

# Employment and Training Programs Serving Low-Income Populations: Next Steps for Research



OPRE Report #2020-72  
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## Overview

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has a long history of supporting rigorous research and evaluation on the broad range of human services programs that fall under ACF's auspices. Many of ACF's programs have components aimed at supporting employment among low-income populations, and, consequently, OPRE regularly supports numerous evaluations of employment and training programs for low-income populations, which the office's Division of Economic Independence oversees. Studies that OPRE sponsored played a key role in the policy debate surrounding welfare reform in the 1990s and since then have contributed to the large, growing body of research that informs policymakers and practitioners in designing and delivering programs to increase work and earnings among low-income families.

OPRE funded MEF Associates, in partnership with MDRC, to organize and facilitate a roundtable and prepare a series of white papers to explore future research topics related to employment and training programs for low-income populations. In January 2019, OPRE held a roundtable among policymakers, employers, researchers, and practitioners to discuss the status of and future directions for research on improving the economic prospects of low-income populations. Roundtable discussions focused on specific interventions and research methodology, among other topics. This white paper is the first in a series building on the roundtable discussions.

### A. Primary Research Questions

1. What have we learned from prior research and evaluation efforts of employment and training programs for low-income populations, and what are the current federally funded research and evaluation efforts?
2. What contextual factors and trends will affect the labor market—and, therefore, the employment and earnings prospects of low-income workers—in the future?
3. What topics and questions surfaced as salient themes across roundtable discussions?

### B. Purpose

This white paper aims to build on the roundtable, summarizing what we know from past and current research, identifying knowledge gaps, and putting forward a set of potential research questions informed by the roundtable discussions that can help define future research opportunities and inform future directions for OPRE's and other federal agencies' research and evaluation portfolios and for the broader field of researchers and practitioners.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The roundtable took place and this paper was drafted before the COVID-19 outbreak that substantially affected the U.S. labor market beginning in early 2020. It does not discuss potential policy developments or future directions for research related to the virus. Future OPRE-funded publications may address these issues.

## C. Key Findings and Highlights

Many important questions about designing effective employment and training programs for low-income populations remain unanswered, and recent developments in the labor market and policy trends have posed new questions. This white paper presents several key areas of interest to consider exploring. These topics were identified as gaps in current research and emerged as salient themes across discussions held at the January 2019 roundtable. For each topic, the paper presents potential research questions in the following areas of interest.

1. **Nature of Work and the Labor Market.** Issues related to nonstandard work arrangements, the effect of automation and other technological developments, and the implications of changing labor demand for designing effective employment and training programs.
2. **Employers' Perspectives and Roles.** Understanding the extent of employer involvement in employment and training programs and research, employers' roles in supporting the employment of disadvantaged populations, and the effectiveness of current practices and variations in employer practices by employer type.
3. **Employment Retention and Advancement.** Understanding how initial employment affects retention and advancement, exploring the relationship of benefits cliffs to advancement, and identifying approaches to encouraging employment retention and advancement for employed low-income populations.
4. **Building and Adoption of Evidence-Based Practices.** Ways to support the continued expansion of evidence-based practices and the adoption of such practices in programs and human service organizations.

## D. Methods

A framing paper prepared for the roundtable by MEF Associates and MDRC reviewed the principal findings from past and current research and served as the starting point for this white paper. Roundtable discussions and insights that grew out of the roundtable shaped the research themes, topics, and questions in this white paper.

## E. Suggested Citation

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## I. Purpose

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), has a long history of supporting rigorous research and evaluation on the broad range of human services programs that fall under ACF's auspices. Many of ACF's programs have components aimed at supporting employment among low-income populations, and, consequently, OPRE regularly supports numerous evaluations of employment and training programs for low-income populations, which the office's Division of Economic Independence (DEI) oversees (see Box 1 for further background). Studies that OPRE sponsored played a key role in the policy debate surrounding welfare reform in the 1990s and since then have contributed to the large, growing body of research that informs policymakers and practitioners in designing and delivering programs to increase work and earnings among low-income families.

In January 2019, OPRE organized a roundtable including policymakers, employers, researchers, and practitioners to discuss the status of and future directions for research on improving the economic prospects of low-income populations. Roundtable discussions focused on specific interventions, (e.g., career pathways, sectoral strategies) and research methodology (e.g., assessing program implementation, testing the effectiveness of program components among other topics). This white paper aims to build on the roundtable, summarizing what we know from past and current research, identifying knowledge gaps, and putting forward a set of potential research questions informed by the roundtable discussions that can help define future research opportunities and inform future directions for OPRE's and other federal agencies' research and evaluation portfolios and for the broader field of researchers and practitioners.

### Box 1: DEI's Research and Evaluation Portfolio on Employment and Training Programs

OPRE studies ACF programs and the populations they serve through rigorous research and evaluation projects. These projects include evaluations of existing programs, evaluations of innovative approaches to helping low-income children and families, research syntheses, and descriptive and exploratory studies. OPRE aims to build and disseminate knowledge about effective approaches to helping low-income children and families.

DEI is one of four divisions at OPRE. Centered on welfare and family self-sufficiency research, DEI's portfolio is designed to expand knowledge about effective programs to promote employment, self-sufficiency, and economic wellbeing among low-income families. This white paper is informative for two of DEI's research focus areas: 1) employment and the labor market and 2) education and training.

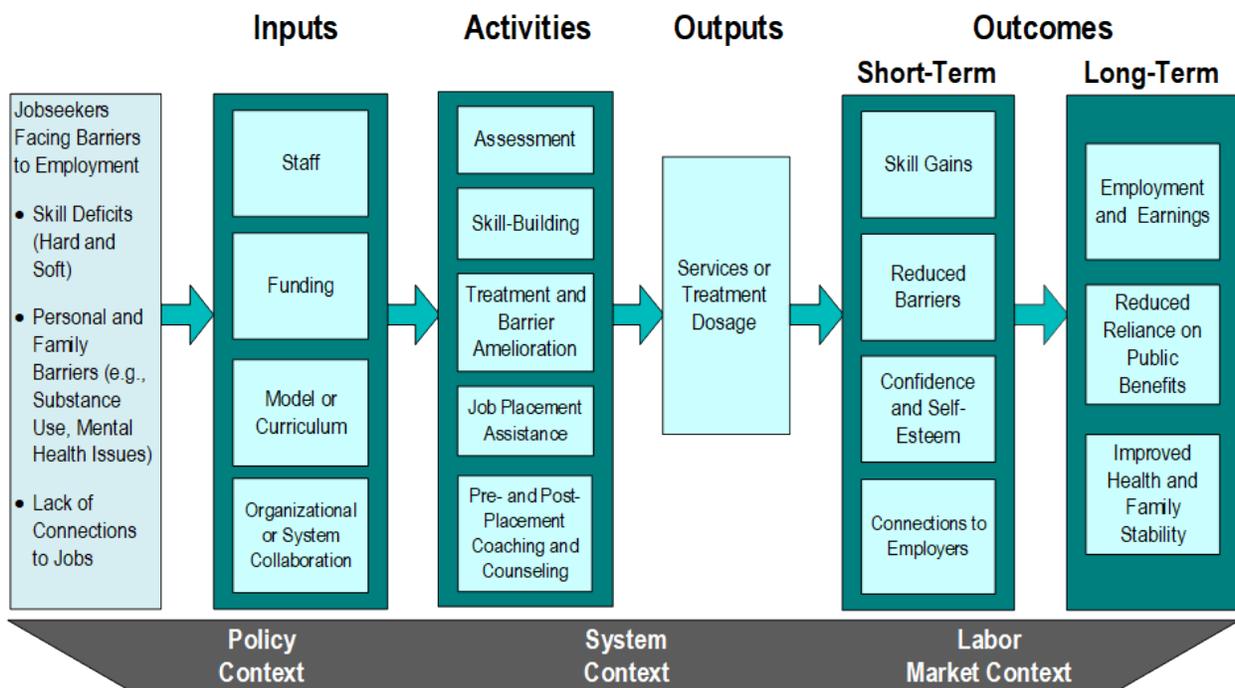
*Note: The roundtable took place and this paper was drafted before the COVID-19 outbreak that substantially affected the U.S. labor market beginning in early 2020. It does not discuss potential policy developments or future directions for research related to the virus. Future OPRE-funded publications may address these issues.*

