**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Building Evidence: The America's Promise Job-Driven Grant Program Evaluation**

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*Transcript by*

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MEGAN BAIRD: (In progress) – Megan Lizik in the Chief Evaluation Office, and also joining us is Jeanne Bellotti. Jeanne is the project director at Mathematica Policy Research, and Mathematica is the evaluation contractor for the America's Promise grant program.

Our goal for today's webinar is to talk about why we are evaluating the America's Promise grants. We'll also share some information about the planned evaluation, and we'll also share what we've learned so far from you all in regard to your programs. There will be an opportunity for questions and answers at the end of today's event, but please feel free to enter questions in the chat function throughout the presentation. And we will certainly pull them to address when we get to the end.

So before we get started, we did want to learn a little bit more about you all and how your programs may be incorporating efforts related to continuous improvement. So for our next polling question, does your organization have a continuous improvement initiative or other learning opportunities and makes it a priority? You could vote yes, no, or I am not sure. And it looks like we've got some folks voting yes. Most of you are voting yes. That is really great to see. It looks like some of you are not sure, but definitely no one has said no. So that's really great to see.

Our next polling question, how often do you use data or research to inform program decisions? And again, here you can choose often, sometimes, or never. So a lot of people checking often. Some checking sometimes. We're glad to see no one is checking never. This is a big theme in America's Promise. So we're glad to see that everyone is thinking about using data or research to inform program design. OK.

So before we get started talking on the why and what of evaluation, I did want to make sure to put an emphasis on the role of the program office in the evaluation. I know you all know the America's Promise e-mail address. You hear from us frequently. And our role really is to support the success of the evaluation of the America's Promise grant and to support you all as grantees in these efforts.

And our goals in achieving this are to work together with you, your federal project officer, the chief evaluation office, and the evaluator to coordinate evaluation efforts and facilitate communication. And we view ourselves as the air traffic controller. We really want to make sure that we serve as a point of contact for everyone involved to make sure that there is clear communication and also a point of contact should you have questions.

And we'll work to ensure that communication on the evaluation does come out to you as available as well as, again, serving as the POC for anything related to the America's Promise grants. And just as a reminder, our e-mail address is on the slide. I'm sure you already have this, but please feel free to e-mail us there with a cc to your federal project officer on anything related to the evaluation or other questions related to the America's Promise grant program.

And with that, I'm going to turn things over to Molly to get us started with why we are focusing on evidence.

MOLLY IRWIN: Hi, everybody. I hope everyone is doing well this afternoon. As Megan said, I'm the chief evaluation officer in the Department of Labor and wanted to spend just a few minutes at the beginning of this webinar before we dive into the details to put all of this in context and talk about why we focus on evidence and why this is so important. And it's really great to see the first two polling questions that all of you, it sounds like, are already focusing on evidence and using data and evaluation and research as you're making decisions and engaging in continuous improvement initiatives to use what you know and continue to make what you're doing even stronger, even more effective. So that is really good to see.

Initiatives like this are happening across the federal government, and more and more in every policy document that we see there is a strong evidence on the importance of doing just that, using data, evidence, and evaluation to inform decision making and ultimately the goal being to improve the outcomes for the folks that we serve. So when you look, for example, in the president's FY '18 budget, there's clear language in there about having an effective and efficient federal government and that doing that requires evidence about where the needs are greatest, what's working, and where we can improve.

In addition to that, there's a federal evidence-based policy-making commission which was introduced into law by a bipartisan group of – bipartisan and bicameral group of folks in the legislature. It was introduced by Paul Ryan and Patty Murray and put in place a 15-month commission to really think about and provide recommendations to Congress about how to better use data, evidence, and evaluation for decision making. The report on that just came out two weeks ago. It's something we're happy to share with all of you, if you haven't seen it, but again, it really reinforces, again, the importance of doing evaluation and using evidence to make better decisions.

So on our part of the Department of Labor this is the reason or one of the many reasons why in almost every grant program now we have a requirement that grantees participate in an evaluation, and we use evidence and evaluation as we're writing the funding announcements for these grants. So that's why you saw, as you were writing your grant, the requirement that you tell us how you're using evidence-based approaches in your programs, and it influenced how your grant was selected.

