**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Evaluation Planning for Remote Workforce Services and Online Learning**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Cynthia Forland, evaluation peer learning cohort lead, Employment and Training Administration, Safal Partners Team. Cynthia.

CYNTHIA FORLAND: Great. Thank you, Jon, and thank you so much to everyone who's joining us today. We've got a great turnout. I know people are still logging on. As Jon mentioned, I'm supporting Department of Labor, ETA in these technical assistance efforts. I'm joined as well by Wayne Gordon who many of you know, director of Division of Research and Evaluation, Office of Policy Development and Research with ETA.

WAYNE GORDON: Hello. Good day, everyone. Thanks for joining us.

MS. FORLAND: Wayne will be – yes. And I'll be turning things over to Wayne in just a moment, but, first, I want to walk through what we're going to be talking about today.

Today's webinar, as John mentioned, focuses on evaluation planning for remote workforce services and online learning. So why are we talking about that? Well, as the public workforce development system has transitioned into new and different modes and methods of service delivery with an increased emphasis on remote services and virtual learning, evaluation planning and thoughtful implementation can play a critical role.

So this webinar is going to highlight initial efforts to assess how states and local areas delivery workforce development services remotely and share ideas for state workforce agencies to consider as you design evaluations of your own remote services and technology-based strategies.

So we've done a couple introductions. You're going to hear a couple more in a couple minutes. Wayne's then going to set the context for evaluation planning and introduce a first poll to ask a little bit about what evaluation work you're doing around remote services. We're going to spend the bulk of our time learning from practitioners, researchers, and evaluators who have been looking at remote service delivery and how you can do some initial assessments of that as well as longer-term evaluation.

We're going to close out by talking a little bit about your needs. We're going to have a couple polling questions at the end asking you about what sorts of technical assistance subject areas you would like to have covered and what sort of modes you would like to be able to get those materials in.

So with that I'm going to turn things over to Wayne who's going to set that important context of why are we talking about evaluation planning for remote services. Wayne.

MR. GORDON: Thank you, Cynthia, and good day, everyone. I'll say good day to accommodate the multiple time zones we have for people that are joining us, and I appreciate that.

We're aware that WIOA emphasized the need to provide services through the use of technology and remote services, and we know states and local areas have been exploring remote virtual services provision, including training, particularly to address access for those in remote areas or those with other barriers to access. It's also a resource decision as well.

We recognize that, but, obviously, in 2020 has made the ability to provide remote virtual services and online learning even more important with states, local areas, and training providers temporarily unable to rely on delivering services and training in person.

States and local areas have quickly adapted to providing services remotely through the use of virtual delivery tools, applications, and websites perhaps more rapidly than originally planned, given what's occurred through 2020. Training providers also face the same challenge of providing education and training without their own brick and mortar facilities and are making this transition as well.

WIOA also includes critical evaluation requirements for the state, aimed at continuously improving services for their customers. And as states and local areas and training providers transition to greater virtual or remote training and service delivery, it becomes even more important to evaluate the effectiveness of those methods using the most rigorous analytical and statistical methods as reasonably feasible to ensure that the best possible services for workforce development customers are being delivered.

Thus, anticipating that states would be in need of an understanding of the effectiveness of these shifts and the decisions they've made to remote services – to our remote services posture, ETA is hosting this presentation for those contemplating evaluations of these activities within their states. And we've assembled some experts in the field with significant experience in evaluating public workforce programs to share their advice.

But before we move on to that, allow me to ask you a polling question, and you should see that here. And if you could respond to that polling question, we will be able to see where folks are coming from and why they joined us today and get an understanding of where they are in the process, if they're considering this at all, if they're partway through or beginning planning, or have even conducted some studies themselves already.

I'm seeing a good mix in the middle of the field. And of course still struggling with service delivery.

As I mentioned, everyone was moving toward that, but perhaps now – excuse me – perhaps now it's at a much more rapid pace than anyone had planned and certainly, if the initial claims load and unemployment insurance claims are first and foremost and we know many staff have been pulled into assist with that.

Looks like we have everyone voted. Any more change? This will help us and help our speakers to address some of your questions later and allow us to plan for future webinars. So thank you, folks. I'm going to turn it back to Cynthia to introduce our speakers.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you, Wayne, and thank you so much for participating in that poll. As Wayne said, this is going to help us target the information to exactly where you're at.

So we're going to be hearing from four distinguished speakers today. The first is going to be Deniece Thomas, and she comes to us from the state of Tennessee, deputy commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. She will speak from her role as a practitioner leader in delivering remote services, even before many of the AJCs had to shut their doors.

Next, we'll be hearing from Alisa Belzer. She's with Rutgers University, professor and program coordinator for the education master's program in adult and continuing education. She will speak from her role in serving state adult basic education programs to learn how they are adapting to providing virtual services.

