**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Assessing and Expanding Evaluation Capacity through State Peer Learning Cohorts: An Overview of Evaluation Technical Assistance**

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GRACE MCCALL: And welcome to "Assessing and Expanding Evaluation Capacity through State Peer Learning Cohorts: An Overview of Evaluation Technical Assistance."

So without further ado I'd like to turn things over to our leader for today, Gloria Salas-Kos, senior program analyst, evaluation technical assistance coordinator, Office of Policy Development and Research, Employment and Training Administration. Take it away, Gloria.

(Pause.) Gloria, I can't hear you right now. I believe you're muted.

GLORIA SALAS-KOS: Sorry about that. I am muted. So welcome, everyone, to this webinar on "Assessing and Expanding Evaluation Capacity through State Peer Learning Cohorts." I'm joined today by the director of research and evaluation, my manager, Wayne Gordon.

WAYNE GORDON: Hi. Good day, everyone. Thanks for being with us today.

MS. SALAS-KOS: So this webinar is an overview of our evaluation technical assistance. And moving forward, we will introduce you to our coaches, describe our approaches to building an evaluation and research community of practice, share key elements of some evaluation tools on Workforce GPS, feature a great discussion with two of our – two members of last year's peer learning cohort – we also call it our eval PLC – explain the application process for the 2020 evaluation peer learning cohort, and give you an opportunity to ask questions via the chat window.

We will have some short breaks in between our sessions to respond to as many questions as possible.

So joining us today are the evaluation PLC coaches who worked on – who worked with (us at ?) state peer learning cohort teams last year, Dr. Cynthia Forland, who is also the eval PLC lead for this project; and Dr. Randall – Randy Wilson. So please welcome Cynthia and Randy.

CYNTHIA FORLAND: Hello. Happy to be here.

RANDALL WILSON: Hello and welcome.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Good to have you guys here. Also joining us today are our featured presenters, state team representatives from the 2019 peer learning cohort. Please welcome Bryan Huebsch, the data integration manager and – data integration and governance manager from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development; and Mark Burgess, who is the performance manager from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

BRYAN HUEBSCH: Hello, friends.

MARK BURGESS: Good afternoon. Thank you for the invite.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Glad to have you here. So with that we'll turn it over to Wayne Gordon.

MR. GORDON: Thank you, Gloria. And let me reprise our thank you to the audience today for participating. We're really glad with the turnout that we've had. And in turn, we look forward to your applications at a future date.

Again, also extend a thank you to Bryan and Mark, former cohort participants. We're glad to have them back and sharing their experiences. And we hope their experiences that they cite and elaborate on will inform some of your questions that you have. And we'd be glad to answer questions in that section of the screen that you see.

First some of the criteria and the environment, goals that we have. In light of the passage of WIOA, we understand real clearly that there's an expectation of research and evaluation both at the federal level and, more importantly and why we're here today, is at the state and local level.

These requirements are that. But let's dispense with just the hard edge of requirements and I'll point to the regulation as put out by DOL. In this section where we're talking about this in the regulation, we wanted to emphasize that, from our perspective, we want to encourage states to meet this requirement in a very open way.

And folks may have heard me describe the three C's of sort of our aspirational adherence to this requirement. And that is, yes, what we all read in this is to conduct research and evaluation, but also two other C's – to collaborate with your partners at the state level. They may be working through their own work with the education department or HHS and our other partner agencies. So you have an opportunity to collaborate there.

As well as cooperate – the third C – wherein we may be putting out grants or soliciting participation or volunteers from states to participate in a larger national study. And that cooperation could be conducting a demonstration within your state with (the comments ?) and evaluation; or sharing of data, providing data that might be needed for an evaluation that's there.

What we've learned over the years is, when working with states, we engage in learning and doing. We learn, state staff learn by conducting these studies. We've had great experience working with states. Some states have a research unit that's already there; some have not.

Some that we've worked with, years later now have one. I'd like to take credit for that and our involvement with them, but I think the march of time and the desire through limited resources that we have available for our programs, that everyone wants to understand how their programs are doing and how to make them better.

Starting out, we're thinking that – in keeping with the premise of the federal-state partnership that we have on many of our programs, the same should apply to research and evaluation activities. And I've had discussions with staff at the National Association of State Workforce Agencies about the cool things that states are doing in this area, as well as the opportunity to engage more and enhance state capacity to do these kinds – to undertake research and evaluation activities beyond labor market information, beyond performance measurement.