## II. Introduction

The logic model presented in Exhibit 1 provides a framework for this white paper’s discussion of existing and potential future research on employment and training programs. It is a simplified generic logic model for a typical individual-level program designed to improve employment outcomes for economically disadvantaged individuals (this white paper does not address macroeconomic strategies designed to affect the job supply, such as fiscal stimulus strategies or tax policy aimed at increasing the economy’s overall growth, which are outside ACF and OPRE’s purview). Most of the programs evaluated operate on the assumption that individuals struggle in the labor market for one or more of the following reasons.

- They lack skills—either job readiness, social and communication skills, motivation, basic literacy, or technical skills.
- They face barriers such as substance use disorders or mental illness that interfere with their ability to work, criminal records that make employers less willing to hire them, or difficulties accessing jobs because of lack of transportation or childcare.
- They have trouble connecting with open jobs because of limited skills in searching for and applying for jobs or because their social networks do not include individuals with access to job opportunities.

**Exhibit 1: Generic Logic Model for an Employment Intervention**



Thus, with a few exceptions (e.g., subsidized employment, other strategies designed to affect employers’ hiring decisions), the interventions take the demand for labor as given and operate at the individual level, seeking to achieve one or more of the following: build skills, ameliorate

barriers, improve incentives, and make connections between employers and jobseekers. Of course, other approaches exist—for example, efforts to combat employment discrimination or broader strategies aiming to address the social conditions that contribute to individual deficits—but such programs are beyond the scope of this white paper.

Exhibit 1 also shows that the labor market context in which a program operates plays a key role in understanding its effectiveness and that the policy and system context plays a role in shaping its design and operation. Many employment and training programs are sponsored by public systems, including assistance systems (e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act [WIOA]) or enforcement systems (e.g., child support, criminal justice). These systems might provide programs with access to clients, funding for services, and, in some cases, “carrots and sticks” they can use to encourage participation (e.g., childcare or transportation assistance, sanctions of benefits for individuals not participating in employment-focused activities). However, each system also has distinctive features that can affect the way individuals are identified for services and how programs are designed and operated. For example, federal work participation standards affect the design of state TANF employment services in various ways, such as by leading states to design services in a way that encourages recipients to meet the needed number of average weekly hours of participation per month. The standards may also affect the types of employment and training activities in which recipients participate due to limitations on counting hours of participation for certain activities such as education or training.

Within this framework, the white paper begins with a brief summary of what we have learned from prior research and evaluation efforts, which began in the 1980s with the early Work Incentive Program demonstrations and continue to the present day, as well as an overview of current federally funded research and evaluation efforts. Next, it discusses several of the contextual factors and trends that will affect the labor market—and, therefore, the employment and earnings prospects of low-income workers—in the future. Finally, it discusses considerations for potential research on employment and training programs, including topics and questions that surfaced as salient themes across roundtable discussions.

### III. Prior and Current Research

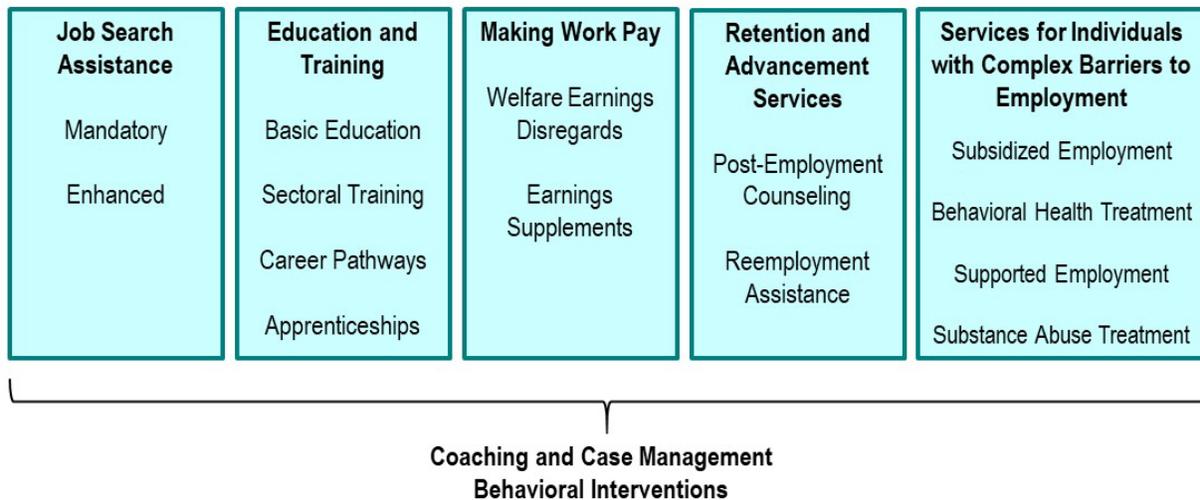
Here, we provide a high-level overview of several streams of rigorous research on employment and training interventions over the past four decades. Intentionally broad and general, this summary aims to briefly set the context for the discussion of potential directions for future research rather than to provide a detailed review of past literature. We particularly focus on programs that have been evaluated with randomized controlled trials (RCT) because well-implemented RCTs can provide rigorous evidence about program effectiveness that other methods often cannot.

## A. Overview of Prior Research Findings

The research agenda has evolved as results from each round of studies triggered new questions and ideas for achieving stronger results. Studies in the early to mid-1980s found that programs requiring welfare recipients to look for jobs as a condition of receiving benefits sped up entry into the labor market compared with programs imposing no requirement. However, the effects were limited: many individuals had difficulty staying employed, the jobs they found were usually low paying, and the interventions failed to increase participants' income because they mostly traded welfare for earnings.<sup>2</sup>

These early results spawned several streams of subsequent research representing different hypotheses about how future interventions might support better outcomes for welfare recipients and other low-income groups. Exhibit 2 displays these research streams in simplified form, and we discuss each below. As shown at the bottom of the exhibit, in recent years, researchers and practitioners have increasingly sought to use principles of behavioral economics to improve the design and performance of a wide range of social programs, including employment and training interventions. Similarly, coaching strategies designed to strengthen self-regulation skills can be used either as a standalone intervention or to supplement other approaches. These domains are addressed below because the evidence base on them is still limited.

