2020–2021 Program Year Annual Report: Evaluation of the Bringing Everyone's Strengths Together (BEST) Program

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Executive Summary

Bringing Everyone's Strengths Together (BEST), a program of the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force (MGPTF), is a youth violence prevention and gang-related crime reduction initiative operated by the City of San José Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS). Through BEST, PRNS identifies and selects nonprofit community organizations in San José to provide services consistent with BEST goals. PRNS then awards individual grants for each program year to support services for youth ages 6 to 24 (and their families) who fit one of four target population profiles—at-risk, high-risk, gang-impacted, or gang-intentional. This report provides findings from the implementation and outcomes study of BEST for Program Year (PY) 2020–2021, conducted by Social Policy Research Associates (SPR).

Implementation and Adaptations

During PY 2020–2021, BEST grantees continued to operate in pandemic conditions, adapting their programming to support the changing needs of their participants.

- BEST grantees moved many services to remote and virtual formats, built out their social media platforms, and provided access to electronic devices and Wi-Fi.
- Though they continued to monitor academic outcomes, programs prioritized participants' mental health and socioemotional well-being due to the pandemic.
- Many programs continued to redesign services to meet participants' evolving needs by increasing one-on-one meetings and providing outdoor spaces for socializing and interacting with peers.

BEST Program Services

While continuing to adapt their services to pandemic conditions, BEST-funded programs provided a wide range of services in PY 2020–2021.

- Grantees provided over 100 percent of the projected number of units of service (UOS)—112,813 delivered, compared to 104,524 projected—surpassing their projected UOS in Emergency Services, Street Outreach/Intervention, Vocational/Job Training, and Case Management.
- Most UOS provided by grantees were in Personal Transformation (34 percent), Case Management (32 percent), and Street Outreach/Intervention (20 percent), as intended by PRNS funding allocations.

- Grantees continued to respond to pandemic-related immediate needs of participants and their families through the Emergency Services eligible service area, which accounted for 9 percent of UOS provided in PY 2020–2021.

Grants and Grant Spending

In PY 2020–2021, PRNS awarded $2,558,166 in BEST grants to 16 community-based organizations.

- Overall funding for BEST programs increased slightly in PY 2020–2021 compared to PY 2019–2020.
- Grantees expended 94 percent of BEST grant funds, which is a slightly lower rate of expenditures than in recent past years.

BEST Participants

Reflecting the challenges of pandemic conditions, BEST programs enrolled fewer youth; some grantees struggled with changing to virtual formats while others increased one-on-one services and decreased group services. Meanwhile, in-person Street Outreach/Intervention continued, and in some cases intensified, despite pandemic conditions. This resulted in a significant increase in the number of youth reached in this way.

- In total, 16 BEST grantees enrolled 2,448 program participants in PY 2020–2021, a 24 percent decrease from the 3,229 program participants enrolled by 15 BEST grantees in PY 2019–2020.
- Most BEST participants (75 percent) were at the lower end of the risk-level range.
- In addition to enrolled participants, grantees made 2,646 contacts with youth through Street Outreach/Intervention. This reflects a 47 percent increase over the estimated 1,800 contacts made in PY 2019–2020.

Participant Outcomes Analysis

The outcomes analysis used participant survey data to examine a range of psychosocial outcomes and program satisfaction.

- Youth participants showed modest but statistically significant levels of improvement during their time in the BEST program on six of the eight psychosocial measures.
- BEST participants were generally satisfied with the services they received through the program, with youth (ages 14–24) having somewhat higher levels of satisfaction than children (ages 7–13).

- Youth appeared to be particularly satisfied with how the program's adults listened to what they had to say, their perceptions of safety in the program, program staff's ability to communicate with youth in their own language, and their ability to understand the youths' cultures and to help them think about their own futures.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges of operating in pandemic conditions, BEST grantees provided remote and virtual services and continued to redesign or tweak services and activities to meet participants' changing needs. Grantees discovered new ways of engaging students (e.g., becoming more active on social media and offering new in-person supports) that they intend to continue in the future. While overall enrollment decreased, UOS remained at a similar level to previous years, as grantee staff provided more one-on-one services. Reflecting this approach, Case Management services increased significantly. BEST staff generally took advantage of these services to address the increased mental health needs of participants. Despite pandemic-related challenges, youth reported outcomes and satisfaction with BEST programs and program staff that were equal to or stronger than in the previous program year.

BEST program administrative staff moved forward during PY 2020–2021 to improve evaluation and internal program management systems. Responding to recommendations from the Office of the City Auditor (2019), the City Council, SPR, and BEST program staff, the management team has made significant progress in addressing several areas that are aligned with the City of San José's larger goals for increased program accountability and improved performance. These include:

- developing a PY 2021–2022 grantee workgroup to reconsider informed consent for third-party data collection and to review survey data collection processes,
- directing SPR to add additional outcome measures to the youth and child surveys for PY 2021–2022 in order to capture additional outcomes,
- working closely with SPR staff to support grantee staff in increasing survey response rates, including regular reports to grantees on survey response rates and describing participant survey responses,
- working with SPR staff to streamline grantee workbooks used for quarterly data collection and to create real-time data dashboards for grantees to monitor their progress toward contract goals,
- receiving funding from the City of San José to purchase a case management system and hire additional staff to assist with its implementation and oversight,

- initiating discussions with the City about the possibility of collecting third-party data directly, rather than through a third-party evaluator, and
- working with a contractor to develop a risk assessment tool and to test it with BEST grantees.

As BEST moves into its final year of this grant cycle, the management team is in a position to significantly improve its evaluation infrastructure and systems. This will help ensure continued progress in assessing its future ability to help participants through rigorous, responsive evaluation systems.

I. Introduction

Bringing Everyone's Strengths Together (BEST) is a program of the Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force (MGPTF) in San José, California. It is youth violence prevention and gang-related crime reduction initiative operated by the City of San José Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS). Through BEST, PRNS identifies and selects nonprofit and faith-based community organizations in San José to be placed on an eligible service provider list as part of a 3-year cycle (i.e., a triennial period). PRNS then awards individual grants for each program year (September 1 through August 31) of the triennial period. Over the past decade, the total amount allocated for BEST program services has ranged between $1.6 and $2.5 million annually.

The MGPTF

Established in 1991, the City of San José's Mayor's Gang Prevention Task Force is a strategic youth violence prevention initiative. It includes the BEST program, the city-staffed Youth Intervention Services, and Neighborhood Services. It also organizes a broad coalition—including law enforcement, school and government leaders, faith- and community-based organizations, and residents—to collaborate on, plan, and implement solutions for reducing gang-related activity and crime.

BEST grants support a wide range of services designed to assist youth in San José. Programs serve individuals ages 6 to 24 (and their families) who fit one of four target population profiles—at-risk, high-risk, gang-impacted, or gang-intentional.[1] In Program Year (PY) 2020–2021, PRNS organized services into six eligible service areas that encompass a range of prevention and intervention services: Emergency Services, Personal Transformation, Street Outreach, Vocational/Job Training, Parent Awareness/Training, and Case Management.[2] Grantees have delivered these services at multiple locations, including in community-based organization (CBO) offices, schools, and juvenile detention facilities, as well as on the street in designated geographic areas.

In May 2020, in response to COVID-19, PRNS added Emergency Services as its sixth eligible service area in order to address community needs related to the pandemic and various

[1] These four target population profiles describe a range of risk levels, from being at-risk of becoming involved in gang or criminal activity to being heavily involved and likely to have a history with the criminal justice system. See Appendix A for a description of each target profile as defined by the BEST program.

[2] Eligible service areas are described further in Chapter III and Appendix B.

emergency conditions that San José and its residents were facing. As the COVID-19 pandemic persisted throughout the 2020–2021 program year, grantees adapted services to be socially distanced or remote and grappled with remote service delivery as well as partner closures.

While BEST grants support service delivery across all of San José, they are designed to target certain areas where leadership from the MGPTF, in partnership with CBOs and the San José Police Department (SJPD), have identified higher rates of youth violence and gang-related crime. In their applications and contracts, grantees specify populations, services, and geographic areas, including "hot spots" for Street Outreach, where they plan to provide services with BEST funding.

Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) began evaluating the BEST program in 2017, when PRNS contracted with SPR to conduct a retrospective impact and implementation study of BEST, examining data from PY 2010–2011 to PY 2017–2018. The findings from that evaluation showed that cumulative provision of BEST services for a given SJPD beat was associated with decreases in gang incidents and youth arrests in both that beat and adjacent beats (Geckeler et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the evaluation found that BEST-funded programs and services were designed to improve many short- and medium-term outcomes, including various psychosocial and education-related outcomes, both for their own sake and as a means to improve criminal justice outcomes for participants. The BEST theory of change (see the next section) suggests that the program does this by providing youth with the skills, supports, alternative activities, and sense of purpose that might be needed to improve one's life and avoid becoming involved in criminal activity. Together, the modest impacts observed on long-term outcomes, like crime, suggest that the program may have even larger impacts on the above-mentioned short- and medium-term outcomes.

BEST Grantees

The following organizations were awarded BEST grants in PY 2020–2021.

- Alum Rock Counseling Center
- Bay Area Tutoring Association
- Bill Wilson Center
- Caminar
- Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County
- ConXión to Community
- Fresh Lifelines for Youth
- Girl Scouts of Northern California
- New Hope for Youth
- San José Jazz
- Teen Success, Inc.
- The Art of Yoga Project
- The Firehouse Community Development Corporation
- The Tenacious Group
- Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.
- Uplift Family Services

As a continuation of this work, SPR has released annual reports for PY 2018–2019 and PY 2019–2020, which present findings around the implementation of BEST (Levin et al., 2020, 2021). The PY 2019–2020 report examined participants' short- and medium-term outcomes of the types outlined above, finding that participants were generally satisfied with the services they received and that youth participants (ages 14–24) showed modest levels of improvement from early in the program to later in the program on some psychosocial measures.

The current report, like the PY 2019–2020 report, examines both program implementation and short- and medium-term youth outcomes. It also continues to situate these findings within the current pandemic-related context, given that social-distancing restrictions and other pandemic-related challenges persisted throughout the entirety of the 2020–2021 program year.

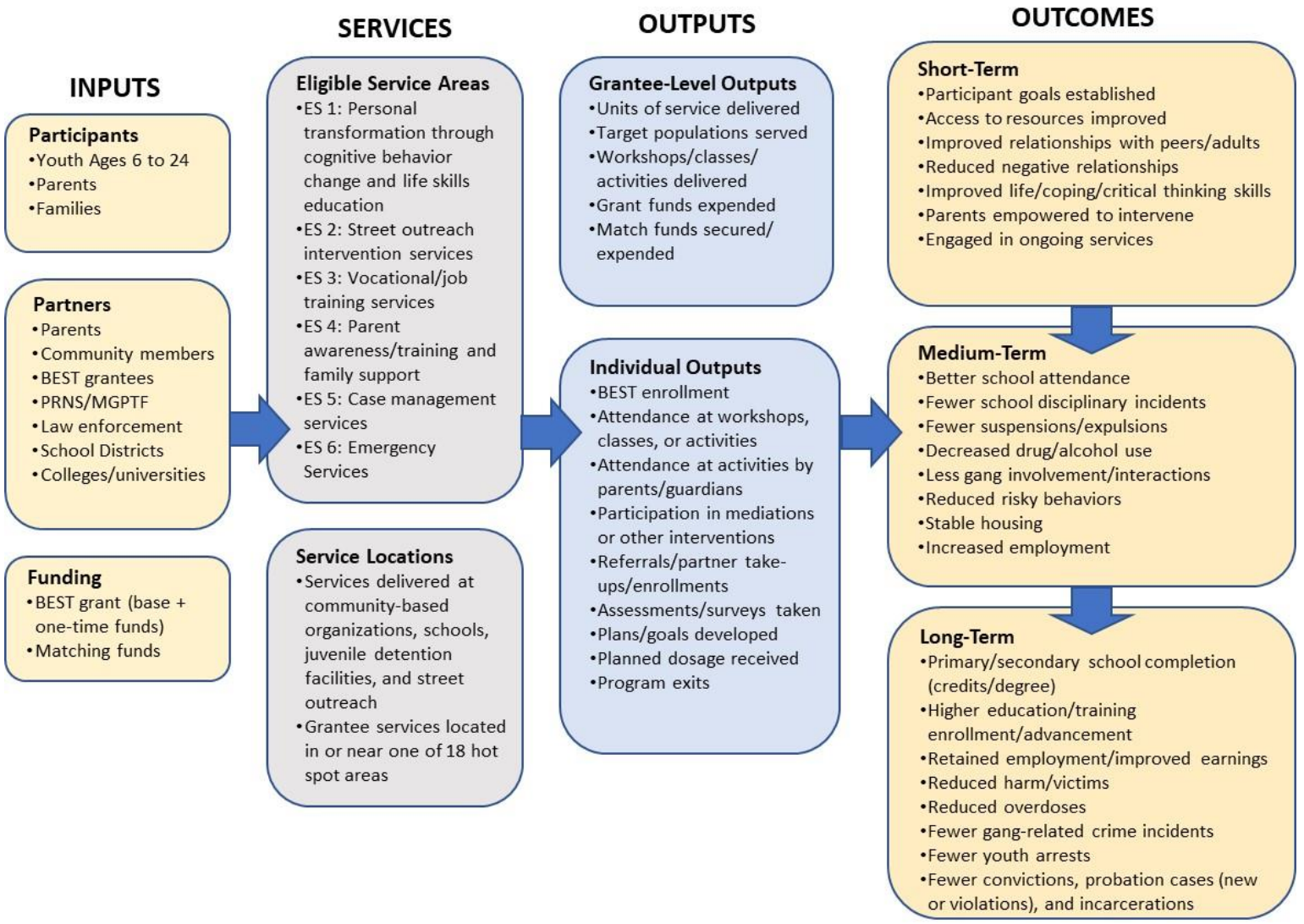
The BEST Theory of Change

PRNS has developed a theory of change for BEST that defines how each eligible service area operates, showing the services to be provided and their connection to different outputs (e.g., enrollment of target population youth, attendance, participation in services, referrals, exits) and outcomes (e.g., measures of psychosocial well-being, educational engagement, health and well-being, criminal justice involvement). This theory of change is rooted in and adapted from implementation study findings described in SPR's prior reports and additional efforts that PRNS conducted with grantees to understand their program models and approaches.

As seen in Exhibit I-1, BEST services are designed to improve short- and medium-term outcomes around positive youth development (e.g., improved self-esteem, improved coping mechanisms, improved connectedness) and increased education (e.g., improved attendance, reduced disciplinary measures). Less directly, BEST services are designed to lead to improvements in longer-term outcomes, like academic engagement and outcomes related to reduced criminal justice involvement (e.g., reduced arrests and probation involvement).

As noted above—and as discussed in the next few chapters—Emergency Services continued to be a temporary eligible service area in PY 2020–2021. It was designed to provide additional assistance to youth and their families related to COVID-19 adaptations (e.g., remote schooling, loss of work). This temporary eligible service area is indicated in the BEST theory of change and considered throughout this report.

Exhibit I-1: The BEST Theory of Change



Evaluation Approach

This report is designed to identify and understand the accomplishments of PY 2020–2021 BEST grantees—including their performance relative to past years of BEST operations and given the current community context—and the effects BEST has had on the youth and families it serves. To achieve these goals, the evaluation team set out to answer the following evaluation questions:

1. What were the main characteristics of the program as delivered by BEST grantees in PY 2020–2021, including budgets and grant amounts expended, eligible service areas funded and provided, and grantee service locations?
2. What were the main outputs of service delivery for PY 2020–2021 (both overall and by grantee, as available), including the number of participants planned for and enrolled, the demographics of those participants (e.g., race, age, risk level), and the units of service (UOS) planned for and delivered?
3. Did program participants from PY 2020–2021 experience positive outcomes—such as improved psychosocial outcomes, increased school engagement, and less frequent involvement with the criminal justice system—compared to before starting the program?

The evaluation includes both an implementation study and an outcomes study. The implementation study answers the first two evaluation questions by describing how service delivery and program operations (e.g., funding, participants, UOS) unfolded relative to plans for PY 2020–2021 and as compared to prior program years. The outcomes study answers the third question by examining youth outcomes through survey data collection.

Data Collection

The evaluation relied on the collection of the following types of data:

- **Grantee contracts and workbooks.** From PRNS, the evaluation team collected contracts and workbooks for each grantee, which together provided information on budgets and expenditures and planned and delivered UOS, as well as some additional details around program implementation. Workbook and contract data were supplemented with additional accounting and tracking documents managed by PRNS.
- **Participant demographic data.** From PRNS, the evaluation team obtained individual-level demographic data on program participants, including background data on participant age, gender, race/ethnicity, and risk level.

- **Staff and participant interviews and focus groups.** The evaluation team conducted phone interviews with staff members from 15 grantees in June 2021. These interviews covered program successes and challenges, youth characteristics, and program outcomes of interest. In August 2021, SPR staff conducted four small group interviews/focus groups with participants from Alum Rock Counseling Center (6 participants), Catholic Charities of Santa Clara Country (2 participants), The Firehouse Community Development Corporation (2 participants), and Fresh Lifelines for Youth (2 participants).
- **School district staff interviews.** In January and February 2021, SPR staff conducted interviews with staff from 12 schools that partner with BEST grantees. Interviews were conducted with administrative and counseling personnel in elementary, middle, and high schools as well as in alternative schools.
- **Participant surveys.** The evaluation included surveys for children (ages 7–13),[3] youth (ages 14–24), and parents enrolled in parenting services provided by BEST grantees. The evaluation team designed these surveys to measure psychosocial outcomes (e.g., resilience, self-efficacy) and satisfaction. Grantees administered these anonymous surveys at various points throughout the program year on a semi-structured schedule that was customized to the grantees' program cycles. These efforts yielded a total of 474 complete responses across the three types of surveys.[4]

Data Analysis

For the implementation study (and to address the evaluation's first two evaluation questions), the evaluation team analyzed grantee contracts and workbooks, participant demographic data, and staff and participant interviews and focus groups. These data were used to compare the services provided, participants served, and funding expended to the program elements grantees planned to implement and the funding they received. Furthermore, the evaluation team compared these aspects of program implementation to past program years.

The implementation study also included qualitative analysis of the information contained in grantee workbooks and collected during staff interviews and focus groups. In particular, this analysis focused on partnerships with schools and delivery of services where the pandemic

[3] BEST serves youth ages 6 to 24. However, based on IRB requirements, 6-year-olds were excluded from the survey, as were incarcerated youth.

