

# Trans Leadership Academy: Program Assessment

Spring 2023 Cohort

Prepared for: Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition

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## Section 1: Overview

### Assessment Methodology

- Participant information
  - Baseline information was collected from all 10 graduates at the point at which they started the program.
  - Final information was collected from 6 of the 10 graduates. The survey was sent to all graduates.
  - Interviews were conducted with 2 participants. The key interview questions were also included in the final survey to capture participants' thoughts who were unable to participate in an interview.
  - A session debrief form was available for participants to fill out following each session. Information was only obtained from the first four sessions.
  - A mentor meeting debrief form was available for participants to fill out following each month of meetings with their mentors. Most participants filled out the form for May.
- Mentor information
  - A mentor-participant meeting debrief survey was available for mentors to fill out throughout the program. 9 of the 10 final mentors filled out the debrief survey at some point; most filled the survey out several times.
  - A final survey was sent to mentors at the end of June to capture overall meeting statistics and feedback for the program. The final mentor survey was filled out by 7 of the 10 mentors.
- Attendance to sessions was captured by instructors and analyzed by the Program Assessment Consultant.
- The participant who did not complete the program was excluded from analyses. The person who joined late was included in calculations starting their first eligible session.

### Program Completion

- 9 of the 10 original participants completed the program.
  - One person left the program after the first month.
  - An additional person entered the program during month 2 of the program (May). They did complete the program.
- 10 of the 11 participants who started the program completed it, a 91% completion rate.

### Session Attendance

- Over 10 sessions, **the average virtual and in-person attendance at each session was 91%**. The attendance for individual sessions was as low as 44% and as high as 100% of the participants.
- For any given session, an average of 80% of attendees would attend in-person, however, this ranged from 50% to 100% of participants attending in-person.

## Section 2: Key Participant Outcomes

### Education

- At baseline, 11% of participants completed some postsecondary education, 11% of participants completed a Bachelor's degree, 56% of participants completed some college, and 22% of participants were a high school graduate or had a GED. Participants' overall formal education level remained the same at the end of the program.
- **Of the participants who want to advance their education, 40% took initial steps towards advancing their education, mainly researching programs to apply to and compiling application materials.**

### Employment/Career

- At baseline, 30% of participants were employed full-time; another 30% were employed part-time, with multiple part or full-time jobs; or self-employed; 30% were unemployed, and 10% were on SSDI.
  - Of the participants who filled out the final survey, no participants changed their employment status category. Although, **50% of these participants started a new job or internship during the program.**
- On a satisfaction scale of 1 being not at all satisfied with one's employment and 4 being very satisfied, **participants' average employment satisfaction at baseline as 2.33, which increased to 2.67 by the end of the program.**
- Qualitative:
  - TLA helped participants build skills and confidence in areas that directly support their career growth and change.

### Financial

- 70% of participants at baseline thought it was very difficult for them to pay for usual expenses within the last 30 days, including food, rent/mortgage, car payments, medical expenses, student loans etc.
  - **This financial instability decreased significantly to only 17% of participants at the end of the program.**
  - On a financial security scale of 1 being very difficult to pay for usual expenses and 4 being not at all difficult, participants' average financial security at baseline as 1.3, which increased to 2 by the end of the program.
- 50% of participants at baseline were very worried that they would run out of food before having money to find more within the last 2 weeks. This percentage remained the same at the end of the program.
  - On a food security scale of 1 being very worried about running out of food and 4 being very worried, participants' average food security at baseline as 1.8, which increased to 2 by the end of the program.

- Two participants enrolled in government resources to support their financial stability during the program, including SNAP, Medicaid, and SSI/SSDI.
- Qualitative:
  - The financial stipend from the program helped participants
    - Bridge the income gap between jobs.
    - Pay off previous debts
  - The bus pass allowed participants to easily access the program and previously set aside transportation money to be used for other expenses.
  - The computer allowed one participant to take a job they otherwise would not have been able to take due to the need to provide one's own technology.

