**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Using Research and Evaluation to Improve Workforce and Education Programs**

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GRACE MCCALL: And welcome to "Using Research and Evaluation to Improve Workforce and Education Programs." So without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to our moderator for today, Ingrid Schonfield. Take it away, Ingrid.

INGRID SCHONFIELD: Hi, Grace. Thank you so much for your help. And good morning and good afternoon, everyone. My name is Ingrid Schonfield and I'm so thrilled to be with you all today. I'm one of your webinar moderators. And I'm so excited to be joined by ETA's Division of Research and Evaluation lead, Mr. Neil Ridley, who will set the stage for us in just a moment's time.

But first we want to hear from you. So your challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to help us get a sense of what brings you here to this virtual room today. So please reflect and enter your brief responses to the question, why did you decide to attend this webinar, in the chat. Brief is important. You don't have to stick to five words. For example, to integrate evaluation results into policy.

I see lots of folks typing and some really great answers. Thank you so much, Christopher, says he wants to conduct net impact studies. By the way, if there's no audio, Grace, can you remind people in chat to use their computer speakers. Wow, looking for evidence-based programs. Fabulous. To better connect education and workforce development programs. To improve mission and outcomes. Yeah, I love it. Right on, Erin. Data is power. Improving programs. Figuring out how to better incorporate research and evaluation. Wonderful. I'm so glad to see your answers. It looks like you are all here in very much the right place today.

We have a really packed agenda for you today and some amazing speakers. So I want to encourage you to please continue to enter your questions and comments in the chat as the webinar progresses. We'll pause to address questions after the three presenters conclude. But before we get into the meat of the matter, I want to just share -- frame a little bit about what we're doing today. Here are the objectives for today. And by the way, this webinar is the fourth in a series on research and evaluation. So we're really trying to bring home, okay, after you've done some great rigorous research and evaluation, then what? So how do you use those results to inform your workforce program.

So we're going to learn about Washington State's I-BEST evidence-based model, which really was the basis for the Accelerating Opportunity initiative that took place several years ago. We'll learn about the findings and the features of that AO model from a really great resource. Learn about how those evaluations informed service delivery and policy changes. And really bring it home to the state level, how to again use those findings to inform collaborations, and policy with all of your stakeholders. So I think based on those responses to our quick question, looks like you all are in the right place.

I have the great pleasure to introduce you to our very esteemed and illustrious panel of workforce development and education presenters. And these are luminaries in our field. And you probably know many of them already. So Eleni Papadakis is joining us. She'll kick us off. She's the executive director of Washington State's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, which is really powerful and long-lasting board. She'll tell you more about it in a moment.

She'll be followed by Lauren Eyster, who was in charge of the evaluation for the Accelerating Opportunity initiative. So she has really perspective on nationally what happened as well as state. And then we'll conclude with Harmony Little, who currently is director of career pathways in Kentucky at the Community and Technical College System, and is a former coordinator of Kentucky's Accelerating Opportunity initiative, now known as GED Plus. So really fantastic presenters, deep experience from a variety of levels, and I'm quite sure you'll enjoy it.

To get us moving along, I want to have Mr. Neil Ridley set the context for us, set the stage. Neil, would you take it away?

NEIL RIDLEY: Thanks, Ingrid. And good afternoon, everyone. Good morning for those on the west coast. So today we're learning about results from I-BEST, a program in Washington State, and Accelerating Opportunity multistate initiative. Both are designed for adults that are seeking to improve their basic skills and find employment. And they feature similar strategies. Both feature integrated instruction, that is instruction in basic skills, combined with or paired with instruction in occupational skills, usually to enter or prepare for a certain field.

I-BEST was started in Washington State, and it's been the subject of an impact study as well as various implementation studies over the years. The model has been very influential, both at the program level through scaling and replication, and also at the policy level. It was considered and it was influential at the time of it, that WIOA was being considered and enacted at the federal level.