[4] There were 412 completed youth surveys, 59 completed child surveys, and 3 completed parent surveys, for a total of 474 completed surveys. There were too few parent surveys to analyze, so the evaluation team only analyzed results from the youth and child surveys.

created ongoing service-delivery and operational challenges for grantees. The evaluation team organized these data into themes and identified the common implementation challenges faced and successes realized by grantees, partners, participants, and PRNS staff. For the outcomes study, the evaluation team compiled data from the surveys and used them to describe outcomes generally and to compare outcomes of participants who had been enrolled for shorter versus longer periods of time. Further details on the approach to the outcomes analysis, the data themselves, and challenges and successes encountered in this analysis (including the decision to retain survey data but exclude administrative data from the analysis due to small sample sizes) are included in Chapter VI, as well as in the technical appendix (Appendix C).

Overview of the Report

The remainder of this report is organized into six chapters. Chapters II–V focus on implementation, describing the types and levels of services delivered, budgets and expenditures, the participants who enrolled, and how BEST staff members and participants adapted to emergency conditions. Chapter VI presents findings from the outcomes study. Chapter VII summarizes key findings and offers conclusions and recommendations.

II. Implementation Challenges and Program Adaptations

This chapter focuses on the successes and challenges of program implementation in PY 2020–2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic and related shelter-in-place and social-distancing conditions. It synthesizes findings from document reviews, school staff interviews in January and February 2021, and grantee staff interviews in June 2021.

Key Findings

- **Overall, programs prioritized participants' mental health and socioemotional well-being due to the pandemic.** Though academic outcomes continued to be monitored, staff were more concerned about students' health and safety.
- **Many programs continued to redesign services and activities to meet participants' evolving needs.** Finding it difficult to engage youth in virtual settings, BEST grantees provided youth with space to socialize and interact with peers, opportunities to build deeper relationships with program staff through increased one-on-one meetings, and much-needed time outdoors.
- **BEST grantees reported maintaining—and in some cases developing—new relationships with schools and other CBOs, despite the challenges of remote and virtual communication.**
- **BEST grantees moved many services to remote and virtual formats.** Key strategies included building out their social media platforms, offering alternatives to in-person activities, providing access to electronic devices and Wi-Fi, and providing in-person, socially distanced services when possible.

Program Challenges and Adaptations During COVID-19

During PY 2020–2021, BEST grantees continued to operate in pandemic conditions. Various public health guidelines, including mask and vaccination mandates, remote learning, and social-distancing protocols, affected services and activities and made it more difficult to engage youth and families than in previous years. Despite these difficulties, BEST grantees successfully delivered meaningful and valuable services by adapting their programming to support the changing needs of their participants. This included:

- shifting the focus from academic engagement to mental health and socioemotional well-being,

- redesigning program services and activities to meet emerging needs,
- maintaining and developing relationships with schools and other CBOs, and
- expanding remote and virtual service delivery.

Challenges

Staff from multiple grantees described the following common challenges:

- **Fewer opportunities to engage with youth.** Prior to the pandemic, program staff were stationed on school campuses and had chances to support and engage youth before, during (in passing periods and class time), and after school. For example, staff could stand by the cafeteria during lunch to remind students to come to the afterschool activity ("I'll see you in room B5!"; "Remember we have group today.") or pull students out of class for one-on-one case management meetings. One BEST program staff person remarked, "We don't get that same opportunity [to engage] right now. You can easily ignore a text reminder. You can't ignore somebody standing in front of you."

  The transition to remote learning meant programs had fewer opportunities to engage youth. Program staff could no longer casually check in on students during the school day without scheduling a phone call or Zoom meeting in advance. Thus, it became more difficult to ensure students would attend program activities consistently. Lack of adequate technology also contributed to reduced youth engagement. For example, one grantee explained that the graphics and videos in the new virtual programming they purchased often froze or didn't work altogether due to computers with slow processing speeds or inadequate internet connections. Further, some agencies were limited in their ability to purchase updated computer equipment, as capital funds were allocated for purchasing pandemic-related personal protective equipment or tents for food distribution, not for technology. One grantee staff member reported purchasing microphones using their personal funds.

> "While some students are thriving with this way of learning, many students don't seem to be engaging in it. Some students may not be present at all. Others may be in attendance, but they aren't turning in work or doing more than the bare minimum. Stress and trauma can interrupt cognitive processing, reduce students' executive functioning skills, and disrupt emotional regulation. All of that makes it difficult to learn, think, and engage meaningfully." – BEST grantee staff

- **Slowed program outreach and recruitment during the pandemic.** Although BEST grantees began attending virtual classrooms to promote their services, they encountered several challenges to recruitment. Some of these were technical, with BEST grantee staff unable to join Zoom classes because of connectivity issues. For example, one grantee reported, "We had three workshops scheduled in December, but we weren't able to connect to show up to the scheduled workshop. Another time we tried logging in to the Zoom class to present and the teacher was not able to let us in because her system was down." Another grantee described how school schedules that were adjusted for online learning conflicted with their scheduled programming, forcing them to cancel or postpone activities.

  Moreover, many recruitment opportunities that existed before the pandemic were no longer available in a virtual environment. For example, one grantee that normally relied on in-person back-to-school nights for recruitment lost this significant source of participants during COVID-19, "which really took the wind out of their sails." School staff mentioned how much more difficult recruitment and engagement became in the virtual school environment, especially as most of their incentives for student engagement, such as snacks, meals, or missing class, became logistical challenges.

  Referrals from schools—which have a significant impact on program enrollment, intake, assessments, and attendance—also slowed down during the pandemic. Often, counselors, teachers, and other school staff were overwhelmed with distance learning and unable to provide many referrals. According to one grantee, "Teachers reported having a lot more challenges as school went online and their personal lives changed because of the pandemic. They had a lot on their plate." A few grantees also noted challenges getting hold of school staff, including slow or no responses to emails or phone calls and staffing turnover and shortages at schools.

  > "Previously, staff were able to meet with potential members on their school campuses, as well as meet with school staff to let them know about our program so they could refer potential members. With the school closures, it has been harder to connect with school staff, which has greatly impacted outreach efforts." – BEST grantee staff

- **Difficulty building trust with youth in an all-virtual environment.** Lack of engagement led to challenges building rapport and trust with youth. Given programs'

lack of consistent, physical presence with students, staff had to rely on remote or virtual communication. If students did not want to connect with staff, they could simply ignore their phones. Infrequent in-person contact meant that it took more time and more work—more phone calls, more follow-ups, more check-ins—to build meaningful connections with participants.

> "Our program is school-based, so if we see kids out of class, we can tell them to go back in. It's different now with it online. The follow-up through text doesn't work the same—for example, kids give short answers and there is less of a connection. We aren't doing as much Case Management; instead, staff has to track kids down and build rapport." – BEST grantee staff

Relatedly, "Zoom fatigue," or the burnout associated with the overuse of virtual platforms, especially videoconferencing, has been a growing challenge during the pandemic and has made it difficult to stay in touch with youth. BEST program staff noticed that students are less engaged in program activities after spending an entire day in distance learning on their computers.

Moreover, when schools and other recreational activities did open for in-person opportunities, youth chose those over other options offered remotely or virtually. One grantee observed that "many of the program participants chose in-person opportunities over virtual programs. And the program participants' feedback that they are 'Zoomed-out' explained their reasoning."

> "With classes functioning completely online since the start of the school year, many students are already experiencing Zoom burnout, that feeling that students can't possibly continue going about school this way. The symptoms include lack of motivation, headaches, extreme drowsiness, depression, and anxiety, or higher levels of stress. All of these symptoms can have a negative [effect] on students' overall mental health."– BEST grantee staff

Staffing challenges impacted service delivery and, as a result, youth engagement for a few grantees. At least three BEST grantees reported being short-staffed during parts of the program year. This meant existing staff had to take on additional responsibilities

and therefore had less time to build rapport and relationships with program participants. For example, one program went through "staffing changes that resulted in shifting program resources and focus." This involved developing a new curriculum and changing the way services were being delivered.

- **Increasing economic and social stresses as a result of the pandemic.** BEST programs and participants and their families came under increasing economic and social stresses that both worsened existing challenges and created new ones. Youth continued to be affected by the previous year's racial injustice incidents and protests and wide-ranging wildfires that limited access to the outdoors due to poor air quality. These contributed to the stress felt by youth and families served by BEST grantees.

> "Just being a Black person living in this society during this time was also a significant impact. Youth were asking, 'What else is going on, what else could they possibly do to us?' There was a lack of motivation, depression, heavy sadness, and hopelessness. So we were reaching out to them, saying, 'That's what our program is, it's tailored to Black people.'"
> – BEST grantee staff

Program staff also noticed other financial and emotional impacts on families during the pandemic. Parents and guardians had to simultaneously work and help their children in distance learning, and many families lost loved ones due to COVID-19. One grantee recalled how difficult it was to get hold of guardians because of their increased financial responsibilities: "Guardians are not available at the same time as staff, especially when staff are part-time employees and have a limited schedule. Guardians seem to be less available with so much more going on in their lives."

Another BEST grantee noticed increases in depression among youth, which they related to the pandemic's impact. For example, some children were seeing their families and parents struggling financially, many for the first time, and as a result were slipping into depression. In addition, some families were strict and would not let their children leave the house; youth "felt like they were stuck and they wanted to interact with other kids. They felt trapped." BEST programs worked to help youth cope with these impacts.

Adaptations

Grantees responded to changing pandemic conditions in the following ways:

- **Shifting the focus from academic engagement to mental health and socioemotional well-being.** During the pandemic, programs became more concerned about students' overall well-being than their class grades and attendance. Programs continued to observe academic outcomes; however, they became less of a priority as youth confronted increased isolation, depression, and anxiety. As one program staff person observed, "The expectations changed because everything around the students changed." Whether virtual or in-person, staff met youth "where they were" and where they felt the safest. The same grantee added that "students reported virtual enrichment activities being a safe space where they make new friends and connect with peers who they can relate to and socialize with."

  One grantee added an additional health and wellness module to its existing curriculum. Moreover, two grantees described introducing meditation into their programs as a means of helping youth cope with the stresses of COVID-19. At one program, staff were honest with youth about the effects of the pandemic on their own mental health, which they reported allowed them to connect with youth at a deeper level. Also, parents grew to trust staff and felt comfortable letting their children attend in-person activities when restrictions eased. Several programs noted that supporting food distribution activities and helping families access other resources was one way they stayed in touch with program participants.

  > "Mental health issues, like depression and anxiety, have increased in youth and definitely in parents. We're just looking to try and stabilize people mentally through wellness, case management, and other activities. We are trying to keep people afloat." – BEST grantee staff

- **Redesigning program services and activities to meet emerging needs.** During the pandemic, programs had to wrestle with students' lack of engagement in virtual settings. They responded by assessing what youth needed in the moment and creating services to meet those specific needs (e.g., fewer lesson-like activities and more open-discussion time; more focus on social and emotional behavior). For example, one BEST program explicitly asked participants how it could create a safe space, and then

followed up with interactive activities that facilitated staff–participant bonding, such as virtual cooking or painting classes.

> "Students are already online for 5 to 6 hours a day, so to be in our program in the evening, it was a lot. When we couldn't see youth in person, we had to get creative. We would deliver food and meet them where they were at. We gave youth the space to talk about what they wanted and what they needed." – BEST grantee staff

Outdoor activities in the spring and summer gave youth much-needed time outside of their homes. Programs organized pro-socials in the park or at high school facilities; popular activities included hiking, kayaking, and bike riding. Peer interaction was a central focus of these events, as youth wanted more time to be with other youth. However, not all of them felt comfortable gathering outdoors. One grantee reported that some families and participants expressed fear of contracting COVID-19: "As a result, our team had to get creative and implement new strategies to keep them engaged, such as creating different virtual events and activities."

In addition, in-person Street Outreach/Intervention services continued—and at times intensified—during the pandemic. Specifically, three BEST grantees—Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, New Hope for Youth, and The Firehouse Community Development Corporation—conducted Street Outreach and offered related services to youth. Street Outreach is examined in more detail in Chapter III.

Program Successes During COVID-19

Despite COVID-19 and its challenges, several BEST grantees celebrated successes during PY 2020–2021. The most frequently cited successes were as follows:

- **Maintaining and developing relationships with schools and other CBOs.** Despite the challenges of remote and virtual communication (e.g., less face time and fewer meaningful connections), program staff reported retaining existing partnerships and establishing new ones during the pandemic, such as with local organizations to provide emergency services. Given BEST's history of working with schools, staff were comfortable reaching out to school administrators during distance learning and were often able to communicate with school staff as necessary, though at times they were slower in responding due to pandemic-related staffing challenges.

> "There are so many different partnerships that have been established. Looking back, if we had networked and looked at how different partnerships could have supported each other and enhanced each other's opportunities, that would have made a difference. There's potential in creating the opportunity to come together."– BEST grantee staff

Further, school staff noted that BEST grantees went above and beyond what was expected of them to support students and their families. This included making referrals with "warm" hand-offs to other agencies (such as for housing and food support), making house visits when possible, and providing transportation to youth. School staff observed that if a BEST program couldn't provide something, program staff would reach out to their networks and connect families to other community agencies. One school social worker observed that BEST grantees were invaluable during this time, saying she "couldn't do all this work alone." School staff were also very appreciative of grantees that were able to meet with youth in person (following social-distancing and masking protocols), as they did not have the same flexibility.

Expanding remote and virtual service delivery. By September 2020, as schools offered remote services only, many BEST programs had shifted to online platforms in an effort to continue offering activities and services to youth and their families. All services, from referrals and case management to group sessions and field trips, were largely conducted by phone, text, email, or Zoom.

> "Everything went virtual: We had virtual meetings, virtual activities. Then, once restrictions lifted, we went into hybrid mode. Whoever was comfortable coming in, we would pick them up, take their temperatures, and bring them to the drop-in center with masks and social distancing."
> – BEST grantee staff

Programs that did not previously have a large online presence built out their social media expertise. For example, one BEST grantee hired interns to create animated videos about social and emotional health and created a virtual space for youth to learn about physical and mental wellness. Two BEST grantees had to create completely new curricula in order to deliver BEST programming in a virtual format.

Another grantee began sharing its Peer Group Learning sessions on Instagram Live, which participants could watch when their schedules allowed.

> "We wouldn't have grown a social media presence without COVID. We have virtual wellness spaces for families—for example, we have a parent corner, a youth corner, and an LGBTQIA corner—where you'll find different resources, books, and events happening in the community."
> – BEST grantee staff

Additionally, programs provided youth and families with laptops and internet access, either directly or through referrals to other local agencies. For example, one program opened a drop-in center where youth could log into class, study, and get help on their homework. This was especially valuable for students who were living with large families and had little to no privacy or poor internet connectivity at home.

> "We will be keeping the drop-in center moving forward. It was a very successful space. Youth were able to get out of their house, and it gave them the opportunity to get academic support and practice their social skills."– BEST grantee staff

Summary

Despite the challenges of operating in pandemic conditions, BEST grantees provided remote and virtual services and continued to redesign or tweak services and activities to meet participants' changing needs. Programs prioritized youth and families' mental health and socioemotional well-being and focused primarily on health and safety. Finally, grantees discovered new ways of engaging students (e.g., becoming more active on social media and offering new in-person supports) that they intend to continue in the future.

III. BEST Program Services

While continuing to adapt to pandemic conditions, BEST-funded programs provided a wide range of services in PY 2020–2021. As in prior years, some grantees provided primarily preventative services and worked with youth who were at lower risk levels for gang activity, while others provided intervention services to youth at higher risk levels. This diversified service approach is consistent with the strategic direction adopted by the MGPTF to emphasize prevention and intervention services (MGPTF, 2018). During PY 2020–2021, grantees provided BEST services in school, community-based, and juvenile justice settings. This chapter describes these eligible service areas and the total UOS projected and delivered as compared to recent program years.

Key Findings

- **Grantees provided over 100 percent of the projected number of UOS.** They delivered 112,813 UOS, compared to the 104,524 that were projected. They surpassed their projected UOS in four eligible service areas: Emergency Services, Street Outreach/Intervention, Vocational/Job Training, and Case Management. They achieved less than their goals in two eligible service areas: Personal Transformation and Parent Awareness/Training.
- **Most UOS provided by grantees were in Personal Transformation (34 percent), Case Management (32 percent), and Street Outreach/Intervention (20 percent).** Grantees provided fewer UOS in Parent Awareness/Training (3,590 UOS) and Vocational/Job Training (2,407 UOS).
- **In response to emergency conditions, grantees continued to meet the immediate needs of participants and their families through the Emergency Services eligible service area.** In all, nine grantees provided 10,200 UOS in this service area, representing 9 percent of the total provided UOS.

Eligible Service Areas in PY 2020–2021

There were two main changes to the eligible service areas in PY 2020–2021 as compared to the previous program years. (See Appendix B for a definition of each eligible service area.) PRNS developed a new eligible service area in May 2020, Emergency Services, which included distribution of food and personal hygiene and laundry supplies. In addition, as discussed in Chapter II, most grantees were obligated to adapt how they delivered services in response to Santa Clara County safety protocols. This required additional changes to how they operated

and worked with participants and sometimes required a substantial rethinking of their service-delivery approaches. Grantees continued to provide Emergency Services during PY 2020–2021, which helped to secure or maintain connections with youth while delivering other services.

The number of grantees providing services in each eligible service area varied widely, and there was also variation in the number of eligible service areas in which each grantee provided services (Exhibit III-1). All 16 grantees provided services in Personal Transformation, while over half provided Emergency Services and Case Management. All but three of the grantees provided services in more than one eligible service area.

Exhibit III-1: Eligible Service Areas Provided by Each BEST Grantee

Grantee	Personal Transformation	Street Outreach /Intervention	Vocational /Job Training	Parent Awareness /Training	Case Management	Emergency Services	Total # of Service Areas
Alum Rock Counseling Center	✓				✓		2
Bay Area Tutoring Association	✓						1
Bill Wilson Center	✓		✓		✓		3
Caminar	✓			✓	✓	✓	4
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	✓	✓			✓	✓	4
ConXión to Community	✓		✓			✓	3
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	✓				✓		2
Girl Scouts of Northern California	✓						1
New Hope for Youth	✓	✓			✓	✓	4
San José Jazz	✓					✓	2
Teen Success, Inc.	✓				✓	✓	3
The Art of Yoga Project	✓						1
The Firehouse Community Dev Corp.	✓	✓			✓	✓	4
The Tenacious Group	✓					✓	2
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	✓				✓		2
Uplift Family Services	✓					✓	2
Total Number of Grantees	16	3	2	1	9	9	

Source: BEST grantee contracts

Projected Versus Provided Units of Service

PRNS employs a formula that uses participants, sessions, and time per session to determine the quantity of services delivered by BEST grantees under their grants.[5] As part of their PY 2020–2021 contracts, grantees indicated the number of UOS they planned to provide in each eligible service area. Three grantees later amended their contracts: One increased its projected number of UOS, while two reduced their projected UOS due to low enrollment numbers.

