PACE EVALUATION

Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA)

Findings from the *Implementation and Early Impact Report* | May 2019 | OPRE Report #2019-22

WHAT ISSUES DID VIDA SEEK TO ADDRESS?

*Many skilled jobs that pay a living wage or higher require some level of **postsecondary education or training.***

*Many low-income adults face **barriers to completing postsecondary training** such as low basic skills, limited financial resources, and family commitments.*

*Traditional **developmental education** to prepare for college entrance exams can take several years to complete and can **use up limited financial aid** resources.*

WHAT IS VIDA?

Launched in 1995 by a partnership of faith-based and business community leaders in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

Funded by local economic development councils, cities and counties in the four-county service area, and grants.

Goal is for VIDA participants to graduate with an associate's degree or industry-recognized certificate in a high-demand middle-skill occupation and achieve living-wage employment in their field.

Recruits residents of the Lower Rio Grande Valley who are unemployed, underemployed, meet federal poverty income levels, or are on public assistance; and who are 18 years or older, with a high school diploma or GED.

WHAT IS VIDA'S APPROACH?

Full-time enrollment in a certificate or degree program at a local partner college.

Weekly mandatory counseling sessions with a VIDA Counselor to monitor program progress, identify issues that could affect continued enrollment, and impart information on college success strategies.

Funding for tuition, books, and other school-related needs (e.g., transportation assistance to get to school).

An accelerated 16-week basic skills program, the College Prep Academy, to prepare those who are not college ready but have 10th-grade skill levels or better to pass college entrance exams.

Assessment of local labor markets to align the training VIDA supports with high-demand occupations.

PACE
Pathways for Advan ing Careers and Educa ion

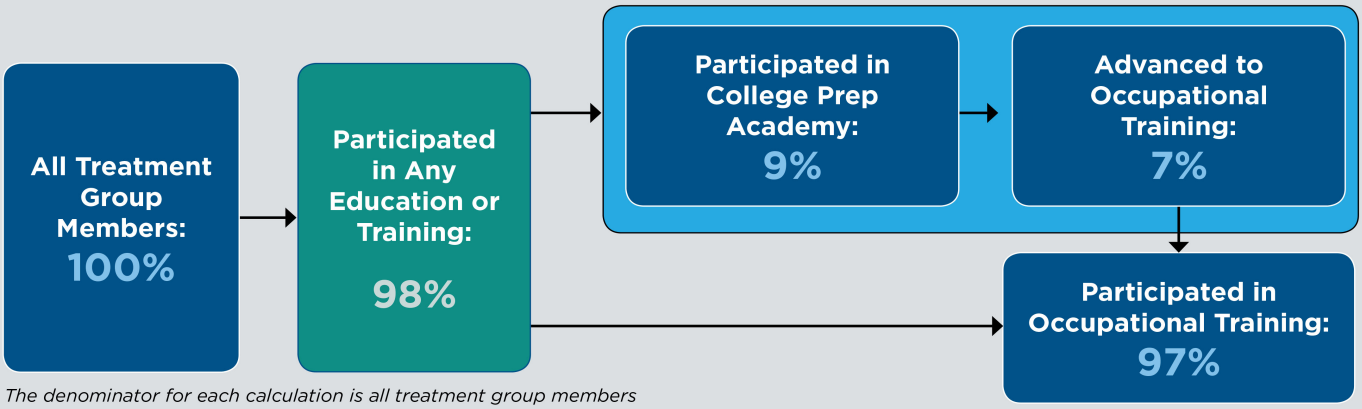
VIDA is one of nine programs included in ACF s Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) Evaluation conducted by Abt Associates. The study used an experimental design in which program applicants were assigned at random to a group that could access VIDA (the **treatment group**) or to a group that could not access the program but could enroll in other programs and services in the community (the **control group**).

WHO ENROLLED IN THE VIDA STUDY?

For PACE, the program randomly assigned 958 study participants, 478 to the treatment group and 480 to the control group. Across treatment and control group members, study participants were older than traditional college students and economically disadvantaged, but had fairly high levels of educational attainment, in line with VIDA's eligibility requirements.

- **63%** age 25 or older
- **71%** female
- **96%** Hispanic
- **73%** had at least some college education
- **51%** earned less than $15,000 in the previous year
- **67%** reported financial hardship in the previous year
- **68%** received SNAP or WIC benefits in the previous year

WHAT TRAINING DID TREATMENT GROUP MEMBERS ENROLL IN AND COMPLETE?



The denominator for each calculation is all treatment group members

Of those who enrolled in occupational training...

