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## DWD
### Department of Workforce Development

# Comprehensive Employment Planning Toolkit Evaluation Report

# CEPT Evaluation Report

Cindi Armstrong, Meghan Donahue, Zach Olson

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the evaluation of the online pilot of the employment plan tool within the Comprehensive Employment Planning Toolkit (CEPT). The toolkit was designed to address consistency, fidelity, and communication concerns. To determine if the new tool improved service implementation for staff and customers, researchers asked both groups to fill out feedback surveys.

While CEPT has been available for a few years, prior to this pilot there were no requirements for using CEPT during employment plan development. The pilot was implemented for six months, and included career planners serving Title I, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), and Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) customers from four workforce development areas. They piloted the use of CEPT in accordance with a joint pilot policy. Upon completion of the project, customers and career planners were surveyed about their experience with each tool within CEPT.

Opinions on CEPT varied between customers who had an overall positive reaction and career planners who were more skeptical of the tool. The toolkit was commonly used as a resource and guide for case management. Career planners expressed concerns with technical issues, the acknowledgement process, and some aspects related to usability. Customers found the toolkit helpful for goal development and in identification of needed services to reach their employment goal(s). Recommendations for improvement include:

- Reducing redundancies between CEPT and the case management tool, Automated System Support for Employment and Training (ASSET).
- Increasing flexibility for how plans are acknowledged.
- Addressing usability features.
- Adding automation features to further assist career planners.

Prior to the pilot, there was not a consistent, systematic employment planning process. CEPT was developed to add consistency and increase the quality of career planning. Career planners worried the tool would add work. While CEPT may have increased the workload for the career planner, customers found CEPT helpful to identify their employment goals and a path towards reaching these goals. Career planners agreed that CEPT improved employment planning, service delivery, informed decision-making, and cross-program communication with mixed opinions on CEPT's impact on goal setting.

CEPT has the potential to help career planners more consistently facilitate employment planning while anticipating and addressing customer barriers to achieving their goals. Toolkit improvements can further improve efficiency of this process. Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development has already started to address career planner and customer feedback by making technical improvements to CEPT, implementing supportive career planner and customer user-training, and modifying CEPT policy.

# INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF EVALUATION

The Comprehensive Employment Planning Toolkit (CEPT) is an application housing five tools that can assist with case management, mainly for Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I programs. The tools include the:

- employment plan;
- economic self-sufficiency calculator;
- budget tool;
- action steps tool; and
- community resources search.

These were designed to help career planners serve their customers by creating a plan that was individually detailed for each customer and directed focus on the customers and their overall goal of success.

To evaluate the toolkit and determine how policy should be developed related to use of CEPT, a pilot program was initiated. This required use of CEPT for all stages of employment planning (including goal setting, conducting job fit reviews, identifying potential barriers, planning services, and developing action steps) in four Wisconsin workforce development areas (WDAs). This was a joint effort by Department of Workforce Development's (DWD) WIOA Title I Programs (Adult Program, Dislocated Worker Program, and Youth Program), the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) Program, and the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program. Most users were from the WIOA Title I program. Prior to the pilot, WDAs were required to use the economic self-sufficiency calculator to determine training funding eligibility for the Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs. The remainder of the tools were developed and optionally available for at least three years prior to the pilot.

The goal of this evaluation was to answer the following learning questions:

1. Does using CEPT decrease the time to complete education and employment planning and reach employment goal(s)?
2. Is education and employment planning in CEPT easier for the career planner and customer compared to employment planning in the online case management tool, Automated System Support for Employment and Training (ASSET)?
3. Does CEPT improve case management, employment planning, goal setting, service delivery, informed decision-making, customer experience, customer involvement, staff experience, training and employment outcomes, co-enrollment, and/or cross program communication?

# METHODS AND EVALUATION PROCESS

Prior to the pilot, staff use of employment plan tools varied, with some using local employment plans, others using the ASSET employment plan screen, and others using the CEPT employment plan tool. During the pilot, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development – Division of Employment and Training (DWD-DET) required that staff use CEPT to develop employment plans and review them with their customers in the following programs: Title I, TAA, or JVSG. This applied to four WDAs: Bay Area, North Central, Northwest, and Western for all customers who enrolled between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2022, and for customers who underwent an employment plan review during this period. After the pilot, CEPT was incorporated within the state-developed online case management system, ASSET.

Throughout the pilot period, DWD's policy analyst team provided monthly virtual meetings with the participating WDAs' management teams and career planners to provide technical support and gather feedback on the use of the toolkit. This allowed DWD to initiate toolkit improvements and policy clarifications. Upon completion of the pilot, two separate voluntary and anonymous surveys were administered: a 93-question survey for career planners and a 37-question survey for customers. Survey questions were about the use of CEPT and experiences using it. Quantitative analysis of survey data included only complete responses to the individual questions.

