

MAY 2020  
EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# SWIFTSTART

Program evaluation conducted for Total Action for Progress (TAP) and New River Community Action (NRCA) by the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG) and the Center for Public Administration and Policy (CPAP) at Virginia Tech

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# ABOUT SWIFTSTART & THE PROGRAM EVALUATION

SwiftStart is a \$4 million partnership funded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration through the Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI). It is implemented by TAP in the Roanoke Valley and New River Community Action (NRCA) in the New River Region. The program began in 2016 and will run through 2021.

Designed with a “whole family and person-centered” approach, SwiftStart offers education and job training services to parents in the high-demand fields of health care, information technology, and manufacturing. The program also assists with quality childcare and other supports that allow participants to overcome complex barriers in order to complete training and certificate programs.

The SwiftStart evaluation was conducted by researchers at the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG) and the Center for Public Administration and Policy (CPAP) from September 2019 to May 2020. The evaluation consisted of a mixed methods analysis of administrative and survey data from participants, paired with interviews with program stakeholders. Stakeholders included program participants, SwiftStart staff, childcare providers, training providers, and employers. This executive summary highlights key findings about the SwiftStart program at the time of analysis. **Training and employment outcomes are expected to further improve as active participants complete SwiftStart.**

## SWIFTSTART Program Process

### Pre-Orientation



#### INITIAL SCREENING

- Career aptitude examination, drug test, background check
- Intake process with career mentors, referral to supplemental services if needed
- Initial development of childcare plan

### Participant Orientation



#### TRAINING & JOB PREPARATION

- Career-focused discussion covering expectations for job training and employment
- Participants research their job of interest, develop mission statements and SMART goals
- Classroom readiness, refining study skills
- Cohort development and study buddies
- Focus on soft skills for the work environment
- Resumes, mock interviews, refine personal funding and childcare plan

### Training Program



#### FULL OR PART-TIME

- Participants complete the requisite training program in a high-demand field
- Some training programs involve applied, on-the-job education

### Earning the Credential

#### IN THE TARGET FIELD

- Participants earn the credential or certification in the target field following training completion
- This may be achieved immediately or longer-term

### Employment Search & Support



#### EXIT STRATEGY

- Participants work with career mentors to apply for employment and commit to a program exit strategy
- Finalize childcare plan
- Wrap up funding resources and supports

#### ULTIMATE GOAL:

PARTICIPANTS FIND AND MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT IN THE TARGET FIELD

**TRAINING OUTCOMES**

**70%**

*Of participants completed one training, and 10% completed multiple trainings*

**59%**

*Of participants seeking a credential earned at least one, and 11% earned more than one*

**4 MONTHS:**

*Average time to earn the credential from the start of training*

**EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES**

**65%**

*Of participants secured employment*

**57%**

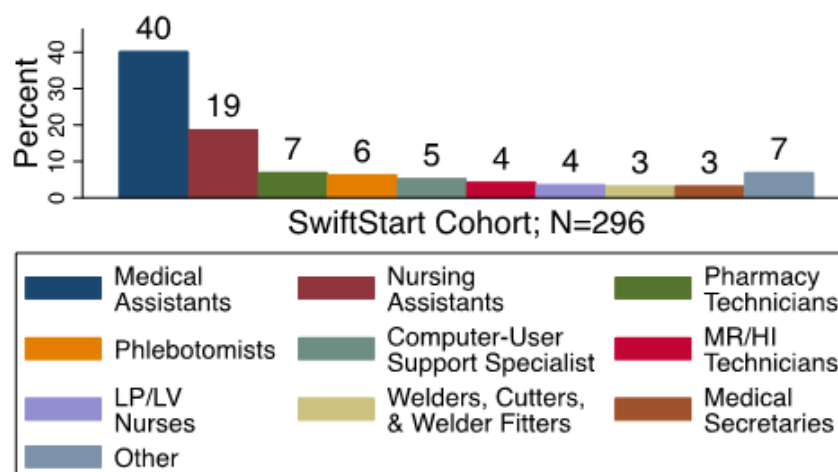
*Of the participants trained found a job in their field of choice*

**2 MONTHS:**

*Average time to secure employment after training*

**PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

Program outcomes reflect analysis of an administrative data set of 400 SwiftStart participants (as of Q4 2019), as well as survey data from approximately 80 participants exploring how SwiftStart impacted their employment and financial stability, their access to quality childcare, and which elements of the program were most effective. Survey participants were representative of the overall cohort, though slightly more likely to be successful. A small subset of SwiftStart participants also conducted interviews to share more about their experience.



**Figure 1.** SwiftStart Training Program Enrollment  
 MR/Hi - Medical Records/Health Information  
 LP/LV - Licensed Practical/Licensed Vocational  
 (Sums do not total 100% due to rounding.)

