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An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

2017 Linking TANF Families to Employment and Economic Opportunities Meeting

Strategies to Incorporate Behavioral Science into Program Delivery

Presented by: MEF Associates

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August 15, 2017

MEF ASSOCIATES

cabs @ mdrc

Goals of Today's Session

1. Understand key benefits of incorporating behavioral science into program design
2. Review examples of behavioral interventions in human services agencies
3. Practice strategies to incorporate behavioral diagnosis and design at your agency

Behavioral Principles 101

- Realities of human behavior:
  - Limited attention
  - Put off pain and speed up pleasure
  - Not great at calculating costs and benefits
  - Limited self-control
  - Swayed by our family, peers, and people we respect
  - Deterred by small hassles

Why the Behavioral View Matters in TANF Agencies

Many welfare-to-work policies and programs are based on an unrealistic picture of how we, as humans, think and behave

TANF agencies sometimes design requirements with the assumption that clients will carefully consider each option, and follow through on intentions

Research from psychology and other behavioral sciences have not been integrated into programs and polices to the same extent as traditional economics

Examples of Behavioral Interventions in Human Services Agencies

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Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS): Overview

- Sponsored by Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF
- Goal: To learn how tools from behavioral science can be used to deliver program services more effectively and improve well-being of low-income children and families

The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project

WORK SUPPORT

Improved engagement in appointments and activities

- CA
- NY

CHILD SUPPORT

Improved payment rates

- OH

Increased requests for order modifications

- TX
- WA

CHILD CARE

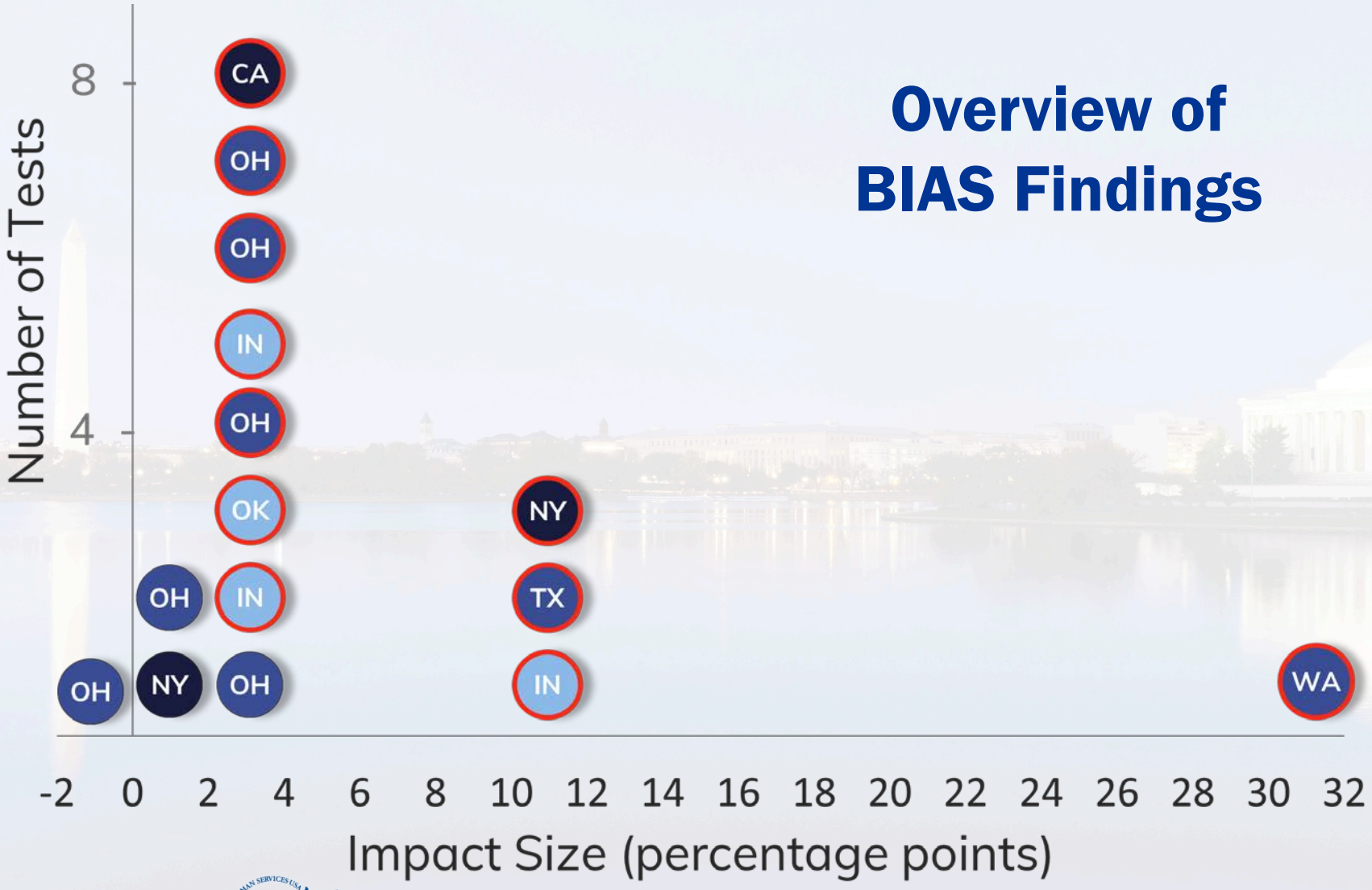
Improved subsidy renewal rates

- OK

Increased use of high quality-rated providers

- IN

Overview of BIAS Findings



Los Angeles Background

- California temporarily exempted some TANF families from the welfare-to-work program, but that exemption ended.
- To "reengage" families, parents were sent two mailings and two phone calls, but many parents still did not attend their mandatory appointment or reach other reengagement benchmarks.

