

CALL FOR INPUT ON EXISTING MEASURES OF *MUTUAL REINFORCEMENT*

Mathematica is seeking nominations for measures of *mutual reinforcement*, or related constructs, to help us develop a new and unique measure of two-generation programs. Such a measure could help stakeholders better understand program characteristics that appear to help children and their families, and whether these programs produce the intended positive outcomes at the family level. We are producing this new measure in partnership with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Please nominate measures for our team to consider. We also invite you to circulate this call widely within your networks.

Project background. OPRE contracted with Mathematica to conduct the Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G) project. In this project, we define *two-generation programs* as those that combine adult education and employment-focused training for parents with accessible, high-quality early care and education for children, in order to improve family well-being and reduce poverty transmission across generations. The NS2G project is seeking to address measurement issues to build a better understanding of the characteristics, processes, and outcomes of two-generation programs. To do so, we will draw on existing measures and tools to develop a new measure focused on a construct, *mutual reinforcement*, that is of potentially critical importance to two-generation programs. Experts in the two-generation field helped us identify *mutual reinforcement* as reflecting both the essence of two-generation programming and the synergies on which ideally, two-generation programs and implementing organizations are capitalizing.

Mutual reinforcement: Service providers' efforts align and build on each other toward achieving a **shared vision** and **common or compatible goals** for serving families as a whole. Efforts can include designing and offering services of comparable quality, duration, and intensity to parents and children in the same families; developing and using shared measures to assess both parents and children in the same families; and seeking to create a common theory of change or aligned mission statements to positively affect both generations within a family. Efforts should be **intentionally differentiated and coordinated** to leverage each service provider's area of strength or expertise, with the idea that those efforts will become synergized and strengthened to achieve broader, shared outcomes for both generations beyond what each service provider would have been able to achieve alone.

An example of mutual reinforcement is an adult-serving organization providing paraeducator employment training for parents and placing parents in classrooms at a child-serving organization that provides early care and education for their children. This arrangement will minimize scheduling and transportation barriers for participating families. It will also facilitate parent and child learning to help each generation build and learn new skills together. For example, parents can learn techniques for the classroom which may also translate to their parenting behaviors that, when used in the home environment, can promote their children's emotional regulation skills. Further, the partnering providers could measure common outcomes, such as an enhanced family experience, related to this service offering.

Existing measures related to *mutual reinforcement*: Call for input on measures. For the tool, we are inviting nominations of measures that capture elements of *mutual reinforcement* as defined by the NS2G project (see sidebar for definition). We are interested in measures from within two-generation programs, as well as those that might be adapted from other fields related to caregivers or their children, or fields that examine how organizations collaborate. These may include early childhood education, K–12 education, workforce development, management and organizational dynamics, and health. We are particularly interested in measures that (1) have been developed or tested within the last 25 years, (2) have been developed and implemented or tested in the United States, and (3) have technical documentation available on their reliability or validity.

Drawing from a targeted search, we have built a list of 12 examples of measures or measurement tools that have items embedded in them related to *mutual reinforcement* (see Table 1). This call for input on measures aims to identify additional measures, including those from published and unpublished sources, such as dissertations or conference papers, or articles currently in press.

Nominate measures. Please send your recommendation for measures, relevant hyperlinks, or technical documentation to Kara Conroy at kconroy@mathematica-mpr.com by **August 28, 2020**, or contact her if you have any questions.

Table 1. Potential existing measures related to *mutual reinforcement*

Characteristic, process, or outcome with embedded measures (and source)	Field
Align and coordinate services; align policies and resources (Forum for Youth Investment 2011)	Youth development
Align and link system tools, operations, and funding streams (Minnesota 2-Gen Policy Network n.d.)	Two-generation, management
Alignment of existing structures, such as coalitions, networks or leadership groups (Forum for Youth Investment 2014)	
Assessing readiness for collective impact (John Snow International 2015)	Management
Collect, measure, and account for outcomes for both children and parents (Minnesota 2-Gen Policy Network n.d.)	Two-generation, management
Engage and listen to the voices of families (Minnesota 2-Gen Policy Network n.d.); engage youth, families, and community members in solutions (Forum for Youth Investment 2011)	Two-generation, youth development
Enhanced family experience (Minnesota 2-Gen Policy Network n.d.)	Two-generation
Identify community on 2-gen community continuum (Ascend 2017b)	Two-generation
Partners' contact information (having and using it) (Minnesota 2-Gen Policy Network n.d.)	Two-generation, management
Sharing, linking, and using data (Minnesota 2-Gen Policy Network n.d.)	Two-generation, management
Understanding needs of the whole family (Integrated Services Assessment Tool from Future Services Institute 2019)	Two-generation
Various items from Texas Christian University (TCU) Organizational Readiness for Change Assessment (Institute of Behavioral Research 2009)	Management