



Jobs for
the Future

Scaling Farmworker Advancement Strategies

Insights from Round 1 of California's Farmworkers Advancement Program

AT A GLANCE

JFF shares lessons from Round 1 of California's Farmworkers Advancement Program, highlighting how 12 organizations designed training, supports, and employer partnerships to advance economic mobility for over 1,000 farmworkers statewide.

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Acknowledgments

This report and associated technical assistance and developmental evaluation provided to the Farmworkers Advancement Program (FAP) for Program Year (PY) 2023-2024 was funded by a grant award totaling \$962,701.50 (100%) from the U.S. Department of Labor, with \$0 (0%) financed from nonfederal sources.¹

We want to thank EDD's Special Populations Support Unit for its collaboration and support throughout this initiative, as well as the 12 project operators from FAP PY 2023-2024 for sharing their insights and expertise.

About JFF

Jobs for the Future (JFF) transforms U.S. education and workforce systems to drive economic success for people, businesses, and communities. www.jff.org

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Executive Summary

California's Farmworkers Advancement Program (FAP) is a first-of-its-kind, population-specific investment that, to date, has directed \$21 million in Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Governor's discretionary funds to advance economic mobility for farmworkers and their families. Through Round 1 (Program Year 2023-2024), 12 project operators (POs), including community-based organizations, workforce development boards, community colleges, a four-year university, and a training provider, designed and implemented regional models that paired skills training with wraparound supports and career navigation.² Together, these POs sought to test what it takes to move farmworkers into good-quality jobs, strengthen organizational capacity in communities that have historically been under-resourced, and surface program designs that can inform long-term systems change.³ Jobs for the Future (JFF) provided technical assistance and developmental evaluation.



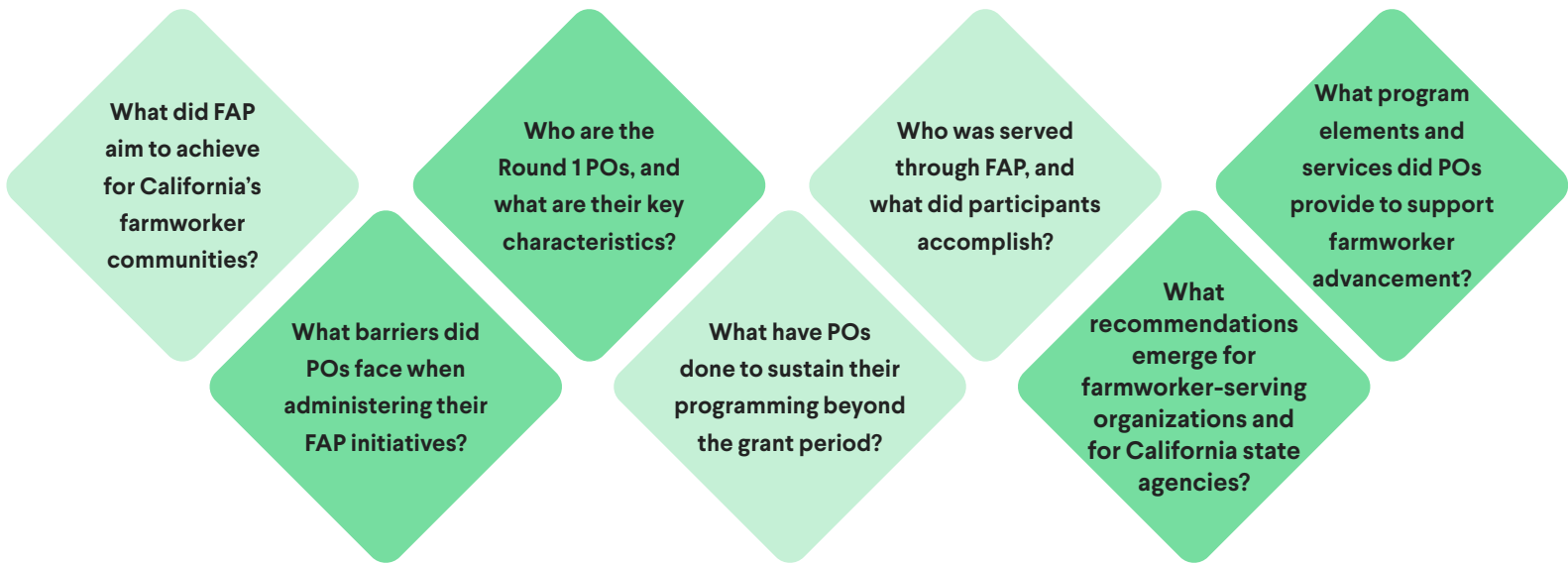
During Round 1, FAP POs served approximately 1,050 individuals, the majority of whom were unemployed at enrollment and faced multiple barriers to employment, including low income, limited formal education, and language and literacy gaps. As of December 2025, with three months remaining in the grant period, the POs had reported 1,159 Measurable Skill Gains, 293 industry-recognized credentials, and 227 job placements. Those figures are expected to increase as participants complete training and transition into jobs over the next four quarters.

Training spanned a wide array of sectors both within and beyond agriculture, including truck driving, welding, energy efficiency, health care, agriculture technology, and climate-resilience and forest-health roles, reflecting both local labor-market conditions and participants' aspirations. Many POs embedded culturally responsive, bilingual instruction and integrated education and training approaches, recognizing that farmworkers have deep experiential knowledge but often have limited formal education and/or English language proficiency and need accessible on-ramps to credentials and higher-wage opportunities.

FAP also demonstrated how targeted workforce investments can catalyze stronger local ecosystems of support. POs combined intentional recruitment strategies rooted in trust, tailored training models, robust wraparound services, and emerging career navigation and job placement functions to create more coherent pathways for farmworkers. Co-enrollment in programs such as the National Farmworker Jobs Program, and the use of braided funding, allowed organizations to offer transportation, child care, housing and food

assistance, legal services, and other supports that are essential for persistence through training, while JFF's technical assistance helped POs adapt in real time and learn from one another. At the same time, Round 1 surfaced persistent challenges, particularly the scarcity of accessible bilingual training options, difficulties connecting training to quality jobs, and the steep learning curve associated with WIOA grant administration. These experiences inform a set of recommendations for both local practitioners and state policymakers at the conclusion of this report.

The analysis that follows is organized around a set of guiding questions:



FAP Overview

What did the program aim to achieve?

California is a global leader in agriculture, generating more than \$55 billion in annual production and employing over 830,000 farmworkers statewide. Yet, despite their critical role in sustaining the country's food system and regional economies, many farmworkers remain undervalued: They face low wages, limited opportunities for advancement, language barriers, and restricted access to education or training. At the same time, droughts, wildfires, and flooding driven by climate change have reshaped agricultural work by displacing workers and changing the skills needed to sustain the industry. Mechanization, automation, and emerging technologies enabled by artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming how agricultural work is done, thus increasing demand for new technical skills even as some traditional roles contract. Meanwhile, immigration restrictions and an aging workforce are contributing to persistent labor shortages and retention challenges. Together, these dynamics highlight the urgent need for a more resilient, inclusive, and future-ready agricultural workforce system that creates pathways to economic mobility and quality jobs for farmworkers and their families.

Against this backdrop, California's Employment Development Department (EDD), in coordination with the Labor and Workforce Development Agency, launched the Farmworkers Advancement Program. Using WIOA Governor's discretionary funds, the state allocated approximately \$10 million for Program Year (PY) 2023-2024 to research, design, and implement regional projects that directly serve farmworker communities. Those projects received funding from February 2024 through March 2026. The purpose of this report is to document lessons and insights from both the technical assistance JFF provided and its developmental evaluation of the 12 projects that FAP Round 1 comprised, and to uplift recommendations to inform future programs and investments.

What makes FAP unique?

A singular focus on the farmworker:

While most workforce grants focus on upskilling within a specific industry sector, FAP takes a population-specific approach, with all services designed for farmworkers or their dependents. Grant recipients, known as project operators, can choose to provide occupational training that helps farmworkers advance within agriculture, support transitions into other industries, or offer multiple career pathways, with an overarching goal of improving economic advancement and job quality for a population that has historically been underserved.

Differentiated funding based on program maturity: FAP has two funding tracks.

Track 1 (implementation and scaling) is for programs that have proven outcomes and are ready to expand and deepen their impact, while Track 2 (emerging programs) offers smaller awards for earlier-stage initiatives that are testing and refining new approaches.