Could Los Angeles increase the percentage of parents who became positively engaged?

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Bottleneck	Behavioral Concept
Did not understand complicated, detailed materials	• Cognitive Load • Limited Attention
Accustomed to receiving TANF with no mandate to participate	• Status Quo Bias • Ostrich Effect
Planned to attend, but forgot or changed mind	• Prospective Memory Failure • Procrastination
Wanted to attend, but had problems getting to meeting	• Hassle Factors • Limited Information
Faced more pressing concerns	• Psychology of Scarcity

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Loss Frame

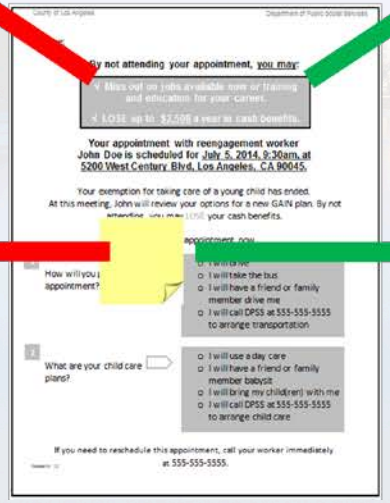
By not attending your appointment, you may:

- ✗ Miss out on jobs available now *or* training and education for your career.
- ✗ LOSE up to $2,508 a year in cash benefits.

Hi Jane,

See you at your appointment next week. We'll make a plan for work, and make sure you don't lose your cash benefits. Call me if you have any questions.

See you then,
John Smith
(555) 123-4567



By not attending your appointment, you may:

- ✗ Miss out on jobs available now or training and education for your career.
- ✗ LOSE up to $2,508 a year in cash benefits.

Your appointment with reengagement worker John Doe is scheduled for July 5, 2014, 9:30am, at 5200 West Century Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

Your exemption for taking care of a young child has ended. At this meeting, John will review your options for a new GAIN plan. By not attending, you may LOSE your cash benefits.

How will you get to your appointment?

- I will drive me
- I will take the bus
- I will have a friend or family member drive me
- I will call DPSS at 555-555-5555 to arrange transportation

What are your child care plans?

- I will use a day care
- I will have a friend or family member babysit
- I will bring my child(ren) with me
- I will call DPSS at 555-555-5555 to arrange child care

If you need to reschedule this appointment, call your worker immediately at 555-555-5555.

Gain Frame

By attending your appointment, you may:

- √ Take advantage of jobs available now *or* training and education for your career.
- √ KEEP up to $2,508 a year in cash benefits.

Hi Jane,

See you at your appointment next week. We'll make a plan for work, and make sure you continue to receive cash benefits. Call me if you have any questions.

