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**Transcript of Webinar**

**What Evaluation Details Do I Need for a Plan and How Long Will It Take?**

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GRACE MCCALL: And welcome to "What Evaluation Details Do I Need to Plan for and How Long Will the Evaluation Take?" So without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, Megan Lizik, senior evaluation specialist and project officer for RESEA Evaluation, U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office. Megan?

MEGAN LIZIK: Great. Thanks so much, Grace. And hello, everybody. I'm delighted to be joining you all on today's webinar. Before we get started, I wanted to take a step back and refresh everyone on the goals of our RESEA evaluation technical assistance and what we're trying to accomplish through these webinars. You saw this graphic a few webinars ago, and I thought it was useful to revisit today and just remind everybody that the evaluation process is an iterative, ongoing process. What you learn from an evaluation – either one that you conduct or one that another state conducts – may lead you to think about changes you want to make to your RESEA program in the future.

In turn, you might want to evaluate that new program, or component of your program, to continue learning more about what's most effective in helping people get back to work quickly – and so on in a cycle of learning and doing. This type of culture of continuous improvement, or culture of evaluation and evidence building, doesn't happen overnight. And we recognize that many of you are already engaged in some type of cycle like this in your states where you seek to use data and evidence to continually inform your program or policy decisions.

This is why the RESEA evaluation TA we've been providing through these webinars, as well as other resources and tools our team is working on for you, are geared toward a broad audience of states with RESEA funds. We wanted to build capacity to use, understand, and develop evidence. These resources can ensure that everyone who is administering an RESEA program, and everyone who is evaluating or considering an evaluation of an RESEA program, has resources on key evaluation topics to either get started or progress from where you're at.

All of our evaluation TA webinars, and other resources our RESEA evaluation TA team develop, are or will be made available on WorkforceGPS. The last time we met, in our "Which Evaluation Designs Are Right for Your State?" webinar, we covered different types of evaluation designs, including implementation, process, and impact studies, and what you can learn from them. We also did a bit deeper dive to learn more about the variety of different types of impact evaluation design. If you did not get a chance to attend the live session, a recording of it is on WorkforceGPS under the past events section, and linked to here.

Today, our webinar will get a bit more detailed or compact in some places than we've gotten so far. Our team will discuss the broad phases of an evaluation, timeline, and key factors you should consider when designing and conducting a high quality evaluation, and provide tips to help you proactively address the range of potential challenges that might arise. It's important to note that many of these activities will be completed by your evaluator rather than by the state's RESEA team. However, the purpose of today's webinar is to give you enough information about different phases of the evaluation so that you and your staff feel prepared to be an engaged partner in an evaluation.

Today's presenters are Phomdaen Souvanna, a Senior Analyst of Abt Associates, and Tresa Kappil, a senior analyst with Abt Associates. And with that, I'll turn it over to Phomdaen.

PHOMDAEN SOUVANNA: Thank you, Megan. Before kicking off today's webinar, I want to say thank you to everyone participating. On behalf of the RESEA Eval TA team, we are excited to deliver this webinar on evaluation planning details and timeline. To get started, we would like to conduct a quick poll to gauge your current thoughts about evaluation timeframes. In a moment, a poll window will pop up asking you to indicate which part of an evaluation you think takes the most time to complete. When the poll window pops up, please mark the option that best reflects your thoughts. We will give everyone about 10 seconds to make a selection. Great.

It looks like the majority of those who are in attendance think that planning the evaluation takes the most amount of time. We hope that this webinar will help to clarify approximately how long each of these activities should take. Before we discuss specific evaluation activities, we would like to talk briefly about the overall timeframe for executing an evaluation. Evaluations are typically multi-year efforts. This includes time to complete the initial planning process, launch the evaluation, and to finally communicate the evaluation's findings.

As we mentioned in the last webinar, the overall timeframe will depend on the evaluation design, that is whether it's an impact, outcome, or implementation study, and most importantly, the amount of time needed to obtain and analyze the data. For example, a descriptive study that relies on existing program data and stakeholder interviews may only take 18 months, while an impact evaluation may take 3 years or more. Impact studies have a longer timeframe, in part, because time is needed to build a sample for analysis and allow time to pass to allow for a follow-up period. Remember that evaluation has many benefits.

Evaluations can help you learn more about your claimants, your program implementation, and your program's impact on claimants' unemployment insurance duration, employment, and earnings. That being said, evaluation requires thoughtful planning to avoid common challenges. With the right planning, your state can avoid or overcome these challenges and produce a robust evaluation.

Early, thoughtful planning will help ensure that you and your evaluators are not learning "how to land" after you've already started to "fly." In other words, planning will help you to make sure you and your evaluator have the knowledge, time, and resources to produce a strong evaluation with results that you can be confident in.

