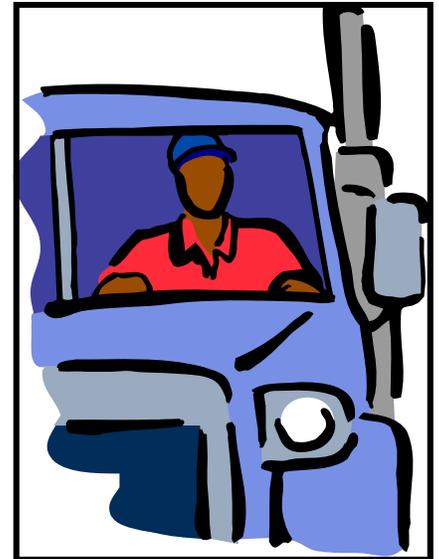


# Rapid Employment Model Evaluation: Initial Findings



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## INTRODUCTION

### Origins of the Rapid Employment Model

In recent decades, policymakers and program administrators have engaged in sometimes heated debates over the merits of so-called “work-first” approaches for various target populations of jobseekers. There have even been large demonstration projects designed to test the relative effectiveness of “labor force attachment” versus “human capital development” strategies for welfare recipients.<sup>1</sup> In many respects, work programs under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) as well as efforts under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 are based on a framework that presumes that jobseekers will seek employment before moving on to more costly services. Under WIA, participants progress through a sequence of services beginning with core services, then to intensive services and finally to training if they cannot find suitable work.<sup>2</sup> In fact, most jobseekers prefer to go right to work rather than undergo long periods of training without pay, and thus most workforce offerings tend to emphasize relatively quick connections to the workplace.

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, strategically coordinating their investments with *WorkSource*—The Greater Austin Workforce Board, the local workforce investment board.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, Travis County and the City together have expended around \$3 million annually on workforce services for local residents.<sup>4</sup> Primary areas of emphasis for these local investments have been longer-term training and support services, offerings that have typically been constrained under federal program rules.

In 2005, Travis County and *WorkSource* staff began discussing the need for improved services to assist jobseekers find suitable work more quickly through a structured effort that

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<sup>1</sup> King (2004) summarizes this literature.

<sup>2</sup> See Barnow and King (2005) for a discussion of these issues.

<sup>3</sup> City and county tax expenditures on workforce services grew out of the experience with the Samsung-related agreements in the mid-to-late 1990s (Glover et al., forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> See Smith and King (2007) for an evaluation of city-funded workforce development services.

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, *WorkSource* 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 receiving Food Stamps or cash welfare benefits and individuals who have been released from incarceration.

### **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 County was particularly interested in determining REM outcomes and impacts.

The Ray Marshall Center evaluation of the REM project thus features two major components, as follows:

- ***Process Evaluation:*** The process evaluation documents the implementation of the REM project. Service and training providers were profiled to provide an overview of the clients they serve; the training and other services they provide; typical client flows; and other information relevant to understanding REM. This portion of the evaluation also examines the REM model and determines how and why project operations deviated from the design.
- ***Outcomes Evaluation:*** 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. This portion of the evaluation also seeks to validate outcomes data now reported by individual service providers to *WorkSource* and the County. The outcomes evaluation will also include an exploratory effort to gauge the “value-added” from these services through quasi-experimental analysis comparing labor

market outcomes for REM participants with those of a comparison group of similar non-REM participants.<sup>5</sup>

### **Report Organization**

This report is organized into six sections including this Introduction. The second section briefly characterizes the REM model design and explains its key features. The third section addresses the implementation of REM in practice, highlighting variations from the original design and important challenges and barriers encountered. The fourth section presents the initial labor market outcomes that have been observed to date. The fifth section offers several concluding observations, followed by a final section that outlines several recommendations to Travis County and its partners for improving the REM project.

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<sup>5</sup> The impact analysis will be the focus of a subsequent report.



## THE RAPID EMPLOYMENT MODEL DESIGN

### **The Partners: Travis County and WorkSource**

The Rapid Employment Model Design was developed by Travis County and WorkSource – Greater Austin as a demonstration project targeting individuals with significant barriers to employment. Travis County, along with the City of Austin, has long been an active supporter of workforce development activities in the region. The investment of local tax dollars in workforce services for the disadvantaged is a distinction that few other localities can claim, and demonstrates the commitment that the County and City have made to improve the economic outlook of their citizens. As the local workforce investment board, WorkSource – Greater Austin is a key partner in these activities. Through federal, state, and local funding, WorkSource operates three Career Centers and works with both employers and job-seekers to improve outcomes in the labor market and to promote regional workforce and economic development priorities.

Travis County selected WorkSource to administer the REM project due to the experience and expertise WorkSource has developed in identifying and responding to employer needs, working with community workforce services providers, and connecting individuals with employment barriers to job opportunities. The contract with WorkSource stipulates performance objectives for the REM project, including the number of participants: completing training; obtaining employment within three months of training; retaining employment for six months; and entering employment at or above \$9 per hour.

### **Training Providers**

In addition to the County and WorkSource, the REM project involved five training providers and one provider focused on job placement services. These organizations are highlighted below; more detailed profiles of the organizations and their involvement in the REM project are provided in Appendix A.

*Austin Academy.* Austin Academy provides workforce training in office and computer skills, as well as preparation and support for individuals seeking their General Equivalency Diploma (GED). For the REM project, training focused solely on office and computer skills.

***Austin Community College (ACC).*** As the primary workforce and continuing education training provider in the Austin area, ACC offers a range of short- and mid-term occupational skills training programs. For the REM project, ACC offered four training options: Administrative Assistant; Para-Educator; Earth Moving Equipment Operator; and Truck Driving.

***Construction Gateway.*** Construction Gateway is a well-established training program preparing individuals—most of whom are ex-offenders from the state jail system—for work in the construction industry. Managed by Skillpoint Alliance, this program has a history of working closely with employers to identify skills needs and providing trainees with hands-on, real-world experience.<sup>6</sup>

***Institute for Child Care Excellence (ICCE).*** ICCE offers training and continuing education for workers in the child care industry. ICCE only participated in the first round of the REM project. Staff turnover and an ongoing reorganization prevented evaluators from gathering more information on the nature of the training and ICCE’s involvement with the REM project.

