
Part B: Collections of Information Employing Statistical Methods for the Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers

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Submitted to:
Office of Management and Budget

Submitted by:
Chief Evaluation Office
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

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PART B: COLLECTION OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

The Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has contracted with Mathematica Policy Research and its partners—Social Policy Research Associates, the George Washington University, and Capital Research Corporation (hereafter “the study team”)—to conduct the Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers (AJCs) in order to examine the full spectrum of institutional features that shape AJCs’ day-to-day operations and customer experiences. The study will (1) present a comprehensive and systematic description of AJC funding, organization, administration and management, and service delivery structures and processes, and (2) examine AJC service delivery to its customers, including those services provided to target populations.

This package requests clearance for three data collection activities conducted as part of the study: (1) site visits to AJCs and their local workforce investment boards (LWIBs); (2) interviews with state workforce administrators; and (3) a network analysis survey of AJC partner organizations.

B.1. Respondent universe and sampling methods

1. AJC sample selection

To select AJCs for site visits, the study team will employ a two-phase sampling approach that will yield a purposive sample of AJCs. This approach aims to capture geographic diversity, variation in urbanicity, and variation in the types of administrative entities that operate AJCs.

Phase one. In the first phase of site selection, the study team will select a systematic random sample of 120 comprehensive AJCs from all AJCs in the United States, implicitly stratifying by state and urbanicity. DOL’s Office of Workforce Investment (OWI) maintains *America’s Service Locator*, a database of the nation’s AJC network. We will obtain from OWI a file containing the name and location (address) of all AJCs in the United States. We will limit the sample by the following criteria to include only the following: (1) comprehensive AJCs (i.e., omitting affiliate job centers), and (2) AJCs in the 48 contiguous states.

Urbanicity will be identified by using the USDA Rural-Urban Continuum Code classification for 2013 (RUCC), which distinguishes metropolitan counties by the population size of their metro area, and nonmetropolitan counties by degree of urbanization and proximity to a metropolitan area. Each county in the U.S. is assigned a RUCC classification by USDA. To match the corresponding RUCC classification to each AJC, we will identify the appropriate state and county Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) codes based on the location of the AJC using Census FIPS code data for counties. We will merge FIPS codes by zipcode onto the sample frame.

We will then create a systematic sample of AJCs using implicit stratification. By implicit stratification, we mean sorting the sampling frame by one or more stratification variables before sampling to help the sample resemble the frame with respect to the distribution of those characteristics. For our phase 1 sample of 120 AJCs, we will implicitly stratify the sampling frame by state, and then by level of urbanicity within state.

Phase two. In the second phase, the study team will select AJCs using purposive sampling based on variation in the types of administrative entities that manage AJC operations, geographic location, and urbanity. Under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 and the recently enacted Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which replaced WIA, center operators can be a wide range of entities including postsecondary educational institutions, employment service agencies, nonprofit organizations, private for-profit agencies, a government agency, or other business organizations. Center operators can be a single entity or a consortium of entities. Because there is no centralized data source that maintains data on AJC center operator type (or other institutional features such as colocation of partners), we will ask the Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs) that oversee the AJCs selected in Phase I: (1) what type of center operator currently manages that AJC, and (2) whether the AJC is part of a designated consortium or procured through a competitive process. In the event that we are unable to make successful contact with the LWIB, we will ask the AJC to provide us this basic information.

After obtaining these two items of information for all 120 AJCs, we will select a purposive sample of 60 comprehensive AJCs to ensure that the AJC study sample captures variation in center operator types, geographic diversity, and a mix of rural, suburban, and urban areas. The study team will conduct site visits to these 60 selected comprehensive AJCs. Because Phase II of site selection uses a purposive approach to sampling the 60 comprehensive AJCs for participation in the study, study findings will apply only to the 60 selected AJCs and will not be generalizable to the entire AJC population.

2. State administrator interview

The study team will conduct telephone interviews with state workforce administrators in each state in which there is a selected AJC. We anticipate that the 60 selected AJCs will be located in as many as 40 states. It is possible that some states may contain more than one selected AJC; the study team will only interview the state administrators from these states once. Therefore, the study team will interview state administrators in up to 40 states.

The study team will focus on interviewing the state-level administrators of entities that are most involved in policy and administrative activities that affect AJC operations. We anticipate that this will typically include a representative from each of two groups of state-level staff: (1) Employment Service managers and (2) agency staff responsible for enforcing WIA/WIOA and setting and monitoring policies relevant to AJCs. The study team will contact the state workforce administrator indicated in DOL records, and request that they identify these individuals. This means that across the 40 states in which selected AJCs are located, the study team will interview about 80 administrators.

