**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Building Evaluation Capacity Through Communities of Practice and Peer Learning Cohorts**

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GRACE MCCALL: Welcome to "Building Evaluation Capacity Through Communities of Practice and Peer Learning Cohorts." Without further ado, I'm going to turn things over to one of our speakers for today, Gloria Salas-Kos, senior program analyst/evaluation technical assistant coordinator, Office of Policy Development and Research, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor. Take it away, Gloria.

GLORIA SALAS-KOS: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Grace, for that warm introduction. I'm also pleased to be joined by Wayne Gordon, the director of the Division of Research and Evaluation in the Office of Policy Development and Research. Wayne?

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

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Wayne. And now we can segue into telling you more about why we're doing this webinar. Our objective for this webinar is to tell you a bit more about our presenters today and to provide an overview of the evaluation activities and resources from the Employment and Training Administration. Wayne Gordon will share the overview and background to describe our expectations for research and evaluation. I will provide quick snapshots about our communities of practices and evaluation capacity building tools that are available to you.

Then our moderator and state workforce agency representatives – who we'll introduce to you shortly – will provide information about their experiences with the evaluation peer learning cohort. We are also going to share more information about the application process for the 2021 evaluation peer learning cohort and provide an open chat to respond to questions we receive from you. Please keep in mind that you may add your questions to the chat at any time. If they can be answered quickly, such as requests for links and materials, we'll do so in the chat.

We will respond to other presentation-related questions during the open chat section of this webinar. Also with us today is Cynthia Forland. I would like to welcome Cynthia, the evaluation TLC lead and moderator for the discussion with our state workforce team leads. Cynthia?

CYNTHIA FORLAND: Thank you, Gloria. I'm happy to be here.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thanks. Also with us today, we are pleased to welcome our guest, Bryan Huebsch, from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, and Sacha Stadhard, from the MassHire Department of Career Services. Bryan is the state lead for Wisconsin from the 2019 evaluation peer learning cohort. And Sacha is the state lead for the Massachusetts team in the 2020 EvalPLC, which just ended this last May. Bryan and Sacha, welcome.

BRYAN HUEBSCH: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

SACHA STADHARD: Thank you.

MS. SALAS-KOS: With that, we'll move over to Wayne Gordon, who will lead us in setting the expectations for the conversation today. Wayne?

MR. GORDON: Thank you, Gloria. Again, folks, my name is Wayne Gordon. I'm the division director for research and evaluation at ETA. Allow me to direct you to this quote on the slide here. I've used this before really in an effort to dispel what many of the initial assumptions are that many have expressed to us when talking about research and evaluation activities, both from a federal standpoint under WIOA and what the expectations are from the states.

Really, performance reporting can inform policy development. But it is not the end of the story. So it's a little more nuanced than that. But this quote kind of sets the stage for it. It's beyond just performance and reporting. In a couple of slides, I'll turn to a polling question intended to get all this to reflect on if; and if so, how your respective organizations undertake research and evaluation activities. The intervening slides I'll use to demystify the process. And you may recognize some of these activities you and your agency may already have done or are in the process of doing.

To really set this context, we've relied on this chart that illustrates how federal agencies are expected to use evidence to inform policy and practice. The approach certainly is no different for the states. And we really like this graphic because it depicts how we'd like folks to view this and approach it. As you can see, each of the four quadrants highlights how performance measurement and management, foundational fact-finding, program evaluation, policy analysis contribute to management and improvement of program services and activities.

Each of these activities can also be used to help develop research approaches or methods to gather and evaluate how well a program functions. This visual help us recognize the various sources from which evidence flows, and to incorporate them to inform decisions about how program operations, policy, and regulations help shape agency priorities. You'll recognize the usual suspects of evidence-building in the lower quadrants of the evidence-building pie on the slide, program evaluation and foundational fact-finding, better known as research.

And then the two top quadrants, policy analysis and performance measurement complete the picture under the Evidence Act, and subsequent OMB guidance is – (audio blip) – workforce programs. Now, I hope looking at this further breakdown you may begin recognizing activities that you and your organization have perhaps been involved with already. To dig a little deeper into how different types of inquiries address different types of information needs, workforce program managers and evaluators should focus on refining the relevant research and evaluation questions to ensure the answer is what will help add to the body of evidence.

