**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Evaluation and Research: Building State Capacity under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

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LAURA CASERTANO: Again, we want to welcome you to the "WIOA Wednesday Evaluation and Research" webinar. If you haven't already done so, or if you're just joining us, please introduce yourself in that chat window.

Now I'd like to turn things over to today's moderator, Gloria Salas-Kos. Gloria?

GLORIA SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Jen (sic). Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Gloria Salas-Kos and I'm moderating today's session on "Evaluation and Research: Building State Capacity under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act," from Dallas, Texas.

To start, I'd like to introduce our presenters, touch on a couple of the key points that relate to WIOA and research and evaluation, and share objectives for this session. Each of the presenters will describe their efforts in implementing evidence-based practices through research and evaluation activities.

We will then respond to as many questions as possible that are received through the chat, and when possible, we will follow-up with responses to the relevant questions and share them as part of the recorded webinar.

With me today from Washington, D.C., are two of my colleagues at the Department of Labor, Dr. Molly Irwin, the chief evaluation officer for the department; and Wayne Gordon, the director of research and evaluation in the Office of Policy Development and Research, both who will share information on activities conducted at the federal level.

Also with us today are presenters from Ohio's workforce system, Keith Ewald, the workforce analytics manager in the Department of Jobs and Family Services; and Josh Hawley from the Education and Resource Center at Ohio State University, who will both provide some highlights on their work stemming from the Workforce Data Quality Initiative.

MR. : Hello. Greetings from Ohio.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Moving forward, in general I just – we'd like to say that – recognize that evaluation is a component of an organizational life cycle for an agency or a program that includes planning, implementation, monitoring, and performance accountability. In this context, we will describe the overall structure from the federal government perspective, and explain how it ties to the WIOA vision.

As a reminder, this vision focuses on three hallmarks of excellence, which include meeting the needs of business and the workforce, providing customer service to One-Stop or American Job Centers, and supporting regional economies. Additionally, continuous improvement for the public workforce system is supported through evaluation, accountability – (audio break) – decision making.

Given this context, the objectives of today's session are to describe the department's evidence-based research and evaluation agenda, to explain the relevance of evaluation and research to WIOA, to learn more about the research being done in Ohio, and to respond to questions from you. To round out today's presentations, we also – (audio break) – is to help state agencies build or expand current evaluation and research capacity.

To begin our discussion, I will turn the slides over to Molly Irwin to cover the first objective for creating a culture and environment that fosters research and evaluation. Molly?

MOLLY IRWIN: Hi, everybody. Good afternoon. I'm excited to be here to be able to talk a little bit about what we're doing in the Chief Evaluation Office and across the department focused on research and evaluation.

I guess I want to start just by saying a little bit about the Chief Evaluation Office. As many of you may know, or may not know, the Department of Labor established a Chief Evaluation Office in 2010 to coordinate, manage, and implement DOL's evaluation program.

And we're an independent office in the Department of Labor, located organizationally within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy. And we work closely with all of the agencies and program offices throughout DOL to develop and implement evaluations that address priorities set by the secretary and the agencies and by legislation like WIOA.

One of the things that we try hard to do is to really think about the important research questions that we want to answer that'll provide information for program and policy to folks like you, who are out there implementing programs, and to the policymakers within this building.

And so we're committed to institutionalizing an evidence-based culture that relies on the program cycle that Gloria really just talked about.

We have dedicated funding to do evaluation that comes through appropriations for our office.

Next slide.

So we do a number of activities within our office, a number of different kinds of evaluations, all starting with developing an evidenced agenda in a particular area to think through what is it that we know, what questions do we have, and what evidence can we build that will help advance the field and improve outcomes for the participants that we're serving?

So our office plans and oversees evaluation projects. These can be big impact studies or outcome studies. We also focus on implementation or process studies. We do work that is more descriptive in nature to understand using administrative data that we already have in hand to understand the relationship between services and outcomes. We do a lot of work focused on feasibility or exploratory studies or looking at systems change.

Our office also does work really to take a step back and understand the state of the evidence, so things like literature reviews, evidence reviews or meta-analyses that really pull together data and evaluations that have already been done and try to understand more broadly the state of the field.

We do a lot of data analytics projects, as I said, focused on using existing administrative data. And we work hard to do capacity development. So not only the work that we do in-house, but also through grants and working with academic scholars we try and push the agenda forward and get dollars out into communities so that others can be building evidence around questions that are important to the Department of Labor.