3. Partner network analysis survey

The network survey is a brief, targeted tool used to explore the strength of relationships between the key entities (partners) that oversee service delivery within the AJC framework as part of the overall effort to describe and analyze AJCs as institutions. The short survey will systematically collect information on select elements of partner interactions (frequency of communication, level of collaboration, and referral flow) (see instrument 6) and will include partners that the study team might not be able to meet with directly on site.

The study team will conduct the survey with a purposively selected subset of 30 of the AJCs visited. The purposes of the survey are to identify different typologies of AJC networks and explore what these typologies suggest about the themes and variations across AJCs in the structure and strength of partner networks. The survey is not intended to comprehensively present the network for each individual AJC. It is an exploratory analysis to further inform knowledge about AJC networks and their functioning. As such, the survey can fulfill its purpose and accomplish its goals by focusing on a subset of AJCs that are purposively selected to represent a range in the types of AJC operating entities, size, and geographic location (states as well as urban/rural mix).

We will administer the survey to an average of 15 partners identified by the AJC manager in each of the selected 30 AJCs. To identify the list of partners, the study team will first discuss the structure of the AJC with AJC managers during initial outreach and previsit planning calls. During these site contacts, we will ask managers about the appropriate entities and locations for the delivery of all programs and services—both mandated and voluntary—that are important to the AJC service delivery structure. During the site visits, the study team will then confirm this structure and, if necessary, add more partners to develop a comprehensive map of the AJC service delivery network.

Based on information gathered through the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, we expect to identify 15 key partner entities, on average, across AJCs. The number of partner entities in the WIA evaluation sites ranged from 4 to 30, with a median of 11 and an average of 12. A recent descriptive analysis of AJC services available to low-income populations at six AJCs found that each had 9 to 16 partners, similar amounts as those identified by the Gold Standard Evaluation (Wright and Montiel 2010). In addition, drawing from the WIA Gold Standard Evaluation information and the experience of the study team, we expect to find the following types of partner entities: (1) state departments of labor or workforce; (2) city or county departments of labor, workforce, employment, and training; (3) state, city, or county departments of human or social services; (4) community and/or technical colleges; (5) state or local housing authority; (6) state or local office of the aging; (6) public–private partnership entities (such as training partnerships); (7) community-based agencies (such as Goodwill or Community Action Agencies); and (8) private, for-profit contracted providers.

B.2. Procedures for the collection of information

1. Data collection

The data sources and data collection activities for the Institutional Analysis of AJCs are as follows.

Site visits to AJCs. The most important source of data for this study will be in-person visits to 60 AJCs. Prior to and during the visits, the study team will use data collection instruments to document information provided by the AJC and/or its LWIB. Sites will not be asked to complete the instruments, but will participate in pre- and on-site visit interviews, and be asked to provide particular documents and materials.

Prior to each site visit, the study team will collect key information about each AJC, such as its address and hours of operation, and information about the AJC operator, its LWIB, and AJC

partners. Information collected prior to the visits will help the study team identify pertinent respondents for site visit interviews and efficiently plan and conduct study site visits. Also, this information will ultimately provide important AJC-level context for the analysis. Before contacting sites, the study team will gather pertinent data available from AJC and LWIB websites, and other publically available sources. During previsit phone calls, the research team will ask only about outstanding items. We anticipate that the data will be collected across two 1.00-hour phone calls: one with each of these staff.

Knowledge about AJCs and their LWIBs gained from reviews of documents can also significantly increase the efficiency of data collection on site, and assist the study team in constructing detailed profiles of each AJC in the sample. Further, these documents commonly contain information that is difficult for respondents to recall from memory and which is particularly tedious and time-consuming to collect while on site. Hence, prior to site visits, during these telephone calls, the study team will request documents from the LWIB and selected AJCs, including:

- Financial documents, such as AJC memorandums of understanding (MOUs), resource sharing agreements (RSAs), and AJC operating budgets, that outline AJC financing strategies and the role of each partner in supporting AJCs' operations and service delivery
- Data management, performance reports or other data outputs that present aggregate figures on customer characteristics, total customers served, percentage of customers receiving select services, and performance outcomes
- Reports or other materials such as data system procedures and training manuals, data dictionaries, data system guidelines and procedures, data mapping documents
- AJC and LWIB annual plans and organizational charts.

