

# **Evaluation of The Johns Hopkins Hospital Retention and Advancement Program**

Submitted By:

Optimal Solutions Group

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Submitted To:

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Empower Baltimore Management Corporation contracted with Optimal Solutions Group, LLC (OSG) to analyze the effectiveness of the Johns Hopkins Hospital Retention and Advancement Program (JHRA). The JHRA program targets entry-level hospital employees with the goal of motivating these individuals to get on a career path and/or encouraging them to increase their formal education and training.

OSG conducted in-person interviews with thirty-six employees who had completed the program, with fourteen employees who had not participated in the program, as well as with department supervisors and directors. The questionnaire focused on the participants' perception of and reaction to the program, the non-participants' perceptions of the program, and all survey respondents' career and educational plans.

From the survey responses, OSG has determined that the participants received the following benefits from the JHRA program:

- Increased self-confidence;
- A stronger desire to further their career or educational aspirations;
- More focused, specific short- and long-term goals;
- Increased knowledge about life-advancing events, such as buying a house or obtaining a GED;
- Better communication skills with co-workers, supervisors, and in their personal lives;
- A firmer understanding of the direction in which they want their life to head.

Non-participants are also extremely enthusiastic about the program. All but one survey participant had heard of the JHRA program, and their feedback was uniformly positive. Most of the non-participants interviewed were on the waiting list for program participation. The JHRA program provides a limited number of slots to non-Empowerment Zone residents. Many non-participants do not reside in Empowerment Zones, but have the same deficiencies and needs as co-workers residing in Empowerment Zones.

Overall, participants, non-participants, and supervisors were unanimously supportive of the JHRA program. The survey respondents reported that the benefits gained from the program greatly outweighed the negatives, which included missed work shifts.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Empower Baltimore Management Corporation (EBMC) contracted with Optimal Solutions Group, LLC (OSG) to analyze the effectiveness of the Retention and Advancement Program that was recently implemented at Johns Hopkins Hospital. The four-week program consisted of one full-day class per week between one instructor and approximately 12-20 employees. The participants designed long- and short-term strategies for their careers, and were provided with an abundance of educational and career advancement information.

The main objectives of the Johns Hopkins Retention and Advancement program (JHRA) include the following:

- Improve the work/career mind-set of participating employees;
- Increase retention and reduce turnover among hospital staff, thereby reducing the costs associated with hiring and training new workers;
- Increase the upward occupational mobility of program participants;
- Increase the wages and salaries of program participants.

After a successful pilot program in 2002, the initiative was continued for four additional sessions during the first half of 2003, enrolling approximately 70 participants. To date, the program has primarily targeted the Housekeeping and Dietary Aide employees who reside in Empowerment Zones.

The program consists of four one-day sessions for Housekeeping and Dietary Aide staff and two one-day sessions for department supervisors. This is considerably less time-intensive than otherwise similar employee improvement programs that have been implemented around the country. The overwhelmingly positive responses that OSG derived from surveys indicate that the program was successful in achieving intermediate objectives.

Employees who participated in the JHRA program were reported to have an increased sense of self-worth and importance, improved teaming skills, and a clearer understanding of the steps each person needs to take to reach his or her individual goals. However, it was not possible to assess the program's impact on JHRA's long-term objectives because not enough time had elapsed for measurable impacts to be apparent with respect to retention, turnover, occupational mobility, and wage increases. As a result, our methodological approach in evaluating the effectiveness of the JHRA program is largely confined to intermediate (but important) indicators, like improvements in career/work mindset and satisfaction with program curricula and instruction.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

To measure the program's performance, OSG administered surveys to thirty-six program participants and fourteen non-participants (to serve as a control group). These surveys questioned the participants' overall satisfaction with the program and attempted to gauge the career benefits received by program participants. In addition, those workers who had not participated in the program were questioned regarding their perceptions of the program, what feedback they had received from their co-workers, their current work/career aspirations, and the steps they have taken to reach their career objectives.<sup>1</sup>

OSG administered structured survey instruments to department supervisors, program participants and non-participants. Results from these surveys provided self-reported data on personal and career advancement, program satisfaction, and demographic characteristics. In addition, OSG staff analyzed program participants' personnel records and self-assessment tests. Unfortunately, data derived from the personnel records and self-assessment could not be used to evaluate program effectiveness for the following reasons:

- No comparable pre- and post- participation data;
- Non-participate data was not available;
- Personnel records do not capture everyday absentee data.

