



Evidence Building at the U.S. Department of Labor: Lessons From Delivering Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Evaluation Technical Assistance

September 2023

Contract #: 1605DC-18-A-0037

Prepared for:

Chief Evaluation Office

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy
U.S. Department of Labor
Frances Perkins Building
200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20210

Submitted by:

Abt Associates

6130 Executive Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20852

Authors:

Elizabeth Copson
Molly Irwin
Karin Martinson
Hannah Engle
Victoria Wheat
Zachary Epstein
Marissa Cuellar



Chief Evaluation Office
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR



This document was prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Chief Evaluation Office by Abt Associates under Contract # 1605DC-18-A-0037. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DOL, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.

About This Report

This brief documents the federal context—in particular within the U.S. Department of Labor—in which evidence-building activities for the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program were developed. It also describes the evaluation technical assistance (EvalTA) provided to states from 2018 to 2023 that supported states in planning and implementing evaluations of their RESEA programs. The brief provides overall lessons on developing federal evidence-building initiatives and providing evaluation technical assistance to support states in carrying out evaluations to contribute to the evidence base.

Authors

Elizabeth Copson
Molly Irwin
Karin Martinson
Hannah Engle
Victoria Wheat
Marissa Cuellar
Zachary Epstein

Suggested citation: Copson, E., M. Irwin, K. Martinson, H. Engle, V. Wheat, M. Cuellar, Z. Epstein. (2023). *Evidence Building at the U.S. Department of Labor: Lessons From Delivering Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Evaluation Technical Assistance*. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office. Abt Associates.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the efforts of many individuals who assisted in the completion of this brief.

As co-Principal Investigators, Demetra Nightingale (Urban Institute) and Andrew Clarkwest (Abt Associates) helped conceptualize this brief and provided comments on drafts. Colleen Bogucki and Caroline Roddey analyzed the fourth wave of the RESEA Implementation State Survey. From the Urban Institute, Daniel Kuehn shared information about early EvalTA delivery and experiences with the Learning Cohort. Bry Pollack edited the report, and Eric Tolbert provided graphic design support.

We extend many thanks for the support received on this brief from leadership and staff from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) and the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), Offices of Unemployment Insurance (OUI) and Policy Development and Research (OPDR). From CEO, Megan Lizik and Evan Murphy provided strong guidance and valuable feedback on drafts of the brief. Additionally, Wayne Gordon, Neil Ridley, and Gloria Salas Kos from OPDR provided thoughtful review and feedback. We also thank Lawrence Burns and Ellen Wright from OUI for their helpful insights.

The team also expresses its deep appreciation to RESEA leaders and program staff in each state and territory for participating in EvalTA over the last five years. Their openness to sharing their evaluation-related questions and issues contributed to the EvalTA team's ability to be responsive to their needs and develop appropriate approaches to technical assistance (TA) delivery. The team also appreciates the efforts of states to complete four waves of a state survey that sought to understand and document their programmatic and evaluation-related experiences and statuses.

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The Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program Evidence-Building Portfolio at the U.S. Department of Labor

Building and using evidence to improve public programs and policies is a critical and growing priority for the federal government. The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (the Evidence Act) is at the cornerstone of efforts to foster and integrate evidence building into federal policy development and service delivery [1]. Through many of its major requirements—including learning agendas, evaluation officers, and evaluation policies—the Evidence Act seeks to build capacity in federal agencies to do this work and highlights the importance of collaborative and transparent planning, rigorous evidence building, and importantly, evidence use. The goal of these evidence-informed activities is for policymakers and program operators to use evidence in their decision making whenever possible and to build evidence where it is lacking.¹

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is at the forefront of federal efforts to implement an evidence-based approach to drive ongoing program learning and improvement. DOL’s Chief Evaluation Office (CEO), in close collaboration with the Offices of Unemployment Insurance (OUI) and Policy Development and Research (OPDR) in the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), is supporting both building and using evidence in its **Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)** program, designed to provide reemployment services to help Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants find and keep jobs (**Box 1**).

Previous high-quality evaluations demonstrated the effectiveness of RESEA’s predecessor, the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) program that operated in only a limited number of states[2,3].² Building on that evidence, a 2018 amendment to the Social Security Act (the Statute) authorizes the RESEA program to operate in all states, funded by RESEA grants from DOL, and introduces “tiered evidence” requirements to support program development and implementation nationwide.³ The tiered evidence requirement means not only that existing research evidence be used to develop RESEA program design and services, but that new evidence building on past studies be produced as part of program implementation [5].

The Statute contains provisions that created a unique opportunity for DOL to incorporate evidence building as a key, permanent feature of RESEA programs. Specifically, DOL was required to develop

Box 1. Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program Overview

The RESEA program is a federally funded, state-run effort to:

- improve employment outcomes for recipients of Unemployment Insurance (UI);
- strengthen UI program integrity; and
- promote alignment between UI and the broader workforce development system.

Legislation enacted in 2018 requires that states’ RESEA programs be supported by evidence and allows states to use 10 percent of their RESEA grants to fund evaluations to help generate such supporting evidence [4].

¹ See https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ap_6_evidence_fy2023.pdf and https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ap_12_evidence_fy2024.pdf.

² In 2014, REA operated in 37 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20140624-1>.

³ The amendment to the Social Security Act (new Section 306) was included in the Bipartisan Budget Act, signed by the President on February 9, 2018. States are not required to operate RESEA programs, but 51 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands (hereafter all referred to as “states”) did so as of federal fiscal year 2023.

standards to rate intervention effectiveness, and states are expected both to use the existing evidence and to produce new evidence by conducting rigorous evaluations of their RESEA programs [5]. To implement the provisions of the Statute, DOL stood up a cross-agency team composed of programmatic and technical representatives to provide oversight and leadership to the project, and drew on its existing tools and long culture and experience of evidence building for the effort (**Box 2**). For example, DOL uses its Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) to assess intervention effectiveness and to disseminate that information so it can be used by states implementing local RESEA programs, and so included representatives from CLEAR in DOL’s cross-agency team.

DOL also developed a broader portfolio of work to build evidence across RESEA programs. As part of this portfolio, DOL sponsored an implementation study of the RESEA program and sought options for evaluating the RESEA program. Importantly, DOL recognized that states needed support to develop and launch rigorous, high-quality evaluations.⁴ State evaluations can be supported by RESEA funds, but building the required evidence using formal evaluations is a new activity for most states. To address this, DOL arranged for comprehensive evaluation technical assistance (EvalTA) to be provided to all states to help them develop and launch their evaluations. In 2018, DOL contracted with Abt Associates (Abt) and its partners the Urban Institute, Capital Research Corporation, and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) to provide that EvalTA. This RESEA study team also developed strategies and tools to help DOL carry out and support new evidence requirements.