And folks might remember that we enlisted NASWA to do a scan and conducted a number of surveys with states as to where they thought they were at and describing their posture, their profile for research and evaluation undertakings within their state. And we found that states were all along the continuum of very robust and well-established networks and publications and reports under their belt, to some states that were really – did not have much in the area of activity in this area.

So we wanted to look to this evaluation PLC as an opportunity to meet the states where they're at. No matter where they are on the continuum, we want to be able to meet you where you're at, with resources that are appropriate for what you're trying to undertake, and to customize it in some way by using the coaches that work with the cohort teams. And at this time I'll thank the coaches for their work last year and look forward to their continued participation in this activity.

Right out of the gate, looking at short-term and long-term outcomes. We did this; what were the outcomes? Not getting into impacts or causality. Some states may wish to do that. There's always been a lot of emphasis on randomized control trials. But there's plenty of information and plenty of evidence can be developed with something less than a randomized control trial. And we want to encourage that. We also want to encourage the pursuit of causal impact and identifying impacts of changes.

In the end, though, the research should reflect the customization that's premised within the federal-state partnership. Each state has different economic conditions and different industry mix and resulting different occupational mix. They have different leadership with different priorities. And having this kind of capacity at the state level is important for us to have partners in yourselves – partners in crime, if you will – and colleagues at the state and local level that we can work with. So we feel that's very important to impart this information and to provide opportunities for technical assistance.

In addition to just producing reports, how does this help the states? In a mirror to what we do here, we find that the work that we do informs our budget. So states have to develop budgets. You have to develop strategic or operational plans. You're negotiating performance measures with us at the federal level in those negotiations. So you're able to develop information that will better prepare you for these kinds of activities.

And in all of these, when I look across all of these things, especially state budgets and operating plans, which would include policy proposals, I see footnotes or citations. And that's where we're at. We should strive to be the footnotes, strive to be the citations. That's where the devil is in those details.

Why are these things being proposed? What is the justification for these things? And that's where we can make the most contribution, both at our level that we try to do and we wanted to expose you and get you thinking about how you can impact policy and evidence development within your states.

And of course, continuous improvement. We have the programs that we have. The programs at this point, unless there's major changes in legislation, these are the programs we have. And there's nothing wrong with looking to improve these programs. So the idea of supporting continuous improvement is key to maintaining our day-to-day support for our customers and the programs that serve them.

At this point I'd like to switch to a polling question now and get an idea as to what folks are – what brought you to this session. And pretty soon we'll see a polling question come up.

And those polling questions is an answer for your capacity or what your assessment of your agency's capacity. We have little or no capacity for evaluations. We have some capacity but aren't sure where to start. We have capacity for evaluation. I encourage you to use the polling buttons there to log your answer, your response.

The third, we have the capacity for evaluation and have stared conducting evaluations. We have capacity for evaluation and coordination evaluations of programs and services across all four WIOA titles.

We're seeing a strong response within – in the middle range of activity. And as I said, we're ready to work and have worked with states all along the continuum. And through the customization that the coaches allow us, there's no wrong answer here.

We also have – we also – I should also mention that our eval PLC and the EvalHub, I should say - website – has a number of resources that are – will be – that you will find useful no matter where you are on the spectrum, whether you decide to apply at this point or not. Maybe you have plans to apply later as things settle down. But I encourage you to look at the EvalHub website.

All right. Thank you, Grace. It looks like we've got a good collection in the middle range of these responses.

Allow me now to turn it over to Gloria and she'll take it from here.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks for that, Wayne. And looking at your responses on the poll and your feedback are all so greatly weigh into our efforts to growing an evaluation community of practice.

And as Wayne mentioned, we have a research and evaluation CoP on Workforce GPS. And this slide provides a screen shot and a hyperlink to the research and evaluation hub. It's a community point of access that provides tools and resources for you as workforce development professionals, to help you move into and develop and design evaluations for your program.

The EvalHub was created to help you with your efforts to use evaluations to improve workforce system services and strategies, and to choose existing evaluations and research that help to inform your program policies and evidence-based practices, as Wayne referenced.

He said it's helpful to have – put notes in this – in the proposals that are submitted because that informs us about what you're using to justify any programs and services that you're providing because there are evaluations or studies that support the types of outcomes that you're seeking to implement in your programs.

So when you have some free time, please explore the EvalHub, its resource library, and become an active member of our community of practice.

When you go to the site, you'll see the "join community" link at the center of the page. So once you join, you'll be able to receive regular updates from us on new and featured resources.

The evaluation and research hub home page also includes further information on events happening, announcements, and new and top resources, as you can see here. Note that some of these resources featured will also be part of our presentation.

