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Basic Career Services

State RESEA programs must include several components, some of which can be categorized as “basic career services” under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).¹ For the purposes of RESEA, basic career services include initial eligibility assessments, provision of labor market information, and self-directed job search assistance.

Relative to “individualized career services” (see Evidence Brief 3: Individualized Services), basic career services are typically less customized and require less staff time and involvement. Because basic services are less intensive, one might expect small impacts relative to a comparison group that does not receive the services.

The studies reviewed for this brief all estimated impacts on UI duration, and most (23 of 28) estimated impacts on employment or earnings.² Those evaluations that did examine employment and earnings rarely found statistically significant impacts, perhaps because detecting impacts of basic career services would require sample sizes several times larger than evaluations of whole RESEA programs, given their lower intensity.^{3,4}

About this Brief

This brief summarizes the state of the evidence for basic career services—a category of reemployment services—to help UI claimants return to work. The brief closes with a discussion of gaps in the current evidence base and implications of evaluating these kinds of RESEA program components. This brief is the second of three summarizing the current state of the evidence relevant to RESEA.

Challenges to Developing and Using Impact Evidence of Basic Career Services

Building evidence on the effectiveness of basic career services is complicated. Programs that include basic career services typically include other features or components that also potentially affect participant outcomes. Therefore, because services are often packaged together, it may be difficult to identify the separate contribution of basic career services above and beyond, for example, the requirement to attend a meeting, enforcement of ongoing eligibility requirements, and provision of individualized services.

About the RESEA Program

RESEA supports states’ activities to improve employment outcomes among persons receiving UI, strengthen UI program integrity, promote workforce program integration, and connect UI claimants with partner programs.

At a minimum, participants must meet with a service provider who completes a review of the claimant’s UI eligibility, delivers customized labor market information, enrolls the claimant in the Wagner-Peyser Act-funded Employment Service program, develops an individual reemployment plan, and refers the claimant to additional reemployment services.

The most recent program guidance is available at <https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/>.

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Though there are many studies of whole program models or interventions that included basic career services among a package of other components, these studies are less informative on the effects of basic career services specifically (and therefore we do not discuss them in this brief).

Given the goal of understanding the effectiveness of basic career services, this scan attempted to identify studies that compare outcomes under one approach to providing basic career services versus outcomes under another approach. The results of such a study can provide insights into the most effective way to implement basic career services. Unfortunately, our scan did not find any such study conducted to date. This type of evaluation would be feasible using random assignment methods, but it would require samples that are likely larger than what any state (other than the very largest states) could generate in two or three years. Large samples are needed because one can expect the differential impact of varying approaches to delivering basic career services to be small.

- Examples of Basic Career Services**
- Eligibility determinations
 - Orientation to services
 - Initial skill assessments
 - Self-directed or staff-assisted job search
 - Labor exchange services
 - Provision of information on programs and services
 - Referrals to other programs

There are, however, studies that have measured the impact of basic career services versus no services. We discuss them below. Specifically, the following sections of this brief describe evidence from two types of studies: 1) those that evaluate basic career services with a mandatory participation requirement and 2) those that evaluate just the basic career services alone (i.e., absent a participation requirement). We hypothesize that this distinction is important. It could be that the mandate to participate has an effect on outcomes that is separate from the impact of the services themselves. Therefore, states’ interest in existing evidence might depend on whether such evidence pertains to services that do or do not have a mandatory participation requirement.

Evidence on Mandatory Basic Career Services

This section considers evidence from studies that evaluate mandatory basic career services separately from more intensive, individualized career services. We highlight the extent to which findings are informative about the separate role of basic career services in the context of an RESEA-like program.

UI Demonstrations

Some of the earliest research on basic career services includes several randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that studied the effectiveness of UI reemployment demonstrations conducted in the 1980s and 1990s (Corson et al., 1985; Corson & Haimson, 1996; Johnson & Klepinger, 1994; Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor, and Human Relations [DILHR], 1984; Hanna & Turney, 1990; Klepinger et al., 2002). Basic career services included in these demonstrations typically consisted of an initial assessment of the claimant’s skills and needs, resources for self-directed job search, staff-assisted job search, and job referrals.

Two of these demonstrations analyzed the impact of mandatory basic career services independent of more intensive services. Wisconsin’s (1984) evaluation of a mandatory half-day job search workshop for UI claimants found reductions in UI duration of slightly more than half a week, but the authors do not appear to have estimated impacts on employment or earnings outcomes. Additionally, the Claimant Employment Program (CEP) implemented in Nevada primarily consisted of job referrals and staff-assisted job search comparable to that provided by the Employment Service (Hanna & Turney, 1990), discussed below.⁵ That study’s authors reported that CEP reduced UI claim durations by about two weeks; but, like the Wisconsin study, they do not appear to have estimated employment or earnings impacts.⁶

Although the studies do not isolate the effect of the mandatory nature of the services relative to the services themselves, it is likely that part of the reported impacts in Wisconsin and Nevada arose from the requirement to participate, not the content of the basic career services themselves. Klerman et al. (2019) provide evidence

suggesting that the requirement itself likely does contribute importantly to impacts. Nonetheless, these studies provide some evidence of positive impact of basic career services in reducing UI duration.

Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS)

Enacted in 1993, the WPRS program provides UI claimants with a combination of basic and individualized services—especially at a mandatory meeting with staff.⁷ Basic career services included an orientation, initial skills assessment, staff-assisted job search, labor market information, and referrals to job openings. Individualized career services included, for example, development of an individual employment plan, individualized counseling, and specialized assessments. Four evaluations have rigorously studied the effectiveness of the overall program (that is, basic plus individualized services) as implemented in the 1990s (Decker et al., 2000; Black et al., 2003; Dickinson et al., 1999) and the 2000s (Michaelides & Mueser, 2016). These studies found that the programs reduced duration of UI benefit receipt, but impacts on employment and earnings outcomes were inconsistent.

Only one of these studies offers insight into the impact of basic career services relative to individualized services. Decker et al. (2000) randomly assigned UI claimants either to an individualized WPRS model, a “structured” WPRS model (i.e., an orientation, assessment, and job search assistance that were not individualized to each participant), or a control group with access to standard services (i.e., services available under the Job Training Partnership Act). Again, both treatments also mandated program participation, and the authors did not identify how much of the reported impact was due to mandatory participation requirements rather than due to the services.

Decker et al. (2000) also reported that services available under the individualized and structured models were similar, but service delivery under the structured model was not customized to each claimant’s needs.⁸ Though not a direct test of basic career services versus individualized services—even claimants in the structured model could attend multiple one-on-one meetings with reemployment service staff—the study found that the two approaches to service delivery yielded comparable impacts. That is, both models reduced UI duration by about one-half to one week. These results could suggest that more-individualized approaches to service delivery may not drive impacts; instead, it might be some combination of the mandatory meeting and the basic approach to career services. Note, however, that though impacts on reducing UI weeks were found for both models, no impacts were found on employment or earnings.

Evaluations of Employment Service (ES) Job Referrals

The Employment Service, authorized by the Wagner-Peyser Act, supports provision of basic career services to any job seeker. Typically, ES services include skills assessments, job development, and job referrals. There are no experimental evaluations of the Employment Service. However, two non-experimental evaluations have attempted to estimate the program’s impact on UI claimant outcomes (Jacobson & Petta, 2000; Jacobson et al., 2004).

Though ES services are universally available to any job seeker who chooses to participate, the two available studies include some estimated impacts in the context of mandated participation specifically among UI claimants. Both found that labor exchange services, namely job matching and referrals, can reduce a claimant’s UI duration. Some evidence suggests that referrals to jobs can also increase a claimant’s earnings. However, due to methodological limitations in these studies, the findings should be considered merely suggestive, rather than causal.⁹

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Evidence on basic career services delivered through the cash welfare program TANF is very limited. The interventions studied in this literature do not emphasize basic career services as defined in this brief. However, one study suggests that impacts of similar basic services on employment, earnings, and benefit receipt are positive but small. Dyke et al. (2005) estimated—via fixed-effects regression analysis—the impact of two services: needs testing and development of a “self-sufficiency plan.” Relative to TANF participants who did

not engage in any welfare-to-work activities, those who took part in these two services experienced increased cumulative earnings of about \$600-\$800 over four years (i.e., an average of \$200 per year, or less).¹⁰

Note, however, that the relevance of evidence from TANF programs to RESEA might be limited, as both their participants and their participation requirements differ. Relative to TANF participants, UI claimants selected for RESEA have more extensive work histories. Additionally, the UI program is a contributory entitlement, whereas TANF is not an entitlement program. In addition, programs for TANF participants tend to impose stricter participation requirements and more severe penalties for non-compliance than programs for UI claimants.

Evidence on Basic Career Services Alone

This section considers evidence from studies that evaluate basic career services in the absence of a mandate to participate. In some cases, the evaluated programs did not mandate participation; in other cases, the evaluators designed the study so as to control for the effects of the participation mandate.

Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) Basic Career Services

The REA program, the predecessor to RESEA, included both basic and individualized career services.¹¹ The basic services included an orientation to services, an initial assessment of UI claimants' skills and needs, provision of labor market information, referrals to job search workshops, and access to resources for self-directed job search (Minzner et al., 2017).¹² Though there have been several studies of the REA program, we do not discuss them further in this section because none of them tried to disentangle the impact of basic versus individualized career services.

