

CUNY's Workforce HUB

A New Model for College-Based
Career-Track Training



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I Introduction

The NYC Accelerated Workforce Recovery HUB (the HUB) emerged in the aftermath of a generational economic crisis, as New York City's economy reeled from the sudden and staggering job losses touched off by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Both lead partner institutions, Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College (Hostos) and LaGuardia Community College (LaGuardia), two schools within the 25-college City University of New York (CUNY) system, pride themselves on offering effective job training and employment programs to the low-income communities they serve. Yet the sheer volume of jobs lost early in the pandemic, the concentration of those jobs within low-paying, face-to-face industries of the sort that many in those communities were trying to advance beyond, and the slow local pace of economic recovery that followed, put severe strain on their capacity to respond.



But even as the pandemic showed the limitations of business as usual and the urgent need for a new approach, the HUB was conceived and has been operated as far more than an emergency measure. Rather, the HUB is a thoroughly intentional attempt to grapple with and solve long-standing problems of practice within New York City's job training and employment services field. As this case study will detail, the HUB has taken on inequities and inefficiencies within the workforce community generally, and their host institutions specifically. Indeed, the partners' thoughtful approach, combined with the potential for systemic impact far beyond the two colleges, compelled the New York Community Trust (NYCT) to make the largest grant award for workforce in its 100-year history to launch the HUB in 2022.

Through nearly three years of programming, the HUB has begun to fulfill that potential. As of June 30, 2025, HUB programs across the two colleges have directly enrolled a total of 2,006 participants, with 80 percent completing all courses and nearly 1,200 students earning industry credentials—both marks well above average for programs of this kind. While not all students enrolled with employment as their objective, over 900 HUB students have secured jobs directly related to their training coursework, with at least an additional 119 entering college. LaGuardia HUB students who have secured training-related employment are earning an average wage at placement of \$23 per hour—nearly 24 percent higher than the average hourly wage of \$18.61 earned by workers placed through New York City's Workforce1 Career Center system during fiscal year 2023.¹

HUB PROGRAM ENROLLMENT



¹ New York City Workforce Development Board, [Meeting Minutes](#), September 12, 2023.

No less important are the systemic changes that the HUB has driven. The HUB's core model of increased access and comprehensive support services for all learners in workforce programs within Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) divisions has indirectly impacted more than 2,800 students across the two colleges. Both colleges have established scholarship funds to support students taking noncredit programs in preparation for the job market, with LaGuardia awarding 353 scholarships for these courses between January 2022 and June 2024. And a growing number of continuing education graduates have received academic credit for prior learning (CPL) upon enrolling in degree programs.

This case study is the first of two publications to closely examine the Workforce Recovery HUB. It begins with a review of how the HUB came together, informed by the previous experiences and hard-won insights of the teams at Hostos and LaGuardia. Next is a look at the model itself, with a focus on the learner experience, followed by a closer examination of innovative elements such as the intensive process of matching students to courses and the Educational Case Manager role, and including lessons the partners have learned over their two-plus years of running the HUB. The analysis concludes with a look at outcomes thus far, considering both individual and system impacts. The second publication, to be released in early 2025, will place the HUB in the context of national best practices for community college workforce programs, and offer recommendations for policymakers and other stakeholders.

II

Origins

The Ambiguous World of ACE

The question of how much colleges should directly and intentionally emphasize a labor market mission of helping students achieve career success and economic security, as opposed to a purely academic mission of offering classes and degree programs without regard for labor market outcomes, has no single right answer. In truth, most colleges try to have it both ways. As an institution, CUNY is rightly proud of the recognition it has gained as an effective vehicle to lift students from low-income backgrounds into the middle class.² But with few exceptions, its colleges emphasize campus life and academics as selling points to prospective students—and when they do emphasize economic mobility, the focus is on the power of college degrees to positively change the life trajectories of graduates.

This institutional ambiguity is especially pronounced at community colleges such as Hostos and LaGuardia. Community college academic programs pursue a dual mission of directly preparing some students for the workforce through AAS (associate of applied science) degrees, while helping others ready themselves for transfer into four-year programs after earning the traditional associate degree. But the tension is perhaps most acutely felt within adult and continuing education (ACE) departments.



To the extent most people are aware of ACE programs at all, they might think about course offerings to help community members learn English for Speakers of Other Languages or earn a high school equivalency. But a major focus of most ACE divisions, particularly at schools such as Hostos and LaGuardia that serve largely low-income students, is on programs expressly designed to prepare learners for employment.

Programs of this type include training courses that lead to professional licensure or certification, contract courses in which employers pay for a cohort of incumbent workers to receive customized training to upgrade their skills, and related offerings.

This subset of ACE programs, often known as continuing education and workforce development (CEWD), are closely and clearly aligned to a college's career readiness mission. At the same time, they present a picture far different from the conventional, romantic, and factually outdated standard mental image of the college classroom as a place where professors and students engage in abstract intellectual discovery.

² CUNY, "[New Study Confirms CUNY's Power As National Engine of Economic Mobility](#)," June 17, 2020.

By the time of the pandemic, the CEWD teams at both LaGuardia and Hostos were led by longtime workforce development practitioners who saw vast promise in job training programs explicitly affiliated with higher education institutions, but were frustrated by operational constraints, restrictive funding models, and institutional norms. They determined that their single biggest challenge was how they secured revenue to offer and operate programs, and the ways those revenue-generating practices unintentionally distorted the work of helping low-income students build skills, earn credentials, and advance into career-track work.

One norm of ACE divisions is that programs must be self-funding. This left the teams at Hostos and LaGuardia with two options to bring in revenue: either attract students who could pay their own way—which few low-income learners in the Bronx and Queens could do—or pursue and secure grants to fund free training for learners. Often, these grants provided students access to a wide range of support services not available for tuition-paying students.

Organizations that largely rely upon securing grants to sustain themselves often struggle to build a meaningful and sustainable identity. For one thing, the inherent unreliability of grants from one year or funding cycle to the next means that even successful programs can quickly disappear—frustrating employer partners, not to mention students and instructors. Further, the constant need to win new grants makes it difficult for CEWD teams to proactively plan new programs and sequences in response to labor market trends, or to build system infrastructure and staff capacity that could improve data collection and program performance. Finally, pursuing workforce grants brought ACE divisions into direct competition with each other, and with the nonprofit workforce development provider organizations they saw as potential partners.



Tuition is limited, and doesn't fund supportive services for students. Grants are time-limited and siloed, usually restricted to single occupational programs. That funding structure represents the headwinds we're fighting against.

—Hannah Weinstock, Senior Director
Workforce Development
LaGuardia Community College

“Tuition is limited, and doesn’t fund supportive services for students,” explains Hannah Weinstock, Senior Director of Workforce Development at LaGuardia. “Grants are time-limited and siloed and usually restricted to single occupational programs. That funding structure represents the headwinds we’re fighting against.”

CEWD instructors and administrators had long noticed a distinction between classes of self-paying students and those composed of grant-funded/scholarship students: thanks in part to the extra services they were receiving, learners in the second group seemed more likely to persist in and complete their programs. It logically followed that they were achieving better employment and earnings outcomes as well. Unfortunately, pre-HUB CEWD courses did not have the capacity to closely track tuition-paying students’ job placement, retention, or earnings outcomes, and only could do so for grant-funded initiatives if and when resources permitted.

In turn, this helped blunt one of the great theoretical assets of ACE departments: the capacity to create a new program responding to an urgent need or opportunity in the labor market within a few months, compared to the multiple years required to approve new degree programs for accreditation. Without data to show evidence of successful labor market outcomes for learners, neither self-paying students nor potential philanthropic funders were likely to pay the costs of new classes.

The COVID Crisis

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached the United States in early 2020, New York City was at the epicenter of the crisis. As hospitals filled beyond capacity and the death count rose into the hundreds, then the thousands, the city all but shut down. Total job loss between February and May was estimated at 1.25 million, with three-quarters of that coming in low-wage, face-to-face sectors such as food service, hospitality, and arts and entertainment.⁴

Unlike the Great Recession of 2010 and other previous recent downturns, groups most likely to have lost their jobs included persons of color, immigrants, young adults, and less-educated workers. These are the communities that Hostos and LaGuardia primarily serve through education and workforce preparation. “Those were service-sector, hourly workers, earning cash, who needed to pay rent and buy groceries,” recalls Sunil Gupta, Vice-President of Adult and Continuing Education at LaGuardia. “They were our students, or family members of our students, both ACE and degree.”



