

ESER

Primary Employment and Training Strategies Used in the Interventions Reviewed by ESER

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ABOUT ESER

The Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review (ESER) is a systematic review of the literature on the impacts of employment and training programs and policies for low-income people. Sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families, ESER provides practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and the public with a transparent, systematic assessment of the quality of research evidence supporting approaches to improve the employment-related outcomes of low-income adults.

The ESER team searched the literature for relevant research published from 1990 to mid-2014 and then screened for eligible studies to review: those that used randomized controlled trials or comparison group designs.

Trained reviewers examined the strength of the causal evidence for each study—that is, they gauged how likely it was that any impacts reported in the study were caused by the intervention being studied, not by something else. They then rated each study based on its rigor (not on the effectiveness of the intervention):

- **High ratings** were for randomized controlled trials with low attrition—that is, few people were missing from follow-up data collection efforts—and with no reassignment of people or cases after the original random assignment.
- **Moderate ratings** were for two types of studies: (1) randomized controlled trials that, due to flaws in the study design or analysis (for example, high attrition), did not qualify for the high rating but satisfied other design criteria and (2) comparison group designs that were well-executed and established equivalence between the two groups.
- **Low ratings** were assigned to studies that did not qualify for a high or moderate rating.

The ESER team also identified a “primary strategy” for each intervention. This was the employment or training strategy used most in the intervention—the service most treatment group members received and most comparison group members did not. The primary strategy was also the one that appeared integral to the theory of change tested by the study of that intervention.

The team determined the primary strategy for each intervention by having two reviewers independently read the description of each intervention, identify a primary strategy, compare their assessments, and discuss until agreement was reached.

For more details, see *Assessing the Evidence Base: Strategies That Support Employment for Low-Income Adults*.

The Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review (ESER) reviewed 314 studies and found 247 that rated high or moderate. Those studies tested a total of 80 distinct interventions. Typically, each intervention consisted of a variety of services, strategies or approaches intended to improve the employment and earnings of low-income adults. In addition, many also included strategies to address other needs of the target population, such as housing. To help ESER users quickly compare across interventions, particularly in relation to the service strategies associated with those interventions, this brief provides a table that summarizes information about the 80 interventions identified through ESER. In addition, this brief provides an overview of the process by which interventions and service strategies were categorized for the database.

Overview of the process for categorizing interventions and service strategies

To help users identify relevant research in the ESER studies database, the ESER team developed a list of frequently used employment and training strategies and used that list to document which interventions included which strategies. We also identified a *primary employment or training service strategy* for each intervention, defined as the employment or training strategy that (1) most treatment group members received and most comparison group members did not, and (2) appeared integral to the theory of change tested by the study. For example, the Labor Force Attachment (LFA)—Atlanta program, which focused on moving clients into work quickly without being selective about the jobs, was compared to the Human Capital Development (HCD)—Atlanta program, which provided education and training to prepare clients for “good jobs.” In both cases, clients could be sanctioned if they did not participate in required activities. The most notable difference was LFA’s emphasis on work experience. Therefore, the primary strategy in the LFA—Atlanta program, when compared to HCD—Atlanta, is *work experience*. Note that when an intervention is compared to two different programs, it may have two different primary strategies. That is, because a different combination of interventions is contrasted in each pairing, the primary strategy characterizing the contrast may be different for each pairing.

To determine each intervention’s primary service strategy, two ESER reviewers separately read the description of the intervention and comparison conditions provided by study authors. They identified the service strategy that seemed most prominent in the intervention, excluding any services also present in the comparison condition. The reviewers then compared notes and discussed until they reached agreement.

The primary service strategy was often the service delivered most consistently to program participants. For example, if an intervention required participants to attend job clubs and engage in structured job searches, and it also provided GED coursework for those who needed it, the reviewers identified work-readiness activities as the primary service strategy, given that the education component was not available to all participants.

ESER was designed to evaluate employment and training strategies. As a result, the primary service strategy identified (and listed in Table 1) was always an employment or training strategy, but the ESER team also reviewed some interventions that had a focus other than employment or training. In these cases, the team identified the primary service strategy as a focal strategy of the intervention that fell *within the scope of the ESER review*. For example, the Parents’ Fair Share program had four components, three of which were related to parenting and relationship skills. Because those are not employment and training services, the team identified training as the primary ESER service. Table 1 defines the employment and training services cataloged for ESER.