And then final piece that we do is really try and communicate and disseminate the findings from our studies or findings from studies that are of interest to the Department of Labor and to ETA. So we have a website that does that and we can point you to that link.

All of the work that we do within the Chief Evaluation Office is governed by the DOL evaluation policy, which lays out five principles that govern our work. And those are rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics.

And just really quickly, rigor really gets at wanting to use the most rigorous methods that we can, the highest quality research methods to answer the questions that we're answering. Relevance really gets at making sure that the evaluations that we do are relevant and useful to both folks in the field who are implementing programs who can use the information to improve programs and improve outcomes going forward, and for policymakers.

The work that we do is transparent. We make known before evaluation studies begin the questions that we're asking. And then at the end of the studies, we put the findings, the reports, on our website. And if you go to our website and to the ETA research and evaluation website, you'll see both one-pages that talk about studies as they begin and lay out the questions that will be answered in the timeline, and then the final reports are posted on the DOL websites as well.

The majority of the work that we do is done through contracts and grants that are given to independent third-party evaluation teams. And then all of the work that we do makes sure to maintain the privacy, confidentiality of the participants that are involved in the research, and is done within all of the ethical standards.

And then finally, I just wanted to say a word about how we develop our research and evaluation plan. The next slide. And again, I said this a little bit at the beginning, but our office does – begins – has about 50 studies going on at any time. And at the beginning of every year we really go through a planning process where we look at the priorities of DOL agencies and program offices, the priorities of the secretary and external stakeholders, congressional requirements like those laid out in WIOA. And based on all of those things, we come up with a plan for evaluation for the next year.

And that's really what guides our work and that's – having calls and conversations like this one today really helps us to communicate to all of you what we are doing in the area of evaluation and evidence building, and also gives us the opportunity to hear from you about the questions that you think are important and that we could begin studies or disseminate information to you that would help as you're doing your job out there in the field.

And with that, I will turn it over to Wayne Gordon, who will go into more detail about some of the things that are underway.

WAYNE GORDON: Thank you, Molly. Hello, everyone. Research and evaluation has a long history at ETA. And I know I can speak on behalf of my staff in the division and ETA when I commend the work of the Chief Evaluation Office of expanding a culture of learning and program improvement, while also building an infrastructure here at DOL that supports those efforts in many ways.

I also want to congratulate Molly as well on her promotion to the position of the chief evaluation officer recently. And we look forward to our continued efforts to support research and evaluation at DOL, as well as the work of the states as we embark under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

At this point I would like to share more about the requirements of WIOA and tell you more about why and how we will continue to support and encourage state and local workforce boards in building a capacity in this field.

The key driving section of WIOA is Section 169 of the law; that drives a lot of what DOL is interested in, but it also cascades down into activities that are – and expectations of the states. This section – that is, 169 – lays out three broad expectations: a continuous examination and exploration of all programs under Title I, as well as other core programs like adult educational, vocational rehabilitation, TANF, and others; coordination at the federal and state level amongst these levels is expected; and finally, a robust method to disseminate what works to the broader workforce community.

As I said, cascading from Section 169 and interspersed throughout the law are expectations for state activity in this area, and we've conveniently spelled them out in Section 116 of the new regulations. I refer to these as the three C's of activity.

And the way we're approaching this, the way we approached it in the regulation, is to be invitational, aspirational, inspirational, if we may, in that we want to encourage all levels, all types of involvement from conducting evaluations, where states conduct their own evaluations or where states are coordinating their evaluations with and amongst their programs at the state level and with their federal partners at Education and here at Labor and other agencies.

Finally, the last C is an expectation of cooperation with evaluations that are undertaken at the federal level. And that cooperation can entail sharing data, providing survey responses, and allowing time for site visits for these evaluations.

While WIA did see a role for state research and evaluation activity, that requirement was perhaps treated more as an option in the years since, both at the federal level and the states. We see with WIOA an opportunity to leverage the bipartisan support that we've seen for policy formation, informed by evidence at the federal and state levels.

We also hope that we can expand our small but mighty group here at DOL by enlisting research and evaluation units within the states, the LMI shops and others – any other partners in crime that we might find out there at the state level – in our efforts, as well as leveraging the research and evaluation work that the states are doing already.

Finding out who's out there and what they're doing has been an interest of mine. And through the events such as the national convening, where our session highlighted the work of some states in this area, and my staff's involvement in the state plan reviews and receiving regional office feedback, we're very excited about what we're learning.