Exhibit III-2 displays the amended total projected UOS across grantees, organized by eligible service area, for both PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021. Overall, projected UOS decreased only by about 2 percent in PY 2020–2021. The projected number of UOS was markedly lower in Personal Transformation and Emergency Services, with Personal Transformation decreasing by about 22 percent and Emergency Services decreasing by about 57 percent. Also notable, there was a large increase (32 percent) in Street Outreach/Intervention Services from PY 2019–2020, and an even larger increase in Case Management (95 percent).

At the beginning of PY 2020–2021, PRNS met with program staff to review their proposed services scopes and instructed them to project UOS at a level they felt would be achievable given the constraints of the pandemic. PRNS staff noted that a continued need for one-on-one services during COVID-19 drove these service changes. Given social-distancing guidelines during COVID-19, group sessions typically conducted under Personal Transformation were either difficult to recruit for or challenging to conduct. Many program staff said that participants were more likely to participate in one-on-one services. Thus, the decrease in UOS was a product of changing participant needs and pandemic conditions.

[5] UOS = Total Number of Sessions x Average Number of Participants per Session x Average Number of Hours per Session.

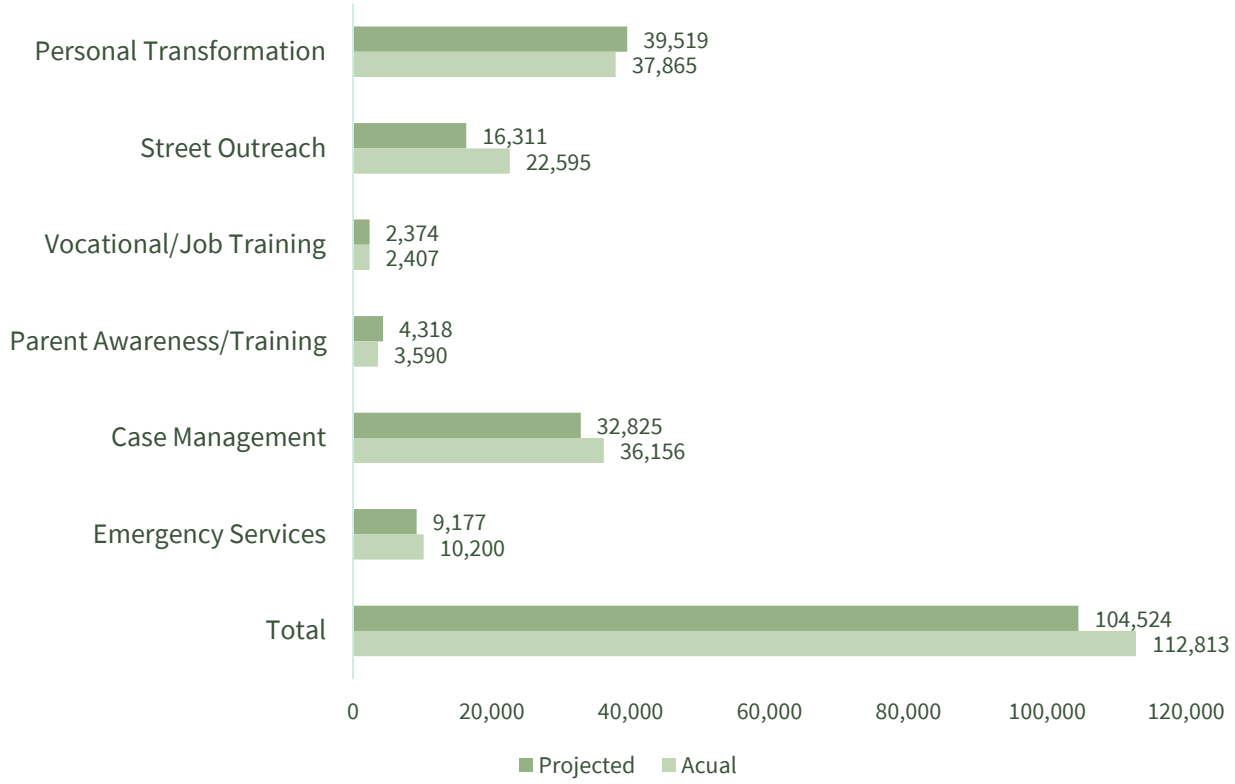
Exhibit III-2: Projected and Actual UOS by Eligible Service Area (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021)

Eligible Service Area	PY 2019–2020		PY 2020–2021	
	Projected UOS	Actual UOS	Projected UOS	Actual UOS
Personal Transformation	50,674	**35,388**	39,519	**37,865**
Street Outreach/ Intervention	10,830	**17,112**	16,311	**22,595**
Vocational/Job Training	2,067	**3,919**	2,374	**2,407**
Parent Awareness/ Training	4,895	**4,671**	4,318	**3,590**
Case Management	17,603	**18,541**	32,825	**36,156**
Emergency Services	21,487	**21,524**	9,177	**10,200**
Total Projected UOS	107,556	**101,155**	104,524	**112,813**

Source: BEST grantee contracts and contract amendments

BEST grantees reported throughout the year on the number of UOS they provided. Exhibit III-3 shows the UOS that the 16 grantees planned to provide and did provide. Overall, grantees provided more than 100 percent of the projected number of UOS (112,813 of 104,524). Grantees significantly surpassed their projected UOS in Street Outreach/Intervention and Case Management and achieved less than their expected goals for Personal Transformation and Parent Awareness/Training. This reflected the shift to more one-on-one services and fewer group sessions as a result of the pandemic.

Exhibit III-3: Projected and Actual UOS by Eligible Service Area (PY 2020–2021)

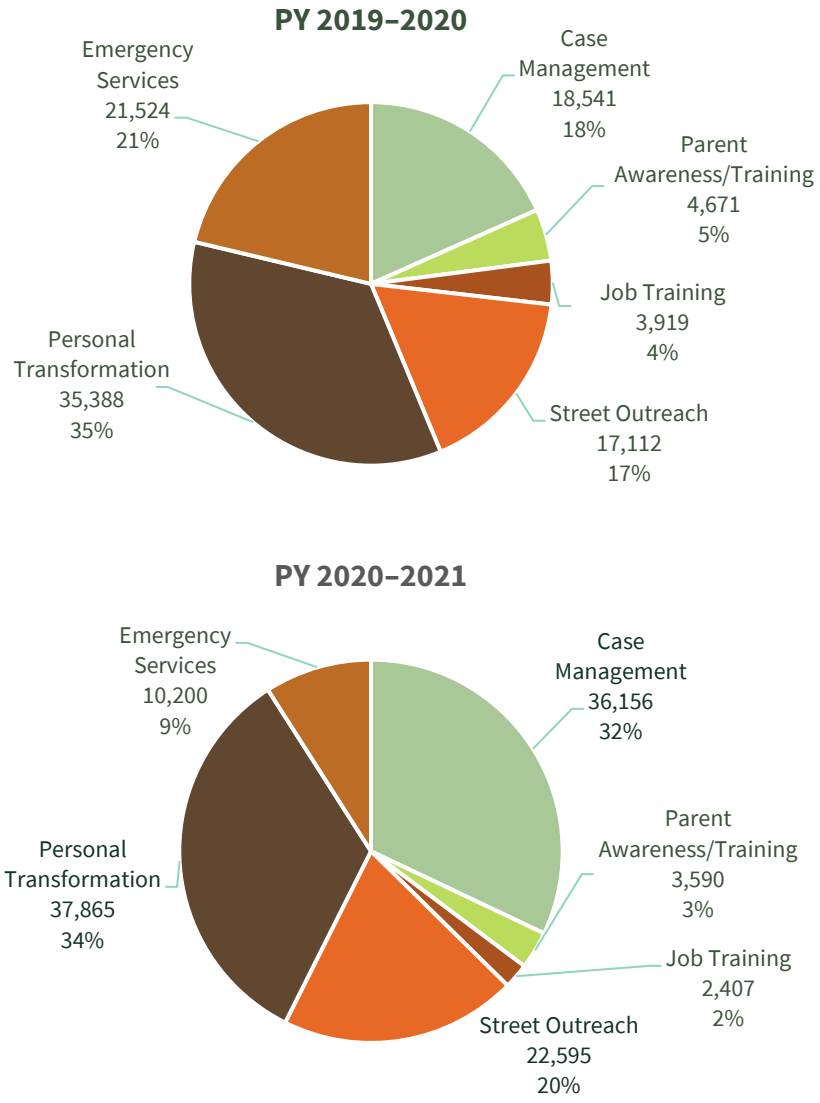


Source: BEST grantee contracts, contract amendments, and workbooks

Note: Amended projected UOS are used for this exhibit.

Personal Transformation made up the largest share of UOS provided in PY 2020–2021 (34 percent), followed by Case Management (32 percent), Street Outreach/Intervention (20 percent), and Emergency Services (9 percent). The other eligible service areas represented far less of the total UOS delivered, with Parent Awareness/Training and Vocational/Job Training representing 3 percent and 2 percent, respectively. These percentages were similar to the previous program year, with the exception of a notable increase in Case Management and a decrease in Emergency Services. Exhibit III-4 depicts the UOS delivered by eligible service area as a percentage of the total UOS delivered for both PY 2020–2021 and PY 2019–2020.

Exhibit III-4: Overall Distribution of UOS Delivered by Grantees (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021)



Source: BEST grantee contracts and workbooks

Summary

PY 2020–2021 was a difficult year for BEST grantees. They continued to face challenges related to the pandemic that limited their ability to provide services as expected, especially in Personal Transformation services, where participant recruitment for group programs became more challenging. Nevertheless, they were able to adapt services to pandemic conditions and exceeded their overall service goals, delivering over 100 percent of their projected UOS.

IV. BEST Grants and Grant Spending

In PY 2020–2021, PRNS awarded $2,558,166 in BEST grants to 16 CBOs, and these same grantees leveraged an additional $1,084,649 in matched funds to help support their BEST programs. This chapter provides information about the funding BEST grantees received, the amount they leveraged through matched funds, and their expenditures during the program year. It also compares PY 2020–2021 grantee funding to funding in prior program years.

Key Findings

- **Overall funding for BEST programs increased slightly in PY 2020–2021 compared to PY 2019–2020.** This was driven by increases in both matched funding and BEST base grant funding, which offset a decrease in one-time funding. Another way of looking at this is that BEST grants were slightly smaller in PY 2020–2021 compared to PY 2019–2020, offset by matched funds.
- **In PY 2020–2021, PRNS continued to fund Emergency Services to help grantees address issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- **Grantees expended 95 percent of BEST grant funds, which is a slightly lower rate of expenditures than in recent past years.** Four grantees underspent, most likely due to operational challenges related to the pandemic.

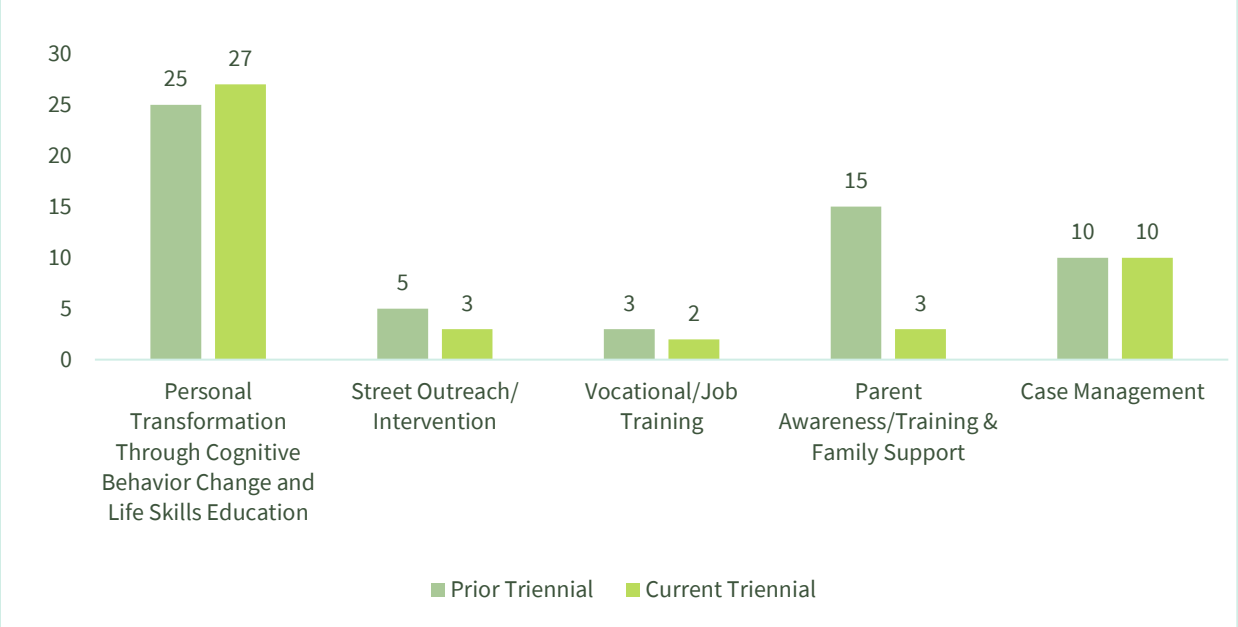
Current Qualified Providers and PY 2020–2021 BEST Grantees

The BEST program typically operates on a 3-year (triennial) cycle. For each triennial, PRNS uses a request for qualifications process to identify interested and qualified CBOs providing youth services in San José. These qualified service providers are invited to engage in the MGPTF Technical Team Meeting and may be eligible for BEST funding. PY 2020–2021 was the second year in the current triennial. The prior triennial ran from PY 2016–2017 to PY 2018–2019.

As discussed in the PY 2019–2020 BEST evaluation report (Levin et al., 2020), PRNS selected 28 qualified service providers for the current triennial, which was somewhat fewer than the 39

identified in the prior triennial.[6] As shown in Exhibit IV-1, despite the overall change in the number of qualified providers, the number of providers offering services in each of the five main BEST eligible service areas (which represents the BEST program's capacity to provide planned services) remained mostly the same. The one exception is Parent Awareness/ Training, in which there were substantially fewer applicants.

Exhibit IV-1: Number of BEST Qualified Service Providers by Eligible Service Area (Current and Prior Triennial)



Source: BEST grantee documentation and contracts

Note: Qualified service providers can provide services in more than one eligible service area. As such, the numbers in the exhibit sum to more than the total number of qualified service providers (39 in the prior triennial and 28 in the current one). Emergency Services is not included in the exhibit because it is a temporary service area created midway through PY 2019–2020 solely to respond to COVID-19 pandemic conditions, and it was not part of the request for qualifications.

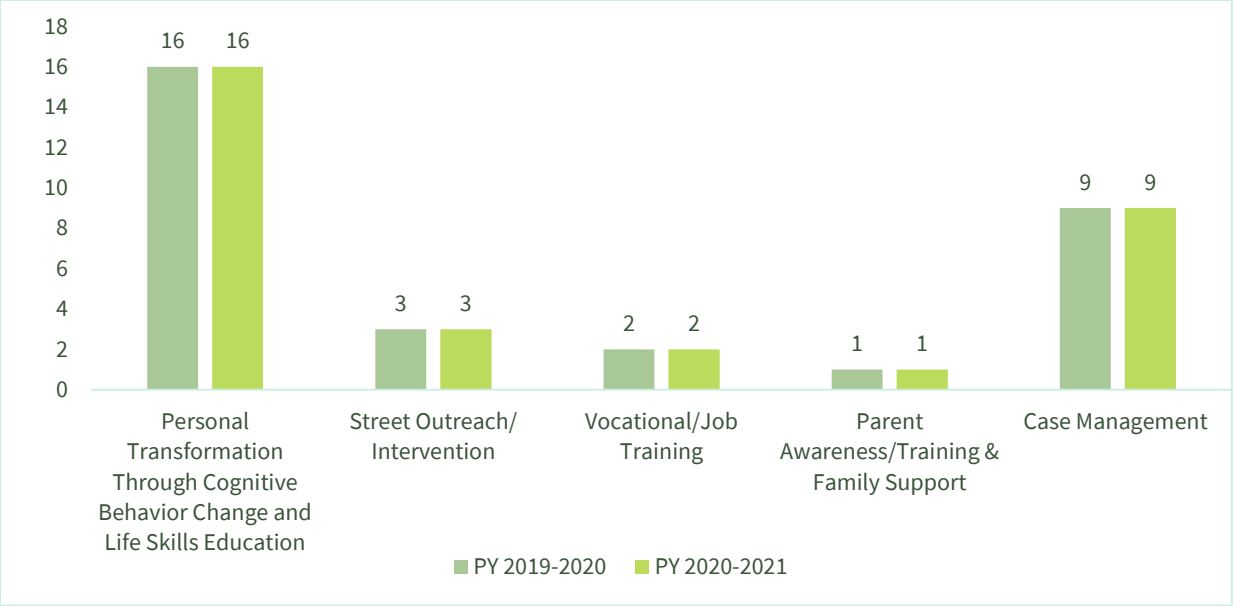
Of the 28 qualified service providers in PY 2020–2021, PRNS awarded BEST grants to 16 grantees. That is one fewer grantee than in PY 2019–2020, and this adds to the trend of slightly decreasing numbers of BEST grantees over the last 5 program years.[7] As shown in

[6] According to PRNS staff, applicants for the current triennial request for qualifications included six new agencies that had not applied previously and excluded 17 agencies that did not reapply (Levin et al., 2020).

[7] PRNS awarded BEST grants to 21 agencies in PY 2016–2017, 18 agencies in PY 2017–2018 and PY 2018–2019, 17 agencies in PY 2019–2020 (although one was unable to complete its grant obligations), and 16 agencies in PY 2020–2021.

Exhibit IV-2, however, the number of PY 2020–2021 grantees providing services in each eligible service area remained the same as in PY 2019–2020.

Exhibit IV-2: Number of BEST Grantees by Eligible Service Area (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021)



Source: BEST administrative data and grantee contracts

Note: Grantees can provide services in more than one eligible service area. As such, the numbers in the exhibit sum to more than the 16 grantees included in the exhibit for both program years. PRNS awarded BEST grants to 17 organizations in PY 2019–2020, but one was unable to complete its grant obligations. Emergency Services is not included in the figure because it is a temporary service area created midway through PY 2019–2020 solely to respond to COVID-19 pandemic conditions, and it was not denoted in funding data as an eligible service area during PY 2019–2020.

