

GUIDELINES ON EFFECTIVENESS OF RESEA INTERVENTIONS

The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, Public Law 115-123 (BBA), amended the Social Security Act (SSA), creating a permanent authorization for the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) program. It also introduced a tiered evidence approach to the program, which encourages states to use “high” or “moderate” rated evidence-based interventions where they exist and to conduct evaluations and build evidence for other RESEA interventions and service delivery strategies. The RESEA intervention causal evidence rating reflects the intervention’s demonstrated capacity to reduce Unemployment Insurance duration, by improving employment and earnings outcomes, for program participants. RESEA intervention causal evidence ratings (or RESEA intervention effectiveness ratings) rely on evidence of impact exclusively from studies that received “high” or “moderate” study causal evidence ratings in CLEAR and the extent of evidence available.

This document describes CLEAR’s technical guidelines for how its reviewers assign ratings indicating the effectiveness of RESEA interventions. For RESEA program guidance, please see the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)’s guidance.¹

A. CLEAR’s Review and Ratings of Causal Studies

CLEAR assigns causal evidence ratings of RESEA intervention effectiveness based on findings from studies that have been reviewed under CLEAR’s “Reemployment” topic area evidence review. This evidence review identifies and summarizes causal impact studies of interventions designed to promote faster reemployment of unemployment insurance (UI) claimants, such as the interventions involved in RESEA programs.² For causal research—defined as research intended to assess the effectiveness an intervention—CLEAR uses its Causal Evidence Guidelines to objectively assess and rate the degree to which the research is able to credibly estimate the causal impact of the intervention on the outcomes of interest.³

CLEAR has three causal evidence rating levels to describe the strength of the causal evidence in a study: high, moderate, and low.

- A **high rating** means we are confident that the estimated effects are solely attributable to the intervention examined.
- A **moderate rating** means we are somewhat confident that the estimated effects are attributable to the intervention studied, but there might be other contributing factors that were not included in the analysis.

¹ Unemployment Insurance Program Letter No. 1-20 may be found here:

https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/UIPL/UIPL_1-20.pdf.

² For more information about the parameters for this review, please see the Reemployment topic area evidence review protocol, found here:

https://clear.dol.gov/sites/default/files/CLEAR_%20UI%20Reemployment%20evidence%20review%20protocol_October%202018.pdf.

³ CLEAR’s Causal Evidence Guidelines may be found here:

https://clear.dol.gov/sites/default/files/CLEAR_EvidenceGuidelines_V2.1.pdf.

- Research that does not meet the criteria for a high or moderate rating receives a **low rating**, which indicates that we cannot be confident that the estimated effects are attributable to the intervention studied. Other factors likely contributed to the estimated effects.

Only results of causal studies that have received a moderate or high study causal evidence rating from CLEAR can contribute to “high” or “moderate” ratings of *intervention effectiveness*. Although other studies may provide useful information, they do not meet the standard required to provide credible evidence of whether or not an RESEA intervention is effective.

B. Definition of Intervention and Relevant Outcomes

This section defines key terms related to the causal evidence ratings for interventions.

Definitions of RESEA Interventions

Intervention: The statute (section 306(i)(3) of the SSA) defines an intervention as “a service delivery strategy for the provision of State reemployment services and eligibility assessment activities.” Multiple strategies or broad program components are often bundled to constitute states’ RESEA programs. An RESEA ‘intervention’ could be a whole program or some subset of one or more components of the program. These interventions are implemented by states in various combinations, but in broadly similar ways, to speed reemployment in appropriate populations served. An up-to-date list of previously studied RESEA interventions, along with their current intervention effectiveness rating and related research, can be found on CLEAR’s RESEA topic area tab.⁴

Definitions of Outcome Domains on Which Effectiveness Must Be Demonstrated

The RESEA intervention effectiveness ratings described later in this document are defined by the extent of evidence that exists that shows an intervention’s effectiveness to reduce the number of weeks for which program participants receive unemployment compensation by improving employment outcomes. Intervention effectiveness must be demonstrated based on an intervention’s impact on two outcome domains, UI duration and employment:

- **UI Duration:** This outcome is measured as the number of weeks RESEA participants receive unemployment compensation (UC);⁵
- **Employment:** For RESEA participants, employment and earnings outcomes are measured in the second full calendar quarter following the start of a participant’s UC claim, or sooner in the claims cycle, to the extent that data is available.⁶

C. Causal Evidence Ratings of Intervention Effectiveness

Each intervention is assigned an ‘evidence-based rating’, which is a determination of the extent to which available research demonstrates that the intervention is effective at improving UI and employment

⁴ CLEAR’s RESEA topic area tab may be found here: <https://clear.dol.gov/reemployment-services-and-eligibility-assessments-resea>.

⁵ In this benefit year.

⁶ Either the fraction of program participants employed or the participant’s earnings can be used as measures of ‘employment.’ As described further below in this document, an intervention’s impact on employment can be met via observed impacts on *either* of these two outcomes.

outcomes as described above. There are four possible ratings, each defined below and summarized in Exhibit 1.⁷

- **High:** Interventions receive a ‘high’ causal evidence rating of intervention effectiveness if two or more credible studies (i.e., studies that have received a ‘high’ or ‘moderate’ study causal evidence rating from CLEAR, based on CLEAR’s causal evidence guidelines described in Section A) have found significant favorable impacts on both the Employment and UI Duration outcome domains. That is, *each* of the studies must show that the intervention *both* reduced UI duration *and* improved employment outcomes in the second full quarter after the start of a UI claim. The requirement to improve employment outcomes can be met by either increasing the percent of claimants who are employed or by increasing average quarterly earnings, compared to a control group. These net impacts on UI and employment outcomes must each be statistically significant at the 5% level ($p < .05$).
- **Moderate:** Interventions that do not qualify for a ‘high’ rating may receive a ‘moderate’ intervention causal evidence rating if at least one credible study has found a statistically significant favorable impact on employment, *and* one credible study has found a statistically significant favorable impact on UI duration. These findings for the two outcome domains may, but need not, come from the same study. These net impacts on UI and employment outcomes must be statistically significant at the 10% level ($p < .10$). The ‘moderate’ rating still relies exclusively on findings from credible studies (i.e., those that receive a high or moderate study causal evidence rating in CLEAR).
- **Potentially Promising:** A potentially promising rating indicates that there is some suggestive evidence that an intervention may be effective. Such interventions are candidates for further evaluation that possibly would allow the intervention to qualify for a higher rating. For an intervention to qualify for a potentially promising intervention causal evidence rating, there must be one impact study reviewed by CLEAR (irrespective of the causal evidence rating it received) that has found significant favorable impacts on either employment *or* UI duration at the 10% level ($p < .10$).⁸
- **No Rating:** All interventions that do not qualify for any of the three ratings above, receive no rating, regardless of the study causal evidence rating given by CLEAR for studies of that intervention. These may be interventions for which no impact studies have been conducted, interventions with an impact study that have not been reviewed by CLEAR yet, or interventions whose studies have been reviewed by CLEAR but have not shown any favorable impacts.

⁷ CLEAR’s guidelines include a technical definition of each rating to transparently demonstrate how CLEAR reviewers are assigning RESEA intervention effectiveness ratings. For RESEA program guidance on definitions, please see DOL’s UIPL No. 1-20.

⁸ CLEAR also rates some studies as “low.” Low-rated studies are not used when considering whether an intervention is eligible for a high or moderate effectiveness rating. However, studies rated as low by CLEAR *can* contribute to a potentially promising rating. The “potentially promising” rating indicates that some suggestive evidence exists that an intervention might be effective. While evidence from a low rated study is not a strong basis for concluding that an intervention is effective, it can suggest that the intervention may be worth considering for more rigorous testing.

















