FY 2022

Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

Administration for Children and Families
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

OPRE

Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

FY 2022

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Prepared by:

Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
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Administration for Children and Families

https://www.acf.hhs.gov

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is a division of the U.S. Department of Health and 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 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 children and families with low incomes, 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 children and families with low incomes.

OPRE has four working 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, child abuse and neglect, and human trafficking.
- 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 increasing 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

OPRE's Division of Economic Independence (DEI) has primary responsibility for welfare and family self-sufficiency research. DEI's portfolio is designed to expand knowledge about how Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other human services programs can best support the self-sufficiency and economic well-being of children and families with low incomes. Research, evaluation, and other activities within this portfolio cover the following topics:

- TANF Policy, Funding, and Administration
- Capacity Building within Human Services Programs
- Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes, with a focus on:
  - Human Capital Development
  - Employment Attainment and Retention
  - Social Services Delivery Systems
  - Social Context and Environment
- Knowledge Building and Communication

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

DEI also invests in activities to support evaluation capacity building and to communicate findings from the rigorous research, evaluation, and other activities it supports.

This *Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency* describes major research projects sponsored by DEI in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022.

ACF EVALUATION POLICY

ACF seeks to promote rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics in the conduct of evaluations. ACF's Evaluation Policy, established in 2012 and announced in the Federal Register in 2014, addresses these five key principles to govern ACF's planning, conduct, and use of evaluation. ACF updated the policy in 2021 to reflect our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, which are germane to multiple principles. 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:** ACF 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, ACF protects 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.

SPOTLIGHT ON LEARNING AGENDAS

Background

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 ("Evidence Act") was established to advance evidence building in the federal government through requirements intended to improve access to data and expand evaluation capacity. Among them is the mandate that federal agencies develop evaluation and evidence-building plans, or learning agendas, to systematically identify and address priority questions relevant to the programs, policies, and regulations of an agency, to promote efficient and effective operations.

For some time, ACF has been pursuing learning agendas and related activities at multiple levels. At the broadest level, ACF contributes to the HHS multi-year evidence plan and annual evaluation plan required by the Evidence Act. At a more granular level, OPRE and ACF program offices are developing comprehensive learning agendas related to specific ACF programs. OPRE drew on these program-specific learning agendas to establish the ACF Research and Evaluation Agenda, which summarizes key past, ongoing, and future research and evaluation efforts, and the priority questions and engagement activities that guide these efforts, for each program area.

Snapshots from the ACF Research and Evaluation Agenda Relevant to Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

OPRE's Division of Economic Independence (DEI) manages learning agendas in two ACF program areas, in coordination with the ACF Office of Family Assistance (OFA), summaries of which are included as "snapshots" within the broader ACF Research and Evaluation Agenda:

- **Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency:** The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program, administered by OFA, provides states, eligible territories, and tribes with flexibility in operating programs designed to help children and families with low incomes achieve economic self-sufficiency. The law that established TANF authorized funding for research and evaluation relevant to TANF and the families it serves. DEI supports a comprehensive portfolio in this area, which this annual report describes. The law also authorized funding for technical assistance activities to support TANF agencies in carrying out their programs and services. OFA leads these activities, which include performance management, technical assistance, and stakeholder engagement.
- **Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG):** From 2010 to 2021, OFA administered HPOG, a discretionary grant program that provided education and training to TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes for occupations in the healthcare field. DEI uses a multi-pronged research and evaluation strategy to assess the success of HPOG. The strategy aims to provide information on program implementation; systems change; participant outcomes; impacts in the short-, intermediate-, and long-term; and costs and benefits.

DEI also works with other OPRE divisions and ACF's Office of Child Support Services to coordinate on a range of research and evaluation activities related to the child support program.

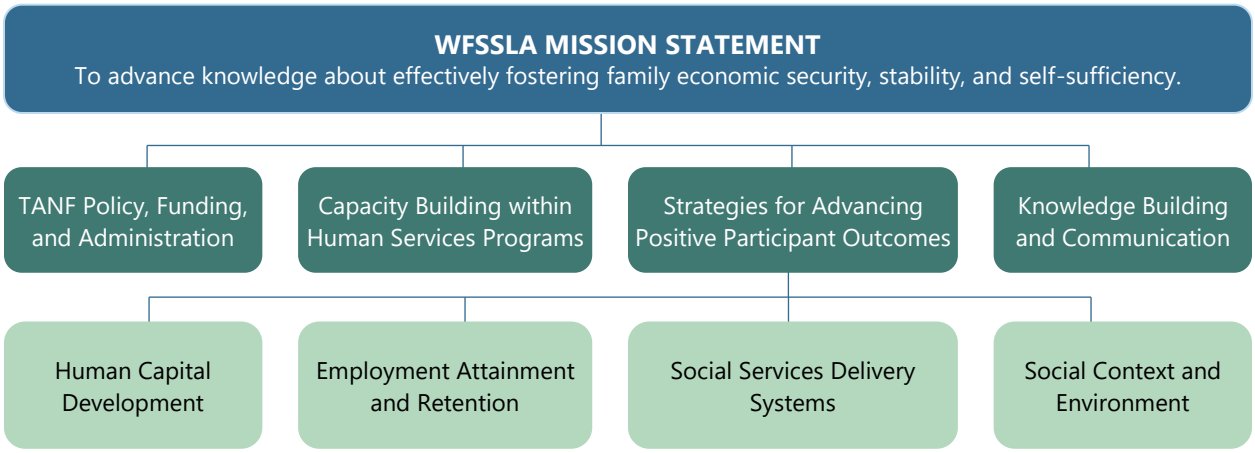
The Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda

Over the past several years, DEI and OFA have been partnering to develop the Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda, or WFSSLA—a more comprehensive learning agenda that both encompasses and builds on the ACF Research and Evaluation Agenda snapshots pertinent to their portfolio, as described above. The WFSSLA has three primary purposes:

- **Documentation** of DEI's and OFA's current and recent past learning activities to inform identification of learning questions that are grounded in and seek to build on these activities; address gaps in knowledge; are responsive to changes in programs, policies, and context; and reflect the interests, needs, and priorities of ACF and other internal and external parties;
- **Planning** for the development and execution of DEI's and OFA's portfolios to enable more effective, efficient, and collaborative work; and
- **Communication** of DEI's and OFA's work and learning priorities to interested parties and engagement with these parties to gather input on learning priorities.

The WFSSLA is organized by a framework (see below) that reflects the overarching mission of the WFSSLA and the major portfolios of work, or "workstreams," across DEI and OFA that are avenues to advancing the stated mission. **This *Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency* for Fiscal Year 2022 has been reorganized to align with the WFSSLA framework.** Each section of the report provides a description of the focal workstream and of DEI's projects that map to that workstream. While many of DEI's projects are cross-cutting in nature and could apply to more than one workstream, each project is grouped within the workstream that most closely aligns with its primary goal. DEI does and will continue to consider how projects across WFSSLA workstreams inform, interact with, and build on each other.

WFSSLA Framework



TANF Policy, Funding, and Administration

The *TANF Policy, Funding, and Administration* workstream addresses questions related to specific regulations or policies specific to TANF cash assistance (e.g., work participation rate, eligibility requirements, cash assistance levels, time limits); the block grant structure (e.g., how it is allocated to states, how states are using TANF funding and why); and TANF program administration (e.g., processes, procedures, and staffing plans for state agencies, how TANF is administered at the federal level).

How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness

In 2013, ACF's Office of Family Assistance 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.

OPRE launched this project in 2017 to strengthen ACF's understanding of 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. Conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with MEF Associates, the project administered a web survey to 54 state and territory TANF administrators and 150 county or local level administrators and conducted five site visits (both in-person and virtually), in addition to other information collection activities. In 2021, the project published the following special topics papers:

- *Assisting Families Experiencing Homelessness with TANF Funding: Findings from a Survey of TANF Administrators*
- *Approaches to Assisting Families Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness with TANF Funds*
- *Using TANF Funding to Provide Housing Assistance During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The project published its final report, which summarizes the study's findings, in early 2022.

Making State TANF Data More Comparable to Better Understand the Operations of Basic Assistance Grant

This grant will develop and test statistical methods to make TANF performance data more comparable across state and local TANF programs. The goal is to support efficient and effective comparisons so that data can be used to inform TANF policymaking at the state and federal levels. The project will provide a statistical model to compare state TANF performance on various individual outcome measures. The University of Maryland School of Public Policy is conducting this work under a grant with ACF.

State TANF Policies: Welfare Rules Database Expansion

Under TANF, states have considerable authority to design the parameters of their programs and set their own rules. ACF has funded updates to the State TANF Policies Database (also known as the Welfare Rules Database) since 1997 to document state program rules. Maintained by the Urban Institute, the database is meant to be a single location where information on TANF program rules can be researched across states and/or across years.

Project activities include:

1. Compile information on state cash assistance policies from state manuals and enter it into the database;
2. Verify the database information with state welfare agencies;
3. Make the database publicly available on the internet, and make improvements to the internet interface as appropriate;
4. Prepare an annual book summarizing the information on state cash assistance policies; and
5. Prepare special tables to support HHS priorities and initiatives.

Annual publications are available on the OPRE website.

SPOTLIGHT ON EQUITY-RELATED WORK

OPRE is committed to building evidence to improve the lives of children and families and working to ensure that evidence is used to inform the effective, efficient, and equitable administration of ACF programs, services, and resources. This includes building evidence to help ACF better understand how its policies and programs advance or hinder equity for populations who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. OPRE underscored the importance of this commitment when it updated the ACF Evaluation Policy in 2021 (the first time it had been updated since its establishment in 2012), which governs ACF's planning, conduct, and use of evaluation, to clarify that considerations of equity are central to our evaluation efforts. DEI takes this commitment seriously and has made steps to advance equity through our research and evaluation by:

- Recognizing and incorporating lived expertise into our research projects and our research planning process through projects such as TANF and Child Support Moving Forward – Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic and Further Incorporating Family Input and Advancing Contextual Analysis and Methods of Participant Engagement;
- Expanding the evidence base on the experiences of African American, Hispanic, and Tribal populations with ACF programs through our contributions to the African American Child and Family Research Center, the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families, and the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center; and
- Deepening our understanding of potential disparities related to the service delivery systems of TANF and the Child Care and Development Fund through the Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services Analysis Execution Project.

Capacity Building within Human Services Programs

The *Capacity Building within Human Services Programs* workstream addresses questions related to building the capacity of human services programs—whether they are administered by state, local, and tribal human services agencies or by non-governmental service providers—to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The workstream includes building two types of capacity: (1) programmatic and operational capacity, and (2) monitoring and evaluation capacity.

Family Self-Sufficiency Demonstration Development Grants and Evaluation Support

ACF is committed to building evidence through rigorous evaluations to identify approaches that more efficiently and effectively serve individuals and families with low incomes. Part of this work includes supporting efforts to build research and evaluation capacity among state and local human services agencies by providing evaluation technical assistance (TA). In 2021, OPRE awarded 20 two-year grants to support planning and execution of evaluation-related activities by organizations that serve low-income families with children. The Family Self-Sufficiency Demonstration Development (FSSDD) grant recipients operate programs that are client-centered and target outcomes related to employment and family well-being (e.g., education, health, food security, financial security, or social capital). Grant recipients' programs are also part of a network of services available to families who are (or may become) eligible for TANF.

The 20 FSSDD grant recipients are:

GRANT RECIPIENT	STATE
Ascentria Community Services Inc.	MA
Bethany Christian Services Michigan	MI
Brighton Center, Inc.	KY
Community Action Commission of Santa Barbara County (CommUnify)	CA
Community Partnership SE Missouri	MO
Cook Inlet Tribal Council	AK
Family Assistance for Renaissance Men	MI
FamilyWise Services	MN
Hennepin Healthcare System, Inc.	MN
HomeFront, Inc.	NJ
Housing Authority of City of Austin	TX
Korean Community Service Center	VA
Lutheran Services in Iowa	IA
Maggie's Place, Inc.	AZ
Michaels Community Services Corp. (Better Tomorrows)	NJ
Northern Virginia Family Service	VA
OneHeart	SD
Prevent Child Abuse Virginia (Families Forward)	VA
Project Self-Sufficiency Sussex Co.	NJ
Urban Neighborhood Initiatives Inc.	MI

Under the FSSDD Evaluation Support contract, the FSSDD grant recipients are working with an evaluation TA provider (Mathematica and its partner The Adjacent Possible™, or TAP) to build their capacity to conduct research and evaluation, use data to improve program outcomes, demonstrate the value of their programs to stakeholders, and ultimately, contribute to the evidence base on interventions serving families with low incomes. During the first year of the contract, the evaluation TA provider developed an individualized TA plan to support evaluation activities tailored to each grant recipient's intervention. Activities included creating a program logic model or theory of change, identifying program core components, drafting data collection instruments, and conducting pilot or other small-scale studies. Grant recipients additionally participated in quarterly and annual grant recipient meetings and learning communities focused on specific evaluation topics, such as qualitative methods. At the end of the FSSDD grant recipients' project periods, grant recipients will present findings from their evaluation activities and determine potential next steps for future rigorous evaluation.

Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data

Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data, also known as the TANF Data Innovation (TDI) project, supports innovation and efficiency within the TANF program through enhanced use of data from TANF and related human services programs. The OPRE Division of Data and Improvement (DDI) oversees this project with support from DEI and OFA. Launched in 2017, TDI is led by MDRC in partnership with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, the Coleridge Initiative, and Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy at the University of Pennsylvania. The project's aim is to provide timely, actionable, and relevant technical assistance to federal, state, and local TANF agencies on a variety of issues related to TANF data.

The TDI project includes the following major components:

- A needs assessment of all 50 states, which collected information on state practices and approaches to collecting, sharing, and using TANF data.
- The TANF Data Collaborative (TDC), which supported the efforts of staff at TANF agencies to improve their routine use of TANF and other administrative data through training and technical assistance. TDC included an intensive and targeted training for a pilot cohort of eight state TANF agencies to design and execute data analysis projects, with a special focus on combining TANF and wage data to inform program management. TDC also supported federal capacity building for OFA on data-related tasks, including data quality, data use, and analysis. The project also examined current issues and future opportunities related to state sampling for the purpose of federal reporting.
- The TANF Employment Project (TEP), which supported the improvement of the TANF data infrastructure. TEP supported the transformation of state-reported TANF data into a longitudinal format; expanded matching of TANF data with wage and unemployment insurance (UI) information from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH); and hosted the resulting data sets in a secure cloud environment to allow collaborative analysis between TDI researchers and ACF staff. TEP represents ACF's continued investment in using existing agency data to understand and manage the TANF program.

Across all TDI contract activities, the project supports the use of data for understanding the impact that TANF has on families broadly, and how the federal government and state partners can use data to better serve families.

TDI published the following reports in 2022:

- *Increasing Data Analytics Capacity in State TANF Agencies: The TANF Data Collaborative Approach* — This brief describes the training and technical assistance that TDC provided to: (1) all TANF agencies or entities that serve families receiving TANF or who may become TANF-eligible, and (2) a select group of state TANF agencies that were chosen to participate in the TDC Pilot Initiative.
- *Exemplary Data Use by State TANF Agencies: Beyond Routine Reports and Analyses*—This report summarizes findings from an analysis of patterns of data use by state TANF agencies and is aimed at understanding what characterizes exemplary data use. The findings highlight the importance of collaboration and communication, both internally and externally, around data and how it is used. Technical and data infrastructure (in particular, the age of a state's primary TANF data system) appeared to have no relationship with the quality of analytic data use.
- *Expanding TANF Program Insights: A Toolkit for State and Local Agencies on How to Access, Link, and Analyze Unemployment Insurance Wage Data*—This toolkit was created to help TANF professionals develop more robust, data-driven practices using administrative data on earnings by exploring strategies to access and use earnings data for program improvement purposes.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE TANF DATA INNOVATION PROJECT

Expanding TANF Program Insights: A Toolkit for State and Local Agencies on How to Access, Link, and Analyze Unemployment Insurance Wage Data

This toolkit is a starting point for TANF leaders who want to access and analyze UI wage data. The toolkit is organized into four main sections: (1) a short **introduction** that lays out the purpose of the toolkit as well as background information on UI wage data and the kinds of research questions that data can be used to answer, (2) a description of common **challenges** to accessing state UI wage data and strategies to address those challenges, (3) methods for **linking UI wage data** to other data sources, including emerging advanced methods that are more secure, and (4) instruction for **preparing UI wage data for analysis**, including how to create common employment-related outcomes that the field has used for decades to measure employment trends, stability, and mobility.

In addition, a GitHub repository provides open source and accessible code for use with the fourth section of the guidance brief. It includes code to use to detect common UI wage data issues and guidance on how to resolve those issues. Documents in the repository walk users through a strategy for processing UI wage data to create an analysis file and employment-related outcomes of interest. Finally, the repository has a resources folder with related supplemental materials that emerged from the larger TDI project as well as from the research team's meetings with members of an expert working group made up of researchers, policy professionals, and state and local TANF agency staff members that toolkit users may find helpful.

Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge (Project SPARK)

ACF has a long history of investing in projects to strengthen the capacity of TANF and other human services agencies to produce and use data and evidence to improve programs for families with low incomes. In 2012, OPRE launched the Advancing Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research Project to provide evaluation TA to support state and local human services agencies with engaging in research and evaluation activities, and subsequently awarded a follow-on contract to continue this work. Under

these contracts, the project developed the "Learn, Innovate, Improve" (LI^2) framework, which is a research-based approach to program improvement that embeds analytic methods in the process of designing, implementing, and iteratively testing program changes.

Building on this work, the ACF Office of Family Assistance awarded the Rapid Cycle Evaluation and Training Technical Assistance (RCE TTA) contract, an ongoing project that provides TA to state and local TANF agencies. RCE TTA has focused on the first two phases of LI^2, "Learn" and "Innovate," which are centered on assisting agencies with identifying, designing, and implementing program changes.

To complement these efforts, in 2019 OPRE launched Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge (Project SPARK) to provide research and evaluation TA to state, tribal, and local TANF programs currently or formerly engaged under RCE TTA. Led by Mathematica, this project supported those agencies in advancing their existing initiatives into the "Improve" phase of the LI^2 process, which focuses on evaluating program changes or innovations using pilot tests or other approaches. This project also supported programs in sharing their innovations, findings, and resources with the other sites involved in the project. The project has released several products based on its work, including:

- A brief describing the experiences of Iowa's Family Development and Self-Sufficiency program as they engaged in the "Learn" phase of LI^2 to assess their successes and challenges with implementing a home visiting program virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- A brief describing the experiences of New York City's Human Resources Administration as they engaged in the "Improve" phase of LI^2 to redesign their intake assessment for families receiving cash assistance; and
- A comprehensive toolkit comprised of five step-by-step guides to support organizations in strengthening their evidence capacity in one or more key areas—leadership, organizational culture, infrastructure, staff capabilities, and engagement and communication.

Additionally, when the COVID-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented disruption in TANF programs' service delivery, SPARK engaged in a collaborative process with sites to understand the challenges they faced, the innovations they developed, and the promising strategies that were emerging. The project held virtual learning community groups with state and local TANF program leaders and staff, and conducted web-based surveys with TANF program leaders and staff to collect information on topics including office safety and reopening, use of technology, staff and participant well-being, and performance and accountability. SPARK produced several resources for TANF practitioners based on the information collected through these activities, including a brief about pandemic-era innovations developed by TANF programs and a brief about approaches to reduce stress and promote wellness among TANF program staff and participants.

Lastly, in recognizing that LI^2 is just one method for providing evaluation TA, the project assessed the landscape of evaluation TA activities in human services program contexts to better understand the range of approaches and what is known about the effectiveness of evaluation TA. In June 2022, OPRE published findings from this assessment in *Project SPARK Landscape Analysis of Evaluation Technical Assistance to Build the Evaluation Capacity of Human Services and Related Programs*. The report documents approaches and evidence of promise or effectiveness of evaluation TA initiatives, proposes a definition of and a conceptual framework for evaluation TA, and draws lessons from the findings relevant for each focal audience. An accompanying overview of the report highlights key findings.

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes—Employment Attainment and Retention

The *Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes* workstream addresses questions related to specific strategies that seek to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The *Employment Attainment and Retention* sub-workstream focuses on strategies that seek to help people participating in TANF and other people with low incomes find jobs, maintain employment, and advance in the labor market.

Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio

Several past and ongoing OPRE-sponsored studies have sought to evaluate programs or interventions that connect individuals with low incomes to the labor force. While these studies have demonstrated that different types of interventions can improve labor market outcomes for certain groups, the duration and magnitude of impacts varies substantially, and many questions remain. Further, recent developments in the labor market and policy trends have inspired new questions.

Through the Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio, OPRE seeks to build on lessons learned and knowledge gaps revealed by these previous and current studies, as well as identify and rigorously evaluate the "next generation" of employment strategies. The portfolio is comprised of two OPRE projects: the **Building Evidence on Employment Strategies** (BEES) project and the **Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies** (NextGen) project. These projects aim to advance the evidence base by evaluating a wide range of employment strategies for people with complex barriers to obtaining and retaining employment, such as physical and mental health conditions, previous criminal justice system involvement, or limited formal work skills and experience.

Additionally, as part of this portfolio, OPRE is partnering with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to incorporate a focus on employment-related early interventions for individuals with current or foreseeable disabilities who have limited work history and are potential applicants for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). SSA is providing financial and technical support for the evaluation and/or service provision of selected interventions within the BEES and NextGen projects.

Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES)

In 2017, OPRE launched Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES) to advance the evidence base on effective interventions for populations with low incomes seeking employment and economic stability. Led by MDRC in partnership with Abt Associates and MEF Associates, the project has a particular interest in: (1) innovative approaches to addressing barriers to employment; and (2) interventions designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with behavioral health challenges that create barriers to employment, including substance use disorder, opioid use disorder, and/or mental health issues. As noted above, in 2019, BEES partnered with SSA to support evaluation of early employment interventions for individuals with current or foreseeable disabilities who are likely to apply for SSI.

BEES consulted with more than a dozen federal agencies to identify emerging priorities for evidence building and conducted a broad field scan to learn about innovative programs to evaluate. BEES will produce individual reports for each

intervention evaluated in addition to developing special topics papers. The COVID-19 pandemic and related factors have introduced challenges to the feasibility of impact evaluations in some sites. The evaluation team continues to closely monitor all sites and make decisions as conditions evolve.

INTERVENTION NAME AND LOCATION	TYPE OF STUDY	DESCRIPTION
Addiction Recovery Care Kentucky	Implementation	A program that combines treatment and recovery services with workforce development for individuals struggling with substance use disorder.
Breaking Barriers San Diego California	Administrative Data Analysis of Long-term Outcomes	A program designed to increase employment among TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes who are affected by disabilities, substance use disorder, and/or mental health issues.
Central City Concern Oregon	Impact, Implementation, Cost	A program based in Portland that provides treatment for substance use disorder, healthcare, housing, and comprehensive employment services.
Employment Services Programs for Individuals with Substance Use Disorder Avivo Treatment and Recovery (MN), Community Recovery Program (VA), IKRON Corporation (OH), Access to Recovery (MA), Women in Recovery (OK)	Descriptive	Five programs across the country that provide employment services to individuals with substance use disorder.
Individual Placement and Support (IPS) within Federal Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) Illinois, New Hampshire, and North Carolina	Impact, Implementation, Cost	Two FQHC sites are providing IPS employment services to unemployed and underemployed behavioral health clients.
IPS within Substance Use Disorder Treatment Sites Oklahoma, Ohio, and Illinois	Impact, Implementation, Cost	Two programs are providing IPS employment services to individuals with a substance use disorder.
IPS with TANF and SNAP Populations Washington State	Impact, Implementation, Cost	A program providing IPS employment services to a population eligible for TANF and/or SNAP.
2Gen (Two-Generation) Service Delivery Model Illinois	Implementation	A demonstration program in Chicago that provides Housing Choice Voucher recipients with an offer of employment coaching for parents and adolescents of working age, and enhanced case management aimed to meet the needs of the entire family and improve their success in the labor market.
WorkAdvance New York	Administrative Data Analysis of Long-term Outcomes	An employment approach designed to help disadvantaged workers with low incomes prepare for and enter quality jobs with opportunities for advancement.

To date, BEES has released the following publications:

- *Two-Year Findings from the Evaluation of Breaking Barriers: An Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Program*
- *Individual Placement and Support (IPS) in Practice: Lessons from Breaking Barriers*
- *Integrating Employment Services with Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery: The Experiences of Five Programs*
- *Providing Employment Services in Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery Programs: Responses to COVID-19 (2021)*
- *Individual Placement and Support in a Federally Qualified Health Center Setting*
- *Challenges to Employment: Fines, Fees, and License Suspensions*
- *Building Evidence-Based Strategies to Improve Employment Outcomes for Individuals With Substance Use Disorders (2021)*
- *Individual Placement and Support: Background and Directions for Future Research (2021)*
- *Site Profile—Breaking Barriers, San Diego County, CA (2020)*

The study team anticipates that findings from the descriptive and cost studies, as well as early findings on the effectiveness of the interventions, are likely to be released beginning in 2024.

Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies Project (NextGen)

In 2018, OPRE contracted with Mathematica to conduct the Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) project to identify and test innovative interventions designed to improve employment-related outcomes for people with low incomes and complex challenges to employment. These challenges may include physical and mental health conditions, criminal justice system involvement, or limited formal work skills and experience. Additionally, in response to the growing recognition of the importance of employer engagement in job training and workforce integration programs, NextGen has a special focus on market-oriented or employer-driven approaches.

INTERVENTION NAME AND LOCATION	TYPE OF STUDY	DESCRIPTION
Bridges from School to Work (Bridges) Bridges operates programs in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Los Angeles, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. A select number of Bridges programs participate in the evaluation.	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Employer-driven program that provides job readiness instruction, placement, and post-placement support for young adults with disabilities.
Individual Placement and Support for Adults with Justice Involvement Case Management Incorporated (TN), Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center, Grand Lake Mental Health Center (OK), Pee Dee Mental Health (SC), Transitions Mental Health Services (IL and IA)	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	IPS model implemented with adults who have mental health conditions and have recently been released from jail or prison following the completion of a sentence or have begun to serve an alternative sentence in the community.

INTERVENTION NAME AND LOCATION	TYPE OF STUDY	DESCRIPTION
Mental health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) Partnership Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Cognitive behavioral therapy and peer support stress management course and employment services for mothers with low incomes who are experiencing symptoms of depression.
Philly Workforce Inclusion Network (Philly WINs) Community Integrated Services (PA)	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Rapid placement and support of adults with disabilities into competitive jobs with employers who have received technical assistance in providing an inclusive workplace.
Wellness, Comprehensive Assessment, Rehabilitation, and Employment (WeCARE) New York City Human Resources Administration	Descriptive	Citywide initiative that addresses the needs of cash assistance clients with medical and/or mental health barriers to employment.
Work Success Utah Department of Workforce Services	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Statewide program that provides clients with low incomes and TANF recipients with coaching, employment and life skills training, and peer support to help them find and keep a job.

Key components of the NextGen project include:

- ***Impact Study***—to examine interventions' impact on participants' employment and earnings, and other outcomes of interest.
- ***Descriptive Study***—to describe the design and operations of the interventions, and to document the outcomes of participants served by the interventions.
- ***Cost Study***—to examine interventions' sources of funding, use of resources for implementation, costs and benefits, and sustainability.

Six interventions have been selected to participate in the NextGen project. Lessons learned from the NextGen project will be shared with a broad range of stakeholders such as policymakers, practitioners, program developers, and researchers across the welfare, workforce, disability, education, and justice communities.

To date, NextGen has released the following publications:

- *Snapshots of programs participating in the evaluation*
- *Employer Engagement: Lessons for Employment Programs from the COVID-19 Pandemic*
- *Understanding the Experiences, Needs, and Voices of Workers in Low-Income Households During COVID-19*

The study team anticipates that findings from the descriptive and cost studies, as well as early findings on the effectiveness of the interventions, are likely to be released beginning in 2023.

Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse

The Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse is a congressionally mandated review of the evidence on interventions designed to help job seekers with low incomes succeed in the labor market. To provide reliable, accessible information about what works to help people with low incomes find and keep gainful employment, the Pathways Clearinghouse provides a comprehensive, transparent, and systematic assessment of the effectiveness of interventions that aim to improve employment outcomes, reduce employment challenges, and support self-sufficiency for populations who have low incomes, especially

people receiving TANF and other forms of public assistance.

The Clearinghouse has several goals:

- Conduct transparent and comprehensive searches to identify relevant studies;
- Rate the quality of those studies to assess the strength of the evidence they provide on the different interventions;
- Determine the evidence of effectiveness for those interventions;
- Share the results, as well as other Clearinghouse products, on a user-friendly website to help state and local TANF administrators, policymakers, researchers, and the general public make sense of the results and better understand how this evidence might apply to questions and contexts that matter to them; and
- Summarize the overall state of evidence in the field by creating and disseminating new reports that synthesize findings from the review and identify gaps in existing evidence.

The Pathways Clearinghouse builds on the work of OPRE's Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review by including newer and wider-reaching research and assessing the effectiveness of the interventions reviewed. The project also collaborates with and learns from other federal clearinghouse efforts.

The Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse website launched in 2020 and, as of late 2022, features the results of the evidence review for 231 interventions and 305 studies. The website provides detailed information on these interventions and studies, including their effectiveness rating for each outcome domain assessed, and – for interventions with evidence of effectiveness – information about how the interventions were implemented.

The website features a host of additional, supplemental products including:

- A series of Evidence Snapshots, short briefs on the effectiveness of programs that use a common approach to service provision, focused on:
  - Employment Coaching
  - Financial Incentives
  - Subsidized Employment and Transitional Jobs
- Several reports synthesizing what can be learned by looking at evidence across interventions including a Bayesian meta-analysis examining specific interventions, services, and combinations of services likely to improve labor market outcomes for different groups of people;
- A Guide for Researchers carrying out studies that are eligible for inclusion in the Clearinghouse; and
- Video tutorials.

A number of other products are forthcoming in 2023, including additional Evidence Snapshots. This project, which began in 2018, is led by Mathematica with assistance from MEF Associates and Hager Sharp.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PATHWAYS TO WORK EVIDENCE CLEARINGHOUSE

Digging Deeper Into What Works: What Services Improve Labor Market Outcomes, and for Whom?

This report used Bayesian meta-analysis—an analytic approach that synthesizes relationships across multiple studies—to provide new evidence on the likelihood that specific interventions will improve labor market outcomes for people with low incomes and which combinations of services are most likely to be effective for different groups of people. Key findings include the following:

- The analysis examined 127 interventions and found that 12 of the interventions have more than a 90 percent probability of improving labor market outcomes for participants.
- Interventions focused on work and work-based learning have the highest probability of improving outcomes relative to interventions focused on delivering other services.
  - Interventions focused on work and work-based learning have a 74 percent probability of improving labor market outcomes overall (including earnings, employment, education and training, and public benefit receipt), and a 94 percent probability of improving employment outcomes specifically.
  - Interventions focused on work and work-based learning were most effective when combined with employment services; these interventions have an 81 percent probability of improving outcomes when offered in combination with work and work-based learning.
- No single primary service is particularly likely to improve outcomes by a substantial amount (by at least $1,000 in annual earnings).
  - Though interventions focused on work and work-based learning have the highest probability of improving outcomes by any amount, they are among the least likely to improve outcomes by a substantial amount relative to interventions focused on delivering other services (a 21 percent probability of improving outcomes by an amount equivalent to $1,000 or more).
  - Interventions focused on subsidized and transitional jobs are the most likely to improve outcomes by an amount equivalent to $1,000 or more (a 32 percent probability).
- The likelihood that an intervention offering a particular primary service improves outcomes differs depending on the characteristics of the population being studied. However, interventions focused on work and work-based learning, employment retention services, case management, and other supports typically have the highest probabilities of improving outcomes in interventions serving primarily people from racial or ethnic minority groups, women, and people with disabilities.

Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED)

OPRE launched the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration (STED) in 2010 with the goal of demonstrating and evaluating the next generation of subsidized employment models for critical populations with low incomes. The project, led by MDRC, examined 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 built upon approaches that have demonstrated effectiveness in previous studies and also tested new and innovative interventions. The evaluation included a random assignment impact evaluation in eight sites, an implementation evaluation at each project site, and a cost-benefit analysis. An in-program survey

measured potential non-economic benefits of subsidized employment, such as emotional and social well-being.

The STED project was conducted in close coordination with the Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD). A project of the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), ETJD funded seven grantees to provide temporary, paid work experiences to noncustodial parents and formerly incarcerated persons 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.

SITE	DESCRIPTION
Atlanta Paycheck Plus United Way of Greater Atlanta	This program offered an enhanced Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income individuals without dependent children. It provided 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 individuals with low incomes – and targets many of the same groups (young adults, former prisoners, and noncustodial parents).
Bridges to Pathways Chicago Department of Family and Support Services	Developed in partnership with the Chicago Crime Lab and University of Chicago, this pilot of the Bridges to Pathways Initiative targeted 16- to 24-year-olds leaving incarceration and included three components: (1) a transitional job; (2) an online high school program; and (3) a cognitive behavioral therapy-like program.
Good Transitions Goodwill of North Georgia	This DOL-funded program provided transitional jobs in Goodwill locations to noncustodial parents with low incomes who were referred to the program by the child support agency.
Jobs Now STEP Forward San Francisco City and County Agency for Human Services	San Francisco tested private sector (both non-profit and for-profit) subsidized employment placements for individuals with low incomes who timed out of TANF or exhausted Unemployment Insurance benefits.
MSTED Minnesota Department of Human Services	This program targeted clients of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (the state's TANF program) who were not working and who had been in the program for at least six months; it included 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 could start in either tier depending on their work-readiness.

SITE	DESCRIPTION
Transitional Subsidized Employment Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services	Los Angeles County tested two different program models for individuals with low incomes: (1) paid work experience in non-profit or public sector placements; and (2) "hybrid" on-the-job training in for-profit, private sector placements.
TransitionsSF Goodwill and the San Francisco Department of Child Support Services	This DOL-funded program provided transitional jobs to noncustodial parents with low incomes 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.
Young Adult Internship Program New York City Center for Economic Opportunity	This program targeted disconnected youth—neither in school nor working for at least three months—ages 16 to 24 and provided initial training followed by a private sector (for- or non-profit) internship for up to 12 weeks.

In 2021, OPRE contracted with MDRC to conduct a longer-term analysis of employment outcomes for STED using data from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH). This analysis added up to three years of data to the prior five years of follow-up periods. The extended analysis will produce a brief examining how study participants' formal earnings and employment fared up to eight years after study enrollment. It will also include a complementary brief examining how study participants' employment, earnings, and unemployment insurance receipt varied across the two years before and two years after the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic. Both briefs will likely be published in the Fall of 2023.

The STED project has published a number of reports to date. The text box highlights select reports. Additional reports, including site-specific reports with findings from impact and cost analyses, are available on OPRE's website.

Select Reports from the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration

2015	• *Testing the Next Generation of Subsidized Employment Programs: An Introduction to the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration and the Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration*
2016	• *The Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Next Generation of Subsidized Employment Programs*
2018	• *The Effects of Subsidized and Transitional Employment Programs on Non-economic Well-Being* • *Tribal Solutions: Subsidized Employment Programs Serving American Indians and Alaska Natives* • *The Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration: New Perspectives on Creating Jobs—Final Impacts of the Next Generation of Subsidized Employment Programs*
2019	• *Findings from In-Depth Interviews with Participants in Subsidized Employment Programs*
2020	• *Can Subsidized Employment Programs Help Disadvantaged Job Seekers? A Synthesis of Findings from Evaluations of 13 Programs*
2022	• *An Earned Income Tax Credit That Works for Singles*

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes—Human Capital Development

The *Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes* workstream addresses questions related to specific strategies that seek to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The *Human Capital Development* sub-workstream focuses on strategies that seek to build or improve people's skills, also known as human capital, in order to help them obtain employment and become economically self-sufficient.

Career Pathways

The career pathways framework has been identified as a promising approach to improve postsecondary education and training for adults with low incomes and low academic skills. 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. To engage, retain, and facilitate learning among adults with low academic skills, the career pathways framework includes four categories of service strategies:

- assessments of skills and needs;
- promising and innovative approaches to basic skills instruction and occupational training;
- academic and non-academic supports; and
- approaches for connecting students with career-track employment opportunities.

Within each of these categories, there are a variety of promising strategies and programs vary in the extent to which include and how they implement these strategies.

Evaluation Portfolio for the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program

From 2010 to 2021, OFA administered the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program, which provided education and training to TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes for occupations in the healthcare field that pay well and were expected to either experience labor shortages or be in high demand.

The HPOG Program used the career pathways framework to address the challenge of preparing adults with low incomes and often low academic skills for jobs with the potential to earn a family sustaining wage in the healthcare sector. Local HPOG programs were expected to target skills and competencies demanded by the healthcare industry; support career pathways; offer trainings that would 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 training and services at times and locations that are easily accessible to targeted populations.

OFA awarded the first round of HPOG grants in 2010 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). OFA later extended HPOG 2.0 for an additional 12 months, ending September 2021. OFA's website provides additional information about the HPOG Program.

HPOG was authorized as a demonstration program with a mandated federal evaluation. As such, OPRE developed and oversees 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; participant outcomes; impacts in the short-, intermediate-, and long-term; and costs and benefits.

