

FY17

PORTFOLIO
OF RESEARCH
— IN —
WELFARE **AND**
FAMILY SELF-
SUFFICIENCY

Administration for
Children and Families

Office of Planning,
Research, and Evaluation

≡OPRE

Administration for Children and Families

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/>

The Administration for Children & Families (ACF) is a division of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS). ACF promotes the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities.

ACF programs aim to:

- Empower families and individuals to increase their economic independence and productivity;
- Encourage strong, healthy, supportive communities that have a positive impact on quality of life and the development of children;
- Create partnerships with front-line service providers, states, localities, and tribal communities to identify and implement solutions that transcend traditional program boundaries;
- Improve access to services through planning, reform, and integration; and
- Address the needs, strengths, and abilities of vulnerable populations including people with developmental disabilities, refugees, and migrants.

Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) studies ACF programs and the populations they serve through rigorous research and evaluation projects. These include evaluations of existing programs, evaluations of innovative approaches to helping low-income children and families, research syntheses, and descriptive and exploratory studies. OPRE also works to improve the analysis of data, coordinates performance management for ACF, and aims to build and disseminate knowledge about effective approaches to helping low-income children and families.

OPRE includes four divisions:

- The Division of Economic Independence focuses on welfare, employment, and family self-sufficiency.
- The Division of Child and Family Development focuses on child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and child abuse and neglect.
- The Division of Family Strengthening focuses on teen pregnancy prevention, youth development, healthy marriage, responsible fatherhood, family violence, runaway and homeless youth, and home visiting.
- The Division of Data and Improvement focuses on improving the quality, usefulness, sharing, and analysis of data to improve ACF programs and program participants' outcomes.



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Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research

The Division of Economic Independence within OPRE has primary responsibility for welfare and family self-sufficiency research.

OPRE's research in the area of welfare and family self-sufficiency is designed to expand knowledge about effective programs to promote employment, self-sufficiency, and economic well-being among low-income families. Research focuses on five major areas:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Employment and the Labor Market
- Education and Training
- Behavioral Science
- Cross-Cutting and Other Safety Net Research

Within these areas, OPRE funds experimental impact evaluations, implementation evaluations, and descriptive research projects aimed at informing the design and implementation of programs.

OPRE also invests in activities to disseminate rigorous research on welfare and family self-sufficiency topics.

This *Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency* describes major welfare and family self-sufficiency research projects sponsored by OPRE in Fiscal Year 2017.

ACF Evaluation Policy

ACF seeks to promote rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics in the conduct of evaluations. ACF's Evaluation Policy, which was published in the Federal Register on August 29, 2014, addresses these five key principles to govern ACF's planning, conduct, and use of evaluation. The [full evaluation policy](#) is available on the OPRE website.

- **Rigor:** ACF is committed to using rigorous methods to yield accurate and unbiased findings.
- **Relevance:** Our evaluations should address legislative requirements and congressional, federal, state, tribal, and local interests.
- **Transparency:** We will make information about planned and ongoing evaluations easily accessible. We will release results regardless of the findings. Reports will present comprehensive results, including favorable, unfavorable, and null findings.
- **Independence:** Evaluation should not be biased. To promote objectivity, we protect independence in the design, conduct, and analysis of evaluations.
- **Ethics:** ACF-sponsored evaluations will be conducted in an ethical manner and safeguard the dignity, rights, safety, and privacy of participants.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Research

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides block grants to states to design and operate programs to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. OPRE's research examines the local implementation of TANF programs and policies, the intersection of TANF with other safety net programs, and other relevant issues related to TANF program operations, TANF recipients, and TANF-eligible families.

Recent past projects include: [an analysis of the coordination of TANF and Workforce Investment Act services](#); [a descriptive study of differences in TANF programs administered by counties versus states](#); and [an examination of situations in which TANF clients have zero reported hours of work participation](#).

Other past projects include: [a study of local implementation of TANF](#); [a descriptive study of Tribal TANF](#); [an examination of state and local efforts to divert TANF applicants from applying for cash assistance](#); [a study of what is known about the effects of time limit policies](#); [an examination of the overlap between TANF and Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\) programs and populations](#); and [a qualitative examination of the dynamics of disconnection from employment and TANF](#).

In addition to the studies described in this section, OPRE conducts experimental research on welfare-to-work and innovative employment strategies; these efforts are described in the later sections on employment and the labor market and education and training.

[State TANF Policies Database](#)

Under TANF, states have considerable authority to design the parameters of their programs and set their own rules. Since 1997, the Urban Institute has maintained the State TANF Policies Database, also known as the Welfare Rules Database, in order to document state program rules. The database is meant to be a single location where information on TANF program rules can be researched across states and/or across years. ACF has funded updates to the database as well as publication of tables summarizing state TANF policies for each year since 1997. Annual publications are available on the [OPRE website](#).

[The Intersection Between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance Services](#)

ACF's Office of Refugee Resettlement administers a variety of social services programs intended to connect newly resettled refugees with resources that help them become economically self-sufficient and integrated into American society. One such program is the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program, which offers financial support and social services to newly resettled refugees. RCA and TANF are both cash assistance programs that provide services aimed at promoting self-sufficiency. However, there is little documented information on the extent to which refugees access TANF versus RCA, how outcomes for refugees compare under these two programs, whether integration of these programs holds promise for refugee self-sufficiency, and other important questions.

The Intersection Between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance Services project aims to improve understanding of how RCA and TANF serve refugee populations, how the programs intersect, and how the programs may be related to refugee self-sufficiency and employment outcomes. The study, which was launched in September 2014 and is being conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with MEF Associates, will document the similarities and differences between TANF and RCA in selected jurisdictions while exploring the population of refugees served by these programs and differences in program services.

In 2016, the study surveyed state refugee coordinators to gather information about state practices and approaches to refugee social service delivery; [a report](#) summarizing the survey findings was released in fall 2017. The project team also completed site visits in eight counties to explore how states and localities have coordinated TANF and RCA programs and whether these approaches have the potential to foster long-term job stability and economic self-sufficiency for refugees. Based on these site visits, a brief focused on innovative practices for coordinating refugee services will be released in early 2018. A final report synthesizing study findings is also expected in 2018. By improving knowledge of these programs and participant experiences, ACF hopes to move toward better serving refugee populations.

Identifying Issues and Options to Understand TANF-Compatible Outcome Measures for Employment Services

OPRE launched Identifying Issues and Options to Understand TANF-Compatible Outcome Measures for Employment Services (OUTCOMES) in September 2016. Conducted by the Urban Institute, the project supports ACF in understanding how employment-related outcome measures could be meaningfully and practically implemented for TANF. The study will explore: 1) the extent to which state TANF programs currently measure employment-related outcomes, and

the practical lessons from those state experiences; 2) best practices in the development of performance measurement systems for employment-related outcomes, and the issues related to implementing such systems for TANF; and 3) ways to improve coordination across performance measurement systems for TANF, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training programs.

The project began with a review of all pertinent literature, reports, and data and held discussions with nine state TANF directors. In 2017 the OUTCOMES team also consulted with experts on TANF and performance measurement.

Understanding Poverty: Childhood and Family Experiences and TANF Office Culture

As part of its mission of promoting the economic and social well-being of low-income groups, ACF seeks to understand how human services programs can help families achieve self-sufficiency while still providing a safety net. While there are many facets to developing such an understanding, two crucial components to incorporate are the operations of the programs themselves and the perspectives of families and children living in poverty. To that end, OPRE has undertaken the Understanding Poverty study, which launched in 2016 and is being conducted by MEF Associates in partnership with MDRC.

- **TANF Organizational Culture**

One component of this project will explore how organizational culture, office design, and office procedures contribute to shaping clients' experiences with TANF, the services provided to them, and potentially their outcomes. The concept of organizational culture encompasses the organization's mission and vision in relation to its clients and the shared objectives guiding its work as well as values, attitudes, expectations, assumptions, and norms. It also manifests in more concrete, everyday ways—such as physical location and office design, staff training, staffing decisions, employee

decision-making and interactions with clients, and written procedures and materials. Fieldwork is expected to focus especially on exemplars of productive client-oriented office settings and organizational processes and culture and/or TANF offices that have made conscious attempts at organizational culture change.

- **Childhood and Family Experiences**

A second component of the project will examine the experiences and perspectives of children and families living in poverty, including the experiences

of families who apply for and access TANF and other safety net benefits. A large body of research spanning decades has reflected a range of psychological, educational, health, and other serious and sometimes long-term impacts associated with severe economic disadvantage in childhood. While there is a growing literature on the lived experiences of adults in conditions of severe deprivation, less work has looked at how low-income children of various ages experience, perceive, and view the day-to-day circumstances of living in poverty. Interviews with

Human Services Research Partnerships

The Human Services Research Partnerships (HSRP) are cooperative agreements that aim to support collaboration among researchers, human services programs, and policymakers within the U.S. territories. Projects focus on topics related to the Head Start and TANF programs, such as self-sufficiency and stability among low-income families and the healthy development and school-readiness of children. Through the partnerships, ACF seeks an improved understanding of the human services needs of the territories and how human services programs in the region are meeting these needs; the unique circumstances and challenges posed by economic, geographic, and developmental factors; the particular strengths, assets, and cultural norms of each region that impact human services; and opportunities for ACF to use human services to enhance the quality of life for residents in the U.S. territories. An additional goal of the HSRP is to increase the capacity of each region to gather relevant data and utilize research.

Human Services Research Partnership: Virgin Islands (HSRPVI)

A HSRP cooperative agreement was awarded in 2014 to the University of the Virgin Islands' School of Nursing. Goals specific to HSRPVI include establishing a research infrastructure to support the provision of quality human services for Head Start and TANF clients; developing a secure data collection system; providing training to support the development of research capacity; and implementing two human services research studies on questions of interest to Head Start and TANF programs locally.

The project has completed environmental scans of Head Start and TANF services available on the islands and continues to involve regular meetings with U.S. Virgin Islands human services government leadership and

working subgroups examining data and research needs. These meetings have included workshops on participatory and rapid-cycle research. The university team has partnered with TANF and Head Start research experts, as well as experts in community-based research, to refine their approach and address priority questions for the local social services community.

The project team piloted a coaching approach with TANF clients. This effort was met with several challenges, including reluctance of participants to engage in the model and limits to the TANF client pool. The team is also examining the obstacles Head Start Centers face in accessing local health resources, the Head Start waiting list process, and the implementation of a professional development model for Head Start teachers that includes a new parallel approach to engage parents in supporting their children's learning.

approximately 50 children and youths as well as their parents are intended to facilitate a deeper understanding of what children understand about their families' economic circumstances, how families talk about public assistance benefits, and other aspects of their life experiences.