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Core Services

Among the services previously funded by WIA, the predecessor to WIOA, "core" services were similar to the basic career services discussed above. Core services typically included an initial orientation to available services, an assessment of the participant's needs, access to self-directed employment services, job search workshops, and light-touch staff-assisted services (D'Amico et al., 2015). Several studies have estimated the impact of WIA, but none has attempted to separately estimate the employment and earnings impacts of core services. The only random assignment evaluation of WIA-funded services did not attempt to isolate the impacts of core services on participant outcomes because denial of those services to study participants in a control group would have been practically and legally impossible (Fortson et al., 2017). We do not discuss those studies further here.

Gaps in the Evidence and Implications for Future Evaluations

Many basic career services discussed in this brief are established, often required, components of RESEA programs. Nevertheless, although some evidence exists to support the effectiveness of interventions that include these services, the available evidence base for the effects of the services is limited. As noted above, some studies have reported on the overall effects of basic career services, by comparing basic to no services. No studies have compared the relative effectiveness of different approaches to basic career services. The evidence typically has found that basic career services, with a mandate to participate, reduce UI durations. Most of these studies either have not analyzed or have not found impacts on earnings or employment, however. This could be due to insufficient sample sizes.

More evidence on which basic career services have the most impact and how to effectively deliver them would be valuable. To generate such evidence appears challenging, but not insurmountable. We consider two types of challenges.

The first concerns required sample sizes. Evaluations of basic services for UI claimants would require very large samples, because expected impacts are small.¹³ In general, basic career services are light touch, and lighter touch interventions might be expected to yield smaller impacts on UI duration and labor market

outcomes. Evaluations of the relative effectiveness of different basic services would require even larger samples.¹⁴

We offer two approaches to states seeking to address the sample size challenge:

- **Pool with other states.** Prior to the surge in UI claims during the COVID-19 pandemic, it appeared that only a few of the largest states could detect impacts of basic career services on weeks of UI and employment using an RCT.^{15,16} To overcome challenges with obtaining sufficiently large samples, states conducting sufficiently similar programs could consider partnering on a single evaluation, thereby allowing for the pooling of samples in a multi-state experimental study.¹⁷
- **Retrospective non-experimental study.** Non-experimental evaluation methods generally require even larger samples than experimental evaluations of the same intervention, but such methods allow states to evaluate their programs retrospectively, perhaps combining data from several years to meet sample size requirements. However, non-experimental designs are complex, and it can be challenging for evaluations using such designs to meet the standards established by DOL’s Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) for high or moderate ratings of causal evidence.¹⁸

Evaluating basic career services also poses logistical challenges. Typically, basic career services are universally available to any job seeker and can be required components of RESEA programs. This complicates any evaluation designs that require some form of service denial to a group of participants in order to identify an appropriate comparison.¹⁹ Also, evaluations of different service models might require states to administer two parallel but different basic career service packages at the same time, ideally in the same office.

States may consider different evaluation design options to address these logistical challenges. For example, using a clustered random assignment design, evaluators could assign American Job Centers, rather than individual claimants, to different study groups. Alternatively, if states are able to conduct a staggered rollout (i.e., implemented at different American Job Centers at different times) of a modified RESEA program model, evaluators might be able to estimate impacts of the modification using an Interrupted Time Series design. These approaches would avoid implementation of multiple service packages in the same office. Finally, a randomized encouragement design would randomly assign claimants to receive some kind of additional information or incentive that attempts to increase claimants’ use of basic services. Relative to a random assignment design, this approach avoids the legal and logistical concerns of randomly assigning claimants to either receive or not receive services.²⁰ We review these and other design options in depth in a separate report (Klerman, et al., 2022).

No matter how states choose to conduct future evaluations of basic career services, the services or strategies tested should be well documented to make study findings practically useful to others. If a state finds that a particular type of basic career service (e.g., provision of labor market information) is effective, program designers and administrators in other states would need to understand the design, logistics, cost, and operation of that service in detail in order to replicate it in their program. Such detail would similarly be needed for researchers interested in implementing and testing the impact of that service in a different state. Careful implementation analysis, when included with the impact analysis, could document the details of service delivery so as to allow for replication.²¹

When designing interventions to test, states could draw on existing impact evaluations and implementation studies and similar analyses that already define specific services, describe their objectives, and define the approach to implementation (e.g., methods, staffing, and other resources).

Notes

1. See the formal definition of basic career services in federal regulations at 20 CFR 678.430. Prior to WIOA, reemployment services were categorized as either “core” or “intensive” under the Workforce Investment Act. WIOA collapses those categories into “career services,” of which there are three

types: basic, individualized, and follow-up. WIOA’s basic career services are comparable to what were core services under WIA.

