

NAWRS Annual Conference 2014

Putting the Pieces Together: Using Research and Analysis to Improve Program Effectiveness and Reduce Poverty



Accelerating Connections to Employment (ACE)

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Presentation Outline

- ❖ Introduction to ICF International and ACE Initiative
- ❖ Goals of the ACE Initiative and Evaluation Methods
- ❖ ACE Logic Model
- ❖ Key Research Questions
- ❖ Why an RCT?
- ❖ Measuring Outcomes
- ❖ Methodological Challenges and Solutions
- ❖ Implementation Challenges and Solutions
- ❖ Next Steps



ACE Program

- ICF International
 - Independent third party evaluator for the Accelerating Connections to Employment (ACE) program
- ACE
 - **Consortium:** Nine Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and 10 partner Community Colleges
 - **Four States:** Maryland, Connecticut, Georgia, and Texas.
 - **Funding:** Nearly \$12 million Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant awarded by the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (USDOL/ETA) to the Baltimore County Department of Economic Development, Division of Workforce Development.
 - **Time period:** 52 months.



ACE Program

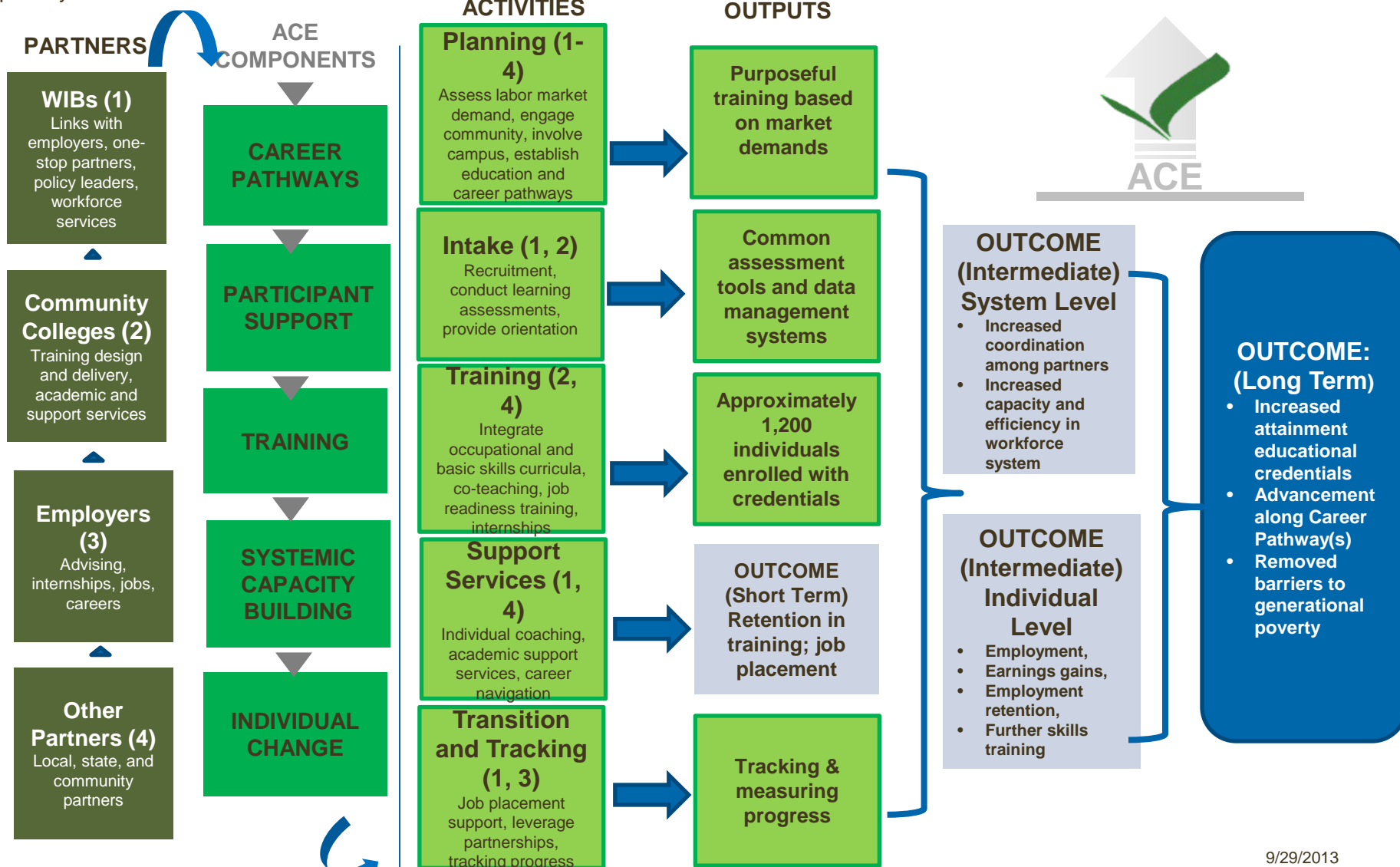
- Goals of the ACE Initiative
 - ✓ **Model:** Apply Washington State's career pathway model known as Integrated-Basic Educational Skills Training (I-BEST)
 - ✓ **Target population:** Provide training and job placements for roughly 1,300 low-skilled adults in Maryland, Connecticut, Georgia, and Texas.
 - ✓ **Career pathways through education:** Link education and training services to provide skill-building opportunities and career pathways for low-skilled individuals within the workforce system
 - ✓ **Capacity Building:** Strengthen the capacity of the public workforce system by developing a measurable way to help low-skilled individuals build basic and occupational skills and enter into sustainable employment.



