

Slingshot Memphis, Inc.

Slingshot Impact Assessment:

Advance Memphis

December 2019



Dear reader,

Slingshot Memphis aims to create a demonstrable reduction in poverty by promoting a results-driven poverty-fighting ecosystem. To accomplish this mission, Slingshot performs three critical functions.

First, Slingshot helps identify which nonprofit organizations have the evidence or potential to create the most poverty-fighting impact. Some of these organizations, like Advance Memphis, become Investee Partners of Slingshot.

Second, Slingshot supports its Investee Partners as they maximize their poverty-fighting impact. We use the Slingshot Impact Assessment to evaluate Investees' performance on four dimensions: benefit-cost ratio, use of best practices, measurement infrastructure, and systems-level change.

In addition to determining a partner's poverty-fighting impact, the Slingshot Impact Assessment identifies core strengths and opportunities for growth. **The purpose of this report is to share the results of the Slingshot Impact Assessment for Advance Memphis.**

When we identify what works, we celebrate it. When we discover what isn't working, or what could work better, we provide concrete recommendations on ways to increase effectiveness and impact.

Third, Slingshot invests in its high-impact partners. Slingshot's funding decisions are based on a partner's poverty-fighting impact, the needs of the partner organization, the emergence of promising new partner organizations who compete for limited funding, and the overall availability of capital.

Slingshot is not a silver bullet. There isn't one. Our team does not have all the answers. Although we strive to assess, support, and fund our partners with the utmost objectivity, we are still developing and testing our evidence-based approach. Thus, we need your feedback. Over time, this will enable us to reduce our margin of error.

The following report is not the end of our work with Advance Memphis - it is really just the beginning. Advance Memphis' willingness to be transparent is something to celebrate. Over time, this transparency will help other organizations maximize their poverty-fighting impact. In order to create a better quality of life for our under-resourced neighbors, it is incumbent upon all of us - funders and fighters - to maximize our poverty-fighting impact.

Together, we can address the systems and structures that impair the quality of life for our under-resourced neighbors. Together, we can help promote a results-driven poverty-fighting ecosystem.

Respectfully,

Team Slingshot

Executive Summary

- Advance Memphis (Advance) is an economic development organization that focuses on high-poverty neighborhoods in South Memphis. Its programs emphasize job training, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and community change.
- **Slingshot Memphis defines “impact on poverty” as an improvement in future earnings and/or health.** Advance’s programs are estimated to create a positive impact on poverty for its residents.
- The Slingshot Impact Assessment evaluated Advance Memphis on four dimensions: **benefit-cost ratio, use of best practices, measurement infrastructure, and systems-level change.**
 - Advance Memphis' estimated benefit-cost ratio is **at least strong**, meaning that estimated benefits exceed the cost of producing those benefits.
 - Advance Memphis' use of best practices is **at least neutral**, indicating that Advance's programs use elements of research-verified best practices and the organization is developing a feedback loop to monitor and improve performance.
 - Advance Memphis' measurement infrastructure is **at least strong**. Advance has strong measurement goals that support its mission. Advance collects a variety of data on participants, programs, and outcomes using quality instruments. It stores data in a secure, centralized platform that supports analysis and reporting.
 - Advance Memphis' systems-level change in Memphis is **at least neutral**. Since its launch in 1999, Advance has focused on high-poverty zip codes in South Memphis, limiting its ability to create broader systems level change. There is, nevertheless, emerging evidence Advance creates systems-level change.
- Advance Memphis can continue to grow and improve its programs by increasing the quantity and quality of data it collects, establishing and implementing data policies, increasing data interoperability, developing its feedback loop, and launching a post-employment career advancement and retention program.

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Introduction

Slingshot Impact Assessment overview

This report is Slingshot Memphis' objective third-party impact assessment of Advance Memphis. The Slingshot Impact Assessment provides a perspective on a nonprofit's poverty-fighting impact.

Comprised of four dimensions – **Benefit-cost Ratio, Use of Best Practices, Measurement Infrastructure, and Systems-level Change** (detailed in Figure 1) – this evidence-based assessment estimates nonprofit impact by evaluating the breadth of an organization's capabilities and results. Slingshot Memphis defines "impact on poverty" as an improvement in a person's future earnings and/or health.

There are several purposes and uses of the assessment:

- **Objectively assess** the quality and impact of partners' poverty-fighting work
- **Enhance understanding** of partners' impact across multiple dimensions
- **Establish context and a basis for conversation** with Slingshot partners about the impact of their work
- **Identify potential opportunities for growth** and areas for collaboration between Slingshot and its partners
- **Assess partners over time** with regular updates to the assessment

Report roadmap

This report proceeds in seven parts. The Introduction provides an overview of the Memphis poverty landscape and Advance Memphis' services, including a theoretical model of how Advance Memphis creates impact. We synthesize Advance Memphis' performance on the assessment into a Ratings Overview. This is followed by an in-depth discussion of Advance Memphis' performance on each of the four dimensions. The report concludes with opportunities for growth.

Figure 1. Slingshot Impact Assessment Dimensions

Dimension	Description
 Benefit-cost Ratio	Estimates the benefits created by a partner organization for the people it serves relative to the cost of creating those benefits
 Use of best practices	Determines the extent to which best practices exist in the area(s) served by a particular partner and if that partner is adhering to those practices
 Measurement infrastructure	Evaluates if a partner has sound practices and processes for collecting, storing, and analyzing program and outcomes data as it relates to fighting poverty
 Systems-level change	Assesses the extent to which a partner organization is able to create poverty-fighting change in the community beyond the individuals and families that it directly serves

Local need

The American South experiences higher rates of poverty and income inequality relative to the rest of the nation.

More than half of Americans residing in distressed communities live in the South.¹ In Tennessee, the poverty rate for adults is 16 percent and for children the rate is 24 percent, compared to 12 percent and 17 percent nationally.² While, the Memphis Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) no longer has the highest rate of poverty in the country, poverty rates throughout the area are higher across almost all dimensions than the nation as a whole.³

Approximately one in four Memphians - almost 157,000 people - live in poverty. Even worse, almost 40 percent of Memphis children face lives of hardship.⁴ Another 84,000 Memphians live in households with incomes between 100 and 150 percent of the poverty threshold.⁵ While not technically living in poverty, these individuals are highly susceptible to economic shocks like job loss or medical emergencies that could push them into poverty.

While the country experiences historically low unemployment, local MSA rates hover just below five percent, almost 50 percent higher

than the national average.⁶ Unemployment is highest for young people, those without college degrees, and people of color.

In Memphis, African Americans experience unemployment at rates more than three times that of white residents: 13.9 percent versus 4.2 percent.⁷ Unemployment also disproportionately affects low-skilled workers, particularly for those over the age of 45, who tend to remain unemployed for longer periods of time than licensed, younger workers.^{8,9}

The unemployment rate for those with high school diplomas and no further education is approximately 11 percent, well above the local average for all workers.¹⁰ This is particularly alarming when just over one in three working-age Memphis residents have at least some college experience.

Despite an overall strong labor market, wage growth has lagged nationally. **At a local level, opportunities for sustainable, living-wage employment in Memphis are sparse.**

Because Tennessee does not have a state-level minimum wage, the minimum wage in Memphis has not increased since 2009, when the federal government raised it to \$7.25.¹¹

1. 2018 Distressed Community Index. Economic Innovation Group. The seven metrics measured to determine the level of distress are: adults without a high school diploma, poverty rate, prime-age adults not in work, housing vacancy rate, median income ratio, change in employment, change in establishments.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
3. Delavega, Elena. 2018 Poverty Fact Sheet. School of Social Work and Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, University of Memphis.
4. Ibid
5. U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
6. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Southeast Information Office. Information reflects August 2019 data for MSA and nation.
7. Employment Status, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 - 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
8. Oesch, D. (2010) 'What explains high unemployment among low-skilled workers? Evidence from 21 OECD countries', European Journal of Industrial Relations, 16(1), pp. 39-55.
9. Barriers to Work: Low-Income, Unemployed and Dislocated Workers. National Conference of State Legislators. July 17, 2018
10. U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
11. Delavega, Elena. 2019 Poverty Fact Sheet. School of Social Work and Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, University of Memphis

This is far below the living wage for Shelby County: \$11.06 for a single adult with no dependent children according to one estimate.¹²

Beyond the age of 35, the Labor of Bureau Statistics reports an increase in the number of self-employed workers. This can be attributed to the experience, knowledge, and assets individuals have acquired by this age, as well as the difficulty in finding more formal employment.