Table 1. Employment and training services

| Service strategy | Definition |
|--|---|
| Education | Services to support educational attainment, such as GED support, adult basic education, or post-secondary education. |
| Training Soft skills training Occupational or sectoral training On-the-job training Apprenticeships | Any training program. Training in the so-called “soft” skills, such as punctuality, manners, professional dress, how to interact with colleagues, how to handle conflict. Also called “life skills” training and “work readiness skills” training. Training tied to a given occupation, such as truck driving or welding, or to a specific economic sector. Training that takes place in a workplace while the employee is doing the actual job. Learning on the job, typically in a skilled trade. Can also include classroom instruction. |
| Work-readiness activities Job development/job placement Work experience Unpaid work experience | Assessment of employment barriers, skills, and interests; assistance designing a resume and cover letter; job clubs or job-readiness workshops; job shadowing and development of an individual employment plan. Services to identify job openings among local employers, assist with a job search, and/or provide placement assistance that matches clients with suitable job opportunities. Paid or unpaid experience in a work-like environment. Work performed on a volunteer or unpaid basis, such as an unpaid internship. |
| Subsidized employment or transitional jobs | Jobs that create or support work opportunities for individuals who would not otherwise be employed—typically vulnerable or economically-disadvantaged populations. Programs may aim to provide short-term work and income opportunities, and/or to improve employability by offering training, work supports, and transition services to support participants as they move into unsubsidized placements. |
| Employment retention services | Services to help employed workers retain and advance in their jobs. Could include ongoing assistance to address barriers or supplemental training to maintain skills. |
| Case management | Individual or small group meeting(s) with an employment specialist or counselor who helps to assess clients’ needs and address barriers, for instance by providing referrals to address specific barriers such as mental health/substance abuse issues. Case management, which includes coaching and developing an individualized plan, may occur at any time, including before, during, or after training and/or employment. |
| Financial incentives or sanctions | Rewards for engaging in a specific activity or achieving a certain goal or sanctions for failing to participate in mandated services. |
| Supportive services | Money or vouchers to help fund child care, transportation, or supplies so that clients can participate in a training program, search for work, or retain work. Also includes personal supports, such as housing or utility payment assistance, or emergency assistance. |

| Service strategy | Definition |
|--|--|
| Health services | Services that support clients' mental or physical health. |
| Substance abuse and mental health services | Services to assist clients with substance abuse or mental health disorders, including assessment, crisis management, and referrals to treatment. |
| Physical health services | Services that address clients' physical health concerns. |

Note: The search function on the ESER website may not include all of these services. The search function only lists the services present in at least one intervention in the database.

Intervention and Primary Services Summary Information

To provide ESER users an overview of all the interventions identified from studies that rated high or moderate and the primary service strategies associated with those interventions, Table 2 shows each of these interventions along with its primary service strategy. The table also lists the program to which the intervention was compared, as that contrast sometimes helped determine which service strategy was primary. In addition, the table notes the other employment and training strategies used in the given intervention.

Table 2. Primary service strategies

| Intervention | Primary service strategy | Additional employment and training services | Comparison |
|--|--------------------------|--|--|
| Interventions with education as the primary service strategy | | | |
| Atlanta Urban League | Education | Training, occupational or sectoral training, supportive services | Employment-related services in the community |
| Education, Training, and Employment program—Oklahoma City | Education | Work-readiness activities, job development/job placement, financial incentives or sanctions, training, soft skills training, occupational or sectoral training, on-the-job training, work experience, unpaid work experience, subsidized employment or transitional jobs, supportive services, case management | Other services in the community |
| Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) | Education | Work-readiness activities, job development/job placement, training, occupational or sectoral training, on-the-job training, work experience, unpaid work experience, supportive services, case management, subsidized employment or transitional jobs | Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) |
| Human Capital Development—Atlanta | Education | Training, occupational or sectoral training, supportive services, case management, financial incentives or sanctions | Employment-related services in the community |
| Human Capital Development—Grand Rapids | Education | Training, occupational or sectoral training, supportive services, financial incentives or sanctions | Employment-related services in the community |
| Human Capital Development—Riverside | Education | Case management, supportive services, financial incentives or sanctions | Employment-related services in the community |
| New Visions Self-Sufficiency and Lifelong Learning Project | Education | Work-readiness activities, training, soft skills training, occupational or sectoral training, case management | Other vocational programs offered by the community |
| Opportunities Industrialization Center | Education | Work-readiness activities, case management, training, occupational or sectoral training, supportive services | Other services in the community |
| Interventions with training as the primary service strategy, which includes soft skills training, occupational or sectoral training, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships | | | |
| Achieve—Cleveland | Soft skills training | Training, case management, employment retention services | Employment-related services in the community |
| Building Nebraska Families | Soft skills training | Training, case management, financial incentives or sanctions | Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) |