Thanks for somebody who is advancing my slides. For example, we can think about and gather past research to see what it suggests for effective strategies. This is a form of evidence review or literature scans for evaluations already completed to generate new knowledge or new understanding. Program managers and evaluators can document how services implemented with developmental, process, or implementation studies.

These types of studies can also help states or grantees to think about how programs, services, or activities may contribute to the observed outcomes, or help visualize logic models for the current program processes, or what the possibilities are for a modified program process – so more along the lines of administrative changes that policymakers might consider. The questions that determine whether a service was effective or considered are impact studies. Impact evaluations can either be random assignment or quasi-experimental, design-type evaluations.

As we move forward into the next set of slides, we will explain why evaluation inquiries, methods, and research questions are essential for state workforce agency capacity development. WIOA generally lays out expectations for ongoing evidence-building that will support improvements in programs and service strategies. Results from past research should be reviewed when the state considers options to promote efficiency and effectiveness of operations and service provision within the workforce development system.

Evaluation in WIOA clearly requires the use of performance data to help states achieve high-level performance within and high-level outcomes from the workforce development system, which also includes results from evaluations. These two quotes here on the slide from the law can also be tied back to the four-sided graphic that I was speaking to earlier. Our focus in Opter (sp) is WIOA Section 169. And it strongly communicates the importance of evaluation and research at the federal level, but also creates new opportunities for research among states in the workforce system.

Now, having broken down what already is and isn't in the previous slides, it is likely more of you will recognize where your organization is somewhere along the continuum of RNE activities. And before I turn to the polling question, I wanted to go back to, early on, we worked with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies to document and understand through a scan of state RNE capacity. And they produced a report on that in 2017 that's available on the various websites that you'll see links to later on.

Our state technical assistance goal is to meet the state teams where they are in the cultivation of research and evaluation culture and capacity within the states. What NASWA found was that states were all along the continuum from barely pursuing this, maybe even claiming that the performance measurement, performance reporting was the extent of evaluation activity that a state ought to pursue, all the way to conducting their own evaluation. So with that precursor, I'm now going to turn to the polling questions that I mentioned earlier.

And I'm going to ask folks to respond to this question using the poll feature that we have. I'll read out the question – what is your agency's capacity to conduct research and evaluation? The options there – full capacity, we're doing it all the time, we've got plans to start, we have little or no capacity, and this is our first step. Participating in this public webinar is our first step toward moving in that direction. Folks should see the results of the polls. It looks, we have some capacity for evaluation and plan to start, is the horse that's winning this race right now.

And there's no wrong answer here, because as I said, we intend and what you'll hear later on today on future slides, you're going to see what kind of footprint that we have established for technical assistance for the states. You're going to hear more about the evaluation peer learning cohort, which we're soliciting for new applications now.

So I think we've settled in. About 48 percent of our respondents indicate that there is some capacity for evaluation and the plan is to start and embark on this kind of activity. I'm going to turn it now back to Gloria Salas-Kos. And we're going to hear from folks that have had some experience with the TA that we've been providing, as well as an overview of the type of TA that's available. Gloria?

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thank you, Wayne. To address some of the capacity-building needs in the workforce system, ETA developed two communities of practice that can be used to research evaluations and other resources as well to identify evidence to develop and improve program practices and strategies. To start, you may want to explore research topics for program evaluations and workforce system strategies. We review and post 120 report summaries and workforce system strategies every year.

Workforce system strategies contain links to over 1,500 reports, program tools, and other resources. And these resources are selected by ETA peer reviewers using a set of criteria to determine if they are relevant and useful for the workforce system programs. Most of the resources profiled come from DOL, other federal agencies, universities, foundations, and other notable nonprofit organizations that fund research and evaluation projects within the public workforce system.

In addition to workforce system strategies, we also have the research and evaluation hub, which we call the Eval Hub. The Eval Hub is a community point of access to support workforce development professionals in their efforts to use evaluations to improve workforce system services and strategies, and to determine how to use evaluations as evidence to help inform program policies and practices. Most recently, we started a quarterly newsletter, the Research and Evaluation Notes, that encapsulates select reading, evidence in action, research info-graphics, and notable evaluation-related events.

If you would like to receive regular announcements about our evaluation capacity-building tools and resources and the Research and Evaluation Notes, please be sure to become a member of the Eval Hub in WorkforceGPS. This screenshot of the evaluation toolkit for state workforce agencies can be found in the Eval Hub landing page. Participants can see some of the featured content and also find self-assessments for evaluation readiness and evaluation design and implementation activities.