Accelerating Opportunity was patterned after I-BEST, as Ingrid mentioned. And it's also been the subject of impact and implementation studies you're going to hear about today. Along with integrated instruction, the AO initiative emphasized collaboration between workforce and adult education partners. You may have noticed that the Department of Labor recently issued an implementation study about WIOA. And one of the findings was that the emphasis on career pathways in WIOA spurred or increased collaboration between core partners, that is Title I programs and Title II in particular. The findings from Accelerating Opportunity, especially the implementation study, offer more detail, further insight into how these partnerships work, how they develop, and how they can be sustained.

Both of these examples make important contributions to the emerging evidence space on career pathways and integrated instruction. And while we're still in the early stages, we're still in the early stages of building evidence on these strategies, we're fortunate to know a lot more today than we did 10 or 15 years ago.

So now we're going to start with a poll to get -- to have you participate here. So perhaps you could run that, open the poll for everyone. And the question is, given your role within your state or your local area, how would you use research and evaluation? So if you could fill that out, you can check any one of them, or all of them, or some of them, any that apply. And then we're going to try to quickly see what people think here. It looks like it's a pretty even rate here. And it looks like trying to improve program services may be edging out creating the evidence-based. So let's give it a couple more seconds. It looks like -- but there's interest across all of these areas, increasing collaboration and using it for replication and scaling. So great. If you could close that. I think we got the clear winner there. So thank you.

And now I'm going to -- we're going to turn it over to our first speaker who is Eleni Papadakis. And she is with the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. And that is the entity that serves as the state workforce board for Washington. So Eleni, if you could take it from here.

ELENI PAPADAKIS: Thanks so much, Neil. And I really appreciate being invited to be part of this panel. One, because I-BEST is one of my favorite programs ever; but two, because this topic is such an important topic when we are talking about improving service delivery for our people, and it is often undervalued.

And I am very fortunate to be the director of Washington's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. It was established 30 years ago with a vision to be an objective third party evaluator of public investments, both federal and state public investments in workforce development. And we are also established in state statute. We are the only agency in state statute required to lobby our state legislature on behalf of the entire system. And we're supposed to use our evidence to do that advocacy for system improvements.

So a few things I want to highlight in this presentation, and I think you'll see it in the coming presentations, is that when we developed I-BEST, it emerged from the research. Research can't be a one and done thing. It's not an evaluation of a small pilot. It's got to be ongoing. And especially when you're dealing with people, when you're dealing with economic factors, it's such a multi-factorial landscape that you're dealing with at any given time, that you have to be able to bring in different sources of data, be able triangulate. But also to be consistent on the measures that you are looking at across whatever programs are being considered as part of the system.

So let me just give you a little overview of the types of ongoing evaluations and research that the board does. You can see annual outcome evaluations and a skills gap analysis. And this is looking at who we're producing for workers, and what employers are saying they need at the time, and what they're projecting to need. This next one, the quadrennial net impact and cost benefit analysis. We're going to talk quite a bit about that, and then some other survey based work. And then the last one, analysis of youth employment. But we also do periodic analysis of different marginalized populations as well.

Common measures, now with WIOA we have common measures pretty much across at least the WIOA partner organizations. We've been doing this -- I think we're in our 20th year of our five common measures. I think the fourth bullet down where our measures were always looking through a dual customer lens. But it's this last one, the return on investment, that really made the difference in moving the needle on what became I-BEST. So I'm going to spend a little time on that.

And this is about measuring the economic impact of our program delivery. And just to be clear, we're not talking about whether or not people were attaining skills in adult basic ed or English language learning. We have loads of evidence that said, yes, they were meeting their learning objectives. But when we looked at the economic impacts for those individuals, that's where it really made a difference. And for folks who don't know what a net impact analysis is, it's basically a way to say what would happen if we didn't have these programs. So it's not comparing one program to another, or even comparing what happens to a person because they went through the program, but really what would it mean if we didn't have the program. So the net impact analysis tries to estimate the direct causal effect of program participation.

We use what's called a quasi-experimental design. For data nerds, a difference in difference propensity score matching system. We match on about I think it's 45 different factors to get return on investment outcomes 5 and 10 years post-exit. We also do a one year post-exit. And we look at the return for every dollar of participant investment, for every dollar of taxpayer investment, and then we do a total economic benefit to the state, what we call the social net impact.