FAP's purpose was threefold:

- To advance economic mobility for farmworkers through skills training, upskilling opportunities, and wraparound supports
- To strengthen organizational capacity among community-based organizations, local workforce boards, and training providers that serve farmworkers
- To generate sustainable, replicable workforce models that can inform long-term, equity-centered systems change at local and state levels.

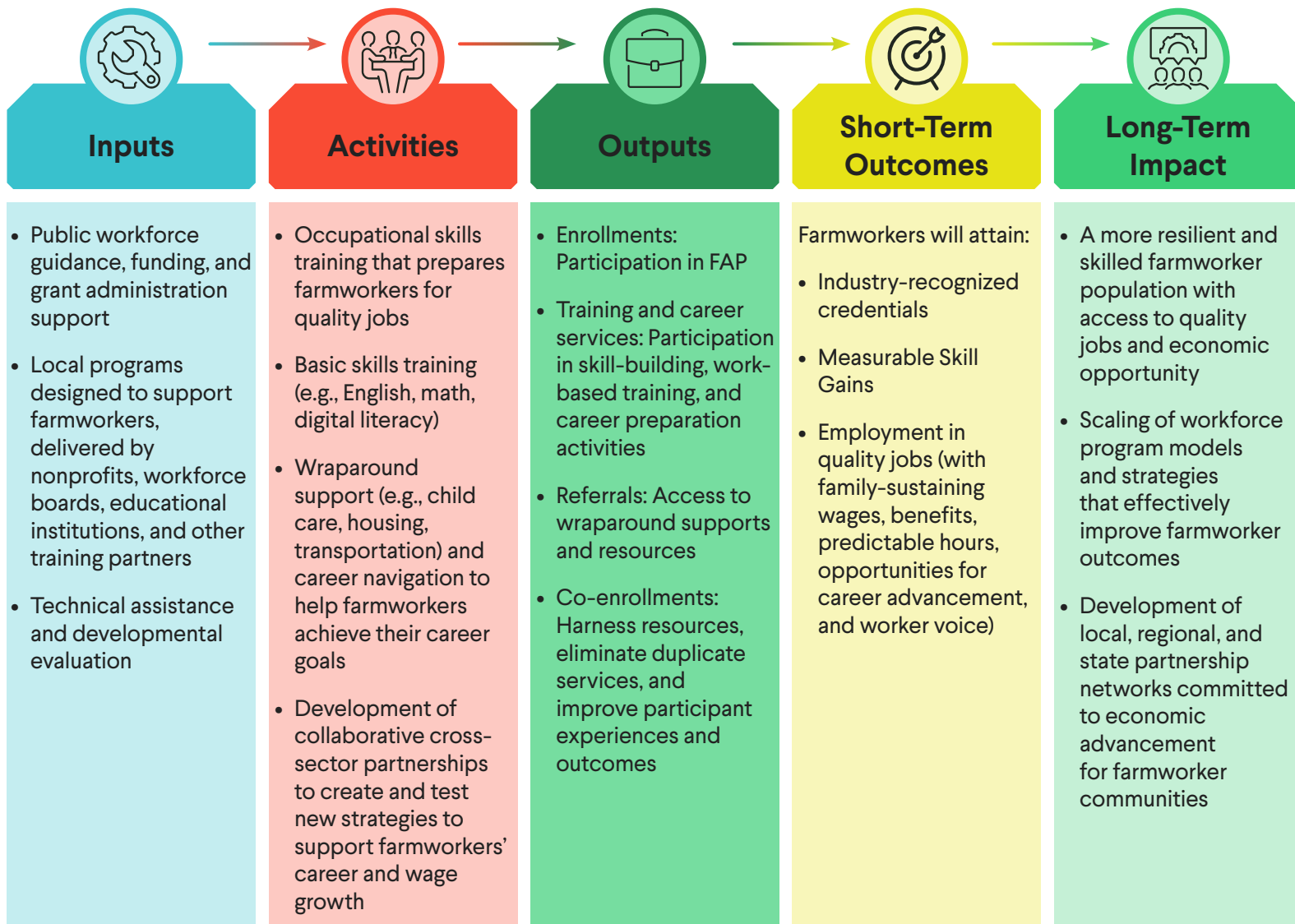
JFF, EDD, and the Round 1 POs codeveloped a shared theory of change to guide planning, implementation, and the assessment of outcomes and impact. The work was driven by an overarching hypothesis that *by designing and delivering targeted workforce training, basic skills instruction, and comprehensive supports for farmworkers, FAP would drive economic advancement, enhance job quality, and strengthen stakeholder networks, both within and outside of agriculture.* The findings and examples that follow in this report illustrate how project operators translated that hypothesis into practice and what they collectively accomplished over the grant period.



The full theory of change, illustrated below, provides a road map of how the different components of public funding, local program delivery, and technical assistance are expected to lead to improved participant outcomes and longer-term systemic impact.

FAP Theory of Change

By designing and delivering targeted workforce training, basic skills, and comprehensive supports for farmworkers*, the FAP will drive economic advancement, enhance job quality, and strengthen stakeholder networks, both within and outside of agriculture.



**"Farmworkers" refers to the workers themselves and their dependents.*

JFF's Technical Assistance and Developmental Evaluation Methodology

As the FAP technical assistance (TA) provider and developmental evaluator (DE), JFF supported implementation efforts across all FAP project operators and documented the themes, outcomes, and lessons of the initiative as a whole. JFF's TA role included facilitating peer learning and collaboration among grantees; offering customized guidance on program design, data collection, and continuous improvement; and synthesizing lessons to inform future state and regional workforce strategies. JFF delivered the following supports to POs and EDD:

1. In-person and virtual community-of-practice sessions to bring together the cohort of POs for peer learning and networking
2. Virtual office hours on topics like job quality, contextualized English language acquisition, case management, and grant administration
3. One-on-one coaching to help POs address specific goal-related challenges and problem-solve in real time
4. Quantitative data tracking, analysis, and visualization of participant data reported through CalJOBS through online dashboards to measure progress against goals

JFF organized TA content around a three-phase learning arc aligned to the project life cycle and designed community-of-practice sessions with speakers, resources, project spotlights, and peer problem-solving workshops focused on key topics relevant to program success at each phase. Phase 1, Program Foundations, focused on recruitment, training, and support, with a deep dive into community engagement and case management best practices. Phase 2, Program Enhancement, focused on navigating challenges and building pathways to quality jobs, with an emphasis on engaging with employers, implementing work-based learning, and strengthening partnerships. Phase 3, Sustainability, focused on long-term planning to support growth and build on projects' success during the grant period.

About This Report

This report draws on a mixed-methods approach to a developmental evaluation, using quantitative participant data reported by project operators through CalJOBS as of December 31, 2025, combined with qualitative insights from narrative reports, community-of-practice and office-hours discussions, individual PO conversations, and mid-project PO reflections. JFF's team analyzed these sources to surface cross-cutting themes, document promising strategies and persistent challenges, and explore recommendations

with POs and state partners. As a developmental evaluation, this analysis was designed to support real-time learning and surface patterns in how activities relate to outcomes rather than to isolate the causal impact of any single service on job placements. The resulting insights and recommendations are intended to inform both local practices and future state-level investments focused on advancing economic mobility for farmworkers.

Project Operators

What are the key characteristics of the organizations that received FAP PY 2023-2024 funding?

The 12 Round 1 POs represented a diverse mix of organizational types, geographic regions, and levels of experience with the public workforce development system. Track 1 grant recipients, which had established programs that could scale, were eligible for up to \$900,000, while Track 2 recipients, whose programs were still emerging, could receive up to \$450,000. The cohort included five nonprofit/community-based organizations of varying sizes, three workforce development boards, two community college districts, one four-year university, and one training provider. Of the 12 POs, five were first-time recipients of WIOA funds and thus new to many of the associated administrative grant requirements.

