

FINALIST: OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION



Overview: OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION's (www.opportunityjunction.org) mission is to fight poverty by helping low-income Contra Costa residents gain the skills and confidence to get and keep jobs that support themselves and their families. From 1999 the agency has grown from a start-up nonprofit running a single job training and placement program into a regional hub with an array of effective programs for low-income job seekers. OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION's three core programs include:

1. **Job Training and Placement Program (JTTP)** prepares participants for administrative careers by combining computer training with life skills, case management, paid experience, mental health services, career skills, job placement, and alumni services.
2. Individualized **Career Counseling and Placement Assistance (CCPA)**, offered in partnership with SparkPoint Contra Costa provides case management, career counseling, group activities, and job placement.
3. **Road Map to College**, offered in partnership with Los Medanos College (www.losmedanos.edu), guides and supports low-income youth, aged 18-24, to enroll in and complete Los Medanos Community College.

OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION also provides an evening Technology Center which offers community free access to computers, Internet, classes in software applications, and English as a second language. Recently they've expanded services to include access to career coaching, additional workshops on career-related topics, and basic resume revisions and interview assistance.

Grant Request: OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION plans to use the Impact 100 Grant to support the Road Map to College program, which was started in 2015. It has recently been enhanced in two significant ways: 1) changing the focus of the target participants from "low income" to "high risk" ages 18-24 youth (meaning pregnant or parenting youth, foster youth, justice-system involved, disconnected youth, and those with disabilities), and 2) broadening the scope of the program to include support for obtaining an AA degree, achieving credits to transfer to a BA program, and continuing to offer technical skills training, which was the program's initial focus. Our grant will support, in part, the critical positions of the college and career counselors, two staff who represent OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION's "secret sauce" of relationship to students, providing one year of intensive support to help students, enroll, attach, and persist into their third semester, and college expenses such as books, supplies, laptops, work uniforms and transportation.

OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION is not your typical top-down, expert centered program; instead it engages each participant cohort in the planning process. Consequently, the program is student focused and effective, helping each participant visualize his/her own success, build a sense of ownership, and develop the feeling of mutual support within the cohort.

Also, unique to OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION's program is its integration with Los Medanos and its approach to meet the students where they are. Given the life obstacles that these students are facing now or have faced in the past, many of their college careers end the first day— they become over-whelmed and confused, give up and turn around never getting beyond the parking lot. This program builds bridges and support to help these students. For example, the program hosts the college staff at OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION's location, avoiding the daunting maze at the college, by bringing assessment staff, financial aid experts, academic counselors, etc. The program also bridges the students to the campus by providing campus tours and visiting the various departments, resource offices, etc. Throughout, OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION meets regularly with each student to help him/her plan, register, prepare, and complete his/her college training. Then it works with employers to help place the participants in training-related careers.

Projected Impact: The target population is unable to achieve the same educational and employment as the general student population. The barriers they face are staggering ('16-'17 data): 70% were unemployed and not in school, 56% had experienced trauma, 40% had been in foster care, 30% had a disability, and 15% had a prior conviction. Our grant would help expand the reach of the program to those who need it most and provide a variety of career path options. The impact to the students who complete the program and achieve gainful employment would be life changing and set them (and their families) on a path for success.

Transformational Potential: With additional funding, this program could transform an at-risk portion of the community, alleviate generational poverty, and influence and/or provide a model for other communities.

Sustainability: The Impact 100 grant would account for just over 21% of the program funds for a two-year period (\$102,000 of total project of \$481,350 two-year budget). The balance comes from 4 other stable funding sources. Given its strong Board and impressive leadership team, we are confident that this program will produce results and gain additional/ongoing support. Demonstrating employment outcomes on a larger scale may open continued funding from the college's strong workforce allocation.