



Case Studies

Protocol for Pathways Clearinghouse Case Studies

The Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse case studies highlight current, innovative, or noteworthy interventions that aim to improve employment outcomes for individuals with low incomes but that have not yet been rigorously evaluated. Given that it may take many years to develop rigorous evidence on new approaches, the case studies allow the Pathways Clearinghouse to be a timely source of information about interesting, as yet untested, new directions in the field. They supplement the Pathways Clearinghouse’s primary purpose of helping practitioners and decision makers easily access, identify, and use findings from rigorous evaluations. In providing these case studies, the Pathways Clearinghouse aims to help practitioners learn from the experiences of others implementing innovative employment interventions, even when there has not yet been an opportunity to rigorously evaluate their effectiveness through an impact evaluation.

How does the Pathways Clearinghouse choose interventions for the case studies?

The case studies focus on two groups of interventions, selected in consultation with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE). The first group consists of innovative approaches used by the employment and training field. The second group comprises interventions of relevance to particular circumstances. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pathways Clearinghouse worked to develop case studies on remote service delivery interventions.

The Pathways Clearinghouse uses a two-stage process for choosing interventions for the case studies in collaboration with OPRE. In the first stage, the Pathways Clearinghouse compiles a broad range of potential interventions, including those recommended by stakeholders in workforce policies or programs for people with low incomes, such as state and local TANF administrators, and by members of the public. In the second stage, the Pathways Clearinghouse chooses from among those interventions based on a consistent set of criteria.

Identifying interventions for consideration

The Pathways Clearinghouse uses three primary sources to identify potential interventions to feature in case studies:

- 1. Nominations from the employment and training community.** The Pathways Clearinghouse accepts nominations from federal staff, stakeholders in the field, and members of the public. Pathways Clearinghouse users are invited to email the name of an intervention, a brief description, and links to any

The Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse

The primary purpose of the [Pathways Clearinghouse](#) is to provide reliable, accessible information about what works to help job seekers with low incomes succeed in the labor market. It does this by identifying [interventions that work](#), disseminating that information to program administrators and policymakers, and providing insights about how the evidence might apply to their programs and populations.

[Case studies](#) provide descriptive information about innovative interventions that have not yet been rigorously evaluated. They aim to provide practitioners with information about the experiences of other organizations implementing innovative interventions.

The Pathways Clearinghouse is sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) at the Administration for Children and Families. OPRE contracted with Mathematica, Hager Sharp, and MEF Associates to develop and administer the Pathways Clearinghouse.

additional publicly available materials—such as websites or reports—to PathwaysClearinghouse@mathematica-mpr.com. The Pathways Clearinghouse also identifies interventions that had been considered for inclusion in federally funded rigorous evaluations but that were ultimately not selected.

2. Interventions included in relevant projects under OPRE and other federal agencies. The Pathways Clearinghouse will consider creating case studies about interventions that are the subject of current OPRE and other federally funded descriptive studies, technical assistance projects, and other ongoing efforts whose focus overlaps with the criteria for the Pathways Clearinghouse case studies. Interventions must not be the subject of ongoing or past rigorous impact evaluation. The interventions explored by OPRE’s [State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\) Case Studies](#) project, a project producing and publishing a series of in-depth, descriptive case studies of innovative interventions for supporting the employment of individuals with low incomes, including TANF recipients, are examples. To identify other appropriate interventions for case studies, the Pathways Clearinghouse explores projects funded by OPRE or other federal agencies—such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Family Assistance, the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, and the Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education.

3. Searches for relevant interventions. The Pathways Clearinghouse identifies timely issues based on input from stakeholders and the public. It then explores how state and local policymakers and direct service providers are addressing those issues to identify relevant and innovative interventions. The Pathways Clearinghouse identifies these interventions by exploring information available on the internet and by talking with researchers and technical assistance providers who work with employment and training programs.

Selecting interventions for case studies

The Pathways Clearinghouse developed selection criteria in collaboration with federal staff and in consultation with experts and stakeholders. The criteria ensure that interventions selected for case studies are consistent with the goals and scope of the Pathways Clearinghouse, are useful to its audience, and are appropriate for case studies.

Interventions must meet the following criteria:

- **Have no rigorous evaluation.** The intervention must not have been the focus of an impact evaluation and must not be featured in an ongoing impact evaluation. Other Pathways Clearinghouse products address interventions studied by completed or ongoing impact evaluations.
- **Focus on employment, education, or training strategies.** The intervention must include an employment, education, or training component meant to improve labor market outcomes for individuals with low incomes in order to be eligible for a case study.
- **Serve populations with low incomes.** Interventions must serve individuals with low incomes, as defined by the service providers. This can include recipients of TANF or other means-tested benefits, disconnected youth, and people who were formerly incarcerated.
- **Be currently in use.** The case studies feature interventions that are implemented and operating at the time that the case study is developed.
- **Represent an innovative or noteworthy approach.** The intervention must differ substantially from those that have been evaluated for their effectiveness. Interventions that have been previously evaluated by an impact study might be considered for a case study if current implementation of the intervention includes additional services or components, changes intervention features to address weaknesses in earlier implementation, or adapts the intervention to apply to substantially different populations or in substantially different contexts. An intervention might also be considered innovative or noteworthy if it fits within an issue of current interest, such as remote service delivery to address challenges caused by COVID-19.

- **Have a clear underlying theory of change.** The case study must be able to present the intervention’s components in a way that demonstrates how they might improve employment outcomes and that helps readers understand the intervention’s applicability to other organizations or agencies.
- **Be described in sources available to the Pathways Clearinghouse.** Although the Pathways Clearinghouse might gather limited new information to support some case studies, most draw from available information sources. The information might be publicly available or internally available to federal staff or the Pathways Clearinghouse.

The Pathways Clearinghouse applies these criteria to each identified intervention and recommends to OPRE which interventions to include.

What is the process for developing the case studies?

The Pathways Clearinghouse follows a consistent process to develop case studies. The Pathways Clearinghouse collects information on the intervention from publicly available sources and from additional sources available to OPRE and the Pathways Clearinghouse. The Pathways Clearinghouse organizes this information according to a case study template, which was developed with input from experts and stakeholders in workforce policies or programs for people with low incomes. The template includes the following:

- Intervention name
- Intervention summary
- Services provided, selected from a list of available tags
- Populations served
- Setting(s)
- Implementing organization
- Year first implemented
- Funding source
- Intervention description
- Research on intervention to date
- More information

The Pathways Clearinghouse might reach out to the organizations or agencies implementing the intervention for more information to complete the template.¹ The draft case studies undergo thorough review by Pathways Clearinghouse team members and OPRE staff. Before posting the case studies to the website, the Pathways Clearinghouse shares the near-finalized draft with the implementing organizations so that they can review it for accuracy and completeness and might make additional revisions to reflect their input.

The final case studies are published to the Pathways Clearinghouse website.

How do the case studies relate to the rest of the Pathways Clearinghouse?

The case studies differ from other studies presented by the Pathways Clearinghouse in that the case studies describe interventions without rigorous evidence of effectiveness. To ensure users understand this, each case study includes language stating, “This intervention has not been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness,” in the section on the research on the intervention to date. In addition, the Pathways Clearinghouse posts the case studies on separate pages from those that describe interventions that have complete or ongoing impact evaluations. The case studies landing page includes a short description of the purpose of the case studies and states that the interventions listed have not been rigorously evaluated.

¹ Collection of this information has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0970-0533, and the expiration date is 8/31/2022.