DOL’s experience implementing RESEA and its evidence-building requirements provides an example of the opportunities, successes, and challenges of incorporating evidence building in a federal program and the role technical assistance plays. This brief first documents the context in which the RESEA evidence-building activities were developed, and then describes the evaluation technical assistance provided to states, including the RESEA study team’s experiences providing EvalTA, based on observations, discussions, and interviews with team members over the course of the study period. The last section provides overall lessons from this example on developing a federal evidence-building initiative.

I. Overview of Federal and State-Level Evidence Building in the RESEA Program

The context in which DOL’s evidence building on the RESEA program operates is critical to understanding its achievements. A key feature of RESEA, as specified by the Statute, is the requirement that state RESEA programs use programmatic interventions and strategies that research demonstrates as

Box 2. Evidence-Building Infrastructure at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

An established infrastructure for evidence building within DOL supported implementation of the Statute’s provisions for evaluation and evidence building. Key features of this infrastructure include the following:

- In 2010, DOL established a Chief Evaluation Office (CEO), a centralized unit that coordinates and supports research, evaluation, and analysis activities within the department.
- As part of its activities, CEO supports subagencies within the department to develop learning agendas that identify research questions and priorities for future studies.
- In 2012, DOL developed the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) to identify and summarize research on labor topics and make that research accessible to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.
- In 2013, DOL created an [Evaluation Policy statement](#) that represents DOL’s commitment to conducting rigorous, relevant evaluations and to using evidence from evaluations to inform policy and practice.

⁴ DOL’s Evaluation Policy contains five principles for designing and conducting evaluations: rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics. Adhering to these principles lays the foundation for a high-quality evaluation.

improving UI benefit and employment outcomes, specifically in reducing the number of weeks that UI claimants receive benefits and increasing their employment and earnings [4]. Moreover, for fiscal years 2023 and 2024, states must dedicate 25 percent of their state RESEA grant to interventions that receive a “High” or “Moderate” intervention causal evidence rating from CLEAR, which is an indicator of evidence of intervention effectiveness (**Box 3**). That percentage increases in subsequent years.

For RESEA, states can implement interventions and strategies not yet backed by evidence—in particular, interventions with a High or Moderate causal evidence rating from CLEAR—as long as those interventions are simultaneously under evaluation [4]. By evaluating their new programs, states contribute new research to the evidence base on the effectiveness of reemployment interventions. As more states produce high-quality evaluations of their RESEA programs, the evidence base grows, generating information on strategies shown to be effective at improving employment outcomes for UI claimants. As findings from evaluations emerge, states then can implement new or modified RESEA service strategies and continue to evaluate.

In response to the legislative mandate for evidence on the RESEA program, CEO worked in close collaboration with OUI and OPDR to develop a comprehensive evidence-building portfolio for RESEA. To help do this, CEO sponsored the *Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) Evidence Building and Implementation Study* to develop strategies to support the evidence requirements in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 that related to RESEA. CEO contracted with the RESEA study team to develop options to meet legislative requirements related to evidence at the federal and state levels; identify the current state of the evidence of RESEA and present it in a usable framework; conduct an implementation study of RESEA programs; and develop options to advance the RESEA evidence base.

A final important component of the *RESEA Evidence Building and Implementation Study* involves providing a range of technical assistance activities to states to support their capacity and ability to conduct evaluations. They include generalized EvalTA to all states, as well as customized EvalTA to a subset of states designing and implementing rigorous impact evaluations. In addition, the RESEA study team provides a range of other activities to support evidence building in RESEA, including conducting an implementation study to help DOL better understand states’ current RESEA programs, developing

Box 3. Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR)

The mission of [CLEAR](#) is to make research on labor topics more accessible to practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and the public to inform decisions about labor policies and programs. Among its activities is rating the quality (or credibility) of causal evidence that individual studies provide. For RESEA, CLEAR also looks across studies of an intervention and rates the extent of evidence of showing that the intervention is effective at shortening Unemployment Insurance (UI) duration and improving employment outcomes.

For **causal research**—defined as research intended to assess the effectiveness of an intervention—CLEAR uses its Causal Evidence Guidelines to objectively assess and rate the degree to which the research is able to credibly estimate the causal impact of the intervention on the outcomes of interest. Causal evidence ratings are based on the strength of the findings and study quality: High, Moderate, and Low.

If the study receives a High or Moderate causal evidence rating, its findings are used to update or expand CLEAR’s set of RESEA **intervention causal evidence ratings**: [High](#), [Moderate](#), [Potentially Promising](#), [No Rating](#).

