They Give You A Voice: Program Evaluation of the Garden State Leaders Program

Prepared by: Rebecca Glinn, Ryan Jeter, Monica Moir, Justin Ray, Breana Stevens
Supervised by: Dr. Andrea Hetling

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

TABLE OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE GARDEN STATE LEADERS PROGRAM

NEW JERSEY
COALITION
TO END
HOMELESSNESS

APN
ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK OF NEW JERSEY

In 2015, the New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness partnered with the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey to create the Garden State Leaders Program. The Garden State Leaders Program (GSL) trains New Jersey residents with experiences of homelessness and poverty to advocate for policies throughout the state. Since its creation in 2015, the program has graduated five cohorts. Once a month, program participants attend a session where the main facilitators and guest speakers teach participants about issues connected to poverty and homelessness or advocacy skills. After attending five of the six sessions, participants graduate from the program.

6 Sessions on advocacy and personal development

49 Graduated Leaders from the program, to date

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Program facilitators asked to the research team to identify the program's strengths and weaknesses. The research team did this by evaluating three research questions.

Research Questions:

1 What are the benefits for individuals participating in the Garden State Leaders? program

2 What are barriers to participating in and graduating from the program?

3 From the point of view of participants, how could facilitators improve the program?

Methods

First, the research team carried out an analysis of program applications from 2015 to 2019. Second, the team conducted a focus group with current and graduated program participants. Findings from the two methods allowed the research team to create a survey for GSL evaluation in the future.

FINDINGS

Applications

The team analyzed the 2016-2019 applications to determine if there is a difference between those who did and did not graduate. This could reveal if experiencing a certain challenge was associated with an inability to complete the program.

Graduates		Non-Graduates
48%	Have been denied welfare (general assistance, AFDC, or TANF)	**64%**
43%	Have been unable to afford childcare	**79%**
57%	Have had their utilities shut off	**93%**
57%	Have gone without meals because there wasn't enough money for food	**71%**
48%	Have stayed in an abusive relationship due to economic hardship	**57%**
46%	Have been unable to go to the grocery store because you could not find affordable transportation	**50%**

"I think they really do just an awesome job of empowering people. You know, after you experience homelessness and you feel like such a victim, you feel like you've done so much and you just couldn't make it right. They give you a voice and they give you a paradigm on how to voice that voice."

Focus Groups

Impacts of the program

- **Professional development**
  - Knowledge of the political system and legislative process
  - Education on engaging with policymakers
  - Public speaking skills
- **Personal development**
  - Empowerment
  - Knowledge
  - Powerful relationships
- **Relationships with peers**
  - Sense of community and voice
- **Relationships with facilitators**
  - Communication outside of the sessions
  - Empathy through shared experiences

Barriers to completing the program

- **Work conflicts**
  - Last minute changes to scheduling
- **Transportation**
  - Resimbursement after sessions
- **Lack of supportive services**
  - Unable to get housing

Participants' suggestions for program improvements

- **Improve time allocation**
  - Shorter sessions with more time to ask questions and network
  - Promptness with session start times
- **Decrease group size**
  - Smaller cohorts
  - More one-on-one time with facilitators and peers
- **Expand diversity**
  - Resources for ESL Leaders
  - Outreach to include the disabled community

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the application and focus group analysis, the research team recommends that the Garden State Leaders program considers the following:

Improve the application process to include demographic questions, clear criteria for participating, and an application deadline

Diversify cohorts by advertising the program to more organizations and hiring a multilingual staff member or translator

Expand supportive services to Leaders who may need them to complete the program

Improve session logistics to maximize Leaders' time in the program

Help Leaders identify next steps after graduation

Implement the end-of-program survey to assess and improve Leaders' experiences in the program

CHAPTER 1: PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Garden State Leaders Program (GSL) trains New Jersey residents with experiences of homelessness and poverty to advocate for policies that support impoverished populations. Since its creation in 2015, the program has graduated five cohorts. Program facilitators report that GSL not only develops effective policy advocates, but also effective self-advocates. They believe that program participation leads to better health, relationships, jobs, and overall well-being. GSL therefore creates systemic change through policy advocacy and individual change through personal and professional development.

The GSL facilitators seek to strengthen and expand the program to improve accessibility and increase capacity. As a result, they submitted a proposal to the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy to participate as a client in its policy practicum. As a requirement to complete their degree, Master of Public Policy degree candidates must participate in the policy practicum, a semester-long research project worth six-credits that matches students with a client to answer a policy-relevant research question. The Garden State Leaders Program asked the graduate student research team to identify the program's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for growth by developing a survey.

The graduate research team worked with the GSL facilitators to finalize the research question and scope of the project. They established that the goal of the research project was to help the facilitators improve the Garden State Leaders Program. They developed three main research questions:

1. What are the benefits for individuals participating in the Garden State Leaders Program?

2. What are barriers to participating in and graduating from the program?

3. From the point of view of participants, how could facilitators improve the program?

In order to answer these questions during one semester, the research team and clients agreed that a quantitative analysis of program application responses in conjunction with a qualitative study analyzing participants' experiences with the program were the most effective research methods. The research team would not conduct a survey to generate data as initially requested. Instead, they would use the results from the data analysis to create a survey that would allow the GSL facilitators to continue evaluating their program after the research practicum is completed.

The report is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 of this report begins with an overview of poverty and homelessness in the United States and New Jersey. It then explores the historical context of participatory advocacy and its relationship to policy change. After, this paper provides an overview of the Garden State Leaders Program and outlines similar programs in other states. Chapter 3 discusses the methodologies used in the evaluation, including an analysis of program applications and the focus group sessions. Chapter 4 and 5 includes a discussion of the analysis findings for the applications and focus group sessions, respectively. Chapter 6 concludes with a presentation of the resulting survey and recommendations for improving the program.

CHAPTER 2: POVERTY, PARTICIPATORY ADVOCACY, AND THE GARDEN STATE LEADERS PROGRAM

The Prevalence of Poverty and Homelessness

Both poverty and homelessness are pervasive problems in New Jersey. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, poverty is when total family income falls below a certain threshold and is based on family size (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). For example, in 2019, the U.S. Census Bureau would consider a family of two adults and two children poor if their family income was below $26,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). In 2017, the U.S. Census Bureau found that 10.7% of the New Jersey population was poor, affecting women and people of color, namely Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, and Native American people, more often than their male and White counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). This is slightly lower than the national rate of poverty, which was 12.3% in 2017 (Semega, Kollar, Creamer, & Mohanty, 2019). However, given that the cost of living is high in New Jersey, some researchers argue that actual poverty is higher than portrayed in official federal statistics (Dubay, Wheaton & Zedelewski, 2013). In fact, 28% of New Jersey residents are in the ALICE population, or asset-limited, income constrained, employed (Hoopes, Abrahamson, Leonard, & Treglia, 2018). Using this measure, over a quarter of the New Jersey population experiences financial insecurity. Figures 1 and 2 below detail the gender and racial breakdown of poverty in New Jersey using the U.S. Census Bureau's methodology and highlight the disproportionate rate that women and people of color experience poverty.

Figure 1: **New Jersey Poverty Rates by Gender**

Poverty Rates in New Jersey by Gender, 2017
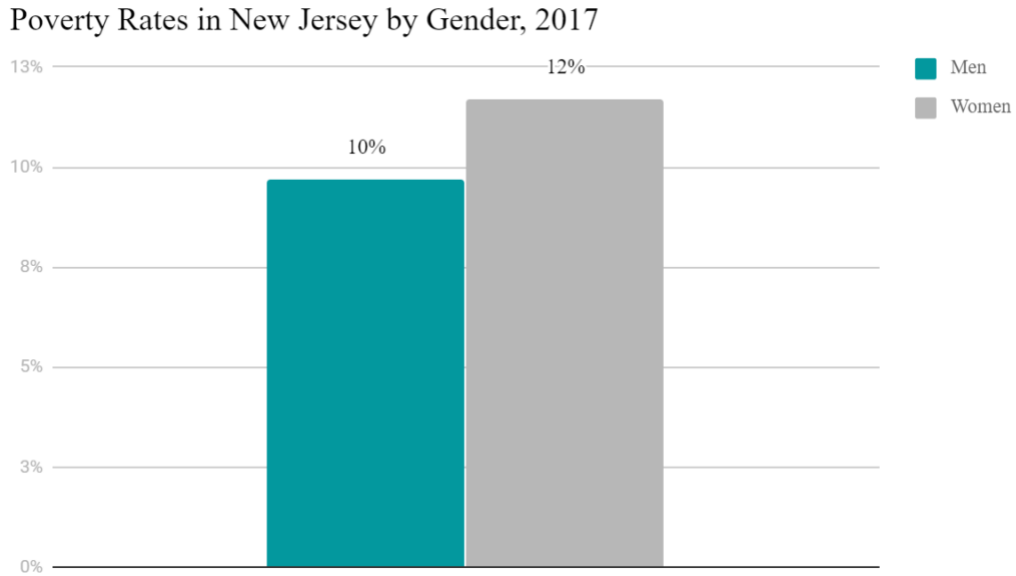
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 2: **New Jersey Poverty Rates by Race**

Poverty Rates in New Jersey by Race/Ethnicity, 2017
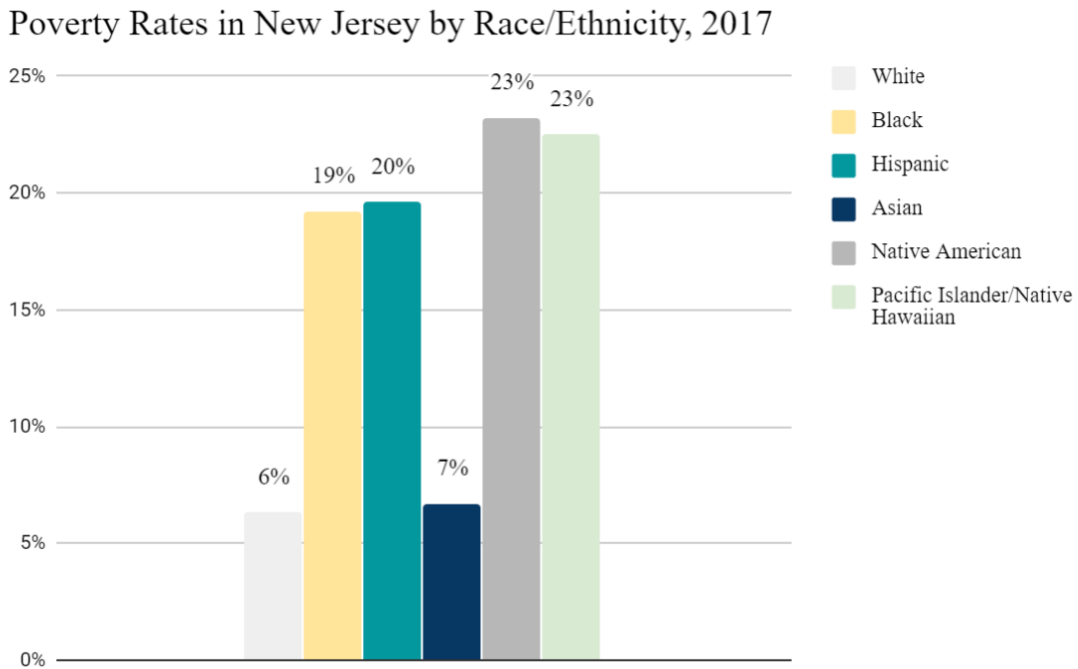
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Related to poverty is the experience and prevalence of homelessness. The Department of Housing and Urban Development defines a homeless person as one "who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (Henry et al., 2018). In 2017, more than 1.4 million people were homeless in the United States (Henry et al., 2018). Researchers counted the homeless population in New Jersey, determining that on a single day, 8,864 people are homeless (USICH, n.d.). Although this accounts for less than 1% of the state's population, some researchers argue that a single count inconsistently measures and may underestimate the number of people experiencing homelessness (Schneider, Brisson, & Burnes, 2016). Like experiences of poverty, people of color are disproportionately represented in the homeless population, with Black men making up the highest percentage nationally (43%) (Henry et al., 2018). Homelessness, like poverty, persists in New Jersey.

In addition to financial and housing instability, both poverty and homelessness lead to other challenges that suggest affected individuals need supportive services. The Garden State Leaders Program addresses some of these challenges through their training. Studies demonstrate that mental illness often co-occurs with both poverty and homelessness (Acri et al., 2017; Faulkner et al., 2020; Ding, Slate, & Yang, 2018). Further, research has connected poverty to experiencing low self-esteem (Doi, Fujiwara, Isumi, & Ochi, 2019; Mikulášková & Adamkovič, 2018). The effects of housing and financial instability can have long-lasting, detrimental effects on individuals. Therefore, programs that support policies that help combat homelessness and poverty while addressing the mental and emotional stress they cause are crucial. The Garden State Leaders Program is a key example of this type of intervention.

