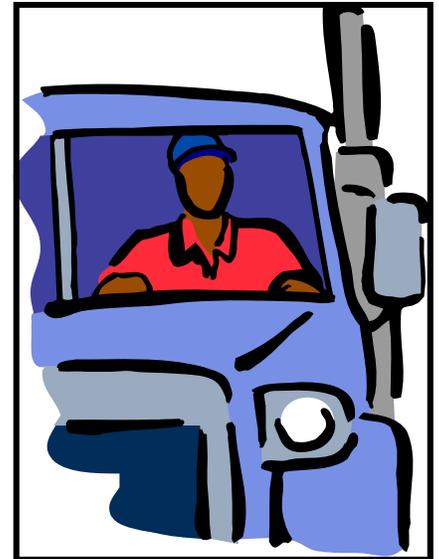


Rapid Employment Model Evaluation: Update



**Ray Marshall Center for
the Study of Human
Resources**

LBJ School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin
3001 Lake Austin Blvd.,
Suite 3.200
Austin, TX 78703

Phone: 512-471-7891
www.utexas.edu/research/cshr

Prepared by:

Tara Carter Smith
Christopher T. King
Daniel G. Schroeder

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INTRODUCTION

This report is an update to the report, *Rapid Employment Model Evaluation: Initial Findings* published in December 2007. Travis County contracted with the Ray Marshall Center to extend the initial evaluation of the Rapid Employment Model (REM) demonstration project. The intent of this effort is to track longer-term participant outcomes for the initial cohort served in 2006 and to document outcomes for the second cohort of participants served in 2007. In addition, this report presents the first quasi-experimental impact analysis for participants in the 2006 cohort.

Background

Travis County and the City of Austin are unique among local governments in the United States in their approach to workforce development. Rather than relying exclusively on federal funding to support services for their residents as most jurisdictions do, they have augmented federal and state funds with local tax dollars in workforce services for about a decade,¹ strategically coordinating their investments with Workforce Solutions – Capital Area,² the local workforce investment board. In recent years, Travis County and the City together have expended around \$3 million annually on workforce services for local residents.³ Primary areas of emphasis for these local investments have been occupational training and support services, offerings that have typically been constrained under federal program rules.

In 2005, Travis County and workforce board staff began discussing the need for improved services to assist jobseekers find suitable work more quickly through a structured effort that would supplement their longer-term skill development offerings. These discussions ultimately resulted in the creation of the Rapid Employment Model (REM). The REM project seeks to demonstrate that work readiness and short-term occupational skills training, when combined with active job placement assistance, can lead to successful employment outcomes for jobseekers who might otherwise struggle in the labor market. REM began operations in January 2006 as a joint effort of the County, Workforce Solutions

¹ City and county tax expenditures on workforce services grew out of the experience with tax abatement agreements related to Samsung in the mid-to-late 1990s (Glover et al., 2007).

² Formerly known as *WorkSource*—The Greater Austin Workforce Board

³ See Smith and King (2007) for an evaluation of locally-funded workforce development services.

and area workforce service providers to decrease the amount of time individuals are out of work. Like all County-funded workforce services, the REM project targets disadvantaged, indigent County residents, particularly those individuals who have been released from incarceration, as well as individuals receiving Food Stamps or cash welfare benefits.

Evaluation Approach

In order to document and understand the effects of participating in REM, the Travis County Health and Human Services Department contracted with the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources (RMC) at the University of Texas at Austin's LBJ School of Public Affairs to conduct an evaluation of these workforce development services. The initial effort included a process evaluation; findings from that analysis are presented in Smith and King (2007).

The ongoing evaluation of the REM project focuses on *outcomes*. The outcomes evaluation documents the results of the REM project, including the number of clients served; number completing training; number placed in employment; wages earned; and other outputs/outcomes that can be determined largely through linked administrative data. The outcomes evaluation includes an exploratory effort to gauge the "value-added" or *impacts* from these services through quasi-experimental analysis comparing labor market outcomes for 2006 REM participants with those of a comparison group of similar non-REM participants.

Report Organization

This report is organized into five sections including this Introduction. The second section briefly characterizes the REM model design and explains its key features. The third section presents the initial labor market outcomes for 2007 REM participants. The fourth section presents longer-term outcomes for 2006 REM participants and findings from the quasi-experimental impact analysis. The fifth section offers several concluding observations and identifies next steps for the ongoing evaluation effort.

