
BUILDING EVIDENCE ON EMPLOYMENT STRATEGIES FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES PROJECT (BEES)

ATTACHMENT A, INSTRUMENT 1
Discussion Guide for National Policy Experts and Researchers

Introductory Script

The Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families Project (BEES) is sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) under contract with MDRC and its subcontractors, Abt Associates and MEF Associates. BEES aims to bolster the knowledge base of employment-focused interventions for TANF recipients and other disadvantaged groups, including those facing substance abuse and mental health challenges, by rigorously testing interventions that are designed to promote employment and economic security.

We are beginning a field assessment phase of the project to understand what types of employment interventions are connected with State and local agencies such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), workforce development, behavioral health, and criminal justice, and what programs or organizations are currently implementing or planning to implement these types of interventions. We are also interested in learning more about what State and local administrators and staff think are the most effective methods to move TANF clients and other disadvantaged groups, including those facing substance/opioid use disorder and mental health challenges, to employment. Your participation will help ACF understand the most important employment interventions that should be tested around the country.

We have two main purposes for gathering your feedback. First, we are interested in hearing about the priority areas of programming in your [state, county, city], as well as what you think effective employment services look like. Second, since we are aiming to identify interventions that are of high interest to the field, we are hoping you will be able to identify existing programs that might be appropriate sites for a random assignment evaluation.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. This information collection has been reviewed and approved by the Office of Management and Budget with OMB #: 0970-0356 which expires on 06/30/2021.

This interview takes about one hour, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or end the interview at any time. We have systems in place to protect your identity and keep your responses private. In writing up our findings from these interviews, we never attribute anything to a specific respondent. The research staff participating in this study have signed notices that they will keep all information gleaned through these interviews private to the extent permitted by law.

Individual (s) Interviewed: (names and titles)

Sponsoring Organization:

Date of Communication:

[Modules and questions will be selected for each discussion, as appropriate.]

Module A: Purpose of Employment Services

A1. When you think about employment services for disadvantaged populations generally, are there groups or types of clients that you feel may benefit most from these services? Why this/these groups?

Probe: TANF recipients, people with substance abuse, specifically substance/opioid use disorder, people with mental or behavioral health challenges, people who have been formerly incarcerated, etc.

- A2. Obtaining employment is typically the overall objective for these services. That is, the point of providing these services is to help individuals obtain employment. However, some programs have different philosophies that guide the services that they provide. What employment services do you think are most effective? And how would the approach differ, if at all, depending on who they serving?

Probes: direct job placement, transitional or subsidized employment, on-the-job training or occupational skills training, etc.

- A3. Thinking about the employment organizations and programs you are aware of, can you tell me your thoughts on what types of interventions may be most effective for TANF clients and other disadvantaged groups, including those facing mental health and addiction challenges?

Probe: Why (or not) do you believe that these interventions may be effective? Are you aware of any evaluations of services?

- A4. Please describe the problems and or challenges you see providing employment services for people who have substance/opioid use disorder? Mental or behavioral health challenges?

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?

- A5. Please describe current research needs in the area of employment-focused interventions, keeping in mind that some interventions may combine treatment and employment services.

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?"

Module B: Identifying Interventions/Program Models to Test

- B1. When you think of promising or innovative employment services that you know of, what comes to mind?

Probes: Looking at these strategies...

- a. *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? Are they currently serving the populations we are targeting in BEES? If so, do you think they could? In other words, what would they need to do in order to serve them?*
- b. *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)?*

- c. *We know that many states and localities are actively seeking ideas and interventions to respond to the opioid epidemic – what are some of these ideas and interventions, and are aware of ones that specifically address employment issues?*
- d. *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?*

B2. What do you consider a successful outcome for the populations we are targeting to be?

B3. Are you aware of reports or papers about these interventions/program models?

B4. What might you like to know about employment services that you do not now know?

B5. What outcomes do you think we should use to measure the effectiveness of employment services? At what intervals should we measure these outcomes?

B6. Are there any particular interventions or program models 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?

B7. Can you recommend any people we should talk to or programs that we should see that may be of interest to program administrators and policy makers? Are there any sites that you think would be particularly strong candidates for the evaluation?