



2023 Evaluation Plan

Introduction

All Americans—including people with disabilities and older adults—should be able to live at home with the supports they need, participating in communities that value their contributions. To help meet these needs, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) created the Administration for Community Living (ACL) in 2012. ACL brings together the efforts and achievements of the Administration on Aging (AoA), the Administration on Disabilities (AOD), the Center for Innovations and Partnership (CIP) and the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) to serve as the Federal agency responsible for increasing access to community supports, while focusing attention and resources on the unique needs of older Americans and people with disabilities across the lifespan. By funding services and supports provided by networks of community-based organizations, and with investments in research, education, and innovation, ACL helps make this principle a reality for millions of Americans.

Planning Activities

ACL will conduct the following planning activities in order to ensure that a variety of viewpoints and voices are represented in the agency's evaluation

work moving forward and to guarantee that issues of concern for a variety of the agency's stakeholders – both internally and externally – are taken into account.

In an effort to make sure that a wide variety of vantage points are captured, ACL will engage in planned outreach and engagement of a variety of stakeholder groups. ACL has already engaged internal stakeholders at ACL through a vigorous Learning Agenda process started in 2018 and developed a list of priority areas for the agency to be revisited every four years. Within these priority areas there are specific areas of programmatic refinement and ACL will be working closely with programs and leadership to understand where there are additional areas for research and evaluative work.

This close work within ACL will support the creation of Research Agendas within program offices or around particular topics of interest nested within the priority areas presented in the Learning Agenda. Other Research Agendas are renewed attention to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion with a specific focus on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) populations. ACL is drafting a specific LGBTQ+ Research Agenda to guarantee that this population receives special attention in our work moving forward. As these internal working documents are implemented, they will be reflected

in ACL Learning Agenda learning activities and ACL's annual evaluation plans, as appropriate.

Other work that is constantly in motion at ACL is building a foundation of information through annual administrative data review and snapshot studies. The review of annual administrative data is critical for ACL to understand the performance of programs and activities undertaken by the agency with regard to what populations we are serving and how we are serving them. Snapshot studies allow for relatively low-cost, small scale, quick turnaround research projects that provide rich contextual information that is invaluable as a foundation for greater in-depth study through broader-scale evaluations. Using these tools, ACL is able to more nimbly engage in understanding programs and service delivery in a timely manner and to design better informed evaluations.

Beyond the engagement of internal stakeholders through research agendas, data review, and snapshot research; ACL intends to engage external stakeholders. External stakeholder engagement will take place through listening sessions, expert panels, requests for information (RFIs), and - field-initiated contracts. By engaging the public in these ways – to speak to issues important to them, to comment officially on ACL priorities and practice, and by asking them to submit their own research or evaluation projects – ACL is ensuring a broad input from the aging

and disability fields. This input will allow ACL to refine its work to better reflect the needs and realities of the populations we serve.

Evaluation Questions

ACL develops the high-level questions that each evaluation is designed to address through an iterative process. Staff in ACL's Office of Performance and Evaluation review the authorizing legislation and program guidance materials to identify each program's goals and objectives. Using this information as a starting point, program staff and stakeholders, such as Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, are consulted regarding their information needs. To ensure the feasibility of each evaluation, service providers and recipients are also involved through their inclusion in expert panels and the process of pilot testing data collection tools and approaches.

ACL evaluation questions typically fall into one of four categories:

1. **Describing program inputs and activities.** These include questions about funding, partnerships, the intended types and level of activities.
2. **Implementation and targeting.** These include questions about actual types and level of activities, variations in activity over time, geography, recipient subgroups.
3. **Measuring program outcomes and impacts.** These include questions about the degree to which program outcomes have been achieved and the



impact of program services on the target populations, communities, and/or systems.

4. **Understanding how and why programs do or do not produce the intended and unintended effects.**

These include questions about program context, sustainability, and replicability.

current ACL award and implementation process; and

- How and why grantees work with developers of the evidence-based program(s) to identify program adaptations that maintain the integrity of the evidence-based nature of the program.

Planned Evaluation Projects

For 2023, OPE is planning for several evaluations, some as continuations or follow-ons of earlier evaluations and some to explore new areas of inquiry. These evaluation areas are outlined below:

Evidence Based Programming

Fidelity Evaluation - This is an evaluation of the fidelity with which ACL and its grantees under the Older Americans Act implement the required evidence-based programs. The evaluation will help ACL and our stakeholders understand the following:

- The process ACL staff use when making awards (i.e., discretionary grants) or verifying grantees (e.g., formula grantees) are using funds for evidence-based programming;
- How grantees select evidence-based programs they implement and how they determine what grants to which they will apply;
- How grantees implement those programs and verify they are being implemented in accordance with their original models, including the identification of intentional and unintentional adaptations;
- The strengths and weakness of the

Upon completion, ACL will publish a report documenting what ACL and its grantees can do to improve the selection, implementation, and monitoring of evidence-based programming.

Ageing Network Process Evaluation –

ACL is conducting a process evaluation to study the role of the Aging Network in implementing Older Americans Act programs and ensuring the well-being of older Americans. The evaluation seeks to determine how the Aging Network operates at the local, state, and federal levels, as well as how the various levels of Aging Network work together and how they work with other partners. Additionally, ACL is interested in learning about the role the Network plays in identifying and responding to emerging needs, how it measures and improves the quality of services, and how it measures success. The evaluation will also investigate feasible ways to evaluate the Aging Network with regards measuring the value of the activities facilitated via Aging Network in support of individuals, families, and communities, specifically with regards to return on investment.

