Study of the American Job Center Customer Experience

Summary Report

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EVALUATION OF THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN AMERICAN JOB CENTERS

1. Overview

In September 2015, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) contracted with IMPAQ International and its partner ideas42 ("the research team") to conduct an exploratory study of the customer experience at American Job Centers (AJCs). The purpose of this study is threefold: 1) to learn more about the customer experience in AJCs, 2) to highlight promising practices in those AJCs, and 3) to produce a set of behavioral science-based strategies that could enhance the AJC customer experience.

This summary report is based on information collected in the spring and summer of 2016 from staff and customer discussions, customer focus groups, and kiosk surveys. Nine centers participated in this study. The study was exploratory, therefore the insights provided in this report are not intended to be representative of all AJCs. Still, the themes and patterns that emerged begin to flesh out the customer experience and to suggest ways to enhance it.

The following themes stood out as important:

- Generally, customers appear to have positive experiences at the AJCs. With some exceptions, customers were satisfied with center staff and services. Job/training seekers explained that being unemployed is emotionally taxing, and that stress and uncertainty may persist during their job search. Customers said that the quality of their experience, especially staff interactions, can mitigate the stress and contribute to a positive experience.

- Individual, one-on-one interactions with staff can shape a customer's whole experience. Customers' initial encounters with individual reception staff, as well as their one-on-one conversations with case managers and service providers, play a significant role in how customers feel about their overall AJC experience.

- New customers do not know what to expect from, or have misconceptions about, their AJCs. After their first visit, customers were often pleasantly surprised by the services offered by the AJCs. However, customers were also often disappointed to learn that the AJC could not immediately provide them with a job.

- Many customers are not aware of the full extent of AJC services. Even regular customers often lack an understanding of the extent of available services. Almost all job/training seekers reported learning about a service or program through one-on-one conversations with specific staff or through interactions with other customers.

- Program registration and enrollment processes and requirements can feel overwhelming or arbitrary to customers. New customers spend time registering online and filling out paperwork — activities that may feel distant from their immediate needs. Customer frustration with these processes can be exacerbated when customers feel that processes are opaque or arbitrary. This opacity can result from centers' efforts to streamline multiple service and funding streams.

- Most employer customers have one point of contact at the center who caters to their specific needs. Employer customers said that they had established rapport with a specific AJC staff member who understands their needs and minimizes their administrative burden.

2.   Study Approach

This section describes the research team's approach to evaluating the customer experience.

2.1   What Is Customer Experience?

The AJC customer experience involves all aspects of an individual's interactions with an AJC, as mediated by the individual's internal, subjective response. In other words, customer experience is highly dependent not just on what an organization offers, but on how an individual customer perceives and interacts with those offerings, with the staff, and with the AJC brand.[1] Customer experience encompasses marketing, packaging, service offerings, utility, ease of access and use, and service reliability. The five main factors that influence customer experience are:[2]

1. **Customer Perception**. A customer's perception of products and services, which often differs from reality, is largely shaped by subtle cues such as the technical service performance, tangible items related to the service, and the behavior of staff.[3]

2. **Customer Expectation.** A pre-existing expectation regarding products and services can shape perceptions of an experience. Expectations play an especially important role in satisfaction assessments if the customer's perceived experience is not consistent with prior beliefs.[4, 5]

3. **Interpersonal Interaction.** Interpersonal interaction is direct contact with staff and other customers. The physical environment itself also has large effects on perceptions of service quality.[6, 7, 8]

4. **Customer Trust.** A customer's trust in whether a service and the staff providing it can meet particular obligations will influence a customer's experience and satisfaction. Greater trust yields more positive customer experience, continued use of services, and the intention to spread word-of-mouth recommendations. [9, 10, 11]

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[1] Meyer, C., & Schwager, A. (2007). Understanding customer experience. *Harvard Business Review, 85*(2), 116.
[2] See *Customer Experience Literature Scan,* 11/20/15.
[3] Berry, L. L., Wall, E. A., & Carbone, L. P. (2006). Service clues and customer assessment of the service experience: Lessons from marketing. *The Academy of Management Perspectives*, *20*(2), 43-57.
[4] Morgeson, F. V. (2013). Expectations, disconfirmation, and citizen satisfaction with the US federal government: Testing and expanding the model. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 23*(2), 289-305.
[5] Van Ryzin, G. G. (2004). Expectations, performance, and citizen satisfaction with urban services. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *23*(3), 433-448.
[6] Bitner, M. J. (1990). Evaluating service encounters: The effects of physical surroundings and employee responses. *The Journal of Marketing*, 69-82.
[7] Harris, P. (2007). We the people: The importance of employees in the process of building customer experience. *Journal of Brand Management, 15*(2), 102-114.
[8] Srivastava, M., & Kaul, D. (2014). Social interaction, convenience and customer satisfaction: The mediating effect of customer experience. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 21*(6), 1028-1037.
[9] Ferguson, R. J., Paulin, M., & Bergeron, J. (2010). Customer sociability and the total service experience: Antecedents of positive word-of-mouth intentions. *Journal of Service Management, 21*(1), 25-44.
[10] Harris, L. C., & Goode, M. M. (2004). The four levels of loyalty and the pivotal role of trust: A study of online service dynamics. *Journal of Retailing, 80*(2), 139-158.
[11] Welch, E. W., Hinnant, C. C., & Moon, M. J. (2005). Linking citizen satisfaction with e-government and trust in government. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 15*(3), 371-391.

5. **Customers' Cognitive and Emotional State.** A customer's cognitive and emotional state at the time of the visit will directly affect whether that customer will return and continue services. [12] [13] [14]

2.2   Evaluating the Customer Experience

The Customer Experience Study research questions are as follows:

1. **What is the customer experience at various AJCs?**
   - What is the customers' experience at different stages of interaction and service – including pre-visit?
   - What is the customer experience of the online portion of their interaction with physical sites (whether engaged onsite or at home/office)?
   - What is the customer experience visiting the virtual AJCs?
   - What is the experience of key customer groups: women, veterans, youth, lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, customers with disabilities, etc.?

2. **How do job/training seekers and employers who seek assistance at AJCs feel they are treated?**
   - How is the customers' perception of their treatment different at different stages of interaction and service?
   - How do customers experience the front-end of services?

3. **What are the customer opinions about AJC services and resources?**
   - What is the customer's perception of the quality and types of services offered?
   - How to job-seeker customers at the center *that day* describe their interactions with staff?
   - What types of services or resources do customers use in the physical locations? In the online sites, do the customers report what services or resources they used?

4. **To what extent do customers feel the system meets their needs?**
   - Have the customers been to the AJC before, or is their first visit?
   - What is the relationship between the customers' ratings or responses to the AJC in social media, and customer expectations and experiences as reported directly to researchers?
   - To what extent do job-seeker customers discontinue receiving services from AJCs (other than finding a job?)
   - For those customers who disconnect, was there a gap in service strategy or outreach or a different customer strategy that they feel might have assisted the individual to remain connected to the system?
   - What features of the AJC make it more or less welcoming?

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[12] Baicker, K., Congdon, W.J. & Mullainathan, S. (2012). Health insurance coverage and take-up: Lessons from behavioral economics. *The Milbank Quarterly, 90*(1)*,* 107-134.

[13] Hall, C.C., Zhao, J. & Shafir E. (2014). Self-affirmation among the poor: Cognitive and behavioral implications. *Psychological Science, 25*(2), 619-625.

[14] Bhargava, S. & Manoli, D. (2013). Why are benefits left on the table? Assessing the role of information, complexity, and stigma on take-up with an IRS field experiment. *American Economic Review, 105*(11), 3489-3529.

5. **What promising customer experience strategies or approaches are being used in the system?**
   - How do AJC staff and leadership describe their promising practices? How is their practice different from before?
   - How are the promising practices and models similar to or different from those identified in the literature scan?
   - What guiding principles of a high-quality customer experience can be identified and shared to support Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) implementation?

