

Title of Event: "Job Retention and Advancement: Program Design Manual"

Date: January 19, 2000

Speakers: Barbara Murphy, consultant to the Lewin Group for the Employment Retention and Advancement Project

Purpose:

This teleconference was coordinated by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) as part of its Family Independence Forum series available to ACF Regional offices and State social service offices. The purpose of the *Employment Retention and Advancement Program Design Manual* is to help States design strategies for improving job retention and advancement among TANF recipients. States now have an opportunity to have their strategies evaluated as part of a national evaluation funded by the ACF Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE). The *Employment Retention and Advancement Project* will be conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) to determine the effectiveness and cost-benefits of programs designed to help current or former TANF recipients or other low income families retain and advance in employment. OPRE has issued a grant announcement for State TANF agencies to participate in the evaluation.

ACF is providing the awards to help defray the costs of participating in the national evaluation. Participating states and localities will benefit from on-site, individualized technical assistance and timely feedback and a state-of-the-art evaluation of their specific retention and advancement policies and programs without cost to them. The technical assistance will be provided by the Lewin Group under contract to ACF. States may apply under two tracks. Under the first track, States may receive up to \$100,000 per year for five years if they have programs that are in place or nearly in place and can begin the evaluation fairly quickly. Under the second track, States may receive up to \$10,000 for a six month period (within which participating agencies will be asked to submit a competitive application to be an evaluation site) if they need more time to fully operationalize their retention or advancement strategies before they are able to begin participation in the evaluation. The revised due dates for applications for both tracks is February 29, 2000, and ACF expects that the national evaluation will ultimately include a total of eight to ten sites.

Highlights:

The *Employment Retention and Advancement Program Design Manual* is the latest in a series of products developed by the Lewin Group to assist States as they design program strategies for promoting the employment retention and advancement of TANF recipients. The manual provides States with a step-by-step process for thinking through goals, target populations, and strategies they might include in their program plans. The manual also provides helpful guidance with regard to issues related to the evaluation of these programs. States interested in participating in the national evaluation will find the manual helpful in thinking through their plans. States who are not interested in the evaluation but are planning initiatives in this area should find the manual helpful in thinking through their design options as well.

The *Employment Retention and Advancement Program Design Manual* is a valuable tool for States applying for the ACF awards. The manual provides a conceptual framework that States might follow when designing their programs. In this framework, States seeking to develop retention and advancement interventions would first define goals, target groups, the focus of the intervention, and their program strategy. Any of these definitions may be changed at any time, but States should consider their goals and target groups first before considering a particular focus or

strategy. In determining goals, States should consider that they will depend upon the characteristics and circumstances of their TANF population, and they should insure that they are related to job advancement and/or retention. Identification of a target group involves determining who will be served, when they will be served, and whether there are other circumstances such as placing geographic restrictions on services. In developing a focus of intervention, States should identify a core set of issues that affect recipients' employability such as those that hinder employability (i.e., lack of skills, labor market issues, etc.), contribute to job loss (i.e., personal and family issues, life skills issues, etc.), or contribute to lack of advancement (i.e., need for work supports such as child care, transportation, etc.). In consideration of specific strategies, States should consider such design issues as current policies and procedures, shortfalls of those policies and procedures, effective methods that have been used elsewhere, and untested ideas that the State may want to try to implement. Implementation issues States should consider include determining who will deliver the services, where the services will be delivered, how the members of the target group will be recruited, and the timing of the services (i.e., when and how long). In evaluating strategies for job retention and advancement, States should consider which services the control group will receive, the size of the research sample, the point of random assignment, and maintenance of the integrity of the study. Each of the main aspects of the conceptual framework provided in the manual need to be considered by States within the context of their individual circumstances. Strategies that work in one particular State may not be feasible in another.

For more information from the Lewin Group on the manual, contact Mike Fishman at (703) 269-5655. For more information on the ACF/OPRE Employment Retention and Advancement Evaluation Project, contact Ken Maniha at (202) 401-5372 or Nancye Campbell at (202) 401-5760.