Project Operator	Counties and Regions Served	Funding Track
Binational of Central California	Fresno, Madera, Tulare, Merced, Kings, and Kern	Track 2
Center for Employment Training	Santa Cruz and Monterey	Track 1
Kern, Inyo, and Mono Counties Consortium Workforce Development Area – Employers’ Training Resource	Kern	Track 1
La Cooperativa Campesina de California	Fresno, Kings, and Tulare	Track 1
MTS Training Academy, Inc.	Santa Cruz and San Joaquin	Track 1
North Bay Jobs with Justice	Lake, Napa, and Sonoma	Track 1

Project Operator	Counties and Regions Served	Funding Track
Santa Barbara County Workforce Development Board	Santa Barbara	Track 1
State Center Community College District d/b/a Reedley College	Fresno, Madera, Kings, and Tulare	Track 2
The Regents of the University of California, Davis Campus	San Joaquin Valley and Northern California, Coastal and Southern California	Track 2
United Way of Central Eastern California	Kern	Track 2
West Hills Community College District	Fresno and Kings	Track 1
Workforce Development Board of Ventura County	Ventura	Track 1

PO SPOTLIGHT

Using an emerging-program track to design farmworker safety training

Unlike the many workforce grants that require organizations to start enrolling participants immediately, FAP’s Track 2 Emerging Programs structure gave the Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (WCAHS) at the University of California, Davis space to do what it does best: research, design, and test a new model before bringing it to scale. WCAHS conducted a thorough, multiregion needs assessment with employers, industry associations, and workers that revealed strong demand for training in fundamental safety skills—such as equipment safety, hazard identification, and clear communication—rather than only niche or highly technical content. This research, which included 60 complete survey responses, confirmed that there is a critical gap in accessible, foundational training to help farmworkers engage safely with both traditional and emerging technologies, allowing for advancement within their industry. Drawing on its deep expertise in health and safety, WCAHS is now developing materials with accessibility, cultural relevance, and long-term usefulness in mind, both for direct use with farmworkers and for other organizations delivering workforce training programs.

Project Outcomes

Who was served, and what did these participants accomplish?

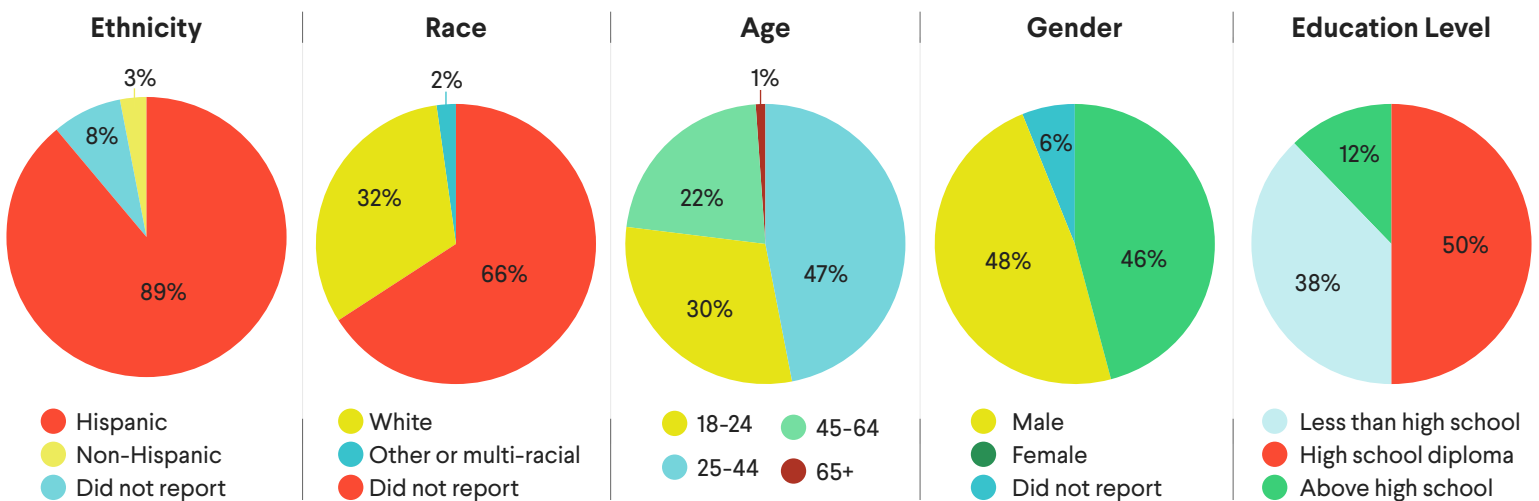
Each project operator was required to establish program goals for measures such as participant enrollment, credential attainment, and job placement and to report on progress toward those goals throughout the grant period using the CalJOBS system. The following section summarizes key characteristics of FAP participants and aggregate progress toward those goals, based on data reported as of December 31, 2025.

Note on Participant Outcomes: This section of the report is based on data submitted by POs in CalJOBS as of December 31, 2025, reflecting seven of the eight quarters of the Round 1 award period (which extends through March 31, 2026). Under WIOA reporting rules, both credential attainment and employment outcomes may be recorded for up to four quarters after a participant exits a program—even after the conclusion of the funded grant period. As a result, we expect the numbers for both measures to increase in the coming months.

FAP Participants: Key Characteristics

Based on eligibility requirements for state and federal workforce programs, individuals participating in FAP services must be 18 or older, a migrant or seasonal farmworker (or their dependent), and meet WIOA Title I eligibility. From April 2024 through December 2025, 1,050 participants were served across all 12 POs. That figure represents 99% of the POs' combined enrollment goals, with several POs substantially exceeding their individual goals.

Among Round 1 FAP participants, 89% identified as Hispanic. There was a fairly even distribution between men and women served, and nearly half (47%) ranged in age from 25 to 44. Half of participants had a high school diploma as their highest level of education.⁴ The key characteristics of Round 1 participants are illustrated in the charts below.



The most common barriers to employment reported at the time of enrollment were having low income, having gaps in basic literacy skills, being an older individual (age 55 or over), and being a single parent. Seventy-eight percent of participants were unemployed when they enrolled in FAP.

FAP Round 1 Outcomes, as of December 31, 2025

Measure	Definition	Examples	FAP Results
Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs)	A way to track a participant's interim progress over time by capturing education or training milestones in real time	GED, report card, skill mastery	1,159 MSGs
Credential	Nationally recognized certifications and licenses that are tied to a specific occupation	Medical Assistant, Welder, Sustainable Energy Efficiency Development	293 credentials
Employment	Individuals placed into jobs	Truck drivers, tractor operators	227 placements

As noted above, POs are expected to track and report both credential attainment and employment outcomes for up to four quarters after a participant exits their FAP, so both measures are likely to increase in the coming months. It is also important to note that not all participants aim to earn a credential or secure a new job; some enroll primarily to build new skills or advance in their current role.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Using Measurable Skill Gains to encourage persistence and improve program design

MTS Training Academy, Inc. is a commercial driver's license training provider that directly hires many of its graduates who obtain the Class B School Bus Certificate. As a first-time WIOA recipient, it initially saw Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs) as just another reporting requirement. But as program leaders began mapping the commercial driver's license pathway into concrete milestones, they recognized that they could use MSG tracking as a tool to strengthen both the program design and participant experience. One key shift was recognizing a commercial learner's permit as a celebratory milestone for students and staff members. Once participants earn the permit, they are allowed to drive commercial vehicles under the supervision of the instructors, which is a powerful incentive and provides students with a sense of accomplishment. Treating the permit as an MSG gives participants an early, tangible win and a confidence boost. MTS Training Academy, Inc. now uses MSGs to identify where participants are getting stuck, adjust instruction and coaching around those points, and build in more frequent celebrations of progress—turning a compliance task into a strategy for persistence, motivation, and continuous improvement.

Key Program Elements

What services did POs provide for their FAP participants?

Despite the variety of program models and organizational types among the 12 Round 1 POs, there is some consistency in the core program elements that POs implemented to move farmworkers from initial outreach through training and into quality employment. Across programs, common components include intentional recruitment and enrollment strategies rooted in trust; training design and delivery that combines occupational skills with basic skills and language supports; wraparound services to address basic needs and logistical barriers; and career navigation and job placement supports that connect training to real jobs. Together, these elements have formed an integrated continuum of services rather than isolated activities, reflecting POs' shared understanding that farmworkers' advancement requires both strong training and strong relationships.

Below, each of the four key FAP elements is first defined and then discussed in more depth.



Recruitment and enrollment

Strategies to reach and enroll new participants through community partnerships and trusted outreach that meets farmworkers where they are.

