

STEP

Sector Training Evidence-Building Project

Research Question Examples

As described in the [STEP RFP](#), this project seeks to build new evidence on sector programs related to research questions in two main areas:

1. What are the **key elements needed to implement or expand access to effective sector programs**, including the program components, target populations, or approaches to scaling or strengthening overall program models?
2. What is the **effectiveness of sector programs that (i) have not been rigorously evaluated and (ii) can expand understanding of the sector model**, including programs targeting less common occupations and industries, serving specific target populations, or adapting to serve more job seekers?

Below are examples of more specific research questions that fall in these areas. Applicants are invited to propose projects that address one or more of these example questions or projects that address other questions that fall within one or both of these research areas.

Key Elements

- Which **component(s) of sector programs** lead to increased earnings? How can these components be strengthened to lead to better employment-related outcomes for job seekers?
 - What are the most effective ways to provide technical skills training?
 - What are the most effective ways to provide support services?
 - What are the most effective ways to teach (and assess) soft skills? What is the relative importance to job seekers of acquiring technical vs. soft skills?
 - What are effective modes for providing the various components of sector programs (for example, offering it online, in person, or in a hybrid format)?
 - What does quality employer engagement look like? What type of employer engagement improves job placement and advancement outcomes? What do employers value in their partnerships with sector programs?
 - Does offering work-based learning opportunities (like internships) improve program outcomes?
 - For programs offering services to people after they graduate and find jobs, which services lead to advancement beyond initial job placement (for example, individual or group coaching)?
- **Who can benefit** from participating in a sector program?
 - Can sector programs relax one or more screening requirements—for example, academic assessments—and still increase participants' earnings?
 - Who is most and least likely to benefit from participating in a sector program?

- How can sector programs recruit and serve individuals that are typically screened out of sector programs? What additional services or supports do participants need (for example, bridge programs or mentoring)?
- How can sector programs serve populations that have not been well-represented in sector programs to date, including rural populations and populations with a history of incarceration?
- What is the **minimum viable sector model** needed to produce earnings effects?
 - Which program components are essential to offer for a program to increase earnings? Which components are not essential? What is the minimum viable investment?
 - What are different approaches or strategies to expanding the reach of sector programs that ensure the quality of the program components and overall model is maintained? What are the facilitators of, and barriers to, different expansion approaches?
 - How can programs assess whether they have expanded with fidelity? For example, how can programs assess maintaining a “dual customer” orientation—meaning they seek to meet the needs of participants and employers?

Effectiveness of Sector Programs That Have Not Previously Been Evaluated

- Are sector programs that have **not been rigorously evaluated** before effective at increasing participant’s earnings and overall job quality? Within this broader question, the following are a number of important questions a STEP project might examine.
 - Are sector programs that target **less common occupations and industries**—for example, industries other than health care and IT—effective at increasing earnings?
 - Are sector programs that serve specific **target populations**—for example, people who live in rural areas, people of color, or people with a history of incarceration—effective at increasing earnings? What additional supports or services do people in these target populations need?
 - Are sector programs that have adapted or expanded **to serve more job seekers**—for example, by opening a new location, by working in a new sector, by working with different types of job seekers, or another way—effective at increasing earnings? What approach(es) to adapting or expanding were used? What challenges or barriers were encountered?