HHS/ASPE Developing and Using Evidence-Building and Evaluation Plans for Improved Decision-Making: Administration for Children and Families

Jessica McNab:

My name is Jessica, and I'll walk us through today's agenda with our featured speaker, Emily Schmidt from the Administration for Children and Families. I'm joined by our Government task lead, Dr. Amanda Cash, and also my colleagues at Mathematica handling our logistics, Chris, who you've met if you joined us early, as well as Derek Mitchell.

Emily will talk through ACF evaluation plan and learning agenda approach, similar to what has been presented by the five other agencies. This is now the sixth webinar in the webinar series. The series does not necessarily build from one agency's story to the next but rather, showcases each agency's approach to evidence-building and evaluation plans.

And some late-breaking news, if you haven't seen it already, we've scheduled our seventh and final webinar of this series tomorrow. That's right, tomorrow August 29th, Thursday, the 29th, with Demetra Nightingale. Demetra is currently with Urban Institute, but formerly with the Department of Labor. Many of you who may be involved with building an evaluation plan may be familiar with her name. So, she'll join us tomorrow from Urban and talk through some of her processes that she used, both at the department, as well as Urban Institute. That webinar will be from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time, and Chris and I will share, as well as Amanda, additional details about that webinar in a couple of upcoming slides.

So, let's get started with a couple of housekeeping details. If you've joined us before, you should be relatively familiar with our WebEx logistics platform. There are specifically a few pods in the right-hand corner of your screen. You can see a screenshot of what that looks like, or in most cases, looks like for folks. A couple reminders and then we'll talk about the pods themselves. One, unless you have speaking, unless you have a question, we'll save time for questions at the end. Please remember to mute your or your computer, so there is an option to do that, both through the WebEx platform and then through your phone. Sometimes taking both approaches is best. There should be a QA box that you can see. You can minimize or maximize that QA box. That's where you can chat in any of your questions or comments Emily or any of the other presenters on the presentation today. Any questions that you might have for Amanda or for Emily, please use that Q&A box. We can also handle any kind of technical questions if you have any concerns there.

If you'd like to make a comment or ask a question through the phone, the easiest way for us to know that you'd like do that is if you use the hand-raising icon, so you should see a little hand icon and be able to click on that, and that will notify us that you'd like to ask a question, in which case, during the Q&A session, we will call on your, and you'll need to unmute your line to ask a question or make a comment. And then last but not least, there should be a multi-media viewer pod as well as with closed captioning action, should you need it.

So, today's agenda, if you've joined us before, it's pretty similar to other agendas. My name is Jessica. I'll walk you through some of the opening. I'm going to hand off to Amanda, here in a minute. Amanda will reach out really emphasis for the first, as well as

the next steps for project and in total, and then Emily will jump in. And Emily will walk us through ACS's approach, which we're very excited to hear.

We'll save some time for Q&A. We usually have between ten and fifteen minutes, so please do think of any questions that you do have, comments that you have. We gladly welcome all of those. And we'll save a couple of minutes for wrap up and next steps.

As mentioned, I'm Jess. I'm a researcher as well as a task lead at Mathematica, and I lead curriculum development, different shared learning and technical assistance projects that focus on quality improvements and delivery system reforms. In previous roles, I've worked with information specialists at managed care hospitals and directed other kinds of technical assistance projects focused on rapid cycle improvement.

I'm also excited to be joined by our government task lead, Dr. Amanda Cash. Dr. Cash is the acting director for the Division of Data Policy within ASPE. Dr. Cash is an epidemiologist by training and focuses much of her portfolio in recent times on research and evaluation methodologies appropriate for complex federal programs. Dr. Cash also co-leads the Federal Task League, combatting antibiotic resistant bacteria. Dr. Cash's office is leading the implementation of Title 1 evidence, which is, of course, really why we're here today.

We're also excited that had Emily has joined us from ACF. Emily is the deputy director in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation within ACF. Emily, as the deputy director, works closely with deputy assistant secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation to plan and execute the mission of the office to build evidence, to improve the lives of children and families. Ms. Schmidt joined the office in 2009 and served as a research fellow social science research analyst, senior social science research analyst, and team lead for behavioral clients Office prior to becoming the deputy director in 2016.