All these questions were addressed based on data collected using a variety of means:

- Unannounced site visits by an IMPAQ researcher posing as a customer

- Regular site visits (co-planned with AJC leadership), including
  - Discussions with staff who interact with customers (including as many different staff members as possible)
  - Discussions with customers
  - Customer focus groups

- Telephone discussions with employers

- Kiosk-based customer exit surveys

2.3   Study Partners

Several criteria were used to select AJCs to participate in this evaluation. To stay within the scope of this exploratory study, the selection was limited to nine AJCs, plus two "AJC websites" that serve a large population of remote customers. This sample size precluded selecting a representative sample of AJCs. To explore the customer experience at different types of centers, the research team used the following attributes to select a variety of AJCs:

- Geographical region

- Urban/non-urban

- Common measures/non-common measures

- Programs focused on women, Veterans, youth, or people with disabilities

- Participation in DOL's Customer-centered Design Challenge (yes/no)

Having determined the criteria for achieving the necessary variety among centers, the research team sought specific site selection feedback from the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) and Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). Specifically, the team asked them to identify any AJCs that were implementing promising practices in the area of customer experience. ETA and VETS recommendations were then mapped onto a matrix of attributes based on the bullets above. The research team worked with the DOL contracting officer's representative to finalize selection of nine sites that to ensure variation based on the attributes.

In an effort to maximize AJC participation, gain objective and meaningful information from such a small sample, and assuage AJC staff fears that this study is an audit, the team asked the state and local

workforce investment boards (WIBs) and AJC leadership to enter into a research partnership. An explicit condition of this partnership is that researchers will not share any identifiable AJC information. We divided the nine AJCs into two groups. The two groups participated in different combinations of data collection methods. This strategy minimized burden on individual AJCs, while allowing the research team to collect information in a variety of ways.

2.4   Unannounced Site Visits

An experienced IMPAQ researcher, who had both worked at an AJC and been an AJC job-seeker customer, conducted unannounced site visits at five AJCs across the country in early-mid-2016. The information gathered from these visits provided *initial* understanding of what walk-in customers seeking services or resources experience when visiting a job center for the first time. This information was used in designing the other data collection tools used in this study.

These site visits followed "mystery shopper" best practices[15,16] to gather high-quality data across observations. Using a single visitor eliminated the need for intensive training to produce inter-rater reliability. Working with the study team, the visitor built a job-seeker profile to help her interact smoothly and consistently with AJC staff.

Prior to each visit, the visitor explored each AJC's website, keeping a record of how much and what information was available, how clear it was, and how easy it was to find. Unannounced visits occurred on different days of the week, at various times of day. When possible, the visitor timed her visit so she could attend an orientation or workshop. The duration of each visit depended on what was available at each AJC; the length of visits ranged from two to six hours.[17] During each visit, the visitor signed in as required and registered on the state labor exchange. She observed job postings and other physical features of the AJC and, whenever possible, participated in additional activities at the center, such as a newcomer orientation, résumé-building workshop, or job fair. She talked with reception desk staff during the sign-in process and with other staff members who made themselves available to help at the computer or answer questions. Unannounced visits did *not* include one-on-one time with caseworkers or registering for unemployment insurance (UI). Either of these activities would have required a valid Social Security number and would have diverted staff from serving customers in need. The necessary parameters of the unannounced visits mean that the visitor's experience is that of a first-time walk-in customer who is seeking employment services.[18]

After each visit, the visitor used a structured template to record all impressions, including interactions with resource room staff and interactions she observed between staff and other customers. She then

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[15] Boeltzig-Brown, H., Brugnaro, L., Gandolfo, C., & Gelb, A. (2004). Taking the mystery out of customer service. Institute Brief 18, Institute for Community Inclusion. Available at http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=128

[16] Adler, P., & Adler, P. (1998). Observational techniques. In Norman Denizin & Yvonne Lincoln (Eds.) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

[17] The amount of time spent at each AJC was similar to that spent by its other customers. Longer visits may result when customers attend a workshop or have a mandate from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to spend 30 hours per week at the AJC.

[18] Though self-service customers are asked for their Social Security number, either at sign-in or upon enrolling in the state job bank, provision of the number was not mandatory at any of the sites visited.

conducted an extensive debrief with the entire research team by conference call.[19] The information gathered during the unannounced visits was used to provide context and inform the study design.

2.5   Site Visits

A pair of researchers, one staff member each from IMPAQ and ideas42, visited each of the nine AJCs between March and May 2016. AJCs were visited between one and three times. Each visit lasted one or two days depending on the size of the AJC.[20] The purpose of the visit was to gather information through observations and semi-structured discussions with job/training seeker customers. During these visits, researchers also conducted group and individual discussions with AJC staff. Though customers are the focus of this study, these talks enabled the research team to earn the trust of center staff by discussing the project with them and answering their questions. Staff discussions also allowed the research team to learn more about promising practices, to understand the local AJC context, and to compare staff and customer perceptions of AJC operations. Each AJC visit had a customized agenda. An example is presented in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 1. Sample Site Visit Agenda

DAY ONE: Orientation and Assessment of AJC Practices

Time	Activity
9:00–10:00	Tour of the AJC, observations
10:00–11:00	Discussion with center director
11:00–12:00	Discussion with employment specialist and WIOA supervisors
1:00–2:00	Discussion with WIOA case manager, adult and dislocated worker program
2:00–3:00	Discussion with resource room staff
3:00–4:30	Job seeker discussions and observations

DAY TWO: Remaining Customer Discussions and High-Level Feedback to AJC

Time	Activity
9:00–10:00	Discussion with veterans representative
10:00–11:00	Job seeker discussions and observations
11:00–12:00	Discussion with WIOA case manager, youth program
12:0–1:00	Discussion with customers from WorkKeys testing event
1:00–2:00	Discussion with partner program (vocational rehab, TANF, etc.), WIB director, or other relevant entity with information on promising practices
2:00–3:00	Observations
3:00–4:00	Research meeting to organize insights and generate hypotheses
4:00–5:00	Debrief with center staff on high-level themes emerging from the study

The research team used semi-structured discussion guides, with one researcher conducting the discussions and the other taking notes. This approach allowed the interviewers to customize the process and questions as they learned about the AJC or a particular customer's situation. In general, early questions primarily focused on "what" or "when," for example, "What was the first thing you did when you came in today?" Later questions focused on "why" or "how," for example, "Why was that goal important to you?"

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[19] Notes taken of site visits are kept in a password-protected file, accessible only to team researchers.
[20] Although all AJCs in this study are comprehensive centers, their sizes vary widely, from large urban centers to small rural centers with only two or three staff members.

The second set of questions allowed the team to generate and refine or discard hypotheses about what drove certain behaviors. The discussion questions reflected the key tenets of customer experience established in the literature: expectations, perceptions, trust, interactions, and emotional and cognitive state.

During unstructured AJC observations, in addition to noting the physical surroundings, the research team paid close attention to staff-customer interactions, the number of customers entering the center, and customers' activities. These observations provided context for the information staff members and job/training seekers shared during the on-site discussions.

2.5.1   Job/Training Seeker Discussions

Job/training seeker discussions of 10 to 15 minutes per customer, in English or Spanish, took place at all nine AJCs. To achieve a mix of scheduled and ad-hoc discussions, the research team both recruited job seekers on-site in the resource room and asked AJC staff who had customer meetings scheduled to set up times for researchers to talk to the customers before or after those appointments. This approach allowed the team to hear about the experiences of both walk-in customers and those with a scheduled appointment. In total, these visits yielded 59 job seeker discussions. The number of discussions per site and per visit depended on the number of customers available. Researchers also observed (on average) dozens of customers with whom they did not talk.