### Exhibit 2: Employment Research Streams



**Job search assistance.** One research stream continued to examine mandatory job search assistance models, including interventions that provided more extensive assistance—for example, services from job developers who work with local employers to identify job openings that match the skills and interests of job seekers. Some of these interventions appeared to

<sup>2</sup> Gueron, Judith M., and Edward Pauly. *From Welfare to Work*. Russel Sage Foundation. 1991.

achieve larger and more lasting impacts than the simpler programs studied earlier (see, for instance, Hamilton et al., 2001).<sup>3</sup> A site in ACF’s Employment Retention and Advancement project included a head-to-head test of an “enhanced” job search assistance strategy that urged participants to focus initially on higher-paying jobs or jobs in participants’ areas of interest, compared with a traditional model that expected participants to take any suitable job they could find. The two strategies produced similar effects on labor market outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Gold Standard Evaluation, funded by DOL, examined the impact of “intensive services” provided in American Job Centers, a category that includes individualized job search assistance, assessments, case management, individual service plans focused on career and training goals, and, in a few cases, work experience opportunities or prevocational training but not occupational training itself. The study found that WIA participants randomly assigned to have access to intensive services had slightly higher earnings than participants who were allowed to access only “core services” (mostly online, self-service job search tools).<sup>5</sup> An earlier nonexperimental evaluation of WIA found that participants who received core and intensive services (this study did not separate the two categories) but not training experienced small but consistent earnings gains compared with individuals who did not receive WIA services.<sup>6</sup>

A 2012 review of evidence on job search assistance programs<sup>7</sup> noted the difficulty of isolating the impact of job search assistance from the impact of a mandate to search for work.<sup>8</sup> This review helped shape ACF’s ongoing Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation. The evaluation included three RCTs and two implementation studies; the selection of programs that underwent evaluation provided a suite of job search, job readiness, and job development services with the goal of helping individuals secure and maintain gainful employment. The two impact studies for which findings have been released showed no differences in employment or earnings for individuals assigned to more rigorous participation requirements (including daily onsite job search activities) than less rigorous requirements (e.g., weekly onsite attendance).<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> Reports for an additional implementation study and RCT are expected to be released in 2020.

**Education and training.** A second research stream focused on building individuals’ skills or human capital, seeking to help participants qualify for higher paying or more stable jobs. The

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<sup>3</sup> Hamilton, Gayle et al. National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies: How Effective Are Different Welfare-to-Work Approaches? Five-Year Adult and Child Impacts for Eleven Programs. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Navarro, David, Gilda Azurdia, and Gayle Hamilton. “A Comparison of Two Job Club Strategies: The Effects of Enhanced Versus Traditional Job Clubs in Los Angeles.” MDRC. 2008.

<sup>5</sup> McConnell, Sheena et al. “Providing Public Workforce Services to Job Seekers. Mathematica Policy Research. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Heinrich, Carolyn et al. “Workforce Investment Act Nonexperimental Net Impact Evaluation.” Impaq International. 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Klerman, Jacob et al. “Job Search Assistance Programs - A Review of the Literature.” Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Klerman et al., 2012, also reviews several studies of job search programs within the unemployment insurance (UI) programs. These programs have generally been found to shorten UI stays.

<sup>9</sup> Martinson, Karin, Eleanor Harvill, Daniel Litwok, Deena Schwartz, Siobhan Mills De La Rosa, Correne Saunders, and Stephen Bell. “Implementation and Relative Impacts of Two Job Search Assistance Programs in New York City.” Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Report #2019-46. 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Martinson, Karin, Alicia Meckstroth, Eleanor Harvill, Correne Saunders, Daniel Litwok, and Steve Bates. “Implementation and Relative Impacts of Two Job Search Assistance Programs in Sacramento County, California.” Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Report #2019-72. 2019.

earliest studies in this stream, California’s Greater Avenues for Independence evaluation and ACF’s National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS), tested the value of providing education and training in welfare-to-work programs. A particularly informative test conducted as part of NEWWS directly compared two approaches: mandatory education-or-training-first and mandatory job-search-first.<sup>11</sup> These tests showed that both approaches increased employment and earnings, but the job-search-first approach moved participants into jobs sooner. And although participants in the education-or-training-first programs eventually caught up, they did not have significantly higher earnings growth up to 15 years later.<sup>12</sup> Overall, although both strategies increased participants’ earnings, the gains were not long-lasting. Although some of the welfare-to-work programs allowed individuals to participate in occupational skills training, the programs primarily increased participation in basic education, not training. These results, along with results from a large DOL-sponsored study of the Job Training Partnership Act,<sup>13</sup> pointed to a role that occupational skills training could play. However, that knowledge was lacking regarding types of skill-building activities that work best and ways in which skill-building should be structured, targeted, and encouraged was apparent.

Two subsequent initiatives—one in the United Kingdom<sup>14</sup> and one in several U.S. locations funded by DOL and ACF<sup>15</sup>—supported the idea that training works if it is aligned with local employer demand and suggested the promise of working directly with employers to focus training in high-demand sectors. This approach received further support from findings from a 2010 Charles Stewart Mott Foundation–funded study that tested three sector-focused training programs and found substantial increases in earnings.<sup>16</sup>

Taken together, the results of employment retention and advancement studies and early studies of training programs helped trigger many additional tests of training-focused interventions. For example, the WorkAdvance sectoral training study found earnings gains for a three-year follow-up period, though the results varied across the four programs tested.<sup>17</sup> An evaluation of Project QUEST,<sup>18</sup> which provides supports to help individuals complete training at community colleges, found earnings gains over nine years, with the largest gain in earnings observed in year nine.<sup>19</sup> Year Up, a sectoral training program for young adults, achieved

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<sup>11</sup> Hamilton, Gayle. *Moving People from Welfare to Work: Lessons from the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Hamilton, Gayle, and Charles Michalopoulos. “Job Search or Basic Education Participation First: Which Improves Welfare Recipients’ Earnings More in the Long Term?” MDRC. 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Bloom, Howard S. et al. “The Benefits and Costs of JTPA Title II-A Programs: Key Findings from the National Job Training Partnership Act Study.” *The Journal of Human Resources* Vol.32, No.3, pp.549–576. 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Hendra, Richard et al. “Breaking the low-pay, no-pay cycle: Final evidence from the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration.” MDRC. 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Miller, Cynthia et al. *Strategies to Help Low-Wage Workers Advance: Implementation and Final Impacts of the Work Advancement and Support Center (WASC) Demonstration*. MDRC. 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Maguire, Sheila et al. “Tuning In to Local Labor Markets: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study.” *Public/Private Ventures*. 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Hendra, Richard et al. “Encouraging Evidence on a Sector-Focused Advancement Strategy: Two-Year Impacts from the WorkAdvance Demonstration.” MDRC. 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Elliott, Mark, and Anne Roder. “Escalating Gains: Project QUEST’s Sectoral Strategy Pays Off.” Economic Mobility Corporation. 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Elliott, Mark, and Anne Roder. “Nine Year Gains: Project QUEST’s Continuing Impact.” Economic Mobility Corporation. 2019.

substantial earnings gains over a three-year follow-up period in an evaluation conducted as part of ACF's Pathways toward Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) project.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, researchers and practitioners began to articulate the notion of career pathways—approaches that include a series of coordinated education or training steps and wraparound support services to help workers advance in an industry or sector. A recent synthesis completed for DOL concluded that almost all of the completed studies in the career pathways domain focus on individual steps of training rather than coordinated systems or steps.<sup>21</sup> One major study of the career pathways framework, the first Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Impact Study, is testing the impact of 42 local programs aimed at helping low-income individuals gain credentials and enter employment in the health industry. Early findings showed positive impacts on educational progress and employment in healthcare but no significant gains in earnings and only a small gain in overall employment after a follow-up period of approximately three years.<sup>22</sup> Additional findings from the six-year impacts report are forthcoming.

