To Improve and to Prove:
Building Evidence across Generations of a Promising Youth Development Program
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Two Generations of Programs: Year Up’s Original (“Core”) Program and the Professional Training Corps (PTC)

• Common to both generations
  ✓ National multi-site programs targeting 18-24-year-olds with high school credentials
  ✓ Screen applicants carefully for ability to benefit from YU
  ✓ Provide 6 months of full-time training (basic, professional/soft, and occupational skills) with substantial supports and behavior contract
  ✓ Provide 6-month internships, also with substantial supports
  ✓ Focus on IT, financial services, and other high-demand fields

• Core program: YU staff provide all services in 9 stand-alone offices

• PTC: A next-generation adaptation for college settings designed to reduce cost and increase scalability, uses college facilities and instructors
Session Goals

• Share findings on different generations of a promising program model
• Demonstrate benefits of sustained researcher-practitioner collaboration across program generations
• Explore Year Up’s “to improve and to prove” approach
• Nod at the elephant in the room (findings precede pandemic, future analysis to extend post-onset)
• Take questions, discuss suggestions from the floor
Still Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Year Up’s Longer-term Impacts

David Fein, Sam Dastrup, and Kimberly Burnett
Abt Associates Inc.
Introduction

- Year Up’s Core Program
  - Intensive recruitment and applicant screening
  - Multi-faceted training, high support, high expectations
  - Internships → work-based training, connections with potential employers
  - Employers finance 59% of average $28,290 cost per participant

- PACE Project (ACF-sponsored)
  - Year Up is 1 of 9 programs evaluated (results for all 9 summarized at earlier session today)
  - 2,544 eligible young adults randomly assigned to treatment (YU) and control (no-YU) groups in 2013-14
  - First PACE report (Fein & Hamadyk 2018) found: 1) high-quality program implementation with many best practices, 2) large positive earnings impacts lasting at least 3 years after random assignment
  - Forthcoming report: 1) extends impacts analysis to 5 years (presented here), 2) provides cost-benefit analysis (presented tomorrow, 11/13 @1:00; hint: 😊)
  - Note: 5-year impacts presented here pre-date pandemic
Main Finding: Large Earnings Impacts Persisted to the End of the 5-Year Period

Related Findings:
- Earnings gains reflect increased %s in IT and financial service occupations.
- Increases in hourly wages and (to lesser extent) % of employed working full-time.

Subgroup analysis shows:
- Substantial impacts for all subgroups.
- Size nonetheless varies by educational background, race-ethnicity, office.

Results for other domains:
- Financial circumstances (+).
- Psycho-social outcomes (0).
- Living independently (+).
Taking Stock

- Year Up’s earnings impacts are the largest to date from RCTs of workforce training
- Likely ingredients: 1) careful screening for ability to benefit, 2) exemplary skills (esp. professional/life) training + high support-high expectation components, 3) strong employment connections, 4) program intensity
- Future PACE analyses to address
  - How long do impacts on earnings last? How large do the net benefits grow? To what degree do benefits radiate to other life domains?
  - How does pandemic affect treatment and control group members?
- Findings call for development and testing of Year Up adaptations
  - Broadening the target population
  - Connecting graduates with follow-on training for career advancement
  - Reducing costs to support up-scaling
  - Some related efforts discussed in the next two presentations…
For More Information Contact

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The contents of this presentation do not necessarily represent the official views or policies of OPRE, ACF, HHS, or foundation sponsors.
To Improve and to Prove: A Development & Innovation Study of Year Up’s Professional Training Corps

Rebecca Maynard
University of Pennsylvania

Panel on “To Improve and to Prove: Building Evidence Across Generations of a Promising Youth Development Program”
APPAM
November 11, 2020
Study Overview

An Institutes for Educational Sciences “Development & Innovation” grant with 3 major goals:

1. Assess pain points for Year Up’s PTC program & conduct 3 quick turn-around studies to inform responses
2. Begin randomized controlled trial (RCT) to estimate overall program impacts
3. Document implementation fidelity at end of 5-year grant (March 2020)

Context: An ambitious, rapidly expanding program with sites at 16 colleges by early 2019
Three Improvement Studies (aka “Mini-Studies”)

Engaged stakeholders in prioritizing 3 challenges for study:
1. Late identification of academic difficulties reduced PTC retention
   → Test improved coaching in small RCT
2. Inconsistent quality of internship experiences
   → Identify best practices through lit review, in-depth interviews, focus groups
3. Tension between goals of full-time employment v. staying in school post program
   → Analyze data on college persistence, explore goals and frameworks in interviews and focus groups

Key qualities:
1. Quick turn-around → timely results
2. Year up staff involvement → enthusiasm & buy-in for using evidence

Example: Mini-study #1 found positive impacts from improved coaching in test sites

![Retention to Internship Phase Chart]

The finding encouraged Year Up to promote adoption of tools & strategies in other sites
Key Take-Aways

For Year Up
- Final implementation assessment documented substantial progress & significant remaining challenges
- Work on challenges was underway
- Heightened interest in & capacity for institutionalizing key principals of improvement research demonstrated in this project

For Other Practitioners & Policymakers
- Demonstrated value of leveraging resources in wider systems to accelerate scaling intensive programs
- Authentic collaboration on focused improvement studies can strengthen understanding & buy-in for evidence-supported solutions

For Researchers
- Be strategic in setting the agenda
- Collaborate & be flexible, but smart, about research design
- Seek, celebrate & rely on practitioners’ expertise
- Prioritize rapid & accessible feedback (e.g., PowerPoint) over lengthy written reports (but provide full reports later if possible)
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- David Fein, co-Principal Investigator, Abt Associates, david_fein@abtassoc.com

Final report:

To Improve and Prove:
A Practitioner’s Perspective on Research across the Policy Lifecycle

Garrett Warfield
Chief Research Officer, Year Up
APPAM, Fall 2020
Practitioner’s Perspective on PACE evaluation

1. Confidence in our foundational model: costly, intensive, but effective and with lasting impacts

2. Large, significant earnings gains across all demographic subgroups are encouraging and rare to find

3. Inspires important questions and new strategies
   - Will impacts persist during the pandemic?
   - How to respond to differential impacts?
     - Unemployed alum: let’s bolster post-program career supports
     - Employed alum: affirms value of a “quality” or career-track job
     - Earning/employment disparities by race: calls for interventions with employers (www.opportunitynavigator.org)
Practitioner’s Perspective on IES evaluation

1. Development & Innovation grants—test improvements before impact—are generous, valuable, rare

2. Improvements in practice persist long after the evaluation
   • Stronger academic supports in settings where we have less insight or control of the classroom
   • Better employer and intern experiences through supervisor orientation and onboarding
   • Vastly improved education outcomes tracking

3. The method of choice...
   • During periods of rapid change or in response to a crisis (e.g., COVID → 100% virtual program)
   • To boost readiness for an impact study: calibrate outputs (boost retention) and outcomes ($)
A Practitioner’s Perspective: Don’t count your chickens before, which came first, a bird in the hand is worth—it’s a chicken and egg metaphor, just roll with it…

**PERCEPTION**

- Most often funders, scholars, and policymakers lead with asking for research that **proves**: did it work, for how long, will it work in other contexts or at scale? These are important questions to answer.
- Yet, those answers often don’t meet a program’s critical need to **improve**: how do we respond to this crisis, what matters most in our model, how could we be cheaper/faster/better for our beneficiaries?
- To **endure the program/policy lifecycle**, we must use 1) **improve** and 2) **prove** methods, and this practitioner believes it isn’t a chicken and egg debate. Improve should come first.

**REALITY**

The Program/Policy Lifecycle

-...
Feedback and Discussion