During previsit calls, the study team will ask the LWIB and AJC managers to indicate from whom we should collect these relevant materials. We anticipate that this will typically be some combination of the AJC manager and LWIB staff. If this information cannot be provided prior to site visits, the research team will collect it during site visits.

Part A of this submission lists the research topics that the study team will explore during site visits. The study team will obtain information on each topic from multiple respondents, allowing the study team to capture multiple perspectives so that no single person's opinions or responses will be assumed to be fully representative. The study team will interview both managers and line staff. This will ensure that the study team members understand not only how service delivery and administrative processes are supposed to work, but also how they *actually* work. The respondents are: (a) AJC operator managers and central office staff, (b) AJC managers, (c) representatives from key partners, (d) AJC line staff, (e) LWIB staff, and (f) local government workforce administrators.

In each center, the study team will conduct structured observations of AJC layouts and operations. Site visitors will use observation worksheets to collect information on topics such as: the location of the AJC (for example, in a mall, a stand-alone building, or in an office building), the signage for the AJC, the layout of the AJC, where various partner staffs are housed at the center, administrative and MIS functional areas, and whether the center's layout facilitates or

impedes collaboration and efficient customer flow. Site visitors will also observe what happens when a customer first walks into the center (for example, how he or she is greeted and guided to different activities, services, and resources), and the resource room.

The AJC data collection materials (see instruments 1 through 3) will guide site visit preparation, on-site interviews, and observations. The specific questions and length of each on-site interview will depend on the specific respondent. On average, teams of three researchers will spend about three days at each site. No single interview will exceed 2.00 hours, and most will average between .75 hour and 1.00 hour.

State administrator interviews. The study team will conduct, semi-structured telephone discussions with state workforce administrators in each state for which there is a selected AJC (we estimate that there will be up to 40 such states). While the work of each AJC partner is overseen by its requisite state agency (for example, the state human services agency oversees Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and the state workforce agency oversees the WIOA program), the study team will focus on interviewing administrators of entities that are most involved with AJCs in each of the study states. This will typically include representatives from two groups of state-level staff: (1) managers of state-run workforce programs such as the Employment Service, and (2) agency staff responsible for enforcing WIA/WIOA and setting and monitoring policies relevant to AJCs. State-level phone interviews will be conducted prior to site visits, providing the study team with state-level contextual information that will allow for more detailed exploration of topics on site. As with AJC data collection, the study team will collect data from state agency websites and other publically available sources, and will focus on confirming this information during interviews and asking only about outstanding items. An introductory letter and the interview protocol are included as instruments 4 and 5, respectively.

Partner network analysis survey. The partner survey will be targeted to the administrator or manager within each identified entity who has the most comprehensive knowledge of service delivery decisions related to the AJC within his/her own entity, and of communication about service delivery issues with other partner entities. This strategy could result in surveying a range of respondents, from a local director of workforce services who is a state employee, to a manager of adult literacy programs within a community-based organization. The study team will identify individuals who fit these criteria, and will obtain contact information for them during the site visits.

All data collection for the survey will be accomplished via email. The use of simple electronic delivery allows for self-administration of the AJC partner survey, as well as for tracking survey completions. Partner contact information, gathered during the AJC site visit, will be used to distribute the survey to the partners identified by each selected AJC. The survey will be attached as a PDF to an email introducing its purpose in the study and providing instructions for its completion and return. Partner respondents can open the PDF attachment on the introductory email, enter their responses, and forward the email back to the sender with the document attached, at a convenient time for them. We plan for three additional follow-up communications with non-respondents through various means: (a) an endorsement email from the AJC manager, (b) a follow-up email from the AJC manager, and (c) follow-up by the study team (see instruments 8 through 10).

2. Statistical methodology, estimation, and degree of accuracy

This study does not require statistical methodology or estimation. The data collected from the site visits, state administrator interviews, and partner survey will be analyzed using qualitative and descriptive methods. Because the study team will use a partially purposive approach to sampling the 60 AJCs for participation in the study, study findings will apply only to the 60 selected AJCs and will not be generalizable to the entire AJC population.

