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Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA)
Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

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Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

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Subject: NonSubstantive Change Request – Fathers and Continuous Learning in Child Welfare Project (FCL) (OMB #0970-0531)

This memo requests approval of nonsubstantive changes to the approved information collection, Fathers and Continuous Learning in Child Welfare Project (FCL) (OMB #0970-0531, Formative Data Collections for ACF Program Support).

Background

The purpose of the FCL project is to identify high-priority father and paternal relative engagement strategies and then conduct a one-year pilot study in six sites to test the use of a continuous quality improvement methodology called the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) to strengthen the engagement of fathers and paternal relatives with children involved in the child welfare system. The information collections associated with the FCL project received OMB approval on November 5, 2019 under the overarching generic clearance, Formative Data Collections for ACF Program Support.

Given the evolving nature of COVID-19, the study team would like to shift the remaining in-person site visits for Wake County, NC and Hartford, CT to virtual site visits. Site visits in the four other sites are complete.

Overview of Requested Changes

For the remaining two sites, the study team proposes to use WebEx Cloud, Mathematica¹'s on-line meeting application, to host and record the following virtual interviews and focus groups:

- Improvement Team interview (Instrument 1)
- Focus Group with Engagement Strategy Staff (Instrument 2)
- Senior leader interview (Instrument 3)
- Fathers and paternal relative interview (Instrument 4)

Additionally, based on the completed in-person interviews and focus groups we propose changes to the flow of the instruments and the addition of minor questions to instruments 1 and 3 that

¹ The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) contracted with Mathematica and the University of Denver to complete this project.

clarify the information we are interested in learning about and more closely align to the pilot study research questions.

The described changes do not change the estimated average time to complete the interviews and focus groups.

We believe the revised mode of data collection will have limited effects on the data collected for the study for the following reasons:

- Online focus groups have been used as a medium for academic research since the late 1990s (e.g. Murray, 1997); and their use has expanded in recent years, particularly in educational and healthcare settings. Online focus groups are particularly well-suited for geographically dispersed participants, well-defined populations, small groups of 6-8 participants, and experienced moderators (Gaiser, 2008).
- Studies on the relative effectiveness of online versus in-person focus groups is limited. Research suggests that face-to-face focus groups generally yield more and richer data; but online groups can encourage more spontaneous interaction, are an efficient means of data collection, and generally yield a similar number and quality of distinct ideas (e.g. Brüggen & Willems, 2009; Richard, 2018).
- Most Improvement Team members including senior leaders and fathers and parental relatives regularly participate in affinity group calls, which use WebEx technology. Respondents are already familiar with calling into WebEx.
- The FCL study team has provided detailed guidance to respondents about how to best access WebEx and webcams for the interviews and focus groups.

We look forward to receiving your response to this non-substantive change request. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me, if you have any questions about the request.

Time Sensitivities

Shifting to virtual interviews and focus groups will ensure the pilot study can be completed on schedule. Delaying in-person site visits to Wake County, NC and Hartford, CT until the COVID-19 pandemic passes could result in delays to project deliverables. Because there is no definite timeline for the end of the pandemic, virtual data collection will allow the pilot study team to remain on schedule, complete data collection, and report findings back to OPRE to inform future decisions.

References

- Brüggen, E., & Willems, P. (2009). A Critical Comparison of Offline Focus Groups, Online Focus Groups and E-Delphi. *International Journal of Market Research*, 51(3), 1–15.
- Gaiser, T. J. (2008). Online focus groups. *The SAGE handbook of online research methods*, 290–306.

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