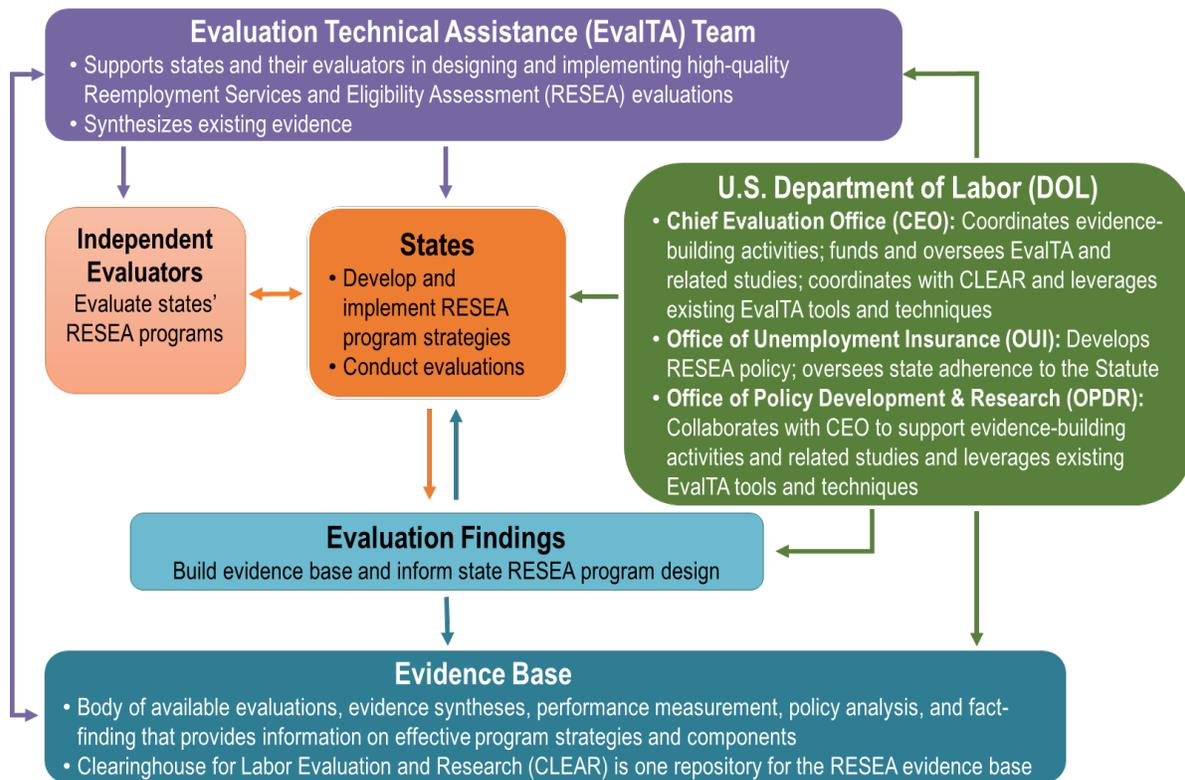
CLEAR assigns causal evidence ratings on the effectiveness of RESEA interventions under CLEAR’s “Reemployment” topic area evidence review. RESEA interventions reviewed by CLEAR for effectiveness can be found under the [“RESEA”](#) tab on CLEAR’s homepage. See also CLEAR’s [guidelines for rating effectiveness of RESEA interventions](#).

Sources: CLEAR RESEA Intervention Rating Icon Key, <https://clear.dol.gov/view-intervention-evidence-ratings>; Guidelines for Rating RESEA Intervention Effectiveness, <https://clear.dol.gov/reference-documents/Guidelines-for-Rating-RESEA-Intervention-Effectiveness>.

options for standards to determine the effectiveness of different reemployment interventions, developing evaluation design options to build evidence on the most effective RESEA approaches, and reviewing annual RESEA State Plans.

Exhibit 1 presents a conceptual framework for RESEA evaluation and evidence building. It shows the roles and relationships among various entities involved in implementing RESEA programs, conducting evaluations, and supporting state efforts to evaluate their RESEA programs.

Exhibit 1. Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Evidence-Building Framework



Source: Developed by the RESEA EvalTA team based on information and experiences from delivering EvalTA

Within DOL, both CEO and ETA play important roles. CEO, as DOL’s centralized evaluation office, coordinates the evidence-building activities for RESEA. Working in partnership with OPDR, ETA’s policy and research office, and OUI, the program office in ETA that oversees the grants, CEO manages the EvalTA contract that provides support to states in implementing RESEA program evaluations. OUI develops RESEA policy and oversees state adherence to the Statute. Notably, ETA requires that states receiving RESEA grant funding describe their evaluation activities and specify the level of funding they will devote to evaluation in their annual RESEA State Plan. CEO, through the EvalTA contract, supports states and their evaluators in designing and conducting high-quality RESEA evaluations that will contribute to the evidence base. Though CEO oversees and advises the EvalTA team on priorities, activities, and content, the team coordinates and collaborates closely with ETA and is able to leverage CLEAR as well as other existing evaluation technical assistance tools that have been developed for other projects. Finally, importantly, staff from CEO, OPDR, and OUI often attend regular calls with the EvalTA team so they can share information and program updates and be kept abreast of and provide input into the EvalTA being provided to states.

Each state engages an independent third-party evaluator to evaluate its RESEA program. As shown in **Exhibit 1**, EvalTA is designed to support the needs of both states and their evaluators in conducting high-quality RESEA evaluations. Though states are the primary target audience for EvalTA, the independent evaluators, who ultimately conduct the evaluations and vary in their experience implementing rigorous evaluations, also benefit. As discussed in the next section, many EvalTA activities and products are designed to help state staff plan evaluations, procure an independent evaluator, and understand technical evaluation information. The EvalTA also addresses technical topics and methodological issues of interest and importance to states and their evaluators.

As shown in **Exhibit 1**, states can use the findings from their individual evaluations to make program improvements to better serve the needs and improve the employment outcomes for unemployed claimants. In addition, the findings from states' evaluations contribute to the evidence base such that over time, as states conduct evaluations on a regular basis, more and more evidence becomes available. As the evidence base grows, states, DOL, policymakers, and other practitioners will learn and can incorporate information about the effectiveness of different interventions.

As a result of these efforts, as of summer 2023, states made progress in developing and launching RESEA evaluations and incorporating evidence building into their programs. An annual state survey of RESEA programs in 2023 found that 12 states completed an evaluation since 2019, which was shortly after the Statute went into effect; of those, 8 states completed experimental impact evaluations, which is the research design most likely to produce strong evidence of program effectiveness [6]. The majority of states (44) are planning, preparing, or actively conducting evaluations of their RESEA programs. Of those states, 21 are in the later stages of the evaluation process, with 2 having released an interim report and 19 in the data collection or analysis stage. Moreover, 38 are planning impact evaluations, including 26 states that are planning experimental impact evaluations [7].

Particularly important to growing the evidence base around intervention effectiveness, many states (37) have plans to evaluate specific program components, approaches, and strategies. As reported on the annual state survey, some plan to evaluate reemployment services including job search and job readiness workshops (4 states) and more-intensive or individualized career services (13 states), and some intend to study the impact of the number of RESEA meetings (8 states) or the mode of RESEA meeting delivery (i.e., remote versus in person) (8 states).

II. Overview of the RESEA Evaluation Technical Assistance Provided to States

The EvalTA provided to states helps build their technical capacity and meet the requirements of the RESEA legislation. Evaluation technical capacity is a central element of DOL's evidence-building activity. EvalTA for the state RESEA grantees has been consistently provided in a wide range of formats, from 2018 to the present.

The EvalTA uses a two-tiered approach both to ensure that *all* states receive information and support to help them develop and launch RESEA evaluations and also to provide more-intensive support for states with additional capacity needs, often because they undertake more-rigorous studies, particularly experimental impact evaluations. The two tiers provide (1) **generalized evaluation technical assistance** to *all* states through written products, webinars, virtual peer learning sessions, and an RESEA Helpline email inbox; and (2) **customized evaluation technical assistance** to a *subset of states* through a Learning Cohort offering longer-term, ongoing support. The EvalTA for each is described below.