Qualitative data was analyzed in three stages. First, the researcher applied an open coding qualitative analysis technique, where the essence of each comment was summarized and reviewed with two CEPT policy specialists. The role of the policy specialists was to ensure coding was consistent with program policy and procedures. Next, the researcher sorted codes into themes and reviewed them with the policy specialists who provided additional context and identified interesting and concerning trends. Last, the codes were developed into a summary, which was integrated with the quantitative data to provide a full understanding of career planner and customer feedback. Those results were broken into sections, one for each of the five tools and one for the overall toolkit, reflecting the different sections of the surveys.

# RESULTS

The results from the analysis are divided into six sections, the first five provide the survey results of each individual tool, and a final section answers remaining learning questions. Forty-two career planners (63% of those it was sent to) responded to the survey, but did not respond to all questions, and around 21 career planners responded to most quantitative questions. One hundred fifteen (of approximately 300) customers responded to their survey, with most quantitative questions receiving 66 responses.

It is important to recognize that prior to the pilot project, there was no DWD-DET policy for employment planning for the WIOA Title I Adult Program and Dislocated Worker Program. Therefore, it was expected that implementation of CEPT would increase employment planning overall, increasing career planner workload. The aim of CEPT is to improve career planning and service delivery for both the customer and career planner.

## Employment Plan

Customers found the employment plan effective in helping them reach their goal and receive needed services. In contrast, career planners reported technology issues. To verify the employment plan, both customers and career planners must approve the employment plan through an acknowledgement process. Helping customers navigate this process was frustrating for career planners. This may be why career planners also reported that the employment plan was not helpful and made case management harder. These concerns present opportunities for improvement to continue to provide value to the customers, while reducing the frustrations experienced by career planners. Policy implications and future recommendations center around usability and increasing the flexibility for acquiring required acknowledgments. Some of these recommendations have already been implemented or are in progress.

## Action Steps

The action steps tool was widely used, likely because the CEPT pilot policy required at least one action step related to the employment goal(s) be added. Although customers had access to this tool through My Job Center of Wisconsin (MyJCW), only 9% reported using it without their career planner. Career planners reported this limited the tool's utility. In contrast, the customers perceived the action steps tool as effective in helping them reach their goal and to receive the services necessary to reach their goal. It is recommended to improve the tool's integration with the employment plan to increase its utility and ease of use.

## Budget Tool

The budget tool was widely used and believed to add value to the customer. Some career planners preferred alternative tools such as mobile apps or low-tech options (for example, paper or spreadsheets). They liked that those were simpler and could be used after exiting the program. Recommendations include providing education about budgeting and increasing the transparency of integration between this tool and other tools.

## Community Resource Tool

While the perceived impact on case management was ambiguous, career planners reported using the community resource tool to identify resources that could help with their customers' specific needs or as a general resource. Customers found the tool effective in identifying the needed services to achieve their goal. Recommendations include integrating an easier way to share identified useful resources with the customer.

## Economic Self-Sufficiency Calculator Tool

The self-sufficiency calculator was widely used by career planners and customers found it effective in helping them identify employment goals. Career planners reported a delay created by the signature process, which in turn delayed implementation of customer's employment plans. Recommendations include increasing flexibility for signatures and creating transparency for the numbers and calculations in the tool.

## Impact of CEPT on Case Management and the Customer Experience

Several quantitative survey questions measured CEPT's perceived impact on case management, employment planning, goal setting, service, informed decision-making, customer involvement, training and employment outcomes, and cross-program communication.

### Case Management

More than half of 21 career planner survey respondents felt CEPT helped some with improving documentation of services (67%) and identifying needed community resources (57%). Eighty-four percent of 73 customers reported CEPT was easy to use, and that CEPT helped them access services and reach their goals.

### Employment Planning

More than half of 21 career planner survey respondents reported CEPT improved employment planning (57%) and improved incorporation of financial planning into employment planning (55%). Eighty percent of 74 customer respondents found CEPT helpful in identifying steps needed to achieve their goals.

### Goal Setting

More than half (57%) of 21 career planner respondents reported that CEPT improved the identification of employment goals that will help them meet their financial needs. Sixty-eight percent of 84 customers reported CEPT helped to identify a goal that aligned with their budget. In contrast, 57% of career planners reported that CEPT did not improve the likelihood that employment goals will lead to self-sufficiency.

### Service Delivery

More than half (57%) of 21 career planner respondents reported that CEPT improved service delivery and that it improved communication about services. Eighty percent of 84 customer respondents reported that CEPT helped in receiving needed services and supports.

### Informed Decision-Making

Sixty-two percent of 21 career planner respondents reported CEPT improved informed decision-making.