Participatory Advocacy

Participatory advocacy is defined as the direct participation of citizens in political decisions and policies that affect their lives rather than indirect participation through electing representatives (Schiller, 2007). Some organizations, like the Garden State Leaders Program, use participatory advocacy as part of their efforts to advocate for policies that reduce the disenfranchisement of marginalized populations. Often referred to as participatory democracy, it is a way for citizens' views and input to influence an otherwise removed and bureaucratic decision-making process (Bherer, 2016). Participatory advocacy creates more effective policies by connecting policymakers and stakeholders, where individuals as the primary stakeholders, rather than the organizations that represent them (Bherer, 2016). Participatory advocacy is especially important to empower poor communities to influence how policymakers create anti-poverty policy (Hardina, 2003). Through empowerment, communities have disproven the myth that democracy is best done when handled by the elite (Bherer, 2016).

Paul Davidoff examined the role of participatory government and advocates in his seminal article, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning" (1965). In the article, Davidoff proposes three necessary components of change while using participatory democracy (Davidoff, 1965):

1. Address the plural needs of a diverse population

2. Develop an inclusive planning process

3. Do not fear the adversary nature of advocacy

These pillars for successful civic engagement exist in participatory budgeting, citizen councils, neighborhood councils, and participatory planning committees. Their mission of creating a diverse, well-trained group of self-advocates is how organizations and units of government realize their democratic principles (Bherer, 2016). For instance, university students receiving welfare

worked with academic researchers to successfully lobby for a state policy in Wyoming that defined postsecondary education as work under the 1996 welfare reform law (Bernita et al, 2000). Their advocacy created transparency, exposed flaws in Wyoming's welfare policy, and led to a systemic change. Their success was directly related to the professors and organizations that empowered, trained, and supported their efforts to advocate (Bernita et al, 2000).

Examples of participatory advocacy demonstrate that participants benefit not only from policy changes, but from the advocacy experience itself. Research shows that such experiences leads to an improved circle of support and an increased level of social capital among advocates (Bernita et al, 2000). As a result of their training, the Wyoming university students not only accessed the basic necessities needed to complete their schooling, but also expanded their social network and better understood how their government works (Hardina, 2003). Organizations that invest in participatory advocacy programs impact policy change and improve the lives of those most affected. Participatory advocacy emphasizes inclusion as a key component to achieving democracy. Inclusion must not only permit citizens to be heard, it also calls for citizens to become well-informed (Bherer, 2016).

The Garden State Leaders Program uses participatory advocacy to affect policy change. The next two sections of this paper provide an overview of the GSL program and similar programs throughout the country.

Garden State Leaders Program Overview

In 2015, the New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness created the Garden State Leaders Program with the intent to train New Jersey residents who have experienced homelessness or near homelessness to advocate for policies that prevent or address homelessness in New Jersey.[1] In 2016, the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey joined as a co-facilitator, and the program expanded to focus on policies impacting poverty in addition to homelessness. The program is made up of six modules that three facilitators host once a month. Each year the program is held in a different part of New Jersey to provide opportunities for all eligible people to participate. To graduate, participants, or "Leaders," must attend five of the six modules. Since the program's creation, 49 of 67 Leaders have completed the program. Table 1 and Figure 3 below illustrate the program's participation and graduation rates over time. While graduation rates fluctuate, the number of individuals participating in the program has increased every year.

Table 1: **Participation and Graduation Rates**

Participation and Graduation Rates					
Year	Number of Applicants	Number of Participants	Participation Rate	Number of Graduates	Graduation Rate
2015	18	9	50.0%	5	55.6%
2016	23	10	43.5%	8	80.0%
2017	23	14	60.9%	13	92.9%
2018	29	14	48.3%	8	57.1%
2019	28	20	71.4%	16	80.0%
All	117	67	57.3%	49	73.1%

[1] On occasion, the facilitators have included those who work with homeless individuals into the program.

Figure 3: Participation and Graduation Rates Over Time

Participation and Graduation Rates Over Time
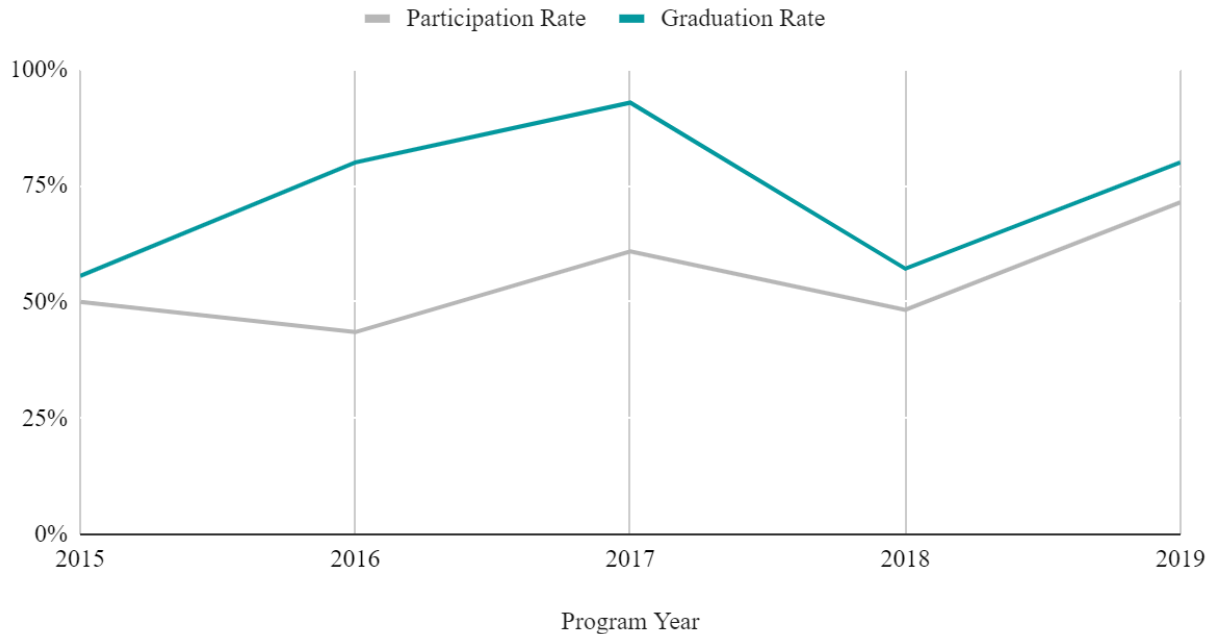
For each module, the program facilitators and guest speakers teach Leaders about issues connected to poverty and homelessness or advocacy skills. Past modules have included practicing public speaking, understanding the legislative process, and developing leadership skills. While the curriculum is constantly evolving, the 2019 schedule listed in Figure 4 represents the typical themes that the program covers. Even as specific topics change from year to year, there is a continued emphasis on preparing participants to share their experiences of homelessness and poverty with various audiences and decision makers, in the hopes that it will initiate meaningful policy change.

Figure 4: **Sample Session Schedule**

Session 1: Introduction to Poverty, Advocacy, and Leadership
This session included a history of the New Jersey welfare system and introductory public speaking exercises.
Session 2: Poverty Prevention and Crafting Your Story
This session included presentations on supportive housing and paid leave policies in New Jersey and an exercise on crafting one's story.
Session 3: Poverty Issues- Shelter and Affordable Housing
This session included information on an affordable housing advocacy group in New Jersey and how to build partnerships in advocacy. Leaders also practiced their testimonials.
Session 4: Communicating Your Story in 2019
This session included a presentation on the causes of inequality in America, using social media as an advocacy tool, and advocacy on a county and local level. Leaders continued to practice delivering their testimonials.
Session 5: Getting Involved in Your Community and Mock Hearing
This session included a presentation on crafting an advocacy message and a mock freeholder-hearing.
Session 6: Legislative Process and Policy
Leaders visited the New Jersey State House, hearing from the partisan office staff, legislators, and state agencies.

GSL facilitators note that in addition to gaining advocacy skills, Leaders see growth in other areas. They cite that once Leaders graduate, they serve in a myriad of leadership roles throughout the state, influencing and advocating on behalf of important causes. Facilitators have observed examples of Leaders benefitting in other ways, whether it is gaining and maintaining employment, improving their own social networks, or advancing their careers. Facilitators also

note that Leaders improve their confidence and gain influential roles in the community. This project seeks to examine these benefits that they often mention.

Since many Leaders have financial limitations that make completing the program challenging, the facilitators provide support to help them overcome these barriers. For example, the program provides lunch during each session and reimbursement for transportation. Facilitators have recalled picking up Leaders who could not access transportation and taking them to sessions. Still, facilitators suggest that several participants do not complete the program largely because of barriers associated with experiencing poverty.

Leadership and Advocacy Programs in Other States

To build effective anti-poverty policy through participatory advocacy, other organizations have developed programs like GSL. While the structure of other programs varies, each program has a goal of amplifying the voices of individuals with lived experiences of poverty, homelessness, and housing instability. Table 2 summarizes participatory advocacy programs in four different states, outlining the year the program was implemented, program length, and the program website.

Table 2: **Characteristics of Participatory Advocacy Programs Similar to GSL**

Participatory Advocacy Programs				
	Program Name	**Year Created**	**Program Length**	**Website**
New Hampshire Coalition to End Homelessness	Granite Leaders	2013	Six months	https://www.nhceh.org/graniteleaders
Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance	Leadership Development Program (LDP)	2013	Eight weeks	https://www.mhsa.net/LDP
Washington Low Income Housing Alliance	Emerging Advocates Program (EAP)	2013	Six weeks	https://www.wliha.org/EAP
San Diego Housing Federation	Homeless-Experienced Advocacy and Leadership (HEAL)	2019	Six weeks	https://www.housingsandiego.org/heal-network

Granite Leaders - New Hampshire Coalition to End Homelessness

Since 2013, the New Hampshire Coalition to End Homelessness (NHCEH) has hosted Granite Leaders, a free, six-month leadership development and advocacy program for homeless or formerly homeless individuals. Through this program, participants are trained to effectively tell their story and interact with state and local leaders (NHCEH, n.d.). Graduates have since written blogs about their experiences with homelessness and were featured on the radio and television (NHCEH, n.d.). Although the program was fully functional from 2013 to 2018, NHCEH has not produced a hosted cohort of Granite Leaders since 2018 but is currently in the process of improving the program with hopes of re-launching in 2020.

Leadership Development Program - Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance

The Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) provides a Leadership Development Program (LDP) that is intended to strengthen the leadership and advocacy skills of individuals who have experienced homelessness. The program applies a social justice framework to train participants in communicating their personal story to stakeholders, leaders, and their communities (MHSA, n.d.). Participants hear from and interact with community leaders and guest lecturers to learn and improve their networking skills. Lectures and sessions typically focus on four key areas: nonprofit management and policy, social justice education, storytelling, and personal communication and presentation (MHSA, n.d.). The overall goal of the program is that participants who are currently or formerly homeless will become leaders in their communities, engage in advocacy on behalf of homeless individuals, and serve on boards of nonprofits or other organizations to advance the mission of ending homelessness (MHSA, n.d.).

Emerging Advocates Program - Washington Low Income Housing Alliance

The Washington Low Income Housing Alliance (WLIHA) provides a leadership and advocacy program focused on creating public policy change for those with lived experiences of homelessness or housing instability. The program teaches participants how to advocate for individuals who have struggled with homelessness to effectuate social change (WLIHA, n.d.). According to the program website, the Emerging Advocates Program offers the following: an introduction to the legislative process, the opportunity to network with peers in the affordable housing and homelessness movement, message development, and contact with legislators and other significant community leaders (WLIHA, n.d.).

The program was originally intended to be a six-week course, but in 2017 the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance moved the program to a new format where participants work with

Alliance staff one-on-one. This revision allowed participants the flexibility to complete training at their own pace and on an individualized basis (WLIHA, n.d.). The application process for the program is an evaluation of the applicant's current skill set and knowledge of housing and homelessness issues. The Alliance trains ten advocates at a time and accepts individuals who meet the criteria for the program on a rolling basis as spots open (WLIHA, n.d.).

Homeless-Experienced Advocacy and Leadership (HEAL) - San Diego Housing Federation (SDHF)

The Homeless-Experienced Advocacy and Leadership (HEAL) program was developed in April 2019, with two training series located in North and Central San Diego county (SDHF, n.d.). This program provides advocacy training to individuals with lived experiences of homelessness and housing instability bridge the gap between policy formation and those directly impacted by housing policies, with the goal of moving policy in a human-centered direction. Within six weeks, participants learn about the causes and effects of homelessness, how to analyze data on homelessness, and how to develop messaging to communicate their story (SDHF, n.d.).

After participants complete the six-week program, the HEAL network continues to host training on leadership and storytelling. To maintain the strength of the network and keep momentum, cohorts hold monthly meetings. Oftentimes, HEAL participants can attend training in conjunction with the Federation's Residents United Network (RUN), which brings residents, resident service providers, and developers together to create affordable housing solutions and set legislative priorities (SDHF, n.d.). The HEAL network expects another two cohorts to begin the program in May 2020.

CHAPTER 3: EVALUATION STRATEGY

The research team employed two data collection methods to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the benefits for individuals participating in the Garden State Leaders Program?