See you then,
John Smith
(555) 123-4567

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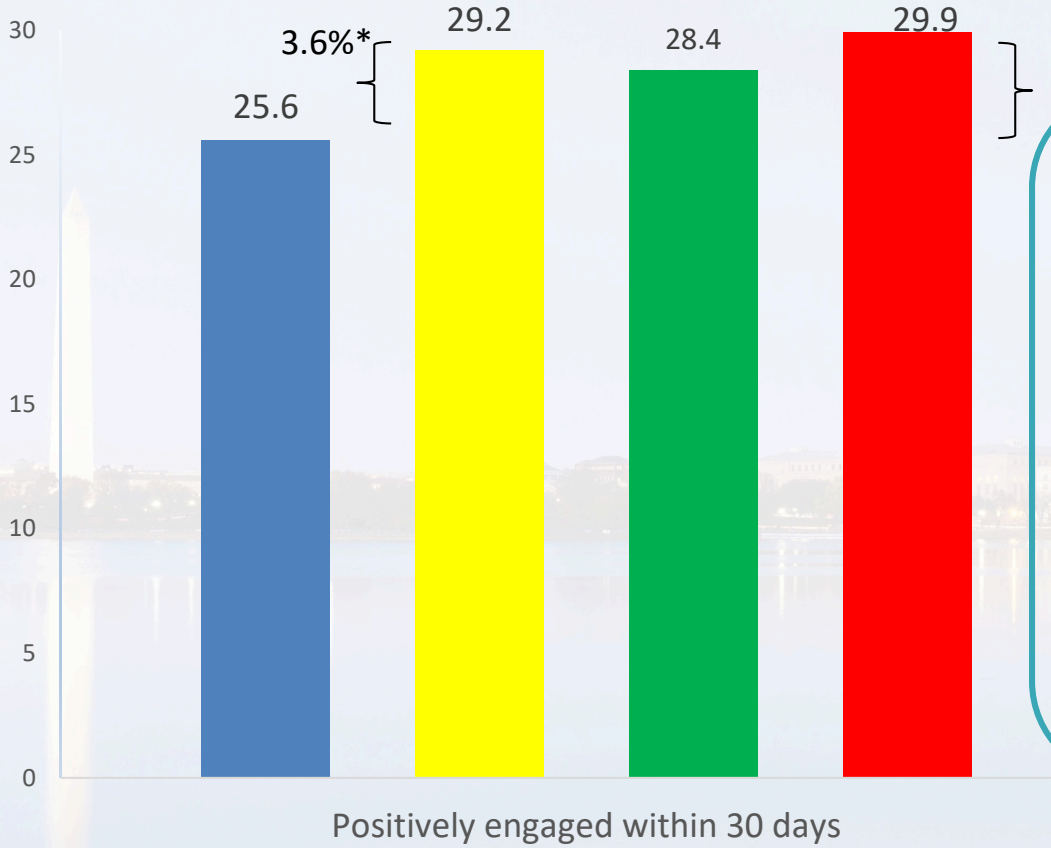

- An additional behavioral notice increased reengagement by 3.6 percentage points
- This effect was largely driven by the loss-framed notice; increased reengagement by 4.4

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

- Aims to expand the use of behavioral science to a wider range of programs and go beyond nudges
- Starting with two domains:
  - TANF (LA County, Monroe County, and Washington State)
  - Child Welfare (Allegheny County and LA County)

Group Activity: Practicing the Behavioral Diagnosis & Design Process

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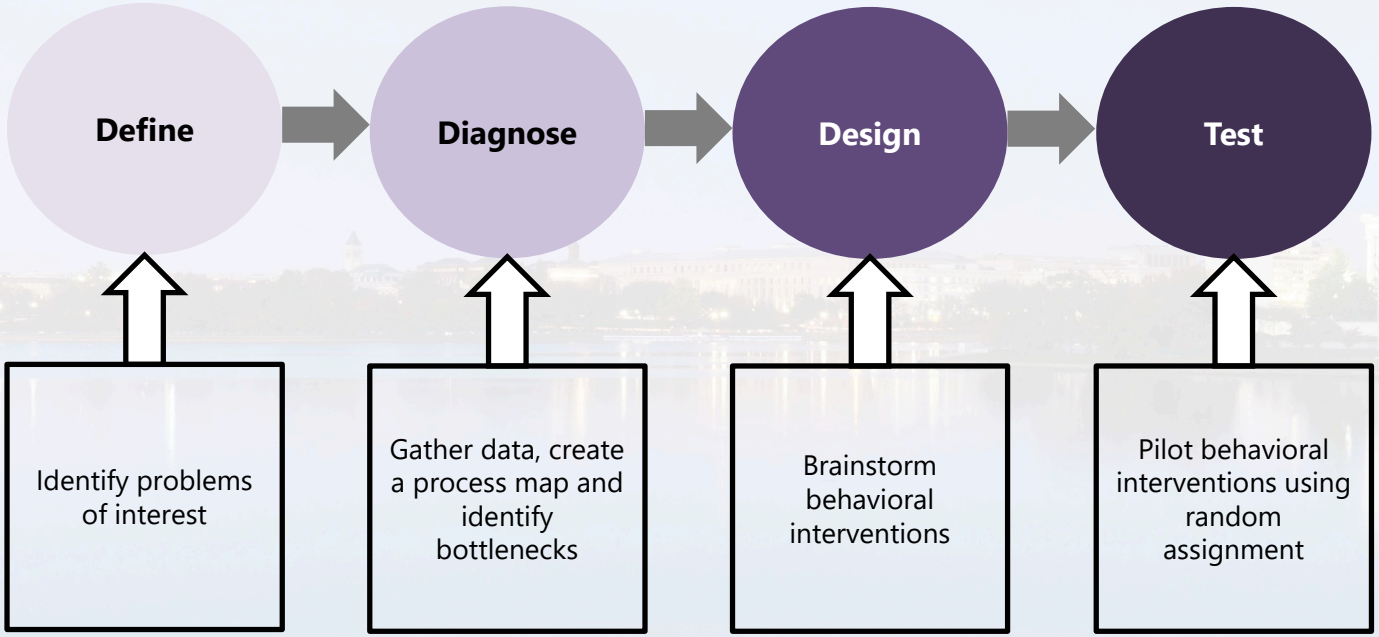
Behavioral Diagnosis and Design (BDD)



Source: ideas42 worked with MDRC in the early stages of the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project to create the behavioral diagnosis and design framework used in the project.