Generalized Evaluation Technical Assistance

The goal of generalized EvalTA is to build capacity and momentum for RESEA evaluations across all states. The primary audience for generalized EvalTA materials is state RESEA staff members, though some products are helpful for evaluators, as well. Because the technical assistance needs of states vary as

they develop and conduct evaluations, generalized EvalTA is designed to meet their needs based on the progress made in their evaluations. The resources created through generalized EvalTA can also facilitate learning for those new to RESEA or new to evaluation, a situation that often arises due to staff turnover.

As appropriate, the products are posted on the RESEA Evaluation and Evidence Resources webpage on WorkforceGPS, the DOL-sponsored web-based technical assistance platform for the public workforce investment system.⁵ The product types developed as generalized EvalTA are described below; a complete list of EvalTA written products, webinars, peer learning events, and videos is provided in the **appendix**.

Written Products

The EvalTA team produces a range of written products, to support state RESEA grantees through the range of evaluation stages. The *RESEA Evaluation Toolkit* (published in 2021) is a comprehensive guide on how to conduct a RESEA evaluation [8]. It is also useful as a reference document that states can use at any time for any part of their evaluation. Other written products build on the *RESEA Evaluation Toolkit* to create a compendium of easily accessible resources ranging in complexity from basic evaluation fundamentals to technical and methodological issues.

Written products use plain language to make them accessible to an audience that includes state staff and evaluators. Because the primary target audience—state agency staff—sometimes have limited evaluation experience, the products avoid the use of evaluation jargon and explain concepts succinctly. All products are reviewed by senior technical and methodological experts on the EvalTA team for accuracy, consistency, language continuity, and concept clarity. The written products include:

- *Tip Sheets*. Quick-reference documents (1-3 pages) that offer a high-level summary of a topic or provide information on one very small part of a larger topic.
- *Briefs*. Easily digestible documents (4-10 pages) that provide more detail about an evaluation-related concept.
- *FAQs*. Documents (4-6 pages) that respond to frequently asked questions from states. The questions addressed often arise from RESEA Helpline requests, conversations with states during outreach calls, peer learning events, and discussions with Learning Cohort states.
- *Other tools*. These include a brief and tool on participant experience research (*Building RESEA Program Evidence by Understanding Participants' Experiences*) and the *Cost-Benefit Analysis for RESEA Programs Handbook*, which provide detailed explanations of evaluation processes, designed to help states or evaluators incorporate these activities into their evaluations.

Webinars

The EvalTA team hosted 22 webinars between 2019 and 2023 to provide information to states and evaluators on a range of topics, designed for audiences with varying levels of experience with program evaluation. All webinars were developed to be accessible and understandable to viewers with little evaluation experience. **Box 4** (below) lists some examples of the topics covered.

Webinars were largely recorded live, moderated by a cross-agency team of DOL staff from CEO, OPDR, and OUI, with presenters from the EvalTA team. Each includes a PowerPoint presentation followed by a question-and-answer session with attendees. Recordings are posted on WorkforceGPS and can be viewed by members of the public at any time.

⁵ See the RESEA Evaluation and Evidence Resources page on DOL's WorkforceGPS, https://rc.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/07/30/17/32/RESEA_Evaluation_Evidence_Resources.

Peer Learning Events

In 2022, the EvalTA team began organizing a series of peer learning events—referred to as “Lunch & Learns”—as a venue for bringing states together to discuss their experiences with particular evaluation-related topics. From 2022 to 2023, the EvalTA team hosted four Lunch & Learns with topics as follows: evaluation designs, procuring independent evaluators, component evaluations, and participant experience research. As reported by both states and EvalTA team members, the Lunch & Learns are useful for connecting states with one another and building community among states working towards evaluation and evidence building. The EvalTA team launched these sessions after hearing from state staff that they wanted to learn about evaluation plans, progress made, and the experiences of their peers.

Box 4. Examples of Technical Webinar Topics

- Overview: RESEA evaluation and evidence requirements
- Evaluation benefits: How evaluations can help states
- Matching research questions to evaluation designs: What designs answer what research questions
- Evaluation designs: Implementation studies, random assignment studies, quasi-experimental studies, and component evaluations
- Data for RESEA evaluations: Access and use
- Procuring an independent evaluator: Considerations for writing a statement of work and types of procurement
- Reporting: Considerations for reporting and communicating findings

To ground the sessions and ensure attendees start with the same foundational information, an EvalTA team member provides an overview of the topic. Next, state staff who indicated they would like to share their experiences related to the given topic deliver brief, informal presentations. For the remainder of the one-hour session, EvalTA team members moderate an open discussion. All states in attendance are invited to discuss the topic with and ask questions of one another. To create an environment where Lunch & Learn participants feel comfortable speaking openly about their evaluations, including challenges and successes, DOL staff do not attend these sessions and the sessions are not recorded or posted on WorkforceGPS.

Videos and Learning Modules

Several of the products are pre-recorded and available in the form of short *videos with a presenter or learning modules that employ an animated PowerPoint with voiceover*. The videos, lasting 5-7 minutes and called “Evidence Coffee Breaks,” provide information presented by the EvalTA team on evaluation topics that are not necessarily specific to RESEA and so are appropriate to anyone new to evaluation. The learning modules, lasting 5-12 minutes, also are intended for state staff without evaluation experience, providing basic information on key evaluation topics. The learning modules feature nine topics that build on one another, so it is useful to watch all of them but not necessary, as each module also stands on its own. The videos and learning modules are available on WorkforceGPS.

RESEA EvalTA Helpline

The RESEA EvalTA Helpline provides on-demand technical evaluation support as states develop questions or encounter issues with which they would like assistance. The Helpline is an email inbox monitored daily by the EvalTA team for incoming requests from state staff and evaluators for assistance and information. Sometimes DOL Federal Project Officers contact the Helpline on behalf of states they work with. Members of the EvalTA team respond to the questions via email or by scheduling a call with the requestor, with DOL support as appropriate. These calls are useful for questions that are more technical in nature or for which additional information or input from the requestor is needed to inform the EvalTA team’s response. RESEA Helpline support is provided to states upon their request as needed. EvalTA team members respond to each request, but do not provide ongoing assistance or follow-up. However, states can submit additional questions and requests for support to the Helpline and the EvalTA team will respond to each of those in turn.

