**WorkforceGPS**

**Using Evaluation and Other Evidence to Inform Strategic Planning Activities**

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GRACE MCCALL: And welcome to "Using Evaluation and Other Evidence to Inform Strategic Planning Activities." Now, without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to one of our moderators for today, Gloria Salas-Kos, senior program analyst/evaluation technical assistance coordinator, Employment and Training Administration, United States Department of Labor. Take it away, Gloria.

GLORIA SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Grace. Welcome, everyone. We're really happy to see that our workforce community has such a large interest in this session. With me today is our co-moderator. Michelle, would you introduce yourself?

MS. MCCALL: Michelle, make sure you're unmuted right now if you're talking.

MS. CARSON: Hi.

MS. MCCALL: There you are. Hey.

MICHELLE CARSON: Thank you, Gloria. I'm Michelle Carson. I'm the project manager for the evaluation dissemination and technical assistance project for the Employment and Training Administration with Safal Partners.

I was formerly in the state office for Title II adult education programs and managed the evaluation of program effectiveness, performance data collection and reporting, and interagency collaboration. So am really passionate about the topic that we're talking about today.

And in my current role I look forward to supporting you all in your research and evaluation efforts through the evaluation and research hub technical assistance opportunities and online resources. Gloria?

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Michelle. So we want to make sure we get the most out of this session. And to get us started our first question gauges your evaluation and evidence building knowledge, and it helps us to understand how familiar you are with this topic.

And the question is, what are the main benefits of including evaluation and evidence in strategic planning? So if you'll look at your screen, please select all the answers that apply.

OK. We'll give you a few more minutes, and then I'll ask Michelle to summarize the responses. I mean a few more seconds. OK. All right. Michelle, what do you make of these responses?

MS. CARSON: So it looks like folks were either selecting very evenly across or folks were selecting multiples because it seems like the policy component, the element of – for planning, and determining funding priorities seem to be fairly closely split across all the respondents.

MS. SALAS-KOS: With that being said, we should go ahead and move on.

MS. CARSON: So we'd like to take a look at today's objectives. So first, we'll hear from the Division of Research and Evaluation which will provide information on helpful tools to determine readiness and capacity for conducting evaluation and followed by the Performance Management Office's insights on how those tools and information are helpful in strategic planning efforts.

And then we'll hear from the chief evaluation officer who will share about the DOL evidence-based resources and ways to use evaluation. And then we'll have some time for Q and A before we wrap up with a synthesis of the resources shared and that are available for you to use in your building your capacity for conducting evaluation and collecting evidence. So I will –

MS. SALAS-KOS: Wonderful. So with that, our speakers today will each provide their perspective. To start us off, we will hear from Wayne Gordon who's the director of the Division of Research and Evaluation with the Office of Policy Development and Research in the Employment Administration – Employment and Training Administration. Sorry about that.

Next, we'll hear from Dennis Johnson, the director of the Performance Management Center in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration.

And lastly, we'll hear – lastly but most importantly, we'll hear from Christina Yancey, the chief evaluation officer at – in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy.

So, Wayne, would you like to go ahead and get started?

MR. GORDON: Thank you, Gloria. And thanks to our webinar participants for joining us today. We've been very pleased with the interest show for our TA efforts, and we welcome questions today and any other input you provide to make these sessions useful to you.

Our overriding message for this session is to share with our state and local partners that we too at the federal level are expected to pursue research and evaluation activities that support continuous improvement across all of our programs and to work with our partner agencies, where possible, recognizing that we serve the same customer.

Federal drivers in this effort are not just Section 169 of the Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act but also the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018 and the more recent Evidence Act. Each piece of legislation leans heavily on the process for developing plans, i.e. learning agendas and evaluation plans, et cetera. And you will hear more from my colleagues today on how we at DOL are approaching these requirements.

ETA, in partnership with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, released a report that provided feedback from a national assessment to understand the then current research and evaluation capacities within state workforce agencies.

