

## Mathematica's Evaluation Summary

# 84.421D RSA Disability Innovation Fund Program Evaluation

In September 2022, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) awarded five-year grants for the federal fiscal year 2022 Disability Innovation Fund demonstration project. The grants fund 14 state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies for projects related to the Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) Innovative Model Demonstration intended to decrease subminimum wage employment and increase competitive integrated employment (CIE) among people with disabilities currently employed in or contemplating subminimum wage employment (SWE).

Mathematica will conduct the SWTCIE national evaluation, which will allow RSA to look across all SWTCIE projects and identify findings useful for the VR and employment fields. The purpose of the national evaluation is threefold: (1) to identify *how*, for *whom*, and in *what context* the projects and their strategies are most effective; (2) to document how other state VR agencies and their partners can replicate the successful aspects of the projects; and (3) to make findings from the evaluation useful for policymakers and practitioners. To that end, the evaluation will answer a range of research questions.

This memo provides SWTCIE project staff and evaluators with information about Mathematica's activities for the evaluation. We present (1) the conceptual framework for our evaluation, (2) a description of the evaluation's analyses, (3) the data we plan to collect, and (4) a timeline of deliverables. RSA may make additional requests of Mathematica, necessitating changes to our evaluation plans or additional data collection activities.

### A. Conceptual framework

We developed a conceptual framework to guide the activities for the SWTCIE national evaluation (Exhibit 1). This framework, drawn from a successful approach to systems evaluation,<sup>1</sup> contains five focus areas. The national evaluation will conduct activities to look within and across the SWTCIE projects on each focus area.

- **Focus area 1: Context.** Context includes the following:

- / State- and local-level political environments (such as advocacy efforts and interest in SWE)
- / Policy environments (such as prior experience with collaborations, Employment First, Medicaid Buy-in, and state and local SWE laws)
- / Economic environments (such as VR agency payments, financial incentives for 14(c) certificate holders, state minimum wage rates, and unemployment rates)
- / Service environments (such as existing VR agency services and provider availability)
- / A VR agency's prior experience leading or participating in demonstration projects (such as an earlier Disability Innovation Fund)

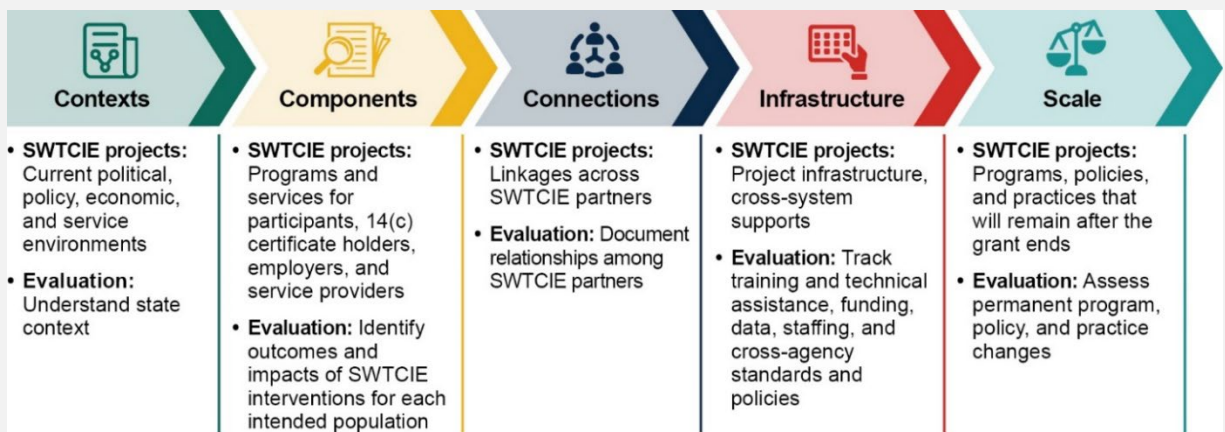
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<sup>1</sup> Coffman, J. "A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives." 2007.

<https://buildinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Framework-for-Evaluating-Systems-Initiatives.pdf>.