Next, we will hear from Kathy Krepcio. She's with the Heldrich Center, executive director and senior researcher, and she will speak from her role in leading efforts to learn about how states are adapting to providing workforce development services virtually and looking to the future of conducting evaluations in this new virtual world.

And then we're going to close out with Burt Barnow who's with the George Washington University School of Public Policy and Public Administration. He's the Amsterdam Professor of Public Service and Economics, and he will be speaking from his perspective as a long-time evaluator of workforce development services.

So with that I want to turn things over to Deniece to talk to us about her experience in Tennessee delivering remote services and particularly what things have looked like over this last year. Deniece.

DENIECE THOMAS: Thank you, Cynthia, and hello to everyone. Happy to join today's webinar to really talk about Tennessee's in-flight evaluation. I stress in flight. I don't want to give the impression that we have it all figured out here, but we'd love to just share with you for a few minutes what really sort of guided our journey to get here.

So in Tennessee just a few things to sort of level set. We were really trying to identify the best way to serve Tennesseans. We noticed foot traffic had sort of stalled a bit at our American Job Centers, but we were seeing an uptick in individuals engaging our system virtually.

So through our Jobs For Tennessee portal, we started to see an increased amount of viewership. And so we decided to really embark on this endeavor to find out why people were trying to connect with us and what mattered to them the most.

And so in doing that, we found that we were missing opportunities to serve, and at the time of our evaluation, over 400,000 Tennesseans were engaging us. And we knew this because we really watched how they went about inquiring about services on our landing page. So we were able to really zoom in and look at how many folks were interested in finding a job versus training, and we tracked that for about 15 months.

And so about 400,000 people were interested in us, but we couldn't really find a way to better connect with them. So for us, our journey really just began in ways to expand our customer engagement, modernize our service delivery, and also shift our learning strategy. So our thought process was the more we knew about what people wanted, the more we could start to build together a strategy that would help enhance workforce – access to workforce training programs for Tennesseans.

So in 2014 we launched Zendesk, and the goal with Zendesk was really just to find out what people wanted and how we could respond to them in a self-service environment. So the goal was, if there were simple questions folks had, not to have to call us or physically walk into a center, could we provide information as simple as that to our public?

And so with within the Zendesk suite, we developed a help center. And in that help center, I will tell you largely the first couple years it was all UI. And 70 percent of the questions were, where is my money, as most claimants would ask.

And so it gave the ability to really ask that question, and then through knowledge-based articles, it would respond back to the claimant or to any participant the answer to their question. And so these knowledge-based articles were really designed to build up the intellectual capacity within the system from our staff.

And so that's really where all of this began. And so each time someone reached out to us, it created sort of a ticketing system, if you will, that would track the inquiry of the participant or the customer from inquiry to resolution. Next slide, please.

So with that self-service capability – and if you're able to see this, it's – I talked about the, where's my money, and this is sort of a visual of that and what the customer would see from their side. So if they ask the question about where is my money or how can I get enrolled in training, the articles will populate sort of in this box. And there would be a back and forth between our customers.

And why this was important is because we were really sort of on the outer edges, the outer bands of testing remote service. And so with this information, we started to learn that, wow. There are some things that we could do, but we're not quite there yet. So how do we get after this with, as most states could attest to – with limited resources both financially and also with staff capacity?

So for us, we were able to really leverage some additional funds that we received to double our American Job Center presence. We knew that a lot of the folks, particularly in rural communities, wanted to engage with us but they couldn't get to an American Job Center. It was simply not feasible for them either through transportation barriers or just simply because they were in outlying rural communities.

So we doubled our American Job Center presence. And just to kind of provide some parameters here, we had six mobile American Job Centers. We doubled – I'm sorry. We had three. We doubled to six throughout our state. There's two per region to be able to do that. And then we also launched just conceptually a Virtual American Job Center back in 2017.

It was designed to really just be a test product to say, now that we know what people are reaching out for through analyzing our web-based traffic, let's start to be able to provide those services from start to finish just with a small sample size. And we launched it in one of our urban core areas where we could get a really cross-section of needs from our customers.

The goal was obviously to provide these services, sort of front-end services, to our customers and also become more intuitive to anticipate the needs of our customers so that we could have those services staged. The goal was to not only have a self-service model just for our agency but to also include other partners so one could engage with our agency and then go the full gauntlet if they needed service from vocational rehabilitation or adult education, was to give them a full service experience.

Also, it allowed us to provide information on our programs and services across multiple departments. Again, the goal was always to do this so that it was more of a system response and not just a response from our agency.

