Regions VI and VIII TANF Data Reporting and Analysis Series
Webinar #3: Using Research to Inform Practice
Thursday, September 12, 2013

Speakers: Brendan Kelly, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE); Michelle Derr, Mathematica Policy Research; Kinsey Dinan, New York City (NYC) Human Resources Administration

Moderator: James Butler, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (OFA)

Content: Overview of the structure of and opportunities available through the three components of the Administration for Children and Families, OPRE's, Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium (FSSRC) including the Scholar's Network, Data Center, and Project AWESOME. This Webinar also included a discussion of how State and local program administrators can work with in-house researchers to gain insight into the impact of their programming.

WELCOME

[Operator] At this time I'd like to turn the conference over to Mr. James Butler, Family Assistance Program Specialist at OFA. Please go ahead, sir.

[James Butler] Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Region VI and VIII TANF Data Reporting and Analysis Webinar Series. This is the third of four and maybe five, Webinars in the series sponsored by Regions VI and VIII under the great leadership of our TANF Regional Program Manager, Larry Brendel, for Region VI who is also Acting TANF Regional Program Manager for Region VIII. Both regions worked together in pulling this Webinar together to introduce TANF staff and other stakeholders to the structure, as well as the opportunities available through OPRE and the Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium, better known as FSSRC. To support you and your continued growth in the work you do, we have Michelle Derr from Mathematica Policy Research, and Brendan Kelly from OPRE who will describe the three components of the FSSRC: the Scholars Network, Data Center, and Project AWESOME. We also have Kinsey Dinan, who is the Deputy Director of NYC Human Resources Administration, Office of Evaluation and Research, who will discuss how State and local program administrators can work with in-house researchers to gain insight into the impact of their programming and the relative effectiveness of different models and approaches.

Q&A INFORMATION

[James Butler] We will have a verbal Q&A session at the end of the presentation, but we also encourage you to submit any questions online that you have throughout the duration of the Webinar. To submit a question online, find the "Question and Answer" pod designated by the letters "Q&A" in the bottom right portion of your screen. Type your question into the open field at the bottom and then click "Send" or you can press "Enter." You will receive an automatic reply thanking you for your question and your question will be forwarded to the Moderator. To make the Webinar a little more interactive, our presenters may ask you questions during their presentations. You can submit your answers to those questions by using the "Chat" pod located above the "Q&A" pod. Following the presentation, we will ask you to respond to a short evaluation and the evaluation will be presented at the end of the Webinar, so please wait to be redirected to the web site. If you have to leave before the end of the presentation, we will send out an email with a link to the survey. Your feedback is very important to us. It helps us shape our delivery of

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technical assistance. All of the materials and presentations for today's Webinar will be posted on the Welfare Peer TA Network web site, and will be sent directly to you within a few weeks.

USING RESEARCH TO INFORM PRACTICE: ACF'S FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND STABILITY RESEARCH CONSORTIUM (FSSRC)

[James Butler] So to tell you a little bit about today's speakers, we have Michelle Derr, who is Senior Researcher at Mathematica Policy Research. She has more than 15 years of experience studying employment and training programs for TANF recipients and other disadvantaged populations. She has a great passion for producing high-quality research that becomes quite useful to TANF policy makers and program administrators. Brendan Kelly is Senior Social Science Research Analyst and the Dissemination Team Leader in OPRE. Brendan's research focuses on improving public policies for low-income children and their families. He currently serves as the Federal Project Lead for the ACF's Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency Demonstrations and Evaluations, better known as ISIS, and is co-lead on ACF's new research portfolio in behavioral economics, better known as BIAS. We also have Kinsey Dinan who is the Deputy Director of the New York City Human Resources Administration, Office of Evaluation and Research. Through program evaluations, primary research and policy analysis, she informs agency programming related to cash assistance, SNAP, child support and other areas. Prior to joining HRA, she was the Senior Policy Associate at Columbia University's National Center for Children and Poverty, working in collaboration with State policy makers, administrators, and researchers to improve support for low-income working families. So, without further ado, I will now turn the platform over to Brendan Kelly, who will then be followed by Kinsey Dinan.