By the winter, the city was coming out of its shutdown, as reopening and emergency federal funding began to fuel job gains—albeit more slowly in New York City than virtually anywhere else in the country. Even so, the crisis highlighted and in some cases accelerated the vulnerability of low-wage, high-turnover jobs already at long-term risk due to automation, the increasing prevalence of remote work, and other labor market trends.

But this was not the only implication for the two colleges, which like virtually all schools had quickly shifted to remote learning at the outset of the crisis. Student enrollment, which had peaked in the mid-2010s and gently declined through the last years of that decade, plummeted during the pandemic and its aftermath. LaGuardia saw a drop of 23 percent from fall 2019 to fall 2021, while enrollment at all CUNY community colleges fell by 13.2 percent between January 2021 and January 2022.⁴

While many factors contributed to the decline, one consideration that had begun to manifest even before the pandemic was the question of whether college was “worth it.” A growing number of Americans were doubtful: among one group of students surveyed in 2023, the percentage arguing that college wasn’t worth the cost was 20 percent—up from 8 percent just four years earlier.⁵

Convergence and Creation

By late 2021, the CEWD teams at LaGuardia and Hostos both had developed concepts for new programming models that they soon realized were closely aligned. Their shared premises were to establish courses that would offer the same high level of support services for all students, regardless of how their seat was paid for; and to secure funding that was flexible enough to respond to demand from learners and/or employers based on labor market trends.

It helped that the key players, specifically Hostos Vice-President for Continuing Education and Workforce Development Dr. Evelyn Fernandez-Ketcham and her LaGuardia counterparts Sunil Gupta and Hannah Weinstock, Senior Director of Workforce Development, were longtime colleagues and friends. “We have history, the three of us,” Fernandez-Ketcham explains. “We come from the community-based space, and had worked together through workforce circles before finding ourselves in higher education. We were having similar experiences in trying to engage community colleges in workforce development, not just basic education, but trying to get participants to earn industry-recognized credentials.”

³ James A. Parrott and Lina Moe, “[The Covid-19 New York City Economy Three Months In: Reopening, and Continuing Low-Wage Worker Recession](#),” Center for New York City Affairs, The New School, June 2020

⁴ Gabriel Sandoval, “[CUNY Community Colleges Contend With Plunging Enrollment](#),” The City, Feb. 1, 2022.

⁵ EAB, “[Recruiting ‘Gen P.’](#)” 2023

Gupta echoes the point. “There’s mission alignment from our previous experiences, and a level of frustration that helped us identify what we did and didn’t want this project to be.”

That the partners were not just willing but eager to work together ran counter to the norm within CUNY, where colleges often are as likely to clash as to collaborate—an all too familiar dynamic for the three HUB designers. “Hostos and LaGuardia staff saw the power in working together and were eager to collaborate with each other and community-based organizations,” says Dr. Fernandez-Ketcham. “We didn’t have any of that. We wanted to collaborate and saw the power in doing so.”

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— Dr. Evelyn Fernandez-Ketcham, Vice President
Hostos Continuing Education
& Workforce Development

At LaGuardia, team members had begun to develop a new pilot, Jobs Direct, that they sometimes referred to as “ASAP for ACE”—a reference to CUNY’s widely lauded Accelerated Success in Associate Programs (ASAP) model, which had more than doubled on-time graduation rates for students in associate’s degree programs. The theory behind ASAP is simply to focus on eliminating the barriers that impede students from persisting in and completing two-year programs. ASAP does this by providing both financial resources, including tuition waivers, textbook assistance, and subsidies for public transportation; and comprehensive academic and support services, including block schedules, career development and advising, and access to other forms of assistance.

For LaGuardia’s workforce team, the ACE version would prioritize scholarships for non-degree students, complemented by intensive support services. “We know ASAP works,” says Weinstock. “It’s financial aid together with intensive advising, and that’s what we’re doing but with an employment focus.” Jobs Direct similarly provided a variety of financial and academic support services for learners seeking certificates as Certified Clinical Medical Assistants and Central Service Technicians, including scholarships that covered between 80 and 100 percent of tuition. The program additionally offered job placement support, career advising from industry professionals, and assistance in building employability and essential skills such as communication and critical thinking.⁶



CEWD leadership at Hostos was thinking along the same lines. The team was exasperated with the public workforce system’s voucher-based approach to supporting training, which did not align with their program menu. Worse, as the post-pandemic economy remained sluggish, they grew increasingly concerned that would-be students could not afford training they sorely needed. In response, they were looking to create and launch no-cost programs for CEWD and matriculated students that would respond to industry demand.

Hostos also brought the confidence of having successfully administered a program that would serve as a template for the HUB: the federal Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG). Hostos initially secured an HPOG award in 2010 and won a renewal in 2015, each for a five-year term. Focused on connecting public assistance recipients and other low-income

⁶ LaGuardia Community College, “[Jobs Direct Initiative Aims to Put Students on the Fast Track to Employment](#),” June 2, 2022. Jobs Direct funders include the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Foundation, Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, Siegel Family Endowment, TD Charitable Foundation, Amazon, Pinkerton Foundation, and Here to Here.

jobseekers to healthcare positions including Certified Nursing Assistants, Patient Care Technicians, Clinical Medical Assistants, and Community Health Workers, HPOG covered the costs of support services, job placement, and guidance around pursuing a college degree—all elements of the later HUB. From 2010-2020, Hostos enrolled over 2,000 participants through HPOG, with an 82 percent completion rate. Hostos CEWD was one of 32 HPOG grantees to participate in a random-assignment national impact study conducted by an outside evaluator, Abt Associates, which found that Hostos delivered statistically significant positive results on 8 of 10 key indicators. Dr. Evelyn Fernandez-Ketcham and her team felt that a strong case management model was the main driver of this success.

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Students need to get jobs, to support their families and earn sustainable wages. LaGuardia is top of the line when it comes to workforce. They're good company and I like to collaborate, and that's part of what comes from being apart of the greatest urban university.

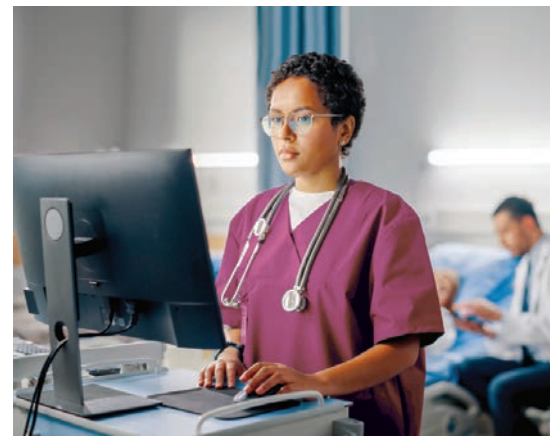
—Dr. Daisy Cocco De Filippis, President
Eugenio María de Hostos Community
College, CUNY

Both workforce teams could move forward with confidence that their respective college leaders had their backs. LaGuardia President Kenneth Adams came to his role after a long career as a business intermediary and public official, including stints as the head of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce and New York's Empire State Development, before serving as Dean of Workforce Programs at Bronx Community College. At Hostos, President Dr. Daisy Cocco De Filippis, a globally esteemed author and literary critic, brought an equally strong commitment to the economic advancement of students at her institution. “Students need to get jobs, to support their families and earn sustainable wages, to survive in New York City,” she states. The two presidents were excited to join forces. “LaGuardia is top of the line when it comes to workforce,” says Dr. Cocco De Filippis. “They're good company and I like to collaborate, and that's part of what comes from being apart of the greatest urban university.”

Beyond CUNY, other stakeholders across New York City's workforce development field were feeling similar frustrations with a decentralized system, largely composed of community-based and nonprofit providers, which could not respond at scale to the crisis in the labor market. “Community-based workforce programs were struggling to handle this much demand,” recalls Roderick Jenkins, Senior Program Director, Promising Futures at New York Community Trust and co-chair of the New York City Workforce Funders, a cooperative foundation effort that has awarded \$18 million in grants for capacity building, policy reform, advocacy, research, employer engagement efforts, and demonstration projects since 2001. “We needed an alternative, a system that was agile.”