BEST Funding Levels

Grantees use three types of funding to support BEST services. First, PRNS supplies base funding, which is assigned to each grantee based on the UOS the grantee plans to provide in each of the six eligible service areas.[8] Second, PRNS supplies one-time funding, which can include support from emergency reserves, carryover funds (or unspent funds from previous

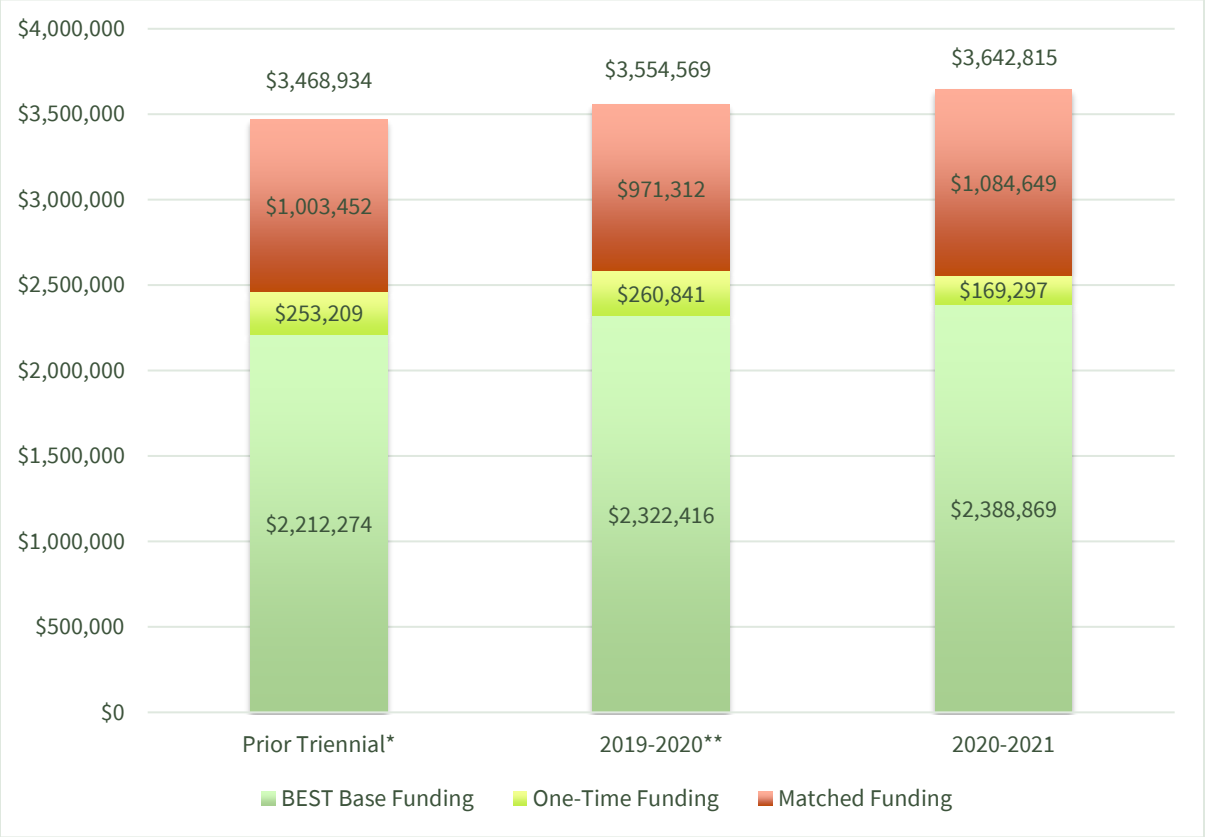
[8] For PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021, base funding includes funding for the Emergency Services eligible service area, which was added partway through PY 2019–2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In PY 2019–2020, Emergency Services was not a funded eligible service area even though grantees recorded the delivery of UOS in Emergency Services. In PY 2020–2021, eight grantees were both awarded funds in and tracked the delivery of UOS in Emergency Services. Effectively, then, there were six eligible service areas in both program years.

years, related to decreased awards, defunded grantees, etc.), and funding for other modes of service delivery from the MGPTF, such as for emerging hot spots or community-of-learning activities. BEST grants include these first two components. The third component is matched funds. Each grantee is required to provide matched funding (a minimum of 20 percent of grant base funding), which can come from various sources, including school district funds, state grants, foundations, or private donors.

Exhibit IV-3 shows the amount of each of these three funding components for PY 2020–2021, PY 2019–2020, and the average of the 3 program years in the prior triennial period. As can be seen in the exhibit, base grant funding and matched funding increased slightly over past years. Base grant funding increases are generally expected given standard cost-of-living increases and a relatively steady level of service delivery based on the demand in the community.

While the reasons for the additional matched funding are unknown, it may be due to increases related to post-pandemic operations as well as the additional ability of these grantees to reach out and obtain funding from various sources. Matched funds decreased in PY 2019–2020, so this could also reflect a correction. In PY 2020–2021, the one-time funding component of BEST grants decreased compared to PY 2019–2020. This is mostly explained by the release of emergency reserve funds in PY 2019–2020 due to COVID-19-related spending adjustments.

Exhibit IV-3: BEST Program Funding by Type
(Prior Triennial, PY 2019–2020, and PY 2020–2021)



Source: BEST grantee contracts and workbooks

*The first column of this exhibit shows the averages of the base, one-time, and matched funding amounts in the 3 program years of the prior triennial period (PY 2016–2017 through PY 2018–2019).

**PY 2019–2020 BEST grant amounts are different than those reported in the PY 2019–2020 evaluation report. In that report, grant amounts for two grantees and some one-time funds were excluded for both analytic and data availability reasons. The numbers in this exhibit reflect the final information available for PY 2019–2020.

Further funding details can be found below in Exhibit IV-4, which shows each grantee's BEST grant amount, broken out into both base and one-time funding; the matched funding amount; and matched funding as a proportion of BEST grant base funding. Total BEST grant funding (the sum of base and one-time funds) ranged from $18,883 to $460,000 across grantees. This variation in funding levels is expected given the widely varying numbers of participants each grantee serves and the different programs and services each grantee provides. In other words, this variation is by design. The variation seen in this exhibit helps convey some information about the size and scale of different BEST programs.

Exhibit IV-4: Funding Types by Grantee (PY 2020–2021)

Grantee	BEST Grant Base Funding	BEST Grant One-Time Funding	Matched Funding	Matched Funding as a Proportion of BEST Grant Base Funding
Alum Rock Counseling Center	$62,930	$15,877	$96,949	154%
Bay Area Tutoring Association	$41,551	$2,000	$8,311	20%
Bill Wilson Center	$234,502	$2,000	$47,300	20%
Caminar	$293,312	$2,000	$58,663	20%
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	$367,228	$42,000	$81,841	22%
ConXión to Community	$142,333	$2,000	$29,390	21%
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	$81,213	$2,000	$104,890	129%
Girl Scouts of Northern California	$16,883	$2,000	$206,295	1222%
New Hope for Youth	$394,580	$65,420	$92,200	23%
San José Jazz	$56,751	$2,000	$139,915	247%
Teen Success, Inc.	$60,525	$2,000	$85,899	142%
The Art of Yoga Project	$61,491	$2,000	$12,300	20%
The Firehouse Community Development Corp.	$292,091	$22,000	$63,500	22%
The Tenacious Group	$83,130	$2,000	$16,626	20%
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	$105,951	$2,000	$21,590	20%
Uplift Family Services	$94,398	$2,000	$19,280	20%
Total	**$2,388,869**	**$169,297**	**$1,084,649**	**45%**

Source: BEST grantee contracts and workbooks

Also notable in Exhibit IV-4 is the final column, which shows that all grantees met or exceeded the requirement that they provide a minimum of 20 percent of their BEST base grant amount in matched funding. In fact, five grantees had access to alternative funding (e.g., a national parent organization, philanthropic grants, direct funding) that allowed them to provide matched funding that was (considerably) more than the amount of their base grant funding. This may translate into a notable operational distinction between two types of grantees:

Those with a lower proportion of matched funds may be more sensitive to changes in BEST grant funding; those with a higher proportion of matched funds may be less sensitive.

Grant Funding and Expenditures

Exhibit IV-5 shows each grantee's BEST grant funding and expenditures for PY 2020–2021. Overall, grantees expended 95 percent of BEST funds awarded to them, which is slightly lower than expenditures in prior years. In PY 2018–2019 and PY 2019–2020, grantees expended 99 percent and 97 percent of their BEST grants, respectively.

In PY 2020–2021, 12 grantees spent nearly all or slightly more than their grant funds (99 to 104 percent), three somewhat underspent (87 to 94 percent), and one underspent by a larger amount (63 percent). This underspending is most likely attributable to delayed or decreased enrollment, increased use of remote versus in-person services, which slowed service delivery, and other service delivery challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic (discussed in Chapter II). In fact, three grantees negotiated downward contract adjustments during the program year to help address these issues. Without these modifications, grantees likely would have underspent grant funds even further.

Exhibit IV-5: BEST Grant Funding Compared to Grant Expenditures (PY 2020–2021)

Grantee	Total BEST Grant Funding (base + one-time funds)	Total Best Grant Expenditures	BEST Grant Expenditures as Percentage of Grant Funding
Alum Rock Counseling Center	$78,807	$78,807	100%
Bay Area Tutoring Association	$43,551	$43,551	100%
Bill Wilson Center	$236,502	$204,985	87%
Caminar	$295,312	$295,340	100%
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	$409,228	$364,454	89%
ConXión to Community	$144,333	$135,061	94%
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	$83,213	$83,213	100%
Girl Scouts of Northern California	$18,883	$19,623	104%
New Hope for Youth	$460,000	$458,223	100%
San José Jazz	$58,751	$59,627	101%
Teen Success, Inc.	$62,525	$62,525	100%
The Art of Yoga Project	$63,491	$63,491	100%
The Firehouse Community Development Corp.	$314,091	$312,204	99%
The Tenacious Group	$85,130	$84,644	99%
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	$107,951	$108,976	101%
Uplift Family Services	$96,398	$60,587	63%
Total	**$2,558,166**	**$2,435,311**	**95%**

Source: BEST grantee contracts and workbooks

Summary

Much about PY 2020–2021 BEST grantees and their funding levels is consistent with recent prior years. The number of grantees and the types of services they provided were nearly the same as in PY 2019–2020. Funding increased slightly overall, even with the decrease in one-time funds, and grantees continued to operate BEST grants of different sizes with wide-ranging amounts and proportions of matched funding. A few grantees underspent BEST grant funds, especially compared to the last 2 program years. It will be important to see how spending levels are affected in PY 2021–2022 as grantees increase in-person services and pandemic-related challenges hopefully begin to subside.

V. BEST Participants

Reflecting the challenges of pandemic conditions, BEST programs enrolled fewer children and youth in PY 2020–2021 compared to previous years. Some struggled with changing to virtual formats while others increased one-on-one services and decreased group services. Meanwhile, in-person Street Outreach/Intervention continued, and in some cases intensified, despite pandemic conditions, resulting in a significant increase in the number of youth reached in this way. BEST grantees continued to serve a diverse set of participants, from school-aged children and their families to young adults from various communities across San José.

Key Findings

- **Sixteen BEST grantees enrolled 2,448 program participants in PY 2020–2021.** This is a 24 percent decrease from the 3,229 program participants enrolled by 15 BEST grantees in PY 2019–2020.
- **One grantee (Caminar) enrolled approximately one third (34 percent) of all BEST participants** This grantee reached a wider service population by providing services to youth and their families in public housing settings.
- **In addition to enrolled participants, grantees made 2,646 contacts with youth through Street Outreach/Intervention.** This reflects a 47 percent increase over the estimated 1,800 contacts made in PY 2019–2020.

Participant Enrollment

Just as grantees received different levels of BEST funding, individual programs varied in enrollment size, with anywhere from 18 to 836 participants in PY 2020–2021. In total, 16 BEST grantees enrolled 2,448 program participants in PY 2020–2021, a 24 percent decrease from the 3,229 program participants enrolled by 15 BEST grantees in PY 2019–2020 (Exhibit V-1).

Looking only across the 15 grantees that were awarded grants in both PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021, the enrollment decrease in PY 2020–2021 was slightly greater (29 percent), from 3,229 participants in PY 2019–2020 to 2,277 in PY 2020–2021. Three of those 15 grantees enrolled more participants in PY 2020–2021—on average 22 more—than the previous year.

The other 12 grantees enrolled an average of 85 fewer participants than in the previous program year.

Exhibit V-1: BEST Program Enrollment (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021)

Grantee Name	Number of Participants Enrolled in PY 2019–2020	Number of Participants Enrolled in PY 2020–2021
Alum Rock Counseling Center	--	171
Bay Area Tutoring Association	75	96
Bill Wilson Center	162	198
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	135	99
Caminar	986	836
ConXión to Community	190	56
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	128	18
Girl Scouts of Northern California	566	179
New Hope for Youth	194	97
San José Jazz	96	44
Teen Success, Inc.	44	54
The Art of Yoga Project	211	200
The Firehouse Community Development Corp.	136	115
The Tenacious Group	125	118
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	86	81
Uplift Family Services	95	86
Total	**3,229**	**2,448**

Source: BEST grantee workbooks

Note: Alum Rock Counseling Center did not have a contract with PRNS in PY 2019–2020.

The average enrollment in PY 2020–2021 was 153 individuals, but enrollment was not evenly distributed across grantees. BEST grantees were affected by COVID-19 and shelter-in-place orders to varying degrees (as discussed in Chapter II). As a result, in PY 2020–2021, fewer grantees were able to meet target enrollment levels than in previous program years. While grantees redesigned their BEST programming to differing degrees, those that provided

school-based services faced additional challenges. Girl Scouts of Northern California, for example, had a 68 percent enrollment decrease—from 566 participants in PY 2019–2020 to 179 participants in PY 2020–2021. As noted, Girl Scouts had to cancel or postpone activities when school was fully remote.

Caminar enrolled more than one third (34 percent) of all BEST participants. In fact, Caminar's enrollment numbers decreased from 986 participants in PY 2019–2020 to 836 participants in PY 2020–2021, yet it remained the grantee with the largest enrollment. This grantee continued to provide services in public housing settings in PY 2020–2021 and, as a result, reached a wider service population that included youth and their family members outside of the 6 to 24 age range.

Street Outreach Contacts

Participant enrollment numbers do not include Street Outreach, an important service area that plays a key function in the BEST program. Three grantees—Catholic Charities, New Hope for Youth, and The Firehouse Community Development Corporation—conducted Street Outreach and related services to youth in 24 hot spot areas. In PY 2020–2021, these three grantees reported an estimated 2,646 contacts with youth through Street Outreach/Intervention.[9] This reflects a 47 percent increase over the estimated 1,800 served in PY 2019–2020.

Because unique individuals cannot be identified in Street Outreach contact counts or linked to other data collected on enrolled participants, Street Outreach contacts are not included in any of the participant data described in this chapter. However, because of the trust-building efforts involved in these activities, staff may end up enrolling individuals in other BEST service areas; in that case, they would be reflected in the data on enrolled participants.

Grantee staff reported creative measures to engage with youth while doing Street Outreach during the pandemic. For example, one grantee described setting up barbeques at safe hot spot locations, as food was a big need. Another grantee distributed turkeys at hot spots in advance of Thanksgiving as a means of connecting with more youth. Distribution of personal

[9] To calculate the total number of contacts, SPR staff added the number of estimated contacts at each Street Outreach location reported in grantee workbooks to arrive at the total estimated number of contacts in the program year. These numbers include duplicate youth within and across hot spot areas.

protective equipment also allowed grantee staff to increase Street Outreach contacts and build trust with potential BEST participants.

Program Target Populations

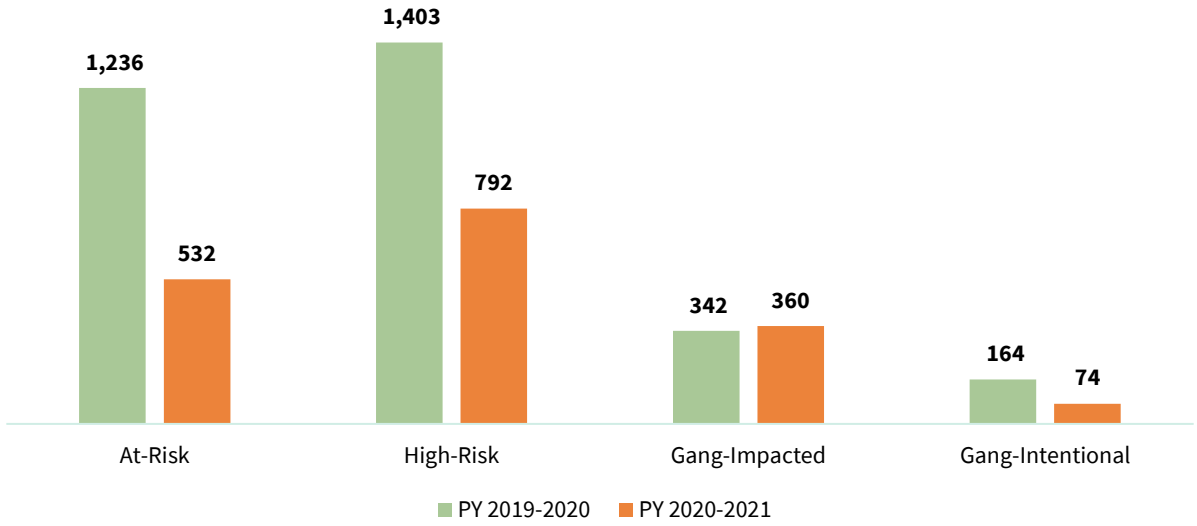
The MGPTF has defined four BEST target populations with different risk levels for gang involvement, with attributes that include residence in high-risk environments and past or present involvement in gang-related activities. Complete definitions are included in Appendix A, but in brief these four populations are defined as follows:

- **At-risk**: Youth who reside in high-risk communities with potential gang-risk characteristics.
- **High-risk**: Youth who have higher levels of intensity at which they adopt characteristics associated with a gang lifestyle.
- **Gang-impacted**: Youth who exhibit high-risk behaviors related to gang lifestyles.
- **Gang-intentional**: Youth who self-identify as gang members or who are engaged in the gang lifestyle.

Out of participants enrolled in a BEST-funded program during PY 2020–2021,[10] the majority were designated as either at-risk (30 percent) or high-risk (45 percent). In contrast, 20 percent of participants were designated as gang-impacted and 4 percent as gang-intentional. These results are largely consistent with data from PY 2019–2020, except for at-risk youth (who made up a smaller percentage in PY 2020–2021) and gang-impacted youth (who made up a larger percentage in PY 2020–2021). Exhibit V-2 shows the number of participants enrolled by target population for PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021.

[10] Some of the 2,448 individuals served by BEST programs in PY 2020–2021 were parents or family members of participants. Examinations of target populations are limited to participants with assigned risk levels who were ages 6 to 24 at the time of enrollment or who were over age 24 and were being served in the Parenting Awareness/Training eligible service area.

