Evaluation of Center for Economic Opportunity's Initiative to Reduce Poverty in New York City

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Outline of Presentation

- Overview of the Evaluation
- Description of the Program Reviews
- Emerging Themes
- Challenges and Strategies to Address Them

Evaluation Overview

- CEO Evaluation attempts to cover a portfolio of 40+ programs:
  - Aimed at different subgroups
  - Using diverse strategies
  - Focused on different short-term outcomes, but all intended to reduce poverty
- Most of programs are newly implemented and many are small
- Evaluation design intended to:
  - Provide understanding of each program, with selected focus on implementation, outcomes, costs and benefits
  - Assess overall impact of CEO in affecting outcomes related to poverty

Evaluation Overview

- Components in process:
  - Full program reviews of 20+ programs
    (more limited reviews of remaining programs will follow)
  - Collection and analysis of CEO performance monitoring data
  - Collection and analysis of individual client data
- Future components:
  - In-depth implementation and outcome evaluations
  - Cross-site and special analyses (e.g., recruitment studies)

Evaluation Approach

- Sequential “purchase” of information
- Use blended evaluation team from Westat and Metis for logistics and expertise
  - 4 senior staff assigned to programs as ongoing liaisons
- Minimize burden to Agencies and providers
- Ensure feedback of information to programs and providers

Program Review

- Based on evaluability assessment (EA)
- EA developed by Joe Wholey and colleagues in the late 1970s to respond to the lack of use of evaluation studies
- Many evaluations found null or negative results:
  - Programs not fully implemented or did not exist
  - Goals were “grant goals”
  - Lack of logic in design
- Also lack of use due to lack of “ownership” or agreement with the focus of the results

What Is Evaluability Assessment?

- A method for determining:
  - The extent to which a program/policy is ready for an implementation or outcome evaluation
  - The changes that are need to increase its readiness
  - The type of evaluation approach most suitable to judge a program or policy's performance

Basic Program Design Method

- Document the program design/clarify intent
- Document the program as implemented
- Analyze the plausibility of the program's goals
- Examine the measurement/information systems
- Address, where possible, research questions posed by CEO and agency
- Develop reports, including program profile and an action plan with options for next steps

Program Review Data Collection

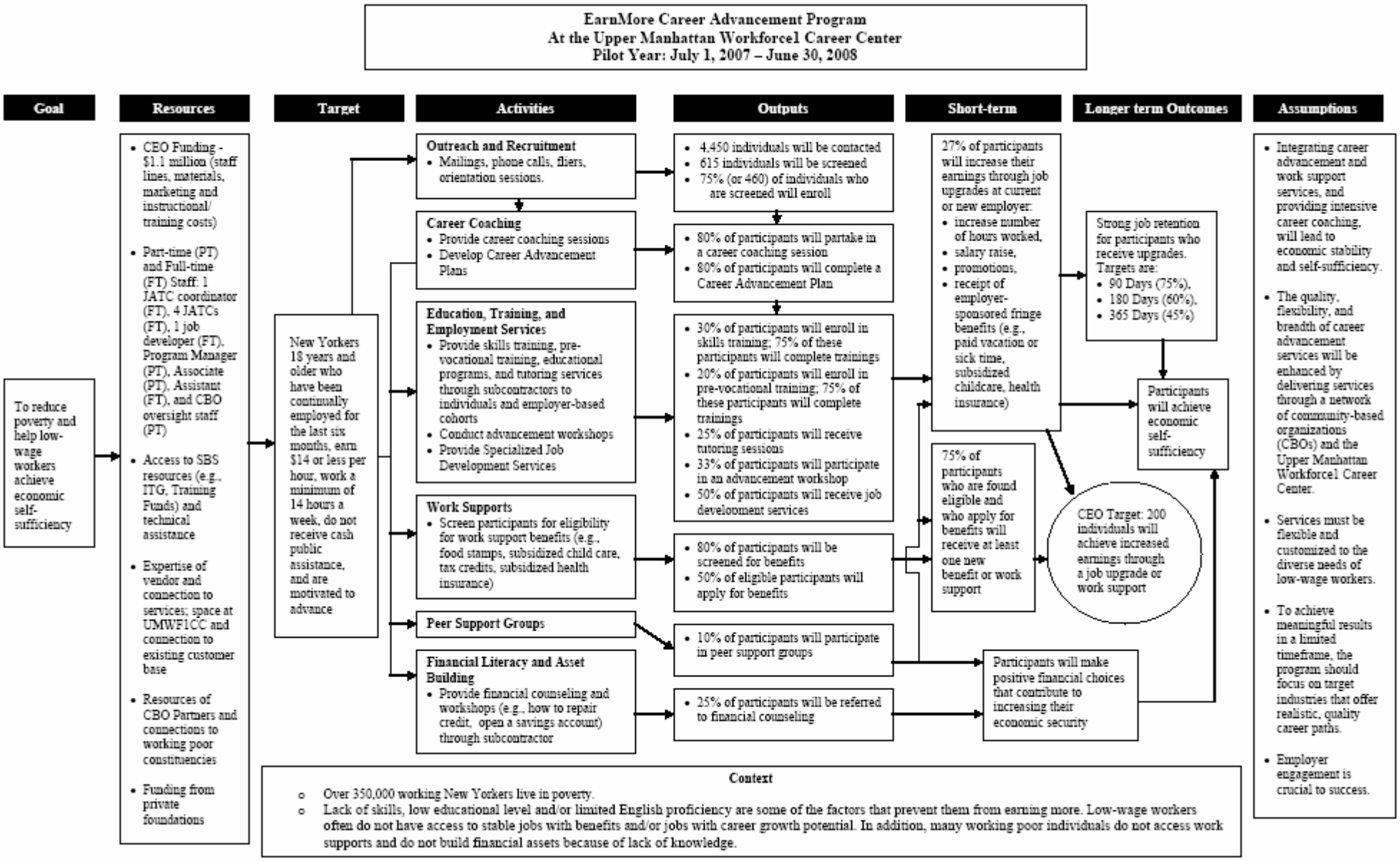
- Same protocol used for each review, tailored to each program and incorporating CEO/Agency/evaluation research questions