Both strands of this project will publish literature reviews in 2018 and conduct consultations with experts in the field and site-based fieldwork to visit TANF offices and interview children and families. Site selection is currently underway. Taken together, the outcomes of this inquiry can be expected to improve the field's understanding of the lives of children in poverty and their families while further building an understanding of how the TANF program and organizational culture affect individuals within this population.

NEW

Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families

For more than two decades, researchers have studied the effectiveness of programs, policies, and practices in TANF-supported employment and training services. Given the changes in the characteristics of caseload populations, labor demands, and the skills needed to advance in the workforce, TANF agencies have innovated over time, resulting in interventions appropriate for new research and evaluation.

In fall 2017, OPRE launched Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES). The project aims to build on and complement current state and federal efforts, efficiently move selected interventions or program models to the next level of evidence, and ultimately, increase the number of evidence-supported interventions for the low-income population seeking employment and economic stability. Led by MDRC in partnership with Abt Associates and MEF Associates, BEES will assist ACF in building evidence for innovative interventions aimed at supporting low-income individuals and families seeking employment, advances in the labor market, and economic security. In

addition, ACF aims to support states in moving toward rigorous evaluations of state-initiated interventions. Within these broad goals, the project will prioritize building evidence specifically related to preventing and addressing behavioral health issues such as opioid dependency, substance abuse, and/or mental health issues that create barriers to employment among TANF participants and individuals at risk of TANF dependency and their family members.

The project will work with states to identify interventions that are focused on improving employment, training, and economic security for low-income families. After interventions are identified, ACF and its contractors will work to determine the most rigorous evaluation approach feasible, focusing on random assignment designs where possible.

Key project tasks include identification of priority areas and interventions ripe for moving to the next level of evidence; review of existing evidence and feasibility issues; conducting rigorous impact evaluations of interventions; and consultation around complex evaluation designs or statistical methods relevant for testing interventions in one or more sites. This multi-pronged research effort will continue through 2022, producing individual reports for each intervention evaluated in addition to developing special topics papers.

NEW

Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data

The Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data project, also known as the TANF Data Innovation (TDI) project, will support innovation and efficiency within state TANF programs through enhanced use of data from TANF and related human services programs. Launched in September 2017, TDI is led by MDRC in partnership with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, the Center for Urban Science and Progress at New York University, and Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy at the University of Pennsylvania. The project's aim is to provide timely, actionable, and relevant

Institute for Research on Poverty National Poverty Center Fellows

The National Poverty Center Fellows Program was established in 2013 in order to build the capacity of emerging researchers to conduct high-quality, policy-relevant research on poverty and inequality in the United States. The program is administered by the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a grant from OPRE and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation that supports post-doctoral fellows in residence at OPRE. The fellows conduct poverty-related research and analysis, contribute to planning and overseeing poverty-related research and evaluation studies, and work on their own ACF-related research projects.

Two fellows are currently in residence in the Division of Economic Independence at OPRE, where they are working on a variety of projects related to career pathways, fatherhood interventions, disparities in human services, services for refugees, innovative research methods, and other poverty and safety net studies.

technical assistance to state and local TANF agencies on a variety of issues related to TANF data. Topics will include integrated data systems, data sharing, promoting proper payments and program integrity, expanding analytic capacity, and overall increased use of TANF and related human services data for program improvement.

The TDI project includes the following key tasks:

- Assessment of the needs of all 50 states around collecting, sharing, and using TANF data;
- Provision of wide-ranging technical assistance for states and localities on a variety of topics related to TANF data;
- Assessment of existing approaches to ensuring program integrity and proper payments in TANF;
- Creation and evaluation of a TDI pilot, which will support specific data-focused projects in selected states and/or localities; and
- Capacity-building around TANF data use, quality, and analysis at the state and local level, as well as at the federal level.

Across these activities, the project will support the use of data for understanding the impact that TANF has on families broadly, as well as how the federal government and state partners can use data to better serve families.

Employment & the Labor Market

A major focus of OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research is increasing knowledge about strategies for helping TANF recipients and other low-income individuals find jobs, maintain employment, and advance in the labor market.

Past projects in this area include: the [Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation](#), which tested several strategies for helping hard-to-employ parents find and sustain employment; the [Employment Retention and Advancement Project](#), which tested strategies for helping employed individuals keep their jobs and advance in the workforce; and the [National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies](#), which evaluated the effectiveness of mandatory welfare-to-work programs.

OPRE is currently conducting random assignment experiments of employment strategies, including [subsidized and transitional employment models](#), [job search assistance](#), and [coaching practices aimed at job entry and retention](#). OPRE's existing [Employment Strategies Evidence Review](#) is expanding to help create a congressionally required "What Works Clearinghouse of Proven and Promising Projects to Move Welfare Recipients into Work." OPRE is also planning to convene a roundtable of subject matter experts to identify gaps in knowledge of employment and training approaches for low-income populations and recipients of social safety net benefits.

Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project

OPRE launched the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED) in 2010 with the goal of demonstrating and evaluating the next generation of subsidized employment models for critical low-income populations. The project, led by MDRC,

examines strategies for providing counter-cyclical employment and for successfully transitioning individuals from short-term, subsidized employment to unsubsidized employment in the regular labor market. These strategies build upon approaches that have demonstrated effectiveness in previous studies and also test new and innovative interventions. The evaluation includes a random assignment impact evaluation in eight sites, an implementation evaluation at each project site, and a cost-benefit analysis. An in-program survey measures potential non-economic benefits of subsidized employment, such as emotional and social well-being.

The STED project is being conducted in close coordination with the Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD). A project of the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) at the Department of Labor (DOL), ETJD funded seven grantees to provide temporary, paid work experiences to noncustodial parents and ex-offenders to improve their employability, earnings, and opportunities for advancement. Given the complementary nature of these efforts, OPRE and ETA entered into a memorandum of agreement to coordinate the STED and ETJD studies, including shared data collection instruments, shared evaluation sites, and coordinated reporting efforts.

STED began with an analysis of what was known about existing or previous approaches to subsidized employment, especially within the context of current TANF policies and requirements, as well as efforts under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. In 2011, OPRE released [Subsidizing Employment Opportunities for Low-Income Families: A Review of State Employment Programs Created Through the TANF Emergency Fund](#).

Following this initial scan, the project team recruited eight sites to participate in the evaluation:

STED Site	Description
Good Transitions <i>Goodwill of North Georgia</i>	This DOL-funded program provided transitional jobs in Goodwill locations to low-income, noncustodial parents referred to the program by the child support agency.
TransitionsSF <i>Goodwill and the San Francisco Department of Child Support Services</i>	This DOL-funded program provided transitional jobs to low-income, noncustodial parents using a tiered approach that placed participants into one of three tiers – traditional transitional job, public sector position, or subsidized private sector placement – based on employability characteristics.
Transitional Subsidized Employment <i>Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services</i>	Los Angeles County is testing two different program models for low-income individuals: (1) paid work experience in non-profit or public sector placements; and (2) “hybrid” on-the-job training in for-profit, private sector placements.
Jobs Now STEP Forward <i>San Francisco City and County Agency for Human Services</i>	San Francisco is testing private sector (both non-profit and for-profit) subsidized employment placements for low-income individuals who have timed out of TANF or have exhausted Unemployment Insurance benefits.
Young Adult Internship Program <i>New York City Center for Economic Opportunity</i>	The Young Adult Internship Program targets disconnected youth – neither in school nor working for at least three months – ages 16 to 24 and provides initial training followed by a private sector (for- or non-profit) internship for up to 12 weeks.
Bridges to Pathways <i>Chicago Department of Family and Support Services</i>	Developed in partnership with the Chicago Crime Lab and University of Chicago, the Department of Family and Support Services is operating a pilot of the Bridges to Pathways Initiative, which targets 16- to 24-year-olds leaving incarceration and includes three components: (1) a transitional job; (2) an online high school program; and (3) a cognitive behavioral therapy-like program.
MSTED <i>Minnesota Department of Human Services</i>	This program targets clients of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (the state’s TANF program) who are not working and who have been in the program for at least six months. The program features two tiers: (1) an eight-week structured work experience in non-profit or public agencies designed to build participants’ soft skills and work experience; and (2) a 16-week subsidized job in the private sector. Participants can start in either tier depending on their work-readiness.
Atlanta Paycheck Plus <i>United Way of Greater Atlanta</i>	This program offers an enhanced Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income individuals without dependent children. As with the other STED programs, this site provides work-based income support, although in regular, not transitional, jobs. This approach has similar goals as the other STED programs – to increase the employability and income of low-income individuals – and it targets many of the same groups (young adults, former prisoners, and noncustodial parents).

Data collection is ongoing with the 12-month and 30-month follow-up surveys.

A [summary report](#) describing both the eight STED programs and the five additional ETJD programs was released in May 2015. Implementation and 12-month findings from [the two joint STED/ETJD sites](#) (Atlanta and San Francisco) and the [Young Adult Internship Program](#) in New York City were released in late 2016 and early 2017 respectively. Additional implementation and impact results from the other STED sites will be available in 2018 and beyond.

Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation

In 2013, OPRE launched the Job Search Assistance (JSA) Strategies Evaluation. Led by Abt Associates and its partner Mathematica Policy Research, JSA is a multi-site, random assignment evaluation of the relative impact of different TANF job search approaches on short-term labor market outcomes such as earnings and time to employment. JSA builds on OPRE's [Design Options of the Search for Employment](#) project, which included a literature review and recommendations for an overall approach to and design of a job search strategies evaluation. JSA draws from this work to conduct the first rigorous test of job search services for TANF recipients.

The JSA evaluation aims to achieve two goals. First, JSA will provide information about the relative impacts of various job search assistance services and the manner in which agencies provide them. Second, JSA is intended to provide actionable and policy-relevant feedback to the TANF field, including federal TANF policymakers, state and local TANF administrators, and frontline caseworkers.

The JSA evaluation uses a random assignment experimental design and includes an impact and implementation evaluation carried out across the selected sites. In addition to administrative data, the study will also include a survey of participants, administered approximately six months after random assignment, to capture information on intensity and duration of JSA services, how

Key Findings from STED

Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) in New York City: Implementation Study and 12-Month Follow-Up Survey

- Across providers, YAIP was delivered with a high degree of fidelity to the program model as designed. Participation rates were high: Over three-fourths of young people assigned to the program group worked in a subsidized internship, and 86 percent of those youth completed the internship.
- Program group members were more likely than control group members to report receiving employment support, as well as advice or support and mentorship from staff members at their agency or organization. However, substantial numbers of control group members also received this type of assistance.
- The program group was more likely than the control group to have worked during the year following random assignment, but the employment rates of the two groups converged shortly after the YAIP internships ended. However, the program group had higher earnings than the control group. While earnings impacts were largest during the time when program group members were working in paid internships, these impacts persisted throughout the follow-up period, suggesting that program group members may have obtained better jobs than control group members.

participants found their current job, attitudes and motivations around the job search, and barriers to employment.

