**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**REA Impact Study Findings and Implications for RESEA Evaluations**

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*Transcript by*

*Noble Transcription Services*

*Menifee, CA*

JONATHAN VEHLOW: Welcome to "REA Impact Study Findings and Implications for RESEA Evaluations." So without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Megan Lizik, senior evaluation specialist, project officer for RESEA evaluations, U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office. Megan?

MEGAN LIZIK: Great. Thank you so much. And hello, everybody. I'm excited to be with you all to moderate today's webinar. Before we discuss the substance, however, I'd like to provide a little background about the independent RESEA evaluation project that this series is a part of.

In the fall of 2018, the Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office contracted with Abt Associates and its partners, the Urban Institute, Capital Research Corporation, and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies – or NASWA – to help states develop strategies that will support new RESEA evidence requirements.

As part of this project, we are assessing the current state of the evidence of RESEA, conducting an implementation study of the RESEA program, and providing evaluation technical assistance to states to build your technical capacity to meet the new legislative requirements. This webinar is part of the project's evaluation technical assistance. You can learn more about the study by clicking on the link above.

Before we get started, I want to take a step back and refresh everyone on the goals of our RESEA evaluation technical assistance and what we're trying to accomplish through these webinars. Evaluation is an iterative ongoing process. What you learn from an evaluation – either one you conduct or one another state conducts – may lead you to think about changes you want to make to your RESEA program.

In turn, you might want to evaluate that new program or component of your program to continue learning more about what's most effective in helping people get back to work quickly, and so on.

This type of culture of continuous improvement, or a culture of evaluation and evidence building, doesn't happen overnight. And we recognize that many of you are already engaged in some type of a cycle like this in your state, where you seek to use data and evidence to continually inform your program or policy decisions.

This is why the RESEA evaluation TA we've been providing through these webinars, as well as the other resources and tools our team is working on, are geared toward a broad audience of states with RESEA funds. We want to build capacity to use, understand, and develop evidence. These resources can ensure that everyone who's administering an RESEA program, and everyone who's evaluating or considering an evaluation of their RESEA program, has resources on key evaluation topics to either get started or progress from where you're at.

So in today's webinar, this is a follow up to a pre-recorded webcast that has been available on WorkforceGPS since the spring, shortly after the final REA impact study reports were posted on DOL's webpage.

We took a break due to COVID and the many competing priorities we know that states had before having today's panel discussions and Q&A's, and we're just thrilled that so many states could join us for this conversation.

Today we're going to start by briefly recapping the REA impact study findings shared in that webcast. Then we'll hear more about the experience of some of our state colleagues whose states participated in that evaluation. And finally, spend some time answering questions about what the REA study findings could mean for RESEA programs and evaluations.

We have put together some questions that we have already heard through our evaluation technical assistance, but are also glad to hear other questions that arise for you during today's session. Please enter any questions that you have into the chat box.

If you haven't yet heard it, we encourage you to revisit this pre-recording later to hear all of the findings from this large study and potential implications for RESEA. And you can also visit the reports and briefs directly on CEO's website. I've put links to both here.

This study is one of the largest evaluations of a social program ever successfully conducted and with significant findings provides compelling insights into the effectiveness of the REA program in reducing UI duration and increasing employment and earnings outcomes, more so than any other study conducted to date. And because of this, we wanted to be sure to take some time to share its findings and implications with you all as you're designing and studying your RESEA programs.

Today we're joined by Jacob Klerman, senior fellow with Abt Associates. Jacob was the principal investigator for the REA impact study we'll discuss today and he currently serves as one of the principal investigators for the evaluation to advance RESEA program evidence.

In the pre-recorded webcast I mentioned, Jacob shared the results of this REA impact study that he and his team at Abt conducted for DOL, in partnership with some of the states we have with us today and a few others, and he'll recap them at a high level.

He's also joined by his Abt Associates colleague Zach Epstein. Mr. Epstein is currently the deputy project director for the RESEA project. For the REA impact study he served as a site liaison. He will be leading a discussion with two representatives from some of the states that participated in the REA study.

Those panelists joining us today are Ann Astin, who is an RESEA UI specialist with the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development; and Catherine Lawell. Ms. Lawell is director of Reemployment Pathways at the state of Indiana Department of Workforce Development. We are very pleased and honored that they are able to join us today, and look forward to hearing their insights into carrying out this kind of high-quality impact evaluation later in the session.

