



# Evaluating Disability Employment Program and Services: What You Need to Know to Structure an Effective, User Friendly Evaluation

John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development

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## Briefing Available Online

- **PowerPoint Version:**

<http://bit.ly/3vBVxJ>

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## Who We Are

- The Heldrich Center is a research and policy institute located at Rutgers University dedicated to raising the effectiveness of the American workplace by strengthening workforce education and training programs
- Founded in 1997, the center employs 18 full-time professional staff and faculty representing an array of disciplines, from economics and human services to business and public policy

## NTAR Leadership Center

- Established in September 2007 through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
- Created for the purpose of building capacity and leadership at the state and local levels to enable change across workforce development and disability-specific systems that will increase employment for adults with disabilities
- Provides technical assistance and research to states in its State Peer Leaders Network
- Piloting innovation through its State Leaders Innovation Institute

# Heldrich Center Research and Evaluation

- Assessing the effectiveness of workforce and education programs, underscoring best practices in education, training, and economic development, while also identifying emerging challenges that employers and policymakers must address.
  
- Selected evaluation projects include:
  - A profile of performance outcomes of New Jersey's community colleges
  - Evaluation of Kessler Foundation funded grantees
  - Examination of US Department of Education financed Parent Information Resource Center

## Significance of Evaluating Workforce Programs

- Learn what works and does not work
- Document best practices for replication
- Identify barriers to success and program weaknesses

Why have efforts to evaluate programs intended to improve the employment of people with disabilities faced shortcomings and limitations?

- Data is often unavailable or inadequate
- Many interventions lack a comparison or control group
- Low participation rates limits the ability to detect impacts
- Studies pooled data across dissimilar interventions, making it difficult to draw conclusions
- Study timeframes too short to assess impact

## Other reasons....

- Evaluations focus only on participant experiences and not broader participants and non participants
- Difficulty in measuring the impact of systems change resulting in process studies not impact analyses
- Lack of investment or resources for evaluation
- Lack of interest in evaluation
- Unfamiliarity with evaluation techniques

# Session Objectives

- Provide an overview of evaluation and learn:
  - What is evaluation?
  - Why evaluate?
  - When should you evaluate?
  - How to use the logic of evaluation to improve programs
  - How to evaluate
  - How to budget and purchase evaluation services
  - Lessons from past evaluations of workforce programs for people with disabilities, including case studies
- Answer Your Questions

# I. What Is Evaluation?

# What Evaluation Is

- Systematic assessment of program implementation and effectiveness according to clearly specified criteria
  - Systematic—rigorous, objective process; ask tough questions
  - Implementation—is program implemented in a way that is likely to produce success?
  - Effectiveness—is program achieving its outcomes?
  - Clearly specified criteria—these include program goals and best practices in program implementation
- The voice of program participants

## What Evaluation is Not

- Evaluation is not auditing
- Evaluation is not needs assessment
- Evaluation is not customer satisfaction
- Evaluation is not technical assistance--though the lessons learned from evaluation may constitute technical assistance in that they may aid in program implementation

# Evaluation Myths

- Evaluation is a gotcha
- The effectiveness of some programs just can't be measured
- Evaluation is just about numbers
- Evaluations must be complex to be successful

# Types of Evaluations

- Process Evaluations:
  - Identify barriers to successful implementation
  - Identify which program components are effective and which and ineffective at helping program achieve its goals
  - Recommend strategies for modifying program to strengthen it
  - Tend to use more qualitative data
- Outcome Evaluations:
  - How well is the program achieving its goals?
  - Tend to use more quantitative data

## II. Why Evaluate?

# Why Evaluate?

- To learn which program components are effective
- To learn which program components are ineffective
- To identify areas for improvement
- To learn whether the program is achieving its goals—i.e., does the program really benefit the people it was designed to help
- To identify barriers to program success
- To gauge stakeholder support

### III. When Evaluate?

## When Workforce Programs Should Be Evaluated

- Before the program begins. In the early stages of developing any program, staff should plan the program to accommodate evaluation
- Data collection should be ongoing
- Program should be evaluated at regular intervals

# Life-Cycle Model of Program Evaluation

- Like products, programs have life cycles:
  - conceptualization
  - piloting
  - widespread implementation
  - maturity
  - (possibly) phase-out
- Type of evaluation to be conducted is a function of where a program is in the life-cycle

## IV. Using the Logic of Evaluation to Strengthen Programs

## Establish Clear and Measurable Goals

- Program goals are the standards by which the outcomes of a program are evaluated
- State goals in measurable terms

# Develop Plan for Achieving Goals

- Think carefully and systematically about HOW to achieve program goals
- At what point should you see tangible progress toward program goals?
- At what point should the program achieve its outcomes?
- What are the barriers to program effectiveness and what is the program's plan for overcoming them?

