

Designing a National Evaluation of an Ongoing Program: Lessons from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation

Sheena McConnell

Presentation at the APPAM Fall Research Conference

November 8, 2013

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research



WIA Adult and Dislocated
Worker Programs

Gold Standard Evaluation

Members of the Evaluation Team

- **U.S. Department of Labor**
 - Eileen Pederson (current project officer)
 - Jonathan Simonetta (previous project officer)
- **Mathematica**
 - Sheena McConnell, Linda Rosenberg, Peter Schochet, Andrew Clarkwest, Annalisa Mastri
- **Social Policy Research Associates**
 - Ron D'Amico, Kate Dunham
- **MDRC**
 - Frieda Molina
- **Corporation for a Skilled Workforce**
 - Nina Babich

Goal: Evaluate WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs

- Large programs designed to help customers obtain jobs or better jobs
- Programs administered by about 600 local workforce investment boards (LWIBs)
- Services offered in about 3,000 American Job Centers to:
 - Laid off workers or otherwise separated (dislocated)
 - Low-income persons (adults)
- Three tiers of services:
 - Core (primarily self service)
 - Intensive (staff assisted)
 - Training

Ambitious Study Design

- **Nationally-representative estimates**
- **Experimental**
 - Nonexperimental study already conducted (Heinrich et al. 2011)
- **Separate impacts of the effectiveness of core services, intensive services, and training**
- **Follow study participants for 30 months**
 - Two rounds of survey
 - Administrative data collection

