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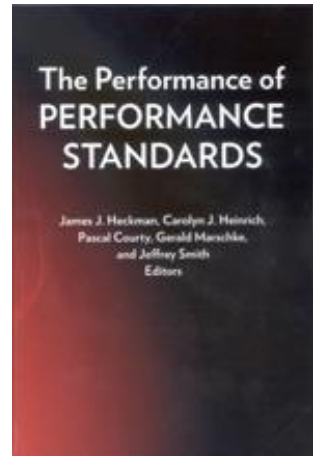
U.S. Employment and Training Programs and Performance Standards System Design

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Prior to the recession that began in 2007, public expenditures on employment and training services were declining. For example, in fiscal year 2007, the total U.S. federal government appropriations for WIA programs—youth employment, adult job training, dislocated worker assistance, Job Corps, and other national activities—was \$4.4 billion, down 18 percent from fiscal year 2005. Within the WIA program, the number of adults receiving training was likewise declining appreciably relative to its predecessor, JTPA (Frank and Minoff 2005). Furthermore, the JTPA program had substantially reduced the size and scope of federal public employment and training programs relative to its predecessors, the Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA).

In 2009, the Obama administration reversed these trends of diminishing public expenditures on employment and training. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) injected an unprecedented level of funding (an addition of more than \$3.5 billion) into the public workforce development system and associated employment and training programs.¹ This infusion of resources to aid unemployed and underemployed workers nearly doubled U.S. federal government funding for WIA programs and rejuvenated public interest in improving the effectiveness of the workforce development system.

This book focuses on the two most recent workforce development programs, JTPA and WIA. JTPA is widely known for having intro-

duced outcomes-based performance standards to public employment and training programs (in 1982). WIA has retained the basic structure of its predecessor while making important operational changes in the performance standards system (in 2000).² This chapter aims to provide basic information about U.S. employment and training programs to aid our readers in understanding the research and analyses presented in this book. In the following sections, essential features of these programs are described, including their origins and organizational structures, eligibility rules and the types of services made available to participants, and the design of the performance standards systems.

ORIGINS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF JTPA AND WIA

During the period in which it operated, JTPA constituted the largest federal employment and training program for disadvantaged U.S. workers. The act mandated the provision of employment and training services to “those who can benefit from, and are most in need of, such opportunities.” It also required that the basic return on training investments “be measured by the increased employment and earnings of participants and the reduction in welfare dependency” (U.S. Congress 1982). Designed in the Reagan era of New Federalism, JTPA was distinguished by a more decentralized administrative structure that included a larger role for the private sector; a performance standards system developed to measure program outcomes, increase local-level accountability, and encourage more efficient program management; and lower program costs per participant, in part due to elimination of public service employment and participant stipend components. Dickinson et al. (1988), LaLonde (1995), and O’Leary, Straits, and Wandner (2004) provide more detail on the history of employment and training programs in the United States.

The original titles of the JTPA legislation established four different programs.³ Title IIA authorized the largest of these programs to serve economically disadvantaged youths and adults, accounting for the majority of JTPA client enrollments and training expenditures.⁴ The primary services provided under JTPA Title IIA—vocational training,

on-the-job training, basic/remedial education, job search assistance, work experience, and other services such as counseling and assessment, job-readiness activities, and case management—continue to be available in WIA, although training priorities and service access have changed. While amendments to JTPA had shifted service provision away from low-cost job search activities and toward more intensive (e.g., classroom) training, WIA made important changes to refocus the program toward assessment and job search assistance services that are made available to a broader population. WIA, enacted in 1998, officially superseded the JTPA program in July 2000. See O’Shea and King (2001) for a comprehensive discussion of the WIA provisions and changes, Social Policy Research Associates (2004) for a comprehensive report on WIA implementation.

In both JTPA and WIA, responsibility for the interpretation and implementation of program provisions was delegated to the USDOL. The USDOL communicates some specific policy directives to states, but the interpretation of many critical provisions and the major responsibility for program administration and service delivery lie with state and local job training agencies. Under JTPA, the distinct (nonoverlapping and exhaustive) program jurisdictions were known as service delivery areas; in WIA, they are called workforce investment areas.

Federal funding for these programs is allocated to states in proportion to measures of economic need, e.g., the number of unemployed and economically disadvantaged individuals residing within them.⁵ And although states are required to expend the recent federal stimulus funding by the end of June 2011, the Obama administration encouraged them to spend the funds in “transformational efforts” to realize the “full capacity” of the system to innovate and improve the effectiveness of workforce development programs (USDOL 2009a).