We've enlisted the National Association of State Workforce Agencies to conduct a scan of state activities and capacity. And my thanks go out to the more than 40 states that responded to their survey over the late summer. We expect a report from this effort in the next two months and we'll share this on our website, but more importantly use it as a resource for developing technical assistance tools and resources to share with the states.

Some tangible resources for data already out there are: UI wage records; the workforce innovation performance system, which will have individual-level data; the Workforce Data Quality grants that have gone out to nearly 40 states, and we encourage states to take advantage of any future grant announcements for WDQI.

We're on slide 16.

The technical assistance we roll out in the coming months will cover identifying resources, both real and in-kind, for funding evaluations. It'll cover finding quality third-party evaluators. And we've had a bit of a head start in supporting state and local organizations getting into the evaluation business through the development of resource and TA materials created to support the TAACCCT and Workforce Innovation grants.

Gloria?

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Wayne. Now that we've shared a bit about the Department of Labor's overviews, we'd like to turn the mic over to Keith Ewald and Josh Hawley, who will provide the perspective from Ohio.

KEITH EWALD: Good afternoon. I'm going to speak on Ohio's cross-agency partnership, (this ?) governance process, and procedures for data access.

We'd like to start out with a cautionary remark in that I think in today's visionary quest to align administrative data, it is easy to quickly jump to the conclusion that is simply an IT solution and all you've got to do is fill in the data in an IT box someplace and 90 percent of the work is done. But in reality, it's very serious data management and organization for research and policy analysis. It is actually more of a program than it is an IT support function. As a result, you need strong partnerships and a good governance structure.

We call our partnership Ohio Analytics. It consists of the core agencies at the Department of Higher Education, Department of Education, the Department of Job and Family Services, and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. And we also partner with the Ohio Education Research Council, which brings in university research expertise.

We do collaborative efforts with other agencies as well, such as Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Ohio Housing Finance Agency. Most of our data goes back at least a decade; some of it goes back well into the 1990s.

We've evolved into a three-tiered governance model. First we have the policy council, which I consider to be the advocates of the system. They do such things as establish a policy agenda. They're intermediaries between partners when issues arise. They cultivate collaborative research efforts. They advocate for funding and they identify and address barriers to our work, such as legal issues or timing of data availability.

The coordinating board is our next level, and I really view these as the implementers of the system. They troubleshoot questions concerning the policy agenda. They review and approve research data requests and resulting products and forward signatures to the agencies. They provide quarterly reports on our efforts to the policy council, the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and the agency directors. And they also identify research requests that are out-of-scope, that are not within the research priorities or the budget.

And finally, we have the data stewards committee, which I view as the data managers. They enforce the – (inaudible) – data access rules and procedures developed by the coordinating board. They provide a forum for technical discussions on state agency data and resources. They offer a platform for advocacy, for data standards, common definitions, or other tools that may help the effort.

GARY GONZALEZ: Keith, sorry to break in. If you could speak a little louder or perhaps move the phone a little bit closer to you. We're getting – (inaudible).

MR. EWALD: Hopefully this helps.

We house the Ohio longitudinal data archive at the Ohio State University Center for Human Resource Research. Ohio's had five considerations for choosing the location for a data archive. One, we looked for a pre-established – (inaudible) – capacity. The center has had a long history with running longitudinal data archives. We also look for a logical and a tight fit with their existing mission. They were already doing research and policy analysis.

They also looked for people that could expand on limited state agency capacity. Quite frankly, most state agencies' data analysis and data work is focused on service provisions to our customers or performance reporting, and there's very little room left in terms of capacity beyond that.

We also looked for people to organize and structure responses for the agencies. And what I mean by this is we're increasingly getting demands for access to our data, often across different agencies wanting to combine the data. And in the past we've generally had an ad hoc approach to that. They had to – researchers had to contact each agency; each agency had slightly different formats and procedures and maybe offered different – and led to often different understandings with the research entity. And we really looked to a way to organize and structure a way to meet requests for data.

And finally, we asked them for a system in establishing research agenda and they helped guide that kind of discussion.

Our access procedures are a very formal research application. You've got to have MOUs. You've got to have agency approvals. You have to have internal review board approvals. We have a website called OhioAnalytics.com, which is an introduction to the process and outlines the procedures and gives people, essentially, the documents they need to make a request.

Our activities have been going on for about six years. Our emphasis is to give priorities to state agencies and their particular research interests. However, it is a unique system in a sense it is open to anybody to apply for the research – any qualified agency or entity. The major issue is we give priority to state research issues. And anybody applying to do research has to indicate how they align with some of the research – align with the research priorities of the state agencies.

