Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OFFICE OF PLANNING, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

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OPRE

Administration for Children and Families

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/

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

ACF programs aim to:

- Promote economic, health, and social well-being for individuals, families, and communities;
- Promote healthy development and school readiness for children, especially those in low-income families;
- Promote safety and well-being of children, youth, and families;
- Support underserved and underrepresented populations; and
- Upgrade the capacity of ACF to make a difference for families and communities.

Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation

http://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 low-income children and families, research syntheses, and descriptive and exploratory studies. OPRE aims to build and disseminate knowledge about effective approaches to helping low-income children and families.

OPRE includes three 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, and child abuse and neglect.
- 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.

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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 low-income families. 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 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 2015.

ACF EVALUATION POLICY

ACF seeks to promote rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics in the conduct of evaluations. ACF's Evaluation Policy, which was published in the Federal Register on August 29th, 2014, addresses these five key principles to govern ACF's planning, conduct, and use of evaluation. 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:** We 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, we protect 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.

TANF Research

The federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides block grants to states to design and operate programs to help needy families achieve 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 a qualitative examination of the dynamics of disconnection from employment and TANF; an examination of the overlap between TANF and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs and populations; a descriptive study of Tribal TANF; and a series of research briefs synthesizing knowledge on important TANF topics.

Other past projects include: a study of local implementation of TANF; an examination of state and local efforts to divert TANF applicants from applying for cash assistance; an examination of the implementation of sanction policies and the relationship of these policies to federal work participation requirements; a study of what is known about the effects of time limit policies; and a synthesis of knowledge about the TANF caseload and TANF leavers.

In addition to the studies described in this section, OPRE conducts experimental research on welfare-to-work and innovative employment strategies; these efforts are described in the later sections on employment and the labor market and education and training.

Improving Engagement of TANF Families: Understanding Work Participation and Families with Reported Zero Hours of Participation in Program Activities

This project, launched in 2011 and conducted for OPRE by Mathematica Policy Research, was initiated to provide information about state TANF work activity reporting, especially with regard to TANF participants who do not participate in TANF work activities or are reported to have zero hours of participation. The project's final report, published in January 2015, describes the policy and programmatic reasons that lead families to have zero reported hours of participation in allowable work activities. The findings suggest that nonparticipation, particularly of families with zero reported hours of participation, is not accurately represented across states because of differences in the definition of participation as well as differences in policy decisions, reporting, and program practices. As a result, there is currently no method for fully capturing the degree of total nonparticipation among low-income families that receive cash assistance. This also complicates

Findings from Improving Engagement of TANF Families: Understanding Work Participation and Families with Reported Zero Hours of Participation in Program Activities

Variables that impact the number of families reported to have zero hours of work participation in a location include:

- State exemption and sanction policies
- Extended processes for applying sanctions
- Problems with reporting tools and practices resulting in those participating not being captured
- Limited resources to provide work activities and address barriers
- Waiting for activities to begin, initially or during transitions between activities

Suggested strategies for improving engagement and employment include:

- Creating policies and procedures with a focus on engagement
- Improving outreach and sanctioning policies and procedures
- Assessing and adapting service delivery processes
- Employing incentives to foster client engagement
- Making it easier for clients to report activities and hours

the task of identifying and quantifying factors that may contribute to the number of families with reported zero hours of participation. The study identifies categories of influences—TANF policies and procedures, service delivery and performance management, and initial activities and ongoing transitions—that may affect the number of families with reported zero hours of participation. The final report also describes promising strategies that state and local TANF agencies are using to encourage and support client engagement.

Descriptive Analysis of TANF/WIA Coordination

The TANF program and programs supported by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) (reauthorized in 2014 as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) both provide employment and training services to low-income individuals. The similarities between the programs have generated interest in coordinating and integrating TANF and WIA services. OPRE launched the Descriptive Analysis of TANF/WIA Coordination in 2011 to learn more about how and to what degree the programs coordinate at the state and local levels and the considerations that influence coordination within selected locations.

The project team, led by Mathematica Policy Research, conducted interviews with state and local respondents in eight states and 11 localities. The team identified 12 strategies for TANF/WIA coordination that study sites use and that other locations could replicate. The strategies fall under six program components: (1) administration and management; (2) funding; (3) policies and procedures; (4) program missions and knowledge; (5) services for customers; and (6) accountability and performance measurement. Overall, the study found that TANF and WIA programs were generally parallel operating programs with varying levels of coordination across specific strategies. No study site was highly coordinated across all 12 strategies, but a few sites achieved mostly high to moderate levels of coordination across the strategies. The extent to which coordination occurred was largely determined by how much TANF program administrators were willing to operate the TANF program within the structure of the WIA program. Coordination above a base level for most strategies required co-location of program services within WIA's American Job Centers. The extent of coordination may also fluctuate with the policy and funding environment or with the willingness of administrators to take risks in service

delivery innovation or performance measurement. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law in July 2014, includes explicit policies that aim to motivate and support coordination between the TANF and Title I Adult program. The experiences in coordinating TANF and WIA services illuminated in this study can help inform policy and practice under WIOA. The project's final report and accompanying brief were published in January 2015.

Descriptive Study of County vs. State TANF Administration

While the majority of states centrally administer their TANF programs, eight states (California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Ohio) play a supervisory role and delegate the administration of the TANF program to their counties. Wisconsin also operated a county-administered TANF program until January 2013. This study, conducted for OPRE by the Urban Institute, assessed how TANF programs administered by counties and supervised by states differ from programs administered by states. The project gathered information from a sample of county- and state-administered TANF programs in order to examine different program experiences and identify potential approaches for technical assistance specific to state-supervised, county-administered TANF programs.

Based on interviews and surveys with administrators in both state-administered and county-administered settings, the project found that differences between state- and county-administered programs are a matter of the degree of authority retained by the state. Overall, state-administered TANF programs retain greater authority and allow less flexibility locally than county-administered TANF programs. However, state-administered programs also exhibit a range of authority and flexibility. The project also found that the structural differences between state- and county-administered TANF programs do not correlate with any quantifiable differences in key program or client outcomes. County-administered TANF programs have a wide range of technical assistance needs, some unique but many shared with state-administered TANF programs. The project's final report was published in May 2015.

State TANF Policies Database

Under TANF, states have considerable authority to design the parameters of their programs and set their own rules. Since 1997, the Urban Institute has maintained the State TANF Policies Database, also known as the Welfare Rules Database (WRD), 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, with contributions from HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, has funded updates to the database as well as publication of tables summarizing state TANF policies for each year since 1997. Annual publications are available on the OPRE website.

The Intersection Between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance Services

ACF's Office of Refugee Resettlement administers a variety of social service programs intended to connect newly resettled refugees with resources and help them become economically self-sufficient and integrated into U.S. society. One such program is the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program, which offers financial support and social services to newly resettled refugees. RCA and TANF are both cash assistance programs that provide services aimed at promoting self-sufficiency. However, there is little documented information on the extent to which refugees access TANF versus RCA, how outcomes for refugees compare under these two programs, whether integration of these programs holds promise for refugee self-sufficiency, and other important questions.

