

Connecting Adults to Success: Evaluation of Career Navigator Training (CATS Study)

Part A: Supporting Statement for Paperwork Reduction Act Submission

May 4, 2022

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A. Justification

Introduction

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the U.S. Department of Education (ED) requests clearance for data collection activities to support a congressionally mandated National Assessment of Adult Education. Specifically, this request covers collection of data to conduct an impact study of training for career navigators—local adult education provider staff who provide services to address the challenges that adult learners face navigating the transition to the workforce and to further education and training. This randomized controlled trial (RCT) study (referred to as Connecting Adults to Success: Evaluation of Career Navigator Training) will compare the education and employment outcomes of learners enrolled in adult education sites whose career navigators receive the study’s training (the treatment group) with the education and employment outcomes of learners enrolled in the business-as-usual sites who are offered the study’s training after the study period (the comparison group).

A1. Circumstances making the collection of information necessary

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, which authorizes funding for adult education programs to help low-skilled adults succeed in the workforce and become more productive and engaged citizens, mandates that ED carry out rigorous research and evaluation to identify effective adult education services. A recent evidence review revealed that existing research provides little guidance on effective approaches for improving outcomes for adult learners (Borradaile et al., 2020). This study will help expand the evidence base.

A key goal of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act—Title II of WIOA—is to help adult learners connect with and move along career pathways. The legislation aims to contribute to a more competitive workforce by providing learners with skills and support to succeed in the labor market and to fulfill the labor demands of employers. To achieve this goal, adult education programs guide and support learners as they transition to further education, training, or employment.

One strategy to support learners is to employ designated staff whose explicit and primary role is to advise them in career and college planning. These staff—often referred to as **career navigators**—assist learners with selecting and applying for appropriate course work to progress on a career path, developing work and education plans, and transitioning to next steps. Career navigators provide counseling to learners and develop partnerships with the workforce development system to help facilitate learner transitions.

Career navigators are common in adult education programs. Several states, such as South Carolina and Georgia, require that local adult education providers have career navigators. But even in states without such a requirement, navigators can be found in many programs. Across states, career navigators are particularly common among adult education providers that offer certain types of programming, such as integrated education and training programs.

Career navigation services have not been tested in rigorous studies on their own but have been a component of some promising strategies emerging from adult education research. One study of a bridge program that included career navigation services found statistically significant positive impacts on completing high school, enrolling in college, and progressing in college (Martin and Broadus 2013). A rigorous evaluation of an integrated education and training program that included career navigation services found the program had statistically significant impacts on post-program employment and

earnings (Modicamore et al. 2017). Similarly, a national evaluation of WIOA-funded intensive services comprising case management and one-on-one counseling to job seekers found significant impacts on participation in training programs and subsequent labor market outcomes (Fortson et al. 2017). A recent synthesis of evidence on career pathways concluded that case management and navigation are key components of effective “pathway entry” programs to retain adult learners in basic skills classes as well as in “integrated education” programs to progress adult learners through training into employment (Bragg et al. 2019).

Although career navigation services have promise for improving outcomes for adult learners, evidence is sparse on how to ensure that career navigators offer high quality, consistent support. One strategy—the focus of this study—is **offering training to career navigators**. The study will test two trainings, both of which include online instruction paired with additional activities. They are:

1. The National College Transition Network at World Education, Inc.’s Navigating Pathways to Opportunity: Comprehensive Student Supports
2. The National Career Development Association’s Facilitating Career Development Training Course

The two trainings were selected for the study based on their content and delivery features, and because they are offered by organizations that could implement the trainings across a large number of sites during the study period. Promising content and delivery features for study trainings were identified during the design phase of the project, which included a literature scan and interviews with stakeholders in the field (ICR Reference No. 1850-0947). This work identified key competencies for career navigators that are important for supporting adult learners. It also identified training delivery features that enhance learning and application for career navigators, such as engaging over multiple training sessions and including experiential learning. The two selected trainings include content that aim to develop the identified competencies and include promising delivery features.

