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FY 2023

Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

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

Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

FY 2023

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Contents

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes — Social Context and Environment 39

Knowledge Building and Communication. 44

OPRE Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Publications — FY 2023 (October 2022– September 2023) 51

Spotlights

Administration for Children and Families

https://www.acf.hhs.gov

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

ACF programs aim to:

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

Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

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

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) studies ACF programs and the populations they serve through rigorous research and evaluation projects. These include evaluations of existing programs, evaluations of innovative approaches to helping children and families with low incomes, research syntheses, and descriptive and exploratory studies. OPRE also supports ACF programs in the responsible management and use of data; coordinates performance management activities for ACF; and communicates information about our research and evaluation activities and findings to a diverse range of audiences.

OPRE includes four divisions:

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

Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research

OPRE's Division of Economic Independence has primary responsibility for welfare and family self-sufficiency research. The Division's portfolio is designed to expand knowledge about how Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other human services programs can best support the self-sufficiency and economic well-being of children and families with low incomes. Research, evaluation, and other activities within this portfolio cover the following topics:

- TANF Policy, Funding, and Administration
- Capacity Building within Human Services Programs
- Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes, with a focus on:
  - » Human Capital Development
  - » Employment Attainment and Retention
  - » Social Services Delivery Systems
  - » Social Context and Environment
- Knowledge Building and Communication

Within these areas, the Division funds experimental impact evaluations, implementation evaluations, and descriptive research projects aimed at informing the design and implementation of programs.

The Division also invests in activities to support evaluation capacity building and to communicate findings from the rigorous research, evaluation, and other activities it supports.

This *Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency* describes major research projects sponsored by the Division of Economic Independence in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023.

ACF Evaluation Policy

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

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

SPOTLIGHT ON LEARNING AGENDAS

Background

The [Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018](#) ("Evidence Act") was established to advance evidence building in the federal government through requirements intended to improve access to data and expand evaluation capacity. Among these requirements is a mandate that cabinet agencies develop evidence-building and evaluation plans, or learning agendas, to systematically identify and address priority questions relevant to the programs, policies, and regulations of the agency.

In line with its mission, OPRE has a long history of helping ACF pursue learning agendas and related activities at multiple levels. At the broadest level, ACF contributes to HHS's multi-year evidence plan and annual evaluation plan required by the Evidence Act. OPRE also works closely with individual ACF program offices to develop detailed learning agendas for specific ACF programs. OPRE drew on these program-specific learning agendas to establish the [ACF Research and Evaluation Agenda](#), which summarizes key past, ongoing, and future research and evaluation efforts, and the priority questions and engagement activities that guide these efforts, for each program area.

Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda

OPRE's Division of Economic Independence and the ACF Office of Family Assistance (OFA) jointly developed the [Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda](#), or WFSSLA, to guide the development and execution of their learning activities pertaining to welfare and family self-sufficiency. As a program-specific learning agenda, the WFSSLA rolls up into and informs the ACF Research and Evaluation Agenda and ACF's contributions to HHS's multi-year evidence plan and annual evaluation plan.

The WFSSLA is broadly intended as a tool to help ensure that learning activities in the Division and OFA proceed in a way that is grounded in, and seeks to build on, current and recently completed learning activities; addresses gaps in knowledge; is responsive to changes in programs, policies, and context; and reflects the interests, needs, and priorities of ACF and key internal and external parties. The goal of the WFSSLA is to enable the Division and OFA to work more effectively, efficiently, and collaboratively to advance their missions and support broader ACF goals.

The WFSSLA's foundation is its organizing framework (see next page) that reflects (1) the overarching mission of the WFSSLA (top blue box), and (2) the major portfolios of work, or workstreams, across the Division and OFA that are avenues to advancing that mission (middle green boxes). Work under one of these workstreams is further divided into four sub-workstreams (bottom light green boxes). This *Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency* for Fiscal Year 2023 is organized to align with the WFSSLA framework. Each section of the report provides a description of the focal workstream and of the Division's projects that map to that workstream. While many of the Division's projects are cross-cutting in nature and could apply to more than one workstream, each project is grouped within the workstream that most closely aligns with its primary goal. The Division does and will continue to consider how projects across WFSSLA workstreams inform, interact with, and build on each other.

WFSSLA Framework

WFSSLA MISSION STATEMENT
To advance knowledge about effectively fostering family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency.

TANF Policy, Funding, and Administration	Capacity Building within Human Services Programs	Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes	Knowledge Building and Communication
Human Capital Development	Employment Attainment and Retention	Social Services Delivery Systems	Social Context and Environment

SPOTLIGHT ON EXPERT CONVENINGS RELATED TO WELFARE AND FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY

OPRE's Division of Economic Independence periodically convenes experts to build understanding in ACF and the field more broadly of timely topics related to welfare and family self-sufficiency. Experts may contribute multiple types of expertise, including technical, content, practical, and lived expertise. These convenings may inform the Division's current and future research and evaluation work, among other purposes. Expert convenings do not seek consensus advice from the assembled experts; rather, they seek a variety of perspectives to inform the Division's work. To promote transparency — a key principle of ACF's Evaluation Policy — summaries and related materials from completed convenings will be posted to OPRE's website.

TANF Policy, Funding, and Administration

The *TANF Policy, Funding, and Administration* workstream addresses questions related to regulations or policies specific to TANF cash assistance (e.g., work participation rate, eligibility requirements, cash assistance levels, and time limits); the block grant structure (e.g., how it is allocated to states, how states are using TANF funding and why); and TANF program administration (e.g., processes, procedures, and staffing plans for state agencies, and how TANF is administered at the federal level).

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

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

Next Steps for Tribal TANF Research and Data — *NEW*

OPRE awarded the Next Steps for Tribal TANF Research and Data (Tribal TANF R&D) project in 2023 to MEF Associates and partners Kauffman and Associates (KAI; an American Indian- and woman-owned firm rooted in supporting the needs of tribal communities through research-informed technical assistance), and independent consultants Dr. Geni Cowan and Dr. Jose Chavez (who have expertise providing technical assistance to Tribal TANF agencies). The goal of the Tribal TANF R&D project is to gather the wisdom and perspectives of American Indians and Alaskan Natives regarding their experiences with the Tribal TANF program, such as considerations for research and evaluation with Tribal TANF recipients and/or programs funded by the federal government and how the administrative data collected by Tribal TANF organizations could better serve tribal communities.

The Tribal TANF R&D project prioritizes robust active engagement and relationship building to work alongside Indigenous leaders and other thought partners to identify strategies for elevating Indigenous voices with the goal that Indigenous communities will shape the next generation of Tribal TANF research and data. In addition to active engagement, this project will be guided by two overarching and concurrent tasks: data needs assessment and knowledge development. Project activities may include site visits, an online survey, storytelling, structured literature searches, listening sessions, and convenings for Tribal TANF leaders. Throughout these activities, the research team will employ a Community-Based Participatory Research approach and use an Indigenous Evaluation Framework to emphasize collaboration, equity, and mutual respect between researchers and Indigenous communities. The project team will work with Indigenous partners and communities to collect knowledge and data and to analyze and co-interpret project findings.

State and Territories TANF Policies: Welfare Rules Database Expansion

Under TANF, states and territories have considerable authority to design the parameters of their programs and set their own rules. ACF has funded updates to the State TANF Policies Database (also known as the Welfare Rules Database) since 1997 to document state program rules. Beginning with the data for 2022, the project is also tracking the policies used in Guam,

Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Maintained by the Urban Institute, the database is meant to be a single location where information on TANF program rules can be researched across states and territories and/or across years.

Project activities include:

1. Compile information on state and territory cash assistance policies from state and territory manuals and enter it into the database;

2. Verify the database information with state and territory welfare agencies;

3. Make the database publicly available on the internet, and make improvements to the internet interface as appropriate;

4. Prepare an annual book summarizing the information on state and territory cash assistance policies; and

5. Prepare special tables to support HHS priorities and initiatives.

In 2023, the project released the following publications:

- *Welfare Rules Databook: State TANF Policies as of July 2021*

- *Graphical Overview of State TANF Policies as of July 2021*

- *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

In spring 2024, the Welfare Rules Database website will launch an updated design and new, user-friendly resources for accessing states' and territories' TANF policy data. The redesigned website will feature a new Frequently Asked Questions page, an improved data download tool, and the option to search for policy tables by topic area.

KEY FINDINGS FROM STATE AND TERRITORIES TANF POLICIES: WELFARE RULES DATABASE EXPANSION

State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This brief provides an overview of selected TANF policy changes states made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and which were in effect for all or a portion of the time between the start of the pandemic and July 1, 2021. Key findings include:

- Thirty-three states did not count at least some portion of unemployment insurance (UI) benefits at some point during the pandemic. As of May 1, 2021, all 33 states continued to exclude at least some portion of UI benefits.

- Forty-one states made changes so that families either were not expected to comply with work requirements or were not sanctioned for not complying at some point during the pandemic. As of July 1, 2021, 27 states had these policies in place.

- Nine states suspended up-front job search requirements at some point during the pandemic and seven states had this policy in place as of July 1, 2021.

- At some point during the pandemic, nine states temporarily stopped counting months towards a state time limit, and 13 states did not stop counting months but granted an extension to families reaching a time limit. One state allowed families that had previously reached the time limit to reapply and receive state-funded benefits if otherwise eligible. As of July 1, 2021, eight states stopped counting months towards a state time limit, and eight states continued to grant extensions.

TANF Policy Research and Analyses (TPRA) — *NEW*

OPRE launched the TANF Policy Research and Analyses (TPRA) project in 2023 to synthesize and build evidence on TANF and create products that are relevant to and actionable by policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and the broader field. The project team, led by the Urban Institute, with partners The Adjacent Possible™ and MEF Associates, will (1) identify key study topics that will inform TANF-related policy, practice, or research; (2) propose an approach for and carry out specific studies on priority topics; and (3) develop and widely share products in useful formats to support evidence-based decision making and inform potential future directions of research.

This project adds to the knowledge base produced by the earlier TANF and Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Research Synthesis Project, which identified research topics and produced briefs that informed TANF policy and practice. The new TPRA project will address research and learning questions identified in the Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda and through active engagement with federal staff, state and local policymakers, community-based organizations, contracted TANF service providers, program participants, and researchers. The project will also contribute to OPRE's commitment to advancing equity, such as by building evidence on how programs like TANF affect historically marginalized populations.

SPOTLIGHT ON EQUITY-RELATED WORK

OPRE is committed to building evidence to improve the lives of children and families and working to ensure that evidence is used to inform the effective, efficient, and equitable administration of ACF programs, services, and resources. This includes building evidence to help ACF better understand how its policies and programs advance or hinder equity for populations who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. OPRE underscored the importance of this commitment when it updated the ACF Evaluation Policy in 2021 (the first time it had been updated since its establishment in 2012), which governs ACF's planning, conduct, and use of evaluation, to clarify that considerations of equity are central to our evaluation efforts. The Division of Economic Independence takes this commitment seriously and has made steps to advance equity through our research and evaluation by:

- Obtaining in-depth understandings of how marginalized populations experience ACF programs and learning what kinds of program adaptations and program supports might help ACF programs do a better job of serving these populations through projects such as TANF and Child Support Moving Forward — Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic and Further Incorporating Family Input.

