**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Accessing and Using Data for RESEA Evaluations**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Welcome to "Accessing and Using Data for Evaluation, RESEA Evaluation Technical Assistance." 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 Employment and Training Administration in the U.S. Department of Labor. Gloria?

GLORIA SALAS-KOS: Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us in this webinar. Joining me today is Larry Burns, the reemployment coordinator for the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Unemployment Insurance.

LAWRENCE BURNS: Hi, everybody. This is Larry. I just wanted to take a brief minute to thank you all for joining us today on the webinar. I know schedules are especially busy right now. But I really do appreciate everybody keeping RESEA a priority and taking the time to meet with us today and go over some really important information. You probably won't hear much from me during most of the presentation. But I will be jumping on at the end to help with questions and also provide some general high level updates of where we are with the RESEA Program. So, again, thanks for joining us. And I'll pass it back to Gloria.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks, Larry. We're really excited about moderating this webinar session for you today. And also joining us today from Abt Associates are the RESEA grantees evaluation technical assistance providers from Abt Associates are our speakers, Phomdaen Souvanna and Liz Yadav. Before we get started, I want to take a step back to provide a quick refresher of the goals for the RESEA evaluation technical assistance, and to remind us about what we want to accomplish through these webinars.

Evaluation is an iterative, ongoing process. What you learn from an evaluation either through one you may conduct or another state conducts may lead you to think about new or incremental changes to make to your RESEA Program. In turn, you may want to evaluate that new program change, or a component of your program to continue learning more about what's most effective in helping people get back to work quickly and so on. This type of culture of continuous improvement or a culture of evaluation and evidence building doesn't happen overnight.

And we recognize that many of you are already engaged in some type of cycle like this in your states where you seek to use data and evidence to continually inform your program or policy decisions. This cycle of learning and doing is why the RESEA evaluation TA provided through these webinars, as well as the other resources and tools that our team develop, are geared toward a broad audience of states with RESEA funds. We want to build capacity to use, understand, and develop evidence.

These resources are designed to help everyone who administers an RESEA program and everyone who considers an evaluation or evaluates their RESEA program that they have the resources related to the key evaluation topics to either start their own program evaluation, or to build upon existing research or previously completed evaluations.

In today's webinar, we will first review key components from the Assessing Data for Evaluation webcast, held for the RESEA grantees in August 2019. It describes some foundational concepts for accessing and using data for evaluations. We will then discuss how to identify, access, and assess administrative data relevant to RESEA evaluations. During the webinar, we will also describe important considerations and some best practices for accessing and using that administrative data.

This information will help RESEA prevent administrators and other state level staff, such as LMI staff and database administrators supporting the RESEA evaluation, to understand the types of administrative data an evaluator will likely need to assess and access for RESEA evaluations. At the end of this webinar, we will reserve some time to answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to enter your questions into the chat box at any time during this webinar. Near the end of the webinar – as Larry Burns indicated – we will have some time to respond to as many questions as possible.

I also want to point out that this presentation has an accompanying data availability review tool that is available to download from the file share window below. The tool is designed to help facilitate conversations between states, their evaluators, and database administrators for state LMI and research staff about data elements needed and potential administrative data sources that are available. So with that, let's kick it off and turn it over to Liz.

LIZ YADAV: Thanks, Gloria. And thank you to everyone who is joining us. Let's kick off today by going over some important concepts from the Assessing Data for Evaluation webcast. This webcast was first hosted August 2019, and can be found on WorkforceGPS. As we discussed in the previous webinar, states and their evaluators can use data in many ways to support their RESEA evaluations. For example, information on claimant characteristics can help states better understand who is being served by their RESEA Program.

Services data can help states understand how claimants flow through the program and what services claimants are most likely to engage in. Combined with American Job Centers information, services data can also help states identify interesting differences in service delivery across locations. States and evaluators can also use data to measure claimant outcomes, in particular, data from state unemployment insurance systems will allow evaluators to measure claimant's UI duration and spells, employment and earnings both before and after RESEA.

Finally, data can help us debate the impact of the RESEA Program on claimant's outcomes. Evaluators can use state unemployment insurance systems and RESEA program information systems to determine what impact specific services or the program as a whole have on claimant outcomes. There are several types of data that are commonly used in evaluation as shown on this slide. Administrative data are data that are regularly collected during the day-to-day administration of a program. Important administrative data include: states' employment services records, information from claim applications, and unemployment insurance wage records.

Your evaluator can also collect original survey data, which can help them get at information that would not normally be in your state's databases, such as hourly wages or weekly hours worked. While surveys can provide valuable insight, surveys are often difficult and expensive to deploy successfully. Surveys require evaluation teams to spend a lot of time and energy following up with potential respondents in order to achieve a high response rate.

Note that if your state plans to conduct a random assignment impact study, your evaluator will have to collect at least two new pieces of data – first, the random assignment status; and second, the date of random assignment. Random assignment status tells you which study group each claimant has been assigned to and will help RESEA program staff ensure that claimants are receiving the right set of services. Random assignment date will help ensure that your evaluator measures claimant outcomes at the appropriate time.

Finally, your evaluator may collect data through interviews, focus groups, and observations. These types of data can provide important insights on how the program is operating and help the evaluator better understand and interpret lessons from quantitative data. Each type of data will help answer different questions about your RESEA program. For example, administrative data might help you better understand the number of claimants that engage with RESEA services. While interview data might help you understand how claimant or staff receive RESEA program operations.