[Brendan Kelly] Thanks, James. I should say thank you to not just James and Larry, but our friends at and colleagues in OFA for allowing us the opportunity to present on this Webinar. Michelle and her colleague, Alicia Meckstroth, actually, I think, are talking to all of the Regions and are presenting at almost all of the Regional meetings over the next couple of weeks and for those folks who may have been at the NAWRS conference in Chicago just a few weeks ago, we did this presentation there and it's always nice to work and collaborate with our friends in OFA. So, thanks for the opportunity.

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

[Brendan Kelly] So, first, we want to start with a bit of the context and motivations for a relatively new project that OPRE has launched, which we call the Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium. So this won't be new to many folks on the phone, but just to set it up, since welfare reform there have been a number of declines in three key areas related to welfare research, evaluation, and data, including reductions in State and local research capacity, reductions in State-generated and State and local sponsors, program evaluation, but also a commensurate, really, decline in academic interest in TANF program operations and the use of TANF administrative and program evaluation data. This is all sort of basically been going on since about 1996 or so with the passage of PRWORA. At the same time, it's important to keep in mind that the folks in the welfare research and evaluation and data also have been leaders in the field, and there have been a number of advances or what we call sort of "headwinds," or no wait, these are the "tailwinds," right? Helping to push things forward. In particular, you know, in this field the use of random assignment evaluations, particularly around welfare reform, as a gold standard methodology has been sort of widely adopted and accepted. A lot of places have made advances in data and computing power, which make it much, much easier to run and to do more complex analyses. At the

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same time, graduate training in public policy programs, social work programs, and other training programs in the field, have really provided new graduates and those entering the field with much more analytic capacity to be able to delve into some of the research questions that are important with more complexity and nuance.

THE FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND STABILITY RESEARCH CONSORTIUM (FSSRC) – THE RESPONSE

[Brendan Kelly] With that as the context, we at OPRE were really motivated to try and address some of the shortcomings and build off some of the chief advantages that we have in this field. One of the things that occurred to us is that it wouldn't be so simple to launch one enterprise. That it really required a unified, strategic, multi-component approach that had a variety of funding mechanisms, that relied on the diversity of TANF programs across the country, across the Regions, in a variety of States and localities, and it was based more on a notion about TANF and TANF programs and TANF research as being a network, rather than sort of a silo, if you will, of programs and component parts. So, to that end, we came up with what we call the Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium, and we really like the term of a "consortium" because it really is, as this definition lays out, an association of a number of individuals and organizations who are all brought together with the objective of engaging in a variety of common activities and toward this common goal of improving really, the applied aspects of family self-sufficiency and TANF research. Under the umbrella of the Consortium, are three sort of component parts, and Michelle will describe these in more detail, and provide you with a nice graphic that illustrates them, but the three components under the Consortium are the Advancing Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research Project, which we colloquially call Project AWESOME; the Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Scholars Network, which we call the Scholars Network; and then the Data Center for Family Self-Sufficiency. I'm going to turn it over to Michelle now to describe each one of those three parts.

PROJECT AWESOME

[Michelle Derr] Great. Thanks, Brendan, and thanks to – sorry, I'm just getting a little bit of a reverb on my phone – but thanks to the Regional offices and OFA for inviting us to participate in this and the way I see it is, this is really about creating a buzz, that this is still in its early stages of rolling out and we want to get as much information as we can to you, but also to get feedback from you because we are in the formative stages. And not only now, but along the way. So, that's really kind of what the purpose of this presentation is. It's not only to give you information, but also to get information back from you through this call or afterwards. So let me just talk a little bit about Project AWESOME. As Brendan mentioned, we've been up and running for about a year now and in the planning stages. For those of you who don't know much about Mathematica Policy Research, it's a large research organization and we have a wealth of internal resources, not only researchers who are very strong substantively across a variety of different areas, but also very strong in research methodology. So, in-house there's a lot of resources and then we're also extremely well-connected to other researchers in other States, regions, and other research organizations. So those connections can help draw in resources to help you, as well as the Consortium really and to strengthen it. So, I just want to introduce a little bit of the project team. It's myself, I'm the Project Director for it, Alicia Meckstroth, who is also a Senior Researcher, and then Matt Stagner, who is a Senior Fellow that recently joined Mathematica and he's very well-known and well-respected and just exceptional at getting this kind of information. So what is Project AWESOME? What I see Project AWESOME as, is really the glue that holds this Consortium together. We are that information hub. We'll do things like respond to rapid research and policy needs to get information quickly. We'll support and coordinate collaboration between the research communities, between the practice community, and also to create those ties between each of you, so for example, if someone in Iowa is working on a project and