And in particular, Cynthia is on point to tell us more about the evaluation toolkit for state workforce agencies, as well as the (vetting this ?) and the design and implementation assessment tools for evaluation. These are helpful for almost anyone who's interested in understanding what elements are needed to help you design and conduct evaluations.

And in the future, please keep an eye out for an upcoming item that summarizes the lessons learned from the 2019 eval PLC.

So with that, we'll turn it over to Cynthia.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you, Gloria. And hello, everyone. I'm so glad we have such a great turnout. We have a lot of diversity across states but also programs, so that's fantastic.

So why and where do we start? We've talked – Wayne did a good job of introducing us to the importance of evaluation. And then Gloria talked about some of the resources available; we're going to dive a little bit deeper into that now.

And I'm just happy to see that we have about 37 percent of you who said you have some capacity for evaluation but aren't quite ready to start. So we have – no matter what you do after today, you're going to walk away with resources to help you with that.

So briefly, as Wayne mentioned, there is a requirement in the WIOA law that states must conduct ongoing evaluations of WIOA Title I core programs. Why is that requirement in there? Well, as the law states, it's to continuously improve program activities and to high levels of performance within and high level outcomes from the workforce development system.

And this is really why we're all in this work, right? You want to do right by jobseekers, by employers, and this is a way to make sure that there's evidence behind the sorts of things that we're doing.

So in terms of the "how" – and this is also called out in the law – it talks about using the most rigorous, analytical, and statistical methods as reasonably feasible. Those are some tough words to say sometimes. But that's the basic idea of where we're starting from. But even more important in this requirement, as Wayne emphasized, is really about how do we learn more to do better by our customers?

So Gloria mentioned the resources on Workforce GPS. Please do join that community. There are a lot of resources there. You can connect to your colleagues. One of the ones I want to highlight today is the evaluation toolkit.

And the reason I want to emphasize that in particular is that this is something that's part of the eval PLC process, for states that have been a part of it in the past. But it's also a resource available to any of you, no matter what program you're in, what background you have. This is an amazing resource that you can use. It's ready on demand for you. You can see the link right there in the slide.

So what all does this toolkit provide? Why should you care? Well, it is a technical assistance guide designed specifically for state workforce program evaluation staff and leaders. But like I said, it really is valid for anyone who's looking to do evaluation of programs involving workforce development in any nature.

There are a series of sections that have a comprehensive view of evaluation. There's a ton of information in there. It's also really well broken out by section so you can easily see, oh, I have a question about what types of evaluations, the different types of evaluations and what they might be appropriate for. That's very easy for you to find without going through everything that's in there.

Because as the law states, there is that statement about you want to be as rigorous as feasible. But there's a discussion about what sorts of evaluations you might want to pursue. In some cases they're experimental design with control groups, and in some cases they're more basic implementation studies that might be appropriate for a pilot that you're working on. So not to worry that you're going to be having to do a full-fledged experimental study in every case.

So sections walk through how do you design an evaluation; how you select an evaluator, whether in-house or third-party. There's also at the end a great set of resources, including the NASWA scan that was already mentioned; links to all kinds of places to find research that's already been done. So a really great tool there.

As part of that tool are two assessments. And these are ones that – the first is a readiness assessment. And not surprisingly, it's meant to measure your overall readiness to conduct rigorous evaluations. And more importantly, identifying and exploring factors that may be inhibiting your capacity, and areas where you may need additional resources or technical assistance.

So once again, no matter what you do after today's meeting, this assessment is available to you as part of the toolkit. You can take it, you can use it, you can do it on your own, you can do it with your partners in other agencies; all of that's open to you.

So the areas this readiness assessment focuses on are: evaluation culture and awareness; funding strategies; data management; staff skills, capacity, and knowledge; and strategic planning.

The second assessment that I wanted to mention to you that's also in that toolkit is about design and implementation. So it measures your readiness to conduct specific elements of rigorous evaluations.

Going one level deeper, identifying and exploring factors that may be inhibiting your capacity and areas for additional resources or technical assistance are needed. So this gets a little more into the nitty-gritty and it looks specifically at evaluation design and research questions, data collection and analysis plan, evaluator selection, participant rights, and the all-important reporting. Right? If you don't communicate out the great results you have, then you're not going to have an impact on how services are provided.

So major plug to all of you who are on here to check out these resources.

We're going to switch gears a little bit. And as Gloria mentioned, we have two state folks joining us and they were each leads for their state teams from our 2019 evaluation peer learning cohort. You're going to find out more after we hear from them about how you can apply for the 2020 eval PLC.