Though these many data types exist, it may be useful for different evaluation types. Our focus today is on using administrative data for impact evaluations. We anticipate that most states will be able to use information collected in their administrative data systems to support their RESEA evaluations. Now let's see how familiar people are with key concepts to data usability. Which of the following is not key to using data for an evaluation? Please select an answer on the poll. It looks like most people have selected the follow-up data point. This is correct.

Whether or not your evaluator needs follow-up outcome data will depend on your evaluation's research questions and design type. If follow-up outcome data on employment and earnings are needed, these data should be collected for the second quarter after the claim application. Data does need to be reliable and complete for the study population in order to have high quality data for strong evaluation. We'll go into these concepts next. What makes data usable for an evaluation? First, data should be complete for the vast majority of claimants in the study.

When a large percentage of claimants are missing data for any particular variable, it is possible that the data are missing in some systematic way that can bias the study results. Common red flag that your evaluator should be on the lookout for is whether data are missing at different rates for the treatment group and the comparison group. If data are more likely to be missing for the comparison group than the treatment group, for example, it may be the case that the comparison group is systematically different from the treatment group in some way that the study has not adequately captured.

Second, data should be reliable. This means that the data value should have consistent meaning and interpretation from American Job Center to American Job Center, from caseworker to caseworker. This helps ensure that data are being interpreted correctly. For example, caseworker A understands the county variable to mean county of residence. Caseworker B understands the county variable to mean county of last employment, these two caseworkers could potentially enter different responses for the same claimant.

If the state was constructing a comparison based on county of residence, the evaluator could include claimants in the treatment group that should really be in the comparison group. Lastly, data should be high quality. High quality data are data that are both complete and reliable. Ensuring and having high quality data is a process that requires identifying data problems and implementing strategies to address those problems. Before we talk about how to access, assess, and use administrative data, we want to spend a moment talking about data security and data sharing.

It's important that claimant data is shared in a way that protects claimant's privacy and confidentiality. This is a consideration to keep in mind throughout the evaluation. Having an evaluator whose experience was clearly sharing relevant data will help. Once the evaluation design is finalized, your evaluator will submit the evaluation protocol to an institutional review board, also known as an IRB, for approval. The IRB will further help you providing independent and objective expertise to ensure the data are shared in a way that protects claimants whose data are being used.

If changes are made to the evaluation protocol after it has been approved by the IRB, their evaluator will submit a modification to the IRB for approval. In addition to an IRB review, your evaluator will create and comply with a data use agreement, also known as a DUA for each administrative data source. DUAs spell out what data will be shared, how and when that data will be transmitted and stored, for what purposes that data can be used, and how and when that data will be destroyed.

State agencies, privacy officer, IT department or legal team may be able to provide templates and information related to the data use agreement procedures. For states, data and legal teams can also help determine language that will ensure that the data during and after transfer can remain private and confidential in accordance with data security standards in your state. The IRB and data use agreement process may take a couple months to complete depending on the level of complexity of the study, the number of data systems data will come from, and the sensitivity of the data.

So take this into account when developing an evaluation timeline. For more information on IRB review and data use agreements, please see the Assessing Data for Evaluation webcast. Lastly, as a reminder, RESEA data may include data that are considered confidential UC data. This includes any UC information which reveals the name or any identifying particular of any individual or any past or present employer or employee unit or which could foreseeably be combined with other publicly available information to reveal any particulars.

Disclosure of UC data including wage records and UC claims information must meet the appropriate privacy and confidentiality protections, outlined in 20 CFR Part 603. Disclosure of confidential UC information to a third party for purposes of conducting an RESEA evaluation is allowable provided the appropriate agreements are in place between the public official responsible for the state's involvement and the evaluation and the evaluator.

As you or your evaluator begin to discuss data sharing, you may have further questions about the CFR and its provisions. While we are confident that states will be able to share this information with their evaluator as many past evaluation have successfully done, states with further questions should contact the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Unemployment Insurance. Now let's dig into some key points about accessing administrative data for RESEA evaluations.

Administrative data has several advantages and disadvantages compared to other data sources. Administrative data systems typically contain information about the entire universe participants and will allow your evaluator to have the same data for both intervention and comparison group members. This data is usually updated regularly and is an official record of what services were received. Because it is an official record, you can be more confident that the information accurately reflects what occurred.

In comparison, if the evaluator were to administer a survey that asks people to provide information about their claims, there is potential for recall, particularly if it is retrospective. For instance, claimants may not know the exact amount of their UI benefits or the date on which the claim was approved. Last, because the data is already collected, using administrative data typically costs less than collecting new data through a survey, for example, which requires time and effort to develop and field the survey instrument. However, administrative data does have a few disadvantages.

First, data quality may be lower and vary due to inconsistencies in data entry practices across American Job Centers and caseworkers. Historical records may also not be retained due to systems-based constraints. And lastly, there may be challenges in linking data across systems due to different claimant identifiers in each system. On this slide, we have listed the range of data elements that may be needed for an RESEA evaluation, as well as how each element will likely be used.

Generally, your evaluator will need this data at the individual claimant level. The evaluator will most likely need information about the characteristics of UI claimants, an event associated with each claimant's application for UI, such as the dates when they applied; the results of the application; whether it was approved, denied, or withdrawn; and if approved for benefits, the weekly benefit amount; the date of exit; and the reason for exiting. Secondly, the evaluator may want claimant demographics and characteristics data.