This was the result of an ongoing conversation I've had with NASWA staff about my desire to enlist states in a mutually supportive network of entities dedicated to workforce system research. Our partners in crime, if you will.

The study attempted to catalog research publications produced by states, gather feedback on the types of studies produced, and identify the types of partnerships related to funding, conducting, or participating in research and evaluation projects.

As part of this assessment, we also learned about staff capacity, including levels of experiences and skills to conduct research and evaluations. Lastly, we asked states to identify individual studies, authors, and partners, research methods used, and data sets accessed central to the research questions that were addressed and approximate study costs.

What we learned was that states' interest in capacity for conducting research and evaluation of their programs ran the gamut from almost nonexistent to a fully built out unit dedicated to research and evaluation. This baseline analysis has helped shape our TA efforts, which attempts to demystify the subject by making resources available, enlisting states to support each other no matter where an individual state happens to be on the continuum I mentioned.

The areas we've initially focused our TA efforts on are understanding the basics of evaluation planning, design, and implementation.

First, out of the gate, as far as planning tools we developed for our state partners, are intended to help frame a baseline on capacity and identifying evidence needs or gaps through a series of questions, the evaluation readiness assessment tool, and the evaluation design and implementation assessment tool. And I encourage you to visit the evaluation hub on WorkforceGPS to find these and other TA resources.

Combined with our broad invitational posture of encouraging individual state conduct of studies, collaboration with state and federal partners and studies they undertake, in cooperation with requests for data and other resources that you may receive, our goal is to divide the TA curriculum that meets states where they are in terms of capacity and planning and provide the resources to help you along the way toward fulfilling WIOA requirements.

I think we're going to turn into a polling question.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Yes. Thanks, Wayne. You've given us a nice overview of ETA's effort to help our audience understand how we track federal evaluations, which is part of the requirements in WIOA. It would also be nice to know how familiar all of you are with these types of evaluations.

Tell us, do you know which one of these evaluations, if any, are being conducted in your state or your local area? And select all the answers that apply.

WAYNE GORDON: I think career pathways is in the lead, but all choices are represented. I think all of us in the room are curious about what the other is.

CHRISTINA YANCEY: Looks like RIO (ph) is one.

MR. GORDON: Remember this is just a small subset that could possibly be happening out there. Well, thanks, everyone, for your input there. We appreciate it. At this time I'd like to turn the mic over to the director of the DOL Performance Management Center, Dennis Johnson. Dennis.

DENNIS JOHNSON: Thank you, and thanks, everyone. It's really great to be here. I used to be in the Employment and Training Administration, and it's been a long time since I've gotten to talk to workforce practitioners, especially those who are interested in planning. So this is very exciting.

I'd like to sort of demystify the idea that planning needs to be done by performance professionals or even evidence professionals. All of you are doing planning all the time. Whether you are running a multi-billion-dollar grant program or you are trying to buy a car, this is a slide that I call the whole ball game, which is what we are doing all day, every day as we go through our lives. And I think it can be instructive as we turn towards strategic planning.

We know what we want to do. That's part of formulation. That's planning in a nutshell based on assumptions, which are usually resources or people. We put a plan down on paper, and we move to implementation or execution, and we usually run into some obstacles. And reality sets in, and it's a little different than what we formulated.

And quarterly, fiscal quarter, program year we assess, and that's the difference between the two, between formulation and execution. And from that assessment we become a little smarter, and we throw all of those inputs into our next formulation phase. So this is sort of the virtuous cycle of planning, moving from planning to implementation to assessment and then turning what we've learned into bettering our plan.

I want to give you an overview of how the planning framework worked at the federal government. We are responsible for a four-year strategic plan. Typically, strategic plans are multi-year. They are setting very high-level strategies and goals. Our strategic plan is obviously aligned with the president's goals as well as the secretary's vision for the department.

From that strategic plan, from that multi-year plan, all other things flow. And in the federal government we write an annual budget request to Congress based on that strategic plan. Once we send that budget request to Congress, we write annual operating plans, one-year plans that say, given those resource levels, given that amounts of money or FTE or people, these are the activities we would undertake. This is how we would measure it. And then we assess that based on fiscal quarters or the fiscal year.

