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.
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.
VISON: 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.
ACE Program Research Questions

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Study</th>
<th>Implementation Study</th>
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<td>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?</td>
<td>What type of services were offered by the program, and which services did participants need the most?</td>
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<td>Does participation in ACE increase the quality of jobs attained by participants?</td>
<td>What challenges and successes were reported in terms of recruitment, enrollment, program completion, job placement, and employment retention?</td>
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<td>How do program impacts vary by site, occupational focus, demographic characteristics, and prior work experience?</td>
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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)

- Anne Arundel County: $17.14
- Baltimore County: $13.56
- Montgomery County: $11.71
- Austin: $11.47
- New Haven: $11.21
- Prince George's County: $10.80
- Atlanta: $10.80
- Upper Shore: $10.06
- Baltimore City*: 0

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

Percentage of ACE Completers Employed (August 2014)

Upper Shore: 80%
Montgomery County: 52%
New Haven: 43%
Prince George's County: 42%
Anne Arundel County: 35%
Austin: 25%
Baltimore County: 24%
Atlanta: 7%
Baltimore City*: 0%

*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

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<tr>
<th>Logistics of working with nine sites</th>
<th>Veterans, Spouses, and Priority of Service</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Geographic barriers to knowledge sharing, site visits</td>
<td>• Simplifying complex laws and regulations</td>
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<td>• Differing organizational cultures and existing procedures</td>
<td>• Truthful reporting of veterans status</td>
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<td>• Impact on meeting numbers</td>
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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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