

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 29-15
	DATE February 29, 2016

TO: COMPREHENSIVE AMERICAN JOB CENTER MANAGERS
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ALL EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION GRANTEES

FROM: PORTIA WU 
Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: Release and Availability of a Report: *Evaluation of Programs Funded by the Technology-Based Learning (TBL) Grants Final Report*

1. **Purpose.** To announce the release and availability of the research report, *Evaluation of Programs Funded by the Technology-Based Learning (TBL) Grants Final Report*.
2. **Background.** The increased pervasiveness of computers and access to the Internet has expanded the opportunity for many individuals to participate in education and training and obtain credentials. Distance education, through a variety of technological enhancements or innovations, also called technology-based learning (TBL) or e-learning, can be more flexible than traditional classroom training in terms of place or space, timing, pace of learning, and course length. Therefore, TBL might be particularly attractive to nontraditional, students or adults whose options for learning may be limited by various constraints such as work, family or other responsibilities, and/or their geographic location or proximity to the training site. For these reasons, utilization of TBL may be extremely relevant as a workforce training strategy for increasing the number of qualified workers available for in-demand occupations requiring specific skills.

The potential of TBL for expanding the access for workforce customers to vocational training and certification led ETA to launch the TBL Initiative in 2008 (see Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 17-07 <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-07acc.pdf>). After several small TBL grants showed promise, ETA provided \$10 million in funding (see SGA/DFA PY 08-04 <http://www.doleta.gov/grants/2008grants.cfm>) to 20 grantees in 16 states to develop and implement TBL programs over a 3-year period, from 2009 to 2012. Education or training provided online and/or enhanced through the use of

technology was expected to result in an increased number of people quickly and effectively trained in high-demand occupations to meet the needs of industry for skilled employees.

3. **Research Design and Analytical Approach.** This report, prepared by Mathematica Policy Research (Mathematica), is the final of three reports commissioned by ETA on the TBL Initiative demonstration. Building on these previously completed evaluations, this study addresses the general question, *how are students in workforce training programs served by TBL programs?* To answer this question, two main data sources were collected and analyzed:

- (1) TBL grant programs' administrative data was collected through fall 2012 on participants' characteristics and outcomes; and
- (2) Survey data on program satisfaction was obtained from surveys administered in fall 2011 and fall 2012 to a sample of TBL participants from all 20 grantees.

4. **Key Findings.** This study is useful in providing preliminary information on the outcomes of the TBL programs' participants. However, generalizations and causal inferences about the results of this study should not be made due to various data limitations. With the goal of better understanding the value of TBL to augment public workforce services, the report shares lessons learned from this study and explores possibilities for additional areas of examination related to TBL.

Participant Outcomes. Results of the study suggest that grantees offered TBL programs that produced positive education and employment outcomes, including the following:

- The educational and employment outcomes observed suggest that TBL programs built workplace skills leading to a recognized credential. More than 70 percent of participants completed their program, and an equal number earned a recognized credential — degree, occupational license, or skills certificate — through their TBL program.
- TBL program participants were 18 percent more likely to complete the program and 13 percent less likely to drop out of the program than participants in programs that blended online and face-to-face interaction. Participants were also more likely to complete a program if they were in programs that (1) led to degrees and licenses; (2) had students interact with instructors on a regular basis, including communication through technology; (3) offered soft-skills training; or (4) used program-provided computers.
- Programs reported that 79 percent of participants continued in or secured new employment after program participation, an increase from a 56 percent employment rate before enrollment.
- About 53 percent of employed participants had a job in the sector of their training. Survey data suggest that workers made gains from pre- to post-program completion, with about 78 percent who reported working full-time, up from 72 percent for those program participants who reported working full-time before enrollment in their TBL training program.

- Wages for TBL training program participants also increased from an initial pay rate of \$19.59 per hour before program participation to \$21.60 per hour after participation.

Lessons Learned. Some of the lessons learned from the program participants' experiences and results are briefly summarized below:

- **Expand the outreach.** Consistent with other studies, the demographic characteristics of TBL participants tended to be female, white, and between the ages of 25 and 44. Participants were also relatively well educated (only about 1.6 percent did not have a high school diploma or equivalent) and low income (about 40 percent). Future recruitment efforts of training providers might focus their outreach on new populations, such as the low-skilled or unemployed who are not typically targeted for TBL.
- **Expand the depth and breadth of content.** While survey respondents felt they learned something new from their TBL training, less than half of the survey respondents felt the knowledge they acquired in these programs would help them advance in their career. While this impression may be attributed to the evolving skills requirements of the industries, such as information technology and health care in which the participants trained, this suggests that TBL training programs may need to evaluate their objectives and determine whether they are offering content that has enough depth or relevance for current skills required of the workforce.

5. **Publication Description.** This study focuses on the participants in the TBL training or e-learning programs, which were offered by the 20 grantees that were awarded funding by ETA. Specifically, this final report provides information on participants' education and employment outcomes, their characteristics, and (for a sample of participants) their satisfaction with the program services received. To help guide future development of TBL training programs or to assist with informing changes to existing ones, the report also discusses key program and participant characteristics that might be associated with participant satisfaction and positive labor market outcomes.

This report contains six chapters, followed by four appendices. Each appendix provides additional information relevant to the study, i.e., an explanation of the collection of administrative data, an account of the collection of survey data, copies of the survey materials used to collect data from program participants, and brief summaries or profiles describing key information concerning each of the twenty grantees, such as training program(s) and credential(s) offered, length of the training programs, populations targeted, mode of instruction (blended, online, video conferencing), among others.

6. **Related ETA Publications.** Two reports released previously on the TBL Initiative grants were prepared by Social Policy Research Associates and primarily concern the implementation and attributes of the 20 grantees' TBL training programs. Specifically, the first or interim report describes the six grantees that implemented their programs during the first 10 months of the demonstration project, while the second or final report focuses on the implementation of the other 14 grantees' programs. To review information on the implementation of the 20 grants funded under the TBL Initiative, please see the following:

- *Evaluation of the Technology-Based Learning Grants Interim Report*
 - ETA Publication:
http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm?fuseaction=dsp_puListingDetails&pub_id=2464&mp=y&start=41&sort=7 and
 - Training and Employment Notice (TEN) 37-10:
http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=3017
- *Evaluation of the Technology-Based Learning Grants Final Report*
 - ETA Publication:
http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm?fuseaction=dsp_puListingDetails&pub_id=2479&mp=y&start=21&sort=7 and
 - TEN 20-11: http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=5052

7. **Inquiries.** To view an abstract of this publication, as well as to download the executive summary and full report, visit the ETA Research Publication Database Web site at:
<http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm>.