2.5.2   Staff Discussions

During the site visits, the team had discussions with staff members from different AJC programs and from AJC partners. Staff responses illuminated institutional context, partnership structures, and perceived system barriers. Staff discussions also helped identify unique features of each AJC and its promising practices. The staff and partners included the AJC center director, frontline resource room staff, WIOA case managers from the adult and dislocated worker program and the youth program, business representatives, and on-site partner staff (such as veterans representatives). Staff responses to the researchers' questions allowed the team to understand staff perceptions of the ideal and actual customer experience and the typical customer flow at their AJC.

With staff permission, the research team audio-recorded the discussions and used the recordings as necessary to compile detailed site visit notes. At the end of day 1, the team reviewed the day's notes for gaps in knowledge or areas where follow-up questions were warranted. Based on this review, the team determined how to iterate on the areas of focus and follow up for the next day. Before the end of each site visit, as part of the research partnership, the team held a debriefing with center leadership and staff to discuss preliminary insights and to clarify any gaps in knowledge. Within two weeks after each visit, the two researchers created a set of master notes reflecting all of the detail in their individual notes. The process of taking unstructured, open-ended notes and then synthesizing them to a final version ensured that data from exploratory discussions were captured without the restrictions of a template, while all details were recorded and checked. The final version of the notes attributed data by type of respondent and were organized topically, facilitating cross-site thematic analysis.

2.6 Job/Training Seeker Surveys

Job/training seeker customer satisfaction surveys were administered at self-serve kiosks at four sites, starting in May 2016. This report presents data collected from May through August 2016. Survey questions were refined iteratively with DOL. They consist of eight items assessing customers' emotional state, adapted from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS);[21] two items assessing expected and actual customer service experience; one item capturing the duration of a customer's visit; and demographic questions. The eight emotional-state items selected from the PANAS are those most relevant to the job center experience and job search process. Four of these emotions have a positive valence (*determined, enthusiastic, excited,* and *inspired*) and four have a negative valence (*confused, distressed, irritable,* and *upset*). The team asked customers whether they were experiencing these specific emotions in order to better understand what factors led to a good (or bad) experience at the AJC. Respondents chose a number on a Likert scale to describe how much they were feeling each emotion in the present moment, from 1, "not at all" to 5, "very much."

Survey kiosks used touchscreen iPads equipped with the QuickTap survey platform. The kiosk survey took about three minutes to complete and consisted of 15 screens: 13 questions plus welcome and closing screens. Exhibit 3 shows examples of the types of survey screens, including multiple-choice, "slider," and open-ended questions, among others. Participation was completely voluntary, and customers were able to skip questions or discontinue at any point in the survey. At the request of center management, a Spanish survey option was implemented at two centers.

Exhibit 3. Sample Customer Survey Screens

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[21]Watson, Clark, & Tellegen (1988). The PANAS is a reliable and valid measure of affect which has been profitably utilized to understand customer experience (e.g., Pullman, & Gross 2004).

The kiosks were positioned near the outside doors of each center, with the intention of collecting feedback from customers at the end of their visit.[22] The research team was able to download real-time data from QuickTap online and shared de-identified data with each center's management staff.

2.7   Job/Training Seeker Focus Groups

The research team conducted two focus groups at four sites during the third and final site visit to those centers. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather fine-grained qualitative information from customers about the factors that shape their job seeker experience and behavior. Focus groups generally consisted of six to nine participants.[23] The research team recruited participants in two ways:

- ▪ The kiosk survey included a question at the end that asked job/training seekers if they were interested in being part of a focus group. If they answered "yes" and provided their email, the research team sent recruitment emails with an option to attend one of two time slots at the center.[24]

- ▪ In order to achieve a balance of customers, the research team also recruited participants on-site on the day of the event. The researchers approached customers who were working in the resource room or leaving workshops to ask if they were interested in attending one of the sessions.

Focus groups took place on-site at each AJC. Each group lasted between 75 and 90 minutes. With participants' permission, the research team recorded the sessions. One focus group at each center was offered around lunch time; the other was run in the late afternoon. The research team gave each participant a $40 gift card.

Each focus group had one moderator and one note-taker from the research team. At the beginning of the focus group, the moderator introduced the two-person team, discussed the purpose of the study, and encouraged participants to share their perspectives and to discuss both positive and negative aspects of their AJC experience. The moderator facilitated the discussion using a set of probes to elicit detailed information about customer experience with, and perceptions of, various service areas and

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[22] Despite the position of the kiosks, customers could have completed the survey at any point during their visit to the center.

[23] Out of the eight focus groups the research team conducted, one group had fewer than four participants.

[24] Customers from previous site visit job seeker discussions who expressed interest in participating in the focus group were also invited to attend and to complete the kiosk survey.

stages. The moderator also shared preliminary findings from previous visits in order to solicit customers' insights about what the results meant and the extent to which the preliminary findings resonated with their own experiences.

After concluding the focus groups, the research team met with center management to debrief staff on the focus group sessions and discuss the main themes, both positive and negative, that customers raised during the session. The research team also discussed with management staff ideas for potential behavioral science-based tools and shared a summary of the preliminary results from the kiosk data.

2.8   Employer Discussions

Another aspect of the study was to examine the experience of employer customers. The research team worked with center management and the business representative from four AJCs to collect contact information for five employer customers who had used business services at that center. The team sought to include one employer from each of the following groups:

- *Small employers* (less than 50 employees) who actively use the labor exchange to post jobs

- *Medium-to-large employers* (50 or more employees) who actively use the labor exchange to post jobs

- *New users* of the labor exchange (of any size)

- *Disconnected employers* who have posted only one job on the labor exchange and have not returned in more than a year

- *Heavily engaged employers* who have a strong relationship with the AJC and participate in center activities beyond just posting jobs

The research team reached out to all 20 employer contacts provided by centers in an attempt to conduct a brief phone discussion with each of the employers. A total of 11 employer contacts were available and were interviewed by phone. In order to minimize the burden on the employer customers, the length of the discussions was flexible; they lasted anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the contact's availability. The research team conducted these as informal conversations rather than formal structured interviews. When possible, employer discussions were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewee. Discussion questions focused on company background, initial contact with and relationship to the center, types of business services used, process for receiving these services, satisfaction with the services, and general comments on the experience. Each contact the team spoke with received a $40 gift card as a thank-you.

3.   Job/Training Seeker Feedback

The kiosk exit survey responses and the customer one-on-one discussions and focus groups revealed several common themes in the experiences of job/training seekers. This section begins by presenting kiosk data to provide an overview of customer demographics and customer experience. It then proceeds to discuss how customers described their experiences to researchers during discussions and focus groups. Employers are treated as a separate customer group (Section 4), and staff perspective is offered in Section 5.

3.1 Kiosk Exit Survey Data

In interpreting the kiosk survey results, it is important to keep in mind that this convenience sample may not be representative of the customer population at each site. Additionally, customers had the ability to complete the survey at any point during their visit to the AJC. Since kiosks were located in the AJC lobby, the research team expected that participants would typically complete the survey at the end of their visit.