A2. Purposes and use of the information collection

The purpose of the current study is to evaluate the effectiveness of career navigator training that has the potential to improve learner outcomes. The study will be a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in which all career navigators associated with an adult education provider are randomly assigned to a treatment group that receives access to one of two career navigation trainings or to a comparison group that receives delayed training two years later. Participating sites will have the option to indicate a preference for a training before they are randomly assigned to the treatment or comparison group. To estimate the impacts of training for career navigators, the study team will compare the outcomes of learners who are enrolled at providers that received access to the training during the study period to the outcomes of learners enrolled at providers in the comparison group, which did not have access to the training during the study period.

IES contracted with Mathematica and its partners—Manhattan Strategy Group and Social Policy Research Associates (together, “the study team”)—to conduct this study. The impact study will address a variety of research questions (Exhibit A.1).

Exhibit A.1. Research questions

Primary research questions

1. What are the impacts of providing training to career navigators on learners' **further education**, including completion of high school equivalency, enrollment in postsecondary education, credit accrual, and credential completion?
2. What are the impacts of providing training to career navigators on learners' **workforce outcomes**, including employment and earnings?
3. Does providing training to career navigators affect learner **participation in career navigation services, the types of learners served, and the nature of the services provided?**

Secondary research questions

1. What are impacts of providing career navigation training on learners' **basic skills**, including literacy, numeracy, or English language skills?
2. Does providing training to career navigators influence learners' **persistence in and completion of adult education classes?**
3. How do impacts vary for **subgroups of learners** with different characteristics at program entry, including gender, age, race and ethnicity, and basic skill level, and for learners enrolled in English as a second language, adult secondary education, and adult basic education programs?
4. To what extent are impacts on longer-term outcomes explained by impacts on **short-term mediating variables**, including the use of career navigation services, persistence in and completion of courses, and basic skills?
5. What is the **cost-effectiveness** of training for career navigators?

To answer the research questions, the study will use administrative data, interviews, and surveys (Exhibit A.2). The data collection plan includes (1) measures of implementation of the career navigation training; (2) measures of the provision of navigation and related services to learners; (3) mediating variables for learners, such as program attendance and measures of basic skills; (4) longer-term outcomes of learners such as educational attainment, employment, and earnings; and (5) contextual (moderating) factors that could affect the implementation or impacts of the training, such as the type of provider.

Exhibit A.2. Data sources for the study

Data	Type of data (primary or administrative)	Source	Mode of collection	Use(s) in study
Site records from adult education providers	Administrative	All study providers covering all study learners	Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the characteristics of sites and learners at baseline, document the program services learners receive, and estimate impacts of the study's training on learners' basic skills and persistence
Learner consent	Primary	All study learners	Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify adult learners who agree to participate in the study
Learner intake form (learner portion)	Primary	All study learners	Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect information to help predict take-up of career navigation services to define the focal sample for the impact analysis, since not all adult education learners will receive career navigation services during the study period (see OMB Part B.2). These data will include learner-reported plans and goals, and learner demographic, employment, and education backgrounds not available in the site records.
Learner intake form (staff portion)	Primary	Intake staff at treatment and comparison providers	Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect information to help predict take-up of career navigation services to define the focal sample for the impact analysis, since not all adult education learners will receive career navigation services during the study period (see OMB Part B.2). These data will include staff predictions of likely program services for learners and learner persistence.
Career navigator baseline surveys	Primary	Career navigators at treatment and comparison providers	Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe navigators' background characteristics, experiences, and prior professional development Understand typical practices used by career navigators when providing services to learners
Program director interviews	Primary	Program directors from treatment and comparison sites	Phone interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect information on the services typically provided by career navigators at the sites, any training that navigators typically receive, and contextual factors that might influence the effectiveness of the study's training
End-of-training implementation surveys	Primary	Career navigators at treatment providers	Hard copy or electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measure the career navigators' perceptions of quality and usefulness of the study's training

