Digital Marketing Interim Evaluation: Intervention Cycle 3

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Executive Summary

Description

This report offers an interim evaluation of the third cycle of interventions undertaken by Virginia's Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) as part of the Digital Marketing grant program, sponsored by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. These interventions took place during the 90-day period beginning at 12:01 a.m. on May 1, 2020 and ending at midnight on July 30, 2020.

We focused Cycle 3 around three problems:

- The decline in the number of child support cases seen by DCSE and other child support programs[1]

- The COVID-19 pandemic, which had sudden and far-reaching effects on the operational activities of DCSE and on the apparent needs of the people served by the program

- Uncertainty within DCSE and the larger child support community about the kinds of digital engagement methods that could be sustained in the absence of the additional funds provided by the grant

In response we developed four related research questions:

1. What paid and organic digital marketing strategies drive positive public engagement with child support services?
2. Can promoting child support applications increase the number of new applications for those services?
3. Will the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic lead child support families to seek DCSE's services to review and adjust child support orders, reduce child support debt on TANF cases, and refer noncustodial parents to employment services?
4. Can a marketing campaign that emphasizes search advertising, supported by display and social media platforms, form the basis for a sustainable, cost-effective approach to paid digital outreach?

We attempted to answer these questions through the six primary components of Cycle 3:

1. Developing, executing, and monitoring a paid advertising campaign centered on search ads but integrating social media and display advertising as well

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[1] Throughout this report, we use "child support" to mean the federal program authorized by Title IV-D of the Social Security Act: https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04/0400.htm.

2. Coordinating the paid social media with DCSE's ongoing organic social media messaging to unite the two campaigns and hopefully encourage other users to share positive content related to child support in Virginia

3. Creating six-second videos for use as ads on Facebook, Instagram, Google Display, YouTube, and Snapchat

4. Promoting through both paid and organic channels at least one three- to four-minute video explaining some aspect of Virginia's child support program (the how-to video)

5. Creating a webinar on the child support program for family law and mediation providers in Virginia that would be in part promoted through organic and social posts on LinkedIn

6. Recording and publishing a series of podcasts on child support topics

Table 1: Cycle Components, Goals, and Research Questions connects these components to our goals and research questions, while Table 2: Campaign Content Areas and Marketing Platforms ties the specific content areas we addressed in this cycle to the eight platforms we used to carry out this work.

Analysis of Results

Research Question 1

What kinds of paid and organic digital marketing strategies drive positive public engagement with child support services?

The results of Cycle 3 suggest that essentially all of the digital marketing approaches we took during this cycle (search and display advertising, paid and organic social media, a webinar for family law attorneys, and a podcast series) can drive positive engagement with the program. The results that support this conclusion include:

- Our paid campaigns received nearly 40,000 clicks in Cycle 3 and led directly to at least 451 conversions—defined in this context as the submission of a contact form on our main project webpage (supportVAkids.com). This translates into an overall cost per click of $0.65 and a cost per conversion of $57.06.

- Our short videos and our longer how-to video earned over 6 million views. YouTube users viewed 40,952,258 seconds (or 11,375 hours) of DCSE videos at an average cost of $1.25 per hour. About 7,000 hours of viewing can be attributed to our how-to video alone.

- Our organic social media campaign continued to steadily broaden its reach, particularly on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. By the end of its first year, DCSE's accounts on those channels had surpassed the follower counts of other, much more established accounts for local and state-level child support programs.

Research Question 2

Can promoting child support applications increase the number of new applications for those services?

While data related to Cycle 2, which we plan to include in our final evaluation, could support the claim that digital marketing methods can increase applications for child support—particularly for Never Assistance cases—we did not see clear evidence of that in Cycle 3. The number of new cases opened from May through August 2020 fell by 25 percent over the same period in 2019 across all case types and by 12 percent for Never Assistance cases.

We attribute at least part of that to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed DCSE offices and Virginia's Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courts and led to economic upheaval and froze many people's living arrangements in place. These factors, combined with the economic effects of federal stimulus payments and expanded unemployment insurance, could have made custodial parents less like to apply for services.

Research Question 3

Will the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic lead families to seek DCSE's services to review and adjust child support orders, reduce child support debt on TANF cases, and refer noncustodial parents to employment services?

We found no evidence that demand for paternity establishment or review and adjustment services increased during COVID-19 or that paid and organic digital marketing efforts bolstered their numbers, despite the relatively large volume of digital conversions associated with those programs. The 63 percent decline in paternity establishment can be reasonably attributed to the suspension of in-office customer service in DCSE offices (where DCSE conducts many of its DNA tests for paternity) and the courts (where many tests are ordered), as well as a general avoidance of medical testing. The decline in the number of requests for review and adjustment of orders cannot be explained as clearly, especially given the somewhat streamlined process DCSE put in place during the cycle.

At the same time, enrollments in DCSE's Family Engagement program more than doubled over the same period in 2019. Given that our Family Engagement ads received the smallest number of conversions in Cycle 3 and relatively few paid ad impressions it seems difficult to attribute

that increase to our efforts, though perhaps the paid and organic campaigns had a word-of-mouth effect that the data does not capture.

Data on enrollments in DCSE's TANF debt compromise program were not available for analysis.

Research Question 4
> Can a marketing campaign that emphasizes search advertising, supported by display and social media platforms, form the basis for a sustainable, cost-effective approach to paid digital outreach?

The results of Cycle 3 show that our best practices model—which put search advertising at its center but also used remarketing campaigns on display and social media platforms to amplify its messaging—offers an approach that DCSE and other child support programs could use going forward.

Our Google Search ads apparently led to 81 percent of this cycle's 451 conversions. The remaining conversions in Cycle 3 can be attributed to three of the four remaining elements of the best practices campaign: Facebook (69 conversions), Google Display (11), and Instagram (6).

1.   Background

1.A.   Grant Purpose

The Digital Marketing grant program, sponsored by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, is a 24-month demonstration project with the goal of researching how digital marketing may help the child support program more effectively reach and serve families. In September 2018, OCSE awarded funds to 14 child support agencies to test digital marketing approaches and partnerships to reach parents that could benefit from child support services and create or improve two-way digital communication and engagement with parents.

1.B.   Problems

In Cycle 3 we responded to three problems:

- The decline in the number of child support cases

- The COVID-19 pandemic, which had sudden and far-reaching effects on the operational activities of DCSE and on the apparent needs of the people served by the program

- Uncertainty within DCSE and the larger child support community about the digital engagement methods that could be sustained in the absence of the additional funds provided by the grant

1.B.1.   The Declining Caseload

The child support program in Virginia faces a challenge common to other programs across the country: how to bridge the gap between the decline in the number of cases in its caseload and the ongoing need for its services demonstrated through analyses of population data. This intervention attempted to bring these two sets of data points into better alignment.

Between federal fiscal years 2013 and 2018 the number of total child support cases in Virginia with either current or past child support due declined by 10.8 percent, or over 35,000 cases. Nearly 20,000 of those cases (or 55 percent of the total decline) came from Former Assistance. Cases classified as Never Assistance fell by less than 5 percent (approximately 6,000 cases) over the same time, suggesting that there remains a relatively robust and ongoing need for child support services among this portion of the caseload.

An analysis of Census data and caseload data from the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) gives a sense of how significant that need might be. According to Census data for 2015, approximately one in four children nationwide had at least one parent out of the

home and appeared to qualify for child support services.[2] Caseload data for a recent comparable period, Virginia's 2016 fiscal year, showed that approximately one in five Virginia children were receiving child support services from DCSE. Presuming that the nationwide figure is roughly representative of Virginia, the difference between the overall need and the caseload data is approximately 93,000 children. Adjusted for Virginia's average of 1.2 children per child support case, this yields a potential increase of approximately 77,000 new child support cases, or 26 percent, over 2018 levels.

More current U.S. Census data suggest that the gap between families eligible for services and those participating in the child support program may be widening. According to American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, there were between 540,416 and 561,162 children under the age of 18 in single-parent households in Virginia in 2017.[3] DCSE caseload data identified 301,284 children under 21 in the DCSE caseload in federal fiscal year 2017. That leaves a minimum of roughly 240,000 children in Virginia who could presumably be eligible for child support services.[4]

Based on market research conducted by other child support programs and broader scholarship on the public perceptions of child support,[5] we hypothesized that one reason for this gap in service was that many members of the public either remain unaware of the federal child support program or have significant misconceptions about it. We believed that digital engagement methods could increase awareness about both the program's existence and how it actually delivers services to families in Virginia and elsewhere.

DCSE leadership—particularly Craig M. Burshem, Deputy Commissioner of State Programs for the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS)[6]—was largely responsible for defining and prioritizing the project team's focus on increasing program participation, particularly among Never Assistance families, though their collective awareness of declining caseloads was also informed by other discussions and research in the child support community.

1.B.2.   The COVID-19 Pandemic
On March 23, 2020, at roughly the midpoint between the end of Cycle 2 and the beginning of Cycle 3, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam issued his initial statewide closure of non-essential

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[2] T. Grall (2018). *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2015*. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports. https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p60-262.pdf.
[3] U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.
[4] Even this large number may understate the need. Among other factors, the mismatch in the age ranges between the two measures (under 18 for ACS data, under 21 for DCSE data) would necessarily mean there are actually even fewer children under 18 on the DCSE caseload.
[5] Perhaps the best-known study of public perceptions of child support was conducted by the public relations agency Ogilvy on behalf of California's IV-D program in 2018.
[6] At the time of the original grant application, Deputy Commissioner Burshem was the Director of DCSE.

businesses and K–12 schools in response to the COVID-19 virus. For the project team the governor's order cemented a growing sense that the social and economic landscape of Cycle 3 would likely differ greatly from those of previous cycles. But it was less clear whether we could or should attempt to address this new and still unclear landscape through the strictures of a grant.

We saw essentially three choices:

- Proceed with our existing plans

- Change our plans to accommodate anticipated changes

- Delay the execution of the cycle until the situation settles down

The idea of delaying the cycle was rejected fairly quickly, but the question of whether to modify our plans for Cycle 3 took some debate.

Staying the course would ensure our alignment with the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI[2]) paradigm of drawing on past results to directly shape our future plans.[7] It would also give us more time to tweak the results of our work on paid and organic marketing platforms that we had not previously used (YouTube, Snapchat, and LinkedIn) and to pursue the additional digital engagement elements planned for Cycle 3: podcasting and a webinar for legal service providers.

At the same time, we knew from previous cycles that the performance of digital advertising improves when audiences have a clear interest in their content. This is particularly true of the search ads that we planned to put at the center of our approach to Cycle 3.

Perhaps the economic and social crisis that appeared to be coming would make people less interested in opening a new child support case than in revisiting their existing ones. If so, making child support applications the primary focus of Cycle 3 might undercut the effectiveness of our work—and be a departure from the spirit of LI[2], which would seem to embrace a broader sense of "learning" than merely replicating earlier activities with some slight modifications.

