

behavioral buzz



Brought to you by the BIAS team

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Welcome! This is an email blast about behavioral economics and the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families' Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project. The BIAS project learns and applies tools from behavioral science to improve the well-being of low-income children, adults, and families.

Behavioral Insight

Want to help clients make appointments?

We've all put off scheduling and completing unpleasant tasks. Sometimes we put these off for so long that we forget that we ever had to do them in the first place. How can we help clients (and staff) remember to do unpleasant things? [A recent study](#) found that just sending a simple reminder postcard doubled the likelihood of a patient scheduling a needed dental appointment. However, including more information or trying to make the messaging more persuasive didn't seem to work at all. The use of simple reminders—such as emails, which are free—can be extremely powerful in encouraging people to take small actions toward good outcomes.

Accomplishments

Behavioral Diagnosis and Peer Practicum

Over the past several months, the BIAS team has been working with several site partners across ACF program areas in order to determine how behavioral economics may be able to suggest improvements to existing programming. The team's approach involves a diagnostic framework called behavioral mapping, which is comprised of a series of steps that allow the team to

- identify possible behavioral problems in a given program,
- focus on the key behavioral bottlenecks in program process, and
- propose a set of behavioral solutions that can potentially address these issues within the context of the existing programs.

Mapping is ongoing with the National Domestic Violence Hotline, Illinois' Department of Human Services, Maine's Office of Child and Family Services, Texas's Office of Child Support, and Kentucky's Division of Child Care. The team has begun to make preliminary intervention suggestions at several sites such as changing outgoing messages, reducing and simplifying forms, changing the sequence of activities, and revising letters that inform recipients of opportunities.

The Bias Peer Practicum: On July 16 and 17, the team hosted a two-day event that brought together policymakers, program administrators, and behavioral experts for an exploration of the application of behavioral economics to human service programs. The event included presentations from behavioral experts and a series of facilitated breakout groups. The breakout discussions focused on understanding how different psychological tendencies influence human services and how to design low-cost, high-impact changes to existing programs informed by an understanding of these psychologies.

Human services program administrators from across the country learned to look in new ways at the problems they face every day and came away excited about applying behavioral insights to their work. Behavioral experts learned more about the problems that human services providers face in the field and brainstormed about how behavioral interventions might help improve program outcomes.

Upcoming Milestones

The BIAS Project is committed to bringing insights from behavioral economics to a range of human services programs. Behavioral mapping will continue with existing partners and new ones, and pilot testing of the resulting behavioral interventions will begin in 2013.

We've also been taking the BIAS show on the road—we presented the BIAS project at Welfare Research and Evaluation Conference (WREC) in May and at the National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics (NAWRS) in August, and you can look for us at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) conference in November!

From the BIAS team at OPRE, MDRC and ideas42.

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