Data	Type of data (primary or administrative)	Source	Mode of collection	Use(s) in study
Data from online/electronic training platforms	Administrative	Training organizations	Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand navigators' use of the study's computer-based trainings, such as number of times accessed, minutes used, and modules completed • Capture training attendance
Cost records on providing training	Administrative	Training organizations and program directors	Data extract and interview data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the cost of the components of providing the study's training, including training sessions, materials, and other supports
Career navigator logs	Primary	Career navigators at treatment and comparison providers	Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure the provision of services by navigators in the treatment and comparison sites in order to assess changes in practices as a result of the career navigator training
Administrative records on employment and earnings from National Directory of New Hires (NDNH)	Administrative	All study learners	Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure employment and earnings in the eight quarters before study intake • Measure employment and earnings 18 and 30 months after study intake
Administrative records on educational attainment data from National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), Federal Student Aid Database (FSA), and high school equivalency	Administrative	All study learners	Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure education outcomes, including high school equivalency and college enrollment, 18 and 30 months after study intake

Data	Type of data (primary or administrative)	Source	Mode of collection	Use(s) in study
test providers (e.g., GED TASC and HiSET)				

The study will last about six years (August 2021 to September 2027), with data collection occurring from late summer/fall 2022 through fall 2025. Exhibit A.3 shows the schedule of data collection activities.

Exhibit A.3. Major data collection activities, by year

Timing	Data collection activity
Late summer/fall 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End-of-training implementation surveys • Cost records on providing training • Program director interviews • Career navigator baseline survey
Fall 2022 to winter 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner intake forms
Fall 2022 to fall 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data from online/electronic training platforms • Career navigator logs
Summer 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult education provider records • NDNH data
Summer 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult education provider records
Fall 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDNH data • FSA data • NSC data • High school equivalency data
Fall 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDNH data • FSA data • NSC data • High school equivalency data

A3. Use of information technology to reduce burden

All surveys will be hosted on the Internet, accessible to respondents via a live secure web link. To reduce burden, the surveys will employ (1) drop-down response categories so respondents can quickly select from a list, (2) dynamic questions and automated skip patterns so respondents see only the questions that apply to them (including those based on answers provided previously in the survey), and (3) logical rules for responses so respondents’ answers are restricted to those intended by the question.

A4. Efforts to identify duplication

Information that is already available from alternative data sources will not be collected again for this project. For example, if a provider in the study has an existing management information system that collects information needed for this project that is exportable and of sufficient quality, the study team will accept data from its existing system. In these cases, the study team will request that the adult education provider site enter into the web-based data management system only information the program is not already collecting. Information obtained from the career navigator baseline survey, end-of-training implementation survey, program director interviews, career navigator logs, and learner intake forms is not available elsewhere. Moreover, the data collection plan reflects careful attention to the potential sources of information for this study, particularly to the reliability of the information and the efficiency in gathering it.

A5. Efforts to minimize burden in small businesses

This study will not involve small businesses. The primary small entities for this study are adult education provider sites. The study team expects that most adult education provider sites will be local education agencies, community colleges, and nonprofit organizations.

The data collection procedures have been designed to minimize burden on these entities. The study team will provide participating adult education providers a secure, web-based system that provider staff will use to administer the study consent and intake form to adult learners. This system will also provide easy access for career navigators to the study logs. In addition, the study team will use low-burden approaches whenever possible to collect data on costs and implementation of the navigator training, focusing on administrative data when feasible and using data collection instruments that only ask for information necessary to address the research questions.

A6. Consequences of not collecting the information

The data collection plan described in this submission is necessary for ED to characterize the effectiveness of providing training to career navigators in improving adult learners' educational and workforce outcomes. Without these data, the field would not have up-to-date descriptive information on the educational and workforce outcomes of learners involved in programs with career navigators. It would also lack recent, national, and large-scale evidence on the effectiveness of promising navigator training strategies to improve these adult learner outcomes.