And finally, and probably most importantly, that – those annual operating plans, those measures and milestones inside those plans are linked to individual staff performance plans. And that's important for two reasons.

First of all, obviously, they are the ones actually implementing the plan. They're the ones that are going to be sure that we get done what we said we would do. But also, it ties them back to the mission. Every staff member should be able to read a plan and find themselves inside it so that we're all sort of rowing in the same direction on the boat.

And lastly, I just want to show you a very generic logic model that might be helpful as you undertake writing your own plan.

So this is sort of a base-level logic model we share with our federal partners when we undertake strategic and operations planning for the year. And essentially, what it starts with is input, those – what at the federal level appropriations, resource levels, money, federal staff. And we say what we're going to do with those inputs.

Those are called strategies. They are essentially activities that we are going to undertake, given a certain resource level.

Once we implement those strategies, we want to measure them through outputs and outcomes. So you can think of outputs as the number of things we do. Maybe that's claims processed or grants solicited. But outcomes, sort of the gold standard of performance management, is actually the intended result. What were the outcomes, wages, entered employment, employment retention, of our grant program?

And then listed below on the core elements, you can include risks and mitigation strategies in your plan. You can include – you should include measures and milestones. You can include other ad hoc requirements that the governors or your workforce agencies find important. But this is just a basic model to be used as a jumping off point or brainstorming activity to get you started.

With that I want to – oh, I've gone too far. With that I want to turn it over to Christina Yancey, the DOL chief evaluation officer, to talk a little bit about evaluation and evidence.

MS. YANCEY: OK. Great. Thank you, Dennis. So to reiterate Dennis' enthusiasm, I also am really grateful to my ETA colleagues here for inviting me to this webinar to speak with all of you and to share some new and exciting updates at the federal level and to answer some questions you may have about them.

For my short time with you, I am going to advance my slides. And so during my short time with you I wanted to talk about two things. One is to talk about the federal context related to evidence building on what works in DOL investments, including some recent changes to our landscape that are due to legislation that has been enacted actually this year.

It's – can be sort of confusing. We have this piece of legislation called the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018, but it was not signed into being enacted until 2019. So – but this piece of legislation, which we also call the Evidence Act, brings about some changes to our landscape.

And I wanted to talk a little bit about what that means, and I think you'll be pleased to see that it opens up some transparency to some of the work that we're doing. And I'll explain how in just a few minutes.

And I also – the second thing I wanted to talk about this afternoon with you all is to describe some updates to one of DOL's premier mechanisms for disseminating information about best practices, about programs and interventions that have a rigorous evidence base behind them, and that show what works related to labor research.

And that's our DOL clearinghouse on labor evaluation and research, also called CLEAR. And that website has undergone a few updates in the last month or so that have been designed specifically to support states' use of evidence. So I wanted to highlight that change that has recently taken place on that particular website.

But first, I wanted to discuss DOL's landscape on evidence building. It's not dissimilar to strategic planning.

So as Denny was just talking about in terms of this idea of setting up these roadmaps where you document your key mission goals – (inaudible) – into objectives and then strategies and tactics to be able to advance on your mission, the evidence building – what we call evidence building plans are also roadmaps that DOL uses, but these roadmaps are related to filling gaps in what we need to know to feel confident about the fact that we're achieving mission as effectively and efficiently as possible.

And you all have done this for some time. We – ETA has done this actually since 1970s. Internally, it has been developing research plans that look to filling holes and gaps in what we know and to develop research and other kinds of rigorous systematic studies to fill those gaps.

But at the department level we've also been undertaking these efforts, but for the most part the content of that work has been conducted internally. And with the advent of the new legislation, we're sharing more about these learning plans.

