

# IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF A GOAL-ORIENTED COACHING PROGRAM FOR CASH ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS IN MICHIGAN

## THE JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES EVALUATION



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# Implementation and Impact of a Goal-Oriented Coaching Program for Cash Assistance Recipients in Michigan

## The Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation

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## Overview

This report describes the implementation and impact study findings from an evaluation of the relative effectiveness of two approaches to assist cash assistance applicants and recipients in finding and keeping jobs. Conducted from 2016 to 2018 in two counties in Michigan, the study compares: (1) an enhancement to the state’s existing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program that provides goal-oriented coaching to help applicants and recipients set and achieve employment-related goals (called the **Michigan Goal Progress Success (MI-GPS)** program), and (2) the state’s existing TANF program that primarily focuses on participation in required work activities, starting with a 21-day Application Eligibility Period (AEP) and followed by the “Partnership. Accountability. Training. Hope.” (PATH) program (the two-step program is called **AEP/PATH**).

Using a rigorous research design, the study did not detect impacts on employment rates (the study’s confirmatory outcome), earnings, or cash assistance receipt over a three to five quarter follow-up period. While participation in employment services was high for both groups, compared to the AEP/PATH program, those assigned to the MI-GPS program received more one-on-one assistance with a number of goal-setting skills and their self-efficacy increased. However, there were no detectable effects on the other intermediate outcomes the MI-GPS was expected to impact.

## Primary Research Questions

### Implementation Research Questions for the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH Programs

- What is the institutional and community context in which MI-GPS and AEP/PATH operate?
- What elements are intended to be part of MI-GPS? How do they differ from AEP/PATH?
- What intervention was actually implemented? Does it differ from plans or expectations, and in what ways?

### Impact Research Questions for the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH Programs

- Does the receipt of employment services and staff assistance differ between MI-GPS and AEP/PATH? Specifically, are there differences in the types of services and assistance received and in the delivery mode (group vs. one-on-one) for those services and assistance?
- What is the effect of MI-GPS on grit, self-efficacy, perceptions of job search skills, motivation to work, and reduced barriers to work relative to AEP/PATH?
- What is the effect of MI-GPS on employment and earnings relative to AEP/PATH?
- What is the effect of MI-GPS on benefit receipt relative to AEP/PATH? Specifically, what is the effect on TANF receipt and SNAP payments?



- What is the effect of MI-GPS on outcomes such as job quality (e.g., wages, benefits, schedule) relative to AEP/PATH?

## Purpose

The TANF program provides cash assistance to low-income families with children, as well as employment-related services to help them become self-sufficient. Balancing the provision of cash assistance with individual responsibility, TANF requires families with a work-eligible individual receiving cash assistance to participate in a specified set of work activities as a condition of benefit receipt. In addition, some states and localities provide employment-related assistance (and require participation in those activities) during the application process. There is strong evidence that employment services, particularly job search assistance, provided as part of a cash assistance programs are effective in increasing employment, but the impacts are modest. Many low-income individuals struggle to find and keep jobs, and families remain poor despite the assistance provided.

Recently, policymakers and program operators have been exploring the potential of goal-oriented coaching approaches to help cash assistance recipients improve their employment outcomes. These approaches are based on psychology and neuroscience research that suggests chronic stress associated with living in poverty hinders the development of planning, decision-making, and organizational skills. This research has generated interest in designing interventions to strengthen TANF and other employment programs by improving participants' self-regulation skills and through this helping them identify and attain meaningful goals related to economic independence.

## Key Findings and Highlights

### Implementation Study Findings

- MI-GPS and AEP/PATH operated largely as designed during the study period, differing as intended.
- MI-GPS coaches consistently reported the goal-oriented coaching tools and the revised orientation developed for the MI-GPS program are valuable in implementing the approach.
- MI-GPS coaches reported difficulties aligning the goal-oriented coaching with work participation rate requirements.

### Impacts on Service Receipt and Other Intermediate Outcomes

- No differences in participation in employment-focused activities, including job search assistance, were detected between the MI-GPS and the AEP/PATH groups.
- Compared to the AEP/PATH program, the MI-GPS program increased the receipt of assistance on workplace behaviors and soft skills, which included goal-setting skills, provided through one-on-one meetings.

- MI-GPS increased self-efficacy, relative to the AEP/PATH program. However, the study does not detect an impact on other intermediate outcomes.

### **Impacts on Employment, Earnings, and Public Assistance Receipt**

- There was no detectable impact on employment levels in the second quarter after random assignment for the MI-GPS program, compared to the AEP/PATH program. In addition, no differences in earnings were detected.
- There was no detectable impact on MI-GPS on receipt of TANF benefits or TANF benefit amounts compared to AEP/PATH.
- The MI-GPS reduced the amount of SNAP benefits received compared to the AEP/PATH program. However, we did not find an impact on the proportion receiving SNAP benefits.
- There was no detectable difference between the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups in the characteristics of their current or most recent jobs, including wages and benefits.

### **Methods**

The JSA evaluation of the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs includes parents receiving support from TANF. The evaluation includes both an implementation study to examine the design and operation of the two programs and an impact study using an experimental design to measure differences in employment, earnings, and public assistance outcomes.

The evaluation randomly assigned 2,081 cash assistance applicants to the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs. The evaluation uses several types of data, including data from the National Directory of New Hires, administrative data from Michigan on cash assistance and SNAP benefit receipt, and a survey administered to study participants approximately six months after random assignment. The evaluation also included site visits and a staff survey to document program implementation and operations.

## Executive Summary

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides cash assistance to low-income families with children, as well as employment-related services to help those families become self-sufficient. Balancing the provision of cash assistance with individual responsibility, TANF requires states to engage a target share of work-eligible cash assistance recipients in a specified set of work activities as a condition of benefit receipt.<sup>1</sup> To meet their federal work participation rate (WPR) target, states engage these individuals in a range of work-oriented activities including job search and job readiness assistance, unsubsidized and subsidized employment, and work experience, among others.

Recently, policymakers and program operators have been exploring the potential of goal-oriented coaching approaches to help cash assistance recipients improve their employment outcomes. These approaches are based on psychology and neuroscience research that suggests chronic stress associated with living in poverty hinders the development of planning, decision-making, and organizational skills. Sometimes called executive or self-regulation skills (Blair and Raver, 2016), these skills are considered critical for adult success in goal attainment related to employment and other areas of life. This research has generated interest in designing interventions to strengthen TANF and other employment programs by improving participants' self-regulation skills and helping them identify and attain meaningful goals related to economic independence (Kauff and Cavadel, 2019).

This report provides results from an evaluation in two Michigan counties examining the implementation and relative impacts of two approaches to helping TANF applicants and recipients, who are required to work, find and keep jobs. The study compares: (1) an enhancement to the state's existing TANF program that incorporates goal-oriented coaching, an approach focusing on identifying employment-related goals and breaking them into smaller, achievable tasks, and (2) the state's existing TANF program that focuses on participation in work activities that meet the WPR requirement. Wayne County (not including the city of Detroit) and Genesee County (the city of Flint and surrounding areas) participated in the study.

The study is part of the multi-site Job Search Assistance Strategies (JSA) evaluation that assesses the implementation and impact of different approaches to help TANF cash assistance applicants and recipients obtain and retain jobs. The JSA evaluation is sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), within the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It was conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with Mathematica. Michigan's goal-oriented coaching program is one of the early efforts to incorporate this approach into a TANF program, and the evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> The TANF statute set the required work participation rate of 50 percent for all families, but that target can be reduced by the credit the state qualifies for under the TANF caseload reduction credit. This credit lowers the target for states that experience caseload decreases. States have the option of allowing recipients to participate in activities that are not countable as long as they meet the required rate.

provides one of the earliest rigorous studies of the impact of an employment program that explicitly addresses goal achievement.

### Programs Studied in Michigan JSA Evaluation

Michigan’s cash assistance program, the Family Independence Program (FIP), begins with a 21-day Application Eligibility Period (AEP) during which applicants must meet weekly with a Career Development Facilitator (CDF) to identify and address any barriers to participating in work activities or finding employment. Applicants who complete the AEP are approved for cash assistance and must participate in the “Partnership. Accountability. Training. Hope.” (PATH) program, which focuses on their participating in activities that count toward the WPR in order to obtain employment. The two-step process is referred to as AEP/PATH, and the same CDF works with the individual in both steps.

The JSA evaluation in Michigan compares the existing AEP/PATH program to Michigan Goals, Progress, Success (MI-GPS), a new goal-oriented coaching approach developed as an enhancement to the existing program. As Exhibit ES-1 shows, the MI-GPS program features a redesigned orientation; goal-oriented coaching by trained coaches that emphasizes applicant/recipient-driven goal identification and task planning to attain goals; new tools to help coaches facilitate goal setting and monitor activities; and the flexibility to allow recipients to participate in activities that do not meet the federal work participation requirements. The goal-oriented coaching was provided to a subset of both cash assistance applicants as part the AEP program and cash assistance recipients as part of the PATH program.

**Exhibit ES 1. Comparison of the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH Programs in the Michigan JSA Evaluation**

	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH
<b>Orientation to FIP Requirements</b>	<b>Redesigned orientation:</b> Delivered by coaches, orientation takes a collaborative approach to helping applicants and recipients set and achieve goals related to employment.	<b>Standard AEP/PATH program orientation:</b> Delivered by PATH workshop instructors, the content focuses on program requirements and compliance.
<b>Staff Approach</b>	<b>Goal setting and monitoring driven by applicant/recipient:</b> Coaches work with applicants/recipients to identify employment-related goals, break goals into smaller steps by identifying weekly activities that build toward their goals, and provide support to help them achieve these tasks. Applicants and recipients have ownership of goal setting and activities to attain goals.	<b>Directive assistance focused on participation in work activities:</b> During AEP, CDFs work with applicants to address barriers to employment. During PATH, CDFs assign recipients to work activities for the designated number of hours each week.
<b>Staff Tools</b>	<b>Coaching tools:</b> Coaches use a new comprehensive assessment and other new tools to assist applicants and recipients in setting goals and identifying the steps to achieve them.	<b>Standard state-mandated forms:</b> CDFs use a standard assessment to identify potential barriers to work, standard AEP forms to identify and track weekly activities during the 21-day application period, and forms that specify and track recipients’ participation in work activities.
<b>WPR and Noncompliance</b>	<b>Flexibility in meeting WPR:</b> Coaches can approve recipient-identified activities that do not count towards the state’s WPR requirement. Recipients face same financial penalties for noncompliance but are given additional warning before imposed.	<b>Focus on WPR:</b> CDFs assign recipients to activities designed to fulfill the work participation requirement. Recipients face financial penalties for noncompliance.

Both MI-GPS and AEP/PATH are jointly operated by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the state's workforce agency Michigan Talent Investment Agency (TIA). DHHS provides cash assistance; TIA provides employment services at local Michigan Works! agency (MWA) offices. Five MWA offices across Genesee and Wayne Counties participated in the evaluation.

### **The JSA Evaluation in Michigan: Theory and Research Design**

DHHS and TIA staff involvement in the JSA evaluation stemmed from their interest in improving services to help FIP recipients find and retain work. The JSA study team approached the agencies in 2014 to discuss potential PATH enhancements. They expressed interest in implementing a goal-oriented coaching approach to employment services and agreed to test its effects compared to AEP/PATH services in two counties. In partnership with organizations that develop coaching interventions, the study team created a coaching curriculum, coaching tools, and redesigned orientation for MI-GPS. The study team and partners trained coaches and monitored the implementation of the approach as they piloted the coaching and tools over a five-month period prior to the start of the study.

#### **Theory of Change**

The MI-GPS theory of change underlies the research design for the evaluation. The MI-GPS program was designed to improve the employment and public assistance outcomes for FIP applicants and recipients. To achieve these outcomes, goal-oriented coaching provided to applicants and recipients, including the flexibility to allow participation in activities that were not included in the federally-specified work activities, was expected to broaden the types of employment activities they attended. The theory of change also suggested that coaches would provide more assistance related to goal setting and achievement.

The theory of change posits that these program elements will affect a number of intermediate outcomes related to setting and attaining goals. These include (1) improved skills to set and meet goals such as planning, time management, and organizing; (2) increased motivation to pursue goals and accomplish employment-related tasks; (3) perseverance to attain long-term goals despite challenges that may arise, sometimes called "grit"; (4) increased belief in one's ability to perform at a high level, known as "self-efficacy"; and (5) reduced barriers to employment. In turn, these intermediate outcomes are expected to increase employment and earnings (including increased wages and job benefits) and to reduce public benefit receipt.

#### **JSA Evaluation Design**

The study uses a random assignment research design to compare the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs. For the evaluation, five MWA offices across the two counties operated both programs. After being determined work mandatory and consenting to the study, FIP applicants

(and sometimes recipients)<sup>2</sup> were randomly assigned to one of the two programs. MWA staff randomly assigned study participants evenly between the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH program.

The evaluation includes both an **implementation study** to examine MI-GPS design and operation and an **impact study** to examine whether the program enhancement improves outcomes relative to the standard AEP/PATH.<sup>3</sup>

The evaluation pre-selected **employment in the second quarter (six months) after random assignment** as the confirmatory outcome. A significant positive difference in this outcome between the groups would identify the MI-GPS as more effective than the existing AEP/PATH program. Reported impacts on other outcomes, such as earnings and receipt of cash assistance and food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), are exploratory. Exploratory outcomes are intended to provide additional information on possible impacts, aid in interpretation of the confirmatory finding, and generate hypotheses for future research.

Although the confirmatory outcome uses a relatively short follow-up period (that was used for all the JSA sites), the time horizon for achieving employment and public assistance outcomes through a goal-oriented coaching approach is not clear. Compared to AEP/PATH, which strongly focuses on participation in work activities and employment, MI-GPS may take longer to produce economic results as applicants and recipients take time setting and achieving incremental and ultimate goals. Given the limited information available on the expected time horizon, we also consider a longer follow-up period of more than six to 15 months after random assignment as an exploratory outcome (the length of the follow-up period varies by data source).

The evaluation uses several types of data. A form completed by FIP applicants at study enrollment provides baseline information on their demographic characteristics, education, and employment history. The National Directory of New Hires provides employment and earnings data for a five-quarter (15-month) follow-up period. DHA administrative data provide information on FIP and SNAP benefit receipt for a three-quarter (nine month) follow-up period. A six month study participant follow-up survey provides information on other outcomes not available in the National Directory of New Hires or in program administrative data. Finally, the evaluation draws from on-site interviews with program staff and an online staff survey.

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<sup>2</sup> Single- and two-parent FIP applicants who arrived for an orientation were candidates for the JSA evaluation, as were recipients returning to services. The Michigan two-parent FIP program was funded by state resources rather than federal TANF funds.

<sup>3</sup> Random assignment ensures that the two groups will be alike in their observed and unobserved characteristics, ensuring that any systematic differences in their outcomes can be attributed to the differences in program requirements and access to program services.

## Implementation Study Findings

Findings from the implementation study are summarized below.

- *FIP applicants enrolled in the study were a disadvantaged group, even though they met the requirements for being mandated to work under FIP rules.*

The FIP applicants had low education levels and limited work history at the time they entered the study. About 10 percent had some high school but did not finish, and about one third had only a high school diploma or GED. Fewer than one third attended some college. Though more than three quarters had worked during the year prior to study entry, they had low earnings, about \$7,701 over the year (including those who did not work). More than half reported they never had received cash assistance before, and slightly more than one fifth reported they received FIP for less than a year.

- *MI-GPS and AEP/PATH operated largely as designed during the study period, differing as intended.*

Both coaches and CDFs reported working closely with applicants and recipients on their caseload, including regular one-on-one meetings, to address barriers to work (during the AEP) and finding employment (during PATH). However, as designed, their approaches differed. MI-GPS coaches strongly focused on building collaborative relationships, using a recipient-driven approach, and breaking goals into smaller, achievable tasks; AEP/PATH CDFs focused on adherence to work requirements.

Coaches consistently reported focusing on building rapport; identifying applicant strengths and barriers using new coaching tools; and working collaboratively to establish a longer-range goal and action plan to reach it, including specific tasks. Coaches reported that although applicants and recipients selected their own long-term goal, most focused on employment. The smaller tasks and steps needed to reach goals often involved addressing other issues, such as housing or a family situation, or obtaining additional training. Coaches reported that during the subsequent coaching sessions, they reviewed the action plan from the previous week and worked with the applicant/recipient to identify new tasks and, if needed, to adjust the progress and longer-term goals. Once applicants began receiving cash benefits, they continued to meet with the same coach weekly.

Like coaches, CDFs reported in interviews that they met weekly with applicants during the AEP to address barriers to employment. During this time, CDFs typically asked applicants to record hours spent on various activities in order to simulate work participation requirements. Once applicants transitioned to PATH as recipients, they continued to work with their CDFs. CDFs reported they were directive in their approach, and that during PATH they focused on activities that met the work participation requirements.



- *Coaches consistently reported the goal-oriented coaching tools and the revised orientation developed for the MI-GPS program are valuable in implementing the approach.*

Coaches described the goal-oriented coaching tools as critical to the strong implementation of the MI-GPS program. In particular, coaches viewed the new assessment tool, called the Bridge of Strength, used in the initial meetings with applicants as essential. The Bridge helped coaches identify barriers and strengths across a range of domains (e.g., housing, health, education and training), understand the multi-dimensional nature of many applicants' needs, and open the discussion to possible solutions. In addition, the My Task-Plan-Do-Review tool was helpful for applicants and recipients to record a plan for accomplishing their weekly tasks. The form is also used to review and record progress toward tasks.

Though the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH staff uniformly disliked the content and presentation of the pre-existing AEP/PATH orientation, coaches gave positive marks to the new MI-GPS orientation. Coaches stated it was more engaging because it invited attendees to envision their path toward employment and self-sufficiency and encouraged them to share their goals.

- *Coaches reported difficulties aligning the goal-oriented coaching with work participation rate requirements.*

Though the goal of the MI-GPS program was to improve the economic well-being of those receiving cash assistance, short-term tasks often addressed needs and barriers in a wide range of domains, as noted above (e.g., housing, mental health, education and training) and, thus, did not count toward the federal WPR. DHHS and TIA management understood that the coaching process could result in fewer recipients participating in countable work activities, and assured staff that this was appropriate for the MI-GPS program, but did not establish an alternative performance measure. Coaches reported that though they used MI-GPS's flexibility on the federal WPR to some extent, they had difficulty disregarding it completely, as it remained part of the program culture. Coaches viewed aligning the goal-oriented coaching within the work participation requirements under FIP as the hardest element of MI-GPS to implement.

### Impacts on Service Receipt and Intermediate Outcomes

This section describes impacts on participation in employment-focused activities and the type and content of assistance from coaches and CDFs. It also reports impacts on intermediate outcomes that were expected to ultimately affect employment and public assistance impacts, including grit, self-efficacy, motivation, and barriers to work. Intermediate outcome findings are based on the six month study participant follow-up survey.

- *We detected no differences in participation in employment-focused activities, including job search assistance, between the MI-GPS and the AEP/PATH groups.*

Although coaches could allow recipients to engage in activities that did not count toward the federal work participation requirement, participation in employment activities was similar for both groups. More than 85 percent of MI-GPS and AEP/PATH group members participated in

any employment-focused activity, with job search assistance accounting for nearly all participation.

- *Compared to the AEP/PATH program, the MI-GPS program increased the receipt of assistance on workplace behaviors and soft skills provided through one-on-one meetings.*

It was expected that the MI-GPS program would increase assistance related to goal setting and problem solving. The six month follow-up survey included questions related to the receipt of assistance provided on workplace behavior and soft skills, including goal setting and problem solving in work and family life, and the mode it was provided. The study found no difference in overall receipt of assistance with these goal-setting skills. However, more MI-GPS group members than AEP/PATH group members reported one-on-one assistance, reflecting the program's focus on building a collaborative relationship with the coach.

- *MI-GPS increased self-efficacy, relative to the AEP/PATH program. However, the study does not detect an impact on other intermediate outcomes.*

Self-efficacy is the belief in the ability to exert control over one's own life; we measured this outcome using a composite score of responses to questions on the follow-up survey. As predicted by the theory of change, the MI-GPS group reported higher levels of self-efficacy compared to the AEP/PATH group. Although the theory of change suggested improvements in other intermediate outcomes, including grit, motivation, and reductions in barriers to employment, we detected no impacts in these areas based on responses to the follow-up survey.

### Impacts on Employment, Earnings, and Public Assistance Receipt

This section examines the impact of the MI-GPS program compared to the AEP/PATH program on employment levels and earnings based on data from the National Directory of New Hires, self-reported employment from the six month follow-up survey, and public benefits receipt from administrative records.

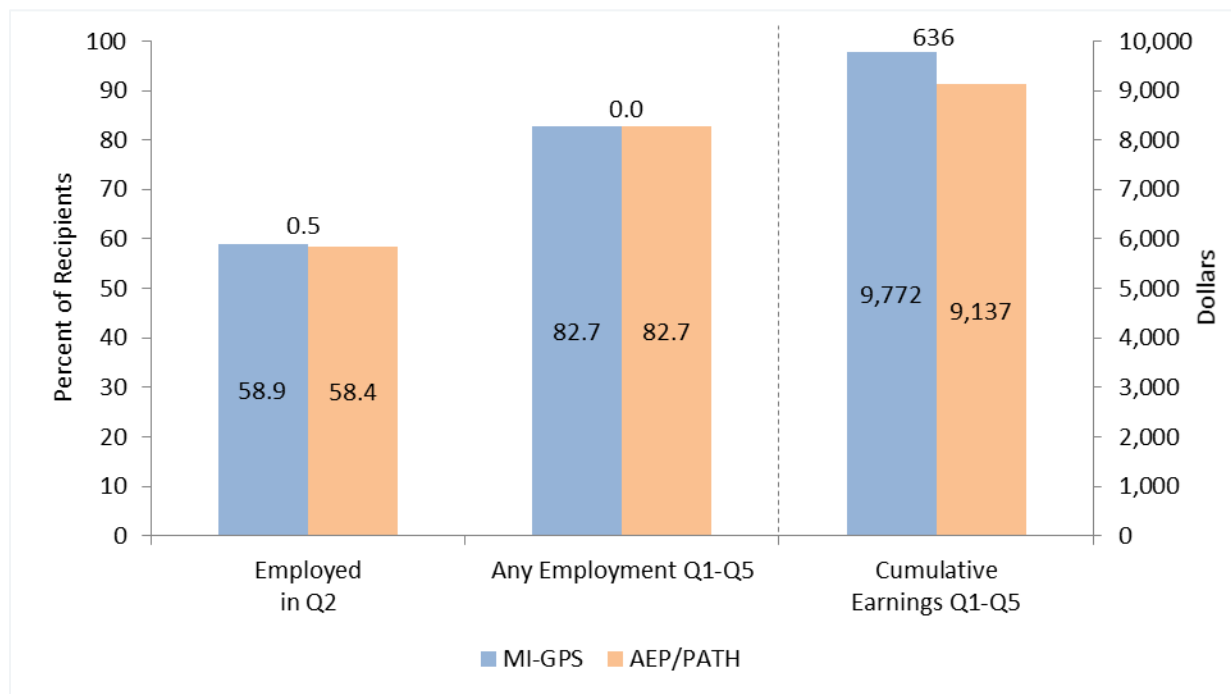
- *We did not detect an impact on employment levels in the second quarter after random assignment for the MI-GPS program, compared to the AEP/PATH program. In addition, no differences in earnings were detected.*

In the second quarter after random assignment, about 58 percent of study participants were employed; there was no measurable difference between those assigned to the MI-GPS program or the AEP/PATH program (Exhibit ES-2). Thus, with respect to the confirmatory outcome—measured by employment in the second quarter after random assignment—the evaluation does not identify one program as more effective than the other. There were no detectable impacts on employment over the longer, five-quarter (15 month) follow-up period either.

Average cumulative earnings during the five-quarter follow-up period were \$9,772 for those assigned to the MI-GPS program and \$9,137 for those assigned to the AEP/PATH group (Exhibit ES-2). The difference of roughly \$635 is not statistically significant. Among those who worked,

earnings were low and averaged approximately \$11,450 for both groups over the same follow-up period (not shown).

## Exhibit ES 2. Impacts on Employment and Earnings



Source: National Directory of New Hires.

Sample: Includes 1,908 (950 MI-GPS; 958 AEP/PATH) individuals.

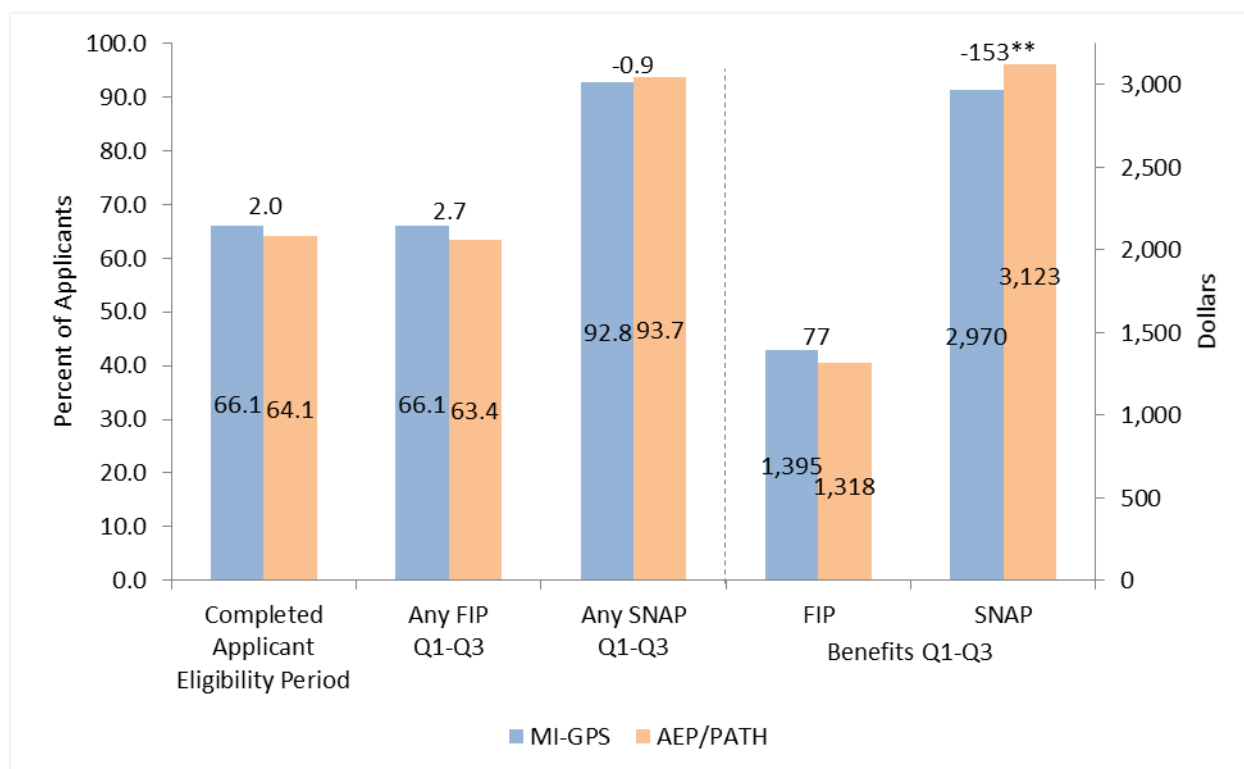
Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

- ***We did not detect a difference in completion of the 21-day Applicant Eligibility Period between those assigned to the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs.***

As discussed above, to be approved for FIP benefits, all applicants first must participate in the 21-day AEP that requires them to meet weekly with a coach (if MI-GPS) or CDF (if AEP/PATH), primarily to address any barriers to participating in work activities or finding employment. Applicants who complied with AEP requirements (and other FIP requirements such as documentation) were automatically approved to receive cash assistance. Though goal-oriented coaching begins during the AEP, we did not have an *a priori* expectation that the MI-GPS program would affect AEP completion rates given its short duration.

During the three-quarter follow-up period, approximately two thirds of FIP applicants completed the 21-day AEP, with no differences detected between the programs (Exhibit ES-3, leftmost bars). The reasons for not completing the AEP were not available in the administrative data, but could include finding employment and becoming ineligible for assistance, experiencing another change in circumstances that affected the applicant's ability or interest in completing the AEP, or failing to provide required documentation to receive FIP benefits.

## Exhibit ES 3. Impacts on FIP and SNAP Benefit Receipt



Source: MI DHHS administrative records.

Sample: Includes 2,053 (1,020 MI-GPS; 1,033 AEP/PATH) individuals with administrative records.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

- ***We did not detect an impact of MI-GPS on receipt of FIP benefits or FIP benefit amounts compared to AEP/PATH.***

In the three quarters (nine months) after random assignment (the follow-up period for which FIP data are available), about two thirds of both the MI-GPS group and the AEP/PATH group received FIP benefits, with benefits averaging approximately \$1,350 across both groups (Exhibit ES-3, second and fourth bars). Given the lack of impacts on employment and earnings, the results are not surprising. About one quarter of both groups were neither working nor receiving cash assistance benefits at the end of a three-quarter follow-up period (not shown), indicating they experienced some financial difficulty.

- ***The MI-GPS reduced the amount of SNAP benefits received more compared to the AEP/PATH program. However, we did not find an impact on the proportion receiving SNAP benefits.***

Almost all (more than 90 percent) MI-GPS and AEP/PATH group members received SNAP benefits during the three-quarter follow-up period, with no difference between the two groups. However, those assigned to the MI-GPS group received \$2,970 in SNAP benefits over three-quarter period, compared to \$3,123 for those assigned to the AEP/PATH program, an impact of

–\$153 (Exhibit ES-3, third and fifth bars). It is not clear what drives this result given that no impacts on employment or earnings were detected.

- *We did not detect a difference between the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups in self-reported employment or in the characteristics of their current or most recent jobs, including wages and benefits.*

Based on the follow-up survey, approximately two thirds of applicants and recipients in either group had worked anytime during the six month follow-up period. Among those who worked, the average hourly wage was approximately \$10.50 for both groups. A low proportion in both groups worked in a job that provided benefits, including paid sick days (less than a fifth), paid holidays and vacations (less than a quarter), and access to health insurance (less than a third).

## Conclusions

There is long-standing interest among policymakers and practitioners in identifying effective approaches to improving economic and public assistance outcomes for recipients of TANF and other public benefits. This report compares the effects of the new MI-GPS enhancement that uses a goal-oriented coaching approach versus Michigan’s existing employment program, AEP/PATH. It provides the first rigorous evidence of coaching’s effects on cash assistance applicants’ and recipients’ employment and public assistance outcomes. Several issues should be considered when interpreting the study’s findings.

- *The MI-GPS goal-oriented coaching program is an early iteration of a goal-oriented coaching approach, and the model has continued to be improved and refined.*

Providing goal-oriented coaching within a TANF program is a relatively new approach to improving employment outcomes, and MI-GPS is one of the first such programs implemented. Since the JSA evaluation in Michigan launched, there continues to be interest and investment in implementing and evaluating this program model. Newer and developing coaching programs continue to modify and enhance coaching approaches, tools, and coach training methods based on earlier program experiences, and thus may produce different results.

- *The time horizon for expected MI-GPS impacts was unclear at the start of the study, and a longer follow-up period may be needed to observe effects.*

It is possible the five-quarter follow-up period on employment and earnings available for this study (with shorter follow-up available for other measures) did not fully capture impacts on employment, earnings, public assistance receipt, and intermediate outcomes. Compared to AEP/PATH, MI-GPS may take longer to produce economic results, as applicants and recipients need time to set and achieve incremental goals that may eventually lead to economic success.

- *The federal work participation rate can make goal-oriented coaching challenging to implement in a TANF program.*

The MI-GPS coaching approach enables FIP applicants and recipients to set their own goals and activities to reach them; as a result, the activities do not always align with federal WPR

requirements. Coaches reported that, though they used MI-GPS's flexibility on the WPR requirements to some extent, they had difficulty disregarding it completely, as it remained part of the program culture. As goal-oriented coaching approaches continue to be implemented in mandatory programs such as TANF, program designers and operators should consider how to balance the objectives of coaching with the WPR requirements and provide appropriate guidance to staff.

- *When providing goal-oriented coaching in TANF programs, it is important to consider that the duration of the goal-oriented coaching provided may vary across the caseload, with some applicants and recipients having limited exposure.*

In this study, and consistent with past studies of TANF caseload dynamics (ASPE, 2014), some cash assistance applicants are not approved to receive cash assistance; of those who are, some experience relatively short spells of cash assistance receipt. Because goal-oriented coaching is a relatively new approach, the duration and intensity of coaching needed to improve outcomes is not known. Nonetheless, in considering the delivery of goal-oriented coaching within a TANF environment, program designers and administrators should consider that the duration of intervention will be short for some individuals (particularly when introduced at the cash assistance application stage when some will not be approved to receive benefits) and whether and how goal-oriented coaching can be adapted for this circumstance.

- *Different approaches can be used to achieve similar employment and public assistance outcomes for cash assistance recipients.*

Though the MI-GPS program does not improve economic outcomes for cash assistance applicants and recipients, it also does not negatively affect their economic outcomes. Inasmuch as policymakers and program administrators are interested in different approaches to help cash assistance recipients move to work, the goal-oriented approach that allowed participation in a wider range activities as a path to employment (while still maintaining overall compliance with WPR requirements) resulted in similar outcomes to those of the AEP/PATH program. Moreover, MI-GPS increases self-efficacy, which may be a goal of importance to some program administrators.

- *Though many FIP applicants and recipients found employment in the follow-up period, their earnings remain low.*

About two thirds of the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups were working at the end of a five-quarter follow-up period, but their earnings are low: \$11,450 on average over the five quarters and hourly wages of about \$10 per hour. Moreover, two thirds of those not working are not receiving cash assistance either, and thus may be experiencing significant financial difficulties. Outcomes may improve with a longer follow-up period, but they do suggest that if the goal is to improve the earnings trajectories of cash assistance recipients, additional strategies may be needed.

In summary, this study of goal-oriented coaching in two counties in Michigan provides new, rigorous evidence on this approach, compared to the state's existing TANF program. The study detects no differences in employment, earnings, or public benefit receipt within the available follow-up period. The study highlights some of the challenges that a goal-oriented coaching approach is likely to face in moving cash assistance recipients to work, particularly to jobs that will improve their overall economic well-being. Additional ongoing studies that include refinements to the approach will provide critical information on the efficacy of goal-oriented coaching for improving employment and public assistance outcomes.



## 1. Introduction

Established by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is intended to foster economic security and stability for low-income families with children. Through a block grant to states, TANF funds monthly cash assistance payments to low-income families with children, as well as a wide range of services that address the program's four broad purposes.<sup>4</sup>

Balancing the provision of cash assistance with individual responsibility, TANF requires states to engage a target share of families with a work-eligible cash assistance recipient in a specified set of work activities as a condition of benefit receipt. Cash assistance recipients participate in a range of work-oriented activities including job search and job readiness assistance, unsubsidized and subsidized employment, and work experience, among others.

Even before the enactment of TANF, policymakers implemented and researchers evaluated services designed to improve cash assistance recipients' employment outcomes and reduce dependency on public benefits. However, programs to date have had mixed results; recipients struggle to find and keep jobs, and families remain poor despite the assistance provided (Hendra and Hamilton, 2015).

Recently, much attention has been given to the potential of "goal-oriented" coaching approaches to help cash assistance recipients improve their employment outcomes. Goal-oriented coaching approaches are based on psychology and neuroscience research that suggests chronic stress associated with living in poverty hinders the development of planning, decision-making, and organizational skills. Sometimes called executive or self-regulation skills (Blair and Raver, 2016), these skills are considered critical for adult success in goal attainment

### Key Features of the JSA Evaluation in Michigan

- Included applicants and recipients of cash assistance through the Family Independence Program, the state's TANF program.
- Conducted in two counties: Wayne (not including the city of Detroit) and Genesee (including the city of Flint).
- Cash assistance applicants were randomly assigned to one of two programs to help them secure and keep employment:
  - an enhancement to the existing TANF work program that incorporated goal-oriented coaching to help individuals identify an employment-related goal, break it into manageable steps and weekly activities, and allows flexibility in the types of weekly activities; or
  - the existing, "business as usual" TANF program focused on participation in required work activities.
- The evaluation measured "differential impacts"—differences in outcomes between the individuals assigned to the two programs in terms of type and content of assistance received, employment and earnings, and public benefit receipt.

<sup>4</sup> TANF has four broad purposes: (1) provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. In creating TANF, the Act repealed the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, which had previously provided cash assistance to needy families.

related to employment and other areas of life. This research has generated interest in designing interventions to strengthen TANF and other employment programs by improving participants' self-regulation skills, helping them identify meaningful goals related to economic independence and attain them (Kauff and Cavadel, 2019).

This report provides evaluation results from a rigorous study in the state of Michigan examining the relative impacts of two approaches to helping TANF applicants and recipients, who are required to work, in finding and keeping jobs.<sup>5</sup> Conducted in parts of Wayne County (areas adjacent to but not including the city of Detroit) and Genesee County (the city of Flint and surrounding areas), the study compares:

- an enhancement to the state's existing TANF employment services that incorporates goal-oriented coaching, focused on identifying employment related goals, breaking them into smaller achievable tasks, and continually reviewing these tasks, in order to give the applicants and recipients the tools to address challenges and achieve goals, and
- the state's existing TANF employment services, primarily focused on participation in required work activities after an initial period of addressing employment barriers.

The study is part of the multi-site Job Search Assistance Strategies (JSA) evaluation examining approaches to help TANF cash assistance applicants and recipients obtain and retain jobs. The JSA evaluation is sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), within the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It was conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with Mathematica. The evaluation provides one of the earliest rigorous studies of the impact of an employment program that explicitly addresses goal achievement.

The remainder of this chapter provides a brief overview of the two approaches studied in the Michigan JSA evaluation (Section 1.1), summarizes findings from the research literature on employment services for cash assistance recipients and goal-oriented coaching (Section 1.2), describes the broader JSA evaluation in greater detail (Section 1.3), and provides a roadmap to the rest of the report (Section 1.4).

## 1.1 Programs Studied in the JSA Evaluation in Michigan

Michigan's cash assistance program, the Family Independence Program (FIP), begins with a 21-day Application Eligibility Period (AEP) during which applicants must meet weekly with a Career Development Facilitator (CDF) to identify and address any barriers to participating in work activities or finding employment. Applicants who complete the AEP are approved for cash assistance and must participate in the "Partnership. Accountability. Training. Hope." (PATH) program as a condition of benefit receipt. The two-step process is referred to as AEP/PATH.

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<sup>5</sup> In Michigan, the state does not require certain cash assistance to participate in work activities if they are ill or incapacitated; caring for an infant younger than 12 months old or an ill or incapacitated family member; pregnant and medically unable to work; or age 60 or older.

The JSA evaluation in Michigan compares the AEP/PATH approach to providing services to applicants and recipients to a new, goal-oriented coaching approach. Each is described briefly below.

1. **AEP/PATH.** CDFs work with applicants and recipients using the existing approach to employment services. This includes:
  - **Standard program orientation.** The AEP/PATH orientation focuses on program requirements and compliance.
  - **A focus on activities that meet federal work participation requirements.** Once an applicant is approved for cash assistance, recipients must participate in work activities for a designated number of hours each week or face a reduction in their benefits due to non-compliance.
  - **Directive staff assistance.** During the PATH program, CDFs assign recipients to activities designed to fulfill the work participation requirement and monitor participation and compliance with these requirements.
2. **Michigan Goals, Progress, Success (MI-GPS).** Program staff, known as coaches, use a new, goal-oriented approach to provide employment services to FIP applicants and recipients that includes:
  - **A redesigned orientation.** The program starts with an orientation, delivered by coaches, that focuses on a collaborative approach to helping applicants and recipients set and achieve goals related to employment.
  - **Goal setting and monitoring.** Coaches work with applicants and recipients to identify employment-related goals, break goals into smaller steps by identifying weekly activities that build towards their goals, and provide support to help them achieve these tasks. Applicants and recipients have ownership over goal setting and activities needed to attain goals. Coaches help applicants/recipients reflect on their strengths (rather than weaknesses) so that they can select and work toward short-term goals and tasks that are a good fit with their long-run goals and abilities, interests, and needs.
  - **Tools to support goal-oriented coaching.** Coaches use a new comprehensive assessment and other tools to assist applicants and recipients in setting goals and identifying the steps to achieve them.
  - **Flexibility on activities that count toward federal work participation requirement.** Coaches have the flexibility to allow recipients to engage in activities that do not count toward this requirement if they facilitate goal achievement.

Both MI-GPS and AEP/PATH are jointly operated by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the state's workforce agency Michigan Talent Investment Agency (TIA). DHHS provides cash assistance. TIA provides employment services at local Michigan Works! agency (MWA) offices.

Conducted between 2016 and 2018, the Michigan evaluation includes an **implementation study** to examine program design and operations and an **impact study**. The impact study uses a

random assignment research design in which FIP applicants are assigned either to a group that receives MI-GPS or a group that receives AEP/PATH. The impact study measures “differential impacts”—differences in outcomes between the two groups in terms of employment, earnings, public benefit receipt (i.e., cash assistance, food assistance to low-income individuals through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/SNAP), and other outcomes over a 6- to 12-month follow-up period.<sup>6</sup> The impact study also examines differential impacts on the employment services and staff assistance that each group receives.

## 1.2 The Research and Policy Context

The JSA evaluation is designed to build on and strengthen the research evidence on effective strategies to help cash assistance applicants and recipients find employment. Employment is critical in providing economic stability, but for some—particularly low-income and low-skilled individuals—it can be hard to get and keep. Employment is typically preceded by some form of job search, which could continue after an individual has found an initial job. Job search assistance programs—short-term, relatively low-intensity and low-cost programs to help job seekers find jobs—are a component of many government-funded assistance programs. Job search assistance programs tend to focus on helping job seekers find a job more quickly than they would on their own, or on helping them find a better job (one with higher pay, benefits, job security, and stable work hours) than they would on their own, or both.

Much of the earlier research (Klerman et al., 2012) has shown that programs providing employment services as part of a cash assistance program, particularly job search assistance, are effective at speeding entry to work, but that the impacts are modest and they did not increase job quality or tenure. Though some cash assistance recipients find jobs using job search assistance services, others do so on their own. Job search assistance can be implemented in different ways—for example, in group classes, one-on-one, or in self-directed activities—but there is little evidence regarding which ways are more effective. Other service strategies to improve the economic outcomes of cash assistance recipients, such as basic skills instruction and work experience, also appear to have modest impact (Bloom and Michalopoulos, 2001).

Some have posited that goal-oriented coaching, by helping cash assistance recipients identify meaningful goals related to economic independence and pursue and attain these goals, may produce better results (Cavadel et al., 2017). The goal-oriented coaching approach to providing employment services grew out of psychological, neuroscience, and behavioral science research. Studies explored the role of goal-setting and attainment in achieving success in a range of settings and with different populations (Burnette et al., 2013; Anderson et al., 2018). Evidence suggests that specific behavioral skills (self-regulation or executive skills, collectively) are

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<sup>6</sup> The study is not designed to measure the impact of either program compared to no staff assistance or no employment services. Doing that comparison would require an unserved control group as a third experimental arm.

needed to set, pursue, and achieve personal goals, including employment-related goals (Cavadel et al., 2017; Diamond, 2013). These self-regulation skills encompass a range of foundational skills that reflect personality factors, emotional skills, and cognitive skills. Examples include time management, organization, prioritization, task initiation and persistence, flexibility, emotional control, and stress tolerance. In addition, research indicates that everyone has strengths and weaknesses in these areas, regardless of socio-economic status, and that they continue to develop and improve in adulthood (Blair and Raver, 2015).

Research also suggests that poverty and associated environmental conditions can hinder development and use of the self-regulation skills needed for goal-setting and attainment. In particular, adverse childhood experiences such as family instability, food scarcity, and/or exposure to abuse or violence can disrupt the development of self-regulation skills (Blair and Raver, 2016). Poverty-related stress also may impede use of these skills because limited financial resources may tax cognitive bandwidth, thus making tasks in everyday life (e.g., navigating transportation, securing child care) difficult. This taxing of cognitive bandwidth, in turn, limits the development of and capacity for other skills, such as the ability to analyze and solve problems, make good decisions, and exercise self-control (Muraven and Baumeister, 2000). Finally, and as a result, adults in poverty are more likely to focus on pressing short-term financial stresses and needs at the expense of longer-term goals, including employment-related ones (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013).

Though a relatively new approach, goal-oriented interventions focused not only on attainment of specific goals but also on the skills needed to set and achieve them in a range of settings—such as schools and non-profit organizations—have improved academic performance, educational attainment, and health (Duckworth et al., 2014; Oettingen et al., 2015). Key elements of the goal-oriented coaching approach include:

- Assessments that provide information staff and participants need to develop a detailed plan for reaching goals (Derr, McCay, and Kauff, 2019).
- Goal-setting activities that break down large goals into smaller steps that build on one another (Oettingen and Gollwitzer, 2001; Schunk, 2001).
- Goal development with an emphasis on “goodness of fit” to a participant’s preferences, skills, and available supports to motivate goal attainment (Dawson and Guare, 2016).
- Assessment of the participant’s outcomes and reflection on the experience that can inform future goal-setting (e.g., if the participant did not achieve the goal, determining which steps were problematic and how to address them) (Anderson, Kauff, and Cavadel, 2017).
- A collaborative relationship in which staff help guide participants in goal-setting (Pavetti, 2014).

There is a growing interest from program operators, policymakers, and researchers in bringing goal-oriented coaching techniques to employment-focused programs. The JSA evaluation is one of three ongoing OPRE studies of goal-oriented approaches (Exhibit 1-1). The MI-GPS program is one of the early programs incorporating goal-oriented coaching into a TANF program but builds off initial work being developed in other states and localities (Martinson and Cook, 2018; Derr et al., 2019).

### 1.3 The JSA Evaluation

The JSA Evaluation includes five sites, each operating a different approach to providing job search assistance to help cash assistance applicants and/or recipients transition to work. The evaluation is designed to provide information both about the relative effectiveness of various job search assistance approaches (through impact studies) and about the operation of promising job search programs (through implementation studies).

#### 1.3.1 Five Study Sites

In two sites—**Ramsey County, Minnesota**, and **Westchester County, New York**—the JSA evaluation assessed the implementation of promising programs in order to draw lessons for program administrators. The Ramsey County site implemented goal-oriented coaching and Westchester County implemented an intensive job search program. These implementation studies were based primarily on site visits by the study team. These two sites did not participate in differential impact studies.

In three sites—**New York City; Sacramento County, California; and Genesee and Wayne Counties, Michigan** (the subject of this report)—the JSA evaluation conducted impact and implementation studies. In New York City and Sacramento County, the evaluation examined the relative effectiveness of more- and less-rigorous participation requirements for cash assistance applicants.<sup>7</sup> This report focuses on the effects of goal-oriented coaching in helping applicants and recipients find employment and leave cash assistance. (Chapter 3 provides more information on Michigan’s evaluation design and data sources.)

#### 1.3.2 Random Assignment Study Design

A critical element of the JSA evaluation design is random assignment. For the Michigan evaluation’s impact study, program staff randomly assigned eligible FIP applicants, and in some cases recipients, to one of two approaches (either AEP/PATH or MI-GPS). The study then measured each group’s subsequent outcomes in a number of domains.

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/job-search-assistance-evaluation> for the New York City, Sacramento County, and Ramsey County JSA evaluation reports.

## Exhibit 1-1. OPRE Studies of Goal-Oriented Coaching Approaches

Project	Goal-Oriented Adult Learning in Self-Sufficiency (GOALS), 2014-2018	Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations, 2016-2021	Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation, 2013-2020
<b>Description</b>	Exploring how emerging insights from psychology can strengthen programs aimed at helping families achieve self-sufficiency	Evaluating up to five interventions that apply coaching practices to promote job entry and retention among TANF recipients and other low-income individuals	Study includes: (1) Implementation and impact of a goal-oriented coaching program for TANF recipients, conducted in Genesee and Wayne (non-Detroit) Counties in Michigan; (2) implementation study of goal-oriented coaching program in Ramsey County, Minnesota.
<b>Publications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving Outcomes Among Employment Program Participants Through Goal Attainment: A Conceptual Framework</li> <li>Self-Regulation and Goal Attainment: A New Perspective for Employment Programs</li> <li>New Perspective on Practice: A Guide to Measuring Self-Regulation and Goal-Related Outcomes in Employment Programs</li> <li>Using The Science About Self-Regulation To Improve Economic Outcomes For TANF Families</li> <li>Using Psychology-Informed Strategies to Promote Self-Sufficiency: A Review of Innovative Programs</li> <li>Improving Employment Outcomes: Using Innovative Goal-Oriented Strategies in TANF Programs</li> <li>Supporting Employees and Maximizing Profit: The Case for Workforce Development Focused on Self-Regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measuring Self-Regulation Skills in Evaluations of Employment Programs for Low-Income Populations: Challenges and Recommendations</li> <li>Employment Coaching Program Snapshots</li> <li>Employment Coaching: Working with Low-Income Populations to Use Self-Regulation Skills to Achieve Employment Goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation and Impact of a Goal-Oriented Coaching Program for Cash Assistance Recipients in Michigan</li> <li>Implementation of a Goal-Oriented Approach to Providing Employment Services to Cash Assistance Recipients: The Lifelong Learning Initiative in Ramsey County, Minnesota</li> </ul>



When successfully implemented, random assignment creates groups with no systematic differences in either observed or unobserved characteristics. As a result, differences in outcomes between the two groups reflect only the relative effectiveness of the services provided them (these differences being the services' "differential impacts") and chance. In particular, random assignment also rules out differences in labor market and non-JSA policy environments as causes for any differences, as both are identical for the random assignment groups.