So sort of at the big "P" policy level in the president's budget, in the evidence-based commission, but also on the small "p" practice and policy level language about this, about the importance of data and evaluation is coming to us from many places. So this grant program and the work that you're going to be doing is really helping to move that forward.

So all of this – next slide. So all of this is really important because what we want to do – again, this goes to the continuous improvement question – is use evidence and evaluation as we're planning, which you guys have done as you're thinking about your program, implement the program, and evaluate it as we're going to do here and then use the information from the evaluation to make better decisions, to make the programs even better at the local level going forward, and to give us at the federal level information so that we can direct resources more effectively in the next round of grants and, again, ultimately with the goal of improving outcomes for individuals.

So how does this tie into America's Promise? Here we started with what we know now. As you guys all saw, there was a strong emphasis in the funding announcement on focusing on sectoral approaches, on using career pathways approaches. Both of these are strategies that have been found to be effective or very promising in the literature. So we want to build those in and then ultimately evaluate the strategies that you're doing and continue to build evidence in these areas.

How we'll do that in America's Promise is through the evaluation, Megan and then Jeanne will go into a lot more detail about that, but the goal, again, is to complete the cycle, to understand the partnerships, the implementation, the services, the characteristics of the population served, but ultimately to understand the impact of these programs on the participants that you're serving, to understand the approaches that you're using, and continue to build evidence on them so that we can direct dollars better, and most importantly, so that you guys who are in the field can be making changes to your programs to better serve the participants that you're serving.

So last slide. So where do you guys fit in? We really see this as a partnership. This is something in the end, building evidence, using – building evidence, doing evaluation is something that we use, that you use, that we think is mutually beneficial, and our goal at the federal level at DOL is to be supporting you both to do the great work that you're doing but also in being partners with us to build evidence so that we can continue to serve this population and improve outcomes. So with that I will turn it over to Megan, who will go into more detail about the evaluation.

MEGAN LIZIK: Great. Thank you so much, Molly. My name is Megan Lizik, and I'm a senior evaluation specialist in the Chief Evaluation Office and the contracting officer's representative for the America's Promise job-driven training program evaluation.

That's a little bit of a mouthful, but basically, I'm going to be helping manage this project for DOL to make sure that we can build the evidence that Molly talked about through this project. So Molly talked a little bit about why it's important to build evidence, and I'm going to talk to you more about how and the specifics we're going to do that under the America's Promise evaluation.

So like was already mentioned, DOL has contracted with an independent third party to conduct this evaluation. Our evaluation contractor is Mathematica Policy Research, and they have partnered with Social Policy Research Associates on this evaluation. So you may be hearing from some folks down the road from either one of these organizations, but they represent our contractor for this project.

We have contracted with an independent third party because independence and objectivity are core principles of evaluation, and it's important to insulate the evaluation functions from undue influence and both the appearance and the reality of bias. And so having this independent party give us a report at the end that tries to answer the research questions that we laid out helps to remove that potential for bias. The evaluation will run for five years, from 2017 through 2022, and this will include time to do everything from the design process to data collection to analysis and reporting.

So now, I'll talk a little bit more about the components in this evaluation. We have two primary components, and this will help us get a little more specific about how we are going to answer the research questions that you saw a few slides ago. So first, we will be doing an implementation evaluation. This is with all 23 of you, and we're primarily going to look to answer those questions about how you're implementing your grant. We will also be planning to conduct an impact evaluation, and that is with a subset of three to five grantees.

The questions that we're going to strive to answer under that component of the evaluation are more to the impact that Molly just mentioned on training and employment outcomes for participants. So you see a little bit of a range here because the ultimate number of grantees involved will depend on a number of factors that we'll talk about in just a minute but things like strength of grantee program models, how many people you think you can serve, and how different what you're doing under your America's Promise program is from what other services might be available in the community. Like she said, we always want to conduct the most rigorous evaluation possible so we can have the most confidence in the answers provided to the research questions.

Like I mentioned, we will have some reports under this evaluation. The exact timeline for those will be determined when we know a little bit more about the design we'll be undertaking.

So next, I wanted to give you a little sense of the kinds of information our evaluation team will be looking to collect from you. If you took a look at the one-pager that is in the file share here and on WorkforceGPS, you'll have seen a little bit about a timeline for some of this information collection. We have already started to collect some of this from you.