Exhibit V-2: Number of Participants Enrolled by Target Population (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021)



Source: BEST grantee workbooks

Note: In PY 2019–2020, grantees served 3,229 participants; of these, 84 were not assigned a risk level. In PY 2020–2021, out of the 2,448 BEST participants enrolled, grantees served 1,768 participants between the ages of 6 and 24; of these, 10 were not assigned a risk level. Participants without an assigned risk level are not included in the figure.

Participant Demographics

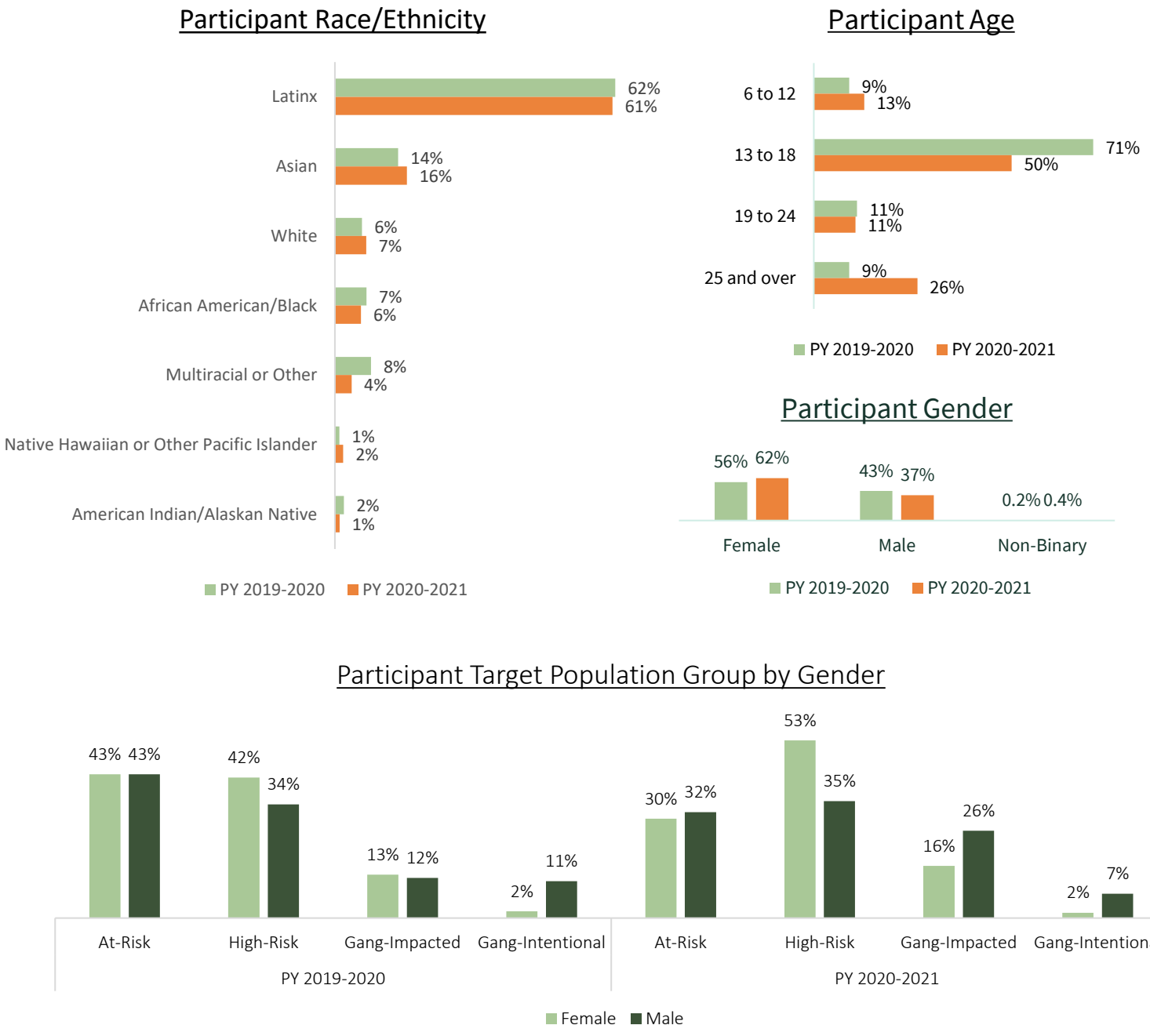
As shown in Exhibit V-3, a large proportion of BEST participants in PY 2020–2021 were Latinx (61 percent), were ages 13 to 18 (50 percent), and were from one of the two lower risk target populations. Unsurprisingly given the focus of the program, 63 percent of participants were age 18 and younger. Participant demographics in PY 2020–2021 changed from those in PY 2019–2020 in the following ways:

- A smaller proportion of BEST participants were ages 13 to 18 (50 percent in PY 2020–2021, compared to 71 percent in PY 2019–2020).
- There was a significant increase in participants ages 25 and over (26 percent in PY 2020–2021, compared to 9 percent in PY 2019–2020).
- Participants who identified as female made up 62 percent of BEST participants in PY 2020–2021, an increase from 56 percent in PY 2019–2020.

The decrease in the proportion of BEST program participants ages 13 to 18 tracks to the overall decrease in participant enrollment across grantees in PY 2020–2021 and reflects the challenges with recruiting and enrolling school-age youth during the pandemic. The increase in the proportion of participants over the age of 25 was driven by one grantee—Caminar—which provided services in public housing apartment complexes. Caminar's service population has shifted to multigenerational households, resulting in 75 percent of their service population being over the age of 25 in PY 2020–2021.

Participants who identified as female continued to make up more than half of BEST program participants in PY 2020–2021 (62 percent). Thirty percent of these participants were in the at-risk target population (compared to 32 percent of male participants) and 53 percent were in the high-risk target population (compared to 35 percent of male participants). Conversely, male participants were more often in the gang-impacted population (26 percent compared to 16 percent of female participants) and the gang-intentional population (7 percent compared to 2 percent of female participants).

Exhibit V-3: Characteristics of BEST Participants (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021)



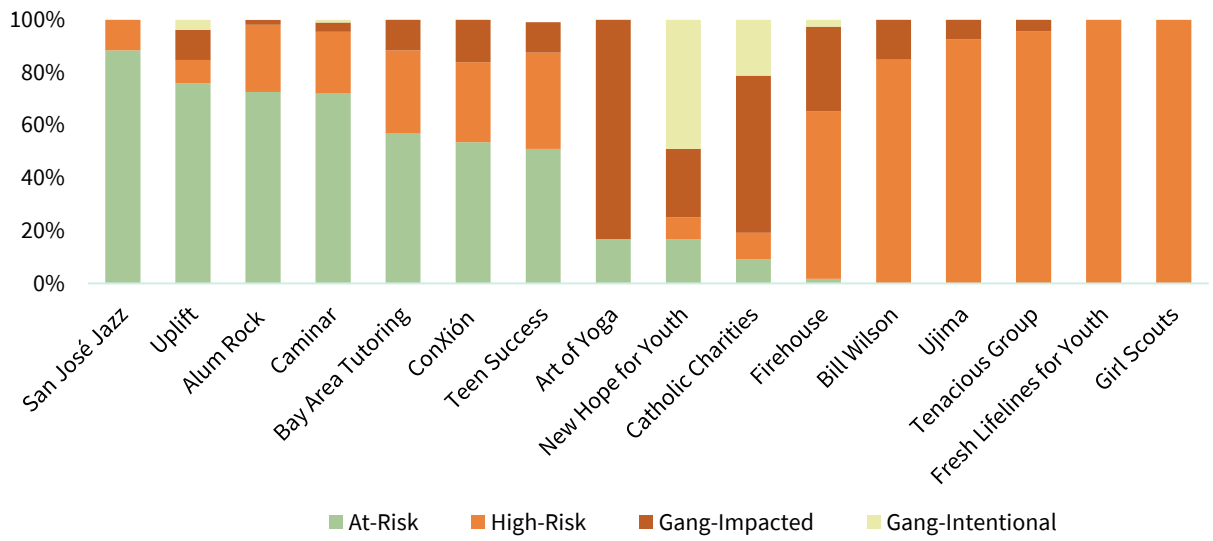
Source: BEST grantee workbooks

Note: In PY 2019–2020, grantees served 3,229 participants; of these, 380 had missing gender information and 84 were not assigned a risk level. In PY 2020–2021, grantees served 2,448 participants; of these, 83 did not specify a race/ethnicity, 10 were under the age of 6, and 22 had missing gender information. Out of the 1,768 participants who were ages 6 to 25, 10 were not assigned a risk level, 21 had missing gender information, and 10 identified as nonbinary.

Participants by Target Population

BEST grantees were funded to work with participants at varying risk levels. Eight of the 16 grantees reported enrolling participants in at least three of the MGPTF-identified target populations, with most enrolling participants in at least two target populations. Exhibit V-4 illustrates the target populations grantees reported serving. Some, like San José Jazz, Uplift Family Services, Alum Rock Counseling Center, and Caminar, overwhelmingly served at-risk participants; two of the three Street Outreach/Intervention grantees—Catholic Charities and New Hope for Youth—primarily served participants in the gang-impacted and gang-intentional target populations. Although The Art of Yoga Project does not provide Street Outreach/Intervention services, this grantee also primarily served gang-impacted target populations, which is related to the services they provide to youth detained in juvenile hall.

Exhibit V-4: Target Populations Served by BEST Grantees (PY 2020–2021)

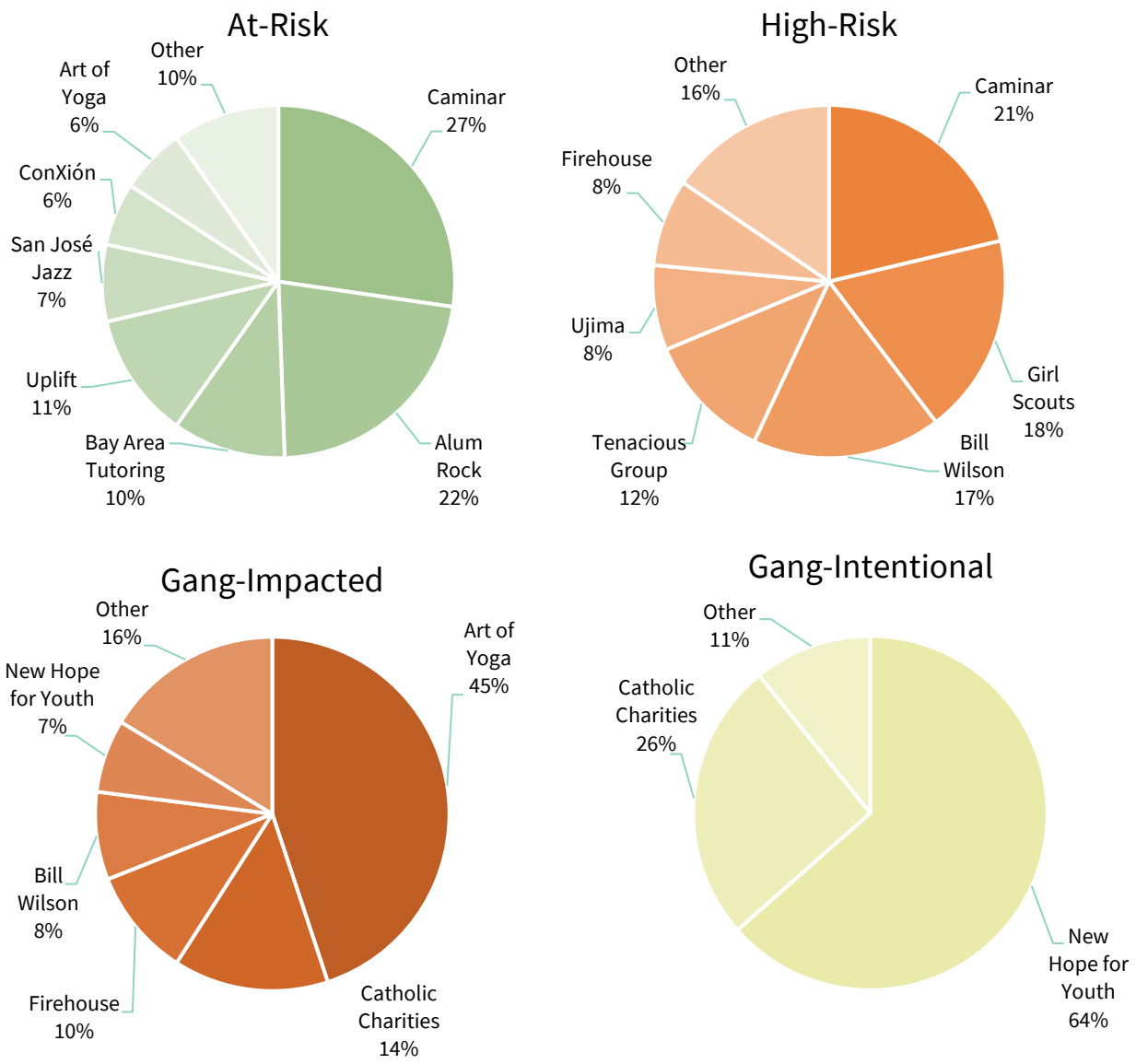


Source: BEST grantee workbooks

Note: Street Outreach/Intervention cold contacts are not included in these data and make up an additional population of primarily gang-impacted and gang-intentional youth served by BEST grantees.

Because of their large target enrollment sizes, some grantees considerably affected the number of participants in certain target populations. For example, The Art of Yoga Project accounted for 45 percent of gang-impacted participants; New Hope for Youth accounted for 64 percent of gang-intentional participants. Exhibit V-5 displays the grantee distribution within each target population and provides a visual depiction of the funding priorities in PY 2020–2021, the populations BEST served, and which grantees served them.

Exhibit V-5: Best Grantees Serving Each Target Population (PY 2020–2021)



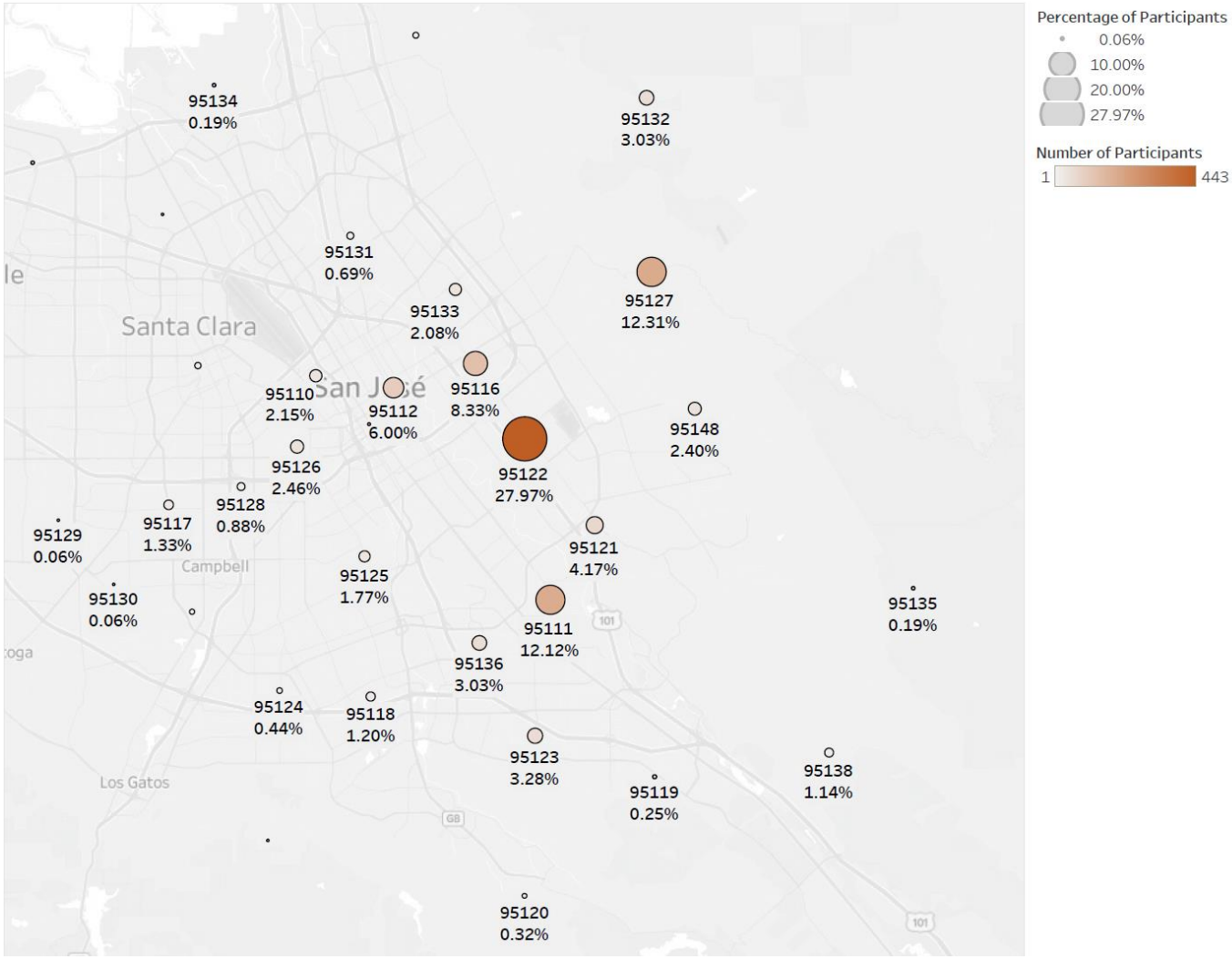
Source: BEST grantee workbooks

Note: "Other" represents grantees that served less than 5 percent of the target population.

Participant Residences by Zip Code

To be eligible for the BEST program, individuals must reside in San José. More than half (62 percent) resided in four of San José's 59 zip codes: 95122, 95127, 95111, and 95116 (see Exhibit V-6). Seventy-two percent of participants in the gang-impacted and gang-intentional target populations lived in these four zip codes, as did 58 percent of at-risk and high-risk participants. These four zip codes correspond to 14 hot spots identified by the MGPTF.

