



Evidence on Career Pathways Strategies: Highlights from a Scan of the Research

SUMMARY

In 2018, the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) and the [Employment and Training Administration](#) (ETA) partnered with independent contractor Abt Associates to conduct the *Career Pathways Descriptive and Analytical Study* to build evidence on career pathways employment and training strategies and inform further career pathways systems and program development. Several sub-studies will leverage existing data to answer specific questions related to worker supply and employer demand in the broader context of the labor market in which career pathways programs operate. The study will also provide insight about the effectiveness of career pathways program components and identify trends to inform the design of career pathways initiatives at program and systems levels.

The *Evidence on Career Pathways Strategies* literature review updates and expands the findings of the Career Pathways Design Study that included the [Career Pathways Research and Evaluation Synthesis](#), an analysis of career pathways research as of February 2017, that found a substantial amount of research and evaluation studies would be published in the near future. The findings from the updated scan will inform the project's planned meta-analysis, which will examine the extent to which different career pathways program components drive impacts found in this body of evidence. Additional reports, including evaluation design reports and final reports will publish by September 2021.

This Department of Labor-funded study was a result of the annual learning agenda process. It contributes to the growing labor evidence base to inform employment and training programs and policies and addresses Department strategic goals and priorities.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

- **The growing evidence base continues to paint a largely favorable picture of the effectiveness of these programs.** Of the 96 impact evaluations the scan identified, most found positive effects on outcomes, though some did not detect an impact (neither positive nor negative).
 - 83 percent of studies that measured **education outcomes** found positive impacts; 16 percent found no impact
 - 62 percent of studies that measured **employment outcomes** found positive impacts; 33 percent found no impact
 - 63 percent of studies that examined **earnings outcomes** found positive impacts; 38 percent found no impact.





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- **A large body of new evidence has emerged on career pathways strategies since the 2017 analysis**, with newly available impact findings. This updated scan includes 81 research projects, which included 123 separate evaluations.
- **Most of the studies reviewed in the updated scan were focused on program versus system-level initiatives.** Of the 81 research projects reviewed, nearly all examined program-level initiatives. About a fourth examined system-level initiatives.
- **Studies examined programs in the healthcare and manufacturing sectors more frequently**, with IT, business, and construction also commonly studied. The studies identified in the new scan provide greater evidence across a variety of sectors.
- **Of the studies that reported demographic data, typical career pathways participants had a high school diploma**, consisted of men and women in equal proportions, and were white or African American. Few studies included substantial percentages of Hispanics or lower-skilled adults.
- **Just 21 percent of the research projects (that reported gender data) served genders equally.** Instead, programs tended to attract more of one gender or the other, with women more often training in healthcare and men more often in manufacturing.

SEE FULL REPORT

TIMEFRAME: February 2018 - February 2019

PARTNER AGENCY: DOL Employment and Training Administration

SUBMITTED BY: Abt Associates

SPONSOR: DOL Chief Evaluation Office

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