But first, I'd like to turn things over to Jacob Klerman for our recap. Jacob?

MR. KLERMAN: Thank you, Megan. And good afternoon to everyone on the call today. As Megan said, there's a long webinar that's available on the web, pre-recorded, that you can get a lot more information about the evaluation. And by the way, additional information about the evaluation is available on DOL's website, including the report and a group of short briefs that provide additional, more easy-to-digest information.

But I what I wanted to do today is to give a very high-level overview to frame some of the discussion that's coming later. So let's start with the design itself.

The REA impact study included a qualitative implementation study, which we talked to senior members of state staff and to local staff directly about their experience with the program. And it also included a random assignment impact study which we tried to assess the difference that the REA program makes, the offer being offered REA versus the choice people were not offered.

The research questions were (long ?). We were interested in whole programs. Does REA versus not REA make a difference? What was the differential effect that different parts of the REA program – as we call components? And we were interested in differential impacts by different characteristics of claimants. And finally, we asked about causal pathways; how does the REA program achieve its impacts?

Those are the research questions. And for each of those research questions, we looked at impacts on UI weeks and on employment and earnings.

The study was run in four relatively large states, two of which will be joining us – are joining us today and will talk later – Indiana, New York, Washington, Wisconsin. And the sample size was large; nearly a quarter of a million people were randomized.

OK. So that was the study design. In one slide I'm going to try to summarize the findings. So with respect to whole programs, there was clear evidence the REA program lowers UI duration. The range varies across the states from about half a week to about a week and a half. This was slightly larger than we would have expected based on the earlier literature.

In addition, there is clear evidence in the short-term REA increases employment. And not only that, but those increases in employment continue past the time the people would have been on UI. They are helping people to find better job matches and those jobs last longer.

With respect to components, the study looked at the impact of multiple meetings and found that in some states adding the second and third meeting lowers the number of UI weeks that people get. But in other states, the evidence was not as clear.

We also looked at whether or not multiple meetings affected employment, but we concluded that our samples were too small to detect whether or not that would be true. And that's going to be a theme that goes forward in much of the talk we have today.

We looked at differential impacts. We did not find evidence that impacts were larger for people with higher profile scores, at least with respect to UI weeks. And the samples were too small, again, to tell if there were impacts on employment.

And finally, we asked about causal pathways. How does the REA impact study lower UI weeks and raise employment? And overall we have some insights about UI weeks but less to say about employment.

The REA study – REA program was supposed to improve outcomes by increasing eligibility assessments, assessing that people – employments were able and available and that they were conducting sufficiently intensive work search. And our study concludes that that pathway is relatively unimportant.

Second, we looked at the effect of additional job search assistance. That's the "assistance" in the REA title – program title. And we found some clear evidence that the assistance lowers UI weeks.

And finally, we found that much of the impact on UI weeks appears to come through enforcement of the requirement to attend the REA meeting. The REA meeting was required and if you didn't attend, your benefits were often suspended and that would lower your UI weeks received.

So those were the findings. And today's focus is not so much on the findings but on implications for research. So I want to conclude with some simple implications for research.

The first one is that administrative data appears to be sufficient to do impact studies. No survey is needed, which is a good thing because we concluded that you need large samples and surveys would be too expensive.

We often think that an attractive way to assess impact is to run random assignment. And our studies show that random assignment is clearly feasible. We had to work closely with the four states, but all four states were easily able to implement random assignment.

We also found that sample sizes detecting impacts are large, probably more than 20,000 to detect impacts of a whole program on unemployment and probably more than 50,000 to detect differential impacts on components on UI weeks, and perhaps even larger for differential impact on components unemployment.

But in all these things, details matter. And as part of the contract that Megan discussed, we are offering evaluation technical assistance and you should be encouraged to contact the evaluation technical assistance group, what we call ETA – or evaluation technical assistance team – for additional help.

Thank you. Megan?

ZACHARY EPSTEIN: Thanks, Jacob. This is Zach Epstein from Abt Associates. I will be leading us through the panel with our two representatives from Indiana and Wisconsin to hear about their experiences participating in the impact study. We have four questions and we'll ask both panelists to answer each one.

So we'll go ahead and get started with question one, which is, what motivated your state to participate in the REA impact study evaluation? Ann, would you care to go first?

ANN ASTIN: Yes. Thanks, Zach. Hi, everyone. This is Ann from Wisconsin. So to answer your question, what we wanted to know was, we wanted to know was our program working? We felt by participating in the REA study we would be able to see what was working and the areas in which we could improve to best fulfill the purpose of the REA program.

MR. EPSTEIN: Excellent. Thanks, Ann. Catherine, would you care to answer question one?

CATHERINE LAWELL: Yes, thank you. Indiana wanted to explore what impact different levels of re-employment assistance would have on Hoosier claimants. And then they also wanted to explore additional questions, such as what, if any, level of REA participation provided a quicker return to work? Do claimants return to work quicker due to the REA intervention provided through program participation?

And then they were also in the process of launching the Jobs for Hoosiers program, which was the state REA model. And we wanted to explore whether a lighter version of REA would provide a better solution for individuals who were profiled as less in need of assistance than a traditional REA claimant.

And then Abt Associates and the U.S. DOL were intrigued by our state REA program, Jobs for Hoosiers, and they saw that was a great fit for the multi-arm random assignment design study.

MR. EPSTEIN: Great. Thank you. So our second question is, what were some of the biggest challenges you faced in conducting the evaluation and how did you overcome them? Catherine, would you go first this time?

MS. LAWELL: Sure. Thank you. One of the major planning challenges was adjusting within TrackOne, Indiana's case management system at the time, so that we could improve how services and delivery was being tracked. This was a very labor-intensive process, but it resulted in the ability to track additional variables and sectors.

Another challenge was finding a middle ground with setting goals for the control group. Indiana has committed to serving nearly every Hoosier – every eligible Hoosier claimant with some level of REA. But Abt wanted to expand our control group to nearly equal the number of the REA group, which would result in a larger number of Hoosiers not receiving any level of intervention unless they asked for assistance. We eventually agreed on a smaller control group.

And then one of the biggest challenges was determining what the study parameters would look like. Indiana already had both a state REA program in place, which we used as a partial REA. And the REA – partial REA had most of the enforcement but little of the assistance. If they didn't participate, they were failed to participate, they lost their benefits.

The traditional full REA program was full re-employment service requirements and enforcement, and then the control group. So this was a perfect opportunity to use a multi-arm three-level random design format.

MR. EPSTEIN: OK. Thank you, Catherine. Ann?

MS. ASTIN: Yes. So the length of the study and data sharing, ensuring the proper data sharing agreements were in place so that the evaluator had access to quality, meaningful information. Having upper management buy-in from the start of the study helped to get data sharing agreements through the process relatively quickly.

Wisconsin was also in a transition of an entire program redesign at the same time as this evaluation was about to begin. We had just transitioned our program into a self-scheduling program in early 2015.

MR. EPSTEIN: OK. So our third question is, what were your experiences working with an evaluator and what lessons have you learned? Ann?

MS. ASTIN: Yes, thank you. Our evaluation team was great to work with. We worked with you, Zach, and Amy from Abt Associates throughout the entire process. They ensured they were available for any questions, concerns we might have had.

We held weekly conference calls to make sure the data being transmitted was understandable and correct. We also conducted site visits to all locations which were participating in the study.

We would suggest being open about all aspects of the program, even those that might indicate a need for improvement. The evaluator isn't a monitor; they are there to provide unbiased, objective feedback and findings. Understanding that the evaluator is there to help throughout the entire process and can identify both program strengths and areas for improvement.

MR. EPSTEIN: Thanks, Ann. Catherine?

MS. LAWELL: Thank you. I also worked very closely with Amy and then with DeLynn (ph) of Abt Associates from the very beginning. We had regular calls two to three times a week with the group; and then we held separate calls with a smaller group as needed, based on topics.

We made site visits together so that we could observe multiple regional processes. And then we worked very closely during the review of data as they cleaned up results.

My best advice would be to remain flexible where you can without sacrificing the integrity of your program. As Ann said, they're there to partner with us to make our programs better, not take apart our processes.

Indiana felt very strongly about not withholding REA services from so many claimants. And multiple calls took place with each team explaining the reasons behind the request. So once Abt Associates understood why we could not expand our control group to match the REA numbers, they adapted how they would weigh the smaller control group results. They were wonderful.

And be flexible and available with your time. Both Amy and DeLynn were very open and available for questions as we worked through the many system changes needed on our end to ensure that the data collected was as clean as possible. We did the same, especially when it came time to (release ?) the data for cleanup.

MR. EPSTEIN: All right. And our last question is, what were the biggest insights or "a-ha" moments from your evaluation experience and/or the findings? And Catherine, could you go first this time?