And so through that, we developed sort of the next level or next stage through this of developing what we would call our modern Virtual American Job Center. Again, this Virtual Job Center, based on the needs of our customers, would have to really widen out access; right? It would have to be fully encompassing of everything that we provided under roof.

And to do that, because, let's be honest, some of our services can be very confusing for a general public who is just simply trying to figure out the next job, their next career path, their next move, would need a virtual agent, a person who could communicate to our customers on the front end. And so with Zendesk there is features such as chat that would allow us to really have some back-and-forth conversations, establish relationships and rapport, and then be able to refer Tennesseans on as their needs began to shift and change.

Also, the goal was to develop an interactive wizard so they could browse recommended programs, particularly if they were interested in postsecondary training. Also, complete forms online and uploading supporting documents and e-sign. And for those who are in the workforce space, certainly understanding a big barrier for us is being able to collect signatures.

This was never more apparent than during the pandemic, even though we had launched this Virtual AJC concept, something as simple as acquiring signatures became a very big deal. So it was one of the first moves that we made to be able to do that because, if we're going to adequately serve the public, we, again, need to be able to take it from start to finish without requiring the person to come in.

What we heard from our Tennessee public was we needed less trips to the American Job Center to get from enrollment – to get from exploration to enrollment. Excuse me. So we know we needed to mitigate and collapse those steps in between, and so the goal was to have them complete everything, be able to submit that to us without having to come into the building.

Also, those virtual counseling sessions, which are so important, because, oftentimes, as you know, our public may be interested in something but it may not be the best path. So the goal was to be able to provide sort of this virtual assistance and direction up front.

Ticket generation, and I want to explain that, flesh that out just a little bit. So as I mentioned, when there's an interaction with our agency, it creates sort of a ticket that our folks are responsible for resolving. The goal was to have a one touch on that ticket so it didn't have to hit multiple staff and to get resolution within a 24-hour period, depending on the need.

The hope was that we can move folks from curiosity to enrollment and also create a feedback loop. And I'll have to share the sophisticated feedback loop here in just a second. There it is.

For us, it was simply a very simple way for our customers to tell us if we were meeting their needs or not. So for each ticket resolution, there is a simple thumbs up or thumbs down. As you can imagine, this goes across the divisions within our agency here in Labor. We're not getting as many thumbs up in UI as you can imagine right now, just given the climate, but for a lot of our folks, the immediacy of being able to tell us how we're doing really matters.

I always cite an example of us really looking on screen. We have screens around our agency that lets us know how we're doing throughout the day. We're able to immediately identify an issue and find out what's underneath. So it's really worked well for us as we continue to evolve in our service delivery.

Again, the key with in flight was to determine what needs were, how we can best meet those needs, and how we can evolve with, obviously, the evolving needs of our public, again, put on full display here during the pandemic. So that is just a really quick overview of what we did here in Tennessee, and I'm sure we'll have time to really delve more in questions and really flesh it out a little bit. But that's a high-level view of what we're doing.

I can't stress enough of how important it is at some level to really look at how well you're serving the public and how we can meet those needs. It takes a lot of really focus on resources, and I'm happy to share that at a later time and really talk about how we were able to financially, fiscally provide some of the services that I spoke about during the presentation. So with that, I will yield back to our moderator.

MS. FORLAND: Thank you so much, Deniece. Really appreciate that, and I know we have questions coming in. We're not ignoring them. We are going to have Q and A after we hear from all four speakers since we have such a packed agenda. But we've got them. They're holding in the queue. So we're not going to miss them.

I'm thrilled to welcome Alisa Belzer to talk to us. She's been working on some initial – basically, initial surveys of how state adult basic education programs are adapting to providing virtual services. So, Alisa, take it away.

ALISA BELZER: Thank you so much. I just want to get back to the beginning of my slides. I'm very happy to be here today. I'm going to be talking about a study that was conducted very soon after adult education programs shut down due to COVID where we were trying to understand how they were responding.

And we did this for the field, but when I was invited to speak for this session, I talked to Cynthia about what are some things we found that might have implications for evaluation or for evaluating the most services. So that's sort of where I come at this from.

The study was conducted sort of under the umbrella of an organization called E-BAES, Evidence-Based Adult Education System, which is a loose collection of researchers, practitioners, state staff, and adult education who come together to try to develop a research – a national research agenda and group of researchers.

So this was actually our first outing as an organization to do a study, and it was a very quick – quickly done study. And E-BAES is under the auspices of the Open Door Collective, which is a program of Literacy Minnesota, to give you a little sense of context.

OK. So as part of this, we conducted 49 qualitative interviews. There was also a survey, but I'm really just talking from the qualitative interviews, and these were conducted late April through May. So this gives you a sense that we were between six and ten weeks out from where most places shut down.