Evaluations of HPOG 1.0

The evaluations of HPOG 1.0 have largely concluded and additional information is available on OPRE's website. Research and evaluation activities pertaining to HPOG 1.0 that are still underway include an assessment of the long-term impacts of HPOG 1.0 (see the Career Pathways Outcomes Studies in this section); and research grants that OPRE awarded to support secondary data analysis of archived HPOG 1.0 data (see the Career Pathways Secondary Data Analysis Grants in this section).

Evaluations of HPOG 2.0

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

This project, led by Abt Associates in partnership with Urban Institute and AKA Enterprise Solutions, Inc., provided recommendations for the design of an evaluation to assess the implementation, outcomes, systems change, and impacts of the HPOG 2.0 programs. Additionally, this project built and maintained the HPOG Participant Accomplishment and Grant Evaluation System (PAGES), a web-based management information system, to track grantee progress for program management and to record grantee and participant data for use in HPOG 2.0 evaluations.

The project also developed annual reports based on PAGES data that described program offerings, participant characteristics, and outcomes. Six annual reports were released; the Final Annual Report was published in 2022.

Additionally, the project released four special topics papers in 2022:

- *Employment and Earnings Outcomes by Length and Occupation of Healthcare Training: Results from the HPOG Program*
- *Who Doesn't Start or Complete Training: Results from the HPOG Program*
- *Multiple Entry-Level Trainings and Credentials for Career Progress: Results from the HPOG Program*
- *Creating a Data System to Manage and Evaluate Grant Programs: Insights from PAGES*

HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation

The HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation of the 27 non-Tribal grantees uses follow-up surveys, PAGES data, and other administrative data to assess outcomes for HPOG 2.0 participants who consent to participate in the evaluation. The National Evaluation includes three key components:

The **Descriptive Evaluation** includes implementation, systems change, and outcomes studies and in-depth interviews with HPOG 2.0 participants. In 2022, the project released several publications:

- *One Step at a Time: Participant Perspectives on Career Pathways*
- *Finding a High-Quality Job in the Caring Industry: HPOG Participants' Occupational Choices*
- *The HPOG Training Opportunity: Participant Perspectives on Finding Motivation While Working and Taking Care of Family*
- *Agile During a Pandemic: How HPOG 2.0 Programs Responded to COVID-19*
- *Program Operator and Partner Perspectives on Local Service Delivery Systems*
- *Implementation Study Report*

The **Impact Evaluation** is using a random assignment design to rigorously assess the impacts

of HPOG 2.0 programs. In 2022, the study released the *Short-Term Impact Report*, which presents impact findings approximately 15 months after random assignment. The study will continue to examine impacts in the intermediate- (about 36 months after study entry) and long-term (about 66 months after study entry). In addition, the study will examine the effectiveness of the HPOG 2.0 Program before and after the COVID pandemic through a 15-month follow-up survey of participants who enrolled in HPOG 2.0 after the onset of the pandemic. In 2022, the study also released a report on *Occupational Training for Jobs That "Pay Well."*

The **Cost-Benefit Analysis** will compare the estimated costs of operating the average HPOG 2.0 program to the monetized value of benefits produced.

The study is led by Abt Associates, in partnership with MEF Associates, Urban Institute, Insight Policy Research, and NORC at the University of Chicago.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE HPOG 2.0 NATIONAL EVALUATION

HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation Implementation Study Report

- HPOG 2.0 participants were mostly women, never married, and older than traditional college-aged students. At intake, almost 25% of participants were already enrolled in schooling or training and over 80% were receiving public benefits.
- All HPOG 2.0 programs offered basic skills education; 50% of participants received it.
- Nearly 80% of participants enrolled in healthcare occupational training courses. Of those, almost 33% of participants enrolled in Nursing Assistant training, making it the most popular occupational training.
- All HPOG 2.0 programs provided:
  - case management and counseling, and nearly all participants received them.
  - academic advising and financial assistance, and more than half of participants received them.
  - personal and logistical supports, though fewer than half of participants received transportation assistance and only 5% received child or dependent care assistance.
  - employment supports, and fewer than one-third of participants received them.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE HPOG 2.0 NATIONAL EVALUATION

HPOG 2.0 Program Operator and Partner Perspectives on Local Service Delivery Systems

- The HPOG 2.0 programs appeared to be an inflection point for new or enhanced collaboration within the system. No one program operator in this study could bring about change alone.
- The programs selected for the Systems Study reported engaging an average of 20 partners per program.
- Local program operators and partners perceived that offering robust support services helped improve the quality of healthcare training and services.
- Recommendations for future similar initiatives include continued encouragement for new and strengthened partnerships and robust wraparound services to improve access to training and address barriers to training completion and post-training employment. Additional recommendations include encouraging a greater focus on advancement in healthcare careers and emphasizing strong employer relationships.

Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE)

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 families with low incomes. Based on stakeholder input, PACE came to focus on postsecondary career pathways as the main intervention framework to study. The nine programs included in PACE are:

- Des Moines Area Community College's Workforce Training Academy Connect Program
- I-BEST Programs in Washington State
- Instituto del Progreso Latino's Carreras en Salud
- Madison College's Patient Care Pathway Program
- Pima Community College's Pathways to Healthcare Program
- San Diego Workforce Partnership's Bridge to Employment in the Healthcare Industry Program
- Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement
- Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County's Health Careers for All Program
- Year Up

The PACE team at Abt Associates and its partners conducted separate implementation and impact studies for each of the nine programs. All publications from the PACE project are available on the OPRE website.

Career Pathways Outcome Studies (CPIO & CPLO)

The Career Pathways Intermediate Outcomes (CPIO) Study and the Career Pathways Long-Term Outcomes (CPLO) Study extend the follow-up periods for the HPOG 1.0 Impact Study and Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) project (see text box for list of programs), both of which examined short-term outcomes from 15 to 24 months after study enrollment.

CPIO, which launched in 2014 and ended in 2021, examined impacts approximately 36 months after random assignment. CPLO, which launched in 2016 and ended in 2022, examined impacts approximately 72 months after random assignment. Both studies used participant follow-up surveys and administrative data to examine impacts on educational attainment, employment and earnings, and family well-being, and were led by Abt Associates.

In 2022, CPLO published reports on long-term impacts for HPOG and for four of the nine programs in PACE:

- *Benefits that Last: Long-Term Impact and Cost-Benefit Findings for Year Up;*
- *Instituto del Progreso Latino's Carreras en Salud Program Six-Year Impact Report;*
- *Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program; and*
- *Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA).*

The project also published a cross-site report that synthesizes six-year impact findings across all PACE programs and the HPOG 1.0 Impact Study (see text box for key findings).

Career Pathways Secondary Data Analysis Grants

Beginning in 2020, OPRE has awarded grants to support secondary analysis of data collected as part of OPRE's Career Pathways Research Portfolio, including PACE and evaluations of HPOG 1.0 and 2.0. The purpose of the grant opportunity is to stimulate and fund rigorous, policy-relevant analyses that deepen the field's understanding of the implementation and effectiveness of career pathways programs. OPRE contracts with ICF, Inc. to provide support to the Career Pathways Secondary Data Analysis grant program. This support includes

dissemination of grant recipient research findings, regular cross-grant recipient convenings, and related activities. One grant was awarded in 2022 to the following institution:

ORGANIZATION RECEIVING AWARD	PROJECT TITLE
University of Texas–Arlington	Health professions training and economic self-sufficiency among low-income women: Understanding the role of multilevel modifiable barriers

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CAREER PATHWAYS LONG-TERM OUTCOMES STUDY

Summary and Insights from the Long-Term Follow-Up of Ten PACE and HPOG 1.0 Job Training Evaluations: Six-Year Cross-Site Report

The PACE and HPOG 1.0 six-year analyses explored whether educational progress impacts identified in the three-year reports translated into earnings impacts, and whether earnings impacts for one program at year three persisted into year six.

- Two programs had confirmatory impacts on longer-term credential receipt.
  - Of the five evaluations that specified a confirmatory educational outcome at the six-year follow up, two found increases in longer-term credential receipt: Carreras en Salud (3.8 percentage points); and Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (12.0 percentage points).
- One program, Year Up, increased earnings at the six-year mark.
  - Year Up's impact on earnings, observed at three years, continued through six years. The program had a $1,895 impact on quarterly earnings six years after random assignment (Q23-Q24), among the largest impacts reported to date from randomized evaluations of training programs for adults with low incomes. None of the other PACE programs, nor HPOG 1.0 programs, had an impact on earnings at six years.
- The lack of earnings impacts for most programs may stem from multiple factors: that many programs had small impacts on credential receipt, the types of credentials earned are typically associated with low wages, and programs have limited connections to employers.
  - For a program to have an overall impact on earnings, it must have a sufficiently large impact on the number or type of credentials earned, those credentials must have sufficient labor market value to result in meaningful wage increases, and credential holders must find employment. If the program falls short in any area—that is, if treatment group members do not complete training at a sufficiently higher rate than the control group, if the impacts are primarily for credentials with low economic returns, or completers do not find employment—then the program's impact on overall earnings will be small. Most programs in the PACE and HPOG 1.0 evaluations fell short in one or more of these areas.

Promising Occupations Achievable through Education or Training for Low-Income Families

The purpose of this project is to expand the knowledge base for career pathways, focusing on those positions requiring 12 months or less of postsecondary training, by updating the resources developed by OPRE's prior Employment Sector Analysis for TANF Recipients and Other Low-Income Families Project. That project identified and analyzed federal, state, and local labor market data in high-growth fields to identify high-growth sectors of the labor market, focusing on positions requiring limited postsecondary training. The project produced three primary resources:

- A resource guide that catalogued seminal studies, technical assistance materials, client assessments, and potential data sources on career exploration and assessment, career pathways, and sector-based strategies and labor market information (LMI) that state and local TANF agencies could use to help connect TANF recipients and other families with low incomes to good jobs.
- A practitioner's guide to help TANF administrators identify opportunities to use LMI to support their work, and to create a common language across TANF practitioners and staff in state departments of labor to promote coordination and collaboration.
- A collection of state-level analyses on "promising occupations" for TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes defined as occupations expected to experience positive growth through 2022 and that require less than a bachelor's degree to gain entry.

The Promising Occupations project, led by MEF Associates, will both update the analyses from the Employment Sector Analysis and increase projections past 2022, in addition to incorporating the career pathways framework which has emerged as a promising strategy to promote education, training, and workforce advancement among low-income and low-skilled individuals. This project will increase the usability of labor market information and create a practitioner-friendly, interactive website which will be hosted by the contractor that allows practitioners serving TANF recipients and other low-income individuals to identify promising occupations for their clients that are attainable through short-term education or training and are projected to grow with family-sustaining wages.

Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations & Long-Term Follow-Up Study

In 2016, OPRE launched the Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations. Led by Mathematica, with partners Abt Associates, MDRC, and The Adjacent Possible, the evaluation is conducting impact and implementation evaluations of coaching interventions that focus on job entry and retention and that target TANF populations and other individuals with low incomes.

The definition of and theory behind employment coaching is discussed in the brief *Employment Coaching: Working with Low-Income Populations to Use Self-Regulation Skills to Achieve Employment Goals*. The evaluation design and process for selecting interventions to study are described in the *Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations: Evaluation Design Report*. Below is a list of the interventions participating in the evaluation; additional information about each intervention and its key characteristics can be found in the *Employment Coaching Program Snapshots*.

- **Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS) program**—operated by the Iowa Department of Human Rights through subcontracts with 17 local agencies across the state (seven of which are participating in the evaluation)

- **Goal4 It!**—administered by the Jefferson County Department of Human Services in Jefferson County, CO
- **LIFT**—a non-profit with locations in Washington, DC; New York, NY; Chicago, IL; and Los Angeles, CA (the latter three locations are participating in the evaluation)
- **MyGoals for Employment Success**—administered by the city housing authorities in Baltimore, MD and Houston, TX

Implementation Evaluation

The project is currently developing descriptive reports with findings from the implementation evaluation of each intervention. Three of these reports have been published to date, for Family Development and Self-Sufficiency, LIFT, and MyGoals for Employment Success. The remaining descriptive report with findings on Goal4 It! is anticipated in 2023. The project also recently released a brief on findings from in-depth interviews with coaching participants, a brief on the use of video recordings as a data collection strategy, and lessons learned by the coaching interventions in adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact Evaluation

Initial impact findings based on the first follow-up point (9 months after study enrollment for FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and LIFT; 12 months after study enrollment for MyGoals) are expected in 2023. The project's analytic approach to estimating impacts is detailed in the technical supplement to the evaluation design report. The project will also assess impacts at a second follow-up point (21 months after study enrollment for all interventions). Additionally, OPRE awarded the Evaluation of Employment Coaching Long-Term Follow-Up Study contract to Mathematica in 2021 to assess long-term impacts on participant outcomes at 48 to 67 months after study enrollment.

As part of the impact analyses, the evaluation will also examine the effect of coaching on self-regulation skills, and the role of these skills in generating any impacts on employment outcomes. To guide this work, the project developed a conceptual framework for measuring self-regulation skills in the context of evaluations of employment programs. In 2021, the project released, *Selecting and Testing Measures of Self-Regulation Skills Among Low Income Populations*, which shares empirical findings from tests of the measures selected for this evaluation.

EXPLORE OUR DATA!

OPRE regularly archives research and evaluation data for secondary analysis, consistent with the ACF Evaluation Policy, which promotes rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics in the planning, conduct, and use of evaluation and research. Archiving evaluation data for appropriate secondary use by researchers promotes rigor and transparency by encouraging the external validation and reproducibility of published results or findings.

OPRE takes appropriate measures to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of individuals contributing data for research throughout the archiving process, consistent with ACF's core principle of ethics. Research data may be made available as public use files (when the data would not likely lead to harm or to the re-identification of an individual) or through restricted access. Restricted access files are de-identified and made available to approved researchers either through secure transmission and download, virtual data enclaves, physical data enclaves, or restricted online analysis.

Many **datasets from current and past DEI projects** are stored at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. Additionally, DEI supports OPRE's Child and Family Data Archive (CFData), also led by ICPSR.

The Child & Family Data Archive hosts over 300 datasets, including several from DEI's research and evaluation portfolio. The Child & Family Data Archive website (https://www.childandfamilydataarchive.org) provides user-friendly information that allows stakeholders to access downloadable data 24/7, search the bibliography of data-related literature, request technical assistance, and much more.

Archived Datasets from DEI Projects

- Evaluation of the First Round of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 1.0) Program
- Evaluation of the Second Round of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) Program
- Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) Project
- Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Project
- Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation Project
  - Transitional Work Corporation and Success Through Employment Preparation Programs, Philadelphia, PA
  - Center for Employment Opportunities, New York City
  - Working Toward Wellness, Rhode Island
- Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) Project
- National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS)

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes—Social Services Delivery Systems

The *Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes* workstream addresses questions related to specific strategies that seek to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The *Social Services Delivery Systems* sub-workstream focuses on how the implementation of, coordination among, and improvements to social services delivery systems, including TANF and other human services programs, relate to participant outcomes.

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Next Generation

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 families with low incomes in the United States. In 2015, OPRE launched BIAS Capstone and BIAS Next Generation 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.

Over the past several decades, innovative behavioral science research has shown that human decision-making and information processing 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.

Principles from behavioral science—an interdisciplinary field informed by economics, psychology, and neuroscience—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 tools can be used to improve follow-through; and default rules can produce positive outcomes even for people who fail to act.

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. BIAS NG, 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, and Child Trends, is building on the activities and lessons of BIAS in several ways including:

- Working with additional ACF programs, specifically TANF, child welfare, and Head Start programs;
- Testing additional types of interventions, including going beyond "nudges," or subtle and modest changes to programs (such as altering messages in letters to clients), and considering changes to agency processes and staff practices; and
- Collecting additional information about the interventions, including conducting implementation research to better understand how and why the interventions do or do not work.

Before undertaking work in these ACF program areas, the BIAS NG team consulted with federal program staff, technical assistance providers, and practitioners about the major challenges facing programs in these areas. To improve client

participation in TANF activities, the project has collaborated with programs in Los Angeles County (California), Monroe County (New York), and Washington State to test text messages, mailed reminders, new tools for staff to use with clients, and new staff practices. To increase families' engagement in their child welfare cases, the project worked with Allegheny County (Pennsylvania) to test a mailed flyer providing a roadmap of key steps in families' cases coupled with reinforcing text messages. To help guide qualified families through the application process to foster or adopt, the team developed tools in partnership with Los Angeles County's Department of Children and Family Services. And in Wayne County (Michigan), the BIAS NG team is collaborating with two Head Start grantees—Starfish Family Services and Matrix Human Services—on behavioral diagnosis and design activities to devise new behavioral interventions.

As of 2022, the project completed randomized controlled tests in three sites (Monroe County, Washington State, and Allegheny County) and was in the field collecting data with LA County's Department of Children and Family Services. Data collection at one site, Los Angeles County's TANF program, was interrupted when in-person services were suspended due to COVID-19 and the decision was made to permanently discontinue sample build up. The project will begin reporting on the results of the completed tests in 2023. The BIAS NG team, with one of their program partners from the Monroe County TANF site, presented early lessons from their work with Monroe County and Allegheny County's Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) at OPRE's 2022 Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency.

Behavioral Interventions Scholars Grants

The Behavioral Interventions Scholars (BIS) grant program was launched in 2017 to support dissertation research by graduate students who are applying a behavioral science lens to research questions relevant to social services programs and policies and other issues facing families with low incomes in the United States. In line with OPRE's BIAS portfolio, 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 doctoral students and faculty members.

The current and ongoing BIS grant recipients and their projects are:

GRADUATE STUDENT	PROJECT TITLE	UNIVERSITY	PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/ FACULTY MENTOR
Basheerah Enahora	Engaging Low-Income African American Adolescents in a Virtual Avatar-Based Nutrition Education Program	University of North Carolina Greensboro	Dr. Jared McGuirt
Luyi Jian	How Does Prosocial Identity Protect Juveniles from Reoffending? Testing Core Components of a Conceptual Model for Identity-Based Intervention	University of California, Berkeley	Dr. Jennifer Skeem
Hannah Ruebeck	Perceived Discrimination and its Effects on Morale, Effort, Cooperation, and Labor Market Participation	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Dr. Frank Schilbach
KaLeigh White	The Long-Term Wellbeing of Families and Children Under a Conditional and Punitive Social Safety Net	University of Iowa	Dr. Mary Noonan

OPRE contracts with ICF, Inc. to provide support to the BIS grant program. This support includes dissemination of grant recipient research findings, regular cross-grant recipient convenings, and related activities.

Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network Grants

In 2020, OPRE awarded the second cohort of the Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network (FSSRN) cooperative agreements. These five-year cooperative agreements support five university researchers to work independently and collectively on systematic, multi-disciplinary examinations of current gaps in family self-sufficiency and stability research.

The FSSRN promotes productive partnerships between the scholars and state or local human services agencies and scholars' participation in a multidisciplinary learning community with other members of the Network. The scholars are:

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	PROJECT TITLE	ORGANIZATION RECEIVING AWARD	PARTNER(S)
Yu-Ling Chang, Ph.D.	Racial Equity in the TANF Service Delivery Path to Family Stability and Self-Sufficiency	University of California, Berkeley School of Social Welfare	California Department of Social Services (CDSS)
Anna Gassman-Pines, Ph.D.	Local Criminal Justice Reform Efforts: Effects on Employment, Self-Sufficiency, and Family Well-Being	Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy	Durham County Department of Social Services
Andrea Hetling, Ph.D.	Family and Economic Stability: Examining TANF as a Supportive Program	Rutgers University The Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy	New Jersey Department of Human Services, Department of Family Development
Kristina Nikolova, Ph.D.	TANF Program and Policy Implementation in Michigan: Building State Capacity for Program Assessment to Promote Family Self-Sufficiency	Wayne State University School of Social Work	Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
David Rothwell, Ph.D., MSW	Paid Family Leave and Family Self-Sufficiency: Evidence from Oregon	Oregon State University College of Public Health, School of Social and Behavioral Health Sciences	Oregon Department of Human Services, Oregon Employment Department, the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative, and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

OPRE contracts with ICF, Inc. to provide support to the FSSRN. This support includes dissemination of grant recipient research findings, regular cross-grant recipient convenings, and related activities.

Human-Centered Design for Human Services (HCD4HS)

The Human-Centered Design for Human Services (HCD4HS) project, led by Child Trends with partners MEF Associates and design firm Anthro-Tech, Inc., aimed to gain a better understanding of what human-centered design (HCD) is; how it is being implemented in the context of human services; requirements for implementation across a range of ACF programs; and the evaluability, feasibility, and sustainability of HCD as an organizational practice. The project explored HCD across ACF programs at federal, state, and local levels.

Prior to the project's conclusion in September of 2022, HCD4HS released the brief, *A Review of Human-Centered Design*, summarizing findings from an assessment of the state of the field obtained through expert and stakeholder consultation, a review of literature, and key informant interviews.

Also in September of 2022, the HCD4HS project published a final report, *Applying Human-Centered Design to Human Services: Pilot Study Findings*. The pilot study was conducted with three human services agencies: Denver Human Services (Denver, CO); Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Support (WA); and Santa Clara County Social Services (San Jose, CA). Key contributions of this project included the development of a theory of change for human-centered design activities in human services agencies and aligned implementation measures.

KEY FINDINGS FROM HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN FOR HUMAN SERVICES (HCD4HS)

Applying Human-Centered Design to Human Services: Pilot Study Findings

- Using a capacity building approach, all design teams participated in an initial HCD Primer workshop (24 hours) followed by 11 months of training and coaching from an HCD consultant (average of 5 hours/week) and content expert (average of 2-4 hours/week). All training and coaching were provided virtually.
- All three pilot sites appeared to make good progress in addressing very disparate challenges: TANF cliff effect, staff engagement, and completion of child support order modifications. However, given that there were only three sites, we cannot fully address which types of challenges within the broad range of ACF programs may be best suited for HCD.
- Design teams (team of staff at each pilot agency) identified project management, leadership support, and incentives for end user participation as critical resources for implementation of HCD, similar to implementation of other change initiatives.
- Design teams identified primary barriers as time and capacity, recruitment of end users, getting incentives in place to encourage end user participation, and organizational structures and processes.
- Given limitations of existing measures, this project developed tools including weekly and monthly logs of HCD activities, interviews, and an Implementation Assessment to evaluate HCD principles, process, and mindset.
- HCD can be evaluated systematically in human services programs with a variety of theoretically-driven data collection tools, although more work is needed in measure development.

Integrating Financial Capability and Employment Services (InFin)

Little empirical or exploratory work currently exists on financial capability interventions delivered in the context of employment and training (E&T) programs. This project, led by MEF Associates and its partner Urban Institute, aims to build more evidence about the extent, forms, and practices of incorporating financial capability interventions into E&T programs serving adult populations with low incomes. This study also aims to help establish a basis for research and evaluation in this area.

In 2021, OPRE released a literature synthesis and a brief on the outcomes, payment timing, and next steps for research on the Earned Income Tax Credit. Study activities, including an online survey, phone interviews, virtual site visits, and virtual focus groups, will conclude in 2023.

Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G)

OPRE's Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security (Integrated Approaches) project, which concluded in 2018, investigated the design and evaluability of integrated approaches to alleviating poverty that address the needs of both parents and children. A national scan found that most existing two-generation programs were in the early stages of development as pilots or as new programs that began only a few years prior and were not ready for evaluations of effectiveness. The scan also revealed that the majority of programs lacked the internal research capacity to conduct and manage research evaluations for themselves, and they rarely had partnerships with local evaluators to help them achieve this goal.

Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G), launched in 2019 and led by Mathematica, builds on the gaps in research and practice highlighted in the Integrated Approaches project. Specific objectives include:

1. Conducting formative research to better understand program implementation, strengthen promising programs, and prepare them for evaluations of effectiveness;
2. Building the capacity of programs and researchers to conduct rigorous and meaningful evaluations of integrated approaches to supporting child development and improving family economic security; and
3. Addressing measurement issues in order to promote learning across evaluations and a better understanding of relevant processes and outcomes of two-generation programs for children and their parents with low incomes.