And essentially, the learning plans in this slide, as you see, we sort of mapped out what will be contained on these plans, which is where we identify priority learning objectives and questions that could potentially be answered through research and evaluation. And we're, again, forecasting out into some period in the future where these plans ultimately align to a similar timeframe as our strategic planning cycles, which at the federal level are conveniently statutorily mandated to be four years.

So you should operate within the cycle, which is ambitious but also reflective of whatever your sort of requirements and also ambitions are for how that makes sense for your particular agency or component.

For us, these are four-year planning cycles, and I do think that it's critical to identify a long timeframe so you can have conversations about big goals and to think strategically about ways and steps that you'll take to get there to advance learning.

And so we develop these plans where we identify these learning objectives and questions, and then flowing down from there will be different types of evidence-building activities that we'll engage in to be responsive to filling those gaps.

And perhaps you're wondering, what is it that we exactly mean by evidence building? And you are in luck. The legislation also provides us some information about what evidence means. So on this next slide I have listed out language specifically directed – directly from the legislation. And it's helpful for us too so we all are able to communicate with a common definitional platform.

My office, the Chief Evaluation Office, we deal mostly in the world of evaluation work, but that's not the only kind of evidence. And so evidence is really helpful. It's different types of information that inform different types of questions and all are important and all help build our knowledge base about what are better and more effective and efficient ways to manage the government resources that we all manage.

So beyond program evaluation, which is helpful for answering questions in the traditional realm of an impact study, for example, where we would look at the impact of a program on a participants – program participant's wages and earnings a year after they completed the program compared to similarly-situated individuals that did not receive the program, that sort of a classic program evaluation question.

But there's a lot of other questions that are important to be answered and that also fit into sort of building an appreciation and portfolio of understanding about a particular issue.

Another important aspect of evidence that's sort of in this sphere would be foundational fact-finding. Traditionally, we've classically thought of this as sort of basic statistics, basic research. The new legislation sort of tries to I think broaden that definition to include some exploratory analysis.

But I think a way to conceive sort of the value of foundational fact finding would be, if you're interested, for example, in knowing about the proportion of the U.S. population that is participating in a certain – for example, I know the gig economy is an area that people are often interested in.

So how prevalent is this as an experience for Americans? Or potentially we're interested in knowing in a specific geographic region or we're interested in rural versus urban populations. We want to know whether or not there's particular age groups that experience this phenomena more than other age groups.

So foundational fact-finding is really helping to appreciate what is the magnitude of a phenomenon or experience, and for whom is this particular experience more prevalent? So foundational fact-finding is really critical for us to really understand the nature of particular changes that are occurring or when we think about things like the future of work, which I think is an issue for – that all of us are sort of – is on the front of our minds.

Another quadrant of evidence that's critically important is performance measurement. If – we're interested in early indicators often, and performance measurement is a great mechanism for appreciating the progress that we're making towards particular goals and to come at this from a variety of different indicators.

It's also helpful too when you look in a retrospective way to performance to see, how are we performing against certain targets over time and to potentially tweak those targets as you see new and emergent data? So performance measurement gets a great insight into changing trends and patterns so that real time adjustments can be made with programs.

A fourth quadrant for evidence is policy analysis, and this is also helpful, particularly if you're sitting on a lot of administrative data and you have a new policy that comes into effect. And you can look at what were existing patterns and behaviors in our administrative data prior to a policy being enacted? And then let's look at what happens afterwards.

So I think there's a variety of different types of questions that these different types of evidence activities can help inform, and together they create a picture so that you get as close to big T truth as possible. And the legislation really brings that into focus for us too.

I mean, I think – I'm sure this – the experience for all of you, as it is for us, that we exist traditionally in our own particular domains. And this piece of legislation has elevated the conversation around evidence and sort of bridging across our perspective domains in this area so that we speak together in terms of describing our activities in a coordinated way.

So I wanted to talk a little bit about – in the next slide – about – oh, that one.

So I wanted to talk a little bit now about sort of how we engage in these activities as a continuous learning process. So as I mentioned at the beginning, we developed these four-year evidence building plans, and we revisit those. I think it's important to think of this in terms of establishing sort of ground rules or anchors to your process.