Cynthia Forland, our EvalPLC coordinator lead, will provide an example of how these assessments are used for the peer learning cohort, and the state presenters will expand upon their experiences with the cohort. So that leads us to our next polling question. And while we just provided a quick preview of the two communities of practice that we use to help address your evaluation needs, we're also interested in knowing how we can improve our efforts. To do so, we'd like to know which types of resources you would like to see on the evaluation and research hub.

There's a set of four different types of resources that you can select. Please note that if you have any specific evaluation-related topics in mind as you select your answers, also identify that topic in the chat. It looks we have a good mix of responses. Tools and guides seems to be the lead. And templates and examples of statements of work, evaluation reports, and other relevant research questions or findings seems to be the highest of the four responses at 84 percent.

Great. It'd be great to get some ideas on which topics matter. Thank you. This is a good preview of things that we can think about as we move forward. Okay. So we can close the chat. And with that, I'd like to turn this discussion over to Cynthia Forland, who will moderate or next section with Bryan Huebsch and Sacha Stadhard. Cynthia?

MS. FORLAND: Thank you, Gloria. So we're going to be able to provide a glimpse into what the experience is of working in evaluation peer learning cohort. I'm going to talk a little bit about some information that we have gleaned from earlier sessions. And then more importantly, you're going to get to hear from two people with firsthand experience. So you'll see on this slide, this gives you a glimpse from the 2019 evaluation peer learning cohort.

And as part of the process, there are a couple of self-assessments that states are able to do to get a sense as to where they're at similar to some of the polling questions you've just seen, but looking at evaluation culture and awareness, data management, strategic planning, funding strategies, and staff skills capacity and knowledge. So to give you some frame of reference for that 2019 cohort, five states chose to focus on evaluation culture and awareness. Four of the state teams identified funding strategies.

Three states considered updates to existing data mechanisms or implementing new data processes, use, dissemination, and documentation. Five of the six states began planning for ways to build in-house research and evaluation capacity. And three states identified goals for integrating strategic evaluation planning into their evaluation action plan. Like I said, that gives you a little bit of a glimpse, but I know you learn a lot more by hearing from folks who were a part of the process.

So we want to start off by having you hear from Sacha, who was a part of last year's evaluation peer learning cohort. And she's going to talk a little bit about the experience in Massachusetts, some lessons learned, some next steps from the action plan they've put together, as well as how the EvalPLC helped build the state's capacity for connecting evaluation. Sacha?

MS. STADHARD: Hello, everyone. Good afternoon. My name is Sacha Stadhard. I'm from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Workforce Development and MassHire Department of Career Services, which serves as the state's workforce agency. And I had the pleasure of participating in the 2020 evaluation learning peer cohort with my colleagues across the state representing WIOA partners. So I'm going to talk a little bit about a couple of lessons learned during participation in the EvalPLC.

Participation in the evaluation peer learning cohort really gave our state team an opportunity to have a deeper dive on areas that we wanted to improve related to conducting evaluation. We were able to use the assessment tool provided through the cohort peer learning opportunity. And we identified areas of improvement related to staff, builds, capacity, and knowledge related to evaluation. And we discussed the importance of staff across all departments having some level of training related to working with and analyzing data.

We also identified areas of improvement related to evaluation culture and awareness; for example, making sure that we incorporate evaluation as a component within program design or request for proposals. Participation in the evaluation peer learning cohort also helped us think about getting our ducks in a row before conducting evaluation. We really learned that it's important to formulate good research questions in order to understand what we want to evaluate, why we would want to evaluate it, and the method that we would use to conduct the evaluation.

So in terms of the evaluation cohort helping with building capacity, we also had the opportunity to develop an action plan. And that gave us some concrete steps for expanding capacity to conduct evaluation. And it really helped us think about prioritizing how we would build capacity in our state, which is really critical. It also gave us an opportunity for our state WIOA partners to come together to focus on subject areas of interest for evaluation to include in our state WIOA evaluation agenda.

And some of the areas of interest for evaluation that we sort of landed on were related to evaluating outcomes of shared customers based on services received; for example, looking at cohorts of populations that receive the same services compared against those that did not receive the same services in determining whether there were differences in terms of the outcomes. Another area of interest that we were able to land on was looking at how we track customers served across our WIOA partner agencies and trying to determine, is there a better way to do this?

