**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Evaluation Strategies for States with Smaller RESEA Programs**

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JON VEHLOW: Welcome to "Evaluation Strategies for States with Smaller RESEA Programs." So without further ado, I'd like to kick things off to our moderator today, Gloria Salas Kos, evaluation technical assistance coordinator, office of policy development and research with the U.S. Department of Labor and the employment and training administration. Gloria?

GLORIA SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Jonathon and good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us. Today I am co-moderating this session with Larry Burns, who is the reemployment coordinator for the U.S. Department of Labor's office of unemployment insurance. We look forward and are here – look forward to moderating this reemployment services and eligibility assessments, or RESEA, evaluation and technical assistance session for you today.

Also joining us today from Abt Associates, your evaluation technical assistance provider, are Tresa Kappil and Alec Wall. Andrew Clarkwest, the project director for the RESEA evidence building and implementation study is also with us and will be available to answer questions at the end of this webinar.

Before we get started, I do want to take a step back to reflect on the purpose of our work, to build evidence and meet the goals of our RESEA evaluation technical assistance. And really, to just quickly review what and why we provide information through these webinars.

So as you can see, we've shared this cycle of learning and doing for evaluation before and it serves to remind us about how we use evaluation. Evaluation is an iterative, ongoing process and may be used to inform various efforts within program management.

What you learn from an evaluation, whether it is one you conduct or one that another state conducts, may lead you to think about changes that you want to make to your RESEA program. In turn, you might want to evaluate that new program or refine a program component to continue learning more about what's the most effective intervention or service in helping people or what's most effective in helping people get back to work quickly.

This type of culture of continuous improvement or a culture of evaluation and evidence building, takes time and we recognize that many of you are already engaged in learning and doing cycles where you gather, analyze and use data, research evidence – and research and evidence to continually inform your program or policy decisions.

Our efforts to provide RESEA evaluation TA through these webinars as well as the other resources and tools available are geared toward helping you and your RESEA program staff develop and use strategies in approaches we share.

These resources can be helpful for everyone that is responsible for implementing RESEA programs. They can also help you as your state begins to evaluate or consider an evaluation for RESEA or as you identify key valuation topics or move towards moving forward with existing evaluation plans.

Today's webinar supports two of our evaluation TA objectives. First objective will be to share and discuss strategies to use when states with smaller RESEA programs conduct rigorous impact studies.

And to explain how detecting impacts on employment and UI weeks is possible. We will then talk about evaluation activities that you, as RESEA program managers, can perform right away to help you prepare to conduct a large-scale impact study.

So now, I'll turn it over to Alec Wall.

ALEC WALL: Thank you, Gloria. Before we dive into the assessment strategy, I would like to start by emphasizing that high quality evaluations of all types, that is implementation, outcomes and impact studies, are all valuable and provide useful information to your agency. However, impact studies are especially valuable, because they are designed to tell whether your RESEA program has an impact on important outcomes.

DOL has emphasized the importance of impact studies that are capable of detecting impacts on employment and UI duration and the goal is for all states, regardless of size, to conduct such an impact study.

Past work suggests that sample size requirements are at least 30,000 claimants. That is 15,000 intervention and 15,000 comparison claimants and that would be for a random assignment whole program impact evaluation, which has the smallest sample size requirements of any impact evaluation that you might conduct in order to examine impact on employment and UI duration.

Even more claimants would be required for an impact evaluation of program components on those outcomes or an evaluation that needs an approach other than random assignments. We also recognize that states with smaller programs may have smaller budgets.

For more information about how to estimate sample size requirements and approaches to financing evaluation, please see our recent RESEA eval TA webinar, Considerations When Writing a Statement of Work for an Evaluation, available on WorkforceGPS.

In a number of webinars, you have heard our team discuss the importance of sample size. We have made this a point of emphasis, because it really has to do with a study's ability to detect the impacts of the intervention.

Detecting impacts is linked to a steady margin of error, which may also be referred to as a competence interval. If the competence interval for a program's impact includes zero, there isn't enough evidence to be sure that the interventions really had an effect, even if it truly might have.

But the more claimants that are included in an impact study, the more likely the study will be able to detect those impacts. In the graphic above, you can see two hypothetical studies of an intervention that has an estimated impacted of two percentage points. However, study A has a relatively smaller sample size and therefore a bigger margin of error.

Because of the large margin of error, the study fails to specifically detect an impact. In comparison, study B finds the same estimated impact, but has a sample large enough that its margin of error does not include zero.

So we can say with statistical confidence that the intervention really did have an impact. DOL's clearinghouse for labor, evaluation and research – (inaudible) – study B as finding evidence that the introduction is effective, but – (inaudible) – would look at study A's findings and say that it does not provide evidence that the intervention is effective.

Your agency is investing time, money and effort into running an evaluation. The state that conducted hypothetical study A would invest in that effort without being able to demonstrate effectiveness in the end or being able to be confident in drawing its own conclusions to learn from the study findings. A larger sample can improve the odds that your investment produces the intended value.

Again, we want to emphasize that all states should have the goal of conducting an impact study examining employment and UI duration. However, we realize this might not be possible for some states right now, particularly states with smaller RESEA programs.

That being said, there are a number of other evaluation – (inaudible) – which states should consider to help and prepare – (inaudible). Broadly, these activities will help states accomplish either of two goals. First, it could strengthen the impact of the RESEA intervention. Strengthening the size of – (inaudible) – impact might reduce your sample size – (inaudible) – impact in a future study.

Secondly, there are activities that can strengthen the – (inaudible) – evaluation capacity. Strengthening internal capacity increases your chances of running a high-quality study that meets clear standards in the future.

We will discuss these types of activities in the second half of the webinar.

Now, though, let's turn our attention to strategies that states with smaller RESEA programs could pursue now in order to help them successfully conduct an impact study capable of detecting impact on employment outcomes and UI duration.

Your state might wish to conduct an impact study in the near future, but upon first glance, you might not have physician sample size. However, there are some strategies that can be used to increase sample size and/or make an impact study possible despite current sample size.

These include lengthening the study enrollment period, conducting a full evaluation or using retrospective data and a quasi-experimental design. We will walk through these strategies and relevant considerations on the following slides.

Thanks, Jon. First, let's look at lengthening the study enrollment period. Conducting random assignments over multiple years can enable states to generate sample sizes sufficient to detect – (inaudible).

As we said, the estimated sample size needed for a random assignment – (inaudible) – program impact study is about 30,000 claimants' total. Let's take a look at a state that has 10,000 non-exempt UI claimants per year.

In the first year of the study, 5000 of these claimants could be randomly selected for RESEA and another 5000 could be randomly assigned to the comparison group. As you know, that's not enough.

Then, in year two, we have another 5000 claimants selected and 5000 not selected for RESEA, bringing us to 20,000 total in the study. That's still not enough – (inaudible).

In the third year, we'd add another 10,000 total claimants, which would take us to the goal and likely allow you to detect impact. If we then continued to enroll for a fourth year, we'd get to 40,000 claimants and have even more than the target, just in case.

Even though we think you'll need the full 30,000 claimants, your evaluator should begin to run analyses after each year of collection.

You should be able to detect impact on UI duration earlier than for employment and earnings and by continuing to conduct random assignment and run analyses year after year, you can keep building the sample until you're able to detect impact – (inaudible) – significance.

In general, we think the option of extending the study enrollment period should be relatively attractive – (inaudible). Firstly, it doesn't require any changes to the program or other necessary conditions, so all states should be able to use these strategies.

Also, in comparison with other strategies that will be discussed, it is relatively straightforward. You will just need to keep continuing selection and building samples year after year, using a whole program brand and assignment would be the least – (inaudible) – design.

There are also a few other potential benefits to using this strategy. For example, – (inaudible) – random assignment over a longer period of time could provide additional opportunities for staff to engage with the studies and thereby increase the familiarity – (inaudible) – and evaluation in general.

And then, to an extent, having a longer enrollment period might also be associated with greater – (inaudible) – of any study – (inaudible). That's because a longer enrollment period may increase the diversity and types of claimants included in the study.

Now, let's turn to another strategy. Conducting a – (inaudible) – evaluation with other states. In this scenario, two or more states who do not have enough samples to conduct an impact study on their own, could potentially pool their data in order to generate a sample sufficient to demonstrate – (inaudible) – effectiveness.

There are a few necessary conditions – (inaudible) – strategy. Ideally, states use RESEA programs and/or the intervention of interest should be relatively similar. For example, states – (inaudible) – data would likely want them to have programs requiring the same number of RESEA meetings and have similar required services.

Partner states would also need to collectively hire a single experience evaluator. This may require agreements between your states regarding funding and operations and you'd also need to establish data sharing agreements such that the data could be shared with one another and be evaluated.

There are a few secondary considerations too. In terms of benefits, partner states would be able to pull sample, but also pull funds. This might help you benefit from economies of scale such as being able to hire a higher quality, more experienced evaluator than your individual state could have done on your own.

Then because your sample is pooled across several states, findings should be more generalizable than those from a single state study. However, one thing to think about is that states will have to coordinate and compromise on the evaluation.

States will need to agree on who to hire, what to study and how. Of course we acknowledge that it might be hard for your state to find willing partners. We recommend leveraging existing multi-state collaborations or partnerships to see which other states might be interested in pooling.

Finally, you can also reach out to the RESEA eval TA inbox if you have specific questions about the feasibility of a pooled evaluation for your state.

Finally, let's take a look at retrospective quasi-experimental designs or QEDs. States trying to conduct an impact study now may be able to make use of previously collected data to conduct their retrospective QED.

In general, QEDs are studies that detect impacts by comparing the group that received the intervention, in this case, RESEA, to a credible comparison group. That is, a group who did not receive the intervention, but who are reasonably similar to those who did.

There are a few necessary conditions for this strategy to work. Because the designs are retrospective, they can only answer questions about intervention and population for which you have already collected data.

And as I mentioned before, you'll also need to be able to form a credible comparison group. In the RESEA context, that can be difficult. Sometimes impossible.

Because those who receive RESEA are generally determined by some sort of selection mechanism, such as a profiling score, those who do get – (inaudible) – services are by definition different and probably not comparable to those who do not get them.

Those who do get the intervention have higher risk of benefit exhaustion and are likely to have longer UI durations and lower – (inaudible). Comparing their outcomes to the outcomes of claimants who are not selected for RESEA and have lower profiling scores will tend to make the program look less effective than it actually is.

For similar reasons, we wouldn't want to compare those selected for RESEA to those in areas not served by RESEA or to out of state claimants. There are a few other considerations too.

On the positive side, if your state is able to meet these conditions and conduct the retrospective QED, the QED will typically be shorter and likely cheaper than perspective studies since the data has already been collected.

On the flip side, these designs are often analytically complex, so you'll want to make sure you find and evaluate it with sophisticated expertise in how to conduct this type of study.

Lastly, sample size requirements for QEDs are typically much larger than for random – (inaudible). That is for any given sample size, a QED will have a bigger margin of error than a – (inaudible) – will.

So you'll likely need several years of the data – (inaudible) – feasible. One design that might allow you to create a credible comparison group is the regression discontinuity design. This design actually takes advantage of the fact – (inaudible) – RESEA based on a profiling score.

Even though in general, we don't think those selected based on that score are comparable to those not selected, they are comparable right around the profiling score selection cutoff value.

In that way, it's possible to compare outcomes for those just above the profiling score cut off to those just below the cut off. Individualization, that means we're only looking at those claimants in the, quote unquote, – (inaudible) – sample.

The discontinuity – (inaudible) – refers to the fact that – (inaudible) – impacts – (inaudible) – change in outcomes right at the selection cut off. That is, suppose a state selected claimants with profiling scores of .6 or above.

In general, we would expect claimants with higher profiling scores to have longer UI duration, but if we saw a sudden, sharp difference in outcomes of claimants with scores of .6 compared to claimants with scores just slightly smaller than that, then a regression discontinuity analysis would find that as evidence of impact.

This design might work for you if you have the data going back several years, including profiling scores, with selection cut off use over time and who was selected or not selected for RESEA.

You'll also need to consider were there any other rules about who should be selected for RESEA were in place and as with other retrospective designs, you'll almost certainly need multiple years with the data and an experienced evaluator since this is a very challenging design to conduct successfully.

If retrospective sample sizes aren't large enough, it could theoretically be possible to pull retrospective data with other states and run a pooled regression discontinuity study.

Of course, as you might imagine, that pooling adds further complications to the analyses. For more details regarding QEDs and the regression with continuity design, you can refer to the eval TA webinar Evaluations Using Your Existing Administrative Data Quasi-Experimental Design posted on Workforce GPS.

Now I'm going to hand things off to my colleague, Tresa Kappil.

TRESA KAPPIL: Thank you, Alec. In the next section, I will discuss what state agencies can do now to help them prepare to conduct an impact study at a later time.