The qualitative and descriptive analysis plan consists of a mixed-method approach with five steps:

- **Organize the qualitative data from state telephone interviews and site visits.** To effectively and systematically manage the volume of data, the study team will develop structured templates and checklists for site visitors to use to distill the information that they collect during site visits. Then, the study team will organize the data from the site visits and the state telephone interviews using qualitative data analysis software, such as Atlas-ti (Scientific Software Development 1997).
- **Create summary statistics from the performance management reports provided by sites.** Using data from the performance management reports provided by sites, the study team will calculate summary statistics by AJC in sites where this data is available. The study team anticipates that the reports will contain data that allow them to describe the percentage of all customers who are enrolled into WIA, the Employment Service, and other key funding/programs, customers' characteristics and their service receipt. The study team will organize this information using a performance management data collection worksheet. This will ensure that data is documented in a standardized way that allows for systematic analysis across sites.
- **Use the funding and resources sharing information to calculate the proportion of AJC infrastructure, management, and services funded by each partner.** As with the performance management data, the study team will use a financial data collection worksheet to organize the financial information collected from sites. This will ensure that data is documented in a standardized way. Then, the study team will calculate relevant summary statistics, and identify themes and patterns in the financial data to complement the institutional analysis and provide a comprehensive picture of variation in AJC funding and cost-sharing approaches. Finally, the study team will highlight resource-sharing challenges; different approaches for defining, sharing, and reporting costs; and particularly comprehensive AJC resource-sharing approaches, which will be of particular interest to policymakers.
- **Identify themes in the data within and across AJCs.** Once all of the site visit data—from pre-site visit data collection (including financial and performance management reports) and onsite interviews and observations—and state administrator interview data have been organized, the study team can examine the data to look for similarities in models of organization, service delivery, or other characteristics, and then develop typologies of AJCs.
- **Conduct a network analysis using data from the network survey of AJC partners to develop typologies of partner relationships.** The study team will use two primary measures to describe and depict service delivery networks within and across AJCs: density

(interconnectedness) and centrality (prominence). Density is the proportion of possible relationships that are actually present, and measures the extent to which each partner is connected with all others across the network as a whole. Centrality can be used to examine a few different concepts: (a) the prominence of individual entities within the network by identifying the partner entities that are most sought after (indegree centrality), (b) partners that play a central role in supporting communication between other partners (betweenness centrality), and (c) the degree to which entities are approximately equally central to the network or to which some entities are much more central than others (betweenness centralization).

Using “sociograms,” the study team will illustrate the patterns in the size of partner networks, the strength of the relationships across partners, and the direction of partnerships. These sociograms will depict the density and centrality of AJC networks based on (a) contact frequency, and (b) the level of collaboration among key partners. In addition to sociograms, the study will produce tables that present network-level characteristics such as overall density and centralization (measures discussed above), also analyzed separately by frequency of communication and level of collaboration. Throughout the analysis, the study team will work to identify different typologies of AJC networks that will display key differences across AJCs.

The study team will also use the data collected on partner referrals to measure density and centrality of the network specifically as it relates to the flow of referrals. Using the typologies derived from earlier analyses, the study team will compare the network measures of density and centrality between the models based on frequency of communication with those of the flow of referrals for select AJCs within each typology. The study team will examine the measures of prominence for specific partners within the select networks across the two models for comparison.

3. Unusual problems requiring specialized sampling procedures

There are no unusual problems requiring specialized sampling procedures.

4. Periodic data collection cycles to reduce burden

There will be only one cycle of data collection.

B.3. Methods to maximize response rates and deal with nonresponse

AJC site visits and state administrator interviews. The process to recruit sites for participation in the study will include an explanation of the nature of the visits, so that state, AJC and LWIB staff are aware of what is expected of them when they agree to participate. DOL will first issue a Training and Employment Notice (TEN) informing states, AJCs and LWIBs about the study and encouraging them to participate fully if selected. The study team will notify AJCs and their LWIBs that they have been selected to participate in the study. The study team will send each an introductory email that includes a letter, signed by DOL’s Chief Evaluation Officer, urging them to participate in the study. The study team will do the same for states within which there is a selected AJC. Site visitors will begin working with site staff well in advance of each visit to ensure that the timing of the visit is convenient.

The site visits will take place over a period of six months, which will allow flexibility in timing. Because the visits will involve several interviews and activities, there will be flexibility in the scheduling of specific interviews and activities to accommodate the particular needs of respondents and AJC operations. In addition, data collectors will meet with in-person interview respondents in their own offices or at a location of their choice.

