

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	Any training program.
Soft skills training	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.
Occupational or sectoral training	Training tied to a given occupation, such as truck driving or welding, or to a specific economic sector.
On-the-job training	Training that takes place in a workplace while the employee is doing the actual job.
Apprenticeships	Learning on the job, typically in a skilled trade. Can also include classroom instruction.
Work-readiness activities	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.
Job development/job placement	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.
Work experience	Paid or unpaid experience in a work-like environment.
Unpaid work experience	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 or 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.

Submitted to:

Emily Schmitt and Kimberly Clum, Project Officers
 Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation
 Administration for Children and Families
 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Contract Number: HHSP23320095642WC/HHSP2337044T

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This brief is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary. Suggested citation: Wissel, Sarah, Jacob Hartog, and Emily Sama-Miller (2016). Primary employment and training strategies used in the interventions reviewed by ESER, (OPRE Report #2016-65), Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.