He was struck as well by the rarity of New York City's approach. “Few cities have the number and variety of community-based workforce organizations that New York City has. Everywhere else, community colleges are the major source of career training, because they work with employers to prepare people for the local labor market. Only New York has CBOs that do it.”

A study published in 2021 from the research nonprofit Opportunity America confirmed the sense of Jenkins and others that CUNY could power an alternative approach. Noting increasing employer demand for workers with higher order skills and education and training beyond high school but short of a bachelor's degree, Opportunity America highlighted ACE as an underutilized asset requiring a “new vision” and greater support. Specific recommendations included greatly expanding work-based learning opportunities, offering academic credit for prior work experience, integrating industry certifications into credit and noncredit programs, providing career counseling at intake, emphasizing job placement and other services to help students and completers successfully navigate the labor market, and financial aid for non-credit students.⁷ The HUB ultimately would incorporate every one of these elements.



⁷ Opportunity America, “[Today's Students, Tomorrow's Workforce: A Roadmap for Change at CUNY Community Colleges](#),” September 2021.

Armed with Opportunity America's report and driven by the ongoing lag in New York City's jobs recovery, as well as the enrollment plunge across CUNY's community colleges, the partners were ready to move. On January 18, 2022, CUNY announced the launch of the HUB at the two colleges "to help low-income communities throughout New York... that have been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic." Describing the effort as "a new model for high-quality workforce development at scale," the announcement pledged to train more than 400 workers for high-demand jobs and expand support services that would help connect graduates to employment and higher education. New York Community Trust funded the initiative with a seed grant of \$1.65 million.⁸ Since then, the HUB partners have leveraged their NYCT grant with more than \$725,000 from federal Perkins Act funding, as well as nearly \$132,000 from the New York State Future of Work Center, which flows through CUNY's central office.



CUNY announced the launch of the HUB at the two colleges ***"to help low-income communities throughout New York...that have been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic."*** Describing the effort as ***"A new model for high-quality workforce development at scale,"*** the announcement pledged to train 400 workers for high-demand jobs and expand support.



The Model

Theory of Action

The HUB simultaneously represents a radical reimagining of what CEWD programs offer to their students, and a logical extension of previous practice. Most of its core elements, including more intensive advising, access to support services, and internship experiences, were already present in various grant-supported programs.

"None of these things are necessarily new," explains LaGuardia's Hannah Weinstock. "What's new is building all these elements into our core business model across training programs that didn't previously have them."

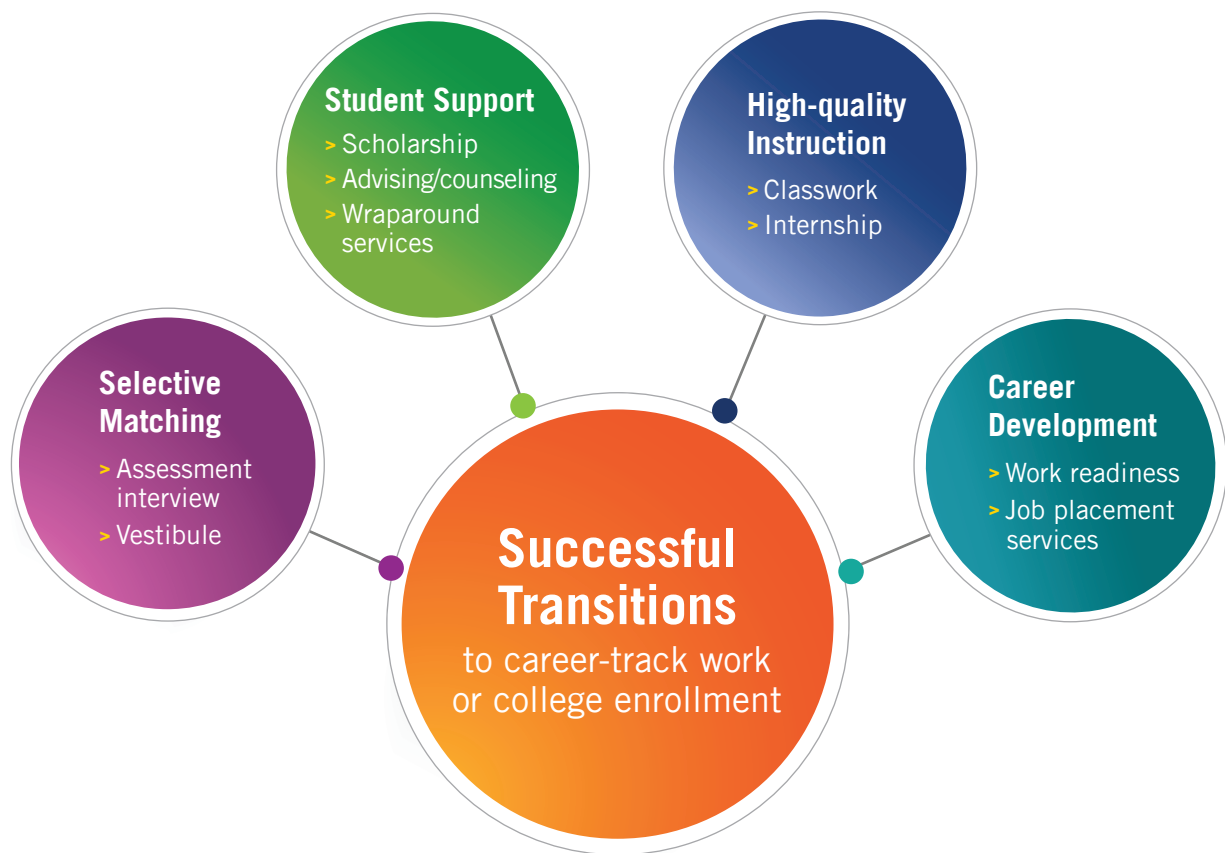
Also new is the concept of equity between students, regardless of how their seats were paid for. "Instead of looking at students coming in through tuition, grant, or contract, the HUB just looks at students as students, and ensures they get the same support services," says Peter Mertens, Assistant Dean of Continuing Education and Workforce Development at Hostos.

The HUB theory of action is relatively straightforward, and would strike many workforce practitioners as common sense. Simply put, it aims to bring together existing best practices while eliminating the distinctions between grant-funded and self-paying students. The program designers determined to test the premise that intensive and intentional matching at the point of intake, high-quality instruction that included meaningful work experience leading to credentials, comprehensive support services beginning with scholarships and featuring intensive advising, and strong career development and job placement support at the conclusion, would enable students to make successful transitions to jobs that offered career pathways (**See Figure 1**).

Of course, the two CUNY colleges could not deliver the entirety of the model themselves. The project leaders determined that the HUB would secure partnerships with employers to provide insight on hiring demand, host work experiences, and consider hiring program completers. A set of community-based partner organizations would refer candidates whose interests matched the training programs offered. Finally, the partners would track learners' subsequent employment outcomes, for three reasons: to review and when necessary adjust its mix of course offerings; to assess and find ways to improve the model over time; and to report to NYCT and other funders on performance.

⁸ CUNY, ["Two CUNY Community Colleges Launch Initiative to Help New Yorkers Recover from the Economic Setbacks of COVID-19, with a Focus on Hard-Hit Residents of Queens and The Bronx,"](#) January 18, 2022

FIGURE 1: THE HUB THEORY OF ACTION



To implement this theory would require both new capacity and a new way of thinking. Historically, the teams responsible for program development, social work, and career services within the ACE divisions had never been asked to collaborate; now, the success of the model would depend upon it. HUB leaders recognized that they needed to achieve both cultural and operational change.

"It's a lot of moving pieces," says Claudio Gaete, Senior Manager for Program and Student Success at LaGuardia.

"With one program, it's a challenge; now imagine doing it with five or six." Regarding the importance of winning hearts and minds among staff working on the project, he notes the issue of getting all team members to see the new way of doing things "as a value add to the program, instead of as one more thing to do."