This data may be used for many different purposes. For instance, the evaluator may use the data to conduct descriptive analyses about claimants who engage with RESEA services or to make sure that the claimants assigned to intervention in comparison groups and impact study share similar characteristics. The evaluator may also need other data to measure outcomes and changes in outcomes depending on your evaluation's outcomes of interest. This could include the services provided, as well as claimant's employment and earnings prior to their UI application, as well as after they have exited UI.

Note that the evaluator will also need individual claimant identifiers, such as a Social Security number, to link data from multiple data sources. We'll get into this more later. Anticipate that most of these common data elements are available through administrative data systems either internal or external to the states. Common state administrative data systems include the state RESEA program information system. This is the data system that contains all the information collected about RESEA program operations.

A second common system are the state information system or systems for other workforce programs, such as WIOA or Wagner-Peyser. It is possible that your state has single state workforce information system that integrates program data for multiple workforce programs, in which case your evaluator will only need access to that one single system. If not, your evaluator may need to gather information from multiple systems. Other administrative data systems include state UI data system and labor market information.

In addition to state administrative data systems, your evaluator may consider using other systems that collect quarterly wage records. Some of these systems have complex access requirements, which may make it difficult for your evaluator to secure access to the data. It's important that you and the evaluator understand those rules before assuming that it will be possible to use them. While the evaluator is expected to do the work of identifying the data elements and accessing the data sources, RESEA program staff will likely act as an intermediary between the evaluator and state staff with knowledge of or responsibility for the data.

Your evaluator may want to speak to different state workforce agency partners and staff, including database administrators that oversee the different data systems, labor market information or performance management teams, any key data security or IT staff, and your legal team. These key contacts can help determine and understand where different data may be stored, how to access those data, how those data are recorded, and also help to address any potential challenges. Remember that evaluation is iterative.

Your evaluator may have initial conversations with your IT and data team to cover what is broadly available in your systems. The evaluator may follow up with more detailed conversations about what is needed and to ensure that they are interpreting data and findings correctly. The rest of this webinar will help you understand the data evaluators will likely need to access and how the data will be assessed by the evaluator. Having this basic knowledge will help RESEA staff to better facilitate conversations between the evaluator and key data staff. I'll now turn it over to Phomdaen.

PHOMDAEN SOUVANNA: Thank you, Liz. In the next part of the webinar, I will discuss how to identify and assess data elements and administrative data sources that the evaluator will likely need for an RESEA evaluation. While some of the steps I will talk about can be completed by state RESEA staff before an independent evaluator is on board, the evaluator will likely take the lead on many of these steps. I also want to take a second to mention that many of the things I discuss in this section will be helpful to keep in mind when completing the data availability tool that Gloria mentioned earlier.

The data availability tool can be downloaded by clicking on the link in the file share window at the bottom of your screen. On this slide is a graphic that illustrates a strategy for identifying and assessing the data elements and data sources that are likely needed for RESEA evaluation. As the graphic shows, this process begins with answering the question, what information is needed to measure our outcomes of interest?

Once you and your evaluator understand what data elements are needed, you can begin the process of identifying potential data sources in gathering information about those sources. The four main things that you and your evaluator will want to know about each data source are: what is the process for accessing the data, how is the data structured, how accurate is the data, and is the data suitable for evaluation purposes? While we anticipate that state RESEA staff to begin this process without an independent evaluator on board, there are some things that may need the required expertise of an evaluator.

For instance, the evaluator will have the technical expertise needed to affect data quality and confirm that the data is suitable for the particular evaluation purposes. Let's now discuss each part of this process in greater detail. Then I'll talk through the process of identifying data elements and data sources for two possible RESEA outcomes – UI duration and service utilization. The evaluation's research questions and outcomes of interest will help determine what data your evaluator will need to collect. This is because your evaluator will want to collect information that can ultimately answer the evaluation's research questions.

Additionally, the research questions will determine the evaluation design type and methods, which in turn, also influence the type of data needed. Thus, for each evaluation research question, you and your evaluator will need to determine what is the outcome of interest, what data is needed to measure that outcome of interest, and for whom and for what time period is data needed? The table in this slide provides examples of two impact study research questions and one implementation study research question.

Let's take a closer look at the first example, research question. Do claimants who are scheduled for a RESEA meeting earn more than claimants who are not scheduled for RESEA purposes? For this research question, outcome of interest is earning. In order to measure changes in earnings, the evaluator will need data on scheduling status, meeting attendance, and quarterly earnings. The evaluator will need this data for all RESEA-eligible claimants that are included in the study, including those not scheduled for RESEA purposes.

Lastly, the evaluator will need to collect the information for the time period starting with the initial claim application through the second quarter after claim approval for each claimant who is included in the evaluation. Once you and your evaluator have identified the data elements that are needed, you'll need to determine the potential administrative data sources where data can be found. As noted, there are seven common data elements that RESEA evaluations will most likely need. The tables and slides show these common data elements we discussed earlier and potential sources for those data.

As you can see, most of the data will likely come from your state UI data system and RESEA program data. Depending on the evaluation's research questions and outcomes of interest, your evaluator may also need to draw on data from additional data systems, such as other state workforce program information systems.

