

# SSI Youth Solutions Conference

Day 1 - Training and Apprenticeships, Transition  
Supports, and SSI Criteria

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy

Mathematica

June 9, 2021

# Tools and Resources

## • Questions

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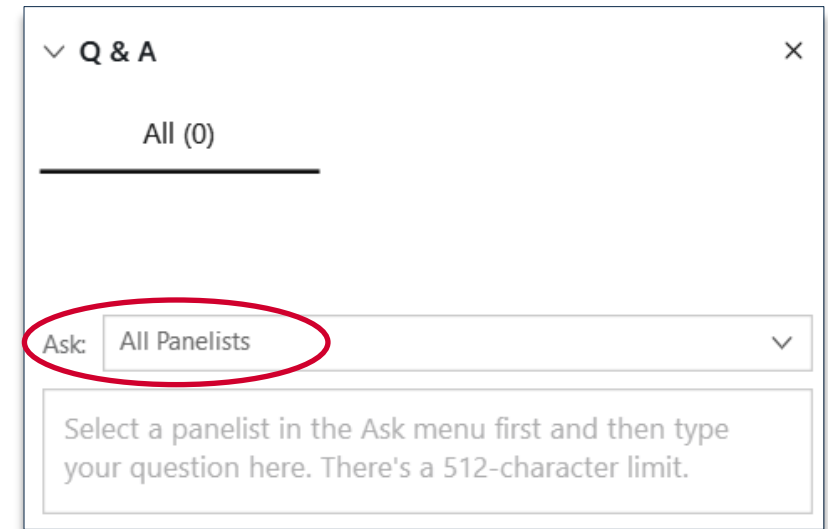
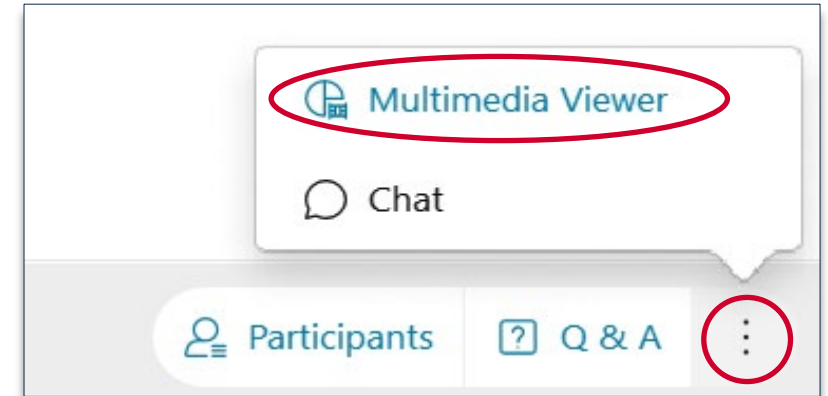
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## • Meeting Materials

- <https://www.mathematica.org/features/ssi-youth-solutions-conference>

## • Meet & Greet with Authors – Day 1

- <https://mathematica.webex.com/mathematica/j.php?MTID=m7733b1ffadf66c9ac86b4286e9e998b2>



# Welcome

**Jennifer Sheehy, Office of Disability Employment Policy,  
U.S. Department of Labor**

# Agenda

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- **Welcome**
- **Current Landscape and Challenges**
- **Proposal Presentations**
- **Response to the Proposals**
- **Questions & Answers**
- **Meet & Greet with the Authors**

# Discussion of Current Landscape and Challenges

**Todd Honeycutt, Mathematica**

# **Why focus on youth receiving SSI?**

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- **Almost 1 million youth ages 14 to 24 receive SSI annually**
- **More than 200,000 youth ages 14 to 24 apply for SSI annually**
- **They have significant health conditions affecting functioning and live in households with low income and assets**
- **Two-thirds of youth who receive SSI as children go on to receive SSI as adults**

# **Youth receiving SSI face unique challenges in transitioning from childhood to young adulthood**

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- **Inadequate preparation for postsecondary education and employment**
- **Uncoordinated service system**
- **Lack of information and awareness**
- **Limited or delayed access to services**
- **Limited use of evidence-based practices**

# **Youth receiving SSI experience poor outcomes in their transition to adulthood**

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- **Low high school completion and employment rates**
- **Low access to postsecondary education**
- **Difficulty meeting basic needs**
- **High reliance on public programs**
- **High rates of social challenges (such as poverty, incarceration, and unintended pregnancies)**