So the research team has done some document review to understand more about your grants and also had some initial clarifying calls with you to make sure they understand what you're planning, and then in several months you'll be asked to participate in a brief electronic survey to collect information on your partnerships, service delivery, and some of your challenges and successes.

More interviews and site visits and a partner network survey with up to 25 organizations actually per partnership will happen in the coming months and years, and we'll talk a little bit more about that anticipated timeline later. Basically, I wanted you to just see here that the evaluation team will be collecting various information over time from all of you for the implementation study.

And now, to talk a little more about the impact study. We are in the process of assessing feasibility. So that means that we are trying to figure out what is the most rigorous and appropriate design to answer the research questions. So again, to figure this out the research team has started document review, having calls with you, and soon will reach out to plan some site visits with a few grantees that seem promising to participate in this component of the evaluation.

After that point the independent research team will discuss recommendations with DOL, and if we're asking you to participate in the impact study, we'll have some more conversations with you about the type of design we'll be using and what will be needed from you and of course you will have a dedicated liaison from the Mathematica team who will then be working with you throughout the evaluation.

But so before we get ahead of ourselves, I wanted to just back up a moment and sort of share with you more about the careful process we go through when figuring out what kind of design we can pursue for an impact evaluation. So we'll be looking at, like I said, how your America's Promise grant program is different from what other programs might be available locally.

What does business as usual look like for participants in the community who might be eligible for America's Promise? And we'll also look at the number of people you plan to serve, which helps us know how confident we can be in the results we can see as a result of your program, if you serve enough people, that can tell us that it's more likely that the results we see are due to the program and not due to something else or random chance. And finally, we'll also be looking at what kind of data is available.

So you can see a lot of careful consideration goes into figuring out the best evaluation design possible for answering our research questions, and at the end of the day DOL is interested in both your grant program and the evaluation being successful. So more to come as we proceed with this feasibility process and the evaluation design.

At this point, though, I'd like to pause and turn it over to Jeanne Bellotti, our project director with Mathematica to tell you a little bit more about what we've already learned so far. Jeanne?

JEANNE BELLOTTI: Great. Thank you, Megan. So I just wanted to start off by saying how excited I am to be working with these grantees, with all of you, and getting to know you over the next couple of years and learning a lot more about how you're actually implementing your programs.

So I'll start with just some basic information that we've learned so far. As Megan mentioned, we did do a review of all of your grant applications, and we also had phone calls with all of you to learn a little bit more about your early planning and expectations for the grant.

So you all know the basic structure of America's Promise. DOL awarded 23 grants to regional partnerships just earlier this year for a total of $111 million, and the grants are four years long with a planning phase of six to nine months. And we did learn during our telephone calls that many of you have already started enrolling participants. So you're in various stages of the planning process. Some are already beginning services and some still in the planning activities.

So the funding announcement included four required activities, and we'll be learning a lot more about how you're actually implementing these through the evaluation. So those include education and training leading to a career pathway in an H-1B industry or occupation, the expansion of your regional partnerships, employer engagement and sector strategies, and then a strong commitment to customer-centric design.

So as you probably know, the grants are spread all across the country, which is great. So we're going to get a lot of diversity in both the economic conditions in your regions but also both urban and rural communities are involved. Some of the regional partnerships cover very large geographic areas, while others are much more concentrated. So it's nice to see that we've got a wide swath of the U.S, covered by these grants.

So most of the regional partnerships had actually already formed before America's Promise, and this was really evidenced in your grant applications. You mentioned a host of different federal, state, and local and regional efforts that you had to bring organizations together to support the regional economy.

We learned a little bit more about those during the phone calls, and as you can see form this graph, these are some of the federal efforts that your partnerships have already been involved with. Not necessarily all of the organizations in the partnerships but at least one. So the vast majority of you had at least one organization involved in a TAACCCT grant, and then some of the other H-1B investments like GIAC, TechHire, SWFI, and Ready to Work.

So the FOA had four required types of partners, employers, the workforce investment system, economic development agencies, and education and training providers. So the lead grant organization was most often those workforce partners or higher education, either community colleges or universities. So those are the group – those are the organizations that are leading the charge here, but the number of partners varied pretty widely.

