Voice for Adoption

SPEAKING OUT FOR OUR NATION'S WAITING CHILDREN

Evidence Building and Adoption

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Overview

- Today we will be providing background information for those who are considering conducting an evidence-based evaluation of post-adoption services, including those who may wish to apply for the recently released $8.9 million grant opportunity for an estimated 12 grants for evidence-building from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Applications for that opportunity are due July 11, 2023, although there may be other opportunities.

- Opinions shared today are mine and Marla's alone. Although they represent our best-informed judgment, they should not be viewed in any way as official or representing the views of ACF or OPRE.

- In my case, the opinions shared are based on lessons learned from interviews with hundreds of successful federal grantees, researchers, and federal personnel across an array of federal evidence-building grant programs, including those focused on social services (including child welfare), health (substance use disorders), and education (K-12 and post-secondary). You can find these earlier reports on the Social Innovation Research Center website.

- Each of our presentations will run about 20 minutes. Q&A afterward. Please write your questions in the chat.
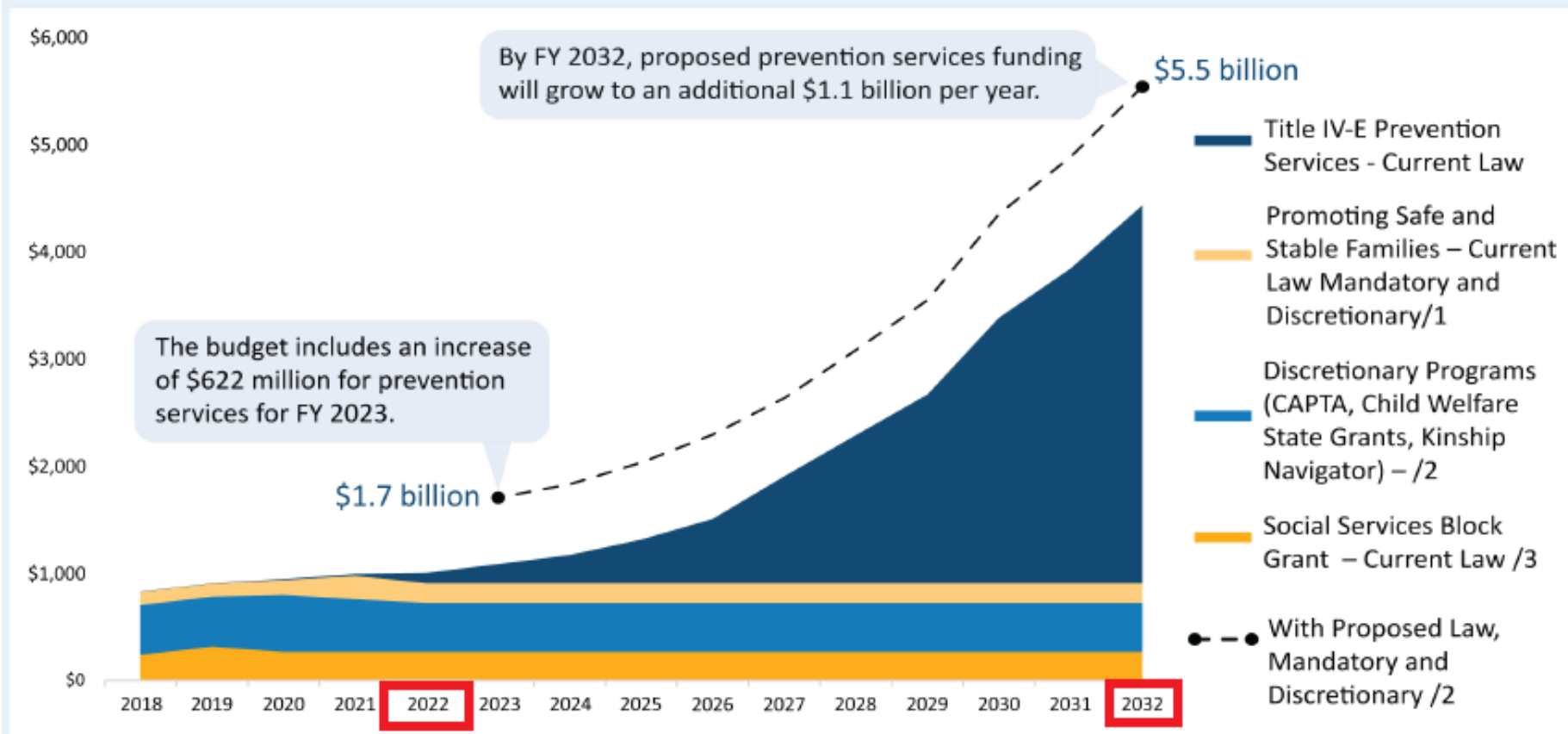
What I Will Cover

