ACF’s Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium (FSSRC): Resources and Supports for Conducting and Using High Quality Research Studies

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Since welfare reform there has been a significant decline in 3 areas related to welfare research:
- State and local welfare and family self-sufficiency research capacity
- State-generated research and state-specific program evaluation
- 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
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
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
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 at the NAWRS Conference

- 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
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!
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