On average, the applications included 22 different partners, and our – as you can see, they range from nine here. There are nine of you who had between 9 and 15 partners, and then four of you who had 30 or more. So it, to some degree, depended on the diversity and the size of your regional organization as well as the types of activities that you were planning to implement. We did find out during the phone interviews that fewer partners are actually engaged now at this early stage of activities. On average, about six organizations were involved in planning. Presumably, additional partners will become part of the effort once the grants move forward.

And I did want to take just a minute to talk specifically about employers. So we did ask on our phone calls about employer engagement up to this point, and most commonly, employers in these early stages were involved on advisory boards and then the development of career pathways and training activities, as well as, as you can see from the graph, some development of work-based learning activities and in one local area referring of participants. There were three grants who reported that they hadn't involved employers as of yet but were planning on doing that once their activities got underway.

So the three main sectors that are the focus of these grants are advanced manufacturing, information technology, and healthcare. There were four of you who were engaged in other sectors, that was aerospace and financial services, for example, but the occupations within those industries or sectors were on the H-1B track, oftentimes in advanced manufacturing and IT. It was interesting that nine of you were focusing on two or more of those sectors. So you might have some components that are advanced manufacturing and others that are in IT.

Moving on, I think the main message on this is that you're planning on serving a lot of folks, which is great. So for that $111 million the expectation is that you'll serve a total of over 21,000 participants over the course of the four years. The size of the grants does vary from a low of 250 up to the largest grantee serving 3,000. So on average, you're expected to serve about 944 individuals.

And the types of people that you're engaging will range some. So the Department of Labor is allowing through these grants for the unemployed, the underemployed, and incumbent workers to be served, but not all of you are necessarily serving all three of those groups. You might have chosen one or two, and even within those target populations, most of the grantees indicated that they are – you guys are serving at least one special population.

So, for example, we heard that 18 of you are planning to target veterans, and the expected numbers aren't quite clear as of yet. They might be quite a small proportion of participants in some of your areas, but your hope is to reach out and make sure that you're providing them with priority of service. And then a few of the other key target populations were low-income individuals, specific groups that are underrepresented within your target H-1B occupations, and then recent high school graduates or non-degree completers.

So we started getting a little bit more information during our phone calls about your recruitment and intake processes, and it was interesting to hear that 16 of you plan to have a centralized approach to this process and are expecting to use one particular type of provider to do your application and enrollment process.

So seven grantees indicated the education provider was going to take responsibility for this process. Six plan it to go through the workforce partnership, and three plan on relying on specific grant-funded staff for their intake process. And then the seven remaining grantees had a more decentralized approach. So it sounded as if multiple partners were planning on conducting intake and enrollment, and the procedures might vary from intake point to intake point.

So types of training. The primary activity conducted under this – these grants will be training, and Department of Labor specified several different types of training that are allowable. So 16 grantees are planning on offering on-the-job training or OJT. Fourteen plan paid internships, and 11 planned paid work experiences. We also heard that 10 of the grantees mentioned registered apprenticeships in their applications, although interestingly only four discussed apprenticeships during the telephone interviews. And it may be that additional grantees are still exploring opportunities for apprenticeships as they move forward.

So the last item I just wanted to mention here was that we did ask you a handful of questions when we had our telephone calls about your experience with evaluation just to gauge your basic understanding and what you've been involved with in the past. And it was great to hear that 15 of the 23 grantees had been a part of an evaluation before America's Promise. So you have some experience, obviously, in working with third-party evaluators and understanding what the process looks like.

So we were really glad to hear that. And interestingly, six of you have already participated in a random assignment study of some sort. So you have a better sense of what that entails but I will caution by saying that every evaluation is different and we're certainly excited to work in partnership with you, as Megan and Molly indicated, to really make this evaluation a success and to design a study that makes the most sense and is the most rigorous for America's Promise in particular.

So I'm going to pass it over to Megan, and she and I are planning on tag-teaming a little bit about what's next so we can give you some of the details about what's upcoming in the next handful of months.

MS. LIZIK: Great. Thanks so much, Jeanne. So here are some immediate next steps for what you can expect. Like I mentioned earlier, we will be continuing our knowledge development and doing some site visits with some of you soon, and then we'll be talking more about which grantees are participating in the impact evaluation.