### Housing Security

- **30% of participants at baseline noted they did not have a steady place to live within the past 30 days, which decreased to 17% of participants at the end of the program.**
  - On a housing security scale of 1 being not having a steady place to live and 3 being having a steady place to live, participants' average housing security at baseline was 2, which increased to 2.17 by the end of the program.
- Within the prior two weeks of the baseline survey, 2 participants noted they lived unsheltered. 1 of those participants remained unsheltered at the end of the program, and the other person's housing status is unknown.

### Health

- **22% of participants at baseline reported poor mental health in the last 30 days. Of those who completed the final survey, zero participants reported poor mental health within the last 30 days of the program.**
  - On a mental health scale of 1 being poor mental health and 5 being excellent mental health, participants' average mental health at baseline was 1.88, which increased to 2.17 by the end of the program.
- 2 participants who completed the final survey reported contacting new healthcare providers because of the financial, technological, or logistical resources provided by TLA.

### Other Outcomes

- No participants who completed the final survey had any new involvement with the criminal justice system.

### Section 3: Participants' Session Feedback

- The sessions that participants found most beneficial to or supportive of their personal/professional goals are:
  - Reviewing Strengths Finder Results
    - “What I found most valuable from the session is the self-discovery aspect of the assignment. I believe that one of our biggest struggles as human beings is getting in our own way by negative thought patterns and false truths/beliefs. This session helped me to really recognize truths that I failed to prior to taking the assessment. I do believe also the way that Gallup provides more information for you to dive deeper into your strengths and weaknesses. I really found it to be a very helpful tool that I am excited to continue to dive deeper into.”
  - **Job Application Essentials: Resume and Cover Letter**
    - “Learning about using chosen names vs. government names is the most impactful lesson.”
  - Financial Literacy as Resistance
    - One participant noted this is a skills session they had not received before at other similar programs, but found it incredibly valuable.
    - **Participants and mentors both suggested MTPC provide individual financial counseling for participants.**
- Overall, participants found that hearing instructors' personal experiences with the workshop topics, the rich group discussions, and having time to work on materials during workshops were the most beneficial and engaging aspects of the sessions.
  - One participant suggested ensuring sessions tie back to the individual's goals, work, or reflection to ensure the takeaways are clear for each participant at the end of the session.
- Sessions participants faced challenges with:
  - One participant noted the financial literacy sessions contained stressful subject matter for them. More support during these sessions may be needed.
  - One participant noted the rights in the workplace session contained a lot of material. They suggested splitting the session into two sessions, one about workplace rights and one about what to do if your rights are violated.
- Participants noted in-person engagement benefited the sessions overall and their ability to engage with and retain the material.
- **Participants noted the sessions started late in the evening and impacted their sleep schedule and home duties/routines.**
  - MTPC should consider starting the cohort sessions earlier in the evening to ensure participants can be home at an earlier time and potentially focus more.
- Participants suggested utilizing icebreakers or other tactics during sessions to make participants more comfortable engaging and sharing in a new group.
- Participants suggested holding an initial conversation with participants of how to have group conversations about difficult topics, with new people, and ways people can take care of themselves during these conversations.

## Section 4: Mentor - Participant Meeting/Relationship Findings

### Statistics

- The average number of **formal meetings mentors held with participants was 4.7 over the course of the program** (ranged from 2 to 8 meetings total). **The average length was 1 hour**. Formal meetings were defined as meetings set up ahead of time, meeting to discuss specific topics, whether virtual or in person. **The majority of these calls were held virtually via video call.**
- Mentors also frequently communicated with participants informally (e.g., impromptu communication via phone, text, or email) over the course of the program. Communicating **at least once a week via text was most common**. One mentor noted they rarely communicated informally unless it was to set up meetings. Several mentors noted they communicated via text several times per week.
- Mentors' ranked their capability for addressing participants' questions and topics a 4.7 out of 5.
- Mentors described the majority of meetings as: casual, positive, and supportive.
- On average, participants ranked their satisfaction with their mentor's support a 4.5 out of 5.