The HUB needed team members who both knew CUNY and the respective colleges well enough to navigate and be effective in those environments, and understood the flaws of the legacy approach to CEWD enough to want to try new ways to serve students and employers. Hiring was slow, thanks in large part to new expectations around working from home and the need to establish clear policies in response. At both schools, it took almost all of 2022—about nine months into the initial 18-month grant from NYCT to fully staff the team of job developers and education case managers.

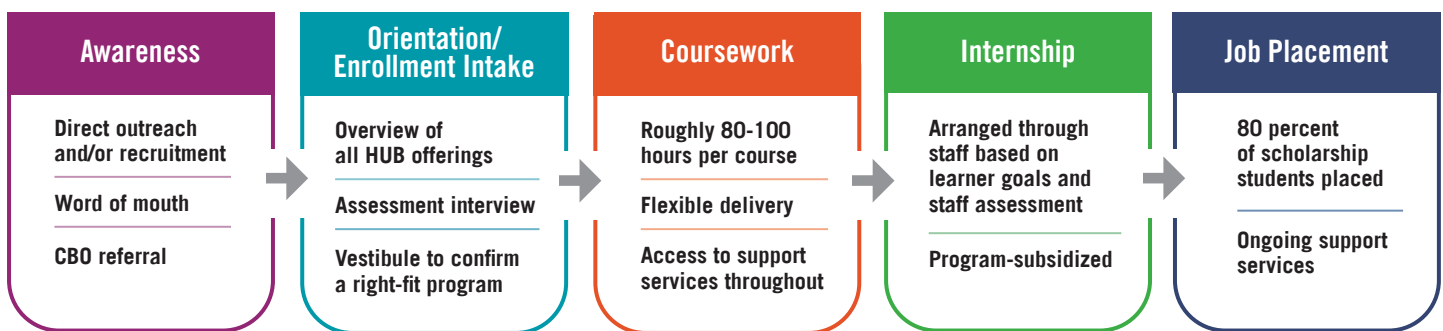
One major step came late that year when Hannah Weinstock recruited Gaete, who had been at LaGuardia since 2016 in different roles within the ACE division, to lead the team of Educational Case Managers (ECMs) that would prove key to the model's success. "They were having a real tough time finding somebody to be a good fit," he recalls. "I had a lot of relationships there already, and I brought institutional knowledge on the programs themselves."

The Hub Learner Experience: Intake to Enrollment

The HUB aspires to standardize and professionalize the core value proposition of CEWD programs: within a span of months, a hard-working student can learn about a training program, enroll, quickly build skills, and earn a credential that will help them land a job that could lead to career success and economic security. From a learner perspective, the experience has five stages: **awareness of the program**, **orientation** and **enrollment intake**, **coursework**, **internship**, and **job placement**. Through each stage, HUB team members keep learners focused on their long-term career development (See Figure 2).

According to the HUB's own analysis, the majority of students who ultimately enrolled in HUB courses at LaGuardia learned about the opportunity through either a web search (30 percent) or through a family member or friend (21 percent). Specifically, many students first heard about the HUB from someone in their personal network, and then went online to find out more, including potential scholarship opportunities. A very small share got connected through community-based organization referrals—one aspect of early implementation where the HUB struggled, as detailed in section IV below. Hostos had less comprehensive data on how students initially connected, but broadly similar results.

FIGURE 2: THE HUB LEARNER EXPERIENCE



Once potential students connect to the HUB, they engage in an intensive intake process. The depth and focus of this process is where the HUB truly begins to distinguish itself from business as usual in ACE programs. At a high level, the process has three objectives: to confirm that a specific training program represents the best fit for the student's interests and talents, to ensure the student is fully aware of the expectations and requirements of the training, and to determine what supports will position the student for success in the program, including their eligibility for a full or partial scholarship.

This degree of intentionality represents a sea change from pre-HUB practice. "The idea of comprehensive intake and assessment is new for continuing education," says Hostos Senior Advisor Daliz Perez-Cabezas. Traditionally, she explains, intake and enrollment processes for students in tuition-based cohorts were strictly transactional. But the new approach was necessary for the HUB to fully test its premises. "If we have them in the door, we should want them to make informed choices about why they're selecting these programs."


The first step of the intake process is an information session at which Hostos or LaGuardia staff share details on program offerings. Those interested in taking the next step then take a basic skills exam to confirm that their reading and math levels are adequate for HUB coursework, and schedule an assessment interview with program staff. In this conversation, which now commonly includes members from both the education case management (social services) and career services teams, HUB staffers determine both candidate fitness and their potential eligibility for scholarships.

"The line of questioning that we're asking in that intake interview is really to understand how interested that student is," explains Carolyn Nobles, Director of LaGuardia's Career and Technical Education Assistance Center. "In order to get to that interview, they've attended an info session. How much did they retain? Do they understand the time commitment for the program?"

Hostos Senior Associate Javier Saldana explains that the goal of this process is “to help us as a staff better understand what support services we would look to provide to make them successful.” As a part of that exercise, the HUB utilizes tools such as a rubric that assesses candidates for healthcare training programs on their experience and knowledge of the industry, their general life management skills and career objectives, their overall professionalism and motivation, and more (See Figure 3). Participants then sign a written agreement, developed jointly by the two partnering colleges, acknowledging their understanding of terms and expectations related to the HUB program.

As with most high-quality workforce programs, the HUB balances robust support services and positive messaging with high expectations of participants. Team members from the career services side are frank about what learners must be ready to do. “I need students to understand they need to be mentally and physically prepared,” says LaGuardia Internship Coordinator Sharmalan Sathiyaseelan, known to students and staff members as Dr. Sam. “I try to determine their mindset, whether they see themselves in this in a couple years, what their strengths are, and what their commitment is in this field.”

FIGURE 3: HOSTOS HUB ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR HEALTHCARE COURSES



Division of
**Continuing Education &
Workforce Development**
CEWD

HEALTHCARE PROGRAM: INTERVIEW RATING SHEET

Applicant's Name: _____ Program: _____ Interviewer Initials: _____

Interview Date: _____

	0 Points (least eligible)	1 Point	2 Points	3 Points (most eligible)	Points
Experience in Health Care Profession	No experience in the healthcare industry or customer service-based on industry. Unable to follow verbal and/or written instructions; resists change. Demonstrated through application and/or interview process.	Minimal experience in healthcare setting or customer service-based on industry. Able to follow instructions without critical thought. Does not demonstrate adaptability. Demonstrated through application and/or interview	Some experience working in a healthcare setting. Demonstrated interest in industry and asks questions; adaptable. Demonstrated through application and/or interview process.	Extensive experience in healthcare setting. Shows critical thinking skills, highly adaptable. Demonstrated through application and/or interview process. Reinforced by resume and/or references (except when is an incumbent worker referred by employer).	
Knowledge of Health Care Profession	Is unaware or has continued misconceptions about the training, skills, pay, etc. despite the Orientation. Demonstrated through application and/or interview process.	Has limited awareness or a few lingering misconceptions about the training, skills, pay, etc. despite the Orientation. Demonstrated through application and/or interview process.	Good in-depth knowledge of healthcare profession-accurately references details about training, skills, pay, etc. Demonstrated through application and/or interview process.	Excellent depth of knowledge -accurately references details, AND applies them to her/his circumstances. Demonstrated through application and/or interview process.	

The interview is also the point at which the team makes decisions about scholarships. As noted above, one core premise of the HUB is that students should receive equally robust training and support services regardless of their mode of pay. At the same time, program administrators also felt strongly that by expanding the reach of scholarships, they could better position more learners to persist in and complete their programs. Hostos decided to award full scholarships, maximizing their investment in student success. At LaGuardia, scholarship criteria include an annual income of \$35,000 or less, authorization to work in the United States, and intention to work in a field related to their training immediately after completing the program. Those with incomes under \$30,000 per year qualified for fully paid scholarships, while those making between \$30-35,000 were eligible to have 80 percent of their tuition paid. The vast majority of scholarships covered 100 percent of tuition.

Here, too, the HUB's holistic approach is setting the conditions for a stronger return on investment in scholarships. "This is where the HUB model has been helpful," says Chandana Madadeswaraswamy, Senior Director of Career and Professional Programs at LaGuardia. "In the past, at times, we've just given students scholarships without identifying and providing the support they need to finish the program." Understanding and addressing those needs, whether related to mental health, childcare, or simply having to rebuild study habits after years out of school, is a vital input toward student success.