- Incorporating lived expertise into our research planning processes and research projects through projects such as Advancing Contextual Analysis and Methods of Participant Engagement.

- Considering how broader structural factors shape the experience and outcomes of particular populations through projects such as Employment Processes as Barriers to Employment in the Lower-Wage Labor Market.

- Expanding the evidence base on the experiences of African American, Hispanic, and Tribal populations with ACF programs through our contributions to the National African American Child and Family Research Center, the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families, and the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center.

- Deepening our understanding of potential disparities related to the service delivery systems of TANF and the Child Care and Development Fund through the Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services Analysis Execution Project.

Capacity Building within Human Services Programs

The *Capacity Building within Human Services Programs* workstream addresses questions related to building the capacity of human services programs — whether they are administered by state, local, and tribal human services agencies or by nongovernmental service providers — to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The workstream includes building two types of capacity: (1) programmatic and operational capacity, and (2) monitoring and evaluation capacity.

Family Self-Sufficiency Demonstration Development Grants and Evaluation Support

ACF is committed to building evidence through rigorous evaluations to identify approaches that more efficiently and effectively serve individuals and families with low incomes. Part of this work includes supporting efforts to build research and evaluation capacity among state and local human services agencies by providing evaluation technical assistance (TA). In 2021, OPRE awarded 20 two-year grants to support planning and execution of evaluation-related activities by organizations that serve low-income families with children. The Family Self-Sufficiency Demonstration Development (FSSDD) award recipients operate programs that are client-centered and target outcomes related to employment and family well-being (e.g., education, health, food security, financial security, or social capital). Award recipients' programs are also part of a network of services available to families who are (or may become) eligible for TANF. Most of the FSSDD award recipients continued to work on their grant activities for a third year under a no-cost extension.

The 20 FSSDD award recipients are:

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

Also in 2021, OPRE awarded the FSSDD Evaluation Support contract, which became known as the Supporting Evaluation Efforts for Demonstrations in Self-Sufficiency (SEEDS) project. Through the SEEDS project, the FSSDD award recipients are working with an evaluation TA provider (Mathematica and its partner The Adjacent Possible™) to build their capacity to conduct research and evaluation, use data to improve program outcomes, demonstrate the value of their programs to partners and other interested parties, and ultimately, contribute to the evidence base on interventions serving families with low incomes. Throughout the grant period, award recipients have regular, one-on-one consultations with a dedicated team of SEEDS coaches who help them document their programs, identify implementation challenges, develop solutions, and rigorously test them on a small scale. FSSDD award recipients additionally participate in quarterly and annual meetings and learning communities and have access to trainings and one-on-one consultations on specific topics, such as culturally responsive and equitable evaluation. At the end of the FSSDD award recipients' project periods, award recipients will present findings from their evaluation activities and determine potential next steps for future rigorous evaluation.

Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data

Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data, also known as the TANF Data Innovation (TDI) project, supports innovation and efficiency within the TANF program through enhanced use of data from TANF and related human services programs. The OPRE Division of Data and Improvement (DDI) oversees this project with support from the Division of Economic Independence and OFA. Launched in 2017, TDI is led by MDRC in partnership with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, the Coleridge Initiative, and Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy at the

University of Pennsylvania. The project's aim is to provide timely, actionable, and relevant technical assistance to federal, state, and local TANF agencies on a variety of issues related to TANF data. In 2023, the project supported the following activities:

- Conclusion of the first cohort of the TANF Data Collaborative (TDC), which supported the efforts of staff at TANF agencies to improve their routine use of TANF and other administrative data through training and technical assistance. TDC included an intensive and targeted training for a pilot cohort of eight state TANF agencies to design and execute data analysis projects, with a special focus on combining TANF and wage data to inform program management.

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

- The development of toolkits and other resources that share important lessons learned from TDI activities.

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

TDI published the following reports in 2023:

- *Strengthening Analytics in Government Agencies: A Toolkit for Sustainable Data Use* — This toolkit offers strategies and tools to help agencies

build the culture and infrastructure needed to apply data analysis routinely, effectively, and accurately — referred to in this publication as "sustainable data use." It covers a variety of subjects — from staffing and technology to collaboration and funding — that can impact the longevity of analytics work in the public sector.

- *TANF Data Collaborative Pilot Profiles: A Collection of Data Analytics Projects from State and County TANF Agencies* — These profiles summarize the data analytics projects undertaken by the eight participating agencies. The pilot included teams from California, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Utah, and Virginia. The two-page abstracts provide project-specific details for each pilot, including the research questions, data landscape, approach and research methods, and initial findings and next steps. Each profile also includes an overview of the state TANF program.

- *Video: Improving Outcomes for Families Through Better Use of Data: The TANF Data Collaborative Approach* — This nine-minute video, produced after the completion of the TDC Pilot, features staff members from the California, Colorado, Minnesota, and Virginia TANF agencies reflecting on their challenges, accomplishments, and general experiences during the pilot.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE TANF DATA INNOVATION PROJECT

TANF Data Collaborative Pilot Profiles: A Collection of Data Analytics Projects from State and County TANF Agencies

Cross-disciplinary teams of staff at eight state and county TANF programs completed data analytics projects that demonstrate the potential of administrative data for learning and program improvement efforts:

California	The team built an analytic data set that linked TANF program data, earnings data, and Census data and then developed a model to explore individual- and community-level characteristics associated with the achievement of stable wages at a level sufficient to cover the costs of raising a family in California. They found: • On average, only about 10 percent of individuals who exited TANF achieved stable earnings outcomes. The strongest predictor of stable wage outcomes was the presence of earnings at the time of exiting TANF.
Colorado	The team leveraged data from Colorado's benefit application processing and case management system and the Unemployment Insurance system to explore whether receiving a supportive payment influenced employment entry of participants within a year after leaving TANF. They found: • There was a positive and statistically significant relationship between receiving a supportive payment in the last spell before a participant leaves TANF and two employment outcomes — entering employment and full quarter stable employment.
Michigan	With the goal of refining the TANF application process, the team in Michigan sought to understand why the TANF application denial rate was higher in Michigan than in other states. The team coded and analyzed over 70 application denial reasons, and found: • The top three reasons for application denials between 2011 and 2019 were applicants not meeting basic eligibility criteria (for example, having no children in the household), having incomes too high to qualify for TANF in Michigan, or failing to comply with program requirements like attending required appointments.
Minnesota	A team consisting of staff from the state and two counties analyzed data about TANF benefit sanctions and the notices that agencies sent to participants who were at risk of receiving a sanction (that is, the withholding of aid or the termination of benefits). The team examined the relationship between the notices of intent to sanction (NOITS) rates and sanction rates and how NOITS and sanctions are associated with race, language, age, and immigration status. They found: • African American, multiple-race, and American Indian TANF participants were most likely to receive NOITS, accounting for program participation and other demographic factors. American Indian participants were the only group to consistently receive more sanctions than White participants, regardless of whether participants received a NOITS.

New Jersey	The team built a longitudinal data set from the state's Family Assistance Management Information System and the Unemployment Insurance system to investigate the characteristics and housing transitions among families experiencing homelessness and participating in the state's TANF Emergency Assistance program. They found: • More than half of all transitions from emergency shelter into partially subsidized temporary rental assistance apartments occurred in just three of New Jersey's 21 counties, for reasons that were only partially described in the administrative data.
New York	The team used administrative data from two systems — the Temporary Assistance (TA) benefits reporting and tracking system and the state Unemployment Insurance system — to create a longitudinal file to understand how regional differences and personal characteristics affect the probability of an individual leaving or returning to TA. They found: • Earning history and a previous history of receiving cash assistance at the start of TA participation were the best predictors of the timing of a participant leaving or returning to TA. Working patterns or earnings two years before entry were especially predictive.
Utah	Using data from Utah's eligibility data system, a TANF case management system, and Unemployment Insurance system, the team sought to identify characteristics of families who exit the TANF cash assistance program and subsequently return. Their hope was to better understand the reasons that families return to assistance and what services might lower the likelihood of their needing TANF assistance in the future. They found: • Data quality varied over their analytic period due to changes in case management practices and front-line staff training, with the more recent data being more complete for TANF program participants.
Virginia	The team linked data from four sources to develop analytical tools to help TANF case workers customize education/employment-related services to increase the likelihood of participants' labor market success after they leave the program. The team investigated which demographic characteristics, household compositions, receipt of other public benefits, and past education/employment-related activities could predict success, and how to construct an unbiased predictive tool using such variables. They found: • Several models accurately predicted labor market outcomes after case leads (heads of household) exited TANF. Future labor market outcomes were heavily driven by prior labor market performance. More work is needed to be able to provide service recommendations for TANF participants.

TANF Data Collaborative 2.0 — *NEW*

OPRE launched the TANF Data Collaborative 2.0 (TDC 2.0) in 2023 to support state and local TANF agencies to expand the routine use, integration, and analysis of TANF and other administrative data to strengthen evidence-informed decision making. TDC 2.0 builds on the TANF Data Innovation (TDI) project that began in 2017, with a specific focus on supporting agencies to examine equity within the TANF program with the goal of improving program administration and outcomes for families. TDC 2.0 is led by MDRC in partnership with Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy at the University of Pennsylvania, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, the Coleridge Initiative, and consultant Blu Lewis.

The TDC 2.0 project will provide intensive training and technical assistance for up to eight agencies who apply for and receive a TDC Equity Analysis Award through a competitive grant award process sponsored by ACF. Over a 36-month project period, award recipients will participate in the following:

- One-on-one coaching support from technical and equity experts who will provide individualized support as each team conducts its data analytics project.

- Applied Data Analytics course that will guide staff in developing key data analytics skills as they conduct equity-related analyses.

- Peer-to-peer learning activities such as virtual meetings and in-person convenings to encourage collaboration and shared learning.

Using a "learning by doing" approach, TDC 2.0 will support state and local TANF agencies to conduct analyses of TANF and other administrative data to complete an equity-focused project relevant to their agency. TDC 2.0 will also provide universal technical assistance to any interested TANF agency through public-facing training materials and events related to TANF data use.

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes — Human Capital Development

The *Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes* workstream addresses questions related to strategies that seek to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The *Human Capital Development* sub-workstream focuses on strategies that seek to build or improve people's skills, also known as human capital, to help them obtain employment and become economically self-sufficient.

Career Pathways Research Portfolio

The career pathways framework has been identified as a promising approach to improve postsecondary education and training for adults with low incomes and low academic skills. Its central feature is instruction that is organized as a series of manageable and well-articulated steps accompanied by strong supports and connections to employment. To engage, retain, and facilitate learning among adults with low academic skills, the career pathways framework includes four categories of service strategies:

- Assessments of skills and needs;
- Promising and innovative approaches to basic skills instruction and occupational training;
- Academic and non-academic supports; and
- Approaches for connecting students with career-track employment opportunities.

