

Utah SSDI '1 for 2' Project

**Task 5:
Data Collection and Management Plan**

Benefit Offset Pilot Demonstration Team:

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This report describes the data collection and data management plan for the Utah SSDI '1 for 2' Project for the Social Security Administration. This report, Task #5 in the scope of work for this Project, builds on the plans for outcomes to be measured (Task #3) and evaluation design (Task #4) with greater emphasis on the procedures and individuals involved in collecting the data and the management of the data once it is collected. As with previous reports, we begin by reviewing the objectives of the Project. We then describe the methodologies for data collection and data management as they relate to both the outcome evaluation and the implementation evaluation.

Goals and Objectives of Utah SSDI '1 for 2' Project Evaluation

Legislative findings in The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (TWWIIA) indicate that very few beneficiaries of Title II / SSDI benefits ever leave the rolls due to working. One reason that is often cited is the 'cash cliff,' so-called because of the abrupt termination of all cash benefits once a minimum earnings threshold is reached. Under current policy if a beneficiary earns over \$590/month (or 80 hours/month of self employment for 2005) for more than nine months (their trial work period) and a short grace period and then earns over Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA, which is currently \$830/month or \$1350/month if blind), they lose their entire cash benefit and any dependent benefits for which they may be eligible. They will also lose their Medicare benefits after 7 years, which is particularly critical for many of these individuals. Given the risk of losing cash benefits and Medicare, many individuals limit their income to remain below SGA.

The Social Security Administration 1 for 2 Benefit Offset Pilot Demonstration Projects are intended to test whether a policy change, specifically replacing the cash cliff with a more gradual reduction of cash benefits (1 dollar reduction in benefits for every 2 dollars of calculated earned income above SGA), would lead to higher earnings and greater economic self-sufficiency for SSDI recipients. A primary goal of the Utah pilot is to obtain useful findings from a demonstration of this gradual benefit offset of SSDI benefits that will inform a national demonstration.

Consistent with this goal and the expectations expressed in the project's statement of work, objectives of the pilot demonstration are:

1. To design and implement recruitment strategies to inform SSDI beneficiaries about the project to enable them to make an informed choice about participating.
2. To design and implement methods of maintaining participation in the project by both intervention and control participants to ensure participation and valid data during the project.
3. To identify problems and issues surrounding the provision of Utah's employment support interventions and the integration of these with the benefit offset.
4. To identify and describe participants for whom the employment support interventions are the most effective.

Data Collection Plan

The first three of these objectives are addressed with an implementation evaluation; the

fourth objective is the focus of an outcome evaluation. We begin by reviewing the specific questions of the implementation evaluation and then discuss the procedures for addressing these questions. We then move to the outcome evaluation, reviewing the questions to be addressed and the plan for collecting the information needed for this evaluation.

Data Required for the Implementation Evaluation

The implementation evaluation will address the majority of questions presented by SSA as the focus of this demonstration pilot. To understand the data to be collected, we review the three sets of implementation questions for the Utah project: (1) challenges and success in implementing the policy intervention; (2) challenges and successes in enrolling and maintaining contact with participants, and (3) challenges and successes in implementing the outcome evaluation of this project. The first of these sets of questions concern the successes and challenges in the coordination with other Utah agencies and with SSA and other Federal agencies. The second set concerns the enrollment of, and ongoing contact with participants, focusing on problems in explaining the project and unmet information needs of the participants. The third set addresses successes and problems in conducting the outcome evaluation of the project, including problems obtaining relevant data and problems in interpreting the data collected.

A. Implementation of Policy Intervention at State and Federal Level

- 1) How, and how effectively, was the offset policy communicated within and across the key State agencies?
- 2) Were there difficulties in developing and executing memoranda of understanding with other State agencies needing to perform tasks or share data?
- 3) Were there difficulties in integrating the benefit offset with other State policies and programs that might have diminished the offset's impact?
- 4) Were there difficulties in coordinating State implementation with the SSA?
- 5) Were the resources allocated for implementation with other agencies adequate?
- 6) What strategies appeared effective in addressing any difficulties or resource limitations?