Zip Codes 38126 and 38106

There are neighborhoods in Memphis where poverty rates spike four to five times higher than the national average.¹³ Within these areas, 40 percent or more of residents fall below the federal poverty threshold.¹⁴ The 38126 and 38106 zip codes, both south of downtown Memphis, are two such neighborhoods.

Both are predominantly African-American neighborhoods, where job growth has been stagnant and unemployment hovers at 30 percent. Half the population on average has completed high school; only one percent has a bachelor's degree. Median income is \$14,131 in the 38126 zip code and \$27,078 in the 38106 zip code.¹⁵ The majority of renters and homeowners with a mortgage spend over 35 percent of their household income on housing. The low frequency and limited public transit service are a barrier to employment in these areas. Unsurprisingly, 90 percent of residents work in the area, as they have limited access to jobs elsewhere.¹⁵

The city of Memphis has been actively investing in these zip codes over the past few years. In September 2015, the city received a \$29 million federal Choice Neighborhoods Initiative Implementation

Grant, which aims to transform poverty-stricken neighborhoods into viable mixed-income communities. These funds were matched with additional support, bringing the total investment in the area to approximately \$100 million. Neighborhood renewal efforts include the redevelopment of Foote Homes, the last traditional public housing site in Memphis. **In order to ensure the stability of the neighborhood redevelopment, concurrent social services are provided, including comprehensive case management, access to medical care, as well as employment and educational programs.**

Advance Memphis

Advance Memphis is one of the first nonprofits in South Memphis that worked to fight poverty in the 38126 and 38106 area. **Founded in 1999, Advance Memphis is dedicated to empowering adults to break cycles of unemployment, establish economic stability, reconcile relationships, and restore dignity.** Toward this end, Advance Memphis offers a series of programs that fall under four broad categories:

- Getting ready to work
- Working
- Managing money
- Contributing to community change

Programs within these four focus areas build upon one another to raise the employment rate of their participants. Advance Memphis offers a formal job training and soft-skills development program (Work Life), high school equivalency preparation courses, entrepreneur support to foster job creation and economic stability (LAUNCH), and personal finance education (Faith and Finances).

12. Living Wage Calculator, MIT, Retrieved October 21, 2019

13. Delavega, Elena. 2018 Poverty Fact Sheet. School of Social Work and Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, University of Memphis.

14. Shapira, Issac et al. Basic Facts on Concentrated Poverty. Policy Brief. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. November 2015

15. U.S. Census Bureau. Selected Economic Characteristics, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

Advance Memphis works alongside a wide variety of nonprofits operating in the 38126 zip code including the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis. In total there are over 25 organizations currently working in the area to address issues of poverty.

In addition, there are several organizations in Memphis that create pathways toward economic stability. Examples include HopeWorks, Economic Opportunities, Workforce Investment Network, The Collective Blueprint, the William R. Moore College of Technology, Code Crew, the Center for Employment Opportunities, Dress for Success, and the Memphis Urban League. **However, only Advance Memphis has a specific focus on South Memphis.**

Originally, Advance Memphis focused exclusively on residents of the 38126 zip code. Recently they expanded their reach to include residents of the 38106 zip code, another historically underserved area of Memphis.

Introduction: Impact Tree Methodology

What is an impact tree?

An impact tree is a tool to help us understand the potential poverty-fighting impact of a nonprofit organization's program(s) and how that impact is achieved.

Components of an impact tree include:

- **Programs:** activities and services provided to participants by the organization
- **Outputs:** direct results of program activities
- **Outcomes:** benefits or changes that result from the program
- **Impact:** the change that happened solely due to the program(s) in question

At Slingshot, we consider only poverty-related outcomes.

How should one read an impact tree?

Start with the column labeled "Programs." This shows how outputs are transformed into outcomes that then lead to impact.

Why is an impact tree useful?

- Helps us break down and comprehend Advance Memphis' potential impact on poverty in simpler terms
- Ensures that we understand all of Advance Memphis' programs, outputs, and outcomes
- Equips us to appreciate the potential poverty-fighting impact of various programs

How can Advance Memphis use its impact tree?

- **Communication:** Provide guidance and structure for communications with stakeholders like funders, partners, and the broader community
- **Strategic planning:** Define the specific, measurable pathways through which Advance Memphis impacts its participants
- **Impact growth:** Map the programs' theoretical impact onto the intended impact of Advance Memphis' broader program model, using the resulting insights to grow impact

Introduction: Impact Tree and Research Overview

Impact tree highlights

The impact tree prepared for Advance Memphis' programs is intended to show the poverty-fighting impact that the programs could be creating in the community. In that sense, it is a theoretical model of how Advance Memphis fights poverty by improving earnings and/or health.

The specific outcomes attributed to Advance Memphis' programs are based on third-party research about identical or similar programs, as well as the stated goals of the programs.

In order to make the jump from a theoretical appreciation of impact to an actual estimation of it, it is necessary to identify specific impact chains, or individual branches of the impact tree, where there is sufficient partner data or third-party research to estimate impact. For the purposes of this report, several impact chains associated with securing employment are highlighted.

Program overview

Advance Memphis offers a variety of services for low-skilled, job-seeking adults. Its programs fall under four broad categories:

- Getting ready to work
- Working
- Managing money
- Contributing to community change

In this section we focus on three of Advance's programs:

- Work Life
- High School Equivalency Preparation program
- LAUNCH

Together, these programs are meant to address the needs of underemployed and unemployed, low-skilled workers looking for steady employment. Work Life in particular feeds directly into Advance Memphis' staffing service, which creates positive employment outcomes for Work Life graduates.

Work Life

Slingshot's analysis indicates that the primary means through which Advance Memphis enables its constituents to improve their earnings and/or health is through its job training and placement services.

Research suggests that employment services, case management, and training programs improve labor market outcomes for low-skilled workers.¹⁶

Advance Memphis' job training and placement service is composed of three components that help ensure participants are prepared to obtain and maintain employment. The first component, Work Life, is a six-week, soft-skills job training class that helps participants prepare for the job search process.

The second component offers elective courses that provide occupational skills training, such as forklift certification, a food service professional certification (ServSafe), as well as a garden-and-kitchen course in culinary education. By underwriting the costs of obtaining these certifications, Advance Memphis is removing a financial barrier to positive economic outcomes. A 2009 study released by the University of Kentucky uncovered evidence that obtaining short-term certifications increase both employment rates and earnings.¹⁷ Examples of certificates include IT network

16. Oesch, D. (2010) 'What explains high unemployment among low-skilled workers? Evidence from 21 OECD countries', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 16(1), pp. 39–55.

17. Jepsen, C., Troske, K., and Coomes, P. (2009). The labor-market returns of community college degrees, diplomas, and certificates. University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research Discussion Paper 2009-08, 2009.

Introduction: Impact Tree and Research Overview

Administrator, automotive mechanic, and electrician. The third component of the program is Advance's staffing service. Through this service, Work Life graduates are hired by Advance's business partners on a full-time or part-time basis. Advance monitors workers' performance and responds to the needs of its hiring partners. This is instrumental in helping graduates build work experience.

The outcome of these combined efforts is that Work Life graduates experience an increase in hours worked and higher wages.

High School Equivalency Preparation program

Approximately half of the individuals that seek support from Advance Memphis do not have a high school diploma. Advance Memphis' High School Equivalency Preparation Program offers flexible courses on a rolling basis that prepare participants to take the High-School Equivalency Test (HiSET). Successfully completing such a test grants the taker a high school equivalency credential. A 2007 Brookings Institution report suggests this type of credential can improve the earnings of its recipients, as well as access to post-secondary education or training opportunities.¹⁸

LAUNCH

Helping chronically unemployed and underemployed workers become entrepreneurs promotes self-sufficiency and economic stability. Small businesses play a central role in the U.S. economy, contributing to job creation and economic development.

Through its entrepreneurship program, LAUNCH, Advance

Memphis helps entrepreneurs plan for their business. It does so by offering training, support, and mentoring.