But we wanted you to hear a little bit about what sorts of reasons this year's colleagues had for joining the eval PLC, what sort of an opportunity it provided for them, and lessons they learned as well as where they're at in their progress in terms of evaluation and research.

So I am now going to turn it over first to Bryan, who's from Wisconsin. He's our data integration and governance manager. And I just have two up here on the slide. You'll see that based on their assessment, Bryan's state came to the eval PLC with strengths as funding strategies, and data collection and analysis planning. So everyone comes at a different point in the process, as we mentioned, and so that's where Bryan and his team were. And Bryan, please take it away.

MR. HUEBSCH: Hello, everyone. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to discuss the experience of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development during our participation in the evaluation peer learning cohort.

We had a very diverse team of professionals from our programs. We had Jeffery Orr from the WIOA Title I program; Amy Heisman (ph) from Title III Wagner-Peyser employment services; John Gilleta (ph), Title IV vocational rehabilitation; Kristen Cullen, who represents both the TAA program and RESEA grants; Gary Myer, the Jobs for Veterans state grant; finally, we had Jimmy Watson join our cohort from the Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, a Title I local board.

I will talk about the three biggest takeaways for Wisconsin. However, first I should highlight that our goal coming into the cohort was to become an evidence-based organization and have an evidence-based workforce development system.

Until recently, Wisconsin DWD was not – has not been able to make strides in that area due to competing priorities and readiness through just a lack of capacity. That situation changed in the previous few years with new leadership and a funding source. It is of note that DWD received WDQI – Workforce Data Quality Initiative – grant round seven.

The WDQI grant, we're leveraging that to build a workforce data integration system that is designed to build an enduring evaluation system. Think of it as the gift that will keep on giving beyond the grant. That means we would have a structure that can facilitate the appropriate governance, data stewardship, and technical capabilities required to ensure that data are trusted, understood, secure, and available for authorized research purposes.

So the first takeaway from our participation in the cohort was actually a strength. Our state has a large amount of administrative data available. It also has a lot of the collection processes to ensure that the collected data is of quality. Many of the collection ensuring mechanisms are already in place.

Recently, the department added an entity matching software to assist matching customers between databases. That tool will help us converse between various data siloes that have been in the department to provide a better picture about the people that we serve.

The second takeaway was that our programs generally lacked extensive experience conducting rigorous evaluation. Our agency has been good at collecting and reporting data to the federal government and other stakeholders to satisfy reporting and on performance requirements, but it must undergo a significant cultural shift in order to realize the value of evidence-based activities and evidence-based policy making.

The state's participation in this cohort, coupled with the guidelines and the foundations in Evidence-Based Policy Making Act of 2018, were drivers for the development of several items in our evaluation action plan that will focus on the cultural shift. The evaluation action plan was I think the capstone exercise of this cohort.

The last key takeaway from the peer learning cohort was the opportunity for our team to see how different states were progressing. We were able to affirm that our state was not alone at undertaking an evaluation journey, and that our struggles were not unlike others. We also found excellent resources and examples from other states that helped us satisfy a lot of our initial goals.

In one example our coach, Randall Wilson, collaborated with Cynthia to demonstrate some of the processes that the state of Washington's educational research data center website had. It was a well-organized website and it had all of – many of the same topic areas that our WDIS system had envisioned. When I showed members of our team the website, I could see the light bulbs flashing over their heads.

Thank you, Randall and Cynthia. Randall was great for us. He was willing to talk to me about additional and timely topics about issues that our state is facing. I really appreciate that he was willing to discuss these things that were not necessarily directly in the cohort but relevant to research data integration and our program operations.

So since the cohort concluded in May, our agency has been working hard to finalize the business requirements to build the – to formally build the longitudinal workforce database that will provide a technical solution for a lot of our long-term evaluation needs. Our partners on the evaluation and research committee are moving forward to finalize a learning agenda which will help guide the questions that we ask our data.

Through these challenging times that our department and nearly everybody is facing right now, the evaluation-building efforts continue to be a high priority. In Wisconsin DWD we are fortunate our leadership affirmed the criticality of increasing evidence-building capacity because they see it as a way to answer many of the significant questions about the challenges that we are trying to solve in today's environment. That's why we feel adequate research and evaluation capacity is so meaningful.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity today to discuss the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development experience in the peer learning cohort.

MS. FORLAND: Thank you so much, Bryan. I now want to turn things over to Mark from the state of Illinois, where he is performance measures manager. And let's hear a little bit about your experience. (Pause.) And I think you're on mute, Mark.

MR. BURGESS: One of these days we'll all figure this technology out.

MS. FORLAND: Right? (Chuckles.)

MR. BURGESS: Thank you, Cynthia. Bryan, thank you too. You provided quite a lead in to some of our takeaways from the evaluation peer learning cohort project as well.

Our team consisted of representatives from the four core partners. We also had a local representative from Title I, and I know that was mentioned earlier about making sure we have a wide variety of individuals participating. And I think it was very helpful to hear the local – provide that local input to hear from them. They are part of a larger team of all of our local areas that meet on a monthly basis, so they were able to provide feedback to them and get feedback in return for us on our team. So it was very, very helpful.

Cynthia provided us quite a wide variety of information beyond even what was provided in the cohort meetings, that you'll find out about later.

It was very helpful in that we did hear from other states. Initially going into this we were kind of concerned that we were on the low scale of doing evaluations, of our knowledge of evaluations. And through those assessments that Cynthia spoke about, we did find out that really we're in the middle of the road with everybody else, that we shouldn't feel at all concerned that maybe we're behind the times in providing evaluations.

But in addition to those assessments, I think one of the takeaways from having knowledge of and hearing from those other states is just to see where there strengths were. We had a call separate of the cohort with Oklahoma, talked specifically about some of their strengths.

While not highlighted necessarily here from Cynthia, one of our strengths we felt was data and information. We've got a lot of different grants going on through the Department of Labor and other organizations, just a large wealth of information that we can garner from our LMI data at our employment security office. But we didn't know really how that played into evaluations. And so it was very important for us to join this cohort and learn more how to utilize one of the strengths we felt we had coming into this.

We built a policy – the state workforce board built a policy recently on collaboration and system integration. And we felt that was one of our strengths as well is that we've been working a lot more closely with all of our partners. And so we think that will be very helpful moving forward with evaluations.

It led us to have a meeting with all of our WIOA leadership to discuss evaluations moving forward and they are committed to doing those, utilizing the information from the evaluation peer learning cohort project, as well as research and really just finding other resources for evaluation.

So I'm looking forward to working with our partners, working with our state workforce board. In fact, the state workforce board has adopted our new evaluation team as a subcommittee to work with them on identifying opportunities for continuous improvement. And again, most of those – most of these discussions came directly from some of the information we learned in our cohort meetings.

One of the other takeaways we had is just gathering more information about evaluations. I think, along with other states, we do a lot of assessments, we do a lot of monitoring, we gather a lot of information. But I don't think we really did true evaluations for the purpose of finding out what's working well, why it's working well; and then taking that information, those reports, and really providing and taking them as an opportunity for continuous improvement.

So that's why we joined with the state workforce board and their continuous improvement committee to begin the process of doing collaborative evaluations with all of our partners and really finding those opportunities to improve across the state; learning from those local areas, those local boards that are doing things well in some areas and passing that information on to everybody else.

We learned about multiple methodologies to conduct evaluations, and when certain ones are appropriate and when certain ones aren't. It really depends on the type of evaluation we're looking for.

And then finally, funding opportunities came from the knowledge of those assessments. We did our own kind of internal audit of funding available, from WIOA funds to private funds. And the opportunity to join with partners outside of the system, such as our universities that do evaluations, and organizations, private companies that do evaluations that are interested in doing evaluations because they know it will benefit their system and eventually benefit their bottom line as well.

And then a third takeaway, really I think Gloria and Cynthia and Wayne have all spoke to, is all of the resources available through this project, both on the evaluation hub that they spoke to on Workforce GPS. The toolkit was very – it's a large document but has such a wealth of information that we gathered and utilized in our conversations.

And then again, working with consultants and that moving forward we have to identify – take our team approach moving forward from this project to conducting the evaluations to really determine what projects that we want to look at, determine what policies we want to evaluate to determine if they're really achieving the goals and the priorities that the state workforce board and our partners have set out by setting the policies.

So really appreciated all the assistance that this project, especially Cynthia, provided us. And look forward to hearing from other states in the future on how they're progressing.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you, Mark. So I want to open it up. If you have any questions for Mark or Bryan, please enter those in the chat. We'll have another opportunity toward the end for questions as well, but particularly if you have any questions about what you just heard from Bryan and Mark about their experience in last year's evaluation peer learning cohort. I'm just going to give a moment here. (Pause.)

I'm not seeing questions pop up yet. So what I'm going to do in the interest of time is I'm going to keep plugging along. Please continue to enter your comments in the chat. Mark and Bryan will still be on the line and available to answer those questions.