### Customer Involvement

Eighty percent of 74 customers reported CEPT helped them identify the steps needed to achieve their goals. Additionally, 57% of 21 career planners reported CEPT improved customer action step follow-through.

### Training and Employment Outcomes

Many of the 21 career planner respondents reported that CEPT did not reduce the time to achieve an employment goal (67%) and it did not increase the likelihood of achieving employment goals (71%).

### Cross-program Communication

More than half (57%) of the 21 career planner respondents reported CEPT improved communication of employment planning across programs.

# LIMITATIONS

Two primary limitations should be noted. These data were collected through a voluntary survey, so only the opinions of those who completed the survey were included in the analysis. The perceptions of those who did not complete the survey are unknown. Survey responses tend to be biased towards those with strong feelings. Therefore, there may be more career planners and customers with neutral opinions who did not respond to the survey. Further, the survey was delivered electronically. This means customers with digital literacy and sufficient access to internet were more likely to respond to the survey. In contrast, career planners reported concerns with using the tool with customers who had low digital literacy and/or limited connectivity, which may account for the difference in career planner and customer survey results.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations can be divided into tool improvements, training, and policy recommendations. Tool improvements were derived from qualitative feedback on tool use and suggestions from career planners. Training needs were identified for both career planners and customers. Career planner training needs were typically derived from feedback from career planners that highlighted a misunderstanding on how to use a specific tool or the existing policy. Customer training needs were derived from career planner feedback on customer challenges and training needs. Policy recommendations primarily came from the qualitative feedback from career planners.

### Toolkit Improvements

1. Add technological improvements that increase the flexibility of how the employment plan is acknowledged. For example, provide a way to acknowledge through email or text that automatically applies the acknowledgment within CEPT.
2. Increase the usability interface for the process of customers acknowledging the employment plan so it is intuitive and flexible enough to accommodate technology challenges and loss of login credentials.
3. Improve the usability and accuracy of the job fit review component of the employment plan tool.
4. Improve integration between CEPT and ASSET.
5. Integrate the action steps with both the employment plan and MyJCW and increase the ability to flow between the tools.
6. Increase the character limit in the text fields in the employment plan to provide sufficient space for details. This will make the information accessible to the customer, where currently extra information may only be entered into case notes, which can only be viewed by the career planner.
7. Increase the value of the action steps to the customer:
   - Create incentives (e.g., gamification) for using the tool between visits with the career planner.
   - Create automated alerts to help customers track their action steps quickly and easily. For example, when creating the action steps, the career planner and customer can set up text or email alerts to track progress.

- If alerts were well integrated, the customer could reply to email or text messages and the response would be added into the tool. This would reduce the steps required for the customer to interact with the tool.

8. Provide transparency behind the numbers and calculations in the economic self-sufficiency tool.
   - For example, provide the source and dates of data used to calculate self-sufficiency. While these are available in a manual, it could be helpful to have the information more accessible (easier to find).
9. Develop a way to share and connect the customer to identified resources (through the community resource tool). For example:
   - Add a way to email or text a specific resource to the customer.
   - Fully integrate with Wisconsin 211 to allow the customer to directly interact with their database and staff.
10. Provide a way for career planners to add their local resources to the community resources tool's database.
11. Increase the usability of the search and filter features in the community resources tool.
12. Increase the accessibility and functionality of the budget tool so it can be used for daily life budgeting activities outside of meetings with the career planner.
    - For example, build a partner app that can be accessed outside of MyJCW yet integrates with CEPT.
13. Improve integration between the budget tool, employment plan, and MyJCW.
14. Increase the usability interface (of all parts of the toolkit) for use with limited connectivity, mobility devices, and printers.
15. Add automation features to assist career planners in case management and nonvalue-added tasks. For example:
    - Add an automated text and/or email reminder to the customer/participant to acknowledge their employment plan if it hasn't been acknowledged within X hours/days of the appointment.
    - Add automated reminders to the career planner to review the employment plan and/or planned services when appropriate.

## Tool Improvements Already Completed or Currently In-Progress

1. Reduce redundancies between CEPT and ASSET and make improvements to address technical challenges that arise from switching between the two programs.
   - CEPT and ASSET have already merged. This alleviates the technical issues that came from switching between the two programs.
2. Flexibilities in employment plan acknowledgements.
   - Provided administrator roles the ability to update the employment plan status and change the selected outcome.
3. Automation features:
   - Automatically add the potential barriers category to the plan when they are updated/reviewed.
   - Plans are in place to automate service entry into the employment plan. ASSET services populate in CEPT, but only when selecting which services are applicable. Removing the selection step will automate the communication between the two tools.
4. Add printing capabilities:
   - Add the capability to print the self-sufficiency calculation so that career planners can print the calculation details for customer signature.
   - Increase the capability to print more services and potential barriers for a customer in CEPT to the first 25. (Previously only the first 10 printed.)
5. Other usability features:
   - Expand the CEPT menu items viewing window so users can maximize their screen real-estate and reduce scrolling.
   - Add a search filter on top of the "Category" for community resources search in CEPT so the career planners can directly search for the known resource and locate it faster.

o   Provide a way to print a customized list of resources selected through the tool. This is like an online shopping cart. Each desired resource can be added to the cart with a print option.