| Intervention | Primary service strategy | Additional employment and training services | Comparison |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Center for Employment Training (CET) | Training | Work-readiness activities, occupational or sectoral training, education, supportive services | Other services in the community |
| CET Replication Sites | Occupational or sectoral training | Work-readiness activities, job development/job placement, training, case management | Other services in the community |
| Individual Training Account (ITA)—Maximum Customer Choice | Occupational or sectoral training | Work-readiness activities, training, case management | ITA—Guided Customer Choice |
| ITA—Structured Customer Choice | Occupational or sectoral training | Work-readiness activities, training, case management | ITA—Guided Customer Choice |
| ITA—Structured Customer Choice | Occupational or sectoral training | Work-readiness activities, training, case management | ITA—Maximum Customer Choice |
| Job Corps | Training | Soft skills training, occupational or sectoral training, education, supportive services, health services, substance abuse and mental health services, physical health services | Other services in the community |
| Parents' Fair Share | Training | Work-readiness activities, occupational or sectoral training, on-the-job training, education, supportive services, case management, work experience | Standard practices for enforcing child support |
| Wider Opportunities for Women | Occupational or sectoral training | Work-readiness activities, case management, training, education, supportive services, work experience, unpaid work experience | Other services in the community |
| Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership | Occupational or sectoral training | Training, soft skills training, employment retention services, supportive services, case management | Employment-related services in the community |
| Interventions with work-readiness activities as the primary service strategy, which includes job development/job placement, work experience, and unpaid work experience | | | |
| Delaware's A Better Chance Welfare Reform Program | Work-readiness activities | Financial incentives or sanctions, training, education, supportive services, subsidized employment or transitional jobs, job development/job placement, work experience, unpaid work experience | AFDC |
| Enhanced Job Club—Los Angeles | Work-readiness activities | Job development/job placement, financial incentives or sanctions, case management | Traditional Job Club |
| Individualized Job Search Assistance (IJSA) | Work-readiness activities | Case management | Unemployment Insurance requirements |
| IJSA with Training | Work-readiness activities | Case management, training | Unemployment Insurance requirements |
| Jobs First—GAIN | Job development/job placement | Work-readiness activities, training, occupational or sectoral training, education, work experience | AFDC |
| Labor Force Attachment—Atlanta | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, training, occupational or sectoral training, education, unpaid work experience, supportive services, case management | Employment-related services in the community |
| Labor Force Attachment—Atlanta | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, training, occupational or sectoral training, education, unpaid work experience, supportive services, case management | Human Capital Development—Atlanta |
| Labor Force Attachment—Grand Rapids | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, training, occupational or sectoral training, education, unpaid work experience, supportive services | Employment-related services in the community |
| Labor Force Attachment—Grand Rapids | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, training, occupational or sectoral training, education, unpaid work experience, supportive services | Human Capital Development—Grand Rapids |