So with that I want to talk a little bit about the 2020 evaluation peer learning cohort. This is an opportunity that's available, very similar to what Mark and Bryan were just describing to you. So what are the basics? Why on earth would you want to be a part of this cohort?

It basically allows you an opportunity to exchange information, to assess your capacity, all focused on research and evaluation.

And it looks like this slide has some weird letters missing. I'm not sure what happened here, but bear with me.

State teams will have access to a technical assistance coach, as we talked about, to help evaluate their state's readiness to conduct evaluations, to inform – ultimately inform policy and practices, and supporting the design and the implementation of an evaluation analysis action plan. Just something tangible that you will walk away from this process.

All meetings are virtual. So that makes things easier, right? It's easier in terms of cost, but it's also so much easier in terms of the pandemic we're all dealing with. So the eval PLC state teams will meet five times as a group, from October through March.

ETA will also hold three complimentary public webinars on hot evaluation topics. And those are really going to be driven by what we hear from states, not only in the questions and comments from today, but also the applications we get from states who are interested in applying to the cohort. So we make sure we're talking about things that are really very topical and important to you right now.

After being selected to participate, state teams will begin by completing the two assessments I talked about earlier, the evaluation readiness assessment and the design and implementation assessment. Set a baseline there and allow you to see where you are. As Mark and Bryan both mentioned, allowing you to compare yourself to where your peers are in the cohort as well.

And you finish up the cohort with an evaluation action plan that you work on based on the conversations you had as part of the cohort with your own internal team, with the other state teams, and really supported by your identified coach who will be working with you through the whole process.

So if you are interested, there's an online application and you'll be hearing about that very soon. You'll be getting a link to that. But look at composing a state team of state and local representatives from Titles I and III of WIOA, as well as representatives from II and IV. The more cross-agency involvement you can have, the better. You also heard too about involvement from local folks, not just statewide; I think that's a great idea as well.

A panel of ETA staff will review all the applications received and select up to six state teams to participate. And applicant states will be notified the first week of September.

With that I want to open it up once again to questions on anything we've been discussing, whether it's the cohort, the state experience you heard about, the cohort coming up, the WIOA evaluation requirement and any related technical assistance tools.

I do want to hand things over first off to Wayne, who did want to weigh in on a comment we had during the session already today.

MR. GORDON: Thank you, Cynthia. I see a question regarding establishing state contacts for evaluation. With that question just – there could be two answers to that and I'll give both. I'm never at a loss for words.

If the questioner is interested in us establishing or whether we plan to establish a list of contacts within states, yes, that's something I think we'd be – that we are interested in. A lot of my interaction right now through the states has been via the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, specifically the research center there that's headed up by Yvette Chocolaad. And Yvette has been very kind and inviting me to various NASWA subcommittee meetings, like with LMI and the other meetings that they have. So I do have a lot of contact with Yvette with regard to the activities underway at the states.

Things like the registrations, the applications, people's – joining the community of practice; these are all ways of developing sort of a list of individuals that are interested in this topic and wish to carry it forward within their states.

So we will look to those things as a draft of interest of possible state contacts. We are conscious, though, at the federal level that we don't want to overreach and go beyond the food chain, if you will, with regard to reaching out to the states directly. And we're very conscious of that and very cautious about doing that. But I think access through NASWA is a good way to begin and get a feel for how that collaboration and how that interaction takes place.

With regard to my second part of the question – or the second part of my answer – is with regard to what you'll learn in the TA tools that are available on EvalHub and Workforce GPS. But also, one of the things you'll learn about is finding those people within your state of like mind.

There are people in the LMI shop who feel – and I've heard this from LMI representatives from states – they're very interested in going beyond the performance reporting and the sort of day-in and day-out activity that they have. They want to participate in the research and evaluation activities that the state may undertake, so I think you'll find partners there.

So looking across your agency, look for those partners that are down the hall, perhaps, and you might never have met. I think I can speak for the state teams that this exercise got them to sort of reach out and around their agency and across agencies at the state level to find like-minded individuals to work with.

And another important thing is to find champions within your state, people in leadership positions, people that can be a champion for evidence-based policy development. And we've heard that as a key feature to our state interactions that we heard from Bryan and Mark.

I hope that answers the question. If I didn't get it right, I apologize, and if the questioner could elaborate. If I didn't hit it, please do so in the chat window there. Thank you.