Other outcomes

Advance Memphis provides several other programs and services to help its participants retain their employment and maximize their earnings. These services include counseling and anger management classes to help foster positive interpersonal relationships and promote employment.

Advance also builds its beneficiaries' budgeting and investment skills through Faith and Finances, its personal finance course. It also offers an Individual Development Account (IDA) program.

A longitudinal study undertaken by Advance Memphis suggests that participation in Faith and Finances leads to improved budgeting skills. Further, the IDA program can help individuals save funds to acquire essential assets and meet financial goals. These can include home ownership, reliable transportation, and entrepreneurship.²⁰

Conclusion

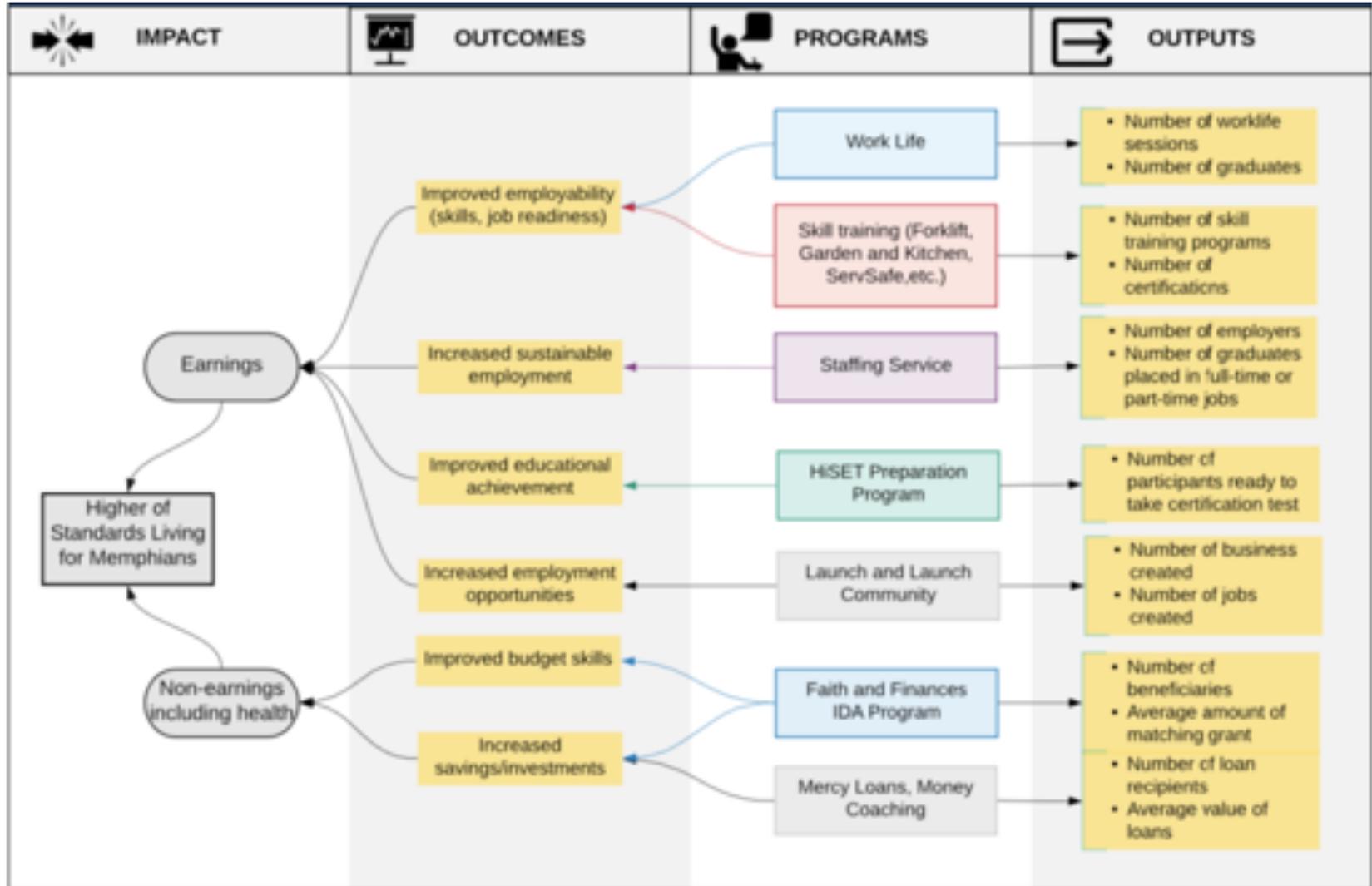
Advance Memphis' programs can create impact along a number of dimensions. **In the following section, Slingshot estimates the monetized value of the benefits Advance Memphis creates, relative to the cost of creating those benefits.** This involves breaking down the impact trees branch by branch into specific impact chains which are then assigned a monetary value.

18. Belfield, Clive and Henry Levine. "The Price We Pay: Economic and Social Consequences of Inadequate Education", Brookings Institution. 2007

19. Economic Bulletin, U.S. Small Business Association, Office of Advocacy, October 2019

20. Gregory Mills, Ken Lam, Donna DeMarco, Christopher Rodger, and Bulbul Kaul. 2008. "Assets for Independence Act Evaluation, Impact Study: Final Report," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, iv.

Introduction: Advance Memphis' Impact Tree



@Slingshot Memphis for Advance Memphis. 2019

Note: This impact tree depicts the potential impacts of a non-profit's programs. It is neither an endorsement nor validation of those impacts.

Ratings Overview: Advance Memphis

Dimensions	Unclear	Negative	At least neutral	At least strong	Very strong
 <p>Benefit-cost ratio</p>	Lack of sufficient research in focus area to support confident estimation of benefit	Costs exceed estimated benefits	Estimated benefits and costs similar	Estimated benefits exceed costs	Estimated benefits substantially exceed costs
 <p>Use of best practices</p>	Indiscernible best practices or insufficient data on partner's practices	Practices considered problematic or damaging	Limited or no evidence for use of best practices	Some evidence for use of best practices and better practices are developing	Current best practices are consistently followed
 <p>Measurement infrastructure</p>	Unclear what measurement infrastructure is most relevant for area of focus	Measurement practices considered problematic or damaging	Limited or no measurement infrastructure; limited or no use to improve impact	Sufficient aspects of measurement infrastructure exist	Robust measurement system used to understand and improve impact
 <p>Systems-level change</p>	Insufficient data to determine systems-level change	Systems-level change considered problematic or damaging	Limited or no evidence for creation of systems-level change	Some evidence for the creation of systems-level change	Compelling evidence of systems-level change

Ratings Overview: Advance Memphis

Benefit-cost ratio

Rating: At least strong – Estimated benefits exceed costs

Slingshot estimates that Advance Memphis creates benefits for its participants in excess of the costs expended to create those benefits. The majority of benefits come in the form of increased wages and labor force participation for graduates from Advance's Work Life program. There are additional benefits created by other programs, such as LAUNCH and the High School Equivalency Preparation program.

Use of best practices

Rating: At least neutral – Limited or no evidence for use of best practices

Slingshot found evidence that Advance Memphis employs some best practices in its programs. It uses known curricula in its programs and modifies them to fit its needs. Slingshot found evidence of a developing feedback loop and a need for professional development opportunities for staff. There are opportunities to improve its feedback loop.

Measurement infrastructure

Rating: At least strong – Sufficient aspects of measurement infrastructure exist

Advance Memphis has clearly defined measurement goals that align with its mission. It is developing abilities to leverage data to help make decisions. It collects nearly comprehensive data on participants and programs and some outcomes data. It recently launched a research study on one of its programs. Data are stored securely and can be accessed for reporting.

Systems-level change

Rating: At least neutral – Limited or no evidence for creation of systems-level change

Slingshot found limited evidence of Advance Memphis creating systems-level change through partnerships and its long-standing presence in the community. Slingshot also recognizes that Advance Memphis seeks to create change at the individual participant level, not the community level. Advance could explore opportunities to create systems-level change without compromising its extraordinary individual-level impact.