Although the evidence from some sectoral training models is promising, one concern is that the successful programs tend to screen heavily, and individuals with low levels of literacy, numeracy, or other significant barriers are often screened out. Several studies have also found positive results for various strategies designed to improve persistence and completion for low-income students in community colleges, which are primary providers of skills training in many areas of the United States; however, these studies have not measured employment outcomes (see, for instance, Scrivener et al., 2015).<sup>23</sup>

A final training category is apprenticeship programs, which offer on-the-job training combined with technical training geared to employer needs. No RCTs of this approach have been conducted, but an extensive DOL nonexperimental study found evidence of substantial earnings gains, and another DOL study of the American Apprenticeship Initiative is currently underway.<sup>24</sup>

**Making work pay.** A third research stream tested strategies designed to “make work pay” by supplementing low-wage workers’ earnings. This research acknowledges that broad labor market trends have dramatically reduced the availability of high-paying jobs for workers without post-secondary education or training and that training-focused models cannot help all workers. Studies of such models, including both TANF earnings disregards and other types of supplements offered outside TANF, found that they can encourage work *and* increase income—with measurable benefits for children in some cases. Results were generally larger for models

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<sup>20</sup> Fein, David, and Jill Hamadyk. “Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program.” Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Report #2018-65. 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Schwartz, Deena, Julie Strawn, and Maureen Sarna. “Career Pathways Research and Evaluation Synthesis.” Abt Associates. 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Peck, Laura R., Daniel Litwok, Douglas Walton, Eleanor Harvill, and Alan Werner. “Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 1.0) Impact Study: Three-Year Impacts Report.” Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Report #2019-114. 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Scrivener, Susan et al. “Doubling Graduation Rates: Three-Year Effects of CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for Developmental Education Students.” MDRC. 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Reed, Deborah et al. “An Effectiveness Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis of Registered Apprenticeship in 10 States.” Mathematica Policy Research. 2012.

that included employment services and full-time work requirements.<sup>25</sup> Early results from the DOL and HHS-funded Paycheck Plus demonstration, testing an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit for childless workers, show small positive effects on labor market outcomes concentrated among women.<sup>26</sup>

Studies of another make-work-pay strategy, Jobs-Plus, which reduced the amount that public housing rent rose with increased earnings and provided other employment services and supports, also showed successes. The program was tested in six public housing developments and produced lasting earning gains (through seven years) in the sites where the program was well implemented.<sup>27</sup>

**Retention and advancement services.** A fourth research stream, also targeting low-wage workers, tested counseling, reemployment, or other services (sometimes combined with financial incentives) to promote employment retention. In a study funded by DOL and ACF, a few of the programs produced positive effects and suggested the promise of involving employer intermediaries (e.g., in one case, a for-profit with close relationships with local employers) and providing assistance to rapidly reemploy individuals who lose their jobs as opposed to concentrating on helping individuals retain particular jobs. The fact that most of the studied programs *failed* to produce positive effects suggested, however, that programs must do more than simply provide post-employment case management and general labor market advice to impact job retention and advancement.<sup>28</sup>

**Services for vulnerable populations with complex barriers to employment.** A fifth research stream focused on specific populations with complex barriers to employment, for whom job search and/or education and training are clearly insufficient. Interventions in this stream targeted groups such as low-income noncustodial parents, youth, individuals with disabilities, individuals with housing instability, veterans, and formerly incarcerated individuals. In addition to employment services, these interventions provided a package of other services to mitigate the barriers to employment that these individuals may face. For example, the Office of Child Support Enforcement’s Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration conducted RCTs of programs for noncustodial parents behind in their child support that combined employment services with case management, enhanced Child Support services, and

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<sup>25</sup> Berlin, Gordon. “Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs”. MDRC. 2000; Michalopoulos, Charles. “Does Making Work Pay Still Pay? An Update on the Effects of Four Earnings Supplement Programs on Employment, Earnings, and Income.” MDRC. 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, Cynthia et al. “Boosting the Earned Income Tax Credit for Singles: Final Impact Findings from the Paycheck Plus Demonstration in New York City.” MDRC. 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Riccio, James. “Sustained Earnings Gains for Residents in a Public Housing Jobs Program.” MDRC. 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Hendra, Richard et al. “How Effective Are Different Approaches Aiming to Increase Employment Retention and Advancement? Final Impacts for Twelve Models.” MDRC. 2010; Rangarajan, Anu, and Tim Novak. “The Struggle to Sustain Employment: The Effectiveness of the Postemployment Services Demonstration.” Mathematica Policy Research. 1999.

parenting services.<sup>29</sup> While the results showed some evidence of small increases in earnings, there were no significant impacts on employment.<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, there have been studies of targeted interventions for individuals with behavioral health issues or other disabilities that make steady work difficult.<sup>31</sup> Several RCTs of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment have found impacts on employment outcomes for individuals with mental illness; the model is now being tested for TANF recipients and other populations.<sup>32</sup> IPS programs seek to place participants into appropriate jobs in the competitive labor market quickly, while providing a set of wraparound supports. One review of 22 RCTs of IPS programs found a mean competitive employment rate of 56 percent for the treatment group and 22 percent for the control group.<sup>33</sup>

Another approach for individuals who face complex barriers to employment involves subsidized jobs programs that use public funds to create or support jobs for individuals who cannot find employment in the competitive labor market. RCTs, many conducted through ACF's Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration and DOL's Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration, have found that temporary subsidized employment programs can dramatically improve employment and earnings—and even affect some measures of personal wellbeing—while the jobs are in place. However, only a few of the programs studied produced lasting improvements in participants' labor market outcomes.<sup>34</sup> In other words, although subsidized employment can be a useful strategy for raising employment levels in the short-term and providing work-based income support, evidence of its effectiveness as a training tool or in changing employment trajectories is weaker and less consistent. Evidence exists, however, that some subsidized employment programs can reduce recidivism among individuals returning to the community from prison.

## B. Lessons Learned and Questions Still Unanswered

A recent OPRE study used a quantitative meta-analysis to draw lessons from across more than 200 rigorous studies of 93 distinct employment and training interventions. The analysis found that interventions bundling multiple strategies are more effective than interventions using a

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<sup>29</sup> While the primary goal of the intervention was to improve the reliable payment of child support in order to improve child well-being and avoid public costs, the noncustodial parents' employment and earnings were key outcomes evaluated in this demonstration.

<sup>30</sup> Cancian, Maria, Daniel R. Meyer, and Robert G. Wood. "Final Impact Findings From The Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)." Institute for Research on Poverty. 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Butler, David et al. "What Strategies Work for the Hard-to-Employ? Final Results of the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation Project and Selected Sites from the Employment Retention and Advancement Project." MDRC. 2012; Bloom, Dan, Pamela J. Loprest, and Sheila R. Zedlewski. "TANF Recipients with Barriers to Employment." The Urban Institute. 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Examples of current studies include the evaluation of the San Diego Workforce Partnership's Breaking Barriers San Diego and the County of Los Angeles Department of Mental Health's study of using the IPS Model in CalWORKs Mental Health Programs. These follow on a study in Minnesota that found positive earnings impacts for TANF recipients with work limitations and disabilities in the first year after random assignment (Farrell, Mary et al. "The TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project: Innovative Strategies for Serving TANF Recipients with Disabilities." MDRC. 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Presentation by Deborah Becker, Gary Bond, and Eugene Oulvey. American Institutes for Research, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Barden, Bret et al. "New Perspectives on Creating Jobs." MDRC, 2018; Golub, Chloe et al., "Testing Two Subsidized Employment Models for TANF Recipients." MDRC. 2019.

single strategy. It also pointed to the importance of implementation quality, regardless of the intervention's specific design.<sup>35</sup>

In sum, rigorous studies have demonstrated that many types of interventions can improve labor market outcomes for disadvantaged groups. Subsidized employment can increase employment and earnings in the short-term, and earnings supplements can increase both employment and income, at least while supplements remain in place. Career pathways models can improve educational progress and, in some cases, produce lasting earnings gains for individuals who meet program entrance criteria.

