

**FY
2021**

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

Administration for Children and
Families

Office of Planning, Research, and
Evaluation



Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

FY 2021

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Administration for Children and Families

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

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

ACF programs aim to:

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



Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

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

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

OPRE includes four divisions:

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

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WELFARE AND FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY RESEARCH

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

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

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

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

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

This *Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency* describes major welfare and family self-sufficiency research projects sponsored by OPRE in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021.

ACF EVALUATION POLICY

ACF seeks to promote rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics in the conduct of evaluations. ACF's Evaluation Policy, established in 2012 and announced in the Federal Register in 2014, addresses these five key principles to govern ACF's planning, conduct, and use of evaluation. In November 2021, ACF updated the policy to reflect our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, which are germane to multiple principles. The [full evaluation policy](#) is available on the OPRE website.

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

SPOTLIGHT ON LEARNING AGENDAS

The [Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018](#) ("Evidence Act") requires federal agencies to develop evidence-building plans, or learning agendas, to systematically identify and address priority questions relevant to the programs, policies, and regulations of an agency, to promote efficient and effective operations. For some time, ACF has been pursuing learning agendas and related activities at multiple levels. At the broadest level, ACF contributes to the HHS multi-year evidence plan and annual evaluation plan required by the Evidence Act. At a more granular level, OPRE and ACF program offices are developing comprehensive learning agendas related to specific ACF programs. OPRE's Division of Economic Independence (DEI) manages learning agendas in two ACF program areas, in coordination with the ACF Office of Family Assistance (OFA):

- **Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency:** The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, administered by OFA, provides states and territories with flexibility in operating programs designed to help families with low incomes with children achieve economic self-sufficiency. The law that established TANF also authorized funding for research and evaluation relevant to TANF and the families it serves. OPRE supports a comprehensive portfolio in this area—which this annual report describes—and OFA leads additional learning activities such as performance management, technical assistance, and stakeholder engagement. For more information, see the [Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research and Evaluation Learning Agenda Snapshot](#).
- **Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG):** OFA also administers HPOG, a discretionary grant program that provides education and training for TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes for occupations in the healthcare field. OPRE uses a multi-pronged research and evaluation strategy to assess the success of HPOG. The strategy aims to provide information on program implementation, systems change, participant outcomes, impacts, and costs and benefits. For more information, see the [HPOG Research and Evaluation Learning Agenda Snapshot](#).

DEI and OFA work closely to update and refine the learning agendas on an ongoing basis to ensure they are responsive to changes in programs, policies, and contexts; are informed by and build on completed learning activities and emerging findings; and reflect the priorities of key stakeholders. DEI also works with other OPRE divisions and ACF's Office of Child Support Enforcement to coordinate on a range of research and evaluation activities related to the child support program. For more information, see the [Child Support Enforcement Research and Evaluation Learning Agenda Snapshot](#).

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) RESEARCH

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

Recent past projects include: [an exploration of issues and options to understand TANF-compatible outcome measures for employment services](#); [a study of the intersection between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance services](#); [an analysis of the coordination of TANF and Workforce Investment Act services](#); [a descriptive study of differences in TANF programs administered by counties versus states](#); [a descriptive study of Tribal TANF](#); [a series of research briefs synthesizing knowledge on important TANF topics](#); [an examination of the overlap between TANF and Supplemental Security Income programs and populations](#); and [a qualitative examination of the dynamics of disconnection from employment and TANF](#).

State TANF Policies Database

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

Project activities include:

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

Annual publications are available on the [OPRE website](#).

Understanding Poverty: Childhood and Family Experiences and TANF Office Culture

ACF is dedicated to promoting the economic and social well-being of families and children and thus has a particular interest in understanding the experiences of families within the systems designed to support them and move them out of poverty. While there are many facets to developing such an understanding, two crucial components are the operations of the programs themselves and the perspectives of families and children living in poverty. To that end, OPRE has undertaken the Understanding Poverty study, which launched in 2016 and is being conducted by MEF Associates in partnership with MDRC.

• TANF Office Culture

One component of this project explores how organizational culture, office design, and office procedures shape clients' experiences with TANF, the services provided to them, and potentially their outcomes. The concept of organizational culture encompasses

the organization's mission and vision in relation to its clients, the shared objectives guiding its work, as well as values, attitudes, expectations, assumptions, and norms. It also manifests in more concrete, everyday ways—such as physical location and office design, staff training, staffing decisions, employee decision-making and interactions with clients, and written procedures and materials. Fieldwork is focusing on exemplars of productive client-oriented office settings and organizational processes and culture as well as TANF offices that have made conscious attempts at organizational culture change.

- **Childhood and Family Experiences**

A second component of the project is examining the experiences and perspectives of children and families living in poverty, including the experiences of families who apply for and access TANF and other safety net benefits. A large body of research spanning decades has reflected a range of psychological, educational, health, and other serious and sometimes long-term impacts associated with severe economic disadvantage in childhood. While there is a growing literature on the lived experiences of adults in conditions of severe deprivation, less attention has been paid to how children in families with low incomes experience, perceive, and view the day-to-day circumstances of living in poverty. Interviews with approximately 50 children and youths as well as their parents are intended to facilitate a deeper understanding of what children understand about their families' economic circumstances, how families talk about public assistance benefits, and other aspects of their life experiences.

Both studies conducted limited follow-up data collection to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the role of organizational culture and families' perceptions of their economic circumstances and experiences with public benefits programs.

In 2021, this project published the final report of the TANF Office Culture study, titled [Promoting a Positive Organizational Culture in TANF Offices](#) (see text box for key findings). Other publications to date include:

- [a review of the qualitative literature on the experiences of parents and children living in poverty](#);
- [a review of literature describing the role that organizational culture plays in the delivery of TANF services](#); and
- [an infographic on Practicing Positive Organizational Culture in TANF Offices](#).

Final reports and briefs on findings from the both the TANF Office Culture and Childhood and Family

Experiences studies are expected to be published in 2022. Taken together, the outcomes of this inquiry are expected to improve the field's understanding of the lives of children and their families who experience poverty, including how the TANF program and organizational culture affect individuals within this population.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE TANF OFFICE CULTURE STUDY:

[Promoting a Positive Organizational Culture in TANF Offices](#)

- **Organizational Culture Change Strategies:** develop and communicate a clear vision that motivates staff; build buy-in and enthusiasm among frontline staff; invest in training; enlist external perspectives; and use performance management systems and surveys to monitor implementation.
- **Practices to Promote and Sustain a Positive Organization Culture:** ensure consistent understanding of mission and goals; involve frontline staff in process improvements; use staff training to build skills and reinforce agency goals; create advancement opportunities for frontline staff and former clients; simplify processes; design client-oriented spaces; and increase client choice in employment services.
- **Challenges Experienced by Staff and Clients:** ensuring consistent implementation across locations; pressure on staff workload and time; client frustration with process changes and with eligibility processes; limits of physical space; and evaluating the change.
- **Lessons for Human Services Practitioners and Policymakers:** demonstrate respect for clients in goal setting, employment services, and everyday administrative requirements; demonstrate respect for staff by investing in training, involving staff in innovation, and offering opportunities for internal promotion; promote positive staff experiences as a way to improve positive client experiences; TANF program requirements might limit programs' ability to alter client experiences to some extent, but progress is possible; clearly defined goals help staff translate agency-wide initiatives into actionable steps; and leaders can shape organizational culture in TANF programs.

Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data

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

The TDI project includes the following key tasks:

- Assessment of the needs of all 50 states regarding collecting, sharing, and using TANF data (see text box for key findings);
- Support to states and localities through the [TANF Data Collaborative](#), including wide-ranging training and technical assistance on a variety of topics related to TANF data use; and
- Federal capacity building through support to OFA on data-related tasks.

In 2019, TDI was expanded to include the TANF Employment Project (TEP). TEP supports the transformation of state-reported TANF data into a longitudinal format; expanded matching of TANF data with wage and unemployment insurance information from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH); and hosting the resulting data sets in a secure cloud environment to allow collaborative analysis between TDI researchers and ACF staff. TEP represents ACF's continued investment in using existing agency data to understand and manage the TANF program.

In 2021, TDI reported findings and recommendations based on its state needs assessment in [Unpacking Data Use in State TANF Agencies](#). The TANF Data Collaborative worked with teams from eight pilot states to design and execute data analysis projects, with a special focus on combining TANF and wage data to inform program management. TDI's Federal Capacity Building effort supported OFA's TANF Data Division in examining current issues and future opportunities related to state sampling for the purpose of federal reporting. In addition, the TEP negotiated data sharing agreements and a memorandum of understanding to enable merging of state-reported

TANF caseload data with wage data from the NDNH. The resulting data set will allow ACF to better understand participants' trajectories of paid work prior to, during, and after receipt of TANF cash assistance, leading up to and through the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

KEY FINDINGS FROM TDI'S 2019 STATE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

TDI's 2019 Needs Assessment surveyed 54 U.S. states and territories to understand their capacity to analyze administrative data for program management and improvement. Findings informed the design of TDI's technical assistance, with a goal of strengthening agencies' use of TANF, employment, and other administrative data.

Positive characteristics of data use by state TANF agencies include the following:

- Information is flowing to TANF decision-makers, especially through regular reports of aggregated data.
- Agencies have access to a consistent set of data elements.
- Agency staff have knowledge of fundamental data analysis tools and techniques.
- TANF staff rate their agency's data use highly.

