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## **Lower Savannah Workforce Development Programs Selected for ‘Gold Standard’ Evaluation by USDOL**

The Lower Savannah Workforce Development Area is one of twenty-eight randomly-selected local workforce investment areas in the nation to participate in a “Gold Standard” evaluation of Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. WIA provides \$3 billion annually for employment and training services to approximately 600 similar areas around the country. Thousands of workers and job seekers have benefitted from these services in the Lower Savannah Region since the Act was passed in 1998, receiving skill assessment, career information and counseling, employability skills, resume help, occupational training, job seeking assistance, and more. The Lower Savannah Workforce Development Area meets the needs of businesses and workers in the South Carolina counties of Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, and Orangeburg.

“With high unemployment and a growing need for a more skilled workforce, providing effective and efficient employment and training services is important,” says Sam Jordan, Lower Savannah Workforce Development Area Administrator. “Yet because these services have not been assessed using rigorous evaluation methodologies, we do not know how they are affecting the employment opportunities and earnings of customers throughout the nation. The results of this national evaluation will tell us how WIA-funded services such as training affect customers’ employment rates, earnings, and other related outcomes and whether the benefits of these services measured in dollars are greater than their costs.”

As part of this national evaluation, customers visiting the local SC Works Centers (formerly called One-Stop Workforce Centers) will be randomly assigned to one of three research groups. Each research group will have access to a different range of services. Everyone will be able to access the basic services at the SC Works Centers and the vast majority of customers will be able to access all the services available, if otherwise eligible. Random assignment is used in this study, just as it is used in drug trials, because it is the most rigorous scientific approach and produces the most defensible findings.

Jordan says that staff were trained in preparation for the start of random assignment, which began December 5<sup>th</sup> and will continue for approximately 15 months. “We are eager to learn what types and sequence of services work best for which types of customers, so we can ensure everyone who walks in our door will receive the most effective assistance possible in their search for a job, a better job, or a new career,” says Jordan. “We are looking forward to release of the first impact findings in 2015.”

The U.S. Department of Labor contracted with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct the Gold Standard evaluation. Mathematica is a nonpartisan policy research firm that conducts research and surveys for Federal and state governments, foundations, and private sector clients. The employee-

owned company has conducted some of the most important evaluations of employment, education, nutrition, welfare, and early childhood policies and programs in the United States and abroad. Mathematica engaged Social Policy Research Associates, MDRC, and the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce as partners in the Gold Standard evaluation of WIA.

For more information, contact Sam Jordan per above information or Mathematica's project director for the study, Sheena McConnell at [smcconnell@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:smcconnell@mathematica-mpr.com)

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