We anticipate that RESEA evaluations, particular impact evaluations, will most likely need to draw data from more than one source. For each data system that is identified, your evaluator will need information about how to access that data into a contact if there are questions about the data. Specifically, your evaluator will want to know the contact information for the main and ultimate place of contact for the agency or the office that manages that data system, whether there's an application that needs to be submitted; and if so, what information is needed for that application, and how long will it take to get approval?

Lastly, whether a formal data use agreement is needed; and if so, who needs to be involved in developing and signing off on that data use agreement. Your evaluator will also want to understand if there are any particular security restrictions, protocols, or software requirements for accessing that data. Next, your evaluator will want to understand how the data is structured. This information will help the evaluator to determine the appropriateness of the data for evaluation and the extent to which data cleaning might be required in order to prepare the data for analysis.

Those are the key information that your evaluator will want to know about the data structure. First, at what level is the data stored? That is, is the data stored at the individual claimant level, or at the AJC, state, or some other aggregate level? To complete an impact analysis, evaluators will most likely need individual claimant level data. Second, why might data be missing. There's always the likelihood that data fields will have some percentage of missing data. However, it's important for the evaluator to make sure that the data is missing because there were no applicable data to record, and not because of a data collection error.

For instance, if UI earnings data are missing, it is because no earnings were received, and not because the information was not collected or not entered for a particular reason. Third, how is the data stored? That is, is the data a date, text, or numerical value? It's possible the evaluator will generally want to stay away from using data stored in open text fields, because a wide range of information can be entered into these fields. The evaluator may find it cost prohibitive to use such data and analysis. Standard statistical analysis software is not designed to process qualitative data efficiently. This process can become very expensive and time consuming.

Lastly, your evaluator will be interested in knowing how often the data is collected or updated and what unique identifiers are available. I would like to pause here to talk about the importance of common identifiers. As we've noticed, the data RESEA evaluations we'll need are likely to come from multiple data sources. In order to create an analytic file for the evaluation, the evaluator will likely need to bring individual claimant's level data across multiple data sources. To do this, the evaluator will need the same identifier for each claimant in each data source.

The identifiers need to be unique to the claimant and consistent over time. These identifiers are not unique, the evaluator won't know that it was really the same claimant's data. Likewise, if the identifier is not consistent across data sources, the evaluator may not be able to match all data related to a particular claimant across those data sources. The strongest identifier is typically claimant Social Security number because it is unique to each claimant across time, and is often collected in the administration of workforce programs.

A Social Security number is not collected across all data sources. State-created claimant identification numbers or the combination of full name and birth dates can be used as alternative identifiers. It is possible that the evaluators may receive a fully identified data set through a secure data transfer. And the evaluator will then be able to perform a linkage across the different data sources that they're drawing data from. In some cases, data linkage may be performed by the database administrator.

In these cases, the evaluator would provide the database administrator with a list of claimants for whom data is needed. The database administrator will form the link between the list of study claimants and the individuals in the database. The database administrator then sends the evaluator de-identified data set that the evaluator can use for their analysis. In addition to understanding the data structure, your evaluator will want to understand the extent to which they can be sure that data are accurately captured in the data system.

What your evaluator will want to understand is whether there are processes in place to check for the accuracy of the data. Also, that enhanced data accuracy include clearly communicated and consistently applied to data and to protocols which you monitor in the data entry and automated processes for updating and checking data. All this information that we've discussed thus far will help you and your evaluator answer the final question, is the data suitable for evaluation purposes?

As a reminder, data appropriate for evaluation are conceived for nearly all claimants in the evaluation and are reliable. Having – (inaudible) – data is such a – (inaudible) – important for estimating impact. Now let's walk through a couple of examples of identifying data elements and data sources for possible RESEA outcomes. In our first example, the outcome of interest is UI duration. Traditionally, UI duration is measured as the number of weeks claimants receive UI benefits. To measure UI duration, our evaluator will need to know the date of the first and last UI benefit claim payment for each claimant in the evaluation.

The evaluator can use this information to construct weeks of UI duration variable. We know that information on UI claims dates and benefits are available in the state UI data system. Our evaluator will need information about how to access the state UI data system. But in speaking with the state UI staff, we learned that the main point of contact is the state UI database administrator, and that a data use agreement is required between designated state staff person and the evaluator.

Next, we learned information about the structure of the data. We learned that there is one record per claimant, per claim, and that the claimant Social Security number is available as a unique identifier for each claimant in UI data system. We also learned that there are automated data checks into the system to ensure that the information is accurate and complete for all UI claims. We also know that there are processes in place to reach any check and verify UI claimant information.

Because we know that there are all these processes in place to ensure accuracy of UI claim information and that the claim data will be available for all claimants that are included in the evaluation over the evaluation time period, we can be fairly confident that the state UI data system is appropriate for our particular evaluation purposes.

The evaluator can then proceed with working on completing the required steps for obtaining and accessing the data. In our next example, we're interested in measuring preemployment services utilization. To measure this outcome, the evaluator will need information about the range of pre-employment services claimants are referred to and whether they completed it. This data will most likely come from multiple data systems in addition to our RESEA program data system, because our state doesn't have a single integrated workforce information system.

The evaluator will need the contact information for each of these data systems and how to complete the required use agreement for each system. The evaluator will also need to examine the data structure, accuracy, and appropriateness for each of these systems. For today's purposes, let's focus on our state's RESEA program data system. We learned that the RESEA program data system contains one record per claimant, per event. The data system also contains claimant Social Security number, which will allow the evaluator to link the RESEA program data to other state workforce program data.

