

Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project: Texas Incarcerated Non-custodial Parents

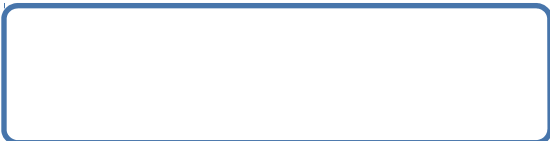
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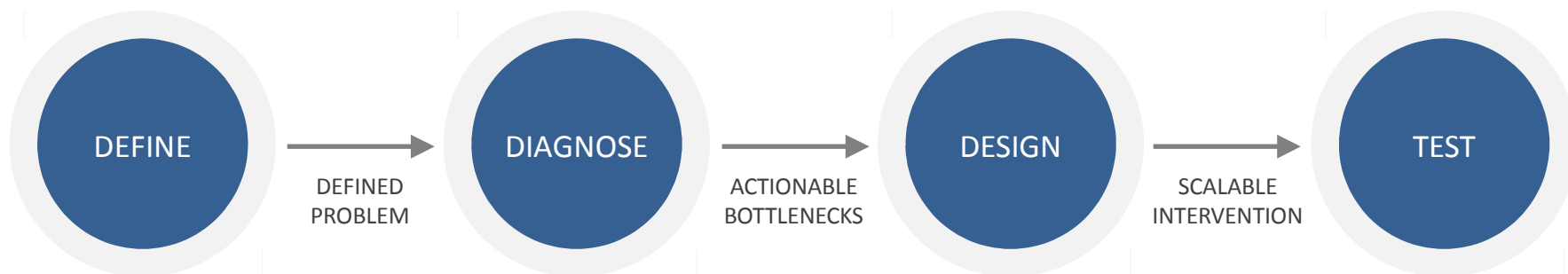
Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS): Overview

- BIAS seeks to answer: How can behavioral economics apply to human services policies and programs?
- Neoclassical economics (traditional) vs. Behavioral Economics:
 - Neoclassical Economics: well-informed; stable preferences; no problems with self-control; completely self-interested; good at making decisions that maximize well-being
 - Behavioral Economics: limited cognition; imperfect self-control; shifting preferences; procrastinate; choice overload; mental shortcuts; small factors matter
- Sponsored by ACF's OPRE