The EvalTA team established the RESEA Helpline early in the provision of EvalTA and references its email address in written products and on webinars. In its outreach to states, OUI also reminds states that the Helpline is an easy and free resource for state staff to receive EvalTA. The number of incoming requests to the Helpline fluctuates: often more requests are submitted when states are writing their annual State Plans and need support with their evaluation section and following webinars or peer learning events when states are seeking additional information to assist with their evaluations.

The majority of the requests to the RESEA Helpline require the EvalTA team to tailor its support to the specific context and evaluation of the requesting state or evaluator. States can also submit materials for the EvalTA team's review and advice. **Box 5** lists examples of RESEA Helpline requests.

Box 5. Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Helpline Questions and Topics

- Assisting a state with identifying an evaluation design
- Determining an approach feasible given staff capacity and available data
- Identifying and selecting an evaluator
- Addressing data analysis considerations
- Reviewing draft statements of work (needed for hiring an independent evaluator)
- Reviewing evaluation design reports and interim and final reports

Outreach Calls

Periodically, the EvalTA team conducts calls with states to remind them that RESEA EvalTA is available and what types of support the team can provide. One round of calls included states that the EvalTA team had not yet had contact with via the RESEA Helpline. Another round included the 40 states that were not receiving customized EvalTA as part of the two Learning Cohorts (discussed below). These calls are helpful for states that have not known where to start with their evaluations and for the project to assess needs for future EvalTA. During these optional calls, an EvalTA team member checks in with state staff on how their evaluation is going and addresses questions and/or issues encountered. If appropriate, the team member can provide EvalTA during the call or can schedule a follow-up call with other members of the EvalTA team with the specific technical expertise needed to assist the state. Some states invite their evaluators to attend the calls, as well.

The round of outreach calls to 40 states in 2023 resulted in the EvalTA team providing support to 29 states that needed assistance getting started with their evaluation planning and determining what type of evaluation to conduct.⁶ The calls also resulted in states asking the EvalTA team to review technical documents such as states' evaluation statements of work, evaluation design reports prepared by their independent evaluators, and interim or final evaluation reports.

RESEA Evidence-Building Week

In Summer 2023, CEO, OUI, and OPDR, along with the EvalTA team, co-sponsored the first RESEA Evidence-Building Week. The roundtable-style event consisted of four virtual panel sessions (60-90 minutes each) that highlighted and celebrated the efforts and accomplishments of states in evaluating their RESEA programs. The sessions featured speakers from the three DOL offices, the EvalTA team, and 10 states. They included moderated discussions around evaluation progress and lessons, building a culture of

⁶ The team contacted the 40 states that were not receiving customized EvalTA as part of the two Learning Cohorts. The team completed calls with 29 of those 40 states. The remaining states either did not respond or indicated they did not have a need for EvalTA at the time.

learning and evaluation, and emerging evidence from RESEA evaluations. DOL also shared its vision for the future of RESEA evidence building.

This public event, attended by state and DOL staff, as well as evaluators, reinforced DOL’s evidence-building objectives and facilitated cross-state sharing of experience and strategies. Recordings from RESEA Evidence-Building Week are available on WorkforceGPS and Abt Associates’ website.⁷

Customized Evaluation Technical Assistance

Customized EvalTA provides longer-term and ongoing, individualized assistance to subsets of states, referred to as “Learning Cohorts” (see **Box 6**). The goal of the customized EvalTA is to help states successfully and relatively efficiently develop and launch high-quality impact evaluations of their RESEA programs and generate findings and reports that meet CLEAR standards for High or Moderate causal evidence (see **Box 3**). As described below, each state in a Learning Cohort is paired with an EvalTA Liaison who provides one-on-one assistance with evaluation planning and monitors its progress. States in a Learning Cohort also participate in group sessions facilitated by the EvalTA team.

Identifying Learning Cohort States

To date, DOL supports two Learning Cohorts, one with five states that launched in 2020 and one with seven states that launched in 2022 (**Box 7**).

- **First Learning Cohort.** The first Learning Cohort formed in Fall 2020 and includes Iowa, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. Planning for this cohort began in early 2020 before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, DOL and the EvalTA team envisioned Learning Cohorts to consist of partnerships of multiple states (including small states) that would implement and test similar RESEA service components (e.g., additional required reemployment services, virtual service provision). Such a design would have allowed for potential pooling across states to achieve adequate sample sizes for an impact study. However, due to demands resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in states shifting to virtual service delivery and processing high volumes of UI claimants, it was not feasible to pursue this strategy. By August 2020, an alternative design was launched that focused on states that served a large enough number of claimants to meet the sample

Box 6. Learning Cohort Objectives

Evaluation technical assistance (EvalTA) delivered through the Learning Cohorts aims to:

- Assist states in launching high-quality evaluations consistent with the statutory requirements.
- Provide EvalTA that is unique to a state’s needs and circumstances not addressed by the generalized EvalTA materials.
- Generate evidence that informs recommendations for states to continuously improve their Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) programs.
- Ensure that the U.S. Department of Labor and states rely on the evidence of effectiveness for RESEA programs and components that meets the [quality standards of the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research](#).

⁷ See https://rc.workforcegps.org/resources/2023/08/28/20/02/RESEA_Evidence_Building_Week and <https://www.abtassociates.com/insights/events/resea-evidence-building-week-celebration-and-sharing-of-states-resea-evaluation-and>.

size requirements for whole-program evaluations without needing to partner with another state to help increase the sample size for the evaluation.⁸

- **Second Learning Cohort.** The second Learning Cohort formed in Fall 2022 and includes Arizona, Hawaii, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Washington State. As the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic began to stabilize, DOL and the EvalTA team focused this Learning Cohort on developing impact evaluations of service components, rather than whole programs. The first Learning Cohort had been recruited at a time when few states had launched rigorous evaluations. Now the EvalTA team found many states already had evaluation plans in progress and so could not make changes to accommodate a component study. For this second Learning Cohort, then, the team prioritized smaller states, states with unique challenges, and those that were interested in exploring partnerships for pooled studies.