A7. Special circumstances justifying inconsistencies with guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.6

This data collection has no special circumstances associated with it.

A8. Federal register announcement and consultation

a. Federal register announcement

A 60-day notice to solicit public comments was published in the *Federal Register*, Volume 87, No. 32, page 8827 on February 16, 2022. Two public comments were received, one of which was non-substantive and did not require a response. The second comment was from the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE). It expressed support for the study and the collection and dissemination of data in ways that demonstrate best practices for adult education programs. The study team did not take any action based on the second comment as it did not raise any issues for which this data collection request is seeking approval. A 30-day notice will be published to solicit additional public comments.

b. Consultations outside the agency

To inform the study design, the study team convened an external technical working group (TWG) meeting that included individuals with expertise in adult education, career pathways and workforce development for adult learners, professional development, and study design and methods. Two additional meetings of the TWG will be held in order to inform the study's interpretation of preliminary analysis findings. Input from the meetings will help ensure the study is of the highest quality and that findings are relevant to policymakers and program stakeholders. Exhibit A.4 provides the names, titles, and affiliations of the eight individuals expected to participate in the TWG meetings.

Exhibit A.4. Participants in the TWG meetings

Name	Title and affiliation
Earl Buford	President, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
Carol Clymer	Associate Teaching Professor; Co-Director, Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy and Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy, Pennsylvania State University
MarcusAntonio Gunn	Program Administrator, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
Carolyn Heinrich	Professor of Public Policy, Education, and Economics, Vanderbilt University
E. Paulette Isaac-Savage	Professor of Adult Education, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Robert Guzman	Operator Director, Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition
Trenia Miles	Deputy Director of Adult Education, Arkansas Department of Career Education
Jeff Smith	Professor and Chair of Economics; Chair of Applied Econometrics, University of Wisconsin-Madison

c. Unresolved issues

There are no unresolved issues.

A9. Payments or gifts

Learners will receive a small incentive to compensate them for taking time to learn about the study. This incentive will be valued at about \$1 and will be in the form of a token gift, such as a study-branded water bottle, notebook, pen, or reusable bag. Given the relatively low burden of participating in the study, the study team believes this incentive will encourage learners to complete the requirements to participate in the study. The study team will work with each provider to determine the most appealing form of incentive and provide the incentive during study enrollment, so it is most salient to learners.

A10. Assurances of confidentiality

a. Personally identifiable information

The information provided by or about participants during the collection of adult education provider records and the learner intake survey will contain participant-level personally identifiable information (PII). This includes names, birth dates, and Social Security numbers. This information is needed to ensure that the study team can link participants to their corresponding administrative data in order to measure college enrollment rates, employment outcomes, and wages. Relying instead on only name and date of birth matching (or similar techniques) for collecting administrative data would lead to the inability of the study to match administrative data for a high proportion of participants, an unacceptably high uncertainty in match success, or both. In addition, the study team will collect the names and email addresses of program directors and career navigators in order to conduct the program director interview and administer the career navigator baseline survey and career navigator log.

The study team will share study participants’ information with IES so that IES and its designated contractors may collect later information about learners’ career pathways. The sharing of information with IES for these purposes and for the specified timeframe are described to participants in the informed consent form (Appendix C).

b. Assurances of privacy

The study team has established procedures to protect the confidentiality and security of its data. This approach will comply with all relevant regulations and requirements, in particular the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, Title I, Subsection (c) of Section 183, which requires the director of IES to “develop and enforce standards designed to protect the confidentiality of persons in the collection, reporting, and publication of data.”

The study team will protect the full privacy and confidentiality of all data collected for the study and will use it for research purposes only. The Mathematica project director will ensure that all personally identifiable information about respondents remains confidential. All data will be kept in secured locations, and identifiers will be destroyed as soon as they are no longer required. All members of the study team with access to the data will be trained and certified on the importance of confidentiality and data security. When reporting the results, the study team will present data only in aggregate form, so that individuals and provider sites are not identified.