The Intersection Between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance Services project aims to improve understanding of how RCA and TANF serve refugee populations, how the programs intersect,

and how the programs may be related to refugee self-sufficiency and employment outcomes. The TANF-RCA study, which was launched in September 2014 and is being conducted by Abt Associates, will document the similarities and differences between TANF and RCA in selected jurisdictions while exploring the population of refugees served by these programs and differences in program services. The study, which is expected to begin site visits in early 2016, will explore how states and localities have coordinated TANF and RCA programs and whether these approaches have the potential to foster long-term job stability and economic self-sufficiency for refugees. By improving knowledge of these programs and participant experiences, ACF hopes to move toward better serving refugee populations.

OPRE METHODS INQUIRIES

OPRE regularly convenes meetings of scientists and research experts to advance the scientific understanding of critical topics in social science research methodology. These meetings bring together experts from varying disciplines and policy fields and from academia, government, and the private sector to explore innovations in research design, analytic techniques, and data measurement that could be employed to advance the government's use of rigorous research methods. These meetings ensure that OPRE-supported research continues to represent the most scientifically advanced approaches to determining effectiveness and efficiency of ACF programs. RTI International provides support to OPRE in its efforts to expand knowledge about scientific methodological tools and practices to advance the field and enhance the government's production and use of systematic research.

OPRE has sponsored six day-and-a-half-long research methods meetings in recent years. The most recent meeting, held in October 2015, focused on using administrative data in social policy research. The five prior meetings explored: 1) effect size; 2) sub-group analysis; 3) implementation science; 4) innovative directions in estimating impact; and 5) methods for unpacking the "black box" of programs and policies. The primary goals of these meetings have been to understand the history of the field, as well as recent advances, and to identify the gaps in knowledge and examine how to build a research agenda to fill those gaps.

Following the September 2014 meeting on methods for unpacking the "black box" of programs and policies, OPRE collaborated with the American Journal of Evaluation to release a special forum in the December 2015 issue of the journal (volume 36, issue 4). The forum featured papers that provide insights into techniques that can be used to go beyond answering the question, "Does a program, service, or policy work?" and help evaluators understand variations in program effects and the mechanisms through which these occur.

In July 2015, OPRE launched a website, http://www.opremethodsmeeting.org, to store and share materials from the meetings including agendas, presentations, and publications.

HUMAN SERVICE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

The Human Services Research Partnerships (HSRP) are cooperative agreements that aim to support collaboration between researchers, human service programs, and policymakers within the U.S. territories. Projects focus on topics related to the Head Start and TANF programs, such as self-sufficiency and stability among low-income families and the healthy development and school-readiness of children. Through the partnerships, ACF seeks an improved understanding of the human service needs of the territories and how human service programs in the region are meeting these needs; the unique circumstances and challenges posed by economic, geographic, and developmental factors; the particular strengths, assets, and cultural norms of each region that impact human services; and opportunities for ACF to use human services to enhance the quality of life for residents in the U.S. territories. An additional goal of the HSRP is to increase the capacity of each region to gather relevant data and utilize research.

Human Service Research Partnership: Puerto Rico (HSRPPR)

The first HSRP cooperative agreement was awarded to Intra-American University Metro Campus in 2013. The project is now in its third of three years. Goals specific to HSRPPR include promoting research and a culture of evidence-based policymaking; advancing research on low-income families and children; implementing a needs assessment; and identifying successful approaches and best practices to improve self-sufficiency among poor families and children in Puerto Rico.

HSRPPR released three publications in FY15:

- *The Demographic Characteristics of Low Income Families and Children in Puerto Rico*
- *Supporting Children and Families: TANF and Head Start in Puerto Rico*
- *Beneficios de las Personas Elegibles al TANF vs. Escenario de Salario Mínimo Federal*

Human Service Research Partnership: Virgin Islands (HSRPVI)

The second HSRP cooperative agreement was awarded in 2014 to the University of the Virgin Islands' School of Nursing. Goals specific to HSRPVI include establishing a research infrastructure to support the provision of quality human services for Head Start and TANF clients; developing a secure data collection system; providing training to support the development of research capacity; and implementing two human services research studies on questions of interest to Head Start and TANF programs locally.

In its first year, the project undertook an environmental scan of Head Start and TANF services available on the islands and engaged in regular meetings with U.S. Virgin Islands human services government leadership and working subgroups examining data and research needs.

EMPLOYMENT & THE LABOR MARKET

A major focus of OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research is increasing knowledge about strategies for helping TANF recipients and other low-income individuals find jobs, maintain employment, and advance in the labor market. Past projects in this area include: 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.

OPRE is currently conducting random assignment experiments of employment strategies, including subsidized and transitional employment models and job search assistance, and is also supporting multi-disciplinary research on reducing work-family conflict.

Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project

OPRE launched the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED) in 2010 with the goal of demonstrating and evaluating the next generation of subsidized employment models for critical low-income populations. The project, led by MDRC, examines 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 build upon approaches that have demonstrated effectiveness in previous studies and also test new and innovative interventions. The evaluation includes a random assignment impact evaluation in eight sites, an implementation evaluation at each project site, and a cost-benefit analysis. An in-program survey will attempt to measure potential non-economic benefits of subsidized employment, such as emotional and social well-being.

The STED project is being conducted in close coordination with the Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD). ETJD, a project of the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA), is funding seven grantees to provide temporary, paid work experiences to noncustodial parents and ex-offenders to improve

their employability, earnings, and opportunities for advancement. As a requirement of their grant, ETJD grantees must participate in a rigorous evaluation. Given the complementary nature of these efforts, OPRE and ETA have 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:

STED SITE	DESCRIPTION
Goodwill of North Georgia	This DOL-funded program provides transitional jobs in Goodwill locations to low-income, noncustodial parents referred to the program by the child support agency.
TransitionSF	This DOL-funded program, which is operated by Goodwill and the San Francisco Department of Child Support Services, provides transitional jobs to low-income, noncustodial parents using a tiered approach that places participants into one of three tiers – traditional transitional job, public sector position, or subsidized private sector placement – based on their employability.
Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services	Los Angeles County is testing two different program models for low-income individuals: (1) paid work experience in non-profit or public sector placements; and (2) "hybrid" on-the-job training in for-profit, private sector placements.
San Francisco City and County Agency for Human Services	San Francisco is testing private sector (both non-profit and for-profit) subsidized employment placements for low-income individuals who have timed out of TANF or have exhausted Unemployment Insurance benefits.
New York City Center for Economic Opportunity	The Young Adult Internship Program targets disconnected youth – neither in school nor working for at least three months – ages 16 to 24 and provides initial training followed by a private sector (for- or non-profit) internship for up to 12 weeks.
Chicago Department of Family and Support Services	Developed in partnership with the Chicago Crime Lab and University of Chicago, the Department of Family and Support Services is operating a pilot of the Bridges and Pathways Initiative, which targets 16- to 24-year-olds leaving incarceration and includes three components: (1) a transitional job; (2) an online high school program; and (3) a cognitive behavioral therapy-like program.
Minnesota Department of Human Services	This new program targets clients of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP, the state's TANF program) who are not working and who have been in the program for at least six months. The program features 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 can start in either tier depending on their work readiness.
Atlanta Paycheck Plus	This program offers an enhanced Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income individuals without dependent children. As with the other STED programs, this site provides 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 low-income individuals – and it targets many of the same groups (young adults, former prisoners, and noncustodial parents).