The job search assistance approaches tested in JSA are relatively short-term in nature. Impact and implementation studies are being conducted in three sites and implementation-only studies are being conducted in two additional sites.

JSA Site	Type of Study	Description of Test
New York City Human Resources Administration	Impact and Implementation	New York City is testing its current approach, which requires 35 hours of participation per week including group job search classes, compared to supervised job search in which clients have one-on-one, weekly meetings with a staff person to assist them with their job search, but otherwise conduct a self-directed search. The study operates at two vendors (America Works and Goodwill) in Brooklyn and Queens.
Sacramento County (CA) Department of Human Assistance	Impact and Implementation	Sacramento is testing: (1) three weeks of job search and job readiness activities in a group/classroom setting followed by five weeks of one-on-one job search assistance compared to (2) three days of group job search assistance followed by one-on-one supervised job search for up to seven-and-a-half weeks.
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (Genesee and Wayne Counties)	Impact and Implementation	Genesee County (which includes Flint) and Wayne County (excluding the Detroit area) are testing enhancements to their current 21-day Applicant Eligibility Period (AEP) and the PATH (Partnership. Accountability. Training. Hope.) program. The enhancement includes a service delivery framework that uses a tool called the “Bridge of Strength,” a revised orientation, revised accountability measures in lieu of the work participation rate, and training for treatment group case managers on how to coach clients and use a number of goal achievement tools.
Westchester County (NY) Department of Social Services	Implementation only	JSA is conducting implementation studies of Westchester’s supervised, one-on-one job search compared to the full-time, classroom-based STRIVE program. STRIVE is an eight-week program that includes four weeks of training on behavioral change and job readiness skills followed by four weeks of some form of supervised job search.
Ramsey County (MN)	Implementation only	JSA is conducting an implementation study of Ramsey County’s Lifelong Learning Initiative (LLI). LLI includes enhanced approaches to assessments, orientations, counseling, and staff assistance (with a focus on goal setting and coaching).

In 2017, the JSA study completed enrollment and will continue to collect data through the six-month survey into early 2018. Data analyses have begun and site-specific reports will be available on a rolling basis beginning in 2018.

Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review

Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review (ESER), launched in 2013 and conducted

by Mathematica Policy Research, is a systematic review of the evaluation research on employment and training programs for low-income adults. The review is presented in a searchable, public database – employmentstrategies.acf.hhs.gov – and has been supplemented with briefs synthesizing its results and highlighting promising strategies identified. ESER is designed to provide practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and the general public with a transparent and systematic assessment of the research evidence for the effectiveness of programs designed to improve the employment-related

outcomes of low-income adults. A core component of ESER, as with other federal evidence reviews, involved analyzing the quality of the research evidence on different interventions.

To identify the programs and strategies, or interventions, that appear to be most effective in helping low-income adults gain and retain employment, the project team systematically conducted a broad literature search for relevant studies; screened studies to determine whether they met the criteria for being reviewed; and assessed the rigor of each study's methods to determine the strength of the evidence presented. This approach followed pre-specified [standards and methods](#). Until ESER, no other such comprehensive review had been undertaken.

Results are presented in a [searchable database](#) on the ACF website that shares findings from the review and key information about studies that resulted in the evidence that is considered most reliable. The website allows users to search for results by program studied, by target population, by favorable impacts found, and in other ways.

Additionally, ESER produced a series of research briefs summarizing the results of the review and examining review topics in greater depth. These briefs:

- [qualitatively summarize the evidence base on employment strategies for low-income adults](#);
- describe the evidence on both [financial incentives and sanctions](#) and [work-readiness interventions](#) as strategies for improving employment outcomes;
- [recommend best practices for study authors on how to describe impact evaluations of employment programs and strategies](#);
- [identify gaps in the research base on employment strategies for low-income adults](#); and
- [review all of the studies in the ESER database to conduct a meta-analysis of which employment strategies appear to be most effective](#).

In the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2017, Congress asked HHS to create a database of projects that

have used a proven or promising approach to move welfare recipients into work, based on independent, rigorous evaluations and create a “What Works Clearinghouse of Proven and Promising Projects to Move Welfare Recipients into Work.” This legislative requirement aligns with and builds on the work OPRE has conducted for ESER. To help HHS best meet the new requirement, OPRE has been convening experts in federal evidence reviews to inform and extend ESER’s existing work.

Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations

In 2016, OPRE launched the Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations. Conducted by Mathematica Policy Research in partnership with Abt Associates, the project will evaluate up to three coaching interventions that focus on both job entry and retention and target TANF populations and other low-income individuals.

Coaching-based interventions have been put forth as one way to give people tools to overcome various barriers in order to build employment-related skills and secure work. The hypothesis underlying this approach is that participants’ challenges may be addressed through coaching by specially trained staff who can help identify participants’ goals and steps needed to attain them. While coaching-focused employment programs for individuals with disabilities have been evaluated extensively, it is not yet known to what extent similar models can work for low-income and other vulnerable groups. This project seeks to fill that gap in the research and contribute to the body of evidence regarding what works for helping TANF clients and related populations move toward self-sufficiency.

Additionally, this project will develop a conceptual framework for measuring self-regulation skills in the context of evaluations of employment programs. Building on this framework, a second paper will include empirical analyses assessing the validity of the baseline measures of self-regulation skills, and a third paper will discuss the relationship between coaching and employment interventions focused on self-regulation.

NEW

Next Steps for Employment and Training Research: Roundtable and White Papers

OPRE is responsible for advising the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of programs designed to better the employment-related outcomes of low-income individuals. To that end, the primary goal of this project is to identify gaps in knowledge of employment and training approaches for low-income populations and recipients of social safety net benefits. This aim will be accomplished by convening a roundtable of subject matter experts to discuss the current status of and gaps in the research and by producing a series of complementary white papers. OPRE may draw on this knowledge as it considers potential future directions for its research and evaluation portfolio. The Next Steps for Employment and Training Research project launched in October 2017 and is being conducted by MEF Associates in partnership with MDRC.

Education & Training

OPRE has a strong history of sponsoring rigorous research on the effectiveness of education and training strategies for improving employment and earnings for TANF recipients and other low-income individuals. Currently, OPRE is a national leader in the rigorous evaluation of post-secondary career pathways programs. Career pathways programs connect education, training, and related supports in a pathway that leads to employment in a specific sector or occupation or to further training. The approach is gaining attention as a promising strategy to improve post-secondary education and training outcomes for low-income and low-skilled adults. Although there is some research evidence on selected components of career pathways programs, to date there has been no rigorous research on the overall effectiveness of this approach.

Beginning in 2007, with the launch of the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) project and continuing with the evaluations of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants program (HPOG), ACF has developed a robust portfolio of research on the career pathways approach. In addition, OPRE completed an [Employment Sector Analysis](#) project to identify jobs that can be attained with 12 months or less of full-time, post-secondary education or training.

Career Pathways

The career pathways framework has attracted increasing attention as a promising approach to post-secondary education and training for low-income and low-skilled adults. Its central feature is instruction that is organized as a series of manageable and well-articulated steps accompanied by strong supports and connections to employment. The steps provide opportunities for pre-college-level students to access college-level training and for better-skilled students to move to successively higher levels of credential-bearing training and employment. Each step incorporates customized curricula and instruction, academic and non-academic supports, and employment experiences and opportunities.

To engage, retain, and facilitate learning among low-skilled adults, the career pathways framework includes four categories of service strategies: (1) assessments of skills and needs; (2) promising and innovative approaches to basic skills instruction and occupational training; (3) academic and non-academic supports; and (4) approaches for connecting students with career-track employment opportunities. Within each of these categories, there are a variety of promising strategies. Though many programs include all of these strategies, the extent to which and ways they do so vary.

For more information visit www.career-pathways.org.

Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education

In 2007, OPRE initiated the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) project, a multi-site, random assignment evaluation of promising strategies for increasing employment and self-sufficiency among low-income families. The project aimed to study interventions with the potential to have substantial effects on earnings and income rather than just modest effects, prioritize strategies focused on skills development, and concentrate on a relatively wide population of low-income parents.

Based on stakeholder input, PACE came to focus on post-secondary career pathways as the main intervention framework to study.

The PACE team, led by Abt Associates, is conducting implementation and impact evaluations of nine innovative demonstrations operating career pathways programs around the country. Each of the programs has been profiled in a separate publication, available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/pathways-for-advancing-careers-and-education>.

The PACE partners include:

Career Pathway Program

Description

Des Moines Area Community College, Prepared Learner Program

Students in the Prepared Learner Program receive contextualized basic skills instruction, instruction in employment and life skills, and vocational training through a short-term certificate course. Each short-term certificate offered in the Prepared Learner Program ladders into one or more specific certificate, degree, or diploma programs.

I-BEST Programs in Washington State

The Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program operates in all 34 of Washington's community colleges to provide basic skills or English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction and training in a range of credit-based occupational training programs, along with counseling and other supports. The PACE project is evaluating I-BEST model programs at the Bellingham Technical, Everett Community, and Whatcom Community Colleges.

Instituto del Progreso Latino, Carreras en Salud

Instituto del Progreso Latino is a large non-profit education and employment organization in Chicago dedicated to serving the city's growing Latino/a population. Launched in 2005, Carreras en Salud (Careers in Health) is a career pathway program in nursing occupations for low-skilled and limited-English-proficient Latinos that leads participants from a certified nursing assistant certification to pre-licensed practitioner nurse and ultimately to registered nurse.

Madison College, Patient Care Pathway Program

The Patient Care Pathway Program provides short-term, condensed training that allows lower-skilled students to take courses for college credit and prepares them for healthcare degree and diploma programs. Students are placed into one of two available tracks depending on individual skill level.

Pima Community College, Pathways to Healthcare*

The Pathways to Healthcare program offers training to students in 16 different healthcare professions based on personal preference and test scores. Professions range from home health aides to medical billers/coders to EMT-paramedics. The length of training can be as short as the five-week nursing assistant training or up to two or three years for any of the associate degree programs.

Career Pathway Program

Description

[San Diego Workforce Partnership, Bridge to Employment*](#)

The Bridge to Employment job training programs enable eligible adults to develop the skills and knowledge needed for emerging career opportunities in healthcare by providing extensive case management and support services.

[Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement](#)

Serving four large counties in southern Texas, the non-profit Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) aims to help students achieve an associate degree and gain occupational training in allied health, manufacturing, technology, business, education, and other specialized trades. VIDA offers a bridge program, the College Prep Academy, to build basic educational and language skills in preparation for enrollment at a local community college.

[Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County, Health Careers for All*](#)

Health Careers for All is designed to meet the region's expanding healthcare labor needs while simultaneously addressing the training, employment, and advancement needs of its low-income residents by preparing them for jobs such as nursing assistant, medical office assistant, and phlebotomist.

[Year Up](#)

This test of the Year Up program focuses on eight sites that offer young adults skills training, experience, and support to empower them to reach their potential through professional careers and higher education. The intensive, one-year program provides high school graduates and GED recipients between the ages of 18 and 24 with a combination of hands-on skill development and corporate internship opportunities.

* This partner was supported by a Health Profession Opportunity Grant (2010-2015).

In 2015, the project released its [Evaluation Design Report](#) and [Impact Analysis Plan](#). The study began to release implementation and early impact reports in 2017 for each of the nine demonstrations. All reports will be released by early 2018. Key findings from some of the reports are included on the following pages.

In 2016, the project released three briefs based on qualitative interviews with PACE treatment group members that were focused on: participants' [motivations for enrolling](#) in PACE programs, the [challenges they faced](#) in participating in the programs, and the [programmatic and other supports](#) they received while participating. Two additional briefs based on the qualitative interviews are expected in early 2018. [Another brief](#) presented findings from an analysis of participants in the control group and highlighted the risk factors disadvantaged students face in college success. The study also released a report that shared [the experiences of and lessons learned from](#) Year Up's efforts to scale up their program.

Key Findings from PACE Implementation and Early Impact Reports

Pima Community College's Pathways to Healthcare Program

- Pathways to Healthcare successfully implemented two “bridges” to help students improve basic skills prior to enrollment in occupational training, with 26 percent of treatment group students participating.
- A sizeable portion of the treatment group – 38 percent – did not enroll in any training. Findings from the implementation study suggest this may have been a result of long waits to start training; poor fit/lack of interest in health care training; failure to complete enrollment process; and personal reasons around balancing family, work, and costs.
- Pathways to Healthcare increased the number of hours of college occupational training that students received. Treatment group members completed on average 65 more hours of occupational training over the 18-month follow-up period than the control group (192 vs. 127 hours).
- This impact on hours of occupational training was driven by the treatment group's higher rate of participation. Among those who participated in training, the average number of hours was very similar across the treatment group and the control group, but the treatment group was 20 percent more likely to participate.

Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA)

- VIDA staff and participants described the program as a set of services, obligations, and incentives.
- Almost all VIDA treatment group members (98 percent) participated in an education or training activity over the course of the study period. Ninety-one percent of treatment group members earned at least one college credit, and 66 percent completed 30 or more college credits (the equivalent of ten courses) through the 24-month follow-up period.
- Two years after enrollment, 42 percent of the treatment group were still enrolled in training. Among those still enrolled, about half were still working toward their first credential while the other half had obtained a credential and were working toward another.
- Over the 24-month follow-up period, VIDA increased the average number of credits earned by 5.6, equivalent to nearly two courses (33.1 vs. 27.5 credits). The average of 27.5 credits for control group members reflects the fact that they had access to the same college courses as treatment group members and were often already enrolled when they applied for VIDA's services.
- VIDA increased the percentage of individuals who received a college credential by eight percentage points (53 vs. 45 percent), with the largest effects observed for those who received a certificate.

(Continued on next page)

Key Findings from PACE Implementation and Early Impact Reports

(Continued from previous page)

San Diego Workforce Partnership's Bridge to Employment in Healthcare Program

- More than 80 percent of program participants enrolled in a healthcare training program. Among those who attended training, 80 percent attended one training program, 17 percent attended two training programs, and three percent attended more than two training programs.
- Most participants enrolled in private, for-profit schools rather than community colleges. Program staff reported this was because private, for-profit schools had comparatively higher course availability and shorter enrollment periods and course length.
- Bridge to Employment increased participants' receipt of any credential by 29 percentage points (64 vs. 34 percent) over the 18-month follow-up period. Treatment group members attended an average of 380 hours of occupational training compared to 279 hours for the control group, a 36 percent increase.
- Bridge to Employment increased the number of study participants working in a job that requires mid-level skills by 10 percentage points (25 vs. 15 percent), as well as the proportion working in a healthcare occupation (26 vs. 16 percent).

Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County's Health Careers for All Program

- More than 82 percent of treatment group members participated in some type of education or training program, either a prerequisite to training or a healthcare training program. Sixty-four percent attended at least one healthcare training program, and 12 percent participated in at least two.
- Health Careers for All had developed a strong partnership with the local TANF agency, and as a result 43 percent of treatment group participants were already receiving TANF at intake. TANF recipients had a shorter average length of stay in the program (4.4 months) compared to non-TANF recipients (6.0 months), although completion rates for both groups were almost identical (47 and 48 percent, respectively).
- The program achieved impacts on the percentage of participants enrolling in training in a healthcare field. However, there was no statistical impact on receipt of a credential or total hours of occupational training. About 49 and 45 percent of participants in the treatment and control groups, respectively, received a credential in the 18-month follow-up period.
- The wide array of education and employment supports available in King County limited the contrast between the treatment and control groups.
- Health Careers for All produced a nine percentage point impact on the proportion of participants reporting that they were working in a healthcare occupation during the 18-month follow-up period (45 vs. 36 percent). However, there were no impacts on any other employment outcomes.

Evaluation Portfolio for the Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program

The Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program provides education and training to TANF recipients and other low-income individuals for occupations in the healthcare field that pay well and are expected either to experience labor shortages or to be in high demand. The HPOG program was authorized by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010 and is administered by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families.

HPOG programs are expected to target skills and competencies demanded by the healthcare industry; support career pathways; result in an employer- or industry-recognized certificate or degree; combine

supportive services with education and training services to help participants overcome barriers to employment; and provide services at times and locations that are easily accessible to targeted populations.

In 2010, OFA awarded the first round of HPOG grants to 32 organizations located across 23 states to carry out five-year programs (referred to as HPOG 1.0). In 2015, OFA awarded a second round of HPOG grants to 32 organizations located across 21 states for a new five-year period (referred to as HPOG 2.0).

The ACA authorized HPOG as a demonstration program and mandated a federal evaluation. OPRE developed a multi-pronged evaluation strategy to assess the success of the HPOG program. The evaluation strategy aims to provide information on program implementation, systems change, outcomes, and impact. OPRE's evaluation portfolio for HPOG includes a number of components.

Emerging Findings from HPOG 1.0 *Key Findings from the HPOG National Implementation Evaluation Final Report (forthcoming)*

- HPOG was successful in training large numbers of individuals in healthcare occupations. In just over five years of operation, HPOG 1.0 grantees served more than 36,000 individuals (well above the target of 31,000 participants) and engaged most of them in healthcare occupational training.
- Most participants who completed training did so within 18 months of entering the HPOG program. Of participants who engaged in training, 73 percent had completed training 18 months after program entry and 78 percent had completed training 36 months after entry.
- Overall, employment and earnings continued to increase through 12 quarters following HPOG enrollment, with steeper increases in earlier quarters. Both participants who completed training and those who did not saw higher earnings and employment than before enrollment, but employment rates and earnings were higher for those who completed training (77 percent and \$6,433 for participants who completed training, compared to 68 percent and \$5,263 for those who did not).
- Assessing change over time, from two years (eight quarters) before enrollment to three years (12 quarters) after enrollment, TANF recipients participating in the HPOG program experienced a 112 percent increase in employment and a 53 percent increase in earnings.

Evaluations of HPOG 1.0:

- **HPOG Implementation, Systems, and Outcomes (ISO) Evaluation Design and Performance Reporting Project**, conducted by Abt Associates and the Urban Institute, developed an evaluation plan for measuring the implementation, systems change, and outcomes of HPOG programs. In support of the evaluation design, the project developed a detailed knowledge base, including reviewing the pertinent literature. Three literature reviews have been published: [on career pathways programs](#); [on analyzing implementation and systems change](#); and [on the policy context within which HPOG is operating](#).

The ISO project also built and maintained the HPOG Performance Reporting System (PRS), a management information system, to track grantee progress for program management and accountability and to record participant data for use in the evaluation. The project analyzed data entered into the PRS to prepare annual reports that describe program operations and participant activities and outcomes. The final annual report, the [Year Four Annual Report](#), was released in June 2015.

The ISO project released three special topics reports in 2017—one on [eligibility criteria and the application process](#), one on [case management and counseling services](#), and one on [measuring HPOG participant career progress](#).

- **HPOG National Implementation Evaluation (NIE)** is the execution of the study designed by the ISO project. The NIE, which is being conducted by Abt Associates and the Urban Institute, includes an in-depth examination of the HPOG grantee programs' design and implementation, a systems analysis of networks created by HPOG programs (e.g., among grantees, employers, and other partners), and a quantitative descriptive analysis of HPOG program outputs and outcomes. The 27 non-tribal HPOG grantees are included in this analysis. The NIE [Design Report](#) is available on OPRE's website, as are several reports that present interim findings on program implementation and individual-level outputs and

outcomes, and changes to the service delivery system associated with program implementation:

- [Interim Outcome Study Report](#)
- [Descriptive Implementation and Outcomes Study Report](#)
- [Systems Change under the HPOG Program](#)

Additionally, the project released a special topics report on [grantees' use of performance measurement information](#).

The final report is expected to be released in early 2018. The report summarizes HPOG training and service opportunities available and provided to participants over the entire course of HPOG 1.0 operations, as well as education, employment, and earnings outcomes for samples of participants at varying time periods after enrollment. It also provides a summary of findings presented in previous reports. A summary of key findings from the final report is provided in an accompanying text box.

- **The HPOG Impact Study**, being conducted by Abt Associates and the Urban Institute, is using an experimental design to examine the effect of HPOG on participants' educational and economic outcomes. This evaluation aims to identify which components of HPOG programs (e.g., types of support services, program structure, and training areas) contribute to participant success. For some grantees, a multi-arm experimental design was implemented creating a control group that does not have access to HPOG, an "HPOG services" treatment group, and an "enhanced HPOG" group that receives one of three program enhancements selected for an experimental test: facilitated peer support groups, emergency assistance, and non-cash incentives. The HPOG Impact Study includes 20 of the non-tribal grantees; additionally, the analysis includes data from the three HPOG grantees participating in the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) study, described earlier in this section.

