

Experimental Evaluations: Assessing Policy and Program Impacts



Through **experimental evaluations**, Abt Associates has produced groundbreaking, high profile studies over the company's 50 years of cutting-edge, mission-driven research. Abt continues leadership in this area, shaping U.S. programs and policies to help improve the economic and social wellbeing of children, youth, families, and workers.

About Experimental Evaluations and Random Assignment

An **experimental evaluation** is the most rigorous, impartial method for *assessing the causal impact of a program or policy*. It enables researchers to determine the causal effects of policy interventions and establish whether one intervention is more effective than the status quo (or than another intervention). **Random assignment** is the core procedure in these evaluations. By creating two statistically equivalent groups, a group exposed to an intervention and a control group not exposed to the intervention, random assignment allows researchers to construct an estimate of the counterfactual (i.e., *what would have happened in the absence of the intervention*). In this way, it can determine if outcomes for the treatment group represent an improvement over the status quo.

Questions We're Examining

Can retaining disability benefits spur beneficiaries to work?

Abt Associates is conducting an evaluation of the Benefit Offset National Demonstration for SSA to determine if allowing beneficiaries to keep more of their benefits, despite reaching a certain earnings' threshold, motivates them to increase their work effort and earnings. This nine-year study involves randomly assigning more than one million disability beneficiaries in 10 randomly selected U.S. sites.

Will USDA's Summer Food program reduce children's very low food security in summer months?

Abt implemented and evaluated USDA's Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children demonstration over three summers—2011 to 2013—using a randomized design.



In Year 2, Abt conducted interviews of 27,000 households with school age children in 14 sites to understand the program's impact on children's food security, nutritional status, household food expenditures, parental perceptions, and participation in nutrition assistance programs.

Can a career pathways framework successfully train low-income adults for careers in health care?

HHS's Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program provides health-sector training in a career pathways framework to disadvantaged workers. To determine the extent to which specific programs or program models help low-income adults complete training that leads to careers in healthcare and family-supporting wages, Abt is conducting a multi-site evaluation involving 10,500 randomly assigned participants. The evaluation introduces new methodologies that capitalize on natural and random variation of program features, and advances the field of inside-the-black-box impact analysis to explore how certain practices and policies are associated with variations in impacts.

Can evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs be replicated nationwide with similar results?

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Replication study for HHS is testing multiple replications of three evidence-based programs being implemented in schools and/or communities. The evaluation is being implemented with nine programs across the country with approximately half of the 9,000 youth randomly assigned to program services. The design allows for an examination of variation in impacts across replications to provide evidence about the generalizability of program effectiveness.

Can targeted job training programs increase earnings and bolster the skills of the American workforce in the industries and occupations facing shortages?

To answer this question, Abt is conducting an evaluation of the H-1B Technical Skills Training Grant Program for DOL. This program, funded by H-1B visa application fees, is intended to raise the technical skill levels of American workers so they can access employment in fields that typically rely on that visa program. This random assignment evaluation will examine impacts on the earnings of trainees and on the skills of the American workforce in these industries. Abt's in-depth process study will inform the understanding of factors that facilitate or impede the effective implementation of these grants.

Are interventions for homeless families effective in promoting housing stability and self-sufficiency?

For the Family Options Study, Abt is measuring the relative impact of four interventions for homeless families in 12 communities. This rigorous, multi-site experimental study for HUD, in which eligible families who consent to participate are randomly assigned to one of the intervention programs, will inform federal policymakers, community planners, and local practitioners about which interventions are most effective for achieving the best outcomes for families.

Ensuring Rigorous Evaluations

Abt Associates' professionals are among the most sought after experts to provide high quality evaluation technical assistance to grantees and local evaluators. Our guidance helps increase the quality of evaluations and build researchers' capacity to design and conduct scientifically rigorous research.

Investing in Innovation (i3) National Evaluation

The Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) initiative funds 117 grantees to expand, develop, and evaluate innovative, evidence-based practices and promising efforts to enhance school and student outcomes. Abt's role includes supporting local evaluators in the design and implementation of experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations; reviewing evaluations for design and implementation quality; and providing cross-study syntheses of evaluation findings.

Workforce Innovation Fund National Evaluation Coordination

DOL's Workforce Innovation Fund supports grantees in designing and evaluating innovative workforce system service delivery strategies for employers and jobseekers as well as the systems change necessary to support, sustain, and scale those strategies. Abt is providing technical evaluation assistance and will assess the relative cost and impacts of the innovations, synthesizing the findings of cost-effective practices in the workforce system.

Contact

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Abt Associates is a mission-driven, global leader in research and program implementation in the fields of health, social and environmental policy, and international development. Known for its rigorous approach to solving complex challenges, Abt Associates is regularly ranked as one of the top 20 global research firms and one of the top 40 international development innovators. The company has multiple offices in the U.S. and program offices in more than 40 countries.

