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SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Professional Portfolio Abstracts: Dianna Tran, Ph.D.

2020-2021 SRCD Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow at the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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Introduction: During my fellowship year at OPRE, I have been involved in a variety of projects. The opportunities that I have had to be involved in science communication, data cleaning, and professional development of graduate students have been rewarding. For example, I have worked on developing a blog post about the timely importance of one of OPRE's contracts, highlighting issues that have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Relatedly, I have also worked on compiling and cleaning data within OPRE that have resulted in blog posts describing pandemic-related experiences of ACF programs and the children and families they serve. Additionally, I have had opportunities to develop and plan events to support the professional development of graduate students and early career scholars.

Portfolio Entry 1: Building and Sustaining the ECE (BASE) Workforce

Project Overview:

Background: The BASE Workforce contract aims to evaluate strategies that support the recruitment and retention of the ECE workforce through activities that include a literature review, environmental scan, expert and stakeholder engagement, secondary analyses, and potentially data collection. It has been widely understood that workforce retention is a significant challenge among ECE programs that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Goal(s): To understand what strategies and program activities and characteristics support the recruitment and retention of the ECE workforce.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Science communication
- Review deliverables
- Assist in development of work plans

Activity Focus Keywords: Science communication, deliverable review
Policy Area Keywords: Workforce, OPRE, Child Care, Head Start

Portfolio Entry 2: Early Care and Education (ECE) Research Scholars Dissertation Grants- Professional Development Event

Project Overview:

Background: Recipients of the Child Care and Head Start Dissertation Grants receive 1 or 2 years of funding to support dissertation research in partnership with a state CCDF agency or local Head Start/Early Head Start program. The dissertation grants also aim to foster effective mentorship and provide a network of scholars for the grantees. OPRE typically provides opportunities for professional development to support dissertation scholars.

Goal(s): To enhance the professional development of ECE research scholars and keep scholars updated on ACF programmatic and research priorities.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Science Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) drafting
- Grant review panel management
- Grants monitoring
- Event planning
- Brainstormed relevant topics with colleagues
- Consideration of current policy context
- Consideration of topics of interest to scholars while providing learning opportunities to enhance professional development
- Connected with program offices to seek and select speakers

Activity Focus Keywords: Professional Development, Grants Management, Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), Grant Review
Policy Area Keywords: OPRE, Office of Child Care (OCC), Office of Head Start (OHS), Professional Development

Portfolio Entry 3: COVID-19 Challenges at OPRE

Project Overview:

Background: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, OPRE has quickly adjusted and modified ongoing contracts to answer key questions about the effects of the pandemic: 1) How does the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery efforts affect ACF programs and service delivery? 2) How do current and potential recipients of ACF services experience the COVID-19 pandemic? 3) How do OPRE technical assistance efforts contribute to evidence building and program improvement during the COVID-19 pandemic? Data were collected within OPRE to assess which projects have pivoted to collect data on the aforementioned questions.

Goal(s): To gather information and assess the effects of COVID-19 on ACF programs and services.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Data cleaning
- Data visualization

Activity Focus Keywords: Data Cleaning, Data Visualization
Policy Area Keywords: OPRE, ACF Services

Portfolio Entry 4: Network of Infant Toddler Researchers (NitR) Graduate Student Early Career Workgroup

Project Overview:

Background: The Network of Infant Toddler Researchers (NitR) is a consortium that brings together leading applied researchers with policymakers and TA providers. NitR was convened by OPRE in order to answer questions of interest to ACF, particularly regarding early childhood programs serving families pregnancy through the first 3 years of life. The NitR Graduate Student Early Career Workgroup was created to support the professional development of graduate students and early career researchers. The core leadership group sought to re-engage graduate students and early career members to further facilitate professional development and networking opportunities among the workgroup.

Goal(s): To support the professional development and networking opportunities of the graduate student and early career members of NitR.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Group facilitation
- Meeting organization
- Agenda development
- Collaboration with OPRE staff
- Promote leadership of graduate student early career members
- Workgroup organization and planning
- Needs Assessment

Activity Focus Keywords: Professional Development, Presentation, Workgroup Planning
Policy Area Keywords: OPRE, Researchers, Graduate Students, Early Career

Read more about Dianna's fellowship experience