Designing a National Evaluation of an Ongoing Program: Lessons from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation

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Goal: Evaluate WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs

- Large programs designed to help customers obtain jobs or better jobs
- Programs administered by about 600 local workforce investment boards (LWIBs)
- Services offered in about 3,000 American Job Centers to:
  - Laid off workers or otherwise separated (dislocated)
  - Low-income persons (adults)
- Three tiers of services:
  - Core (primarily self service)
  - Intensive (staff assisted)
  - Training
Ambitious Study Design

- Nationally-representative estimates

- Experimental
  - Nonexperimental study already conducted (Heinrich et al. 2011)

- Separate impacts of the effectiveness of core services, intensive services, and training

- Follow study participants for 30 months
  - Two rounds of survey
  - Administrative data collection
Challenging

- Needed to insert random assignment into well-established procedures
  - Procedures different across LWIBs
  - Needed to randomly assign 35,000 customers

- Recruit many randomly-selected LWIBs. But:
  - LWIBs were not required to participate
  - Service providers do not want to deny services
  - Providers concerned about disruption
  - Financial compensation was not large
Did Not Attempt to Estimate Impact of Core Services

- Not feasible to deny core services
  - Would need to deny access to American Job Centers
  - Core services described in law as “universal”
  - Multiple sources of funding

- Lack of “no-service” control group assisted in recruiting LWIBs
Random Assignment: When a Customer Seeks and is Eligible for Intensive Services

- Full-WIA
  All WIA services: core, intensive, and training (if eligible)

- Core and Intensive
  Core and intensive services only

- Core-Only
  Core services only
Low-Assignment Rates to “Limited-Service Groups” Critical to Success

- Rates of assignment to “core-and-intensive” and “core-only” groups set at 0.7% to 8%

- Possible because:
  - Power driven by number of sites
  - Large number of program applicants
  - Planned 18-month intake period

- Critical because:
  - Made evaluation more acceptable to LWIBs
  - Limited disruption to procedures
Some Exemptions from Random Assignment

- Important to keep exemptions low to maintain representativeness of estimates

- Some exemptions required by DOL:
  - Trade Adjustment Assistance participants

- Some exemptions affecting few people granted because important to LWIBs:
  - Veterans
  - Wild cards
Random Assignment Made as Easy as Possible

- Worked with programs to insert random assignment in a way that minimized disruption to program operations
- Baseline data collection limited to two-page self-administered form sent to Mathematica
- Minimal information entered into computer system to conduct random assignment
- Training, manuals, hot-line, ongoing technical assistance provided by study team
30 LWIBs Randomly Selected for Study
28 Agreed, 26 original and 2 Replacements

Blue dots = sites originally selected and agreed to participate
Red dots = sites originally selected and refused
Green dots = replacement sites
Recruitment took 18 months, substantial funds

Department of Labor very involved
   – Assistant Secretary made calls
   – DOL staff accompanied us on visits

Senior project staff made multiple visits
   – Discuss with senior LWIB staff
   – Brief the members of the workforce investment boards
   – Brief line staff
Small Number in Limited-Service Groups Key to Program Staff Acceptance

- Small limited-service groups one of the most important factors in recruitment success

- Program staff were concerned about number in limited-service groups, not percentage
  - Agreements with LWIB stated a maximum number
  - Many requested a shorter intake period even though it increased percentage in limited-service groups
  - Percent in limited-service groups turned out to be 2-16%
Messaging to LWIBs Also Important

- We understand this is hard, we will be there for you
- Future funding depends on this, some denied services now but more served in future if program found effective
- LWIB-specific impact estimates not made public
- Your participation is necessary for study to be successful
- This is important to the Department of Labor
- Ineffective message: “Many are eligible for services, you are effectively denying services now anyway”
Conclusions

- Feasible to conduct rigorous nationally-representative evaluation of ongoing program
- Requires flexibility in design
  - Small limited-service groups key
- These evaluations are not cheap!
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