In these roles, she's initiated and led the office's work on the application of behavioral economics, social services, and oversaw projects related to TANF, employment and training, homelessness, and disconnected family. Prior to joining the office, Miss Schmidt worked for the U.S. House of Representatives and the National Alliance to End Homeless. She's a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Kennedy School.

So, with that, Amanda, I'm going to hand off with you to just take us back to the objectives for the webinar series and our collective purpose. Amanda.

Amanda Cash:

Thanks, Jessica. Just as a quick reminder to folks, if you have not joined one of our webinars before, the Office of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation within HHS is the policy advisor to the secretary for HHS. And, again, as Jess mentioned, we are leading implementation of the Evidence Act, in particular Title 1. And the goal of these webinars is to give HHS and other federal staff an opportunity to learn more about evidence-building plans, and we're glad you're here.

And the objectives of this series is to have speakers discuss their organization's stage of implementation evidence-building approaches, the processes developed to build evidence-building plans and how the plans were implemented, and barriers faced when developing and implementing evidence-building plans and strategies to address them. And lastly, understanding the impact of evidence-building plans on evaluation, organizational decision-making, and program effectiveness. I'm a little tongue tied today. Apologies for that. And I think we can go to the next slide.

We've held five webinars to date within NIH, USDA, CNCS, NSF and FDA, which is a lot of alphabet soup. Sorry about that. And we're really hoping that these webinars have actually helped people to learn something new. But in addition to that, we're taking the themes and looking at promising approaches to implementing evidence-building and evaluation plans to put into a report, and the webinars are being posted on Mathematica's website. We'll also be putting them on our website in ASPE, and once the report is done, we'll be posting that as well.

So, Jess and Chris are going to share more information about where you can access the materials when we wrap up today's webinar, and I'll also share the links through the Fed Eval. Listserve and on the O&B next webpage for evidence and evaluation. So, I think that's it for me. Back to you Jessica.

Jessica McNab:

Thanks. Yes, we're really excited to share the information through the Mathematica website, and then internally through ASPE global. We'll share the Mathematica details later in this webinar, and then, of course, you will receive other details from Amanda or the ASPE team as well. So, with that, if you have joined us, you're used to our two baseline polls asking about your learning interests, a safe conversation, as safe conversation as well as smart conversation with Demetra from Urban, as well as your state of implementation from your agency, from your perspective.

So, with that, Derek, I'm going to ask to push poll one about the learning interests. Okay, so poll one, again if you joined us before, same poll that we've asked first before, but, really, we're interested in what do you folks most want to hear about in today's conversation, as well as our seventh and final webinar tomorrow, which agencies have really implemented learning agendas, how agencies have structured their approach and processes, the barriers, as well as the strategies that they've used to overcome those barriers when implementing, how agencies have learned to from the process, or other.

If we haven't captured what you're hoping to learn, feel free to chat your response in the Q&A. You have to use the Q&A to chat. So, we'll give you just a minute here to choose one of those five options. Again, if you choose other, you'll chat your response in the chat box, in the Q&A box. So, I'll pause there in a minute, and when you're ready to press the results, Chris or Derek, feel free to do that.

Chris Talbot:

Thank you very much, Jess. It does look like a number of participants today are interested in how agencies have structured their plans, as well as there's a good interest

in the barriers that agencies have experienced, and how and what agencies have
learned through this process.

Jessica McNab:

Great. Thanks, Chris. We'll push those results, and then we'll go to the next poll. Okay,
yes. So, option B, the details behind the approach, followed by barriers and strategies.
Thank you. Let's go to our second polling question about ages of implementation. So, at
what stages is your agency implemented learning agenda to evidence building? Have
you fully implemented and are you operational? Are you fully implemented? Are you in
the process of implementing? Are you planning to implement, or other? That captures
the stage of where you are with your learning agenda. And, again, if other, feel free to
use the Q&A to type in your response. And, again, we'll just give you a minute here.

Chris Talbot:

Jess, it does look like half off our respondents so far have said that they are in the
planning stages to implement, as well as about a third of the audience is in the process
of implementing. So that tends to be the focus of the people that are participating in our
survey today.

