff with helping them establish goals, encouraging them to finish high school and pursue postsecondary education, and providing college and career information and resources.

While there was some alignment in all five strategies from the beginning of the program, MIGIZI staff agreed there was lower alignment in the concepts and strategies that focused on structured mentoring arrangements. MIGIZI staff are highly trained, knowledgeable, and experienced mentors, but the Green Jobs Pathway program was not designed to teach youth about mentorship in a formalized way. To bring the program into greater alignment with the model, MIGIZI staff partnered with MENTOR Minnesota to provide training for youth on identifying and maximizing relationships with formal and informal mentors. After completing this work, MIGIZI staff identified their program as “strongly” aligned in all five strategies. In particular, the MENTOR Minnesota training helped MIGIZI staff reframe the concept of mentorship to better connect with their opportunity youth, although staff also recognize that the community emphasis of the Green Jobs Pathway program means that their connections to opportunity youth go beyond time-limited mentoring relationships.

Feature 2. Coordinated Career Pathways Framework

MIGIZI staff rated all eight career pathways strategies as “strongly” or “mostly” aligned during the November 2017 program mapping session, reflecting a commitment to guiding

youth to sustainable employment in the green jobs sector. Youth participants shared that MIGIZI staff provided them with opportunities to learn about the green jobs sector:

MIGIZI taught me more about green energy and stuff that I didn't know about.

I'm able to talk about renewable energy the way I do.

I didn't know how to wire wires, and now I do. And how solar and energy works, and now I know how it works.

MIGIZI helped me learn more about greenhouse [effect] [and green] energy and stuff.

Yeah, it makes me feel good to actually do stuff to help with green energy and stuff like that.

Strategies that MIGIZI staff identified as slightly less aligned (“mostly” rather than “strongly” aligned) tended to ask for more formal or structured processes, such creating an education or work plan for youth. As with mentorship, MIGIZI staff are highly trained and capable of guiding youth to more meaningful, stable, and long-term careers; however, the Green Jobs Pathway program was not initially designed to provide formal training on specific job skills or social-emotional competencies. Trainings in résumé writing and postsecondary planning were introduced in 2018 to bring the Green Jobs Pathway program into greater alignment; in addition, staff accessed various technical assistance modules and training that helped their opportunity youth, thanks in large part to the networking opportunities provided by the Opportunity Reboot program.

Feature 3. Responsive Individualized Goals Supports

In general, MIGIZI staff perceived the Green Jobs Pathway program to be well-aligned in this feature, with 9 of 10 strategies identified as “strongly” or “mostly” aligned in November 2017. Youth recognized that MIGIZI staff helped them set goals and keep them on track toward achieving them:

They help us set the goals and they help us work toward the goals. Like, I've been working with [MIGIZI staff] a lot with our goals, setting them up and stuff, and what we expect out of ourselves.

And we're getting really good. We're on track, we keep it [the goal's status] updated.

MIGIZI staff also shared that they provided opportunities for youth to speak with adults in various situations about their goals, which helped youth become more self-confident and able to work with others:

I think every time they speak to a group of adults, it reinforces that they do have something to say and it reinforces their own self-confidence in themselves. That is huge, that is gonna take them very far in college, in their work life.

That's one really cool thing about the Green Jobs Pathway program -- they have to work in groups and work as a team, so we're teaching them that, too. Maybe it's a softer skill that we're not really noticing, but we're teaching them that skill of having to work as a team and complete a project, get a job done.

MIGIZI staff identified lower levels of alignment in strategies that referred to tracking goal progress and updating or modifying plans; the short-term nature of the Institute program (nine weeks) means that there is little time for plans to change and no formalized way of updating them. As a result, two strategies (one addressing modifying plans, one addressing staff assisting youth with revising and expanding goals) remained “mostly” aligned in the final program map, although staff felt confident that the technical assistance they received in this area gave them the tools to move themselves toward creating a formal process for updating youth goals and plans.

Feature 4. Impactful Cross-Sector Partnerships

The Green Jobs Pathway program has cultivated relationships with cross-sector partners, including businesses and higher education institutions. These partnerships have led to some positive changes for the programming and positive outcomes for youth:

We partner with [postsecondary schools like Dunwoody and MCTC] to share curriculum on renewable energy and also onboarding and best practices for new students, new postsecondary students.

We also bring in Cultural Knowledge Keepers that also assist [youth] in their identity. So one of the things, speaking of goals, they talk about their identity and their need to connect to their culture.

MIGIZI staff identified a few challenges with the cross-sector partnership features in the Opportunity Reboot model, particularly the strategy around maintaining and strengthening collaboration through regular interactions. In particular, the educational partners engaged in the Green Jobs Pathway program experienced a significant amount of staff turnover during the evaluation period; as a result, MIGIZI staff have spent time reintroducing and reestablishing connections rather than strengthening collaboration with these partners. Despite these challenges, MIGIZI staff saw strong alignment with two of the three strategies by May 2018; they also shared that these ongoing partnerships, despite the challenges, have allowed them to create a unified vision and goals that they can share with private industry partners that they encounter.

We have maintained consistent contact with [partners], and extended a relationship with Century College nicely. MCTC is also a positive partnership, where we had to dig into the vision and goals for collaboration and really do some strong work with them to realign the partnership and sharing details as we learned more about the industry and credentialing. That was a natural re-visioning process. We have also made connections with private industry partners through conferences and established vision and goals with those entities as well.

Lessons learned

MIGIZI staff learned a number of lessons over the course of the implementation of the Opportunity Reboot model and evaluation of the Green Jobs Pathway program, including the following:

- The Green Jobs Pathway program has a chance to teach employers and postsecondary institutions about the challenges facing opportunity youth through continued partnerships. Having a formalized program that shows evidence of impact may help reinforce the importance of maintaining and strengthening those partnerships.
- MIGIZI staff can benefit from having a formalized system for tracking youth involvement in the Green Jobs Pathway program. Since the program is time-limited and project-based, differing levels of involvement (dosage) may result in different intermediate and long-term outcomes for youth.
- The iterative nature of the evaluation (e.g., returning to the program mapping tool at several points during the implementation process) allowed MIGIZI staff to engage in program improvement at several stages.

Next steps

Staff and youth identified a few areas that the MIGIZI Green Jobs Pathway could be further strengthened to provide support for opportunity youth. We recognize that improvement efforts are already underway. These areas of improvement include:

- **Recruiting more participants.** The program recently expanded to include non-Native American youth participants in the summer. Also, because the program had difficulty in finding youth who are current high school students at risk of leaving school before earning a high school diploma, the program might consider targeting different kinds of students for this cohort.

- **Extending the program.** Because some of the youth outcomes are intermediate and long-term, MIGIZI staff should consider extending the length of the Green Jobs Pathway program beyond the initial nine-week program.
- **Continuing to use the practices and features gained from participation in the Opportunity Reboot initiative, as appropriate.** The core strength of MIGIZI's Green Jobs Pathway program is in building informal relationships with youth and community partners. Being part of the Opportunity Reboot initiative required program staff to formalize and track program activities, including mentoring relationships with youth, the relationships with partners, and to show evidence of program effectiveness. Staff shared that most of these tasks served to strengthen the program overall.



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