- Key steps include:
  - Reviewing program documents prior to site visit
  - Meeting with CEO/DMHHS to identify key research questions
  - Developing draft logic model
  - Conducting planning meeting with Agency operating program and interviews with Agency
  - Conducting site visit to providers (with 4 person team)

Logic Models

- A major contribution of the method
- Visual representation of the underlying logic or theory of a program
- Models developed at beginning of the review and modified throughout
- Model provides the analytic tool for assessing plausibility

Logic Model


EarnMore Career Advancement Program
At the Upper Manhattan Workforce1 Career Center
Pilot Year: July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008
Goal
To reduce poverty and help low-wage workers achieve economic self-sufficiency
Resources
CEO Funding - $1.1 million (staff lines, materials, marketing and instructional/ training costs)
Part-time (PT) and Full-time (FT) Staff: 1 JATC coordinator (FT), 4 JATCs (FT), 1 job developer (FT), Program Manager (PT), Associate (PT), Assistant (FT), and CBO oversight staff (PT)
Access to SBS resources (e.g., ITG, Training Funds) and technical assistance
Expertise of vendor and connection to services; space at UMWF1CC and connection to existing customer base
Resources of CBO Partners and connections to working poor constituencies
Funding from private foundations
Target
New Yorkers 18 years and older who have been continually employed for the last six months, earn $14 or less per hour, work a minimum of 14 hours a week, do not receive cash public assistance, and are motivated to advance
Activities
Outreach and Recruitment
Mailings, phone calls, fliers, orientation sessions.
Career Coaching
Provide career coaching sessions
Develop Career Advancement Plans
Education, Training, and Employment Services
Provide skills training, pre-vocational training, educational programs, and tutoring services through subcontractors to individuals and employer-based cohorts
Conduct advancement workshops
Provide Specialized Job Development Services
Work Supports
Screen participants for eligibility for work support benefits (e.g., food stamps, subsidized child care, tax credits, subsidized health insurance)
Peer Support Groups
Financial Literacy and Asset Building
Provide financial counseling and workshops (e.g., how to repair credit, open a savings account) through subcontractor
Outputs
4,450 individuals will be contacted
615 individuals will be screened
75% (or 460) of individuals who are screened will enroll
80% of participants will partake in a career coaching session
80% of participants will complete a Career Advancement Plan
30% of participants will enroll in skills training; 75% of these participants will complete trainings
20% of participants will enroll in pre-vocational training; 75% of these participants will complete trainings
25% of participants will receive tutoring sessions
33% of participants will participate in an advancement workshop
50% of participants will receive job development services
80% of participants will be screened for benefits
50% of eligible participants will apply for benefits
10% of participants will participate in peer support groups
25% of participants will be referred to financial counseling
Short-term
27% of participants will increase their earnings through job upgrades at current or new employer:
increase number of hours worked,
salary raise,
promotions,
receipt of employer-sponsored fringe benefits (e.g., paid vacation or sick time, subsidized childcare, health insurance)
75% of participants who are found eligible and who apply for benefits will receive at least one new benefit or work support
CEO Target: 200 individuals will achieve increased earnings through a job upgrade or work support
Participants will make positive financial choices that contribute to increasing their economic security
Longer term Outcomes
Strong job retention for participants who receive upgrades. Targets are:
90 Days (75%),
180 Days (60%),
365 Days (45%)
Participants will achieve economic self-sufficiency
Assumptions
Integrating career advancement and work support services, and providing intensive career coaching, will lead to economic stability and self-sufficiency.
The quality, flexibility, and breadth of career advancement services will be enhanced by delivering services through a network of community-based organizations (CBOs) and the Upper Manhattan Workforce1 Career Center.
Services must be flexible and customized to the diverse needs of low-wage workers.
To achieve meaningful results in a limited timeframe, the program should focus on target industries that offer realistic, quality career paths.
Employer engagement is crucial to success.
Context
Over 350,000 working New Yorkers live in poverty.
Lack of skills, low educational level and/or limited English proficiency are some of the factors that prevent them from earning more. Low-wage workers often do not have access to stable jobs with benefits and/or jobs with career growth potential. In addition, many working poor individuals do not access work supports and do not build financial assets because of lack of knowledge.