Because the purpose of career navigation is to move adult learners onto and along a career pathway, IES may seek to collect longer-term outcome data after the current evaluation contract is over. To facilitate a later use of administrative records such as NDNH for this purpose, Mathematica will provide a file with all study data, including personally identifiable information, to IES. IES will store this file and the appropriate documentation on its secure data center.

All voluntary requests for data will include the following or a similar statement:

“Mathematica and its subcontractors—Manhattan Strategy Group and Social Policy Research Associates—follow the confidentiality and data protection requirements of the U.S. Department of Education’s IES (The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, Title I, Part E, Section 183). **Responses to this data collection will be used only for research purposes.** The reports prepared for the study will summarize findings across participants and will not associate responses with a specific adult education provider or individual. Because the purpose of career navigation is to move adult learners onto and along a career pathway, IES may seek to collect longer-term outcome data after the current evaluation contract is over. The study team will provide a data file that includes personally identifiable information to IES, so that IES and its designated contractors may collect later information about learners’ career pathways. Across all other reports and data files, the study team will not provide information that identifies respondents to anyone outside the study team, except if required by law.”

Mathematica routinely uses the following safeguards to maintain data confidentiality, which will be consistently applied to this study:

- All Mathematica employees are required to sign a confidentiality pledge (Appendix A) that emphasizes the importance of confidentiality and describes employees’ obligations to maintain it.
- Personally identifiable information is maintained on separate forms and files, which are linked only by random, study-specific identification numbers.
- Access to hard-copy documents is strictly limited. Documents are stored in locked files and cabinets. Discarded materials are shredded.
- Access to computer data files is protected by secure usernames and passwords, which are available only to specific users who need to access the data and who have the appropriate security clearances.

Mathematica's standard for maintaining confidentiality includes training staff on the meaning of confidentiality, particularly as it relates to handling requests for information, and assuring respondents about the protection of their responses. It also includes built-in safeguards on status monitoring and receipt control systems. In addition, all study staff who have access to confidential data must obtain security clearance from ED, which requires completing personnel security forms, providing fingerprints, and undergoing a background check.

A system of records notice is currently being prepared for this study. ED expects to publish the notice by Summer 2022.

A11. Questions of a sensitive nature

This study will not include questions of a sensitive nature.

A12. Estimates of response burden

The total response burden for these data collection activities is 19,919 hours.

Exhibit A.5 shows estimates of time burden for the data collection activities, broken down by instrument and respondent. In addition, the exhibit presents estimates of indirect costs to all respondents for each data collection instrument.

Exhibit A.5. Estimated respondent time burden and cost

Respondent type and data collection activity	Time per response (hours)	Maximum number of responses per respondent	Number of respondents	Total time burden (hours)	Average hourly wage	Cost per response	Total cost burden
Career navigators							
Career navigator baseline survey	30 minutes (.5)	1	180	90	\$29.96 ^a	\$14.98	\$2,696.40
End-of-training implementation survey	10 minutes (.17)	1	90	15	\$29.96	\$4.99	\$449.40
Career navigator logs	3 minutes (.05)	1,500	180	13,500	\$29.96	\$1.50	\$404,460.00
Learner intake form (staff portion) ^b	2 minutes (.03)	159 ^c	180	954	\$29.96	\$0.99	\$28,581.84
Program directors							
Program director interviews	45 minutes (.75)	1	64	48	\$36.13 ^d	\$27.10	\$1,734.24
Cost records on providing training	240 minutes (4)	1	32	128	\$36.13	\$144.52	\$4,624.64
All study learners							
Learner consent	2 minutes (.033)	1	33,600	1,120	\$7.25 ^e	\$0.24	\$8,120.00
Learner intake form	8 minutes (.133)	1	28,560	3,808	\$7.25 ^e	\$0.97	\$27,608.00
Administrative records							
Adult education provider records	240 minutes (4)	1	64	256	\$36.13	\$144.52	\$9,249.28
Total hours and costs across all years				19,919			\$487,523.80
Average burden per year within the three-year data collection period				6,639.7			\$162,507.93

^a Average hourly wage for career navigators is the wage for “Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors” from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020).