Still, many questions remain. The most successful training programs are generally inaccessible to individuals with low literacy or numeracy levels or significant personal barriers. Interventions targeting individuals who face complex barriers to employment, even when these programs boost employment and earnings, typically leave most participants with low earnings or inconsistent employment. Future programs must do better, even while swimming upstream against some of the daunting contextual challenges discussed later in this white paper.

## C. Employment and Training Research Underway

Ongoing rigorous evaluations of employment and training interventions are continuing to focus on most of the domains discussed in Subsection A. Appendix A provides a list of some of the most notable current studies, including the following.

- **Job search assistance.** DOL's WIA Gold Standard Evaluation is in part looking at the effects of job search assistance, one-on-one counseling, and other services that were part of WIA's intensive services; early impact findings showed that these services led to an increase in participants' earnings five quarters after they were enrolled in the study, but longer-term findings have yet to be released.<sup>36</sup> The SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) Pilot Program Evaluation, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), is examining 10 different state approaches offering numerous job search and job readiness services. As noted previously, ACF's Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation expects to release reports for an additional implementation study and RCT in 2020.
- **Education and training.** ACF's PACE project, noted previously, is studying nine career pathways programs across the country, and the first HPOG Impact Study (also noted previously) is testing the impact of 42 local programs, funded through ACF grants, in helping low-income individuals gain credentials and enter employment in the health industry. Most of the programs studied in PACE have showed positive early impacts on educational outcomes (e.g., obtaining an industry certification), yet whether these outcomes translate into higher earnings will remain unclear until the longer-term impact findings become available. As discussed in Subsection A., early findings from the

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<sup>35</sup> Vollmer, Lauren et al. "The Right Tool for the Job: A Meta-Regression of Employment Strategies' Effects on Different Outcomes - Appendices." Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Report #2017-40-B. 2017.

<sup>36</sup> McConnell, Sheena et al. "Providing Public Workforce Services to Job Seekers: 15-Month Impact Findings on the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs." Mathematica Policy Research. 2016.

HPOG Impact Study also show positive impacts on educational progress but no gains in earnings. These studies are ongoing to measure longer-term impacts at approximately six years after individuals were randomly assigned. A separate evaluation of a second round of HPOG programs includes a descriptive study to assess program implementation, participant outcomes, and systems change; an impact study to assess impacts of the HPOG programs; and a cost benefit study. DOL's TechHire and Strengthening Working Families Initiative Evaluation is advancing research into employer engagement by documenting how partnerships between programs that provide training and support services and employers help connect participants to targeted employment opportunities.

- **Making work pay.** The Paycheck Plus demonstration, discussed previously, has released final findings from its New York City site that showed increased employment rates in the second and third year after study enrollment, with these effects concentrated among women and more disadvantaged men. However, interim findings from the demonstration's Atlanta site did not show significant increases in employment rates in either the first or second year after study enrollment. Another report presenting effects through three years in Atlanta and a final report synthesizing findings from both cities combined are forthcoming.
- **Retention and advancement services.** Many of the studies described in the other domains are examining programs that include services that help individuals find jobs and either retain them or advance to better jobs. To help individuals advance within their field, some programs use career pathways strategies, for example, to provide opportunities for additional training after a first job placement. Some of the behavioral health-informed strategies used in services for individuals with complex barriers to employment focus on helping them stay in a job after they have found one.
- **Services for individuals with complex barriers to employment.** Multiple projects are continuing to study interventions for groups that typically face complex barriers to employment, including low-income noncustodial parents, youth, individuals with disabilities, individuals with housing instability, veterans, and formerly incarcerated individuals. One example is the Social Security Administration's Supported Employment Demonstration.

Several study efforts cut across these streams by focusing on the growing knowledge bases related to brain science and behavioral economics to inform and improve other approaches or the ways they are delivered. For example, ACF's Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency-Next Generation project is looking at ways to improve the outcomes of a range of human service programs, including welfare-to-work programs, through small changes in the service delivery environment that could potentially affect client and program administrator behavior. Various other studies focus on strategies that seek to strengthen self-regulation skills because research has shown that these skills are important for setting, pursuing, and achieving personal goals, including finding and maintaining employment.<sup>37</sup> For example, ACF's Evaluation

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<sup>37</sup> See Almlund, Mathilde et al. "Personality Psychology and Economics." In *Handbook of the Economics of Education* (vol. 4, pp. 1–181), edited by E.A. Hanushek and L. Wößmann. Amsterdam: Elsevier. 2011.

of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations is looking at whether trained coaches working with these populations can help individuals enter and retain jobs, and examining the impact of coaching on self-regulation skills and the role of these skills in generating any impacts on employment outcomes.

Finally, ACF’s Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES) Project and Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies Project (NextGen Project) span multiple categories of employment and training evaluations. BEES is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of programs attempting to improve employment and earnings among low-income individuals. With capacity to conduct up to 21 rigorous evaluations of programs operating at or near scale, BEES is considering evaluations in a broad range of focus areas, including career pathways, education and training, substance use disorders, mental health, and TANF programs. A key theme is the integration of employment services into systems and programs that serve many low-income individuals (e.g., child support, substance use disorder treatment). BEES is currently recruiting sites for participation in the study; early results should be available in two to three years. The NextGen Project supports a multicomponent, rigorous evaluation of innovative interventions designed to enhance employment outcomes for highly vulnerable populations who face complex challenges, such as physical and mental health conditions, a criminal history, or limited work skills and experience. The project will also explore the role of market-oriented, employer-driven programs (e.g., social enterprises) in helping highly vulnerable populations obtain and retain employment. BEES and the NextGen Project are coordinating closely to maximize what will be learned from the two studies. Additionally, ACF is partnering with the Social Security Administration on evaluations under these two projects, adding a focus on employment-related early interventions for individuals with current or foreseeable disabilities who have limited work history and are at risk of applying for Supplemental Security Income.

## **D. Contextual Factors and Trends That Will Affect the Labor Market**

As illustrated in the logic model in Exhibit 1, a host of contextual factors—including labor market conditions and the policy and systems environment, among others—shape both the design and effects of employment and training interventions. Any effort to set an agenda for future research on employment interventions must consider the trends in these contextual factors.

For example, labor market trends include the following.

- Despite the fact that the official unemployment rate is low, a large proportion of prime-age workers—particularly men—remain out of the labor force, continuing a long-term trend. Although the direction of causality is unclear, it is worth noting that 44 percent of prime-age males out of the labor force reported taking pain medication the previous day. Most of these individuals were taking prescription medications, including opioids.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Krueger, Alan B. “Where Have all the Workers Gone? An Inquiry into the Decline of the U.S. Labor Force Participation Rate.” Brookings Institution. 2017.