Benefit-cost Ratio: Summary of Evidence

Dimensions



Benefit-cost ratio

Unclear

Lack of sufficient research in focus area to support confident estimation of benefit

Negative

Costs exceed estimated benefits

At least neutral

Estimated benefits and costs similar

At least strong

Estimated benefits exceed costs

Very strong

Estimated benefits substantially exceed costs

Overview

The benefit-cost ratio estimates the benefits created by a partner organization for the people it serves relative to the cost of creating those benefits. The benefits described here accrue to an individual or family in the form of improved future earnings and/or health.

Our estimates consider only private benefits to the individuals affected, not any societal benefits like cost savings to taxpayers. While we do not yet include societal benefits in our estimates, we recognize the importance and magnitude of them.

Summary of evidence

Slingshot rates Advance Memphis' benefit-cost ratio as **at least strong**, meaning that estimated benefits exceed costs. Slingshot investigated and monetized the benefits for three of Advance's programs:

- Work Life
- High School Equivalency Preparation Program
- LAUNCH

Our analysis suggests that Work Life creates more than 90 percent of estimated benefits and thus drives Advance's benefit-cost ratio.

Work Life provides participants with both soft- and hard-skill training that prepares them for the job market.

Advance Memphis creates poverty-fighting outcomes for around two-thirds of Work Life graduates by employing them through its staffing service. This provides graduates with current employment and higher wages while also adding professional experience to their resumés.

Advance Memphis creates additional value for its beneficiaries through two targeted programs. First, Advance's HiSET preparation program supports clients as they pursue their high school equivalency credential. Second, the LAUNCH program provides aspiring entrepreneurs with the fundamentals to start and run their own businesses.

Advance Memphis has an opportunity to better understand and improve the impact it creates in the community by tracking additional employment outcomes for its graduates, creating a post-program job retention and development program, and using the benefit-cost dimension as a lens for its decision-making on program innovations.

Benefit-cost Ratio: Description of Evidence

Introduction

In this section we will go into greater detail about the methodology underlying our estimates of impact for Advance Memphis' programs.

Generally speaking, our estimates begin with collecting individual, program, and output data from our partner. We then divide the impact tree into individual branches called impact chains. **Each impact chain connects the number of people who participate in a program, to those successfully treated, to the outcomes achieved, to how those outcomes affect earnings and/or health.**

We also apply discounts to account for various counterfactuals. Slingshot defines a counterfactual situation as what would have occurred in the absence of our partner's programs. These discounts include the percent of participants who could have achieved an outcome on their own (i.e., without assistance) or through some other program, as well as the state of earnings or health that would have existed were it not for the intervention. Further, we take into account ecosystem discounts, based on the extent to which other organizations or interventions contributed to the desired outcome. If benefits accrue in the future, we make adjustments to calculate the present day value of these future benefits.

We apply the above discounts and adjustments in order to estimate the actual impact on participants that occurs solely due to Advance Memphis' programs and not other factors, like individual characteristics, expected outcomes, and other programs.

Finally, the following estimates were produced using Advance's data from 2017 and 2018. When possible we use two years worth of data to smooth out cyclical fluctuations.

Programs overview

Slingshot included the following programs in our benefit-cost estimates:

- Work Life
- High School Equivalency Preparation program
- LAUNCH

We excluded Advance's financial programs from our estimates due to a lack of independent research into outcomes produced by similar programs. Also, because Advance is no longer offering counseling services, we did not include any impact chains related to that program, as we have in the past.

Work Life

Work Life prepares its participants for employment by teaching soft skills such as timeliness, respect for authority, and being a team player. It also connects participants to elective hard-skill training classes, like ServSafe certification and forklift driver training.

All of these programs are helpful in preparing candidates for employment. However, given that Work Life participants are normally under-educated, chronically unemployed and often have a criminal record, **the staffing service has proven to be a critical element in helping program participants secure employment and build their work history.** More people have access to employment opportunities because of Advance Memphis' placement services.

Slingshot estimates that Work Life graduates earn between \$2.3 million and \$2.4 million in total increased income due to employment in Advance's staffing service in the five years following graduation. This is over 90 percent of estimated benefits created.

The following estimates were constructed using data obtained from Advance Memphis except where noted.

In 2018, Advance Memphis enrolled 273 participants in Work Life. Of those, a third (91) completed both soft-skill and occupational skill training, thus graduating from Work Life. **Sixty-five percent of graduates (59 persons total) were able to obtain employment of some sort in the first year following graduation.**

Most graduates start with temporary or seasonal employment and progressively move up to secure permanent full-time employment. Of those that obtained employment in year one, 36 percent obtained full-time work, with the remaining 64 percent securing part-time employment.

Full-time employment

Slingshot estimates that 21 Work Life graduates obtained full-time employment in their first year following graduation. That number increased to 42 in year two. Eighty-one percent did not have full-time employment prior to enrolling in Work Life.

The average earnings for those graduates was \$18,800 per person in the first year, increasing to \$22,000 per person in subsequent years. There was also an employment rate increase of 81 percent for full-time workers.

Part-time employment

Slingshot estimates that 38 Work Life graduates obtained part-time employment in their first year following graduation. That number decreased to 17 in year two, as more graduates found full-time work. Half were not working part-time prior to Work Life.

The average earnings for these graduates in year one was just under \$8,000 per person, an outcome that persisted into

subsequent years. Further, the employment rate for part-time workers increased by 50 percent in the first year.

Discounts

In order to estimate the impact of Work Life, we applied discounts for the number of graduates who were working prior to the program, and their pre-program earnings. We also discounted for the percent of graduates that could have secured employment through a staffing service elsewhere.

We were not able to secure outcomes data for Work Life graduates who found employment outside of Advance's staffing service.

Time horizon

We then aggregate these values over a five-year time horizon. This is based on research into the persistence of earnings increases for graduates of job training programs.²¹ All future earnings are discounted into present value terms.

High School Equivalency Preparation program

Taking into account lifetime improvements in earnings and health, the High School Equivalency Preparation program is estimated to generate over \$80,000 in present value benefits for its participants over the course of their careers.

Advance Memphis works with relatively young adults, half of them approximately college-aged, to secure a high school equivalency credential. Research suggests that obtaining such a credential increases lifetime average earnings. Slingshot conservatively estimates this increase to be approximately \$1,500 per year.²² On average eight people complete this program each year.

21. Greenberg, D., Deitch, V. & Hamilton, G. (2010). A synthesis of random assignment benefit-cost studies of welfare-to-work programs. *Journal of Benefit-Cost Analysis*, 1(1), 1-28.

22. "GED Recipients Have Lower Earnings, are Less Likely to Enter College" Stephanie Ewert, U.S. Census Bureau

In order to estimate benefits, we multiply the number of participants who obtain their equivalency certificate by the above earnings boost, then sum those increases over a 25-year time horizon.

Slingshot assumes that the average career duration for participants in the High School Equivalency Preparation program is twenty-five years. This is based on the average age of those participants – Advance participants are older on average than high school students – and the assumption that the average high-school graduate will experience a 35-year career. Thus, the above increase in earnings is extended over twenty-five years and then discounted into present value terms.

We added several modest counterfactual discounts to adjust for potential double-counting with other outcomes. For example, in addition to the income benefit, research suggests there are health benefits associated with securing this certification.²³ Slingshot uses the quality-adjusted life year (QALY) metric to estimate the dollar value of these health benefits. One QALY is equivalent to one healthy year of life and is assumed to be worth \$50,000. There are many other ways to do this.

The increase in QALY from obtaining a high school equivalency credential is also extended over twenty-five years and then discounted into present value terms. Further, we applied an interdependency discount to these impact chains. This is because the instructors in the High School Equivalency Preparation program are provided by HopeWorks, another local nonprofit.

Launch

Advance Memphis' LAUNCH program provides consulting and financial support for entrepreneurs. This increases the number of

new businesses formed, income earned, and jobs created. To estimate the value created by LAUNCH, we focused on job creation. Most of the jobs created by LAUNCH graduates were for themselves as business owners: self-employment as an entrepreneur. Additionally, the jobs that we included in our analysis were all part-time, meaning that graduates would have been able to operate their businesses in addition to working elsewhere.

Using data provided by Advance Memphis, we estimate that LAUNCH graduates created at least fourteen total jobs in their first year of business ownership.²⁴ We further estimate that half of those jobs persist into year two.