Random assignment began for the first sites in early 2012 and is complete in all sites except for Chicago, Minnesota, and Atlanta. Data collection is ongoing with the in-program survey and the 12-month and 30-month follow-up surveys.

A summary report describing the eight STED programs and five additional ETJD programs was released in May 2015, and initial impact findings are expected in 2016.

Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation

In fall 2013, OPRE launched the Job Search Assistance (JSA) Strategies Evaluation. Led by Abt Associates and its partner Mathematica Policy Research, the JSA evaluation is a multi-site, random assignment evaluation of the relative impact of different TANF job search approaches on short-term labor market outcomes such as earnings and time to employment. JSA builds on OPRE's Design Options of the Search for Employment project, which included a literature review and recommendations for an overall approach to and design of a job search strategies evaluation. JSA draws from this work to conduct the first rigorous test of job search services for TANF recipients.

The JSA evaluation aims to achieve two goals. First, JSA will provide information about the relative impacts of various JSA services and the manner in which agencies provide them. Second, JSA is intended to provide actionable and policy-relevant feedback to the TANF field, including federal TANF policymakers, state and local TANF administrators, and frontline caseworkers.

The JSA evaluation uses a random assignment experimental design and includes an impact and implementation evaluation carried out across the selected sites. In addition to administrative data, the study will also include a survey of participants, administered approximately six months after random assignment, to capture information on intensity and duration of JSA services, how participants found their current job, attitudes and motivations around the job search, and barriers to employment. ACF expects that the job search assistance approaches tested will be relatively short-term in nature. The project team is currently finalizing site recruitment and developing policy-relevant tests of JSA strategies. The project is expected to publish initial findings beginning in early 2017.

Complementing this work will be a series of special TANF studies that will feature short-term descriptive or qualitative inquiries into TANF-related topics of interest.

Work, Family & Health Network

"Family-friendly" or "work-life" polices have become increasingly prevalent in the United States, but few longitudinal studies using experimental designs have been implemented to test such policies. Moreover, knowledge about work-life policies aimed at low-wage workers is scant. To address this gap, OPRE provided partial support for a study by the Work, Family and Health Network (WFHN) of the National Institute for Child Health and Development (NICHD).

WFHN implemented a workplace intervention designed to reduce work-family conflict by working with supervisors and employees to redesign work activities to better meet employee needs and achieve employer goals. The intervention included training supervisors on ways to support work-family balance and to increase employees' control over their work time. OPRE contributed funding for the collection of follow-up data on employees in a low-wage industry who left their jobs over the course of the study.

A report released in October 2015 describes the characteristics of participants who left their jobs during the course of the study, as compared to employees who stayed, and examines the reasons for leaving. Leavers and stayers were similar on several socio-demographic and work characteristics, but they differed on a few key measures. On average, leavers tended to be younger and to have smaller household incomes, possibly indicating less attachment to the workplace and more job mobility. The primary reasons given for leaving

the job were job-related, such as job satisfaction. Overall, the study findings suggest that direct work characteristics and the intersection of work with personal and family needs are important factors for workers in deciding whether to remain at a company.

Findings from the overall study are available at the Work, Family & Health Network website.

Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review

In November 2015, OPRE released the results of the Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review at employmentstrategies.acf.hhs.gov.

Systematic evidence reviews are a reliable, transparent, and comprehensive way to review the universe of research literature and provide an assessment of the evidence of effectiveness for specific programs and strategies. In recent years ACF and HHS have undertaken systematic evidence reviews in a number of programmatic and policy areas, including home visiting, teen pregnancy prevention, and strengthening families.

The Employment Strategies for Low-Income Adults Evidence Review, launched in 2013 and conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, is intended to provide practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and the general public with a transparent and systematic assessment of the research evidence for the effectiveness of programs designed to improve the employment-related outcomes of low-income adults.

The review was conducted according to pre-specified standards and methods. The review team conducted a systematic, broad literature search to identify relevant studies; screened studies to determine whether they met the criteria for being reviewed; and assessed the strength of evidence in each study.

Results are presented in a searchable database on the ACF website that shares findings from the review and key information about highly rated studies. The website allows users to search for results by program studied, by target population, and in other ways.

Additionally, a series of research briefs summarizing the results of the review and examining review topics in greater depth will be published in 2016.

THE WAY FORWARD II: Measurement for Human Service Programs in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

On November 3-4, 2015, OPRE held a meeting to explore pressing evaluation and research issues related to measurement validation and development with American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The meeting also explored specific challenges federal programs and their tribal grantees face with regards to developing relevant and useful implementation and performance measures. Follow-up goals of the meeting include sharing what was learned with other audiences and determining the steps to creating resources for program offices, grantees, and tribal communities to help build their capacity to identify and develop meaningful measures for performance management and program evaluation.

EDUCATION & 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 low-income individuals. Currently, OPRE is a national leader in the rigorous evaluation of post-secondary career pathways programs.

Career pathways programs connect education, training, and related supports in a pathway that leads to employment in a specific sector or occupation or to further training. The approach is gaining attention as a promising strategy to improve post-secondary education and training outcomes for low-income and low-skilled adults. Although there is some research evidence on selected components of career pathways programs, to date, there has been no rigorous research on the overall effectiveness of this approach. Beginning in 2007, with the launch of the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) project (formerly the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency project), and continuing with the evaluations of the Health Professions Opportunity Grant program (HPOG), ACF has developed a robust portfolio of research on the career pathways approach. In addition, OPRE launched an Employment Sectors Analysis project to identify jobs that can be attained with 12 months or less of full-time, post-secondary education or training.

CAREER PATHWAYS

The career pathways framework has attracted increasing attention as a promising approach to post-secondary education and training for low-income and low-skilled adults. Its central premise is instruction that is organized as a series of manageable and well-articulated steps, accompanied by strong supports and connections to employment. The steps provide opportunities for pre-college-level students to access college-level training and for better-skilled students to move to successively higher levels of credential-bearing training and employment. Each step incorporates customized curricula and instruction, academic and non-academic supports, and employment experiences and opportunities.

To engage, retain, and facilitate learning among low-skilled adults, 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. Though many programs include all of these strategies, the extent to which and ways they do so vary.

For more information visit http://www.career-pathways.org.

Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education

In 2007, OPRE initiated the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) project (formerly the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency project), a multi-site, random assignment evaluation of promising strategies for increasing employment and self-sufficiency among low-income families. The project aimed to study interventions with the potential to have substantial effects on earnings and income rather than just modest effects, prioritize strategies focused on skills development, and concentrate on a relatively wide population of low-income parents. Based on stakeholder input, PACE came to focus on post-secondary career pathways as the main intervention framework to study.