# SSI Youth Solutions project

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- **The Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, funded 12 papers by subject matter experts exploring potential interventions that advance employment and other outcomes for youth receiving SSI**
  - Novel, untested ideas
  - Enhancements or extensions of existing practices
- **Selected through a competitive process**
- **Papers are available at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/individuals/youth/ssi-youth>**

# Proposed interventions address important considerations

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- **What gap or limitation in the existing system will the intervention address—that is, why do we need it?**
- **What agency could sponsor and implement the intervention?**
- **What existing evidence supports the theory of change?**
- **What are the potential costs, and who bears them?**
- **How does the intervention consider replicability, scalability, and sustainability?**

# **Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) considerations**

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- **Establishing culturally appropriate and inclusive service models**
- **Person-centered planning and services**
- **Increased DEI into program infrastructure and delivery**
- **Ensuring DEI in evaluation efforts**

# Today's presentations on training and apprenticeships, transition supports, and SSI criteria

- **Demonstrating the Effectiveness of Short-Term Career and Technical Training in a Residential Setting for Transition-Age Youth with Disabilities**
  - *Kevin Hollenbeck – Independent Consultant*
- **Building an Apprenticeship Infrastructure for SSI Youth**
  - *Daniel Kuehn – Urban Institute*
- **Prototype Transition to Economic Self-Sufficiency (TESS) Scholarships for Youth and Young Adults with Significant Disabilities**
  - *David Stapleton – Tree House Economics, LLC; James Smith and Tara Howe – Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation*
- **Delaying Application of SSI's Substantial Gainful Activity Criterion from Age 18 to 22**
  - *Sheryl A. Larson and Judy Geyer – Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, and Abt Associates*



# ResPECT—An Effective Intervention for Transition- Age Youth with Disabilities

Kevin Hollenbeck, Consultant

# ResPECT–Residential Postsecondary Education and Career Training

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- **Blends and expands upon two successful, existing programs:**
  - Michigan Career and Technical Institute (MCTI)
    - Serves adults (age 18+) with disabilities
    - 22% SSI participants in recent class
  - Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT)
    - Serves secondary school students (special education or Section 504 plans)
    - ResPECT proposes expansion to out-of-school youth with disabilities

# Intervention Components

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- **Case management**
- **Thorough assessment of skills and interests**
- **Rigorous employer-driven career and technical education curricula**
- **Instructors with industry experience**
- **Developmental academic coursework**
- **Appropriate student supports**
- **Job development and placement services**
- **Independent living in a postsecondary residential setting**

# Intervention Motivation

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- **For in-school or out-of-school youth with disabilities (currently or potentially receiving SSI), ResPECT will provide:**
  - Thorough assessments of interest and ability
  - Short-term residential experience
- **For adults with disabilities (18 and older), who may lack prior educational success and who may lack effective advocates, ResPECT will provide:**
  - Rigorous training that will lead to sustainable career
  - Self-confidence developed by successful independent living and peer interaction



# Key Features of ResPECT as Students Progress

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- **Upfront – thorough interest and aptitude assessments; career counseling and exploration; developmental coursework**
- **Training – employer-driven curricula; instructors with industry experience and strong desire to work with individuals with disabilities; supports as needed**
- **Residential experience – independent living skills; peer socialization; recreational and governance opportunities**
- **Placement – aggressive job development; job search skills; follow-up**

# Key Features of ResPECT from Social/Funder Perspective (Based on Precursor Programs)

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- **Substantial diversity in both faculty and student characteristics (over 25% people of color)**
- **Institutions are accredited; programs offer recognizable certificates**
- **High completion rates (> 90%) and placement rates (80 to 90%)**
- **Average weekly wage at placement: \$400 to \$425**
- **Intervention has many features that are similar to Job Corps, but per-student cost is less than 50% as great**

# Strengths and Limitations

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- **Strengths**

- Independent living skills that reinforce rigorous technical training
- Small class sizes and adult–student ratios
- Successful developmental education
- Aggressive job development

- **Limitations**

- Scalable concerns (within current institutions, at other institutions)
- Uncertain whether intervention can be successful with out-of-school youth
- Perception that intervention is segregated and sheltered