ACE: ACCELERATING CONNECTIONS TO EMPLOYMENT



VISION: Through the ACE model, employers are connected to the education and workforce systems for the benefit of ACE customers launching participants on a sustainable career pathway. Participating adults are guided through the training and educational process by a dedicated career navigator and supported by ACE partners. These strategies will reduce generational poverty over time.



9/29/2013



ACE Program Research Questions

- Key research questions that ICF will answer include the following:

Impact Study

Implementation Study

What is **the impact** of the ACE initiative on an individual's ability to attain an occupational credential, secure employment, retain employment, and increase their earnings?

What type of services were offered by the program, and which services did participants need the most?

How did partners contribute to the program?

Does participation in ACE increase the quality of jobs attained by participants?

What challenges and successes were reported in terms of recruitment, enrollment, program completion, job placement, and employment retention?

How successful were ACE sites in recruiting their target populations, and how well did target populations make use of the services offered?

How do program impacts vary by site, occupational focus, demographic characteristics, and prior work experience?



Evaluation Methodology

Mixed Methods Approach

- Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) for several cohorts at each site.
- Implementation study and
- Case studies



Why an RCT for ACE?

Typical Benefits of an RCT

- Known and unknown characteristics of individuals evenly distributed across treatment and control groups
- Extraneous variation not due to the intervention is controlled for experimentally
- Results can be causally attributed to ACE model

Typical Drawbacks of an RCT

- Generalizability
 - 9 sites, nationwide
 - Sites vary in terms of WIB and CC structure
- Ethics
 - BAU services are available and stressed for control group
 - Veterans receive Priority of Service
- Lack of contextual information
 - Use mixed-method approach
 - Implementation study examines how elements of ACE model are working, check for fidelity to model