- **Focus area 2: Components.** Components reflect the specific interventions or service models the projects will offer. Elements of this focus area capture the following:
  - / Their collaborative models (such as leadership teams, staffing, and partnerships)
  - / The populations included (the people and organizations who choose to participate)
  - / Activities (the specific interventions offered to people with disabilities, 14(c) certificate holders, other employers, and service providers as well as system changes)
  - / Outcomes that result from the interventions
- **Focus area 3: Connections.** Connections are the relationships that projects rely on and develop for successful implementation, including through advisory groups, communities of practice, and statewide collaborations. VR agencies will connect their SWTCIE projects, to varying degrees, with 14(c) certificate holders, other employers, and service providers, along with stated referral sources, such as secondary schools and community organizations.
- **Focus area 4: Infrastructure.** Various types of infrastructure or cross-system supports are necessary for successful project implementation. These supports include the following:
  - / Staffing (for the VR agency, 14(c) certificate holders, and service providers, depending on the service model)
  - / Training and technical assistance for project staff and staff of participating organizations
  - / Funding
  - / Data collection and sharing activities
  - / Policies that involve multiple organizations
- **Focus area 5: Scale.** A project’s scale refers to what remains after the five-year project period. Various components and outcomes could outlast or result from the projects: state policy changes related to SWE; practices and policies that affect the VR agency, 14(c) certificate holders, and service providers; and specific services, programs, or models embedded into the VR agency to encourage CIE over SWE.

**Exhibit 1.** Conceptual framework for the SWTCIE national evaluation



SWTCIE = Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment.

## B. Analysis types

The SWTCIE projects are complex, with a variety of implementation approaches and wide-ranging potential impacts. For this reason, the national evaluation will conduct the following analyses to understand project implementation and their effects:

- **Participation analysis:** The participation analysis will help us understand the people, employers, and service providers that take part in the SWTCIE projects and provide context for the findings of the SWTCIE national evaluation. The participation analysis will describe participants' characteristics, including whether they represent populations historically underserved by VR agencies and people with high support needs, and then compare their characteristics with those of other populations with disabilities. In addition to participants, the participation analysis will describe the types of partnerships with employers and service providers and their roles in the projects.
- **Implementation analysis:** The implementation analysis will explore participants' experiences and service use, SWTCIE project operations, VR agency engagement with organizations, and the efforts projects make to change systems. The analysis will inform how projects deliver core components of services to participants and will distinguish which activities have been accomplished with project funding, which activities are built on prior initiatives, which activities have occurred in parallel to SWTCIE implementation, and how local and state contexts affected implementation.
- **Outcome analysis:** The outcomes analysis will describe the outcomes of participants, employers, providers, and systems potentially affected by the SWTCIE projects. The projects intend to affect a range of outcomes, such as participants' employment, earnings, health, and well-being; VR policies and practices; 14(c) certificate holder and employer practices; and system changes regarding interagency practices or state policies.
- **Impact analysis:** The impact analysis will generate evidence about the effects of the SWTCIE projects on key demonstration-related outcomes. To understand whether any observed changes in these outcomes are attributable to the projects, we will compare the outcomes of each project's SWTCIE participants with those of similar VR participants whose outcomes represent what would have happened to the participants had they not enrolled in a project.
- **Benefit-cost analysis:** Using data collected throughout the course of the national evaluation, the benefit-cost analysis will show whether the benefits of each project (for example, employment and earnings) were large enough to justify the project's costs. To provide a comprehensive accounting of each project, we will report benefits and costs from four perspectives: participants, the VR agency, the state (everything associated with the state except VR), and the federal government.

## C. Data sources

The national evaluation team will collect three types of data. We will collect **qualitative data** from grantee meetings, project documents, and site visits (which will include on-site and virtual interviews, focus groups, and observations). Qualitative data will provide rich insight into SWTCIE project implementation activities that we cannot glean from other data sources. To better understand the experiences of those directly involved with the projects and assess project outcomes, we will collect **survey data** from providers, participants, and parents and guardians of participants. Finally, we will leverage a range of **administrative data** from projects (staff records, RSA Case Service Reports, project status charts, and cost data). These different sources of administrative data will provide information on the backgrounds of SWTCIE project staff, the characteristics and activities of project participants, services, outcomes, and

project costs. Exhibit 2 describes the data collection activities, expectations for SWTCIE project staff, and timing.

Exhibit 2. Data collection activities and expectations for the SWTCIE national evaluation

Activity	Data collection description	Expectations of SWTCIE project staff	Timing
<b>Qualitative data collection</b>			
Grantee meetings	Mathematica will hold regular virtual meetings for staff from the SWTCIE projects and RSA to keep attendees informed about each other's activities and support the evaluation.	Mathematica will work with SWTCIE project leaders to schedule these meetings. Attendees will vary by meeting. We expect meetings to be at least quarterly, typically lasting an hour.  The meetings provide project staff with opportunities to describe their accomplishments to date, share plans for implementation, and present potential challenges to implementation and their solutions.	Quarterly through March 2027
Project documentation collection	Mathematica will work with SWTCIE project staff to collect project documents that describe SWTCIE project implementation, including project applications, initial and revised logic models, recruitment flyers, success stories, training manuals, and other materials related to project implementation.  This information will inform Mathematica's ability to describe SWTCIE project implementation, the connection between the VR agency and its partners, and project infrastructure.	Mathematica will work with SWTCIE project staff during regular project meetings to identify relevant project documents to share.	Quarterly through December 2026
Site visits	Mathematica will conduct site visits consisting of on-site observations, interviews, and focus groups with project leaders, partner staff, participants, and their parents or guardians. In 2026, we will include additional interviews with staff from select 14(c) certificate holders to learn about providers' transformation activities.	Mathematica will work with each SWTCIE project director to (1) collect background information that helps create the site visit protocols and support the selection of interview and focus group participants and (2) coordinate the logistics for observations, interviews, and focus groups.	August to October 2024  August to October 2026