EvalTA Liaisons

Each state in a Learning Cohort is assigned a dedicated EvalTA Liaison who delivers customized EvalTA and serves as an accessible resource to help plan and implement a high-quality evaluation. Liaisons are experienced qualitative and quantitative researchers who bring expertise in designing and launching rigorous evaluations. Because state staff vary in their level of evaluation knowledge and experience, the EvalTA Liaisons customize the intensity and focus of technical assistance to each specific state's needs. For example, for states where RESEA staff do not have prior experience drafting a statement of work, Liaisons provide basic tutorials on different types of evaluations and the tasks associated with each. Liaisons also use a “scaffolding” approach, meaning they revisit and expand on topics over time. Some complex topics such as “how random assignment works” might be revisited in multiple sessions, with new information and applications to the state's specific context added each time. EvalTA Liaisons frequently draw on and refer states to materials and resources developed under the generalized EvalTA activities available on [WorkforceGPS](#).

Over time, EvalTA Liaisons build rapport and trust with the state staff with whom they work, enabling states to be candid with their Liaison about challenges they are facing in their evaluation and allowing for an opportunity to effectively address their concerns. It has been the EvalTA team's experience that being dedicated to a single state enables the EvalTA Liaison to learn the specifics of their state's RESEA program and its evaluation plans, contributing to consistency and continuity in technical assistance delivery. When a question or issue arises that dedicated EvalTA Liaisons cannot address, other members of the EvalTA team with particular substantive and technical expertise are involved to make sure that states receive accurate information and assistance.

Box 7. Learning Cohorts of States Focused on Whole-Program versus Component Evaluations

To date, the U.S. Department of Labor supports two Learning Cohorts with different objectives for their impact study designs:

1. The first cohort comprises states analyzing their Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) programs as a whole, comparing the outcomes of claimants with access to the RESEA program versus those who do not.
2. The second cohort comprises states analyzing specific components of their RESEA programs, such as remote vs. in-person service delivery or an added intensive re-employment service. They are comparing the outcomes of claimants who receive RESEA with the component versus those who receive RESEA without it.

⁸ As discussed in the *RESEA Evaluation Toolkit* [8], a whole-program evaluation needs an estimated 5,000 to 25,000 UI claimants in order to detect impacts on intermediate and long-term outcomes.

EvalTA Liaison Calls with States

Each EvalTA Liaison holds regular calls with their state to assist state staff with developing and implementing RESEA program evaluations that will meet the quality standards established by CLEAR. Through these calls, Liaisons provide assistance with a range of topics and issues throughout the lifecycle of the evaluation, from early evaluation design development to evaluator selection to implementation, analysis, and reporting.

In the early stages of both Learning Cohorts, Liaisons typically held biweekly calls with their state, with written follow-up via email between calls. This frequency of communication reflects the substantial amount of planning to be done before a state can select an evaluator. These calls often become monthly once states launch evaluations and their independent evaluators are in place. States and their EvalTA Liaison continue to meet periodically to stay in touch about evaluation progress and to create a forum to discuss mid-evaluation topics. Sometimes states invite their evaluators to attend the check-in calls, as well, either ad hoc or regularly.

Facilitated Group Sessions

A Learning Cohort includes quarterly, virtual group sessions that are facilitated by EvalTA Liaisons and to which all member states are invited. The facilitated sessions enable peer-to-peer sharing among the Learning Cohort and develop connections among state RESEA staff working on evaluations. Supporting work with their Liaisons and other states, the sessions allow for the sharing of ideas and concerns, as well as brainstorming possible solutions.

The EvalTA team selects the topics based on state needs. They cover a range of issues, including developing research questions and determining evaluation designs; evaluator selection and approaches to addressing challenges in the selection process; state experiences working with an evaluator; data access, sharing, and agreements between states and evaluators; approaches to evaluation monitoring and data analysis; developing components to test; and strategies to increase sample size.

With the second Learning Cohort, EvalTA Liaisons began incorporating human-centered design activities as a way of drawing out the experiences and expertise of state staff to inform their RESEA component evaluation designs. The human-centered design activities, which include strategies for soliciting feedback from program staff on areas for program improvement and input from program staff on approaches to addressing those areas, also make the sessions more interactive and give states ideas for how to engage their own RESEA staff in program design and developing an evaluation learning agenda for their RESEA program.

Lessons on Evidence Building from the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program

The Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment program is a large-scale federal effort to build systematic rigorous evidence that promotes program learning, improvement, and future development on strategies to help Unemployment Insurance claimants find and keep jobs [4]. As part of RESEA, as summarized in this brief and documented elsewhere [9,10], the U.S. Department of Labor has undertaken a broad range of efforts to build evidence into RESEA program planning and implementation at both the federal and state level. Those efforts include providing wide-ranging technical assistance to states on the importance of and how to conduct rigorous evaluation.

The efforts by DOL and RESEA-participating states in the first five years of RESEA—from 2018 to 2023—to incorporate rigorous evaluation and a culture of evidence building into program implementation provide lessons that could inform related initiatives undertaken by other programs and/or agencies. This

section identifies and discusses some of these lessons, based on the experiences and observations of the Evaluation Technical Assistance team.

- **The RESEA legislation included several provisions that laid the groundwork for evidence building playing a central role in the program.**

A unique and important aspect of RESEA is that rigorous evaluation was explicitly recognized as a core element of the program as part of the authorizing 2018 amendment to the Social Security Act. For DOL, the Statute created a need to develop standards to rate the effectiveness of state RESEA interventions. For states, the Statute created an expectation to conduct evaluations of intervention effectiveness, allowing them to spend up to 10 percent of their RESEA grant funds on evaluation activities. These requirements and state resources for evaluation established a solid foundation to incorporate evidence building as a key, permanent feature of RESEA programs nationwide.

- **DOL has experience, capacity, and an infrastructure that it was able to draw from and build upon to support RESEA evaluations and evidence building.**

DOL has a strong evidence-building culture and has for some time been undertaking activities—such as having evaluation officers, developing learning agendas, and establishing an evaluation policy—now required of most federal agencies by the Evidence-Based Policymaking Act [1].

DOL established its Chief Evaluation Office in 2010, adding evaluation technical staff and leadership, including a Chief Evaluation Officer. CEO provides a centralized platform to build and coordinate evidence capacity across DOL and to help operationalize and institutionalize an evidence culture. Drawing upon several decades of experience in the Employment and Training Administration and other DOL research teams, CEO also began working with all operating agencies to create five-year learning agendas that identify questions and priorities for future studies that would be relevant and useful to the agency and other stakeholders. This helped strengthen a collaborative environment where CEO and agency research staff, such as those in ETA, work with program and policy staff to share information about how to incorporate evaluation, research findings, and evidence into programmatic decision making. It also helped to build trust and collaborative relationships among offices operating programs and CEO and other staff responsible for planning and overseeing evaluations of those programs.