THE RAPID EMPLOYMENT MODEL PROJECT

The REM project enrolled jobseekers in four separate rounds of training for up to six weeks between January 2006 and October 2006; in 2007, there were six separate rounds between February and October. The project design and offerings were modified slightly in each round of implementation.

Participant Characteristics

REM participants were identified for possible inclusion in the project based on their association with one of three programs serving populations typically at a disadvantage in the labor market (see Table 1):

- **Project RIO (Re-Integration of Offenders)** – an employment and training program targeting individuals who have been released from incarceration in the state jail system. REM participants were overwhelmingly Project RIO clients (83% in 2006, 77% in 2007).
- **Choices** – the workforce program in Texas serving recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds. Some 14.3% of 2006 REM participants were drawn from the Choices program, while in 2007 Choices clients represented 22% of participants.
- **Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET)** – a program providing access to employment and training programs for individuals receiving food stamp assistance. Only 2.7% of 2006 REM participants were drawn from the FSET program, while in 2007 that share dropped to 1.8%.

Because each of these programs has specific participant eligibility requirements, as well as distinct policies on the amount and type of employment and training activities that individuals must engage in, the individuals participating in the REM project are not a homogenous group and should not be assumed to share similar motivations for employment.

Table 1: Number and Percent of REM Participants by Program

Program	2006		2007		Overall	
	n	%	N	%	n	%
Choices	16	14.3	24	21.6	40	17.9
FSET	•	•	•	•	5	2.2
Project RIO	93	83.0	85	76.6	178	79.8
Total	112	100	111	100	223	100

Note: A dot indicates that there were too few participants to report.
Source: Workforce Solutions – Capital Area data.

Components, Services, and Duration

Pre-Employment Training

One of the first activities an individual is expected to complete for the REM project is the pre-employment training program. The program selected for REM participants is Standard Industry Skills Training and Education Media, or SISTEM, a computer-based training program for individuals or groups which emphasizes job readiness and basic employment skills. Table 2 below provides a snapshot of the number of individuals completing this training.

Rates of completion for pre-employment training improved considerably for the 2007 participants. Career Center staff indicated that not all participants were expected to complete the SISTEM training; those clients with an established work history were exempted. SISTEM training records, unfortunately, did not identify which clients were participating in the REM project nor did this training information get consistently reported to The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST) database.

Table 2: REM Participants Completing Pre-Employment Training

	2006	2007	Total
Total Number of Participants	112	111	223
Number Completing Pre-Employment Training	79	102	181
Percent Completing	71%	92%	81%

Source: Workforce Solutions – Capital Area data.

Occupational Skills Training

After the pre-employment training, REM participants selected and entered a short-term training program. Overall 87% of 2006 REM participants completed occupational skills training, as detailed in Table 3. In 2007, 89% of participants completed the occupational skills training.

Table 3: REM Participants Completing Occupational Training

	2006	2007	Total
Total Number of Participants	112	111	223
Number Completing Occupational Training	97	99	196
Percent Completing	87%	89%	88%

Source: Workforce Solutions – Capital Area data.

The occupational training programs available in the REM project varied considerably. The length of the programs in 2006 ranged from three days to six weeks, while programs offered in 2007 ranged from two to six weeks. Though most programs did include training on resume development and interviewing skills, these activities were not necessarily part of the normal training sequence offered by the providers. Three training providers from 2006 continued on in 2007: Austin Academy, Construction Gateway, and Austin Community College's (ACC) Truck Driving program. The only new provider in 2007 was the Central Texas Nurse Network, which offered Certified Nurse Aide training.

Table 4 identifies the number of participants for each of the training providers. It is important to note that the training options available to participants were driven both by the timing of the training as well as by the population being served.

Table 4: Number and Percent of REM Participants by Occupational Training

Occupational Training Program	2006		2007		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Austin Academy	19	17	16	14	35	16
ACC: Admin. Asst.	2	2			2	1
ACC: Para-Educator	1	1			1	1
ACC: EMEO	7	6			7	3
ACC: Truck Driving	45	40	31	28	76	34
Child Care	1	1			1	1
Construction Gateway	34	30	50	45	84	38
Dental Assisting	3	3			3	1
Certified Nurse Aide			14	13	14	6
Total	112	100	111	100	223	100

Note: Percentages may total more than 100 due to rounding.

Source: Workforce Solutions – Capital Area data.