B. Enrollment of and Ongoing Contact with Project Participants

- 7) How, and how effectively, were potential participants notified about the benefit offset study?
- 8) Why did some choose not to apply for participation?
- 9) How, and how effectively, was the informed consent and information release requirement handled?
- 10) What were the strengths and weaknesses of the procedures for verifying eligibility? Were resources adequate?
- 11) To what extent did the multiple steps of the enrollment process interfere with the participation by participants?
- 12) What were the strengths and weaknesses of the procedure for notifying enrollees of their assignment to either the intervention or control groups?
- 13) How was contact maintained with different groups of participants, and how did participants feel about these efforts?
- 14) What was the nature of continued cooperation by members of the intervention and control groups (e.g., completing follow-up surveys), and what factors seemed to influence the degree of cooperation?
- 15) What strategies appeared effective in addressing any problems with enrollment?

16) What strategies appeared effective in maintaining contact with project participants?

C. Implementation of Outcome Evaluation

- 17) Were there difficulties in developing valid measures of the primary outcomes?
- 18) Were there difficulties in obtaining access to needed State and Federal administrative data?
- 19) Were there other outcome or predictor variables that should have been included in the outcome evaluation?
- 20) Were there difficulties in identifying the other employment support programs used by participants?
- 21) Were there difficulties in using the survey procedures to complement administrative measures of outcomes or to identify individuals who benefited more from the benefit offset than others?
- 22) Did attrition, non-cooperation, and/or other problems, particularly from the control group, threaten the validity of the aggregate comparisons?
- 23) What difficulties for the evaluation emerged that were not anticipated?
- 24) What strategies appeared effective in addressing any problems with measurement or with maintaining valid research comparisons?

Data Collection Procedures for Implementation Evaluation

Table 2 provides an overview of the issues to be addressed by the implementation evaluation and the primary sources of evidence to be employed in this effort. The evidence for the first set of implementation questions (Questions 1-6) will come from interviews and focus groups with key agency and project staff and a review of procedures used. Evidence for the second set (Questions 7-16) will come from a review of procedures, survey responses from participants, and interviews or focus groups with selected participants and non-participants. The third set of questions (Questions 17-24) will be addressed through discussions among project staff and a review of outcomes.

Primary responsibility for conducting these interviews and focus groups will fall on George Julnes, Sara McCormick and Jeff Sheen. Anne Reither will assist with these activities if she is approved to be part of the project staff. Supplementing these primary evidence sources, we will also invite feedback from the SSA project officer on relevant questions, such as the effectiveness of our coordination with SSA and the effectiveness of our evaluation. In addition, our understanding of the Utah experiences related to the implementation evaluation questions will be informed by our dialogue with representatives of the other three pilot states.

Participant Surveys. Each of the three participant surveys (initial baseline, 6-month mail, and 12-month telephone) will have some focus on addressing implementation questions. The baseline survey will have questions on whether applicants feel they understand project features, whether problems with the enrollment process discourage participation, and whether other policy changes would make the intended employment support more effective. The mail survey will include one question that asks of any policy-relevant obstacles to employment experienced by participants. The 12-month telephone survey will have a section of questions soliciting the participant perspective of implementation issues, including the effectiveness of the benefits counseling that they received and whether there are remaining unresolved questions.

Participant and Non-Participant Interviews and Focus Groups. Selected participants and non-participants (those who received letters from one of the five target agencies/programs inviting them to participate but who chose not to respond and those who expressed initial interest but chose not to enroll) will be asked to provide feedback. Non-participants will be interviewed to assess the reasons why they chose not to participate. The selected individuals will be invited to attend focus groups that address the successes and challenges associated with this project. We are particularly interested in understanding any remaining obstacles that might prevent or discourage the intervention (or Pilot Rules) group members from achieving increased earnings and greater financial self-sufficiency. If the focus groups participants do not include members of important subgroups (such as different types of disabilities, different age groups, and rural versus metropolitan communities), then additional participants will be sought out for interviews.

Project Staff Logs. Project staff involved in enrolling participants in the study will be asked to keep logs where at the end of each week they make quick notes on forms developed to assess problems that emerged in the enrollment process, solutions or potential solutions to these problems, and concerns raised by applicants. Selected other project staff members will also be asked to keep these logs. These logs will be sent in weekly to the project coordinator, who will have the project secretary maintain a file of these log notes.