2. What are barriers to participating in and graduating from the program?

3. From the point of view of participants, how could facilitators improve the program?

First, the research team carried out a quantitative analysis of program applications. Second, the team conducted a focus group with current and graduated program participants. The team used the findings to create a survey that assesses program impacts and participants satisfaction.

Application Analysis

The GSL facilitators provided the research team with a total of 123 program applications from 2015 to 2019. Applications included non-participants and participants who both graduated and did not graduate the program. The research team received the application responses in a de-identified excel spreadsheet. The GSL application had 11 questions in 2015 and increased to 26 questions in 2016. The facilitators also provided information on whether applicants participated in and graduated the program. The research team used the applications to calculate descriptive statistics on program participation and graduation, and experiences with homelessness and poverty. To determine if there were significant differences between graduates and non-graduates in their experiences, the research team utilized a Pearson's Chi-Square Test for independence with a 95% confidence interval. The team also completed an analysis examining differences between participants and non-participants. These results are not discussed in the body of the report but are instead presented in Appendix D. The results of the analysis of differences between graduates and

non-graduates, which are discussed in Chapter 4, informed the development of the focus group questions.

Focus Group Analysis

To better understand participants' experience with the program, the research team conducted a focus group with a total of 13 participants on Saturday March 7, 2020. To recruit focus group members, the research team provided the GSL staff with an informational flyer to email to participants and post in their group's Facebook page. All past and present program participants who wished to participate in the focus group were welcome. Participants signed a consent form, which included their consent to be recorded. To limit the number of people in the focus group discussions and allow for authentic conversations between a smaller number of people, the research team split the participants into two groups. Both graduates and non-graduates of the Garden State Leaders Program participated in the focus group. The focus group included both a 45-minute group discussion and a 45-minute participatory action research (PAR) based session. The purpose of the PAR-based session was to empower participants to think about ways to improve the program and engage them in the data analysis process. However, unlike typical PAR projects, their participation in the research process ended after the focus group session concluded.

Following data collection, the research team used an online transcription software (Trint) to transcribe the data. Then, the research team performed a content analysis of the responses using an open coding process. This allowed the research team to identify concepts and categories within the data. Then, the research team used an axial coding process to combine concepts into broader themes at the group level. The focus group procedures and instrument are included in Appendix A. The data from the PAR session is listed in Appendix B.

CHAPTER 4: APPLICATION ANALYSIS FINDINGS

The GSL program requires interested individuals to complete a short application consisting of questions related to their experiences with poverty. Topics range from experiences with homelessness to access to transportation, childcare, and food. Facilitators use applicant responses to assess if applicants qualify for the program. The research team began analyzing this data by running descriptive statistics. Then, the research team analyzed the data to determine if there was a difference between those who did and did not graduate. This type of bivariate analysis can reveal if a certain experience was associated with an inability to complete the program. In order to examine if there was a significant difference between these groups, the research team utilized a Pearson's Chi-Square Test for Independence.[2,3]

It is important to note that the 2015 applications only ask if applicants have experienced homelessness or housing instability. Therefore, this analysis is based on responses to the 2016-2019 program years except for that question. The 2019 application is included in Appendix C. The 2016-2019 sample sizes for each category is listed in Table 3 below[4].

Table 3: **Graduate Sample Sizes for Chi-squared Analysis**

	All Participants	**Graduates**	**Non-Graduates**
n=	58	44	14

[2] Differences were significant if the p value was less than or equal to 0.05.

[3] The research team also tested for differences between participants and those who did not participate. A full table of results is included in Appendix D.

[4] Due to technical challenges in transferring information, the research team used data that indicated 6 Leaders graduated in 2018, not 8 as listed initially.

Number of Barriers

The 2016-2019 applications ask 18 questions to capture applicants' experiences related to economic instability. The research team first compared the number of total experiences between the groups, and then examined these questions individually. As detailed in Figure 5, on average, graduates experienced 11.59 of the 18 items (64.4%) and non-graduates experienced 12.86 of the 18 items (71.4%). While those who did not graduate report a slightly greater number of experiences than those who did graduate, that difference is neither large nor significant. Next we present analyses of each experience individually, revealing that there are significant differences for specific experiences.

Figure 5: **Percentages of Experiences for Graduates and Non-Graduates**

Average Overall Experiences (2016-2019)
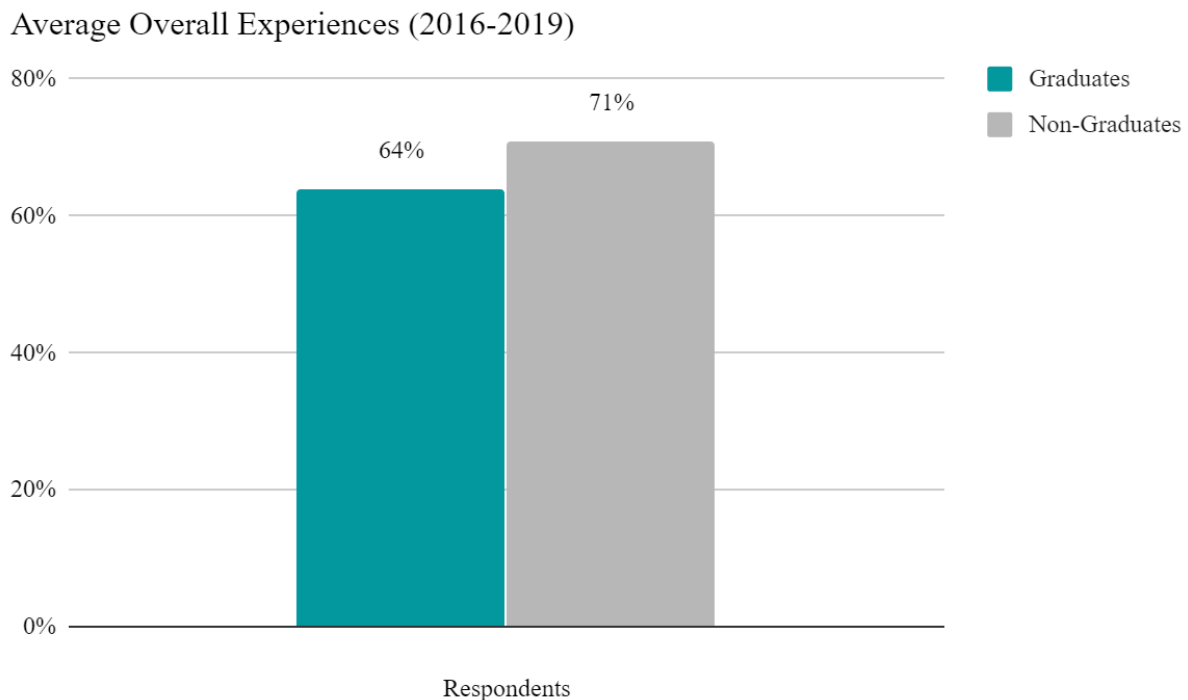
Experiencing Housing Insecurity and Utility Shut-Off

Applications from each year include questions about homelessness and housing insecurity. The 2015 application asks, "Have you personally experienced homelessness and/or housing instability in your own life?" The 2016-2019 application asks two questions related to housing insecurity, "Have you ever been homeless?" and "Have you ever had to stay with friends or family because you could not find an affordable place to live?" The research team combined these two questions to create a housing insecurity variable. Together, the one 2015 question and the two 2016-2019 questions created a measure for housing instability of participants from 2015-2019. There was not a large nor significant difference between the percentage of graduates and non-graduates that experienced housing instability (92.8% vs 88.9%). Figure 6 shows the differences between these groups.

Figure 6: **Percentages of Experiences for Graduates and Non-Graduates who Experienced Housing Instability**
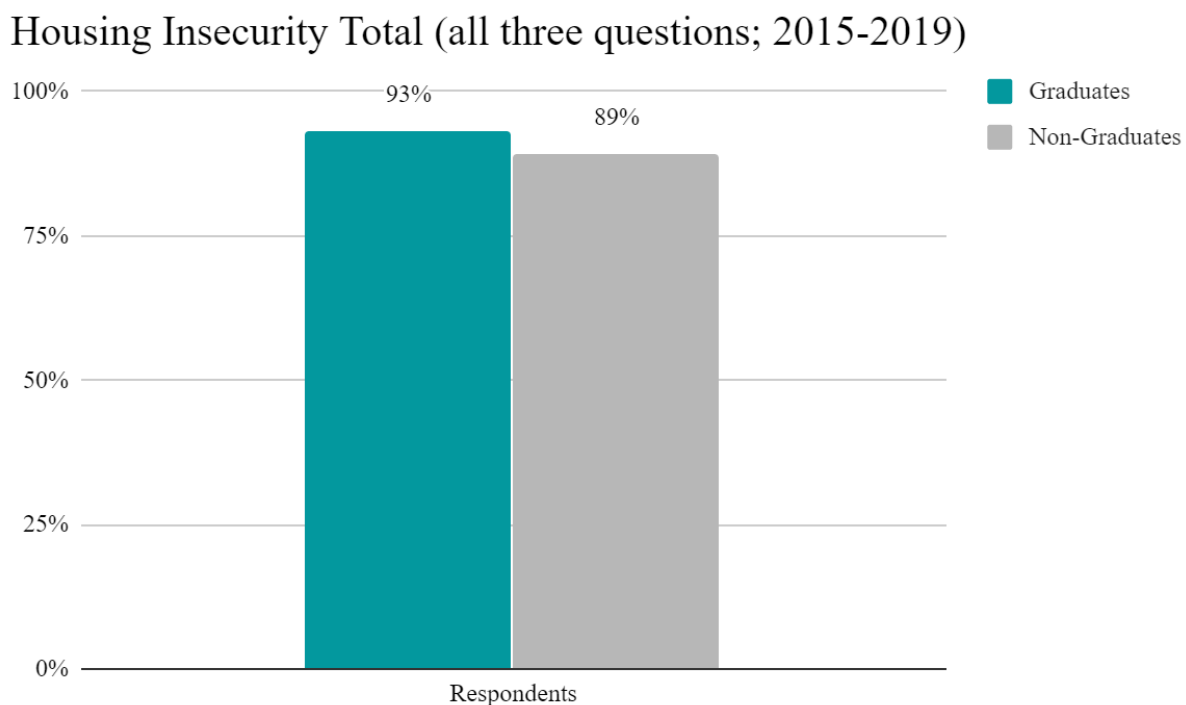
The 2016-2019 application also asks, "Have you ever had your utilities shut off?" Figure 7 shows these differences. There was a significant difference between graduates and non-graduates who reported experiencing their utilities being shut off. 56.8% of graduates versus 71.4% of those who did not graduate reported this experience, a 15-percentage point difference.[5] This suggests that those who cannot afford to pay for their utilities may face extra challenges to completing the program.

Figure 7: **Percentages of Graduates and Non-Graduates Who Have Had Their Utilities Shut Off**

Percentage of respondents who have had their utilities shut off
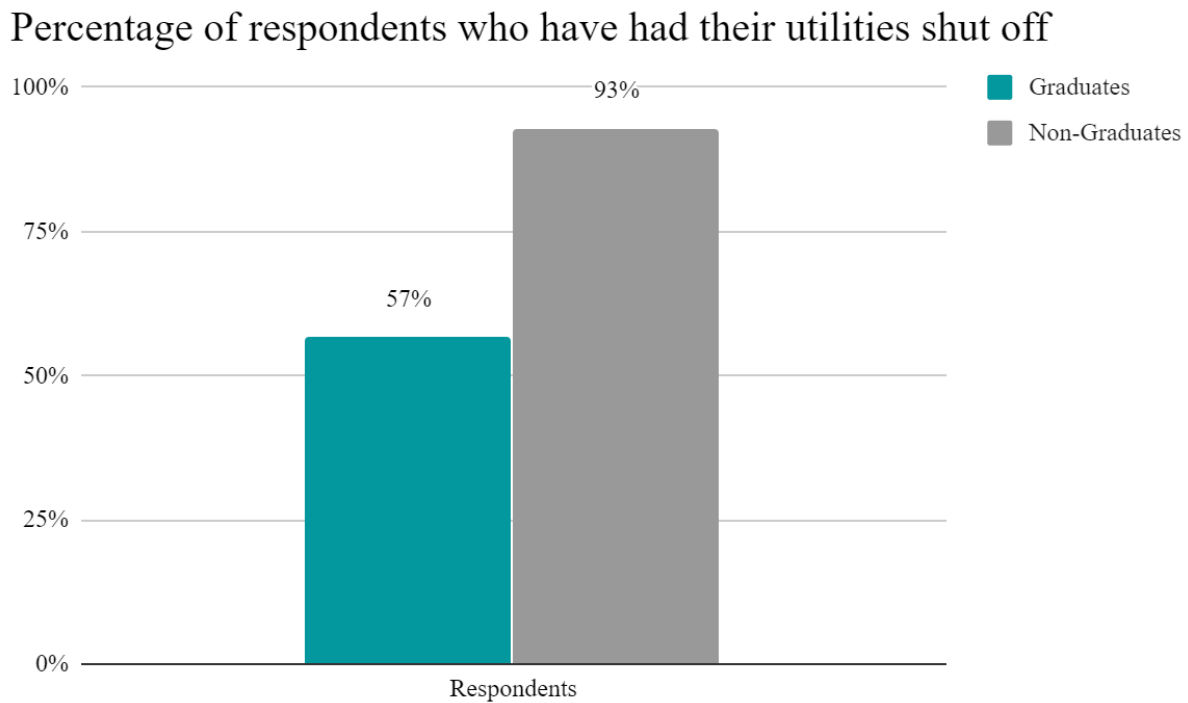
Experiences with Economic Hardship

The application asks three questions that the research team categorizes as economic hardship. The first question was "Have you ever experienced poverty or economic hardship in your life?" 100% of both graduates and non-graduates reported experiencing economic hardship.