The prevalence of participants needing readjustment support as they returned to a college environment for the first time in years, or ever, led the HUB to one of its most striking innovations: the Vestibule. This is a required two-day session, lasting six hours in all, that enrolled HUB learners must take before they officially start training. Scholarship awardees must complete the Vestibule to have their tuition covered.



At one Vestibule session in March 2024 for a Medical Assistant training, LaGuardia Education Case Manager Arlene Chico-Lugo explained the day to a group of seven learners. "A lot of folks who come to our program haven't been to school for a long time, so we like to jumpstart your six month program with tips and tricks on what it will be like." Throughout the three-hour session, she led the students through a series of conversations and exercises related to time management, organizing priorities, and expectations for what was to come, all in the context of their program. Discussing a norm for the day around communication, for instance, Chico-Lugo noted, "You're in a training program to eventually enter the workforce as a medical assistant. That means being open to all points of views and personalities. You will encounter them, especially if you work in New York City."

The Hub Learner Experience: Coursework to Placement

Once participants complete the Vestibule, they begin training. Courses are typically 80-100 hours each, with some sequences, such as the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant training at LaGuardia, encompassing multiple courses. **Table 1** shows the menu of training programs at the two HUB sites, including both current and former courses.

TABLE 1: HUB COURSE OFFERINGS

Hostos	LaGuardia
Patient Care Technician	Certified Clinical Medical Assistant
Billing and Coding	Central Service Technician
Certified Medical Administrative Assistant	Plumbing
Phlebotomy and EKG (offered 2022-23)	Electrical
IT Support (offered 2022-23)	HVAC
Certified Nurse Assistant (offered 2022-23)	Emergency Medical Technician (offered 2023)
	Quickbooks (offered 2022-23)
	Pharmacy Technician (offered 2022-23)

The programs were chosen by internal committees at each college, which meet every six months to adjust which training tracks were included in the HUB initiative based on participant outcomes, direct insights from employers gleaned through the job development and career services teams, and labor market information. As **Table 1** shows, the committees have made the difficult but necessary decision to remove several courses from the menu in response to changing demand, participants' results, and limited funds.

Targeting industry-recognized credentials as a core goal for learners and high-quality work-based learning experiences as a key to getting completers placed, the HUB leaders brought a new level of focus and seriousness to these program offerings. "These are not courses you finish in two weeks," says Dr. Evelyn Fernandez-Ketcham. "The occupational training programs are three months at the shortest, up to eight months. These courses require a real commitment."

In a sense, HUB courses bridge the norms of a college classroom and a workplace. From the Vestibule onwards, instructors try to convey that learners must meet employers' expectations for conduct, appearance, and attendance. A healthcare training course such as Medical Assistant, for instance, requires students to show up in scrubs, with their hair pulled back; students who do not show up in uniform can be sent home and marked absent. Lateness is penalized as well, with three late arrivals counting as one absence. After three absences, students are penalized one letter grade. Students who are absent for more than six sessions must retake the course. As important, since the course is designed to prepare students to take and pass a certification exam, missing class means not learning content they will need to know for the exam.

These high expectations come in the context of a strongly supportive environment in which instructors take pains to know each student and specifically speak to their individual learning style and needs. Former student Joli Vidal, who took the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant sequence at LaGuardia in 2022, credits the program for this mix of rigor and positivity. "The instructors always had time for questions, and for lab they were very helpful, giving me corrections if I needed it."

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These are not courses you finish in two weeks. The occupational training programs are three months at the shortest, up to eight months. These courses require a real commitment.

—Dr. Evelyn Fernandez-Ketcham, Vice President
Hostos Continuing Education
& Workforce Development CUNY

Now a working medical assistant with plans to attend medical school and become a doctor, Vidal also notes the value of the lab experience. “We got to work with each other on aspects like phlebotomy and EKG, rather than on a test dummy, and see how it felt from the patient’s perspective.”

At one LaGuardia pharmacy technician training in January 2024, toward the end of the course, students split their time between a review of aseptic technique and preparation for an exam on calculating prescription dosages. Through the first part, students had to sterilize themselves in the proper order: covering their shoes, covering their heads, putting on a face mask, washing and putting sanitizer on their hands, putting on their gown, putting on rubber gloves, and applying sanitizer to the gloves.

After this was complete, students began to prepare compounds, using syringes to mix sterile water with powder from vials. Instructor Geneva-Marie Louis gave steady encouragement and guidance throughout, urging students to “hold the syringe as if you were about to start writing,” and reminding them to roll the powder bottle back and forth rather than to shake it, which sometimes can deactivate the medication. Louis consistently referred to real-world context, noting that “If you’re making IVs on a regular basis, you’ll sit, versus in retail where you’ll be standing.” As the focus shifted toward calculation exam prep, she walked students through practice problems, praising their responses and participation.

A longtime academic with a background in pharmaceutical sciences and psychopathology, Louis has been at CUNY since shortly after the start of the pandemic. Her primary focus is to prepare pharmacy tech students to take a national certification exam, which is a requirement to work in many states and something employers look for in hiring decisions. “Over the course, we cover a lot of the topics that could be asked on the exam,” she explains. Among other subjects, this includes basic pharmacology, a review of the 200 most commonly prescribed medications, and especially an emphasis on calculations. “We go very in-depth there,” Louis adds. “We want to make sure students are comfortable enough to perform those calculations on the exam and at pharmacy in internship experiences.”

With the dual focus on certification exam preparation and internship placement, the career services teams within the two HUB partners assume a larger role in supporting students. “I come in towards the end and prepare them for interviews and schedule or assign them to respective hospitals,” explains LaGuardia Internship Coordinator Sharmalan “Dr. Sam” Sathiyaseelan. Dr. Sam oversees training for both Pharmacy Tech and Central Service Technician (CST), a role in which workers process, assemble, package, store, and keep inventory of medical devices and surgical supplies. Initially a Jobs Direct training track, CST was integrated into the HUB in January 2024 after the two initiatives were merged.

To be licensed as a CST, students must complete 400 hours of clinical practice. Dr. Sam manages their applications and helps them engage with the governing body that oversees licensure, to get them a provisional certification. “Once they take the exam and pass, then I start providing all their information to hospitals,” where they begin internships. He keeps a tracker that monitors participants’ hours as well as any issues that come up in his regular conversations with employers managing the interns. After students have earned the full certificate, Dr. Sam connects with his colleagues in career services to help the program graduates secure full-time employment.



Some learners report that the internship was the most important part of their training experience. Paula Valois Bruno, a longtime home health aide who enrolled in LaGuardia's Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) program, describes her 200-hour internship with Weill Cornell Internal Medicine as "a pivotal chapter in my story. The experience of working directly with patients, performing clinical tasks, and applying what I had learned in a real-world setting was both demanding and deeply fulfilling." She now works for Urban Health Plan as a Health Care Service Representative at Elmhurst High School, helping to run the school's health clinic.

Not surprisingly given the wealth of research on the connection between internship and positive labor market outcomes, HUB learners who complete internships advance into employment at very high rates. "The internship piece of the program has been amazing," says Aracelis Ellis, Training and Internship Manager at LaGuardia. "We're at about 96, 97 percent hiring at the end of internship. That's why we send them out there. It's not just hands-on training, we want them to get a job." Dr. Sam adds that a number of students have received job offers in the middle of their internship, "because they performed well and employers did not want to lose them."

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Once students take the exam and pass, I start providing their information to hospitals. I come in towards the end and prepare and schedule interviews at these hospitals.

—Sharmalan Sathiyaseelan
Internship Coordinator
LaGuardia Community College

Partnering employers confirm the point. Ben Liefer, Regional Vice President of Operations for Towne Nursing, has hired graduates of Hostos CEWD programs since joining the company, a healthcare staffing agency, in 2016. He estimates that Towne has hired 245 completers of Hostos programs since then as Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), including 104 since 2019. "Hostos has it figured out," Liefer says. "I wish we could just duplicate what they do all over the place."