Jessica McNab:

Thanks, Chris. All right, feel free to push those results, and that just helps us -- we've
asked these questions in each webinar series. This is the sixth time we've asked the
question, to see, you know, how folks joined us. For each of these webinars, have they
joined us, other agencies joining that have not before that may be in different stages of
implementation or have different learning interests? So, it certainly gets us in terms of
what you are most interested to hear, as well as your stages of implementation. And I
think you provided some nice baseline data, Emily, for you, just to think about joined
what their level of experience is and how your discussion might be able to provide some
additional insights. So, thank you, Derek and Chris, for pushing that poll.

So, with that, and with that baseline information gathered, I'm going to circle back to
Emily, and, Emily, we're super excited that you're here again from ACF. I will welcome
you to floor. I'll continue to advance the slides. The floor is officially yours. Welcome.
Emily, are you there but perhaps on mute?

Emily Schmitt:

Can you hear me?

Jessica McNab:

Yes, we can hear you.

Emily Schmitt:

Okay, great. Thanks for having me. You can go to the next slide, and I'll start off by
telling everyone a little bit about the Administration for Children and Families at our
Office of Planning, Research, and evaluation. So, ACF, Administration for Children and
Families, is part of the Department of Health and Human Services. We're Human

Services operating division. We promote the economic and social well-being of children, families, individuals, and communities. We're primarily a grant-making organization. We administer more than 60 programs, and the FY19 budget was more than $58 billion.

Major ACF programs includes child care subsidies for low-income families, Head Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, which is Welfare, and Welfare to Work Services, Child Welfare, Child Support Enforcement, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, and Refugee Resettlement, and many more. Go to the next slide.

At our office, of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, is charged with building and disseminating knowledge about improving approaches to helping low-income children and families, so we focus on ACF programs and the populations served by ACF programs. We do this by funding a variety of research and evaluation projects, including evaluations of existing programs, evaluations of innovative programs, research syntheses, descriptive and exploratory studies. We also invest in building the capacity of our grantees to do and understand research, and we also invest in disseminating research findings. We also have a mission of working to improve the quality, usefulness, sharing and knowledge the data for ACF programs, and we also still receive performance management for the agency.

In FY19, we had a budget of about $200 million. And then I also wanted to note, because it's important for this topic, that we conduct research and other activities in the areas where we have authority and funds, which covers much of ACF programs but not all ACF programs. And our funding typically comes to us in specific streams, so, for example, we have funding to do Head Start research or welfare research. Next slide.

So, I want to say a little bit about our evaluation policy, because it governs how we conduct and use research at ACF. We have an evaluation policy, which was established in 2012, and published in the federal register in 2014, and it talks about five key principles that govern our planning, conduct, and use of evaluation. So, rigor, meaning that we're committed to using the most rigorous methods appropriate for the question at hand; relevance meaning that we aim to ask and answer questions that address the interest of our stakeholders, including congress, our ACF leadership, administration leadership, federal, state, tribal, and local interests, and other researchers in the field. Transparency means we'll make information about our plans and ongoing evaluations easily accessible. Part of this means we also release all of our results regardless of findings, so we report favorable, unfavorable in those findings and we're committed to reporting findings timely, and as I mentioned, we do make a big effort to disseminate our research findings.

Independence means that we don't want our evaluation to be biased, so we have processing in place to protect our independence and the design, content, and analysis of our evaluations; namely, we do most of our research through competitively awarded contracts and grants, so the evaluations themselves are done by third parties. And, also, our deputy assistant secretary for planning, research, and evaluation is a career official who has the authority to approve research designs and approve the release of research results. And then finally, ethics, we aim to comply with the letter and spirit of all rules and regulations related to protecting human subjects. Next slide.

So, I want to talk about our current approach to learning agendas. We have a long history of doing the type of work that goes into developing and executing a learning agenda, although we haven't all called it that. So, the part of a theme of what I'll say today is that we're trying to think about what we already do and how that fits into new requirements or things that we're being encouraged to do, due to the Foundation for Evidence-Based Policy-Making Act.

And I also want to say again that most of our funding comes to us to do work in specific programmatic areas, so that's generally how we organize our research planning, and how we've been thinking about learning agendas to date. And our work looks a little bit different depending on the topic area, so, again, you know, Head Start research versus welfare research versus child services research.