Across the four centers, 297 job seekers completed the survey: 52.2% were male, 43.4% female, and 4.4% transgender. A total of 37 participants (12.4%) were veterans, and 13 (4.4%) completed the survey in Spanish. Exhibit 4 shows the number of respondents by age.
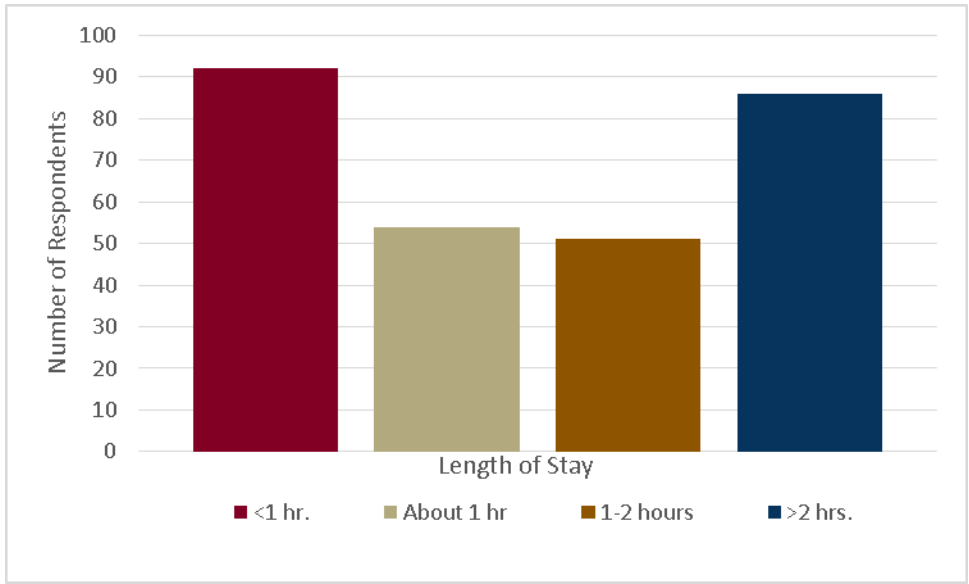
Exhibit 4. Number of Respondents by Age
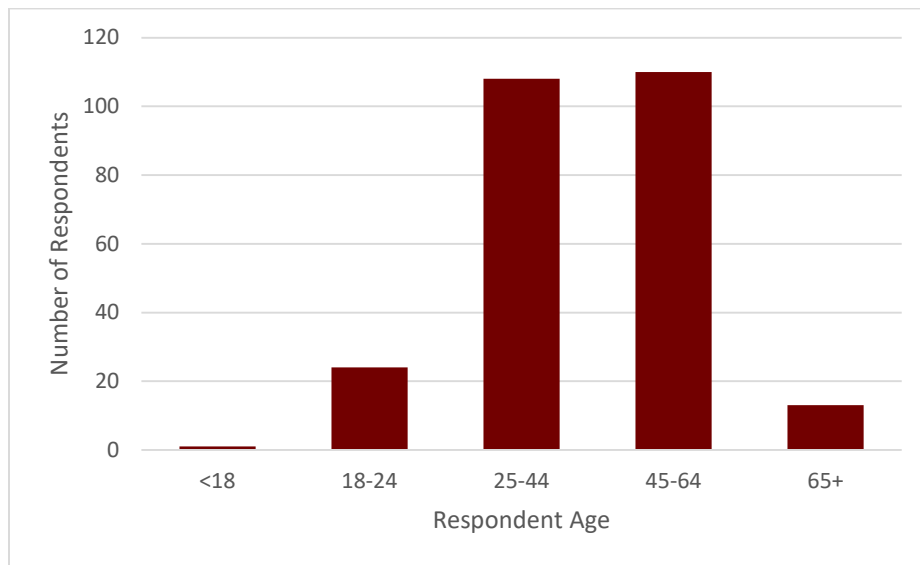
3.1.1 Length of Visit
Most survey respondents had been at the center either for less than one hour (32.9%) or for two or more hours (30%). Exhibit 5 displays the distribution of respondents' length of visit.

Exhibit 5. Respondents' Length of Visit

3.1.2 Actual and Expected Level of Service

Respondents typically came to the job center with high expectations. For the most part, it appears that those expectations were met. As shown in Exhibit 6, 71.5% of respondents indicated that they expected to receive "excellent" service. In describing their actual experience of the service, 83.1% of survey participants reported that the actual service they received was equal to their expectation, and 86.1% reported receiving "excellent" or "above average" service.

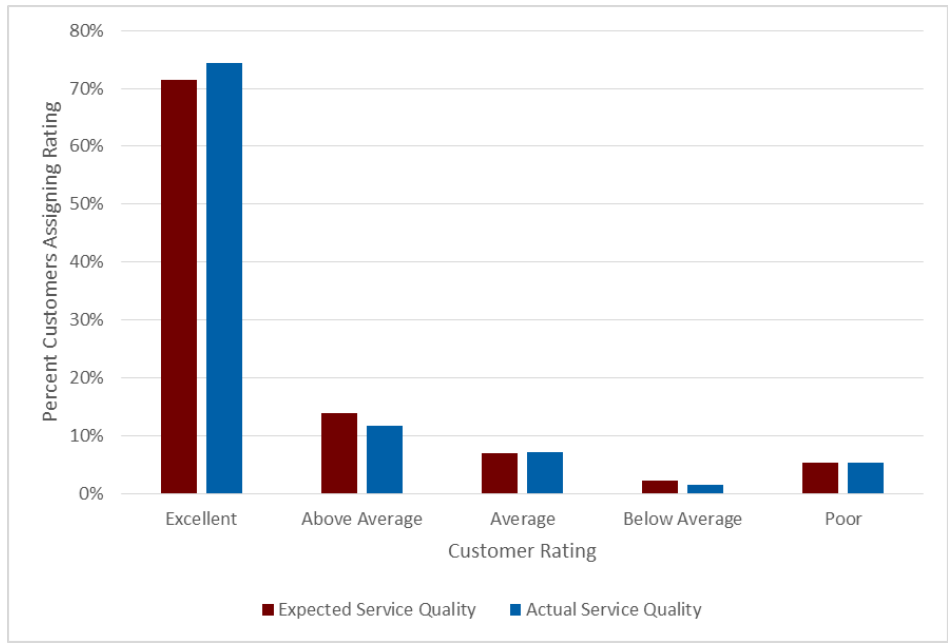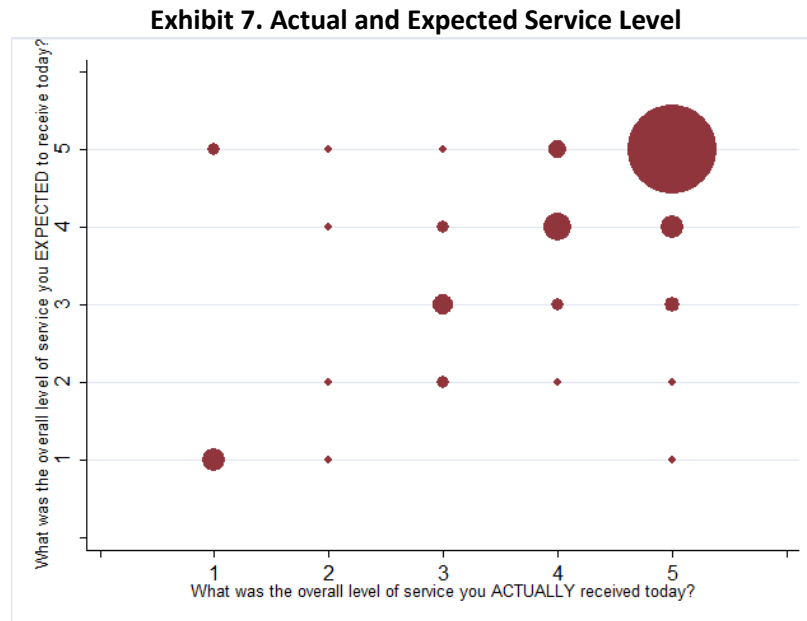**Exhibit 6. Expected Versus Actual Service Quality**

Exhibit 7, a scatterplot, depicts the number of exact matches between a customer's rating of expected and actual service. Larger dots represent higher numbers of survey participants reporting an exact match of expected and actual service.

Exhibit 7. Actual and Expected Service Level

3.1.3   Positive and Negative Emotions

Exhibit 8 shows how frequently respondents selected a particular response for each of the emotions derived from the PANAS, sorted into the positive and negative valence emotions. Additionally, the exhibit correlates with the "actual service" indicator derived from the question about customers' experience of the service they received that day.