The average earnings created by each job in year one is just under \$5,000; in year two, it is more than \$5,700. These earnings are in addition to other sources of income received by the graduates.

As is our custom, Slingshot applied modest discounts to adjust for the percent of LAUNCH graduates that could have obtained similar outcomes elsewhere.

Conclusions and opportunities for growth

Slingshot would like to celebrate Advance Memphis and its continually impressive benefit-cost performance. We have estimated their benefit-cost ratio three times now, using a variety of techniques, and they consistently produce convincing results. This speaks to the clear and sustained poverty-fighting benefit that Advance Memphis is creating in the community.

Slingshot has identified several opportunities for growth that could help Advance amplify the impact it is creating in the community.

First, Advance could consider offering more post-employment

23. Levin, H., Belfield, C., Muening, P., & Rouse, C. (2007). *The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America's Children*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.

24. The actual number of part-time and temporary jobs created is higher. Lacking data on employment duration and earnings for all positions, we chose to focus on those jobs who persisted for one full year.

retention and career advancement support. This could help graduates maintain employment and advance in their jobs, thus producing better poverty-fighting outcomes. In particular, this sort of support has been shown to help people maintain jobs in the wake of negative shocks that would otherwise lead to job loss.

Second, Advance recently adopted trauma-informed practices in its programs as a response to evidence and widespread support for trauma-informed care. We encourage Advance to attempt to determine how this programming shift has altered program outcomes for participants. This will enable Advance to weigh the benefit-cost impact of future strategic decisions.

Finally, Advance Memphis' adaptability and desire to continuously improve its program model are core strengths. In the midst of seemingly endless options and approaches to improving programming, Advance can use the benefit-cost dimension as a lens for its decision-making on program innovations. This approach can narrow the scope of potential program innovations and prioritize those with the highest concentration of benefits for Advance's participants.

Slingshot is excited for the opportunity to support Advance Memphis in this important work.

Use of Best Practices: Summary of Evidence

Dimensions



Use of best practices

Unclear

Indiscernible best practices or insufficient data on partner's practices

Negative

Practices considered problematic or damaging

At least neutral

Limited or no evidence for use of best practices

At least strong

Some evidence for use of best practices and better practices are developing

Very strong

Current best practices are consistently followed

Overview

The use of best practices assessment is intended to help Slingshot determine the extent to which best practices exist in the area(s) served by a particular partner and if that partner is adhering to those practices.

Best practices are determined by independent research, ideally by comparing the outcomes produced by a given program or model to those produced by similar models.

In the absence of researched best practices, other considerations within this dimension include the extent to which a partner follows an existing model with fidelity, offers training and professional development opportunities to its staff, and is itself evaluated by an outside organization.

Summary of evidence

Slingshot rates Advance Memphis as **at least neutral** on its use of best practices. Slingshot identified a clear desire on behalf of the Advance team to incorporate best practices into its programs to the greatest extent possible. Upon investigating Advance's individual program models, Slingshot found limited evidence that

the program models are validated by rigorous academic research.

Slingshot found evidence that Advance Memphis uses limited best practices in its programs. Specifically, its Work Life program mirrors some practices found in research-verified job training programs. It also adheres to some best practices in the job-training sector.

Advance's feedback loop does not appear to be fully formed. Advance struggles to systematically monitor program performance across the organization, rendering it difficult to test solutions.

Advance's professional development opportunities are limited because current offerings no longer meet the development needs of Advance's staff and leadership.

Advance can improve its practices by adopting more aspects of research-verified job training programs. It could also grow its feedback loop to collect more information, then use that information to make programmatic improvements.

In 2018 Slingshot rated Advance as "at least strong" in best practices. Advance's new rating is a reflection of Slingshot's elevated best practice standards. It should not be read as evidence of regression by Advance's programs.

Use of Best Practices: Description of Evidence

Context and overview

Slingshot's use of best practices assessment investigates the degree to which an organization adheres to best practices across its programs. Two conditions are necessary for Slingshot to designate a program or program element as adhering to best practices. **First, a best practice standard must exist for the program.** We determine best practice standards by identifying high-quality academic research that demonstrates a program model is more effective than other similar researched models. **Second, an organization must implement the program with fidelity, such that we have confidence that its participants are benefitting from the effective elements of the program.**

We also assess an organization's performance management and improvement process, i.e., the extent to which it has a robust feedback loop that facilitates programmatic improvement. Finally, if a program is innovating on top of an established model, and doing so with rigor and objectivity, the program can still conform to best practices despite some modifications to the original design.

Programs

In assessing the best practices for Advance Memphis' job training program, Work Life, Slingshot turned to research about similar programs that focus on individuals living in poverty. These programs have been thoroughly researched and have established best practices.²⁵

Five components have been found to be crucial for such programs:

- Screening for one's level of aspiration and commitment
- Pre-employment and career-readiness training
- Occupation skills training
- Job development and placement services
- Post-employment retention and advancement services

Slingshot has found evidence that Advance Memphis incorporates three of the five components suggested by certain research-verified job training programs into its Work Life program and subsequent electives. The use of three of five components is consistent with a limited use of best practices, as Slingshot's expectation for a best practice program would be to incorporate all five components and use a model that itself has been independently researched verified in some form.

Work Life

Advance Memphis' Work Life program demonstrates evidence of best practices in its pre-employment and career-readiness training, occupational skills training, plus job development and placement services. The nine week program is an adaptation of the Jobs for Life curriculum. According to a separate 2017 study, the Jobs for Life model in turn adheres to many best practices for the job training sector, although the research is ambiguous about which specific best practices those are.²⁶ Jobs for Life has been found to be a promising practice if not a best practice outright. Advance Memphis is about to get three to four members certified to teach work Life.

25. Hendra, R., Greenberg, D., Hamilton, G., Oppenheim, A. and Pennington, A. (2016) Encouraging Evidence on a Sector-Focused Advancement Strategy: Two-year impacts from the Work Advance Demonstration. MDRC.

26. "Jobs for Life: National Evaluation" Sagamore Institute. Spring 2017

Elements of Advance Memphis' pre-employment and career readiness training, including the Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) Anger Management model, have been researched-verified as best practices. This model uses curriculum from Correctional

Counseling, which also certifies the MRT facilitator at Advance. Research suggests that MRT is effective at reducing recidivism by improving emotional control.²⁷

Advance Memphis is currently modifying the Work Life curriculum in partnership with the Memphis Chamber of Commerce to include a trauma-healing component that addresses domestic violence and drug abuse.

The electives component of Work Life show evidence of a best practice.²⁸ In it, Advance Memphis provides occupational skills training for forklift operation, food services, and culinary education.

Slingshot recognizes that a majority of participants that graduate from Work Life take advantage of the staffing services made available to them. As noted previously, this helps create impressive social impact at Advance Memphis.

Other programs

In addition to Work Life, Slingshot found that LAUNCH, while not research-verified, is based on a nationally recognized entrepreneurship model created by Co.Starters. It is a nine-week long curriculum that covers topics like customer identification, marketing and messaging, business modeling, management skills, and pitch-making. Co.Starters is widely used by nonprofit organizations in the social enterprise industry.

Slingshot recognizes that the Faith and Finances program uses

existing, Bible-based curriculum. However, Slingshot was unable to locate any research on this particular model.

Internal processes

Quality feedback loop

Having a quality feedback loop is crucial in establishing a performance improvement process. This allows an organization to monitor program delivery and leverage feedback in order to enhance outcomes. **Slingshot did not find evidence of a strong feedback loop within Advance's programs.**

There are several elements necessary for a healthy feedback loop. First it should consistently collect information to monitor performance across each of the organizations programs. Second, it should help the organization identify and analyze program successes and gaps. Third, it should help implement solutions and program modifications to address gaps and improve on successes.

Advance administers a brief survey at the end of Work Life to collect feedback from program participants. These surveys are then shared with program directors. Slingshot however could not find evidence of processes or practices for reviewing and analyzing the evaluation survey results in order to leverage their insights.

Further, Slingshot could not find evidence of a mechanism for Advance to collect feedback from its staff about programmatic outcomes, their personal performance, or their level of morale, engagement, and so on. Slingshot also found little evidence for the existence of practices that use clear metrics for program performance monitoring and assessment.