***Professional Institute of Dental Assisting (PIDA).*** PIDA prepares individuals for careers as certified dental assistants. This training program, which was only offered in the first round of the REM project, was significantly condensed from its normal course schedule to meet the time requirements of the project.

***Goodwill Industries.*** While Goodwill does provide occupational skills training as a normal part of their workforce services, its involvement in the REM project was limited to job placement activities. Goodwill’s job developers focus on specific industries to develop knowledge of workforce demands and build relationships with employers. Goodwill works closely with individuals to identify job leads and develop resumes and other materials that will support their job search.

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<sup>6</sup> See King et al (2005) for an evaluation of the Construction Gateway program.

## **The Rapid Employment Model**

The Rapid Employment Model (REM) design is fairly straightforward (see Figure 1). Disadvantaged residents are identified for inclusion by Travis County and *WorkSource* Career Center staff, as well as case managers for the Project RIO, Choices, and Food Stamp Employment and Training programs. In general, individuals with multiple or significant barriers to employment, and low-income residents are eligible and targeted for participation. Prior to entering occupational skills training, individuals complete a computer-based job readiness training program to work on the “soft-skills” often cited by employers as critical for entry-level positions, such as timeliness, interpersonal communication, customer service, and following directions.

After completing pre-employment training, participants worked with *WorkSource* case managers to identify two possible training options. When a number of participants were ready for occupational skills training, *WorkSource* held an Open House for participants to learn more about their possible training opportunities. Each training provider was expected to present information on the training program and opportunities for employment in the field, as well as answer any questions that potential trainees might have. Individuals then selected the training program they desired. Once this selection was made, participants were asked to sign a participation agreement that outlined their responsibilities in the training and detailed opportunities for earning incentives.

As envisioned in the REM design, training programs were to last six weeks or less in order to encourage quick entry into the workplace. Programs were chosen for inclusion based on several factors, including: cost and length of the training resulting in a certificate or workforce credential; availability of entry-level jobs paying at or above \$9 per hour; and suitability for the target population. To encourage individual participation in the training, the project design included weekly incentives of \$100 in cash or gift cards for individuals who attended all training sessions.

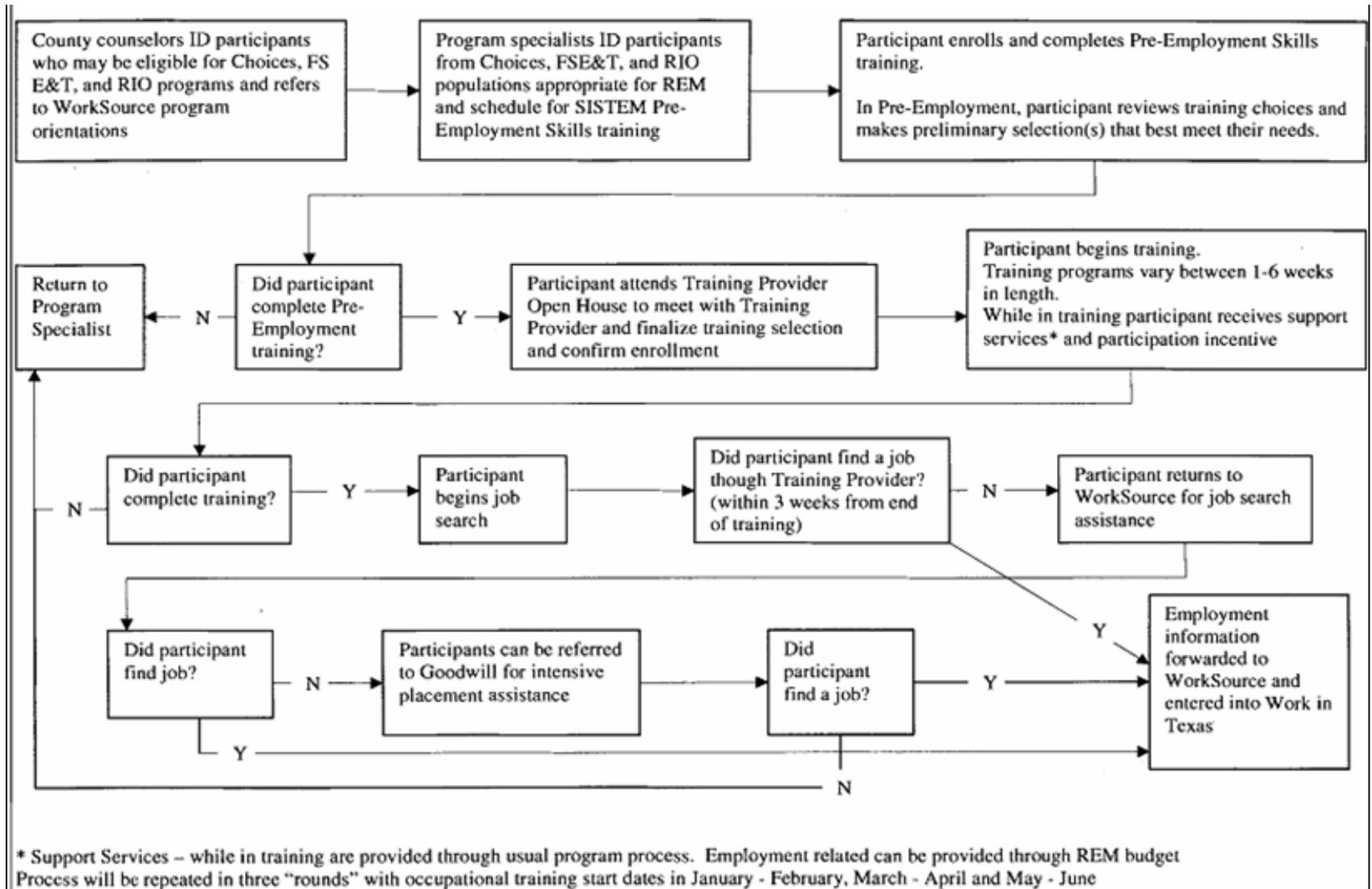
In order to help trained individuals connect with employment, the REM design included three levels of placement services. Training providers could earn an additional \$100 per participant entering employment at or above \$9 per hour within 21 days of completing training. If an individual was not employed in that time frame, the next step in

the design was a referral back to *WorkSource* for job placement assistance. For those individuals who were still unable to connect with employment after working with the Career Center, the model included intensive job placement services through Goodwill Industries. An incentive of \$50 was offered to REM participants to encourage them to report to their training provider when they obtained employment.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The intent of the REM project is to connect individuals facing significant employment barriers with job opportunities paying at or above \$9 per hour. Because the individual receives a certificate or training credential, the training is intended to lead to immediate employment and potentially a longer-term career as well. The careers targeted by the REM project are potentially ones that provide participants with opportunities for employment retention and career advancement, including increased earnings. Employed individuals may draw fewer public benefits and contribute more to the local economy. For Project RIO participants, employed individuals may be able to pay restitution and probation/parole fees.