**PRE-TRAINING ASSESSMENT**

**72%**

Of respondents agreed that it helped them to identify their job skills and interests.

**TRAINING**

**91%**

Of respondents agreed that the training provider was excellent.

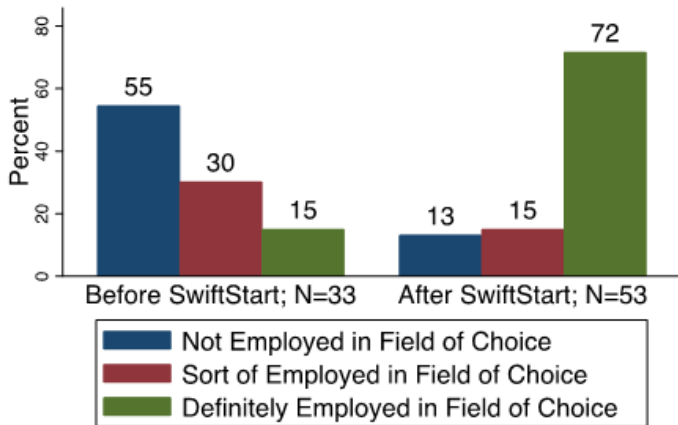
**JOB SEARCH**

**73%**

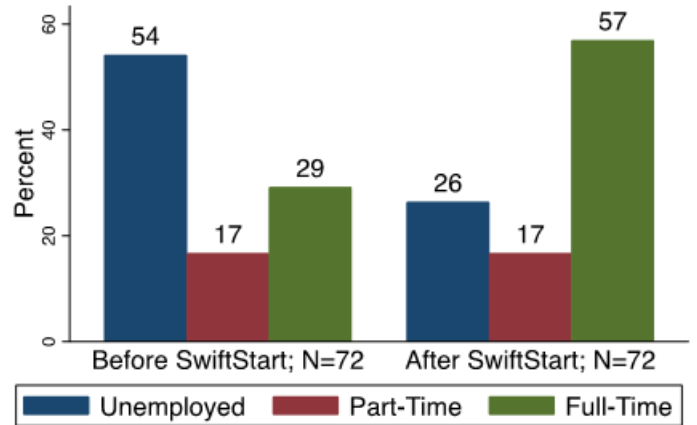
Of respondents agreed that SwiftStart helped them identify, apply for, and secure a job.

# SWIFTSTART EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**BEFORE and AFTER SwiftStart**, survey respondents reported improvements for a variety of metrics, including those with previous criminal records. 85% of respondents strongly agreed that SwiftStart was more effective than other employment assistance programs.

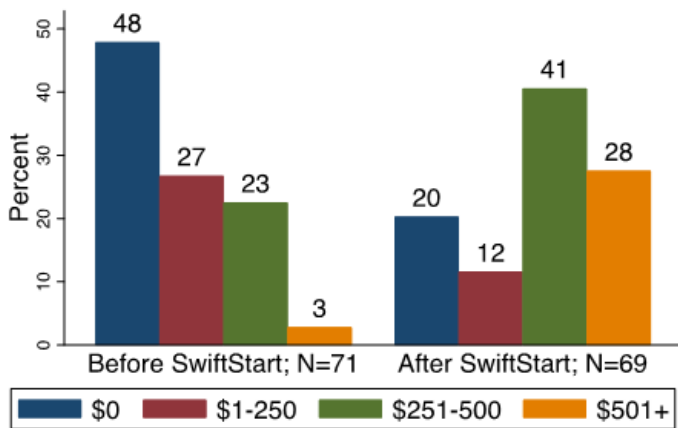


**Figure 2.** Employment in Field of Choice Before/After SwiftStart

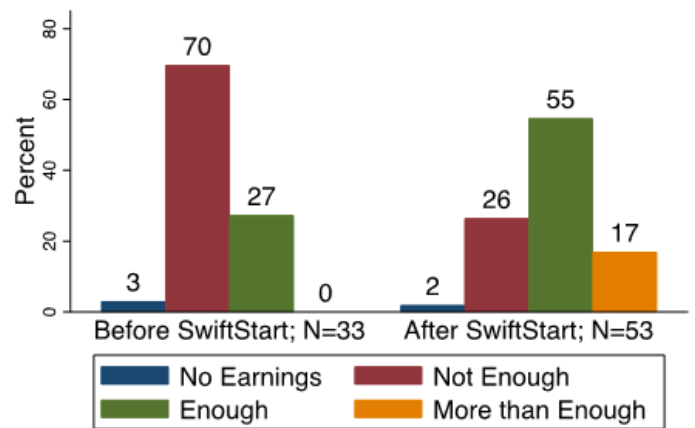


**Figure 3.** Employment Status Before/After SwiftStart

After SwiftStart, there was an increase of 57% for those definitely employed in their field of choice, and there was an increase of 28% for those with full-time employment.

