

Opportunity Junction: On the Road to Self-Sufficiency



Grant Type: **Dollar support**

Dollar Amount: **\$65,000 per year for 3 years**

Foundation Name: **Dean & Margaret Lesher Foundation**



What was your objective with the grant or initiative?

The foundation's objective with this grant was to monetarily help Opportunity Junction to fulfill its mission. Founded in late 1999 by a consortium of community-based organizations, local government agencies, and private businesses, Opportunity Junction was established as a direct response to three emerging needs:

1. A local economy that lacked technology-proficient, entry-level workers
2. The mandates of federal welfare reform and the county's tendency to fast-track individuals into low-wage jobs that perpetuated the cycle of poverty
3. Significant underserved pockets of poverty in Eastern Contra Costa County, CA

More than 12 years later, Opportunity Junction is a hub for local job seekers. It features programs that help job seekers develop the skills and experience required to secure sustaining-wage-paying jobs in the historically underserved communities of East Contra Costa County.

What were the results of this grant or initiative?

The foundation's grant to Opportunity Junction helped that organization fulfill three categories of goals:

1. **Training and placement**—During the grant year, Opportunity Junction placed 100 program participants into employment with an average starting wage of \$14.74 per hour, 10% higher than the previous year's starting wage. In addition, the organization helped alumni get placed into new jobs or earn raises and promotions with existing employers.

2. **Poverty-fighting programs**—With the assistance of the foundation's grant, Opportunity Junction was able to serve more than 1,000 local residents for the first time ever. Its technology center attendance increased from 498 to 592, and do-it-yourself tax assistance participation increased from 172 to 201.
3. **Capacity-building, infrastructure goal**—During the last grant year, Opportunity Junction completed a comprehensive, Web-based performance management system to ensure the highest level of accountability and the availability of data to support ongoing learning and program enhancement.

Why would you say this grant or initiative had outsized impact?

Opportunity Junction is a vital work-training and employment hub in a part of the county that has a severely underdeveloped nonprofit community. The organization's job-training participants enrolled in an intense, comprehensive program, and 44 ultimately were placed in positions with a starting average wage of \$15.57 per hour, well over the goal of \$14.00 per hour. For those who reached the 18-month post-placement mark during fiscal year 2014-2015, 73% still were employed in their original job, whereas many others had successfully moved to better jobs.

Opportunity Junction's impact comes because it does not simply focus on one aspect of need. Instead, it tries to focus on breaking down the barriers a person may face so that person may have a satisfying career. With proper training, effort, care, and diligence of all involved, this is an achievable goal.

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