# Next Steps

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- 1. Randomized controlled trial or quasi-experimental design evaluation of MCTI or PERT – these programs have had positive outcomes, but causality has not been tested**
- 2. Single-site demonstration of full ResPECT intervention to test efficacy and address implementation issues with respect to out-of-school youth**
- 3. Multi-site demonstration to test replicability/scalability and, as feasible, vary components to evaluate value-added of each**

# Contact Information

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# Building an Apprenticeship Infrastructure for Youth Receiving SSI

Daniel Kuehn, The Urban Institute

# Intervention Overview

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- **Intervention**

- A grant program for Youth Apprenticeship Intermediary organizations, which would develop and coordinate with youth apprenticeship programs and systems to support youth receiving SSI and other youth with disabilities

- **Grantees could be:**

- High school districts (a traditional youth apprenticeship coordinator)
- State vocational rehabilitation agencies
- Disability rights organizations
- Other apprenticeship intermediaries

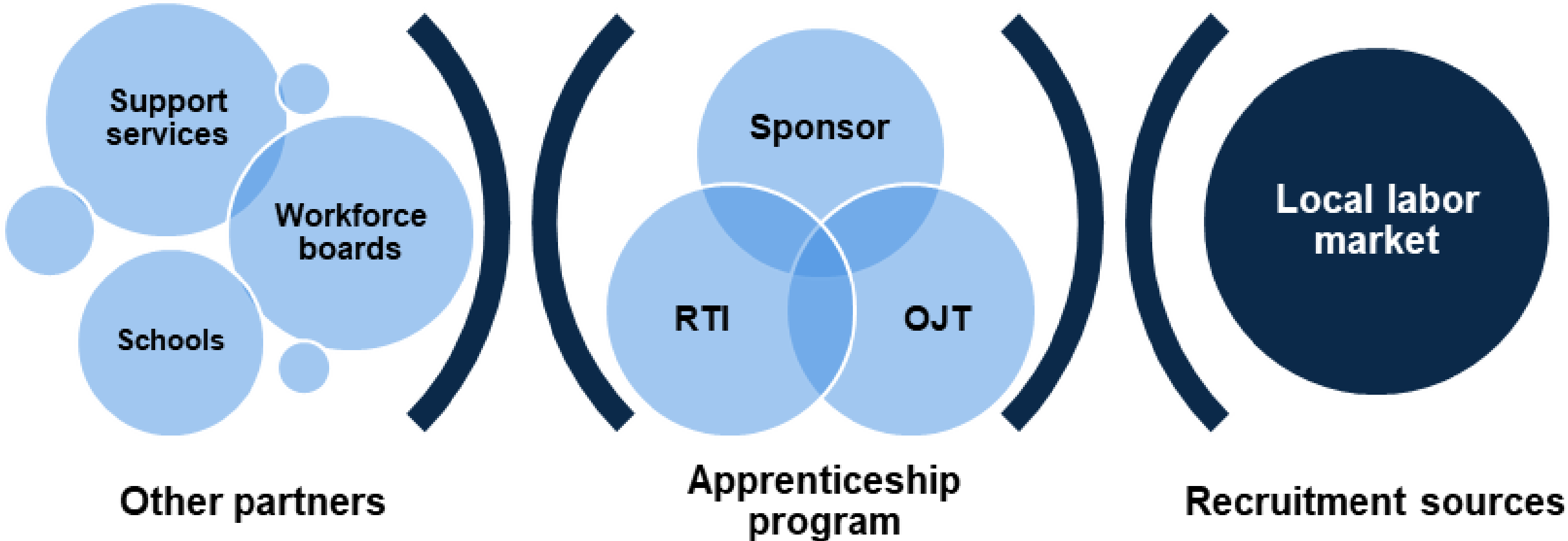
# Intervention Rationale

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- **Apprenticeship is a training model that combines classroom-based instruction with paid, productive on-the-job training. It improves participants' earnings and employment (Hollenbeck & Huang 2016; Reed & others 2012) and provides value to employers (Helper & others 2016).**
- **Apprenticeships are a flexible approach to learning with a strong connection to the labor market driven by partnerships.**
- **People with disabilities are underrepresented in registered apprenticeship, as are youth. A grant program could demonstrate new program models and establish partnerships.**



# Components of an Apprenticeship Program



• OJT = on-the-job training; RTI = related technical instruction.