And so the origination of I-BEST, it started after about eight years of net impact studies that showed no real economic return to adult ed students or ELL students. And in fact that the average earnings were lower than those who had similar education ELL levels who didn't participate. And then when we dug a little deeper, we saw that ABE students who also took occupational skills training, either subsequently or at the same time, did much better than their matched counterparts over time. But very few ABE students enrolled in other programs after they completed the ABE program.

So I have to call out the role of our State Board for Community and Technical College that took this on in a big way and convened problem solvers from across the system -- faculty; administrators. They brought students in. They really tried to understand what keeps people from continuing on in occupational education. And time and money were of course the big issues. There were also issues around support services.

They developed all different types of models to test out and they tested them in small ways. In the end what emerged is close to what you see today, contextualized industry, contextualized co-teaching model. Some pilots were funded and evaluated, and we worked really hard on trying to figure out the business model. Because this co-teaching model was going to be significantly more expensive than any other teaching model that was already in process.

And you folks have heard, I'm sure, the results over the years. But I want to point you to the third bullet about increased earnings by over 40 percent in a net impact analysis. Absolutely amazing. And what that did was convince a lot of stakeholders to link arms, and go to the governor, and go to the legislature, and say, yes, this is expensive, it's more expensive, but look what we get in return. And for the populations of people who are the least likely to be successful in the economy.

And so I just want to end real quickly -- well let me get to that last bullet -- last two bullets. We now have I-BEST programs in each of Washington's 34 community and technical colleges, at least one, in some case more. And in addition there are now high school I-BEST programs, there's an I-BEST at work program, an I-BEST academic transfer program, and there's now a high school plus program to accelerate GED attainment and move people quickly into occupational pathways.

So I want to end on this year's net impact results. And I-BEST just keeps proving to pay off. And the numbers are still small. Most people still choose adult education only. And you can see at the top line, 54,000 participants annually in ABE only, 4,900. So it's only 0.09 percent of the total. But look to the bottom, the social ROI, the total economic return, 450 million (dollars) for adult ed only. Still good. I mean that's a really good return for the state; but 193 million (dollars) for I-BEST.

Look at the dollar return, $2 returned for ABE, $4 returned, almost $5 for I-BEST. So we still continue to get legislative support, business and labor together. We'll still link arms to defend this program, to fight for expansion of this program. And really without the kind of ongoing research and evaluation that we do in performance tracking, we would have never gotten here.

So with that, I'm going to turn it back to Neil.

MR. RIDLEY: Thanks, Eleni. And now we're going to hear from Lauren Eyster, the senior fellow with the Urban Institute. Lauren has been involved with a number of career pathway studies. And she's been involved with evaluations of the TAACCCT programs and TAACCCT grants as well. Lauren?

LAUREN EYSTER: Great. Thank you, Neil. And thank you all so much for being here today. This is definitely one of my favorite topics. And it's such an honor to be here with both Harmony and Eleni. Thank you, Eleni, for giving such a great presentation on I-BEST. It's such a great jumping off point for us to talk about Accelerating Opportunity.

So Accelerating Opportunity was aimed to help adults with low basic skills earn valued occupational credentials, obtain well-paying jobs, and sustain rewarding careers. And it was really designed to replicate and scale key elements of the I-BEST model. It had shown early promise from its early years.

And so there was a lot of desire to be able to replicate I-BEST and tailor it to different states' needs. So key components of the I-BEST model that were replicated of course were the short term certificate programs of one year or less that were built in as a part of a career pathway. And then as well as Neil discussed, integrated instruction, where adult education and technical instructor are working together to teach courses.

Accelerating Opportunity was launched in five states starting in 2011, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and North Carolina. And we have Harmony here from Kentucky to talk about their experience in more detail. The Accelerating Opportunity initiative was led by Jobs for the Future and funded by multiple foundations. And by the end it had expanded to seven states and 85 colleges. So that was in 2018. And this went beyond the evaluation of these initial states, which in the end included four states, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana. Or in the third party evaluation that was led by the Urban Institute and our partners at the Aspen Institute and George Washington University.

