



Applying Behavioral Economics to Human Services

ACF's Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Project

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Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
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BUILDING KNOWLEDGE TO
IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

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ACF Overview

- The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is a division of the Department of Health & Human Services. We promote the economic and social well-being of children, families, individuals and communities with leadership and resources for compassionate, effective delivery of human services.
- ACF administers more than 60 programs with an FY19 budget of more than \$58 billion.
- Programs include: Child Care, Head Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Child Welfare, Child Support Enforcement, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention, Refugee Resettlement, and more.



OPRE Overview

- The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) builds and disseminates knowledge about effective approaches to helping low-income children and families through rigorous research and evaluation projects including:
 - Evaluations of existing programs and innovative approaches to helping low-income children and families
 - Descriptive and exploratory studies
 - Research syntheses
- OPRE also works to improve the quality, usefulness, interoperability, availability, and analysis of ACF data.
- OPRE conducts its research and evaluation work primarily through competitively awarded grants and contracts, and actively disseminates findings.



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The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS) Project

- Launched in 2010
- Sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families
- Led by MDRC, with partners
- Motivated by the question:
 - Can insights from behavioral science be used to improve the operations and efficacy of human services programs, and ultimately the well-being of low-income and vulnerable children, adults, and families?




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Bias Portfolio


3 domains, 7 states, 15 tests



WORK SUPPORT

CA Meeting Attendance

NY Meeting Attendance

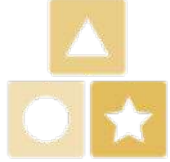


CHILD SUPPORT

OH Collections

TX Order Modifications

WA Order Modifications



CHILD CARE

OK Recertification

IN Recertification & Provider Choice



Los Angeles TANF



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Los Angeles TANF - Design

Sent an additional notice incorporating behavioral insights

Simplified
Message



County of Los Angeles Department of Public Social Services

Jane:

By not attending your appointment, you may:

- Miss out on jobs available now or training and education for your career.
- LOSE up to \$2,500 a year in cash benefits.

Your appointment with reengagement worker John Doe is scheduled for July 5, 2014, 9:30am, at 5200 West Century Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

Your exemption for taking care of a young child has ended. At this meeting, John will review your options for a new GAIN plan. By not attending, you may **LOSE** your cash benefits.

Plan for your appointment now.

1 How will you get to your appointment?

- I will drive
- I will take the bus
- I will have a friend or family member drive me
- I will call DPSS at 555-555-5555 to arrange transportation

2 What are your child care plans?

- I will use a day care
- I will have a friend or family member babysit
- I will bring my child(ren) with me
- I will call DPSS at 555-555-5555 to arrange child care

If you need to reschedule this appointment, call your worker immediately at 555-555-5555.

Research 10

Implementation
Prompt



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 Implementation Prompt



Los Angeles TANF - Design

Loss Frame

Gain Frame

By not attending your appointment, you may:

- ✗ Miss out on jobs available now or training and education for your career.
- ✗ **LOSE** up to \$2,508 a year in cash benefits.

By attending your appointment, you may:

- ✓ Take advantage of jobs available now or training and education for your career.
- ✓ **KEEP** up to \$2,508 a year in cash benefits.

Personalization

Hi Jane,

*See you at your appointment next week. We'll make a plan for work, and make sure you **don't lose your cash benefits**. Call me if you have any questions.*

*See you then,
John Smith
(555) 123-4567*

Jane:

By not attending your appointment, you may:

- ✗ Miss out on jobs available now or training and education for your career.
- ✗ **LOSE** up to \$2,508 a year in cash benefits.

Your appointment with reengagement worker John Doe is scheduled for July 5, 2014, 9:30am, at 5200 West Century Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

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- I will bring my children with me
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If you need to reschedule this appointment, call your worker immediately at 555-555-5555.

