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Child Support Grants: Creating Alphabet Soup or Building Evidence for More Efficient Child Support Services?

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How Many Letters of the Alphabet Can We Use?

AV = State Access and Visitation Grants

BICS = Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services

CSPED = National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration

PJAC = Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt Demonstration

PTOC = Parenting Time Orders for Children Pilot Program

TIG = Tribal Innovations Grant

XRQZM = ?



Planting Seeds:

- Broad priority area(s)
- Single or multiple sites
- Program models proposed by states/tribes
- Individual site evaluators
- Varied evaluation models

Building Evidence:

- Focused priority area(s)
- Multiple sites
- Similar/comparable program models
- Single national evaluator
- Rigorous evaluation model



“A machine for jumping to conclusions”

Daniel Kahneman (Noble Prize – Economics)



How Do You Know If It's a Best Practice?



Randomized Control Trial Study = Gold Standard?

“Parachute Use to Prevent Death and Major Trauma Related to Gravitational Challenge:
A Systematic Review”

- Conclusion: Parachutes appear to reduce the risk of injury from gravitational challenge, but their effectiveness has not been proven in randomized control trial studies.



Federal Child Support Grants

- Discretionary Grants (competitive)
- Mandatory Grants
 - noncompetitive,
 - formula set by statute,
 - e.g., IV-D funding, Access and Visitation Grants



What Are OCSE's Discretionary Funding Authorities?

- Section 1115(a) of the Social Security Act
 - authorizes experimental, pilot, or demonstration projects that are likely to assist in promoting the objectives of Part D of Title IV.
- Section 452(j) of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. §652(j)
 - authorizes information dissemination and technical assistance to states, training to improve child support programs, and research, demonstration, and special projects of regional or national significance relating to the operation of state child support programs.

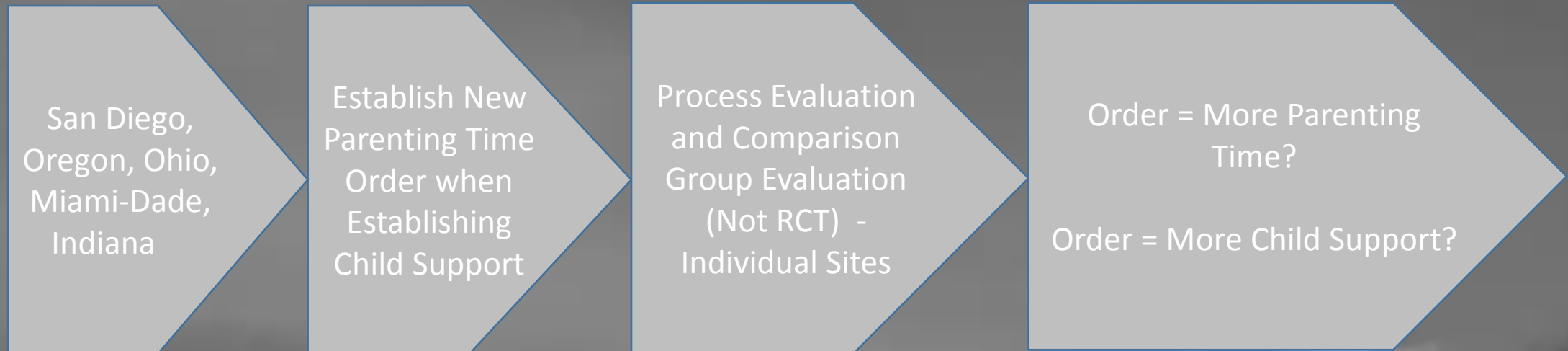


From Statute to Grants

1. Determine Priorities and Strategies
2. Draft a Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)
3. Publish FOA and Accept Applications
4. Independent Review and Rank Applications
5. Award Funds
6. Support and Monitor Grantees



PTOC: Identifying Promising Practices for Establishing Parenting Time Orders



San Diego Evaluation Highlights

Program was able to incorporate parenting time with little impact on regular operations

PTOC CPs and NCPs felt more positive about the other parent

PTOC NCPs paid 82% of support due

Comparison NCPs paid 78%

32% of parents screened had experienced some domestic violence

Nearly one third of PTOC NCPs reported improved relationships with their children



BICS: Testing Behaviorally Informed “Tweaks” To Child Support Operations

California,
Colorado,
District of
Columbia,
Georgia, Ohio,
Texas, Vermont,
Washington

Print
Communications

In Person Meetings

Phone/Texting
Outreach

National
Evaluation – RCTs
at each Site

Multiple Outcomes of
Interest: Focused on
improved efficiency and
cost-effectiveness



Vermont Evaluation Highlights

Test in person meetings: increase participation of both parents and agreed orders

23% of control group participated
36.5% of treatment group

Cost Savings?

