

Empire State Poverty Reduction Initiative - Buffalo
Phase 2 Implementation Plan
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During Phase 1 of ESPRI, survey responses collected from more than 900 individuals living in low income neighborhoods within the City of Buffalo indicated that financial hardship, jobs/employment, and education/training were among the most pressing challenges facing our community. And we learned that some of the primary barriers to securing and sustaining employment were transportation and child care.

To address these issues, the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County(UWBEC) is launching a supply-side workforce development pipeline through a racial equity lens to connect underemployed and unemployed City of Buffalo residents living in financial hardship with the education, training, and supportive services necessary to secure and maintain sustainable employment with companies in high-growth industries in Erie County, as well as transition into long-term financial stability.

This project will bring partners in the public, private and nonprofit sectors together to launch a comprehensive, systemic workforce development and financial stability initiative that engages key stakeholders; leverages workforce development efforts already underway; and aligns systems and resources to support long-term sustainability and maximize outcomes.

ESPRI funds will be used to build a cross-sector infrastructure and launch **THRIVE Buffalo**, a pilot that embraces a holistic workforce development pipeline and supportive services approach informed by and modeled in part on a recognized national best practice program in Houston, TX known as United Way Thrive/Upskill Houston. It is predicated on three pillars:

- **Workforce Development:** help individuals find employment, or better employment, through job readiness skills, vocational training, and supportive services to address barriers to success (e.g. child care, transportation);
- **Financial Education:** provide access to a variety of financial education strategies to help individuals build strong financial habits as they transition into family-sustaining employment; and
- **Financial Products and Services:** facilitate long-term financial stability for individuals by connecting them with resources and strategies to help them build/maintain assets.

THRIVE Buffalo will work with Employ Buffalo Niagara on the supply side of sector pilot projects with key high-growth industries including advanced manufacturing, healthcare/life sciences, and hospitality/tourism. THRIVE Buffalo will also incorporate additional industries including construction and other trades as opportunities emerge in those sectors.

Program Model

THRIVE Buffalo will concentrate on City of Buffalo residents; particularly low-wage earners. Recruiters will identify potential candidates not currently served by existing efforts and Care Coordinators will work with candidates and connect them with training, supportive services and other resources from intake through placement and for up to one year where indicated. The program structure is as follows:

Recruitment/Referral:

Candidates will enter THRIVE from a variety of sources within the public workforce system with additional referral sources coming from the Erie County Department of Social Services (ECDSS), 2-1-1WNY and 3-1-1 City of Buffalo Call Centers, nonprofit service providers, employers with large populations of low-wage workers and Recruiters that help identify the working poor.

Intake and Care Coordination:

THRIVE Buffalo Care Coordinators will be hired through a performance based contract and will conduct a standardized intake process to evaluate skills, experience, career interests, training and supportive service needs and create an individualized plan for each candidate. They will connect candidates to necessary pre-employment training, as well as other services or resources necessary to address barriers to employment.

Placement and Retention:

Care Coordinators will refer candidates for open positions through a variety of sources including Employ Buffalo Niagara, existing employer relationships, through the contracted nonprofit, or positions available through NYSDOL or BETC. Once a candidate has secured employment, the Care Coordinator will maintain regular contact for up to 12 months to ensure that any ongoing barriers to employment are addressed.

Staffing and Governance

The ESPRI Director, with assistance from ESPRI support staff, will be responsible for the administration of the grant including but not limited to reporting, supervision, performance tracking, governance oversight, monitoring work plans and contracts, management of Recruiters and interface with One Stop entry points.

The THRIVE Buffalo Director will be responsible for management and oversight of THRIVE BUFFALO including Care Coordination contract management, facilitation of the THRIVE Buffalo Team, integration of Financial Stability services, supervision and coalition management. The governance structure will ensure that the broader community, including individuals experiencing financial hardship, is engaged throughout the implementation process through the following governing bodies:

1. **Executive Committee:** this cross-sector group is responsible for overall governance, vision and strategy, and systems integration, and will meet monthly;
2. **Community Advisory Committee:** this group will include some members of the current Task Force and monitor the progress of the pilot and identify barriers that can be addressed by the Executive Committee;
3. **THRIVE Buffalo Team:** this group will facilitate service provision and coordinate with partner entities, and identify individual and programmatic challenges for collaborative problem solving.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Targeted results will be measured using indicators agreed on by the key stakeholders across a continuum that includes both demand and supply-side outcomes. Partner organizations will track and report data on a regular schedule and UWBECC will contract with an external evaluator to collect and analyze the data and regularly share results with all the partners.

Timeline and Goals

The timeline assumes a Phase 2 contract start date of January 1, 2018, a contract end date of March 31, 2019 and an expected request for a no-cost extension; minimally through calendar year 2019 thus providing 2 years for start-up/full implementation of THRIVE Buffalo. Performance metrics for the initiative are enumerated in the Implementation Plan and will concentrate on supply side and demand side measurements with a particular focus on who and how many people are being served and whether they are better off financially because of their participation.

Project Sustainability

THRIVE Buffalo will leverage existing public and nonprofit workforce resources in a braided funding model designed to change the workforce development landscape in Buffalo. ESPRI funds will be used as a catalyst for systems change to fund aspects of the project for which other funding sources have yet been identified and proven success of the model will invariably lead to the reallocation of existing public, private and nonprofit sector workforce development resources as well as new opportunities within the Foundation community.

