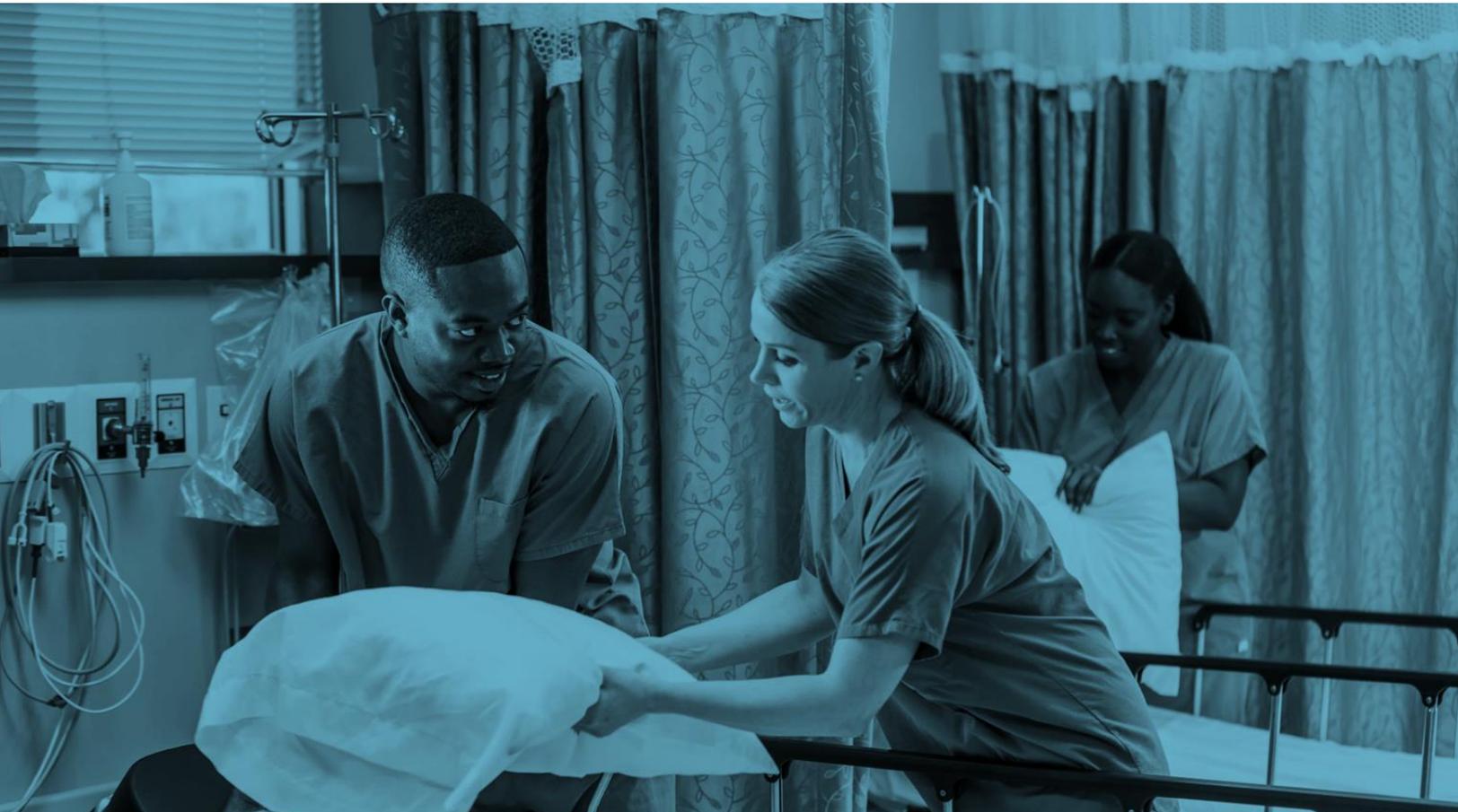


Doing Things Right: Lessons Learned from the Advocate Aurora Health NAVIGATE Employee Training Program



Rachel Carly Feldman, Ph.D.
Elizabeth Villegas, Ph.D.
NORC at the University of Chicago

OCTOBER 2020

Acknowledgements

This report was made possible by Advocate Aurora Health who is committed to evaluating and improving their education initiatives. Program funding came from JP Morgan Chase. Special appreciation to Katrina Boatright-Williams, manager of AAH Workforce Development, and Mary-Frances Teshler, AAH Workforce Development consultant, for their deep commitment to continual program improvement. Their recruitment efforts and NAVIGATE program content knowledge greatly improved this report. Lastly, we wish to recognize the NAVIGATE facilitators and participants who volunteered their time during a global health crisis to speak with us about their experiences. Their invaluable insights comprise this report.

NORC at the University of Chicago would also like to acknowledge the University of Chicago Poverty Lab for inviting us to investigate the NAVIGATE program.

Executive Summary

There are over 30 million frontline workers in the United States.ⁱ Many of these workers lack the skills to advance into higher paying jobs.ⁱⁱ This skills shortage poses impediments to the workers themselves who struggle with little career mobility, and just as importantly, this shortage creates challenges for employers who have job openings but no one qualified to fill them. In fact, finding and hiring key talent is a critical organizational matter that consumes time and expense, impacting the bottom line.ⁱⁱⁱ Given the tight relationship between skills and wages^{iv}, improving workers' skills benefits both workers and their employers. Yet, figuring out ways to improve workers' skills still poses challenges.

Upskilling refers the practice of investing in a company's existing workforce by providing skill development and training. This practice maximizes employees' potential while reducing costly staff turnover. While gaining in popularity, many businesses still look elsewhere for talent rather than within their own ranks. This is a costly proposition and potentially self-defeating: [54 percent](#) of surveyed employees reported that opportunities for career advancement was the reason they would remain with their current employer.^v Thus, investing in existing employees makes economic as well as social sense.

Many companies are still determining how best to maximize their investment in their employees. Advocate Aurora Health (AAH), a Midwest hospital system, has found one method that seems to be working. The organization developed a training program designed to increase workers' skills and create within-system job pathways. Developed by the AAH Workforce Development team, the NAVIGATE program aims to encourage professional and career development among entry-level AAH employees. A two-pronged program, it includes both in-class career development training and professional mentoring. The program helps participants strengthen their interpersonal, communication, and critical-thinking skills alongside job training efforts.