We develop these four-year plans so that we're able to think in a big-picture way, but then we also revisit our plans on an annual basis so that we can make sort of mid-course corrections that you can crystalize your relevant targeted areas that you want to focus research and activities on. So it's important to sort of balance big-picture thinking with short-term concrete objective gains and initiating projects.

So we – internally, we meet on an annual basis to discuss and update our four-year planning document. So I know that sounds a little – it can – it's sort of like having two somewhat contradictory ideas in your mind at the same time, but they work together in the fact that you don't need to hash out everything you want to do for the next four years.

You can identify big-picture ideas of things that you want – that you anticipate that you want to learn about and then make incremental gains and progress towards that in your annual meeting – with your annual meetings.

But then, obviously, for folks that are interested to collaborate and discuss more, we'll meet more frequently. But I think it is helpful to establish sort of a benchmark of a minimum engagement, and for us it works to do that on an annual cycle, particularly aligning with how budgets – with the budget cycle. And so it's helpful to think about these planning conversations to occur concurrently with other types of planning conversations, particularly aligned with budgeting conversations.

Another thing that is helpful to mention is that our documents are considered living documents, that we update them as is important and as is relevant. They are not static documents but rather things that we see as adaptive to changing conditions.

And lastly, it's important that, while the process of developing and planning the research activities, as well as disseminating those findings, are a collaborative, iterative engagement with all of the stakeholders, once we commit to a project or an independent research activity, those – the activity itself is done in a way that is separate and done objectively and independently and has sort of these standards that are wrapped around the project itself.

And that's really important so that you sort of impart a neutrality to your research project so that it isn't – so that there is no perception or reality of any bias or – but it always sort of maintains its neutrality and perspective.

So in terms of dissemination, I wanted to talk a little bit about one important way that we discuss the products of – that come out of the research activities that we engage in, which is to make use of a clearinghouse.

I'm not sure how many of you are familiar with our Clearinghouse on Labor Evaluation and Research, but this is a website that we've maintained for several years. And essentially, the clearinghouse is an example of how DOL's committed to continuous improvement and how we disseminate information and research to help make it more useful for consumers.

We've developed this website to communicate about – to synthesize and summarize the state of evidence on various labor-related topics. This is aimed at research that is about the impact of specific interventions on intended beneficiary populations, and it's research we funded but not – it's not exclusively DOL-funded work. It really runs – we scrape all of the relevant research and analyze that and compile that and synthesize and communicate about what sort of the collective knowledge base is around specific topics.

In the last couple of months, we have specifically targeted our – a development in our website to be able to add a specific filter function so that you can drill down to specific types of programs, target populations to see what evidence there is on what works. And on our slide deck here I have highlighted specifically that work related to our Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments program.

So as many of you I'm sure know there is a grant program for RESEA out of the Office of Unemployment Insurance, and this grant program has some requirements that involve helping to identify and build evidence about effective RESEA component programs to support individuals that are separated from employment to regain connection to employment opportunities.

And so we've developed a specific page on our CLEAR website. So you'll see here this is just a screenshot, and then on the upper right-hand blue banner on the right-hand side, we have a tab targeted just to RESEA. And when you click on that, we have there a list of very specific type program components that are – that many states have.

And we offer there then, based on these particular components, a summary of the evidence related to that particular component, and we identify whether the evidence is very strong in that area. Not only do we highlight whether or not the evidence is strong, but we also indicate what the evidence indicates.

And then you can sort of drill down to read about specific studies, or you can just stay at a high level and say, based on this topic, based on reemployment eligibility assessment, I just want to know what is the bottom line. And we offer that there. Or you can say, well, I want to know how many different studies there are. What are the specific populations they studied? What are the specific findings by study? We have that as well.

So there's many different – it's a very dynamic site offering you a variety of ways to interact and intersect with the work. And that is just one of our topic areas. We have a variety of other topic areas which I hope you'll peruse. And again, we have this new really great dynamic search and filter option so you're able to drill down to the specific population or program type that you may be interested to know what is the evidence base about that specific intervention.