An additional area of interest that we landed on through this process was to evaluate the impact of the delivery of virtual services on customers and businesses. And by doing that, we really want to understand what is working, what's not working for customers related to virtual services, and could it help us better understand the future of work? During our time together in putting together the evaluation action plan, one of the outcomes of this cohort was that we had decided to establish a committee to focus on implementing the evaluation action plan.

So we know that evaluation is an ongoing commitment. And it's something that our partner agencies have agreed to come together on a regular basis to discuss doing. In addition to working on areas of improvement for evaluation – as identified in that evaluation action plan – our committee, as we come together to meet, will continue to develop next steps for areas of interest for evaluation identified in our WIOA evaluation agenda. So we're really going to use this opportunity to leverage our collective partner agency and to move our WIOA evaluation agenda forward.

And so I'll just say holding that, this was a really great opportunity to get our state to start strategizing on how we think about evaluation. We also had a great subject matter expert assigned to us, Randall Wilson. And he worked with us along the way, which is extremely helpful. He's a great resource of information related to evaluation. And we were really pleased with the resources and the opportunity to connect with other states through this peer learning cohort. And I just want to say thank you to everyone for letting me share our experience.

MS. FORLAND: Thank you so much. That was great and incredibly helpful for folks who are thinking about applying. Bryan, if you can tell us a little bit about your experience when you had a team from Wisconsin participating in the 2019 cohort.

MR. HUEBSCH: Certainly. And thank you for the opportunity to reflect upon the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's participation in a previous evaluation cohort. We found the cohort very beneficial because it helped launch the department's evidence-based division that we are seeking to achieve. That vision is we seek to base programs, policies, and service delivery on evidence. We seek to understand the DWD's systems impact because citizens – (inaudible) – system.

We are looking to leverage and manage DWD's collective data and efficiently build to improve upon person-centered outcomes, and finally, to build and make data available for use – both internally and externally – to define and implement better service in citizen's communities. And this cohort was able to help us to really begin the journey to get to that vision. So a couple of lessons learned that I'll highlight – the first is, we were able to develop a complete plan during the cohort that served as the basis of our workforce data quality initiative project plan.

The cohort's plan allowed us to focus on what were the key strategies that we needed to build – what were the key components that we needed to build and carry that over into implementation? The cohort allowed us the time to develop and complete that plan, including a framework for how we're going to work with our programs. And I'll highlight the second lesson learned, which was really about the value of critical partnerships. Later on, our cohort was approximately 18 months ago. It finished, I believe, in March of 2020.

So in late 2020, we were able to capitalize on some of the existing partnerships. And we started receiving requests for data through our structure, which included governance. We had a research and evaluation team that was working to build critical products, such as a learning agenda that I'll touch on in a few minutes. And we were also able to hone in and start identifying those questions and those activities that were going to provide value to our agency. A couple of specific examples – the RESEA Program – in fact, recently procured a third-party evaluator.

And this is a success point because one of our valued members of our cohort team was in that RESEA Program. And they were able to connect the dots from their program activity all the way to the point of being able to speak enough of the evaluation language to go through that process with some help. And ultimately, they were able to procure a third-party vendor to meet their RESEA evaluation needs. A second success – recently, a graduate student from the University of Wisconsin was asked for something we have never dug into, and that's workers' compensation data.

And through the consultation efforts through our framework, DWD was able to provide that brokered discussion between the researcher and the workers' compensation division. Although those are just a few examples, there's a lot more work being done with many of our DWD partners and divisions using our framework and a lot of the activities that we learned through the cohort.

A couple of steps that we were able to implement – I'm going to talk about three specifically. The first is a governing structure. We were able to compose an operations manual/charter for the workforce data integration system. And that's the framework that I've been talking about that is going to help us with our cross-divisional data requests and research needs. This is one of the first cross-department governance structures in our department's history. It includes all six of our subordinate divisions. And it is capitalizing on existing information technology board.

So that was a big step in the cultural change and in setting up a framework to help us meet that vision in an efficient manner. The second big bullet is we achieved a learning agenda. And it was informed by a diverse group of partners. The learning agenda was able to be refined in the specific question that helped us define an evidence plan. We were able to do that this spring. It was approved by our governing body in the spring around May. And we are now able to start our plan.

And we're actually going through the process of undertaking some of those items on the evidence plan. For example, one of the key initiatives of our current administration is diversity, equity, and inclusion. And there's a consultation between our framework; our workforce data integration system; and the diversity, equity, and inclusion about the state employees here at the Department of Workforce Development. And then the last part is interoperable infrastructure. We have nearly completed our longitudinal workforce database.