***Bolded statements below indicate findings reported by more than half of mentors and/or participants.***

### Mentor-Participant Meeting Discussion Topics and Activities

- **Initial boundary setting of mentor/mentee relationship**
- **Built genuine relationships and provided a supportive space**
  - *Mentor: "I think [they] felt that [they] could trust me on some level to ask for support and reached out several times asking me for specific things, so to me that was a success."*
  - *Participant: "I love my relationship with my mentor and the amount of opportunities being shared with me."*
  - *Participant: "I feel as though I get tons of guidance from my mentor. [They] continuously point me in the right direction based on any questions or worries I have/had."*
  - *Participant: "I feel that [my mentor] took the time to listen to me and fully understand my goals before offering [their] own knowledge. That created an ambiance of equality that made me feel safe to learn and also be curious and unapologetic."*
- **Discussed the intricacies of one's identities' and how they relate to personal, professional, and daily life (e.g., trans joy, navigating the workforce as trans)**
- **Supported career development and growth including:**
  - Navigating and identifying career goals and longer-term trajectories

- Discussing current job/career challenges (e.g., loss of job, difficult work conversations)
  - *Participant: “They have helped me immensely with my interview skills and seeing the gaps in my own knowledge of the work force and expectations that people have.”*
- **Rewrote participants’ resumes, cover letters, and/or LinkedIns for specific jobs**
  - *Mentor: “I felt success most acutely when I gave [them] a compliment or an encouraging comment and I could feel her internalize it.”*
- Interview skills/mock interviews
- Identified specific jobs for participant to apply to *outside of set meeting time*
- **Discussed personal life challenges** (e.g., death of family members, accessing secure housing or other resources, relationship challenges, mental health)
- **Directly helped participants fill out forms or applications together during meetings** for identified job opportunities, community monetary funds, housing supports, and/or mental health professionals
- Discussed how to deal with discrimination and harassment, especially transphobia
- Built community connections
  - *Mentor: “I think we also built good rapport and I introduced her to two colleagues at the MTPC fundraiser, one of whom is a trans woman and [they] have a meeting with her.”*

## Challenges Mentors Faced

- Lack of participant communication, inconsistent participant communication plus conflicting schedules made it challenging for mentors and participants to meet up consistently.
- Balancing program content with supporting participants’ personal challenges
  - **Several mentors noted participants were going through personal challenges and crises that limited participants’ ability to engage in the program fully.** Mentors noted this led to mentor meetings a) being focused on personal challenges and not professional challenges or reviewing workshop information, b) participants being less available to meet with the mentors throughout the program, and c) participants needing a high level of direction, but facing barriers to enacting the steps given.
  - **Several mentors noted not feeling equipped to address the personal challenges and crises participants were experiencing.**
- One mentor noted they struggled to support their mentee who had very different identities than their participant. They suggested matching participants with mentors based on identities and life experiences, as well as professional goals.
- One mentor suggested teaching participants *\*how\** to search for jobs, i.e. what platforms to use, what search terms to use, what each section of job description means.

## Section 5: Other Mentor Feedback

### Stipend vs. Hours

- Mentors spent an average of **6 hours per month** working on TLA-related activities, but this **ranged from 3 hours to 15 hours per month** depending on the mentor's availability and participants' needs.
- All mentors who filled out the final survey thought the **TLA mentor stipend was adequate for their commitment to the program**, with the following comments:
  - Several mentors considered the mentorship a volunteer position and noted the money was not their primary factor for mentoring.
  - One mentor suggested the stipend be adjusted to be distributed based on each mentor's financial need.
  - Two mentors suggested the stipend or other money be distributed in a way that could support growing the mentor-participant relationship and/or to support participants directly (e.g., giftcards, resource information).
  - One mentor suggested if mentors' involvement in the program increases, the stipend should be increased accordingly.