The vast majority of the data available were either post-program participant responses, or non-participant responses. In an ideal situation, the non-participant cohort should be used as a control group. However, it is difficult to compare the two groups because those employees who select themselves into the program may inherently have more motivational qualities, raising the likelihood that they would advance in their careers and/or education without the JHRA program. It would be more statistically sound to compare career and/or educational aspirations for the same individuals prior to and after attending the JHRA program. However, pre-program data was not recorded, so OSG used the non-participant group's data as an alternative.

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<sup>1</sup> To provide the *most* academically rigorous evaluation of the JHRA program, the following conditions and data would be necessary:

- Comprehensive anecdotal and quantitative data on worker attitudes on on-the-job performance (i.e., tardiness, absentee, and disciplinary records);
- Pre- and post-program implementation data on worker attitudes and performance;
- Participant and non-participant data;
- Sufficient demographic and work characteristics;
- Sufficient passage of time for complete revelation of program impacts.

Unfortunately, many of these conditions were not met and necessary data are not available. Therefore, the methodological approach used in evaluating the JHRA program is not the *most* academically rigorous, but is as rigorous as circumstances allow.

Another limitation of the study was that the program has only been in place for a short time. Most participants have not had the opportunity to advance in their careers because they have only been out of the program for a few months. Ideally, this study should interview participants at least one year after their graduation from the program in order to give them time to look for and land a higher job, or enroll in and complete additional education. It is difficult to comprehend the complete value of the program in such a short time-span. Therefore, OSG analyzed the minor differences and emerging trends between participants and non-participants in terms of workplace habits and future goals as stated in their surveys. The results of these comparisons are detailed in the remainder of the report.

## **MAJOR FINDINGS**

Based on the overwhelmingly positive response from employee participants, non-participants, and supervisors, OSG was able to find consistent and strong evidence that the JHRA program has met intermediate goals and will ultimately be successful in achieving its stated long-term objectives.

OSG interviewed the majority of the employees who completed the JHRA program, as well as a significant number of employees who have not yet participated in the program. Out of thirty-six completed surveys, 100% of respondents viewed the program as beneficial and positive.

Participants were tremendously satisfied with the quality of services and information provided, shown by an average response of 1.14 on a scale from 1 to 6 (1 being "very satisfied" and 6 being "very dissatisfied"). Similarly, every single respondent who participated in the program at least somewhat agreed that it improved his or her work/career mindset, with an average response of 1.57 on a scale of 1 to 6 (1 being "strongly agree" and 6 being "strongly disagree"). This is significant since improving career and work mindset were among the primary goals of the program.

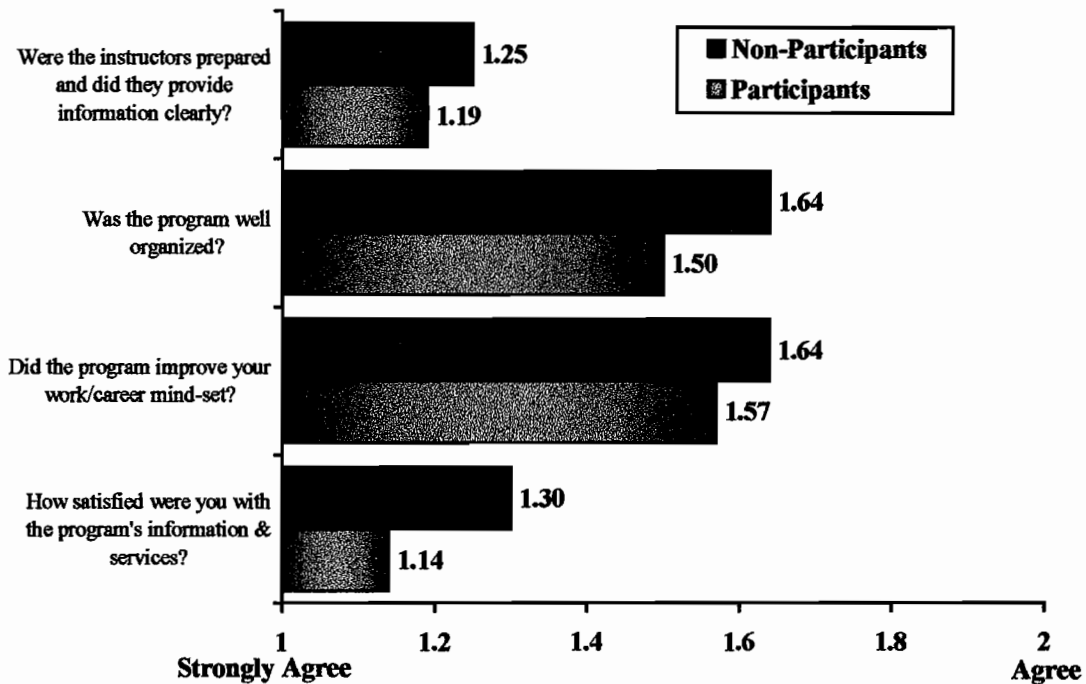
*100% of respondents viewed the program as beneficial and positive.*