However, some of the RESEA program data are stored in open text fields. In particular, information about service referrals are typically recorded in case notes. Because of this, we cannot be sure that the data is complete or accurately captures information that we need for our evaluation since each caseworker might require different types of information and details in the case notes. Before we can begin using this data for evaluation purposes, our RESEA program may consider taking steps to make sure that the data is consistently entered across all caseworkers.

For example, you may establish data entry protocols requiring caseworkers to enter information about service referral within 24 hours of the RESEA meeting. We may also establish routine data monitoring and cleaning protocols to make sure that the data is consistently updated and entered. If time, budget, and resources allow, we may also consider making modifications to the data system so that there are separate fields for service referrals with radio buttons or drop-down menu, rather than a single open text field. These types of modifications will make it easier for data analysis software to process the information.

Once you can be sure that the information is accurate and reliable, we can be more confident about using this data for our evaluation purposes since the data contains information about all claimants for the time period of interest. As previously mentioned, we have developed a data availability tool to help states with the process of identifying data elements and data sources. This tool is designed to help facilitate conversations between states, their evaluators, and database administrators, or state labor market information and research staff about data elements needed and potential data sources that are available to help support the RESEA evaluation.

The tool provides states to write down notes about the data elements and related data sources. The tool is also prepopulated with some common data elements that – (inaudible) – state RESEA evaluations may likely need. You can download the Microsoft Word version of this tool from the file share window at the bottom of the screen. Before we move on to closing remarks, we'd like to provide some additional considerations for accessing and using administrative data.

For each administrative data source, it is generally good practice for your evaluator to receive routine data extracts. The evaluator can use the data extracts to monitor the quality of the data and its completeness. Your evaluator should also provide new or relevant data administrators with a clearly written data request that includes information about the specific data elements requested, the time frame for the data, and preferred data structure. If possible, you and your evaluator may want to obtain a data dictionary for relevant databases, help the evaluator understand the data and its structure.

State agency staff work half with managing the different data systems may already have a data dictionary that can be readily shared with RESEA program staff and with the evaluator. Lastly, the evaluator may request raw data elements rather than calculated or aggregated data elements in order to help improve the precision of their analysis. As a reminder, the evaluator will need to protect the privacy and confidentiality of individual claimant information by preventing its accidental disclosure or loss.

Protecting privacy means collecting data in such a way that claimant's information or personally identifiable information is not seen or overheard by others. Data are considered identifiable if sufficient information individually or in combination can be used to identify a specific person. Protecting confidentiality involves sharing information only with those who are authorized to have it; complying with a site-wide plan for secure collection, transfer, storage, and use of the data as described in applicable data use agreements; reporting evaluation results in a way that individual claimants cannot be identified.

For example, the evaluator may report results in the aggregate, such as at the county level. Lastly, once the evaluation is completed, the evaluator should destroy the data following procedures that are outlined in the data use agreement. I will now turn things back to Gloria for closing remarks.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Phomdaen. We'd like to give the mic to Larry Burns for a minute to provide some closing remarks.

MR. BURNS: Thanks, Gloria. I just wanted to take a minute to give a quick update on some RESEA activities. I know everybody is getting ready to develop and submit plans for fiscal year 2021 in thinking about evaluations and what that's going to look like moving forward. So I wanted to give a quick heads-up about a few key things to be on the lookout for over the next couple weeks. First of all, the big one is our guidance for fiscal year 2021 is in the very final stages before publication. So please keep a look out on that. It should be out very soon – probably within the next week or two.

And one of the key things about that guidance I wanted to remind everybody about is that once that guidance is published, it starts the timeline for submission of the FY 2021 RESEA state plans. So it'll be similar to last year – it'll be a 45-day window to submit plans. But the RESEA state plans are going to be in the same template that we used last year. So you should have a pretty good starting point using last year as a starting point in doing some updates. The template will be the same as what we used last year for fiscal year 2020.

Also, in the guidance that's forthcoming, one of the things we set forward in last year's guidance was the expectation that states would begin doing the evaluate the RESEA programs during fiscal 2020. And we realize that given everything that's happened over the past year that many of those plans were delayed, need to be changed, or modified. So as part of the state plan submission for this upcoming year, we're asking states to update their information about their planned evaluations. And any state that did not start evaluation work during 2020 would be expected to start in 2021.

A few other things – over the past year, we've really been emphasizing the use of virtual and remote services. We've been encouraging their use where in-person services are no longer possible or safe to do so. And we've also been given the added flexibility to do RESEA via phone where needed. So this is a flexibility that will be continued into the next year. I know a lot of states have been working closely on that, developing capacity and training around these virtual services. So I just wanted to provide a heads-up that that's something we're going to be continuing for the near future at least, if not longer.

And also, a few other quick things is a big concern I know a lot of states had is, given slowdowns and disruptions in program activities this year, a lot of states had carryover. And as you guys may or may not know during fiscal year 2021, we're implementing a new funding formula that included a limit on carryover to 30 percent. Due to the activities and events of the past year, we will suspend and delay implementing that requirement. So there won't be a carryover limit for this year. And we'll delay implementation until next year. So those are the big updates.