Project Staff Interviews and Group Discussions. Every month project enrollment and office staff will be debriefed on any issues that have come up that require attention. At regular staff meetings, typically weekly, project staff will participate in group discussions that focus on any problems that have emerged and on solutions to these problems. Solutions will be implemented as appropriate. The notes from these meetings will be distributed to the staff and kept in a file by the project secretary.

State Agency Staff Interviews and Focus Groups. Beginning two months after the start of the enrollment period and continuing as needed, staff from the Utah state agencies will be asked to participate in either interviews or focus groups. The focus groups will be used where there are several members in an agency, such as the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation, that are engaged in a common task for our projects. In other cases interviews will be used. A major source of feedback from senior administrators at other Utah state agencies will be our regular advisory board meetings. In addition to experts from outside Utah, this board is comprised of senior administrators from all of the Utah agencies that are involved with this project.

Data Required for the Outcome Evaluation

The Outcomes Report (Task #3) specified the outcomes and explanatory variables that represent the data for the outcome evaluation. Table 2 provides a brief review of these variables and the sources of information for them. These variables and the data sources will be elaborated further in the Data Dictionary (Task #6), but it is useful here to note that there are three basic sources of data for the outcome evaluation—participant surveys, administrative data from Utah agencies, and administrative data from SSA.

The content of the baseline participant survey corresponds to the categories listed in Table 2. A copy of the current survey instrument (or initial interview intake form) is provided in Appendix A. The mail survey will be short and will focus primarily on employment activities. The 12-month telephone survey will have questions for the

implementation evaluation described above, but the outcome evaluation portion of this survey will be similar to the employment-related sections of the baseline survey. Enrollees will also provide data on annual income estimates at least once per year and more often if their income changes. Because of the time that is likely to be required to receive reliable income data from the 500 participants, we do not plan at this time to solicit information beyond earning estimates during these contacts.

Data Collection Procedures for Outcome Evaluation

As noted, the outcome evaluation requires obtaining data from three sources. We address these three sources individually, focusing on the procedures required to collect data from these sources.

Participant Surveys. The baseline survey will be completed as part of the enrollment process. This will be conducted in-person with an enrollment specialist, who will also be attempting to verify the applicant's eligibility for the project. Once completed, the baseline survey will be transferred to the project secretary for data entry.

The mail survey will be sent to participants six months after enrollment, along with a stamped return envelope. Those who do not return this mail survey after two weeks will be called using the telephone numbers on record and reminded of the importance of their information. If they would like to have another survey mailed to them, this will be done.

The telephone survey will be conducted 12 months after participants enroll. This time period was selected because we anticipate that most participants will be enrolled in time to be in the program for 12 months prior to the end of the project. Also, 12 months after enrollment is judged as the minimal time required for the policy change group to evidence some change in employment-related outcomes. If we are able to secure funding for a follow-up phase beyond the two years of this current study, we intend to conduct annual surveys of enrollees, excluding, of course, those who withdraw from the project. We intend to subcontract with an established survey research firm in Salt Lake City, Dan Jones and Associates, to conduct these telephone surveys on a rolling basis to correspond to 12 months after enrollment for each participant.

Utah Administrative Data. The Utah data will come from the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation, the Utah Department of Workforce Services, the Utah Department of Health, and the two mental health agencies under the Department of Human Services. Data will be matched by social security number and date of birth, with names also noted to check for multiple names or inconsistencies. If there are problems in matching data that cannot be resolved through queries of the administrative data, we will contact the individuals on record and seek reconciliation. The data elements to be shared by these other agencies are specified in the memoranda of understanding that have been drafted and are being signed. The data elements from these memoranda are presented below, though some elements listed are redundant for matching and validation. In overview, wage data will be obtained from the Utah Department of Workforce Services Unemployment Insurance (UI) file. Use of work incentives will be obtained from the BPQY and the BPAO database. VR program status will be obtained from USOR. Data on Medicaid benefits will be obtained from the Utah Department of Health. George Julnes will have primary responsibility for coordinating access to these data with the appropriate data managers of the Utah state agencies.