Within each of these categories, there are a variety of promising strategies and programs vary in the extent to which they include and how they implement these strategies.

The Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program

From 2010 to 2021, OFA administered the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program, which provided education and training to TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes for occupations in the healthcare field that pay well and were expected to either experience labor shortages or be in high demand.

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

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

HPOG was authorized as a demonstration program with a mandated federal evaluation. As such, OPRE developed and oversees a multi-pronged evaluation strategy to assess the success of each round of the HPOG Program. The evaluation strategy aims to provide information on program implementation; systems change; participant outcomes; impacts in the short-, intermediate-, and long-term; and costs and benefits. To date, OPRE has published reports

examining the impacts of HPOG 1.0 at 15, 36, and 72 months after enrollment into the study. Work is underway to extend the follow-up period to roughly 10 years after enrollment into the study. All publications from the HPOG 1.0 Impact Study are available on the OPRE website.

HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation

The HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation of the 27 non-Tribal HPOG award recipients uses follow-up surveys, program administrative data from the Participant Accomplishment and Grant Evaluation System (PAGES), and other administrative data to assess outcomes for those who consented to participate in the evaluation. The National Evaluation includes three key components:

The **Descriptive Evaluation** includes implementation, systems change, and outcomes studies and in-depth interviews with HPOG 2.0 participants. In 2023, the project released several publications associated with the Descriptive Evaluation:

- *Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) National Evaluation Implementation Study Report*
- *Understanding Local Systems that Supported HPOG Programs: Perspective from Program Operators and Partners*
- *Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) National Evaluation: Outcomes Study Report*

The **Impact Evaluation** is using a random assignment design to rigorously assess the impacts of HPOG 2.0 programs. In 2023, the study released the *Intermediate-Term Impact Report*, which presents impact findings approximately 36 months after study entry. The study will continue to examine impacts in the long-term (about 66 months after study entry). In addition, the study will examine the effectiveness of HPOG 2.0 before and after the COVID-19 pandemic through a 15-month follow-up survey of participants who enrolled in HPOG 2.0 after the onset of the pandemic. In 2023, the study released its *Analysis Plan* for the COVID Study.

The **Cost-Benefit Analysis** will compare the estimated costs of operating the average HPOG 2.0 program to the monetized value of benefits produced.

The study is led by Abt Global, in partnership with MEF Associates, Urban Institute, Insight Policy Research, and NORC at the University of Chicago.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE HPOG 2.0 NATIONAL EVALUATION

Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) Intermediate-Term Impact Report

For the confirmatory outcomes, HPOG 2.0:

- Improves completion of training (earned any new credential) by 14 percentage points.
- Does not have a detected positive impact on earnings in the 12th quarter after study entry.
- Increases employment in healthcare by 7 percentage points.

For the secondary outcomes, HPOG 2.0:

- Increases educational progress (earned a credential or still in training); exam-based certifications or licenses from authorities other than training providers; and number of months of training.
- Improves employment offering health insurance.
- Does not have a detected impact on perceived career progress or on career connectedness.
- Does not have a detected impact on trouble making ends meet (i.e., families' self-reported inability over the past year to pay for the necessities of life and keep up with their bills at the end of the typical month) or on receipt of public assistance.

Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE)

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

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

The PACE team at Abt Global and its partners conducted separate implementation and impact studies for each of the nine programs. To date, OPRE has published reports examining impacts at 18, 36, and 72 months after enrollment into the study. Work is underway to extend the follow-up period to roughly 10 years after enrollment into the study. All publications from the PACE project are available on the OPRE website.

Career Pathways Secondary Data Analysis Grants

Beginning in 2020, OPRE has awarded funding to support secondary analysis of data collected as part of OPRE's Career Pathways Research Portfolio, including PACE and evaluations of HPOG 1.0 and 2.0. The purpose of the funding opportunity is to stimulate and support rigorous, policy-relevant analyses that deepen the field's understanding of the implementation and effectiveness of career pathways programs.

OPRE contracts with ICF, Inc. to provide support to the Career Pathways Secondary Data Analysis grant program. This support includes dissemination of award recipient research findings, regular convenings of award recipients, and related activities. Six projects were awarded in 2023 and one project was awarded in 2022, to the following teams:

ORGANIZATION RECEIVING AWARD	PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)	PROJECT TITLE
FY 2023 Awards		
The George Washington University	Principal Investigator: Robert Olsen, Ph.D. Co-Principal Investigator: Jacob Klerman, Ph.D.	Testing innovative methods to project impacts of career pathways programs
MDRC	Principal Investigator: Richard Hendra, Ph.D. Co-Principal Investigator: Kristin Porter, Ph.D.	Building stronger paths to healthcare careers: Reanalyzing data to understand disparities in health profession training programs
Mighty Crow Media, LLC	Principal Investigator: Rebecca McCloskey, Ph.D. Co-Principal Investigators: Brieanne Beaujolais, Ph.D., and Gretchen Clark Hammond, Ph.D.	Examining the effects of motherhood, material hardship, and health in utilizing supports and program outcomes among women in HPOG 2.0
Northwestern University	Principal Investigator: Teresa Sommer, Ph.D. Co-Principal Investigators: Terri Sabol, Ph.D., and Lauren Tighe, Ph.D.	Unpacking the impact of HPOG 2.0 on student parents' education and employment: Exploring the role of childcare
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	Principal Investigator: Stephanie Walsh, Ph.D. Co-Principal Investigator: Andrea Hetling, Ph.D.	Career pathways for TANF recipients and TANF-eligible individuals: A mixed methods equity analysis of secondary data

ORGANIZATION RECEIVING AWARD	PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)	PROJECT TITLE
FY 2023 Awards, Continued		
Texas Christian University	Principal Investigator: Ashley Palmer, Ph.D. Co-Principal Investigator: Mary Collins	Examining pathways of connection to education, training, and employment among emerging adults experiencing low-incomes and the impact on later health and economic well-being
FY 2022 Awards		
University of Texas — Arlington	Principal Investigator: Yeonwoo Kim, Ph.D. Co-Principal Investigator: Sehun Oh, Ph.D.	Health professions training and economic self-sufficiency among low-income women: Understanding the role of multilevel modifiable barriers

Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations & Long-Term Follow-Up Study

In 2016, OPRE launched the Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations. Led by Mathematica, with partners Abt Global, MDRC, and The Adjacent Possible™, the evaluation is conducting impact and implementation evaluations of coaching interventions that focus on job entry and retention and that target TANF populations and other individuals with low incomes. Impacts are being assessed at two follow-up points — approximately 9 or 12 months after study enrollment and approximately 21 months after study enrollment. In 2021, OPRE awarded the Evaluation of Employment Coaching Long-Term Follow-Up Study contract to Mathematica to assess long-term impacts on participant outcomes at 48 to 67 months after study enrollment.

The definition of and theory behind employment coaching is discussed in the brief *Employment Coaching: Working with Low-Income Populations to Use Self-Regulation Skills to Achieve Employment Goals*. The evaluation design and process for selecting interventions to study are described in the *Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations: Evaluation Design Report*. Additional information about each intervention and its key characteristics can be found in the *Employment Coaching Program Snapshots*. Below is a list of the interventions participating in the evaluation.

- **Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS) program** — operated by the Iowa Department of Human Rights through subcontracts with 17 local agencies across the state (seven of which are participating in the evaluation)

- **Goal4 It!** — administered by the Jefferson County Department of Human Services in Jefferson County, CO

- **LIFT** — a non-profit with locations in Washington, DC; New York, NY; Chicago, IL; and Los Angeles, CA (the latter three locations are participating in the evaluation)

- **MyGoals for Employment Success** — administered by the city housing authorities in Baltimore, MD and Houston, TX

Implementation Evaluation

The project published descriptive reports with findings from the implementation evaluation of each intervention: FaDSS, Goal4 It!, LIFT, and MyGoals. The project also recently released briefs on a variety of topics including, the coach–participant relationship, considerations for providing services in participants' homes, and the implications of offering financial incentives.

Impact Evaluation

Initial impact findings based on the first follow-up point (9 months after study enrollment for FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and LIFT; 12 months after study enrollment for MyGoals) were published in a report and four intervention-specific briefs in 2023. The project's analytic approach to estimating impacts is detailed in the technical supplement to the evaluation design report. The report documenting impacts at a second follow-up point (21 months after study enrollment for all interventions) is anticipated in 2024.

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

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION OF EMPLOYMENT COACHING

Can a Participant-Centered Approach to Setting and Pursuing Goals Help Adults with Low Incomes Become Economically Stable? Short-Term Impacts of Four Employment Coaching Programs

The study examined the short-term impacts of the participating programs at 9 or 12 months (depending on the program) after study enrollment. Key findings include:

- Two of the four coaching programs had statistically significant impacts on goal-setting and attainment skills — a measure of self-regulation skills.

- Although no program had a statistically significant impact on average monthly earnings, Bayesian analysis of self-reported earnings suggests impacts that were small and likely positive for three of the four programs.

- None of the programs had positive impacts on earnings reported to an Unemployment Insurance agency, and Bayesian analysis suggests evidence of a small, likely negative effect on those earnings for one program.

- One of the four coaching programs led to a statistically significant reduction in economic hardship (such as inability to pay bills or cutting the size of meals because of the inability to afford enough food).

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

This project created the Promising Occupations website, https://promising-careers.org/. The website is a career exploration tool for case managers, employment service providers, and job seekers to identify occupations that are attainable through short-term education or training and are projected to grow with family-sustaining wages. The Promising Occupations Website provides national, state, and local (where available) labor market information on over 600 occupations that are expected to grow over the next 10 years and pay $15 per hour or more.

The website built on the resources provided by the Employment Sector Analysis for TANF Recipients and Other Low-Income Families project. The website also incorporated the career pathways framework, which has emerged as a promising approach to improve postsecondary education and training for adults with low incomes and low academic skills. In 2023, the project published the report *Identifying and Combating Bias in TANF-Funded Employment Services*. The Promising Occupations project was led by MEF Associates, in partnership with Mathematica.

Explore Our Data!

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

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

Many datasets from past Division of Economic Independence projects are stored at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. Additionally, the Division of Economic Independence supports OPRE's Child and Family Data Archive (CFData), also led by ICPSR.

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

Archived Datasets from Division of Economic Independence Projects

- Evaluation of the First Round of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 1.0) Program
- Evaluation of the Second Round of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) Program
- Evaluation of the Second Round of Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) Participant Interview Data
- Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) Project
- Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Project
- Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation Project
  » Transitional Work Corporation and Success Through Employment Preparation Programs, Philadelphia, PA
  » Center for Employment Opportunities, New York City
  » Working Toward Wellness, Rhode Island
- Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) Project
- National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS)

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes — Employment Attainment and Retention

The *Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes* workstream addresses questions related to strategies that seek to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The *Employment Attainment and Retention* sub-workstream focuses on strategies that seek to help people participating in TANF and other people with low incomes find jobs, maintain employment, and advance in the labor market.

Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio

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

Through the Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio, OPRE seeks to build on lessons learned and knowledge gaps revealed by these previous and current studies, as well as identify and rigorously evaluate the "next generation" of employment strategies. The portfolio is comprised of two OPRE projects: the **Building Evidence on Employment Strategies (BEES)** project and the **Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen)** project. These projects aim to advance the evidence base by evaluating a wide range of employment strategies for people with complex barriers to obtaining and retaining employment, such as physical and mental health conditions, previous legal system involvement, or limited formal work skills and experience.

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

Building Evidence on Employment Strategies (BEES) Project

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

BEES consulted with more than a dozen federal agencies to identify emerging priorities for evidence building and conducted a broad field scan to learn about innovative programs to evaluate. The chart below provides a description of BEES evaluations underway.

INTERVENTION NAME AND LOCATION	TYPE OF STUDY	DESCRIPTION
Addiction Recovery Care Kentucky	Implementation	A program that combines treatment and recovery services with workforce development for individuals struggling with substance use disorder.
Breaking Barriers San Diego California	Administrative Data Analysis of Long-Term Outcomes	A program designed to increase employment among TANF recipients and other individuals with low incomes who are affected by disabilities, substance use disorder, and/or mental health conditions.
Central City Concern Oregon	Impact, Implementation, Cost	A program based in Portland that provides treatment for substance use disorder, healthcare, housing, and comprehensive employment services.
Employment Services Programs for Individuals with Substance Use Disorder Avivo Treatment and Recovery (MN), Community Recovery Program (VA), IKRON Corporation (OH), Access to Recovery (MA), Women in Recovery (OK)	Descriptive	Five programs across the country that provide employment services to individuals with substance use disorder.
Individual Placement and Support (IPS) within Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) Illinois, New Hampshire, and North Carolina	Impact, Implementation, Cost	Three programs providing IPS employment services to individuals with a substance use disorder.
IPS with TANF and SNAP Populations Washington State and Illinois	Impact, Implementation, Cost	Two programs providing IPS employment services to a population eligible for TANF and/or SNAP
2Gen (Two-Generation) Service Delivery Model Illinois	Implementation	A demonstration program in Chicago that provides Housing Choice Voucher recipients with an offer of employment coaching for parents and adolescents of working age, and enhanced case management aimed to meet the needs of the entire family and improve their success in the labor market.
WorkAdvance Multiple states	Administrative Data Analysis of Long-Term Outcomes	An innovative employment approach designed to help disadvantaged workers with low incomes prepare for and enter quality jobs with opportunities for advancement.

In 2023, BEES released the following publications:

- *Individual Placement and Support in a Substance Use Disorder Treatment Setting*
- *Integrating Employment Services with Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery: The Experiences of Five Programs*
- *Individual Placement and Support in a Federally Qualified Health Center Setting*
- *Challenges to Employment: Fines, Fees, and License Suspensions*

Other publications from BEES can be found on OPRE's website. The study team anticipates that findings from the descriptive and cost studies, as well as findings on the effectiveness of the interventions, will be released beginning in 2025.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE BEES PROJECT

Integrating Employment Services with Substance Use Treatment and Recovery

This report documents the experiences of five programs that integrate employment services into treatment and recovery programs for people with substance use disorder (SUD). Key findings include:

- **Programs made different decisions regarding the nature and content of employment services and when in the treatment and recovery process those services were offered.** Some programs in this study began employment services early in the recovery process, while others began them after participants had been in recovery longer. Moreover, some programs offered participants more leeway in deciding which types of employment services to use and when, while others required participants to follow a specific timeline, participate in specific services, or both. Finally, for some programs, participation in employment services was a condition of program enrollment, while for others it was optional.

- **Organizational partnerships are important for providing the range of employment and treatment and recovery services participants need.** People in recovery from SUD navigate complex barriers to employment that often require services from multiple systems. Organizations can offer these services (treatment, occupational training, and support services) in different ways. Several types of organizations led the programs in this study, and those organizations had varying abilities to provide the array of services needed. All the programs relied to some extent on organizational partners for some program services.

- **Programs offering employment services — including job-placement services — must adapt them to accommodate people in recovery from SUD.** While the study found variation in the types of adaptations programs made to employment services, the programs did consistently design those services to reflect the needs of people in recovery from SUD: They adjusted the timing and intensity of employment services to align with treatment and recovery service needs, provided job-readiness services (to prepare people for workplace expectations of behavior and communication) to ease the transition to employment, identified occupational training programs of interest to and appropriate for this population, found appropriate work environments and provided continuing support once participants had jobs, and cultivated relationships with employers to support the hiring of people in recovery.

Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies Project (NextGen)

In 2018, OPRE contracted with Mathematica to conduct the Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) project to identify and test innovative interventions designed to improve employment-related outcomes for people with low incomes and complex challenges to employment. These challenges may include physical and mental health conditions, criminal justice system involvement, or limited formal work skills and experience. Additionally, in response to the growing recognition of the importance of employer engagement in job training and workforce integration programs, NextGen has a special focus on market-oriented or employer-driven approaches.

INTERVENTION NAME AND LOCATION	TYPE OF STUDY	DESCRIPTION
Bridges from School to Work (Bridges) Bridges operates programs in Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Los Angeles, New York City, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. A select number of Bridges programs participate in the evaluation.	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Employer-driven program that provides job readiness instruction, placement, and post-placement support for young adults with disabilities.
Individual Placement and Support for Adults with Justice Involvement Case Management Incorporated (TN), Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center, Grand Lake Mental Health Center (OK), Pee Dee Mental Health (SC), Transitions Mental Health Services (IL and IA)	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	IPS model implemented with adults who have mental health conditions and have recently been released from jail or prison following the completion of a sentence or have begun to serve an alternative sentence in the community.
Mental health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) Partnership Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Cognitive behavioral therapy and peer support stress management course and employment services for mothers with low incomes who are experiencing symptoms of depression.
Philly Workforce Inclusion Network (Philly WINs) Community Integrated Services (PA)	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Rapid placement and support of adults with disabilities into competitive jobs with employers who have received technical assistance in providing an inclusive workplace.
Wellness, Comprehensive Assessment, Rehabilitation, and Employment (WeCARE) New York City Human Resources Administration	Descriptive	Citywide initiative that addresses the needs of cash assistance clients with medical and/or mental health barriers to employment.
Work Success Utah Department of Workforce Services	Impact, Descriptive, Cost	Statewide program that provides clients with low incomes and TANF recipients with coaching, employment and life skills training, and peer support to help them find and keep a job.

Key components of the NextGen project include:

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

Six interventions have been selected to participate in the NextGen project. Lessons learned from the NextGen project will be shared with a broad range of interested parties such as policymakers, practitioners, program developers, and researchers across the welfare, workforce, disability, education, and justice communities.

In 2023, NextGen released a report with findings from the descriptive study of WeCARE entitled *An Unprecedented Crisis: The WeCARE Program's Experience Serving People with Mental and Physical Health Challenges During a Pandemic*. The report documents how WeCARE served clients before the pandemic, how the program changed in response to the employment and service needs of its clients during the pandemic and economic recession, and the implications of those changes for long-term modifications to the WeCARE model. Other publications from the NextGen project can be found on OPRE's website. The study team anticipates that findings from the descriptive and cost studies, as well as early findings on the effectiveness of the interventions, are likely to be released in 2024.

Long-Term Outcomes (LTO) Evaluation: A Demonstration

The Long-Term Outcomes (LTO) Evaluation, led by MDRC, seeks to leverage administrative data sources to explore long-term outcomes for participants of federally-funded research projects. Linking completed program evaluation data to administrative data sources is a promising and potentially low-cost means of tracking the long-term effects of policy or program interventions. This latest iteration of LTO began in 2022 and builds on previous work that investigated the feasibility of linking administrative data and identified employment program evaluations that were suited for long-term follow-up. In this previous work, also led by MRDC, LTO produced *A Guide for Using Administrative Data to Examine Long-Term Outcomes in Program Evaluation* and a *Compendium of Administrative Data Sources for Self-Sufficiency Research* to support other researchers in conducting long-term follow-up for employment, education, health, and other social programs. In the coming years, LTO will link administrative data sets to at least one completed employment program evaluation, analyze those data, and develop research briefs and journal articles to share findings. To date, the project has focused on the national YouthBuild evaluation and will examine longer-term impacts on education, employment, and earnings.

Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse

The Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse is a Congressionally mandated systematic evidence review and website that provides reliable, accessible information about what works to help job seekers with low incomes succeed in the labor market. OPRE contracted with Mathematica, Hager Sharp, and MEF Associates to develop and administer Pathways to Work from 2018 to 2023. In 2023, OPRE awarded a new contract for the next five years of the Pathways to Work (2023-2028) to Abt Global, AIR, and Greene Street.

In 2023, Pathways to Work continued to systematically review new evidence related to employment and training programs for people

with low incomes and to update the website with the findings from this review. Practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and others can visit the website to:

- Search for programs that are well-supported, supported, or not supported;
- Identify programs that work with similar target populations;
- Examine detailed study-level information on findings;
- Read short briefs that summarize the effectiveness of programs using a common approach to service provision; and
- Explore existing gaps in the evidence base.

In 2023, the project also released the following publications:

- *Digging Deeper Into What Works: What Services Improve Labor Market Outcomes, and for Whom?*
- *Key Elements of Employment Programs: Strategies from the Field for Identifying, Implementing, and Sustaining Core Components*
- *Evidence Snapshot: Employment Retention Services*
- *Evidence Snapshot: Work Experience and Work-Based Learning*

In 2024, Pathways to Work plans to refine and update the evidence review standards; gather feedback from users to inform forthcoming improvements to the Pathways to Work website; and begin work on a new product line — Evidence-to-Practice Guides — which will provide concrete, actionable, and evidence-informed practice recommendations for people delivering employment and training programs for job seekers with low incomes.

Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED)

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

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

In 2021, OPRE contracted with MDRC to conduct a longer-term analysis of employment outcomes for STED using data from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH). This extended analysis added up to three years of data to the prior five years of follow-up periods to examine how study participants' formal earnings and employment fared up to eight years after study enrollment. A brief presenting findings from the analysis was published in September 2023. Additionally, a complementary brief examining how study participants' employment, earnings, and unemployment insurance receipt varied across the two years before and two years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was also released. Both of these briefs and all reports from the STED project are available on OPRE's website.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE STED PROJECT

Effects of the Subsidized and Transitional Jobs Demonstration on Earnings After Eight Years

- Three of the seven programs analyzed improved participants' earnings more than three years after program enrollment, a notable feat given the short duration of these interventions, which lasted less than six months.

- Two programs maintained consistent, positive earnings effects through the end of the available data. Those two and a third program saw positive, statistically significant effects on cumulative earnings.

- Although earnings effects tapered off after Year 4 for a fourth program, that program showed a positive pattern of earnings increases for six years after study enrollment.