Exhibit 8. Survey Data on Customers' Positive and Negative Emotions

Emotion	Not at All	A Little	Moderate	Quite a Bit	Extremely	Correlation with Actual Service
Determined	3.0%	4.9%	15.1%	21.5%	55.5%	0.51
Enthusiastic	7.1%	7.5%	17.2%	24.3%	43.9%	0.52
Excited	9.0%	7.0%	17.6%	25.0%	41.4%	0.46
Inspired	9.1%	5.0%	16.9%	22.3%	46.7%	0.50
Confused	57.9%	19.5%	6.3%	7.2%	9.1%	−0.31
Distressed	53.4%	14.9%	9.5%	8.6%	13.6%	−0.43
Irritable	69.1%	7.3%	9.9%	4.3%	9.4%	−0.51
Upset	74.0%	7.3%	8.7%	2.3%	7.8%	−0.58

In general, customers were much more likely to report experiencing the positive valence emotions than the negative valence emotions. For example, for each of the positive valence emotions, about half of all customers (41-56%) rated their feelings as "extremely" positive. Conversely, for each of the negative valence emotions, the proportion of customers who rated their feelings as "extremely" negative ranged from 8-14%. As shown in Exhibit 7, all of the positive valence emotions are positively correlated with

the reported actual service, while all of the negative valence emotions are negatively correlated. In other words, individuals who reported more positive emotions also tended to have more positive perceptions of their experience.

These findings have implications for the types of changes that could improve the customer experience. However, a larger percentage of customers report feeling "determined" than report feeling "enthusiastic," "excited," or "inspired." That finding suggests there is room to improve. By contrast, the correlations between service quality and the negative emotions vary widely. "Irritable" and "upset" have the strongest negative correlations, but only a relatively small number of customers reported feeling those emotions more than moderately (14% and 10%, respectively). Although "confused" and "distressed" had weaker correlations, a higher percent of customers reported strongly experiencing those emotions (16% and 22%, respectively).

3.2   Job/Training Seeker Discussion and Focus Group Data

This section reviews what customers told researchers about their AJC experience. This information is presented chronologically, beginning with customers' awareness and expectations before their visit.

3.2.1   Pre-Visit: Customer Awareness and Expectations

Prior to their actual visit, customers may begin to interact with the center in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, informal conversations with family and friends who have accessed AJC services, formal communications from government agencies, and self-directed searches online. These pre-visit interactions can shape customer expectations and influence the customer experience. The research team heard several common reasons that customers might enter an AJC. These can be grouped into two categories: mandatory and voluntary.[25] For some customers, access to other services or benefits, such as UI, is contingent on visiting an AJC. Customers in this "mandatory" category often receive an official letter in the mail or a referral while accessing services from another government agency.[26] Most of these customers reported not knowing what to expect from the AJC based on the content of the letter. What they did know was that, to continue accessing benefits or services, they had to go to an AJC.

"Voluntary" customers visit an AJC on their own; such customers most often indicated some type of informal referral to the center, often from a friend or family member. Only one customer reported having found an AJC through its online presence or through self-directed searching. Many customers reported that, prior to visiting the AJC, they had not known it existed. No customers recalled having seen any outreach materials. This lack of visibility can contribute to inaccurate expectations about what services are offered at AJCs.

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[25] The proportion of AJC customers in each of the groups (mandatory and voluntary) is substantial; however, accessing reliable data to report these numbers would require data sharing agreements with two agencies, so it is beyond the scope of this study.
[26] The letters typically inform customers that they are required to attend the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) session. The letters give contact information to schedule the REA or dates when REAs are held. Letters also inform customers that they may lose access to UI if they fail to attend the session.

> **LACK OF AWARENESS -** "If I had not been directed by UI, I would have continued to drive by this location and possibly sought out a company to find my job instead of realizing this resource." – *Job/training seeker*

Most customers—even those referred by friends or family—reported having had misperceptions about AJC services. Prior to visiting the center, these individuals thought it was an unemployment office or a type of temporary employment agency. They reported being surprised not only by the variety and quality of services, but especially by the fact that these services were all free. Even customers who came in with degrees or specialized training reported being surprised by the services from which they could benefit. The few dissatisfied customers with whom researchers spoke, typically expressed disappointment that the AJC did not provide immediate job placements and/or offer higher-paying jobs.

3.2.2   Pre-Visit: Customer State of Mind

AJCs provide services for diverse populations that include customers of all ages, education levels, and socioeconomic brackets. Many customers, including single parents, veterans, ex-offenders, people with disabilities, and other key customer groups, have particular needs. This means that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to meeting customers' needs. However, across this diverse population, all customers have one goal in common: gainful employment. In response to the study questions, customers reported experiencing stress that can be described as acute or chronic.[27] Acute stress is typically associated with a short term stressor such as loss of a job while chronic stress is longer lasting. Individuals who suffer from either form of stress may need help not only with employment but also with other daily demands, such as housing, food, or other basic needs.

> **EXTERNAL DEMANDS AND SCARCITY -** *"I have three kids at home, so it's so hard to sit here [at the AJC] and keep working. I'm really just looking for work…. When I was here last time, it was really hard. I had to leave at 6 pm with three cranky kids." –Job/training seeker*

Some stress experienced by some customers would be described by behavioral scientists as being rooted in "psychological scarcity." While tangible scarcity is the lack of needed resources (time, money, or anything else), psychological scarcity is a lack of available cognitive resources over a given time period.[28] Individuals who are facing tangible scarcity due to their unemployment are likely to find their cognitive capacities taxed by the mental demands of unemployment.[29] Specifically, determining where their next rent check, bus ticket, or meal will come from uses up customers' cognitive bandwidth. This cognitive load can reduce an individual's capacity to engage optimally with the AJC services. For example, a customer experiencing reduced cognitive bandwidth, or psychological scarcity, may have difficulty setting distant goals like continuing education for a better-paying future job. Thought processes like weighing future plans against immediate needs (for example, choosing a minimum wage job now over a better-paying job in the future) can also be difficult when someone is experiencing psychological scarcity. The cognitive and physical impact of customer stress may be part of the reason that customers reported feeling more positive about their AJC experience when multiple services were

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[27] http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-kinds.aspx

[28] Mullainathan, S., & Shafir, E. (2013). *Scarcity: Why having too little means so much*. New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

[29] Mani, A., Mullainathan, S., Shafir, E., & Zhao, J. (2013). Poverty impedes cognitive function. *Science*, *341*(6149), 976-980.

housed at a center, enrollment procedures were streamlined, hours were flexible, and guidance was personalized.

3.2.3   Reception Staff Set the Stage

Customers consistently cited the quality of their interactions with AJC staff as a major influence on their experience overall, and as a primary reason why they would, or would not, recommend the AJC to friends and family. If reception staff are warm and responsive when customers enter the AJC—for instance, greeting customers by making eye contact and promptly directing them to an appropriate location or action (e.g., signing in) – it is expected that this can not only increase efficiency of the center processes, but it can also reduce first-time customers' feelings of ambiguity and the associated stress. Several repeat customers described how reception staff would grow personal relationships with them, often coming to know them by name. This individuation and familiarity is particularly meaningful to customers who reported experiencing marginalization in their daily lives and having feared marginalization in the AJC. Such individuals included persons with criminal backgrounds or disabilities.

> **THE IMPORTANCE OF STAFF INTERACTION -** *"At first I didn't want to come down here, but then I met so many people who were in the same predicament as me. Everyone was helping everyone out with his or her applications and giving ideas. I really enjoyed it." – Job/training seeker*

All nine centers position their reception staff behind a desk or podium near the front entrance. As a result, the initial interaction of job/training seekers with the AJC begins with the reception staff, immediately upon entering the center. One center had recently implemented an "Apple store approach": Two to five reception staff stood near the front entrance, with tablets, ready to welcome customers. Before implementing this approach, this AJC often had a line of waiting customers stretching out the door of the center.

> **FIRST-TIME EXPERIENCE -** *"It's my first day here, just using the computer lab. They are making me feel comfortable, [so] I am excited to see what they can help me out with." – Job/training seeker*

3.2.4   Sign-In and Registration
All nine AJCs require job/training seekers to provide the following at sign-in:

- First and last name

- Time of visit

- Veteran status

- Reason for visit (access to resource room, workshop attendance, meeting with WIOA staff, etc.)

