

Research and Evaluation Notes

June 2022



To support the public workforce system's research and evaluation efforts, these notes share:

- Select research and evaluation initiatives, reports, and resources relevant to the nation's workforce development system, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs, and select populations; and
- Technical assistance efforts to support positive customer and program outcomes through research, evaluation, and evidence-based program design.

Highlights from this issue:

- **Select Reading** offers findings from a recent meta-analysis, a new mid-level occupations report, and a summary of wage growth disparities by gender and race/ethnicity from the Career Pathways Descriptive and Analytical Project.
- **Evidence in Action** features two new Individual Placement and Support (IPS) issue briefs along with a scan of key trends in the labor market and workforce development system.
- **Research in Living Color** presents an infographic with the steps involved to conduct a rapid cycle evaluation study.

SELECT READING

Career Pathways Descriptive and Analytical Project

The career pathways approach to workforce development seeks to advance workers to better-paying jobs by earning in-demand postsecondary credentials. The approach involves articulated steps of education, training, and employment within an industry sector, combined with other services, to support participant success. The Department of Labor (DOL) released two studies and several briefs and tools on career pathways program approaches and career trajectories. The [*Career Pathways Descriptive and Analytical*](#) project includes a meta-analysis on the impacts of career pathways program approaches and a study on longitudinal career trajectories and occupational transitions. The [*Meta-Analysis of 46 Career Pathways Impact Evaluations*](#) examined 46 evaluations (primarily conducted by the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education) to determine the overall impact of the career pathways approach on educational progress and earnings gains. The meta-analysis also examined career pathways program characteristics associated with such impacts. The studies found "that the career pathways approach leads to large educational progress gains, large gains in industry-specific employment, small gains in general employment, small gains in short-term earnings, and no meaningful gains in medium/longer-term earnings."

Building Better Pathways Study

The [*Building Better Pathways: An Analysis of Career Trajectories and Occupational Transitions*](#) study identified current information on the prospects and pathways for economic advancement. This report focuses on "mid-level" occupations—occupations that typically require postsecondary education but less than a four-year college degree. The report found that workers in mid-level "launchpad" occupations (i.e., ones with higher-than-average wage growth) earn approximately \$7.20 more per hour after ten years than those in occupations with lower-wage trajectories. The [*The Wage Growth Disparities by Gender and Race/Ethnicity Among Entrants to Mid-Level Occupations in the United States*](#) paper summarizes the findings concerning disparities in wage trajectories by gender and race/ethnicity—even among similar workers starting in the same occupation. Strategies to address the disparities include program-level interventions and broader policies that directly address wage disparities, such as longer-term services to assist workers in making upward career transitions beyond the initial mid-level step.

EVIDENCE IN ACTION

Two Issue Briefs on the Individual Placement and Support Employment Model

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (HHS OPRE) recently published two issue briefs that focus on the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) evidence-based employment support model.

The first issue brief, [*Measuring Access to IPS and Employment Outcomes for Historically Underserved Groups*](#), reviews the research on access to and effectiveness of IPS for historically underserved groups and suggests a standardized template for states, including those participating in ASPIRE (Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment), to track race

SPOTLIGHT

- New webinar: [Conducting and Leveraging Practical Aspects of Evaluations in Workforce Development](#) and related resources available in the WorkforceGPS EvalHub community
- New interactive tool: [Career Trajectories and Occupational Transitions \(CTOT\) dashboard](#) available from the [Chief Evaluation Office](#) website

and ethnicity in programs. The brief provides recommendations for research on race and ethnicity in IPS programs; shares a suggested template for tracking race and ethnicity information; identifies five issues to address related to data collection and reporting information on race and ethnicity; and discusses future directions in tracking people identifying as LGBTQ+.