Social Determinants of Health



Evaluability Study– The purpose of this contract is to begin looking at how the services provided by ACL grantees influence the social determinants of health (SDOH). The World Health Organization describes the social determinants of health as the “conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, including the health system. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources at global, national, and local levels, which are in and of themselves influenced by policy choices.” ACL’s programs address these conditions through grants designed to improve organizations and systems, and to mitigate their effects on individuals through the delivery of direct services such as providing nutrition, linking people to services, preventing/addressing violence, health education, mobilizing community partnerships, providing transportation, investing in economic support, social integration, and education, among many others.

Living Well Cross-site Outcome Evaluation – During the last two decades, the number of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) living in community settings and receiving home- and community-based services (HCBS) increased dramatically. While this led to better outcomes, including people with I/DD making more of their own choices and being a part of the community, there are great variations in the accessibility of quality HCBS across the country.

In 2017 and 2018 ACL awarded Living Well grants to help develop and test model approaches for enhancing the quality, effectiveness, and monitoring of home- and community-based services (HCBS) for people with developmental disabilities. These Model Approaches for Living Well grants, awarded as Projects of National Significance by ACL’s Administration on Disabilities, are focused on building the capacity of HCBS systems and enhancing community monitoring to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Key features of focus of the cross-site evaluation are:

Partnerships, meaningful and active engagement with self-advocates and families, evidence based practices for service improvements, building capacity of direct service providers and HCBS providers, reducing abuse and neglect through community monitoring, addressing health and safety with data tools, program and outcome evaluation, and sustainability.

Process and Outcome Evaluation of the National Paralysis Resource Center (NPRC) Grant Program – Using a multi-method approach, this project will assess the value of the NPRC highlighting approaches that are working well and identifying areas for improvement. It will examine the NPRC outcomes of improved health and quality of life of individuals living with paralysis of all ages, their families, and their support system; increased awareness of members of the target populations about paralysis; increased



access of members of the target populations to services relevant to individuals with paralysis; increased empowerment, confidence, and independence of individuals living with paralysis; stronger support networks for individuals living with paralysis; and changes in community living opportunities for individuals living with paralysis. The evaluation will be implemented concurrently with the grant period of the resource center.

CLAS Standards Evaluability Study–

This project seeks to explore existing ACL documentation and grantee understanding of Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Service (CLAS) Standards, as well as a separate effort concerning how grantees operationalize CLAS Standards to support the communities and individuals they serve. There are three separate phases for this work. The first phase focuses on ACL and key stakeholders, the two additional phases target feedback from ACL grantees and beneficiaries.

Phase one seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the CLAS Standards? How are they implemented, supported, and measured?
2. How is ACL supporting grantees to implement CLAS Standards?
3. How can ACL enhance existing CLAS Standards implementation supports for grantees?
4. How does ACL assess grantee adherence to CLAS Standards?

5. How can ACL help grantees assess community needs to ensure CLAS Standards are being met?

Other Evaluation Areas for Consideration

The following are areas of evaluation interest for ACL and for which ACL is starting to develop research and evaluation frameworks in order to conduct more robust evaluation studies in the future. Some of the areas outlined below have initial work underway in the shape of small studies that may be scaled up or followed on with continued inquiries. Others would be newer efforts to understand more about the needs of the populations that ACL serves and the intersections with programs that ACL funds.

Housing – Understanding the impact and issues of housing for older adults and how this intersects with service delivery. Looking at linkages between government housing programs and how ACL might strengthen or support aging housing programming.

Veterans – Understanding how aging Veterans are served by the aging and disability networks and how VA and network services overlap and interconnect. Looking at veterans with disabilities, aging, considering housing, assistive technology and looking at considerations for how ACL might strengthen or support Veterans programs related to aging and disability services.

Unmet Needs –Building from a literature review regarding possible ways to define unmet need, looking at



ways in which OAA services can be adapted/expanded/differently targeted. This project would look to identify, develop, and measure the effectiveness of practices to address unmet need.

Territories – Looking at how ACL’s programs are enacted within the US territories and the cultural and other considerations involved in providing these programs equitably.

Formal Caregivers – Understanding more about this population and their intersection with the aging and disability networks, the role they play in supporting older adults and individuals with disabilities to remain independent and live in the community, and identifying possible new ways that ACL programs can support this population.

Language minorities – Assessing the degree to which ACL services are accessible to people with a range of communication needs including limited English proficiency, assessing the availability of technical assistance for ACL grantees on this topic, and identifying areas for improvements among ACL programs.

Volunteers – The aging network historically relies on volunteers to help with service provision, particularly around helping to provide meals and transportation. ACL has completed initial work to understand some of these relationships within portions of the aging network, but there is additional work to be done to understand the full impact of volunteerism for the aging network; as well as to understand what the role of

volunteers and their impact may be within the disability services that ACL funds.

Commitment to Quality Improvement

ACL is committed to rigorous evaluation practices as defined in the Office of [Management and Budget memorandum M-20-12](#) and reflected in the [ACL Evaluation Policy](#), including committing to a process of PDCA (plan, do, check, act). With that in mind, the agency is continuously working to improve our processes of evidence dissemination as well as supporting program offices in creating tools to ensure evidence-based change as a result of evaluation findings. ACL is looking to implement a process by which evaluation findings and recommendations would be revisited with programs to review uptake of recommended practices. Further, ACL will commit to shifting towards an evaluation process that moves beyond the presentation of findings and lessons learned and begins to work collaboratively with programs to find ways to implement recommended changes. In this way ACL can continue to build stronger programs and create an agency-wide PDCA cycle with multilateral support between programs and performance with evaluation and evidence as the foundation.

For more information about ACL

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