But, in general, across the board in all of our program areas we have a couple things that we do consistently. So, as mentioned previously in the prior slide, we have commitment to relevance, and our evaluation policy states that we need to take into account the needs and interests of our stakeholders. So, at a minimum, we consult with our internal agency stakeholders annually as part of our annual research claim a minimum. That is a minimum, so, of course, we talk to our stakeholders throughout the year, but we always have a dedicated, at least annually, as part of planning our research planning process, and this includes ACF program office staff and leadership, a d ACF leadership. And we work with these partners to get ideas discussed and prioritize research questions. And these efforts specifically contribute to our annual research claim for the following fiscal year, but can also give us ideas for longer-term priorities.

We also have some specific ways that we've consulted with external stakeholders, so, for example, for welfare research and related funding, for nearly a decade, we've convened a group that we call our family self-sufficiency technical working group, and once or twice a year, we'll get together a group of represents from state agencies, research firms, academia, philanthropy and other parties who can provide a range of perspectives on our research planning.

We've also funded some specific efforts in recent years to get external stakeholder input, so we, earlier this year, hosted a meeting on next steps and employment and training research. We have an ongoing project looking for gaps in the research based on helping marriage and responsible fatherhood, including your expert consultations. So, we have some of these dedicated efforts to reach external experts, which can help with our annual research planning, but also help us take a broader view and generate some long-term questions. So, we take all this into account in this internal consultation, external consultation and then thinking about what we've learned from our past research, where the gaps are to produce our annual research plans.

So, in terms of what we do right now to share the product of all the consultation is right now we produce an annual research plan, which is an internal document that goes to our assistant secretary. And, at the moment, we don't make this annual research plan public. It essentially becomes public when we put out contract statements or grant funding opportunity announcements, but right now, we don't publish our research plan.

What we do publish right now is the annually produced published research portfolio. So, once a projects have been funded, we put out a document that talks about ongoing and recent past projects, highlighting key questions, methods, data sources, key findings, and is tied together with a little bit of narrative about how our research efforts have unfolded over time and how current initiatives are responding to priority questions.

So, everything I have just talked about we basically do across the board in all of our research areas. We do have a few research areas which have already produced something that they call learning agenda. Although, this work predates the foundation for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, so it may not look exactly like what a learning agenda is, in terms of the guidance and the foundations for Evidence Policymaking Act.

But what we've done in several areas is produce a learning agenda that is a little bit broader and high level than this annual research plan and talks about, based on stakeholder consultation and taking into account past and ongoing projects, what's the map of everything that's going on and how do projects that we have answer different types of questions.

So, if you can go to the next slide, this is an example learning agenda from our Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting research portfolio, and you can see it's centered on the goal of the learning agenda is to improve outcomes for families, again, children, and to improve services. You can see that stakeholder engagement is inherent in the agenda, and then what this learning agenda does, which several of our portfolios do, is talk about all the different types of different research projects that can be done and what specific efforts we have underway. So, what are we doing to work on continuous quality improvement? What are we doing to work on descriptor research? What are we doing as an impact evaluation?

This is something, again, that predates recent learning agenda guidance. This is something we need to think about, which I'll get to, which is how do we adapt what we have going on for the new requirements, and something we're thinking about is should something like this be framed in terms of questions rather than framed in terms of research methods for example. Next slide.

Okay, so I obviously couldn't pick how to answer the question about what stages of implementation we're at, which is why I have four arrows here, because we really are doing this portfolio by portfolio, and I think in many cases, we've been doing the work. We just haven't thought about it or documented it in a way that is called a learning agenda. Or maybe we have something that we call a learning agenda, but we need to think about whether it meets the spirit and the letter of new requirements, so that will bring me right to my next steps, and I'll tell you what we're thinking about now. So, next slide.

Okay, so while we have been doing a lot of this work, we're taking this opportunity with the new guidance, the new legislation to challenge us to kind of take stock of where we are, what we're doing well, what we could be doing better and how we can tie it all

together. So, as I described, we've been doing this work in individual program areas, but we'd like to produce something that's one agency-wide learning agenda that has some consistency across research areas, so that's something we're thinking about.