We talked to participants in 18 different states, and it was a mix of practitioners. Practitioners included program administrators, instructional leaders, and supervisors and teachers. And we also talked to state staff. As you may or may not know, adult education money – federal money flows through a state agency. It's different agencies in different states, and then those state agencies give the money out to local programs.

Our goal was really simply to describe the shifts programs were making and to illustrate the challenges and successes they were facing as they went to what some people have taken to calling emergency remote learning.

The report, which I'm not going to detail today but the link for the report is in the resources at the end of these slides, had nine sections. The sections really came out of both the questions that we asked and also bubbled up from the data that we had. And the sections were describing the patterns and themes that we saw in each of these categories, along with distinctive differences and concluded with key takeaways, innovations, and recommendations for practice.

But what I'm going to focus on here is findings that really related to things to consider in terms of evaluating remote programming.

So the first thing I want to talk about is that we found that programs were responding and acting in a very dynamic way. Responses were really quickly evolving. And what that means in terms of evaluation is that, if you're looking at programs that are newly up and running as a result of the emergency situation we're in now as opposed to something that's been sort of a long time coming, a long time planned, and so forth, you're really looking at a moving target.

So here's some of the things that were in constant motion, described that way to us. First of all, programs had to figure out which tools to use, and some of them started using some digital tools and then switched for a variety of reasons. They were on an extremely steep learning curve in terms of knowledge and skills, and so what they knew to do and how to do it was constantly changing. They were constantly changing policies directives that had a direct impact on their service provisions.

The conditions for the learners for our clients were changing in terms of health status, employment, childcare, homeschooling issues, whether or not people had access to hardware and broadband, et cetera, and also a tremendous amount of uncertainty for the future.

So we were doing this in late spring. As programs were looking towards potentially a summer break – I realize that that doesn't really exist in the workforce sector, but the uncertainty certainly does in terms of whether or not they would be able to open, not open, open in some kind of hybrid form. So everything was sort of in a state of flux in so many different ways. So when it comes to evaluation, it's just really thinking about how do you accommodate for that flux.

The next thing is not only learners or clients, however you want to refer to them, but teachers, the providers had significant digital literacy gaps both in terms of access to broadband, access to hardware – my slides just disappeared – but also – thank you – but also in terms of skills. Even our providers, really they were working from home and didn't necessarily know what to do.

So what this means is that even the best laid plans and policies can really become hindered by just technical issues. And so that's something to take into account. So yeah. Programs were really improvising to accommodate for the differences in access and skills.

I saw a question that came up earlier about how do you meet the needs of ESL clients. So we have ESL and basic literacy and numeracy at all different levels, as well as all different access levels. So programs improvised and really did a combination, sort of digital and technological solutions and old-fashioned like U.S. mail and paper and lots and lots of phone calling. And, also, practitioners needed really significant professional development in order to be able to respond. So, again, the idea that the best laid plans can really be put asunder by capacity issues.

OK. Another relates to the idea that policy guidance that was needed under sort of rapidly changing circumstances really shined a light on where there were policy gaps, and there definitely were policy gaps. And what we saw is, when there was an absence of policy, one of two things happened.

Either, in the case of – for example, how do you track attendance hours or, more generally, how do you track contact hours when people are not actually physically there? And in that case many programs were sort of improvising about how to do that. And sometimes they chose to use a digital tool that would automatically track use, but other programs did not have that. So they were just improvising. But in some cases it would actually cause a halt.

So in adult basic education, by WIOA rules we have to pretest everyone entering into programs, and programs did not have the capacity to do remote testing. So what that meant is programs basically just stopped doing intake at that time. It was just completely halted.

So, obviously, this means new standards and expectations are needed and also the awareness that without – with the policy gaps, programs are going to do what they're going to do the best they can do under the circumstances but that that might mean that services are not really quite being delivered as intended.

The next area that we saw sort of some important issues emerging had to do with state-level leadership. We found that state leaders that were really truly engaged, offering a lot of resources, being extremely accessible for answering questions, and so forth had programs in their states who were able to respond more resiliently, more flexibly, and there really was a huge variation.

So thinking about evaluating programs could mean backwards mapping to what's going on at the leadership level.

And let's see. We also found that the ways in which programs responded in the sort of emergency situation really depended on what was in place beforehand, which I suppose is not that surprising. But programs that had built infrastructure around remote learning, that had done planning, that had done infrastructure around professional development and so forth were just much better able to respond. So this is a contextual factor that might really explain some of the differences across programs.

And the last thing is that programs – that there was an enormous need for new kinds of supports for both learners and staff. So in considering evaluation issues, it's really important to know that programs likely just can't function at their normal level because their resources as they make that – made that shift to remote learning were being sapped up in such different ways.