^b The study team expects that this will be completed either by the career navigator or by intake staff at the adult education provider with similar wage rates.

^c The number of responses per respondent is an estimate based on the total number of adult learners the study team expects to enroll.

^d Average hourly wage for program directors is the wage for “Social and Community Service Managers” from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020).

^e Average hourly wage for adult learners is the federal minimum wage.

A13. Estimate of total capital and startup costs/operation and maintenance costs to respondents or record-keepers

This data collection has no direct, start-up, or maintenance costs to respondents or recordkeepers.

A14. Annualized cost to the federal government

The estimated cost to the federal government for this study, including establishing a technical working group, preparing initial OMB clearance forms, implementing the intervention, conducting data collection, preparing the reports, and creating data files is \$6,274,966 or approximately \$1,045,827.66 per year.

A15. Reasons for program changes or adjustments

This is a request for a new collection of information.

A16. Plans for tabulation and publication of results

a. Analysis plan

The study team will address the research questions for each component of the study using the following analyses:

- **Contextual analyses:** Contextual analyses will include several descriptive analyses that will aid in interpreting the impact findings. These analyses will include (1) examining implementation of the training, (2) documenting existing professional development services offered to career navigators, and (3) describing the background characteristics of learners and career navigators. These analyses will rely on administrative records, interviews, and survey data. For measures using continuous scales, the study team will calculate means, percentiles of distributions, and standard deviations to describe central tendency and variation. For categorical scales, the study team will use frequency distributions and percentages.
- **Service receipt analyses:** The service receipt analyses will describe and contrast (1) the career navigator services the treatment and comparison groups receive and (2) the adult education services both groups receive. Understanding the services the comparison group receives will be critical for defining the “counterfactual” for the study. The study team will conduct these analyses using administrative records and career navigator logs. To estimate impacts, the team will use comparison of means and regression analysis, controlling for baseline characteristics of career navigators and learners.
- **Impact analyses:** Impact analyses will focus on estimating the effects of the training on learners’ educational attainment, employment, and earnings. The study team will use regression analyses to compare the education and labor market outcomes between the treatment and comparison groups. To estimate impacts, the study team will regress individual educational and employment outcomes on whether the individual was at a treatment provider, controlling for baseline characteristics such as demographics and pre-study employment and earnings. Standard errors will be adjusted for the clustering of learners within sites. Additionally, the study team will use regression analysis to understand the circumstances under which the treatment may be most effective. This will allow the team to assess whether the treatment is more effective for individuals with certain characteristics. To do so, the study team will run regression analyses with interactions between treatment and individual

characteristics. Outcomes will be measured using administrative data. Individual characteristics will be measured using administrative data and survey data.

b. Publication plan

Reporting plans include a study snapshot and two study reports.

- The study snapshot will provide information on the demographic characteristics, professional backgrounds, and business-as-usual practices of career navigators in the study sample.
- The first study report will provide information on the implementation of the study’s trainings and examine impacts on learners’ educational attainment, employment and earnings within the 18-month period after study enrollment. It will also explore differences in learners’ basic skills gains and persistence, for learners at sites that received the study’s treatment in Fall 2022 and those at sites that did not.
- The second study report will provide updated impact findings on learner educational attainment, employment and earnings, within 30-months of study enrollment. It will also examine the cost-effectiveness of the study’s trainings.

Publication	Expected release date
Snapshot	Fall 2023
First report	Spring 2026
Second report	Spring 2027

A17. Approval not to display the expiration date for OMB approval

IES is not requesting a waiver for the display of the OMB approval number and expiration date. The study will display the OMB expiration date.

A18. Exception to the certification statement

No exceptions to the certification statement are requested or required.

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