INITIAL LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES FOR 2007 REM PARTICIPANTS

The outcomes analysis draws on three types of data: 1) provider-reported data on employment and wage levels submitted to Workforce Solutions; 2) program (Project RIO, Choices and FSET) specialists' data entered into The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST) database; and 3) Unemployment Insurance wage records maintained by the Texas Workforce Commission.

Immediate, Provider-reported Employment and Wages

The following two tables convey provider-reported employment and wage data that researchers received from Workforce Solutions. For 2007 participants, 65% were reported as employed by providers after they completed their training program (see Table 5). Employment includes both part-time and full-time work. Participants with reported wages averaged \$9.59 per hour.

Table 5: Reported Employment and Wages for 2007 REM Participants, by Round

	Number of Participants with Reported Employment	Percent of Participants Employed	Number of Participants with Reported Wages	Range of Wages Per Hour Reported	Average of Wages Per Hour Reported
Round 1	12/17	71%	11	\$5.50 - \$15.00	\$10.25
Round 2	18/24	75%	15	\$7.00 - \$13.00	\$9.83
Round 3	9/14	64%	9	\$7.00 - \$12.00	\$9.64
Round 4	13/22	59%	13	\$3.13 - \$14.00	\$8.94
Round 5	9/17	53%	9	\$9.00 - \$15.00	\$10.72
Round 6	11/17	65%	11	\$6.00 - \$10.00	\$8.14
Total	72/111	65%	65	\$5.50 - \$35.00	\$9.59

Source: Workforce Solutions – Capital Area data.

ACC's truck driver training program and the Construction Gateway program reported the most 2007 REM participants in employment. Details are provided by training provider and round in Table 6 below.

Table 6: 2007 REM Participant Employment Rates by Training Provider, by Round

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5	Round 6	Total
Austin Academy	33%	33%		0%	100%	60%	44%
ACC – Truck Driving	80%	78%	50%	100%	60%	25%	68%
Construction Gateway	78%	89%	63%	64%	33%	86%	70%
Certified Nurse Aide		67%	100%	50%	50%	100%	64%
Total	71%	75%	64%	59%	53%	65%	65%

Source: Workforce Solutions – Capital Area data.

UI Wage Records Data on Employment and Earnings

Prior to examining labor market outcomes based on UI wage records, two caveats should be noted. First, it is anticipated that UI wage records for construction and truck driving will *under-report* employment and earnings for these workers due to lower rates of UI coverage in these industries.⁴ Second, the employment and earnings numbers reported in the following tables for 2007 participants are based on an early analysis. As additional quarters of information become available, more definitive numbers can be reported.

Researchers are tracking 85 participants from the 2007 cohort. Missing identification data precluded the inclusion of all participants in the analysis. In addition, participants in the last quarter of 2007 (Round 6) are not included as there has not been sufficient time elapsed post-service to measure and assess outcomes.

Participants in the 2007 REM project were employed approximately 22% of the time in the four quarters prior to their enrollment in the REM project (see Table 7, third column). In their last quarter of participation in the REM project, 31% of participants were employed (fourth column). Approximately 55% of REM participants were employed two quarters after their participation in the project had ended (fifth column) and 54% when looking at all post-service quarters (last column).

⁴ See Stevens (2002) for a review of employment that is not covered by state unemployment insurance laws.

Table 7: Quarterly Employment for 2007 REM Participants

Cohort	Total Participants	Four quarters before service	Last quarter of service	Second quarter after service ends	All quarters after service ends
2007 Round 1	17	25.0%	29.4%	70.6%	60.0%
2007 Round 2	20	16.3%	35.0%	40.0%	44.4%
2007 Round 3	14	21.4%	35.7%	50.0%	50.0%
2007 Round 4	18	25.0%	33.3%	50.0%	54.0%
2007 Round 5	16	23.4%	18.8%	68.8%	67.3%
Overall	85	22.1%	30.6%	55.3%	54.0%

Source: UI wage records.

UI wage records also provide information on the individual's quarterly earnings. In the four quarters prior to their participation in the 2007 REM project, participants who were reported as employed earned an average of \$2,360 per quarter (see Table 8). In their last quarter of REM services, employed participants earned an average of \$1,141. In the second quarter after completing the 2007 REM project, employed participants earned an average of \$3,191. In all post-service quarters, employed 2007 REM participants earned on average \$3,179 per quarter.