- **Background on the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)**
  - FFPSA: A Multi-billion Dollar Opportunity
  - Family First and Adoption
  - Post-Adoption Evidence-Building Opportunities
- **Grant Tips**
  - Application Tips
  - Intervention Design Basics
  - Typical Project Success Rates
  - Success Factors
  - Adaptations of Existing Programs
  - Home-grown Programs
  - Evaluation Tips
  - Dissemination
  - Going to Scale
- **Additional Assistance for VFA Members**
- **Resources**

Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)

- My remarks are focused on the recent ACF/OPRE grant opportunity that supports evaluations of prevention-based programs that would qualify for funding under the Family First Prevention Services Act.

- Eligible programs for this grant fall into four eligible-service areas:
  - mental health prevention and treatment programs or services,
  - substance abuse prevention and treatment programs or services,
  - in-home parent skill-based programs or services, and
  - kinship navigator programs.

FFPSA: A Multi-billion Dollar Opportunity

THE BUDGET BRINGS ACF'S FUNDING FOR SERVICES TO PREVENT CHILD MALTREATMENT TO A TOTAL OF $5.5 BILLION IN FY 2032.

By FY 2032, proposed prevention services funding will grow to an additional $1.1 billion per year.

$5.5 billion

The budget includes an increase of $622 million for prevention services for FY 2023.

$1.7 billion

Title IV-E Prevention Services - Current Law

Promoting Safe and Stable Families – Current Law Mandatory and Discretionary/1

Discretionary Programs (CAPTA, Child Welfare State Grants, Kinship Navigator) – /2

Social Services Block Grant – Current Law /3

With Proposed Law, Mandatory and Discretionary /2

Source: FY 2023 Department of Health Human Services Budget, p. 132

Family First and Adoption

Eligible FFPSA services must be for "a child who is a candidate for foster care," which means a child …

- At imminent risk of entering foster care
- Identified in a child-specific Prevention Plan (as determined by the state plan)
- That can remain safely at home with provided evidence-based prevention services
- Includes "a child whose adoption or guardianship arrangement is at risk of a disruption or dissolution that would result in a foster care placement." (42 U.S. Code § 675(13)) → <mark>So post-adoption services qualify</mark>.

States are responsible for developing their operational definition of "candidacy" within the parameters of the federal law

- Several state FFPSA plans do address adoption, but not all. Consult with your state to determine the treatment of adoption in your state's FFPSA plan.
- If adoption is not currently adequately addressed within your state plan, the plan can be modified by the state. It likely would be if you partner or consult with them in your project, which I recommend.

Evidence-Building Opportunities

- Key barrier = lack of evidence-based post-adoption programs

- Evidence-building Opportunities
  - Pending ACF/OPRE Grant Opportunity ($8.9 million for estimated 12 grants)
  - Possible similar ACF/OPRE grant opportunities funded under Promoting Safe and Stable Families program (Title IV-B) in subsequent years?
  - Possible opportunities through the Adoption Opportunities program starting next year? (Pending legislative action. VFA is working on this.)

