



INCREASING ENGAGEMENT & EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

IN A RANDOMIZED EXPERIMENT WITH OVER 5,500 JOB-SEEKERS, WE FOUND THAT SENDING INDIVIDUALS TIMELY AND REGULAR TEXT MESSAGES ABOUT JOB-SEARCH RELATED ACTIVITIES HAS A MEANINGFUL IMPACT ON INTERACTIONS WITH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES AND EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES. INDIVIDUALS IN OUR SAMPLE WHO RECEIVED TARGETED TEXT MESSAGES WERE 3% MORE LIKELY TO CONNECT WITH LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES AND 20% MORE LIKELY TO SECURE EMPLOYMENT AT THE END OF OUR STUDY COMPARED TO INDIVIDUALS WHO DID NOT RECEIVE TEXT MESSAGES.

The challenge

The Economic Workforce and Development Department (EWDD) in Los Angeles runs 16 WorkSource Centers (WSCs) that provide free employment services to around 27,000 job seekers a year in LA County. WorkSource Centers offer specialized services including career counseling, skills workshops, resume guidance, job matching, and employment referrals to enrolled clients. However, despite this robust workforce development infrastructure, the WorkSource Centers are underutilized by Los Angeles residents looking for employment. In fact, over half of enrolled clients (56%) only visit their local WorkSource Center once after enrolling.

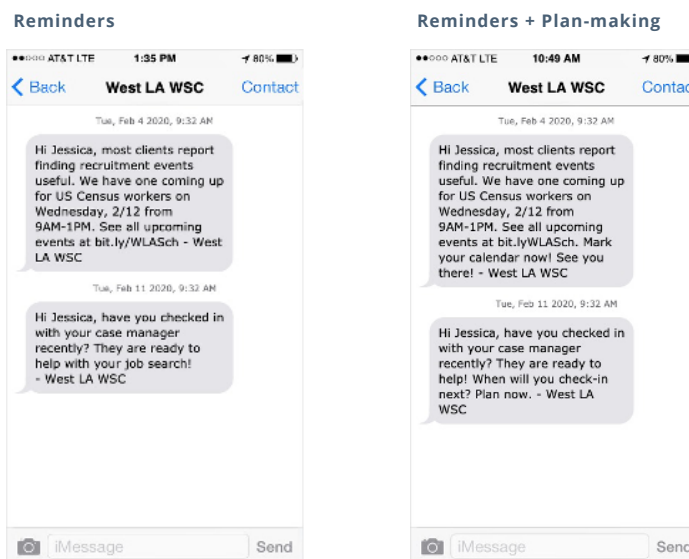
Motivating sustained engagement and behavior over time is a common challenge faced by many public sector agencies. While people often intend to change and maintain their behavior, evidence suggests that doing so is difficult. For instance, WorkSource Center clients may intend to attend an upcoming recruitment event, reach out to their case manager, or apply for a certain number of jobs each week. But, job seekers—like most people—face numerous cognitive and psychological barriers that can make it difficult to remember and motivate themselves to follow through on their intentions. This intention-behavior gap may contribute to low rates of client engagement with the WorkSource Centers, as well as limited employment outcomes.

What we did

In partnership with the California Policy Lab, the Los Angeles Mayor’s Office Innovation Team, and EWDD, we developed and rigorously tested the impact of timely, actionable, and behaviorally-informed text-based communications to encourage engagement among job seekers at the city’s WSCs.

For 14 weeks from November 2019 to February 2020, we conducted a randomized experiment with 5,537 active WorkSource Center clients. Clients were randomly assigned to a control group that did not receive communication as part of the study, or one of two treatment groups. Clients assigned to the “Reminders” group received weekly text messages with information about upcoming WSC events and workshops, and reminders to engage in individual job search activities like checking in with case managers and utilizing the WSC computer centers. Clients assigned to the “Reminders + Plan-making” group received the same weekly text message reminders as the “Reminders” group with additional language encouraging goal-setting and plan-making. These messages leverage existing evidence showing that prompting people to set goals and make plans can increase follow-through and help bridge the intention-behavior gap in areas like [voting](#) and [annual flu shots](#).

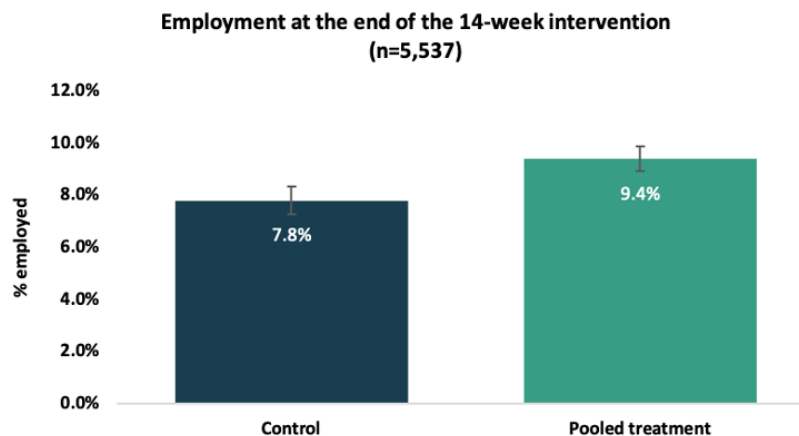
At the end of the 14-week intervention, we evaluated the impact of receiving communications on engagement with WorkSource Centers and employment outcomes.



Our findings

We found that clients who received communications were 3% more likely to interact with the WorkSource Centers: 45.9% of clients in the two treatment groups interacted one or more times with the WSCs during the 14-week intervention period compared to 44.5% of clients in the no-communication control group.

Additionally, clients who received text messages were 20% more likely to report being employed at the end of the 14-week intervention period: 9.4% of clients in the two treatment conditions reported being employed, compared to 7.8% of clients in the control group.



Next steps

Our 14-week program of weekly personalized communications increased engagement with WorkSource Centers, and improved employment outcomes. Additionally, approximately 80% of jobseekers who received the communications reported finding them helpful and expressed interest in enrolling in the program if offered again. Our results suggest that jobseekers can benefit from a low-cost communication program to prompt engagement with workforce development services and job search-related activities. Future research could consider similar information interventions in other public sector contexts that require sustained behavior and engagement over time.



Additional resources

Read more about our work:

- [Project page](#)

ABOUT US

The People Lab aims to transform the public sector by producing cutting-edge research on the people in government and the communities they serve. We collaborate with governments and other stakeholders to evaluate strategies that can strengthen the public-sector workforce, improve public service delivery, and foster an engaged democracy. Our team brings together public management scholars, behavioral economists, political scientists and public policy experts who are committed to evidence-based policy making, and who use rigorous quantitative, qualitative, and experimental methods to better understand what works. All projects are co-designed with our partners to ensure feasibility and scalability.