Table 8: Average Quarterly Earnings of those Employed, 2007 REM Participants

Cohort	Total Participants	Four quarters before service	Last quarter of service	Second quarter after service ends	All quarters after service ends
2007 Round 1	17	\$2,766	\$1,227	\$3,234	\$3,462
2007 Round 2	20	\$2,434	\$968	\$2,467	\$2,678
2007 Round 3	14	\$2,380	\$1,154	\$3,651	\$3,508
2007 Round 4	18	\$2,338	\$782	\$2,514	\$2,823
2007 Round 5	16	\$1,845	\$2,095	\$3,931	\$3,496
Overall	85	\$2,360	\$1,141	\$3,191	\$3,179

Source: UI wage records

UPDATED LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES FOR 2006 REM PARTICIPANTS AND INITIAL IMPACT FINDINGS

Researchers are tracking 103 participants from the 2006 REM cohort. As UI wage records for some quarters in the evaluation have now been finalized, some of the numbers reported in the following tables may not match those reported in the *Initial Findings* report (Smith et al, 2007). The numbers reported here are based on the most complete, up-to-date records available.

REM participants were much more likely to be found in UI wage records in the quarters following their participation in the project than they were in the quarters prior to it. In the four quarters prior to their participation in the 2006 REM project, these individuals were employed approximately 16% of the time (Table 9). Two quarters after they finished the project, 59% of participants were employed. In all post-service quarters, 54% of these participants were employed.

Table 9. Quarterly Employment for 2006 REM Participants

Cohort	Total Participants	Four quarters before service	Last quarter of service	Second quarter after service ends	Sixth quarter after service ends	All quarters after service ends
2006 Round 1	18	22.2%	55.6%	61.1%	35.3%	47.7%
2006 Round 2	35	15.7%	51.4%	60.0%	54.3%	58.4%
2006 Round 3	26	13.5%	57.7%	53.8%	42.3%	51.3%
2006 Round 4	24	15.6%	41.7%	62.5%	50.0%	55.7%
Overall	103	16.3%	51.5%	59.2%	47.1%	54.1%

Source: UI wage records

2006 REM participants also experienced improved earnings in the post-service period (Table 10). In the four quarters prior to participating in the REM project, these individuals earned an average of \$1,953 per quarter. In the sixth quarter following their participation in

the project, employed participants earned an average of \$5,361. Employed participants averaged earnings of \$4,265 in all quarters after service.

Table 10. Average Quarterly Earnings of those Employed, 2006 REM Participants

Cohort	Total Participants	Four quarters before service	Last quarter of service	Second quarter after service ends	Sixth quarter after service ends	All quarters after service ends
2006 Round 1	18	\$2,082	\$1,073	\$3,252	\$4,505	\$3,701
2006 Round 2	35	\$2,311	\$1,695	\$3,818	\$6,384	\$4,990
2006 Round 3	26	\$1,459	\$1,447	\$1,853	\$4,303	\$3,519
2006 Round 4	24	\$1,750	\$2,177	\$3,331	\$5,139	\$4,122
Overall	103	\$1,953	\$1,598	\$3,145	\$5,361	\$4,265

Source: UI wage records

Unemployment Insurance Benefits

Ray Marshall Center researchers examined two measures related to UI benefits. In the first measure, qualification for UI benefits, researchers examined participants' work histories in the pre- and post-service period to determine if workforce development services had increased participants' eligibility for receiving UI insurance in the event of a layoff or other employment separation. Qualification for UI benefits is based on length of employment, earnings levels, and reason for separation, among other factors. An individual must have sufficient earnings in at least two of the four quarters prior to separation to qualify for UI benefits. This measure is significant as it looks at the stability of an individual's employment. Prior to entering the REM project, most participants had a history of unstable employment. After their participation in these services, many of these individuals have moved into stable employment that qualifies them for benefits through the UI program, the nation's first-tier safety net for laid-off workers that is funded by both employers and workers.⁵ In the second measure, UI benefit claims filed, researchers examined UI claims in

⁵ Employers pay taxes that directly support the UI program; economists point out that workers also contribute to the program indirectly in the form of somewhat lower wages.

both the pre- and post-service period to determine if the REM project had reduced participants' reliance on UI benefits.

In the four quarters prior to participation in the REM project, approximately 10% of 2006 participants would have qualified for UI benefits based on their earnings history (Table 11). In the sixth quarter after they completed the REM project, fully 53% of participants would qualify for UI benefits based on their earnings history.