Slingshot did find evidence of a feedback loop with Advance's

27. "A Meta-Analysis of Moral Reconciliation Therapy" L. Myles Ferguson and J. Stephen Wormith, International Journal of Offender Therapy Comparative Criminology, June 2012

28. Hendra, R., Greenberg, D., Hamilton, G., Oppenheim, A. and Pennington, A. (2016) Encouraging Evidence on a Sector-Focused Advancement Strategy: Two-year impacts from the Work Advance Demonstration. MDRC.

business clients, related to Work Life graduates in its staffing program. Advance checks in with its business clients weekly for feedback on its employees. If a worker is identified as needing more guidance and support, Advance provides counseling to the worker. However, the specific services provided to the employee are not tracked, nor is the feedback from employers.

Professional development

Providing professional development opportunities for staff is a key component of best practices. Doing so allows employees to learn about emerging practices and research.

Slingshot found evidence that Advance has provided professional development opportunities to its employees in the past. For example, staff members used to attend the annual conference of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA).

As staff members' knowledge and experience has grown, existing conferences have become increasingly irrelevant. Essentially, Advance Memphis has 'matured' out of CCDA resources.

While Slingshot did not find clear evidence of a professional development action plan, Advance's leadership has already pinpointed this growth opportunity, wanting to more deeply foster a continuous learning culture. Slingshot encourages Advance to push ahead in this area and looks forward to supporting this effort.

Conclusions and opportunities for growth

Slingshot would like to recognize that Advance Memphis has in place several elements of internal best practices, and that it uses elements of best practices in several of its programs.

Advance Memphis could formalize efforts to evaluate its programs' performance by assigning and tracking key performance metrics. These metrics could include program enrollment numbers, completion rates, and future economic outcomes. In order to

continue building a data-driven organization, Advance should consider establishing routine staff meetings to track and discuss these metrics.

Advance could also implement a feedback loop related to program fidelity. While there is no accrediting organization that offers feedback about the Work Life program, Advance could regularly check in with the Chalmers Center about the status of the program and its outcomes.

Advance should also build feedback loops with both program managers and participants. This is another important part of ongoing program monitoring and could highlight improvements from the perspective of people who experience the programs as enrollees, participants, and graduates. There is room to improve the quantity and quality of data collected from graduates, as well as the consistency of analysis and implementation.

In order for the Work Life program to meet best practice standards, Advance Memphis should consider adding post-employment retention and career advancement support. Studies have shown that the most effective job-training programs help participants maintain a job and advance in their employment. This creates poverty-fighting outcomes by increasing employee retention and employment continuity.

Elevating other programs to best practice standards could be difficult if there are no research-based best practices. To the best of its ability, Advance could ensure that it is following program models with fidelity. Further, when Advance chooses to innovate on top of existing models, it should do so with an eye toward research into best practices, as well as data derived from programs and outcomes.

Slingshot is excited for the opportunity to support Advance Memphis in this important work.

Measurement Infrastructure: Summary of Evidence

Dimensions



Measurement infrastructure

Unclear

Unclear what measurement infrastructure is most relevant for area of focus

Negative

Measurement practices considered problematic or damaging

At least neutral

Limited or no measurement infrastructure; limited or no use to improve impact

At least strong

Sufficient aspects of measurement infrastructure exist

Very strong

Robust measurement system used to understand and improve impact

Overview

The goal of this assessment is to help Slingshot better understand the extent to which a partner has sound practices and processes for collecting, storing, and analyzing program and outcomes data as it relates to fighting poverty.

Purpose and uses of the measurement infrastructure assessment:

- Build a shared understanding of a partner's current measurement practices as they relate to poverty alleviation
- Identify opportunities to improve measurement practices, with an eye towards a better understanding of participants, outcomes, and potential impact on poverty alleviation
- Develop a future vision for a partner's measurement strategy that is aligned with the poverty-fighting aspects of its mission

Summary of evidence

Slingshot rates Advance Memphis' measurement infrastructure as **at least strong**, indicating that Advance's measurement capabilities are sufficient to meet the day-to-day needs of the organization.

Slingshot found evidence that Advance Memphis has strong measurement goals that are in line with its mission. Advance is also on track to formalize an organizational data policy and shows some evidence of using data for decision-making. The ultimate goal is to use the information gathered to help drive the organization's growth strategy.

Advance collects nearly comprehensive poverty-related participant and program data and adequate outcomes data, including information related to income and employment.

Moreover, the data that Advance collects is mostly good quality. It collects data using a variety of reliable measurement instruments. Advance has a qualified data team that oversees data quality.

Advance stores its data in a high-quality storage system that is well-suited for analytics and reporting.

Advance Memphis has several opportunities for growth, including refining its data policies and sharing them with more employees; improving staff training surrounding data practices; increasing the quantity and quality of data collected, especially around employment outcomes; and improving the interoperability of data.

Measurement Infrastructure: Rating and Sub-ratings

Dimensions	Unclear	Negative	At least neutral	At least strong	Very strong
 Measurement infrastructure	Unclear what measurement infrastructure is most relevant for area of focus	Measurement practices considered problematic or damaging	Limited or no measurement infrastructure; limited or no use to improve impact	Sufficient aspects of measurement infrastructure exist	Robust measurement system used to understand and improve impact
Measurement goals, policies, and data use	Insufficient access to systems and/or information to support evaluation	Problematic measurement objectives; data use could result in harmful decisions	Limited or weak measurement objectives; data are rarely used to inform decisions	Clear measurement objectives; data are often used to inform decisions	Clear measurement objectives; data are consistently used to inform decisions
Data collected	Insufficient access to systems and/or information to support evaluation	Some data collected could be harmful to clients; several metrics are irrelevant and time consuming	Limited tracking of participant/program data; limited to no tracking of outcomes data	Most participant/program data are tracked; some outcomes data are tracked	Data tracked comprehensively; clear data definitions exist
Data collection methods and measurement instruments	Insufficient access to systems and/or information to support evaluation	Poor collection instruments and methods; results could be erroneous and mislead analysis	Insufficient collection instruments and methods; data quality is limited	Sufficient collection instruments and methods; data are mostly high quality	Excellent collection instruments and methods; data are consistently high quality
Data storage, security, and analytics	Insufficient access to systems and/or information to support evaluation	Data storage is reckless and insecure; analytics could result in harm	Data storage provides basic security; analytics are limited or basic	Data storage provides robust security; analytics are high quality	Data storage provides robust security; analytics are research-grade

Measurement Infrastructure: Description of Evidence

Measurement goals, policies, and data use: At least strong – *Clear measurement objectives; data are often used to inform decisions.*

The **measurement goals, policies, and data use** subdimension of the Measurement Infrastructure assessment is designed to assess a partner's data strategy as it relates to understanding and improving the poverty-fighting impact of its programs. Slingshot rates Advance Memphis as **at least strong** on the **measurement goals, policies, and data use** subdimension.

Advance Memphis has set bold measurement goals to help drive the organization's growth strategy. The organization seeks to use data to help increase its clients' employment rates, retention, and wages. Specifically, Advance Memphis would like to better understand the type and cadence of support its clients need while also determining which services prove to be most effective. In addition, Advance wants to know about the background and specific needs of its participants, offering more targeted services accordingly. Together, this information can help inform the creation of a best in class work force program.

Slingshot found limited evidence of data being used for enhanced decision-making and program improvement; Slingshot recognizes however that Advance is working toward this goal. Data are routinely used to understand the return on volunteering and to monitor participants' progress in managing their finances as a result of their participation in the Faith and Finances program. However, Slingshot could not find evidence that data collected has led to any data policy changes or program improvements to date.

Advance Memphis has begun building its data collection processes and policies for their existing programs. Advance has also migrated its existing data to an industry recognized data platform,

Salesforce, and made an effort to improve both the quality and security of the data collected. Advance Memphis has an opportunity to strengthen these efforts with staff by better communicating new data standards to all employees, codifying measurement policies in an employee handbook, and providing employee training on data processes.

Data collected: At least strong – *Most participant and program data are tracked; some outcomes data are tracked*

The **data collected** subdimension assesses the ability of an organization to collect sufficient metrics to be used to improve the poverty-fighting impact of its programs. Slingshot rates Advance Memphis as **at least strong** on the **data collected** subdimension.