- Some research shows an increase in the percentage of workers in alternative work arrangements (e.g., temporary workers, independent contractors). For example, one study found the percentage of workers in such arrangements increased from 11 percent to 16 percent from 2005 to 2015.<sup>39</sup> However, the Bureau of Labor Statistics recently found that such work arrangements have not increased.<sup>40</sup> Researchers are currently exploring this discrepancy among findings. Whether there has been such an increase has potentially important implications for the types of jobs program participants might get.
- Nonstandard and variable work schedules have created significant childcare challenges for parents and result in variable earnings that strain household resources.<sup>41</sup>
- Real wages in the bottom and lower-middle quintiles of the national wage distribution have either fallen or risen only slightly since 1979. Overall, real wages were merely 10 percent higher in 2017 than they were in 1973.<sup>42</sup> Further, low unemployment levels in the later part of the 2010s were not accompanied by the increases in real wages that some economists expected would occur in a tight labor market.<sup>43</sup>
- Automation continues to reshape the supply of jobs, with the biggest impacts on lower-paid, less-skilled, and less-educated workers.<sup>44</sup> This trend will continue, though predicting the pace of change or the specific industries that automation will affect beyond the short-term is difficult.
- Occupational gender segregation continues to be a factor affecting employment outcomes, and many training programs reflect this segregation. Female-dominated occupations pay less than male-dominated ones.<sup>45</sup> A recent issue brief reported one study found that few women participated in trainings for traditionally male-dominated fields funded through WIOA, Trade Adjustment Assistance, or Job Corps. Further, women account for only 1 in 10 participants in registered apprenticeship programs, and most are in apprenticeships in social service occupations.<sup>46</sup>

And on the policy front, the following trends have emerged.

- While the federal minimum wage has fallen in real terms,<sup>47</sup> nearly 30 states—representing 60 percent of the U.S. population—have raised their minimum wages above the national level.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Katz, Lawrence F., and Alan B. Krueger. “The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 1995–2015.” National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No.22667. 2016.

<sup>40</sup> “Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements - May 2017.” Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Enchautegui, Maria E. “Nonstandard Work Schedules and the Well-Being of Low-Income Families.” The Urban Institute. 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Shambaugh, Jay et al. “Thirteen Facts about Wage Growth.” Brookings Institution: The Hamilton Project. 2017.

<sup>43</sup> See discussion, for example, in Furman, Jason. “The Real Reason You’re Not Getting a Pay Raise.” Vox. August 11, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Frey, Carl Benedikt, and Michael A. Osborne. “The Future of Employment: How Susceptible are Jobs to Computerisation?” University of Oxford. 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Hegewisch, Araine, and Emma Williams-Baron. “The Gender Wage Gap by Occupation 2017 and by Race and Ethnicity.” Institute for Women’s Policy Research. 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Inanc, Hande, Karen Needels, and Jillian Berk. “Gender Segregation in Training Programs and the Wage Gap.” Mathematica Policy Research. 2017.

<sup>47</sup> Cooper, David. “The federal minimum wage has been eroded by decades of inaction.” Economic Policy Institute. 2016.

<sup>48</sup> “The 21 States Stuck at \$7.25: Federal Raise the Wage Act of 2017 Would Lift Wages for 20 Million Workers in These States.” National Employment Law Project. 2017.

- WIOA’s enactment in 2014 made many changes to the workforce system, including an emphasis on career pathways approaches and employer involvement in training.<sup>49</sup> Community colleges have emerged as the key providers of workforce training in many areas.
- Reforms in enforcement-oriented systems (e.g., criminal justice, child support) have increasingly driven them to become more “client” focused, increasing the attention they place on the economic status of the individuals involved in the systems.
- The federal government and some states are increasingly considering or experimenting with imposing work requirements in means-tested programs (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, housing assistance), although whether additional funding will accompany new mandates is unclear. Federal policymakers are also considering consolidating various benefit programs, at least on a trial basis.

Other key trends include the following.

- A dramatic decline has occurred in the TANF caseload. The percentage of poor families receiving TANF assistance has fallen from nearly 70 percent in the 1990s to less than 25 percent today,<sup>50</sup> having implications for how to reach parents struggling in the labor market and fund services for them.
- The number of individuals receiving disability assistance has leveled off or declined slightly as the labor market improved over the 2010s, but caseloads are still much larger than they were two decades ago.<sup>51</sup>
- Federal funding for employment and training programs has fallen in real terms. One analysis found that 2017 funding levels for the DOL’s main job training grants were 19 percent below 2010 levels and 40 percent below 2001 levels, after adjusting for inflation.<sup>52</sup>

## IV. Potential Topics for Future Research

As noted earlier, research has left unanswered many important questions about designing effective employment and training programs for low-income populations, and recent developments in the labor market and policy trends have posed new questions. We present here several key areas of interest to consider exploring in future research. These topics were identified as gaps in current research and emerged as salient themes across discussions held at the January 2019 roundtable. For each topic, we present potential research questions. Some of the questions were raised by roundtable participants across multiple roundtable discussions, suggesting that they are high priority topics that resonate with a range of stakeholders in the employment and training field.

<sup>49</sup> “The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act - July 22, 2014.” Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Loprest, Pamela J. “How Has the TANF Caseload Changed over Time?” Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2012.

<sup>51</sup> “Chart Book: Social Security Disability Insurance.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Reich, David, and Chloe Cho. “Unmet Needs and the Squeeze on Appropriations: Policymakers Should Continue Bipartisan Sequestration Relief.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 2017.

This list of areas in which further research and evaluation could benefit the employment and training field is not exhaustive. Rather, it is meant as a suggested subset of topics consistent with OPRE’s mission and focus that would be potentially valuable additions to its and other federal agencies’ research portfolios and to the broader field. Each table presents a broad theme identified as an area of interest, topics related to the theme, and research questions suggested for each topic.

## Theme 1: Nature of Work and the Labor Market

*Areas of interest include issues related to nonstandard work arrangements, the effect of automation and other technological developments, and the implications of changing labor demand for designing effective employment and training programs.*

### Topic area: Nonstandard work arrangements

1. Implications for job stability and quality
  - What occupations do flexible work schedules and contracting out work most affect?
  - How do nonstandard work arrangements affect job quality and stability? What factors should be considered, and what are methods for measuring them?
  - Do innovative employment practices that address both employer and employee needs exist in this sphere?
2. Types of supports for workers
  - What types of supports are most critical for workers in nonstandard arrangements (e.g., childcare, transportation)?
  - What innovative practices exist for supporting workers in such arrangements?
  - How should the effectiveness of approaches for supporting workers be evaluated?

### Topic area: Effect of automation and other technological developments

1. Impact on employers and workers
  - What sectors and occupations does or will automation affect the most?
  - How will automation affect the available jobs and work experiences of low-skilled workers?
2. Implications for skills needed and for training approaches
  - What re-skilling approaches are most impactful and for which workers?
  - How does automation affect the nature and content of occupational training (e.g., need to train individuals to use more advanced machinery or gain IT-related skills)?
  - Can “lifelong learning and training accounts,” which workers could use at any time during their careers to pay for education and training, help workers who face automation-driven displacement?

## Theme 1: Nature of Work and the Labor Market (continued)

### Topic area: Implications of changing labor demand

1. How employment and training programs can stay knowledgeable of labor demand changes and can plan for how to serve individuals given those changes
  - Which labor market information (LMI) is most useful to federal, state, and local programs in designing future employment and training services (e.g., sectors or occupations to focus on for sectoral-based or career pathway program offerings)? Do ways exist to organize and present LMI to better facilitate its use?
  - What are effective approaches programs can use to connect with employers to better understand their changes in labor demand?
2. How job developers can use LMI to identify promising jobs for jobseekers
  - What are effective ways in which programs can leverage LMI in facilitating employment for their jobseekers?
  - What are effective approaches for training jobseekers to use LMI to conduct job searches in industries with available jobs and livable wages?
3. Implications for reskilling over a lifetime
  - What approaches are effective in retraining displaced workers who were previously in declining industries or obsolete occupations?
  - Can training prepare workers for experiencing multiple job changes over their working lives?
  - To what extent should digital literacy be emphasized in training low-skill workers?
  - As in-demand skills evolve, how should programs determine the skills for which training before hiring is needed versus skills that can be learned on the job?

