



RETHINKING JOB SEARCH

About Rethinking Job Search

Rethinking Job Search (Rethinking) was funded by a Workforce Innovation Fund grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The program operated from January 2015 to September 2018 in 10 Oregon counties and was led by Willamette Workforce Partnership (WWP). It required statewide collaboration between the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system, Employment Services, and the participating local workforce boards. The program sought to boost job seekers' confidence in their ability to quickly be reemployed by offering an intensive educational workshop that used cognitive-behavioral techniques (CBT) to enhance motivation and self-efficacy in job-search activities. The target population consisted of registered Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) participants aged 18 and older who were receiving UI benefits and lived in one of the counties served. The goals of Rethinking were to improve participants' employment rates, reduce their time receiving UI benefits, and reduce service-provision costs.

Key components of the program included the following:

- A well-tested, proprietary training curriculum designed by a CBT specialist at WWP.
- A four-week workshop with two-hour sessions three times a week (24.5 hours total), with an average of eight participants per workshop.
- Highly qualified, well-trained facilitators who received peer-support opportunities.
- Rigorous fidelity checks and monitoring to ensure consistent implementation across the 10 counties.

Public Policy Associates, Inc. (PPA) conducted a third-party evaluation to measure the process, outcomes, and cost efficiency of the program. The evaluation included a comparison group of UI recipients who did not participate in the program.

Program Implementation

The Rethinking program was carried out smoothly and with strong fidelity to initial plans. Implementation highlights include:

- *Fidelity.* Thanks to regular fidelity checks and guidance, workshop delivery adhered to initial plans with little site-by-site variation.
- *Facilitators.* Facilitator quality was high and was sustained over time, indicating that the facilitator selection criteria and support mechanisms were appropriate.
- *Use of data.* Evaluation reports were used to track progress and fidelity, address problems, and inform sustainability efforts.
- *Performance.* The program exceeded performance targets, including goals for recruitment and completion, as well as targets for participants' socioemotional skills, confidence, and motivation in job search.
- *Satisfaction.* Participant satisfaction was very high, particularly with regard to the facilitators and their presentation style.

Several key factors contributed to the successful implementation. These included effective program management; optimal use of the planning year, including pilot testing of various program functions; clear standards for facilitator training and monitoring; a tightly choreographed, pre-tested curriculum; and a strong and consistent focus on communication and partner relationship-building.

Program Outcomes

- The Rethinking outcomes analysis used propensity score matching to understand the employment and UI-benefit outcomes for participants. The results suggest that Rethinking is effective in boosting employment outcomes and reducing the use of UI benefits.

- *Employment.* Although participants only had a 5% better (i.e., statistically insignificant) chance of being employed in the first quarter after program exit vis-à-vis the comparison group, they had statistically significant positive results in the third quarter (12% greater odds of employment) and fourth quarter (8% greater). While the effect sizes were small, the findings indicate a long-term differential impact.
- *Retention.* Participants had a 5% greater likelihood of retaining employment in any job than the comparison group, but the effect was not statistically significant.
- *UI benefits.* The program had a statistically significant effect on reducing UI benefits consumption. The estimated treatment effect was 1.4 fewer weeks vis-à-vis the comparison group.

Cost and Sustainability

Rethinking aimed to reduce the per-participant cost of programming for UI recipients, as compared to the expenses they incur. The evaluation compared program costs to non-monetary outcomes, i.e., employment success, retention, and reduction in length of UI-benefit receipt.

- *Cost per participant.* The per-participant cost of the program was \$1,188.85 for the full cost and \$1,163.55 excluding startup.
- *Cost effectiveness.* Estimated \$237 value (per person) for a one percentage point increase in the probability of employment. Estimated \$248 value for a one percentage point increase in the probability of retention. Estimated one-week reduction in UI benefits for every \$849.18 expended.
- *Caveats.* Conservative cost-benefit analysis suggests that the cost effectiveness of the program is modest at best. However, this outcome is largely due to treating the program as an add-on program rather than an integral component of WIOA services. If Rethinking were treated as a part of the traditional suite of WIOA services that eliminated the need for other WIOA services, the cost-benefit would be much more favorable.
- *Sustainability.* WorkSource center staff strongly supported adding Rethinking to their standard services. This could be done without significant changes in policy or practice, but requires funding availability and the addition of staff with specialized skills. Several efforts are currently underway to carry out versions of Rethinking at smaller scale with specific target populations.

Implications and Recommendations

- *General.* Rethinking appears well suited for replication at larger scale and in other locations. Evidence supports the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral techniques to support job seekers. Referring staff should receive robust orientation to the workings of the program, and facilitators should receive rigorous training and peer-support opportunities.
- *Target populations.* Future research is needed to adapt and test the model for other populations. Future programs should incorporate a clear and intentional focus on cultural relevance to ensure an optimal level of service to participants.
- *Evidence base.* The study findings indicate that the Rethinking model offers a strong value proposition, and they justify ongoing efforts to fund new versions of Rethinking. Further research should be conducted to test the effectiveness of the model with different populations, conditions, and variations on the curriculum, with well-developed success benchmarks and a strong focus on long-term impacts and job retention.

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