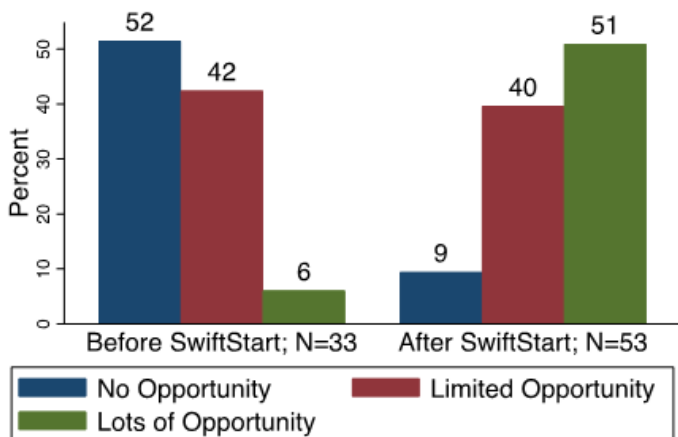


**Figure 4.** Weekly Income Before/After SwiftStart

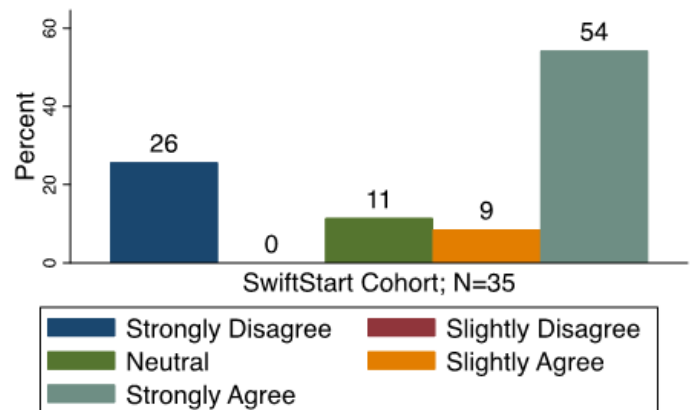


**Figure 5.** Earnings Stability Before/After SwiftStart

After SwiftStart, participant weekly income, earnings stability, and opportunity for professional advancement increased. For those respondents with previous criminal records, more than half strongly agreed that SwiftStart helped them to overcome this barrier in the job search.



**Figure 6.** Opportunity for Professional Advancement Before/After SwiftStart



**Figure 7.** "SwiftStart Helped Me Overcome Previous Criminal Record(s) in the Job Search"

# PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES

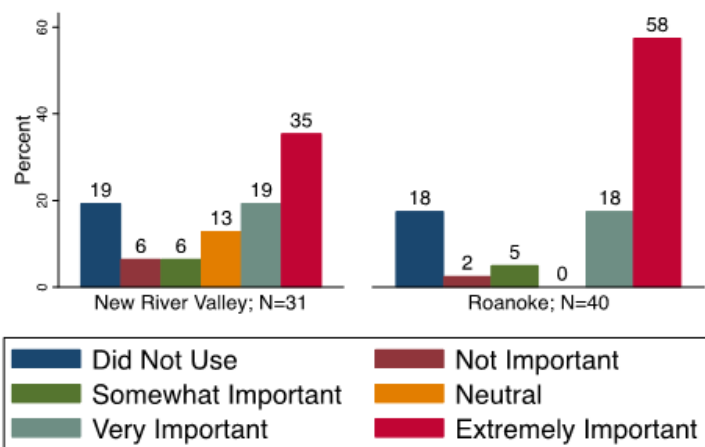
Based on the criteria to participate in SwiftStart, individuals were either unemployed (50%) or under-employed (50%) at program entry. A large majority of participants were women (91%) and mostly identified as either Non-Hispanic White (42%) or Black/African-American (52%). Almost a quarter of participants were ex-offenders (23%), and a small ratio reported having at least one disability (4%). A majority of participants had a high school diploma or equivalent (67%) before SwiftStart.

"I loved the program and all of the staff! They stayed with me from beginning to end, and made sure I had everything I needed to be successful after the program!"