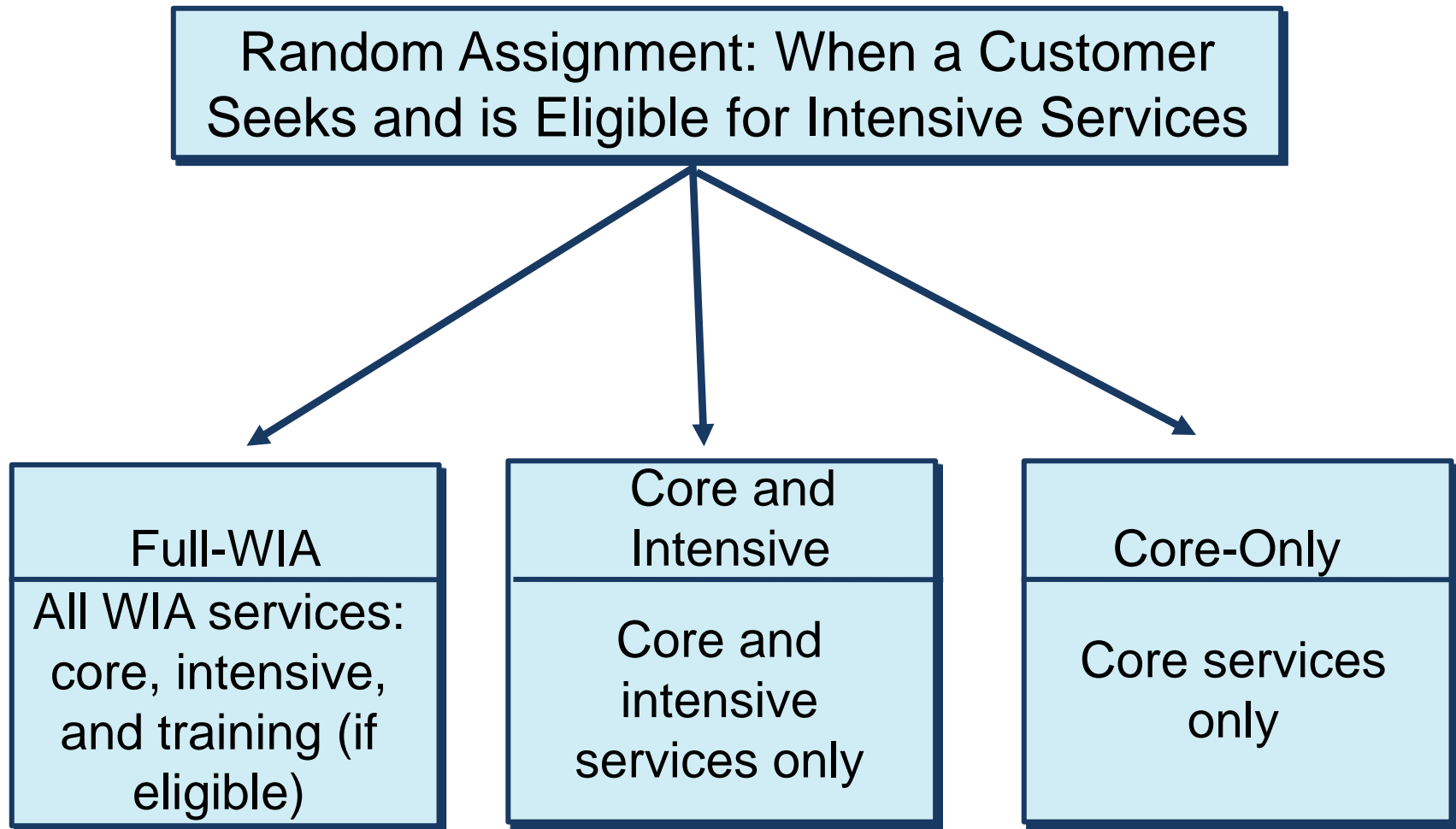
Challenging

- **Needed to insert random assignment into well-established procedures**
 - Procedures different across LWIBs
 - Needed to randomly assign 35,000 customers
- **Recruit many randomly-selected LWIBs. But:**
 - LWIBs were not required to participate
 - Service providers do not want to deny services
 - Providers concerned about disruption
 - Financial compensation was not large

Did Not Attempt to Estimate Impact of Core Services

- **Not feasible to deny core services**
 - Would need to deny access to American Job Centers
 - Core services described in law as “universal”
 - Multiple sources of funding
- **Lack of “no-service” control group assisted in recruiting LWIBs**

Simple Design: Randomly Assign Once, To Three Groups



Low-Assignment Rates to “Limited-Service Groups” Critical to Success

- **Rates of assignment to “core-and-intensive” and “core-only” groups set at 0.7% to 8%**
- **Possible because:**
 - Power driven by number of sites
 - Large number of program applicants
 - Planned 18-month intake period
- **Critical because:**
 - Made evaluation more acceptable to LWIBs
 - Limited disruption to procedures