Exhibit V-6: Map Showing Percentage of BEST Participants in Each Zip Code (PY 2020–2021)

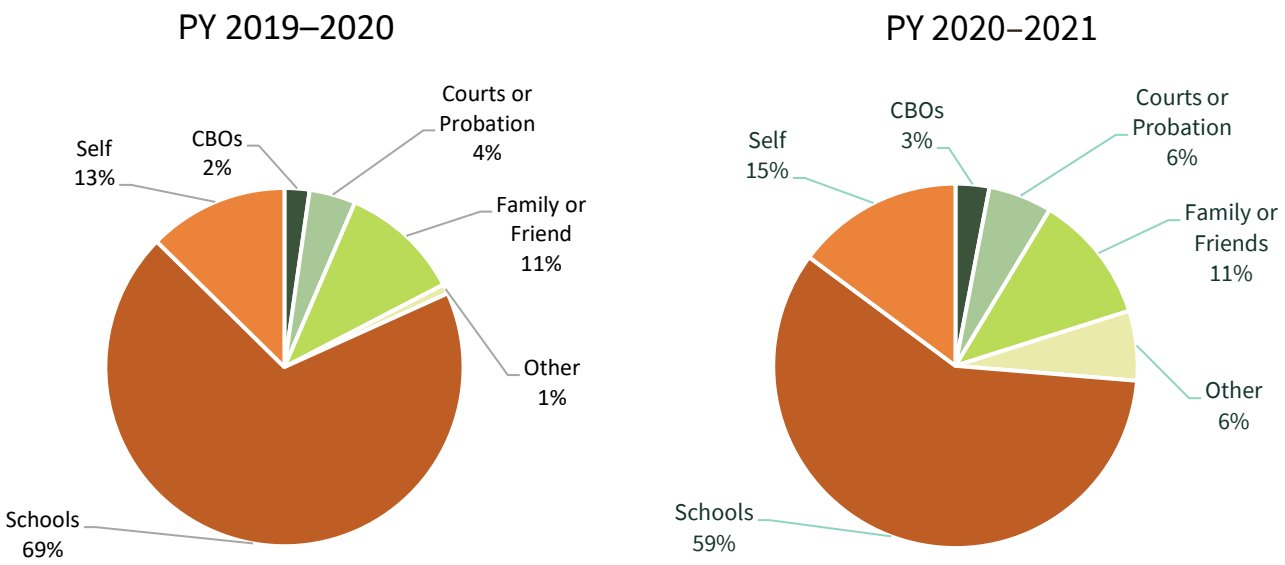


Source: BEST grantee workbooks

Participant Referral Sources

As in PY 2019–2020, schools were BEST grantees' largest referral source. In PY 2020–2021, schools sent 59 percent of participants to the program, compared to 69 percent in PY 2019–2020. The decrease in referrals from school reflects the overall decrease in participant enrollment and school-based programming in PY 2020–2021. Referrals from family or friends remained unchanged, with 11 percent of participants coming to BEST this way in both program years. In contrast, self-referrals (15 percent) and referrals from CBOs (3 percent), the courts or probation (6 percent), and other sources (6 percent) all increased from PY 2019–2020. Examples of other referral sources in PY 2020–2021 include public housing and apartment complexes and community parks and recreation centers. Exhibit V-7 compares the various referral sources identified by BEST-funded programs across PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021.

Exhibit V-7: Referral Sources for BEST Program Participants (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021)



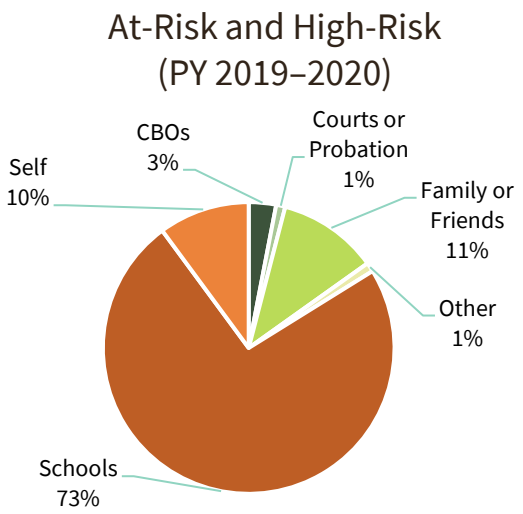
Source: BEST grantee workbooks

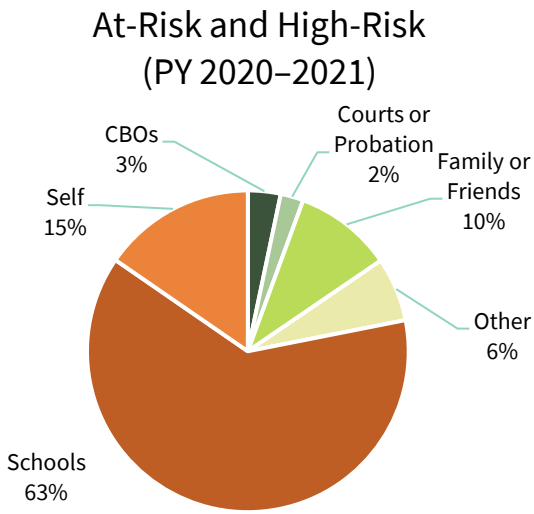
Note: Total number of participants with non-missing referral source information included in the calculations is 3,187 for PY 2019–2020 and 1,665 for PY 2020–2021.

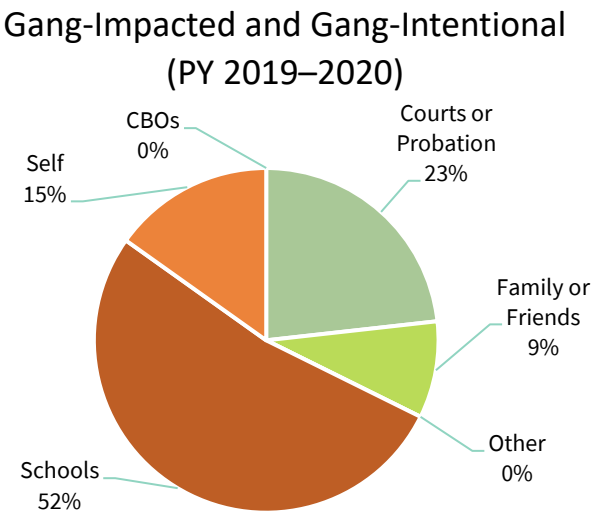
As in PY 2019–2020, youth in the two lower risk categories (at-risk and high-risk) more frequently came to BEST programs through schools—representing 63 percent in PY 2020–

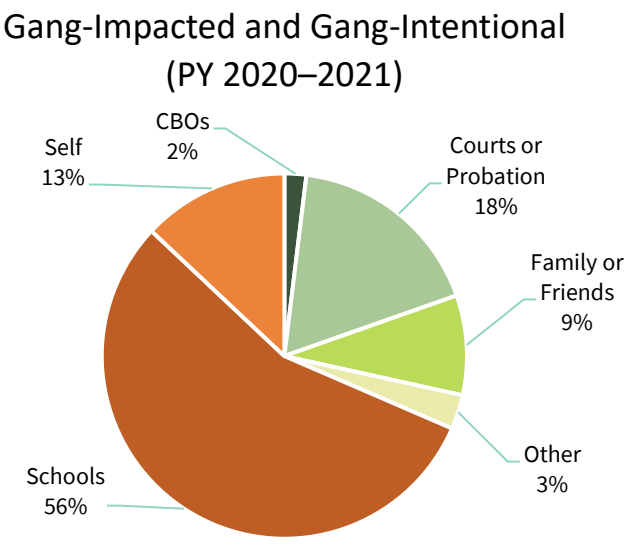
2021. Across both program years, gang-impacted and gang-intentional youth were largely referred by their schools or by the courts or probation (Exhibit V-8).

Exhibit V-8: Referral Sources for BEST Participants by Target Population (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021)









Source: BEST grantee workbooks

Note: Total number of participants with complete information included in calculations is 2,577 for PY 2019–2020 and 1,578 for PY 2020–2021.

Summary

In PY 2020–2021, BEST grantees provided a wide range of services to a diverse group of children, youth, and families in targeted San José neighborhoods, addressing a variety of needs. Overall, there were relatively few changes in the composition of participants from PY 2019–2020, but there was a shift in the participant enrollment levels of grantees, with most enrolling fewer youth than in the prior year.

VI. BEST Participant Outcomes Analysis

As in prior years, the primary objective of the outcomes study was to describe the outcomes overall but also to understand how the outcomes of individual participants may have changed over time in relation to their involvement in BEST. Given the program's broad theory of change, the evaluation focused on a relatively broad range of psychosocial outcomes.[11]

Key Findings

- **Youth participants (ages 14–24) showed modest but statistically significant levels of improvement during their time in the BEST program on six of the eight psychosocial measures.** The remaining two measures showed no real difference.
- **Younger participants (ages 7–13) did not display similar differences.** The differences were smaller than for youth participants; in addition, the small number of respondents may have prevented detection of differences.
- **BEST participants were generally satisfied with the services they received through the program.** Youth (ages 14–24) had somewhat higher levels of satisfaction than children (ages 7–13).
    - Youth appeared to be particularly satisfied with how the program's adults listened to what they had to say and displayed a caring attitude, their perceptions of safety in the program, program staff's ability to communicate with youth in their own language, and their ability to understand the youths' cultures and to help them think about their own futures.
    - Children identified their programs as a safe environment, appreciated that program staff allow them to talk in the language they chose, and indicated they learned a number of new things while participating.

[11] The outcomes study was initially intended to also provide an analysis of educational and criminal justice system outcomes and a more detailed understanding of how service delivery strategies may have been associated with different outcomes. However, the limited number of individuals for whom these outcomes data were available made this aspect of the design infeasible.

Participant Survey Data Used in the Outcomes Study

The data used in the outcomes study came from participant surveys, which were administered during program year 2020–2021 as they had been in the prior program year. Grantees administered one of two different surveys, with questions customized for different ages and respondent categories—children (ages 7–13) or youth (ages 14–24). These surveys were intended to measure participant satisfaction with the program as well as psychosocial outcomes (e.g., resilience, self-efficacy). Grantees generally administered two or three rounds of surveys during three general time periods: September–December 2020, January–May 2021, and June–August 2021.

This effort resulted in 59 completed child surveys and 412 completed youth surveys. The number of survey responses was substantially lower than the prior year, likely due to a combination of reasons related to program changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. These reasons included lower overall enrollments in this program year and much less in-person engagement of participants, which reduced the number of direct opportunities for staff to collect surveys.

Survey responses were not uniformly reflective of the broader population of youth and children served by the programs or of all the programs operating under BEST. For example:

- Not all grantees implementing BEST were represented among the survey respondents.
- Some grantees contributed a greater proportion of survey responses than their overall proportion of BEST participants.
- The demographic profile of an individual grantee's survey respondents often did not match that of the program's participants in general.
- Overall, the survey sample characteristics did not match BEST program participants.

These imbalances are not unusual in surveys of program participants, as some individuals are more likely to respond than others and some programs place a greater emphasis on participants completing a survey. To account for the differences, the evaluation team created poststratification weights and used these weights in all the analyses presented in this chapter.[12]

[12] Without weighting, all sample members have the same "importance." Weighting changes this, so that a single respondent may "count" as more or less than one depending on whether a category that respondent represents (such as age, gender, group, or ethnicity) is underrepresented or overrepresented in the sample.

Analytical Approach

The analytical approach included two main strategies:

- an analysis of differences in outcomes between respondents who had been in the program only a short time (i.e., baseline participants) and those who had been in the program for at least 1 month (i.e., established participants); and
- an overall analysis of participant satisfaction with the program.

The first of these analyses was designed to explore whether program experience contributed to improvements in psychosocial outcomes by examining whether established participants showed stronger outcomes than baseline participants. In contrast, other survey items asked participants' opinions about BEST or some aspect of program operations. Because participants cannot be expected to have an opinion about program services until they have had a chance to experience them, pre–post analysis for these types of outcomes is not possible. Instead, the analysis of these survey items shows only the distribution of responses overall and by major sociodemographic subgroups.

Analyzing differences between BEST participants' outcomes after they experienced the program for at least 1 month compared to before they entered the program (or at their initial involvement in the program) is a potential indicator of whether the program has had an effect on its desired outcomes (otherwise known as *program effectiveness*). Although this analysis does not control for factors other than program participation that might influence pre–post differences in outcomes, and therefore cannot determine whether participation in the program alone caused participants to have positive or negative outcomes after participation, it can still be used to assess whether the program reached its intended outcomes for individual participants.

To measure changes in outcomes over time using surveys, the ideal approach would be to survey the same participants at enrollment and then at subsequent intervals during (and perhaps even after) program participation. However, due to concerns that consent for such an approach might have acted as a deterrent to participate in the survey, and because grantees had limited software and financial resources for tracking participants, the evaluation team designed the survey to be administered anonymously; it was administered

The process is repeated for multiple categories until the sample distribution of all the weighting variables is identical to the population. Appendix C offers additional details about imbalances and weighting procedures.

at various points in time, with an added question about length of time in the program at the time of the survey.[13]

As noted above, survey respondents who indicated they had been in the program for less than a month were considered baseline participants; given their limited experience with the program, their answers were used to estimate "pre" program outcomes. Respondents who had been in the program longer than this were considered established participants; their answers were used to estimate "post" program outcomes. This approach is identical to the one used in the prior year's report.

Because this approach does not measure changes within individual participants, but rather between two distinct groups of participants, comparisons between these estimates could be influenced by differences in the characteristics of each group. Differences between the two groups in observable sociodemographic characteristics were, in fact, relatively small, which lends greater confidence that these two groups are comparable.[14]

An additional concern emerged in the current year's data, because there were too few respondents who would be considered baseline participants (n=13). As such, we could not make reliable comparisons using only this year's data. To address this, we combined data across the 2 program years for which survey data were available (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021) and compared the means on these variables using these combined data.

There are clear caveats with this approach. The data span different program years (during which individual grantees may have altered their programs or there may have been shifts in any number of conditions external to the program).[15] And, in theory, some individuals could be represented in both sets of data.[16] After considering the advantages and disadvantages of this approach, we opted to present the differences on these items between baseline and

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[13] The anonymous nature of the participant surveys means that respondents could not be matched with BEST program data containing service dosage for program participants. Therefore, an estimation of the correlation between service dosage and pre–post outcome changes could not be conducted.

[14] A significant limitation to this analysis (or any similar analysis) is that there may be substantial differences in characteristics that were not measured that could have important impacts on the outcomes observed.

[15] The most obvious of these are the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. That said, at least some of the participants during the PY 2019–2020 program year were affected by the pandemic and, thus, combining the two program years does not reflect a binary distinction on this factor.

[16] Since the surveys are anonymous, there is no way to match them across program years.

established participants in the combined data across the 2 program years while noting the limitations of this approach. The proportion of survey respondents by length of participation in the program is shown in Exhibit VI-1.[17]

Exhibit VI-1: Distribution of BEST Participants by Length of Participation (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021 Combined)

Length of Participation	Youth Survey	Child Survey
Less than a month (baseline participants)	11.1%	12.5%
A month or more (established participants)	88.9%	87.5%

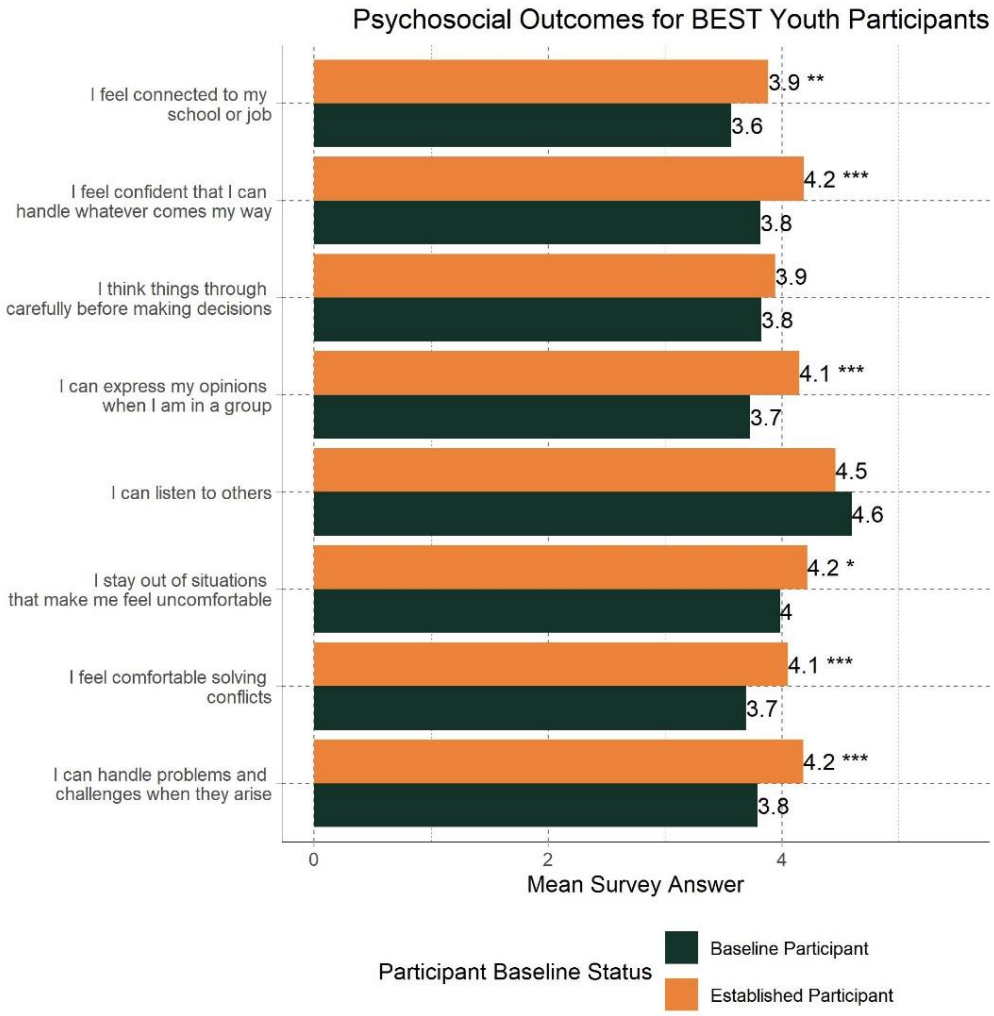
Source: BEST participant surveys
Note: Results are weighted to adjust for differences between survey respondents and BEST participants overall.

Comparison of Psychosocial Outcomes Between Baseline and Established Participants

The evaluation examined differences in psychosocial outcomes between baseline and established participants, including on eight separate indicators of psychosocial well-being. Exhibit VI-2 presents the findings of a series of comparisons between the average psychosocial outcome scores of baseline and established program participants for the youth survey. All survey items were measured using a Likert scale with values ranging from 1 to 5.

[17] The small percentage of baseline respondents among the total number of respondents (which was itself small) means that our estimations of pre–post differences in outcomes are not as precise as they could have been. Small sample sizes can increase the likelihood of Type II errors, which occur when we fail to observe a difference when in truth there is one.