So the AO model has some pretty clear design elements to it. Each college had to develop two or more integrated career pathways. They had to include strategies to accelerate learning and credential attainment. So thinking about how to use asynchronous instruction, or online learning, prior learning assessment, other ways to accelerate learning. And I apologize. That's the thunder. We have a storm coming through.

Also included were academic and social student supports like tutoring, childcare, and transportation, really to address the needs of adult learnings to help, so help them persist and succeed both in their classes as well as in the workforce. This may include a career navigator, which we saw a lot of in the AO initiative. So dual enrollment strategies, so having paired courses, I-BEST or I-BEST-like courses, where the technical and adult education instructor overlapped. There were also marketable, stackable credit bearing certificates and degrees that were part of AO. This was also modeled on I-BEST, that the coursework had to be for credit and the certificates as well.

Partnerships were a key component of the AO initiative. Eleni just talked about that, especially with their employers, has been very strong and helped to sustain the I-BEST initiative. So that was why that was a key component here. As well as with the public workforce system who could help individuals find these programs, maybe get some career counseling or ITA support. So those were two very specific partnerships that were encouraged. And finally really the pathways needed to show evidence of strong local demand. And some of the states used the WIOA high demand, high growth occupations as their base for that. And then did some local analysis as needed.

The Accelerating Opportunity evaluation contained an implementation study, a quasi-experimental impact study very similar to what Eleni was describing for the net impact analysis that they've conducted, as well as a cost benefit analysis that we did as well to capture those economic benefits to students and the state.

So there was a lot of rich qualitative findings from the AO implementation study. And so Eleni and Harmony especially will talk about a lot of the changes made within their systems, partnerships, policies that they implemented maybe around co-enrollment. So there was a lot of system change. But I wanted to focus a little bit on the partnership here so you could have some sense of how the AO colleges and state system connected to workforce development in their state.

So we saw many state college offices working with their workforce development agencies especially to obtain those UI wage records to really measure those workforce outcomes. Now I mention Kentucky here because they have a data warehouse that contains all these data. That wasn't exactly necessary for that particular state, but that was pretty common. And we saw that a lot in TAACCCT. Some system offices also built deeper connections to their workforce or labor agencies. For example, Kansas created a liaison position between the system office and workforce development office to leverage the resources offered by the public workforce system. And so that was within the state's department of commerce.

At the local level we saw some colleges work with their local workforce boards and American Job Centers to obtain referrals, access career counseling and ITAs. But this wasn't always done consistently. And there may have not been a formal partnering role for the one stop. Colleges often lacked strong employer connections. They typically used their advisory boards to get feedback on curriculum.

But they didn't typically or more consistently work to develop those deeper connections such as developing those work based learning opportunities, or maybe just did not work with their local workforce board to improve connections to the employers. And Harmony is -- there are of course exceptions. You heard from Eleni, but -- although Harmony will talk about those strong employer connections that have really helped support the success of AO in their state.

So just to provide some overall findings from the impact and cost benefit analysis. There were largely consistent results of the early I-BEST research. And that means that we saw some similar gains in credential attainment, but no impact on persistence and limited labor market impact. And now based on Eleni's updated analysis, we've seen that grow. And I think that's mainly as a result of course of getting more practice really of the initiative and the programs getting to a steady state, doing continuous improvement, and using their data to upgrade what they're doing, improve what they're doing. But that was the larger comparison that we saw.

Overall AO helped participants with building -- with low academic skills earn more credentials from community colleges. And they often increased their educational attainment. There were some promising labor market impacts for Kansas' career and technical education students, as well as Kentucky's adult basic education students. And we did see some positive net student benefits for three states. And then we did see that AO was only cost beneficial in Kansas, those larger economic findings. But as Eleni has shown, those returns can really increase over time.

I'm going to stop here and turn it over to Harmony, as I am -- or actually back to Neil, as I am out of time. Thank you.

