NJHSA Pillars of Excellence Awards Submission Form

Submission Title: **JVS Boston’s English for Advancement program: a new way of delivering ESOL**

Agency Name: **JVS Boston**

Pillar Submission is Aligned With: **Research and Innovation**

Supporting resources (url, pdf) [https://www.jvs-boston.org/pay-for-success/](https://www.jvs-boston.org/pay-for-success/)
[https://www.jvs-boston.org/english-for-advancement-free-program/](https://www.jvs-boston.org/english-for-advancement-free-program/)

II. Summary

a. Description of Submission

JVS Boston developed and implemented an innovative way of delivering and measuring adult education classes that moves English Language learners into the labor market. English for Advancement (EFA) differs from traditional adult education in almost every way possible: model, implementation, assessment, curriculum, staffing, metrics, financing, employer relationships, and outcomes measurement. This new approach aligns with what adult learners want and what employers need, with the added bonus of improving the economy by increasing the tax base. JVS Boston successfully used an innovative financing tool, Pay for Success, to implement this approach to adult education. This successful model can now serve as a pilot for embedding outcomes based contracting into core adult education funding and utilizing adult education to give students exactly what they want: increased access to the labor market.

b. Initial Problem(s)/Challenge(s) to be Addressed

69% of students in adult education classes are enrolled because they want a new or better job, according to a student satisfaction survey administered by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). However, traditional adult education classes for English language learners (ELLs) are designed only to increase their knowledge of the English language and use one standard model of classroom delivery for a limited number of hours each week. Given this model, ESOL programs that receive DESE funding are also measured solely on their ability to teach English, with no focus on the labor market or skill attainment. In fact, key performance metrics like student retention and keeping rosters at capacity disincentivize employment outcomes, as students who are placed in jobs are likely to stop attending classes and therefore negatively affect their program’s score on three performance metrics (seats filled, student retention, and percentage of students completing both a pre- and post-test). **JVS Boston designed English for Advancement (EFA), an innovative model for delivering adult education services that centers workforce outcomes and economic opportunities.**

c. Successes and Lessons Learned

**Success #1: A new model for adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)**

EFA improves the traditional adult education system by rewriting the assessment process, contextualizing ESOL classes to focus on job readiness and workplace skills, and connecting all students to a career coach dedicated to moving them into and up in the labor market.
EFA’s structured assessment allows the reviewer to assess for English language skills in the context of understanding the client’s readiness for the program, eliminating the need for a specific English language exam. In traditional adult education, potential students meet with an interviewer to assess their ability to attend classes and then spend more time completing an English assessment, which then needs to be scored by an ESOL teacher. In EFA, one assessment screens for work readiness and English language skills and places students into classes.

The foundation for the curriculum is the set of skills students need to be successful in the American workforce, particularly the process of obtaining and keeping a job. Students learn workplace vocabulary, job interview skills and professional communication. While traditional adult education uses a variety of examples to explain grammar concepts or demonstrate lesson mastery, EFA contextualizes all program content to the workplace.

Each EFA student also has a dedicated career coach, and coaching caseloads are kept small. In traditional adult education, there may be one coach to every 100 students, whose primary function is goal setting and barrier removal so students can attend class. Job development capacity, if available at all, is very limited. In EFA, career coaches are responsible for exploring career goals with each student and creating a customized employment plan. Coaches also work with employers to build relationships and identify job leads, in order to match students to openings. Coaches then support students through the application, interview, job start process and job retention.

The model utilizes monthly admission to class (to backfill for students who obtained employment) and allows for student-driven exits, where each student identifies based on their own goals when they want to start looking for a job, and completes the program once they gain employment. This can be anywhere from as little as two months for students who need to start working immediately to up to a year for students who want to make greater gains in their English language skills before moving into employment.