In 2020, the NAVIGATE program underwent a process evaluation conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago to learn just how program participants and facilitators experienced the program. The evaluation consisted of participant and facilitator virtual focus groups in the spring of 2020. Participants came from across four acute-care hospital sites in the state of Illinois. This report details their experiences.

Overall, findings indicate that both participants and facilitators were satisfied with the NAVIGATE program. Facilitators continued to participate because of the connections they made with the participants. Participants appreciated that the skills they learned helped both at work and in their daily lives. Participants also recognized that AAH's investment in NAVIGATE illustrated AAH's commitment to them as employees. Findings show that participants believed they learned valuable skills and many credited the program with assisting them in advancing in their careers.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	II
Executive Summary	III
Table of Contents.....	IV
The NAVIGATE Program.....	1
The Evaluation.....	2
Findings	4
Facilitator Recruitment and Experience	4
Participant Recruitment and Selection	7
Participant Course Experience.....	8
Mentoring.....	10
Participant Outcomes	11
Discussion and Conclusion.....	14
Appendix A. Focus Group Protocols (Facilitator).....	15
Appendix B. Focus Group Protocols (Participant).....	19
Appendix C. NAVIGATE Course Outline.....	23

The NAVIGATE Program

Advocate Aurora Health (AAH) created the NAVIGATE Incumbent Training Program as an internal effort to encourage professional and career development among AAH team members. Currently run within four acute-care Advocate hospitals, the program is designed to develop staff capacity and support them in advancing their careers. The program primarily targets (but is not limited to) front-line, non-managerial, clinical support roles (Certified Nursing Assistants [CNAs], radiography & surgical technicians, medical assistants, phlebotomists, etc.) and non-clinical support roles (patient access representatives, food service workers, environmental technicians, guest services representatives, etc.). The program is structured to provide participants with professional skills that can be applied across a wide variety of settings, broadly supporting upward mobility. A secondary, but potentially growing, aim is to provide direct job training skills such as resume and interview support.

NAVIGATE is a two-pronged program managed by the Advocate Aurora Workforce Development team (WFD). The core component of NAVIGATE is an in-person training course designed to help participants with career exploration through improving their interpersonal, communication, and critical thinking skills. Course sessions are facilitated by hospital administrators and meet for nine sessions over a period of six months. The second component is a formal mentor who acts as a “career coach,” exposing participants to other lines of work within the hospital and helping them network. Mentors are leaders within their hospitals. Currently, there is flexibility in the mentor role. However, behind the scenes, the Workforce Development staff also support participants by helping them develop a career plan, identify training and education resources to reach their career goals, and connecting them to recruiters who hire for specific roles.

“I really appreciate this program in particular because in organizations good people get lost. We’re not brought to the forefront and given a chance to excel... You don’t know who is hiding in the corners. We overlook those who just do their job and wait for others to get out of the way. Advocate excelled at getting people who are ready to grow. We don’t have a M.A., B.A., but we’re good workers and we may need a hand.”

To participate in the program, the staff member must have worked at Advocate Aurora Health for at least six months, applied to the program, completed an interview and received a letter of support from their supervisor. Selection is partly based on cohort composition (efforts are made to foster cross-departmental engagement) and partly based on competitiveness.

Courses include emotional intelligence, communication in the workplace, stress management, goal setting, conflict resolution, critical thinking, problem solving, and hospitality. Materials included curriculum, curriculum guides, and interactive video segments. Most of the lessons were developed in house with some additional lessons purchased from an outside vendor.

As of summer 2020, the NAVIGATE program had been implemented in four hospitals in the Illinois Advocate Aurora Health Network. These are: Christ Medical Center, Illinois Masonic Medical Center, South Suburban Hospital, and Trinity Hospital. Both Christ Medical and Illinois Masonic are comprehensive medical centers whereas South Suburban and Trinity Hospitals are regional hospitals. Trinity Hospital piloted the NAVIGATE program in 2017, Christ Medical Center and Illinois Masonic Medical Center came on board a year later in 2018 and South Suburban Hospital began their first cohort in 2019. To date, there have been a total of 13 NAVIGATE cohorts, reaching 258 employees across the four hospitals.

The Evaluation

The aim of this evaluation report is to provide feedback on the NAVIGATE program's implementation. NORC at University of Chicago (NORC) conducted the evaluation, focusing on how staff members (facilitators and participants) experienced the program. This process evaluation examines the effectiveness of the program from the perspective of those who experienced it, providing insight into how the program works in practice. Considering that NAVIGATE is a relatively new program, this process evaluation is intended to help Advocate Aurora Health identify practices that work and ones that may need improvement in order to successfully replicate the program across additional Advocate hospitals.

Research Questions

- What program activities were accomplished?
- How did respondents experience the NAVIGATE program?
- What did respondents identify as successes and challenges?

Methods

To complete the process evaluation, NORC conducted focus groups with the facilitators and recently-enrolled participants at each participating hospital. Focus groups for both facilitators and participants were scheduled back-to-back in the same week over a period of four weeks in spring of 2020. They were scheduled strategically with facilitators speaking first to help lay the groundwork for the discussions with participating staff. Additional follow-up interviews occurred with respondents (facilitator or participant) when either a respondent reached out to reschedule or no respondents attended the focus group, at which point those who initially showed interest were re-contacted by both the Workforce Development team and NORC researchers.

Focus groups were originally scheduled to occur in person at each hospital. However, the COVID pandemic forced focus groups online. These occurred between late April and May, 2020. Each participant who expressed a willingness to join the conversation was sent an internet and telephone-capable Zoom link.

Recruitment for the focus groups began in mid-April with blanket emails sent to the most recent participants and facilitators requesting their participation and detailing the time and process for attending. Reminder emails continued through the day of the focus group. Participation was incentivized with a \$25 Amazon gift certificate provided by Advocate Aurora Health and managed by the Workforce Development team.

In total, outreach went to 69 participants and 22 facilitators across the four sites.