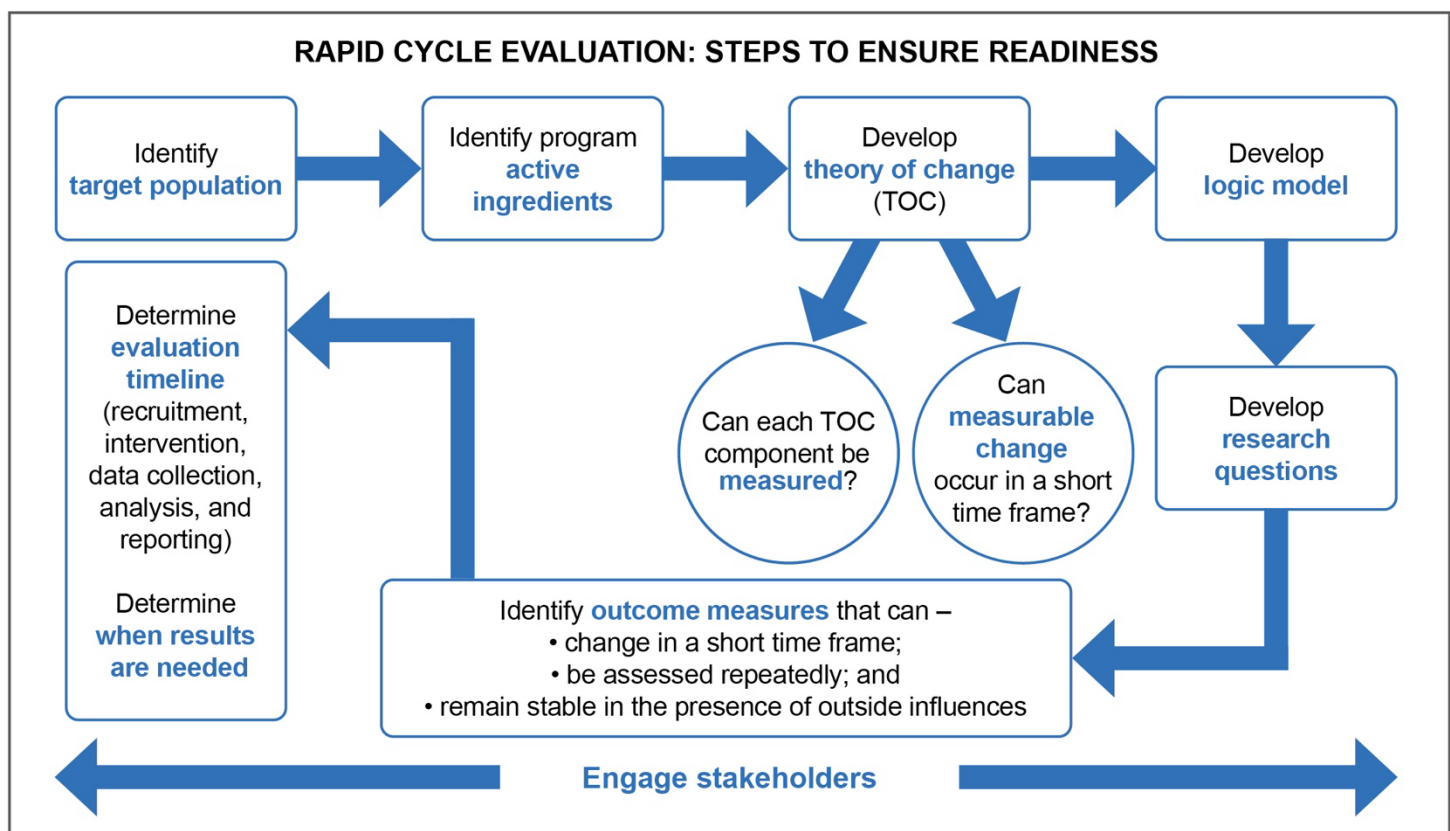
In 2019, the IPS Employment Center conducted a follow-up national survey to examine the expansion of IPS services and strategies used by survey respondents. The second issue brief, [State-Level Barriers and Facilitators to IPS Implementation](#), elaborates upon barriers and facilitators to IPS development as described by state leaders. Barriers to IPS growth include funding, lack of prioritization, system-level challenges, and workforce issues. The most common facilitators to IPS development are leadership, funding, quality improvement, building awareness, and government actions and programs.

A Scan of Key Labor Market and Workforce Development System Trends

Conducted in consultation with the DOL's Chief Evaluation Office and the Employment and Training Administration, [The WIOA Research Portfolio: A Scan of Key Trends in the Labor Market and Workforce Development System](#) focused on four topics: broad economic trends and recent changes in employment and wages; changes in industries and occupations resulting from advancements in technology, automation, and the rise of the gig economy; growth in remote services in workforce systems; and federal policy trends related to the public workforce system. The scan describes trends associated with each area and summarizes the knowledge gaps in the existing evidence base.

RESEARCH IN LIVING COLOR

The rapid cycle evaluation (RCE) approach relies on methods that can quickly evaluate program components and provide actionable results to employ in further testing and program improvement. Published in 2020 this brief, [Rapid-Cycle Evaluation at a Glance](#), defines RCE, compares it with traditional research designs, describes the methods that can be used, indicates how it can address a research question, outlines steps to prepare for RCE, and lists the potential benefits of this approach. The chart below highlights steps to ensure readiness to implement successful RCE approaches that include identifying the population and program components, developing a theory of change and logic model, identifying outcome measures, and determining an evaluation timeline.



Source: Mathematica Policy Research (2017). [Rapid-cycle evaluation. https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/-/media/publications/pdfs/education/2016/if_rce.pdf](https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/-/media/publications/pdfs/education/2016/if_rce.pdf)

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