DOL created an [Evaluation Policy statement](#) in 2013; then in 2012, to strengthen dissemination and evidence use, DOL developed the evidence-based [Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research](#). CLEAR provides both the infrastructure to rate the rigor of evaluation studies and a tool so implementors (such as state RESEA grantees) can access and understand which programs and components are proven effective.

- **Federal-level leadership and cross-agency coordination, across the program and evaluation offices in providing evaluation technical assistance, was considered critical to the progress made by states in developing and launching evaluations to build evidence.**

The Office of Unemployment Insurance, which administers RESEA within DOL’s ETA, provided important early leadership soon after Congress permanently authorized RESEA. Importantly, OUI required a section of each state’s annual RESEA State Plan to address how the state proposed to develop and carry out its evaluation using the resources provided by DOL.⁹ That requirement facilitated integrating evaluation planning into program development from the earliest stages, helping to institutionalize evaluation and emphasize evidence building across states. CEO, working closely with

⁹ The Fiscal Year 2022 State Plan can be found in Attachment II of Unemployment Insurance Program Letter No. 02-23 [11].

OUI and OPDR (ETA's research office), was vital in supporting and developing states' evaluation efforts. Importantly, recognizing that many of the required activities were new to state employment agencies, CEO and ETA established the EvalTA contract discussed here to offer ongoing resources and assistance to states to develop their evaluations.

For states, the active participation of and collaboration among CEO, OPDR, and OUI underscored the importance of evaluation in launching their RESEA programs. For example, all three offices were represented, and often served as co-moderators, during public-facing EvalTA webinars. CEO invited ETA colleagues to periodic conversations with the EvalTA provider, to ensure the exchange of information necessary to inform ongoing EvalTA efforts. For the EvalTA team, these activities were critical to raising awareness of current RESEA program issues or areas of focus and to enabling the EvalTA to be responsive to federal and state needs for evaluation support.

■ **It was important for the EvalTA to adapt and respond to evolving state needs in evaluation planning and implementation as these shifted over time.**

Flexibility in EvalTA content and delivery was needed to respond to the changing conditions and shifting state needs that occurred over the course of their RESEA program and evaluation development. Though the primary areas of focus for EvalTA remained the same over time, the areas of emphasis shifted as states progressed in their evaluations. The three primary EvalTA-focused areas include (1) helping states to understand the evaluation-related RESEA legislation; (2) supporting states in planning and conducting high-quality evaluations; and (3) assisting states in using evaluations, such as for program improvement. All are important, but the emphasis on each has changed over time as states progressed with their evaluations:

- Early on, states first needed to *understand what the legislation* asked of them with regards to conducting research on their RESEA program.
- States then needed support to *learn about the different types of evaluations and identify an evaluation design appropriate* to their learning interests that was achievable with the data available and their staff capacity to oversee an evaluation.
- Next, states needed assistance to *identify and select an independent evaluator* and with *addressing technical questions* as they carried out their evaluations, including building sample size, the logistics of random assignment, and establishing data sharing agreements with their evaluators.
- Finally, once states had launched an evaluation and gained some experience, they needed assistance to *develop a cycle of learning about their RESEA program* and using study findings to improve it.

EvalTA also had to be flexible in ways beyond the topics it covered. For example, to respond to states' interest in learning from one another about evaluation implementation, the EvalTA team organized peer learning events (see the **appendix** for topics of these events). These events helped promote a sense of community among states, with states connecting and sometimes contacting one another in follow-up after the events. As another example, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EvalTA team moved to provide virtual, customized EvalTA that has helped five states launch impact evaluations and make progress with them despite this significant disruption in service delivery. Additionally, turnover in state staff highlighted the importance of EvalTA to be a continuous process and of regularly soliciting feedback from states through outreach calls, which often raised questions from new staff and outlined new technical assistance needs.

- **The broad range of EvalTA activities—including both generalized and customized—helped make evaluation support accessible to all states. It also ensured that a subset of states ready for it could receive more-intensive assistance to implement high-quality, rigorous evaluations, so they could make contributions to the evidence base relatively quickly.**

The generalized and customized EvalTA were complementary in assisting states with their evaluations, with both playing critical roles in promoting evidence building. Generalized EvalTA was made available to all states and was effective at reaching states and their evaluators to convey technical information and to address questions in real time. Any state can also contact the RESEA Helpline to receive EvalTA tailored to its particular questions and issues.

For a subset of 12 states (as of the writing of this report), the EvalTA team provided one-on-one and group customized support to help states plan and implement impact evaluations. This intensive EvalTA to these states is intended to help support the development of higher-quality evaluations that could meet CLEAR standards. In particular, building trust and rapport with states in the Learning Cohorts was considered key to further developing and providing high-quality EvalTA. Liaisons worked with states as partners and facilitators to provide customized EvalTA based on state need, experience level with evaluation, and the capacity of the state staff. The Liaison role is not a monitoring position, and thus created the opportunity for states to share challenges, concerns, and successes with their Liaison in real time. Being dedicated to a single state also enables an EvalTA Liaison to learn the specifics of that state's RESEA program and its evaluation plans, which contributed to consistency and continuity in EvalTA delivery over the planning and implementation periods.

- **Engaging states early on—and often—by soliciting feedback about their preferred modes of delivery, cadence, and topics was an important element of the EvalTA.**

DOL's experience implementing RESEA and its evidence-building requirements indicates the importance of developing a wide continuum of EvalTA materials and remaining responsive to states' needs as they change over time and as staff advance in their ability and capacity to plan, implement, and conduct evaluations. For instance, early on, the EvalTA team produced a *RESEA Evaluation Toolkit* [8] to provide comprehensive information, but later the team produced shorter, topic-specific briefs and tip sheets designed to address frequent questions and issues that surfaced from states via the RESEA Helpline and Learning Cohorts.¹⁰ The generalized EvalTA provided the opportunity to apply topics solicited through the customized EvalTA to a broader audience, but also facilitated connections and sharing among states and identified areas where customized assistance might be appropriate. The EvalTA team often re-circulated early written products and webinar recordings that initially were beyond where states were with their evaluations, but became relevant later. Also, as state staff turned over, new staff were unaware of those early EvalTA tools, and so reminders raised awareness for them. Re-circulating EvalTA tools proved an important step in addressing questions and building states' knowledge of evaluation.