MS. LAWELL: Thank you. The – (inaudible) – participation was the opportunity to truly shake the program up. We were in a mindset of doing the same process from the very beginning of the program in Indiana. So we learned that just because it wasn't broken didn't mean it couldn't be better.

We wanted to explore the different results as assisting more claimants at different levels of (our ?) employment need. One struggle we had had in prior years was claimants attending orientation and then failing to return for the assessment interview two weeks later.

After consulting with Diane Wood (ph) of the U.S. DOL, we made the decision to hold them on the same day as a mini-REA boot camp. And between the group orientation and one-on-one initial assessment interviews, was used for workshops, referral to case managers, over-the-shoulder computer résumé assistance, and in some regions mini job fairs.

By holding both events on the same day, claimants could be held accountable to complete both to receive credit for the day. And while in most cases it did make for a longer day for everyone, claimants could save gas and they could see the vast number of services beyond unemployment that was available within the (Work One ?) American Job Center.

In addition, staffs' clerical work was reduced. And since the notification process was combined, everyone who was sent a letter could be counted as scheduled for assessment interview, which was the trigger service. And that resulted in lowering the SBT (ph) rate from approximately 50 to 70 percent to 30 to 40 percent.

And then finally, even claimants who score a lowest-in-need often benefit from some level of re-employment services to return to work quickly, most likely due to rescue job search or interviewing skills.

MR. EPSTEIN: OK. And Ann?

MS. ASTIN: Yes, thank you. So we feel very similar to Indiana. But for Wisconsin, frankly, we were a little surprised at the results. We had expected that the duration of benefits would have been shortened by more days than what was found. This result prompted us to move quickly on implementing IT enhancements, such as the ability for participants to self-schedule subsequent appointments online.

Prior to self-scheduling subsequent sessions, participants were scheduled for a specific date and time to return by the staff member. This new change allowed for more flexibility for the participant.

MR. EPSTEIN: OK. Thank you both very much. We really do appreciate your insights.

And with that I'm going to hand it back over to Megan.

MS. LIZIK: Great. Thank you so much, Zach. And thank you, Ann and Catherine. This is just a great panel and we really appreciate the chance to hear your insights about your experiences, which we think are useful to kind of show to all eight partners that we have with us today kind of how these high-quality impact evaluations unfold and kind of look at things that are involved and even some insights for how to pave the way on RESEA evaluations.

So with that, our next portion of today's webinar is going to be to ask Jacob some additional questions that have been raised about the REA impact study findings and implications. And remember, while we're going through these questions and answers, if you have others that come up and occur to you, please don't hesitate to write them in the chat box. Thank you.

So Jacob, our first question here, we want to know more about what was involved in carrying out the REA impact study that we discussed today? And then the RESEA context where a lot of our state colleagues are currently thinking, what kinds of tasks are expected of the state versus of the evaluator?

MR. KLERMAN: Thank you, Megan. So I'm going to talk about tasks that are required of the states and how they will share them with the evaluator in three parts.

So the first thing is there are a bunch of, for want of a better term, contractual issues you need to get an evaluator into place. Exactly what that will mean will vary depending on exactly what type of a contract you're going to do, if you're going to work with an outside contractor or someone in the state or someone in your agency.

But in general, you're going to want to write a statement of work and a request for proposal, or something that looks vaguely like that. Then you're going to solicit bids. You're going to select someone to be the evaluator and then to finalize whatever the contractual terms are.

And then throughout the term of the contract, you'll work on conventional contractual issues – payment, performance management, issues like that. So that's the purely administrative part of the path. That's the first piece.

The second piece is the design piece. So here, this is more of a joint activity with the evaluator – with the state and the evaluator. So the first thing is going to be to finalize exactly what to evaluate, what research questions you're going to try and answer. And sometimes that will involve designing a new intervention. And in that case, you're going to want to work with the state and the evaluator together to design that intervention.

Then usually our studies will involve some amount of qualitative fieldwork (and to use ?) with state and local staff. Usually interviews will be conducted by the evaluator, but the state and its staff will be required to facilitate the process. Say yes, you really should talk to this person, find the right people to talk to, and to set up those meetings.

Then you'll want to think carefully about what the available sample is. That will usually mean which office are you going to include and for how many years you're going to continue the evaluation, at least collecting more data.