With that in mind we changed our original approach and focus on four content areas:

- Applications

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[7] More information about the LI[2] paradigm is available in the original OCSE funding announcement. *Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program* (2018). Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement Program. Grant HHS-2018-ACF-OCSE-FD-1368. https://ami.grantsolutions.gov/files/HHS-2018-ACF-OCSE-FD-1368_0.pdf. The Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation (OPRE) provides additional details in *Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI2): Enhancing Programs and Improving Lives.* OPRE Report #2017-108. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/li2_brief_final_b508.pdf.

- The review and adjustment of existing child support orders

- Virginia's debt compromise program for child support arrears that accumulated while the custodial party or the noncustodial party's children were receiving benefits the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program[8]

- The employment support services available through DCSE's Family Engagement program

1.B.3. *The Sustainability of Digital Interventions*

The original announcement for this grant noted that funding for learning opportunities was made in part "to develop the capacity of the agency to continue digital outreach after the *Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program* grant has ended."[9]

In one sense the training provided to project staff has served the stated purpose of developing DCSE's capacity to continue to use digital outreach methods tested over the three cycles. In particular, training helped the program develop a stronger sense of the many forms that digital outreach can take and how to develop outreach strategies that emphasize the particular strengths of each method.

The grant itself also gave additional momentum to DCSE's development of an online child support application and smoothed the path for DCSE to establish its own organic social media presence on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn and revitalize an existing YouTube account. DCSE's willingness to support those organic approaches with staff hours should make those approaches sustainable, at least if present staffing levels remain the same.

However, like many grantees, DCSE also integrated paid marketing interventions into each cycle, and Cycles 1 and 2 suggested that the program could benefit from continuing that approach. Yet with our average monthly advertising expenditure of approximately $8,000, it seemed hard to imagine DCSE sustaining even before the pandemic, when child support budgets were relatively stable. The uncertainties brought by COVID-19 only sharpened the project team's sense that any budget we proposed to continue advertising needed to be as modest as possible. At the same time, it needed to be sufficient to meet public demand.

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[8] For simplicity we refer to this program elsewhere as the TANF debt compromise program. A description of Virginia's program, alongside other similar programs from other jurisdictions, is available in Aspen Institute and the Good+ Foundation (2020). "Reducing Arrears: Child Support Policy Fact Sheet." https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2020/09/ChildSupport_Arrears.pdf.

[9] See, among other places, page 6 of *Using Digital Marketing to Increase Participation in the Child Support Program* (2018).

To address this, the project team looked at the previous two cycles and identified the elements that had seemed to offer the clearest return on investment, as indicated by relatively low cost per conversion, among other factors.[10]

In Cycle 1 Google Search ads had an average cost per conversion of $18.37, if measured across the whole cycle, or $13.44 when the numerator (ad cost across the entire cycle) is adjusted to account for the period when we could not track conversions. Our cost per conversion for the Google Display ads during Cycle 1 was much higher, averaging $546.48 across the three campaign areas (Applications, Paternity, and Family Engagement), but the cost per conversion for the Paternity and Family Engagement campaigns fell for the segments of those campaigns that used remarketing[11]—dropping from $2,245.29 to $1,237.75 for ads from the Paternity campaign and from $489.40 to $344.57 for Family Engagement.

Our initial analysis of Cycle 2, described in section 3.III.B. of our second interim evaluation, suggested that costs per conversion were fairly high for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, averaging $64.75 per conversion across the three platforms. More recently we separated out the conversion results for Facebook and Instagram and determine that costs per conversion on those platforms in Cycle 2 were $115.65 and $89.94, respectively. Those costs fell significantly, however, when the goal of the ads was set to conversions rather than clicks. For that subset of Cycle 2 ads, the costs per conversion were $24.75 for Facebook and $27.51 for Instagram.[12]

Data limitations prevented us from conducting a similar analysis for Twitter, but it seemed reasonable to believe that a similar shift in our approach to ad targeting on that platform might bring similar results.

Based on these analyses, we created a best practices campaign for Cycle 3 that placed Google Search ads at the forefront, allowing us to guide interested users to the project website. Any visitors who failed to complete the contact form on the site during their initial visit could then receive remarketing ads from the Google Display Network, Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. The remarketing ads would be set to make conversions their objective[13] and would also be

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[10] In digital marketing terms, a conversion is the moment when a user carries out a desired action. Typically, this follows some other type of engagement with campaign content. The most common conversion for the ads placed in our first two cycles occurred when a user submitted the contact form on the main project webpage (suppotVAkids.com). The other possible conversion point was hitting the "APPLY" button the project's child support application gateway page (apply.supportVAkids.com).

[11] Remarketing is the practice of delivering ads to users who had previously visited an advertiser's website, clicked on their digital ad, or had some other digitally recorded interaction them or their content.

[12] These figures include Lead Form ads.

[13] Most digital marketing platforms allow advertisers to select objectives for ads (in this case, conversions) that are distinct from the user action that determines the cost of the ad (typically in our ads, a click). Our experience in Cycle 1 was that making the ad objective conversion improved conversion rates, though it sometimes led to worse performance according to other measures (such as the cost per click).

delivered to any users who visited any other DCSE webpages we updated with the necessary tracking tag.

We set the budget at $4,000, under the supposition that Virginia and other programs might be able to afford an annual expense of less than $50,000. This figure was also about half of our average monthly ad spend up to that point—and the project team had somewhat reluctantly come to accept that about half of the money we spent in Cycles 1 and 2 had gone to learning the lessons that the best practices campaign was meant to embody.

2. Intervention

2.A. Goals of the Overall Project

The primary purpose of the overall project was to gather information about strategies to close the apparent gap, described in section 1.B.1.   The Declining Caseload, between the number of families eligible for services and those currently connected to Virginia's child support program. To accomplish that, Virginia sought to increase requests for child support services, with a focus on applications for the core child support services (locating parents, establishing paternity and child support orders, collecting and distributing child support, and enforcing and adjusting child support orders) from custodial parents who are eligible for child support services but not currently connected to the child support program and who have never received public assistance benefits (Never Assistance).[14]

To achieve this goal, we mapped a three-part intervention that reflects a simplified version of the Transtheoretical Model of Change, originally described by James O. Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente.[15] While their model described five overall stages (Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Maintenance, and Relapse), we focused primarily on the three middle sections (Contemplation, Preparation, and Action).

Looking at those stages from the outside—that is, from the perspective of a program such as ours, rather than from the individual decision maker described in the model—we recast those sections into three intervention cycles, which we named Find (Cycle 1), Engage (Cycle 2), and Educate (Cycle 3).

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[14] We use "public benefits" here to refer to the small number of assistance programs, primarily TANF, that distinguish child support case types for purposes of reporting on Form OCSE-157. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/at_14_09b.pdf.

[15] J. O. Prochaska and C. DiClemente (1983). Stages and Processes of Self-Change of Smoking: Toward an Integrative Model of Change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 51(3): 390–5. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/16334721_Stages_and_Processes_of_Self-Change_of_Smoking_-_Toward_An_Integrative_Model_of_Change. For a fuller discussion of how the Transtheoretical Model of Change relates to our approach, see our original grant application ("Virginia Child Support Digital Marketing Demonstration").

Interim evaluations for DCSE's intervention during Cycles 1 and 2 were approved on March 30, 2020 and August 25, 2020, respectively. The focus of this report is Cycle 3 (Educate).

2.B. Goals of Intervention Cycle 3 (Educate)

In Cycle 3 we had three general goals:

1. Encouraging more families to apply for services child support program, as measured by the number of new cases opened by case type
2. Finding ways to use digital marketing methods to address the needs of Virginians growing out of the economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic
3. Developing an approach to paid digital marketing that could be successfully reproduced by DCSE and other child support programs once the grant has ended

2.C. Cycle 3 Research Questions

To evaluate how successfully our interventions supported the goals of Cycle 3, we sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What kinds of paid and organic digital marketing strategies drive positive public engagement with child support services?
2. Can promoting child support applications increase the number of new applications for those services?
3. Will the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic lead child support families to seek DCSE's services to review and adjust child support orders, reduce child support debt on TANF cases, and refer noncustodial parents to employment services?
4. Can a marketing campaign that emphasizes search advertising, supported by display and social media platforms, form the basis for a sustainable, cost-effective approach to paid digital outreach?

What do we mean by "positive public engagement"? Our views here are informed by an analysis from the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB). In a report titled "Digital Ad Engagement: An Industry Overview and Reconceptualization," the IAB describes three distinct categories of engagement: cognitive, emotional, and physical.[16] The authors see cognitive engagement as encompassing mental states related to taking in and acting on information, particularly

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[16] Internet Advertising Bureau (2013). "Digital Ad Engagement: An Industry Overview and Reconceptualization." https://www.iab.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IABAdEngagementWhitepaperDec2012FinalFinal.pdf. As the report notes from the perspective of 2013, "Nearly two decades into the growth of online advertising, 'engagement' is still one of the most used, yet least understood terms [in advertising]." Little appears to have changed in the intervening period, and examples of online marketers and researchers trying to grapple with the meaning of "engagement," and especially "digital engagement," remain plentiful.

"awareness, interest, and intention," that could be measured by such means as heart monitoring, eye tracking, and pupillometry. Emotional engagement considers a user's felt response. For some marketing techniques this might be gauged through surveys or focus groups. For others, such as the type of social media activities conducted in Cycle 2, it could be assessed by looking at the number of likes a post received or the content of comments on those posts. Physical engagement is perhaps the most commonly measured type of engagement, since it can be recorded through clicks, shares, and conversions.

The IAB authors distinguish between two points that are often conflated: the intangible qualities of individual user experiences, on the one hand, and the methods used to capture evidence of those experiences, on the other. Maintaining this disinclination is especially valuable in the context of a formal evaluation, where metrics can sometimes seem to represent the whole of engagement rather than merely the visible evidence of it. We have tried to follow their approach in this report.

2.D.   Development of Cycle 3 Intervention

2.D.1. Revising Initial List of Activities for Cycle 3

Plans for Cycle 3 were initially developed by DCSE leadership as part of the original grant application. In that iteration this cycle focused on increasing engagement with parents by first engaging with judges in Virginia's Juvenile and Domestic Relations district courts, which perform the judicial side of child support in the state. The plan had these components:

1. Distribute print collateral that was supposed to have been developed in Cycle 2 and brief Juvenile and Domestic Relations judges on the material and its distribution

2. Execute the text message service that the print collateral was intended to promote

3. Update any advertising placed in Cycle 1 and adjust the project website as needed

In February 2019 these plans were revised by the primary members of the digital marketing project team, which included DCSE project staff, the project's primary internal partner (the VDSS Public Affairs unit), and its outside vendor (Grays Peak Strategies). The consensus at the time was that introducing a print component into the outreach mechanism seemed at odds with the grant's overall focus on digital media. It also seemed harder to apply insights gleaned from an LI^2-based analysis of Cycles 1 and 2 to this initial vision of Cycle 3.