Table 11. Percent of 2006 REM Participants Qualified for UI Benefits

Cohort	Total Participants	Four quarters before service	Sixth quarter after service ends	All quarters after service ends
2006 Round 1	18	18.1%	58.8%	45.9%
2006 Round 2	35	5.7%	57.1%	54.6%
2006 Round 3	26	8.7%	50.0%	40.3%
2006 Round 4	24	10.4%	45.8%	44.7%
Overall	103	9.7%	52.9%	48.2%

Source: UI claims records

Despite the large increase in eligibility for UI benefits, few REM participants filed an unemployment insurance claim in the post-service period (Table 12).

Table 12. Percent of 2006 REM Participants Filing UI Claims

Cohort	Total Participants	Four quarters before service	Sixth quarter after service ends	All quarters after service ends
2006 Round 1	18	1.4%	0.0%	1.0%
2006 Round 2	35	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2006 Round 3	26	0.0%	•	0.8%
2006 Round 4	24	0.0%	•	0.0%
Overall	103	0.2%	0.0%	0.4%

Note: A dot indicates that there were too few participants to report.

Source: UI claims records

Quasi-Experimental Impacts Analysis

This section reports the results of exploratory quasi-experimental impact estimation that Ray Marshall Center researchers conducted to gauge the “value added” of participation in the REM project. Researchers are continuing to refine their approach to impact estimation and will present additional estimates in future reports. The quasi-experimental impact analysis compared employment and earnings outcomes for 2006 REM participants with a comparison group of individuals who received basic workforce services (e.g., job matching, resume development). The analysis reveals mixed impacts, only some of which are statistically significant. Findings are detailed below.

Quasi-Experimental Estimation

In an attempt to measure the impacts of REM participation, researchers conducted a quasi-experimental analysis comparing labor market outcomes for REM participants with those of a comparison group of similar non-participants. Quasi-experimental analysis has been shown to produce impact estimates comparable to those resulting from more rigorous and costly approaches involving the use of experimental designs that randomly assign individuals to treatment and control status.⁶ In fact, for many groups, quasi-experimental estimates may understate employment and earnings impacts from workforce services. In addition, the outcomes examined here compare individuals engaged in minimal, short-term training to those who received basic labor force attachment services; large impacts are not expected. For these reasons, results presented in this report, while exploratory, should be considered *conservative estimates* of the true impacts.

Quasi-experimental approaches tend to work well when participants for whom comparison groups are being created have sufficient prior employment and earnings histories and when data are available on a sufficient number of variables with which to perform the requisite match. Youth and ex-offenders are problematical in this regard precisely because their prior employment and earnings histories are either lacking or difficult to determine.

Potential comparison group members were drawn from two sources: individuals who either registered to look for employment using the state’s WorkinTexas program or received “core” services under the Workforce Investment Act (such as job-matching or resume

⁶ For example, see Greenberg et al. (2006) and Hollenbeck and Huang (2006).

development). Thus, the comparison group selected as described below is not a “no-services,” but rather a “low-intensity services” group. The resulting impact estimates thus reflect the *incremental value* of the County’s investments in the REM project.

REM participants were matched on a one-to-one basis with potential comparison group members using a method known as *weighted multivariate matching*. This technique places greater weights on those variables showing greater initial (pre-service) differences. Matching was done by selecting for each participant the one comparison group member judged most similar. Matching was done without replacement, with no caliper applied to eliminate poor matches, since doing so would have reduced the generalizability of the results.

Exact matches carried out included: county; year of entry into the program; and whether or not individuals had recently experienced an earnings dip of 20% or more. *Distance matches* were carried out on additional variables by treating them as numeric and including them in the overall multivariate distance measurement. These variables included: age, gender, race/ethnicity (white, black, Hispanic), time since first earnings, employed at entry, percent of time employed over four (4) years prior to program entry, average quarterly earnings over four (4) years prior to program entry, and percent of time in any workforce development service in the year immediately prior to program entry (matched according to service intensity: high for training programs, and low for job placement services). For those experiencing a recent earnings dip, the time since the earnings dip and the percent of earnings represented by the dip were also included in the matching process.

Adequacy of each comparison group was judged by performing t-tests comparing treatment and comparison groups on the same dimensions. If the groups were statistically different at $p < .01$ on more than two dimensions, the comparison was considered inadequate. Using these parameters, the comparison group did not significantly differ from REM participants on any of the tested variables.

