



RESEA Component Evaluations

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April 2023

BACKGROUND: EVALUATING RESEA COMPONENTS

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has a long history of supporting research and evaluation to promote program improvement. For DOL’s Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program, designed to help Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants find jobs, states have a key role in building the RESEA evidence base. Specifically, they are required to conduct rigorous evaluations of their RESEA programs and implement evidence-based programs.

To date, most RESEA evaluations are impact evaluations that use a random assignment design and compare outcomes for UI claimants assigned to receive RESEA services versus outcomes for UI claimants who are not assigned to receive RESEA services. These “whole-program” evaluations, sometimes referred to as “0/1 Tests,” are designed to measure the impact of the complete package of RESEA program services. Whole-program evaluations designed in this manner can provide valuable evidence about whether a RESEA program is having the desired impact on claimants. However, for ongoing programs such as RESEA, it is often important to determine not only whether a program is effective overall but also how its specific components contribute to impacts and how program outcomes for claimants can be improved.

In contrast to whole-program evaluations, “component” impact evaluations, sometimes referred to as “A/B Tests” because they compare two distinct approaches to providing services, can provide evidence that supports RESEA program improvement. This brief discusses what component impact evaluations are, how to identify components to evaluate, and methods to evaluate program components.

WHAT IS A COMPONENT IMPACT EVALUATION?

RESEA component impact evaluations compare outcomes for RESEA participants who are randomly assigned to receive different versions of RESEA services. Well-designed and -implemented component evaluations provide causal evidence of whether specific RESEA components, including modifications to an existing program or improve outcomes for program participants.

The motivation for conducting a component evaluation often begins with an initial **hypothesis** about whether the addition, intensification, or removal of a RESEA program component will improve reemployment outcomes for program participants. For example, RESEA program staff might hypothesize that adding an additional series of meetings to their RESEA program, thus providing staff more time to work with program participants, will intensify job-search activity and improve reemployment outcomes. A component evaluation’s primary **research question** is stated to test this hypothesis, such as, “Does

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requiring RESEA participants to attend additional meetings lead to faster reemployment or improved earnings?” Initial hypotheses should be refined to produce a clear and detailed **theory of action**, which describes the proposed mechanisms through which the component will impact RESEA participants. A clearly stated theory of action can be used to develop and implement the RESEA component under evaluation. It can also be used to identify additional outcomes the component might impact and that could also be included in the evaluation.

Component impact evaluations typically are strengthened when they are complemented by other studies. For example, an implementation study can clarify whether program components operated as planned and the extent to which services reached the intended target population (see Trutko et al. [2023] for additional information on implementation studies). When combined with a cost study, evidence from component evaluations can help RESEA program administrators assess the cost-effectiveness of program modifications. Together, a complete understanding of a component’s impact on RESEA participants, implementation logistics, and associated costs can enable program staff to optimize their RESEA programs and ensure that program dollars are spent in the most effective manner possible.

IDENTIFYING RESEA COMPONENTS FOR AN IMPACT EVALUATION

RESEA components selected for evaluation could be existing program components that are already in operation, or newly developed program components that are intended to complement and improve existing programming (see Box 1).

Box 1: Evaluating an Existing RESEA Component vs. Evaluating a New RESEA Component

Evaluating an Existing RESEA Component: Impact of second RESEA meeting

- Treatment A: Business-as-usual RESEA services that include **two** RESEA meetings
- Treatment B: Modified RESEA services, to consist of only **one** RESEA meeting (but otherwise business-as-usual)

Evaluating a New RESEA Component: Impact of second RESEA meeting

- Treatment A: Business-as-usual RESEA services that include **one** RESEA meeting
- Treatment B: Modified RESEA services, to consist of **two** RESEA meetings (but otherwise business-as-usual)

Ideally, components selected for evaluation will have the following features:

- A clear **theory of action** that indicates the proposed mechanisms through which the modification to RESEA services will improve the intended outcomes for RESEA participants.
- The expectation that the component will produce a **large impact** on RESEA outcomes. Selecting a more-intensive component where large impacts are expected increases the likelihood that an evaluation will be able to statistically measure the impact of that component (see Box 2 for examples). Making the modification more intensive should reduce the sample size needed to detect that impact. For further discussion, see Klerman et al. (2022).

Box 2: Examples of More-Intensive RESEA Components

- Number of RESEA Meetings: Instead of evaluating the impact of a single additional meeting, consider evaluating the impact of multiple follow-up meetings for RESEA clients.
- Initial RESEA Meeting Duration and Content: Instead of evaluating the impact of an initial meeting of standard duration, consider evaluating the impact of two or three additional hours for the initial RESEA meeting, allowing the program to provide more in-depth and individualized job search assistance with a structured curriculum.