Something else we're thinking about we need to do is that we typically produce public safety and products on an annual basis, but we need to think about what could we do that would be a multi-year perspective, and then, of course, the big emphasis and learning agendas is stake holder input, which I think we do, but we could do a better job of documenting and then considering are we doing this systematically. How can we make sure we're doing this consistently?

So, in terms of next step to get us to an agency-wide multi-year learning agenda, we're going to start by document where we are, so we're just going to kind of take stock and say any different program areas, what are we doing in terms of all the steps by outline stakeholder input, research planning, putting our projects into a framework. And we're hoping that just by kind of pausing and documenting what we're already doing, it will help us identify what are we doing well, where do we have gaps, are there best practices that we can take from one portfolio and bring to another portfolio. So, that's our first steps.

We do know, you know, without doing the work yet that there are some gaps that we'll have. So, we know that, for example, we don't cover all ACF program areas. We also don't, in all instances, cover all types of learning, so some of our portfolios are more focused on research evaluation, whereas others do more in terms of performance measures or other things of learning that program office would do. So, we know we definitely have some things to think about in terms of expanding to other program areas, other types of learning, and we also want to kind of look back at our stakeholder outreach and see if we have room to grow there. Next slide.

Okay, so some of the challenges that we anticipate, so as I mentioned, we have several existing learning agendas. We have research planning ongoing in each of our portfolio areas. We want to create an agency-wide learning agenda that, again, will meet the spirit and the requirements of our new guidance and legislation, but we also don't want people to have to reinvent the wheel if they've already been doing work and doing it well, so we're trying to put together a plan that will balance flexibility so people could keep doing what they're doing well, but also provide that structure for program areas that may need some more guidance, so that's something that we're thinking about.

Another challenge is, as I've mentioned a couple times, OPRE does work where we have resources and authority, and this doesn't apply to all ACF program areas. So I think, actually, the capacity building plan will give us -- capacity building assessment will give us aa chance to, again, take stock of where we are, see where we're not doing work, see if there are places where we need to ask for resources, but then also consider are there some lower resource efforts that can be made in program areas where we really don't have the capacity to do extensive research right now.

Finally, I think a challenge for us is that we've thought about research plans, research agendas, and really thinking about how can we be more expansive to learning agendas, incorporating a lot of types of learning, not just the types that we already specialize in in

OPRE. So, something we're thinking about is we do know that some of our program areas do this well, so how can we learn from them. Okay, next slide.

Okay, so, in terms of expected impacts, we are hoping that by kind of pausing, documenting what we're doing, seeing where we are, we'll be able to identify some best practices. Perhaps some program areas we're doing this really well and we'll be able to capture that and share that with others in the agency. Also likely by documenting. We'll see some gaps. I think this applies both to our planning processes. Then maybe the program areas are doing stakeholder outreach really well and we can share those best practices. Maybe the documentation will show us there are some types of questions that we're answering really consistently and others that we're not, so we hope that by getting kind of documenting and getting a good handle on where we are, we'll be able to learn and improve.

We also think it will be a good exercise, again, to kind of document what we're doing. Learn how activities contribute to evidence-building over time and be able to really show that. Help identify gaps and prioritize learning questions. Something else we think is that having a learning agenda will help us communicate our learning plans and priorities, so internally, perhaps new leadership or other new partner in the agency, and also externally, and be able to really help us communicate what we're doing and why. Next slide.

So, lessons learned, and I'm taking these from some of our portfolios that are farther along, and we've really heard from them that learning is a really helpful frame; that if you go to a program partner and say you want to work on your research agenda, it might be less motivating than if you can go and talk about learning and that learning is a really motivating frame for people to come together and the service of program improvement, so we like talking about a learning agenda and think that will be useful for us going forward.

We've also found, again, for those program areas that are farther along, that having a learning agenda framework can be really helpful for explaining what we're doing and why. For new program leadership or external stakeholder, if you have a really nice kind of map of what you're doing and why, and how you arrived there, it helps explain these questions have been answered, these are the remaining gaps, this is what we've heard from stakeholders, these are the types of projects we do, and this is how this research fits together. So, we anticipate having this at an agency-wide level will be really helpful.

