Building Objective Evidence about the Impact of Social Programs

Presented by: Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities (LEO) at Notre Dame

MNN Webinar Date: January 17, 2018

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Director of Membership and Programs

www.massnonprofitnet.org
BUILDING OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE ABOUT THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Date:
January 17, 2018
1. Types of evaluation

2. “Causal” program evaluations – objective, unique benefits

3. About LEO

4. Case studies

5. Next steps – partnering with LEO
POVERTY IN THE U.S.

• Estimated $1T spent annually

$200 Billion

$800 Billion

• Gains, still 41M in poverty

• Nearly 1 in 5 children
SHORATGE OF CAUSAL EVIDENCE

As little as 1% of programs backed by hard evidence
### TYPES OF EVALUATION

#### Needs Assessment
- Define target population
- Where is the need?
- Where are programs now?
- Any unmet need?
- Inform scale-up, new programs

#### Predictive Analytics
- Analyze historical data
- Algorithms, machine learning
- Predict likelihood of future outcomes
- Help target limited resources

#### Implementation/Fidelity Evaluation
- Program being implemented as designed
- Consistent service delivery across staff, sites
- Program & process improvements

#### Qualitative Evaluation
- Focus groups, in-depth interviews
- Smaller studies (n = 25 to 50)
- Insights into program design, service delivery

#### Causal Evaluation
- Quantitative (n = 250 to thousands)
- Specific program, measurable outcome(s)
- Compare outcomes for two groups – same except program

**PROGRAM CAUSES OUTCOME**
1. Isolate program impact – two groups, program only difference
   - Unable to serve everyone eligible and equal opportunity enrollment
   - Cut-off point (e.g., 2 x FPL, age 65) and large # just above/below

2. Study size – LEO studies range from 250 (125 + 125) to thousands
Several research options meet causality threshold:

- Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) – gold standard
- Other options

Explore options based on specific program – customize
• Multiple RCTs – NY, TN, CO

• Positive effects – child abuse/neglect, maternal employment

• Expanded to 42 states, served over 250K families to date
“We decided to double down on things we know work for families in poverty... We can’t do that by relying on our favorite client success story. We need an unbiased examination of our work.”

- Heather Reynolds, President and CEO, CCFW
ABOUT LEO
LEO OVERVIEW

• Nonpartisan research center (2012)
• Economics Department, Notre Dame
• Permanent research team
• National network of Faculty Affiliates
• Causal evaluations
Vision
Reducing poverty and improving lives through evidence-based programs and policies
ACHIEVING THE VISION

Inform Key Decisions

- Program design, targeting, scale-up
- Support for evidence building; cumulative causal studies
- Policy Impact

LEO causal program evaluations

Reduce poverty & improve lives
1. Match

2. Evaluate

3. Information-sharing
LEO STUDIES

Focus Areas
- Housing
- Health
- Criminal Justice
- Education
- Self-Sufficiency

Populations
- Single adults
- Families
- Youth – child welfare, detention
- Seniors
- Refugees
- Formerly incarcerated
- Very low-income
NONPROFIT INTERESTS

• **Pilot-Test**: Pilot-test new program before scale-up

• **Improve**: Improve new, existing program model

• **Target**: Better target limited resources

• **Fundraise**: Expand fundraising, partnership opportunities

• **Communications**: Spread the word about effective programs
LEO CASE STUDIES
STAY THE COURSE
NATIONAL CONTEXT

- Community college persistence low in U.S.
- Only 39% of students have earned a degree after 6 years
- Higher education affects employment, earnings
EVALUATION PARTNERS

Tarrant County College

Catholic Charities Fort Worth

Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities
### EVALUATION OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>STUDY DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEO Focus Area</strong></td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Measurable Outcome(s)</strong></td>
<td>• Community college persistence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Degree completion</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Time-bound</strong>: 6 semesters</td>
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<td><strong>Research Design</strong></td>
<td>RCT</td>
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<td><strong>Study Size &amp; Target Population</strong></td>
<td>869 low-income community college students (for STC)</td>
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<td><strong>Evaluation Timeline</strong></td>
<td>4 years</td>
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<td><strong>Data Sources</strong></td>
<td>• National Student Clearinghouse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community college partner</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nonprofit partner</td>
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• Age 18 or older
• Registered for 9 or more credits
• Pell eligible or below 200% FPL
• Degree seeking
• GPA > 2.0 or first time student
• Passed at least one TSI Exam
INNOVATIVE PROGRAM