Figure 1: Participant Flow for Rapid Employment Model (REM)





## REM IN PRACTICE

The REM project enrolled jobseekers in four separate rounds of up to 6 weeks between January 2006 and October 2006. The first round ran between January and March 2006. The second round ran between March and May 2006. The third round, initially planned as the last round of the project, ran between May and July 2006. The fourth round ran between August and October 2006. In December 2006, WorkSource offered four individuals an opportunity to participate in a fifth round; this final round is not included in the evaluation. 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):

- **Choices** – the workforce program in Texas serving recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds. Some 14.3 percent of REM participants were drawn from the Choices program.
- **Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET)** – a program providing access to employment and training programs for individuals receiving food stamp assistance. Only 2.7 percent of REM participants were drawn from the FSET program.
- **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 (83 percent) Project RIO clients.

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	Round 1		Round 2		Round 3		Round 4		Overall	
	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Choices</b>	8	32	4	12.5	3	10	1	4	16	14.3
<b>FSET</b>	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2.7
<b>Project RIO</b>	14	56	28	87.5	27	90	24	96	93	83
<b>Total</b>	25	100	32	100	30	100	25	100	112	100

Source: WorkSource data.

### **Components, Services, and Duration**

#### ***Pre-Employment Training***

One of the first activities an individual was expected to complete for the REM project was the pre-employment training program. WorkSource elected to use 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 in each round.

Rates of completion for pre-employment training were relatively high overall, at about 71%, and for Rounds 1, 2 and 4, but were only about half of that (43%) in Round 3. WorkSource 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**

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Total
<b>Total Number of Participants</b>	25	32	30	25	112
<b>Number Completing Pre-Employment Training</b>	19	26	13	21	79
<b>Percent Completing</b>	76%	81%	43%	84%	71%

Source: WorkSource data.

### ***Occupational Skills Training***

After the pre-employment training, REM participants selected and entered a short-term training program. Overall 87% of REM participants completed occupational skills training, as detailed in Table 3. As with pre-employment training, completion rates for skills training were substantially lower (67%) in Round 3.

**Table 3: REM Participants Completing Occupational Training**

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Total
<b>Total Number of Participants</b>	25	32	30	25	112
<b>Number Completing Occupational Training</b>	25	28	20	24	97
<b>Percent Completing</b>	100%	88%	67%	96%	87%

Source: WorkSource data.

The occupational training programs available in the REM project varied considerably. The length of the programs ranged from three days to six weeks. While 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. Each of the programs is highlighted below; more specific details are available in the profiles included in Appendix A.

***Austin Academy.*** This six-week training program prepared individuals with the computer and other skills necessary for entry-level office/clerical work. Participants spent the first four weeks building skills in typing, filing, and computer software applications,

including the internet. In the last two weeks of the training, individuals worked on job search skills, including developing a resume and participating in a short-term (2-4 day) internship. Austin Academy participated in all four rounds of the REM project.

***ACC – Administrative Assistant.*** Like the Austin Academy training, this program prepared individuals for work in an office environment. The four-week program helped individuals build basic computer skills and assisted them in developing a resume and portfolio. The Administrative Assistant program was only offered in the second round of the REM project.

***ACC – Para-Educator.*** The Para-Educator training program prepared individuals to work as Teacher’s Assistants in the classroom. This three-day program helped individuals develop a portfolio of activities and classroom strategies. Due to changes in state law regarding the education requirement for Teacher’s Assistants, this program was only offered in the second round.

***ACC – Earth Moving Equipment Operator (EMEO).*** This 3 ½ week training program helped individuals build skills in heavy equipment operation, particularly for the construction industry. In addition to the occupational skills training, individuals received assistance with resume development and interview skills training. Due to several factors, this program was only offered in the first round of the REM project.

***ACC – Truck Driving.*** Over the course of this 4-week training program, individuals developed the knowledge and skills necessary to earn their commercial driver’s license. If an individual failed to pass the driving test, a 40-hour refresher course was offered at no additional charge. Individuals in this training program also developed job search skills and had the opportunity to participate in “in-the-field” job fairs. The truck driver training course was offered in all four rounds of the REM project.

***Construction Gateway.*** This five-week program prepared individuals for a career in the construction industry, including training in basic carpentry, electrical and plumbing work, OSHA certifications, job search and interviewing skills. The Construction Gateway program was offered in all four rounds of the REM project.

***Institute for Child Care Excellence.*** This five-day training in child development, positive guidance, health, safety, nutrition and first aid prepared individuals to work in the child care industry. Due to several factors, this program was only offered in the first round.

***Professional Institute of Dental Assisting.*** This six-week program prepared individuals for employment in a dental office. In addition to occupational skills, students also received training in resume development and interviewing skills. This program was only available in the first round of the REM project due to cost concerns.

Table 4 identifies the number of participants, by round, 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 the population being served. As the program became more oriented to the ex-offender population, many training options became unviable.

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

Occupational Training Program	Round 1		Round 2		Round 3		Round 4		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Austin Academy	5	20	2	6	8	27	4	16	19	17
ACC: Admin. Asst.	--	--	2	6	--	--	--	--	2	2
ACC: Para-Educator	--	--	1	3	--	--	--	--	1	1
ACC: EMEO	7	28	--	--	--	--	--	--	7	6
ACC: Truck Driving	3	12	16	50	14	47	12	48	45	40
Child Care	1	4	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	1
Construction Gateway	6	24	11	34	8	27	9	36	34	30
Dental Assisting	3	12	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	3
Total	25	100	32	100	30	100	25	100	112	100

\* Percentages may total more than 100 due to rounding.

Source: WorkSource data.