- **In addition to state RESEA leaders and program staff, a key audience for the EvalTA is the array of independent evaluators actively working on state RESEA evaluations.**

These third-party evaluators—among them state evaluation offices, university research centers and faculty, and research and evaluation firms—play an important role in producing the evidence needed on the RESEA program. Still, evaluators had varying levels of expertise in designing and conducting rigorous evaluations. Some used the EvalTA available, including attending webinars and Lunch & Learn events, and contacting the RESEA Helpline to ask questions or discuss technical or methodological issues

¹⁰ The RESEA Evaluation Toolkit [8] and other EvalTA products are available on the RESEA Evaluation and Evidence Resources page of WorkforceGPS, https://rc.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/07/30/17/32/RESEA_Evaluation_Evidence_Resources.

with the EvalTA team. Addressing evaluators' needs and questions contributed to their ability to conduct high-quality evaluations.

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Appendix: Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Generalized EvalTA Products

This appendix lists the EvalTA written products, webinars, peer learning events, and videos and learning modules delivered from 2019 through 2023. With the exception of the peer learning events, which were not recorded, these materials can be found on the [RESEA Evaluation and Evidence Resource page of WorkforceGPS](#).

| Product | Date |
|---|----------------|
| Written Products | |
| Frequently Asked Questions about RESEA Evaluations | November 2020 |
| Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Evaluation Toolkit: Key Elements for State RESEA Programs | January 2021 |
| Common Pitfalls in Designing RESEA Evaluations | April 2023 |
| RESEA Implementation Studies | April 2023 |
| RESEA Component Evaluations | April 2023 |
| Strategies for RESEA Evaluations in Small States | May 2023 |
| Understanding the Legislation on RESEA Evidence and Evaluations | June 2023 |
| Using the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) to Build Evidence on RESEA Programs | June 2023 |
| Introduction to the RESEA EvalTA Analysis Tip Sheet Series | September 2023 |
| Analysis Tip Sheet Series: Tip Sheet #1: Estimating Impacts When Participants' Random Assignment Status Does Not Match the Services They Received | September 2023 |
| Analysis Tip Sheet Series: Tip Sheet #2: Adjust for Varying Randomization Fractions During Analysis | September 2023 |
| Building RESEA Program Evidence by Understanding Participants' Experiences | September 2023 |
| Considerations for Assessing the Applicability of Evaluation Evidence | September 2023 |
| Considerations for the Secure and Responsible Management of RESEA Evaluation Data | September 2023 |
| Cost-Benefit Analysis for RESEA Programs: A Handbook | September 2023 |
| Impact Evaluation Reporting Tips for RESEA Evaluators | September 2023 |
| RESEA Evaluation Spotlight Series: Spotlight on Iowa's RESEA Evaluation: Planning and Collaborating with an External Evaluator | September 2023 |
| RESEA Evaluation Spotlight Series: Spotlight on New York and Connecticut: States Working Together on an Evaluation | September 2023 |
| RESEA Evaluation Spotlight Series: Spotlight on Tennessee's RESEA Evaluation: Engaging a Third-Party Evaluator | September 2023 |
| RESEA Evaluation Spotlight Series: Spotlight on Wisconsin's RESEA Evaluation: Launching Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) | September 2023 |
| Why and How to Submit an RESEA Evaluation Report for CLEAR Review | September 2023 |
| Webinars | |
| How Does Evaluation Help My State and Where Do We Start? | May 2019 |
| What Evaluation Details Do I Need to Plan for and How Long Will It Take? | June 2019 |
| Which Evaluation Designs Are Right for My State? | May 2019 |
| Evaluation Strategies for States with Smaller RESEA Programs | November 2020 |
| Procuring and Selecting an Evaluator | July 2019 |
| Assessing Data for Evaluation | August 2019 |

| Product | Date |
|--|----------------|
| Considerations When Writing a Statement of Work for an Evaluation | September 2020 |
| Accessing and Using Data for RESEA Evaluations | January 2021 |
| De-Mystifying Random Assignment Designs for RESEA | August 2019 |
| Evaluations Using Your Administrative Data: Quasi-Experimental Designs | September 2019 |
| Implementation Studies | October 2019 |
| RESEA: Overview of Evaluation and Evidence Requirements | November 2019 |
| Using the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) – A Demonstration | August 2019 |
| Findings from the REA Impact Study and Implications for State RESEA Evaluations | October 2020 |
| RESEA Program Strategies: State and Local Implementation | April 2022 |
| RESEA Peer Learning | August 2022 |
| An Introduction to RESEA Component Evaluations | November 2022 |
| Conducting Component Evaluations | November 2022 |
| Informed Use of Evidence for RESEA Evaluations | April 2023 |
| Reporting RESEA Evaluation Findings | May 2023 |
| Understanding Participant Experience: RESEA Evaluation Technical Assistance | June 2023 |
| Producing and Using Cost-Benefit Analyses for RESEA Evaluations | July 2023 |
| Peer Learning Events | |
| Lunch & Learn 1: Considering and Selecting an Evaluation Design | October 2022 |
| Lunch & Learn 2: Early Evaluation Planning: Establishing Learning Goals | December 2022 |
| Lunch & Learn 3: Procuring and Selecting an Independent Evaluator | March 2023 |
| Lunch & Learn 4: Collecting and Analyzing Participant Experience Data | August 2023 |
| Videos and Learning Modules | |
| Evidence Coffee Break: Three Evaluation Tips | September 2023 |
| Evidence Coffee Break: Creating a Culture of Evidence | September 2023 |
| RESEA Evaluation Virtual Learning Series: An Overview | September 2023 |
| Virtual Learning Series Module 1: Why evaluate our RESEA program? | September 2023 |
| Virtual Learning Series Module 2: How do we decide what we want to learn about our RESEA program? | September 2023 |
| Virtual Learning Series Module 3: What types of evaluations are there and how do we select one? | September 2023 |
| Virtual Learning Series Module 4: How do we develop an evaluation Statement of Work? | September 2023 |
| Virtual Learning Series Module 5: How can CLEAR help in meeting our RESEA evidence-building needs? | September 2023 |
| Virtual Learning Series Module 6: What are the fundamentals of conducting an impact evaluation? | September 2023 |
| Virtual Learning Series Module 7: What are the fundamentals of conducting a component impact evaluation? | September 2023 |
| Virtual Learning Series Module 8: What to consider when identifying an evaluator for RESEA evaluations | September 2023 |
| Virtual Learning Series Module 9: Our evaluation has launched—now what should we be doing? | September 2023 |