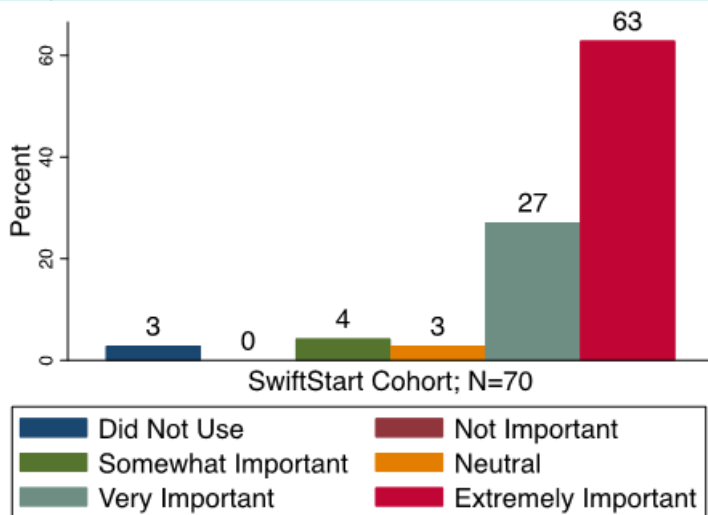
*SwiftStart Participant in Roanoke*

"SwiftStart gave me a second chance with schooling when it was financially impossible for me. I can make a real career with a lot of room for advancements within the field now. I am so incredibly grateful for this program!"

*SwiftStart Participant in the NRV*



**Figure 9.** Importance of Childcare Assistance During SwiftStart



**Figure 8.** Importance of Career Mentoring During SwiftStart

"Great program for candidates that need assistance to continue their education and support their family who are not able to afford on their own. The career mentors were amazing and helped in any way they could along with the chosen instructor for the Medical Assistant course."

*SwiftStart Participant in Roanoke*



More than 75% of survey respondents indicated that resources provided during SwiftStart were either "Very Important" or "Extremely Important," especially career mentoring and childcare, as well as tuition assistance, employment assistance, and emergency assistance,

# OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

SwiftStart has proven to be a successful, two-generation workforce development program. Opportunities moving forward include securing additional funding to continue the program. The following recommendations could further enhance program implementation and outcomes.

## TRAINING

With regard to training supports, stakeholders recommend:

- Providing in-person, hands-on instruction preferred over on-line training.
- Providing some participants with additional support and skill development, to balance their training hours and assignments with their parenting and other caretaker roles.
- Expanding offerings for healthcare training courses and clinical placements.
- Creating more opportunities for on-the-ground training for manufacturing sector skills similar to those available in the healthcare fields.
- Improving training instructors' understanding of the barriers and challenges faced by the target population.
- Offering longer-term support for trainings in more advanced degree areas, such as completing a nursing degree or a multi-year welding program.
- Providing greater flexibility in spending to support a broader scope of training topics, degrees, and certifications.
- Coordinating additional supports to streamline and systematize training offerings in advance of program delivery.
- Working with training providers to increase regularity and frequency of the trainings, to reduce wait times for participants to enter their target training program.

## EMPLOYMENT

With regard to employment supports, stakeholders recommend:

- Providing participants with additional support and confidence building activities at the point of the employment search.
- Encouraging SwiftStart career mentors to teach graduates to apply for jobs at a supportive workplace, to consider the relationship with the employer as much as the paycheck when making employment decisions.
- Dedicating staff in both program locations to improve the pipeline for apprenticeships and job referrals with and for SwiftStart graduates, using incentives for peer advocacy.
- Simultaneously, continuing and deepening coordination with the workforce development board to facilitate more direct communication with employers to understand their workforce needs.
- Collecting and sharing feedback with training providers and other program partners regarding participant performance in the workforce, and whether graduates are employed in the field related to their training.

# OPPORTUNITIES, CONT.

## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

With regard to overall program implementation, stakeholders recommend:

- Hosting regular meetings between the two SwiftStart locations to improve program operations and enable shared learning. Similarly, regular meetings with training provider partners should continue where possible, to foster communication and address ongoing needs and challenges.
- Coordinating with community partners, including the private sector, to address transportation barriers. The program can consider strategies to subsidize or develop more rideshare capacity for the target population.
- Coordinating with community partners, including the private sector, to address barriers to safe and affordable housing.
- Improving outreach to potential students and SwiftStart participants through the training providers.
- Emphasizing, through career mentors, training responsibilities and commitments for program participants to avoid last minute drop-outs from training programs.

## CHILDCARE

With regard to childcare supports, stakeholders recommend:

- Requiring that participants commit to a childcare “exit strategy” upon program completion, with SwiftStart providing two weeks’ notice to the childcare provider before a participant’s funding terminates.
- Extending childcare assistance following graduation from the training program (up to three months) to provide support as the participant transitions into employment.
- Providing feedback to childcare providers on which services and supports they offered that were most and least effective for parents with children enrolled in childcare facilities during their participation in SwiftStart.





**Figure 10.** Word Cloud from Participant Survey Comments