- Recommendation = If possible, apply this year
  - There may not be future opportunities.
  - Failed applications lay the groundwork for future applications if opportunities arise.
  - First mover advantages: The first adoption programs approved by the clearinghouse may have an edge when it comes to scaling evidence-based adoption programs.

Application Tips

- <u>Eligibility for the ACF/OPRE Grant</u>: Includes state, city, and local governments; public, private, and state-controlled institutions of higher education; private, non-profit organizations (and others, see notice).

- <u>Start Immediately</u>: One month to July 11 deadline (tight).

- <u>Public Partners</u>: If you are a nonprofit organization, contact and ideally partner with your state and/or your county in county-administered systems
  - States control their FFPSA plans and determine eligibility for funding.
  - States & counties control administrative data (this will be discussed by Marla)

- <u>Get an Experienced Federal Grant Writer</u>: If you do not have one already sometimes they will work under <u>contract.</u>

- <u>Find an Evaluator to Help with the Grant</u>: For the evaluation section.

Intervention Design Basics

- Eligible Interventions (service categories)
  - mental health
  - substance abuse prevention and/or treatment
  - in-home parent skill-based, or
  - kinship navigator program or service

- Manualized: *Discussed more in Marla's presentation*

- Evaluation-Ready: *Discussed more in Marla's presentation*

- Aligned with goals and requirements of the Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities
  - See also the ACF Position on Equity and ACF Equity Action Statements

Typical Project Success Rates

Typical Success Rates: For most evidence-building projects, the chance of achieving a statistically significant positive impact in your evaluation (i.e., an evaluation that is clearinghouse ready) ranges from about 15-50%

- Lower percentage is associated with lower-resourced developmental projects
- Higher percentage is associated with higher-resourced projects with significant pre-existing evidence
- The recent ACF/OPRE grant is intentionally geared toward the latter (already manualized, evaluation-ready), so the chances of success for the grant should be at the higher end of the range.

Success Factors

- <u>Existing Evidence for the Chosen Intervention</u>: Beyond a logic model
- <u>Organizational Capacity & Project Resources</u>: Budget, staff qualifications and experience. Includes both general organizational capacity among project lead and partner organizations as well as project-specific resources
- <u>Pre-existing Experience with the Tested Intervention</u>: Even an intervention with solid evidence behind it will produce a bad evaluation result if it is poorly implemented. Experience matters.
- <u>Genuine Buy-in From Project Staff and (especially) Partner Organizations</u>
- <u>Fidelity Monitoring</u>
- <u>Other Implementation Factors</u>
  - For additional information see this brief which summarizes factors drawn from implementation science and other sources, see <u>Using Evidence in Child Welfare</u>.

Adaptations of Existing Programs

- Consider Adapting an Existing Evidence-based Model to Adoptive Families
  - Most of the infrastructure will already be in place: Manualized already, pre-existing evidence, evaluators, etc. Helpful given the limited time until the July 11 deadline.
  - Caveat – ACF Prefers New Programs or Services
    - "ACF is particularly interested in evaluations of programs or services that are eligible for review by the Clearinghouse but which are not yet rated; programs and services with a rating of 'does not currently meet criteria' by the Clearinghouse" (from the ACF/OPRE grant opportunity)
  - But Genuine Adaptations are Considered Separate Programs or Services
    - NO = "Programs or services that go by different names in different local implementations but that clearly use the same manual are considered to be the same program for purposes of review." (Clearinghouse Handbook, pp. 4, 14-15)
    - YES = "When programs and services that are identified for inclusion in the Prevention Services Clearinghouse have multiple available formal adaptations or multiple treatment manuals, each is reviewed as a separate program or service." (Clearinghouse Handbook, p. 4, 14-15)
    - So adaptations of existing evidence-based interventions must be genuinely different (i.e., use different treatment manuals and be adapted to the specific needs of adoptive families).

Home-grown Programs

- Your program should exist already, be manualized, evaluation-ready, and have experienced staff already in place.