The organizational forms of the job training centers and their approaches to service delivery have varied across states and localities under both JTPA and WIA.⁶ Some job training centers are public entities at the state, county, or municipal government level, and others are private, not-for-profit, or for-profit organizations. Under WIA, states are required to establish a State Workforce Investment Board, including the governor, members of the state legislature, and representatives of business, labor, educational entities, economic development agencies, and community-based organizations. A major responsibility of the

board is to develop a state plan that outlines a five-year strategy for the statewide workforce investment system. At the local level, all job training centers are directed and supervised by a board of representatives from business, labor, the community, and local elected officials, known formerly as Private Industry Councils under JTPA and currently as Workforce Investment Boards under WIA. These boards determine who is served, the types of services made available, and who should provide the services (within the limitations of the statute).

The particular structure of local program administration depends on a number of factors, including the size of the job training jurisdiction and its population, urban versus rural location, local political configurations, and state-level administrative policies. In the JTPA program, some agencies provided training services directly to eligible clients, while a majority contracted with independent service provider organizations to select participants and deliver program services (see Dickinson et al. 1988). Workforce Investment Boards in the current program are required to operate at least one One-Stop Career Center in their service area, with the objective of colocating programs of the USDOL, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Housing and Urban Development (e.g., employment services, unemployment insurance, vocational rehabilitation, adult education, welfare-to-work, and postsecondary vocational education). The local boards develop and enter into a “memorandum of understanding” with the One-Stop partners that specifies the services to be provided through the One-Stop delivery system, how the service and operating costs of the system will be funded, and methods for referral of customers between the One-Stop operator and the partners.

WIA also uses a form of vouchers for some participants, called individual training accounts (ITAs), which allows them to purchase training services directly from certified providers, a provision intended to increase “customer choice” over the JTPA approach of using sub-contracted providers. Implementation of ITAs varies on several dimensions, including how the amount of the ITAs (or customers’ spending) is determined, whether counseling in the use of the ITAs is required or voluntary, and how much local staff restrict customers’ training choices. D’Amico and Salzman (2004), Decker and Perez-Johnson (2004), and McConnell et al. (2006) provide more detail on ITAs and also describe an experimental evaluation of alternative ITA implementations.

The research presented in the subsequent chapters of this book conveys how critical these structures and processes are (as well as the allocation of authority and discretion within them) in determining service access and program effectiveness.

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AND SERVICES

Although JTPA and WIA differ considerably in their eligibility criteria, they have in common the voluntary nature of program participation. The JTPA Title IIA program was more narrowly focused on serving the disadvantaged, requiring 90 percent of all enrollees to be disadvantaged and minimum levels of service to particular segments of the population, including youths, high school dropouts, and welfare recipients.⁷ At the same time, Devine and Heckman (1996) show that the federal eligibility rules defined a fairly broad JTPA-eligible population, and local job training centers retained discretion to enroll noneconomically disadvantaged persons who satisfied other “hardship” criteria defined in the act (e.g., displaced homemakers, persons with limited English proficiency, etc.) for the other 10 percent of their participant populations. Because annual program funding levels afforded services to less than 3 percent of the JTPA-eligible population (Heckman and Smith 1999), state and local administrative entities had considerable leeway in identifying specific target groups and developing additional participant selection criteria within the eligibility guidelines (i.e., being eligible did not guarantee one the opportunity to participate).

Under WIA, the most basic “core” services—outreach, intake/assessment, job search assistance/placement, and labor market information—are made available to the general public with no qualifying criteria/eligibility requirements. The USDOL does not require monitoring and tracking of participants using the self-directed core services or non-WIA services at the One-Stop centers, but rather only those participants who receive substantial staff assistance in the WIA programs. Individuals’ access to intensive or training services (e.g., comprehensive assessment and case management, vocational, or on-the-job training) proceeds sequentially if they are “unemployed and are unable to obtain employment through core services provided” (WIA, Section 134 3.A.i).

However, as Eberts, O’Leary, and DeRango (2002) note, the USDOL offers little guidance to One-Stop center workers on how to identify the needs of this broader target population and how to refer customers to the various levels of service in a cost-effective manner. Wandner (2002) nicely summarizes the differences in JTPA and WIA “service referral principles,” and argues that there is a greater need for the use of targeting tools under WIA to aid frontline staff in determining appropriate service levels for customers.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS SYSTEM DESIGN

Under both JTPA and WIA, the performance standards system is designed to reward job training centers or state workforce development programs, respectively, that achieve performance goals with incentive (budgetary) awards and external recognition. The USDOL, state job training agencies, and local job training centers have together defined and enforced these incentive policies.

The federal government is primarily involved in defining the basic structure of the performance standards system in public employment and training programs. These responsibilities of the USDOL include defining mandatory performance measures to be used by states and local areas, setting state accounting and reporting rules, and monitoring, rewarding, and/or sanctioning job training center performance. Table 2.1 shows the performance measures currently in effect under WIA and also indicates which of these are new to WIA (i.e., were not used in JTPA). Though the majority of these measures are common to JTPA and WIA, there were a number of changes made in JTPA that shifted the focal point of performance measurement from enrollees’ labor market status at the time of program completion to three months after termination from the program. Under WIA, the follow-up period has been extended to six months after program completion. Chapter 4 includes additional discussion of the evolution of the performance measures under JTPA.

