

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

Presentation at NAWRS

August 2014

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Presentation Goals

- **Introduce the Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium (FSSRC) and its three components to a broader audience**
- **Highlight findings from the Data Center's recent Needs Assessment as reinforcing the Consortium's work**
- **Showcase the resources available through the Scholars Network, Data Center, and the Advancing Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research project (a.k.a. "Project AWESOME")**
- **Discuss ongoing and potential collaboration between states/localities and the Consortium for conducting and using high-quality research**
- **Entice key stakeholders to engage with the Consortium's work**

Question for the Group

What do you hope to get from this session?

Introduction and Overview of the FSSRC

Context and Motivation for the Consortium

- **Decline/gap in welfare research among academicians, states, and localities**
- **Increased use of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to answer important causal questions**
- **Increased data and analytic power to be tapped for research purposes**

Core Components of the FSSRC

- **Scholars Network**
- **Data Center**
- **Advancing Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research Project (a.k.a. “Project AWESOME”)**

Collective Mission of the FSSRC

- **Promote the use of rigorous research**
- **Bolster state and local research capacity**
- **Facilitate research connections, collaboration, and partnerships**

Discussion

**What questions do you have about what
you've heard thus far?**

(Please write 2 or 3 questions on post-it notes.)

Data Center Needs Assessment

Research and program support needs

– Objective and methodology

- Obtain input from potential Data Center users & providers to learn how the Data Center can help meet needs
- Focus groups and interviews conducted between February and May 2014
- Solicited input from key stakeholders, N= 96 people

Interviews

- Public agency administrators
 - » Federal, state, and local levels
 - » Regionally and economically diverse
 - » Serving urban and rural populations
 - » State- and county-administered systems
 - » TANF and SNAP programs, also vocational rehabilitation, workforce services, etc
- Researchers and other data users (foundations, advocacy groups)

Focus groups

- Held in February 2014
- Members of the University of Chicago Advisory Council for the FSS Data Center project
- FSS Scholars

– Topics addressed

- Scope of FSS (programs and populations)
- Current use of data and research about FSS
- Data and assistance needed among the FSS data user community to inform TA strategy

Preliminary feedback

- **Broad scope of topics considered under the umbrella of “family self-sufficiency”**
- **Current data challenges:**
 - Access (esp. earnings and education)
 - Quality
 - Linking cross-program
 - Sharing
- **Data wants/needs:**
 - Client outcomes post-TANF
 - Client experience/outcomes cross-program
 - Comparisons with other states/localities
- **Technical assistance needs:**
 - Data analytics
 - Data management/quality
 - Linking across programs/states
 - Translating data to inform policy

Progress and Next Steps for the Data Center

Year 1

- **Completed the needs assessment**
- **Started to tailor the Orlin System data analytics tool to state and administrative data users**
- **Piloted the system on Illinois administrative data**
- **Identified potential state partners and data sources**

Year 2

- **Conduct outreach to:**
 - State and local government leaders
 - Researchers
- **Process incoming data:**
 - Improve their quality and usability through editing, record-linking, and other tasks as needed
 - Make data easier to understand and to use
- **Provide customized technical assistance and training to:**
 - Data providers
 - Users

Discussion

**What are your reactions to the feedback
from state and local research staff?**

(Identify 2 or 3 additional recommendations using post-it notes.)

Collaborative Opportunities: Prospective Partnerships between Scholars and Practitioners