Step 1: Define the Problem

- ❑ Measurable
- ❑ Improvement possible
- ❑ Policy-relevant
- ❑ Solution-neutral

Steps to Identify Problem:

- Interview staff (all levels)
- Interview clients
- **Process mapping (client POV)**
- Document review
- Cohort data analysis

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Agency + Client Experience

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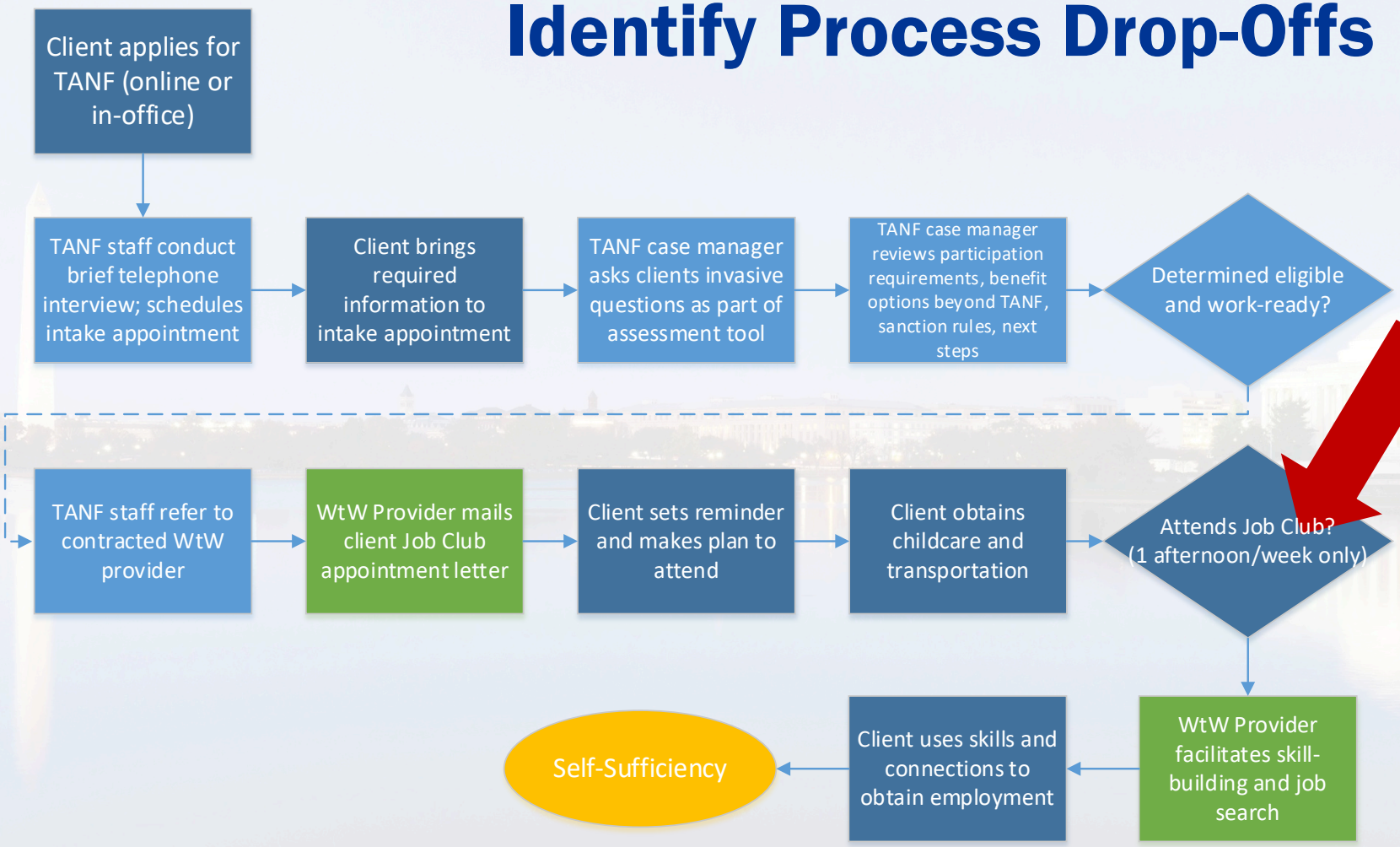
Identify Process Drop-Offs