The project team kept outreach to legal professionals a part of Cycle 3 but to replace the focus on Juvenile and Domestic Relations judges with private Family Law attorneys. Instead of print materials, we would provide them with information about the child support program and how both they and their clients can benefit from DCSE services.

Initially, we planned to provide that information to family law attorneys using either a webinar or a podcast. When it became clear that the Virginia State Bar would more easily approve continuing legal education (CLE) credits for a webinar, we pursued that approach and continued working on a podcast, but with a focus on sharing information about the DCSE with a broader public.

By the end of Cycle 2 we were also planning to use Cycle 3 to test the best-practices intervention described above in section 1.B.3.   The Sustainability of Digital Interventions and to see how child support content fared on the video-driven social media sites YouTube and Snapchat. In particular, we hoped to create and promote how-to videos that made it easier for the public to navigate routine child support processes.

We also wanted to see whether the professional focus of the social media site LinkedIn could help the program reach its goals for this cycle.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led us to several more adjustments to our plans for Cycle 3, as detailed above in section 1.B.2. The COVID-19 PandemicBy the time the cycle started, our plan included seven general components, described in Table 1: Cycle Components, Goals, and Research Questions

Table 1: Cycle Components, Goals, and Research Questions

Cycle 3 Component	Associated Goal or Goals (Section 2.B.)	Associated Research Questions (Section 2.C.)
1. Developing, executing, and monitoring a paid advertising campaign centered on search ads but integrating social media and display advertising as well	1 (Applications) 2 (COVID response) 3 (Best practices)	1 (Digital marketing in general) 2 (Applications) 3 (COVID response) 4 (Best practices)
2. Coordinating the paid social media with DCSE's ongoing organic social media messaging to unite the two campaigns and hopefully encourage other users to share positive content related to child support in Virginia	1, 2	1, 2, 3
3. Creating six-second videos for use as ads on Facebook, Instagram, Google Display, YouTube, and Snapchat	1,2	1, 2, 3
4. Promoting through both paid and organic channels at least one three- to four-minute video explaining some aspect of Virginia's child support program (the how-to video)	1	1, 2
5. Creating a webinar on the child support child support program for family law and mediation providers in Virginia that would be in part promoted through organic and social posts on LinkedIn	1	1, 2

Cycle 3 Component	Associated Goal or Goals (Section 2.B.)	Associated Research Questions (Section 2.C.)
6. Recording and publishing a series of podcasts on child support topics	1, 2	1, 2, 3

As noted in Section 1.B.2.   The COVID-19 Pandemic the economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic led us to expand the kinds of content we planned to include in our organic and paid campaigns. By committing to producing the legal services webinar, the how-to video, and the podcast, we committed to promoting them using digital marketing tools. We also planned to use DCSE's organic social media to provide operational updates on DCSE offices—an important element during a period when a series of executive orders affected the availability of both public and private services.

In the end Cycle 3 encompassed nine primary content areas[17] and nine platforms. These are described below in Table 2: Campaign Content Areas and Marketing Platforms

Table 2: Campaign Content Areas and Marketing Platforms

Content Area	Facebook and Instagram (Paid and Organic)	Twitter (Paid and Organic)	Google Search (Paid)	Google Display (Paid)	YouTube (Paid)*	Snapchat (Paid)	LinkedIn (Paid and Organic)	Web†
Applications	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes
Review and Adjustment	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes
TANF Debt Compromise	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes
Employment Services	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Paternity Establishment						yes		yes
How-to Video					yes		yes	
Webinar							yes	
Podcast							yes	yes
DCSE Operational Updates (Organic Only)	yes	yes						yes

* On YouTube, the how-to video was also part of an organic campaign.
† The web category includes DCSE's main website (dss.virginia.gov/family/dcse/), the project website (supportVAkids.com), the supportVAkids-branded page on the podcast platform Anchor.fm (anchor.fm/childsupportva), and Virginia's paternity information webpage (VApaternity.com).

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[17] As noted below in section 2.E.2.c.   Organic Posts on LinkedIn, our posts to LinkedIn included content not used on other platforms.

To accommodate the additional content and acknowledge the straitened circumstances created by the pandemic, we revised the text of the main project webpage and the contact form that served as the primary mechanism for tracking advertising conversions across all three cycles. Another reason to revise the webpage was to ensure that the text on the page reflected significant themes in the ads and thus increase the advertising platforms' automated assessment of the relevance and overall quality of the ad.[18] (The updated text of the main project webpage and an image of the page are included as Appendix A: Updated Main Project Page)

For similar reasons, we also revised the project's dedicated contact form to allow users to select review and adjustment and TANF debt compromise as a reason for contacting DCSE. While most of these changes were made before Cycle 3 began, we made one change about a month into the cycle: replacing the phrase "Apply for" on the contact form with "Enroll in," which was the language used on our Search ads for applications.[19] (An image of the contact form and its text are included as Appendix B: Updated Contact Form)

2.D.2 Determining Approach to Geographic Targeting for Ads in the Paid Campaign
After Cycles 1 and 2, we reviewed the available data for indications that the ads delivered during those cycles might have been more productively targeted to areas other than the 40 localities[20] we originally selected. Our conclusion was that we saw evidence that paid marketing materials delivered to our targeted locations performed better than those distributed to all of Virginia.[21] The project team therefore continued to focus on those same 40 localities for most of the paid campaigns in Cycle 3.

Eventually, we deviated from this approach for part of our Twitter campaign and targeted all of Virginia, as noted below in section 2.E.1.b.3.Twitter

A more significant exception was LinkedIn. The already narrow targeting of family law attorneys and mediators and the statewide value of the marketing content planned for that platform—

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[18] Stephanie Mialki (2020) offers a concise guide to how various platforms assess relevance and overall ad quality: "Want a Good Quality Score on Every Ad Platform? Perfect the Post-Click Experience." Instapage. https://instapage.com/blog/good-quality-score.

[19] We chose the phrase "enroll in" after hearing a description of preliminary results from the Indiana IV-D program's Digital Marketing interventions. This change was also made in the text that appears in the videos created for this part of Cycle 3. We saw no clear benefit from making this change and will probably return to using "apply for" in future campaigns.

[20] A complete list of the 40 localities appears in Appendix E of the Communication Plan submitted as part of this grant, along with a detailed explanation of how we arrived at this particular set of 19 cities and 21 counties across Virginia.

[21] A full description of those analyses can be found in our interim evaluation for Cycle 2.

the webinar on Virginia's child support services—led us to deliver ads on that platform to users in every part of the state.

Meanwhile, content on our organic social media campaigns was fully public.

2.D.3. *Determining the Types of Images and Video to Be Used in the Paid and Organic Campaigns*

In Cycle 3, after a brief discussion of expanding our pool of stock photos for our paid campaigns, we reused the images initially tested in Cycles 1 and 2. The organic side continued to draw on new images and designs throughout the cycle, both to address the new content areas and to meet the more varied demands of offering updates on DCSE during the pandemic.

Our plans for video in Cycle 3 fell into three categories:

- Adapting elements of videos created for Cycle 3 so they fit the new advertising parameters for Snapchat and YouTube

- Creating new videos on content areas new to Cycle 3 (review and adjustment, TANF debt compromise, paternity and employment services) and more in line with the upbeat, playful tone associated with Snapchat

- Developing a series of how-to videos to explain basic child support processes

These videos were planned for use by the paid campaigns. The organic campaigns used only the how-to video.

2.D.4. *Creating Content Calendars for the Organic and Paid Campaigns*

For most of Cycle 2, the organic campaign (developed and implemented entirely by DCSE staff) used the online project management tool Asana for the development, review, and scheduling of their posts. Meanwhile, the paid campaign (developed and implemented largely by vendor staff, with oversight by DCSE and VDSS) used an Excel spreadsheet for those same purposes, in part so all aspects of the paid campaign, including its budgeting tool, could be in the same place.

We continued essentially these same practices in Cycle 3. The only notable difference was that we moved from a locally stored Excel spreadsheet to a Google Sheet that stayed in the cloud so multiple project members could update or annotate it.

2.E. Cycle 3 Description

As explained above in section 2.D.1. Revising Initial List of Activities for Cycle 3, Cycle 3 of our project had six major components:

1. A test of a best practices model for paid advertising centered on search ads but integrating social media and display advertising as well

2. Organic social media messaging campaigns on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube posting messages largely reflective of the paid campaign's content areas

3. Creating six-second videos on:

   - Child support applications

   - The review and adjustment of child support orders

   - DCSE's TANF debt compromise program

   - Family Engagement services related to employment

   - Paternity establishment through an acknowledgment of paternity (rather than through genetic testing, as with Cycle 1)

4. The development and organic and paid promotion of at least one three- to four-minute video explaining some aspect of Virginia's child support program (the how-to video)

5. A webinar for family law and mediation providers in Virginia on child support services

6. A podcast series on child support–related topics

2.E.1. Testing a Best Practices Model for Child Support Advertising

The best practices model we developed for Cycle 3, described above in section 1.B.3.   The Sustainability of Digital Interventions, was implemented essentially as planned, running from May 1 through July 30, 2020.

2.E.1.a.   Google Search

Google Search served as the primary tool for driving traffic to the main project website and its contact form. We placed four Search ads in each of the four content areas associated with the best practices campaign:

- Applications

- The review and adjustment of existing child support orders

- Virginia's TANF debt compromise program

- The employment support services available through DCSE's Family Engagement program

The ads in the applications and TANF debt compromise campaigns performed roughly in line with our expectations, so we made no significant adjustments to any of them (see Figure 1 for examples). By comparison, we stopped distributing two of the ads in the review and adjustment campaign about halfway through Cycle 3 because they were underperforming the others across all of our primary metrics (click-through rates, conversions, and cost per click or conversion). Three of the four ads for employment services underperformed across those same metrics, while the fourth had the highest conversion rate of any Search ad in this cycle: 22.22%. We nonetheless continued to deliver all four employment services ads since the other performance differences were small.
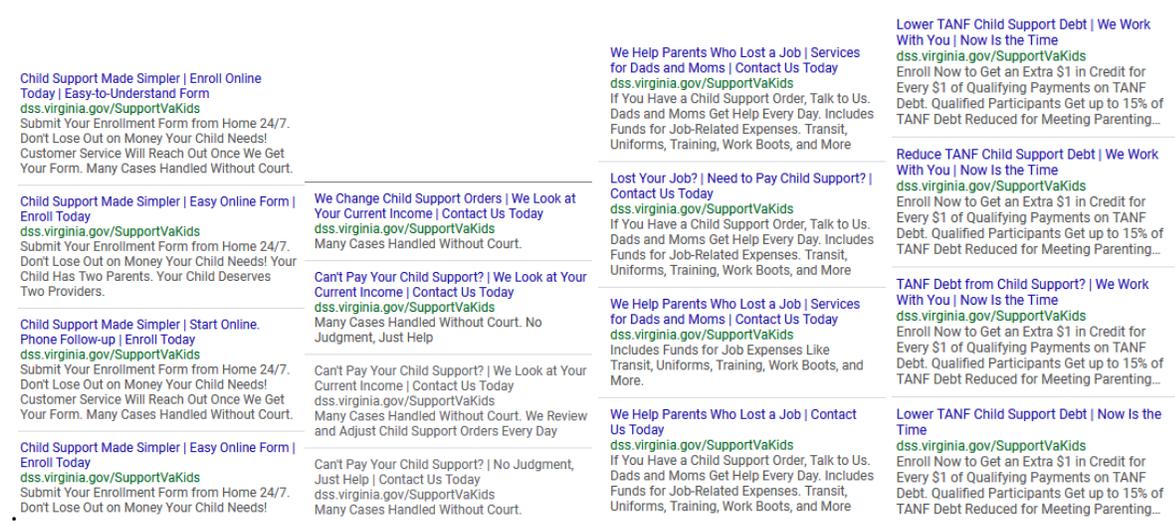

Figure 1: Cycle 3 Google Search Ads by Content Area

2.E.1.b. Remarketing Platforms

For the first four weeks of Cycle 3, we phased in our ads on the other platforms in the best practices segment (the Google Display Network, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) by content area. This approach gave us time to develop and review the videos associated with each campaign, but it also allowed the Search campaigns more time to draw interest to the website—thus expanding the audience for the remarketing aspect of these ads.