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has some experience in an area, but has some questions on performance management or something like that, then we can maybe connect them with somebody else that we know of in the community that is doing similar work, so you're not reinventing the wheel. I think that one of the goals of Project AWESOME and of the Consortium is to help States and localities to produce and to use good quality research. And then also to create, again, those networks, those peer-to-peer learning exchanges. Alright, so next slide, Brendan.

FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY DATA CENTER

[Michelle Derr] So the second component is the Family Self-Sufficiency Data Center. And both the Data Center and the Scholars Network, they are grantees that are going to be announced any day now. But they haven't been announced, but we know who they are. So far, and I think that people will be pleased to know once this information is released. The Data Center will be an academic institution that will be a resource to States and localities to help with on-going data kinds of issues. So, it's really a hub for the development of State and institutional capacity and potential activities that they may do. For example, an assessment of State needs -- State and local needs in the field. They may coordinate data agreements so that you're not reinventing the wheel. They may also provide some technical assistance and ideas around data -- improvements in data quality. So, again, they're in the formative stages, they have not yet been awarded, so once they're up and running, then we'll know a little bit more, as it kind of rolls out, about what kinds of things that they'll do. But again, this is going to be a resource -- it's funded for at least one year and up to multiple years so it will be an on-going resource that may be available to you.

FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY RESEARCH SCHOLARS NETWORK

[Michelle Derr] And now the third component, the third leg of the wheel, or leg of the stool in the Consortium, is the Family Self-Sufficiency Research Scholars Network. And these are grants, again, that should be announced any day now to principal investigators at university-based organizations. And these scholars will work independently on projects that are related to family self-sufficiency and stability, but they will also over time work on group initiatives. So they're funded at the base year for one year, but we anticipate funding them for multiple years so that these contracts carry out, those are option years, so they're in kind of place for a long period of time and really able to kind of generate a new energy within the field of family self-sufficiency and stability networks. Again, they'll work independently on projects but they may also do group initiatives. So as States are struggling with different research questions and have different research needs, that may be an opportunity to be able to link some of the scholars to the States in terms of doing that kind of research -- potentially doing some research. Some of the topics that they cover will be more broad than TANF. They'll cover -- so it's not just on TANF-related issues, but more broadly on family self-sufficiency and stability and it's also multi-disciplinary, so you have researchers who are in academic institutions that are in social work, are in public policy, that are in psychology, but are in different fields that brings together this collective cross-training in different disciplines that will be represented. So that is the -- so, next slide, Brendan.

FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND STABILITY RESEARCH CONSORTIUM (FSSRC)

[Michelle Derr] So collectively these three components, Scholars Network, the Data Center, and Project AWESOME, will work together as part of the Consortium and then together they will be organized under representatives from each of these that will join together and form what's called a "steering committee." And this is a draft diagram -- this triangle -- that really illustrates what we envision that the Consortium will do. Again, it's in the early formative stages and some of these things may change a little bit, but the

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main goal for us -- this is a starting place, but the main goal for us, and me particularly, under Project AWESOME, is to make sure that the resources that are available to the Consortium are accessible to you, are provided to you in an efficient way so it's a good use of your time if you participate in these activities or access these activities, and that they are effective, that they are useful to you in terms of helping you do your job more effectively. So, Brendan, you're up.

COLLECTIVELY, WHAT WILL THE CONSORTIUM DO?