Slingshot found evidence that Advance collects nearly comprehensive participant data. When participants enroll in Work Life, Advance requests information on their housing situation, educational attainment, employment status, criminal history, drug test results, access to government benefits, and earnings.

Advance Memphis also tracks program data such as what services are delivered to specific participants, program session dates, and participant progress and completion status.

Slingshot found adequate outcomes data are gathered, including employment-related information for Work Life graduates. Additionally, Advance Memphis has initiated a longitudinal study for its Faith and Finances program to assess how it affects participants' money management habits.

Advance does not collect control data. Slingshot recognizes that doing so is beyond the capabilities of most nonprofits.

Data collection methods and measurement instruments: At least strong – *Sufficient collection instruments and methods; data are mostly high quality*

The **data collection methods and measurement instruments** subdimension assesses the quality of an organization's data collection tools and the methods it uses to collect and track data. Slingshot rates Advance Memphis as **at least strong** on the **data collection methods and measurement instruments** subdimension.

Advance's measurement instruments are good quality. Information is collected from applicants and participants through a variety of means. These include face-to-face interviews, paper surveys, document reviews, phone conversations, and in-person observation. The methodologies used to gather information are easily understood by most of its participants.

Slingshot found evidence of a basic data quality assurance process. For example, when individuals seek services at Advance, they provide application and enrollment data on paper. Advance's staff enter this information into an electronic data system and then review the accuracy of the data entered.

However, Slingshot could not find evidence that efforts are in place to ensure all information requested is gathered. Missing data are not always collected and entered. While there are likely reasons applicants choose to not disclose certain information, maintaining complete data is important.

Advance Memphis' data team is qualified to run its data operations, which includes designing data processes and instruments, collecting data, cleaning and storing data, maintaining its Salesforce data platform, and creating reports for the organization's leadership.

Advance Memphis recently launched a longitudinal study for its Faith and Finances program. The goal of this project is to better understand the relationship between the program and participants' labor market outcomes. Slingshot recognizes that very few of its partners have engaged in such self-directed research on outcomes. This could promote more advanced data practices, technical expertise, statistical analysis, and reporting to stakeholders.

Data storage, security, and analytics: Very strong – *Data storage provides robust security; analytics are research-grade*

The **data storage, security, and analytics** subdimension assesses the quality of an organization's data storing practices, security policies, and reporting practices. Slingshot rates Advance Memphis as **very strong** on the **data storage, security, and analytics** subdimension.

Slingshot found convincing evidence that Advance Memphis uses robust and secure data storage. Advance Memphis has fully migrated to Salesforce. Access to certain data is limited to authorized staff, which is standard practice. Data about participants, programs, daily activities, and volunteers are all stored in Salesforce.

Using a centralized data storage system facilitates analysis and reporting. Advance Memphis has begun to exploit the data visualization and reporting functionality in Salesforce. This allows it to monitor programs and regularly share reports. As Advance Memphis better identifies the data it needs to generate actionable intelligence, these Salesforce features will become increasingly useful and support regular data analysis.

Conclusions and opportunities for growth

Slingshot would like to highlight the evolution of Advance Memphis' measurement infrastructure over the past few years. Advance Memphis is in a position to start maximizing and enhancing the data it has gathered to generate performance insights.

To maximize its analytics capabilities, Advance Memphis should collect additional participant data before, during, and after providing services. For example, information about labor market experiences prior to enrollment would establish a clearer baseline against which to measure improvements in employment and earnings outcomes. Data on participants' attendance, behavior, and performance during programming could help predict program completion and future labor market outcomes.

Advance should continue to craft policies covering its data practices and standards. These practices and standards should be communicated with all staff. Further, Advance should standardize the training and coaching of staff involved in data collection and analysis to support the organization's measurement goals. This would help ensure that key metrics are recorded.

Slingshot observed that when interviewing participants, Advance's staff sometimes struggle to record important information while having important, organic conversations. This particular opportunity for growth might be met through targeted professional development.

Advance would also benefit from collecting data on additional professional support services provided to graduates, especially for those individuals who are suspended or terminated from their employment. This could illuminate programmatic changes to reduce the likelihood of negative labor market outcomes.

Systems-level Change: Summary of Evidence

Dimensions



Systems-level change

Unclear

Insufficient data to determine systems-level change

Negative

Systems-level change considered problematic or damaging

At least neutral

Limited or no evidence for creation of systems-level change

At least strong

Some evidence for the creation of systems-level change

Very strong

Compelling evidence of systems-level change

Overview

The systems-level change assessment is used to determine the extent to which a partner organization is able to create poverty-fighting change in the community beyond the individuals and families that it directly serves.

We conceptualize systems-level change as happening through two broad spheres: pathways and policy.

Pathways refers to the local network of peer and partner organizations and how participants in those programs pass through and between them, sometimes in tandem, other times in sequence. It is both quantitative and qualitative and can reflect program capacity, quality, or alignment.

Policy captures the ability of a partner to change the broader system itself. This can happen by affecting public policy, funding flows, social norms, and so on.

Summary of evidence

Slingshot rates Advance Memphis' ability to create systems-level change as **at least neutral**. Slingshot found evidence of Advance's potential to influence the local poverty-fighting landscape.

However, Slingshot could not find sufficient evidence to conclude that Advance has made meaningful systems-level change to date.

Slingshot found evidence that Advance has influenced local systems in the neighborhoods where it serves that would not have happened in Advance's absence.

Advance partners with HopeWorks to bring the latter's high-school equivalency test preparation classes to the neighborhood. This partnership likely produces poverty-fighting outcomes that otherwise would not occur.

Advance reduced blight in its neighborhood by purchasing and renovating a warehouse for training and employment purposes.

Further, Advance has served as a convener, trainer, and thought partner in the community. It regularly hosts neighborhood events. The Work Life curriculum - developed by Advance Memphis - is taught at the Memphis Center for Urban Theological Studies.

Advance Memphis has demonstrated its ability to create meaningful poverty-fighting change in the neighborhoods it serves. Extending that impact into other communities not directly served by Advance by sharing its methods and insights with other organizations could create additional systems-level change.

Systems-level Change: Description of Evidence

Context

As one of the first nonprofit organizations that focused on the 38126 and 38106 zip codes, Advance Memphis' presence has attracted additional resources to the area.

Considered a leader in the community, Advance Memphis works with several local nonprofit organizations to promote poverty-fighting outcomes. These organizations include HopeWorks and Literacy Mid-South, both of which partner with Advance in its High School Equivalency Preparation program. Advance also enlists Families Matter to teach parenting classes to its participants, as well as Memphis Tilth for the ServSafe certification.

Promoting literacy, the acquisition of high-school equivalency credentials, and other certifications have been shown to produce poverty-fighting outcomes.²⁹ Parenting classes have been shown to increase earnings for children later in life by improving academic performance and reducing the likelihood of arrest.^{30,31}

Further, the Work Life curriculum - developed by Advance Memphis - is taught at the Memphis Theological Seminary. Advance is often sought out for advice by other local nonprofits.

Slingshot however did not find substantial evidence that Advance uses these partnerships in a way that creates new pathways, nor to increase the capacity or quality of existing pathways.

Slingshot recognizes that Advance created systems-level change in zip code 38126 by purchasing an abandoned warehouse and

converting it to active use. Advance uses the warehouse to train and employ Work Life graduates, provide space to local business owners, and host neighborhood events.

While Slingshot cannot verify the extent of these systems-level changes, we acknowledge the benefits created by transforming a blighted property into a place for economic productivity.

Conclusions and opportunities for growth

Advance Memphis' potential to create systems-level change is extensive. Given that systems-level change, especially at the institutional or policy level, can take time to come to fruition, Slingshot has identified some near-term opportunities for Advance to consider.

Given its role in the past as a convener and thought partner, Advance could bring together the various nonprofits providing services in 38126 and 38106. These organizations could then identify shared opportunities for growth in how they serve those neighborhoods. For example, how to increase the quantity and deepen the quality of existing partnerships.

Advance Memphis could also connect with other job-training nonprofits in the community to discuss opportunities to promote systems-level change. There might be opportunities for Advance to support other efforts, or borrow ideas for its own work.

