EVALUATION PLAN IMPROVEMENT GUIDE

Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training – PROJECT TYPE A

SGA-REQUIRED ITEMS

The table below provides a list of the required items for confirmation of the grant award. These are stipulated in the SGA.

Requirements from the SGA Evaluation Plan Factors
• None

RECOMMENDED EVALUATION PLAN IMPROVEMENTS

The National Evaluation Coordinator, Abt Associates, Inc., completed the following table, noting in which areas the grantee's original evaluation plan needs improvement. Abt's recommendations refer to both the original SGA and professional evaluation standards relevant to the type of intervention and evaluation proposed. Comments identify omissions that require consideration and errors that must be corrected in the original evaluation plans and the grantee's responses to SGA's evaluation requirements.

Evaluation Plan Factor	Recommendations for Improvement
Logic Model Does the logic model sensibly and accurately reflect the inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes for the specific innovation beyond the general program operations?	*No comments; the logic model is detailed and comprehensive. The innovation is complex, and the logic model is sensibly broken down in two major goals and five major sub-goals. Each has an associated set of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. This framework makes it clear how the various pieces fit together.*
Research Questions Does the evaluation design include a reasonable number of research questions that are logical and linked to the specific innovation? Are there hypotheses about expected outcome changes due to the innovation?	• While the research questions are generally reasonable, consider closer linkages between the research questions and the logic model. For example, "How was activity X conducted and how did it lead to outcome Y?" For example, one research question is: "How is data being used across and within agencies?" As it stands, this question may be too broad. It could be sharpened by linking it to the interim output "Data

Evaluation Plan Factor	Recommendations for Improvement
	dashboard created and used." • Add hypotheses about expected outcome changes.
Evaluation Design (Type) Is the evaluation type appropriate enough for the proposed innovation to accurately measure anticipated outcomes and answer evaluation questions? Are the designs from previous evidence sources (if they exist) described?	• The plans for both the formative and summative evaluations are incomplete and need to be further developed. • A strength of the summative evaluation is that there are clear differences in the services offered to different groups. A weakness is that participants themselves decide which group to join. This "self-selection" creates problems for causal inference of effects; the plan should propose methods to address it.
Evaluation Design (Rigor) Are the analytic methods detailed and appropriate to the evaluation design type and proposed innovation? Is the source(s) of the control or comparison group, random assignment or other selection procedures, and mitigation of selection bias described? Are confidentiality issues addressed? For non-experimental designs, does the source of the comparison group cover the entire treatment group? Have potential comparisons voluntarily applied for something comparable?	**Formative evaluation** • Although the general plan is appropriate for a formative evaluation, it is incomplete. Evaluators need to design the data collection tools and analysis methods. **Summative evaluation** • The summative evaluation includes a comparison group design for measuring impacts. There are two treatment groups and one control group, with self-selection of job seekers into groups. The sources of these groups are well defined. The evaluation plan acknowledges that self-selection of study participants into treatment groups is a problem for estimating impacts, and the evaluator needs to come up with a way of dealing with the self-selection problem. If that proves infeasible, however, the study would still be a strong outcomes analysis. Such an outcomes study would be appropriate and sufficient for a Type A project.

Evaluation Plan Factor	Recommendations for Improvement
Data (Definitions and Measurement) How are the specific innovation indicators (especially outcomes) defined? Are the proposed measurements for outcomes valid and appropriate? Are they reliable? Are their unit(s) of analysis sensitive enough to note changes from the innovation?	**Formative evaluation** • The system change outcomes in the table appear to be consistent with those in the logic model, although the terminology shifts somewhat between the two and should be made consistent. The measures appear to be appropriate, valid, reliable, and sensitive to change. **Summative evaluation** *No comments; the measures appear to be appropriate, valid, reliable, and sensitive to change.*
Data (Sources and Collection) Are the data sources fully described for each measurement? Are these new or existing administrative sources (like an MIS or financial reporting)? Are they sources unique to the innovation and evaluation? Will the sources produce the defined data or a proxy? Are the specific methods for collecting the data from each of the sources proposed? Are these methods reliable and, if necessary, secure? How often and how are they collected? What is the baseline collection? Does the evaluation plan include appropriate strategies for dealing with missing data? Are sample data collection instruments described?	**Formative evaluation** • The formative evaluation will include interviews with stakeholders, document and budget review, and extant data from agency systems. The data collection plan is incomplete and needs to be more fully developed. **Summative evaluation** • The plan includes a fairly complete description of the data collection plan. Data collection will piggy-back on the extensive data collection system already in place, and will require modifications to that system. • Another component of data collection calls for follow-up on 1,500 participants to be done by One-Stop counselors. The evaluator should focus on the follow-up plans in detail to make sure that they are realistic given the other demands on One-Stop counselors' time and resources (e.g., the technical proposal emphasized that the staff were already "overstretched" (p. 2)).

Evaluation Plan Factor	Recommendations for Improvement
Analysis (Sampling) Where applicable (for experimental and quasi-experimental studies), is there a sampling plan that describes the purpose and method of sampling, includes power calculations, and provides appropriate anticipated sample sizes?	**Formative evaluation** • Not applicable **Summative evaluation** • The plan for the comparison group design does include estimates for numbers of members in the three comparison groups. Evaluators should ensure that all the systems change components will be in place in time to recruit the anticipated numbers into the study. Additionally, they should account for attrition at follow-up (particularly given the issue mentioned above) in calculating the baseline sample size needed to meet their targeted sample size for analysis.
Analysis (Methods) Are there impact formulas, cost-benefit calculations, or other preliminary analytical assumptions provided? Are the analytical software or other tools described, and appropriate for the kinds of data and evaluation design?	• The plan needs to describe analysis methods for the formative and summative components of the evaluation.
Evaluation Timeline Is the evaluation timeline feasible and appropriately aligned with the intervention's components and schedule?	• The timeline needs clarification. The plan timeline indicates that an evaluator will not be hired until November, though it appears the implementation *may* begin prior than that (the exact date for the beginning of implementation is not clear). Ensure that the timeline allows for baseline data collection.
Evaluation Budget Is the evaluation budget reasonable and mapped to specific evaluation tasks or milestones?	• Linking the budget to specific tasks rather than general years will be helpful for management and rigor.
Evaluation Contribution How will the evaluation enhance the broader workforce system? Does the evaluation plan include a dissemination plan?	• Fully explain how funding the proposed program evaluation will provide knowledge that can be used to enhance the broader workforce system.

Evaluation Plan Factor	Recommendations for Improvement
Independent Evaluator Has the third-party evaluator been procured? Do they have experience with this type of evaluation?	• Clearly describe your process for procuring the services of a third-party evaluator, including the levels of capacity and expertise you will require.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

The table below provides a short-list of priority items for the grantee and grantee's third-party evaluator to improve the evaluation design. Though not required for confirmation of the grant award, these priority items are necessary for a strong program evaluation. This list may be helpful in procuring the third-party evaluator, as well.

Priority Evaluation Design Improvement Items
• Integrate the research questions and design of formative evaluation with the logic model.
• Provide additional detail to fill in the gaps in the current plan regarding the design, data collection, and analysis.
• Link the budget to specific tasks rather than general years.