There are a number of activities that you can perform in the short term to help you prepare to conduct the type of large scale impact evaluation that will be able to help you determine impacts on employment and UI duration.

We grouped these activities into two categories. The first set of activities consists of things that you can do to strengthen your ability to detect impacts of your RESEA program. The logic would be that if you have bigger hypothetical impacts, you may have a better chance to detect them with an impact study in the future.

Activities that fall under this include conducting outcome studies, implementation studies or special kinds of impact studies that focus on intermediate outcomes. The next set of activities focus on strengthening your agency's evaluation capacity.

These activities may help improve the quality of a future impact study and improve the chances of your study getting a higher peer rating by helping your agency identify and address issues now.

You can strengthen your ability to detect impacts of your RESEA program by conducting studies such as outcome studies or implementation studies. These studies can help you identify potential issues and improve your program or processes, thereby increasing the potential impact of your program.

As you may recall from previous webinars, outcome studies measure intervention participants' outcomes and compares them to your state's goals. For instance, you may conduct an outcome study to examine your state's failure to report rates and how it varies across claimant populations.

As a reminder, outcome studies do not have a comparison group and thus cannot provide evidence on intervention effectiveness in the same way that impact studies do.

Your state can also think about running an implementation study, which uses both qualitative and quantitative data to examine the RESEA program's design, implementation and operation.

For example, you may want to conduct an implementation study to answer the question, what reemployment services and activities do claimants participate in? This may seem obvious, but conducting an implementation study may show that localities may vary a great deal in how intervention is actually operationalized.

For more details, see the previous webinar, What Evaluation Designs Are Right for my State and Implementation Studies on WorkforceGPS.

Conducting implementation and outcome studies can have many benefits. Outcome studies can be particularly useful if comparing over time, across locations or populations. Though not causal, outcome studies may highlight things to look at more closely.

For example, you may find that some career centers have better outcomes than other career centers, which may indicate promising practices or potential issues that need further investigation.

An outcome study can also help you identify if there are potential problems with your administrative data. Your evaluator may notice that the data doesn't look quite right.

For instance, key information such as service referral dates and types might be missing for a large portion of claimants. You can then explore the issues in greater depth to identify whether it's a problem with how the data is being collected or recorded.

Learning these things about your data now will better help your state to improve the quality of its data and put you in a better position to conduct an impact study later.

Running an implementation study can help your agency understand a claims experience with the RESEA program or it could provide quick feedback on areas to improve claimants' movements throughout different parts of the program.

Your state may also want to consider running both an implementation study and outcome study, which would provide information that your state can use to refine the design or implementation of the RESEA program.

For example, some RESEA programs may have a significant percentage of claimants that do not appear for their first scheduled meetings. State agencies could conduct an outcome study using retrospective data to identify all claimants who are scheduled for a first meeting, but did not appear at the meeting.

Looking at variations across locations and times and compare these to their target goals. States could additionally conduct an implementation study to understand why there are differences between locations.

Conducting both of these studies together will provide your agency with useful information to help refine your program.

Another option is to conduct an impact study on intermediate outcomes rather than UI duration or employment. Intermediate outcomes are the expected program service delivery milestones or goals achieved on the pathway to the final outcome.

While impact studies of both UI duration and employment likely require sample sizes of approximately 30,000 claimants, sample size requirements for studies of intermediate outcomes are much smaller, generally a few thousand.

Impact studies on intermediate outcomes will likely focus on components and not the whole RESEA program and intermediate outcomes are generally more behavioral and might include things like meeting attendance, the number of job applications submitted by claimants and participation in additional reemployment services.

Let's look at an example. In this simplified logic model, there are three different program components. Reminder messages, career center orientation and intensive case management.

We could design an impact study to examine the impacts of each of these components on the intermediate outcomes that we anticipate that the components directly affect.

For instance, we can study the impacts of intensive case management on increased utilization of reemployment services and job search activities.

It is important to note that while we think that impacts on intermediate outcomes may lead to impacts on long term outcomes like increased employment and reduced UI duration, an impact study of intermediate outcomes such as this will not provide evidence on it.

A slightly different type of evaluation that focuses on intermediate outcomes is a rapid cycle evaluation. In contrast to traditional impact studies, rapid cycle evaluations are focused on a very specific piece of the program and are completed in a much shorter time frame.

Typically less than one year. The discrete focus of our rapid cycle evaluations and the quick turnaround allows program administrators to make evidence-based decisions to support continuous program improvement.

Rapid cycle evaluations really highlight the nature of the evaluation and the cycle of learning and doing that Gloria mentioned earlier in the webinar.

Generally, rapid cycle evaluations use a mixed methods approach using both estimates of impact on intermediate outcomes and qualitative analysis to understand staff and/or claimant experiences.

This information will allow you to quickly make changes to your program's operations or service delivery in order to improve quality or efficiency.

Similar to impact studies of intermediate outcomes, rapid cycle evaluations can produce evidence on the intervention's effects on intermediate outcomes, but it does not produce evidence of effects on UI duration or employment outcomes.

It is also important to note that the outcomes examined should be observable within a short time frame and that the data needed to measure the outcomes should be easily accessible.

Let's take a look at an example. A state agency that's interested in identifying messaging strategies that are effective for increasing meeting attendance can conduct a rapid cycle evaluation.

The agency can implement a new messaging strategy and test its impact on meeting attendance. The task could involve randomly assigning one group of claimants to receive the existing message and one group of claimants who receive the new message over a period of four to six months.

The evaluator can then analyze the data to determine if the messaging strategy was effective for increasing meeting attendance. In additions to estimating the impact, the evaluator can also interview staff and claimants about the perceptions of the message.

The state can use the results to refine their messaging strategy and then conduct another test to examine the effectiveness of the change. As you see, rapid cycle evaluations focus on a particular activity, it's effect on an intermediate outcome and then using that information to improve the program and continuing this process.

A 2015 study from Mathmatica Policy Research and UpJohn institute provides a real-life example of a study that focuses on intermediate outcomes.

The study's goal was to find cost effective ways to get REA claimants to schedule and attend REA sessions with Michigan Works Southwest. The study team first conducted interviews with local staff to identify possible issues the sites were experiencing and possible solutions to those issues.

As a result of the interview, the study team developed seven emails that were to be sent to claimants in addition to the standard notification letter issued by the unemployment insurance agency or UIA.

The new emails had a positive tone and include easy to understand instructions for rescheduling and attending REA sessions.

After the UIA selected claimants to participate in the REA program and referred them to Michigan Works Southwest, 372 UI claimants were assigned to the intervention group and sent the new email messages in addition to the initial notification letter.

The other 375 UI claimants were assigned to the control group and received only the initial notification letter. The study found that emails encouraged more individuals to sign up for and attend REA sessions. As you will note, this study is a behavioral study and focused on the intermediate outcome of getting participants to attend REA sessions.

Because of this, the intervention and control group sample – (inaudible) – smaller than for an impact study that focuses on long term outcomes and the actual experiment lasted only six months.

Though impact studies on intermediate outcomes and rapid cycle evaluations look similar, they are different from one another.

Both types of studies focus on intermediate outcomes that are more behaviorally focused and testing components of the REA program, but rapid cycle evaluations really focus on continuously using the results of the evaluation to improve programs and then continuing to run the evaluations to improve programs and then continuing to run the evaluations, thus the cycle part of the title.

Rapid cycle evaluations also tend to be much shorter in duration. Running these studies have some benefits. Both types of studies may help your agency – (inaudible) – get used to running a random assignment study and delivering services based on claimant study group status, that is the intervention and control group. These studies can also help inform specific program design questions, which can lead to actionable insights and refining your program.

Because rapid cycle evaluations focus on a mixed methods approach and using both impact estimates and qualitative analysis, they can build evidence and strategies that work best and in which context, which may strengthen your overall RESEA program.

There are also other smaller activities your agency can undertake now to prepare for an impact evaluation on UI duration and employment later such as conducting evaluability assessment.

As you may recall, evaluability assessments are designed to determine the extent to which the RESEA program can be readily and reliably evaluated using your rigorous design.

Conducting an evaluability assessment can help states to define specific interventions that are evaluation ready to test and ensure that the interventions to test are well understood. It can also help your state confirm availability of data and other necessary resources as well as build consensus on evaluation goals and identify evaluation feasibility issues.

Overall, conducting an evaluability assessment will help you to prepare to successfully conduct a rigorous evaluation by identifying issues that need to be addressed before conducting an evaluation.

More information about evaluability assessments can be found in the evaluation TA webinar Evaluating RESEA How Does it Help my State and Where do we Start? You can also use a valuation readiness assessment link above to help you understand your agency's readiness to conduct rigorous evaluations.