Because we believed that they addressed an urgent need, ads for the review and adjustment of child support orders appeared during the first week. Ad for employment services came during the second, applications for the third, and the TANF debt compromise program for the fourth. Beginning with the fifth week, all four ad sets were delivered simultaneously.

Initially, the ads on the remarketing platforms used essentially the same content, with only minor variations made in the text to accommodate differing requirements. The only departures from this approach came later in the cycle, when we attempted to increase exposure to our

paid content on Twitter by boosting organic content, as noted below in section 2.E.1.b.3.
Twitter

2.E.1.b.1.   Google Display

Our Google Display Network ads used the Google Responsive Display Ad tool to combine a predetermined set of assets (five headlines, five descriptions, five images,[22] two logos, four to six videos, and a single long headline) so they fit across a variety of devices and platforms (webpages, smartphone apps, etc.). The aggregate performance of the thousands of individual ads that resulted from this process was in line with what we anticipated in terms of click-through rates, given that the primary advertising objective of these ads was to maximize conversions rather than clicks.[23]

The audience for the ads on Google Display, however, was relatively limited, since it was exclusively focused on users who had clicked on the Search ads or recently visited the DCSE sites we could track. Having a relatively small audience also meant that we were under-budget for remarketing Display ads. About midway through Cycle 3, we added a second set of Google Display ads that went out users in the targeted zip codes. The content of these ads was identical to the remarketing set. Only the targeting was changed.

The Google Responsive Display algorithm created thousands of individual ads created across these two ad sets (remarketing and zip code targeting). Figure 2 shows what Google recorded as the most popular combinations for each content area in July 2020.

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[22] Google requires five images in a 1:1 aspect ratio and five images with an aspect ratio of at least 1.91:1. (Aspect ratios indicate the relative width and height of a given image.) In theory, each set of images could be different. Our approach was to use the same five images but crop them to suit their requirements. More information about Google Responsive Display Ad specs are available here: https://support.google.com/google-ads/answer/7005917?hl=en.

[23] See section 1.B.3.   The Sustainability of Digital Interventions for information about our focus on conversions in our remarketing ads.
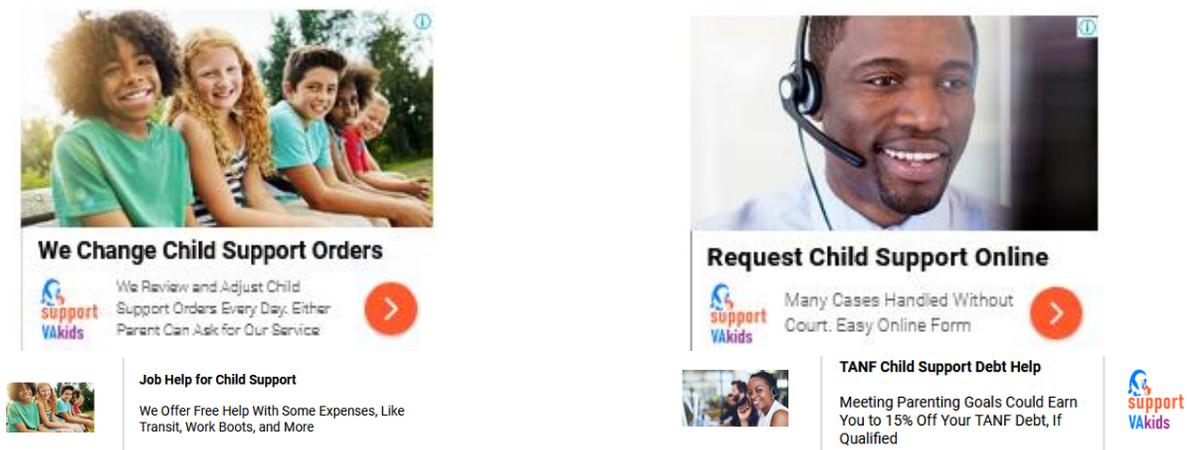
Figure 2: Representative Cycle 3 Google Display Ads from Each Content Area

2.E.1.b.2.   Facebook and Instagram

Though we faced the same ad approval delays we expected from our experience in Cycle 2, our paid campaigns on Facebook and Instagram were implemented as planned.

Notably, though these platforms used the same remarketing targets as our Display ads and rarely are thought to have a greater level of market penetration over Google's network, we reached enough users to meet our goals without having to add a second campaign, as we had with our Display ads.

Presumably the primary difference lay in Facebook's willingness to keep showing the same ad more often to the same users, with individual Facebook and Instagram users seeing our ads an average of 14.29 times during Cycle 3. In Cycle 2, when we took a broader approach to targeting on these platforms, the average advertising frequency was 3.71, a figure that we considered worryingly high.

One important change we made to our approach in this cycle was to give Facebook a general daily budget and let its algorithms determine the platform. This led to an increase in the number of impressions that our ads received on Facebook relative to Instagram by comparison to Cycle 2, but it also seemed to have contributed to a more balanced cost per conversion.

We placed 24 distinct combinations of content (text, image or video, and calls to action) on Facebook and Instagram that were then adjusted dynamically into hundreds of slightly different versions to suit different placements within their platforms (see Figure 3 for examples).

Figure 3: Representative Cycle 3 Facebook and Instagram Ads from Each Content Area

2.E.1.b.3.   Twitter

Our ads for Twitter matched the ones we created for Facebook and Instagram in almost every detail of content, timing, and targeting but were served far less frequently to users. We took repeated measures during Cycle 3 to increase the number of impressions for our content but never found a way to do so consistently.

Our problems with the platform were acute at the beginning and end of the cycle. Between May 1 and May 15, our ads received zero impressions; between July 15 and July 30, the last day of the cycle, they received 997. This is less than a quarter of the number of impressions received on Instagram and 2 percent of our Facebook impressions.

In the intervening period we tried these approaches to increasing the number of times our ads were delivered to users:

- **Changed the ad objective to website visits rather than conversions**. This boosted impressions only enough that the ads began to be shown

- **Boosted organic content**. This led to increased engagement with that content but not with the main target website

- **Removed the remarketing restriction on the ads**. This allowed the ads to be served to anyone in the targeted locations but did not consistently increase the number of impressions

- **Broadened the targeting to include all of Virginia**. This had no clear benefit

- **Changed the ad objective to engagement rather than website visits**. This also had no clear benefit and preceded our decline to receiving no ad impressions in the final days of Cycle 3

Presumably Twitter's ad distribution algorithm limited the distribution of our ads during this cycle because it determined that our ads would not generate much revenue. At a certain level this suggests that our relatively poor performance on Twitter in Cycle 2, detailed in the corresponding interim evaluation, seemed to teach the platform to expect similar results this time as well. The paid and organic content we posted during this cycle apparently did nothing to contradict this analysis.

By the end of Cycle 3 we had placed 36 ads on Twitter (see Figure 4 for examples). Thirty-two of those began and ended as paid content, while the remaining four began as organic content before being integrated into the paid campaign. Twenty of the thirty-two purely paid ads had distinct content. The remaining twelve differed in terms of targeting or ad objectives.

Figure 4: Representative Cycle 3 Twitter Ads from Each Content Area

2.E.1.b.4.   User Responses to Paid Posts to Social Media
As we saw in Cycle 2, users responded to paid social media posts fairly infrequently relative to the number of impressions.

In Cycle 3, we received only one comment on a paid Twitter post out of 87,705 paid impressions across all of our ads.[24] In Cycle 2 we also received only one comment on Twitter, out of 263,786 impressions on the Twitter platform itself.[25]

On Facebook and Instagram, we received 28 comments on paid posts that received 156,810 impressions. In Cycle 2 users wrote 152 responses to Facebook and Instagram ads that received 1,985,588 impressions. A representative set of user responses to paid Facebook content is given below in Figure 5.

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[24] The one paid tweet that a user replied to post began in the organic campaign, making the source of the comment somewhat ambiguous).
[25] As we explained in our interim evaluation for Cycle 2, we also received a large number of impressions and possibly bot-based clicks on Twitter's Audience Platform.

Figure 5: Facebook Comments on a Paid Post about the TANF Debt Compromise Program

The change from 0.018 percent of Facebook and Instagram ad impressions receiving a comment in Cycle 2 to 0.008 percent in Cycle 3 is presumably the result of using remarketing. Since the ads were delivered only to users who had responded to earlier ads or visited DCSE webpages, they were probably more positively inclined toward the program than the much more widely targeted ads in Cycle 2. Regardless, the ratio of comments to ad impressions was small in both cycles.

On LinkedIn, our paid posts received four comments out of 47,592 impressions. Two of those comments were negative.[26] Both were essentially unrelated to the content of the post. Negative comments about DCSE on a platform strongly focused on professional uplift may be more suggestive of the public perception problems faced by child support programs than similar responses on Facebook, which already tend toward polarization.

A discussion of DCSE's process for responding to negative user comments is given below, in section 2.E.2.e. User Responses to Organic Posts

2.E.2. Implementing a Multi-platform Organic Social Media Campaign in Concert with Paid Campaign

2.E.2.a.   Scope of Organic Campaign
In Cycle 2 we launched social media accounts for DCSE on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We continued posting to those accounts after Cycle 2 and through all of Cycle 3. In Cycle 3 we added organic posts to YouTube and LinkedIn.

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[26] For simplicity's sake, we have grouped together several types of comments under the heading of "negative. These include specific complaints that raise legitimate concerns about the services a person has received and broader statements of dissatisfaction or disagreement. A third subcategory of negative comments—"Your Agency Makes Me Unhappy"—is added by Kristy Dalton (2017). "How to Manage the 3 Types of Negative Comments on Social Media." *Government Technology*. Google cache link.

We made organic posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter two times per week through Cycle 3 and weekly posts to LinkedIn. We made only one public post to YouTube during Cycle 3.