Understanding Economic Risk for Low-Income Families: Economic Security, Program Benefits, and Decisions about Work — *NEW*

Accepting an opportunity to increase earnings is not without risk for people who receive federal benefits. Additional earnings can lead to a loss of benefits that can substantially erode the financial benefit of additional earnings. The Understanding Economic Risk for Low-Income Families project is carrying out a discrete choice experiment to better understand how people who receive federal benefits, including people who receive TANF, weigh the potential risks and tradeoffs of additional earnings. The project was launched by the HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in 2021, and the Division of Economic Independence joined the project in 2023. The Division is partnering with ASPE to support fielding a discrete choice survey and analysis of the results. Mathematica is carrying out the survey and will conduct the analysis primarily using Bayesian methodology.

The survey will provide respondents with a series of vignettes regarding hypothetical recipients of public benefit programs, including people receiving TANF, faced with decisions about whether to increase their earnings. The vignettes will vary the amount of benefits the hypothetical individuals will lose and the amount of earnings

increase; the likelihood of subsequent job loss; and the ease with which they could regain their benefits. Respondents will choose whether the hypothetical individuals should increase their earnings, allowing the study team to assess how different types of economic risk affect people's decisions about work. The project will strive for a total survey sample of approximately 2,000 respondents, using both a probability sample from a national panel and a non-probability sample of TANF recipients. In FY 2024, the project team will finalize the survey instrument, field the survey experiment, and report on the results.

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes — Social Services Delivery Systems

The *Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes* workstream addresses questions related to strategies that seek to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The *Social Services Delivery Systems* sub-workstream focuses on how implementing, coordinating, and improving social services delivery systems, including TANF and other human services programs, relates to participants' outcomes.

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Research Portfolio

Over the past several decades, innovative behavioral science research — an interdisciplinary field informed by economics, psychology, other social sciences, and neuroscience — has shown that human decision-making and information processing is affected by the contexts and environments in which people operate. These contexts and environments can make it easier or harder for people to absorb critical information, make important decisions, follow through on intentions, and achieve desired objectives. Human services programs often require participants to complete complex and lengthy program processes to access and maintain program benefits. Behavioral science suggests these complex and lengthy processes may hinder the ability of programs and participants to achieve the goals they set for themselves.

By providing insight into how people process information, make decisions, and take action, behavioral science can inform changes to program processes that can make human services programs work better for the people receiving services. Small changes in the environment can make it easier for participants to complete required steps; planning and commitment tools can reduce some of the burden on participants for follow-through; and redesigned communications can make key information more salient.

In 2010, OPRE launched the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project, the first federal effort to apply insights from behavioral science to programs serving families with low incomes in the United States. In 2015, OPRE launched two additional behavioral science projects — BIAS Capstone (concluded in 2018) and BIAS Next Generation (ongoing) — in order to synthesize, disseminate, and continue to advance the application of behavioral science to ACF programs and focal populations. In 2017, OPRE created the Behavioral Interventions Scholars Grants to support dissertation research that will add to the growing body of knowledge on effective behavioral interventions for ACF programs and populations.

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Next Generation

The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency-Next Generation (BIAS-NG) project continues ACF's exploration of the application of behavioral science to the programs and target populations of ACF. Led by MDRC in collaboration with Larry Katz of Harvard University, Marianne Bertrand of the University of Chicago, Judd Kessler of the University of Pennsylvania, MEF Associates, and Child Trends, BIAS-NG is building on the activities and lessons of BIAS in several ways including:

- Working with a greater number of program partners and additional ACF programs, specifically child welfare and Head Start programs, while continuing to work with TANF programs;

- Testing additional types of interventions, including going beyond "nudges," or subtle and modest changes to programs (such as altering messages in letters to clients), and considering changes to agency processes and staff practices; and

- Collecting additional information about the interventions, including conducting implementation research to better understand how and why the interventions do or do not work.

Before undertaking work in these ACF program areas, the BIAS-NG team consulted with federal program staff, technical assistance providers, and practitioners about the major challenges facing programs in these areas. To improve client participation in TANF activities, the project has collaborated with programs in Los Angeles County (California), Monroe County (New York), and Washington State to test text messages, mailed reminders, new tools for staff to use with clients, and new staff practices. To increase families' engagement in their child welfare cases, the project worked with Allegheny County (Pennsylvania) to test a mailed flyer providing a roadmap of key steps in families' cases coupled with reinforcing text messages. To help guide qualified families through the application process to foster or adopt, the team developed tools in partnership with Los Angeles County's Department of Children and Family Services. And in Wayne County (Michigan), the BIAS-NG team is collaborating with two Head Start award recipients — Starfish Family Services and Matrix Human Services — on a text message intervention to increase parent engagement and child attendance.

As of 2023, the project completed randomized controlled tests in five sites (Monroe County, Washington State, Allegheny County, LA County's Department of Children and Family Services, and LA County's TANF program) and initiated data collection with Starfish and Matrix. The project will begin reporting on the results of the completed tests in 2024. The BIAS-NG team, with one of their program partners from the Monroe County TANF site, presented early lessons from their work with Monroe County and Allegheny County's Office of Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) at OPRE's 2022 Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency.

Behavioral Interventions Scholars Grants

OPRE launched the Behavioral Interventions Scholars (BIS) grant program in 2017 to support dissertation research by graduate students who are applying a behavioral science lens to specific research questions relevant to social services programs and policies that affect children, adults, and families with low incomes in the United States. Part of OPRE's BIAS research portfolio, these grants are intended to facilitate the completion of high-quality research projects that will add to the growing body of knowledge on effective behavioral interventions for ACF programs and populations. BIS also aims to build the body of research that applies a behavioral science lens to social services and to support faculty mentorship of high-quality doctoral students.

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

GRADUATE STUDENT	PROJECT TITLE	UNIVERSITY	PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/ FACULTY MENTOR
Luyi Jian	How Does Prosocial Identity Protect Juveniles from Reoffending? Testing Core Components of a Conceptual Model for Identity-Based Intervention	University of California, Berkeley	Dr. Jennifer Skeem
Ilana Brody	The Effects of Agency Frames on Resource Allocation: Moral Motives for Giving and Receiving Aid	University of California, Los Angeles	Dr. Sherry Jueyu Wu
Matthew Ogan	Making Space to Connect: Examining Macroeconomic Factors, Cash Assistance, and Romantic Relationship Functioning in Low-Income Contexts	University of Missouri	Dr. J. Kale Monk

OPRE contracts with ICF, Inc. to provide support to the BIS grant program. This support includes dissemination of award recipient research findings, regular convenings of award recipients, and related activities.

Diaper Distribution Demonstration and Research Pilot (DDDRP)

Diapers are an essential resource, especially for families with young children, yet unmet diaper need is a widespread material hardship. To help address diaper need and increase economic security, the Office of Community Services (OCS), in partnership with OPRE, launched the Diaper Distribution Demonstration and Research Pilot (DDDRP). Between September 2022 and September 2023, OCS awarded three cohorts of grants to six state community action agencies and one tribal organization per cohort, for a total of 21 award recipients. In 2023, OPRE awarded the DDDRP Evaluation contract to Westat, with partner Public Profit.

The DDDRP Evaluation will inform the administration of this new program and lay the groundwork for a future impact evaluation. Activities include an implementation study, a participant experience and outcome assessment, and an impact study feasibility assessment and study design. A final report is expected by December 2025, but the study will also publish an impact study design and several interim products to convey findings as they are available.

Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network Grants

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

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

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

OPRE contracts with ICF, Inc. to provide support to the FSSRN. This support includes dissemination of award recipients' research findings, regular convenings of award recipients, and related activities.

Integrating Financial Capability and Employment Services (InFin)

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

In 2021, OPRE released a literature synthesis and a brief on the outcomes, payment timing, and next steps for research on the Earned Income Tax Credit. In 2022, study activities included conducting an online survey, phone interviews, virtual site visits, and virtual focus groups with program administrators, program participants, and employers. In 2023, the project completed all data collection and analysis and worked on developing a final report and three related briefs anticipated to be published in early 2024. The briefs will describe participant perspectives on programs that integrate E&T and financial capability services; share findings from interviews with 10 employers to better understand employer-provided financial capability services targeted to employees with low or moderate incomes; and provide an overview of preemployment credit checks for practitioners

working to support individuals with low incomes who may be affected by this practice.

Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G)

Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G) was led by Mathematica from 2019-2023. The project aimed to address gaps in research and practice identified in OPRE's Integrated Approaches to Supporting Child Development and Improving Family Economic Security project, which concluded in 2018. Specific objectives included:

1. Conducting formative research to better understand program implementation, strengthen promising programs, and prepare them for evaluations of effectiveness;

2. Building the capacity of programs and researchers to conduct rigorous and meaningful evaluations of integrated approaches to supporting child development and improving family economic security; and

3. Addressing measurement issues in order to promote learning across evaluations and a better understanding of relevant processes and outcomes of two-generation programs for children and their parents with low incomes.

Four initiatives delivering two-generation services to support child development and family economic security partnered with Mathematica to implement formative evaluation work:

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

Six additional initiatives (10 total) participated in a learning community that met periodically to work on activities related to building their evaluation capacity:

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

The project team also developed, pilot tested, and refined a new measure specific to two-generation programs with participating NS2G initiatives. In 2023, the NS2G study team published several products for two-generation practitioners and researchers:

- *Strengthening Two-Generation Initiatives That Support Child Development and Improve Family Economic Security: Insights from the Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches Project* (final synthesis report)
- Series of practitioner briefs:
  - » *Defining a Two-Generation Logic Model* (with fillable template)
  - » *Using a Structured Learning Process to Strengthen Two-Generation Service Delivery* (with program improvement planning worksheet)
  - » *Using Rapid Cycle Learning to Build Momentum for Change in Two-Generation Service Delivery*
- *Two-Generation Mutual Reinforcement Measurement Tool* (brief on initial development of the tool with several appendices, including an electronic version of the tool)

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NEXT STEPS FOR RIGOROUS RESEARCH ON TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES (NS2G)

The Two-Generation Mutual Reinforcement Measurement Tool

Mutual reinforcement occurs when service providers align and build on each other's efforts to serve whole families by adopting a shared vision and working toward common or compatible goals. The NS2G project created the following preliminary resources to quantify a two-generation initiative's level of mutual reinforcement for two-generation research and service delivery:

- A brief that describes the initial development of the measurement tool: *The Two-Generation Mutual Reinforcement Measurement Tool: Development and Pilot Study Findings*
- *Appendix A: Subscales and Scoring*
- *Appendix B: Technical Approach for the Pilot Study*
- *Appendix C: Two-Generation Mutual Reinforcement Measurement Tool* (Hardcopy PDF)
- *Appendix D: Two-Generation Mutual Reinforcement Measurement Tool* (Electronic Version with Automated Scoring)

The measurement tool includes prompts and questions to help two-generation initiative staff and partners assess the degree to which:

- Programs and services in the two-generation initiative are of high quality and appropriate intensity;
- Partners align and streamline the implementation of these programs and services;
- Partners capitalize on their relative strengths or areas of expertise in providing programming and services; and
- Partners collect data about the two-generation initiative and, if so, (1) what types of data, (2) the extent of data sharing and linking across partners, and (3) the quality and usage of data.

