SUMMARY

In 2021, the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) partnered with the [Employment and Training Administration (ETA)](#) to fund contractor Manhattan Strategy Group to conduct the *Navigators in Social Service Delivery Settings: A Review of the Literature with Relevance to Workforce Development Programs.* The literature review aims to examine the roles and activities of navigator programs in workforce development and related fields as well as the outcomes and impacts of such programs. To address these goals, researchers identified and reviewed relevant literature published between 2010 and 2021. They also reviewed the bibliographic references of the identified articles for additional materials.

Service navigators provide information about supports and services within complex systems to help individuals or families navigate them. Navigators may offer possible solutions to program access challenges by coordinating services, increasing knowledge via education, and even promoting systems change efforts that reduce barriers to access and make service delivery more welcoming to targeted populations. The use of navigators emerged in patient care in the early 1990s and has since expanded to workforce development, education, and social services programs.

This Department of Labor-funded study was a result of the Department's research priorities for the upcoming year. It contributes to the labor evidence-base to inform [employment and training-related](#) programs and policies and addresses Departmental strategic goals and priorities.

Key Takeaways

- **Navigators serve both recipient-facing and system-facing roles, depending on the specific program.** Recipient-facing activities incorporate a wide variety of direct service functions, including making referrals, coaching recipients, and providing case manager services. System-facing activities are internal to the program, including addressing policies and procedures that could create barriers for users, cultivating closer and more effective inter-system partnerships, leading teams, and providing capacity development and knowledge to those who perform the service delivery.
- **Navigator activities can be grouped into seven areas:** recruitment and uptake, engagement, direct service, referral and direction, partner and system coordination, policy and procedural improvement, and capacity building. Each program described in the review emphasized a different combination of these roles and responsibilities for its navigators.
- **Five causal studies included in the review indicated that programs offering navigator support had mixed to positive impacts on participant outcomes.** In postsecondary education, participants receiving navigator services and more direct contact with their navigators had higher semester-to-semester persistence

and higher weighted grade point averages. In workforce programs, navigator services were associated with higher employment rates, and higher likelihood of receiving federal disability benefit but had limited or no impact on earnings or housing stability. These five studies all examined navigator programs, which often included other resources and support in addition to navigator services.

SEE FULL STUDY

TIMEFRAME: 2021

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