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5 The difference is significant, *p=-0.023*

Like housing instability, this is likely because experiencing economic hardship is a criterion for participating in the program. The second question related to economic hardship is "Have you ever had a full-time job but still struggled to make ends meet?" The difference between percentages of graduates and non-graduates (95.5% vs 100%) with that experience was neither large nor significant. The third question, "Have you ever had to work more than one job to meet your family's basic needs?" however, did yield significant differences. 75% of graduates reported this experience, compared to 100% of non-graduates.[6] Therefore, participants may view working multiple jobs as a barrier to completing the program. Figure 8 demonstrates the differences between these groups.

Figure 8: **Percentages of Graduates and Non-Graduates Who Have Experiences with Economic Hardship**

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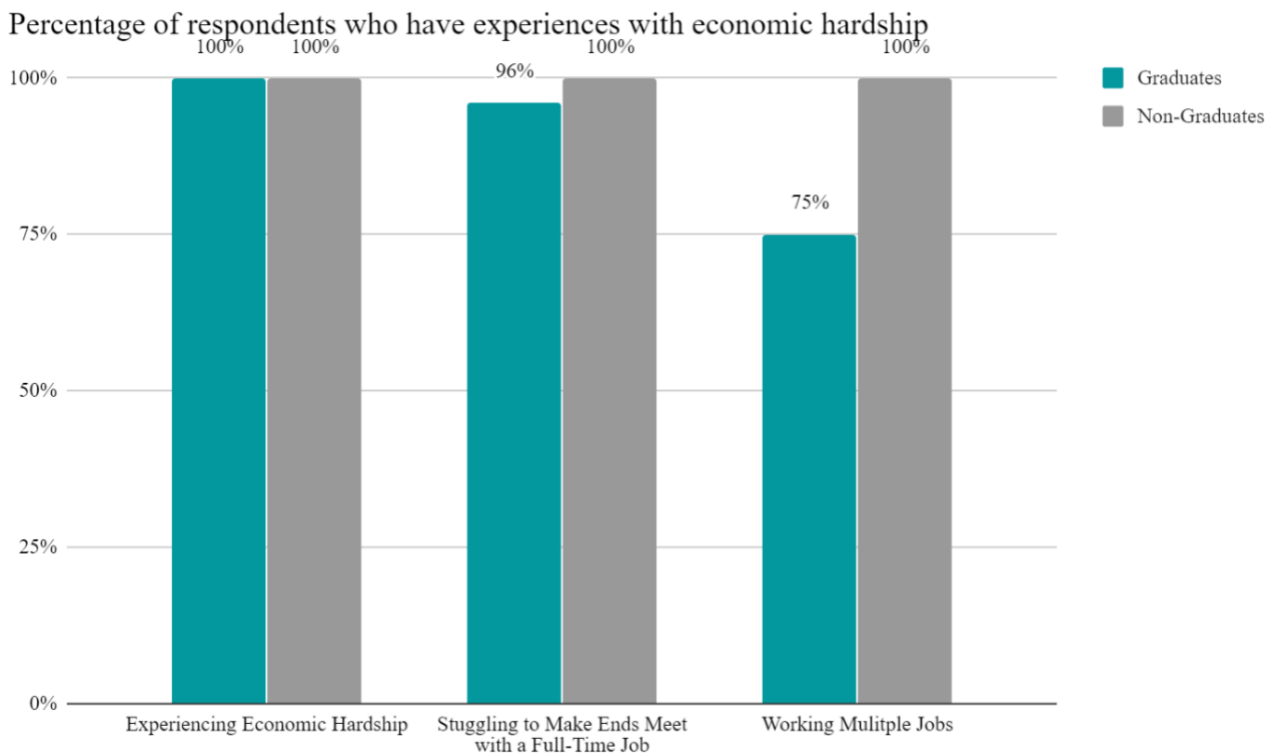
[6] The difference is significant, *p*=0.045.

Experiences with the Social Safety Net

The application includes four questions about applicants' experiences with various aspects of the social safety net. Figure 9 demonstrates the differences for the first two questions, "Have you ever received welfare (general assistance, AFDC, or TANF?)[7]" and, "Have you ever been denied welfare (general assistance, AFDC, or TANF?)." There were significant differences among those that graduated and those who did not graduate from the program. While 77.3% of graduates received welfare, only 64.3% of non-graduates did.[8] Those who did not graduate outnumbered graduates for experiencing denial of welfare benefits by over 15 percentage points (64.3% vs 47.7%).[9] This may suggest that receiving welfare benefits is a useful support for completing the program, however, the research team is not sure if participants were receiving welfare benefits during the time of the program.

Figure 9: **Percentages of Graduates and Non-Graduates Who Have Received or Been Denied Welfare**

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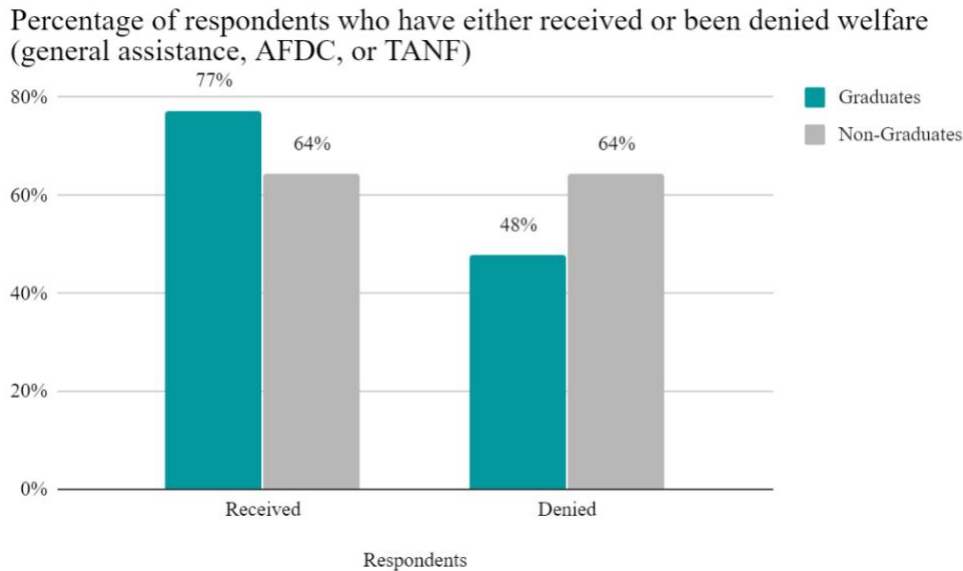
[7] AFDC-Aid to Families with Dependent Children; TANF- Temporary Aid to Needy Families

[8] The difference is significant, *p*<0.001

[9] The difference is significant, *p*<0.001

Figure 10 demonstrates the differences for the second set of questions, "Have you received SNAP (foods stamps), WIC, Medicaid, or SSI[10]" and, "Have you ever been denied SNAP (foods stamps), WIC, Medicaid, or SSI." 86.4% of graduates reported receiving those supports, compared to 71.4% of non-graduates. There was a smaller percentage difference of being denied SNAP, WIC, Medicaid or SSI between those who did not graduate and those who did graduate (50% vs 45.4%). These patterns suggest, again, that access to government support is a useful aid to completing the program.

***Figure 10*: Percentages of Graduates and Non-Graduates Who Have Received or Been Denied Social Safety Net Benefits**

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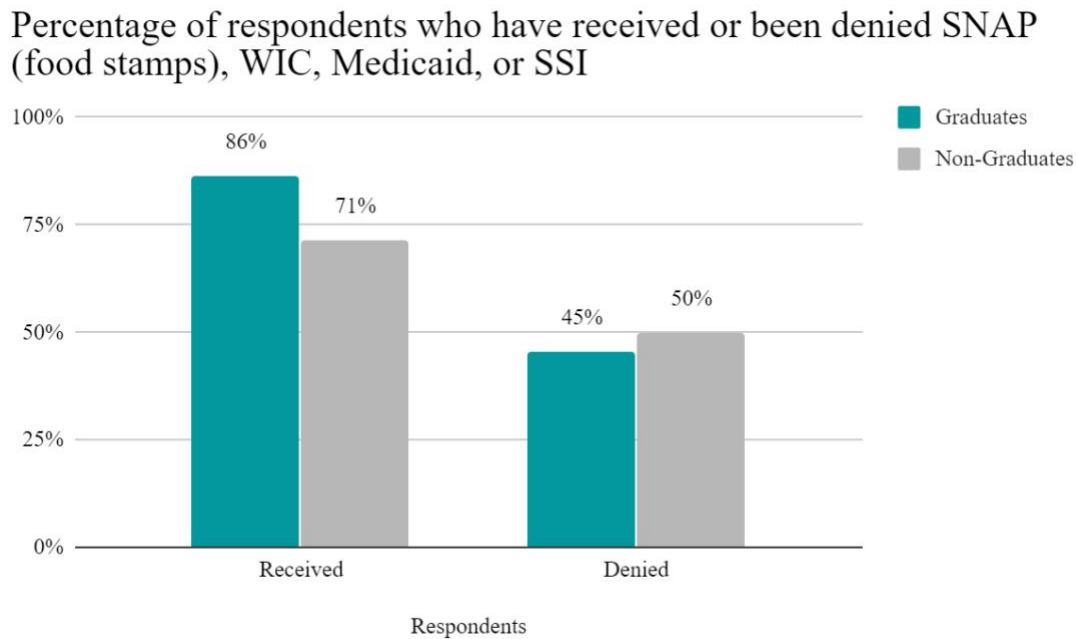
[10] SNAP-Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; WIC- Women, Infants, and Children SNAP program; SSI-Supplemental Security Income

Access to Basic Needs and Supports

The questionnaire also asks questions about applicants' ability to obtain medical treatment, food, transportation, and childcare. The differences between groups is displayed in Figure 11. The question, "Have you or anyone in your family ever lived with a medical condition for which you or they were unable to afford necessary medicines or treatment?" yielded insignificant differences for graduates and non-graduates (50% vs 42.9%). This held true for graduates and non-graduates when asked the question "Have you ever gone to a food pantry to feed yourself or your family?" (79.5% vs 85.7%). However, when asked "Have you or any member of your family ever gone without meals because there wasn't enough money for food?" there was a large difference. Non-graduates experienced going without a meal due to costs at a rate of 71.4%, nearly 15 percentage points higher than graduates (56.8%). Those who do not graduate seem to have less access to food.

The questionnaire also asks, "Have you ever been unable to afford childcare?" There were large reported differences among groups. While 43.2% of graduates reported not being able to afford childcare, 78.6% of those who did not graduate cited this experience, a difference of 35 percentage points. This is the largest difference of any experience and suggests that not having childcare could prevent applicants from completing the program. The question, "Have you ever had to leave school or training because you couldn't afford to go anymore?" also yielded differences between graduates and non-graduates. 50% of graduates reported not affording school or training as compared to 61.4% of those who did not

Percentage of respondents who don't have access to basic needs and supports

Access to Transportation

The application also asks questions about respondents' access to transportation. The question "Have you ever missed school or doctor's appointments because you could not find affordable transportation?" yielded no difference between graduates and non-graduates. There was also a minor difference between graduates and non-graduates (45.5% vs 50%) who answered yes to, "Have you ever been unable to go to the grocery store because you could not find affordable transportation?" Figure 12 shows the percentages of experiences for both groups.