# Roles of a Grantee Intermediary Organization

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- **Coordinating apprenticeship partners, including traditional registered apprenticeship partners, youth apprenticeship partners, and youth receiving SSI/with disabilities partners**
- **Managing or funding supportive services**
- **Providing technical assistance and training to employers**
  - Assistance on accommodation for apprentices
  - Proper reporting of disability status to the Office of Apprenticeship
  - Compliance with equal employment opportunity requirements
- **May also provide training for mentors on how to mentor apprentices, disability rights, and accommodation of apprentices with disabilities**

# Roles of a Grantee Intermediary Organization

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- **Facilitating use of work incentives and rules waivers**
  - Student Earned Income Exclusion—apprentice can keep benefits
  - Plan to Achieve Self-Support—funding for related technical instruction (RTI)
  - Individual Development Accounts—funding for RTI
  - Continuing disability reviews—apprentices can keep benefits
- **Evaluation of the Youth Transition Demonstration project suggests that these incentives, benefits, and rules waivers have a weak effect on employment and earnings, so they are not a substitute for outreach and recruitment. However, they can help to reward youth apprentices for work.**

# Strengths and Limitations

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- **Strengths**

- Apprenticeship has a proven track record for improving employment and earnings outcomes and brings multiple partners to the table that can serve the needs of youth receiving SSI/with disabilities
- Learn and earn models guarantee competitive pay in an integrated work environment, not sheltered workshops or training without a job

- **Limitations**

- Employers currently employ people with disabilities as apprentices at low rates and often are not knowledgeable about designing inclusive apprenticeship programs

# Conclusions

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- **Registered apprenticeship in the United States is an evidence-based workforce development strategy but does not adequately serve people with disabilities or youth**
- **A grant program to support Apprenticeship Intermediaries for youth receiving SSI/with disabilities could develop new knowledge about how to design inclusive youth apprenticeship programs**
- **The intermediary model is particularly well suited for benefits coordination, training, and technical assistance to employers that will be required**

# Contact Information

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# Transition to Economic Self-Sufficiency (TESS) Scholarship Programs

David Stapleton, Tree House Economics, LLC

James Smith, Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Tara Howe, Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

# TESS Scholarship Program

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- **State-private partnership**
- **Eligible population**
  - Significant disability, low-income family, 18+, transitioning out of high school
  - Awardee must develop and actively pursue an individualized career plan (ICP)
  - Annual renewal up to age 30 possible
- **Scholarship provisions**
  - ABLE (529A) account established on behalf of the TESS scholar
  - Career coach supports the scholar's pursuit of a career
  - Protection of access to in-kind services and supports
  - Encourage and facilitate postsecondary education



# Background and Motivation

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- **2007—Ticket to Work Advisory Panel’s vision for transformative change: TESS**
- **Post-2007 policy changes favorably reshaped the landscape**
- **Enormous systemic challenges to career pursuit remain**
  - Work disincentives built into SSI, SSDI, and the support system that has developed around them
  - The burden of navigating a fragmented support system
  - Limited access to investment in human capital
- **Institutional and political barriers have stalled efforts to make progress via changes to federal policies and programs**
  - CareerACCESS (World Institute on Disability, PolicyWorks, and National Centers for Independent Living)
  - TESS Scholarship Programs enable states and private partners to circumvent programmatic barriers

# Key Features: Institutional Structure and Funding

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- **State-private partnership under current federal law**
  - State agencies
    - Vocational rehabilitation, health and human services, education, labor
  - Private sector
    - A nonprofit with a compatible mission, businesses and business organizations, postsecondary education and training programs, foundations
  - Partners represented on an advisory committee
- **Funding**
  - Foundations
  - Private donors/sponsors

# Key Features: Entry and Annual Renewal

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- **Outreach and application**

- Supported by pre-employment transition counselors, school counselors, and special education teachers

- **Eligibility determination**

- Review committee accepts and reviews applications
- Lottery to allocate limited awards to all those meeting eligible criteria

- **Annual renewal**

- Scholar submits application for renewal, with support from career coach
- TESS review committee determines outcome

# Key Features: Scholarship Provisions

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- **ABLE (529A) account established on behalf of the TESS scholar**
  - Program contributes \$2,500 per quarter until age 28; phases down to \$0 at age 30
  - Program is custodian until age 30
- **Career coach responsibilities**
  - Teach executive skills participants need for success
  - Help develop ICP, get it approved, navigate pursuit, and update when needed
  - Support reporting to scholarship program for annual renewal
- **Protection of access to in-kind services and supports**
- **Encourage and facilitate postsecondary education**