### ***Incentives***

The training providers generally felt that the weekly incentives offered to REM participants were a great motivator which helped to alleviate some of the financial issues

participants faced by being in full-time training. Choices and FSET clients received \$100 gift cards to HEB or Wal-Mart for each week that they completed all required training activities. *WorkSource* case managers reported that one client saved her weekly incentive cards to purchase a laptop computer for her family.

Project RIO clients received a check for \$100 each week for attending all training sessions. Because many Project RIO clients are required to attend parole or probation meetings, as well as undergo home inspections by probation or parole officers, they often had to miss a class session. While individuals could still earn the incentive by submitting written documentation of their required meetings, this did cause some problems for training providers. Providers felt that participants did not clearly understand how weekly incentive money could be earned, which led to arguments and disruptions in the classroom. *WorkSource* reported another issue with incentives which was a particular problem for Project RIO clients. Many of these participants were unlikely to have stable residences, therefore checks sent to the address in the participant's file were often returned by the post office.

In addition to the weekly attendance incentive, REM participants had the opportunity to earn an additional \$50 if they reported back to their training provider when they became employed. Few participants took advantage of this incentive.

### ***Support Services***

Support or wrap-around services were provided to REM participants; however they were not available to all clients or through all training providers. REM participants who were also Choices clients had access to child care support. FSET participants also received support services through their program. Project RIO helped participants access funding for work clothes and basic equipment. Project RIO clients also received fairly intensive case management, as that program requires clients to meet with case managers every two weeks to discuss job contacts and identify new job leads.

Support services through training providers were varied. The ACC-based programs did not offer participants any wrap-around services. Austin Academy's female participants could access interview and work clothes through Dress for Success, a local non-profit organization. Construction Gateway offered participants 30-day bus passes and other transportation supports such as gas cards on a case-by-case basis. For Construction

Gateway's Project RIO clients, a \$100 Home Depot card was awarded to participants who found employment in the construction industry.

### ***Placement Services***

Placement services were not implemented at any of the three stages as consistently as envisioned in the REM design. Some of the training providers, Austin Community College in particular, do not normally offer placement services as a part of their program offerings. More typically, programs offered training in job search and interviewing skills. Across the providers, participants generally developed a resume as a part of their training sequence. Few providers identified job leads, developed internships or work experience opportunities, or helped participants contact employers.

The three training providers that were engaged in all four rounds of the project were those that provided participants with the most placement services. Austin Academy's program included a short-term internship as well as two weeks of supported job search assistance. Construction Gateway includes regular Friday training classes on job search and interview skills, bringing in local employers to help with these sessions. Because this program has a history of working with ex-offenders, it offered specific guidance to Project RIO clients on how to discuss their criminal backgrounds and current probation or parole restrictions with potential employers. ACC's truck driver training program regularly holds "in-the-field" job fairs where local trucking companies and independent operators have an opportunity to observe students behind the wheel. The truck driver program often connects students with employers prior to their training completion.

In the second stage of placement services, participants were supposed to be referred back to the *WorkSource* Career Centers for assistance in finding employment. Case managers for their primary program (Choices, FSET, or Project RIO) as well as other Center staff were to provide more individual assistance in identifying job leads and connecting with employers. However, there was no formal process for referring individuals back to the Career Centers, and no records were kept on the individuals that sought this service.

In the third and final stage of placement services, participants were supposed to be referred to Goodwill Industries for intensive job placement assistance. Due to contracting issues, Goodwill was not engaged with the REM project until the fourth round. In that round, Goodwill made multiple attempts to connect with participants, attending the Open

House to share information about their services with participants, as well as visiting each training program prior to participants' completion to remind individuals that Goodwill's placement services were available free-of-charge. Similar to the second-stage issues, there was no formal process established for individuals to be referred to Goodwill for services; therefore, it is unknown if any REM clients accessed this placement service.

### **Key Variations from the REM Design**

Several variations from the initial REM design are worth noting. First, the number of REM program offerings dropped over the course of the 2006 demonstration project. Jobseekers were to have had a choice of eight different occupational training programs, ranging from a few days to six weeks in length. By the end of the first round, only five of the eight programs were still being offered: ACC's Earth Moving Equipment Operator, the Child Care Provider program, and the Dental Assistant program had been dropped. In the second round, ACC's Administrative Assistant and Para-Educator programs were dropped. By the final two rounds, only three of the original eight programs were still being offered by three providers: Austin Academy, ACC-Truck Driving and Construction Gateway. The winnowing of programs and providers appears to be the result of several factors, including cost (e.g., Dental Assistant), leadership changes (e.g., Earth Moving), lack of participant interest and changes in state law (e.g., Para-Educator). Also, as the project moved to serve primarily ex-offenders, several of the initial training options were no longer viable career opportunities due to legal and other barriers.

Second, the REM model envisioned that participants would be provided three stages of placement assistance—from the training provider, from *WorkSource* Career Centers and, as a last resort, intensive placement assistance from Goodwill Industries—after the completion of short-term occupational skills training. In fact, few participants were referred to Goodwill for placement assistance, possibly because Goodwill's contract for this purpose was delayed until the fourth REM round. It is also worth noting that REM's lack of formal mechanisms for referring participants to either Career Centers or Goodwill for job search assistance likely was a factor in the low levels of job search assistance provided.

Third, the REM model became a vehicle for serving mainly ex-offender participants from Project RIO rather than a broader, more representative mix of jobseekers. Overall, fully

93 participants (83 percent) were from Project RIO, another 16 (14 percent) were from the TANF Choices program, and only three were Food Stamp E&T program participants. Among other things, this shift has important implications for future REM cohorts.