I think a major focus on data organization for research is a major requirement and is very beneficial in the long run. Bottom line is that administrative data tends to be messy data. It's generally not organized in a way that's particularly immediately useful for researchers or how they ask questions or look at things. You have to – you've got to align data and you've got to sometimes transpose data.

So I think effort spent at that as well as creating a public-facing metadata system – in Ohio we call it the Investigator – is worth the investment because it has major returns in efficiency. It's very – generally, by having these things in place, you can create the data set for research in rather efficient ways.

Finally, I want to talk a little bit about our four steps to our access process. First, there is overall permission. You have to have research – contact information. You have to have specified the questions and intended product that you want to address. And you have to be very specific in the data elements you're requesting and the timeline.

And a second step is you really – where there's a number of things you have to focus in on in terms of security and (suppression ?) requirements, things related to equipment and location. We only allow people to have access to de-identified information, so generally we don't allow people to take survey data and merge it with our data because then they can re-identify data. So it's got to be de-identified data sets. And then there's various (expression ?) issues, such as cell sizes and other (suppression ?) criteria.

The last two steps I wanted to share – and I think are more likely to be overlooked but I think are very important – is agency review before any kind of publication, whether it be a public forum where they could be giving a webinar or a PowerPoint presentation, a formal paper or report, or doing something with dashboards or other kinds of systems. We ask agencies to approve all releases of that information to the public.

It has the advantage that it gives comfort to the agencies that PII issues are being addressed. It allows the agencies to note anything where they feel there may have been misunderstanding of our data or misinterpretation of our data. And lastly, it gives us some idea of what's out there so that we're not blindsided by inquiries from stakeholders or other people about the publications that go out.

And finally, I think it's important to have a termination of the access. The bottom line is, agencies that get our data morph in nature over time; they change staff, personnel, and so forth. And unless you have a clear ending and terminating process, you could ultimately have data misunderstood or misused in the future.

With that, I'll let Josh give us some background on specific projects.

JOSH HAWLEY: Thank you, Keith. I'll try to leave some time for questions that we can answer and just go through some things very quickly.

So the OERC, which I direct, is a full-service policy research center. We're based at the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at Ohio State. But the interesting thing is, is we have kind of a structure that connects across agencies and high education institutions around the state of Ohio. We've done a lot of contractual work with other institutions to serve Ohio's kind of policy research needs.

And we have a research agenda that's basically in four areas: education, higher ed, workforce, and human services. These agenda elements are set on an annual basis and are approved by the policy council that Keith referred to earlier. The – you want me to do this? I'll do this.

So one of the requests we had by the federal government was to talk a little bit about how we determine this agenda. And I think there's a variety of ways that topics get surfaced to study in a collaborative way in a state. The most direct way is the same way that DOL receives research, is that the state agencies issue RFPs that we respond to or other potential evaluators respond to. And I suspect a lot of people on the webinar today are evaluators or people who work in organizations that bid on evaluations.

But there's some other less well known ways. State legislation often has explicit call-outs for evaluation requirements. So for example, lots of states have what are called tracking report requirements, where workforce program participants need to be tracked into the labor market to understand the effects of those programs. Washington, Florida, other states kind of – Kentucky – have examples of those and they're explicitly written into legislation.

There's also performance reporting, such as WIOA or other federal or state programs. And then states can set their own evaluation and research priorities, which are different.

And then finally, there's a lot of external requests. All state agencies that I'm aware of receive external requests for data from academics or nonprofit organizations, or for-profit companies that deal with research and evaluation. So there's a lot of ways the agenda gets set at the state level and it's important to keep in mind the variation.

So I'm going to describe a couple of examples we've dealt with over the last few years. The first is a very important report that our colleagues at Case Western issued, looking at the relationship between early childhood data and reading scores in the early elementary grades. And this was driven primarily by a state policy requiring that all students have a certain level of reading score by the time they leave third grade or they would be held back. It's designed to clamp down on social promotion, you know, early elementary grades.

And the report was really very well done, partly because it had such a wide array of health and human service data in addition to having education and workforce data. And I commend our colleagues at Case Western, Claudia Coulton and Rob Fischer in particular, for taking leadership over that.

But that's an example of a project that we funded with the state agencies and were able to connect help with the data kind of delivery for Claudia and Rob.

The second example is different. This is a performance reporting example. So the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation in Ohio has a strategic plan. The strategic plan requires coordinated reporting across WIOA programs. We developed a website, a dashboard, that displays kind of common performance measures for all of the statutory programs – Perkins, VR, higher ed, WIOA. And critically important – we've been doing this for three years now – the measures line up very closely with the WIOA measures in terms of employment and earnings outcomes, as well as skill attainment.