## Career Planner Training

1.  There is flexibility in the existing policy that provides exceptions to completing employment plan acknowledgements within CEPT. Training that emphasizes these options will be useful to career planners and may reduce delays in delivering services due to customers' lost login credentials.
2.  Action steps are available to customers for independent use in MyJCW. Career planners should be trained to teach customers how to access and independently use the tool.
3.  There is a tri-annual economic self-sufficiency report that explains many of the calculations in the self-sufficiency calculator. Career planners should be trained to discuss this report with customers, particularly when they disagree with the results.
4.  The community resources tool is much broader than local resources. This adds value to career planners who may find resources that were previously unknown to them. Career planners should be trained on the scope of the resources within the tool.
5.  Many conversations with WIOA participants may feel intrusive and uncomfortable, but they are necessary to provide quality service and employment planning. Training on how to sensitively navigate these crucial conversations is necessary so they are addressed in a respectful manner and not avoided. The topic of budgeting was specifically highlighted in this evaluation.
6.  Develop training and training guides that clarify the integration between the budget tool, employment plan, and MyJCW.

## Customer Training Opportunities

1.  Increasing understanding of the concept and principles of self-sufficiency.
2.  Increasing awareness and encourage the use of training tools on budgeting and financial literacy already available in MyJCW.
3.  Use of the Community Resources Tool via MyJCW and/or Wisconsin 211 independently so they can rapidly access resources in times of need.
4.  CEPT's features, including their value for customers.

## Policy Implications

1.  Increase the flexibility of how the employment plan is acknowledged to accommodate situations where connectivity and digital literacy are limited.
2.  Increase the flexibility for economic self-sufficiency acknowledgment and provision of services. While it is understood that state requirements include acknowledgement within 30 days of eligibility determination and before commencing training, other formats for signatures can be permitted in some situations.
3.  Incorporate guidelines for recommended use of CEPT's Community Resources tool as part of assessment policies.
4.  New assessment and employment plan policy will require career planners to help educate participants about self-sufficiency, interests, and barrier reduction, and to incorporate these into the employment plan.
5.  Underlying policy philosophy should encourage employment goal development that leads to economic self-sufficiency.

## Already Completed or Currently In-Progress

1. There are already exceptions for acknowledging the employment plan. For example (in CEPT, career planners can select "acknowledged outside of CEPT" and use emails, fax, and photos). Additional flexibility is being explored.
2. An improvement to the self-sufficiency tool prints the self-sufficiency calculation. This printed form can be signed as a form of acknowledgment.

# CONCLUSION

## Impact of CEPT On Time to Complete Employment Planning and Goal Attainment

The responses from career planners and from customers conflicted with each other. Customers reported developing their plans quickly, and career planners reported longer periods. Career planner survey respondents (57%) reported that CEPT did not reduce the time to complete employment planning and reported it did not reduce the time to acknowledge an employment goal (71%). Customers did not feel that CEPT took too much time, nor that acknowledgements took too long.

## Impact of CEPT On the Career Planner and Customer

While there is not customer feedback on pre-CEPT methods, the customers who used CEPT found CEPT helpful and easy to use. Customers also found CEPT to be a helpful way to communicate with their career planner. Career planners found the CEPT employment plan to be a burden in its current iteration, but they recognized its potential. With a few tool improvements and policy modifications to increase flexibility of the tool when working with customers who lack digital literacy and/or internet service, CEPT has the potential to improve case management.

Since prior to the CEPT pilot, there were very few guidelines on employment planning, it was expected that the requirements would increase the workload for career planners. Despite this increase in workload, CEPT added value to the employment planning process. A key value is that customers reported that CEPT was useful and it helped them identify and meet their goals.

## Impact of CEPT On Case Management

Career planners reported CEPT improved aspects of case management such as documentation of services, employment planning, service delivery, informed decision-making, and cross-program communication. Their perception of CEPT's role in goal setting was more mixed, generally finding it helpful in identifying employment goals consistent with their customer's current financial situation. However, they did not feel the tool would improve the likelihood that the employment goals would lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Overall, this pilot indicates CEPT, in conjunction with recommendations provided through this evaluation, has a lot of promise to continue benefitting customers and meet its objectives.