

Appendix VII

Memo Describing Pilot Results

MEMO

TO: JAMES MAXWELL
FROM: MARTHA ZASLOW, KATHRYN TOUT, TAMARA HALLE
SUBJECT: REVISIONS OF ECEPD EVALUATION INTERVIEWS BASED ON PILOT WORK
DATE: 6/7/2007
CC:

This memo details the revisions we have made on the Director, Project Team, and Evaluation Team Interviews based on the piloting of the measures we conducted. The goal of these pilot interviews was to confirm that understanding of items by respondents was as intended, and to minimize the burden on participants.

The Piloting Process. We conducted pilot interviews with four ECEPD Project Directors: one from the 2003 cohort, and the three directors representing the most recent ECEPD grantees (i.e., the 2006 cohort). We selected the 2006 ECEPD Project Directors for the pilot so that we did not further reduce our participant pool for the evaluation study itself. In addition, we interviewed the Project Team and the Evaluator that corresponded to the 2003 ECEPD project for which we had completed a Director Interview. All interviews were audio taped on a digital recording device. After completing each interview, we asked the interviewees to evaluate the interview as a whole and also to identify items that were redundant, difficult to respond to, and/or would require obtaining information not readily at hand to answer the question. We used the version of the interviews submitted with the OMB clearance package for this pilot work. Detailed interview notes were created by taking notes on a computer during the call; researchers went back to listen to the digital recordings of the interviews to clarify these notes and fill in details, as necessary.

Findings of the Pilot Work. Our pilot work revealed that our interviews were taking about 80 minutes to complete, which matched our assumptions and expectations. All participants indicated that, for the most part, the questions we included in the interviews were relevant to their experiences with the ECEPD programs. However, there were some instances of redundancies across items, and need for clarification of terminology on a few items. Where redundancies occurred, we eliminated unnecessary items. Where clarification was needed, we inserted additional language or “probes” that the interviewer could use if necessary during the telephone interviews.

We found that the timing of the interview made it difficult for some grantees to fully answer the questions we had developed. Specifically, all three Directors in the 2006 cohort found it difficult to answer questions about the “lessons learned” from their project because it was just too early in the process for them to provide good responses. Nevertheless, we will be keeping these items in the interviews, because we feel that the cohorts that comprise the evaluation will be able to adequately answer such questions (as

did the one Director from the 2003 cohort in our pool of pilot participants). This issue of timing, however, made us aware that the final Evaluation Report will need to report findings by cohort, precisely because the timing of the projects may affect their responses to the questions.

When we spoke to the Evaluator from the 2003 ECEPD project, he found it difficult to remember details of the evaluation report in order to respond to questions about the “most surprising finding” in their study. He suggested that we ask the Evaluation Team to review the most recent (or final) Annual Performance Report (APR) or Evaluation Report prior to the phone interview with our team. We intend to include this additional request in our protocol.

Revisions to Interviews. Specifically, the revisions we made to the interviews were as follows:

- Eliminated questions that were redundant or did not seem to elicit the information we were seeking, based on the review of the detailed interview notes of the pilot interviews
- Reworded questions to avoid yes/no responses
- Made sure that all questions linked back to our conceptual model for the evaluation and added a “rationale” statement after each question to identify the linkage to the conceptual model
- Reordered questions, where necessary, to improve the flow of the interview
- Eliminated items that requested information we could possibly get from other sources (e.g., review of APRs) with one exception – we kept the first question that asks the Director to describe in his/her own words the goals of the ECEPD project. We felt that there was a need to have an “icebreaker” that allows them to start talking about their program, and this question provides the needed impetus to discuss the project. We do, however, convey our familiarity with the programs in the introduction to the call by informing the interviewees that we have recently reviewed all APRs and Evaluation Reports.

An additional change we made to the interviews was eliminating the section on “Finalizing Project Characteristics Form and Evaluation Description Form” that we had placed at the very beginning of the interview. This section was to help fill in gaps in summary documents we will be creating based on the review of grantee documents provided to the Department of Education. We decided to eliminate this section because it obstructed the flow of the interview and could potentially add up to 15 minutes to the overall interview time, depending on the amount of clarification needed. Instead, we will email the forms to the Director prior to the interview. However, rather than completing them during the interview, we will briefly discuss the forms with the Director at the close of the interview to answer any questions, to clarify what we are collecting and to highlight the information that is still needed to complete the form. We will then ask that the Director complete the form and email it back to the Child Trends team.