So there's a huge opportunity, because of the data system we've built, to produce these reports on a regular basis at a minimal cost over time. And then the state agencies kind of can use the data and the reports to kind of counsel or work with counties or workforce program leaders to understand strengths and weaknesses in the programs at the local level.

The final one I'm going to talk about briefly is the Central Ohio Compact site. And you can Google any of these. The Central Ohio Compact site is a regional website that we built showing kind of how the region in Central Ohio can achieve a 60 percent goal of adults with postsecondary degrees by 2025. And it's a predictive modeling kind of tool, as well as a lot of dashboarding data. And I invite you to go use it and play with it; it's a lot of fun.

The last one I'm going to talk about a little bit in depth because it's a good example for other states, if you've not had a lot of experience working with researchers on quasi-experimental work, is a report we wrote on WIA-funded on-the-job-training and workforce outcomes in Ohio. So this involved – it's an – (inaudible) – research study and kind of looked at OJT participants. We measured earnings and employment three, four, five years out.

The data we used – and this is important to remember, is that because of the data resources that Keith described, we have the outcomes data and wage record. We have participant data through WIA, and we also have an employment (receipt ?) data.

So the key problem when you're doing any kind of quasi-experimental design is to look at comparison groups. And we were able to do some nice kind of matching work with non-OJT participants from WIA who were matched on a lot of kind of prior experience and geographic characteristics.

And the program size for OJT is not huge; it's about a thousand participants. But we were able to find well-matched participants in the pool of people who were in WIA service but not – and this is just an example of kind of the participant and the number of non-OJT WIA participants that we had access to do the matching on. You see the kind of – the enrollment in OJT is relatively concentrated in the northern part of the state.

So the results of the evaluation were pretty strong. There was a very kind of strong percent found working outcome. So after the intervention, which is kind of this line here, you see a very strong kind of bounce back in terms of the percentage found working, which is not surprising, given the intervention is OJT and the focus is on connecting with jobs. But there's also a strong connection to earnings even four or five years out. So there's a sustained kind of difference in terms of earnings for individuals who have been through the OJT programs.

Then we did some more sophisticated kind of programming to try to determine what the gap was. And in a summation, there's an 11 point difference in individuals who were found working for those people who were in the OJT study versus those people who were just in WIA but not in OJT. And there was an average about $1,100 difference in quarterly earnings.

So these are a few of the links for our research center. You have the links for the partnership that Keith described more generally, a link for the two research centers that are our partners in this, and then a link to some of the dashboards that we have.

And I think I'm handing it back.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Yes. Thank you, Josh and Keith. Your presentation really demonstrates how much more both the federal and state agencies can do to improve what we do with research and evaluation.

To regroup, let's go over some of the questions that were received from the chat to this point. So I will read a question and then direct the question to one of you to respond.

And the first question is – I believe Wayne can answer this one. And the question is, "What elements of WIOA would be satisfied through an impact evaluation?"

MR. GORDON: Hi. This is Wayne. Thank you, Gloria. Either me or Molly could answer this. Really simply, it would fall right up into the requirements of WIOA. But really, any kind of activity with regard to quasi-experimental design, random assignment, net impact evaluation, implementation studies, even desktop analysis of data. We have found here, just by encouraging program offices here at the department to examine its own data and allow others in the know with the right expertise to analyze that data, there are answers and there even more questions that reside in that data.

So broadly, we will accept and we are encouraging all forms of research and evaluation activity to better understand how the programs are working, or to try new things, even if it's a modification to an administrative process that might speed the receipt of services to our customers, as an example.

So it's very broad what we're looking for and what we undertake here at the department and what we'll be encouraging the states to do. It's very broad with regard to what counts toward WIOA.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Wayne. Molly, maybe this one kind of is an add-on to the first question and it's, "If a net impact study analysis does not completely satisfy the research and evaluation component of WIOA, what would be needed to improve upon or to add?"

MS. IRWIN: So a couple things. I mean, just to add onto what Wayne said, I think with – certainly with WIOA and with any research study in general, I think we really want to start with the question. So sometimes specified in the legislation the question is obvious; it's specifically asking about the effectiveness of a certain thing, and that would seem to call for an impact evaluation.

And then within that, we want to use the most rigorous design that we can. And so I think it was Keith who just said, in talking about a quasi-experimental design, that the challenge is the control group. And I think – but they were able to find a way to identify an appropriate control group for that study.