Several well-proven strategies will be used to ensure the reliability of site visit data. First, site visitors, all of whom already have extensive experience with this data collection method, will be thoroughly trained in the issues of importance to this particular study, including how to probe for additional details to help interpret responses to interview questions. Second, this training and the use of the protocols will ensure that the data are collected in a standardized way across sites. When appropriate, the protocols will use standardized checklists to further ensure that the information is collected systematically. Finally, all interview respondents will be assured of the privacy of their responses to questions.

As is described in section **B.1. Respondent universe and sampling methods**, the study team will use a partially purposive sampling approach; in the event that an AJC or its LWIB declines to participate, the study team will use the same selection criteria to purposively select a replacement AJC from the same region. Similarly, while making every effort to arrange interviews that accommodate the scheduling needs of the state-level administrators, there may be instances when an administrator is unable to meet with the team; when this happens, the study team will request to meet with the administrator's designees. We anticipate that these approaches will result in 95% or higher response rates for AJC site visits and state administrator interviews, which the study team has achieved while conducting qualitative research that include similar data collection activities (such as, the Workforce Investment Act Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, the Evaluation of the Summer Youth Employment Initiative under the Recovery Act, Impact Evaluation of the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program, among others). Further, the study team will conduct follow-up interviews by phone for key respondents who were unavailable to meet during the AJC visit itself.

Partner network analysis survey. To encourage response to the survey, the study team will use methods that have been successful for numerous other Mathematica studies. We expect an 80 percent response rate for the partner survey, based on recent Mathematica network analysis surveys such as the Evaluation of the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Initiative, Healthy Weight Collaborative and Community Coalition Leadership Program. Based on the study team's previous experience conducting network surveys using approaches similar to those described below, this response rate can be achieved through a strategy of outreach and multiple follow-ups, timing and means of data collection, and ease of survey completion.

Outreach materials will be clear and succinct, and convey the importance of the survey data collection from multiple perspectives. The initial outreach email conveying the survey to each AJC partner will (1) introduce the study and its purpose, and its inclusion of the local AJC with which the partner is connected; (2) highlight DOL as the study sponsor; (3) explain the voluntary nature of participation in the survey; (4) include a DOL website address that sample members can use to learn more about the study; and (5) provide a contact name, number, and email address for questions that sample members may have. We will request that the AJC operator at each selected site send a short endorsement email to encourage the participation of the AJC

partners within their site (we will provide one that can be adapted by the site). A reminder email, sent two to three weeks after the initial invitation to complete the survey, will contain similar information to the initial invitation email about the purpose of the study and encourage the AJC partners to complete the survey.

After four weeks of non-response, the AJC operator within the selected site will be asked to contact any non-responding AJC partner within their site. Mathematica will provide the suggested email text, but we will request that the AJC administrator send the email directly to the AJC partner. Alternatively, we may seek the endorsement of another partner that has participated in the survey and has a stronger connection with a non-responsive partner entity than the AJC operator may have. A thank you/reminder email will be sent to each non-responder six weeks after the initial email, thanking them for their participation in completing the survey if they have done so, or reminding them to go on line and complete the survey. If there is no response eight weeks after the initial email, a member of the Mathematica team will place a telephone call to the non-responders requesting that they complete the survey, and offering to complete it quickly by phone if they prefer. The emails that will be sent to sample members are included in instrument numbers 7 through 10.

The timing of the partner survey shortly after a site visit will support high response rates. The survey will be administered in waves within two to three weeks of completion of the site visits to the selected AJCs. The study team will have made some initial contact with a majority of potential respondents during site visit interviews, lending them a level of comfort with the purpose and legitimacy of the survey. In addition, administering the survey by email can support a high response. Because the AJC partners are working professionals, email will be the most effective means of communication.

Lastly, the AJC survey is designed to be easy to complete. The questions are written in clear and straightforward language. The average time required for the respondent to complete the survey on the web is estimated at 10 minutes. The full list of partners will be pre-loaded into the PDF document to obtain a response that relates to each partner. The PDF will allow for the entry of responses (only check marks or Xs are necessary) but prevent revision of any other text or information in the questionnaire. The respondent will be able to view the question matrix with each possible category of response (across the top) and the full range of partners (down the side) on one sheet. This approach is commonly used for network data collection to help respondents consider their levels of connectivity with all partners of the network and assess their relationships using a common set of considerations regarding the question of interest. The approach can only be used when the network is known ahead of time and the number of partners is relatively small, and it has the added advantage of facilitating data entry and analysis in that respondents provide information about all partners in the network.