Table 1. Participating NAVIGATE Staff

Group	Hospital				Totals
	Christ	IL Masonic	South Suburban	Trinity	
Facilitators	1 focus group (3)	1 focus group (1)	1 focus group (0)	2 interviews (2)	6
Participants	1 focus group (2)	1 focus group (4) 1 interview (1)	1 focus group (4)	1 focus group (1)	12
Totals	5	6	4	3	18

Focus groups and interviews followed semi-structured protocols (Appendices A & B). NORC staff conducted and documented the conversations. In addition, focus groups were recorded to confirm quotations and verify findings. Focus group and interview transcripts were coded using qualitative coding software and analyzed across hospitals. Because of small response rates and to maintain confidentiality, we present findings in aggregate rather than distinguishing between hospitals unless contextually appropriate. Study findings are limited to focus group participants, and may not represent all participant experiences. In each findings section, we describe the topic and explain the research findings.

Findings

In the sections below, we describe the responses facilitators and participants had to the course. Both groups were highly satisfied with the course and their experiences with it. Overall, facilitators felt they had the resources to deliver the curriculum and participants found the course valuable in both their professional and personal lives. Suggestions for program improvement centered on ways to expand the program both by increasing the capacity and improving the job training services. As one facilitator explained,

“You get people who come in, maybe they came in [to an Advocate hospital] as a teenager and they are working in transport, then we say what are your goals? Maybe they don’t go back to school or college, and they

think they can only get this job. [The NAVIGATE program] was a great tool to show that you can grow and develop in our organization. Here is a program we offer that teaches you some skills that maybe you don’t have and it can open your mind up to think about things differently.” In this way, the NAVIGATE program was seen as a mechanism through which entry-level staff could advance in their careers and therefore, was a program with which facilitators wished to be a part.

“I immediately signed up [to facilitate], and said what do you need me to do? I thought it was a great program so [I wanted to do] whatever I could do to be a part of it.”

We begin our discussion by describing the facilitator experience: how facilitators were selected, how they prepared, and their perceptions of the program. Then, we detail both participants’ experiences and course practices.

Facilitator Recruitment and Experience

The NAVIGATE program was facilitated by existing hospital leadership on a volunteer basis. Facilitators each led a different session and were responsible for reviewing the provided materials beforehand.

Each facilitator in the 2020 cohort was invited to participate based on recommendation. A recommendation could be because they had taught the course previously, because of their background knowledge of a particular topic, or because of their experience as facilitators. Each of the four hospital-based courses relied upon their own in-house facilitators, with each facilitator leading a single course session (rarely, a facilitator taught two sessions). Facilitators came from across departmental leadership roles; all were

managers and many were long-time employees. All facilitators worked at the hospital where they taught.

Six of 22 facilitators spoke with NORC. While a 27 percent response rate is not atypical, we hypothesize that the global pandemic and its ensuing medical demands may have reduced response rates. Overall, they enjoyed teaching their selected session, engaging with the participants, and wanted to continue their involvement. Furthermore, facilitators enjoyed contributing to the growth and development of the participants and wanted to engage with the program in future cohorts.

Training

To prepare to teach their session, facilitators received prepared course materials. Materials were either created in-house (6 lessons) or purchased from Catalyst Learning, a leader in health care career development programming (3 lessons). These materials included a participant workbook, a facilitator's guide, and brief videos that illustrated the lessons' main points.

Facilitators could attend a train-the-trainer session that provided a course overview and explained how each session fit into the larger course objectives. The training shared tips on classroom management and participant engagement—themes that addressed the entire group—rather than individual-level guidance on how to teach their course. Even though the Workforce Development team offered one-on-one training sessions for facilitators who wanted it, facilitators participating in the focus groups did not mention that option. Regardless, for the most part facilitators praised the curriculum and the accompanying guides as being enough training and they reported feeling prepared to teach their session.

Similarly, evidence was mixed as to whether facilitators were encouraged to personalize the curriculum, but either way, all facilitators reported they did adapt the course curriculum to fit their teaching style. They did this by inserting personal and hospital-focused examples into their presentations. One facilitator seemed to overlook the given materials and described having to create a curriculum from scratch. Given the structure of the facilitation process this seems unlikely. More likely is that he reconfigured the curriculum around his own personal experience with the session topic.

Potentially due to facilitators' high investment in their sessions, current facilitators wondered if the existing level of guidance could be challenging for a facilitator who was new to teaching. As a facilitator noted, "If you have never taught before then [facilitating] might be hard; if you have never presented before then you might need to practice and...it might be time consuming." While this may be the case, current facilitators reported that the level of training was adequate for them.

Preparation and Presentation

Facilitators prepared to teach their session on their own. Across the board, facilitators took approximately 1-2 hours to prepare for each of their presentations and none of them described the personal time they put in as a hardship. Instead, they spoke of their programmatic commitment by describing how they voluntarily kept course notes so they could improve from cohort to cohort or by skimming materials annually to refresh even though they had taught the session in prior cohorts.

Facilitators also worked within the parameters of the course organization. For example, at times facilitators did not believe some of the stock videos aligned with the needs of the participants. At these times, facilitators modified the video with in-person roleplaying experiences. While shifting away from the video was a straightforward adjustment, some facilitators noted that at times, they were unsure how to differentiate the curriculum to meet the varying levels of participants' experience, qualifications, and education.

Facilitator Investment

In terms of the structure of the curriculum, facilitators—who only experienced their own session—wanted “to know what each topic is and how things overlap”. That is, they wanted additional information about the other session topics they were not teaching and more information about the participants themselves. They believed that learning about the additional course topics would help them improve their course by incorporating prior knowledge from other lessons into their current topic. Furthermore, additional

information about the participants would better prepare the facilitators to create tailored examples and connect with them outside of the sessions.

Facilitators also sought to know more about participants' career goals and trajectories. That is, facilitators initially wanted to know what types of positions participants were interested in and then they wanted follow-up information about participants' job successes. In these ways, facilitators communicated their continued investment to the NAVIGATE program.

“When I was asked to do it, I was thrilled... I felt so good after teaching. It was such a rewarding time. I really would have cried if I wasn't asked to come back. When you see the response of the students it is just amazingly rewarding.”