Another concrete step you can take to prepare for a large-scale impact evaluation is to review your administrative data and improve it's quality where needed. As we've mentioned in previous evaluation TA webinars, high quality administrative data is the key to a successful impact study for RESEA.

There are many methods that you can use to get this data. Some suggestions include developing standardized data tools and data entry protocols, establishing regular checks on data quality, strengthening data literacy through things like staff training and creating opportunities for staff to use data or understand the importance of data. I've only touched on these important steps, but my colleagues will dive into these on our next webinar, "Accessing and Using Data for Evaluations."

Now I'll hand it over to Gloria and Larry for some final words.

LARRY BURNS: Gloria, you might be on mute if you're talking right now.

MS. SALAS-KOS: I am, I'm sorry. Here we go. Thanks, Tresa. I do want to take a few minutes to review and highlight some of the concepts that were covered today.

For states with smaller RESEA programs, we understand that running an impact study can be difficult because of the size issues – sample size issues.

An appropriate path forward to address this challenge can be to lengthen the study enrollment period to include multiple years. This approach may allow your agency to accumulate the sample needed to detect impacts.

Other options are to conduct pooled evaluations or conduct QEDs or quasi-experimental design studies, which each have their own considerations and will have more complex undertakings requiring very skilled evaluators.

If your state is not quite ready to jump into conducting an impact evaluation on your UI duration and employment, the webinar presented several other evaluation options such as implementation studies, outcome studies, rapid cycle evaluations and studies that focus on intermediate outcomes.

These studies are valuable and may help you strengthen or refine your RESEA program and can help you prepare for an impact study on long term outcomes in the future.

Finally, there are a number of smaller activities that you can do now in preparation for an impact study on UI duration or employment like conducting an evaluation assessment or reviewing your data and your data processes to make sure they are accurate and consistently reported.

Larry Burns will now share a couple of things with you.

MR. BURNS: Hi everybody, and I just want to take a moment before we get into the resources to remind people we're going to have some time at the end to answer any questions you may have, so if you do have any questions, feel free to put them in the chat box as I'm going through and just reminding everybody about a few of the resources we have available for you.

One of the big things I wanted to cover was this webinar went over a lot of information and you're probably still going to have some questions at the end of this.

So I just wanted to remind everyone that this webinar in particular is part of our longer RESEA technical assistance series that's been going on for over a year now and all those previous events are all archived on WorkforceGPS so you can go back and look at the recordings and refresh your memory about some of the resources and things we've talked about in the past.

I think that will answer a lot of your questions. So I really do encourage you to do that and also, as a reminder, we still have, as a resource, our colleagues at Abt Associates as a technical assistance team that are happy to work through any state specific questions you might have.

So we do encourage you to continue to reach out to them and you can do so via email at RESEA@abtassoc.com, that's R-E-S-E-A at Abt Associate.com and if you missed that email, don't worry, we do have it repeated at the end with our contact, so we'll bring that up again.

But again, this listing here that we have on this page is just a partial listing of some of the resources we have related to RESEA and evaluation. So again, I do encourage you to go back and look at that.

For the remainder of our resources, anything regarding operations, evaluation, performance, funding, we have an RESEA landing page, which is part of the reemployment connections resource page on WorkforceGPS.

And I know most of the people on this call are likely familiar with this, but I did want to remind people that this is a resource page that covers everything. So it will link you to the evaluation resources I just discussed in addition to operating guidance and anything else you may need related to RESEA.

This page has been a little bit quiet over the past couple months, but we do have a bunch of updates that are in the works, especially as we're starting to get ready and do some thinking about activities next year in fiscal year 2021.

So if you're not familiar with this page, I really do encourage you to visit it. Bookmark it. Come back often, especially over the next few weeks and months as we ramp up for next year. So again, just a reminder about this resource and the landing page.

With that, we're going to move over to the question phase of the presentation, so if you have any questions, again, feel free to use that chat box to let us know. I do know we had a couple come in and the first one was asking if we could quantify what we meant by very large samples. I was going to hand that over to Andrew to field.

ANDREW CLARKWEST: Sure, thanks, Larry. Can you hear me?

MR. BURNS: Yes.

MR. CLARKWEST: I believe this was Robin's question and definitely right that it is not the most quantitatively precise term. So by very large or for any size metric that we talk about, we're generally benchmarking these to the size of state's RESEA programs.