[Brendan Kelly] Thanks. So I want to make one point which I don't think I made clearly -- which is that in designing the Consortium, in addition to looking at the existing landscape of TANF and family self-sufficiency programs, we also looked at the existing landscape of what research and TA organizations and enterprises are already underway and how the Consortium and its component parts could really complement, rather than compete with any of those existing activities or resources, and how they could be used to leverage the on-going activities like this Webinar series, like the Welfare Peer TA network, like the Self- Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse that OPRE has sponsored, and collectively then sort of fill in some of the gaps. So the Consortium, while it is a new enterprise and effort, it's really one that should be seen as one that's sort of complimentary to what's already on-going and existing. And to that end, we do want to supplement State and local research capacity to stimulate interest by the academy in TANF and family self-sufficiency programs, particularly with the more applied rather than more academic bent, and to facilitate partnerships, and to that end, you know, applied research requires strong research partnerships between those in the field and the research network. So, collectively we hope that the various components of the Consortium will provide a variety of institutional mechanisms to allow us to have both a sense of stability and long-term investment, but also the ability to respond and we say sort of to be nimble to respond to research opportunities that naturally arise.

TIMELINE

[Brendan Kelly] As Michelle noted earlier, we are just now sort of in the formative stages. Project AWESOME began last year and we've done a number of things, including sponsoring a research academy at the National Association of Welfare Research and Statistics Conference that was recently held in Chicago. As Michelle noted, the Scholars Network grants and the Data Center grants will be announced -- as you all know, everything gets funds at the end of September -- so Michelle is correct when she says any day now, but no later than September 30th. And then we'll start with our initial Steering Committee meetings in October and really, from now on, we really do hope that folks will see the Consortium as an opportunity to engage with me and Michelle and with the other members of the Network and the Data Center to really address some of the pressing research and evaluation needs that are out in the field. To that end, I think we're lucky to have Kinsey with us, because Kinsey and her team in New York have really been battling against some of the headwinds and are an example of what I think some of the activities that we are hoping to undertake as part of the Consortium can be like. So, I'll turn it over to Kinsey.

WHY ENGAGE? A LOCAL AGENCY PERSPECTIVE…

[Kinsey Dinan] Hi. I want to start by saying thank you to Michelle and Brendan and our OFA hosts for inviting me be a part of this session. I'm really happy to have the opportunity here to talk about what I see as the value of engaging with these efforts that Brendan and Michelle have just described. So as was mentioned, I work in the Office of Evaluation and Research in New York City's social service agency [the Human Resources Administration; HRA]. And the ultimate goal of my office and my work is promoting improved policies and programs at HRA through evidence-based decision-making—something that's

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obviously always important and increasingly important in restrictive fiscal times. So I'm going to keep my eyes on my screen, but I want to hit on three points and then can elaborate in Q&A. First, I strongly believe -- and I may be biased -- but I strongly believe that internal research and evaluation capacity can greatly enhance agency operations and I'll talk a little about why I think that's the case. Second, I want to talk about some of the prerequisites for developing high-quality internal research capacity at a State or local agency and then finally, I'll end with a few thoughts from my perspective about the role the Research Consortium can play in making this happen.

1. IN-HOUSE RESEARCH CAN IMPROVE OPERATIONS

[Kinsey Dinan] So first, you know, why have an internal research and evaluation team when there are so many high-quality research firms and university-based researchers out there who can do the work? Clearly, at HRA and elsewhere, we find that external researchers play a really critical role in helping us figure out what works and for example, if you want to conduct a large-scale, multi-site demonstration program across the U.S. you are certainly going to need to engage one or more organizations like Mathematica and its peers to conduct the study. But internal research capacity offers a number of distinct advantages to agencies. One is that easy access to administrative data and to staff and clients for the purpose of collecting primary data without lengthy agreement and approval processes. So administrative data analysis, surveys, interviews, observations, and focus groups can be conducted without MOU's and contracts and so on. Second, and what's more important even, is the familiarity that in-house staff can develop regarding agency programs and the structure and contents and what I'll call "quirks" of agency administrative data. We all know that there's a large learning curve involved in understanding the details of how a program actually operates on the ground and understanding the ins and outs of administrative data and the relationship between those data and the operations that they are developed to support. Without this knowledge, it can be easy to miss or misunderstand important aspects of the program you're studying and its results. And in addition, in-house researchers are more able to be responsive to administrators' timelines. They can attend internal program and planning meetings on a regular basis and inform program reporting and operations in real-time.