And then you're going to want to ask what data are going to be available to be analyzed. Options include UI benefits; that will get you weeks and dollars paid. If people attend the meeting. What happens with non-compliance? If people show up; if they didn't, how did the state respond? And then longer term, what were the employment and earnings of people offered the program and not offered the program?

And then finally there will be back-and-forth with the evaluator about writing all that down in a design document. And you should usually assume that there will be multiple drafts of that document until everybody's happy with what's going on, everything is clear, and the plans are clearly stated. We want to upfront know that everybody agrees on what's going on.

So that's the second piece, the first one being the contractual stuff, the second one being design.

And then the third piece is actually to carry out the design. So often that design will involve random assignment. In that case, you have to figure out how you're actually going to randomize. Usually that will mean incorporating randomization into the computer system that selects people for RESEA or REA and then who actually comes to the meeting.

Then, as appropriate, if you're doing a new intervention, you're going to want to train the staff and supervise them on exactly what the intervention is. We want to test what we intended and not something else.

Then the evaluator is going to want continual updates of data. So you're going to need to arrange the initial data access, but you need to be careful. These are private data, confidential data that are covered by a variety of statutes – state and federal – and you want to be sure that the data access you set up is appropriate and all the I's have been dotted and the T's crossed.

And then after that, the evaluator is going to want you to regularly transmit data back to them quarterly, annually; you'll have to work that out together. It's not a one-time thing to submit data.

And then you're going to want to arrange the site visit, introduce the state and local staff to the study implementation.

And then finally at the end, the good part and the bad part is that you're going to want to review the deliverables that actually have content, reports and briefings – (inaudible). And again you should assume that you will need to review multiple drafts until everybody is mutually happy with the document.

It's the evaluator's job to call it as they see it and it's the state's job to be sure that the descriptions are clear and that they are fair and they correctly describe the program as it went forward.

MS. LIZIK: Great. Thank you, Jacob. Our next question is, what does it mean that much of the impact on UI weeks comes from a requirement to attend an REA meeting? And what potential implications does shifting to remote or virtual services have?

MR. KLERMAN: So I think that, at least in our experience when we ran the REA evaluation, it was our clear sense that not everybody who's invited to come to an REA meeting actually comes. In fact, very roughly, only about half the people invited will actually turn up.

And so it should not be surprising that we will get some reductions in UI duration – number of weeks people claim – because the claimants don't show up and therefore we suspend their benefits at least for some period of time.

And I think that, as we heard in the comments from the states, thinking carefully about why it is that claimants are not coming in and finding ways to get more people to come in is one of the fundamental challenges of running an REA or RESEA program. It's not a glamorous part. But if people don't come in, we can't get the benefits to their program.

So we want to look carefully at whether or not claimants are getting our notices and whether or not they understand them. And there's evidence from a study that was done in Michigan that those are real issues.

And then it's also possible that, now that the claimants know that we have to come to a meeting, that they might not want to meet with us and they'll take some job that's out there. So both parts seem possible and we need to consider both of them.

As to the consequences for the current era, well, we're in a very different era. In the period that we studied, almost everybody came in for that first interview in person. Only very rare exceptions for very remote people.

But today, because of COVID, the vast majority of services, as we understand it, are being provided remotely, over the phone, through a video chat, or stuff like that. So it's at least possible that will make it easier for people to come in because they don't need to get on the bus. They don't have to find bus fare. They can just call in from wherever they are and so that may reduce failures to report and therefore suspensions, make it easy to attend.

And in as much as that's true, more people will get the assistance that we are trying to offer and therefore they will have better outcomes.

MS. LIZIK: Great. Thank you. So the third question that we have is about sample sizes. So these sample sizes seem large. What options does my state have if we have only a smaller sample available for RESEA impact evaluation?

MR. KLERMAN: Well, I guess the place to start is to say we also think that the samples are large. We were, frankly, a little bit surprised by how large the samples we needed to get. When we came in, we started by looking for the largest possible states because we knew that sample is always a challenge. That was an issue for us running a national evaluation. It's less of an option for states running their own evaluations.

But it's important to remember that the REA or RESEA evaluations are relatively light touch. They give people a couple of hours of services and therefore we should not expect that the program be transformative. And the smaller the impacts, the larger the samples we need.

So with that introduction, there are a variety of ways to get larger samples. The first one is to make sure that you're including as many offices and workforce development boards as possible. In some of the earlier evaluation technical assistance discussions we had, states were talking about saying, we'll take three of our offices out of 23.

