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SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Professional Portfolio Abstracts: Ellen Litkowski, Ph.D.

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Introduction: As a Fellow in the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), I had the opportunity to work on many different types of projects that covered a wide variety of content areas and required unique skills and expertise. With such a breadth of work, I feel that I have greatly expanded both my content knowledge and my understanding of how research informs policy. I include here in my portfolio a range of the projects I had the opportunity to be a part of, including my work on contracts, grants, and cross-divisional collaborations, and also include an example of an extramural professional development opportunity that I was able to partake in as a Fellow.

Portfolio Entry 1: Child Care and Early Education Policy and Research Analysis (CCEEPRA) Project: COVID-19 Research, Evaluation, and Data Agenda

Project Overview:

Background: The Child Care and Early Education Policy and Research Analysis (CCEEPRA) project is a contract awarded to Child Trends that aims to support a wide range of activities, including – but not limited to – conducting assessments, analyses, and summaries of policies, practices, and research; identifying and refining measures and instruments; identifying sources of data and conducting analyses on high-priority questions; and convening experts and consultations. With the capacity for rapid responses to pressing needs, after the start of the pandemic, the CCEEPRA team began to conduct several strands of work related to COVID-19, including the drafting of a COVID-19 research, evaluation, and data agenda.

Goal(s): To develop a research, evaluation, and data agenda that articulates high priority questions in the child care and early education field and could be used by multiple groups of stakeholders (e.g., researchers, policymakers, advocates, funders) to guide research on how the child care and education space has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Provided input on the conceptualization of the research, evaluation, and data agenda
- Met regularly with Child Trends team members to discuss preliminary results from key stakeholder meetings and key findings
- Attended large-group convening with experts from the field and participated in breakout discussions
- Reviewed draft versions of the Special Topics paper and provided feedback
- Shepherded final document through leadership review and the publication process

Activity Focus Keywords: Document Review, Written Report, Stakeholder Convening
Policy Area Keywords: Center-based care, Family Child Care, Families, Workforce, ECE System

Portfolio Entry 2: OPRE Methods Team

Project Overview:

Background: Since 2007, the OPRE Methods Team has been planning and hosting meetings to convene federal evaluation staff, contractors, and academic researchers to advance their understanding of innovative

social science research methodology that they could apply in their daily work. Past topics have included Open Science, Core Components Research, and Rapid Learning Methods. The OPRE methods team is comprised of individuals from each of OPRE's divisions, and we meet regularly to discuss meeting planning and logistics, dissemination of products, the planning of quarterly seminars, etc.

Goal(s): To support OPRE's work in and understanding of rigorous evaluation methods through quarterly topical seminars and an annual meeting covering an innovative method.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Conceptualized, planned, and moderated the discussion for a Quarterly Methods Seminar entitled "Overcoming Challenges with Recruitment and Retention"
- Met regularly with Insight Policy Research (IPR), the contractor, to discuss logistics and upcoming deliverables
- Co-led working group meetings with five experts in the field in order to plan the 2021 Methods Meeting ("Enhancing Rigor, Relevance, and Equity in Research and Evaluation through Community Engagement")
- Invited speakers to the 2021 Methods Meeting and held planning calls to determine the content and structure of their presentations
- Reviewed deliverables, including the meeting topic memo, agenda, meeting website, etc.

Activity Focus Keywords: Cross-divisional collaboration, Presentation, Meeting Planning
Policy Area Keywords: Evaluation, Methods

Portfolio Entry 3: Coordinated Evaluations of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Policies and Initiatives Funding Opportunity Announcement

Project Overview:

Background: As outlined in the funding opportunity announcement, the purpose of this grant program is to support partnerships between Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies and researchers to develop rigorous, policy-relevant evaluations testing child care subsidy policies designed to increase low-income families' access to high quality child care. More specifically, sponsored projects will evaluate local policies and practices related to rate setting and implementing subsidy payment rates and/or family co-

payments. These projects will inform local and federal understanding about the efficacy of child care subsidy policies and practices.

Goal(s): To draft a funding opportunity announcement designed to support partnerships between Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies and researchers to develop rigorous, policy-relevant evaluations testing child care subsidy policies designed to increase low-income families' access to high quality child care.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Drafted and advertised the forecast for the FOA
- Assisted with the drafting of the FOA
- Shepherded the draft FOA through the leadership and review process
- Advertised the FOA, once published, through relevant dissemination channels
- Met regularly with the contractor from ICF to arrange for the review process
- Helped identify reviewers, coordinate review panels, and review and approve final summary reports

Activity Focus Keywords: Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), Grant Application Development, Grant Review
Policy Area Keywords: Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program, Child Care Subsidy

Portfolio Entry 4: Writing portfolio for "Writing Persuasive Public Policy" course taken through University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy

Project Overview:

Background: "Writing Persuasive Public Policy" is a credentialing course offered by University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy that focuses on effective strategies, and evidence-based persuasive writing techniques, for writing compelling policy stories. In its entirety, this was a six-week course with two lectures per week in addition to group writing and individual reading and writing assignments.

Goal(s): To develop a customized writing portfolio that included both a solutions narrative and a policy brief on topics of interest to each student.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Attended lectures twice each week over the course of six weeks
- Completed reading assignments and group writing activities
- Drafted a solutions narrative focused on universal pre-K
- Drafted a policy brief focused on the alignment between children's early school readiness skills and states' early learning guidelines

Activity Focus Keywords: Written Report, Policy Brief
Policy Area Keywords: School Readiness, Public Policy

Read more about Ellen's fellowship experience