### **REM Challenges/Barriers**

The 2006 project was the first year of REM implementation, and, as with any new project, it faced a number of challenges or barriers. Some of the major ones included:

- ***Hard-to-Serve Participants.*** REM was explicitly designed to provide assistance to an array of very hard-to-serve populations, ranging from ex-offenders and welfare mothers to Food Stamp recipients. As indicated, over the four rounds, REM evolved into a program serving mainly ex-offenders. Yet, according to the contractors, participants from all of these populations tend to come with behavior problems, poor work experience and large support service needs. Serving individuals with so many deep-seated needs will continue to be a challenge that is difficult to address.
- ***Constrained Program Options.*** REM encountered difficulty in offering the planned array of training program options for the reasons discussed above. It may be possible to negotiate lower costs for some of the higher-priced options and to create more responsive curriculum offerings in the future.
- ***Alignment of Job Search with Training.*** Offering better job search assistance in tandem with training was one of the planned features of this REM program, yet it did not often occur this way. Program staff will need to figure out how to better align job search with short-term training if the REM models is really going to be tested. Building in structured referral mechanisms would be a logical first-step.
- ***Coordination Between Workforce and Probation/Parole Systems.*** In light of the fact that REM's largest group of participants was ex-offenders from Project RIO, it was not surprising that a series of conflicts surfaced between the workforce and the probation and parole systems. One of the more disturbing of these conflicts was that parole/probation officers insisted on their charges coming downtown for check-in meetings during the day, even when such meetings would force participants to miss mandatory training classes, often for a full day given transportation times. Better up-front coordination between these two systems is needed.
- ***Participant Understanding of Incentives.*** Although participation incentives were incorporated into the REM design and participants were asked to sign an agreement outlining their responsibilities and opportunities to earn incentives, it became clear to providers that many participants did not understand the incentive

process well enough to take much advantage of it. This is an aspect of the program that could be improved considerably with little effort.

## INITIAL LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES

The outcomes analysis draws on three types of data: 1) provider-reported data submitted to *WorkSource*; 2) program (Project RIO, Choices and FSET) specialists' input 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 Earnings

The following two tables convey provider-reported employment and earnings data that evaluators received from *WorkSource*. Overall, 65 percent of REM participants are reported as employed immediately at or after they completed the program (see Table 5). Employment includes both part-time and full-time work. Average reported wages in each round met or exceeded the REM's targeted rate of \$9 per hour. Overall, REM participants with reported wages averaged \$10.68 per hour. Job postings and placements are not consistently reported to the Work-in-Texas system.

**Table 5: Provider-Reported Employment and Wages for REM Participants by Round**

	<b>Number of Participants with Reported Employment</b>	<b>Percent of Employed Participants</b>	<b>Number of Participants with Reported Wages</b>	<b>Range of Wages Per Hour Reported</b>	<b>Average of Wages Per Hour Reported</b>
Round 1	21	84%	17	\$7.25 - \$33.33	\$10.56
Round 2	22	69%	20	\$5.50 - \$25.00	\$11.03
Round 3	19	63%	16	\$6.50 - \$35.00	\$10.99
Round 4	11	44%	12	\$5.75 - \$17.00	\$10.15
Total	73	65%	65	\$5.50 - \$35.00	\$10.68

Source: *WorkSource* data.

ACC's truck driver training program and the Austin Academy program reported the most REM participants in employment. Surprisingly, an employed participant is reported for each of the three programs eliminated in Round 1. Details are provided by training provider in Table 6 below.

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

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Total
Austin Academy	80%	50%	63%	25%	58%
ACC – Admin Asst	--	100%	--	--	100%
ACC – Para-Educator	--	100%	--	--	100%
ACC – EMEO	86%	--	--	--	86%
ACC – Truck Driving	100%	82%	71%	33%	67%
Child Care	100%	--	--	--	100%
Construction Gateway	83%	45%	75%	67%	65%
Dental Assistant	67%	--	--	--	67%
Total	84%	69%	70%	44%	67%

Source: WorkSource 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.<sup>7</sup> Second, the employment and earnings numbers reported in the following tables are based on an early analysis, particularly for individuals who received services in the fourth round. As additional quarters of information become available, more definitive numbers can be reported.

While WorkSource records indicate that there were 112 REM participants in 2006, complete data for linking individuals with UI wage records were only available for 103 participants. The following discussion will focus solely on those 103 individuals.

Participants in the 2006 REM project were employed approximately 16% of the time in the four quarters prior to their enrollment in the REM project (see Table 7). In their last

<sup>7</sup> See Stevens (2002) for a review of employment that is not covered by state unemployment insurance laws.

quarter of participation in the REM project, 51% of participants were employed. Approximately 55% of REM participants were employed two quarters after their participation in the project, with that percentage rising to 60% of participants in all post-service quarters. Note that insufficient time has elapsed to examine six-month retention for participants from Round 4.

**Table 7: Quarterly Employment for REM Participants<sup>8</sup>**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>Four quarters before service</b>	<b>Last quarter of service</b>	<b>Second quarter after service</b>	<b>Sixth quarter after service</b>	<b>All quarters after service</b>
2006 Round 1	18	22.2%	52.9%	56.3%	.	56.8%
2006 Round 2	35	15.7%	51.4%	58.8%	.	60.0%
2006 Round 3	26	13.5%	57.7%	46.7%	.	56.1%
2006 Round 4	24	15.6%	41.7%	.	.	69.6%
Overall	103	16.3%	51.0%	54.5%	.	59.6%

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 REM project, participants who were reported as employed earned an average of \$1,953 per quarter (see Table 8). In their last quarter of REM services, employed participants earned an average of \$1,607. In the second quarter after completing the REM project, employed participants earned an average of \$3,035. Note that sufficient time has not elapsed to examine six-month earnings for participants from Round 4. In all post-service quarters, employed REM participants earned on average \$2,931 per quarter.

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<sup>8</sup> In this table and the ones to follow, a dot signifies cells with too few participants or no observations to report.

**Table 8: Average Quarterly Earnings of those Employed**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>Four quarters before service</b>	<b>Last quarter of service</b>	<b>Second quarter after service</b>	<b>Sixth quarter after service</b>	<b>All quarters after service</b>
<b>2006 Round 1</b>	18	\$2,082	\$1,066	\$2,809	.	\$3,441
<b>2006 Round 2</b>	35	\$2,311	\$1,695	\$3,818	.	\$3,507
<b>2006 Round 3</b>	26	\$1,459	\$1,447	\$1,089	.	\$1,601
<b>2006 Round 4</b>	24	\$1,750	\$2,177	.	.	\$1,996
<b>Overall</b>	103	\$1,953	\$1,607	\$3,035	.	\$2,931

Source: UI wage records

### **Compare Outcomes from Providers and UI Wage Records**

When more complete UI wage data are available for all 2006 REM participants, researchers will conduct detailed comparisons of these results (i.e., employment status, mean earnings) with those reported directly by providers.

### **Quasi-Experimental Impacts**

Researchers are continuing to explore the appropriate methodology for the impact analysis of the REM project. In addition to the limited post-service time frame, challenges in identifying an appropriate comparison group for Project RIO clients have delayed this effort. As these issues are overcome, researchers will be able to develop service impact estimates for both employment and earnings.