Noting that all hired CNAs must complete training and pass an exam, Liefer observes that what differentiates new hires is how they act with patients. "Hostos does a really good job with soft skills," he says. The diverse backgrounds of candidates is a significant asset as well, as they possess language and cultural competency to better care for patients whose first language is something other than English.

"A good portion of the students they serve are ESL speakers," Liefer adds. "Anyone we want to send to a facility around the Bronx or Spanish Harlem, if they speak Spanish that's a huge plus."



Employer partners for LaGuardia's medical assistant (MA) training offer similar praise. "For that role, we definitely need someone that has customer service," says Yvette Soltren, Clinical Operations Administrator for Weill Cornell Medicine. "Someone that's compassionate, has empathy, and is in the medical field because they care about patients. Someone that's reliable also—when you're running a medical practice, one person calling out or not being there turns the whole schedule you planned in advance out the window."

Weill Cornell both hosts LaGuardia MAs during the internship phase and has hired six of them for permanent roles, with several other candidates having declined job offers to go back to school. "They are teaching the MAs everything they need to know," Soltren adds. "They're doing the internship to have real experience and interaction with patients. But LaGuardia is giving them the skills they need."

⁹ See for example Strada Education Foundation and the Burning Glass Institute, [Talent Disrupted: College Graduates, Underemployment, and the Way Forward](#), February 2024.

IV Innovations and Lessons Learned

In the two and a half years that the HUB has operated, the model designers have seen a number of their initial premises confirmed, determined that others required tweaking, and found that still others needed a more fundamental reconsideration. This is a common experience for designers of almost any new program, particularly one as ambitious as the HUB. The blending of funds noted above helped enable this process of experimentation and recalibration, with some of the highlights detailed below.

A New Role: Educational Case Manager

The importance of social services and reliable support for students and workforce training participants to persist and complete their programs is well understood. In concrete terms, this means access to services ranging from food pantries to transportation assistance and mental health referrals. In psychological terms, it might be even more important: students want to feel seen and supported, and to believe that the host institution is invested in their individual success.

At the HUB, Education Case Managers (ECMs) provide these two levels of support. The ECMs bring both a social service background, in several cases including formal social work training, and a deep familiarity with their host institutions built over years. They work hard to communicate that this knowledge is at the service of HUB students.

“My engagement with students is just getting them to tell me about themselves, who they are, what they want to do,” explains Claudio Gaete, Senior Manager for Program and Student Success at LaGuardia. “I try to get them to share with me experiences that have either gotten them over a barrier when they thought they might not be able to, what has worked for them, what has not, what makes them click and motivates them.”

ECMs stay with HUB learners from the start of the intake process through the end of the formal engagement with the program, and sometimes beyond. They function as a resource and a sounding board. “It’s helping them not spiral and panic,” says Carlos Gerena, Senior Social Worker at Hostos. “If they’ve lost their housing and might have to go into shelter, we jump in and try to help them find a place to stay. Some students have lost family members while enrolled in the program, so we help them process that. It’s addressing any issues that have become a barrier to completing the program.”

The most common needs of HUB students include food security and transportation. “I would say, and I’m not exaggerating, that 75 percent of our students are using the food pantry,” says Gaete. “People are going to the pantry for eggs, milk, cheese, rice, pasta, some vegetables. At the store, that can be fifty bucks or more just for those items.” To assist with transportation costs, the ECMs provide access to MetroCards. “For people having economic struggles, it’s almost six dollars for a round trip. Multiply that to travel almost every day, and it can be a hundred dollars a month or more.”

After an extensive search, Hostos hired Freddy Hernandez as an ECM in November 2022. He had spent nearly two decades working across CUNY in roles including admissions and recruitment as well as case management, in addition to time in the private sector doing similar work. Hernandez has built particular expertise within Hostos’ extensive portfolio of healthcare training options, serving as a case manager for all but Community Health Worker. “I touch base and ensure that they’re doing well academically and socially, and if there are any issues or problems outside the classroom I can refer them to resources that we have on or off campus, for food, academic assistance and tutoring, or other issues that come up.”



In Spring 2024, Hostos and LaGuardia brought their ECM teams together to discuss common barriers they faced and lessons learned. Shared challenges included difficulties in getting progress reports from instructors or tracking data. This emerged in part from an ongoing dynamic of tension between instructors and ECMs, who sometimes ask to observe classes.

“You’re there to observe the student, not the instructor,” Gaete explains, acknowledging that instructors might not see it that way. “Once you build the relationship with a student, they might tell you, ‘Hey, I really don’t get along with this teacher,’ or ‘I don’t understand this teacher.’ Part of our role is to help the student navigate these situations.”

From Training to Placement

One way in which the HUB has distinguished itself from its predecessor programs is through its explicit emphasis on all students’ labor market success. As discussed above, this required a shift in staffing patterns and resource allocation, as the two partner colleges added capacity to create internships and clinical work experiences, build employer relationships, and otherwise help students to make the transition from program completion to career track employment. Along the way, the HUB made a number of shifts in response to emerging challenges.

One such issue that both Hostos and LaGuardia noticed was that a concerning number of students were completing training but not going on to take industry credentialing exams. To help, Hostos began to offer a \$225 stipend for students who had stopped short of taking the exam. This move brought back a total of 57 learners who either had taken or retaken the exam, or were on track to do so. Cost was a factor at LaGuardia as well, for both scholarship and self-paying students. Drawing from resources allocated for the Jobs Direct program, which was merging with the HUB, the team was able to secure funds to cover exam fees.

Another challenge related to credentialing exams was scheduling. LaGuardia Training and Internship Manager Aracelis Ellis reports that previously students that finished their classes would contact the National Healthcareer Association (NHA), which oversees the exams, on their own. But when NHA switched to a new online system that many students found complex and frustrating, a number put off scheduling their exams, and some lost confidence over time.

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It’s helping students not spiral and panic. If they’ve lost their housing and might have to go into shelter, we jump in to help them find a place to stay. It’s addressing any issues that have become a barrier to completing the program.

—Carlos Gerena, Senior Social Worker
Hostos Continuing Education
& Workforce Development

Here, the new connection between Hostos and LaGuardia paid off, as Ellis and her colleagues learned that a Hostos staff member already had become qualified to proctor NHA exams. She quickly signed up for a two-day training to do the same. “So I am now the proctor for these exams,” she says. “Not only are we paying for them to take the exams, but they do that with me, a familiar face.” With student confidence bolstered by Ellis’s presence, the percentage of LaGuardia Certified Clinical Medical Assistant graduates earning all three NHA credentials, including EKG Technician and Phlebotomist, increased from under 50 percent among the first several cohorts to 91 percent after she became a proctor.

LaGuardia’s Quickbooks training offered another example of how the HUB can shift practice and learn as it goes. As with many tuition-based programs, the program neither tracked labor market outcomes nor provided job placement services prior to the launch of the HUB. Early on, Quickbooks placement numbers were low enough that HUB leaders considered removing it from the menu of offerings. But the addition of a HUB-specific employment specialist, Andre Garland, provided a jolt.



An experienced job developer in the workforce field, Garland is primarily responsible for connecting with employers and creating paths to job placement for HUB students who have completed their courses, earned certifications, and are coming to the end of their internships. “I like to communicate that they need what I have,” he explains. “That is, fully trained students, who are ready to work and skilled in an area that matters to their business. By the end of the conversation, the employer hopefully is saying, ‘I’m glad you called, because I absolutely needed six Quickbooks students who are starting out and willing to learn and ready to hit the ground running without too much assistance.’”

Indeed, he soon found a number of small local businesses, including multiple payroll companies, that were interested in HUB graduates. By late 2023, it was LaGuardia’s highest performing HUB program track, with 95 percent of students placed.¹⁰

Credit For Prior Learning: A Bridge Back to College

While the HUB primarily has focused on labor market outcomes, a key aspect of its strategy has been to reduce the distance between job training and traditional college academics. One promising tool to help achieve this goal is credit for prior learning (CPL), a process through which colleges award academic credit to students who demonstrate “college-level learning acquired outside the traditional classroom.” Research has found that CPL earners are more likely to persist in and complete degree programs.¹¹ In 2020, CUNY’s board of trustees approved a new system-wide policy related to CPL that seemed to open new options for CEWD learners to accumulate academic credit they could apply toward college degrees.