- Students assigned a “Navigator”
- Student outlines goals
- Assess strengths, weaknesses
- Develop “service plan” together
- Emergency financial assistance
- 3 years of service
If/how does the Stay the Course program impact persistence and completion among low-income community college students at Tarrant County College in Texas after 6 semesters?
Fall 2013 Cohort after Six Semesters

- Still Enrolled: 48.9% (Treatment) vs. 23.8% (Comparison Group)
- Doubled Persistence

KEY FINDINGS
Females who participated in Stay the Course were 31.5 percentage points more likely to earn an Associate’s Degree than females in the relevant comparison group – statistically significant.
How did partners go from interest in “causal” evaluation to launching the evaluation and sharing results?
Staff Consensus

- Executive Director
- Program, IT, evaluation, other
- Commitment to learning: positive, null, negative
- Point person for evaluation: timely communications, authority
Feasibility Assessment

- Identify two comparable groups – same except program
- Study size – causal analysis
- Data sources – multiple, Data Sharing Agreement
LEO receives list of eligible students enrolled at TCC.

CCFW unable to serve everyone eligible. {N=869}

**Equal opportunity enrollment:**
LEO assigns eligible students into Treatment & Control groups.

- Treatment Group {N=430}
- Control Group {N=439}
Feasibility Assessment (continued)

• Program fidelity
  ▪ CCFW – staff trainings, monitoring
  ▪ Qualitative component

• IRB approval – ethical, study consent

• Ongoing information exchanges to identify causal design
Evaluation Launch & Monitoring

- MOU
- Regular conference calls
- Jointly address questions, issues
- NBER Working Paper – certify reliable, causal results
- LEO Policy Brief
- Press release
- LEO social media
- Presentations
IMPACT ON POVERTY & LIVES

- **Partnership:** Nonprofits in community colleges
- **College Success:** Case management, not just financial aid
- **Targeting:** Differences in impact for females vs. males
- **Fundraising:** Nonprofit leveraged LEO evaluation for fundraising
Strategy

Replicate Effective Programs: CCFW packaging Stay the Course, trainings

Cumulative Evidence Building: Additional causal evaluations
County in California: Rapid Rehousing (Developing)
If/how do Rapid Rehousing services impact housing stability, health, and criminal justice system contact among homeless single adults in the County?
• **Measurable Outcomes**: Shelter entry, hospital entry, arrests

• **Evaluation Partners**: County, one nonprofit service provider, LEO

• **Causal Study Design**: RCT
  
  • *Two Groups*: Unable to serve everyone eligible
  
  • *Equal Opportunity Enrollment*: Yes

  • *Study Size*: 360 unique individuals

• **Outcome Data**: County administrative data
1. Define target population – common, consistent
   - Cluster of risk scores, define “single adult” and “homeless”

2. Digitize the screening process
   - New tablets – loaded paper-based intake/eligibility questions

3. Equal opportunity enrollment, on the spot
   - Via tablets – Survey CTO

4. LEO train nonprofit staff, ongoing support
Causal Evaluation: Good Fit?
Program

• Replicable program – clear components, length
• Measurable outcomes (vs. outputs), time-bound
• Mechanisms to ensure program fidelity
• High program take-up, completion rates
• Compelling reason to evaluate, key question of interest
Research: Causal Evaluations

- Two groups – same except program
- Study size – 250 to thousands, may aggregate over time
- Outcome data – both participants, comparison group
  - Nonprofit
  - Administrative data: County, hospital, school, police, state, other – *LEO can link different data sets*
Agency

• Electronic data tracking
• Commitment to objective learning
• Highly engaged partnership
• Staff point person
• Support information sharing
Next Steps
1. leo.nd.edu

2. Request project consultation: one-on-one

3. Promising projects: Application for Feasibility Assessment

4. Likely to launch: Feasibility Assessment

5. Evaluation

6. Information Sharing
Questions?