Hi Jane,

*See you at your appointment next week. We'll make a plan for work, and make sure you **continue to receive cash benefits**. Call me if you have any questions.*

*See you then,
John Smith
(555) 123-4567*

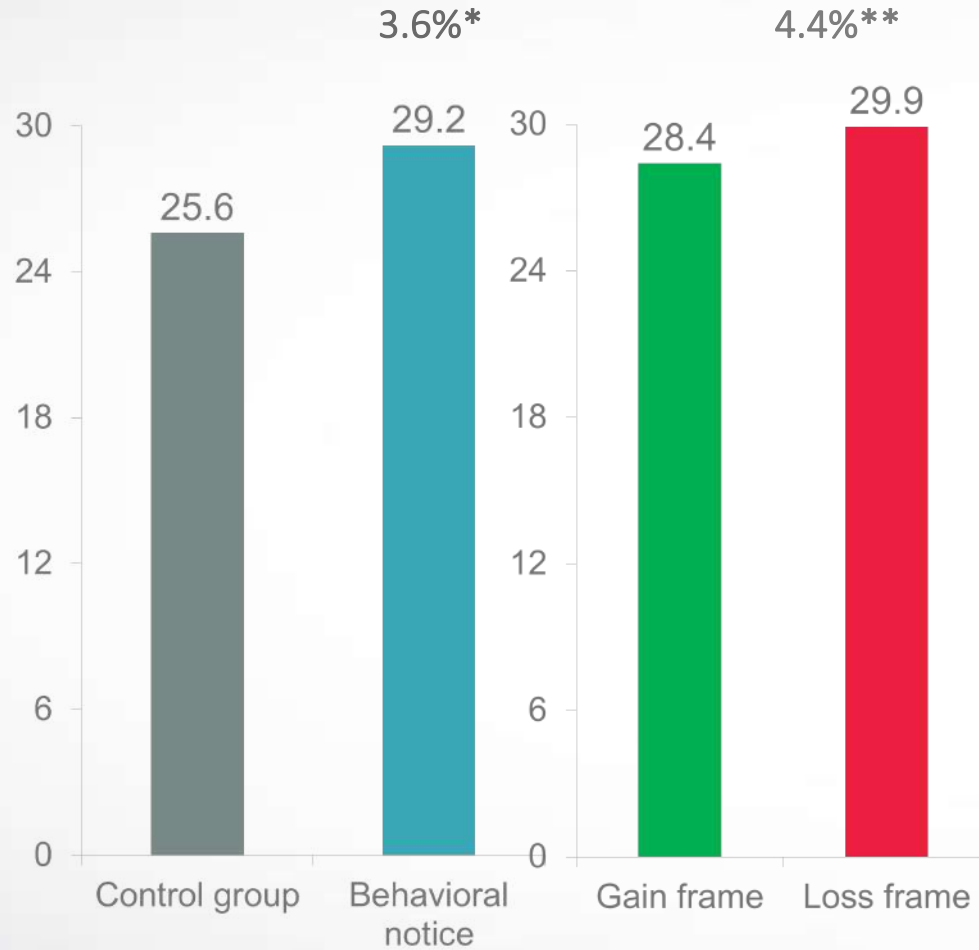


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Los Angeles TANF - Test




- An additional behavioral notice increased reengagement at 30 days by 3.6 percentage points
- This effect was largely driven by the loss-framed notice, which increased reengagement by 4.4 percentage points




BIAS Portfolio

3 domains, 7 states, 15 tests



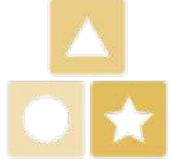
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BIAS Findings

- All sites saw a significant impact on at least one primary outcome of interest
- Impacts typically ranged from 2 to 4 percentage points, with some much larger
 - typical of this field
- Intervention costs were typically less than \$4 per program group member
- While the impacts from behavioral interventions were typically modest, they were also:
 - consistently achieved
 - very low-cost
 - scalable
 - small changes can add up



What's Next

BIAS Next Generation

- Building on lessons of BIAS and going beyond BIAS
- Working with additional ACF programs
- Moving beyond changing communications, greater emphasis on changing program and staff level processes and practices

Behavioral Interventions Scholars

- Support dissertation research by advanced graduate students who are applying a behavioral science lens to research questions relevant to social services programs and policies and other issues facing low-income and vulnerable families in the United States.



Learn More



[acf.hhs.gov/opre/behavioral-interventions-to-advance-self-sufficiency-bias-research-portfolio](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/behavioral-interventions-to-advance-self-sufficiency-bias-research-portfolio)



[Behavioral Buzz](#) email newsletters



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QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, CURIOSITY?

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