

Appendix B

Interview Strategy Discussion Guide

Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS)

Intervention Strategy Discussion Guide

ISIS is a new demonstration initiative being designed to rigorously test innovative employment strategies to improve family self-sufficiency—for TANF families or for other low-income families. We are beginning an exploratory phase to obtain feedback from program administrators and staff, researchers, and policymakers about strategies you feel worth studying, in terms of effectiveness and impact on families and individuals. We are interested in getting your opinion on the most important types of strategies that should be tested around the country as we really want this demonstration to test strategies that are of high interest to the field. We want your feedback on types of strategies that should be experimentally tested using random assignment methods. In addition, if you know of specific initiatives that might be appropriate demonstration sites, we'd like to discuss them.

Module A: General Issues and Priorities

A1. When you think about employment problems for the low-income population generally...

- a. What groups do you believe have the greatest needs for assistance in terms of employment?
- b. For what groups do you think information about promising strategies would be most beneficial? Why this/these groups?

Probe: long-term TANF recipients, people approaching the time limit, former TANF families, families neither working nor receiving welfare assistance, youth in TANF families, low wage workers, two-parent families or couples, non-English speakers, people with multiple barriers, non-custodial fathers

A2. We are interested in identifying employment strategies that are both important today and will make a sustained contribution for years to come. What trends and issues do you think may impact efforts to improve economic self-sufficiency in the next 3-5 years and how they may have an impact?

Probe:

- *Population trends (e.g., immigrant populations; more isolated rural populations)*
- *Economic and employment trends (e.g., changing mix of industries & jobs, needs for certain types of workers)*
- *TANF caseload trends (including both projected growth/decrease as well as caseload composition)*
- *Political trends and areas of interest.*

A3. Given the challenges we've discussed, where do you see the greatest needs for improved information?

Probe:

- *Concerning program effectiveness; that is, what works and doesn't?*
- *Concerning how to implement and operate strong programs and program approaches?*
- *With regard to understanding the target population's needs and experiences better?*
- *Are there any other topics where improved information would be useful?*

Module B: Promising Initiatives

ISIS is assessing a wide range of program strategies as possible bases for this next-generation demonstration. One key requirement is that leaders in the field are excited about the models we choose. The range of strategies we are considering includes [*Hand list to respondent/send in advance*]:

- **Employment-focused strategies** (e.g., job search, subsidized employment, temporary jobs, transitional jobs)
- **Strategies addressing personal and family challenges** that inhibit employment (e.g., counseling, couples-interventions, housing, mental health, substance abuse)
- **Human capital and skill development** (e.g., basic remedial education, employer-based training, post-secondary education or occupational training, apprenticeships)
- **Financial and other work supports** (e.g., asset-building, wage supplements, tax credits/EITC)
- **Other financial incentives and penalties** (e.g., sanctions, time limits, bonuses, diversion payments)
- **Innovations in service delivery** that will improve employment outcomes (e.g., case management, vouchers, home visits/services, service consolidation/integration)

B1. Do any of the general categories or strategies on this list strike you as especially promising? Which ones? Are there any general categories that you think are missing from this list? Any on the list that should *not* be pursued?

B2. What approaches or programs are you hearing about or involved with that you see as especially worthwhile considering/implementing?

- a. For these programs, what do you consider a successful outcome to be? How successful do you think these programs or types of strategies are? Why do you think that?
- b. Are you aware of reports or papers about these programs/strategies? How can I obtain reports or studies of these programs?
- c. What might you like to know that you don't now know—such as long-term outcomes, or what would have happened without the services, or how to mix or sequence services?

B3. What kinds of programs or policies related to employment seem to be “**hot topics**” now—for you and for others concerned about low-income families (e.g. practitioners, advocates, policymakers, researchers, general public)?

B4. Are there any particular programs or strategies that you think are interesting, but for which there is currently insufficient information about whether they work well to support a decision to implement them?

B5. Can you recommend any people we should talk to or programs that we should see that would provide additional information about employment-focused strategies that may be of interest to program administrators and policy makers?

Module C: Local Practitioners

C1. We want to learn about what localities are doing that's especially innovative and promising to increase employment and economic self-sufficiency among low-income parents. We would like to hear about some of the efforts you have underway right now. We're interested in new policies, services, or service delivery approaches. These could be targeting low-income families receiving or not receiving TANF.

Probe:

- *Strategies for getting TANF participants back to work quickly*
- *Strategies that might avoid the need for cash assistance among families not currently receiving it*
- *Strategies for helping low-income parents sustain and advance in employment*
- *Strategies aimed at families with difficult personal and family challenges affecting employment?*

- a. What outcomes are you trying to achieve?
- b. What would you regard as "success" for these initiatives?

C2. When you look around, there are a lot of different possible directions for policies and programs to increase employment and economic self-sufficiency among low-income parents. Please think about some of the policies, programs, or service delivery strategies that you have heard may be promising, but haven't yet been implemented. What are they?

Probe:

- *Strategies for getting TANF participants back to work quickly*
- *Strategies that might avoid the need for cash assistance among families not currently receiving it*
- *Strategies for helping low-income parents sustain and advance in employment*
- *Strategies aimed at families with difficult personal and family challenges affecting employment?*

- a. How did you learn about them? What interested you about them? What would you hope that they would achieve?
- b. What are some of the reasons that you have not yet implemented these approaches? Do you think that they can be surmounted? Is there any information that would be helpful?

Probe:

- *Feasibility issues (too expensive)*
- *Political issues (not enough political support)*
- *Lack of evidence*
- *Too many other high priorities*

C3. Considering the different strategies we have discussed, do you know of any programs that seem especially promising and worthy of evaluation? If “yes:”

a. Please describe the intervention.

Probe:

- *Goals and target outcomes; policies/problems it addresses*
- *Theory of change*
- *Target/relevant populations and population served: size, characteristics, and needs*
- *Major program components: contents, intensity, duration*
- *Approach to identifying and engaging participants, take-up rates*
- *Service delivery system: agencies and organizations, staffing, coordination*
- *Number and variety of sites operating program*
- *Program costs per participant*

b. What strikes you as the major strengths of this program? Weaknesses or shortcomings?

Probe:

- *What kind of information exists for this program: on implementation? on impacts?*
- *On what is your sense of this program’s promise based?*
- *What are some of the important questions that this program raises for you?*

c. Are you aware of any plans for substantial changes to this program, either in design or scope?

Probe:

- *To address unmet needs (e.g., size or characteristics of populations needing services)*
- *To respond to administrative challenges? What are some of the administrative and resource challenges involved in expanding this program (organizational capacity, staffing, funding)?*

d. Is this program or approach the only one of its kind being used in the area, or are other services or program approaches also operating within the area that have generally similar goals and approaches?

Probe:

- *Please describe some of these other services or program approaches*
- *What do you see as some of the key similarities and differences across these approaches?*

e. Are you aware of localities beyond this one that are operating, or planning to operate, this intervention or a similar intervention?

Probe:

- *Location of other site/sites (sponsoring organization, number of sites)*
- *Details of intervention*
- *Population served by the intervention, number of participants (current, annual)*
- *Length of time intervention has been operational*

f. Who should I contact for additional information about this program or program approach?