The LWD is intended to provide individual data from multiple program data sets in a format so that a researcher could take that format and then put it into a statistical too. So we're really looking for one person getting one line of grain – what is the 360-degree picture of that person? So that initiative is nearly complete. And we can yearly do that. And we have the necessary governance and the necessary questions to help inform how we're going to use that shared data solution.

And so just a couple of things on how the EvalPLC helped build our state's capacity, which is a reason why everyone should consider this. It really helped us build the understanding of what it takes to build a system, the components that shaped the plan for the agency. And this is an agency that did not have a lot of evaluation experience, that those components were very beneficial. Most of us thought research was just diving into data and then magically pulling out some stroke of brilliance or some magical insight, which obviously it is not.

You need to have great questions to be able to pull out the right data in the right format with the right design to provide the evidence that you need to appropriately inform service delivery. And as mentioned earlier, some of us also thought performance reporting was just good enough, which obviously it's not. It's one part of the evidence circle. And there are other different types of evidence that are required. So a couple of the other benefits – Cynthia and Randall introduced us to some other state's models and provided terrific guidance that helped us along the way.

So we gained all of this understanding about those three components – people, process, and technology – so that those were, I think, the big points that helped the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. So thank you for the opportunity to discuss our state's experience with the peer learning cohort a couple years ago.

MS. FORLAND: Thank you, Bryan. And we do have a question for you right off the bat. "Are you willing to share the governance tool that you just discussed?"

MR. HUEBSCH: Governance tool, I have a manual. I don't know what the tool would refer to, but I do a governance structure that I can share.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you. And thank you to both of you. So I just want to open it up for questions that any of you might have for either Sacha or Bryan. Particularly for those who are thinking, okay, I'm on the cusp – I might want to apply for this opportunity, but I really want to ask a couple questions about what the experience really is. And we're going to talk a little bit more about the – (inaudible). But I do want to just take a moment for any other questions you might have for our two state representatives.

Feel free to enter your questions in the chat. While we wait to see if anything comes in, I do know there's a question that came in a little bit earlier that I think we might be able to address. No, wait. Hold on. We have a question for our two state folks. "Do you also use third-party evaluators?" Bryan or Sacha, would either of you like to weigh in on that?

MS. STADHARD: Hi. This is Sacha. So we are not currently using the third-party evaluator, but that's definitely something that we've considered just thinking about capacity and looking across our partner agencies to see which agency really does have capacity to conduct evaluations. We thought that for WIOA evaluation of a cross-partner agency, that, I think a lot -- hello.

MS. FORLAND: Yes, go ahead. We can hear you.

MS. STADHARD: Oh, OK. That was a connection there. OK. So essentially we are considering a third-party evaluation, but not at this time. So that is something that we are looking into.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you. Bryan, do you want to add anything on third-party evaluators?

MR. HUEBSCH: I can. And so the decision on whether we use third-party evaluation evaluators is based on a couple of factors. The first is do we have the capacity to do an evaluation in-house? And then the next one is do we need that third-party component, that neutral evaluator?

So in the RESEA example that I wrote earlier, the program decided due to capacity that we would want to have evidence that is strong enough to meet the -- I believe it was moderately relevant or -- I'm forgetting the word. But anyway, they decided to go with that third-party evaluator for that, where there in other parts of our efforts -- our learning agenda and our evidence plan -- we're doing internal work through evaluators or some of the foundational facts.

And so it really depends, but we have gone through that process, worked with our procurement, ensured we were meeting all of the state statutes and legislative statutes because those were a little bit tricky. But we were helped through that by our excellent procurement department.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you. And we do have a follow-up question here. "So if legislation or policy requires an evaluation, how do you handle that?"

MR. HUEBSCH: So I'll start it.

MS. FORLAND: Go ahead, Bryan.

MR. HUEBSCH: Was that for the state panel?

MS. FORLAND: Yes, it was. Go for it.

MR. HUEBSCH: OK. So will we find a way to do it now? And so I'll use the RESEA example again. So I believe there was 10 percent that -- we may spend up to 10 percent of that grant, and that was part of the budgeting process when we were determining whether to go third-party or do that internal. And so we use those resources and also to capitalize on those shared resources.