Evaluation activities can be grouped into six broad phases:

Phase 1, the "Planning" phase involves defining the evaluation purpose, scope, and research questions, as well as selecting an evaluator.

Phase 2, "Designing" the evaluation involves you working with the evaluator to define the outcomes measures, evaluation procedures, and timeline for the evaluation.

Phase 3, "Launching" the evaluation primarily entails the evaluator formalizing data collection instruments and processes, as well as training staff, as needed.

In Phase 4, "Collecting Data," the evaluator will continue data collection activities, and both you and the evaluator will continue to monitor evaluation progress.

Phase 5, "Analyzing" evaluation data. In this phase, your evaluator will work on data cleaning and conducting the data analysis.

Phase 6, "Communicating" evaluation findings entails sharing evaluation results with key stakeholders.

Many of these activities may happen concurrently. For instance, while the evaluation is in the "Collecting Data" phase, the evaluator may be collecting data, analyzing preliminary data, and preparing interim reports. Lastly, as we mentioned in Webinar 1, the evaluation process is iterative. For instance, what you learn from evaluation may lead to you make changes in how your program operates or the types of services provided, which you may test in a future evaluation. It is helpful to think of the evaluation as part of a larger learning agenda. In the remaining time we have together in this webinar session, we will be taking a closer look at each of the evaluation phases.

But, before doing so, we would like to pause for a second and ask you to answer this poll: which of the evaluation phases do you have the most questions about? Please indicate your response in the poll window. Great. It looks like the majority of those who've answered the poll so far think that the designing phase is what you have the most questions about. As we progress through the webinar, the activities, challenges, and strategies we discuss will hopefully help to answer some of your questions that you currently have. If not, there will be time at the end of the webinar for you to ask any questions that are not addressed. As always, please feel free to contact our team at RESEA@abtassoc.com with specific questions about your planned evaluation activities.

Now, let's take a deeper look at Phase 1: Planning the Evaluation. The planning phase is critical for setting up your evaluation in a way that will allow it to ultimately be successful. Activities typically include determining your evaluation scope, purpose and research questions, as well as selecting an evaluation design type. Taking these first steps will help you draft an evaluation scope of work that you can use to advertise for and select an appropriate evaluator.

We discussed many of these initial steps in our first two RESEA Eval TA webinars – "What Can We Learn and How Do We Start?" and "What Evaluation Designs are Right for my State?" If you didn't get a chance to participate in the live webinars, make sure to check out the webinar recording on WorkforceGPS. Your state's RESEA program team will be responsible for completing most of these early steps. Once you have selected an evaluator, your evaluator may want to work with you to refine your initial evaluation plans and may also make recommendations to strengthen or clarify the evaluation.

These initial planning activities may take anywhere from 6 to 12 months, depending on the evaluator you select and the process needed to finalize the evaluator. So what are common challenges during the evaluation phase? First and foremost, is selecting an appropriate evaluator.

An evaluation cannot be learned as you go. As such, it is important to choose an evaluator who has experience conducting a workforce evaluation using your design type, and has specialized education and training in evaluation methods. It is also important that the evaluator is independent from the RESEA program. That is, the evaluator should not be someone who is involved in designing or implementing the RESEA intervention.

Although internal evaluators have the advantage of having a greater depth of knowledge about the RESEA program, internal evaluators are often not perceived as having the same level of objectivity as an external evaluator. In addition to concerns about objectivity, it may be a good idea to obtain evaluation assistance from outside your agency, that is, an external evaluator, in order to tap experience and expertise of individuals who lead evaluations all the time. In fact, we anticipate that most states that plan to conduct an impact study will need an external evaluator given the complexity around implementing these design types.

This is especially true for quasi-experimental design evaluations, which require a higher level of statistical expertise and are often harder to execute well than randomized control trials. If your team determines an external evaluator is needed, you may need to procure evaluation services or explore whether your state workforce agency has an existing partnership with a university or other research institution for evaluation purposes.

If you plan to procure evaluation services, you will need to check with your local procurement office to confirm what specific steps you need to take and the length of time needed to complete the process. Please make sure to tune into our next webinar, which will discuss the procurement process in greater detail.

To help you select an appropriate evaluator, you should determine which evaluator is most qualified. You may ask yourself which evaluator has the most experience evaluating similar programs or interventions; has demonstrated expertise with a chosen evaluation design; can show that their findings will be independent of the program; and special factors that are important to your program and the state. This might include local knowledge of the state or the capacity and resources to facilitate meetings or collect and analyze large datasets.

If you need to obtain an evaluator outside of your agency, you should determine whether you need to procure evaluation services or if your agency has an existing partnership with an academic research center or other similar organization that you can leverage. If there is already a partnership in place, you may need to simply modify any existing agreements or contracts.