Slingshot recognizes that Advance Memphis' focus is the individual participants in its programs. Slingshot is excited to support Advance as it considers increasing its systems-level change.

29. Jepsen, C., Troske, K., and Coomes, P. (2009). The labor-market returns of community college degrees, diplomas, and certificates. University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research Discussion Paper 2009-08, 2009.

30. Gomby, D. S. (2005). Home visitation in 2005: Outcomes for children and parents (Invest in Kids Working Group Paper No. 7). Washington, DC: Partnership for America's Economic Success.

31. Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., Robertson, D. L. and Mann, E. A. (2002). Age 21 cost-benefit analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24(4), 267-303.

Opportunities for Growth

Augment measurement capabilities by expanding outcomes collection, formalizing policies, and educating staff

- Develop and communicate Advance Memphis' data policy in a way that is accessible to all staff members.
- Standardize the training and coaching of staff involved in data collection and analysis to support the organization's measurement goals
- Collect additional participant data before, during, and after receiving services, i.e., work history and experience
- Improve the consistency with which data are collected
- Track labor market outcomes, i.e., employment rates, wages, and hours worked, for Work Life graduates that are not placed in jobs through Advance's staffing program
- Increase interoperability of data

Improve feedback loop and move toward best practices

- Grow and refine feedback loop with program participants and staff about desired and actual outcomes
- Further refine feedback loop with business clients about employee performance
- Leverage data from feedback loops to improve programs and outcomes
- Ensure models are being followed with fidelity
- Regularly discuss data from Work Life and staffing with program staff

Increase the impact of job-training and placement services

- Provide more and better support surrounding post-employment retention and career advancement to help graduates maintain and then advance in their jobs
- Evaluate programmatic performance by assigning and tracking key performance metrics
- Use the benefit-cost dimension as a lens for decision-making on program innovations

This assessment is the beginning of a deeper partnership. Slingshot will provide ongoing, customized support and thought partnership to Advance Memphis following the assessment.

Slingshot Memphis, Inc.

Slingshot Impact Assessment:

Advance Memphis
Appendix



Slingshot's Approach

Slingshot Memphis works alongside Investee partners to understand, measure, and communicate their impact on poverty alleviation. Slingshot's Impact Assessment aims to understand the potential impact an Investee is creating by assessing the partner across four dimensions of impact. We then share our conclusions in a way that aims to help the Investee.

Phase 1: Impact Tree, Literature Review, and Program Map

Slingshot meets with the Investee Partner to better understand its programs and **create an impact tree**. In creating the tree, Slingshot **conducts a brief literature review** to identify relevant research that might provide evidence for the impact of a partner's model. Slingshot also creates a **program map** that lays out the programs offered by the partner organization.

Phase 2: Impact Assessment

Slingshot collaborates with the Investee Partner to **assess the partner** on four dimensions:

- Benefit-cost ratio
- Use of best practices
- Measurement infrastructure
- Systems-level change

The assessment process involves several meetings, questionnaires, and data requests. It lasts approximately 2-3 months.

Phase 3: Synthesis and Conclusions

Slingshot compiles the information it learned in previous phases to provide the Investee Partner with a report. The report **presents the partner's impact tree, program map, as well as the full Slingshot Impact Assessment**. The report concludes with opportunities for improvement, followed by continued engagement by Slingshot as a thought partner.

Program Maps

What is a program map?

A program map is a tool to help us understand the programs offered by Advance Memphis from the perspective of its participants. It shows us how our ultimate partner – our under-resourced neighbor – would experience Advance Memphis.

How should one read a program map?

These maps can be arranged in numerous ways, depending on the program they are depicting. For the following program maps, start on the top, as participants first engage with Advance Memphis.

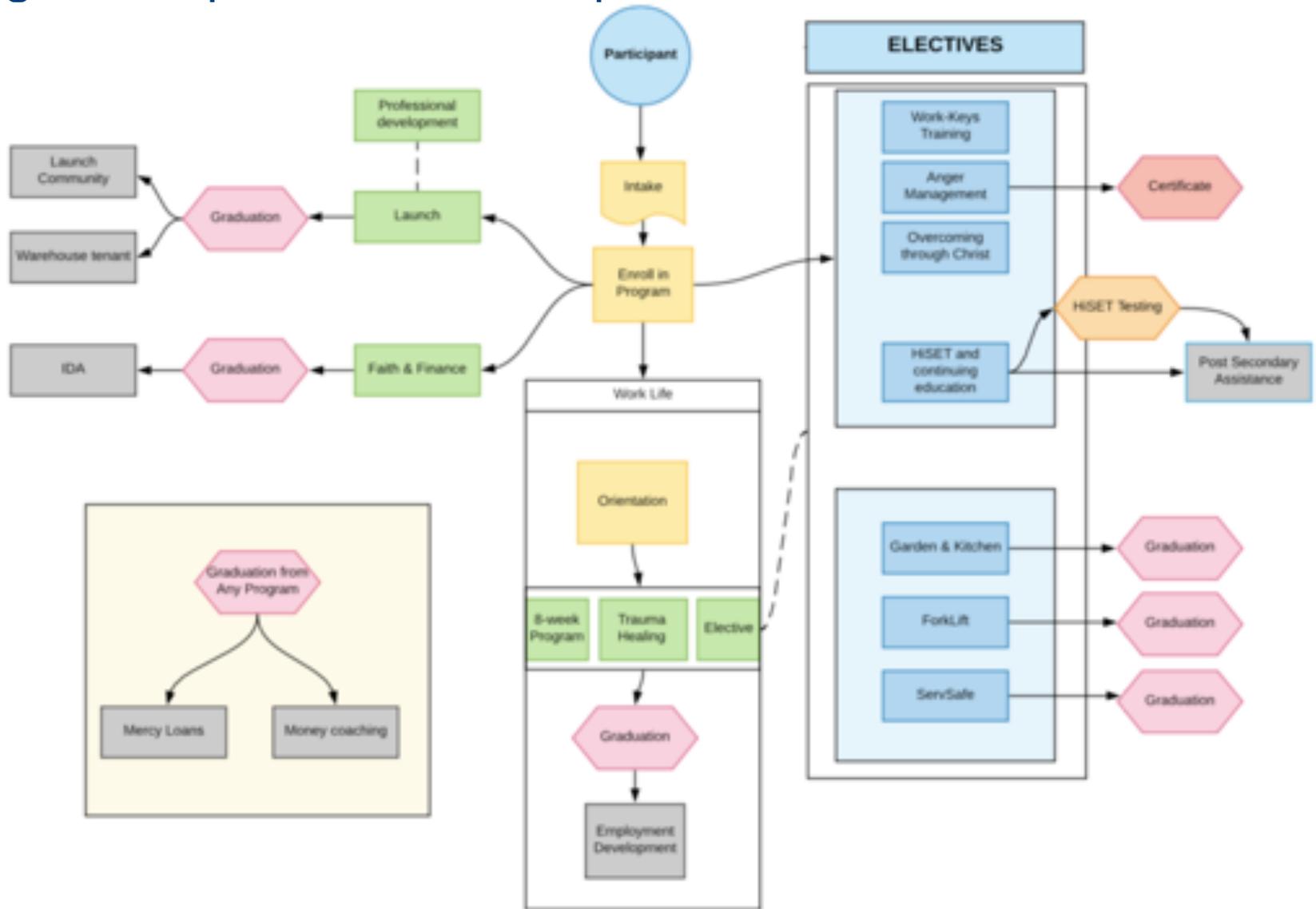
Why is a program map useful?

- Helps us understand the experience of someone participating in Advance Memphis' programs
- Depicts every stage of a program, beginning with entry, through various decision points and potential bottle necks, all the way to program exit
- Clearly shows the programs' desired outcomes and where participants might not achieve them

How can Advance Memphis use its program maps?

- **Participant experience:** Demonstrate how Advance Memphis' programs are experienced from the beneficiary's perspective
- **Organizational structure:** Help identify key junctures and potential leakages from programs
- **Resource acquisition:** Communicate with current and potential stakeholders about how Advance Memphis' programs operate and add value to participants' lives

Program Map: Advance Memphis





Slingshot Memphis aims to create a demonstrable reduction in poverty by promoting a results-driven poverty-fighting ecosystem