### **1.3.3 Outcomes of Interest**

Across the impact study sites, the key evaluation outcome is employment during the study period. The study also estimates program impacts on the amount and content of employment services received, earnings, public benefit receipt, job characteristics, and other outcomes. The JSA impact study analyzes these outcomes for approximately 6-15 months after program entry using administrative data on employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt and a follow-up survey of study participants for data on other outcomes.

## **1.4 Structure of This Report**

The rest of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 describes the program environment and context for the JSA evaluation in Michigan and development of the MI-GPS approach.
- Chapter 3 describes the methodology, including the theory of change for the MI-GPS approach, the evaluation's research questions and overall research design, the analytic methods used to estimate impacts, and the data sources.
- Chapter 4 describes findings from the implementation study, including the administrative structure and staffing for MI-GPS and key differences between it and AEP/PATH.
- Chapter 5 describes the differential impacts on service receipt and types of job search assistance received, based on data from the participant follow-up survey.
- Chapter 6 describes the relative effectiveness of MI-GPS and AEP/PATH in terms of their impacts on employment and earnings, public benefits, and job characteristics.
- Chapter 7 considers the implications of the study's findings.

Appendices provide the revised MI-GPS orientation slides (Appendix A), the tools used by MI-GPS coaches (Appendix B), additional information about the study sample (Appendix C), the data sources and approach to missing data (Appendix D), analytic details (Appendix E), and expanded impacts (Appendices F and G).

## 2. Program Environment and Structure of FIP in Michigan

This chapter describes the program context for the JSA evaluation in Michigan. Section 2.1 provides an overview of FIP. Section 2.2 characterizes demographic and economic conditions in the two participating counties during the evaluation period. Section 2.3 describes the components of AEP/PATH and MI-GPS. Finally, Section 2.4 summarizes DHHS' and TIA's impetus for and objectives in participating in the JSA evaluation.

### 2.1 Michigan's Family Independence Program (FIP)

Federal TANF rules require that states meet the federally defined work participation rate (WPR), measuring the extent to which families with a work-eligible individual engage in work-related activities as a condition of benefit receipt.<sup>8</sup> To meet the WPR, states engage cash assistance recipients in several types of work-related activities, including job search and job readiness activities.<sup>9</sup> TANF also requires states to impose sanctions on recipients who do not satisfy their work activity requirement (e.g., by reducing their cash assistance). In addition, a 60-month lifetime limit applies to federally funded benefits for families with an adult receiving assistance.

These TANF rules are made at the federal level, but states have wide discretion to set eligibility and program requirements, as well as to make benefit determinations. In Michigan, families with children and pregnant women whose income and assets are low enough to meet program requirements qualify for FIP monthly cash benefits.<sup>10</sup> DHHS, which oversees FIP, set a 48-month time limit on benefits. The FIP monthly cash assistance benefit is about \$492 for a single-parent family of three in 2017 (during the study period), similar to the national average.<sup>11,12</sup>

Michigan follows federal TANF guidelines, requiring families receiving cash assistance with a work-eligible individual, as defined by criteria established by the TANF statute, to participate in

<sup>8</sup> The WPR calculates the share of the state's TANF families with a work-eligible individual participating in countable work activities for the required number of hours. The TANF statute set the required work participation rate of 50 percent for all families, but that target can be reduced by the credit the state qualifies for under the TANF caseload reduction credit. This credit lowers the target for states that experience caseload decreases. States have the option of allowing recipients to participate in activities that are not countable as long as they meet the required rate.

<sup>9</sup> To meet the WPR, cash assistance recipients may participate in several core activities: unsubsidized and subsidized employment, work experience, on-the-job training, job search and job readiness assistance (limited to 12 weeks), community service programs, vocational educational training (up to 12 months), and child care provided to an individual who is participating in a community service program. These activities apply to the first 20 hours of participation; three non-core activities (job skills training, education related to employment, and secondary education) can count toward the WPR if families have a 30-hour requirement.

<sup>10</sup> Michigan also operates a two-parent FIP program that is funded by state resources and not subject to federal work requirements.

<sup>11</sup> In 2017, the mean maximum monthly TANF benefit for a family of three was \$454 nationally. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/welfare-rules-databook-state-tanf-policies-as-of-july-2017>

<sup>12</sup> In addition to FIP, Michigan operates other public assistance programs, including home energy assistance, rental assistance, and emergency assistance, from which FIP recipients may receive benefits.

work activities for a specified number of hours per week to avoid sanctions for noncompliance. A work-eligible recipient must participate an average of 30 hours per week if a single parent; 20 hours if a single parent with a child under six; and 35 hours if part of a two-parent family. Michigan's sanctions for noncompliance with work activity requirements are suspension of all FIP benefits for three months for the first occurrence and for six months for the second occurrence. The case is closed permanently for the third occurrence.

Although DHHS oversees FIP, it is TIA that provides AEP/PATH employment services through its contracted network of 16 local MWAs, called "service centers." The MWAs operate a range of employment programs in addition to AEP/PATH, including the U.S. Department of Labor's American Job Centers under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Some MWAs provide AEP/PATH employment services directly, but many subcontract to local service providers using performance-based contracts. These contracts require the service providers to track the percentage of FIP recipients who are meeting the WPR, employed, enrolled in training, participating in community service or work experience programs, in subsidized employment, and the percentage of case closures. Local service providers that do not meet their performance targets may have their contracts terminated or may not be selected to provide services in the future under a subsequent Request for Proposals.

## 2.2 Demographic and Economic Environment

The demographic and economic environment in which MI-GPS and AEP/PATH operate is important for understanding their impact. As discussed further in Section 2.4, the study team conducted the Michigan JSA evaluation in five MWA offices in two counties: (1) Wayne County offices in the Detroit-adjacent cities of Southgate, Highland Park, Livonia, and Wayne; and (2) Genesee County, one office in the city of Flint. Exhibit 2-1 provides the demographic and economic characteristics from 2016 (when the study began) for the four Wayne County cities, Genesee County, and the United States overall. Both counties are relatively large. The population of Wayne County was 1.7 million people in 2016, with more than 1 million in the areas surrounding Detroit where the study was conducted (not shown). The Genesee County population was more than 400,000, with about one-quarter living in the city of Flint (not shown).

Two cities in Wayne County (Highland Park and Wayne) as well as Genesee County are relatively disadvantaged compared to the United States overall. As shown, in these three areas, median family income was less than \$44,000, compared to the U.S. median of about \$68,000. Similarly, a quarter or more families live in poverty, including almost half in Highland Park, well exceeding the U.S. average of 17 percent. More than a fifth of study families receive SNAP benefits, compared to 13 percent nationally. Likely reflecting lower housing costs in these areas, excepting the city of Wayne, the proportion of residents spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing is less than the U.S. average, whereas homeownership levels are similar. Among those older than age 25, educational attainment is generally similar to the United States overall, where 13 percent lack a high school diploma.

Exhibit 2-1. Demographic and Economic Characteristics, Wayne and Genesee Counties, by Office as of 2016

Characteristic	Wayne County				Genesee County	United States
	Southgate	Highland Park	Livonia	Wayne		
<b>Total population</b>	29,355	23,498	25,905	17,143	413,090	318,558,162
<b>Median household income (\$)</b>	51,138	21,181	67,288	40,973	43,246	67,871
<b>All families with children below age 18 below poverty level (%)</b>	15	47	4	24	28	17
<b>Households receiving cash public assistance (%)</b>	2	9	1	5	5	3
<b>Households receiving SNAP benefits in the last 12 months (%)</b>	12	45	6	23	22	13
<b>Gross rent as a percentage of monthly income (%)</b>						
Less than 30 percent	85	61	78	42	70	49
30 percent or more	15	40	23	58	30	51
<b>Occupied housing units (%)</b>						
Owner-occupied housing units	63	43	84	57	70	64
Renter-occupied housing units	37	58	17	43	30	36
<b>Race and ethnicity (%)<sup>a</sup></b>						
White, non-Latino	88	8	95	81	77	73
Black or African American, non-Latino	7	91	4	17	22	13
Other race, non-Latino	7	3	4	5	5	14
Latino	7	1	3	3	3	17
<b>Highest educational attainment (%)<sup>b</sup></b>						
Less than high school diploma/equivalent	11	21	5	15	10	13
High school graduate	35	36	26	35	32	28
Some college, no degree	27	25	26	28	27	21
Associate's degree	10	5	10	10	11	8
Bachelor's degree	12	8	22	9	12	19
Graduate degree or higher	5	6	11	3	8	12

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2012-2016 American Community Service Five Year Estimates. MWA offices also serve areas surrounding the city where they are located, statistics are provided only for the ZIP code for that city (it is not possible to provide statistics for the entire service area). The MWA offices in the city of Detroit (also part of Wayne County) did not participate in the study. Genesee County includes the city of Flint.

<sup>a</sup> Race and ethnicity sums to more than 100 percent because respondents could identify as two or more races in the survey.

<sup>b</sup> Among those age 25 and older.

The MWA service areas are not racially diverse. Residents of Highland Park, in Wayne County, almost all identify as Black, non-Latino (91 percent), whereas residents in the other areas mostly identify as White, non-Latino. Neither county is home to many residents identifying as Latino.

The Wayne and Genesee County economies improved during the study period, although unemployment is still higher than the national average. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates (not shown), from 2016 to 2018 the Wayne County unemployment rate decreased

from 6.3 percent to 4.9, and in Genesee County it dropped from 5.6 percent to 5.2 percent. Meanwhile, the national unemployment rate decreased from 4.7 percent to 4.0 percent.<sup>13</sup>

An additional contextual factor is the Flint water crisis in Genesee County, which began in 2014 when the state changed the water supply to a source with unsafe levels of lead. Michigan declared an emergency in 2016 and provided bottled water throughout the city until early 2017 (Clark, 2018). Although the crisis did not affect the operation of the two programs studied, much of the evaluation operated in a period of difficulty and considerable stress for study participants, other residents, and program staff in Genesee County.

## 2.3 FIP Enrollment and AEP/PATH Service Delivery Structure

Michigan implemented the PATH program statewide in 2007. To help ensure that FIP recipients are ready to participate in work activities as soon as they are approved for cash assistance, PATH includes the 21-day AEP during which staff and applicants identify and address barriers to employment. This section describes the enrollment process for FIP and AEP/PATH services.

### 2.3.1 FIP and AEP/PATH Enrollment Process

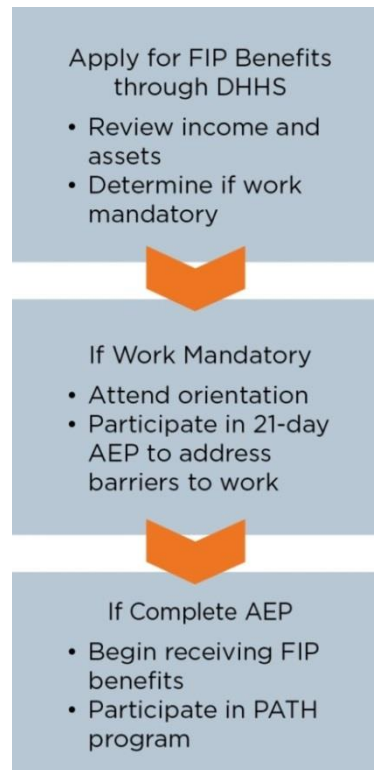
AEP focuses on barrier removal services for FIP applicants, and PATH provides employment services to FIP recipients. As shown on **Error! Reference source not found.** and outlined below, applicants who meet the FIP eligibility criteria and are determined mandatory for work based on the state's criteria are required to participate in the AEP/PATH program:

1. **Apply for cash assistance.** Individuals can apply for FIP online, at kiosks located in local DHHS office lobbies, or by mail. If a review of the application indicates the individual is qualified for FIP based on income and assets and is not exempt from work requirements, DHHS sends an automated referral letter instructing the applicant to attend an AEP/PATH orientation within 15 days at the MWA office nearest the applicant's home ZIP code.
2. **Attend AEP/PATH orientation.** The applicant attends an hour-long orientation that introduces the FIP employment services, including the 21-day AEP followed by PATH once cash assistance is approved.
3. **Participate in AEP until cash assistance approved.** Immediately following the orientation, the applicant is assigned to a CDF. The applicant and CDF meet weekly for three weeks to identify and, then, address barriers to work.
4. **Participate in PATH.** Applicants who complete the 21-day AEP (as well as meet other income eligibility rules such as submitting required documentation) are approved to receive FIP benefits. Recipients start PATH and are required to participate in work activities that meet the federal work requirements, or face sanctions for

<sup>13</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/lau/tables.htm>. Unemployment rates for the individual cities in Wayne County are not available over this time period. The overall rate in Wayne County may still be helpful, as individuals can seek employment beyond the city of residence.

noncompliance. During PATH, recipients continue to meet with their assigned CDF to prepare for and obtain employment.

#### Exhibit 2-2. Overview of Cash Assistance Enrollment Process Prior to the JSA Evaluation



Working with DHHS and MWA staff, the JSA evaluation altered the steps in the above process by establishing an alternative to AEP/PATH: MI-GPS, a new goal-oriented coaching approach. For the study, work-eligible applicants were randomly assigned to either AEP/PATH or MI-GPS.

#### 2.4 Participation in the JSA Evaluation: Developing and Piloting MI-GPS

Michigan's involvement in the JSA evaluation stemmed from its interest in improving how PATH helped FIP recipients find and retain work. The JSA study team approached DHHS and TIA staff in 2014 regarding study participation and proposed an employment services program that would enhance the state's current AEP/PATH program. As part of the JSA evaluation in Ramsey County and involvement with other related OPRE studies (Exhibit 1-1), the JSA study team was already developing a goal-oriented coaching approach to employment services for TANF recipients. Both DHHS and TIA staff expressed interest in implementing such an approach and agreed to participate in the evaluation to test its effects compared to AEP/PATH services.

**Study Sites.** Two of the largest MWAs in Michigan agreed to participate in the study:

- Genesee Shiawassee Thumb Michigan Works! (GST) is the second largest MWA. Its Genesee County Flint office participated in the study; offices in Shiawassee and Thumb Counties did not.

- Southeast Michigan Community Alliance (SEMCA) is the third largest MWA and covers Wayne County, excluding Detroit, as well as Monroe County, which did not participate. All four Wayne County SEMCA locations participated in the study:
  - Southgate Michigan Works! One-Stop Service Center – Downriver Community Conference (“Southgate”)
  - Highland Park Michigan Works! One-Stop Service Center (“Highland Park”)
  - Livonia Michigan Works! One-Stop Service Center (“Livonia”)
  - Wayne Michigan Works! One-Stop Service Center (“Wayne”)

The five participating offices agreed to operate AEP/PATH and the new program concurrently. Each office manager selected half of the CDFs to train as coaches and provide MI-GPS, based primarily on staff interest; the other CDFs would continue to provide the standard AEP/PATH program.<sup>14</sup> Across the two counties, 15 of 30 CDFs were trained as coaches (see Chapter 4 for more information on staffing for each program).

**MI-GPS Curriculum and Tools.** In collaboration with The Prosperity Agenda (TPA), a non-profit organization with experience developing goal-oriented coaching for low-income populations, the study team developed and provided the study sites with a comprehensive coaching curriculum and tools for MI-GPS. TPA trained CDFs as coaches in two cohorts in April and June 2016. Each coach cohort pilot-tested the new approach and tools with FIP applicants and recipients for six weeks and provided feedback to TPA on a variety of topics during bi-weekly calls. These included length of each coaching session, the tools used most often and why, the tools that were difficult to use, and their overall perspectives on their experiences as coaches. In August 2016, both cohorts attended a day-long training on the final tools adapted after two rounds of coach feedback. DHHS and TIA managers attended all trainings.

**New Orientation.** During the same period, Global Learning Partners (GLP), in cooperation with the study team and managers from SEMCA and GST, designed a new orientation for the MI-GPS orientation. GLP staff are experts in adult learning principles and have extensive experience in developing seminars, meetings, and orientations that incorporate a coaching approach. GLP trained coaches on the new orientation in September 2016.

As described in the next chapter, staff in each office began randomly assigning FIP applicants and returning FIP recipients in October 2016 to the MI-GPS program or the AEP/PATH program.

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<sup>14</sup> The study team discussed with each participating office whether to randomly assign CDFs to train as coaches (the preferred approach from a research perspective), but decided it was not operationally feasible to do so.



### 3. JSA Strategies Evaluation Design and Data Sources

The goals of the JSA evaluation in Michigan are to describe the implementation and operation of the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs, compare the use of job search assistance and related services by applicants assigned to the two programs, and determine whether the MI-GPS program or the standard AEP/PATH program yields more favorable labor market and public assistance outcomes. As discussed earlier, to achieve these goals, the evaluation included an implementation study (to document program operations) and an experimental impact study (to determine differences in service receipt and in employment and public assistance outcomes).

This chapter describes the evaluation's methods. Section 3.1 provides the theory of change that links the key aspects of the MI-GPS and standard AEP/PATH program design and implementation to their potential effects on individual outcomes. This theory of change motivates the research questions that the evaluation seeks to answer (Section 3.2). Then Section 3.3 describes the overall research design and analysis plan—including random assignment procedures, characteristics of the research sample, and analytic methods. Finally, Section 3.4 describes the data sources used to conduct the analyses.

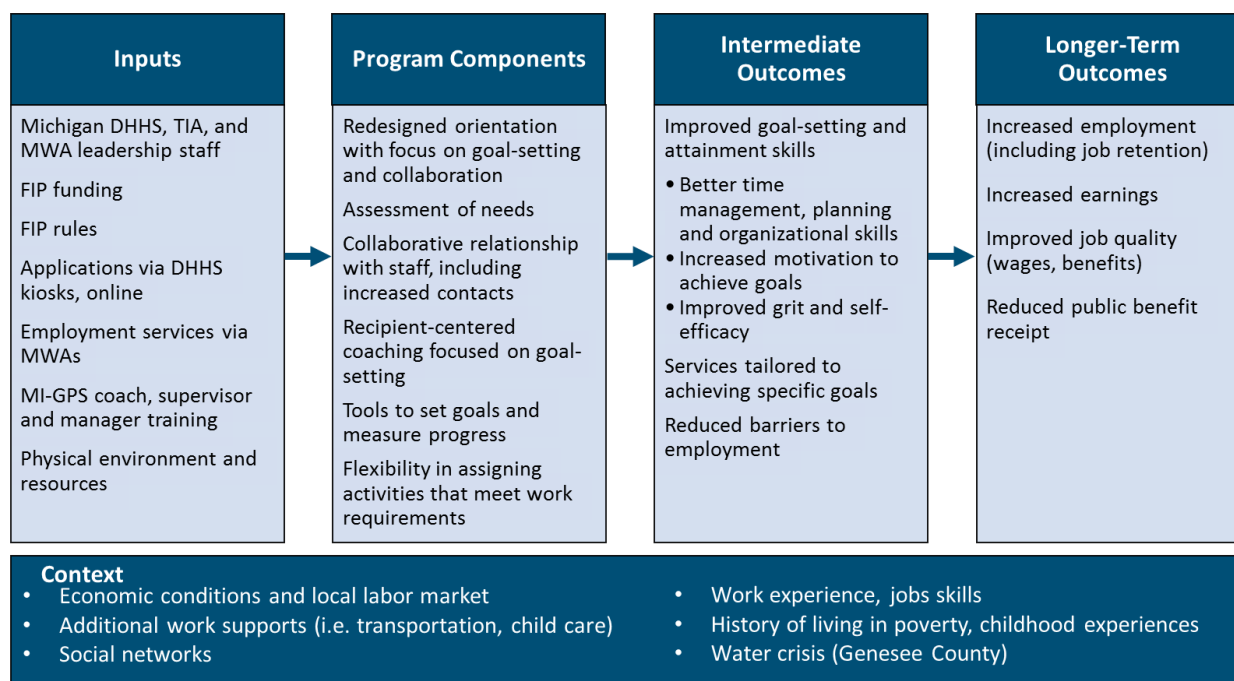
#### 3.1 Theory of Change

Both MI-GPS and AEP/PATH are designed to help applicants remove barriers to participating in work activities during the 21-day application eligibility period and, once FIP benefits start, to assist recipients to find employment and reduce or end their need for FIP and/or other public assistance programs. Both sets of services aim to provide one-on-one assistance and engage applicants and recipients in job search and other work activities, but the two approaches differ in key ways (as described further in Chapter 4):

- **MI-GPS** staff use a new goal-oriented coaching approach based on incremental goal-setting and close monitoring of goal achievement to employment-related goals. The approach includes: guiding but not directing goal setting, focusing on individual's strengths, and establishing goals with a good fit. Coaches are given flexibility to allow recipients to participate in activities that do not meet the federal work participation rate and deliver a new orientation that focuses on collaboration with coaches and goal achievement.
- **AEP/PATH** staff continue implementing the existing approach, which is directive and focused on job search and other core activities that meet federal work requirements. Workshop instructors facilitate the orientation that focuses heavily on FIP program requirements and compliance.

Exhibit 3-1 depicts the MI-GPS theory of change. It shows how program inputs and components are hypothesized to produce effects on intermediate outcomes, which in turn lead to effects on employment outcomes. Because MI-GPS was developed as an enhancement to standard AEP/PATH services, the theory of change describes MI-GPS components and outcomes relative to those of AEP/PATH.

Exhibit 3-1. Theory of Change for the MI-GPS Program



Starting in the box at the left, **program inputs** include the lead agencies (DHHS and TIA), the FIP application process, FIP funding and policies, training provided to MI-GPS coaches, employment services available at the participating offices, and the physical resources provided.

The next box shows how inputs translate into MI-GPS **services and activities**. These include the revised orientation focused on goal-setting and collaboration, an assessment of applicant/recipient needs, applicant/recipient-centered coaching focused on setting incremental and longer-term goals, coaching tools to set goals and measure progress, and flexibility in allowing recipients to participate in activities that do not meet the federal work requirements.

The next box shows the **intermediate outcomes**, where improvements are expected to lead to better longer-term outcomes. Intermediate outcomes include improved skills in setting and attaining goals, including:

- Improved planning, time management, and organizational skills;
- Increased motivation to pursue goals and accomplish tasks;
- Improved perseverance to attain long-term goals despite challenges, sometimes called “grit” (Duckworth et al., 2007);
- Increased belief in one’s ability to perform at a high level, known as “self-efficacy” (Bandura, 2012).

Other intermediate outcomes include increased participation in services tailored to achieving applicant/recipient goals (versus to meet WPR) and reduced barriers to employment.

The far right box shows the **longer-term outcomes** MI-GPS seeks to change. These include employment that is a good fit for the recipient, increased earnings, improved job quality (including increased wages and job benefits), and reduced public benefit receipt. The time horizon for achieving these outcomes is not clear. Compared to AEP/PATH, which strongly focuses on participation in work activities and employment, MI-GPS may take longer to produce economic results as applicants and recipients take time setting and achieving incremental and ultimate goals. On the other hand, MI-GPS' focus on removing barriers and setting goals that are a good fit could result in attainment of incremental goals that are directly related to employment goals and, thus, more immediate employment outcomes.

Influencing expected effects are a number of **contextual factors** including the economic conditions and labor market, additional supports available, the availability of social networks to support applicants and recipients, and their background experiences including work experience, history of living in poverty, and level of stress, which in Flint included the water crisis.

### 3.2 Research Questions

As discussed, the JSA evaluation in Michigan included an implementation study of the MI-GPS approach and an impact study of the effectiveness of MI-GPS relative to AEP/PATH. More specifically, the evaluation sought to answer the following questions.

#### 3.2.1 Implementation Research Questions for the MI-GPS versus AEP/PATH

- What is the institutional and community context in which MI-GPS and AEP/PATH operate?
- What elements are intended to be part of MI-GPS? How do they differ from AEP/PATH?
- What intervention was actually implemented? Does it differ from plans or expectations, and in what ways?