Survey respondents were equally positive about the program's instructors, with 100% agreeing that instructors were well organized and explained matters clearly (1.19 average; 1 being "strongly agree" and 6 being "strongly disagree"). Most participants raved about the instructors, emphasizing that they were compassionate and connected with each individual. Several respondents remarked that the instructors impacted them "spiritually, mentally, and emotionally," while others referred to their teachers as "role models." The quality of the instructors and personal connections that were formed were repeatedly mentioned during the survey administration.

The employees who have not completed the course demonstrated an exceptionally high level of interest in the JHRA program. Indeed, the vast majority of the non-participants' responses were parallel to the participants', although somewhat less emphatic since they had not experienced the JHRA program first-hand. Only one survey respondent had not heard of the program at all; he is employed in the Clinical Department of Johns Hopkins Hospital, a department that has yet to be exposed to the JHRA program.

The following chart illustrates the average responses for a few select survey questions. Note that the non-participants were asked to respond based on their perceptions of the program and what they have heard from their co-workers who had already completed classes. Most non-participants had heard enough details from the participants about the program to evaluate how helpful they thought it was. Only four non-participants declined to answer, responding that they did not have enough knowledge of the program to give an accurate answer.

**Participants' & Non-Participants' Responses**  
 Survey Averages (Scale: 1="Strongly Agree", 6="Strongly Disagree")



In terms of attendance, nearly all participants regularly attended the JHRA classes. Only four out of the thirty-six respondents said that they had not attended all of the classes. Reasons for non-attendance included a previously scheduled job interview, a transportation problem, and a request from a supervisor not to attend because of staffing issues. In addition, the JHRA program instructor mentioned that a total of four employees started the program

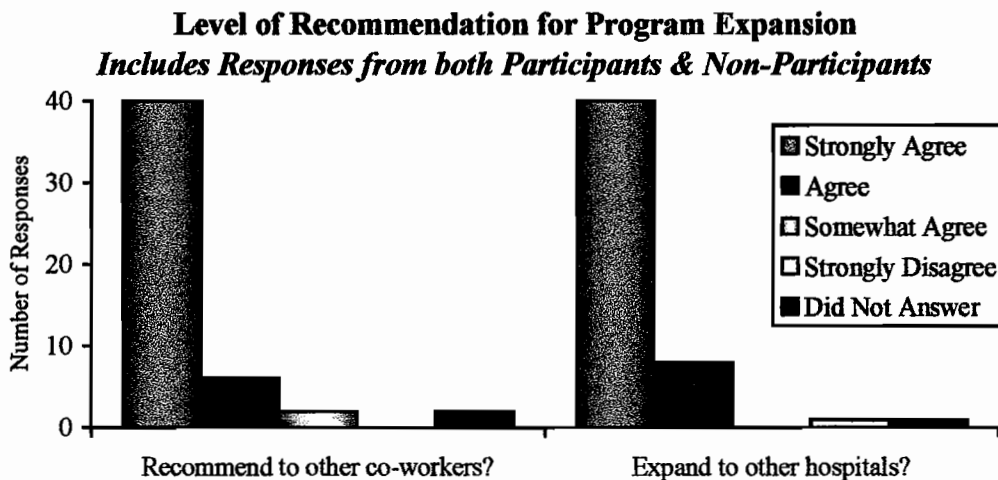
at one point and dropped out before graduation. These data translate to a program retention rate of 95%, and an overall attendance rate of nearly 99%.