Figure 12: **Percentages of Graduates and Non-Graduates Without Access to Transportation**

Percentage of respondents who have missed a school or doctor's appointment because they could not find affordable transportation
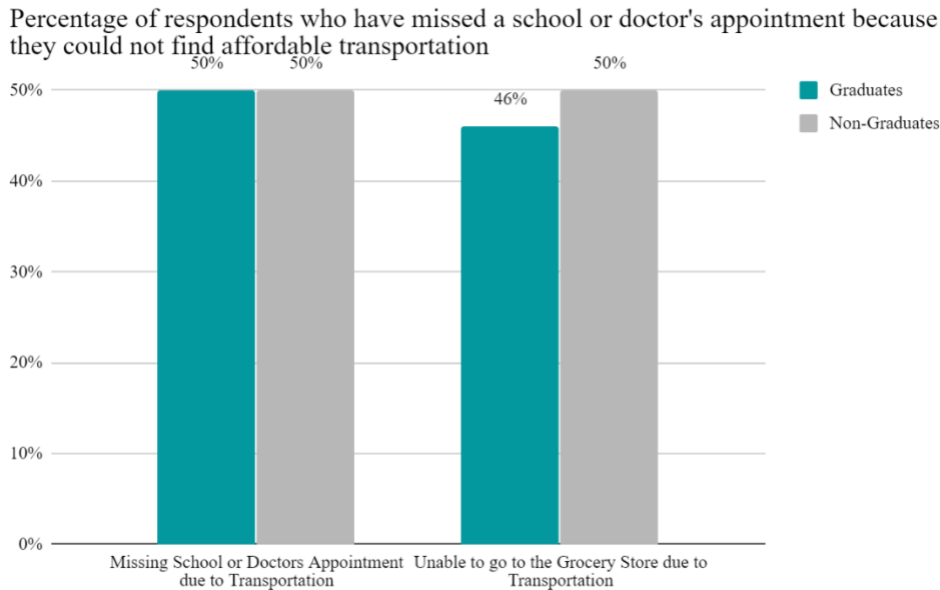
Experiences with an Abusive Relationship

Finally, the application contains one question about experiences with abusive relationships. Specifically, applicants are asked "Have you ever stayed in an abusive relationship because of a lack of economic options?" Graduates reported this experience at a rate of 47.7% as compared to 57.1% of those who did not graduate. This may suggest that experiences of abuse may present barriers to completing the program. Figure 13 displays the percentages of graduates and non-graduates with this experience.

Figure 13: Percentages of Graduates and Non-Graduates who Have Stayed in an Abusive Relationship Because of a Lack of Financial Options
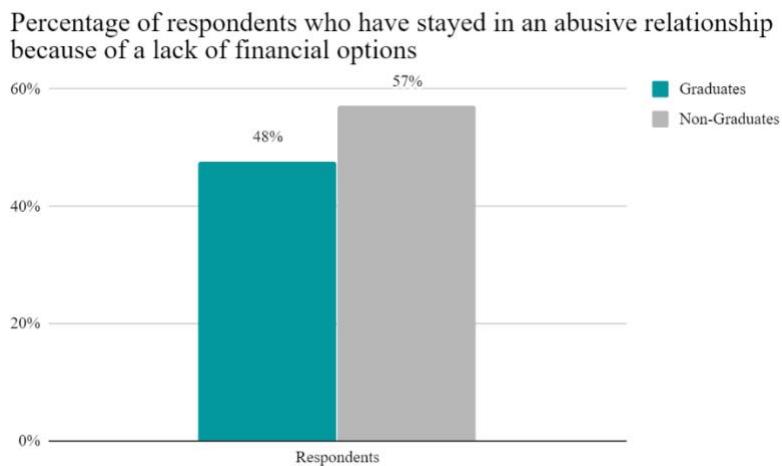
General Trends

This analysis reveals several trends among different types of experiences. There were little differences between percentage of graduates and non-graduates who experience housing instability and no difference between groups who experienced economic hardship generally; this is likely because these are criteria for joining the program so most participants reported these experiences. Other experiences with small differences in percentages include being denied some government supports, using a food pantry, going without medical treatment because they could not afford it, and not having access to transportation.

In many cases, those who did not graduate experienced certain challenges at much higher rates than those who did graduate. This included having their utilities shut off, having multiple jobs, having been denied welfare benefits, going without meals, not having access to child care, and staying in an abusive relationship due to financial reasons. Further, there were large differences between percentages of graduates and non-graduates who received and were denied welfare benefits, with more graduates receiving welfare and more non-graduates having been denied welfare. Implications of these trends are further discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5: FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS FINDINGS

The research team facilitated a focus group session to examine participant experiences with the program and to complement the findings from the application analysis. Topics covered six areas: learning about GSL, the application process, reasons for joining the program, impacts of the program, barriers to completing the program, and participant recommendations for GSL. This chapter explains the themes that the research team uncovered and that focus group participants identified in their PAR session.

Learning about GSL

The research team asked participants how they heard about GSL. Several participants explained that they knew people who recently graduated from the program and encouraged them to apply. Other participants were recruited from emails or notifications from the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey. A number of participants noted that recruiting efforts stemmed from GSL's various connections with other organizations. Table 4 summarizes how participants learned of GSL.

Table 4: **Introduction to the Garden State Leaders Program**

Introduction to the Garden State Leaders Program	
Other Organizations	• Supportive housing through Rutgers University (UPHC) • New Jersey Alliance for the Homeless • Various resource centers • Social media sites/other electronic advertisements, emails
Alumni	• Family members • Peers

Application Process

The research team asked participants to describe their experience with the application process. Participants noted that the facilitators of the program were accommodating and most stated that they did not experience any issues with the application process. One participant disagreed with the group and described feeling scrutinized because of the number and depth of the questions asked. It was not clear to him the criteria for entering the program. The research team identified two themes as summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5: **Description of the Application Process**

Description of the Application Process	
Easy but varying	• Facilitators were accommodating and spoke with applicants on the phone instead of relying on the application alone • Online application process had minimal questions • Facilitators were empathetic about participants' experiences • The questions were wide-ranging and numerous

Reasons for Joining the Program

When asked about their reasons for joining the program, most participants mentioned the potential benefits of becoming a trained advocate. Some wanted to increase their knowledge about homelessness and poverty, while others wanted to advocate specifically for the mental health needs of homeless and poor people. Table 6 below summarizes participants' reasons for joining GSL.

Table 6: Reasons for Joining the Garden State Leaders Program

Reasons for Joining the Garden State Leaders Program	
Learning about Advocacy & Resources	• Looking for a voice • Networking opportunities • Increasing knowledge base for advocacy purposes • Utilizing the information to start other advocacy programs
Mental Health	• Represent those with mental health challenges

Learning About Advocacy and Resources

Participants expressed that they joined the program to learn about advocacy. One participant spoke of the benefits of learning about resources when stating, "The key is to know what's going on out there, to know what resources there are, what grants there are, APN is a great, great area for resources." Participants wanted to strengthen their advocacy skills despite personal struggles. One participant explained "I joined the GSL program. Number one was to increase my knowledge, because I've been an advocate for many years. I also am still legally homeless. But I've always been out there impacting lives even while they're going through my trials and tribulations." Several participants emphasized the potential benefits of increasing their knowledge about advocacy.

Mental Health

Some participants noted that they joined the program to advocate for the mental health needs of the homeless. One participant disclosed:

It's important to give a voice to the voiceless cause there's not many people that have lived experiences, sharing the experience, and advocating on behalf of other people. So I like to put a face to someone living with lived experience with mental illness and to show people

that you can be successful. You can do well and help the people that are struggling right now and let them know that there are other resources out there.

Participants wanted to advocate for themselves and those who have faced similar mental health struggles.

Impacts of the Program

Participants revealed several significant impacts of the program which are divided into four categories: professional development, personal development, relationships with peers, and relationships with facilitators. Table 7 below summarizes those aspects of GSL that participants found impactful.

Table 7: **Impacts of the Garden State Leaders Program**

Impacts of the GSL Program	
Professional Development	• Expanding knowledge of the political system and legislative process • Educating participants on how to engage with policymakers • Building public speaking skills for advocacy
Personal Development	• Cultivating and leveraging relationships to improve personal welfare and outcomes • Increasing sense of empowerment • Broadening personal knowledge
Relationships with Peers	• Listening to others' stories fostered community • Cultivating relationships helped participants discover their own voice
Relationships with Facilitators	• Continuous communication with facilitators in-and-out of the program • Felt connected due to shared experiences

Professional Development

Participants reflected on the impact that the GSL program had on their professional development. For many, understanding how the state legislature works greatly improved their advocacy skills. One participant declared, "I have a much better understanding of the legislative process and now I can push for things that are important to me with more confidence."

The participants also appreciated the dynamic and influential presenters. The opportunity to learn about the legislative process from subject matter experts was important and a factor in their completion of the program. Shaking hands with politicians and learning the legislative process has even encouraged some to consider a future as a professional advocate after completing the program. The networking opportunities gave participants direct advocacy experience. Facilitators integrated experiences such as trips to the New Jersey state house and Washington D.C. to advocate on the effects of homelessness and poverty into the curriculum for participants.

Participants also learned how to maximize their time with policymakers to advocate for anti-poverty legislation. When responding to what made the program effective, one participant replied, "I learned to listen for what my colleagues were NOT saying." Understanding the value in engaging policy makers in conversation, the program helped participants strengthen their listening skills.

Lastly, participants highlighted how learning public speaking skills contributed to their efficacy as advocates. Participants identified learning how to tell their story as one of their most valued skills from completing the program. The program worked to ensure participants could do so in a concise manner while incorporating data. Participants discussed how the supportive environment contributed to their growth and effectiveness as advocates. One participant explained:

> Before we presented, we had a little breakout group where we presented to our table of colleagues and got feedback. You know the feedback that I got was really excellent. I had almost no data and my colleagues said, you know, you should have some data. So I built that into what I had. With that information I was able to build my presentation. That's one of the things that politicians said. "Oh, I love the data."

The skills gained through professional development were a catalyst for increased relations among peers. This process enabled participants to collectively build and share their stories with one another.

Personal Development

The support offered through the GSL program went beyond professional development and expanded to personal development. As advocates in the GSL program, participants encountered several people and organizations with considerable influence and expertise. One participant described their experience attending an advocacy training and leaving with connections to housing that personally benefited him. He explained:

> The third speaker of the five meetings brought a pastor that was a specialist on housing and buying houses. He introduced us to over 40 connections, including 5401-ck construction loans, where you can fund a house that needs construction and the government will back a loan so you can buy a house.

In this case, not only did the participant find a valuable resource, but he fostered a connection. Leveraging relationships with subject matter experts improved personal welfare and outcomes for the participants. Networking also increased their awareness of what resources are available.

Additionally, participants felt the program helped them empower themselves to gain the confidence to speak out about their experience with homelessness. One participant shared:

They really do just an awesome job of empowering people. You know, after you experience

homelessness and you feel like such a victim, you feel like you've done so much and you

just couldn't make it right. They give you a voice and they give you a paradigm on how to

voice that voice.

GSL helped participants who felt victimized from homelessness advocate for themselves. GSL

helped participants find their voice and trained them to understand the value in their voices.

Relationship with Peers

Peer-to-peer relationships created a sense of solidarity, and participants noted it was a way

to affect change on a large scale. Participants stated that they might not necessarily feel close with

all the participants, but they remember and appreciate each other's stories. One participant

recalled:

I can't remember names, but I remember the story because that story I will take back and

tell somebody else. The people that I related to were a couple of social workers and another

lady that worked in social services. Now, I related more to them, but they didn't say much

during class. In the last session when we were in Trenton, they spoke up for the first time,

and I was like yes! You know, it's like now they really do think the way I'm thinking.

Participants' unique stories gave inspiration and purpose to push forward and advocate for others

with similar experiences.

Connections with Facilitators

Finally, connections with facilitators were identified as a critical impact of the program.

Many participants noted that facilitators made a significant impact on their personal and

professional lives. The participants appreciated the personal connections and relationships they

shared with the program facilitators, as well as the opportunities they offered. For example,

participants described how facilitators were invested in the success of the participants beyond the confines of the classroom. One participant shared, "I know specifically that there's a couple of people in our group that they spend time with outside of class, you know, in helping them." Another participant disclosed that they valued that facilitators also experienced poverty, saying, "Well, for me, I like that one of them has a lived experience with poverty and their openness and willingness to share where they came from, what they're doing now and how they're advocating and how they are like a mentor to look up to." Additionally, several participants appreciated facilitators giving information on changes within the government and how to navigate the support networks on government websites, which some participants felt was crucial to them. This sense of commitment and duty from facilitators greatly impacted participant success.

Barriers to Completing the Program

In sharing their experiences and challenges, participants identified barriers to completing the program, specifically work conflicts, transportation, and lack of supportive services. Table 8 summarized the barriers participants described as hindering themselves and their peers.

Table 8: Barriers to Completing the Program

Barriers to Completing the Program	
Work Conflicts	• Inconsistency in scheduling sessions (i.e. changing session dates or times without enough notice)
Transportation	• Lack of access • Reimbursed after sessions rather than paid for upfront
Lack of Supportive Services	• Unable to find affordable housing • Did not discuss acute challenges as a group

Work Conflicts

Many participants revealed they had issues with program sessions conflicting with their work schedules. Participants also noted inconsistency in the scheduling of program sessions. With session dates and locations often changing, they agreed that attempting to schedule work around program sessions was difficult. One participant expressed this concern by saying, "Conflict with work…I already had set in stone with my employer that I was taking a specific day off. I couldn't go back and say, now I mean this day, and I couldn't do that. So I guess I would say just be consistent with the days."

Transportation

Many participants told stories of other Leaders who had difficulty in affording or accessing transportation to attend program sessions. One participant revealed:

I know another lady, also another member of our cohort. You know, it's a hardship for her to lay out money for training in advance. So, if she knew somebody needed that money, they would get it the day they came to the meeting, the workshop. But what if they needed the money to get to the workshop?