The HPOG Impact Study addresses the following research questions:

1. What impacts do the HPOG programs, as a group, have on the outcomes of participants and their families?
2. To what extent do those impacts vary across selected subpopulations?
3. Which locally adopted program components influence average impacts?
4. To what extent does participation in a particular HPOG component (or components) change the impact on trainees?

Random assignment concluded in November 2014. The study is examining impacts at 15 months after random assignment using a participant follow-up

survey and administrative data on employment and earnings from the National Directory of New Hires.

The [HPOG Impact Study Design Report](#) is available on the OPRE website, as is the study's [analysis plan](#), which serves as a technical supplement to the design report. In 2015, the study also released a [report on TANF recipients' engagement and experiences](#) in the HPOG program.

The final report is expected to be released in early 2018, and will be posted to [HPOG's webpage](#). The report presents findings on short-term impacts on participants' educational and economic outcomes.

Summary of First-year HPOG 2.0 Participant Activities and Outcomes from the [HPOG 2.0 Year One Annual Report](#)

- The HPOG 2.0 program enrolled 5,150 participants over the last six to eight months of year one (the first several months of the year served as a planning period). A majority of participants were female (91 percent), had never married (57 percent), and had one or more dependent children (62 percent). About 18 percent were receiving TANF benefits at enrollment and the majority were low-income.
- After enrollment, about one-quarter of participants enrolled in basic skills training to improve basic academic skills before enrolling in occupational trainings. In addition, participants enrolled in many other skill-development activities and support services to help them enter into and complete training and gain employment. The most common support services included case management (87 percent), academic advising (57 percent), assistance for training-related costs (47 percent), and transportation assistance (44 percent).
- In year one, 69 percent of participants began healthcare occupational training. The most common occupations participants took training courses for were nursing assistant (30 percent), licensed practical and vocational nurse (14 percent), home health aide (12 percent), and registered nurse (10 percent).
- Of those who began healthcare training, 41 percent completed the training within year one, and 55 percent were still in training at the end of the year.
- Of the 5,150 participants in year one, 19 percent started jobs or received a promotion after enrollment. Employed participants earned between \$10 and \$12.49 an hour.

Evaluations of HPOG 2.0:

- **Evaluation and System Design for Career Pathways Programs: 2nd Generation of HPOG**

OPRE awarded a contract to Abt Associates, the Urban Institute, and AKA Enterprise Solutions to conduct the Evaluation and System Design for Career Pathways Programs: 2nd Generation of HPOG project. The project has two primary aims:

1. The first aim was to develop evaluation design options for rigorously evaluating the effectiveness of the HPOG 2.0 programs. The design options addressed potential research questions to explore outcomes for HPOG participants, how best to implement HPOG program strategies, and what strategies or program components are likely to be effective.
2. The second project aim was to design, build, and maintain the HPOG Participant Accomplishment and Grant Evaluation System (PAGES), a management information system in use by the HPOG 2.0 grantees to track progress for program management and accountability and to record participant data for use in evaluation and research activities. PAGES launched in January 2016.

Additionally, the project is tasked with drafting annual reports that describe program offerings, participant characteristics, and participant outcomes in training enrollment and completion, and employment, based on PAGES data. In July 2017, the [Year One Annual Report](#) was released.

- **National and Tribal Evaluation of the 2nd Generation of HPOG**

OPRE awarded a contract in 2015 to Abt Associates, in partnership with MEF Associates, the Urban Institute, Insight Policy Research, and NORC at the University of Chicago, to conduct impact, outcome, and implementation studies of the second round of grants awarded under the HPOG program. Under this contract, OPRE is conducting evaluations of the 27 non-tribal HPOG 2.0 grantees (HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation) and the five Tribal HPOG 2.0 grantees (HPOG 2.0 Tribal Evaluation).

- **HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation:** The HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation is rigorously assessing the impacts of HPOG programs administered by the non-tribal grantees. The 27 non-tribal grantees operate 38 HPOG programs across 17 states. The impact study includes randomly assigning eligible participants to either a treatment group that is allowed to receive HPOG services or a control group that does not have access to HPOG but is allowed to receive other services available in the community (“business as usual”). The descriptive study includes implementation, systems change, and outcomes studies and will help interpret findings from the impact study. The evaluation also includes a cost-benefit analysis to weigh the financial impacts of a standard HPOG program. Data sources for all three components of the National Evaluation include program data, administrative data from the National Directory of New Hires and National Student Clearinghouse, and participant follow-up surveys at approximately 15 and 36 months after random assignment.
- **HPOG 2.0 Tribal Evaluation:** The five Tribal HPOG grantees are participating in a comprehensive implementation and outcome study led by NORC at the University of Chicago. The HPOG 2.0 Tribal Evaluation is assessing the HPOG programs administered by the Tribal grantees, using sound scientific methods and grounded in culturally appropriate approaches. This evaluation is guided by the principles outlined in the [Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities](#), developed by ACF’s Child Welfare Research and Evaluation Tribal Workgroup. The Tribal Evaluation is using a mixed-methods approach and will collect quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources. The research questions focus on the Tribal HPOG programs’ structure, processes, and outcomes. The [Tribal HPOG 2.0 Evaluation Plan](#) is available on the OPRE website, as is the first in a series of project briefs, titled [An Introduction to the Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants \(HPOG\) 2.0 Program and Evaluation](#).

- [HPOG University Partnership 2.0 Research Grants](#) support research and evaluation to inform and improve HPOG program performance and complement OPRE's multi-pronged evaluation of the HPOG program. Applicants were required to demonstrate a partnership with one or more HPOG programs as an integral part of the research plan development and execution. A brief that provides an [overview of the HPOG University Partnership 2.0 Research Grants](#) is available on the OPRE website. In September 2016, grants were awarded to Northwestern University, Brandeis University, and Loyola University of Chicago.

Organization

Receiving Award	Project Title	HPOG Program Partner
Northwestern University, Institute for Policy Research	The Northwestern University Two-Generation Study (NU2Gen) of Parent and Child Human Capital Advancement	Community Action Project of Tulsa County, Inc. (Tulsa, OK)
Brandeis University, Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Heller School for Social Policy and Management	Study of Career Advancement and Quality Jobs in Health Care	The WorkPlace (Bridgeport, CT)
Loyola University of Chicago, School of Social Work	Evaluation of Goal-Directed Psychological Capital and Employer Coaching in Health Profession Opportunity Development	Chicago State University (Chicago, IL)

Career Pathways Outcomes Studies

The [Career Pathways Intermediate Outcomes \(CPIO\) Study](#) and the [Career Pathways Long-Term Outcomes \(CPLO\) Study](#) are follow-up studies to assess the intermediate and long-term impacts, respectively, of career pathways program models. Specifically, CPIO and CPLO will look at the educational progress, employment, and earnings of participants in the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Impact Study and Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) programs, described earlier in this section.

CPIO, launched in 2014, is a 36-month follow-up study, while CPLO, launched in 2016, will look at impacts approximately 72 months after random assignment. Both studies are led by Abt Associates.

CPIO and CPLO will both use administrative data on all participants to examine employment and earnings impacts. Each of the two studies will also field a survey of program participants. These studies complement and augment the current HPOG Impact and PACE studies, which are examining short-term outcomes from 15 to 24 months after entry into the study.

National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families

The [National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families](#) generates new research and translates research across three priority areas—poverty reduction and self-sufficiency, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, and early care and education—to build knowledge and inform ACF programs and policies in order to better serve Hispanic children and families. The Center has three primary goals: 1) advance a cutting-edge research agenda; 2) build research capacity; and 3) translate emerging research concerning low-income Hispanic children and families in the United States. The Center is led by Child Trends and Abt Associates, in collaboration with university partners at the University of Maryland-College Park, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and

New York University's Institute for Human Development and Social Change. Over the past year, the Center released numerous [publications](#) and [webinars, data tools, and trainings](#) examining various topics concerning low-income Hispanics in the United States. These include research briefs on the work schedules of low-income Hispanic parents; participation of Hispanic children in early care and education; the estimated number and the well-being of Hispanic children with undocumented parents; characteristics and experiences of Latino boys, young men, and fathers; and exploration of family stability and instability in families with young children. In addition, the Center produced resources on [supporting researchers and service agencies in the use of publicly available data](#) to better understand the [changing demographics and needs in their communities and to enhance the cultural responsiveness of social services](#).

Key evaluation questions that will be addressed in these studies include:

1. What are the intermediate and long-term effects of the HPOG and PACE programs on their populations of interest?
2. How do effects of career pathways programs vary over time, across outcomes or domains, by occupational sector, by program model, and by participant characteristics?
3. Do different PACE and HPOG models, strategies, or components (e.g., a particular curricular model, such as I-BEST, or particular recruitment strategies or support services) lead to different impacts for participants?
4. How can career pathways models be adjusted to promote intermediate and longer-term outcomes for participants?

Reports on intermediate impacts from CPIO will be released beginning in 2018 and continuing through 2019. Reports on long-term outcomes and impacts from CPLO are expected beginning in late 2020.

Behavioral Science

A growing body of research demonstrates that all humans have limited attention, limited self-control, and finite cognitive resources, and that public policies can be more effective when they acknowledge and account for these realities of human capacity and behavior. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that coping with the stress of poverty and economic insecurity can place a high demand on cognitive resources, making attention to the realities of human capacity and behavior particularly important when designing programs and policies for low-income populations. Insights from psychology, neuroscience, and other social and behavioral sciences can provide tools to help the design of programs reflect the reality of how people actually make decisions and behave. OPRE is building a portfolio of projects focused on learning and applying insights from social and behavioral sciences.

In 2010, OPRE launched the [Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency \(BIAS\) project](#), the first major opportunity to apply behavioral science insights to programs serving poor and vulnerable families in the United States. In 2015, OPRE launched two new behavioral science projects – [BIAS Capstone](#) and [BIAS Next Generation](#) – in order to synthesize, disseminate, and build on BIAS's applied behavioral science work. Most recently, OPRE created the Behavioral Interventions Scholars Grants to support dissertation research that will add to the growing body of knowledge on effective behavioral interventions for ACF programs and populations.

Additionally, OPRE's [Goal-Oriented Adult Learning in Self-Sufficiency](#) project is exploring how psychological processes associated with goal-oriented skills (such as goal-setting, self-regulation, planning, and problem-solving) can usefully be incorporated into programs aimed at improving job entry, retention, and advancement. OPRE's [Employment Coaching for TANF and Other Low-Income Populations](#), featured in the section on Employment and the Labor Market, also draws on behavioral insights.