Again, the guidance will be out very soon, so please be on the lookout for that. We want to keep the questions and answers to this session focused on the topic. After the guidance is out, we will be scheduling the webinar to talk specifically about the RESEA Program and program concerns. But I know as people are through this webinar thinking about their evaluation for next year, these were some of the things that were probably in the back of your mind. So I wanted to provide a quick update on that.

And we will have a webinar and lots of opportunities to discuss the RESEA Program and service delivery in the future. So we're really going to focus on questions related to data access today. And just as a final reminder, I know over the past few months we've had a lot of turnover in the RESEA Program. We have a lot of new people, a lot of shifting of responsibilities. So I just wanted to emphasize that this session that you're attending today is part of a series of technical assistance. We've done over 15 of these webinars, all intended to help states operating RESEA programs build their capacity for evaluation.

So as you go back and review this in the future once it's archived and up online, I really encourage people to use and leverage that resource of all these prerecorded sessions we've done as a resource moving forward. They're very helpful. And we will be continuing to provide TA in the future with tool kits and other resources in development. All of our technical assistance lives on WorkforceGPS on the reemployment connections website. So please visit often, especially over the next couple weeks as we start putting guidance and additional technical assistance resources out for you guys to use during fiscal year 2021. So that's it for closing remarks. With that, I'll pass it back to Gloria. I believe we have a second poll.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks, Larry. The additional information for technical assistance is a nice precursor to the question that's in front of you now. What we'd like to do is get a bit more of your feedback for this question. And it is, if future RESEA evaluation technical assistance is provided, what additional topics would help you lay the ground work for your state's RESEA evaluation? You may pick more than one of the responses.

And they are: preparing frontline staff for their role in evaluation; evaluation design reports: what to expect; planning your RESEA evaluation during COVID; and then lastly, other. And then if you have some other things in mind that you would like technical assistance for, please feel free to enter those in your chat box now. I'll give another couple of minutes as we broadcast the results. It looks like a good mix of the first three, with frontline staff training being first, and planning for your RESEA evaluation during COVID second. Those are really nice responses.

I think those are good to start with. And we will definitely review your feedback in the chat. And if any other things come to mind, you can always follow up with us after the webinar. As Larry indicated, moving forward, I think we can end this poll now and talk a little bit more about what we have that's directly related to the information that was shared today. And as you see, you may already be familiar with some of the resources that are provided for the RESEA grantees. But we also want to let everyone know that we do make them available – as Larry said – on WorkforceGPS.

This slide actually provides direct links to the RESEA overview of evaluation and evidence requirements webinar – which was held last year – and then the assessing data for evaluation webcast, which is a recorded session that primarily focused on how you could do that. We also plan to make a resource available for frequently asked questions about RESEA evaluations, and in the near future, RESEA tool kit that'll provide key elements for state RESEA programs.

So with that, I'd like to go ahead and move forward into our Q&A phase. We have 20-30 minutes to do Q&A. I believe we're on until 4:30 today. So if you would like to start, let's take a stab at some of the questions that we've received so far. Larry, would you like to take the first question that came in earlier?

MR. BURNS: Sure, Gloria. And just to remind everybody, if you have any questions, please use the chat feature and feel free to put those in. We did receive a couple during the presentation that we'll try to dig into. And I'll start off with the first two actually. We received a couple questions pertaining to how to access wage data, in particular the SWIS Agreement. I know a lot of states are interested in that information and want to know what are the first steps to looking into that and working out accessing that SWIS data.

What we will be doing after this presentation – when we put this presentation up on the archive, there is a resource we have online that is a series of frequently asked questions and also background information about SWIS that we feel would be a really good starting point for everyone to take a look at and review. And that may address a lot of your questions and help get you started. But also, each state has a state designated SWIS point of contact that's responsible for the program. And that's also a good point of contact.

And lastly, as you're digging in more into the weeds with your program looking at evaluations, the last resource you have – and we've mentioned this before, and we'll have it again at the very end – is that we do have an RESEA help line. At the end of the presentation, we'll give you that email address. It's part of the Abt Associates, our TA providers, helping monitor a helpline. So you have really three resources we'll put up – a background document with some facts and other information. You have your state point of contact for SWIS. And also, you have the RESEA helpline.

So between the three of them, we think that's a good starting point to investigating those options. In the next question we had one technical question regarding slide 10, which was our first poll. And the question there was, shouldn't the question have asked about the sample – not the population? And you're absolutely right. That was a typo on the slide. We intended to say, "sample." So that's another correction we'll make in the PowerPoint. So we just want to flag that as a technical correction.

SIOBHAN: We have a question about, "What about service information? For example, a service named RESEA follow-up in three weeks, for example tell anyone looking at a service the jobseeker was a claimant, a service." So we're not entirely sure which slide the question asker is referencing. So we encourage you to type that in if that's your question. First, there was some information can infer interpretation the RESEA services data. But you can't refer selection to RESEA.

You could imagine that someone who's not plugged into RESEA but maybe they come in and get their services anyway. In a lot of cases depending on your evaluation research question, you would want to know who selected RESEA whether or not they attended or participated in services that happened to be marked RESEA in the workforce information system. So certainly, for many of these evaluations, you're going to want to combine a number of different data elements for a number of different data sources.