Redesign case opening and office appointment letters, reminder calls, train staff in negotiation skills

8.3% of control group stipulate

26.9% of treatment group stipulate



Washington Demonstration Highlights

Early outreach to noncustodial parents prior to order establishment

Behaviorally informed cover sheet added to service package with key information and next steps

Staff appreciated proactive, customer oriented approach

Pre-service phone call using behaviorally-informed talking points, follow up letter to those not reached by phone

Early results suggest no significant impact on the time it takes to serve a notice



Evaluation of BICS

Grant Award - Washington State

- Contract with MDRC

- Subcontracts with MEF and Center for Policy Research (CPR)

- MDRC, MEF, and CPR are the TAE Team

Technical assistance and evaluation (TAE) services for eight BICS Grantees

BICS Grantee Workshops in Washington, DC in 2015 and 2017

Phase 1 – RCTs for each location, early findings memos

Phase II – Both experimental and non-experimental evaluations



Other Grants - Access and Visitation (AV)

Mandatory
Formula
Grants
awarded to
states by
OCSE

State
programs are
managed by
agencies
designated by
the Governor

Establish and
administer
programs to
support and
facilitate NCP's
access to and
visitation of their
children

Funds awarded based
upon number of children in
single family households ,
formula contained in statute.
AV grant awards require a
state match equal to 10% of
the total award



Allowable AV Services

- Mediation
- Development of Parenting Plans
- Visitation Enforcement
- Counseling
- Parent Education
- Guidelines for Visitation and Alternative Custody Arrangements
- Program services typically vary by state and by provider
- Can include regional service provider contracts or statewide call centers
 - Access and Visitation Hotline (TX)
 - Parenting Order Legal Line (TX)
 - Custody and Visitation Hotline (KY)



Washington's AV Program

- Contracts with six regional service providers located statewide.
- All providers offer mediation and development of parenting plan services.
- Other services vary by provider, but all offer multiple AV services.
- RFP process in 2017. New contracts with some updates to modernize program and increase service capacity.
- Includes ability to provide some services by phone.
- Focus on reaching more clients statewide.



Collaboration with OCSE

- Federal grant projects create unique opportunities for child support agencies to build capacity or try something new.
- Traditionally, grant roles and responsibilities were structured somewhat differently than they are now.
- Demonstration projects in particular can be helpful in identifying areas where improvement may be needed.
- Today, grant projects are much more of a collaborative effort. This has created even more opportunities for us to learn from each other.



But How Do We Get There?

- Develop proposal. What problem are we trying to solve, and how will the grant help us do that?
- FOA – what is OCSE looking for?
- Develop budget and grant application. Circulate along with pre-approval form, ask for input. Finalize and submit to OCSE.
- Intra-agency collaboration, includes DCS senior leaders.
- Include in the planning other staff or departments who may become a part of the project.
- Consider any anticipated contracts or approval needed from the Institutional Review Board.



Grant Responsibilities

Grants Administrator

Administer grants, including the budget, expenditures, and contracts.

Monitor grant projects to ensure compliance within grant parameters.

Research new grant opportunities, prepare grant applications.

Project Managers

Develop, lead and manage project activities. Set and track goals and objectives.

Coordinate meetings and events. Lead contact for stakeholders.

Review and analyze project data and make recommendations to project decision makers.



Implementing Lessons Learned

- The grant is ending. What now?
- How do we integrate what we've learned into our regular work practices?
- Are any changes to policy, laws, or systems needed?
- Who makes those decisions?
- Begin those discussions early.
- Keep agency leaders involved all along the way.
- Share updates with staff so they are aware of what's happening.
- Invite project evaluators to a meeting with agency leaders to share final results.



Questions?

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Just go for it, right?

- Make sure it's the right opportunity
 - ✓ Invested in testing new ideas
 - ✓ Interested in advancing evidence base
 - ✓ Agreement on what counts as success
- It's not really "free money"
 - ✓ Time, focused-attention, new skills, selling
 - ✓ Flexibility of in-house vs fed requirements
- If you get the grant, will you be ready?



Remember BHAG?

- Audacious but not considered impossible
- It could change how we do business
 - ✓ Policy, Training, Practice
- It could change how we see ourselves
 - ✓ Organizational Culture
- It could change how others see us
 - ✓ Customers, Public, External Partners (old and new)



Meaningful and Sustainable

- Start with the sustainability in mind
 - ✓ Absent grant funds it will carry on
 - ✓ Integrate into existing processes
- Build and maintain stakeholder buy-in
 - ✓ Post-grant program maintenance starts during grant period
 - ✓ Plan for changes to investment
- Teaches us what we still have yet to learn
 - ✓ Tweak and try again? Abandon?



Spotlight on previous grants

NPOP

- New Parent Outreach Project
- Hospital-based educational outreach to unmarried new parents
- Fatherhood, paternity, healthy relationships, co-parenting
- **Challenges** w/hospital-based education, **but ...**
- **Developed** materials hospitals and parents liked

BSHFT

- Building Strong and Healthy Families – Texas
- Relationship skills education for new, unmarried parents
- Improve well-being of children, financial & emotional support
- 3-year **study found no impact** on long-term relationship health
- **Advanced research; informed development** of future materials



Spotlight on previous grants

HEROES

- Help Establish Responsive Orders Ensuring Support...
- Identify and respond to unique challenges of military/vet parents
- Educational materials; regularly scheduled legal info clinics
- **Some structural challenges, but ...**
- **Long-term collaboration** with 3 large military installations, vet orgs

BAFF

- Building Assets for Fathers and Families
- Understanding financial goals of CS customers
- Connect asset-building services to low-income customers
- **Dads less responsive** to asset building options, **but**
- Public private partnership; tax time returns; college savings **pilots**



Spotlight on previous grants

CSPED

- NCP Choices P.E.E.R.
- Child support-led employment program for parents who owe CS
- Added a parent education component
- Low participation in parent groups, **but** ...
- Positive impact on employment and payment of support

BICS

- Texas Start Smart
- Parent-centered communication, nudge into action
- Close gap to 1st payment => prelim data shows impact
- Phase II: Increase show rate at in-office negotiations
- Simple messaging is easy enough, right? Not necessarily



Final thoughts

- Be prepared for the unknown
- Beware of distractions; focus on the primary purpose
- Innovation isn't for the faint of heart



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