

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

Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

FY 2013

OCTOBER 2013

Administration for Children and Families

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is responsible for Federal programs that promote the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals and communities. ACF programs aim to:

- Empower families and individuals to increase their own economic independence and productivity;
- Foster strong, healthy, supportive communities that have a positive impact on the quality of life and the development of children;
- Create partnerships between individuals, front-line service providers, communities, American Indian tribes, Native communities, States and Congress that enable solutions which transcend traditional agency boundaries;
- Plan, reform, integrate, and improve services; and
- Work for people with developmental disabilities, refugees and migrants to address their needs, strengths and abilities.

Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) is responsible for advising the assistant secretary for children and families on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of programs to improve the economic and social well-being of children and families.

In collaboration with Administration for Children and Families program offices and others, OPRE is responsible for performance management for ACF, conducts research and policy analyses, and develops and oversees research and evaluation projects to assess program performance and inform policy and practice. The office provides guidance, analysis, technical assistance and oversight to ACF programs on: strategic planning; performance measurement; research and evaluation methods; statistical, policy and program analysis; and synthesis and dissemination of research and demonstration findings.

OPRE includes the Division of Economic Independence, the Division of Child and Family Development and the Division of Family Strengthening.



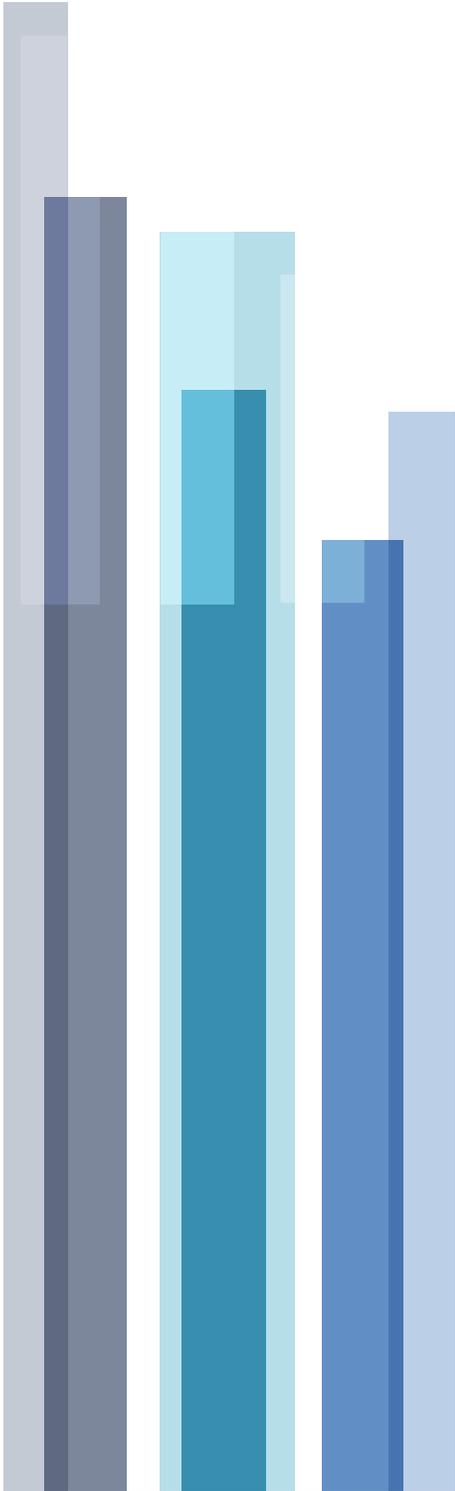
*Rigorous evidence for improving
child and family well-being*



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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 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 four major areas:

- TANF and the Safety Net
- Employment and the Labor Market
- Education and Training
- Other and Cross-Cutting 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.

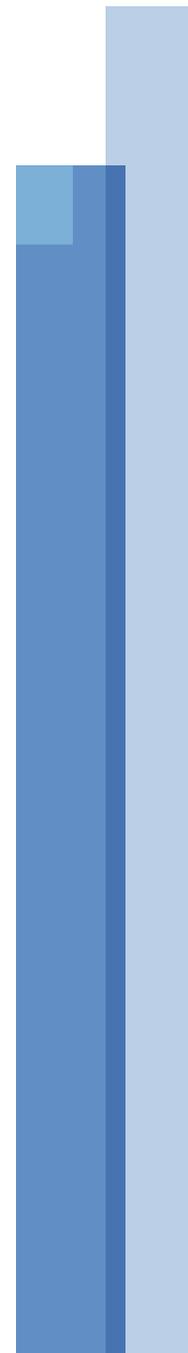
This *Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency* describes major welfare and family self-sufficiency research projects sponsored by OPRE in Fiscal Year 2013.

TANF and the Safety Net

A major focus of OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research is the TANF program, the primary program for the Federal Government to provide temporary cash assistance to poor families. TANF, created in 1996 by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), took the place of the previous Federal cash welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). OPRE's support for research and evaluation efforts in TANF aims to provide a better understanding of the nature and consequences of TANF policy choices, especially as they relate to the well-being of children and families.

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. OPRE more recently commissioned a series of research briefs synthesizing knowledge on important TANF topics.

OPRE is currently funding several descriptive studies to further our knowledge of State TANF and related safety net programs. In addition to the studies described below, OPRE conducts experimental research on welfare-to-work strategies; these efforts are described in the following sections on education, training and the labor market.



Understanding the Dynamics of Disconnection from Employment and Assistance

Since the creation of TANF in 1996, there has been concern about the substantial minority of TANF recipients who leave TANF without finding work, as well as TANF eligible individuals who are neither receiving TANF nor working. Low-income individuals and families who are neither employed nor receiving cash assistance are often referred to as “disconnected.” According to recent estimates, 20 to 25 percent of low-income single mothers are disconnected from work and TANF over the course of a year.

In recent years, HHS has invested in better understanding the dynamics, characteristics and circumstances of disconnected families. These efforts include a [research brief on Disconnected Families and TANF](#); grant funding to the National and Regional Poverty Centers for research on local disconnected populations; and an ASPE analysis of the dynamics and characteristics of low-income single mothers disconnected from work and public assistance. This research has sought to address questions such as the size of the disconnected population, the characteristics of disconnected families, the extent of economic hardship faced by disconnected families, and dynamics of disconnection.