Otherwise, you will need to factor in the process and time needed to complete the procurement process. Knowing the criteria that you will use to assess the qualifications of the evaluator will help ensure that you pick the evaluator best suited for your evaluation and prevent the process from feeling like you are playing pin the tail on the donkey.

A second common challenge to the successful execution of an evaluation is not having sufficient resources to carry out the full evaluation. Creating a realistic budget will help to ensure that you have enough funds to complete evaluation tasks; are able to meet changes in costs from year to year; and have staff available to help facilitate evaluation efforts. Now we'd like to take a quick moment to ask you, what other resources do you think you will need for an evaluation? Please include your thoughts in the chat box. Great. It looks like other resources that you may want to also consider are technology and analytical software.

Developing a realistic evaluation budget will also help you to feel like you are not going into the evaluation blindly. A realistic budget will allow you to monitor costs so that your "spending does not go over the edge." At a minimum, your evaluation budget should consider the level of effort needed to achieve the target sample size, or the number of claimants who will be included in the evaluation. A larger sample size can give you more precise findings and may be necessary to detect the effect of your RESEA intervention. However, as your sample size increases, your evaluation costs will also increase. You will also need to take into consideration the level of effort needed to complete data collection.

Complex data analysis that includes linking data from multiple sources will give you richer evaluation findings, but will take more staff time to process. Since much of program development and evaluation design is iterative, we strongly recommend that you budget for several planning meetings and several rounds of revisions to major deliverables. Lastly, the budget should take into consideration the different staff levels and their involvement in the evaluation process. More senior staff will have higher costs than junior- and mid-level staff. It is crucial to include a mix of staff in your evaluation efforts. Senior staff will help frame the evaluation, while mid- and junior-level staff will help execute the evaluation.

Qualified, experienced evaluators will be able to help you determine realistic expectations for the level of effort for planned evaluation activities. Once you have developed an initial evaluation plan and selected an evaluator, your team will work closely with the evaluator to design the actual evaluation. Designing the evaluation involves refining outcomes measures, data sources, and required sample sizes; determining evaluation procedures; establishing a timeline that is tailored to the evaluation procedures that will be implemented; and producing an evaluation design report. As you can see, most of these steps will be executed by the evaluator.

However, there are key activities – such as refining the outcomes measures and establishing the evaluation timeline – that your RESEA program team will need to provide input on. The steps in this phase may take approximately two to six months to complete. As you work with the evaluator to refine the evaluation plans, you will want to ensure that the outcomes specified are appropriate. That is, your outcomes should be specific, measurable, and relevant to the intervention you are testing. That is particularly important if you are conducting an impact study.

Selecting appropriate and measurable outcomes will allow you and your evaluator to determine appropriate data sources and collect valid or reliable data for outcome measures. Mapping out the connection between the outcomes, measurements, and data sources will ensure that the evaluator has the data needed to conduct the planned analyses. Essentially, this will prevent you and your evaluator from "fishing for that key piece of data" later on in the evaluation. It is important to make sure that your evaluators are defining the outcomes of interests, not the outputs of the intervention. It may be easy to confuse the two terms.

To help distinguish between outcomes and outputs, remember that outputs indicate that an event or activity occurred. Whereas, outcomes indicate that the claimant is making progress towards the long-term goals of your RESEA intervention. For example, an output may be 70 percent of claimants receive job search assistance. An outcome would be that there is a reduction in the number of weeks claimants receive unemployment insurance; thus, indicating that claimants are finding employment more quickly.

A second challenge is moving from general outcomes of interest to specific data elements and sources that can be used to support the evaluation. Here, we have a table with examples of different RESEA-relevant outcomes, how some past studies have defined them, what data can measure these outcomes, and what data sources can be used. For example, let's say we are interested in testing whether the RESEA intervention has an impact on the unemployment insurance duration as defined by the number of weeks that claimants receive UI benefits. To measure this, we will need the date claimants first start receiving UI benefits, as well as the last date of UI benefits received.

We will most likely be able to find this data in our state's UI database. Identifying the type of data needed and the data sources for all outcomes will help ensure that data is valid, reliable, and appropriate for measuring the outcome and determine whether you will have the data needed for both those who are receiving the RESEA intervention, as well as those in the comparison group if you're conducting a randomized control trial or quasi-experimental design evaluation. A second common challenge that is encountered during this phase is tackling realistic estimates of time needed to complete each planned evaluation activity.

Timelines are critical for determining the feasibility of planned evaluation, aligning evaluation activities with intervention activities, and ensuring you and your evaluator are on the same page.

Misallocating time may lead to not meeting the target sample size and the inability to gather sufficient data on targeted outcomes. We are currently developing more detailed information about evaluation timelines as a part of an RESEA toolkit. To tackle this challenge, you will need to make sure that the evaluator builds a timeline that considers all evaluation activities.

