



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES



**Welcome to the
Office of Family Assistance (OFA)
Regions VI and VII
TANF Data Reporting and Analysis Series
Webinar #3: Using Research to Inform Practice**

Thursday, September 12, 2013

*Please dial 1-888-329-8877 and use passcode
8536897 to join the audio teleconference.*

Q&A Information



Use this “Chat” pod to address or answer any questions posed by presenters.

Use this “Q&A” pod to ask overall/specific presentation questions. Type your question here and hit “Enter.”

Screenshot of the Adobe Connect interface. The top bar shows the meeting title "TANF Data Reporting and Analysis Webinar Series Webinar # 3 (Collaboration) - Adobe Connect" and navigation options like Meeting, Layouts, Pods, and Audio. On the right side, there is a video feed window titled "Dinan_photo.JPG" showing a woman. Below the video is a chat pod titled "Chat 3 (Everyone)" with a message "The chat history has been cleared" and a text input field. At the bottom right is a Q&A pod titled "Q & A" with a "Show All Questions" dropdown and an "Assign To" dropdown.

Using Research to Inform Practice: ACF's Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium (FSSRC)

September 12, 2013

OFA Regions VI and VIII TANF Webinar Series: TANF Data Reporting and Analysis, Webinar # 3

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Context and Motivation

- **Since welfare reform there has been a significant decline in 3 areas related to welfare research:**
 - 1. State and local welfare and family self-sufficiency research capacity**
 - 2. State-generated research and state-specific program evaluation**
 - 3. Academic interest in TANF program operations including the use of administrative and program evaluation data**

- **Simultaneously, there have been a number of advances in welfare research including:**
 - **Acceptance and adoption of RCT's as the “gold standard” for answering causal questions**
 - **Advances in alternative methodologies examining causal relations**
 - **Increases in data and computing power which make it easier and faster to conduct research**
 - **Improvements in the academic training of new graduates entering the field**

The Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium (FSSRC) – The Response

- A unified, multi-component approach
 - No one entity or funding mechanism could meet all research and program needs and address all issues
 - Diversity is a strength
 - Based on a network theory of implementation and change
 - FSSRC > sum of the parts
- Consortium – “An association of two or more individuals or entities with the objective of participating in a common activity or pooling their resources for achieving a common goal.”
- Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium (FSSRC) Components
 - Advancing Welfare & Family Self-Sufficiency Research Project (a.k.a. Project AWESOME)
 - Family Self-Sufficiency & Stability Research Scholars Network (Scholars Network)
 - Data Center for Family Self-Sufficiency

Project AWESOME

- **OPRE contract with Mathematica Policy Research**
 - **Key Personnel: Michelle Derr, Alicia Meckstroth, Matt Stagner**
- **Primary Activities**
 - **Document the state of the field**
 - Development of a strategic plan for the FSSRC
 - **Maintain engaged communication with key constituencies**
 - **Be “on call” to respond rapidly to emerging policy and research needs**
 - **Produce and disseminate products that enhance the knowledge base in family self-sufficiency research**
 - **Support collaboration and coordination of activities of the Consortium including related cooperative agreements and research contracts**