When asked whether they would recommend the program to other co-workers, the participants agreed emphatically, with all but four responding, "strongly agree." The remaining four simply agreed, for an average response of 1.11 on the same scale used above. This question received the lowest average response out of all questions; that is, it averaged the highest level of participant agreement, evidently illustrating that participants feel very strongly that the program would be useful to other employees.

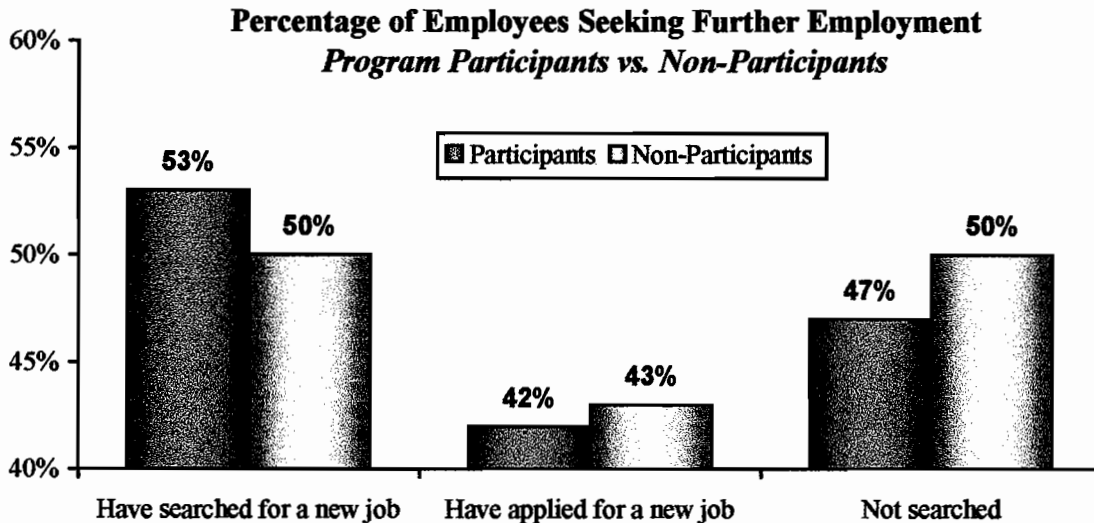
Similarly, most participants thought that the JHRA program was worthy of being expanded to other hospitals in Baltimore, with all but one person agreeing or strongly agreeing. That one person gave a response of "strongly disagree," but tempered the answer by saying that he or she wanted Johns Hopkins to be better than other area hospitals, and therefore did not want the program expanded.

*All but one person thought that the program should be expanded to other hospitals...that person gave a response of "strongly disagree," but tempered the answer by saying that he or she wanted Hopkins to be better than other hospitals, and therefore did not want the program expanded.*

Comments from non-participants were similarly positive about expanding the program, as illustrated in the following chart. Several non-participants expressly mentioned that they would like the program to be readily available to all employees, not just those who live in the empowerment zones. Some non-participants remarked that they had tried to enroll in the JHRA class, but had instead been placed on a long waiting list comprised of interested employees who live outside of Baltimore's empowerment zone.



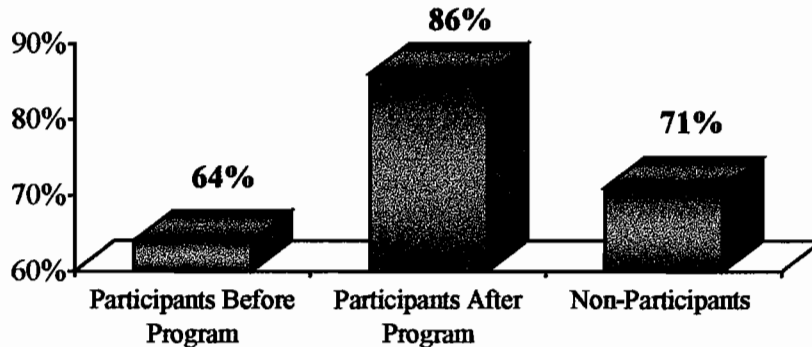
Perhaps the most concrete evidence of the JHRA program's success would be the number of employees who are motivated by the course enough to seek career advancement or additional education. As the chart below illustrates, the percentage of program participants who have sought additional employment or career advancement since their completion of the program is slightly higher than the percentage of non-participants who have recently looked for a new job. Of all survey respondents who have searched for another job, 88% reported that the pay at the new job would be more than his or her current position.