MR. RIDLEY: Thanks, Lauren. And now we're going to hear from our third presenter, Harmony Little. She's the director of career pathways at the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. Harmony, you're up.

HARMONY LITTLE: Great. Thank you so much, Neil. And thank you everybody else. Please to be here with you and sharing our experience with AOKY, as we ended up calling Accelerating Opportunity Kentucky.

As you've heard before, AOKY or AO was designed to replicate Washington's I-BEST model. And we wrote a proposal to do just that. But paying for tuition hinged upon the ability to benefit provisions which changed just around the implementation time in 2011. So I just want to say up front that we've had to pivot and expanded the target population during implementation.

So we were looking at those who qualified for adult education, but they might have already earned their GED, but were deficient in terms of their basic skills. And most of the evaluation period or the three-year grant that the evaluation was based on, was for a different cohort than what is originally intended. So our goal then ended up being for all students who were eligible for that, but we wanted to prioritize the GED population. But GED students were quite small during this time.

So from our data story, the third party evaluation was wonderful. And when it finally came out, it confirmed a lot of things that we were experiencing. And we're really thrilled to see that it reinforced what we were experiencing along the way, and also gave sort of that additional foundation for our own internal data.

But we knew early on that we could not wait for the third party evaluation. We were looking at this was a three year grant project. And we had decisions to make to institutionalize it and keep it going, and couldn't wait for the evaluation that was set to come well after the project had ended to make decisions. So parallel to what was going on with the third party evaluation, we identified our own data and tracked it to make decisions.

So one of the things I want to highlight in my time with you this afternoon is how the data that we were tracking helped us understand our students. We were able to make evidence-based adjustments to the model that we've been asked to replicate, how we used that to institutionalize and had culture shifts in terms of the program acceptance, and finally how we moved beyond the grant and what has now turned into our GED plus program.

So first of all, we developed a robust series of dashboard, both based on data that we knew the third party evaluators were looking at, Lauren and her team, but also additional information that we thought would be beneficial to track. And then we did comprehensive professional development to help those in the field who were working with the students day to day and running the programs, understand how they could use these real time dashboard to see what was going on in their programs. And we frequently brought everybody together to look at that and see what is the data telling us, what adjustments can we make, etc.

As I mentioned in my previous slide, we had to pivot, and the majority of our students enrolled ended up being what we considered remedial students. So they actually had a GED or high school diploma, but were not ready for college level courses, and tested in either into our math, reading, and/or writing at that time developmental education courses.

So we were able to demonstrate significant success for those students with our own data. We also created a comparison cohort. So the comparison cohort was students who did not take the AOKY track, but instead they enrolled in those remedial courses. And the outcomes we saw on those were vastly different in terms of success, both while they were with our program, but after the program as well.

Something that was really interesting that we did not really anticipate early on was that students stayed with us beyond the initial Accelerating Opportunity grant credential. So most of our programs were designed around short term credentials, either one semester or two semester programs. And we expected to see a lot of them leave and enter the workforce. But instead we had to wait longer than expected to get some of those other outcomes such as the UI data we were looking for to see what happened with students when they left us, because they persisted in the program. It was a wonderful surprise, but it was also kind of funny to say, well the students are still here, so we can't look at where they got placed or what their earnings are, etc.

But once we were finally able to track that, and that was huge for us, we really were able to see that we saw a lot of our students who came to us having those retail trade, accommodation, food services jobs, and shift their employment into healthcare and manufacturing. So they told us early on that students were entering into fields that were relevant to the studies that they were taking through AOKY.

The I-BEST model and lots of data around I-BEST said that the 12 credit hours was a tipping point for students succeeding. Our internal data showed that it was less for our students. So one of the adjustments we made was in allowing students to enroll in credentials that were less than 12 credit hours. The data showed us they were successful. We didn't see a reason not to.