- Keep It Simple!
  - The more complicated the intervention, the more bells and whistles, the greater the likelihood that something will go wrong and that you will get a null evaluation result.
  - You do not need a perfect program out of the box. Stick to core elements. Expect further improvement over time.

- Think ahead to scaling
  - A program that is too expensive or has requirements that are overly demanding is less likely to be selected and scaled by other organizations.

Evaluation Tips

- Choose an Experienced Evaluator
  - Your evaluator(s) should have previously successfully conducted an evaluation that meets clearinghouse standards for either Title IV-E Clearinghouse or the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare
  - Working with an insufficiently experienced evaluator is one of the top reasons why projects fail.
  - Selected Quotes from Previous Evidence-based Projects
    - "Use references. Have they evaluated a program like yours? Who will do the evaluation? Do they have experience with the mechanics of working with and cleaning the data?"
    - "Have someone on the project team who can interface with the evaluation team and critique and tweak the design to make sure it is a good match for the program work and its assumptions."
    - "Spend a lot of time up front having the researchers learn about the program … We had a two-day kick off for the research team to learn about the work. Then we went through the research plan with a fine-toothed comb."

More Evaluation Tips

- <u>Evaluation Extras</u>: Don't just do an impact study. Consider mixed methods, including implementation studies and qualitative studies. These can tell you why you got the impact results you did, which an impact study generally will not do by itself.

- <u>Cooperative Agreements</u>: Pay attention to this. ACF/OPRE does not plan to give you a grant and leave you alone. Cooperative agreements are common for evidence-based grants and they are generally very hands-on. They will probably assign you a project officer that will monitor project performance and compliance. Project officers are also a resource if you have questions. Expect:
    - Monthly virtual meetings
    - Four full-day meetings of grant recipients and federal staff

- <u>More Evaluation Tips</u>: See Marla's presentation.

Dissemination

- <u>Dissemination Plan</u>: Must describe in application. Typically includes:
    - Journal articles
    - Conference presentations
    - Presentations to policymakers
    - Submission to the Title IV-E Clearinghouse <u>and</u> California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse.
    - Note = VFA will commit to providing a venue for a presentation by VFA members, either through a member Zoom call / webinar and/or a future conference presentation (latter is still pending)

- <u>Active Dissemination</u>
    - Proactive outreach and meetings with public agencies and nonprofits interested in an intervention are a more effective path to scale.

Going to Scale

- <u>Dedicated Support Organization</u>: Serious scaling usually requires a separate support organization (created after the evaluation). Typical activities include:
  - Materials development & maintenance (manuals, research-based tools, etc.)
  - Marketing of the model
  - Assistance with new site launches
  - Training
  - Ongoing fidelity assistance, monitoring, and site visits
  - Technology & data systems
  - Ongoing research, continuous improvement, and adaptations
- <u>Funding</u>: Usually a combination of fees charged to organizations that implement the models and/or public or private grants made directly to the model developers
- <u>Learn More</u>: See Scaling Evidence-Based Programs in Child Welfare

Assistance for Voice for Adoption Members

- If you are a VFA member, you can ask for and/or expect:
  - Free one-on-one consultation (from me) during the application process, including during meetings with application teams and potential partners.
  - Help with connections where needed, including to other members of the VFA network
  - Dissemination opportunities

- If you are not a VFA member and want to learn more, please see our VFA Membership Page

Resources

- [ACF / OPRE Grant](#): $8.9 million for an estimated 12 grants. Deadline is July 11, 2023.
- [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#)
  - [Handbook of Standards and Procedures](#) – Must read for evaluators
  - [ACF Evaluation Plan Development Tip Sheet](#)
- [California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare](#)
- [QIC-AG: National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation](#) (via VFA member Spaulding for Children)
  - [Program Catalog](#): Tool for identifying evidence-based or evidence-informed programs
  - [Literature Review](#) – Very helpful for the literature review portion of the application
- Zoom Presentation and PowerPoints: The recording of this presentation + PowerPoints will be publicly available on the VFA website (in the [News section](#)) by tomorrow, June 13.