The *Understanding the Dynamics of Disconnection from Employment and Assistance* project lays the groundwork for the next stage of research on disconnection. Launched in 2011 and being conducted by the Urban Institute, the project began by convening a meeting of experts who discussed existing research on disconnection and offered input on the most important knowledge gaps and areas for future research.

Currently, the project team is engaged in qualitative fieldwork with disconnected single mothers to better understand their circumstances. The team is conducting in-depth interviews with over 60 low-income single mothers who are disconnected from employment and public assistance. Research questions include experiences with employment and benefits, reasons for their current unemployment and lack of assistance, families’ coping strategies, and families’ perspectives on pathways out of disconnection.

This research is expected to shed new light on this hard to reach population and offer new hypotheses for further study. A final report is expected in spring 2014.

TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project (TSDTP)

Numerous studies have identified the substantial potential for overlap in families and individuals served by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. The TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project (TSDTP) is an effort to examine the extent of the overlap between the TANF

ACF Evaluation Policy

ACF’s mission is to foster health and well-being by providing federal leadership, partnership and resources for the compassionate and effective delivery of human services. The importance of this mission demands that we continually innovate, improve and learn. Through evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families and our partners can learn systematically so that we can make our services as effective as possible.

ACF’s [evaluation policy](#) establishes the principles of rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics for evaluation activities.

- **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.

and SSI program and populations and to develop innovative pilot programs that can improve a variety of outcomes for individuals with disabilities and barriers to employment. TSDTP is a collaborative effort between the Administration for Children and Families and the Social Security Administration through a contract to MDRC

The first stage of the project was to understand the existing environment. Federal TANF and SSI data were merged to determine the national overlap between TANF and SSI application and participation. Analysis of this merged data revealed a number of interesting findings. Key findings include:

- Less than 10 percent of TANF recipients had an open SSI application, and just 6 percent of adults applying for SSI received TANF benefits within a year of the application.
- Most TANF recipients who apply for SSI do so long before nearing their federal benefit time limit.
- TANF recipients who applied for SSI were slightly less likely to be found disabled than other SSI applicants. Much of this difference is explained by differences in demographic characteristics like age.

A [report](#) on this analysis is available online.

In the second stage of the project, the team worked with three sites—Ramsey County, MN; Los Angeles County, CA; and Muskegon County, Michigan—to implement pilot tests of innovative approaches to serving individuals with disabilities either through the provision of services to TANF clients with barriers to employment, streamlining the SSI application process or improving coordination between the two systems.

Several short briefs and a report on the project's second phase will be published throughout 2013–2014.

Descriptive Analysis of TANF Work Participation

The Claims Resolution Act of 2010 extended the authorization of the TANF program and required State reports to distinguish between activities directed toward attaining self-sufficiency and activities that do not qualify as work activities but are otherwise reasonably calculated to help the family move toward self-sufficiency. The Secretary of HHS may provide any additional information that he or she determines

appropriate, including information about individuals who have no hours of participation and the principal reasons for such nonparticipation.

This study aims to provide information relevant to this requirement, including close examinations and documentation of work participation levels among TANF recipients, reasons for nonparticipation and selected States' use of Federal TANF funds.

The study will culminate in a final report documenting selected State and local TANF program policies, administrative infrastructure, service delivery processes and the monitoring and reporting of client program participation, among other parameters.

Mathematica Policy Research and its partners are conducting this study.

Descriptive Analysis of TANF/WIA Coordination

When the TANF program was created in 1996, it differed from the Federal government's previous cash assistance program for needy families by imposing time limits on receipt of cash assistance and broadening and strengthening mandates for clients to work or engage in work-related activities. These changes increased the need for employment-related services for welfare recipients, applicants and potential applicants. In 1998, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) consolidated multiple employment-related public programs into a unified system through which comprehensive labor market information, job training and job search assistance could be provided in One-Stop Career Centers.

Delivering services more efficiently is a critical objective for Federal and State officials who administer TANF and WIA. Both programs seek a more cost-effective, coordinated way to serve their clients and ultimately, to improve client employment outcomes. However, ongoing research on TANF/WIA coordination and integration has revealed wide variation in management structures, administrative designs and implementation experiences.

Previous studies have focused on the degree to which various factors may influence cross-program coordination and the degree to which WIA program services are provided to TANF clients.

Ongoing and Recent Descriptive Research on the TANF Program

OPRE has supported a number of descriptive studies of various aspects of TANF programs. Current and previous topics of study include:

- Differences in administration between County- and State-administered TANF programs,
- Understanding the TANF child-only caseload,
- State and local diversion programs for TANF applicants from cash assistance,
- Sanction policies and their implementation,
- Strategies and implementation of policies and programs to fulfill work participation requirements,
- The extent and effects of time limit policies and
- The State TANF Policies Database.

Briefs, reports and material from these projects can be found on the [OPRE website](#).

This project, being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and its partners, is gathering information from States to identify, analyze and describe promising practices that have emerged from State and local efforts to coordinate TANF and WIA services.

Understanding the Child-Only TANF Caseload

While adult TANF recipients have been the subject of most TANF research, child-only cases—cases where no adult is included in the benefit calculation and only the children are aided—are an increasingly large percentage of the caseload. In FY 2011, child-only cases represented almost half of the total TANF caseload. Lack of research on this subject had meant that much was unknown about a large segment of the TANF caseload and some of the nation's most vulnerable children and their families.

In response to the need for research on this subject, OPRE and ASPE awarded a grant to Chapin Hall to

document differences in State policies that affect child-only TANF cases, describe characteristics and dynamics of such cases, and address the programmatic and policy context in which these cases exist. The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining secondary administrative data analysis; informant interviews at the federal, State, and county levels; and a national survey of TANF administrators. Findings provide a broad overview of policies, demographic trends, and program challenges nationwide and in four focal jurisdictions—California, Florida, Illinois, and New York. A [final report](#) was published in December 2012.

A Descriptive Study of State Tribal TANF Programs

The 1996 welfare legislation authorized the allocation of funding to American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages for the administration of Tribal TANF programs. Currently, there are 68 approved Tribal TANF programs serving 300 American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages and the non-reservation American Indian and Alaska Native populations of over 121 counties. Little is known about the characteristics, implementation and promising practices of these programs. This project, conducted from 2011–2013 for OPRE by the Urban Institute, provided a descriptive study on the implementation of four Tribal TANF programs. The study included visits to four Tribal TANF programs and analyses of information available in Tribal TANF plans and program documents, as well as data from HHS, the Census Bureau, and other data sources.

The study found that tribes use the flexibility of Tribal TANF to create diverse programs that reflect their unique circumstances, opportunities, and cultures. Elements of tribal culture were evident in the program design, in the way program staff and clients interacted, and in the types of activities in which clients were engaged. The Tribal TANF programs in the study generally focus on the broad goal of self-sufficiency, beyond the narrower goal of employment. The final report was published in the fall of 2013.

Descriptive Study of County vs. State TANF Administration

While the majority of States centrally administer their TANF programs, nine States (California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio and Wisconsin) play a supervisory role and delegate

the administration of the TANF program to their counties. The two-year study, being conducted for OPRE by the Urban Institute, has the main objective to provide a descriptive study of the dynamics of county-versus State-administered TANF programs and document lessons about different programmatic implementations and experiences. The study will address a key policy research question: How are TANF programs administered by counties and supervised by States differing from programs administered by States? This project involves gathering information from a sample of county- and State-administered TANF programs and will identify and recommend potential approaches for technical assistance specific to State-supervised, county-administered TANF programs. The final report will be published by the end of 2014.

State TANF Policies: Welfare Rules Database

With the shift from AFDC to TANF, States gained considerable authority to design the parameters of their cash assistance programs and set their own rules. In order to document what was happening in states, the Urban Institute in 1997 began developing the State TANF Policies Database, also known as the Welfare Rules Database (WRD). The database is meant to be a single location where information on program rules can be researched across states and/or across years. ACF, with contributions from ASPE, has funded updates to the database, as well as publication of tables summarizing State TANF policies for each year since 1997. The database currently contains State TANF Policies through July 2012.

Family Self Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium

Much attention has been paid to the changes in policy, structure and program operations caused by PRWORA, but relatively little attention has been paid to the significant effect that PRWORA had on data, research and program evaluation. Since the emergence of TANF there have been substantial changes in how Federal and State Governments develop, execute and fund research and evaluation activities, as well as significant cutbacks in the collection, analysis and reporting of administrative data.

To fill gaps in research and data activities and to complement its ongoing research, OPRE developed a multi-faceted **Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium**.

The first component of the Research Consortium is the **Advancing Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research Project**. Launched in 2012 and led by Mathematica Policy Research, this contract provides research support and a flexible research and evaluation mechanism for responding to rapidly-emerging policy priorities and research opportunities.

The second component of the Consortium is the **Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Network**. OPRE selected a network of Principal Investigators to investigate critical issues in family self-sufficiency and stability research. The Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Network (the 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 policies. The list of scholars in the Network include Yumiko Aratani (Columbia University), Heather Hill (University of Chicago), Marybeth Mattingly (Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire), Jennifer Romich (University of Washington), Jodi Sandfort (University of Minnesota), Colleen Heflin (University of Missouri) and Gregory Fabiano (University of Buffalo, State University of New York).

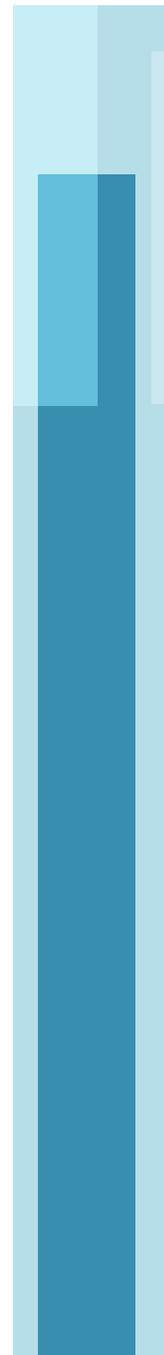
The third component of the Consortium is the **Family Self-Sufficiency Data Center**. OPRE has awarded the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago a cooperative agreement to support the development, implementation and ongoing operations of a Data Center to support family self-sufficiency research and activities. This Center serves as a hub to support 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 Network.

EMPLOYMENT AND THE LABOR MARKET

For most families and individuals, employment is the foundation of self-sufficiency. Households headed by employed workers who work full-time all year have a poverty rate that is nearly one-eighth of those households headed by individuals not employed full-time for the full year.

A major focus of OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research is 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 (HTE), which tested several strategies for helping hard-to-employ parents find and sustain employment; the Employment, Retention and Advancement Project (ERA), which tested strategies for helping employed individuals keep their jobs and advance in the workforce; and the National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS), which evaluated the effectiveness of mandatory welfare-to-work programs.

OPRE is further examining strategies to use wage subsidies and transitional employment programs in the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED), which was launched in 2010 and is testing the next generation of subsidized employment models for critical low-income populations. OPRE also recently concluded a project on Design Options of the Search for Employment (DOSE), and will soon begin the Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation.



Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED)

ACF launched the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED) in 2010 to demonstrate and evaluate 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 seven sites, an implementation evaluation at each project site, and a cost-benefit analysis. Of particular note is STED's in-program survey, which 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 Department of Labor's Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD). ETJD, a project of DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA), is funding seven grantees to provide temporary, paid work experiences to non-custodial 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, experimental evaluation. Given the complementary nature of these evaluations, 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 is 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. ACF released [this report](#) in 2011.

Following this initial scan, the project team recruited sites to include in the evaluation. As of Fall 2013, seven sites will participate in the study, including:

- ***Goodwill of North Georgia.*** This DOL-funded program provides transitional jobs in Goodwill locations to low-income non-custodial parents referred to the program by the child support agency.
- ***Office of Economic and Workforce Development.*** This DOL-funded program provides transitional jobs to low-income non-custodial 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 UI benefits.
- ***New York City Human Resources Administration.*** New York City is testing two different program models for low-income individuals: (1) subsidized employment with a private sector employer, and (2) placement in the Parks Opportunity Program, which includes a transitional job with a partner agency.
- ***New York City Center for Economic Opportunity.*** The Young Adult Internship Program targets disconnected youth—out of school and work for at least three months—ages 16 to 24 and provides initial training followed by a private sector (both for- and non-profit) internship for up to 12 weeks.