1. IMPROVE OPERATIONS (CONT.): INTERNAL RESEARCH STAFF ARE THUS UNIQUELY POSITIONED

[Kinsey Dinan] As a result of these advantages, in-house researchers offer a cost-effective way for agencies to develop evidence on the effectiveness of their programs and programmatic approaches. In-house researchers are uniquely positioned to evaluate the impact of a wider range of agency actions. Not only new, large pilot programs, but also small changes to procedures when the cost and complexity of contracting out to an external firm would be unfeasible. Internal researchers also have a significant advantage in terms of conducting process or implementation evaluations that are detailed and timely enough to improve implementation on a real-time basis. And again, given their access and understanding of administrative data; their ability to quickly collect new data on clients, programs, and staff; and their familiarity with program operations—as well as their working relationship with administrators in the agency—this makes internal researchers far better placed than researchers outside the agency to inform new policy and program development: to conduct research on what's going on now that can really inform the decision-making as promising ideas are being developed.

1. IMPROVE OPERATIONS (CONT.): EXAMPLES FROM NYC HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION

[Kinsey Dinan] To give you a sense of the types of research and evaluation activities that in-house staff can conduct, I just want to throw out a few examples of recent or on-going efforts in my agency. These

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include: a random assignment evaluation of an alternate process for establishing child support orders for children on cash assistance; a quasi-experimental evaluation comparing public- to private-sector subsidized jobs programs for cash assistance clients, using a statistical technique called propensity score matching to control for differences between clients in the two tracks; a wide range of efforts involving client surveys, staff surveys, client-staff observations, and analysis of administrative data to inform our agency's transition toward a self-directed service model for the delivery of SNAP benefits; and client focus groups, which we conduct as part of evaluation efforts to better understand the program outcomes that we're seeing, and that we conduct with different client populations simply to better understand their perspective and enhance our communication efforts with our populations.

2. DEVELOPING AND LEVERAGING RESEARCH CAPACITY

[Kinsey Dinan] So moving on to how you build internal research capacity. First, I have to emphasize that the support of agency leadership including senior program area staff is really critical. And I mention this first because without that, these next two bullets really become very unlikely. Second, competent and trained research and evaluation staff are very important, as is developing a culture of collaboration between administrators and researchers. So there are a lot of challenges even with in-house staff, to implement rigorous research and to do it consistently and effectively. There are time constraints, there are differences in orientation and perspectives between administrators and researchers, and various competing priorities. So a real culture of collaboration which is supported by that agency -- commitment from the leadership is very important. And then a final condition I want to emphasize that is perhaps less obvious, but has become increasingly clear to me in my time working as an internal evaluator and researcher in a local agency, is the need for connections to others in the field. So you have people to bounce ideas off of, so that you have places to go for technical assistance, to understand a certain result, or for ideas about how to approach a certain problem and learn from others' experiences regarding research and methods and strategies and techniques. And given that the audience for in-house research is primarily or even often exclusively internal, building those connections can sometimes be challenging.

3. THE RESEARCH CONSORTIUM CAN HELP

[Kinsey Dinan] And that brings me to the Research Consortium, which I think promises to be very helpful in all of these areas. The Research Consortium activities and goals that Michelle and Brendan described will serve to: really highlight and articulate the value of in-house research and evaluation capacity; provide technical assistance and other support from resources for rigorous in-house agency research; and facilitate information sharing among state and local agency researchers. And on that, I want to end with a plug for one particular initiative that's been mentioned on the call that the Consortium is already supporting and that's the Research Academy of NAWRS, which is the National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics, an association of State and local social service agency researchers, analysts, administrators, and others that work in the field.