2.E.2.b.   Organic Posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter

Our organic posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter during the first four weeks followed the same content cycle used in remarketing ads: review and adjustment, employment services, applications, and TANF debt compromise. But instead of mixing content areas for the remaining weeks in the way the paid posts did, the organic posts continued to follow that same content sequence for the rest of the cycle. The organic campaign also included a few posts related to other aspects of DCSE, such as office closings and Public Service Recognition Week.

Unlike Cycle 2, where organic posts often passed through several tiers of internal review, the review process for organic posts in Cycle 3 was limited largely to the project team and its immediate manager within DCSE. This more streamlined approach did not seem to affect the level of engagement, positive or negative, that our posts received. We did revise one post early in the cycle, given below in Figure 6: Sample Organic Post across Twitter, Facebook, and after we realized that phrasing the headline as a question probably opened it up to negative responses, but organic posts in Cycle 2 had drawn a similarly negative response. No other organic posts in the cycle produced similar results.

2.E.2.c. Organic Posts on LinkedIn

We created a LinkedIn account for DCSE in April 2020, after working with the VDSS Public Affairs unit to ensure that the new account aligned with the approach taken on VDSS's existing page.

Organic posts on LinkedIn appeared almost weekly and, in recognition of the distinct focus of the platform, shared content that fell outside of the main content areas promoted on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.[27] Organic content posted only to LinkedIn included:

- The legal services webinar described below in section 2.E.5.   Leading a Webinar for Private Family Law Attorneys and Mediators and the creation of a page on the DCSE website with resources for attorneys and legal services providers

- The Digital Marketing Grant

- Displays of compassion to co-workers as everyone adjusted to the new working conditions created by COVID-19

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[27] See Table 2: Campaign Content Areas and Marketing Platforms for a list of this cycle's primary content areas and associated platforms.

- Research on the broader social benefits of paternity establishment

2.E.2.d. Organic Posting to YouTube

We made one public post to YouTube during Cycle 3: the how-to video described below in section 2.E.4. Creating and Promoting a How-to Video

Figure 6: Sample Organic Post across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram

2.E.2.e. User Responses to Organic Posts

Our organic posts received fewer user responses in Cycle 3 than Cycle 2.

Users left no comments to our organic Instagram posts or our one organic YouTube post, though the latter result was likely a consequence of our following other government programs in turning off user comments for all videos on our YouTube channel. Our organic tweets received only four replies (one to a post in the paid campaign). The project's organic posts on LinkedIn generated five comments. Our organic Facebook posts, meanwhile, received 28 comments. Sixteen of those comments came from two users, with the remainder associated with six other accounts. The vast majority of comments were negative or expressed frustration with the program, part of it related to the interception of the stimulus checks through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.[28]

While written responses to positive comments are largely unnecessary and neutral requests for information can be easily handled, negative responses often require more attention. Reponses to negative comments from DCSE generally passed through the same review process used in

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[28] A discussion of these payments and how they might relate to other tax-related intercepts by the federal child support program can be found in this Dear Colleague Letter from OCSE's Acting Commissioner, Scott M. Lekan (2020). "Economic Impact Payments under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act." ACF/OCSE DCL-20-02. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/resource/economic-impact-payments-under-the-coronavirus-aid-relief-and-economic-security-cares-act. The U.S. Department of Treasury offers a clear overview of the CARES Act here: https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/cares.

Cycle 2.[29] A set of sample negative comments and DCSE responses are included below in Figure 7: Sample Organic Social Media Comments with DCSE Responses.
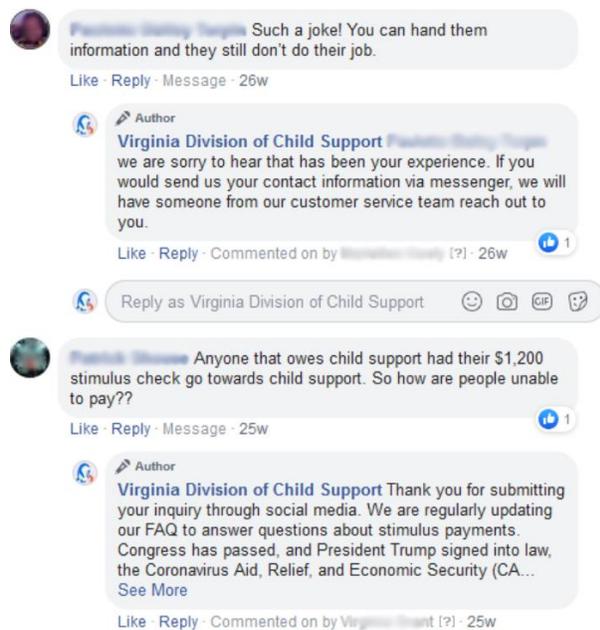

Figure 7: Sample Organic Social Media Comments with DCSE Responses

2.E.3.   Creating a Series of Six-Second Videos to Support the Paid Campaign

YouTube and Snapchat offer advertising categories focused on six-second-long videos. Short video ads are also encouraged on the Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Google Display platforms, though the specifications of length are more open-ended.

To simplify the production of videos and associated ads, we used the same six-second videos across all channels that used video: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google Display, YouTube, and Snapchat.

We created two distinct videos for each of the four main content areas:

- TANF debt compromise program

- Family Child support applications

- The review and adjustment of child support orders

- DCSE's Engagement services related to employment

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[29] After the conclusion of the cycle, as part of DCSE's analysis of how to move forward with digital marketing in the future, program leadership adopted a new procedure for responding to social media comments.

Because we were disappointed with the number of conversions generated by the applications ads, we made a second set of videos for that area.

Toward the end of the cycle, we added a fifth content area, paternity establishment, for our ads on Snapchat. This decision grew out of another concern about relevance—namely, that most users who engaged with our ads on that platform were under 18 and thus unlikely to have orders that would be old enough to warrant review and adjustment or need debt compromise.

In the end we created twelve videos in three formats (horizontal, vertical, and square) so they would work in as many different placements as possible, for 36 distinct videos. All but two videos (or six, if counting distinct formats) were animated. We saw no consistent performance differences between live-action video and animation in terms of user preference, though the live-action videos tended to receive higher impression counts—suggesting that the platforms themselves might anticipate a better response from users.

The videos themselves constituted essentially the entire ad on YouTube and Snapchat, which offer only minimal text options. On Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, we combined the videos with text to create two distinct ad sets for each of the content areas. The same text was then paired with still images to create a second set of ads for that content area. Essentially the same result came from our ads on the Google Display Network, but because we used the Google Responsive Display Ad tool to create the ads, we could not control which text elements were paired with images or video.

Our experiences in Cycle 2 had prepared us to expect delays in ad approvals on Facebook and Instagram. To avoid that in this cycle we submitted ads well before our desired distribution date. However, we found that delays in receiving approval for ads on Snapchat were even more protracted than on the other channels and we lost six days of ad distribution to these and related problems.

2.E.4. Creating and Promoting a How-to Video
As part of a longer term strategy to develop a sustainable digital engagement strategy—embodied in the best practices activities summarized above in section 2.E.1.   Testing a Best Practices Model for Child Support Advertising—we wanted to produce, publish, and actively promote at least one somewhat longer video that explained some of the child support program in more detail than the shorter videos used in Cycles 2 or 3.

We intended to lay the groundwork for a suite of videos that gave families a clearer understanding of how to accomplish some child support activity, such as applying to have your child support order adjusted or responding to a driver's license suspension. But because these videos are longer and include more detail, they take more time to develop and we posted only one video during Cycle 3.

That video, titled "The Life Cycle of a Child Support Case," was the one organic post made to DCSE's YouTube page during Cycle 3. We also included it in our paid YouTube campaign alongside the six-second videos described above in section 2.E.3. Creating a Series of Six-Second Videos to Support the Paid Campaign The video received some additional organic and paid promotion through a post on LinkedIn.

2.E.5. Leading a Webinar for Private Family Law Attorneys and Mediators
As noted above in section 2.D.1.   Revising Initial List of Activities for Cycle 3, outreach to legal professionals had been a part of our initial plans for Cycle 3 but had shifted over time to focus on family law attorneys specifically. To support our goal of increasing applications from Never Assistance clients, we planned to provide those attorneys with information about the child support program and how both they and their clients can benefit from DCSE services. Toward the end of the planning process, we did additional outreach to mediation providers and received approval to provide similar continuing education credits to them as well.

To understand what kinds of topics we needed to cover in the webinar, we first surveyed members of the Office of the Attorney General of Virginia who work on child support about what kinds of myths or points of confusion they offer encounter when working with private family law attorneys. Some of those same staff attorneys then used the results of the survey to develop an initial draft of the webinar's content. The two people selected to lead the webinar— the Digital Marketing Grant's project leader, Mariellen Keely, and G. Scott Darnell, the legal director of child support division within the Office of the Attorney General—then revised the content, with additional input provided by members of the project team during repeated practices to ensure that the content was accurate.

We secured two hours of CLE credits for the webinar by working with the Virginia State Bar Association, which also helped promote the webinar through an email blast distributed to its Family Law division and eventually its entire membership.

We also promoted the webinar in paid and organic posts on LinkedIn, including using a variation on the lead form ad to direct record registrations. But perhaps the most effective method of electronic promotion was a direct invitation from child support attorneys to private family law attorneys they had worked with in the past.

Except for those who registered through LinkedIn, attendees signed up for the event via a Google Form. When response from private family law attorneys led us to cap enrollment at around 400 and open up a second one, we redirected users to a new Google Form that showed the revised date.

During the two webinars, both lasting two hours and both conducted over the video conferencing platform Zoom, project staff and additional child support attorneys fielded

questions related to the presentation being given by Mr. Darnell and Ms. Keely. Those questions were later collected into a document that project staff planned to post online after the cycle ended.

2.E.6.   Creating and Publishing a Podcast Series on Child Support

As explained above in section 2.D.1. Revising Initial List of Activities for Cycle 3, we originally planned to record a podcast to reach family law attorneys but changed our approach to take in a wider audience. Under this new plan, our plan was to bring in guests to discuss topics that would expand public understanding of the program and address common misconceptions about the program.

By the end of Cycle 3, Ms. Keely had recorded, edited, and published three episodes of the podcast and a trailer explaining what listeners can expect. The first episode offered an interview with DCSE Director Barbara Lacina and her vision for the program. The second and third episodes interviewed DCSE staff who work with the program's Family Engagement area.

Following the pattern of our other social media channels, we chose the username "childsupportVA" on the podcast hosting and distribution platform Anchor (anchor.fm/childsupportva). The page title reflected the hashtag campaign implemented in Cycle 2: #supportVAkids.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the episodes were recorded with the interviewer (Ms. Keely) and the various subjects in different locations, rather than in a central studio-like environment as we had originally planned. Problems with acquiring and learning the software necessary to edit the recordings were addressed fairly quickly but are likely to be common to other programs that want to create a podcast series.

