

# Boosting Skills and Earnings



For more than 30 years, Abt Associates has conducted research on workforce development and its effectiveness in raising skills to meet employers' workforce needs and improve employment and earnings. This portfolio includes Abt's groundbreaking work in career pathways, an important innovation for helping low-income and low-skilled individuals succeed in postsecondary education and training. Career pathways may also help these individuals enter and advance in occupations that provide opportunities for long-term economic success. Abt's evaluations of career pathways provide rigorous evidence of what works and comprehensive assessments of program design and implementation. Using evidence-based strategies, Abt also provides technical assistance (TA) to states and local entities as they develop, implement and evaluate career pathways and other skills training programs and systems.

## Selected Expertise

- Experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation approaches to measuring impacts
- Implementation studies that examine program design and operations, organizational capacity and scale and partnership experiences to provide lessons for policy and practice
- Cost-benefit studies
- Evidence-based TA
- Recruitment strategies and scaling of programs to facilitate evaluation
- Collaboration with practitioners and policymakers to ensure relevant and useful results

## Selected/Featured Projects Skills Training Evaluations

### The Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) Evaluation

Abt conducted this random assignment evaluation of strategies that promote employment and self-sufficiency for economically disadvantaged individuals. This nine-site study, funded by the Administration for Children and Families at the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), focused on programs that adopted key elements of a career pathways framework. Career pathways offer a series of occupation-specific education and training steps accompanied by supports and connections to employment. PACE estimated early impacts on educational and career pathways employment 18- to 24-months after random assignment. Seven of the



nine programs had a statistically significant impact on the outcome most critical to judging program effectiveness. For all but one program, the key outcome examined in this early period was education-related. One of these education-focused programs, I-BEST, more than tripled completion of college credentials in the first two years. Year Up, the sole program for which employment was the expected early outcome, produced the largest earnings gain yet seen for a rigorously evaluated workforce development program, increasing participants' average quarterly earnings by more than 50 percent.

## Evaluations of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG)

HHS funds the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG), a federal program with two important goals: 1) training low-income adults for careers in health care; and 2) addressing the nations' shortage of skilled health care workers. Abt has played a key role in supporting HPOG's two rounds of grants through three efforts: 1) a grantee administrative and performance tracking system; 2) experimental impact evaluations; and 3) implementation evaluations. The impact evaluation found that in the short term, HPOG increased occupational training; receipt of academic support, career support and other services; and educational progress. Implementation and impact evaluations of the second round of 32 HPOG grants, including a cost-benefit analysis, are under way.

## Career Pathways Intermediate Outcomes (CPIO) and Career Pathways Long-Term Outcomes (CPLO) Studies

The initial PACE and HPOG impact evaluations measured program effectiveness at 15 – 24 months. For most of the programs, the short-term primary outcome was educational progress, theoretically a prelude to longer-term employment and earnings gains. The CPIO and CPLO evaluations assess HPOG and PACE program impacts at approximately 36 and 72 months, respectively. For these evaluations of longer-term impacts, the primary outcome is earnings, thus providing a more complete test of career pathways programs' effectiveness in raising employment and earnings.

## Green Jobs and Health Care Impact Evaluation

The Green Jobs and Health Care Impact Evaluation evaluated four U.S. Department of Labor-funded career pathways programs for unemployed and dislocated workers. The programs provided occupational training and support in the healthcare or green-energy sectors. The evaluation included: 1) an impact study that used random assignment to assess program impacts on participants' credential attainment and employment, earnings and other related outcomes; and 2) an implementation

study that examined the operation of the programs and participation patterns of program enrollees. One of the four programs had a statistically significant positive impact on earnings after 18 months. All four programs had large positive impacts on participation in vocational training and receipt of training-related supports and vocational credentials.

## Skills Training TA

### Year Up Professional Training Corps TA and Evaluation

The Professional Training Corps (PTC) initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, continues Abt's close partnership with the nationally known nonprofit organization Year Up, which provides training and paid internships with private companies to low-income youth. Since 2010 Abt has helped Year Up scale up nationally. PTC brings the Year Up model into community colleges. Abt's research helps Year Up develop and implement changes to its program model to adapt it to the college setting. Abt will conduct an impact evaluation of the modified model.

### TA for States Developing Career Pathways Systems

Abt partnered with Manhattan Strategy Group and the Center for Occupational Research and Development in this Department of Education-funded project providing multi-tiered TA to states' efforts to integrate and scale adult education career pathways approaches with workforce development and college efforts. Abt led the TA component in which 13 states' adult education offices and their interagency partners received customized TA to strengthen their career pathways state systems and expand the delivery of career pathways in basic education programs located in community colleges, school districts, and community-based organizations. Implementation and outcome data were collected to develop models for scaling career pathways for low-skilled adults at the local level.

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