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency

Many human services programs are designed such that individuals must make active decisions and go through a series of steps in order to benefit from them—from deciding which programs to apply for, to completing forms, attending meetings, showing proof of eligibility, and arranging travel and child care. Program designers often implicitly assume that individuals will carefully consider options and make decisions that maximize their well-being. But over the past 30 years, innovative research in the area of behavioral economics has shown that human decision-making is often imperfect and imprecise. People – clients and program administrators alike – procrastinate, get overwhelmed by choices, and miss important details. As a result, both programs and participants may not always achieve the goals they set for themselves.

Insights from behavioral economics, which combines findings from psychology and economics, suggest that a deeper understanding of decision-making and behavior could improve human services program design and outcomes. Principles from behavioral economics can both shed light on decision-making and offer new tools to improve outcomes for program participants. Small changes in the environment can facilitate desired

behaviors; planning and commitment devices can be used to improve self-control; and default rules can produce positive outcomes even for people who fail to act.

The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project was the first major opportunity to apply a behavioral economics lens to programs that serve poor and vulnerable families in the United States. BIAS was launched in 2010 and led by MDRC in collaboration with MEF Associates and a network of academic behavioral science experts.

In the first two years of the project, the BIAS team developed a strong base of knowledge of the existing behavioral economics literature and the needs of human services programs. The team engaged in detailed conversations with stakeholders from the academic, policy, and practitioner communities, created a glossary of behavioral interventions from a review of select field experiments, and hosted a Peer Practicum during which program administrators from across the nation joined with behavioral experts to explore the application of behavioral economics to ACF programs. The BIAS report [*Behavioral Economics and Social Policy: Designing Innovative Solutions for Programs Supported by the Administration for Children and Families*](#) describes insights from these early stages of the project.

BIAS then worked with a range of human services programs from across the country to diagnose program challenges using a behavioral economics lens and to design and test behaviorally informed interventions. BIAS conducted 15 random assignment tests in seven states with nearly 100,000 sample members in the areas of child support, child care, and work support. In each of the project sites, and in 11 of the 15 randomized controlled trials, behavioral “nudges” like reminders or simplified, personalized letters had a statistically significant impact on at least one primary outcome. BIAS interventions [increased child care subsidy renewal rates and the use of quality-rated child care](#); [boosted requests for child support modifications](#) and [modifications granted](#); [increased frequency of payment](#); and [fostered engagement in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#) and [other social service appointments](#)

[and activities](#). While effects were typically modest, they were consistently achieved and are meaningful due to their scalability and low cost.

The final two site-specific reports were published in late 2016:

- [Cutting Through Complexity Using Behavioral Science to Improve Indiana’s Child Care Subsidy Program](#) (October 2016)
- [Simplify, Notify, Modify: Using Behavioral Insights to Increase Incarcerated Parents’ Requests for Child Support Modification](#) (November 2016)

BIAS Capstone

The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project produced a site-specific report for each of the sites where behavioral interventions were tested. Following from that work, BIAS Capstone, led by MDRC, was launched in order to take stock of the lessons learned from BIAS and to discuss implications from the project overall for future research and practice. To that end, the BIAS Capstone team first hosted a convening of over 100 experts and stakeholders to share findings and lessons learned from the BIAS project and discuss future directions for behavioral science and poverty alleviation and next steps for the Administration for Children and Families. Incorporating ideas that came out of the convening, BIAS Capstone published a [final synthesis report](#) in May 2017. *Nudging Change in Human Services: Final Report of the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project* discusses the overall findings from the BIAS project, synthesizes lessons learned across the eight sites and during the knowledge development period, situates the findings within the broader context of applied behavioral insights and human services policy, and discusses implications for future research and practice. Additionally, the BIAS Capstone project is continuing to widely disseminate BIAS findings to inform stakeholders within the areas of research, policy, and practice. To ensure that these findings reach a broad and diverse audience within those areas, BIAS Capstone uses an array of different formats and media for dissemination. This includes creating materials that can be used

for teaching, engaging infographics, journal articles for academic publications, and a short video.

BIAS Next Generation

The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project demonstrated that applying behavioral insights to challenges facing human services programs can improve program operations and outcomes. While the effects of interventions tested in BIAS were typically modest, they were consistently achieved and meaningful due to their scalability and low-cost. In 2015, OPRE launched the BIAS Next Generation (BIAS NG) project to build on the successes of BIAS and continue exploring the application of behavioral science to the programs and target populations of ACF. This next-generation project, led by MDRC in collaboration with Larry Katz of Harvard University, Marianne Bertrand of the University of Chicago, Judd Kessler of the University of Pennsylvania, MEF Associates, Child Trends, and Public Strategies, will build on the activities and lessons of BIAS as well as go beyond the work of BIAS in several ways including:

- Working with additional ACF programs, with an initial emphasis on TANF and child welfare programs;
- Testing additional types of interventions, including [going beyond “nudges”](#) and considering changes to program structures and choice architectures;
- Collecting additional information about the interventions, including conducting implementation research to better understand how and why the interventions work (or do not work); and
- Focusing on translating findings into practical lessons for human services practitioners.

In the first year of the project, the BIAS Next Generation team consulted with TANF and child welfare stakeholders about the major challenges facing these programs. Based on these consultations, BIAS Next Generation will seek to design TANF interventions focused on improving recipient engagement in welfare-to-work programs. For child welfare, BIAS NG will focus on goals including increasing the supply of qualified foster placements and engaging families in services that lead

to accomplishment of their permanency goals. In 2017, BIAS Next Generation completed recruitment of an initial set of TANF and child welfare program sites to participate in the project. These include Los Angeles County in California, Monroe County in New York, Allegheny County in Pennsylvania, and Washington State. Behavioral interventions are being designed to address the identified challenges in these sites. As the project continues to progress, other program areas may be added.

NEW

Behavioral Interventions Scholars Grants

The Behavioral Interventions Scholars (BIS) grant program was launched in 2017 to support dissertation research by advanced graduate students who are applying a behavioral science lens to specific research questions relevant to social services programs and policies and other issues facing poor and vulnerable families in the United States. In line with OPRE’s Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency portfolio of projects, these grants are intended to facilitate the completion of high-quality research projects that will add to the growing body of knowledge on effective behavioral interventions for ACF programs and populations. BIS also aims to build capacity in the research field to use behavioral science approaches in this area and to foster mentoring relationships between high-quality doctoral students and faculty members.

The inaugural BIS grant recipients and their projects are:

Graduate Student	Project Title	University	Principal Investigator/ Faculty Mentor
Ania Jaroszewicz	The Psychological Costs of Seeking Help for Financial Hardships	Carnegie Mellon University	Dr. Alex Imas
Kathryn Andrews	Supporting Families of Infants in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit to Access Supplemental Security Income	Harvard University	Dr. Margaret McConnell
Eleanor Martin	Virtual Mentorship to Support Maternal and Infant Health and Wellbeing: Understanding the Participant Experience and Evaluating the Impact of NurturePA	University of Michigan	Dr. Christina Weiland
Marika Yip-Bannicq	Promoting Constructive Conflict in Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) Couples: An Abstraction-Based Intervention Approach	New York University	Dr. Patrick Shrout

Goal-Oriented Adult Learning in Self-Sufficiency

ACF launched the Goal-Oriented Adult Learning in Self-Sufficiency (GOALS) project in 2014 to investigate the extent to which psychology-informed frameworks can be incorporated into programs aimed at improving job entry, retention, and advancement.

The project, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, reflects the confluence of several lines of research suggesting that adults who engage in goal-directed activities are more likely to be productive and successful both in the workplace and at home. Emerging research by psychologists and neuroscientists suggests that self-regulation skills such as executive functioning, metacognition, motivation, and other cognitive and emotional skills are critical for goal achievement. In addition, research suggests that exposure to poverty, chronic stress, lack of in-demand skills, and parenting responsibilities may challenge an individual's ability to

operationalize self-regulation skills that support goal-directed behaviors and advance self-sufficiency. While there has been substantial research in the early childhood field on the impact of exposure to adverse experiences, there has been less work focused on psychological processes that could support adults and young adults in overcoming similar contextual challenges.

This project aims to improve understanding of relevant self-regulation skills associated with goal-directed behaviors both by synthesizing existing research and by undertaking fieldwork to learn about programs that are currently integrating these frameworks into adult workforce development programs. In early 2017, a [synthesis report](#) was released. The report summarizes existing research about the underlying skills relevant for goal-directed behaviors and goal achievement in workforce programs and promising strategies and interventions for strengthening underlying skills. In late 2017, the project produced a [conceptual framework](#) that describes the relationship between self-regulation skills, the goal achievement process, personal goal attainment, and

employment and self-sufficiency outcomes. The conceptual framework describes approaches and strategies for strengthening goal-directed behaviors among low-income adults in workforce development programs.

Under the fieldwork component of this project, the team conducted exploratory site visits to programs integrating psychology-informed frameworks to provide employment and training services to low-income families. In addition, the project used a rapid-cycle learning framework in select TANF programs to assess the impact of changes to program interventions targeting self-regulation skills and goal achievement among participants.

OPRE intends to use the results to inform future programmatic and evaluation efforts in the areas of strengthening and supporting goal-directed behaviors among low-income working adults. A final report summarizing project findings, including an evaluability assessment of select programs, and three briefs focused on special topics will be available in early 2018.

Cross-Cutting and Other Safety Net Research

In addition to research that falls clearly within the substantive areas of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Employment and the Labor Market, Education and Training, and Behavioral Science, OPRE's family self-sufficiency research portfolio includes several projects that span these issues in a cross-cutting way.

Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium

To fill gaps in family self-sufficiency and stability research and data activities and to complement its ongoing research, OPRE developed and launched a multi-faceted Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium (The Consortium). The mission of The Consortium is “to improve the lives of low-income families and children through better policies and practices by integrating research, policy, and practice on family self-sufficiency and stability; by engaging federal, state, and local actors in meaningful conversations and supporting them to be better producers and users of data; and by doing path-breaking, rigorous, and relevant research on contemporary questions related to family self-sufficiency and stability.”

The first component of The Consortium is the [Advancing Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research Project](#), also known as “Project AWESOME.” Launched in 2012 and led by Mathematica Policy Research, this project provides research support and a flexible research and evaluation mechanism for responding to policy priorities and research opportunities and helping states conduct and use research.

