

**Transformation Design Committee**  
**Advisory Committee on Demonstration Site Selection & Transition**  
**Issues**

December 10, 2009

1:00pm - 4:00pm

**Committee Members Present:** Charlotte McCullough (via telephone); Jeanine Livingston; Tommy Williams (by Phone); Joe Mienko; Nancy Sutton, Trudy Marcellay; Mary Jean Smith; John Seals; Mary Armstrong (by phone); Mike Petcu for Brenda Lopez

**Others:** Carrie Hoon, AGO; Marna Miller, WSIPP, Beth Canfield, FPAWS

**Staff:** Julie Dunnington, Jennifer Strus, Ben Berres

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The meeting began with a discussion about random assignment (RA) of cases to the public and private agencies. Charlotte indicated that Mary is better able to explain RA and how one can obtain valid data while ensuring that the process is indeed random. Some places call it RA but the gate keeping function is performed by the public agency. Evaluators had a problem with this method because of comparability issues. In addition there was concern about eliminating some bias that might occur due to "creaming." One way is to give the case assignment task to an independent evaluator to assign the cases. It is important to use an independent evaluator.

In places that use RA, there is no reading of cases before assigning them to the public or private agency. To do so would take the randomness out of the assignment. In RA there is an equal chance that the case could be assigned to the public or the private agency.

To achieve what the bill requires, nearly 24% of the entire caseload per treatment condition using a  $p = .05$  and a Power of .7 is necessary according to WSIPP. Using a  $p$  value of .10 and not worrying about power of seven would only require 15% of the entire caseload.

According to Mary Armstrong the evaluation models that are most frequently utilized are a model whereby we examine the baselines of one region and examine the rate of change over time. Then create a comparison group using SES covariates. Mary indicated that she believes that it might be difficult to overcome the challenges of transition and that those underlying problems will create difficulties that may be insurmountable from a random assignment.

Some committee members raised the issue that there are too many changing variables to establish a reliable baseline. Mary also recommended that we perform a qualitative study as well.

Marna Miller indicated that RA vs. Geographical area won't alter the size of the sample. Joe Minco stated that he thought maybe we need to reduce the size of the experiment? He believes a "quasi-experimental study" might solve the problems. The committee discussed this issue at length.

Mary suggested that another way to evaluate the demonstration sites would be to have 2 discrete pilot sites and rather than use RA take the 2 sites served by the care coordinator and compare the outcomes in those sites with comparable sites in another part of the state. Or could compare the system in the pilot site a year before the demo site begins and the same system after the demo has been completed. Although she knew the committee was contemplating the RA approach in most child welfare Mary is most familiar with the approach she described above. Has used socio-economic as well as child abuse or neglect in the demo sites and compare them to each other. With the RA approach, the case numbers needed are generally very high. State CWS workers have relationships with players in the system and then a newcomer comes in to the community to provide case management services and they need to develop strong relationships with all entities that make up the child welfare system in that community. This is very challenging. Will the new agency have the same caseloads? What happens with ongoing cases? What about salaries and benefits for newcomers? Comparability of the 2 conditions at pilot sites is very challenging.

Mary indicated that she would rather look for two comparable communities to evaluate that use random assignment in the same site.

Charlotte indicated that the factors Mary is concerned about in a random assignment situation will still be in play if the two comparable community's method is used. Pre and post evaluations are difficult because things are not constant in the areas where the sites are located. There will be lots of changes because of the performance based contract conversion and that conversion will still be evolving when the evaluation is occurring.

Jeanine pointed out that there is no solid baseline from which to evaluate because of the number of policy changes over the past several years.

Marna indicated that whether one uses random assignment over a huge area or pick specific geographic sites will still need a large number of children involved in the pilot sites based on statistical requirements in the bill. The sample size under either method will be the same. If only want to show a 20 or 30 percent change then the number of children involved can be much smaller.

Joe indicated that he supports a random assignment method in the same geographic area because this method would allow the

retention of the Children's Administration infrastructure in the demo sites. For a quasi-experimental method of evaluation, random assignment is not required. Causation can be inferred within the 2 groups being studied.

Nancy stated that there is a lot of concern about using a historical perspective to infer causality. There are too many historical confounds to reasonably account for. It would be good for the researchers to consult and come up with some recommendations. It would be too hard to come up with two comparable groups

Mary indicated that the issues presented by the committee are all realities that have been dealt with in other states. If the committee is willing to let a subgroup work on this issue and come back to the larger committee with a couple of suggestions that are credible, that would be her recommendation. The subgroup would consist of Marna, WSIPP; Mary; Charlotte; Mark; and Fred Wulczyn. Items to be reviewed by the sub-group: What size is necessary, without decimating the state, to get the proper statistical validity; clear numbers and quantifiable number for each scenario; distinguish between sampling methods and research design; come up with the results in STORY-FORM, and; **come** up with definition for a lot of the terminology.

Dana Phelps talked about the timeline for CA: need to have solicitation on the streets in March of '11; need to have a full recommendation by the end of June, 2010. CA wants to do the most transparent/open solicitation process as possible. Posting dates will be April 15, 2011 and all responses must be submitted within two months. End of Sept 2011 will be the contract execution through March of 2012 (assuming the readiness assessments are done). CA target for the selection of the demo sites is by June 30, 2010.

Jennifer went through a quick review of the Governor's proposed 2010 supplemental budget for the Children's Administration and related programs.

Jeanine stated that she would like to discuss that the committee recommend to the TDC that the pilots do not move forward until they are funded.

Joe agreed that we should not move forward with the demo sites until we know how much it will cost.

After a discussion, the committee determined that it would prefer to see how the issue unfolds during the larger TDC meeting.

Public Comment was taken.