Exhibit VI-2: Psychosocial Outcomes for BEST Youth Participants, Ages 14–24 (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021 Combined)



Source: BEST participant surveys

Note: Results are weighted to adjust for differences between survey takers and BEST participants overall.

* Statistically significant at 90%; ** Statistically significant at 95%; *** Statistically significant at 99%

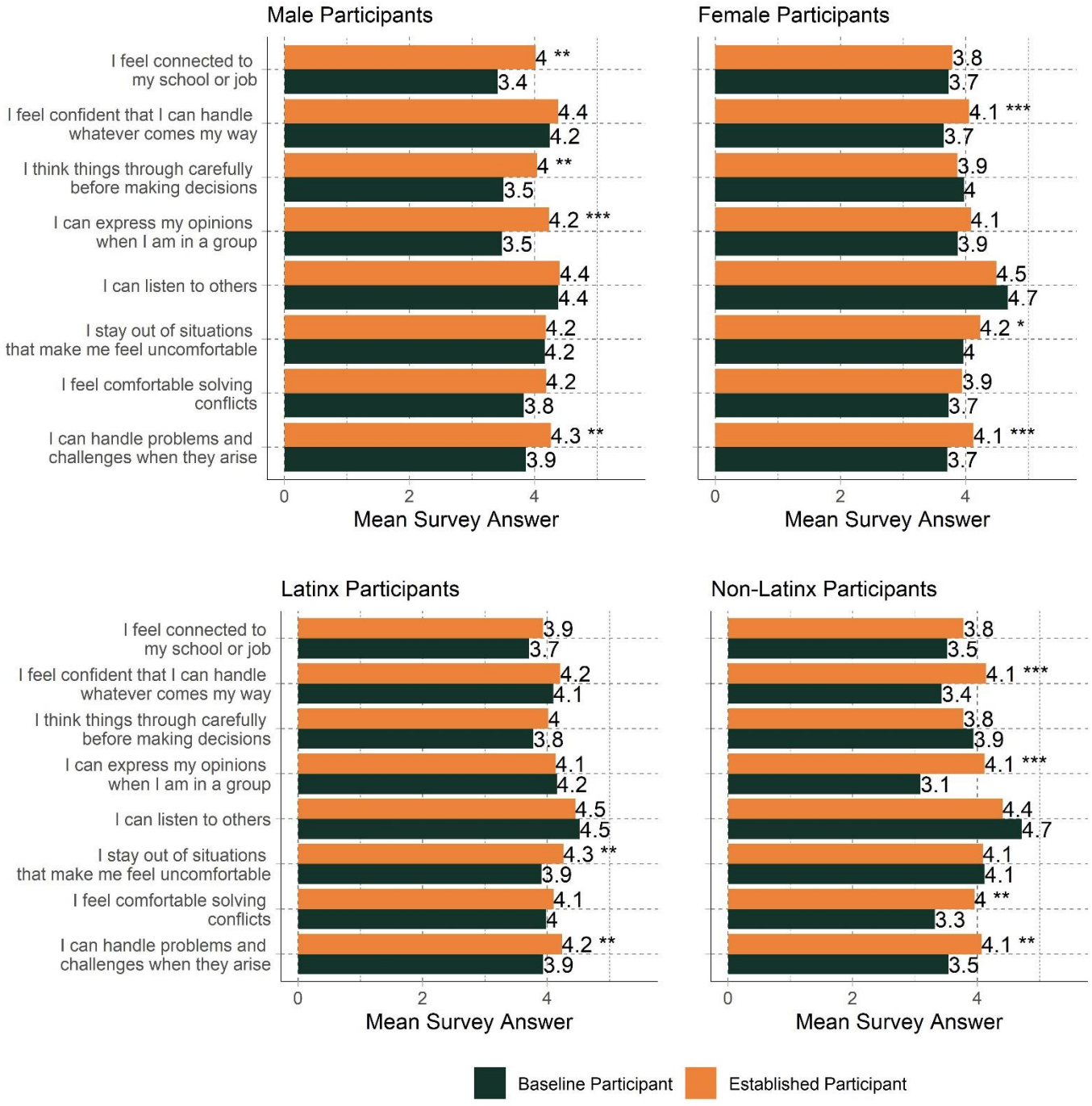
For six of the eight survey items, the average scores of established youth participants were significantly higher than those of baseline participants. For the remaining two items, there was no statistical difference between established and baseline participants. These results suggest that youth program participants who have been in the program for at least a month tend to have better psychosocial outcomes than those who are new to the program.

Further analysis suggests that there were some differences in these comparisons by subgroup (Exhibit VI-3). Among young men, the average scores of established program participants were significantly higher than those of baseline participants on four psychosocial outcomes. For young women, there was a slightly more mixed picture, though the three outcomes that showed statistically significant differences all indicated positive effects of the program.[18] For young men, the largest differences were in their perceived ability to express themselves in a group and in their connection to school or a job; for young women, the largest differences were in their perception of their ability to handle whatever comes their way and their ability to handle problems and challenges when they arise.

As in PY 2019–2020, due to the small sample size and the large proportion of Latinx respondents, all the non-Latinx respondents (who were mostly Black/African American and Asian) had to be grouped together for analysis. It was therefore not possible to conduct a full subgroup analysis by race and ethnicity. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that for both racial/ethnic subgroups (Latinx and non-Latinx), established program participants generally had higher psychosocial outcomes than baseline participants. However, the differences between baseline and established participants tended to be greater among non-Latinx program participants, in large part due to their lower baseline outcomes.

[18] Given the small number of gender nonbinary individuals in the sample, these respondents were excluded from the analysis to protect their confidentiality.

Exhibit VI-3: Psychosocial Outcomes for BEST Youth Participants, Ages 14–24, by Gender and Race/Ethnicity (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021 Combined)



Source: BEST participant surveys

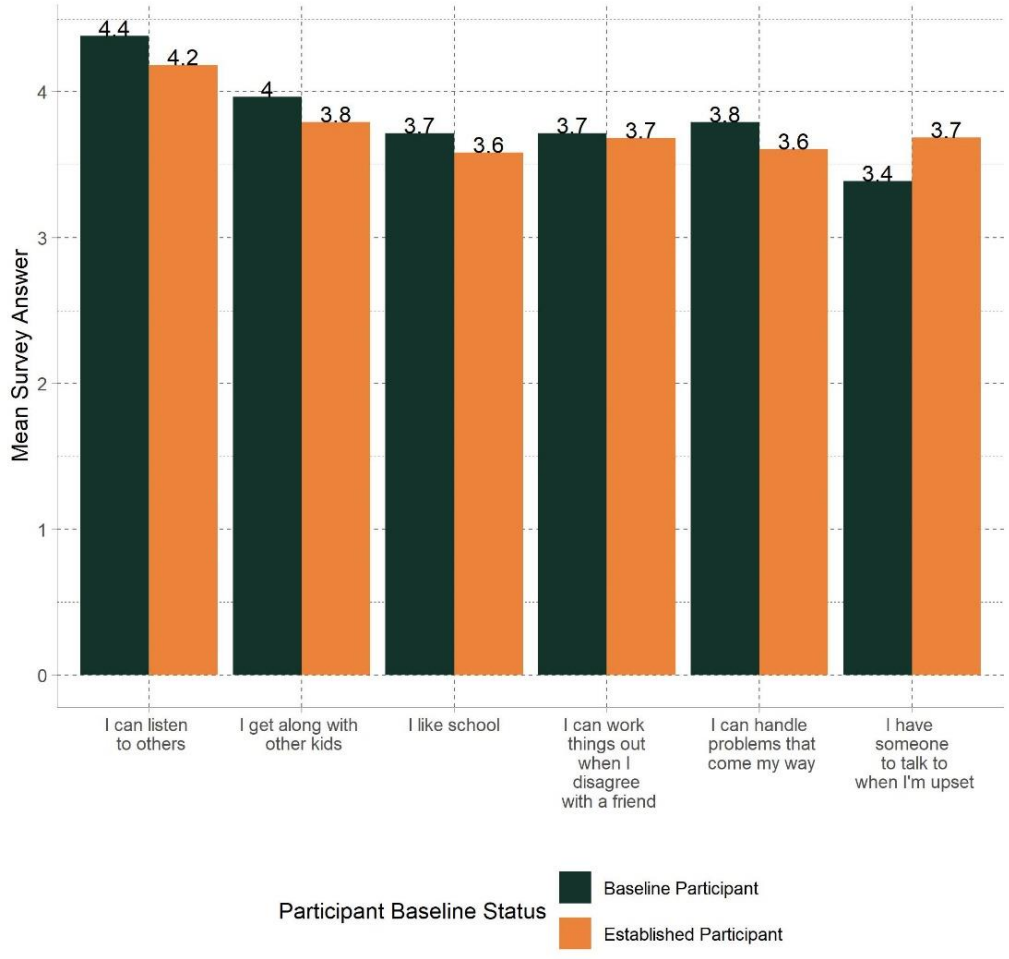
Note: Results are weighted to adjust for differences between survey takers and BEST participants overall.

* Statistically significant at 90%; ** Statistically significant at 95%; *** Statistically significant at 99%

The findings from the child survey reveal a different picture compared to the youth survey (Exhibit VI-4). For many of the measures, established program participants had slightly *lower* average scores compared to those at baseline. However, these differences are very small and none are statistically significant.

The one contrast in this exhibit is in children's ability to rely on a supportive adult when they are upset. Here, the mean for established participants is somewhat higher than for baseline participants. Again, this difference is not statistically significant, but it is the largest in magnitude of the comparisons and perhaps would be significant with a larger sample size.

Exhibit VI-4: Psychosocial Outcomes for BEST Child Participants, Ages 7–13 (PY 2019–2020 and PY 2020–2021 Combined)



Source: BEST participant surveys

Note: Results are weighted to adjust for differences between survey takers and BEST participants overall.

* Statistically significant at 90%; ** Statistically significant at 95%; *** Statistically significant at 99%

Satisfaction With the Program

Measuring satisfaction with BEST services is important for understanding how program participants assess their time in the program. It may also be useful for PRNS and grantees in assessing whether program improvements are needed or where their efforts to improve should be focused. Accordingly, the surveys included multiple questions that aimed to measure participants' satisfaction with BEST. Results for these outcomes are limited to participants only in the current program year (PY 2020–2021).

The results from the youth survey, displayed in Exhibit VI-5, suggest that, overall, satisfaction with the program among youth remained strong: A large majority of respondents answered "often" or "always" to most of the survey questions. Respondents appeared to be particularly satisfied with how well adults in the program listened to what youth have to say, how they were treated by program staff in terms of their general caring attitude, their perception of safety within the program, and program staff's ability to communicate in youths' own languages and to understand youths' cultures.

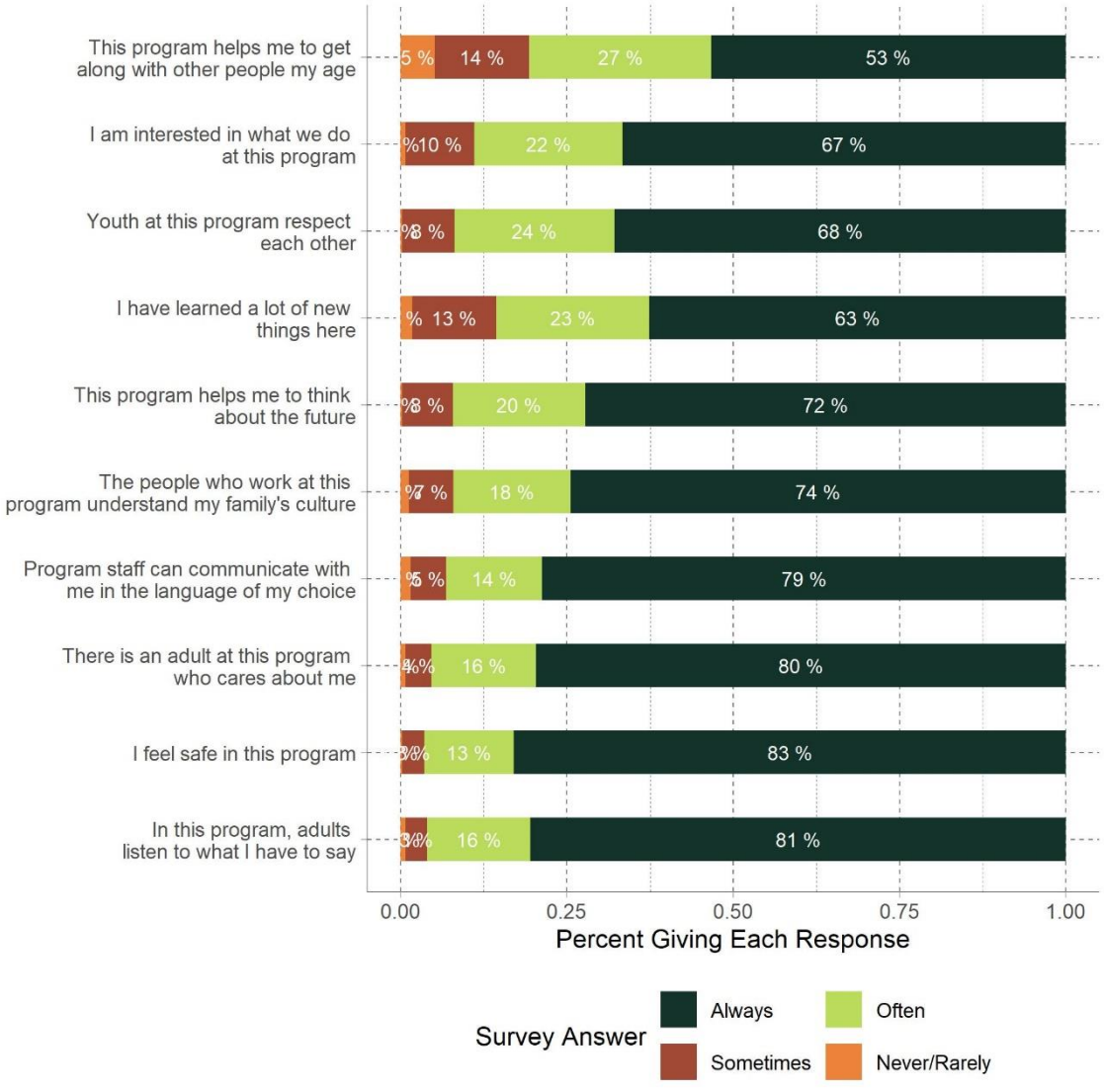
One substantial change from the prior year is in the measure of whether youth feel safe in the program. In PY 2019–2020, 30 percent of youth respondents indicated feeling safe only "sometimes" or "never." In contrast, less than 10 percent of current-year youth reported feeling safe only "sometimes," and almost none reported "never" feeling safe in the program. This is especially remarkable in light of the increased stress and health dangers posed by pandemic conditions; it speaks to the extra efforts that staff have made to reach youth and meet their socioemotional needs during this difficult time.

While satisfaction ratings were also high in the child survey, they were somewhat lower than in the youth survey (Exhibit VI-6). Children identified their program as a safe environment, appreciated that staff allowed them to speak in the language of their choosing, and said they had learned a lot of new things in the program.

As in the prior year, the items that received somewhat lower ratings were focused on the program's ability to create an environment supportive of collaboration among children and youth. This is illustrated by the distributions of responses to the following items: "Since being in this program, I work better on a team"; "Kids respect each other here"; and "This program helps me get along with other kids." In a year where there was much more limited peer

contact among youth due to social distancing and school closures, these findings are not surprising.

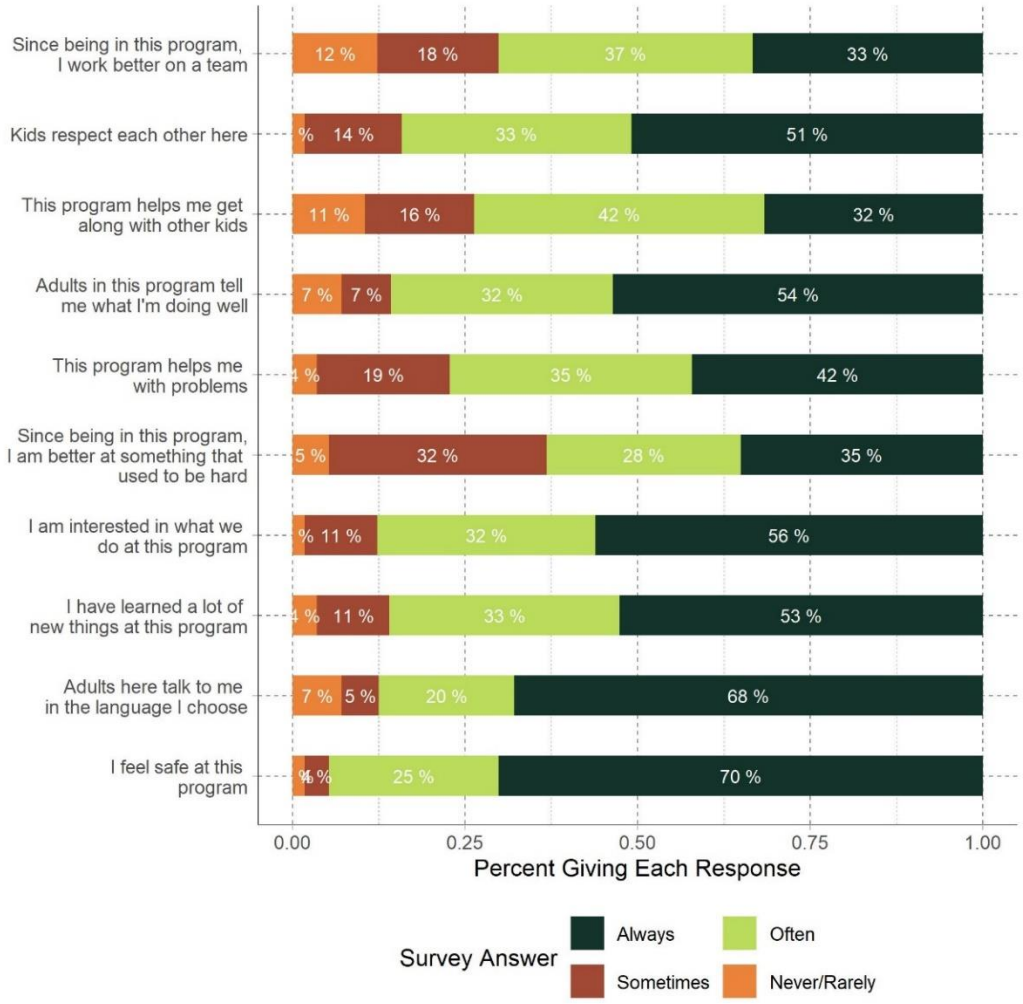
Exhibit VI-5: Satisfaction with BEST Program for Youth Participants, Ages 14–24 (PY 2020–2021)



Source: BEST youth surveys

Note: Results are weighted to adjust for differences between survey respondents and BEST participants overall.