Over the first two years after the HUB launched, the two partner schools awarded CPL to a total of 78 learners, including 50 at Hostos.¹² Dr. Samuel Byrd, Transition and Advising Coordinator at Hostos, credits the policy change for greatly increasing the number of students both interested in and receiving CPL.

“If a student is coming in with a certificate from continuing education, say, for Community Health Worker (CHW) or Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), we generate a transcript, and the academic department grants credit based on the grade they get,” Dr. Byrd says. Students must earn a C or above in their CEWD course to earn credit.

But while both CHW and CNA are popular CEWD options that yield credits for students who pass the course, CHW students are far more likely to seek and receive CPL at Hostos. CHW certification confers nine credits toward a degree in Community Health or Aging and Health Studies, saving students significant time and money. By contrast, the CNA certification confers only two credits—a tiny share of the 60 credits required for an associate degree—and those count only as elective credit. Often, CNA students who want to pursue nursing but realize their certification will not count toward the major or place them out of prerequisite courses choose not to bother seeking CPL.

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If a student is entering Hostos CC with a certificate from continuing education for Community Health Worker or Certified Nursing Assistant, we generate a transcript, and the academic department grants credit-based on earned grade.

—Dr. Samuel Byrd
Transition and Advising Coordinator
Hostos Continuing Education
& Workforce Development CUNY

¹⁰ Due to limited funding, LaGuardia discontinued offering Quickbooks as part of the HUB during the 2023-24 school year.

¹¹ CUNY, Credit for Prior Learning. Accessed on July 18, 2024.

¹² Number through Nov. 30, 2023.

To address the issue, Hostos is looking to create a new degree program for Health Science, which would offer an alternative path into a range of health careers and confer greater flexibility for students who had earned certification as a CNA or patient care technician. This new major would further embrace the idea of merging credit and noncredit programs by offering students in their last semester an opportunity to earn PCT or CNA certification, potentially awarding them several credits in addition to bolstering their prospects to quickly find work.

Hostos is attempting to expand the reach of CPL through additional options, including an intriguing option for native Spanish speakers, who comprise a large share of the Hostos student population. “We have a Spanish for Healthcare Workers course that’s available through CEWD,” notes Dr. Byrd, “but if they enter the college they get three credits for it.” Another related opportunity is the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), a set of standardized tests in a range of subjects that CUNY has determined should confer credit for students who score above a certain level.

One priority for these approaches is to help students not just transfer from CEWD programs into degree pathways, but to help current degree students who are approaching the number of credits needed to graduate reach that milestone by taking a HUB course. “It’s great for students who are coming in,” Dr. Byrd observes. “But I also want to help them complete their degrees and get on to something else.”

An Early Disappointment: CBO Referrals

One key initial premise of the HUB was that it would demonstrate a new way for college-affiliated job training programs to partner with and leverage the strengths of community-based organizations (CBOs). Both colleges felt they had strong relationships with local CBOs, and included the concept of sourcing students from CBOs as part of their original proposal to New York Community Trust.

Soon after receiving the grant award, LaGuardia and Hostos conducted a competitive process to select four CBOs, two each in Queens and the Bronx, that would engage community residents and direct qualified candidates to information and orientation sessions for HUB programming. But the number of referrals fell far short of projections: at the end of 2023, the four CBOs had made a total of 90 referrals—and only six of those 90 ultimately enrolled in HUB courses.



“We thought that would be a slam dunk,” recalls LaGuardia Vice-President Sunil Gupta, pointing to the colleges’ history of strong ties to the CBO community and their shared interest in connecting neighborhood residents to high quality training opportunities. “And for a lot of reasons, it didn’t seem as effective as we’d expected.”

HUB staff members and administrators at the CBOs have worked to identify what went wrong. One issue was an inadequate financial incentive for the partners: one program manager at a partnering CBO recalled that the amount per referral was only \$75. At that price point, it was not surprising that partners did not dedicate much of their already-limited capacity toward finding candidates to refer. With another CBO, HUB officials speculated that referrals fell far short of projections because between when they applied to partner and the HUB’s launch, the CBO had secured funds to launch a set of training programs that overlapped with HUB offerings.

For the most part, however, it seems like the two colleges and four CBOs simply struggled with some basic operational components of the sort that often plague new programs that require collaboration across institutions. CBO partners cited problems with data and tracking, noting a number of instances in which they would refer participants to one of the colleges only to find they were already registered. Similarly, if participants had heard about the HUB opportunities through the CBO but registered on their own, the CBO could not be credited for the referral—making it all but impossible to know, or invoice for, how many referrals they had made.

Another issue was communication, as the colleges sometimes would share information about specific course opportunities very shortly before those courses began. One partner suggested the problem was less knowing when classes would start than being aware of when information sessions were being held: “We don’t always have a backlog of people whom we can just call and email and say, hey, you were waiting for this and now it’s ready to happen.”

While the first set of contracts for referrals have expired, HUB leadership and CBO partners, including at least one returning partner from the first round, have been conferring on how to improve the process. Ideas under consideration include a shared calendar, information sessions and potentially even “vestibules” customized for specific CBOs, focusing recruitment on alumni of CBO programs instead of or in addition to current participants, and creating customized links for referred participants to enroll that would clearly indicate how they had become aware of the HUB and ensure the partner was appropriately credited.

V Participants and Outcomes

As **Table 2** shows, compared to traditional college students, most HUB learners across both colleges are slightly older, with half of students age 30 or older. Students with only a high school degree or equivalency make up about 30 percent of participants, though nearly a quarter report having a bachelor’s degree or higher. In most cases, these students had earned their degrees in another country but were unable to apply them toward high-paying jobs in the U.S.

At both colleges, Hispanic/Latinx students account for the largest racial/ethnic group, followed by Blacks/African-Americans the next largest group. Perhaps reflecting the demographics of the healthcare industry that many students are looking to enter, a substantial majority of HUB learners are women.



TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHICS OF HUB STUDENTS*

Gender				
Category	Hostos	LaGuardia	Total	Percentage
Men	110	441	551	36%
Women	570	396	966	64%
Non-binary	0	3	3	0
Total	680	840	1520	

Age				
Category	Hostos	LaGuardia	Total	Percentage
18-19	86	24	110	7%
20s	250	409	659	43%
30s	185	253	438	29%
40s	96	106	202	13%
50s	49	39	88	6%
60+	14	9	23	2%
Total	680	840	1520	

Race/Ethnicity				
Category	Hostos	LaGuardia	Total	Percentage
Black or African-American	197	207	404	27%
Hispanic	224	336	560	37%
Asian	19	100	119	8%
White	8	52	60	4%
Other	54	48	102	7%
Didn't Answer	178	99	277	18%
Total	680	840	1520	

Educational Attainment (in US or country of origin): LaGuardia		
Category	LaGuardia	Percentage
HSD/HSE	242	29%
Some college/no degree	186	22%
Associates	80	9%
Bachelor's	206	25%
Master's	92	11%
Other/not reported	34	4%
Total	840	

Educational Attainment (in US or country of origin): Hostos		
Category	Hostos	Percentage
HSD/HSE	210	31%
Some college/no degree	246	36%
Other/not reported	224	33%
Total	688	

Note: Due to rounding, percentages might not sum to 100

*Through June 30, 2025

**LaGuardia students only

Not surprisingly, the very large majority of participants are low-income. Through November 30, 2024, among LaGuardia students, 47 percent reported annual income of less than \$25,000 at the beginning of training, and 78 percent indicated that they made less than \$50,000 per year. (An additional 14 percent did not answer the question.) Of LaGuardia HUB students who received scholarships, nearly three-quarters had income of less than \$25,000 per year.

Valeria Hidalgo is a recent high school graduate taking the Medical Assistant sequence at LaGuardia. She has a part-time job in the mornings, and takes the course at night. “This is the first experience I’ve had for entry into a college, and I’m getting more familiar with that.” She received a scholarship to attend the HUB sequence, and is excited to start her internship. Like many HUB learners, Hidalgo is trying to simultaneously bolster her earning power by obtaining certification as an MA, and prepare for full-time higher education, hopefully in neuroscience at LaGuardia or Hunter College, while continuing to work. Economic motivation is paramount. “We’re immigrants, and my mother doesn’t work because she doesn’t know English,” she explains. “So I’ve had to be the head of the family, and find a good job to support my brothers.”