Areas for growth in state TANF agency data use include:

- Limited staff capacity, especially staff time, restricts what agencies can do.
- Users may not be able to understand or trust data because of data quality or documentation challenges.
- Some states have modernized data systems, but other systems are increasingly obsolete.
- Agencies report access to employment data for TANF recipients, but access for analytic purposes continues to be a challenge.

State TANF Case Studies

Launched in 2018, this project identified and provided in-depth, systematic case studies of nine promising and innovative employment and training programs for TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes. It focused on programs that have strong linkages with wraparound support services, with special emphasis on child care assistance. The project aimed to increase

ACF's knowledge about strategies that TANF and workforce development agencies implemented to help TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes become economically self-sufficient. The selected programs were identified through a scan of the field and stakeholder engagement, which included interviews with program staff and participants, and structured case reviews.

SITE	DESCRIPTION
Business Link New York City Human Resources Administration	Offers job development, placement, and training for New York City residents, particularly those receiving cash assistance.
Climb Wyoming Wyoming Department of Family Services	Offers a statewide employment and training program for single mothers.
Community Action Organization of Scioto County, Inc. Scioto County, Ohio	Provides employment services for youth and services for families with low incomes.
Community Caring Collaborative Washington County, Maine	A partnership of 45 community organizations focused on supporting people with low incomes.
Targeted Assessment Program Kentucky Department for Community Based Services	Provides case management to parents in the state's TANF or child welfare systems.
New Moms Chicago, Illinois	Provides job training and housing for young mothers.
'Ohana Nui – Family Assessment Centers Hawai'i Department of Human Services	Emergency shelters with on-site services for families experiencing homelessness in Honolulu.
Rhode Island Works Rhode Island Department of Human Services	A state TANF program that first addresses participants' barriers to work.
Solutions for Change San Diego County, California	Provides housing, training, and support services to families experiencing homelessness.

Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge

A growing number of TANF and workforce development agencies are interested in becoming better users and producers of high-quality research in order to improve programs for families with low incomes; however, many of these agencies currently lack the expertise and capacity to integrate data and evidence into their program

practices. ACF has responded to this need through investments to strengthen the evaluation capacity of human services agencies through the provision of evaluation technical assistance (TA). In 2012, ACF launched the [Advancing Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research Project](#) to support state and local human services agencies with research and evaluation activities, and subsequently awarded a [follow-on contract](#) to continue this work. Under these contracts, the project developed the

“Learn, Innovate, Improve” (LI²) framework, which is a research-based approach to program improvement that embeds analytic methods in the process of designing, implementing, and iteratively testing program changes.

Building on this work, the ACF Office of Family Assistance awarded the Rapid Cycle Evaluation and Training Technical Assistance (RCE TTA) contract, an ongoing project that provides TA to state and local TANF agencies. RCE TTA has focused on the first two phases of LI², “Learn” and “Innovate,” which are centered on assisting agencies with identifying, designing, and implementing program changes.

To complement these efforts, in 2019 OPRE launched Supporting Partnerships to Advance Research and Knowledge (Project SPARK), which aims to provide research and evaluation TA to state, tribal, and local TANF programs currently or formerly engaged under RCE TTA. Led by Mathematica, this project supports those agencies in advancing their existing initiatives into the “Improve” phase of the LI² process, which focuses on evaluating program changes or innovations using pilot tests or other approaches. This project also enables programs to share their innovations, findings, and resources with the other sites involved in the project.

In March 2020, TANF programs experienced an unprecedented disruption in service delivery as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the project has engaged in a collaborative process with sites to identify and develop strategies to address these changes to their work. In September 2020, sites gathered for a two-day virtual convening designed to facilitate knowledge sharing and build connections. In addition, SPARK has produced several resources for TANF practitioners, including briefs highlighting innovative approaches that TANF programs developed in response to the pandemic. In addition, SPARK has produced several resources for TANF practitioners, including a [brief](#) highlighting innovative approaches to service delivery and operations that TANF programs developed in response to the pandemic. Other resources for practitioners, including a brief on strategies TANF programs have developed to reduce stress and promote wellness among staff and participants, will be forthcoming in 2022.

Additionally, in recognizing that LI² is just one method for providing evaluation TA, the project is documenting existing evaluation TA approaches and examining the literature about whether certain approaches are more promising than others at building evaluation capacity within agencies. This work assesses the landscape of current or previous evaluation TA activities in human services program contexts, asks what can be learned from other fields that have examined this question, and documents lessons to inform future federal evaluation capacity-building efforts.

NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER ON POVERTY AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY

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

In 2021, the HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) awarded a new grant to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to administer the National Research Center on Poverty and Economic Mobility. The Center will continue many of the activities of past Poverty Centers but with some new priority areas. Specifically, the Center will 1) support a fellowship program to place both emerging and senior scholars at HHS to work with federal policy, research, or program offices; 2) administer a grant program to fund research and analysis on equity, inclusion, diversity, and access in human services and economic mobility programs; and 3) host events to disseminate actionable findings to federal policy and research communities.

OPRE provides support for the Center’s fellowship program and dissemination events. Two fellows are currently in residence in DEI, where they are working on a variety of projects related to employment, self-sufficiency, and economic well-being among families with low incomes. OPRE will also coordinate with the Center to co-host policy-relevant research events.

NEW

TANF and Child Support Moving Forward - Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic and Further Incorporating Customer Input

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on State, Tribal, and Local TANF and child support programs. While some efforts have been made to understand these impacts, there are significant gaps in our knowledge of how these programs were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, OPRE launched a project to document the changes these programs made during the pandemic, lessons learned, and changes that have been incorporated into ongoing program operations.

This project will also advance knowledge regarding how State, Tribal, and Local TANF and child support programs can incorporate customer input to inform program improvements and operations. There is an increasing understanding of the valuable role of customer input in creating more effective, equitable social programs. First, this project will describe how TANF and child support programs are currently using customer input to inform their programs. Then, it will create a customer input guide and other resources for TANF and child support programs to obtain customer input, pilot these resources with select programs, and conduct rapid-cycle evaluations of these resources.

Mathematica and its partner MEF are conducting this project.

NEW

Family Self-Sufficiency Demonstration Development Grants and Evaluation Support Contract

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

programs are also part of a network of services available to families who are (or may become) eligible for TANF.

The 20 FSSDD grantees are:

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

Under the FSSDD Evaluation Support contract, the FSSDD grant recipients are working with an evaluation technical assistance provider (Mathematica and its partner The Adjacent Possible™, or TAP) to build their capacity to conduct research and evaluation, use data to improve program outcomes, demonstrate the value of their programs to stakeholders, and ultimately, contribute to the evidence base on interventions serving families with low incomes. During the first year of the contract, the evaluation TA provider will collaborate with each grant recipient to understand their existing evaluation capacity and begin to provide research and evaluation support through activities appropriate to the particular stage of development of each grant recipient's intervention. Such activities may range from creating a program logic model or theory of change to conducting pilot or other small-scale studies. Throughout the project, Mathematica and TAP will also coordinate annual grantee meetings, learning communities, and other universal/cross-site support to foster learning and collaboration among grant recipients. At the end of the FSSDD grant recipients' project periods, their readiness for future research and evaluation activities will be assessed and next steps to move them toward rigorous evaluation will be identified.

NEW

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

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

NEW

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE STUDY OF POLICIES TO REDUCE INTERGENERATIONAL CHILD POVERTY

In the 2021 House Appropriations Committee Report (H. Rept. 116-450), Congress directed HHS to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences to “provide an evidence-based analysis of and recommendations for policies and programs to reduce intergenerational poverty and improve child welfare.” This project will support an ad hoc committee, formed under the auspices of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), in conducting a consensus study over the course of 30 months. The study will be designed to complement the 2019 NASEM report, [*A Roadmap to Reduce Child Poverty*](#), which provided recommendations for policy and programs to reduce child poverty within 10 years, and to address the following objectives:

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

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

EMPLOYMENT AND THE LABOR MARKET

A key focus of OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research is increasing knowledge about strategies for helping TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes find jobs, maintain employment, and advance in the labor market. Major past projects include: the [Job Search Assistance Evaluation](#), which measured the relative impact of job search activities offered by TANF programs; the [Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation](#), which tested several strategies for helping hard-to-employ parents find and sustain employment; the [Employment Retention and Advancement Project](#), which tested strategies for helping employed individuals keep their jobs and advance in the workforce; and the [National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies](#), which evaluated the effectiveness of mandatory welfare-to-work programs during the welfare reform era of the 1990s.

OPRE is currently conducting experimental impact evaluations of employment strategies, including [subsidized and transitional employment models](#), [coaching practices aimed at job entry and retention](#), and approaches targeting hard-to-employ populations including [low-income individuals with behavioral health issues such as opioid dependency, substance abuse, and/or mental health challenges](#). OPRE aims to increase the number of evidence-supported interventions for populations with low incomes seeking employment and economic stability. In addition, OPRE's congressionally mandated [Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse](#) is building on the earlier [Employment Strategies Evidence Review](#) to identify interventions that aim to improve employment outcomes, reduce employment challenges, and support self-sufficiency for populations with low incomes.

Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration

OPRE launched the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration (STED) in 2010 with the goal of demonstrating and evaluating the next generation of subsidized employment models for critical populations with low incomes. The project, led by MDRC, examined strategies for providing counter-cyclical employment and for successfully transitioning individuals from short-term, subsidized employment to unsubsidized employment in the regular labor market. These strategies built upon approaches that have demonstrated effectiveness in previous studies and also tested new and innovative interventions. The evaluation included a random assignment impact evaluation in eight sites, an implementation evaluation at each project site, and a cost-benefit analysis. An in-program survey measured potential non-economic benefits of subsidized employment, such as emotional and social well-being.

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

STED began with an analysis of what was known about existing or previous approaches to subsidized employment, especially within the context of current TANF policies and requirements, as well as efforts under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. In 2011,

OPRE released [*Subsidizing Employment Opportunities for Low-Income Families: A Review of State Employment Programs Created Through the TANF Emergency Fund.*](#)

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

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

The STED project concluded in June 2021 and has published a number of reports to date (see text box for reports).

REPORTS FROM THE SUBSIDIZED AND TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT DEMONSTRATION

- 2015:** • [Testing the Next Generation of Subsidized Employment Programs: An Introduction to the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration and the Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration](#)
- 2018:** • [The Effects of Subsidized and Transitional Employment Programs on Noneconomic Well-Being](#)
 - [Forging a Path: Impacts and Costs of New York City's Young Adult Internship Program](#)
 - [Tribal Solutions: Subsidized Employment Programs Serving American Indians and Alaska Natives](#)
 - [The Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration: New Perspectives on Creating Jobs – Final Impacts of the Next Generation of Subsidized Employment Programs](#)
- 2019:** • [Findings from In-Depth Interviews with Participants in Subsidized Employment Programs](#)
- 2020:** • [Can Subsidized Employment Programs Help Disadvantaged Job Seekers? A Synthesis of Findings from Evaluations of 13 Programs](#)

Evaluation of Employment Coaching for



TANF and Related Populations & **NEW** Long-Term Follow-Up Study

In 2016, OPRE launched the Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations. Led by Mathematica, with partners Abt Associates and MDRC, the evaluation is conducting impact and implementation evaluations of coaching interventions that focus on job entry and retention and that target TANF populations and other individuals with low incomes. The definition of and theory behind employment coaching is discussed in the brief, [Employment Coaching: Working with Low-Income](#)

[Populations to Use Self-Regulation Skills to Achieve Employment Goals](#). The evaluation design and process for selecting interventions to study are described in the [Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations: Evaluation Design Report](#). Below is a list of the interventions participating in the evaluation; additional information about each intervention and its key characteristics can be found in the [Employment Coaching Program Snapshots](#).

- **Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS) program** – operated by the Iowa Department of Human Rights through subcontracts with 17 local agencies across the state (seven of which are participating in the evaluation)
- **Goal4 It!** – administered by the Jefferson County Department of Human Services in Jefferson County, CO
- **LIFT** – a non-profit with locations in Washington, DC; New York, NY; Chicago, IL; and Los Angeles, CA (the latter three locations are participating in the evaluation)
- **MyGoals for Employment Success** – administered by the city housing authorities in Baltimore, MD and Houston, TX

Implementation Evaluation

The project is currently developing descriptive reports with findings from the implementation evaluation of each intervention. The first such report, on [Family Development and Self-Sufficiency](#), was published in March 2021, and the others are anticipated in 2022. The project also recently released a [brief on findings from in-depth interviews with coaching participants](#), and will soon release papers featuring other components of the implementation evaluation, including the use of video recordings as a data collection strategy and lessons learned by the coaching interventions in adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact Evaluation

Initial impact findings based on the first follow-up point (9 months after study enrollment for FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and LIFT; 12 months after study enrollment for MyGoals) are expected in 2022. The project's analytic approach to estimating impacts is detailed in the [technical supplement to the evaluation design report](#). The project will also assess impacts at a second follow-up point (21 months after study enrollment for all interventions). Additionally, OPRE awarded the Evaluation of Employment Coaching Long-Term Follow-Up Study contract to Mathematica in 2021 in order to assess long-term impacts on participant outcomes.

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

[Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse](#)



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

The Clearinghouse has several goals:

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

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

NEW

[NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTER](#)

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

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

The [Pathways to Work Clearinghouse](#) website launched in 2020 and, as of late 2021, features the results of the evidence review for 221 interventions and 295 studies. The website provides detailed information on these interventions and studies, including their effectiveness rating for each outcome domain assessed, and – for interventions with evidence of effectiveness – information about how

the interventions were implemented. The website features a host of additional, supplemental products including:

- [a video explaining how to use intervention details from the Clearinghouse](#);
- [a brief on lessons learned delivering remote services to job seekers with low incomes during COVID-19](#);
- [a report detailing the standards and methods used to conduct the review](#);
- several reports synthesizing what can be learned by looking at evidence across interventions including a [meta-analysis that examines which types of interventions and services appear to be most effective during economic recessions and recoveries](#); and
- [recorded webinars and briefings](#).

A number of other products will be forthcoming in 2022, including additional meta-analyses and an evidence gap map.

This project, which began in 2018, is led by Mathematica with assistance from MEF Associates and Hager Sharp.

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

The purpose of this project, which launched in 2017 and is led by MEF Associates in partnership with MDRC, is to identify gaps in knowledge of employment and training approaches for populations with low incomes and recipients of social safety net benefits, in order to inform future directions for research and evaluation.

NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER ON HISPANIC CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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

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

- ***During COVID-19, 1 in 5 Latino and Black Households with Children Are Food Insufficient***: Many Latino and Black households with children have struggled to obtain enough food to feed their families during the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis. According to data from the [Household Pulse Survey](#), 19 percent of Hispanic households and 22 percent of Black households with children experienced food insufficiency in the summer of 2020, compared with 9 percent of White households with children.

- ***State Level TANF Policies and Practice May Shape Access and Utilization among Hispanic Families***: Several examined policies and practices across states interact with demographic characteristics more common among Hispanic families in a way that may support access to TANF cash assistance, such as the high prevalence of information and application materials in the Spanish language. However, other policies and practices may discourage access—especially documentation practices and eligibility requirements around citizenship status.
- ***Latino Child Poverty Rose During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Especially Among Children in Immigrant Families***: The economic impact of the pandemic fell especially heavily on Latino children in immigrant families. From 2019 to 2020, poverty rates increased by 6.1 percentage points among Latino children living in families headed by non-U.S. citizens, compared to a 4-percentage point increase among all Latino children.
- ***Practitioners in New Mexico’s TANF program Offer Perspectives on Engaging Hispanic Families***: New Mexico’s TANF system has implemented a number of strategies that successfully engage Hispanic families, such as hiring dedicated immigrant specialists, using a combined application process for public benefits, and co-locating services. Despite these efforts, some challenges reaching Hispanic applicants remain. Information about public programs is accessible in-person or online, but not using smartphone apps.

In 2019, the project held the Next Steps for Employment and Training Research Roundtable in Washington, DC. The U.S. Department of Labor's Chief Evaluation Office served as a key partner to OPRE in organizing the convening. Invitees included a mix of researchers, employers, practitioners, and federal staff. The Roundtable consisted of presentations and group discussions on specific topics within the area of employment and training including strengthening sectoral strategies in serving disadvantaged populations, assessing and improving implementation of program models, and implications of the changing nature of work for job skills and work quality and stability. In 2020 the project published [Employment and Training Programs Serving Low-Income Populations: Next Steps for Research](#), which synthesizes themes from the 2019 Roundtable, summarizes what is known from past and current research, identifies knowledge gaps, and proposes a set of potential research questions that can help define future research opportunities.

The project recently released three additional publications. One paper focuses on [potential changes in the labor market and nature of work over the next 10 to 15 years and implications for research on employment and training programs supporting workers with low incomes](#). There are also two briefs that highlight new directions in employment and training research and evaluation. One brief focuses on [digital employment tools created with Human-Computer Interaction design approaches](#) and the other focuses on [employer-based interventions intended to reduce the inherent conflict many employees face in managing work and life demands](#).

Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio

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

Through the Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio, OPRE seeks to build on lessons learned and knowledge gaps revealed by these previous and current studies, as well as identify and rigorously evaluate the “next generation” of employment strategies. The portfolio is comprised of two OPRE projects: the **Building Evidence on Employment Strategies** (BEES) project and the **Next Generation of Enhanced**

Employment Strategies (NextGen) project. These projects aim to advance the evidence base by evaluating a wide range of employment strategies for highly vulnerable populations with complex barriers to obtaining and retaining employment, such as physical and mental health conditions, a history of criminal justice system involvement, or limited work skills and experience.

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

Building Evidence on Employment Strategies



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

Since the project's inception, BEES has consulted with more than a dozen federal agencies to identify emerging priorities for evidence building and conducted a broad field scan to learn about innovative programs. These efforts resulted in the list of initial sites for further study or evaluation. BEES will produce individual reports for each intervention evaluated in addition to developing special topics papers. The COVID-19 pandemic and related factors have introduced challenges to the feasibility of impact evaluations in some sites. The evaluation team continues to closely monitor all sites and make decisions as conditions evolve.