The survey results also indicate that respondents are more likely to search for a higher position within Johns Hopkins Hospital rather than seek employment with an outside company. Only 22% of both program participants and non-participants have looked for employment outside of the hospital, while approximately 42% of participants have searched for another position in JHH since taking the JHRA class. Fifty percent of non-participants have searched for a new job within Hopkins. Out of those employees who have searched for another job, 84% had also applied for the new job.

In addition to the fact that the program seems to slightly increase an employee's motivation to search and/or apply for a higher-paid job, many JHRA participants are furthering their education or taking special training classes as a result of the program. While 64% of participants had already considered seeking additional formal education or training prior to taking the JHRA class, that percentage jumped to 86% after completing the program. In fact, one person in a managerial position mentioned that there was a "definite increase" in the number of employees who enrolled in classes to complete their GEDs, as well as courses offered through JHH such as medical terminology, radiology, nursing, and emergency room technician training.

**Percentage of Survey Respondents Considering Additional Formal Education or Training**



One positive trend that may be emerging as a result of the JHRA program is that work-shift attendance rates seem to be improving. OSG obtained personnel records from JHH and compared participants' attendance records before and after the program. Out of a random sample of ten program participants, the combined number of times an unexcused lateness and/or absence was recorded in the last six months dropped from eleven (prior to attending the JHRA class) to two (after completing the class). This translates to a decline of 82% in the number of times an unexcused absence or lateness was reported. While this may be a statistical abnormality, it may also indicate that the program boosts work-shift attendance rates to a certain extent.

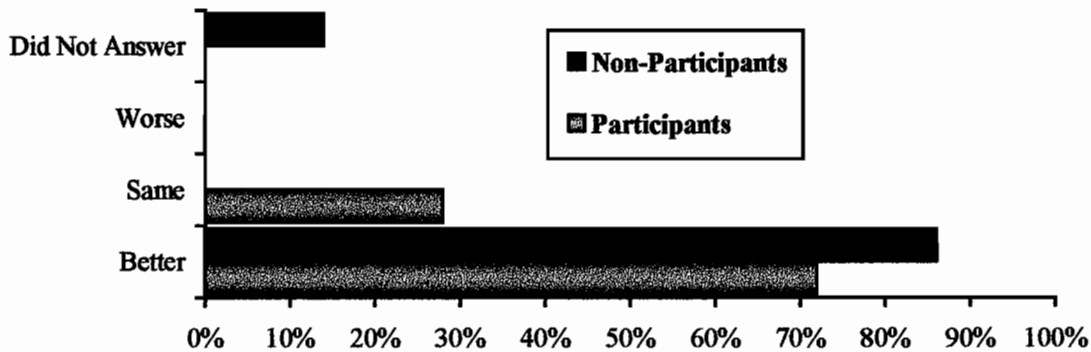
In addition to examining personnel records, OSG examined CareerScope reports and the Individual Development Plans for individuals who have completed the JHRA program. While these reports were interesting because they showed the aptitude tests and detailed career plans for each participant, OSG was unable to utilize these reports in studying the program's overall effectiveness. Since only the program participants completed the reports, the results could not be compared to those of non-participants. By the same token, the participants would have needed to complete pre-program CareerScope reports and/or Individual Development Plans so that OSG could compare the two and subsequently evaluate the program's effectiveness.

Perhaps the most striking realization emerging from the survey responses was one that cannot be measured by any statistical means; employees became more focused on their future as a result of the program. Participants seemed to have definite ideas of what their goals are and how to accomplish them, while non-participants gave vague responses when questioned about their career or educational plans. This distinction has not revealed itself in any statistically measurable way, but was perceived by surveyors.

*Participants seemed to have definite ideas of what their goals are and how to accomplish them, while non-participants gave vague responses about their career plans.*

What is clear, however, is that both participants and non-participants sense that taking part in the JHRA program will assist them in achieving their career goals. More than 72% of participants responded that their chances for work/career advancement are better after participating in the program, while the other 28% said their chances for advancement remained the same. The non-participants are even more confident in the program, with nearly 86% saying that their chances for advancement would be better after completing the JHRA program. The other 14% of non-participants responded that they could not make an accurate assessment until they had experienced the program first-hand. The following chart illustrates these answers.

