

**Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration
and Evaluation Project (STEDEP)
Discussion Guide for use with Researchers, Policy
Experts, and State-Level Coordinators**

SUBSIDIZED AND TRANSITIONAL EMPLOYMENT DEMONSTRATION AND EVALUATION PROJECT (STEDEP)

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[Introduction] STEDSEP is a demonstration designed to rigorously test innovative subsidized employment strategies aimed at successfully transitioning individuals in several low-income target populations from short-term subsidized employment to unsubsidized employment in the regular labor market. We are interested in employment programs that offer opportunities for substantive, productive work; strategies that couple work experience with wrap-around support services (e.g., child care assistance, skills training, job search assistance, career advancement services); strategies that incorporate pre-employment activities; and strategies that target specific low-income populations, including welfare recipients, low-income non-custodial parents, prisoners re-entering the community, low-income youth transitioning to the labor force, low-income individuals with disabilities, American Indians and Alaska Natives, and English language learners.

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 within the context of current TANF policies and requirements as well as recent efforts under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). We have two main purposes for gathering your feedback. First we want to understand better your experiences --especially over the past year-- in considering, implementing or administering subsidized and transitional employment strategies. Second, we aim to recruit and assist in developing demonstrations 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 to any strategies or promising approaches you may know of, please be sure to let us know of existing programs that might be appropriate demonstration sites.

Please note that your responses will be discussed internally among ACF and its research team but that, to the extent allowable by law, individual identifying information will not be disseminated publicly.

Individual (s) Interviewed: (names and titles)

Sponsoring Organization:

Date of Communication:

Module A: General Issues and Priorities

A1. [General Framework] When you think about subsidized and transitional employment strategies for the low-income population generally...

- a. What groups do you believe have the greatest needs for this type of assistance?
Why this/these groups?

Probe: welfare recipients (long-term TANF recipients, people approaching the time limit), former TANF families, families neither working nor receiving welfare assistance, low-income non-custodial parents, prisoners re-entering the community, low-income youth transitioning to

the labor force, low-income individuals with disabilities, American Indians and Alaska natives, and English language Learners)

A2. [Programs/Strategies] We are interested in identifying subsidized and transitional employment strategies targeting these groups.

a. Please describe any program you know of. Please include any programs you have heard of, including those which may be new, innovative, or heretofore untested. Are any of these programs funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

Probe: Of these programs, which do you think hold the most promise?

A3. [Population Groups] Please describe how these programs may differ for different target groups.

Probes: Are there programs that you think would work better for some of these groups than others? Which ones?

A4. [Challenges/Problems] Please describe the problems and or challenges you see in these programs?

Probes: What issues do you think may impact efforts to improve these programs? Are there any emerging issues, trends, or problems you see in the near future?

A6. [Research Needs] Please describe current research needs.

Probes: Given the challenges and programs we have discussed, where do you see the greatest need for improved information? 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? Which gaps can experimental research best "fill in?"

A7. [Additional Issues and Priorities] Please tell me about any other issues and priorities that should be noted in this field of subsidized and transitional employment.

A8. [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)]. Please tell me about your experiences applying for and/or receiving funding for subsidized employment activities under ARRA.

Probes: What need did you seek to address through ARRA funding in this area? General unemployment in your community or state? Instability of families on public assistance? TANF client employment? Where do you see the greatest need for similar strategies for the unemployed? Concerning how to implement and operate ARRA-funded program approaches, what improvements would you recommend for future emergency initiatives? Are there any other topics relevant to ARRA-funding that would be useful to discuss?

Module B: Promising Initiatives

[Introduction] STEDEP is assessing a wide range of program strategies as possible bases for this next-generation demonstration. One key requirement is that strategies effectively transition participants into unsubsidized employment. These strategies have used many different designs and have gone by many different names (often used inconsistently), including public service employment, publicly funded jobs, paid work experience, workfare, transitional employment, community service jobs and supported work. In addition to work experience and skill development, most of the programs provide the following types of services: [*Hand list to respondent/send in advance*]:

- Pre-placement assessments to identify barriers, develop short- and long-term employment and career goals, and match participants to work assignments that fit their interests, needs, and circumstances;
- Life skills and job readiness training (such as adhering to workplace norms);
- Work-focused case management to help participants address personal problems that could negatively impact their ability to sustain employment and to connect to other social services (such as substance abuse treatment);
- Enhanced worksite supervision to help participants learn basic skills, acquire good work habits, ensure that they have significant job responsibilities, receiving training, and make contributions to their employers;
- Connection to work supports, such as child care and transportation subsidies, which can be critical to job retention; and
- Unsubsidized job search and job placement activities.

B1. [Expanding/Focusing List] please describe how you would expand or focus this list.

Probes: Considering the list of services...

a. *Are there any services that you think are missing from this list?*

B2. [Identifying Promising Programs/Strategies] Please describe any programs/strategies you know of.

Probes: Looking at these strategies...

- What approaches or programs are you hearing about or involved with that you see are especially worthwhile considering/implementing? Are there any interventions (within the larger strategies that seem particularly promising?*
- What kinds of interventions or policies seem to be “**hot topics**” now-for you and others concerned about employment issues (e.g. practitioners, advocates, policymakers, researchers, general public)?*
- How does funding, and funding decisions, affect these programs?*
- Did ARRA funding substantially support your ability to create program opportunities that you believe would not have otherwise existed?*
- When you look around, there are a lot different possible directions for policies and programs aimed at helping target populations secure and maintain unsubsidized employment. 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 some of the reasons that they have not yet been implemented? Do you think that they can be surmounted? Is there any information that would be helpful?*

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?
- d. What information that could be gathered from the field about employment initiatives implemented in the past year would be most useful to you?

B3. With regard to ARRA-funded subsidized/transitional employment projects that you're aware of, were there particular policy issues that created implementation challenges? Were these programs targeted in ways that differed substantially from similar programs of which you're aware.

B4. 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)?

B5. 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?

B6. Can you recommend any people we should talk to or programs that we should see that would provide additional information about subsidized employment-focused strategies that may be of interest to program administrators and policy makers?