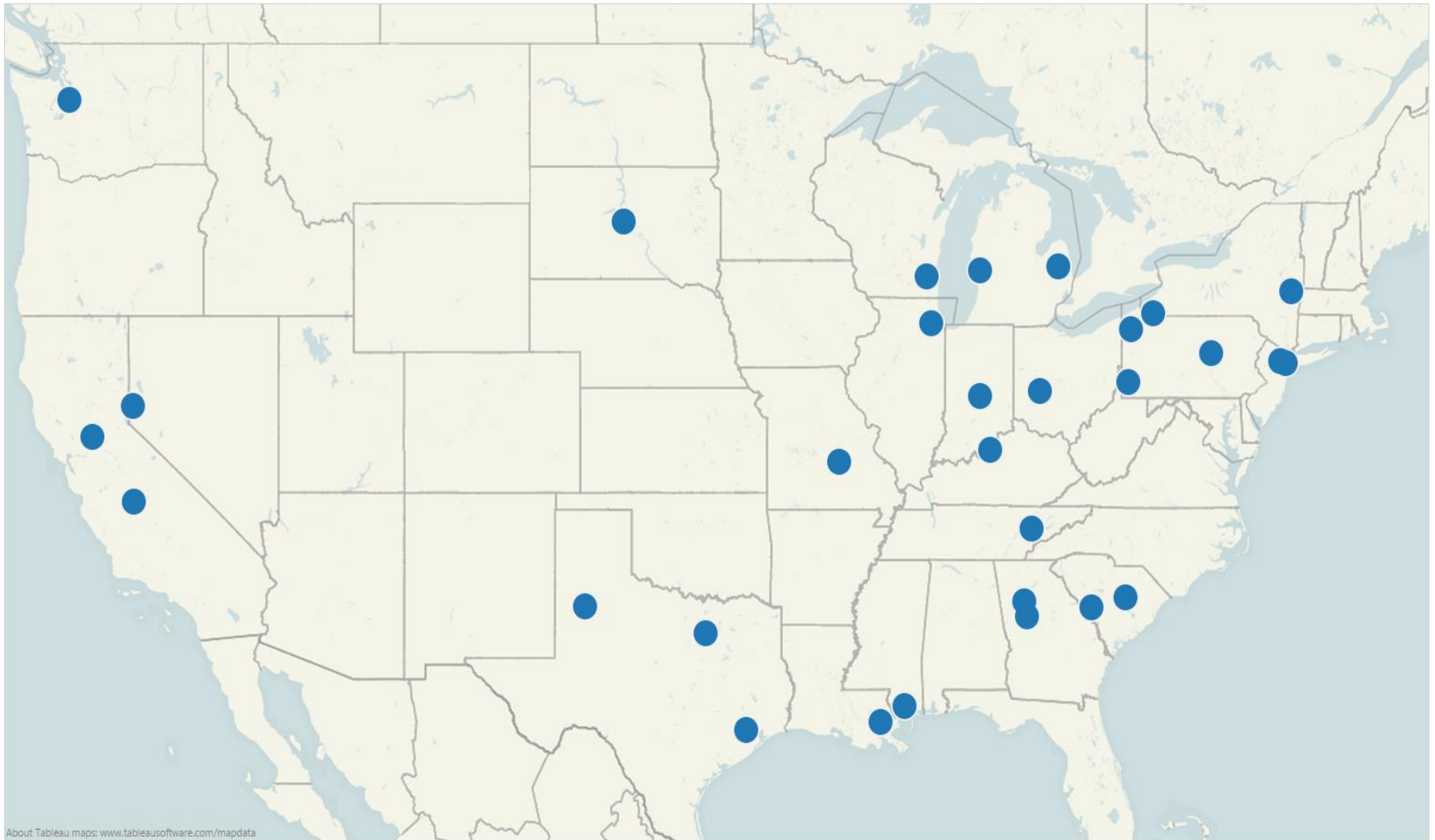
Some Exemptions from Random Assignment

- Important to keep exemptions low to maintain representativeness of estimates
- Some exemptions required by DOL:
 - Trade Adjustment Assistance participants
- Some exemptions affecting few people granted because important to LWIBs:
 - Veterans
 - Wild cards