Participant Recruitment and Selection

To recruit participants, the NAVIGATE program was advertised internally at each hospital. Messages were disseminated on big screen message boards located within hospital corridors and through email blasts dispatched to all staff members over the course of three or four months, depending upon the hospital. Participants reported different ways they learned about the program, suggesting that different approaches reached different people. One participant inaccurately believed the notification went out only in the hospital newsletter because that is how she had learned about it. Another participant learned about NAVIGATE from a presentation delivered by the Workforce Development team. Participants also reported hearing about the program through word-of-mouth either from a supervisor or a colleague. In fact, participants were far more likely to report hearing about the program and becoming interested through informal peer and supervisor communication than through an email notification. One participant thought word-of-mouth was more successful because “if you basically read it you would think it is [just] a program,” suggesting that part of the motivation to participate came from hearing about the positive experiences from past participants.

Supervisor engagement throughout the recruitment and application processes varied. According to focus group participants, some supervisors encouraged their employees to submit applications, while other supervisors seemed to have never heard about the program, even though the Workforce Development team notifies all supervisors. Whether participants received supervisor encouragement or not, they believed “supervisors and directors should have full knowledge of this [program] prior to us even knowing,” so that they could encourage their staff to take advantage of it. That is, while many participants proactively engaged their supervisor, some credited their supervisor with providing the push they needed to submit an application.

Supervisors were critical in recruiting participants. Not only were supervisors instrumental in informing and encouraging participants to apply, but they also had to write a letter of recommendation and state their support for the participant attending the course during work hours. Without their supervisors’ stated support, participants could not be selected. Logistically, supervisors’ support was necessary to schedule job coverage during NAVIGATE sessions.

Participant Course Experience

Participants attended each NAVIGATE session in a meeting room on hospital grounds. Sessions lasted for three hours including a break for either breakfast or lunch. Sessions followed similar formats; each one included lecture, integrated video illustrating a curricular point, in-person exercises and role-plays, and discussion. Facilitators typically taught one session, sometimes two. While the exact timing and format varied by facilitator and topic as previously discussed, these building blocks remained the same. While the facilitators rotated with each class session, a person, typically the same person, from the Workforce Development team attended each one, serving as a key resource. In many ways this role was the lynchpin of the NAVIGATE program. By being the keeper of all NAVIGATE information, she was able to track and motivate participants, answer questions, remind facilitators when to teach, and ensure each session had the necessary materials. She also provided additional one-on-one job training support to participants.

The Formal Curriculum

Overall, participants valued the program. They appreciated the diversity of facilitators and said that each one was knowledgeable about the topic about which they presented. They also appreciated that the facilitators were from “every aspect of the hospital,” so they could describe their own experiences within their department and thus expose participants to the operations within different departments. These personal stories served two related purposes for the participants. They enabled participants to connect with the facilitators on a personal level rather than simply on a professional one. Additionally, the personal stories about facilitator’s career trajectories helped the participants visualize how they too could move to the next stage in their career.

“[The facilitators] had so much knowledge when they spoke to us. [NAVIGATE] was a support group for one, empowerment for two, a lot of the people there had hesitation...if they could get a better job or move up. All the [facilitators] that came, they were so positive, the energy was so good. Every talk you would just look forward to the next one.”

Participants appreciated the course content as well. They felt the organization of the course, with the sets of PowerPoint slides, videos, interactive discussion and role playing kept the course engaging and educational. A unique aspect to the program were hands-on activities such as role-playing. For example, a participant described how role playing enabled her to practice having a difficult conversation with some colleagues before the real event. She was grateful to have the process modeled for her and she felt much more confident going into that dialogue than she would have otherwise.

Physical and Organizational Management

Sessions were held in conference rooms on hospital grounds. Room configurations varied across the sites, but were typically structured to enable small group collaboration while also enabling participants to view the facilitator and videos in the front of the room. The Workforce Development team maintained a continual presence, serving as a constant from week to week. They were also in charge of ensuring teaching supplies (e.g., presentation notepads, technology) and food was provided.

The physical space for the course mattered to participants, and in most instances it worked well. Participants only seemed to notice the physical space if it bothered them in some way. Thus, most participants never mentioned the room. However, some participants at one hospital noted that “it was crowded”; they had limited table space, which meant some participants had to write on their laps and collaboration could only occur with the people to their left and right. In these ways, the physical space limited intra-cohort interactions.

For the most part, participants appreciated that food was present. They also largely reported that the amount of time and structure of sessions worked well, with only a couple of participants wishing sessions were either longer—so they could “get more information”—or shorter—because she was tired after the lunch break.

The First Class: Creating a Welcoming Environment

Organized by the Workforce Development team, the first session and official welcome to NAVIGATE is the time to describe the program (see Appendix C), communicate Advocate’s mission and philosophy, and articulate participant expectations. They provided an overview of the course structure and encouraged hospital leadership to attend. They included leadership to impress upon participants the value the hospital system places on the program and its participants.

According to facilitators and participants, it is also an opportunity to meet each other and begin developing as a cohort. One facilitator stated that she used that time to learn about participant interests because she would not see them again until she was teaching them. She used the insights gleaned from her conversations to shape her class presentation.

The Last Class: Recognition and Celebration

A final celebration took place during the ninth and last class session. The participants, facilitators, the Workforce Development team, and upper hospital management were all scheduled to attend the event. In past cohorts, the final celebration was where the participants were individually recognized for course completion. It was also where they learned who would be their mentor.

The value of the graduation ceremony to participants needs to be underscored. As leadership noted, for many NAVIGATE participants, this was the first graduation ceremony they had participated in since high school. They were proud of the skills they had developed during the NAVIGATE training program, and they viewed this final celebration as recognition of their investment and effort. That both hospital and system-wide administrators were present to honor their accomplishments impressed upon them their value within the wider hospital community. Simply, having leadership present mattered greatly to the participants.

Mentoring

Mentoring was a key component of the NAVIGATE program. Mentoring relationships were structured between NAVIGATE participants and members of hospital leadership. The aim of the mentoring component was to provide participants with in-hospital guides positioned within departments aligned to the participant's interests. Participants were instructed to select mentors that fit that parameter. They entered selections into an online system called Mentor Cliq, which assisted in the matching process. Some participants identified who they wanted for their mentor and others explained their interests and let the program do the matching. The Workforce Development team determined the final matches after confirming participation from potential mentors, including existing facilitators.