States are also now required to calculate performance outcomes using Unemployment Insurance (UI) data. An earlier GAO report (2002) indicated that some states were experiencing difficulties in getting

access to these records and developing or modifying data systems to produce this information. The USDOL has since been working to promote data exchange between states via the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS), which specifically facilitates the exchange of wage data for the purpose of assessing and reporting on state and local employment and training program and provider performance. As of August 2009, all states were participating in the WRIS.⁸

Performance standards are the numerical goals that job training centers must achieve to become eligible for incentive awards and to avoid sanctions. In JTPA, the USDOL exercised greater authority in the determination of performance standard levels (or targets). It established expected performance levels in JTPA using a regression-based model with national departure points. States could use the optional Labor Department adjustment model or develop their own adjustment procedures, although state-developed procedures and adjustments had to conform to the department's parameters (Social Policy Research Associates 1999). A majority of states adopted the optional USDOL adjustment model and used the USDOL-provided performance standards worksheets to determine performance targets, although sometimes with modifications. Chapters 4 and 5 present additional information about how performance standards were adjusted under the JTPA program.

Under WIA, states negotiate with the USDOL and local service delivery areas to establish performance targets, using estimates based on historical data that are similarly intended to take into account differences in economic conditions, participant characteristics, and services delivered. Since performance data were collected in JTPA, more than half of the states used these baseline data to determine appropriate levels for the WIA-negotiated performance standards or to inform negotiations with local workforce development officials. The informal process of making these adjustments during negotiations in WIA contrasts noticeably with the standardized regression-based approach used by states under JTPA. States' own reports of procedures used to determine WIA performance standards suggest that there is substantially greater discretion and variation in both the processes and types of information used to establish the state-level standards (Heinrich 2004). The pretext for making this change to a system of negotiated standards was to promote "shared accountability," described as one of the "guiding principles" of WIA (USDOL 2001, p. 8).⁹

Table 2.1 Performance Measures—JTPA and WIA

Performance measure	Description
Adults	
Entered employment rate	The percentage of adults who obtained a job by the end of the first quarter after program exit (excluding participants employed at registration).
Employment retention rate at 6 months	Of adults who had a job in the first quarter after exit, percentage with a job in the third quarter after exit.
Average earnings change in 6 months	Of those who had a job in the first quarter after exit, the postprogram earnings increases relative to preprogram earnings.
Employment and credential rate ^a	Of those adults who received WIA training services, the percentage who were employed in the first quarter after exit and received a credential by the end of the third quarter after exit.
Dislocated workers	
Entered employment rate	The percentage of dislocated workers who obtained a job by the end of the first quarter after program exit (excluding those employed at registration).
Employment retention rate at 6 months	Of those who had a job in the first quarter after exit, the percentage of dislocated workers who have a job in the third quarter after exit.
Earnings replacement rate in 6 months	Of those who had a job in the first quarter after exit, the percentage of preprogram earnings that are earned postprogram.
Employment and credential rate ^a	Of those dislocated workers who received WIA training services, the percentage who were employed in the first quarter after exit and received a credential by the end of the third quarter after exit.
Older youths (19–21)	
Entered employment rate	The percentage of older youths who were not enrolled in postsecondary education or advanced training in the first quarter after program exit and obtained a job by the end of the first quarter after exit (excluding those employed at registration).

Employment retention rate at 6 months	Of those who had a job in the first quarter after exit and were not enrolled in postsecondary education or advanced training in the third quarter after program exit, the percentage of older youths who have a job in the third quarter after exit.
Average earnings change in 6 months	Of those who had a job in the first quarter after exit and were not enrolled in postsecondary education or advanced training, the postprogram earnings increases relative to preprogram earnings.
Older youths employment/education/ training and credential rate ^a	The percentage of older youths who are in employment, postsecondary education, or advanced training in the first quarter after exit and received a credential by the end of the third quarter after exit.
Younger youths	
Retention rate	In employment, postsecondary education, advanced training, apprenticeships in third quarter after exit.
Skill attainment rate	Attain at least two goals relating to basic skills, work readiness, skill attainment, entered employment and skill training.
Diploma rate	Earn a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (GED).
Customer satisfaction	
Participant satisfaction ^a	The average of three statewide survey questions, rated 1 to 10 (1 = very dissatisfied to 10 = very satisfied), asking if participants were satisfied with services, if services met customer expectations, and how the services compared to the “ideal set” of services.
Employer satisfaction ^a	The average of three statewide survey questions, rated 1 to 10 (1 = very dissatisfied to 10 = very satisfied), asking if employers were satisfied with services, if services met customer expectations, and how the services compared to the “ideal set” of services.