And then we also think it will help us organize our own thinking, so kind of, again, I think having this one-plan document that kind of pulls all of our work together will help us see what we've been doing, think about next steps, both in terms of the process of stakeholder engagement and prioritizing questions, and also in terms of specific research projects to take on. And I think that's all I have. You can go to the next slide.

Jessica McNab:

Great. Thank you, Emily. That was a really nice recap. I know it's hard to fit everything that you've done ACF, and for all of the presenters that have presented so far. This is

just a few slides and a few minutes of discussion, but I think, you know, what you've shared really gives us a good sense of your approach and where you are, and I think that stage of implementation aligns quite a bit about how many balls you have in the air and that taking stock next steps seems to really resonate with other folks that joined us in other agencies who have shared their approach. So, with that, again, thanks for joining us.

We always do save time for question-and-answer. And I know we already have a couple of questions that we've received through the chat panel, and everybody can see those. But a few reminders, if you'd like to ask Emily questions, or Amanda questions, while she's with us from ASPE, you can ask those questions about the content that Emily shared in terms of ACF's approach, as well as any questions you have or might have from the bigger picture perspective about this ongoing work.

Please remember that you'll need to unmute your line. So, if you have a question you want to ask the questioner or make a comment over the phone, feel free to raise your hand. Use the hand icon and we'll call on you. You'll, of course, need to unmute your line at that point, or you can use the Q&A tab if you've joined us by WebEx and you're on the platform. You should be able to maximize or click on the little arrow or caret and type your question into us, and we'll receive that and we'll queue that up for Emily, as well as if it's relevant for Amanda we'll give that to Amanda to address.

So, let's start with a couple of questions while folks think of other questions they might have, Emily. I know I have a few questions for you as well. A couple of questions from Clint. Clint, thanks for raising questions. One question is kind of a comment and a question, two parts. Some grant-making agencies have historically focused mostly on evaluation of third-party efforts; for example, through impact evaluations with less emphasis on internal evaluation of the grant-making agency's own operation for example. Can you talk about internal evaluations and learning that ACF/your office and how that fits into your overall development of a learning agenda?

Emily Schmitt:

Yes. That's a great question and a great comment. So, yes, I would agree that we have historically focused on -- you know, I wouldn't necessarily say third-party efforts, because they are our ACF grants, and we're involved. But, yes, we mostly have, at least in our office, Planning and Evaluation, we have focused a lot on evaluating our grantees or other interventions, other relevant interventions. Yes, it's a great question. It's on our radar, thinking about internal evaluation and operations.

I mentioned early on that we also, in addition to evaluating human services programs, we do have a focus on improving the use of ACF data, and so that is definitely an area where we can think about learning more about our own internal operations and our own internal programs. So, yes, on the radar for sure.

Jessica McNab:

Thanks. Feel free to comment, Clint. I think Emily did a great job of answering your questions. Of course, shout out or send a question or comment back in the box. Clint

has a second kind of comment and question, and, again, if any others have any questions for Emily, feel free to use the Q&A pod. Type in your questions or raise your hand and ask the question. So, the second question is, given your heterogeneity of complex in which grantees operate, do you see emerging ways of thinking about learning; for example, evaluating complex interventions with a broad portfolio of analytical and qualitative methods?

Emily Schmitt:

Sure. So, I will answer, but feel free to follow up if I'm not quite answering your question. So, I think something that I really like about the framework, the home visiting framework that I showed, and some of the other ways that our portfolios have developed learning agendas is trying to show how different projects map on our different types of research, answer different types of questions, and that it's a nice way to say, okay, in this portfolio, you know, we're doing performance measurement. We're doing a descriptive evaluation. We're do an impact evaluation. Maybe we're doing an impact evaluation of a single grantee or a few sites, or maybe we're doing an evaluation of funding stream essentially.

So, I do think that one of the benefits kind of thinking about learning agendas the way we have is that they show that you need to be asking multiple questions about a program and during multiple ways, and I definitely think that we have a heterogeneity -- whatever -- portfolio research to match these various questions and contexts. I'm not sure if that exactly answers your question, so feel free to follow up.

Jessica McNab:

Thanks. I think I don't see other questions in the chat. We may have a shy group this afternoon. Chris, let me check with you. Any folks raising their hands? Any chat questions that I've missed so far?