2.F.   Target Populations

Our approach to targeting for our paid campaigns in this cycle is described above in section 2.D.2   Determining Approach to Geographic Targeting for Ads in the Paid Campaign The specific locations targeted within Virginia are listed below in Table 3: Location Targets and Extended Focus Areas

Table 3: Location Targets and Extended Focus Areas

Initial Target Area	Surrounding Areas Included in Ad Target Markets
Bristol (city)	Washington County
Brunswick County	
Caroline County	
Clarke County	
Colonial Heights (city)	Chesterfield County, Prince George County
Danville (city)	Pittsylvania County
Dinwiddie County	

Initial Target Area	Surrounding Areas Included in Ad Target Markets
Essex County	
Hampton (city)	Northampton County, Poquoson (city), York County
Henrico County	
Martinsville (city)	Henry County
Nelson County	
Newport News (city)	Isle of Wight County, James City County, Surry County, York County
Norfolk (city)	Virginia Beach (city)
Petersburg (city)	Chesterfield County, Prince George County
Portsmouth (city)	Chesapeake (city)
Richmond (city)	Chesterfield County
Roanoke (city)	Roanoke County
Salem (city)	Roanoke County
Staunton (city)	Augusta County
Suffolk (city)	Chesapeake (city), Southampton County
Waynesboro (city)	Augusta County
Winchester (city)	Frederick County

The organic campaigns are public and thus do not include geographic targeting.

2.G.   Timelines

2.G.1. Overall Project Timeline
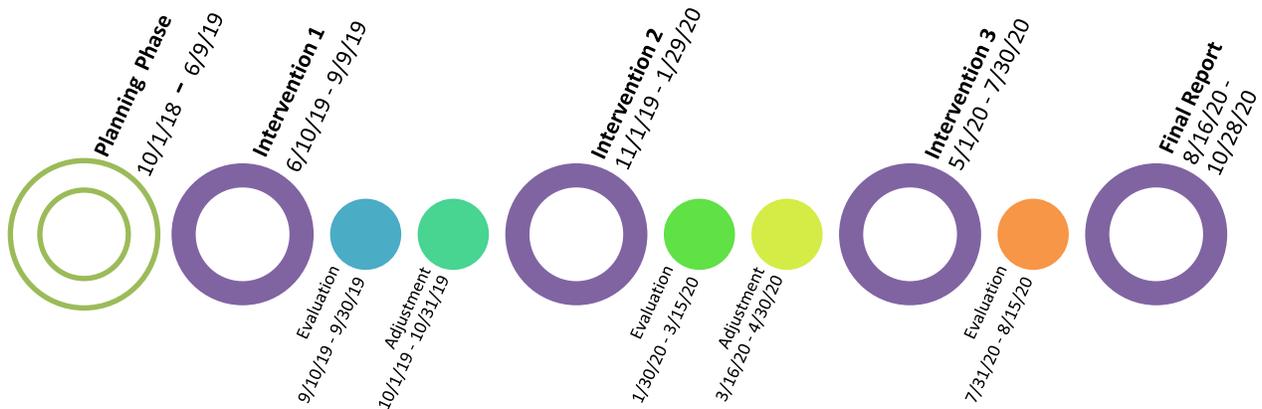A broad outline of our project's overall timeline appears below as Figure 8: DCSE DMG Overall Project Timeline.

Figure 8: DCSE DMG Overall Project Timeline

2.G.2. Detailed Timeline for Cycle 3
The detailed timeline for Cycle 2 appears below as Table 4: Detailed Timeline for Cycle 3.

Table 4: Detailed Timeline for Cycle 3

Step	Plan Element	Approx. Date of Completion
1	Complete initial review of Cycle 2 outcomes and finalize activities for Cycle 3	2/15/20
2	Finalize content calendar and budget for paid ad spending	4/15/20
3	Complete updates to main project webpage and contact form	4/24/20
4	Launch Cycle 3	5/1/20
5	Review 45 days of data and revise paid and organic ad strategies	6/18/20
6	Host first webinar for family law attorneys and mediators	6/26/20
7	Host second webinar for family law attorneys and mediators	7/15/20
8	End Cycle 3 paid and organic campaigns	7/30/20

2.H.   Cycle 3 Outcome Measures

We looked at two types of outcome measures: online analytics and caseload data. A list of outcome measures, sources, and applicable dates appears in Table 5.

Table 5: Outcome Measures for Cycle 3

Data Element	Frequency	Source	Applicable Dates[30]
Impressions (Paid Content)	Platform total across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20
Ad Clicks (Paid Content)	Platform total across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20
Views (for Video) (Paid Content)	Platform total across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20
Click-through Rates (Paid Content)	Platform average across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20
Cost per Click (Paid Content)	Platform average across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20
Cost per (Video) View or Cost per 1,000 (Video) Views (Paid Content)	Platform average across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20
Cost per 1,000 Impressions (Paid Content)	Platform average across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20
Conversions (Paid Content)	Platform total across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20
Conversion Rate (Paid Content)	Platform average across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20
Cost per Conversion (Paid Content)	Platform average across cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20- 7/30/20

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[30] For reasons described in sections 2.E.1.b.3.   Twitter and 2.E.3.   Creating a Series of Six-Second Videos to Support the Paid Campaign, there were multiple dates during Cycle 3 when Twitter and Snapchat delivered no ads to our audience. We have nonetheless included these dates in all analyses related to those platforms.

Data Element	Frequency	Source	Applicable Dates[30]
Followers (or Subscribers) to Organic DCSE's Social Media Accounts	Change from beginning to end of cycle	Each social media platform's reporting tools	5/1/20-7/30/20
Webinar Attendees	Total per webinar and combined	Attendee lists cross-checked with signups and notes	6/26/20 and 7/15/20
Views of Webinar Recording	Platform total from posting to 3 months after cycle	YouTube	6/27/20-10/30/20
Listens to Podcasts	Platform total from posting to 3 months after cycle	Anchor.fm	7/1/20-10/30/20
Case Openings[31] for Never Assistance Cases	Cycle total (+ 1 month) over previous year	DCSE caseload data	5/1/20-8/31/20
Paternities Established	Cycle total (+ 1 month) over previous year	DCSE caseload data	5/1/20-8/31/20
Requests for the Review and Adjustment of Child Support Orders	Cycle total (+ 1 month) over previous year	DCSE caseload data	5/1/20-8/31/20
Enrollments in DCSE's TANF Debt Compromise Program	Cycle total (+ 1 month) over previous year	DCSE caseload data	5/1/20-8/31/20
Enrollments in DCSE's Family Engagement Program	Cycle total (+ 1 month) over previous year	DCSE caseload data	5/1/20-8/31/20
Contact Form Submissions	Count during cycle	DCSE form data	5/1/20-7/30/20

3. Results

3.A. Sample Size

As in previous cycles, we estimated the number of individuals reached by Cycle 3 interventions by looking at the number of unique individuals reached by ads on Facebook. Known as *reach* in the online advertising world, this measure is only an estimate, since it attempts to account for duplicated or pseudonymous accounts.

Based on Facebook data, we reached approximately 11,000 unique individuals during Cycle 3.[32]

3.B. Results

As explained above in section 2.D.1. Revising Initial List of Activities for Cycle 3, we began this cycle with four research questions:

1. What kinds of paid and organic digital marketing strategies might drive positive public engagement with child support services?
2. Can promoting child support applications increase the number of new applications for those services?

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[31] As in Cycle 2, we are treating case openings as equivalent to the successful submission of an application.

[32] Facebook explains how it defines reach here: https://www.facebook.com/business/help/710746785663278.

3. Will the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic lead child support families to seek DCSE's services to review and adjust child support orders, reduce child support debt on TANF cases, and refer noncustodial parents to employment services?
4. Can a marketing campaign that emphasizes search advertising, supported by display and social media platforms, form the basis for a sustainable, cost-effective approach to paid digital outreach?

Table 1: Cycle Components, Goals, and Research Questions connects those questions to the six components of this cycle. Each of the six subsections that follow (3.B.1. Results of the Best Practices Model, 3.B.2. Results of the Organic Social Media Campaign, 3.B.3. Results of Paid Campaigns Centered on Six-second-long Videos, 3.B.4. Results of Paid and Organic Campaigns for How-to Video, 3.B.5. Results of Webinars for Family Law Attorneys and Mediators, 3.B.6. Results of Podcasts) corresponds to one of those components and, by extension, to a research question or questions.

The seventh subsection (3.B.7. Child Support Program Results) addresses program outcomes related to Cycle 3 and addresses research questions 2 and 3. In that same section we report data on contact form submissions made on the main project website, an outcome touching on questions 1, 3, and 4.

3.B.1. Results of the Best Practices Model

We executed the best practices campaign more or less as planned and the results from our chosen indicators were largely in line with our expectations. Table 6: Results of the Best Practices Model provides a broad overview by platform.

Table 6: Results of the Best Practices Model

Performance Measure	Facebook	Google Display	Google Search	Instagram	Twitter
Impressions	143,599	1,284,949	73,482	13,211	87,705
Clicks	675	11,598	5,545	28	68
Views[33]	39,192	NA[34]	NA	6,387	14,670
Click-through Rate	0.47%	0.90%	7.55%	0.21%	0.08%
Cost per Click	$1.93	$0.13	$1.36	$5.66	$2.75
Cost per View	$0.03	NA[35]	NA	$0.02	$0.01
Cost per 1,000 Impressions	$9.09	$1.20	$102.43	$12.00	$2.14
Conversions[36]	69	11	365	6	0
Conversion Rate	10.22%	0.09%	6.58%	21.43%	0%
Cost per Conversion	$18.92	$140.14	$20.62	$26.43	NA
Benchmark[37] **for Click-through Rate**	1.20%	0.64%	2.88%	0.88%	1.55%
Benchmark[38] **for Cost per Conversion**	$18.68	$75.51	$48.96	Not available	Not available
Previous Cycle Average[39] **for Click-through Rates**	0.94%	0.57%	7.78%	0.37%	0.13%
Previous Cycle Average for Cost per Conversion	$115.65	$546.48	$18.37	$89.94	NA

Within the best practices model, outcomes varied significantly by content area. As shown in Table 7: Selected Cycle 3 Best Practices Outcomes by Content Area, the click-through rate for Google Search ads was as low as 1.28 percent for our Family Engagement ads but nearly 25 percent for the Applications content area. Similarly, a single set of Google Search ads—for DCSE's order review and adjustment services—accounted for almost three-fifths of all Cycle 3 conversions.

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[33] Each platform defines a video "view" differently. To simplify reporting, we have attempted to align the various meanings as much as practicable on each table rather than across the evaluation as a whole.

[34] Throughout, we use "NA" to mean "not applicable." When data is not available, we have spelled out that phrase.

[35] Though Google Display uses videos in some ad combinations, it does not report video views for those ads.

[36] Conversions for these ads were achieved when users completed a contact form on the main project webpage.