Exhibit VI-6: Satisfaction with BEST Program for Child Participants Ages 7–13 (PY 2020–2021)



Source: BEST participant surveys

Note: Results are weighted to adjust for differences between survey respondents and BEST participants overall.

Summary

Overall, the outcomes study suggests that BEST participants in PY 2020–2021 were generally satisfied with the program and that established participants tended to have higher psychosocial outcomes than baseline participants, at least among youth (ages 14–24). The data for child participants were less clear, as their program satisfaction was generally lower than their youth counterparts and there were no clear differences between baseline and established child participants on psychosocial outcomes.

These results largely mirror those presented in the prior year's report, though perhaps the contrast between baseline and established youth participants is even clearer with the current program year. Together with the findings from SPR's previous evaluations, there is continuing evidence that the BEST program is having some positive effects upon its participants, particularly those ages 14–24.

VII. Summary and Recommendations

The previous chapters described the implementation and outcomes of the BEST program for PY 2020–2021. This concluding chapter summarizes these findings and reflects on improvements made to program monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Summary

During PY 2020–2021, PRNS and BEST grantee staff continued to respond to the challenges of ongoing pandemic conditions. Various public health guidelines—including mask and vaccination mandates, remote learning, and social-distancing protocols—affected services and activities and made it more difficult to engage youth and families than in previous years. Despite these challenges, youth participating in BEST programs continued to report high levels of satisfaction and personal growth.

While overall enrollment decreased, UOS remained at a similar level to previous years, as grantee staff provided more one-on-one services. Reflecting this approach, Case Management services increased significantly. BEST staff generally took advantage of these opportunities to address the increased mental health needs of participants.

Building on their work in PY 2019–2020, grantees continued to adapt their services to engage with and meet participants' needs while staying distanced, notably through virtual platforms and safer outdoor activities. Continuing to provide in-person services throughout the program year, Street Outreach contacts increased significantly while schools were remote.

Notably, grantees continued to build on the strengths of their programs and innovate in ways that will continue to bolster their connections with youth and the community. These successes included:

- maintaining and strengthening relationships with schools and other CBOs,
- building out virtual programs, including through the use of social media platforms,
- innovating new curricula, and
- creating drop-in programming that offered safe spaces for youth to engage with BEST staff.

The outcomes findings from the survey analysis confirm that BEST programs have continued to build strong relationships with youth participants. Despite pandemic-related challenges, youth reported outcomes and satisfaction with BEST programs and program staff that were equal to or stronger than in the previous program year.

Progress on Addressing Evaluation-Related Challenges

The BEST program administrative staff moved forward during PY 2020–2021 to improve evaluation and internal program management systems. Responding to recommendations from the Office of the City Auditor (2019), the City Council, SPR, and BEST program staff, the management team has made significant progress in addressing several areas that are aligned with the City of San José's larger goals for increased program accountability and improved performance.

Previous evaluation reports from SPR (PY 2019–2020 and earlier) and the City Auditor's report identified several challenges related to program data management:

- less-than-optimal data collection tools, a lack of a client management system, and limited staff resources to support evaluation efforts,
- a need for a risk assessment tool for BEST participants,
- low participant survey participation, and
- challenges with obtaining informed consent of participants to collect third-party administrative data to conduct a more rigorous outcomes evaluation.

BEST management staff have addressed these issues by:

- developing a PY 2021–2022 grantee workgroup to reconsider informed consent for third-party data collection and to review survey data collection processes,
- directing SPR to add additional outcome measures to the youth and child surveys for PY 2021–2022 in order to capture additional outcomes,
- working closely with SPR staff to support grantee staff in increasing survey response rates, including regular reports to grantees on survey response rates and descriptions of participant survey responses,
- working with SPR staff to streamline grantee workbooks used for quarterly data collection and to create real-time data dashboards for grantees to monitor their progress toward contract goals,

- receiving funding from the City of San José to purchase a case management system and hire additional staff to assist with its implementation and oversight,
- initiating discussions with the City about the possibility of collecting third-party data directly, rather than through a third-party evaluator, and
- working with a contractor to develop a risk assessment tool and to test it with BEST grantees.

As BEST moves into its final year of this grant cycle, the management team is in a position to significantly improve its evaluation infrastructure and systems. This will ensure continued progress toward assessing its future ability to help participants through rigorous, responsive evaluation systems.

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Appendix A: Target Population Definitions

Following are the four PRNS target population profiles that grantees use to describe participants in BEST-funded services.

At-Risk: Youth in this category may be distinguished from other at-risk youth in that they are residing in a high-risk community (identified as a "hot spot" area) and have some of the following gang-related risk characteristics:

- Has a high potential to exhibit high-risk gang behaviors.
- Has not had any personal contact with the juvenile justice system.
- Exhibits early signs of school-related academic, attendance, and/or behavior problems.
- Has periodic family crises and/or is a child welfare case.
- Is low-income and/or lives in overcrowded living conditions.
- Knows some neighborhood gang members but does not associate with them.
- Is beginning to experiment with drug/alcohol use.

High-Risk: This category may be distinguished from the "at-risk" population based on the following additional characteristics and level of intensity:

- Admires aspects of gang lifestyle characteristics.
- Views gang members as "living an adventure."
- Lives in a gang "turf" area where the gang presence is visible.
- Has experienced or participated in gang intimidation type of behaviors or has witnessed violent gang acts.
- Feels unsafe being alone in the neighborhood.
- Has family members who have lived or are living a juvenile delinquent, criminal, and/or gang lifestyle.
- Has had several contacts with the juvenile justice system and law enforcement.
- Does not see the future as providing for him/her; has a perspective of "you have to take what you can get."
- Casually and occasionally associates with youth exhibiting gang characteristics.

- Has a high rate of school absences; experiences school failure or disciplinary problems.
- Uses free time after school to "hang out" and does not participate in sports, hobbies, or work.
- Is suspicious and hostile toward others who are not in his/her close circle of friends.
- Does not value other people's property.
- Believes and follows his/her own code of conduct, not the rules of society.
- Only follows advice of friends; does not trust anyone other than friends.
- Uses alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Has had numerous fights and sees violence as a primary way to settle disagreements and maintain respect.
- May have been placed in an alternative home or living arrangement for a period.
- Does not have personal goals/desires that take precedence over gang-impacted youth groups.

Gang-Impacted: Youth exhibiting high-risk behaviors related to gang lifestyles, including the following:

- Has had several contacts with the juvenile justice system and law enforcement. Has likely spent time in juvenile hall. Has had a probation officer and/or may have participated in a delinquency diversion program.
- Has had numerous fights, and views violence as primary way to intimidate, settle disagreements, and maintain respect.
- May claim a turf or group identity with gang characteristics but still values independence from gang membership.
- Personally knows and hangs out with identified gang members.
- Considers many gang-related activities socially acceptable.
- Feels he/she has a lot in common with gang characteristics.
- Views gang involvement as an alternative source for power, money, and prestige.
- Wears gang-style clothing and/or gang colors/symbols.
- Promotes the use of gang cultural expressions and terminology.

- Identifies with a gang-related affiliation and/or turf but has not officially joined a gang. Is ready to join a gang.
- Does not seek employment, and regards "underground economy" as a viable option.
- Probably has gang-related tattoos.
- Has drawings of gang insignia or symbols on notebook/book covers or other personal items.

Gang-Intentional: This category is distinguished from all other categories in that youth must be identified and/or arrested for gang-related incidents or acts of gang violence through the justice system (police, district attorney, probation, etc.).

- May have been identified or certified as a gang member by law enforcement agencies.
- Associates almost exclusively with gang members to the exclusion of family and former friends.
- Views intimidation and physical violence as the way to increase personal power, prestige, and rank in a gang. He/she is active in "gang banging."
- Regularly uses/abuses alcohol and other drugs.
- Self identifies as a gang member.
- Has spent time in juvenile hall, juvenile camp, or California Division of Juvenile Justice.
- Regularly deals with gang rival and alliedgang business.
- Has gang-related tattoos.
- Identifies specific individuals or groups as enemies.
- Is engaged in the gang lifestyle.
- Rejects anyone or any value system other than that of the gang.
- Believes that the gang, its members, and/or his/her family live for or will die for the gang.
- Has fully submerged his/her personal goals and identity in the collective identity and goals of the gang.
- Has adopted and/or earned gang status within the gang system.

Appendix B: Eligible Service Areas

During PY 2020–2021, BEST grantees offered programming to youth in one or more of six eligible service areas. These eligible service areas are listed below together with definitions derived (with some limited modifications) from documents that include the BEST request for qualifications, grantee workbooks, and other grantee documents.

Personal Transformation Through Cognitive Behavior Change and Life-Skills Education. This service area includes a wide array of intervention and education services focused on developing internal thinking and attitudes as they relate to external personal/social attributes and behaviors, improving intrapersonal and interpersonal problem solving, and enhancing school engagement. Examples of program activities and curricula include mentoring, life-skills classes, legal education, jazz instruction, and yoga classes.

Street Outreach/Intervention. Street Outreach workers engage with youth in designated hot spot communities to provide prosocial activities and case management. Staff work with service providers, schools, and families to provide outreach and mediation services in targeted neighborhoods and surrounding communities. Program activities include preventing gang activity through "cold" street contacts and group outings to locations such as nature areas and theme parks.

Vocational/Job Training. This service area consists of educational and vocational training as well as work opportunities for youth. Program activities include education completion support and job coaching and placement.

Parent Awareness/Training. Grantees provide programs designed to increase parent–child bonding and communication skills. Curricula educate parents and youth about positive decision-making skills. Program activities include support groups, character education classes, and family gatherings, such as barbeques.

Case Management. Services include initial one-on-one scheduled assessments and client appointments in home, school, and community settings. These services help grantee staff establish an understanding of youth life challenges, current problems and issues, family influences, skills/abilities, personal strengths, interests, and aspirations. Grantees use risk and needs assessments to inform the tailoring of individual service plans and/or specialized

intervention plans. Program activities include personalized one-on-one coaching, goal setting, and home visits.

Emergency Services. This temporary eligible service area, introduced by PRNS in May 2020, includes supports designed to address the immediate needs of BEST participants and their families (e.g., food, hygiene supplies) related to COVID-19 and shelter-in-place orders.

Appendix C: Technical Appendix

This technical appendix provides additional information on the data collection and analysis for this evaluation.

Data Collection

This section describes each type of data collected for the evaluation and provides additional detail on the completeness of these data.

Grantee Contracts, Workbooks, and Individual-Level Service Data

From PRNS, the evaluation team collected three types of grantee documents. First, contracts and contract amendments provided information on grantee program plans. Second, grantees provided quarterly workbooks consisting of several sheets that include information on the level of services provided and funding spent. And third, grantees completed separate documents providing information on services received at the individual participant level.

Staff Interviews and Focus Groups

The evaluation team conducted qualitative data collection with grantee staff, participants, and school district partner staff:

- **Staff and participant interviews and focus groups.** The evaluation team conducted phone interviews with staff members from 15 grantees in June 2021. These interviews covered program successes and challenges, youth characteristics, and program outcomes of interest. In August 2021, SPR staff conducted four small group interviews/focus groups with participants from Alum Rock Counseling Center (6 participants), Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County (2 participants), The Firehouse Community Development Corporation (2 participants), and Fresh Lifelines for Youth (2 participants).
- **School district staff interviews.** In January and February 2021, SPR staff conducted interviews with staff from 12 schools that partner with BEST grantees. Interviews were conducted with administrative and counseling personnel in elementary, middle, and high schools as well as in alternative schools.

Participant surveys. The evaluation also included surveys for children (ages 7–13), youth (ages 14–24), and parents enrolled in parenting services provided by BEST grantees. The evaluation team designed these surveys to measure psychosocial outcomes (e.g., resilience,

self-efficacy) and customer satisfaction. These efforts yielded a total of 474 complete responses across the three types of surveys. The evaluation team used the same surveys that were developed and implemented in the previous program year. Grantees administered these anonymous surveys at various points throughout the program year on a semi-structured schedule, customized to each grantee's program cycle. Exhibit C-1 shows the total numbers and types of surveys collected by each grantee.

Exhibit C-1: Numbers of Each Type of Participant Survey Collected By Grantees (PY 2020–2021)

	Child	Youth	Parent	Total
Alum Rock Counseling Center	29	11	0	**40**
Bay Area Tutoring	6	0	0	**6**
Bill Wilson Center	0	0	0	**0**
Caminar	4	9	3	**16**
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County	0	29	0	**29**
ConXión to Community	0	21	0	**21**
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	1	18	0	**19**
Girl Scouts of Northern California	0	40	0	**40**
New Hope for Youth	14	130	0	**144**
San José Jazz	4	0	0	**4**
Teen Success, Inc.	0	21	0	**21**
The Art of Yoga Project	0	0	0	**0**
The Firehouse Community Development Corp.	0	75	0	**75**
The Tenacious Group	0	41	0	**41**
Ujima Adult and Family Services, Inc.	0	17	0	**17**
Uplift Family Services	1	0	0	**1**
Total	59	412	3	**474**

Data Analysis

This section describes the approach the evaluation team took in analyzing data for both the implementation study and the outcomes study.

Implementation Study Analysis

For the implementation study, the evaluation team cleaned and prepared datasets using grantee contracts and workbook data as well as individual participant service data. It then used those datasets to compare the services provided, the participants served, and the funding provided for and expended on the program elements grantees planned to implement. The evaluation team compared implementation in PY 2020–2021 to past program years and provided a detailed discussion of these findings. The tables in the main body of the report include cross-year comparisons.

The evaluation team conducted separate, qualitative analysis of the information collected during interviews and focus groups, organizing data into themes and identifying common challenges and successes identified by grantee staff and PRNS staff.

Outcomes Study Analysis

For the outcomes study, the evaluation team used survey data to examine how individual-level participant outcomes changed over time.

Analysis of Survey Data

Because of study procedures surrounding the protection of human subjects, the evaluation team administered participant surveys anonymously. Therefore, it was not possible to compare pre–post psychosocial outcomes (i.e., within-person changes). However, all surveys included questions about the length of participation in the program and a limited amount of demographic information. Comparing participants who said they had been in the program for a short time to those who declared they had been in the program for a longer time provided a robust, if imperfect, measure of pre–post changes associated with the program.

Survey findings were weighted to potentially compensate for the nonresponse bias that might arise if survey respondents differed markedly in observable characteristics from the population served by the program (see “Survey Weighting Procedures” below).

Pre–post differences in outcomes were estimated by comparing the means of survey items for “baseline” respondents (who said they had been in the program for less than a month)

and “established” survey respondents (who said they had been in the program for a month or longer). For each outcome, a weighted mean was calculated for each group defined by baseline status. Then, a difference in means across groups was calculated, giving a basic difference between point estimates. From here, the pooled variance for the answer was calculated. The pooled variance was divided by the sum of squared deviations for the baseline group, and the square root of this expression was obtained to yield the standard error of the point estimate.

The difference in means was divided by the standard error to determine the t-statistic for a weighted difference in means test. This t-statistic was then used to get the p-value for a two-tailed test of significance to determine if the difference in point estimates was statistically significant. The p-value determines if a result is significant and its corresponding level of significance.

This methodology is consistent with PY 2019–2020 survey analysis, which used a linear regression to determine if there was a significant difference between participant groups. This round of survey analysis was also verified by running a weighted linear regression where the outcome was regressed on a baseline status indicator to verify that the p-values and point estimates were correct. A different approach was used to create a specific desired data structure optimal for data visualization in R.

Survey Weighting Procedures

After the evaluation team compared the structure of the respondent samples with the structure of the BEST program participants overall, several sociodemographic imbalances were noted. Exhibit C-2 shows the distribution of available sociodemographic characteristics in the youth population (ages 14–24) and the sample of youth who responded to the survey. The data suggest that the survey sample underrepresented the proportion of “Other” participants and it overrepresented the proportion of Latinx participants; 19- to 24-year-old participants were underrepresented, while 14- to 18-year-old participants were overrepresented; other differences were relatively minor.

Exhibit C-2: Comparison of Sociodemographic Characteristics for BEST Youth Population and Youth Survey Respondents, Ages 14–24 (PY 2020–2021)

	PY 2020–2021 BEST Population	PY 2020–2021 Survey Respondents
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	125 (9.4%)	23 (6.3%)
Asian	88 (6.6%)	20 (7.2%)
Latinx	819 (61.4%)	242 (75.6%)
Multiracial	52 (3.9%)	16 (5%)
Other	249 (18.7%)	19 (5.9%)
Age		
14–18 years old	1,076 (80.5%)	336 (86.8%)
19–24 years old	254 (19%)	47 (12.1%)
25 years old	6 (0.5%)	4 (1.1%)
Gender		
Men	569 (43.3%)	184(48.1%)
Women	747 (56.7%)	199 (51.9%)

Source: BEST program data and participant surveys

Differences between the survey respondents and the full pool of eligible survey participants could potentially bias the survey findings. To mitigate possible bias caused by nonresponse, the evaluation team created nonresponse weights that were used to compute survey findings. The nonresponse weights were created using an iterative proportional fitting algorithm (also known as a raking algorithm) that performs a stepwise adjustment of survey sampling weights to achieve known population margins. The adjustment process is repeated until the difference between the weighted margins of the variables and the population margins are deemed sufficiently close. The poststratification weights for the youth sample were calculated using the demographic variables listed in Exhibit C-2. Weighting through the technique described above resulted in demographic sample proportions that were identical to proportions among the BEST population.

The evaluation team took a similar approach for the child survey. As shown in Exhibit C-3, the survey respondents appeared to differ from the population of BEST participants, from the perspective of both race/ethnicity and especially gender. In particular, the number of survey responses that fall into the "Other" category account for a greater proportion of the child survey data. The evaluation team calculated raking poststratification nonresponse weights using the sociodemographic characteristics in Exhibit C-3. These weights were used to compute all survey findings shown in Chapter VI.

Exhibit C-3: Comparison of Sociodemographic Characteristics for BEST Child Population and Child Survey Respondents, Ages 7–13 (PY 2020–2021)

	BEST Population PY 2020–2021	BEST PY 2020–2021 Survey Respondents
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	12 (2.7%)	2 (5.4%)
Asian	60 (13.8%)	4 (10.8%)
Latinx	283 (65.5%)	25 (67.6%)
Multiracial	35 (8.1%)	3 (8.1%)
Other	42 (9.7%)	3 (8.1%)
Gender		
Boys	208 (48.1%)	23 (45.0%)
Girls	213 (49.3%)	23 (45.0%)
Other	11 (2.5%)	5 (10%)

Source: BEST program data and participant surveys