When building the evaluation timeline, you should identify the specific tasks required, as well as the expected level of effort for each task, which in turn will help you to develop the budget. While every evaluation is unique, several activities are common to all evaluations and should be included in your timeline. For instance, your timeline should include time for obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, enrolling claimants into the study, as well as collecting, preparing, and analyzing data. As mentioned earlier, an upcoming RESEA toolkit will cover evaluation timelines in more detail.

You may also want to consider asking the evaluator to create an Evaluation Design Report, or EDR. An EDR serves as a roadmap – for both the evaluator and RESEA program team – to the complete series of evaluation activities and its links to program operations.

An EDR should be longer than a memo, but it does not have to be a lengthy 200-page document. At a minimum, the EDR should describe in sufficient detail what your research questions the evaluation intends to answer, what aspects of the RESEA program are being studied, what data and methods will be used to answer the research questions, and all the key steps of the evaluation.

The EDR should make clear how the evaluation will be integrated into your program operations and when key evaluation activities will be taking place. Additionally, the EDR will provide you with opportunity to learn more about what the evaluator is planning, for you to provide feedback, and to confirm your understanding of how the evaluation will or will not answer the evaluation research questions.

As part of your program evaluation efforts, you and your evaluator will most likely be collecting and/or storing detailed information about individuals who agree to participate in the evaluation. You and your evaluator should create a joint plan to protect claimant data that will be used as part of the evaluation.

Federally-funded research and evaluation involving human subjects must comply with federal and state laws and regulations governing the ethical treatment and rights of research participants. Your state already spends significant time and energy protecting claimant data as a part of your regular program activities. The key here is communicating your state’s data requirements to your evaluator and ensuring data is securely transferred, stored, analyzed, and eventually destroyed. An experienced evaluator will be familiar with data security requirements and practices and can help ensure data security.

You and your evaluators have a collective responsibility to protect participants' information, and together you can put in place a plan for data security. It is important to take data security and human subjects' protection as seriously as the knight in this image takes IT security.

To ensure appropriate protections are put in place and maintained, your evaluator should obtain Institutional Review Board, or IRB, oversight. IRBs serve as an independent and objective ethics committee to ensure the protection of human subjects of research, like the individual claimants that would be included in an RESEA evaluation. An IRB's job is to approve or disapprove or require modifications to research protocols.

IRBs are also responsible for providing continuing review by monitoring active research projects, reviewing any unanticipated problems, and reporting serious adverse events to regulators. IRB review and approval must occur before starting any evaluation procedures involving claimants or their identifiable data.

Some states may be interested in obtaining an exemption to informed consent processes. Only an IRB can determine whether an evaluation should be exempt. The evaluator or RESEA program staff cannot make this determination. It is your evaluator's responsibility to obtain IRB oversight and approval. Evaluator's may have their own IRB. If not, the evaluator will need to secure services of an IRB.

Depending on the evaluation design, the IRB process may take between one to three months. Your state is likely spending significant time and energy to secure data. We would like to just take a quick moment here to reiterate a few practical steps that are easily incorporated into routine practices. Your staff may already be doing these things, but we find that it never hurts to repeat them. For instance, do not send emails that contain personally identifiable information, such as Social Security numbers or date of birth or other sensitive data.

I'll now turn it over to my colleague Tresa.

TRESA KAPPIL: Thanks, Phomdaen. Now that you've planned and designed your evaluation, you are ready to launch the evaluation itself. This is an exciting time, and all of the hard work you put in during the planning phase will really pay off as you launch your evaluation. There may be some additional hiccups as you proceed, but your work in planning the evaluation and selecting a good evaluator will minimize those bumps. I'd like to take a moment before I begin to talk about this phase to ask you what activities – I have another polling question.

What do you think should be in place before sharing RESEA data with external evaluators – data sharing agreements, secure methods for transferring data, or establishing procedures for creating a data extract, or all of the above? I'll give you all about 10 seconds to respond. Great. It looks like most of you think "all of the above," and you are right. All of these important pieces should be in place when you are about to launch your evaluation.

Now, this table lists activities that are included in the launch phase of the evaluation. These activities include coordinating data collection instruments across partners, formalizing data sharing agreements and data security procedures, modifying data systems to incorporate evaluation data elements, and training staff in evaluation procedures. These tasks may look like a lot, but as you can see your evaluator will be heavily involved in almost all aspects of this phase.

States implementing random assignment studies and quasi-experimental studies, which are types of impact evaluations, may need to complete additional tasks during the launch phase.