Note that the impacts tables display two effects columns. The Unadjusted Net Effect simply shows the computed difference between the treatment and comparison groups on the outcome in question. The Adjusted Net Effect column presents the net effect after further statistical adjustments have been made (e.g., demographic differences). The figures in the Adjusted Net Effect column are the measures of program impacts emphasized in the discussion that follows.

Employment and Earnings Impacts

Based on the analysis, participation in the REM project did have a positive, statistically significant impact on employment (Table 13). This modest employment impact was the expected result of the REM project. Overall, 2006 REM participants were 5.3% more likely to be employed in the post-service period than were comparison group members.

Table 13. Quarterly Employment Impacts

Cohort	Number of Post-Service Person-Quarters	All quarters after service ends: Comp group	All quarters after service ends: Treatment group	Unadjusted net effect	Adjusted net effect
2006 Round 1	251	41.4%	47.7%	6.2%	
2006 Round 2	478	60.5%	58.4%	(2.1%)	
2006 Round 3	271	52.4%	51.3%	(1.1%)	
2006 Round 4	259	56.0%	55.7%	(0.3%)	
Overall	1259	54.0%	54.1%	0.1%	5.3% *

Note: * denotes significance at p<.05
Source: UI wage records

While earnings growth was not a central goal of the REM project, the County and Workforce Solutions did target employment at a living wage. Though not statistically significant, REM participation had a small but positive impact on quarterly earnings (Table 14).

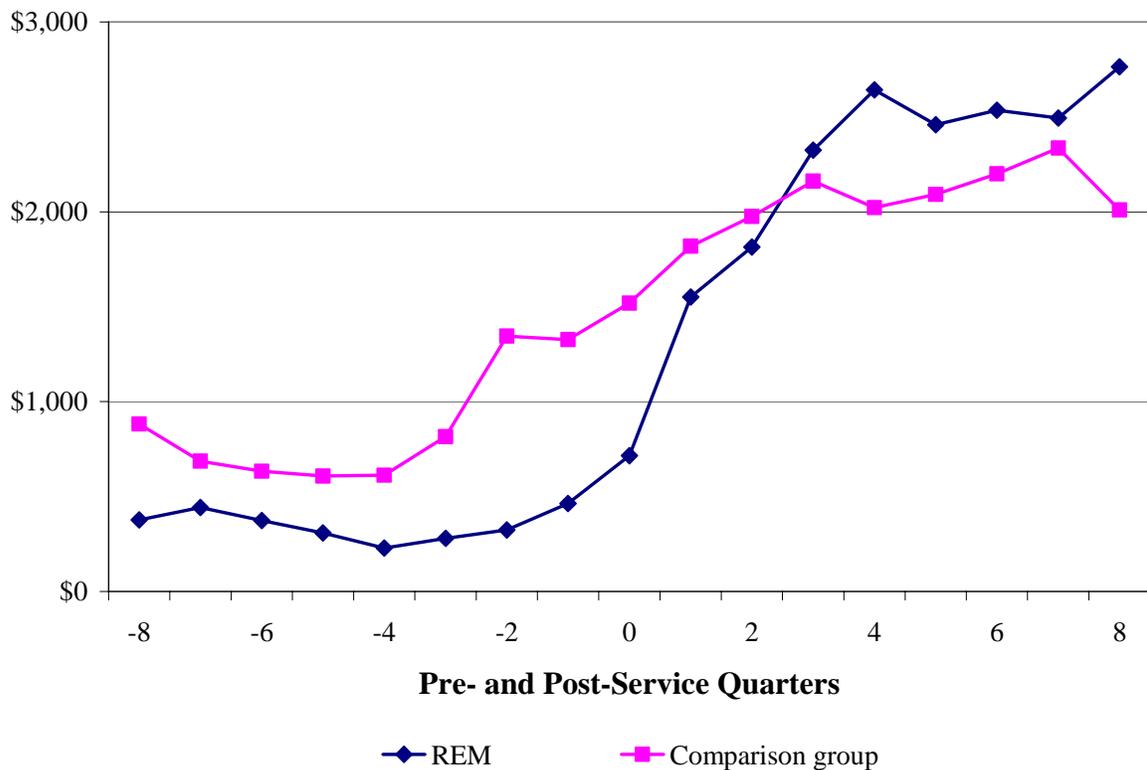
Table 14. Quarterly Earnings Impacts

Cohort	Number of Post-Service Person-Quarters	All quarters after service ends: Comp group	All quarters after service ends: Treatment group	Unadjusted net effect	Adjusted net effect
2006 Round 1	104	\$3,816	\$3,701	-\$115	
2006 Round 2	289	\$4,580	\$4,990	\$410	
2006 Round 3	142	\$3,632	\$3,519	-\$113	
2006 Round 4	145	\$4,266	\$4,122	-\$143	
Overall	680	\$4,198	\$4,265	\$66	\$230