And in general, our answer is go all-in. Think about applying the program in randomization in the entire state. And some places may need to be left out for a variety of reasons; they're too small or something else is going on. But we would advise you to start by saying, can we include everybody? Who do we have to drop? Every office.

And then you can get larger samples by running the evaluation for longer. A study that runs for two years will have the sample, on average, which is about twice as big as a study that runs for one year.

And then you want to think about whether or not there are other states around you with similar programs with which you could run a joint evaluation.

OK. Then there are a variety of options to reduce how large a sample you need. The first one is something I alluded to earlier, which is the larger the program, the smaller the sample size you'll need. So rather than evaluating a small component of your program, look at a larger component or even looking at the whole program. That will require larger sample – smaller samples.

And if you're not already using random assignment, in general random assignment requires much smaller samples. And so think carefully about random assignment. In some ways it is disruptive; but in terms of detecting impacts, it's your best bet by far.

MS. LIZIK: Great. Thank you so much. That was really interesting and useful. Now we'd like to move over to our audience Q&A. We've already had a number of questions come in. And as we're going through those, if other questions come to mind, please don't hesitate to write them in the chat.

So the first question that we would like to tackle I'm going to pitch over to Jacob. We have a question about power analysis. And this is related to sample sizes. And the question is, "Can you provide more information about the power analysis that your REA impact study conducted? And perhaps talk a little bit about some of the specific values that you used and other ways to think about these types of calculations?" Jacob?

MR. KLERMAN: Sure. So I'm not sure that this is the perfect place to go through all the technical gory detail. We're happy to do that as part of the evaluation technical assistance that the team is providing. But I want to give you some high-level perspective.

The first thing is that from what we did in the REA impact study, we estimated the standard deviation or the variance or the outcomes. And that's a crucial parameter for trying to do proper power calculations. And so you or your evaluator should contact the Department of Labor or the Abt team and we can try and provide you with some of those technical numbers. I can't reel them off here.

The second thing to notice is that you want to think really carefully about how large your impacts are likely to be. And when we did that, when we were designing the study, we went back and we looked carefully at the literature to ask, well, what is the range of impacts in the studies that are out there? And our report has a careful review of the literature up to the time that we published the report, plus our additional four states.

So as you're thinking about how big a sample you need, among the crucial questions to ask is, how big do I really think that my impact on my program is going to be? And the advice that I often give to people in this situation is, don't be really aggressive and be sure that your program is a home run.

It may be true that that's true and you'll have really large impacts. But it's also possible that you're probably more average or maybe even a little below average. After all, somebody has to be below average. And so you want to be conservative. Try and choose a larger sample so you can be sure to demonstrate that your program really does work.

And I think that Megan wanted to discuss this one a little bit as well.

MS. LIZIK: Thanks, Jacob. The only other thing I wanted to add was just that your independent evaluator should have the technical expertise to be able to help conduct that power analysis for your evaluation, and help tell you how big the sample size needs to be to answer the research questions you have.

Of course, that being said, if you need ad hoc support, the RESEA evaluation TA team can be reached through the help line. So they can also provide you some additional insights on how to start thinking about this.

The next question that we're going to take is, "Do we need to procure an evaluator for our RESEA study or can we use an in-house evaluator?" And this is a great question. This is something that we've heard a lot over the last several months or maybe even a couple years now. And this is really a state-by-state decision that you'll be making.

Really, either an in-house or an external evaluator, like one that you might develop a contract with at a university locally to you, or maybe have an existing relationship at a university; or whether you go through a procurement process to get a contractor in place, like Jacob talked about during his earlier Q&A, which was done for this REA impact study, that's going to be a decision that you're going to be thinking about at the state level.

I would point you to some resources that might help you with that decision. Last – let's see, in 2019 we did a webinar all about selecting your evaluator and thinking about those different types of evaluators and which type might be right for you.

And then last month, our evaluation TA team did a webinar on writing a statement of work which – (inaudible) – both outline the scope and the timeline and other important aspects of your evaluation, sort of whether you're working with an in-house team or whether you're deciding to contract it out.

I think the most important thing to emphasize is that whoever your evaluator is, they should be independent, have no oversight or line of sight to your RESEA program.

And lastly, I would just encourage that as you're thinking about this, to really think about sort of your interest and your capacity to take this on. So not just your technical expertise within the state – because of course that's something that many states have the capacity to do some research and evaluation, other types of analyses. But also think about things like time.