#### 3.2.2 Impact Research Questions for the MI-GPS versus AEP/PATH

- Does the receipt of employment services and staff assistance differ between MI-GPS and AEP/PATH? Specifically, are there differences in the types of services and assistance received and in the delivery mode (group vs. one-on-one) for those services and assistance?
- What is the effect of MI-GPS on grit, self-efficacy, motivation to work, and reduced barriers to work relative to AEP/PATH?
- What is the effect of MI-GPS on employment and earnings relative to AEP/PATH?
- What is the effect of MI-GPS on benefit receipt relative to AEP/PATH? Specifically, what is the effect on FIP receipt and SNAP payments?
- What is the effect of MI-GPS on outcomes such as job quality (e.g., wages, benefits, schedule) relative to AEP/PATH?

As discussed further below, the JSA study used a six month follow-up period to measure most outcomes. However, given uncertainty about the time frame for seeing employment and

earnings outcomes under MI-GPS, the study used a 15-month follow-up period to assess those outcomes.

### 3.3 JSA Evaluation Design and Analysis

The JSA impact study used a random assignment research design to estimate the differential impact between the two programs on FIP applicants' and recipients' employment and other outcomes. The advantage of such a design is that when properly implemented, it ensures that differences in outcomes between the two groups—those with access to MI-GPS and those with access to AEP/PATH—can be reliably interpreted as resulting from programmatic differences, and not from differences in characteristics or external circumstances of the group members.

The study's random assignment methodology estimates the impact of MI-GPS as a whole compared to AEP/PATH as a whole, rather than the impact of either program's specific components. The study compares the outcomes for the group assigned to MI-GPS versus the group assigned to AEP/PATH, regardless of whether individual group members participated in any activities or participated at all.

As discussed in the remainder of this section, an effective evaluation incorporates four factors: (1) rigorous sample intake and random assignment, (2) matched random assignment groups, (3) a strong impact analysis plan, and (4) an integrated implementation analysis plan.

#### 3.3.1 AEP/PATH Intake Process and Random Assignment

The study team worked closely with DHHS and TIA leadership, as well as intake and eligibility staff at the five participating service centers, to design and implement study intake and random assignment procedures. Single- and two-parent FIP applicants who arrived for an orientation were candidates for the JSA evaluation, as were recipients returning to services. Exhibit 3-2 depicts the steps in the study's intake and random assignment process, as detailed below.

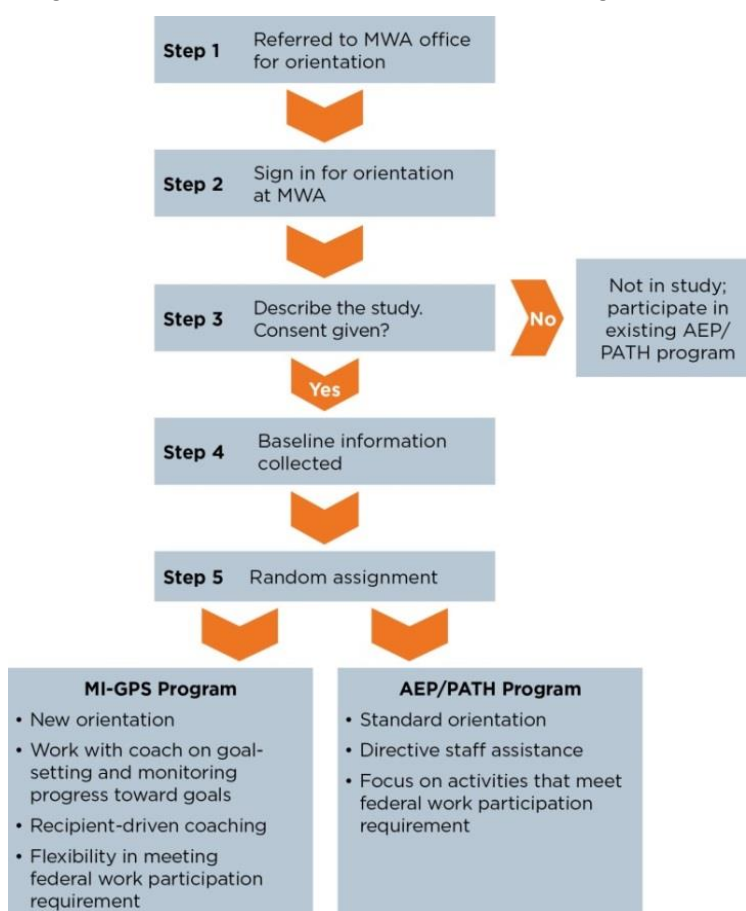
1. **Apply for FIP and referral to program orientation.** As discussed in Chapter 2, the application process starts with DHHS. Applicants deemed eligible for cash assistance and determined mandatory for work are referred to an orientation at their closest MWA service center.
2. **Arrive for orientation.** When applicants sign in for the orientation, MWA staff, in one-on-one conversations, verify each applicant has an active referral from DHHS (within a 15-day window), is not exempt from work requirements, and has not been randomly assigned previously.
3. **Informed consent, Baseline Information Form (BIF), and random assignment.** The MWA staff member explains the JSA evaluation and invites the applicant to participate; those who express interest review and sign an informed consent form. The applicant then fills out the study's BIF, which collects demographic and contact information. Next, staff use the JSA online management information system to randomly assign applicants

to either the MI-GPS group or the AEP/PATH group.<sup>15</sup> The random assignment ratio is 1:1, so that each group includes about half of the applicants who consent to be part of the study.

4. **Service receipt based on assignment to MI-GPS and AEP/PATH.** MWA staff lead each group to the designated orientation, which typically begins quickly after the random assignment. The MI-GPS and AEP/PATH orientations are provided concurrently in separate rooms at the same location. Immediately after the orientation, applicants meet one-on-one with their MI-GPS coach or AEP/PATH CDF, respectively, to begin services.

Between October 2016 and August 2017, MWA staff randomly assigned 2,081 applicants, 1,037 to the MI-GPS group and 1,044 to the AEP/PATH group.

**Exhibit 3-2. Random Assignment Process for the JSA Evaluation in Michigan**



<sup>15</sup> Recipients who do not consent to participate in the evaluation are not included in the study sample and are assigned to the AEP/PATH program.

### 3.3.2 Characteristics of the Study Sample

Exhibits 3-3 through 3-5 show demographic characteristics and prior education, employment, and cash assistance receipt for the entire sample and for each program group separately. As noted above, when properly implemented, random assignment ensures that sample groups will be very similar, differing only by chance; therefore, there should be minimal differences between the groups. The far right column of each table indicates whether these differences reached statistical significance or were more likely due to chance. For characteristics with multiple sub-categories (e.g., marital status), the study team conducts chi-square tests to determine whether the characteristic differs between the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups; this joint test considers all the sub-categories (e.g., married, widowed, divorced, never married) simultaneously rather than testing for differences for each separately.

As expected, the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups are very similar, with only one statistically significant difference. As described below and in Appendix E, we control for these characteristics when estimating impacts. Because the two groups are mostly similar, we discuss the characteristics of the entire (“pooled”) sample.

As shown on Exhibit 3-3, more than 90 percent of the study sample is female. More than 60 percent reported being Black, close to one-third reported being White, and the remaining reported being Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin (4 percent) or Other (3 percent). Sample members were approximately 28 years old, on average.

More than three-quarters of study participants had never married, and less than eight percent were married at the time of enrollment. Close to 60 percent of the sample reported that there was one adult in the household. On average, households had two children. About two-thirds had a child under age six; one-third had a child under age three (not shown).

Exhibit 3-3. Demographic and Household Characteristics of Study Sample at Baseline

Characteristic	Entire Sample	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Significance
<b>Gender (%)</b>				
Female	91.7	92.0	91.4	
Male	8.3	8.0	8.6	
<b>Race (%)<sup>a</sup></b>				
Black or African American	60.3	61.8	58.9	
Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino Origin	3.9	3.4	4.3	
White	32.6	31.7	33.6	
Other (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or Multi-race)	3.2	3.2	3.2	
<b>Average age</b>	27.7	27.6	27.7	
<b>Marital status (%)<sup>a</sup></b>				
Married	7.4	7.5	7.4	
Widowed	0.6	0.6	0.7	
Divorced	8.8	8.0	9.5	
Separated	7.1	7.0	7.2	
Never married	76.1	77.0	75.2	
<b>Adults in household<sup>a</sup></b>				
1 adult	58.6	59.4	57.8	
2 adults	26.3	25.5	27.2	
3 or more adults	13.3	13.1	13.5	
<b>Children in household (%)</b>	90.4	89.2	91.6	*
<b>Number of children in household</b>	1.8	1.8	1.8	
<b>Average age of youngest child</b>	3.5	3.4	3.5	

Source: Baseline Information Form.

Sample: Includes 1,044 AEP/PATH and 1,037 MI-GPS respondents. Sample sizes vary by characteristic due to item non-response.

<sup>a</sup> Indicates equivalence is tested jointly using a chi-square test; results appear only for joint test.

Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

Statistical significance levels for joint tests are indicated with † signs, as follows: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

As Exhibit 3-4 below shows, the study sample had low education levels. Less than 10 percent had some high school but did not finish, and about one-third had a high school diploma (24 percent) or GED (nine percent) but no additional education; fewer than one-third (about 30 percent) had attended some college. Approximately one-quarter (26 percent) had received a postsecondary vocational or technical certificate. Sample members received mostly B's (46 percent) or C's (34 percent) in high school.



**Exhibit 3-4. Educational Background of Study Sample at Baseline**

Characteristic	Entire Sample	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Significance
<b>Attainment (%)<sup>a</sup></b>				††
Some high school	7.1	8.5	5.8	
GED or alternative credential	9.7	8.5	11.0	
High school diploma	26.5	27.8	25.1	
Some college credit, but less than 1 year	14.0	13.1	14.9	
1 or more years of college credit, but no degree	15.6	15.3	15.8	
Associate's degree	3.8	4.3	3.2	
Bachelor's degree or higher	2.6	2.1	3.2	
<b>Received postsecondary vocational or technical certificate</b>	26.2	26.5	25.9	
<b>High school grades (%)<sup>a</sup></b>				
Mostly received A's	17.1	15.4	18.8	
Usually received B's	46.2	47.6	44.9	
Usually received C's	33.5	34.0	32.9	
Usually received D's	2.9	2.6	3.2	
Usually received F's	0.3	0.4	0.2	

Source: Baseline Information Form.

Sample: Includes 1,044 AEP/PATH and 1,037 MI-GPS respondents. Sample sizes vary by characteristic due to item non-response.

<sup>a</sup> Indicates equivalence is tested jointly using a chi-square test; results appear only for joint test.

Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

Statistical significance levels for joint tests are indicated with † signs, as follows: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

As shown on Exhibit 3-5, the study sample had low employment rates and earnings. This is not surprising given they were applying for cash assistance. About 13 percent reported they were working at the time they enrolled in the study, although over half had worked in the quarter prior to random assignment, based on administrative data and three-quarters had worked in the year prior. Approximately 63 percent reported that they had stable employment (full-time employment with a single employer for six months) at some point prior to random assignment.

Earnings in the period prior to study enrollment were very low, averaging \$1,449, which includes those who had \$0 earnings. Cumulative earnings over the four quarters prior to study enrollment averaged \$7,071, or \$9,177 among those who worked (not shown) during that time period. These earnings levels put the typical FIP applicant well below the federal poverty level, which in 2016 was \$16,020 for a two-person household and increases based on family size.

More than half (55 percent) of the sample reported they never received FIP. Close to one-quarter (22 percent) received FIP for one year or less, and 16 percent did so for two to five years. Few (six percent) reported they received assistance for five years or more.

**Exhibit 3-5. Employment, Earnings, and Public Benefit Receipt of Study Sample at Baseline**

Characteristic	Entire Sample	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Significance
<b>Self-reported employment and earnings<sup>a</sup></b>				
Working at time of application (%)	12.7	12.6	12.8	
Not working at application, worked in past 12 months (%)	49.1	49.8	48.3	
Not working at application, no work in past 12 months (%)	38.2	37.6	38.9	
<b>Self-reported stability of employment</b>				
Ever worked full-time for 6 months for one employer (%)	63.2	64.3	62.2	
<b>Self-reported TANF receipt prior to application<sup>a</sup> (%)</b>				
Never received TANF	54.7	53.3	56.2	
Received TANF for less than 1 year	22.3	24.5	20.0	
Received TANF for 2 to 3 years	16.5	15.9	17.0	
Received TANF for 5 to 10 years	4.4	4.3	4.5	
Received TANF for 10 years or more	2.1	2.0	2.3	
<b>Employment and earnings<sup>b</sup></b>				
Employment in quarter prior to random assignment (%)	54.0	52.8	55.1	
Employment in 4 quarters prior to random assignment (%)	77.0	76.8	77.2	
Earnings in quarter prior to random assignment (\$)	1,449	1,418	1,479	
Earnings in 4 quarters prior to random assignment (\$)	7,071	6,954	7,186	

Source: Baseline Information Form and the National Directory of New Hires.

Sample: Includes 1,044 AEP/PATH and 1,037 MI-GPS respondents. Sample sizes vary by characteristic due to item non-response.

<sup>a</sup> Indicates equivalence is tested jointly using a chi-square test; results appear only for joint test.

<sup>b</sup> Measures of average earnings include \$0 for individuals who were not working.

Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

Statistical significance levels for joint tests are indicated with † signs, as follows: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

### 3.3.3 Analysis Plan for the Impact Study

An essential JSA evaluation principle is to organize and limit the number of statistical tests conducted. The Michigan impact study seeks to understand the differential effects of MI-GPS and AEP/PATH on many different outcomes, which tends to increase the chance of detecting impacts where none exist. If the evaluation were to test for impacts on 20 outcomes, for example, one or two impacts (five percent) would likely be statistically significant at conventional levels purely by chance, even if there were no real effect on any outcome.

This is known as the “problem of multiple comparisons.” The standard way of addressing the problem is to stipulate in advance a very small number of *confirmatory* hypothesis tests by which to judge an intervention’s success. Significant findings for these confirmatory tests signal one of the interventions as superior to the other. All the remaining hypothesis test results are considered *exploratory* of additional possible impacts, but they cannot be as conclusive as the confirmatory test(s) regarding the overall success of one of the interventions over the other.

#### Confirmatory Test

For the JSA evaluation, the study team confined confirmatory analysis to a single outcome and corresponding impact test. Because there is only one confirmatory outcome, no correction for multiple comparisons is required for this outcome (as would be required if we were testing two or more confirmatory outcomes). This strategy of selecting one confirmatory outcome

maximizes the chance of deriving a conclusive result on the superiority of one of the job search assistance approaches over the other.<sup>16,17</sup>

In Michigan, as with the other JSA impact study sites, the impact analysis uses ***employment in the second quarter after random assignment*** as the confirmatory outcome to be tested, reflecting the goal of helping cash assistance recipients find employment and exit the program.

As discussed in Chapter 1, much of the earlier research has shown that job search assistance activities provided as part of a cash assistance program are likely to have a modest impact and are more likely in the short term to affect employment rates than they are on outcomes such as earnings or public benefit receipt. However, as discussed in Section 3.1, unlike other job search assistance programs, the time period needed to observe the effects of MI-GPS was not clear. Given the limited information available on the expected time horizon, for the Michigan study, we again measure employment two quarters after random assignment, but we also consider a longer follow-up period of up to five quarters (15 months) after random assignment, as an exploratory outcome (discussed next).

### Exploratory Tests

The JSA analyses also estimate impacts for many outcomes other than short-term employment, including the content and type of assistance received; longer-term employment, earnings, and public benefit receipt; and job characteristics. The outcome measures are described in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

There are a large number of exploratory hypotheses, which introduces the multiple comparisons problem again. We follow the standard approach and report exploratory findings without multiple comparisons corrections. However, we address the problem in part by focusing on patterns of findings across related outcomes, rather than reporting on every significant finding.

We use several different approaches to identifying and describing patterns of impacts on related outcomes to draw conclusions about the differential impact of MI-GPS versus AEP/PATH. For outcomes measured in dollars (e.g., earnings), we use aggregate measures (e.g., cumulative earnings over the follow-up period). For related outcomes that cannot be easily combined (e.g., measures of assistance with various job search skills), we conduct a statistical test across all related outcomes. The statistical test is an *f*-test of the null hypothesis that all

<sup>16</sup> Schochet (2008) provides an explanation of the importance of a multiple comparison adjustment when two or more confirmatory tests are run and the reduction that creates in the ability of an analysis to prove that *any* confirmatory effect has occurred.

<sup>17</sup> No multiple comparison adjustments are needed across JSA evaluation sites, as the New York City, Sacramento County, and Michigan randomized tests do not constitute multiple attempts to prove that any *one* JSA approach somewhere among the three settings generates more favorable outcomes for cash assistance applicants/recipients than does another approach. Instead, the three sites offer different JSA programs and services in each of their random assignment arms (two arms in each site); they differ as well in their service populations (Family Assistance and childless Safety Net applicants in New York City, TANF recipients in Sacramento County, and TANF applicants and recipients in Michigan).

impacts are zero. Rejecting this hypothesis implies that there is a significant difference between the two groups on one or more of the outcomes tested.

### Estimation Method

The JSA evaluation estimates impact as the difference in average outcomes between study participants randomly assigned to receive MI-GPS and those assigned to receive AEP/PATH. The random assignment research design implies that a simple difference in mean outcomes provides an unbiased estimate of the impact of the enhancement. To improve precision, however, we estimate impacts using a regression model that adjusts for differences in baseline characteristics between the two groups.

We do this because adjustment increases the statistical precision of impact estimates—and thus heightens the chance of correctly detecting non-zero differential impacts as statistically significant. The adjustment does this by controlling for chance differences in baseline characteristics between the two samples. By using regression adjustment, the impact study is able to detect smaller true impacts with a given probability. Regression adjustment also helps to reduce bias that is due to follow-up survey nonresponse for outcome measures taken from that source (see Appendix E).

We use the following equation to estimate the differential impact of AEP/PATH versus MI-GPS:

$$y_i = \alpha + \delta G_i + Z_i' \gamma + X_i' \beta + \varepsilon_i$$

where

$y_i$  is the outcome of interest (e.g., employment, earnings, public benefit receipt);

$\alpha$  is the intercept, which can be interpreted as the regression-adjusted AEP/PATH mean;

$\delta$  is the incremental effect of AEP/PATH relative to MI-GPS assignment on the outcome;

$G_i$  is the random assignment group indicator (1 for those individuals assigned to MI-GPS; 0 for those assigned to AEP/PATH);

$Z_i$  is a vector of pre-intervention measures of key outcomes;<sup>18</sup>

$\gamma$  is a vector of coefficients capturing the relationship between pre-intervention measures of key outcomes and the (post-intervention) outcome;

$X_i$  is a vector of baseline characteristics centered around means;<sup>19</sup>

$\beta$  is a vector of coefficients capturing the relationship between baseline characteristics and the outcome;

<sup>18</sup> All analyses include self-reported measures of pre-intervention receipt of FIP. Pre-intervention measures of employment and earnings are included in analyses of employment and earnings outcomes. See Appendix E for additional details.

<sup>19</sup> See Appendix A for a complete list of the baseline measures included in the model.

$\varepsilon_i$  is the residual error term; and

$i$  is a subscript indexing individuals.

We use ordinary least squares to estimate these parameters, testing whether the  $\delta$  coefficient is significantly different from zero to determine whether outcomes differ between the two JSA models.<sup>20</sup>

Where possible, we use outcome measures from administrative data over outcome measures from survey data. We do so because survey data have substantial survey nonresponse, whereas administrative data do not. To some extent, we address nonresponse by weighting, but there are challenges to that, as well.

Section 3.4 provides a more detailed description of our various data sources. Appendix D provides a technical discussion of our approaches to missing data and survey nonresponse.

### 3.3.4 Analysis Plan for the Implementation Study

The implementation study documents the operation of MI-GPS and AEP/PATH in the five MWA offices. It had two goals: to provide context for interpreting impact findings; and to assess whether MI-GPS operated as planned and where it differed from AEP/PATH.

As this is a differential impact study comparing the outcomes of two different programs, in order to interpret the employment and public assistance outcomes of each program, the implementation study measures key aspects of design and implementation for the same key dimensions. Driven by the theory of change (Exhibit 3-1), the implementation study considers the orientation services, assessment of applicant/recipient needs, relationship with program staff (e.g. collaborative, recipient vs. staff driven), goal-setting activities and tool use, approaches to monitoring progress on goals, and focus on the WPR.

The implementation study uses data from interviews with MI-GPS and AEP/PATH staff, observations of orientations and meetings with staff, and a web-based staff survey. To document and compare the operation of the two programs, the study relies on qualitative information from the interviews and observations and on quantitative analyses from the staff document the dimensions.

The implementation study used site visits (interviews with MI-GPS and AEP/PATH staff, observations of orientations and coaching and case management sessions) and a web-based staff survey.

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<sup>20</sup> For binary outcome measures, such as employment in a given quarter (Y/N), this model is a linear probability model. A key advantage of the linear probability model is that impact estimates are interpretable. For employment, the impact estimate is the expected difference in the employment rate between the two groups.

## 3.4 Data Sources

This section describes data sources (Section 3.4.1) and corresponding sample sizes (Section 3.4.2).

### 3.4.1 Data Sources

The JSA evaluation's implementation and impact studies use a variety of data sources.

#### Site Visits

For the implementation study, the study team conducted site visits to five participating MWA service centers in May 2017; about seven months after random assignment began. The visits aimed to document the implementation of MI-GPS, including staff training, the redesign of the program orientation, new assessment and goal-setting process, ongoing monitoring and review of goals, types of employment services provided, successes and challenges, and changes made over time.

At each MWA service center, we interviewed office managers, supervisors, and staff, including MI-GPS coaches and AEP/PATH CDFs. We observed each type of orientation as well as coaching and CDF one-on-one meetings with applicants or recipients. We also interviewed the DHHS and TIA administrators who were involved in designing and overseeing MI-GPS and managing AEP/PATH.

In addition to the site visits, we attended the MI-GPS training sessions in April, June, and August 2016.

#### Job Search Assistance Staff Survey

The study team surveyed staff from the MWA service centers participating in the JSA evaluation, including MI-GPS coaches and AEP/PATH CDFs, and staff who worked as job developers or workshop instructors. The online survey had an overall response rate of 93 percent (39 of 42 staff), including 15 coaches and 14 CDFs. The survey asked respondents about the types of assistance provided, staff services and activities, and staff perceptions of the services.

#### Baseline Information Forms (BIFs)

As part of the intake process, MWA service center staff collected BIFs from all study-eligible cash assistance applicants just prior to their being randomly assigned. The BIF includes questions about demographic characteristics, prior education, and employment history. As with any survey, the BIF responses are subject to some degree of missing data (see Appendix D) as well as potential self-reporting error.

#### Follow-Up Survey

The study team sought to survey all JSA study participants by telephone starting at six months after their random assignment date. In Michigan, the interview occurred on average about

seven months after random assignment.<sup>21</sup> The survey measured levels and types of job search assistance received, use of job search tools, employment, job characteristics (including hourly wage, work-related benefits, and regularity of hours), and non-economic outcomes (including motivation to search for a job and factors affecting ability to work). A total of 1,325 study sample members (675 MI-GPS, 650 AEP/PATH) responded to the survey, for an overall response rate of 64 percent (rates are similar for both groups).

### **National Directory of New Hires (NDNH)**

The evaluation's primary source of data for estimating impacts on sample members' employment and earnings is wage records that employers report quarterly to state Unemployment Insurance agencies. We access these through the NDNH database maintained by the Office of Child Support Enforcement at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Most but not all types of employment are included in these data. In particular, independent contractor, cash-based, and self-employment jobs are omitted.

The study collected quarterly employment and earnings data from NDNH for sample members for the seven quarters prior to their random assignment, which we use to describe recipients' past work history and as covariates in the impact analyses of earnings and employment outcomes. We also collected at least four quarters of their employment and earnings data after random assignment.

Of 2,081 total study participants, 1,917 (954 from MI-GPS and 963 from AEP/PATH) had valid Social Security numbers. We submitted those, plus their names and dates of birth, to the NDNH for matching. The NDNH was unable to match study records to UI records for nine study participants (four in MI-GPS and five in AEP/PATH), so earnings and employment data are missing for them. (These match errors are most likely due to data entry errors made at study intake.) Thus, NDNH data are available for 1,908 individuals (950 from MI-GPS and 958 from AEP/PATH).