The second component of The Consortium is the [Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network](#). The network supports cooperative agreements with scholars to work independently and collectively on systematic, multi-disciplinary examinations of the current gaps in family self-sufficiency and stability research. In 2013, OPRE awarded grants to a network of university-based researchers to investigate critical issues in improving family self-sufficiency and stability. Scholars also work with state and local human services agencies on research and program evaluation activities. Two major areas of focus for the scholars’ collaborative work are (1) instability and public policy and (2) safety net access in the 21st century. In 2017, several of the scholars guest-edited and wrote a conceptual essay for a [special issue](#) of the journal *Social Service Review*, which focused on determinants and consequences of economic instability among low-income families and the relationship between instability and social policy.

The third component of The Consortium is the [Family Self-Sufficiency Data Center](#). In 2013, OPRE awarded the University of Chicago a cooperative agreement to support the development, implementation, and ongoing operations of a data center to support family self-sufficiency research and activities. This center supports the development of state and institutional capacity for data collection, linkage, and, where necessary, storage in order to provide access to high-quality data to practitioners and policymakers in family self-sufficiency programs and research. The center works independently and in collaboration with the affiliated Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network. During its first year, the data center conducted a comprehensive [needs assessment](#) and developed a prototype for a [web-based data archive and analysis tool](#). The center has piloted the tool with Illinois and Colorado

administrative data and is currently seeking to develop data partnerships with other states and other sources of administrative data. In 2017, the center released [a brief](#) describing their model for using TANF data to understand caseload dynamics and address key policy questions. Additionally, the data center plans to develop and share open-source programming code to support administrative data users in state agencies. Other ongoing activities include providing technical assistance to states around administrative data and facilitating convenings for data users to exchange ideas and best practices.

Assets for Independence Evaluation

From 1998 until 2017, ACF operated the Assets for Independence (AFI) program, a demonstration program that supported an assets-based approach for increasing the economic self-sufficiency of individuals and families with low incomes through Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). In 2011, ACF launched the first-ever random assignment evaluation of the impact of participation in the AFI program. The AFI Evaluation built on the previous quasi-experimental evaluation of the AFI program, as well other research on IDAs. While research suggests that IDAs help low-income families save, rigorous, experimental research is limited, and the majority of research has not focused on AFI-funded IDAs. Although the AFI program concluded in 2017, questions remain about the impact of the AFI program on participant outcomes.

The study, led by the Urban Institute and its partners MEF Associates and RTI International, began with an extensive field assessment to identify potential evaluation sites. The evaluation includes two AFI grantees: Prosperity Works in New Mexico and RISE Financial Pathways in Los Angeles, CA. Enrollment began in mid-2013 and ended in summer 2014. A [report](#) summarizing early impact and implementation findings was released in late 2016.

In 2015, ACF provided support to the Urban Institute and its partners to conduct intermediate follow-up data collection on participants in the initial study. This follow-on effort surveyed participants at 36 months after random assignment in order to provide important

information on the intermediate impacts of AFI participation. This follow-up is critical for thoroughly evaluating AFI, as IDAs are designed to help people move up the asset and economic ladder over time. The 36-month follow-up survey was completed in fall 2017 and a final report summarizing impact findings is expected in mid-2018.

Homeless Families Research Briefs

In 2014, OPRE and HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation engaged Abt Associates to produce a series of research briefs on issues related to the well-being and economic self-sufficiency of families and children experiencing homelessness. The Homeless Families Research Briefs project is using data collected as part of the [Family Options Study](#) of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a multi-site random assignment experiment designed to study the impact on homeless families of various housing and services interventions. The Family Options Study, which enrolled over 2,000 families and followed them over the course of at least three years, provides a rich set of data with which to examine the well-being and self-sufficiency of homeless families with children. This project will produce briefs that build on the data and analysis already being conducted for HUD to answer additional questions about this population.

The project released two briefs in 2016: one that examined [whether families experiencing homelessness are connected to the benefits and services of the social safety net](#) and another focused on [the well-being of adolescents who had recently been in homeless shelters with their families](#). An additional four briefs were released in 2017:

- [Well-being of Young Children after Experiencing Homelessness](#) found that 20 months after a stay in emergency shelter, young children who had recently been in homeless shelters with their families scored worse in pre-reading skills and had higher rates of behavioral problems and early development delays compared to children their age. However, they displayed only small disadvantages in pre-math skills. The brief additionally explores these children's

experiences with housing instability, child care instability, and enrollment in center-based care, as well as associations between housing and child care stability and child well-being.

- [*Child and Partner Transitions among Families Experiencing Homelessness*](#) explores child and partner separations among families experiencing homelessness. The brief found that about 30 percent of families reported separation from at least one family member during their stay in emergency shelter; that families experienced separations and reunifications 20 months after their stay in emergency shelter, with some families reporting reunifications and other families reporting new child separations; and that in the 20 months following a shelter stay, housing instability and child separations were related.
- [*Patterns of Benefit Receipt among Families who Experience Homelessness*](#) examines patterns of receipt of TANF cash assistance, SNAP food assistance, and publicly funded health insurance benefits among these families, with a focus on the characteristics of those receiving and not receiving benefits. An earlier brief in the series ([*Are Homeless Families Connected to the Social Safety Net?*](#)) found that families received these benefits at rates equal to or greater than other families experiencing deep poverty in the same community. This brief explores the patterns of receipt using family characteristics and experiences with housing stability.
- [*Hispanic Families Experiencing Homelessness*](#), a short research snapshot, explores the resilience of Hispanic families 20 months after a shelter stay, finding that Hispanic families who enter emergency shelter appear to retain some of the resilience that has been found to help other Hispanic families avoid going into shelters. The snapshot analyzes the regional variations in the well-being of Hispanic families, though many of these differences are also observed for non-Hispanic families.

Four additional briefs are expected through 2018, covering issues including behavioral health among adults, additional analysis of child separations, family housing instability after experiencing homelessness, and adult employment.

Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security

ACF has a particular interest in integrated approaches that combine intensive, high-quality, adult-focused services with intensive, high-quality, child-focused programs. Many ACF programs that support vulnerable children or adults either mandate or allow flexibility to provide services to other family members. For example, since its inception in 1965, Head Start has acted as a two-generation program, providing children with enriched learning environments and helping families to access services that enable them to support their children's development (e.g., parenting education, social services, health and mental health services). Other ACF programs – such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and programs under the Office of Community Services – provide services to all family members.

In 2015, OPRE launched the Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security project to gain a better understanding of approaches that intentionally combine services for adults and children. Additionally, the project provided options for how these models might be evaluated.

Conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, the project included a targeted literature review, expert consultations, and fieldwork to identify and describe program models, goals, and objectives and developed options for research and evaluations that may be feasible, relevant, and useful to ACF and others in the field. A final report and one of three topical briefs aimed at program administrators were released in late 2017. Two additional topical briefs will be released in early 2018.

- The [final report](#) is a comprehensive summary of all project components. It includes a literature review; summarizes results from an environmental scan, highlighting features of identified programs; presents two conceptual frameworks, including a change model for these programs and a framework for understanding partnerships that often form in these types of approaches; and provides directions for research and evaluation.

- [Features of Programs Designed to Help Families Achieve Economic Security and Promote Child Well-being](#) explores common features across the programs identified in the environmental scan.
- *Conceptual Frameworks for Intentional Approaches to Improving Economic Security and Child Well-Being* will describe 1) a change model for these programs and 2) a framework for considering partnerships that serve both generations together.

OPRE Methods Inquiries

OPRE regularly convenes meetings of scientists and research experts to advance the scientific understanding of critical topics in social science research methodology. These meetings bring together experts from varying disciplines and policy fields and from academia, government, and the private sector to explore innovations in research design, analytic techniques, and data measurement that could be employed to advance the government's use of rigorous research methods. These meetings ensure that OPRE-supported research continues to represent the most scientifically advanced approaches to determining effectiveness and efficiency of ACF programs.

OPRE has sponsored eight day-and-a-half-long innovative methods meetings. The topic of the most recent meeting, held in October 2017, was "Bayesian Methods for Social Policy Research and Evaluation." The seven prior meetings explored: 1) effect size; 2) sub-group analysis; 3) implementation science; 4) innovative directions in estimating impact; 5) methods for unpacking the "black box" of programs and policies; 6) using administrative data in social policy research; and 7) alternatives to randomized controlled trials. These meetings are intended to help OPRE understand the history of the field, recent advances, and gaps in current knowledge, as well as examine how to build a research agenda to fill those gaps.

Following the September 2016 meeting on building strong evidence in challenging contexts, OPRE collaborated with the *American Journal of Evaluation* to release a special forum of the journal, scheduled to be published in early 2018. The forum features papers that provide insights about research strategies for policy settings where randomized controlled trials are not feasible or where the strict requirements of such studies may undermine community buy-in and the quality of the resulting data.

OPRE will release a summary brief that highlights major takeaways from this meeting in early 2018. Two additional briefs that are in progress focus on important themes from the 2016 meeting: causal validity in non-experimental designs and equity considerations in evidence-building efforts and research design.

In addition, in 2017, OPRE published two briefs relating to the 2015 meeting: [Issues in Accessing and Using Administrative Data](#) and [Using Aggregate Administrative Data in Social Policy Research](#). OPRE is also collaborating with the journal *Public Administration Review* to complete a symposium from the 2015 meeting.

Materials from all of OPRE's past methods meetings, including agendas, presentations, and publications, are available at www.opremethodsmeeting.org.

- *Using Research to Support Programs that Promote Parents' Economic Security and Children's Well-being* will provide program administrators and stakeholders with information about how research can help programs articulate their goals and see if their operations align with those goals; help understand the quality and intensity of services for families; inform stronger program implementation; and begin to think about considerations for program evaluation.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services

The United States is rapidly becoming a majority-minority nation. According to U.S. Census projections, by mid-century no single racial or ethnic group will comprise a majority of the population. In 2013, for the first time, more children of color were born in the United States than white children. At the same time that the United States is becoming a more diverse nation, considerable data exist showing significant racial and ethnic differences in many aspects of well-being. Among the most basic differences is that more than one of every three African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian children lives in a household with an income below the poverty threshold, while the corresponding rate for white children is one in seven.

The programs for which ACF is responsible can play a critical role in remedying racial and ethnic differences in well-being. Yet some scholarship has found that certain racial and ethnic groups are disproportionately represented among those who experience worse program outcomes. Such academic work is more developed, however, in relation to some program areas than to others. For most ACF programs, little evidence exists as to whether and in what ways racial and ethnic differences affect program experiences and outcomes.