In some cases, component evaluations will examine the effectiveness of components that have never been the focus of evaluation or research. In these cases, RESEA component evaluations will help *broaden* the evidence base on reemployment interventions by generating evidence on never-studied interventions. In other cases, component evaluations will examine the effectiveness of components that have already been the focus of other studies. In these cases, RESEA component evaluations will help *deepen* the evidence base on reemployment interventions, making it possible to better understand whether component impacts are consistent or whether they vary across time, place, or population. All RESEA component evaluations will expand the evidence base on reemployment interventions and support informed decision-making about whether a particular component should be adopted (or removed) for RESEA participants.

Components selected for evaluation can occur during any stage of the RESEA program, including pre-meeting activities, the design of RESEA meetings, and post-meeting activities (see Box 3 for examples). Components identified by states for evaluation might target areas for program improvement, such as improving low rates of meeting attendance, low take-up of follow-up services, or more personalized claimant support. Input from program staff or RESEA participants can help identify RESEA components that are strong candidates for component evaluations.

Box 3: Examples of RESEA Components for Evaluation

Pre-Meeting Activities	Design of RESEA Meetings	Post-Meeting Activities
• Meeting Timing (e.g., earlier vs. later in the claim) • Scheduling Procedure (e.g., meetings self-scheduled vs. staff-scheduled) • Reminder Frequency (e.g., increasing frequency of meeting reminders) • Reminder Content (e.g., language of reminder or mode of contact)	• Meeting Mode (e.g., remote vs. in person) • Meeting Content (e.g., assessments used, services offered, referrals made) • Number of Meetings (e.g., requiring attendance at additional RESEA meetings) • Meeting Staff (e.g., UI staff vs. American Job Center staff or both)	• Staff Contact Requirements (e.g., none vs. weekly or monthly) • Referral Follow-Up Reminders (e.g., never vs. always) • Service Requirements (e.g., participating in American Job Center job assistance services required vs. not required) • Responses to Non-Compliance (e.g., immediacy of benefits suspension)

IDENTIFYING OUTCOMES FOR RESEA COMPONENT IMPACT EVALUATIONS

DOL intends RESEA impact evaluations to estimate component impacts on two **primary outcomes**: the duration of unemployment compensation (*UI duration*) and employment status in the second quarter after the start of the UI claim (*Q2 employment*) (for more details, see USDOL/ETA [2019]). However, because the impact of any single RESEA component is likely to be smaller than the impact of the whole program, it is more challenging for component evaluations to detect statistically significant impacts on these primary outcomes than it is for whole-program evaluations.

For this reason, it is important to identify additional **intermediate outcomes** to estimate in a component evaluation that can help clarify whether the component is having its intended effects. Each additional

outcome in an evaluation should be justified by a theory of action that proposes clear and plausible relationships between the program component, the intermediate outcome, and the primary outcomes. For example, RESEA program staff might expect additional meeting reminders to improve meeting attendance and, in turn, expect that improved meeting attendance leads to reduced UI duration and increased Q2 employment. Including intermediate outcomes provides states with additional opportunities to learn from component evaluations, even when the evaluations might not detect statistically significant component impacts on UI duration or Q2 employment.

EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH DESIGNS FOR CONDUCTING RESEA COMPONENT EVALUATIONS

A variety of impact evaluation research designs exist, but component impact evaluations commonly rely on experimental approaches. An experimental evaluation design is one that uses random assignment (akin to a lottery) to determine which study participants are offered an intervention and which are not. In general, experimental evaluation designs produce more reliable impact estimates and require smaller sample sizes. Experimental evaluations are therefore more likely to meet evidence standards set by DOL's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR).

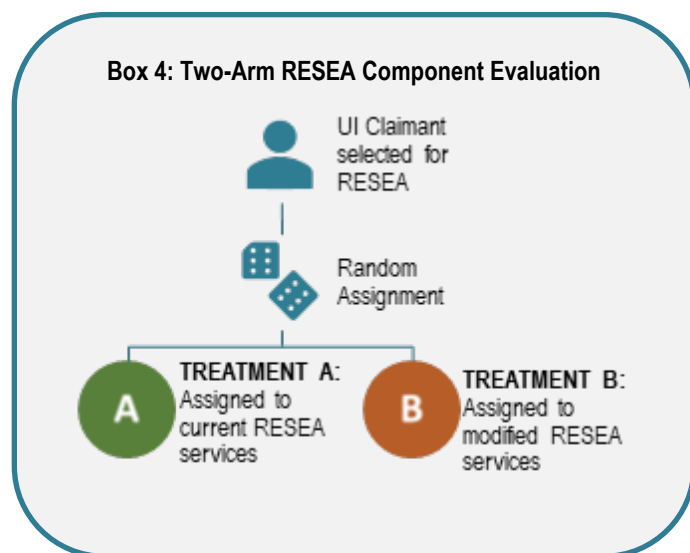
This section discusses three important issues in designing RESEA component evaluations: use of two- and three-arm designs, the level of random assignment, and appropriate sample sizes.