As in past cohorts, mentors and mentee matches were to be revealed at the Final Celebration. However, the global pandemic delayed the roll out of the mentorship program, pushing the start date back from March 2020 to June 2020. Typically, mentors and mentees meet at the Final Celebration and begin to form a plan for their time together over the next six months. While some Final Celebrations occurred prior to the onset of the global pandemic, some Final Celebrations had to be cancelled. These unfortunate events stymied the roll out of the mentor program for some participants.

Likely because of these unforeseen delays, this cohort of NAVIGATE participants had mixed experiences with their mentors. Some participants felt that their mentors were not properly matched with their goals and areas of interest. One participant noted her disappointment in her match because the mentor, while highly knowledgeable, did not align with her career interests. She had wanted someone who was "in line with where I see myself in the future." She noted that the conversations they had were high level, but her mentor could not offer details on her future job of interest. This experience was in direct opposition to another participant who valued her mentor because of their career alignment. This mentee wished to cross into a new department, and her mentor exposed her to this department of interest and offered concrete advice in how to tailor existing experience into skills desirable for the new department. These efforts led to a new job. A third participant explained that his mentor assisted him with framing his resume and interview preparation. He credits that preparation with helping him land his future position.

Participant Outcomes

What did participants say they gained from their participation in the NAVIGATE program? Participants expressed their satisfaction with NAVIGATE in two ways; on how well the program served as a leadership course for self and job improvement and whether or not it was a springboard to career advancement. Those who believed it to be a leadership course were grateful for the skill development; they believed NAVIGATE improved their demeanor, understanding, and competence at work while also bettering their familial relationships. Those who felt NAVIGATE was solely about job advancement (even if that occurred through learning leadership skills) appreciated the course but expressed more dissatisfaction with the outcomes if they did not result in a direct promotion. Additionally, participants developed new connections with peers and upper management. These connections became a system to support them in pursuing the goals and reinforcing the skills developed through NAVIGATE.

Job Preparation and Career Advancement

Participants expressed a desire for more concrete job training. While not an explicit mission of the NAVIGATE program, recently, more and more job training has been incorporated into the program. Participants appreciated updating their resumes and learning how to translate their existing skillset into a new field. Participants felt empowered knowing their resumes were up-to-date, so they could advance into another position, possibly in another field.

However, participants gave NAVIGATE job preparation mixed reviews, suggesting NAVIGATE is on the right track, but there is still room for improvement:

I think the resume was a good thing. They took time to tell us each key points we needed to address and each point we needed to take out and also how to do things in the interview. I had an interview a few days before, and I was thinking that I did good because I did all the stuff she just said. That means NAVIGATE had an impact on how I interviewed. What types of questions to ask, thinking through what I said before speaking.

One day they had a recruiter from HR, 45 minutes saying you should do this, this, this, and this. Literally, she went around the room, looked at our resumes, said 'You should do that, fix that.' But it was nothing like a real one-on-one, you literally had 30 seconds to show your resume and she told you what you needed to fix. That I felt was too short and abrupt.

In particular, participant responses to job advancement activities were mixed. Multiple participants reported that upon completion of the NAVIGATE course they had applied for and been hired for a new role within the organization. Many credited the program with this career advancement; their mentors had been directly involved in making that happen. While most participants were satisfied with the services they received through NAVIGATE and the Workforce Development staff, one participant seemed to be confused about what resources were available to her, believing that she was no longer eligible for NAVIGATE services. This miscommunication left her frustrated and unclear about her next steps towards advancement. We offer this atypical response to illustrate how even the most explicit instructions can be misconstrued.

Another critique was that the program did not offer guidance to help participants identify future fields of interest. Several participants were unsure of their career path, and they felt that they could not take full advantage of the advancement opportunities offered through NAVIGATE (They did express more satisfaction with their current jobs, however). This critique is at odds with the practices and activities enacted by the Workforce Development team. The Workforce Development team introduced both a career exploration map and a career tool to

“Perhaps offering these team members (participants) a guaranteed interview for a job, or hosting an internal job fair...something that is a next step. So at the end of the cohort, let’s give them a reward.”

participants. Taken together, these two items presented career pathways and provided possible career options based on participants’ current position and interests. These items were completed outside of class time, so focus group participants may not have considered the activities when responding about the NAVIGATE program. In addition, while these tools were designed to assist participants with identifying a future career path, some still may have been uncertain about their path upon course completion.

Making Connections

Peer Network. Participants and facilitators spoke about how the program increased their cross-departmental network. While they may not know everyone in their cohort well, they now recognized people in the halls and this made the hospital itself feel like more of a community. Some participants went further, describing how they continued to act as support for each other as they worked to advance in their careers.

Hospital and Leadership Network. Time and again participants spoke of the personal value that came from hearing their administrators' stories of career advancement. These stories helped participants gain a greater connection with their leaders both inside and outside of the program. At one hospital, all focus group participants spoke movingly about having lunch with the hospital president. The lunch "show[ed] you the top", allowing them to visualize where board meetings were held and demystifying and humanizing the president and upper management. Specifically, the participants heard the president describe how he overcame challenges along his path that led to the presidency. One participant said, "The whole experience helped push me to not let anyone tell me what not to do. [The] only person to have power over me is me."

"Dynamics of the program changed towards the end. I felt I got to know people throughout the hospital. We became a support system for each other. The cohort is what made the experience better. We all had a common interest in growing and we succeeded. I've grown fond of everyone."

Personal Growth

Some participants said that NAVIGATE helped them be better at their current job. The skills they learned showed them the skills necessary to be a leader and that they themselves could be leaders. One participant recognized that she was now better able to deliver high-quality customer service, even with difficult patients. Another said NAVIGATE showed her she could control how she was perceived and that she could "be a leader." For example, she now "thought of being more in tune with the leader" of her department. This behavior change led to her gaining the trust of her department leadership, so that now she could "run the department with them not being around."

"I've now been able to identify and acknowledge challenges that had been keeping me stagnant. I couldn't identify what had been keeping me back—education, personality traits, or issues that have arisen that I may not have handled correctly. [NAVIGATE] taught me about how to move forward in my career, [it] taught me how to better connect with people emotionally."

