

Purpose

The purpose of this Agreement is for Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) to assist the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services (WDWS) with evaluation of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I programs. With WIOA increased emphasis on serving disadvantaged populations, the evaluation model will simultaneously measure service delivery for priority groups and better outcomes for program participants.

Background

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) places a focus on evaluation as a basis for pursuing evidence-based practice in workforce development. Performance evaluation can help steer resources to the most effective programs and make improvements in those that are less effective. To this end, Northern Illinois University's Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) will perform an evaluation of Wyoming Title I programs in cooperation with the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services.

According to WIOA regulations, each state's Unified or Combined State Plan is required to have a section focused on evaluation. Guidance for this section is as follows:

Describe how the state will conduct evaluations and research projects on activities under WIOA core programs; how such projects will be coordinated with, and designed in conjunction with, State and local boards and with State agencies responsible for the administration of all respective core programs; and, further, how the projects will be coordinated with the evaluations provided for by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education under WIOA. (Required Elements, p. 12)

The DOL Evaluation Toolkit¹ states evaluation is empirical analysis that uses program and other quantitative and qualitative data to describe the operation of a program, measure the program impacts on outcomes of policy and program interest, and/or determine cost effectiveness of the program to identify improvements, best practices, and/or what works and does not work. These types of evaluation may help with the following actions:

- Improving specific programs, services, interventions or activities. Evaluations can inform whether program service components produce positive outcomes or whether there is a need for other program improvements
- Use of tested or evaluated innovative interventions may also increase or improve outcomes for program participants
- Determine which state policies to implement, planning activities to continue, and funding priorities to consider as part of WIOA program administration and management
- Secure state or other funding needed to sustain and scale up a state priority initiative
- Demonstrate long-term impacts to individuals and communities
- Educate the larger workforce development community

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Policy Development and Research (2019). *Evaluation Toolkit: Key Elements for State Workforce Agencies*. https://evalhub.workforcecegps.org/-/media/Global-Site/Content/ETA-Webinars/2018/10---October/20181002_An_Evaluation_Readiness_Assessment/WIOA-Evaluation-Toolkit-for-States-as-of-July-2018.ashx

While evaluations conducted by internal staff may be less costly, there are challenges related to expertise and evaluator independence. According to the DOL Evaluation Toolkit, “the complexity of conducting [evaluations] means the qualifications, experience, and dedicated time commitment of a potential evaluator are critical to success in conducting the evaluation. Furthermore, impact studies generally require evaluator independence to ensure that the study is conducted objectively, and the results can be “trusted.”

Recognizing these challenges, The DOL guidance suggests that a partnership with an external research partner can be a better option for workforce agencies that lack the expertise or staff time to perform evaluations internally. *This approach can help build capacity of internal staff to conduct future evaluations.* “Partnerships are options to conduct a specific study (a one-time effort) or to form an ongoing relationship to make state administrative data available for external research. An ongoing relationship with a research entity at a university is much more involved and affords many more options for external evaluations” (DOL Evaluation Toolkit, p. 47).

The Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) at Northern Illinois University has performed evaluations of WIOA Title I programs in Illinois and Colorado, U.S. Dept. of Labor grant funded apprenticeship expansion efforts in Illinois, and the Illinois Community College Board’s Workforce Equity Initiative. CGS has worked with the Illinois Dept. of Commerce to develop and refine a variety of workforce development programs. Additionally, CGS has provided training and technical assistance to improve the evaluation capacity of state and local workforce area personnel.

Project Approach

CGS will lead a process to develop a learning agenda to determine research and evaluation goals. This approach will build upon the findings of the evaluation conducted under the 2023-24 scope of work. Based on the learning agenda, CGS will conduct research and evaluation activities to address the identified research questions.

NIU’s Center for Governmental Studies shall work with WDWS to perform the tasks outlined below.

Tasks

TASK 1 — DEVELOP ONE-YEAR AND LONGER-TERM LEARNING AGENDAS

CGS will work with WDWS and local workforce area leadership to create a learning agenda. The learning agenda will be developed to meet WDWD’s goal to increase evidence-based program and policy development.

Learning agendas develop learning questions that focus on broad strategic goals. High level approaches to address the learning questions are also included. An example of a workforce development learning agenda can be found on the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development’s website:

<https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/wdis/products.htm>

TASK 2 – PERFORM EVALUATION ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE OUTCOME OF THE LEARNING AGENDA DEVELOPMENT

Evaluation activities might include quantitative and/or qualitative evaluation. Quantitative analysis can expand on the analysis of participant data completed as part of the report published under the 2023-24 CGS scope of work. Additional available data in the participant tracking system should be considered.

Qualitative work can provide a greater understanding of quantitative findings. Approaches that might be considered include frontline staff interviews or focus groups, participant surveys or focus groups, or employer surveys or focus groups.

Examples of learning questions include:

- What are the most effective policies/practices for training program selection and approval?
- Females that do not receive training have employment rates that are more than 10 percentage points higher than males. What are the factors that lead to this disparity?
- What are the most effective policies/practices for providing services to customers in rural areas?
- What are the financial implications of program completion for the customers? (i.e. does the benefits cliff impact exiters employment rates?)

TASK 3 – PREPARE FINAL REPORT AND ASSIST WITH DISSEMINATING FINDINGS

To be an effective tool for continuous improvement, the results of evaluation must be shared through reports and other methods. Again, according to the DOL Evaluation Toolkit these products “convey the evaluation’s findings to relevant stakeholders, including the sponsoring state agency, state stakeholders, DOL, the larger workforce community, and other potential funders.”

Final reports will include details from the quantitative and qualitative analyses as well as a shorter, more easily digestible executive summary. CGS will present findings to an in-person gathering of workforce leaders in cooperation with WDWS leadership.

Components of Task 3:

- Prepare final report
- Present findings as needed

Cost

Deliverable	Cost
Task 1: Facilitate the development one-year and longer-term learning agendas	\$5,000
Task 2: Perform evaluation activities based on the outcome of the learning agenda development	\$35,000
Task 3: Prepare final report and assist with disseminating findings	\$5,000
Total	\$45,000