Measuring Outcomes

Reliability of measurements and survey instruments

→ Conducted survey pilot/cognitive interviews/expert review

Accessing UI / New Hires Data

→ Jacob France Institute; National Directory of New Hires

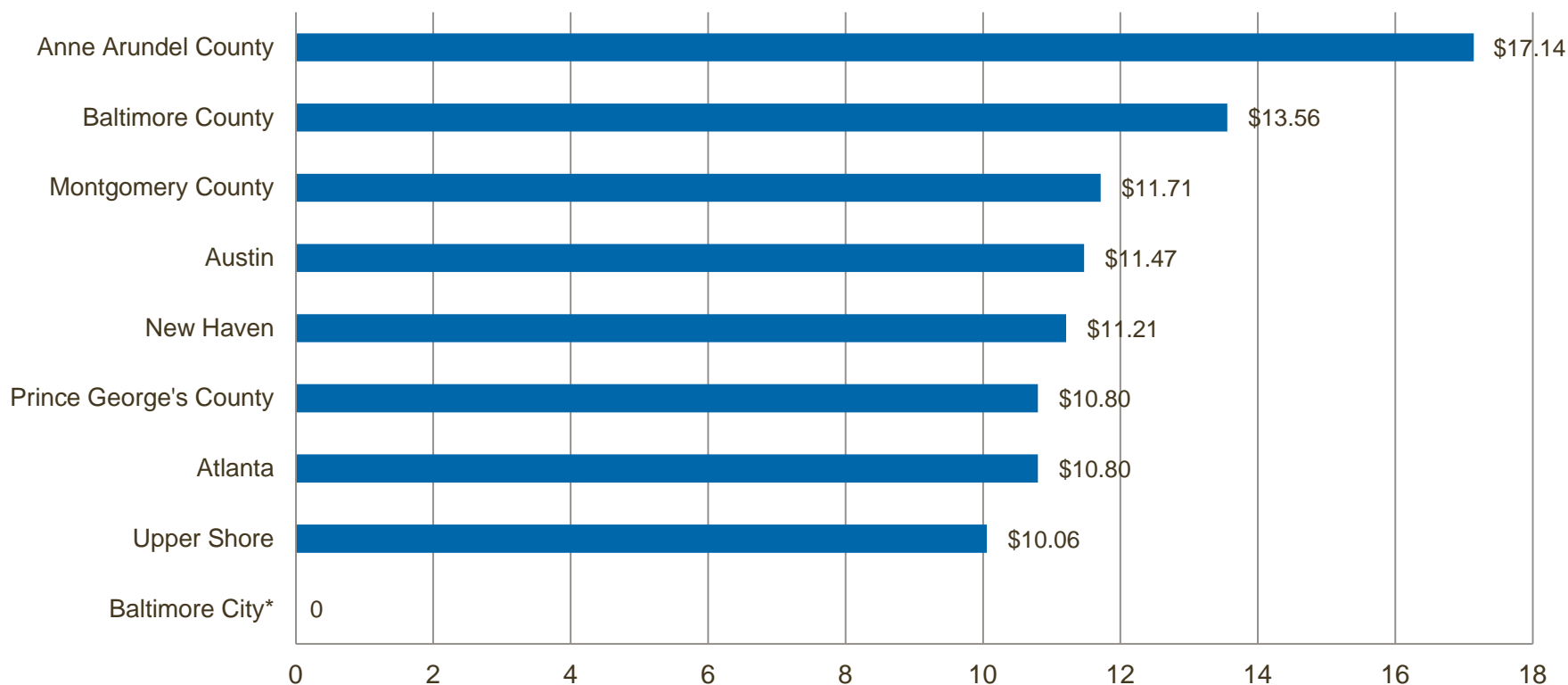
**Findings of
survey pilot
process**

- **Social desirability bias (e.g., tips, wages)**
- **Nine sites use differing terminology**
 - E.g., “Career Navigator”, “Workforce Investment Board”, “One-Stop”, “Workforce Center”
- **Translating workforce development-speak for participants**
 - E.g., “Job development,” “Job Readiness,” “Job Search Assistance,” “Career Counseling”



Previewing Outcomes: Wages

Average Wage in Training-Related Jobs (August 2014)

