

Increasing State and Local Capacity for Cross-Systems Innovation: Assessing Flexibility and Opportunities under Current Law

Project Goal:

To identify the flexibility, opportunities and barriers that exist under current law with respect to cross-program integration and collaboration so as to 1) assist states and localities that are interested in implementing service delivery reform and 2) inform the national discussion around state flexibility.

Background:

State and local officials note that federal funding silos, different eligibility and reporting requirements, and conflicting regulations can make it difficult to serve families comprehensively and effectively. Under the flexibility provided by the 1996 welfare reform legislation, some states developed programs to deliver coordinated services through initiatives employing imaginative cross-program integration. Their initial promise has heightened interest in identifying new opportunities and addressing remaining barriers to such integration.

The National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices, the Hudson Institute's Welfare Policy Center, and the University of Wisconsin's Institute for Research on Poverty, in consultation with other interested organizations, have developed a set of initiatives designed to reinvigorate a dialogue over state flexibility that is grounded in evidence, experience, and substantive inquiry. As a first step in this effort, it is essential to understand the flexibility, opportunities and barriers that exist under current law with respect to cross-program integration and collaboration both within human services programs and across the welfare and workforce systems. This six-month project aims to achieve that goal.

Activities:

This particular effort will be a collaboration between NGA, the Hudson Institute and the Center for Law and Social Policy. Project staff will develop three detailed models of cross-program integration that will subsequently be analyzed to determine their feasibility under current law and regulations. The three models will focus on integration efforts in which states and localities have demonstrated an interest and that include components which would be relevant across a wider array of integration efforts: TANF/WIA integration, benefit simplification, and comprehensive family/children services. Technical and legal analysis of each model will identify components that can be achieved under current provisions of law and regulations, and clarify the necessary authority and process. The analysis will also identify any specific legislative and regulatory impediments to implementing aspects of each model.

Products and Events:

The project will disseminate findings from the analysis through the following products and venues:

Guide for State and Local Policymakers will describe how to maximize current flexibility in federal programs to implement cross-program innovations to better serve families and children.

Policy Options Report for National Stakeholders will identify specific provisions in regulations and statute that are problematic and offer multiple policy options for addressing the issue.

Program/ Benefit Matrices will illustrate differences and similarities across relevant programs that will increase our understanding about the impediments to cross-systems innovations.

Stakeholder Forum to present project findings and discuss possible federal and legislative changes in human services and workforce programs that would improve capacity for cross-program innovation.