# Strengths and Limitations

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- **Challenges**

- Complexity of collaboration
- Uncertainty of financing
- Duration and stability

- **Lottery**

- Fair way to allocated limited resources
- Eligible applicants not awarded scholarships remain eligible for other supports
- Supports rigorous evaluation

- **Barriers and disincentives to career success remain**

# Contact Information

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# Delaying Application of SSI's Substantial Gainful Activity Eligibility Criterion from Age 18 to 22

Sheryl A Larson, Institute on Community Integration, University  
of Minnesota

Judy Geyer, Abt Associates

# Intervention

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- **Postpone use of the adult disability criteria for SSI eligibility (capacity for substantial gainful activity) until age 22**
- **Determinations and redeterminations of SSI eligibility for youth ages 18 to 21 would use the child SSI disability eligibility criteria expanded to assess substantial functional limitations in:**
  - Self-direction
  - Independent living
- **No other eligibility standards for adults would change**



# Rationale

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- **SSI provides cash benefits reducing the rate of deep poverty for transition-age adults with disabilities**
- **SSI provides presumed eligibility for other federal supports**
- **Fewer than half of 18-year-old youth with severe disabilities have ever worked, making direct assessment of their capacity for substantial gainful activity impossible**
- **Developmental Disabilities and Assistance Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (DD Act) defines the developmental period as extending to the 22nd birthday**
- **Current SSI disability criteria for children do not include two domains from the DD Act that are relevant for adults ages 18 to 21**
  - Self-direction
  - Independent living
- **Other federal policies extend youth eligibility past age 18**
  - Children's Health Insurance Program (age 22)
  - Affordable Care Act (age 26)

# Expected Outcomes

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Better alignment of the eligibility criteria for access to cash assistance (SSI) and related supports and services to the developmental needs of low-income young adults ages 18 to 21 with severe disabilities:

- Helps meet basic needs
  - Food security
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Health care
  - Long-term services and supports
  - Education and training
- Facilitates participation in activities that improve work readiness
  - Work skill development
  - Work experience
  - Educational credentials
  - Self-determination skill development
  - Developmental maturity
- Increases the likelihood of employment at the substantial gainful activity level at age 22

# Implementation Challenges

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- **Requires legislative amendments to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Public Law 104-193**
- **Requires revisions to protocol for disability review**
  - Operationalizing substantial limitations in self-determination and capacity for independent living
  - Establishing the threshold for eligibility (e.g., substantial limitations in 3 of 7 areas) for adults ages 18 to 21
- **Requires retraining disability reviewers**
- **Suggest demonstration project to:**
  - Confirm hypotheses about the effect of the intervention on eligibility decisions and employment and other related outcomes
  - Evaluate selected threshold and adjust if necessary to avoid disproportionate impact on subpopulations

# Potential Costs

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- **Demonstration cost with SSA using its current demonstration authority under Section 1110 of the Social Security Act**
- **If all SSI youth age 18 remained eligible at redetermination, an estimated 39,179 more people per year would continue to receive benefits**
  - Would result in a monthly cost increase of up to \$18.9 million, based on the \$577 average monthly benefit level as of May 2020
- **Potential increase in the number of new SSI awards for young adults ages 18 to 21 (a 1 percent increase in award rate translates to an increased monthly cost of \$0.6 million)**
- **Potential increased use of transition services, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, and other services**

# Summary

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- **Determinations and redeterminations of SSI eligibility for youth ages 18 to 21 should use the child SSI disability eligibility criteria (with two additional domains) instead of the adult eligibility criteria (capacity for substantial gainful employment)**
- **This policy change would align SSI disability criteria with other federal legislation on developmental disabilities and health care for young adults with severe disabilities**
- **A demonstration project to test this policy intervention would help the public understand its associated costs, impact on SSI receipt, and impact on transition-related outcomes**

# Contact Information

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# Response to Proposals

**Jeffrey Hemmeter, Social Security Administration**

# Q&A



# Meet and Greet with the Authors

Join the authors for an informal discussion of their proposals at:  
<https://mathematica.webex.com/mathematica/j.php?MTID=m7733b1ffadf66c9ac86b4286e9e998b2>