And like I said, we'll have more conversations to discuss that, if we cross that bridge with you. We'll also be meeting with all of you again at your grantee meeting in November. So you'll get to hear an update on sort of where we are, what's being planned, what we know about the design at that point, and any next steps there too.

So now, Jeanne, I'll turn it back over to you to tell them a little bit more about specific times you'll be hearing from Mathematica.

MS. BELLOTTI: Sure. So I'm going to start with the implementation study. So we've already had some telephone discussions with you. Our first formal data collection effort will be hopefully in the sprint of 2018, pending approval from the Office of Management and Budget. At that point we'll give a brief survey to the primary grantee, and that will – shouldn't be – I think it's a half an hour, that survey, and that will provide some – us with some information about your overall partnership and the types of activities that you're implementing.

We're planning on working with the Department of Labor to then select a subset of six partnerships that will be involved in a partner survey, and this will be conducted twice, so in summer of 2018 and then again in winter of 2020. And this will give us a better sense of how your partnerships are changing over time and the interactions that you have across different organizations working towards the same goal. So we will be hopefully identifying at some point in early 2018 as we finalize our design which six organizations or partnerships will be involved in that component.

And then we plan on talking with all 23 partnerships in some form or another in the fall – summer or fall of 2019. So we'll be conducting site visits to a subset of 12 of you, and those will be two to three days long, depending on the size of the partnership and, to some degree, the geographic dispersion of your program. It will take us some time to travel from place to place. And for the rest of you, the remaining 11, we'll be doing telephone interviews. So we're expecting several hours of telephone interviews to collect some of the same information we'll be collecting while on site. So that's the schedule for the implementation study.

For the impact study we are currently planning out one-day site visits that we will conduct with a subset of five grantees this fall. So we're expecting to work with the Department of Labor to identify which sites we'll actually be coming out to visit within – hopefully, within the next month we'll have some information out to everyone who might be involved in those. And then the Department of Labor will work with Mathematica to finalize the impact design and select the sites to be involved in the impact study, depending on the design that we determine is the most rigorous and feasible. And that will happen in early 2018.

So for the sites that are involved in the impact study, Megan already made reference to the fact that Mathematica is going to be your partner in this process. So we will be providing you with as much support as we can along the way. So we'll work with you to develop an MOU that will lay out the responsibilities of our team and what we'll be doing and then what the site will be involved in.

We will customize all of the impact procedures, and really our goal there is to minimize the burden on you and your staff as well as participants. And we've got lots of experience in trying to customize the way things are done in impact evaluations. And then we'll come out and train all your local staff on what it means for the program and what the evaluation will look like, and we'll have a dedicated liaison that will work with each of the impact sites and will provide ongoing support to you throughout the course of the evaluation. So that's the basic overview for the impact study.

So I wanted to – we are going to open it up for questions, and, John, am I turning it back over to you or Megan Baird?

MS. BAIRD: Yes. Thank you, Jeanne and Megan and Molly. Now is your chance. If you haven't yet typed in any questions, please feel free to type those in, and just as a reminder, the purpose of today's webinar is on evaluation. So we're not going to answer policy questions. With that said, I do want to clarify.

Sean had a question. There was a reference earlier on Jeanne was talking about the America's Promise grantees that also had experience in evaluations from other grant programs, and there was a reference to some of you also have Ready to Work grants. And just to be clear, those are separate grants, separate efforts, and we weren't talking anything about co-enrollment, which is not allowable.

And certainly, Sean, if you've got some follow-up questions, you just send those to your FPO, but just wanted to clarify that that slide was meant to identify that a lot of you have experience through other grants separately in evaluation. And we've got – oh, great, Sean.

And we have another question coming in for the – in regards to next steps. "When will we hear if we're chosen as a site visit for consideration of the impact study?"

MS. LIZIK: So this is Megan Lizik. I can jump in here. The timing here, it's probably going to be – I would say probably in about early November we may start having those conversations, give or take a week or two depending on how complex it is to sort of sort out all of the great information that we collect from you guys. So it won't be – it won't be too much longer. Jeanne, is there anything you wanted to add there?