So Alec did that at the beginning, talking about, okay, what very small or not very small, but small-ish means to us. Very large, when we use that term, we are talking probably well over 50,000, probably closer to 100,000, maybe more than that.

It's the sort of sample size that is large enough that there are very few states that serve that many RESEA claimants in a single year. So it's a size that very few states would be able to generate within a year if they're trying to conduct a study that requires a sample that size.

Of course it's worth noting that state RESEA programs may grow over time, so because of increased funding, so there may be more states that have this type of sample in later years, but in at least FY2019, the most recent year for which we have sort of normal data, that sort of sample size is a size that would be rare for a single state to generate.

MR. BURNS: Thanks Andrew, and with that, I just wanted to remind people we still have a few more minutes for questions, so feel free, if you have anything you want to ask, to put it in the chat box.

And we'll give it another minute or two just to see if there's some final questions before we wrap up. But as a reminder, and we mentioned before, we do have all of these events archived on WorkforceGPS, so I do know over the past couple months we've had a lot of new people join RESEA.

So if you're trying to get back up to speed with the program, I do strongly encourage that you take a look at the landing page I highlighted and go back and take a look at some of those previous webinars that cover quite a bit of information over the past couple months we've pulled together.

It's also a good clearinghouse for some promising practices and also some general informational guidance and other things not evaluation specific.

MS. SALAS-KOS: We have a question from Robin again. Andrew, would you like to take that one as well?

MR. CLARKWEST: Sure. Sure, so Robin's question operationally I see great benefit in rapid cycle evaluations, but at what point does constant change muck up a longer running impact study? Which is – I mean, it's a good question and it's certainly true that it's a real – an obvious advantage of rapid cycle evaluation that it's a way that produces – it's the mechanism that produces information that is immediately useable for program improvement.

In fact, it requires program improvement, but that's the cycle part it. It implies that you're getting results back and you're using those results to make program changes and then you're testing again. So this is a cycle that – I mean, it works if you're doing something that you can do, get results for quickly, and that are areas where you can make programmatic changes.

I would guess that in most cases, the sorts of evaluations wouldn't cause problems for a larger, longer running impact study, because typically they wouldn't fundamentally change the nature of the program. Usually if you're doing it for something like this, you're looking – you're evaluating, in your rapid cycle evaluation, something that's a relatively small piece of your program.

The sort of thing that you might do for rapid cycle evaluation is test maybe different types of reminders, different messaging in the reminders you send people, different frequency of reminders, different communication mode for the reminders to see if you can increase program attendance rates.

So you're working on that sort of immediate outcome, trying to get more people to attend RESEA meetings. Now, suppose at the same time that you're also running an impact evaluation of your RESEA program as a whole. If you're making these changes to reminders that you're going on, it is changing your program somewhat over the course of the evaluation.

So what you're evaluating in your larger, whole programming impact evaluation, is technically evaluating a new thing, but I think in general this sort of thing wouldn't be fundamentally changing your program to a degree that you would think, oh, this is a really – our program at the end of the evaluation is completely different than it was at the beginning of the evaluation.

Usually you'll be making some minor tweaks that are improving the program and I think generally that's fine. I think we would assume that no matter what you're doing over your program, if you're evaluating your program you're probably keeping it fundamentally the same, but you always want to be looking for ways to make improvements.

And so I don't think – we wouldn't want the evaluation to stop any state from trying to make improvements in their program as they're going along. It's just that's something you have to keep in mind when you're reporting your results, to say okay, we evaluated our program and then when you're reporting the results, you say, okay, well, what is our program?

And you sort of describe how it may have evolved as it's gone on so the data is clear to people. You may do some other things to see is there evidence that the impact of our program changed over time? It may be tough to say that definitively, but those are things that you could look at to see if these other small changes you were making along the way seem to be having an effect on what the overall impact of the program is.

But the short answer is I think generally. Generally, it's not a problem and – (inaudible) – rapid cycle evaluations can be a very good thing to do before you do a large scale impact evaluation if you're looking for ways to sort of have – tweak your programs and make program improvements to make sure that it's strong in the ways that you want it to be strong before you invest in a full scale impact evaluation.

Particularly if you're a smaller state, then you know that, okay, maybe you don't have that large of a sample and you may be at the edge of being sure that your program is strong enough that you could detect an impact.