## **CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS**

### **Overall Observations**

There is a lot to learn from this initial evaluation of the Rapid Employment Model design. While the pre-employment and occupational skills training components seem to have been implemented fairly well, the placement sequence simply was not implemented as designed. When considering future REM projects, it will be important to bolster this design component in order to truly test its effectiveness with the target population. In addition, careful consideration should be given to the target population to ensure that training offerings are appropriate and structured to support the diverse needs of the participants. Our initial findings indicate that participants experienced greater labor market success after receiving REM services; more participants had reported employment with higher average quarterly earnings. We will be able to address the “value-added” question better once we have completed the impact analysis.

### **Data Collection and Reporting Issues**

Data collection appeared to start strongly in Round 1 then became more variable as the project progressed. Issues including the lack of consistent reporting for employment and wages, as well as the collection of few demographic variables on participants, limit evaluation options for this program. In addition, there appears to have been little follow-up to track participant employment or retention.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Travis County and its partners should consider undertaking several steps to refine the REM project. These have been grouped by issue below.

### **Obtain More Complete UI Wage and Other Records**

As discussed, the quality of the UI wage records data available should improve considerably over time. Second-quarter 2007 UI wage data are still being reported by employers, as well as being challenged by employers and workers alike, as part of the standard UI claims process. As these data become more complete in ensuing quarters, the researchers will obtain them and update the analysis. As indicated, UI wage records for construction and truck driving are likely to under-report employment and earnings for these workers due to lower rates of UI coverage; both of these sectors tend to have high incidences of independent contractors who are not covered by UI. Researchers will also be accessing UI claims and other data in order to examine a broader array of program outcomes.

### **Compare Outcomes from Providers and UI Wage Records**

When more complete UI wage data are available and have been analyzed, the researchers will conduct detailed comparisons of these results (i.e., employment status, mean earnings) with those reported directly by providers.

### **Conduct Exploratory Quasi-experimental Impact Analysis**

The workplan for the REM analysis calls for the research team to conduct an exploratory quasi-experimental impact analysis of REM. This phase of the analysis will be conducted in the coming months as better data become available and appropriate comparison groups for REM participants are identified.

### **Improve Data Collection and Reporting**

Travis County and its partners and providers should address the shortcomings in data collection and reporting for the REM effort. Among other things, they should more fully report participant demographics, services and start and end dates and do so in simple,

common formats. One relatively straightforward option would be to have providers use the existing The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST).

### **Address Program Challenges and Barriers**

Travis County should also work with its partners and providers to address the start-up challenges and barriers that may be impeding program success, including:

- Creating structured job search referral mechanisms.
- Restoring broader training program options.
- Improving coordination between the workforce and pardon/parole systems.

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## APPENDIX A

### Organizational Profile: ACC – Administrative Assistant

<b>Type:</b>	Community College Continuing and Workforce Education program
<b>Services Provided:</b>	Occupational skills training in clerical and office skills and computer applications such as MS Office.
<b>Participation in REM project:</b>	<p>The Administrative Assistant program only participated in one round of the REM project. Ultimately, WorkSource decided it was too similar to the training being offered by Austin Academy and too few students were applying for the training to justify ACC forming a class.</p> <p>2 participants: One Project Rio and one Choices client.</p>
<b>Training Program and Adjustments Made for REM Project:</b>	<p>This is a 4-week training program which does not require the individual to hold a GED.</p> <p>No adjustments were made for the REM project.</p>
<b>Placement Services:</b>	Placement is not a normal part of the college's services; however, they do partner with WorkSource. The training program does include resume development, developing a portfolio, and interview skills practice.
<b>Wrap-Around Services:</b>	None offered.
<b>Provider Comments:</b>	<p>The Choices participant was not committed to the training. The student frequently missed class due to child care and transportation issues, and only earned two of the four possible incentive cards available to her.</p> <p>The Rio participant was very committed to the training – coming to class early, staying late, and working through breaks.</p> <p>WorkSource needs to better understand the requirements of the training program so that better candidates are sent forward. WorkSource also needs to work with clients to establish expectations for class participation --- perhaps this could be included in the pre-employment SISTEM training.</p>

Organizational Profile: ACC –  
Earth Moving Equipment Operator (EMEO)

<b>Type:</b>	Community College Continuing and Workforce Education program
<b>Services Provided:</b>	Occupational skills training in the operation of heavy equipment typically used in construction.
<b>Participation in REM project:</b>	<p>This course was only offered in the first round of the REM project. It was decided that the training was too expensive to continue for the number of participants interested in attending. In addition, the instructor was unavailable for future classes due to a contract in Houston. Finally, the behavior of the students in class left the instructor feeling that the offering was a waste of time and resources.</p> <p>7 REM participants: 5 from Project Rio and 2 from Food Stamp Employment &amp; Training.</p>
<b>Training Program and Adjustments Made for REM Project:</b>	<p>EMEOs must have a driver’s license for employment, as well as a GED and a 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Participants are made aware that many employers require drug screenings.</p> <p>No adjustments were made to this 3.5 week course for the REM project.</p>
<b>Placement Services:</b>	<p>Placement is not a normal part of the college’s services; however, they do partner with WorkSource. The course included some resume development and interview skills training.</p> <p>The EMEO instructor did work to identify job leads for participants; however, he felt that most made no effort to follow-up on leads and find employment.</p>
<b>Wrap-Around Services:</b>	None offered.
<b>Provider Comments:</b>	<p>The instructor documented several issues with students in the class, including the behavior of the Project RIO participants and a lack of real motivation for completing the training and entering the workforce. The incentive stipends were a real problem – students did not fully understand how they earned the incentive. Many students missed class time and then became angry with the instructor when they missed out on the \$100 weekly bonus.</p> <p>Project RIO clients, particularly when there were more in attendance, became very disruptive and difficult to manage in the classroom. Also, many students had difficulty in accessing the remote sites used for hands-on equipment training due to lack of transportation. The instructor felt that WorkSource, the college, and probation/parole officers needed to work together to outline expectations for Project RIO clients; develop guidelines for excused absences; create a verification process for parole/probation meetings; and develop make-up coursework where appropriate. While the EMEO instructor views the program as empowerment tool, he acknowledged that the program’s minimal structure – especially when compared to the truck driver training program - might have limited its success.</p>