Chris Talbot:

Let's see, we do have a question that came in through the Q&A pod, asking -- Rick is asking if, Emily, you might be able to discuss the annual planning, implementing and decision-making cycle for learning agendas. In other words, what are some of the high-level learning agenda milestones and when are they executed?

Emily Schmitt:

Sure. That's a great question. So, as I mentioned earlier, right now we're really on this annual cycle of research planning for sure, with some pulling back to think about longer-term questions. So, typically, we are, right around now, trying to award FY19 money, and then early in the fall -- late in the summer, early in the fall, we start really thinking about what we going to be planning next year. So, of course, we're looking to see what have we learning from recent and past project, what do we have going on now, where do we think there are gaps that need to be addressed, consulting with stakeholders, as I mentioned earlier, and certainly in the fall, having a dedicated research planning conversation with our program office partners, hoping to finalize plans by around the New Year so that we can spend January, February, March, April, writing statements of work, which become RFPs for contracts. Then, over the summer, we would be competing our research contract, then, with the hope of awarding in September and

starting all over again. So, we definitely do have an annual cycle of research planning, research award.

And then we didn't talk about what happens after we plan, which is that we execute our project, so starting in October, we'll be kicking off new research projects, and then we do work very closely with our contractors and grantees to oversee the work.

Jessica McNab:

Thanks, Emily. And, Chris, thanks for seeing Rick's question. And thank you Rick, as well. Any other questions from the group? Any hands raised? I see none.

Chris Talbot:

At this point, we have caught up with all the questions being submitted, but we can certainly take more from audience members if they have them available. Again, you can feel free to submit those through the Q&A pod or the chat, or if you would like to ask the question verbally, you could use the raise-hand icon over on the right-hand side of your screen, and I'll be able to unmute your phone.

Jessica McNab:

Thanks, Chris. All right. Well, Emily, I'll ask you one question, and then perhaps we do have a couple additional slides that we fill in that we typically don't review, we haven't reviewed yet, because we'd like to showcase where those materials valid in Mathematica's website, and Amanda Elliott might have any additional comments about our last webinar, our seventh webinar, which will be tomorrow, with Demetra Nightingale, which is, again, with the Urban Institute. So, Emily, I'll ask one more question, we'll see if we get any other folks asking any questions.

So, a lot of the folks who have presented so far have talked about developing operational definitions, and you speak about this event, in terms of some of your approach, kind of setting the tone and coming to some common language, but did you find as, you know, as you are and as you will continue to take stock that you have come to common language, because we're talking about engaging external and internal stakeholders and those internal stakeholders being leadership, but across the entire agency everyone who may be, in some shape or form, involved with evidence-building and evaluation plans for learning agendas, or otherwise, may not be using the same terminology. So, have you done anything to build any operational definitions or come to common ground or common language within ACF?

Emily Schmitt:

Sure. So, I'll mention a few things. So, one thing I haven't mentioned yet is that somewhat in preparation for having to do an agency-wide learning agenda, and, again, in the spirit of taking stock, something we did was try to catalog all of our existing research projects to see if we could come up with a common framework to talk about them. So, we do have a common framework for research and evaluation that's on our website that's meant to explain and get people on the same page in terms of what different terminology mean, but we found that we were actually doing a lot of things that didn't fit into the six categories that we had, so we've been trying to catalog our research

and come up with a framework that everything that we do can fit into, which I think could
be the basis for an agency-wide learning agenda, in terms of having some common
categories and terminology, like you said. But we started with -- we kind of went bottom
up in terms of looking at what we were already doing and coming up with a framework
that we knew for sure everything that already existed could fit into.

I will also say I think that something like the home visiting learning agenda that I showed
an example of that, where it visually shows where projects fit within certain research
types or question types, and I think it's a nice way to visually explain to people what you
mean when you're talking about something.

Jessica McNab:

Absolutely. Okay. Well, with that I think, Emily, I'll thank you again for joining us, again,
really, I'm grateful to hear ACF's approach, and you may get some people, after today's
webinar, with questions that they couldn't think of this afternoon. So, I will keep charging
ahead, but, of course, continue the Q&A and the chat with any additional questions that
come up for Emily. Thanks, Emily.

