



THE FUTURE OF  
*Workforce Development*  
WHERE RESEARCH MEETS PRACTICE

**Session:**

Evaluation of Program Outcomes: Implications for the Future

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September 20, 2012

Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Kansas City, Mo.

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# Evaluation of program outcomes: Implications for the future

**Elizabeth Weigensberg**

The Future of Workforce Development Conference  
Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City  
Kansas City, MO  
September 20, 2012

**ChapinHall** at the University of Chicago  
Policy research that benefits children, families, and their communities

# Presentation Overview

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- Introduction
- Highlights of workforce development research
- Outcome measures
- Future of workforce development research & outcomes

# Introduction: Overview of Chapin Hall

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## **Chapin Hall** at the University of Chicago

is an independent policy research center whose mission is to build knowledge that improves policies and programs for children and youth, families, and their communities.

- Applied research to support state & local policymakers
  - Long standing relationships with many state & local agencies
- Expertise in administrative data linking & analysis

# Introduction: Recent research

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- *CWICstats*:

  - Chicagoland Workforce Information Collaborative

    - Collaborate with partner agencies to link & analyze individual-level administrative data across workforce system
      - Workforce program performance measures
      - Website for WIA training program outcomes  
<http://www.chicagolandwiatraining.com>
      - Research on participants' program engagement, educational attainment, and employment outcomes over time and across programs/system
      - Workforce program evaluation

- Recent study - *Inside the black box: What makes workforce programs successful?*

# Highlights of workforce development research

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Many objectives of workforce development research:

- Evaluate federal, state, local or other programs
  - UI, WIA, JTPA, Job Corps, TAA, Employment Service, Rapid Response, TANF
- Test specific interventions or strategies
  - transitional jobs, bridge programs, individual training accounts, one-stop centers, work-based learning, on-the-job-training, employer engagement, sector-based strategies, support services
- Study approaches to serve specific populations
  - disconnected youth, young adults, ex-offenders
- Determine if program improved outcomes
  - employment placement, job retention, increase in wages, educational attainment, obtain credentials
- Assess & identify evidence-based strategies

# Highlights of workforce development research

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Numerous sources of workforce development research:

- US DOL sponsored studies
- US GAO reports
- Reports by state and local agencies
- Academic publications
- Reports and papers by research firms, non-profits, advocacy organizations

Useful annotated bibliographies:

- Matri, Evans, Pancratz, & Wolfson. (2011). *Employment Research in Brief: An Annotated Bibliography of ETA-Sponsored Studies*. Mathematica Policy Research. Report submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Policy Development and Research.
- IMPAQ International. (2008). *Annotated Bibliography for the Reemployment Technical Assistance Effort*. Report submitted to the Designing Reemployment Team, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

# Workforce development research: Evolution of research

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Long history of publically-funded workforce programs:

- MDTA – Manpower Development & Training Act (1962)
- CETA – Comprehensive Employment & Training Act (1973)
- JTPA – Job Training Partnership Act (1982)
- WIA – Workforce Investment Act (1998)
- ES, TAA, TANF, Food Stamp E&T, Adult Education & Literacy, Vocational Education, Vocational Rehabilitation
- State and local-funded training programs

Since the 1970's, evaluation efforts have tried to assess the impact of public workforce programs on employment earnings

- Experimental design evaluation preferable, but challenging to implement
- Non-experimental methods used for identifying comparison groups
- Can have substantial variability in estimated impacts, cost-benefit

# Workforce development research: Research overview

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Early studies of CEDA and JTPA show evidence of ...

- increased employment & earnings for several years post-program
- more positive impacts for women, but less so or mixed findings for men & youth
- dislocated workers benefit from job search assistance, with mixed evidence on effectiveness of OJT and classroom training
- youth benefited from more intensive training (Job Corps)

Several sources with excellent summaries of prior research:

- LaLonde, R. (1995). The Promise of Public Sector-Sponsored Training Programs. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 9(2), 149-168.
- King, C. (2004). The Effectiveness of Publically Financed Training in the United States: Implications for WIA and Related Programs. In *Job Training Policy in the United States*, O'Leary & Wandner (Eds.) Kalamazoo, MI: Upjohn Institute for Employment Research
- Decker, P. (2011). Ten Years of WIA Research. In *The Workforce Investment Act: Implication Experiences and Evaluation Findings*, Besharov & Cottingham (Eds.) Kalamazoo, MI: Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

# Workforce development research: Workforce Investment Act

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## Workforce Investment Act general findings:

- Increased employment rates and quarterly earnings for several years following exit for those receiving WIA services and WIA training.
- WIA training participants initially had lower earnings compared to those only receiving WIA core or intensive services, but they caught up within 10 quarters.
- Short and long term benefits from participating in WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs were greater for women than men.
- Maximum customer choice (no mandatory counseling) were most likely to receive ITA. Those with more requirements may have been less likely to complete them to receive ITA. Follow-up for 15 months showed comparable employment and earning across all 3 levels of choice.