Activity	Data collection description	Expectations of SWTCIE project staff	Timing
<b>Survey data collection</b>			
Participant baseline survey	All participants who enroll in a SWTCIE project (or their parents or guardians) will complete a short baseline survey as part of their enrollment process. Survey topics will include project involvement, employment, educational attainment, and experiences with SWE and CIE.	Mathematica will work with project staff to tailor the process before enrollment begins. We will establish a secure transfer site to regularly share baseline survey information with projects. SWTCIE project staff will share a link to the survey with participants during the enrollment process.	On a rolling basis from August 2024 to November 2026
Participant follow-up survey	Participants (or their parents or guardians) will complete the follow-up survey. Survey topics will include project involvement, service use, employment expectations and goals, educational attainment, and experiences with SWE and CIE.	Mathematica will use contact information collected at baseline to follow up with participants. Mathematica may ask SWTCIE project staff to relay information about the survey to participants to improve response rates.	August to November 2026
<b>Administrative data collection</b>			
Staff records	Project staff records will include characteristics and qualifications of critical staff. Variables include demographic characteristics, degrees attained, relevant training and certifications, and work history and experience. Staff records also provide the sample frames for the provider survey.	Mathematica will send an annual questionnaire to SWTCIE project directors asking for information on key staff. Mathematica will resend the questionnaire annually so the directors can include new staff and update information about other staff.	August 2024 August 2025 August 2026
Project status charts	These are detailed summative statistics about goals related to project participants and outcomes.	Mathematica will obtain project status charts twice a year through projects' reporting to RSA.	May 2024 November 2024 May 2025 November 2025 May 2026 November 2026
RSA-911	VR agencies provide RSA with quarterly data on participants' applications, services, and exits.	There is no SWTCIE project involvement. RSA will provide Mathematica with quarterly files.	Quarterly files from July–September 2023 to July–September 2026
Finder files	Finder files will contain unique identifiers (as found in RSA-911 data) and enrollment dates for each SWTCIE participant.	Mathematica will provide guidelines and a template to share finder files to RSA or Mathematica (using a secure file transfer site).	July 2024 January 2025 July 2025 January 2026 July 2026 January 2027

Activity	Data collection description	Expectations of SWTCIE project staff	Timing
Project cost data	Cost data document services, training, and technical assistance offered through the projects.	Mathematica will provide projects with an Excel form describing the cost information needed. At the end of the cost data period (Project Year 4), we will ask projects to submit their completed forms and participate in an interview to confirm our understanding of the data.	May to October 2026

CIE = competitive integrated employment; RSA = Rehabilitation Services Administration; SWE = subminimum wage employment; SWTCIE = Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment; VR = vocational rehabilitation.

## D. Schedule for evaluation deliverables

The SWTCIE national evaluation will produce many evaluation-related reports describing data collection, the analyses, and the findings (Exhibit 3). Near the end of the national evaluation in spring 2027, we will submit to RSA a final evaluation report describing our findings and their implications for policy and practice. Other deliverables, such as a study snapshot and how-to guide, will complement the final evaluation report by summarizing findings in condensed and practitioner-friendly formats.

### Exhibit 3. Deliverable schedule for evaluation-related reports

Deliverable	Key contents	Due date
Memos on SWTCIE project enrollment progress	A description of progress toward enrollment and the challenges	January and July of 2024, 2025, and 2026; January 2027
Early assessment snapshot	A summary of initial implementation successes and challenges for each SWTCIE project based on the first round of site visits	Early 2025
Evaluation report	A comprehensive description of findings from the SWTCIE national evaluation, detailed descriptions of analysis methods, discussions about how the findings could affect policy and practice	March 31, 2027
Internal study brief	Key findings from the evaluation report	March 31, 2027
Study snapshot	Main headlines from the evaluation report with minimal text	March 31, 2027
How-to guide	Guidance on how to implement strategies that the evaluation found effective	March 31, 2027
Data file	The main data used for the evaluation	July 31, 2027

SWTCIE = Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment.