

The University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy

Family Self-Sufficiency Data Center

Goal: The goal of this project is to develop and operate a Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Research Data Center that will increase the amount and quality of data available for FSS research, making both new and existing data sources easier to access, interpret, and analyze securely and efficiently. The Data Center will provide an empirical, data-driven research platform for researchers, policymakers and administrators to use in answering fundamental policy and program questions, and will build knowledge that will ultimately be translated into better policy and practice.

Needs Assessment: This assessment will gather information in three areas: definitions of family self-sufficiency; the current state of family self-sufficiency research; and the data requirements of the family self-sufficiency data-user community. Information will be collected primarily through phone interviews (at least 60) across the spectrum of potential data users, including federal, state, and local leaders and administrators; researchers in academic and non-academic settings; and foundations and advocacy groups. Results will be analyzed and used as a guide in designing and implementing a strategy to accomplish the Data Center's goals.

Data Development: This effort will be informed by the needs assessment, but it will start by focusing on three types of data relevant to family self-sufficiency:

- State and local administrative data. This data will be acquired and processed to improve their usability by cleaning, record linking, and other tasks as needed.
- Surveys and other national-level data. To make this data easier to access and use, basic metadata for major national data sets will be placed in a searchable archive. Also, data will be placed into a database framework (the Orlin Data System) that has customized access tools such as search, data recoding, record restructuring, and file creation.
- Evaluation study data. Results from national-level impact evaluations that address self-sufficiency will be collected and organized into an accessible, searchable archive.

Research and Data Support: In conjunction with data development, a metadata archive and a flexible data access/management/file creation system will be created to help users search and understand their data, perform recodes and restructure tasks, link records across time or other categories, and create and use appropriate analysis files. Technical assistance and training will also be provided to both data providers and users, customized for the family self-sufficiency field. Finally, analytic capacity will be available to help users who need to perform quick-turnaround analyses of data in time-sensitive situations.

Outreach and Collaboration: Outreach will be conducted to potential users through academic, public agency, and practitioner-professional networks, websites, e-mail lists, conferences, and other venues. Collaboration with stakeholders will involve internal and external advisory groups as well as other efforts to obtain feedback from stakeholders and ensure their views are represented.

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