Two- and Three-Arm Random Assignment Designs

As shown in Box 4, a two-arm component evaluation design compares outcomes for RESEA participants assigned to receive the current version of RESEA services (Treatment A) versus outcomes for RESEA participants assigned to receive a modified version of RESEA services that includes (or omits) the component being evaluated (Treatment B).

Box 5 provides an example of a two-arm component evaluation that was conducted as part of RESEA's predecessor program, the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA). That component evaluation examined the impact of a new email outreach strategy on rates of meeting attendance.

Two-arm component evaluations provide evidence about the effectiveness of a particular RESEA component. However, because all study participants receive some version of RESEA services, two-arm component evaluations do not provide evidence on whole-program impacts.



Box 5: Example of a Two-Arm Component Evaluation Design

Study: Darling, M., et al. (2017). *Using behavioral insights to improve take-up of a reemployment program: Trial design and findings*. Mathematica Policy Research.

Research Question: Can behaviorally informed email notifications increase REA meeting attendance rates?

Research Design: UI claimants in Michigan were randomly assigned to one of two study arms:

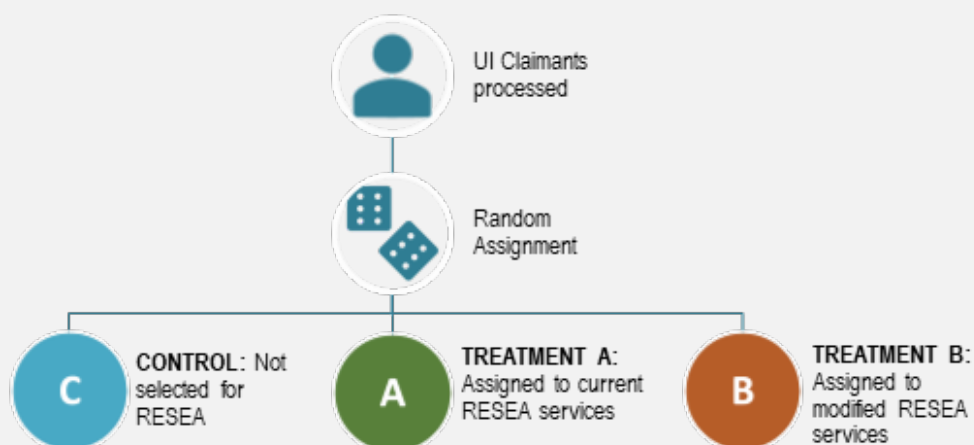
Treatment A: Business-as-usual REA meeting notification: claimants received a single “standard” notification letter.

Treatment B: Modified REA meeting notification: claimants received a series of seven notification emails that used messaging informed by behavioral insights.

Findings: Behaviorally informed notification emails increased the proportion of UI claimants who participated in the REA initial meeting by 15 percentage points and increased participation in subsequent sessions.

The two-arm design can be augmented with a third “arm” of study participants who are not selected for RESEA (see Box 6). As with a two-arm design, the three-arm design makes it possible to estimate component impacts by comparing outcomes for study participants assigned to Treatment A to outcomes for those assigned to Treatment B. The three-arm design also makes it possible to estimate whole-program impacts by comparing outcomes for study participants assigned to Treatment A or B to outcomes for those not selected for RESEA, called the “control” group. A three-arm design is particularly attractive for states that have insufficient RESEA capacity to serve all eligible UI claimants, thus allowing for the control group to be established with minimal disruption to program operations.

Box 6: Three-Arm Component Evaluation



Box 7 provides an example of a three-arm component evaluation of the REA program. This component evaluation examined the whole program impact of the REA program and the impact of a specific REA component: the number of required meetings (see Box 7).

Box 7: Example of a Three-Arm Component Evaluation

Study: Klerman et al. (2019). *Evaluation of impacts of the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) program: Final report*. Abt Associates.

Research Questions: What is the overall impact of REA on outcomes for UI claimants? What is the impact of additional REA meetings on outcomes for REA participants?

Research Design: UI claimants across four states were randomly assigned to one of three study arms:

Control: Not selected for any REA services.

Treatment A: Assigned to receive version of REA services that included a single initial meeting.

Treatment B: Assigned to receive version of REA services that included an initial meeting plus a subsequent follow-up meeting.

Findings: REA reduced average UI duration and benefits paid. Participants assigned to receive multiple REA meetings had shorter average UI durations.