But you will probably need that UI claim information to know whether or not somebody was selected for RESEA, depending on how you set up your evaluation. We have also gotten a question about whether or not the training or webinar available for SaaS programming. So at this time, we are not planning to put together a training for SaaS programming. SaaS is a really big system. And it can be very complex, depending on what you're trying to do and what your data availability is. That said, there is a lot of really great information on the web.

I would strongly recommend that folks look at Zoom, SaaS programming, and Google. Often you can find your particular error that you're getting in SaaS. And you can get some really great documentation. SaaS as a company has a lot of documentation and sort of white papers that will tell you things like code and will provide sample codes that can be very helpful. Their entire blog is dedicated to SaaS that I have personally found helpful when trying to figure out a SaaS problem.

And then of course, there are also videos that will actually walk through a particular issue that you're dealing with. You can see it on the screen. And those can be very helpful. There are lots of good online resources, not only for SaaS but also for -- (inaudible) -- Python, and any of the technical program issues might be dealing with and a few questions about where you can find some of those – (inaudible) – emails at RESEA EvalTA inbox. I'm going to go ahead and kick it over to Andrew for a question about outcomes.

ANDREW CLARKWEST: Thanks, Siobhan (sp). We got a question about measuring UI duration. "For UI duration, would that be just the weeks the benefits were received? Also, for claimants who receive partial weekly payments, would their weeks be converted to the equivalent number of full benefit weeks?" Yeah. This is a good point. Duration here is a (little bit ?). But it's not technically measured. It's not calendar weeks, but it's measured essentially in dollars rather than calendars. So if someone has 26 weeks they can claim, that 26 means 26 times their weekly benefit amount.

So when calculating UI duration for the purposes of evaluation here, it would be calculated as the total dollars claimed divided by the weekly benefit amount. So if someone, for example, is claiming full benefits for 10 weeks and then they had a partial week where they claimed, say, half of their WBA and then they ended their claim, that would be 10.5 weeks claimed. A good clarification – it is technically measured in dollars converted to weeks, not in calendar weeks. I think I'm passing it now to either Michelle Beebe or Larry again.

MR. BURNS: We are getting a few questions specific to data systems within the state and IT challenges associated with admin and other things. A lot of that is going to be state specific. So one of the things I'd recommend for these IT questions is to reach out to your DOL regional office, and they'll help point you in the right direction for some assistance and some information about that. So we're a little bit outside on the scope of getting too much in the weeds with the IT information. We've received a bunch of questions all at the same time. If you just give us a few seconds, we're going to do a little organization on our end and delegate some of those out.

SIOBHAN: All right. Thanks, Larry. We have this question, "You stated, "confidential." Can I share this data with an evaluator?" Yes. Data can be shared with an evaluator for specific research provided the appropriate agreements are in place between public official and responsible involved in the evaluation and the evaluator. Federal law does include provisions to ensure confidentiality of UI data. That same federal law makes clear that these data are to be for performance and public official duties, such as the program improvement which meets statutory evidence requirements.

Your evaluation can help states localities may also have their own data sharing regulations. Many states have successfully shared data with evaluators to support this kind of research, including the evaluations for REA. (Inaudible) -- describe what data is needed and how it is accessed for different studies, RESEA evidence base clears RESEA topic area path. The appropriate agreement in place, we're confident that all states will be able to share to use their UC data to support their RESEA evaluation only in requirement that it maintain confidentiality.

RESEA program administrators or state UI directors the questions about specifics of what is required in order to share data with a third-party evaluator while meeting legal requirements and maintain their standards to speak with their agency's privacy officer, as well as data sharing expert at the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Unemployment Insurance. RESEA evaluation TA helpline can also help answer your questions as you navigate this process. We also received a question –

MS. SALAS-KOS: Siobhan, can you take the question that says, this feels very overwhelming. Where do I start? And then we can go back and address the question about considerable time constraints in a minute or so?

SIOBHAN: Yeah. Sure can. There's a question, "It feels very overwhelming. Where do I start?" We hope this webinar gives you tools to start tackling the challenge, but I know it can feel daunting. If you're not sure where to start, the RESEA evaluation TA helpline can help you start to develop a plan. It can help you think through a number of key data considerations and help clarify any questions you may have. You can also download the data availability worksheet located in the button right-hand corner of this screen. This worksheet will be a useful tool to facilitate a conversation about data with your evaluator and with your state colleagues.

MS. SALAS-KOS: We also want to remind everyone that Larry Burns did talk about the community of practice on WorkforceGPS for the RESEA grantees. So all the topics are organized based on the topics that are being covered today and the other ones that have been covered related to designing and implementing evaluations. So, Larry, can you respond to the question related to time constraints?

MR. BURNS: Sure. Thanks, Gloria. In your state, data staff are probably under a lot of strain due to COVID and wondering how they can do the things outlined in this webinar when staff aren't available to you for assistance. With that, we know that an unprecedented demand for unemployment insurance and newly created programs have really increased the demands on data staff nationwide. However, states conducting impact and outcome studies will need state administrative data to answer your study's research questions.

At a minimum, support from data staff to extract outcome data on quarterly earnings and UI claim duration, though other types of administrative data on services received were describing the population served will also be important. States conducting implementation or process studies may also need these data to answer your study's research questions. This request to extract data can occur later on in an evaluation at a time when data staff are less busy.