NAWRS RESEARCH ACADEMY

[Kinsey Dinan] The NAWRS Research Academy was launched at the 2012 annual NAWRS workshop in Baltimore and is focused precisely on enhancing agency capacity to use rigorous research methods and especially to use small-scale random assignment experiments to improve and document program effectiveness. The Research Academy connects researchers from Federal, State and local government together with other research and evaluation experts, like Michelle. It provides panels, workshops, speakers at the annual NAWRS conference, Webinars and other virtual events throughout the year, and it

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links people through a Google group that serves as a forum for discussion and information sharing. We have 80-some members now, about half from State and local government, and then the rest from university-based researchers and from Federal government and from private research firms. I hope that you will encourage staff from your agencies to join as well. So, I have the link here or you can feel free to just contact me directly.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Kinsey Dinan] I think that ends my comments. I really look forward to the conversation.

[James Butler] Thanks, everyone. So at this time we invite you to submit questions for our presenters through the Adobe Connect System's Q&A pod. It's located on the bottom right-hand side of your screen. If you have not done so during the presentation, the operator will also explain how to ask questions verbally using your phone system. Aaron, if you could give a brief explanation of how they can do that, please?

[Operator] Certainly, sir. Ladies and gentlemen, if you would like to ask questions, please signal by pressing "*1" on your telephone keypad. If using a speaker phone, please make sure your mute function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Again, that's "*1" over the phones today. As reminder, it's "*1" to ask a question. And there are no phone questions at this time.

[Stephanie Vester, ICF International] And we have no questions online at this time.

[Brendan Kelly] So, we had a couple of questions that we thought might be useful to stimulate some discussion and to get folks' feedback on. The first one is if there are any topics, problems, or current challenges that folks are struggling with that the Research Consortium might be a useful tool to help come up with some creative solutions for? And again, I'm assuming if you want to respond, you have to press the "*1."

[Operator] And we do have a question or comment over the phone. We'll take Eileen Friedman with OFA. Region III.

[Eileen Friedman] Hi. I was wondering if you can give -- this is for Kinsey -- any more information on the random assignments you're doing for processing child support orders.

[Kinsey Dinan] Sure. So, obviously, like all other agencies we have a mandate and an effort to establish child support orders for children on cash assistance. And what we find is that there are a number of challenges, obviously, and even once we've located the non-custodial parent and we have a judicial system here and we've sent a court summons to bring the person to court, we find in a large number of cases, more than half, the non-custodial parent does not appear in court and then getting an order is very difficult. It requires personal service by the Sheriff, which in the majority of cases, is unsuccessful. And cases are therefore dismissed. So there are a lot of strategies that our child support agency is engaging in to try to address different aspects of this problem. One strategy was to try to address the fear and aversion regarding court that we hear expressed so many times by the non-custodial parents, which are typically fathers. And so, this alternate process provides an opportunity for non-custodial parents to draft their child support agreement and sign it at a child support office and never step foot in a courtroom. And so, when this was initially discussed, the agency really wanted to evaluate it, see if it was effective, and at first they were a little bit hesitant to do a random assignment because they wanted to get as many cases

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as possible into this path -- they wanted to give an invitation, basically, to everybody. But as we talked about it, it was clear that they really weren't going to be able to figure out whether it was successful, doing it that way. There wasn't a good enough system for tracking court outcomes and appearances in court and linking them back to the kind of case it was – only certain cases are eligible for the child support office agreement process, cases that don't involve interstate, for example, or prison. And so it's just going to be very difficult.

So we ended up creating a random assignment experiment -- the random assignment part turned out to be a very simple addition to what otherwise is a rather complex pilot -- which are simply that after cases are identified as eligible for this, 40 percent -- it was to be half, we reduced to 40 to give a little bit more into the process. So 40 percent are put into a control group and don't get the invitation to customer service. Simply the normal thing, they just get the court summons and the other 60 percent get the invitation to the customer service center. And so, through that, which started just over two years ago, the process takes a long time, so we're now writing up results on the first year of referrals. We've been able to see what proportion of people come into the office, whether they end up signing an agreement, which proportion of those people end up going to court, and whether they are able to complete the process, but then also be able to compare the ultimate outcomes of getting agreement and complying with the agreement between the two groups. So it's definitely provided information that would have been -- wouldn't have been clear through complete tracking of program operations.

[Eileen Friedman] Thank you. I think that's a good example, too, of doing research on your own programs. Thank you.

[Kinsey Dinan] Oh, thank you.