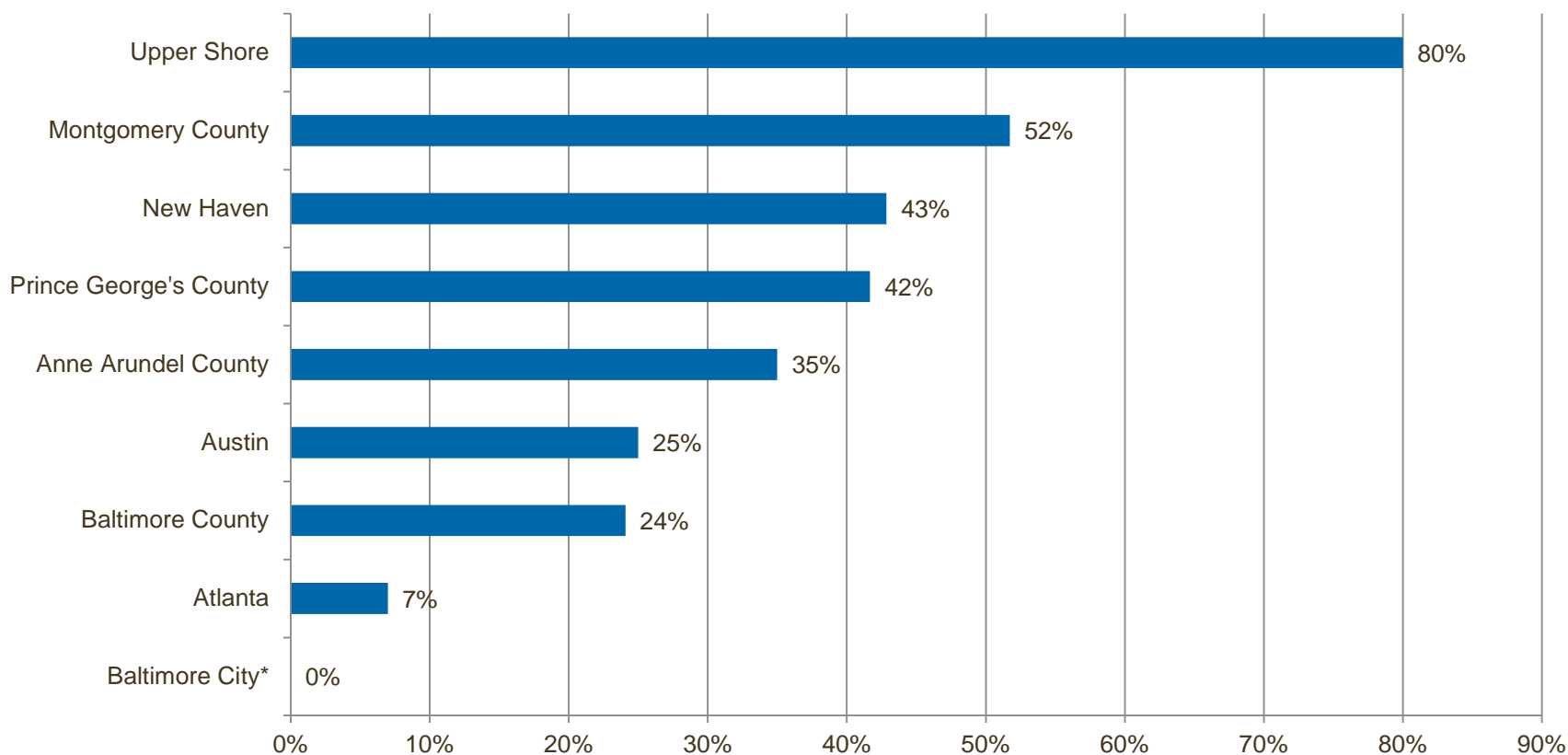


**Baltimore City had not yet had an ACE class complete as of the August 2014 data collection*



Previewing Outcomes: Employment

Percentage of ACE Completers Employed (August 2014)



**Baltimore City had not yet had an ACE class complete as of the August 2014 data collection*



Methodological Challenges

Nature of population

- Control group is difficult to reach and keep engaged
- Attrition is expected to be high

Meeting enrollment targets

- Recruiting for an RCT is new to CC/WIB staff
- Selling the RCT to students and project partners

Nested structure

- Achieving power necessary for subgroup analyses



Implementation Challenges

Customized database system

- Training sites
 - Consistent, timely reporting
 - Minimizing burden on sites
- Training evaluation staff
 - Data download/formatting challenges
 - Data entry inaccuracies and impact on merging multiple datasets

Randomization process

- Achieving buy-in from staff, participants, and project partners
- Address difficult or special cases in the randomization process
 - Veterans
 - Individuals that approach more than one site



Implementation Challenges

Logistics of working with nine sites

- Geographic barriers to knowledge sharing, site visits
- Differing organizational cultures and existing procedures

Veterans, Spouses, and Priority of Service

- Simplifying complex laws and regulations
- Truthful reporting of veterans status
- Impact on meeting numbers



Next Steps

- Launch follow-up survey at the end of August
 - ICF's Consolidated Business Operations & Support Services (CBOSS) Center in Martinsville, VA. Provides call center and survey administration services.
- Conduct site visits for implementation analysis and special case study topics
- Explore more in-depth topics using rich evaluation data
 - Practice Briefs



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