**Do you think your chances for work or career advancement are worse, better, or the same after participating in the JHRA program?**



### **SUPERVISORS'/MANAGERS' COMMENTS**

Supervisors, managers, and other senior-level personnel collectively seem to be advocates of the JHRA program. Several respondents mentioned that their employees are more cooperative and have improved work habits after attending the program. One said that his or her employees who had completed the program were more likely to perform tasks outside their job description without complaint. Managers confirmed that work-shift attendance seemed to improve after attending the class, as was discussed previously in this report. Indeed, the general sentiment most often expressed by managerial staff was that their employees seemed to have “better attitudes” after attending the program.

It was also mentioned that members of the managerial staff benefit from the program because they learn to better understand their employees and communicate with them in a more personal manner. Some managers/supervisors said that while employees can greatly benefit from the program, upper-level staff members do not need the motivational aspects of the program as much.

**NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF JHRA PROGRAM**

When questioned about the most negative aspects of the JHRA program, many participants remarked that they thought it was too short in length. However, upon further questioning, the reason they desired a longer program did not seem to be that they thought that the program structure was incomplete or rushed, but rather that they enjoyed the time spent in the program, and missed the friendships developed in class.

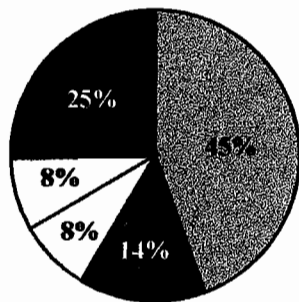
*42% of respondents said that they could not think of a single negative aspect of the program.*

Indeed, the most common answer given when asked about the worst part of the program was “nothing.” Statistically, twenty-one people out of the fifty total surveyed (42%) responded that they could not think of a negative aspect of the program. The most often-mentioned negative aspects are illustrated below.

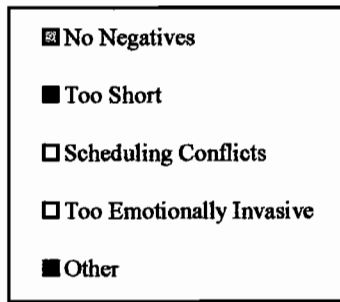
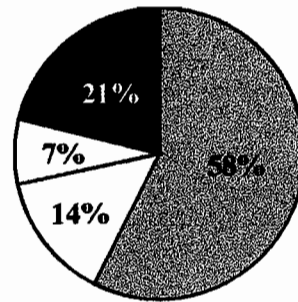
Supervisors and managers mentioned scheduling conflicts most frequently, since attending the program required that employees miss work shifts. However, most managers acknowledged that the benefits gained from the program (improvement in employees’ attitudes and personalities, enthusiasm about their work) were well worth missed time on the job.

The following charts illustrate the differences between the negative aspects perceived by the participants and non-participants.

**Program Participants' Responses**



**Non-Participants' Responses**

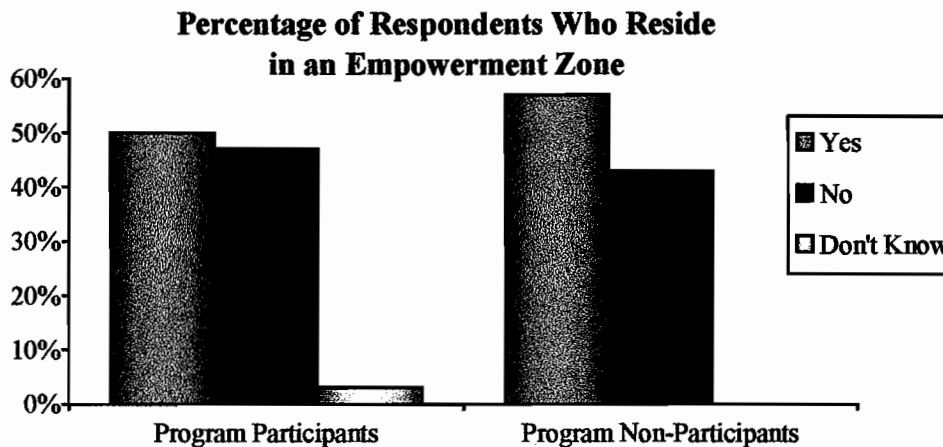


## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SURVEY POPULATION

Out of the people surveyed who have already completed the JHRA program, OSG determined that the average respondent works in the Housekeeping sector of the hospital. The average hourly wage among participants (excluding managers and supervisors) was reported to be \$9.74. This population is reasonably analogous to the non-participant population, out of which the average respondent works in the Housekeeping sector and (again, excluding managers and supervisors) earns about \$9.19 per hour. The educational background of the two groups is nearly identical, with the standard respondent having achieved either a GED or a high school diploma.