While participants appreciated that the program paid for their transportation, it was not always enough to ensure they could travel to sessions.

Lack of Supportive Services

Participants noted that some Leaders could not complete the program because they lacked supportive services to address pressing personal issues. One participant shared the story of a friend who did not complete the program because she was currently homeless. She disclosed:

One of them was experiencing problems, acute problems in their housing situation and the group really didn't have anything to offer her, right...but I felt like they could have

offered like, like we had brainstormed then, you know, we could come up with some sort

of solution for her.

This participant felt that because existing personal challenges were never openly discussed as a

group, the program missed a valuable opportunity to address Leaders' problems. Unable to access

resources to provide supports ultimately prevents some participants from graduating.

Participant Recommendations

Participants identified ways the facilitators could improve the program to reduce barriers

to participation and learning. These include time allocation, group size, and diversity. Participants'

suggestions are listed in Table 9 below.

Table 9: **Participants' Suggestions for Program Improvements**

Participants' Suggestions for Program Improvements	
Improve time allocation	• Include more time to ask questions of presenters • Start sessions promptly • Shorten sessions and include less information per session
Decrease group size	• Create smaller cohorts • Include more one-on-one time with facilitators and other participants
Expand diversity	• Provide more resources (i.e. translators) for non-English speaking participants • Improve outreach efforts to be inclusive towards the disabled community

Improve Time Allocation

When discussing improvements, participants were concerned with how facilitators

allocated session time. They wanted more time to ask questions of each other and of session

presenters. One participant said, "Even in a small group, there wasn't always enough time to ask

the questions that we were curious about." Participants stated that the sessions contained too much

information to process in one day, and often started later than scheduled, and that the program should address this.

Decrease Group Size

Participants also felt that decreasing group size would improve the program. A participant suggested, "But I think if there's any criticism I have of the classes that you hold it down to like 10 people or something at the most, you know, because 20 was an awful lot of people, it really was." Generally, participants said 20 participants in one group was too large and that smaller groups facilitated more connections, support, and intimate dialogue.

In addition to the in-person sessions, one participant specifically expressed concern with large-group conference calls the program sometimes hosts, stating that, "You couldn't get people that were talking. You couldn't hear the question being asked." The majority of other participants, though, felt that smaller, supplemental conference calls would be beneficial if they took place between the larger, in-person sessions.

One-on-one sessions, whether through the phone or in person, allow everyone to have their questions answered and receive individualized support. One participant summed up the group's consensus, stating, "Now, my experience was, you know, when there were too many people, it didn't work. But your situation was excellent where it was one-on-one." The participants' desire for smaller group sizes would improve communication and creates more opportunities to connect with one another.

Expand Group Diversity

Participants recommended that the program prioritize diversity to help the program grow. One participant pointed out, "New Jersey has a lot of speakers of other languages, especially a lot of Spanish speakers. So that combination can be made, but it's something to think about."

Participants noted that translators would be a great resource for non-English speakers, or those with English as a second language. Participants also identified that there are large numbers of people experiencing varying levels of homelessness, who have disabilities, and the program should make accommodations for them to participate. Participants emphasized greater need for awareness about the GSL program among individuals with lived experiences of homelessness and poverty, specifically non-English speakers or those with disabilities.

Overall, participant suggestions regarding improvement: time, group size, and diversity, were related more to program logistics than content or impact. Participants explained that suggestions were identified to improve an already impactful program. Everyone agreed that program expansion is an important goal, particularly if growth could incorporate considerations regarding session logistics and diversity.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations

This research project had several limitations, many related to it being embedded into the parameters of a semester-long course. First, the research team would have liked to host more focus groups with participants to capture a wider breadth of experiences, however, this was not possible due to the time limit. More time would have also allowed the research team to follow traditional PAR methods more closely, such as presenting findings to focus group participants to ensure that their thoughts were accurately presented. Therefore, the research team cannot generalize the experiences and perspectives of participants as those of all Garden State Leaders. Future evaluations of the program should consider increasing the numbers of focus groups conducted to ensure that they capture diverse experiences.

A second limitation is that the research team created this project without funding for incentives. While the Garden State Leaders Program generously provided food and transportation to participants during the focus group sessions, the research team would have liked to provide between $15 and $30 to each focus group participant in compensation for their time and to increase the number of participants.

Third, the focus group participants were not representative of all participants in GSL. The research team found that it was easier to contact those who completed the program for the focus groups than those who did not graduate. Those who completed the program may have been more likely to participate in the research project. Therefore, focus group findings may more accurately capture the benefits of the program rather than the barriers. Additionally, most participants in the focus group graduated from the 2019 cohort, which was larger in size and had more unforeseen

scheduling challenges than previous cohorts. Some of the barriers and suggested improvements may not be generalizable to other Leaders' experiences from earlier years.

Fourth, the research team used Leaders' self-reported applications to assess their life experiences. Applicants may have defined, for example, "homelessness" or having difficulty "making ends meet" differently. Therefore, the results may lack consistency.

Implications of Results and Survey Development

Despite the limitations to the project, the research team is confident in the findings' ability to inform the development of a survey for the facilitators to use to continuously evaluate the program. The findings from the literature review, application analysis, and focus group were incorporated into the question design and answer options. Based on feedback from the facilitators, the research team included four sections in the survey: barriers and supports, personal and professional development, program evaluation, and demographics. GSL facilitators may choose to add several of these questions to the program application, which would allow for a pre/post examination of program impact. The final version of this survey is included in Appendix E.

Barriers and Supports

The research team developed two survey questions for participants to report their experiences so facilitators could expand current helpful supports or add additional supports to address barriers. Large differences between graduates and non-graduates who experienced challenges suggest that additional supports are necessary to aid participants in completing the program. Focus group participants verified this finding, suggesting that some participants do not complete the program when they cannot access supportive services like housing.

The small variation between graduates and non-graduates who experienced certain challenges suggest that the supports the program already provides are working. There were little to no differences in application responses between these groups regarding difficulty accessing transportation. This may indicate that because of the reimbursement for transportation costs, this challenge is not a significant barrier to completing the program.

Personal and Professional Development

Participants indicated that a significant reason for joining the program was to gain connections and learn new skills. They indicated that impacts of the program included making friendships, learning about New Jersey politics, and developing public speaking skills, among others. The survey asks a question measuring participants' confidence in various aspects of their personal and professional life mentioned in the focus group before and after the program, in order to better capture this growth. Facilitators can also focus on developing the program to address the areas in which participants experience less growth.

Program Evaluation

In the focus group sessions, participants offered valuable insights on how to improve the program. The survey offers them the opportunity to continuously voice their evaluation of the program with three questions, two open-ended questions and one with a checklist of what aspects they found most valuable.

Demographics

The research team added several demographic questions, so the Garden State Leaders facilitators can note differences in experiences by race, gender, and income levels. Trends of poverty and homelessness in New Jersey and nationally indicate that they disproportionately affect

women and people of color. Further, increasing diversity, specifically of English as a second language speakers and those with disabilities, was an expressed concern of participants. Including these questions allow facilitators to assess if their current outreach strategy is attracting a cohort representative of those with experiences of economic insecurity.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to evaluate the efficacy of the Garden State Leaders Program by identifying perceived program benefits, barriers to program completion, and potential program improvements. The program evaluation used a strong, mixed-methods approach. The application analysis discovered several barriers to program completion that illustrated an economic divide between graduates and non-graduates. Program graduates had more resources in some aspects compared to non-graduates. From there, the research team facilitated focus groups to speak directly with Garden State Leaders and learn more about their experience with the program. Participants discussed the impact of professional development, personal development, and relationships with peers and facilitators. They also acknowledged the barriers that existed in work conflicts, and lack of access to transportation and supportive services. These two barriers prevented some Leaders from attending required training sessions.

Overall, the participating Leaders offered suggestions that focused on more efficient time allocation for group sessions, smaller groups, and improved outreach to those that represent the diversity of New Jersey. In conjunction with the Leaders' suggestions, the research team identified recommendations that fall under three categories: applying and recruiting, completing the program, and graduating leaders and evaluating the program. These recommendations focus on how GSL can better support their Leaders before, during, and after they participate in the program.

Applying and Recruiting

Through examining the application and conducting a focus group, the research team found that the application may not communicate important information potential Leaders need prior to starting the program. In addition, Leaders highlighted a lack of focus on diversity in recruitment efforts. In order to rectify these concerns, we recommend that GSL:

- Improves the application process to include demographic questions, and clear criteria for participating
- Diversifies cohorts by advertising the program to more organizations and hiring a multilingual staff member or translator

Completing the Program

Data from the application analysis and focus group revealed that Leaders face barriers that may prevent them from completing the program. Once enrolled in the program, Leaders expressed that session logistics, including cohort size and time allocation, could be improved. In addition, some Leaders felt as though they did not receive enough supportive services, which made it more difficult to complete the program. To mitigate this, we recommend that GSL:

- Expands supportive services to Leaders who may need them to complete the program
  - Offer child care to parents at program sessions
  - Provide funds for transportation to the sessions in advance
  - Host an optional program session to discuss resources that Leaders may need
  - Develop a resource page with contact information for agencies that offer services
- Improves session logistics to maximize Leaders' time in the program

- Reduce the size of cohorts or include more small-group and one-on-one sessions to allow more time for bonding, such as during lunch

- Shorten session times to keep Leaders engaged and add more time for questions and networking with presenters

- Consider weekend or evening sessions to accommodate work schedules

Graduating Leaders and Evaluating the Program

The Garden State Leaders program exposes participants to a myriad of advocacy, professional, and personal development opportunities. To both prepare participants for life after the program and to ensure that the program can continuously improve, we recommend that GSL:

- Helps Leaders identify next steps after graduation

  - Foster connections to schooling, job training, and apprenticeship opportunities

- Implements the end-of-program survey to assess and improve Leaders' experiences in the program

Through our application analysis, focus groups, and recommendations we have concluded that the Garden State Leaders program has effectively trained participants on how to find their voice to advocate for anti-poverty and anti-homelessness legislation. Despite some barriers that Leaders face in completing the program, focus group participants report an overall positive experience with the program. This is largely due to the program's useful content, strong relationships with peers, and the dedication of facilitators to provide Leaders with the skills to support themselves and others. The research team believes that, if implemented, the recommendations will expand GSL's capacity to train and impact the lives of even more advocates, amplifying the voices of those who have so much to share.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES

Adapted from "Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews" by Richard A. Kreuger.

Before Beginning the Focus Group:

Participants in the focus group are those in attendance of the Garden State Leaders' program quarterly meetings. We expect 15-30 participants. Researchers will divide the participants into two groups and then initiate the focus group procedures. In total, the focus group procedures in its entirety will take two hours.

Introduction: [10 minutes]

Hi everyone. We are graduate students at the Rutgers University Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy conducting research for a project that will help us complete our degree. The research project is evaluating experiences with the Garden State Leaders program. Your insights will help the Garden State Leaders program improve and expand their program. It will also help create a survey that future leaders will take to continue evaluating the program. You were selected to participate in this focus group given your in-depth experience with the program and the valuable knowledge you have to share. Thank you so much for your help!

Guidelines:

Please remember that participation in this focus group is completely voluntary and you can stop participating at any time. We do not believe there are any risks to participating in this focus group. Benefits include helping improve a program that will benefit future participants.

I am now going to pass out consent forms. Please review it and sign if you are comfortable giving consent to participate in this focus group. Providing consent also includes being audio recorded. The recordings will *only* be used for the duration of this project and we will delete them once the project ends. Comments will be confidential and deidentified, which means that we won't attribute anything said to a specific person. [Pass out consent forms]

What questions do you have?

Can everyone pass me your signed consent forms when you are done? Do I have everyone's form?

We are going to begin recording now. [Begin recording]

I am so excited to hear everyone's opinion today. To make sure everyone feels comfortable sharing we should follow some guidelines.

First, there are no right or wrong answers. We may not always agree with each others' opinions and that is ok! But it *is* important that we respect them.

Second, please try your best to speak one at a time and as clearly as possible, that way we are sure to capture all of your perspectives.

Third, we encourage participation because your thoughts will be extremely helpful in improving the Garden State Leaders program, however, you do not have to answer every question. Feel free to say more or less. You can always choose to respond or not to respond. If at any point you find a question sparks some emotions and you'd like to leave the room, please feel free to do so. Self care is our top priority. Kate and Renee will be nearby if you would like to go find them.

Fourth, please refrain from using cell phones while this focus group is in session unless necessary.

Fifth, just as we will keep what is said in this room confidential, we ask that you do that too. Please refrain from repeating what is said outside of the focus group.

What questions do you have?

We are now going to start with the questions.

*denotes could skip if not enough time

Round 1: Question and answers (40 Minutes)

1. Let's go around the room and state your name and how you found out about the Garden State Leaders program.

For the next questions, anyone can answer first.