Round 1 POs treated recruitment and enrollment as relationship-building work, not just outreach. Many leaned on community events and trusted messengers—for example, resource and tax-preparation fairs, Día de Reyes celebrations, farmers markets, school district events, and outreach in farmworker housing complexes—to meet participants where they already gathered and introduce FAP services in low-pressure settings. Others tapped into existing organizing and advocacy bases, faith communities, and adult schools to recruit participants who might not otherwise seek out workforce programs. POs also experimented with multiple outreach channels, including Spanish-language radio spots, social media posts, and rapid-response visits to worksites experiencing closure, to reach workers quickly and in their preferred language.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Using community-centered innovations to make college more accessible

Through its Track 2 program, Reedley College is developing an AgTech certificate to help farmworkers upskill and advance within the agriculture sector. It has prioritized community-rooted outreach to recruit new participants. Rather than relying only on campus-based outreach, the college partners with community and advocacy groups, including faith-based organizations, that already have trusted relationships with farmworker families. Bilingual college and partner staff members explain programs, answer questions, build trust in a climate of uncertainty, and address

participants' hesitation about sharing personally identifiable information. These strategies have paid off: Reedley exceeded its original enrollment goals.

The AgTech certificate ceremonies are a centerpiece of this approach. A recent event drew over 100 community members, celebrated 14 certificate completers who are the first in their families to attend college, and generated 15 new sign-ups, turning graduation into both a recognition and recruitment event. To reduce logistical barriers, Reedley offers portions of its coursework online and provides laptops so farmworkers can participate even if they cannot travel regularly to campus—an especially important strategy in rural areas and amid heightened immigration enforcement-related fears. Staff members continue working to close internet access gaps, underscoring the college's commitment to meeting farmworkers where they are, both physically and digitally.

After initial outreach, warm handoffs and high-touch follow-up played an important role in helping POs successfully onboard new participants into services and training. For example, several POs spoke about the benefits of having staff members accompany participants to partner training sites or stay with them through registration and paperwork, or in co-enrolling FAP participants in complementary programs, such as the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), to extend the package of services available from day one. These approaches helped convert outreach into sustained engagement, particularly for farmworkers who had previously experienced broken referrals (e.g., they had been sent to another program but had never actually received services) or confusing bureaucratic processes.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Adapting programming to meet participant needs and interests

Midway through the grant period, Binational of Central California (BCC) recognized that many of the women it served were less interested in pathways like truck driving and more drawn to roles that aligned with caregiving and community-based work. In response, BCC designed and launched a paraprofessional education pathway to both reflect participants' interests and address a pressing community need for bilingual classroom support. Early on, staff members found that many existing paraprofessional programs offered classes only in the daytime and in English—immediate barriers for employed farmworkers with caregiving responsibilities and limited English proficiency. To remove these barriers, BCC forged a new partnership with Moreno Institute, a local training provider that offers paraprofessional coursework in Spanish on Saturday mornings, with food provided to make attendance more feasible. By reshaping its program model and cultivating that partnership, BCC created an option that is more accessible, schedule-friendly, and responsive to the aspirations of female farmworkers and their families—resulting in a particularly high number of credentials attained by program completers as of this report's writing.



Training design and delivery

Program models that meet farmworkers' needs through culturally responsive instruction, technology platforms, and integrated education and training (IET) approaches.

Round 1 FAP training offerings spanned a wide range of sectors—both within and beyond agriculture—and were deliberately designed to align with local labor-market opportunities. Some POs delivered their own certified training, while others partnered closely with a range of training providers, delivering their own recruitment and wraparound supports tailored to the farmworker community. Classroom and hands-on instruction included skills in areas such as truck driving, welding, energy efficiency and solar installation, health care (including certified nursing assistant and medical assistant pathways), AgTech, facilities maintenance, and climate-resilience and forest-health work. Many programs embedded culturally relevant and bilingual instruction, recognizing that farmworkers bring deep experiential knowledge and that Spanish- and Indigenous-language access is essential for true inclusion.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Using a train-the-trainer model to build farmworker leadership

North Bay Jobs with Justice, a grassroots coalition of labor and community groups in Sonoma, Napa, and Marin counties, prepares Indigenous and immigrant farmworkers to transition into careers in climate resilience and forest health. Its model is grounded in the belief that farmworkers' experiential knowledge, leadership potential, and organizing skills are central assets in building a more just and resilient climate workforce. Training focuses on topics such as wildfire-fuels mitigation, prescribed fire, ecological literacy, and process-based restoration and emphasizes collective problem-solving, reflection on lived experience in the agricultural fields, and opportunities for participants to practice facilitation and decision-making. The program also includes a train-the-trainer element: Selected participants revisit courses that they completed or in which they earned a certification, shadowing instructors to ready themselves to lead future trainings. This train-the-trainer approach builds participant leadership, fosters peer-to-peer learning that can increase learners' comfort and engagement, and reduces reliance on external trainers by retaining more instructional capacity within the cohort while still strategically bringing in outside experts when specialized technical or cultural expertise is needed. To date, 29 participants have decided to form a worker-owned cooperative of climate resilience practitioners, extending the impact of the program into shared economic ownership and ongoing community-based climate work.

In addition to occupational content, several POs ensured their participants received instruction in basic skills such as vocational English language, math, and digital literacy through an IET model or through referrals to other service providers, so participants can build foundational skills while progressing toward credentials. Others employed technology-enabled learning, such as mobile-based English language lessons and basic-skills platforms, to make training accessible to workers who need flexible, low-bandwidth options, lack transportation, or are hesitant to travel because of immigration enforcement-related fears.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Using technology to embed anytime, anywhere English language instruction

Recognizing the high demand for opportunities for farmworkers to build their English language skills, the Workforce Development Board of Ventura County uses the Cell-Ed technology platform to provide them with accessible, mobile-based English and job-skills instruction as a core component of its FAP. Farmworkers can complete short audio- and text-based micro-lessons on any phone (including flip phones without internet access), receive support and nudges from live Cell-Ed coaches, and earn certificates for completed coursework. Through its close partnership with Cell-Ed, members of Ventura County's FAP staff have been able to provide feedback on participant experiences, and Cell-Ed has adjusted its offerings to remain responsive to learner needs.

One participant, Gemma, a farmworker who immigrated to the United States from Mexico, enrolled in the Sowing Seeds of Success program through Cell-Ed after meeting employers at the Pride Career Fair in Oxnard and realizing that she needed to strengthen her English language skills. Her dedication is paying off: Her ability to communicate in English has improved significantly, boosting her confidence, and she has secured a housekeeping position at a hospital that offers medical insurance and provides better pay and a healthier work environment than her previous position did.



Wraparound supports

In-house and partner-delivered resources that help participants overcome barriers and persist in training.

Recognizing that farmworkers often face low wages, irregular schedules, and significant caregiving responsibilities, Round 1 POs used FAP and braided funding to offer a broad menu of wraparound supports. Common supports included transportation assistance (such as mileage reimbursement, gas cards, or shuttle coordination), child care, food access, housing navigation, and help paying for utilities and work-related expenses such as uniforms, tools, and licensing fees. Some POs also connected participants to health care, mental health services, and legal assistance, often through strong partnerships with community clinics, social

services agencies, and farmworker-serving community-based organizations. Co-enrollment in NFJP and other public programs expanded the reach of these supports, allowing POs to stretch limited FAP dollars while still meeting participants' basic needs over time. At the same time, POs reported variation in uptake: A few noted low utilization of supportive services despite making such options available, which points to the importance of clearly communicating at intake, normalizing the use of supports, and simplifying referral processes so that participants see these resources as an integral part of the program rather than an add-on.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Using intensive wraparound supports to make rural training truly accessible

West Hills Community College District (WHCCD) is using its FAP grant to serve migrant and seasonal farmworkers on the rural west side of Fresno and Kings counties. Through intensive one-on-one wraparound supports, WHCCD is making training pathways in health care, transportation, and other high-demand sectors accessible for this population. FAP staff members and partners provide child care, mileage reimbursement, transportation assistance, uniforms, food pantry access, and completion stipends alongside individualized case management and career navigation to help participants stay enrolled and transition into quality jobs. Transportation remains the most requested support in this geographically isolated region, and WHCCD has become known within the FAP cohort for its strong, strategic use of supportive services funding to meet this critical need for farmworkers and their families.



Career navigation and job placement

Services that help participants choose pathways, secure employment, and experience improved job quality.