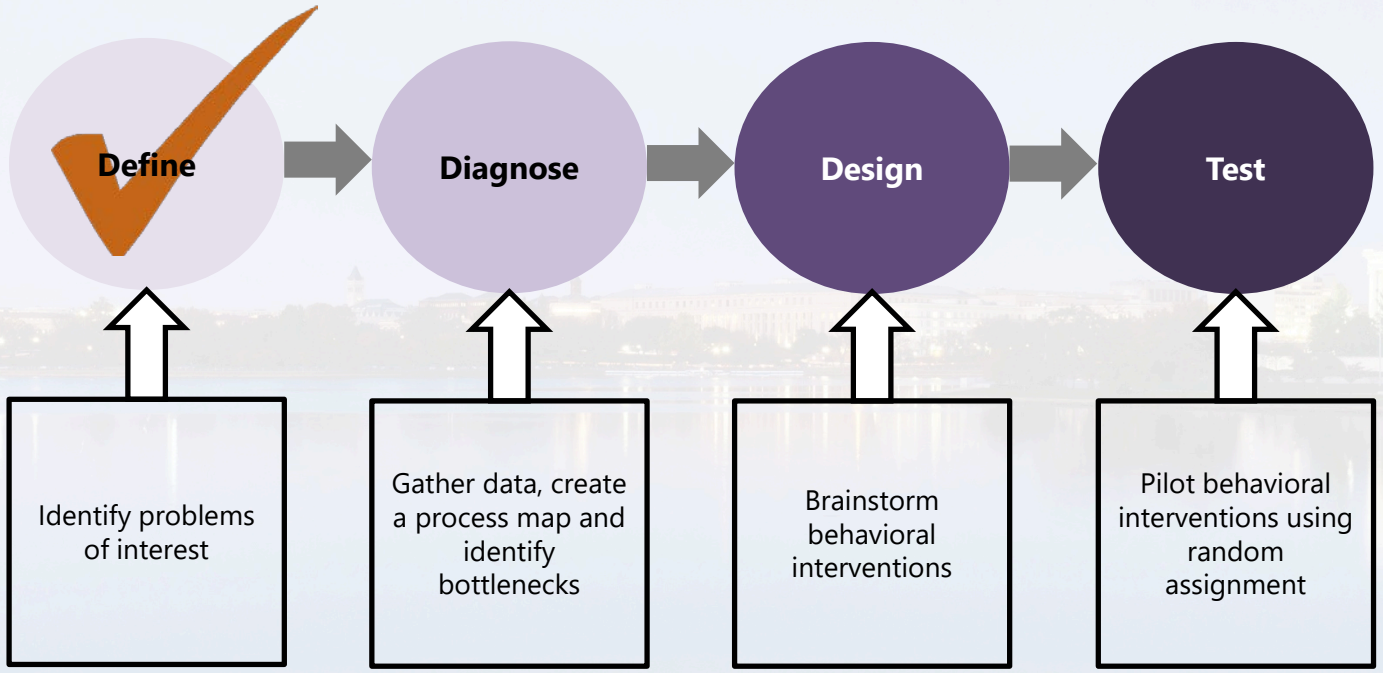
Today's Problem Definition

- 60% of parents do not attend their first job club session, which leads to low engagement in work-preparation activities.

Reframe as measurable goal:

- How might we increase attendance at initial job club sessions by 10 percentage points?

Behavioral Diagnosis and Design (BDD)



Source: ideas42 worked with MDRC in the early stages of the Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) project to create the behavioral diagnosis and design framework used in the project.

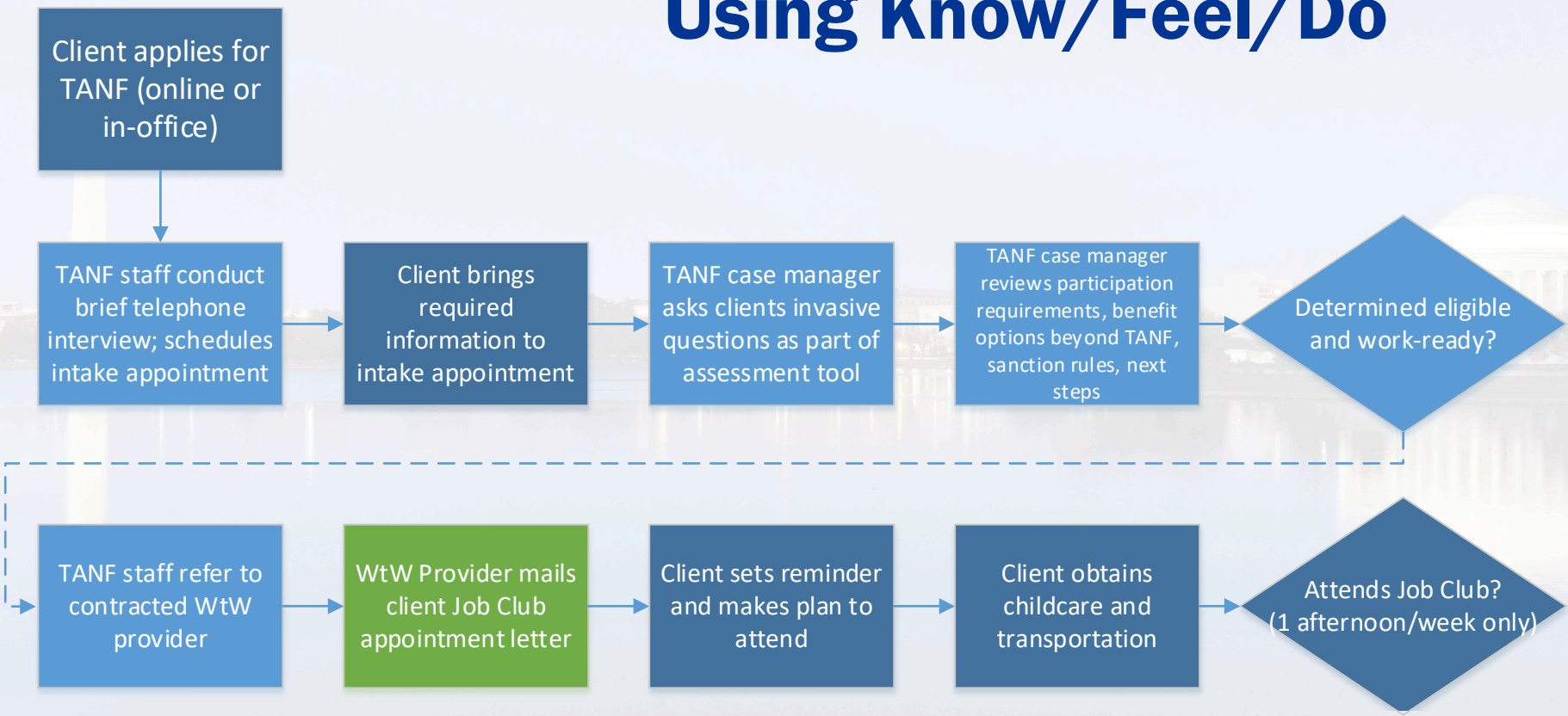
Step 2 Diagnose: Hypothesize the Behavioral Bottlenecks Driving your Problem