For example, random assignment studies will have to incorporate random assignment of claimants into their existing processes. Additionally, if you are testing a new service, your team will have to make changes in your program implementation to include the new service being tested, if you haven't already implemented that change. As a note, there are also some quasi-experimental studies called retrospective studies that use data collected in the past, but this will have a very different schedule of activities, and likely will have a shorter timeline.

If you select an impact study, the phase can take anywhere from two to four months. You should note that formalizing data use agreements and secure data transfer processes can take a lot longer than expected depending on your state's processes. Talking to your legal and IT teams early on is crucial to setting an appropriate timeline for data use agreements and data transfer processes. For implementation studies, the timeline can be shorter – approximately two months. Activities around this involve refining research questions of interest and developing data collection protocols like interview guides.

One key challenge that may arise during this phase is making staff aware of evaluation procedures. In a random assignment and some quasi-experimental impact studies, frontline staff play an important role. They are needed to implement key evaluation activities, like delivering appropriate services based claimant's random assignment status; collecting baseline data; securing, storing, and transferring electronic and paper records. Often, a lot of the evaluation is being designed and planned at the management level.

When frontline staff are not trained in the evaluation procedures, there can be improper provision of services, or poor data completeness and quality, and compromised data security. It’s also important to get buy-in from staff for the evaluation because they are so heavily involved in the day-to-day activities of the program and the evaluation. In order to address this, it's important to train staff on evaluation procedures. Trainings should be in-person and can be in a group setting; should include frontline staff, AJC leadership, and state leadership; allow plenty of time for questions; and provide written guidance that staff can take away with them once the training is complete, like a training manual.

Training should include information on evaluation procedures and how they are being incorporated into existing program procedures, especially if there are changes in program implementation. For example, if your state wants to test the impact of two RESEA meetings with claimants versus one meeting, you will want to explain how to determine which claimants are scheduled for one meeting or two meetings and how staff will know claimants' status using your state data system. Other things to include in your training are data collection and security and protecting human subjects of research.

Additionally, training staff can help you achieve buy-in for the evaluation, and give management a chance to discuss the purpose and goals of the evaluation. The fourth phase is actually collecting the data. Your evaluator will continue to be heavily involved in this phase.

Activities in this phase may include but are not limited to enrolling claimants in the study. For RESEA, this means running the study for a long enough period of time to ensure that a sufficient number of claimants have been served to measure outcomes or impacts. When conducting an impact study, this will make sure your evaluation achieves the power needed to be a strong impact study.

For random assignment studies, this means randomly assigning claimants to their study groups. For quasi-experimental studies, this means using claimant data to build equivalent treatment and comparison groups. Please note that a quasi-experimental impact study usually requires even more sample than a random assignment study. For more information on this, please check out our previous webinar on "What Evaluation Designs Are Right for My State?" posted on the WorkforceGPS.

Other activities in this phase include continued data collection. For impact studies, this may involve baseline data collection and follow-up data collection like surveys and admin data. For implementation studies, this involves interviews, focus groups, observations, and document review. Finally, this phase also involves monitoring evaluation activities, which I will talk about in a few minutes. How long will this take? You should estimate between one and three years.

You and the evaluator have worked really hard to thoughtfully plan a well-designed evaluation.

Now that you have begun data collection, it's important to make sure the evaluation runs as planned. If you do not actively make sure your evaluation is running as planned, there can be problems, such as incorrect implementation of evaluation procedures. An example of this could be the wrong services delivered to the wrong claimants if it's an evaluation that tests new/alternative procedures. There could also be a lapse in human subjects protections, like loss of PII.

Another problem that could occur is incomplete data – for example, perhaps staff are not entering in important information. As you know, the quality of your evaluation is completely dependent on the quality of your data. How can you tackle this challenge? The best way is to establish monitoring procedures. Make it a habit to discuss progress on evaluation activities and intervention implementation with your evaluators. You can do this by establishing regular communication with the evaluator. These can be in both written form, like a progress report, or verbally though regular conference calls. Or you could do both.

Conference calls check-ins would be frequent at first and decrease over time, but progress reports should be expected consistently throughout the evaluation. Also, consider appointing an internal staff person to be the liaison for the evaluators. For random assignment studies, ensure claimants also receive the services they are assigned to. You can create automated reports to compare claimants' assignment statuses with the services they actually received. You can also assess data quality and completeness by routinely providing your evaluator with extracts of program data. Then you would be able to quickly troubleshoot or clarify data issues with the evaluator.

The fifth phase is analyzing data. I'm not going to spend too much time on this because your evaluator is primarily responsible for this phase of the evaluation. But you should know what activities are included in analysis. Preparing data for analysis includes: data cleaning, which is checking data files to ensure they contain the expected data; flagging unexpected values as necessary; and following up with your RESEA agency to answer questions and resolve inconsistencies.

