



# National Guard Youth Challenge and Job Challenge Program Evaluation

## SUMMARY

In 2015, the Chief Evaluation Office partnered with the [Employment and Training Administration \(ETA\)](#) to fund contractors Mathematica, Social Policy Research Associates, and MDRC to design and conduct an evaluation to better understand the implementation and outcomes of the National Guard Youth Challenge (YC) and Job Challenge (JC) program. The implementation study and outcome evaluation of three Job Challenge grants includes an analysis of post-JC outcomes between 2016 and 2018 for justice-involved graduates. The analysis drew on quantitative and qualitative data including interviews, observations, program and survey data, focus groups, and administrative data from state education and criminal justice agencies.

The National Guard YC program is an initiative that aimed to assist high school dropouts aged 16-18 in obtaining their high school diploma or GED through a 20-week, community-based residential course followed by a year of mentoring. ETA's Reentry Employment Opportunities program funded YC programs in Georgia, Michigan, and South Carolina to include more court-involved youth and add a follow-on 20-week residential occupational training program called Job Challenge (JC). JC grantee programs recruited and enrolled 905 youth from January 2016 to December 2018.

This Department of Labor-funded study includes a final report and an issue brief and was a result of the annual learning agenda process. It contributes to the growing labor evidence-base to inform [employment and training](#) programs and policies and addresses Department strategic goals and priorities.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **While the JC grants aimed to provide more services to court-involved youth, grantees reported difficulty reconciling that goal with the existing National Guard criteria for the YC program.** Without a clear definition from DOL and an agreement with the National Guard that allowed a shift from the existing criteria, programs defined court involvement as they saw fit.
- **Grantees continued to serve court-involved youth and placed a higher priority on documenting court involvement, but they did not substantially alter YC recruitment practices to reach new groups of participants or adjust service delivery for court-involved youth.**
- **JC Grantees successfully established new occupationally-focused, residential programs, creating key partnerships with community colleges.**





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The community colleges provided intensive, certificate-based vocational training and supplementary education.

- **Programs reported a need for increased staff and greater supervision and/or discipline in the JC program.**
- Across the three grantees, **86 percent of JC participants were involved in a productive activity (employment, education, or military enlistment) approximately 14 months after JC.** At the time of the survey, 81 percent of JC participants were employed.
- **Court-involved JC participants had similar rates of post-program employment to non-court-involved participants,** with no measurable differences in weekly earnings, benefits, hours, and job tenure.
- **Court-involved youth were less than half as likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education one year after the YC program,** with only 36 percent of court-involved participants receiving a credential compared to 50 percent of non-court-involved participants.
- **Court-involved JC participants had higher rates of post-program justice system involvement,** with 14 percent arrested in the year following YC, relative to only 5 percent of non-court-involved participants.
  - **An impact study would be needed** to understand whether these outcomes were influenced by the program or merely reflect individual differences among program participants.

[SEE THE FULL STUDY](#)

**TIMEFRAME:** 2015-2020

**SUBMITTED BY:** Mathematica, Social Policy Research Associates, MDRC

**DATE PREPARED:** February 2021

**PARTNER AGENCY:** Employment and Training Administration

**SPONSOR:** Chief Evaluation Office

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