In addition, STED is working with the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services to launch a study of the Bridges and Pathways Initiative. This new intervention, developed in partnership with the Chicago Crime Lab and the University of Chicago, targets 16 to 24 year olds leaving incarceration and includes three components: (1) a transitional job; (2) an on-line high school program; and (3) a cognitive behavioral therapy-like program.

Random assignment began for the first sites in early 2012 will continue through late 2013. Data collection has begun with the in-program survey and the 12-month follow-up.

A summary report outlining the seven STED programs and five additional ETJD programs will be released in late 2013, and initial findings may be released as early as 2016.

Design Options of the Search for Employment (DOSE)

Searching for a job is an experience shared by most Americans. Most people will, at one or more points in their lives, seek out, apply for, and accept a position of employment. In a policy context, searching for a job is an important component of many public assistance programs, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Despite the widespread prevalence of services to support the search for employment in TANF, known as job search assistance (JSA) services, we know little about the relative effectiveness of different JSA approaches and their components. While job search activities are often included as an essential component of programs that have been the subject of OPRE-sponsored evaluations, they have not independently been the focus of rigorous examination.

In the fall of 2011, OPRE launched the Design Options of the Search for Employment (DOSE) project to address these gaps in the literature. Conducted by Abt Associates, DOSE explored the potential to develop rigorous impact evaluations of alternative job search strategies. The project scanned the current state of knowledge of job search strategies and developed ideas to test job search strategies and approaches. ACF released the project's knowledge development report in early 2013. This report featured a [conceptual framework](#) that guided other components of this project, as well as an extensive [review of the literature](#) around job search strategies in the TANF and Unemployment Insurance programs. The project team also developed a [companion brief](#), which summarized the knowledge development effort. The project concluded with an evaluation design options report. In this report, the authors explored key research questions, appropriate research methods, data collection methods, exploration of general equilibrium effects, and other evaluation components. ACF released this report in spring 2013.

The DOSE project provided the foundation for the newly launched Job Search Assistance (JSA) Strategies Evaluation, described below.

Job Search Assistance Strategies Evaluation

In fall 2013, OPRE launched the Job Search Assistance (JSA) Strategies Evaluation, which will be conducted by Abt Associates, Mathematica Policy Research, The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, and other consultants. The JSA evaluation will feature a multi-site random assignment evaluation to measure the relative impact of specific job search services offered by TANF programs on short-term labor market outcomes such as earnings and time to employment. This project builds on OPRE's recent Design Options of the Search for Employment (DOSE) project described above. As part of DOSE, the project team developed recommendations for an overall approach and design for the job search strategies evaluation, as well as an updated review of the literature in this field. The JSA evaluation draws from this work to launch the first rigorous test of job search services for TANF recipients.

The JSA evaluation aims to achieve several goals as it examines the most innovative and promising JSA approaches currently in use. First, ACF intends for this evaluation to 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. A third and final goal is to use innovative and state-of-the-art methods to develop a study that is cost-effective and efficient, while rigorous and methodologically sound.

The JSA evaluation will use a random assignment experimental design and will include an impact and implementation evaluation carried out across the selected sites. Consistent with the policy framework of TANF, ACF expects that the approaches studied will be relatively short-term in nature. ACF anticipates that these outcomes will be measured using administrative data sources, including the National Directory of New Hires; however, ACF may also conduct a follow-up survey with a subsample of participants to examine broader outcomes. 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. The project is expected to last four years and may publish initial findings as early as the end of 2016.

Work, Family and Health Network (WFHN)

“Family-friendly” or “work-life” policies have become increasingly prevalent in the United States, but few longitudinal studies using experimental design have been implemented. Moreover, knowledge about work-life policies aimed at low-wage workers is scant. To address this gap, OPRE is supporting 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. Implemented with two large employers, the intervention includes training supervisors on ways to support work-family balance and to increase employees’ control over their work time. Within each employer, worksites were randomly assigned to participate in the intervention. The two employers represent different industries—one is more “white collar,” while the other employs low-wage workers with more irregular hours.

OPRE has contributed funding for the collection of follow-up data on employees in the low-wage industry who leave their jobs over the course of the study. This funding will contribute to a fuller understanding of the effects of the intervention on all workers and especially lower-income workers, including how family-friendly or work-life policies may or may not contribute to employment retention for low-wage workers. Analysis of data on employees who left their jobs over the course of the study will begin in Fall 2013.

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 low-income individuals, dating back most notably to the National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS). Currently, OPRE's research portfolio includes the Employment and Training Evidence Review, as well as an evaluation of multiple 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 further training. OPRE is evaluating nine career pathways programs as part of the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS) project, and is also conducting a set of studies focused on the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG), a set of health care career pathways demonstration projects funded by OFA.



Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS)

In 2007, ACF initiated the ISIS project, a multi-site, random assignment evaluation of promising strategies for increasing employment and self-sufficiency among low-income families. During the project's development, consensus emerged that the evaluation should study interventions with potential for substantial effects on earnings and income rather than just modest effects, should prioritize strategies focused on skills development, and should focus on a relatively wide population of low-income parents (not limited to TANF recipients).

Based on stakeholder input, the ISIS team has come to focus on career pathways as the main intervention framework to study. Career pathways consist of a series of connected education and training steps paired with related supports. Steps along the pathway lead to employment in a specific sector or occupation but can also lead to further training. Examples include basic and sectoral bridge programs, certification programs, and Associate's Degree programs. The pathway allows individuals to achieve employment and progressively advance over time. ISIS is especially focused on career pathways models that include innovative instructional strategies, promising support services strategies and connections to employment.