Source: UI wage records

When examining employment and earnings impacts for all participants, whether employed or not, REM participants and their comparison group members demonstrated similar trends (Figure 1). In the pre-service period, REM participants had considerably lower earnings than comparison group members. In the third quarter post-service, however, REM participants' earnings overtook those of the comparison group and remained stronger in the quarters that followed.

Figure 1. REM vs. Comparison Group Earnings Over Time⁷



Impacts on Unemployment Insurance

The analysis of impacts on UI benefits did not yield statistically significant results. The direction of the findings, however, is positive and seems to indicate that REM participants are experiencing improved UI-related outcomes. REM participants were less

⁷ Earnings in this figure are averaged across all participants, whether employed or not.

likely to have filed a UI claim in the post-service period than comparison group members (Table 15). In addition, in the event of a job loss REM participants were more likely than comparison group members to be qualified for UI benefits based on their earnings history (Table 16).

Table 15. UI Claims Impacts

Cohort	Number of Post-Service Person-Quarters	All quarters after service ends: Comp group	All quarters after service ends: Treatment group	Unadjusted net effect	Adjusted net effect
2006 Round 1	161	4.3%	1.0%	(3.3%)	
2006 Round 2	313	4.5%	0.0%	(4.5%)	
2006 Round 3	163	1.8%	0.8%	(1.0%)	
2006 Round 4	145	6.2%	0.0%	(6.2%)	
Overall	782	4.2%	0.4%	(3.8%)	(1.7%)

Source: UI claims records

Table 16. Impact on UI Benefits Qualifications

Cohort	Number of Post-Service Person-Quarters	All quarters after service ends: Comp group	All quarters after service ends: Treatment group	Unadjusted net effect	Adjusted net effect
2006 Round 1	18	83.3%	45.5%	(37.9%)	
2006 Round 2	39	56.4%	57.7%	1.3%	
2006 Round 3	0	•	•	•	
2006 Round 4	0	•	•	•	
Overall	57	64.9%	54.1%	(10.9%)	3.5%

Note: A dot indicates that there were too few participants or no observations to report.

Source: UI claims records

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Rapid Employment Model project was designed to shorten time unemployed and boost employment. The evidence continues to show that the project is meeting its objectives. Travis County participants who complete the occupational skills training are entering and retaining employment at higher rates than individuals in the comparison group. While earnings increases were not a primary expectation for the project, many participants have also experienced increased earnings following the training. As more time passes since participants completed the REM training, researchers will have more data to determine the project's true impact on employment and earnings trajectories.

It is also important to note the impact that REM participation has had on individuals' unemployment insurance benefits. Though it is not possible to directly measure the project's impact on time unemployed, the measures that are available are telling. While UI claims by REM participants held steady across pre- and post-service periods (less than one percent had filed a claim), the percent of individuals who would qualify for UI benefits based on their employment history increased dramatically in the post-service period. That REM participants can now access this important safety net in the event of a job loss is a significant impact of the project. Moreover, while the impacts on UI claims filed are not statistically significant, they are in the right direction: REM participants filed for UI benefits at a lower rate than did the comparison group.

As a demonstration project, the REM design appears to be a viable tool for working with disadvantaged residents in Travis County. The modifications that have been incorporated over the course of the project, particularly the narrowing of training options to more adequately address the employment barriers that participants are working to overcome, are important to its success. Moving forward, the County and Workforce Solutions should continue to monitor the type of participants engaged in the project to ensure that the training opportunities are appropriate.

In the next phase of the evaluation, Ray Marshall Center researchers will continue to monitor post-service employment and earnings, as well as continue to refine the quasi-experimental impacts analysis and extend its application to the 2007 REM cohort. Center researchers would also like to explore the possibility of adding a benefit-cost or cost-

effectiveness analysis to the evaluation. This would allow researchers to answer the question: *Is the REM project worth the investment of public resources?* The answer would give Travis County Commissioners and others valuable information to help guide future workforce services investments.

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