[37] Click-through rate benchmarks are taken from AdStage (2019?). "Paid Media Q2 2019 Benchmark Report." https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4350015/Benchmark%20Report/Q2%202019%20Paid%20Media%20Benchmark%20Report.pdf. We chose second quarter 2019 results as the most clearly analogous for Cycle 3. All AdStage values represent medians, not means. For reasons described in the interim evaluation of Cycle 2, we have come to doubt that clicks from the Twitter Audience Platform in that cycle clearly reflect the interest of real users in our target locations. We have thus excluded results from the Twitter Audience Platform from these figures.

[38] Facebook cost per conversion benchmarks are taken from Mark Irvine (August 2020). "Facebook Ad Benchmarks for YOUR Industry [Data]." Wordstream. https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2017/02/28/facebook-advertising-benchmarks. Google cost per conversion benchmarks are taken from Mark Irvine (October 2020). "Google Ads Benchmarks for YOUR Industry [Updated!]." Wordstream. https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2016/02/29/google-adwords-industry-benchmarks.

[39] Previous cycle data for Google Display and Google Search come from Cycle 1; for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, Cycle 2.

Table 7: Selected Cycle 3 Best Practices Outcomes by Content Area

Platform	Content Area	Clicks	Conversions	% of Cycle 3 Conversions	Click-through Rate	Cost per Conversion
Facebook	Applications	109	13	2.88%	0.36%	$23.17
	Debt Compromise	89	5	1.11%	0.46%	$32.80
	Family Engagement	65	6	1.33%	0.56%	$16.13
	Review and Adjustment	412	45	9.98%	0.50%	$16.53
Plat. Total		675	69	15.30%	0.47%	$18.92
Google Display	Applications	2,980	3	0.67%	1.08%	$111.20
	Debt Compromise	4,272	5	1.11%	0.88%	$116.40
	Family Engagement	2,714	0	0.00%	0.74%	NA
	Review and Adjustment	1,632	3	0.67%	1.06%	$89.58
Plat. Total		11,598	11	2.44%	0.90%	$140.14
Google Search	Applications	963	3	0.67%	24.85%	$347.59
	Debt Compromise	948	92	20.40%	7.46%	$16.88
	Family Engagement	15	2	0.44%	1.28%	$11.97
	Review and Adjustment	3,619	268	59.42%	6.50%	$18.31
Plat. Total		5,545	365	80.93%	7.55%	$20.62
Instagram	Applications	10	2	0.44%	0.28%	$23.54
	Debt Compromise	6	1	0.22%	0.29%	$19.63
	Family Engagement	2	0	0.00%	0.16%	NA
	Review and Adjustment	10	3	0.67%	0.16%	$25.24
Plat. Total		28	6	1.33%	0.21%	$26.43
Twitter	Applications	23	0	0.00%	0.08%	NA
	Debt Compromise	19	0	0.00%	0.07%	NA
	Family Engagement	0	0	0.00%	0.00%	NA
	Other	26	0	0.00%	0.08%	NA
	Review and Adjustment	0	0	0.00%	0.00%	NA
Plat. Total		68	0	0.00%	0.08%	NA
Total		17,914	451	100.00%	1.12%	$23.77

3.B.2. *Results of the Organic Social Media Campaign*

We made organic social media posts to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at our expected rate of at least two times per week throughout Cycle 3. Our weekly organic posts to LinkedIn fell similarly in line with our plans for the cycle. We made only one organic post to YouTube (the how-to video), which fell below our expectations but was a natural consequence of the development cycle for that video.

At the beginning of Cycle 3, we had 360 followers on Facebook. By the end of the cycle, we increased our follower count by 28 percent to 460 followers. On Instagram we began the cycle with 745 followers and ended it with 885, a 19 percent increase. Our Twitter account started with 108 followers and grew by 15 percent to 124 followers at the end of the cycle. On YouTube an active subscriber drive among the project staff increased the number of subscribers to the DSCE YouTube page from 3 to approximately 115 by the end of the cycle. Achieving the milestone of 100 subscribers allowed us to choose a custom URL that reflected our overall project branding: youtube.com/c/ChildSupportVirginia.

3.B.3. Results of Paid Campaigns Centered on Six-second-long Videos

Our video development and related ad program proceeded as expected (Table 8). The results from our chosen indicators varied considerably by platform. See Table 2 for additional details. No conversions can be attributed directly to our ads on Snapchat and YouTube so those outcomes are not measured here.[40]

Table 8: Results of Cycle 3 Video Platform Ads

Performance Measure	Snapchat	YouTube
Impressions[41]	1,608,445	2,560,985
Clicks[42]	17,852	3,868
Views	14,342	2,560,985
Click-through Rate	1.11%	0.15%
Cost per Click	$0.14	$2.89
Cost per 1K Views	$174.17	$4.37
Cost per 1K Impressions	$1.55	$4.37

We have no reliable benchmarks for Snapchat performance. For YouTube, AdStage's benchmark report for the second quarter of 2019 gives a median click-through rate of 0.38 percent, a cost per thousand impressions of $8.00, and cost per click of $2.33. That report is silent about the type or types of YouTube ads these benchmarks cover but presumably includes skippable ads—unlike this portion of our YouTube ads.

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[40] Note that video-related data for Facebook, Google Display, and Instagram are given in Table 6: Results of the Best Practices Model.

[41] Since viewers could not skip the six-second ads placed on YouTube, every impression of the ad is counted as a view. On Snapchat we have counted completed views as views in an effort to align our definition of "view" across the two platforms, though we recognize that making a video ad unskippable does not necessarily mean that it was watched completely. (A user could have simply left YouTube in response to seeing the ad, for example.) This gap in the number of views across the two platforms led us to use cost per 1,000 views as the outcome measure here. Otherwise, we would be measuring YouTube views in fractions of a penny.

[42] We have followed the wider digital advertising community in treating the Snapchat-specific action of swiping up to see additional information as equivalent to a click on other platforms, such as YouTube.

As with the best practices model discussed in section 3.B.1.   Results of the Best Practices Model, outcomes for the video platforms varied by content area, in Table 9: Selected Cycle 3 Video Platform Outcomes by Content Area. (Because neither platform generated conversions, we have focused on data points commonly associated with brand awareness instead.)

Table 9: Selected Cycle 3 Video Platform Outcomes by Content Area

Platform	Content Area	Impressions	Clicks	Click-through Rate	Cost per Click	Cost per 1K Impressions
Snapchat	Applications	504,440	5,000	0.99%	$0.18	$1.79
	Debt Compromise	170,051	2,365	1.39%	$0.10	$1.33
	Family Engagement	127,260	1,472	1.16%	$0.15	$1.77
	Paternity	400,611	3,297	0.82%	$0.19	$1.60
	Review and Adjustment	406,083	5,718	1.41%	$0.09	$1.23
Plat. Total		1,608,445	17,852	1.11%	$0.14	$1.55
YouTube	Applications	1,835,608	2,579	0.14%	$3.12	$4.39
	Debt Compromise	101,477	176	0.17%	$2.57	$4.46
	Family Engagement	399,632	762	0.19%	$2.40	$4.58
	Review and Adjustment	224,268	351	0.16%	$2.42	$3.79
Plat. Total		2,560,985	3,868	0.15%	$2.89	$4.37
Total		4,169,430	21,720	0.52%	$0.63	$3.28

3.B.4. Results of Paid and Organic Campaigns for How-to Video

The how-to video we developed and posted in Cycle 3, titled "The Life Cycle of a Child Support Case,"[43] received the vast majority of its 162,393 views through paid advertising on YouTube, as described below in Table 10: Results of Paid Postings of Cycle 3 How-to Video. Organic traffic drove 194 views and is not included in the data captured in this table. The paid LinkedIn post promoting the how-to video received no views within that platform, though it may have contributed to the 194 views that YouTube counted as organic.

Table 10: Results of Paid Postings of Cycle 3 How-to Video

Performance Measure	LinkedIn	YouTube
Impressions	4,051	619,357
Clicks	57	4,275
Views	0	162,197
Click-through Rate	1.41%	0.69%

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[43] The video is viewable through this link: youtu.be/9Ihqkm47f4Y.

Cost per Click	$3.99	$0.71
Cost per 1K Views	NA	$18.77
Cost per 1K Impressions	$56.18	$4.92
Conversions	0	0
Conversion Rate	0.00%	0.00%
Cost per Conversion	NA	NA

3.B.5. Results of Webinars for Family Law Attorneys and Mediators

Five hundred seventeen people attended the two webinars we held for family law attorneys and mediators. We hosted 295 during the first webinar, held on June 26, 2020, and 222 on the second, held on July 15.

After each webinar, we sent attendees a link to an otherwise unlisted video recording of the webinar available on the DCSE YouTube channel. Those videos received 102 views between the date of posting and October 30, 2020. Thirty-seven of those views came after Cycle 3 ended, suggesting that the videos continue to be a resource for attendees.

Attendee responses to the webinar were almost uniformly positive, with most comments focusing on the value of the information and the clarity and accessibility of the presentation itself.

3.B.6. Results of Podcasts

As noted in section 2.E.6.   Creating and Publishing a Podcast Series on Child Support, we posted three full episodes and one trailer during Cycle 3. Those received a combined total of 75 listens by October 30, 2020, with 49 of those coming after the cycle ended. As with the webinar, the continued interest shown in the podcast, despite not having added new content, suggests continuing interest in this channel.

3.B.7. Child Support Program Results

We looked at program-related data for five of the content areas identified in Table 2: Campaign Content Areas and Marketing Platforms: applications, paternity establishment, review and adjustment, TANF debt compromise, and employment services.

To bridge the gap that typically exists between an individual user's initial interest in these programs and the actions necessary for that interest to be reflected in the data, we extended the period under analysis from the nearly three months covered by the cycle (May to July 2020) by an extra month (August 2020). For comparison we then looked at data from the preceding two years during that same period. The results appear below in Table 11: Cycle 3 Child Support Caseload Outcomes.

Table 11: Cycle 3 Child Support Caseload Outcomes

Child Support Outcome	May–August 2020		May–August 2019		May–August 2018
	Count	% Change over May–August 2019	Count	% Change over May–August 2018	Count
Case Openings for Never Assistance Cases	5,774	-12%	6,533	-7%	7,010
Paternities Established	524	-63%	1,422	-4%	1,474
Requests for the Review and Adjustment of Child Support Orders	2,837	-24%	3,754	-1%	3,774
Enrollments in DCSE's TANF Debt Compromise Program					
Enrollments in DCSE's Family Engagement Program	208	126%	92	44%	64

Counts of contact form submissions by area of interest appears below in Table 12: Cycle 3 Contact Form Submissions by .

Table 12: Cycle 3 Contact Form Submissions by Topic and Associated Paid Conversions

Contact Form Topic	Submissions	Paid Digital Marketing Conversions
Applications	153	21
Debt Compromise	67	103
Employment	3	8
Existing Case	93	NA
General Information	10	NA
Paternity	25	NA
Review and Adjustment	226	319
Total	577	451

The number of contact form submissions (577) differs significantly from the number of conversions (451) tracked by the digital advertising programs. We presume but cannot know for sure using these methods that the difference comes from our organic social media accounts, since that is essentially the only significant way that public users could have found their way to the main project webpage.