### **DHHS Administrative Data**

The evaluation used administrative data from the state to measure FIP and SNAP monthly benefit receipt amounts. We collected data from the month of a study participant's random assignment and enrollment in the study enrollment to at least 10 months following the date of random assignment and study enrollment, so as to cover the first three full calendar quarters after the quarter of random assignment. Of the 2,081 study participants randomly assigned, DHHS administrative data on public benefit receipt were not available for 28 of them.

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<sup>21</sup> The average follow-up period is six months and 28 days across all sample members—the difference in average time to follow-up between the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups is just under three days. Seventy-five (75) percent of respondents completed their surveys between six months and four days and seven months and 15 days after randomization.



## Program Documents

The study team obtained and reviewed program documents, including reports and program materials such as applications and forms, job search materials, and class syllabi and PowerPoint presentations.

### 3.4.2 Sample Sizes across Data Sources

Exhibit 3.6 shows the total number of study participants randomly assigned and the sample sizes for each data source used for the impact study.

**Exhibit 3-6. JSA Evaluation Impact Study Sample Sizes**

Sample	Total	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH
Total randomly assigned.	2,081	1,037	1,044
Follow-up survey sample	1,325	675	650
NDNH sample	1,908	950	958
DHHS administrative data sample	2,053	1,020	1,033

## 4. Implementation of AEP/PATH and MI-GPS

This chapter describes the implementation of AEP/PATH and MI-GPS. It begins with an overview of the administrative structure and staffing for the two programs. It then discusses the design of AEP/PATH services and MI-GPS programs including key differences between the two. The chapter concludes with findings from the implementation study on how MI-GPS, a new approach, operated during the study period and contrasted to the AEP/PATH program. This chapter draws on data collected during site visits by the study team, regular communication between the team and program staff during the study period, and an online survey of staff in each of the offices participating in the study.<sup>22</sup>

### 4.1 Administrative Structure and Staffing

As noted in Chapter 2, the AEP/PATH and MI-GPS programs were both administered and operated by a total of five MWA offices in Wayne and Genesee Counties. Each of the offices operated both programs concurrently. Each office had a similar staffing structure: a manager overseeing operations, supervisors providing immediate oversight and ongoing assistance to staff, coaches and CDFs, and job readiness workshop instructors and job developers. The MWAs in the study establish performance-based contracts with local service providers to operate the AEP/PATH program (and as part of this contract, the MI-GPS program) that included performance targets for meeting the WPR as well as other measures.

The primary difference between the programs is the nature of one-on-one meetings: applicants and recipients assigned to AEP/PATH work with CDFs whereas those assigned to MI-GPS work with coaches. Exhibit 4-1 shows the number of coaches and CDFs in each office that participated in the study.

**Exhibit 4-1. Number of Coaches and CDFs in JSA Evaluation, by Office**

County/Office Location	Number of Staff	
	MI-GPS Coaches	AEP/PATH CDFs
<b>Wayne County</b>		
Southgate	2	2
Highland Park	2	1
Livonia	2	2
Wayne	1	1
<b>Genesee County</b>		
Flint	8	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>

<sup>22</sup> The JSA staff survey was fielded to coaches for the MI-GPS program, CDFs for the AEP/PATH program, and workshop instructors, who worked with individuals in both programs. Of the 39 staff who completed the survey, 15 were MI-GPS coaches, 14 were AEP/PATH CDFs (one CDF did not complete the survey), and the remainder were workshop instructors. The analysis presented in this chapter excludes the workshop instructors who provided services to both programs because their responses do not provide information about the difference between the programs.

Overall, a total of 15 coaches and 15 CDFs delivered the program services across all the locations. The Wayne County offices were smaller and had at most two coaches and two CDFs; whereas the Genesee County office had eight coaches and nine CDFs. CDFs and coaches generally each had an average caseload of 25.

Each office also had at least one job developer and one instructor available to recipients in both programs. Job developers were responsible for identifying local subsidized employment and community service opportunities, organizing job fairs at the MWA office, meeting one-on-one with recipients to review resumes and practice interviewing skills, and linking recipients to potential employment opportunities. The instructor role varied by office, but consistently included running group workshops and individual meetings with recipients (and applicants beginning job search) to develop and refine resumes and discuss job search strategies (see Section 4.2.3 for more information on the types of workshops offered). The instructors worked with the job developers to help applicants and recipients with job search activities and to identify job opportunities. They also delivered the AEP/PATH orientation.

Managers and supervisors periodically monitored case notes to ensure CDFs and coaches recorded sufficient detail on their interactions with applicants and recipients and used the appropriate forms. During the study period, supervisors typically held monthly meetings with CDFs separate from coaches, but also met with them individually as needed.

## **4.2 Design and Operation of AEP/PATH and MI-GPS Programs**

As outlined in Chapter 3, applicants deemed eligible for FIP and work mandatory were randomly assigned either to AEP/PATH or to MI-GPS. This section describes the AEP/PATH and MI-GPS program design and content, including key differences between them. Exhibit 4-2 shows the key elements of each program.

### **4.2.1 The AEP/PATH Program**

The AEP/PATH program began operation in 2007 and includes three key steps: (1) orientation, (2) AEP, and (3) PATH. Each is described in this section.

#### **Orientation**

FIP applicants must attend an orientation at the MWA office prior to receipt of employment services or cash assistance. The content, taught by workshop instructors, is standardized across all MWAs in the state and includes two state-mandated videos that describe AEP and PATH requirements, expectations of applicants and recipients, and available services. GST included another video of success stories that includes testimonials from recipients who secured employment and transitioned off FIP.

Following the videos, instructors may further explain the difference between AEP and PATH, the work participation requirements, and the available supportive services and address any questions. Applicants then fill out required paperwork, including the state's Individual Service Strategy (ISS) form that includes questions on education and employment history, employment goals, and barriers affecting employability. They then meet with their assigned CDF. In Wayne

County, all applicants are also administered the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), an assessment used to determine individual aptitude and skill levels.

#### Exhibit 4-2. Comparison of Key Elements of MI-GPS and AEP/PATH

Element	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH
<b>Orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets collaborative tone about PATH and services available</li> <li>• Focuses on program philosophy, program flow, mutual expectations, and coaching overview</li> <li>• Delivered by coaches; interactive</li> <li>• Completion of required paperwork (same as AEP/PATH), with the addition of a goals worksheet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview presentation and two state-mandated introductory videos</li> <li>• Focuses on available services, requirements, and expectations</li> <li>• Delivered by instructors; not interactive</li> <li>• Completion of required paperwork, including TABE test (in Wayne County only)</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Assistance Received during AEP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly meetings with coach</li> <li>• Coach uses goal-oriented coaching techniques and tools, including comprehensive assessment and tools to break goals into smaller tasks and monitor progress</li> <li>• Must complete three consecutive weeks of assignments to start FIP benefits and transition to PATH</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly meetings with CDF</li> <li>• CDF assigns weekly activities, with focus on addressing employment-related barriers</li> <li>• State-mandated forms; no standard set of tools to monitor progress</li> <li>• Must complete three consecutive weeks of assignments to start FIP benefits and transition to PATH</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Assistance Received during PATH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent (typically weekly) meetings with coach</li> <li>• Continued use of MI-GPS tools; coach and recipient regularly assess progress and modify goals</li> <li>• No assignment of activities; recipients can focus on activities that do not meet work participation requirements</li> <li>• Continued focus on addressing barriers and achieving goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent (typically weekly) meetings with CDF</li> <li>• CDF assigns work activities; emphasis on activities that meet core work participation requirements</li> <li>• Less emphasis on addressing barriers to employment</li> </ul>
<b>Consequences for noncompliance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as AEP/PATH, but coach may give recipients an additional verbal warning to encourage compliance, before issuing a letter of noncompliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CDF attempts outreach (call/email) to reengage</li> <li>• Reengagement meeting to determine if good cause exists</li> <li>• If no good cause for noncompliance, full family sanction is issued; duration varies by sanction number, with third sanction permanent</li> </ul>
<b>Employment services</b>	One-on-one meetings with job developers for assistance with job search (resumes, job search strategies, or interview skills); job developers provide labor market information and referrals to employers and job openings. Group job readiness workshops focused on developing resumes, interviewing, and completing job applications. Subsidized employment, training, and work experience available to those who do not find work after 30 days.	
<b>Retention services</b>	Up to \$2,000 vehicle purchase supportive service to employed participants after 30 days of employment; eligible for continued supportive services for up to 180 days after case closed due to income (e.g., transportation assistance, clothing or training stipend).	

Sources: Site visits and regular communication between study team and MWA program administrators during the study period.

## AEP

During the 21-day AEP, applicants are required to meet with their CDF weekly. At the first meeting, the CDF reviews program requirements and the ISS form with the applicant and develops the first AEP Weekly Task Plan, a mandatory state form that documents assignments to complete prior to the next meeting. AEP assignments typically focus on addressing barriers to work (e.g., identifying reliable child care or transportation). However, depending on the applicant, assignments could include job readiness activities (e.g., resume development, attending workshops). The first AEP Weekly Task Plan often includes state-mandated activities; this could include completing required assessments, such as the FAST or WorkKeys® (in Genesee County).

The time applicants spend in their weekly AEP assignments is designed to simulate the federally defined number of hours that will be required in PATH; however, because they are not (yet) receiving cash benefits, FIP applicants are not counted in the WPR calculation.

During the second and third AEP meetings, the CDF reviews the status of the previous week's activities and assigns new ones. If the applicant does not complete an assignment, it is added to the plan for the following week. Applicants who fail to attend the initial CDF meeting within five weeks of orientation or who miss one of the weekly AEP meetings have to reapply for FIP in order to be considered for cash assistance.

## PATH

Applicants who comply with AEP requirements are automatically approved for cash assistance at the conclusion of the AEP. As recipients, they continue to meet with their CDF as part of the PATH program. During these one-on-one meetings, the CDF assigns weekly participation activities tailored to the recipient, but that meet federal work participation requirements. Recipients who are working or in school have to submit weekly activity logs to their CDF during the check-in meetings. Those who are not working or in school typically participate in job search activities for up to a month, including attending job readiness workshops and working one-on-one with their CDF on identifying job leads or other job search activities.

Job developers are available to help identify job openings, connect recipients with these openings, and provide assistance on job readiness topics such as resume development and interviewing.<sup>23</sup> In some offices, supervisors also monitor whether each CDF's caseload is meeting the participation level in work activities required by the WPR.

If a recipient does not meet the PATH program requirements (e.g., fails to participate in required activities, submit necessary paperwork, or meet with the CDF), the CDF first tries to call or email the recipient to reiterate program requirements. If the recipient does not reengage, the CDF sends a noncompliance letter that starts the clock on a 120-day

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<sup>23</sup> In the Wayne County office, PATH and other workforce programs shared job developers, but there was typically at least one job developer dedicated to working with the PATH participants.

noncompliance period. The letter requires the recipient to attend a reengagement meeting to develop a plan to reengage in PATH services; the CDF also attempts contact to encourage compliance during this time.

At the end of the 120-period, a recipient who fails to participate as required must attend an additional meeting that includes DHHS staff for possible sanction. Recipients deemed noncompliant and lacking good cause are sanctioned by DHHS. The sanction results in a loss of the full benefit: the first sanction lasts three months, the second six months, and the third results in lifetime case closure.

#### 4.2.2 The MI-GPS Program

DHHS and TIA, in partnership with the study team, developed the MI-GPS program to include four elements: (1) a redesigned orientation designed to establish a collaborative tone; (2) goal-oriented coaching that is recipient-centered and focuses on developing individualized short- and long-range employment goals; (3) goal-oriented tools coaches can use to help applicants/recipient set goals and measure progress; and (4) flexibility in meeting the federal work participation requirement. Each is described in this section.

##### Redesigned Orientation

The new MI-GPS orientation, conducted by coaches rather than workshop instructors, aims to set a positive tone for the coaching relationship and the MI-GPS services. The orientation focuses on how MI-GPS can help FIP applicants attain goals, including employment, and leave cash assistance. The orientation includes the information about work participation requirements and FIP sanctions, but the topics were presented in terms of mutual expectations—coaches have roles and responsibilities as do applicants and recipients. The hour-long orientation combined presentation and discussion.

The revised orientation included the following topics (see Appendix A for PowerPoint slides):

- **Opening and overview.** Coaches welcome the attendees and describe the purpose of the orientation. Coaches explain that for those who have participated in PATH before, the coaching relationship will feel different.
- **Personal focus and introductions.** Coaches ask attendees to write down where they are in their life currently and where they want to be in the next three to six months. Coaches invite applicants to share brief, personal introductions. In the GST service center, coaches add an icebreaker during this section to encourage interaction.
- **Philosophy and vision.** Coaches explain the MI-GPS program philosophy, highlighting the focus on goal setting and achievement. Attendees begin the goal-setting process by completing the “Your Journey” handout, on which they record where they want to be in three to six months, what they think they need to achieve that goal, and one of the first goals they might set on their path to goal achievement.
- **Program flow.** Coaches describe the coaching process and how they work collaboratively with applicants/recipients. They describe the 21-day AEP and requirements after transitioning to FIP.

- **Mutual expectations.** Using handouts, coaches explain what applicants, then as recipients transitioned to FIP, can expect of coaches and other staff and what is expected of them. Coaches also describe the consequences of noncompliance.
- **First coaching session.** The coaches describe what to expect during the first coaching session.
- **Closing and “meet & greet.”** Finally, coaches respond to any questions and note that the next step will be a one-on-one meeting with the attendee’s assigned coach. Attendees then complete state-required paperwork, including the “Customer Background” section of the Individual Service Strategy “Bridge” (ISS-B) form (described further below).

### Goal-Oriented Coaching

The MI-GPS coaching process was built on the goal-oriented coaching research described in Chapter 1. The approach is designed to refocus applicant/recipient and staff interactions from one that is directive to one that is goal driven, customer centered, and strength based (see text box). A primary role of the coach is to teach recipients goal-setting and attainment skills so when they leave FIP, they can continue to set and achieve goals by breaking them into manageable steps.

Coaches were trained to (1) **learn** about the applicant or recipient’s strengths and weaknesses through assessment; (2) set one or more individualized **goals**, with a focus on incremental goals to achieve an overall objective; (3) create an action **plan** to help the applicant or recipient achieve the goal(s); (4) support the applicant or recipient to **do** individual tasks; and (5) **review** together the progress toward goal achievement and develop new goals and tasks based on what was learned from this review.

The coach is expected to closely monitor progress, and to work with applicants and recipients who are not making progress, reviewing and revising the goals and tasks as necessary. If they did not attend scheduled meetings, the coach attempts to contact and reengage them. Coaches could give recipients an additional verbal warning before issuing a letter of noncompliance, but otherwise noncompliance and sanction procedures were the same as in the AEP/PATH program (as described in Section 4.2.1).

#### Key Elements of Goal-Oriented Coaching

- **Goal Driven.** Coaches help applicants and recipients reflect on their own lessons, strengths, values, and insights so that they can select and work toward goals and tasks that are a good fit. The concept of goodness of fit between an individual’s goals and his/her abilities, interests, and needs is hypothesized to be a critical element in improving the likelihood of goal achievement.
- **Recipient-Centered.** Applicants and recipients drive the goal-setting process. Coaches support them by listening to their needs, beliefs, and motivations; setting aside personal opinions and judgments; and building rapport by showing interest, reading body language, and asking questions rather than telling the individual what to do or making suggestions.
- **Strengths Based.** Rather than focusing on skill deficiencies or problems, coaches focus on the recipients’ strengths and resiliencies and what is possible for them to achieve.



In order to keep the process recipient-centered and not directive, coaches were trained to employ a number of specific strategies as outlined on Exhibit 4-3 and included in the MI-GPS training materials. These recipient-centered strategies include specific language and phrases for coaches to use, such as “Can I share an idea with you?” “You have accomplished your goal and showed great persistence,” and “What is the single most important thing to focus on today?”

**Exhibit 4-3. Recipient-Centered Coaching Strategies**

Strategy	Explanation
<b>Powerful Questions</b>	Uses open-ended, short, simple questions; start with what, where, who, when (not why). Example: “What is the single most important thing to focus on today?”
<b>Asking Permission</b>	Ensures the recipient remains in the “driver’s seat” by asking to provide guidance. Example: “Can I share an idea with you?”
<b>Reflective Listening</b>	Reflects the spirit or feeling of what the recipient is saying. Increases clarity and helps ensure recipient feels heard. Example: “That felt really overwhelming.”
<b>Holding the Focus</b>	Keeps the conversation focused on goals and steps. Example: “Let’s focus on [one or two things the recipient wants to accomplish] during this session.”
<b>Bottom Lining</b>	When recipient tells a long story, returns focus to main points. Example: “I will bottom line you from time to time if you are telling a long story, not because I don’t care, but because it isn’t a good use of coaching time for me to spend the whole time listening to a story, right?”
<b>Clearing</b>	Provides an opportunity for recipient to vent prior to starting a coaching conversation; should be time-limited (3 minutes or so). Example: [When the recipient pauses] “Anything else? Ready to start coaching?”
<b>Checking In</b>	Ensures conversation is going in the right direction. Example: “Is this good for you? Are we missing anything?”
<b>Celebration</b>	Calls out achievements and the strengths used (as noted on a form to track accomplishments and what the recipient did to make them happen). Example: “You have accomplished your goal and shown great persistence!”
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	Points out qualities the recipient visibly demonstrates or values they are honoring. Enables recipients to connect with their values and strengths. Example: “I appreciate how honest you are with yourself. That is a real strength.”

Source: The Prosperity Agenda Career & Life Coaching Toolkit for MI-GPS, Core Coaching Tools (August 2016)

### Goal-Oriented Coaching Tools

MI-GPS includes several tools to help coaches change the approach they use for interacting with applicants and recipients. Exhibit 4-4 lists the MI-GPS tools described below (see Appendix B for copies of the MI-GPS tools).

**GPS Coaching Socialization Guide.** MI-GPS designers intended this guide to help coaches structure the initial coaching session. It provides talking points to guide the coach through (1) welcoming the applicant/recipient and building rapport, (2) describing the program requirements, (3) providing an overview of the coaching model, and (4) introducing the other coaching tools.

**Individual Service Strategy Bridge.** The ISS-B has three elements:

- **Applicant background** that expands on the standard ISS form. During the first meeting, coaches review the background information, including personal characteristics, education history, and employment history.
- **My Bridge of Strength.**<sup>24</sup> Coaches use this tool to help applicants identify barriers and strengths across several domains (see text box). Under each domain, applicants identify which of four statements best describes their level of security or need. For example, the Housing domain statements range from “I have stable and safe unsubsidized housing” to “I have no housing and am currently homeless.” The coach and applicant initially use the information to document needs and priorities during the AEP and develop aligned goals and action steps. Coaches are also expected to revisit the My Bridge of Strength in subsequent meetings with recipients to highlight their progress and/or to reassess needs and priorities.
- **GPS.** Coaches use this tool, generally in the second meeting, to help applicants draw a roadmap to their identified long-term goal. Between the starting point (at the bottom of the page), and their long-term goal (at the top of the page), the coach and applicant list up to three incremental (progress) goals. Progress goals are shorter term in nature and expected to be accomplished in three to six months. Applicants can record day-to-day tasks needed to attain each progress goal and the time period for task completion. Coaches continue to use this form with recipients to adjust long-term and progress goals as needed.

#### My Bridge of Strength Domains

- Housing
- Child Care
- Transportation
- Health
- Life Skills (Wayne County only)
- Safety
- Education
- Financial (Wayne County only)
- Workplace Skills
- Job Search Readiness
- Legal
- Career Pathway (Genesee County only)
- Water Crisis Issues (Genesee County only)

**Revised AEP Weekly Task Plan.** Coaches use the Revised AEP Weekly Task Plan (the required state form that was revised for the MI-GPS program) to record applicant-identified goals and tasks to be completed prior to the next week’s meeting.

**My Task-Plan-Do-Review.** Applicants and recipients can use this form to record a plan for accomplishing their weekly tasks. Starting with a small task identified to achieve the first progress goal on the My GPS form, the applicant/recipient records the steps and time needed to accomplish the task. Applicants and recipients can record anticipated barriers that may impede task completion and strategies to address them. Coaches and applicants/recipients also use the form to review and record progress toward tasks, and in instances where tasks are not completed, noting what could be done differently.

<sup>24</sup> In Genesee County, the Bridge of Strength was called Bridge of Stability.

**GPS Coaching Conversation Guide.** Coaches can use this guide to outline ongoing meetings. The guide includes talking points coaches could use to (1) learn about applicant/recipient progress toward goals (which could be recorded on the “Review” section of the My Task-Plan-Do-Review form); (2) set new long-term or short-term goals; (3) ensure that the goal was a good fit; (4) work with the applicant/recipient to develop action steps for the week to accomplish the short-term goal; and (5) check the next steps, reflect on any learning, and schedule the next session date and time.

Exhibit 4-4 shows how coaches were trained to use the MI-GPS forms at various points in their work with FIP applicants and recipients. During the initial sessions, coaches use the Bridge of Strength and the Coaching Socialization Guide to establish a relationship and to determine individual needs that then serve as the basis to set goals. Later, they use the My GPS tool to help set both short- and long-term goals. Coaches use the Revised AEP Weekly Task Plan during the AEP only, and then My Task Plan-Do-Review on a regular basis to monitor progress on specific goals. The Coaching Conversation Guide included tips on structuring conversations at different points in the program.

**Exhibit 4-4. Goal-Oriented Coaching Objectives and Supporting Tools**

	Objectives	Tools
<b>Learn</b>	Applicants and recipients are introduced to MI-GPS Coaches learn about the applicants/recipients Applicants/recipients learn about themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicant Background</li> <li>• My Bridge of Strength</li> <li>• Coaching Socialization Guide</li> </ul>
<b>Goal</b>	Identify a goal with a good fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My Bridge of Strength</li> <li>• My GPS</li> <li>• GPS Coaching Conversation Guide</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>	Develop an action plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My Task-Plan-Do-Review</li> <li>• Coaching Conversation Guide</li> <li>• Revised AEP Weekly Task Plan (during AEP only)</li> </ul>
<b>Do</b>	Take action and address what barriers might get in the way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My Task-Plan-Do-Review</li> <li>• GPS Coaching Conversation Guide</li> <li>• Revised AEP Weekly Task Plan (during AEP only)</li> </ul>
<b>Review</b>	Reflect on progress toward the goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My Task-Plan-Do-Review</li> <li>• My Bridge of Strength</li> <li>• GPS Coaching Conversation Guide</li> </ul>

Source: MI-GPS Career & Life Coaching Toolkit.

### Flexibility in Meeting the WPR

A central tenet of the coaching approach is understanding applicants’ and recipients’ service needs and goals and then helping them, with the use of tools, to take ownership of action steps to reach their goals. Like PATH, the ultimate goal of the MI-GPS is employment and improved economic well-being, but in MI-GPS short-term tasks can continue to address service needs in a wide range of domains (e.g., housing, mental health, education and training). Thus, recipients can select goals and steps that do not necessarily align with those that would allow them to count toward the state’s WPR.

Because only two counties implemented MI-GPS, neither DHHS nor TIA made official policy, system, or reporting changes to FIP to accommodate the new program. The MWAs participating in the study also did not alter the WPR-related performance targets in their contracts with the service providers. Rather, to encourage coaches to operationalize the key features of the MI-GPS program, DHHS and TIA jointly developed a PowerPoint presentation that outlined the changes to service provision they approved under MI-GPS, particularly that recipients in PATH could select activities that did not count toward the federal work participation requirements.<sup>25</sup>

DHHS was aware the WPR might decline in the offices participating in the study, but the state overall had been exceeding its requirement prior to the study (and continued to do so throughout the study period). States have the option of allowing recipients to participate in activities that are not federally countable as long as they meet the required rate. During the study period, Michigan faced a low effective participation rate due to the caseload reduction credit.<sup>26</sup> While DHHS maintain the WPR targets in their contracts with MWAs, this gave them the flexibility to allow staff to engage recipients in activities that did not count toward the rate.

#### 4.2.3 Program Services Common to Both Groups

Recipients (and applicants who were beginning job search) in both AEP/PATH and MI-GPS can access the same workshops.<sup>27</sup> The workshops available vary across the offices but commonly include career exploration, resume and cover letter development, workplace expectations, job search strategies, and interview techniques. Other workshops provide information on caring for infants, mental health, financial literacy, and nutrition.

Additionally, both groups have access to job developers, and both can participate in unpaid work experience and subsidized employment. Genesee County offered paid internships distributing bottled water during the Flint water crisis.