- Revisit Process Map and selected drop-off
- Empathize with client's POV
  - Observe process
  - Review documents
  - Client interviews are key!
- Add "behavioral layer" using Know/Feel/Do bottlenecks:
  - What are clients **thinking** or **feeling** at each step?
  - What is keeping them from **doing** the step that is in their best interest?

Step 2 Diagnose: Hypothesize the Behavioral Bottlenecks Driving your Problem

Let's practice!

Revisit the Process Map Using Know/Feel/Do



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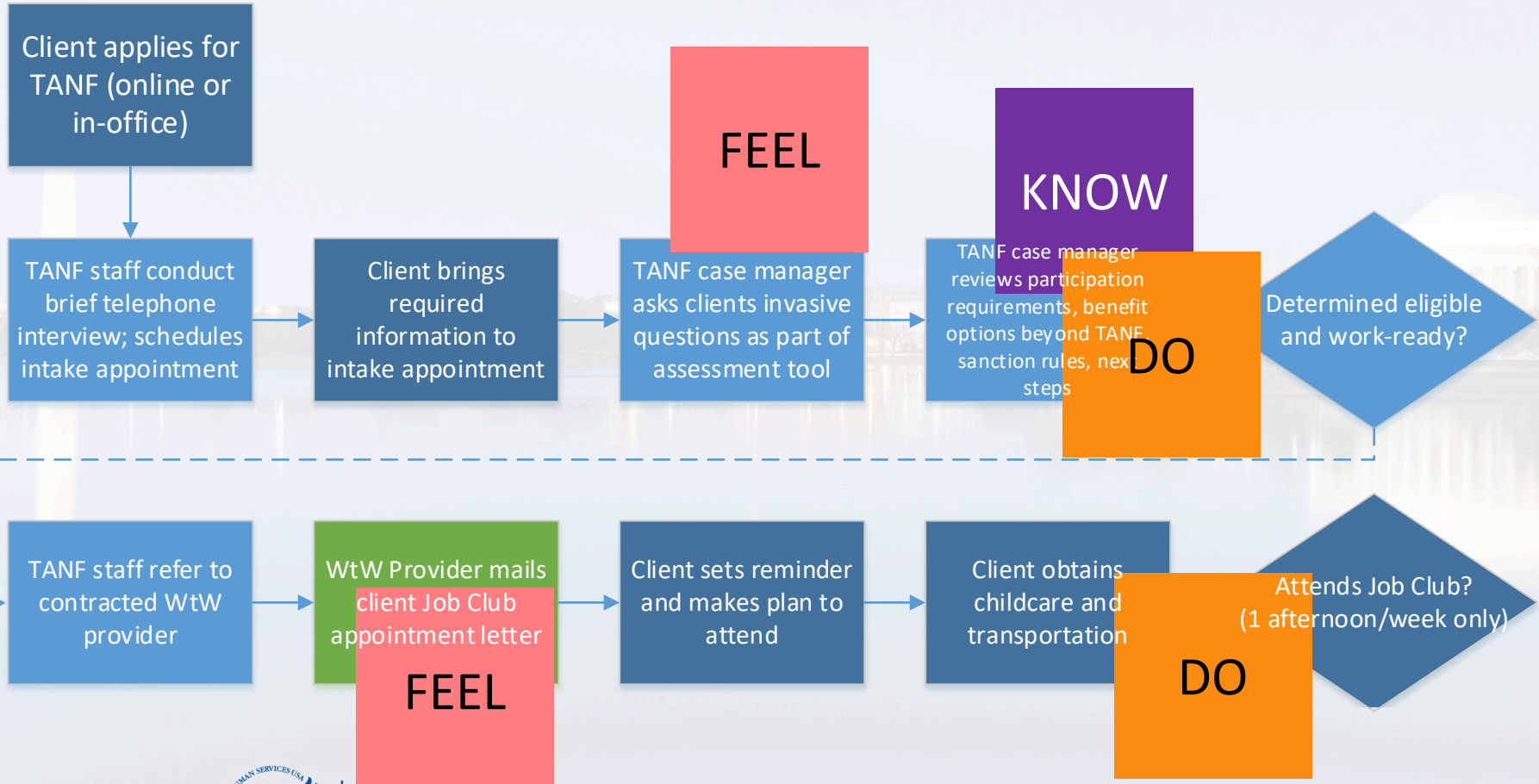
Add KFD Post-Its