## Theme 2: Employers' Perspectives and Roles

*Areas of interest include understanding the extent of employer involvement in employment and training programs and research, employers' roles in supporting the employment of disadvantaged populations, and the effectiveness of current practices and variations in employer practices by type of employer.*

### Topic area: Employer engagement

1. Employers' roles in supporting employment and training programs
  - What partnership approaches best enable programs to obtain input and buy-in from employers when designing employment and training approaches?
  - Which practices are effective in securing the active engagement of employers in the delivery of employment and training programs?
2. Employers' roles and perspectives in hiring and in supporting the retention and advancement of disadvantaged populations
  - What is the range of employer policies and practices that workers in low-wage jobs experience?
  - What hard and soft skills are most important to employers, and what are the most effective approaches for building these skills?
  - What is the best way for programs to engage with employers to identify and/or create job opportunities for low-income populations?
3. Employers' perspectives and roles in research
  - What descriptive research could provide a better understanding of employer perceptions of disadvantaged workers and the factors that influence those perceptions?
  - What are feasible methods for conducting impact research in employer settings?

### Topic area: Employer practices and tools

1. Employer screening and hiring practices
  - What types of screening tools do employers use, and what factors do these tools assess?
  - Whom are employers screening out? What supports do those individuals need to gain employment?

## Theme 2: Employers' Perspectives and Roles (continued)

- What steps can policymakers or employment and training programs take to encourage a broader set of employers to consider hiring individuals with complex barriers to employment (e.g., by potentially making the case that hiring and supporting such workers is beneficial to their businesses or provides a positive return on investment)?
  - What types of models, such as Greyston Bakery's Open Hiring model,<sup>53</sup> can employers adopt that might be effective in increasing the hiring of individuals with multiple barriers to work?
2. Variation in employer engagement and employer screening and hiring practices by type of employer (e.g., private sector, social enterprise)
- Are certain approaches to screening, assessment, and hiring more common in the for-profit or not-for profit sectors? Do promising practices exist in one sector that could be applied in the other?
  - Do social enterprises offer any "lessons learned" with regard to these issues?

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<sup>53</sup> Greyston, a social enterprise, hires individuals automatically off a waitlist without screening them and provides on-the-job training and support. (See the Greyston website <https://www.greyston.org/> for more information.)

### Theme 3: Employment Retention and Advancement

*Areas of interest include understanding how initial employment affects retention and advancement, exploring the relationship of benefits cliffs to advancement, and identifying employment and training approaches that lead to employment retention and advancement for employed low-income populations.*

#### **Topic area: Methods for matching individuals to the best sector and/or job, and for ensuring they receive the right supports mix and dosage to retain or advance in that job**

1. Effective tools and approaches that programs can use to assess individual strengths, weaknesses, and barriers to employment
  - What are efficient and effective approaches to assessment? What are the most important factors to assess?
  - Under what circumstances and with what populations do assessments lead to effective services and employment?
  - What are the most effective approaches for matching individuals with the best sector and/or career for them, with “best” meaning, among other things, fulfilling, fostering economic mobility, and supporting longevity in positions?
2. Career pathways approaches
  - In which sectors have career pathways approaches shown the most promise for advancement? What characterizes these sectors? What challenges have they faced and overcome? What challenges remain?
  - Which components of career pathways programs are the strongest drivers of wage growth and advancement?
  - To what extent is the impact of a combination of career pathways components greater than the impact of any individual part? That is, are certain components more effective when bundled together?
  - For which subgroups are career pathways programs most effective in fostering wage growth and advancement?
  - How are education and training institutions revising their degree and credential programs to support the skill-building needed to progress along specific pathways?
  - What systems level changes are needed to support career pathways (e.g., restructuring education programs or jobs to support advancement)?
3. Education and training program designs
  - What steps can education and training programs implement to best support participants engaging in work while pursuing further education?
  - How can sectoral training programs be made more accessible to individuals with barriers or low cognitive skills to enable them to obtain and advance in higher paying occupations?

### Theme 3: Employment Retention and Advancement (continued)

#### 4. Apprenticeships

- What steps can the workforce system and employers take to expand the use of apprenticeships to include nontraditional workforce fields and into new industries and occupations?
- Can pre-apprenticeship programs help prepare disadvantaged populations for entry and success in apprenticeships?

**Topic area: How benefits cliffs might affect the decisions of both low-wage workers and their employers, and what approaches human service programs, employment and training providers, and employers can take to support decision making<sup>54</sup>**

#### 1. Participant perspective

- What do participants receiving government benefits understand about how access to and/or level of benefits are related to their earnings?
- How does their understanding influence their employment choices (e.g., number of hours worked, accepting promotions)?
- How do earnings increases and loss of benefits affect their overall economic stability?
- Do effective approaches (e.g., financial literacy education) exist for helping participants make sound choices based on their individual circumstances?

#### 2. Employer perspective

- What do employers understand about the interaction of employee earnings and receipt of government benefits?
- Do effective approaches exist for educating and/or supporting employers in optimizing outcomes for these workers?

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<sup>54</sup> Here, benefits cliffs refer to the decreases in or cessation of some public benefits when a recipient's earnings increase.

## Theme 3: Employment Retention and Advancement (continued)

### Topic area: Interdisciplinary approaches—adapting evidence-based approaches for populations other than the populations for which they were initially designed

1. Individual Placement and Support (IPS), a model of supported employment that has demonstrated strong employment and earnings impacts for individuals with serious mental illness<sup>55</sup>
  - To what extent is IPS effective with other populations with complex barriers to employment (e.g., individuals with criminal records, individuals with disabilities, low-income noncustodial parents, and “disconnected” young adults who are neither in school nor in the labor market)?
  - How might the model be adapted for these populations while retaining its effectiveness?
2. Cognitive Behavioral Interventions for Offenders Seeking Employment (CBI-EMP), a cognitive behaviorally based model currently being tested with individuals recently released from incarceration<sup>56</sup>
  - To what extent is CBI-EMP effective with other populations with complex barriers to employment?
  - What adaptations might be needed for using the approach with these populations?
3. Identification of other fields to explore
  - What other fields have learnings that employment and training research can incorporate to identify new effective service models or strategies to test?
  - What populations should programs using such service models target?

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<sup>55</sup> “What is IPS?” *The IPS Employment Center*. 2020. Retrieved from <https://ipsworks.org/>.

<sup>56</sup> The University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute and MDRC developed the CBI-EMP curriculum.

University of Cincinnati Corrections Institute. “CBI-EMP Overview”. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://cech.uc.edu/content/dam/refresh/cech-62/ucc/overviews/cbi-emp-overview.pdf>.

## Theme 4: Building and Adoption of Evidence-Based Practices

*Areas of interest include ways to support the continued expansion of evidence-based practices and the adoption of such practices in programs and human service organizations.*

### Topic area: Building the evidence base

1. Access to data
  - What steps can federal and state agencies take (e.g., creating public access data bases, streamlining data request processes, creating and/or providing access to data warehouses) to support or promote researcher access to administrative data?
  - How can federal agencies support or promote data sharing among government entities?
2. Rapid cycle evaluations
  - What steps can researchers take to expand and support the use of relatively low-cost rapid cycle tests by states, localities, and community-based organizations to assess the effectiveness of alternative approaches?
  - What is the business case for both programs and employers to engage in rapid cycle evaluations involving low-income workers?
3. Unpacking the “black box”
  - What methods can researchers use to unpack the black box to identify effective program components or approaches that contribute to successful employment and training models and inform resource allocation, quality improvement, and development of practice standards for the field?
  - In what ways can the field build effective workforce development models as has been done in other fields (e.g., home visiting, early childhood education) that have an explicit evidence base?
  - What are the key crosscutting factors that affect program quality, regardless of the model (e.g., how staff are hired, trained, and managed; how programs encourage participation among clients)?