2. Tell us about why you decided to join the Garden State Leaders program?
    a. *Probe: Were there any other reasons?*
3. Describe what it was like to apply to the Garden State Leaders program?
    a. What were the challenges to applying to the program?
    b. *Probe: Are there any ways to improve the application process?*
4. What aspects of the GSL program have you found to be the most valuable? These can be big or small aspects.
    a. *Probe: How (or why) have these been valuable to you?*
    b. Does anyone have other thoughts?
5. What aspects of the GSL program have you found to be not as valuable?
    a. Does anyone have other thoughts?
6. Describe the relationships you have with the facilitators of the Garden State Leaders program?
    a. How have the facilitators impacted your experience in the Garden State Leaders program?
    b. Does anyone have another opinion?
7. How have your peers impacted your experience with the Garden State Leaders programs?
    a. Were there any particularly meaningful relationships?
    b. Does anyone have another opinion?
8. What program sessions did you find most valuable?
    a. *Probe: Why was that session most valuable?*
9. Is there any information you would have liked the sessions to cover? If so, what?
    a. *Probe: What other types of information would have been good to cover?*

b. *What other skills did you wish you learned?*
10. What types of barriers exist that may make it harder to complete the program?
    a. *Probe: What do you think could be a barrier?*
11. What are things that help participants complete the program?
12. Before we take a break, are there any other thoughts that you want to add that we haven't covered in this part of the session?

Round 2: Interactive Activity (40 Minutes)

Adapted from "Using human-centered design to strengthen collaborative, participatory research and program innovation" by Anna Mastri and Jon McCay.

We are now entering the second half of the session. This part involves working together as a group. We will ask a series of questions and ask you to group your answers in specific ways. Please write your answers on a post-it note, with one answer per post-it note.

I will be taking photos of the board after each question to use for analysis later.

13. How has the Garden State Leaders program impacted your life? These impacts can be big or small. You can write 2-3 reasons, just make sure that they are on separate post-it notes. [2 minutes]
    a. As a group please order these from most significant impact to least significant impact. The most significant impacts should be in the center, like a bullseye. The farther away from the bullseye, the less significant the group feels that impact is. Afterwards you will be asked to explain your reasoning. Tell us when you are done. [3 minutes]

Share out [4 minutes]

   i. Why did you order these this way?
   ii. Was this easy or hard to do?

Time for picture and erasing (facilitator: pass out notes and pens again)

14. How has the Garden State Leaders program made you a more effective advocate? You can write 2-3 reasons, just make sure that they are on separate post-it notes. [2 minutes]
    a. As a group, please organize these post-it notes into categories based on their similarities. Afterwards you will be asked to explain your reasoning. Tell us when you are done. [3 minutes]

Share out [4 minutes]

   i. Why did you order these this way?
   ii. Was this easy or hard to do?

Time for picture

      b. Now that you have your groups, how would you label each grouping? Please decide as a group. Afterwards you will be asked to explain your reasoning. Tell us when you are done. [3 minutes]

Share out [4 minutes]

        i. Why did you order these this way?
      ii. Was this easy or hard to do?

Time for picture and erasing

15. What can the Garden State Leaders Program do to improve the program? You can write 2-3 reasons, just make sure that they are on separate post-it notes. [2 minutes]
      a. As a group, please organize these post-it notes into categories based on their similarities. Afterwards you will be asked to explain your reasoning. Tell us when you are done. [3 minutes]
    Share out [4 minutes]

        i. Why did you order these this way?
      ii. Was this easy or hard to do?

Time for picture

      b. Now that you have your groups, how would you label each category? Please decide as a group. Afterwards you will be asked to explain your reasoning. Tell us when you are done. [3 minutes]

Share out [4 minutes]

        i. Why did you order these this way?
      ii. Was this easy or hard to do?

Time for picture and erasing

Round 3: Final Thoughts

16. For this last question, let's move back to the chairs to sit down. Are there any perspectives you did not share that you think are relevant to the focus group?

Thank You

Thank you so much for participating in our focus group. Like we said, your perspectives will really help improve the Garden States Leaders Program. We have learned so much from you today and we look forward to completing this project!

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH DATA

The following tables display the responses that participants wrote on their sticky notes during the participatory action research session. The research team typed participants' sticky note responses to ensure that they were both legible and included in the report. Below each table are corresponding photos from the session.

Table 10: **What Can GSL Do to Improve the Program?**

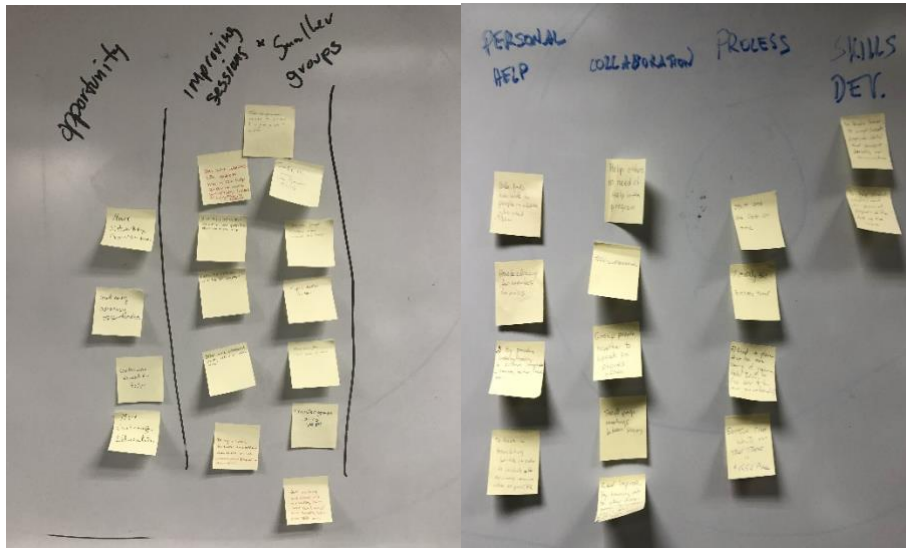| What Can GSL Do to Improve the Program?	
Opportunity	• More networking/networking opportunities • Continuing advocacy opportunities • Continuing education - 4x per year • More continuing education
Improving Sessions	• Speakers who teach self-sufficiency • Conference calls • Increase reflection time within sessions • Smaller groups/classes • Shorter sessions • Offer healthier meals
Personal Help	• Make funds available for people who need them • Provide advocacy for people in crisis • By having sessions available in different languages or translator • To have a translating service in order to include as many communities as possible
Collaboration	• Help others in need of help in the program • Teleconference more often • Group people together to speak on phones often • Small group meetings between sessions • Can improve by reaching out to other diverse groups to increase GSL's #'s
Process	• Start and end class on time • Literally set 3-minute timer • Include vegetarian food options • Getting the word out that there is a GSL program
Skills Development	• To learn how to create proposals (bills) that benefit directly our communities • To help students create/work on personal projects at the end of the course

Figure 13: **What Can GSL Do to Improve the Program?**

Table 11: How Can GSL Improve the Program?

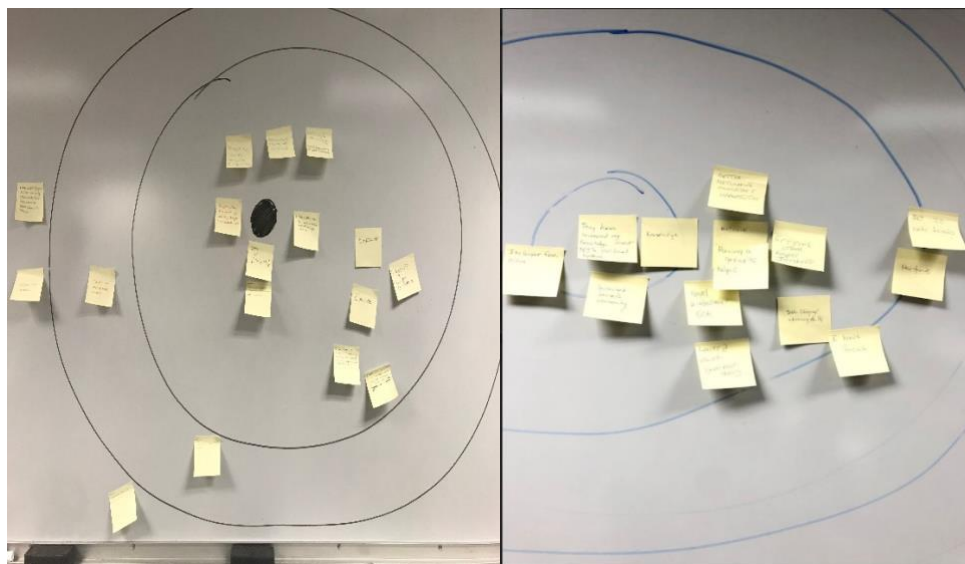| How Has GSL Impacted Your Life?	
Inner Circle	• Taught me how to professionally tell my story with an authentic voice • Taught me how to advocate for the homeless • Encouraged me to get involved • Encouraged me to speak up • Confirmed Ocean City deficiencies • Broadened viewpoints and perspectives on homelessness • Sense of purpose • Make me start to see the impact a certain segment of my life had on me • Empowerment • Provide and build confidence • Educate • I now know of a host of resources and organizations that I can point people to when they need help • I feel more confident in my knowledge about poverty and homelessness and their causes • Knowledge • Increased sense of community • I no longer feel alone • They have increased my knowledge about NJ's political system
Middle Circle	• Taught me the legislative process • Increased networking contacts • Learned about government housing • Travel reimbursement cash • Having a group to talk to helps • Network • Better networking knowledge and opportunities
Outer Circle	• Helped me network • Made me start to figure out how me, my life (story), and the things I care about can impact others via advocacy • I have focus • Better lobbying advocacy skills • Getting other people involved
Outside Circle	• Met 20 new friends • New friends

Figure 14: How Can GSL Improve the Program?

Table 12: How Has GSL Made You a More Effective Advocate?

How Has GSL Made You a More Effective Advocate?	
Telling Stories	- GSL taught me how to tell my story - Helped me to tie my personal story to the data - Helped me effectively share lived experience - As each individual experience is different, opened my eyes to various causes & solutions of homelessness - Push more often, push louder, share first hand stories
Networking	- I learned how to effectively tell my story- Reaching people to teach them how to navigate this system - This system - Networking opportunities - To work with... a service organization = strength in numbers
Understanding Legislation	- Especially when it comes to government, I have a much better understanding of the legislative process and now I can push for things that are important to me with more confidence - Educated on legislature and how it works - Help understand the political process/ system - Taught the correct wording of issues - Introduced me to the legislative process - GSL taught me the legislative process which is all important - Exposed me to my legislatures and their staff- made reaching out to them a possibility in my head
Group Skills	- Learn to listen - Learned to listen for what colleagues were NOT saying - Opportunities to meet/network others that think/work alike
Knowledge	- Resources provided - I now know the terminology & dialogue to use - Have a plan of action - Share knowledge and political processes with colleagues - Learned how to craft a presentation - GSL has made me a more effective advocate by providing me with more skills and knowledge to assist my constituents - Expanded knowledge - I am more informed as a voter - We have learned to have a plan of action together - I now know how to gain access to the state house - Started new initiatives

Figure 15: **How Has GSL Made You a More Effective Advocate?**
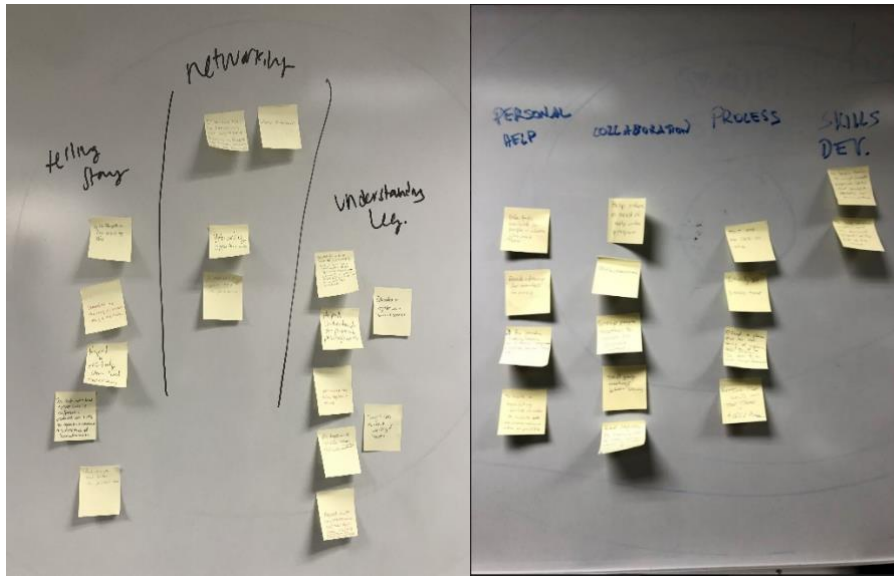
APPENDIX C: GARDEN STATE LEADERS 2019 APPLICATION

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Garden State Leader. We will follow-up with you after receiving your application, so please be sure to provide a reliable phone/email address. We have marked which questions are required in order for us to consider your application. All answers are kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone. Thank you for taking the time to fill out the application and tell us about your experience. Please mail your completed application to the address provided at the end.

