

## **Getting it Right: A Rigorous Assessment of the Accessibility of the Public Workforce System**

As addressed in AEA's Guiding Principles, an important aspect of multiculturalism is the concept of inclusivity: *Evaluators have the responsibility to understand and respect differences among participants, such as differences in their culture, religion, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and ethnicity, and to account for potential implications of these differences when planning, conducting, analyzing, and reporting evaluations (Respect for People, #6)*. We have spent the last three years developing an understanding of inclusiveness—what it means, what it looks like—and ways to measure it in the context of an evaluation of the accessibility of the public workforce system. The evaluation focuses on participants' experience of, ability to use, and equal access to, all phases of the service delivery process, rather than on “compliance” as is typically the practice in most studies of accessibility. In addition to this novel approach, our proposed presentation adds to knowledge in the evaluation field by describing how we developed a design that permits investigation of the magnitude of socially desirable responses (highly likely in a study of this type) and validates self-reported data in a unique way.

Recognizing employment disparities for people with a disability (PWD),<sup>1</sup> the US Department of Labor has made a commitment to the inclusion of *all* PWD, regardless of type of disability, in all services of its American Job Centers (AJCs). In preliminary work for our evaluation of the accessibility of the AJCs to PWD, we examined prior studies that measured the accessibility of service providers, including AJCs, and identified a range of measures, instruments, and data items for possible use in our study. We determined that *there are virtually no metrics which validate these measures*; as a result, our current work in developing rigorous measures that can be validated represents groundbreaking work with respect to measuring inclusiveness and promoting high standards of quality in evaluation practice.

This presentation will describe how we created our survey by first developing a conceptual framework for assessing accessibility that addressed programmatic, communication, and physical accessibility. After discussing the challenges of gathering data across the universe of AJCs and the limitations of relying on center director self-report, we will describe how we are supplementing the survey with site visit interviews, architectural accessibility assessments, and focus groups with customers at 100 AJCs, to validate the survey data and provide a deeper understanding of the true inclusiveness of the centers.

Validation of the survey required the site visit sample to be much larger than is typical of federal evaluations, involving 100 two-person evaluation site visits, plus on-site assessments of the 100 sites by an architectural firm specializing in accessibility, plus focus groups with customers. This turned what would have been a brief online survey into a rigorous study. This session thus provides an example of effective development of a study design that goes beyond typical survey data collection to ensure more accurate and meaningful results. It also offers important implications for evaluation practice as an approach to adjusting survey results to account for socially desirable response bias.

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<sup>1</sup> The unemployment rate for PWD was 13.2% in 2013, almost double the 7.1% rate for persons with no disability. US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013.