So some examples of this is that, not surprisingly, everyone was dealing with COVID stress in such a different way. The necessity of supporting digital learning, the need to provide additional support to clients, and the exponentially increased staff workload all had an impact on program and instructor ability to function.

So that's my presentation. I hope these are some helpful things to consider that can translate to your context as you think about evaluation.

MS. FORLAND: Thank you, Alisa, and we'll get to those questions that are coming in for you at the Q&A at the end.

We're going to turn now to Kathy Krepcio. Like I said, she's with the Heldrich Center, and she's going to be able to talk about some initial efforts that have been undertaken to look at workforce development services being offered virtually. Kathy, take it away.

KATHY KREPCIO: Great. Hello, and thanks, Cynthia. On behalf of the Heldrich Center, we certainly welcome this opportunity to share some of our work and insights and to talk a little bi about why we decided to go suddenly virtual and do some very rapid research so that we could provide some early guidance and some insight into the public workforce system.

Our project began in March 2020, literally a week or two after the pandemic started, at least in New Jersey, when we realized the public workforce staff were suddenly forced into this virtual operations many had not – could not have foreseen or did not plan for. We had at the center been operating for the past five years a program in New Jersey for older long-term unemployed jobseekers called the New Start Career Network, which has been operating virtually for almost five years.

So our team of folks who are working on this, Michele Martin, Liana Volpe, and Amanda Bombino, who are leading this initiative, were quite versed in providing virtual services. And I should say what we were doing under New Start is what we were calling high tech, high touch. We would be providing a lot of Zoom-based interactive sessions with our long-term jobseekers. We were also providing virtual group coaching via Zoom, and we were also providing one-on-one coaching with some – (inaudible) – career coaches which were a very hands-on kind of practice.

So we developed a good deal of expertise about how to provide virtual services in multiple ways and how to work as a remote team to do that because nobody was really in the office, even for the last five years.

So our Suddenly Virtual research is a series of four issue briefs, three toolkits, and 11 medium blogs supported by an online community of practice via Zoom that helped to explore how the public workforce system has been responding to COVID-19 and the need to now offer these virtual services through remote teams. And I won't go through some of the findings from that. I think Alisa's findings mirrored a lot of what we found, and the resources are found in the file share.

But one of the things we did really understand is a lot of folks – and this is a survey we did of about seven states, got 160 responses, is that there was this need to serve the WIOA traditional population, but they were being inundated with questions from all other kids of jobseekers. So we were trying to work with them, listen to them, talk to them about how to quickly expand the customer engagement, given the small capacity of the staff and the ratio of large numbers of unemployed workers that may be beyond their traditional WIOA population.

So why are we moving to something we call strategically virtual? Well, as Alisa and Deniece, things are changing so rapidly that we began to see sort of with the – (inaudible) – thing. Oh, we're going to go back to work. We're going to go back to our offices and then maybe we're going to go back to our offices and then maybe we're not going to go back to our offices. And so there became this growing realization that the one-stop system and the workforce invest – and workforce development boards need to be much more strategic now and learn how to be strategic.

And at least in some of the states that we talked to, their idea of virtual was just to put up a static PowerPoint presentation and then go through a series of slides, as opposed to being a little bit more interactive using Zoom. And, again, as Alisa and Deniece had mentioned, you had not just the jobseeker experience, but you had the professional workforce development staff scrambling to try to figure out how to work as a remote team, how to get signatures, what does interactive really mean, how to deal with their local levels in New Jersey. And in New York it's a very county-based system, and so how do you get the county to understand that you need to change your website right away.

So we decided sort of pivot ourselves to developing a strategically virtual series to build off of the lessons learned from the Suddenly Virtual and to chronical how we can better provide proactive guidance to the public workforce system, being more strategically virtual, particularly how that could be operationalized at the local level.

So right now, my team is working on the Strategically Virtual series which envisions how the public workforce system could better engage community resources and partners to holistically address jobseeker needs. And what I mean by that is can they use the library system or some community-based organizations they could use, which many of them had been working with all along. But how can they then create a bigger community within the community, given their limited capacity?

And also, how to do this, need to address jobseeker's needs at large, how to address the physical and psychological safety, in addition to more traditional job search supports and the skill development that people said they need.

So our Strategically Virtual series will develop a framework for jobseeker services and produce some issue briefs, some more blogs, practical guides, and much more. Our products will be targeted toward the executive directors and chairs of the nation's workforce development boards, and so you can look forward to seeing some of that.

So what does that mean for evaluation, since this is about evaluation? So the Heldrich Center has been conducting hundreds of program evaluations in the field on several areas when the pandemic hit, and certainly, we've had to pivot our own data collection and methodologies without compromising our bigger.