The PACE team, led by Abt Associates, is conducting an implementation and impact evaluation of nine innovative demonstrations operating career pathways programs around the country. Each of the programs has been profiled in a separate publication, available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/pathways-for-advancing-careers-and-education.

The PACE partners include:

- **Des Moines Area Community College—Prepared Learner Program.** Students in the Prepared Learner Program receive contextualized basic skills instruction, instruction in employment and life skills, and vocational training through a short-term certificate course. Each short-term certificate offered in the Prepared Learner Program ladders into one or more specific certificate, degree, or diploma programs.

- **I-BEST Programs in Washington State.** The Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program operates in all 34 of Washington's community colleges to provide basic skills or English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction and training in a range of credit-based occupational training programs, along with counseling and other supports. The PACE project is evaluating I-BEST model programs at the Bellingham Technical, Everett Community, and Whatcom Community Colleges.

- **Instituto del Progreso Latino—Carreras en Salud.** Instituto del Progreso Latino is a large non-profit education and employment organization in Chicago dedicated to serving the city's growing Latino/a population. Launched in 2005, Carreras en Salud (Careers in Health) is a career pathway program in nursing occupations for low-skilled and limited English proficient Latinos that leads participants from a Certified Nursing Assistant degree to Pre-Licensed Practitioner Nurse and ultimately to Registered Nurse.

- **Madison College—Patient Care Pathway.** The Patient Care Pathway Program provides short-term, condensed training that allows lower-skilled students to take courses for college credit and prepares them for healthcare degree and diploma programs. Students are placed into one of two available tracks depending on individual skill level.

- **Pima Community College—Pathways to Healthcare.*** The Pathways to Healthcare Program offers training to students in 16 different healthcare professions based on personal preference and test scores. Professions range from home health aides to medical billers/coders to EMT-Paramedics. The length of training can be as short as the five-week Nursing Assistant training or up to two or three years for any of the associate degree programs.

- **San Diego Workforce Partnership—Bridge to Employment.*** The Bridge to Employment job training programs enable eligible adults to develop the skills and knowledge needed for emerging career opportunities in healthcare by providing extensive case management and support services.

- **Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement.** Serving four large counties in southern Texas, the non-profit Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) aims to help students achieve an associate degree and gain occupational training in allied health,

manufacturing, technology, business, education, and other specialized trades. VIDA offers a bridge program, the College Prep Academy, to build basic educational and language skills in preparation for enrollment at a local community college.

- **Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County—Health Careers for All.*** Health Careers for All is designed to meet the region's expanding healthcare labor needs while simultaneously addressing the training, employment, and advancement needs of its low-income residents by preparing them for jobs such as Nursing Assistant, Medical Office, and Phlebotomist.

- **Year Up.** This test of Year Up focuses on eight program sites that offer young adults skills training, experience, and support to empower them to reach their potential through professional careers and higher education. The intensive, one-year program provides high school graduates and GED recipients between the ages of 18 and 24 with a combination of hands-on skill development and corporate internship opportunities.

**This partner is supported by a Health Profession Opportunity Grant (2010-2015).*

In 2015, the project released its Evaluation Design Report. The study will assess initial program impacts at 15 months after random assignment using a follow-up survey and administrative data. The project is expected to release implementation and initial impact reports starting in 2016.

Evaluation Portfolio for the Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program

Authorized by the Affordable Care Act of 2010 (ACA), the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funds training in high-demand healthcare professions targeted to TANF recipients and other low-income individuals. The HPOG program has dual goals: to provide TANF recipients and other low-income individuals with opportunities for education and training that lead to employment and advancement in the healthcare workforce, and to address the increasing shortfall in the supply of healthcare professionals in the face of expanding demand. Grant funds may be used for training and education as well as supportive services such as case management, child care, and transportation.

In 2010, ACF awarded five-year grants to 32 HPOG grantees in 23 states. HPOG grantees include post-secondary educational institutions, workforce investment boards, state and local government agencies, and community-based organizations. In addition, five grantees are tribal organizations. ACF distributes approximately $67 million annually to these grantees. As of the end of the fourth year of grantee activities, the HPOG program had enrolled 32,123 participants.

The ACA required an evaluation of the HPOG demonstration projects. OPRE is using a multi-pronged evaluation strategy to provide information on program implementation, systems change, outcomes, and impact. The portfolio includes the following projects:

- **HPOG Implementation, Systems, and Outcomes (ISO) Evaluation Design and Performance Reporting Project** developed an evaluation plan for measuring the implementation, systems change, and outcomes of HPOG programs, including enrollment, program retention, training completion, job entry, employment retention and advancement, and earnings. In support of the evaluation design, the project developed a detailed knowledge base, including reviewing the pertinent literature. Three literature reviews have been published—one on career pathways programs; one on analyzing implementation and systems change; and one on the policy context within which HPOG is operating.

  The ISO project also built and maintains the HPOG Performance Reporting System (PRS), a management information system, to track grantee progress for program management and accountability and to record participant data for use in the evaluation. The project analyzes data entered into the PRS to prepare annual reports that describe program operations and

participant activities and outcomes. The Year Four Annual Report was released in June 2015.

The ISO project is being conducted by Abt Associates in collaboration with the Urban Institute.

- **HPOG National Implementation Evaluation (NIE)** is the execution of the study designed by the ISO project. The NIE, which is being conducted by Abt Associates in collaboration with the Urban Institute, includes an in-depth examination of the HPOG grantee programs' design and implementation, a systems analysis of networks created by HPOG programs (e.g., among grantees, employers, and other partners), and a quantitative descriptive analysis of HPOG program outputs and outcomes. The 27 non-tribal HPOG grantees are included in this analysis. The NIE Design Report is available on the OPRE website, as is the Interim Outcome Study Report. Released in September 2014, this report presents findings on the interim key outcomes of HPOG healthcare training completion and employment, as well as on participants' pre-training activities and receipt of support services and employment assistance. A brief summarizing key findings from the report was released in August 2015. The Descriptive Implementation and Outcome Report, the Systems Change and Network Analysis Report, and a report on Grantees' Use of Performance Measurement Information in the HPOG Program are expected by early 2016.

- **The HPOG Impact Study** is using an experimental design to examine the effect of HPOG on participants' educational and economic outcomes. This evaluation aims to identify which components of HPOG programs (e.g., types of support services, program structure, and training areas) contribute to participant success. For some grantees, a multi-arm experimental design is being implemented, creating a control group that does not have access to HPOG, an "HPOG services" treatment group, and an "enhanced HPOG" group that receives additional supports and services. Three program enhancements were selected for the experimental test of the enhanced HPOG experience: facilitated peer support groups, emergency assistance, and non-cash incentives. The 20 grantees that are not part of another study within OPRE's portfolio that is collecting individual-level data are included in the HPOG Impact Study. Additionally, the HPOG Impact Study analysis will include data from the three HPOG grantees being evaluated as part of the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) study. The HPOG Impact Study is being conducted by Abt Associates in collaboration with the Urban Institute.