The ISIS team, including Abt Associates as the principal researcher, is randomly assigning participants in nine innovative sites operating career pathways programs around the country. These ISIS 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 ISIS project is evaluating 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 to serve the city's growing Latino 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 (CNA) degree to Pre-Licensed Practitioner Nurse (LPN) to LPN and ultimately to Registered Nurse (RN).
- **Madison Area Technical College (Patient Care Academies).** Patient Care Pathway Program provides short-term condensed training that allows lower-skilled students to take courses for college credit and prepare them for health care degree and diploma programs. The program is split into two tracks offered in the program depending on the student's skill level.
- **Pima Community College (Pathways to Healthcare).** The Pathways to Healthcare Program offers training to students in sixteen different healthcare professions based on personal preference and test scores. Trainings 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. This site is also part of the Health Profession Opportunity Grant evaluation.
- **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 health care by providing extensive case management and support services. This site is also part of the Health Profession Opportunity Grant evaluation.
- **Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (Project VIDA).** Serving four large counties in southern Texas, the non-profit Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA) aims to help students achieve an Associate's 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.

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING EVIDENCE REVIEW

A [White House initiative](#) underlines the importance of using evidence and rigorous evaluation in management and policy decisions. Where evidence is strong, we should act on it. Where evidence is suggestive, we should consider it. Where evidence is weak, we should build the knowledge to support better decisions in the future.

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, which include:

- ***[Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness](#)***, which provides an assessment of the evidence of effectiveness for home visiting program models that target families with pregnant women and children from birth to age five;
- ***[Teen Pregnancy Prevention Evidence-Based Programs Database](#)***, which identifies programs effective in reducing the risks of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy from adolescent sexual activity; and

- ***[Strengthening Families Evidence Review](#)***, which reviews research on programs serving low-income fathers or couples to encourage fathers' involvement in their children's lives and support couples' relationships.

In addition to these areas, the employment and training field has a rich body of evidence on the effectiveness of programs and strategies for low-income individuals. Despite the extent of the research, the field lacked a systematic review of this evidence. To meet this need, OPRE launched the ***Employment and Training Evidence Review*** in 2013, which will be conducted for OPRE by Mathematica Policy Research.

The Employment and Training Evidence Review will comprehensively review the evidence on employment and training programs and strategies, summarize what is known about evidence of effectiveness, and disseminate the findings. The goal is to provide an updated and comprehensive synthesis of knowledge for the research, policy, and practice fields, and to help inform Federal, state, and local policymakers as they make decisions about evidence-based investments in programs and services.

- ***[Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County \(Health Careers for All\)](#)***. Health Careers for All (HCA) 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](#)***. Year-Up operates in nine nationwide sites to provide urban young adults with the skills, experience and support that will empower them to reach their potential through professional careers and higher education. Our intensive one-year program provides high school graduates and GED recipients between the ages of 18–24 with a combination of hands-on skill development and corporate internship opportunities.

Program sites are randomly assigning participants on a pilot basis as all nine partner sites will conduct full-scale random assignment experiments, and Abt will conduct implementation and impact evaluation studies. More information on the ISIS project is available at <http://www.projectisis.org/>.

Evaluation Portfolio for the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program

The Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program was established by the Affordable Care Act to provide training programs in high-demand healthcare professions to TANF recipients and other low-income individuals. In 2010, ACF awarded five-year grants to

32 grantees in 23 states across the United States. In each of the first three years of the program, ACF has provided approximately \$67 million to these grantees. HPOG grantees include post-secondary educational institutions; workforce investment boards, state or local government agencies and community-based organizations; five are Tribal organizations. The grantees have implemented programs that provide education and training activities and supportive services to demonstrate new and promising approaches to serving TANF and low-income adults who may experience multiple barriers to employment success.

OPRE is implementing a multi-pronged evaluation strategy to assess the HPOG demonstration projects. This strategy includes the following components: (1) HPOG Implementation, Systems and Outcomes Evaluation Design and Performance Reporting; (2) HPOG National Implementation Evaluation (NIE); (3) HPOG Impact Study; (4) additional impact studies of a subset of HPOG grantees through the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS) Project; (5) Evaluation of Tribal HPOG; and (6) University Partnership Research Grants for HPOG. These research and evaluation activities aim to provide information on program implementation, systems change, outcomes and impact. The components of this research strategy are closely coordinated to avoid duplicative efforts, maximize the re-use of data and information that is collected, reduce burden on grantees, and promote cross-project learning.

HPOG Implementation, Systems and Outcomes Evaluation Design and Performance Reporting

The purpose of this project is to recommend an evaluation design for the 27 HPOG sites focused on TANF recipients and other low-income individuals and to assess implementation, system change, and outcomes. Abt Associates recently concluded this design, which is being executed in the National Implementation Evaluation (described below).

Primary questions of interest were:

1. How are health professions training programs being implemented across the grantee sites?
2. What changes to the service delivery system are associated with program implementation?
3. What individual level outputs and outcomes occur (e.g., recruitment, enrollment, retention, completion (accreditation/certification), job entry, employment retention and advancement, and earnings)?

4. What can be learned about how best to implement these programs for this population (what implementation and/or systems components are related to programs outputs and outcomes)?
5. What key components appear necessary or contribute to the success of these programs?

In support of the evaluation design, the project developed a detailed knowledge base, including a review of pertinent literature. The project recently published a [Literature Review: Career Pathways Programs](#), which reviews selected research studies on career pathways program design, implementation, outcomes and impacts, and summarizes the implications of the research literature for the evaluation design. A literature review on analyzing implementation and systems change will be released in fall 2013.

Additionally under this contract, Abt Associates and The Urban Institute designed and are providing ongoing support for the HPOG Performance Reporting System (PRS), a web-based management information system. This system collects data that will be used by ACF and its evaluation teams for both performance management and evaluation efforts across all 32 grantees. The system was operational on September 30, 2011.

Lastly, this project is responsible for developing annual reports of grantee progress, using data from the HPOG PRS and other sources (e.g., grantee performance progress reports, continuation applications). The [first year annual report brief](#) provides a summary of performance indicators, enrollment and service levels, demographic characteristics of participants as well as information on implementation accomplishments and challenges. The second year annual report is forthcoming.