1. Name (required) _____

2. Phone Number (required)_____

3. Address (optional)_____

_____

4. Email (optional) _____

5. Why do you feel it is important to develop advocacy skills? (required)

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. How do you hope participation in this program will help you as an advocate?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Can you commit to one day a month for six months, January 2019 - June 2019? (We may be able

to provide information to employers on the benefits of leadership development training)

(required)

Yes_____ No_____

8. Do you need assistance with transportation, childcare or other basic needs in order to

participate in the program? (will be held in Camden) (required)

Yes_____ No_____

9. If you answered YES to question 8, please tell us specifically what would help to make it possible for you to participate? (eg. Bus fare to and from each session)

_____

10. Please describe any other barriers that might impact your ability to participate.

_____

_____

_____

11. Is there anything else you want us to know?

_____

_____

12. Have you ever communicated with an elected official about an issue you care about? (required)

Yes_____ No_____

13. Have you ever experienced poverty or economic hardship in your life? (required)

Yes_____ No_____

14. Please provide the name and contact information (emails and/or phone numbers) for 1-3 people who know you and can serve as references. Examples of possible references are neighbors, family members, friends, faith leaders, educators, employers, case workers, etc. (required)

_____

_____

_____

15. Please answer the following questions:

Note: Your answers to these questions will not necessarily determine your eligibility for the program, as we understand poverty is a subjective condition. This questionnaire is more to help you understand what are generally considered indicators of poverty and to help us get a sense of our participants' experiences in order to inform program curriculum.

a. Have you ever had a full-time job but still struggled to make ends meet? Yes ___ No ___

b. Have you ever had to work more than one job to meet your family's basic needs? Yes __ No __

c. Have you ever received welfare (general assistance, AFDC, or TANF? Yes__ No__

d. Have you ever been denied welfare (general assistance, AFDC or TANF?) Yes __ No __

e. Have you ever received SNAP (food stamps), WIC, Medicaid or SSI? Yes __ No___

f. Have you ever been denied SNAP (food stamps), WIC, Medicaid or SSI? Yes __ No __

g. Have you ever gone to a food pantry to feed yourself or your family? Yes___ No ___

h. Have you or anyone in your family ever lived with a medical condition for which you or they

were unable to afford necessary medicines or treatment? Yes ___ No ___

i. Have you ever been homeless? Yes __ No __

j. Have you ever had to stay with friends or family because you could not find an affordable place to live? Yes___ No___

k. Have you ever had your utilities shut off? Yes __ No __

l. Have you or any member of your family ever gone without meals because there wasn't enough money for food? Yes__ No __

m. Have you ever stayed in an abusive relationship because of a lack of economic options?
Yes ___ No ___

n. Have you ever been unable to afford childcare? Yes __ No __

o. Have you ever missed school or doctor's appointments because you could not find transportation? Yes __ No___

p. Have you ever been unable to go to the grocery store because you could not find transportation? Yes __ No___

q. Have you ever had to leave school or training because you couldn't afford to go anymore?
Yes __ No __

Thank you for completing the application for the 2019 Garden State Leaders Program!

Please mail to:

Kate Leahy - NJ Coalition to End Homelessness
288 Woodside Avenue
Ridgewood, NJ 07450

APPENDIX D: BIVARIATE STATISTICS OF PARTICIPANT AND NON-PARTICIPANT, GRADUATE AND NON-GRADUATE APPLICANT RESPONSES

(Years 2016-2019)	All Applicants (n=99)	Participants (n=58)	Non-Participants (n=41)	Graduates (n=44)	Non-Graduates (n=14)
Have you ever experienced poverty or economic hardship in your life?	97.0%	100.0%	92.7%	100.0%	100.0%
Have you ever had a full-time job but still struggled to make ends meet?	93.9%	96.6%	90.2%	95.5%	100.0%
Have you ever had to work more than one job to meet your family's basic needs?	79.8%	81.0%	78.0%	75.0%	100.0%
Have you ever received welfare (general assistance, AFDC, or TANF?)	75.8%	74.1%	78.0%	77.3%	64.3%
Have you ever been denied welfare (general assistance, AFDC or TANF?)	51.5%	51.7%	51.2%	47.7%	64.3%
Have you ever received SNAP (food stamps), WIC, Medicaid or SSI?	83.8%	82.8%	85.4%	86.4%	71.4%
Have you ever been denied SNAP (food stamps), WIC, Medicaid or SSI?	49.5%	46.6%	53.7%	45.4%	50%
Have you ever gone to a food pantry to feed yourself or your family?	81.8%	81.0%	82.9%	79.5%	85.7%
Have you or anyone in your family ever lived with a medical condition for which you or they were unable to afford necessary medicines or treatment?	49.5%	48.3%	51.2%	50.0%	42.9%
Have you ever missed school or doctor's appointments because you could not find affordable transportation?	54.5%	50.0%	61.0%	50%	50%

(Years 2016-2019)	All Applicants (n=99)	Participants (n=58)	Non-Participants (n=41)	Graduates (n=44)	Non-Graduates (n=14)
Have you ever been unable to go to the grocery store because you could not find affordable transportation?	49.5%	46.6%	53.7%	45.5%	50.0%
Have you ever had your utilities shut off?	71.7%	65.5%	80.5%	56.8%	92.9%
Have you or any member of your family ever gone without meals because there wasn't enough money for food?	65.7%	60.3%	73.2%	56.8%	71.4%
Have you ever stayed in an abusive relationship because of a lack of economic options?	47.5%	50.0%	43.9%	47.7%	57.1%%
Have you ever been unable to afford childcare?	47.5%	51.7%	41.5%	43.2%	78.6%
Have you ever had to leave school or training because you couldn't afford to go anymore?	53.5%	53.4%	53.70%	50.0%	64.3%
Homelessness Questions	**All Applicants**	**Participants**	**Non - Participants**	**Graduates**	**Non - Graduates**
Have you personally experienced homelessness and/or housing instability in your own life? (2015 Only)	55.6%	88.9%	22.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Have you ever been homeless? (2016-2019)	66.7%	63.8%	70.70%	63.6%	64.3%
Have you ever had to stay with friends or family because you could not find an affordable place to live? (2016-2019)	77.8%	86.2%	65.9%	88.6%	78.6%
Homeless Total (all three questions; 2015-2019)	78.60%	91.0%	64.0%	92.8%	88.9%
Average Number of Experiences	**66.5%**	**66.09%**	**67.1%**	**64.4%**	**71.4%**

APPENDIX E: END-OF-YEAR PROGRAM SURVEY

Section 1: Barriers and Supports

1. Did you complete the Garden State Leaders Program? *Completing the program means attending at least 5 of the 6 sessions.*
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No [Skip to Question 4]

2. What barriers did you face that made completing the program more difficult? *Please check all that apply.*

   - ☐ Physical health challenges
   - ☐ Mental health challenges
   - ☐ Lack of child care
   - ☐ Lack of transportation
   - ☐ Lack of welfare benefits (e.g. *general assistance, TANF, WorkFirst New Jersey*)
   - ☐ Lack of other government support (SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, or SSI)
   - ☐ Unstable housing
   - ☐ Inconvenient location
   - ☐ Work schedule conflicts
   - ☐ Other, *please specify:* _____

3. What support did you receive that helped you complete the program? *Please check all that apply.* [Skip to Question 6]

   - ☐ Money for transportation to sessions
   - ☐ Carpool/sharing rides to sessions
   - ☐ Food at sessions
   - ☐ Emotional support from facilitators
   - ☐ Emotional support from peers
   - ☐ Welfare benefits *(e.g. general assistance, TANF, WorkFirst New Jersey)*
   - ☐ Other government support (SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, or SSI)
   - ☐ Help with child care
   - ☐ Other, *please specify:* _____

4. What barriers did you face that prevented you from completing the program? *Please check all that apply.*

    - ☐ Physical health challenges
    - ☐ Mental health challenges
    - ☐ Lack of child care
    - ☐ Lack of transportation
    - ☐ Lack of welfare benefits (e.g. *general assistance, TANF, WorkFirst New Jersey)*
    - ☐ Lack of other government support (SNAP/food stamps, WIC, Medicaid, or SSI)
    - ☐ Unstable housing
    - ☐ Inconvenient location
    - ☐ Work schedule conflicts
    - ☐ Other, *please specify:* _____

5. What support did you receive that helped you participate in the program? *Please check all that apply.*

    - ☐ Money for transportation to sessions
    - ☐ Carpool/sharing rides to sessions
    - ☐ Food at sessions
    - ☐ Emotional support from facilitators
    - ☐ Emotional support from peers
    - ☐ Welfare benefits *(e.g. general assistance, TANF, WorkFirst New Jersey)*
    - ☐ Other government support (SNAP/food stamps, WIC, Medicaid, or SSI)
    - ☐ Help with childcare
    - ☐ Other, *please specify:* _____

Section 2: Personal/Professional Development

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident did you feel about these personal characteristics *before* participating in the Garden State Leaders Program, 1 being least confident, and 5 being most confident?

Ability to get a job in your desired field	1	2	3	4	5
Public speaking skills	1	2	3	4	5
Understanding of the policy process	1	2	3	4	5
Physical health	1	2	3	4	5
Mental health	1	2	3	4	5
Healthy friendships	1	2	3	4	5
Healthy romantic relationships	1	2	3	4	5
Healthy family relationships	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to express your personal needs	1	2	3	4	5

7. On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident did you feel about these personal characteristics *after* participating in the Garden State Leaders Program, 1 being least confident, and 5 being most confident?

Ability to get a job in your desired field	1	2	3	4	5
Public speaking skills	1	2	3	4	5
Understanding of the policy process	1	2	3	4	5
Physical health	1	2	3	4	5
Mental health	1	2	3	4	5
Healthy friendships	1	2	3	4	5
Healthy romantic relationships	1	2	3	4	5
Healthy family relationships	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to express your personal needs	1	2	3	4	5

Section 3: Program Evaluation

8. What aspects of the program did you find most important? *Please select your top 3.*
   - ☐ Hearing other leaders' stories
   - ☐ Practicing delivering your own story
   - ☐ Visiting the New Jersey Statehouse
   - ☐ Engaging with elected officials
   - ☐ Networking opportunities with other Leaders
   - ☐ Networking opportunities with those outside the program
   - ☐ Peer support/relationships
   - ☐ Facilitator support/relationships
   - ☐ Learning about resources
   - ☐ Learning about NJ politics or policy
   - ☐ Developed writing skills
   - ☐ Developed public speaking skills
   - ☐ Other, *please specify:* _____

9. How can the Garden State Leaders Program improve participants' experiences?

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. Do you have any additional thoughts on your experience with the Garden State Leaders Program that you would like to share?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 4: Demographics

11. How old are you? *Please specify in number of years only (e.g. 35).*

    _____

12. Which of the following best describes your race/ethnicity? *Please check all that apply.*[11]
    - ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
    - ☐ Asian
    - ☐ Black or African American
    - ☐ Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
    - ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
    - ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    - ☐ White
    - ☐ Some other race, ethnicity, or origin, *please specify:* _____
    - ☐ Prefer not to disclose

13. How would you describe your gender? *Please check all that apply.*
    - ☐ Man
    - ☐ Woman
    - ☐ Another, *please specify:* _____
    - ☐ Prefer not to disclose

14. Which of the following best describes you? *Please check all that apply.*
    - ☐ Straight (heterosexual)
    - ☐ Gay/Lesbian
    - ☐ Bisexual/Pansexual
    - ☐ Another, *please specify:* _____
    - ☐ Prefer not to disclose

15. Which of the following is your best estimate of your current annual household income? *Household income means the combined income of everyone living in your current household.*
    - ○ Less than $25,000
    - ○ $25,000 to $50,000
    - ○ $50,000 and above

16. Are you currently receiving a form of welfare? *(e.g. general assistance, TANF, WorkFirst New Jersey)*
    - ○ Yes
    - ○ No

---

[11] Adapted from Hughes, J., L., Camden, A., A., Yangchen, T. (2016). Rethinking and Updating Demographic Questions: Guidance to Improve Descriptions of Research Samples. *Psy Chi. The International Society in Psychology. 21*(3). 138-151. Retrieved from
https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.psichi.org/resource/resmgr/journal_2016/21_3Fall16JN-Hughes.pdf

17. Are you currently receiving SNAP/food stamps, WIC, Medicaid, or SSI?
- o Yes
- o No

18. What is your level of education?
- o Less than a high school degree
- o High school graduate or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- o Some college credit, no degree
- o Trade/technical/vocational training
- o Associate's degree
- o Bachelor's degree or higher

19. What county in New Jersey do you live in most of the time?
- o Atlantic County
- o Bergen County
- o Burlington County
- o Camden County
- o Cape May County
- o Cumberland County
- o Essex County
- o Gloucester County
- o Hudson County
- o Hunterdon County
- o Mercer County
- o Middlesex County
- o Monmouth County
- o Morris County
- o Ocean County
- o Passaic County
- o Salem County
- o Somerset County
- o Sussex County
- o Union County
- o Warren County

20. What is your first language?
- o English
- o Spanish
- o Another, *please specify:* _____

21. Do you have a disability?
- o Yes
- o No