The number of users who contacted us about applications through this tool (153) also contrasts sharply with the number of conversions associated with that ad type (21).

Out of the 577 submissions in Cycle 3, thirty-nine individuals had, by the end of September 2020, opened new child support cases with DCSE. For the Digital Marketing Grant

approximately 200 new DCSE cases were opened after making their initial contact through the form on the main project webpage.

Contact information from the complete forms was forwarded to the program's customer service staff, who contacted users directly. If the initial attempt at contact failed, customer service staff made two attempts to follow up, each separated by an interval of several weeks. DCSE staff tracked this process and reported on it to the wider project team as part of project meetings.

3.C.   Analysis

3.C.1. Research Question 1
Our first research question asked what kinds of paid and organic digital marketing strategies might drive positive public engagement with child support services. The results of Cycle 3 suggest essentially all of the digital marketing approaches we took during this cycle (search and display advertising, paid and organic social media, a webinar for family law attorneys, and a podcast series) can drive positive engagement with the program. The results that support this conclusion include:

- Our paid campaigns received nearly 40,000 clicks received in Cycle 3 and led directly to at least 451 conversions. This translates into an overall cost per click of $0.65 and a cost per conversion of $57.06.

- Our short videos and our longer how-to video earned over 6 million views. On YouTube users viewed 40,952,258 seconds (or 11,375 hours) of DCSE videos at an average cost of $1.25 per hour. About 7,000 hours of viewing can be attributed to our how-to video alone.

- Our organic social media campaign continued to steadily broaden its reach, particularly on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. By the end of its first year, DCSE's accounts on those channels had surpassed the follower counts of other, much more established accounts for local and state-level child support programs.

- Our legal webinar engaged 517 people and garnering strongly positive written responses from private family law attorneys across the state.

- Our podcast series received 75 listens between their launch and the end of October 2020.

3.C.2. Research Question 2

Our second research question asked whether promoting child support applications through digital marketing could increase the number of new applications for those services, particularly for Never Assistance cases.

While data related to Cycle 2, which we plan to include in our final evaluation, could support the claim that digital marketing methods can increase applications for child support, we did not see clear evidence of that in Cycle 3. The number of new cases opened from May through August 2020 fell by 25 percent over the same period in 2019 across all case types and by 12 percent for Never Assistance cases.

We attribute at least part of that to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic., which froze many people's living arrangements in place and led to the suspension of in-office customer service in DCSE offices and similar service changes in Virginia's Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courts. These factors, combined with the economic effects of federal stimulus payments and expanded unemployment insurance, could have made custodial parents less likely to apply for services. We suspect that the infrastructure provided by DCSE's recently created online application and the aggressive marketing of DCSE services through the grant probably buoyed the number of applications.

3.C.3. Research Question 3

Our third research question asked whether the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic lead child support families to seek DCSE's services to review and adjust child support orders, reduce child support debt on TANF cases, and refer noncustodial parents to employment services. Our primary way of assessing this was to look at the number of requests or enrollments related to those programs.

We found no evidence that demand for paternity establishment, debt-reduction, or review and adjustment services increased during COVID-19 or that paid and organic digital marketing efforts bolstered their numbers, despite the relatively large volume of digital conversions associated with those programs. The 63 percent decline in paternity establishment can be reasonably attributed to the suspension of services in DCSE offices (where DCSE conducts many of its DNA tests for paternity) and the courts (where many tests are ordered), as well as a general avoidance of medical testing. The decline in the number of applications for review and adjustment of orders cannot be explained as clearly, especially given the somewhat streamlined process DCSE put in place during the cycle.

Enrollments in DCSE's Family Engagement program more than doubled over the same period in 2019. Given that our Family Engagement ads received the smallest number of conversions in Cycle 3 and relatively few paid ad impressions it seems difficult to attribute that increase to our

efforts, though perhaps the paid and organic campaigns had a word-of-mouth effect that the data does not capture.

Data on enrollments in DCSE's TANF debt compromise program were not available for analysis.

3.C.4. Research Question 4

Our final research question asked in effect whether a paid marketing campaign like our best practices model—one with search advertising at the center but also used remarketing campaigns on display and social media platforms to amplify its messaging—could form the basis for a sustainable, cost-effective approach to paid digital outreach. The results show our best practices model does offer an approach that DCSE and other child support programs could use going forward.

While occupying less than a third (29 percent) of our overall advertising budget and receiving only 14 percent of the cycle's 40,000 clicks, our Google Search ads apparently led to 81 percent of the cycle's 451 conversions. The remaining conversions in Cycle 3 can be attributed to three of the four remaining elements of the best practices campaign: Facebook (69 conversions), Google Display (11), and Instagram (6). That our Twitter ads received no conversions may be better thought of as evidence we could never make that platform work for us than that the site itself is not a good fit for child support content.

Notably, making conversion our ad objective[44] on Google Display, Facebook, and Instagram appears to have lowered the costs per conversion over previous cycles, as shown in Table 6: Results of the Best Practices Model. We would recommend that any future versions of the best practices integrate Snapchat and YouTube but use remarketing audiences and make conversions their advertising objective.

4. Lessons Learned and Next Steps

4.A. Lessons Learned

We see three primary takeaways from Cycle 3.

1. **Search advertising appears to be an effective method of digital advertising, but supporting it with ads on other platforms can improve overall outcomes**. The flexible budgeting of search ads and its readily adaptable, purely text-based approach speeds development while also, in our experience, offering a high click-through rate and a low cost per conversion. Using remarketing and conversion targeting on other platforms to

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[44] See footnote 14 for an explanation of advertising objectives and the associated passage for an explanation of how we used them in Cycle 3.

reinforce your messaging to interested audiences can lead to even better results at a much lower cost than if the ads had started on that platform.

2. **Organic social media is best thought of as a long-term investment in outreach and brand awareness.** The steady increase we saw in the number of followers or subscribers across our organic social media platforms, combined with the reduction in the number of negative comments, suggests that the steady, positive messaging employed by DCSE's organic social marketing experts appears to making headway among the general public. The absolute number of followers or subscribers remains low relative to the overall child support caseload, but the openness and accessibility DCSE is demonstrating through its public presence may have ripple effects beyond this group.

3. **Public educational webinars and, to lesser degree, podcasts can improve public engagement at a basically no cost for distribution.** Offering family law attorneys and mediators a free opportunity to earn continuing education credits appeared to generate goodwill for DCSE among that group and provide the program with an opportunity to offer substantive questions about policy and practice. While the podcast has yet to reach as many people as the webinar, it nonetheless did gain momentum even after the conclusion of the cycle and may eventually find a footing among the wider public. Since both rely on platforms that are either free (Anchor.fm) or already needed for other daily tasks (the videoconferencing tools used for the webinar), their distribution comes at essentially no cost.

4.B   Next Steps

With all three cycles of the Digital Marketing Grant now completed, our first next step is to synthesize the results from the interventions into a final evaluation report.

More broadly, DCSE plans to:
- Continue all parts of its organic social media program
- Continue and broaden its offering of webinars for family law attorneys and add to its podcast series
- Investigate potential procurement options that would allow it to continue paid advertising

Schedule of Appendices

[A. Updated Main Project Page](#)

[B. Updated Contact Form](#)

Appendix A: Updated Main Project Page

The final text of the updated project page (supportVAkids.com) is given below, with a simplified markup (h1 = Heading level 1, h2= heading level 3, etc.) included to indicate relative importance. Other formatting is used to indicate rough placement of the text.

Bracketed text notes the beginning and ending of updates to the text since Cycle 2.

Figure 9: Image of main project page with updates for Cycle 3.

<h1> Making Virginia's Child Support Program Simpler </h1>

<h2>An Easier Application, Low-cost Paternity Testing, and Help for Both Dads and Moms</h2>

As Virginia's Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE), we know the child support program can be hard to navigate. We have district offices across the state to support our families, make it easier to receive and pay child support, and even offer low-cost paternity testing.

[Begin update.] Right now it's particularly important to remember that DCSE works with dads and moms. We have an easy-to-understand form for requesting essential child support services.

We can also look at you and the other parent's current income to see whether your child support order should be adjusted—often without going to court. We have programs to help noncustodial parents who have lost a job and can't pay child support. And we even offer a special process for reducing TANF debt. [End update.]

<h2>We're making changes to improve how we serve families like yours... </h2>

Your child's needs just can't wait!

Reach out to us today!

We'll respond within two business days.

<h3>More Services for Custodial Parents (Parents Wanting to Receive Child Support)</h3>

1. NEW online child support application
2. Customer service experts trained to walk you through the process
3. Only $35 annually (and only if we collect more than $550/year on that child support case)

Don't lose out on the money your child needs!

<h3>[Begin update.] **Review Your Current Child Support**</h3>

1. Moms, dads, and caretakers can all request a review
2. We look at current income and recognize proven special circumstances
3. Requests can be made remotely

Don't miss a chance to update your child support! [End update.]

<h3>Support Services for Dads and Moms </h3>

1. Help the paying parent with some job-related expenses (work boots, uniforms, training, transportation, etc.)
2. Convenient ways to make child support payments
3. Free parenting and co-parenting programs

Don't delay building your child's potential!

Appendix B: Updated Contact Form

The final text of the updated contact form appears on the following page. Bracketed text indicates the beginning and ending of updates to the text since Cycle 2.

Full Name *Required*

| First Name | Last Name |

Phone Number *Required*

(xxx) xxx-xxxx

What can we do for you? *Required*

○ Enroll in the Virginia Department of Social Services Child Support Program
○ Review your existing child support order to see whether it can be changed
○ Get you information about our TANF debt compromise program
○ Provide another kind of help with an existing child support case
○ Connect you to employment services
○ Other

Email (optional)

your.email@example.com

Address (optional)

Street Address | Apt / Suite

Address 2

City | State ⌄ | Zip / Postal

How do you want us to contact you? (optional)

○ Phone (voice)
○ Email

How did you find us? (optional)

○ Internet search
○ Social media
○ Friend/family member
○ Other

SUBMIT

Figure 10: Image of the contact form as revised for Cycle 3.

Full Name (Required)

[ ] [ ]

Phone Number (Required)

[ ]

What can we do for you? (Required)

[Button]   [Begin update.] Enroll in the Virginia Department of Social Services Child Support Program [End update.]

[Button]   [Begin update.] Review your existing child support order to see whether it can be changed [End update.]

[Button]   [Begin update.] Get you information about our TANF debt compromise program [End update.]

[Button]   [Begin update.] Provide another kind of help with an existing child support case [End update.]

[Button]   [Begin update.] Connect you to employment services [End update.]

[Button]   Other [Box for user to complete]

Email (optional)

[ ]

Address (optional)

[ ] [ ]

[ ]

| Street | Apt/Suite | Address |

How do you want us to contact you? (optional)

◯ Phone (voice)

◯ Email

How did you find us? (optional)

◯ Internet search

◯ Social media

◯ Friend/family member

◯ Other [ ]

Submit