MS. FORLAND: Thank you, Wayne. Thank you. No, thank you for that response. And we also had a couple questions too that came up around I think kind of the purpose of this effort. And I addressed some of them, I think, when I was talking about the opportunity for this upcoming cohort. But let me just speak a little bit more to that.

The question was around, are there opportunities for states to share techniques under the framework – (inaudible) – opportunity to acquire resources to conduct evaluation, opportunity to develop interstate dialogue? Yes, yes, and yes.

So Wayne talked a little bit and Gloria talked a little bit about the benefits. Even if you don't want to apply for the evaluation peer learning cohort, just taking advantage of the resources that are available to you through the EvalHub, joining that community, being a part of those conversations.

If you want to do that in a more intense way, yes, the evaluation peer learning cohort is a great way to do that. You not only get to work more with folks in your own state, where you might not have that much time to speak with or interact with; this allows you to do that as part of a team. Be able to talk across states and develop interstate dialogue.

In some cases there have been relationships that have continued even beyond the end of the cohort, when a couple of states have found similarities in what they were interested in and wanted to keep conversations going.

So yes, all of those things are part of both the resources you have available on demand on Workforce GPS, as well as if you're interested in being a part of the evaluation peer learning cohort for 2020.

We're going to see if any other questions are popping up.

MR. GORDON: Cynthia, I could add to that. This is Wayne.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Yes, please.

MR. GORDON: We heard about the Workforce Data Quality Initiative grants; that had funding associated with it.

You might also – folks might also be familiar with some of the grant announcements that come out of DOL, as well as Education and HHS. They often have dollars set aside for research and evaluation. Sometimes it's expected at the federal level; other times it's expected at the state level and engaging with a third party firm is things that we've tried through these FOAs. So there's examples there.

RESEA is another one, through the unemployment insurance system. There are dollars attached to grant initiatives that would allow the states to use those dollars to further the research and evaluation activities.

And those are things that have money behind them right away. If someone's interested in it, it wouldn't be a grant announcement. So those are good opportunities to get in on the ground floor of activities like that and get some funding, hopefully.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you, Wayne. So we do have two polls to close out today's session. And please continue to put any comments or questions in the chat as we continue, because we'll have a chance still to be able to answer some questions.

So the first one – Grace, if we could pop up that first poll. And that's around what type of resources you would like to see on the evaluation and research hub. Go ahead and select two that you would find most helpful. Because not only – as I've been mentioning, not only is being a part of the evaluation peer learning cohort an opportunity, but just using your resources available to you. And you have a chance right now to inform what sorts of things are added to those resources.

So do you want more how-to tools and guides? Podcasts or videos with voices of experience? Templates and examples of statements of work, evaluation reports, and relevant research questions and/or findings? Professional development resources? Or other? And if you have an "other," please do put that in the chat.

I'm seeing a lot of answers right around more how-to tools and guides, as well as templates and examples. Very concrete, practical things. Oh, and I'm seeing some more folks interested now in professional development resources, so that's great.

Definitely an overwhelming amount in the how-to tools and guides and templates. OK. And let's turn to our – I think we've got most folks responding. Let's turn to our second of our two closing polls.

And that's one just asking whether or not you are interested in applying for the 2020 cohort. Grace is bringing that up now. So let us know. Yes, looking forward to putting together a team and developing a state evaluation action plan. Maybe, not sure whether we can. Not sure we can commit the necessary time. No, but interested in learning about resources available.

So, good. We've got a good group here. I love it. We've got about 8 percent – 7 percent who are saying yes, they're ready to go. About 53, it looks like, percent between the two maybes, so that's good. That sounds realistic. And some say no. Now we're getting up to more like 40 percent saying, you know what? Yeah, I'm really going to be focused on the resources that you've told me are available right now. So that's great.

And then it looks like we do have – go ahead and finish responding to the poll. And we have a couple other questions that have come up.

Let's go with the – oh, the first question is, "Where is the application for the eval PLC?" So that is going to be sent out to you. It's going to be an online application. And so in follow-up materials to this event, you're going to be able to get that link and get the information on that. But trying to make that as easy for you as possible to apply.

And then the other question we've gotten – and Grace, you can go ahead and close out that poll, because we did want to close out with just another opportunity for questions.

So, "New legislation requires states RESEA program to be more integrated with WIOA programs; and that impact evaluation is required for both programs, WIOA and RESEA, separately. Would there be a way for legal requirements for evaluation for those programs to be more integrated?" And Wayne, I'm not sure if you might want to weigh in on that.