# Develop Logic Model

- Logic model: how does each activity in the program contribute to a goal?
  - Identify program inputs. Inputs refer to any activities and individual elements that are necessary for each activity to be successful? (Example: quality instruction)
  - Identify the outputs. These are not goals but they are intermediate (Example: high attendance by students)
  - What are the outcomes (goals) the program aims to achieve? (Example: employment)

# Think Like An Evaluator

- At what stage is the program in its life-cycle?
- What evidence would be needed to convince a neutral observer that the program is effective? That it's being implemented well?
- If this program were successful what would I expect to observe?
  - Look for the observable implications of program success
  - Observable implications can be measured, either qualitatively or quantitatively
- Focus on both process and outcomes

## V. How to Evaluate?

# How to Evaluate

- Identify stakeholders
- Types of data: qualitative and quantitative
- Methodologies of data collection
  - Individual interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Surveys
  - Observation of program activities
  - Collection of programmatic and administrative data
- Some methodologies can be used to collect qualitative and quantitative data, e.g., surveys
- When to collect data
  - Design program so that needed data can be collected from day one

## VI. Purchasing Evaluation Services

## Tips for Purchasing Evaluation Services

- Identify an evaluator in the *proposal* stages of a program, before implementation
- Evaluator should have experience evaluating similar programs
- For new programs, a local evaluator who can visit the program and observe may be preferable
- For process and outcomes evaluations, budget about 10 percent of program budget to evaluation--more for more sophisticated (e.g., quasi-experimental and experimental designs)

## How to Make It Easier for an Evaluator to Evaluate a Program

- Clearly define program goals
- Develop a clear logic model for how program should help people with PWD become employed
- Set up program to facilitate data collection
- Make stakeholders aware that the program will be evaluated and explain the importance of evaluation

## VII. Lessons Learned from Past Evaluations

## Lessons from Past Evaluations

- Challenges in Getting Enough People in the Program
  - Develop partnerships and good relationships with public referral agencies such as VR before program start up
- Difficulty engaging businesses (to participate, to hire, to take interns, etc)
  - Develop partnerships and good relationships with businesses before program start up and get interviewing/internship agreements up front
  - Create business advisory groups
  - Develop opportunities to listen to, and understand, the needs of business

## Lessons Learned (continued)

- Lack of vital post employment supports such as health care
  - Take into account the need to secure and/or find or finance post employment supports when placing individuals into jobs
  - Educate program participants about benefits planning, especially Medicaid benefits
- Training developed with no connection to the needs in the labor market
  - Understand the local labor market and train participants for demand occupations
  - Confirm with local businesses that the training the program offers will endow participants with the skills businesses demand

## Lessons Learned (continued)

- Training is too short or inadequate
  - Provide program participants with enough training to put them on a level-playing field, skill-wise, with the people against whom they will be competing for jobs
- Partnership development and relationship building takes considerable time
  - Need to recognize that relationship building is a slow process and should be started early and often
  - Begin projects with willing partners and those with whom you have an established relationship

## Lessons Learned (continued)

- Persons with disabilities hesitant and/or reluctant to go to work or Parents are hesitant to have child go to work
  - Recognize and anticipate issues pertaining to concerns and fears about loss of benefits, new environments and other factors that contribute to work hesitancy
  - Important that the jobseeker be actively engaged in what they want to do (re: training and work)
  - Educate parents about the benefits of their child working

## Lessons Learned (continued)

- Difficulty in hiring the necessary project staff quickly
  - Account for the necessary time to hire key project staff
- Long delays associated with projects that required equipment purchase or buildings renovations and/or new construction
  - Take into account the timeframes associated with purchasing and procurement, organizational approvals and permits

## VIII. Evaluation Case Studies

# Vocational Model for People with TBI

- Program
  - Goal: assist people with TBI in order to help them return to work
  - Program developed a standardized process by which DVR and job coaches would handle TBI cases
- Evaluation Approach
  - Process evaluation: interviews key stakeholders and students to learn how the program functioned
  - Pre- post surveys of job coaches
- Findings
  - Identified some ways the program could be improved
  - Identified some barriers to program effectiveness

# IT Training Program for PWD

- Program
  - Goal: Prepare PWD for IT careers
  - Provided 60 PWD classroom training in business and IT skills, four days a week, six hours a day in five 18-week sessions over two years
- Evaluation Approach
  - Process evaluation: interview key stakeholders and students to learn how the program functioned
  - Outcome evaluation: examined employment outcomes of program participants
- Findings
  - Program needed stronger relationship with the state DVR
  - Initial curriculum did not provide students with enough instruction for them to make them competitive in the labor market
  - Program needed stronger relationships with employers
  - Program needed a stronger focus on job placement

# Questions



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