INTERVENTION NAME AND LOCATION	TYPE OF STUDY	DESCRIPTION
Addiction Recovery Care Kentucky	Implementation	An innovative program that combines treatment and recovery services with workforce development for individuals struggling with substance use disorder.
Breaking Barriers San Diego California	Long-Term Data Analysis	A program designed to increase employment among TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes who are affected by disabilities, substance use disorder, and/or mental health issues.
Central City Concern Oregon	Impact, Implementation, Cost	A program based in Portland that provides treatment for substance use disorder, healthcare, housing, and comprehensive employment services.
Individual Placement and Support (IPS) within Federal Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) Illinois and New Hampshire	Impact, Implementation, Cost	The IPS model will be tested within two FQHC sites, offering employment services to unemployed and underemployed behavioral health clients within FQHC settings.
IPS within Substance Use Disorder Sites Oklahoma and Ohio	Impact, Implementation, Cost	The IPS model will be tested within two programs that provide employment services to individuals with a substance use disorder.
IPS with TANF and SNAP Populations Washington	Impact, Implementation, Cost	The IPS model will be tested with a population eligible for TANF and/or SNAP.
Substance Use Disorder Sites Multiple states	Descriptive	Several programs that provide employment services to individuals with substance use disorder.
Two-Generation Program Illinois	Impact, Implementation, Cost	A demonstration program in Chicago that provides Housing Choice Voucher recipients with an offer of employment coaching for parents and adolescents of working age, and enhanced case management aimed to meet the needs of the entire family and improve their success in the labor market.
WorkAdvance Multiple states	Long-Term Data Analysis	An innovative employment approach designed to help disadvantaged workers with low incomes prepare for and enter quality jobs with opportunities for advancement.

Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies

In 2018, OPRE contracted with Mathematica to conduct the Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) project to identify and test innovative interventions designed to improve employment-related outcomes

for people with low incomes and complex challenges to employment. These challenges may include physical and mental health conditions, criminal justice system involvement, or limited formal work skills and experience. Additionally, in response to the growing recognition of the importance of employer engagement in job training and workforce integration programs, NextGen has a special focus on market-oriented or employer-driven approaches.

INTERVENTION NAME AND LOCATION	TYPE OF STUDY	DESCRIPTION
Bridges from School to Work (Bridges) Select Bridges programs (multiple states) will participate in the evaluation.	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Employer-driven program that provides job readiness instruction, placement, and post-placement support for young adults with disabilities.
Families Achieving Success Today (FAST) Ramsey County Workforce Solutions (MN)	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Adaptation of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model to help TANF clients with physical or mental health challenges achieve competitive employment.
Individual Placement and Support for Individuals with Justice Involvement Case Management Incorporated (TN), Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center, Grand Lake Mental Health Center (OK), Pee Dee Mental Health (SC), Transitions Mental Health Services (IL and IA)	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	IPS model implemented with adults who have mental health conditions and have recently been released from jail or prison following the completion of a sentence or have begun to serve an alternative sentence in the community.
Mental health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) Partnership Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Cognitive behavioral therapy and peer support stress management course and employment services for mothers with low incomes who are experiencing symptoms of depression.
Work Success Utah Department of Workforce Services	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Statewide program that provides clients with low incomes and TANF recipients with coaching, employment and life skills training, and peer support to help them find and keep a job.
Wellness, Comprehensive Assessment, Rehabilitation, and Employment (WeCARE) New York City Human Resources Administration	Descriptive	Citywide initiative that addresses the needs of cash assistance clients with medical and/or mental health barriers to employment.

Key components of the NextGen project include:

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

To date, six interventions have been selected to participate in the NextGen project. Lessons learned from the NextGen project will be shared with a broad range of stakeholders such as policymakers, practitioners, program developers, and researchers across the welfare, workforce, disability, education, and justice communities. The study team anticipates that findings from the descriptive and cost studies are likely to be released beginning in 2022, and early findings on the effectiveness of the interventions are likely to be released beginning in 2022.

NEW

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

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

NEW

EXPLORE OUR DATA!

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

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

Many datasets from past DEI projects are stored at the [Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research \(ICPSR\)](#) at the University of Michigan. Additionally, DEI supports OPRE’s [Child and Family Data Archive \(CFData\)](#), also led by ICPSR. The Child & Family

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

Archived Datasets from DEI Projects

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

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

OPRE has a strong history of sponsoring rigorous research on the effectiveness of education and training strategies for improving employment and earnings for TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes. Currently, OPRE is a national leader in the rigorous evaluation of postsecondary career pathways programs. Beginning in 2007, with the launch of the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education project and continuing with the evaluations of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program, ACF has developed a robust portfolio of research on the career pathways approach.

CAREER PATHWAYS

The career pathways framework has been identified as a promising approach to improve postsecondary education and training for adults with low incomes and low academic skills. Its central feature is instruction that is organized as a series of manageable and well-articulated steps accompanied by strong supports and connections to employment. Each step incorporates customized curricula and instruction, academic and non-academic supports, and employment experiences and opportunities to support students at various levels of preparation.

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

Evaluation Portfolio for the Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program

The Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program provides education and training to TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes for occupations in the healthcare field that pay well and are expected to either experience labor shortages or be in high demand.

The HPOG Program uses the career pathways framework to address the challenge of preparing adults with low incomes and often low academic skills for jobs with the potential to earn a family sustaining wage in the healthcare sector. Local HPOG programs are expected to target skills and competencies demanded by the healthcare industry; support career pathways; result in an employer- or industry-recognized certificate or degree; combine supportive services with education and training services to help participants overcome barriers to employment; and provide training and services at times and locations that are easily accessible to targeted populations.

The HPOG Program is administered by OFA. In 2010, OFA awarded the first round of HPOG grants to 32 organizations located across 23 states to carry out five-year programs (referred to as HPOG 1.0). In 2015, OFA awarded a second round of HPOG grants to 32 organizations located across 21 states for a new five-year period (referred to as HPOG 2.0). OFA later extended HPOG 2.0 for an additional 12 months, ending September 2021. [OFA's website](#) provides additional information about the HPOG Program.

HPOG was authorized as a demonstration program with a mandated federal evaluation. OPRE oversees a multi-pronged evaluation strategy to assess the success of the HPOG Program. The evaluation strategy aims to provide information on program implementation, systems change, participant outcomes, impacts, and costs and benefits.

Evaluations of HPOG 1.0

The evaluations of HPOG 1.0 have largely concluded and additional information is available on [OPRE's website](#). Research and evaluation activities pertaining to HPOG 1.0 that are still underway include an assessment of the long-term impacts of HPOG 1.0 (see the Career Pathways Outcomes Studies in this section); and research grants that OPRE awarded in 2019 to support secondary data analysis of archived HPOG 1.0 data (see the Career Pathways Secondary Data Analysis Grants in this section).



Evaluations of HPOG 2.0

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

Pathways Programs: 2nd Generation of HPOG

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

The project also develops annual reports based on PAGES data that describe program offerings, participant characteristics, and outcomes. Annual reports have been released for the first five years of HPOG 2.0, the most recent being the [Year Five Annual Report](#) in 2021. Additionally, the project has released three special topics papers to date:

- [*Career Prospects for Certified Nursing Assistants: Insights for Training Programs and Policymakers from the HPOG Program*](#)
- [*Targeting Higher Skills and Healthcare Jobs: How HPOG Grantees Set and Use Performance Goals*](#)
- [*Which Program Characteristics are Linked to Program Impacts? Lessons from the HPOG 1.0 Evaluation*](#)

HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation

OPRE awarded a contract in 2015 to Abt Associates, in partnership with MEF Associates, Urban Institute, Insight Policy Research, and NORC at the University of Chicago, to undertake impact, outcome, and implementation studies of HPOG 2.0.

The HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation is conducting a descriptive evaluation, impact evaluation, and cost-benefit analysis of all 27 non-Tribal grantees.

- The **descriptive evaluation** includes implementation, systems change, and outcomes studies and will help interpret findings from the impact study. It also includes in-depth interviews with HPOG 2.0 participants. The project released a [design report](#) and [analysis plan](#) for the descriptive evaluation, and a separate [design plan](#) for the in-depth interviews.
- The **impact evaluation** is using a random assignment design to rigorously assess the impacts of HPOG programs. The [impact evaluation design plan](#) presents information on the study design, key research questions, and research methods that will be used to estimate the impact of HPOG 2.0 programs. The project has also released [analysis plans for the short-term impact report](#) and the [intermediate-term impact report](#) to provide additional information on how analyses will be conducted. The impact evaluation's short-term impact report will be published in early 2022 and presents short-term impact findings approximately 15 months after random assignment (see text box for key findings).
- The evaluation includes a **cost-benefit analysis** of a standard HPOG program. The [cost-benefit analysis research design](#) specifies how costs and benefits will be estimated and compared, and the [analysis plan](#) provides additional information on how analyses will be conducted.
- Additionally, in 2021, OPRE funded the HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation COVID-Cohort Study to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic affected HPOG 2.0 programs and participants. The study will conduct a 15-month follow-up survey of participants who enrolled in HPOG after the onset of the pandemic in order to compare the impacts of HPOG 2.0 before and after COVID. Also in 2021, the National Evaluation released a special topics paper on the [healthcare workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). A forthcoming special topics paper will be released in 2022 on how HPOG 2.0 programs responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.