And we hope you find that useful and are excited to hear any feedback you have because, again, we're always looking for ways to make sure that we're sharing the information that we have coming in and that we're communicating what the body of the literature has around a specific topic or intervention.

So at this point we actually want to ask you for our next polling question about the methods that you undertake to evaluate or to use evidence in your practice. Gloria?

MS. SALAS-KOS: So if you could review the responses. So there's four. We use qualitative methods, such as literature or synthesis reviews, to evaluate evidence. We use quantitative methods, that includes other standards, measurements, or analysis of data. We use both types of methods, quantitative and qualitative. Or we are not using any but would like to learn more.

So if you could take a few seconds to respond, it would be great to hear from – to help us think about what we would want to develop when it comes to future TA – to your TA needs in the future.

MS. YANCEY: This is great that it looks like most of you have – almost all of you have employed a variety of different methods for evaluating your evidence, with the majority responses kind of combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. But as we just discussed, everything adds to the knowledge base. So it's great if you have just quantitative methods, it's great, but it's great to have qualitative as well.

And we are obviously interested to help share what we know about the different – what we can do to be a resource to you. So if you have any particular insights that you'd like to share about particular methods that you would like to learn more about, please do add some text into the chat box function, and we would – we would appreciate hearing more from those of you that are interested to learn more about the methods.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks, Christina. And now that we've heard from our presenters, let's try to pull this all together for you and what we wanted to – what we'd like to share in terms of a recap when it comes to using evaluations and evidence to inform strategic planning.

So Wayne Gordon shared information about our efforts to learn about the technical assistance needs related to readiness and capacity at the state level. He also referenced how the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires that we track evaluations both at the state and at the federal level.

Dennis Johnson gave us a framework and, as he calls it, the whole ball game for the department's strategic planning efforts. He also described the core elements of a strategic plan, which are also elements that can be used to evaluate strategies and outcomes.

Christina Yancey talked about the evidence, how it's synthesized through policy analysis, performance management, foundational fact-finding, and program evaluation. She also shared tips for evidence building and planning so that it anchors on continuous improvement.

And that's a lot of information to absorb. So of course, if you have any questions that – where you'd like any clarification, we will be responding to them in a few minutes.

And in the meantime, Michelle, can you help us – our audience see what kinds of resources they might be able to use as they move forward with informing their strategic planning efforts?

MS. CARSON: Sure. We're on slide 24 now. So we just put together some of the resources that were mentioned in the presentations today. So the first is the Performance Management Center that leads the department's results-driven management through strategic planning, continuous process improvement, and performance reporting and all of that that's associated with the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010.

The next resources is the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research that Christina talked about that helps to make that research more accessible. It sounds like with that new feature even more so that you'll be able to drill down into specific program areas.

The evaluation and research hub is a community of practice located on the – within the WorkforceGPS, and it's designed to help support you in your efforts to use evaluations to improve workforce system strategies, services, and also to help you choose evaluations and research that could help you inform your policies and evidence-based practices.

So we do invite you to visit the eval hub and participate in some of the peer learning activities. And also, you can subscribe for regular updates from the eval hub as well.

The next link goes to the Evaluation Readiness Assessment tool that Wayne talked about at the top of our webinar. And then there's also the link here but we've – to the national scans that Wayne referenced. It's also – we've uploaded the file. You can see that in the file share section of the webinar right now.

And then the last two are some of the legislation around evaluation and evidence base that were policies that were referenced within the presentation. So the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 and then the Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018 that Christina referenced, House Bill 4174.

So just a few things there. And if you have any other questions, as Gloria said, feel free to enter those into the chat, and we'll be happy to answer those now. Gloria?

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks, Michelle. So we'd like to hear from you. We haven't had many questions yet. We're – we have a few minutes to spare, and so if you have any, what would you like to know about using evaluations and evidence building information to inform your strategic planning activities?

We'll give you a few minutes to think about your questions, and then just type them into the chat room.