And that's one of the ideas behind our longitudinal workforce database, is here we're looking to build a shared data service that can be used not only by the RESEA program but used by other programs who have similar questions, similar legislative needs. We wouldn't want to build that capacity in all the different programs because they may only use it once or twice in a two- or three-year period, where if we have built this shared structure, it can continue to deliver.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you.

MS. STADHARD: And then I would also add to that for the RESEA program, we are looking to procure a third-party evaluator for that program as well, so that's something that is also being looked at.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you. So I think that -- thank you for both of our our state representatives for being with us and being able to answer some questions. Thank you for those of you who put questions in the chat. We also have a question that I think Wayne Gordon might be able to answer, and that was one that came up a little bit earlier saying having this email hub plus the CLEAR website plus RESEA evaluation and WorkforceGPS, that feels kind of splintered. So there's been a newsletter on top of that, so I want a little bit of context there on the various tools that are available and how to go about navigating them.

MR. GORDON: Sure. Thank you. I can take that. Yeah. The Eval hub and the most tangible aspect of that, the Eval PLC, the the cohorts -- of which we just heard from Bryan and Sacha -- are the main thrust of to TA that ETA is providing to states. It's the footprint we've staked out to address the basic requirements of WIOA.

The other items here -- and it's approaching it with let's use the term "widgets," and just formulating research questions, building -- that get to the the answer that policymakers want. The CLEAR website -- and actually all of the TA, of course, is on the WorkforceGPS platform, but that is the main thrust that ETA has undertaken regarding TA and just basically orienting states and agencies that are interested in pursuing research and evaluation. None of it's a WIOA requirement. This is our our footprint for providing technical assistance for that. The RESEA technical assistance, which we were involved with as well, was kind of like the deep end. Grantees were given funding; we heard that from Bryan; there was a percentage set aside for research and evaluation. So that was kind of the deep end for those that received those grants for RESEA.

The CLEAR website is yet another resource for existing completed research, something that one would use as a resource, identifying where past research, specifically past research that has high rigor to it, can be used as a reference in planning or formulating research questions or understanding whether there's other information available that's out there.

I'm really glad everyone has listed those in that question, that the Eval Hub, the CLEAR -- (inaudible) -- workforce system strategy, that's another one in there as well. But this is our effort, our attempt to push out basic TA. The RESEA is more of applied, as I called it, deep end; it's more of an applied use of what we're talking about, very much a sink-or-swim activity, but all of it is in support of -- both at the state level and I would admit at the federal level, creating and cultivating a culture of using research and evaluation in policy planning and development.

MS. FORLAND: Great. Thank you, Wayne. And I'm just going to spend a couple of minutes talking a little bit more about the application process for the 2021 evaluation peer learning cohort. In the interest of time, because the discussion we just had was the most important topic on the agenda today, I'm going to go through this this information a little bit quickly.

This gives you a preview here of the application questions. If you do apply for the cohort, basically asking what are you looking to gain from the experience? How does your state workforce agency's evaluation and other evidence to improve or support programs, policies and services? What do you see as the primary benefits of research and evaluation for your workforce development programs and services? And then to what extent have you been partnering with your WIOA core programs to conduct evaluations, coordinate evaluations with partners -- you heard Bryan talk a little bit about that -- and collaborate with federal evaluations? And lastly, how are evaluation plans and results incorporated into your WIOA state plan?

In terms of the structure of the evaluation peer learning cohort, it's an interactive, customized technical assistance forum comprised of cross-agency representatives of up to six states each year. State teams who represent core WIOA programs have the opportunity to collaborate and develop a capstone project. That could be a state evaluation action plan; could also be an evaluation design or statement of work for a specific project. Participants have the opportunity to learn from federal evaluation and research staff, subject matter experts from the evaluation community across the country, dedicated coaches as well as fellow state workforce and program partner representatives from several states within the cohort.

So what kind of technical assistance are you being provided? So I want to talk a little bit more about a couple of things I mentioned on that last slide. You get to identify a range of research and evaluation experience and capacity to test; exchange promising information and evaluation practices.

If you're seeing things the way I am, it looks like some some words get a little jumbled on this slide. That looks like a little bit of a technical difficulty in the translation to the software.

State teams will have access to technical assistance coaches, as we mentioned. They help you evaluate your state's readiness to conduct rigorous, relevant, independent, transparent evaluations to ultimately inform policy and practices. And the coaches also help support designing research and evaluation activities and building evaluation capacity.

