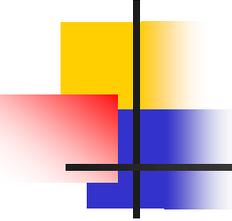


Applying Research and Evaluation to Everyday Practice

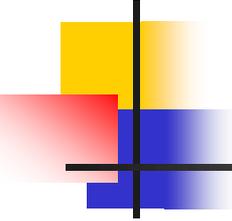
Burt S. Barnow
Johns Hopkins University

For presentation at the Employment and Training Recovery and Research
Conference, Washington, DC, September 15-16, 2009



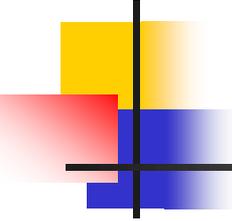
Issues Addressed

- How do/should researchers and evaluators findings influence and shape public workforce system policy and practice at the direct service level?
- How do findings translate into improvements for the system?
- How do seemingly conflicting findings get resolved?
- What are the research/evaluation questions that have not been yet identified, but would be helpful to explore to improve local level service delivery?
- How can ETA facilitate use of research and evaluation findings?



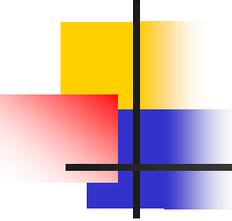
How do/should researchers and evaluators findings influence and shape public workforce system policy and practice at the direct service level?

- Research findings are only one of many factors that influence policy and practice: Preferences and politics will always trump research findings
- Theoretical findings are generally not sufficient to convince policymakers and is more likely to predict direction than magnitude
- Empirical findings also have problems:
 - There is often conflicting evidence
 - Program may be good in some ways but not others
 - Existing evidence often for different target groups, programs, or economic conditions
 - Avoid over-generalizing from a single success
- Strategies to make research more relevant
 - Use random assignment if possible
 - Replicate intervention
 - Present findings as clearly as possible



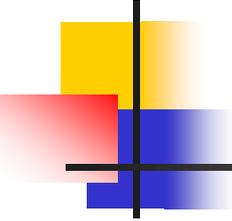
How do seemingly conflicting findings get resolved?

- From a scientific viewpoint, there is a hierarchy for evidence
 - Studies with fewer assumptions better (random assignment)
 - Robustness across model specifications
 - Robustness across nonexperimental approaches (matching schemes, difference in difference v. level, time series v. cross section)
 - Replication using different settings
- Some debates take decades or longer
 - Monetary v. fiscal policy
 - Effect of minimum wage on employment
 - Most problems when random assignment not possible and impacts vary with plausible assumptions



What should we test next?

- When is training better than less expensive approaches?
- Is long-term training a better investment than shorter training?
- Replicate and expand promising sectoral and customized training approaches
- Test and develop more effective strategies for out-of-school youth
 - Can Job Corps gains be sustained?
 - Can we develop less expensive effective training strategies for out-of-school youth?



How do findings translate into improvements for the system?

- Make findings available and accessible on the Internet
- Provide guides to help states, local areas, and vendors to learn about innovative, promising, and proven practices
- Provide technical assistance to programs interested in implementing such practices
- Provide incentives for implementing practices of interest