Then we evaluated different team teaching approaches. If you are familiar with I-BEST, there are really six different approaches. Some are more intensive with the two instructors in the classroom together, while others it's more of a cooperative approach where one does their thing in the classroom and one does another in there. And we tested that to see if we made changes due to the cost, could we still achieve the outcomes we were hoping for. And we saw that that was possible. And then originally we started with this with AO students being in their own classrooms with just AO students. But that also was not sustainable to us. It cost a lot of money. So then we started tracking them, integrating them into our regular college level classroom, and saw that their success rates persisted. So that was another change we ended up doing to the model.

Once we were able to use our own data, we really saw a huge culture shift in the acceptance of the program, but really the acceptance of those students. And I hate to say that, but that was the language that was used originally. And we were told like well we see that this has results in Washington, but we don't know what it is in Kentucky. When we were able to say AOKY students are successful, AOKY students are persisting. AOKY students are earning credentials, and they keep on going, and they're entering the job place, the program got a lot more acceptance across the state. And that kind of was the impetus of us being able to scale it and replicate it across all 16 of our community and technical college students. So that was a really great culture shift for us that could not have happened if we did not have data to tell the story.

And then what we did after the grant, I've already hit on some of those points, and in the interest of time I'm not going to read all the bullets on this slide. But I want to mention it was really the data and being able to look at what we did that helped us determine what this model is going to look like moving forward. And then with the reinstatement of ability to benefit, we were able to refocus the shift on the true intended target population of GED seeking students. But because AOKY had had such a focus on the remedial college student population, we decided it was also time to change the name.

So we made those couple of changes in terms of just recruitment and in terms of what the program looked like, credential hours, etc., and sort of rebranded it GED plus. The navigator component is alive and well in that program. The short term credentialing is alive and well in that program. And it keeps on going at all 16 of our institutions. So we're just really happy about that. As a side note, KCTCS independent of this has moved into a corequisite model for remediation instead of development education. AOKY was not the reason it happened, but having that research behind it certainly assisted with that change as well on the KCTCS side.

Moving away from the data, I also just wanted to hit upon some of the partnerships since that was an integral component to the model. And our state executive team was comprised of the vice president of adult education, the commission of the cabinet for education and workforce development, and the community technical college system chancellor. There was some major staffing changes in these different areas, but even throughout that the partnership remained strong through the staffing changes. So one of the thing -- the partnership was already in place to begin with, but AOKY really strengthened it.

And rather than looking at AO as another initiative we did, we created an alignment matrix to help all of the players and partners see how AOKY could help everybody achieve their outcomes. And this document was really key for people on the ground to understand what their role was and how it was not in addition to what they were already doing, but would help them just reach their goals, including a lot of the strategic plan goals in the KWIB plan.

So again, I want to finish by just saying we did not -- we already had partnerships in place. But what AOKY did was strengthen those connections. And those partnerships are still in place today and we keep on collaborating together, not just on GED plus, but lots of other opportunities. So with that, I see my time is up, and I'm happy to hand it back over to Neil.

MR. RIDLEY: Thank you, Harmony. And certainly appreciate our speakers -- that our speakers have been very efficient with their time and really gotten through all of their points. We have time for some questions that have been coming in while everyone -- while we've been speaking. And so let's start with a question -- I'm going to start with one for Lauren. If you could talk a little bit about Accelerating Opportunity, about the study itself, how long did it take, approximately when did it start, when did it end, and just take us through the different phases of the study.

MS. EYSTER: Sure. Happy to do that. And the initiative began in 2011. And there was a deadline phase for the initiative. And then the states really launched towards the end of 2011 when we really launched our evaluation work. We collected data over the course of the three year pilot initiative for Accelerating Opportunity and then rolled out findings at various points along the way, especially implementation findings in first, second, and third year. And a final report on both the cost benefit analysis and the impact study were then released as well. That was in about 2017.

So always, I think Harmony's right. Waiting for third party evaluations can be sometimes frustrating. But some of our implementation work was maybe more timely. But I appreciate that states have to do their own analysis along the way to help them improve their programs. I did want to say a few words just about some things that workforce development professionals can think about based on these findings. We could really see how the local workforce system could collaborate with the AO programs. And really when it happened, it was quite successful in ensuring that there was labor market demand for the pathways selected. There was a really good referral process that really could help students access AO especially coming from the workforce system.