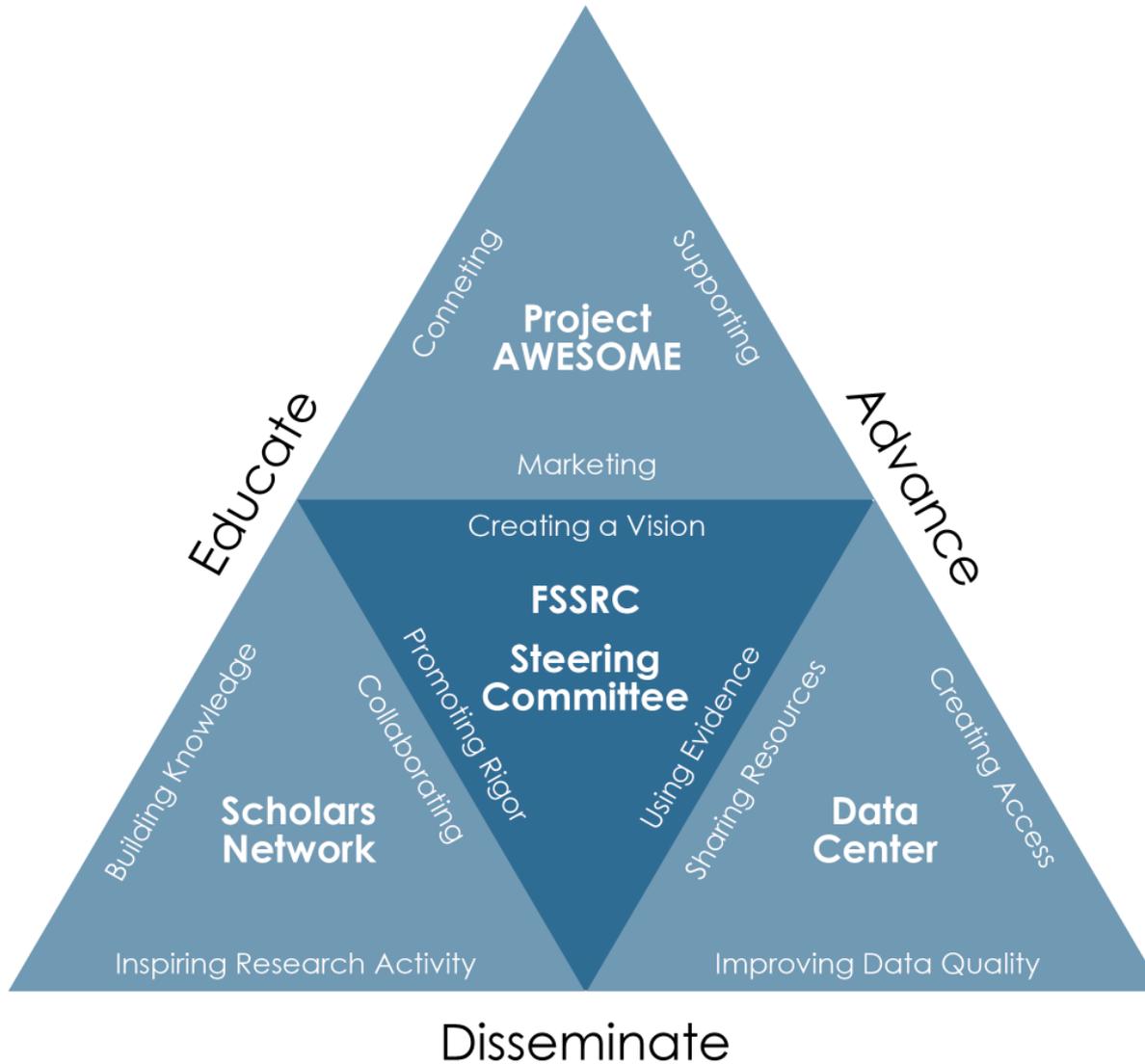
Family Self-Sufficiency Data Center

- **Cooperative agreement to develop, implement and support ongoing operations of a Data Center related to Family Self-Sufficiency programs and research.**
- **The Center will serve as a hub to support the development of state and institutional capacity for data collection, linkage, and, where necessary, data storage.**
- **Possible Center activities include:**
 - **Conducting a national assessment of state and needs of the field**
 - **Negotiating, supporting and maintaining ongoing access agreements for administrative and program evaluation data**
 - **Facilitating expedited data access and streamlined processes for accessing data**
 - **Engaging in activities to support secondary analysis of data**
 - **Conducting supporting activities**
 - **Working with State and local human services to improve data quality**

Family Self-Sufficiency Research Scholars Network

- 7 grants to Principal Investigators to join a network of scholars
- The Scholars Network will be a collaborative enterprise of scholars who undertake research in family self-sufficiency and stability that is both scientifically rigorous and highly relevant to family self-sufficiency programs and research.
- Cooperative agreements with scholars to :
 - Work independently and collectively to undertake a systematic, multi-disciplinary examination of the current gaps in family self-sufficiency and stability policies, programs and existing research focusing on two areas:
 - Research on the institutional state of the field of State and local human service agencies, CBOs and systems of support for children and families,
 - Contributions of stability and instability within and across various domains and disciplines.
 - Execute research and program evaluation activities in collaboration with human services agencies and CBOs
 - Participate in a multi-disciplinary learning community by collaborating with other members of the Network , Data Center and affiliated scholars

Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium (FSSRC)



Collectively, what will the Consortium do?