Key findings from the small pilot study included that the tool would be useful for stimulating ideas for strengthening initiatives and improving coordination with partners. Respondents felt it was best suited for group administration and suggested it would be more useful if initiatives could calculate their own mutual reinforcement score over time. Based on this input, the NS2G team developed the electronic, Excel-based version that automates scoring for users.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services Analysis Execution (RED-X)

This project builds on OPRE's Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Human Services (RED) project, which concluded in 2017. RED helped build a base of knowledge to inform ACF's identification and understanding of racial and ethnic differences across the service spectrum — more specifically, in access to and take-up of human services, nature and quality of services received, and outcomes of services. The goal was to develop a framework for understanding when racial and ethnic differences likely constitute disparities and to examine how greater insight into racial and ethnic disparities could be used to improve human services program delivery for ACF. To help achieve this goal, RED created a research plan to reliably identify racial and ethnic disparities across the service delivery system in a range of ACF programs and services. The plan outlined research questions and proposed approaches to addressing those questions, including recommended data sources, analytic strategies, and data collection activities.

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

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

1. Racial and ethnic differences in the level of underlying financial need for TANF cash assistance,
2. The stringency of TANF policies that people of different races and ethnicities face based on where they live, and
3. Racial and ethnic differences in TANF participation rates among program-eligible families.

The findings from this analysis of quantitative TANF data will be published in 2024.
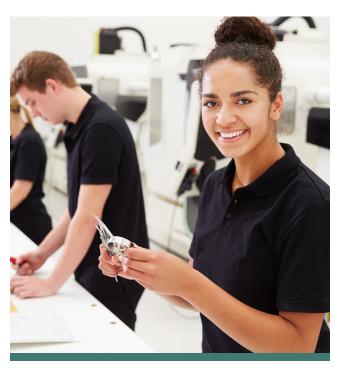
For CCDF, the project is exploring the following questions, using a combination of Census survey data, data generated by microsimulation, and CCDF program administrative and policy data:

1. Racial and ethnic differences in the level of underlying financial need for child care subsidies,

2. The nature of CCDF policies that people of different races and ethnicities face based on where they live,

3. Racial and ethnic differences in CCDF participation rates among program-eligible families, and

4. Whether different parts of the country show different patterns of participation rate variations across racial and ethnic groups.

RED-X is also undertaking a small-scale qualitative research study exploring how one state's adaptations to COVID-19 may have introduced new and/or ameliorated existing racial/ethnic disparities in TANF.

TANF and Child Support Moving Forward: Further Incorporating Family Input

Seeking and obtaining feedback from families on how programs can better operate, improve services, and serve future families can create more effective and equitable social programs. This project will advance knowledge regarding how TANF and child support programs can incorporate family input to inform program improvements and operations. In 2022, the project released a summary of how TANF and child support programs are currently using family input to inform their programs. In early 2023, it released a set of family input resources (toolkit) for programs to obtain family input. These resources are designed to encourage and make it easier for TANF and child support program staff and leaders to actively seek to hear the opinions and perspectives of families they have served, are currently serving, or could serve in the future as they improve their services, processes, operations, service delivery, program spaces, or policies. The study is currently piloting these resources with select programs and conducting rapid-cycle evaluations of these resources. This project also includes the Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic study (described later in this report under the *Social Context and Environment* sub-workstream). Mathematica and its partner MEF Associates are conducting this project.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM TANF AND CHILD SUPPORT MOVING FORWARD: INCORPORATING FAMILY INPUT

Elevating Family Input in TANF and Child Support Programs: Resources for Program Staff, Leaders, and Families Toolkit

The toolkit includes several sections, listed below. Program leaders and staff using these resources should consider what they want to learn about engaging families in the program improvement process, then navigate to the section that best aligns with their starting point and goals.

- What Do We Mean By Program Improvement? — This section will help you gain a better understanding of program or continuous improvement processes.

- Why Engage Families in Your Program Improvement Efforts? — This section will help you make the case for gathering input from families to improve your program.

- An Overview of Family Engagement in Program Improvement — This section explains what family engagement looks like in program improvement.

- Building and Maintaining Trust with Families — This section explains how to restore, build, or maintain trust with the families you engage.

- Preparing for Change — This section describes how to get your program ready to include families in program improvement.

- Getting Started on Gathering and Using Family Input — This section is targeted for those who are new to gathering family input for program improvement and are not sure where to start.

- Integrating Family Input Throughout Program Improvement — This section is targeted for those who already gather input from families but want to formalize or deepen how you engage families.

- Sharing Power with Families to Drive Continuous Improvement — This section is targeted for those who want to start to share decision-making power with the families you engage in program improvement.

- Family Input Toolbox — This section lists tools and resources that can help you plan for, collect, and incorporate feedback from families in program improvement.

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes — Social Context and Environment

The *Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes* workstream addresses questions related to strategies that seek to foster family economic security, stability, and self-sufficiency. The *Social Context and Environment* sub-workstream focuses on how broader social context and environmental factors, including public policy and economic conditions, relate to participants' outcomes.

Advancing Contextual Analysis and Methods of Participant Engagement in OPRE (CAMPE)

OPRE launched Advancing Contextual Analysis and Methods of Participant Engagement (CAMPE) in 2021 to identify and increase the use of equitable research practices in federally-funded research and evaluation. Specifically, CAMPE focuses on advancing the use of participatory methods and analysis of contextual factors in projects funded by OPRE. The project also provides consultations to OPRE's divisions to expand OPRE's capacity to apply an equity lens to the framing and language used in research and evaluation products.

Led by Urban Institute, CAMPE will directly engage people who have participated in ACF programs; develop guidelines and tools to facilitate the use of equitable evaluation practices in current and future OPRE projects; and communicate findings and lessons learned from the project to a broad range of audiences, including federal staff inside and outside of ACF, researchers, and people with lived experience. In 2024, the project will produce a synthesis of community-engaged research and evaluation in the federal context and a toolkit for developing and facilitating a community advisory board (CAB) to inform federal projects.

CAMPE COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

CAMPE directly engaged people with lived experience by convening a Community Advisory Board (CAB). The CAB was made up of 13 members who have experience participating in and working with ACF programs and who represent a variety of identities, experiences, and geographies. The term "CAB" is commonly used in research and evaluation practice and does not refer to a Federal Advisory Committee; OPRE did not seek consensus advice from the CAB, but rather sought a variety of perspectives to inform the project. Over the course of 18 months, the CAB engaged in regular virtual meetings to contribute ideas and provide feedback on four key inputs to the planning, implementation, and communication of OPRE'S research. Specifically, the CAB reviewed the OPRE Editorial Style Guide and the Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda. They also provided input on how OPRE studies develop surveys with local research partners and participants, and the approach and language used in informed consent processes across OPRE studies. For each of the four engagements, the CAB produced a memo outlining their discussions and specific recommendations for OPRE staff to consider in future work. In addition, CAB members collaborated to develop dissemination materials for the project. CAB members were hired as part of the CAMPE study team and compensated for their time and expertise.

Baby's First Years Qualitative Substudy

Baby's First Years, launched in 2017, is a multi-site randomized controlled trial supported by a grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) within the National Institutes of Health, along with other public and private funders. This study seeks to fill important gaps in scientific knowledge about the role of economic resources in children's early development by evaluating whether unconditional cash payments have a causal effect on the cognitive, socio-emotional, and brain development of infants and toddlers in families with low incomes. Specifically, 1,000 mothers of infants with incomes below the federal poverty line have been recruited into the study and are receiving monthly cash payments by debit card for the first 52 months of the child's life. Parents in the experimental group are receiving $333 per month ($4,000 per year), whereas parents in the control group are receiving a nominal monthly payment of $20. Mothers were recruited in New York City, greater New Orleans, the Twin Cities, and the Omaha metropolitan area.

To understand the impacts of the added income on children's cognitive and behavioral development, an interdisciplinary study team will periodically assess treatment/control group differences on measures of cognition, language, memory, self-regulation, and socio-emotional development. Because brain circuitry may be sensitive to the effects of early experience even before early behavioral differences can be detected, the study team will also assess treatment/control group differences in measures of brain activity. To understand how family economic behavior, parenting, and parent stress and well-being change in response to income enhancement, the study team will assess treatment/control differences in family expenditures, food insecurity, housing, and neighborhood quality; family routines and time use; parent stress, mental health, and cognition; parenting practices; and child care arrangements.

From 2019 to 2022, OPRE contributed funds to the NICHD grant to enable a qualitative examination of how the cash income affects families' lives. Because the meaning mothers attach to the income is important to how they will use it and the impacts it will have on families, the study team conducted four waves of qualitative interviews with a subset of mothers in the Twin Cities and greater New Orleans to ask about their views and experiences of the transfer. The analyses from the randomized controlled trial and qualitative interviews will provide the first definitive understanding of the extent to which income plays a causal role in determining early child cognitive, socio-emotional, and brain development among families with low incomes.

In 2023, OPRE contributed funds to support the project's effort to collect high quality measures of the child's development including school readiness, cognitive skills, and socioemotional development when the focal child is age 6, and again when they are age 8. As in prior rounds of data collection, a maternal survey will accompany those data collections to provide information about family contexts.

The study is releasing findings and making study data available for secondary analysis on a rolling basis. Learn more and find recent publications on the study website.

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

Launched in 2021, the purpose of this project is to support research to better understand how to improve economic, social, and health outcomes for individuals and families with low incomes seeking employment, advancement in the labor market, and economic security. In particular, the project is focusing on how racial biases and disparities in hiring, promotion, and wage assignment, as well as in other factors related to the nature of work, such

as work schedules or arrangements and benefits, may be barriers to employment and advancement in the lower-wage labor market. The project seeks to foster greater understanding about these barriers, identify promising practices for mitigating them, and specify research questions and/or design options for further research in this area. To accomplish these objectives, the project will gather input from interested parties including employers, workers, policymakers, program operators, and researchers; produce a literature review to provide a comprehensive summary of the current evidence base regarding the nature and biases of employment processes, and opportunities to "disrupt" them; and conduct a field scan and site visits to document promising practices. These activities will inform the development of a final report to OPRE that proposes research questions for potential future inquiry. Abt Global is leading this project.

Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts

While a significant body of research has improved our collective understanding of human services programs and their contribution to the economic and social well-being of individuals and families, notable knowledge gaps continue to persist regarding how these programs can best serve the needs and interests of rural communities.

This project engaged subject matter experts, conducted a literature review, conducted over 100 interviews with human services providers and community partners across 12 rural communities, and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data to meet the following goals:

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

The study focused on four ACF programs: TANF; Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV); Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF); and Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG). In 2023, the project published a comprehensive report on study findings, four briefs, and three snapshots. The briefs focus on exploring the remaining needs and opportunities for each of the four focal human services programs. The snapshots focus on racial inequities in human services programs in rural contexts, housing supports in rural contexts, and broadband access in rural communities. 2M Research and its partner Urban Institute conducted this study.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS IN RURAL CONTEXTS PROJECT

Human Services in Rural Contexts Comprehensive Report

- Economic and social well-being needs in rural contexts are intertwined. Identified needs include transportation, employment, mental health services, and reliable broadband internet.