So what's expected of you and what do you get out of this if you participate in the evaluation peer learning cohort process? You heard a little bit about that from Bryan and from Sacha. But let me just walk through a couple of key points. Expectations. You're establishing a cross-agency state team, so representation from all four titles of WIOA. You'll be completing self- assessments of state evaluation, readiness and design implementation. Preparing for and actively participating in five virtual Eval PLC sessions. Holding state team meetings in between those virtual sessions -- so making sure you're working together as a state team on top of the work that's spent with your other fellow five states; and ultimately developing a capstone project.

Now, in terms of the benefits, we've talked a little bit about these things. You get to learn directly from federal research and evaluation staff, subject matter experts and fellow cohort states. You get to participate in those five virtual sessions that are designed specifically to meet the needs of the six cohort states, so no curriculum for any cohort is going to look the same as any other because it is tailored to the needs of the specific states -- six states that are in that year. You have access to an assigned coach throughout the process and access to a private community of practice website.

Timeline. Here's the headline, applications are due August 31st, and you're going to see a link in this presentation to the application. Basically compose a state team consisting of at least four folks representing Titles I and III, at least two from Titles II and IV. A panel of ETA staff will review the applications and select up to six state teams to participate, and applicant states will be notified in September.

Terms of once you are selected to participate. If you apply and successfully make it into the cohort, you'll participate in initial calls with an assigned coach to set up regular meeting times, discussing, discussing your state needs and identifying what each team hopes to gain from participation. You'll finish the cohort with a capstone project that you get to select as a state team that ultimately is going to be something tangible to help guide your work in the future.

You heard how both Bryan and Sacha talked about the evaluation action plans that their states developed and how those proved to be valuable. All meetings are virtual -- no travel involved. Meetings will be from October 2021 through March 2022. And as I mentioned, in between meetings you'll be able to meet with your coaches and also be able to meet with your state teams.

With that, any questions about anything we've talked about today, if any new questions have popped up? Let's see.

It looks like we do have a new question in the chat. The New Jersey State Board was part of the New Jersey state team in an earlier Eval PLC round. So Cheryl says she'd recommend to all state that the state boards be a part of the state team. The evaluation peer learning cohort was a great exercise and enabled great buy-in and capacity building for the entire workforce system. Thank you, Cheryl, for giving us a great plug there. We appreciate that.

Any other questions for the federal leaders on the call or for the states who are on the call? OK, in the interest of time, I do want to point out some additional evaluation resources that are available to you. Here's the link for the evaluation peer learning cohort, which also includes the link for the application. So please go there and check that out if you're having any thoughts about applying for the cohort.

The second link here is the evaluation tool kit for state workforce agencies and this is a tool kit that we'll rely on heavily during the evaluation cohort process. That provides all kinds of information, whether you're involved in the cohort or not, about ways to develop your evaluation capacity. It includes the self-assessments that we just talked about. It's real wealth of information that you can use on demand, whether or not you're part of the cohort.

And then other places to find evaluation reports and studies. There's -- you've been hearing from folks from the division of research and evaluation, there's a link here. We talked about the workforce system strategies and evaluation and research hub. Those are both on WorkforceGPS. And the question earlier about a newsletter, what's that about? Well, if you sign up as a member of these two communities, you'll be getting regular emails about new resources that are available. It could be kind of handy, just as something that comes directly to you to say, hey, there's something new here, just in case this might be valuable to you. And then also the Department of Labor chief evaluation office. You have links here both for current studies and completed studies.

And with that, I think I'm going to turn things back over to Gloria.

MS. SALAS-KOS: Thank you so much, Cynthia.

So to close, we provided a broad picture of evaluation at the beginning of our presentation for those attendees who might not have been familiar with evaluations and the WIOA evaluation requirements for states.

We also shared snapshots of the two communities of practice to which we disseminate evaluation information and provide evaluation capacity building resources. We were also fortunate enough to have our moderator, Cynthia Forland, and the two state representatives, Sacha Stadhard and Bryan Huebsch, discuss their experiences with the evaluation peer learning cohort.

And for those attendees and state workforce agencies, we covered aspects of this year's evaluation peer learning cohort application and all the links that are related to additional resources. So if you're interested in learning more about what we shared today, you may also contact us at the emails provided on this slide.

So I do want to say thank you to everyone attending, and if you have any questions again, please feel free to reach out with us to us. And with that, thank you, and we're at the end of the presentation.

(END)