The vast majority of the employees who completed surveys are African American (96%), and slightly more than half (56%) are female. There was a wide range of answers in terms of marital status, and most respondents have children. One difference between the two groups of respondents worth noting is that the group of participants surveyed tended to have fewer children (average of 0.92 children under age 18) than did the group of non-participants surveyed (average of 1.7 children under age 18).

An interesting fact about the survey population is that while survey participants repeatedly emphasized the difficulty they had getting into the program without living in an empowerment zone, the statistical breakdown tells a different story. Out of the program participants who completed interviews, just slightly more than half reported living in an empowerment zone. Surprisingly, 57% of the non-participants reported that they live in an empowerment zone. However, this could just be a statistical anomaly that resulted from randomly interviewing employees, and may not be indicative of the workforce group as a whole. This is illustrated in the following chart.



## CONCLUSION

All employees surveyed, with the exception of the individual who had not heard of the JHRA program, were extremely enthusiastic about and supportive of the program. Employees conveyed that they gained confidence and a sense of life direction from the course. One participant remarked that the class motivated him to buy land and build a house from the ground up. Another mentioned that the program provided a well of information about existing career programs, and helped him to feel like he is "working towards something, not just working for money." One more said, "It is an excellent program, very personalized. The instructors try to get to know you before they try to help you so they can head you in the right direction."

Managers and supervisors felt that the employees who had completed the program became more productive workers, who also were willing to complete tasks outside their individual job descriptions. One respondent in a managerial position remarked, "Inner city folks need this kind of program." Another supervisor mentioned that the class is beneficial to managers as well as entry-level employees because it teaches them how to communicate with their employees on a more personal level.

*Managers felt that employees became more productive workers, who also were willing to complete tasks outside their job descriptions.*

Overall, the JHRA program appears well structured, efficient, and is perceived as being extraordinarily beneficial by participants. Those who seem to gain the most from the program are entry-level employees who might not otherwise be motivated to move up the career ladder. Members of the Housekeeping Department at all occupational levels strongly support the program and report personal and professional growth as a result. Those survey respondents who have not yet participated in the program are, on the whole, nearly as positive as participants, and nearly all mentioned that they are eager to experience the benefits first-hand.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

While the overwhelmingly positive nature of the survey responses allowed OSG to conclude that the JHRA program is meeting its intermediate goals, the program's effectiveness could be validated further if the following data were available and conditions were met:

- A pre-program survey was administered that measures each individual's initial career and educational goals.
- Detailed records were kept of each individual's work attendance before and after the program.

- Sufficient time (at least one year) had passed between program completion and survey administration. This would allow an individual enough time to make quantifiable advancements in their career or educational.

As the above criteria demonstrate, the report would be more statistically sound if individual participants could be tracked over a period of time. A future study should aim to satisfy these conditions in order to determine the precise impact of the JHRA program.

**APPENDIX A. PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Johns Hopkins Retention and Advancement Program**

**Participant Survey**

Sponsored by:

**Empower Baltimore Management Corporation  
3 South Frederick Street, Suite 800  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202**

**Consent Form**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. This survey will ask you about your experience in Retention and Advancement program. For us to determine how to best serve you and Johns Hopkins Hospital, we need your honest answers. All the information you provide will not be linked with your name or other identifying information in our published reports.

For the sole purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the Retention and Advancement program, may Optimal Solutions Group staff obtain information from your personnel file?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions about the survey or would like to provide additional information about the Retention and Advancement program, please call Mark Turner at (410) 342-8674.

Thank you again for your help. We appreciate your participation!

1. Current Occupation:

1. Housekeeping
2. Dietary Aide
3. Other, \_\_\_\_\_

2. Rank/Status:

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Hourly wage rate:

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

4. When did you start working at Johns Hopkins Hospital?

\_\_\_\_\_ month/year

5. When did you attend the Retention and Advancement program?

Beginning date (mm/yyyy): \_\_\_\_\_

End date (mm/yyyy): \_\_\_\_\_

6. Did you attend all of the Retention and Advancement program sessions during the 4-week period?

1. Yes
2. No

If No, please explain why?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. How satisfied were you with the services and information the Retention and Advancement program provided to you?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Somewhat satisfied
4. Somewhat dissatisfied
5. Dissatisfied
6. Very dissatisfied

8. Has your participation in the Retention and Advancement program improved your work/career mind-set?

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Somewhat agree

4. Somewhat disagree
5. Disagree
6. Strongly disagree

Please indicate your response to the following questions.