In addition to offering a flexible model, EFA employs additional strategies to ensure that delivery methods meet students’ needs:

- EFA classes are multi-level to ensure we are able to accommodate students at the location nearest them. However, if multiple classes are offered at the same site, they are leveled according to the students’ English proficiency to ensure that course content is meeting their needs. Volunteers are available to work with students who have specific learning goals or barriers.
- Differentiated Instruction- Some students have master’s degrees, and others have not finished elementary school. JVS makes content for both ends of the spectrum, and everywhere in between. By working in smaller groups, creating specialized worksheets, and learning more about the students – the EFA team is able to make sure to meet students where they are and provide them with content that is just challenging enough for them to grow and build confidence.
- Student Driven - In traditional ESOL, instructors often have no room to develop content specifically for their own students. In EFA, instructors work closely with students and learn about their job and career goals - and make learning content that best suits their needs.
Success #2: Implementing the first Workforce Development Pay for Success project
Pay for Success (PFS) is an innovative financing tool that moves capital from the private sector into non-profits through the core principles of clearly defined outcomes, data-driven decisions, cross-sector partnerships, strong governance, and accountability. EFA is part of the first PFS project in the United States to focus exclusively on workforce development. Pay for Success allowed Massachusetts to experiment with a new vision for adult education, because the vehicle of Pay for Success transfers the risk from the government to private investors, who are only repaid if the intervention is successful. While most Pay for Success projects base repayment terms on savings to the government, JVS’ was the first in the world to utilize a revenue based model that demonstrates earnings for the state through increasing the tax base. Pay for Success allows non-profits to innovate and scale, and once they have a proven track-record, the government can shift resources to pay for what works.

Success #3: Utilizing Administrative Data to Verify Outcomes
Access to administrative wage data was a significant obstacle during project development that has now yielded a novel and robust data set for all project partners to monitor project performance, a historic first for workforce development programs in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. As EFA programming under its original iteration fell under three Secretariats – Labor and Workforce Development, Education, and Administration and Finance – JVS Boston and project partners worked with the Commonwealth to access data already collected. To verify outcomes, EFA sought a solution through existing administrative wage data from DUA. This impact was two-fold. First, it would reduce the service provider staff hours needed to engage program graduates for self-reported income data. Second, administrative data is more reliable, can track outcomes for much longer, more robust, – and if successful, could be replicated for other programs in Massachusetts. It took almost a year to set up the data-sharing agreements, cross-departmental systems, and data flow procedures, but JVS’ Pay for Success project was able to create a functioning administrative data outcome verification system.

Success #4: Recruitment at Scale
Recruitment from numerous cities, especially in the presence of a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to measure outcomes for EFA, was a hurdle to overcome for JVS Boston and project partners. Initial projections suggested a 50% increase in recruitment needs annually in order to meet enrollment goals. EFA had expanded programming to new communities that had little to no brand awareness of JVS Boston’s services and outcomes. Simultaneously, the policies implemented under the current Federal Administration have effectively ended new refugee arrivals and created an environment where immigrants, regardless of their legal status, are less likely to seek community services. Consequently, administering programs requiring clients to provide their social security card and immigration documentation became much more complicated. Lastly, the strength of the current labor market has impacted workforce development and adult education programs across the board, including EFA. It has been increasingly difficult to find enough individuals seeking support to enter the workforce to meet recruitment goals.
In response, JVS hired two dedicated FTEs to support program recruitment. The centralization of recruitment supports allowed for more efficient lead generation, structured follow up, and a robust social media marketing strategy. In addition, EFA partnered with key organizations in program expansion communities. Instead of opening new offices and hiring new staff, JVS Boston co-located and co-branded with trusted community agencies to build awareness and trust in these new communities. The outreach team led social media campaigns, flyered in neighborhoods and at community events, and led full-day recruitment events involving multiple 60+ JVS staff members. These strategies resulted in a 53% year over year increase in program information session attendance—the direct feeder of eligible participants to enroll in the program—and ultimately EFA exceeded its enormous recruitment targets.

III. Components

Human Services Component

JVS has a long history of integrating ESOL instruction with preparation for a job (or a better job). The agency has pursued this approach across its programs, despite the fact that until recently the publicly-funded adult education system neither required nor supported it, in the belief that contextualized instruction is the best way to both ensure successful English language acquisition and economic integration for recent arrivals and to maximize the use of scarce public and private resources. Contextualized instruction ties course curricula and concepts to the ultimate goal of employment, by making extensive use of occupation-specific vocabulary and employer materials, and connects to the daily experience of participants by drawing on real-life examples in lessons.