The HPOG Impact Study is addressing the following research questions:

1. What impacts do the HPOG programs, as a group, have on the outcomes of participants and their families?

Key Findings from the Health Profession Opportunity Grants Interim Outcome Report

- The typical HPOG participant is a low-income young woman who has finished high school, has children, and has at least 8th grade-level academic skills.
- Many enrollees continue working while part of the HPOG program.
- In the first year after enrollment, 84 percent of HPOG participants started at least one healthcare training course.
- Of those, 59 percent completed it and 28 percent were still participating at the end of 12 months.
- Within their first 12 months, almost all participants received supportive services from the program to address academic and personal challenges.
- Two-thirds of those who exited the program after completing one or more healthcare training courses in their first year were working, and over half were working in healthcare jobs.

2. To what extent do those impacts vary across selected subpopulations?
3. Which locally adopted program components influence average impacts?
4. To what extent does participation in a particular HPOG component (or components) change the impact on trainees?

Random assignment concluded in November 2014. The study is examining impacts at 15 months after random assignment using a follow-up survey and administrative data on employment and earnings; these findings are expected in September 2017. The HPOG Impact Study Design Report is available on the OPRE website. The study's analysis plan, which serves as a technical supplement to the design report, was released in September 2015.

- **Evaluation of Tribal HPOG** is a separate evaluation designed for the five tribal grantees considering the unique contexts in which these programs operate. The evaluation, led by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with Red Star Innovations and the National Indian Health Board, focuses on program implementation and participant outcomes for the tribal grantees. The study's goal is to provide documentation and lessons about diverse programmatic approaches to health professions training serving tribal populations. Four practice briefs have been published to disseminate lessons learned and findings. The briefs provide overviews of: the tribal grantees and evaluation, the grantees' provision of supportive services, program implementation and evolution, and higher education and workforce development in tribal communities. Additionally, in 2015, the evaluation team released individual briefs for each of the five tribal grantees to describe preliminary outcomes, available on the project website. Lastly, the Interim Report published in March 2014 provides an overview of the tribal HPOG grantees' progress over the first two years of the program. The evaluation's final report is expected in late 2015 or early 2016.

- **University Partnership Research Grants for HPOG** fund studies being conducted by university-based researchers who have partnered with one or more HPOG programs to answer specific questions about how to improve HPOG services within local contexts. Grants were awarded to Northwestern University, Temple University, Brandeis University, Loyola University of Chicago, and North Dakota State University. A brief that describes each grant and presents preliminary findings was released in September 2015.

Award Recipient	Project and HPOG Program Partners
Northwestern University, Institute for Policy Research	CareerAdvance: *A Dual-Generation Program's Effects on Families and Children* Community Action Project of Tulsa County, Inc. (Tulsa, OK)
Temple University, School of Social Work	*Building Capacities/Making Connections: A Multi-Year Study of Human and Social Capital Development through the HIP Career Pathways Initiative* Temple University, Center for Social Policy and Community Development (Philadelphia, PA)
Brandeis University, Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Heller School for Social Policy and Management	*Study of Employment and Advancement of Racial, Ethnic and Linguistic Minorities for New Hampshire Health Profession Opportunity Project* New Hampshire Office of Minority Health and Refugee Affairs (Concord, NH)
Loyola University of Chicago, School of Social Work	*Evaluation of Empowerment Pathways to Self-Sufficiency in Health Professions Career Development for Low-Income Individuals* Gateway Technical College (Kenosha, WI); Southland Health Care Forum, Inc. (Chicago Heights, IL); and Instituto del Progreso Latino (Chicago, IL)
North Dakota State University	*Sustaining Career Pathways for American Indian Health Professionals in ND: Building Apprenticeship and Workforce Options with the Next Steps HPOG Project* Cankdeska Cikana Community College (Fort Totten, ND)

Second Generation of the HPOG Program Evaluation Portfolio

The Protecting Access to Medicare Act of 2014 extended the HPOG program, enabling a new grant competition. Accordingly, in September 2015, ACF awarded nearly $72 million to 32 grantees under the second grant competition for HPOG. Five grantees are tribal organizations, and 17 of 32 are returning grantees from the first round. OPRE is instituting a new research and evaluation portfolio around the second round of HPOG programs. The portfolio is intended to build on the knowledge being generated in the current OPRE career pathways portfolio, as well as other similar studies that have been conducted. The following projects are components of this new portfolio:

- **Evaluation and System Design for Career Pathways Programs: 2nd Generation of HPOG.** In October 2014, OPRE awarded a contract to Abt Associates and the Urban Institute to conduct the Evaluation and System Design for Career Pathways Programs: 2nd Generation of HPOG project. The project developed evaluation design options for rigorously evaluating the effectiveness of the new HPOG programs. The design options address research questions that explore outcomes for HPOG participants, how best to implement HPOG program strategies, and what strategies or program components are effective. The project is also responsible for designing, building, and maintaining the HPOG Participant Accomplishment and Grant Evaluation System (PAGES), a management information system to be used by the new HPOG grantees to track progress for program management and accountability and to record participant data for use in evaluation and research activities.

- **NEW National and Tribal Evaluation of the 2nd Generation of HPOG.** OPRE will implement a rigorous evaluation of the second round of HPOG programs. The newly awarded non-tribal HPOG programs will be evaluated using a randomized controlled trial. Program implementation and systems change will be assessed through an implementation study, and participant outcomes and program impacts will be assessed using follow-up surveys and analyses of administrative data. Select HPOG programs may also implement different program components or "enhancements" to measure the impact of specific program components. The new tribal HPOG grantees will be evaluated under a separate but coordinating comprehensive implementation and outcomes study under this contract. This contract was awarded in September 2015 to Abt Associates, in partnership with the Urban Institute, NORC at the University of Chicago, MEF Associates, and Insight Policy Research.

Career Pathways Intermediate Outcomes Study

The Career Pathways Intermediate Outcomes (CPIO) Study, launched in September 2014 and led by Abt Associates, is a 36-month follow-up study of both HPOG and PACE participants to assess the intermediate impact of career pathways program models on the educational progress and employment and earnings of individuals who participate in the programs. The follow-up study uses both a survey of program participants and administrative data on their employment and earnings. This study complements and augments the current HPOG Impact Study and PACE project studies, both of which are examining outcomes at 15 months after entry into the study.

Key evaluation questions that will be addressed in CPIO include:

1. What are the intermediate effects of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants and Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education programs on their populations of interest?
2. How do effects of career pathways programs vary over time, across outcomes or domains, by occupational sector, by program model, and by participant characteristics?
3. Do different models, strategies, or components, (e.g., a particular curricular model, such as I-BEST, or particular recruitment strategies or support services) lead to different impacts for participants?

4. How can career pathways models be adjusted to promote intermediate and longer-term outcomes for participants?

Employment Sectors Analysis for TANF Recipients and Other Low-Income Families

The Employment Sectors Analysis examined sectors of the labor market that are experiencing high growth and in which a stable job can be attained with 12 months or less of full-time post-secondary education or training. A goal of this project was to inform state and local TANF programs seeking to provide strategic support for post-secondary education and training opportunities for recipients. The project, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, was launched in fall 2014.