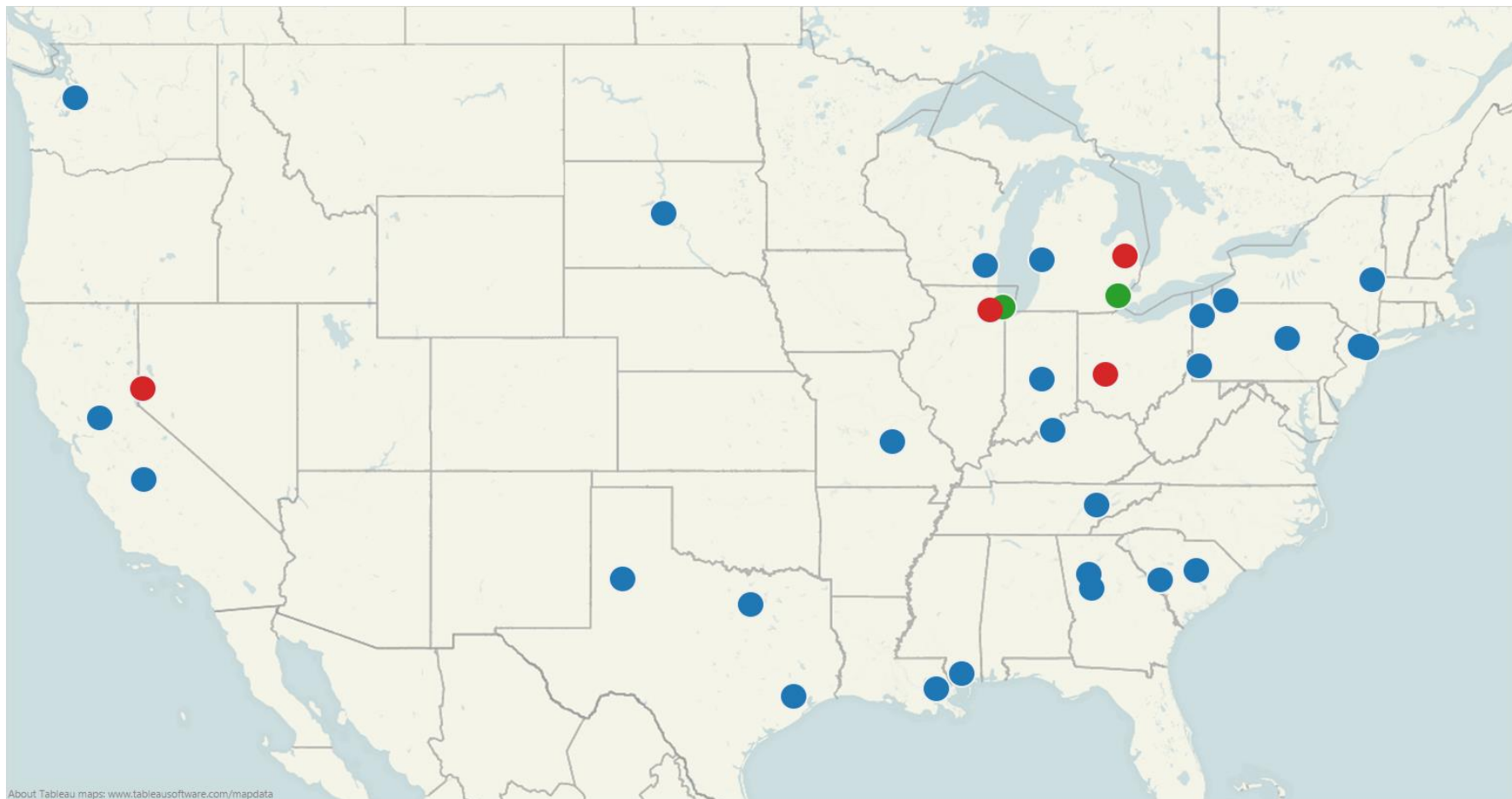
Random Assignment Made as Easy as Possible

- Worked with programs to insert random assignment in a way that minimized disruption to program operations
- Baseline data collection limited to two-page self-administered form sent to Mathematica
- Minimal information entered into computer system to conduct random assignment
- Training, manuals, hot-line, ongoing technical assistance provided by study team

30 LWIBs Randomly Selected for Study



28 Agreed, 26 original and 2 Replacements



Blue dots= sites originally selected and agreed to participate

Red dots = sites originally selected and refused

Green dots = replacement sites

Recruitment was Time and Resource Intensive

- **Recruitment took 18 months, substantial funds**
- **Department of Labor very involved**
 - Assistant Secretary made calls
 - DOL staff accompanied us on visits
- **Senior project staff made multiple visits**
 - Discuss with senior LWIB staff
 - Brief the members of the workforce investment boards
 - Brief line staff

Small Number in Limited-Service Groups Key to Program Staff Acceptance

- Small limited-service groups one of the most important factors in recruitment success
- Program staff were concerned about number in limited-service groups, not percentage
 - Agreements with LWIB stated a maximum number
 - Many requested a shorter intake period even though it increased percentage in limited-service groups
 - Percent in limited-service groups turned out to be 2-16%

Messaging to LWIBs Also Important

- **We understand this is hard, we will be there for you**
- **Future funding depends on this, some denied services now but more served in future if program found effective**
- **LWIB-specific impact estimates not made public**
- **Your participation is necessary for study to be successful**
- **This is important to the Department of Labor**
- **Ineffective message: “Many are eligible for services, you are effectively denying services now anyway”**

Conclusions

- **Feasible to conduct rigorous nationally-representative evaluation of ongoing program**
- **Requires flexibility in design**
 - **Small limited-service groups key**
- **These evaluations are not cheap!**

For more information:

- **Eileen Pederson**
 - Pederson.Eileen@DOL.gov
- **Sheena McConnell**
 - smcconnell@mathematica-mpr.com
- **Linda Rosenberg**
 - lrosenberg@mathematica-mpr.com