[Michelle Derr] And the whole point of -- you know, with projects -- with the Consortium, is that your in-house researchers may not be as sophisticated as Kinsey and the rest of the staff at HRA. But the goal is to work with your staff to increase capacity, to move them up a notch in terms of being able to conduct various research studies.

[Operator] So we have no further questions or comments over the phone at this time? We did just receive another one from Eileen Friedman? We'll go back to you.

[Eileen Friedman] Sorry about that. Michelle, so are you saying that your local -- like New York City or any other agency that might want to take on this research doesn't have to be as sophisticated as validated research; it could be more anecdotal?

[Michelle Derr] It can be -- I mean, the point is, some states and localities just need somebody to talk it through and to figure out what can they do in terms of the most rigorous design given the research question. And oftentimes, you know, States and localities are working in isolation or they're reactionary to the latest, you know, request from their legislature. So this is an opportunity for them to step out of that kind of rat-race and work with the administrators to say, "What questions are we really interested in answering, and how can we get support around thinking about what's the best design to do that?" And so at this point, like Brendan said, it's in the formative stages, so we need information about what you guys need. So don't hesitate to email me, call me, and just let me know what you're doing and then we're going to catalogue that and figure out if I know somebody's doing something in Tennessee or in -- you know, a county in California that's similar to what you're doing, then we can make those connections and provide that support. Or connect you with somebody like Kinsey. So part of it is creating those networks

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to be able to get support from each other and then also, to get input and start to develop more formal kinds of technical assistance based on different States and localities' needs. But it won't work unless everybody comes to the table and lets their needs be known. So, again, keeping it accessible and useful at this point -- call me, email me, let's have a conversation so that we can get, through Project AWESOME, some of the needs out on the table and into the Consortium, so that we can get information and support back out to you guys.

[Brendan Kelly] And Eileen, this is Brendan. Let me -- let me piggyback a little bit off of what Michelle said by giving an example of a way that Project AWESOME could be useful. So, as folks on the phone all know, drug testing, and changing drug testing requirements is a hot topic across the country in a number of TANF programs, a number of States have changed their laws or their regulations around drug testing recently. Let's say that an enterprising State said, you know, "We're thinking   about this, but we're not sure if it's going to work. We're not actually sure whether or not if you impose drug testing rules on TANF clients, it will maybe divert some substance abuse folks into treatment or if it will harm folks who otherwise might need treatment and prevent them from getting on TANF and getting the treatment that they need?" So what we'd really like to do is to do a small experiment where maybe we either randomly assign some clients to the drug testing rule or we randomly assign some counties to imposing the drug testing rule and we randomly keep some others exempt from it. And we really want to do that, but we just don't have the capacity. We don't know who the researchers are that would be to be able to tap into that, but we're really interested in doing a research project around this new rule or law to find out what the effects are. Well that's a perfect place for someone to call up Michelle and to say exactly that. And to say, "Are there opportunities to connect me with Mathematica researchers or is there someone in the Research Scholars Network who would be interested in this? And, you know, our State has a lot of data, so the administrative data would be easy to see what the outcomes of this kind of an experiment would be and I'm happy to provide you with the MOU's and to do the legwork on getting those agreements. But I just need the researcher or the folks who would be willing to conduct and implement the experiment. Can you help me out with that?" That would be a perfect opportunity to tap into Project AWESOME and the resources in the Consortium to really take that policy change and not just make it a policy change, but make it a research opportunity as well.

[Eileen Friedman] And I think it's a great idea. I mean, I understand now where you're coming from, so you are really a good support for some of this research that might be going on or the State might want to do. I think it's terrific. Thank you.

[Michelle Derr] Absolutely. And it's not just for the researchers. Administrators may initiate that call or a researcher may initiate that call, but I'll probably pull in both together to say, "Okay, let's figure out what this looks like." Because I think that's how effective research gets done. So again, there's no stupid question in this, in this whole piece. And if you need a sounding board, you know, we can provide that. It doesn't take a lot of resources to do that.

[Eileen Friedman] I think that's great. Thank you.

