

The Research-Practice Nexus: Reflections Based on the ITA Experiment

Irma Perez Johnson
USDOL Recovery and Reemployment Research Conference
September 15, 2009

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research, Inc.

Plenary Session Questions

- **How do research findings influence workforce policy and direct service delivery?**
- **How do research findings translate into improvements for the system?**
- **How are seemingly conflicting findings resolved?**
- **What further research questions could be explored to improve service delivery?**

Essential Background on the ITA Experiment

- Launched in 1999 by USDOL to inform states and LWIAs on how best to implement ITAs
- Tested 3 approaches side-by-side in 8 local areas
- ITA experimental approaches reflected:
 - Variation in ITA models emerging at local level
 - Flexibility in program design allowed by WIA
- One-Stop customers randomly assigned to an approach after being determined eligible for training
- Study participants followed for 15 months

The ITA Experimental Approaches

	A1 Structured Choice	A2 Guided Choice	A3 Maximum Choice
Counseling	Mandatory; most intensive	Mandatory; moderate intensity	Voluntary
Can Counselors Reject Choices?	Yes	No	No
ITA Amount	Customized	Fixed cap	Fixed cap

Notable ITA Experiment Findings

- **Maximum choice (A3) was feasible, promoted ITA use, and did not lead to poor training or employment choices**
- **Under Structured Choice (A1), counselors struggled to direct customer choices; didn't ration ITA funds**
- **Approaches had no effect on overall training rates, occupation choices, or completion rates; only small effects on employment and earnings (but some customers were still in training)**
- **No evidence (so far) to recommend wholesale shift to a particular ITA approach, but important cost implications for local areas**

Plenary Questions

1. How research findings influence workforce policy and service delivery?

- Study sites, like most local areas, adopted Guided Choice (A2) approach after participating in the ITA Experiment
- Building on findings from the ITA Experiment, USDOL launched other demonstrations:
 - Personal Reemployment Accounts
 - Career Advancement Accounts
- Training Choice Option included in WIA Gold Standard Evaluation

2. Translating research findings into system improvements

- **PRA demonstration (2004)**
 - For UI recipients likely to exhaust benefits
 - \$3,000 award, for intensive/supportive services or training
 - Providers need not be on the ETP List
 - Up to 60% of PRA can be released as reemployment bonus
- **CAA demonstration (2006)**
 - For dislocated or incumbent workers, out-of-school youth, spouses of military personnel
 - Award of \$3,000/year for up to 2 years, for training only
 - Customers need not receive core or intensive services
 - Providers need not be n the ETP List
 - Training must lead to portable, industry-recognized credential

3. Resolving seemingly conflicting findings (ITA Experiment examples)

- **Structured choice (A1) and maximum choice (A3) more costly for local areas than guided choice (A2)**
- **Counselors reluctant to be directive in their interactions with Structured Choice (A1) customers**

4. Further research questions to improve local service delivery

- What are the net impacts of ITA training?
- Are modified, cost neutral ITA approaches feasible? What are their effects?
- What are the effects of:
 - expanding allowable uses of ITAs?
 - lifting ETP List requirements ?
 - imposing credential requirements ?
- What services help steer customers to train for high-growth, high-demand or strategic sectors of the economy (e.g., green jobs)? What are the effects of such services?

Concluding Thoughts

- **Research findings unlikely to lead to blanket prescriptions for service delivery; more likely to identify alternatives, modifications to enhance program efficiency or effectiveness**
- **Research findings support WIA's emphasis on customer choice and local flexibility**
- **Close collaboration, communication among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners enhances the feasibility and usefulness of research**
- **Incentives are necessary to promote innovation and continuous quality improvement in workforce service delivery**