## Key studies:

- Hollenbeck, Schroeder, King & Huang. (2005). *Net Impact Estimates for Services provided through the Workforce Investment Act*.
- McConnell, Stuart, Fortson, Decker, Perez-Johnson, Harris & Salzman. (2006). *Managing Customers' Training Choices: Findings from the Individual Training Account Experiment – Final Report*. Mathematica Policy Research.
- Heinrich, Mueser & Troske. (2009). *Workforce Investment Act Non-Experimental Net Impact Evaluation*. IMPAQ International.

# Workforce development research:

## Other programs

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### Trade Adjustment Assistance

- Those with training had higher reemployment and retention rates, and those with matching between occupational training and employment had higher wage replacement outcomes.
  - Park, J. (2011). *Does Occupational Training by the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program Really Help Reemployment? Success Measured as Matching*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

### Reentry programs

- Employment services, mentoring, and support services to ex-offenders promote better employment and recidivism outcomes for women, older participants, non-black participants, those a high school diploma or GED, those who served longer sentences, and those who served in Federal institutions.
- Transitional jobs increased employment earnings but gains due to temporary subsidized jobs. Those with transitional jobs were not more likely to find unsubsidized jobs or less likely to return to prison.
  - Bellotti & Paxton. (2009). *Evaluation of the Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative*. Mathematica Policy Research.
  - Redcross et al. (2010). *Work After Prison: One-Year Findings from the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration*. MDRC.

# Workforce development research:

## Other general findings

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### Program services:

- Job search requirements and employment services help shorten unemployment spells
- Reemployment bonuses promote quicker return to employment
- Basic skills, job skills, and on-the-job training promote reemployment
- Positive employment outcomes found with educational (high school/GED) attainment, vocational training completion

### Coordination of services/partners:

- Great progress with one-stops centers but integration with partners continues to be a challenge
- Services can be challenged by lack of effective integration among partners

### Employers:

- Need to align training with employer demand/needs
- Partnerships with employers are important for programs
- Sector-based partnerships can facilitate employment

# Workforce development outcome measures

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Several common (and not as common) outcome measures:

- Successful program completion
- Job placement
- Job retention
- Wages
- Educational attainment, certifications
- Skills attainment
- Cost per client trained
- Economic self-sufficiency, well-being
- Job quality

Varying elements:

- Definitions of measures
- Follow-up time frame – short and long term
- Data used to assess these measures – data sources, systems, quality

# Role of outcome measures

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Outcomes play a role in...

- Identifying what works
- Assessing & communicating program performance
- Program management

Assessing outcomes with program evaluation versus performance measurement:

## Evaluation

- Individual or occasional in-depth studies that assess the outcomes of a program and attempt to identify why those results occurred, assess causality

## Performance measurement

- “Regular measurement of the results (outcomes) and efficiency of services or programs” (Hatry, 2006)
- Primary purpose is continuous program improvement and identify how to enhance their ability to achieve desired outcomes

# Challenges with outcome measures

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## Measurement definitions:

- Despite common measures, lack of consistency in definitions
- Identifying appropriate time frames to assess outcomes
- Often not able to obtain level of specificity

## Data to assess outcomes:

- Need for reliable and high quality data
- Data not easily available/shared

## Measurement methods:

- Need to account for varying expectations of achievement for different populations, economic conditions

## Unintended consequences:

- Do not want to promote creaming of participants

## Meaning of outcomes:

- Outcomes alone are not enough to identify why something was successful
- Often a mismatch between what one wants to measure and what is be measured
- Difficulty translating for policy and practice

# Future of workforce development research & outcomes

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1. What is needed in workforce development research?
2. Do outcomes address what we want to know?
3. What is needed to assess outcomes?
4. How to translate research/outcomes to influence policy & practice?

# What is needed in workforce development research?

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- Need for greater investment in rigorous evaluation of workforce development program impact and investigate how the workforce system can be modified to enhance services (GAO, 2009)
  - Build evidence-base for what works and understand what factors are key to success
- Local programs are implementing many innovative workforce development strategies, but not much is known about effectiveness
  - Increase capacity for self assessment and external evaluation
- Research should account for changing context of the economy & labor force
  - Aging workforce, declines in youth employment, growing Hispanic population, industrial shifts, increasing demand for higher education
- Need to look across workforce system, not limited to program/funding silos
  - Assess partnerships and pathways - secondary & post-secondary education, workforce training, support services, employment trajectory
- More research is needed on effectiveness of specific strategies or populations:
  - Role of community colleges, community based organizations, employer partnerships
  - Strategies/programs serving the hardest-to-serve, disconnected youth, long term unemployed, older workers, immigrants

# Do outcomes address what we want to know?

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Currently used outcomes provide good foundation of knowledge about programs, but more information is needed in regard to...