In 2020, four initiatives delivering two-generation services to support child development and family economic security were selected to partner with the project to implement formative evaluation work:

- Brighton Center (Newport, KY)
- Garrett County Community Action Committee (Oakland, MD)
- San Antonio Dual Gen (San Antonio, TX)
- Valley Settlement (Carbondale, CO)

In 2021, these four initiatives began receiving technical assistance on the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI^2) framework (which is discussed in the Capacity Building within Human Services Programs workstream above). Six additional initiatives (bringing the total to 10) participated in a learning community that met periodically throughout 2021 and 2022 to work on activities related to building their evaluation capacity:

- Aroostook County Community Action Program (Presque Isle, ME)
- Briya Public Charter School (Washington, DC)
- Center for Transforming Lives (Fort Worth, TX)
- Chicago Commons (Chicago, IL)
- Jeremiah Project (various locations)

- United Way for Greater Austin (Austin, TX)

In 2022, the project team also pilot tested and refined a new measure specific to two-generation programs with participating NS2G initiatives. Planned dissemination products to be released in 2023 include practitioner-friendly briefs with tools for initiatives to conduct their own formative evaluation work, a new measure with accompanying brief describing its development and scoring, and a final report.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services Analysis Execution (RED-X)

This project builds on OPRE's Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services (RED) project, which concluded in 2017. RED helped build a base of knowledge to inform ACF's identification and understanding of racial and ethnic 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. The goal was to develop a framework for understanding when racial and ethnic differences likely constitute disparities and to examine how greater insight into racial and ethnic disparities could be used to improve human services program delivery for ACF. To help achieve this goal, RED created a research plan to reliably identify racial and ethnic disparities across the service delivery system in a range of ACF programs and services. The plan outlined research questions and proposed approaches to addressing those questions, including recommended data sources, analytic strategies, and data collection activities.

The Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services Analysis Execution (RED-X) project, which launched in 2018 and is being conducted by Urban Institute and its partner NORC at the University of Chicago, is implementing aspects of RED's research plan in relation to two ACF programs: (1) TANF and (2) Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)-administered child care subsidies. The goal of this continued work is to improve ACF program delivery for all racial and ethnic groups. The project will use the results of the analyses to develop briefing papers.

For TANF, the project is exploring the following questions, using a combination of Census survey data, data generated by microsimulation, and TANF program administrative and policy data:

1. Racial and ethnic differences in the level of underlying financial need for TANF cash assistance,
2. The stringency of TANF policies that people of different races and ethnicities face based on where they live, and
3. Racial and ethnic differences in TANF participation rates among program-eligible families.

The findings from this analysis of quantitative TANF data will be published in 2023.

For CCDF, the project is exploring the following questions, using a combination of Census survey data, data generated by microsimulation, and CCDF program administrative and policy data:

1. Racial and ethnic differences in the level of underlying financial need for child care subsidies,
2. The nature of CCDF policies that people of different races and ethnicities face based on where they live,
3. Racial and ethnic differences in CCDF participation rates among program-eligible families, and
4. Whether different parts of the country show different patterns of participation rate variations across racial and ethnic groups.

RED-X is also undertaking a small-scale qualitative research study exploring how one state's adaptations to COVID-19 may have introduced new and/or ameliorated existing racial/ethnic disparities in TANF.

TANF and Child Support Moving Forward: Further Incorporating Family Input

Seeking and obtaining feedback from families on how programs can better operate, improve services, and serve future families can create more effective and equitable social programs. This project will advance knowledge regarding how TANF and child support programs can incorporate family input to inform program improvements and operations. First, this project released a summary in 2022 of how TANF and child support programs are currently using family input to inform their programs. In early 2023, it will release a set of family input resources for programs to obtain family input. Then the study will pilot these resources with select programs and conduct rapid-cycle evaluations of these resources. This project also includes the Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic study (described later in this report under the Social Context and Environment sub-workstream). Mathematica and its partner MEF Associates are conducting this project.

Understanding Poverty: TANF Office Culture Study

This study explored 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 focused 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. The TANF Office Culture Study was part of the Understanding Poverty project, which launched in 2016 and was conducted by MEF Associates in partnership with MDRC.

In 2021, this project published the final report of the TANF Office Culture study, titled *Promoting a Positive Organizational Culture in TANF Offices*. Other publications include:

- a review of literature describing the role that organizational culture plays in the delivery of TANF services;
- an infographic on Practicing Positive Organizational Culture in TANF Offices;
- a brief on approaches for promoting a positive organizational culture in TANF offices; and
- a brief on the role of positive organizational culture in a pandemic response.

The Understanding Poverty project consisted of the TANF Office Culture Study and the Childhood and Families Experiences Study (described later in this report under the Social Context and Environment sub-workstream). Taken together, the outcomes of this inquiry improve the field's understanding of the lives of children and their families who experience poverty, including how the TANF program and organizational culture affect individuals within this population.

Understanding the Value of Centralized Services (VOCS)

The Understanding the Value of Centralized Services (VOCS) project, awarded to MEF Associates and its subcontractor Mathematica in 2020, was a broad inquiry to explore the advantages, disadvantages, and costs of centralizing services from the perspectives of staff and clients. It synthesized existing research on centralized services and supplemented it with new data collection on how three centralized community resource centers (CCRCs) provide multiple services in a single location to support individuals and families with low incomes.

The study concluded in 2022 and released findings in three publications:

- *Under One Roof: Findings from the Understanding the Value of Centralized Services Study*—Final report synthesizing findings from the literature review and qualitative data collection with three CCRCs. Detailed profiles of each of the following three CCRCs are included in the report and available for separate download:
  - Blackfeet Manpower One-Stop Center (Browning, MT)
  - Neighborhood Place (Louisville, KY)
  - Wayne Metro Community Action Agency (Wayne County, MI)
- *Approaches to Funding Centralized Services: Lessons Learned from the Understanding the Value of Centralized Services Study*—Brief presenting findings from qualitative data collection with the three CCRCs regarding how they fund their centralized services. The brief provides information for social service practitioners that can help them consider whether and how their funding sources can support a centralized service approach.
- *Learning from Those with Life Experience: Client Voices in the Understanding the Value of Centralized Services Study*—Short document summarizing how the study team incorporated the experiences and insights that clients shared into the study. The brief was shared with clients following the conclusion of the study and offers one example of how researchers can close the feedback loop with the clients engaged throughout a study.

KEY FINDINGS FROM UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF CENTRALIZED SERVICES (VOCS)

Under One Roof: Findings from the Understanding the Value of Centralized Services Study

- There are multiple approaches to centralizing services, which can encompass a wide range of degrees of centralization. The approaches that CCRCs use depend on factors such as community context and community member needs; funding streams, structures, and requirements; partner staffing structures; and data infrastructure and requirements.
- A shared mission and vision among staff and partners are critical to centralizing services. Centralization requires investment and effort by providers and staff to offer the range of services a family needs, rather than focusing on a single service. All CCRCs emphasized the need for a common understanding of this holistic approach.
- According to staff and clients, centralizing services can increase access for clients, including connecting clients to services for which they may not have known they were eligible. Clients appreciate being able to receive services to meet various needs at the same location rather than visiting multiple offices and filling out several applications, and many clients learn of additional services from CCRC staff.
- Staff described how centralizing services can result in a more efficient allocation of resources but often requires up-front investment in physical space or data infrastructure. Efficiencies can result from streamlined data collection practices such as sharing a data system or developing a data release form, as well as efficiencies for clients through time and money savings from not having to visit multiple offices for different services. However, staff noted that large up-front investment can be required to build or renovate office space to meet the needs of centralized service provision or to build a shared data system that meets the needs of partner agencies or funding streams.
- Staff buy-in and cross-training supports centralization efforts, but staff turnover and training can present a challenge. CCRCs described the value of staff at all levels buying in to the centralization approach. Likewise, cross-training staff is important so staff can be knowledgeable on the array of services provided at the CCRC. At the same time, ensuring buy-in and cross-training staff on many services requires significant time and resources, especially when levels of staff turnover are high.

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes—Social Context and Environment

The *Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes* workstream addresses questions related to specific strategies that seek to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The *Social Context and Environment* sub-workstream focuses on how broader social context and environmental factors, including public policy and economic conditions, relate to participant outcomes.

Advancing Contextual Analysis and Methods of Participant Engagement in OPRE (CAMPE)

OPRE launched Advancing Contextual Analysis and Methods of Participant Engagement (CAMPE) in 2021 to identify and increase the use of equitable research practices in federally-funded research and evaluation. Specifically, CAMPE focuses on advancing the use of participatory methods and analysis of contextual factors in projects funded by OPRE. The project also provides consultation to expand OPRE's capacity to apply an equity lens to the framing and language used in research and evaluation products.

Led by Urban Institute, CAMPE is directly engaging people who have participated in programs like those OPRE evaluates, working toward the development of guidelines and tools to facilitate the use of equitable evaluation practices in current and future OPRE projects. CAMPE will communicate findings and lessons learned from the project to a broad range of stakeholders. Future reports expected in 2024 will focus on incorporating contextual information into research and evaluation and describing strategies for enhancing the use of participatory methods in federally-funded research.

CAMPE COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

CAMPE is directly engaging people with lived experience by convening a Community Advisory Board (CAB). The CAB is made up of members who have experience participating in and working with ACF programs, and represent a variety of identities, experiences, and geographies. The term "CAB" is commonly used in research and evaluation practice and does not refer to a Federal Advisory Committee; we will not seek consensus advice from the CAB, but rather will seek a variety of perspectives to inform the project. The CAB engages in regular virtual meetings to contribute ideas and provide feedback on key inputs to the planning, implementation, and communication of DEI research. Specifically, the CAB is reviewing the OPRE editorial style guide and the Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda. They will also provide input on how DEI studies develop surveys with local research partners and participants, and the approach and language used in informed consent processes across DEI studies. CAB members are part of the CAMPE study team and are compensated for their expertise.

Baby's First Years Qualitative Substudy

Baby's First Years, launched in 2017, is a multi-site randomized controlled trial supported by a grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) within the National Institutes of Health, along with other public and private funders. This study seeks to fill important gaps in scientific knowledge about the role of economic resources in children's early development by evaluating whether unconditional cash payments have a causal effect on the cognitive, socio-emotional, and brain development of infants and toddlers in families with low incomes. Specifically, 1,000 mothers of infants with incomes below the federal poverty line have been recruited into the study and are receiving monthly cash

payments by debit card for the first 52 months of the child's life. Parents in the experimental group are receiving $333 per month ($4,000 per year), whereas parents in the control group are receiving a nominal monthly payment of $20. Mothers were recruited in New York City, greater New Orleans, the Twin Cities, and the Omaha metropolitan area.

To understand the impacts of the added income on children's cognitive and behavioral development, an interdisciplinary study team will assess treatment/control group differences at age 3 (and, for a subset of measures, age 2) on measures of cognition, language, memory, self-regulation, and socio-emotional development. Because brain circuitry may be sensitive to the effects of early experience even before early behavioral differences can be detected, the study team will also assess treatment/control group differences in measures of brain activity. To understand how family economic behavior, parenting, and parent stress and well-being change in response to income enhancement, the study team will assess treatment/control differences in family expenditures, food insecurity, housing, and neighborhood quality; family routines and time use; parent stress, mental health, and cognition; parenting practices; and child care arrangements at child age 2 and, for a subset of these measures, child age 1.

Since 2019, OPRE has contributed funds to the NICHD grant to enable a qualitative examination of how the cash income affects families' lives. Because the meaning mothers attach to the income is important to how they will use it and the impacts it will have on families, the study team will conduct four waves of qualitative interviews with a subset of mothers in the Twin Cities and New Orleans over the course of the study to ask about their views and experiences of the transfer. Together, these analyses will provide the first definitive understanding of the extent to which income plays a causal role in determining early child cognitive, socio-emotional, and brain development among families with low incomes.

The study is releasing findings and making study data available for secondary analysis on a rolling basis. Learn more and find recent publications on the study website.

Employment Processes as Barriers to Employment in the Lower-Wage Labor Market

Launched in 2021, the purpose of this project is to support research to better understand how to improve economic, social, and health outcomes for individuals and families with low incomes seeking employment, advancement in the labor market, and economic security. In particular, the project is focusing on how racial biases and disparities in hiring, promotion, and wage assignment, as well as in other factors related to the nature of work, such as work schedules or arrangements and benefits, may be barriers to employment and advancement in the lower-wage labor market. The project seeks to foster greater understanding about these barriers, identify promising practices for mitigating them, and specify research questions and/or design options for further research in this area. Abt Associates is leading this project.

Human Service Programs in Rural Contexts

While a significant body of research has improved our collective understanding of human services programs and their contribution to the economic and social well-being of individuals and families, notable knowledge gaps continue to persist regarding how these programs can best serve the needs and interests of rural communities. This project engaged subject matter experts, conducted a literature review, conducted over 100 interviews with human services providers and community partners across 12 rural communities, and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data to meet the following goals:

1. Provide a rich description of human services programs in rural contexts;
2. Determine the remaining need for human services in rural communities; and

3. Identify opportunities for strengthening the capacity of human services programs to promote the economic and social well-being of individuals, families, and communities in rural contexts.