So I would offer, do you want to oversee the evaluation, for example; or do you want to actually conduct it? Do you have space and time to do that? So those are some of the things that you might weigh and would refer you to looking back at some of those webinars to help you think a bit further through it.

So next we have a question revisiting some of our – the thoughts Jacob provided a little bit earlier about the pandemic context. "Do you have suggestions for implementing an RESEA evaluation given the pandemic and the state of the job market? What kinds of parameters might be considered in the design?" And for that I will pitch it over to Jacob and also invite Zach to chime in as he might like to.

MR. KLERMAN: So I guess I have a couple of things to say about the COVID situation. The first one is I hope it passes soon. The second is that while it's a terrible thing for our claimants that they're unemployed, for the purposes of an evaluation it means that we have much larger samples than we had a year ago. And so it means that we can more quickly get to the larger samples that we need in order to get to – (inaudible) – provision. And that's a silver lining for those of us who are trying to do evaluations. At least there's one silver lining.

The second thing is that it is my understanding that many states have made a shift towards remote or virtual or over-the-phone services. And it is also my understanding that many states are thinking about making that a more long-term shift. True in many areas including our business that we're thinking, what do we really have to do in the office and what have we now learned that we think we can do outside the office?

And inasmuch as this is going to be the new normal and evaluating this current situation, what is a virtual service, is well worth doing. That's the second point.

The third point is that inasmuch as it might be the new normal – and one of the things that we might like to understand is, to what extent is it true that in-person services are much better than virtual/remote services? And that's an imminently evaluable question.

We can send some of the people to no RESEA, some of the people to in-person services, and some of the people to remote services, and we can compare the outcomes. And that will give us a sense as to what extent it's really worthwhile to try and rush back to get people into the offices for in-person meetings. And to what extent we want to instead continue with the virtual model, which is easier on the claimants because they don't have to get on the bus or drive in a car. And in some ways it's easier on our staff.

And then the final thought is that there is some evidence the impact of programs like this, they're smaller when the economy is bad; but that evidence is not overwhelming. And so we have reason to believe that whatever we're going to find, even in the currently less-than-optimal job market, is likely to carry over into the longer-term when we hope the job market improves.

And as we have emphasized in some of our evaluation technical assistance materials, evaluation timelines are long. If you were going to start an evaluation now, you probably wouldn't really get into the field until early 2021. And we all hope by then that the economy will be continuing to improve and will be less extreme than it is today.

Zach, anything to add?

MS. LIZIK: Thank you.

MR. EPSTEIN: I'll just add that to the extent that programs have changed dramatically over the last six months, there are some pre-impact evaluation activities that may be helpful for states as they're thinking about preparing for evaluation. A lot of those activities are explained in technical assistance resources that have been made available, things like (evaluability ?) assessments and implementation studies that can inform the development of impact evaluation.

MS. LIZIK: Thanks, Zach. Relatedly, we have another question about the generalizability of results during COVID. So the question is, "For generalizability of results and external – (inaudible) – do you think evaluating RESEA during or in the context of COVID is valuable and useful for learning about the program during non-pandemic service provision? Looking forward to hearing your response."

MR. KLERMAN: I think the answer is yes. As I said earlier, it is my sense that while impacts vary some with the strength of the economy, they do not vary overwhelmingly. And so what we'll learn today will be generalizable to the future.

And furthermore, we can actually test, hopefully, the program – the economy will improve over the next couple of quarters. And then once we do that, we can compare our impacts at the beginning of the study to later in the study and check whether or not there is evidence that impacts were radically different in the early period or in the later period, when the economy was worse and when the economy wasn't.

MS. LIZIK: Yeah. And Jacob, this is Megan. I would also add I think something that is – that I think many of us have realized is that the COVID context and the – that has really just accelerated the use of some of these virtual services in some places where they might have already been sort of moving in that direction or making some virtual services or remote services available. Certainly some states do this by part of their regular business model for serving a diverse population.

So I think that to the extent to which there might be virtual or remote services that persist even after the pandemic, again I think this is all really valuable to be learning about and adding to the RESEA evidence base. And hopefully potentially finding some new interventions that we can add to the list for you all as effective in the future.

So another question that has come in is about, "What do the findings from this REA study imply to individual states gearing up for the RESEA evaluation; as in what to evaluate, especially for the states who were under the evaluation?"