This project will generate three products:

- A resource guide that catalogues seminal studies, technical assistance materials, client assessments, and potential data sources that state and local TANF agencies can use to help connect TANF recipients and other low-income families with good jobs. The resources identified center around three themes: career exploration and assessment, career pathways and sector-based strategies, and information on the local economy and labor market (labor market information, or LMI).
- A guide to "promising occupations" for TANF recipients and other low-income individuals, defined as occupations that are expected to experience positive growth through 2022 and that require less than a bachelor's degree to gain entry. A list of promising occupations was generated for each state as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.
- A practitioner's guide on how TANF administrators, data analysts, and frontline staff can use LMI to help match clients to good jobs. The guide provides information on how TANF administrators can use LMI to create tools for staff and design effective, targeted programs; information for data analysts on the technical details of how LMI is created and analyzed; and information for frontline staff on how to incorporate LMI into service delivery.

CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON HISPANIC CHILDREN & FAMILIES

The National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families generates new research and translates research across three priority areas—poverty reduction and self-sufficiency, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, and early care and education—to build knowledge and inform ACF programs and policies 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. The Center is led by Child Trends and Abt Associates, in collaboration with university partners at the University of Maryland-College Park, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and New York University's Institute for Human Development and Social Change.

INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON POVERTY NATIONAL POVERTY CENTER FELLOWS

OPRE and HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) established the National Poverty Center Fellows Program in 2013 in order to build the capacity of emerging researchers to conduct high-quality, policy-relevant research on poverty and inequality in the United States. The program, administered by the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, supports post-doctoral fellows in residence at OPRE and ASPE. The fellows conduct poverty-related research and analysis, contribute to planning and overseeing poverty-related research and evaluation studies, and work on their own related research projects.

Two fellows from the 2015–2016 class are in residence in the Division of Economic Independence at OPRE working on a variety of projects related to career pathways, fatherhood interventions, disparities in human services, innovative research methods, and other poverty and safety net studies.

BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE

Insights from psychology, neuroscience, and other social and behavioral sciences can make important contributions to welfare and family self-sufficiency research. OPRE is building a portfolio of projects focused on learning and applying insights from social and behavioral sciences.

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 poor and vulnerable families in the United States. In 2015, OPRE launched two new behavioral science projects – BIAS Capstone and BIAS Next Generation – in order to synthesize, disseminate, and build on BIAS's applied behavioral science work. Additionally, OPRE's Goal-Oriented Adult Learning in Self-Sufficiency (GOALS) project is exploring how psychological processes associated with goal-oriented skills (such as goal-setting, self-regulation, planning, and problem-solving) can usefully be incorporated into programs aimed at improving job entry, retention, and advancement.

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency

Many human services programs are designed such that individuals must make active decisions and go through a series of steps in order to benefit from them — from deciding which programs to apply for, to completing forms, attending meetings, showing proof of eligibility, and arranging travel and child care. Program designers often implicitly assume that individuals will carefully consider options and make decisions that maximize their well-being. But over the past 30 years, innovative research in the area of behavioral economics 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.

Insights from behavioral economics, which combines findings from psychology and economics, suggest that a deeper understanding of decision-making and behavior could improve human services program design and outcomes. 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 devices can be used to improve self-control; and default rules can produce positive outcomes even for people who fail to act.

The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project is the first major opportunity to apply a behavioral economics lens to programs that serve poor and vulnerable families in the United States. BIAS was launched in 2010 and is being led by MDRC in collaboration with academic behavioral science experts.

In the first two years of the project, the BIAS team developed a strong base of knowledge of the existing behavioral economics literature and the needs of human services programs. The team engaged in detailed conversations with stakeholders from the academic, policy, and practitioner communities, created a glossary of behavioral interventions from a review of select field experiments, and hosted a Peer Practicum during which program administrators from across the nation joined with behavioral experts to explore the application of behavioral economics to ACF programs. The BIAS report *Behavioral Economics and Social Policy: Designing Innovative Solutions for Programs Supported by the Administration for Children and Families* describes insights from these early stages of the project.

Since then, BIAS has worked with a range of human services programs from across the country to diagnosis program challenges using a behavioral economics lens and to design and test behaviorally-informed interventions.

In September 2014, BIAS released results from its first experiment, a test of a behavioral intervention designed to increase the number of incarcerated noncustodial parents in Texas who apply for modifications to reduce the amount of their child support orders. BIAS redesigned the mailings informing incarcerated parents of the option to apply for an order modification. The redesigned materials resulted in a significant increase in applications at a relatively low cost and demonstrated the promise of applying behavioral economics principles to improve program implementation and outcomes.

In FY 2015, BIAS released two additional reports, *Reminders to Pay: Using Behavioral Economics to Increase Child Support Payments* and *The Power of Prompts: Using Behavioral Insights to Encourage People to Participate*. Both demonstrated that interventions designed using behavioral insights can have positive impacts on programs and participants.

Findings from additional sites will be published in late 2015 and 2016.

NEW BIAS Capstone

The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project will produce a site-specific report for each of the eight sites where behavioral interventions are being tested. The BIAS Capstone project, led by MDRC, will produce a final synthesis report that discusses the overall findings from the BIAS project, synthesizes lessons learned across the eight sites and during the knowledge development period, situates the findings within the broader context of applied behavioral insights and human services policy, and discusses implications for future research and practice. The report will be informed by a spring 2016 convening of experts who will provide their perspectives on key takeaways from the BIAS project. Additionally, the BIAS Capstone project will widely disseminate BIAS findings to inform research, policy, and practice stakeholders.

NEW BIAS Next Generation

The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project demonstrated that applying behavioral insights to challenges facing human services programs can improve program operations and outcomes at relatively low cost. The BIAS Next Generation project will continue ACF's exploration of the application of behavioral science to the programs and target populations of ACF. This next-generation project, launched in September 2015 and led by MDRC, will build on the activities and lessons of BIAS as well as go beyond the work of BIAS in several ways including: working with additional ACF programs; testing additional types of interventions; collecting additional types of information; and creating dissemination materials targeted specifically to program administrators and operators.

BIAS SITES

PROGRAM AREA	BIAS SITE	FOCUS OF BIAS INTERVENTION
Child Support	Texas Office of the Attorney General's Child Support Division	Increasing the number of incarcerated noncustodial parents who apply for child support order modifications
Child Support	Franklin County (Ohio) Child Support Enforcement Agency	Increasing amount of owed payments collected
Child Support	Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Office of Child Support Services	Increasing amount of owed payments collected
Child Support	Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Office of Child Support Services	Increasing payments immediately after orders are established but before wage withholding begins
Child Support	Washington State Division of Child Support	Increasing the number of incarcerated noncustodial parents who apply for child support order modifications
Child Care	Indiana Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning	Improving the CCDF redetermination process, including encouraging parents to attend scheduled appointments, reducing the number of appointments needed to complete redetermination, and improving on time redetermination
Child Care	Indiana Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning	Increasing the number of CCDF voucher recipients who choose QRIS-rated child care providers
Child Care	Oklahoma Department of Human Services	Increasing the percentage of families who renew their child care subsidies on time
TANF	Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services	Increasing the percentage of previously exempt participants who show up for mandatory reengagement appointments
Other	New York City Paycheck Plus	Increasing the number of eligible individuals who participate in an informational meeting about an EITC-like benefit

BIAS FINDINGS RELEASED IN 2015

Reminders to Pay: Using Behavioral Economics to Increase Child Support Payments, released in July 2015, presents findings from two behavioral interventions designed to increase the collection of child support payments in Franklin County, Ohio. The Franklin County Child Support Enforcement Agency (FCCSEA) sought to increase the number of noncustodial parents making child support payments, as well as the total dollar amount of those payments. In particular, FCCSEA was focused on increasing payments from noncustodial parents who do not have income withholding and who thus need to take action each month to make a payment. BIAS worked with FCCSEA to use behavioral insights to design and test low-cost payment reminder interventions for parents who did not have income withholding.