KEY FINDINGS FROM THE HPOG 2.0 SHORT-TERM IMPACT REPORT

- **HPOG 2.0 substantially increases educational progress in the short term.** About 15 months after randomization, 63 percent of the treatment group are making educational progress compared to 46 percent of the control group (an impact of 16 percentage points).
- **HPOG 2.0 leads to large increases across other training measures** including cumulative months of training, receipt of a credential, receipt of an exam-based certification or license, and completing at least six months of training.
- **In the short term, HPOG 2.0 does not have an impact on overall employment but does increase employment in healthcare occupations.** About 45% of the treatment group obtained employment in healthcare occupations, compared to 41% of the control group.
- **HPOG 2.0 does not increase earnings in the short term but does improve two potential precursors for future earnings**—career connectedness, defined as being engaged full-time in work or school or at least part-time in both, and self-assessed career progress.
- **Impacts for individual local HPOG programs in the short term vary.** Analyses using Bayesian methods found that most programs improve educational progress and about half increase cumulative of months of training; findings regarding effects on healthcare employment and earnings are inconclusive for almost all programs.

Tribal HPOG 2.0 Evaluation

The five Tribal HPOG 2.0 grantees participated in a comprehensive implementation and outcome study led by NORC at the University of Chicago. The Tribal HPOG 2.0 Evaluation assessed the HPOG programs administered by the Tribal grantees using methods grounded in culturally appropriate approaches and guided by the principles outlined in [A Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities](#), developed by ACF's Child Welfare Research and Evaluation Tribal Workgroup. The Tribal Evaluation used a mixed-methods approach to assess Tribal HPOG programs' structure, processes, and outcomes. Several reports are available on OPRE's website including the [Tribal HPOG 2.0 Evaluation Final Report](#) and [companion brief](#) (see text box for key findings), a brief describing [Tribal HPOG grantees' program adaptations in response to COVID-19](#), and a brief examining [how Tribal grantees and their partners incorporate tribal culture and heritage into training programs](#).

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE TRIBAL HPOG 2.0 EVALUATION FINAL REPORT

- The Tribal HPOG 2.0 grantees used a career pathways framework to provide postsecondary training to participants. All grantees implemented a career pathway in nursing and some grantees offered other trainings in allied health professions.
- Grantees formed partnerships with educational institutions, workforce development organizations, and other providers to deliver healthcare training across their service areas.
- Grantees tailored academic (e.g., financial assistance for tuition and training-related costs) and non-academic (e.g., assistance with transportation, food, and childcare) supports to meet participant needs. However, across grantees, there was low uptake of some of the non-academic supports.
- The majority of participants (69 percent) completed at least one healthcare training. Of those participants, 74 percent completed one training and 26 percent completed one training and enrolled in a second training. Eighty percent of participants who enrolled in a second training completed it.
- Forty-two percent of participants obtained employment after enrollment, with the majority (93 percent) working in a healthcare occupation (e.g., Nursing Assistant, Registered Nurse, and Personal Care Aide).

ORGANIZATION RECEIVING AWARD	PROJECT TITLE	HPOG 2.0 PROGRAM PARTNER
Northwestern University, Institute for Policy Research	The Northwestern University Two-Generation Study (NU2Gen) of Parent and Child Human Capital Advancement	Community Action Project of Tulsa County, Inc. (Tulsa, OK)
Brandeis University, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Institute on Assets and Social Policy	Study of Career Advancement and Quality Jobs in Health Care	The WorkPlace, Inc. (Bridgeport, CT)
Loyola University of Chicago, School of Social Work	Evaluation of Goal-Directed Psychological Capital and Employer Coaching in Health Profession Opportunity Development	Chicago State University (Chicago, IL)

HPOG University Partnership 2.0 Research Grants

The HPOG University Partnership 2.0 Research Grants (HPOG UP 2.0) augmented OPRE’s multi-pronged HPOG evaluation strategy by funding university research teams to conduct studies relevant to HPOG goals and objectives and that benefit the broader employment and self-sufficiency research field. The teams partnered with HPOG program grantees as an integral part of the research plan development and execution. In 2016, the HPOG UP 2.0 grants were awarded to the universities listed above.

The HPOG UP 2.0 grants ended in 2020, but two grantees (Northwestern and Loyola) operated through 2021 under no-cost extensions. A [report released in 2021](#) summarizes lessons learned and early findings from the HPOG UP 2.0 research grants as of the end of the HPOG UP 2.0 grant cycle.

Career Pathways Outcomes Studies

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

CPIO, which launched in 2014 and ended in 2021, examined impacts approximately 36 months after random assignment. CPLO, launched in 2016 and expected to end in 2022, is looking at impacts approximately 72 months after random assignment. Both studies use follow-up surveys and administrative data to examine impacts on

educational attainment, employment and earnings, and family well-being, and are led by Abt Associates.

CPIO and CPLO have released several publications:

- Analysis plans to document how the studies’ key research questions will be addressed, including the analysis plan for the [PACE intermediate follow-up analyses](#) (released in 2018), the plan for the [HPOG intermediate follow-up analyses](#) (released in 2019), and the [HPOG Six-Year Follow-Up Analysis Plan](#) and the [PACE Six-Year Follow-Up Analysis Plan](#) (both released in 2021).
- Reports on intermediate impacts for [HPOG](#) and for all nine programs in PACE, six of which were recently released in 2021:
 - [Madison Area Technical College's Patient Care Pathway Program](#);
 - [Year Up](#);
 - [Des Moines Area Community College's Workforce Training Academy Connect Program](#);
 - [Instituto del Progreso Latino's Carreras en Salud Program](#);
 - [Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training \(I-BEST\) Program](#); and
 - [Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement \(VIDA\)](#).
- [Cross-site report](#) that synthesizes three-year impact findings across all PACE programs and the HPOG 1.0 Impact Study (see text box for key findings).
- Reports on long-term impacts reports for HPOG and several PACE programs (see text box for key findings from these reports). All long-term impact reports are expected to publish in 2022.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CAREER PATHWAYS INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES STUDY

Summary and Insights from the Ten PACE and HPOG 1.0 Job Training Evaluations: Three-Year Cross-Site Report

- **Most programs had large impacts on credential receipt and modest impacts on training duration.** Out of the 10 evaluations, nine found increases in credential receipt, ranging from 6 percentage points (36 percent) to 32 percentage points (145 percent). Most of the increase was for short-term credentials such as a Certified Nursing Assistant certificate.
- **Only one program, Year Up, increased earnings at the three-year mark.** Year Up's large and statistically significant impact is among the largest reported to date from randomized evaluations of training programs for adults with low incomes.
- **Few programs increased employment overall, but several HPOG-funded programs increased employment in the healthcare field.** Only two of the 10 evaluations detected modest improvements in employment. Four of the five evaluations of HPOG-funded programs found favorable impacts on employment in the healthcare field.
- **There is little evidence that any programs, other than Year Up, affected participants' career progress or well-being.** Consistent with the lack of impact on earnings, there is little evidence that PACE or HPOG 1.0 programs reduced financial distress or public assistance receipt, nor did they consistently affect child development or well-being. Some programs reduced personal student debt.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CAREER PATHWAYS LONG-TERM OUTCOMES STUDY

HPOG 1.0 Six-Year Impact Report

- HPOG did not detectably increase receipt of a postsecondary credential requiring a year or more of training among those who had access to HPOG. About one-third of the entire study sample had completed such a credential.
- HPOG increased employment in a healthcare occupation by 5 percentage points, from 32 percent in the control group to 37 percent in the treatment group.
- HPOG did not detectably increase quarterly earnings. Members of the treatment and control groups were both earning about \$6,000 per quarter as of the six-year follow-up.
- HPOG increased receipt of a postsecondary credential of any length by 8 percentage points, from 70 percent in the control group to 78 percent in the treatment group.
- Though COVID-19, which struck during this report's follow-up window, affected the labor market, the evaluation did not detect positive or negative effects on HPOG outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CAREER PATHWAYS LONG-TERM OUTCOMES STUDY (continued)

Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA): Six-Year Impact Report

- **VIDA increased receipt of longer-term college certificates and degrees.** Six years after random assignment, VIDA increased by 12 percentage points (66 percent of the treatment group and 54 percent of the control group) receipt of a college credential after eight or more months of FTE enrollment. VIDA also increased receipt of an associate degree or higher by eight percentage points (49 percent of the treatment group versus 41 percent of the control group).
- **VIDA's credential impacts did not lead to detectable earnings impacts.** VIDA did not have a detectable impact on average quarterly earnings in the 23rd and 24th follow-up quarters, which is the confirmatory outcome in the earnings domain at this follow-up point. Both treatment and control group members earned about \$8,400 per quarter.

Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program: Six-Year Impact Report

- **I-BEST continued to show no detectable impact on credentials requiring at least a year of full-time college.** Six years after random assignment, about 13 percent of treatment and control group members earned college credentials after eight or more months of FTE enrollment by quarter 24. The impact faded over time during the follow-up period as control group members “caught up.”
- **I-BEST's impact on educational outcomes did not translate into a detectable impact on average earnings.**

Instituto del Progreso Latino's Carreras en Salud Program's Six-Year Impact Report

- **Carreras continued to have an impact on credentials requiring at least a year of full-time college.** About 17 percent of treatment group members, compared to 13 percent of control group members, earned a college credential preceded by eight or more Full-time Equivalent (FTE) months of enrollment by quarter 24.
- **Carreras' impact on college credentials did not translate into an impact on average earnings.** The program did not have a detectable impact on quarterly earnings. This was true for the end of the follow-up period, the focus of the confirmatory outcome, as well as all study quarters.

