

Landscape assessment summary: measuring returns to workforce development

Workforce training providers face growing pressure to demonstrate the returns to their programs, yet the tools available for doing so vary widely in rigor and accessibility. This document summarizes the current landscape of initiatives that are working to understand, measure, and improve the outcomes of workforce development programs and to better determine how the Opportunity Insights and the Social Finance Institute initiative fits into this area of study. This research is based on conversations with initiative leaders and desk research on what initiatives have published and shared publicly. Understanding the landscape of these initiatives allows us to identify how to best leverage each one to strengthen measurement and learning and how our initiative can best add value to what other organizations are doing. The initiatives fall into three types:

1. **Foundational infrastructure:** these initiatives establish the foundational inventory of who offers training and what credentials they grant, but they cannot answer questions about participant outcomes. These are essential inputs to the ecosystem but are not evaluative tools. Their primary value is supply-side visibility.
2. **Outcomes measurement with limited administrative data:** these initiatives attempt to measure economic outcomes for participants after training, but rely mainly on data sources (credit bureau records, scraped labor market data) with significant coverage gaps and selection biases. None currently construct a validated comparison group, limiting their ability to make causal claims.
3. **Outcomes measurement using administrative wage records:** these initiatives use official administrative wage data (i.e. UI wage records, IRS income records, or Census LEHD data), which is the most accurate and comprehensive source for earnings measurement. Of these initiatives, only Opportunity Insight's project combines individual-level IRS data linkage with a validated counterfactual methodology to produce rigorous causal impact estimates of workforce training participant outcomes.

Another key differentiating factor across initiatives is what type of workforce development programs they are targeting. While Opportunity Insights and the Social Finance Institute are focused on short-term non-degree granting training programs, other initiatives also include college degrees.

Questions to consider

1. Which of these initiatives have you previously interacted with and what has your impression been? Which initiatives would you like to learn more about?
2. Which of these initiatives seem to add the most value to your work? Why?
3. Are there any gaps in measuring workforce training programs that these initiatives do not cover?
4. The initiatives here focus largely on earnings outcomes. Are there other outcomes — job quality, career advancement, economic mobility — that you wish the field was better at measuring?
5. Given the number of initiatives in this space, where do you see overlap that creates burden for providers, and where would better coordination or data-sharing across initiatives be most valuable?

The table below summarizes the characteristics of the key initiatives within each category.

Comparative Summary of Initiatives Measuring Workforce Development

Initiative	Overview	Program coverage	Data sources
Type 1: Foundational Infrastructure			
<u>Workforce Almanac (Harvard Project on Workforce)</u>	Creating a database of training providers and their characteristics	Nationwide programs < 2 years (~20,000 in database)	Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS); TrainingProvidersResults.gov Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Database; IRS Form 990
<u>The Project on Workforce (Harvard)</u>	Producing basic and applied research at the intersection of the education and labor markets for leaders in business, education, and policy	Specific case studies	Aggregated census data; WIOA performance records; state Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) data; HBS surveys
<u>Credential Engine</u>	Mapping credential landscape to create credential transparency and a standardized credential terminology	Broadly examining programs providing credentials nationwide	Provider-reported credential and skill information on learning outcomes, cost, and market value
Type 2: Outcomes measurement – limited access to administrative wage records			
<u>CredLens (Strada supported)</u>	Building a National Data Trust of credential-related data for credential verification and labor market outcomes	Nationwide non-degree credential training programs	National Student Clearinghouse; Equifax; Strada Survey; SLDS; Secure Query System (IRS)
<u>Credential Value Index (CVI) - Burning Glass Institute</u>	Estimating value of certifications and non-degree credentials in the labor market	Most certifications in non-degree credential programs nationwide	Burning Glass database (LinkedIn, Glass Door, Light Cast, Facebook); catalog of credentials
<u>Postsecondary Equity and Economics Research Center (PEER) (American University)</u>	Building a “one-stop shop” for policymakers to get evidence related to higher education and workforce development	Nationwide post-secondary education, training programs	Project specific; has used administrative data from the U.S. Department of Education and the Texas Education Research Center
Type 3: Outcomes measurement – analysis of administrative wage records			
<u>Massive Data Institute/Secure Query System (Partnership between Yale, Georgetown, IRS)</u>	Developing a system to access IRS descriptive income statistics on groups of individuals – includes confidence intervals to account for sampling and IRS-added “noise”	All tax filers	IRS tax data
<u>Post Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO)</u>	Creating a federally-backed data infrastructure of reported earnings and employment outcomes for college graduates by degree level, major, and institution to make the economic returns of a college degree transparent and comparable across institutions	Post-secondary institutions nationwide	Post-secondary institution enrollment data; Census Bureau’s Local Employment Household Dynamics (LEHD) data using state UI wage records, supplemented with federal agency records for worker and firm characteristics
<u>Opportunity Insights / Social Finance Institute</u>	Using a matching methodology with Census and IRS data to estimate the causal returns to workforce training across a range of short-term workforce training providers	Short-term non-degree workforce training program nationwide	Census demographics; IRS earnings data; training provider program characteristics