The aim of the Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services project was to examine how greater insight into racial and ethnic disparities could be used to improve human services program delivery for ACF. Through a number of activities, the project built a base of knowledge to inform ACF's identification and understanding

of ethnic and racial differences across the service spectrum—more specifically, in access to and take-up of human services; nature and quality of services received; and outcomes of services. First, the project synthesized the existing research on racial and ethnic disparities in relation to the service delivery system of six programs operated under the auspices of ACF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the child support enforcement program, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Head Start, programs for runaway and homeless youth, and adolescent pregnancy prevention programs. This synthesis was released as a [literature review](#) in November 2017. Second, preliminary data analyses were conducted to identify racial and ethnic differences in eligibility for and enrollment in TANF, child support, CCDF, and Head Start, identifying differences between eligibility and participation within and across programs. Finally, a comprehensive plan was designed to identify and analyze racial and ethnic disparities across the service delivery system in a range of ACF programs and services.

The project, conducted by the Urban Institute, was launched in 2015 and concluded in 2017.

Building Evaluative Capacity Through a Focus on Key Components of the Community Services Block Grant/Community Action Agency Model

The mission of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is to provide assistance to states and local communities, working through a network of Community Action Agencies (CAA) and other neighborhood-based organizations, for the reduction of poverty, the revitalization of low-income communities, and the empowerment of low-income families and individuals to become fully self-sufficient. CSBG is administered by the Office of Community Services (OCS) at ACF. In FY 2012, OCS initiated efforts to increase performance and improve outcomes at all levels of the CSBG network. Specifically, OCS has worked to develop reporting systems that better integrate information from the local level on the

people served, services provided, strategies used, and outcomes achieved.

Building on these efforts, and to help build the evaluative capacity of the CSBG network, this project focuses on three key components of the CSBG/CAA model: community assessment, community-level strategies, and leveraging of funding. It is also helping identify ways in which an evaluative approach can be incorporated into the community assessments that CSBG-eligible entities are required to conduct regularly, facilitating the network's ability to rigorously measure the effectiveness of efforts undertaken to address identified needs. Because CSBG-eligible entities can find it challenging to tell an effective "causal story" about their community-level change work, this project is identifying promising practices to demonstrating effectiveness in relation to community-level change efforts. Finally, leveraging funds from multiple sources is an important component of CSBG-eligible entities' ability to engage in the work they do. The goal is to help the CSBG network better understand the relationship among different approaches to leveraging funding and program services and strategies.

OPRE is conducting this work through comprehensive reviews of literature as well as consultations with experts. The end result of this work will be a set of products that will inform future efforts to evaluate the CSBG/CAA model that can be implemented by state CSBG agencies or by CAAs themselves.

Conducted by the Urban Institute, the project launched in September 2016 and is projected to run through spring 2018.

NEW

[Descriptive Study of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors \(URM\) Program](#)

The Descriptive Study of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) Program was launched by OPRE in fall 2017. Led by MEF Associates and its partner, Child

Trends, this project will document and improve the field's understanding of the range of child welfare services and benefits provided through the URM program. Administered by ACF's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the URM program was established in 1980 to provide child welfare services and benefits to children and youth eligible for placement, services, and benefits. Upon arrival in the United States, these refugee children are placed into ORR's URM program and receive refugee foster care services and benefits. ORR also identifies certain minors who may become eligible for the URM program after they arrive in the United States, provided they do not have a parent or a relative available to provide care. The URM program encourages reunification of children with their parents or other appropriate adult relatives through family tracing and coordination with local refugee resettlement agencies; however, if reunification is not possible, each program works to design an individualized permanency plan for each minor or youth in care. The program provides eligible children and youth with the same range of child welfare benefits and services available to other foster children in the state of placement, including associated independent living benefits and services. Since its inception, ORR has served more than 13,000 minors under the URM program, and at its peak in 1985, ORR provided protection to 3,828 children in care.

While some research has been conducted to examine programs and outcomes for youth aging out of foster care, the URM program and participants have yet to be closely examined. Through site visits to select URM programs, surveys, and analysis of existing URM data, OPRE is conducting a descriptive study of the URM program to better document the array of child welfare services and benefits that are provided and the experiences of participants. This project will provide a deeper understanding of the current social service delivery systems serving unaccompanied refugee minors and will help to identify gaps in existing knowledge and data collection.

How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness

In 2013, ACF's Office of Family Assistance (OFA) released an Information Memorandum on the "Use of TANF Funds to Serve Homeless Families and Families at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness," which clarifies how TANF funds can be used to help address the housing and other needs of families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. It encourages TANF agencies to consider using TANF funds to address housing needs; coordinate services for TANF-eligible homeless families; provide employment services to TANF-eligible homeless individuals; and serve as partners in statewide, regional, and local homeless efforts, such as Continuums of Care.

ACF is interested in systematically learning about the extent to which states, counties, and local agencies are explicitly using TANF funds to serve families experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and what they are specifically doing with TANF funds to support and serve these families. This project will include a scan of state policies (including an agency survey and document review), site visits, interviews, and focus groups.

The project launched in September 2017 and will be conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with MEF Associates.

Spotlight on Dissemination

OPRE continually strives to produce high-quality, rigorous research and ensure that it is available, accessible, and relevant to those interested in deepening their understanding of this work. Whether communicating with researchers, practitioners, policymakers, or the public, OPRE understands that program and policy research does not exist in a vacuum and is part of a cycle of communication. With that in mind, OPRE uses a range of resources and events to reach all who would like to learn more about this work.

Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse

The Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse (SSRC), available at <https://www.opressrc.org/>, was launched in 2012. The SSRC disseminates quality research and evaluation studies on TANF and low-income populations, focusing on self-sufficiency, employment, and family and child well-being, not limited to ACF-sponsored research. The clearinghouse is intended to be of use to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, assisting all three groups in accessing high-quality research. The SSRC, administered by ICF International under a cooperative agreement, continues to look at how to engage and serve the needs of these three user groups, while also considering questions around research standards and categorization. During the past year, the clearinghouse has offered several webinars on relevant topics to enhance its services to users.

Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency

Since 1998, OPRE has hosted the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS) to convene researchers, state and local administrators, practitioners, and federal officials and policymakers to discuss cutting-edge research from evaluations of programs, policies, and services that support low-income and vulnerable families on the path to economic self-sufficiency. The biennial conference serves as an opportunity to present the latest findings from evaluations of human services programs and policies; discuss ways to incorporate findings into the design, implementation, and improvement of programs; and develop strategies for future evaluations. In addition, the conference provides an opportunity for emerging scholars who are early in their research careers to showcase their work. Conference topics include: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs, Policies, and Populations; Employment and Mobility in the Labor Market; Youth Well-being and the Transition to Adulthood; Strengthening Families, Fatherhood, Marriages, and Relationships; Evaluating Social Programs, Building Evidence, and Using Data; and Approaches to Alleviate Poverty and Expand Opportunity. The 2016 RECS had over 1,100 participants, included 41 plenary and breakout sessions, and featured the work of 18 emerging scholars. The 2018 RECS will take place May 30-June 1, 2018 at the Renaissance Hotel in Washington, D.C. For more information on past and future conferences, visit <http://recsconference.net>.

OPRE Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Reports Published in FY17

Employment & the Labor Market

Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration

- [*Reengaging New York City's Disconnected Youth Through Work: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Young Adult Internship Program*](#)
- [*The Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Next Generation of Subsidized Employment Programs*](#)
- [*Testing Two Subsidized Employment Approaches for Recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Los Angeles County Transitional Subsidized Employment*](#)

Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review

- [*The Right Tool for the Job: a Meta-Regression of Employment Strategies' Effects on Different Outcomes*](#)
- [*Gaps in the Evidence on Employment and Training for Low-Income Adults*](#)
- [*Work Readiness: Can It Lead to Better Employment and Earnings for Low-Income Adults?*](#)
- [*Primary Employment and Training Strategies Used in the Interventions Reviewed by ESER*](#)
- [*ESER Reporting Guide for Study Authors*](#)
- [*Financial Incentives and Sanctions: Can They Improve Employment Outcomes for Low-Income Adults?*](#)

Education and Training

Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education

- [*The San Diego County Bridge to Employment in the Healthcare Industry Program: Implementation and Early Impact Report*](#)
- [*Pima Community College Pathways to Healthcare Program: Implementation and Early Impact Report*](#)

Evaluation Portfolio for the Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program

- [*An Introduction to the Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants \(HPOG\) 2.0 Program and Evaluation*](#)
- [*Health Profession Opportunity Grants \(HPOG\) 2.0 Tribal Evaluation: Evaluation Plan*](#)
- [*Health Profession Opportunity Grants 2.0: Year One Annual Report \(2015-16\)*](#)
- [*Health Profession Opportunity Grants \(HPOG\) Impact Study: Technical Supplement to the Evaluation Design Report: Impact Analysis Plan*](#)
- [*Using Within-Site Experimental Evidence to Reduce Cross-Site Attributional Bias in Connecting Program Components to Program Impacts*](#)
- [*The Health Profession Opportunity Grants \(HPOG\) 1.0: Eligibility Criteria and Application Procedures*](#)
- [*The Health Profession Opportunity Grants \(HPOG\) 1.0 Case Management and Counseling Services*](#)

Behavioral Science

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency

- [*Simplify, Notify, Modify: Using Behavioral Insights to Increase Incarcerated Parents' Requests for Child Support Modification*](#)
- [*Cutting Through Complexity Using Behavioral Science to Improve Indiana's Child Care Subsidy Program*](#)

BIAS Capstone

- [*Nudging Change in Human Services: Final Report of the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency \(BIAS\) Project*](#)

Goal-Oriented Adult Learning in Self-Sufficiency

- [*Self-Regulation and Goal Attainment: A New Perspective for Employment Programs*](#)

Cross-Cutting and Other Safety Net Research

Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium

- [*Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium Year in Review – 2016*](#)

Assets for Independence Evaluation

- [*Building Savings for Success: Early Impacts from the Assets for Independence Program Randomized Evaluation*](#)

Homeless Families Research Briefs

- [*Patterns of Benefit Receipt among Families who Experience Homelessness*](#)
- [*Child and Partner Transitions among Families Experiencing Homelessness*](#)
- [*Well-being of Young Children after Experiencing Homelessness*](#)

OPRE Methods Inquiries

- [*Unpacking the "Black Box" of Programs and Policies: A Conceptual Overview of Mediation Analysis*](#)
- [*Using Aggregate Administrative Data in Social Policy Research*](#)
- [*Issues in Accessing and Using Administrative Data*](#)

Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

FY 2017

OPRE Report # 2018-19

Prepared by:

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