Both groups can also access supportive services and employment retention services. Supportive services include gas cards, bus tickets, money for vehicle repairs, and clothing vouchers. The Wayne County offices also offer reimbursement of up to \$5,000 for training expenses. After 30 days of continuous employment, recipients are eligible to receive up to \$2,000 to be used toward a vehicle purchase. One office in Wayne (Livonia) provides a \$25 gift card to recipients

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<sup>25</sup> This guidance from DHHS and TIA also specified that coaches (a) could schedule additional meetings with applicants and recipients beyond AEP to continue to focus on barrier removal and (b) could give an additional verbal warning prior to starting the sanction process, as discussed above.

<sup>26</sup> By federal statute, the target WPR is 50 percent. The target is lower, however, for states that have experienced caseload decreases or invested state maintenance-of-effort dollars above the required amount. Many states, including Michigan, have a lower effective WPR target. For example, in federal Fiscal Year 2016 (the latest year for which data are available), Michigan had an effective WPR target of 0 percent and achieved a 65 percent WPR (DHHS, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> In one of the MWAs, workshop content is delivered in a one-on-one setting because caseloads are small.

who report employment. Employed recipients who exit FIP due to income are eligible for supportive services (e.g., gas cards, bus tickets, clothing) for up to 180 days.

### 4.3 Key Findings from the Implementation Study

This section examines key findings from the JSA evaluation's implementation study. It describes MI-GPS program operation in terms of its four key elements: the (1) redesigned orientation, use and perceptions of goal-oriented (2) coaching and (3) tools, and (4) flexibility in meeting work participation requirements, versus the AEP/PATH program.

- *MI-GPS and AEP/PATH operated largely as designed during the study period, differing as intended.*

Both coaches and CDFs reported working closely with applicants and recipients on their caseload, including regular one-on-one meetings, to address barriers to work (during the AEP) and finding employment (during PATH). However, as designed, their approaches differed. MI-GPS coaches strongly focused on building collaborative relationships, using a recipient-driven approach, and breaking goals into smaller, achievable tasks; AEP/PATH CDFs focused on adherence to work requirements.

In the study interviews, coaches consistently reported focusing on building rapport; identifying applicant strengths and barriers using specified tools; and working collaboratively to establish a longer-range goal and action plan to reach it, including specific tasks to achieve that goal. Coaches reported that although applicants and recipients selected their own long-term goal, most focused on employment. The smaller tasks and steps needed to reach goals often involved addressing other issues, such as housing or a family situation, or obtaining additional training. Coaches reported that, during the subsequent coaching sessions, they reviewed the action plan from the previous week and worked with the applicant/recipient to identify new tasks and, if needed, to adjust the progress and longer-term goals. Once applicants transitioned to PATH, they met with the same coach weekly to continue this process.

Like coaches, CDFs reported in interviews that they met weekly with applicants during the AEP to address barriers to employment. During this time, CDFs typically asked applicants to record hours spent on various activities in order to simulate work participation requirements. Once applicants transitioned to PATH, CDFs continued to work with them. CDFs reported they were directive in their approach, and that during PATH they focused on activities that met the work participation requirements. Supervisors reported that AEP/PATH did not allow a “deep dive” into identifying and resolving applicant and recipient barriers post AEP, nor did applicants and recipients set personal goals and the tasks to reach them.

- *Coaches reported that in their view, MI-GPS helps FIP applicants and recipients set and achieve goals.*

Coach interviews and responses to the staff survey indicated that they viewed the goal-oriented coaching approach favorably. In particular, the training and tools helped coaches focus on applicants' and recipients' goals and associated tasks. In addition, coaches reported that the

MI-GPS process typically resulted in achievable goals for applicants and recipients because they had to identify the steps needed to attain the goals. As shown on Exhibit 4-5, all coaches responding to the staff survey agreed or strongly agreed that coaching helps FIP applicants and recipients (called “customers” on the survey, following the terminology used in the AEP/PATH program) to break goals into smaller tasks. Almost all (93 percent) agreed that this helps applicants and recipients achieve their goals. Most (86 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that coaching helps applicants and recipients set realistic goals based on their strengths and helps them develop strategies that will move them into employment. Most also agreed that coaching tools are easy to use (85 percent) and that they used them when working with applicants and recipients (93 percent).

Fewer coaches agreed or strongly agreed that coaching helps move recipients to employment more quickly or to find a job that is a good fit for them (50 percent). Based on interviews, this likely reflects the MI-GPS focus on short-term goals (e.g., addressing a housing issue, obtaining additional training) in support of a larger goal (e.g., employment) and multiple steps to reach the progress goals first.

**Exhibit 4-5. Coach Views of MI-GPS Coaching and Tools**

Survey Item	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)
Coaching and coaching tools help customers break large goals into smaller, achievable steps	100.0
I consider customers' strengths often when working with them to set goals and develop action steps	92.9
I use the MI-GPS tools when working with customers	92.9
Breaking goals into smaller steps helps customers achieve their goals	92.3
Coaching and tools help customers set realistic goals based on their strengths	85.7
The MI-GPS tools are easy to use	85.7
The MI-GPS tools are valuable in developing strategies to move customers to employment	84.6
The MI-GPS approach helps customers move to employment quickly	50.0
The MI-GPS approach helps customers find a job that is a good fit for them	50.0

Source: JSA Staff Survey.

Sample: Includes 15 MI-GPS coaches. Sample sizes vary by tool due to item non-response.

- *Coaches consistently reported the redesigned orientation was an improvement over the one used in AEP/PATH, helping to set a collaborative tone and build rapport between coaches and applicants.*

Both MI-GPS and AEP/PATH staff uniformly disliked the content and presentation of the AEP/PATH orientation, describing it in interviews as “mechanical,” “unfriendly,” “boring” (not engaging), and “not comprehensive.” The study team observed a number of orientations and noted that attendees appeared disengaged and asked few questions after the videos ended.

By comparison, coaches described the redesigned MI-GPS orientation as more engaging because it invited attendees to envision their path toward employment and self-sufficiency, instead of just being told what to do.

Moreover, the new orientation encouraged coach and attendee interaction. Coaches reported it allowed for sharing of personal stories and examples of goal planning and achievement to motivate applicants, thereby building rapport. They reported that attendees often participated in the discussion and talked with one another. Coaches also noted that attendees were generally prepared to talk about their goals during their first one-on-one coaching session because of the groundwork laid in the orientation (see text box).

#### MI-GPS Orientation is Engaging and Focused on Goal Setting

*My favorite part is at 9:22 a.m. because at this point in the presentation they start talking right after the program flow [description during the orientation]. They talk to each other, and I like to let that happen. They have valuable insight to share with each other. They get even more engaged after that. The goals conversation is awesome, and I allow them to go back and forth with each other. Having clients who were previously in the program is helpful because they have a lot to offer and they get to see the difference with the revised orientation.*

MI-GPS Coach

As shown on Exhibit 4-6, results from the staff survey show that almost all coaches (93 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that the redesigned orientation introduces the flow of AEP and PATH as well as the relationship with the coach. Most (86 percent) agreed that the redesigned orientation helps build a level of trust, clarified mutual expectations, and focused more on interaction than presentation. Most (79 percent) agreed that the redesigned orientation helps applicants to understand the purpose of AEP and PATH and the services available as well as to think about long-term and short-term goals. Finally, about two-thirds agreed that the orientation helps attendees reflect on their strengths.

**Exhibit 4-6. Coach Views of the Redesigned Orientation**

Survey Item	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)
The revised orientation introduces the flow of the AEP/PATH process as well as the relationship with the coach	92.9
The revised orientation helps build a level of trust and clarification of mutual expectations	85.7
The revised orientation focuses less on presentation and more on interaction	85.7
The revised orientation helps customers begin to think about long-term and short-term goals	78.6
The revised orientation helps customers understand the purpose of the AEP/PATH program and the services available to customers	78.6
The revised orientation helps customers reflect on strengths that have served them in the past, and ways to use those strengths moving forward	64.3

Source: JSA Staff Survey.

Sample: Includes 15 MI-GPS coaches. Sample sizes vary by tool due to item non-response.

- ***Coaches reported the Bridge of Strength tool was particularly useful in operating the goal-oriented coaching approach.***



In interviews and the staff survey, coaches reported that the My Bridge of Strength is an important element of the goal-setting approach because it helps applicants identify their barriers to goal achievement and opens the discussion to possible solutions. In interviews, coaches reported the Bridge of Strength was their favorite tool and liked that it was a visual way to depict challenges and reduction of those challenges over time, as applicants/recipients began to set goals and take steps. In particular, coaches reported that the My Bridge of Strength helps them understand the multi-dimensional nature of many applicants' needs better than does the ISS form used in the AEP/PATH program, which takes a checklist approach, and only briefly discussing work-related barriers.

#### Bridge of Strength Tool Meets a Need

*Out of all of the activities, the Bridge is my favorite; there is nothing I would change about it.*  
Supervisor

Coaches reported they typically fill out the Bridge of Strength as part of the ISS-B together with the applicant during the first meeting; some assign it as a first-week AEP activity. Coaches also reported that they revisit Bridge regularly to document reduction of barriers. As shown on Exhibit 4-7, almost all coaches (93 percent) reported using the Bridge often or always. Each office planned to continue using it after the study.

Coaches also reported the My GPS form was an important tool to identify short-term and long-term progress goals. The study team included this form in the redesigned orientation so that applicants begin to think about their goals prior to their first meeting with the coach. Most coaches (79 percent) reported using it often or always; another 14 percent use it sometimes.

**Exhibit 4-7. Coach Reported Use and Value of MI-GPS Tools**

Tool	Never or Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often or Always (%)
<b>Staff reporting they used the tool</b>			
Bridge of Strength	0.0	7.1	92.9
My GPS	7.1	14.3	78.6
AEP Weekly Task Plan	0.0	0.0	100.0
My Task-Plan-Do-Review	0.0	21.4	78.6
GPS Coaching Socialization Guide	35.7	28.6	35.7
GPS Coaching Conversation Guide	35.7	28.6	35.7
<b>Staff reporting they found value in the tool</b>			
Bridge of Strength	0.0	21.4	78.6
My GPS	7.1	7.1	85.7
AEP Weekly Task Plan	14.3	21.4	64.3
My Task-Plan-Do-Review	7.1	14.3	78.6
GPS Coaching Socialization Guide	35.7	14.3	50.0
GPS Coaching Conversation Guide	28.6	21.4	50.0

Source: JSA Staff Survey.

Sample: Includes 15 MI-GPS coaches. Sample sizes vary by tool due to item non-response.

- *Coaches worked with FIP applicants and recipients to set tasks needed to attain incremental goals and monitor progress toward these goals. Coaches found the My Task-Plan-Do-Review tool be valuable in doing so.*

My Task-Plan-Do-Review is a simple one-page form that applicants and recipients use to define and track their weekly activities. On the survey, 79 percent of coaches reported using the form often or always, and 21 percent use it sometimes. Usually applicants and recipients fill out the form together during their one-on-one coaching sessions. The applicant/recipient first writes the task (“What do I want to do?”), then the plan (“How will I do it?”), and then the process (the Do: “When will I do it? What might get in my way?”). During the next session, the applicant/recipient completes the review (“How did it go? What could I do differently?”). Coaches use the Revised AEP Weekly Task Plan during the AEP only. As noted above, the AEP Weekly Task Plan is a required form; it was adapted for MI-GPS to add fields to monitor progress.

Coaches indicated they use the *GPS Coaching Socialization* and *GPS Coaching Conversation Guides* less often. About two thirds use each guide often or always or sometimes. Some staff reported that these tools took too long to complete and some aspects were repetitive with other tools. Some reported using them primarily as resource guides.

Some coaches created their own tools. For example, one coach developed a “Gratitude List” worksheet for applicants and recipients to write down what they are thankful for each week. This reminds the coach of the customer’s current situation (e.g., “I woke up with lights on today” or “I have running water today”) and reminds applicants and recipients what is going well. This coach also developed a “My Future Tense” worksheet for applicants and recipients to write down something they would tell their coach 10 years from now.

#### **My Task-Plan-Do-Review Tool Useful in Setting and Monitoring Progress toward Goals**

*It does a good job of setting incremental successions, which is a main difference between MI-GPS and standard services. They set up smaller goals each week instead of “your only goal here is gaining employment, and we will try to help you get there.” This is more attainable for our type of customers because [goals] are set up in smaller chunks each week and not so big that the customer would give up and feel like they can’t accomplish it because the goal is so high. Each time the customer completes something, learning how attainable the goals are, which changes the attitude of the customer because they feel more empowered that they accomplished this and now can move on to that. [It] builds empowerment and self-esteem.*

MI-GPS Coach

- *Coaches experienced difficulties aligning the goal-oriented coaching with work participation rate requirements.*

As designed, the recipient-centered, goal-oriented coaching approach developed for MI-GPS was to allow applicants and recipients to set their own goals. As a result, selected tasks did not always count toward the WPR. As discussed above, DHHS and TIA management understood that the coaching process could result in fewer recipients participating in countable work activities, and they did not establish an alternative performance measure. Additionally, coaches

worked in MWA offices that had WPR targets built into their contracts with TIA and where half of the staff continued to focus on the WPR. As a result, staff reported the WPR remained part of the program culture. For example, some offices posted charts documenting WPR performance, which served as a constant reminder to all staff of the importance of meeting this target. In some cases, when it looked like the office might fall short of its monthly WPR goal, management staff sent emails to both coaches and CDFs telling them to focus efforts on countable activities.

As a result, coaches reported that though they used the flexibility on the WPR to some extent, they had difficulty disregarding the WPR completely. Coaches raised this concern often with management staff, who continually reassured coaches that a decline in the WPR was permitted during the study period. Several coaches reported that moving away from a WPR mindset was the hardest part of coaching.

- *Coaches and CDFs reported using different approaches with their cases, but both focused on assisting applicants and recipients in developing their job search and workplace behavior and soft skills.*

Based on the interviews and the staff survey, both coaches and CDFs focused on developing recipients' job search skills and workplace behavior and soft skills, reflecting the employment-related goals of FIP. Exhibit 4-8 shows the percentage of coaches and CDFs, respectively, reporting on the staff survey that they emphasized various job search skills with the recipients on their caseloads. Coaches and CDFs reported a similar and generally high level of focus on providing assistance on skills in these areas. None of these differences is statistically significant.

**Exhibit 4-8. Job Search Skills Covered in the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH Programs**

Survey Item	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference
<b>Staff reporting topic is a "major" or "moderate emphasis" of one-on-one meetings (%)</b>			
Resume preparation	92.9	92.9	0.0
Job search techniques	85.7	92.9	-7.1
Use of online job search resources	76.9	92.9	3.0
Assistance filling out job applications	57.1	78.6	-21.4
Interviewing skills/mock interviews	69.2	71.4	-2.2
<b>Staff reporting they provide assistance on topic "frequently" or "quite a bit" (%)</b>			
One-on-one sessions to review and monitor job leads	85.7	85.7	-0.0
One-on-one guidance on career and job opportunities	93.3	92.9	0.5
Counseling on jobs and careers to consider	93.9	92.9	-0.5
Oversight of self-directed job search activities	66.2	78.6	11.9

Source: JSA Staff Survey.

Sample: Includes 15 MI-GPS coaches and 14 AEP/PATH CDFs. Sample sizes vary by item due to item non-response.

Note: None of the differences is statistically significant.

Exhibits 4-9 shows the percentage of coaches and CDFs, respectively, reporting on the staff survey that they emphasized various workplace behavior and soft skills with their caseloads.

Again, coaches and CDFs reported a similar and high level focus on providing assistance on skills in these areas with no significant differences.

**Exhibit 4-9. Workplace Behavior and Soft Skills Covered in the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH Programs**

Survey Item	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference
<b>Staff reporting topic is a “major” or “moderate” emphasis of one-on-one meetings (%)</b>			
Proper workplace behaviors	85.7	92.9	-7.1
Communication in the workplace	100.0	92.9	7.1
Problem solving (work-related or personal)	92.9	92.9	0.0
Handling stress and anxiety in the workplace	85.7	85.7	0.0
Balancing work and family responsibilities	100.0	92.9	7.1
<b>Staff reporting that they spent “quite a bit” or “a lot of time” on activity (%)</b>			
Providing assistance focused on “life skills” including training on communication and social skills, teamwork, and problem solving	80.0	78.6	1.4
Providing guidance on workplace behaviors or etiquette	60.0	64.3	-4.3
Providing guidance on persisting in job search and skills needed to overcome challenges (e.g., stress, anxiety, other challenges, resilience)	86.7	84.6	2.1

Source: JSA Staff Survey.

Sample: Includes 15 MI-GPS coaches and 14 AEP/PATH CDFs. Sample sizes vary by item due to item non-response.

Note: None of the differences is statistically significant.

- *Staff from both programs reported that they monitored attendance closely and required applicants and recipients to participate in the activities established to meet their goals, including taking steps toward a sanction if needed to enforce the requirement.*

Both coaches and CDFs reported that they monitored and tracked attendance in the activities applicants and recipients were expected to attend, undertaking noncompliance steps as needed, including the imposition of sanctions as appropriate. In interviews, coaches generally reported that because MI-GPS recipients had more flexibility in the types of activities allowed and could select those aligned with their interests and goals, they were more likely to complete their identified short-term activities. Still, coaches reported that some recipients did not participate in their weekly activities, requiring coaches to respond accordingly. Following the guidelines for noncompliance (see Section 4.2), both CDFs and coaches reported that they allowed recipients multiple chances to comply (with coaches allowed an extra verbal warning) before imposing a sanction.

Not surprisingly given the importance of work requirements in FIP, more than 90 percent of both CDFs and coaches reported that they spent quite a bit or a lot of time monitoring and reporting participation in work activities (Exhibit 4-10). However, reflecting the flexibility provided in meeting the WPR, fewer MI-GPS staff reported they spent quite a bit or a lot of time reengaging recipients who were not complying with the work participation requirements (67 percent for coaches versus 93 percent for CDFs, a difference that is statistically significant). A smaller proportion of coaches also reported that they spent significant time on the sanction process compared to CDFs, but that difference is not statistically significant.

**Exhibit 4-10. Monitoring of Participation Requirements in the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH Programs**

Survey Item	MI GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference
<b>Staff reporting that they spent “quite a bit” or “a lot of time” on activity</b>			
Monitoring and reporting participation in job search and other work-related activities	100.0	92.9	7.1
Reengaging customers who are not fully engaged in mandatory work activities (e.g., letters, outreach calls)	66.7	92.9	-26.2*
Carrying out the sanction process (from initiation until imposition)	40.0	57.1	-17.1

Source: JSA Staff Survey.

Sample: Includes 15 MI-GPS coaches and 14 AEP/PATH CDFs. Sample sizes vary by item due to item non-response.

Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

Test of null-hypothesis that differences are zero:  $\chi^2(20) = 39.31$ ;  $p$ -value < .01.

Because data are not available, this study cannot determine the effect of the MI-GPS program compared to the AEP/PATH program on the imposition of sanctions.

- *There were few differences between the coaches and CDFs in perceived goals of their programs.*

Although MI-GPS and AEP/PATH had different approaches, coaches and CDFs reported similar goals for their respective programs. All coaches and CDFs reported that they made an effort to learn their caseloads' employment goals and motivation to work (Exhibit 4-11). Similarly, most coaches and CDFs agreed recipients are matched to jobs based on their skills, abilities, and interests. Few coaches or CDFs reported rapid employment as the most important goal of the program (seven percent), and substantial portions of both coaches and CDFs believe the most important goal was a good job match or a combination of rapid employment and a good job match. (Differences between the groups are not statistically significant.)

**Exhibit 4-11. Staff Views for Making a Good Job Match for MI-GPS and AEP/PATH**

Survey Item	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference
<b>Staff reporting “somewhat agree” or “strongly agree” (%)</b>			
Staff make an effort to learn about customers' career and employment goals and motivation to work	100.0	100.0	0.0
Customers are matched to jobs based on their skills, abilities, and interests	92.9	85.7	7.1
<b>Staff reporting most important goal of their program is (%)</b>			
Making a good job match	35.7	50.0	-14.3
Both equally	57.1	42.9	14.3
Rapid employment	7.1	7.1	0.0

Source: JSA Staff Survey.

Sample: Includes 15 MI-GPS coaches and 14 AEP/PATH CDFs. Sample sizes vary by topic due to item non-response.

Note: None of the differences is statistically significant.

- *Staff reported that participating in the MI-GPS program development and pilot period before study launch was critical to strong implementation of the approach and gaining staff buy-in to participate in the evaluation.*

MI-GPS managers and supervisors reported that the opportunity to be involved in the development of the program both was an important factor in their decision to participate in the study and strengthened program implementation. They had input into the design of the coaching intervention and the revised orientation. As discussed in Chapter 2, to help ensure coaches were comfortable with the coaching approach and the tools developed for it, the study team asked coaches to pilot the tools for six weeks following training with a small group of applicants or recipients. Supervisors also observed the coaches. Several coaches reported there were too many coaching forms and that the meetings were taking too long. Almost all coaches reported that the initial GPS Coaching Socialization tools needed improvement because they involved a lot of writing and took a long time to complete, and thus took away from time they could spend with recipients. Coaches also reported that using the coaching forms in combination with existing AEP forms was burdensome and sometimes redundant.

Based on the feedback, prior to study launch the study team integrated streamlined and shortened coaching forms. They also designated the Coaching Socialization and Coaching Conversation Guides as resources to help build the coaching relationship, rather as tools to use during the initial sessions.

#### 4.4 Summary

MI-GPS programs operated largely as designed during the study period, differing from the AEP/PATH program as intended. Coaches had a strong focus on building a collaborative relationship, developing a recipient-driven approach, and breaking goals into smaller achievable tasks. In contrast, CDFs generally focused on recipients' adherence to work requirements. MI-GPS coaches reported that in their view the goal-oriented approach helped FIP applicants and recipients set and achieve goals. Coaches also reported that they found the tools and redesigned orientation to be valuable in implementing the approach.

MI-GPS coaches experienced difficulties aligning the goal-oriented coaching with WPR requirements. The WPR remained part of program culture, even though coaches were given flexibility in meeting this requirement. In spite of reassurance from program management, coaches reported that though they used the WPR flexibility to some extent, they still had difficulty disregarding the WPR completely. In terms of providing assistance with job search skills and workplace and behavior skills, both coaches and CDFs covered topics in these areas to similar degrees. Staff from both groups also reported that they monitored attendance closely and required applicants and recipients to participate as required.



## 5. Impacts on Service Receipt and Intermediate Outcomes

The previous chapter described MI-GPS program implementation and the AEP/PATH program from the staff perspective. This chapter uses six month follow-up survey data to describe MI-GPS and AEP/PATH program services from the recipient perspective and the impact of the MI-GPS program on intermediate outcomes.

The MI-GPS theory of change (Chapter 3) posits that, relative to the AEP/PATH program, goal-oriented coaching will result in changes in the type of activities recipients attend; improved goal-setting skills; greater grit, self-efficacy, and motivation to work; and fewer barriers to finding and retaining employment. In turn, impacts on intermediate outcomes are expected to affect longer-term outcomes in employment and public assistance receipt. This chapter presents impacts on the type and content of staff assistance provided and employment-focused services received (Section 5.1). Then it describes impacts on grit and self-efficacy (Section 5.2) and on perceptions of job-search skills, motivation, and barriers to work (Section 5.3).

This chapter reports impacts—that is, the differences in outcomes between the two programs for otherwise identical groups of individuals. For such impacts, the chapter also reports statistical tests of the probability that the observed impacts could be due to chance rather than MI-GPS. The textbox **How to Read Impact Tables** below briefly explains how to read and interpret impact tables in this chapter and the next. In general, we discuss program-specific

### How to Read Impact Tables

The exhibits in this chapter and Chapter 6 list the outcome measure in the analysis in the left-most column (**Outcome**), with the unit of that outcome in parentheses; for example, (%). The **MI-GPS** column presents the mean outcome for that group of FIP applicants and recipients, followed in the next column by the corresponding mean outcome for the **AEP/PATH** group. These means are regression adjusted. The regression adjustments correct for random variation in baseline covariates between the two groups (and thus differ slightly from the raw means). The **Difference (Impact)** column gives the estimated impact (e.g., in percentage points) of MI-GPS relative to AEP/PATH, which by construction equals the difference between the previous two columns. The next column is the **Percent Impact**, which expresses the impact as a percentage of the AEP/PATH mean in the second column.

In the **Difference (Impact)** column, **statistical significance** is denoted by asterisks that reflect the strength of the evidence that the estimated impact of the MI-GPS program is not the result of chance but is a real difference in the effectiveness of the two programs. In this report, tests are considered statistically significant and highlighted in tables if the probability that the measured impact is due solely to chance is less than or equal to 10 percent (p-value less than or equal to .10). The smaller the p-value, the stronger the evidence of a real effect. Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated as follows: \* = 10 percent, \*\* = 5 percent, \*\*\* = 1 percent.