- Federal and state requirements such as data collection, reporting, and restrictive eligibility requirements can prove burdensome for human services program staff and can take away time that is otherwise dedicated to service delivery to address remaining needs in rural communities. Local factors such as limited staffing and high turnover can also hinder effective service delivery.

- In rural contexts, nonprofit agencies that have multiple funding streams (including non-federal funding) bridge the gap between communities and federally-funded human services programs, helping to establish trust and cultural capital, and generally have more flexibility in service delivery.

- While the level of remaining need for the four human services programs is consistently high across rural counties, there are 229 rural counties in 26 clusters or geographic concentrations that have significantly higher needs than the average. These counties are in different rural regions and contexts. Persistent poverty and poor access to broadband internet is more common in these clusters than in rural counties overall.

- Lessons learned for program delivery that can address remaining need for human services in rural contexts include:

  a. A tailored approach to service delivery can provide human services practitioners with an opportunity to address highly contextual implementation challenges.

  b. During the COVID-19 pandemic, expanded resources and increased flexibility improved the ability of programs to meet the needs of rural communities.

  c. Greater state technical assistance and support for collaboration across programs can improve program adoption and fidelity.

- Recommendations from human services practitioners to mitigate barriers to access and improve capacity include:

  a. Streamline and unify human services in rural areas to mitigate barriers to access.

  b. Understand and value local culture and knowledge in developing and delivering human services to improve programs.

  c. Prioritize flexibility and allow for ad hoc adjustments in making local decisions.

- Potential future directions for research include collecting and analyzing information about the participant experience of human services in rural contexts; and comparing the ways programs are delivered in rural and urban environments to establish a basis for identifying key similarities and differences, uncovering barriers that may be unique to each setting, and identifying ways to improve program delivery in both settings.

Measuring, Supporting, and Understanding Child and Caregiver Well-being through Employment and Self-Sufficiency Research (Measuring SUCCESS)

The Measuring SUCCESS project, awarded in 2021 to Mathematica, is supporting OPRE in integrating empirical findings from the literature on child development and family well-being into its welfare and family self-sufficiency research portfolio. Specifically, this project aims to identify and prioritize constructs of child, caregiver, and family well-being, and the measures of those constructs, that could be systematically integrated into research on and evaluation of programs and interventions aimed at improving the economic security of parents with low incomes.

From 2022 to 2023, the project team synthesized learnings from literature, theoretical models, logic models, a technical working group, federal staff engagement, and focus groups with parents and caregivers with lived experience participating in programs that the Division of Economic Independence studies. These activities informed the development of a conceptual framework for assessing how welfare and self-sufficiency interventions relate to the social well-being of families. A report introducing the conceptual framework is expected in 2024, and a collection of measures aligned with the framework is expected to be published by spring 2026.

TANF and Child Support Moving Forward: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on state, Tribal, and local TANF and child support programs. While some efforts have been made to understand these impacts, there are significant gaps in our knowledge of how these programs were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, OPRE launched this project to document the changes these programs made during the pandemic, lessons learned, and changes that have been incorporated into ongoing program operations. The project will complete data collection in early 2024. Final reports with findings for both the TANF and child support programs are expected in 2025. This project also includes the Further Incorporating Family Input study (described earlier in this report under the *Social Services Delivery Systems* sub-workstream). Mathematica and its partner MEF Associates are conducting this project.

Knowledge Building and Communication

The *Knowledge Building and Communication* workstream addresses questions related to expanding and synthesizing the evidence base, supporting scholars who focus on research related to ACF initiatives and the people that ACF serves, and ensuring knowledge generated within and outside of ACF is communicated effectively to inform policy, practice, and further research.

ACF Evidence Capacity Support

OPRE and ACF program offices are partnering to extend and deepen evidence capacity, which refers to a culture of and infrastructure for building and using evidence for learning and improvement. Launched in 2020, the project builds on OPRE's existing efforts to augment evidence capacity at ACF and incorporates the principles of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018.

The project prioritizes the learning needs of agency staff and partners for information about the context, reach, implementation, performance, and impact of their programs, and aims to strengthen capacity for using evidence in five areas: (1) evidence culture, (2) evidence infrastructure, (3) data access, (4) knowledge and skills, and (5) dissemination.

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

In 2023, the project supported ten projects across seven ACF program offices:

ACF OFFICE	DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT
Administration for Native Americans (ANA)	Conducting activities associated with the ANA Learning Agenda
Office of Child Support Services	Developing the inaugural Child Support Learning Agenda
Office of Community Services	• Producing a brief describing diaper distribution programs and the available research • Supporting the revision of federal performance measures to improve data quality and reduce administrative burden
Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response	Reviewing the evidence on disaster displacement and human services to define the core issues, summarize existing research, and identify gaps
Office of Refugee Resettlement	• Analyzing performance measures and identifying lessons on effective community partnerships from the Voluntary Agencies Matching Grant Program • Supporting the streamlining of performance measures to improve data quality and reduce administrative burden

ACF OFFICE	DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT
Office of Trafficking In Persons	Visualizing administrative data on trafficking incidence and services offered by ACF
OPRE	• Synthesizing lessons learned from archiving research and administrative data for secondary analysis • Analyzing focus group and interview data to inform the inaugural ACF Data Strategy

Examples of Evidence Capacity Support publications from the past year include:

- *Diaper Distribution Programs: Overview of Programs and Available Research*
- *Human Service Needs and Disaster Displacement*
- *Using Interactive Workshops to Inform Development of a Child Support Learning Agenda*
- ACF Evidence Capacity Spotlight Series:
  - » *Using Evidence to Engage Audiences on an Emerging Issue: How the Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Used an Evidence Synthesis to Engage Key Audiences on a Critical Human Services Issue*
  - » *Building Evidence to Promote Equitable Access to Funding: How the Administration for Native Americans Worked with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation to Improve Notice of Funding Opportunities*
  - » *Managing Complex Inputs to a Learning Agenda: How the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and the Office of Family Assistance Refined the Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda*
  - » *Refining Program Data to Support Learning: How the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Assessed Data Collection for the Direct Services to Survivors of Torture Grants*

National Academies of Sciences Study of Policies to Reduce Intergenerational Child Poverty

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

In 2023, NASEM released the final report of the committee's findings, titled *Reducing Intergenerational Poverty*. The report identified the drivers of long-term intergenerational poverty, racial disparities in intergenerational poverty, potential policies and programs to reduce it, and recommendations for actions to address gaps in research. The committee also released a special report in 2023, *Intergenerational Poverty and Mobility Among Native Americans in the United States: Proceedings of a Workshop*. In 2024, committee members will present findings

to local, state, and federal policymakers, and other relevant audiences, and will publish special topics briefs.

National Academies of Sciences Study on Addressing the Long-Term Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children and Families

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will likely carry significant downstream implications for child physical and mental health. In addition, the pandemic highlighted pre-existing societal inequities and introduced new challenges and obstacles, particularly for children and families living in communities that have been historically marginalized. To better understand the state of the science on these complex issues, in 2021 OPRE contributed funding to support an ad hoc committee, formed under the auspices of NASEM, in conducting a consensus study on the consequences of and solutions to the long-term effects of COVID-19 on children living in high-risk communities.

In 2023, NASEM released the consensus report of the committee's findings, titled *Addressing the Long-Term Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children and Families*. In the report, the committee examined the societal context of the COVID-19 pandemic, short-term outcomes, and pandemic-era responses, and made recommendations for a path to recover and rectify the inequities resulting from and exposed by the pandemic. Among the committee's recommendations for policies and practices are approaches to supporting children's social, emotional, and education needs and addressing families' economic needs. The report also highlights research and data needs, including (a) strengthening data systems to support service provision and identification of needs and opportunities, and (b) prioritizing rigorous research, and the infrastructure to support it, on the effects of the pandemic on children and families.

National African American Child and Family Research Center

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

1. Advance Research — The Center will plan, initiate, and maintain a community-engaged, focused, and high-caliber research program that will build on the existing literature related to African American children and families and be directly relevant to the needs and interests of the focal ACF programs.

2. Build Research Capacity — The Center will build research capacity and infrastructure to conduct research relevant to ACF program and policy goals that is culturally rigorous and informed by an understanding of current and historical circumstances that shape the experiences of African Americans. The Center will seek to develop and expand the pool of researchers reflective of the communities being studied by the Center.

3. Communicate Research — The Center will develop and implement a dissemination strategy that broadly and efficiently communicates findings from Center activities and increases the use of research, data, and relevant resources among researchers, federal and state policymakers, ACF grantees, program administrators, and communities participating in the research.

National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families

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

Examples of the Center's work in 2023 include:

- *Practitioners in North Carolina's TANF and Related Income Assistance Programs Offer Perspectives on Latino Families' Experiences:* This brief examines Latino families' experiences with North Carolina's TANF and related income assistance programs, based on practitioner responses to a survey that included a questionnaire and a series of open-ended questions. It also discusses implications of the findings for how income assistance programs are administered in North Carolina and in other states with large and growing Latino populations.
- *Understanding and Measuring Latino Racial and Ethnic Identity:* This webinar discusses the research pertaining to the measurement of race and ethnicity in the U.S. Census and across other surveys. It addresses conceptual issues and challenges surrounding the measurement of race and ethnicity in Latino populations, and proposed solutions for measuring racial and ethnic identity more accurately, including the measurement of mixed-race identity.
- *One in Four Children Nationwide Are Latino, with 6- to 12-year-olds Making Up Nearly 40 Percent of Latino Children:* This analysis of American Community Survey data describes the share and age distribution of the Latino child population in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Among the findings is that nationwide, Latino infants and toddlers account for 15 percent of all Latino children, preschool-aged children account for 16 percent, school-aged children account for nearly 40 percent, and adolescents account for 28 percent.

National Research Center on Poverty and Economic Mobility

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

In 2021, the HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) awarded a new grant to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to administer the National Research Center on Poverty and Economic Mobility. The Center is continuing many of the activities of past Poverty Centers but with some new priority areas. Specifically, the Center is:

- Supporting a fellowship program to place both emerging and senior scholars at HHS to work with federal policy, research, or program offices;
- Administering a grant program to fund research and analysis on equity, inclusion, diversity, and access in human services and economic mobility programs; and
- Hosting events to disseminate actionable findings to federal policy and research communities.

OPRE provides support for the Center's National Poverty Fellows Program and dissemination events.

Two fellows are currently in residence in the Division of Economic Independence, where they are working on a variety of projects related to employment, self-sufficiency, and economic well-being among families with low incomes. In addition, the Division utilizes the Center for support planning convenings and consultations with experts in the field on a variety of topics.

Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS)

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

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

RECS 2022 was held June 1-3 in a virtual format. The conference engaged more than 1,100 participants across three plenaries, 30 concurrent breakout sessions, three "lightning round" presentations from 23 Emerging Scholars, and one networking and mentoring session. RECS 2024 was held in Washington, DC, on May 29-31, 2024. For more information about RECS 2024 and past conferences, visit https://recsconference.net.