Benefits that Last: Long-Term Findings for the Year Up Program

- **Year Up's earlier impacts on earnings continued through the end of the follow-up period.** Average quarterly earnings in Quarters 23–24 (the confirmatory outcome) were \$1,895 higher for treatment than control group members (a 28 percent effect)—virtually unchanged since the \$1,857 impact observed at the intermediate follow-up point.
- **Year Up continued to be financially worthwhile for society overall and beneficial for participants.** With financial benefits continuing and little new costs, the net return to society for each dollar of program costs rose to \$2.48 over the seven-year period—an increase from \$1.66 reported after five years. The net gain to society was \$34,328 per participant—the difference between an average benefit of \$57,463 and average cost of \$23,135.

Career Pathways Secondary Data Analysis Grants

In 2019, OPRE awarded four grants to support secondary analysis of data collected for PACE and the HPOG 1.0 evaluations. The purpose of the grants is to stimulate and fund data analyses on questions relevant to career pathways programs' goals and objectives. Grants were awarded to the following institutions:

ORGANIZATION RECEIVING AWARD	PROJECT TITLE
Brandeis University, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Institute on Assets and Social Policy	Analysis and Measurement of Career Pathways and Progress through Job Quality and Micro-Advancements
Harvard University	Determinants of an Effective Job Training Program: An Analysis of Year Up
MDRC	Leveraging Data to Understand Career Pathways
University of Texas at Austin, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources	Which Program Characteristics are linked to Certified Nursing Assistant Training Participants Educational Outcomes? Lessons from the HPOG 1.0 Evaluation

PATHWAYS FOR ADVANCING CAREERS AND EDUCATION



In 2007, OPRE initiated the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) project, a multi-site, random assignment evaluation of promising strategies for increasing employment and self-sufficiency among families with low incomes. Based on stakeholder input, PACE came to focus on postsecondary career pathways as the main intervention framework to study. The nine programs included in PACE are:

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

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

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

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

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

The Promising Occupations project, led by MEF Associates, will both update the analyses from Employment Sector Analysis and increase projections past 2022, in addition to incorporating the career pathways framework.



BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE

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

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

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

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Next Generation

Over the past several decades, innovative behavioral economics research has shown that human decision-making is often imperfect and imprecise. People – clients and program administrators alike – procrastinate, get overwhelmed by choices, and miss important details. As a result, both programs and participants may not always achieve the goals they set for themselves.

Principles from behavioral economics can both shed light on decision-making and offer new tools to improve outcomes for program participants. Small changes in the environment can facilitate desired behaviors; planning and commitment tools can be used to improve follow-through; and default rules can produce positive outcomes even for people who fail to act.

In 2015, OPRE launched the BIAS Next Generation (BIAS NG) project to build on the successes of BIAS and continue exploring the application of behavioral science to the programs and target populations of ACF. BIAS NG, led by MDRC in collaboration with Larry Katz of Harvard University, Marianne Bertrand of the University of Chicago, Judd Kessler of the University of Pennsylvania, MEF Associates, Child Trends, and Public Strategies, is building on the activities and lessons of BIAS in several ways including:

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

For each program area mentioned on the previous page, the BIAS NG team consulted with stakeholders about the major challenges facing these programs. To improve client participation in TANF activities, the project has collaborated with programs in Los Angeles County (California), Monroe County (New York), and Washington State to test text messages, mailed reminders, new tools for staff to use with clients, and new staff practices. To increase families' engagement in their child welfare cases, the project worked with Allegheny County (Pennsylvania) to test a mailed flyer providing a roadmap of key steps in their case coupled with reinforcing text messages. To help guide qualified families through the application process to foster or adopt, the team is developing tools in partnership with Los Angeles County's Department of Children and Family Services. And in Hennepin County (Minnesota), the project is working with Child and Family Services on behavioral diagnosis and design activities to devise a new behavioral intervention. Likewise, BIAS NG is collaborating with two Wayne County (Michigan) Head Start grantees – Starfish Family Services and Matrix Human Services – on behavioral diagnosis and design activities to devise new behavioral interventions. In 2020, the project completed random assignment in three sites and will begin reporting on the results of those tests in 2022.

In February 2021, BIAS NG released an [edition](#) of the project's Behavioral Buzz newsletter highlighting a practitioner's perspective on the value of bringing a behavioral science informed approach to human services' practices and processes based on our work with Monroe County.

Behavioral Interventions Scholars Grants

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

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

GRADUATE STUDENT	PROJECT TITLE	UNIVERSITY	PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/ FACULTY MENTOR
Basheerah Enahora	Engaging Low-Income African American Adolescents in a Virtual Avatar-Based Nutrition Education Program	University of North Carolina Greensboro	Dr. Jared McGuirt
Emily Hanno	A Novel Approach to Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers	Harvard University	Dr. Stephanie Jones
S. Gabe Hatch	Optimizing Amount and Type of Practitioner Nudges in Online Relationship Education for Low-Income Couples	University of Miami	Dr. Brian Doss
Hannah Ruebeck	Perceived Discrimination and its Effects on Morale, Effort, Cooperation, and Labor Market Participation	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Dr. Frank Schilbach
KaLeigh White	The Long-Term Wellbeing of Families and Children Under a Conditional and Punitive Social Safety Net	University of Iowa	Dr. Mary Noonan
Danke Derek Wu	The Effects of Automating Welfare Services on Program Enrollment and Well-Being: Evidence from Indiana	University of Chicago	Dr. Bruce Meyer

CROSS-CUTTING AND OTHER SAFETY NET RESEARCH

In addition to research that falls clearly within the substantive areas of TANF, Employment and the Labor Market, Education and Training, and Behavioral Science, OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research portfolio includes several projects that span these and related issues in a cross-cutting way. Current projects focus on, among other topics, the characteristics of and services provided to refugee youth; ethnic and racial differences in human services delivery; integrated approaches to supporting child development and improving family economic security; co-location of social services; and human services programs in rural contexts.

Recent past projects include: an [evaluation of the Assets for Independence program](#) to assess impacts on participants' savings, savings patterns, and asset purchase; a [series of research briefs on issues related to the well-being and economic self-sufficiency of families and children experiencing homelessness](#); and a [project to explore conceptual frameworks for youth development and successful transition to adulthood](#).

Descriptive Study of the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program

Established by the ACF Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in 1980, the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) Program serves refugees and other eligible youth within the United States who do not have a parent or relative available and committed to providing for their long-term care. The URM Program provides services within or parallel to the domestic child welfare system, including placements, independent living services, educational assistance, and other services to promote youth well-being through local URM provider agencies.

While past research has examined programs and outcomes for youth aging out of domestic foster care, these studies have not focused specifically on the URM Program and its participants.

In 2017, OPRE, in coordination with ORR, launched the Descriptive Study of the URM Program with the goal of improving the field's understanding of the range of child welfare services and benefits provided through the URM Program and the experiences of participants. Led by MEF Associates and its partner Child Trends, the study includes analysis of URM Program administrative data, surveys of state and local administrators and URM service providers, site visits to six URM service providers, and focus groups with URM youth and foster parents. OPRE, ORR, and the project team worked together to select URM service providers for site visits across six different states, representing a diverse range of program ages, program sizes, geographic contexts, policy and program environments, and mixes of URM youth from around the world.

This study concluded in September 2021 and findings are now available, including a [final report](#) and [companion brief](#) synthesizing study findings. Additionally, this study has released two briefs that do a deeper dive into URM youth's [educational supports and experiences](#) and [their mental health](#), as well as [brief overviews](#) of the six URM programs visited as part of data collection.

How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness

In 2013, ACF's Office of Family Assistance released an Information Memorandum on the "Use of TANF Funds to Serve Homeless Families and Families at Risk of Experiencing Homelessness," which clarifies how TANF funds can be used to help address the housing and other needs of families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It encourages TANF agencies to consider using TANF

funds to address housing needs; coordinate services for TANF-eligible homeless families; provide employment services to TANF-eligible homeless individuals; and serve as partners in statewide, regional, and local homeless efforts, such as Continuums of Care.

OPRE launched this project in 2017 to strengthen ACF's understanding of the extent to which states, counties, and local agencies are explicitly using TANF funds to serve families experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and what they are specifically doing with TANF funds to support and serve these families. Conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with MEF Associates, the project administered a web survey to 54 state and territory TANF administrators and 150 county or local level administrators and conducted five site visits (both in-person and virtually), in addition to other information collection activities. In 2021, the project published the following special topics papers:

- [*Assisting Families Experiencing Homelessness with TANF Funding: Findings from a Survey of TANF Administrators*](#)

- [*Approaches to Assisting Families Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness with TANF Funds*](#)
- [*Using TANF Funding to Provide Housing Assistance during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Example from One County Agency*](#)

The project produced a [final report](#) in early 2022.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services Analysis Execution

This project builds on OPRE's [Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services \(RED\)](#) project, which concluded in 2017. RED helped build a base of knowledge to inform ACF's identification and understanding of ethnic and racial differences across the service spectrum – more specifically, in access to and take-up of human services, nature and quality of services received, and outcomes of services. The goal was to develop a framework for understanding when racial and ethnic differences likely constitute disparities and to examine how greater insight into racial and ethnic disparities could be used to improve human services program delivery for ACF. To help

OPRE METHODS INQUIRIES

The Methods Inquiries project helps ensure that OPRE-funded research uses the most scientifically advanced and appropriately applied methods possible. To accomplish this goal, OPRE regularly convenes meetings of scientists and research experts to advance its understanding of critical topics in social science research methodology. In addition to OPRE staff, these meetings include participants from a variety of contexts including academia, government, and the private sector. The meetings explore innovations in research design, analytic techniques, and measurement. Additionally, the Methods Inquiries project includes an ongoing seminar series; publications with further information on topics addressed in the meetings; and ad hoc responses to emerging methodological issues.

