

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 34-12
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TO: AMERICAN JOB CENTERS
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STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT LIAISONS
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STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARDS
LOCAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARDS
SENIOR COMMUNITY SERVICE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM
GRANTEES

FROM: JANE OATES
Assistant Secretary



SUBJECT: Release and Availability of Employment and Training Administration (ETA) Occasional Papers: *Evaluation of the Aging Worker Initiative: Interim Report* and *Evaluation of the Aging Worker Initiative: Final Report*

1. Purpose. To announce the release and availability of ETA Occasional Papers: *Evaluation of the Aging Worker Initiative: Interim Report* and *Evaluation of the Aging Worker Initiative: Final Report*.

2. Background. ETA developed the Aging Worker Initiative (AWI) in response to the rising percentage of older workers in the labor force and the potential need for the workforce system to address their needs. AWI involved 10 grants of about \$1 million each, awarded competitively in the summer of 2009 to local organizations across the U.S. Grantees were to use the funds to develop new strategies for serving workers aged 55 and above, and to build the capacity of the public workforce investment system to serve such workers. Grantees had the option to pick one or more focus areas, such as innovative training techniques, self-employment, skills updating, career awareness, and targeting needy older worker subgroups. The projects were required to involve employers and the workforce and education systems as partners, to focus on high-growth jobs, and to provide data for reporting and evaluation purposes. Starting in June 2009, Social Policy Research Associates and its subcontractor, Mathematica Policy Research, conducted an evaluation of the AWI projects.

3. Publications Description. The reports describe the grantees, their project goals, implementation challenges, types of interventions, participant characteristics, outcomes, and recommended service features. Findings are based on qualitative data collected from two rounds of telephone reconnaissance calls and site visits, one telephone focus group, and quantitative data collected by grantees. The descriptive methods used in the

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evaluation did not involve rigorous testing of the efficacy of any practices or service features, but some of the experiences of the AWI projects suggest possible program features for further exploration and testing. A profile of each site with the latest available outcome data can be found in Appendix A of the report.

4. Key Findings. Key findings from the reports include the following:

- ***Overview:*** The AWI projects began with certain assumptions about how to prepare older workers for jobs in expanding occupations, based on the job opportunities that existed at the time that grantees submitted their proposals to ETA. The recession substantially changed economic conditions by the time the projects were launched in 2009 and many of the grantees found it necessary to shift from a design focused narrowly on occupational skills training for specific growing occupations to services that addressed a broader range of older worker needs.
- ***Participants:*** The AWI projects served just under 4,000 older workers, 85 percent of whom were either unemployed or anticipated being unemployed. Thirty percent of the participants were long-term unemployed and only 2 percent were retired. Prior occupations included high-skilled, high-paying ones, as well as lower-skill, lower-paid jobs. Over half of the participants were women and were between 55 and 59 years of age at enrollment. A majority of participants had some post-secondary education. Overall, African-Americans constituted 31 percent of participants, whites 61 percent, Latinos 3 percent, and a small percentage were of other or unknown ethnic backgrounds.
- ***Occupational Training:*** Although the initial plan in many projects was to provide 6 to 12 months of classroom-based occupational training, most grantees found that participants were reluctant to enroll in occupational skills training lasting more than 2 or 3 months and were interested in getting jobs as quickly as possible to meet their financial needs.
 - Many participants were intimidated by attending training in a community college classroom with primarily younger students.
 - Several grantees altered or adjusted the occupational training offered to meet the needs and goals of participants, including creating a cohort of older students who could attend training classes together and thus provide each other with support and encouragement.
- ***Case Management and Job Readiness:*** The AWI projects used a combination of one-on-one counseling and group workshops, which made it possible to combine staff support with peer support.
 - Several innovative case management or job readiness services were tested by grantees, including use of “older worker specialists” or “navigators” to help older workers access services; special

workshops to rebuild self-confidence and knowledge of the current job market; and revamped job search skills training and job clubs designed for older workers.

- Grantees also created short-term training opportunities for older workers, such as three to six months of introductory computer skills and workplace literacy training, as well as internships.
- ***Coordination and Integration:*** Grantees used a variety of models for coordinating or integrating services with other programs, some of which showed promise for building capacity in the workforce system. These included co-location within the public workforce investment system, co-enrollment of AWI participants in other publicly funded workforce programs, and distinct offices co-located in other multi-service centers used by older individuals.
- ***Business Engagement:*** Each AWI grantee tried to engage local businesses and educate them about the employment needs of older workers and the benefits of hiring them. However, project managers said that these outreach efforts were not as successful as they had hoped, due in part to the depressed economy during much of the AWI, and the lack of staff with the skills and experience needed to conduct effective outreach to employers.
- ***Outcomes:*** At the time that grantees provided participant data in the spring of 2012, most of the projects were still ongoing. Grantees had already achieved or were on track to meet their enrollment targets but still had participants in training and other services. At that time, however, about half of exited participants (i.e., those who had not received services for 90 days) had obtained unsubsidized employment and most were working full-time. Younger participants had better outcomes than older participants -- 63 percent of those aged 55 to 59 were employed compared to 47 percent of those 60 to 64 and 37 percent of those 65 to 69. The number of participants reported as self-employed was very small. Participants who had been in training had a slightly lower rate of employment than those who received other services. Less than a third (29 percent) of trainees secured jobs in training-related fields.
- ***Plans to Sustain Services for Older Workers:*** Five of the ten grantees took steps to ensure that the improvements in older worker services implemented under the AWI grant would be sustained beyond the grant period. One of the key strategies was the training of American Job Center staff members to understand the needs of older workers and how best to serve them. In addition, four grantees worked to sustain the progress they had made in serving aging workers in one or more of the following ways: encouraging the retention of the specialized older worker case managers as direct service staff working within the American Job Centers; continuing the delivery of specialized training programs or workshops developed during the demonstration; and maintaining Web sites with information about resources for older workers.

- ***Resources to Support Replication of Grant Innovations:*** Under the terms of the AWI grant, each project was required to submit products developed with grant funding to ETA. Products that AWI grantees were planning to submit included: descriptions of their overall AWI project design, materials to support employer outreach efforts, and curricula developed or adapted for use with older workers (such as career readiness training curricula, a basic computer skills training curriculum, and several industry foundation skills training curricula for older workers with limited English language skills).
- ***Recommended Service Features:*** Based on their informed assessment of how to meet the needs of older workers within the public workforce development system, AWI project directors recommended the following:
 - Ensure that the targeted occupations are of interest to aging workers and appropriate to their skills and that any training programs provide skills that make participants employable;
 - Screen participants to ensure that they are motivated and have appropriate and attainable job goals;
 - Attend to participants' needs for supportive services, provide individualized case management, and provide support during the job search/job placement phase of participation;
 - Assure staff are knowledgeable about the needs of older workers; and
 - Involve employers and industry representatives.

5. Inquiries. To view the reports and an abstract of them, visit the ETA Research Publication Database Web site at: <http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm> and type in key words from the title.