The study focuses on four human services programs: TANF; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting; Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood; and Health Profession Opportunity Grants. In 2021, the project published a brief on its definition of rural and a *Mixed Methods Analysis, Integration, and Triangulation Plan*. A comprehensive report and seven briefs on study findings are anticipated in early 2023. 2M Research and its partner Urban Institute are conducting this study.

Measuring, Supporting, and Understanding Child and Caregiver Well-being through Employment and Self-Sufficiency Research (Measuring SUCCESS)

This project, awarded in 2021 to Mathematica, is supporting OPRE in integrating empirical findings from the literature on child development and family well-being into its welfare and family self-sufficiency research agenda. Specifically, this project aims to identify and prioritize constructs of child, caregiver, and family well-being, and the measures of those constructs, that could be systematically integrated into research on and evaluation of programs and interventions aimed at improving the economic security of parents with low incomes. This project will lay the groundwork for building the knowledge base around child and family well-being in the context of parents' participation in and completion of welfare and family self-sufficiency programs or interventions.

Objectives include:

1. Assess past and ongoing efforts to measure child-, caregiver-, and family-level well-being in OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research and evaluation portfolio, and identify measurement gaps and opportunities for future work;
2. Create a conceptual framework informed by empirical findings from the literature on child and family development and input from experts from programs, related research fields, and with lived experience that would enable OPRE to generate hypotheses and test short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes of child, caregiver-, and family-level well-being that are most appropriate to measure in the context of welfare and family self-sufficiency research; and
3. Create a compendium of constructs and associated measures of child-, caregiver-, and family well-being that are aligned with the conceptual framework and appropriate for inclusion in welfare and family self-sufficiency research.

Additionally, the project will conduct focus groups with parents and caregivers with lived experience participating in programs that DEI studies. The focus groups will strengthen the relevance of the conceptual framework by lifting up participants' perspectives of what well-being means to them. Reports from this project are expected in 2024.

TANF and Child Support Moving Forward—Lessons Learned From the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on state, Tribal, and local TANF and child support programs. While some efforts have been made to understand these impacts, there are significant gaps in our knowledge of how these programs were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, OPRE launched a project to document the changes these programs made during the pandemic, lessons learned, and changes that have been incorporated into ongoing program operations. This project also includes the Further Incorporating Family Input study (described earlier in this report under the Social Services Delivery Systems sub-workstream). Mathematica and its partner MEF Associates are conducting this project.

Understanding Poverty: Childhood and Family Experiences Study

This study examined the experiences and perspectives of children and families living in poverty, including those 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 is known about how children of various ages experience, perceive, and view the day-to-day circumstances of living in poverty. Interviews with children and youth as well as their parents facilitates 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. Study participants were recruited from three communities located in Los Angeles, New York City, and South Central Appalachia.

In 2022, this project published the final report of the Childhood and Family Experiences study, titled *Understanding Families' Experiences of Poverty: Results of a Qualitative Study Exploring the Perspectives of Children and Their Parents* (see the text box for key findings). Other publications include:

- *a review of the qualitative literature on the experiences of parents and children living in poverty;*
- *a brief on children's and adolescents' perceptions and experiences of poverty and inequality; and*
- *a brief on families' stories from the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

The Understanding Poverty project consisted of the TANF Office Culture Study (described earlier in this report under the Social Services Delivery Systems sub-workstream) and the Childhood and Families Experiences Study. Taken together, the outcomes of this inquiry are expected to improve the field's understanding of the lives of children and their families who experience poverty, including how the TANF program and organizational culture affect individuals within this population.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EXPERIENCES STUDY

Understanding Families' Experiences of Poverty: Results of a Qualitative Study Exploring the Perspectives of Children and Their Parents

- Parents valued and recognized the important role that public assistance benefits played in easing their family's experiences of material hardship. Families relied on a mix of public assistance programs, especially the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid. Parents reported both value and drawbacks to participating in public assistance programs. They described mostly positive interactions with program staff members, were grateful to receive benefits, and saw the benefits as essential to meeting their family's needs. However, they were aware of the stigma that is associated with these programs, and some felt uncomfortable receiving benefits.
- Children's and adolescents' understanding of the benefits the family received was limited, except for SNAP benefits. Both children and adolescents knew that their family received food assistance from SNAP. But they were less familiar with other public assistance programs, especially TANF. Older children and adolescents were able to explain SNAP in greater detail than younger children and understood that SNAP is a government-sponsored food program to assist families in need.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY EXPERIENCES STUDY (Cont.)

- Parents worried about but were resourceful in dealing with economic hardship. They placed a priority on basic needs such as rent and food, and tried to meet their children's needs and wants. They considered carefully when, how, and what to share with their children about their family's economic circumstances. Parents tried to shield their children from their financial worries and difficulties, but they were more forthcoming with their adolescent children. They tried to help their children understand the importance of prioritizing needs over wants.
- Children and adolescents were aware that their families struggled financially and could not always afford to meet all of their needs and wants. They knew that their parents worried about finances, but they did not describe their families as being "poor." Instead, children and adolescents would say that they were "doing okay." Children and adolescents, but especially adolescents, understood the need to place a priority on needs over wants and to delay purchases.
- Children and adolescents described poverty as having few material possessions and difficult circumstances, but they did not refer to their own circumstances when describing what it means to be poor. They described wealth as an abundance of material possessions and access to resources and opportunities, and the middle class as "normal." Children, more so than adolescents, said that economic inequality is unfair. Both children and adolescents mentioned that wealthier families and the government should help those who are less well-off.

Knowledge Building and Communication

The *Knowledge Building and Communication* workstream addresses questions related to expanding and synthesizing the evidence base, supporting scholars who focus on research related to ACF initiatives and the people that ACF serves, and ensuring knowledge generated within and outside of ACF is communicated effectively to inform policy, practice, and further research.

ACF Evidence Capacity Support

OPRE and ACF program offices are partnering to extend and deepen evidence capacity, which refers to a culture of and infrastructure for building and using evidence for learning and improvement. Launched in 2020, the project builds on OPRE's existing efforts to augment evidence capacity at ACF and incorporates the principles of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018.

The project prioritizes the learning needs of agency staff and partners for information about the context, reach, implementation, performance, and impact of their programs. The project aims to strengthen ACF's capacity for using evidence on five dimensions: (1) evidence culture, (2) leadership, (3) evidence infrastructure, (4) human capital, and (5) engagement.

The needs of participating program offices drive the activities completed under this contract, in partnership with OPRE and Mathematica and Child Trends. Activities include conducting needs assessments to inform learning agendas and supporting program offices in analyzing data to answer their high-priority questions or improve program management.

In 2022, the project supported ten projects across ACF:

ACF OFFICE	DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT
Administration for Native Americans (ANA)	Conducting activities associated with the ANA Learning Agenda
Office of Child Support Services	Development of the inaugural Child Support Learning Agenda
Office of Community Services	Production of a brief describing diaper distribution programs and the available research
Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response	A literature review on disaster displacement to summarize existing research and identify gaps
OPRE	Development of a framework for Evidence Capacity that can inform future organizational improvement efforts
OPRE	Refinement of the Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda
OPRE	Synthesis of lessons learned from archiving research and administrative data for secondary analysis
OPRE	Brief on OPRE's annual Evaluation and Monitoring 101 training that describes the training's history, content, and learning outcomes, as well as OPRE's approach to continuously improving the training based on participant feedback
Office of Refugee Resettlement	Analysis of performance measures and identifying lessons learned from the Voluntary Agencies Matching Grant Program; and Analysis of performance measures and recommendations for data quality improvement for the Survivors of Torture grant program
Office of Trafficking In Persons	Visualizing administrative data on trafficking incidence and services offered by ACF

Examples of Evidence Capacity Support publications from the past year include:

- *Evaluation and Monitoring 101*
- *Evidence Capacity in Organizations: A Literature-Informed Framework*

National Academies Study of Policies and Programs to Reduce Intergenerational Child Poverty

In the 2021 House Appropriations Committee Report (H. Rept. 116-450), Congress directed HHS to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences to "provide an evidence-based analysis of and recommendations for policies and programs to reduce intergenerational poverty and improve child welfare." OPRE is one of the project's sponsors, along with several foundations. The project is supporting an ad hoc committee, formed under the auspices of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), in conducting a consensus study over the course of 36 months. The study is designed to complement the 2019 NASEM report, *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty*, which provided recommendations for policy and programs to reduce child poverty within 10 years, and to address the following objectives:

1. Identify key contributors of long-term, intergenerational poverty through the review and evaluation of available evidence;
2. Identify and assess existing research on the effects of major assistance, intervention, and education programs on intergenerational poverty;
3. Identify policies and programs that have the potential to significantly reduce the effects of the key contributors identified in the first objective and for which there is strong evidence that they will reduce multi-generational poverty; and
4. Identify key, high-priority gaps in the research needed to help develop effective policies for reducing intergenerational poverty in the United States.

NASEM will produce a report based on the committee's synthesis of the evidence and recommendations regarding policy options for reducing intergenerational poverty and improving child welfare in the United States.

National Academies Study on Addressing the Long-Term Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children and Families

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will likely carry significant downstream implications for child physical and mental health. In addition, the pandemic highlighted pre-existing societal inequities and introduced new challenges and obstacles, particularly for children and families living in communities that have been historically marginalized. To better understand the state of the science on these complex issues, in 2021 OPRE contributed funding to support an ad hoc committee, formed under the auspices of NASEM, in conducting a consensus study on the consequences of and solutions to the long-term effects of COVID-19 on children living in high-risk communities. The committee will address issues such as:

1. What policies and programs are necessary to address the developmental, emotional, behavioral, and physical health needs of children in high-risk communities to promote child health and wellbeing in the long-term? What has been learned during the pandemic that informs these approaches?
2. What was learned during the pandemic about promising practices to support parent and caregiver well-being?
3. What policies (e.g., child care, health care, etc.) and practices can work to address disparities and inequities experienced by communities of color following a pandemic?

In 2023, NASEM will produce a report based on the committee's recommendations for practice, programs, and policy and identify critical areas for needed research.

National African American Child and Family Research Center

The National African American Child and Family Research Center was established in 2021 through a cooperative agreement between OPRE and the Morehouse School of Medicine. The Center seeks to investigate the assets, needs, and experiences of the diverse population of African American families and children served (or potentially served) by ACF programs, as well as identify promising approaches to address economic and social inequities and promote their social and economic well-being. The Center will focus on child care assistance, TANF, and Head Start and Early Head Start programs and the populations they serve, and will draw on interdisciplinary approaches to accomplish three goals:

1. Advance Research—The Center will plan, initiate, and maintain a community-engaged, focused, and high-caliber research program that will build on the existing literature related to African American children and families and be directly relevant to the needs and interests of the focal ACF programs.
2. Build Research Capacity—The Center will build research capacity and infrastructure to conduct research relevant to ACF program and policy goals that is culturally rigorous and informed by an understanding of current and historical circumstances that shape the experiences of African Americans. The Center will seek to develop and expand the pool of researchers reflective of the communities being studied by the Center.
3. Communicate Research—The Center will develop and implement a dissemination strategy that broadly and efficiently communicates findings from Center activities and increases the use of research, data, and relevant resources among researchers, federal and state policymakers, ACF grantees, program administrators, and communities participating in the research.

National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families

The National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families was established through a cooperative agreement between OPRE and Child Trends, in partnership with Duke University, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and University of Maryland, College Park. The Center has three primary goals: (1) advance a cutting-edge research agenda; (2) build research capacity; and (3) translate emerging research about Hispanic children and families with low incomes in the United States in three priority areas—poverty reduction and self-sufficiency, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, and early care and education. The Center's activities are designed to build knowledge and inform ACF programs and policies to better serve Hispanic children and families. Over the past year, the Center released numerous publications, data tools, webinars, and trainings examining various topics concerning Hispanic communities in the United States.

Examples of and key findings from the Center's work from the past year include:

- *State-Level TANF Policies and Practice May Shape Access and Utilization among Hispanic Families*—A survey of administrators and frontline staff in North Carolina found differences in their perception of accessibility to TANF and other income support programs. Administrators were more likely than frontline staff to feel that applying for and navigating North Carolina's income assistance programs were easy for Hispanics.
- *Child Care Subsidy Staff Share Perspectives on Administrative Burden Faced by Latino Applicants in North Carolina*—Child care subsidy

administration practices "on the ground" sometimes vary from state policies as they are "on the books" in ways that may exacerbate administrative exclusion and constrain low-income Hispanic parents' access to child care assistance. Documentation is a key area where many local caseworkers and administrators engage in more restrictive practices than exist in official state policy.