HPOG National Implementation Evaluation (NIE)

The HPOG National Implementation Evaluation is executing the study devised in the HPOG Implementation, Systems and Outcomes Evaluation Design project described above. The NIE will conduct an in-depth examination of the HPOG grantee program design and implementation, a systems analysis of networks created by HPOG programs (e.g., among grantees, employers, and other partners), and a quantitative analysis of how HPOG program features and implementation strategies are associated with outcomes. The collection of information through surveys of

various organizations and respondents (including a Grantee survey, Program Management and Staff survey, Stakeholder/Network survey, and Employer survey) will feed into these analyses.

The NIE Design Report is expected to be released in the fall of 2013. Reports detailing findings from the implementation analysis and systems change analysis are expected in early winter 2014; an outcome analysis report is expected in spring 2015.

HPOG Impact Study

The HPOG Impact Study is being led by Abt Associates in partnership with the Urban Institute. The study is designed to demonstrate how variations in program services affect program impacts. The literature on promising and innovative Career Pathway programs, especially in health care, is quite limited. As such, the HPOG Impact Study will fill a void in the sectoral training and career pathways literature both about program effectiveness and about which types of programs or program components are most effective. Key evaluation questions that will be addressed in the study include:

1. What impacts do HPOG programs have on outcomes of interest?
2. To what extent do these impacts vary by subgroups of interest?
3. To what extent does HPOG program participation (in particular components, with particular dosages) have an impact on outcomes of interest?
4. To what extent do various HPOG program models or components have varying impacts?
5. To what extent do specific program enhancements have impacts, relative to the “standard” HPOG program?
6. How does parental participation in various HPOG program models and components affect outcomes for children?

The HPOG Impact Evaluation Design Report will be released in the winter of 2013. The Final HPOG Impact Evaluation Report with study findings is expected in June 2016.

Evaluation of Tribal HPOG

A comprehensive process and outcome evaluation of the Tribal HPOG grantees is being conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with Red Star Innovations and the National Indian Health Board (NIHB). The goal of this evaluation is to provide documentation and lessons about diverse programmatic approaches to health professions training serving the tribal population. Interview and program operations data will be collected to provide an in-depth, systematic analysis of program implementation, operations, and outputs and outcomes in all tribal sites. Additionally, data will be compared within and across sites to examine correlations and patterns and generate hypotheses about the effectiveness of different program approaches for tribal populations.

The Tribal HPOG Evaluation team is developing a series of practice briefs to disseminate important lessons learned and findings from the evaluation. [Three practice briefs](#) have been released—An Introduction to the Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) and Evaluation; Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program Implementation & Evolution; and Overview of Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Supportive Services. The Tribal HPOG Evaluation Interim Report, which details findings with regard to how grantee sites have implemented health professions training programs for tribal populations and any available outcomes of the programs, is expected to be released in the fall of 2013.

University Partnership Research Grants for HPOG

In FY 2011, ACF awarded five grantees funding through the University Partnership Research Grants for HPOG to support research and evaluation that will inform and improve HPOG program performance and complement ACF’s multi-pronged evaluation of the HPOG programs. Applicants were required to demonstrate a partnership with an HPOG program(s) as an integral part of the research plan. The five grantees are working closely and coordinating with ACF’s multi-pronged evaluation in order to promote cross-project learning and avoid duplicative efforts. Grants were awarded to Brandeis University, Loyola University of Chicago, North Dakota State University, Northwestern University, and Temple University.

University Partnership Research Grants Detailed Information

GRANT RECIPIENT	PROJECT
<p>Northwestern University, Institute for Policy Research</p> <p><i>HPOG Grantee Partner: Community Action Project of Tulsa County, Inc. (Tulsa, OK)</i></p>	<p>CareerAdvance: A Dual-Generation Program's Effects on Families and Children.</p> <p>Quasi-experimental, mixed methods approach to examine: (1) short-term and long-term family, parent and child outcomes; and (2) how variation in program participation is linked to differential patterns of educational attainment, employment, and family health and well-being.</p>
<p>Temple University, School of Social Work</p> <p><i>HPOG Grantee Partner: Temple University, Center for Social Policy & Community Development (CSPCD)</i></p>	<p>Building Capacities/Making Connections: A Multi-Year Study of Human and Social Capital Development through the HIP Career Pathways Initiative.</p> <p>Mixed method study to examine: (1) participants' increased workforce capacities and access to labor market opportunities; (2) participants' pre-existing and enhanced networks that impact career development success; (3) how participant engagement is helped or hindered by these networks; (4) how networks may be positively affected by virtue of participation in HPOG; and (5) how community contexts facilitate or challenge program performance and network enhancement.</p>
<p>Brandeis University, Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP), Heller School for Social Policy and Management</p> <p><i>HPOG Grantee Partner: New Hampshire Office of Minority Health and Refugee Affairs (OMHRA) (Concord, NH)</i></p>	<p>Study of Employment and Advancement of Racial, Ethnic and Linguistic Minorities for New Hampshire Health Profession Opportunity Project.</p> <p>Surveys of and interviews with New Hampshire healthcare employers, job developers, and incumbent minority workers to ascertain best practices for developing a diverse workforce and related career mobility pipeline.</p>
<p>Loyola University of Chicago, School of Social Work</p> <p><i>HPOG Grantee Partner: Gateway Technical College (Kenosha, WI) & Southland Health Care Forum, Inc. (Chicago Heights, IL)</i></p>	<p>Evaluation of Empowerment Pathways to Self-Sufficiency in Health Professions Career Development for Low-Income Individuals.</p> <p>Evaluation of empowerment-based workforce development models (the extent to which one's psychological self-sufficiency affects one's employment placement and outcomes in health professions) through analysis of data from Gateway Technical College and Southland Health Care Forum HPOG program participants, the Cara Program, Chicago Urban League and Chicago Housing Authority's Summer Food Program employment support services</p>
<p>North Dakota State University, Sponsored Programs, VPRCATT</p> <p><i>HPOG Grantee Partner: Cankdeska Cikana Community College (Fort Totten, ND)</i></p>	<p>Sustaining Career Pathways for American Indian Health Professionals in ND: Building Apprenticeship and Workforce Options with the Next Steps HPOG Project.</p> <p>Descriptive study of the recruitment and retention of American Indian people into professional nursing programs. Implementation of Health Care Apprenticeship Programs (H-CAP) in rural North Dakota settings, and evaluation of impact on participants' attainment of professional nursing licensure and employment in nursing. Implementation and outcome evaluation of <i>Introduction to Health Care Careers</i> (a pipeline course) among American Indian high school students in rural settings.</p>