Many Round 1 POs invested in career navigation and job placement supports to ensure that training led to concrete employment gains. Approaches included individualized career assessments, resume and interview coaching, job search workshops, and regular one-on-one check-ins to help participants refine their goals and troubleshoot barriers. Several POs used co-located one-stop staffing models, pairing case managers with job developers so that navigation and placement were tightly linked instead of occurring in separate silos. Others focused on building and maintaining employer partnerships—for example, with health care providers, transportation companies, agricultural employers, and public agencies—to create pipelines into permanent jobs with better wages and benefits. Many POs also reported sponsoring career fairs and providing opportunities to get company tours and engage in job shadowing with employer partners. Work-based learning, including internships, externships, and pre-apprenticeships, were another key feature in some programs, giving participants supervised, paid opportunities to apply new skills, demonstrate MSGs, and build relationships with employers before transitioning into unsubsidized roles. Where possible, POs incorporated paid work experience and on-the-job training so participants could earn income, build references, and test new roles while still receiving support.

Career navigation and job placement remained an area of ongoing development across the cohort: Some POs excelled at moving participants into jobs but were still strengthening their emphasis on job quality and advancement; others, however, had strong training pipelines and wraparound supports but needed deeper employer engagement to translate those strengths into sustained employment outcomes. Even so, across the cohort, Round 1 POs made clear progress toward building navigation and placement functions that center farmworkers' long-term mobility rather than just short-term placement numbers.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Using co-located career navigation and paid work experience to connect farmworkers to quality jobs

The Kern, Inyo, and Mono Counties Consortium Workforce Development Area (KIM) uses a co-located one-stop model that brings occupational training, English language instruction, career navigation, work-based learning, and supportive services under one roof. One unique feature is that participants in the early childhood learning program provide free on-site child care for their own children and those of other trainees, including those in the construction trades program, which enables them to earn wages, build skills, and gain references. Case managers and job developers also work side by side to provide soft-skills workshops, mock-interview sessions, resume help, and ongoing one-on-one coaching rather than one-time referrals. This model had translated into some of the strongest employment outcomes in the FAP cohort as of December 2025. To sustain and verify these outcomes, KIM uses creative, proactive follow-up strategies and a lot of persistence, trying multiple approaches until something works. Its tactics include sending employment verification letters with pre-stamped return envelopes to program completers, contacting them from a variety of phone numbers, and sending verification forms directly to employers.

Connecting Services to Program Outcomes

Across the PO cohort, JFF observed patterns in how specific services were related to enrollment, MSGs, credential attainment, and job placement outcomes. The programs that reported the highest enrollment levels were often the ones that had the strongest participant-centered recruitment strategies—particularly efforts that were grounded in trusted messengers and community-based outreach. Thoughtful training design and delivery, including accessible schedules, relevant content, and integrated basic-skills supports, were closely associated with stronger MSG and credential outcomes. Finally, JFF observed that robust employer partnerships and intentional career navigation services were most frequently present in programs reporting stronger job placement results, and that programs with long-standing community partnerships, organizational capacity to braid funds and co-enroll participants, and a comprehensive package of supports tended to have strong outcomes across all four measures.

Challenges

What barriers did POs face when administering their FAPs?

The barriers to economic mobility that California’s farmworker communities face are well documented and have been shaped by the conditions of low-wage employment, limited worker protections, language barriers, and immigration status. While Round 1 POs developed innovative, population-specific strategies to help participants overcome barriers to training, challenges in the ecosystem still affected their programs, especially during a period of rapid change in the broader political and economic climate. Some of these challenges underscore the persistent need for more training options designed to serve the populations that have limited ability to take advantage of typical offerings, while others reflect the difficulty of transitioning participants from training into quality jobs. JFF also observed and documented challenges that some POs faced related to administering a WIOA-funded program, reporting data, and tracking participant outcomes. Recurring challenges documented across the JFF team’s interactions with POs fell into the four broad categories described below.

01.

A lack of training options and credential pathways aligned with participant needs and skill levels

While many POs intentionally harnessed regional partnerships to help meet their participants’ needs for certified training in their chosen career pathways, several reported challenges in identifying appropriate training placements. Commonly cited barriers included location and lack of transportation—particularly in rural areas, such as those served by Reedley College and the West Hills Community College District—as well as limited night or weekend classes that could fit into farmworkers’ busy schedules.

Beyond these logistical challenges, some POs noted a mismatch between occupational training programs’ eligibility requirements and typical farmworker skill levels. Many community college certificate programs, and even some nonprofit training providers, require a high school diploma or GED for enrollment, though the average level of formal education for California farmworkers is eighth grade. As one PO noted, “It’s hard to match their eligibility criteria. Most of our participants don’t have [their diploma].” Several other POs indicated that minimum education requirements affected their participants’ credential-attainment outcomes. The experience of FAP POs demonstrates an ongoing need to rethink education requirements and redesign pathways to credentials for farmworker communities, including through strategies such as bridge programs, pre-apprenticeships, and credit for prior learning.

Focusing on GED attainment to open doors to future training and employment

United Way of Central Eastern California's Farmworker Essential Skills Training Program treats GED attainment as a core strategy for expanding farmworkers' long-term options in education and work. Staff members now offer GED preparation alongside soft-skills workshops; they also bring participants in regularly to take practice tests and build confidence before scheduling the official exam. This focus on completing a high school equivalency is paired with taking advantage of existing partnerships with California State University, Bakersfield and the Kern Community College District to develop uniquely tailored support and education to help each participant attain a higher-paying job. Because many certificate and training programs require a high school diploma or GED for enrollment, this emphasis on GED completion helps farmworkers clear a common eligibility barrier and access higher-skill, higher-wage opportunities that would otherwise remain out of reach.

Language barriers were also frequently cited as an obstacle to both enrolling participants in training and to supporting credential completion. POs noted that some regions, such as the Central Coast, particularly lack occupational training options delivered in Spanish. In some cases, even when POs provided training in Spanish or offered support from bilingual staff members, participants faced language barriers when it came time to take licensure exams available only in English, such as the behind-the-wheel test to earn a California school bus driver's license. This systemic barrier to credentialing can limit advancement opportunities, even for workers in roles that do not demand English proficiency. This challenge necessitates that POs continue exploring creative solutions to build participants' English proficiency or identify alternative pathways.

Finally, some POs noted challenges with the cost, location, and limited availability of licensure exams in certain fields. For example, exams for paraprofessional educators are seldom administered in the Central Valley, and one PO reported that its participants sometimes needed to travel to Los Angeles for testing, which resulted in extra travel costs and missed work.

02.

Challenges connecting training to employment

In Round 1, translating training into quality-job placements required deeper employer partnerships and alignment with workforce needs than many POs initially had in place. Several POs described challenges in supporting participants' job searches and identifying employers willing to hire them, particularly among farmworkers transitioning into a new field and lacking formal experience. This dynamic was exacerbated by a softening labor market and a broader context of economic uncertainty during the second half of the performance period. Some POs also noted that their rural location limited their ability to engage with employer partners. Others said that they needed to continually remind employer partners about their

programs and engage with them regularly rather than waiting until a training cohort had completed the program.

Lack of employer engagement particularly affected projects that included work-based learning or on-the-job training as a significant aspect of their design. Multiple POs noted that agricultural employers are often hesitant to invest in training for roles with high worker turnover. One experienced training provider had to pivot its approach away from on-the-job training due to employer reluctance to offer publicly funded training to incumbent workers.

Knowing that employer engagement often proves to be among the most challenging aspects of implementing workforce development programs, JFF facilitated several virtual and in-person community-of-practice sessions focused on sharing best practices and troubleshooting issues related to this part of the program life cycle. POs highlighted examples of progress in building their employer relationships through mutually beneficial activities such as inviting employers to use their training facilities for job fairs and including them as guests at program graduations.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Delivering customized, employer-driven training through collaborative partnerships

The Farmworker Resource Center of the Workforce Development Board of Santa Barbara County prioritizes building strong, long-term partnerships with both agricultural employers and farmworkers to support the success of its FAP. Program leadership recognized early on that meaningful workforce development requires trust, transparency, and shared ownership among all partners and worked closely with employers and employees as a unified group to identify needs, design training, and support long-term career advancement. Throughout the award period, the team hosted employer and employee engagement activities, conducted ongoing needs assessments, and developed customized training programs based on direct input from industry partners and participating workers. Those efforts resulted in a range of employer-aligned trainings, including digital literacy, forklift certification, ammonia refrigeration safety, commercial driver's license preparation, and pesticide safety and compliance training in partnership with West End Supplies.