Organizational Profile: ACC - Para Educator

<b>Type:</b>	Community College Continuing and Workforce Education program
<b>Services Provided:</b>	Occupational skills training in classroom management techniques and activities for teacher's aides.
<b>Participation in REM project:</b>	<p>The para-educator (teacher's aide) training was only offered in the first round. A change in state law now requires para-educators to have at least 60 hours of college credit; therefore, the 3-day program is no longer sufficient for workforce training.</p> <p>One Choices participant completed the training.</p>
<b>Training Program and Adjustments Made for REM Project:</b>	<p>No adjustments were made to the program for the REM project.</p> <p>The training helps individuals develop a portfolio of activities and classroom strategies - - essentially building a reference manual for the classroom.</p> <p>Participants can earn a certification for continuing education. The program requires individuals to hold at least a high school diploma or GED.</p>
<b>Placement Services:</b>	Placement is not a normal part of the college's services; however, they do partner with WorkSource.
<b>Wrap-Around Services:</b>	None offered.
<b>Provider Comments:</b>	<p>A big issue was the number of students available for training. Often, there were not enough interested trainees to justify a class (the college requires a minimum of 12 students).</p> <p>The para-educator program director indicated that school districts are still sending employees to the 3-day training – apparently because workers with more college experience expect to earn more than the teacher's aide position pays.</p>

## Organizational Profile: ACC – Truck Driving

<b>Type:</b>	Community College Continuing and Workforce Education program
<b>Services Provided:</b>	Occupational skills training in driving tractor-trailers and other commercial vehicles, leading to a commercial driver’s license.
<b>Participation in REM project:</b>	In the four rounds of the REM project, the truck driver program served 45 Project RIO clients.
<b>Training Program and Adjustments Made for REM Project:</b>	<p>The truck driver program has a pre-set 4-week class schedule running all year long. Class sizes range from 12-18 students and the program does not have trouble finding candidates. Truck drivers are not required to hold a GED as the commercial driver’s license only requires a 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. The program does require a valid driver’s license, a background check, and a physical including a drug screening. The background check is primarily focused on the driving record – a candidate can have no more than 3 offenses and no DUI convictions in the last ten years.</p> <p>The program often trains WIA and DARS clients. No adjustments were made to the program for the REM project.</p>
<b>Placement Services:</b>	While ACC programs were not required to offer placement services, the truck driving program includes this component as a normal part of their course offerings. The program expects participants to be actively engaged in job search activities, and emphasizes resume development, filling out an application, and learning how to fax. The program often has in-the-field job fairs when employers come to class to demonstrate their rigs or certain driving skills. This often leads to individuals securing employment prior to graduation.
<b>Wrap-Around Services:</b>	None offered.
<b>Provider Comments:</b>	<p>The truck driver training was one of the most successful REM components.</p> <p>Local and larger companies are more willing to hire individuals with criminal backgrounds; however, they still look closely at each candidate’s offenses and history. One barrier for these clients is their probation/parole restrictions – this often means that they cannot accept long-haul jobs requiring them to be out of the county over-night.</p> <p>The training instructor has a pretty strict classroom discipline policy. She does not allow students to talk on cell phones in class, and will take a phone away from a student who refuses to comply.</p> <p>The course is rigidly structured. Individuals who do not pass their driving test are offered a 40 hour refresher course at no charge. In addition, former students can call for a training refresher at any time over the course of their career.</p>

Organizational Profile: Austin Academy

<b>Type:</b>	Small Workforce Training Provider
<b>Services Provided:</b>	GED preparation; basic skills training; job readiness training; computer/office skills training
<b>Participation in REM project:</b>	In the first three rounds, Austin Academy served 15 participants: 9 from Choices, 1 from FSET, 5 from Project RIO. In each of Rounds 2 and 3, one trainee dropped out of the program prior to completion. In Round 4, Austin Academy served 4 participants.
<b>Training Program and Adjustments Made for REM Project:</b>	<p>Originally Austin Academy agreed to serve only non-felon GED holders; however, they did accept clients with felony convictions and/or without GEDs in later rounds. Their reluctance stemmed from two factors: 1) Concerns about working with offenders, centered on difficulty in job placement; and 2) Concerns about working with non-GED holders, centered on the length of the training and the program's overall philosophy for preparing adults for their future. Also, there were concerns about difficulties with job placements – individuals with poor reading and writing skills generally do not do well in clerical positions.</p> <p>Because of the restricted time frame, Excel classes were dropped from the 6-week training curriculum. In Weeks 1-4 training was provided in typing, Windows XP, Microsoft Word, Internet and email applications. Weeks 5-6 focused on developing a job search plan, resume, references, developing interviewing skills, conducting independent job search, and participating in a short-term (2-4 days) basic office/clerical internship.</p>
<b>Placement Services:</b>	Austin Academy focuses on helping participants build job search skills and identify potential job leads. They do get some calls from employers looking for graduates. WorkinTexas.com is a resource, but primarily only for those clients who are computer-savvy.
<b>Wrap-Around Services:</b>	Dress for Success works with female graduates to pull together an interview outfit and clothing appropriate for the work environment.
<b>Provider Comments:</b>	<p>Austin Academy has concerns about their reputation and relationships with employers due to their work with individuals in the REM project who are hard-to-serve (i.e., ex-offenders and those without a GED). Even the city and county seem reluctant to hire individuals with a criminal record.</p> <p>AA also has concerns about the quality of the referrals they have received from WorkSource – some have skills that are beyond the training program while others need more adult basic education services than can be included in such a short time frame.</p> <p>Another issue that arose was the behavior of some REM participants. Regular Austin Academy clients are in the program because they want to be – they need no incentive to come and do well because they are trying to change their lives. REM participants, however, were in training because they had to be. In spite of the incentives they were given to participate, many approached the training without enthusiasm and did not put much effort into improving their skills.</p>

Organizational Profile: Institute for Child Care Excellence

<b>Type:</b>	Small Workforce Training Provider
<b>Services Provided:</b>	Occupational skills training in child development, first aid, and related skills necessary to work in the child care industry.
<b>Participation in REM project:</b>	The Child Care program, a 5-day course, was only offered in the first round of the REM project and served one client.
<b>Training Program and Adjustments Made for REM Project:</b>	Unknown
<b>Placement Services:</b>	Unknown
<b>Wrap-Around Services:</b>	Unknown
<b>Provider Comments:</b>	Provider did not respond to multiple contacts by phone and email.