FOR HISPANIC CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The substantial and growing proportion of Hispanic families in the nation introduces new challenges and opportunities to ACF programs. In keeping with ACF's strategic plan, ACF aims to strengthen programming to meet the service needs of this population. Substantial and increasing proportions of ACF program participants are of Hispanic origin, and many more Hispanic families and individuals who could benefit from these services do not access ACF programs. OPRE has developed and oversees several research and evaluation projects to inform ACF policies and programming to help low-income Hispanic children and families. Across these projects, OPRE aims to advance the research on specific programmatic concerns related to self-sufficiency and well-being of Hispanic populations. Current OPRE research efforts that focus on the self-sufficiency needs of Hispanic children and families include:

- ***Hispanic Research Work Group (ongoing)*** brings together experts in a wide range of content areas relevant to ACF's mission to assist ACF/OPRE in identifying research priorities concerning low-income, Hispanic families, to encourage open dialogue about ACF/OPRE's ongoing research and how it could better engage and reflect the experiences of Hispanic communities, and to identify priorities for future research that is more inclusive of and culturally responsive to Hispanic communities.
- ***Research Initiative on Poverty, Inequality, and Mobility among Hispanics (2012-2013)***. In 2012, OPRE provided funding for a research initiative focused on poverty, inequality, and mobility among Hispanics in the U.S. The initiative is led by the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, one of the ASPE-funded Poverty Research Centers. The university established five research groups, each focused on a particular topic and each spearheaded by an expert in poverty among

low-income Hispanic populations, and funded a research project in each of the topic areas, which include monitoring and explaining basic trends related to poverty among Hispanics, incorporation of new generations into American society, intergenerational social mobility, immigration policy, and health and wellbeing. These projects are expected to be completed in the fall of 2013.

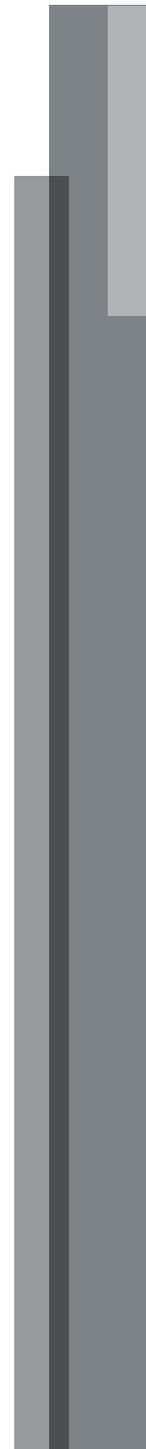
- ***Center for Research on Hispanic Children and Families (2013-2018)***. In 2013, OPRE provided funding through a cooperative agreement to Child Trends to lead and support investigation of the needs of Hispanic populations served by ACF and promising approaches to promote social and economic well-being among low-income Hispanic families. The primary goal of the Center is to support the advancement of research that addresses the service needs of low-income Hispanic families. Specifically, the Center will advance understanding of poverty and self-sufficiency, marriage and relationships, fatherhood, and child care and early education among Hispanics.
- ***Evaluations of Programs that Serve Hispanic Populations***. A number of OPRE projects are evaluating programs or are focused on sites that serve majority Hispanic populations. An example is the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency project (2007-2015), which is testing strategies to promote employment and self-sufficiency among economically disadvantaged families. The project team is working with two partner organizations that serve primarily low-income Hispanic families - the Instituto del Progreso Latino, in Chicago, IL and the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement, in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. In OPRE's Understanding the Dynamics of Disconnection from Employment and Assistance project, approximately half of the in-depth interviews are with Latinas, many of whom are immigrants.

OTHER AND CROSS-CUTTING RESEARCH

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

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS)

Many social programs require participants to actively navigate a series of steps, and 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, display limited self-control, and are influenced by small changes in their environment. Principles from behavioral economics suggest potential improvements. For example, by changing program defaults, pre-populating forms, and adding reminders, programs can improve measured outcomes. Among other results, behavioral economics principles have been used with great effect to increase participation in 401k programs and boost organ donation rates.



The *Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS)* project, which launched in 2010, is the first major opportunity to apply a behavioral economics lens to programs that serve poor families in the United States. The ultimate goal is to learn how tools from behavioral science can improve the well-being of low-income children, adults, and families. BIAS is being conducted for OPRE by MDRC in partnership with behavioral experts.

In the first two years of the project, the team engaged with a range of policy and practitioner stakeholders, created a glossary of behavioral interventions from promising field experiments, hosted a Peer Practicum for human services program administrators and behavioral experts, and launched behavioral diagnosis and design (also called, “behavioral mapping”) with several ACF-funded programs.

In 2013, the project team has continued behavioral diagnosis and design with ACF programs to develop behaviorally-informed interventions for pilot tests. In the pilot phase of BIAS, interventions will be rigorously evaluated to test whether they influence desired outcomes. The goal is to move beyond exploring the promise of behavioral economics for ACF programs and begin building evidence about the effectiveness of behaviorally-informed interventions.

BIAS launched its first pilot test in May 2013. Working with the Texas Attorney General Child Support Division, BIAS used insights from behavioral economics to redesign materials sent to incarcerated non-custodial parents informing them of an opportunity to apply for a modification to their child support order. BIAS is conducting a random assignment experiment to test whether the use of these behaviorally-informed information and application materials can increase the overall response rate, as well as the accuracy and timeliness of their application materials.

Additional pilots expected to launch in 2013 and 2014 include:

- Work with the National Domestic Violence hotline testing behaviorally-informed interventions to keep on hold callers from hanging up before their call is answered by a hotline staffer.
- Work with the Franklin County (Ohio) Child Support Enforcement Agency to test behaviorally-informed interventions to encourage non-custodial parents to make child support payments in full and on-time.

