



USING EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

To achieve long-term results in federally-funded job training and placement services, it's vitally important to make programmatic choices based on the best available research evidence. But what is that evidence and how can you find what is particularly relevant to your work? This Bulletin will provide you with a framework for evaluating the research that exists, practical information you can use to improve training outcomes for your participants, and resources for keeping abreast of the latest evidence-based workforce system strategies.

A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING RESEARCH



When reviewing research relevant to workforce development services, you should consider the level and strength of the available evidence.

The highest or strongest level of evidence is based on multiple, well-conducted, and randomized experimental trials. The next level involves strategies based on a single, randomized experimental trial. In the absence of any relevant experimental trials, the next level to consider involves studies of a single program or several programs that identify promising, but untested, practices. When evaluating this type of evidence, it is important to consider the extent to which these strategies are accepted by workforce development professionals and the degree to which the study's cohort has characteristics that are similar to your trainees.

THE “BIG PICTURE” VIEW—WHAT WORKS?

[What Works in Job Training – A Synthesis of the Evidence](#), a report prepared by the Departments of Labor, Commerce, Education, and Health and Human Services in 2014, presents evidence of what works in job training for adults and youth. The report indicates the value of the following programmatic features:

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- ✦ A Framework for Evaluating Research
- ✦ The “Big Picture” View – What Works?
- ✦ What Works to Improve Training Completion Outcomes

- ✦ Post-secondary education, especially when it results in a degree or industry-recognized credential related to in-demand jobs;
- ✦ Flexible and innovative training and post-secondary education approaches such as contextual learning and bridge programs;
- ✦ Robust employer and industry sector engagement in training initiatives;
- ✦ Access to accurate and up-to-date labor market data, as well as information and guidance about career and training opportunities; and
- ✦ Coordinated strategies across systems for lower-skilled individuals and those with multiple barriers to employment.

WHAT WORKS TO IMPROVE TRAINING COMPLETION OUTCOMES

[Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs \(ASAP\) for Developmental Education Students](#), a report released by MDRC in 2015, presents findings from a random assignment study of ASAP at three City University of New York Community Colleges. Launched in 2007, ASAP was designed to increase graduation rates and help students graduate more quickly. Students participating in the program were required to attend school full-time and were provided with comprehensive guidance from an advisor with a small case load.

Seminars covering topics such as study skills and goal setting were provided along with free public transportation cards, contingent on participation in key program services. Program participants also

received a tuition waiver to cover any gaps between financial aid and college tuition and fees and were provided with textbooks at no cost. The research determined that

- ✎ the program was well-implemented and had substantially improved academic outcomes over three years, doubling graduation rates;
- ✎ the cost per degree was lower in ASAP because it generated many more graduates than the typical college services;
- ✎ the program's full-time enrollment requirement and multiple supports were essential to the program's success;
- ✎ the program's requirement to participate in critical program components such as tutoring and guidance, and monitoring their engagement in these activities and providing them with incentives for participating, was likely to have increased engagement in these activities; and
- ✎ a high level of monitoring, with a focus on improvement, contributed to the program's positive effects for students.



There is also a substantial body of research that supports the use of small groups in which students work together to acquire

knowledge or a skill. A meta-analysis of 168 studies conducted by David Johnson, Roger Johnson, and Karl Smith provided clear evidence that cooperative learning produces greater academic achievement than both competitive learning and individualist learning.ⁱ In light of this evidence, our next bulletin will offer practical tips and strategies that can be used to increase the effectiveness of study groups and improve student scores on credentialing exams.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Workforce System Strategies, an initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, identifies a range of potential strategies informed by research evidence or peer expertise.

(<http://strategies.workforce3one.org>)

- ✎ To stay up-to-date on the latest research and best practices, register to receive weekly e-alerts by clicking here:

http://strategies.workforce3one.org/weekly_digest_signup

The Laura and John Arnold Foundation's Evidence-Based Policy and Innovation Initiative develops and supports projects that encourage governments and nonprofit organizations build the evidence base for social interventions.

(<http://www.arnoldfoundation.org/initiative/evidence-based-policy-innovation/>)

ⁱ Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., and Smith, K.A. (2006). Active learning: Cooperation in the university classroom (3rd edition). Edina, MN: Interaction.