## Organizational Profile: Construction Gateway

<b>Type:</b>	Small Workforce Training Provider, part of Skillpoint Alliance
<b>Services Provided:</b>	Basic construction skills training, OSHA certification, First Aid training
<b>Participation in REM project:</b>	In Rounds 1-3, 25 Project RIO clients chose Gateway training
<b>Training Program and Adjustments Made for REM Project:</b>	<p>The only difference from a normal 5-week Gateway training class was the fact that the entire class was made up of ex-offenders; usually only about half of each class are ex-offenders.</p> <p>Project RIO helps clients access funding for work clothes and equipment (such as work boots). Individuals who find employment in the construction industry also receive a \$100 Home Depot card.</p> <p>Gateway requires individuals to score a minimum of 70/Level M on the TABE in reading comprehension and math, unless the individual can show proof of college-level coursework.</p>
<b>Placement Services:</b>	<p>Clients receive help in job search during the 5-week program and in identifying job leads afterwards. The first two Fridays of the class are dedicated to employability skills such as appropriate dress and timeliness; the third Friday is dedicated to interviewing skills. The program sees finding a job as the individual's responsibility; however, staff are there to help. For example, every participant sets up a yahoo email account to aid in job searching.</p> <p>Gateway also works closely with WorkSource to help with placement, and those that are co-enrolled in WIA or other programs often receive additional services.</p> <p>In general the construction industry accepts individuals with a criminal record; however, some employers will not accept certain offenses. The program emphasizes employment retention – advising clients to stick with an employer for at least one year, two if they have a felony conviction, to start building up their trust-profile with employers.</p>
<b>Wrap-Around Services:</b>	Gateway offers individuals in the training two 30-day bus passes, which they will continue to provide if a graduate is looking for work or working and trying to save money for a vehicle. Other supports, such as gas cards, are available on a case-by-case basis.
<b>Provider Comments:</b>	<p>Gateway staff thought that the weekly incentive was a great motivator, and gave the participants some money to live on while in the full-time training course. Of course, this also attracted individuals who were interested in the \$500 they could earn, not the training program.</p> <p>Project RIO clients miss significant training time due to requirements of probation/parole. This interferes with their skills development because the short-term program does not offer make-up classes.</p> <p>Since the Choices and FSET candidates were primarily women, it was not surprising that Gateway received only Project Rio clients. Since the program started in 1994, only about 11-12% of Gateway participants have been female.</p>

## Organizational Profile: Professional Institute of Dental Assisting

<b>Type:</b>	Small Workforce Training Provider
<b>Services Provided:</b>	Occupational skills training leading to a certificate in dental assisting.
<b>Participation in REM project:</b>	<p>The Dental Assistant training was only offered in Round 1.</p> <p>3 participants – all Choices clients – started the training, two completed.</p> <p>Participants who completed the training program earned a certification.</p>
<b>Training Program and Adjustments Made for REM Project:</b>	<p>The training program is normally one day a week (Fridays) for twelve weeks. It also requires a 40-hour internship with a practicing dentist. The program includes frequent field trips to dental offices around Austin, to showcase the variety of environments an assistant might work in.</p> <p>For the REM project, the class schedule was compressed to six weeks, with classes on Fridays and Saturdays. Field trips were eliminated.</p>
<b>Placement Services:</b>	While the program does not offer placement services, the trainer does work with participants to develop a resume, practice interview skills, and identify job leads. Due to the quality of the program and length of operations in Austin, the trainer has extensive relationships with area dentists who contact her when they are seeking new, job-ready employees.
<b>Wrap-Around Services:</b>	None offered.
<b>Provider Comments:</b>	<p>The trainer noted that the REM clients were very different from her usual students, who tend to be older individuals seeking a second career. The REM participants were all younger women looking to start their first career. One of the students in particular struggled with childcare and transportation, factors that ultimately led her to drop-out of the training.</p> <p>Dental Assisting is a career that requires focus and attention to detail. The trainer felt that the altered schedule required students to be more actively engaged in learning activities and to absorb new material more quickly --- a challenge for the students in the class. The time frame was too short for the amount of material covered. This is a 72-hour lecture/lab training course.</p> <p>The program was found to be too expensive (at \$4,000 per student) to continue being offered through the REM project.</p>

## Organizational Profile: Goodwill

<b>Type:</b>	Training and placement provider
<b>Services Provided:</b>	Placement services
<b>Participation in REM project:</b>	Goodwill did not become actively engaged in the REM project until the 4 <sup>th</sup> round. In Round 4, Goodwill representatives attended the Open House to let clients know that they were available to help with job search. In addition, a Goodwill representative visited each training program prior to the end of the course to once again remind participants about their services.
<b>Training Program and Adjustments Made for REM Project:</b>	Normally Goodwill provides employment services to a range of low-income individuals (to 200% of poverty line) and individuals with barriers to employment.
<b>Placement Services:</b>	Goodwill provides one-on-one case management with a focus on developing applications and resumes to help clients connect with employers. Case managers offer lots of guidance to clients. One technique is mock-interviews to sharpen skills. Staff specialize in industry clusters and publish weekly job leads for each field to share with clients and each other. Another emphasis of the Goodwill program is on contingency planning – helping clients overcome small obstacles and barriers (transportation, child care, etc) to stay employed.
<b>Provider Comments:</b>	<p>Because Goodwill was not actively engaged in the first three rounds of the REM project, they have decided to work towards placing individuals in employment who fit a similar profile to REM clients – including homeless individuals and those recently released from incarceration. Goodwill’s contract stipulates placement services for an additional 20 individuals over their standing city/county contract standards, resulting in placement for 10.</p> <p>No formal process exists for either WorkSource or REM training providers to refer clients to Goodwill. Because Goodwill is an open-enrollment service, they have no way of tracking which clients, if any, were REM participants.</p> <p>Goodwill conducts a criminal background check on each client to help identify an appropriate case manager and access services needed to find employment. Goodwill also offers post-placement retention services to address job and personal barriers.</p> <p>Most clients do not want Goodwill to intervene on their behalf – many perceive Goodwill as solely serving individuals with disabilities and do not want to be stereotyped.</p> <p>Goodwill uses incentives (for the 20 REM clients) to encourage retention – a \$100 HEB or Walmart gift card for 30 and 90 day retention.</p>