| Intervention | Primary service strategy | Additional employment and training services | Comparison |
|--|--|---|---|
| Labor Force Attachment—Riverside | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, job development/job placement, financial incentives or sanctions, case management, supportive services | Employment-related services in the community |
| Labor Force Attachment—Riverside | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, job development/job placement, financial incentives or sanctions, case management, supportive services | Human Capital Development—Riverside |
| Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) | Work-readiness activities | Financial incentives or sanctions, training, education, supportive services | MFIP Incentives Only |
| Minnesota Tier 2 | Work experience | Case management, financial incentives or sanctions, education, training, occupational or sectoral training, on-the-job training, work-readiness activities, unpaid work experience, supportive services, subsidized employment or transitional jobs | Minnesota Tier 1 |
| Non-Custodial Parent Choices PEER curriculum enhancement pilot | Work-readiness activities | Employment retention services, supportive services | NCP Choices without the PEER curriculum |
| Personal Roads to Individual Development and Employment | Unpaid work experience | Education, employment retention services, work-readiness activities, work experience, job development/job placement, training, financial incentives or sanctions | TANF |
| Portland Job Opportunities and Basic Skills program | Work-readiness activities | Job development/job placement, financial incentives or sanctions, training, soft skills training, occupational or sectoral training, education, work experience, supportive services, case management, health services | Other services in the community |
| Project Independence | Work-readiness activities | Financial incentives or sanctions, training, education, supportive services, case management | AFDC |
| Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) Plus | Work-readiness activities | Case management, financial incentives or sanctions, training, soft skills training | SSP |
| Structured Job Search Assistance | Work-readiness activities | Case management | Unemployment Insurance requirements |
| Valuing Individual Success and Increasing Opportunities Now—Salem | Work-readiness activities | Supportive services, case management, financial incentives or sanctions, job development/job placement | TANF |
| Welfare Restructuring Project (WRP) – single-parent families ¹ | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, subsidized employment or transitional jobs, supportive services, health services, case management, training, job development/job placement | Aid to Needy Families with Children |
| WRP – two-parent families | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, subsidized employment or transitional jobs, supportive services, health services, case management, training, job development/job placement | Aid to Needy Families with Children |
| WRP – single-parent families | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, subsidized employment or transitional jobs, supportive services, health services, case management, training, job development/job placement | WRP Incentives Only |
| WRP – two-parent families | Work experience | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, subsidized employment or transitional jobs, supportive services, health services, case management, training, job development/job placement | WRP Incentives Only |
| Interventions with <i>subsidized employment</i> or <i>transitional jobs</i> as the primary service strategy | | | |
| Center for Employment Opportunities | Subsidized employment or transitional jobs | Case management, job development/job placement, work-readiness activities | Work-readiness activities and other services in the community |

| Intervention | Primary service strategy | Additional employment and training services | Comparison |
|--|--|--|--|
| Transitional Jobs Program at the Transitional Work Corporation | Subsidized employment or transitional jobs | Case management, education, financial incentives or sanctions, work-readiness activities | Other services in the community |
| Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration | Subsidized employment or transitional jobs | Case management, financial incentives or sanctions, employment retention services, supportive services, work-readiness activities, job development/job placement | Other services in the community |
| Interventions with <i>employment retention</i> services as the primary service strategy | | | |
| Academy for Career Advancement—Bridgeport, Connecticut | Employment retention services | Case management, training, occupational or sectoral training, on-the-job training, education | Existing employment services |
| Employment Retention and Advancement Project—Chicago | Employment retention services | Work-readiness activities, job development/job placement, training, education, case management, financial incentives or sanctions | Other services in the community |
| Move Up/Career Advancement Unit—Dayton, Ohio | Employment retention services | Case management, financial incentives or sanctions, training, on-the-job training, education, supportive services | Existing employment services |
| Post-Assistance Self-Sufficiency—Riverside, California | Employment retention services | Work-readiness activities, supportive services, case management, training, soft skills training, education | Other services in the community |
| Postemployment Services Demonstration (PESD) program—Chicago | Employment retention services | Work-readiness activities, supportive services, case management, job development/job placement | AFDC |
| PESD Program—Portland | Employment retention services | Work-readiness activities, supportive services, case management, job development/job placement | AFDC |
| PESD program—Riverside | Employment retention services | Work-readiness activities, supportive services, case management, job development/job placement | AFDC |
| PESD program—San Antonio | Employment retention services | Work-readiness activities, supportive services, case management, job development/job placement | AFDC |
| Progress Towards Retention, Opportunities, Growth, Enhancement and Self-Sufficiency—Eugene | Employment retention services | Work-readiness activities, job development/job placement, supportive services, case management, education, training | Employment-related services in the community |
| Project EARN! (Earnings, Advancement, Retention Now!)—San Diego, California | Employment retention services | Case management, financial incentives or sanctions, training, on-the-job training, education, supportive services | Existing employment services |
| Training Focused—Riverside, California | Employment retention services | Supportive services, case management, training, education, health services, substance abuse and mental health services, work-readiness activities | Work Focused—Riverside, California |
| Work Plus—Riverside, California | Employment retention services | Supportive services, case management, training, education, health services, substance abuse and mental health services, work-readiness activities | Training Focused—Riverside, California |
| Work Plus—Riverside, California | Employment retention services | Supportive services, case management, training, education, health services, substance abuse and mental health services, work-readiness activities | Work Focused—Riverside, California |
| Interventions with <i>case management</i> as the primary service strategy | | | |
| Career Builders—Portland | Case management | Education, training, supportive services | TANF |
| Enhanced Early Head Start | Case management | Health services, physical health services, substance abuse and mental health services | Other services in the community |

