

The Impact of NPower's Tech Fundamentals Program in Harlem and Dallas

A preliminary report prepared for NPower

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Executive Summary

Key Takeaways

Tech Fundamentals substantially increased earnings of enrolled students. For a preliminary sample, we find that enrollment in Tech Fundamentals increased average quarterly earnings in the second year after application by \$3,308 (p -value < 0.01), a 56 percent increase relative to the control group mean of \$5,869 per quarter.

The program also led to improvements in other post-program labor market outcomes related to job stability and earnings potential:

- 19 percent higher quarterly employment rate
- 35 percent more likely to work in ever quarter of the year
- 65 percent more likely to earn more than \$30,000 during the year, which is roughly equivalent to working a \$15 per hour job full-time for the entire year

Data collection is ongoing and future reports will analyze program impacts on creditworthiness and credit usage using quarterly credit bureau data, as well as effects on health, well-being, and more granular labor market outcomes from a follow-up survey.

The Issue

Income inequality between those with and without a college degree has been increasing over the past few decades ([Katz and Murphy, 1992](#); [Goldin and Katz, 2008](#)), driven in part by an increasing demand for more-educated workers due to skill-biased technological change. Unfortunately, many young adults who grow up in low-income families are poorly prepared for post-secondary education or vocational training, leaving many without the human capital and credentials needed to have a successful career. As a result, these young adults remain on a trajectory of low earnings throughout their adult lives ([Ratcliffe and McKernan, 2010](#)). Even when workers manage to obtain the requisite skills, those who do so through alternative routes—so called STARS—have struggled to find employment in careers that typically require BA degrees ([Blair et al., 2020](#); [Blair, Debroy and Heck, 2025](#)).

Improving job skills by increasing college completion rates among minorities and individuals from underserved communities and providing training in lieu of formal education are key ways to reduce economic disparities in the U.S. Typical interventions intended to improve labor market outcomes for these groups fall into one of two categories: 1) equipping workers with basic work skills and placement in jobs for which they are already qualified, or 2) supporting longer-term investments in formal schooling such as an associate's degree. Although these approaches can be helpful, each has significant weaknesses. Randomized evaluations of training and transitional jobs programs reveal that they often work well in the short-term, with participants enjoying substantial increases in employment rates and earnings while receiving services.

These benefits are often relatively short-lived, however, with participants’ outcomes much closer to the control group’s outcomes within a few years. Community college, on the other hand, offers substantial longer-lasting returns. For example, completing an associate’s degree or diploma is estimated to increase quarterly earnings by \$1,500 for men and by \$2,000 for women more than four years after college entrance (Jepsen, Troske and Coomes, 2014). Unfortunately, completion rates are low. Fewer than 40 percent of students who start community college earn a degree or certificate within six years, which suggests that these investments have a much lower payoff for the majority of enrollees (Levesque, 2018; Bailey, Jaggars and Jenkins, 2019).

A new generation of sectoral training programs, in contrast, provide relatively short but intense training designed to prepare participants for a specific set of skilled occupations. These programs—sometimes operating outside of the formal education system—typically combine classroom-style education, practical experience, and career placement services with the goal of launching participants into a high-paying career path that would otherwise be inaccessible (Schaberg, 2020; Katz et al., 2022). Because the programs have a short duration and often offer supportive services, completion rates are close to double those seen in community college.

These programs often target the technology sector because it offers particularly strong career prospects. The computer and information technology field is expected to grow by more than 540,000 jobs in the coming decade (BLS, 2019), and, importantly, this sector provides high-paying jobs. In 2019, individuals in this field had a median average income of \$86,550, which is substantially higher than the median of all occupational fields, which was \$38,640. Furthermore, although these jobs typically require academic credentials that limit access to young adults who have not completed a post-secondary degree (Blair et al., 2020), employers are often willing to hire workers with a demonstrated capability to succeed even if they lack formal post-secondary credentials.

The Intervention

The NPower Tech Fundamentals program works to create career pathways into the information technology industry through training and job placement. Operating at eleven campuses across seven states, NPower serves young adults (aged 18–26) and veterans and military spouses. Tech Fundamentals students participate in a 16-week, tuition-free, technology training course that targets industry-recognized certifications (CompTIA A+, Google IT Support). Hard skills training is supplemented with soft skills development. Throughout the program, participants are exposed to mentors from the IT industry, complete employment readiness workshops, and receive on-going support from a social support manager who helps them identify and overcome barriers to program completion. Graduates of the training course are placed in a 7-week paid internship with a local company to further develop hard and soft skills. Upon completion, program alumni receive job placement assistance to help them match to an entry-level information technology position with top employers in the area. This job placement assistance is available to all graduates of the program for as long as they need it. Finally, alumni can return to NPower to receive further training in additional

technology courses such as cloud computing and cybersecurity.

LEO's Study

Beginning in Fall of 2019, NPower partnered with researchers from the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at the University of Notre Dame to launch a randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluation of Tech Fundamentals. Study enrollment began in the spring of 2021 and concluded in the spring of 2024 with a sample size of 1,663. The evaluation took place at NPower's Dallas, Texas and Harlem, New York sites. In order to be eligible for the program at the Dallas site, applicants were required to be either a veteran or the spouse of a veteran. The Harlem site targeted opportunity youth: those between the ages of 18 and 26, holding a high school diploma, and receiving less than 200% of the local median income. The Dallas site enrolled 833 study participants and Harlem enrolled 830.

We leverage random selection among program applicants to estimate the causal effect of Tech Fundamentals. As part of the study's design, applicants were randomly assigned to one of two groups: a treatment group or a control group. The treatment group was given the opportunity to go through the interview process with NPower staff, while the control group was referred to other employment programs. For applicants who were randomly selected to go through the interview process, they were given multiple screenings on their ability to regularly attend classes as well as their interest in the tech field. Those who passed this screening were then offered a spot in Tech Fundamentals. Since membership in each group was randomly determined, any differences in outcomes between the two groups is attributable to the Tech Fundamentals program. In total, there were 517 consenting study participants assigned to the control group (263 in Dallas, 254 in Harlem) and 1,146 assigned to the treatment group (570 in Dallas, 576 in Harlem).

We measure program effects by linking study participants to quarterly administrative data on employment and earnings from the New York Department of Labor and the Texas Workforce Commission. The data allow us to observe outcomes during the two years following random assignment for most of our sample. Most services are provided during the first four quarters after application, which we refer to as the in-program period. Future reports will additionally examine program effects on credit outcomes from a large credit bureau, as well as effects on health, well-being, and more granular labor market outcomes from a follow-up survey administered by NORC at the University of Chicago.