



Ready to Work Partnership Grant Evaluation

SUMMARY

In response to the 2008-2009 economic recession, the U.S. Department of Labor funded and administered the Ready to Work (RTW) Partnership Grant program. These grants were intended for organizations offering services to help the long-term unemployed re-enter jobs in high-growth occupations and industries. Successful grant applicants were required to enroll and provide services for people unemployed or underemployed for over 27 weeks who had the educational and/or experience required for middle and/or high-skill positions. The grants allowed for a flexible range of customized services, including career planning guidance and activities, occupational training, employment readiness and job search assistance, and work-based training. In 2014, DOL awarded 4-year grants totaling \$180M to 24 grantees. Programs began providing services in spring or summer 2015 and continued operating through summer or fall 2019 (including a one-year no-cost extensions of the grants).

In 2020, the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) sponsored an evaluation of the RTW grant program that was conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with MEF Associates. The evaluation included an implementation study, summarized here, and an experimental impact study to be released in 2021 and 2022. A prior implementation report focused on the first year of funding and how grantees translated Department of Labor resources and guidance into operational programs and services.

The 2020 implementation study, *Providing Employment Services to the Long-Term Unemployed: Implementation and Sustainability of the Programs in the Ready to Work Partnership Grant Evaluation*, examined the design and operation of four selected programs as they evolved over the four-year grant period. The study included analysis of services provided, participation patterns of enrollees, implementation experiences, and plans to continue the programs after expiry of the grants. Researchers selected three workforce agencies and one non-profit for study: Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation (AAWDC); RochesterWorks!; Worksystems Inc. (Worksystems); and Jewish Vocational Service (JVS). All four served urban, suburban and rural areas. All focused services on jobs in the IT industry, while three also included advanced manufacturing and two included the healthcare industry.

The researchers' primary data source for the study consisted of three rounds of in-person interviews between 2016 and 2018 which were conducted with grantee program administrators, line staff, and organizational partners. To examine participation patterns,





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the researchers analyzed administrative data including dates of participation, types of activities attended, and completion status. The researchers also used information on program participants, including demographic characteristics, employment and education history, and receipt of public assistance.

This Department of Labor-funded study was a result of a learning agenda. It contributes to the labor evidence-base to inform [employment and training](#) programs and policies and addresses Departmental strategic goals and priorities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Grantees fully used the program's flexibility.** Grantees used the program flexibility to address local needs, with some emphasizing occupational training to upgrade skills, while others focused on developing employment readiness skills and/or connections to employers.
 - In the JVS and Worksystems programs, at least two-thirds of enrollments were focused on occupational training (largely in IT).
 - In contrast, RochesterWorks! provided employment readiness activities to nearly all of its enrollees, with only about one quarter attending occupational training.
 - AAWDC's participants received both services.
- **Grantees used funds to proactively pursue networking.** To enhance chances for employment, all grantees prioritized developing industry connections. They explored work-based training options and encouraged employer visits and the posting of job opportunities. They also solicited input from employers on program design and invited them to job fairs.
- **Work-based training was the least-common service provided.** Grantees reported that work-based training (e.g., subsidized employment or unpaid work experience) remained a small percentage of services due to the large time investment needed to develop positions and build trust with employers.
- **An improving economy changed the grant program dynamics.** Grantees reported that as the economy improved, the more qualified enrollees found work. The remaining participants had lower skills and less experience and grantees had to modify services to meet this unexpected need. Changes included:
 - Increasing emphasis on occupational training.
 - Acknowledging that it was critical that customized assistance also provided mental health and confidence-building services.





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- Using more aggressive recruitment strategies to continue to meet grant enrollment targets as participants left for jobs.
- **Most participants were older with some higher education.** More than 80 percent of program participants were unemployed at enrollment, with about one-third having been unemployed for a year or more. One-third to one-half had a bachelor's degree, while most others had some college or a technical or associates degree. Because of the education and experience requirements, enrollees had an average age of 45, with about one-fifth older than age 55. About half of participants were receiving some type of public benefit.
- **Grantees hoped to continue some program components.** Although they could not afford to continue all grant-funded services, the grantees planned to seek new funding to continue motivation and confidence-building activities, cohort training (which prepares small groups to meet the needs of an employer), and building on relationships with employers and workforce development agencies initiated during the grant period.

[SEE THE FULL STUDY](#)

TIMEFRAME: 2016-2022

SUBMITTED BY: Abt Associates, MEF Associates

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SPONSOR: Chief Evaluation Office

CEO CONTACT: ChiefEvaluationOffice@dol.gov

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