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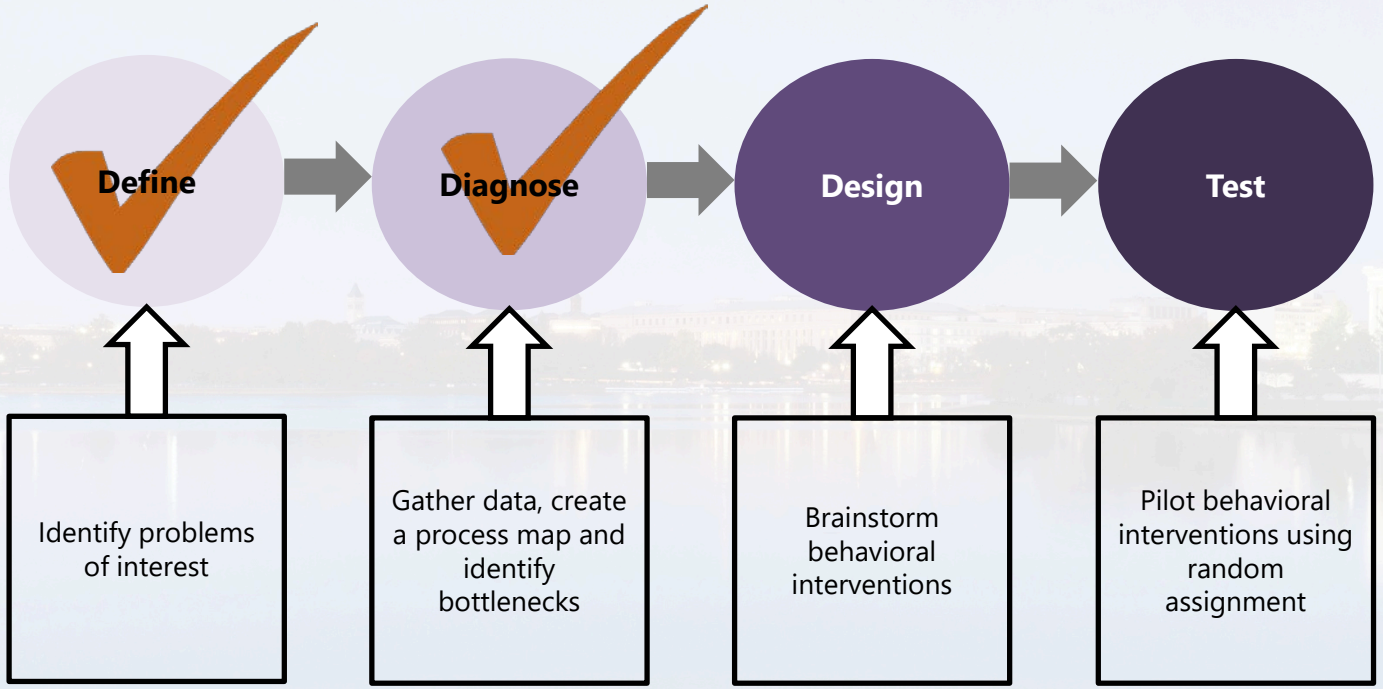
Today's Hypothesized Behavioral Bottlenecks

1. **Cognitive overload:** Information presented to parents during orientation is complex and overwhelming; staff do not help parents distill information into concrete next steps that parents can remember
2. **Negative Identity Priming:** Initial staff-parent interactions focus on barriers and past failures, which may reduce parents' sense of efficacy or motivation
3. **Planning fallacy:** Without a concrete plan, parents who express confidence about following through on next steps fail to do so
4. **Hassle Factors**: Job club is offered once/week in the afternoon after staff lunch breaks, which parents share is inconvenient given their other household commitments

Behavioral Diagnosis and Design (BDD)