| Intervention | Primary service strategy | Additional employment and training services | Comparison |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Future Steps | Case management | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, employment retention services, supportive services | Other services in the community |
| Integrated Case Management—Columbus | Case management | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, training, soft skills training, occupational or sectoral training, education, work experience, unpaid work experience, supportive services | Traditional Case Management—Columbus |
| Integrated Case Management—Columbus | Case management | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, training, soft skills training, occupational or sectoral training, education, work experience, unpaid work experience, supportive services | Other services in the community |
| Michigan Opportunity and Skills Training and Work First—Detroit | Case management | Training, occupational or sectoral training, education, supportive services | Other services in the community |
| Moving Up—South Carolina | Case management | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, training, employment retention services, supportive services, health services, substance abuse and mental health services | Other services in the community |
| Reach For Success—Los Angeles | Case management | Work-readiness activities, job development/job placement, training, soft skills training, employment retention services, supportive services | The existing post-employment services program |
| Strengthening Families (The New York Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers Initiative) | Case management | Work-readiness activities, job development/job placement, training, soft skills training, supportive services, health services, substance abuse and mental health services | Other services in the community |
| Success Through Employment Preparation | Case management | Education, job development/job placement, work-readiness activities, soft skills training, training | Other services in the community |
| Traditional Case Management—Columbus | Case management | Work-readiness activities, financial incentives or sanctions, training, soft skills training, occupational or sectoral training, education, work experience, unpaid work experience, supportive services | Other services in the community |
| Transition, Advancement, and Growth—Medford, Oregon | Case management | Work-readiness activities, employment retention services, supportive services, education, training, job development/job placement | Employment-related services in the community |
| Working Toward Wellness | Case management | Health services, substance abuse and mental health services | Other services in the community |
| Interventions with <i>financial incentives or sanctions</i> as the primary service strategy | | | |
| California Work Pays Demonstration Project | Financial incentives or sanctions | No other services provided | AFDC |
| Connecticut's Jobs First Program | Financial incentives or sanctions | Work-readiness activities, education, training | AFDC |
| Family Transition Program | Financial incentives or sanctions | Training, education, work-readiness activities, work experience, unpaid work experience, supportive services, case management, health services | AFDC |
| Indiana Welfare Reform | Financial incentives or sanctions | Work-readiness activities, supportive services | AFDC |
| Iowa Family Investment Program | Financial incentives or sanctions | Work-readiness activities, training, education, work experience, unpaid work experience, supportive services | AFDC |
| Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families | Financial incentives or sanctions | Work-readiness activities, education, training, occupational or sectoral training, supportive services, job development/job placement, soft skills training | Other services in the community |
| MFIP | Financial incentives or sanctions | Work-readiness activities, training, education, supportive services | AFDC |

| Intervention | Primary service strategy | Additional employment and training services | Comparison |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| MFIP Incentives Only | Financial incentives or sanctions | Work-readiness activities, training, education, supportive services | AFDC |
| New Hope Project | Financial incentives or sanctions | Subsidized employment or transitional jobs, supportive services | Other services in the community |
| Opportunity NYC—Family Rewards Demonstration | Financial incentives or sanctions | No other services provided | No cash incentives |
| SSP | Financial incentives or sanctions | No other services provided | Income Assistance |
| SSP Plus | Financial incentives or sanctions | Work-readiness activities, case management, training, soft skills training | Income Assistance |
| Texas Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) | Financial incentives or sanctions | Work-readiness activities, work experience, unpaid work experience, training, employment retention services, supportive services, case management | Texas's standard welfare-to-work program |
| WRP Incentives Only | Financial incentives or sanctions | Work-readiness activities, supportive services, health services, case management | Aid to Needy Families with Children |
| Interventions with <i>supportive services</i> as the primary service strategy | | | |
| Welfare to Work Voucher Program | Supportive services | Financial incentives or sanctions | Some members of the comparison group obtained housing vouchers through the Housing Choice Voucher Program |
| Interventions with <i>health services</i> as the primary service strategy, which includes <i>substance abuse and mental health services</i> and <i>physical health services</i> | | | |
| Public Health Nursing | Health services | Case management | Welfare Transition Program |

¹ The Welfare Restructuring Project offered slightly different work readiness services to single-parent families and two-parent families.

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