^aNew to WIA.

In JTPA, 6 percent of the federal government's JTPA appropriation to states was designated for performance incentive awards to local job training centers. Some states made the incentive awards for job training centers dependent on their performance relative to other service delivery areas. Other states defined a maximum incentive payment for each job training center, with the fraction awarded depending on the difference between the center's measured performance and the state standards. Until recently in the WIA program, the Secretary of Labor awarded incentive grants to states that achieve at least 80 percent of their negotiated performance levels on each performance measure and at least a 100 percent cumulative program area score for each of the program areas (adults, dislocated workers, and youths) and the customer satisfaction measures.¹⁰ States were required to apply for the incentive grants and may receive a minimum grant award of \$750,000, up to a maximum amount of \$3,000,000 (conditional on the availability of funds), for use in innovative programs. States that did not meet their performance goals for two consecutive years may be sanctioned with a 5 percent reduction in their WIA grants. In addition to the monetary incentives and penalties under JTPA and WIA, states have also recognized high performers and innovative programs with special non-monetary awards. In general, the performance standards system serves as the primary means for federal- and state-level monitoring and motivation of local job training center operations and performance.

SUMMARY

The goal of this chapter is to provide the basic information essential to understanding the more in-depth and rigorous analyses of the performance standards systems in U.S. employment and training programs that follow in this book. The subsequent chapters delve into the complexities and challenges of operating an efficient, informative, and accurate performance standards system, and the implications of basic program design elements—i.e., legislative objectives, organizational structures, accountability requirements, reporting relationships, and funding—for the effective functioning of a performance standards system. And importantly, the research presented in this book also ad-

addresses the implications of these systems for the programs' outcomes and impacts on participants' employment and earnings. The majority of the following chapters focus primarily on JTPA, in part because it was the longest running public sector employment and training program in the United States and has had the longest history of any public sector program with an outcomes-based performance standard system; in part because of the unique data available from the experimental evaluation of the JTPA program; and in part because it is similar enough to yield important lessons for current WIA programs and their future adaptations.

Notes

1. "Agency Reported Data," Recovery.gov, accessed February 22, 2010, http://www.recovery.gov/Transparency/agency/reporting/agency_reporting3.aspx?agency_code=16&dt=02/12/2010.
2. According to Franklin and Ripley (1984, pp. 176–177), performance standards were under development for JTPA's predecessor, CETA, but were not implemented prior to CETA's replacement by JTPA.
3. Title IIB authorized a summer youth program, Title III funded a program for dislocated workers, and Title IV governed various federally administered programs. Title I of the act described JTPA's administrative structures, and Title V contained amendments and miscellaneous provisions relating to the interaction between JTPA and other programs such as the former Aid to Families with Dependent Children.
4. In the early 1990s, Title IIA was split, and a new Title IIC was created specifically for economically disadvantaged youth, while IIA was reauthorized to serve adults only.
5. In both the JTPA and WIA programs, one-third of the funds received by states depends on the relative number of unemployed individuals in the state; another third depends on the relative excess number of unemployed individuals (over 4.5 percent), and the final third depends on the number of economically disadvantaged persons (as defined by the act).
6. The term *job training center* is used interchangeably with service delivery area and workforce investment area in this book.
7. Section 4.8 of JTPA specifically defined economic "disadvantage" and was the basis from which the program eligibility criteria were derived. An individual was eligible for JTPA services if 1) the person or another member of his or her family received cash public assistance; 2) the person's family income did not exceed the higher of the poverty level, or 70 percent of the lower living standard level; 3) the person was a handicapped adult whose own income met these criteria even though his/her family income may not have; 4) the person was eligible for food stamps

sometime during the six months prior to applying to JTPA; or 5) the person (a youth applicant) was a foster child.

8. "WRIS Membership, August 7, 2009," accessed March 4, 2010, http://www.doleta.gov/performance/pfdocs/WRIS_MAP_08_07_09.pdf.
9. The USDOL is currently testing regression models for the WIA performance standards with the goal of returning to a system of regression-based adjustments beginning in July 2011 (USDOL 2009b).
10. For example, if a state negotiates a 70 percent adult entered employment rate standard and then achieves actual entered employment rate performance of 75 percent, it will have a score of 107 percent for that measure. If it does less well on its adult employment retention rate, say, achieving 60 percent instead of the 62 percent standard, its score of only 96.8 percent on this measure will be offset by its exceptional achievement on the entered employment rate measure (or possibly one of the other two adult measures as well). Among the four adult performance measures, the cumulative score must be 100 percent (determined "by simple or weighted averaging").

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