Randomly Assigning Individuals vs. Groups

One of two approaches is generally used to randomly assign study participants in an experimental evaluation:

- **Individual-Level Random Assignment:** UI claimants are assigned to a treatment group individually, regardless of the American Job Center (AJC) or region where they receive services. In a RESEA component evaluation, individual-level random assignment typically will take place after a UI claimant has been selected for RESEA but before the program delivers any RESEA services. Ideally, random assignment would be implemented statewide at all locations where the RESEA program operates, to ensure that the full range of RESEA participants is represented in both treatment groups.
- **Group-Level Random Assignment:** UI claimants are assigned to a treatment group depending on the AJC or region where they receive RESEA services. For example, a RESEA component evaluation might randomly assign some American Job Centers in a state to provide one version of RESEA services (Treatment A) and some AJCs to provide a different version (Treatment B). All RESEA participants receiving services at these centers would receive the version of RESEA services assigned to that center.

These two approaches to random assignment offer different advantages. Individual-level random assignment typically results in smaller appropriate sample sizes for the evaluation (see discussion in next section). However, program site staff must simultaneously manage two versions of RESEA services (Treatment A *and* Treatment B) and ensure that UI claimants receive the “correct” version of RESEA services to which they were randomly assigned. In contrast, program staff at a given site are responsible for administering only a single version of RESEA services (Treatment A *or* Treatment B). However, group-level random assignment typically requires much larger appropriate sample sizes and requires a large number of sites.

Sample Size Needed to Detect Component Impacts

RESEA component evaluations will need large samples to detect component impacts. For this reason, there are substantial advantages to using experimental evaluation designs that rely on *individual-level* random assignment. Because of sample size considerations, group-level random assignment often will not be appropriate for RESEA component evaluations. The specific sample size needed will depend on the component selected for evaluation, the outcomes on which it is critical that the evaluation be able to detect impacts, and the evaluation design used. An evaluator can help states conduct a power analysis to

determine the appropriate sample size for their evaluation and can support states in implementing individual random assignment for their experimental evaluation.

In general, states will want to recruit the largest possible sample for their RESEA component evaluation. Doing so will increase the likelihood that the evaluation is able to detect impacts that occur as a result of the component services provided. For a more detailed discussion of approximate sample sizes for RESEA evaluations, see Mills De La Rosa et al. (2021). For a discussion of strategies to help ensure that sample size needs are met, see Wheat and Klerman (forthcoming).

DISCUSSION

Component evaluations offer exciting opportunities to improve the effectiveness of RESEA programs. The process of designing RESEA evaluations can provide a valuable opportunity for reflecting on and learning about options for program improvement. This brief has introduced several topics that warrant consideration by states as they work to design and implement RESEA component evaluations.

- **Component Selection:** Prioritize evaluating more-intensive RESEA components that are expected to have comparatively large impacts on participant outcomes. Choosing a more-intensive RESEA component can increase the likelihood that an evaluation is able to detect the impact of that component.
- **Outcome Selection:** Develop a theory of action that can help identify intermediate outcomes that might also be included as part of the evaluation. The addition of intermediate outcomes can enhance opportunities for learning from a component evaluation, especially if it might not be possible to detect component impacts on UI duration or Q2 employment because of challenges to recruiting an appropriately sized sample.
- **Evaluation Design:** Use an experimental evaluation design that relies on random assignment to provide the most rigorous evidence.
- **Design Considerations:** Work with an evaluator that can help determine the appropriate approach to random assignment and the appropriate sample size for the evaluation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND EVALUATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

DOL is providing states with a range of resources to design and implement rigorous RESEA component evaluations that are likely to produce high-quality evidence. Box 8 highlights three of these resources. Additional material can be found on the RESEA Evaluation and Evidence Resources page of DOL's [WorkforceGPS](#).

Box 8: Key Resources for Designing and Implementing a RESEA Component Evaluation

- **[RESEA Evaluation Technical Assistance Helpline](#):** The RESEA Evaluation Technical Assistance team is available to support states in all aspects of evaluation planning and implementation. Contact RESEA@abtassoc.com.
- **[RESEA Evaluation Toolkit](#):** The Toolkit provides a comprehensive overview of evaluation design and the implementation process.
- **[Options for Building Evidence on RESEA Programs](#):** This report details various approaches to RESEA component evaluation and identifies components that are promising candidates for evaluation.

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ABOUT THIS BRIEF

State agencies’ evaluations of their RESEA interventions (i.e., the whole program or components) are integral to expanding the evidence base of effective service delivery strategies. This brief is part of a series of resources on component evaluations developed to serve as a quick-reference tool for states planning, launching, and carrying out evaluations of their RESEA programs. Please also see the [Introduction to Component Evaluations Webinar](#) and the subsequent [Conducting Component Evaluations Webinar](#).

Suggested citation: Travis, A., & Clarkwest, A. (2023). *RESEA Component Evaluations*. RESEA Evaluation Technical Assistance Brief. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office. Abt Associates.