Multiple participants acknowledged that the program gave them additional tools to manage their stress, which has been helpful both at work and also helpful at home.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, the NAVIGATE program was successful in providing participants the leadership skills necessary to advance in their careers. Both NAVIGATE participants and facilitators valued their connection with the course.

Participants made unique connections, learned and developed necessary skills intended for promotion and leadership, and practiced skills useful for their current positions. Participants also offered thoughts for how to sustain the program, including through continued mentor and leadership support, supervisor buy-in, and program expansion. This last suggestion was both future- and self-serving. That is, participants were aware that expanding the program would both benefit additional entry-level workers, and the expansion would increase program awareness, making the NAVIGATE credential more well-known company wide.

Limitations. We recognize that participation in the focus groups was on a volunteer basis during a high stress period (i.e., the global pandemic), particularly for health care workers. Therefore, we acknowledge that focus group representation, and thus responses, likely exclude the voices of many participants, particularly those working on the front lines. Whether and how this may impact the findings is an open question. However, we hope this report articulates the overall enthusiasm those involved felt about their participation in the NAVIGATE course as well as noting sites for program improvement.

Conclusion. Ultimately, continuing to provide career and professional development to entry-level hospital staff can have wide-reaching benefits for both Advocate Aurora Health and individuals' career pathways. The NAVIGATE curriculum and its implementation made a positive impression on participants and facilitators and could serve as a model to other hospital systems and organizations looking to improve the skills and careers of their entry-level workers.

“This is a program that should be expanded, I think we have an opportunity... You get people who come in, maybe they came in as a teenager and they are working in transport, then we say what are your goals? Maybe they don't go back to school or college, and they think they can only get this job. [NAVIGATE] was a great tool to show that you can grow and develop in our organization. Here is a program we offer and teaches you some skills that maybe you don't have and it can open your mind up to think about things differently.”

Appendix A. Focus Group Protocols (Facilitator)

NAVIGATE Facilitator Focus Group Protocol

Introduction/Framing

Hello. My name is (NAME OF INTERVIEWER), and I am from NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC). I am joined by my colleague (INSERT NAME). We are part of an independent research team that is conducting an evaluation of the NAVIGATE program. As part of this work, we are interested in learning about the experiences of the program facilitators, such as yourself, who taught program units.

Thanks for your willingness to participate in this focus group today. We know you're busy and have lots going on, and we really appreciate your time.

During today's discussion, I am going to ask questions for the whole group, and you are all welcome to answer as few or as many questions as you like. You can respond to the question, and you can also respond to what others are saying. Think of this discussion as a conversation that I will guide with questions about your experience facilitating the NAVIGATE program and how you have interacted with the curriculum and participants of the program.

In addition, I want to say that the reason for this discussion is so you can share your thoughts and experiences, whatever they may be. There are no right or wrong answers, and every answer is important. We ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or share what anyone said outside of this group discussion. While your name will not be connected with anything you say by the research team, please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally disclose what was said.

Today's focus group should take about 1 hour, but we will have some time to accommodate any questions or discussions before or after the conversation. Both my colleague and I will be taking notes, but we will also be recording our conversation to make sure that we don't miss anything important. Recordings will be held for reference and destroyed at the end of the study.

Verbal Consent

Before we begin, I would like to re-state that this focus group is completely voluntary, and there will be no consequences if you decide to leave at any time. We will not to use your names (or identifying information) in any of our reports or share anything you say with anyone outside of our study team, and we ask all of you to please also honor the confidentiality of this group. Please do not repeat what you or others have said outside of this room. **Does anyone have any questions about this study, consent, or what I just said?**

If this is okay with you, will you please acknowledge by nodding your head or assenting yes? [*Pause and wait for everyone to nod or acknowledge verbally.*]

Also, we will give you a copy of a consent form for you to take home. Should you have any questions or decide at a later time that you would like to opt out, you can call the numbers listed on that sheet.

Facilitator Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Location: _____

Getting Started

Hand out table tents and have everyone write their name so they are visible to everyone in the group.

Turn on the recording devices.

Focus Group Questions

Facilitator Background

1. First, we would like to ask you about yourself. Could you please introduce yourself and include your current position and your experience facilitating training programs?
 - *Probe:* Which NAVIGATE training course did you implement?
 - [topics: (1) emotional intelligence, (2) mastering communication, (3) mastering stress and cultivating mindset, (4) setting goals and utilizing feedback, (5) conflict resolution, (6) critical thinking skills, (7) problem solving, (8) providing customer experience]
2. Can you tell us about any training you completed before teaching the course?
 - *Probe:* What other training do you wish you had had?

3. What was your reason for choosing to be a facilitator for the NAVIGATE program?

Program Implementation

This next set of questions is about your impressions of the NAVIGATE program and the time and effort you spent implementing the program.

4. What are your impressions of the NAVIGATE program?

- *Probe:* What aspects did you like best?
 - *Probe:* What was particularly helpful?
 - *For example:* resources, supports, technology, curriculum
5. Thinking about the classes you taught, what were the particular issues, concerns, or barriers that you faced?
 - [Issues can range from participant issues, resources, attendance, participant preparation, motivation, etc.]
 - *Probe:* What areas did students seem to have difficulty with?
 - *Probe:* How did you address these challenges?
 - *Probe:* What do you think could have been **done differently** to help with the implementation of the NAVIGATE program?
 - *For example:* resources, supports, technology, curriculum
 6. How much time did you take to prepare for the class that you facilitated?
 - *Probe:* If you taught again, would this amount of time be sustainable?
 - *Probe:* What recommendations would you make for future facilitators?
 - *Note taker:* attend to who taught which course, and if facilitators worked on their own time
 7. Thinking about the lesson topic you facilitated, how closely do you believe you followed the curriculum?
 - What made this possible (or not)?
 - *If the course was scripted:* what amount of time would you estimate you spent learning the script? What was your opinion of the script?
 - *If the course was self-created:* what resources did you use to create your curriculum?
 8. How often, if applicable, did you follow up with participants of the program before or after the training?
 - What kinds of mentoring or topics did you discuss when you met with participants outside of the class time?