- Work with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and another Midwestern state to help parents choose higher quality child care, and/or to smooth the recertification process for child care subsidies.

The team is actively recruiting additional site partners, and new partners are expected to begin the behavioral mapping process in upcoming months.

An overview paper from the BIAS project on applying behavioral economics to ACF programs will be published in early 2014, and results from the pilot tests will be released on a rolling basis throughout 2014 and 2015.

Youth Demonstration Development Project (YDD)

OPRE embarked on the Youth Demonstration Development Project (YDD) in 2009 in order to systematically explore conceptual frameworks for youth development and successful transition to adulthood. Conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and its partner, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, the primary objective of YDD was to identify, modify, or develop conceptual frameworks that could be applied to existing or new ACF programs to improve the well-being of at-risk youth and increase their ability to become self-sufficient adults and avoid long-term reliance on public assistance.

The project began with a scan of ACF’s youth-serving programs and [synthesis of research and resources to support at-risk youth](#). In addition to gathering expert feedback through two Technical Working Group meetings, the project team also conducted site visits to six youth-serving programs around the U.S. to gather comments on and reactions to the draft framework. Using these activities as background, the project developed a conceptual framework that program providers can modify to meet the needs of specific youth populations, such as homeless youth or young parents. The framework suggests the possibility of using evidence-informed interventions to address two primary areas: youth’s resilience and human capital development. The framework also highlights the need to find tailored solutions grounded in a trusting relationship between youth and program staff to help move youth toward both healthy functioning and economic self-sufficiency as they transition to adulthood. [A final report summarizes this framework.](#)

In addition to the final conceptual framework report, the YDD project produced a series of practice briefs that explore a range of issues related to the project, including:

- [An overview](#) of the conceptual framework,
- [Occupations](#) in health care and construction that hold promise for at-risk youth in search of employment that does not require extensive education or training, and
- [A description](#) of differences in the economic well-being between former foster youth who self-identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and youth who self-identify as heterosexual.

Assets for Independence (AFI) 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 Experiment 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 warranting further rigorous evaluation.

The study, led by the Urban Institute and its partners, began with an extensive field assessment to identify potential evaluation sites. The study includes two current AFI Grantees—Prosperity Works in New Mexico and the Community Financial Resource Center in Los Angeles, CA. Enrollment began in mid-2013 and will continue into spring 2014. The study will conduct a follow-up survey 12 months after baseline data collection, and additional follow-up surveys may occur in the future. One unique contribution of this study will be the addition of credit scores to data collection activities to measure whether program participation has an impact on a participant's credit score. An implementation study will complement the impact study.

Human Services Research Partnerships: Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands

This cooperative agreement supports partnerships among researchers, local governments, and community-based organizations to define and address research questions regarding the social and economic well-being of low-income children and families in Puerto Rico. A three-year project, the Research Partnerships reach across priorities at OPRE and are intended to improve understanding of the most promising human services approaches to improve the quality of life in the region, with particular focus on topics related to the Head Start and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programs. The grant was awarded in Fall 2013 to the Inter American University of Puerto Rico Metropolitan Campus (IAUPR).

ACF Research Development Project on the Human Service Needs of LGBT Populations

OPRE, in coordination with ASPE, is conducting a research needs assessment to identify data gaps to better understand the human service needs related to low-income and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) families, children, individuals and communities.

The project, launched in 2012, is being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research with their subcontractor, the Williams Institute, an organization dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The study team has begun to explore the characteristics of low-income and at-risk LGBT populations and their interactions with human services. Reports include a “knowledge development” memo, providing the most recent updates on available data on low-income and at-risk LGBT populations and a “needs assessment.” The research team will develop a set of research-focused recommendations and criteria for prioritizing their recommendations to inform ACF's research agenda on human service needs of LGBT populations. There is also a sub-study on Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Program grantees serving LGBT youth: a report on this sub-study will be available in 2013.

SPOTLIGHT ON DISSEMINATION

OPRE is continually striving to not only produce high-quality rigorous research, but also to ensure that this research is available, accessible and relevant to policymakers and program operators. Program and policy research is not created in a vacuum, but as part of a cycle of communication between researchers, practitioners and policymakers. If research does not reach those who can implement it—if it is not responsive to key questions in the field and presented in accessible forms—then that research will not have maximum impact. In recent years, OPRE has devoted greater attention to the dissemination of its research and to the relationships that are crucial for that dissemination to be successful.

OPRE Dissemination Project

The OPRE Dissemination Project, conducted by Public Strategies Inc. and jointly-funded by ASPE, developed an evidence-informed research dissemination strategy for OPRE. The Project involved a series of tasks informed by a synthesis of the evidence about effective dissemination of research, and included market research interviews with policymakers and intermediaries. The process culminated in a clear pathway for improving dissemination of OPRE's projects to various audiences and heightening communication and interoperability with other ACF offices. In April 2013, the Project published a detailed, user-focused [dissemination framework](#) and a [literature review](#).

Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse (SSRC)

The Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse (<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. The clearinghouse, administered by ICF 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.

Welfare Research and Evaluation Conference (WREC)

For more than sixteen years, the Welfare Research and Evaluation Conference (WREC) has been a leading forum for welfare and poverty researchers, State and local administrators, practitioners, program operators and Federal officials and policymakers to discuss cutting-edge research on welfare and related programs and policies. The WREC promotes conversation about the latest findings in evaluation of welfare programs and policies, ways to incorporate findings into the design and implementation of programs and policies and strategies for future evaluations. In addition, the conference also provides opportunities for emerging scholars who are early in their research careers to showcase their work. Conference topics include: TANF; Education, Training and Success in the Labor Market; Child and Youth Well-Being; Fatherhood, Relationships and Strengthening Families; Evaluating Social Programs: Building and Using Evidence; and Approaches to Alleviate Poverty and Strengthen the Safety Net. The 17th Annual WREC will take place May 28th to 30th, 2014, in Washington, D.C. For more information on past and future conferences, visit <http://www.wrconference.net>.

Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

October 2013

OPRE Report # 2013-53

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Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
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