So I'm just going to offer a couple of insights that we've been finding and we're all dealing with this and grappling with and I know there's some folks on the webinar from the New Jersey Department of Labor who we've been working with. And we're all learning as we go along.

So number one, clearly, the traditional qualitative methods are difficult or challenging to conduct. We had all these plans to conduct all these focus groups, and now, we're doing things by phone or e-mail or video conferencing. So what that means, it amplifies the importance of reliable contact information of participants and program operators and partners. If we can't reach them via e-mail, if we can't get reliable cell phone numbers, then we can't find out what's going on with them as participants but also as program operators and partners.

Evaluators and program operators must take into account the lack of broadband and digital/video skills. I mean, clearly, this has come out so far. We see that jobseekers and, in instances, some program staff don't have computer or good broadband equipment, and mobile versus e-mail contacts, given the populations being served, since we know lots of people have cell phones but that they may not have a computer or that computer is being shared with another person in the home who's working or where their kids are being now at school remotely. So all that has to be taken into consideration, trying to reach out to people to see how their services are being rendered.

I think it's also important to have strong program model documentation. I mean, we have been struggling with, okay. This program started pre-pandemic and here was the model and now this program is post – is in the pandemic. What's the program model? What's the logic model now? Things have definitely changed, and also, program administrative data.

I mean, we have seen administrative data problems pre-pandemic, but it's even more critical to be able to capture things and capture them virtually and figuring out how to do that beyond how many users are using some site or how long they're being engaged on that site because that might not – they may not need – they may be effective if they're only engaging the site for a few sessions as opposed to maybe 100 sessions isn't effective.

It's also critical on the quantitative data that these be set up and embedded up front to reflect virtual services during program startup. Now, clearly, when we were evaluating things pre-pandemic, people hadn't set those things up, but I know now that a lot of program operators are trying to figure out, with the help of a lot of consultants and researchers, now what do I capture and how do I capture it?

And getting the right data elements, as I said, including those that reflect virtual activities, will be critical to evaluation efforts going forward.

And, finally, as you go forward in terms of evaluation, the research questions really need to reflect a new virtual environment because it's one thing to say we want to know how many people are coming into XYZ program. Now, it's like you need to be able to somehow count their participation in a virtual environment and being able to set your virtual environments up to be able to do that. So thank you.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you so much, Kathy.

And we're now going to turn to our last speaker, Burt Barnow. And I just want to point out the slide is a little long here, but Amsterdam Professor of Public Service and Economics. So, Burt, please take it away.

BURT BARNOW: Thank you. Thanks very much. I want to first thank the Department of Labor and Employment and Training Administration for inviting me to this exciting event and to say that, actually, although professors often study the theory of what's going on, we actually at the university got thrown into doing online teaching without even planning to in the middle of this past semester. And now, I think we finally learned it and everything seems to be going smoothly. So I definitely am sympathetic to what you're going through out there in the field. We had to change in the middle of last semester.

These are the topics I'm going to talk about, developing a logic model, what kinds of evaluations you can do, selecting the outcome, what approaches you can use, and then some concluding thoughts.

OK. So the first thing is a logic model. I came to logic models late in life because as an economist we didn't really learn them, but they can be very helpful. This is just a simple generic logic model, but logic models are really a good way to think about what's going on in your program, so moving from what are the inputs and processes to what is it your outputs are and then what is the value? What are your outcomes that you want to look at? So it can be a very variable exercise.

Two good sources of information on logic models – I'm sure you all have your own favorites, but the Kellogg Foundation has a book. It's free online. It's a little old, but I think it's still very useful. And then the University of Wisconsin Extension also has a very interesting website with lots of different logic models. So this is a good way to get started to help you think through what are we trying to come up with, and then what are the other factors that can influence the variables – the outcome?

So next, I want to talk about what questions do evaluations answer? And, basically, the way I put it to my class is that evaluations actually answer the same questions you might ask yourself after you've been to a wild party, what you might ask yourself the next day.

So the first question is, what happened? And that's what we study in process studies or implementation studies. Then second, what difference did it make? So what's different now? What happened to our outcomes compared to what would have happened if we hadn't done the intervention? Those are impact evaluations. And the third question you might ask yourself is, was it worth it? And that's what we do in cost-benefit analysis.

And, obviously, I only have seven minutes. So I'm not going to talk about all three of these. I'm going to focus on impact evaluations, but it's valuable to do all three of these to really put things in context. So I would want to recommend that you do that. OK.

So what are you going to look at? What are your outcomes? For an employment and training program, we have two basic types of things you can look at. First, you can look at the knowledge, skills, and abilities that you teach people to do in your services. So, for example, you might look at do people have better resumes? Do people do better job searches than they did before? If you're doing training, do they have the skills that you were training prior to that? So that's one kind of outcome you can look at.