So really work with your evaluator to understand how your data staff's availability may impact evaluation time-wise. And keep your federal project officer in the loop as well. If you have concerns about how the availability of your data staff might impact your evaluation, the RESEA evaluation TA helpline is here to answer questions. And also, folks at the Office of Unemployment Assistance are here to help you navigate the process as well.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks, Larry. We are getting quite a few questions coming in. We see a question here. Siobhan, can you take the question about IT unless they look at us puzzled?

SIOBHAN: Sure. The question is, "Our IT mostly looks at us puzzled when we ask her to do the dictionary. The past project other places called a code book or a logbook. Of the many data sets I've previously used, the admin always provided this item upfront. Mostly our IT looks at us puzzled when we request any of these three. Any suggestions?" This is not – these data sets are typically large. And in any place I've ever worked in documentation is often the part of the data work that is left to last, right? It's often the least interesting, so it often falls by the wayside.

So I would really recommend if you're in a situation where your IT staff either don't have a data dictionary or a code book or something like that, I would pick up a data availability worksheet and walk them through it and say, these are the kinds of data elements we are looking for. We really want to understand where these data elements live in terms of data sources. We want to understand how you define them. We want to understand what the values are. And those kinds of questions should really resonate with the IT staff.

The other thing that you might ask for is if they have a record layout. A record layout is often in an Excel worksheet. And it has a list of all the variables of data systems, the length of all those variables, whether or not they're character or numeric. It will often have the values and their meanings. And so that might be another way that your IT staff are referring to the information that you need. Isn't listed here. If none of those things work, I think to the extent possible getting on the phone and trying to hash it out is the way to go.

The other thing you might ask for is if they have any reports that they've generated using the data. You may be able to back out what they have based on the sort of information they're providing in their reports, because there's underlying data that feeds into those reports. So you might be able to make good guesses about what data is available there. So the second question here – (inaudible) –

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks, Siobhan. I think there's a question that we can have. Andrew Clarkwest, who's also one of the TA evaluation team experts answer on, "Does UI duration apply to spells of unemployment? Many claimants have several additional claims throughout the year." Andrew, can you answer that one?

MR. CLARKWEST: Yeah. This relates to the other question we spoke about on duration being in dollars rather than in weeks. We measure in UI duration for the purposes of evaluation. You would include all weeks claimed during the benefit year up through the end of the time of measurement, however far out you're measuring the data. At that point it doesn't matter.

It may be used someone claimed for 10 weeks, then got a job maybe temporarily, but then that job ended. They restart again. They claimed another 10 weeks. That is still 20 weeks of duration, just like it would be if someone started and they claimed for 20 weeks continually. Even if the claim ended, it's still important. I think it's an important outcome to know whether people are getting back to work in a way that is permanent or not permanent. So we want to be able to capture all of the time that someone's spent on UI.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks, Andrew. There's another question about additional sessions in TA. Larry, can you respond to that?

MR. BURNS: Sure. Happy to. We received one question about additional technical assistance sessions in the future. And this one in particular's asking if we'd consider doing a session about technical assistance for IT staff. Because a lot of the times in the IT world, claims and the UI claims work tend to take precedence. And programs like RESEA, kind of it's on the side. But given the requirements of RESEA, we really need kind of a cultural change in the importance in having those conversations.

So just generally speaking, over the past year and a half, we've really focused on technical assistance on the evaluation side of RESEA because there's some really tense time restraints on that. We needed to get the evaluation work started pretty quickly to develop the evidence base we're going to need in the future years.

But one of the things we are interested in doing is more technical assistance around RESEA generally, so other resources and sessions you need. So at the end of this presentation, we'll be providing our contact information.

And if you have ideas for additional technical assistance to help with RESEA, feel free to share them with me regarding general TA. Or if it's evaluation-specific, you can always reach out to the evaluation helpline with specific evaluation ideas. But anything generally related to RESEA would be helpful from a technical assistance standpoint. I'm really interested in your ideas, thoughts, and opinions. So feel free to share those with me.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks, Larry. So as follow-up to that and the question about blogs, we just had the link to the RESEA services page on WorkforceGPS added to the chat. So you're more than welcome to use that as a reference as you start thinking about additional TA. Larry, of course, is the person to reach out to. So if you are giving more thought about TA and other TA-related resources, that's a page that you can also refer to as well. Are we with questions? I think we're at the bottom of the list unless there's anything else anyone would like to ask.

MR. BURNS: Gloria, I just wanted to piggyback on something you just said in the importance. We shared in the chat feature the link to the resources that we've done so far. And we've done quite a few.

Again, I know a lot of states had changes in RESEA staff bringing on new staff, changes in who's administering the program. So I really strongly encourage everyone to take a look at those resources and go back. Because in addition to evaluation resources, we do have operating guidance and other things on those websites. That will be a good resource for you. If you haven't already, please take a quick look at some of our previous technical assistance.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Great. That's a great reminder, Larry. Thank you so much. Okay. As we move forward to wrapping up, you will now see our contact information. And as Larry mentioned, for additional questions about evaluation technical assistance coordinator and – (inaudible) – meaning any other types of evaluation – you can always reach out to me at that email address. If you have questions about program or RESEA evaluation guidance questions, please reach out to Larry Burns.

And as always, if you have any questions about RESEA evaluation TA questions, you can reach out to the RESEA EvalTA team at the email address provided below. We do appreciate all the time that you've spent with us today. And please feel free to reach out if there is anything that you would like us to discuss going forward. Thank you so much.

(END)