One example of a success is a customized digital literacy training that the Farmworker Resource Center created for a major agricultural employer. Offered as a two-month program for incumbent workers, the initiative led to three participants being promoted into office and supervisory roles, strengthening internal workforce pipelines while improving employee retention and advancement.

03.

Program eligibility, policy shifts, and a climate of fear

In addition to facing economic uncertainty, POs also had to contend with ongoing shifts in policy guidance related to program eligibility and work authorization, as well as immigration enforcement activities and the heightened vulnerability of many farmworker communities. While FAP is funded through federal WIOA dollars, the state and federal guidance in place at the beginning of the PY 2023-2024 performance period encouraged an inclusive approach that allowed grantees to deliver certain services, such as career assessments and referrals to community resources, without verifying a participant's program eligibility.⁵ Verification of work authorization was required only for activities such as job placement assistance, work-based learning, and training leading to employment. This flexibility was particularly important in allowing POs to meet the varied needs of their communities, given that an estimated 49% of California farmworkers lack work authorization. However, the federal Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 10-23 was rescinded in March 2025, and updated guidance issued in July 2025 clarified that WIOA grantees must verify potential program participants' work authorizations in order to deliver any services to them.⁶

These midprogram shifts introduced confusion about FAP implementation rules and prompted frequent questions from POs during group TA activities and one-on-one meetings with the JFF team. EDD's Special Populations Support Unit (SPSU) worked closely with many POs to address their questions about eligibility verification and concerns about protecting sensitive participant information.

The shifting political and legal context introduced a heightened sense of risk for employers as well. At least two POs expressed concern about securing job placements for program participants who had temporary work permits that would eventually expire.

In parallel, the broader immigration enforcement climate contributed to fear and distrust, deterring program enrollment and the use of in-person services at times. Several POs said that they had to take extra measures to rebuild community confidence, such as partnering with trusted messengers, delivering remote services or pivoting to new locations, and enhancing strategies to protect personally identifiable information.

04.

WIOA program administration and outcome tracking

EDD's Workforce Services Branch made a strategic effort to engage a diverse pool of applicants for public workforce funding, including community-based organizations with deep expertise in serving target populations. Many of the FAP Round 1 POs were first-time recipients of WIOA funding, and some had particularly small staffs and organizational budgets. As anticipated, these organizations faced a significant learning curve when it came to administering and reporting on their use of WIOA funds. Using the CalJOBS system, in particular, was repeatedly mentioned as a pain point, due to both the time required for data entry and the challenges of understanding activity codes and accurately reporting information. In one case, a PO that had been awarded FAP funding ultimately withdrew after completing CalJOBS training, recognizing that its three-person staff could not realistically handle the administrative requirements. This experience underscores that burdensome grant administration can unintentionally exclude smaller, deeply rooted farmworker-serving organizations, resulting in missed opportunities to direct resources to trusted community partners. Limited CalJOBS proficiency was cited as a factor affecting the quality of the data POs provided, potentially leading to underreporting of participant outcomes such as MSGs, credentials earned, and employment.

In an effort to mitigate these challenges, EDD's SPSU team shared extensive resources and training videos with POs and proactively encouraged them to reach out for one-on-one assistance with their specific questions. The SPSU project manager also shared guidance and fielded questions at a virtual office-hours session hosted by JFF in September 2025, with a focus on topics that frequently caused confusion, such as WIOA performance measure definitions. The JFF team also facilitated peer learning on topics such as tracking MSGs. Nonetheless, some POs may have been reluctant to contact EDD or draw attention to their data; in other cases, the representatives participating in TA activities were not the same staff members who were responsible for reporting and grant administration. Confusion and a lack of knowledge about WIOA requirements also led to challenging experiences with EDD audits for some POs that did not have all of the necessary policies and documentation practices in place.

Maintaining contact with FAP participants after exit to verify their post-program employment status and credential attainment also proved difficult for many POs, particularly smaller organizations with limited staff capacity. Multiple POs reported challenges in contacting or receiving calls back from former FAP participants. JFF facilitated cross-PO sharing of ideas and examples of strategies for addressing this challenge; nonetheless, low response rates and limited staff capacity for post-program tracking will likely lead to an undercount of successful outcomes in the second and fourth quarters after participants' exit, particularly once FAP funds have been fully spent.

Program Sustainability

What have POs done to sustain their programming beyond the grant period?

POs used a range of sustainability strategies to ensure that Round 1 FAP funding functioned as a catalyst rather than a one-time investment. Drawing on tools from JFF's Sustainability Toolkit, the JFF team helped POs assess their current FAP's sustainability and identify strategies to continue their programs' impact and operations after grant funding ends.⁷ JFF observed that FAP is the sole funding source for some programs, whereas others are diversified in their funding sources. Some POs reported drawing from a mix of state and local resources, federal funds, philanthropic grants, and employer contributions to supplement FAP dollars, while others currently have no additional funding dedicated to sustaining their FAP. The POs' financial sustainability efforts included the following approaches.



Using non-FAP public dollars for wraparound supports

Several POs tapped into other public programs to cover essential supports for FAP participants. Three operators that also administer the NFJP co-enrolled FAP participants, giving them access to expanded supportive services critical for training completion and employment retention, such as assistance with rent and utility costs, transportation, food, and child care. NFJP co-enrollment enabled these POs to offer more robust job training and support services than FAP alone could finance. Because NFJP is a standing U.S. Department of Labor program that POs administer under

separate grants, co-enrolled participants will remain connected to case management and basic-needs supports beyond the FAP grant period; this reduces the risk of a sharp drop-off in services and gives POs a more stable platform for sustaining their farmworker programming beyond this round of funding. Some POs also drew on Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding to provide basic-needs supports for FAP participants.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Co-enrolling with NFJP to maximize supportive services

La Cooperativa Campesina (LCC), through its implementation partner Proteus, applies its long-standing role as an NFJP grantee to co-enroll FAP participants and braid resources across both initiatives. As of fall 2025, Proteus had co-enrolled 80 of its 93 FAP participants into NFJP—an 86% co-enrollment rate—allowing the organization to stretch limited FAP dollars by using NFJP funds to cover critical supports such as rent, utility, transportation, food, child care, and work clothing assistance, as well as other training-related expenses. LCC and Proteus had preexisting NFJP partnerships and memoranda of understanding with local workforce boards and America’s Job Center of California sites. Those relationships enabled them to quickly integrate FAP into an established regional ecosystem of referrals, vocational training, and wraparound services across sectors like agriculture, construction, health care, and transportation. This integrated model is especially important for unemployed participants who are attending full-time classes and need stable basic-needs support to persist in training and searching for employment. The results of this intensive support are notable: LCC’s credential attainment and employment outcomes were among the highest in the FAP Round 1 cohort as of this report’s writing.

Securing additional rounds of FAP funding to expand their scale and scope

POs also pursued continued state investment to support subsequent rounds of their FAP initiatives. In March 2025, a second round of FAP awards was issued, and three Round 1 operators—the Center for Employment Training, KIM, and WHCCD—secured Round 2 funding through the competitive process, allowing them to expand or refine their program models. Many Round 1 POs have expressed interest in a potential third round of FAP funding anticipated for 2026, viewing it as a pathway to further scale and sustain their work.

PO SPOTLIGHT

Leveraging diversified funding and advocacy to sustain farmworker training

The Center for Employment Training (CET) sustains its farmworker programming by drawing on multiple public funding streams. Building on decades of experience with the NFJP and other federal grants, CET has developed robust internal systems for tracking outcomes, braiding funds, and demonstrating impact to funders and policymakers. Its leadership plays an active advocacy role with state and federal legislators and in national farmworker networks, helping to protect and expand resources that support training opportunities for agricultural workers. Because CET is an accredited institution that participates in Title IV federal student aid programs under

the Higher Education Act, it has additional avenues to help eligible students pay for training. At the regional level, CET's long-standing relationships with workforce development boards have matured into deeper, co-designed partnerships that align workforce training, supportive services, and employer engagement strategies. This coordinated approach strengthens CET's ability to deliver industry-aligned training while expanding access to quality jobs for farmworkers and their families. It also positions the organization to build on its Round 1 experience and expand its impact through subsequent FAP funding rounds while preparing to take advantage of future opportunities, such as the Workforce Pell Grant program, when they become available.