The stronger your program is, the more likely it is to be able to detect an impact with whatever size sample your program has. So hopefully that's helpful.

MR. BURNS: Thanks, Andrew. This is Larry again. We have a bunch of people that are typing, so we're going to give another minute or two for people to put those questions in.

While we're doing that, I just wanted to highlight that on the slide here, we had a few questions for you to help kind of spark some conversation. So we were curious if there's – can we clarify any of the strategies to help small states conduct RESEA impact study?

What details on evaluation activities would help you lay the groundwork for your state's RESEA impact study? So a couple questions we had for you and we'll – it looks like a few people are typing, so we'll give another minute or two for some questions to come in.

Just bear with us for a second.

MS. SALAS-KOS: We have another good question from Ellie Hartman. What about socially distanced virtual service delivery because of COVID?

Now that might change back to in person services in the future, how might that influence evaluation design and timing of evaluation, especially on an impact evaluation? Andrew?

MR. CLARKWEST: Sure. I think there may be some questions embedded in here that may be more for OUI about allowability eventually, but it is important to think about.

If you're starting an evaluation of the program and you think it's totally fundamentally different of what's going to be in the longer term, then you – it could make sense to test – to do some sort of test on more intermediate outcomes, some rapid cycle things.

There are things that you could evaluate about how the virtual service delivery is going, because even though obviously states are using it almost – not picking up the word I want to pick up, but they're only using virtual services for the most part right now.

Whereas in the longer term, they're likely to go back to in person services, although presumably there will continue to be some virtual service delivery. But you might imagine that the impact of virtual services, a virtual service model is going to be different than for an in-person service model.

So I would think that there might be an argument for not starting a large scale impact evaluation of the whole program until – while you're in sort of an intermediate period, but that would be a conversation to have with OUI to some degree, if it's about allowability.

I do think that by the time a lot of states, particularly if you haven't got started yet, by the time an impact evaluation actually gets off the ground, that may be several months down the road and we may be in a new world by then.

I think that regardless, it probably makes sense to press forward right now if you think you're going to do an impact evaluation, can move forward with plans for getting an evaluator in place and by the time that happens, you may be in a position where you have a better sense for, okay, how stable is our program right now?

What makes the most sense for us to do at this point? Does it make sense for us to something that helps further prepare us for a large-scale evaluation of our program or do we think that we're ready to do it now?

Larry, is there more that you would add there? I may have stepped on some of the things you might say.

MR. BURNS: No, I think you covered it. We are in this world where we're doing a lot more virtual services, obviously, and this is one of those things that I think is probably going to stick around for a little bit.

We're working on guidance for fiscal year 2021 that will hopefully be out a little bit later this month that will have a little bit more information. I don't want to speak too much to it until it's final, but I do think we're going to be kind of living in the virtual services world for a bit.

So I hope that alone wouldn't be enough to kind of distract somebody from going about and starting to do some evaluation work. Again, it is something we're willing to work with you on a state by state basis, because I know each state is kind of implemented a little bit differently.

If there specific questions, we're happy to work with you on those.

MR. CLARKWEST: Yeah and if you don't mind, I think it's obviously useful just from a purely practical standpoint to know how effective these virtual service models are right now, so setting aside whatever the – whether you think that it applies to what your program is going to be in the longer term, the evidence that you can get from evaluation of virtual services I think is useful to you as a state and I'm sure useful to the RESEA system nationwide as well.

MR. BURNS: Yeah, I agree. It's a really unfortunate set of circumstances we're in, but it is an opportunity to learn a lot about some of these changes that are happening to the program and what works and what doesn't, so I concur with you there.

With that, I think we're running a little bit out of time. We're running into the end of the allotted time that we had. What I'd like to do is just move it along to our contact information. So if you do have any questions, as we mentioned, we're happy to work with you.

We have our contact info here, but most likely the best contact, if you have questions related to evaluation specifics to your state is the RESEA eval TA inbox over there in the corner.

So all these presentations and information will be up on our website in a couple days, but wanted to provide that info to you. And with that, we want to send our thanks and also give you a heads up that again this is a technical assistance series and we are working on another event for December that we'll talk a bit about the use of data for evaluation.

So please keep on the lookout for more technical assistance and keep visiting our websites frequently as we make some updates over the next few weeks. With that, thanks again, and I'll pass it back to Jon.

(END)