MS. CARSON: Gloria, do you see the question from Kim Carol?

MS. SALAS-KOS: Yes.

MS. CARSON: OK.

MS. SALAS-KOS: I do. Yes. Wayne, would you like to take that question?

MR. GORDON: This is the question related to the tribal government participant on our viewer. Sorry we couldn't respond sooner. My reaction is, yes. If you're partnering and you interact with the public workforce system, this is certainly an applicable webinar to become familiar with the big picture of how the state – of how the states and your organization can collaborate on whatever research question that you come up with.

Knowing the extent of which that individuals are served, the outcomes for that service is important to learn. So I would say yes. It is a selfish response, but I would say, yes. It is applicable.

MS. CARSON: Right. There are some but (inaudible).

MS. SALAS-KOS: So we have a question about, "What is the status of data sharing agreements between government agencies such as DHS and DOL?"

MS. YANCEY: So I can take that, Gloria. This is Christina. So there's a variety of data sharing agreements that we are working on on a continuous basis. I think that this is – actually, this is something that the new legislation also is diving into that space in terms of with – in terms of the fact that we're trying to figure out ways to be able to leverage and use government data in a way that is helpful to inform a variety of these evidence building activities that I spoke about earlier. And so these are real time activities.

We do have examples of successful collaborations where we have, for example, routinely accessed and engaged in data sharing agreements with our partners and Department of Health and Human Services that oversees the National Directory of New Hires Wage Record data file specifically for research and evaluation purposes.

And I think, overall, there are some examples of these partnerships occurring at the state among certain states that have come up with data sharing agreements. I think that in the future this is a big area that we are focused on to continue finding ways to streamline these connections so that we can protect individuals' privacy, that confidentiality of data, and to be able to engage in these data stream transfers in a way that also holds the highest data security standards.

So I think that's a great question because this is the mind space that we also are in is that the opportunities are there to be able to – especially now with a lot of these cloud-based resources, to be able to leverage opportunities to be able to use data for a multitude of purposes and to make sure that they're fit for these different purposes. And that's a big objective for us at this moment as well.

MS. SALAS-KOS: OK. So another question that came in on, "How do you see evaluation activities playing into ETA grant solicitations?" Wayne?

MR. GORDON: I can take that. This is Wayne Gordon.

Over the last number of years we've added some language to all of the Federal Opportunity Announcements, FOAs, with regard to discretionary grants. And the language itself is I guess – is a warning or a welcoming to grantees that are – that receive an award can expect to be approached or may be expected to be approached to participate in an evaluation, if one was planned under that FOA.

It's a language that's been a long-time coming, and we've included that in there. It's important too that applicants and awardees understand that, given this effort to fund a special project or a special initiative, we want to learn something for it. So it's something that's going to be built in more and more.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Great. Do we have any other questions coming in? Any final thoughts from our presenters about what we see ahead?

MR. GORDON: While – this is Wayne. While Christina was speaking about the data access and sharing of data, I wanted – I was reminded of a briefing we had yesterday from Julia Lane who originally worked on the LEHD effort with census.

And she's participating in an initiative called the Coleridge Initiative, and it's – their goal is to bring states together to, one, have a location, a technical or an IT location, a portal, a place for the storage of administrative data as well as for the analysis of that data. And one of the key features of this effort has been her and her colleagues' work on creating a curriculum for manipulating and using that data.

States don't have to share it with anyone. They can create a location unto themselves. She referred to them as a house, I believe, and the pairing of a location – of a secure location for this data and obviously the PII is removed and scrambled. But we're learning more about this, and it seems to be a very, very good place for states to perform analysis of their own administrative data. Again, she's adding a curriculum. She's added curriculum components to that to train folks on how to manipulate, how to use that data, and the various software that's available there.

So like I said, we heard this presentation yesterday. It seems interesting, and I encourage folks to look into it more.

MS. SALAS-KOS: So, Christina, I have a question for you.

MS. YANCEY: Sure.