Limited use of philanthropic dollars

Only one PO, to date, has secured philanthropic funding to supplement its FAP; it used those funds to pay for child care for training participants. Private dollars are often more flexible and less restricted than public grants and thus are an important strategy for strengthening long-term sustainability and supporting services that fall outside of narrow grant requirements. This is a particularly important strategy for serving populations that may not be eligible for services under federal workforce programs, given that philanthropic funders often do not have the same requirements. However, philanthropic grants are an underused resource. For some entities, such as public workforce boards without 501(c)(3) status, accessing philanthropic dollars may require creative solutions, including partnering with nonprofit organizations that can receive the funds and then subgrant or subcontract for FAP-related services.

Explanation of different funding strategies

Co-enrollment

Formally enrolling a single participant in FAP and at least one other program (for example, NFJP, WIOA Title I, or CSBG) at the same time. Each program has its own eligibility rules, case files, and reporting procedures, but the participant experiences a more seamless package of training, supportive services, and job placement assistance across funding streams.

Braiding funds

Designing one integrated program model and budget that is intentionally supported by multiple funding streams at once (FAP, NFJP, and CSBG, for example), with costs allocated and tracked back to each source. Braiding lets operators build a more comprehensive set of services (such as training, work-based learning, and wraparound supports) than any single grant could fund on its own, while still meeting each funder's rules and documentation requirements.

Leveraging funds

Using the FAP grant as a catalyst to draw in or align with additional resources that are not formally part of the FAP budget. This can include in-kind staff time, philanthropic grants, employer contributions, or existing public funds (such as WIOA Title I or community college apportionment). Leveraging expands the overall capacity to serve farmworkers—often extending or sustaining services before or after the FAP grant period—without necessarily co-enrolling every participant or fully braiding the dollars. Leveraging funds or services from other sources (accounting for at least 20% of the budget) was a requirement of the FAP grant for Track 1 awardees.

Overall, the variation we see in sustainability approaches is shaped by organization size and type, its internal capacity, its prior experience with federal funding, and the level of leadership engagement. Smaller programs embedded in large institutions often need explicit political or executive sponsorship to keep FAP-related fundraising on the agenda, while many small, community-based organizations simply lack the staff time and infrastructure to plan beyond the current grant period. Toward the end of the Round 1 period, we began to see organic cross-PO partnerships emerge as a sustainability strategy; for example, a nonprofit operator with more flexibility and fundraising experience started exploring creative ways to partner with a workforce board that was unsure about how to pursue philanthropic dollars. Across all organizational types, one clear lesson is that program sustainability planning needs to start early and be revisited regularly throughout the life of the grant rather than treated as an end-of-project exercise.



Recommendations

The recommendations that follow were drawn from direct input from Round 1 project operators, as well as observations from the JFF team. They highlight what other farmworker-serving organizations can learn from the FAP PO experience and what California can do to strengthen future rounds of this type of investment.

Recommendations for farmworker-serving organizations

POs emphasized that farmworker-serving organizations can significantly strengthen their impact by deepening collaboration, adapting programs to emerging needs, and tailoring services to diverse farmworker communities. In particular, they underscored the importance of treating wraparound supports and outreach as shared responsibilities across a local ecosystem rather than as tasks that any single program can shoulder alone. While all of the information presented throughout this report points to successful program delivery and challenge-mitigation strategies that can serve as lessons for other organizations, there are a few overarching recommendations:

01.

Stay tightly focused on the target population by prioritizing program accessibility and selecting partners and training offerings that reflect participant needs.

Ensure that partners are able to offer linguistically and culturally responsive programs. Additionally, develop a strategy to address skill gaps, including through IET models, so that all participants are able to work toward the educational thresholds required for credential attainment and placement into well-paying jobs. Don't create a rigid plan; instead, build flexibility into the program design and scope so services can expand or adjust as new participant needs or promising partnership opportunities emerge.

02.

Cultivate employer engagement throughout the program life cycle so training reliably translates into quality job placements.

Develop partnerships that are mutually beneficial rather than transactional, by focusing on how to address the talent needs of high road employers that offer quality jobs. Engage early and often: Codesign roles and curricula with employers before cohorts launch, and set a recurring touch-point cadence so you're not "reintroducing" programs to employers only when participants are approaching program completion.

03.

Engage in collaboration to provide comprehensive wraparound supports.

Collaborate closely with community partners to co-enroll participants so they receive timely wraparound services (such as access to food pantries, legal services, and other basic-needs supports). Focus on organizational strengths, and partner for other services to avoid duplicated efforts.

04.

Invest in intentional trust-building between your team and farmworker communities.

Show up consistently where people already gather (such as schools, swap meets, and community events), and work with trusted community-based organizations with bilingual, culturally familiar staff members to introduce FAP-funded services, answer questions, and support FAP recruitment. Given heightened immigration enforcement-related fears, be explicit about what data is (and isn't) collected and how it will be safeguarded. Prioritize team-member continuity, deliver on your promises to participants, and cultivate word-of-mouth champions so that trust and participation grow organically.

05.

Recognize that the farmworker community is not monolithic.

Seek out community partners and staff members who are familiar with Indigenous languages and cultures and other distinct community identities so that programs can effectively serve a wide range of farmworkers and their families.



Recommendations for California state agencies

FAP Round 1 generated a set of lessons about how the state can refine its role as a grant maker, administrator, and supportive partner. While some administrative elements of the program are constrained by state and federal regulations, POs stressed that thoughtful design and implementation at the state level can reduce their burdens, promote learning, and increase the long-term impact of this type of investment. State-level recommendations from FAP Round 1 can be grouped into three broad categories; action-oriented suggestions are provided for each.

01. Strengthen the statewide ecosystem of farmworker supports and employer incentives.

Because FAP is organized around a population rather than a single industry, it underscores the need to think about farmworker services holistically rather than through the silo of any one funding stream or department. From a farmworker’s perspective, the funding source is irrelevant—they simply need trusted messengers and clear, accessible pathways to support. This calls for stronger cross-sector and interagency coordination at the state level so that services feel integrated and coherent to participants and so that public investments are aligned and used to maximize the positive impact on farmworker communities. Consider the following ideas for achieving this:

- ▶ Increase visibility for farmworker-focused work at the state level, and model interagency collaboration to maximize resources and impact for this target population. Highlighting farmworker voices and projects through greater coverage of FAP and related initiatives in statewide communications and the governor’s messaging can help build public support and normalize sustained investment in this sector. Coordination across publicly funded programs can help POs better leverage and braid funding to support participant outcomes.
- ▶ Incentivize the hiring of newly trained and credentialed FAP participants, and encourage collaborative employer engagement. Because securing quality jobs with family-sustaining wages and benefits remains one of the biggest barriers to realizing FAP’s goals, tools such as wage subsidies, hiring incentives, or targeted tax benefits for employers who hire graduates of state-funded programs could help shift hiring behavior. Additionally, the state can promote collaborative approaches to employer engagement by encouraging grant recipients to work through entities that already have strong employer networks, such as local workforce boards, chambers of commerce, and industry associations. Having each PO build its own employer relationships from scratch is resource-intensive and difficult to sustain.
- ▶ Work with education and training providers to expand accessible, bilingual pathways to credentials. Encourage institutions, especially community colleges, to revisit where high school diploma/GED entry requirements are not legally required; increase their evening,

weekend, and Spanish- and Indigenous-language offerings; and invest in bridge programs, integrated education and training models, and credit for prior learning so farmworkers' existing skills and experience count toward credentials rather than being a barrier to enrollment and completion.

02.

Replicate EDD SPSU's strong support for FAP POs, and explore new approaches to deepen proactive, just-in-time guidance.