The other is, since we're in this to try and help people in the labor market, you can just skip to what are the ultimate labor market outcomes? Do people get a job or not? Do they get a job faster than people would have with something else?

And so those are both useful, and you should think this through carefully. It's – the first one, the knowledge, skills, and abilities evaluation, if those are the outcomes you look at, the problem is it's hard to figure out how to measure them often. So that may be problematic.

Secondly, if you look at the labor market outcomes and you find they're missing, you won't know whether they didn't learn the skills or whether the skills just weren't valued at this time. So that's really important.

Another factor that I've mentioned here at the bottom of the slide is that both types of outcomes can fade over time. We have a lot of experience from evaluating employment and training programs that shows that even really good training programs have impacts that fade as time goes on and people end up moving the gains as people who didn't get the training catch up to them.

OK. So how do you actually do the evaluation? Well, there are two broad approaches. One is to conduct what's called a randomized controlled trial, and the other is to use what are called quasi-experimental or non-experimental methods. And the randomized controlled trial is simply where people randomly get assigned to either get the treatment or get nothing or get some other treatment. And when you can do this, randomized controlled trials are really useful because they control for all the other factors that might affect the outcome.

Of course, in real life we often can't do randomized controlled trials. Even though they're called the gold standard and in these last Department of Labor evaluation of WIA was called the gold standard evaluation, but sometimes things get in the way. Sometimes it's unethical to withhold services from people.

RCTs are expensive, and it may cost a lot more than just doing a non-experimental study. And, finally, not all questions can be answered by RCT. So those are some of the problems that may hold you back, but I would encourage you to think about doing RCTs. And especially if you're transitioning back from online services to in-person services, you might think about introducing it gradually and then randomly assigning some people to get the online services and some to get the in-person services.

If you're doing non-experimental methods, quasi-experimental design, often they depend on very strong assumptions. Sometimes they cannot be verified. So it's often useful to use multiple methods or vary the key assumptions and see if that makes a difference.

So let me give you some conclusions. First, don't assume that the remote learning is going to be worse than in-person learning. We – actually, at the university we've been thinking some things are going better online, surprisingly to us, than when we did them in person. So give yourself an even playing field and test both of them.

Begin planning now. You often have to start gathering data, getting baseline data before you actually do the evaluation. So it's very important to think how you're going to do it, especially if you want to try to do a randomized controlled trial as you reintroduce your in-person services. This is the time to start thinking about it.

Give careful consideration to what your outcomes of interest are, how you're going to measure them, who you're going to compare, and then where you'll obtain the data. These are not easy questions, and it's often very complicated.

And, finally, know your strengths and limitations. You may want to get somebody else involved to help you do the evaluation. I know I work with the District of Columbia Department of Employment Services. I'm trying to help them do an evaluation of some of their workshops and some of their job search programs. And you can do the same thing getting people from your local university.

Also, I wanted to mention there are some good books that are free online. The World Bank actually has published two good evaluation books on doing non-experimental evaluations, and if you get in touch with me later, I can get you copies or tell you how to get them.

So I think evaluation is really important. Otherwise, you won't know if what you did worked. So I encourage you to think about it and think about it now. What's the best outcome to measure? What's the best way to try and assess the impact? Thanks very much. I'll be glad to answer any questions later.

MS. FORLAND: Thank you so much. So we are going to turn to Q&A. One of the first questions we had and actually came up twice for Deniece and I think it's an important one I want to make sure we talk about. "What about jobseekers that do not have access to technology, lack of internet access, lack of computer equipment skills, as well as ESL issues?" Deniece?

MS. THOMAS: Thank you, Cynthia. Really appreciate the question. We get this one a lot. So a couple things.

One, our Virtual AJC is just one avenue, not the only avenue that we have. I will tell you with the Zendesk product, what it's allowed us to do is outside of chat we also use a feature called Zendesk Talk. So if someone calls us the traditional way to engage us, it pulls in all of that customer interaction into one fluid sort of ticket or engagement that we can refer back to. So even if it's chat, if it's a phone call, if it's an e-mail, all of that is collapsed so we can still see the customer's journey. So that's very important.

So for those who may not have access or – to the internet or even digital literacy, we can still serve them by phone. For those folks who are not – English is not their first language, we still use, like most systems, the Google Translate – (inaudible) – those types of things. Our system also can be converted into multiple languages as well so that way we are providing that accessibility for others also. So we're using that currently.

That continues to be an ongoing issue that we have to very carefully navigate, but so far we've been able to serve. Nashville is absolutely a melting pot. We see it more here in our urban core, and we've been able to navigate that pretty well so far.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you. And then a question that popped up during Alisa's presentation, and that was about digital literacy and how exactly to navigate – creating and navigating digital literacy component within WIOA in which digital training and support are made available. How would you approach that?