Idea Generation and Evaluation

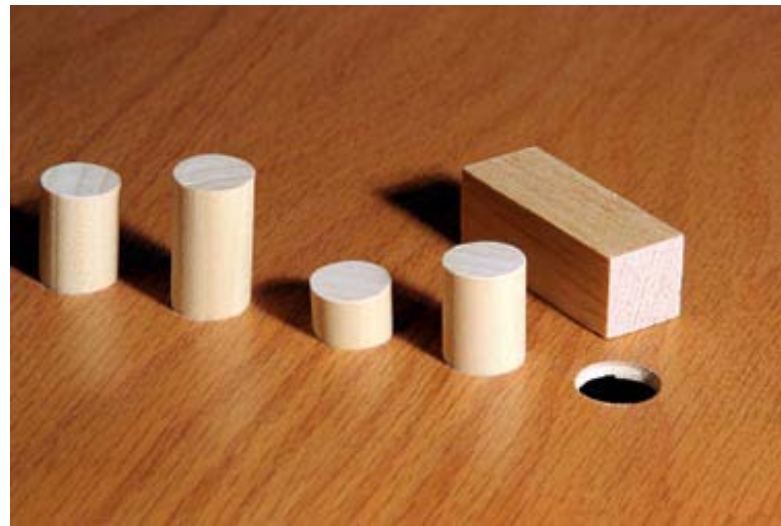
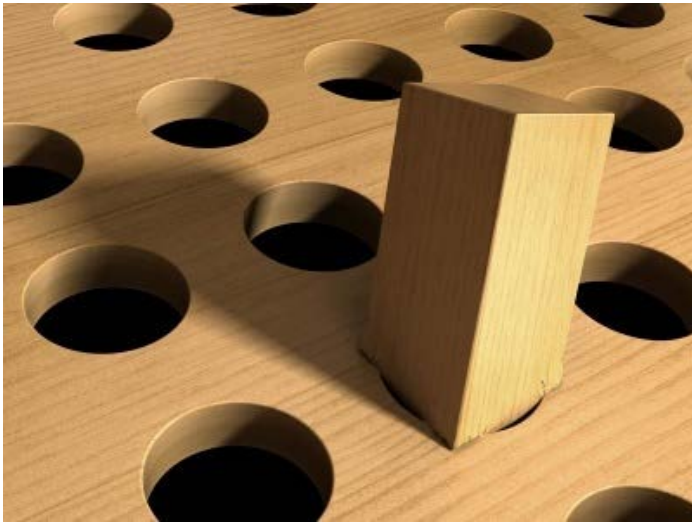
- **Seven Office of Planning Research and Evaluation Research Scholars were funded in 2013.**
- **Goal was to create a cadre of scholars who would be “idea generators” to provide solutions and innovations for promoting family stability and self-sufficiency.**
- **The scholars are:**
 - **Yumiko Aratani, Ph.D., Columbia University**
 - **Greg Fabiano, University at Buffalo, SUNY**
 - **Colleen Heflin, University of Missouri**
 - **Heather Hill, University of Chicago**
 - **Marybeth Mattingly, Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire**
 - **Jennifer Romich, University of Washington**
 - **Jodi Sandfort, Humphrey School, University of Minnesota**

Idea Generation and Evaluation

- **There are a range of areas of expertise and concentrations within the Scholars Network:**
 - **Child Care Subsidy Receipt and Child Care Stability**
 - **Engaging and Retaining Fathers in Interventions to Promote Family Stability**
 - **Family Stability and Material Hardship**
 - **Promoting Economic Stability Amidst Precarious Employment and Complex Family Structure**
 - **Understanding Family Stability and the Intergenerational Implications of Work across Place**
 - **Income Stability of Families Involved with the Child Welfare System**
 - **Studying Family Self-Sufficiency Program and Policy Implementation: A Multi-Level Approach**

Scholar Network Goals

- **Complete individual projects with local, regional, state, and national policy-makers and policy-implementers.**
- **Collaborate on shared projects to promote innovation and generalizability of projects.**
- **Cultivate research opportunities with partners that utilize rigorous designs.**
- **Scholars aim to engage state and local stakeholders in research partnerships to both:**
 - **Answer and assess solutions for short-term/local goals**
 - **Inform policy and practice**



Scholars Network Goals (Cont).

- **Use research to promote evidence-informed practice.**
- **Leverage partnerships with stakeholders to develop novel and ecologically valid research questions.**
- **Support states/localities in efforts to become better implementers of rigorous research methods.**

Different Questions, Different Methods

- **Descriptive, Observational Research**
 - **Cross-sectional and longitudinal**
- **Archival and Secondary Analyses**
- **Single-case designs**
- **Randomized, controlled trials**
- **Cluster or Partial-Cluster Randomized trials**
- **Regression Discontinuity Designs**
- **Novel innovations to answer novel questions (e.g., adaptive designs)**

- **Designs should match the research questions.**
- **Measures should be appropriate for the design and the question.**

Foundational Role of Partnerships in Research

- **Early Relationship Development**
 - **Assure Complementarity and Mutual Support**
 - **Expand Collaborative Relationships to Include all Stakeholders**
 - **Adjust Research Infrastructure and Staffing as Needed**
 - **Collaborative Participant Recruitment**
 - **Maximize Implementation Support (Yet Ensure Procedures are Sustainable)**
 - **Collaborative Dissemination of Findings**
-
- **Barriers to Effective Collaboration can occur in any one of these levels.**

Potential Advantages and Synergies

- **Ensure policies, interventions, and assessments have practical relevance.**
- **Reduce time between innovation, studies of efficacy, and implementation.**
- **Promote culture of continuous, systematic monitoring of progress.**
- **Cultivate relationships that include conversations to inform future work and collaborations.**
- **Better serve the children, adults, families, and others who are the targets of policy and intervention.**
- **Support the staff and individuals charged with implementing policy and intervention.**



Discussion

What topics relating to family self-sufficiency and stability are of high interest to states and localities?

What advice do you have for Greg and the other Scholars regarding working with states and localities on research projects?

The Consortium as a Resource

Integrated Program and Research TA

- **Complementing deep program expertise with the best and most recent research from the field to support TANF/program administrators**

Opportunistic Experiments

- **Leveraging rigorous research methods and existing data resources to answer short-term questions about the effects of a planned intervention or policy action**
- **Examples:**
 - **Colorado**
 - **Washington**
 - **Minnesota**

Discussion

How do the three components of the FSSRC work to address states' and localities' needs?

For More Information

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