- *Many Latino and Black Households Made Costly Work Adjustments in Spring 2021 to Accommodate COVID-Related Child Care Disruptions*—The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of, or reduced operations for, a substantial number of child care centers, leading to loss of child care on which many employed parents relied. Latino and Black households were more likely than White households to report leaving or losing a job, cutting work hours, and supervising children while working in response to COVID-related child care disruptions.
- *Latino Child Poverty Rose During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Especially Among Children in Immigrant Families*—The economic impact of the pandemic fell especially heavily on Latino children in immigrant families. From 2019 to 2020, poverty rates increased by 6.1 percentage points among Latino children living in families headed by non-U.S. citizens, compared to a 4-percentage point increase among all Latino children.

National Research Center on Poverty and Economic Mobility

Over the past five decades, HHS has funded Poverty Centers to support and disseminate policy-relevant research on poverty and inequality, and to build the capacity of emerging scholars to conduct research in this area.

In 2021, the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) awarded a new grant to the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to administer the National Research Center on Poverty and Economic Mobility. In addition to continuing the activities of past Poverty Centers, the Center will:

- support a fellowship program to place both emerging and senior scholars at HHS to work with federal policy, research, or program offices;
- administer a grant program to fund research and analysis on equity, inclusion, diversity, and access in human services and economic mobility programs; and
- host events to disseminate actionable findings to federal policy and research communities.

OPRE provides support for the Center's National Poverty Fellows Program and dissemination events. Two fellows are currently in residence in DEI, where they are working on a variety of projects related to employment, self-sufficiency, and economic well-being among families with low incomes.

Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS)

Since 1998, OPRE has convened the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS) for 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 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:

- TANF 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
- Approaches to Alleviate Poverty and Expand Opportunity

RECS 2022 was held June 1-3 in a virtual format. The conference engaged more than 1,100 participants across three plenaries, 30 concurrent breakout sessions, three "lightning round" presentations from 23 Emerging Scholars, and one networking and mentoring session. RECS 2024 will be held May 29-31, 2024. For more information about RECS 2024 and past conferences, visit http://recsconference.net.

Shared Methodological Advancement

The Methods Inquiries project helps ensure that OPRE-funded research uses the most scientifically advanced and appropriately applied methods possible. To accomplish this goal, OPRE regularly convenes meetings of scientists and research experts to advance its understanding of critical topics in social science research methodology. In addition to OPRE staff, these meetings include participants from a variety of contexts including academia, government, and the private sector.

The meetings explore innovations in research design, analytic techniques, and measurement. Additionally, this project supports an ongoing internal seminar series; publications with further information on topics addressed in the meetings; and ad hoc responses to emerging methodological issues.

To date, OPRE has sponsored 13 meetings on innovative methods. The most recent meeting, held in October 2022, was entitled "Applying Mixed Methods and Qualitative Approaches to Social Policy Questions." This meeting explored integrating qualitative and mixed methods approaches into evaluation research in order to answer in-depth questions such as describing fully how, when, and why a program works. These approaches can also illustrate different perspectives, creating space to learn more about program participant motivations and experiences—a factor critical for promoting equity in research. Prior meetings explored community engaged research methods; core components research; effect size; subgroup analysis; implementation science; innovative directions in estimating impact; methods for unpacking the "black box" of programs and policies; use of administrative data in social policy research; alternatives to randomized controlled trials; Bayesian methods; rapid learning methods; and open science. These meetings are intended to help OPRE explore recent methodological advances, gaps in current knowledge and implementation, and opportunities to apply innovative methods to government-funded research and evaluation.

In 2022, OPRE published a summary of the 2021 meeting highlighting key themes about community engaged research, *Enhancing Rigor, Relevance, and Equity in Research Through Community Engagement*. Additionally, OPRE released a brief, *Engaging Communities in Culturally Responsive and Equitable Research and Evaluation* which provides a roadmap for engaging communities in each step of the research and evaluation process, including examples of how to embed community engagement in the research and evaluation process and make research more culturally responsive and equitable.

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

Tribal Research Center on Early Childhood Development and Systems (TRC)

In 2020, OPRE awarded another five-year cooperative agreement for the Tribal Research Center on Early Childhood Development and Systems (TRC), and in 2021 DEI contributed additional supplemental funds to the TRC to deepen the understanding of family economic well-being within tribal communities and early childhood settings. The TRC provides leadership

and collaboration to promote excellence in community-based participatory research and evaluation of ACF early childhood and family economic well-being initiatives that serve tribal communities. Settings include tribal home visiting programs, early care and education center-based programs, home-based and family child care providers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and TANF.

The TRC:

1. conducts research to identify needs and/or develop effective practices and integrated systems for ACF early childhood and family economic well-being initiatives in tribal communities;
2. identifies, validates, and/or develops measures of culturally meaningful inputs, implementation processes, and proximal and distal outcomes of those programs;
3. establishes peer-learning communities for tribal research on areas of shared priority;
4. provides training and professional development to facilitate interest and competencies in research relevant to early childhood and family economic well-being in tribal communities;
5. provides forums to increase cultural competence and sensitivity to tribal voices in research and evaluation; and
6. strategically shares and disseminates the work widely.

SPOTLIGHT ON DISSEMINATION

OPRE builds evidence to improve the lives of children and families. OPRE recognizes that the evidence and insights we generate are ultimately valuable only if they reach intended audiences and are useful to them. OPRE strives to communicate information about our research and evaluation activities and findings in a manner that is clear, accessible, engaging, and useful to our diverse range of audiences and stakeholders; this includes using plain language, adhering to principles of clear communication, and producing 508-compliant products. OPRE also hosts conferences to bring stakeholders together and share findings with researchers, program administrators, and policymakers. Explore the *OPRE website* to learn more and stay up to date with our latest work and updates by subscribing to *OPRE News* and following us on *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram*.

OPRE Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Publications—FY 2022 (October 2021–September 2022)

TANF Policy, Funding, and Administration

How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness

- *Approaches to Assisting Families Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness with TANF Funds*
- *Using TANF Funding to Provide Housing Assistance During the COVID-19 Pandemic*
- *Supporting Families Experiencing Homelessness: Strategies and Approaches for TANF Agencies*

State TANF Policies: Welfare Rules Database Expansion

- *Graphical Overview of State TANF Policies as of July 2020*
- *Welfare Rules Databook: State Policies as of July 2020*

Capacity Building within Human Services Programs

Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge (Project SPARK)

- *Pandemic-Era Innovations for the Future of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs*
- *Supporting Mental Wellness for Program Staff and Participants: Strategies for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Leaders*
- *Project SPARK Landscape Analysis of Evaluation Technical Assistance to Build the Evaluation Capacity of Human Services and Related Programs*
- *Learning to Enhance Strategies for Coaching Families Virtually: Lessons from Iowa's Family Development and Self-Sufficiency Home Visiting Program*
- *Using Data-driven Reflection to Improve Program Quality: New York City's Human Resources Administration Redesigns Its Upfront Assessment Process for Youth and Families Receiving Cash Assistance*
- *Overview of Key Findings: Project SPARK Landscape Analysis of Evaluation Technical Assistance to Build the Evaluation Capacity of Human Services and Related Programs*
- *Toolkit: Building Organizational Evidence Capacity: Guides for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Related Programs*

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes—Employment Attainment and Retention

Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES)

- *Career Paths for Entry-Level IT Workers: Findings from the Per Scholas WorkAdvance Program*
- *Two-Year Findings from the Evaluation of Breaking Barriers: An Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Program*

- *Individual Placement and Support (IPS) in Practice: Lessons from Breaking Barriers*

Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies Project (NextGen)

- *Employer Engagement: Lessons for Employment Programs from the COVID-19 Pandemic*
- *Get to Know the Next Generation of Employment Strategies Project with Four New Program Snapshots*
- *Understanding the Experiences, Needs, and Voices of Workers in Low-Income Households During COVID-19*

Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse

- *Overview of Findings: What Works During Economic Recessions and Recoveries? Evidence from the Pathways Clearinghouse*
- *Synthesis Report: What Works During Economic Recessions and Recoveries? Evidence from the Pathways Clearinghouse*
- *Evidence Snapshot: Employment Coaching*
- *The Pathways Clearinghouse Guide for Researchers*
- *Report: What Works to Improve Employment and Earnings for People with Low Income?*
- *Evidence Snapshot: Financial Incentives*
- *Synthesis Report: Pathways Clearinghouse: Overview of the Research*
- *Evidence Snapshot: Subsidized Employment and Transitional Jobs*

Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED)

- *An Earned Income Tax Credit That Works for Singles*

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes—Human Capital Development

Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) 2.0 Evaluation

- *Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Tribal HPOG 2.0 Grantees' Program Adaptations*
- *Key Findings from the Evaluation of the Tribal HPOG 2.0 Program, 2015-2020*
- *Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) 2.0 Evaluation: Final Report*

Evaluation and System Design for Career Pathways Programs: 2nd Generation of Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG)

- *Employment and Earnings Outcomes by Length and Occupation of Healthcare Training: Results from the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program*
- *Who Doesn't Start or Complete Training: Results from the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program*
- *Multiple Entry-Level Trainings and Credentials for Career Progress: Results from the Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program (HPOG 2.0)*

National Evaluation of the 2nd Generation of Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation)

- *Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) Short-Term Impact Report*
- *How a National Healthcare Training Program's Impacts Vary Locally*
- *Finding a High-Quality Job in the Caring Industry: HPOG Participants' Occupational Choices*
- *One Step at a Time: Participant Perspectives on Career Pathways*
- *Agile During a Pandemic: How HPOG 2.0 Programs Responded to COVID-19*
- *The HPOG Training Opportunity: Participant Perspectives on Finding Motivation While Working and Taking Care of Family*
- *Occupational Training for Jobs That "Pay Well": Patterns from the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program*
- *Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) Program Operator and Partner Perspectives on Local Service Delivery Systems*

Career Pathways Outcomes Studies (CPIO & CPLO)

- *How Can Postsecondary Education and Training Programs Help Working Students Persist? Findings from Career Pathways Studies*
- *Instituto del Progreso Latino's Carreras en Salud Program Six-Year Impact Report*
- *Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 1.0) Impact Study: Six-Year Impacts Report*
- *Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program Six-Year Impact Report*
- *Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA): Six-Year Impact Report*
- *Career Pathways Long-Term Outcomes Study: Appendices for PACE Six-Year Impact Reports*
- *Benefits that Last: Long-Term Impact and Cost-Benefit Findings for Year Up*
- *Summary and Insights from the Ten PACE and HPOG 1.0 Job Training Evaluations: Three-Year Cross-Site Report*

Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations & Long-term Follow-up Study

- *Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations: Technical Supplement to the Evaluation Design Report*
- *Employment Coaching: What Do Participants Say?*
- *LIFT: Implementation Findings from the Evaluation of Employment Coaching*
- *Using Video Recordings as a Data Collection Strategy: Lessons from the Evaluation of Employment Coaching*
- *Employment Coaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons Learned*

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes—Social Services Delivery Systems

Human-Centered Design for Human Services (HCD4HS)

- *A Review of Human-Centered Design in Human Services*
- *Applying Human-Centered Design to Human Services: Pilot Study Findings*

Understanding Poverty: TANF Office Culture

- *The Role of Positive Organizational Culture in a Pandemic Response: Lessons from Five TANF Programs*
- *Approaches for Promoting a Positive Organizational Culture in TANF Offices*

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes—Social Context and Environment

Understanding Poverty: Childhood and Family Experiences

- *Understanding Families' Experiences of Poverty: Results of a Qualitative Study Exploring the Perspectives of Children and Their Parents*
- *"I Feel Like Some People Work Twice as Hard to Get Half as Much": Children's and Adolescents' Perceptions and Experiences of Poverty and Inequality*
- *"We Live One Day at a Time": Families' Stories from the Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Knowledge Building and Communication

National Center for Research on Hispanic Children and Families

- *State Level TANF Policies and Practice May Shape Access and Utilization among Hispanic Families*
- *Child Care Subsidy Staff Share Perspectives on Administrative Burden Faced by Latino Applicants in North Carolina*
- *Many Latino and Black Households Made Costly Work Adjustments in Spring 2021 to Accommodate COVID-Related Child Care Disruptions*
- *Latino Child Poverty Rose During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Especially Among Children in Immigrant Families*

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

- *Understanding the Changing Nature of Work: Implications for Research and Evaluation to Inform Programs Serving Low-Income Populations*
- *New Directions in Employment and Training Research and Evaluation: Digital Employment Tools Created with Approaches from Human-Computer Interaction*
- *New Directions in Employment and Training Research and Evaluation: Employer-Based Work-Family Interventions*

Shared Methodological Advancement

- *Enhancing Rigor, Relevance, and Equity in Research and Evaluation Through Community Engagement*