Exhibit rows in italics flag findings for **subsets of survey respondents** defined after random assignment (e.g., those who worked since random assignment). These estimates are not impacts, but instead are descriptive profiles of experiences/outcomes for the most relevant subset of participants. These estimates use the same adjustments as the impacts, so the reader can make meaningful comparisons between the analyses using the full sample and selected subsamples. Exhibit rows not in italics contain outcomes and impact estimates for statistically equivalent populations and thus do reflect the impact of the MI-GPS program.

To determine whether findings clearly imply that the result is not due to chance, we use both the **individual item-level comparison tests** and **joint tests** that look for patterns across items. As discussed, for each test, a p-value of less than .10 indicates that there is a less than 10 percent chance that the finding is due to chance. That means that we can expect to see one spurious finding for every 10 unrelated tests we conduct. (This is the multiple comparisons problem we discussed in Chapter 3.) The joint statistical tests combine information from multiple item-level analyses to consider whether there is evidence of impact on one or more of the items. The results of these tests are reported at the bottom of each table. When we see a statistically significant item-level finding and the joint test does not find evidence of impact across the larger set of items, we conclude that the item-level finding is most likely due to chance rather than a true impact.



results only when the statistical tests clearly imply that the impacts are not due to chance (formally  $p < .10$ ). Exceptions are explicitly noted.

## 5.1 Receipt of Employment-Related Assistance

This section describes the employment-related assistance, particularly the type of activities and delivery mode, received by applicants assigned to the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs. This is reported by study participants on the follow-up survey in the early weeks after random assignment. This time frame roughly aligns with the period during which FIP applicants were in AEP and transitioned to PATH if they were approved to receive cash assistance.

- *No differences were detected in participation in employment-focused activities, including job search assistance, between the MI-GPS and the AEP/PATH groups.*

Exhibit 5-1 shows participation in any employment-focused activity, including job search assistance, during the initial weeks after random assignment. Per the theory of change, we hypothesized that the MI-GPS program could result in differences in recipients' participation in work-related activities when compared to the AEP/PATH program. This would be due to flexibility in the MI-GPS program that allowed coaches to engage recipients in activities that did not count toward the federal work participation requirement if the activities facilitated goal achievement. Participation in employment activities was similar for both groups, however. More than 80 percent of MI-GPS and AEP/PATH group members participated in any employment-focused activity, with job search assistance accounting for nearly all participation. Fewer than 17 percent of either group reported participation in classes to prepare for a specific occupation or participation in unpaid work experience. There appears to be an impact of MI-GPS on participation in unpaid work experience (17 versus 12 percent), but the difference is likely due to chance, as the joint test does not find a difference in participation across the four measures.<sup>28</sup>

- *No differences were detected between the MI-GPS and the AEP/PATH groups in the receipt of job search skills and workplace behaviors and soft skills assistance.*

The follow-up survey inquired about receipt of two types of employment-related skills: (1) job search skills, such as how to fill out a job application or interviewing techniques; and (2) workplace behaviors and soft skills that promote success in job search and the workplace, including goal setting, problem solving, stress management, and handling rejection. As discussed in Chapter 4, MI-GPS and AEP/PATH group members could access the same employment readiness workshops and job developers, but the MI-GPS program allowed more flexibility in types of activities recipients could attend. Based on the theory of change, it is possible that the MI-GPS group would receive less assistance with job search skills. In addition, because MI-GPS focuses on skills needed to set and attain goals, it is possible that applicants

<sup>28</sup> The  $f$ -test fails to reject the null hypothesis that all participation impacts are zero.

and recipients assigned to this group would receive more assistance with workplace behavior and soft skills.

**Exhibit 5-1. Impacts on Participation in Job Search Assistance Services and Other Employment-Focused Activities in the Early Weeks after Random Assignment**

Outcome	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference (Impact)	Percent Impact (%)
<b>Participation type (%)</b>				
Participated in any activity	84.8	85.6	-0.9	-1.0
Participated in job search assistance services	83.1	84.1	-1.0	-1.2
Participated in classes to prepare for specific occupation	14.6	13.2	1.4	11.0
Participated in unpaid work experience	16.5	12.3	4.3**	34.9
<b>Received help with skills either one-on-one or in a group setting</b>				
<b>Job Search Skills (%)</b>				
Practicing for job interviews	53.1	57.7	-4.6*	-7.9
Creating or editing resume	63.0	66.7	-3.7	-5.6
Figuring out right job or career goal	60.8	64.1	-3.3	-5.1
Looking for a job	63.8	65.4	-1.6	-2.4
Finding specific job leads	55.0	56.4	-1.4	-2.5
Using web-based job search engines such as Monster	48.7	48.9	-0.2	-0.3
Learning about messages sent with dress, speech	54.4	54.6	-0.2	-0.4
Filling out job applications	38.0	38.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Workplace Behaviors and Other Soft Skills (%)</b>				
Setting and managing goals	66.2	63.2	3.0	4.8
Communication at the workplace	50.5	52.7	-2.3	-4.3
Proper workplace behaviors	53.6	55.2	-1.6	-2.9
Dealing with rejection	42.3	42.6	-0.3	-0.7
Managing anger and frustrations	40.2	40.4	-0.2	-0.5
Managing money and finances	47.4	46.7	0.7	1.5
Having a good work ethic	61.9	61.5	0.4	0.7
Problem solving in work or personal life	56.2	54.4	1.8	3.2
Handling stress or anxiety	42.8	40.1	2.7	6.8
Balancing work and family	52.9	48.6	4.3	8.9

Source: Six Month Follow-up Survey.

Sample: Includes 1,325 (675 MI-GPS; 650 AEP/PATH) survey respondents. Sample sizes vary for outcomes due to item nonresponse.

Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

Test of null-hypothesis that all *participation* impacts are zero:  $F(4,1321) = 1.50$ ;  $p$ -value = .20.

Test of null-hypothesis that all *job search skills* impacts are zero:  $F(8,1317) = .95$ ;  $p$ -value = .47.

Test of null-hypothesis that all *workplace behaviors and soft skills* impacts are zero:  $F(10,1315) = 1.34$ ;  $p$ -value = .20.

No differences were detected between the groups in the receipt of either job search skills or workplace behavior and soft skills (Exhibit 5-1).<sup>29</sup> More than half of each group reported receipt of assistance with a range of job search skills, including creating or editing a resume and looking

<sup>29</sup> There appears to be a negative impact of MI-GPS on practicing for job interviews (53 versus 58 percent), but the difference is likely due to chance, as the joint test does not find a difference in receipt of assistance with job search skills across the eight measures. The  $f$ -test fails to reject the null hypothesis that all participation impacts are zero.

for a job. The exception was assistance filling out job applications, which was reported by less than 40 percent of each group. There are also no differences between the groups in receipt of assistance with workplace behaviors and soft skills. More than 50 percent of both groups reported assistance with five of the 10 skills included in the survey, including setting and managing goals, having a good work ethic, and problem solving.

These results are consistent with the implementation findings in Chapter 4, where MI-GPS and AEP/PATH staff reported providing similar amounts of help in these areas. However, it is not expected given the theory of change, which predicted the MI-GPS group would receive more assistance on workplace behaviors and soft skills related to goal setting.

- *Compared to the AEP/PATH program, the MI-GPS program increased the receipt of assistance on workplace behaviors and soft skills provided through one-on-one meetings.*

While the MI-GPS program did not affect receipt of assistance addressing job search and workplace behavior skills overall, the program did have an impact on the mode through which assistance was delivered. As the theory of change notes, one-on-one coaching is the cornerstone of the MI-GPS model. Thus, we would expect to see more one-on-one staff assistance for the MI-GPS group compared to the AEP/PATH group.

**Exhibit 5-2. Impacts on Receipt of One-on-One Assistance on Job Search Skills and Workplace Behaviors and Soft Skills in the Early Weeks after Random Assignment**

Outcome	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference (Impact)	Percent Impact (%)
<b>Job Search Skills (%)</b>				
Practicing for job interviews	28.2	27.2	1.0	3.8
Creating or editing resume	38.1	37.6	0.5	1.3
Figuring out right job or career goal	49.0	45.5	3.5	7.6
Looking for a job	43.1	40.6	2.4	6.0
Finding specific job leads	43.4	41.6	1.8	4.4
Using web-based job search engines such as Monster	30.1	27.9	2.3	8.2
Learning about messages sent with dress, speech	23.8	21.6	2.2	10.4
Filling out job applications	26.4	25.9	0.5	2.0
<b>Workplace Behaviors and Other Soft Skills (%)</b>				
Setting and managing goals	42.7	30.8	11.9***	38.7
Communication at the workplace	25.0	19.0	6.0***	31.3
Proper workplace behaviors	25.3	18.9	6.5***	34.4
Dealing with rejection	21.0	16.7	4.3**	25.9
Managing anger and frustrations	22.8	15.7	7.2***	45.7
Managing money and finances	23.5	16.1	7.4***	45.8
Having a good work ethic	31.0	26.5	4.5*	16.9
Problem solving in work or personal life	30.2	21.2	9.0***	42.6
Handling stress or anxiety	25.8	17.4	8.4***	48.4
Balancing work and family	33.7	24.4	9.3***	38.1

Source: Six Month Follow-up Survey.

Sample: Includes 1,325 (675 MI-GPS; 650 AEP/PATH) survey respondents. Sample sizes vary for outcomes due to item nonresponse.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

Test of null-hypothesis that all one-on-one *job search skills* impacts are zero:  $F(8,1317) = .33$ ;  $p$ -value = .95.

Test of null-hypothesis that all one-on-one *workplace behavior and soft skills* impacts are zero:  $F(10,1315) = 3.02$ ;  $p$ -value < .01.

Consistent with this expectation, compared to the AEP/PATH program, the MI-GPS program produced a statistically significant increase in the proportion of cash assistance applicants and recipients who received one-on-one assistance with a range of workplace behavior and soft skills, including setting and managing goals, balancing work and family, problem solving in work or personal life, handling stress and anxiety, managing anger and frustrations, and managing money and finances (bottom panel of Exhibit 5-2).<sup>30</sup> For example, 43 percent of the MI-GPS group received one-on-one assistance of goal setting, compared to 31 percent of the AEP/PATH group. However, as also shown, we do not detect any differences in the receipt of one-on-one assistance on job search skills such as finding job leads or filling out job applications (top panel).

- *There were no differences in the receipt of job search or workplace behavior assistance in a group setting.*

Exhibit 5-3 shows the proportion of each group that received job search skills or workplace and soft skills assistance in a group setting. Likely reflecting that both groups could access the same job readiness workshops, we detected no differences in the receipt of group-based assistance. Although there are two significant differences in each skill area, joint statistical tests suggest that these differences are likely due to chance.

**Exhibit 5-3. Impacts on Receipt of Group Assistance on Job Search Skills and Workplace Behavior and Soft Skills in the Early Weeks after Random Assignment**

	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference (Impact)	Percent Impact (%)
<b>Job Search Skills (%)</b>				
Practicing for job interviews	38.5	40.3	-1.8	-4.5
Creating or editing resume	45.2	49.8	-4.7*	-9.3
Figuring out right job or career goal	29.2	33.8	-4.6*	-13.7
Looking for a job	39.4	42.8	-3.4	-7.9
Finding specific job leads	27.0	26.9	0.1	0.2
Using web-based job search engines such as Monster	31.5	31.2	0.3	0.9
Learning about messages sent with dress, speech	43.6	41.8	1.7	4.2
Filling out job applications	21.3	19.1	2.3	11.9
<b>Workplace Behaviors and Other Soft Skills (%)</b>				
Setting and managing goals	39.7	45.3	-5.6**	-12.3
Communication at the workplace	37.7	41.6	-3.8	-9.3
Proper workplace behaviors	41.0	44.3	-3.2	-7.3
Dealing with rejection	31.8	34.4	-2.6	-7.6
Managing anger and frustrations	26.2	31.0	-4.8*	-15.5
Managing money and finances	34.0	37.8	-3.7	-9.9
Having a good work ethic	46.5	47.3	-0.8	-1.7
Problem solving in work or personal life	38.6	43.0	-4.5	-10.3
Handling stress or anxiety	27.4	29.4	-2.1	-7.0
Balancing work and family	31.4	33.7	-2.3	-6.8

Source: Six Month Follow-up Survey.

Sample: Includes 1,325 (675 MI-GPS; 650 AEP/PATH) survey respondents. Sample sizes vary for outcomes due to item nonresponse.

<sup>30</sup> A joint statistical test indicates that these differences are highly unlikely to be due to chance. The  $f$ -test strongly rejects the null hypothesis that all group setting impacts are zero with a  $p$ -value less than .01.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent. Test of null-hypothesis that all group setting *job search skills* impacts are zero:  $F(8,1317) = 1.64$ ;  $p\text{-value} = .11$ . Test of null-hypothesis that all group setting *workplace behavior and soft skills* impacts are zero:  $F(10,1315) = 1.05$ ;  $p\text{-value} = .40$ .

## 5.2 Impacts on Grit and Self-Efficacy

The follow-up survey included measures of grit and self-efficacy. The *grit scale* measures “perseverance and passion for long-term goals,” which is shown to be correlated with a variety of measures of success (Duckworth et al., 2007). The *self-efficacy scale* measures belief in ability to exert control over one’s own life, which is hypothesized to be a key factor in motivation (Bandura, 1997). The theory of change for MI-GPS posits that teaching cash assistance applicants and recipients how to break down large goals into small, achievable tasks will make achieving long-term goals seem possible, thereby increasing perseverance (grit) and belief in their ability to achieve their goals (self-efficacy).

- ***No differences in grit were detected between the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups.***

Both groups reported high levels of grit, averaging 3.3 and 3.2 on a four point scale (Exhibit 5.4).<sup>31</sup> In both groups, more than 90 percent of applicants agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements: “I am a hard worker,” “I finish whatever I begin,” and “I am diligent.” There was not much room for MI-GPS to increase grit, given the already high levels of grit among the AEP/PATH group.<sup>32</sup>

- ***MI-GPS increased self-efficacy, relative to the AEP/PATH program.***

Consistent with the theory of change, the MI-GPS group reported higher levels of self-efficacy compared to the AEP/PATH group, 3.4 versus 3.3 on a four-point scale (Exhibit 5.4).<sup>33</sup> MI-GPS decreased the proportion of applicants who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “There are times when things look pretty bleak and hopeless to me,” from 43 percent in the AEP/PATH group to 33 percent, a 23 percent reduction. Similarly, MI-GPS reduced the likelihood that applicants agreed or strongly agreed with “Sometimes when I fail I feel worthless,” from 38 percent to 28 percent, a 26 percent reduction.

<sup>31</sup> On Exhibit 5.4, the items used to construct the scale are listed below the row showing the scale score. Respondents were asked whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with each statement. The items were scored from 1 to 4, with higher values assigned to responses that reflect a more positive outlook. A score of 3 on a particular item corresponds to answering “agree” if the statement is positive (e.g., *I am a hard worker*) or to answering “disagree” if the statement is negative (e.g., *I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one*). The scale score is the average of the item-level scores.

<sup>32</sup> These levels are similar to those found in the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) evaluation, an experimental evaluation of nine separate career pathways programs seeking to increase educational and economic outcomes for low-income individuals (c.f. Rolston et al., 2017; Martinson et al., 2018; Farrell and Martinson, 2017; Glosser et al., 2017; Gardiner et al., 2017). All PACE impacts reports include grit as an outcome and can be found at <http://www.career-pathways.org/acf-sponsored-studies/pace/>.

<sup>33</sup> The self-efficacy scale was constructed in the same manner as the grit scale. The survey asked respondents whether they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with each of the statements listed below the row showing the self-efficacy scale score. Similarly, the items were scored from 1 to 4, with higher values assigned to responses that reflect a more positive outlook.

Very high proportions of both groups agreed with most positive statements regarding self-efficacy. More than 90 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements: “I complete tasks successfully,” “When I try, I generally succeed,” “I am capable of coping with most of my problems,” “I determine what will happen in my life,” and “Overall, I am satisfied with myself.” The impact on self-efficacy appears to be driven by reducing feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, rather than increasing feelings of confidence.

#### Exhibit 5-4. Impacts on Grit and Self-Efficacy

Outcome	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference (Impact)	Percent Impact (%)
<b>Grit (range 1 to 4)</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>3.23</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>1.4</b>
<b>“Somewhat” or “strongly agree” with the following statements (%)</b>				
New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones	34.9	35.0	-0.1	-0.3
Setbacks don't discourage me	64.7	61.6	3.1	5.1
I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest	34.3	31.7	2.6	8.3
I am a hard worker	99.7	100.0	-0.3	-0.3
I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one	47.8	48.1	-0.3	-0.5
I often have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete	22.0	23.1	-1.1	-4.8
I finish whatever I begin	94.0	93.6	0.4	0.4
I am diligent	97.0	96.5	0.4	0.4
<b>Self-Efficacy (range 1 to 4)</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>0.09***</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>“Somewhat” or “strongly agree” with the following statements (%)</b>				
I am confident I get the success I deserve in life	88.8	86.8	2.0	2.3
Sometimes I feel depressed	48.3	52.5	-4.2	-8.0
When I try, I generally succeed	96.1	96.2	-0.1	-0.1
Sometimes when I fail I feel worthless	28.4	38.3	-9.9***	-25.8
I complete tasks successfully	97.9	97.7	0.1	0.1
Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work	28.9	31.0	-2.1	-6.9
I am filled with doubts about my competence	21.5	22.1	-0.6	-2.6
Overall, I am satisfied with myself	91.3	91.0	0.2	0.2
I determine what will happen in my life	93.4	91.6	1.8	1.9
I do not feel in control of my success in my career	15.7	18.2	-2.5	-13.5
I am capable of coping with most of my problems	95.6	94.0	1.6	1.7
There are times when things look pretty bleak and hopeless to me	32.9	42.5	-9.7***	-22.7

Source: Six Month Follow-up Survey.

Sample: Includes 1,325 (675 MI-GPS program; 650 AEP/PATH program) survey respondents. Sample sizes vary for outcomes due to item nonresponse.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

Test of null-hypothesis that all *grit* impacts are zero:  $F(9,1316) = 1.15$ ;  $p$ -value = .33

Test of null-hypothesis that all *self-efficacy* impacts are zero:  $F(13,1312) = 1.98$ ;  $p$ -value = .02

### 5.3 Impacts on Perceptions of Job Search Skills, Motivation, and Barriers to Work

The follow-up survey asked sample members about a range of issues that might affect their interest in and ability to work. This section presents impacts on self-perceptions of job search



skills, motivation to work, and potential barriers to employment. The specific questions on perception of job search skills capture confidence in ability to set and manage goals (e.g., how to make a plan that will help achieve goals for the next five years) and related skills (e.g., how to accurately assess abilities and challenges). The MI-GPS program focused on developing these skills through the goal-oriented coaching approach. The theory of change suggests that coaching will result in recipients selecting goals and activities that reflect their skills and needs, which in turn will increase motivation and reduce barriers to employment.

- ***No differences in perceptions of job search skills, motivation to work, or barriers to work were detected between the MI-GPS and the AEP/PATH groups.***

As shown on Exhibit 5-5, both the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups reported high levels of confidence in their job search skills, with more than 80 percent of survey respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the following positive statements: “I know the occupation I want to be in,” “I know how to make a plan that will help me achieve my goals for the next five years,” and “I know the type of employer I want to work for.” Similarly, less than 40 percent of applicants in both groups agreed with the three negative statements including “I am not sure how to accurately assess my abilities and challenges.” Overall, there were no detectable differences between the groups, although those assigned to the MI-GPS program were more likely to report that they knew the occupation they wanted to be in (87 percent versus 83 percent).

**Exhibit 5-5. Impacts on Perceptions of Job Search Skills, Motivation to Work, and Barriers to Work**

Outcome	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference (Impact)	Percent Impact (%)
<b>“Agree” or “strongly agree” with following statements regarding perception of job search skills (%)</b>				
I know the occupation I want to be in	87.0	83.1	3.9*	4.7
I know how to make a plan that will help me achieve my goals for the next 5 years	89.2	87.4	1.7	2.0
I know the type of employer I want to work for	86.1	82.9	3.2	3.8
I am not sure what type of education and training program is best for me	33.4	33.3	0.1	0.3
I am not sure how to accurately assess my abilities and challenges	22.4	24.3	-1.9	-7.8
I am not sure what type of job is best for me	35.3	38.1	-2.8	-7.4
<b>Importance of having a job (%)</b>				
Very important	93.8	94.4	-0.6	-0.7
Somewhat important	6.0	5.2	0.8	15.0
Not important	0.3	0.4	-0.1	-35.7
<b>Situations that “very often” or “fairly often” interfered with work, job search, or ability to take a job (%)</b>				
Child care arrangements	32.6	34.4	-1.8	-5.3
Transportation	29.6	27.0	2.6	9.7
Illness or health condition	12.7	11.9	0.8	6.9
Alcohol or drug use	0.5	0.5	-0.0	-5.1

Source: Six Month Follow-up Survey.

Sample: Includes 1,325 (675 MI-GPS; 650 AEP/PATH) survey respondents. Sample sizes vary for outcomes due to item nonresponse.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

Test of null-hypothesis that all impacts are zero:  $F(12,1312) = .69$ ;  $p\text{-value} = .76$ .



As a measure of motivation to work, the vast majority of both groups ranked it very important to have a job (94 percent of each group). Only five to six percent of respondents in both groups ranked it somewhat important. Very few respondents ranked it not important to have a job.

There was no difference in reported situations that interfered with work, job search, or the ability to take a job, measured by the survey. The most commonly reported situation was child care arrangements, affecting about one third of respondents in either group. The next most common barrier was transportation arrangements, affecting about one quarter of either group, followed by health issues.

## 5.4 Summary

This chapter reported impacts on participation in employment-focused services and receipt of assistance with job search skills and workplace behavior and soft skills including those related to goal setting. The chapter also reported impacts on intermediate outcomes in the theory of change, including grit, self-efficacy, perceptions of job search skills, motivation to work, and barriers to employment.

The theory of change suggested that the MI-GPS program would result in participation in different activities compared to the AEP/PATH program, due to the flexibility MI-GPS allowed for recipients to engage in activities that did not count toward the WPR if the activities facilitated goal achievement. However, based on the data collected from the follow-up survey, more than 85 percent of applicants and recipients assigned to the MI-GPS or AEP/PATH program participated in employment-focused activities, with job search assistance services being the primary activity for both groups.

The theory of change also suggested an increase in assistance related to goal setting and problem solving. For this study, outcomes in those areas were measured by a series of survey questions related to workplace behavior and soft skills. The study found no difference in overall receipt of assistance with these goal-setting skills. However, more MI-GPS group members than AEP/PATH group members reported one-on-one assistance related to goal setting, reflecting the program's focus on building a collaborative relationship with the coach.

As predicted by the theory of change, the MI-GPS group reported higher levels of self-efficacy compared to the AEP/PATH group. This impact appears to be driven by reducing feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, rather than by increasing feelings of confidence. Improvements in grit and motivation to work and reductions in barriers to employment were also expected; however, no impacts were detected in these areas, based on responses to the follow-up survey.

Overall, though the MI-GPS program was implemented largely designed, as discussed in Chapter 4, it did not produce several of the anticipated changes in service receipt or expected impacts on recipients' intermediate outcomes.

## 6. Impacts on Employment and Earnings, Public Assistance Receipt, and Job Characteristics

Both MI-GPS and AEP/PATH seek to transition FIP applicants and recipients to employment, eliminating or reducing their need for public benefits. Both programs use the 21-day applicant eligibility period to work with applicants to reduce barriers to employment. If the applicant does not find a job during that period, both programs continue to provide services to them as recipients after their FIP applications are approved. The MI-GPS program differs from the standard AEP/PATH program in its use of coaching and focus on setting incremental goals. Having described the implementation of the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs in Chapter 4 and the impact of MI-GPS on a range of intermediate outcomes in Chapter 5, this chapter examines the impact of MI-GPS, compared to AEP/PATH, on economic and public assistance outcomes.

The first section of this chapter describes the impact of MI-GPS, compared to AEP/PATH, on employment and earnings, including the impact on the study's pre-specified confirmatory outcome: **employment in the second quarter after random assignment**. Section 6.2 reports impacts on outcomes related to public benefit receipt, specifically FIP and SNAP receipt. Section 6.3 reports impacts on job characteristics, including wages, hours, and benefits. The impact estimates in those sections are based on NDNH data, administrative data on FIP and SNAP receipt, and the six month study participant follow-up survey.<sup>34</sup> Section 6.4 summarizes the results.