To date, OPRE has sponsored 12 meetings on innovative methods. The most recent meeting, held in October 2021, was entitled “Enhancing Rigor, Relevance, and Equity in Research and Evaluation through Community Engagement.” This meeting focused on how community-engaged research methods can be used to address inequity by collaborating with communities impacted by our programs to identify promising practices and co-create programs. The meeting explored the multiple, complex dimensions of inequity that ACF program participants and service providers

must contend with, such as racial inequity. Prior meetings explored core components research; effect size; subgroup analysis; implementation science; innovative directions in estimating impact; methods for unpacking the “black box” of programs and policies; use of administrative data in social policy research; alternatives to randomized controlled trials; Bayesian methods; rapid learning methods; and open science. These meetings are intended to help OPRE explore recent methodological advances, gaps in current knowledge and implementation, and opportunities to apply innovative methods to government-funded research and evaluation.

In 2021, OPRE published a summary of the 2020 meeting highlighting key themes about core components research, [*Exploring Core Components Research in Social Services Settings*](#). Additionally, OPRE released a brief, [*Methods, Challenges, and Best Practices for Conducting Subgroup Analysis*](#), that describes the features of a well-designed and implemented subgroup analysis that uses a multiple regression framework, and provides an overview of recent methodological developments and alternative approaches to conducting subgroup analyses.

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

achieve this goal, RED created a research plan to reliably identify racial and ethnic disparities across the service delivery system in a range of ACF programs and services. The plan outlined research questions and proposed approaches to addressing those questions, including recommended data sources, analytic strategies, and data collection activities.

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

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

1. Racial and ethnic differences in the level of underlying financial need for TANF cash assistance;
2. The stringency of TANF policies that people of different races and ethnicities face based on where they live; and
3. Whether a multivariate approach helps us better understand observed racial and ethnic differences in TANF participation rates among program-eligible families.

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

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

Human-Centered Design for Human Services

In 2018, OPRE launched the Human-Centered Design for Human Services (HCD4HS) project, led by Child Trends with partners MEF Associates and design firm Anthro-Tech, Inc. Human-centered design (HCD) aims to create solutions to complex problems through intentional engagement with the beneficiaries of the solution. The purpose of this project is to gain a better understanding of what HCD looks like in the context of human services; the requirements for implementation across a range of programs; and the evaluability, feasibility, and sustainability of HCD as an organizational practice. HCD will be explored across ACF programs at federal, state, and local levels.

This project began with an assessment of the state of the field through expert and stakeholder consultation, a review of literature, and key informant interviews. These activities aimed to define core elements of HCD; identify human services programs that have implemented HCD; and to identify evaluation efforts to date. Key informants were interviewed from Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit in Milton, Pennsylvania; Multnomah Idea Lab within the Multnomah County Department of Human Services in Oregon; and the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood. A synthesis of the findings across these foundational activities is forthcoming.

Building on what was learned from these early activities, the HCD4HS project conducted a pilot demonstration and implementation evaluation in partnership with three human services sites: Denver Human Services (Denver, CO); Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Support (WA); and Santa Clara County Social Services (San Jose, CA). Each participating site received HCD training followed by ongoing coaching from January through November 2021. Findings from the evaluation will provide insights on the implementation, feasibility, and evaluability of HCD, and outcomes of interest to ACF programs. Publication of these findings is expected in 2022.

Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches

OPRE's [Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security \(Integrated Approaches\)](#) project, which concluded in 2018, investigated the design and evaluability of integrated approaches to alleviating poverty that address the needs of both parents and children. A national scan found that most existing two-generation programs were in the early stages of development as pilots or as new programs that began only a few years prior and were

not ready for evaluations of effectiveness. The scan also revealed that the majority of programs lacked the internal research capacity to conduct and manage research evaluations for themselves, and they rarely had partnerships with local evaluators to help them achieve this goal.

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

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

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

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

In 2021, these four initiatives began receiving technical assistance on the Learn, Innovate, Improve (LI²) framework discussed in the TANF Research section above. Six additional initiatives (10 total) were selected in 2021 to participate in a learning community that will meet periodically to work on activities related to building their evaluation capacity:

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

In 2022, the project will test and refine a new measure with participating two-generation initiatives.

Integrating Financial Capability and Employment Services

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

In 2021, OPRE released a [literature synthesis](#) and a brief on [the outcomes, payment timing, and next steps for research on the Earned Income Tax Credit](#). In 2022, study activities will include an online survey, phone interviews, virtual site visits, and virtual focus groups.

Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts

Though significant evaluative work has been carried out to improve our understanding of how human services programs meet their goals of improving family economic self-sufficiency, financial security, and overall well-being, there are gaps in knowledge of how programs can best serve rural communities. Rural contexts present unique opportunities and challenges for administering human services programs. Through the Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts project, ACF seeks to better understand these contexts for several programs: Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood; TANF; HPOG; and Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting.

The types of challenges human services programs experience in rural communities translate into a series of more specific challenges for leveraging the four ACF programs that are the focus of this study. While rural communities often have many assets, some can struggle with access to economic opportunity, transportation, broadband internet, and health and human services. Distance to services and negative cultural perceptions of public assistance also present barriers to accessing human services and other benefits for which families may be eligible. Disparities in access to services and benefits can lead to basic needs going unmet. Given these key challenges, this study will focus on the following goals:

1. Provide a rich description of human services programs in rural contexts;

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

In 2021, the project published [a brief on its definition of rural](#) and [a Mixed Methods Analysis, Integration, and Triangulation Plan](#). 2M Research and its partner Urban Institute are conducting this study.

Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network

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

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

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

BABY'S FIRST YEARS

Baby's First Years, launched in 2017, is a multi-site randomized controlled trial supported by a grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) within the National Institutes of Health, along with other public and private funders. This study seeks to fill important gaps in scientific knowledge about the role of economic resources in children's early development by evaluating whether unconditional cash payments have a causal effect on the cognitive, socio-emotional, and brain development of infants and toddlers in families with low incomes. Specifically, 1,000 mothers of infants with incomes below the federal poverty line have been recruited into the study and are receiving monthly cash payments by debit card for the first 40 months of the child's life. Parents in the experimental group are receiving \$333 per month (\$4,000 per year), whereas parents in the control group are receiving a nominal monthly payment of \$20. Mothers were recruited in New York City, greater New Orleans, the Twin Cities, and the Omaha metropolitan area.

In order to understand the impacts of the added income on children's cognitive and behavioral development, an interdisciplinary study team will assess treatment/control group differences at age 3 (and, for a subset of measures, age 2) on measures of cognitive, language,

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

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

Understanding the Value of Centralized Services

In order to gain access to the social services for which they are eligible, individuals and families with low incomes in the United States often must navigate a complex network of support. Providers that serve the same clients may be geographically dispersed, and the level of communication and coordination among them varies. In addition, the programs they operate may have different eligibility criteria, application processes, and participation requirements. However, in some communities, providers have worked together to bring important services under one roof.

The Understanding the Value of Centralized Services (VOCS) project, awarded to MEF Associates and its subcontractor Mathematica in 2020, seeks to build knowledge on the costs and benefits of co-locating social services for families with low incomes. VOCS will summarize the findings from existing research on this topic. Building on this knowledge base, VOCS will identify approximately three state and local social services

providers or networks of providers that have undertaken efforts to centralize and coordinate services and, using qualitative methods, will document client and staff experiences receiving and providing services at these sites. A final report, expected in 2022, will synthesize findings from the literature review and descriptive studies.

ACF Evidence Capacity Support

OPRE and ACF program offices are partnering to extend and deepen evidence capacity, which refers to a culture of and infrastructure for building and using evidence for learning and improvement. Launched in 2020, the project builds on OPRE's existing efforts to augment evidence capacity at ACF and incorporates the principles of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018. It prioritizes the learning needs of agency staff and stakeholders for information about the context, reach, implementation, performance, and impact of their programs. The project aims to strengthen the capacity for using evidence in five areas: 1) evidence culture, 2) evidence infrastructure, 3) data access, 4) knowledge and skills, and 5) dissemination.