We also saw some states co-enroll AO students to really provide that access to career counseling and ITA. So it was another step they could take, as well as help colleges track labor market outcomes for AO students that were co-enrolled in WIOA. Also we saw that states and local workforce systems could help colleges develop strategies around increasing work based learning opportunities within AO programs. And we've seen so much around apprenticeship now and building those programs. That may be one way to help build stronger connections to employment and employers for those participants.

And then finally just the state workforce agencies could work more closely with the community college systems office to improve that data sharing, and use to track and evaluate AO participants. When that happened, that was really great, not just from the national evaluation perspective, but you have heard Eleni and Harmony talk that it was quite powerful for their own sustainability and scaling of I-BEST and AO. So I'll stop there.

MR. RIDLEY: Great. Thank you. And now we have a question for Eleni. Someone's interested in learning more about the net impact study and how the results are calculated. I think there's also interest in the ROI calculations. Perhaps you could provide us a few more details about that. Hello? Eleni?

MS. PAPADAKIS: You just missed those pearls of wisdom while I was on mute. Sorry. What I was saying is that ROI calculations are pretty complicated and different for calculating returns to participants, taxpayers, and the general public. And so there is a very lengthy and detailed methodology section in the report that we do give you a link to in the end. But I will give you just some of the components, some of the factors that we look at, obviously earnings over time. And when we look at earnings, we look at the industry sectors that people train for or were employed in, because we have to project out what the likely earnings might be. And we have different calculations for the different occupations.

Similarly we look at foregone earnings. So for the time that somebody's enrolled in a program, what do they lose in terms of earnings. Because you have to assume that the people who weren't participating were earning over that time. Employment generally, same thing, same conditions. We have a calculation for fringe benefits especially since healthcare insurance is now a mandate in our state. We have paid family leave as well as a mandate. So we look at the fringe benefits that people are likely to have and come up with a calculation of that. Employee tax liabilities, federal income and payroll taxes, so we don't have a state income tax so we have to look at that.

We also have an office of financial management that does economic modeling. And we have what's called an input output economic model that we use that can add some value, and kind of looking out across some of our calculations, and what's the multiplier effect on any of these. So again I won't spend more time on that, but we have loads of information on this, and we're happy to share it with anybody.

MR. RIDLEY: Great. Thanks, Eleni. And I think the next question is for Harmony, and go a little deeper into Kentucky's approach. There's a lot of interest in navigators and the role that navigators can play. Can you talk a little bit about that from your perspective, Harmony?

MS. LITTLE: Yes, Neil. I'd be happy to. And one thing I didn't mention during my presentation that I want to -- it's a great introduction to that question -- is when we did focus group with our students and we talked to them about what was the best thing about your AO experience or what was most helpful, overwhelmingly the answer was always my success coach, as we call them. They just said without this one point person contact, I wouldn't be here today. They were my cheerleader, they were my -- all of those things.

They were not so much focused on career -- career focused. What they were focused on was being that one source point of contact as AOKY was between two programs. It was between adult education and it was between the individual college. So it helped them navigate the system. It helped them know -- fill in paperwork, answer questions, help them make connections that they needed to do, including refer them to a career navigator at their local Kentucky career center. Where the goal was -- we had a robust online program at the time that allowed students to enter their educational experiences. And it matched them with job information, etc. But then we learned that that didn't really work that well. So then we started just bringing them onto campus instead so that the students didn't have to go to another place.

Carrying that over to our GED plus program, independent of this, or whether you're enrolled in GED plus or if you're just at skill view as Kentucky adult education is now called, all adult ed students now have a navigator. And that was an outcome of the experience from AOKY. And that person really is there to help those students in adult education make a postsecondary connection.

So kind of goes the other way than what we did in AOKY. But they're really there to help them figure out what it is that you want to do after adult education. If you're in GED plus, they bridge that gap already. But if you earn your GED and then want to go to postsecondary, they're there to not only make the intentional referral, but to help them understand everything from application deadlines, to filling in the FAFSA, etc.