9. The Retention and Advancement program was well organized.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Somewhat agree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Disagree
6. Strongly disagree

10. The Retention and Advancement program instructors were always prepared and provided information in an understandable manner.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Somewhat agree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Disagree
6. Strongly disagree

11. I would recommend that my other co-workers participate in future Retention and Advancement program sessions.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Somewhat agree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Disagree
6. Strongly disagree

12. I would recommend that the Retention and Advancement be expanded to other hospitals in Baltimore.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Somewhat agree
4. Somewhat disagree
5. Disagree
6. Strongly disagree

13. Since participating in the Retention and Advancement program, have you searched for or have you applied for another position at Johns Hopkins Hospital?

1. Searched but have not applied
2. Searched and have applied
3. Not searched
4. Other \_\_\_\_\_

14. Have you searched for or have you applied for another position outside of Johns Hopkins Hospital?

1. Searched but have not applied
2. Searched and have applied
3. Not searched
4. Other \_\_\_\_\_

15. If you have searched or have applied, does the position pay more than your current position, require additional training, or provide on-the-job training?

1. Pays more
2. Requires additional training
3. Provides on-the-job training
4. Other \_\_\_\_\_

16. Do you think your chances for work/career advancement are worse, better, or the same since participating in the Retention and Advancement Program?

1. Worse
2. Better
3. Same
4. Don't know

17. What was the most useful aspect of the Retention and Advancement program?

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18. What was the worse aspect of the Retention and Advancement program?

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19. Highest school grade completed:

1. Did not finish elementary (grades 0-7)
2. Completed elementary (grade 8)
3. Did not finish high school (grades 9-11)
4. Earned high school diploma
5. Earned GED
6. Some college (> 12)
7. College Graduate

20. Besides this program, have you ever received skills training?

1. Yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_
2. No

21. If yes, was the other skills training program better, worse than, or just as good as the Retention and Advancement program?

1. Other program was better than Retention and Advancement program

2. Other program was worse than Retention and Advancement program
3. Same
4. Don't know

22. Prior to participating in the Retention and Advancement program, did you consider seeking additional formal education or training?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

23. After participating in the Retention and Advancement program, did you consider seeking additional formal education or training?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

24. Do you usually work full-time (35-40 hours per week), part-time (less than 35 hours per week), or over-time (more than 40 hours per week)?

1. Full-time
2. Part-time
3. Over-time

25. Do you have children?

1. Yes, if yes, how many under age 18? \_\_\_\_\_
2. No

26. Do you live in an empowerment zone?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

27. Date of birth (mm/dd/yyyy):

\_\_\_\_\_

28. Marital Status:

1. Married
2. Never married
3. Separated/Divorced
4. Widowed

29. Gender:

1. Female
2. Male

30. Race/Ethnicity (Circle all that apply):

1. White
2. Black
3. Latino/Hispanic
4. Asian/Pacific Islander
5. American Indian/Alaskan
6. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## About OSG

Optimal Solutions Group (OSG) provides comprehensive consulting that promotes superior internal operations and external relations with funding streams, the public, customers and government agencies.

We do this by integrating analytical, software and change management capabilities in the service of our clients. Our clients include corporations, government agencies, social service providers, and workforce development professionals.

### Staff

**Mark Turner, Ph.D.** is the founder and President of Optimal Solutions Group. Dr. Turner's work has focused on academic performance, workforce development, and social welfare policy. Prior to founding OSG, Dr. Turner was a Research Scientist at Johns Hopkins University.

**Anirban Basu, M.P.P., J.D.** is the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Optimal Solutions Group. Prior to joining OSG, Mr. Basu was Director of Applied Economics & Senior Economist at RESI, the research and consulting arm of Towson University.

**Monica Leal** is an Analyst at Optimal Solutions Group. Ms. Leal is also a public policy graduate student at the Johns Hopkins University. Her area of concentration is social policy with an emphasis on welfare and housing policy. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Political Science from Loyola College in Maryland in 2002.

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