Shared Methodological Advancement

The Methodological Advancement project helps ensure that OPRE-funded research uses the most scientifically advanced and appropriately applied methods possible. To accomplish this goal, OPRE regularly convenes meetings of scientists and research experts to advance its understanding of critical topics in social science research methodology. In addition to OPRE staff, these meetings include participants from a variety of contexts including academia, government, and the private sector.

The meetings explore innovations in research design, analytic techniques, and measurement. Additionally, this project supports an ongoing internal seminar series; publications with further information on topics addressed in the meetings; and ad hoc responses to emerging methodological issues.

To date, OPRE has sponsored 14 meetings on innovative methods. The most recent meeting, held in October 2023, was entitled "Addressing Unit Missingness in Social Policy Survey Research." With surveys widely used across OPRE and as one of the main tools used to learn about the experiences of children and families interacting with ACF programs, this meeting examined the issue of nonresponse in survey data and shared concepts and strategies to help overcome challenges of nonresponse and unit missingness. Prior meetings explored mixed methods and qualitative approaches to social policy research; community engaged research

methods; core components research; application of effect sizes; subgroup analysis; implementation science; innovative directions in estimating impact; methods for unpacking the "black box" of programs and policies; use of administrative data in social policy research; alternatives to traditional randomized controlled trials; Bayesian methods for social policy research; rapid learning methods; and methods for promoting open science. These meetings are intended to help OPRE explore recent methodological advances, gaps in current knowledge and implementation, and opportunities to apply innovative methods to government-funded research and evaluation. The contractor that facilitated the 2014-2016 methods meetings was RTI International. Insight Policy Research was the contractor that facilitated the 2017-2023 methods meetings. MEF Associates will facilitate methods meetings for 2024-2026.

In 2023, OPRE published a summary of the 2022 meeting, that shared key themes from the virtual meeting, _Applying Mixed Methods and Qualitative Approaches to Social Policy Questions: Summary of 2022 OPRE Methods Meeting_. Additionally, OPRE released two briefs and a guide. The first brief, _Culturally Responsive and Equitable Data Parties: A Method for Participatory Analysis and Sense-Making in Virtual Spaces_, introduces the concept of data parties, an inclusive and equitable research method for engaging diverse voices to review and interpret data through participatory analysis and sense-making. The second brief, _Understanding Qualitative and Mixed Methods Approaches: Resources for Further Reading_, provides a list of resources for those wanting to learn more about qualitative and mixed methods approaches in social policy research. Finally, the guide, _OPRE Research and Evaluation Technical Assistance Resources_, offers technical assistance (TA) resources to build the capacity of ACF award recipients, evaluators, and TA providers for applying recent advances in research and evaluation methodologies to their work.

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

Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC)

In 2020, OPRE awarded another five-year cooperative agreement for the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC); beginning in 2021, the Division of Economic Independence contributed additional supplemental funds to the TRC to deepen the understanding of family economic well-being within tribal communities and early childhood settings. The TRC provides leadership and collaboration to promote excellence in community-based participatory research and evaluation of ACF early childhood and family economic well-being initiatives that serve tribal communities. Settings include tribal home visiting programs, early care and education center-based programs, home-based and family childcare providers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and TANF.

The TRC:

1. Conducts research to identify needs and/or develop effective practices and integrated systems for ACF early childhood and family economic well-being initiatives in tribal communities;
2. Identifies, validates, and/or develops measures of culturally meaningful inputs, implementation processes, and proximal and distal outcomes of those programs;
3. Establishes peer-learning communities for tribal research on areas of shared priority;
4. Provides training and professional development to facilitate interest and competencies in research relevant to early childhood and family economic well-being in tribal communities;

5. Provides forums to increase cultural competence and sensitivity to tribal voices in research and evaluation; and

6. Strategically shares and disseminates the work widely.

Notable TRC activities in 2023 included:

1. The 2023 Native Children's Research Exchange (jointly funded by the TRC and the National Institute on Drug Abuse);

2. The TRC Summer Institute course "Early Childhood Research with Tribal Communities" in partnership with the John Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health;

3. TRC Virtual Learning Circles focused on early childhood and Indigenous food sovereignty practices;

4. Communities of learning focused on Family Economic Well-being, Early Relational Well-being, Workforce Needs Assessment, and Native Language and Culture;

5. A scoping review and latent class analysis related to tribal family economic well-being; and

6. Many dissemination activities, including presentations at relevant conferences and publications in academic journals.

SPOTLIGHT ON DISSEMINATION

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

OPRE Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Publications — FY 2023 (October 2022–September 2023)

TANF Policy, Funding, and Administration

State TANF Policies: Welfare Rules Database

- *Graphical Overview of State TANF Polices as of July 2021*
- *State TANF Policies During the COVID-19 Pandemic*
- *Welfare Rules Databook: State TANF Policies as of July 2021*

Capacity Building within Human Services Programs

Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data (TDI)

- *Expanding TANF Program Insights: A Toolkit for State and Local Agencies on How to Access, Link, and Analyze Unemployment Insurance Wage Data*
- *Strengthening Analytics in Government Agencies: A Toolkit for Sustainable Data Use*
- *TANF Data Collaborative Pilot Profiles: A Collection of Data Analytics Projects from State and County TANF Agencies*

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes — Human Capital Development

National Evaluation of the 2nd Generation of Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0 National Evaluation)

- *Analysis Plan for the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) COVID-Cohort Impact Report*
- *Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) Intermediate-Term Impact Report*
- *Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) National Evaluation: Implementation Study Report*
- *Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG 2.0) National Evaluation: Outcomes Study Report*
- *Understanding Local Systems that Supported HPOG Programs: Perspective from Program Operators and Partners*

Evaluation and System Design for Career Pathways Programs: 2nd Generation of Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG)

- *Creating a Data System to Manage and Evaluate Grant Programs: Insights from the Participant Accomplishment and Grant Evaluation System (PAGES)*
- *Health Profession Opportunity Grants 2.0: Final Annual Report*
- *Summary Brief: Key Findings from the Final Annual Report of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program, 2015-2021*

Career Pathways Long-Term Outcomes Study

- *Summary and Insights from the Long-Term Follow-Up of Ten PACE and HPOG 1.0 Job Training Evaluations: Six-Year Cross-Site Report*

Career Pathways Secondary Data Analysis Grants

- *Keep It Simple: Picking the Right Data Science Method to Improve Workforce Training Programs*

Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations & Long-Term Follow-Up Study

- *GoalIt!: Implementation Findings from the Evaluation of Employment Coaching*
- *MyGoals for Employment Success: Implementation Findings from the Evaluation of Employment Coaching*

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes — Employment Attainment and Retention

Building Evidence on Employment Strategies (BEES)

- *Challenges to Employment: Fines, Fees, and License Suspensions*
- *Individual Placement and Support in a Federally Qualified Health Center Setting*
- *Individual Placement and Support in a Substance Use Disorder Treatment Setting*
- *Integrating Employment Services with Substance Use Treatment and Recovery*

Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies Project (NextGen)

- *An Unprecedented Crisis: The WeCARE Program's Experience Serving People with Mental and Physical Health Challenges During a Pandemic*

Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse

- *Digging Deeper into What Works: What Services Improve Labor Market Outcomes, and for Whom?*
- *Evidence Snapshot: Employment Retention Services*
- *Evidence Snapshot: Work Experience and Work-Based Learning*
- *Key Elements of Employment Programs: Strategies from the Field for Identifying, Implementing, and Sustaining Core Components*

Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration

- *Effects of the Subsidized and Transitional Jobs Demonstration on Earnings After Eight Years*
- *Employment, Earnings, and Unemployment Insurance During the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Analysis of Participants in the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration*

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes — Social Services Delivery Systems

Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches (NS2G)

- *Defining a Two-Generation Logic Model*
- *Strengthening Two-Generation Initiatives That Support Child Development and Improve Family Economic Security: Insights from the Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches Project*
- *The Two-Generation Mutual Reinforcement Measurement Tool*
- *Using Rapid Cycle Learning to Build Momentum for Change in Two-Generation Service Delivery*
- *Using a Structured Learning Process to Strengthen Two-Generation Service Delivery*

TANF and Child Support Moving Forward: Further Incorporating Customer Input

- *Elevating Family Input in TANF and Child Support Programs: Resources for Program Staff, Leaders, and Families Toolkit*
- *Gathering and Using Family Input to Improve Child Support and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Services: Approaches from the Human Services Field*

Understanding the Value of Centralized Services (VOCS)

- *Approaches to Funding Centralized Services: Lessons Learned from the Understanding the Value of Centralized Services Study*
- *Learning from Those with Life Experience: Client Voices in the Understanding the Value of Centralized Services Study*
- *Under One Roof: Findings from the Understanding the Value of Centralized Services Study*

Strategies for Advancing Positive Participant Outcomes — Social Context and Environment

Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts

- *A Snapshot of Broadband Access in Rural Communities*
- *A Snapshot of Housing Supports for Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts*
- *A Snapshot of Racial Inequities in Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts*
- *Exploring Remaining Needs and Opportunities for Improvement in Rural Communities: A Focus on Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Programs*
- *Exploring Remaining Needs and Opportunities for Improvement in Rural Communities: A Focus on Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) Services*
- *Exploring Remaining Needs and Opportunities for Improvement in Rural Communities: A Focus on Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Services*
- *Exploring Remaining Needs and Opportunities for Improvement in Rural Communities: A Focus on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Programs*
- *Human Services in Rural Contexts Comprehensive Report*

Knowledge Building and Communication

ACF Evidence Capacity Support

- *ACF Evidence Capacity Spotlight Series:*
  - » *Building Evidence to Promote Equitable Access to Funding: How the Administration for Native Americans Worked with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation to Improve Notice of Funding Opportunities*
  - » *Managing Complex Inputs to a Learning Agenda: How the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and the Office of Family Assistance Refined the Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Learning Agenda*
  - » *Refining Program Data to Support Learning: How the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Assessed Data Collection for the Direct Services to Survivors of Torture Grants*
  - » *Using Evidence to Engage Audiences on an Emerging Issue: How the Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation Used an Evidence Synthesis to Engage Key Audiences on a Critical Human Services Issue*
- *Diaper Distribution Programs: Overview of Programs and Available Research*
- *Evaluation and Monitoring 101*
- *Evidence Capacity in Organizations: A Literature-Informed Framework*
- *Evidence Capacity in Organizations: A Snapshot of a Literature-Informed Framework*
- *Guide to Publishing Research Data for Secondary Analysis*
- *Human Service Needs and Disaster Displacement*

Shared Methodological Advancement

- *Applying Mixed Methods and Qualitative Approaches to Social Policy Questions: Summary of 2022 OPRE Methods Meeting*
- *Culturally Responsive and Equitable Data Parties: A Method for Participatory Analysis and Sense-Making in Virtual Spaces*
- *Snapshot of Evidence Capacity in Organizations*
- *Understanding Qualitative and Mixed Methods Approaches: Resources for Further Reading*
- *Using Interactive Workshops to Inform Development of a Child Support Learning Agenda*
- *Using Partnerships to Support Refugee Self-Sufficiency*