### Clinical Supervision Meeting Feedback

- **Clinical supervision meetings were grounding, provided sound guidance, and mentors appreciated the opportunities to connect with each other**
  - *Mentor: "It was obvious that an intentional community was built for the mentees that was really nourishing and energizing."*
- One mentor noted the timing of the clinical mentor supervision meetings interfered with home activities and commuting home.
- One mentor did not think their work with their participant rose to the level of intensity that required a clinical supervision meeting. They suggested a peer check-in with other mentors would be better.
  - One mentor suggested increasing the amount of clinical supervision meetings.
  - These statements are in conflict. It may be good to offer drop in hours for mentors that need more support.

### Mentor-TLA Interactions

- **Mentors noted expectations and communication were clear and generally found the weekly emails insightful.**
  - One mentor suggested expectations could have been clearer on how closely mentor-participant meetings should align with the weekly/bi-weekly workshops participants attended.
  - One mentor suggested including high-level notes from each workshop in the weekly email so mentors know exactly what participants are learning.



## Section 6: Key Findings + Adaptations

### Key Needs to Address in Future Programs

Key needs/findings were points consistently brought up by both mentors and participants.

- **Need for case management**
  - **Greater support for participants' basic needs** (e.g., secure housing, food, clothing), including more connections to local organizations and supports.
    - A list of community resources should be developed and shared with both participants and mentors.
    - The importance of the content and skills being shared during the program should be balanced with the need to address basic challenges participants face day to day that may impact their ability to fully participate in the program.
  - **Greater support and/or linkage to mental health resources**
    - Provide more self-regulation and self-care strategies to participants to use both during program sessions and outside of the program.
  - Greater resources to support job readiness, prior to larger career growth mentoring
    - Some participants may need a higher level of support understanding skills to hold a job generally prior to thinking about broader career growth. This may look like engaging in volunteer opportunities or smaller commitments before taking on a larger commitment.
- **Greater connection building between mentors and participants as a whole**
  - Host a large, combined kickoff meeting with mentors and participants allowing them to meet each other prior to pairs being made.
  - Hold more casual events for connection among participants and mentors throughout the program (both virtually and in-person).
  - Create digital, separate spaces for mentors and participants to interact with their cohort from the start of the program.
  - Create a list of TLA network contacts for participants to reach out to, including the ability for participants to engage with other mentors.

### Other Suggestions for Adapting the Program

- Increase the length of the program (to 6+mo) to ensure participants have the space to reflect on, utilize, and build their skills overtime.
  - Structure the program so each week is either a workshop or a meeting with one's mentor, alternating weeks throughout the program.
- Increase the funds given directly to the queer and trans participants to combat systemic barriers trans people
  - Create a reparations policy for how MTPC allocates participants and mentors' stipends.

- Create clear guidelines on mentor/mentee relationship dynamics/expectations (especially related to exchange of money, substance use together, and romantic relationships with each other during the time of the program)
- Increase the number of mentors of color and trans women mentors to better align with the identities of the participants
  - Higher stipends should be provided to these individuals if needed.

## Mentor Quotes

- “I'm just so grateful this program exists and so grateful to have been a part of it! I would love to continue to be involved in TLA in some way going forward. Thank you for all your amazing life-changing work.”

## Participant Quotes

- “I really appreciated being around other trans people... I have not found a place I felt comfortable in more than one identity facet since college.”
- “TLA has helped me grasp my skills and build confidence in those skills. Although I haven't gotten a position during the program, I believe I have all the skills to ensure I can shift from [my current position] to more creative [and desired] work. I am super excited for the next chapter in my life.”
- “Working with TLA has provided me with the courage, knowledge, and resources to take action and work towards a better life that is lived for myself and my community, instead of resigning myself to a life of struggle and misery. Were it not for the tools provided to me by this program I don't know if I'd have the confidence to continue pursuing a career that won't drain me of my joy, and to work towards my long term goals.”
- “I learned all the skills that I wanted to learn and sharpened the skills that I already had.”
- “Thank you so much for this amazing opportunity there's no words to say how thankful and how much I cherished everyone's time and effort and especially MG, Kay with the dedication and how much work and how helpful they were and how much time and effort they put into this it turned out amazing. I'll be forever grateful and cherish the moment we shared and all the things that we learned together.”