### 6.1 Impacts on Employment and Earnings

This section reports the impact of MI-GPS, compared to AEP/PATH, on employment and earnings, based on NDNH data. As discussed in Chapter 3, the theory of change suggests that the MI-GPS program ultimately will increase recipients' employment and earnings, but how soon those impacts would be realized is not clear. Given the limited information available on likely timing of impacts, like the other sites in the JSA evaluation, we use employment two quarters after random assignment as the confirmatory outcome. We also consider a longer follow-up period of up to five quarters after random assignment, as an exploratory outcome. We exclude the quarter of random assignment from the impact analysis; otherwise, if an

<sup>34</sup> As described in Chapter 3, the large number of exploratory hypotheses introduces a multiple comparisons problem; that is, that some of the impacts would simply by chance appear to be statistically significant. In part, we address the problem by focusing on patterns of findings across related outcomes, rather than reporting on every significant finding. For outcomes measured in dollars (e.g., earnings), we use aggregate measures (e.g., cumulative earnings over the follow-up period) to draw conclusions about the impact of the MI-GPS program. We use a similar approach for measures of receipt of public benefits and to conduct joint statistical tests.

individual applied for benefits at the end of a quarter, the quarter of random assignment would be almost entirely *prior* to the start of the program.<sup>35</sup>

- *We did not detect an impact on employment levels in the second quarter after random assignment for the MI-GPS program compared to the AEP/PATH program. In addition, no differences in earnings were detected.*

In the second quarter after random assignment, approximately 58 percent of applicants and recipients in the MI-GPS or AEP/PATH program were employed (Exhibit 6-1).<sup>36</sup> We do not detect a difference in employment between the two groups. Thus, with respect to the confirmatory outcome—measured by employment in the second quarter after random assignment—the evaluation does not find that MI-GPS increased or decreased earnings relative to the AEP/PATH program.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, we do not detect a difference in employment in any of the five quarters after random assignment.

**Exhibit 6-1. Impacts on Employment and Earnings**

Outcome	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference (Impact)	Percent Impact (%)
<b>Confirmatory Outcome (%)</b>				
Employed in quarter 2	58.9	58.4	0.5	0.9
<b>Employment (%)</b>				
Any employment in quarters 1-5	82.7	82.7	0.0	0.0
Employed in quarter 1	52.7	51.4	1.3	2.6
Employed in quarter 2	61.2	59.0	2.2	3.7
Employed in quarter 3	61.5	61.8	-0.3	-0.4
Employed in quarter 4	62.3	62.2	0.1	0.2
<b>Earnings (\$)</b>				
Cumulative earnings in quarters 1-5	9,772	9,137	636	7.0
Earnings in quarter 1	1,426	1,268	158*	12.5
Earnings in quarter 2	1,822	1,691	132	7.8
Earnings in quarter 3	2,044	1,950	94	4.8
Earnings in quarter 4	2,160	2,043	117	5.7
Earnings in quarter 5	2,323	2,184	139	6.4

Source: National Directory of New Hires.

Sample: Includes 1,908 (950 MI-GPS; 958 AEP/PATH) individuals.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

<sup>35</sup> Depending on when an applicant was randomly assigned during a quarter, the follow-up period begins anytime from the day after randomization to three months after randomization.

<sup>36</sup> Quarterly *earnings* are calculated as the sum of all wages (not earnings per hour) reported to the NDNH for an individual in a calendar quarter (i.e., January through March, April through June, etc.). If the individual does not have any wages reported in a given quarter, earnings are considered to be zero for that quarter. *Employment* is constructed from the calculated quarterly earnings: if an individual has positive earnings in a quarter, that individual was coded as employed; if earnings in a quarter are zero, the individual was not coded as employed.

<sup>37</sup> We can rule out the possibility of large differences in outcomes between the two programs. The 90 percent confidence interval for the confirmatory outcome (i.e., estimated impact on employment in the second full quarter after random assignment) ranges from -3.0 to 4.0 percentage points. Appendix C reports standard errors and confidence intervals for all impact estimates.

Average cumulative earnings during the first five quarters after random assignment were approximately \$9,750 for the MI-GPS group and approximately \$9,150 for the AEP/PATH group. The difference of roughly \$600 is not distinguishable from zero.<sup>38</sup> A small impact on earnings of \$158 is detected in the first quarter after random assignment, but this impact is not sustained. Among those who worked, earnings were low and averaged approximately \$11,450 over the five-quarter follow-up period (not shown).

Appendix F presents impacts on employment and earnings separately for subgroups defined by educational attainment at application, FIP benefit receipt prior to application, work history at application, and county where services were delivered. We do not detect differences in impacts on earnings or employment over the five-quarter follow-up period between subgroups in any of these analyses.

## 6.2 Impacts on Public Benefit Receipt

This section presents the impact of MI-GPS on receipt of FIP and SNAP benefits. The theory of change suggests that by developing applicants' and recipients' ability to set and attain goals related to employment, MI-GPS will increase their employment and thereby reduce their receipt of FIP and SNAP over the longer term. We measure FIP and SNAP benefit receipt for three quarters following random assignment (unlike employment data, five quarters of follow-up data on FIP and SNAP receipt were not available).<sup>39</sup>

- *We did not detect a difference in completion of the 21-day Applicant Eligibility Period between those assigned to the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs.*

Approximately two-thirds of FIP applicants assigned to either the MI-GPS or the AEP/PATH program completed the 21-day AEP within the three quarter follow-up period, with no differences detected between the programs (Exhibit 6-2). Because completion of the applicant eligibility period is a requirement for approval of FIP benefits, the proportion of sample members receiving FIP during the follow-up period cannot exceed this level. The reasons for not completing the AEP were not available in the administrative data, but could include finding employment and becoming ineligible for assistance, experiencing another change in

<sup>38</sup> The 90 percent confidence interval for the impact of MI-GPS over the five-quarter follow-up period ranges from -\$100 to +\$1,372. A negative impact would mean that MI-GPS decreases earnings, and a positive impact that MI-GPS increases earnings. We can rule out the possibility that the MI-GPS program meaningfully decreases earnings over the five-quarter period. It remains possible that MI-GPS increases earnings over the period by a meaningful amount. Appendix C reports standard errors and confidence intervals for all impact estimates.

<sup>39</sup> We convert the monthly benefits data to quarterly data to align the follow-up period for impacts on public benefits with the follow-up period for impacts on earnings. This alignment is important because earnings directly determine benefit eligibility, and one might expect changes in benefits to occur in the same time window as changes in earnings. The value of quarterly benefits is calculated as the sum of monthly payments. Participation in the FIP or SNAP is constructed from the calculated quarterly benefits: if an individual has benefits in a quarter, that individual was coded as receiving benefits for that quarter; if an individual's benefits in a quarter are zero, the individual was coded as not receiving benefits for that quarter.

circumstances that affected the applicant's ability or interest in completing the AEP, or failing to provide required documentation to receive FIP benefits.

#### Exhibit 6-2. Impacts on FIP and SNAP Benefit Receipt

Outcome	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference (Impact)	Percent Impact (%)
<b>Family Independence Program (FIP)</b>				
Completed applicant eligibility period (%)	65.9	64.1	1.9	2.9
Received benefits (%)				
Quarters 1-3	66.0	63.4	2.6	4.1
Quarter 1	60.7	58.1	2.6	4.5
Quarter 2	41.0	38.9	2.1	5.4
Quarter 3	29.0	27.3	1.7	6.4
Benefit amount (\$)				
Quarters 1-3	1,388	1,318	70	5.3
Quarter 1	665	634	31	4.9
Quarter 2	420	396	24	6.2
Quarter 3	303	288	14	5.0
<b>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)</b>				
Received benefits (%)				
Quarters 1-3	92.8	93.7	-0.9	-1.0
Quarter 1	90.3	91.7	-1.3	-1.5
Quarter 2	85.4	87.9	-2.5*	-2.8
Quarter 3	83.4	83.9	-0.6	-0.7
Benefit amount (\$)				
Quarters 1-3	2,965	3,123	-158**	-5.1
Quarter 1	1,064	1,112	-48*	-4.3
Quarter 2	1,003	1,060	-57*	-5.4
Quarter 3	898	951	-53**	-5.6

Source: MI DHHS administrative records.

Sample: Includes 2,053 (1,020 MI-GPS; 1,033 AEP/PATH) individuals with administrative records.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

- ***We did not detect an impact of MI-GPS on receipt of FIP benefits or FIP benefit amounts compared to AEP/PATH.***

In the three quarters after random assignment, about two thirds of both the MI-GPS group and the AEP/PATH group received FIP benefits, with benefits averaging approximately \$1,350 (or \$2,100 for those who received FIP) over this time period.<sup>40</sup> Given the lack of impacts on employment and earnings, the lack of impacts on FIP benefits are not surprising. These results also indicate that there is not a difference in the imposition of sanctions for noncompliance (which result in case closure) between the two programs. As discussed in Chapter 4, administrative data on sanction levels are not available, but these results showing no effect of

<sup>40</sup> The 90 percent confidence interval for the impact of MI-GPS on FIP benefit receipt in the three quarters after random assignment ranges from -0.8 to +6.0 percentage points. This means there is a less than five percent chance that MI-GPS decreases FIP participation by more than one percentage point or increases FIP participation by six percentage points. As a result, we can rule out the possibility that MI-GPS meaningfully decreases FIP participation over the three quarters after random assignment. Appendix C reports standard errors and confidence intervals for all impact estimates.

MI-GPS on FIP benefit receipt suggest that the MI-GPS program did not affect the level of sanctions imposed.

- *The MI-GPS reduced the amount of SNAP benefits received compared to the AEP/PATH program. However, we did not find an impact on the proportion receiving SNAP benefits.*

Almost all (more than 90 percent) MI-GPS and AEP/PATH group members received SNAP benefits during the three-quarter follow-up period, with no differences between the two groups (Exhibit 6-2). However, applicants assigned to the MI-GPS group received \$2,965 in SNAP benefits over three-quarter period, compared to \$3,123 for those assigned to the AEP/PATH program, an impact of –\$158. We detect small impacts in each individual quarter, as well. Given that we do not detect differences in employment or earnings (Exhibit 6-1), this finding is unexpected and maybe due to chance.

Appendix F presents impacts on public benefit receipt separately for subgroups defined by educational attainment at application, FIP benefit receipt prior to application, work history at application, and the county where services were delivered. These analyses sought to understand whether MI-GPS was more effective for one subgroup compared to another. Tests estimating differences in impacts do not suggest that MI-GPS was more effective for any subgroup.

- *We did not detect a difference between the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs on the proportion who were working and not receiving public assistance in any of the first three quarters after random assignment.*

In addition to increasing employment and earnings, the MI-GPS program was designed to increase the proportion of cash assistance recipients who both find jobs and leave public assistance, a measure of self-sufficiency. Exhibit 6-3 shows the degree to which the MI-GPS program succeeded in this regard, showing outcomes and impacts for four composite measures: (1) the proportion of each group who were working and not receiving cash assistance; (2) the proportion who combined work and cash assistance; (3) the proportion who were not working but receiving cash assistance; and (4) the proportion who were neither working nor receiving cash assistance.

**Exhibit 6-3. Impacts on Employment and FIP Benefit Receipt**

Outcome	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference (Impact)	Percent Impact (%)
<b>Employment and No FIP Benefits (%)</b>				
Quarter 1	23.4	23.6	-0.2	-1.0
Quarter 2	38.0	37.2	0.8	2.1
Quarter 3	46.3	45.5	0.8	1.9
<b>Employment and FIP Benefits (%)</b>				
Quarter 1	29.3	27.8	1.6	5.6
Quarter 2	20.9	21.2	-0.3	-1.3
Quarter 3	14.9	13.6	1.4	10.0
<b>No Employment and FIP Benefits (%)</b>				
Quarter 1	31.2	30.8	0.4	1.5
Quarter 2	19.6	18.0	1.6	8.9
Quarter 3	13.0	13.6	-0.5	-3.9
<b>No Employment and No FIP Benefits (%)</b>				
Quarter 1	16.1	17.8	-1.8	-9.9
Quarter 2	21.5	23.6	-2.1	-8.9
Quarter 3	25.7	27.4	-1.7	-6.1

Source: MI DHHS administrative records and National Directory of New Hires.

Sample: Includes 1,908 (950 MI-GPS; 958 AEP/PATH) individuals with administrative and NDNH records.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

As shown, there are no differences between the groups for any of these combinations of outcomes in any of these quarters. In the third quarter of follow-up, about 45 percent of MI-GPS and AEP/PATH group members were working and not receiving cash assistance, a proportion that increased throughout the follow-up period and was the largest of the four measures examined. During this same quarter, about 14 percent of each group were employed but still received FIP benefits, with a similar percentage not working but receiving FIP benefits. Finally, in the third quarter of follow-up, about one quarter in each group were neither working nor receiving FIP benefits. Those with no earnings or cash assistance benefits, which comprises approximately about two-thirds of those who were not working (not shown) at the end of the follow-up period, may be experiencing significant financial difficulty.

### 6.3 Impacts on Job Characteristics

This section presents impacts on the characteristics of sample members' current or most recent job, as reported on the six month follow-up survey. The discussion focuses on wages, hours worked, job benefits, job schedule, and the time to find a job.<sup>41</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, by helping cash assistance applicants and recipients find employment that is a good fit with their skills and interests, the MI-GPS program was expected to increase wages and job benefits.

<sup>41</sup> These results include all survey respondents; in particular, those with no recent job were coded as zero for these outcomes. Thus, these are experimental comparisons and can be interpreted as estimates of program impacts.



However, the time needed for the MI-GPS program to achieve these outcomes is not clear. It may be that the survey's six month follow-up period is too short to fully capture any effects on these outcomes.

- *We did not detect a difference between the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups in self-reported employment or in the characteristics of their current or most recent job, including wages and benefits.*

As shown on Exhibit 6-4, approximately two thirds of applicants and recipients in either group had worked anytime during the six month follow-up period, with slightly more than 40 percent working at the time of the follow-up survey.<sup>42</sup> We also do not detect differences in how long it took applicants and recipients to begin working after random assignment (about 20 weeks).

Earnings were low for those assigned to either program, with weekly earnings of \$230 for the MI-GPS group and \$217 for the AEP/PATH group and worked about 20 hours per week. Among members of either group who worked, they earned an hourly wage of approximately \$10.50. A low proportion worked in a job that provided benefits, including paid sick days (less than a fifth), paid holidays and vacations (less than a quarter), and access to health insurance (less than a third).

Finally, we do not detect differences in job schedule, with the exception of the proportion of the MI-GPS group working a regular evening shift, and this difference is most likely due to chance, according to a joint statistical test. The largest share of both groups reported working a regular daytime schedule.

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<sup>42</sup> Where we measure similar outcomes using both survey and NDNH data, we consider NDNH findings to be stronger. NDNH data are more reliable for multiple reasons: Survey data are available for only the 64 percent of the randomized sample who responded, whereas NDNH data are available for 92 percent of the sample (more than 99 percent of sample members with valid SSNs). NDNH data are not subject to recall bias the way that survey data are. We use nonresponse weighting to address survey nonresponse bias, but more complete data still outperform statistical adjustment.

**Exhibit 6-4. Impacts on Job Characteristics**

Outcome	MI-GPS	AEP/PATH	Difference (Impact)	Percent Impact (%)
<b>Worked for pay during follow-up period (%)</b>	64.0	66.0	-2.0	-3.1
Currently working for pay (%)	41.4	43.8	-2.3	-5.4
Time to employment (weeks)	20.8	19.3	1.6	8.1
<b>Pay and Hours Worked</b>				
Weekly earnings (\$)	230	217	13	6.0
Hours worked per week	20.9	21.0	-0.0	-0.2
Current or most recent job paid (%):				
Less than \$10/hour	31.1	30.9	0.2	0.8
\$10-\$13/hour	23.6	25.4	-1.8	-7.0
\$13-\$15/hour	2.9	3.1	-0.2	-7.7
Greater than \$15/hour	5.7	5.7	0.0	0.2
<i>Hourly wage for those who worked for pay (\$/hour)</i>	<i>10.6</i>	<i>10.3</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>2.6</i>
<b>Job Benefits (%)</b>				
Paid sick days	17.2	14.4	2.8	19.5
Paid holidays	25.6	27.1	-1.5	-5.6
Paid vacation	23.0	20.5	2.5	12.3
Health insurance	29.4	26.9	2.5	9.2
Retirement or pension benefits	18.9	18.6	0.3	1.6
<b>Job Schedule (%)</b>				
Regular daytime schedule	39.7	37.1	2.6	6.9
Regular evening shift	4.9	7.9	-3.0**	-37.7
Regular night shift	5.4	7.0	-1.6	-22.8
Rotating shift	5.6	4.8	0.7	15.0
Other schedule	5.8	6.7	-0.9	-13.5

Source: Six Month Follow-up Survey.

Sample: Includes 1,325 (675 MI-GPS; 650 AEP/PATH) survey respondents. Non-experimental contrasts (italicized) includes 870 (436 MI-GPS; 434 AEP/PATH) survey respondents who worked since random assignment. Sample sizes vary for outcomes due to item nonresponse.

Notes: Statistical significance levels for two-sided tests are indicated with asterisks, as follows: \*\*\* = 1 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; \* = 10 percent.

All comparisons in the table are experimental. The third of the sample who never worked for pay are included in analysis with zero values. Time to employment estimates come from a survival analysis described in the Appendix E.

Test of null-hypothesis that all impacts (other than time to employment) are zero:  $F(19,1305) = 1.24$ ;  $p\text{-value} = .22$ .

**6.4 Summary**

This study does not detect an impact on employment in the second quarter after random assignment for MI-GPS compared to AEP/PATH. Thus, with respect to that confirmatory outcome, the evaluation does not indicate that the MI-GPS program is more or less effective than the AEP/PATH program. No differences in employment and earnings were detected for the longer, five-quarter follow-up period also examined in the study. At the end of this longer follow-up period, about two-thirds of both groups were working.

No difference in the receipt of FIP benefits was observed, although SNAP benefit amounts were smaller for those assigned to the MI-GPS group compared to those assigned to the AEP/PATH group. For both the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs, about two-thirds of FIP applicants moved from AEP to PATH. Moreover, only one-quarter of FIP applicants remained on cash assistance at

the end of the available three quarter follow-up. About one quarter of both groups were neither working nor receiving cash assistance benefits at the end of the three quarter follow-up period, indicating they experienced some financial difficulty. Finally, no differences were detected in a range of job quality measures, including wages, hours worked, and benefits.

## 7. Conclusions

There is long-standing interest among policymakers and practitioners in identifying effective approaches to improving economic and public assistance outcomes for recipients of TANF and other public benefits. This report compares the effects of the new MI-GPS program to the state's existing AEP/PATH program. MI-GPS is a new goal-oriented coaching approach in which coaches work one-on-one with cash assistance applicants and recipients on incremental goal setting and close monitoring of achievement of employment-related goals. In contrast, the conventional AEP/PATH program focuses on participation in work activities that meet federal WPR requirements, after an initial period of addressing barriers to employment, and does not incorporate goal-oriented coaching elements.

There has been a growing interest in the goal-oriented coaching approach, and this is one of the earliest rigorous studies of its effects on cash assistance applicants' and recipients' employment and public assistance outcomes. The MI-GPS program did not result in improvements in employment, earnings, or public assistance receipt.

Regardless, several issues should be considered in drawing implications of these results for efforts that incorporate goal-oriented coaching within a TANF program.

- *The MI-GPS goal-oriented coaching program was an early iteration of a goal-oriented coaching approach, and the model has continued to be improved and refined.*

Providing goal-oriented coaching within a TANF program is a relatively new approach, and the MI-GPS program represents one of the first efforts.<sup>43</sup> Since the JSA evaluation in Michigan was launched, there has been an increasing interest and investment in launching and evaluating goal-oriented coaching programs. In particular, OPRE's *Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations* includes a rigorous evaluation of four goal-oriented coaching programs. These and other new and developing programs continue to modify and enhance the goal-oriented coaching approach, tools, and coach training methods used by the MI-GPS program (see Derr et al., 2019). These more recent programs, with adaptations made to build on past efforts, may produce different results.

- *The time horizon for expected MI-GPS impacts was unclear at the start of the study, and a longer follow-up period may be needed to observe effects.*

It is possible the follow-up period of five quarters on employment and earnings available for this study (with shorter follow-up available for other measures) did not fully capture employment and public assistance impacts or intermediate outcomes. Compared to AEP/PATH,

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<sup>43</sup> Other early efforts include Ramsey County, Minnesota. The implementation of the goal-oriented coaching in Ramsey County was documented in a separate report that is part of the JSA evaluation (see Martinson and Cook, 2018).

MI-GPS may take longer to produce economic results, as applicants and recipients need time to set and achieve incremental goals that may eventually lead to economic success.

- *The federal work participation rate can make goal-oriented coaching challenging to implement in a TANF program.*

The MI-GPS coaching approach enabled FIP applicants and recipients to set their own goals and activities to reach them; as a result, the activities did not always align with federal WPR requirements. Though the MI-GPS goal has improved economic well-being of those receiving cash assistance, short-term tasks often addressed needs and barriers in a wide range of domains (e.g., housing, mental health, education, and training) and thus may not count toward the WPR. Coaches reported that though they used the flexibility on the WPR requirements to some extent, they had difficulty disregarding it completely, as it remained part of the program culture.

As goal-oriented coaching approaches continue to be implemented in mandatory programs such as TANF, program designers and operators should consider how to balance the objectives of the approach with the WPR requirements and provide appropriate guidance to staff. The use of goal-oriented coaching is just one factor that should be considered in determining the flexibility that can be allowed for staff in meeting the WPR. In particular, critical factors are the state's target participation rate (states may significantly lower the WPR target they have to meet through the TANF caseload reduction credit) and the extent to which benefit levels allow recipients to combine work and cash assistance (where recipients can count toward the rate even after they find work). Thus, states and localities may face different choices in how to balance the WPR with goal-oriented coaching.

- *When providing goal-oriented coaching in TANF programs, it is important to consider that the duration of the goal-oriented coaching provided may vary across the caseload, with some applicants and recipients having limited exposure.*

In this study, and consistent with past studies of TANF caseload dynamics (ASPE, 2014), some cash assistance applicants were not approved to receive cash assistance; of those who were, some experienced relatively short spells of cash assistance receipt. For both the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH programs, the study found that about two thirds of FIP applicants moved from AEP to PATH. Moreover, only one quarter of FIP applicants remained on cash assistance at the end of the available nine month follow-up period. This indicates about one third of the MI-GPS group only received coaching during the 21-day AEP period, and some who moved into the PATH program did not receive coaching that lasted beyond a few months.

Because goal-oriented coaching is a relatively new approach, the duration and intensity of coaching needed to improve outcomes is not known. Nonetheless, in considering the delivery of goal-oriented coaching within a TANF environment, program designers and administrators should consider that the duration of intervention will be short for some individuals (particularly when introduced at the cash assistance application phase when some will not be approved for assistance) and whether and how goal-oriented coaching can be adapted for this circumstance.

- *Different approaches can be used to achieve similar employment and public assistance outcomes for cash assistance recipients.*

Though the MI-GPS program did not improve economic outcomes for cash assistance applicants and recipients, it also did not negatively affect their economic outcomes. Inasmuch as policymakers and program administrators are interested in different approaches to help cash assistance recipients move to work, the goal-oriented approach that allowed participation in a wider range of activities to meet employment goals (but still maintained overall compliance with the WPR) resulted in similar outcomes to those of the AEP/PATH program. Moreover, MI-GPS increased self-efficacy, which may be an important goal to some program administrators.

- *Though many FIP applicants and recipients found employment in the follow-up period, their earnings remained low.*

About two thirds of the MI-GPS and AEP/PATH groups were working at the end of a five-quarter follow-up period, but their earnings were low: \$11,450 on average over the five quarters and hourly wages of \$10.50 per hour. Moreover, of the share not working, two thirds were not receiving cash assistance either, and thus may be experiencing significant financial difficulties. However, this suggests that if the goal is to improve the economic well-being of cash assistance recipients, different and/or additional strategies may be needed.

In summary, this study of goal-oriented coaching in two counties in Michigan provides new, rigorous experimental evidence on this approach compared to the state's existing TANF program. The study detected no differences in employment, earnings, or public benefit receipt within a nine to 15 month follow-up period. Nevertheless, the study highlights some of the challenges that a goal-oriented coaching approach is likely to face in moving cash assistance recipients to work, particularly to jobs that will improve their overall economic well-being. Additional ongoing studies, including those sponsored by OPRE, that include refinements to the approach will provide critical information on the efficacy of goal-oriented coaching for improving employment and public assistance outcomes for cash assistance applicants and recipients.

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