JVS’s approach integrates vocational ESOL with job readiness training, employment and career counseling, job search assistance, and direct placement assistance by proactively connecting clients to employers. EFA is designed so that students attain the skills needed to move into a new/better job while acquiring the knowledge and resources needed to continue developing their English skills. Curriculum topics used to build English language skills while also assisting students with job retention include reading and understanding a work schedule, appropriate ways to call out of work, communicating with a supervisor through email and text, understanding paychecks and navigating public transportation to a new location.

Coaching focuses on educational attainment, employment persistence and removing obstacles and barriers to success. Career coaching includes short term and long term goal setting, resume and cover letter development, barrier removal, researching and outreaching to employers for and with clients, job application assistance, interview practice, interview follow up assistance, hiring paperwork/steps assistance, and follow up support after placement. Classroom and counseling topics geared toward job retention and advancement include how to meet employer expectations and job requirements, how to pursue promotion within a company, and how and when to look for a new job as a vehicle for career and income advancement.

Outreach/Community building Component

One key methodology for expanding English for Advancement into Gateway Cities was to develop strong community partnerships that could both house and provide recruitment support to the program. Rather than opening mini-JVSes, there was a purposeful strategy of finding community partners with name
recognition and institutional trust within the immigrant communities in those towns. As such, English for Advancement program has formal partnerships with three community-based organizations which include dedicated outreach staffing support for the program, as well as classroom and office space. EFA students benefit from other services offered by our partners, dependent on location. As EFA staff are co-located at partner organizations, they are in close communication with partner organization staff and can easily refer clients for additional services. JVS also works informally with local businesses, school districts and faith-based institutions, to fully understand the needs of community members and adapt our contextualized curriculum for each class.

IV. Outcomes

a. Outcomes

Serving unemployed or underemployed English Language Learners, EFA combines contextualized ESOL classes with one-on-one career coaching to move participants into new or better jobs. Participants enrolled in FY17 and FY18 (n=623) achieved an overall job placement rate of 67%, and of the sub-set of participants not working at intake (n=327), their job placement rate was 75%. These job placements resulted in an average annual earnings increase of $8,025 (or 43%) for students working at intake, and $22,000 for those not working. These job placements also resulted in qualitative stability measures, such as more predictable work schedules, access to benefits, and proximity to key locations (such as a child’s school or family home). EFA’s placement rate of 67% - nearly doubles the Massachusetts Adult Education Participants (WIOA Title II) placement rate of 39% from PY 2013, the last year of data publicly available.

In addition, the chart below outlines the systems change outcomes achieved through English for Advancement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Adult Basic Education System</th>
<th>English for Advancement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Designed to move students to the next level of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>One service to increase English skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Engagement</td>
<td>Limited connection to workforce development services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Partners</td>
<td>No connection with local employers or area labor markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Measures an increase in English language improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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b. Evaluation Method

EFA is measuring clients’ annualized earnings in the second year after enrollment through the gold
standard of evaluation, a randomized controlled trial (RCT), which will assess how participant earnings compare to annualized average earnings in the second year of enrollment with a control group of like participants. The project is being independently evaluated by Economic Mobility Corporation (Mobility), with a report and principal findings to be released in the fall of 2022.

V. Sustainability

a. Total Program Initiative Cost/Major Income Sources

In order to support over 1,000 students enrollment in EFA over three years in four cities, JVS received ~$6,000,000 through the vehicle of Pay for Success. This money was raised from 40 investors.

b. Agency’s Plans for the Continuation

The goal of developing and implementing EFA is to move the adult basic education system, funded through the Department of Education, to measuring and rewarding employment outcomes. JVS is pleased to report that in late 2019 the Commonwealth of MA issued an RFR for a performance based contract that measures outcomes and pays accordingly. JVS submitted a very competitive response which will become the primary funding source to support the continuation of EFA. In addition, JVS is reaching out to philanthropy interested in innovation to further support the scaling of this successful model. Nationally (and internationally), EFA is both replicable and sustainable across adult education systems, as it encourages government to utilize resources differently to give adult students what they want and reward providers who are successful.

VI. Contact Information

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