Other things that can be involved are robustness checks. Robustness checks are analyses your evaluator could run that demonstrate whether results would be the same if different, reasonable study design decisions were made. If the study is robust, that means that it can stand up to scrutiny; and this is a good thing. Another activity evaluators may do during this phase is initial descriptive analysis, which usually involves running frequencies of variables. Often, evaluators may wish to understand certain topics by subgroup, like number of claimants who complete by region, etc.

Your evaluator will then conduct analyses according to plan. Time needed for analysis will depend on the type of data collected and complexity of analysis methods. We estimate that this may take about four to six months. The final phase of the evaluation is communicating findings. When you undertake an evaluation, it's very important to communicate what your study learned, regardless of the results, through reports, briefs, or other types of products. Disseminating findings is very closely linked with the use of those findings.

You can think of dissemination as an opportunity to share accomplishments of your program, identify potential areas for improvement, and share lessons learned that either your state or other states can use to make decisions or take action about for future enhancements to your RESEA program.

And you can also use findings to develop new research questions or further learning goals about your RESEA program. Because of this, you will want to be thoughtful about how to communicate what the study did and found to different audiences. You will want to think about, who needs or wants to hear about the evaluation results? What do you need to learn? What is the best way for them to get this information?

Different audiences need different things, and you and evaluators can work together to figure out how to best disseminate your evaluation findings. For example, your state RESEA staff and colleagues in other states may be interested in particular programmatic details. What program or part of the program did you study?

What seems most promising in those programs? Your state's leadership may have additional interests and things they want to learn about from the study. And evaluators and DOL's CLEAR – which is the U.S Department of Labor's clearinghouse for labor evaluation and research – will need specific types of technical information so that it can review and summarize the study in its database.

This will be discussed in a future webinar on the CLEAR standards. But, you can see how different audiences have different interests. A short brief or one-pager may be good for conveying information in an easily digestible form to the general public, but a full report may be necessary for policymakers, academics, or other state agencies who are interested in perhaps replicating your interventions or evaluation methods. As the comic shows, you'll want to work with your evaluators to think about your potential audiences when deciding how and in what format to disseminate the evaluation findings.

You've probably noticed that timelines are important to consider in every phase of the evaluation. When communicating findings, it's important to build time into your timeline to revise dissemination products, because no one gets it right the first time. Each report may need at least two rounds of revisions by evaluators. State RESEA staff should review each draft to check for report quality and clarity. You might find it helpful to involve not just RESEA program staff, but technical evaluation staff during the review.

When you review, you might consider: Is program properly described? Are the methods clearly described? Is there enough technical detail for a technical audience, like other evaluators and researchers, to understand how the study was conducted? Is there a non-technical summary that is accessible to a particular audience?

Plan for at least three to four months for each report, including review and revision time. So in order to tackle this challenge, include dissemination products in your timeline and budget, clearly communicate reporting expectations in the RFP, in a joint agreement, or in-house guidance to staff who might be involved in the evaluation.

RFPs should explicitly list the number of reports or other deliverables expected and the timeline for delivery. Proposed budgets should sufficiently allocate funds to cover all dissemination activities. Like I mentioned earlier, build in revision and review time. Discuss dissemination activities with your evaluator early on in your evaluation contract, including any innovative ideas your agency may have for making findings more accessible or reaching a larger audience.

Building these things into your timeline and budget will help ensure that your evaluator does not feel like they are receiving the phone call depicted in the cartoon on this slide.

I'm going to hand it over to Larry Burns, who is the reemployment coordinator, to talk about some resources that are available to you.

LARRY BURNS: Thanks, Tresa. Today, the evaluation TA team gave you a high-level picture of the full cycle of an evaluation. As you mentioned earlier in the webinar, many of the things the team talked about today are pretty technical and not things we'd expect the state's RESEA program staff to do alone. Getting an experienced evaluator involved in any study you do will help make the process of learning about your RESEA programs easier and more successful. However, we can get started by taking a look at some of the resources we've mentioned today and discussed in depth in other webinars.

And, we are posting all of our RESEA evaluation webinars on WorkforceGPS, so you can revisit them at any time. Finally, we wanted to remind you that our RESEA evaluation TA team is available to answer specific questions you might have, for those of you who are preparing to do an evaluation, to help you prepare to do many of the things we talked about today. Remember, it is much easier to create a strong evaluation during the planning process than it is to fix it later.

As I mentioned, we're planning more evaluation TA webinars for you. Please save the dates for these next two live events – Procuring and Selecting an Independent Evaluator, which will be July 16, 2019; Using CLEAR – A Demonstration, August 19, 2019. We also shared a one-pager that gives you the schedule of evaluation TA webinars. Again, all these will be posted on WorkforceGPS, along with other resources and tools the team is developing around these concepts. And now back to Megan.