Exhibit 1. Summary of RESEA Intervention Causal Evidence Ratings

RESEA Evidence Standard Ratings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>High</i>: Two or more credible studies with favorable impacts for both outcome domains (at $p < .05$)• <i>Moderate</i>: At least one credible study with favorable impacts on each outcome domain (at $p < .10$)• <i>Potentially Promising</i>: One study with favorable impacts on either outcome domains (at $p < .10$)• <i>No Rating</i>: Intervention does not qualify for other ratings

Note: “Credible” studies are those that have received High or Moderate study causal evidence ratings.

Exhibit 2 illustrates how CLEAR’s causal evidence ratings of studies contribute to ratings of the effectiveness of six hypothetical interventions. The exhibit organizes the process of assigning intervention effectiveness ratings into five steps, beginning with the identification of studies of reemployment interventions. Those studies are rated against CLEAR’s s causal evidence guidelines (step 2). Steps 3 and 4 identify the extent to which the studies offer evidence of favorable impacts on employment and UI duration outcomes. Those determinations of favorable impact contribute to the intervention effectiveness ratings assigned in step 5.

Exhibit 2. Hypothetical Examples of Application of Ratings of RESEA Intervention Effectiveness

	Step 1 Study of Intervention	Step 2 CLEAR Study Causal Evidence Rating	Step 3 Outcomes Examined by the Study	Step 4 Did Study Find Favorable Impacts?	Step 5 RESEA Intervention Effectiveness Rating
Intervention A	Study 1	 HIGH	UI Duration Employment	Yes, strong confidence Yes, strong confidence	 High
	Study 2	 MODERATE	UI Duration Employment	Yes, strong confidence Yes, strong confidence	
	Study 3	 LOW	Employment	No	
Intervention B	Study 4	 HIGH	UI Duration Employment	Yes, strong confidence Yes, strong confidence	 Moderate
	Study 5	 MODERATE	UI Duration Employment	Yes, strong confidence Yes, modest confidence	
Intervention C	Study 6	 MODERATE	UI Duration Employment	Yes, modest confidence Yes, modest confidence	 Moderate
Intervention D	Study 7	 HIGH	UI Duration	Yes, strong confidence	 Potentially Promising
	Study 8	 HIGH	UI Duration	Yes, strong confidence	
Intervention E	Study 9	 LOW	UI Duration Employment	Yes, modest confidence No	 Potentially Promising
Intervention F	Study 10	 HIGH	UI Duration Employment	No No	 No rating

Notes: Strong confidence = impacts are statistically significant at the 5% level ($p < .05$); Modest confidence = impacts are statistically significant at the 10% level ($p < .10$); Steps 1-4 collectively determine the rating in Step 5. That is, with the information available in Steps 1-4, reviewers rate intervention's effectiveness in Step 5.

The RESEA “high,” “moderate,” and “potentially promising” intervention causal evidence ratings only account for studies of interventions that demonstrate favorable impacts. They do not incorporate findings from studies that have mixed or unfavorable findings. However, as a larger body of credible causal evidence becomes available in coming years, DOL may revise these standards to incorporate all types of findings and more precisely reflect the evidence base.

How do CLEAR's study causal evidence ratings differ from its RESEA intervention effectiveness ratings?

- CLEAR's **study causal evidence ratings** apply only to the strength of causal evidence. They show how confident we can be that the study's findings reflect the impact of the intervention evaluated, rather than something else. They do not indicate how effective the intervention was—the impact of the intervention may be favorable, unfavorable, or null (i.e., no impact). Once study ratings are assigned, they do not change. CLEAR's study causal evidence ratings are represented by a gas gauge icon:



- CLEAR's **RESEA intervention effectiveness ratings** are an indicator of how many credible studies show favorable impacts (i.e., improved outcomes) of an intervention at this time. These ratings rely on the level of confidence in those favorable impacts and the amount of evidence available. Once RESEA intervention ratings are assigned, they may change as more studies are completed. The list of rated interventions may also change and expand as more studies are completed, to reflect new or newly defined intervention definitions. CLEAR represents RESEA intervention effectiveness ratings with a thermometer icon:

