



THE FUTURE OF
Workforce Development
WHERE RESEARCH MEETS PRACTICE

Session:

Evaluation of Program Outcomes: Implications for the Future

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The Future of Workforce Development: Where Research Meets Practice

Evaluation of Program Outcomes: Implications for
the Future

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Commonwealth Corporation Background

- Quasi-public workforce organization in MA
- Has an internal applied research & evaluation team that evaluates internal programs and serves as third party evaluators of external programs
- Major programmatic activities are in sector partnerships and programs, incumbent worker training and teen employment
- Partner with external organizations to develop regional labor mkt profiles, convene regional stakeholders to shape workforce strategies and conduct studies on emerging workforce challenges

Our Primary Audiences and Approaches to Research & Evaluation

- Grantees – evaluation is closely integrated with program activities for better data capture, program management & continuous quality improvement
- Workforce Development in Practice – a series focused on sharing promising and effective practice in the field with practitioners beyond grantees
- Policymakers & Funders – capturing & analyzing data focused on outcomes as well as demonstrating impact through first person stories (especially from business) about positive impact of training investments

Current Metrics in Evaluation of Workforce Training & Sector Programs

- Capturing data on traditional employment outcomes – employment, wage gains, promotions & retention
- Also capturing data on industry-recognized credentials
- Additional focus on qualitative/process measures – what are the elements of effective practice that will result in intended outcomes and institutionalize innovation & coordination
- System outcomes – new degree or certificate programs, changed employer practices such as revised tuition reimbursement policy

Evaluating the Elements of Successful Practice in Regional Sector Partnerships

- Measuring Business Impact – report & guidebook to identify and measure business impact of workforce development strategy
- Partnership Formation – guidebook on the steps necessary to develop an effective partnership & culture of collaboration across industry, education, workforce and community partners
- Labor Market Information – 10-year trends in employment, demographics and outputs of post-secondary programs to identify critical challenges and foster communication across organizations to design shared strategies and goals.

The Changing Environment for Evaluation of Workforce Development Programs

- Declining funds – competing with other systems for limited federal & state funding; needing to do more with less. Puts additional stress on balance of direct services versus evaluation. However, creates opportunity to drive change with data
- Challenging hiring environment – difficult to determine reasonable employment outcomes – both in definition and goals
- Increasing use of “try-out” employment – how do we capture that in design & metrics – is it an outcome or an interim step?

The Changing Needs of Evaluation

- Evaluation has often focused on longitudinal net impact. We cannot lose sight of that, but we need real-time data that can affect critical decision-making in managing a program and for policymakers to allocate resources
- Given fast paced changes in demand, many of the elements of effective practice involve creating a culture and structures that support cross-sector partnerships in reviewing data, surfacing changing needs and utilizing formal & transparent decision-making processes

Additional Challenges to Meaningful Evaluation in Workforce Development

- Many powerful evaluations for real-time management and longer term impact are those that cross-reference multiple data sources. This requires trust, legal agreements and a sustained willingness to share data.
- Wage records can provide data that regular follow-up will not capture, but the lag in time makes it less effective in learning and driving change
- Programs are uncomfortable with random assignment - it limits the resources or strategies that they can make available to individual customers
- Business customers are uncomfortable with providing participant-level data

Implications for the Future

- Evaluations will need to draw data from more than one source to track services/activities with outcomes and we need good models to do that
- Measure process indicators as well as outcomes to ensure that we have the cross-sector structures & culture necessary to respond effectively to changing needs and conditions
- Determine right balance of funding & time committed to evaluation activities given shrinking resources & urgency to respond to the immediate needs of customer base

Links to Additional Resources

- http://www.commcorp.org/resources/documents/YouthWorks%2002-14-2012_final.pdf
- http://www.commcorp.org/resources/documents/MBI_Guidebook_1215.pdf
- http://www.commcorp.org/resources/documents/MetroSouthWest_06.2012.pdf