And there's a link we're going to put up that Alisa's pointed to in the chat, but, Alisa, please talk a little bit about that.

MS. BELZER: Sure. First of all, I would – I saw there was another question about assessing digital literacy. So the link I've provided is for digital assessment. It's a very widely used tool nationally in adult education that people might find useful, and it's out of Literacy Minnesota.

As far as providing digital literacy programs, I would say the best thing you can do is to partner with adult education in your state because adult education programs are working on this a lot already.

There are also a number of toolkits and guides and national trainings going on in adult education that are available. I can possibly put up a few links after I'm done talking, but there's a lot out there through adult education. And WIOA really asks that we work together across titles, and Title II adult education providers are really on top of this because they see this as so vital to preparing our learners for the workforce.

So it's happening, and I think if there's ways to build those bridges, it would really serve everybody extremely well. I know that's kind of a general answer, but I think that's the best I can provide under the circumstances. I'll look for some other sources while someone else does the talking.

MS. FORLAND: That's great. Thank you. I have a couple questions that came in for Kathy, and I'd like to pose those as a pair. Kathy, if you can talk a little bit about how to address virtual fatigue by customers and staff as well as how likely is it that some of these suddenly virtual strategies are retained by career centers when there is no longer a pandemic.

MS. KREPCIO: I thought for a moment you were talking about me when you were talking about virtual fatigue because I know this is starting to set in with a lot of people.

It's funny because Burt mentioned they're finding higher participation with people virtually, and I think anecdotally we've been hearing from the field that more people are participating online than if they'd done it in person. So I think maybe there were some place – (inaudible) – the key or it showed the difficulty that people were having juggling childcare or transportation or scheduling.

So I think my answer to that is I don't know, but I think it's a great area for us to research in our Strategically Virtual because I think it is going to become a problem, and I think it also is thinking about whether you can do things in short bursts. For example, I was observing an online orientation on a particular county in New Jersey, and it was two hours long. And so we were making some suggestions to this particular county to chunk it up into smaller bits so that people don't sit there for two hours and do it. So there's some techniques that can be taken that will make things less of a fatigue for people.

The other question is is I think this cat's out of the bag. I think that the – there's no going back in terms of providing virtual services, especially if unemployment stays as high as it is with the number of people. I don't have a lot of faith that the capacity of the job centers and the workforce development boards will be increased exponentially any time soon.

So I think that states and local areas are going to find this to be a way to engage jobseekers more quickly. And I say this because we know from our research that early engagement of jobseekers is so critical that they don't become part of the long-term unemployed. And I think for economic development purposes, for community health, for all kinds of things to be able to engage people virtually, having a Zoom meeting with 50 people is going to be much more effective than trying to get those 50 people into the one-stop.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you, Kathy. And I know we didn't get to all the questions. At the end of the presentation, there are contact information for our speakers so you can e-mail them. Thank you so much for your questions.

We want to put up two polls because we want to know more about what you need. So let's get the next one up there, and this focuses on what sorts of things do you want to learn about in technical assistance around evaluation.

Great. I already see votes coming in. Thank you. Because I know we're going to try to close as quickly – as close to on time as possible, but please let us know – I like that. All of the above – what types of information do you really want to learn about in terms of technical assistance.

So we have a nice mix, but we definitely have a lot of folks saying, I want to know about all of it, implementation studies, outcome studies, impact studies, cost studies. So in the interest of time – I think we've gotten most folks logged in. The numbers for all of the above keep growing.

In the interest of time, let's move on to the next poll. It's related to this one. Thank you for answering. And this is asking what mode you prefer. So what sorts of things are helpful to you? Referrals to existing toolkits and literature on evaluation, interactive, small group webinars with peers, online learning modules, individual coaching or mentoring support, all the above? And maybe you're an expert and you don't need anything. You figured it all out.

We have a lot of all of the above. We also have quite a bit here for online learning modules and referring to existing tools. So I will make a really quick plug. The way you might have heard about this event is through the evaluation and research hub on WorkforceGPS. So keep an eye out for that where a lot of great resources are on demand for you.

As I mentioned, there are resource links in here relating to everything you've heard today as well as a couple of additional ones we've added in the chat.

We have contact information for our generous presenters. We so appreciate them being on today and have provided a really great mix of information from the practitioner perspective starting with Deniece to some initial quick turnaround studies from Alisa and Kathy and then that longer-term evaluation perspective from Burt.

We also have contact information for ETA folks.

And with that, I'm going to say thank you. We had a great turnout. Thank you for participating, and I'll turn things over to Jon for some logistical closeout. And please respond to the feedback survey he's putting up on the screen.

(END)