- Sending reminders to parents who did not have income withholding and were not already being sent any reminder to pay produced a 2.9 percentage point increase in the number of parents who made at least one child support payment over four months. 51.5% of noncustodial parents who were sent a reminder made a payment, as compared to 48.5% of control group parents. However, the increase in the total dollar amount of collections per person was small and was not statistically significant.
- Across the tests, any form of reminder had a positive effect compared with no reminder at all. However, no one form of reminder was more successful at increasing payments compared with the others.

The Power of Prompts: Using Behavioral Insights to Encourage People to Participate, released in September 2015, presents findings from two behavioral interventions designed to increase the number of participants who attended an informational meeting about the Paycheck Plus benefit. Paycheck Plus is offering single New Yorkers a larger earned income tax credit-like earnings supplement if they work, earn wages within an income cap, and file taxes. Enrollment into the Paycheck Plus program took place in late 2013 and early 2014. Since participants enrolled about a year before they could receive their first bonus payment (in the spring of 2015), Paycheck Plus program operators offered an optional informational meeting in spring 2014 to review the requirements and encourage participants to work. The BIAS study examined whether using behavioral techniques could increase the attendance rate at this optional informational meeting. BIAS tested two behavioral interventions to encourage people to participate — one that used behavioral messaging postcards and text message reminders, and one that made the meeting easier to attend by offering it over the phone.

- Behavioral messaging led to a 7.1 percentage point increase in meeting attendance, compared with standard messaging (25.6 percent versus 18.5 percent).
- Sending text messages led to a 5 percentage point increase in meeting attendance, compared with sending only postcards (24.5 percent versus 19.5 percent).
- There was a 12 percentage point (73 percent) difference in attendance between the group sent behavioral postcards plus behavioral texts and the group sent only standard postcards (28.5 percent versus 16.5 percent).
- Offering the meeting over the phone instead of in person led people to participate sooner but did not have any overall effect on the participation rate.

Goal-Oriented Adult Learning in Self-Sufficiency Project

ACF launched the Goal-Oriented Adult Learning in Self-Sufficiency (GOALS) project in September 2014 to investigate the extent to which psychology-informed frameworks can usefully be incorporated into programs aimed at improving job entry, retention, and advancement.

The project, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, reflects the confluence of several lines of research suggesting that adults who engage in goal-directed activities are more likely to be productive and successful both in the workplace and at home. Emerging research by psychologists and neuroscientists suggests that certain cognitive processes such as executive functioning and soft skills are critical for cultivating goal-oriented skills including goal-setting, self-regulation, planning, and problem-solving. In addition, current and past circumstances and individual barriers such as exposure to poverty, lack of in-demand skills, and parenting responsibilities, may challenge an individual's ability to operationalize psychological processes that support goal-directed behaviors and advance self-sufficiency. While there has been substantial research on the impact of exposure to adverse experiences in early childhood and adolescence, there has been less research on psychological processes that could support adults and young adults in overcoming similar contextual challenges.

This project aims to improve understanding of relevant psychological processes associated with goal-oriented skills through the synthesis of existing research, development of logic models, and fieldwork to learn about existing programs that are currently integrating these frameworks into adult programs. The project will produce a literature review in early 2016 to document how insights gained from research can be used to promote economic advancement among low-income populations; identify promising strategies and interventions for strengthening underlying skills in these areas; and explore measurement of changes and developments in skill acquisition for employment programs. The project will also conduct site visits to programs integrating frameworks informed by psychological concepts to provide employment and training services to low-income families. OPRE intends to use the results of this project to inform future programmatic and evaluation efforts in the areas of strengthening and supporting goal-directed behavior for families.

CROSS-CUTTING AND OTHER SAFETY NET RESEARCH

In addition to research that falls clearly within the substantive areas of TANF and the Safety Net, Employment and the Labor Market, Education and Training, and Behavioral Science, OPRE's family self-sufficiency research portfolio includes several projects that span these issues in a cross-cutting way.

Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium

To fill gaps in family self-sufficiency and stability research and data activities and to complement its ongoing research, OPRE developed and launched a multi-faceted Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium (The Consortium). The mission of The Consortium is "to improve the lives of low-income families and children through better policies and practices by integrating research, policy, and practice on family self-sufficiency and stability; by engaging federal, state, and local actors in meaningful conversations and supporting them to be better producers and users of data; and by doing path-breaking, rigorous, and relevant research on contemporary questions related to family self-sufficiency and stability."

The first component of The Consortium is the Advancing Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research Project, also known as "Project AWESOME." Launched in 2012 and led by Mathematica Policy Research, this project provides research support and a flexible research and evaluation mechanism for responding to policy priorities and research opportunities and helping states conduct and use research.

The second component of The Consortium is the Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network. In 2013, OPRE awarded grants to a network of university-based researchers to investigate critical issues in improving family self-sufficiency and stability. The Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network supports cooperative agreements with scholars to work independently and collectively on systematic, multi-disciplinary examinations of the current gaps in family self-sufficiency and stability research. Scholars pursue individual and collaborative research projects in the area of family self-sufficiency and stability and work with state and local human services agencies on research and program evaluation activities. Two major areas of focus for the scholars' collaborative work are (1) instability and public policy and (2) safety net access in the 21st century.

The third component of The Consortium is the Family Self-Sufficiency Data Center. In 2013, OPRE awarded the University of Chicago a cooperative agreement to support the development, implementation, and ongoing operations of a data center to support family self-sufficiency research and activities. This center supports the development of state and institutional capacity for data collection, linkage, and, where necessary, storage in order to provide access

to high-quality data to practitioners and policymakers in family self-sufficiency programs and research. The center works independently and in collaboration with the affiliated Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network. During its first year, the data center conducted a comprehensive needs assessment and developed a prototype for a web-based data archive and analysis tool. Currently the center is working with states and localities to add data and functionality to the web-based data archive to improve its utility for state and local policymakers and researchers.

Assets for Independence Evaluation

In the fall of 2011, ACF launched the first-ever random assignment evaluation of the impact of participation in the Assets for Independence (AFI) Program. The AFI Evaluation builds on the previous quasi-experimental evaluation of the AFI program, as well other research on Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). While research suggests that IDAs help low-income families save, rigorous, experimental research is limited, and the majority of research has not focused on AFI-funded IDAs. Thus, questions remain about the impact of the AFI program on participant outcomes.