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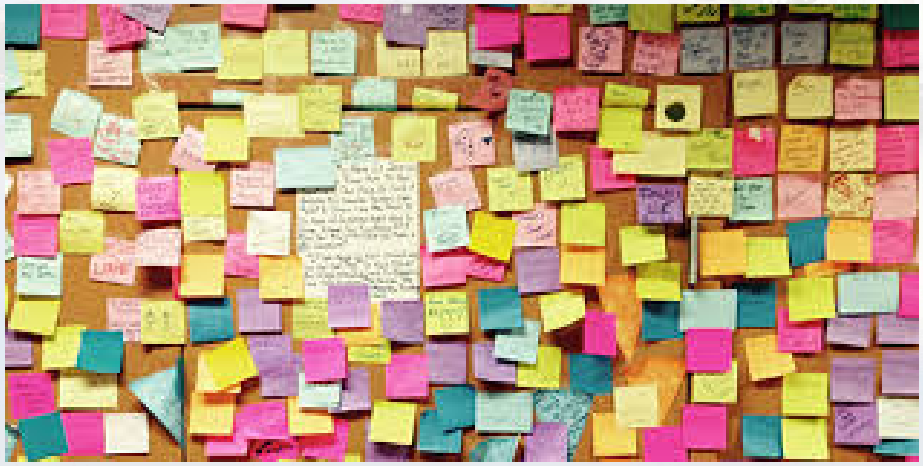
Step 3: Design

- **Revisit goal:** *How might we increase attendance at initial job club sessions by 20%?*
- **Agency levers:** Where does or could the agency interact with clients to shape behavior?
- **Address specific bottlenecks:** Use EAST Framework, placemat examples
  - Look to past BE research and everyday marketing for inspiration
- **Prototype** and seek **user feedback** prior to launch

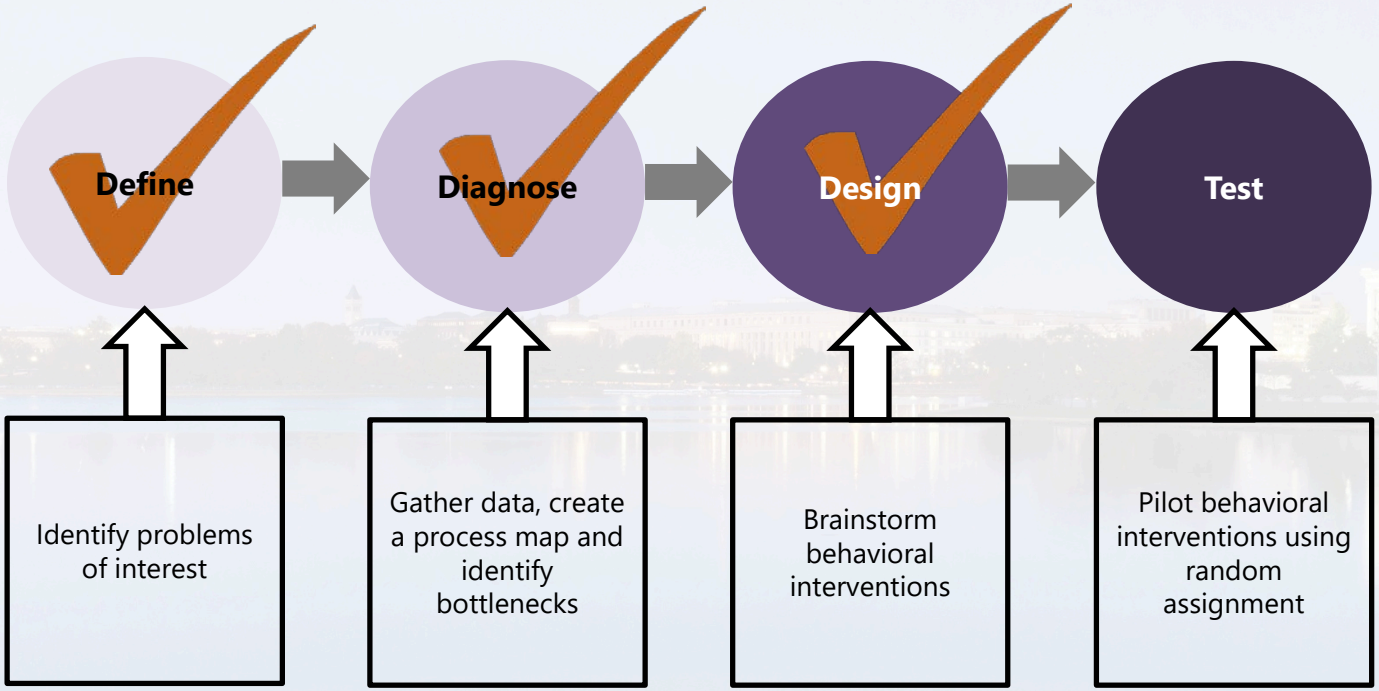
Small Group Activity: What are your design ideas?

- How might we increase attendance at initial job club sessions by 10 percentage points?
- How can we make the process:
  - Easier?
  - More Attractive?
  - More Social?
  - More Timely?



Share Out
(1-2 ideas/group)

Wrapping Up



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