Program Improvement/Outcomes

9. Are there any recommendations you have for improving the program?
 - [For example: tracking and reporting impact, organizational buy-in, participant applications, upward mobility?]
 - What changes would you like to see to make it easier for you to teach again?
 - Was there any topic that was not necessary?
 - Was there any topic that was particularly difficult for them to understand, comprehend or implement?
 - Was there any topic not included in the curriculum that should have been? Or could have been helpful for the participants?
10. What external factors influenced NAVIGATE program delivery?
 - [For example: (1) department needs or requests, (2) organizational factors, etc.]
11. [If time remains] Is there anything else you would like to say about being a facilitator of the NAVIGATE training program that could be useful for future implementation of the training?

Appendix B. Focus Group Protocols (Participant)

NAVIGATE Participant Focus Group Protocol

Introduction/Framing

Hello. My name is (NAME OF INTERVIEWER), and I am from NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC). I am joined by my colleague (INSERT NAME). We are part of an independent research team that is conducting an evaluation of the NAVIGATE program. As part of this work, we are interested in learning about the experiences of Advocate employees, such as yourself, who participated in the NAVIGATE program.

Thanks for your willingness to participate in this focus group today. We know you're busy and have lots going on, and we really appreciate your time.

During today's discussion, I am going to ask questions for the whole group, and you are all welcome to answer as few or as many questions as you like. You can respond to the question, and you can also respond to what others are saying. Think of this discussion as a conversation that I will guide with questions about your experience with the NAVIGATE program and how it has influenced your work.

In addition, I want to say that the reason for this discussion is so you can share your thoughts and experiences, whatever they may be. There are no right or wrong answers, and every answer is important. We ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or share what anyone said outside of this group discussion. While your name will not be connected with anything you say by the research team, please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally disclose what was said.

Today's focus group should take about 1 hour, but we will have some time to accommodate any questions or discussions before or after the conversation. Both my colleague and I will be taking notes, but we will also be recording our conversation to make sure that we don't miss anything important. Recordings will be held for reference and destroyed at the end of the study.

Verbal Consent

Before we begin, I would like to re-state that this focus group is completely voluntary, and there will be no consequences if you decide to leave at any time. We will not use your names (or identifying information) in any of our reports or share anything you say with anyone outside of our study team, and we ask all of you to please also honor the

confidentiality of this group. Please do not repeat what you or others have said outside of this room. **Does anyone have any questions about this study, consent, or what I just said?**

If this is okay with you, will you please acknowledge by nodding your head or assenting yes? [*Pause and wait for everyone to nod or acknowledge verbally.*]

Also, we will give you a copy of a consent form for you to take home. Should you have any questions or decide at a later time that you would like to opt out, you can call the numbers listed on that sheet.

Facilitator Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Location: _____

Getting Started

Hand out table tents and have everyone write their name so they are visible to everyone in the group.

Turn on the recording devices.

Focus Group Questions

Intro/Getting into the Program

1. First, I'd like to spend a little time introducing each other. Could we please go around the room and introduce yourself by stating your name, your current position, and briefly say why you joined the NAVIGATE program.
 - *Probe:* How much did you know about the training beforehand/what were your expectations for the training?
 - *Listen for:*
 - What were they hoping to get out of the training?
 - How did they learn about the NAVIGATE program?
2. How did you learn about the NAVIGATE program?
 - *Probe:* How did you sign up? What information did you receive from your supervisors, if any?
 - What could have been communicated to improve the signup process?

About the Program

This next set of questions is about your experience during the NAVIGATE program. We're thinking about different program aspects, like the curriculum topics, the use of mentors, the strength of facilitation, or structural things like scheduling.

3. What are your impressions of the NAVIGATE program?

- *Probe:* What aspects of the program did you like best?
- *Probe:* Were there any particular aspects that you remember were especially helpful?
 - Curricular topics: [(1) emotional intelligence, (2) mastering communication, (3) mastering stress and cultivating mindset, (4) setting goals and utilizing feedback, (5) conflict resolution, (6) critical thinking skills, (7) problem solving, (8) providing consumer experience]
 - Facilitation and facilitators
 - Structural: schedule, length of course

4. What aspects of the program were challenging or unhelpful?

- *Prompt:* For example, these could be personal or they could be programmatic, such as(1) the timing of training, (2) location,
 - (3) other work obligations
 - *Note:* try and guide these to highlight limitations and not repeat anything said above.
5. Next, I want to ask you about the mentors and facilitators you interacted with during the program. What role did your **mentor** play for you?
6. How effective were the NAVIGATE program **facilitators**?
- *Listen for:* effectiveness creating a safe learning environment, communication

Program Impact

7. What parts of the program did you find useful to your current position?

- *Probe:* what did you learn about soft skills and how to improve your skills at work?
- *Probe:* were there any skills you learned that you did not expect? Like what?

8. How has completing the NAVIGATE program affected your perceptions regarding future employment?

- *Probe:* how will this training impact your future career plans and goals?
- *Probe:* how will it help you move up in your position or department?

Program Recommendations

9. What aspects of the program do you think should change?
 - *[If nothing has been mentioned yet]* Are there any additional topics you would have wanted to learn about in the training?
 - This could be in the sign-up process, the courses, activities, classroom structure, lesson topics, instructors, application to work, logistics of the classes (scheduling, etc.)
10. Is there anything else you would like Advocate to know about how the NAVIGATE training program worked or didn't work?

Appendix C. NAVIGATE Course Outline

Theme	Session Topic	Purpose and Training Objectives
Welcome	Session 1: Welcome and Program Onboarding	<p>Purpose: introduction to the Navigate program, course curriculum, tools and resources, and career pathway. Get to know fellow cohort participants and bond as you kick off your learning journey!</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recognize Advocate's Mission, Values & Philosophy ■ Identify Advocate's Key Result Areas (KRAs) ■ Recognize the participant expectations of the NAVIGATE program ■ Distinguish the career path opportunities within Advocate using the Career Pathways document ■ Access the Tools and Resources page ■ Describe the basic current landscape within health care
Bringing My Best	Session 2: Emotional Intelligence Smarts	<p>Purpose: Understand emotional intelligence and why it is important to personal and professional success. Recognize five competencies you can work on to increase your level of emotional intelligence and practice your skills to make better decisions and build stronger relationships.</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify emotional intelligence and why it is important to personal and professional success. ■ Recognize five competencies you can work on to increase your level of emotional intelligence. ■ Listen to and employ your emotions for better decision making. ■ Show you care, and build trust by displaying sensitivity and concern. ■ Use your energy and enthusiasm to motivate others.
Mastering Communication	Session 3: Mastering Communication in the Workplace	<p>Purpose: Learn essential skills for improving communication in the workplace. Discover common communication styles, understand how to be a team player, and get the tools to start using a process for communication- one that can dramatically improve patient safety outcomes.</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <p>Recognize and identify the communication styles of yourself and others</p> <p>Identify communication skills that meet patient safety and satisfaction standards</p> <p>Identify verbal and non-verbal communication effectively to clarify and confirm messages</p> <p>Utilize active listening skills</p> <p>Recognize and limit barriers to communication</p>