I think what we want to do is really start with the research question. And then based on the research question, use the most rigorous design that is feasible and possible within budget. So if a randomized control trial is possible and feasible, given sample sizes and budget, that might be where we want to start. But then we would look at quasi-experimental or other designs after that if that wasn't possible.

There's also, like Wayne said, many times when the question that we really want to answer isn't about effectiveness, but is really trying to understand how a program was implemented, or wants to understand more qualitatively what best practices are, or promising directions, and that would call for a different methodology.

MS. SALAS KOS: So Wayne, maybe you can help people understand whether or not they need to – one question is, will they need to – "Will be required to use external evaluators?" is the question.

MR. GORDON: No, that's not necessarily the case. Each state has different capacity and different skill sets within their respective agencies. Units within – I think I mentioned the LMI unit. Some states have dedicated research and evaluation staff. And really, it's a decision that the state makes. It could be undertaken internally. In some instances, enlisting third-party evaluators is useful for an arms-length analysis of a particular program or pilot. But our resource – the plans for resource rollout will touch on all of these things. But it's not required that a third-party evaluator be enlisted.

MS. SALAS-KOS: So we have another question asking about training and will we be conducting training on rapid cycle evaluation/assessment?

MR. : You want to take that?

MS. IRWIN: I think it's certainly something that we can consider. If that would be something that would be useful to folks, we can definitely look into that and –

MR. GORDON: And at a minimum identify resources where that information is available. I would just point to some of the work that the Chief Evaluation Office has done. We have these brown-bag sessions here where they have enlisted evaluators with many years of experience to come in and talk about the different techniques and methods that are being employed out there. So we're learning here ourselves at the department and I see no reason why we can't share the wealth of that information in our resource material.

MS. SALAS-KOS: And then next question is, "Can you provide resources or TA on how to develop an evaluation plan?"

MR. GORDON: Yes, certainly. We do that ourselves internally through the development of a five-year plan, which I'll go over in a couple of minutes; as well as an annual basis, where we develop a learning agenda and work with the Chief Evaluation Office. When I say "we," I mean ETA. But the Chief Evaluation Office is engaged with all of the agencies within the department in developing their respective learning agendas, which really are just an annual wish list of information needs that's generated from the program staff.

MS. SALAS-KOS: We have another question that maybe Molly or Wayne can answer, and that is, "Will you conduct fidelity reviews on states – (inaudible) – evidence-based practices?"

MS. IRWIN: I don't know that there – and Wayne can speak up. I don't know that there are plans to – that there's a plan for a specific study to conduct fidelity reviews. But certainly many times, as part of an implementation study, if there's a specific model that we're studying we would do an implementation study or a fidelity study as part of it, to understand the extent to which what we're evaluating looks like the model that was intended.

So it's really a study that is trying to understand what does the model look like and is it being implemented the way it was originally designed? But to my knowledge, right now there's no specific plans for that, but that is certainly something that we often do as part of evaluations.

MR. GORDON: That's right. There's no plans for that right now. And you're correct, Molly. Within a study, that's important to do. But whether we're actually reviewing state activities and making a judgment call as to whether there was fidelity to an approach is not on our plans.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks, Wayne. So I think we have time for two more questions. And this one I'm going to direct to Keith on how they coordinate evaluation activities with third-party evaluators and how they're selected to research grants or programs.

MR. EWALD: It's pretty much the same as everybody. I mean, we basically have a process where people have to apply for access to the data. It's approved by the agencies. Even the agencies or partners or the Center for Human Resource Research, who maintains archive, cannot touch the data while submitting a formal research request and requesting data. And then it's approved through a – and then it goes through a standard approval process.

MS. SALAS-KOS: And then lastly – and because of interest of time and we still have a few more slides to cover, I'm going to ask Wayne to answer this last question. "Would the ETA representatives please speak to the timelines and minimum requirements for states to report on their activities – evaluation activities?"

MR. GORDON: Yes. It's hard with a timeline now. We're just rolling this out. We are planning on providing technical assistance and resource materials going forward. And I want to restate what I said earlier is that we're encouraging all types of activity on – addressing the research and evaluation requirements of WIOA. But we want to be invitational and aspirational, were the words I used, and we want to encourage all types of approaches, all activity in this area.

We're reviewing state plans. We had some of my staff – Gloria being namely the number one person of my staff was involved with the state planning review. We're also working with our regional offices in preparation of when they go out on monitoring visits, simply to ask that question. So what's the state been doing with regard to research and evaluation activity?