MS. LIZIK: Great. Thank you so much, Larry. Now we're going to open it up to questions. And we have Larry and myself and our evaluation TA team members here to answer some questions you have. But if you do have them, go ahead and type them into the Q&A chat. We've already had a couple of them come in. And the first one we'll tackle is about funding. And the question is, with proposed funding formula, there is no way small or rural states will be able to afford an independent evaluator. So, Larry, I'll turn it over to you to kick off the answer here.

MR. BURNS: Sure. Thanks, Megan. We do know that some of the more rural or smaller states under the formula do receive less funds, and the percentage cap on evaluation is 10 percent. So that is a bit of a challenge. But there are a few different ways you can go about this. First, this is a good time to start talking to other states that may be wanting to go research similar concepts and look for opportunities to pool your resources together on an evaluation. Another thing to consider is incrementally funding evaluations over multiple years. And that doesn't necessarily have to be all upfront costs. You could spread the cost out over a couple years of the program.

And here's another thing I want to remind the individuals about this, that the authorized funding level for RESEA are scheduled to increase over time. So hopefully if the program grows and your capacity of doing evaluations grow, funding will also be increasing. But for the immediate things that you can think about, it's meeting with your procurement staff to talk about different ways of funding the evaluations, and also really looking for opportunities to partner so you can leverage resources together.

MS. LIZIK: Great, Larry. Thank you. The next question that we have is, do you consider a research department employee as being independent from the RESEA program? And I'll go ahead and take that one. So independence and objectivity are core principles of evaluation and part of ensuring high-quality evaluation.

So state research departments may be independent from the state's RESEA program. And they may be able to do some evaluations or some pre-evaluation activity for you. However, not only are evaluation activities, I think, particularly designed like everyone or many people earlier today were sort of had a question about that, so particularly design data collection, data protection and analysis – extremely complex.

I think it's important to think about how you can insulate your evaluation functions from undue influence, meaning either the appearance or the reality of bias. And I would just note that conducting an evaluation is likely to be too heavy of a lift for just one person.

For these reasons, I think we do encourage you to look to existing evaluation partnerships you might have, as was mentioned earlier, such as with a local university, or consider procuring an independent, experienced evaluator contractor yourself. I think particularly if you're thinking about undertaking an impact study at some point, getting that type of expertise up front can help ensure that you're set up for a successful, high-quality study.

If you want a quick refresh on what we mean by a high-quality study, you can look at CLEAR'S causal evidence guidelines for impact studies. And CLEAR has other guidelines for other types of studies, like implementation studies as well. You can find those on the CLEAR website at clear.dol.gov. We talked about CLEAR, which is DOL's clearinghouse for labor evaluation and research on some previous webinars. And we'll definitely talk more about CLEAR again in a few months.

And if any of you out there do want to talk more about this – like if you have a particular situation that you're wondering about – you can feel free, of course, to reach out to our RESEA evaluation TA team, and we can help discuss further your specific instance. OK. So the next question here is a question about someone who missed the start of the webinar and wondered if there was some type of timeline for when evaluations might be expected to begin.

MR. BURNS: Megan. I'll start this one, but feel free to add if I miss anything. But I just wanted to highlight one of the key things about the new RESEA program (so it's authorized ?) is that it's intended to increase the availability and use of evidence-based strategies and interventions.

And that requirement kicked in immediately in 2019. So beginning in 2019 in our operating guidance, we provided some preliminary information on how to get started with the evaluation components for RESEA. And we are planning to issue a much more detailed guidance document in the next few weeks. Hopefully, we have the document in clearance now that we're trying to finalize and get out to you.

But long story short is beginning in 2023, parts of funding need to be linked to evidence-based requirements. It's this whole setting of new funding requirements that go along into the program, and basically the rigor that has to go into your program design increases as time goes by.

So really, given enough time it takes to plan and conduct an evaluation, states really need to be looking for our partners to work with, evaluators, and discussing and planning what they want to evaluate now. So it really has started already. And the resources for developing through this technical assistance series of webinars and other resources are going to be available for you any time you need them. Megan, do you have anything else on that?

MS. LIZIK: No. I think you've covered it pretty well there, Larry. Thank you. So we have another question that has come in about whether members of the control group may receive similar services from non-RESEA one-stop staff. And is this a potential issue? if you're thinking about it from an impact study design perspective. And I'm wondering if Siobhan (sp), if I could point to you or Phomdaen to help us get a technical answer there.

MS. SOUVANNA: Sure. This is Phomdaen. I can take a stab at answering this question. So this will depend highly on what type of services you will be testing in your impact study. Typically, the control group can access other services that are available to the community. But what you want to make sure is that the control group, or those individuals who are in the control group, does not get the specific services that are being tested by the RESEA program. So if you're testing the whole program, you wouldn't want individuals who are in the control group to receive the services that are unique to the intervention itself.