Overview of Incarcerated NCP Program



BIAS methodology



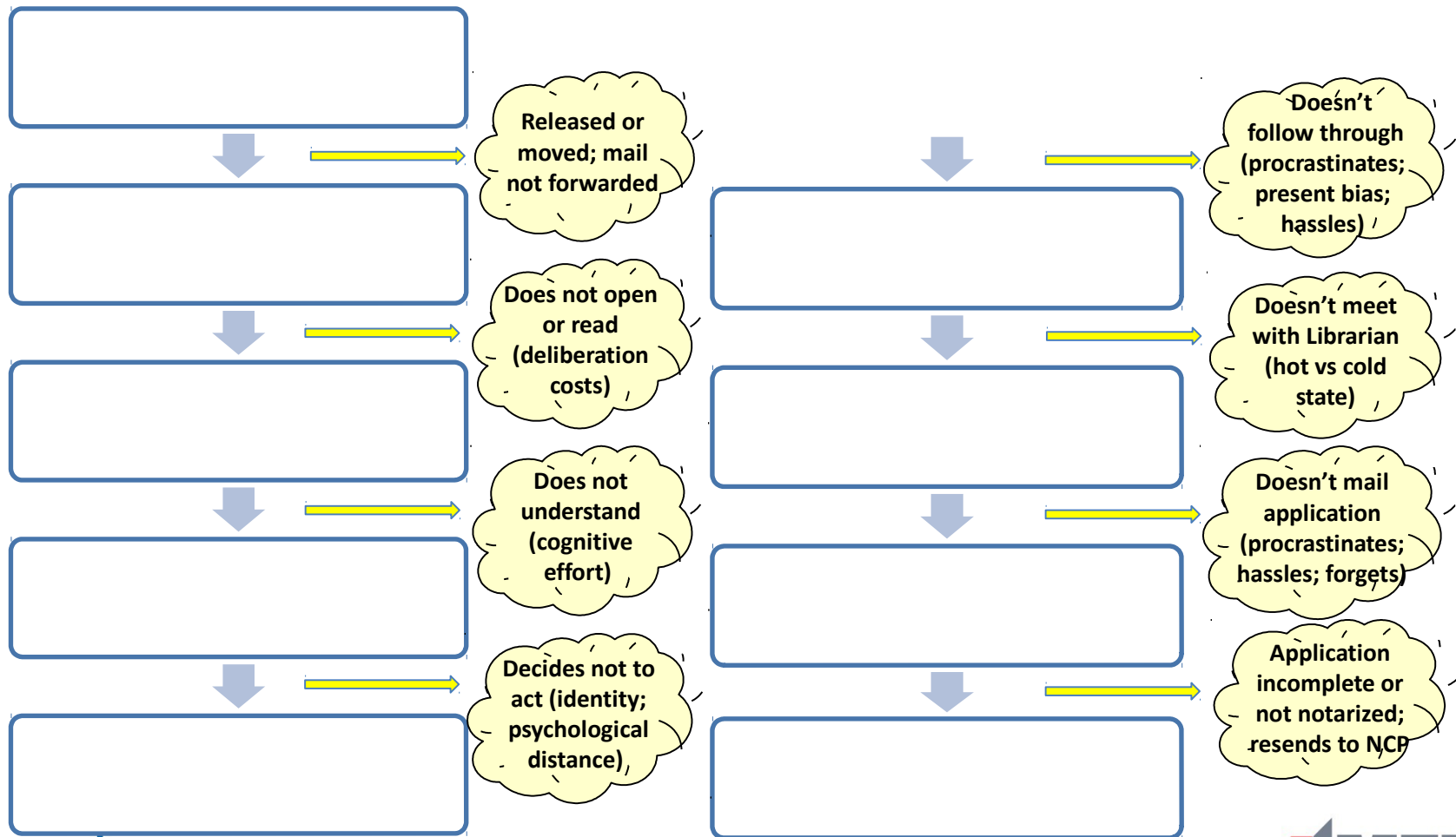
Step 1: Define Problem

- In 2011, OAG sent out 868 letters and received 266 responses (31%). Of these, 20% received modifications.
- Can the response to the program be improved with a behavioral intervention?

Step 2: Diagnose

- Data Collection Process
 - Collected materials, information about process
 - Informal conversations with prison staff in state prison
 - Analysis of management information data
- Some Key Takeaways
 - 7% of letters submitted to OAG are not notarized
 - Smaller facilities have higher response than larger
 - Average incarcerated parent owed over \$18,000 in arrears; monthly order averaged \$239
 - Annual interest rate of 6% is applied to all unpaid arrears

Incarcerated NCP Program Bottlenecks



Step 3: Design

- Sent teaser postcard: One week prior to the letter and application being sent
- Changes to letter:
 - Printed on blue paper
 - Simplified reading level
 - Removed the reference to the custodial parent
 - Inclusion of a checklist to support plan-making
- Changes to the application:
 - Pre-populated with information available to OAG
 - Wording changes to increase clarity
- Reminder Postcard to NCPs: Six weeks after letter had been sent to NCPs who had not responded

Step 4: Test

- Targeted Texas child support regions that had not yet received letters:
 - Abilene, Corpus Christi, Houston, Laredo, Lubbock, Paris, San Angelo, Tyler
- Developed list of 1,904 individuals eligible
 - At least one child under age of 18 on the child support case, at least one year left before paroled, no history of domestic or family violence
- Randomly assigned list, stratifying by state facility (105 facilities)

Test (cont'd)

- OAG tracking outcomes over 4 months for both groups:
 - Primary outcomes of interest: Application is submitted to the OAG; Application is forwarded to child support office for processing (rather than being sent back for more information)
 - Secondary outcomes: Child support order with downward modification; Average reduction in child support order amount
- Impact = difference between two groups' outcomes
- Subgroups of interest:
 - Type of facility (e.g., public prison, private prison, state jail, private state jail, transfer facility, or medical facility)
 - Prison size
 - Security classification or years of sentence

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