Analyzing Plausibility

- Is it plausible to achieve outcomes given:
  - Level of resources provided
  - Level, consistency, fidelity of implementation of activities
  - “Reach” of the program and enrollment
  - The timeframe
  - What is known through past research/theory
  - Basic common-sense/logic in linking activities to outcomes and in linking short term and long-term outcomes

Program Review Reports

- Profile of Program and Status Review
- Action Plan
  - Description of the basic program elements and their level of implementation, keyed to the logic model
  - Analysis of the plausibility of the program reaching its outcomes
  - Answers to those CEO and agency questions that could be addressed
  - Outline of options for strengthening the program and data collection, and for evaluation

“Design Sensitivity” Technical Review of Action Plans

- Internal review of all action plans to:
  - Provide cross-site consistency
  - Ensure highest rigor brought to the proposed evaluation action plans
- Specifically focused on ensuring that the program review has:
  - Considered the elements of study design that relate to statistical power, and
  - Incorporated them into the proposed study design

Elements in Design Sensitivity Review

- Intervention:
  - Whether PR has been able to determine the strength and fidelity of the program
  - Whether there are confounding conditions
- Control/Comparison Conditions:
  - Whether conditions are in place to support the strongest design alternative

Elements in Design Sensitivity Review

- Size and Nature of Participant Sample:
  - Whether PR has been able to determine the size and heterogeneity of the program sample (across and within sites) and of any possible comparison group
- Data/Measurement:
  - Whether measures are available on key proximal outcomes
  - Whether the PR has been able to assess each measure's validity, reliability, and sensitivity to change

First Program Reviews

Career Advancement Program	NYC Department of Small Business Services
Teen ACTION	NYC Department of Youth and Community Development
CUNY ASAP	City University of New York
Young Adult Internship Program	NYC Department of Youth and Community Development
Office of Financial Empowerment	NYC Department of Consumer Affairs
School Based Health Clinics	NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Model Education Program	NYC Department of Correction
CBO Outreach	NYC Department of Small Business Services
Work/Life Skills	NYC Department of Juvenile Justice
CUNY Prep	City University of New York

Emerging Themes

- Difficulties in reaching the intended population
- Having sufficient service intensity at the individual client level
- Whether programs with multiple sites maintain fidelity to the same model
- Whether adaptation of models stretch beyond fidelity or are within appropriate bounds
- How to set reasonable program targets
- The role of the city agency in managing the program and assuring accountability
- Long-term prospects of the program for sustainability

Evaluation Timeline

- July: Program reviews of all evaluated CEO programs
- September: First interim report of evaluation
- Ongoing: Implementation/outcome evaluations for specific programs

Challenges and Strategies to Address Them

- Assessing the potential of the Initiative and its efforts in creating long term change in a compressed political timeframe
  - Coordinated program reviews, especially development of logic models, help to focus subsequent efforts that are likely to be more feasible and targeted to key outcomes

Challenges and Strategies to Address Them

- Developing interim products that can remain durable
  - Comprehensive internal documents
  - Public documents containing information less likely to change in the short-run

Challenges and Strategies to Address Them

- Developing rigorous impact studies that can be conducted in a 12-18 month window
  - Using a “design sensitivity” technical review to identify best opportunities