At least five of the nine centers also require customers to provide their Social Security number (SSN). Many job/training seekers with whom researchers spoke were uncomfortable providing their SSN at the front desk. To help mitigate this concern, four centers provide an electronic means for customers to enter their SSN, such as a kiosk, keyboard, or tablet. Two centers require customers to show their right-to-work documents: an official picture ID and either a Social Security card or U.S. passport. Once staff have verified these documents, the job/training seeker can become a "member" at the center. Membership is required for access to resources and programs, including the resource room. For customers who cannot provide these documents, the centers offer a one-time day pass.

Reception staff are responsible for ensuring that all job/training seekers, particularly those new to the center, have a complete overview of the center's services and resources. AJC staff try to ensure that the center's resources are communicated through a variety of methods, including posters, leaflets, calendars, group orientations, and one-on-one discussions. Seven of the nine centers provide informal "mini-orientations": Staff at the front desk provide a brief one-on-one overview of the resources and workshops. Where applicable, reception staff use the center's paper takeaway handouts, which list resources, programs, and workshops, as a guide during this conversation.

Two of the nine centers also give new customers a welcome packet, which contains a calendar of events, lists of programs, flyers about upcoming job fairs, and other local community information. One of these centers also has a volunteer "concierge" who greets new customers at the reception desk, walks them to the computer lab, and discusses each document in the packet. At the other center, packet materials are color-coded so staff and customers can refer, for example, to the "yellow sheet" rather than to "the WIOA sheet." This can help reduce confusion about receiving services as most customers are not familiar with the different laws and funding streams associated with AJC services. When researchers spoke with customers at the centers with welcome packets, all of the customers said the packets were helpful in providing a broad view of center resources and programs. Customers at these sites also said that they liked being able to take the information home to review on their own time.

All first-time job/training seekers are encouraged, but not required, to register in the state's job bank system. Registration *is* a requirement for customers receiving UI benefits. At each of the nine centers, job/training seekers who were computer literate told researchers that they used the state job bank system and were comfortable doing so at the AJC and at home. Conversely, customers with limited computer skills told researchers that accessing the website was difficult, especially at home.

Job/training seekers and center staff discussed the issue of privacy (or lack thereof) during the sign-in or enrollment process. Customers are asked—orally, electronically, or on paper, depending on the center—to share information that can include their phone number, address, SSN, veteran status, and disability status. At centers that ask customers to state the last four digits of their SSN aloud, several customers expressed concern. Beyond sign-in and registration, customers discussed the difficulty of sharing information such as criminal history, trauma, or abuse, without adequate privacy. Often privacy issues are an unfortunate consequence of an open floor plan intended to foster staff and customer communication.

3.2.5   Orientation

Seven of the nine centers require or actively encourage new or newly returning customers to attend an orientation to learn about center resources and programs. At three of these centers, orientation is done at the customer's convenience, through a self-guided PowerPoint presentation available on computers in the resource room, or, in the case of one center, in a designated welcome center with its own computers. First-time job/training seekers customers must watch the presentation and select programs they would like to learn more about. Once the presentation is complete, a staff member sits with the customer to review the eligibility criteria of the programs the customer has selected. If the customer is still interested, the staff member walks him or her to the appropriate program staff member. When possible, the program staff member enrolls the customer on the spot.

The other four centers provide 10–15-minute staff-led group orientations. These orientations are held at specific dates and times, which are posted in advance on center calendars. After an orientation

presentation, staff meet briefly one-on-one with each customer to discuss his or her specific needs, as well as program services, eligibility, and next steps. This meeting can occur immediately after the group orientation or on a separate occasion. All of the customers with whom researchers spoke said they enjoyed learning about the center's resources, programs, and workshops. Many were pleasantly surprised by the range of services provided. One customer said, "The center's services blew my mind. I didn't even know about the [availability of] housing assistance."

3.2.6   Further Interaction with Center Staff

Typically, AJC job/training seekers interact with several different center staff, depending on the level of service they are receiving. Regardless of the services received, job/training seekers with whom researchers spoke were overwhelmingly positive about their interactions with center staff. Most customers said center staff were highly trustworthy and helpful. One said, for example, that a staff member "answered questions I didn't even know I had." However, a few customers expressed frustration. They perceived that they had received inaccurate information from reception staff.

> **KUDOS FOR CENTER STAFF -** *"People are very nice! More than helpful. [Staff] try to help you and give you ideas." —Job/training seeker*

In discussions and focus groups, job/training seekers said that they learned most about AJC services and programs through one-on-one conversations with staff. Several customers in focus groups described initiating such conversations and expressed frustration about "having to" do so. These customers said that a service provider should initiate questions with each customer to determine what next steps or programs would be most beneficial. None of the customers who expressed this frustration were receiving intensive or individualized services.

> **STAFF DIRECTION -** *"If a person was able to sit down with me [and say], 'We are going to do this, this, and that, this is what we are shooting for,'... But that's not happening. You are kind of wandering aimlessly."*
> *—Job/training seeker*

Beyond the initial contact with center staff, interactions with resource room staff and case managers influence customers' perceptions of the center and the quality of their experiences. Customers perceived interactions with staff to be very positive when staff members could answer their questions or meet their needs in a timely fashion by, for example, offering prompt assistance at a resource room computer. Customers in all focus groups expressed gratitude for staff flexibility and responsiveness. For example, one participant said that her caseworker would accommodate her scheduling needs by holding discussions on the phone rather than in person. The few focus group participants who chose to tell researchers that they had a disability or were ex-offenders said that they were especially thankful for staff members who were consistently welcoming and supportive.

> **STAFF FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS -** *"My advisor called me at home to change my résumé for an employer interview. It saved me 40 minutes to just come to the center. I really enjoyed this. We fixed my résumé and I was ready to go." —Job/training seeker*

3.2.7   The Resource Room

All customers reported going to the center to use the computer resource room for such purposes as job searches, writing and printing résumés, and faxing materials to potential employers. For about half of the customers in each focus group, using the resource room was the primary reason for their visits. Despite the usefulness of the available resources, focus group participants perceived barriers that hindered their use of the resource room. The most frequently cited barriers were not allowing purses and bags, not permitting customers to use their own laptops, prohibiting children in the resource room, and time limits on the computers. Customers also reported distracting noise levels in the resource room. Socializing between customers was, according to focus group participants, the most frequent distraction. More than one customer said that, when staff speak with customers in the resource room, personal information is frequently audible.

> **RESOURCE ROOM NOISE -** *"I don't want to be overhearing other people's stories and problems. I want to concentrate on what I am doing!"—Job/training seeker*

At all of the centers, focus group participants said they used websites such as Monster.com or Indeed.com either to complement the state job bank website or as their main source for online job searching. Focus group members expressed frustration with state job sites that were difficult to navigate or had restrictive features. For example, most state sites will not allow an individual to have multiple profiles. Some sites are difficult to navigate if a customer is searching for work in multiple industries.

> **STATE JOB BANK WEBSITE -** *"They have information on the website, but I wish I had more insight on the website. I always have problems with it." –Job/training seeker customer*

4.   Employer Discussion Data

This section presents the findings from telephone discussions conducted with 11 employers. By discussing customer experience with a range of employers, the research team was able to gather information about their perceptions of, expectations for, and experiences with the AJCs. All employers participating in OJT were pleased with OJT-related services received at the AJC, while employers had mixed opinions on the usefulness of AJC pre-screening services and job fairs.

4.1 Initial Contact with AJC

In telephone interviews, employers reported having learned about their local AJC through various channels. Two-thirds of the 11 employers interviewed had heard about the center through word of mouth. Four employers found out about their local AJC after being contacted by an AJC business representative. Three others had a longstanding relationship with their AJC. These respondents said that they had been using the AJC since they started their current position, having, as one put it, "picked up where the [previous incumbent in his job] left off." Two of the respondents who had been using center services for years could not recall their first interaction with the center. Employers said that, after initial contact, they typically met an AJC staff member in person to discuss their business and staffing needs. This meeting lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, according to employer respondents. Employers recalled that the center staff member reviewed AJC resources such as on-the-job training (OJT),

candidate pre-screening, and employer participation in job fairs and on-site recruitment. All employers were asked to register on the state job bank system.