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We assume each group takes at least six months to get through the onboarding process and interviewing, but by six months out, we want to see good employment outcomes.

—Hannah Weinstock, Senior Director
Workforce Development
LaGuardia Community College

With this economic need in focus, the question is whether the HUB is successfully helping participants connect to better jobs and higher wages. Based on the available data, the answer seems to be a strong “yes.” Of the HUB’s total enrollment through June 30, 2025, 80 percent of students had completed all courses, and about three-quarters of completers had attained at least one industry credential. Among LaGuardia students who had completed a HUB program, nearly two-thirds secured jobs related to their training, at an average starting wage of \$23 per hour.

Another CCMA student, Zainebe Ceesay, enrolled in the training after working at a Manhattan Trader Joe’s near NYU’s Langone Tisch Hospital and meeting a number of medical workers who shared stories about their career paths. Exploring her educational options, she determined that LaGuardia’s program was a strong fit. “The program itself exceeded my expectations and served as the catalyst needed to get me started on

my career in healthcare,” she reports. Upon completing her training, Ceesay immediately found work at an NYU Langone Family Health Center.

Teams at both colleges intensively track employment results by program, checking in monthly to discuss progress in each training sequence. LaGuardia tracks for both scholarship students specifically, and all learners including those who self-pay, a number of whom might have taken courses for reasons other than employment. They take into account that there will be something of a lag between program completion and a positive employment outcome. “We assume each group takes at least six months to get through the onboarding process and interviewing,” says LaGuardia’s Hannah Weinstock. “But by six months out, we want to see good employment outcomes.”

As **Table 3** shows, LaGuardia’s CCMA program offers a particularly striking before-and-after comparison. From 2018 through 2021, the four years immediately before the launch of the HUB, just 22 percent of all CCMA completers secured employment related to their training. In the two years after the HUB launched, the figure rose to 81 percent. HUB administrators credit these stunning gains in large part to the addition of an internship experience as part of the program; in many cases, host employers simply hired interns into full-time roles after their internships ended. HUB participants also showed stronger outcomes in completing all courses within the CCMA sequence, and earning all industry credentials.

TABLE 3: CERTIFIED CLINICAL MEDICAL ASSISTANT TRAINING AT LAGUARDIA: PRE-HUB VS. HUB

	Total enrollment	Completed all courses in series	Attained all industry credentials	Participated in internship	Training-related employment**
Pre-HUB (2018-2021)	436	261/436 (60%)	209/261 (80%)	0	57/261 (22%)
HUB (2022-2023)	258*	149/209 (71%)	144/149 (97%)	104	94/123 (76%)

*Includes 49 enrolled at time of analysis

**Results for cohorts that ended at least six months prior to analysis

New York Community Trust's Roderick Jenkins, who worked with staff at LaGuardia and Hostos to develop the HUB concept, is pleased with its results to this point. "The numbers are just phenomenal," he says. "I'm very happy with how it's going so far."

The leaders of the HUB are somewhat more circumspect. "We don't want to necessarily brag too much," says Hostos CEWD Vice President Dr. Evelyn Fernandez-Ketcham. "On its face, the impact looks huge already. But the backdrop is the systems change we're trying to get at, and that's why we're trying not to get too excited yet."

VI Conclusion: From Culture Change to Systems Change

As the numbers above suggest, the HUB is already delivering real value for learners, while operating at a scale that is decidedly on the larger side for workforce training programs. Of course, the focus of the project was not simply to maximize short-term outcomes for job placement or even wages. If it had been, the partnering colleges might have done more to screen candidates, or pushed even harder to hire or leverage job developers.

Rather, the outcomes were intended to serve as proof points for a new way of doing business within continuing education and workforce development programs offered in a community college setting. As discussed above, core to this idea was the notion of questioning norms and breaking down barriers that, regardless of why they had gone up in the first place, were now clearly not serving the best interests of learners, nor of the institutions.

However logical changes might be, it is never easy to disrupt people out of their accustomed ways of doing business. "At Hostos, even staff who had run performance-based grants struggled to wrap their heads around the idea of helping potential students before enrollment, or buy into the idea of expanding scholarships for students who committed to attending class and providing support to help them keep that commitment," notes Dr. Fernandez-Ketcham.

Shifting this dynamic opened the door to the HUB's subsequent successes. Hostos Senior Advisor Daliz Perez-Cabezas observes that three teams within CEWD, focused on programs, social work, and career services, traditionally worked within defined silos. "Now, they're working and planning together to determine who goes into the program, who gets the scholarships, and how we make sure that they get all the supports they need to finish."

LaGuardia's Carolyn Nobles provides a concrete example. "One thing I've always wanted is to have someone from my team be part of the intake process, part of the enrollment process," she notes. "We were finding before that often we'd have program staff interview interested candidates, but they were looking through their lens of expertise, which is not always employment. My team is going to ask different questions than what an instructor will ask."

Ultimately, the HUB's leaders and funders hope that the defining characteristics of the model—equal services for self-funding and scholarship students that include intensive advising, comprehensive supports, hands-on work experience, and effective placement assistance—will become expected norms for most if not all CEWD offerings. More than two years after the HUB was announced, a growing number of CEWD programs reflect signature HUB practices.

Both colleges have established scholarship funds for non-credit workforce students. At Hostos, the team has utilized \$465,000 from New York Community Trust, as well as a \$25,000 grant from the MacKenzie Scott Adult and Continuing Education Scholarship for CEWD program completers who then enroll in degree programs. LaGuardia has leveraged \$465,000 from NYCT to raise nearly \$800,000 from 29 individual donors for scholarships. In addition to HUB programs, LaGuardia has awarded scholarships for students in courses including Community Health Worker, Mental Health Peer Specialist, Paramedic, Medical Interpreter, and Cybersecurity Specialist, as well as for English language and high school equivalency programs. Combined, the two colleges awarded 1,601 scholarships between the launch of the HUB and the end of 2023.

Accompanying the dramatic expansion of scholarship awards has been an even larger increase in access to support services and job placement assistance. The HUB determined that between January 2022 and July 2023, its offerings indirectly benefited a total of 2,809 students in workforce programs across both colleges. This included the development of internships or clinical experiences in training programs such as Central Service Technician, as well as the opportunity to leverage employer relationships developed by HUB team members, and added capacity to follow up with students who might have dropped out of a class or track the outcomes of completers who might be interested in additional training or study.

TABLE 4: HUB INDIRECT IMPACTS, JANUARY 2022-DECEMBER 2023

	Hostos	LaGuardia	Total
Career Services	806	6,532	7,338
Transition to College	n/a	3,344	123
CPL Inquiries	n/a	304	105
CPL Awarded	50	28	81

Hostos and LaGuardia have managed to extend these “HUB-inspired” services in part by tapping funding sources beyond the initial NYCT grant. The partners have brought in more than \$850,000 between federal Perkins Act funding and New York State Future of Work Center dollars, in addition to what they have raised from individual donors. At the same time, the project leaders are mindful of the danger that dedicated funding can unintentionally reinforce the silos between programs as well as teams that they are determined to break down.

As they approach the end of the project’s first phase, the leaders of the HUB are trying to maintain a balance between transformational ambition and operational humility. “Moving from a transactional model to comprehensive intake and assessment is delicate,” Dr. Fernandez-Ketcham notes. “We can’t become a social services agency, but we’re trying to help adult learners balance life, school and work.”



“We’re filling a gap that has not been met by the city or other providers, and showing that if we can mesh all these elements, we can change how we operate,” adds LaGuardia’s Sunil Gupta. “We are shifting our operating and business model and being sensitive to the fact that as community colleges, we have a certain obligation to serve the community beyond matriculating students.”

The forthcoming second policy brief on the Accelerated Workforce Recovery HUB will assess the HUB in the context of other efforts around the country to harness the power of community colleges and other higher education institutions in supporting job training and economic mobility. Specifically, the brief will analyze the HUB

against the indicators of best practices for non-degree workforce programs, as well as the institutional and system inputs that typically lead to strong outcomes. That study also will feature a set of recommendations for program-, college-, and system-level leaders, as well as public and private funders and policymakers, to sustain and expand the HUB.

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