However, we can't prevent the individuals from going somewhere else to get similar services. What you can only do is make sure that steps are in place so that they don't get the specific intervention that you are testing. For example, if you're testing one meeting versus two meetings, you want to make sure that the control group members don't get two meetings. But we are available to help talk through any specific cases that you'd like to try to figure out how to pick the control, the (counterfactual ?) there. And your evaluator should be able to help distinguish between those two as well.

MS. LIZIK: Thanks, Phomdaen. This is Megan. And I think that's a really great technical answer. And I would just also add that I think experienced evaluators know that this type of thing happens, right?

Sometimes control group members can receive a treatment or other kinds of things happen. And this is part of why an experienced evaluator will try to assess the context that your intervention is happening in, that your program's running in, and try to provide information to you particularly in your reporting materials about what that landscape looks like so you can help interpret results. It's important to be aware what's happening there.

I think it's not realistic to assume that we always have perfect control to make sure that none of the control group members get what treatment members have. And I think they are often even being referred to other services in the community that can help them with their needs.

Again, I think it's a little tricky of a question. It's a little complex. And the evaluation TA team would be happy to answer specific questions. And I'm sure we'll be getting more into things like that in later evaluation TA resources that we'll share. So we have another question related to rural areas. How do you recommend determining sample sizes? This is a really great question.

It's one that we have been talking about a lot internally, and I think are going to be trying to produce some additional information in the next couple of months to help you think about that. If you are at a point where you're thinking about it right now, I would suggest that you reach out to our evaluation TA team so we can try to understand your specific instance. We've had another question come in about will there be a place to see what topics other state workforce agencies are doing for evaluations and evaluation design? From an evaluation standpoint, I would say as a reminder to everybody, we are going to be conducting an implementation study under our DOL-funded RESEA project.

And through that, we are going to be trying to get a sense for, what are the different kinds of programs that are happening out there that you guys are implementing? What are the different combinations of services? How are you bundling them together? Are there some particular similarities or groupings that we're seeing lots of states doing, a certain model or a couple different types of models? So eventually, there will be some reporting on that from an evaluation standpoint. But then, Larry, I'll also turn it over to you to see if there are places that they can learn more about that.

MR. BURNS: Sure. Thanks, Megan. And from a program operations standpoint, one of the new requirements under the new RESEA program is that we'll be transitioning hopefully beginning in fiscal year 2020 to an RESEA state plan. This is a statutorily required plan, and will take the place of our previous applications that we used in earlier years. The plan does not have a detailed evaluation work plan in there, but it does ask states to provide some information about the types of evidence-based strategies they're using, types of evaluations they are currently conducting, and things they will be researching.

We are intending to make those plans public – probably on WorkforceGPS or maybe another DOL website that we'll share with you. So you will be able to see either the state plans or summaries of state plans and get a feel for other states are looking at from an evidence-based standpoint.

MS. LIZIK: Great. Thanks so much, Larry. There's another question that has come in about can the outside evaluator have access to the state workforce information systems and data? And the answer is that you can have external evaluators gain access to the data with proper agreement. So data use agreements, data sharing agreements, MOUs – you can put these in place to ensure that there is an appropriate level of security and an appropriate plan for transfer use, analyzing and destroying eventually once the evaluations complete the data.

So again, our RESEA evaluation TA team has a lot of experience in this area. If you are at a point where you're trying to think about this, you can reach out to us. But I do also believe that this is a topic we're going to be trying to put in a few of our future evaluation TA materials. And finally, I think we have time for just one more question. Larry, when are states required to provide an evaluation plan to U.S. DOL? And in what way are these expected to be communicated? Can you share your thoughts with us?

MR. BURNS: Sure. And I think we hinted at this a little bit earlier. Again, one of the requirements of the new law is that we'll be transitioning to this RESEA state plan, which is more of a high-level evaluation. It will include more of a high-level evaluation plan in it. We've got a timeline. We have to have the plan reviewed and approved before we can issue funding. So we're developing guidance. And we're developing and finalizing the plan template.

But I'd anticipate that states would want to submit those plans in the summer before the fiscal year starts. But it's not going to be a detailed evaluation plan. It's going to be more of a high-level framework of what you're planning for the year to do. And from that, we'll be able to identify states that we may reach out to provide technical assistance, in which case we may want to work with you on your more detailed plan.

MS. LIZIK: Great. Thanks so much, Larry. And that's all we have time for today. We do really appreciate all of you joining us. Here is the contact information from the speakers that you heard from today, as well as the RESEA evaluation TA inbox. If you have questions that are needing more immediate answers and help, feel free to send them an email. And thank you so much for coming.

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