Theme	Session Topic	Purpose and Training Objectives
Growth and Development	Session 4: Managing Stress and Cultivating Mindset	<p>Purpose: Provide best practices and techniques for effectively reducing stress and burnout and avoiding common career pitfalls. Provide an opportunity for participants to evaluate their attitudes and beliefs regarding their potential, learn how to break unhealthy habits and enhance mastery in the workplace.</p> <p>Managing Stress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify personal and professional sources of stress ■ Identify stressors common to the health care profession ■ Define “compassion fatigue” and create a plan to maintain positive self-care strategies and healthy rituals to recover from compassion fatigue ■ Create a plan for effective stress management that applies self-care techniques <p>Cultivating Mindset:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Describe benefits of creating growth mindset in the workplace ■ Identify thoughts and behaviors that create a negative environment ■ Identify actions that can be taken alone and with others ■ Define the difference between a fixed vs. growth mindset ■ Identify ways to utilize positive language
Growth and Development	Session 5: Setting Goals and Utilizing Feedback	<p>Purpose: Familiarize with a framework for personal and professional goal setting and utilize feedback for growth, development and advancement.</p> <p>Setting Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Describe the various types of goals ■ Create goals that follow the S.M.A.R.T. format ■ Identify key tasks that will help achieve the goals ■ Explain the steps to monitor goal achievement ■ Explain the tips for maximizing goal success <p>Utilizing Feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recognize foundational elements of feedback ■ Use SAO tool to objectively describe behavior ■ Provide positive feedback describing behavior and the impact of the behavior ■ Provide constructive feedback including objective descriptions of undesired behavior and its impact, as well as desired behavior and its impact ■ Plan for a variety of reactions when delivering feedback ■ Describe how receive both positive and constructive feedback effectively

Theme	Session Topic	Purpose and Training Objectives
Resolving Conflict	Session 6: Conflict Resolution	<p>Purpose: Identify common conflict themes, provide opportunities for self-reflection and tools for strengthening communication skills in the face of conflict.</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Define conflict, lateral violence, bullying and harassment ■ Identify your own personal conflict resolution style ■ Identify and apply a 5-step process of conflict management to diagnose conflict, improve communication, and promote de-escalation of conflict ■ Identify and apply resources within the work environment to manage situations involving conflict
Solving Problems	Session 7: Critical Thinking Skills	<p>Purpose: Identify critical thinking skills to improve decision making. Learn the four essential traits that critical thinkers possess. Practice three key skills: analyzing, evaluating and reasoning. Apply critical thinking strategies in healthcare situations.</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Define critical thinking ■ Recognize how thinking critically can improve decision making and job performance ■ Name the four essential traits that critical thinkers possess ■ Describe the three key critical thinking skills - analyzing, evaluating and reasoning ■ Recognize strategies to develop critical thinking skills
Solving Problems	Session 8: Effective Problem Solving	<p>Purpose: Identify and apply the steps in the problem-solving process. Learn to clarify a problem and determine the root causes of problems. Use creative thinking techniques to develop solutions. Apply the problem-solving process to come up with solutions before problems get out of hand.</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Describe the steps in the problem-solving process ■ Identify the observable condition(s) of a problem and develop a problem statement ■ Apply the Fishbone Method to organize the root causes of a problem ■ Select the problem-solving process to proactively implement solutions

Theme	Session Topic	Purpose and Training Objectives
Serving Customers or Creating an Elite Customer Experience	Session 9: Providing an Elite Customer Experience	<p>Purpose: Identify and practice conversation skills to enhance the customer experience, provide strategies for transition effectiveness (hand-offs) and enhance service recovery success, and promote understanding of empathy and diversity in the health care setting.</p> <p>Empathy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Define and identify components of empathy ■ Recognize how the 5 competencies of Emotional Intelligence can build empathy ■ Recognize empathy’s importance as a “game changer” for compassionate patient care ■ Identify 5 skills of empathy ■ Recognize how to increase your ability and confidence to influence your peers ■ Utilize self-reflection to continually improve <p>Cultural Competence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Analyze the dimensions of diversity in self, patients and staff. ■ Implement a plan to apply evidence-based strategies related to cultural competence to ensure patient safety and high-quality outcomes of care for diverse populations. ■ Understand the need for and use of language assistance services to achieve effective communication and mutual understanding with patients and their families ■ Apply the components of cultural competence to multiple patient populations <p>Elite Customer Experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Apply best practices to deliver a consistent, excellent customer care experience ■ Use customer experience tools (AIDET, SERVICE RECOVERY, HAND- OFFS) to increase customer loyalty
Celebrate!	NAVIGATE Graduation!	<p>Purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recognize participants for program completion ■ Inform participants of their mentors ■ Create course closure

ⁱ Rho, H. J., Brown, H., & Fremstad, S. (2020 April 7). *A basic demographic profile of workers in frontline industries*. Center for Economic and Policy Research. Retrieved from: <https://cepr.net/a-basic-demographic-profile-of-workers-in-frontline-industries/>

ⁱⁱ OECD. (2013). *Time for the U.S. to reskill? What the Survey of Adult Skills says*. OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing. Retrieved from:

https://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/events/text/Survey_of_Adult_Skills_US.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ The Aspen Institute. (2018). *A guide to upskilling America’s frontline workers. A handbook for employers*. Retrieved from:

https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/03/UpSkilling_Employer_Handbook_042015.pdf

^{iv} [OECD](#).

^v The Aspen Institute, p. 12.