And if they can say that, well, there was a grant announcement for an evaluation that the Department of Education or Department of Labor had put out and we volunteered as a potential grantee and participant in that, that would satisfy I think the cooperation or coordination part that I mentioned in the three C's.

And projects don't need to be done within a given year – started and done within a given year. Some of these projects take longer than others.

So what we're looking for is just continued emphasis and involvement in the area of research and evaluation. And we want to be very open and accepting of all approaches.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Wayne. So we really do appreciate everyone's questions and interest in this topic, and also look forward to learning more about what other states are doing to expand or build evaluation capacity.

Now we'll ask Wayne and Molly to tell us more about some of the plans that DOL has underway for future research and evaluation activities. Wayne? Molly?

MS. IRWIN: Great. I think I'm first. So I'm going to talk – I think as folks know, in WIOA there are both required and suggested evaluations. And I'm going to talk about the first two on the slide that are both required evaluations in WIOA that are either underway or we're in the planning process.

And the first is career pathways. And the legislation actually requires the Department of Labor, in collaboration with Health and Human Services and Ed, to do an evaluation of career pathways approaches, specifically focused on health care and/or early care and education.

And as many of you probably know, there is a lot of work going on right now in the Department of Labor and in other federal agencies, and outside of federal government, looking at doing evaluations of career pathways programs.

So what we decided to do to meet this requirement is before launching into a new big study, to take a step back. And we have funded a smaller study that is really looking at the state of the evidence now, compiling what it is we know, what studies are currently in the field and what questions those studies will be answering and what timeframe. And then based on that, we've asked the research team to develop a set of evaluation recommendations that will help advance the evidence in this field.

So that study is currently underway and will be completed about midway through 2017. And based on that – based on what we learn from that – we'll then plan to do a bigger study to meet this requirement. But out of this first project I think we will have a really comprehensive review of what's currently known in this area and what studies are currently being undertaken, which will be really valuable, certainly to us and I think to folks who are interested in this topic in the field as well.

The second, which is also required in the legislation, is an equivalent pay study. This is one that we have not yet begun but are in the process really of planning and thinking through what is it that we know already and how can we build on other studies that are either completed or currently underway, including the nontraditional jobs study, apprenticeship, some work that the Women's Bureau here at the Department of Labor has done. And based on all of that, we will be moving forward to answer more questions in this area.

MR. GORDON: And while not required under the WIOA, we've learned from – we have found value in undertaking implementation studies of major events in our world, such as WIOA, to understand and learn for future reference what steps were taken at the federal and state levels to implement the law and identify successes to replicate and what challenges to address in the future.

We did the same for the implementation of the recovery act, and this report can be found on our website.

Similar to WIA, WIOA carries over a requirement that DOL develops and updates every two years a five-year plan for research and evaluation that relies on large part on the gathering of stakeholder input. And we had begun soliciting this input under WIA, which of course transcended the passage of WIOA, this activity and stakeholder input.

However, since WIOA continues and simply strengthens much of what was in WIA, the feedback we received from the stakeholder input is still very relevant and appropriate as we develop the current five-year plan.

In addition to the carryover of that plan, there is a new twist in WIOA which requires that all programs covered under the law receive the benefit of research and evaluation attention, no matter how small the program, on a regular four-year cycle. And we're looking at activities now or projects now, kind of plugging it into the – into a schedule of things, just to make sure we don't miss any programs just getting through a regular cycle.

And these activities are not just is the program good or is the program bad; does the program work for folks or it doesn't work. More importantly I think sometimes is individual components – isolating and examinating (sic) individual components of a program model that just a slight tweak on those can make a world of difference for the outcomes for the individuals that we serve.

And we look forward to continued cooperation with the Chief Evaluation Office and our sister agencies at Education, HHS, as well as other agencies that share a common customer, such as Agriculture, Commerce, and SBA. We've worked with all of those over the years. And we didn't WIOA to tell us to cooperate across the Mall here in D.C., but we have done that. And now with this as our guide we're certainly going to take advantage of that expectation.

And lastly on this slide, it's important to note that with dwindling resources at both the federal and state level that research and evaluation findings can and should be used in budget formulation, which is policy formation, identifying and providing justification for ways to improve programs.

And using this kind of information in addition performance management – performance measurement – is just good government. Finding out what works, what doesn't, what could stand to change or some attention, is just good government-making and striving for continuous improvement.