MR. GORDON: Thanks, Cynthia. I was on mute. I'm reading the question now. (Pause.) The expectation is integration under RESEA. And that is the age-old time of unemployment insurance be solely support of people for income security while they're unemployed. Unemployment insurance is also the first step or the first door upon which – or through which our customers come.

And we know from past research that early intervention with unemployed individuals, and engaging them quickly in a job search, or at least an assessment of what their next steps should be, is important. So integration is the purpose for RESEA, as UI is the first time we often see people who are out of work.

So yes, if I'm answering that – if I'm reading that correctly, I hope my answer is responsive to that. If not, please – the questioner, please indicate so and we can get responses to questions that we can't answer today.

MS. FORLAND: And we just got another question in asking about the link for the evaluation toolkit. So that's on the slide that you should be able to see right now that has a number of resources, the evaluation and research hub, the toolkit specifically, as well as a couple other pieces – an information sheet on the 2020 peer learning cohort. So please take advantage of that.

And also, if you download the slides, as you can through the webinar, you can see that there.

And one other thing I would just want to add quickly to what – to Wayne's comments relating to RESEA and WIOA, even if they're not the exact same statutory requirement, Department of Labor is very interested in seeing those things done cooperatively and in a coordinated way.

So if you do have any questions about how to make sure those are integrated, how to coordinate, those, if you feel like you're having to do double work, please reach out to folks at Department of Labor and get some clarity on that. Because I think they really are very interested in making sure that your efforts are coordinated and not redundant.

MR. GORDON: Thank you, Cynthia.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Cynthia, this is Gloria. If I may add as well, there is an RESEA evaluation technical assistance team as part of the RESEA national implementation evaluation. The RESEA program has put on a platform of evaluation-related technical assistance webinars that you can find on the re-employment connections webpage in Workforce GPS. I can share that link as well via this webinar page before we close out for the day.

Anyone who's working on WIOA and RESEA program activities at the state level should make sure they're working with their state liaisons who are working on the RESEA evaluation components.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you. And I see one more question. It asked what was I referring to when I mentioned the NASWA scan? It's typed there as "scam" but it should have been "scan" as an N.

So as Wayne had mentioned, NASWA – this is a couple years ago now, but NASWA reached out to states across the nation to get a better sense of what kind of evaluation capacity states have. And that's something – it's a great resource. It is linked there within the toolkit, so you can see that as one of the resources. So feel free to look at that to get a little more information on that. But we can also, as part of a follow-up email, include that link with – relating to RESEA as well as the NASWA scan.

And I'll just leave up here contact information for the folks you heard from. Certainly there's Gloria's information, Wayne's information. And then any questions you may have relating to resources on EvalHub or the eval PLC, there's an email there for that.

And so I think in the interest of time I don't see – oh, wait. OK. Hold on. We've got one more question. I don't want to cut things off if we got one more question.

The question is, "Could an agency receive funding to conduct research evaluation?"

MR. GORDON: I guess that's for my answer.

MS. FORLAND: Probably.

MR. GORDON: (Chuckles.) Well, aside from what I listed before, when there's funding dedicated for research and evaluation through a grant announcement, there's funding there. Separately, you'll learn in the eval PLC and on the resources there that there's often grant announcements from other federal agencies.

But there's also activity with regard to nonprofit organizations that are supporting research and evaluation that states may be able to access. The John & Laura Arnold Foundation (sic) is just one, as an example, but there's many more.

With regards to federal dollars for that, we don't have that identified yet. Ideally it would be something we would love to do and seize upon. And when opportunities arise, we would want to do that. But at this point, there's nothing that we have available at DOL. That doesn't preclude anything coming out of our partner agencies at HHS, Education, et cetera.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you, Wayne. And you're going to see – you already saw pop up a moment ago in the chat the RESEA link, and then also you'll be seeing a link to the NASWA scan.

Let's see – oh, another question, "Can VR agencies –" vocational rehabilitation agencies "– use RESEA re-allotment funding for that?"

MR. GORDON: That's a difficult question that I don't have the knowledge base to make that kind of declaration. We'd have to consult with our legislative review colleagues on that. But we can follow that up with a more informed answer. But I'd be remiss if I said I knew exactly what's allowed and what's not.

MS. FORLAND: Great question. So yeah, we want to make sure we have our vocational rehab experts to be able to let us know about that.

So with that I think we're going to wrap. Please stay on the webinar for just a moment. We're going to have a closeout poll that Gloria's going to tell you – I'm sorry, Grace is going to tell you about.

And with that, just thank you so much for your participation, for your comments and your questions and for being a part of this webinar today. Thank you so much.

(END)