And this is a great question. And I think the next couple of slides I have – this tees us up well for me to kind of talk to you a little bit about where this study is in CLEAR and how to look to CLEAR to find some more information in this space.

I think if you have a specific question about your program and whether something that you're going to put in your RESEA state plan is going to be viewed as allowable or evidence-based by OUI, I would encourage you to follow up with our OUI colleagues. Larry Burns unfortunately couldn't be here today, but his contact information is on our final slide. And would suggest that you all follow up with him for case-by-case answers.

I would just say that generally the findings from the REA study were added to CLEAR under the REA intervention tab, adding to the evidence that we have for that intervention that is effective. I mean, moving the needle on the kinds of things that RESEA is also trying to move the needle on related to UI duration and employment. And so you can find those there.

And again, when we're looking at whether an intervention is rated high or moderate, we are looking at things like how much good quality evidence exists. So this just sort of further puts REA into that high group that it does have a good amount – and in this case, several more than just two studies – that show that it is effective and actually does cause those outcomes.

So with that we're going to – that's all we have time for the Q&A portion. We're going to wrap up this portion and I'm going to show you a little bit more about incorporating some of these findings into CLEAR.

So as a refresher, CLEAR is DOL's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research. This is our public resource that the Chief Evaluation Office manages. And we have added this new REA study to the list. And in fact, not just one, but actually four new study profile summaries, one for each of the contracts – for each of the states that we talked about – to the database.

So each study contract has received a high causal evidence rating by CLEAR. Again, meaning that this new study provides very credible evidence and you can have a lot of confidence in its findings that the intervention caused these outcomes.

This rating is represented by the (gas gauge ?) icon that I have shown here on the slide. And for now, the interventions examined by this new REA study are going to stay in this high-level topic of REA interventions into that category. And like I said, they received the high intervention causal evidence rating.

However, when CLEAR conducts the next RESEA systematic evidence review – likely in a few years as more studies of RESEA programs are completed – this study and all the other new causal evidence will inform possible changes to the existing RESEA intervention categories and ratings.

So for example, if we end up being able to build evidence about intensive case management services or scheduling or other things that are relevant to – relevant components to your RESEA programs, we're going to try to be teasing those out to show you to what extent they have been shown to really be effective in causing the outcomes we're looking for for UI claimants.

So again, this isn't expected to happen for a few years. But just a reminder that the intervention rating – represented by the thermometer here that we see – could change at that time.

So you can take a look in CLEAR in the RESEA topic area tab for these new study summaries and ratings, as well as generally all of the interventions that we have reviewed and rated so far in CLEAR.

Now, what does this mean for states leading evaluations of RESEA programs? What I would say is that, as you know, the studies with high or moderate causal evidence ratings produce the most credible evidence. This means you can have the most confidence in those results. And studies with those high or moderate causal evidence ratings inform the RESEA causal evidence ratings for interventions, which are based on how much good quality evidence of effectiveness exists.

So because of this, like we talked about in some of our past webinars, states that are conducting impact studies should be aiming to produce higher-quality evidence that can meet CLEAR standards, like this REA impact study did. And here I have the three things that we've suggested in the past to help you get your impact evaluation on the right track to producing that kind of high-quality evidence.

You'll want to make sure your impact evaluation is using an academically rigorous design.

You'll want to make sure you have a large enough sample so that your results are statistically significant. You don't want to finish your study and then realize that your – (inaudible) – inconclusive because you didn't have enough people included in your sample; your sample wasn't big enough.

And then finally, have an experienced independent evaluator. Again, this is a person with no – or team with no responsibility for the program administration or operation. And the evaluator can help you think about what's the right design to answer your questions? How big of a sample do you need?

So that's going to be the partnership that you guys will have as you're carrying this out.

Finally, here are the links you can find to the publicly available reports on DOL's REA implementation and impact studies. These are on the Chief Evaluation Office website. We've also shared the link to the WorkforceGPS landing page, where you can find all the webinars listed as part of the Evaluation TA webinar series so far. And other links here will take you to other resources that provide additional information about the RESEA evidence base as well as tips for planning and conducting impact studies.

We really appreciate your attendance today and your continued commitment to evaluations.

Again, if you have further questions you can reach out to your presenters that are listed here, or of course the RESEA evaluation TA help line at RESEA@abtassociates.com. That's RESEA@abtassociates.com.

And with that, I will wrap up the formal presentation part today. Again, thank you all for joining us. And pass it back to Jon to close us out.

(END)