In FAP Round 1, the Special Populations Support Unit set a high bar for what it should look like when a state acts as a true thought partner to grantees, not just a compliance monitor. Building on this model and making it more proactive and structured would help more POs—especially smaller or first-time WIOA funding recipients—access the right supports at the right times. Consider the following suggestions for expanding support for POs across future grant programs:

- ▶ Foster a culture of collaboration and problem-solving between the state and grant recipients so that POs experience state staff members as thought partners. When POs adopt a collaborative stance, it helps them identify challenges early, encourages learning, and supports thoughtful adaptations over the life of the grant. The SPSU team effectively fostered this type of culture by encouraging POs to modify program scopes and budgets when needed, making real-time changes to programmatic guidance when issues arose, and being a consistently reliable resource and thought partner. This approach should be replicated across other grant teams.
- ▶ Provide CalJOBS “buddies” or data navigators for each grantee to help troubleshoot data entry problems, interpret performance metrics, address co-enrollment questions, and translate CalJOBS requirements into program-friendly language. While POs have received strong support after reaching out to state staff members, a more proactive and structured model would better serve people who are hesitant to ask for help because they worry about being perceived as struggling or out of compliance.
- ▶ Offer proactive, targeted support for first-time WIOA grant recipients, especially around EDD audits. Several Round 1 POs were relatively small community-based organizations that had never before received WIOA funds, and the audit process came as a surprise to them. An orientation or training session for first-time recipients that clarifies what to expect—what documents to have in order, and how long the process is likely to take—would better prepare new grantees.
- ▶ Create a centralized grant handbook or guidance hub that consolidates key policies, reporting requirements, FAQs, examples, and contact information in one place rather than dispersed across multiple emails and training sessions.

- ▶ Encourage program sustainability planning from the outset by building sustainability-related prompts into the solicitations for proposals (SFPs), asking follow-up questions in narrative reports, and connecting grantees to existing resources, such as JFF's Sustainability Toolkit.

03.

Identify creative solutions to improve the PO user experience that are still in compliance with state and federal regulations.

In their feedback, POs noted how time-intensive the processes of completing FAP grant proposals, modifying exhibits post-award, and reporting on progress and outcomes were. These experiences echo recent findings from the Little Hoover Commission, which concluded that California's grant and contract systems often rely on complex application processes and extensive, sometimes duplicative reporting requirements that place a disproportionate administrative burden on smaller, less-resourced nonprofits.⁸ Because many aspects of these processes are legally mandated, we recommend establishing structured co-planning between the relevant state project management team and EDD's Grants & Solicitations Unit before each new grant is released, so that the application's design balances PO needs with state and federal requirements. The project management teams can provide firsthand insight into how POs will use funds, while the Grants & Solicitations Unit can ensure alignment with contracting and administrative rules. Collaborating upfront will enable the state to develop solutions to common challenges that satisfy federal and state requirements while minimizing the burden on grantees. While some elements of grant administration will require longer-term, system-level changes, there are near-term opportunities to convene teams to coordinate key design decisions in advance of release.

State staff members could assess the following recommendations in advance of a grant release to determine which ones are legally feasible:

▶ *Application*

- Streamline the SFP application by removing repetitive questions, tightening prompts, and more clearly aligning narrative questions to how projects will be assessed.
- Minimize the need for extensive modifications to exhibits at the beginning of the grant period by providing clearer guidance in the SFP. Ensure that requested modifications are truly required and well explained to applicants.

▶ *Reporting*

- Integrate narrative and quantitative reporting so that CalJOBS data and narrative reflections are submitted through a single, coordinated process or tool rather than separate, parallel systems.
- Shift the narrative-report frequency from monthly to quarterly to allow time for meaningful implementation, reflection, and analysis rather than compliance-only updates.

▶ *Participant Data Collection*

- Reduce required participant data collection to only the most critical fields, recognizing that many farmworkers are understandably hesitant to share personal demographic information and that over-collection can undermine trust and participation.
- Clarify how to report on wages, industry, and occupation to better track trends. (For example, should a participant who gets a job in truck driving for an agricultural company be classified under “agriculture industry” or “transportation and logistics”?)

Streamlining application, reporting, and data collection requirements is especially important to enable the participation of small organizations or first-time public-funding recipients that may lack the staff capacity and infrastructure needed to successfully administer FAP grants.

By acting on these recommendations, both farmworker-serving organizations and state leaders can help ensure that FAP—and similar investments in the future—deliver deeper, more durable benefits for California’s farmworker communities.

Conclusion

Round 1 of the Farmworkers Advancement Program offers clear evidence that when farmworker-serving organizations are given funds to design population-specific workforce strategies, they build models that reflect the realities of farmworker life: irregular schedules, transportation constraints, language and literacy barriers, and deep mistrust rooted in immigration enforcement and historical exclusion. Project operators used FAP dollars not only to expand training capacity but also to invest in trust-building, culturally relevant instruction, and comprehensive supports that make participation possible. They also showed that co-enrollment and the braiding and leveraging of other public funds can transform a single grant into a broader platform for farmworker advancement, especially when those processes are paired with responsive state partners and technical assistance that centers on learning rather than compliance alone.

At the same time, Round 1 underscores that advancing economic mobility for farmworkers is a long-term systems project, not a short-term programmatic fix. Many POs are still strengthening their employer engagement strategies, deepening their focus on job quality and advancement, and building the internal capacity to manage WIOA requirements and sustain programming beyond the life of their grants. The lessons highlighted in this report point to several priorities for the next phase of work: expanding accessible training options that meet farmworkers where they are; incentivizing employers to hire and promote FAP participants into quality jobs; reducing the administrative barriers that deter smaller, community-rooted organizations; and sustaining cross-agency collaboration at the state level so farmworkers experience services as integrated rather than fragmented. By continuing to invest in and refine initiatives like FAP, California can move closer to a workforce system in which the people who power the state’s agricultural economy have real, durable pathways to economic security and opportunity.

Endnotes

- 1 “Federal Grant Funding Disclosure: Stevens Amendment,” California Employment Development Department, accessed November 14, 2024, https://edd.ca.gov/en/jobs_and_training/federal-grant-funding-disclosure-stevens-amendment/.
- 2 FAP Round 1 (PY 2023-2024) funded 12 project operators during the performance period of February 2024 to March 2026. FAP Round 2 (PY 2024-2025) funded 11 project operators during the performance period of March 2025 to March 2027. The application period for FAP Round 3 opened in early 2026.
- 3 EDD uses the term “good quality” to refer to jobs that pay family-sustaining wages, offer benefits, have predictable hours, offer opportunities for career advancement, and support worker voice. Detailed information related to how “good jobs” is defined can be found in the following resources: “Job Quality Frameworks,” Results for America, accessed February 20, 2026, https://results4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/RFA-WorkLab_-_Job-Quality-Framework-Final.pdf; Maureen Conway, Jeannine LaPrad, Amanda Cage, Sarah Miller, To Build Back Better, Job Quality Is the Key (The Aspen Institute, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, National Fund for Workforce Solutions, and Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, April 2021), <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/To-Build-Back-Better-Job-Quality-Is-the-Key.pdf>.
- 4 Statewide National Agricultural Workers Survey data for 2015-2019 shows that 96% of California farmworkers are Hispanic and 69% are male, with an eighth-grade level of formal education, on average. See Izaac Ornelas, Wenson Fung, Susan Gabbard, and Daniel Carroll, California Findings From the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2015-2019: A Demographic and Employment Profile of California Farmworkers, Research Report No. 15 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, January 2022), <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/news/pdfs/NAWS%20Research%20Report%2015.pdf>.
- 5 Employment and Training Administration, “Reducing Administrative Barriers to Improve Customer Experience in Grant Programs Administered by the Employment and Training Administration,” Training and Employment Guidance Letter No.10-23 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Feb. 21, 2025), <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/advisories/TEGL/2023/TEGL%2010-23/TEGL%2010-23.pdf>; Workforce Services Branch, “Pathway to Services, Referral, and Enrollment,” California Workforce Services Directive 18-03 (Sacramento, California: California Workforce Development Board and State of California Employment Development Department, August 29, 2018), https://edd.ca.gov/siteassets/files/jobs_and_training/pubs/wsd18-03.pdf.

- 6 Employment and Training Administration, “Rescission of TEGL No. 10-23: Reducing Admin Barriers to Improve Customer Experience in Grant Programs Administered by ETA,” Training and Employment Guidance Letter No.10-23 Change 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, July, 10, 2025), <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/advisories/TEGL/2023/TEGL%2010-23%20Change%202/TEGL%2010-23%20Change%202.pdf>.
- 7 “Sustainability Toolkit,” Jobs for the Future, April 15, 2025, <https://www.jff.org/idea/hrtf-sustainability-toolkit/>.
- 8 Little Hoover Commission, Shared Priorities, Strained Systems: Modernizing State Grants and Contracts with Nonprofits, Report 291 (Sacramento, California: Milton Marks “Little Hoover” Commission on California State Government Organization and Economy, January 2026), <https://lhc.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/LHC-Report-291-State-Grant-and-Contract-Administration-with-Nonprofits-FINAL.pdf>.



Building a Future
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