So if there's anything else on that, I'm happy to elaborate more. But that's it in a nutshell.

MR. RIDLEY: Great. Thanks, Harmony. And got a question about methods and some of the big challenges in carrying out these evaluations in the various states. Lauren, could you talk a little bit about any of the major challenges and how you tackled them, and any of the other methods issues that you want to deal with?

MS. EYSTER: Sure. So first of all, of course we wanted to do an impact study of AO's effects on participants, and educational and employment outcomes. Ideally you would have a randomized control trial and be able to control for other factors in ways that other methods can't. And so but we quickly found that would be quite difficult. There were pressures on the states to enroll as many students as possible. And so we found that over subscription, which is a key part of doing an RCT, was not feasible.

We also looked at doing regression discontinuity design, which means there's a cutoff score of some sort. In this case we were planning to use basic skills testing scores to use that cutoff, and assign people to a treatment or control group. But the challenge there was a lot of students were trying to retest to get into AO because there was a cutoff there. So many people who started off in the control group could end up in the treatment group. So we did settle on a quasi-experimental design that used propensity score matching.

Now you asked about overcoming that challenge. You can see ABT Associations, who have led the PACE study. I forget what PACE stands for. I apologize. But the I-BEST program is part of that. And they were able to use RCT methods to estimate the impacts of AO. So there are ways to overcome it. But I think sometimes the most rigorous options for impact studies are not ideal for the beginning point of a program that is not necessarily in a steady state. So I think that played out as well as possible. And that was one way to overcome and really continue to build the evidence around the I-BEST and AO approaches.

MR. RIDLEY: Great. Lauren, thanks very much for that detailed answer. And we're in our closing minutes here for this session. But I want to give our presenters one last change for some final thoughts. And in particular if you have any final -- some advice for those in the field that are thinking about starting these programs, or expanding them across the state, or to other colleges, or other programs, now would be a great time to share. If you just want to jump in, that would be great. Maybe start with Eleni, perhaps?

MS. PAPADAKIS: Just about implementing these kinds of research and evaluation programs, just want to tell you all about something that we experimented with this year with our net impact study that might be worth considering. We have traditionally contracted the study out to very expert research organizations. But it's expensive. And it's why we only do it every four to five years. And we wanted to do it more often. And we have some really skilled, talented researchers on staff.

And so this year we had our researchers design a net impact study. And we used about a quarter of the funding to contract with peer reviewers, so expert researchers from across the fields of labor market and education research, to be on a panel to review first the design phase and then the analysis phase. And it was fabulous. And when we did hit up again some methodological challenges, we had such great advice. So just a recommendation that you might want to consider that. I'll bet you all have some really excellent, talented researchers in your midst.

MR. RIDLEY: Thanks. Any quick words from Lauren or Harmony?

MS. EYSTER: I'll say a few words just to really emphasize the point around strong employer connections. Throughout much of our research on career pathways, this feels like an area that many colleges, public workforce systems, the larger workforce and education systems, are challenged to do. And some do it very well. And I think these implementation studies from across the career pathways evaluations can really provide some great insight about how that can happen. So just as an emphasis that to really ensure that those connections to employment are strong for students, for WIOA participants, thinking about those strong employer connections really can support better career pathway outcomes.

MR. RIDLEY: Thanks, Lauren. That's important advice to reinforce for everyone, I think. So at this point we're going to wrap up. I have a slide here that collects resources from our presenters. We have resources from Washington State, I-BEST, and some Accelerating Opportunity links to the studies. And we also have some Department of Labor resources, the eval hub which is a collection of useful resources, toolkits for states, and workforce system strategies of course.

And then we have our final slide which is thank you very much for staying with us and for all of your great questions. Just want to point out we have an email at the bottom of this slide. If you have some questions that you'd still like to have answered, please send it to that email address and we'll do our best. We may not be able to answer every question, but we'll do our best to answer your questions.

And so with that, I'm going to say thank you, good afternoon, and hopefully we'll see you the next time.

(END)