Data elements to be provided by the Utah Department of Workforce Services:

- Quarterly wage data from Unemployment Insurance Records for dates extending from January 1, 2000 to the most recent quarter of reliable data (eventually to December 31, 2010).
- Family Employment Program (FEP) data
 - Months eligible for cash assistance from January 1, 2000 through most recent date available (eventually to December 31, 2010).
 - Monthly amounts of cash assistance
- General Assistance (GA) program data
 - Months eligible for cash assistance from January 1, 2000 through most recent date available (eventually to December 31, 2010).
 - Monthly amounts of cash assistance
- Food stamp program data
 - Months eligible for food stamps from January 1, 2000 through most recent date available (eventually to December 31, 2010).
 - Monthly amounts of food stamp assistance
- Training program data
 - Type of employment preparation or vocational training provided
 - Months provided with training from January 1, 2000 through most recent date available (eventually to December 31, 2010).
 - Total cost of training per consumer paid by DWS (as of data draw).

Data elements to be provided by the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation:

- Identification data
 - District, Caseload
 - Street Address, City and Zip code
 - Telephone number
 - Email address
- Program data
 - USOR Application date
 - Current SSDI/SSI status
 - Ticket Holder
 - Ticket Assigned
 - Eligibility date
- Education data
 - Education level at application
 - Individualized Education Program
- Employment data
 - Weekly hours worked at application
 - Weekly earnings at application
 - Primary source of support at application
- Other supports and need
 - Medical insurance at application
 - Type of Public support at application
 - Indicator of need for special accommodation (e.g., TDD, Braille)

In addition, for closed USOR cases

- Closure categories
 - Type of closure
 - Code 3 only, Achieved employment outcome (status 26 or status 33)
 - Reason for closure, Code 00, Achieved employment outcome status (status 26 or 33)
 - Date of closure
 - Closure status, Code 26, closed rehabilitated; Code 33, employment maintained from Post employment services
- Employment and Education at closure
 - Employment status at closure
 - Weekly hours worked at closure
 - Weekly earnings at closure
 - Occupation at closure
 - Primary source of support
 - Supported employment status
 - Education level at closure
- Other Services and Supports
 - Services provided
 - Medical Insurance at closure
 - Public support at closure

For consumers who have used the Utah Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach Program, USOR will provide:

- Client information
 - Client Name
 - Social Security Number
 - Date of Birth
 - Date Participation form signed
 - Address
 - Phone number(s)
 - Email address
- Program information
 - Current benefits
 - Services delivered
 - Recommended work incentives
 - Recommended provisions
 - Special Language or other considerations
- Employment information
 - Current employment status
 - Anticipated employment status change
 - Gross monthly earned income at intake
 - Employment status at time of intake
- Client Plans
 - Intends to use Ticket to Work to seek new or additional job
 - Intends to pursue education or training.

Data elements to be provided by the two mental health agencies, Valley Mental Health and Bear River Mental Health:

- Services received by participants
 - Services received with start and end dates
 - Total hours of services received

Data elements contributed by the Utah Department of Health for Medicaid recipients

- Client information
 - Year of birth
 - Marital status
 - Ethnicity
 - Household size
- Program and services information
 - Medicaid program type
 - Medicaid start and end dates
 - Medical excess & medical excess paid
 - Vocational rehabilitation indicator and service dates
 - Bus pass issuance and dates
- Earnings and employment information
 - Gross earned and unearned income
 - Countable income
 - Income and asset types
 - Unemployment reason

SSA Administrative Data. SSA has provided us with a spreadsheet that lists the available data fields from the MBR (master beneficiary file). Some of the fields, such as those addressing start and end dates of services received, reported earnings, and disability diagnosis codes are of clear use. Others, such as those documenting use of the Ticket, will require further discussions with SSA officials and researchers in other states for us to have a clearer sense of what will be useful. Another example on needed discussions concerns the nature of the SSDI benefits received by participants. We want information on both the dollar amounts received each month and on whether the benefits are less than the actual entitlements due to garnishing for child support, alimony, or some other reason. Developing this understanding will be required to accomplish our next task, development of the project's data dictionary (Task #6). George Julnes will be responsible for downloading and matching these data.

Data Management Plan

The primary task in data management will be to create the data files required for implementation and evaluation. While the survey data will be entered using Microsoft Access, the two primary data files will be maintained as Excel files, with a single row for each participant and columns for the variable fields. The first of these files, the enrollment file, will have contact and demographic information on all people who respond to the invitation to participate in the study. This file will also have contact and demographic information on participants in the Utah Medicaid Work Incentive program who chose not to participate in the benefit offset program. This information will be used to interview a selected sample of those who offer to share with us why they chose not to participate in the Utah '1 for 2' project. For those who are later enrolled in the project, this file will also have a field recording whether they were assigned to the Intervention or Control groups.