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FIRST MEETING - *"It was a great first meeting. I wasn't aware of all the services the center had to offer."*
–Employer

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4.2   On-The-Job Training Program

Seven employers said they had used, or were currently using, the OJT program.[30] During initial OJT set-up, employers and center staff discussed the training activities and duration. Employer respondents described the process of establishing OJT as lengthy, but not cumbersome. All participating employers praised their AJC business representatives. One employer who had a well-established OJT program said, "I don't think about the paperwork anymore. [The AJC staff member] comes to my office and all I have to do is review and sign." All seven employers said that they appreciated the OJT program and that they had hired permanent employees through the program. One employer said that 10% of his workforce (10 individuals) had come through the OJT program in the past two years.

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THE VALUE OF OJT - *"The OJT program is the biggest thing that saves us the most money."*
—Employer

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4.3   Job/Training Seeker Pre-Screening

Employers had mixed opinions on the usefulness of AJC pre-screening services. Six employers said they were currently using, or had used, these services. One of these employers, the owner of a very small business, said the AJC's "pre-screening and recruitment is really helpful. The center will do a lot of work for me, which helps me in my HR role." Another employer agreed, saying that the center was meticulous in its pre-screening, so that it sent only qualified job/training seekers. Other employers (17% of those using the service) had not found any qualified candidates through the process. They explained that the center had sent several applicants, but none were a good fit. One employer felt the AJC did not properly pre-screen applicants, because the applicants sent expected a salary higher than what was offered. One employer suggested that the AJC set clear expectations with job/training seekers about salary and job activities, so that the employer and the job/training seeker would be on the same page.

4.4   Job Fairs and On-Site Recruitment

Eight employers had participated in their center's job fairs, had set up a booth at the AJC to conduct on-site recruitment, or both. These employers had mixed reviews on both activities. Two of the employers who had participated in job fairs found them useful. One employer said he was able to hire five employees from a single fair. Another employer described job fairs as an opportunity to meet other employers and potential partners as well as potential applicants. Two employers said that the job fairs were not sufficiently well attended. One speculated that the lack of attendance resulted from poor promotion. In response to low job fair attendance, one employer worked with center staff to conduct an

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[30] OJT takes place in a normal working situation. Usually an experienced employee or professional trainer serves as the instructor, using hands-on training to help employees learn to effectively perform their job.

open house at the employer's location. Fourteen job/training seekers attended. The employer said it was very helpful for potential candidates to "get a taste of what [the company] does."

> **POSITIVE ASSESSMENT -** *"Overall I think [the AJC] does a really good job. I love the contact I work with at the center. I could sit here all day and tell you all the wonderful things about my point of contact... He really cares and goes above and beyond to help us out every single time."—Employer*

4.5 State's Job Bank Website

Like job/training seeker customers, employer customers are required to register on the state's job bank website prior to receiving center benefits. Also like job/training seeker customers, the employer customers with whom researchers spoke had mixed views of the websites. One employer described the state website as "cumbersome." Another said, "We haven't had much success getting applicants through the website, but I post jobs because it's one of the requirements." Another employer explained, "At first [the website] had some issues because the applicants did not match the skill set we wanted. We made some changes. It was trial and error, but we're set now." One employer liked the state website and said the state employment office was "doing really great things."

5.   AJC Staff Discussion Data

By discussing customer experience with a variety of staff members at each AJC, the research team learned about the staff members' perceptions of customer experience best practices and challenges. In no case did staff contradict what researchers heard from customers. This finding suggests that staff in these nine AJCs sites have a good grasp of what their customers experience.

5.1 AJC Staff's Perceptions of Customers' Impressions of AJCs

While staff felt that the majority of customers found benefit in the AJC, staff reported some customers saying that the AJC was "not for them." Many customers noted that they had not been aware of the level of services and support offered by the AJCs. Once engaged, these customers often return for more intensive services. However, some customers felt they already knew how to do things like write a résumé or network professionally. According to staff, these customers in particular perceived that the AJC could not link them to mid- to upper-level high-paying jobs. However, later these same customers told staff that AJC services and events, such as job fairs and workshops, were beneficial.

Staff across centers indicated that they would like to do more systematic outreach and branding for the centers in order to reduce false expectations and increase customer participation. However, staff at each of the participating AJCs reported having no budget to implement any widespread outreach. Two of the larger centers reported on-the-ground efforts to network with local organizations. For example, veterans representatives at these centers reached out to veterans in their communities through email lists provided by other veterans organizations. Furthermore, staff at these larger AJCs described participating in local high school career fairs as a means of outreach.

5.2   Staff-Customer Interactions

Reception staff at all centers stressed the importance of welcoming customers and making them feel comfortable. When asked how they accomplished this goal, all used similar examples such as smiling and asking how they could assist the customer. Many staff members also discussed relating to rather than judging job/training seekers. Some center staff members cited their own past unemployment and their experience as a customer of the center.

Staff across AJCs told the research team that some reception staff grow personal relationships with repeat customers, often coming to know them by name. As was explained by customers, this personalization and familiarity is particularly meaningful to customers with employment barriers such as limited English proficiency or disabilities. At the same time, AJC staff noted that customers with barriers that affect their computer literacy require a significant amount of assistance.

Many non-reception staff members discussed the challenge of providing quality one-on-one assistance while meeting case management responsibilities. To address this challenge, staff at some centers said that they dedicate part of each day or week to such case management activities as completing paperwork, scheduling customer meetings, following up with customers, tracking down disconnected youth, following up with employers, and checking in with AJC partners. At seven centers, one or more staff members reported having high caseloads. Several staff across AJCs said they were regularly responsible for more than a hundred cases.

Staff members at all AJCs discussed the importance of striking a balance between, on the one hand, streamlining activities to reduce customer burden and, on the other, reviewing program details with customers to explain unavoidable burden. A manager at one center summed it up as follows: "The eligibility [process] can be invasive, and documentation required up front can create an adversary relationship, which can [lead customers to] a negative opinion." According to staff, many job/training seekers who enroll in multiple programs are unaware that the programs have separate funding streams, which may have different eligibility and paperwork requirements. Customers then become frustrated with what appears to be redundant paperwork. To alleviate these frustrations, staff stressed the importance of transparency in explaining the funding processes and program requirements. "Once this is explained, the customers are more forgiving," said one. Staff also said that they often allowed job/training seekers to come back another day to complete program enrollment requirements.

6.   Implications and Potential Strategies for Improvement

This section provides a brief description of key potentially promising practices and strategies to improve the customer experience, for individual job/training customers and for employer customers, based on this exploratory study. These strategies include both existing practices that appear promising and ideas for developing new practices. Many are drawn from behavioral science and address specific behavioral barriers that customers may be facing.

6.1   Pre-visit: Common Themes and Strategies for Improvement

Almost all job/training seekers reported having either no expectations or inaccurate expectations about what the center offered and what would happen once they arrived there. "Uncertainty and ambiguity aversion," or a preference for known over unknown risks, might reduce the likelihood of a new

customer going to a center.[31] Furthermore, not knowing what to prepare for a first visit might negatively affect a customer's experience once there. The strategies listed below could be tested to determine if they reduce pre-visit uncertainty and increase knowledge of and willingness to use the AJCs.

1. ***Revise or augment the invitation letter that job/training seekers receive.***
    Revising Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment letters or sending a supplemental letter could help to set clear expectations and improve customers' emotional responses to receiving these letters. By highlighting all the benefits and free services, programs, and job-search tools at AJCs, these letters could use a "gain-framed" message to motivate people to visit the center. Additionally, revising the layout of the letters to highlight critical content and specific next steps may increase the likelihood that individuals attend to and remember relevant information.