In addition to the TA resources I already mentioned earlier, we have some resources to share and are planning to provide more technical assistance and support, dissemination tools and reports from studies that we complete on a regular basis. We'll have guidance coming out in the early part of 2017, and that will begin our rollout of describing what we're working on, what we expect to work with the states on, and what kind of TA that everyone should expect to see in the coming days.

Gloria, can you tell us a bit more about what's in the works?

MS. SALAS-KOS: So just to share more about the resources, we do have quite a bit that has been covered during this session and we're hoping that you've found it useful. We do have hyperlinks on this slide that show what's available for you, if you're interested in learning more about what the Office of Management and Budget has produced in terms of guidance around evidence and evaluation.

We also have several web links at the Chief Evaluation Office, the office of the chief evaluation officer, where they include principles and practices under the first link. The clearinghouse for evaluation and research – CLEAR – assesses the quality of that evidence for RCTs and other experimental and nonexperimental causal designs to demonstrate impact. And then they also have current studies identified that they've produced and published on that website that covers all of the DOL agencies and programs.

Then on the Employment and Training Administration website, the Division of Research and Evaluation has the five-year research plan from 2012 to 2017. Again, as Wayne mentioned, that's published every two years and it identifies ETA's priority areas that relate to our planning around research and evaluation. And then we also have a publications database, similar to the one that the CEO has, that has reports on employment and training and workforce development dating back to 1977; so there's quite a bit of history there.

And then more recently, a website was created to help practitioners find and sort through studies that might be relevant to their programs and target populations. It's called Workforce System Strategies. It's a searchable collection of studies and reports and publications that have been produced by other research organizations that are publicly available at no charge. And so we profiled them on this site to get you a high-level overview of what's included in the study. And you can go in and search it by geographic region, by state, by program, by types of services, by management and operation. So it's got a really extensive research function that might at least help you see what's there.

And so in addition to that, we continue to work on providing additional resources.

And so as we move forward, we're looking forward to working on a WIOA-specific evaluation and research toolkit that is supported by recent evaluation tools that were created for the Workforce Innovation Fund and TAACCCT programs.

We are also engaging national and regional office staff to finalize these resources and plan to work with – or are working with WIOA technical assistance teams to develop – to continue to finesse and develop research and evaluation materials for regional training forums, and then create a technical assistance plan for the WIOA evaluation and research activities that we do.

So that brings us to the next slide, which is really just to help us see whether or not we were able to give you enough information that'll at least provide us a guide for going forward. And we have a polling question for you.

So the question is, "When it comes to building state evaluation and research capacity, which answer is false?" So there is four responses. Pick the one that is least correct, or false. And we'll give you a minute or two to – a minute or so to respond to that. (Pause.)

MS. CASERTANO: Also, just a reminder for everyone that a recording of today's webinar, as well as a transcript, will be made available on Workforce GPS in about two business days.

MS. SALAS-KOS: OK. So I am looking at the response and it seems like we have several of the responses that think – that seems that are false. And it does change.

What we were considering the false response was, "Causal evidence does not explain economic impact." And that is actually false because when we do a review or create evidence around what causes impact, it does explain economic impact in most cases.

Thank you for your responses.

And then lastly, what we'd like to do is to have you provide some feedback to us on the session and also to give us a couple of – one or two ideas or things that you think states need to build or expand on their current evaluation capacity. We're going to roll those comments up and then help to – use them to kind of finesse what we've developed to this point. So please feel free to start entering those comments.

And at this point I'd like to ask Wayne to go ahead and close the session for us.

MR. GORDON: Thanks, Gloria. I'd like to thank everyone who joined us today. We genuinely appreciate and hope that this presentation answered many of your questions, and perhaps generated some more, or else we wouldn't be doing our job if we weren't coming up with new questions. I want to thank everyone on behalf of Molly, Gloria, and Josh and Keith in Ohio as well.

This is our first of many conversations and we look forward to working together and learning from each other in the future. As we move forward, we want to facilitate additional dialogue that will help you with your evaluation and research plans. That being said, we are more than happy to address any other questions that relate to helping your state agencies build or expand evaluation and research capacity.

My thanks to our friends Keith and Joshua in Ohio, Molly and Gloria, for helping us with this presentation, as well as the Maher & Maher folks who were corralling or herding three different sites. We had Gloria in Texas, Josh and Keith in Ohio, and Molly and I here in Washington, D.C. So my thanks to the Maher & Maher group for handling this webinar for us; we appreciate it.

And lastly I'd like to thank our audience for tuning in. We appreciate the benefit of your interest and attention, and certainly the gift of your time. And we look forward to working with you in the future. Thank you.

(END)