- Assessing measures beyond common measures to measure outcomes meaningful to programs
  - Look beyond ...
    - program-specific outcomes to trajectory, engagement across programs/system
    - immediate credential attainment to future education, stackable credentials
    - job placement to career pathway
    - Obtaining any employment to assess job quality
    - employment outcomes to include broader well-being, self-sufficiency
- Moving beyond standard methods of measurement to use risk-adjusted approaches that account for populations served and local economic conditions
- Learning more about how/why programs achieve positive outcomes
  - How engagement with partners, employers, and community impact positive outcomes?
  - How program practices and processes impact outcomes?
  - What's inside the black box of workforce programs that makes them successful?

# Conceptual Model of Workforce Program Factors

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## 1. External elements

- Employer engagement
- Partnerships
- Community context

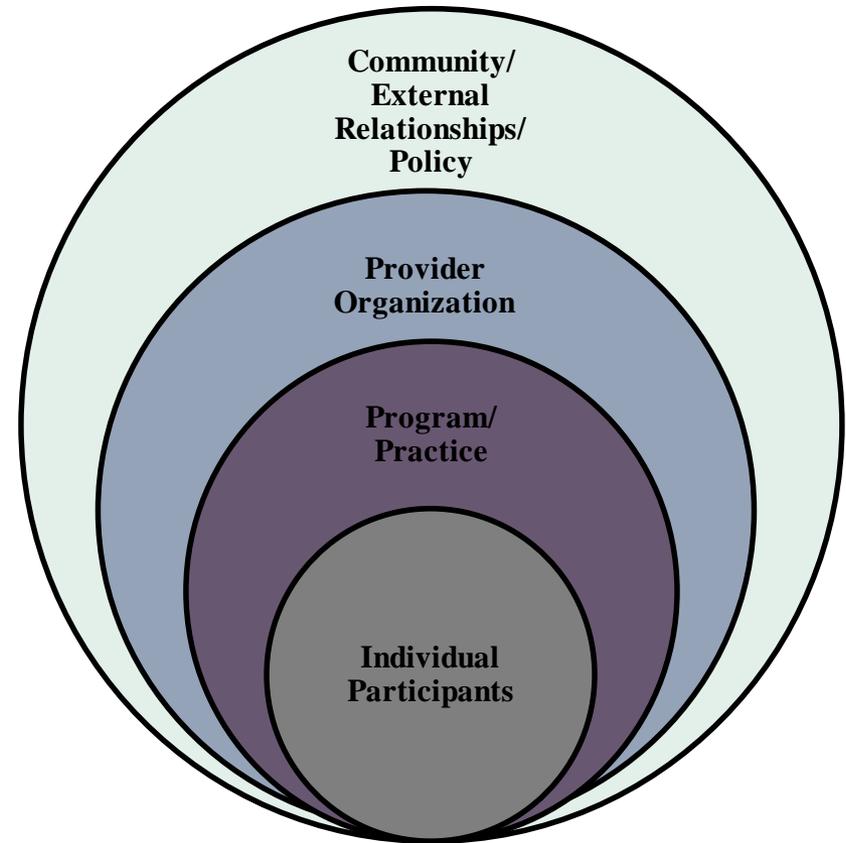
## 2. Organizational elements

- Diverse funding sources
- Staff, leadership, size

## 3. Program/practice elements

- Support services
- Program flexibility
- Family involvement
- Focus on quality of job placement

## 4. Individual participant characteristics



# What is needed to assess outcomes?

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## Research capacity:

- Increase internal organizational capacity to assess program performance, program effectiveness
- Embed outcomes as part of continuous program improvement, feedback loop
- Promote outcome-informed decision making
- Organizational culture embracing outcomes, use of data
- Willingness to engage external research partners

## Data:

- Improve data systems and quality of administrative data
- Need for assessment data to capture information about characteristics
- Collect data about additional factors of importance – external relationships, organizational or programmatic factors
- Minimize hurdles to data sharing, linking, and analysis
- Promote development of improved, coordinated management information systems at local level and with providers
  - Reduce redundant data entry into multiple systems
  - Collect data on all program participants (not only those within funding silos)

# How to translate research/outcomes to inform policy/practice?

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- Ensure research and evaluation is beneficial to agency and program staff at all levels
- Engage program staff in the process to increase understanding of research and use of outcomes
- Communicate outcomes in a straightforward manner and discuss how they may influence changes in policy/practice
- Promote culture of questioning & interest about existing research, looking into how it can be beneficial for specific programs & populations
- Use research and outcomes as part of decision-making and management
- Partner with those who can help interpret complex findings, look for resources

“You can do the best research and be making the strongest intellectual argument, but if readers don't get past the third paragraph you've wasted your energy and valuable ink.”

– *Carl Hiaasen*

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# Thank you!

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