Emily Schmitt:

Thanks.

Jessica McNab:

Absolutely. So, late breaking news, we have loaded much of the material from the
webinar series into that website. So, if you've been to the Mathematica website in days
past, you may have noticed a different look and feel. We have rebranded, so we are now
Mathematica, no longer really referred to as Mathematica Policy Research, so you will
see a different look and feel, and it may take a minute to refamiliarize yourself with the
site if you've used it before.

We put, often, works that we've supported through different projects and publications in
our evidence path of our of website, go to Mathematica-MPR.com and you click on the
evidence tab, that's where we often load projects and associated publications, and I'll
walk you through the steps to get to our project materials. Again, if you click on the
evidence page, you'll see different ways to get into publications and projects, as well as
other kind of working papers on recent evidence, et cetera, or you can use the search
functionality, and I think folks often don't go to search to find the click to find the
particular publication or document from our website, so I would highly suggest using that
search icon. You can use something as simple as ASPE, and our most recent projects
will pull up in terms of this webinar series.

So, again, if you type "ASPE" in the search box, you'll be able to click on the webinar
series, and we will take you to a project page. The project, much of which Amanda
introduces on the webinar series. It links the evidence back itself, and then you can read
about the related publications. So, in this case, the related publications will be the
materials from each webinar, so if you click on "related publications," you will be taken to
a list of all of the publications, and then you can, of course, click on each the publications
for each webinar, so they're listed in reverse chronological order, dated by last date first.

And I just included USDA's example here, so once you get into that site, if you want to refer to anything that Ellie shared from USDA, there's a quick description webinar itself. You can play the recording of the webinar. You can click on a couple of learning agendas that Ellie shared specifically, or you can click on the transcript, read the transcript, and, of course, file through the compliance slides from Ellie's presentation.

So to date, we have that project page, we have associated publication pages for all of the materials that have received approval from the appropriate -- raised approval within the agency and are now 508 compliant. We don't have each document and resource loaded in there, but as soon as those are approved and compliant, we will continue to load them into Mathematica's website.

And as Amanda mentioned at the beginning of the call, she will also, or ASPE in general, will also share these resources internally, so you'll have a couple of different routes to locate them. And I know many of you have been very patient. We've had folks ask us about access to the materials since day one and launching the webinar series in mid-July, so we appreciate your patience, and we hope you enjoy the reading and the listening and the transcripts, and, of course, put in there if you have any questions, we'll show our general help e-mail in a minute. We will keep moving on.

I don't see any particular comments or questions about the website, but we'll provide links to that website in the chat. So, as a reminder, once the webinar wraps, we will, as we have for each webinar, ask you if you can take just a few minutes to fill out our webinar evaluation. We do truly read every single evaluation, all of your comments. We gladly welcome your feedback on pretty basic questions to ask you about the quality of today's presentation, did we meet our objectives for the series, for presentation itself. What kind of feedback do you have about the content, and did you feel that there was some actionability based upon today's conversation? Can you go back to your agency and take some next steps? You will get a pop-up for that webinar evaluation. We appreciate you responding.

So, just a few more slides. This is our typical wrap-up slide, but, here, we put in the very long link to the project page, as well as a truncated link for this webinar, the seventh webinar, the final webinar in the webinar series, which will be tomorrow, again, Demetra Nightingale from the Urban Institute. Demetra is formerly from Labor, so she'll talk a bit about that experience, as well as some of her words of wisdom from her time and experience at Urban. Again, if you're familiar with this content, as many of you are, you probably read some different resources or materials from Demetra, so we're very excited to tie it together, the webinar series with information and shared by Demetra and the team at Urban Institute.

So, again, Chris will put all of those links to the project page and to the webinar, the seventh webinar, into the chat, and please let us know if you have any questions about the website, about the project pages, about the publication pages, or about tomorrow's webinar. With that, we will wrap a little bit early, ten extra minutes into your day, which I hope you can appreciate and share. Everyone does appreciate a few minutes back to your day. So, please do feel free to send us any comments, any additional feedback

outside of the evaluation. Ask us any questions. You can see our ASPE evidence-building help desk email right there, it's aspeevidencebuilding@mathematica-mpr.com.

With that, thank you again. Have a great afternoon.