[Brendan Kelly] I think one more example that might be helpful to folks. I know a lot of States right now are focused on implementing the Affordable Care Act and with the 90/10 money there's a lot out there that states are doing to change their data systems as part of the ACA. If someone were to say, "Wow, we'd really like to seize this moment and -- with the Affordable Care Act to not just improve our health care data, but across the safety-net for our data systems for low-income folks, but we really need some help." That's a perfect opportunity to tap into the Data Center grantees. They can provide a lot of

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technical assistance to folks who are interested in sort of making the most out of that -- that moment, and the existing emphasis that a State may be placing on that priority and getting a little bit more out of what you're already doing.

[Michelle Derr] I can't stress this enough that we are passionate about this topic. Brendan and I are definitely so invested and so excited about rolling this out. We've got other people that we're pulling in, like Kinsey, who's smart and passionate also and in the trenches. We're very committed to just doing everything we can to make sure that this works.

[Kinsey Dinan] And those of us in the trenches are very excited about it as well.

[Stephanie Vester, ICF International] Aaron, do we have any other questions over the phone?

[Operator] We do not have any other questions over the phone at this time.

[Stephanie Vester, ICF International] And we do not have any more online.

THANK YOU!

[James Butler] Thank you, Michelle, Brendan, and Kinsey. As I mentioned earlier, a transcript and audio recording will be made available for everyone within the coming weeks. Please be sure to fill out your evaluation survey that will -- that you'll see pop up as you exit the Webinar. And before we close, I'd like to turn the platform over to Larry Brendel, TANF Program Manager for Region VI with some closing remarks. Larry?

[Larry Brendel] Thank you, James. Good morning or good afternoon, depending on where you're listening to today's Webinar. Again, as James said, my name is Larry Brendel and I'm the TANF Program Manager in Region VI and also Acting Manager at this time in Region VIII and I certainly join James in hoping that today's Webinar has been useful and has given you some insight into OPRE's Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium, including an understanding of its three primary components. Particularly Project AWESOME, which will help States and local TANF agencies to produce and use high-quality research. I particularly want to thank our presenters, Michelle Derr from Mathematica, who certainly is always a pleasure to listen to and to work with, as well as Brendan Kelly, Senior Research Specialist and Project Director of this OPRE initiative, and I certainly want to thank Kinsey Dinan of New York, who has given us some practical approaches to connect to these program evaluations and research projects to more effectively do our work. On behalf of Regions VI and VIII, I want to thank all of you for taking time to participate on today's Webinar. Certainly thank you, James, for your help and finally, to our friends at ICF International for their on-going assistance and support. Just a little heads-up about our concluding Webinar in this series that we've had on data reporting, collection, and analysis. I think we will probably be exercising some flexibility in terms of date and content. First of all, in terms of date, I think we had indicated that we would do our final Webinar this fiscal year two weeks from today. However, there are some competing activities and demands for some of the TANF administrators and so we're looking at Monday the 23rd, which is the Monday from this coming Monday, for the final Webinar. So, that's part of it. And then content, as many of you probably know, today's Federal Register and also an accompanying Memorandum of Understanding that was released today talk about proposing revisions to the TANF financial data collection. The anticipated new form and the revised 196 would result in two basic changes to TANF quarterly financial reports. The first is to require respondents or State agencies to allocate annual expenditures among an expanded list of categories on the reporting form. These categories would better

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reflect the wide range of activities on which States are expending TANF funds. And then the second change would be to revise the accounting method used to report the expenditures made in a fiscal year and monitor cumulative expenditures by grant year award. Specifically effective in FY 2015, with each open grant year award, States would be required to report actual expenditures made in a fiscal year rather than updating cumulative totals using the new 196R. So, with that said, we thought it would be very timely and we are trying to nail down some OFA national experts in our DC office to roll out and share some of the details with you on that Webinar. And so we hope by the end of today we will have that nailed down and then we'll get back with ICFI and hopefully tomorrow or by latest, Monday, we will have an invitation to you and we will work with our Regional grants management folks here, but also if you can help us get the word out to your financial folks who work with the TANF programs to then register for this particular Webinar that we'll hold before the end of the fiscal year. So, with that said, please enjoy the rest of your day today and we're certainly looking forward to talking with you again in the very near future. Thank you.

[End.]