Most Common Programs^

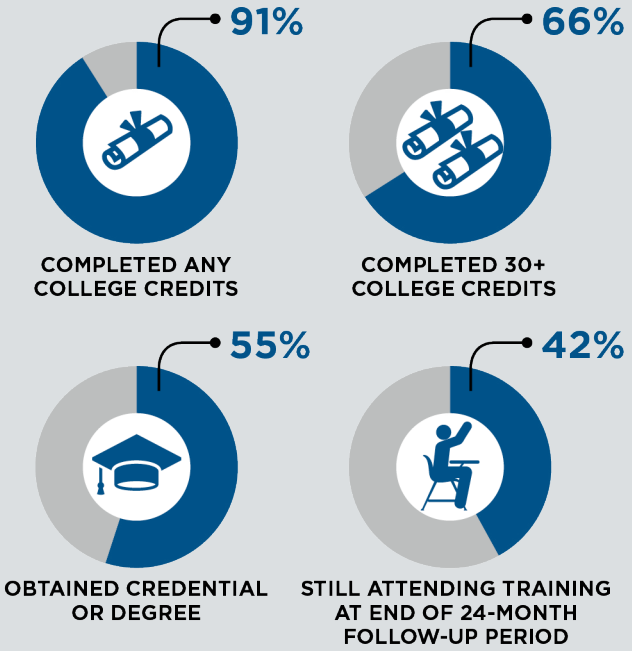
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES	14%
OTHER PROGRAMS	31%

NURSING AND ALLIED HEALTH	75%*
Licensed Vocational Nursing (LVN)	25%
Associate's Degree in Nursing (ADN)	19%
LVN to ADN pathway	8%
Allied Health	24%

^ The sum of the percents exceeds 100 percent because participants could enroll in more than one training program

** Subtotals may not add to the total due to rounding*

Credits and Credentials Received



WHAT WERE THE IMPACTS OF VIDA ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING?

VIDA participants earned more college credits.

VIDA increased the number of college credits earned by about six credits, or roughly two courses over the 24-month study period. **This impact is among the largest reported to date from random assignment tests of programs aiming to increase college success among low-income individuals.**

TOTAL COLLEGE CREDITS (#)

Sample size
- Treatment Group: 478
- Control Group: 480

*** *Significant at the 1% level*

Source: VIDA college partner college records

VIDA participants enrolled in college full-time at a greater rate.

VIDA increased full-time enrollment in college by 11 percentage points.

EVER ENROLLED FULL-TIME (%)

Sample size
- Treatment Group: 478
- Control Group: 480

*** *Significant at the 1% level*

Source: VIDA college partner college records

VIDA participants earned more college credentials.

VIDA significantly increased the receipt of college credentials by more than 8 percentage points.

EARNED A COLLEGE CREDENTIAL (%)

Sample size
- Treatment Group: 478
- Control Group: 480

*** *Significant at the 1% level*

Source: VIDA partner college records

WHAT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE DID TREATMENT GROUP MEMBERS RECEIVE?

VIDA spent an average of **almost $7,000 in direct financial assistance per participant** within 24 months of study enrollment, primarily for tuition and school-related expenses.

PARTICIPANTS RECEIVING ASSISTANCE

WHAT PROGRAM FEATURES MAY EXPLAIN VIDA'S EFFECTS?

VIDA **screens carefully** for individuals with the capacity, motivation, and commitment to attend school full-time.

During program intake, VIDA staff **assess each individual's financial need** to determine that VIDA's financial assistance will make a difference in the individual's ability to attend school.

Substantial financial assistance coupled with mandatory participation in counseling appear to be critical components of VIDA's ability to help participants graduate with certificates and degrees. VIDA participants underscored that both were important to them. VIDA's high level of financial assistance incentivizes participants to attend weekly counseling sessions, which VIDA believes gives them the tools and peer support to remain enrolled in school.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT VIDA'S IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT?

Early results show no program impacts on employment.

Although the program resulted in more treatment group members than control group members enrolling in occupational training and earning more credentials, the treatment group was not more likely to be employed at 24 months after study enrollment.

Some 42 percent of treatment group members were still enrolled in training at 24 months after study enrollment, which might explain why impacts on employment were not observed.

Among those still attending training, about half were still working toward a credential; the other half had obtained a credential, suggesting they continued in their educational pathway to attain further certificates or degrees.

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PACE
Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education

What is PACE?

The Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) evaluation uses a random assignment methodology to assess the effectiveness of nine career pathways programs targeting low-income, low skilled individuals on credential attainment, employment, and earnings. Key features of career pathways programs include:

1. A series of well-defined training steps;
2. Promising instructional approaches targeted to adult learners;
3. Services to address academic and non-academic barriers to program enrollment and completion; and
4. Connections to employment.

This brief summarizes findings from the implementation study and impacts 24 months following study intake. The study is funded by the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Next steps in the PACE evaluation of Valley Initiative for Development and Advancment (VIDA)

The next VIDA report will cover a 36-month follow-up period and will examine employment outcomes, such as average rate of employment and average earnings over successive follow-up quarters, and job characteristics, such as occupation, hourly wage, receipt of benefits, and career progress. Thus, it will begin to answer whether the educational gains that VIDA achieved after 24 months will translate into economic gains in the workplace in the longer term. It will also include a cost-benefit study. Later, an analysis at 72 months after random assignment will estimate long-term effects of the VIDA program.

This brief summarizes findings from the following report: Rolston, H., E. Copson, and K. Gardiner. (2017). *Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement: Implementation and Early Impact Report*, OPRE Report #2017-83, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This brief, the full report, and other PACE publications are available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/pathways-for-advancing-careers-and-education and www.career-pathways.org

OPRE

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