### Topic area: Adopting evidence-based practices

1. Strategies to support adoption in human services organizations
  - Which approaches are effective for encouraging adoption of a learning culture in state and local human services organizations?
  - What are the most effective methods for federal agencies to collect and disseminate evidence-based practices? What role can states, foundations, and the broader research community play to contribute to this effort?

## Theme 4: Building and Adoption of Evidence-Based Practices (continued)

- How can federal agencies support approaches for fostering adoption of evidence-based practice (e.g., “quality rating systems” for employment and training programs; training and technical assistance for workforce personnel; professional standards for the field)?
2. Importance of implementation
- How can evidence-based practices be scaled up or replicated across different contexts? How do implementation fidelity and quality affect successful adoption?
  - How do embedded contexts, including partnerships with other organizations, affect implementation?

## V. Conclusions and Next Steps

This white paper’s overview of past and current research on employment and training programs for low-income populations is intended to help inform potential future directions for OPRE’s and other federal agencies’ research and evaluation portfolios and for the broader field of researchers and practitioners. As the paper has discussed, the research on employment and training programs has identified several strategies that have shown some effectiveness in helping some program participants enter employment and increase earnings but also has identified the limitations of these strategies. The current body of knowledge leaves many questions unanswered about how such programs can best help disadvantaged groups achieve earnings and employment stability needed for self-sufficiency and wellbeing, particularly for individuals with low skills or the most complex barriers to employment. In addition, the changing labor market context in which these programs operate raises new questions about what strategies will be most effective going forward. While various studies are already underway to investigate newer approaches, the wide range of remaining questions—such as the ones outlined in Section IV—suggest that future studies and evaluations could contribute in many areas to the evidence base regarding effective approaches for supporting employment among low-income individuals.

## Appendix A: Selected Ongoing Evaluations of Employment and Training Interventions

Project	Description of Interventions Tested	Funder
<b>Job Search Assistance</b>		
<a href="#"><u>Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation</u></a>	Job search approaches for TANF recipients	ACF
<a href="#"><u>SNAP E&amp;T Pilot Program Evaluations</u></a>	Job search, education, and training programs for SNAP recipients	FNS
<a href="#"><u>WIA Gold Standard Evaluation</u></a>	Evaluation of WIOA programs serving adults and dislocated workers	DOL
<a href="#"><u>Evaluation of the Reemployment Eligibility and Assessment Program</u></a>	Reconnecting UI claimants to the workforce	DOL
<b>Education and Training</b>		
<a href="#"><u>Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education</u></a>	Career pathways models for various populations and sectors	ACF
<a href="#"><u>Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Impact Study</u></a>	Career pathways programs in the healthcare sector for TANF recipients and other low-income individuals	ACF
<a href="#"><u>National and Tribal Evaluation of the 2nd Generation of HPOG</u></a>	Career pathways programs in the healthcare sector for TANF recipients and other low-income individuals	ACF
<a href="#"><u>WorkAdvance Demonstration</u></a>	Long-term effects of sectoral training and post-placement supports for low-income individuals	SIF/Foundations
<a href="#"><u>Evaluation of Strategies Used in TechHire and Strengthening Working Families Initiative Grant Programs</u></a>	Training programs for technology occupations in high demand and training programs in multiple sectors, which include specialized childcare for parents in training	DOL

Project	Description of Interventions Tested	Funder
<a href="#"><u>Los Angeles Reconnections Career Academy Program</u></a>	Secondary education and subsidized vocational training	City of Los Angeles
<a href="#"><u>Evaluation of the American Apprenticeship Initiative</u></a>	Apprenticeship opportunities for underrepresented populations	DOL
<a href="#"><u>Evaluation of the Ready to Work Partnership Grant Program</u></a>	Occupational training for individuals experiencing long-term unemployment	DOL
<a href="#"><u>Study of the Self-Employment Assistance Program</u></a>	Self-employment assistance for dislocated workers	DOL
<b>Make Work Pay</b>		
<a href="#"><u>Paycheck Plus Demonstration</u></a>	Enhanced EITC for single workers	New York City Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity/ DOL/HHS/Foundations
<b>Retention and Advancement Services</b>		
<a href="#"><u>Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations</u></a>	Coaching interventions aiming to build employment-related skills and improve job retention <i>as well as</i> job entry	ACF
<b>Services for Individuals with Complex Barriers to Employment</b>		
<b>Noncustodial Parents</b>		
<a href="#"><u>National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration</u></a>	Child support–led job search and job readiness programs for low-income noncustodial parents	OCSE
<a href="#"><u>Families Forward Demonstration</u></a>	Sectoral training for noncustodial parents who owe child support	OCSE/Foundations
<b>Youth</b>		
<a href="#"><u>YouthBuild Evaluation</u></a>	High school equivalency and construction training for disconnected youth	DOL
<a href="#"><u>Reentry Employment Opportunities Evaluation</u></a>	Case management and occupational skills training for court-involved youth	DOL

Project	Description of Interventions Tested	Funder
<u>Evaluation of Youth Career Connect</u>	Integrated academic and career-focused learning for youth	DOL
Individuals with Disabilities		
<u>Evaluation of Community College Interventions for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities</u>	Integrated education and career development services for individuals with disabilities	DOL
<u>Pathways to Careers Program Demonstration Evaluation</u>	Customized employment for individuals with disabilities	SourceAmerica
<u>Breaking Barriers in San Diego Evaluation</u>	IPS model of supported employment for individuals with disabilities	San Diego Workforce Partnership
<u>Supported Employment Demonstration</u>	Integrated vocational and behavioral health services for individuals with disabilities through the IPS model	SSA
Individuals with Housing Instability		
<u>MyGoals for Employment Success</u>	Executive-skills workforce coaching approach with financial incentives for housing voucher recipients	Arnold Foundation and partners (Note: also part of ACF’s Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations, above)
<u>The Family Self-Sufficiency Program Evaluation</u>	Case management, work incentives, and employment service for housing voucher recipients	HUD
Other Populations		
<u>Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Impact Evaluation</u>	Case management and employment and training services for veterans	DOL
<u>Building Bridges and Bonds Evaluation</u>	Enhanced approaches for fatherhood programs, with one focused on employment	ACF
<u>Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration</u>	Subsidized employment models for TANF recipients, youth, and others	ACF

Project	Description of Interventions Tested	Funder
<u>Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration</u>	Enhanced transitional jobs approaches for noncustodial parents and individuals with criminal backgrounds	DOL
<u>Evaluation of the IPS Model in CalWORKs Mental Health Programs</u>	IPS model of supported employment for TANF participants with mental health concerns	County of Los Angeles
<u>Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency - Next Generation Project</u>	Behaviorally informed interventions to improve operations and efficiency of human services programs	ACF
<u>Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families</u>	Up to 21 rigorous evaluations of innovative programs aiming to improve employment and earnings among low-income individuals	ACF
<u>Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies Project</u>	Multicomponent rigorous evaluation of innovative interventions designed to enhance employment outcomes for highly vulnerable populations who have demonstrated difficulty entering and sustaining employment	ACF

*Key*

- EITC: Earned Income Tax Credit
- HUD: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- OCSE: Office of Child Support Enforcement within ACF
- SIF: New York City Center for Economic Opportunity Social Innovation Fund
- SSA: Social Security Administration
- UI: Unemployment Insurance

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