The study, led by the Urban Institute and its partners MEF Associates and RTI International, began with an extensive field assessment to identify potential evaluation sites. The evaluation includes two AFI grantees: Prosperity Works in New Mexico and RISE Financial Pathways in Los Angeles, CA. Enrollment began in mid-2013 and ended in summer 2014, and the study has completed interviews for the 12-month follow-up survey. An implementation study, which will complement the impact study, took place in fall 2014. A report summarizing early findings will be available in 2016.

In 2015, ACF provided support to the Urban Institute and its partners to conduct intermediate and longer-term follow-up data collection on participants in the initial study. This follow-on effort will survey participants at 36 and 60 months after random assignment in order to provide important information on the intermediate and longer-term impacts of AFI participation. This longer-term follow-up is critical for thoroughly evaluating AFI, as IDAs are designed to help people move up the asset and economic ladder over time.

Homeless Families Research Briefs

In 2014, OPRE and HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation engaged Abt Associates to produce a series of research briefs on issues related to the well-being and economic self-sufficiency of families and children experiencing homelessness. The Homeless Families Research Briefs project is using data collected as part of the Family Options Study of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a multi-site random assignment experiment designed to study the impact of various housing and services interventions on homeless families. The Family Options Study, which enrolled over 2,000 families and will follow them over the course of three years, provides a rich set of data with which to examine the well-being and self-sufficiency of homeless families with children. This project will produce briefs that build on the data and analysis already being conducted for HUD to answer additional questions related to the well-being and economic self-sufficiency of families and children experiencing homelessness. Topics include the well-being of homeless children, youth, and adults; the extent to which homeless families access safety net programs and benefits; and homelessness among Hispanic families. Briefs will be released in 2016.

NEW Scan of the Status of States' Integration of Human Services and Health Insurance Programs

In 2015, OPRE and HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation launched a Scan of the Status of States' Integration of Human Services and Health Insurance Programs study. The project will assess state human services agencies' current efforts to integrate affordable health insurance programs with human services programs, as encouraged under the Affordable Care Act. Key tasks include a survey of all state human services offices to learn about and document their integration achievements, challenges, and

technical assistance needs; and a webinar for states to learn about the survey findings and discuss their experiences. The project is led by MEF Associates in partnership with the American Public Human Services Association and the Rockefeller Institute of Government.

NEW Two-Generation Approaches to Improving Family Self-Sufficiency

ACF has a particular interest in two-generation approaches to improving family self-sufficiency, as many ACF programs that target vulnerable children or adults either allow flexibility for or mandate the provision of services to other family members. For example, since its inception in 1965, Head Start has acted as a two-generation program, providing children with enriched learning environments and helping families to access services that enable them to support their children's development (e.g., parenting education, social services, health and mental health services). Other ACF programs – such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and programs under the Office of Community Services – provide services to all family members.

In 2015, OPRE launched the Two-Generation Approaches to Improving Family Self-Sufficiency project to build evidence on strong approaches to supporting parents, children, and families and to gain a better understanding of approaches that intentionally combine intensive, high-quality, adult-focused services with intensive, high-quality, child-focused programs. Additionally, the project will provide options for how these models might be evaluated.

Conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, the project will include a targeted literature review, expert consultations, and fieldwork to identify and describe program models, goals, and objectives; assess how well-defined and evaluable the models are; engage stakeholders in a discussion regarding the potential evaluation of any of the models; and develop options for evaluations that may be feasible, relevant, and useful to ACF and others in the field. The targeted literature review will be available in late 2016, with a final report planned for 2017.

NEW Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services

The United States is rapidly becoming a majority-minority nation. According to U.S. Census projections, by mid-century no single racial or ethnic group will comprise a majority of the population. Already, in 2013, for the first time in U.S. history, more children of color were born in the United States than white children. At the same time that the United States is becoming a more diverse nation, considerable data exist showing significant racial and ethnic differences in many aspects of well-being. Among the most basic differences is that more than one of every three African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian children lives in a household with an income below the poverty threshold, while the corresponding rate for white children is one in seven.

The programs for which ACF is responsible can play a critical role in remedying racial and ethnic differences in well-being. Yet some scholarship has found that certain racial and ethnic groups are disproportionately represented among those who experience worse program outcomes. Such academic work is more developed, however, in relation to some program areas than to others. For most ACF program areas, little evidence exists as to whether and in what ways racial and ethnic disparities affect program outcomes.

The aim of the Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services project is to examine how greater insight into racial and ethnic disparities could be used to improve human service program delivery for ACF. Building on existing work on racial and ethnic disparities, the project will seek to understand how such work could inform analyses of ethnic and racial differences across the service spectrum—more specifically, in the access to and take up of human services; nature and quality of services received; and outcomes of services. The study, which was launched in 2015 and is being conducted by the Urban Institute, will synthesize current research literature on these topics and conduct preliminary data analyses to identify racial and ethnic differences in eligibility for and enrollment in certain ACF programs, as well as patterns within any differences found. The study will also develop a plan for more comprehensive data analyses for the reliable identification of racial and ethnic disproportionalities and disparities in a range of ACF programs and services.

SPOTLIGHT ON DISSEMINATION

OPRE continually strives to produce high-quality, rigorous research and ensure that it is available, accessible, and relevant to those interested in deepening their understanding of this work. Whether communicating with researchers, practitioners, policymakers, or the public, OPRE understands that program and policy research does not exist in a vacuum and is part of a cycle of communication. With that in mind, OPRE uses a range of resources and events to reach all who would like to learn more about this work.

Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse

The Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse (SSRC), available at https://www.opressrc.org/, was launched in the summer of 2012. The SSRC disseminates quality research and evaluation studies on TANF and low-income populations, focusing on self-sufficiency, employment, and family and child well-being, not limited to ACF-sponsored research. The clearinghouse is intended to be of use to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, assisting all three groups in accessing high-quality research. SSRC, administered by ICF International under a cooperative agreement, continues to look at how to engage and serve the needs of these three user groups, while also considering questions around research standards and categorization. During the past year, the clearinghouse has offered several webinars on relevant topics to enhance its services to users.

Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency

For nearly 20 years, OPRE has hosted a conference to convene researchers, state and local administrators, practitioners, and federal officials and policymakers to discuss cutting-edge research on family self-sufficiency and social welfare programs and policies. As the conference moves from an annual to a biennial schedule, OPRE decided to change its name, starting with the 2016 conference, from the Welfare Research and Evaluation Conference to the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS), to better reflect the breadth of work featured.

The 2016 RECS will take place on June 1-3, 2016 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. The conference will again serve as an opportunity to gather and hear the latest findings from evaluations of social welfare 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 also 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; education, training, and success in the labor market; child and youth well-being; fatherhood, relationships, and strengthening families; evaluating social programs by building and using evidence; and approaches to alleviating poverty and strengthening the safety net. The 2014 conference had over 1,000 participants, included 35 plenary and breakout sessions, and featured the work of 20 emerging scholars. For more information on the upcoming 2016 conference and past conferences, visit http://recsconference.net.

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