- **Maintain, elevate and promote an emphasis on rigor**
 - For example, through Project AWESOME the Consortium will support the activities of the NAWRS Research Academy
- **Supplement state and local research capacity**
- **Stimulate academic interest**
 - Develop a multi-disciplinary conceptual framework
 - Focus on unanswered, but emerging interests
 - Exploit variation across states and localities as an opportunity for research, rather than a constraint
- **Facilitate research partnerships**
- **Provide an institutional mechanism to be nimble and respond rapidly when policy and research issues arise, such as natural experiments**

Timeline

- Consortium is in its formative stages
- Project AWESOME began October 2012
- Scholars Network and Data Center grants will be awarded by Summer 2013
- FSSRC Steering Committee will begin planning October 2013
- Ongoing – Engage stakeholders and seek out opportunities for program and research collaborations
 - We want you to be engaged with us!

Why engage? A local agency perspective...

The Goal: Improved policies and programs through evidence-based decision-making at state and local social service agencies.

→ Increasingly important in current fiscal environment.

- 1. Internal research and evaluation capacity can enhance agency operations with critical and timely insights into policies, programs, and procedures.**
- 2. Fully developing and leveraging high-quality research capacity requires agency commitment, internal resources, and external supports.**
- 3. The Research Consortium can play a valuable role in making this happen!**

1. In-House Research Can Improve Operations

Advantages of internal research capacity include:

- **Easy access to administrative data and to staff and clients (for interviews, surveys, focus groups)—without lengthy agreement and approval processes.**
- **Familiarity with agency programs and with the structure, contents, and “quirks” of agency administrative data.**
- **Ability to be responsive to administrators’ timelines and inform program reporting and operations in real time.**

1. Improve Operations (cont.)

Internal research staff are thus uniquely positioned to:

- Evaluate a wide range of agency actions, from small program and procedural “tweaks” to complex new interventions and pilots.
- Conduct detailed and timely process evaluations to complement and explain impact findings and support improvements in implementation.
- Inform the development of new policy proposals and pilot programs through research and analysis re: client experiences, perspectives, and outcomes.

→ Cost-effective way to develop the evidence base agencies need to maximize their impact.

1. Improve Operations (cont.)

Examples from NYC Human Resources Administration:

- **Random assignment evaluation of an alternative process for establishing child support orders for children on cash assistance.**
- **Quasi-experimental evaluation (propensity score matching) of public- vs. private-sector subsidized jobs programs for cash assistance clients.**
- **Client surveys, client-staff observations, and administrative data analysis to inform transition toward a self-directed service model in SNAP.**
- **Focus groups with clients to understand program outcomes and enhance communications efforts.**

2. Developing and Leveraging Research Capacity

Key conditions include:

- **Buy-in from agency leadership.**
- **Trained research and evaluation staff.**
- **Culture of collaboration between administrators and researchers able to override time constraints, differences in training and perspectives, and competing priorities.**
- **Access to technical assistance and “lessons learned” regarding research methods, strategies, and techniques that can be applied at the agency level.**

Also very helpful: High quality administrative data and archiving!

3. The Research Consortium Can Help

The FSSRC offers an array of mechanisms to:

- **Communicate the value of in-house research and evaluation capacity to agency leaders and administrators.**
- **Provide technical assistance and other resources and supports for rigorous research.**
- **Facilitate information-sharing among state and local agency researchers about research methods and findings.**

→ E.g., Through support of the NAWRS Research Academy...

NAWRS Research Academy

- Focused on enhancing agency capacity to use rigorous research methods—including random assignment—to improve and document program effectiveness.
- Connects federal, state, and local researchers and administrators together with other research and evaluation experts.
- Activities include panels, workshops, and plenary speakers at the annual NAWRS conference, as well as webinars and other virtual events throughout the year.
- A Google Group serves as a forum for discussion and information-sharing—encourage your staff to join!
→ Go to <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/nawrs-research-academy/join> or email me at dinank@hra.nyc.gov.

For More Information

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Any Questions?

- To ask a verbal question, please dial *1 on your phone. The operator will unmute your line and place you in the queue to ask a question.
- To ask an online question, use the Q&A pod, in the bottom right portion of your screen. Type your question into the open field at the bottom and then click the “send question” button or press enter.



Thank You!

- Thank you for joining today's Webinar on the Using Research to Inform Practice!
- Please take the time to fill out the **Webinar evaluation** that will pop-up on your screen as the Webinar concludes.



Thank You!

- Please join us for more events in the OFA Regions VI and VIII TANF Data Webinar Series. Information on upcoming events will be available soon!