2. Readers can find more detail about studies cited in this brief through CLEAR: <https://clear.dol.gov/reemployment-services-and-eligibility-assessments-resea>.
3. Throughout this brief, we only discuss findings from studies for which the authors report impacts that were statistically significant at $p < 0.1$.
4. Some analysts estimate that sample sizes required to detect statistically significant impact estimates for tests of basic career services could be over 50,000 claimants. See *REA Impact Study Briefs: Methodological Insights*, available at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/REA%20Impact%20Study%20Briefs%20-%20Methodological%20Insights.pdf>.
5. Though CEP participants were eligible for more intensive, individualized services (e.g., development of individual employment plans), less than 10 percent of participants received these kinds of services.
6. The study randomly assigned participants to either a treatment group (which received services) or a control group, but the Department of Labor’s Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) assigned the study a “Low” quality rating due to concerns related to potential differences between the two groups that affected measured impacts. See the CLEAR review here: <https://clear.dol.gov/study/economic-impact-nevada-claimant-employment-program-hanna-turney-1990.t>
7. Participation in WPRS also increases the likelihood of identifying a non-monetary eligibility issue that could result in the suspension or termination of the claimant’s benefits. Enforcement of UI eligibility rules through WPRS participation could affect UI durations.
8. The studied service package consisted of an orientation, assessment of needs and skills, aptitude and interest testing, a job search workshop, and individual counseling with potential follow-up (Decker et al., 2000).
9. Readers should interpret these findings with caution. One of the two Employment Service evaluations has not been reviewed by CLEAR, and the third was reviewed and assigned a “Low” causal evidence rating. Studies must receive a “High” or “Moderate” rating from CLEAR for their findings to meet the evidence standards set by DOL.
10. See Table 5 in Dyke et al. (2005).
11. Implementation studies of REA programs suggest that most REA services would be categorized as “basic career services” under WIOA guidelines. However, these studies cannot report on the amount of time devoted to each service. Further, because “individualized career services” are assumed to be more time intensive, it is unclear whether REA program participants spend most of their time in basic or individualized services. Moreover, states sometimes differ in their categorization of services as either basic or individualized (D’Amico et al., 2015).
12. Required REA components included a UI eligibility assessment, customized labor market information, registration with the state’s job bank, an orientation to AJC services, development of an individual reemployment plan, and a referral to reemployment services and/or training. These components are similar to RESEA’s minimum required components.

13. See *REA Impact Study Briefs: Methodological Insights*, available at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/REA%20Impact%20Study%20Briefs%20-%20Methodological%20Insights.pdf>.
14. Rather than comparing the relative effectiveness of different basic career services, a state could elect to evaluate the impact of all basic career services relative to no services. If these larger service contrasts have bigger impacts, then required sample sizes would be smaller. However, the results of such an evaluation would not offer evidence of potential improvements to existing service delivery.
15. See *REA Impact Study Briefs: Methodological Insights*, available at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/REA%20Impact%20Study%20Briefs%20-%20Methodological%20Insights.pdf>.
16. The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020. <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>
17. Though pooling samples in a multi-state non-experimental study is theoretically possible, the approach offers little to no advantage over a comparable multi-state experimental study. For more discussion, see the *Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Evaluation Toolkit: Key Elements for State RESEA Programs*, available here: https://rc.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/07/30/17/32/RESEA_Evaluation_Evidence_Resources.
18. The RESEA context in particular makes it hard to find a non-experimental comparison group that would be credible (Mills De La Rosa et al., 2021). To demonstrate that an RESEA program is effective, states must rely on evidence available from studies that have received a high or moderate rating from CLEAR. See CLEAR’s causal evidence guidelines here: https://clear.dol.gov/sites/default/files/CLEAR_EvidenceGuidelines_V2.1.pdf
19. In an experimental evaluation of WIA services, the design did not involve denying core services to study participants (Fortson et al., 2017). The RESEA program does not face the same universal service requirements as do WIA-funded programs, but denial of basic career services could be equally unpalatable.
20. Under a randomized encouragement design, all study participants are permitted to engage in services, but some participants (i.e., a treatment group) are randomly selected for extra encouragement to engage in services whereas other participants (i.e., a control group) receive no extra encouragement. This random encouragement is intended to generate a contrast in service receipt between the treatment and control groups that allows for estimation of impacts of the services. That encouraged contrast is expected to be smaller than that of a random assignment design, which assigns treatment group participants to treatment services and may bar control group members from those services. Encouragement designs are expected to require larger sample sizes, perhaps several times larger than assignment designs, depending on the extent to which encouraged treatment group members take up the intended treatment.
21. For more information about implementation studies, see the *Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Evaluation Toolkit: Key Elements for State RESEA Programs*, available here: https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/RESEA_Toolkit_February2021.pdf.

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