MS. BELLOTTI: Nope. I think that sounds like the right timeframe.

MS. LIZIK: OK.

MS. BAIRD: And then just a follow-up question from Jennifer. "It appeared that site visits will be in October. Is that correct or incorrect?

MS. LIZIK: Yes. That is what we are targeting. I know that we are just on the cusp of it about to be October. So, like I said, we're working through sort of doing some analysis on the information that our evaluation team has gotten so far from you and then we're going to talk a little bit more with them, DOL will, to sort of decide which sites we're going to visit and then we'll let you know. So we're hoping that the sites – site visits will happen in October. If there are logistical or other challenges that you're foreseeing and we do reach out to you, we're happy to work with you to try to work around those dates. Jeanne, do you have anything to add there?

MS. BELLOTTI: No. I think our timeline is a bit of a moving target, as Megan said, and we're trying to move as quickly as we can. And so I think October, November are the two months to keep your eyes open for additional information.

MS. LIZIK: Yeah. And just to clarify, we are anticipating those site visits to be scheduled and happen in October. If they can't all happen in October, then some may go into November, but we are going to get them done as fast as we can. Right. And then our hope and expectation is that, if you are identified as a site who would be a great partner for our impact evaluation, then we would anticipate that we'll likely be reaching out to you and you'll know more about that in November.

MS. BELLOTTI: Sean, it looks like you're inviting me down to Texas.

MS. BAIRD: Oh, and, Sean, you don't know what you've gotten yourself into.

MS. IRWIN: No. Being in evaluation is great. More people should invite the team.

MS. BELLOTTI: Well, it is great. Like so many – it was great to see so many of you interested in learning and making it a priority, doing continuous improvement, and looking at what evaluation research is already out there.

So I think sometimes people can feel nervous, but I think it's something that there's a lot that can be learned from – about yourself as well as your peers from what you're doing and that's important.

MS. BAIRD: And this is Megan Baird. I think our goal and our role really, if you are struggling with understanding how you fit into an evaluation and how you can benefit from participation in it, that is something that really our role is to help you kind of really see the positive effect it can have on your current program and future programs. It's definitely something that going forward you'll hear more on, and again, just to reiterate that this is still really in the planning stages, and you might have many, many questions that you should send in.

We may or may not have answers to them, just given where the stage is, but we are really committed to making sure that we can share as much information as possible to you as it's available and make you really understand where we are in the process, what the expectations are, and what assistance – technical assistance is available to support your efforts. So that is something that we always welcome you looping us in, if you've got questions or concerns, and that we're committed to really making sure that we're providing as much information as possible.

And if there aren't other questions, don't – this is not your last chance. Again, if we go to the next slide, I know you all have this. It's saved in your favorite contact, but there are many more opportunities to come. Again, the in-person convening November 14th and 15th, if you've not registered yet, we – we'll do our sales pitch now.

We really hope to see you there. Lots of great opportunities for peer networking with grantees and subject matter experts, but you will be able to meet the evaluation team and office and we'll have a session on the evaluation with hopefully some more information then as well. So lots of opportunities coming, and just know that you can continue to use us as a contact should questions come up after today's event.

And we will be following up within five business days, I believe, with a link to the recording. I think John's going to talk about that a little bit. Please make sure you're going to share that and the evaluation one-pager available in the file share with any of your other grant staff that was not able to attend today but should also have this information.

Thank you for joining us. I will give you 15 minutes back of your day and we'll turn things over to John to wrap us up.

JONATHAN VEHLOW: And that concludes building evidence, the America's Promise job-driven grant program evaluation. I want to thank all the participants and presenters today, and if you could please stay logged into the room for just a minute longer to provide us with some feedback.

If you look at your screen, you'll see a feedback window where you can let us know what you thought of today's webinar. Please take a second now to share your thoughts. Let us know what you liked or what we can improve on. There was also an additional topics window on the screen where you can let us know what you'd like to hear in future webinars.

A recording of today's webinar, as well as the transcript, will be made available on WorkforceGPS in about two business days. Also, to better connect with your WorkforceGPS colleagues, please take a few minutes and sign up for the member directory on WorkforceGPS. That link is located at the top of that feedback window.

So again, we want to thank everyone for joining us, and with that, have a super day, everybody.

(END)