Non-response will be addressed two ways. Partners that do not complete the survey at all will be excluded from the analysis for that AJC. Missing responses on particular questions or for particular partners will be represented as no communication, collaboration or flow of referrals in the analysis. The default for nonresponse is that there is a minimal relationship between the partners.

B.4. Tests of procedures or methods to be undertaken

All procedures, instruments, and protocols to be used in the conduct of the AJC evaluation will be tested to assess the data collection processes, to evaluate the clarity of the questions, and to identify possible modifications to either the wording of the question, or question order that could improve the quality of the data.

To ensure that the AJC data collection protocol is used effectively as a field guide and that it yields comprehensive and comparable data across the study sites, senior research team members will conduct a pilot site visit before any other visits are conducted. The purpose of the pilot test is to ensure that the field protocol, which will guide field researchers as they collect data on site, includes appropriate probes that assist site visitors in delving deeply into topics of interest, and that the protocol does not omit relevant topics of inquiry. Furthermore, use of the protocol during a pilot site visit can enable the research staff leading this task to assess that the site visit agenda that the research team develops—including how data collection activities should generally be structured during each site visit—is practical, given the amount of data that is to be collected and the amount of time allotted for each data collection activity. Adjustments to the AJC data collection protocol will be made as necessary.

Based on the pilot experience, the study team will train all site visitors on the data collection instruments to ensure a common understanding of the key objectives and concepts as well as fidelity to the protocols. The training session will cover topics such as the study purposes and research questions, data collection protocols, procedures for scheduling visits and conducting on-site activities (including a review of interview techniques and procedures for protecting privacy), and post-visit files and summaries.

Senior research team members will pilot the state administrator phone interview guide in the same way and for the same purposes as the AJC data collection protocol, before any other interviews are conducted.

The AJC partner survey will be pre-tested using two to three AJCs with three to four partners within each AJC, not to exceed nine AJC partner respondents in total. The study team will select two AJC sites to pre-test the AJC Partner survey. The sites will be selected from among the AJCs that are likely to be among the first scheduled for site visits but are not included in the 30 AJCs selected for the full partner survey. Pre-tests will be conducted using the same methods as those planned for the full survey administration, using hard-copy versions of the survey delivered electronically by email. The participants will be asked to complete the survey and record the amount of time that it took. Following each pre-test, the study team will debrief with each participant using a standard debriefing protocol to determine how long the survey took, whether any words or questions were unclear or difficult to understand and answer, whether the participant thought that key partners were missing (and who those were), and how the general flow and sequencing of questions worked.

B.5. Individuals consulted on statistical aspects of design and on collecting and/or analyzing data

Consultations on the statistical methods used in this study have been used to ensure the technical soundness of the study. The following individuals were consulted on the statistical methods discussed in this submission to the Office of Management and Budget:

Mathematica Policy Research

Dr. Sheena McConnell
 Vice President, Director of Human Services Research, Washington, DC Office
 1100 1st Street, NE, 12th Floor
 Washington, DC 20002-4221

Social Policy Research Associates

Dr. Ron D’Amico
 President & Senior Social Scientist
 1330 Broadway, Suite 1426
 Oakland, CA 94612

George Washington University

Dr. Burt Barnow
 Amsterdam Professor of Public Service
 Media and Public Affairs Building
 805 21st St. NW
 Washington, DC, 20052

Additional staff responsible for collecting and/or analyzing data are listed in Table B.1 below.

Table B.1. Individuals who will collect and/or analyze data for the Institutional Analysis of AJCs

Mathematica Policy Research P.O. Box 2393 Princeton, NJ 08543-2393 (609) 799-3535	Pam Holcomb (Project Director) Linda Rosenberg Gretchen Kirby Jessica Ziegler Elizabeth Clary Brittany English Scott Baumgartner Katie Bodenlos
Social Policy Research Associates 1330 Broadway Suite 1426 Oakland, CA 94612 (510) 763-1499	Kate Dunham Deanna Khemani Mike Midling Jeff Salzman Christian Geckeler Melissa Mack Jill Leufguen Hannah Betesh Miloney Thakrar Anne Paprocki David Mitnik Lydia Nash

	Vernice Chavota-Perez
George Washington University 2121 I Street, N.W., Suite 601 Washington, D.C. 20052	Burt Barnow
Capital Research Corporation 1910 N Stafford Street Arlington, VA 22207 (703) 522-0885	John Trutko Carolyn O'Brien

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