The second file, the participant record file, will be restricted to those enrolled and assigned to either the Intervention or the Control groups. This file will contain the demographic information from the enrollment file but also all survey and administrative data for participants. Accordingly, this file will be expanded with additional columns as more data are obtained for participants, either by the follow-up surveys or additional administrative data.

This accumulation of additional data fields highlights the data management task of ensuring the appropriate matching of the administrative data files obtained for project participants. We have agreed with other Utah agencies to match primarily according to SSN and date of birth. Given the small population in question, a total of 500 but far fewer enrolling in any given month, problems in this approach to matching should be detectable within several months of enrollment and resolved shortly thereafter. All of the administrative files, however, will be updated across the life of the project, and so matching will continue to require attention.

The informed consent forms signed by participants will authorize maintaining the resulting data files until December 31, 2010. Once the data are entered into these files and validated, the hard-copy telephone survey data forms will be stripped of the identifying information on the cover sheet, with the other pages having only the project ID number. These hard-copy sheets will be stored in locked cabinets until the end of the project or December 31, 2010. Three electronic copies of the enrollment record and the participant record files will be kept.

Data analysis will be based on SPSS and SAS, in each case beginning with Excel flat files. The experimental contrast of employment outcomes for the Intervention and the Control groups will be the primary focus of these analyses, but we will also conduct analyses to suggest more contextual patterns wherein the benefit offset opportunity encourages some to work and earn more but not others. The current plan is for George Julnes and Sara McCormick to have responsibility for conducting data analyses. We have requested supplemental funding, however, that would include Anne Reither in data management and analysis.

Table 1: Implementation Items and Data Sources for Measurement

	Utah Participants	1 for 2 Project Staff	Utah Agency Staff
A. Coordination with State Agencies and SSA			
1		x	x
2		x	x
3		x	x
4		x	x
5		x	x
6		x	x
B. Enrollment and Ongoing Contact			
7	x	x	x
8	x	x	
9	x	x	
10		x	
11	x	x	
12	x	x	
13	x	x	
14		x	
15		x	
16		x	
C. Effective Outcome and Implementation Evaluation			
17		x	
18		x	
19		X	
20		X	
21		x	
22		x	
23		X	
24			

Table 2: Outcomes Measured and Data Sources

	Initial Survey	Mail Survey	Phone Survey	Utah Data	SSA Data
A. Employment/Income Outcomes					
Hours/wk Employed	x	x	x		
Earnings/Wages	x	x	x	x	
Length of Sustained Work	x	x	x	x	
Work Attempts	x	x	x		
Monthly Income	x	x	x		
B. Employment-Related Attitude Outcomes					
Work Plans	x		x		
Attitudes about Work	x		x		
Work Barriers/Problems	x		x		
C. Changes in Use of Utah Employment Supports					
BPAO: Types and Dates of Services				x	
MWI: Types and Dates of Services				x	
VR: Types and Dates of Services				x	
Mental Health: Types and Dates of Services				x	
D. Changes in Use of Public Services Outcomes					
Changes in SSDI Cash Benefits					x
Changes in Receipt of Food Stamps	x		x	x	
Changes in Medicaid Benefits	x		x	x	x
Changes in Medicare Benefits	X				
Changes in Housing Benefits	x		x		
E. Changes in Health Outcomes					
Changes in Perceptions of Health Status	x		x		
Changes in Health Care Coverage	x	x	x		
Changes in Access to Medical Care	x		x		
Changes in Reported Health Care Costs	x		x		
F. Participant Characteristics for Disaggregation					
Work history	x			x	
Education	x				
Type of Disability	x				x
Age & Age at Disability	x			x	x
G. Program Services for Disaggregation					
BPAO & MWI participation				x	
VR services & Ticket to Work				x	
Mental Health Services				x	
H. Timing of Enrollment for Disaggregation					
Months left of Trial Work Period				x	
Months left of Extended Period of Eligibility				x	
Months of SSDI prior to enrollment				x	