2. ***Initiate a social referral program.***
    Because so much knowledge of AJCs is spread by word of mouth, a social referral program could capitalize on these interpersonal connections to clarify expectations and encourage uptake of center resources. If current customers (both job/training seekers and employers) had a sheet of information about the center that they could share with friends or colleagues, this social process of referral could reduce uncertainty and stigma around using the center, increase the accuracy of expectations, and encourage uptake. Referral cards or information pages could invite new customers to the center using an incentive, such as entry into a raffle or the opportunity to "earn" an individualized tutorial or training. These referral cards or pages should also include a call to action for the newly referred customer, such as providing a phone number to call or an invitation to schedule a first visit.

6.2   Strategies for Improving Center Services

Many job/training seekers and staff indicated that customers are not aware of all the resources and services available at the center. Job seekers/trainers indicated confusion and frustration about how to identify which services they were eligible for or whom to ask about possible services. However, merely knowing information does not always increase the likelihood that a person will act on it. The following strategies could be tested to determine if they reduce uncertainty and frustration while increasing program and service uptake.

1. ***Simplify the registration and check-in process for job/training seekers.***
    Where possible, the registration process could be streamlined and automated. For example, if registration could be all digital, so that customers could fill in necessary information online at home prior to their visit, they might experience less uncertainty about required documentation and fewer hassles with initial registration and subsequent visits. Moreover, completing this task online prior to a first visit could make customers' intention to go to the center more concrete and increase their commitment.

2. ***Streamline the registration process for employers and allow for more control over digital tools.***
    Employers reported wanting more control over their website job listings and the screening process for job candidates. In particular, they wanted to be able to access job/training seekers'

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[31] Fox, C. R., & Tversky, A. (1995). Ambiguity aversion and comparative ignorance. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *110*(3), 585-603.

applications directly themselves. Reducing the hassle of relying on center employees to serve as middlemen who receive and then share all the applications from the state-run online portals would simplify the process and should improve employers' customer experience. Not only might this simplification increase the efficiency of the system, but it might also provide employers with a feeling of control and personalization that could increase their engagement with the AJC.

3. ***Offer short, targeted orientation sessions that focus exclusively on introducing AJC services and resources.***
   Shorter orientation sessions that provide an overview of services to all job/training seekers could increase accurate knowledge about all the resources available at the center and reduce uncertainty about eligibility requirements. By being open to all job/training seekers and focusing exclusively on introducing services, this shorter orientation could be easier to fit into customers' schedules. Short, concise orientations would maintain customers' focused attention. Additional relevant information could be provided afterward. An alternative to hosting regular in-person orientation sessions might be to adopt an existing practice: self-directed digital orientations in a dedicated area of the resource room, followed by one-on-one meetings with staff to help connect job/training seekers with appropriate services immediately. This self-directed format would reduce the hassle of having to return at a certain time for a group orientation.

4. ***Create a one-page document with a brief overview of all services.***
   A one-page document like the one suggested for social referrals could list all services, with a short, one-sentence description of each and a link or direction for learning more. Providing such a document to all job/training seekers could reduce confusion, increase knowledge of services, and motivate job/training seekers to act to access those services. Many centers provide new customers with in-depth information in informational packets or folders. However, these packets can lead to information overload—customers may be unable to attend to salient information because they are receiving too much information all at once, before they can take any action. If these one-page documents were constantly updated and available throughout the center, job/training seekers could access them as needed, including closer to the time when they can act on the information.

   Similarly, a one-page document of all services relevant to employers could be developed. Most employers indicated a lack of awareness about the ways in which AJCs can help them recruit and screen candidates. A simplified listing could help employers identify which services are most relevant to their needs.

5. ***Remove eligibility barriers by opening services to everyone.***
   At all of the centers, many job/training seekers were confused not only about what services were available but also which services had eligibility requirements and whether they met those requirements. Although funding and policy parameters might limit the ability to expand services, allowing all interested job/training seekers to access all intensive services could reduce their uncertainty, make the atmosphere more welcoming, and improve job/training seekers' motivation to participate fully at the center.

6.3   Strategies for Improving the Customer Experience Beyond the Visit

Job/training seekers, employers, and staff have many demands on their time and energy. Job/training seekers are experiencing the stress and anxiety of unemployment. Employers are trying to create and

maintain a base of excellent employees while continuing to run their businesses. Staff are managing dozens of cases at once. Casework involves not just meetings with a job/training seeker but all of the associated paperwork and follow-up with the job/training seeker and employers. Two possible means of planning and executing all parties' goals, which could be tested to determine if they are more effective, are outlined below.

1. *Create a personalized calendar for job/training seekers.*
   Breaking up big goals, like finding employment, into smaller concrete sub-steps increases the likelihood of achieving the big goals. Having job/training seekers use a personal calendar to plan for these sub-steps on the way to their bigger goal can help maximize their use of center resources. Though paper-based calendars could serve this function, a digital calendar that automatically updates or that can be linked to text message reminders for upcoming events and sub-goals would be most effective. As part of this effort, job/training seekers could be provided with examples of reasonable timelines to help reduce frustration and increase the likelihood of achieving their goals. For example, many job/training seekers said that they thought they should be able to get a job in their first visit but realized later that this expectation was unrealistic. As smaller steps are achieved on the path to finding employment, customers can benefit from visible feedback on their progress. Positive rewards for task completion, such as badges or some other form of positive feedback, could help reinforce goal setting and achievement.

2. *For staff, set aside time for "busy-work," incorporate set breaks, and centralize calendars.*
   At some centers, case managers reported that center management set aside specific blocks of time for completing paperwork and filing tasks. Having this time dedicated to such tasks helped to alleviate some of the stress on their schedules. Similarly, at one center that was open late one day of the week, staff had bi-weekly Fridays off to compensate for this time put in to accommodate job/training seekers. Both of these practices were appreciated by staff and contributed to their ability to manage their caseloads. In addition to setting aside staff time in these ways, centers might also implement a centralized digital staff calendar. This calendar could be personalized to staff needs and goals in a way similar to the personalized calendar and goal-setting tool for customers. It could also be a way for supervisors to provide positive reinforcement for staff as they achieve certain goals.

7.   Increasing Understanding of the Customer Experience

This exploratory study, applied a behavioral science lens to multiple data collection methods, including a literature scan; discussions with AJC staff; discussions, surveys, and focus groups with job/training seekers; and discussions with employer customers, provides a foundation for understanding what the customer experience is, in AJCs. Data collection at nine brick-and-mortar AJCs and two state AJC websites yielded the following themes:

- Generally, customers appear to have positive experiences at the AJCs.
- Individual, one-on-one interactions with staff can shape a customer's whole experience.
- New customers do not know what to expect from, or have misconceptions about, their AJCs.
- Many customers are not aware of the full extent of AJC services.
- Program registration and enrollment processes and requirements can feel overwhelming or arbitrary to customers.

- Most employer customers have one point of contact at the center who caters to their specific needs.

This information about how customers experience AJCs suggests avenues for further research, including quick turnaround studies, using behavioral science-based adjustments that might enhance the customer experience. The findings suggest potential changes that could be tested at three different stages of the customer experience: Pre-visit, during-visit, and post-visit. Some of those changes reflect promising practices observed at one or more of the study AJCs. Those potential changes are as follows:

- Revise or augment the invitation letter that job/training seekers receive.

- Initiate a social referral program.

- Simplify the registration/check-in process for job/training seekers.

- Simplify the registration process for employers, and allow more control over digital tools.

- Offer short, targeted orientation sessions that focus exclusively on introducing AJC services and resources.

- Create a one-page document with a brief review of all AJC services.

- Remove eligibility barriers by opening services to everyone.

- Create a personalized calendar for job/training seekers.

- For staff, set aside time for "busy-work," incorporate set breaks, and centralize calendars.

The AJCs that participated in this study were instrumental in allowing researchers to begin building a deeper understanding of how DOL can support AJCs in enhancing the customer experience – and ultimately, improving customer employment outcomes.