MS. SALAS-KOS: So DOL is a little bit ahead of the curve when it came to the learning agendas. Can you tell us how we evolved and what you see as prioritizing our research in terms of what we're doing now with developing a new learning agenda?

MS. YANCEY: Well, so I think the – where I think that we are headed is in a direction to build what we would call portfolios of evidence. So I think in the past there were – there was this kind of mindset that was, let's commit to one randomized controlled trial that will definitively tell us whether our program works, and then we're done. And now, we can march into the future.

And we realize that the reality is much more complicated. That in a time and a place a program may have worked, but what we're trying to get to, our future state, is to understand what all of the different pieces of information are collectively telling us about for whom? Which populations does some – is something affected? Under what circumstances? In which geographies?

We're really trying to drill down to helping a solution set that may not be the same for every single person, and that's why I think it's really critical that we – even though I come from an evaluation background and obviously I think an evaluation is really important, we also need to make sure that our data points are there and that we're able to have a multitude of ways that we interact with our programs and collect information. And that starts with having good quality information and also information that we understand and that we can plug into these different kind of purpose areas.

So to me, that is sort of the evolution of where we're headed, and I think this is – I think this is really a conversation that you'll see across all of the agencies. So for the states, for you all where you are working on HHS grants, this – and Department of Education, we're having those same conversations.

And I'm hopeful that because we are having these conversations at our level and trying to kind of communicate about this in a similar way and use similar definitional constructs that we're going to be speaking from kind of a united front more and more. So hopefully, we'll be a helpful resource and that we can all sort of collaborate in terms of making sure that we are able to do our – initiate our programs more effectively and efficiently but for different people.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Great. Dennis, I have a question for you.

MR. JOHNSON: Go.

MS. SALAS-KOS: "How have you seen evaluations and evidence evolve in terms of developing the strategic plan?"

MR. JOHNSON: Well, what I would say is, so for the first time in developing the most recent strategic plan, we started to incorporate language about evidence and evaluation. And the great thing about the new act is that it forces an intertwining between performance management and all types of evidence really.

And so stay tuned for the next strategic plan which will – we will start work on a little under a year from now because I think evaluation is going to play an even more important role in determining what are our objectives in the Department of Labor and how do we measure that we're actually getting the impact we expected?

MS. YANCEY: And I think it's important just to mention – this is Christina again – is that when we publish the budget, the next iteration of the budget, we will be including information on these department-level learning agenda plans. And not only will we be doing that, but all of the 24 CFO at the agencies. So all of the large agencies and departments across government are now required to produce these learning documents that they release with the budget.

So as Denny mentioned to me, perhaps on or about February 3rd, 2021, you shall see the first –

MR. JOHNSON: 2020.

MS. YANCEY: No. It won't be in 2020.

MR. JOHNSON: Oh, the next one. Yeah. It will be the first. Yeah.

MS. YANCEY: Right. So it will be in February 3rd, 2021.

MR. JOHNSON: That's right.

MS. YANCEY: There will be more to come.

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah.

MS. YANCEY: So we'll share more later.

MR. GORDON: This is Wayne Gordon. That's an opportunity for everyone on the webinar today to get a clue as to what the Department of Labor is interested in, HHS, and what these – these public facing documents are certainly – we're telegraphing what our interests are.

If states see overlap with interests that they share, collaboration or participation in these activities is something we'd encourage. And states can sort of kill two birds with one stone if they're looking to do something that overlaps with what the federal level is proposing.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thank you, the three of you. That was all very useful information.

We are about five minutes short of our regular ending time. So with that I think we can go ahead and close. Please know that you are all more than welcome to reach out to us if you have any questions related to the content of the session that was – the information we presented today.

You can reach Wayne Gordon, myself, Gloria Salas-Kos, or our evaluation and research hub technical assistance e-mail if you have any questions related to tools and resources available for conducting evaluations.

And with that I want to say thank you to all of you, and thank you to our audience. And don't forget to become a member of the evaluation and research hub. Thanks, everyone.

(END)