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

In 2021, the contract supported three projects:

ACF OFFICE	DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT
Office of Refugee Resettlement	Analysis of performance measures and recommendations for data quality improvement for the Survivors of Torture grant program
Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response	A literature review to summarize existing research and identify gaps
OPRE	Development of a framework for Evidence Capacity that can inform future organizational improvement efforts

NEW

Advancing Contextual Analysis and Methods of Participant Engagement

OPRE launched Advancing Contextual Analysis and Methods of Participant Engagement (CAMPE) in 2021 to identify and increase the use of equitable research practices in federally-funded research and evaluation. Specifically, CAMPE will focus on advancing the use of participatory methods and analysis of contextual factors in projects funded by OPRE. The project will also provide consultation to expand OPRE’s capacity to apply an equity lens to the framing and language used in research and evaluation products. Led by Urban Institute, CAMPE will directly engage people who have participated in programs like those OPRE evaluates; develop guidelines

and tools to facilitate the use of equitable evaluation practices in current and future OPRE projects; and communicate findings and lessons learned from the project to a broad range of stakeholders. Future reports expected in 2024 will focus on incorporating contextual information into research and evaluation and describing strategies for enhancing the use of participatory methods in federally-funded research.

NEW

Measuring, Supporting, and Understanding Child and Caregiver Well-Being through Employment and Self-Sufficiency Research

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

Objectives include:

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

SPOTLIGHT ON DISSEMINATION

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

Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency

Since 1998, OPRE has convened the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS) for researchers, state and local administrators, practitioners, and federal officials and policymakers to discuss cutting-edge research from evaluations of programs, policies, and services that support families on the path to economic self-sufficiency. The biennial conference serves as an opportunity to present the latest findings from evaluations of human services programs and policies; discuss ways to incorporate findings into the design, implementation, and improvement of programs; and develop strategies for future evaluations. In addition, the conference provides an opportunity for emerging scholars who are early in their research careers to showcase their work. Conference topics include:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Programs, Policies, and Populations
- Employment and Mobility in the Labor Market
- Youth Well-Being and the Transition to Adulthood
- Strengthening Families, Fatherhood, Marriages, and Relationships
- Evaluating Social Programs, Building Evidence, and Using Data
- Approaches to Alleviate Poverty and Expand Opportunity

RECS 2020 was held October 13-15 and 19-22 in a virtual format. The conference engaged more than 1,700 participants in 45 plenary and breakout sessions, 11 networking roundtables, and featured the work of 19 emerging scholars. RECS 2022 will be held June 1–3, 2022. For more information about RECS 2022 and past conferences, visit <http://recsconference.net>.

OPRE Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Publications – FY 2021 (October 2020–September 2021)

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) RESEARCH

- [State TANF Policies Database](#)
- [Welfare Rules Databook: State TANF Policies as of July 2019](#)

Understanding Poverty: Childhood and Family Experiences and TANF Office Culture

- [Promoting a Positive Organizational Culture in TANF Offices: Final Report](#)

Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data

- [Unpacking Data Use in State TANF Agencies](#)

State TANF Case Studies

- [Graphical Overview of State TANF Policies as of July 2019](#)
- [Case Study of an Employment Program for Youth and Services for Families: Community Action Organization of Scioto County](#)
- [Case Study of an Employment and Training Program Serving Single Mothers with Low Income: Climb Wyoming](#)
- [Case Study of a Program Serving Families Experiencing Homelessness: Solutions for Change](#)
- [Case Study of a Collaborative Approach to Improving Community-Based Services for People with Low Income: Community Caring Collaborative](#)
- [Case Study of a Program Serving Families Who Are Homeless: 'Ohana Nui – Family Assessment Centers](#)
- [Case Study of an Employment Program Serving People with Low Income: Business Link](#)
- [State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\) Case Studies: Summary of Innovative Programs Serving People with Low Income](#)
- [Case Study of a Job Training, Housing, and Family Support Program for Young Mothers: New Moms](#)
- [Case Study of a Program Addressing Participants' Barriers Before Providing Training and Other Work-Related Activities: Rhode Island Works](#)
- [Case Study of an Approach for Preparing Individuals with Low Income for Work: Kentucky Targeted Assessment Program](#)
- [Designing Participant-Centered Programs: Participant Reflections on What Works Well in Social Services Programs](#)

EMPLOYMENT AND THE LABOR MARKET

Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation

- [The Effectiveness of Different Approaches for Moving Cash Assistance Recipients to Work: Findings from the Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation](#)
- [Implementation of an Intensive Job Search Program for Cash Assistance Recipients: The STRIVE Program in Westchester County, New York](#)

Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations

- [Selecting and Testing Measures of Self-Regulation Skills Among Low-Income Populations](#)
- [Family Development and Self-Sufficiency \(FaDSS\): Implementation Findings from the Evaluation of Employment Coaching](#)

OPRE Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Publications – FY 2021 (October 2020–September 2021)

Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse

- [Lessons Learned Delivering Remote Services to Job Seekers with Low Incomes During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

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

- [Individual Placement and Support: Background and Directions for Future Research](#)
- [Building Evidence-Based Strategies to Improve Employment Outcomes for Individuals With Substance Use Disorders](#)
- [Newsletter: BEES News and Updates - May 2021](#)
- [Providing Employment Services in Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery Programs: Responses to COVID-19](#)

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Evaluation Portfolio

- [Tribal HPOG 2.0: Integration of Tribal Culture into Healthcare Training Programs](#)
- [Research to Practice Partnerships: Early Findings and Lessons Learned from the HPOG University Partnership 2.0 Research Grants](#)
- [The Healthcare Workforce during COVID-19: Results from an Environmental Scan](#)
- [Health Profession Opportunity Grants 2.0: Year Five Annual Report \(2019–20\)](#)
- [Analysis Plan for the HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation Intermediate-Term Impact Report](#)

Career Pathways Intermediate Outcomes Study

- [Workforce Development Council of Seattle–King County's Health Careers for All Program: Three-Year Impact Report](#)
- [Madison Area Technical College's Patient Care Pathway Program: Three-Year Impact Report](#)
- [Still Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Year Up's Longer-Term Impacts](#)
- [Des Moines Area Community College's Workforce Training Academy Connect Program: Three-Year Impact Program](#)
- [Instituto del Progreso Latino's Carreras en Salud Program: Three-Year Impact Report](#)
- [Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training \(I-BEST\) Program: Three-Year Impact Report](#)
- [Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement \(VIDA\): Three-Year Impact Report](#)

Career Pathways Long-Term Outcomes Study

- [Health Profession Opportunity Grants \(HPOG\) Impact Study's Six-Year Follow-Up Analysis Plan](#)
- [PACE Six-Year Follow-Up Analysis Plan](#)

BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Next Generation

- [Behavioral Buzz: January 2021 - A Practitioner Reflects: Applying Behavioral Science to Social Services](#)

Behavioral Interventions Scholars Grants

- [Behavioral Interventions Scholars Grants Summary Chart 2020–2021](#)
- [Behavioral Interventions Scholars: 2020 Grantee Project Abstracts](#)

OPRE Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Publications – FY 2021 (October 2020–September 2021)

CROSS-CUTTING AND OTHER SAFETY NET RESEARCH

How TANF Agencies Support Families Experiencing Homelessness

- [*Assisting Families Experiencing Homelessness with TANF Funding: Findings from a Survey of TANF Administrators*](#)
- [*Approaches to Assisting Families Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness with TANF Funds*](#)

Integrating Financial Capability and Employment Services

- [*The Earned Income Tax Credit: Program Outcomes, Payment Timing, and Next Steps for Research*](#)
- [*Integrating Financial Capability into Employment Services: Literature Synthesis*](#)

What We Learned from Recent Federal Evaluations of Programs Serving Disadvantaged Noncustodial Parents

- [*What We Learned About Programs Serving Disadvantaged Noncustodial Parents*](#)

OPRE Methods Inquiries

- [*OPRE 2019 Methods Meeting Resources List*](#)
- [*Methods, Challenges, and Best Practices for Conducting Subgroup Analysis*](#)
- [*Exploring Core Components Research in Social Services Settings*](#)
- [*Presentation: Pre-Registration: What and Why*](#)

National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families

- [*During COVID-19, 1 in 5 Latino and Black Households with Children Are Food Insufficient*](#)
- [*Navigating the Job Market During COVID-19*](#)
- [*State-level TANF Policies and Practice May Shape Access and Utilization among Hispanic Families*](#)
- [*More than One in Four Latino and Black Households with Children are Experiencing Three or More Hardships during COVID-19*](#)
- [*Disruptions to Child Care Arrangements and Work Schedules for Low-Income Hispanic Families are Common and Costly*](#)
- [*Programs Can Build on the Strengths of Latino Families with Low Incomes to Improve Outcomes*](#)
- [*4 in 10 Latino and Black households with children lack confidence that they can make their next housing payment, one year into COVID-19*](#)
- [*Resources for Social Science Students Navigating Graduate School and the Job Market*](#)
- [*Latino Child Poverty Rose During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Especially Among Children in Immigrant Families*](#)
- [*Building Upon the Resilience of Hispanic Families During COVID-19*](#)
- [*Latino Children Represent Over a Quarter of the Child Population Nationwide and Make Up at Least 40 Percent in 5 Southwestern States*](#)
- [*Federal Stimulus Payments Kept More Than 2 Million Latino and Black Children Out of Poverty During the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020*](#)
- [*Practitioners in New Mexico's TANF Program Offer Perspectives on Engaging Hispanic Families*](#)
- [*Latino Parents Report Positive Co-parenting and Parent-Child Interactions that Vary by Gender and Nativity*](#)

